THE BLOODY SHAMROCK

An 80s Odyssey

R. Deravakian

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February 11, 1975:

Dear Diary,

Welcome to the streets, but don't expect a welcome party!
This be the jungle. And, in the jungle, you're either the early bird, or you're just plain sorry.
So, don't you come around and be showing no face,
strutting up and down these streets like you own the place.
What? You think you A Number One Hot Shot? You think this is fun?
Okay, son!
Okay, now show me your guns!
But if you got none, then, you'd best be on the run.
Show these streets some due respect!
They been here long before you and will be long after you, you can bet.
That, or you're bound to get wrecked.

Oh, I see you. I see! Trying to hide,
with 'em swaying eyes,
with much despise.
I see through your lies.
Your punk ass ain't something.
You got—nothing!
You ain't hunting no game, you the one the game be hunting.
You scared! You afraid! Tough guy, you ain't!
You just second rate.
Stick around long and the streets will seal your fate.

Thinkin' you great.
But you're just a pretender.
Pretend all you want! You still ain't changing the weather.
You either book smart or street smart. But in these mean streets if you the former and not the latter,
your ass will get served on a silver platter.
Understand the matter?
These mean streets are the Mad Hatter.

So, school yourself,
and stop trying to fool yourself.
Don’t lose yourself.
With the lousy poker hand fate to you has dealt.
Go home and do your homework, with what I’m confirming.
Before coming out here, seeking higher learning.
Don't fuck with these streets with all your sassy skirting.
Stop flirtin’.
Or you’ll be the one hurtin’!

This is the city! The big apple. And you’re like some hick from a farm,
looking at all the wrong things that mean you no harm,
while all the things that do,
got their sights on you!
They see you.
So, now, what you gonna do?
They see you scared!
So, don’t you dare!
And whatever you do, don’t cry if it ain’t fair.

Thought if you kept your chin high enough and your chest high enough, no one would notice how low you were really holding yourself together.
Sorry, pal, you in the wrong flock of feathers.
So, it be the better,
to hightail your ass,
for without a friendly face, you ain’t getting a pass.

And now, allow me to introduce to you to much fame,
Michael Connelly is my name.
One big bad motherfucker, and here’s my game!
For yours truly, good ol' me, is here to stand up for what’s true.
Just so we’re through.
And I’ll make sure nothing bad from these mean ass streets come to you.
So, no worries, friend.
And I’m not one to pretend.

I might offend much, but I also know how to defend.

You see, I'm that one pair of eyes,
those street eyes,
won't have the nerve to try.
Oh, they see me. And I see them!
But this ain't the end of the beginning, it's the beginning of the end.
They like a villain, all up in the dark, trying to hide,
while I stand dab smack in the middle of the light.
They see me! But I see that they can see.
Standing so still, like they think they a tree.

Fuck 'em! Fuck these streets. For I know their secret.
They won't be able to fool me with all their silent treatment.
So, do hear…
my dear!
And don't give me your rear.
Simply put… the dark secret is nothing but plain ol' fashion fear!

And with fear?
Secret is…. simply put… you gotta make it your bitch!
Get the hitch?
Mitch?
And don't tell me "That's rich!"
Don't start stressin', because I know a way out of this ditch!

Truth is, it all comes down to love and hate.
Hate will hate!
While love will give you much more meat on your plate.
Don't hate!
Mate!
Don't! Put up something else on the tray,
in full display.
Something that won't dismay.
Better than any lay.

You see… you gotta see fear as a pussy.

So, don’t fight, with all your might, but make love to it, and name it Lucy.
Make the bitch moan and groan and fall head over heels.
But keep yourself on the ball, so you always know the deal.
And when it gets to that state,
and you’re done with the mate,
move on to your next conquest, before the end of the date.

For, pussy is pussy, only good for getting fucked,
and it's worthless once it has. This ain’t Lady Luck.
So, don’t buck.

I mean, who needs pussy that's been had?
It's only as good as it is unobtainable. And once it’s un-unobtainable.
It’s just a fad.

Wait, what am I talking about, fear or pussy?
Ah, whatever! Same shit! And here’s the doozy:
take fear, fear is only good as it is unconquerable.
But once it's un-unconquerable…
well, there you go, Constable!
Now you know what's really important.
Don’t keep your mind dormant.
Fear or pussy, pussy or fear,
unless they can love you back, stick to the center lane and don’t veer.
Don’t let them take your steer.
And that’s just the matter of fact.
Jack.
Or is your name Mack?
Fact is fact,
There ain’t no love in fear, so don’t roll out the welcoming mat.

I'm only nineteen years old. Ain’t that something?
I ain’t nothing!
I ain’t one easy to rid.
I don’t kid.
Not your average stupid, punk kid without a lid.

Oh, yes! I got much to bid.
I do, oh so very rude.
A stupid punk kid afraid of no dude.

Stupid curly haired little fast walkin', shit talkin', ain't no stoppin' son-of-a-gun.
Hun!
Make you so mad while I'm having some fun.
Gonna make you wanna smack my face,
from such disgrace.
But I have truth to be told.
I'm bold.
So, don't hold.
For I have heaps of love and respect to unfold.

I ain't insolent,
I can be intimate.
I'm just a ball of hot mess,
with much to stress,
I confess.
I confess!
Just the way God made me, I can only guess.
So, if you give me a chance, say that you goin' my way,
I just might have much love to pay.

Women!

I have a love and hate relationship with them. I mean, I love them.
I love them.
I do.
Not here to rue.
But sometimes I feel as clueless as a raging shrew.
Like I'm wasting my time.
With women with no reason nor rhyme.
And I shouldn't mind!
They just ain't made like my kind.
Because, with much love, I've felt helplessly stuck in a hole.

And I’m no mole.
Truth be told…
not even from my own mother… God rest her soul.

Hmm… don’t want to talk about that!

But anyways, with women, I like to keep my pace.
Keep my space.
So, I don’t end up being dragged all over the place.
I see them. I do. Walkin' their walk.
Talkin’ their talk.
And if you pay much attention, you’re just bound to get blocked.
Struttin’ up and down these streets with nothing special in their names.
But, to much fame.
For look at all the attention they’ve obtained.
Don’t be tamed!
For they really sly as a fox.
Sprawled out on some rocks.
So don’t go about and start with the losing of your socks.
Fox or no fox,
they know how to get their rocks off.
While flippin’ your top off.
So, when you see one pass, try to hold your cough!

Love, I got. But love, not mentionin’.
Which gets me flinchin’.
I’m concerned.
For, they don’t give a damn no matter how my heart might burn.
No return.
No, and I don’t like what I’ve learned.

Sex, plenty, I get.
Mounds and mounds of bounty have been met.
So, maybe I shouldn’t have much to fret.
For I’m just too fine for them not to let.
But what if I wanted to give them my heart?

I don’t want to harp,
but I just don’t know where I would need to start.
I just can’t stop thinking about this all the time.
In my mind.
Me in my attic with nothing to find.
I mean, if I'm to show a love that’s true,
will they do it, too, or would they leave the feeling, feeling blue?

Now I know... I've heard women complain,
it’s the men that be wanting just one thing.
And then, cry and cry, for all the lost flings.
Well, me, personally... I won't deny it.
I won’t fight it.
For I can’t help but get excited.
No, I won’t hide it.
I know I’m a whore always willing to try it.

Now, I’ve fucked a lot of bad bitches, that, I have!
But I fucked them, because, they can make me so mad.
And why so mad?
Because, sometimes, they can be so bad.
They just too vicious.
And all that does is make me suspicious.
Where’s the love? The heart? Woman, you’re being inhuman!
Don’t get me fumin’.
Don’t make this our undoin’.

Can’t be bad all day,
every day,
with the games that you play.
For, “you can tell a tree by its fruit,” as they say.
I got so much love. But, for women, love is just a word.
As light as a bird.
And not a real thing. Worth less than a turd.
Though, they won’t say that. Won’t admit it!
But I've had women wanting to make love, but then want me to just hit it.

I've seen how they fantasize love.
Like they gentlin' a dove.
But fantasies are fantasies.
So put down your Hennessy!
They're not real.
No matter how you peel.
So why don't you get off your heels!
Love is real!
I know, 'cause, I know how it feels.

But women don't seem to see my route.
Being so uncouth.
Filled with doubt,
making me question if they even know what it's all about.

Yeah… what I'm saying is, I don't think women are capable of love.
A fleeting thing, a fleeting dream, with nothing to rub.
And dreams are only good as long as you're sleeping.
So, stop dreaming.
Wake up! Wake up! Look at me—see how I'm peakin'!
I'm your dream come true!
So, enough with the blue.
But what the fuck do I know. I'm just another dog in the mood.
A real dogged dude!
Just wanting a quick piece of ass to quench my brood.

But then again… yeah… that's also true.
But it's true, because… what else is left for me to do?
What's left.
You heard me, do tell me, you ain't deaf.
Obviously, not love. So, someone call the ref.

Nah! Nah! Nah!
I gotta stop.
Before I drop.
I'm just going in circles, and the shits making me dizzy.

For I can’t stop thinking about all these Lizzies.
Fine ass pretties.
But don’t expect me to be your lamb.
You might not be capable of love. But I still am!
And, I can.
And that’s what it takes to be a—man!
Fear and pussy are so much alike,
you have to love both to conquer both. That, or take a hike!

Take a long walk off a short pier.
You hear?
If you a man—you gotta—be the man!
With much flames to fan.
Conquer, or be conquered, don’t lose your hand.
Don’t get banned.
Don’t burst.
And don’t give into the thirst.
Keep your A game on and keep it well-rehearsed.
And if you allow them to conquer any bit of you, you’ve already lost.
you won't have any more love in your heart and no rivers to cross.

And you won’t be a man no more! Just the fuckin’ dog they say you be!
Absolutely worthless! As bad fruits falling from some bad tree.

I believe we all have souls, and that's what it would take to lose it.
They say “God is Love!”
Little dove!
Use it!
And don’t abuse it.
But if you got no God in your soul, then expect to lose it.
And here’s what’s dire:
bad trees with bad fruits, will be cut down… and thrown into the fire.

I rather lose my life than to lose my soul.
And that’s what’s made me bold.

Fear can do that. Pussy can do that, too.

Make you lose your boo.
Like these streets, becoming the end of you.
For the harder you think you are, the harder the streets will match you right back.
Jack!
For the streets, what they really are, is the—-devil!
Will kill, steal and destroy. Leave you nothing to revel.
And this ain't no ploy.
So, stand your ground like Troy.
And don't allow the wooden horse into your convoy.
You gotta have a lot of love in your heart, to stand up against the man!
And let him know, you ain't no fan.
But, even with the devil, do respect him.
Don't disrespect him.
Respect the streets. Respect 'em!
And that be the truest way to really best 'em.
Because when love goes to war with hate… you gotta stand firm in your heart.
Don't fall apart.
Unity will heal, while division will only leave a mark.

Yeah! I ain't that stupid for a nineteen-year-old,
I got my shit down, cold!
Got it evenly rolled.
Like to stay positive with my traits.
So, now, how about we stop with all the hate?

Damn, do I love women. And, yeah! When they bad. They bad as bad!
And, God help me—I'm guilty as sin because it makes me so glad!
It drives me mad,
clicking and clacking with their high heels on my nads.
Amazonian women of the concrete jungle.
Damn, young thing! Slaying my heart and making me call "uncle."

Bad. Vicious. Although… also something inhuman!
Heartless! But with much love, for I must be a true man.
Fine… keep struttin', hot momma, you got the right stuff.

That ain’t no puff.
But don’t judge me just ‘cause I like it ruff.
You got all the fools around the block wrapped around your pinky.
But, know, not completely.
With me, not so deeply!
Not so weepy.

You see!
With me?
I want something more,
and you can never have me without your heart’s open door.

I don't know….

I know I can be pretty corny about this shit, too.
That I do.
It’s the truth.
Ruth!
Don’t try to put me in a booth.
Just accept it.
Don't roll your eyes at it.
And be all heck with it.
Stick to the righteous path and don’t drop the method.

The girls want me ‘cause they know I have something to offer.
Like a love for a daughter,
something that can only grow stronger and stronger.
Something brilliant within me.
Invisible to see.
But once you see it, it will surely set you free!
Something guarded.
Something which I hold immensely regarded.
And, if you the devil in a red dress, I bid you to be departed!
Something I guard deep within me.
Not easy to see.
But when they see it.
They’ll feel it.

And then know they can never have it.

No way—Jose!
If you just want to play!
Know, no, not that way.
Rolling around lost in a mountain of hay.
Pussy don't make the world go round.
So, keep your feet on the ground.
It’s not bound.
Love will, while lust… loses everything sane or sound.

I mean, I know I can be shallow.
But here's the truth about that, so try to follow,
It's just a front. It’s just a ruse.
Shit set up to confuse.
So, don’t lose!
It’s to figure who's real and who’s into the booze.
If they fall for your shallow ways,
they don't deserve you, anyways.
Since all they want to do is spread you like glaze.

But if they want who’s behind the curtains, they in for a treat.
For, The Wizard of Oz, they shall meet.
With much to greet.

Yeah, I know I'm a dude, but what’s that to ye?
So lewd. Just a dude. But don’t let that fool ye.
I can play this game, too. It ain't gender specific.
I can play it, too, and be just as terrific.
And, let's face it:
women are just as shallow as men.
Also about the pretend.
So, don’t be amend.
They are! It’s true.
So, check yourself, before you begin with the boos.

Although, then again, when it comes to being shallow—and me!

I can't blame them, really. 'Cause, damn, I can see what they see.
I'm just that good lookin'.
I ain't hookin'.
Damn, am I so! With how I look.
Don't be mistook.
For God knows, He the Chef, and I'm what's been cooked.
For He really lined up the stars for me to be this way.
I got the six-million-dollar smile all up in my rays.
My smile is all vicious, and angry, and longin', and lovin'.
So don't mind me as I go on with the drummin'.
And a bunch of other big words to describe how I'm feeling.
And to some of you and what you might be thinkin',
"No," I ain't gay.
No, I don't swing that way.
So, forget about the lay.
I'm off that tray.

My smile is vicious.
Like it's all superstitious.
I practice it in the mirror.
And damn, do I look good, as I see myself glimmer.
Mirror, mirror…
Don't be a liar!
Who's the tiger?
Me! You see! As my pride flies higher and higher.

Watch me fired!
Leaping out of the brush,
One fine ass tiger putting all the gazelles out to blush.
Honey, hush!

Roar!

As I strike, with all my might.
Thrown into the fight.
Beautiful stripes.
Can you see my types?

Even shocking all the dykes.
With golden curls.
Ain't that a whirl?
Putting you in your seat and putting you into a twirl.
"Smiling Tiger," would be my Indian name.
And you ain't ready for this game.

When I see a bad bitch, I smile, and I make them melt just by the sight of me.
Oh, yes, I can! Even in despite of me.
There comes this sizzle, this compassion, and this cunning.
And with all good loving…
then comes the fuckin'!

"Ahhhhh!"
Slap.
Moan!
I make them sound out all for the love of me.
All for that love. Even though it ain't hard to see.
…
How unruly and unreal it can also be.

But fake love to pass the time.
Stuck in my mind.
Stuck in my mind.
Oh, great! I'm stuck again! And stuck since I can't stop with all the damn sinnin'!
My sins got a face that keeps on grinning.
Stop with the pinning!
Truly, I can only pray to the Lord's grace,
to eventually get me out of this place.

You know, I think sometimes I used to be smarter as a child.
And it gets me riled,
wondering if I'm bound to get even dumber by the mile.
So, the older I get, how much dumber will I be?
For instance… when I reach the age of thirty-three?

Fuck!
I can't even imagine me at that age.
Fuck! But… yeah! Still got some years to that date,
before I'm the late.
I do believe we're all getting dumber the older we get.
Falling and falling, down and down, but will there be a net?
Sure, it does sound like it should be in reverse.
But… sometimes… it just seems that be the nature of the curse.

I know I was a lot more brilliant about this shit when I was a kid.
Not one to fib.
But that's just the sense that it gives.
Now… with everyday… I see reasons to question.
Reasons to question my heart, my soul, just to mention!
And to wonder over everything I've been told.
And I feel like I've lost something important I used to hold.
Feeling cold.
I remember being new.
I can't get as excited anymore as I used to.
Even though I'd still would choose to.
And never choose to lose to.

I wish I believed in love as I did when I was a child.
I've lost much and life is now feeling so mild.
And I feel like I'm bound to lose more the older I grow.
And here's the fucked-up part: just to fill a mold.
I'm to do as I'm told.
In love, what you see, isn't there, love is just fool's gold.
So enough with the old.
Feelings aren't real. Just a lot of chemistry within your head.
And there's nothing else needed to be said.

It has no… soul… behind it.
So, stop trying to find it.
I don't know, as a kid, I felt nothing but reassurance.
And now, feeling an emptiness growing within me from the

endurance.

Fuck.

You know, sometimes, I feel like I really hate women, too.
They're the ones making me doubt these things being true.
I feel like it's their fault. And theirs, to own.

Or do they go through the same things I do?

Does everyone?
Do women?

Or... am I just that alone?

THE STORY OF THE CAT THE FEDORA AND THE LIZARD

The Cat: One

"A man of action forced into a state of thought is unhappy until he can get out of it."
-John Galsworthy

The Studio Wasteland.

When I was a child,
my mom once said to me:

'You know, every man I've ever had in my life has always managed to let me down.

My father… was a
drunk.
My brother… is
nuts.
And your father is all of those and a straight up
loser.

Son…

I got my eye on
YOU!'

Wait… let me start again!
Sitting there at the corner of his bed in his wife-beater, Michael took a good look at his mitts, and began to wonder what to do with them. If there was ever a part of him that had given him a sense of his own true worth, it be they. They had once been his livelihood and his pride.

But the only thing now is….
Thought Michael, while sitting there alone in the dark.

Can they give me the strength to make it through the night?

Hmm…?
Then thought Michael, all tongue-in-cheek. As he realized how his thoughts were getting.

The strength! To make it through… ha! Well, I guess that's as good a start as I can come up with….

Besides that whole mother bit… which I don't want to think about right now.

Plus, it rhymed, too. Although, really, sounds a bit too cheesy to me. But that's just the thing, try too hard to make something sound good, and the material you come up with is probably just gonna sound that, and also pretentious.

But…?

Since I already am such a pretentious jackass over here, and all so cheesy, too, I guess that makes it befitting, and it'll do.

Michael then felt a nice, cool, transatlantic ocean breeze coming from his window, coming in from the east, which made him feel invigorated by. And as he looked out of that window, Michael felt lost in a moment, as he watched the skies clear, while the sun began to set, and then watched as the streets below slowly began brewing with life.

And that's New York City night life we're talking about. Motherfucking Brooklyn! And in today's world, now in the 80s, here in the concrete jungle, one very, very mean and dangerous place to be living in.

At twilight, you could see all the unsavory characters and creatures of the night coming out of their hidey-holes to hunt and breed. The domesticated lot with their sharp suits and dwindling dreams had all gone to bed. And it was now the hour for the other sort to come out and play. And as much as Michael wanted to step outside and join his lot, there was still a fear left within him, keeping him at bay. Downing a Jack Daniels, Michael stood up, and went over to his crummy bathroom mirror to check the damage. And as he got up to the man in the mirror, he took a good look at himself, while waiting for the liquor to set in.

Well… there you are!

Thought Michael Connelly, as he looked at himself some more. Then felt a little depressed, then nearly tipped over, then felt a bit self-conscious, and now decided to fancy himself since he was up there, which usually made him feel better at mopey times like these.

Well, now… there… you… are!

He figured himself as an oddly handsome guy. But oddly so, since he'd stare at himself so often; so much so that he'd start to see himself all weird. Oddly for him, but not anyone else. For for anyone else,

especially women, Michael was nothing less than drop dead gorgeous. And in that dangerous sort of way. Since fundamentally Michael was your average, run-of-about bad boy. The leather jacketed one. Your average, run-of-about street hustler, womanizer, player, prick!

Yeah, yeah, yeah! Fine! Flatter me some more—why don't you!

All around jerk.

Hey! Give me a break, here!

Even though nothing at all average about him.

That's a little better.

Really bad! Really vicious! And also, oh so corrupt. And corrupt in that way that when you saw his special million-dollar smile, seeing as just how much of a beautiful man he really was, it could eat your heart away.

Eat your heart out, it will!

And regurgitated out into mush.

We all got a gift that we're born with. You got yours, and I got mine.

Which, of course, Michael knew all too well. Since, how could he not see the effect it had on the lot.

I wasn't born yesterday.

And always women. Always them!

For alas… tis such a burden in life I have been deemed fit to carry.

Tis!

Which always gave him that arrogant sense of privilege seeing as how he'd fair better when hitting on them, compared to how he would if he was just some ordinary looking dude. That! Or an ugly fuck.

Yeah, yeah, yeah! Glad to see you've taken notice, but… yeah! I am that shallow. And I'd like to keep it that way, too. Keep it simple, nice and neat, and not be thinking in too deeply. For, in the end, everyone is also that shallow, and everyone does judge a book by its cover. So why be different, when all that would do is become a major disservice to you, as you found yourself all alone, seeing how you cared more, while everyone else didn't?

He had large green eyes fitted deep within his eye sockets; so large, and yet so deep, that they always seemed like they were some hidden figures peering out from within the shade. He had the thickest and curliest golden hair which he had ever seen, on not no man, except himself, and not even on some women that had gone in for a perm at some beauty salon; dark at the root, but pure gold at further gradation; hair that was

kept short as so that it wouldn't turn into a bushy mess (which it had still managed to do so, anyways), and so thick and shiny that it made him look like some long ago, far away, Hebrew Prince; golden locks, thick, bold, and shiny; but with also a small rat-tail grown at the back (which really looked like a pigtail considering how curly his hair was), that stuck out 3 inches, and was tied up with a rubber band Michael had found in some broken-down, white tiled, graffiti-ed up subway restroom down in the Bronx. At one point, Michael was thinking about getting that Ziggy Stardust do everyone had now. That Rod Stewart. That...!

> That style of hair that's all short in the front, but long in the back. Everyone has it now, but no one has a name for it... odd!

Was thinking, until he realized with his stubbornly curly hair, it would never make do. Plus, he was already getting sick of seeing it. For everyone was sporting one now. Everyone!

> Fucking everyone!

And seeing so much of it had made Michael lose interest.

Michael was 5'11, 175 pounds, and was fitted for a 32-inch waist; with some tight shredded jeans. Tight! And shredded! Looking mighty mean and lean in 'em jeans. His sole pair. That didn't come shredded, but became that way through Michael's personal living conditions, and lifestyle choices.

> Yeah, in other words, I didn't buy them like this, like I've seen them selling it now at the mall. They became this way. Every rip, something stupid I done to almost get myself killed.

Lifting up his shirt from the front, he was mildly pleased to see how he was cut well enough now all over to finally be able to sport a six pack. Which Michael eyed with some more arrogant sense of privilege, now extended to newer heights.

> At least working out in the joint paid off. Now let's see how it fairs with the ladies.

Since getting out, Michael had seen on MTV some rock star wearing a dangling crucifix to his left ear. And seeing how bitching it looked, Michael had then fancied himself to get one too. Although, Michael did love him some crucifixes a lot, the thought of religion did scare him

some for some reason. But still, Michael just felt comfortable being around them: calm, not so tense all the time and at peace. He had two to one ear, a gold one around his neck, one with a broken chain in his left pocket, three wrist bracelets with all crosses on it. And finally, a Rosary in his right pocket, that he liked to pull out and play with. As for the two to his left ear, for a second there, Michael had almost made the mistake of getting it done on his right. Almost! That is until the guy that did the piercing told him what it would mean in public. All in all, even though he liked what he saw.

Eat your fucking heart out, anyone who'd say I just look decent.

He still knew there was only so much a man could get from the surface.

Well, you're in your 30s now, and either than your bitching looks and your mitts. Ha… bitching looks!

Thought Michael, as he rolled his eyes from how dumb and conceited that last bit sounded in his head. That oh so very self-conscious side of his kicking in. But then smirked and accepted it.

Well, either than you and your stupid conceited ass, you really have nothing else to show for… do you? With looks, you can only derive so many hours of enjoyment before you start to notice all the flaws and imperfections, and then spend so many more hours staring deeper and… don't get into it again!

Checked Michael, himself.

But, anyways, I'm a dude! So, it's not like I can get my looks to pay the bills to keep this dump in order.

Thought Michael, while staring all around his surroundings: the dirty white walls, the black cascading streaks. The mountains of unwashed shirts and crusted over socks. One dingy, foldable, summertime chair set next to a pile of pizza boxes, which Michael had made into a table to set a TV on top of; a black and white, 10 inches, stolen TV, with wooden paneling; one TV… or minus one, since it went missing one night that Michael decided (against his better judgment) to let in some itchy, pig-tailed, junkie chick into his place. Who had offered him some blow.

And also, to blow… and me! That is. You wouldn't believe how many women I sometimes get just looking at me, and then saying they want to suck my dick, just to know how it feels to blow somebody as good-looking as this. But anyways….

Next to the pizza boxes on the ground, one broken and also stolen

cassette player, with wooden paneling, that that chick had stepped on. Next to one broken, but actually paid for, VHS machine, with wooden paneling, that that chick then fell on. All surrounded by crumpled up tin foil Michael had used to wrap that TV's antenna with. Tools Michael had tried to use to fix his cassette player and VHS machine with. And finally, one condom, Michael had used to…

Oh, get the fuck outta here! That's been lying there all this time? How long has it been there since I used it to…?

Fuck that chick with.

Then again, was it her I used it on? Pig-tailed girl? Pony tailed girl? But then there was also the girl with the Heather Locklear do, the one with the Bon Jovi do… she having he hair even though he hair is really she… ha! And the one with the Pat Benatar… fuck! I can't tell!

And then looking around….

Wait, how many more condoms do I have just lying around in the open? Okay, there's another one. And another! And… and… and… oh, what the fuck! Seriously! This is disgusting! This is… this is… getting a little too depressing now to be taking in.

Michael now sighed.

But… where would I even throw them? I don't even have a trash can. All I got are a couple of smelly trash bags over there in the corner that I really needs to take out to the dumpster—quick! And they're both stuffed solid, and tied up so they wouldn't smell as bad. And I've opened them up a couple of times, already, to stuff them some more, which I tied back up again. So, they're worn in, and if I untie them again, they're most definitely going to break. Fucking plastic! Don't think I can squeeze anymore items in there. Not even rubbers. Fuck this place is getting disgusting! Fuck this place is…!

Michael then sighed again.

Fuck!

Fuck…

fuck….

And then felt depressed.

But then looking back up at his gorgeous mug in the mirror, Michael

thought:

Wait, who says I can't get my looks to make dough, to make ends meet? Maybe if I start pulling some American Gigolo shit I could make it happen? I've been having strange women for the past few months giving me dough for some reason or another. And all I did for them was the same thing I was doing for myself. I mean, I've seen how all those old and lonely Breakfast at Tiffany's sort of women on 5th Ave gawk at me when I pass them by. How they ogle my junk: my bulging pecs and biceps. All staring at me, while pretending not to stare, while walking their stupid mutts. Although, most of them are now too old and wrinkly, and a little too much for me and my taste. But, some of them, although, look like they were a real catch back in the day, back in 'em proud days, back in the 40s and 50s, when they were in their prime. And I do got a thing for those old movie starlets: Elizabeth, Rita, Marilyn, Sofia, Grace. Back when women were women. So, if I can just imagine balling their younger selves back when they had beehives or victory rolls—which looked hot as fuck back then! There's always that!

And now Michael began to smile, as the depressive feelings subsided.

But, wait! What if it doesn't work? And I'm forced to pull some Midnight Cowboy shit instead? And I have to… fuck that! Seriously… fuck that!

And as the good feelings subsided, so did Michael's smile, as it turned into a frown.

Fuck that shit! I don't want to… but then again…?

Thought Michael now.

Today that whole cowboy shit won't fly. No one's into them like they were when I was a kid. That cowboy shit is too gay now. Even for gays! And now it's all about looking like Queen, with everyone all into that Hair Metal scene. And to keep up, I'm going to have to go straight drag. Shit!

And as repulsive as that idea seemed on one side, on the other…?

Hmm? Although, for the sake of just entertaining the idea. With the wig… would I go redhead or blonde? Leather or latex? Fishnets or leg warmers?

And after entertaining the idea some, Michael then thought:

Fuck it! It's the 80s! So why not both of each. And all thrown in together? Ha!

Michael was now smiling again. But then as Michael looked up at the gorgeousness again, his mug in the mirror, and caught the sight of him in drag—but for real this time! Michael thought:

Ah shit! Okay, don't start that stupid shit, at least not again. I ain't going fag! Even though I know dudes would be lining up all around the block for my supple sweet ass if I ever did. But it ain't ever happening! Ever! And that's that!

Michael was now laughing; enjoying a fleeting moment of feeling good; which to Michael, always came with an abundance of. Fleeting moments. There! Then gone again—fast—gone too quickly before Michael could really enjoy them well enough to leave a meaningful, everlasting impression.

Ha ha! Ha ha! Oh—

And now back to the sadness.

Oh—

If there was one defense mechanism Michael had for just about any occasion, it was trying to be funny, and even though just for himself with his own unique brand of humor, which Michael figured only he would ever get (hence why he would never share with anyone else). Trying to be funny, no matter how depressed, angry, irritated, or scared he felt. If he felt all those ways, on the flip side, Michael had to then find something he, and only he, would find funny, to lighten up the mood. But most of the time:

Oh… oh God! Help me!

It just left him with a weird burning sensation in his chest. That then took hold and began to slowly eat away at him. To best describes it: the feeling of overloading a fire with gasoline to keep it from going out, but overdoing it, and now having to deal with the third-degree burns.

Oh… God!

All followed up by a sharp sting of sorrow. That shot all the way straight to his core. And it was now that Michael felt like singing a more serious tune.

You know… at this point in your life… you really should have had

everything already set. A stupid wife. Stupid kids. And a stupid boring job in place, instead of your dreams of being a rock star or something. Although, never dreamed of being a rock star. I either wanted to be a professional heavy weight champ, that, or a sea boat captain. Toot toot!

Tried Michael, but to no success, even though the feelings of burn and sorrow shot twice as deep.

But anyways, at this time of night, I really should have been coming home from a long day of work, from the shop, all dirty and greasy, after spending something like the last six hours straight trying to replace old Miss. Montgomery's irreplaceable '58 Chevy transmission. Something like that, now… would have been the life!

But as it turned out, something as simple as that was never to be. Trying to take another sip out of an empty bottle, Michael felt a bit nauseous, as he stared deeper into his mug, that now just seemed to get staler and uglier by the second.

So, how about it, why sit here? Why don't I go back to old Fred Scharnick's garage, and see if I can get my old job back, huh? I mean, I still got the skills. And. I'm pretty sure he'll take me back. So, why don't I?

But the thought of going back to being a greasemonkey for old Fred made Michael feel even more depressed. Spending one senseless day in, another senseless day out, doing the “same old, same old,” felt like he'd be setting himself up for his own personal mild-mannered hell. Even though he used to love working on cars and motorcycles back when he was younger, he wasn't feeling it now, and Michael wasn't sure if he ever would again.

So, what then… huh?

And then, staring down at his mitts again, Michael felt his response.

No! Hell no! I've been over this a dozen times. As much as I want to, it's not going to do me any good. I just got out of prison, and that's only going to send me back in. Or worse! To the morgue in a plastic bag.

Michael paused. But then felt the response again. A whole lot stronger, pounded out, tenfold. Michael was now shivering. He felt the rage inside building up again, and the beast inside demanding it so! Demanding for the resolution he knew he would get if he confronted

him again.

No! I ain't going out there. Not for that! It's not worth it… it's not… It's not…?

Confronting him again, and most definitely….

Please, don't make me think about her again. Please! Please?

But there was more to it than just that, so much more to it. Too much more! And not enough of anything else to stand against it.

No! I can't be that guy anymore… I… I… just stays here, Michael! And wait it out—all right? Just…?

But the thought of him being cooped up another night in this studio wasteland made his heart wrench and made him feel depressed a whole lot more. Claustrophobic even. Almost maniacal in a sense.

Shit! I hate this place! I hate this fucking place. Which almost makes me feel… like I'm back at that other place. That other place. That other fucking place! All alone. There. Waiting… just waiting… for something to—

Smash!

Michael's knuckles were now bleeding.

Wait… what I do?

Michael had punched and embedded his fist into the bathroom mirror, so hard and so deep, it had broken into the med cabinet, and had popped open a case of Tylenol. Although, the pain that followed, just made him smile, as he felt the itch to spout out a morbid joke to himself.

"Well, you do feel like a headache coming on… isn't that right," asked Michael, to himself.

But, before he could pop one in his mouth, Michael found himself once again with his other fist also now bleeding, after trying to open his bathroom door with it.

Smash!

Fuck this fucking place! I hate this fucking place! I feel like it's sucking out my soul, bit by bit, and dissolving it away into nothing! I'm already a shell of a person, how much more can they take away from me? Why doesn't anyone see me for how I am? See me and at least show that they…. no one fucking… I hate them. I hate them all!

By this point, there was no stopping him. All the blood and pain and morbid thinking had enraged him, and had sent him off, as he began

totaling his studio apartment with the fury of a man on the edge. Eight months wasting time in this shithole, soaking in the fumes from the meth lab next door, had become eight months too many. Eight months of sitting around jobless, senseless, scared of the future and what it had in stored for him; scared out of his own mind, sometimes, for no apparent reason other than from out of habit and boredom; sometimes feeling scared shitless of just how mad he felt and not knowing what to do next. Eight months of that… and now this!

"Fuck you!"

And with that, Michael picked up a chair, and threw it through and out of his 5th story window. And with a large gush of wind that came spewing in, Michael felt chilled to the bone, and felt done.

Rompous-pompous!

Thought Michael, as he sat back down.

Rompous-pompous!

Thought Michael again.

What that was was a personal philosophy of his… what it was was… all that mattered was to keep it simple, to keep it fresh, to keep it cool. And most of all, keep it in-your-face!

In your face! You big disgrace! Kicking yo….

Michael had once heard someone call something a romp, and at the time, he wondered what that meant. So, when he asked that person, the man had then told him: "Ever just beat the fuck out of a man and love it? Love it like sex?" Michael, at the time, had then made a crooked smile, noticing that the hombre didn't know who he was talking to. "Well, that's what I call a rompous good time," concluded that streetwise stranger, which Michael had the displeasure of meeting never again, and never getting to know his name.

Rompous-pompous!

Of course, pompous part is easy to understand. Because it's not two words like 'romp' and 'rumpus' smooshed together, and then regurgitated out on the streets with a different meaning. Or really! Just in Michael's head, since no one else was saying it (Michael enjoyed making up his own language like that). The pompous part was all about

the hot air. It was about being a pretentious asshole, and acting like you loved it. And just for show. Just to rub it in. Now, him, personally, coming from the streets, Michael hated pompous assholes. But he knew that that's what it took to get by: when a man started beating his chest, you had to beat yours harder; when he started yelling, you yelled louder. And when he tried to put his hands on you, that's when the rompous part came in. Altogether, it was all about the double package:

Bark and bite, might and word, sword and pen, spit and steel.

Now, taking all this in, Michael then took another look back down at his mitts, and started to feel different.

> Wait a sec... what the fuck am I afraid of, still? You're there, already, at that place. There! You know... there! Like from the stories told by the bar by barflies like your Uncle John: stories like that one about that guy in the 60s that ran out of his house, in his boxers, wielding a hacksaw. Never meaning no harm, even though he terrorized two old ladies and a librarian in the process. The man was just out and about, looking for love and attention. And which he found in the arms of seven bulls on the corner of Bronxdale and Morris.

Remembering that story, Michael began to snicker.

You have nothing left to lose... do you?

Michael Connelly was beginning to come to a conclusion, after spending the last rage incarnate minute wrecking his dump.

Which really doesn't look that much different from before.

Michael wanted to feel done being afraid and done worrying about his future. It was time to stop trying to move forward with his life; his answers were obviously nowhere in it; he had no future. The answer he had been looking for all this time was still in his past. And deep down, in his gut, he knew it. But for some reason, until now, he didn't have the insight to see it being so.

What just happened?

Thought Michael, but as he looked back down at his mitts, once more, that were covered with blood, his blood, he got his answer. It was really the feeling of pain pulsating from them that did what months of sitting around contemplating couldn't do. These mitts of his had finally made a call for action, and Michael smiled as he thought this, while looking

down at the instruments of his own intervention.

There is no reason left in controlling it. I have nothing precious left in my life to preserve. So maybe… just maybe… it's about time I become my own tall tales told in bars and beat up joints across the East Coast: a tale about a guy in the 70s, who had been sent to prison to rot. That came back out in the 80s, out on the other end. Came back out—against all odds—to take back… that! That had been taken from him.

Wow… that sounded cheesy!

But Michael didn't mind, the words there felt righteous, and it was making him feel good.

Okay, Michael… enough with this already! You're not going to be sitting out another Friday night here in this shithole, all alone, waiting to do it again tomorrow. It's time to do it! It's time to find Radboy and settle old matters straight. It's time to get me some bitch-ass smacking kicks!

Michael then chuckled, and then began getting himself ready for the night ahead.

Fuck this fucking place! I deserve better than this. I deserve better after all the shit I've been through.

Michael slipped on his father's old (newly rhinestone studded) Letterman high school jacket. Then popped the collar, while taking another look at his gorgeous mug in the shattered mirror.

Hmm… a million of mes. If only all the chicks in this city could be so lucky.

Michael then paused and felt like addressing all the crazy shit that was about to go down. Giving it a name. A calling. A title. That would describe it all in all its meaning.

Feels like I'm setting myself off on some type of adventure. Some type of quest. Journey. Some type of… Odyssey! An Odyssey? Ha! Why not? An Odyssey. A New York Odyssey. A Palooka's Odyssey.

But then it came to Michael, exactly what it should be called.

You know something funny that's been on my mind… something I've noticed. On TV, I've been seeing a trend in everything that's on. In movies, sitcoms, on even the news. It seems as if though people now can't cut it out mentioning the decade we living in, as

if though there's something entirely special about them. As if people now are trying to separate themselves from the world we were living in, in the 70s, in a really, really major way. It's the 80s! It's the 80s! It's the 80s! Everyone keeps saying. Why so many chicks into aerobics now? Well, duh! That's because it's the 80s! Why so many dudes wearing Miami Vice suits, snorting a bunch of coke, and going totally out of their way to act like the biggest jackass in the room? Well, duh! It's the 80s! 'And what does all that mean?' One might ask. 'Hey… shut up, and stop asking stupid questions, it's the 80s means it's the 80s!' Responds the other. Everyone is so overly self-conscious now, too. So self-aware and self-absorbed. Round and round, they go, like on a merry-go-round, on an infinite number of loops, all headed inwards. Spiraling into the abyss of their own inner being, as if to find definition. To find meaning. Find meaning as to what it means to be me.

Michael then smiled as he saw he was onto something.

Well, I guess the world is a very different place now since I went in. I feel it being so. I feel it! So how about it? An 80s Odyssey…?

Yeah! That's what it'll be. I mean, the world is different, the city's different, people are different, and I'm… I'm… but I'm still me! An 80s Odyssey, that's what it'll be! You wait and see!

Michael then lit up a cig, bandaged his fists, and decided it was damn-fine-time to hit the streets. To get some of that fresh night's air he was feeling earlier. Michael 'Madboy' Connelly decided this as his personally hand-picked theme song, Danzig's 'Mother', began playing in his head.

Mother
Tell your children not to walk my way
Tell your children not to hear my words
What they mean
What they say
Mother

God… I love that song!

The Feather.

As he stepped outside, Michael saw a bull flying by, on through, with the sirens on. And as he did, he then pictured himself being that disturbance on the other end. Michael then laughed.

Fuck!

Wow!

When was the last time I felt this… alive?

Michael then thought about bearing, and where to begin. Where to begin this so called….

Odyssey… really? Is that what I'm to make of it?

Odyssey. Yes!

Okay. So, how do I do this now? How do I find Radboy?

And then thinking about all the crazy shit he was about to get himself into, Michael Connelly realized what the best place would be to start.

Stumpy's Place! I gotta get to Stumpy's Place. The Fingers! Ol' Johnny 'Stumpy Fingers' De Luca, for he always knew what was what around town.

As Michael began to remember old Stumpy, the left side of his mouth cringed up, and began to fill up with sour lemons.

Old Stumpy… that old cheap skate, checker woolen suit wearing, comb-over, dago wop motherfucker! A real snake oil salesman, who at first and last glance looked like some cheap-ass car salesmen, from '63, who'd sell his own crotchety mother a car with bad breaks, for twice the sticker price. A real die-hard disco duck, that was too old even when disco was 'happening'. A real cocksucking piece-of…!

Michael then paused, as his mind continued speeding on without him. For a few seconds more… and then stopped.

Oh wow! I really do hate that man… do I?

Realized Michael.

What it was was… back when Michael ran the rings, Stumpy had walked into his gym, and into his life, and had told him the guys upstairs were asking him to sincerely….

To sincerely… ha! His words exact.

To sincerely throw that fight that was coming up on that Saturday night,

which had ended Michael's boxing career before it ever really began.

Well, if I see both Stumpy and Radboy by the end of this night, that'll be a two birds with one stone deal. Nice! I can live with that!

Trying to move forward, Michael then saw a feather lying before his feet. But not no ordinary feather. No! For the strange thing was, it didn't look like much like any feather, from any bird, he'd seen, flying through the city, any time in his life.

Don't look like no pigeon feather…?

It was half black, half white, with the tip being black. And there was some brown gradation in between. It was nearly the length of Michael's forearm, so, in no way a feather of some small bird.

Fucking A! A new accessory. Gonna look totally bitching with this now. I know it. Yes!

Michael then thought, as he then took the feather, took out the gum in his mouth, wrapped the gum around the tip, then jammed that tip with the gum on up behind his left ear, so the length of the feather hung downwards, with the gum sticking to his tightly curled hair, now holding it in place.

Fucking A! Now I'm set! Time to go Geronimo on some motherfuckers!

Thought Michael, as he began to make Indian noises like what he remembered from the Westerns he grew up on. Tapping at his mouth with the palm of his hand, while going:

"Wha wha wha wha wha!"

The Bitching Fine-Ass Latin Chick.

Fuck up a lot of dudes

+

Fuck a lot of chicks

=

Happiness!

…?

I can live with that!

Michael then saw a bitching fine-ass Latin chick walking in his direction. Wearing a blue mini dress that was caressing all her curves in all the right places; all sticking out lovely and proud and strong; letting

everyone know she was in her sexual prime.

Damn, she's bad!

Thought Michael, but then noticed the facade she was putting up with her nose up in the clouds; eyes blazing forward; oblivious to all, even Michael. Looking like she hated these streets and wanted nothing to do with them; to be somewhere else.

So… that's how it is—huh? Okay, babe! Well… I can take you there, if only you were willing to give me the shot!

Thought Michael, while staring directly at her. And as they approached each other to cross paths, Michael then instantly began broadcasting his signal, letting her know, he was also still in his prime….

And then some!

Of course, that Latin princess, there, still kept to herself, high in those castles in the sky. But Michael, on the other hand, smiled, and kept up his gaze, firmly pressed on her outer walls. Michael knew the act and knew it all too well. Since chicks like her were always being hit on left and right by guys, over time, they had developed a hard shell to all the attempts.

Most guys can never get passed this stage, and it really is a cinch. Women will try to come across as being harder than a rock, when they're really—ain't! And are really oh so gooey and horny inside. I can tell the ones that want love. Lots and lots of it. But are too afraid of what it'll all mean if they were to get it. And especially, in that way they truly desire: Slap! Moan!

Thought Michael, in his mind, already back there, giving it to her, to this fine-ass Latin woman. All the best lovin' he knew how to give.

Ha! I love it how they then look back, when I'm hitting it like that. And they just give me the look, like they about to call out: 'Daddy… is that you?' Since they a little confused, now, getting rocked—so good! Ha!

Then thought. Then snickered. But then, started thinking about the whole 'Daddy' notion, which Michael had been called, several, several times by women in the act. And now, that was starting to get a little off putting. And creepy!

Okay, don't start thinking too deeply about that. Most women have daddy issues—period! That's a well-known fact, Jack, and let's just leave it at that.

But anyways!

Yeah! Anyways! As for the hard shell they'll put up during the introductory period? It isn't that tough to break. It's all just made of porcelain. It’s not how they really feel. Just a pose frozen over, looking for love and attention. Wanting to be so close, yet castaway, far, to seem so distant. Having set herself on an island, to herself, so as to feel special, being far away from all that has been deemed—isn't! But... whatever! I mean, I want to be nice to her. Really, I do! But then again, I also want to be genuine. And with a woman like this you can't be any other ways but completely genuine if you want to get some attention. And since right now I just want to straight up pounce on this woman and eat her alive... well? That's exactly what I'm going to show I'll do if given the chance.

Why? Because I'm a fucking tiger! So why hide that?

So, Michael then kept his gaze and charms on her, firmly, as he waited her down, until she could no longer resist.

I see that drop of sweat running down your forehead! Come on, baby. Come on! I know what you are, and you know what I am. You're a hot babe, and I'm a hunk, so it's only destined for us to have this end in that one special way. I see you wanting to chew your bottom lip, imagining me pounding it in, as you moan and groan in Spanish:

'Ay! Ay! Que fiebre! Ay!” I can hear that 70s tune, 'Jungle Fever' by Chakachas playing in my head already. You want some of this. Look at me!

And as she was about to pass him by, her eyes finally gave in, as she made a quick glance... and with that...!

Now, let her have it!

Michael busted out with a loud-as-fuck “YE-HA” like that of an overly excited cowboy riding a bull. Which startled the shit out of her and made her cringe up with teeth.

“¿Cuàl es tu problema, pendejo?¡Idiota! ¿No te das cuenta que no tengo ningùn interés en tì?”

Bullshit! Then why are you now looking me up and down… and mostly down… at my junk, if you don't want some of this?

Thought Michael, as he kept up his charms, smiling at her all tender and playful like, like he had done nothing wrong.

Come on, baby! Feel the vibes I'm sending you. No reason to hate so much. Feel the vibes! Shit that words can never express. Even though we just crossed each other's paths—I love you! I'm like that! I love all women. Feel my vibes, and know that even though all we might just have are a couple of hours of hot steaming sex—and nothing else! It's still going to be the best night of your life. Because unlike other guys, I ain't just looking for a quick piece of ass to hit and quit to please myself. Unlike other guys, I'm beyond all that, for my game is on a higher level. And I'd really would be doing it all for you—not me! All for you! And that's how I would make it worth your while, and give you something to remember me by. Feel it! Feel how I'd take you places you can only dream.

As the girl continued cussing him out in Spanish, after a while, Michael's sexual vibes and body language began to wear her in. And as her eyes gave in again, and took another glance down at Michael's nether region, she lost all her composure, and blushed.

Oh, there you are! ¡Que linda!

Rejoiced Michael. As the Latina then quickly coward away and quickly walked off, realizing how badly she had lost the battle. Then went back to cloud-surfing….

As if!

Pretending like nothing had happened. But Michael kept looking back at her, smiling, and waiting for her to give him a double take.

Come on, baby! I don't wanna play games. I just want to eat your pussy out—that's all! You'd like that though. There's no shame in that. Think about wrapping your legs around my head as I do that to you, and look back at me. But smile this time.

And surely enough, just before she was about to turn the corner, she did, blushed steaming red and smiled seeing how Michael still had his sights on her. Then cowered away again, realizing how it was all going to be more than she was willing to handle.

Ay, Papi… ay! Ay…?

Wait… Papi is 'Daddy' in Spanish.

Oh, don’t start thinking about that again!

The Latina then cowered, turned quick, and ran into a mailbox, while trying to avoid all the sexual images from entering her mind.

Oops? Ha! Hmm… wow! Why so much resistance? Hmm! She must be the devoted catholic type… that'd make sense.

She was blushing in infrared now with embarrassment, as she looked at Michael again, blushed even harder, walked around the mailbox, and finally walked off holding her hand over the side of her temple, in utter defeat.

Oh, don't be like that! We're all human. You do know that—right? Damn women! They're all the same!

Michael then grew a quaint smile, and blew that girl that just left a kiss.

Although… it really would have been sweet. Later, Senorita. Maybe next time. Damn, she had an ass on her… would have loved to have….

Michael then turned around and tripped over a fire hydrant, and fell flat on his face.

What the…?

After a second of massaging his face sitting up, he then began to laugh.

Fuck! Why didn't she see this? I would have totally had her then.

Father
I'm gonna take your daughter out tonight
I'm gonna show her my world
Oh father

That is definitely my theme song—abso-fucking-lutely! My motherfucking song—mine!

Mine!

The Yesteryears.

As Michael kept on trotting through on these neon shining, streaming, shimmering streets, he watched like a spectator, of people of every walks of life, pass him by: there were some drunken hobos looking

straight out of some 30s soup kitchen, all huddled together, trying hard to keep warm in a cold looking alley; pushers, pimps and guidos strutting around while licking their lips, strutting around while twisting their hips, strutting around like peacocks with leather pants so tight it made Michael wonder; there were also a couple of creepshows, here and there, some in trench coats, giving anyone and everyone the crazy eyed look of a man that might have died forty years ago, and what you were now witnessing was their ghost.

And finally, there were the women.

Oh, the women!

High heels, studded up, nylon fashioned Amazonian women of the 80s. Living large and in charge in a 36 - 24 - 36-inch frame.

If it weren't for bitching hot mommas like these, this city would have eaten itself alive a long time ago!

Thought Michael, taking them all in; with yellow eyes, behind some green brush and the darkness.

So many gazelles out tonight. So many! But if only they knew what was also out and about in the brush. Out on the hunt down after them. Ha!

Snickered Michael. Feeling fully and completely comfortable with that side of himself. That darker side. That most other guys… wouldn't dare to let out.

What? I told you I'm a tiger. I've already revealed that to you. Revealed to you all my stripes. So, what you all stressing about now?

So many fine-looking women. So many! And lo' and behold, there on the corner, Michael now saw their queen.

Would you look at that! Biggest hair, smallest waist, longest legs, shortest skirt.

Just out walking… her lion… on a leash.

Yeah! Just out walking her… wait—what? What the fuck did I just see?

Looking back, Michael gawked at her again, her and her lion. An actual fucking lion. On a leash. The hot mama then turned her head around to check out Michael, and Michael, then, got intimidated, seeing how she was walking a bigger cat around than he was, himself. Michael got

scared, then mad, and then thought:

Oh, whatever! Her thighs are too narrow anyways.

After some time, then. Some more time spent taking all this in, all these wild and brightly animated people of the night, Michael then grew amused at how pompous and lively and vain they all seemed. Which also began to fill him up with a stir of contempt. For they all seemed so centered on themselves. Full of themselves. And nothing but themselves.

They're all really just a bunch of assholes, really!

Thought Michael. As he felt a change of heart.

They probably wouldn't give two shits about you even if you were sick with diarrhea!

Thought Michael again.

Well, it doesn't matter now.

Michael then began to think about the past, and wondered over how people used to seem different.

Yesterday
All my troubles seemed so far away
Now it looks as though they're here to stay
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Wait…?

What song is… oh… Beatles.

Years ago, people didn't seem all so obsessed with the bloated pride and misery which they called their lives. People seemed much more genuine then. Before all this Me Generation, which Michael began to see in the 70s, in his teens. Back before, there was a different time, in the 60s, that Michael remembered. Back when there were still people around that would go out of their ways to greet you when you'd pass them by. They'd say “hello,” making you feel good, and you looked forward to seeing them again the following day. Of course, for Michael, that Avalon was Coney Island, and it was a smaller neighborhood where everyone knew his name. Back starting in the late 60s, as kids, Michael used to run in a gang. Not doing nothing much that would be meaning getting someone killed—mind you!

Nothing too serious!

For it was a simpler time, when any beefs between one and another hombre was handled mano-a-mano, and no other ways else. No guns….

Although, there were lots of knives, and crowbars, and chains. And one of my buds used to fancy swinging TVs from the cord.

But still… no guns! Those were the rules. And to break that one rule—especially—would brand you and your crew as a bunch of wimps, with no principals. No balls to handle things like men. If you pulled a gun on anyone, you'd be branded by the entire city as such, as you and you-ladies were ran out of town.

Fine! That's a bit of an exaggeration on how I like to remember things. But still, it was nothing like now. Now? You have to be carrying a piece. The lot today is too chicken shit to handle matters with that old sense of all that's righteous and valiant and fair. Hmm, sorta makes me wonder how much of a fucking idiot I have to now be to think I can go all the way to Stumpy's place without one.

Michael then stopped dead in his tracks, while playing around with that nasty taste in his mouth. But then smiled, and thought:

Fuck it! Just shows I got more balls, really, then if I did going out hiding behind one.

Now, back then, Michael and his crew used to call themselves The Bloody Shamrocks. And back then, they were an Irish gang (of mixed races) that had banded together, all forming those bonds, as kids… one thinks… would never break. They were a happy-go-lucky bunch of thieving, juvenile delinquents, who couldn't avoid a day without a rumble, even if their mother's word depended on it.

The Bloody Shamrocks! That's what we called ourselves!

That's what Michael still called himself.

And if there was to be anyone left behind to continue parading that name, it would be he. An unchecked resource of fire and spit, added with the know-how of how to really beat the ever-loving motherfucking shit out of a man, had always been his bread and butter.

Having that old sense about you, as you pit yourself into great acts of violence, and lavish in it! But do it not for all the wrong reasons. But all the righteous ones! Where what you're really doing is testing the depths of your own beating heart and comparing its

love and anguish with the likes of another. Pain begetting more pain, but not for spite… but resolution! The old sense. What the fuck do people know about that shit now?

And if you could hardly imagine the level of subtlety at work, they used to call him 'Madboy' for it. And so, so were the nicknames they all gave themselves. All nicknames ending with boy. There were thirty members in total. But only the key figures that started the gang were honored as such. And the key figures at the time of the gang's prime were: Madboy, Radboy, Sadboy, and Dollboy. Jackyboy, Nastyboy, Rudeboy and Blueboy. Whiteboy, Sassboy… and finally Tomboy…?

Tomboy… ha!

Thought Michael, with a smirk.

Tomboy!

Who was particularly called that because the rest figured him for being a fag, while still pretending to be one of the guys.

He must have been! I mean… I never saw him with any chicks. So… what else could he be?

But one thing he most definitely was was a real tough son-of-a-bitch, who always insisted he wasn't what everyone teased him to be. And also loved to claim how he was really bopping lots of chicks, left and right. Never letting go, even when everyone told him they didn't give a shit, as long as he didn't start getting—too friendly!

Although…?

Thought Michael, thinking about it now, in retrospect, their suspicions couldn't have been too far off. For the last Michael had heard, Tomboy was now a lovely lady living the glamorous showgirl life, as a topless dancer on Broadway.

Ha! Fucking showgirl! Fucking Tomboy! Ha! That's funny! I can already imagine him looking very, very lovely in some skimpy costume, with a five o'clock shadow. Ha! I wonder now if he's done Cats.

But still, as for the gang…?

There were thirty of us in total, and we were a special bunch of crazy misfits, not to be messed with. Thirty of us… and now… there’s only me.

Michael then sighed, in discontent, thinking and feeling these things.

But! Alas! Also felt like it was a righteous story to tell. For for whatever they were, whatever the gang had been at its prime, none of it mattered now. But what did matter, was Madboy! For he was still here, around, kicking, carrying around his colors, even when everyone else had lowered theirs. Still carrying it, for he'd be damned if he was to start slipping.

> Okay, I feel like I'm getting mopey again. Need to liven up a bit. Hmm… fucking arcades, and stupid-ass kids today…?

The Arcade and Stupid-Ass Kids Today.

Michael had then come across an arcade, and after a while of eyeing the scene, and the whole twenty-one and below lot, he began to feel old. And a little depressed again.

> Great! Now I feel even mopey-er. But why? I ain't that much older than them now.

Thought Michael, even though really over twice most of their ages.

> Fine! There's that! But I don't feel like it, at least. So… who are you to judge?

The place was always jammed packed with High Schoolers on a school night, looking like they were making no plans to head home to do their homework. And even from a good distance, the place stank like a gym locker room stuffed with jockstraps and pizza.

> For some reason, my old uncle Francis' words are ringing in looking at all this. The man once asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Funny how I was only eight years old, I told him I wanted to be Popeye the Sailor Man.
>
> Ha! Popeye!
>
> But then my uncle Francis told me, 'kid… growing up? There is no such thing! The day you become an adult is the day you realize you're still no different from when you were as a kid. You haven't changed, everyone else around you also haven't. But now, you're expected to take on responsibilities, and pretend that you have. And instead of feeling what you'll think you'll feel, all you will feel then is alone and abandoned in the world, as you begin missing your parents and their guidance.'

Yeah, I remember those words of his that vividly. In full detail! That specifically, even at that age. My uncle Francis then got really sad, and started drinking a lot. And back then, I could never, for the life of me, understand… why.

At the arcade, there was a purple, spastic, neon sign, up front, that said: 'Stuttering Sputnik's Arcade.' And taking in this sight, Michael stopped thinking about that whole bit, and began to remember Stuttering Sputnik, the Russian. Who was ironically called that since really being a well-spoken, womanizing, jerk, who used to be part of The Ravishers.

Well, as well spoken as a Russian can get, with their ogrish sounding accents, and their manners of a belligerent wino. I don't know how he is now, but the guy was a fucking dog back then. Used to treat women like complete shit. Used to do that whole whistling and snapping one's fingers, and demanding one to come hither, like the woman was a mutt, or something. And the worst part is, most women really seem to like things being that way. And that just pisses me off! I mean, I like to fool around with women, but that's because I actually like them. This sleazy jerk-weed was a straight up misogynist. Fucking asshole once tried hitting on my sister by wiggling his tongue at her, while holding up a V shaped sign, after she blew him off. And I caught the fucker in the act.

The asshole had no clue she was my sister… all smiling at me, then, like he was thinking I was going to start digging, him trying to make my blood out to be some degenerate whore…!

Yeah, I beat the living daylights out of him then, and honestly, it had to be one of the most satisfying whoopings I've ever given.

Hmm… he owns a video arcade now? Well, that's something I would've never expected…?

A week or two ago, Michael had decided to head in and see what kids today were up to. And the first obstacle he had to deal with was the noise. The noise coming from inside sounded like the Death Star, from

Star Wars, going through major repairs. And something about all those electric farts, all buzzing and humming and beeping, all together, had made Michael feel like he was going to lose it.

> I don't like mishmash of random sounds all together like that. I at least need to hear rhythm or tempo behind it, or it'll drive me nuts.

One of the games he had come across was some duking beat 'em up called Double Dragon, and for some strange reason, the game had appealed to him. Of course, when he tried to play the game, since he had never even touched a video game in his entire life until that moment, he had gotten his ass handed to him within the first three minutes. After the third quarter, Michael threw his arms up, as he gave up. But then, when he looked back at the game, he had then had a revelation:

> What the fuck? This game is practically my entire life's story! It's practically me back in the 70s, before prison, and now again. Beat up some goofy looking dudes, move to the right, beat up some more, and then move onto a boss fight. It's just me vs. an army of douchebags I can only relate to by beating the fuck out of. I mean, those are the only buttons available: punch, kick and jump. Can't talk to them. I can't ask them how their day has been going. Just beat the fuck out of them, and move to the right. Beat the fuck out of them, and move to the right some more—and for what? For some bitching hot momma at the end dressed in some flaming red miniskirt that needs saving? Oh, fuck this game! Why does it have to be just one guy vs. the world? Every other character is programmed to take you on, because that's just what's in their 1s and 0s. There's no love, no compassion, in the world. There's nothing but full-on aggression. Everyone vs. you. You vs. all! And you're forced down this lonely path to save the damsel in distress. And in the end, the game gets really weird. After I got my ass handed to me, I watched a kid play it from start to finish with a friend. And in the end, Billy and Jimmy there went from the streets dealing with street punks, to dealing with crazy ass occult figures; some evil looking dudes, in some evil looking' temple. And in the end, they had to fight each other to claim the prize. Fuck this game! I mean, I had to play by myself since no one wants to play with some thirty-year-old guy in an arcade, but what was I going to be

facing in the end? Myself again? And that Jimmy character just looks like an evil version of Billy. Fight all that way, and for what?

And this was what was really getting to him:

Why can't it be the other way around? Why does the damsel need saving? Even though, not saying she doesn't, since all the world is also out to get her. Get her, and stick it to her! I'd also do everything in my power as a man. But it seems like the hero there needs some saving, too. I mean… what I'm trying to say is… why can't she save him for once? And now, hear me out! I know that's the man's job. But… poor Billy here is the one that's all alone, abandoned in the world, being forced to take arms against a sea of trouble. So… even though that's the part he's made to play, there's still a part she's gonna need to play that's gonna be just as important.

Michael didn't know what to make of those thoughts. But pondered on, and felt very keenly about it.

And what's the plot here? What are the motives? Why can't Billy find any other means of communicating? Punch, kick and jump… and that's it? Why is the entire world against him? Why would anyone be driven mad enough to go all that way for just one…?

Michael had then paused, as he thought of her.

I mean, everyone is against him… everyone! And there are no deviations, because that's just what's in the 1s and 0s. One straight shot, from start to finish. And at the end, you have to fight an evil version of yourself? Shit! This game is starting to scare me on a weird level.

Michael had then begun to eye the arcade game, all spooked out like. As that arcade game… began to strangely enough… eye him back.

What the fuck?

Michael had then gotten scared, again, seeing all this. But after a while, he came back to his senses. As he shook it off, smirked, and then thought:

Du du du du—du du du du—dara da—stupid Twilight Zone shit! What the fuck was all that about? It's just some stupid game, and

there's no reality to it. I mean, how would that all play out in the real world?

He had then thought of his Rosary for some strange reason, and strangely enough some more, he then felt better again.

Ah, fuck this! Let's see what other arcade games are around here.

Michael had then come across another street fighting game, called Street Fighter, literally enough. And Michael, for a second there, had grown a bit skittish to try it out.

Fuck that! Another game about my life? Double Dragon, there, was giving me some mad vibes, and I don't want to see how this game is going to affect me.

But he had then seen how silly and fantasy like the game seemed to be, with karate dudes jumping 15 to 25 feet up into the air. And shooting fire out of their hands. Michael had then grown amused.

Okay? Don't see what all this has to do with being a street fighter, but whatever!

When he got up to the arcade game, some twelve-year-old had then popped up, and decided to challenge him.

Wait? Where's your parents at, kid?

And then thought:

Wait, do I know you?

But as he really tried to think about it, he realized he couldn't figure, at least not for the moment.

Fuck it, all kids his age look the same, I guess.

Michael had then gone on with his concern of what this kid was doing up, and out, this late.

No really, where's your parents at?

What the...?

Fine! Fuck it! I guess that's 80s parenting for you! No wonder the world's going to hell, as it is, with all the juvenile delinquents now on the streets. And lookie what we have here, the little fucker smokes, too.

Now playing Street Fighter with the kid, Michael found it fun, at first. But once the kid started tearing him a new one, that's when Michael began to feel different.

Hey… hey! All right, fine! You beat me. You beat me! Wait! Hey!

After the 5th match, Michael had thrown up his arms a second time in defeat. But then the pipsqueak had noticed how sore Michael had gotten, and began pointing and laughing at him, and had then given him the finger. Of course, Michael, understood he was just some kid, and he shouldn't be letting it get to him. But then again…?

Stupid munchkin! Kids have no respect today. No respect—whatsoever! He's downright being mean about it. I mean, fucker was blowing smoke in my direction during the match, all sneaky like, on purpose, to blind me a little and make sure to lose! Motherfu—…?

Well, fine! Whatever! You keep playing your stupid video games. You keep pressing those buttons like George Jetson, thinking you got skills, and you're putting some hard work and effort into it. Because I'll tell you what, if you want to be a real-deal street fighter, like for instance, me, then you need to get your head out of your ass with these games. With karate idiots jumping high up into the air to do one uppercut, or, doing stupid spinning kicks twirling around like a ballerina, because real fighting is nothing like that! And how the fuck are they street fighters, anyhows? Where are all the hoods at? What's up with all these karate dudes? I've never seen no fools trotting through Queens, wearing a bathrobe, held together by a rope, all bear footed like. Pretty sure any idiot that decided to do that, especially some pissy Japanese dude named Ry… Ryee… Ryu… Riayu, he'd would get laughed at and his ass handed to him before he even crossed the block. I mean, look at all those loose clothes! You can't have anything on you that anyone can grab onto, and grapple your ass, if you want to survive any fight.

Michael had then looked down at all the loose clothing he was wearing, but shrugged it off.

Fuck it! I'm just that good!

But anyways, the second someone grapples you, all the dragon punches and spinning kicks won't do you any good. Well, these games do come from Japan. So, whatever! It's all fantasy, really,

and I guess I can accept that. Anyways, kid, you get your head out of stupid shit like this, and then come talk to me, and I'll teach you what's what.

Michael had then paused, smirked, and realized just how much of a sore loser he was being, losing a fight to some snot-nosed brat, and feeling this way. First fight he had ever lost, too.

Yeah, first one! But then again, how the fuck does a video game count? And set up boxing matches don't count, either. In real life, and on the streets, I've never lost one. And on the streets, that's where it matters. None of the stupid point system like in boxing, nor any stupid health bars like in these stupid games. It's all about taking a beating, and not going limp, and not backing out. Fighting and fighting and fighting, until you find yourself on top. And when it comes to one-on-ones... I've always KO-ed the fucker, too! I'm just that good!

Then again... I did used to get my ass whooped by my dad all the time, but that doesn't count, either, that's just an ass whooping. And there was that one time I got rushed by fifty dudes—but come the fuck on! I have to be a total idiot not to chicken out on that! I've never lost a fight when it comes to one-on-ones, at least. So there!

The Scam Bar.

There, on the corner now, Michael could see Stumpy's place. He was finally there. Stumpy's place was a scam bar that was full of some of the thickest and meanest assholes Brooklyn had to offer. The last place Madboy, in particular, wouldn't be caught dead in.

That is to say, if you figured me for a pussy!

Outside, the bar was swimming in Numbskulls: an old rival gang of Madboy's from back in his Shamrock days. Back then, they were the biggest pile of degenerate slimebags that this part of the city had to offer. And from the looks of it now, it seemed like they had mutated into an even bigger pile of human wastoids, that one might expect from a Tromaville movie. Madboy couldn't recognize any of them individually. And if it wasn't for the tattoo of a penis with a mohawk on the side of

their heads.

No shit! A freaking tattoo of a freaking cock, on their freaking heads... yes!

Without that insignia, there, there was no telling if they were Numbskulls at all, compared to any and all other punks you'd find on the streets these days. Back then, Madboy and the rest were always getting mixed up in their business, but back then, you could at least expect a Numbskull to know how to form complete sentences. Now? There was no communication with the lot. No parley whatsoever. Grunting at them wouldn't work, since Michael couldn't figure a civilized way to do it to let them know he wasn't looking for trouble.

Me, not looking for trouble? Ha!

And even though the idea of just swinging a sledgehammer over their heads seemed like the best means of communicating, once you had one's attention, they'd all swarm on you by the hundreds in half a second. They were still sporting their signature Travis Bickle's from way back when. But now, seeing a cock with its own mohawk tattooed on the side of their heads.

That's some new shit they've just come up with.

Had to be the stupidest fucking gang emblem that Michael had had the displeasure of ever gazing at. Much about this new breed of Numbskulls Michael had only just learned about in prison, when they started getting dumped in by the masses. With this new breed, Michael figured as long as you were willing to get such a retarded tattoo done up, any psycho could be accepted in. But the question now was:

What the fuck are they doing here?

Stumpy's had always been infested with the wrong sort, but these guys weren't even human.

Other than these gentlemen....

As Michael got closer to the entrance, he also saw a few Beefcakes hanging out front with the Loony Tunes. And now Michael was really confused. Back in the day, you'd never see a Beefcake hanging out with a Numbskull. They were practically rival gangs. But, then again, practically nobody liked The Numbskulls, so seeing any gang out front with them would have still been a surprise.

"Michael," called out one of The Beefcakes.

Michael didn't know this clown. He was a bit too small and scrawny looking (even with boulders for biceps) to be a member of The Beefcakes, so he must have been someone new. That was also the thing about The Beefcakes; they were an actual gang of bodybuilders that started out from the gyms.

Fucking meat-trucks!

As Michael continued moving forward, it was becoming apparent that more and more of them were beginning to recognize him.

Fuck it! Bring it!

But at this point, it didn't matter. Madboy had set himself straight back at his dump that time had come to confront his past. And there was just no chickening out now.

That is to say... if I could chicken out?

Something was in him tonight, driving him forward, as if he was on autopilot; something that gave him no fear. And that was part of what was beginning to scare him.

I wonder if I'll see her again tonight...?

"Oh shit, is that you, Madboy," called out a face Michael did sorta recognize.

Telling from his treads...?

Wearing leather from head to toe, that’s covered in rhinestones. Shirtless underneath to exemplify his sweaty, man loving physique. But wearing a jacket that has a sewn-on image of their pussy-faced leader, at the back, that's all puckering up like the sleazy pervert be whistling Dixie. Also, this faggot wannabe, here, is wearing a bow-tie.

Based on all that, the slimebag must have been a Ravisher. And finally, Michael was now finding the lot he'd be expecting here.

"Hey... hey... Michael? What's the rush? Where’s your manners," dished he, this time.

Michael didn't respond, and went totally out of his way to show he had little interest in doing so.

"What's wrong, Michael, you seem lost?"

Michael just walked on by without a flinch. Knowing that any greeting from a Ravisher meant a knife to the back when he wasn't looking. Entering the bar, Michael finally saw the usual suspects: Ravishers, Jam

City 5s, Brooklyn Brawlers, also, Brooklyn Busters, and some Turkish Delights. The Turkish Delights were a group of Turks.

Obviously!

And not really a gang. Whose business was importing a lot of exquisitely expensive drugs; like hashish, for all the high life parties all over Manhattan: the city of vanities.

Fucking Armani Suits! I'd like to throw all those cocksuckers into a bonfire, and dance around it like a wild Indian.

A few of the guys from upstairs were also here. Who were basically, in a joint like this: fuck-up mobsters that never got made, because they were… well…?

Well… plain fuck-ups!

They were always found doing grunt work with street hoods like these. Street hoods, who were themselves out trying to make higher connections. Stumpy, of course, was one of these fuck-up, errand boys, in-betweeners, stuck dealing with people of such lower disposition and age.

“Hey… I know you!” Said a stranger Michael wasn't all too sure of:

Haunting eyes!

Some of the lot, there, seemed to recognize Madboy. Some didn't. Although, some of the ladies on the tables, really seemed to remember his face…

And all too well, too.

“Hey, Michael,” smiled out some chick Michael was sure he fucked a week ago.

A really tall and skinny Polish girl that I had brought over to my dump one night for the usual. And when I wasn't looking, she had taken a bottle of chocolate syrup I had, and started squirting it all over me. Giggled. And started licking it up. Now. I'm not going to complain about that, there. Oh no! That was sweet! But then she got it all over the place, and now the cockroach problem I got is ten times worse. I mean, stupid girl! I fucking hate cockroaches! I really, really fucking hate them! They gross me the fuck out. And now, I can’t go without a night without those little bastards being all over me. And some of them ain’t little, but huge! And for what? She wasn't even that good in the sack!

Michael took another look up at her, and then felt like it was being a little mean to feel that way about her now. She was an awkwardly tall looking girl, with a bit of a slouch going on. But still, very beautiful to Michael, nonetheless. She seemed like such a sweetheart, still. And Michael then began to smile.

Although, I do have a thing for taller women. And, I love that quaint little smile of hers. Plus, she's really got a beautiful set of legs there, too. You can see all the muscle definition... and I love that! Plus, she did suck some really mean dick back at my place, really going all out and falling head over heels in love with my manhood, like she wanted to send it Father's Day Hallmark cards, and call it 'Daddy'. Ha! Hmm...?

Thought Michael, as he looked at her again, and started getting turned on by her. While... disassociating the whole notion that when being called ‘Daddy’ had any association with the girl having some major, major emotional scarring from her childhood. Since her real father might have....

Shut up! Don’t associate it like that! They call me ‘Daddy’, because... it’s cute! Let’s just leave it there.

And now, seeing how Michael still had his sights on her, the girl then started biting her pinky, while whisking her face around a little, and that was now getting Michael feeling excited of her prospect again.

Hmm... I just might have to give her another tumble someday. But, as long as I keep her away from the condiments.

Thought Michael, now, smiling back up at...?

Whatever her name is.

As he grew a dastardly smile, as Pat Benatar's 'Heartbreaker' began to play. And with that, Michael began to entertain the thought that the song was really dedicated to him.

Fuck! What was your name? Judy? Juliette? I know it started with a J.

Looking at the ladies around him, Michael began to really feel horny again, and fully extended. And that made him begin to grow worried. He had plans, and he had business, here at Stumpy's, and he couldn't allow some tail now to get the best of him. But, then again, he just couldn't help watching ladies pass him by, as he narrowed his eyes on their diamond windows.

A diamond window is something else I made up. It's when you look at a chick from their ass end, and you see that small diamond shape gap between her thighs, that gives you a lovely peepshow of their lovebox. And, gotta note, it really does look like a window, too, if you look at it: with the way the ass crack separates at the bottom... makes it look like curtains. And all you're left with is the million-dollar vistas of what lays beyond. Helluva scenery! Of course, if the thighs are too close together, it doesn't work! And neither does it work if the thighs are too far apart. Gap can't be too narrow, nor wide. And if you can't see the lovebox passed the window, there's definitely no magic there. You gotta see it, and it's gotta look juicy enough to where you can smell it. It's got to be perfect! And when it is, it can give you tunnel vision. Make you see looping zoom-ins, which is that camera technique you see a lot of now, where they keep looping a short clip, over and over again, when the editor wants to emphasize something to a hypnotic effect. But with a diamond window... your eyes just get zoomed in, and...!

Michael shook his head, as he tried to break that line of thought. Also. Michael realized he was practically explaining all this to himself, in his own head, which sorta scared him to think that he would.

Fuck, who am I explaining all this to? I already know all this. I'm the one that came up with it. Fuck! And I think I do this a lot, too. Now all I really need to do is do it out loud, and then everyone would think I'm a certified nut.

Absorbing all the atmosphere, and all the people around him, Michael saw how differently Stumpy's Place looked and felt from what he remembered it back in the 70s. And seeing the difference time had made, had Michael then entertaining the thought of what it meant to be a tough guy in the 80s. Seeing this new breed of tough guy acts acting up around him, the way they were now.

Goofy looking bunch. All trying way too hard to show for something. Even though—full of nothing! Although, I guess they still got their entertainment value, even though not the effect they were looking for. Ha!

Michael had always noticed the differences time had made, going from decade to decade, from generation to generation. And here at Stumpy's,

Michael saw the lot he'd been seeing all his life. Since as early as he could remember, as early back as the 50s.

I was around, here, in New York City, when the Greasers were here, too. As early as when I was four years old.

And now seeing the same lot, again. Different. And yet not. Had Michael's gears in his noggin now turning. Every decade had its lot full of personalities and characteristics. Of course, even though, individually, most still all had their own unique things going on that made them uniquely them. But generally, most people also liked to keep their acts trendy. Pizazz, attitude, and slang were just as much a trendy thing as music, movies, and fashion was.

Monkey see. Monkey do. Good monkey! Have a banana.

And mostly, what Michael had seen in this decade was shit from prison, and that didn't count since most of the people in prison were sorta frozen in time. In Attica, Michael was still seeing a lot of those cold, brooding, calculative, political activist types, he remembered from the 60s.

Attica had a lot of political activist from a bygone era… a lot!

But if there was one thing that stood out, always, that Michael had seen, was that every decade had its tough guy acts all acting all stoic.

At least with my-so-called generation. And just acting. Not actually being.

Although, Michael did find the stoic types annoying. No matter how real they might have really been, since he couldn't see how people could be so cold and uncaring. Since, Michael found it inhuman. So disconnected with reality.

Like a lot of people now, too. All trying to seem hard, and on the ball. But, if you ask me, all faking it.

They looked like they were hiding something. And Michael, being how his nature was, just wanted to punch them in the face to see what their first reactions would be.

But not to be offensive!

Michael just felt like he could really see a man's true nature when his nose had been broken bloody, and his facade had been shattered into pieces. Revealing then what lay underneath.

But anyways!

As for what Michael saw of now around him, all the macho tough guy acts, they now had a funny persona going on. There was no more of that Sweathog's lighthearted strut and goof and pizazz Michael remembered from the decade past. Stuff that Michael liked. But still, plenty of that annoying, mean as fuck, macho crap: where all you really needed to be tough was some aviator sunglasses, a red bandanna, a fortified brown mustache that just oozed machismo, and a cigar in your mouth. And the harder you chomp down on that cigar, the harder you seemed.

Although, the look is pretty stupid funny, as annoying as it is. Yeah, you go ahead and mouth on that giant brown dick—I mean cigar—there! Chomping down on it like some Hungry-Hungry Hippos. Growl!

Everyone now was also, on the funny side, trending this head bopping thing, like they couldn't stop digging what they dug. Digging and digging and digging, all the way to China. One would think of something that was 'bitching', then start bopping, then turn to his pal next and say, 'bitching', and this other fool would now get infected with this most heinous disease, and start bopping' and also saying 'bitching'—even though! Really, not knowing what for.

Ain't that some, stupid silly shit! Ha!

And they all seemed in synchronize and choreographed even. But besides that, some of them had this really weird thing going on that Michael liked to refer to as a Journey Face.

You know, Steve Perry and the 'don't stop believing' guys... love that song!

Something he came up with after seeing that one music video of them, on MTV, where they were all making weird looking faces, all panting and sweating, at some PP: Problematic Pixie, passing by.

You know... a pretty girl with problems. The ones with the long faces that you start aching for, but you say nothing to. Because, if you did, their problems would then become your problems. But you continue to ache for them, and now more so than ever.

But anyways, as for the Journeymen...?

The thing about these fools is....

These fools had a way of sneaking up on a man, and Michael had been spooked by them a couple of times. One minute, you'd be minding your

own business....

And then all of a sudden!

You'd be face-to-face with some hombre brooding up a storm; with quivering lips, and soul-blazing eyes; they would have this throbbing, sweaty, passionate look of a lover and a fighter; as they'd glare at you with eyes enraptured by Journey's Separate Ways, played out on the 80s astral plains. Looking so alone, and angry, and hungry, and righteous, like they wanted to rip your heart out, and fuck it! That! Or kick it to the wall! Really spooked Michael silly the first time he saw someone cold-flash him one in close-up, and he didn't know if that lonesome stranger, there, wanted to beat his ass... or beat that ass!

Ah shit!

"What the fuck you lookin' at, you want some of this," called out Mr. Journey Face, a centimeter away from Michael's nose.

Where the fuck did you... damn! And right while I was thinking about you fools, too. What timing!

"Nothing," replied Michael.

As he walked away, and tried to regain some of the composure that was just lost.

Don't fucking do that, shit!

Thought Michael.

Dammit... they spooked me again!

Michael then chuckled, as the silliness of it all began to set in, and then began to like it, seeing how the persona really would suit his own.

Then there was the way everyone dressed now, and that there was something else. They were all so tacky now; their threads looked all so flashy and shiny; nothing but leathered up jackets and pants. And headbands and wristbands and this bands and that bands. And with their mean as fuck head bopping thing, they looked like they had stepped off the set of that Michael Jackson 'Beat It' music video.

Actually, I heard they brought in some real hoods to make that vid look authentic. No wonder I felt like I recognized some of those frowny fuckfaces in there.

They weren't wearing clothes—not normal ones—no! They were wearing rhinestone studded belts, rhinestone studded bracelets, rhinestone studded leather jackets. Rhinestone! Rhinestone!

Rhinestone! Then some cloth underneath covered in graffiti. That! Or they were covered head-to-toe in denim. A lot of acid washed shit. Which was also covered in rhinestones, and looked like it was put through a mulcher.

Wait a fuck... why am I criticizing? I look just like they do now... damn you MTV!

Then there was their hair, and that was another thing.

Wild!

Wild could only be the word to describe it. For every head in the joint practically had a wild animal tied up on top. All thrashing and slashing. And moaning and mangy-ing. Trying to break free. Also, a lot of them now had a Ziggy Stardust do.

Oh! You know, the do looked good on David Bowie back in the 70s. But it's a travesty now! A fucking travesty! Fuck their backwards waterfalls! And they're all over the place, now! Can't believe I wanted to get one just a couple of months ago. Now? Looking at them all just makes me want to yank at their shit as they pass me by, to see if they'll start making 'hee-haw' sounds. Fucking mule-heads!

Then Michael thought of his rat tail, and felt like cutting it off.

Even Italians and Hispanics here have that shit now, too, looking all curly and greasy. And even black guys! Too! What the fuck! All short in the front, long in the back. And with blacks, their shit all around juicy, since they trying to Jerri curl their shit to boot! What is this world coming to?

Michael was frowning; Michael was frowning now something fierce, watching all this.

But then again, a couple of the chicks here have it, too, but what they got is that punk rocker variation that I've also seen a lot of, that I like to call a Jareth. And it's a look that looks totally badass and hot on them.

A Jareth was basically David Bowie's hairdo, from that weird Muppet movie: Labyrinth.

So, it's definitely a do for chicks. And damn do they know how to rock it! Looking like man-eaters. Looking so slutty and vicious and vain and nasty, like they just stepped out of a CBGB bathroom stall, after getting double penetrated by Sid Vicious and Frank

Sinatra—Sid doing his usual in the poop shoot while Blue Eyes did his usual nailing her in the kisser! Then stepping out, and not washing up, first, before they left. Looking like they're the deities of skank, Kiss would sacrifice a virgin schoolgirl to, on stage, for a good pussy harvest to last the nation through the winter. Fuck! I'd like to yank their manes, hard, and have 'em neighing like ponies, while I work my plow from the back.

Michael shook his head again, as he noticed someone else was calling out to him.

"Michael," called the character.

Michael knew the guy, but couldn't remember the name. He was a Nim Fo Matic: another high scale group of blow-pushers from Manhattan. Also, pimps. Known for pimping beautiful black and Hispanic women from the ghettos. Now, of course, if you were to call them a pimp to their face, they'd try to cut you in a heartbeat with an old fashion straight razor. You see, for them, they were saving their women from crack infested hoods... by making them addicted to coke, and then selling them to some white Armani suit in Manhattan, who just had a taste for something 'Nubian', as those Lizard People would put it. But either than being pimps and coke-pushers, they weren't such bad guys.

But honestly... fuck pimps!

"Mike—Michael—Mike—Mr. Knight! Come on, man, you don't remember me?"

"Maybe? I know your face, but can't remember the place."

"Fuck, man—Mike! It's me! James 'Slims' Holly."

Yeah, Michael knew him, only face he felt like he could stomach in a dive like this.

"Mike, what are you doing here, and with that jacket on? What do you think this is, the good ol' days or something? I mean—"

"Don't worry, James, not going to be here for long. I just want to talk to Stumpy, and then leave," responded Michael, eyeing away at some more diamond windows passing by.

"Why do you want to talk to Stumpy? Mike... Seriously! What the fuck are you doing here? The whole joint is up at arms talking about you? Anywhere else might have been cool, but you know how most of the guys here feel about you," explained James, as he

tried to get Michael's attention.

"Don't worry, James, everything is bitchin'. By the way, what are The Numbskulls doing outside," asked Michael.

"You mean The Cockskulls? I can't exactly tell you," responded James.

"Cockskulls," exclaimed Michael.

"They changed their name...."

"To Cockskulls? What? The tattoos of dicks on their heads wasn't trying hard enough to prove how fucking retarded—"

"Well... um?"

"Never mind, I'll find the man by myself," concluded Michael.

Michael passed him by, and continued looking for Stumpy.

"Cockskulls," uttered Michael, boldly to himself in amusement.

So, this was the situation: everyone in the joint had their eye on Michael, and he was probably not going to leave this place in one piece. And then, Michael had a funny thought cross his mind:

This is my scene!

This was what it was all accumulating up to, and now, he couldn't stop relishing in it. Madboy had always enjoyed a good fight, but this had become something entirely different, and on an entirely new level.

Probably going to get myself....

"Oh my God, Mikey... is that you?"

As Michael turned his head around to see who was calling him out now, he saw it was Letoya 'Lipsticks' Green. Or 'Ms. Lipsticks,' as everyone else called her. Supposedly, from years of study, the neighborhood had made her out to be half Caribbean black on one side; and half Cuban, Russian, and Cherokee mix on the other. Or simply put, the best example of genealogical ingenuity New York City had to offer, and a true mixing pot of utter perfection. Her hair was all wild and curled up like a golden bush in flames. Lips always glossed, and puckered up, and held into position; able to drive any man with a dry piece hysterically out of his mind.

"Oh, don't tell me, Kimberly Chambers," guessed Michael, with a playful smirk.

"What," exclaimed Letoya, while shifting her eyes.

"How you doing, Letoya Green?"

"Tsss—really— Michael? You gonna call me out like that?"

Letoya gave Mikey a hug. And this time, some of the crowd couldn't stop pretending, not to notice.

“So, how are you and your sexy lips there doing?"

"Ha—really? Is that all you got for me after all these years?"

Letoya paused. She had lost herself for a minute greeting an old face, and now she looked like she was settling back in with the mindset of the rest of the crowd.

"Michael, what are you doing here? I've heard Conway, there, talking about you, and you do know there's a lot of people here that don't like you much—right," explained Ms. Lipsticks, while staring at Conway, as Conway stared back.

"Well, to be honest, I don't like them much, either," responded Michael, playing around with that bitter taste in his mouth.

"Michael, this is serious!"

"I know, I already got that line from James."

"WHAT THE FUCK you doing here, Madboy," bellowed out a large figure in the back.

That sounded like he had a mega-speaker instead of a voice-box, the room froze; Boomatic had that effect, even when he wasn't trying to be loud.

“You listening to me? Hey, Letoya—BITCH! What the FUCK you doing over there with him,” bellowed out Boomatic, again.

At this point, the room continued pretending like it was carrying on with its own business.

"Boom, don't be talking to me like—”

“Shut the FUCK UP, WOMAN! Don't give me any of that lip! Get your bony ass back over here before I...!”

Letoya quickly listened, and Boom, just gave her that look like he was going to deck her in the face. Intimidating her shitless. He didn't. Madboy, on the other hand, decided not to listen, and continued walking off looking for Stumpy.

Why the fuck did you get yourself involved with these pimps, Letoya?

Thought Michael.

"Oh no you don't! Who the FUCK do you think you is? You think

you A Number One, Hot Shot, here? I'm talking to you, SUCKA," lashed out Boom, again.

"You know where I can find Stumpy," asked Michael, without turning around.

Boomatic began laughing in amusement.

'This little Irish hick must have lost his mind, and his way in here, for if he knew any better, there's no way he'd diss me like that!' I know that's what you're thinking!

Thought Michael, as he noticed Boom was now approaching him in a demanding pace.

“You think I’m playing? Oh, I’m coming for you, I’m coming for yo' ass—now! I’M GONNA GET YOU, SUCKA!”

Of course, Madboy was ten steps ahead of him; Boomatic was left-handed, and his left foot was moving much faster than his right; the big oaf was telegraphing all his moves for Michael, and didn't even know it.

Rompous-pompous, asshole! Make your move!

As Boomatic came around to grab him from behind, Madboy turned, and clocked him over the head with a bottle of Jack Daniels; the same one he'd been drinking out of all night; still in his hands to his surprise. Then, Madboy took one last swing to his sweet spot, and Boom dropped like an ox. Oh! There was no pretending now, the room was itching to jump Madboy's ass. But seeing practically one of their hardest hitters go out so quick, made them think twice, no matter what their numbers were.

"So, do any of you know where I can find Stumpy—anyone? Or, do I have to really start losing character," called out Madboy.

As he stared the lot down, trying to pick out which fool would have the balls to step up to him next.

Plus, if any of them try pulling out a piece, now, I'd best hold onto this empty whiskey bottle, here, to chuck it at them. So fucking stupid coming here like this! Ah—fuck it!

"Motherfucker," shouted someone from the back, and kept himself in the back.

Yeah! Keep your ass at the back of the class, before the teacher—calls on you!

"Stumpy,” yelled out Michael.

"Hey, Michael, I'm right here!"

The Fingers.

Wow! The years had not been kind to Stumpy. He seemed shorter and uglier than ever before. But somehow, his hair was also darker and thicker, which made Michael think of Jerry Lewis for some reason.

"Let's take this to the back… okay? You okay, Michael? Okay Mike! Come on, let's go back to my spot, and have a drink," mumbled Stumpy.

As Michael began to follow Stumpy, he then noticed he was being escorted by five Beefcakes, who all just so happened, popped up all convenient like.

Oh… so that's how it is? Well… fine! Bigger and taller all you guys might be. Just remember… I'm bigger and taller… in all the ways that—count!

Up until now, the bar had been pretty dark, smelly, and looked like the insides of a bus-stop toilet. But as Madboy approached the back, things started seeming prettier. There was no more graffiti on the walls. No smell of sweaty cocks and vag that had gone bad months ago at some fisherman's wharf. And. No loud as fuck guitar riffs playing in the background, to some act that couldn't sing for shit, that started up after that Pat Benatar song was over with. What there were were: nice orange paper lampshades hanging from the ceiling, deco-ed out in 70s designs; cherry wooden furnishing that smelled as fresh as a camping trip; and the booth to Stumpy's was hidden in a corner, that had colorful beads hanging down, at its entrance, all the way to the ground. Michael felt a certain sense of calm here he hadn't felt since he was a kid.

But then again….

Michael… wasn't born yesterday. And even though as stupid and gullible as he might have seemed on the outside. On the inside…?

You know, Stumpy… maybe all the others might fall for your chummy ways—but I won't! Because I know you're really just a two-faced conniving bastard. I mean, you work for the fucking mob, and my dad taught me never to trust you and your Cosa Nostra lot. You there, with your olive oil charms, when you're really just two-faced. So, you go ahead now and play your spiel,

and try to butter me up like some Dean Martin, even though you're one ugly motherfucking bastard, if I do say so myself. Go ahead, and have some Spaß. But in the end, if you don't give me the info I need, I'm ringing your neck in! And, no! I'm not going to be afraid of your goombah friends, again, like when you asked me to throw that fight, way back when. Not this time! Because I really don't give a shit—this time! And, I also know there really won't be any. You're too much of an errand boy fuck up for them to care if you get choked out by some two-bit punk like me. And then again, they might even find the story funny, and laugh in your face, when you tell them about it. You! Hoping they might do something about it. Fuck you now for pretending to be my friend!

"Okay, Michael, sit down, and let's talk this over," said Stumpy, as one of his golden teeth glimmered so bright that it blinded Michael, almost.

Ah! What the fuck? Close your fucking mouth! That, and you got spinach stuck between your teeth, and it's disgusting to look at.

“Call me Madboy.”

“Okay… gotcha,” replied Stumpy, while gesturing with his hands like he had a pair of shooters; going 'pew pew,' and winking at Madboy in a queer and corny manner.

It was just Stumpy and Madboy in that corner. That, and Stumpy had conjured up a martini out of thin air. And as good as Michael was reading people’s movements, he had no fucking clue how Stumpy had come up with such a large glass of gin, swimming with green olives.

"Oh, you want a drink," asked Stumpy, as the glimmer from his golden tooth began to piss Madboy off.

"Nah, already been drinking all night, and right now, I have a nice buzz going on… like to keep it that way."

"Okay, pussycat.”

Pussycat? Fucking 60s people and their buttery slang! Okay—whatever—Kojak! Just better not start calling me a butterfly, or I'll sting you like a bee!

“Nice to see you taking things easy. Oh, and it's nice to see you, Michael—I mean—Madboy! How have you been, son?"

"I'm looking for Radboy."

"Radboy—ha! Well I remember a time you two were as thick as

thieves. A rowdy group of boys always up to no good—am I right? Ha-ha," joked Stumpy while faking a laugh, as if he was actually funny.

Madboy just glared at him, straight on.

"Oh, just kidding around, Madboy, I know how you been, and I know how you must feel."

"You know how I must feel," retorted Michael, amusingly.

"Come on, Madboy? I've known you forever! I've known you since you and your Bloody Shamrocks were just kids. Hell, I remember your father—Redboy—and his posse back in—"

"Radboy—Stumpy—where's Radboy? Not my father, Redboy!"

Stumpy paused.

"He doesn't want to see you," responded Stumpy, with a shrug.

"Oh, you asked him already? Well, that's amazing! I was really wowed how you pulled that martini out of your ass—but now this?"

"He doesn't want to see you, Madboy—I just know," responded Stumpy, again, trying to kill the subject.

"Why?"

"Why are you looking for him," asked Stumpy.

"Well, you do remember why I went to prison—right? Well, the word from the grapevine has been that maybe he could have had something to do with it," explained Michael, as his eyes narrowed onto Stumpy.

"Wait a sec—hold the horses—you thought he was behind the fire? Michael, I tell you—"

"Madboy!"

"Okay... Madboy? Well, I can honestly tell you now he had nothing to do with it," explained Stumpy, as he tried to evade Madboy's stare, which was starting to intimidate him.

"Oh, so you know something? You know who might have had something to do with it? Okay, now I'm interested in that," said Michael, as his brow widened with intrigue.

"Son, believe me when I say, if I knew, I'd tell you. Your father had a lot of friends that were guys up-top. They at least would have dealt with the matter if anyone really knew the purpose of the fire in that building," explained Stumpy, keeping a coy watch of Michael, as if he was hoping Michael had bought the line.

Stumpy, I can read you like a fucking book—you conniving bastard! And stop mentioning my father, because I know you're just trying to do that to win my sympathy.

"Unless you and your guys up-top are protecting him… how does that sound," guessed Michael.

"I don't know, son, we don't know! I don't know where you heard such a crazy story like that, but—"

"Fine, then maybe Radboy does, so how about I go see that chum of mine," said Michael, forcing his stare into Stumpy, letting him know he wasn't backing down.

"Michael, can I ask you something?"

"No," responded Michael, really not interested in seeing Stumpy try and change the subject.

Stumpy grew even coyer now, as if though he was some perky, little, Lolita schoolgirl, Michael was supposed to start digging.

Ah! Why did I even picture that in my head? Fucking Stumpy in a catholic schoolgirl outfit… ugh!

"Michael—son?"

Didn't I tell you…!

"Does this have something to do with that last boxing match of yours," asked Stumpy, looking all sympathetic like.

Ah, great! I knew he was going to bring this up.

"Because seriously, son, after all these years, are you still soaking over that matter," asked Stumpy, trying to nod his way into Michael's graces.

Michael said nothing, realizing how far Stumpy might take this. Then bit down on his bottom lip, hard, and decided to wait it out, before going back to asking questions again.

And knowing Stumpy, this is going to be painful… oh so painful. And buttery, too!

"Son, I want to tell you something, and I hope you don't take this the wrong way."

Oh, shut up, you!

"But, you do know… how I should put this…?"

Stumpy went on with another phony look of sympathy, as Michael felt like blowing up at his comb-over to see if it would rise up off his bald spots.

Actually, not gonna happen. It looks like he's glued that stringy hair of his into place, just in case something like that would ever happen. Oh, I hate this man!

“You were never cut out for it—to be a boxer—I mean,” said Stumpy.

And that there almost had Michael completely lose his nerve.

“I mean, you could have been a contender!”

Yeah, I could have been somebody… I've seen the movie! Fuck you!

“But you were too aggressive in the ring. You didn't want to play by the rules. You kept going for headbutts and low blows and—"

“What you saying, I sucked,” broke out Michael, as he was no longer able to contain it.

“No, you had potential. Really, you did! But you can't bring the streets into the ring, you have to play by the rules, and—”

“I just wanted to win,” broke out Michael, again, as he felt like biting his tongue.

Don't hold him up anymore! Let him finish… so I can then… yeah!

“Well it's not always about winning,” responded Stumpy.

Another forced smile, and then:

“Anyways, that's over now, but I'm not going to argue over the fact that you did have potential—we all saw it! You could have gone straight to the top. It would have really been something if it all worked out. Seeing as a kid like you who had never been given much of a chance to really shine… never finishing high school… beginning hard labored work at a very young and tender age… practically raised by the streets since your old man worked most of the time for us. And then there's what happened to your mother.”

No! No! No! Don't bring up my mom, you gremlin!

“Don't know what to say about that tale. You and your sister didn't deserve something like that happening to your family. What possessed that woman to do what she did? I feel sorry for you—I do! It's always heartbreaking seeing another kid from the neighborhood being forced to deal with all that growing up.”

Is it over? Please, tell me it's over!

“Then you went to prison—such a tragedy! But like I said….”

Please, make it stop! God, please, make it stop!

"You could have been a real contender, could have really been somebody."

Stumpy had then stopped, and Michael felt relieved that it was possibly over. But then all of a sudden, Stumpy broke out with the phoniest, most overly indulgent, conniving smiles Michael had had the displeasure of ever gazing at. And as Michael began to shake his head, softly, awestruck by Stumpy's corniness, Stumpy went on to nod his, as if to say, 'it's okay, son… it's okay,' and then said it:

"Even your father believed it!"

Oh, so buttery!

Thought Michael, as he slumped down in his seat, and felt so stupefied by what he had just experienced, that for a second there, he almost forgot about the whole Radboy matter. Why he even went in there in the first place.

Oh, I hate you! I hate you so much!

"Well, I hope you understand."

Fuck you from the bottom of my heart! Stop smiling!

A good ten seconds then passed, as Stumpy held on to that last look, and then said:

"Well, is there something you want to say to me?"

And then Michael felt like it was time to flip the tables.

"Yeah, I do, Stumpy—I really do," mumbled out Michael, still simmering from Stumpy's last bit.

"What is it, son," asked Stumpy—sincerely—as Michael almost felt like growling at him.

"Well, Stumpy… fuck you and your conniving two-bit ways! I mean, fuck you sincerely! And if you try and put me through another one of those again, and don't tell me where Radboy is… Stumpy? Straight up! I'm going to choke you silly," explained Michael, as he finished it off with a nod.

And with that, Stumpy went off.

"Michael? Son? I'm—I'm telling you—I'm…?"

Stumpy had now really lost some of his cool, seeing as how Michael wasn't going to be buying his shtick, which had him stuttering his silly head off. And as he did, Michael began to feel a 180, as he reverse-slumped his way back up from his cushy and lethargic surroundings, and felt it was about time to end this. Michael's dad had once taught

him something about guys like Stumpy. He had taught him: how they'd always try to dance around a subject matter to try and wear you down. How guys like Stumpy, really, had very tiny balls. And if you really wanted to get something out of them, all you had to do was reach for them, squeeze, and make them squirm it out.

"Son, do you really think you can just waltz in here with all the enemies you've made in your time… a lot of them guys you passed by to see me… and just waltz on out," asked Stumpy, seeming all of a sudden, a little too confident for Michael's taste.

No, fuck you—it's my turn! You had your spaß, and now it's time for me to have mine.

"It couldn't hurt to try. So, how about that Radboy," lashed out Michael, as he glared at the man some more, to let him know, he wasn't backing down, ever.

"Oh, you are something, you really are a character. You know—you—um? You know who you remind me of," whimpered out Stumpy, trying hard to hold his composure, and failing at it miserably.

Madboy then tilted his head in Dutch angle, and gave the look as if he was just bubbling up with anticipation, all sarcastically. Then said:

"Tell me."

But then cringed up inside, realizing exactly back to where Stumpy was going to take this.

"Well, Redboy!"

You piece-of-shit! Stop mentioning my—

"Your father back in the day, he was also—"

"Hey! Stumpy! Might if I make an observation," broke out Madboy.

"Um… I guess?"

Now's the time!

Madboy smiled… said nothing for a second so as to make Stumpy anticipate for it… then said it:

"What is the deal with those stumpy little fingers of yours? I mean, I know that's where you get your nickname and all—but still! I can't help but ask, I mean, they're so stumpy—but yet so fat! They look like really, really fat children's hands."

Stumpy began blinking, rapidly, as he realized Madboy wanted to take him back to how the other boys used to treat him in the schoolyard as kids.

"Michael?"

"And—boy—are your knuckles hairy, too! Or are those finger sweaters? I mean, I've never heard of such a thing, but looking at those hairy digits of yours…?"

"Madboy—please!"

"Plus, I also have to ask, do those Polish sausages ever get stuck trying to dial a rotary phone?"

"Just leave—Michael—just—"

But by this point, Madboy had had enough of the worm, as he grabbed Stumpy by the throat.

"Stumpy! Stop fucking around and tell me—"

But within a split second later, a 500-pound gorilla had escaped from the zoo, and had Michael over its head. This particular Beefcake had been waiting for this moment, and once he saw Madboy jump at Stumpy, the Beefcake then saw his chance to jump in after him. Madboy was up high now, really high, almost helpless.

Damn! Who called an elevator in the Empire State Building to the top floor?

And the quickest and most effective reaction he could act out on was to now go for the eyes.

"What the…?"

As the meat-truck realized what Madboy was trying to do, he then threw him across two tables (which absolutely totaled them) and into the bosom of some Go-Go dancer. Michael then tried to get up (even though not completely in a rush), but then Beefy Chesty…

No joke! That's actually the Beefcake's name, and, man, is his chest beefy, too, and hairy. That and he wears a really low hanging tank top, just so he can parade around his proud beefy presence. But anyways, I'm in a pickle right now, so—

But then Beefy Chesty had him up in the air, again, and then flying into another row of tables and chairs (no boobies this time). At this point, Madboy felt like he wasn't doing as well as he thought he would.

Well, that's what happens….

Thought Michael, as he began pulling shards of glass from his forearms.

When you get too cocky, and underestimate a little man with a gang of Schwarzeneggers protecting his ass.

This time, as Beefy Chesty tried to pull another grab and throw cycle, Madboy was ready with a table leg, which he had found scattered about from that last Peter Pan number he had done, just a second ago. Madboy took one giant swing, and smashed Beefy Chesty over the temple with it. And as hard as he swung, Beefy Chesty took it, and didn't seem too hurt, not just yet. Not hurt at all... and to tell you the truth... looking more confused. Madboy then smashed him over the head, again, hard, and finally the blows started seeming to register.

But... nope!

Madboy had now only managed to hurt Beefy's feelings. As the meat-truck tried to grab Madboy once more, Madboy decided to smash and break the table leg across the man's throat; a dirty move, that could have easily killed anyone, no matter their size. Once he did, Michael finally got a real reaction, as the big oaf started choking up, and then dropped like an ox. Began heaving like crazy while caressing his throat. And the sight began filling Michael up with distaste.

Fucking asshole... stay down!

Michael then started to feel pity looking at the big ox with his belly up, but then realized that this wasn't the best of times to be doing so, as he saw the three other Beefcakes charging in. Michael then decided it was high-time to leave, as he booked it towards Stumpy, who Michael had seen cowering up some stairs. But before he could, one of the meat-trucks then got a hold of his arm, and was ready, from the looks of it, to jerk Michael's shoulder straight out of its socket. But Madboy then used that momentum, and cocked him right in the kisser with his other fist, as hard as he could. And swore... he felt his fist go through his teeth, and get jammed down his throat. Madboy had no time to check the damage this time, and was already running up the stairs, as the other two meat-trucks hesitated a second in awe.

Up a flight of stairs. Up another. And finally, Michael saw Stumpy trying to escape to the roof. Both men were on the roof now, and Stumpy had nowhere to run. Stumpy was wheezing for breath; scared out of his dickless mind.

"Michael—please! Please don't do anything you'd regret!"

But Madboy already had him by the throat a second time; he had him locked down, hard, making Stumpy gurgle some, with his eyes going all palooka's last bout (just picture Rodney Dangerfield), as Michael then started pushing him over the edge.

"You hairy little wop! Bastard! Give me the info I need! Stop making this so difficult for the both of us," bellowed out Michael.

There was a crowd of people forming at the bottom, and Stumpy's goons had now reached the roof.

"Stumpy—you little weasel—I'm not fucking around! You see?"

"Drop the fatass—yeah," cried out one of The Cockskulls.

You know... maybe I—

But before Michael could entertain the notion of whether or not he should or shouldn't, it was around this time when it happened.

Ground Zero Brooklyn.

Something was in the air that night that wasn't just affecting Madboy's chemistry. Because from the looks of it, everyone seemed to be feeling their own share of craziness. There was a full moon out just like in some horror story; so big and full, it almost seemed to have lost its orbital course, and was moving towards earth; just about ready to crash down, here, at ground zero Brooklyn. Something was definitely in the air, and some force was out and about, about ready to intervene—to change things—for the better or worse. No one was paying attention to the scene Madboy had created on top of Stumpy's place anymore. And from the North, a large group of marauding cyclists could be seen massing up, and heading in their direction. Michael had no clue what was going on, nor who these guys were. He knew just about every other MC in the city, and these guys didn't remind him of any of the sort.

They're not the Highriders—no! They're not the Mad Mad Leviathans—no—not them! I used to ride with them sometimes. Then again, they could be some new group I didn't hear a lick of in prison.

Just about all the information Michael had about the what-nots of the city were shit he'd get from other prison inmates, and none of the stories seemed to match what he was seeing here. There had to be at least a hundred of them massing up, like some horde of barbarians, massing

up at an ancient city's gates. And up front, Michael could immediately then make out their President. Out of all of them, this guy had his own special aura. Like some futuristic Attila the Hun, he was covered in leather that glisten and glimmered in the dark; he wore what looked like a poncho made of chain mail armor; he had black as night shades on, wearing sunglasses at night; his hair was slicked back and pony-tailed up, which hung down to his ass.

"Oh no... they're here," muttered Stumpy.

"Stumpy? Who the fuck are these guys," demanded Michael.

And then Michael heard a loud yipping type of sound, like the sound of the mountain dwellers from Lawrence of Arabia, which came directly from the booming sound of Attila's own vocal cords. It was the sound of a manic rebel yell, that pierced through the night, and had everyone's attention by the balls in an instant. Michael then let Stumpy safely go free, as he felt a bit depleted, seeing how his scene had come and went. It was their scene, now, and Michael had become just another spectator. As Stumpy ran off for safety, Michael then looked back, worried, that at this point, the other Beefcakes on the roof might still try to rush him. But they didn't. Their eyes were just as much glued to the new scene on the block as Michael's was. Then some of the crowd started scattering in panic, and Michael felt it was time to ‘make like a tree, and leave.’

There ain't no point in sticking around. Getting to Radboy is all that matters. I can figure out who these clowns are, later.

As he got to a corner of the roof, Michael saw a lot of points he could use to lower himself to the ground level. The scene itself was still tense, yet, nothing was happening.

"MOTHERFUCKERS—I kill you—you FUCKS," screamed a Cockskull, as he banged his head against another Cockskull mate, and nearly knocked that mate of his to the ground.

And then all of a sudden—it was on! The Cockskulls rushed towards the motorcycle horde, as the two clashed. It was mayhem. Some of The Beefcakes also got involved, but even with all their numbers (combined with The Cockskulls) they were still no match. The horde began riding over them as they wielded chains and bats and Molotov cocktails, massacring the lot. Taking in the vistas, Michael began to feel invigorated, and had the inclination to rush and join—

Wait... rush and join in? No, this ain't my scene!

But the ultra-violence was just so cathartic and tempting, that a part of Madboy wanted a piece of it, no matter the cost. But then, seeing all the violence, began to have a reverse effect on him, as it began feeling a bit too violent.

What am I doing? I gotta get out of here!

"Fuck you, Madboy," cried out a Cockskull, as him and four others rushed at Michael.

And it now seemed like the scene was going to make Madboy a part of it. Madboy popped one easily enough, as the moron ran straight into his fist, and the cock-face went down for the count. The second grabbed Michael from the waist, and tried to twirl him to the ground, but Madboy kept his balance, and elbowed the greasy fucker in the nose. But then the third guy caught up to him, fast, and sacked Madboy to the ground. Michael now needed to hurry to his feet, but as he tried, he saw the fourth Cockskull running towards him, looking like he wanted to kick his face in. The one Cockskull that had sacked Madboy then tried to hold him down, but Madboy kneed him in the face, and knocked him out. And before the fourth Cockskull could reach in for the kick, Madboy lunged out of the way, and the idiot swung his leg so hard and wide, that he lost his balance, and plopped, ass first onto the pavement. It was now Madboy's turn at the bat. As he ran up, he punted The Cockskull's face so hard, it almost flew off. At this point, the fifth Cockskull stopped, for he seemed ready just a second ago to make his own attempt. But seeing as how fast his mates had gotten fucked-up by Madboy, had made him hesitant. And strangely enough, Michael found the only Cockskull around with a sense of self-preservation.

Oh, come on! No six men enter, one man leaves?

Thought Michael, and then chuckled.

"Run," whispered Madboy, simply enough.

But the fucker then started pacing up and down, and smacking himself across the sides of his forehead, while screaming like a howler monkey in the mood.

What the fuck is he... hmm... must be his way of assessing the matter. It's like watching the Discovery Channel. But if all the animals are retarded, or something.

Then the slimebag booked.

Looking back, Michael saw Stumpy's place was now on fire. There was still a full-on rumble going on, but some of the cyclists were beginning to leave. Their President was no longer thumping skulls, and was with the evacuating party out. There were sirens now in the air, and it sounded like the bulls were finally getting around to doing their freaking jobs.

That's the thing about the city today, there's always gang wars breaking out, here and there, so the cops are way too thinly spread out to make much of a difference. You think with that cowboy/actor as President, the cops would now be armed like the military. But the fact is, they really ain't. Fucking Reagan...!

Mr. Ronald Reagan—to You!

Michael smiled a bit thinking about him then.

Although, I like the guy, a lot! He's one ancient, evil, tough son-of-a-bitch—but I like that! Better than that pussy Carter ever was. Truth of the matter is, every organization is really just a gang, and the US government is really the biggest and toughest gang there is in all the world. In a gang, you have your soldiers, your turf, your common lot that live in that turf, and all your job is, is to hold onto it all and protect it. Because outside your turf, you've got all the other gangs around eyeing what you got that they would want, and that's when things get complicated. Your gang has to be tougher than them if you want to survive, because in the end, everything and everyone is out for the taking. If some Numbskull was to stroll into our turf, and try to snatch some fancy car, or some foxy chick, and try to tail it, we had to then chase him down, beat the ever-loving shit out of him then, and take it back. Then, later the next day, that's when politics would step in. We'd then have to deal with the rest of The Numbskulls when they'd try to come at us for what we done. We might have parley beforehand, but all politics is—in Freudian terms—is a dick measuring contest, where all you're doing is describing the enormous size of your cock, to make all the fools around you come to an understanding of how badly you'd fuck them up if they ever decided to go to war.

Yeah... I've read some books when it comes to human psychology.

Mostly in prison. Never would I have imagined so much of the male ego revolves around one's own member, but after giving it some thought, I could see that it does. And if you want to know the truth, so does it revolve around it, too: all of human civilization, since the beginning of time. Did you know back in Roman days, when the Roman armies had parades in the streets, they would carry around giant towering statues of a penis on the end of a staff… did you? Well… yup! That's what they did. They'd parade them around like banners, letting the world know what it was all about. One thousand years of world domination, hundreds of nations banded together, all to live under the shadow of an erect Italian penis. Makes you really see things in a completely different light. Used to think there was more to it… but nope! We're all just gangs, really, and the strength and power of a gang is all about that special little somebody!

In the end, it's all just one giant dick measuring contest. Wars, politics, anything, no matter! And for a group, a nation, a gang, when there ain't external conflicts, there's always internal ones. A gang has to be tough to hold its own, and the toughest one of them all that keeps everything together has to be the A Number One. The Head Honcho. The Leader. He has to be the toughest and meanest son-of-a-bitch there is, with the biggest member, there, representing it. And that's why Ronald Reagan will go down as one of the greats. Even though he's a fucking dinosaur now, he still knows how to swing it. Swing it over a man's head, and bash his brains in. And this whole decade the man has been really bending over those Soviets, and fucking them in the ass, like they were just a bunch of Russian whores. Ha!

Thinking about women of any sort, Michael went on to do his usual, and completely focus his attention on that matter instead. Forgetting for a second what he was centered on before, and completely devoting his mind to the one thing that was always going to matter more than anything else. And since Michael's mindset was already on the matter of the male reproductive organ, it was only a matter of time before it got to the….

And, man, do I love me some Russian pussy! Fucking love fucking

Russian women! They've been some of the best and most satisfying lays I've ever had! That nimrod Sputnik never did get to my sister, but I sure as hell got to his. All of them tall, blue eyed, blonde, and unlike other white women—completely built for fucking! Oh, I love bending them over and pounding them as they start screaming "Да" for me. Love it so much! Really wish I had Reagan's job. I'd just go visit that chump Gorbachev in Moscow, and have him round up all those pillars of beauty to show them how we do things in America. And since I prefer to be more of a lover than a fighter, I'd show them what pledging allegiance to my red, white and blue star-spangled banner would be all about. I'd do them all in the Kremlin while Bruce Springsteen music would play over the airwaves. Nothing but "Born in the USA" and "Да, Да, Да" would be heard echoing throughout that building. That's how I'd win the Cold War. And if that bitch-ass Gorbachev was to start acting up, didn't like how I was winning his people over with my diplomatic skills, I'd just threaten to push the big red button on him, and detonate a big fat one over that silly birth stain on his head. That's what the President Michael Connelly administration would be remembered for. Ha!

After enjoying a moment with those thoughts and sounds and images… Michael then came back to reality, back from that fantasy, and remembered who he was, and the type of person that President Ronnie would really be if he was to ever meet him.

But then again, if by some off chance I was to ever meet him, I'm pretty sure he wouldn't take much of a liking to the likes of me—a punk-ass, ex-con, hot-tempered, nobody like me? He wouldn't even want to get his hands dirty shaking mine if I offered it to him in respect. And at one time, I really wanted to do what my dad had done and serve my country. Back then, I tried to go into the Marines, but they wouldn't take me in because of my record, and that's before I went to prison for all those years. Now? Those recruiters wouldn't even look me in the eyes if I begged for the chance to serve.

Michael then got really depressed… really, really depressed.

Actually, fuck Ronald Reagan! Fuck the Marines! And fuck these

pigs here, too! No matter how I feel about them, they'll never feel the same way about me. And nothing I do will ever be enough to win their favors. They'll always see me as an outsider, just because I've done some wrong as a youth, getting fucking incarcerated just for trying to save my sister.

"Hey, Michael, get over here and follow me!"

The Merry-Go-Round.

It was Sadboy, and Michael couldn't believe how long it had been since he'd seen that gloomy mug of his.

"Come on, Michael, let's get outta here!"

Michael followed Sadboy down an alley, over a fence, and down towards the shore. They were running for a good ten minutes at the most, and Michael could now hear the sirens everywhere. A gunshot! Then followed by silence. It took a while, but the two were finally at their old hide out around Coney Island.

"Hey, check it out, here we are where it all began," announced Sadboy.

At first, Michael didn't recognize it, but Sadboy was right, they were at the spot by the shore where The Bloody Shamrocks originally started out. Looking around, Michael saw an old merry-go-round he used to play on as a kid, and for some reason, he began to feel sick to his stomach. He shook the feeling off, and then turned to Sadboy to take a gander at the pale faced elf, to see how much the years had changed him. Noticing that Michael was doing this, Sadboy started to grow self-conscious in his old insecure manner.

"Wh—what—what are you… sup, Mike," spouted out Sadboy, as he began blinking rapidly, while brushing away his hair away from his face.

Yup!

It was Sadboy, all right, in all his eccentric glory. Former Bloody Shamrock, and bass player for some group of potheads all into the CBGB scene back in the day, back when it still meant something. Sadboy—or really—Gabriel Mammikonian was an Armenian, that had the air about, of that of an orphan straight out of some Dickensian novel. Now sporting some crazy ass hairdo that looked part mohawk without the sides shaved, and part… whatever Robert Smith had from

The Cure. The fucker was still pale as white night, and looked like some Victorian era vampire, especially considering his attire. He had a Nazi fascist looking trench coat on made of black leather, and a black blouse with fluffy cuffs all feathered out and studded up with rhinestones. Pretty much black everything except for the silky red tie.

Gab… I can see you've finally let yourself go. Nice to see you've come to terms with how much of a weirdo you really are. Ha!

"Michael, what were you doing back there," asked Sadboy, looking surprised to be seeing him after all this time.

“Gab, I'm looking for Radboy, have you seen him?”

“No… why?”

“Never mind, I'll tell you later,” replied Michael, not wanting to get into the matter, just yet.

After a while, Gab began to grow curious. It had been years since he had seen Michael, and it was disappointing for him to see Michael acting so cold and distant; seeming to be in a world of his own where nothing else mattered.

"So, you're looking for Anthony,” asked Gab, trying to break the ice.

“Yeah,” replied Michael.

Sadboy began to grow weary; feeling a bit awkward. Then a thought popped in his head.

“How come you didn't come see me first? I mean, I might have been able to help you out."

Michael shrugged.

"I never heard anything from you, man! Actually, I heard you moved to LA with that group you used to play with," responded Michael, finally.

"We did, but the scene over there is a bunch of drag queens thinking they're the next Led Zeppelins… when they're definitely not! So, me and the boys had enough of LA, and been back since April."

Sadboy then lit a cig; he was the biggest chain smoker Michael had ever met. Hell—he had been smoking the whole time they'd been running.

“Yeah, we were in LA, the scene is garbage out there, just a bunch of asshole musician wannabes, doing everything they can to

become famous, except actually making music," detailed Gab, now feeling a bit chatty.

"So fucking fake out there. Me and the boys were almost done with the West Coast, that is until we decided to go up to Seattle, just for site seeing. And, man… were we surprised! If anything, if there's any place in America where—"

"Where is Radboy," interrupted Michael.

Not wanting to be mean about it, doing so, but Michael wasn't feeling for Gab's chatty mood.

"He's in Uptown," replied Gab, feeling a little discouraged.

"Where?"

"Somewhere up there… with Nikki," replied Gab, as he turned and peered at Michael the second he mentioned her name.

Michael cringed up for a second, but said nothing, and concluded with:

"I don't want to talk about her!"

Gab paused, and then concluded himself with:

"I understand."

After another minute passed, Michael grew curious to know how much Gab knew about Radboy since the gang broke up.

"So, Radboy finally made it to Uptown—huh? What's he selling up there," asked Michael.

"Coke… what else? Plus, he has a deal with some of the suits up there. He's part of The Ravishers now."

Oh… The Ravishers.

There was a group Madboy was all too interested in avoiding, at all cost. A shifty bunch with really good connections with all the suits in Manhattan.

"Ha! I can see you're still wearing the old uniform! Always the one-man army, you were," commented Gab, eyeing his threads.

Hearing Gab mention the old uniform began to cheer up Michael, a bit, for he was referring to Michael's green and white Letterman jacket, which on the back had the Bloody Shamrock emblem.

A shamrock dripping in blood—of course!

The Letterman was sleeveless, and was worn over some rhinestone studded denim jacket, unbuttoned.

"Where did you get that tank-top? And that crazy ass design on it," asked Gab.

Gab was referring to his white wife-beater that had a unique specialty made design on it: a Patrick Nagel like design of some naked white vampire chick with big red hair, big red bush, big red tits, covered in red blood, on her knees, screaming up to the heavens, while stabbing herself with a stake through her own heart.

> Actually, I came up with the design for some tattoo artist that did it for me in the slammer, on the left side of my chest. The stake is supposedly going through my heart, as well. Later, I liked the design so much that I got some T-shirt maker, out here, to have it done on my wife-beater. That way, people can see it without me walking around shirtless. Although, pretty sure the chicks would love that, but then again, so would the fags. And… I don't want to send out the wrong messages. Ha!
>
> But the design sounds pretty bitching, doesn't it?
>
> Although, having the tattoo on my chest, and the same design on my wife-beater might sound redundant. Hmm… ah fuck it! It's the 80s!

Yeah! As you can see, Michael has gone off, again, in his own head, describing shit about himself, to himself! Let's for a moment, there, act like we'd want to take interest, and listen in just how far Michael is now willing to go, entertaining his own damn ego. Shall we?

> Also, I got a tattoo of a bloody shamrock on my right shoulder. A tattoo of some palm trees overlooking a beach scene overlooking a sunset, on my left… I like tropical settings, yeah! And… here's my centerpiece… on my underbelly, I got a bunch of kiss marks trailing down to my junk, done in red lipstick. And the funny part is whenever I bring over a chick, and they see it, at first, they'll look at me all anxious and concerned like, like they're wondering what type of freak they're getting involved with here. And sometimes think it's real lipstick. This one time, I had some Cuban girl….
>
> Pretty little thing that was all legs and lips, and curly jet-black hair.
>
> She asked me whose it was when I took off my shirt and pants, and she saw them. For sure, wondering when the hell I got them since

she'd been with me all day:

'Did he get blown at Fat Tony's Pizzeria while I took five, heading over to the lady's room?'
Ha!

I then told her I've just been kissed down there so often, that the love marks have been rendered permanent. She shrugged then, then smiled as if she found it kinky, and then went on to mark me up some more of her own with those juicy fat lips of hers. Giving me a one-way ticket to Baton Rouge, you can say. Ha!

Michael was about to mention all that to Gab, but then felt like he didn't want to get too sidetracked; he felt like opening up a bit, but he also still had too much on his mind.

Mentioning that to cheer me up—huh? Well that's fine and all, but...?

Now that Gab had mentioned the old uniform, Michael then began to grow sore, wondering what he ever did with his.

"Yeah, I'm wearing our old uniform, what you ever do with yours," asked Michael.

That pissed off Gab a little to hear.

"Damn, Michael, what year are you still living in?"

And that pissed off Michael a little to follow.

"I don't know, man... last I checked... it was still the 70s. I mean, that's what being in the slammer does to you. You get no sense of time passing by, even though every year seems like a decade of your life, and you end up feeling frozen in the moment. Then when release day comes, you get defrosted, and thrown back out before getting too comfortable," replied Michael, with a self-righteous frown.

Michael was starting to get pretty pompous around Gab, and Gab and the old gang used to be some of the few people Michael didn't act that way with. This discouraged Gab to see.

"Michael... drop the wise talk! You don't have to be in character around me. I know you can talk like a normal human being, in English, when you want to. But you just choose to talk like that because you think it sounds bitchin'," reacted Gab, looking

dismantled.

Michael frowned up some more, but this time ixnay the whole self-righteous sense about it.

But alas…

Thought Michael, for if one thing was true, Madboy did have his own unique character. And his vicious sense of charm was all anyone ever saw of him, at least on the surface. Since Michael felt like he was such a connoisseur when it came to mannerisms, since he enjoyed studying people so well, he had become very self-conscious of how he wanted to express himself, when others were around.

You want to hear the rundown? Well let's begin….

First off, most importantly, since Michael hated the stoic and expressionless types, he felt most centered when showing his wild and vibrant side, by wearing his heart on the end of his sleeve. And what that all meant to Michael when surrounded by others, usually forked two separate ways. Usually for Michael, it all depending on their sex.

> In other words, with other hombres around, I'll just beat the fuck out of them if they get too pushy—plain and simple! But with a chick around, I'll make them crave for it, by serving it to them on a silver platter, like some savory delicacy. Yeah! I'm a sexist like that… wanna make something of it?

Also, there was this idiosyncrasy that Michael had developed over the course of his life, having this panting thing going on, like there was an animal within him. Mouth partially cocked open, taking in long, fast, and hard breaths of air, like that of a wild cat.

I can growl like one, too. No, really!

Puffing up his chest with pride as he did it, and the more excited he got, the harder he'd pant.

> Yeah, listen to this spiel, and try taking notes if it starts to get too complicated for all you guys to hear. I subconsciously developed this idiosyncrasy on purpose back when I was a kid. Did I lose you there? Well… let me explain further… back when I was a kid, this one time, my dad took me to the zoo to see the animals. And it was then that… I don't know… when it came time to check out the tiger cages, it was then something about the nature of those wild cats that deeply inspired me, and made me want to be one, too. There

was this sense of kinship I felt, like finding a lost family that I had never known about, or the feeling one might get seeing into themselves, and who—or what, in this case—they might have been in a different life. Now fast forward into the present, this peculiar habit has had the effect of scaring the shit out of other wannabe alphas, around, over the thought that what they might be dealing with, when confronting me, is a real wild animal that's escaped from the zoo.

Although, sometimes… I also use it on chicks… particularly when I'm feeling—how do I say this?

Michael thought of the feeling he felt at those moments, and the words to best describe it:

Viciously fucking horny? Yeah! That's the ticket! Viciously fucking horny… and I want to scare off the weak, to tempt all the bad mamajammas that would be willing and able to ride this wild bronco here.

Yeah….

If I was a Greek mythological creature, I'd be part tiger from the waist up, and part bronco from the waist down, with one giant-ass boa constrictor growing out from… you know where…

When it came to his talk, although, Michael liked to keep it simply the way he had it in the 70s. Keeping it with the lingo of that decade. And keeping it in contrast to what people saw of him when he kept it quiet. And what that contrast meant was it being all about that old tongue-in-cheek slang; cheerfully strutting one's words around, like you wanted to turn heads, and make them smile.

I don't like how people talk these days. Everything is so rad! And sounding bad. And rowdy. And vicious. Cranked up to the max, Jax! And I don't feel like I need my talk to be like that to seem menacing. Since my form already dictates that! So as for my talk? Best example that I can give, showing what 70s slang from Coney Island was all about… is… well… think about all that goofy silly talk you saw from those characters on Welcome Back Carter. Yeah…

so... well... them! Those guys! Them Sweat Hogs, there.

Mannerisms and self-expression were very important to Michael, because it meant a lot to Michael to have people connect with him, and how he felt. For he'd be damned if he was to be an island to himself, with millions of people around, all throughout the Big Apple.

Yup! So whatcha think about that?

Thought Michael... in all reality... asking himself.

And then...

When he got his answer, Michael frowned, hard. And felt like bringing it all together:

> You know, I know I can be a pompous prick. But... I'm going to be genuine for once right now, and tell you the real deal. Truth of the matter is, back before I learned how to talk the talk, I was practically an island to myself. I was the quiet type, and I didn't know how to open up and express myself outside of beating the fuck out of someone. And when you're that way, you're left alone, like an island, to yourself, even though that's not how you want things. During those years, seeing how hard it was to connect, and seeing how little anyone cared as they'd abandon me when I couldn't catch their interest, that all made me choose to be different. Truth is, if you ain't got the talk, if you ain't the confrontational type, and if you don't have that in-your-face attitude, everyone will think you're not worth their time and attention. And they'll think they're—better! Better! And the problem with having all bite and no bark is then you're seriously left alone, because everyone is now scared of you. Like you're some derange animal—when you're not! Back then, I could like someone—just genuinely like them—but it didn't matter, because they're all really just a bunch of miserable assholes, with some serious issues within themselves. They all think they're superior—that they're better—all of them do! Even the ones that ain't, wish they were. Which is the exact same shit, really! When you have the type that think they're superior, or at least think they should be, they'll never want to waste their time with something they see as an inferior. That, or some wild uncommunicative fuck that they'd

imagine really belongs in a zoo. I think everyone is that way, to a degree, and that there is the problem with human nature. Money isn't the root of all evil—arrogance is! Vanity is! Without those elements, those that are rich wouldn't mind so much sharing their wealth, but because they think they're better, they'll then try to hoard as much as possible. And are then never able to feel satisfied with what they got. Since they can't stop comparing their wealth to those that are wealthier. Truth of the matter is vanity is like a vacuum, empty space trying to absorb everything around it to give itself a sense of form and grandeur. Absorb everything, and everybody. I first realized this when I eventually did learn how to speak, and then the lot all came flocking towards me to take a piece of me. Before, they wanted a piece of me because they couldn't match my bite. Now, they wanted a piece of me because they couldn't match my bark. But I wasn't even trying to bark, I just wanted to find a way to relate. All those arrogant assholes now wanted something. All take and no give. Selfish! They're all a self-absorbed lot. They're empty vessels in a sea of empty vessels, when they should just accept their pitiful selves, and how pitiful everyone else is, also, around them.

Well...?
I'm no fucking empty vessel! You know, I used to genuinely want to like people, but seeing as how they either want to treat me like I don't exist when I act shy, or try to take a piece of me when I act the opposite, I fucking hate them all, now. Fuck all of them! Now that I can talk the talk, I can let them know who I am, and what I'm about. I show more character, more pizazz, and more attitude, than they'll ever have in their entire lives. And if that isn't enough, I'll beat the ever-loving motherfucking shit out of them, then. And I've never lost a fight! Never lost one. Practice has made me perfect in the streets, and I have become that good! And besides my fists, I also now got some lips, a real mouth on me, and no has been able to match me on that level, either! I got more life in me in a spur of a second, than they can ever churn out in the entire time they live and breathe on this earth. I got more heart, more courage, and... and...!

I got fire! Lots and lots of fire! And if they ever decided to try and take a piece of me, now, I'll burn them alive with that little stück, alone.

If you think you're that bad—come and try me! If you want it—you got it! You want some, come get some! Was is' Du Blöde Wichser? Willst du auf die Fresse? Komm schon, zeig mir was Du hast!

Come, but first prepare yourself the burden. Because first I'll inflate your empty vanity with oxygen. And with the snap of my fingers, I'll ignite it into flames. I will destroy you, and your egos, and your alter egos, and your heroes, and your gods. And I'll do it all—in style—just to rub it in! Just so you can feel the burnnn that comes from being so foolish and insolent, thinking you can try and step up to the sun. The sun! And try to pocket it! Because I am the motherfucking sun in comparison to you! Burn you motherfucker—burn! Yeah! Go ahead and run around screaming your head off as you do so, I like the sight of that, I need a good laugh. Ha! And when I'm through with you, when I start to get bored, when you begin to make me frown, I'll snap my fingers a second time, and then you'll be dead! Rompous-pompous!

Michael then had this weird inclination to pull out his Rosary... and do something with it. After a minute, that weird inclination faded away, and Michael decided to go back to asking Gab about Radboy.

Cool Hand Mike.

"Hey, Gab, I just... I need to get to Radboy. Is there anything you can do?"

Ah—fuck my temper! Shit! I feel like I burned myself just thinking like that! I really hate thinking that way, it's like I'm possessed. And I do it a lot, too! Keep spinning that shit inside me like a merry-go-round. Fuck, I hate merry-go-rounds!

Seeing as to how Michael had faded into his own thoughts, Gab had done the same. But hearing Michael speak to him, again, had him startled for a second.

“Oh—what—huh? Okay? So why are you looking for Anthony? Do

you need money?”

Michael paused, feeling irritated.

As if I give a shit about money right now.

“No, just want to know if he was responsible,” replied Michael, finally, while still trying to fight the fire he had started in his own head, before.

Calm the fuck down, Michael! Calm down! Calm! No, don't start looking at Gab like that. He friend! He ain’t no target you can just… just don't attack him for no good reason. Please!

“Responsible of what,” questioned Gab.

Then Gab’s eyes lit up.

“You think he was behind it?”

For a second there, Michael had forgotten, just now, what the conversation was about. But then looking into Gab's eyes, and seeing his shock, brought him back, centered.

“Yes, I actually do! I think he was behind it, and that's why I'm looking for him.”

"I don't think he had anything to do with it, Michael," responded Gab, trying to make sense why Michael would think that he would.

"Well, I need to hear that from him.”

"And if he did?"

"Then I'm going to have to fucking kill him, I guess, that's all," responded Michael, as he frowned a bit.

“Not really your style.”

“Well, I guess I'm going to have to make an exception, this time.”

"We all know you and Radboy never got along—but come on—Michael? You really think he would pull something like that?"

"Yeah, I do! Ever since I went to prison, and been out of the picture, I've heard him and Nikki have been doing really well," exclaimed Michael, trying to prove his point.

"Don't tell me you think Nikki also…?”

"No!”

But then Michael began to come to terms.

“I don't know… fucking asshole finally has her now, and he's with The Ravishers," busted out Michael, now feeling dismantled, himself.

"Come on… let's go to the Tropic of Cancer!"

That was the dive The Shamrocks always used to hang out in. Supposedly, way, way back in the day, it used to be a really nice joint; a haven for artist and writers to hang out; writers like Henry Miller, lounging around, getting drunk, before leaving for Paris. And supposedly, that's where the place also got its name; named after that book he wrote, that was banned in America, for obscene sexual references—or something.

"Hey, have you ever read that book," asked Michael.

"What? Tropic of Cancer… no. Have you?"

"Yeah," replied Michael.

"Really? What's it about," asked Gab, seeming a bit weirded out that Michael would actually read anything.

"Well… it's weird… funny at parts, though."

"Really, how?"

"Well… it begins with something to do with shaving armpits, something about timelessness, and then biting into a clitoris and spitting out two francs… then it gets really weird," explained Michael, chuckling at that two francs bit.

"Yeah, I guess it is weird," commented Gab, unsure how to follow up on that.

Michael then began to think about the Tropic (their old hide out) and wondered how the years might have changed the place.

"What's at the Tropic," asked Michael.

"Nothing, man! It's just me and the boys, kicking it, and getting high—the usual!"

"No, I mean, how has the place changed?"

"Oh, you'll see," concluded Gab.

Gab then began wondering about Michael's time served in prison. And even though he knew it wasn't exactly a matter best to bring up…

"So how were things in the joint?"

And asking that, all Michael did was make a face.

"Pretty bad… huh," commented Gab, figuring that it was really a stupid question to ask, considering how else prison could be like.

Michael just sighed, but said:

"Actually, it was absolutely smurfy!"

Gab then chuckled hearing that response.

"What?"

"Yeah, Gab! It was pretty bad, it's fucking prison!"

"Yeah… but, why did you say smurfy of all things," followed up Gab.

Michael didn't reply.

"There wasn't a lot of gay shit involved?"

Michael then froze, and grew a queer looking grin on his face. Gab's awkwardness then grew tenfold.

"Wait… Michael… umm…."

Michael now began to laugh.

"I mean, I've seen how in movies, how some of the guys might start— "

"That's just shit in movies," interrupted Michael, as he brushed that notion off with his left hand.

Gab, once again, didn't know where to go from there. But Michael then decided to show him, by giving his friend, here, the rundown:

"It's like this… when you're in… all that matters best is to keep your head low, or turned to where you ain't looking, and pay no attention to shit, when shit goes down. See no evil, hear no evil!"

That distilled Gab a little to hear.

"So, a lot of fucked up shit went down…?"

"Maybe…. I didn't pay any attention to find out," repeated Michael, with a shrug.

That came across a bit peculiar to Gab, knowing Michael was never the sort.

"So, no thumping skulls for you… huh," followed up Gab, finding something pleasant seeing as how Madboy had been placed in a situation where he finally met his match.

Michael but shook his head then, then eyed Gab with a look of disappointment.

"What?"

Michael didn't say anything, again.

"No… what?"

"Oh, nothing… just admiring your ignorance, that's all!"

Gab felt a bit insulted, then, and made a face.

"No, Gab! No thumping skulls for me. In prison, you have to have a serious death wish to be that way."

"Yeah, but don't you first have to prove something… like someone might try to test you, and you have to prove you ain't chicken shit?"

"No, Gab, that's just stupid shit you see in movies. Again!"

Gab now felt like he might really be very ignorant about the matter. Michael then felt like addressing it and closing it off.

"You know… the first day I was in, I felt that way, too, and I remember telling myself how I best keep a stiff upper lip, so no one would take me for a wimp, and have me marked off as having faggot potential to the rest, or something. And I remember the first face I came across in the joint, that seemed to want to get all in-your-face about it… you know what I saw then when I looked him in the eyes, and got confrontational?"

"What," asked Gab.

"Fear… absolute fear!"

"Fear?"

"Yeah, fear! Although, rage fueled by fear, but fear still enough. You see, in prison, it's really best to be friendly with everyone, because everyone in there is scared shitless of each other. Leading everybody to be locking onto each other, all growling and grring and shit, like a kennel full of Doberman Pinschers. But yet, it's all still a reaction coming out of fear. No one wants to do anything to anybody, and no one knows what the other guy is capable of, and they know if they have to—they have to! And the second you start giving people ideas that you're a bad motherfucker, one minute you gonna find yourself rolling with the punches, and the next minute, you're going to be forced to shiv some guy in the face. And after that, shit can get morbid… very, very morbid! And grossly violent, too. And you really don't want things to go down that road."

"You don't… huh," gasped Gab.

"No… you don't! You see, Gab… prison is a very depressing place to be in, and way too overly aggressive. So, what's really valued in there ain't none of that macho shit. No one really wants that crap in there. I mean, we're all in prison! We've all proven to society, and to each other, that we ain't the most savory characters on the

planet. There's no need for macho-ing it up anymore. Plus, it reminds us all of how it wasn't enough on the outside, considering how our stupid macho asses still got us thrown in there. No one wants to see it. But what the peeps do want to see is people being all Cool Hand Luke with each other. That way, we can all try making life on the inside a bit more bearable and pleasant. Also, there's a giant racial thing in there, and if you're white, gotta stick to other whites, blacks to other blacks, and Hispanics with their own people. But still if you put on a smile and act cool, people will gladly accept it. Because—as I said—life can get very depressing in there, morbidly depressing! And it can all cause someone to turn, and start having morbid thoughts…."

"Thoughts about what," asked Gab, as he began to feel that it was best if he didn't get an answer.

Michael seemed stone-faced, now, as if… afraid to give one. Gab… getting the sense that he felt where this was going, decided to drop the matter, and ask him about more positive stuff. For one thing! The fact that Michael was no longer there, at that place, and was now a free man.

"So, what are you doing for a living now, Michael," asked Gab growing a bit curious about his chum's present situation.

Michael just shrugged, and didn't seem like getting into that, either.

"What you doing for dough? I think you could go back to Fred Scharnick's, and he should—"

"Just stealing shit and pawning it off. That's what's been paying for the bare necessities. What other job can an ex-convict get," asked Michael, as he stared into Gab's eyes, intently.

Gab cringed and said nothing. And the look Michael gave made him wonder a bit:

You do know you're out now, Michael… right? You're no longer at that place, doesn't that count for something?

Thought Gab. But then Gab turned his head around and thought about everything Michael had told him about wanting to see Radboy, and seeing as he went to Stumpy's, first, Gab began to grow distressful.

"Really—Michael! You should have come by, since you've been out," responded Gab, looking Michael up and down, in a carping manner.

Michael said nothing.

The Bullyslayer.

As the two strode on, Michael started regarding Gab; he gazed at him with a sense of nostalgia and began to see him as an embodiment of another time, of how things used to be.

> Shit! So, this is what's left of The Bloody Shamrocks—huh? Just you and me now? We were always just a rag-tag group, but I liked it that way. And now, you wouldn't even want any part of it.

Michael began entertaining that sense of abandonment, which both depressed him, and prided him, at the same time. There was something bittersweet and poetic, Michael felt, about being the last of his kind; willing to toughen it out after the bombs had fallen, and go at it alone, wandering the wastes.

> Wandering the wastes? Ha! Okay, I'm no Mad Max, here. But still, kinda curious now of what the rest of the crew has been up to.

That seemed to Michael as a good place to start a conversation.

> "Hey, Gab... whatever happened to the rest of the crew?"

Gab paused a second to reflect, then looked at Michael, and felt reluctant to delve into the matter; knowing that Michael wasn't really curious about their whereabouts. Instead, he just wanted to hear how they had abandoned him, and his colors. For Gab knew Michael, he knew him that well.

Back in those days, in Coney Island, Michael had been the one that had founded the creed; he was their pride and symbol. So, Gab knew just how much it must have disheartened him to see The Bloody Shamrocks disband, after he went to prison. Without Michael, there never would have been any Bloody Shamrocks, because Michael was just that much of a figurehead, and the embodiment of it. All starting back when they were really young kids, they had all been drawn to him because they couldn't believe just how headstrong he was. Michael had been eventually expelled from school, all because he couldn't stop getting into fights with other kids. The furthest he ever went was the 9th grade, and after that, his father had talked an old buddy of his—Fred Scharnick—to come work for him, in his garage, while his wife tried to home-school him the rest of the way.

Tried, is the word!

Now, the reason the rest of the crew admired him back then the most wasn't because of how stupidly rompous-pompous he was. A cocky asshole—he was! But a cocky asshole, when dealing with other cocky assholes. Mostly. Michael saw no heart in beating up the weak to get some kicks; he found it quite despicable, actually. But he did see a lot of heart in beating up the rest. Michael was a bullyslayer. Michael's pride and joy was beating the ever-loving shit out of the strong, that liked to beat the ever-loving shit out of the weak. It was also all about testing his might. If you were to look into Madboy's eyes when he was sitting on top of some punk kid, while pummeling his face in, he looked like a kid that had crowned himself king of the block. Most of The Bloody Shamrocks were either kids that looked up to him (Sadboy), or kids Michael had initiated, by shoving his foot up their ass, and had sent them crying home to their mothers (Radboy). Madboy was an alpha type, through and through, who had become a Mecca for all the betas around the block, and other alphas that couldn't match his left and right.

But a funny thing was…

Thought Gab, this time.

As tough as he was, back when we were kids, he never looked the part. I think we were in the 6th grade, and twelve at the time, and it was around then when we first noticed this scrawny looking kid, with curly hair, and dimples, who never said much, but always had an innocent smile about him. The type you'd expect from a normal happy kid his age. He really seemed like more of the type that should have been getting bullied, let alone, being as he is, able to take them on, and beat them in their own game. I mean, Michael looked like a bigger twerp at the time then I did, and if you ever saw how I looked then… well… it really boggled our minds to one day see him suddenly drop that smile, in a heartbeat, and become all enraged, like some nutcase would. First time I saw him beat someone up, he took out one really big, freckled kid, green eyed Italian kid, which everyone was afraid of. He was at least three times as big as Michael, and on the outside, seeing as how Michael looked, none of us were expecting much. Ten times out of ten, anyone that had any sense about them, would have placed money

on the Italian kid. It had to have been that much of a given. But Michael turned out to be a colossal upset no one would have ever expected. And if that wasn't enough, it was what happened next that made Michael a legend. That big fat freckled kid had an older brother, that was a part of some old outfit which the name escapes—oh! I remember! The Jets! Really old New York gang. Really old! And they were Greasers, too. But anyways, this older brother had to be twenty years old at the time, at least. And when he found out how his little brother had been beaten up by this scrawny little twerp, he decided to go to his aid, and put Michael in his place. Now, can you imagine a twelve-year-old kid being able to beat up a grown adult? Well, no one else could have, either. But it happened. After school, that guy grabbed Michael, and pulled a switchblade on him, and didn't expect much seeing as how he was only dealing with a child. Looked like he wanted to scare him a bit, and maybe rough him up, some. But was no doubt surprised to see what happened next, as so were the rest of us. Michael head-butted him, and in a minute later, here was this kid sitting on the chest of a grown ass adult, beating the crap out of him. I mean, I've never seen anyone more humiliated in my life as that, and I've never seen a kid like Michael move as fast has he did, to do all that humiliating. I mean… you don't see shit like that, and how could you ever expect it. Michael really made a name for himself that day, as that guy was turned into a laughingstock all over Coney Island.

Gab had once asked Michael why he was the way he was, and how he had become so inclined to let his fists do all the talking. Michael's answer was that his father had made him that way.

"Your dad would beat your ass—or something," Gab had asked.

"Every fucking day," Michael had answered.

"Why? What did you do to get that?"

"Nothing! He would just beat me for the sake of beating me."

This had disturbed Gab to hear, but when Michael had noticed, Michael had then responded:

"It wasn't like that. He just wanted to toughen me up. He wasn't out to straight up injure or kill me! Although, one time, he did go too far and broke my nose in when I was a kid. Broke a rib or two.

Really fucked me up good, all around."

Michael's father Robert 'Redboy' Connelly was some old war hero from WW2; a man of true grit and steel; a fucking Marine Sergeant. And a man that had come back from the war and had started his own motorcycle club of Hell's Angels, in LA, back in the late 40s. Also called The Bloody Shamrocks. Or, "The Good Ol' Bloody Shamrocks," as Michael would refer to them.

"So, that's where you got the name," Gab had asked.

"Yeah," Michael had answered.

"He'd beat your ass every fucking day," Gab had asked, again.

"Gab—lay off it! He wasn't a cruel man, it's like in John Wayne movies, punching people in the face was just another way he'd say 'hello,'" Michael had responded.

A second passed.

"That fucking hard-ass," Michael had concluded, with a ten-ton frown.

Another second.

"John Wayne movies," Gab had asked.

"Yeah, John Wayne movies," Michael had continued, "ever watch them? My dad used to take me to see them in the 60s. And the first thing you'd see John Wayne do was punch some guy in the face. Next scene, he'd punch another guy in the face. You watch another movie—punch in the face! Next movie—punch in the face again! I'm guessing you can see a reoccurring theme here—right? Well, movie after movie, that's all you'd see him do. First act: him punching. Second act: although, shit would get serious, when some varmint would punch him right back. Which would lead to the third act: of John getting really mad and knocking the dude's dick into the dirt. Roll credits. And it didn't matter who he was punching: the bad guy, his best friend, a corrupt business type, or some hobo down on his luck. He'd punch them, anyways, and then buy them a drink, later. That, or get overly emotional around women, and yell at them, because he loved them and didn't know how to show it. But anyways, through all that punching—somehow—he became like the number one icon for everyone in my dad's generation… go figure!"

Gab had then stood there, shrugged it off, and then felt like he had a

new sense of appreciation of his old man, and how he was nothing like that.

> Although, funny thing though, if you were to watch Jimmy Cagney movies, you'd sorta see the same thing, but done to make him the most iconic bad guy in films. And what would he do to get that? Put his hands on women. First act: he'd smack the taste out of a woman for no good reason. Second act: do it again, but then shove her down, and kick her while she's down there. Final act: this time the unlucky dame would have something for him, and would tell him off how she two timed him, and then Jimmy… would just shoot the bitch. So much violence, so much violence, and always towards women, and that's how he became the most hated… and also most beloved man, on screen. Ha!

Now back to John Wayne, and none of that heinous putting hands on women crap:

> "I fucking love the movie North to Alaska, nothing but him and a bunch of rowdy varmints getting drunk and silly, and beating the fuck out of each other, for two hours straight. Then him yelling at some lovely French whore, and the movie ends with 'I love you.' And that was it! No need for some overly complicated plot to tell a story. I don't know… I like simplicity like that," Michael had brought up.

But then Gab thought about what Michael had just said about John Wayne being overly emotional, and knowing Michael, he felt like pressing on that matter.

> "You like John Wayne movies," Gab had asked.
>
> "Yeah… why?"
>
> "Overly emotional, you say," Gab had asked, again.
>
> "Yeah… what about it? That's how a lot of people in my dad's generation were, even when being tough guys, not this overly stoic bullshit you see now," Michael had responded, seeming a bit pissed.
>
> "What, like Clint Eastwood," Gab had followed up.

Michael then sneered.

> "You don't like him?"
>
> "No, I like his movies, and I think he's pretty cool, I'd punch him

in the face but…?”

“What,” Gab had asked.

“Nothing! I just like characters that got heart, and ain't afraid to say what they feel,” Michael had commented.

Gab seemed intrigued.

“Not a lot of guys would think that way, anymore,” Gab had commented back.

“Yeah, that's because they got no heart. They think being coldblooded and expressionless as dry-ice is what's tough. And you know—I know—with some guys around, if you say the word 'emotional' they'll take you for being a fag and laugh. Well, you know what? Let them say that to me, to my face, and when I have them crying like a little girl—which I always do—we'll see who gets emotional,” Michael had responded, seeming more pissed.

Gab had then cringed, as he saw the fire building up in Michael's face, and then felt like he should probably detach.

“Gotta say, Gab, you should experience it sometime. You bump into some macho asshole that thinks he's tougher and better than you. And when he tries to give you shit… you knock him the fuck down! Then sit on his chest and start whaling on him until he drops the tough guy act and starts bawling! Shit feels like heaven,” Michael had then finally concluded.

Gab then stood there, as he watched Michael continue to burn some more. He then saw him take out his mother's old Rosary, kiss the crucifix, and then watched him leave, as his fire subsided.

The Pussyslayer.

“So, what's up, Gab? What happened to the rest,” asked Michael, as he noticed Gab was ignoring the question.

“Well, I don't know where to start? You want to know about the lackeys, too,” asked Gab, finally, after breaking away from his thoughts.

“No, just the key players. What happened to Sassboy?”

“Oh, he moved to Florida.”

Michael felt like digging deeper, but then remembered how he never really did like Sassboy to begin with and decided to leave it at that.

“Nastyboy,” asked Michael.

“Dude, fuck that guy,” responded Gab, plainly enough.
Michael then made a crooked smirk, remembered Nasty, and all that he was about, and thought:
Yeah… my sentiments exactly.
And left that one at that.
“Tomboy?”
“He moved up-state, got married, and started a family.”
Michael smirked hearing this, as he found this story conflicting with the one he had heard in prison.
“Really? I heard he became a she, and became some—”
“Where did you hear that,” asked Gab, inquisitively, as he narrowed his eyes onto Michael.
“Well, everyone kinda thought—”
“He wasn't,” answered Gab, seeming a bit disgruntled, “he was just really that bad when it came to hitting on chicks, and you guys kept picking on him over that matter. It used to really get to him—you know?”
“We were just fucking around, and really it was all him instigating it. We'd usually say nothing, but he kept trying to prove that he wasn't, and it got annoying,” broke out Michael, in defense.
Gab then rolled his eyes, grew a smirk, and said:
“Fine, I agree! He was a real insecure hot-head about everything—not just that—and sorta had it coming.”
Michael shook his head as he now remembered how Tomboy had once come up to him and had asked him for trade secrets in chasing tail. And had then demanded Michael not to tell anybody about it.
Well, I kept from telling anyone that story for this long… and he's married now.
“Yeah, I guess you're right about Tomboy. One time he asked me how to hit on chicks, and what to say when he'd see them.”
“Oh really, how did that go,” asked Gab, looking away, and not minding the story behind it much, yet.
“Well, I told him that wasn't what mattered. Told him how a lot of guys make the same mistake of thinking that getting into a woman is like trying to get into a speakeasy, and you need some password to do it. Fucking 'open says-a-me' bullshit! I told him first thing—right off the bat—he needed to do was make eye contact, and smile,

and to feel happy to see them… and not fake it."

"Oh, wow, you're really going to get into this, now in detail, are you," asked Gab, seeing as how lively Michael was getting, explaining all this.

"Yeah, I am, can I continue," asked Michael, and waited for the nod.

Gab then nodded, reluctantly.

"But, yeah! People can genuinely tell when you try to fake liking them, so you're setting yourself up for certain failure when you do. Told him that, and how when he smiled, to definitely not drop the eye contact, or drop the smile, getting intimidated when you notice they noticed. That shows weakness. And women hate weakness, because it reminds them how weak they are."

"How weak they are," asked Gab, wondering where Michael was going with this.

Michael shrugged.

"Yeah! I mean if you were always overly emotional—in a weak way. Smaller, scrawnier, insecure all the damn time, and surrounded by a sex that generally wasn't, how would you be? Strength and power are the only things they can see and care about in this world, since they weren't born with it. It's what you call in psychiatric circles as 'penis envy.' Now, yeah, I've seen some ogrish looking women that can probably body slam Andre the Giant at Wrestlemania, and such. But generally, the majority are weak. The only true weapon they have in this world are their looks—if they're born with it, that is! And if you can get passed that—which most guys can't—they're puddy in your hands."

Gab stood there, stupefied, after what he just heard, for about four seconds. Then opened his mouth to say something, but then decided it wasn't worth telling Michael how much of a sexist prick he sounded, there.

"Anyways, back to the story. I told him how what he needed to do was set the mood, first. Body language! And how that smile alone, if done correctly, was half the battle. Rest of the battle being their stupid silly tests they give to try and see if you're not a pushover, which I always have to bite my lip and try not to laugh. But anyways, then he asked, 'what do I say to set the mood,'" recounted

Michael, lifting up one cheek, in antipathy.

"What did you tell him?"

"Well, I told him then how you feel, dictates mood, and if you enjoy talking to them, they'll enjoy listening. If you don't—they won't! Confidence comes from the passion you feel inside, when you really like someone and want them to like you, not some hot air that you come fronting with, just for show, just to impress, and nothing else. So, in the end, you have to be genuine. Plus, if you're trying to fake a smile and pretend to like them, you're doing it all for the wrong reasons."

Michael then paused, and felt very, very, very depressed, all of a sudden, for some reason.

"I also then told him how deep-down women love to be dominated over, even though they'll never admit it. They still do. That's how the sex act works. We fuck them, they don't fuck us. So, you always have to remind them who is the penetrator, and who is the penetratee."

"Are those even real words," asked Gab, smiling up like a smart-ass.

"Shut up! Anyways, then I realized I was probably going over his head with shit he couldn't handle yet—being the dominating force and all—so I went back to setting the initial mood. I asked him how he felt when talking to chicks, he said 'great!' I said, 'really?' He said 'yeah!' Of course, I didn't believe him. So, I asked him to close his eyes, and think about every time he's talked to chicks… then after ten or twenty seconds… I asked him again."

"What did he say then," asked Gab, now very intrigued.

"Well, he finally let out the truth of how he felt scared shitless talking to them, and I told him that was the problem, that that was the awkward mood he was setting, and girls don't like that—no one would, really! If you got all awkward talking to me, I'd get all insecure and feel what you're feeling, also. So, what you're really doing is scaring them when you're that way. Mentioned then again how it's all body language…."

Gab shrugged, as Michael paused a bit.

"But then the dumb-ass asked me, 'then what do I say not to feel awkward and scared,'" continued Michael, shaking his head.

Gab grinned a bit, and shook his head, also.

"Shit! Finally, I was like, 'do you want to fuck 'em?' He said 'yeah!' Then I said, 'then go up to them, and just tell them how much you'd love to eat their pussies out, and if you can muster up enough balls to say that, you'll never feel awkward again.'"

Now both Michael and Gab were laughing.

"But then he freaked when I told him that, and said, 'that can never work!' Tomboy was just like most guys, completely oblivious to that whole body language vibe dynamic, and how it works, and I just could not get through the idiots head there is no 'open says-a-me' line," concluded Michael.

"Has the 'I want to eat your pussy' line worked," asked Gab, knowing Michael, and his shenanigans with women.

Michael just smiled.

"Has it?"

"Fucking A, it has! That was my number one pick up line from way back when! Of course, you got to know when they want it, for they'll look you in the eyes, beforehand, and glare a bit with anticipation. Can't do that with the prude, man-hating librarian types. The one's that hate the thought of being dominated. Those crazy chicks will try to murder you before you even say 'hi', just because their daddies didn't love them enough," explained Michael, all wild-eyed.

Gab now faced Michael, in Dutch angle, and asked again:

"Has it worked? With the prude man-hating types?"

Michael then made a mischievous smile.

"Fucking A... sometimes... usually they'll slap the shit out of you, first. That, or give you the look like they're scheming to bite your dick off in revenge later. But it has worked... sometimes! Especially when they slap you, and you smile at them, like you enjoyed it. That does something to them, there, though. And when it does work, I really felt like they were working out some man-hating aggression out on me, through sex, which seemed therapeutic for them. So there," explained Michael, as he shrugged, with that same mischievous smile.

Gab just shook his head, and wondered why the man had never gotten a restraining order.

Well, I guess with your looks, you can get away with anything.
Concluded Gab, in his thoughts. Plus, he began to think about something else.

"Dude… don't you ever worry about VD," asked Gab.

"No… what's that," followed up Michael, looking like he really didn't know.

"Venereal disease."

"No, what's that?"

Gab was speechless.

"Dude, what the fuck?"

Michael began chuckling.

"No! Don't laugh! It's not funny! I know you're fucking with me! How the hell can you not know about that stuff?"

But considering who he was dealing with, Gab really began to wonder.

"Tell me you at least know about this new thing called AIDS, people are dieing from that—you know?"

"No! What's that," asked Michael, again.

And before Gab could think of a comment to follow up with the shit he was hearing, Michael busted out into laughter, and said:

"Don't worry, man, a week ago my parole officer… seeing as to how a couple of convicts at the dump I'm at, next door to, have been complaining about the moaning noises coming from my place every night… well… he decided to pay for me to get a checkup. I'm clean."

"Clean," gasped Gab, in shock.

"As a whistle," concluded Michael.

Gab was speechless, again. Michael, on the other hand, felt like continuing with what he was saying earlier, before being interrupted over VD.

Always the ones that ain't getting none that will come up to you asking you that crap. If you ask me, this giant concern with VD going on now is just some shit the boring types are pushing, to scare people into becoming just as unhappy and boring as they are. Everyone was fucking like crazy in the 70s, and having a good time, and you never heard so much concern. And rarely did people get anything serious. Really, just a bunch of bull! Although, considering how many chicks I have been with, really am lucky not

to have gotten one by now. Plus, how the hell would I get AIDS? I'm not gay.

"Of course, when chicks want it, when they hear that line—they'll instantly freak in delight! So, when they hear it, they'll then try to drag me by my pubic hairs to the chick's restroom, lock it, then sack me to the ground, and try to sit on my—"

"Okay—Michael—okay! I don't want the details," cried out Gab, knowing how much of a sex fiend Michael was, and knowing there was no limit to how far he would go recounting his sex-capades if Gab allowed him to.

TV People.

"Who else you want to know about," asked Gab, trying to change the subject.

"Dude! Girls are just as sex crazed as—"

"Fine! I get it! Who else?"

Michael lifted up his pupils to think for it bit.

"Whiteboy?"

"Oh, he's with the BJAs now, said Gab.

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah, really," responded Gab, looking surprisingly at Michael, as Michael did the same back.

"Dollboy?"

"Oh, he really turned out to be gay. And has moved to San Fran, and now looks like a black Freddie Mercury."

"What do you mean? We'd go to bars or clubs, and he kept trying to compete with me over the same chicks—the cock-blocking asshole!"

"Well, turns out, he was bi... I mean! The guy sometimes sends Polaroid pictures of himself to us, in the fucking mail if you can believe! Showing all the men and women, he's been with. And sometimes all together... fucking pervert," sneered Gab, through his teeth.

"Yeah, I remember he once showed me a Polaroid picture of himself, fucking this Puerto Rican, that he picked up before I could. Then just smiled at me, all conceited like... what a

flamboyant asshole he was!”

Gab then bursted out with a chuckle, as he seemed to be enjoying going down memory lane. Michael smiled, and felt glad that Gab still could. Michael wasn't expecting him, or anyone from the old gang, to still care about those good ol' days as he did.

“Jackyboy?”

“Oh, yeah,” said Gab, seeming distressed, “he died in a car crash while racing his hot-rod!”

“Ah,” responded Michael.

And then began remembering that red-headed freckled Polish kid, that was all into that retro-rockabilly revival shit that was going on in the 70s.

Actually, that's what I did, too! The 50s gave us the ultimate teenaged heartthrob look, and it will never be topped. Long live the memory of James Dean! Long live!

Jackyboy used to grease up and duck-tail his flaming red hair to the back. And he'd always pick up the weirdest, freakiest, skank-iest, and yet nicest chicks Michael had ever met. Michael sighed.

“Shit! Now I’m scared to go on… how about Rudeboy?”

Gab then stopped, and had the look on his face of a dude on top of his chick, ready to get some. Although now, just realizing he forgot to get the rubbers at the store.

Hey, Gab… what’s with that look on your face, man,” chuckled Michael, finding his expression a little amusing.

Gab then turned around, shook his head in bewilderment, and spoke:

“Damn, dude, I totally forgot about that guy. Sorry, I can’t tell you.”

Michael was now sorta confused.

Come on, Gab, how do you not remember Rudy? Fucking Rudy! He was always… he was always… wait?

But then Michael was astonished to find out he, himself, couldn't remember jackshit about the guy, either.

What the fuck! Well, that’s weird. Feels like I got a mental block set up around that guy. All that comes to mind was the fact that he was… rude? One rude dude… I guess? Huh?

“Oh, and, who else was there,” asked Gab.

“Blueboy?”

“Oh… I have no idea,” responded Gab, seeming a bit spooked.

Okay… good! I do remember him. How the fuck do I not remember…?

"Man—I remember little boy blue and how he'd toot his horn, coming in with his overly elaborated dick jokes. One time, I remember him talking about how he had caught this weird VD from a Romanian chick. And I asked, 'what's that?' Knowing him, and how he'd just bullshit and make up stuff on the spot. He changed his story and said she really cursed it, and his penis wanted now to grow wings and fangs, at night, and go vampire on people. And what's funny is he'd talk like he was being dead serious about it. He'd seem very spooked out by the idea, as his eyes would light up like in a horror movie. A vampire penis? What a bunch of stupid silly shit!"

Michael then chuckled, as Gab made no response.

"And kept going on and on into detail with his tales of him, and his Vampirella, there—which he named—saying his penis was really possessed by a 14th century demonic female vampire, by that Bulgarian, or was it Romanian… Hungarian… something chick, that fucked him."

"Yeah! I remember," said Gab, still seeming spooked.

"Then he said how he tried to get a priest to exercise that vampire demon out, begged him, 'please father, exercise my penis!'"

Michael burst into laughter, as Gab continued to stone gaze.

"The power of Christ compels you—and all that! Yeah—throw some holy water on it and burn the witch out—ha! Fucking stupid silly shit! Always had us laughing how nuts he'd get with the stories he'd make up. So, you have no idea what happened to him?"

"Nope," responded Gab, again, not seeming to be taken in by Michael's recounts of Blueboy, by the least, which began to distill Michael.

"Oh, you two weren't able to keep in touch?"

"No, actually, if you remember, me and him used to be pretty cool."

"Okay, then what happened," asked Michael, now feeling a bit spooked out, himself, while looking into Gab's eyes.

"Well, we used to be neighbors, if you remember. And, one day, him and his family were there. Next day… vanished," explained Gab, as he snapped his fingers at the end, there.

“What?”

“Yeah—I mean—overnight… they were gone! And in the morning, I remembered seeing the door was open, so I walked in to bullshit with him like we always did, and there was nothing there. I mean, the place was empty. No family, no furniture, not even dust, and I checked.”

“You checked for dust?”

“Well, the place was always a pigsty. Let's just say, for example, they decided to move to escape some loan shark or something—and overnight… would they really clean up that well?”

An eerie sense began to fill up in Michael, as he watched how frightened Gab got recounting his tale.

“Then I went into the bathroom and… I thought I saw something in the cabinet mirror.”

“What,” asked Michael, finding the story a little too surreal now.

“I don't know, it might have been just the lights playing around with my eyes, but I got the fuck out of there after that!”

Michael then smiled, disbelievingly.

“Are you being serious? I mean, it all sounds like—"

“No, Michael! I know how he was! Dick jokes are one thing, but him and his entire family to simply vanish like that? That's something else,” explained Gab, as Michael began to believe the possibilities.

Gab then paused, to reflect a bit, as Michael waited impatiently for him to continue.

“And the thing is… Blueboy always told me things… he'd tell me what he was up to… and his family had lived in that apartment for twenty years.”

So, what you think happened,” asked Michael, feeling a bit skittish to hear a response.

Gab paused, again, as he readied his conclusion.

“Blueboy? Let's just say he got gobbled up by the Twilight Zone—man! The TV people got to him,” concluded Gab, as he glared into Michael's eyes, intently.

After another pause, both Michael and Gab shuddered thinking about it, and then decided to move on.

Well, wherever Blueboy is, at least he’s there keeping Rudeboy

company. Maybe they both went up on some plane, and got erased from existence. Maybe I should look up some old pictures of the crew to see if those two are still....

Michael then felt like pulling out his Rosary to look at it. But as he did, Gab noticed.

"You want to kiss it, don't you," asked Gab, seeming distressed.

"What?"

"Nothing, something I remember you doing a lot back in the day," concluded Gab, and walked off.

The Tropic.

After a brisk travel, they were at the Tropic of Cancer. And looking at the place, Michael had no clue what he was looking at. It looked like CBGB but taken over by cyberpunks.

I don't know what to call them. They're the exclusively subcultural types, that don't like to be labeled as anything. I met a few in prison, and out of everyone there, all the murderers and robbers and rapists, they were the ones that really seemed... off! They can be very intelligent, although. And since they've got such an affinity for some weird science shit, that's what I'll just be calling them: Cyberpunks. Although... nerds, also comes to mind.

Entering the joint, Michael heard 'Smalltown Boy' by Bronski Beat playing. Gab then turned around with a smirk to face Michael, and asked:

"What do you think now?"

Michael just shrugged as he tried to get a feel of the place. But then, a weird notion went through him, like a ghost, and then disappeared. Michael shrugged, again.

What the hell was...?

There was a whole lot of old CBGB bands there that never went anywhere, playing and tuning their axes; a whole bunch of leftovers from an era that never got passed a three-chord progression; bitter old twenty-somethings that cursed the day Billy Idol or New Wave killed their scene—as they would put it. Most of them were also now criminals working to pay the bills. The most recognizable group Michael saw was The Technomancers: a former group of street racers that later formed a band. Then when they couldn't make bread anymore with their music

in a legal manner, they turned to the chop shops as car-lifters. Michael actually kinda liked this bunch. On the surface, you couldn't tell what their business was, since they acted too peculiar to seem like criminals. In the 70s, they were actually called The Spud Holidays, a gang going 50s retro that Jackyboy used to hang out with a lot. But now it seemed like they had seen the movie Blade Runner one too many times, and turned it into a damn religion.

> And I shit you not! They now go by nicknames like Blue Tears, Red Rain, Black Unicorn, and White Origami. And they like to hoard exotic animals like they're trying to save them from extinction. I mean… White Origami there has a fucking owl! A fucking owl, of all things, perched on his shoulder, that he named Archimedes.
>
> Wait? An owl as a pet named Archimedes? Why does that sound familiar?

They dressed all 80s rockabilly-ish as fuck, now, with a billion patches on their jackets like that one kid in The Lost Boys. Their hair was a curled up greasy mess, like Sadboy's was. But their leader had that Leningrad Cowboys Go America hairdo. As Michael passed by Voight-Kampf (their leader) he saw that he was carrying a boombox that had 'Song to the Siren' by This Moral Coil playing on it, and he looked like he longed for a good weeping session. Hearing some of their conversations, Michael heard them talking about that weird science shit; seeming to have been arguing for hours on end over the coming technological singularity—or something. And Michael also saw a few carrying a copy of a William Gibson or Phillip K. Dick novels, at hand.

Funny how even the subcultural types can be a bit of a tool.

Even though a complete dive, the joint was really bitchin', too. In its own unique way. The walls had a mosaic of anything geeky. There were Garbage Pail Kid's collector cards glued all over the place. Large posters hung on the walls of all sorts, from cult movies like 2001: Space Odyssey, to graphical illustrations such as the lovely ladies of Boris Vallejo and Luis Royo.

Naked chicks with guns and swords? I can dig it!

There were some posters of that sexy robot pin up girl posing like

Marilyn Monroe Michael had seen in Omni magazine. Posters for the movies Clockwork Orange, Buckaroo Banzai, and of course a giant poster of Rocky Horror Picture Show, with Tim Curry on the front, dressed in drag. Which also (from closer inspection) had a quick doodle of an ejaculating penis up near Tim's mouth.

"Hey, you remember the guys—right," asked Gab.

It was Sadboy's old band mates.

"Yeah, I remember! What did you guys call yourselves again?"

"Nosferatu Anonymous," said some weirdo, Charles Manson look-a-like, Frenchmen, also dressed like a raving lunatic Amadeus.

Nosferatu—what? And I thought I come up with weird shit to think and say.

"Alors, qui est il," asked the Frenchmen.

"Oh, this is Michael, an old ami," responded Gab.

Michael cringed, as he felt like the language was giving him headaches.

The guys were all sitting around watching some French movie called Betty Blue. Watching and rewinding over and over a particular scene from that movie's beginning. Then looking at the table they were sitting by, Michael saw there was an orgy of VHS, Beta, and 3/4 U-matic tapes: Blue Velvet, The Thing, Brazil, Robocop, Videodrome, Body Double....

That chick's nice little ass was so mesmerizing in that movie, and I loved that short platinum blonde hair of hers, too. Oh, and that blow-job tease thing she did to that nerd, there, was—oh so cute!

Followed by Return to Oz, The Road Warrior, Poltergeist, Buckaroo Banzai, Highlander, some Japanese cartoons....

Japanese cartoons? Why would anyone want to... wait? I see blood and tits on the cover! What types of cartoons have... wow! Okay? I'm really curious now.

Evil Dead 2, Heavy Metal....

More blood and tits? And some rock star looking chick riding a pterodactyl? Jeez, cartoons aren't for kids anymore—are they?

Scanners, The Vanishing, Heathers, Altered States, Blade Runner, a French movie called Subway, and some Elvira flick....

Oh, the things I would do to that woman!

There were also a bunch of movies from the 70s, like those weird Sci-Fi

Charleston Heston flicks: The Omega Man, Soylent Green, and Planet of the Apes. Then Logan's Run, Eraserhead, A Boy and His Dog, The Man Who Fell To Earth, THX 1138, Tommy. Then Al Pacino movies like Serpico, Cruising, and A Dog Day Afternoon….

Ah, fuck Attica!

Also, The Warriors, Taxi Driver, Mean Streets, Herald and Maude, Quadrophenia, Clockwork Orange, The Entity, The Fury. Then finally a bunch of 60s movies like Dr. Strangelove, Easy Rider, Midnight Cowboy, The Graduate, Rosemary's Baby, and Barbarella.

Yeah, Jane Fonda used to be a real fox! Woof! But then again… she's always sorta looked a bit too much like her dad. And that's sorta freaky, come to think of it.

Also, there were tons and tons and tons of pornos.

Fuck pornos!

“Hey, Mr. Irish,” called out the Frenchmen, beneath his purple haze, “so, what are your thoughts on the upcoming technological singularity?”

Michael cringed hearing the frog ask him that question, as he knew where this was going.

So? Trying to test me to see how stupid I can be—huh?

Thought Michael, as he drew a smile.

Well, time not to be so stupid, for once.

“Well, Mr. Frog—question? Isn't that where computers become more intelligent than us, and are able to upgrade themselves passed our own abilities," responded Michael, breaking out of his usual macho character, as he came up with a sophisticated look, that confused the mon-sewer-rat, there, for a second to see.

"Well, yes," responded the frog, sounding very surprised.

"Well, I don't know, if it happens, it happens—so what," shrugged off Michael.

"What? You're not worried if an AI becomes more intelligent than humans, that they'll try to eradicate us? You do know what an AI is—right," questioned the Frog, looking certain that Michael wouldn't.

I was just able to explain, in detail, what I knew about the technological singularity… how the fuck would I not know about

an AI, now?

"Yeah, I've read enough Omni magazines in prison to know what you nerds are talking about, and I've seen that Schwarzenegger flick."

Ho, quel petit bâtard suffisant tu fais! Je me sens si insulté par ton attitude qu'en vérité je suis impressionné!

Thought Michael (yes, Michael!).

"So," asked the frog as he raised one eyebrow, inquisitively, making Madboy want to staple it in its position, so he could never lower it again.

“A computer is still a tool. That's what we made them to be. And a tool is an extension of us to do a job, no different than our own hands. So, if they're tasked with upgrading themselves, they only upgrade themselves how we program them to. If they're tasked with destroying us, that's just what we made them to do, too. No different than if we decide to destroy ourselves with nukes and shit," answered Michael, as he lifted up his own brow, all rompous-pompous like.

The Frenchmen seemed confused.

"Okay, you see my hands," said Michael, as he raised his up in front of the Frenchmen.

"Yes."

"Well, like my hands, tools are an extension of the choices I make. If I decide to choke you silly right now, whose fault is it going to be? Me, or my hands?”

"But what if they decide to destroy us, themselves, and they were never programmed to do it," asked the Frog.

"You mean if computers become self-aware and decide to do that for themselves by way of free choice... well... I don't believe in that."

"Why not?"

"Because a machine has no soul, they can only do and think what you program them to. Plus, computers aren’t built to be sentient, like how we’re built, they’re just overly elaborate light switches. Going on and off, on and off. They have about as much understanding of what they’re doing as a tea kettle has boiling water, when put over a fire. If you were to draw a happy face on a

tea kettle with a marker, that might have you imagining it's alive now, but, still, that wouldn't make it so."

"You believe in a soul—ha! Do you also believe in an all seeing, benevolent God, too," cracked up the Frog.

Michael smiled, and pictured himself going ahead with that strangulation demonstration he had just brought up.

"Okay... okay... Michelle."

"My name isn't Michelle, pronounce my name in English," lashed out Michael.

"Okay, Michael... what if machines were to finally be built to be sentient, could gain free will, and the ability to think for themselves, in a hypothetical sense?"

Michael paused for a second.

"Oh, I don't know, ever seen that Star Trek movie—the first one? Well, if they're like humans, they might decide to fuck us instead, and we'll make cyborg babies. How does that sound," responded Michael, feeling like busting out with a chuckle, as he began picturing the idea of robo-sex in his head.

"Ha! Are you kidding me?"

"No, actually I'm not. If we can create machines to be sentient, capable of thinking for themselves, how far off is the idea that we can create them to feel. And really, I don't believe free choice is even possible without that at its center, as the driving mechanism. Cold calculative emotionless killing machines with free choice? It's impossible for that to exist! Free choice and the decisions we make come from the emotional response of what we think, and the bases of that is how we resolve them. Without it, thoughts are just a bunch of 1s and 0s, and have no meaning. They'll still go by programming instead of free will. But if they're capable of feeling fear and hate, which is what it would take for them to turn on us out of self-preservation, they should also be able to feel love and the desire to mate, too. And if we create them in our own image... well... there you go."

The Frenchmen seemed frustrated and at a loss; he had no answer to that. Michael grew a smug grin as he watched the euro-trash fucker seeming insulted. For Michael knew the asshole really didn't ask that question to get much of an answer, or have an intellectual debate with

him; he asked it for the hard-on he got from making himself sound superior to guys like Michael. But now that he had to actually use his brain and contemplate over Michael's response, it was making him look like the idiot.

> Funny! One would think with these intellectual types, here, things would be different. I mean, they're really just awkward nerds, pretending to not be. But still, you'd think that these nerds, here, would have more courtesy and manners, unlike the morons on the streets I'm always dealing with. You'd think with these Lambda Lambda Lambdas, here, they'd be friendlier and more understanding, since they ain't the confrontational types that are always out looking to beat someone's face in to get respect. You'd think that… but they ain't! Nerds—really—are some of the bitterest and most spiteful people you'll ever meet. Don't believe me? Think about this! Remember that movie, Revenge of the Nerds? Well now… think about what type of people those Lambda Lambda Lambdas would really turn out to be, considering how badly they were picked on by those Alpha Betas. Yeah… it's like that! Fucking Alpha Betas!

But then again, Michael wasn't exactly the jock type, either. And knew their pain. Just in his own way.

> I mean, fuck 'em. They'll always pick on the scrawny and weak. But I'd love—love! To see them try me out for size! They'll be complete fucking assholes to guys they think they got an edge over. But let's see them try it out on someone that's—been over the edge! If that Stan character was to ever try half the shit he did to those nerds… on me? Oh boy, oh boy o' boy! Golly gee willikers! Fuck!
>
> I'd go to one of his games, take his game winning football, shove it in his mouth sideways, and punt his face so hard the ball would shoot out of his ass, to make the spread. Then I'd turn on the rest of his Alpha Beta lot, sack them all down with one big sweep, and completely erase that whole alpha part from their name, using Ogre's bushy head as the eraser. And then, finally, I'd pile up all their twitching bodies up on top of one another in the middle of the field, and fuck that cheerleader, Becky, doggy style, at its

summit… as she gave me a cheer, with her pompoms… while the crowd went wild.

Michael had a tiny moment to himself, there, as the fantasy gave him a sense of catharsis, as if it was making mends to grievances he personally had had.

So, yeah! You gotta understand these nerds, here, were never accepted in high school by their peers, and by girls they had a crush for. And because of that, they have a chip on their shoulders the size of the national debt. I mean, I've tried to be friendly with them, I've tried, but this is all I've ever gotten from them. Since, whenever they see me, they immediately hate my guts with a passion, seeing as how I look like I can bag all the women, that wouldn't give them the time of day. But much of their problems with women have absolutely nothing to do with them being undesirable, their major malfunction is they're anti-social as fuck, and they don't know how to talk to people, especially women, and they feel envious of anyone that can.

But then again, Michael wasn't exactly a Great Gatsby. And, who, for the most part, had been more anti-social than most nerds he had met, all put together and combined. And all his charms, came from him being…

Shut up! Shut the fuck up! Don't give me away!

Anyways…

Nerds? Really got some issues, some major, major issues. Bitter, angry, vengeful… sometimes even sociopathic lot—they are! That use their brains to measure up to others, instead of their brawns. Everything has to be about one's sense of superiority/inferiority, when they're anti-social. Some measure each other based on money, my people measure how macho tough they can be. And, as for these guys, their superiority complexes revolve around the level their intelligence is at, and they judge each other on that basis.

Michael then eyed the Frenchmen, and thought:

Well, I'll tell you what… if that's the sort of dick measuring you want to do with me, Froggy? Know this much… mine's still bigger!

“Well,” asked Michael, in a gloating manner.

The Frog raised his eyebrow, again.

"Well, I think the Wrath of Khan was a much better film," responded the Frog.

"Wait? What? I thought we were talking about technological singul—"

“Yes, I know what the fuck we were talking about, but if you think that the Motion-*less* Picture was a good film, then I guess I'm wasting my time.”

Michael felt stupefied.

What a dickless asshole! Yeah, keep watching your Betty Blue, since that's the only pussy you're ever going to see—you surrender-monkey!

Michael turned his attention to Gab; he was done with the frog.

"Hey, Gab, who were those guys over at Stumpy’s," asked Michael.

"Wait, you don't know?"

"Know what?"

“Gab, who is this conard,” pouted out the Frog, again.

And hearing the Frenchman call Michael a shithead….

Yeah, I understand French, fluently! I taught myself the entire language in prison. Weren't expecting that from a moron like me… were you?

So, therefore, knowing exactly what the Frenchy was saying, now, made him lose it.

“Shut the fuck up you accordion playing pansy, before I introduce you to my German half,” scolded Michael, as he stared at the jerk, like he meant it.

"Haven't you been watching TV, lately," asked Gab, as he tried to intervene, with what he knew would eventually lead to Michael losing his Chucks, up the Frog's derriere.

"Dude, I've been cooped up in some halfway house all this time. You don't keep anything a nickel’s worth in a place like that."

That and some bitch jacked my shit. So fucking stupid of me for letting her in!

"Well, the TV wouldn't be telling you much, anyways. Someone has been meddling into network TV broadcast, and has been pandering a message about The Age of Rage."

"What?"

"Some old guy with a big white head. The news has been all over it, trying to figure out how he's been getting the signal. The guys around town have been calling him 'The Big White Head' literally enough, and he's planning an attack on the city," explained Gab, looking like he meant it.

Michael couldn't help hearing all this, without bursting out into laughter. He'd had heard some ridiculous shit in his time, but this took the cake.

"Are you fucking kidding me," chuckled out Michael.

"No, I'm not! You saw that motorcycle gang outside Stumpy's place—right? They're called The Iron Monkeys MC. They're supposed to be from Columbia, or something," explained Gab, again.

"Tony Montana is invading America—that's great," joked Michael.

"No—not Cuban… Colombian!"

"Okay, so let me get this straight: Colombian communists, led by Che Guevara, and Ted Kennedy, are invading America… is that the gist of it? Maybe we should head for the hills, live off of deer's blood, and call ourselves the Wolverines—what do you say?"

Michael looked over at 'Mr. Altered States,' and decided he just had to make another cheap shot.

"Hey, Froggy, would you like to help? If they get here, you can stand around doing what you guys do best, and surrender, while we flank them from the side… we got ourselves a plan?"

The mon-sewer-rat got up, enraged, like he was ready to spout "Sacrebleu" and make Michael eat those words. But then remembered that he had no dick, and sat his ass back down.

"Yeah, fine—I get it—pretty fucking ridiculous! But that's the word around town." replied Gab, after a pause.

"The Age of Rage," retorted Michael, trying to get all this crazy shit to settle.

"That guy—The Big White Head—has been rambling on TV how the city is a cesspool of gangs and violence that none of the powers in charge care to solve. The Age of Rage is our time to get up, and take back our city—and through anarchy! Bring back the old west in the heart of our city. That there is the gist of it," snapped Gab,

trying to equal Michael's jokes, while still holding a serious tone.

As stupid as all of this sounded, it was beginning to make sense to Michael. The city had become an unacclaimed third world nation onto itself. Split between the 80s Romans up in Uptown living like Caligulas, and the rest of the city that was left to rot in crack infested hoods. With all the gangs around, now, all it would really take was one spark, to set the whole city ablaze.

"So, what are these Iron Monkeys supposedly going to do," asked Michael.

"You saw for yourself. The police don't care as long as Uptown doesn't get raided."

"Fine, then I guess it's time to start 'movin' on up,'" responded Michael, deciding that Gab's story really had nothing to do with him.

Age of Rage? Whatever! I gots my own business.

"Nice line, Mr. Jefferson, but I can't get you there. I don't have that type of connection," responded Gab, shaking his head.

"Who does? Come on, man, give me something," demanded Michael, squeezing Gab with his eyes, to get something out.

"Fine, I might know a guy," responded Gab, looking distressingly at Michael, again.

"Hey everyone," yelled out one of the Technomancers, "they're outside!"

The Battle of the Bands.

The group that was on stage then stopped performing, and the dead look on the Technomancer's face gave it away to everyone at the joint, that the Age of Rage was afoot. Michael rushed to the window with Sadboy to check, and it was them, all right. They were here!

"What do they want? What do we— "

And then all of a sudden, the doors to the entrance were bashed open, as one after another the Iron Monkeys rode in.

Ah shit! Shit's about to go down. Fast!

A member of a small group called The Babylonian Masochist, tried to make a run for it, out! But was taken down, hard, with a whip of a chain. The bartender (some funk singer Michael remembered being called Thunderblade Barbarella) pulled out a shotgun and began spitting lead,

getting one in the chest. But was then, shortly, taken down by the Iron Monkeys MC President.

That Futuristic Attila, character, you know!

Who shot poor Barbie with a gold plated .44 Magnum. And now with the sound of discharging gunfire, everyone there began to panic. Everyone… except….

Oh, you fucking assholes! Not the Tropic!

Michael had had enough trying to avoid these party crashers, as he felt like it was about time to finally make them a part of his scene. So, he grabbed Sadboy's bass guitar, ran up, and started swinging. Then nailed one off his bike, before the hombre was able to make his own move whip lashing someone with his chain. At first, everyone seemed skittish to do anything, since guns were now in play, but once they saw Michael battle-axing a guitar around, they all now began picking up their own guitars, and began swinging them, too. And as they did, an all-out rumble broke out, and….

Woah shit! Shits getting badass, now!

And Michael, couldn't help being taken back a bit, noticing how ridiculous things were getting, as it looked like the Hells Angels had declared war on rock and roll.

Badass! But Jeez—shit's getting really stupid in here, too.

As the battle continued, one Technomancer got thrown into a jukebox, and it must have set it off, as Billy's Idol's 'White Wedding' began playing over the havoc.

Am I really seeing all this crazy shit?

Thought Michael, as he narrowed his eyes on the Iron Monkey's bossman, and decided it was time to test some might. As the Che Guevara sellout continued riding around the joint, Madboy jumped on top of the bar, and kicked a bottle at his head. The bottle connected with his face, and broke off his sunglasses, and underneath, Madboy saw the hombre's eyes: he had clear pupils.

Aww! What the fuck… what the fuck are you?

The hombre smiled at Michael, as he took aim with his revolver, but Michael evaded the bullet by jumping onto another one of his boys riding around, knocking him off his bike. The two started struggling on the floor, as the giant Latin continued aiming, looking for a shot without shooting one of his own men—or was he?

Bang!

Michael pushed off the twitching body of the man he was wrestling with, who now had a giant hole in his head. Then looked up at the shooter, who continued smiling, readying his second aim.

Shit! He fucking killed him... he killed one of his own!

Thought Michael, as he saw how he was next. Before El Presidente could makes his shot, Michael saw Gab running up spinning a small shitty TV around by its cord. And as it connected with the shooters back, the hombre was taken back, as the TV shattered against his profile.

At a boy, Gab, you swing that shitty ass TV, to the rescue.

Rejoiced Michael, but only for a moment. For the effort hadn't completely expired him. The hombre was still standing. Tall. And Michael now booked it over to him, with Sadboy's bass, and took a swing at the bossman, himself.

But missed.

As Attila jumped off his bike, and out of the way. Sadboy had destroyed the TV, and was now looking for something else to swing with. He found another ax, and tried to swing it, but was crossed by another Iron Monkey, that got in his way, as that one took the collateral damage, instead. Michael then saw that the bossman was now trying to center his aim onto Gab, so he ran up to try and nail him, again. As he bashed the guitar over his chest, it shattered, but, did nothing, as the hombre just turned his head around and smiled at him.

“Hi, there, allow me to introduce myself... my name is—”

But before Michael could finish, the hombre then grabbed him by the throat, and lifted him off the ground. Then the giant asshole looked at Michael, in the eyes, and said:

“Don't fuck with Angel Eyes!"

Then began taking aim with his fist.

Yup! This, here, is an 80s villain for you. Some overly one-dimensional punk, psychopath, that's some nutcase with a ponytail, and with a bunch of piercings and tattoos all over his face and body. That's psycho for the sake of being psycho. Don't got no

Mommy issues, or nothing. The fucker was just born this way, I guess? The remnants of a bankrupt culture, that has already deemed society as being lost. Since we're all supposedly bond for nuclear Armageddon, anytime soon. Mere minutes away from Midnight. And afterwards, this is what's to be expected—by everyone! Since deep down at the root of all humanity, we're really just this twisted and evil. Clear white pupils? 'Don't fuck with Angel Eyes?' What stupid shit!

Thought Michael, but then thought:

Hmm, the fucker's still got me up by the throat, maybe I should do something before I start with the analyzing.

And then did.

Madboy then lifted up his leg, and gave the man some foot-to-face action; which registered, and made him stagger back, some, as Michael fell out of his grip. Then this Angel character lifted up his head, and made a loud cackling sound, smiled at Michael, got back on this bike, and rode out. It now seemed like the Iron Monkeys were done.

Fuck that bullshit! I don't want no draw! I can take your ass, you sleazy fuck! You ain't that badass! You ain't A Number One! Hot Shot!

One of them had poured gasoline all over the place, and had lit a match. As Angel Eyes exited the building, so did his crew, and everyone else also decided to hightail it out; stampeding out before the flames could get to them. Even though it seemed like the rumble was over with, Madboy still felt like he wanted another tumble with the men on Harleys, and jumped the last one trying to flee. He and that hombre then went flying through a window, over some trashcans, and into the street. Madboy sat on the fucker's chest and started whaling; cursing him out, as he beat him senseless.

"Come on man—let's go—let's go," screamed out Gab, grabbing Madboy by the waist, and pulling him off his prey.

The two men ran around an alley, and onto the beach, as The Tropic of Cancer raged in fire in the background.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael while staring up at his old favorite hidey-hole, that was now engulfed in flames. Then he collected himself up, and decided to leave.

"Michael, they were killing us in there," cried out Gab.

"Yeah… I'm not exactly used to this, either," responded Michael.

“Michael, I think we need to get the hell out of dodge.”

“Not yet!”

“For fuck sakes, Michael—the hell with Radboy! He ain't worth it!”

But as Gab looked Michael up and down, he realized, there was no way of changing his mind. Michael wasn't even paying any attention; instead, he was eyeing his Rosary, again. Gab sighed, and then decided to give him the info he was looking for.

“If you want a pass to the big leagues, we need to talk to Betamax. That's the guy I know that can make that junction,” responded Gab, finally, looking worn out by everything.

“Betamax, really?”

“Yeah, Betamax,” responded Gab.

The Haitian.

Ah man! Can't believe the Tropic went up like that… after all those years!

Thought Michael.

Well… nothing I can do now.

And felt depressed.

Michael then remembered that at times like these, the best antidote was a good sense of humor. His father had taught him this; taught him how in Iwa Jima, even with hell and death and decay all around, the only good medicine then was a dose of humor from the men, to keep them going. Of course, Michael's father, Robert, was never a humorous type. So, it sorta weirded Michael out how his father had ever brought it up.

Was pretty funny in there how everyone started swinging guitars. Thought Michael, as he came back to his senses. But then when he closed his eyes, he saw the face of that hombre that that Angel character had shot. The image of that hombre with a hole in his head, and since Michael had never seen gore in real life like that before, the image began to disturb him.

Nah—fuck that! Rompous-pompous! Don't start thinking about that shit! Just keep it funny, keep it fresh, and keep it in-your-face, like the good ol' John Wayne movies used to do.

And then felt better.

Betamax—huh?

Betamax was a limey, former disc jockey, that used to work around town as the man that could get you your entertainment fix, from mostly stolen hardware equipment. He also had the connections with underground fights and number runners. He was a two-bit idiot, that loved videotaping himself around parties, talking to people like some Geraldo Rivera; relishing the sound of his own voice.

How the hell he ever got into The Ravishers territory by doing the same service, with Uptowners, is beyond me.

"He's with The Ravishers now," mentioned Gab.

Well, that explained it.

"Isn't there anyone else we can go to? I don't think the Brit ever really liked me, much," explained Michael.

"How's that, you do something to have him turn on you," asked Gab, all suspicious like.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, as he began remembering the details.

Annabelle 'Lovely' Cunningham... damn it's been years since I've seen her.

Betamax used to hang out with Radboy a lot, back when the gang was still together. And he'd get all wasted, and try hitting on Nikki. Of course, pretending to be fucking around! Michael, on the other hand, wasn't pleased, and knew the act all too well. So, to get back at Betamax, Michael fucked his lovely, petite, red-headed, barely eighteen-year-old, virgin sister, who just so happened to have a humongous crush on him, and caught the entire transaction on an 8mm camera.

Then again, she was lieing! Eighteen my ass! She was definitely sixteen at least, and I was... twenty... I think? So, it's not like there was a giant age gap between us—even though still illegal. I mean, you want a giant age gap? My first was when my dad took me to a prostitute when I was twelve years old, and she was thirty-five. She was almost three times my age, and it was fucking awesome! She

was bitching! Thick ass Haitian woman that sorta looked like Pam Grier without the afro, who tried to teach me paddy cake in French to calm me down since I was so nervous. She was very pretty, and smiled a lot, seeing how I was still a kid. And once I calmed down, she unzipped my pants, and went straight to work, and blew my stupid fucking twelve-year-old mind away! How can that shit be a crime? After that, I had Caribbean dreams for months. After that, I was like, 'fuck playing with toys!' After that, I was all about touching and playing with girls at recess while all the other boys stuck to their stupid sports. Although, it's interesting how my dad specifically asked the pimp for the most voluptuous black woman that pimp had, and how he wanted her to be the 'saucy' and 'ferocious' type. And definitely, definitely—black! His words... like he wanted to set me up for something... hmm?

As for Annabelle, Michael made the scene as vile and gratuitous as he could possibly make it.

Actually, if you want vile and gratuitous, you should have seen what that Haitian woman did to me that day. Shit that scarred me—in a good way—for life. Ha!

Michael, did a lot of nasty to that young filly. A lot of nasty. A lot! And even though Michael did later begin to feel pretty despicable for the whole thing.

Yeah, but then again, the reasons for taking her virginity were wrong as fuck!

His mood about it changed when that Annabelle girl kept bringing it up, how Michael had blown her mind away, and how she wanted more. Said it made her want to go into porn.

Stupid girl!

She also wanted to start dating Michael. But Michael was at the time seeing Nikki, and even though he told her “no!” The little Missy then began to follow him around for four months straight, begging Michael to make a sequel.

Which I did eventually make, off camera, several times.

But as for the smut flick Michael made, he eventually found someone to develop the reel, and then mailed it to Betamax, which he entitled:

'The Deflowering and Whorefication of Annabelle Lovely.'

Oh, thinking about it now, I can't believe I did such a low-down and dirty thing, then! Damn! But, then again at the time, that Annabelle was definitely no virgin from what I experienced with her, and definitely a freak. She had to be lieing about that virgin thing! Ha! She was about as much of a virgin as that Madonna lady. She also had hetero—what the fuck was it called? Different colored eyes. Damn, it was sexy to see that emerald and sapphire gems looking up at me, when she was down there doing the deed. After tonight, if I survive, I should look her up, again, and have some Hollywood talks about that sequel.

But then Michael began to think of the fact he really had cheated on Nikki, and....

Why were you so... no! Stop! Don't get into it, again! That's ancient history, now! So, leave it be!

As for the Betamax situation, the only problem was... Michael never checked the film to make sure his face wasn't caught on camera. But then again....

His sister might have told Betamax everything.

If Betamax was the only option, there was a small chance what Michael did back then could come back to bite him in the ass, now.

"No, I haven't done anything, the Brit just always rubbed me the wrong way—that's all," responded Michael, while exiting from his thoughts.

"Well, either than Stumpy, The Ravishers are the only group connected to Uptown."

"No, they're not! What about The Nim Fo Matics? At least I've been able to get along with them, and there's several others, too, like the—"

"Connected to Uptown—and—have any clue where Radboy and Lady Nikki might be. Without them, you won't find Radboy, and you know how reclusive he is. When he doesn't want to be found—he won't be," responded Gab, with a shrug.

"Wait a second, what did you call Nikki," asked Michael.

"That's what they're calling her now. She's supposed to be someone with a lot of high connections. I mean, really high up there," explained Gab, eyeing to see what Michael's reaction would be. Michael made none.

“I see… where do we find Betamax?”

“Well, that's another problem. He's at Big Dick's Gym.”

It was the Beefcake's territory. And Richard Dick was the owner.

And yes! People did call him silly juvenile names like Two Dicks, Dickey Dick, or Old Man Double D.

Even though he didn't run The Beefcakes, he was still a major supplier of theirs of their steroid needs. Really, The Beefcakes had no leader; they were a group of bodybuilders who worked mostly as bouncers or bodyguards doing any type of hired muscle job: such as pimps asking for one of their girls to be set straight, or a loan shark looking for something big and scary to go and collect. If Betamax was involved, he must have been there to hook them up with the underground fights over at Uptown.

The Disco Dweeb.

“You want us to go into Beefcake territory,” asked Michael.

“Yeah, I know that group of guys don't like you much, but what else are your options? Want us to go wandering around Uptown screaming out Radboy's name, until we get picked up by the bulls, instead?”

“You know what—fuck it,” responded Madboy, lifting up an eyebrow.

“No—Michael—no! You might want to, but I don't,” responded Gab, knowing that Madboy would actually be crazy enough to try, and not just play it off as a joke.

“Want to what,” Madboy now asked, with a certain judgmental stare, and a mischievous smirk, which Sadboy was all too familiar with, coming from him.

Gab now paused, and began to stare at Michael, while shaking his head; looking at this thirty-something adolescent, that didn't seem to have matured a bit since going to prison.

“Michael, you haven't changed one fucking bit, you know that? Actually, I think you might have grown worse,” said Gab, bitterly.

“What is that supposed to mean—Armenian?"

“Don't call me out like that! You ain't all Irish like your dad was. All stereotypically stupid and proud and drunk and violent all the time. You're also quarter Armenian, too—right,” asked Gab, trying

to find a connection.

"Yeah, German-Armenian on my mom's side—so what? But I barely knew jack squat about that part since she wrote a 'Dear John' and left us—me and my dad—when I was a kid."

Gab eyed Michael, dishearteningly, realizing what Michael just said, might have had something to do with why he'd give him ugly stares, sometimes, as kids.

"Got anything else to say," asked Michael, as he raised his brow, again.

"Yeah, you got abandonment issues. Always have, and now I can tell you always will. And the problem is, you've never wanted to accept it. You don't know what you want, but you always want the same thing. And that's why you're looking for Radboy and Nikki! But you should really just let it go! They were never good for you," explained Gab, as his eyes shimmered a bit from the truth he felt he was dishing.

"Yeah, and you've always been a wimp, and a major drag," declared Michael, shaking his head, as Gab's face cringed up with anger.

A pause happened, as the two began eyeing each other very unfriendly like... like enemies, almost.

"You got anything else, Sigmund Freud," asked Michael, while continuing to shake his head.

"Gena sikdir eli, du khent!"

"Okay, don't you start that, again, every time you really want to say something—either than that one time—you start speaking in your mother's tongue," said Michael, staring Sadboy down through his teeth.

"Never mind, let's just go."

Gab eyed Michael up and down, again, and felt like he was escorting around a brick wall. But then again, he felt sorry for him, because he knew Michael probably better than anyone else. If Michael had any real friend in the world, it would have been Gab, there. He was the only one willing to put up with his confrontational ways. But eventually things got ugly. Even though Michael was never initially a bully, he did like to practice his own form of discipline, for the same reasons as his father did.

“Gab, if you don't start sticking up for yourself, if you don't start taking some pride—I'm going to beat some into you,” Michael would tell Gab.

Any time Gab would get picked on, Michael would rush the guy, beat his face in, then turn around and shake his head at Gab, as if to say, “fucking wimp!” And, eventually, Gab got fed up with Michael's disapproving stares, and began building up his own fire—and not for some bully! But for Michael. Michael would beat up some guy that was picking on Gab, he'd give him that stare, and Gab would feel like rushing him, instead.

“Michael, if you—fucking—look at me like that, again, I'll bash your brains in,” Gab had once said.

But Michael had then sized Gab up, scrutinizing him with his eyes, smirked, and had busted out into laughter. That did something to Sadboy, there, as Madboy began to grow on him. He began developing a twitch. Sadboy felt his mopey ways turning into Madboy's aggressive ones. And one day, he snapped.

“Hey, Gab, I remember you telling me you wanted to bash my brains in, one time, seems like you really want to do that now,” Madboy had taunted.

What had happened was, Gab had tried on a pair of those stupid platform shoes those idiots going to discos wore in the 70s. But Gab wore it as a joke; a joke that went horribly wrong. Even though Gab had done it as such, everyone wanted to simply pick on him, anyways. Michael wasn't the only one tired of Gab's inabilities to prove himself as a Shamrock, and everyone wanted to get on his ass because of it. When Gab had walked in, he lost balance, and fell. At first, Gab began laughing at himself, but his mood changed when he realized everyone else wasn't laughing with him.

“What? I did it as a joke,” Gab had said.

“Yeah, right, seems like we got two sisters in our mitts,” Sassboy had commented, obviously also referring to Tomboy, who wasn't there that day.

“Hey, Maddy, your gang’s a joke! How are we going to pride ourselves now with shit like this,” Sassboy had continued.

And as Gab looked at Michael, he saw him shake his head again, and mutter, “wimp!” Gab then got up, took off those stupid ugly-ass

platformers, and threw them at Michael. Michael dodged the two, looked at Gab, made his taunt, and began laughing hysterically, again. After seeing that, Gab flipped. He rushed at Michael as Michael continued to laugh. And once he got up to him, to Gab's surprise, Madboy was more than ready, as he popped him in the mouth, and threw his ass into a trash can. Then kicked the trashcan down and started kicking it some more as Sadboy went circling around inside. Sassboy did his usual of making a scene, running around hooting and shouting like an excited pup, while Madboy did the rest. Once Madboy stopped, Gab came out, and Madboy just crouched over and said:

"Just be glad I didn't go all out on you… fucking disgraceful!"

And shook his head, again, as he frowned. In the end, Gab couldn't hate Michael too much for what he had done, because he knew Michael had some deep inner conflicts clashing within him, as he saw him go back to kissing his crucifix, again, afterwards.

The Peckerhead.

After a while, Gab felt like trying to lighten up the mood, seeing as how much of a mopey bastard Michael had become. So, he decided to ask him about stuff Gab knew would blow up his pride, and cheer him up a bit.

"Hey, Michael, what's the most number of dudes you've taken on all at once," asked Gab.

Michael first shrugged. But as his moodiness began to dissolve away, he came up with a smile, and began to scan his memory.

"Hmm… let me think."

"I mean, I remember how often you used to tear up The Ravishers, I remember you taking on ten of them one time," mentioned Gab. Yeah, no thanks to you, since you used to stand idly by, and just watch me do it.

Thought Michael, but then continued to scan his memory, and after a short while, he then came up with one.

"Oh, I remember! Remember back in the 70s… I mean—way back, a group of boys called the… what were they called again? A group of jackasses that were into that kung fu or karate bullshit. Well, whatever they were called, I took out thirty of them," recounted Michael, with a smirk.

Gab's eyes went up into the air as he tried to remember them, but then hearing Michael say he took out thirty dudes at one time made his jaw drop in disbelief, and Martial Artists no less!

"Wait? Thirty guys? Really? How did you do that," asked Gab, curiously.

"Dude, they were really a bunch of wimps!"

"Yeah, but you say they knew kung fu or karate," asked Gab.

Michael then rolled his eyes hearing him gasp at the thought, as if though that would really matter that much.

"So? I know boxing, that's not a martial art?"

"Yeah, but…?"

"Gab, what difference does it make," asked Michael, giving Gab a look all sore.

"Well…?"

"Oh, don't believe in that bullshit you see in movies or arcade games, people that know kung fu or karate ain't that tough! They ain't no ninja masters with some ancient archaic skills in roundhouse kicking a dude in the face, and fucking him up! It's not magic! Not going to give you super powers and make you glow orange like The Last Dragon. So enough with this stupid Asian stereotype that karate or kung fu, or whatever, is godly, when it comes to unarmed combat. Roundhouse kicks to the face? Fuck that Chuck Norris bullshit," explained Michael.

Fucking Chuck Norris! Now there's the king of the stoic bastards I'd love to punch in the face. I'd Bruce Lee his ass any day!

Gab shrugged.

"Anyways, a lot of Asians I know are cool and normal people, that don't even know any kung fu, or whatever! But as for the ones I have met and fought? Ha! I remember a group of Koreans that knew taekwondo, and I remember how they did nothing but kicking, which is such a risky move to pull over and over again, considering how much time and energy is put into it, I might add. Plus, when you kick, you're throwing yourself off balance, leaving yourself with one leg to hold up your entire weight. And balance is everything in a fight! Those taekwondo black belt idiots… I remember beating the fuck out of them like there was no

tomorrow. Hell, I've had better fights with punks on the streets that knew nothing about that stupid shit they teach you at dojos, than I have dealing with the ones who did. Honestly, I think most dojos are scams. All they do is prey upon idiots that have watched too many kung fu movies from China—which are all heavily choreographed and made to look pretty—to make someone believe that what they're being taught can do some serious damage on the streets, against the likes of me. And they charge them an arm and a leg making them think that way for those stupid lessons. But, it's all bullshit, really. Although, one of my buds from prison told me kickboxing is where it's at, and I'll have to agree with him from what I've seen."

Gab got the sense that Michael was breaking off with his story, and felt like bringing him back on track.

"Yeah, but thirty of them? Thirty fucking guys! How? What's the story," asked Gab.

"Well, I remember their leader... what was his name? Some peckerhead that called himself the White Shadow—or something? He'd pick on you, and one day, I decided to go to his dojo and ask him to stop," recounted Michael.

Pasty looking dude with a long ass neck, and big ass nose. Larry Bird looking motherfucker—really! A fucking peckerhead!

Gab's eyes lit up like a TV with scrambled reception.

"Really? I don't remember that," said Gab.

"Yeah, they were a bunch of white guys, too! Anyways, back then you did get picked on a lot, so maybe you forgot about it," explained Michael.

"Okay... go on," said Gab, with a spoon full of sugar, after the humiliating line Michael just fed him with.

"Well, when I went there, and when that peckerhead saw me, his face then began spewing up with hate. He began foaming at the mouth, just about. I'm guessing the jerk-off knew I had come to see him over you."

"Oh shit, what happened next," went Gab.

"Well, I went up to him, during some stupid punching practice they were doing, and told him to stop picking on you. Although, when I told him, he first said he didn't know what the fuck I was

talking about. But then he started talking mad shit to me, calling me a cocksucking asshole, and said he wanted to see how tough I really was."

"So, what happened," gasped Gab.

"What happened? The fucker went off after I called him and all his buddies a bunch of bathrobe wearing pussies, and then all hell broke loose."

"You didn't get scared, at all," asked Gab, sensing Michael was being a little too cocky with his tale.

Even for him!

"Well, yeah, I am human! I got scared of the idea of taking on thirty dudes, and nine of them being 3rd or 5th or something degree black belts. I mean, I've seen all those kung fu movies back in the day, too, and for a second there, I did get scared the David Carradines, there, were going to start jumping off of walls to roundhouse kick me in the face, or something. But when I started popping 'em left and right—just straight up murderizing 'em—I then realized how much of a joke all that karate bullshit really was," explained Michael, as he began to snicker, while his chest swelled up with pride from his victory that day.

"So, it's all bullshit, you say," asked Gab, wanting to hear what Michael's take was on the matter, since Gab had always thought about taking karate.

"Well, here's the thing… those idiots that know karate and think they're tough… the problem with them is they spend too much time in the dojo practicing, when they should be practicing on the streets, for real, if they really want to get good at fighting. They're training in a controlled environment where nothing serious ever goes down. Unlike in dojos, on the streets you'll sometimes have psychos getting all enraged, and coming at you with broken liquor bottles or knives to straight up kill you. In a dojo, there's none of those dangers that can really scare a man, shitless. And when it comes to real fights on the street, majority of the time the first one that gets scared is the one that loses. Skills ain't everything. Not getting intimidated is!"

"Okay?"

Michael then turned around, getting the sense Gab didn't completely

believe him.

"No—really man! I saw the truth with my own eyes that day, and it was funny how they kept posing and doing those stupid stances while I was popping 'em."

Michael then chuckled, again.

"They'd go 'ha yah!' And would have this stupid look on their faces like that 'everybody was kung fu fighting' song was playing in their heads. And when they were done doing their thing, there, I was like, 'okay?' And I'd pop them in the noses, as they exploded with blood. And seeing how quickly I was able to do that, how babyface they were, and seeing how they'd freak out by the sight of their own blood made me realize they had never really taken a punch like that before. And you need to know how to take a blow if you want to learn how to fight. Fuck! I used to get that all the time from my dad."

Gab shrugged, again, and then asked:

"So, you just beat the fuck out of all of them?"

"Yup," said Michael, as he came up with pearly teeth.

"I mean, they didn't suck! I'm not saying you won't learn anything from karate or kung fu. I believe you will! The training they got looked like it was a good foundation to start off with, like boxing was for me. But until you take that know-how of how to beat the ever-loving motherfucking fuck out of a man onto the streets—I'll tell you straight up Mack—you ain't Jack! They knew the theory of fighting, but they didn't have the practice. You want to be the king of the block, you want to have you some bitch-ass smacking action, then you gotta be a street fighter like—ME," soul-blazed Michael, while doing the Journey Face, as he came up with two thumbs up, pointing himself out; as his collar popped up a bit by themselves, simply from the purely concentrated, cocky-ass, conceited, 80s awesomeness, he was spewing.

Gab, on the other hand, just rolled his eyes, as he saw how fast Michael was talking, now, while going hog-wild with his lingo, there; jamming way too many slang words together, to make himself sound cool.

Ah shit! Don't start this, now—it gets annoying! Well, at least he hasn't yet broken out with that stupid abstract talk like he does

now and then. Half that shit doesn't even seem like it's making much sense to him. Let alone, the people around forced to listen to.

Thought Gab, and then went on to wonder what kid Michael was talking about that used to pick on him, also started sensing something weirdly familiar about the story.

"Michael? I honestly don't remember being picked on by some karate guys—are you serious," asked Gab.

Michael turned around and looked at Gab, straight up.

"Dude, it happened! I mean, I even ended up taking on their sensei, all because of you. Some guy that looked like some evil Vietnam Vet asshole, that was teaching his students 'no mercy' or some shit. Now, he was tough! But it seemed like the years of not taking it to the streets had also made him go soft. Shit, man! I beat the fuck out of him, while 'You're the Best' by Joe Esposito, started playing in my head. Ha!"

Michael started doing a Journey Face, again, as it then came to Gab what was so weirdly familiar about the story.

"Wait a second? Karate gang picking on me? Evil former Vietnam Vet sensei teaching no mercy? 'You're the Best?' Dude! You're fucking thinking about the Karate Kid movie, and that song wasn't even out in the 70s," blew up Gab, as Michael's eyes lit up.

"Oh shit—you're right," gasped Michael, but then shrugged, and went back to smiling, "well, maybe I'm exaggerating a bit."

Gab couldn't believe it.

"Hold up? Did you just rip that movie off, and make up that entire story as your own, just now?"

"No, I didn't! I mean, I remember hearing that that peckerhead was picking on you, and I went to meet him that day and—"

"Dude! There was never a gang of Cobra Kais picking on me—okay?"

Michael looked flustered now.

"I swear, man, I'm not making it up! I went to the dojo, I told that kid—oh yeah… his name was Greg Knickerbocker… to stop picking on you. He got mad as fuck seeing me, and had the entire dojo take me on and…!"

Michael then went back to scanning, and remembered some more

exaggerations.

"Although, even though there were thirty or forty of them in there, the white and yellow belts did get too scared of me and chickened out, once I took out all their black belts. So, I really just took out seven guys and the sensei…?"

Once Gab had heard Greg's name, all the pieces began to fall into place.

"G. Knicks? I remember him. He was actually cool with me! He was a cool guy! He never picked on me! Why would he be so mad at…?"

And then, the final piece fell into place, as Gab realized what must have happened.

"Oh wait, I think I know what might have happened, now."

"What," asked Michael.

"You remember Kimberly Chambers," asked Gab.

Kimberly Chambers? Oh yeah, I remember her. Pretty girl next door type. Small little breasts with giant missile looking nipples attached. And damn, I remember they'd get bigger the more excited she'd get! Getting all ballistic and shit, looking like they could take out Moscow after working them over for ten minutes. Love how she would then make yummy sounds when I would. Crazy catholic girl, though, liked to also get choked during sex, which I really wasn't into at all. And would keep asking for me to do it to her like that, getting really angry and feisty, and sometimes… demonic, in a way. And—wow—then there's that one time she asked if she could bring her sister into it. I mean, those two seemed kinda like they were…?

"Yeah, I remember her," responded Michael, finally.

"Dude, that was his girlfriend, and I remember you fucked her, while she was still dating G. Knicks," explained Gab.

She never told me…!

"G. Knicks was—"

"Yeah, he was! I remember seeing him in Coney Island one night, and he looked sad, and like he was going to burst into tears. I asked him what was up, and he blew up on me and told me how he was going to fuck you up for screwing Kimie," explained Gab.

"Gab, I swear! I don't remember Kimie having a—"

“Well, she did! And it was G. Knicks, and that's why he must have gotten so mad to see you there,” lashed out Gab, as he looked like his eyes were going to roll back up into his sockets.

“Oh, don't give me that look! That fucker… he attacked me first!”

“That's because you fucked his girlfriend, and had nothing to say for yourself, except calling him a bathrobe wearing pussy, to his face, in front of everyone at that dojo,” lashed out Gab, again.

Michael felt small now, as Gab blew up bigger.

“Dude, you fucking asshole! You fucked his girlfriend, and then went over to his dojo, to beat the shit out of him? You were the one messing up—big time—for breaking him and Kimie up, and you beat the shit out of him? And now that I think about it, I remember seeing him again with a black eye, a split lip, looking like someone had really worked him over, good. I remember asking him what had happened, and he said, 'fuck you and your Bloody Shamrocks, just keep away from me!' So, I know you definitely didn't make up that part. Wow, Michael, I don't know what to say! And for what? Because you thought he was picking on me? What made you think that,” demanded Gab.

Michael scanned his memory and came back with nothing.

“I don't remember.”

“Oh—Michael? You're such an asshole! That is so fucked-up!”

Gab then busted out into laughter, feeling overwhelmed with disbelief. Michael just shook his head and began to feel like a royal piece-of-shit, realizing what he had done back then.

“I didn't mean to do it! I didn't know… I really… ah fuck it! It's ancient history now,” murmured out Michael, as he shrugged.

A pause followed between the two, as Michael began trying to recall more details.

“Gab! That girl was a complete—”

“It doesn't matter,” responded Gab.

Another pause.

“I did beat up their sensei, though,” mentioned Michael.

Gab just shook his head.

“I did!”

“Did you sweep the leg,” snapped Gab, sarcastically.

“Shut up,” concluded Michael.

Enough with the Violins!

After a while, Gab felt like talking about the crucifix thing.

"Michael," called out Gab.

"What?"

“You remember when I brought up about kissing crucifixes,” asked Gab, with a distressed look again on his face.

Michael eyed Gab up some, all baffled.

“Why did you do it a lot?”

“What do you mean, why did I? You're making it sound like it's a weird thing. What's wrong with it?”

“Nothing, really, but when you did it... I don't know, I just always got this vibe from you, and all. And it looked like it was something very important to you, when you did it,” Gab tried to explain, since it did fill him up with distress every time he saw it.

Michael then went into his head, and thought about it for a second.

“I don't know, I guess I'm religious,” answered Michael, finally, not very sure what Gab was driving at.

“Never seen you go to church...?”

“Well, I guess I picked it up from my mom, she used to do that a lot, too, kissing crucifixes, from what I remember,” responded Michael, and felt like not pushing it any further.

The two continued on, as Gab also continued thinking about other matters that troubled him about his old chum, here.

"Why do you always let your fists do the talking," asked Gab.

“What? It's fun,” responded Michael, not thinking too much about it.

“No, I mean, why do you always have to feel like the world is against you?”

Michael now stopped. Unlike what Gab had asked first, this one at least struck a chord with him. It was the type of question that could take one back a bit, and bring things into focus.

"I don't know, maybe because it is," replied Michael, unwilling to go any further.

Gab didn't like that response; Michael was just being self-centered, again, seeing as how he seemed to think the world somehow revolved around him, and his troubles, and Gab didn't like it one bit.

"Everyone's a fucking asshole," continued Michael.

"No, they're not! Not every guy you come across is going to be an asshole trying to best you," countered Gab.

"Then how come I always get that?"

"Because you're always looking for it," blew up Gab, "one thing I've learned about people in general is, that they tend to attract the lot they feel the most comfortable around. Whether they're good for them or not. It's all about what you're used to, and unfortunately for you, Michael, the sort you're most comfortable around and used to are macho assholes, that will try to best you. And that's why you feel everybody is like that, when you're only really paying attention to the small group that would. And are really completely oblivious to anyone else that might just be nice to you and would actually want to be your friend."

Hearing all that, Michael looked at Gab, chuckled, but then looked into himself, and frowned.

"Yeah, Michael... it's all you! It's—"

"Oh, shut the fuck up, Gab! You were around all those times, you saw how many times I was attacked, out of the blue, by some random stranger, just because of my rep—and nothing else! Everyone always wants to prove how tough they are. To show that they're A Number One! And they all had to go through me to do that, since I was the one-man army—undefeated on the streets! A lot of the times, getting attacked by ten to fifteen to twenty-five guys at a time, with bats and knives and chains and all. And, I'm willing to admit, I'm a cocky asshole that's taken a lot of pride in the fact that I've been through all that and survived. Yeah, I'm cocky... but what else do I got," expressed Michael, as he got very depressed at the end.

Gab soured up, then, as he realized where this was going.

"And I was always all alone in all those moments. It was always me vs. all of them. I mean, where were the rest of the—"

"We—the rest of the Shamrocks—didn't even know half the shit you'd pull, until we heard about it the next day," lashed out Gab, a response to a question Gab had given several times in the past.

Michael paused, but decided not to let it set in. Gab noticed and went on to try and drive the matter further. Hoping maybe this time it would

stick.

"No, Michael, we weren't 'abandoning' you. We tried to be there with most of the shit you'd start. But we couldn't be there all of the time. And really, you wanted to be alone most of the time…."

Gab paused, as Michael started setting up his blockade against hearing the rest. Gab then decided to go for a weak spot and try to burst on through.

"You know, Michael, I'm not sure if you're aware of this, but you were never the Head Honcho in the outfit… not really!"

Gab then paused, so Michael would look up and make eye contact, and once he did, Gab then let him have it:

"Radboy was!"

Oh… what the fuck ever! Not listening!

"He was the one that was orchestrating shit, while you were off with Nikki, beating the tar out of anyone that would dare even look in her direction."

Okay, fine! Whatever! Radboy the Head Honcho? Ha! What a joke!

"And as for Nikki? What can I not say about her? I mean… really! What isn't there to say about a girl like her? I guess all that I can is, I know for a fact she really got off on seeing you beat up all those poor bystanders, that made the simple mistake, of finding her pretty. So just how much of a horrible human being does one need to be to get a kick out of…."

Michael now turned around, and blazed at Gab, with two massive fireballs, shooting out from his eye sockets; letting him know, it, wasn't cool to go there. Gab petrified for a second seeing this, and decided it was best to leave that part out.

And after a bitter pause….

Michael then felt like going back to what he was saying earlier:

"You know… being who I was, with the rep I had… it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy! Even though everyone wants to be that guy, being A Number One hasn't been all fun. Really, it's been more of a curse!"

Gab rolled his eyes, in irritation, hearing Michael give him—that line. But felt like he had a solution to all of Michael's troubles. Something so

simple—that for the life of him—Gab couldn't understand why Michael wasn't able to grasp.

> "Well, that shit was back then, you're in your 30s now, so how about simply not being that way, and mov—"
>
> "And shit got really crazy, too, sometimes. Motherfuckers eventually trying to pull guns on me. Assholes always trying to instigate shit. Every last dickhead I've come across!"

Michael had pretty much interrupted Gab, there, before he could finish, and what pissed Gab off the most was how he continued to play his little violin, as Gab tried to do his best to give him a simple way out: not being his old self!

> You know, Michael, you really are something else! A real oddity, now that I think of it. A real freak of nature. Guns and shit? At least a quarter of the Shamrocks were packing back then, and so was the rest of the city. Yet you kept going on as how you probably imagined how your dad must have done back in the day, off some silly code that only existed in your head. Yours! For let's not forget… your father was a hitman for the fucking mob, so a code I'm sure he—especially and definitely—didn't live by. Going mano-a-mano with your fists, which really no one else has been doing. You really are something funny, and weird, and it really is astonishing how you've come this far and survived, considering the ridiculous number of enemies you've made. I guess there's something about your nature that affects everyone around you, making them hesitate half the time pulling out a piece. I guess when they see you putting up your dukes the way you do, it makes them want to play by your rules, and makes them want to beat you at your own game. Like watching some old-world figure stepping out of the past from some black and white photo. Where everybody's got a mustache, and all about the fisticuffs. Bringing his old school Palookaville ways into the present-day mix, and changing the whole mindset of the game. And then again, I've seen you cheat. So, you ain't exactly Mr. 'put up your dukes and fight me like a real man' all of the time. But all in all, in all honesty, besides all that, you've really just been lucky, too. Mostly, actually! Lucky no one just didn't decided to pull an Indiana Jones, and shoot your ass, while you had your dukes up. If you were to never

have had that affect on people I'm sure someone would have gunned you down a long time ago. And I guess the rest of us got lucky, too. We were always a ragtag outfit. Small potatoes. So, we were never worth the trouble. Wow! You really are something else. So fucking stupid! Even though you're not stupid. But yet still, so stupid in your own unique way. Living in your own little world where....

Thought Gab, all that, as he sighed off the last bit, and didn't feel like entertaining the thought any further at the ends, cutting himself off from the weariness. And then felt like closing the matter off.

"So, you're saying you've never instigated anything," asked Gab, all dreary like.

"Oh, for fuck sakes—Gab!"

"What?"

"Yeah—I guess I have! Like that G. Knicks thing, I'm an asshole and an idiot, and I can't change my nature," declared Michael, and felt like he could at least accept that.

A pause. And then Gab felt like dropping the sour lemons.

"You know, I was kinda impressed how you argued with the French bandmate of mine. Except for the jokey bits, you seemed pretty articulate about it," commented Gab.

"So," wondered Michael.

"Nothing, just never seen you like that before," mentioned Gab, as he began to hope he could drive a better response out of Michael.

"No, Gab, I'm still that same old dumb-ass you remember from way back when," replied Michael, with a smirk.

Gab began scratching his head, as he was unable to make any sense out of what he just saw and heard. Couldn't understand how anyone would seem pleased to be considered an idiot, which Gab knew Michael really wasn't. Gab always felt like he knew Michael inside and out. But still, not deep enough, for all he saw, Gab felt, was really still just the tip of the iceberg. After entertaining that mystery for a second, Gab felt like addressing the Nikki matter again. Since he knew, Michael, and how much precedence it would have. Even after all these years. And hopefully this time, address the matter, without being scorched.

"Michael," asked Gab.

"What now?"

"Might if I make another observation?"

"Fine, what?"

"Well, I've noticed how you are around most girls, or were, since I can't really say for now, but…?"

“But, what?”

“But… but… around Nikki you were different. Also, with… but with Nikki, especially, you were a bit of a—"

"A bit of a what?"

"Um… nothing.”

Sadboy chickened out, fearing another reprisal, as Michael spun his head around, and eyeballed him in a menacing manner.

"If you want to say something—say it! Don't beat around the bush like you used to—it's annoying," barked Michael, as he grew irritated.

Sadboy seemed a bit hesitant at first to respond, but then did:

"I'm saying if you run into Nikki, don't let her—"

“What?"

"Influence you like she used to. Don't forget what happened between you, her, and your old girl Roxanna."

Michael had no response to that. The stuff that Gab was speaking of had gone over his head.

Roxanna? What was the point of bringing up her name?

The Man with the Master Plan.

The city felt like it was on the brink of total devastation; like it had gone from a thriving metropolis, to a post-apocalyptic playground for anarchist in the matter of a few hours. But technically, it still hadn't. As Michael and Gab made their journey to Big Dick's Gym, they watched gangs on the streets fighting cops and their rivals all over. A building here or there would catch on fire. Then police, ambulance, then firetruck sirens, and then nothing. There was no trace of the Iron Monkeys MC around, but they had already done their work, and they weren't going to try and take on every hood in the streets. Getting ever closer to Big Dick's Gym, the two Shamrocks watched a 500-manstrong riot going down in Crown Heights. It was the two biggest gangs in that hood; two vicious gangs known for their bitter hundred-year rivalry. They were the Red Roses and the Black Stallions: they were like this

city's Montagues and Capulets; a couple of bitter old Irish and Italian gangs that had been duking it out since before the turn of the century, back when New York was separated among tribes of immigrants, where one group didn't take much liking to the next. But, for at least the last forty or so years, things had seemed to have settled down between the two. Of course, tonight was a different story, and all thanks to the man with the giant white head.

"Hey, Michael, check it out, that's The Big White Head, there." Michael looked over at a mom and pop's TV shop, and saw a bunch of Puerto Rican kids (looked like The Mofongo Wilds) breaking in and looting. Michael had a couple of acquaintances that were part of that outfit. They were all mostly small-time heisters-shysters, dealing with stolen electronic goods. If you wanted a Hi-Fi entertainment setup in your living room, these were the niños to go to. A couple of the TVs were on, and it seemed like The Mofongos weren't really in a rush, as some sat around watching TV, and drinking Medallas.

"So, that's the man with the master plan—huh," asked Michael.

"Yeah, that's him," responded Gab.

Sadboy wasn't kidding, the whole screen was filled up with this Irish prick's head; looking like an evil hundred-year-old Ted Kennedy. He was shouting like a madman on the TV, and the broadcast looked like some snuff footage; all frizzled out and shaking in its own horror.

> "It's time, New York, it's your time! For all you scum-suckers on the streets looking for a way out of the ghetto, to make a difference. Yes! I'm calling you all scum-suckers, and you know why? Because you're all exactly that, and also low-lives, degenerates, maggots, and thieves. Up until now, none of you have deserved the finer things in life. When the line was drawn by the man, you scum-suckers stepped back in pussy-fied fear, to tell yourself, 'well, maybe this is all I'm good enough for… some two-bit hood is all I'll ever be!' And you allowed the man and everyone up-top to rape you, and your mothers, and fathers, in the ass, like some filthy, two dollar, Vietnamese whores. And you know what! Well, *I'll tell ye* what—you deserved it! None of you have hungered enough for it, and that's why I'm calling all you scum-suckers, filth, and garbage! None of you up until now had the balls to cast down your yellow

faggoty-ass selves and grow a pair."

And then he paused for a second.

"But now—I'll tell ye—none of you have no fucking choice! I'm running this town now. This is my city, and I am your king. So, obey me when I say, I want you all to get up now, and burn this motherfucking city to the ground. This is the Age of Rage! And I command you all to burn this motherfucker—to the ground! Revel in cathartic joy, as you finally, you scum-suckers, finally… show your worth to your king."

"Fuck this—let's do it! Let's burn this motherfucking city to the ground! All the fucking racist assholes calling us spics, and taking our women!"

One of the Mofongo Wilds had really gotten inspired by all this, and was pacing back and forth, now, trying to energize up his crew.

"Fuck the man!"

And with that, he threw his beer into the TV, that was airing that mysterious man with the giant white head a second ago.

Michael didn't know what to make of that strange old man, at first. On a lighter note, Michael initially found it all a bit silly. That Big White Head talking about "scumsuckers" and whatnot, and it seemed more like he was crudely attempting to bust out with swearing just to lower himself to the level of younger street punks. Michael shook his head, and had a small chuckle to that initial impression, but then something else began to settle in. Michael had noticed something else; his eyes had a tale—that big white-headed man—his eyes had a bloody tale to tell. Even though the TV was totaled, and that live feed was over with, Michael could still see his eyes, up front, somehow, staring him down. Unflinching, unnerving, and unrelenting eyes, that continued to cast their gaze. And then it felt like a whole minute had passed, yet Michael felt like they were still on him, and he grew unnerved by the thought that they were to follow. And—forever! Possibly even.

What the fuck?

Thought Michael, as he had a small chuckle over that whole notion, but then continued to grow more and more unnerved by it. Further with the notion that it might be real.

At first glance….

Reality can sometimes seem silly and unreal to the untrained eye; a figure as horrifying as that might just look simply silly and unreal. But once your mind begins to grasp the truth of it, that it's real, and it's out there, and it has form as much as you do, that's when the horror of it all really begins to set in; realizing that that horror might really be out there—watching you! You no longer feel safe, because you feel that it exists, and the hell it brings begins to incarnate hell all around you; shattering your perception of reality… as it makes it his.

Another minute passed.

Du du du du—du du du du—dara da—stupid Twilight Zone shit!
Thought Michael, with yet another chuckle, but then became horrified beyond hellish belief as he noticed, those eyes? Were yet again, unflinchingly, unnervingly, and unrelentingly, still, glaring right at him.

Another pause.

Okay, fine! Whatever!
Thought Michael, as he began to stare at his Rosary.

"Do you see now, Michael? Do you see what's going on? This is all bigger than the both of us! Let's just get the fuck out of dodge—leave this city, man! I got some friend in Baltimore. Let's go down there and lay low until this all blows over. Actually, fuck this city! I don't think it'll ever be the same after this," cried out Gab, breaking Michael from his train of thought.

Michael shook his head, and glared at Gab, all disappointed like.

"If you don't want to come with me, Sadboy, you can go, I know my way there," said Michael, with a sigh.

"Michael! You know what? Fuck you, man! Seriously, I've just met you, again, after all these years… and…!"

"Hey, man, if you're afraid, I understand. It's not like I've ever really expected you to come this far, and not chicken out, when shit

really starts hitting—”

“Fuck you!”

And with that, Sadboy rushed in, and sacked Michael to the ground. Then started popping him in the face. And as pissed off as Madboy got, he couldn't switch this around, and go on his own offensive. Michael allowed Sadboy to pop him some, and the pissed off Armenian really knew how to bring the pain. Michael took it, and kept some defenses up, so as not to take too much damage. But once Sadboy realized that Michael wasn't even trying, he got up, and looked at him in disgust, as Michael just waited to see what his next reaction would be.

> “Fine, Madboy, you're on your own. I ain't afraid. I just ain't a fucking retard looking to get myself killed. You could have come to me, first. You could have come to the Tropic of Cancer, but you—wanted—that confrontation! You wanted to get to Radboy, through Stumpy, and his goons, knowing that the place was swarming with gang members that would have liked to have seen you dead and gone a long time ago. You're reckless Michael—too reckless! Go do what you have to do. Best of luck! Really mean when I say, ‘best of luck’ because I know you’re definitely going to need it, with the shit you’re setting yourself up for, this time. I might be some scum-sucking loser, but I have my own sense of worth, and I don't need you, or that fat-headed fucker on TV, to tell me different. You, that fat headed white head man, this city and the coming Age of Rage shit are made for each other!”

Gab then left.

The Cat: Two

"The surest cure for vanity is loneliness."
-Tom Wolfe

Sonny Corleone.

Why was I such an asshole around him? Why can't I just stop being that way for once?

Michael stood there a while contemplating, as he felt something different now, which he couldn't quite explain. It was a very rare feeling for him. Was it shame? No! He knew what shame felt like, and he wasn't angry anymore—well—he was! But that wasn't what was driving him this moment. Then he looked up into the skies, and saw the moon, and it began to scare him for some reason.

What was up with those eyes? I don't see them anymore, but—wow! They really spooked me there for a second. Fucking feeling like they were going to follow me forever.

As that weird feeling continued to churn in Michael, he thought about those eyes, and the mad vibes he was getting from that Big White Head figure and realized it all seemed very familiar.

Like I know the person.

He stood there for a while, as the Mofongo Wilds finished looting, and lit a match. Then left. Sirens could be heard now coming, and Michael decided it was time to ditch this scene, as well. As he ran off, he remembered what Gab had said about kissing crucifixes, and for some reason... he felt like he wanted to do it.

I did use to do it a lot... didn’t I?

So, as he took out his Rosary, he kissed the crucifix at the end, and strangely enough, whatever strange feeling he was having before, was gone, and he felt better again. Running across the street, Michael was nearly run over by some guy on a motorcycle. He had his girl sitting to his back, holding on so very tender like. Looking back at them as they passed, Michael remembered how it was when he was with Nikki; before going to prison, and before that night.

70s

It was the late 70s, and almost days away from turning into a new decade. Disco wasn't dead yet, but for anyone that had the heart of rock and roll, it was really starting to get annoying. 'Studio 54 can kiss our asses, we want some real music!' Was the battle cry on the streets, and of The Bloody Shamrocks. Michael had his dad's old '49 Triumph Thunderbird modded up, and looking slick enough for a new decade.

Michael spent most of those days riding around with his girl Nikki to his back, feeling like a young Marlon Brando, and living the life of a teenage dream (even though already over twenty). That night, he got to the Tropic of Cancer to meet up with the Shamrocks, to see what's what. The place was more of a biker joint back then before the cyberpunks took it over. It still had a lot of artist types, there, and not just your average biker bar with your stereotypical wild ones, rows of pool tables, and a foxy chick in pigskin collecting up all the attention. You had a lot of your poor man's Jack Kerouac wannabes there. Not disciplined enough to sit down and consolidate their thoughts into poetry on paper, but definitely disciplined enough to run an outrages bar tab.

"Hey, Maddy!"

It was Sassboy, and what an arrogant little prick he was. But then again, the type of prick you just loved listening to shit-talk a storm. Every outfit had to have one: that one guy that would always instigate a fight with your enemies just when you thought things were going to settle all civil like. Of course, between Sassboy's bark, and Madboy's bite, for The Bloody Shamrocks, things settling peacefully was almost always a rare occasion. Plus, Michael eventually became a shit-talking force to be reckoned with, himself. Back in the Shamrock days, Michael would hang out with Sassboy a lot, and not because he liked him. At least at that point, Madboy was just a mad boy, and barely even verbal. He liked his fists to do the talking, but he felt like expanding his horizons. Even though he found Sassboy as one unapologetic annoying piece-of-shit, something in Michael wanted to get a grasp of all that verbiage.

> And you think I cluster-fuck the shit out of a sentence… and not know half of what it means… ha!

And so, he started hanging out with him, he did so just to customize himself to his attitude and abilities as a shit-talker. And eventually, he got the groove down; began to understand what to really say to tick a man off and make them go hog-wild.

> Just how I like it.

And eventually, Michael felt like he even surpassed Sassboy, which led him to stop hanging out with him.

> Maybe if he had some redeeming qualities, I wouldn't have just ditched him like that! Such an unapologetic annoying piece of shit, through and through!

“Hey, if you two shag rabbits done lollygagging, Radboy has something to say inside the Tropic,” yapped Sassboy.

Michael and Nikki were sitting in missionary position on the Thunderbird, making out.

“Hey, come on! You two can make porno, elsewhere, another time—let's go,” yapped Sassboy, again.

A pause.

“Chop chop—let's go!”

“Alonzo! Don't make me get up and fuck you instead,” called out Michael, testing his spit against Alonzo.

“Anytime—sugar lips—anytime," dished out Alonzo, as he blew Michael a kiss.

“So, Nikki, should we go in and see what the brains has to say, now,” asked Michael.

“Brains? Radboy has brains,” replied Nikki, with an eyebrow raised in question.

“I'm being sarcastic! You know him and his plans. He's always trying to get us to follow along on some half-baked scheme.”

“Yeah, and you always have to be there to ruin his day,” continued Nikki.

“True, maybe I should give him a break, and not get involved this time—huh?”

“Fine by me,” replied Nikki, rolling her eyes.

“Hey, Alonzo, we ain't going in,” called out Michael.

“Come on, Maddy, this sounds import—”

“I don't give a shit—he can do without me!”

“Fine,” finished off Sassboy, as he went in.

Michael was really lucky to have a girl like Nikki. An Uptown girl, from the other side of the train tracks. Of course, as caring and as loving as she was in her own way, Michael always worried that part of her was into him to resolve some daddy issues. Having your typical overbearing rich father, she was a silver-spoon fed and raised daughter, that might have just grown a lust for bad boys in her boredom. And Michael was just a means to pass the time until she upgraded to some college football star, or, a jet pilot in the Navy or Air Force. Michael never understood how much it really pained him to think that way, but it did. But, at the time, Michael was still young, stupid....

Stupider!

And getting some. So, it didn't bother him that much. Plus, she also legitimately did seem to be into him, and just for him. They had a wild and lustful start, and since then, they had really formed a bond. All thanks to Mary.

"What's wrong, Michael? What are you really thinking about" asked Nikki.

Michael shrugged, and said:

"Actually... my sister... funny enough," said Michael.

That's how Michael had met her; her and Michael's sister were best friends in high school. The tension felt between Michael and Nikki meeting was like how Stan Kowalski meeting Blanche DuBois, was.

Yeah, that's at least how I feel... for some reason...?

Except with no Stella, Nikki not being some crazy old southern dame, and if Blanche DuBois had just given into the temptation of something that thick, hard, and sweaty.

Well, that's how I felt about the movie, I never liked Stella, and I always felt really sorry for Blanche. She really needed someone strong like Stan to stick by her side, and if she had, maybe she wouldn't have turned out so crazy. But, then again, Stan was also a douchebag that would beat women. Love Brando... hate that character.

Thought Michael, as Nikki noticed him staring off, like he sometimes did.

"What movie you thinking about now, Michael," asked Nikki, knowing how sometimes during these spells, he'd fall deep into thought over cinema.

"Oh, nothing," responded Michael, with a shrug.

Nikki began to eye Michael all antsy like. But seeing how Michael had fallen out of the mood to make out some more (which was hardly ever the case for him) Nikki decided to spin the rhetoric over his sister.

"So, how has Mary been," asked Nikki, obviously not very interested, since she and Mary had had a falling out some years ago.

"Mary is fine, but I don't know about her boyfriend, though—that little weasel," responded Michael, as he cringed up some.

"I told her that that guy was a creep, years ago. Actually, I... but...

I don't know. I guess your sister is just into guys like that," said Nikki, while seeming to be hiding something, which Michael was all too used to from her personality.

"Don't fucking say that! she doesn't know better. She's mistaking his sleazy obsessive manners as charm, and—"

"Stop… maybe we should go inside."

Nikki's question had put Michael off, and his temper was beginning to change the mood some more. Nikki, knowing how overly emotional Michael would get to the slightest thing, decided not to press it. After a short awkward pause, that's when it happened. Michael and Nikki then noticed Alonzo stepping out of the Tropic, again, but with a worried look on his face, and said:

"Hey, Michael, your sister was on the line."

"What," called back Michael.

"She sounded like she was crying, and then the line was cut off."

A second passed, as Nikki heard a teapot beginning to whistle.

"Oh, really," replied Madboy, as the whistle grew louder.

Sassboy went back inside, and Nikki began to notice Michael's hand quaking, as the whistle was now loud enough to boil over.

"No, Michael, don't go! Something doesn't sound right. I'll go see Mary," said Nikki, eyeing Michael distressingly.

"No… I'll go! Plus, you two haven't even talked to each other since we got together."

"Michael, don't be stupid, this sounds like something out of—"

As the movie popped into Michael's head, his anger evaporated a bit over the silliness of that notion.

"What—a movie? You saying I'm Sonny Corleone, about to go get machine-gun downed at a toll booth by some Numbskulls," sneered out Michael.

"Michael?"

"Don't worry. Stupid coincidental shit like that only happens in movies. I'm just going to go kill that creep—that's all," replied Michael, as Nikki got off, and Michael took off.

Of course, when Michael got to the apartments Mary was living in, he found a different scene. The building was on fire, and neither the cops, nor the fire department were there yet. There was a crowd standing off

in safe distance from the building, and Michael started scrambling about looking to find his sister's face within the crowd.

Oh, is she still in there?

Michael saw one of his sister's neighbors, Miss. Gilmore, sitting on the curve, staring up at the burning building. She was covered in soot, holding her Cocker Spaniel.

"Gilmore—where's Mary? Where is my sister," cried out Michael.

"Michael, I think she's still inside, I didn't see her come out of the building with the rest of us on the 5th floor," responded Miss. Gilmore.

Michael freaked hearing this, as his adrenaline began pumping tar through his veins, for he now knew he had to go in. Once Michael had built up the audacity to do this, Michael rushed in, and began trying to make it to the staircase. Luckily, the 1st floor wasn't engulfed in flames, but Michael knew it was going to be a raging inferno the higher he got. As Michael ran up, reaching the 3rd floor, he was nearly knocked on his ass from the wall of heat permeating from the flames all around, and there seemed to be no avoiding it. Michael's eyes began tearing up, and his nose ran like a broken faucet; he then covered his face up with his shirt, as he made his advance. Finally, reaching the 5th floor, Michael had to crawl his way around as the heat pressure continued building up around him. Crawling down the hallway, Michael was finally up to Mary's door. Michael kicked in the door and started searching the rooms. After a minute of searching, Michael realized his sister wasn't anywhere to be found.

Where the hell is she?

Michael couldn't take the fumes anymore, as he started coughing up mucus; his lungs felt like they were stuffed with ash, and Michael reluctantly decided to vacate. Running down the hallway in a crouched position, he finally got to the stairs, and nearly ran down a firefighter in the process. The firefighter gave Michael a gas mask and covered him up with one of their flame-retardant jackets.

"Come on, we need to get you out of here," said the fireman.

"I think my sister is still in this building," cried out Michael.

"What? I'm sorry... we need to go!"

Michael was quickly rushed down by two firefighters, as more of them

made their way up with axes. They were on the street, again. The firefighters then tried to get him into an ambulance, but Michael refused being taken into the hospital. And before he could run back over to the crowd to see if his sister had come out yet, Mary's disembodied voice called out to him.

Mary, where are you?

And looking around, Michael saw her. She was inside one of the ambulance trucks, and Michael then freaked to see how her face was charred with third degree burns; looking as if it was about to melt off.

"Mary," cried out Michael.

Mary seemed to try and call back to him, but was quickly sustained, as the ambulance drove off. Michael felt faded now; he fell down to his knees, and nearly lost consciousness. Looking around, he then saw them.

In the crowd, he saw two Numbskulls, laughing, and pointing at the burning building, and this made Michael suspicious.

Fucking Numbskulls! How can you laugh at the sight of a… wait?

Could it been them? This isn't anywhere near their turf… did they start this fire?

Michael then got up, as his teapot began to whistle, again, and seemed about ready to boil over. As he took a couple of breaths to consolidate his energy, and his convictions, the teapot then exploded, as Michael rushed in and attacked the two Numbskulls, head on.

"You motherfuckers—you did this!"

Madboy sacked both of them to the ground and began popping them all over. One of the police officers saw this outbreak, and ran over to intervene, as Madboy went into full gear beating them down into a pulp.

Die… fucking die!

Madboy was really thrashing away at the two, and seemed like he was aiming to kill them, good. As the police officer grabbed him from the back, he tried to pry him off, but failed to do so. Then the Numbskull that Michael had a hold off began laughing, as he choked up with blood. And then said:

"Radboy sends his regards!"

After that, more bulls rushed in to intervene, and eventually got Michael

off the two. But Michael wasn't done—not just yet!

Let me kill them! Let me… fuck you pigs!

Michael was already in full gear berserk mode wanting blood—anyone's blood—so once he noticed the bulls were stepping in, he then started popping them senseless, instead. It took four police officers to try and hold him down as they piled on top. But even then, Madboy muscled his way out, and ran back over to The Numbskulls (who were all bloodied up and nearly unconscious) to see to it to finish the job. By the end of that night, Michael had put two officers in the hospital, both Numbskulls, and besides The Numbskulls, one of those officers was also in severe condition.

When the day of the trial came, it didn't matter what Michael's motives were, nor did his plea matter that it was all in the heat of the moment of an emotional outburst. With Michael's previous criminal record, and his history of violence, Judge Bonhoeffer found him to be a danger to society and sentenced him to hard time at Attica State Prison. Fortunately, though, Michael never got any of his victims killed, or that would have meant a heavier sentence of manslaughter. Although, one of the Numbskulls was beaten so bad, that he was probably going to end up living the rest of his life eating food through a straw, but Michael saw justice in that.

Good, that at least is the right sort of justice he deserves outside of killing him.

In prison, Madboy thought about his release, and how he'd confront the other Numbskull for what his chum told him, which still rang in Michael's ear.

Radboy sends his regards? Since when have Numbskulls been able to speak so good? Well! Radboy sends his regards? That's just something Radboy would teach them to say.

Michael hardly had any visitors during his stay. Nikki had come by a couple of times, but eventually she stopped coming, especially after what Michael told her about that night.

"Michael, they said that to confuse you. Why would Radboy set up such a thing?" Nikki had said.

But Michael kept insisting it must have been true. He demanded her to stay away from him, especially after Nikki had told him that she and

Radboy might start seeing each other.

"Radboy? Are you serious," Michael had cried out, in disbelief.

"Maybe… Radboy keeps hitting on me… and… I don't know," Nikki had responded.

"But wait… what about us?"

But then Nikki broke out with a contemptuous glare, to that line, a look in which Michael quickly picked up on, that made him grow sullen. It was becoming apparent now that Nikki was no longer willing to hold onto anything of their past, especially with everything that had now happened. Not simply from that look alone, but, the more Michael tried to cling onto Nikki with rhetoric after that, the more she seemed to want to pull away. Her face moving away, centimeter by centimeter, with every word he spoke. And once Nikki seemed about ready to leave, it was then that Michael realized… that he was on his own.

"Nikki, what about us," cried out Michael, again. Completely out of character, desperately… almost!

No, not just almost…

Never been so weak, felt weak, for most of my life. Being that fucking pathetic, with someone… I could never be pathetic with. Damn!

Nikki cringed up a bit, glared at Michael, looking a bit saddened, and said nothing. Then she turned and tried to walk away.

"Nikki," cried out Michael, again.

"I'll see you when you get out, Michael, I promise," said she, while keeping her back to Michael.

Michael then spent the next few weeks thinking about what he had seen and heard. Nikki had also told him how she had gotten an easy-pickings job in Uptown thanks to her dad (who she mentioned had recently passed away) as an assistant in a network programming department. And with that, Madboy figured Radboy had also finally gotten his one-way ticket to mainstream living. It was all too convenient like: Radboy now living the high life with Michael's girl by his side, as Michael himself left rotting away in the slammer.

Present

Why were you so cold, Nikki?

Fucking… was it because of how pathetic I seemed?
And then all of a sudden!
Fucking bitch!
Michael felt something truly out of character. A rage inside. An unimaginable rage… and?
Woah, woah, woah! What the fuck, Michael? That also ain't you!
Damn!
Michael felt himself stepping into uncharted territory, within himself. Shit he didn't like. And all because of….
Her!
Obviously, this all did matter a lot to him. Obviously! Probably more than he would ever know.
And if that? Maybe it would be best… if it didn't!
Since, it made Michael seem weak!

And Michael… Madboy… being weak?
Don't even get me started! Don't even! Ever!
Michael then sighed….

And then started thinking of her again.
But why? Why should I? How much more time and thoughts can I invest in…?
Michael sighed, again, and then allowed himself to do so.

It seemed like she was also… holding back on something. And I couldn't then, and still can't, understand, what it is, and was.
Thought Michael, as he continued making his way to Big Dick's Gym. While thinking about Nikki, again, he pulled out his Rosary, and kissed the crucifix, twice. Then placed it back into his pocket. And then… Michael began to feel a bit better about himself, all of a sudden.

But then he started picturing Radboy, again, with Nikki, at his side!
Fucking Radboy! Fucking… Fagboy, more like it! That stuttering, stammering, backstabbing twerp… that I used to at least consider—never really a friend—but someone I had grown to know over the years, which meant something to me—at least!

But absolutely nothing to him, I guess! Fucking… ‘Radboy sends his…!’

Fuckers gonna pay—pay! For what he did to me! To my sister!

The Ugly Ritual.

Radboy sends his regards—huh? Well, now I guess it's time for me to send mine—and directly!

But then Michael remembered the report, and as he passed an old barber shop, he saw his reflection in the window, and stopped to think about it a bit, while staring into his own eyes in the reflection.

What about the report? What about it—huh? What about it? Radboy sends his regards! Fucking Numbskulls! What about the report?

He now felt something inside him that wasn't in accordance with what he was doing, but as he stared a bit more into the man in the mirror, he settled with his resolve, and went back on his way.

Rompous-pompous! I gotta get to Betamax, and find out how to find Radboy, and…!

But then Michael began to wonder:

What if I bump into her, too?

Part of him was hoping not to see her there—absolutely dreading, even—remembering how heart wrenching it was to see her blow him off that one visit. But another part of him felt like he couldn't deny wanting to be beamish about the possibilities. Even after all the years that had passed, something about what they had, especially now, seemed like it could still be reestablished.

No, Michael! No! Don't get hopeful over a lost cause. Just because you feel it, after all these years, doesn't mean she will, too. All that shit will do is make you feel desperate… and fucking weak, again! Getting you out of character… for some bull—I really don’t need in my life right now. Or ever!

But Michael just couldn't help it. He still felt bright-eyed and longing for the possibilities, of what if?

What if… what if…?

And as he continued to contemplate all the scenarios of what might turn

out, with each ugly result, his face cringed up, and his heart sank deeper into his stomach, and began to boil up in its acids.

What if… what if…?

And with that, Michael pulled out a quarter, and flipped it. And as he caught it, he placed it on the back of his hand, and kept the results from himself.

So… heads or tails?

And as he tried to slowly pull away his hand, then all of a sudden, Michael's emotions—forked—into the two possible outcomes: feeling blissfully over joyous; or, utter heart wrenching defeat and dismay. They were two paths heading in opposite directions, and Michael began to feel like each possibility was like a Dodge Charger chained to each of his arms, pulling away at him. As Michael stared down at his left hand holding onto the results, that quarter then began to take ominous precedence, in his mind, and it began to scare him.

Ah shit! Twilight Zone shit—again!

He felt like whatever turnout that quarter had in store for him was going to hold omnipotent sway over Michael's reality… of what was to come to be.

What? You got to be fucking shitting me! It's just a stupid fucking quarter, and I'm being superstitious as hell right now!

But the more he eyed his possible outcome, the more it eyed him back. And then Michael clenched up the quarter that was on the back of his hand, without taking a peek, and flung it as far from him as he could.

Fuck, I hate quarters… or loose change of any type.

Thought Michael, as he continued making his way to Big Dick's Gym.

Du du du du—du du du du—dara da—stupid quarter!

Thought Michael, again, as he emptied his pockets of all the loose change he was carrying, then pulled out his Rosary, and kissed the crucifix, thrice.

The Unfinished Business.

This’ll be the shortest chapter in my story—tell you! Feels like it, though.

Michael then began thinking of his sister; he really hadn't seen her in years.

I miss you, Mary. I really do! And… part of me feels like we’re to

never see each other again.

Sometime after that night, the night of the fire, Mary had moved to Seattle, and in with some old high school friend of hers. Michael had called her a couple of times while in prison. But since they never got along to begin with, after the second call, the two eventually had a complete falling out. From the little Michael was able to gather, she was supposedly doing well, and her wounds were recovering through surgery and physical therapy. Michael had also asked her about that night, and the reasons for the phone call. But all she was willing to give away was that it had nothing to do with that creep boyfriend of hers. That. And. She had already dumped him a couple days prior. And. She was just going through some emotions. And that being her reasons for the call. Michael didn't feel like persisting to get a different answer from her, for he knew if his sister wanted to keep secrets, there was no way he could ever get it out of her.

Plus, she'd always make up stuff and used it to cover up the real reasons she felt upset. Shit! Nikki would do that shit, too.

Michael then felt like wanting to think more about her: his sister. Much more! But… that, there, was just some business, that was never going to allow itself to be.

But…?

Why, though? Why?

You know why, Mike! You've been over this, over your sister, all your life.

Yeah, fine, I know. I don't give a shit! Why does this have to be business… that's meant to stay unfinished?

Well?

I'm waiting?

But, as it was, so it was, and there was nothing Michael could do about it. No explanation found. No explanation needed. Somethings… are just never meant to be.

Sigh.

The Gym.

After a short journey, Michael was now at Big Dick's Gym, and what a

beat-up joint this was.

But then again, what joint around these parts isn't?

The place looked more like some metallic dungeon, rather than a gym. Some Castle Grayskull looking place, but really taken over by Skeletor and his gang. Old Dick was also a slumlord to a bunch of projects in the district, so Michael wasn't sure if he'd be around, or doing slumlord shit somewhere else.

Slumlord shit… somewhere else… huh? Ha! I get the picture of a balding fat guy in a wife-beater, with really, really hairy shoulders. Evicting some poor mother of three, that spends most of her life working three jobs, working her fingers day and night to the bone. Him standing over her smoking a disgusting looking cigar, laughing up tar and spit, while the poor woman weeps all balled up on the floor with her babies. And the louder the woman weeps, the louder he laughs. How does my mind come up with this shit? And why do I also find it somewhat… funny?

And, why does it feel like I've seen it all in a cartoon before?

Ha… that was funny. I just imagined the slumlord being Porky Pig. Ah—yeebidy! Yeebidy! Wha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Okay, that was fun.

There was a bunch of Beefcakes outside, and—

But then again, I gotta say, lady… maybe if you were to—you know! Swallow your pride a little, and give him something he'd really want, like swallowing something else, you could buy yourself another few months' worth of rent. Come on, lady! Just marinate his chops a little, and swallow that overzealous bull-shitting womanly pride, a little, and—

Will you cut that out so I can go on with the narrative?

Who… what… huh…?

So, will you?

Fine! Fine! I'm done!

You done?

Yes! Yes! I'm done… you may proceed.

Okay, good! Now, where was I?

Um… there was a bunch of Beefcakes—

Yes!

There was a bunch of Beefcakes outside, and Madboy smiled while readying himself, with anticipation. Now it's your cue:

Here I go, again. Just gotta keep pressing the punch button, and stepping to the right, and this night should be all over, soon.

Thought Michael, to himself, and followed up with the thought of wanting his scene back, and then what Gab had told him.

You were right—Gab—you were right! I just love a good confrontation.

"What the fuck you doin' here, runt," asked one of The Beefcakes, "we heard what you did to Beefy back at Stumpy's place, and The Gunshow lost most of his front teeth, and is in the hospital, now, because of you."

"I have business with Betamax."

The Beefcake chuckled, once, and began cranking up his ass.

"So, we're just supposed to let you in?"

At first, Michael felt the urge to begin bashing away at the punch button, but then…!

No, no! Not just yet! Reality check—Mikey! Reality check! You do have the button to communicate available. This ain't no video game. How about using it for now, and resorting to the punching when shit goes down?

And decided to go along with that… for now.

Now if I can just get that damn Double Dragon tune out of my mind.

"Why don't you hightail it outta here, before we get physical," said he.

Why don't you make me!

Thought Michael. But decided not to say.

"Listen up, chump, if you think we're just gonna—"

"I ain't here to rumble with you guys, and Beefy attacked me first. I didn't have a choice. All I wanted to know was where I could find an old friend of mine, and Stumpy was being a prick about it, so this is Shamrock business—not Beefcakes'," responded Michael, as he eyed upwards at the big momo.

"There are no Shamrocks no more," said a titan of a Beefcake

named Cobrakong.

Cobrakong looked to be Italian, with a face all boney and folded up on itself, which made him look like he was thirty going on sixty. He had a black tank top on, holding onto dear life; which considering how his muscles were so overly formed, a simple gesture like trying to raise his hand up to scratch his nose (if done too quickly) might have been enough to split it in half.

> When it comes to their treads, best way to tell if one's a Beefcake—besides being built like Arnie—is they'll always have a tank top on. And they're irresponsible like chicks when it comes to this shit, it could be cold as hell snowing outside, but they'll sacrifice the comforts of not being turned into a frozen popsicle, developing hypothermia, just to show off some skin. Always with a tank top. And sometimes they'll walk around shirtless. And one time I saw one wearing nothing but briefs.

Cobrakong had that stupid short up front/long at back thing going, but where the sides were all shaved, and the hair at the back was all bunched up on his shoulders.

> Fucking mule-head!

He had that same panting thing that Michael had, except he looked like an overly excited hippo trying to do it, instead of a tiger; not really breathing in air, but trying to devour it. Looking into his yellowing face, that pulsated from some sort of tension bubbling up inside, Michael could tell the wop was definitely on the juices. And seeing how he was carrying a bottle of water with him, Michael figured he was using it to wet himself down, to keep himself cool, since the juices were keeping him from sweating normally. He had gold rings, and necklaces, and earrings, everywhere. And it seemed like the situation was about to get tense, again, like back at Stumpy's place... until:

> "Cobrakong, Pink Gorilla, just let him in, I want to hear what Michael's got to say," called out what Michael figured was Betamax on a speaker-box.

Cobrakong then made a menacing stance before Michael, but said:

> "Well, looks like you caught a lucky break—asshole! But don't think this means you and The Beefcakes are through, just yet."

Michael flashed Mr. Kong a Journey Face, and responded with:

> "Nice to hear—Cobrakong—is it? I'm looking forward to the break

dance lesson later. If you want, I'll show you some of the popping and locking I showed your B-boy Beefy."

And as he said that, Michael smiled, because the line ended up tasting sweeter on his lips than it did in his thoughts. Even the big momo seemed impressed. Although, the Journey face had a weird effect on him, as the momo tilted his face at Dutch angle, and looked like a confused dog would.

I think I need more practice with that.

As Michael entered the building, he saw The Beefcakes, and a runt bodybuilding gang called the Mastodonians; all doing the usual thing big oily muscular guys do: grunting and sweating as they pumped some iron. They were all kissing their biceps and trying really hard to compensate for something. But then again, Michael felt like he could probably use a workout, himself. He'd been a lazy slouch since getting out of prison, and he hadn't been keeping up on his old work out routines.

Although, in prison I kept up the boxing, so my right and left wouldn't go completely soft. If I had slouched off on that in prison? There is no way I would have been able to keep it up as much as I have, tonight. No way, Jose!

Still, he was feeling a bit insecure over his six-pack, seeing as that the meat-trucks around him were sporting six-packs on top of six-packs, which throbbed like sub-woofers, as they made their reps. Seeing all this, Michael began to grow humorous, again.

Wait a sec? Why? Six-packs on top of six-packs? Yeah, that's kinda disgusting, actually. I think I'll pass and continue feeling happy with what I got. I mean, look at all these overgrown mutants! Why feel peer-pressure from them? It's really so unreal to be this big. Really! You gotta have something seriously wrong with you to want to get this big.

As Michael continued on, the sight of all their mounds of bulking muscles began to weird him out, some. Began to make him see things all surreal. As if it was all a cartoon. And that gave Michael an idea.

You know what? That's what they are! They're like those He-man cartoon characters of today. Big, bulky, sweaty. Totally unrealistic.

And for some reason… coming off as being super, super gay.

Most of the 80s cartoons he had been watching was stuff shown in prison.

I shit you not! In prison, we practically had nothing better to do on a Saturday morning than to sit around watching cartoons, which was sorta funny seeing how we're all a bunch of tattooed, frowning, hardened criminals, sitting around watching little blue gnomes prance and sing and frolic about, saying how everything is 'smurfy', skipping along while picking flowers. Hardened criminals watching that shit? Ha! I guess that was the warden's idea of a joke to us, but yet, all those frowning tough guy acts in there also really seemed to favor it. I guess it was therapeutic for us to be seeing something other than that hard knocks shit we had to bear with, day in day out. That shit can get really morbidly depressing and aggravating when dealing with it for far too long. I mean, there's nothing but criminals all around you, and they're all dudes, and everybody is always pissed off looking. No women, no children around to lighten the mood, so we needed something colorful and 'smurfy' to do so, before we ended up murdering each other in the end, and….

Okay… okay… no, Mike! Don't get into that depressing shit!

Michael now gave himself a moment, so he wouldn't.

But anyways, as for what kids are watching today, majority of it is fucking overgrown musclebound beefcakes just oozing machismo, like these Beefcakes, here. A bunch of meatheads short on blood reaching their brains, since the muscles in their fat necks are restricting access. And I love how they then decide to wear headbands to restrict even more access, just in case a couple of blood cells do reach headquarters. I mean, look at how white-knuckled and oxygen deficient their domes look! Everybody in here. But with cartoons, it's funny, you can look at abnormality like it's the usual. There, you got your He-men and Thundercats, a bunch of beefy gay dudes slapping each other on the asses, while pounding their chests, as Van Halen music resonates from their—oh so manly—vibes. Pounding their beefy chests, demonstrating their love and desire to pound other things—most likely! As they

elbow drop their way through stupid cackling medieval musclebound minions, led by some stupid cackling medieval musclebound overlord, hellbent on turning the entire world into a gym, with them as an 'only member.' Those meanies! And if you want to work out at their gym, you better wear skimpy hot shorts shorts, ridiculously too short to join, which He-man then decides to—gladly—do anyways, to Skeletor's surprise! Making Skeletor shut the fuck up quick with all his cackling and look all 'what the fuck!' And the skimpy short shorts He-man be wearing is purple, too, worn along with some purple tights, followed up with purple ballerina slippers, to match. Yeah, He-man gladly does so since he always fancied a purple ballerina slipper giving him definition into his own inner being and all that it longs for. Ha! The shit's stupid and funny since it's all a bunch of gay mutants after the bombs have fallen, sucking on the Godzilla juices, from the lizard's own tit. And they're all really a bunch of narcissistic bastards in love with themselves and their manly bods.

Michael then began to rub his hand up against his six-pack, all self-conscious like.

Oh, and let's not forget about that Thundercats shit! Fucking Cat People? Hell—why not? That's what people want to be today—not just these Beefcakes! Everybody now in the 80s! Fucking Cat People! A cat is the very definition of everything that's arrogant, vain, and narcissistic. An animal that's an island to itself, and—absolutely positively—loving it! And they're all really just pussies, too! That's what people want to be today, gay Cat People, meowing at balls of yarn, while licking themselves, and panting like….

And then Michael couldn't help but to realize how he was definitely one of them, in his own way: arrogant, meowing, licking himself… except no gay shit—of course!

Fine! I don't give a shit! I am one of The Cat People! Meow, sucka! Just means I get a lot of pussy since I'm all pussy magnet, here. Beating that Cheetara ass in as she meows me up a storm!

Michael then began snickering to himself, but then cut it out once he noticed others were noticing.

But anyways, some of today's cartoons are really stupid, and weird,

though, too, like those Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles...?

I mean they're turtles that look like people... that know ninjutsu... and their teenagers...?

I mean... what the fuck? It's all a mixed bag. But wait! I can play that game, too! How about: Middle-aged Commie Psychic Giraffes, or Prepubescent Nazi Sushi Chef Orangutans, or—get this shit:

Napoleonic Mustachioed Underwater Basket-weaving Pterodactyls?

Okay, that last one went too far.

Michael then tried to picture that last absurdity and had a chuckle.

And these characters don't have conversations, anymore. They just fight all the time and say one-liners. I guess kids today have even less attention spans than I used to. Sorta miss Yogi and Booboo just having stupid silly conversations with each other, throughout an entire episode, over picnic baskets. Sorta miss the Flintstones and the Jetsons ripping off the Honeymooners, and having conversations leading up to—but not surpassing—wanting to do some 'bang zoom right to the moon' shit. Sorta miss Scooby Doo's silly giggling ass, surrounded by potheads, trying to fight crime while on the munchies. But then again, I also grew up on older cartoons, like the Looney Tunes, and all they were, were one episode after another, of two sociopathic pricks, beating the fuck out of each other over the head with mallets, until one went insane, and spent the rest of the episode being chased by goons sent in by the nuthouse, wielding giant butterfly nets, to catch the Daffy Ducks. Fuck, I hated Tweedy, such an asshole! Some really violent shit, even though there was never any blood involved. So, I guess I had both worlds.

Then Michael began to notice something, that cartoons did have a way of expressing the zeitgeist of a generation, just as movies did.

Well, it makes sense. Even though cartoons are made for kids, they're still made by adults. And my personal love of movies has always been trying to understand people, in a sense. Well, more of

how they want to be portrayed as—not them, really! People in general are never anything like the movies. But I think, maybe, with cartoons, you can get away with showing things you couldn't in a movie. Not everyone's expecting socio-cultural messages in them, since they're made for kids. So, with today's cartoons, I see the formula. All you need to make a cartoon today is:

- Musclebound beefcake mutants, with in-your-face undertones of homoeroticism.
- The random mixing and matching of details, like turtles and pizza and ninjas and shit.
- Cheesy one-liners never really leading to any real conversations.
- Lots of stupid pointless violence, for the sake of stupid pointless violence, with no story behind it.
- Cobra attack! Cobra retreat!
- And then tons and tons and tons of finger-tapping Van Halen music.

That! Or…

- Giant transforming robots—and then Van Halen!

What a bunch of stupid crazy shit is that? Ah fuck! Why am I complaining about it, though? It's still the type of stupid silly shit I would actually like. Maybe I'm just getting old, and it's harder for me to like new things—hmm?

But it was one thing to see monstrosities like that in a cartoon, and it was another seeing grown adults trying to reach those feats in real life.

Yeah! In cartoons, it's all right, but seeing this shit for real scares the ever-loving shit out of me. I mean, not everyone can be a Schwarzenegger, yet everyone seems to want to be one, today. This big, and this muscular. Hell, I busted my ass to get this six-pack, and yet I'm supposed to feel insecure seeing this shit? Fuck that! And if that's not enough, these guys seem to be totally in love with their bods, on an extremely… perverted… level.

Then one of The Beefcakes brushed up against Michael, and Michael swore the meat-truck had been eyeing him up like a dreamboat. The Beefcake then almost had Michael crawling for the ceiling.

> Fuck! Don't do that! Shit! Fucking bullqueer! You know, I don't got nothing against gay people whatsoever, because I don't give a shit. Plus, I've seen enough gay-bashing to make me frown on how cruel people can get when they think they have just cause to bully someone. But fuck this place! I know they all eyeing me like I'm the little guy here. They the butch, and I'm the bitch.

But then Michael smiled, as he got all rompous-pompous like. And felt his old drive.

> But you know what? Fuck 'em! I can take 'em! Muscles don't make you impenetrable, but too much of it does make you clumsy and slow. Fuck these He-men! So why don't all you guys give me a reason to get all in-your-face about it, huh?

Taking a gander of his surroundings, Michael noticed that there were a whole bunch of TVs stacked and mounted all over the place. Plus, VHS machines and taping equipment. Seeing all this, Michael began to grow curious with what the deal was here.

> What have I walked onto… a Hollywood set?

Thought Michael,

> I mean, they're just a bunch of hulking masses of spit and that anabolic stuff really meant for horses, what use do they have with such equipment? Are they making a bodybuilding documentary like the one Arnie did? What would a bunch of grunting, sweating, moaning, possible under-the-covers daisy meat-trucks be doing with…?
>
> "Okay… maybe it's better that I completely drop this line of thought, once and for all," spoke out Michael, as he noticed one of the momos had paid attention.
>
> "What you say," asked the momo.
>
> Shit! Think it, don't say it!
>
> "Nothing—I just got out of prison—talking to myself," spat out Michael, as he walked off.

The Beefcake that overheard Michael sized him up, and pictured him

off as a wacko.

And then all of a sudden, before Michael could grow a bit accustomed to the joint, music began playing from all around. The TVs had started up, and just about every rock and roll song made in the last thirty years was being played like—snap! It was a mosh-pit of guitar riffs and whaling from bands like Led Zeppelin to Iron Maiden to Metallica, Jimi Hendrix, Kiss, AC/DC, Van Halen, Ozzy Osborne, The Rolling Stones and The Who. No hard to heavy music group was spared from this scene. They were all playing at once—loud as bloody fuck—over the speakers, and it was horrible! Practically an MTV nightmare!

What the… grr!

What are these Lou Ferrignos—what is Betamax up to? Are they trying to introduce me to their state of mind without the horse fuel?

“What, you don't like it, son? Don't like music? No like rock and roll? What type of creep, pansy, butt-fucking, twerp, square don't like music—huh? Tell me—huh,” dished out a Mastodonian at Michael, with biceps the size of bicycles, and calves the size of twigs.

“No way—man! You got me all wrong, ese! This shit is like an orgasm in my ears, and I'm cuming all up in my pants just listening to this,” sneered out Michael, with full sarcasm, which the meat-truck wasn't able to pick up on.

“Riiiggghhhttt! Now that's what I want to hear,” dished out the meet-truck, lips all puckering with excitement.

Fucking momos! They're making The Cockskulls look normal, right about now.

Sheila the Magnificent.

Finally, Michael made it to a room that was soundproofed, from the looks of it. It was the offices of Big Dick. Inside, Michael entered to see Big Dick, himself, sitting all the way to the left. He was feeding his Dobermans slabs of raw meat, and next to Dick was a TV, in a fancily-designed, baroque looking high-chair, all buttoned-up for the Duke of Earl. Then Michael noticed that Betamax was on the screen, and before he could whip his head around to seek out Max, in person, TV Beta

smiled. And then spoke:

"Michael, how you doin', there, old chum?"

And now it looked like Elvis had finally left the building. Michael twitched, once, and then allowed himself to take in the shit he was seeing. As Michael glazed at the TV and frowned in disbelief, Betamax glazed back, and winked a bit. Michael began to remember how he used to have nightmares as a child of moments like this; how he'd lay around watching Howdy Doody, and nearly piss himself when imagining the screen zooming in with a close-up of that evil looking puppet; chattering its splintered, wooden teeth, at Michael, incessantly. As if excited by the thought of how Michael's skin might taste like.

"Betamax, what the fuck are you doing on TV—huh? What is this? Why is Big Dick sitting there, at a corner, not saying a word, feeding his dogs? And… what the…?

Why is… why is there a giant naked woman bench pressing what looks to be… a half a metric ton?"

Yeah! Michael just noticed her, too. She was all the way on the right of him, next to a window. Outside, a neon sign was shining in the color of pink orgasm, onto the glistening bulk of her herculean body, as she heaved what looked like two walruses attached to a stick. And every time she heaved, her bulk would then blow up like balloons, making Michael skittish at the thought of seeing them burst. And then, Michael got really scared, as she began moaning and grunting, sounding like the mating calls of a chainsaw (which must have also startled the shit out of those poor walruses, as they shuffled and scrambled about, trying to break away from the bar, free). And as she climaxed, she bellowed out one last, everlasting moan, that shattered the sound barrier, and had the 80s gods running for their cigarettes.

And then all of a sudden, the colossus got up. She was simply—gigantic! Just… so… big! She dwarfed everything in the room, and then some; looking like she could make every musclebound maniac male at that joint, her bitch. About that moment, Michael felt like he had probably never been more terrified in his life, and what terrified him the most was how cute she was, at least in the face.

Oh… no! She even has a perfect diamond window. No, I don't want

that!

"Michael? Michael? Talk to me, Michael! Don't worry about Sheila over there. She is such a sweetheart of a girl, once you get to know her. Don't let her—um—girth! Make you feel… she's really a doll—I tell you," responded Max, with a look of concern on his face.

The towering Barbarella looked at Michael. And smiled. And Michael smiled back, and had to admit, she did have this certain… Doris Day glow about her. That is, if Doris Day was an overgrown mutant.

Big Dick continued feeding his dogs, not saying a word to Michael. He hadn't even looked up at Michael once; he continued feeding his babies, alone in a world of his own, whispering something gently to his pups, like a mother does to her newborn child.

"Hey, Michael, I heard what happened at Stumpy's place, and some of the boys, here, aren't too happy with you, to say the least. I had to have a good pow-wow with them that you were a good friend of mine, and I didn't want them to—well—as they put it! 'Introduce you to the club,'" explained Max, as he winked, again.

What is that show? About that reporter… that's a ghost stuck on TV?

As Betamax smiled, all girly like, Doris Day with her chipmunk face continued standing there like a mountain, proud and strong, and she seemed like she was starting to come on to Michael. Which to Michael's distaste, began to turn him—

No, fuck no! Not happening!

Thought Michael, trying to avoid any sexual images of 'how she would be like,' from entering his mind; how it would be like if this towering Barbarella, here, decided to make him her bitch.

Ah, shit!

Thought Michael, as it was then too late to repress all the images and smells and sounds from taking shape.

Oh, no!

"Hey, Michael, you okay," asked Max, seeing as to how Michael was shivering again, staring up at the giant Aphrodite.

"So. you're going to help me… why would you do that, Max," asked Michael.

“I told you, you've always been a good friend to me. Such a Greek tragedy what happened that night when Mary's building had caught on fire. You didn't deserve going to prison after all that. And for what? A couple of—”

“I remember the story, Max. I was there, and it's not exactly a memory I like to dwell in, right now,” explained Michael, while trying to fight off, with a stick, the images of Doris Day, there, trying to bend him over, and introduce him to her club.

“Of course—of course—Michael! I understand, completely,” responded Max.

“So, where are you right now, and how are we going to do this,” asked Michael, as he kept reminding himself how stupid it was for him to be talking to a TV.

“I'm here in Manhattan. Radboy is actually here, too. Not here, here… around.”

“Where at in Manhattan?”

“1999, I think you know the place,” concluded Max, as he signed off.

Betamax's broadcast was off the air, and static was now the only thing left. Doris Day then made a quick kissy face at Michael. Michael first cringed up a bit at the thought, again, but then began to feel different. And then grew curious, as Sheila began licking her lips at him. And then thought—why not?

Well, it's kinda like this… how often has a mortal male gotten the chance to woe a Greek Goddess, with his boyish charms, and then gotten the chance to do the nasty with her? So maybe if I come by here, again….

Yeah!

Cobrakong, Smash!

Exiting Big Dick's offices, the music and noises from the gym began filling up into Madboy's ears, again, which made him feel like he was going to have a seizure, right then and there. Continuing on, he noticed Betamax on one of the screens, as he seemed to be in an interview process with a bunch of weird terrifying looking puppets. It seemed like some British political TV show, and Michael began thinking of Howdy

Doody, again, looking at those hyper-realized, uncanny, anatomically incorrect monstrosities.

What the fuck? What is this… fucking limeys are weird!

By this point, Michael had finally reached the front entrance, and before he was able to exit the building, he was then confronted by Beefy Chesty, stepping through the doors. And the wounded, rage infilled expression on Beefy's face, once he saw Michael, spelled it all! Shit was about to roll down hill, again, and Michael was standing in its path, all the way at the bottom. Beefy was massaging his throat, and Michael now wished he had nailed him in the Adam's apple harder, and expired the big fuck, completely.

"What the fuck is he doing here," screeched out Beefy, while shattering his teeth as he bit down hard.

"Betamax let him in," explained the Pink Gorilla.

Pink Gorilla? What type of… I don't even want to know…!

"Fuck Betamax! Ever since he's been here, him and his TVs have been driving me off the chain, get this piece of shit," bellowed out the man with the beefy chest.

Ah shit! Be careful of what you wish for—huh?

But then Michael couldn't help but to smile, as he thought:

Rompous-pompous, asshole! Make your move!

Realizing, he was up for some more in-your-face kicks. And as Beefy tried to reach out and grab him, Michael kicked him in the crotch—and it was on, again!

It was like in a kennel of starving dogs, and someone had thrown in a rack of lamb. Because within a split second, Beefcakes were now toppling in from everywhere, into every which way direction to get to Michael. There were at least sixty of the meat-trucks in there, and if it wasn't for the fact that how oily they were, how clumsy they got as they collided into each other trying to get to Michael, the boy would have surely been mincemeat. Within a split second, there were at least five Beefcakes on top of Michael, and within a split second later, ten more jumped in to get their mitts dirty. And even with all these hulking masses, almost none of them could get a hold of Michael, since they

were mostly in arms with themselves. Michael felt almost helpless now under their musky masses, as it stank of a thousand pounds of pork, that had been placed out under the sun too long, in the Bronx, at summertime. One of the Mastodonians then must have accidentally grabbed some Beefcake by the balls—real hard—because the Beefcake then began moaning loud like an elephant seal with blue—you know whats! The only Beefcake that did have Madboy by his mitts was Cobrakong, none other. Cobra had wanted a piece of Michael ever since he had stepped in the place. Hell! He had been wanting a piece of him ever since Michael fucked his girlfriend back in 70something. Back then, Cobrakong wasn't even a porker like he is today; he was a tall wiry looking jerk that turned to bodybuilding—probably to mend his ego, after Michael had totaled it. Cobrakong had a bone to pick with Madboy, and he was prime ready, now, to collect.

> Long-legged, nicely tanned, statuesque, well-rounded Italian girl that sorta reminded me of Sofia Loren. And when I say well-rounded—I mean—well-rounded even for an Italian girl, and I think that speaks for itself! Ever just been simply humbled looking at the naked bosoms of a woman? Hers could do that to you! They were so mountainously large that they were simply majestic. Also, the asshole used to beat her, so fuck him! No regrets for what I did back there. And no! There's no mistaking over this story, like the one with G. Knicks! Well... I think?
>
> “How about you show me those dance moves now, you motherfucker,” wailed out Cobrakong.

Both men were now up, and Cobrakong had a hold of Michael, good. But before he was able to lay down some elbow work across his skull, both men were then jumped by another Beefcake that got too excited, and didn't want to miss out on the action. The three men were now in a tailspin, as one Beefcake after another joined in like it was some twirling conga line. Michael, at this point, couldn't help but laugh, as the heavy-breathers kept trying to nail him down, shut.

> These dumb oafs just don't know how to pace themselves.

And once again, they had piled on top of one another, except this time, without the ball. Cobrakong had fumbled, and Michael was now free to make his escape. Michael tried to run for the doors, as he popped one Mastodonian in the nose, which activated his tear-ducks; another

Beefcake in the ear, fucking up his equilibrium; and another in the kidney.

Piss blood for a week, asshole!

Then ran up fast, going super speed into overdrive, and headbutted Pink Gorilla in the sweet spot like a butting ram, and sent that momo packing to Shangri-la.

The sweet spot is when you hit a guy in the chin from the front, and if you do it right, his head jerks back in a way, fucking with the cords leading from his brain. Instant knock-out!

One momo then grabbed Michael from the back and tried to back suplex his ass, but Michael placed his foot on top of one of the arms of a bench press, and lunged himself—flipping himself—over the palooka, and out of his grip. As he landed on his feet, he almost fell back, but slammed his back up against a wall. Madboy then lunged himself off the wall, ran up, and also headbutted that dude in the back of the head, and sent him packing to Bali Ha'i.

Bali Ha'i will whisper
In the wind of the sea:
'Here am I, your special island!
Come to me, come to me!'

Go to her, you big oaf. Go to her! In a cruel and uncaring world, she's a place that'll treat you fairly, how you always desired to be treated since you were a child. So, go to her. Bon Voyage!

As Michael got to the doors, he found himself confronting two Beefcakes standing guard; unwilling to let him leave, just yet. As he began to shake-and-bake grappling attempts, he found himself now surrounded by the musky lot, as they all finally seemed to have learned how to pace themselves, for none of them were trying to rush him all at once. Michael needed to do something—and something, quick! He needed to gain some leverage, because he knew once one had gotten a good hold of him, now, the others would slowly follow, and he'd be done for. As he scoured around his eyes to find that leverage, the first thing he saw was a dumbbell rack that was set next to him, and his first thoughts, then, were to begin picking up dumbbells from a dumbbell rack, and begin chucking. As Cobrakong tried to rush in, first, Michael

quickly grabbed a 100 pounder, and tried hurling it at him, but missed, as the big palooka dodged his pitch.

What the hell did I just do? I'm going to kill one of these fuckers if it connects with their face!

Now chucking that 100 pounder wasn't as easy as it sounded. As he did, it almost felt like it took his entire arm, right off, with the attempt. As the dumbbell flew passed Cobra, it crashed into the leg of a Mastodonian, and cracked it in two.

"Ahhhh! My leg," screamed out the Mastodonian.

"Oh, shit," cried out a Beefcake, seeing as to what Michael had done.

"Fuck!"

"You piece-of-shit!"

"We're going to kill you, Madboy," cried out another.

Ah hell, that looks gruesome! I really shouldn't be doing this.

Thought Michael, but he knew he didn't have any better options. Michael now had another dumbbell at hand.

Chuck!

And another.

Chuck!

And another…!

Chuck!

"Ahhhhhhhh," they all went.

Ah shit! Stop, Michael, stop!

Michael now had another at hand. But this time, he wasn't going to be chucking them, anymore, after what he saw he did to that Mastodonian, there, plus everyone else. Michael, instead, started faking throws, in order to scare back the meat-trucks, and he aimed it so he could make a path towards the doors. Every time they'd try rushing him, one at a time, Michael would fake one, and had them cowering back.

"Someone rush in and get him!"

"Kill him!"

"Shut up! Don't make me do it, I'll murder one of you fuckers—I swear," yelled out Michael, hoping that would dissuade them.

And the strategy had almost worked, but now one of the momos got the idea to fight fire with fire, and reached over to pick up some ammunition of his own.

“Don't do it,” screamed out Michael.

But the stupid momo went ahead, as he bellowed out for revenge, and heaved that 80 pounder at Michael. Michael quickly jumped out of the way, as the dumbbell then flew straight into the stomach of one of the Mastodonian's mates, who then collapsed onto the floor, and began bellowing in pain. Seeing this, Cobrakong then picked up a bar off a bench that was at least caring 250 on each side. For a second, there, Cobrakong tried to chuck it, but then realized if he did, it was going to go through Michael, and hit five of his buds on the other end. So, instead, Cobrakong decided to charge in, and hit a home run. Everyone and Michael, seeing as to what Cobrakong was about to do, panicked, and tried to scatter.

“No—no—no! Don't do it, you stupid momo! It's not going to work,” screamed out Michael.

But then Cobrakong grinned like the Reaper, and charged in, anyways. Everyone began crying out for him to stop, for they knew if Cobrakong was to misfire, it was bound to get really messy in there.

Cobrakong misfired.

As he tried to swing in and connect with Michael's head, one by one the weight discs flew off, and embedded themselves into the landscape. Lots of screaming and moaning began to ensue. Michael was spared from Cobrakong's fuck-up, but now Cobrakong began swinging around the weight bar, by itself. Almost everyone now had some form of weight training equipment at hand as weapons. One Mastodonian even decided a jump rope could make a nice whip, and started flailing it about like a retarded lion tamer. Michael grabbed another dumbbell, and was now duel wielding them around like some urban gym-breed barbarian.

Yeah, I know how fucking stupid that sounds, but what else are my options right now?

And then, while holding those dumbbells… for a sec there… Michael decided to do some reps, then kiss his right bicep. That had everyone look at Michael in a way.

Yeah, I am that much of a showy asshole, eat your fucking hearts out, you overgrown gorillas! I am—just—that badass. The Zeus of

Cool. Now bow your asses down and worship me!

Thankfully, though, no one wanted to continue chucking dumbbells around, anymore, after seeing how gruesome things got. As Michael stood at guard, scouring his eyes for which of the momos was going to make the next attempt, a Mastodonian charged in, and his dumbbells clashed with Madboy's like maces. Another Mastodonian then charged in, right after, wielding weight discs, but accidentally smashed it over the back of the last guy that did. As his buddy crashed to the floor, Michael popped the mammoth man still standing in the kisser with the 50 pounder, which sent him twirling into the gym mirror, as it shattered.

Shit, where's the rumble music?

But then Cobrakong began bellowing, again, holding a 200 pound dumbbell at each hand, and began kicking back dust beneath his feet.

Okay, that's not what I asked for—but fuck it! Let's play another Billy Idol song, for the last one was pretty good rumble music. Oh! Oh! Rebel Yell! Fuck yeah! Now that should do it!

As he bellowed out, everyone began scattering like cockroaches, and backed off of Michael to spare themselves from the collateral damage; they saw the mess Cobrakong left the last time, and they wanted none of it. Cobrakong then made one last cry like a bull, and charged in for the red. He took one giant swing at Madboy and... missed! Madboy, at this point, jumped onto his back, as Cobrakong began circling around in frenzy. Madboy had now had enough of Cobra Commander, here, so he clocked him over the head with that 50 pounder, and Cobrakong was now down... but not out. It was like a chicken with its head cut off, Cobrakong's brains had gone nighty-night, but his body was still flailing about, wide awake. As he went spiraling out of control, he began knocking-over all his jabronis in his path. Finally, he crashed into the doormen, and out the door, and Michael was finally on the street, again. Michael then leaped off of Cobrakong, as the Bluto keeled over, and Michael just about felt like kissing the ground at this point. He took one last look back at Cobrakong, and noticed he was now practically snoring. Then got up, and started running, as a couple of The Beefcakes tried to chase him down. But since Michael was lighter on his feet, he was over a fence, and out of sight, before any of them could run him down. Unable to find him anywhere, The Beefcakes gave up, and went

back inside.

School of Rock.

Michael crouched behind a dumpster, as he tried catching his breath.

Oh shit, that got fucking stupid! Oh shit, that got fucking stupid!

Thought Michael, but then began grinning up a circle, as he felt the rush invigorate his spirit.

Oh shit… that was a hell-of-a-lot of fun! Now that's what I call some bitchin' ass-smacking, rompous-pompous action!

Michael then felt like pulling out a cig to commemorate the experience, and so he did. He lit his cig, and began puffing out clouds and rings and heart shaped arrows going through them, while trying to catch his breath, still.

So, how many of those meat-trucks did I take out in total? There were at least eighty of them in there, and I'd say I took out six to ten, personally. Wait… only six to ten? Come on!

Michael didn't like those results.

Actually… fuck it! I took on eighty guys! This was even better than G. Knick's dojo! Ha! In your face, you big disgrace! Kicking your motherfucking cans all over the place! I rocked them!

Thought Michael, as Queen's 'We Will Rock You' began playing in his head, and his eyes flared up once the guitar riffs came in at the end. Michael then began missing the 70s.

Yeah! That's what the theme song to that rumble I had should have been. I can't have Billy Idol playing out for every occasion. Even though I like him, really, never did like the rest of that whole punk thing that started up a few years before I went to prison. Which artists today have all but now completely commercialized, to where they might as well sell their freaking cassette tapes through Corn Flakes cereal, as a surprise present found at the bottom of the box. Some Little Orphan Annie decoder pin, shit. But, like I said, even before that, punk music was bad! And not good, bad! But piss poor and terrible. Even before this whole New Wave, the music was already fizzling out, since it had no heart nor soul. It was just music made to say:

'The world's fucked, we're all fucked, everything's fucked! So now

let's all go OD and die! And save ourselves, before shit gets biblical, with the Mad Max nuclear Armageddon, shit, that's coming.' And it went ahead, and did so, killed itself off. And now we're stuck with the music made by its corny cousin.

Fuck! I miss rock & roll! Real rock & roll! That 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' shit that was playing, just before the music died. And died for—real! For its demise was a tragedy. Not died like punk music, which was really just put out of its misery. And not just 70s rock, but, really, the music I heard growing up, just before that stupid hippie shit came in, too, that made it all go granola and pansy-ass! Then got all butt-fucked, inside out, from all the acid it took, and turned into some melted, mushy mess. Fuck that weird-ass Yellow Submarine, crap. Stay out of my oceans and don't tread on me, you freaks! Fuck all that! I want me some real, wholesome, God loving, feel good rock & roll. From back in the 50s and early 60s. Now, that was some really good music. Pure of heart and soul.

But, Michael was too young to be James Dean, a part of that "fixing my hot rod to cruise the strip, later," scene. Too young, to even understand much of all that American Graffiti thing meant, before it was gone.

But, besides that, my foundation was still in the 70s. I missed the real Happy Days, but I did—at least—get a TV sitcom to commemorate all that was lost. And… 70s also rocked! I can't deny that. And they did try to fix all the mess that came out of the 60s. Led Zeppelin did try to do their best. Even though, they went a little too into that pagan, zoso crap. And got a little weird.

But, talking about weird shit, if anyone did it right, it was at least David Bowie, as Ziggy. But he did it all for fun, that's the difference. He wasn't being weird for the sake of being weird. Not like the 60s, that just had a bunch of draft dodgers, really just trying to get their brains to go plant food, so their pussy-asses wouldn't have to go to 'Nam. There was a method behind Ziggy's madness.

But, alas, both the 70s and 50s were a thing of yesteryears. And Michael was now stuck in the 80s. And God knew what the 90s would have to offer.

But… now… looking into today's shit. As for a lot of this 80s nerd

mode crap, playing now, it’s just all sell out material. Just a tamer and commercialized version of that Sex Pistols, crap. But made for Poppy MTV viewers, all bubble gum, to a bunch of kids, today, that wouldn't know the difference from a Ramone, from a Kajagoogoo. So, pretty much, being at complete and total odds with everything its founding music used to stand for. Today's music is Unicorn jizz. And 70s music—besides discos—kicks 80s music's ass, up and down the block. Fuck today's music. Punk music really did suck, but still, at least it was raw and real! And authentic. Even though certified garbage. Fuck 80s music. Fuck it!

But then, really thinking about it, thinking about all the music he had been listening to since this decade began, and thinking about all the moments he had shared.

That Yazoo song, 'Only You'... almost made me cry, one time—it did! And... how long has it been since I have?

Michael then began to have a change of heart.

Okay... okay! You got me, there. I'll admit, I have been getting really partial to New Wave.

Then began admitting other things, Michael at the time, was in denial of.

Like I sorta did with... disco?

In the 70s?

...?

Huh!

But, I mean, how can I deny how much I did used to love listening to the Bee Gees, and watching the movie ‘Saturday Night Fever,’ and John Travolta, even though we were all supposed to hate disco at the time, for some... hmm?

Wow...!

What a bunch of tools we all were, back then.

My Fish!

Michael then pictured that one momo he seriously injured, when the snapped his leg in half, by chucking a dumbbell into it. And after a while

with the image in his head, Michael grew squeamish.

You know what—fuck that! No one got killed in there… although, I don't think they did.

No! No one did! And that's all that matters. That wasn't like the Tropic, and shit really did get intense, there. Too intense!

But then Michael thought about what he was going to do once he got to Radboy.

Nah! That's different! That's personal! Getting those Numbskulls to try and burn down Mary's building… he was going to put my only sister's life at risk—just to get to me? No, that's different! He's really got something coming to him. Piece-of-shit asshole! That's some lowdown and dirty shit, right there. Pussy-ass, bitch-ass coward! You were going to murder my sister, because you're too much of a coward to face me, by yourself! Because you know I'd whoop your ass. And I've done it before. You're a wimp compared to me! And you knew that. And that's why you lowered yourself down to the level of a dog… fucking junkyard dog—oh you got something coming! You got something special coming!

Michael then imagined Radboy's head popping open like that Iron Monkey's did at the Tropic and wondered if that would be going too far.

My sister's face was almost burned to ash! You know what… I think maybe that would be the right sort of justice for him, there.

Feeling like he was going to boil over, Michael felt like going for his Rosary, again. But as he looked down at his hand, he saw it was covered in blood. His blood.

What the…?

Looking down to his side, Michael noticed he was bleeding, profusely.

Oh—you got to be shitting me! I must have cut myself, bad, jumping over that 14-foot fence, and after all I went through at Big Dick's Gym.

Michael needed to find a means to bandage his wounds, and as he looked around the neighborhood, he remembered that Letoya's place wasn't too far from where he was at. To Michael's luck, Letoya used to be a nurse, but seeing all the blood and gore at St. John's Hospital in the Queens eventually got to her, which made her decide to quit.

Well, I got no choice, now, I guess. Hopefully she still lives in that

apartment, I gotta get this tended to—lickety split!

Thought Michael, as he smiled, seeing how this could be a chance to rekindle an old flame.

Yeah, done enough fighting for now, and maybe that's why I'm still all hyped up. My mind's starting to race, and I hate when that shit happens. I need to get with the loving, now, to balance me out. Fuck I'm feeling tense! Too tense! Like right after a good workout, you need something to relax the muscles, and mellow them out. Unwind. Loving now sounds like it could be the trick!

Michael then saw a stray cat jump out of a trashcan that lay next to him, hop right onto his lap, hiss, and rush off. Michael got startled there for a second, but then smiled, looking at that feline, that now stood on the other end of the alley, licking itself.

Yeah! I am one of The Cat People. Just another mangy feline out for himself, like all the other cats around me. A mangy stray cat, all alone in the world. Always running about, scraping on by, and finishing the day licking up his wounds. Going dumpster hopping to find himself some eats—hopefully a fish—and getting some before the other cats came scrapping, looking to put up a fight for whatever tasty morsel he might find. All surrounding him and hissing and shit! Well, you can't have any of my fucking fish. My fish! Mine!

Michael then thought of the symbolism.

Fuck, I love me some fish, love the way it smells, too! Love the stink it puts up that would detract lesser felines. But not me! For I know the more stank it's got, the tastier it'll be. Gotta have it smelling up the joint, like we at a Chinese market, if you want the good stuff. My fish!

Michael thought about Letoya, then how he fucked up Boomatic, smiled, but then thought of her.

Why were you so...?

Michael then got up, and began making his way to Letoya's place.

If anything, I rather get with Letoya, now. I didn't like how Boomatic was treating her, there. What the hell have you gotten yourself into, Letoya? You're better than dealing with garbage like that.

Letoya and Michael had been close, once, and seeing her at Stumpy's, it seemed she still had some feelings for him. Of course, a lot of girls did for Michael back then. Most women were easy for him, and he never had that much trouble flirting, and showing some charm, which also made a lot of guys jealous.

The Mack-aroni.

> Used to not understand why so many guys have so much trouble with attracting women, but then one day it hit me in prison. Yeah! In prison, you have a lot of time to think about everything and anything. But anyways... society today teaches women everything on how to attract a man but teaches men nothing on how to attract a woman. And the fact of the matter is, it has everything to do with lust, and most people—when it comes to women—don't want that to be the reason. Fact of the matter is, men don't want women to lust, because it places them at a disadvantage. Because society is built around catering to male needs, and everything it tries to teach women is how to cater to those male needs. When it comes to women's needs? They supposedly don't exist. Since they're not supposed to exist, outside of having the need to satisfy men all the time, and that's where I come in as a break in that equation.

Then Michael began to think about what it really meant to be one of The Cat People, at least, in the leagues he was playing.

> If you want to attract women, it's all about playing the same game they do that makes them appealing. What is that game, you ask? Spending hours upon hours upon hours looking into that mirror, and watching yourself, until you start to pick up all the tell-tale signs of what you really gots to offer. Being narcissistic is a big part of it, and the hardest part that guys, I'm pretty sure, won't get over, is... you have to understand a man's sexuality!

That, to Michael, was what he felt separated him from everyone else. Beyond just his very good looks.

> Here's the thing, that all the fat ugly people—don't—understand! Looks... are ninety percent maintenance! Yup, that's the truth, Ruth! Right now, I'm a hunk, but that's because I worked hard to get this way. If I was to live the life most of the fugly people do,

sitting around being a couch potato, drinking six-packs all day while watching the 49ers— watching other people play sports and achieve shit! Paying zero attention to my own looks… if I was to do all that—guess what! I'd turn into a fat loser too! That's how it is, it's a choice, and a choice I decided not to make, because I wanted to have sex with beautiful women, instead of sitting around feeling sorry for myself, and watching other people live that lifestyle. And it wasn't something predetermined, either, me being born this way… hell, during the years in prison, during the long stretch, there was a year I gained sixty pounds, and when I looked into the mirror, I was terrified to see I wasn't myself anymore. I was another one of them, and no longer a hunk, and that terrified me to think I'd stay that way. So, of course, that's when I started doing the old regiment more, started hitting the gym more, to lose that weight. Stopped eating! Stopping—fucking—eating so much! With all that gluttony with burgers and beacons and all that heart clogging bile! And then, presto-change-o, I was back to being gorgeous me again. So, it's all a choice. Looks are a choice, it's not something that's predetermined. You gotta want to be good looking to be good looking. That. Or you can want a Big Mac, with fries, with some chicken nuggets on the side. And… I know, I know, it can get tempting to just say—fuck it! And go for the Big Mac instead. But, that's all on you then.

But then Michael thought about some of the mugs he had seen. And realized, maybe…?

Okay, fine, I guess there is some predetermination behind it. A God's gift, and all. Take Mick Jagger. The dude is universally acclaimed as a beaver tail collector and connoisseur. But the guy is also universally acclaimed as a Guinness Book of World Records setting 'Ugly Motherfucker.' So, how do you explain that? How, I ask, how? Also, as a performer, he can't dance for shit. And, can't sing for shit. Yet, he's still as famous as he is. The only thing I can think of, that would be a good reason, is nothing short of selling his soul to the devil, himself.

Michael then realized he might be on to something.

Well, makes sense, don't it? I mean… he's fucked a lot of chicks—a lot—… and with an ugly mug like that? Come on! That's got the

devil's trickery and tomfoolery written all over it! Without a doubt, that fool must have cut a deal with the Horned One a very, very long time ago, to get the chicks, to not get stuck up by that monstrous pucker of his. Now I can understand why he did it. But, damn, Micky? I'm so very sorry how ugly you turned out. But, was signing with Satan really the answer?

Although, then again, considering how evil Micky and company are, I don't see them having signed no contract with The Big Red Goat… Mr. Goat-for-brains was the one signing a contract—with them! Keith Richards… fucking!

Michael shuddered then. But then, thought of that one other mug. And shuddered more.

Okay, fine, you got me! You got me! There's no way in hell around a mug like that. No amount of makeup, maintenance, even Satan's black magic is going to make that mug look good. But, then again, the guy's like a horror writer and shit. And part of the horror of reading his books is that moment you have of closing the book, and, in contemplation of what you just read, you then turn the book around, and—wham! Yikes! You see a giant picture of the author himself. And, you were already scared, and now even more so, just looking at that ghoulish face of his. And, with his books, and that picture of him on the back, that's always a big ass picture of the guy. A big scary ass picture! You staring at him, him staring you right back! No books from any other authors have a picture of themselves as big as his. It's like the damn book editors knew—freaking knew—what they were doing for making it so big. So, if anything, it complements what he does for a living. Trying to scare your ass and all! And it works for him.

Anyways….

Anyone that's got the looks, also knows, they're not all that it really takes to cut it, really, either. Sure, it does its job initiating shit. But if all you got are looks, and no feel nor vibe, you might as well be a statue. And, sure, statues can be pleasant to look at, but how you gonna fuck the inanimate thing? You need that fluidity and flow, that motion to stir the ocean. And, as a man, you need to

understand your sexuality. You need to understand the importance of charm, too. Beyond looks… I mean, back to the whole matter of looks and ugliness. I've met some girls, that no matter how hard they tried to look attractive, how much make up they put on, they were born with a face that was never gonna get them there… but… when they smiled? I couldn't help but smile back. And there was this one girl, I remember, she had the face of a donkey… but… she charmed me into her bed. She charmed me! So yeah… charm!

And that there was what Michael felt brought upon women in his life in abundance. Beyond just looks… charm! While most other guys could barely manage pulling what can be counted on two hands, their entire lives.

There's this thing called a male sexual aura—or the sexual aura of a… whatever! What it is, is the shit we got to offer. And it's what makes women start licking and biting their lips, getting their blood to flow into their lips, tits, and sexual organs, and having them balloon up, some, and turn juicy red. Chemistry! What gets that biological chemistry flowing. If you want that effect on women, you have to learn how to ooze sex, and make them want to beg for it, for a change. Just like how most women are taught how to ooze it out to get to men. It works the same, both ways, really! And personally, every time I see a hot momma, I immediately start imagining myself having sex with her, and thoughts influence your mood, vibes, and body language, and people around you can sense that. When women sense that in me, they immediately know what I'm thinking, and since I'm also good looking, all I have to say is a simple 'hello' and I'm already in the door. And have women trying to tear my pants off, to get to all my goods.

But with most beta types…?

I feel sorry for them, most of them are clueless. They either think being really, really nice is what's going to get their attention. That, or coming off with a lot of hot air. It's all chemistry, really. A feeling! Just a feeling of one's own sexuality, and how it correlates with others. That… or…?

Possibly… magic?

Then, of course, there was that.

> Magic. And, I mean, real magic. But... of course, real magic doesn't...?

And that there was something Michael was still working on, trying to figure out, within himself.

> But, anyways. Stick to practical science, shall we? At least for now. It's all chemistry and charisma. And, I mean... all men have the ability to do all this, we're all born with it, but only a very few know how to. Have learned to really tap into it. That's why you have what seems like ten percent of men, having sex with ninety percent of the women on earth. At bars, I always see me, and one other dude, night after night, setting up 'em swings when getting to the plate; and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of other dudes sitting at the bleachers, looking all lost and confused. Because, for all those lonely heart owners? I'm pretty sure if they went to look at themselves in the mirror, and tried to think about what makes them sexually appealing, they couldn't last ten seconds without calling it quits, out of fear that it might turn them homo or a freak. Men have to come to terms with their sexual nature, if they want women to, and most men don't know how to vibrate it, because they think men shouldn't have one. Because if they did, they'd be gay, or something. And here's the ringer, if you really, really, really wanted to attract women, it's all about looking, acting, and dressing gay as fuck! You want proof? Look at all those Big Hair Metal groups today. Their music might suck, but they sure know what they're doing. Dressing all in drag, and putting on makeup, and puckering up at the chicks in the aisles. And women are by the horde-loads running, stampeding, and trampling over themselves to get to them, just so they can drop to their knees and start blowing. In the end, you have to thank David Bowie, in Ziggy Stardust we can trust! But he didn't start no revolution, he just brought shit back. Honestly, I think this whole looking and acting and dressing like a male prude thing started a hundred years ago. Because, have you ever noticed how ridiculously gay men used to dress, before the mid 19th century? Fuck! Look how gay the founding fathers dressed. George Washington, with his fucking

puffy white wig. Knickerbockers, which are tight ass pants that go knee length, then he wore white stockings, down to his shoes. And the shoes they wore back then were gay as fuck, too, with buckles or bowties on them, and shit. Yeah! That's right! The first American commander and chief looked and dressed like an 18th century drag queen! Stick a feather in that ass and call it macaroni, ha! And I've read how he was a real good dancer. And being good at dancing, equals being good at other things, in the mind of a woman. Ha! Now look at the Shakespearean era… same shit! The shit they wore was gay as fuck, too! I saw that Romeo and Juliet movie—what the fuck where the dudes wearing back then? Tights with jockstraps worn over them to emphasize their crotches? Looking like a bunch of male ballerinas, a bunch of Baryshnikovs. Hmm? Shit worn to emphasize their crotches—huh? I wonder why they wore silly gay shit like that? Fuck, you can go all the way back to the Ancient Greeks. Same shit! Gay as fuck! All they wore back then were skimpy robes that looked like they just wanted to fall off. They were practically dresses held together with a safty pin. And Alexander the Great's army was a bunch of beefy naked dudes going to war with hardly anything on. Going out, with their cocks out, slaying all their enemies in the battlefield, and then, slaying all their enemies' women in other places. All in all, together, you have thousands of years of men dressing gay as fuck. Why? Because back then, I guess, men understood the male sexual aura. Now, only the rock stars do.

Then Michael thought about what other guys would think.

I bet those gay-bashing douchebags are the way they are, because their sexual nature scares them, they confuse it for the possibility that they might be homo, themselves, and that's where all of homophobia stems from. Personally, I love the Marlon Brando thing, since it also works without going pink. Well… not now! He's a fat fuck now! And that late 60s counterculture nonsense did a number on him. I mean, back in the 50s, with Streetcar Named Desire and The Wild Ones. Those are the examples I've gotten to establish my own.

Michael had pretty much seen the movie, The Wild Ones, over a hundred times as a kid.

You know one thing I hate about movies? People generally don't act like normal human beings would in them. All movies, in the end, are just fantasies of what people want to see, how they wished the world and the people in it were really like. But that man's performance? Never seen anything more real in my life. Not even in real life, itself. But anyways... If you don't want to dress and act gay as fuck, you have to go all badboy, and that really does the trick, too. But deep down, women also hate the type. They see the evil in it, and the evil that it puts into them, which makes them excited in a way they feel like they shouldn't. And because of that, there's a very fine line between coming across as a badboy, and coming across as a jerk, so you have to be careful. The difference is... jerks haven't earned the experience dealing with chicks, and their own emotions when dealing with them, so their vibes are all over the place. I remember when I was thirteen years old, all the girls thought I was the biggest piece-of-shit in school. And I really was back then, since, I'd go around lifting up their skirts behind them, and go 'ye-ha' pretending to ride them like a bull. Plus, do other stuff like yanking their pigtails. Or making moaning sounds, really loud, behind their backs, to startle them. I'd do all those horrible things, then laugh in their faces when they'd start yelling at me. Fuck! Kids can be so evil!

Michael smiled remembering those days, and sorta felt like he missed being that little rascal.

Who am I kidding, I kinda still am! But anyways, once I got my shit down, got the experience to have it put on my resume, that's when they started calling me back for second, third, and fourth interviews. But, even now, I can still fuck it up and come across as a jerk, especially if I have mixed feelings. Just goes to show, no matter how good you get, you always gotta keep up the practice, if you want to stay the best. Same as fighting, fucking, hustling, stealing, and playing the cello. Everything, really! It's all about keeping up the practice, in the end.

Then Michael thought about going drag, himself.

Ha! Fuck that shit! But honestly... if that's all it took, I probably would. And strangely enough... not just to bag on chicks, either.

For a second there, Michael pictured himself dressing like George

Washington; wearing puffy white wigs, knickerbockers, a Napoleon bicorne hat, and all. And trotting through these mean streets trying to pick up chicks, while getting all the attention of the tough guy acts, around town. Michael chuckled.

Fuck it! I'm doing it! And we'll still fuck anyone up who dares laugh at us. And we'll call ourselves the… The Yank-Me-Doodle Dandies! And we'll ride ostriches through the streets, beat the fuck out of punks with horse whips, and throw macaroni shells on their twitching bodies on the ground as our calling card. Also, hit on chicks by tickling them with feathers attached to the end of our….

Okay…?

That would be really stupid!

And for that, we'd do it, anyways! Ha! Damn, will we stir some shit up, with the scene we'd cause, doing all that in the Bronx.

Michael chuckled some more, then went back to the whole matter of being a prude today.

Yeah, today it's all about being a prude. What you got now in the 80s is a bunch of sexually repressed freaks, trying hard to be conservative, forgetting about all the crazy shit they did in the 60s and 70s. But… then again, considering all the drugs people were taking, then, I can understand why most seemed to have forgotten all about those years. Ha! But anyways… most guys can't attract women, today, because they're placing zero to no effort acknowledging what they got, while women will spend their entire lives trying to understand it. Guys don't want to be sexually appealing, and I bet they would even think being charming is gay, now, too. I mean, do you know how many hours I've spent in front of a mirror talking like Dean Martin trying to charm myself? Lots! You know how many hours I've spent working out kissing my biceps? More than I can remember. Of course, then there's cats like The Beefcakes, and a lot of guys now that do that, but do it for all the wrong reasons.

Michael then thought about those freaks.

I do it because I want to attract women. I don't want to lust after them, I really would rather have them lust after me! Have their

mouths water up looking at my junk, as much as mine does looking at theirs. Those freaks? I think for them it's just another form of dick measuring. I mean, why do I need a bod like Schwarzenegger, if I can already fuck up a gang of them with what I got? I already got tone, why go super mutant? Assholes! Everything always has to come down to the size of one's own member, I mean mine is only about 6 inches, 7 inches if I get really excited. Even 8 at tops. And, really, a vagina is only truly 4 inches deep, so I haven't heard any complaints over my size, as of yet. How much bigger does it need to get? I want to woe chicks, here, the humankind, what point is there to go bigger unless I'm planning to start swimming with sperm whales and shit? Hell, I'm pretty sure with what I got will be enough to chop down, that woman, Sheila's tree. And have that giant redwood of a woman screaming timber, too. All better than the rest of the Beefcakes at Big Dick's, I bet, would be able to manage. Fuck, she looked horny in there! Like she hadn't gotten any in a long time. Looking all antsy, as she started dancing around a little in place, doing the pee pee dance— but for her—doing the 'hurry up someone fuck me quick, so I can release myself this tension building up inside' dance. But since I'm pretty sure none of those studs, there, have been willing to ride her, just yet—all scared of her and shit, since she towers above most of them, that's why she looked so grateful to see me. Most of those Beefcakes were scared of her, because I'm sure her clit would be bigger than most of what they had, and that's why men hate women, in general, because women make them feel emasculated. Funny thing is with me, women make me feel emasculated, too, but for me… I think I like it?

Michael paused, for a moment, as he thought about that, then went on with guys like The Beefcakes.

So, I bet all those freaks, there, don't even have girlfriends. They're just working out to stroke their own, while being afraid that a woman might come along, and bite it off. Fuck! All you got there are some hardcore narcissists, macho-ing it up to see who can win the biggest douchebag of the decade award, and nothing else. Hardcore narcissists! And you know the myth behind it, right? If

you keep looking in too deeply, into your own reflection... you might slip, fall in, and drown.

Thought Michael, as he pictured himself, looking into his own eyes, and then got scared, for he started to feel lost in them. Like he... just fell into them.

What the... well, that was weird. I wonder what that was supposed to mean...?

First Tango in Paris.

Continuing on, Michael turned out of an alley, and could now see Manhattan's skyline from a distance.

Then there are the types that live in that city. Those rich assholes, that try to buy their way into women. Women like Letoya. I mean, I can understand ignorance from the likes of Tomboy that don't know better, but the extremes those Lizard People take things to is another story. They have no warmth, no grace, no charm, and no souls. They're not human. But still, they yearn for the same things we do. So, what you have there is a bunch of slimy, sleazy perverts who are loaded, trying to hit on some supermodel looking babes. Thinking if they pay chicks off enough, they'll get them to admire their scaly bodies, in exchange of admiring the warm body I gots here. But, of course, those creatures, there, have an advantage, money is a weakness most women share. But still, they aren't attracted to them. Not sexually, nor personality wise, nor anything else wise! They really hate them and find them disgusting. And ten times out of ten, I'm pretty damn sure those hot babes married to those rich assholes are going to be willing to kiss the end of my sweet dick, before kissing their rich asshole husband's wallets. Sure, those babes will stay with them when they need their bills paid off, but they're going to then sneak away, and come straight to—me—when they want to get their rocks off.

Then Michael remembered her, and her story.

Fine, you go ahead a marry a supermodel, buy her designer clothes, buy her summer homes, diamonds, Lamborghinis—and definitely do buy her lingerie! Thinking she'd ever wear them for you. But then buy her plane tickets, for two, to Paris. And you know what's going to happen next? She's going to take those tickets, and

take me with her, instead. Oh, I remember you Izabella! That was a lovely trip we had together.

Izabella Gandara was a Brazilian supermodel, married to some Wall Street Top Hat back in the 70s, which Michael had picked up at a fancy club in Manhattan.

Wait? Was it Studio 54... I don't remember.

Until Doris Day at Big Dick's Gym, Michael had never met a taller woman in his life. She was 6'3, very dark skin, with an ass so plump, you could set drinks on top of, no tits.

I kinda like small breasts though. I mean, I like me some big ass pair of hooters, too. But small ones can be so cute! Plus, I think they get more sensation out of me doing things to them, and they seem more responsive to it.

Also, she had long dark hair that hung down to the length of her miniskirts, and when she'd turn, her hair would swoosh around like gigantic sails, looking to catch wind to the East Indies.

Wow, never seen a woman gush so much in my life! And seeing her climax really was a sight for sore eyes... and in a funny way! Early in the process of working her coal mines, her face would just freeze over, looking dumbfounded, as she'd go cross-eyed. Her mouth would also be halfcocked open, making no sounds, whatsoever. But the second it registered, she'd go even more cross-eyed, and would let out this long-winded moan that was really very unappealing to listen to.

Michael then began chuckling, trying to remember how it sounded.

Oh! It really sounded terrible! It sounded like a moaning Scotsman, wearing a kilt, getting his balls licked by a goat, while bagpipes are being played in the background. It sounded like a camel that had eaten a ton of oysters, that had gone bad a month ago, making nauseated sounds, about to barf. It sounded like she was possessed by Gilbert Gottfried, who was possessed by Bobcat Goldthwait, who was possessed by Sam Kinison, who was possessed by a banshee, that was getting butt-fucked by a donkey. No sweet heavenly music, there! I could have never imagined such terrible, silly, and downright scary sounding noises, coming from such a beautiful creature like her.

But after that...?

It was like watching a giant dam crumble before me. Fucking Niagara Falls! Then she'd start whipping her hair around, slashing me across the face with it. Ha! That's how I got my pussy eating scar across my left cheek. Except for how goofy she looked and sounded, once she climaxed, it really was some good fucking! Good fucking—indeed! Damn—what a sex machine she was!

But then, Michael remembered the rest, and the stuff that really wasn't all that fun.

Yeah, but then again, she was even dumber than Annabelle. Way, way, way dumber! Annabelle was just naive and happy-go-lucky. Her stupidity was because she was ignorant and inexperienced. It didn't involve possible brain damage, which this Izabella must have had. This woman was dumber than a cow licking up the barrel of a shotgun, pointed at its head. I'd tell her a joke, she'd then stare at me for a minute, then start laughing, and then ask me what was so funny about it. I remember how she dropped a roll of toilet paper in the bowl, and decided to flush, anyways, not understanding how it was going to clog the pipes, forcing me to call room service to get it fixed. She'd break everything she'd touch. I mean, how do you break a fridge? Oh yeah! You leave the door open to cool the room down, even though the place has air conditioning, and when I asked why she didn't use that, her excuse was she didn't know how to turn it on. Stupid giraffe of a woman! And you don't just take two plane tickets, and run off with another guy! I mean—again! With G. Knicks story—I didn't know she was with somebody. At Studio 54… was it Studio…?

Oh, nevermind!

Whatever bar I was at, where I hit on her, it was then she offered the tickets, not even mentioning her hubby. And luckily, I had a fake passport, for whenever I used to ride with the Mad Mad Leviathans to Canada. But then all of a sudden, after the third day in Paris, while I have her bent over, fucking her in the jacuzzi, after she cums, and does that special moan of hers….

That also kinda sounds like a moose straining its brain to do arithmetic.

Ha! I kill myself!

She then turns her head around, looking at me all cross-eyed—which sorta confuses a person for a sec to see! And finally mentions her husband, and how he had bought another ticket to come find out what had happened, then goes back to moaning, leaving me with that as food for thought.

Michael then rolled his eyes, remembering that awkward moment, especially considering the position he was in while she told him. Also, remembering how she then got curious, and asked him if something was wrong, since he didn't seem to be in the mood, any longer.

Wow, she was stupid! And later that day, I had to explain to her how that was a bad thing, which she didn't seem to get. But, when she finally did, understanding that that could mean the end of her marriage, and no more rich moneybags husband supporting her stupid ass, she then said 'good-bye' to me in that hotel, and left. Not realizing I didn't exactly—belong there! Leaving me in that hotel, with unpaid bills, and in that country without any means of getting back. And I know she didn't just ditch me—I mean—she bought a whole bunch of clothes in Paris for me, since I looked like a greaser back then. Spent three thousand dollars on me, so a plane ticket back shouldn't have been an issue.

Michael chuckled, remembering how stupid that supermodel was, and then grew a bit compassionate towards her. The woman was just so dumb and oblivious, that Michael couldn't help but to find it charming.

Yeah, but then I had to spend a week wandering around the streets of Paris, and, man, are French people all a bunch of assholes, too! I didn't believe the stories that they could be that bad compared to douchebags you find here in New York, but they're far, far worse! Those Voltaires, there, have turned being a pompous windbag into an art form. You try to be viciously insulting to them, and they'll smile, and grade your performance. As much of an asshole as I am, I'd probably get a D, a passing grade, if they were grading me on a curve based on that country's average. Fucking cocksuckers thought they could fuck with me, just because they took me for some dumb American tourist. I remember I went into that one bar,

and some frog, there, spilled his drink on me on purpose. So, I introduced him to my German half, him and five other... wait a second... ten other French cocksuckers. But then their stupid képi wearing Jacques Clouseaus were called in, and I had to ditch the joint. Shit, that was a stupid week! Although, it was nice of that pretty blonde florist girl—what was her name?

Michael frowned seeing how he couldn't remember her name.

Well, whatever her name was, it was still nice of her to allow me to stay at her place above her shop. She was a bit chubby, but in a good way. All baby fat, really, that made her all cushy, and accentuated her curves in a delightful way. Made her more attractive to the touch than she would have been if she was thinner. Too bad she was a lesbian, or I would have showed her my gratitude, in the best way I know how. Also, extremely nice of her to fuck her girlfriend next to me that one morning, after making me breakfast, and allowing me to watch.

Then Michael's alarms went off.

Wait, was she just a lesbian? Why did she keep staring at me while licking her... oh, fuck me! She did want me to join in! Why didn't I... I was eighteen years old at the time, and an idiot... end of story!

The Better Half.

Continuing on, Michael began to think about whether or not he had spent too much time trying to turn himself into the ultimate tail chaser; completely focused on what women thought of him and trying to conform to their needs.

It can be exhausting, though. I feel like I've practically spent my entire life doing so. At least, starting at twelve... for, whatever reason...?

And then remembered what Gab was trying to tell him over Nikki.

So... that's what you were trying to drive at, there. Weren't you, Gab? Calling me pussy whipped.

And with that, Michael began to look at things a little deeper in.

They mean everything to me! Fine, I'll admit it. They do! They simply do. There's something truly mystical and magical about their presence compared to our own. I see it and feel it, too, and I know every other guy does so, as well. I look at other Joe Schmo

guys like me, and all I see is another worthless face, like my own, searching for something greater and grander in this world to love and value. And women are it. Only difference there is with me compared to most other guys, is, I've had to reinforce my sense of value, to show worthiness. By working on my sex appeal, my sexiness, and my charm, in order to stand out. I've had trials and errors, tons and tons of trials and errors. But, I've learned from them and moved on. And even though, it's true, you'd have to be really pussy whipped to go that far, all for the sake of making someone's... anyone's... head turn and smile. Here's the thing, Gab, it's what's gotten me laid, multiple times, and it's what's left you high and dry.

Something... Michael had noticed. About his chum, that he didn't say.

Yeah, Gab! I can tell about things like that! And, from what I saw from you tonight? What I saw almost had me in tears, feeling sad, for how lonely and sad you must feel. Mr. Owner of a Lonely Heart. You, there!

Anyways, here's the thing: people can genuinely tell when you've placed a lot of time and effort into a passion. And when they see that, they commend you for it. Especially if it's something they've been enslaved—yeah! I'm using that word! Enslaved, to have to work at. I mean, that's all women are allowed to excel in, really. Their looks. Even now in the 80s, with women CEOs to corporations, and shit. Even though a few might have excelled that far in their goals and dreams. The majority are still left worrying day and night about their looks, since it's the only thing that matters to anyone in the world. With women, that's all that matters, day and night, that's all anyone thinks of when it comes to them. 'Is she hot? Is she hot? Is she hot?' That's all anyone cares about, when caring about them. And God help them when they get old and wrinkly.

That, and how sexy they can be. Objectivica—yeah, Gab! I know what that word means, you'd be surprised how 'not dumb' I've become since the span of time you haven't seen me.

Michael then realized he was picturing Gab way too much, with these

conversations he was, supposedly, having with himself. And decided to drop it, and move on with what he was thinking:

> But anyways... it's like this: most guys I see, decide never to put hardly any attention towards their sex appeal, how women are enslaved to do so, to get ahead in life. So, comparing me from the lot, and all the effort I've made to stand out, it's something—I know—they end up appreciating. Since, look! Here's a guy wanting to cater to our needs and desires, who isn't just gonna try to take or buy them, like most guys will try and do. So many guys, so many... I've come across, who try to buy that shit. That, or, they get all domineering and....

But then Michael got checked, by himself.

> I do the whole domineering thing, because, deep down...?
>
> Umm... wait!
>
> Wait... okay! I know now. It's because they love it. They do! It's a fact—Jack! They do. They most certainty do! I mean... be a nice guy and see how far that gets you.

Michael now began to feel depressed. Very depressed. But came back to terms with what he was thinking.

> I don't like my gender. I don't! We really are worthless if you come to think about it. What the fuck are we good at, except being all domineering and taking? That's all we're good at. And that's the only thing—the only thing! That's kept us in charge of the world. Since we're bigger and stronger, and if they didn't like it, they could then answer to the back of our hands, as we smack them across the face, putting them in place. Since... violence. Violence! Is, and will always be, the ultimate means to resolve anything.
>
> I fucking hate my gender. Not only are we worthless. But also, wretched, and evil. And they're far better than us, in every way.

'But are women free of sin and evil doing?' Michael now thought.

> No, it's different with them. I mean... it's different.

And then, Michael thought of that bitch. And how badly she had wronged him. And now, was left feeling not so sure.

Fine, they're capable of it. They are! But, still, it's different for them. For instance, I know how vain they can be. I mean, fuck! If vanity had a face, it would definitely be that of a woman! But still, it's different with them. And the difference is…

The difference is…

It is…?

Umm…?

They ain't inherently evil like men are.

And with that, Michael felt like he was onto something.

Whatever wrong that comes out of them, was never originally there from the start. So, evil is never inherently there. And anything found, was probably put there… and by a man. What's that story about Adam and Eve, and that apple? The story is all backwards, if you ask me. Plus, they can't help but be empty vessels, since it's just the way they're built. I mean, look at sexual intercourse, who's filling up who in the act? It's just the way they're both physically and psychologically built. They're not capable of being inherently….

But then, Michael thought of her, again, and….

Stop thinking about her. That religious fanatic! That woman had to be possessed, or something. Going all the way out to LA—and for what?

Michael then stared down at the Rosary, that was half hanging out of his pocket, swinging by his side, and decided not to delve too deeply into that matter, as he had as a teen.

Anyways, they're better than us. So, don't start calling me pussy-whipped, just because I'm inclined to side with them more.

With women, Michael felt at eased and connected. Around other guys, there was always that competitive nature that demanded confrontation—one to stand out!

Clashing of the fists! Is what I call it.

And, on an average of fifty percent of the confrontations Michael had had, always had something to do with a woman. Sometimes, not even really trying, he'd manage to charm some bright-eyed filly with a

boyfriend, and he'd end up dodging chairs and beer bottles for the rest of the night.

> Ah, fucking G. Knicks! You said nothing at that dojo, there, about Kimie—why didn't you? He should have known better, though. It didn't take me long to realize what type of girl Kimie… but… then again…?

Michael then began looking at things in a different light.

> Now that I think about it, maybe it was G. Knicks that made her that way? Fuck what Gab thinks of the guy, he always came across as an asshole to me, and why would I think he was picking on him, if it wasn't so? Gab used to get picked on a lot back then, anyways. And G. Knicks also came across as a conniving two-faced bastard, too, himself. He probably would pick on Gab, and then switch over, and pretend to be his friend. That's how you really win over people to make them into your personal plaything. First, put them down to make yourself seem superior; then when they're feeling low, raise them up to your level, and since a guy like Gab usually tends to feel inferior most of the time, anyways, that uplifting feeling he gets reaching newer heights, and feeling accepted by G. Knicks, after he torn him down, some, makes him feel like a new man. Yeah, probably was G. Knicks that made Kimie into such a slut. Except he did things with her in reverse, to put her down like a dog, so then he could fuck her like one. First, he'd be kind to her, and when he'd win her over, he'd then switch it around to get what he really wanted. Made her feel like the only good she was to him, or anyone, was when she'd be on all fours, begging him to smack her ass, and yank down hard on her hair, with all his might. Just the way G. Knicks would love it.

Thought Michael. While licking his lips.

But then Michael thought about how he related to women. Especially during sex.

> Fine! I fuck women like I'm racing them in the Kentucky Derby, too. All 'Giddy up' and shit! Smack! Moan! But I do that shit only when I know they want it like that. I'd would never do that to degrade them if I knew they really didn't like it. G. Knicks, on the

other hand, would really do it to put the girl down. All take and no give, as he'd try and break her in like a mule.

Michael then shook off that line of thought, as he realized if he kept this up....

In the end, I'm a guy, too! So, I'm no good to begin with, no matter how much I'd wish not to be.

He'd be going in circles, all night long, when he really had bigger fish to fry.

What if...?

Sigh!

Reaching Letoya's projects, Michael came across a Hispanic couple making a scene out front. There was a wimpy looking guy with a long ass nose and a bit of a Jewish messy do, all entangled and drooping from the sides. Who was slouching over a Toyota, holding a box full of goods, while begging his girlfriend in Spanish (and this is what Michael heard, since he knew Spanish fluently):

"Flores! Please believe me, I didn't cheat on you! I didn't! How many times do I have to tell you what I was doing last week? I wasn't hitting on any chicks. I was at my friend's place—not some bar—why can't you believe me?"

And as much as Michael felt like moving on....

Fuck it! I need some entertainment!

Thought Michael, as he stopped short from entering the building, leaned up against a wall holding some distance between the couple, lit up a cig, and pretended he wasn't listening. Also, kept his bleeding side away from them so the blood wouldn't draw their attention. As Michael did so, he kept his radar on the couple through his peripherals and began picking up all the signals he was sure they wouldn't when facing each other.

These two seem very lily to me. Not streetwise at all. Not the confrontational types one bit. Or, in other words, they don't know how to read into a person like my sort can do. Don't know nothing about the hustle and bustle—not one bit! I mean, I bet I can read them better than they can read themselves, and they could have known each other for years, while I just met them. Lily people are just that clueless and lost. I mean, I look into their eyes, and I see

weakness. The type of eyes centered on their own pitiful selves, instead of the people around them when they're interacting. The type that will never look you in the eyes when they talk to you, because they're either afraid of you, or, they don't even know you exist. Right now, I bet the guy's all thinking:

'What's wrong with me? Why don't you love me anymore? What do I have to say and do to change how you feel? Why are you being so mean to me? This isn't fair, I didn't do anything!

But....
Then again, maybe I'm just that pathetic, and really don't deserve you to begin with. Maybe, that's really the problem. I wish I was different! Why can't I be different, for once?'

While she's thinking... wait a sec...?
Looking into the girl's face, Michael then saw something different; something he didn't expect at first; it seemed very odd to him how the slouch was the one seeming so pained by everything, while this Flores girl wasn't. The slouch was leaning all up on her, begging for support and acceptance, while she kept to herself; her mind focused on other places, matters, or possible people.

Or people?
The couple then began conversing again in Spanish:

"I got nowhere else to go," said he.

Oh, so he's getting kicked out. Probably doesn't have a job and has been mooching off of her. But then again...?

"I'm sorry, Juan, I can't... I can't," said she, still seeming to be minding other matters, instead of the one at hand.

"Flores? You just want me to stay at a crummy motel while...?"

"While what," barked out she, as finally, her attention seemed centered.

Ha! Oh, you gotta be shitting me! Maybe she ain't all lily, just pretends to be so. Didn't see it at first, but now I sense the hustle is strong with this one.
Thought Michael, as he began to see the bigger picture. The Missy was

now staring holes into the slouch, as the slouch eyes peered away, and then spotted and directed them at Michael.

Ah crud! I been discovered! I'm in this picture now too. Ha!

The couple wasn't saying much, anymore, but there was still a lot of tension there, as Flores continued to intimidate Juan, as Juan shook his head at Michael, as if to say, "can you believe this shit?" And now the girl took notice of how Michael was also there. And. At first, she tried to redirect her intimidating stare at Michael. But then, when she noticed the enormous size of Michael's manhood.

Both figurative, and nonfigurative. Yeah, I got a hard on right now.

I got a hard on—all the time! What, didn't you know that?

Anyways, when she noticed it, she immediately shied away. Then cringed up, and then began yelling at Juan, in Spanish, again:

"It's your fault—and don't fucking be giving me any bullshitting excuses, I know what you been up to!"

And then she looked into her own eyes, the woman in the mirror, and Michael now knew what was up.

"How long do you want me to stay in a motel for," asked he.

"Until I find my own place… I mean, you don't expect me to stay at a motel after what you did to—"

"No! No! I understand."

"Well then," concluded she.

And said nothing else, while staring at her nails, also trying to sneak another peek at Michael.

Is that a giddy little schoolgirl smile I see you trying to sprout, there?

Juan made a couple of more attempts to cling onto Flores, again, and Michael couldn't help but to start feeling sorry for the slouch, as he saw how futile it was to do so.

Sorry, Mack, she's really not that into you—at all! Never has been, it's really that obvious. Save yourself from the humiliation and show some dignity!

"How long am I supposed to stay in a motel for? I don't have that much money to pay the rent here at the apartment, and stay at one… I might have to sleep in the car after a couple of…."

Flores just shook her head, as she faked a look of sympathy—which Michael picked up on.

Can she really be that fucked up? Wow! Simply wow!

After another minute of waiting for a response from her, the slouch gave up, picked up the rest of his stuff, placed them in his car, sighed, and then left. Now it was only Michael and Flores, there, and Michael had a theory he wanted to test out, to see if his conclusions were right about what was really going on.

You know what the deal is here? Well, here is my theory: she's the one that's been cheating on him, but she wants to pass the blame, so she can get his mangy ass out of the picture, as a means of dealing with her guilt. That, and she has no place else to stay, so she's kicking him out of his own apartment. So she can go back to fucking other dudes, in peace. Fucking other dudes— like me!

Thought Michael, while pointing himself out, while his collar did that popping by themselves bit, again. As Michael smirked.

I can tell when a girl's got the craving, and this one, here, seems full of it. Practically skippin'! Of course, I can't jump to conclusions. I might be wrong, though. So, now I just have to test this theory to see the truth.

And with that, Michael began smiling, with his cock....

I can do that!

And began sending out all the right vibes, to see how she'd respond.

You like badboys? Well bow your ass down to the badboy prince!

As Michael continued vibrating, Flores, there, stood perfectly still, like a deer sensing the presence of a predator: of a wolf. As Michael thought:

Shhhh! Be quiet... be very, very quiet... we hunting pussy, tonight. Howl!

After more than a second, Flores tried to hide a faint smile, but then cringed up with teeth, as she went ballistic on Michael in English.

"Hey, you creep! Don't you have anything better to do than eavesdrop on other peoples' conversations? Are you that spineless and pathetic? Get the fuck outta here, before I walk over there, and smack that smilllllllle straight off your disgusting face!"

Michael almost busted out with laughter hearing her blow up like that, but kept it shut, because he knew that was going to blow the experiment.

"What a fucking sleazy pile if slime you are, buddy! Stop smiling at me! No, I don't think you're a hunk!"

Oh? You think I'm a hunk? Why, thank you! Ha! Yeah, she's doing that staring me up and down, and mostly down, thing. And, boy, are her eyes telling me a different story. She's probably fighting the urge to start licking her lips, right about now, checking out the dish I gots to offer. Oh! When will I ever meet a woman that's different—just once!

But then Michael thought of her, and almost dropped the ball, again.

No! Don't send those vibes! That'll blow it, for sure!

"What, you think you're tough? Ha! Well... you should meet my hermanos, they're a part of the Jam City 5s!"

You mean those guys I once beat the fuck out of, ten of, at some strip club? Back in the day... okay? Maybe if you had more than ten brothers, I might start taking you seriously. Might! But then again, you are Catholic... so...?

"And they'll cut your fucking balls off, and feed it to you, you bitch! Ha! That's right! That's what I think of you! You're a spineless, disgusting, little bitch! And actually—fuck my hermanos! You look like such a sniveling loser, I bet I could do that, myself! Fuck you!"

Okay... I'm starting to get bored with this yipping chihuahua, here. It's about time I make my move. Time to go viciously fucking horny mode.

And with that, Michael took off his sheep's clothing, and the wolf was now out. Flores? Made a bah sound and looked like she almost pissed herself.

Yeah? Just don't let it all out. Don't want to scare this poor girl. Can't let that happen, now, if I want to test this theory.

As Michael began prancing up to Flores, the girl looked like she was going to freak out and start screaming. But, before she could, as she opened up her mouth wide to do so, she felt **it** enter, and then felt it.

You like it... don't you?

And... ooooooohhh... she did! She most certainly did!

"Hey... I see you dumped that loser, there. So now how about you and me...?"

"What," bahed out Flores, as her eyes went all black, from her expanding pupils.

Okay… if she's a good person, she should then think about Juan and reject me. If she doesn't….

"I don't know, I was kinda admiring you back there—you and your feisty ass! So how about you and me…?"

"What," moaned out Flores, as she began to blush.

"I don't know, princess. Your wish is my command," dished out Michael.

And with that, Michael now had his answer; seeing as how ecstatic Flores was getting, all hyperventilating, as if Michael was already giving it to her.

"Well, since you put it like that… how can a girl resist," moaned out Flores, again, as Michael began to fill up with sour lemons.

Fucking bitch! Didn't even think about poor Juan, there, once—did she? I'm done! I have my answer now.

"Oh, what's wrong? You're bleeding all over the place," cried Flores, as she finally noticed Michael's wound.

The side of Michael's mouth cringed up, some, as he eyed and judged her, a bit more.

Oh, this ol'? Where did it all come from…?

Well, you see, I'm a psycho killer!

And I've just arrived after having murdered and chopped up a couple of whores in the alley over there. Anyways… would you be interested in coming along to see my handiwork? What I've created really is a work of art… worth dieing for!

Thought Michael, and really felt like saying all that to Flores, here. But then:

Ah… fuck me! I can't!

Didn't.

Then turned around. And started heading back into the building.

"Oh, you look like you need help… do you want me to call for an ambulance?"

Please, I don't need your concern! I find a lot of things wrong with the fact that you'd show more care to a stranger like me, than you

would to someone you're supposed to love.

Thought Michael, as he entered the building, and didn't say a word.

Women can't help but be empty vessels? Inherently they're incapable of being evil? G. Knicks turning Kimie into a slut? Shit! Maybe I am a little pussy whipped to have been thinking that way? I'm guessing, having been in prison so long, dealing with dudes all the time, has really warped my perception of things, and how I'd like to see them. But, then again, maybe I've always been that way? Gab noticed it way back then, when I was with….

Was she just using me back then as this Flores girl, here, was using…?

Now, Michael was hyperventilating, thinking about his relationship with her. And the thought that Nikki was just….

Trying to satisfy some badboy lust, before moving onto some college football star, or, a… oh fuck! I hope that wasn't all there was to… no! No! It wasn't!

Thought Michael, as he pulled out his Rosary, again, and kissed the crucifix some more.

All My Exes….

Michael was now finally at Letoya's door, and after he knocked, he saw her looking through the peephole, and then began hearing the sound of lock after lock being undone. This took a while.

"Michael," called out Letoya, with a welcoming grin.

"Letoya, might if I come in?"

"Sure, of course," replied Letoya, as she opened her door, completely.

As much of a dump as the rest of the building was, Letoya's place seemed really nice and cozy. Even with all the madness outside, Letoya seemed to have decided to ignore the havoc, and had settled in for the night with some black lights, wine, and Sade's 'Smooth Operator' playing on her Hi-Fi stereo. At this point, Michael began to feel like staying a bit longer than needed.

"Oh, Michael, you're bleeding all over the place," cried out Letoya, as her eyes scurried along the trail of blood that was following him.

"Yeah, sorry about that," responded Michael.

"Get on the couch, and I'll see what I can scrounge up in my med cabinet," ordered Letoya.

She quickly hurried to her bathroom to grab her stuff. Michael then sorta slumped onto the floor, holding his wound.

"Michael, I said get on the couch. Don't worry about the blood, I can clean it up later," ordered Letoya, again.

Michael really didn't feel like moving right now; he felt faded, and the skin on his arms were slowly growing pale, right before his eyes. Plus, he really did feel skittish and unwilling to ruin Letoya's leather black surroundings.

Although, I can see I've already ruined her alabaster carpeting… ah crud!

"Michael, get on the… fine! I'll treat you there!"

She quickly got to work sanitizing Michael's wound with alcohol.

"I think you've lost a lot of blood, and I think you need to—"

"I'm fine—Letoya—I'm fine," responded Michael, again, eyeing her while she went to work on his side.

Feels good to have a woman tend to your wounds. I'd like to see if that Florence Nightingale effect could come out of this. Wait? Florence Nightingale effect? Where did I get that from? Oh yeah! Lea Thompson is such a cutie pie in that movie.

Once Letoya was done bandaging his wound, Michael quickly got up to try and prove that he didn't need to go to a hospital.

"You see, I'm fine."

But then Michael realized by doing that, he had definitely spoiled the chances of that Florence Nightingale thing taking effect, and felt a bit letdown by his showy actions.

Fucking idiot!

"You sure you're fine, Michael?"

Michael shrugged. Then nodded.

"Okay, I did what I could," replied Letoya, blowing out a sigh.

Letoya knew how stubborn Michael could be. If she ignored him, and tried calling for an ambulance, anyways, he might leave. As Michael continued to breathe in the well decorated interior he'd expect from a girl like Letoya (that had womanly fragrances of jasper and jasmine hovering about) Michael felt keen to take a load off on that couch, now that he wasn't trailing blood. And to remind himself how far he'd come

from that crummy, smelly studio wasteland he was brooding in before.

Fuck it! I need a bit of R&R right now!

As Letoya rushed to her kitchen to get Michael some refreshments, Michael went on to the do his usual when women passed him by, and thought:

Almost perfect.

Then....

Okay, I like Letoya, and that's mean!

"Thanks, Letoya! I was around the neighborhood, and if you had moved out, or if you hadn't been home, I don't know what I would have done," said Michael, as he waited for her smile.

"Well, doesn't seem like you've lost too much blood, you seem okay, now," said Letoya, while blowing a sigh of exhaustion.

Michael smiled, seeing how he'd—put her to work! And Letoya picked up on that, just gave him a look.

"What's going on, Michael? What happened at Stumpy's place," asked Letoya, without the smile.

"You didn't see," asked Michael.

"I left after you knocked out Boomatic, and left him bleeding on the floor. After that, I didn't feel like being there that minute. Plus, I was only there seeing a friend, who never showed up," explained Letoya.

"I'm just looking for Radboy—that's all," responded Michael, hoping Letoya wasn't bothered about what he did to Boomatic.

Fuck that pimp!

Letoya gave Michael some pink lemonade, and as she looked down at Michael sitting on the couch, she did her old demure smile Michael used to love; the one she knew he was waiting for. The reason that Michael loved it so much, was because he knew just how much passion and fire was really churning underneath. Michael eyed Letoya, as he began to entertain the notion that he should have really been flipping quarters for her, instead.

As weird as that idea is... so fucking superstitious and... weird! Ugh.

Seeing an old face like hers standing before him, brought out from the familiar past, and brought to life in the present, made Michael want to

stay longer than really needed, now.

Maybe all night.

As much as Michael wanted to move on to 1999, this was beginning to seem more important to him. He already had his rompous-pompous moments at Stumpy's, and at Big Dick's Gym, and maybe that was all the catharsis he needed for tonight.

You know what? Maybe the Radboy matter can wait for way later tonight. Maybe even tomorrow. He's not leaving any time soon. I still got business to take care of with him. So, let it wait!

As Michael went back to eyeing Letoya, he began staring at her lushes' lips; her old familiar lips; lips that had layer over layer of crevasses packed with evening doe; lips so wet and juicy, that they could drive any man with a dry peace hysterically out of his mind. A hysteria Michael remembered, oh too well, and now wanted to be a part of again.

Fuck me, she'd give some good head! The—best! Well, almost better than….

Ahem!

Eight months cooped up in that halfway shithole, and maybe this is what I really need right now. Years cooped up in that hole-in-the-ground Attica, and maybe this is what can finally uplift me from there, and set me free…?

Since getting out of prison, being a nymphomaniac as he had always been, first thing Michael had obviously done was to dive in headfirst to satisfy his male needs.

First night I went out? I realized how rusty I had gotten after blowing it three times coming on too hard, like I just got out of prison—as I literally had! I mean, I scared the crap out of those poor girls. Probably thought I was a maniac, and I fucking hate when I come across like that. I know some women deep down absolutely love the maniac thing, and that whole masochistic/sadomasochistic shit. But deep down, I hate the idea of being that way, to its core. I rather drop dead than to have that! Fuck, I gotta control my lust, sometimes! Of course, every time you blow it with one chick, it's probably best to switch bars, since every chick in there notices and keeps score—which is sorta vain of them! It's always a popularity contest. They can't just give you a shot on their own terms, because they really have none, and base

their entire judgment on what other....

Michael then shook off his pessimism, and went on.

Luckily in the second bar—some sports bar... how the fuck I got there, I couldn't tell you. Since it's full of those beer drinking, beer belly loser men, that couldn't woo a chick even if they looked and possessed the charisma of Richard Chamberlain from Thorn Birds....

Oh! I know how swooned women get over that Thorn Birds crud. And all that forbidden love with a humbled handsome priest. I know! Ha!

But anyways, at that sports bar, looking to better my charms. After a minute of comparing myself to the competition—which there was so much of! End sarcasm. It all started coming back, as I remembered how to pace it. She was some ruggedly good-looking platinum blonde gal from Texas, with a rectangular face, and a lot of rectangular features, yet, still very effeminate and attractive in her own special way. She had a thick ass tan and a thick ass accent, who kept talking about football as if I cared. I hate watching sports, I'd rather be playing them if I had to! I mean, it was pretty damn obvious I had no interest in the NFL, since I made no comment, whatsoever, about it. And wasn't able to answer any of her questions about statistics, teams, players, the Superbowl, Joe Montana—whatnot! And after a while, she didn't seem that interested in talking about it, either. But kept on going. Hmm, talking about sports had to be a comfort zone for her. It had to have been her way of dealing with being as overwhelmingly anxious and horny for me, as she was after I gave her my old pick-up line....

And, my word, was her pussy a meaty one! Felt like I was going to have a heart attack scarfing down that foot long roast beef hoagie sandwich... with extra, extra, extra roast beef. And smothered with melted cheese. Ha!

Michael now pounded his fist over his heart twice, thinking about it.

"Michael, are you all right," asked Letoya.

Michael phased back into reality, and gave a look of deer in headlights.

"Oh, yeah… of course," Michael said.
Anyways….

After I did….
Giving the pick-up line, I mean… not after… ahem!
Michael pounded his heart one more time.

After the pick-up line… it was funny seeing her eyes blow up like that for a second, giving me the sheep eyes, once the wolf came out. Pupils all big and round, and dilated. It's the look they give when you know it's a done deal, and there's nothing else you need to do to cement it. You've taken them in. They're yours now, completely. You own them. And you can do with them whatever you please, and in the end, they'll thank you for it. It's the same look Flores gave me just a while ago, looking like she's already found her prince, as she fantasizes about dropping to her knees to pay homage to the majesty that is my crown jewel. Ha!

But anyways, with that cowgirl, even though it took her a good minute to respond—saying anything! Which in her case, was more of that boring small talk that people like to feed themselves, when they're feeling too anxious to say what's really on their minds. Even though it took her a good minute, she never did fully recover. After that, she was blinking fast, trying desperately to keep eye contact, like she still had some fight within her. Sighing and biting her lips every few seconds, as her eyes would escape south, then instantly would jump back up, again, like she was spooked by what she saw down there. Eyes escaping south, probably trying to get a glimpse of my… hmm… I wonder what?
Michael then grew a sinister smirk, but then allowed compassion to fill up again.
I find it cute, though. She was awkward as fuck for the rest of the night, but it's an awkwardness I know that comes from her just craving it—that bad! But unable to express how she does so. So fucking cute! I love it, really. For as long as I know they like me, they can be as awkward and anxious as they want, and it won't affect me in the slightest. Awkwardness might come off as a red

light for most to stop engaging, but when you know the story behind it, their story, and what they truly feel, and when you're the strong sort, you'll know how to turn it around, and make it green.

Then Michael thought of her, again.

That cowgirl really seemed like the repressed type, as if words like 'sex' and 'orgasm' were nowhere to be found in her vocabulary. But definitely in her thoughts, considering how often she kept trying to sneak a peep at my goods. After we left that bar, and once I got her to my place, and I undressed her, there was something then I found very delightful about her. She was really physically attractive in the most peculiar way. Small breasts, small ass—fine! But she had an elongated torso, that I strangely found appealing. Midriff all oval shape, with that long crevice running down the center—very appealing! And it had to be her erogenous zone, because when I started rubbing her stomach, and running my finger up and down that crevice, she'd begin to stutter... talking about the Dallas Cowboys! Ha! Silly girl! Then she'd shift her balance from one leg to another. Never seen a woman stutter and tremble so much, especially after I gave her what I promised at that sports bar, there. Wasn't the moaning type, but she'd tremble so much, that she'd start to chatter her teeth. Would have loved to have heard her moan in that accent of hers. Loved! Pity! But then she started to spasm out like a possessed person, as her quakes started going off the Richter scale. Really must have been giving it to her good, seems like she'd also had gone without the touch for some time, as I had.

Also, kinda funny how she got too excited, and accidentally kneed me in the jaw, almost knocking me out, cold, in the middle of it.

"Ha!"

"What's so funny, Michael?"

"Nothing, Letoya."

Damn, that girl could throw a blow!

But then she spent the rest of the night feeling guilty, and apologizing for what she done, every five minutes or so. There's another pussy eating scar for you. Ha! Fucking apologizing to me

in the middle of doggy-style, then in the shower, and then after I blew my load in her mouth. Who does that? Silly Texas girl! I thought you people were all supposed to be really tough and made of nails, and never the apologetic sort. Yet every Texan I've met has been really very sweet and friendly, and even docile, I would say.

Michael smiled thinking about her, but then realized something that deeply annoyed him.

Wait… what was her name?

That now really began to annoy him.

Fuck no! What was her name—I really liked her! Please don't tell me I forgot her name, too. She was the first woman I've been with in years. How could I have forgotten something as important as that, already? Plus, she gave me like five hundred dollars, seeing the conditions I was living in, in that crummy halfway house. Also, her number. And practically begged me to come see her if I was ever down in Dallas. Even suggesting she'd pay for my trip down there. Said she was newly separated from her husband, and had kicked him out—another beer drinking loser Dallas Cowboys fan, I can only imagine—and had a giant house to herself, and would love to have someone around to keep her and her kids company.

And now, Michael started to ponder on that possibility.

Hmm, a big ol' house down in Dallas, with horses, and shit. And all I have to do is play Mr. Mom. Play with her kids, take them to school, tend to the house chores while she's out working and earning the big bread… since she has a college education and all. And then, tend to the horses. And, I've always had a thing for horses, and horseback riding—just never done it. Beautiful animals! I would love that!

Wait, Michael, I don't remember her mentioning owning horses. Did she, or are you just stereotypically imagining that she would? Since you see her as some cowgirl from Dallas, and you're thinking of that Dallas TV show, even though she told you her profession was that of a district attorney, and she lived in the inner city, and not on some ranch.

Stereotypically imagining it… so?

Nothing, just making sure.

O… kay.

Anyways… I think I would like that. Better than the living conditions I'm in now. And, later that night, I'd just have to take her kids to bed, and tell them a bedtime story, and tuck them to sleep….

And then later on that night… tuck her ass to sleep!
Slap! Moan!
And that's that… ha!

Hmm… I think I would like that lifestyle.
Thought Michael, now truly considering it.
Fuck, I might get fat, though. Nothing but cheesy roast beef sandwiches every day and….
I think… wait…

What did I do with her number…?

Fuck!
Come on! Please, please, please don't tell me I…?
And as pissed as he was to this revelation, then, something else occurred to Michael.
Wait a second? I didn't just get with her to hustle sex and money out of her… did I? I mean, I liked her a lot.
Yet! You…!
I forgot her name? And lost her number? No, no, no! That can't be possible! Only a fucking dog would do that! Like that Russian prick, Sputnik. A misogynistic asshole only out for himself, and…
I couldn't have… could I?
Michael now began to realize something about himself, he wasn't completely aware of, until now. Something that had to do with that Texas girl, and several other women he'd been with, in the last few weeks. Which involved both sex, and especially money.
Am I really that much of a piece of…?
But before the realization could be fully cemented, Letoya accidentally dropped something in the kitchen, and bent over to pick it up. And with

the sight of Letoya's juicy supple ass, Michael was back in form, again.

Damn, Letoya! You been working out, or what?

The Mouthbreather.

Back when Michael was in prison, at the time, he was seriously feeling like he was going to lose his mind if he didn't feel the touch of a woman again.

I need it! I'm not a perv... well... maybe a little. But I need it! It's like a spell. I just need it to feel sane, really.

Thought Michael, as 'I Want To Know What Love Is' by Foreigner began to play.

Yeah, well, I'm not just a sex fiend! I do have other sides to me, too. I know what it is—Roxy!

The only dedicated person Michael did have in prison to visit him during conjugal visits had been Annabelle Lovely. She had been a hell of a trooper the first year, coming in with salutes; coming twice a week, sometimes. And she always had a fresh smile on her face with each visit. But then, she eventually decided to move on to LA, to pursue that dream of hers.

Stupid girl! Who dreams to be a porno star? Women usually go to Hollywood wanting to be some big star actress, and then fall into doing porno when they can't pay the bills. And I fucking hate pornos, too! Especially the one's today with the VHS boom, they used to be like movies, at least, with stupid silly storylines of chicks with clits in their throats. Stupid silly 70s pornos, with that "bon-chika-bon-bon" disco soundtrack. They were at least entertaining in other ways, besides straight up sex being involved. And the performers were more like real actors and actresses back then. Now, it's really just another form of prostitution....

Okay, it was always prostitution but... come on!

With all the women they round up off the streets of LA, short on funds, and with no means of getting back. What dickless loser watches that shit to get off, anyways? Go out and get laid! Go out and get some of the real stuff! Don't sit around jerking off to some skank faking it on screen. And it's so depressing to watch, too,

seeing as how they're faking it, and how little chemistry there is.
And then Michael felt like confessing something, to himself.

Fine! I've been watching a ton of that shit, lately. Well, until that stupid pig-tailed girl, what's-her-name...?

Michael was then expecting himself to get pissed-off, again, for another chick he'd fucked, and couldn't remember the name of... that is until:

Fuck that twitchy chick! As if I give a shit remembering a stupid wastoid like her! I can't stand drug fiends. They have no fucking souls, anymore, after all the shit they've put through their systems. And me, personally, I like to enjoy myself, with the senses I have. So, I don't need to warp them, to enjoy having something else.

And that there, over that matter, was the truth! Michael had no patients or passion for that whole Yellow Submarine crap. No drugs. No nothing! Not even pot.

Fuck yeah, all about that War on Drugs shit, here, Ronnie be instigating.

Except when it came to the booze!

Hey! That's not a drug!

And when it came to alcoholism, Michael was...?

Fine, fine, I know! Let's not get into it! I ain't interested in getting into that topic. Let's stick with porno right now.

Okay... but anyways...!

Yes! But anyways...!

Back to porn!

Yeah! Fuck porn, too! As much as I watched on my VHS machine—before that bitch broke it! And before deciding never to do so, again, I could tell... I could always tell! Those girls were faking it. Since they wouldn't even look at the douchebag that was fucking them, in the eyes. They'd get fucked, raw! Inside out! As they'd moan like a banshee, but hardly would there ever be any eye contact. And you can tell a lot by a person that won't look at another person in the eyes, especially with such a transaction going on. And... but... when they would, they'd look pissed, like

they couldn't believe the douche they were fucking. That! Or, like they couldn't believe they had resorted to doing this as a living. There's this whole other language we speak with our eyes, and I guess most people don't see it, for why else would anyone find the garbage you see in porn as sexy? But I could see, and it was obvious to me, seeing what those women were thinking and feeling. And what I saw and felt, felt so off putting. Those girls would look so miserable, and that was what I found most depressing of all, forcing a smile for the cameraman as some asshole would try to force their cocks all the way down the poor woman's gullet.

Fucking Annabelle! Dreams to be a porno star… who fucking has that? So fucking stupid of her! And I'm sure she's a part of that world now, too, and finally realizing how much of a big mistake she's made.

Fuck… it's all my fault! I sorta got her into that whole thing to get back at….

Then Michael shook his head, and denied himself going back into that line of thought, as he had in prison.

Men can be such douchebags, throwing out all that money, to tempt women into that type of lifestyle. Like with Letoya, here, having to drop a decent job as a nurse, and being tempted to become some escort, for some Armani cocksucking loser.

“Ha, what are you looking at, Michael,” asked Letoya, with a playful smirk.

Michael, although, looked away in depressed and diminishing thoughts.

I can see, from the apartment, money had a lot to do with it. She was missing the money she'd get being a nurse. So, this was all she had left.

But anyways….

Damn, Annabelle! Stupid girl! Although, I do miss her a lot! All the moments we shared. I remember how I taught her what it meant to be with me. She got on top, and started bouncing up and down like a cutesy little bunny rabbit, with her mouth wide open, making cutesy little playful honking moans, while facing the ceiling…

completely in a world of her own, with raindrops, and lollipops—which isn't how it's supposed to be like! It was like she'd seen one too many pornos, herself—today's pornos mind you—and had no clue what real sex is all about.

That's another thing I fucking hate about pornos, they teach people how—not—to have sex! Annabelle that night? All she did was moan for the sake of moaning, in a world of her own, not even looking at me… but I got fed up with it, eventually. So, I sat up, then, grabbed her by the hair, bend her head down, breaking her out of the fairytale she was in, and forced a domineering… yet compassionate stare… into her eyes, as I got raw and real on her. At first, she was all 'deer in headlights' when she noticed I was there. Ha! Noticed I was there! I mean, yeah! 'Hello? Please to meet you… silly girl!'

Michael then chuckled out loud.

"What's on your mind," asked Letoya, then.
"Nothing," responded Michael, very quickly.

And after a couple minutes, when I had her completely captivated, that's when she started trembling, gushing like crazy, and moaning— but for real, this time! As her voice changed, and began tearing up—and that's how you know! That's how you do it!

Fuck Meg Ryan in that Harry Met Sally movie… fuck that scene! No, sweetie, maybe Bill Crystal wouldn't be able to tell, but I sure as hell would. Because I know if you were with me, making some sweet heavenly music, you'd really—wouldn't—be sounding like no earth angel, but a hell's angel. As you'd have bees and bats flying out of your lips and ass. Ha. Don't fuck with this! For I am that Mr. Zero!

Wait. What year does this story of yours take place, Michael?

Huh? Umm… it takes place in the 80s. What… you know that!

Yeah, but Harry Met Sally came out in July of 1989.

Okay… so? That's still the 80s.

Yeah, but, you're claiming Ronald Reagan is president right now?

Yeah, it's the 80s. He is the president in the 80s. So what?

Yeah, but... not in July of 198—

Hey, hey, hey... enough with the technicalities! This is an 80s Odyssey, and let's just leave it at that.

Yeah, but... still! Which year in the...?

I said... let's just leave it at that!

Fine, let's go back to talking about Annabelle.

Yeah... let's do so!

Ahem....

Fuck, I miss her, though. Annabelle. I miss that cute accent of hers, that I first confused for being Scottish. And how she'd try to teach me to talk dirty with it, while she'd sit on my lap, as I'd finger her. Real sex can actually involve having conversations during the act. It's not all boning, how some idiots take it to be, because all they know is what they learn watching fake-ass pornos.

I mean, here's the thing about pornos, again. I didn't get that Texas gal until after the third day of being out. The first three days, I did nothing but sit around watching all that VHS crap, and I swear it fucked me up, and made me worse with women. Maybe I wasn't being all that rusty, it was the porno fucking with my shit, really! Pornos got me super sensitive with visual cues, and in the wrong way. Hell, I'm still kinda fucked up by it. As I'll still, now and then, stare at their tits during a conversation, and get looping zoom-ins, and fall into a trance, like I do watching porn, and completely lose track of thought or time. Shit makes you disconnected from reality. Fuck, I hate them!

Man do I miss her!

Thought Michael, again, as he really began to remember her.

I miss the way she used to rub my underbelly for some time, while staring up at me, with those jewels of hers, before performing fellatio. Miss how she would stick her tongue in my ear, and start

feeling her way inside… damn what I would give to have that back.

Although… Nikki would tongue my ear, too, actually, and….

After Annabelle had left, Michael had barely been able to get any of his old flames to come visit. He did get that Italian girl of Cobrakong's, named Cecilia, to come a couple of times. Michael then shook off the depressing thoughts he had for Annabelle, having to go into porno, and how he missed her, and tried to cheer himself up remembering Cecilia.

Damn, those hooters of hers were huge, you could suck on them for days and days on straight—and they'd still have more milk to give!

Damn she'd love it, too. And damn, she'd get loud!

Michael smiled a bit, but also grew depressed, remembering how fleeting those moments with that Italian girl were, who also moved away.

The Foreigner.

After her, Michael wasn't able to get in contact with anyone else from his past. Neither Letoya, here, nor some girl he used to date, named Roxanna. And as for the thousands of other girls Michael had had in the past.

I can't remember their names, I can't remember their faces, and I don't even remember our times together. I can't even tell you how many women I've been with in my entire life. And, really, that's not what it should be about. I mean, seriously! What was the name of that Texas girl—I really, really liked her, for fuck sake! It didn't need to just be a one-night thing. If the laws of love and stuff dictated me and her being together, how a man and woman….

Fuck her! Fuck Nikki! That ain't ever happening! Wasn't my choice. It was… grr!

Michael needed a second.

"Michael, you're starting to worry me, again, you keep making weird faces," said Letoya.

Michael… just carped at her.

Me and that Texas girl, if it was to be. I'd… I'd want that! I would. I really, really would. Fuck! Fuck my memory! What was her fucking… I think it started with an R… Randy? Rachelle? Renee? Damn! That's all I've ever had. One one-night fling after another, and only two relationships, ever, really.

Truth of the matter is, with most women, I can't go passed sex. I can't! Something within me just won't allow me to. Sometimes, I'll stay a little while longer with them than I feel like I should. And after a couple of days, I'll get really, really fucking awkward around most, and will want to leave. And there were a lot of them that wanted me to stay, but I felt like I had to move on, for some strange reason or another. Since I've been out of prison, I've had a lot. And, before that, when I was younger? Man!

And as for the ugly side of it:

A lot of them got really mad. Really, really fucking mad, when they saw how I was already moving on, after our encounter. Calling me a dog. A heartbreaking piece-of-shit. Homewrecker, a bunch called me, since they were married. And then they'd start crying and spitting, and some then trying to hit me. And then there is that one… that decided to come after me, with a knife, that I had to subdue.

'What's wrong with me? Why don't you love me? Why this… and why that?' They'd cry, and expect all those tears to somehow win my affections over… or… I don't know what. But, truthfully, most of those tears just makes me hate them, in a way, as I'd see something into them, I really didn't like. I'll see gorgeous… simply gorgeous! Women… that'll start off looking to be on top of the world. But once I dumped them, they'd be reduced like that, going 'why don't you… blah blah' towards me, and all, and it'll make me not like them, then. And worse yet, look at them all pathetic. And… man, do I hate when that happens!

But there was more to it than that, Michael figured.

Truth is, after sex, I lose my… magic. I do! I just do! And it's real magic, too, I do believe it. But. I lose that thing that got them in the first place, and… they're not going to want me then. They're

not! They'll cry their eyes out and act so wronged and victimized for what I done. But I know—I'll know for a fucking fact—for I can just feel it in my bones! While they're boo hoo-ing at me?

If it was the other motherfucking way around… and I was the one crying my eyes out, for them, giving the exact same spiel… they'd do the—exact—same thing to me! And ditch me in a heartbeat! So, even if I did stay, and decided to grow with them a while, take a chance with what they were willing to offer, they'd eventually grow apart, once they saw the magic was no longer there. And, really! I'm just as much of an awkward average fucking nobody as anyone else—and when they'd realize that!

They'd abandon me.

So, fuck them! And their 'boo hoos.' Fucking hypocrites! Me breaking their hearts wasn't something I enjoyed doing, it was just something I did to spare me… and also them… the heartbreak, of having to go through all that process. Everyone wants something special. They want magic! Can't just accept their pitiful selves, and all the other pitiful people around them, and maybe find something else to….

“Michael, are you all right,” asked Letoya.
Ah shit! I'm slipping, again! Shit! Stop it, before Letoya sees the truth. Stop! Stop! Get back into character.
“Yeah, of course, babe, why you ask,” asked Michael, Journey Facing up something mad, and maxing it out to eleven. Which was a little off putting.

Fix that!
Michael checked himself. And once again, had his persona back in tune with how he liked it. At least on the outside. As he continued with his inner monologued spiel with the woes of the night life.

I ain't rich. I ain't classy. I'm not even a financially or an emotionally stable person. Truth is, I'm ten times more batshit crazier than most of them, most women, that have claimed to have

been as nutty as… that woman from that Fatal Attraction movie! I know these things, and, I know, really, they wouldn't want nothing to do with me, if they found out. I ain't got nothing to offer beyond one hot night. They'd eventually ditch me… I know!

The Fantasy.

Besides all those women which Michael—did—remember! Then, of course, there was Nikki! But after how she had given him the cold shoulder that one visit, Michael felt too embarrassed to call upon her ever again.

What if… what if… ah, shut up! Enough of that, now! Get that damn woman out of your head!

Years Michael had spent without the touch, without the spell, in prison. But once Michael had gotten out, that third night, he knew he had to get back into action, before he felt himself truly wither away and die. That night, he went out, picked up that Texas chick, did the deed, and felt great. Second night, went out, picked up another chick, some girl from Quebec, did the deed, but unfortunately… felt it a little less. Third night… felt lesser. Fourth… even more so. Michael was obviously seeing a pattern after the third night. Some of the nights afterwards did get better, but never as good as the first.

All is vanity… under the sun, they say. Sigh!

What the fuck was that Texas girls…. Oh! Enough!

After a while, it slowly began to scare him to think he could no longer be his old self. And being his old self… mattered a lot to him. But then, Michael thought of what it meant to be in his 30s, and realized he couldn't base his feelings on how he remembered himself back when he was younger.

Shit! My 20s went to waste, mostly in prison. Frozen in time, then reanimated and thrown back out, and having to come to terms of being in my 30s.

Now, he felt like the world was slowing down, as he found his vibrant energy following the same direction. One night, Michael decided:

Fuck it, I need more!

And decided to up the ante. So, he went to one of those sleazy sex parties that he had found fliers of around the neighborhood. Of course, getting

there, he found the crazy shit other people were into were downright despicable and disgusting. Michael took himself as being a bit old fashioned, a simple meat and potatoes, type of guy. One hot mama, hot steaming sex, furthest he'd go was to toss their salad….

Ha! Tossing their….

Ha!

But wait…?

Wait a second? Is that term only meant to be between dudes? I know in prison, some of the lonely butt-pirates, there, used to get salad dressing, and spread it over their love tunnels, for those special outings, at sea, with other lonely able body seaman, like themselves. That's what that term is supposed to generally mean. But, I've done it to chicks, and, I've seen how cross-eyed and stupid they get, when it looks like I'm really tossing something in their noggins, as they start singing me 'Daisy Bell.' Is it only between…?

Fuck it! I like that term! Damn did Cecilia lose her noodle when I did it to her like that! Izabella was always cross-eyed and stupid, so I couldn't tell much of a difference. But damn did Nikki go….

But whatever the deal, to Michael, sex was his fantasy. For him, sex was that otherworldly place, that ethereal plane of existence, that escapism that he felt brought him peace and harmony. That gave him… salvation, you can even say.

No, no, no, no, no—Michael! I ain't… please don't start thinking about that whole blasphemy of the…!

Damn! My Catholic up—… grr!

And seeing how he saw it all as a fantasy, Michael felt he had a role to play, to be that all masculine type, being a man above all other men; all male, and captivating all other females, with his domineering ways. And making them:

Moan and groan…

And weep and whimper…

And scream and squeal…

And shake and shiver…

And quake and quiver...

And howl, and wail, and spasm, and convulse and cry...!

And then finally—climax! Harder than they've ever done so before... in their entire lives! And that, there, to Michael, was the good stuff.

The good stuff, that comes with having a real woman in your arms. That you love, and want to make the best—the best! Loving to....

Well...?

As long as it's not Izabella, who's just going to moan at you like a walrus trying to 69 a grizzly bear.

Wait... how would that even work?

Hearing a woman—other than Izabella—make all those hoots, and howlers, and noises, was sweet heavenly music to Michael's ear. Feeling her vibrate like that, like the feeling of vibrating coming from her own beating heart, gave Michael the sense of peace and harmony that he was looking for, as he felt it sustaining that sense of life well lived within him, as it did in her. That there! Was Michael's... meat and potatoes. And he believed it to be the only true great meaning in life... at least in his.

If I could, I'd just have every waking second of this life spent like that. What other greater meaning is there to life, anyways? All the knowledge and possessions gained, are all the knowledge and possessions lost, when we're good and buried, so, our loves are all that matter, as long as we're here.

Ixnay The Fantasy Now!

Michael had been building up his expectations for having some of the best sex in his life. But... all so naively, too, since he didn't exactly know what he was getting himself into. Was to discover, later, his scene wasn't there to be found, and there was a completely different scene that followed:

Yeah, nothing of meat and potato wholesome value there. More like some mystery meat, served in a sushi roll, that's got a tentacle coming out, trying to drag itself away from your plate. I'm... not even going to get into the shit they were into, not even going to

speak of it. Really, really fucked up and despicable shit! Stuff you'd expect in Jersey, too. Yeah! Of course, a party like this would be in Jersey... and Newark, no less!

And to Michael...?

I mean... what the fuck is this? Who are these people? Who gets off on this shit? Are they even human?

Although... seeing some skank getting fucked by a donkey was sorta funny. Ha!

Most of that shit disgusted him (besides getting him to bust out with the laughs), and he didn't even want to think about it. They seemed like a bunch of sleazeballs and jerks, that couldn't appreciate the purity in a good old fashioned orgasm, and had perverted themselves to such extremes. As for his time at that party, the furthest he was willing to go with those jokers was an all-out orgy.

Well... as long as there's only chicks in the room. Maybe, just to teach them how things should be, since, I'm pretty sure, those chicks wouldn't be getting much from the type of guys there. Since most of the guys in there were some real creepshows. You know, type of losers that are all balding, wearing bifocals, and dressed like their mothers still dress them, and they're also in their thirties and forties, too. But look to be reaching for their sixties. You know, type of guys you'd find spending hours upon hours in video stores, in the porn section. That, or running shitty motels, out in the middle of the desert, just outside Phoenix, AZ... with their mothers. You know what type of characters I'm driving at, right?

Although... who am I kidding! The women, there, were no Heather Locklears, either. But some Lily Munster looking women, and not even the kind that are all sorta hot in a freaky way. Mostly just freaky.

Although, still, he'd be willing to do it even with those types, but as long as he was the only cock present.

I would get too territorial in that shit, in orgies, with having any other dudes around. Especially any Norman Bates looking motherfuckers. If I was to see any of their swinging dicks around

mine, I know, I would up and do something, and have their wimpy looking asses tossed out of the fucking joint.

So what Michael decided to do was just to pick up a couple of bi-chicks, to see if they were all that were needed to get his rocks off. So, when he found three, he took them out of that disgusting place, and took them home. Then, did the deed, and really ripped into those three girls.

Three okay looking brunettes. With Misfits and Ramones T-shirts on. Also, one with a bull piercing… let's just put it at that.

And had them orgasming out into the speed of light; blasting them off into outer space, and had them weeping for the dwindling stars, out there, that were eventually going to burn out one day.

But even then:

It… it… it sucked! It did! Even with all the sucking involved, which those women were all about. They were like babies with a pacifier with that shit. Fine, suck my dick, I get that. I'll enjoy that. But why are you trying to suck on my nipples, now, too. I'm a dude, what the fuck you expecting to get out of it? No, not my toes, not my feet. What the fuck! That's disgust—wow! Having sex with three women, at the same time, was actually terrible, if you can believe.

For the problem was… he was now slowly beginning to feel bored and impotent for the first time in his entire life, at intercourse. And days later, when he fully realized it, it had then enraged him.

What the fuck was happening to me? Fuck! Maybe this is what happens when you overdo it! Since getting out, eight months ago, I'd say, I've at least been with… forty to fifty women?

Actually, Michael had been with something around the likes of a hundred and fifty.

Fuck… really? A hundred fifty women… in the last eight months?

One hundred and fifty-four to be exact.

Fuck, I've become a sexoholic… or something!

Wait a second? Besides fucking, how many fights have I been in since getting out? Not counting the night I've had. Hmm… ten or twenty-ish?

Actually, Michael had been in over forty-two.

I've been in over forty fights? Fuck! I truly am a video game character. Fucking Double Dragon, and shit. And in real life, that means being a real certified nutjob of a person.

Maybe I should... just... go back to the slammer...?

Maybe... Michael... should.

Actually, fuck that! Fuck that shit! I rather be dead then go back in. Rather end up dead out here in the streets. Then go back in, and continue living, but truly dead... at that fucking place!

As for those women, the three women Michael had had a foursome with. The problem that Michael realized then was....

Comparing it to the good sex I've had in my life. There was just no... connection. And I don't mean the physical type.

He felt glad that they were glad. Since Michael was able to get them off.

'But, why wasn't I able to?' Well, that's what I thought, then, until it came to me.

And when it did, Michael then realized, most of his thoughts were still on the women he used to have in his life, and these new ones he was meeting, now, since getting out of prison, seemed too....

Hollow, I would say would be the word. Just not there. Hollow, empty, shallow. Too... meaningless.

Yes, too meaningless, for him to feel a sensation with. His sensations had grown dull to the touch of fresh new strangers, for he felt their touch was lesser giving. Yet, thinking about the touch of something old and familiar—like Annabelle's—seemed much more meaningful to him now. Since, he felt, he understood hers more deeply. Fresh new strangers had a way to scratch a good itch on the surface, but Michael now felt like it was the old flames that were really going to be able to engulf his corps, and burn it away into his center.

In other words, I miss the touch of the old, the forgotten, the ones that awakened me to new and beautiful experiences, back when I had fewer layers of callous built up over my heart.

And if that wasn't enough, what really, truly, irritated him about that

foursome was, was, the type of sex he was having. Those younger women didn't seem too sure at all of how the whole sex act worked.

> They spent the entire fucking time staring at me like they were questioning the whole experience. Whether or not it was happening. Yeah… they were on drugs. Tons! So doped out of their minds that they kept staring at me like I was a fucking animal, or demon, or something. Pretty much anything but human. Besides all the sucking, with us all fucking in animal mode, with them all looking scared, while screaming their heads off. And I'm feeling fed up of hearing it… yeah! Fed up of hearing womanly orgasms, since they were practically screaming like possessed nutbags. Fed up, since there was no heart nor soul found anywhere in the experience, none at all.

Michael was mostly ramming those three brunettes since, nothing else seemed to work. They understood him when he was laying it hard, but understood nothing when he was trying to do something much more meaningful, with his gentleness.

> I have that, too! I do! I have that, too! I don't have it just all rough and tough… I have it—both! Gentle when they want to connect, and rough and tough when they wants me to be a man and command and conquer.

Michael now began looking at Letoya's bulging calves, that were fitted in beige nylon, and began feeling like massaging them. Michael loved the feel of nylon stockings on skin; he loved the rough feel of them. Back when he was with Letoya, on some nights, he'd be at her place, here, on the couch, watching Taxi or Welcome Back Carter, on TV, with her. As he'd just lay his head down on her lap, and would gently rub his cheek against her thighs fitted in nylon. He loved that feel; how warm it felt from the warm throbbing body underneath. He also loved it when he'd feel little rapid muscle spasms pulsate, as she would adjust the pressure in her legs. He felt like he could spend all night doing that.

> I used to do that with… too.

Michael shook that thought out, and went back to concentrating on Letoya.

> With Letoya, here, all I needed to do to really get her motors going was to rub her calves for ten or twenty minutes, or so. Which always did the trick for her. That. Or… well… eat her out for an

hour. But then again...?

Ha! What woman doesn't blow their load when a man is feasting on their hair-pie? Ha! Fuck... I feel hungry now.

Michael sighed, glared a bit more at Letoya, and began to think about her, again.

You know what I miss the most, though? When all she needed to do to really make me feel alive, didn't even involve intercourse, at all. All she needed to do was place her hand over my heart, smile into my eyes, and wait....

Just wait....

For something to give.

I miss that! That, there, was something that felt like it would transcend every experience, just about, I've ever had in my entire life. Sending me into an entirely different realm. Bali Hai'! Shangri-La! Beimeni! Ys! Nirvana! Heaven...! Reaching that transcended place beyond all. Maybe, for something, you could consider... the metaphysical.

The Sting.

Now looking up at Letoya, Michael saw an old flame, and then heard 'Into the Night' by Benny Mardones playing on her system.

Wow, Letoya! Nice mix tape you got there. How many more songs you got about longing for someone? I can see where you're at in your love life, today.

He looked at her, and now decided it was time to test that theory; test her waters, again, to see just how much more meaningful the old touch could be compared to the new.

So then, looking up at Letoya, Michael smiled up at her familiar lips—that familiar touch. And decided he wanted to be a part of it, again. He wanted to see how much more meaningful sex with her would be, for him, compared to all the women he had been with within just the last month or so.

Okay... time to get into character. Time not to be so contemplative,

so deeply, and go all stupid mode.

"Hey, Letoya? How are those sexy lips of yours, there, doing," asked Michael, as he went full stupid mode on her, to see what her first reaction would be.

That now got her attention….

Letoya rolled her eyes, quickly, and smiled with some enthusiasm, but also seemed like she had a lot of questions, before allowing Michael to entertain her with his wooing attempts.

Oh, come on! Not now! I got a good build up, here. Don't ask me stupid questions I don't care about, and please don't bring up Nikki!

"Michael… you say you wanted to see Radboy, right," asked Letoya.

"Yeah," said Michael, feeling glad that she didn't.

Then Letoya eyed Michael a bit cold and distant like, and it reminded Michael of how Nikki had eyed him that one visit.

Oh, this doesn't look good.

"So, Michael, do you want to see Nikki, too," asked Letoya.

Shit!

And there it was. Michael had fooled around a lot with Letoya back in the day… with a lot of women, actually. And all while he was still seeing Nikki.

Eventually, she was going to go cold on me. We had been together for some time, then, but I always felt like it was eventually going to go down that road.

"No, just him," responded Michael.

"That's it? That's why you were at Stumpy's? And I heard the place was set on fire, afterwards."

Michael felt like rolling his eyes, but caught himself before doing it.

"Yeah, I know, it was a group called the—"

"The Iron Monkeys MC—yeah! I know about them," interrupted Letoya.

Michael decided not to say anything, as he held up a smile, for a second, knowing she might have more questions, but not wanting to give her the sense that it should matter.

"Michael, you didn't have anything to do with them—did you," gasped Letoya.

Oh great!

“No, Letoya, of course not! I've never even heard of them, until tonight,” insisted Michael, hoping she would drop that concern, as quickly as she had picked it up.

“Well, I know! But it's also kinda strange that you appear after all this time… right as they—"

“Just a coincidence! I never even heard about these MC guys, and this whole Age of Rage, business, until Sadboy told me about it all,” hammered in Michael.

Letoya smiled, and seemed relieved.

Remember what you taught Tomboy, if you want sex, let them know it! It's that simple!

“You know… you look really beautiful under this light, really highlights all your features,” teased Michael, as he made a dastardly smile, and began chewing on some Bubblemint Gum, that just now, magically appeared in his mouth.

Letoya shook her head, seeing how corny Michael was getting, all on purpose. Since he was looking—anything but! Sitting there, with his pecs and biceps beginning to bulge up, some. And, knowing Michael, Letoya knew exactly what that meant.

Still… a line a little too corny… even for my taste.

“Ha, okay,” brought out Letoya, trying to recover from that.

Oh, don't become that way! You like this!

“No, I mean it, Letoya, you look marvelous,” dished Michael, turning his head to one side, and biting his bottom lip.

‘Marvelous?’ What? Where did that corny bit come…?

Fucking Billy Crystal! And his corny ass shit! I need to change up characters!

James Dean? Yeah, that always works! Fucking Billy Crys—

“Do I look just as marvelous as I did back, when you were still seeing Nikki… while seeing me,” asked Letoya, raising an eyebrow.

Actually… James Dean isn’t going to work at this point. That awkward yet cool shit. You use him when you first meet a girl, and if they’re the nice and sweet type, and also innocent. And when you—just—meet them. And Letoya already knows who and what

I'm all about, and she's anything but innocent, and knows I ain't either. Just be your regular horny self.

“You look more so!”

Michael continued smiling, while building up his tensed-up physique, showing off all he was willing to bring next. Kept it up, while waiting for that special glimmer in her eye, that marked her memory of the good times he and she had had together. But as for the Nikki's question, Michael knew better. It was a man-trap, to kill his libido.

But… it really shouldn't matter. For I know, and she knows, really, there's nothing I should feel regretful and ashamed about. Letoya had played just as much of a guilty party, having gone under the sheets with a tagged man, as I had, being that man.

So, Michael knew there was only so far she could go with it. Michael wanted sex. He knew it, and he knew she knew it now, too. But Michael also knew, first off, he needed to defuse the Nikki matter, before he could start making his moves on her.

I don't want her to be thinking about Nikki and me when I take her, that's just going to kill the mood.

“Letoya, Nikki was a sweet girl, and I loved her to death, but—"

"Sweet girl? We talking about the same person I knew," gasped Letoya, surprising Michael.

What? She was a sweet girl from what I remember… spoiled and controlling… but sweet!

"Let me finish," said Michael.

"Fine, go ahead," responded Letoya, growing weary.

"Nikki? I loved her to death, but, she was never going to stay with me, long, you did know that—right? I mean, a material girl like her, with a book of her daddy's credit card in her purse… something like that was never going to last.”

Michael watched as Letoya nodded on that behalf, but then shook her head suddenly, as if to disagree.

What, you knew something I didn't?

“I mean, me and Nikki were together, and I was also with you! Plus, a lot of other girls, on the side. We were all doing it for fun, back then—so were you! I mean, we were all a bunch of stupid horny kids,” explained Michael, with a small chuckle at the last bit.

And seeing Letoya now make a mischievous looking grin, considering

all the dastardly parts she had definitely played, there: all quick, then quickly concealing it. All of that was enough to give Michael confirmation that he needed that he was getting to her.

"Really fucking stupid bunch, we were," joked Michael, again, as he closed his eyes, and gave Letoya some breathing room.

Gotta pace it.

After a moment, Michael then opened his eyes, and saw Letoya glimmering in the moments they had shared. And now, he knew he had her, there. And now, he felt like bringing up one last bit, before sealing the deal.

"Anyways, I always liked you, Letoya, and I always thought to myself, when time came that I didn't feel like fooling around anymore. If there was any girl I would want to be with… she'd be you."

Michael then tilted his head, while being all beamish, and smiled at Letoya. But then realized… the girl was still not buying it completely.

She's really become resilient over the years.

"Smooth, real smooth," said Letoya, a bit coy like.

Michael now understood that Letoya might have been holding onto something against him. As he now began to wonder what.

"Oh, come on! You know there's more to it than that—right? I saw how your face lit up when you saw me at Stumpy's," said Michael, as he began to wonder what Letoya had on him.

"Yeah, but you know what, Michael? I didn't see your face light up much, at all, when you saw mine," disclosed Letoya.

And there it was!

That stung Michael now, as he came to terms with the fact that he hadn't given her the most welcoming greeting.

Along with everyone else at that joint.

But, then again, he knew he had feelings for her, and he knew that meant something. He needed to express it, if, he was going to have her tonight.

"Well, I guess I had a lot on my mind, at that point. But I was really happy to see you," responded Michael, opening his brow, suggestively.

“I know, Michael.”

Okay… no! This is still going to work. Don’t give up now. Don’t. Don’t!

Michael felt it was about time to set up the execution.

“Do you still have feelings for me, Letoya,” asked Michael.

Letoya didn't say much, but smiled a bit, looking to one side like a child would.

“Please… tell me,” asked Michael, all sincere like, “I need to know.”

Letoya began to whisk her head around, like a child, again, and seemed a bit afraid, now, to look Michael in the eyes.

Knowing once she did… she'd surrender to them.

“You want sex, Michael,” asked Letoya, haphazardly.

“Fuck yeah, I do,” responded Michael, spreading his legs, while still sitting all relaxed and leisured like.

At this point, Letoya completely turned around to hide whatever look she didn't want Michael to see. Michael allowed it, and now knew he had to remind her how it was.

“You got someone in your life now, Letoya,” asked Michael, calmly.

Letoya shook her head.

“Do you still like me?”

Letoya did a faint nod.

“Did you like the times we had back then?”

Letoya definitely made a nod this time. Even though, still, haphazardly. Michael placed his hand on Letoya's left calf, and began to massage it. Letoya, remembering the old touch, quickly arched her back, and then tensed up that calf, as it began to pulsate. And as it did, Michael began to remember her, remembering the old moments. The old touch. That magical old touch. And feeling it again, and seeing how Letoya was vibrating, had Michael vibrating now, too. As diamonds in the sky began appearing, spinning, glimmering, shimmering, and dancing. As 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' began to play, on the Hi-Fi system.

The Missed Opportunity.

Submissive Letoya… always wanting to give in so quickly.

Thought Michael, all too soon, as he misjudged the magic moment he thought was now happening. As Letoya, then, went on the offensive.

"What about Nikki," asked Letoya.

Michael said nothing, at first. But after a small awkward pause, held with an awkward smirk, said:

"Letoya, I haven't seen Nikki since I went in, we don't have anything anymore between us," explained Michael, hoping it would stick.

But then Letoya turned around, and now, Michael felt afraid to look her in the eyes.

"Letoya? That was years ago. Right now, I'd like to maybe see if there can be—"

"What about Nikki," asked Letoya, again, with the same tone and texture, while watching Michael like a hawk.

Michael now began to grow mad.

"What about her," snapped Michael.

What is this? You trying to be mean to me… or what?

"Letoya… I… I…?"

"What about Nikki," again she said, and this time really stamping it out.

And now, Michael began to really lose his cool, as he fidgeted around with his expressions; going this way, going that way, and unwilling to face Letoya directly.

"What about her? She blew me off the last time she saw me, that's all there is to say," expressed Michael….

But then expressed something else, while getting that feeling of kissing his Rosary.

And as Michael looked up at Letoya, he saw his defeat, as Letoya smiled a disheartened smile, and began to nod, as if she had come to a conclusion. A conclusion that most definitely involved disowning Michael, in that special way, that made things less special. And that had Michael go:

"It's been years, Letoya, I feel—nothing—for her," bellowed he, as he startled Letoya, in the process. Completely changing the moment into something else.

Letoya said nothing, as she began to step away.

Fucking bullshit! Fucking… bull!

At this point, Madboy just felt like leaving Letoya behind. Exiting outta there! Out of her well-to-do joint and presence. For it seemed to him that she was willfully being unfriendly towards him, over shit that didn't matter anymore. Considering all the years that had passed, making it ancient history.

Is she jealous about how me and Nikki were, together? Over ancient history shit! Does she think I still have feelings for her? I mean, all I got from her in the end was a sense of loss, the same sense you're now giving me, Letoya! And that's not fair!

Michael sighed.

So much for that old sensation. There's nothing left of it!

But then his feelings turned desperate.

No! I want it, still. I…?

Maybe, I can… maybe find… Annabelle, again, and… fuck!

As Michael began swaying his eyes, back and forth, with his swaying thoughts, the first object his eyes decided to pick up on then was the door.

So, if it's going to be like that, huh? Fine. Catch you later… maybe!

Michael then looked at the door, and nodded to himself in agreement. He still had business to take care of, with Radboy, and Michael began to think—maybe—it was better to stick to the main mission he had set himself up for, tonight, than to stick around, and have another woman in his life, give him the cold shoulder. Which was practically what Letoya was doing to him right now.

I can get any chick I want—anytime! If you don’t want something more meaningful, Letoya, something that we might have cherished—really fucking cherished—I mean! Since it would have meant that much to me, then, that's all there is to that, I guess.

Your loss, honey! Enjoy your fucking music!

There was also the fact, which dawned on Michael just now, that if he

was to decide to give up the chase, tonight... by tomorrow? Michael might have lost all his opportunity to find Radboy. To do that 'settling old matters—straight,' business.

I know exactly where he is now. By tomorrow, I'll be back to square one, and I might not get another opportunity like this one to catch up with him.

"Okay, fine! If it's going to be like that, I guess I'll—"

"No, Michael, don't leave," called out Letoya, as she broke out of her gloom, and had a look of pure concern on her face.

What now? I'm not playing games anymore!

Thought Michael.

"Michael, I'm sorry for what I did," spoke out Letoya.

Michael looked at Letoya, up and down, and wondered what she was talking about.

"Sorry about... what," asked Michael, unsure of what she meant.

If you didn't wanna come across as being all cold towards me, then, why did you?

"Michael, I feel like I can't—"

"You can't, what," demanded Michael, as he eyed Letoya for a better response.

"Michael, I wasn't trying to be mean to you, I just needed to see something for myself," responded Letoya, and smiled.

That, though, threw Michael off, for the smile seemed genuine, and un-cold. Which got Michael to smile also. But too quickly, as he then shook it off in revolt.

I don't get it.

"Michael, I can see there's certain things in you... right now... that you need to figure out for yourself. But please believe me when I say I wasn't trying to be mean to you," expressed Letoya.

Oh great... more riddles! What else does she have for me?

And now, Letoya got serious, with her motives:

"Michael, I don't want you to leave. You can stay if you want. Actually—I want you to stay," insisted Letoya, as her face filled up with a bit of dread.

"Why," asked Michael, as he began to wonder what the concern

was.

But then Michael saw Letoya's eyes pan out towards the window, and as he saw fear embrace them, Michael then knew why Letoya wanted him not to leave. At least, not for the moment. It was obvious that the events of this night had really began to frighten her, and Letoya was at least feeling some sense of safety with someone else inside her apartment.

"Letoya, I'm sorry, but I need to leave."

"Michael, haven't you been seeing all the craziness going on outside, with buildings going up in smoke? I've been watching from my window, and on the TV, all night long. I mean, it's dangerous out there! And you know what? I haven't even felt safe here in my own apartment, since."

Michael said nothing, as he watched Letoya begin to panic at the thought of him leaving. And seeing her like this, Michael, at least now felt like he couldn't leave her alone, given the possibilities that something might actually happen.

Might have not given you a warm greeting when I saw you, but I still do care about you.

Letoya began to grow aghast over the thoughts now entering her mind. She knew feeling safe inside her apartment was really just her false sense of security, and now hearing that Michael wasn't willing to stick around, made her feel like leaving with him. She was now afraid to be alone, and she knew it was only a matter of time, possibly, before her building went up in smoke. A possibility she wasn't willing to now gamble with. She needed to act—and act fast!

"Michael, come with me! I have a Pinto down in the garage—let's just leave the city!"

This was the second person in Michael's life, tonight, that had now asked him this. Michael didn't have a lot of friends left, really. And he felt enticed to take her offer.

"I can't! I have to do something first, and when I come back, we'll leave."

"Michael, I'm being serious! I want to leave, now, but not alone."

Michael began eyeing the door, again, but felt like he at least made up his mind that he was going to take her with him. But as to where to, he knew. Letoya then ran over to the window with a look on her face, as if

she was expecting fire and brimstone to start raining in.

The White Fuzz.

"Oh my God!"

Michael ran over to the window, too, and saw black smoke coming out of the building across the street, and there was a whole bunch of Monkeyfuckers....

Another real gang name in all its glorious stupidity!

Dancing like crazed psychos, attacking tenets with bats, that were running out of the building in desperation. Michael had to get Letoya to safety; it would be inhuman of him to leave her here, now, like this. Plus, this was all beginning to remind Michael of the night he had to run into a burning building to try and save his sister.

"Okay, let's go!"

The two ran out of the apartment, and dashed into the elevator. Then got to the garage level, and finally reached Letoya's Pinto. And then, Michael realized something: he had never driven a car before. A motorcycle—yeah! But living in New York, owning a car was more of a burden than an asset. The two got into the car, and Michael felt funny sitting in the passenger seat.

Now, call Michael old fashioned, and it wasn't that he thought Letoya couldn't drive well enough being a woman, but....

I would just feel a lot more comfortable if I was at the helm.

"Oh, come on," cried out Letoya.

The car wasn't starting, and from the sound of it, Michael could tell the starter was going out.

"Not now—not now—not now," pleaded Letoya with the car, as it continuously refused to work.

Michael then noticed a Harley parked next to the car, and then looked over at Letoya, as to say, "how about we take a ride on that badboy, there?"

"No, if you're going to hot wire anything, let's take this Toyo—...."

But Michael was already out of the Pinto, and on top of the chopper. This was actually Michael's old criminal trade when he was in the Shamrocks: jacking choppers and selling them to chop-shops. And

most of all, Madboy just loved pissing off all the Hells Angels wannabe, tough guy types: the motorheads that came with the job. Taking their wheels, and driving off at the last second, as they came running out, cursing him off in their redneck yammer.

Yeah, of course, the non 1%er types, I'm not a fuckin' lunatic, here. Ha!

But then again, the Mad Mads did commission me a bunch for them for that service. What the Highriders didn't know won't kill 'em, nor me. Ha!

"You know there's a perfectly good Toyota next to my car—right?" The choppers engines growled.

"Too late," said Michael, smiling up at Letoya.

Letoya reluctantly hopped on back, and they were off. And then—wouldn't you know it—to Michael's luck.... some 99%er did pop out of the blue, and start cussing, too. A cross-eyed, shirtless, shoeless man, that had a sagging gut covered with white fuzz. Who began bellyaching at Michael, faster than he could check himself; firing off his 12 gauge, in the air, as a warning, as he cursed away:

"You fucking—fuck you—I kill you—die!"

"Ye-ha... asshole! Put on some fucking shoes!"

And Michael was now feeling better again.

As they got out of the garage, and onto the street, a few of the Monkeyfuckers then took notice.

Are you fucking kidding me?

Thought Michael, as he saw three of the idiots rushing in their direction. They had no weapons; they weren't driving any vehicles, but it seemed as if though they still wanted to play chicken.

Or play turkey, in their case!

At first, the thought of running them over made him a bit skittish, but then Michael thought:

Rompous-pompous! You want some? Come and get some!

Michael then roared up the engine, and took off, no longer feeling any hesitation in running them over, clean. As the two parties rushed at each other, two of the idiot Monkeyfuckers had then, finally, seemed to have grasped the predicament that they were heading in:

If you put roughly 800 pounds of metal—not even counting me and Letoya adding another 300 pounds together into the mix—up against their scrawny 140-pound fleshy asses, each… ten times out of ten, the metal would win!

So, as two of them got out of the way, the third one….

Who I'd say is the Nobel Prize winning gentlemen of their guild. Screamed then, at the very last second, before the collision. Michael rammed into the jerk-off, as the jerk-off—flew! Up high, then through, right into a streetlamp post. And practically got tied up around it like a pretzel would. And to the sight of that, the rest then started jumping up and down like hyped up monkeys would, in a zoo, that had been dosed with some acid. Even making ape like noises, as Michael began to think maybe their name was meant in the literal sense.

"Michael, you could have killed those guys, what were you—"

"No, I wouldn't have," interrupted Michael. With a satisfied smirk. Letoya then noticed how Michael wasn't riding in the direction she wanted, out of town, and was driving towards Manhattan.

"Michael, where are we going," asked Letoya, nervously.

Michael didn't respond.

"Michael, this isn't the way out of the city! Michael, I don't want to go to Uptown!"

The Hot Air.

Michael then felt some resentment building up towards Letoya, as he continued to ponder over what she meant earlier.

Something I have to figure out for myself? What's that supposed to mean? Sounds like you just don't want me anymore, but don't have the heart to say it like that. Maybe you don't want to hurt my… but it's too late, with that now!

Michael then felt the resentment push a little harder, then ease back, as he looked back, and saw Letoya's always demure expression.

I mean, I can handle rejection. I get rejected! My looks and charms aren't going to get me laid with every single woman I come across.

More resentment! And now Michael wanted to feel some humor, again.

I mean… most times when it happens, I can understand what's the deal. I mean, it's true! Most chicks love the badboy thing. Since most of them are all soft and sweet, and totally not built for this

world.

What about that Flores chick? Was she all soft and…?

Fuck that bitch!

But anyways—most, at least! And when they all feminine, all that means is what they want is something that's gonna be all masculine! Since they craving for someone strong to stand by their side. No nice guy, push over, wimpy types… like that Juan character. Fucking disgraceful. They want someone strong to stand by their side. Who can also later on turn around and rock their world. Can't be like that Juan character—you just can't! But here's the thing… there's badboys, and then there's carnivorous apex predators—like me! And how are most chicks gonna be able to handle this? Since… I mean… if a cute little bunny rabbit was to fall in love with a T-rex, where would they then build their nest? Ha! Most likely in the belly of that T-rex, there, that's for sure! So, I can't expect much, and can understand when women get intimidated by me. And decide that they—

That's not why Letoya rej—

Shut up!

So… it takes a special type of Missy, that's gonna be willing and able to handle all this! Allow me to eat them alive, as I do.

‘Cause… I don't want to rock their world.

‘Cause… what I really want to do—is fucking devour them!

‘Cause… I ain't human!

Thought Michael, as he grew sinister smirk on his face.

And let's face it, majority of women are all fragile, even today. Even these post-feminist Amazonian women of the 80s, today, who are doing aerobics, and putting up a facade like they're tough… still! Really! They ain't! So, fact of the matter is, I still have to watch how strong I come across. Majority of the time, I have to control my animalistic nature around them, so I can come across as human, so not to scare them away.

Michael now sighed. For beside the jokey notion of what he was getting at. There was some truth to his concern, here.

If I don't do that? If I let it all out—and I mean—all out! All of a

sudden, it's like we have ourselves a full moon, like the one tonight, as I start growing hair and claws and teeth, all over the place! And I really do become one of The Cat People. All growling at the unfortunate little Missy, there, that had to witness me through this transformation, and now has to muster up enough fight to deal with me, as I go all 'welcome to the jungle, baby,' and try to go for her jugular. I've yet—yet! To meet a strong type… that can see that side of me, smile like she enjoys what she's seeing, and try to tame it.

But then Michael thought of her, again, and how she had been the only one able to do that.

When will it stop! Stop thinking about her! Enough with her, already! Damn! Plus… Aviv managed to do that, too! So, it's not just her!

Michael had a small pause. Felt depressed by the whole ordeal, and a little sour realizing how he was now just blowing up his ego, to make himself feel better, after Letoya's rejection. And then continued:

Although, Letoya, it really does sting to have you reject me… really fucking does!

But Michael knew he couldn't let it get to him; inside and out, he knew that sex, love, and all those forms of relationships were like a tango: that there had to be a give and receive, a force and embrace, a yearn… and a self-sacrifice. And without those ingredients, he was just gonna be wasting his time with the chick. Or simply put… it took two to tango.

I want to start fires, I don't want to beat around the fucking bush! Play 'love me or love me not' games. I want someone to want me, and then want to take it, when I give it to them! If there's no want—I'm through! Honestly, I don't know what Letoya's deal is, I feel like she wants me—I feel it! But her words are really now fucking with my head. Is she jealous of what me and Nikki had? Does she think that I still…? I don't love Nikki any—

Michael then felt like going for his Rosary, again. But then….

Fuck! Stop going for that! Stop doing that… me and her are through!

With Letoya, Michael had always gotten love from her, without any hassle, and without any bullshitting games. And ninety percent of the

time she was almost always willing and able to drop to her knees—quick! And receive the commendation Michael had in store for her.

Ha! With my old pocket watch… with it? She used to always fall for it—quick! I'd pull it out, and begin swinging it…

back and forth,

back and forth,

back and forth,

and had her hypnotized in a matter of seconds. And when she'd drop to her knees—she'd dropped! Falling down so quick, used to call her my London Bridge! Still can't stop blowing up my….

And that's how Michael used to love it when it came to Letoya, and he knew that's how Letoya loved it, too. For Letoya always was….

The submissive type.

But also…!

Too submissive!

But also!

Maybe that all means she didn't exactly love it as much as I like to think she did… huh?

Michael also remembered her abilities in always spotting the truth. Her ability to do so was so good, it was almost uncanny, really. There was just no hiding anything from her.

As good as I am… with her? Damn!

But for such an ability, there was just one major flaw in her character that always set her back. Letoya was the submissive type. For no matter, how good she was in spotting the truth, she would still allow herself to be taken in by all the falsehoods. It was a flaw that Michael had noticed in her a long time ago, and a flaw he had taken advantage of, many, many times. But, in the end, it was also a flaw that made Michael grow the more sentimental and compassionate towards her, for it was an ugly flaw, that made her the more human.

But you didn't fall for it this time, though.

Although… I'm guessing… pretty sure, if I hadn't fallen apart back there, with that whole Nikki questioning. And had pushed a bit further. I could have had you, again, dropping to your….

But Michael then frowned, as he realized he didn't like that idea,

anymore… not one bit!

No, I guess if you don't want me, anymore, that's all there is to that. Wouldn't want to pressure you into anything you wouldn't wanna do. Like I expressed, I believe in that ‘takes two to tango' bit, so if you were to get all submissive, again, and allowed me to take you. But, deep down, you really weren't interested. I'd still just be wasting my time, making love to a woman that had no passion for it, whatsoever. Like some stupid chick, with some stupid guy, in some stupid porno! Fuck that passionless shit. I wanted the old touch, and I know for a damn fact I wouldn't be getting any, with you, if that was the circumstance involved.

At least, I guess, it's nice to see how you're now finally able to stand up for yourself. Even if that means brushing me off. Now, if you can just get away from those Nim Fo fucking pimps, you'd really be better off.

Hmm… really should find Annabelle, again. I mean, during conjugal visits, this one time, she flirted up one of the guards into giving up his hat. And when she came in to see me, she had it on. She then smiled and giggled at me when she saw how confused I looked. Then literally gave me a salute, said, 'reporting for duty,' in that cutesy accent of hers, giggled again, dropped to her knees, and went to town.

God, she was adorable…
God, she was stupid, too…
God… do I miss her!

Life in the Big Apple.

As they continued riding towards Uptown, Letoya began to grow weary of where Michael was taking her.

“Michael, I don't know what business you have with Radboy, but, I don't think it's a good idea to be going to Manhattan,” replied Letoya, finally.

Michael sighed, and stood by his mission.

“Michael, you know Manhattan isn't any safer than the rest of the

city—right?"

"Come on, Letoya! It's safer than where we were at," responded Michael.

But, Michael knew—damn well! Letoya was right about that matter. Driving over the Williamsburg Bridge, Michael looked towards the Manhattan skyline, and smiled. But, as mentioned, the Big Apple was still no place for one to be feeling safe.

Since Michael had gone to prison, things had not been the same. The crime rate all over the city (and really, all over the country) had continued to grow in a daunting pace, but so had its economic structure, and with the rise of the yuppies, along with the gangs, there was now an interesting mix of the two, where they were both managing to do business, side by side.

Nothing you'd see on the surface, but if you were to check out the criminal underbelly? You'd be seeing a vastly uglier scene.

Of course, Manhattan was still NYC's jewel, so nothing would be apparent on the surface, except for all the bulls around, that were pretending to be keeping things in order. But, as for the underground?

Shady deals and business practices.

And the employment of two-bit criminals that were willing to make some extra dough catering to the high ups.

Best example of how rotten the Big Apple has gotten, we need to then take a good look at its core. To the heart of the matter, and, the heart of the city. And that being....

Central Park.

If you're looking for the best example I can give expressing how bad things have gotten, this is the place to start.

In all of New York City, Central Park was the last place anyone wanted to be at after the sun had set. Besides the type of characters Central Park always attracted at night, there was now this urban legend about there being these group of guys, called The Nightslashers, that stalked the night, making anyone who wondered in, accidentally, regret ever doing so. Truly regret! For say what you wanna say about The Cockskulls or Monkeyfuckers, at least they weren't some crazy pagan cult, looking to do human sacrifices.

Hell! Central Park, as mentioned, has never been a safe place at

night. But once these jokers moved in, that's when you started to see all the other whack-jobs, flashers, perverts, and thieves, come rushing out in horror, of what The Nightslashers were all about. Once they moved in, all the other rats—moved out!

And the thing was, nobody was willing to do anything about it. Since they weren't a group you'd find out in the open, and since, supposedly, still just an urban legend (meaning: they might not have even existed). As long as they stayed hidden in the park, the police weren't willing to go in to deal with them, personally.

A person might ask themselves, then: 'Why would the anyone allow such evil to continue in the heart of the city?' But. Fact of the matter was, the city, and all those Armani Suits, sorta insisted on it. Truth of the matter was, Uptown was now just as much of a dangerous place as anywhere else in the city. For in those skyscrapers, those castles in the sky, there was a different sort of gangland warfare being waged, amongst the corporations. Being waged amongst the suits. Fuck-up in Uptown, and you got gagged, bagged, and dumped into the middle of Central Park, at midnight. For this was also the entertainment hour for all the Gordon Geckos, living it up on 5th Ave. As they'd be partying it up, up there, on the roofs of their chateaus, and watch with their telescopes, as a co-worker of theirs, would be chased by scythe wielding maniacs, dressed up like it's always Halloween.

It was simply disgusting what this city had become during the span of time since Michael had been in.

You know, I also remember Cecilia, and I do miss her, too, for the short period of time we had together. Fleeting fucking moments... but still!

Being an Italian girl from the Bronx, she had that love/hate thing over arguing in that 'if I'm lyin,' I'm diein" accent of hers. And I don't know what it is I find about Italian women complaining, that turns me on... but it does! There's so much fire and passion spewing out of them, because what they really want is a man to show them right. I remember Cecilia would be churning up a

maelstrom of spit and brimstone at me, thinking I was one of those dickless Italian boyfriends of hers. That only knew how to express themselves, by beating her. She'd go off on me, embittered about something or another, for a while, straight. Calling me all sorts of names, and complaining about this, and that. And I'd listen... and find it all sexy. After a while, I'd just smile at her, get down on my knees, and start showing her my cunning linguist skills. That there would then completely throw her off. And... it was like, she had never had a man go down on her before. I mean... dickless Italian boyfriends—

Although, they scare me, though! Keep claiming they're related to someone that works for John Gotti, just to make themselves look tough and formidable. And I can't help but get all afraid I might get whacked, and hung in some freezer, if I said something wrong to them. Even though, I know, I can take most of them, since they're all mostly a bunch of spaghetti slurping fat fucks, so unfit! Thought Michael, but then went back to Cecelia, and Italian women.

But... anyways! I'd be eating that rug out, like a vacuum cleaner, and the funny part was, how she'd continue bitching me out. But, after a bit, her bitching would slowly transition into moaning, as she'd start singing a different tune, crying out an opera. Now, that there, was some sweet heavenly music to my ears. And—boy—do Italian women go ballistic when someone is munching on their carpets, too! Never seen nor heard a woman weep and moan so much in my life... but... then again, there's also....

“Michael, there's cops behind us?”

“What?”

“What if they stop us... and... I mean, you know how they are now, too, right? let's just turn back. This isn't worth it!”

It really wasn't worth it, either. For another detail to that urban myth was, the police had developed a nasty habit, of creating their own form of off-the-books justice. One of them which involved The Nightslashers. Piss off the cops, enough, and you'd also find yourself in the middle of Central Park, with a bag over your head, and handcuffed behind your back. In prison, Michael would sometime catch the guards talking about

some snuff tape that was being passed around: of some Cockskull, running for his life, and plowing face first into a tree, as The Nightslashers caught up, and swarmed in for the kill.

Were those videos real? Or, were they fake? I don't know…

"Oh, thank you, we're in Chinatown," cried out Letoya.

The bulls, at this point, stopped pursuing the two, and turned back.

"Yeah—yeah! We're in Chinatown, but let's not get too excited until we reach 1999."

"Michael, I don't know if I want to continue anymore, this is all just too much for me."

"Don't worry—okay? Everything will be fine."

Michael then realized something, considering the fact that he had now dragged Letoya all the way out here, he was definitely responsible of what might happen next. Even though Letoya was a regular in Uptown, she was usually escorted here in a limo, drinking champagne, with a couple of Suits. Not by some crazy Mick, straight out of prison, riding around on a stolen chopper; with vengeance in his eyes, and blood on his shirt.

I ain't that bad though… am I? I mean, I know I'm crazy and stupid… but I'm no Freddy Krueger! Right?

Michael also then realized that maybe the reason why Letoya was allowing him to drag her all this way was because of that complex of hers; always allowing the men in her life to have their way with her; make her come along where she didn't fit. She went from being a well-established nurse, to being pimped out by a bunch of sex fiends calling themselves 'The Nim Fo Matics;' Michael thought about how far she had fallen after losing her job in the hospital, needing money, and turning towards escort service. Now, here they were, and Michael was the escort. Realizing this, Michael started to feel like a royal piece-of-shit. If something was to happen to—

I don't want to think about that! You pushed me away when we were safe at your place, Letoya, but now you're allowing me to take you places where it might not be safe. Ah fuck, I don't want to think about that shit, either!

Then Michael thought about something else he could center on:

Stumpy getting his fat fingers stuck in a rotary phone dial—ha! Now that's funny!

They were now in the heart of Chinatown. Michael had spent a lot of time here in the past, messing around with some pals of his that were part of The Real Americans.

> Yeah, just to make something clear, right now, I do have a lot of acquaintances, but they're not exactly what you'd call: friends. What it really is, is that macho bullshit, where we just accept each other's presence, because one or the other knows, one or the other can fuck one of the other up, up quick! Of course, with me around... well... there! So, all these people I know, aren't exactly friends, but really just people scared and unwilling to go beyond formalities. Fuck I want me some hair-pie!

Actually, The Real Americans were a Chinese outfit, really called the Lo Jack City Kings. They just also called themselves The Real Americans, to fuck with the heads of any white cops trying to arrest them. It was their way of giving racist white America the middle finger.

> A lot like the Black Jesus Army in Harlem.

Who had obviously come up with that name, just out of spite, and nothing else. A funny story about the BJAs was: a couple of years ago, some BJA graffiti artist had managed to pass himself off in Uptown as a billboard artist. At nighttime, he painted a giant image of Black Jesus, looking pissed, and pointing like Uncle Sam. And it was captioned:

> 'Black Jesus wants all you white crackers—DEAD!'

It was all over the news, and all over America, and it was a riot. But then it got really ugly, when gun-toting rednecks from all over took it as a sign of war being declared: a race war. And they stepped out of their houses condemning the blackies and spics and chinks, as state enemies, that needed to be punished. Waving American flags, and spewing their racist nonsense. The reactions from these yahoos were so bad, and embarrassing, that the city's Mayor had to step out and apologize in reluctance, for something he had nothing to do with. For Michael, words could not express how stupid it was seeing all that happen on prison TV.

Let's Talk About Race.

> I don't wanna talk about race! I hate talking about race! I ain't racist! That's something I at least ain't. I mean, I know there's a lot

of shit wrong with me. I'm an asshole, a jerk, a user, a prick. I'm completely batshit crazy! I'm also a heartbreaker, a womanizer... what you might even call... misogynist, even. Even though I truly, deeply, love all women with all my heart and soul... so...?

But I ain't no—
Shut up, Michael, shut up! No one's calling you that.
That's better. I was worried you might—
Not yet!

Anyways, let's talk about racism in the city now.
You know, that's one reason why I love living in New York. It's all a mixing pot, and you really only get racial shit going down when the pigs step in.
But then Michael realized how untrue that was.
I mean, there's still tons of racism, here, but the city is a mixing pot, and we're all miserably living on by in this festering cesspool, like one giant unhappy dysfunctional family. Like the Bundys. We all hate each other, but at least it's not because I'm white, he's black, she's Hispanic, and that guy over there is an Asian.
Michael shook his head, as he continued to realize how much he was bullshitting himself, still.
Fine! That does happen a lot. But still, we've at least accepted each other... well... not completely!
But we can at least tolerate one another... sometimes?
Although, I'm pretty sure anywhere else in America it might be a different story... would it?

Actually, I don't like thinking nor talking about this shit, even though I do have to deal with it all the time. I mean, with racial shit. I might be white, but that doesn't mean my strongest feelings would be directed to nonwhites. I mean, did you know there's whites being racist with other whites, in a way? Well. For instance. Italians! If there's any group I don't like, it's them! But not to be racist. They just scare me the most, so, if there's any group I might personally have a thing against—it's them! With them, I just get edgy, when I get the feel the asshole might be linked to the mob,

or something, and they're gonna try to use it against me. But, that also just means I really just hate the mob, and not all Italians.

As for other groups, like Hispanics... I don't know... they can be cocky, and get all hot-blooded, and in-your-face with me, sometimes. But... fuck... I get that a lot, from everyone, all around. So, it hasn't exactly gotten me to separate them in my mind from the rest of the lot, as being some Numero Uno arch villains of mine, I'd have some major beefs with. Or, something.

Fuck, I love me their women, though! Fuck, I would love to be eating out some Puerto Rican babe right about now, instead. Instead, of riding around in this cold ass weather. Would rather be... if I was in... something warm. But yeah! Fucking love doing it to them like that, as they start calling me 'Papi'! With Puerto Rican babes. That, or Cuban babes. Mexicans. Salvadorians. Or Spaniards... wait? What Latin woman have I not been with?

Ha! Wanna hear something funny, though? I can always tell exactly what country they from, from the taste and texture. With one chick, I even impressed myself, when guessing she was a Colombiana from Cartagena, and got it right. That's right! Even got the city, down! Really impressed her, too! Ha!

Anyways.

Asians? They're sorta quiet, and... I don't know... I haven't met one that knows Kung Fu, that can kick my ass, so whatever! Although, I've never been attracted to Asian women, either. Why is that?

Other whiteboys and girls, like me? Well, here's my personal feeling about being white in America, today. Even though it feels like there's thousands of separate groups of us—English, Irish, Italian, German, Greek, etc, etc—and us all unable to get along with each other. Even though... there really is only two ever that comes to mind: lily whites, and the other sort—my sort! Now, with lily whites, they're the ones that have pretty much gotten their acts

together. They're the ones that are middle class and up. Well to do. What all other races think of when they imagine whites, and forget about the rest. Lily whites are also people that've gotten soft. Weak and scared people that since the 50s, have been moving out of the inner cities, and into the country. Into Suburbs.

Hmm, reminds me of I Love Lucy, for some reason. Half the show was set in New York City, the other half practically moved to Connecticut... somewhere, and got lame.

But yeah, I guess that show was the sign of the times, of how most white people were feeling. Although, funny how they let a Hispanic, Ricky Ricardo, into those communities. But... yeah! It was all about lily whites moving out, and into giant gated communities, segregating themselves from the foreign lot. Lily whites are just frail people, with frail wills, and minds. But since they're so cooperative and productive amongst themselves, they can build things, own things, and in the end, control things. Those are what lily whites are, and what they're made of: sugar and spice, and everything nice, and shit! Funny though, how they're now trying to move back in, and gentrify shit! I mean, we've been getting a shit load of them, their yuppie variations, moving back into Manhattan, and changing shit up.
Hmm...?

Ha! Maybe they should do a I Love Lucy spinoff, and have Ricky Jr. as a yuppie, moving back to the old apartment, and having to deal with how much has changed. That would be... nah! I still wouldn't watch it!

But anyways, as for the other sort. Unlike the lilies. The ones that ain't so nice, and are made of snips and snails, and puppy dog tails. The ones that you'd think are still fresh off the boat, even though Irishmen, and Italians, and Germans, and Hungarians, and Pollacks, and So-and-Sos, have all been done getting off of ships for over a hundred years now. Well... the thing about them is... well... let's first start off calling them for what they're mostly being

called today: 'White Trash!' And really, I'd say they're the most despised group in all of America, if you were to come to think about it. I mean, check this out. With blacks! Most people are mostly scared of them, especially the lily whites. But they're not that much despised, as they are felt sorry for, and feared. Blacks, and Hispanics, also, might get the most shit since everyone is scared of them the most, but they're not the most despised group. White trash are the most despised group. Society fucking hates our kind, so much, they like to call us just straight up trash. I mean, the n word is the Spanish word for black. And black people seem fine being called black. So, even with all the connotations, literally, the n word isn't a bad word.

Now here's the question… how the fuck do you call a group of people straight up trash, huh? I've heard all other racial slurs for people: spade, spic, wetback, chink, gook, slope, camel jockey… ha! Camel jockey, that name's kinda funny, though.

Michael now snickered a bit to himself.

None of them are really that bad. But—trash! Fucking straight up 'trash?'

It's the most racially generated hateful slur ever created in the history of man!

It's like if they were to start calling black people 'turds.' Oh yeah! It's like that!

Now you fools get it, don't you!

Michael, are you breaking the fourth—…?

Fuck yeah, I am!

Michael now needed a moment, after contemplating over that matter.

And mostly, lily whites are the ones doing the most hating. Since we remind them of how they used to be, before they got their acts together, and went all Village People. And since we're white like them, they don't feel guilty about expressing that hatred, either.

They hate us… because we're the nigger versions of them staring them back into the mirror! Fucking…!

Michael now needed another moment.

Oh, I forgot there's a third white group… also, a fourth! And even though in today's world it might seem—seem—like all Europeans have put aside all their differences; giving each other high fives for the master race, and shit… then there's the 'other white meat,' Russians! And they're even whiter than the rest of us, yet, they just ain't no love for the Russkie. Ain't no love whatsoever… but I've never had anything against them.

As for dealing with blacks? I end up dealing with extremes. I'm usually the coolest around them. Never been really scared of them like the rest of lily white America really is. Although, they are some cocky fuckers, but then again—so am I! Funny how whenever I start talking about pussy, they get really excited, and want to be all buddy-buddy with me, seeing as how much of a sex fiend I am, which most of them are themselves. And I remember the best conversations I had about chasing tail had always been with Dollboy—fucking cockblocking jerk! Can be really bitching cool with blacks. But then, when I get into a fight with them, it always turns into a race war, whether I want it to or not. I remember trying to pick up some black chick in Queens a couple weeks ago, and I had four black guys approach me, telling me to fuck off, and stick to my own kind. And the main dude was some ex-boyfriend that was stalking that chick at that bar. Well… that's what she told me later that night. Of course, once I blew him off, that's when shit went down. And the thing is, every time I get into a fight with a black guy, they always say something about me being a whiteboy, as they look me up and down, and laugh like they're thinking: 'Ha-ha! I'm black, you're white! Mike Tyson is the champ, so that means I can kick your ass!'

But then when I beat the fuck out of him, him and his three black friends. All of a sudden, I was now the bad guy. Looking up at me like a bunch of Kunta Kintes, and I'm supposed to be some white

plantation owner, that's whipping them, and calling them Toby—stealing their women! Fucking bullshit!

Oh, I hate dealing with racial matters!

I mean, that black girl was so bad! Damn she had an ass on her! And every time she walked, her ass started firing off like pistons on a chopper. Fuck you and your 'stick to your own kind!' As if every black guy I've met doesn't try to hit on white chicks. And fuck you and your Mike Tyson shit, too—you ain't him! So, don't start thinking the color of your skin is going to give you superpowers, since a lot of athletes are black. I mean, based on that logic, that's like saying being white is going to give you higher intelligence, since you never see black people being scientists, and inventing shit, or working for NASA. So, is that to say most blacks are a bunch of dumb apes?

Ha! You don't like the sound of that—do you? Then don't be thinking stupid racist shit like having magical ass kicking powers, because you're black—okay? I mean, that's just the Asians, since they all know Kung Fu. Wha-Da!

Michael then rolled his eyes, and chuckled.

It's really just a cultural thing. It's what society has allowed them to excel at, sports and entertainment. If it was the other way around, it would have been the other way around! Stupid shit! Not saying the world hasn't taken the biggest shit on them, because I've seen how it has.

Truthfully! All hands down! The only reason there still hasn't been a Great White Hope, isn't because of physical differences. It's because of righteousness. Yeah… righteousness! Boxing is… the ultimate sport when it comes to two men bringing all the pain and pressure and passion and suffering they've experienced in their lives, and proving it to themselves, and the rest of the world, in the ring. Trying to see if it's been enough, to make them the better man.

Black people?
The title is rightfully theirs, because they've fought and suffered enough to where they now are the ones that righteously deserve it. And until there's a white man that's fought and suffered enough, there won't be any Great White Hope, because proving superiority isn't what it's all about.

Michael then had a pause… but then thought:

But still… they're really racist, too, in a way. What the fuck do I have to do with slavery, and the shit that went down in this country back in the day? If it's a shame that's supposed to be inherited. Well… okay! Check this shit out! Both my family lines weren't even here when slavery was going on. My dad and his family moved from Ireland in the 30s, and they lived like train hopping hobos during the Great Depression. And even though my mom was born here, her parents met in Germany, back in the 30s, also, and moved here to escape the craziness going on in that country at the time. So, I'm exempt from all the guilt and shame I see going on! If I want, I can fuck as many black chicks—as I wanna! And beat up as many of their dudes—as I wanna! As I damn well please!

Plus, I'm part Armenian, so—fuck y'all! My people have had it—worse!

And as with black chicks, from what I've seen, those chicks love my white dick! Fucking love it! And in comparison, with size, an issue has not once been brought up, not once! And the only thing that has been brought up when dealing with my real true-to-the blue Great White Hope, has been:

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah suki suki, now!

So there!

Fuck… I hate racial shit! Everyone is so sensitive, now, and there's so much red tape and boundaries being set up all around, that I no longer know what to think, anymore. And they're just boundaries,

too, and the only time I really do think about race is when I'm thinking:

- I love fucking Hispanic chicks, it's like they're dancing on my cock! Yeah, it is getting pretty caliente up in here—isn't it?
- Wow, the big lips black girls got really does take fellatio to a newer level!
- Okay, a scrawny white girl. This should be really, really easy. I don't have to talk her into doing any kinky shit, like I have to do with Hispanic and black chicks—she'll just do it!
- Wait? She's Jewish? Fuck! Just lie to her about your occupation, and... wait? Why am I even hitting on her? Except for one, every Jewish girl I've met has been: mean, self-centered, humorless, spoiled, and really horrible at sex. Also, too hairy for my taste. Only that one feisty Aviv girl, that was a gung-ho Israeli commando, with a buzzcut, looking like a bitching Sinead O'Connor, was totally badass! Damn she had tone, with zero fat, except for her humongous pointy tits, that stuck out like she was holding up two AK-47s under each arm, aimed and ready. Almost broke my back trying to give it to her, as she kept moaning 'harder!' Man, it felt good when she began pulling it with her teeth, while tonguing the tip, to see how far she could stretch it. I think we got four more inches before it felt like it was going to tear, right off. Man, that felt good! Then she began fingering me, before moving around, and tossing my salad. Damn woman had me moaning and groaning like Nikki used to! I think I was in love for the second time in my life. Hmm... yeah, sorry, not Aviv Jewish chick. Sorry princess! Maybe if you were from Israel, I'd have interest in you, still. But right now, I see a Hispanic chick sitting at the other end of the bar, that really deserves my attention. So, see you later—Tootsie!
- Ha! I love fucking Middle Eastern chicks! The sex varies, but just the thought I might be pissing off some Middle Eastern dude, that would've had this woman all covered up, makes my day. Now, the only thing covering her is my joy juice.
- Italian girl? Okay! Better get an umbrella, and wage out the storm, before she eventually gets horny, and finally decides to fuck me.

Actually, Hispanic girls are like that, too. And black girls. It's just other white girls that aren't… why is that?

- Hmm—I've never fucked an Asian girl before, I need to change that, no matter if they don't really attract me much. Gotta do it just to see if I'd like the touch. Definitely should start with Japanese chicks, though. I think I like them the most, seeing how lively and animated they are with their peace symbols, all smiling so lovely for cameras. So cute! And unlike every other Oriental language, which most sound like a cat with the whooping cough being swung around by its tail, Japanese sounds like sweet music to my ears, so I'd like to hear them moan it out, for me, while I'm turning Japanese on them. Fuck! Now I gotta get me some Japanese chicks, later!

  So yeah! Let all the dickless douchebags—no matter their race—have their race wars, while I fuck all their women. And really, when it comes to racism, it's only men that wage that shit. But let them, and when they're all done, and come looking to take me on, next, I'll then prove just how much of a fighter I am, as I am a lover, as I gather them all up, and break them over my knee, like a bunch of twigs. Then go back to fucking all their women, again, but this time let them watch, as they lay there all bloodied up and twitching on the floor. Have all their women moaning and groaning, while I show their men how it's done!

  Rompous-Pompous!

Michael!

What?

Michael… what about the fourth white group?

Huh?

You said there was a fourth…?

….

Did you mean, Middle Easterners?

No.

I don't know, I'm thinking about, how in application forms, 'white' tends to mean a bunch, and I thought you meant them.

No… I guess they're more like the fifth. Or, most today see them as 'Brown People'… I don't know.

Then, who, by your opinion and understanding, are you referring to?

Umm.

Michael now got really depressed.

You don't want to—…!

No, I'll talk about it, I'll talk about it!

Like that example, of application forms for work, you said 'white,' what's another word for them?

….

Come on, you're my inner thoughts, don't play coy!

Oh… you mean: Caucasians.

….

Did you mean them?

Yeah.

You mean, like Armenians? And you're 1/4th Armenian, I believe.

Michael got more depressed.

You know, it's funny, there's an entire group of people between Europe and Asia, in the Caucasus, the world has completely forgotten about, isn't there?

You see Caucasian on work applications, but there's an entire group of people, with that name, the world has—

Yeah, yeah… enough! Bingo. Good shit, Sherlock, you solved the case.

Why are you getting defensive?

….

You know, it's funny, Armenia, Biblically, might be where the Garden of Eden was located. It's definitely where Noah landed his Ark. On Mount Ararat. Of course, if you believe in that stuff.

….

So, it's where all of humanity got a second shot. All white, brown, black, yellow… everyone! Take them all, they all came from a small group of survivors off a boat. Like Gilligan's Island, ha! From Noah's sons: Ham,

Shem and Japheth. Armenia, maybe not the original Eden, but, the second Eden, which we're all descended from.

....

And in a sense, you can take it as, 'Caucasian,' being the original name for all races. Since in the lands of Armenia, all were related in blood. From Armenians to English to Russians to Eskimos to Aztecs to Chinese to Japanese to Egyptians to Zulu to Polynesian to Australian Aborigines. All! At that point in time. At that place. Simply being three brothers.

I don't know...
Maybe I'm putting too much thought into this.

Of course, in today's world, the word 'Caucasian' might be used a lot, but everyone has forgotten what and where it...!

Michael... you okay?

....

Michael?

The Hindenburg.

Then Michael started thinking in a weird way, as his mind began to do looping zoom-ins.

> In the end, it's all about me creating my own unique race. Ha! Nazi Germany's blonde and blue-eyed Übermensch ain't got shit with what I'm concocting up in here, in New York. Fuck everyone, no matter their race! It's all about me, and my gene pool, fucking all of theirs! Wrapping the legs of every white, black, brown, yellow, blue, orange, plaid woman alive, around my waist, to create the unirace—or whatever the fuck you'd call it!
>
> Ich bin der Übermensch!
> Yes em Geramart-uh!
>
> I've already taken on an army of supposed Übermensches, and I wiped the floor with those cartoon characters. So, everyone now better stand at attention, and sieg hail my dick! I am Friedrich

Nietzsche's wet dream of how a man can only be fantasized as being. I'm Oden if Oden wasn't such a stupid fucking moron to get himself killed in Ragnarök. Got both brains and browns, and I can slay an army of men in ways that have only been depicted in Schwarzenegger movies, of that archetypical embodiment, of the super alpha! I'm not just an alpha, I'm a super apex alpha! Everyone here be swimming around like they're Jaws and shit—a bunch of puny great whites—while I'm a 100-foot-long, 80 metric ton, motherfucking Megalodon in these waters. The king of the sea! Now spin that Jaws' theme song around as I come bursting through the motherfucking movie screen, to take a bite out of all the popcorn munching audiences. I am the 80s prototype of what every dickless Babyboomer, my generation, truly strives for, because they're all envious of their war hero parents. I am what every 80s tough guy act could only dream of being. I am the one-man army! I'm Rambo in the second movie, without the PTSD from the first! Actually—beyond that! Fuck Nam! I'm what's left standing after WW2! I am Mr. Iwa Jima raising up the American flag! I am Americana if the Americana truly existed! I am what President Ronnie points at, when he speaks of America, and how he remembered it! I am John Wayne! I'm perfect!

I am the great white hope that can beat the black man at his own—game!

I am the missing link to what would truly lead up to the master race! I am what will be left after WW3, when the 90s roll over, and the world has been nuked back to the Stone Age. Just me and the cockroaches! So now round up all the women, bring them to me in a specially built fortified bunker underground, and let Dr. Strangelove nuke the world, and the rest of the—inferior—males in it. And let's start this over the right way! Rompous-pompous!

Then Michael broke off from that weird line of thought. Looked left, looked right, and had a small chuckle, as he thought:

What the fuck was that? Me and these crazy tangents I sometimes get. Fucking stupid shit! And I felt like I sorta meant it, too! Fuck,

I gotta be careful, before I turn into a Bond villain, or something. Ha! I got issues! And… why did I even teach myself German in prison, if I'm just going to self-service some…?

Crazy Nazi power fantasy… what? Wait—what? That's why I learned German? Fuck, I got issues!

After a while a reconciliation with himself, Michael then began thinking:

Damn that Aviv girl was badass! She was bitchin'! Another great chance at a potential significant other, lost to a one-night fling. Pity! Damn shame, really! I mean, I take it back, I have gotten my ass kicked—hard! And it was her, and I loved it! I mean, she made me moan and groan! Me! Only other person that's done that was…!

Stop thinking about her!

I really did like that Aviv girl; it was only two months ago I met her. And I truly did fall in love. But… I guess she moved on, as I moved on, 'cause, that's what the both of us were good at doing. Well, at least, I remembered her name. What the fuck was the name of that Texas girl? Come on! What was her name? What was also the name of that Polish girl? And what was the name of that French bisexual florist? Fuck!

"There it is," said Letoya.

Don't even talk to me Letoya! Fucking bitch! You'd go along with a bunch of pimps, and slimy yuppies in Manhattan, but reject me. You know what? You're just a…

Shit! Don't think that way with Letoya… not her!

Not Just the Kelly Bundy Types!

I feel depressed, again.

Thought Michael.

I really… I should really, like… feel blessed, with, what I got, though. I mean, nobody can woo a chick like I can. Nobody. Not

nobody! I'm the baddest motherfucking badboy on the planet. I mean, man… just look at me. Look at me! And my good looks. No dude has a face as perfect as this. With a bod to follow. And now, look at my charms to match! Along with bark and bite I gots that makes me out into a helluva fighter, I also gots me some grace and gorgeousness, that makes me out to be a true-to-the-blue dream boy lover, too. Who fucking has both? Who can wield both, like I can? Nobody. Ain't nobody.

And the fact of the matter was, **he was!** At this time in the world, in this world. Nobody was! For Michael, really was that ravishing and refined in appearance and appeal. You'd just had to meet him, and see his face, and look into his eyes, to see it! We can go on and on and on and… on… describing. But it would still all be in vain, for it's something that no words could ever… nor would ever… be able to describe.

Okay… okay… fine! I ain't no Jesus Christ Superstar! I ain't the face that would be able to change nations, and the world, or something! Get my ass crucified in the end, trying to save the human race. Humility check, Mikey! Humility check!

But still. I got my specialties. And thankfully. Thankfully, even after all those years I spent in prison, I still gots how I always had it with the ladies.

I mean… I shouldn't get afraid that… one day… I'd lose it?

And then all of a sudden, just the notion of that shook Michael, all the way down to his bones. As he almost had himself a major panic attack, while he quickly rushed for his Rosary, and began kissing.

"Michael… you still do that," said Letoya, seeming all concerned.

Shut the fuck up, Letoya… fucking…!

Shit! Don't get with the hate, again!

But luckily, the trick still did its job, as the panic attack was avoided. Michael now began centering on why this was the way it was:

If I lose that, it would be me losing my only true connection I have

with this world. The one only true means of communicating, I still gots with other people. And I don't want to lose it! I'm as territorial as a motherfucker right now. Since I spend so much time alone, and in isolation, at that studio dump I just came out of. A fucking wild animal in a cage, just throw live food in, and never enter, yourself. So, except for my special outings, that's how I am right now in my life. Every time I'm around other people for too long, I get territorial as shit, and feel like attacking them, for no damn reason at all.

How is this different from how you've always been?

No, I know that… but… I could possibly get worse. Even with all the fighting I've been doing, I was still getting into fights with another macho asshole like me, that are just asking for it. I mean, I could get worse! Really, really, really fucking worse! And start attacking the innocent. Women and children, even. And that—shit?

That now… really fucking scares me!

Scares the shit out of me! Like I might eventually turn, and go full 'Ender Mode,' go full Charles Whitman, go complete psycho… and…?

No, no, no! Don't go there! Don't go there! Don't! Not that fucking place! Please…?

Think of something, Michael. Think of something—now! A story or joke to change these fe—

I still got it, though, and not just with the Kelly Bundy types. All those bad chicks with the slutty power dresses, covered with tons and tons of crosses, who are just beggin'—beggin'! Like they on their knees, 'Please, please Daddy… Please!' for some alpha cock, like me, to come along, and show them a good time.

Thought Michael, and grinned something mean and maniacal, then. Then imagined himself checking himself out, as he blew himself a kiss.

Damn, is the fucking so good! When I can make those chicks beg

for my goods, that badly! Those Kelly Bundy streetwise, bitching beauties? Damn! Fucking damn!

And with that, Michael's constant full on hard on... got even bigger!

You know, fuck that one song, that Danzig's 'Mother'. The shit's too dark. And I ain't dark. I don't have a really dark... fucked up side... that....

My theme song should be... 'Cum on Feel the Noize' by Quiet Riot. Wait, let me reevaluate that for a moment, to see if it'd be true.

And then, Michael began playing the song in his head, then smiled. Since it was a song about getting rocked by vicious hot mamas, who loved to get wet, getting themselves with a real stud, like Michael. And now, Michael discovered he liked the song. A lot!

Yeah, that fucking song! That should be my theme song, there! Hmm—why is that song so awesome? Those Glam metal bands have yet to make a song that awesome... why is that? Oh yeah! It's originally a 70s song by Slade. That explains everything!

Michael then paused, trying to remember how the original was different, compared to the Quiet Riot version, but couldn't.

Fuck it!

Thought Michael, as a different story began playing in his head:

You know, also recently, at a bar, I decided to pick up the other type. Not just the Kelly Bundy types. But the ones I'm not so much used to. The super shy introverted types. I mean, the problem with those girls is that awkward shit they gots? It can be infectious. And as much as I might want to talk to them, I turn into Tomboy around them, and find myself in loss of words, and vibes, and body language. It's ironic a bit, how I'm more comfortable around the bold and emasculating lot, and a mess around the ones that ain't that way. But, that's the thing about awkwardness, it's just a sign you're ignorant about something, and if you want to overcome it, you have to learn to grow. You have to learn to deal with the types you ain't used to.

So... I saw this quaint and pretty blonde chick, with a button nose,

and chubby cheek bones. But, a real flat-chested girl, with hardly any butt. But, as I've mentioned earlier, big tits and ass don't matter to me, that much.

Like they do on the Kelly Bundy—

Fine! With those chicks, it does! But that's just their beauty. But with this chick I'm bringing up, now, that I met at a bar, I found myself loving the qualities she had, that were uniquely her own. I mean, it is possible to find attraction with someone that isn't all bombshell, you know. And sometimes, the qualities they got, can be leagues better, when you find them playing the same game you'd rather be.

Michael found himself thinking about her, again. Then sighed, and accepted it.

Anyways, with this chick, the little she had did something weird to me, that made me want to give all my love and attention to the little she had. Wanted to see how excited she'd get when I started sucking on her little tits, and kissing her little cherry ass, like I couldn't get enough of it.

And, I love kissing a woman's ass, too!

I don't know why, but I can do it for hours on end. Well... that is... if she allowed me to. If she didn't get too bored. As I worked my way to her diamond window. Used to do that with....

But anyways! This girl was all into that new wave crap: dressed in a pink shoulderless blouse, with blue bra straps. A pair of black and pink striped tights, along with blue leg warmers, and blue heels. And on her arms, she had tons and tons of plastic bracelets on, and she had giant hooped earrings on her ears, all plastic, in every color imaginable. She looked like she had had some eight-year-old kid barf up all over her, after trying to consume an entire box of Crayola, earlier. So fucking colorful, and MTV savvy, too, she was looking like the type of girl a flock of seagulls would be circling, everywhere she went. I mean, I know that cable TV channel has now become the nationwide standard for young America of how to walk and talk, look and dress, but—come on!

Have some originality! And she was so totally out of place at that bar, too. Considering she was in a biker bar, with motorheads, who all looked like they'd want to chain her up to the front of their choppers, as a hood ornament. I mean, she looked scared as fuck, too, in there. What the hell was she doing… a nice girl like her? In a mean place like that?

Anyways… I kinda felt protective of her, considering all that. So, I sat next to her, and smiled. She smiled back, but then instantly shied away, since she was—as I mentioned earlier—the super shy and sensitive type. At this point, I felt awkward as shit. This girl was too much of a delicate flower for these rough and tough hands. And I knew it, and she knew it, too. Both of us had gotten that sense of each other, instantly. And then… I found myself sitting there for far too long, as she started staring at me, all concerned like, with her peripheral vision.

Shit! I then felt best getting up and leaving. I mean, she looked like she probably thought I was also looking for a hood ornament… and…?

Which I sorta was! I'll admit, on the end of my… ha! But she'd like that, though!

Anyways, I wasn't used to this. I'm too dastardly and dirty minded, and I deal with chicks that like it like that. This girl was definitely not the type that would buy that 'I want to eat your pussy' line, even if she did like it herself.

Or would she?

But anyways, after getting a feel of her, I knew then I had to do something super cheesy to win her over. Before she left, and left me feeling a little too awkward to continue, looking for someone else. I knew I had to do something super cheesy, that she would definitely like. So first, I did what I always do: I got stupid… really, really fucking stupid. Then turned towards her, smiled, again, as

she did the opposite, and looked ready to leave. And then I started singing:

I feel fine and I feel good
I'm feeling like I never should
Whenever I get this way
I just don't know what to say
Why can't we be ourselves like we were yesterday
I'm not sure what this could mean
I don't think you're what you seem
I do admit to myself
That if I hurt someone else
Then I'll never see just what we're meant to be

Every time I see you falling
I get down on my knees and pray
I'm waiting for that….

I got so fucking cheesy, I started singing 'Bizarre Love Triangle' by New Order. And thankfully! Thankfully! It worked. And also, thankfully, I can hold a tune, and I have a pretty sweet singing voice, because if I didn't, that might have turned out disastrous. But, sure enough, it worked, and I had her then chattering a mile a minute at me in that Southern California valley girl accent, even though she said she was originally from Ohio. Saying 'totally this' and 'totally that' talking about this band, and that band, and I don't know what the fuck else. Since I had chosen to bring up music.

I mean… gag me with a fucking spoon!

Then Punky Brewster, there, took me to her college dorm, where a bunch of her Punky Brewster roommates, and friends, were having some sort of slumber party, or something. Oh, and I thought she was a Crayola mess! With them all, and their interior decorating skills, and all those posters, I felt like I was reading rainbows in there. I mean, how many posters of the Corey brothers do you need on the walls? Damn! Of course, being college girls, there was no

pillow fights, and talks about schoolboy crushes going on. They were no Marsha Bradys. But definitely some Jans. They were all getting drunk, playing spin the bottle, amongst themselves, and watching The Wraith on VHS. And to break the ice, since they were all also initially intimidated by my 'other side of the train tracks' presence, the girl I came with—what was her name?

Michael was just about to erupt into fits of rage… but then…?

Cindy? Yeah! Cindy. Pretty little Cindy Wallace. And I remember her last name, too! Yay!

But anyways, she got me to sing for them, too. But since I'm mostly into Led Zeppelin, and all that 70s Rock, only other new songs I knew most of the lyrics to were that Ah-Ha song, that Mister Mister song, and that Tears for Fears song. Pretty sure 'Stairway to Heaven' would have been going over all their heads since they were all eighteen, nineteen, and the oldest twenty-one. That twenty-one-year-old was probably just there as the booze runner, she was even more awkward than the rest, and the rest didn't seem to like her much. Frowned a lot, and reminded me of my sister. But anyways… I'm sure my favorite song 'Battle of Evermore' definitely would have been going over their heads. I mean, it's a song inspired by a book, and, what the fuck does this younger generation today know anything about nerdy bookworm stuff like the Lord of the Rings? Besides Seventeen magazine, do kids today even read anymore? Ha! Try to pry them away from the tube, that's got their brains turning to mush from watching too much MTV. Just try it! MTV, and the thousand other channels out right now thanks to cable. A thousand fucking channels, and with nothing ever any good that's on!

Michael then felt a little sad, there. But only a little.

But, the singing worked. It was enough to get them all stirring, too. Also, good thing I look younger than I do. I still get carded even for cigs, now and then. Knowing how their age group thinks, someone that's in their 30s would be ancient history to them. But anyways, then they started singing along and drinking, singing along and drinking, giggling and drinking, giggling and drinking, drinking and drinking and drinking—and then all of a sudden—they went

silent, and all started eyeing me like a piece of meat. Then got really, really, really fucking horny! All ten of them! As I got really, really, really fucking scared! I mean, there was fucking ten of them, and it looked like they probably took me for one of those Fonzie types, that never gave them an ounce of attention in high school, since they were all a bunch of Joanies. Yeah, I can see why they were sitting around watching The Wraith, probably took me for Charlie Sheen from that movie, which got them even more excited. And maybe that's why Cindy went into that bar in the first place, looking for a sacrificial lamb, or something. Yeah, that was a night to remember, getting a train ran on me by the cast from The Facts of Life. I mean, looks can be deceiving, and I've never felt more violated in my life.

And…?

I liked it—a lot! And fuck I got drunk, too! Can't believe I let them turn me into those Mötley Crüe glam metal types, when they started pulling out the make-up and wigs. What the fuck was I thinking allowing them to do that? Although, when they made me look at myself in the mirror, I had to admit—even though it went completely against my nature—I had to admit that I'd make one smoking hot babe, if I was a she instead of a he. Fuck, am I hot as a…?

Okay…!

Maybe I shouldn't be thinking too much into that, since I spend a lot of time already looking at myself in the mirror all…?

Anyways! Then they tried pulling out their toys on me, too, and—fuck that! I wasn't going anywhere near that shit. Ha! As for the next morning, after crawling out of that pile of women, I had to take a shower. I had to! And I had to spend twenty minutes scrubbing my genitals and that entire region to get all the lipstick and makeup and glitter off. Funny how that one girl spread lipstick on the tip, and asked if Pacman—now Miss. Pacman—would like

to give her a kiss. Ha! And I thought I had a filthy mind! Yeah... hell of a night! And even still till this very day, I keep coming up with glitter every time I look, since it's so hard to get that shit off. Sometimes in weird places. Two days ago, I found some in my belly button. But still, it was worth it. So fucking worth it!

And thinking about all that, Michael felt better again.

"Michael, is that glitter behind your ears," asked Letoya.

Fucking A!

Thought Michael, as he rushed his finger up to scrape it off. And then after about a minute had passed, as he came up to a red light, he then went back to that one notion, he just couldn't resist entertaining another second of, in his head.

Hmm—if I was born a she instead of a he? Wonder how things would have turned out? And I know I would be hot as fuck, too! Hotter than most chicks I've come across. Even that Isabella girl, and she was a supermodel. Also, a part of me thinks I'd...?

And scary enough... a big part, really.

Fuck!

But then again, since I'm such a man-whore, allowing trains to be ran on me...?

I'd be... wait?

No!

Yeah, I would have to be a lesbian then!

And left it at that.

New Slang Of York

As a wandering spirit out and about in the mortal world…
I flew into a window…
And saw a man, that made me grow mighty frightful.

His eyes.
Just, his eyes.

He had to be a man in his 30s, somewhat. A broad and brutish man, who was very reminiscent of a long ago, far away, Hebrew Prince. With golden hair, amassed with strong golden curly locks. And hazy green eyes. Deep green eyes, deep as a forest in the morning hours. Like the planet of Uranus. Green and deep and deluged. Like seas into a world of a very alien nature.

This was New York City,
In the year, 1988.
In Brooklyn.

I flew into this window, of a fifth story halfway house.

The man sat there, in his underwear, staring at his hands. And, so fearful I felt, watching him do so. This was a dark place. And this man, and this man's mind, body and soul, were in a dark place. The studio apartment was a place of haunts and horrors, in of itself. A hole in the wall, in a very, very decrepit building. In a very decrepit city. All were buildings, abandoned in ravenous ruins. All were outfitted as useless. Like rocky formations in badlands, holed with several, several, several bird's nests, which had all been abandoned.

And here,
In this particular pigeonhole, was this man, with also such a decrepit and decayed and devilish soul.

Is he a demon?
I feared.

For he seemed as such.
And those eyes.
Those monstrous eyes.
And how intently they stared at his hands.

His bare hands.

As though… they were speaking to him.

He was a man in a white undershirt, that had a peculiar design on it. He sat there, barefooted. And next to him was set a nearly empty bottle of Jack Daniel's whiskey.

Actually, looking at the apartment as a whole, there were many sets of totally empty liquor bottles:
Jack Daniels.
Johnny Walker Black Label.
Jameson.
Jim Beam.
Wild Turkey 101. Lots of Wild Turkey 101 bottles roosting everywhere. So much Kentucky Bourbon lying around. And even a Van Winkle, which was an expensive bottle, and looked to be stolen.

Plus, lots of Beefeater.
Bombay Dry.

Rum!
Tons of Goslings and Morgans and Bacardis.

Vodka, not so much.
But lots of Swedish Absoluts.

No tequila.

So much liquor.
So many spirits.
So, so many spirits. Like a tavern in hell, with so, so many demonic

spirits and sprites all around this man. Sitting with this man. Speaking with him. As was now that one Jack Daniels, even after being so completely depleted of everything it had to say.

The man was fixated on his hands still.
Staring at them!
His lips would move methodically, as he'd speak to them. And his eyes, were terrifying! What thoughts were in this man's mind? With what understandings and reasonings? And most likely, what lack thereof?

He got up now, and walked over to a mirror in the bathroom.
He was now staring at himself in the mirror.
Staring, with those unholy and ungodly eyes.
Like greenish hells. Like green shamrocks dripping in mortal red blood of countless and countless innocent foes.
Staring!
A devil looking at a devil in the mirror, and not recognize it to be itself, for devils are not able to mentally grasp the horrors into their own very souls with such a blind mind's eyes, and they cannot and would not even recognize themselves when seeing themselves. The man then lifts up his shirt, and begins eying at his corps. Eying mostly his midriff. He's an attractive man. Very attractive. Must note. Physically well endowed. And, looking at his midriff, I see tattoos of kiss marks, all trailing downwards on his lower belly. And the man stares into his own eyes, as if the Greek Narcissist would, into his own reflection. And now I get a sense into other aspects of this man and what he is about. Now noticing other details, as I look all around, more into his apartment. And I see perversions of so, so many forms.

Pornography, so much pornography: Playboy, Hustler magazines, and videotaped pornography. And there's condoms laying out in the open. Used condoms. And there's stains of ejaculation all over the place. Especially the man's bed. And then a stench hits me, for I realize, I am practically in a bordello. It's not just the smells of a man, but women. Several, several, several women. As if the entire living spaces were made to encapsulate so much flesh, womanly flesh, fashioned as trophy pieces. Here, a wall covered with plaques with sets of many women's

breasts, out on display. Here, their hearts. And now look at the wall over there of their heads. And here, the Taurus shaped figurines of their womanhood.

Is this man a lady killer?
No… he isn't that… yet. Not in the literal act, at least.
For these trophies are still but set pieces committed by heart, and not by hand. Even if God has already judged this man of being a slayer of women's mortal shells, anyways.

He is still staring at himself in the mirror.
What does he see in there?
What does he see into his very own soul?

And then, rage incarnate, as the demon sights a bit more into itself, as it must have for once, recognized itself and for all and what it is.
And then:
Smash!
As it rams his own fist into his own reflection. Damning itself!

Blood!
Blood now gushes from his hand.
He licks at the blood.

And now, rage again!
As he slams his other fist into his own door.

And… now all is bedlam.

He is a man recking his own very apartment like a man on the edge. He then throws a chair out of his window, shattering that window. Then sits down on the bed he was on before. And says:
"Rompous Pompous."
The first words he has uttered yet, before me.
"Rompous Pompous." He says again.
And now, he lifts his arms out before himself again. And begins a ritual, of one he had been so heavily invested in before. Speaking, speaking,

speaking, with whatever exactly it is, they are, they be, his hands, to this man. What relations he so-called has with them.

Now he seems enamored.
In love.
A demon in love. But, how can that be? In love with his own arms, as if they were the instruments of his own intervention. He speaks again, but speaks now, as if he knows not that he is speaking:
“There is no reason left in controlling it. I have nothing precious left in my life to preserve. So maybe… just maybe… it's about time I become my own tall tales told in bars and beat up joints across the East Coast: a tale about a guy in the 70s, who had been sent to prison to rot. That came back out in the 80s, out on the other end. Came back out—against all odds—to take back… that! That had been taken from him.”

He says this to himself, itself, and, I see him pointing down as he does so. With much conviction. While still holding onto that empty bottle of Jack Daniels from before. He looks again at the mirror, the shattered mirror. And leers at himself. And smiles. And says:
“Hmm… a million of mes. If only all the chicks in this city could be so lucky.”
And now, the demon kisses himself in the mirror. And just the nature of that kiss disturbs me so. For there was great perversion in it. He then dresses himself. Then lights a cigarette and sings to himself:

“*Mother*
Tell your children not to walk my way
Tell your children not to hear my words
What they mean
What they say
Mother”

Now smiles. And says:
“God… I love that song!”
He now leaves.

As he steps outside, the man sees a police car speeding across the street

before him, with the sirens on. And I am struck now with a particular sense, as if this is the man that is the disturbance on the other end. The demon laughs. And says:
“Fuck! Wow! When was the last time I felt this… alive?”

He is now in the street, headed in a direction.
And now, a woman appears before this lonesome stranger’s path, a beautiful woman, tanned and tempting and voluptuous. But the stranger sees not into her soul, but chooses to see all there is about her without. And now, something peculiar. But sinfully so, and all but sinister in nature. The man stares at the woman creepily. And then to my abhorrent astonishment, the man begins to commit to sorcery. The man’s body is now all but soulless. And carnal. And cruel. And cruel to the woman’s eyes. The woman might have come bearing physically pleasing fruits, but her nature was that of a fair maiden. This man, a loathsome dog. And like a dog returning to its own vomit.

He's hypnotizing her.
Sex!
Sex!
His eyes beckon to her.
Sweat covered adulterated sex.
And the woman, now cannot help but to find this temptation, this hulking brute’s temptation, welcoming. Much, much too pleasingly so.
Moan!
Her mind does, and she’s losing all her senses. And falling into a singularity of one hellish sense. She is now the lonesome and loathsome iron center core of Venus.
He’s mocking her now.

The woman has left.
The man blows her a kiss.
“*Father*
I'm gonna take your daughter out tonight
I'm gonna show her my world
Oh father”

I… do not know who I am.
What I am, exactly.
All I can say is, I am a spirit, a spirit ordained to follow this man. I exist between worlds. In the twilight recesses of one world and another. It's night out now. It's the year of our Lorde, 1988.
But to me, it feels like another era.
Another epoch.
It might as well be 988, Ano Domini.

Ano Domini 954… hmm?
Actually, that feels familiar.
Why… yes! I recall now. I recall. I recall that year.
In York.
But now, here I am… in York, again, but of New.

I am… a spirit in a Nexus.
A place between worlds, and a time between times. And here, time matters not. For, now I remember being a man once, around the year 954AD. And yet, here I am, over 1,000 years into the future, and as greatly and gravely as the world has changed, all of existence still feels faintly familiar.
I know what a… New York… is!
I know about automobiles.
Aeroplanes.
Radios.
Democracy. Presidents. And how there are no more kings and queens and all are Republics.

So much change… yet… man.
Hasn't changed at all.
And all the tanks and jets and computer games and aeroplanes will not, and shall not, hide man, nor woman… from sin!

I know what nuclear armaments are.
Oh my God!

But as greatly as has been tried in this era, with such towers of Babel,

glass towers of such….

None can escape the ever-present precedence of God.

I… am a time traveler.
I now understand.
Time matters not now.
There is no present.
Future nor past.
All is a singularity in all times. All is a world of faded black. Before curtains. And a host, taking me here. Then there. Taking me everywhere. And showing me things. And now, this man.

This lonesome stranger.

This world, and the world I come from, both now feel similar in many ways known, also unknown, to my present sensibilities:

I see a dark age.
I see a world of glass.
Cities of glass.
Crafted of such.
Castles of such.
I see a world in this time, in my presence, as black and white. For I see no color. But not white and black, but cream and black.

The man trots now, through these shining, streaming, shimmering streets, watching like a spectator, of people of every walks of life, pass him by.

This, is an epoch, of great boasts and barbarisms.
This man, is an unholy knight, of the night.
Black and red and green are his colors.
A demon, committed to such evils. And he is not alone.
For, all are demons here.
All are knighted demons.
This is a kingdom, of sorts, a kingless kingdom, of bastardized knights,

with no one worthy to serve.
They all serve colors.
All colors.
Except for the color purple.
Idolatry be their names.

Oh, this man. This demon. His eyes. How they scan the astral planes. Music plays over the airwaves:

Metallica's For Whom the Bell Tolls.
Black Sabbath's War Pigs.
Billy Idol's Rebel Yell.
Guns N Roses' Welcome to the Jungle.

Gone insane from the pain…
Evil minds that plot destruction… Sorcerer of death's construction…
Stranger now are his eyes to this mystery….
No more war pigs have the power… Hand of God has struck the hour….
In the midnight hour, she cried….
You're in the jungle, baby… wake up… time to die.

Electric guitars.

And the nether being, which is the one I follow, he has these pupils that stalk from here to there. He views the world with brutal intent. He is a brutalizer. He is vested in the armors of the warriors of this age. Slacks. Cloth. Cartilage. He is one that will not hesitate or hold back any fierce or force. He is all forehead, with a head of a battering ram, and he will lunge, headfirst, headlong, into any obstacle, to absolutely obliterate it. Your absolute destruction will be his most mightiest masterpiece. Devastation, is his calling. Death, be now yours. Scan, his eyes do. For he will make you anguish in fits of absolute pain, and absolute punishment, screaming and shivering and seizing.

I'm now in an alley.
And a figure appears before me, in the darkness.
He wears acid washed denim.

He has a crooked mouth. Crooked teeth. With a crooked smile. He sees me. And he speaks to me now. How peculiar: all I see of him, is a mouth. With a devilish smile.

“Psst.
Psst.
Come here… come herrreee!”

It’s another demon. It has hexed me. And hypnotized me to draw near its souleater mouth. He speaks now. And speaks of the story to come:

“It’s the 80s. It’s New York City. And life in the Big Apple is one mean and dangerous place. Crime is at an all time high. And out here there’s a man that would like to think of himself as the biggest and baddest dude to ever grace these streets. One Michael "Madboy" Connelly. A real brawler, a real womanizer, a real player, and a real prick. Just an all around bad boy. But he’s got his story, that of a newly released man that's planning for revenge, against those he believes had set him up and had him sent to the slammer. But that’s just one man’s story in a bigger story. There’s also a man in the city that’s been all over the TV, that everyone’s calling "The Big White Head." A mysterious man with a lot of power, that plans to start anarchy. Start what he’s proclaiming as "The Age of Rage," leading to all the gangs on the streets to rise up and try to wipe this city straight off the map. Between Michael "Madboy" Connelly, The Big White Head, and The Age of Rage, it’s gonna be a hot time in the city, tonight.”

Michael… Connelly?
That’s the demon’s name.
The demon I’ve been ordained to partake with in such misadventures.
I… know this now.
But, that “word of mouth” demon, which I shall call, it spoke of a figure, called The Big White Head. And also, an Age of Rage. I do not know of these things yet. But, I am being led to believe, I soon will.

The demon is at a tavern now, surrounded by other demons, like himself. All are but pots. So, so many pots, doing nothing but calling the

kettles black. An army of demons, and with no Lucifer in sight, to manage their sinister and sadist ways, and have the hordes not turning on one another. Although, this one man, this Michael Connelly, seems like one, with his own special aura, his shamrock green Celtic aura, to maybe rise to the occasion. If the position of Citizen Lucifer, was a presidential honor to be achieved.

So, so many hordes.
All have their own distinctions.
Their cultures.
And cultures in war with other cultures.

The Michael demon is once again leering at women. He's all but staring directly at their genitals, while licking his lips incessantly.

And now, he's being greeted by friends, or so-called friends. Plus, a crossbreed woman named Letoya.
"Michael, what are you doing here? You do know there's a lot of people here that don't like you much—right?" Latoya says.
"Well, to be honest, I don't like them much, either." Responded Michael.
"Michael, this is serious!"
"WHAT THE FUCK you doing here, Madboy!"
There is now a very large Cushite, that just spoke to Michael and company. The woman that is the company, seems to be his, this other man's. And now he's pacing at Michael. But then this Michael person swings around, and swings the same empty bottle of Jack Daniels, and bashes it over the other man's head.

Full force!
Full intent to murder the other man in the most brutalist of fashion. I saw the eyes of Michael. His eyes, were even more bloodcurdling than ever before, and blood drenched. I can now see, this is a man that would fully commit to murder. "Murder," would be second nature to him. A second name. A middle name. His eyes spoke of gates of hell, in Dante 7th circle. The one with the most direct form of hatred, that can be enacted by one man, towards his fellow man: Violence. Michael, is a

man of violence. A demon of pure violence.
Bash!
Gash!
Flow!
Blood now pumps from the other man's skull. As the other man shivers in his own mortal destruction, in the most forceful and fierce encounter. Full force. Full force! Is Michael's intent. Also, by his smile, his passion and pleasure. Ungodly delight! The other man shivers, shivers, as he drops to his knees, with his most bottom lip. As it prunes purple.
And then:
Bash!
Michael executes the Moor, full force, again, with overkill precision. To take that man's pain, to uncharted territories of absolute agony. And he's dead now. That man is dead. Not here. Not now, presently. But now, surely. And from a concussion that will flatline his brain's functions in a matter of some hours from now, in a hospital. Until later. Until it's too late. Michael eyes this fallen foe, with his special eyes. And they rapture over his victory. Rapture! He now directs his attention on the rest of the crowd.
"So, do any of you know where I can find Stumpy—anyone? Or, do I have to really start losing character?" Michael speaks.

Or, Madboy… should I name him…
The other man named him such by moniker…
Should I, also?
I think I shall do it, too.
"Stumpy!" Yells out Michael.
"Hey, Michael, I'm right here!"

That man just now committed murder.
I witnessed it.
I did!

But… then again, he was being approached in a manner, that spelled out that there would be nothing less than physical altercations, and Michael didn't bring upon it, as the other man did. And, the other man, it seemed as if nothing less would have been expected of him.

If Satan casts out Satan…
What discernable difference would it make, seeing as both were of the same vile and villainous nature? The destruction of one would be just as befitting as the destruction of the other.

And now I must recount to myself, within myself, all of these accounts, for I must prioritize what will all of this serve in the end. Let me delve into it so. Contextualize everything, to gain clarity and cohesion.

"Okay, Michael, sit down, and let's talk this over." Says Stumpy.
And now, at this bar, this shady front, posing as a bar, but one I can see is nothing more than a den of thieves, here are these two in a quiet space. And they're about to communicate with one another.
"I'm looking for Radboy." Says Madboy.
So this Madboy is seeking a man with the moniker of Radboy. And they were once in a guild together.
"He doesn't want to see you." Responds Stumpy.
"Why?" asks Michael.
"Why are you looking for him?" Asks Stumpy.
And now I must note, this Stumpy character, seems to be a shifty sort. Polite in his ways. But a politeness used as a mask to mask over what he doesn't want others to see. He is cunning. Conniving. A man of false witness.
"Well, you do remember why I went to prison—right?" Asks Michael.
"Wait… you thought he was behind the fire?"

And now, even though I haven't been one to favor any of these characters, and found them as wicked, something in Michael's character, now, seems to show a shimmer of possible… "nobility." If I should dare word it. And not do so, too soon.

But then I witness events, that do nothing but illustrate just how incorrect I was to jump ahead, and assume possible integrity, in the hopes of an upright moral character. As I see this Madboy person, grow more and more in cathartic seeking anger, at this Stumpy fellow, while Stumpy continues to dance around the subject matter. And I eventually

see Madboy's character explode with violent hatred, as he lunges at this man and grabs him with both hands by the throat. Then begins to choke the man with full intent to have the man die the death of asphyxiation.

No.
No.
All here are vile.
All here, every person, is wicked.
And evil.

This Madboy then continues to commit more acts of death seeking violence, as comrades of that Stumpy rush in to give aid to thwart the efforts of his assailant. And now, Madboy is full on waging many acts of violence, all around, as he clashes with the comrades of Stumpy. What seemed like hulking bodyguards.

Stumpy now tries to flee, as Madboy continues to wage it out with Stumpy's henchmen. And once finished, he then takes off after Stumpy, up the stairs, and up onto the rooftop, of the building they were in. Now, he stands before Stumpy. And the little man has nowhere to run.

As said, I know not how I feel for any of these characters, I know not how to judge. If Satan assaults Satan, with which would I side with? Satan, or Satan? One dead devil is as good as rubbish as the other dead devil.
"Michael—please! Please don't do anything you'd regret!"
Madboy now has the little man by the throat a second time, as he then starts pushing him over the edge.
"You hairy little wop! Bastard! Give me the info I need! Stop making this so difficult for the both of us!" Madboy bellows.
There's now a crowd of people forming at the bottom.
"Stumpy—you little weasel—I'm not fucking around! You see?"
"Drop the fatass—yeah!" Yells up some degenerate from below.
And, now, Madboy seems intent on the degenerate's behest.

And then something else occurs.
As my thoughts fix on the idea of that Age of Rage, I heard about before.

And now, I see something.

I remember now, my age, the age I was pulled from, and brought here. In York of the old world, there were they. There was him. Eric the ol' Bloodaxe was his name. King of the Norsemen. A savage king we had to drive away with his pagan Norse ways, and devil gods of bloodshed and butchery and gore. Bloody, bloody gore. And away from our virgin Christian lands. A jar of clay made to house a soul, God surely made to lick the flames of everlasting agony in hell, for all of eternity, never to get enough of. A barbarian from the north. And now, here, I see barbarians again. And those from the south.
Barbarians!
So, so many barbarians.
In my time, we were successful in driving these maniacs and murderers from our lands, in ol' York.
But, look here, in New York, and they're back again.
A thousand years. And what difference has progress in the world made with radios and trains and aeroplanes.
None!
No progress.
Dark Ages, my times were called. Yet, here, I see a darker age to come.
Look now, the hordes of hell, the hell hounds, they approach. So, so many of these fiendish foes, and they approach. Metalhorsemen riding upon metalhorses. On motorcycles. A horde, massive of such, now approaches.

As a spirit of witness, I am beginning to understand certain things…

God…

has chosen me to come here. In my ethereal like form. I, here, in this Nexus, between worlds. Between space and time continuum. As a sort of made to be host. By the one Host of many hosts.
Fine… so be it.
Pulled from the voids of the underworld of Sheol. To be brought to witness these transactions. I, a mere pair of eyes, amongst many eyes, like the eyes of the wheeling cherubim, Ezikiel had once been made to

witness. Although, I look all around, and yet my eyes I see happening to be the only phantom eyes brought here to witness this. Why mine, then? Only mine? Are there others? I cannot see. But only what can be seen in the here and now.

New… York.
The life of this city and its lords and serfs, all are now existing at a juncture, where many, many forms of possibilities also happen to exist. Many, many prospects. Future prospects! All can go good. Or. All can devily rot. And turn horribly, horribly bad.

And now… FLASH!
I see a possibility of a FUTURE, not yet decided.
FLASH!
FLAME!
My senses are now shot.

Oh my God.
That discovery that has been revealed to me of the arsenals of this age. This technologically advanced age.

By splitting an atom.
the smallest units conceived by God's imagination, like a mustard seed. From something so small. To something so BIG!

Wait… my Lorde?
What are you telling me right now?
This world.
This city?
Is going to go up in flames?
Is this Judgement Day?

Are the dead to rise… you've risen me from Sheol as a spirit of witness… is that to say…?

Judgement Day?
In the here and now?

"Oh no... they're here." Mutters Stumpy.
"Stumpy? Who the fuck are these guys?" Demands Michael.

And what of these men, these reprobate men, whose eyes and souls are as black and blind as the deepest reaches of Outer Darkness? Why, Lorde, why? Why show me them? Why have I been made to be an audience to be showcased such individuals? What account am I meant to keep, keeping these men in mind? And with what I am now being made to discover....

Lorde...
You say... this city is about to face Judgement Day... and before the sun rises in the following day. You say that this city, alone, is being singled out to harbinger such, as a beacon, a flaming fiery beacon, of everlasting hell, for all the world to witness.

New York.

Is it...?
Will it...?

Lorde...
You are right now not being clear with me on this. I see before me a blue hour, before sunrise, on the following day.
Then... FLASH... FLAMES... AND FURY!
A mustard seed, a black hole, is about to be borne into this New York, and damned to hell. Fiery, fiery hell. Behold, before this city of towers upon towers, castles atop of castles, York of the Future, furnished and founded in glass and steel. Before this cityscape, like a utopian fortress, surrounded by a moat. A fortress built, not to keep any barbarian hordes out, but in. In these upside-down times, in this upside-down world...

behold...

I see a door.

A phantom door.
Before this city.

And on the door I see a clock.

And the clock has a feature on it. Much like a face.
The face is borne on the clock's surface, as it makes a grimace, like how all babes make when seeing what world they're being borne into. Yet, it hasn't seen. For its eyes are still shut. Now not. Now, the face, that's before the clock, that's before the door, that stands as a phantom door standing high above New York City's cityscape at blue hour… within this vision of a possible future to come, when the morning hour strikes… has eyes open. And, its eyes see me.

"Tell me… are you a demon?" I ask.
"What?" It speaks, the face on the clock, it does.
"I apologize… I don't mean to be offensive… calling you such…

But all I've been made witness of, since I… like you… had eyes borne into this world… all that I've been shown have been demons.

Demons.
Demons!
A legion of such.

What be you…?"
"I am no demon." It speaks. And now seems a bit cross with me.

"A clock… on a door… are you…?"
It now shuts its eyes.
I now understand, it understands much. More than I do. All here which I and it are made to make account.
"Yes…." It says, knowing what my thoughts are behind the rhetoric.

"I am… ignorant." I say.
"I…

used to be a toymaker." I recall now.

"I used to be a simple merchant. From ol' York. Lorde… God… has risen me from Sheol, to witness this New York. And how the world both has and hasn't changed much. More and less than are to be expected. But, this world is mere minutes before judgement.

What say you… Doomclock?"

"A toymaker?" Asks the Doomclock, with a quaint smile.
"Yes…

I…

I was a nobody before.

Not a king.
Nor thegn.

Nor a figure that would be found in any royal court of my day. I wouldn't even surmount to being a court jester. Just a simple toymaker. A simple merchant. Which I'd make by whittling wood and sewing cloth with hay. My father was a tailor with much more reputation compared to my own simple practice. And I'd live with him. In Old York. Applying my own trade… which I wasn't much successful at."

"How did you die?" Asks the Doomclock.
My eyes now glaze over the details. Remembering that day.

"Oh…

I was murdered."

"By whom… and how?" Asks the Doomclock.
"By… Eric… the Bloodaxe… by his men, at least.

When the ol' Viking King was being driven from the city. His men had grown bloodthirsty with wrath.

They took my head.
Killed many of us within my community.
As an act of bitterness and spite.

My head was on a ship, around the waters of the Isle of Man, before being tossed overboard, into the cold waves below, where it was buried at sea. And that was the last my soul was made to witness after my end. All I was ever made to witness, really. Until now."

The Doomclock says nothing.

"I… am ignorant.
I don't understand much. Although I have been made to understand much. But, why I? I cannot say.

I see this New York.
I see the world now a thousand years into the future, and how the devises of men of this age, their weapons, are about to be used upon their own heads. And, men in this age, are capable of—so much! So much more than men from my time.

Almost godlike… with the mastery of their seasoned crafts.

I see a flash.
I see light.
Heat.
Fire and brimstone.
Death.

An explosion is about to engulf this New York you now stand as a door in front of. A massive, massive explosion. As hot as the sun. Which be what men of this age are capable of.

Might!"

“Yes.” Says the Doomclock.
Then looks down.
Answering on behalf of my newborn fear.

“Yes… it will.
Yes… it might…?
I see a future… but, it’s not clear to me as it must be to you. So, is this New York about to…?”
“I cannot tell you that.” Answers the Doomclock.
That annoys me to hear.
Why be shown these things… why be shown this door… and then…?
"MOTHERFUCKERS—I kill you—you FUCKS!" Screams a degenerate I see back at the sight where the mass of barbarians of this age are gathering at. I see Michael. I see that Italian fellow. I see all the degenerates surrounding the building which Michael and the Italian are standing on its roof. I hear their fowl words.

And then I realize… I don’t care.

I don’t care for this… New York. This new age. New world. Full of demon men, serfs of demons, and nothing but demons, as idols of worship. Worship of sins involving bloodthirst. All blood-crazed. With all forms of wickedry involving blood shedding violence. The sort of men… that murdered me back in Ol’….

I… hate… them all.
All. I grimace, in repugnance.

“Is that it, Doomclock?
Is that why I am here?
Am I being allowed to see such men, to watch them burn, when the Judgement hour is upon us… and you, Doomclock… will open your door?” I ask.
And then all of a sudden—back at the site in the present hour, I see combat! The group of degenerates, called Cockskulls, that are at ground level, I see now, waging it out, with the horde of cyclist, called The Iron

Monkeys, as the two groups clash. Now mayhem. The motorcycle horde then begins riding over them as they wield chains and bats and Molotov cocktails, massacring the lot. Taking in the vistas, I feel sick to my stomach.

Now speaks the Doomclock:
“Toymaker…

Watch!

Watch this world. Take account. Of all its proceedings.
We are at Ground Zero Brooklyn.
Look up into the sky… do you see the moon?”

I look up towards the moon. And see to my astonishment… the moon… and how it seems to have become dislodged from its celestial orbit. From Godly calculations. And seems to be drifting towards earth.

Wait… wait… oh… no, no! Oh Lorde. God… it’s not real. It’s only a vision. I understand by the sense I am being fed. The Doomclock continues to speak:
“This is a world invested heavily into its own Madness. Man, in this era, having grown further and further from God’s graces, and having invested so much of its pride and pleasure, into works of its own hands. Into works of its own bare hands.

Barehands.
Barehands!”
That word now, twists and turns in my stomach, as it gives way into the acids, and I feel sick hearing it.

“Barehands!
Yes. Into the instruments of their own destruction, left to their own devices.”
“Good riddance.” I say, as my heart grows hard as stone to everything being shown. I then glance over at the events taking place. As these barbaric men, do what they do. Brutish men, I have absolutely no

sympathy towards. That funny fellow, named Michael… Connelly… ha! Irish. He's Irish. He would be too. And a mix of other things, I sense. I see him watch all these groupings of men wage war with each other. And watching such men war, only fills me with a repugnant sense one would have watching ravenous dogs, dogs of war, war with each other, with beady eyes and foamy mouths. Like some lord in his castle, tossing bones from the dinner plate, at a pack of mangy mutts, for the entertainment of watching them sic onto each other, for such mangy rations. These men, might as well be animals, watching them gnaw on each other, like all beasts that walk on all fours would do. Only having their mouths' and teeth's utility to service whatever crude and cruel attempt to make constitutions and communications with one another. For their dexterities are in their mouths, not hands. Like placing a quill in a dog's mouth and expecting it to take it to ink onto a piece of parchment.

That Michael Connelly has managed to find a way down from the roof he was on, and after some scuffles with that group of punks and degenerates at ground level, I see him scurry off, like a rat he is. Actually, like all other rats around him. They've managed to set that establishment they were in on fire. And as it burns, like rats, they're doing everything they can do to evade the flames. They had themselves set the building on fire. And, they know not what they do. But know only what else to do to escape what they did, so they can scamper off and do more of what they will know not, but only know they will eventually need to escape from, yet again. Repeating and repeating and repeating themselves, until they've eventually set all the world on fire… and then where will they escape to, where?

No, Lorde.
Forgive me, but I must protest.
I wish not to take witness to any of such rubbish. These people. These events. In this world. I have nothing but indifference and apathy, and I fear it can only lead to holdings of lukewarm accounts. Which will serve you not. And have you spit me out, and by good measure. Forcing me to hold witness to these fowl persons and places will not.

That Madman, Madboy, Mad Demon whatnot, is now facing another man. He left that scene of murder and mayhem, possibly to seek his own scenes of murder and mayhem, instead of facing the drudgery of only witnessing the accounts of others, as I am now forced to.
Yawn.
He is now by his lonesome, but not. Although this other person seems friendly to him. “Friendly,” ha! What would demons know of friendliness. They are only agents in accordance with their dark master, Lucifer. Slaves! Not sons. Slaves. And as slaves and all wicked persons, mere fleshly automatons programmed to make all like themselves. Slaves. Automatons. Soulless. For all slaves are soulless. And will die the second death. And know nothing of “friendship.” Only striking and strife and fire! For all of eternity.
"Come on, Michael, let's get outta here.” Says the so-called “friend” of this Michael.
Michael follows him down an alley, over a fence, and down towards the shore.
"Hey, check it out, here we are where it all began." Announces the so-called “friend.”

I now, the spirit of witness, take a gander. And… I see a metallic object mostly used by children in this age called a “merry-go-round.” Children? Ha! Are there such things in this world? This isn’t an innocent world. So, what children? And these two mortal coils might have been born from the earth fully adults for all I would gather.

"Ha! I can see you're still wearing the old uniform! Always the one-man army, you were!" Comments Gab.
“Where did you get that tank-top? And that crazy ass design on it?” Asks Gab.

What are these two babbling about, I now wonder. I look at what Gab asks of and… perversion. An image of a naked woman on his shirt. I had noticed it before. But had also noticed so many more perversions, that I forgot I had, since this era is deluged with perversions. Not of water, which was for the Great Deluge. Nor fire, which will be for Judgement Day. This is the age not of the Lorde, but inbetween lordes, in

stewardship of the Lorde's garden. So a deluge of perversions. What have you.

Oh, Lorde.
I grow weary.
Too weary.
I hate.
Simply hate.
Nothing matters. Nothing. Let these images and imitations fade away. Fade away from me now!

I was robbed of my time.
I was robbed.
Murdered.
Spat on. Discarded. As nothing. A nothing toymaker.

Were there souls made to take witness of that?
Were there?
As I am to take witness to this?
Am I even beneath these monsters? These mongrels. Slack jawed, slanted brow, mongrels…!

"Hey, Gab, I just… I need to get to Radboy. Is there anything you can do?"

Lorde… you spit on me.

The Cat: Three

"Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves."
-Henry David Thoreau

And Now... It Begins!

Right as they exited Chinatown, Michael and Letoya were now at the building. 1999 was a code, really. It was where the real parties in Uptown were happening. If you looked at the cityscape of New York, at exactly midnight, from the south, one building's lights would be on in a pattern forming the numbers 1 - 9 - 9 - 9 vertically, and stay on until morning. Something so obvious, yet no one ever bothered to check to see what really went on inside.

> And, why would they? Cops know better than to go snooping around in there. What do you do when you're a cop, or an investigator, that gets curious, and you decide to go in, and finds the chief of police—plus the mayor—snorting coke off the tits of an imported Argentinean prostitute? Arrest them? Ha! Good luck with that.

Michael had actually been to 1999 before. Back then it was called Studio 54, and it was a lot more open to the press and the public. Now that it was all in secret—supposedly—all hush-hush, what went on in that magical building, was nothing less than what you might have expected from Sodom and Gomorrah, back in Biblical times. If it wasn't for all the arrogant jackasses, there, or the horrible music, Michael actually liked hanging out in Studio 54.

> They were simpler times... I think! Plus, I picked up a lot of Izabella types, there.

But, he saw how fucked-up and crazy things got.

> That sex party I had gone to, involved a lot of despicable shit, by a bunch of blue-collar freaks, with no imaginations. A lot of dirty, dirty shit! But one thing it most definitely didn't involve was possible sorcery.

Yeah! It was kinda like that. Although, when he was at Studio 54, Michael did never see any of it, since it supposedly happened mostly behind closed doors, places mostly celebrities and highbrow socialites were allowed in, but Michael's kind weren't.

> Yeah, I know what you're thinking. Sorcery? Witchcraft? Black magic, voodoo mumbo jumbo shit, really? But... I've been around people of higher status. And the one thing you learn about them—

quick—is... they're a group that are just full of secrets. A much more enlightened group, that are possibly dealing with otherworldly forces, which is what's possibly keeping them fat and wealthy, and on top of shit. While keeping the rest of us at the bottom; us all drowning in the cesspool of subservient living; keep us all as slaves! So, pretty much, some ‘selling one's soul to some devil’ type of shit!

Now, honestly, no! Of course, I don't truly believe in all that stuff. But then again, I don't know. I won't deny the fact that I've experience some real uncanny shit, myself. So, were those things real? Or, were they just my mind playing tricks on me? And remember, I ain't no wastoid. No drug abuser. And... let's face it....

'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy... and shit.
So... there!
And if that ain't enough. I'll let this one out, also, I believe... I do believe, the shit I'm capable of... also has something supernatural about it, too. I mean, I got magic. I do believe my abilities as a lover and fighter might have some magical properties behind it. I mean, how do I even begin to describe how it feels to be me, when I'm at the top of my game, doing what I do best? And then there's the fact that a lot of women I've been with, throughout the course of my life, keep saying they've seen brilliant flashes of light sometimes shining out of....

No! I'm not fucking kidding, here! I've heard them making that claim, time and time again. And all while I'm... you know! Doing what I do best. And, no! Personally, from my point of view, I don't know what the fuck they're talking about. Since I never see it, nor how I'm supposedly an angel... which some have made the claim of seeing me being as.

That... or a devil.

Ha! Now—that! I do believe possible.

Sigh!

But… yeah! Hope I don't go in here, now, and see a bunch of pagan nutbags wanting to stick me in a wickerman, and try to burn me alive, to appease some pagan god of blowjobs, or something.

As wild as what Studio 54 had been, Michael had no clue what awaited him in this building.

Actually, Letoya might know.

"So, Letoya, what am I going to find, here," asked Michael.

"What makes you think I know what…?"

But then Michael stared her down, as to say, "I ain't judging… just let me hear it!"

"Okay! Let's just say you're going to see a lot of stuff going on, and most of it not all too pretty," responded Letoya, squeamishly.

"Yeah, I remember Studio 54, now what about this place?"

"Well, um?"

"No… pagan shit, or anything, like, reenacting that one scene from that Conan the Barbarian movie, right," asked Michael.

And now Letoya made a worrisome look.

"Well?"

"Well… it's got better music," noted Letoya, and it seemed like that's all she was willing to give.

Fine—fuck it! I think I need something like this after the night I've had.

Thought Michael, as his eyes glared with anticipation.

Might not be so bad. I mean, surely the worst is now over—right? Getting a couple of lines of coke off the tits of my own Argentinean babe. Watch a bunch of rich pagan assholes try to summon Cthulhu, and then watch them do so, and get devoured by it. While I choke Radboy, on the side. Sounds like a night to remember.

Thought Michael, and accepted it.

Also, if that Argentinean babe decides she wants to do a couple of lines off me, I'll spread a whole load across the length of my… yeah! That's right! And have her snort it off that. Ha! And considering the spread of that line, I'll probably have three of those hot babes OD on me before they reach the tip.

Thought Michael, and smiled.

“Fine, let's go,” said Michael, and felt ready.

“Michael, you can't just walk in there—who's your pass?”

“Betamax.”

“Betamax—ha! Oh!”

Letoya was now laughing hysterically. She had a very quiet, but maniacal laugh, that could get anyone else going, just by hearing her. Sounding like a methodically sinister (also silly sounding) dynamo behind a wall.

“What's so funny about that,” asked Michael.

“So—um… what you do to get that pass,” asked Letoya, with her mouth partially cocked open, like she was expecting some.

“Nothing, what do you mean,” wondered Michael, looking confused.

“I mean, you do know Betamax… for the longest time… has been infatuated over you—right?”

“Wait—what? What are you talking about? That limey prick used to try just about anything to get with Nikki—not me,” explained Michael.

“No! He was messing with Nikki… to get to you… you didn't see that,” asked Letoya.

Michael actually had no clue about this, until now. But now that he thought about it, it all started to make sense. Even while Betamax was flirting with Nikki, he was just about always staring at Michael. Michael just thought Betamax was doing that to fuck with him. But now…?

“Letoya, he wasn't even there at Big Dick's Gym—okay? This might sound crazy, but he was broadcasting himself over the TV.”

“No, that's Betamax, all right! No surprise, there,” explained Letoya, while awkwardly looking to one direction.

A pause.

“Wait, you went to the Beefcake hideout,” asked Letoya, as she snapped back to attention.

“That's where Sadboy told me—you know what? Forget it! Let's just go in, and see what happens.”

Michael felt a little uncomfortable now. He thought:

What if Betamax wants something in return, for allowing me into 1999? Well—fuck that! He can kiss my ass if he does—and not literally!

And then, as Michael was about to get up off the bike him and Letoya just rode in on, a couple of yuppies with their ladies exited the building from the lobby, and started laughing their asses off, holding onto each other, while their ladies started staring at Michael, and smiling. And seeing that, Michael thought:

> You know what? Been feeling a bit down with Letoya, here, after what she did. And, I think I need to drop that feeling, quick. Fuck this shit! Enough drowning yourself in depressing shit, Michael. I mean, what the fuck was that earlier? Almost having a panic attack over…?

But then, Michael grew aghast, and checked himself from thinking about it any further. The thought had become just too terrifying for him. And as he looked back at Letoya, he started thinking about something else.

> Also, fuck that old touch thing I was thinking about earlier, too. I shouldn't just give up on new ones, altogether, just yet. Maybe I haven't been trying hard enough? Maybe my libido can still grow with newer women. Hmm…?

Then thought Michael, as he noticed the two chicks that were with the yuppies, were still staring at him. Michael then wondered:

> Damn! They still checking me out? Wow! Maybe… I do gots some black magic, voodoo mumbo—whatever—that gets women to get this way? I mean, what exactly is it that's getting them this excited? I haven't even whipped out my ol' pocket watch, yet, and they're practically going gaga, over there, checking me out.

But then Michael realized it must have had something to do with how he looked: all Marlon Brando-ed up; all sweaty and masculine, in his studded Letterman jacket; while a smoking hot dark-skinned woman sat to his back, holding onto him like a lover; as they both sat on top of a chromed out chopper, that glimmered and glistened and danced under the moon light.

> Oh shit, I see it now, I'd wanna fuck me, too, if I saw that!

The two seemed just about ready to walk over, and dive right in, like they would be going skinny-dipping. They were both fairer than white snow, and looked fragile almost; very Scandinavian looking. Both super skinny. Both platinum blonde: one having short hair all flat-topped the way women do it now; and the other big hair and long; looking like one

was the butch and the other was the bitch, but definitely not lesbians, considering the vibes Michael was getting. They were all biting their pinkies, looking at Michael's scene—up and down—with surrendering eyes, and perpetually giggling. And.

> Doing that clumsy, rhythm-less, stumbling around thing, that pasty white chicks—that don't know how to dance—tend to do, when they're prancing around, feeling excited and horny.

Which Michael found cute and quaintly sexy. But, then again, their thighs were way, way, way too far apart.

> Hey, no one's perfect. I'd still fuck their brains out, though, and it looks like I'd be able to wreck them in a second. Although, they don't seem like they'd know what they'd be doing. They look like they'd probably spend most of the time giggling to each other, while feeling insecure about their gag-reflexes. They seem very inexperienced. Looks like they'd start gushing the second my tip greeted their rosy petals. I'd probably be doing them more of a favor, which I ain't totally against the idea. Fuck it! Why not? I'll take one on my junk, and the other one on my face, as I'd seesaw their bony asses to the moon. Although, still, more of a service to them than me, would have been nice if Letoya was to join in, and teach them a thing or two.

Michael smiled, back, but then the two yuppies that the ladies were with saw what was going on, and grabbed them by their arms, as an argument ensued.

> "No time for love, Dr. Jones," whispered Michael, to himself, as Letoya just rolled her eyes.

As Michael and Letoya got up to the front entrance, Michael then took a look inside the lobby, and saw two giant figures in suits, standing in front of the elevators.

> "Oh, no, those two are here," expressed Letoya, haphazardly, with a frown.
>
> "Friends of yours," Michael asked.

But Letoya said nothing.

Entering the building, the two goons in front of the elevators then immediately turned their heads towards Michael and Letoya, and began staring, suspiciously. Judging from what Michael saw, they had to be twins, two massive black dudes, wearing shades, that were frowning so

hard that they were turning it into an Olympic sport. And if they were to hug each other, they would only be a bit smaller than that Valkyrie of a woman, Michael had met at Big Dick's Gym. As Michael and Letoya approached them, one of them stepped forward.

"You that Madboy character—right," asked one of the brothers. From the sound of his accent, he must have been Kenyan.

"Yeah, that's me," responded Michael.

"Hey, Letoya, how you doin', sweetheart?" said the other.

"Oh, I'm fine Jamil."

"What you doin' with this fool, here," said again the first.

"Oh, don't worry about it, I know him."

"O… kay," said the second, all suspicious like.

Oh great! They're the types that like to finish each other sentences.

"Oh, and how are you doing, Jalil," asked Letoya, smiling haphazardly.

Jalil then smiled, as then Jamil just smiled. And as they turned their heads towards Michael, Jamil started frowning, as Jalil then started frowning, right after.

Great pair of conversationalists these two are.

"Hey, Betamax made instructions that one of us is to escort you around upstairs. Make sure this place don't turn into another Stumpy's place—dig," explained Jamil, as he lowered his head down, and looked at Michael with his own eyes, over his shades.

"Sounds reasonable," responded Michael.

"Oh, and another thing… sorry, Letoya, you're not on the guest list for tonight. But if you want? You can chill here…."

"With me," said Jalil, finishing Jamil's sentence.

Jalil then started smiling, as Jamil then started smiling, right after.

"You guys are a really funny pair—I'll tell you that," chuckled out Michael.

But as Michael tried to hold onto the humor of their presence, both Jamil and Jalil then started doing their frowning bit, again, and Michael felt a little tired of the act.

"Okay, can we go now, Jamil," asked Michael, beckoning with his eyes.

They were in the elevator now, and there was George Michael's 'Careless

Whispers' playing inside.

Fucking elevator music! Always something to do with a sax, and soft rock shit.

I don't hate it though.

Animals Striking Curious Poses.

As they reached the 54th floor, the doors opened, and Michael was finally in. The floor was part of the building that wasn't yet set up for cubicles to offices like the other ones, Michael imagined; all the guts of the building were showing; all the pipes, ventilation systems, and what-nots were exposed in plain sight. But... the rest of the place was as what Michael did imagine.

Whoa!

Thought Michael, as he was completely taken in by the scene he was now witnessing.

Oh shit! This is surreal!

It was a party straight out of 80s Caligula's imagination; 80s Romans were all over the place drinking, snorting, and shooting it up. Almost every inch of the scenery was draped in white cloth, or silk, that had torn ends folded over and over itself across the expanses. Everything was white. Almost everyone was dressed in white, and the ones that weren't, looked like peasants mixed in with the nobles for servitude. Michael felt like he had stuffed his head inside a pillowcase full of white lingerie. The scenery and the characters around made it seem like Patrick Nagel had painted his own Sistine Chapel in the lust sector of white hell, and then had the white devil make it come to life. Everything and everyone seemed immaculate, flawless, and symmetrical... at least on the surface. Also, there were tons and tons and tons of mirrors everywhere, reflecting all the whiteness. There was a layer of white smoke at knee level, and here and there white doves would fly out and begin to cry. So much smoke and mirrors—so much smoke and mirrors—Michael began spinning around and around, looking at it all, and felt lost inside a white crystal cave.

Wow! It feels like I'm going to go snow blind in here. Might develop a cataract, or something, if I look at all this for far too long. Thank God, the place isn't very well lit! Also, are they really trying to be

subtle about it? I mean, don't tell me I'm the only one that sees all the in-your-face symbolic shit going on? Yeah, that's the 80s for you, best way to be subtle, is to beat it over someone's head, with the message you're trying to get across.

There was 'Sweet Dreams' by the Eurythmics playing over the airwaves.

Wanting to be used and abused—huh? Really setting the mood, with what this place is all about.

Greek and Roman statues were everywhere, and on one statue, someone had placed a top hat on its head, and a condom over its crown. All in all, even though it was everything Michael sorta imagined on an inconceivable level, he also sorta felt a bit underwhelmed by it.

It all looks all so gorgeous and gracious… but!

There was no magic involved.

Yeah, I'll admit, I guess I did get a little too excited thinking I'd see some otherworldly shit happening in here. I mean, everything here looks magical, looks like a fucking Prince music video… really! Might I add. But!

There was definitely no real magic involved. Just a lot of meticulous set and atmosphere building. That really just involved a lot of blowing fans and smoking dry ice, and props being propped up all at the right spots. All behind cameras and shit. But, besides that:

As for the freaks in here, hedonist, sexual deviants… it's still a lot of the same shit I saw at that nasty sex party, just with a much, much better production value, all around. Enacted by—supposedly—much, much better people. A bunch of pervs, with their animal parts hanging out, while getting very animalistic with each other. But nothing at all transcendent about it. Nothing otherworldly. Pity!

He'd been building his expectations up of what he'd see, but now that he was here, all he could think about was finding Radboy, and….

Oh, please let me not see her here… at least not tonight.

Michael then picked up a wine glass, from a server, that was all dressed in a white latex gimp outfit, riding around on a zebra… then began strolling around a bit, taking in the atmosphere. Jamil was, of course, right behind him, riding his coattails. And, making sure he was behaving. And not misbehaving.

So, these are The Lizard People—huh?

Thought Michael, as he remembered Nikki once calling them that.

Used to have an entirely different impression of them when I was younger. Growing up in a shithole, surrounded by shitheads, whenever I saw these types when I'd come to the island, they'd seem a lot more refined and revered. Dignified. Civilized. Gents. A bunch of somebodies much more ideal. Better type of people than the likes of me. But, when I mentioned that to Nikki, she told me, 'Michael, these people are straight up evil! They're like lizards, heartless and coldblooded and cruel, and nothing like the type of people you're used to dealing with. They're far, far worse!' And the way her eyes bulged out explaining all that scared me. Lizard People—huh? That's the name she had given them. Funny! The impression I now get seeing them under this new light makes me think... makes me wonder just how heartless and coldblooded and cruel can they actually be. In the end, I know what to expect from scrap-happy cats like myself, looking for some fish. I don't think we all got nothing against each other on a twisted level, because we're just really trying to make it on by on our own. But what can you expect from a slimy lizard, that's standing perfectly still, unflinchingly unnervingly and unrelentingly staring at you, while licking its eyeballs. Waiting for you to turn your back, before making its move. Makes me just want to fuck them all up, now, before I find myself stabbed in the back, later, when I'm not looking. I mean, The Ravishers have been dealing with these assholes for years and years, and I've seen how underhanded and conniving they can be in the past. Stumpy too! Look at all of them, all dressed up in their posh Armani shit, smiling and greeting each other, as if they were all the bestest of friends, bestest of bestest of pals. And all—while really—also looking like they're scheming each other's dooms. They're two-faced, and fuck do I hate those types!

You know what? You lizards go ahead and smile, too, when you face me. But the second you do, I'll just start immediately ringing your necks, like I did Stumpy—that's what I'll do! I swear!

Michael continued to eye them all, all suspicious like, as he thought that. But then lightened up a bit, once he saw some cute Japanese chick,

looking bored, and getting fucked by two yuppies. Who then smiled at Michael, seeming much more interested in him, as she blew him a kiss.

Ha, just as I thought!

Thought Michael, as he felt his shining, of his own true worth, shine out, against this avarice in the dark.

All the money in the world won't buy you guys what I already gots with the ladies: magic. Real magic! And the sort of magic that's a four-letter word, that starts with an L. And doesn't end with -ust! I mean, I've barely got here, and I've now already had three chicks looking like they wanted to dump their loser yuppie mates for me. Me! Looking like I just crawled out of a sewer, while everyone here is looking all tailored out, then suited up, after stepping out of a spa. And I haven't even done nor said anything, yet. Haven't popped out my ol' pocket watch, once! You lizards are all really just pathetic! You boys are slippin'. I mean, you call that fuckin'? Looking all confused, like you might be doing it wrong.

Yeah!

The penis enters the hole!

Good job there, you Arthurs! Good job! I can see the Ivy League education your daddies bought you at Yale or Princeton or Harvard is really paying off. All that schooling and networking with hob-knob jackasses like yourselves, to create a lucrative career, to make a lot of dough, just so you can attract the sort of women—you wouldn't even know what to do with!

Michael then thought of clapping, but didn't. Instead, he just shook his head, while frowning.

Bravo! Simply… bravo! I'd applaud, but, forgive me, for I'd then feel a bit awkward doing so, and ashamed; like I'd be applauding to some mentally retarded five-year-old child, that just learned which hole to stick the food into. So sad! Makes me want to walk over there, and smack those two idiots off that poor girl, and show everyone here…!

But then Jamil would jump in, and…

She's Japanese, too, and…

She even has that Jareth hairdo, and…?

fuck!

Fuck!

FUCK!

Michael now felt like turning his attention, and fucking with Jamil a bit, since he was feeling humorous, again.

And a bit pissy, too.

“Hey, Jamil, I thought zebras couldn't be tamed, used to ride around on like regular horses,” asked Michael.

“Why you asking me? What makes you think I know anything about zebras,” asked Jamil, avoiding the obvious implications behind the joke.

Michael just looked at Jamil, and then smiled, suggestively, as Jamil began cracking his fists. Then Michael's eyes caught onto something else.

“Hey, Jamil, is that really David Bowie over there, walking some chicks tied to velvet leashes,” gasped Michael.

Michael was really curious this time. He looked like David Bowie dressed in complete black Armani.

Fuck yeah! You let the establishment know you're going to do your own thing. Rebel, rebel!

And there were women on all fours, crawling around with velvet leashes around their necks.

Is he trying to make a statement? Don't seem like something of his character to be doing all this. Except if he was doing it to be ironic. I mean, considering most of the chicks in here, are just here, for one purpose, and one purpose—alone: hot beef injections. Smack! Moan!

Hmm… wow! Actual subtlety, but then again… not! It's still the 80s, and that's now been rendered impossible to tell.

As Michael looked up at Jamil, the big palooka looked away in irritation, and didn't say a word.

“Hey, Jamil, is that a—”

“Yes, that is a woman being fucked by a panther—now let's go! Betamax is waiting for you over there, on the other end.”

Jamil pointed towards a section that had giant white drapes hanging from the ceiling, all the way down to the floor. There was a very large cloud of smoke swarming out from inside, making it seem like they were about to enter a dragon's lair. And the silk was being blown around from giant fans on the other end. But before moving onward, Michael decided to entertain one final thought, that was nagging him, over all the in-your-face subtle symbolism at work here.

> You know, I think I finally understand racism now. I mean, purely, deconstructivity, for what it really and truly is. Personally, coming up in Coney Island, I've been raised around way too many ethnic groups, so I've never been able to understand it how these lily mofos do. But now, looking at all this, I think I now can. I'm starting to think it might be more than just another form of dick measuring, us vs them, tribal shit. The way I understood it, with different groups, just all trying to compete with each other, all dog eat dog, in this giant rat race. But, I think with these lilies it's not about competitiveness, but conflict, and the conflict between the concepts of good and evil. The colors themselves can be represented as something much more than skin tones, but effigies of good and evil. White can represent the color of light, good, innocence, and purity, whereas black can represent all of the opposite. So maybe all the lily-white people think they're pure... or something? And black people are the work of the devil, and represent the temptation?

And now Michael took a gander at all the zoo porn going on, with panthers, with extremely, extremely pasty white women.

> I mean, look at all these panthers in here fucking pasty white women! Is that what white people really desire, and are afraid of, also? To get fucked by everything they see as impure and corrupt? Was this done on purpose, or am I the one that's just seeing this?

Michael then shrugged, and decided not to think too far on the matter, considering how much he hated the topic.

> I hate thinking about racial matters. No more, Michael, no more!

But then thought:

> Although, racial shit on the side, I have to say, there's something mesmerizing about watching a woman getting fucked by such a beautiful animal. I mean, look at all these women tense up, and

freak out, every time the damn animal rams it into them. I've never heard a woman scream like that—except for….

Ahem!

And, it looks like their faces are going to explode from the jolts its sending into them. Hell, listen to them purr and growl, and I don't just mean the panthers. I mean, I've seen bestiality before, but this ain't no goofy Eeyore looking donkey. A panther is this slick and sexy, powerful, predatory, well-toned, muscular animal, that…?

And then, Michael's alarms went off.

Ah! What the fuck am I thinking? I gotta find Radboy, and get this over with, before I…?

The Warhol Wannabe.

Once Michael broke out of that, both he and Jamil began making their way through the drapes.

Oh, these things look…?

As they entered, Michael realized how not easy this was going to be, as he felt their violence wavering around, all up in their faces.

Oh, what the… and they're huge, too.

It smelled of Jasmine and Jasper. But something synthesized and wrong from the smells Michael got from Letoya's place. And the drapes were not letting up, as both Michael and Jamil felt lost trying to make it through to the other end. It felt like trying to walk from A to Z, while a hurricane was a blowing.

"Jamil—what the fuck," cried out Michael, fighting off the wavy hysteria.

"No—my sentiments exactly!"

Even with the drapes, Michael was pleased for a second to see him and Jamil having found some common grounds: their hatred for being put through this wacky gauntlet. It wasn't much, but Michael was starting to get annoyed by the frowning Kenyan, and any accordance between him and Jamil was welcoming.

Halfway through the wavy hysteria, Michael found himself at the eye of

the storm, and bumped into the leader of The Ravishers.

Oh, not you!

He was a very hairy man that went by the name of Greasylocks. Actually, his name was Jack Doukas the Greek. But everyone called him Greasylocks, because of his obvious hairy nature, which he loved to share. He was wearing cowboy boots with golden spears, a red bow tie, and some flaming red-hot Speedos worn so tight, that it looked like it wanted to merge with his soul. Also, he was completely covered, head to toe, with Vaseline.

Oh no!

"Oh my, Betamax told me you were coming. Michael, it's been so long! Come here and give me a hug," bubbled out Greasylocks.

Greasylocks grew a shit-eating grin, as he said that. He knew how repulsive an idea like that would be to a guy like Michael, and that was exactly why he said it. Michael, going against Greasylocks expectations, made a quick kissy face, as he walked past him, and slapped him twice on the cheek.

Not the butt cheeks!

Greasylocks didn't like this, as his shit-eating grin, turned to a displeasing look, like he really did just have some shit to eat. Even though he wasn't gay, he wanted other straights to think he was, and feel repulsed by his come-ons, so he didn't like it that Michael wasn't. That was just how much of a perv that Greek was.

"Come on, Michael, you can do better than that," demanded Greasy, while waving his hair around.

"Maybe later—sweetie—maybe later."

Michael kept walking—well, actually, still fighting through the wavy hysteria that continued—and then saw that Jamil was smiling at him; seemed as if though he liked how Michael had handled Greasy back there, and it seemed he was starting to take a liking to him.

Michael could now see Betamax, who was sitting on a couch, dressed in white polyester. There was a giant statue of David behind him, and he was surrounded by some lackeys, who seemed stoned out of their minds; all huddled around him; hanging on to every word he said, as if though he was some 80s guru, messiah, something. Fucker even had a white wig on, that looked terrible, and was placed on terribly, like Max

had gotten it from a cheap customer store. And seeing how some of his brunet hair underneath was showing, Michael now knew—exactly—who this fool was pretending to be. Betamax still hadn't seen Michael. He was babbling on in a very stoned-out tone, while seated centered around an entire studio of cameras. Michael looked up at Jamil, and Jamil just shook his head… his sentiments exactly!

"Oh, Michael—you're here, finally! Come sit down next to me," muttered out Max, as he stared off the words shooting out of his mouth.

Michael just continued standing there, but wasn't looking at Betamax anymore, for his attention was now on the lesbian orgy that was erupting to his left. There had to be like thirty supermodel looking babes, of all races, all going at it: moaning, licking, screaming, on a silk-sheeted bed shaped like a heart. There were also video cameras all around taping the process.

"Oh, yes! That is a very lovely sight—isn't it, Michael? Especially for a man coming straight out of prison," said Max.

Michael shook his head, again, and turned it around, giving Betamax his full undivided attention. Jamil, on the other hand, had his shades now off, looking like he was ready to walk over, and dive right in.

"Still looking for Radboy—Michael," asked Betamax.

"That's the only reason I'm here."

"Are you sure? Wouldn't you rather be joining those women over there? They're not all lesbians, they like men, too," responded Max.

Oh, fuck me! One looks Japanese!

"That is actually very tempting, now, that I think about it. Yeah! But? Maybe later," mumbled Michael, trying hard not to give into 1999's temptations.

All right! I think the effects of this place are now starting to show their magic. But, still… this ain't the spell I be looking for.

"Radboy… huh? Well, he's on another floor," responded Max, with his eyes closed, seeming sullen.

The wannabe Campbell soup cans peddler there was starting to look like he was phasing in and out of existence; moving his hands around in a fluid manner, as if he was stringing an invisible harp. And now, Michael, was really starting to get pissed. If Radboy was on another floor, then

why did Max ask him to come here?

"Okay! Which floor is he on, Max! Hey, Max! Snap out of it!"

Damn, fuckers on acid!

Greasylocks had also now entered the frame, as he sat down next to Betamax, and crossed his legs (which seemed difficult for him, considering how slippery they were, as his left leg kept trying to slip off his right). Jamil continued stargazing. And Michael waited impatiently for Betamax to speak.

"Michael... what were we talking about, again," asked Max, finally.

"Oh, for fuck sakes," exclaimed Michael.

Michael slammed his palm against the side of his face, and looked like a man that had thoughts of hanging himself.

"I'm really starting to get tired of saying this, but, here I go again... where the fuck is—"

"Oh, Radboy? He's on the next floor down!"

"Thank you... fuck," exclaimed Michael, one last time.

Finally, an answer! And with that, Michael had had enough of this scene. But as he tried to turn around and leave, 'Here Comes the Rain Again' by Eurythmics began to play.

Le Rêve.

They really do like that British duo, here—don't they?

Thought Michael, but then the love song began to do something strange to him. Something otherworldly. Something... magical. Like a spell. All of a sudden, memories and old feelings began to form in Michael's thoughts. Good times, better times, times when Michael didn't have to constantly check himself, and force positive feelings within himself, so he wouldn't fall into the negative. Times when he didn't need large doses of humor and pride, and any other forms of hot air and sensory overloads, to keep him from the feelings of withering away. For these were times Michael felt positive, because he was positive, and so was the world positive around him, with him. The ethereal years. First off, he began remembering his moments with Nikki in the past:

I remember she used to pick me up in her Ferrari 250 GT Spider California, and take me to the Garment District, here, in Manhattan, just to spend all day wearing chic designer clothes, and flaunt them around in front of me. She didn't even want to buy any,

really. She normally wouldn't even dress in that way.

But then there's that first time I met her…?

But, now and then, I guess, she wanted to treat me to another side of herself, that was much more exotic and exquisite. She'd prance out of the dressing room in some—what she'd call them? Yves Saint Laurent garments…?

Ha! Funny how I remember a name like that… hmm… why is that?

But anyways. She'd step out, and then her heels would start clicking and clacking, hard, to the rhyme of my heartbeat. And then—strike a pose! And stare at me with those domineering eyes. Click-clack, click-clack, click-clack—boom! Her eyes would then hammer me in—and nail me to the wall! And, time would slow down, then, just freeze over… for what felt like centuries. And then all of a sudden, nothing else existed in all the world, but those fixated eyes of hers, which seemed so imposing, so enchanting, so captivating, and so brilliant. Unflinching, unnerving and unrelenting… yet in a way I liked. She'd do it all day long, just for me, and no one else—and not even herself! And, I just couldn't get enough of it.

And then, like a spell, it was casting another memory of Nikki, and not the Nikki of yesteryears, but the Lady to come. This was odd. It was almost fantasy-like. The love song playing on the airwaves was creating his and her story to come. Feeling her before seeing, smelling, hearing, and touching her, as she moved gracefully below the song's crashing waves.

The Lady of the Night?

Thought Michael, as the preconceived image of this newborn woman began to formulate, develop, and grow inside Michael's subconsciousness. And with it, the preconceived emotional investments to come.

Endless oceans spread across the horizon, and I feel like I'm lost somewhere in the middle of its eternity. Water is the essence of all life, and out here I'm one with this entity. For the ocean is a living

thing. It has a mind, body, and soul, and at its far depths, one can find its heart. A living creature, endlessly swaying back and forth, back and forth, telling all who have the right sort of ears to hear its story. The story of what it means to be immortal. And how lonely it is, really, to be so. A living creature, but really, nothing like you or I. I'm in the middle of the ocean, and how I got here, and how long I've been here, don't seem to matter much right now. Actually, it feels like I've always been here, and it feels like I always will be. Swimming... just swimming. Endlessly swimming. Nothing else matters, there is no beginning, nor end, just this, and I'm swimming not to reach any destination...?

Or am I?
Or am I?

Now... I don't know....

Am I here to swim endlessly? Or am I here looking for an actual destination?

Someplace?
Or, maybe... someone?
Wait... I hear someone.

I hear a voice calling out to me. I hear a woman's voice calling out to me, in French, and she's singing to me.

Flottant longtemps sur les océans sans bouées
J'ai fait de mon mieux pour sourire
Jusqu'à ce que tes yeux et tes doigts chantant
M'aient fait trouvé l'amour dans tes yeux.
Et tu chantais
Navigue vers moi, navigue vers moi
Laisse moi t'enlacer
Me voici, je suis là, je suis là
En attendant de te serrer contre moi.
Ai-je rêvé que tu rêvais de moi ?

Etais-tu là lorsque j'étais en pleine mer?
Maintenant mon stupide bateau sombre
Brisant mon mal d'amour sur tes rochers
Et tu chantes
Ne me touche pas, ne me touche pas
Reviens demain
Oh mon coeur
Oh mon coeur est emplit de tristesse
Je suis aussi intrigué qu'un nouveau-né.
Je suis aussi troublé que la mer.
Dois-je rester au milieux des décombres ?
Ou dois-je agoniser en attendant la mort, ma jeune mariée?
Entend moi chanter
Navigue vers moi, navigue vers moi
Laisse moi t'enlacer
Me voici, je suis là, je suis là
En attendant de te serrer contre moi.

She knows I'm out here, and she doesn't want me to swim endlessly anymore, and now I don't want to, either. She's a siren! She's an island to herself—like I—lost and alone, somewhere, in this endlessness. That's what she is! She's calling out to me, to come to her, so she can end my endlessness. Now, after an eternity of being out here, what feels like, I want to find something that isn't endless. I want to die now. But I can't do that until I find her. Find her, somewhere, out here, and crawl into her womb, to die, and begin the cycle again.

So, I can... loop....

So, I can bend all the endlessness of space and time, into a ring, and begin again.

I need to die... I need to!

But, where is she? Baby, where are you? Please—please—please! Let me die! Let me die! I'm tired of it all! Please let me die! I have

to find her, so I can die! If I don't find her, I can't die, and begin again... I need to... I need to...?

Michael felt one tear roll down his cheek, and nothing else. A minute passed.

And now, Michael realized, what he had just experienced, was one of those moments, that was probably going to take a long... long... long, very long time, to genuinely understand what all that meant.

If ever....

Whatever it was, it was definitely one of those moments. For he felt it and he knew it. For these moments are always this way, understood in that inside place, where one truly is able to see into depths of their true selves, the source of where all fears and dreams originate from. That place where real magic can be made.

Oh... I want it back, though, so much! I want the old touch, back, so very, very much.

I have nothing! Absolutely nothing! Nothing precious! I don't know....

The only thing he was truly sure of was, that what he just experienced, was most definitely a flashback to a dream he had had, a week or so ago, back before his insomnia began. He thought of the night he had been having... and then... thought of the morning to come.

I'm not a day person, I don't belong under the sun's warmth and graces. For me, all is endless nights, wandering through these meandering streets, with no sense of direction nor memory. Lost. Worse really... how can one be lost, if he was never found to begin with? But being lost in these meandering streets, in the dark, is where I belong. Sad. At night, you can look down each path set before you and find nothing but total darkness ahead, and that is where I belong. I'm not a day person. All those day people with a sense of direction, purpose, and meaning... and... I am not one of them. What they have is something I never will. A sense of being centered, a sense of wholeness, a sense of home. They're all laying underneath the sun, basking in its warmth, and feeling one with the earth, while I'm lost in the dark, forever afraid, and forever alone. All I have now is the memory of the spell, and that was my

only sense of wholeness I've ever felt. Like a siren, singing a song calling me there. Which is now nothing but a memory to me. Like a flame, dwindling in the dark, seemingly ready… to burn out.

And with that, Michael then flipped.

Fuck, I hate everything! I hate everyone! Why have I been left like this? Where am I going? What am I doing? And to what end? I don't want to do this! I don't want to be here! Why can't I break away?

Every fucking day, every fucking night, the world has to continuously remind me why I should hate.

I 'm tired of hating! I'm so fucking tired of hating. It won't end! I can't change! People won't change! I don't want to see another day! I don't want to see another night! I don't want to go on like this! I don't want it! No more humor! No more pride! No more one-night flings going nowhere! None of it's doing me any good. Actually… it's making things worse! Enough with the pushing! Stop! I can't go on anymore! Push—push—push! And for what? I don't want this! And all I do want is…?

I want my stop at Willoughby! I said, I want my stop at Willoughby, and I want it, now! Fuck this nonsense! Fuck I wish tonight….

Then Michael's eyes shimmered a bit, and smiled at the possibilities.

I wish somehow, I had…

I mean… ha!

I'm Sonny Corleone.

I really am him from the three Corleone brothers. The hotheaded idiot, rushing in to save his sister. And getting shot up in the process. I wasn't supposed to get this far. Characters like that are supposed to burn up twice as strong and burn out twice as fast. I'm not supposed to have… but, why have I?

I didn't even bring a piece with me… seeing as to what I was getting

myself into. Wasn't that a sign how I really wanted to...!

Thought Michael, and then felt like going for his Rosary. But once he pulled it out, he then had a strange impulse to eat it. And the absurdity of that notion finally brought Michael back center.

Okay, enough! Enough with these strange thoughts and vibes I'm getting! I got to get out of it! I got things to do, people to see. None of this shit means anything. This shit ain't magic. It's just me getting....

Michael then shook his head, again, breaking off from the spell the song and the recollections of that dream were all casting. And once he did, came back to reality.

Okay, good! This is more like it... this is...?

But then as he took a look around, around his surroundings, he started to feel forlorn and depressed, realizing how much of a mistake he had made to end the spell, and now have to deal with reality again.

Fuck! I don't want to be here.

Thought Michael as the song ended.

Michael then turned to Jamil, and tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention. Tapped him again! Jamil then finally regained consciousness, and looked at Michael, as Michael made a hand signal for them to go.

Strange... why did I feel like eating my Rosary?

And then all of a sudden...!

Walking back towards the smoke and drapes, 'Darling Nikki' by Prince, began to play over the stereo systems, and that there scared Michael, shitless, as he realized what was about to happen next.

Oh, fuck!

No—no—no!

Let it not be her! Let it not be her!

Please God!

I don't think I could handle seeing her, ever again!

And with that, an electric shock went through Michael's spine, making all the hairs on his neck stand on end. Almost from precognition, he felt

her before seeing her. He felt her silhouette stepping out of his past and his memories, and then embodied before him, live and present. And in that very next second....

No—no—no!

The real Nikki, stepped out of the drapes.

The Lady Reborn.

Michael had just about fallen into another trance seeing her again. Time shifted before him, and everything was now moving in looping zoom-ins, rippling this woman's presence out in waves, one after another, as they all came crashing back to Michael.

Crash!
Crash!
Crash!

It was really her. Not just one of Michael's memories of her—but her! In flesh and blood and soul! But it wasn't just her, there, there was also something else about her; hyped up and hyper realized, all in hyper defined detail. But done so, so much so, that it made Michael question whether to believe what he was seeing or not. With all of Patrick Nagel's works of art laying around, here stood in front of Michael his Mona Lisa. Watching her step out of such heavenly scenery, dressed and poised the way she was, was mesmerizing to witness. This wasn't Michael's old Nikki. She had changed! She had changed! Her aura had definitely changed. But whether for the better or worse, that, Michael, wasn't exactly sure of just yet. She had an air of nonchalance, mixed with some danger and dastardliness about her, that was also a bit unsettling. Like some battle born Pocahontas, her hair was done up, long, pinned up into a mohawk; looking very wild, and untamed; totally messy, and definitely totally sexy. She was wearing white teddy lingerie, with white straps, white stockings, that was all covered with white tapestries of white hearts, unicorns, and flowers. And even with all the white around, hers seemed in complete contrast from the rest. She had enough diamond jewelry around her neck and dangling from her ears to reflect enough light to match the stars. And finally, she wore white stiletto pumps: all clicking and clacking, hard, to the sound of a war drum; looking like white stiletto swords—really! Practically forged by

Hephaestus' own hammer; created simply to conquer all of man-kind.

As she walked up to Michael, with one-step perfectly placed in front of the next, also perfectly paced with her hips, like some runway model, Michael's presence began to deteriorate with every step she took. And before Michael could even muster up enough confidence to speak to her, Nikki began circling him like a shark, while eyeing her prey. The smoke from the dry ice continued building up, as Michael began feeling very hot under the collar.

"Nikki—what are you doing? You're making me dizzy—stop!"

Nikki continued to circle him. She still had a nonchalant air about her, but there was also something very cruel and uncaring underneath; like as if underneath that human face of hers was really that of a giant lizard.

Oh—please, don't be cold to me, again, I can't deal with this!

But she was being more than cold; much, much, more than Michael had ever seen from her before.

"Please stop, honey! Just stop!"

But Nikki wasn't stopping. She knew what she was doing. Perfectly. And hearing Michael now pleading, made her smile through her sharpened teeth; as she took one last spin around him, and, when she came around front, she stopped. Her ass then went straight up to one side and froze in place, and began puckering up to the sky. She stretched out her hand, and with the nail of her pinky, she gently scratched Michael's chest, and said:

"Hey...."

Michael was speechless.

Who is this woman, and what has she done with the Nikki I remember?

Thought Michael, for it wasn't just the way she was dressed. Michael remembered those wild moments of hers when she'd go all out with her costumes; it was really the way she was vexing and vibrating, that was making all the difference. All so very bewitching like. Casting spells, which Michael all but liked. If this was her, really, she had gone through a metamorphosis; and the thing was, Nikki was already a butterfly to begin with.

What the hell on God's green earth has she turned into now?

"Nikki, is that you?"

“Lady Nikki to you, Michael,” said Betamax, smiling like a devil.
Michael looked back at Betamax, all confused, and felt like socking him in the mouth. But, instead, turned his attention back to Nikki.

“Of course, it's me—silly,” responded Nikki.

“Then why are you acting…?”

Nikki began circling, again, but this time, she could no longer hold how much she was loving the effect she had. And began laughing. Hysterically laughing, like a cartoon witch, with way too much glee and glamor and personality, and all very sinister in nature. And even though Michael couldn't help but to snicker a little back, from the sight and sound of all this, for truly how cartoonishly evil Nikki was being, how he felt about it all could only be summed up as: sheer terror!

No, no, no! Please! Don't be mean to me!

Thought Michael, as he began to feel so hung and heartbroken by this whole ordeal, as to how cruel and mean this new Nikki was being towards him, he almost felt like shedding tears.

What? Me? Cry? Fuck that! I can't do that now in front of… why is she being so mean to me?

“Come on, lover, I think we need to go have a chat.”

Nikki stopped circling, and started skipping, in slow motion, towards the drapes. And, before disappearing into them, she turned around, and made that 'come hither' motion with her index finger. Michael felt spellbound now, he felt as if he had no more control over himself, as he found himself moving towards this 'Lady of the Night.’

Fucking Witch of the Night, more like it. Got me following her now, all reluctantly.

If she's leading me to Radboy, I gotta follow her, though. I gotta… I gotta…?

Trying to get through that gauntlet of wavy hysteria, again, Michael found himself exhausted by everything; physically and mentally exhausted. And now feint.

“Hurry up, don't keep the Lady waiting,” said Jamil.

And then Jamil shoved him forward, and Michael lost balance, and fell over, flat, landing face first, inches away from Lady Nikki's feet. Then looking up, and looking up at her perky feet, and well-toned legs, with muscles that bulged as they adjusted her balance, Michael now began

to feel sex crazed. And added the scent of her nylon stockings, Michael felt like he was about to lose it.

"You can't stay down there forever, Mikey," said Lady Nikki, teasingly.

Michael looked up at her, her and her smiling that crooked smile of hers, still, and thought:

Fucking bitch!

For she was openly enjoying seeing him crawl around, down, by her feet. This was beyond just being cold and uncaring towards him, she was now openly being villainous. And Michael—for the first time that night—felt totally at a loss.

He felt small, he felt weak, and then… he felt mad!

Felt like dragging her down to the floor with him, and putting her in her place. Ripping apart her teddy with his teeth. Then pulling it out, and giving her a taste of some of his own villainous attributes; a thorough lesson as to which gender is supposed to fuck which.

"Boy, you look mad, Mike."

Michael got up, and saw how she could read his thoughts, smiling some more as if though she knew she was asking for it. But Michael resigned his lust and contempt building up towards her, and focused back on the matter at hand.

Fine! if this is how it is then…?

"Where is he," demanded Michael.

"Who," asked Nikki indifferently.

"You know who," said Michael, trying to reflect the same level of indifference, but failing at it miserably.

Nikki then finally dropped the smile, dead, and now had a more somber look on her face. She turned to look at Jamil, and gave him the look like she didn't want him to follow; shooing him off with a gesture in her eyes. Nikki then pranced off towards the elevator, as Michael followed. And then, unable to help staring at the seams running up the back of her stockings, leading up to her diamond window.

Perfect! Fucking perfect! Now I hate diamond windows!

They both entered the elevator. Michael then began eyeing Nikki straight, as Nikki eyed nothing, ignoring Michael, still very

indifferently.

Who the fuck is this bitch? And what has happened to the Nikki I knew?

Michael felt like saying something—anything! But he knew there was nothing he could say at this moment without coming off as sounding weak and pitiful. And what pissed him off worse was, he had never been this way with Nikki, ever! And Nikki had never been this way with him, ever, either! But Michael kept his mouth shut, as his lust and contempt began building up again, further.

You trying to put up a facade? Is that it? After all the time we knew each other. You're treating me like some waste-of-space lowlife loser, not worth your...!

The doors opened, and they were now on the 53th floor. Looking out of the elevator, Michael now saw pretty much what was to be expected from a financial building; housing office complexes where some corporation could function in. As Michael stepped out of the elevator, after Nikki, he then saw him. Radboy was standing there with his head cocked to one side, tapping his foot, and looking at them both, impatiently. It was him! It was really him!

It really is! And after all these years.

Michael eyed him, and then realized he wasn't exactly sure what to do next. Seeing both Nikki, and now Radboy, was making him feel extremely awkward, and out of place; the feeling a man gets when he isn't expecting yet to reach the end of his journey. And for Michael, the end of his journey was this.

Feels different, as I thought it would, seeing these two, again.

But he was here, and Nikki and Radboy were there, and Michael knew he had to consolidate his convictions, if he was going to settle matters the way he had planned. Michael closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and then felt ready for the moment.

Rompous... why is she so mean to...?

But broke up, again, and now felt another panic attack coming back on, but now, tenfold.

No, no, no! Control it! Control it! What the hell? This isn't me! Why is she being so... stop thinking about that!

Another second passed, and it was gone.

Radboy at this point stopped looking like a penny-loafer wearing schmuck, and turned to walk into an office to his left. Michael and Nikki followed. Getting to the door, Michael noticed on the doorplate, the inscription said:

'Ms. Nichole N. Nakita Jackson'

Are you fucking kidding me? All I knew of her name up until now was Nichole Jackson. Well… that's all she told me. Funny…?

Thought Michael, for up until now, he never knew Nikki had such a long, pretty—yet stupid, porno-star sounding name. Michael smiled, and felt humorous, again.

Good! Get humorous! That always works. Think of something funny… a fucking white owl perched on his shoulder named…!

Wait…?

The owl was never white!

And lost it, again.

Get the fuck outta here! I've never been this bad! Shit! What do I do? I'm acting like a punk-ass, bitch-ass loser right now, and in front of these two, of all people. What do I…?

Wait… fuck it! Do it again! Who cares if they watch.

Michael then closed his eyes, as he reached for his Rosary. Took it out, then kissed the crucifix, even in front of both Nikki and Radboy, and felt a bit better. As Michael opened his eyes, he saw how Radboy had taken notice. Radboy whip-lashed his head back, all taken back, in bold amusement, while cringing, and now seemed like he was trying to control any fits of laughter from bursting out. Also, while eyeing Michael like he was some religious freak lunatic. Obviously, Radboy also remembered the obsessive-compulsive stuff, Michael used to have. But still, Michael didn't care, he felt no embarrassment, for the trick had once again worked for him.

Okay Ms. Nichole N… ha! Ms. stupid porno sounding name, let's have some spaß.

“So, this is your office—huh? Ms. Nichole N. Nakita… so… what's the other N stand for,” asked Michael, freshly.

First things coming out of his mouth, now, since entering the offices,

and having Nikki and Radboy wait to hear him speak. And obviously, this wasn't anything the two of them now had the patience for.

"Nancy," stated Nichole, finally, after a moment of realizing Michael was going to be acting his old self.

And him being in his thirties now, wasn't going to mean jackshit.

"Nichole—Nancy? Nakita Jackson... I can see why you kept it abbreviated," commented Michael, keeping up his freshness, as Nikki's eyes went slit.

Michael then let out a sneer, and felt like he was gaining some control. But Nikki then did what she could do to be all fresh, and get to Michael, and sprawled over her table, like some panther in heat, and began eyeing him, and panting. And the sight of her doing so, got both Madboy's and Radboy's attentions.

What the...?

Damn! Fine! Growl to you, too, bitch! Shit! She's making me want to now start hissing at her, like a cat, like I used to do to my... who the fuck is this...?

Michael then looked at Anthony, and, funny enough: his sentiments exactly! Michael then took a deep breath, and tried to take in his settings, instead. And break away from the tension building up, again, between him and her. Nikki's office was a beautiful office with high ceilings, that had a very minimalistic theme going on. There was a giant window in the back, with the brilliant view of the Manhattan skyline. They were in baby blue moonlight, and the moon itself now only seemed like a short distance away; almost in driving distance; still on a collision course with earth.

Strike One!

"So, here we are, Michael! You're here! I'm here! What do you want?"

Radboy had always been a killjoy. The babbling, stuttering, 'not so sure about himself" brains of the team. And now he just looked like that man, but saved from his embarrassing Shamrock beginnings.

Which really suits him well, though. Compared to how he looked, when he just looked like one of us.

He had a ponytail, now.

Simple way to tell if somebody is a bad guy in the 80s: he'll have a

fucking ponytail!

All in all, the hard-knocks life of Uptown had really seemed to have made him more conservative, more refined, and more pretentious. An ideal candidate for a materialistic man of the 80s. Back then, they all dressed like a gang of dilapidated misfits, now, the ol' boy had grown into a $5,000 styling Armani suit.

Fuck this shit! I still remember you for who you were. Now, let's see how you'd feel about it, me bringing up 'em yesteryears, with you!

"Wow, Radboy, those are some nice threads you got, there! Finally looking like you know what's what! Like you would know what the fuck is going on, and what you'd be talking about," said Michael, bopping his head back and forth, Journey Facing up a storm.

That was an inside joke of theirs: always being Radboy's duties to whine and moan about the situation of the Shamrocks; Madboy's duties being to ignore him, like he was an idiot. Michael felt like bringing this up, now, and seeing how he would react. Anthony just stood there, nodding, and eyeing Michael, remembering Michael and his awful, awful Shamrock beginnings, while seeming to try and hide an eye twitch.

"So, I heard you been running around thumping skulls, getting yourself in to a lot of trouble—and all to see me. So! What is it, Mr. Michael Connelly? Why have you been doing all this," asked Anthony, bopping his head, as well, to mock Michael back, but unable to keep up the same groove, and looking silly while at it.

Michael just smiled, then. And said nothing. And felt like he was on to him.

You know exactly why I'm here for!

Thought Michael.

"You want money," asked Anthony, and that now pissed Michael off.

"What are you—"

"Well…" said Michael, cutting Anthony off, "Mr. Anthony Coo…."

But before he could finish, Michael then almost busted out into laughter, remembering how stupid Anthony's last name really was.

"You know, I forgot how you pronounce your last name, actually! How did it go again? Coo—coo—chi? Coo—chi? Coo—chi—coo? Coo—"

“It's Italian, Michael! The CH is silent, so it's just—Cucchi—as in a cookie,” snapped Radboy, remembering how he had been through with this, with Madboy, at least a half dozen times back in the day.

“Cookie? Okay… Cookieboy! Should I call you that, now? Or, do you still go by Radboy?”

Ha! Still sounds stupid! Cookie? Well, I guess it's better than having a name that sounds like someone's tickling a vagina.

Tony didn't speak.

“How about just Tony, can I at least call you that?”

Mr. Cucchi still said nothing.

Oh, you fucking killjoy… stop staring at me like that! Like some uptight prick, whose sole mission in life is to rid the world of humor.

“You know, I remember you wanting to be called Ponyboy at one time, especially after you read that book,” mentioned Michael, for some reason or another.

Anthony then made a face, as if that really struck a chord with him.

“Yeah, I did! That was the original nickname I wanted to go by… but then you didn’t like how I wasn’t being original, and started calling me Coochiboy, instead, and I wasn’t having that,” mentioned Anthony, back.

“Oh yeah, Coochiboy! Yeah, I remember calling you—”

“Where the fuck you going with this,” asked Anthony.

Yeah… where the fuck am I going with this?

Thought Michael, and felt like it was time to start getting a little serious.

“Well, first off, I'm kinda wondering why I never heard from you the entire time I was in prison. I mean… we used to be such good friends back then, and all, and….”

Anthony didn't speak, again, and Michael now felt like he was losing patience; wondering if he should continue playing these games, or, should he just get to the matter. And looking at Nikki, who was still sprawled out on that table, Michael began to feel at odds with the two, and interestingly enough, mostly with her.

She's like a stranger, what is with… actually! Just think of her as that. A stranger. And nothing more.

"Michael, what do you want," asked Nikki, in a vapid tone.

You know what? Fuck Radboy! I think I want to take this up with

you instead!

"So, do you and Nikki have a thing, now," asked Michael, out of the blue, while piercing his eyes at her.

Nikki didn't like this. She was no longer acting like the cartoon villain from a minute ago, as her aura of exclusivity began to fall apart. For she was no longer looking all indifferent to what Michael had to ask about.

"Yes, Michael! Actually, we're engaged to be married," broke out Radboy.

And whatever sense of composure Michael felt he had been able to build up dealing with these two, felt completely lost, now, from what he had just heard. For that there stung hard.

Oh!

Really deep. Ferocious and fierce! Which almost had Michael going back for his…!

No, no, no! How many times am I going to kiss it in front of them? That just shows weakness!

The words had sunk down—deep—into Michael's chest, and had made him feel like he was going to have a heart attack. Madboy felt nauseated, as he turned away for a second. Then looked back at the two, and glared at them—both—in a menacing manner. Now, Michael's aura of exclusivity was beginning to fall apart. Also! As a thousand emotions began cooking inside of him, being cooked like a pressure cooker. Nikki had noticed this, and so had Radboy. Anthony then quickly grabbed Nikki by the hand, and started massaging it, like some gentle suitor would do. Michael felt really broken up inside now, as Anthony broke out a smile. Nikki, on the other hand, now just looked…?

I still don't know what. Still has that stupid facade up, hiding everything.

"You want to kiss your crucifix, again—don't you? I remember you doing that crazy shit a lot back in the day. Strangely, I don't remember you ever being religious," pouted out Radboy, as he had small disdainful laugh, one simple one, so as not to be breaking character.

Michael looked down, now, looking distraught.

"Oh… and the wedding will be held at The Lighthouse, at Chelsea

Pier, of March—”

Nikki had then quickly whipped away her hand, cutting Anthony off, in mid-sentence, with her sudden withdrawal. Michael barely noticed this, but did notice some tension between the two, now, as if they weren't at full accordance with each other.

Something is up, here... but whatever!

“Okay, Michael, let's get to business, what do you want? Do you need money or no? You looking for a handout,” asked Radboy, breathing faster, seeming to also be losing his patience.

Michael didn't respond.

"Or... is it... maybe... someone you want?"

Radboy had then made a ridiculing look, all buggy eyed, as he stared down at Nikki, as to suggest. Michael felt fits of rage, now, wanting to lash out.

Nikki, why the fuck did you get with this jackass, did you do our thing to him, too?

Michael now felt like breaking loose, completely, on a rampage, and murdering everything he could get his mitts on. He felt it, as he also felt the need to continue fighting the temptation.

No! Forget my Rosary! I feel like it might be time, I—truly! Truly! Let it all out.

Thought Michael, as he looked down at his mitts, then looked up at Radboy, and then said it:

“Radboy sends his regards.”

There was a pause amongst the three.

“What," asked Radboy, in confusion.

Madboy looked down, and up at Radboy, again, and said it again:

“Radboy sends his regards.”

It was time... to end this.

It had been an interesting journey for Michael, coming from some halfway house shithole, fighting his way to the top, and now here facing the man amongst the clouds, but it was now time to end this.

I hate beating around the bush, and that's exactly what I've been

doing right now. This is what I came here for, and it's now time I end this.

What's up, Tony? You wanna raise hell with me? Well, if you do, I can show you what that's like. For trying to murder my sister… to get to me! You cocksucking piece-of-shit!

And the odd part was, Michael was still staring all at Nikki, as he thought this, as piece by piece, Nikki began breaking apart from Michael's stare. No reborn Lady, anymore. But someone that seemed much more familiar.

"You remember the night that my sister's face was burned to a crisp, Radboy," asked Michael.

Radboy seemed at a loss, as his eyes began to fidget, left to right. Nikki seemed to have now petrified, still, like a statue; frozen over in a sullen state. For she at least remembered Michael's words over this matter, when he had brought them up to her in prison.

"Well, anyways," continued Michael, "I remember seeing a couple of Numbskulls laughing and pointing at her burning building that night, and… when I decided to sincerely—to sincerely—ask them what was so funny, they told me 'Radboy sends his regards.'"

Michael's eyes were now wider than they had ever been before; they were now madder than they had ever been before. They were bloodshot, deranged, and now both Radboy and Lady Nikki knew that the next wrong answer, might set him off.

"And so, you—you—you…?"

Radboy was stuttering now.

"Believed them?"

Madboy didn't say a word. His face and demeanor had frozen over with that look of derangement, and the longer it stayed fixed in that expression, the more it was unnerving the two other parties at hand.

Jason Voorhees was now rising from Crystal Lake.

Unflinchingly, unnervingly, and unrelentingly I stare at you both, now! So, tell me, something, to make me stop.

"So, this is what it's all about? You think I betrayed you? You're here for revenge," gasped Radboy, as sweat began to roll down his

forehead.

"You said it yourself, I've been a bad boy, lately, running around, thumping skulls, and all to see you. Why else would you figure I would go through all the trouble," asked Michael, as his eyes began shooting out nails.

But now Radboy cringed up with teeth, and began his own front.

"Well, I don't know, Michael, maybe because you're a—fucking lunatic?"

The response was strong with Radboy, and it took it bit out of Madboy's posture.

"I mean, back then, any problem we had with The Numbskulls, or the Repomen, or the Jam City 5s, it was always because of you! Sassboy at least would start trouble for the jokes. But in the end, he was harmless, because he knew his limits. You, on the other hand, always did it because you wanted blood. You and that fucking temper of yours! You always had to start conflicts and drag the rest of The Bloody Shamrocks into it.

I mean, I know you, I know you...

and...

how many enemies have you already made, tonight, trying to get to us? How many—Michael—how many?"

Michael didn't respond, as he thought about how he was definitely enemies with The Beefcakes, now, everyone at Stumpy's, almost, and if the Nim Foes didn't take too kindly to what he did to Boomatic, he was probably now enemies with them too.

"Yeah—just as I thought!"

A paused followed, and then Radboy began again:

"That's why The Bloody Shamrocks never went anywhere, because you kept us from expanding. Any connection I tried to make, you'd fuck it all up! Like when you fucked Betamax's sister, who was only fourteen years old at the time, you sick freak! If Betamax wasn't so head over heels in love with you... and didn't just so happen to enjoy that reel...?" and now Anthony made a face, an awkward face, sorta funny, too, and said, "probably imagining himself on the other end," and now got back to the drilling, "that would have been another connection lost."

Another pause.

> "And don't even get me started on how hard it was, afterwards, to get reacquainted with The Ravishers, from all the shit you put them through. Fact is, ever since you've been out of our lives, me and Nikki have been doing—great! Doing swell! Everything has been peachy! You were always nothing more than a thorn to our side, and now that you're out of prison, I can see you've become nothing less than a raving psychopath."

Madboy then peered out in retaliation. For he was beginning not to like where this was going.

> "You're dangerous, Michael, I can see that now! Someone this time needs to lock you back up, and throw away the key. So why don't you do me and Nikki a favor, and get the fuck out of this office, and out of our lives, but for good this time!"

Radboy was now done. Madboy, on the other hand, hadn't even started. He wanted to rip the pompous look on Radboy's face, who had just told him he deserved to be locked back up, again, but for good this time.

> Go back in for another five to ten years so you can continue fucking Nikki, and laughing at what you did? Oh, fuck you! And then there's this bitch, just lying there, still sprawled out on this table, like some dessert: a treat for Cookieboy, there, after he's done-finished dealing with me.

Michael now felt like dealing with Radboy, personally, in the only way he knew best. Madboy felt ready! He felt ready to pass judgment. But before the execution, Madboy felt he should at least let his dear ol' friend, here, know what his verdict was. So, as he closed his eyes, again, opened them one final time, he then said:

> “Strike one!”

And now, things, really began.

Radboy and Nikki flinched a bit, at first, in confusion of what that meant, but when they saw the look in Madboy's eyes: Rage incarnate! They almost freaked, as they realized what was about to go down. Almost freaked! And Madboy enjoyed watching them almost do so. Nikki, now, looked like she was contemplating over how badly she had screwed up, telling Jamil to stand back, earlier. Because the fact was:

they were all alone, and if Michael was to kill them both with his bare hands, there was nobody there to stop him. They knew Madboy's anger; they knew his wrath, all too well. But for some reason up until now, they had chosen to underestimate it.

Wait… wait… I'm not going to attack her, too, am I? But I…?

"St—st—strike one? What type of—Michael! I had nothing to do with it—nothing! What, you think… Nikki could have had something to do with this, too?"

What? You too?

And then all of a sudden, Michael shifted, as he glared at Nikki like the Grim Reaper. For what he just heard took things into a newer, and much more scarier level. So scary, even Michael grew scared, realizing how angered he now felt. And something in him now changed. As whatever graciousness there was left within him got twisted, and turned. Turned wretched. And as he looked down at his mitts, again, he felt them crying out for blood. Her blood. Crying out in strange tongues, that sounded… demonic in a way… you can say.

Nikki, getting a sense of this through Michael's eyes, quickly got up, and walked over to a corner, not facing the two, while holding her arms.

Who the fuck is this…?

"What you going to do, Madboy, strangle us—both? Here? You're in Uptown! The second you step out of this office, you're going to be in a world of shit! Forget about prison, you'd be lucky if you're not hog tied with an apple in your mouth, left stranded in the middle of Central Park, as The Nightslashers' supper. Lucky!"

"Hahahahaahahaaaahaaa ahaaaaaha hahaa!"

Michael then began laughing, hysterically, giving them the sense as if he even cared. All that mattered for him was this moment, for the future had nothing of value to him.

What do I have to do tomorrow, except go back to my zilch life? I got nowhere to go, I got nobody to be with. Letoya wants nothing to do with me, anymore. And this bitch, now, looks like she's turned evil just to spite me, for the sake of spiting—me! And nothing else.

Thought Michael, as the demonic shit his mitts were crying out began

to make sense to him.

“Strike two—Lady of the Night,” called out Michael, lashing his head in her direction.

Did you also have something to do with that night—huh? Oh, what the fuck have I done to deserve this heartache—huh?

Nikki turned and had the look of eyes flashing light, from the headlights of an approaching runaway vehicle, approaching fast to seal her doom. Madboy now felt like he wanted this Lady to have a chance with an answer. For obviously, Radboy didn't have any clue as to what the fuck he was doing, and the danger he was putting themselves in. Nikki now had a trench-coat on, as if she was feeling embarrassed for everything that had led to this point.

Why the fuck would you do this? Mary used to be your best friend!

Why the fuck would you do this me….

Murder!

Murder!

Murder!

Rip you with my barehands to fucking shreds and shreds and shreds and… AAHHH!

And then all of a sudden, the last piece of Nikki's facade fell, and Michael was now finally able to see what lay beneath.

The Fallen Mask.

Oh. What was I feeling?

And as the mask fell, Michael now saw light shining out. And beyond that, a shivering scared little girl, with eyes that Michael remembered. Eyes like old touch, long lost and forgotten. But now found.

Oh, Nikki, it's you!

His mitts now stopped making sense, and stopped crying out for vengeance, in those other tongues. In within a shimmering moment, of seeing things otherworldly, and magically, Michael felt the change of heart he was waiting for. Feeling that transitioning feeling.

“You want to kill me, Michael,” asked the last woman on earth.

Nikki was in tears, now; they were red, bulging up and outwards. They seemed swollen and lost, and they glistened grievously in the moonlight.

“You want to kill me, Michael,” asked Nikki, solemnly, again, but with the look more intense.

Michael first felt warm, for the moment was full of warm innocence, emanating from her eyes. But then felt burned, from how hot they got, emanating forth the pain and strain she felt from the anguish, like what hurt her the worst wasn't her fear that he would, but the idea that Michael would ever consider it, at all. Michael felt their old connection, a connection felt beyond this world, and even the next.

All feels like all those little moments together, them days, reminding me of how we were together, then. How on some nights, while asleep, I'd wake up in a way, partially, and notice how she had just been staring at me, for what might have been hours upon hours upon hours on end. And when I'd notice, I would then also notice, how there was something very melancholic in her eyes. Like she was really saddened about something, or another. Like she was afraid if she stopped staring at me, I'd vanish. As if I was the last person left on earth, as she was, herself. But then when she'd notice I was awake, and had noticed, she’d get scared, and break away. Then lay her head down on my chest, and begin to pant a little.

Ha! I know... how weird.

And, yeah! I won't deny the fact of how much it would also creep me the fuck out, too, sometimes. When I'd notice she was doing all this. But... in a strange way... for whatever strange reason... I couldn't help but to like it. Really, really like it, her being that way.

Fine! I'll admit... downright loved it! In a way. In a very, very strange way. For it all just felt like a... spell.

And thinking about that, the troubling feeling that now grew inside Michael was....

The thought....

That someone like his Nikki, that had always wanted to cling on so deeply, onto him, as she used to, for love and support....

Would do so… with someone… that would then turn around, and try to kill her.

Oh God!

Thought Michael. As Jason Voorhees took out a machete, and came across the presence of his first prey.

Oh God! No! Please no!

Thought Michael, again, as the thought began to truly terrify him.

Was I really going to attack her, too? I felt like I was looking at a different person, there, for a second. And…?

No! No… I couldn't have! That couldn't have happened! Could it? The idea of it terrified him, and what terrified him the most was the uncertainty if he was or wasn't having premeditated thoughts of doing so.

Wait, what was I thinking a second ago….

Murder?

Barehands… ripped to… no! I didn't think that, did I?

Did I?

That part of his mind felt like it was on a different wavelength, which he wasn't no longer able to pick up on, right now. Still, the contempt he had built up towards her, earlier, still felt like it was lingering around, and it was making him feel sick to his stomach. Michael now felt frozen, at this moment, for this moment had now made all the difference.

I wanted to strangle her, too? No! That's impossible! That could have never have happened! Never!

Michael then looked back down at his mitts.

What the fuck was that shit? Her fault… what? It all being her fault.

And what he had felt of them was beginning to disgust him, for the first time in his life, feeling disgusted by them.

Let me feel it again, that vengeful demonic… demonic? What? No… it couldn't have been that! Well, let me feel it, again, just so I can put those feelings in place.

But his mitts weren't allowing him to feel it, again, at this moment.

Fuck you!

Thought Michael, as he was now truly feeling disgusted by them. Whatever difference these instruments of his own intervention had

made, earlier, at his dump, Michael was no longer sure of... if now... if it was for the better or worse. Whatever definition they had once given him, into his own being, of his own true worth, now felt like:

Garbage! Pure concentrated garbage!

Thought Michael, as he fell into himself, deep in thought, and was no longer able to see what was about to happen next.

Seeing the effect that Nikki's tears had had on Michael, seeing as how Michael no longer seemed aware of his surroundings, Radboy felt like he now had a chance to take matters into his own hands. He had underestimated Madboy; he had taken very little precaution in inviting him here. He had no clue that the boy had come for revenge. And now, seeing as how he had a mad dog loose in his woman's offices, that was capable of anything, Anthony now felt the inclination of putting this mad dog down, himself. Michael was still drifting in and out of it; staring down and away, and not paying any attention to anything. Especially Radboy. Radboy, on the other hand, was now fully fixated on Michael, and he had a surprise waiting for him. Quickly, Radboy then went for it, as he went for the revolver that he had tucked away behind in his pants, concealed behind his suit jacket. And as he pulled it out and pointed it at Michael, who was still brooding within himself, unaware of what was about to happen, he began pulling the trigger. But, before taking the shot, that very moment, Nikki then dashed in, grabbing his hand, and pushing it up and away, towards the ceiling. The gun went off, and Michael was finally snapped back to reality, as he saw Radboy holding a gun, while struggling with Nikki over it. And—

You motherfucker!

Before he even knew it, Madboy burst forth, furiously, springing forth into action, while screaming, as he reached Radboy, hurling him backwards. Hurling him in full force. Hurling him away. Radboy flew back into the glass behind him, as it shattered, and went sailing out into the night, far and fast and forever. And then fell, down, straight down, straight to his end.

It was now over. It was now finally over.

Piece-of-shit, fucking cocksucker... let's see what's left of the

backstabbing asshole, now. Trying to get to me while I wasn't looking. I wanna see this now! Right now! I want to see what's left of him!

Michael walked over to the window to see the last of Radboy; his body had splattered onto the pavement, and there was a pool of blood expanding from his contours. Michael scoured his eyes about to see if anyone had noticed the body. But where it had fallen, it was out of sight for anyone on the ground level to notice.

There you go, that's what I'm talking about!

Thought Michael, as he began obsessively nodding. Hard. And uncontrollably.

That's what I'm talking about, that's what I'm… talking about!

Thought Michael, again, still nodding. Still nodding. Still nodding… as if…?

Yeah! That's what I'm talking… about? That's the right sort of… justice? That's… that's…?

What it was was….

Oh!

The sight of the fallen Radboy, him down there, dead.

Oh…?

Was also now beginning to disturb him, as Michael began to feel sad and squeamish. It looked like the back of his head had busted open from the impact of the fall, and his brains were also decorating the ground beneath him. There was a lot of gore to it, and nothing like the gore one sees in an action or horror movie, involving a lot of fake effects, that were easy for anyone to spot. Unlike them, these weren't effects, that dead body down there wasn't fake, it was Anthony. How he was just a minute ago, still alive, and yet, now not.

This is justice?

Thought Michael, as he was no longer nodding, and able to see what he had done as that. For, that down there was Anthony, no doubt about it. He was dead. And to Michael, he wasn't some mook character he wouldn't be giving two shits about. Anthony was somebody Michael once knew—an enemy of his or not—and as much as Michael hated him for everything, it was still disturbing to see him in a state like this; the state we all might one day end up, when life decides when and where and how our time has come. And now Michael saw himself, dead, down

there, with his head busted open, and his brains decorating the place, and that image really began disturbing him.

What the fuck is going on? Why am I seeing it like this?

Thought Michael, as he found himself feeling sorry for the person laying down there. Michael then slumped down, onto his knees, and now felt hollow.

After a second, he then felt like pulling out his Rosary, again, to kiss the crucifix. But for whatever reason, felt too hollow to do that, or anything. So, he didn't.

And then, seeing as to what he had just done, it all then felt like nothing had happened.

What the fuck is happening to me?

Michael then looked down at his mitts to see if they could give him some sense of bearing. Since they had always done the job at times like these. But... looking down.

Ah! Fuck!

Michael then remembered how they had made him feel, just a moment ago, when they weren't just responsible of doing to Anthony what they just did. But were also willing to be responsible, to do the same thing, to...

Ah!

Scared Michael, as he stopped staring at them. And shunned them away from his sight.

Well, what's done is done... so... now what?

Now thought Michael, as he now found himself back... at that place. Back where it all began. Michael had looped. Back to that dump he called home. Back to there, sitting there, in his bitching wife-beater, with the redundant design of some vampire chick, stabbing herself with a stake through her own heart. Back there again, at the corner of his bed, while feeling a nice, cool, transatlantic ocean breeze, blowing in through his window. Back... to where nothing again mattered.

Why am I feeling this way? He tried to shoot me just now! He's the piece-of-shit that had those Numbskulls try to burn down Mary's building, and have her killed, just to...

Wait a minute...?

The report!

No, no, no! I don't want to think about that now!

Looking up at Nikki, Michael saw she was frantic, scrolling and screaming about something, which Michael felt too muted to hear. After a while, she stopped, fell into his arms, holding him, as she began to tremble.

A couple minutes then passed, as Michael began regaining his senses.

"We need to leave, Michael, we need to leave, now!"

Michael didn't respond.

"Michael, we need to get outta here, now!"

"Why—what's wrong," murmured out Michael, now feeling a lot more conscious.

"Because White Head is coming!"

Something Wicked This Way Comes.

Wait a second, you're in my arms again? How did this happen?

Who is coming... who did you say?

But Michael had heard her—perfectly!

The Big White Head... coming here?

Michael had almost completely forgotten about him, about Angel Eyes, and his army of Iron Monkeys, and about the Age of Rage. The real shit going down in New York, in this time in the world. In this world. Shit that Michael had refused to make part of his scene, since, the shit then seemed way too big for his breeches.

But now, with his original mission completed. And with the emptiness left feeling inside, it was now time for a new mission, and something new to creep its way in.

Those eyes! Those eyes, of his, and the bloody tale they had to tell... There was a sense of horror slowly creeping its way into him; he felt it moving underneath his skin. Something much, much, much more

prime and primordial. His original mission might have been over, but the night was still young. Michael was still here, and the city was still here, too. And so was the Age of Rage, that was devouring everything Michael knew around him.

"Nikki... I killed him," murmured Michael.

"Michael, that's not important right now, we need to leave."

"It's not important... but you—"

"Didn't you hear what I said? White Head is coming!"

Michael now fully acknowledged Nikki's presence. She was with him, next to him, at his side. Even after everything that had just happened. And even though this to him wasn't making any sense. That, what she had just brought up, also wasn't. Something wasn't adding up.

Michael looked suspiciously at Nikki, and began to wonder what—exactly—she and Radboy were up to, before he had stepped into the picture.

"What is going on, Nikki? Tell me exactly what is going on. And tell me everything."

At first, she seemed reluctant to say anything, but after staring at Michael for a bit, also acknowledging his presence, here, with her, by her side, after everything that just happened....

She then nodded, as a sign of acceptance. Nikki then went into herself for a bit, as she tried to consolidate her senses; she still seemed half hysterical with everything that had just happened; she needed to regain some of her composure, so she could explain what was about to go down.

"Nikki, you're involved with this... Big White Head... how? Who is he?"

And with that, Nikki began:

"His name is Mr. Dorian... and sufficed to say... he's a very, very powerful man."

"Okay," said Michael.

"From what I know, Mr. Dorian is... or used to be... a CIA agent, whose operations were mostly in South America, where he had spent years and years down there, working with, and financing, all

the drug cartels, dictatorships, and contras—any organization that has shown willingness to fight Communism from spreading."

"Okay," said Michael.

What the… what the… that was a lot to take in.

Michael now thought. As he took a big gulp, and realized, just how fucked up shit was about to get, with what Nikki was explaining about this guy. And seeing into Nikki's eyes, the details weren't even over just yet.

"He's the man behind Ollie North no one speaks about. He was the man put in charge of all this, and for pouring almost a billion or so dollars into those countries, to reinforce their capital. But, now, since the U.S. Government has found out how he's been skimming money off the top, they've decided to put a hit on him, and take him out. This has made Mr. Dorian very, very angry. So much so, that he's now wanting revenge."

And Nikki was now done. She had really managed to sum up everything. And….

Oh, you got to be fucking shitting me!

Thought Michael, trying to grasp all that in, in one setting… since, to Michael, it all felt:

Fucking impossible!

To do so.

Michael's eyes then just about flipped, and switched places, thinking about all that. As he felt overwhelmed, just trying to take it all in.

What, are you kidding me? CIA? Who is Ollie North? Communism from spreading… skimming money off the top… Revenge?

It all sounded too much like a movie, Michael understood the bits; but it all seemed way too much of anything Michael could have ever imagined he would be getting involved with. And for that, Michael wasn't feeling a connection. But, even without the connection, he was feeling something about the whole matter: fear. Real fear. And dread. For it also seemed way too much of anything Michael could have ever imagined he would be able to handle. Dealing with a villain like this was going to be something beyond him.

And this fucker is coming here, now… how am I…?

Baby blue moonlight, saw Michael, outside the window, the glow of it

all. And then saw the cratered and cracked moon, getting the ever and ever more closer; a celestial body of eternal evil that existed before all of continuum; thousands and thousands and thousands of times bigger than Michael, Nikki, and the rest of NYC; coming to make their world into its.

After giving himself some time to really have it settle, Michael felt the spark of a question ignite in the back of his head. The only thing of this Mr. Dorian's story, he was able to feel a connection with.

Just how far is a madman willing to go… to get his revenge?

"We need to leave, Michael," cried out Nikki, in dread.

"How mad are we exactly talking about, here?"

Nikki went silent, as her eyes blazed a bit, in worry.

"Nikki—tell me," shouted Michael.

"He wants to detonate a bomb. A blockbuster called a Daisy Cutter. Supposedly big and powerful enough to level this building, and even a few blocks. Plus, with the riots he's started, he's hoping it'll all lead to complete anarchy."

Michael didn't say a word.

"Michael, we need to get out—now!"

Michael looked into her eyes—looked at his Nikki—and began to wonder what part she had to play in all this.

"How do you know all this?"

Nikki looked phased. She seemed conflicted. Michael now grabbed her by the shoulders, and demanded again:

"How do you know all this?"

"Because… Radboy and I… we're in on it," let out Nikki.

Nikki's eyes were now flickering and flailing about like crazy. And Michael could now see Nikki, without the mask, and see what his once sunshine had now become. Now, lying there. Now, next to him. Now naked, in mind and mold and presence.

She's so… jittery. But why?

Michael could see she was breathing in and out, in and out, real hard and fast. Her eyes were dilated. Her skin was drenched with sweat. And her nose was as red and agitated as a wino's.

Her nose is so red?

Michael then took his left hand and placed it over her heart.

"Michael… what are you…?"

Her heart felt like a jackhammer, trying to break through a yard of concrete.

"Nikki… are you okay?"

She didn't respond. She was too jittery to respond. And Michael could now tell, as Nikki could also tell, that Michael was really seeing into her for what she had become. Truly and deeply! For everything Michael had seen from her up until now, truly and really, was just a front, a facade, an illusion; the street wise habit of keeping a cool lid, to make everyone else think you're in control of things. That you're what's happening. But the truth of the matter was far from the illusion. And without the porcelain mask on, Michael could now see how she:

Has become a coke head. Sigh!

I mean… she's gone! Truly and really gone! I can see that now. But… how did she get to this point? What type of life has she been living to get her to this? Damn… was she hiding a lot from me. But now… I can see that.

And now, Michael could see her story. She was no longer a Patrick Nagal work of art, hiding everything behind a blank face, white as innocence. And the story Michael started seeing of her now, now that all her details were out and showing, was one Michael realized, he was all too familiar with.

Oh God, no… she's her! She's her, now! Seeing Nikki like this is starting to remind me of the picture my dad made, of my mom, describing her to me on what happened to her after she left us. Initially, he didn't want to tell me nothin'. Since the time she left, I was only twelve. But when I got older… I guess… he felt he owed me some bits of the story.

I guess, at the ends, she just couldn't take living the dismal day-to-day life we had. As she started feeling like she was on a merry-go-round, with the life she had, going around and around, heading in

no real direction. From what I remember, she used to spend hours upon hours indoors, obsessing about the cleanliness of her own house. Our house. She'd clean and clean and clean, and... do nothing else. Until everything looked immaculate. And then she'd buy a whole bunch of junk from garage sales from the neighborhood, and fill our house with them. Really pretty!

Make it like she was creating her own little palace... which I guess... she eventually felt a prisoner in.

When she finally flipped, and decided to leave us, my dad told me she had then went to the bank, and had cleaned out all his accounts. And... my dad? He had a hefty sum, then, since... you know... he'd do a lot of odd jobs for the mob. 'Five hundred grand,' he said. And when she cleaned us out, she then decided to run away, to LA, to start a new life... as an actress... or something. Supposedly, that being an old dream of hers, before she decided to settle with me and my dad.

Now looking at Nikki, Michael now began to remember the other parts; things his father had also said about his mother to Michael:

My father also told me that she always had something crazy inside her. Told me how impulsive she was. And also, secretive. Like she was possessed! Going all that way to become some Hollywood—something... but... ended up falling flat on her face for all the vices of that city. I can't say what she had to do then, though, since my father didn't even know the whole story. But, as for the details, I can only imagine: Flipping tricks to get this acting gig, or that. Then flipping tricks, for money, after she went through all the money she had stolen from us. My mom was a real stunner, too. Type of woman lots and lots of men would want to take advantage of... for obvious reasons.

Fuck! I remember as a teen, back in the 70s, me and this girl went to see a porno... and... I had this really, really fucked up worry, I was gonna end up seeing her in it.

Oh! Don't think about that crap again!
Michael paused for a moment, as he forced that thought out of his head.
But still. Whatever hell she put herself through trying to reach for those stars, she eventually found herself somewhere on the Sunset strip, head down, laying half naked in a gutter, after she had ODed from heroine. Fucking bitch! What would get into her to go down that road? And my mother was a religious fanatic, too! It really makes no sense! It's like she became possessed by a demon to go 180 like that, down that path.

Reprobate…?
Oh, God, not that word. I don't want to think of—that word!

Looking at Nikki, Michael could now obviously see she had in some manner followed the same path. She had become a shell of her former self. Life in Uptown must have really broken her in, used her up, and left her a ghost of a woman. She had become what you can call….

A Roman Tragedy:
a victim of her own abundant and decadent lifestyle.
Drugs, sex, rock n roll, and then some.

"Seriously Nikki… are you okay," Michael asked now, but got no response.

In prison, Michael had maybe spent tens of hundreds of thousands of hours, all thinking about her, and what she meant to him. Trying to understand what she ever saw in a nobody punk like him. Thinking about her, and what he had lost once she was gone. And what it all meant to him that he had lost her. Thinking about her obsessively, impetuously, maniacally… almost to the point of utter collapse. To a point where he just couldn't think about her no more, and had to make the heartbreaking decision to stop.

To let go.

In the end, you gotta move on. You have to! I had to! Once the

years started to pass, I knew then, if I didn't? I was probably going to go insane. I mean, when these many years pass, it can never go back to being the way they were before... right?

Thought Michael. But then looked down at her, and seeing how she was here, not as a memory from his past, but here, now, in his present... and possible future. Michael started to think beamishly of the possibilities.

Really? After all these years... they can go back to being...?

Michael, for a moment there, forgot about the whole Big Bad White-Headed Guy, and got excited over this.

Maybe I did do this all for her? To have her back into my life. And I really didn't come here for....

But then Michael pictured Anthony down there, and got sad and squeamish, again. And then got depressed, seeing as how the night had preceded itself.

Oh, what have I done!

Up until now, even with all the thumping and fighting and thrashing about, Michael had really enjoyed living up the life he once had. This night, he was his old self again. He was a fighter, he was a brawler, and he was a wise-cracking force to be reckoned with. He was a winner that no lady could resist. He was a somebody, and no longer that lonely and miserable inmate, jamming books and dictionaries into his head. For he was his old self. His old self. His....

I was my old self!

The thought now started repeating in Michael's head. Over and over. For he didn't want to think about anything else. Especially the insanity he had just heard about former CIA agents starting riots in the city, and wanting to blow up buildings, and shit.

Nope!

What Michael really wanted to think about was:

Doris Day—that goddess of a freak of a woman!

And how insane it would have been if he ended up—

Yup!

He thought about Letoya, and how good it felt to have a woman tending to his wounds in that time of need. He thought about the rumble he had with The Beefcakes, and how he took on a hundred supermen, and won. He thought about Sadboy, and how proud he felt when he saw the once

cowering mook stand up for himself, and swing a TV into the back of a giant, leathered up Attila the Hun.

He had had a great adventure. Truly had had a great one! But it had ended the moment Michael had pushed Radboy crashing out of a window.

So that's justice… huh?

You know… back in the ol' Shamrock days, we did used to get into a lot of crazy shit. Thumped a lot of skulls, had some real bitching good times, started lot of mayhem, mostly just for the kicks. And when we saw a man on the streets calling out to us, we ran at him to bang heads. Test each other's might, but not to end each other's life. That's really cowardly and despicable—and over what? What the fuck have I done? Did I really do all this for justice? If I did, I should have then burned his face off, and sent him to prison for all those years. Eye for an eye… tooth for a tooth… I don't know… hell! I don't think I would have even wanted to do that much.

Now, he wasn't his old self. He was at that place… all alone… at that place… waiting… just waiting… for something to give. He was once again that lonely man, with the lonely eyes, staring out of a jail cell; a man so lost in dreariness and gloom, that he might as well have forgotten his own name. It all began to feel like Attica, again.

When you're in prison… you're dead! You're a ghost! A figment of your own imagination, spending an eternity haunting your own damn self.

Likewise, it seemed that's exactly what Nikki had become, just in her own way.

Maybe the way my mother became… could I make that semblance with Nikki's story, here, as that of hers?

Also, the question was—was it all Nikki's doing? Or was there an outside force at work? The way a woman has to deal with the world. With power hungry, overbearing, devious men. That. Would take a sweet girl like Nikki, and concoct her into the ideal of their own ideas of perfection.

That's what Radboy would do! Even though he didn't really deserve what I did to him, there, he was still a piece-of-shit asshole that would do that. Turn Nikki into this Lady.

Obviously, whatever Nikki had become, Radboy had to have had something to do with it. Back when Michael knew her different, Nikki was never the type to put on such a vicious and vexed facade, to intimidate those around her with her sex appeal. She was no vixen.

Although, there was that first time that I…?

Michael shook his head and lost his train of thought. He glared a bit at Nikki, who seemed to be on the verge of going catatonic.

Okay… okay… okay… gotta go back to the whole White Head matter. I have to!

Michael now started watching Nikki, studying her, trying to pick out whatever else she might be hiding:

Considering how secretive I've known this woman to be.

Mr. Dorian… CIA agent… Daisy Cutter? It all just seemed way too fantastical, and yet, horrifying, to believe.

Does she really have something to do with all that? Or. Is she just so coked out of her mind, that…?

Michael now started wondering over this possibility.

“Hey,” said Michael, trying to break her out of the state she was in, but to no avail.

Nikki now looked like she was burying herself in the safety of her own inside world. Burying her head in her own arms, like an ostrich burying its head in the sand, pretending the outside world didn't exist anymore.

“Nikki—please? Mr. Dorian… Daisy Cutter… blowing up this building? Are you being serious about all this," asked Michael, all baffled.

"Yes!"

"I mean, it seems a little—"

"What—you think I'm making this up? That I'm tripping out, and being delusional? I'm not—fucking—kidding," cried out Nikki, batting her eyes, violently, in disapproval.

"Fine, I believe you!"

Actually, Michael still didn't feel like he could. But the second he saw Nikki light up red, and start cussing, he didn't feel like putting her through any more scrutiny.

"But, please! At least tell me how did you and Radboy become connected with all this craziness,” demanded Michael.

“Well, Mr. Dorian needed a safe transfer of the Daisy Cutter. Since

it weighs something over 15K, it needed to be transported by semi-truck, and stored for three days where no one would check. Radboy and me, we knew Mr. Dorian, since he's a major supplier for this city. And before everything that had happened to him, with the hit being placed on his head, and all, he was quite a regular here at 1999… well… as long as 1999 was being conducted in this building," explained Nikki, while continuing to bat her eyes like a shutter, framing all the details.

Ah shit!

As coked out of her mind as she seemed on the outside, there was a level of composure and reassurance in her tone. There were a lot of details involved; too many details to be made up on the spot, from someone under the influence. And it all sounded reasonably plausible, given the events that had been going on all night long with the Age of Rage.

"What the hell, Nikki," gasped Michael.

"We can't waste any more time sitting here, we have to—"

"Why? Why do you want to leave? I mean, if you're connected to all this, and this Mr. Dorian, then what are you afraid of," asked Michael.

"I don't—trust—him, Michael! Radboy kept insisting that nothing would happen, but he was being blinded by the money Mr. Dorian was promising us. And also there's something else…."

Nikki's eyes scanned a bit, and decided not to bring that up.

"Since he couldn't just leave a semi-truck anywhere for three days, he was willing to pay a hefty sum to have it kept secret at the underground garage of this building. Once he gets here, and his men set up the timer, he won't need us anymore to keep his secret. Do you see now why we need to leave?"

"Who else knows about all this," asked Michael, curious to see how far the details went.

"Um… nobody!"

Nikki then clocked her pupils away from Michael as she said that, and counterclockwise too, as if she didn't want Michael spending another second reading into them. Letting Michael know, that what she just said, was probably a lie.

You always kept things from me, Nikki, making me out to be some stupid child that wouldn't understand the details. Well, at least she

explained everything else.

And then a thought came to Michael that displeased him so.

"So, you and Radboy were doing this all for the money? I mean, how many people can such a huge explosion kill? Hundreds? How many people are really up there on the 54th floor?"

Nikki grew an expression of shock on her face, which had Michael dumbfounded, as to whether or not she had even considered those consequences.

That!

Or that's what she wanted Michael to think.

I mean, there's no doubt about it, such a huge explosion? It's gonna total this building to the ground, and maybe then some, with other buildings around. Is there something you're not telling me, Nikki? Who the fuck is this Lady?

But as the notion lingered, building up dread and horror in Nikki's face, as her lower lip began to quiver, it was beginning to make Michael think—

Maybe she hasn't? Considering the consequences… that is.

Her expression seemed as shocked and surprised as that of a child, who had just learned she was the one responsible for setting her house on fire, having played around with matches in the basement. And for that, Michael felt he couldn't judge her, not just yet.

No! I don't want to judge her at all! I don't want these things to be real!

There were obviously way too many drugs in her system right now for her to be making rational decisions. And then, there was the fact that Michael wasn't exactly the best example of a man known for his reasoning.

Why the fuck you judging? You're really an amoral piece-of-shit, yourself! Ex-convict… get the fuck outta here!

Michael sighed, and grabbed Nikki by the hand, to reassure her, he wasn't going to get on some high horse and begin persecuting. Nikki went silent, as she closed her eyes, and even though it wasn't much of a reassurance, she seemed to be more at peace. The two then got up, ready to leave, and as Michael turned his head around…

He saw them in the way.

And also, him.

Enter The Big White Head!

He wore a Fedora on his head, and had a style about him you could now only see in black and white movies. He wore a common black tie, a common gray suit, along with some common gray trousers to match. And when he wore them, he did so, not because he was some businessman, some Gordon Gecko, or Donald Trump, trying real hard to look professional or important to anyone—no! He did so, as a uniform, of his generation. Of his principals and his prestige. This man, here, was a real-deal G.I. Joe. This man was no spoiled and pathetic Baby Boomer, that prayed to rock and roll, to keep his skin looking young, and his life free of any responsibilities. He had scars. His face looked old, and seasoned, and wrinkled, and he stood there proud to wear them. He was the splitting image of classic Americana. A man that had lost his innocence a very, very, very long time ago: while in WW2, hearing the sound of screaming Japanese soldiers, being burned alive in a hole, lit up by a blowtorch, somewhere in Iwo Jima; or, while growing up starving to death fighting over a dead rat with another eight-year-old child, like himself, like seething wild animals, during the Great Depression. He was the perfect ideal of what a real man once used to be, and he was a classic evil most people today had been very fortunate never to have truly experienced. That is... until now.

> “Bossman, something must have happened," commented Angel Eyes, who was standing at the doorway, with a toothpick in his mouth, smiling through his teeth.

The Fedora Man edged his head forward and whispered something into Angel's ear.

> “Ms. Jackson, Mr. Dorian wants to know what the fuck is going on,” spoke Angel, in for Mr. Dorian.

Nikki stood in petrified silence. She seemed to be trying her best to collect up the pieces of her fallen facade she had earlier, but seemed unable to do so. It was now totally lost to her, as she continued to stand there, half shivering, while half trying her hardest not to shiver.

> Oh—Nikki—don't fall apart, now. I don't know what to do here. These are the people you're used to dealing with.

But Michael remembered Nikki as a meticulous planner, that liked

everything in its place, and everything done in orderly fashion. And since the havoc Michael had caused coming here, Nikki was out of her element, now, dealing with these guys. Since everything was at disarray.

"So, Bossman, the chocha is here, but what should we do with him," asked Angel Eyes, as he smiled at Michael, as if he already knew what his bossman's answer would be.

I got a bad feeling... bad! Just bad! Looking at these two.

The Fedora Man then took one last glance at Michael and Nikki, looked at the window that had shattered behind them, and said:

"Matalo!"

Ah shit!

Thought Michael. And at that moment, Michael saw Anthony's revolver on the desk, and went for it. He quickly grabbed it. And as he looked up, while holding the piece up to be aimed....

Ah shit... again!

Thought Michael, now finding himself at a standoff. For Angel Eyes had also gotten a hold of that .44 Magnum, of his, he had earlier. Angel now stood there pointing it at Michael, as Michael, there, stood, pointing his back.

"Wait—please! I'm sorry, Mr. Dorian, I know how crazy all this must—"

"Mr. Dorian wants to know where Mr. Cucchi is, who this carechimba is, and why is the window behind you two broken," spoke out Angel, in an even tone, cutting Nikki in mid-sentence.

Also, did so, even though Mr. Dorian hadn't even said to Angel anything. The two just seeming to be linked like that.

And it was then, that, Michael felt his old drive:

Rompous-pompous!

Felt it, and how it was now the moment to get involved. Say something—quick! Anything—really! Before things got too ugly.

"Mr. Cucchi is dead, and the window behind me is broken... because I pushed him out of it," replied Madboy, "and as for who I am? That's none of your fucking business!"

Ah hell! I've seen too many Dirty Harry movies and—ah fuck it! Just go with it! Maybe it'll work...?

Before this night, Michael had never once held a gun at someone; he had held a gun before, but never like this. This now was a new experience for him, and he was now feeling a uniquely new sense of power and precedence, that he had never before experienced.

Oh, this isn't me.

Thought Michael, for he now felt how it wasn't suiting him. One bit. It felt too powerful, and maniacal. And mechanical. Like something he felt had no heart nor humanity to be found in. Unlike the prows and valiance and violence that it took in just beating another man with one's own barehands, this felt inhuman. But still, Michael was stuck with it, for he needed this leverage. Because, he knew, his fists alone were going to be no match against the .44 Magnum Angel Eyes was holding onto, there. The Fedora Man then grinned, seeing Michael, for he seemed like he must have enjoyed hearing his boldness. And, as he grinned, it looked like his old face almost cracked up doing so.

Angel Eyes now spoke to The Big White Head in Spanish:

"Oh, Bossman! I think I know this guy. He's that son of a bitch at Stumpy's place, everyone was talking about before I got there. And the man I saw at the Tropic, that took out Felipe."

Oh, trying the bilingual thing, huh? Won't work on me.

The old man leaned forward, and whispered something else to him.

"Okay, carechimba, Mr. Dorian wants to know what you want."

Another Iron Monkey had now entered the scene, and Michael saw that he was carrying a Kalashnikov '47.

"Well, for one thing, I want to know why the old dude can't speak for himself," asked Michael, growing curious as to what type of character he was dealing with, with Mr. Dorian, there.

Something about those eyes of his. Something hellish about them. And also, somewhat familiar. I wanna see them again, like I did back when I was still with Sadboy.

Both Mr. Dorian and Angel Eyes were looking at each other, grinning, in amusement. 'Who the fuck is this guy?' They were probably thinking to themselves.

"Mr. Dorian has come here to do business with the Lady, and Mr. Cucchi. Not with you, carechimba! But now he wants to know why my friend over there, shouldn't gun you both down," asked Angel

Eyes.

Motherfuc—

“That's because I'm still holding a gun, pointed straight at his big ugly mug, and I won't hesitate to put a hole in it, before your friend, there, blows us two away. So, does that sound like reason enough not to?”

Shit! I never shot a man before... well! I better be up to doing it now if we're to survive this.

“Okay, carechimba—”

“Oh, and if you call me carechimba, again, I'll just shoot him on principal, and then shoot your balls off, and make you into a cacorro! So, feel free to try me, again, and we'll see what happens,” said Michael.

Oh, that was nice!

Sassboy was also a Colombian, so for Michael, there wasn't a Spanish curse word in the Colombian slang he didn't know. Plus, Michael himself understood Spanish, fluently. Angel Eyes didn't respond, and he now had a psychotic look in his eyes, like he wanted to gut Michael with a Bowie knife. For he obviously didn't like hearing some gringo, whiteboy, putting him in his place, and especially in his own slang.

“Me and the lady are leaving,” said Michael.

“No, you're not—not just yet! Your bitch, there, has my cargo, in a heavily locked facility, and I need the excess codes to get to them!”

The old man finally spoke, directly. There was a menace in his voice, that would have made any other man piss their pants, just hearing him speak. He had that old school mobster lingo; the type Raymond Chandler could write an entire book about. No plot. Just this character. One giant face and monologue. For two and a half hours straight scoring and screaming into the camera like a madman. And no Jack Nicholson! One only Jimmy Cagney could ever play. And if only Jimmy Cagney the character was Jimmy Cagney in real life. Type of old school that would literally bite your head off, chew it in its mouth, then spit it out. No punk ass street posing by fourteen-year-old streethoods, playing cops and robbers on the streets, that can’t even hold a gun correctly. Just: bite, chew, spit! As he’d go on to mutter something about ‘a good scratch’ as he’d start to scratch his neck in a way.

“Nikki, what is he talking about? Heavily locked facility? You told me the truck was in the garage,” asked Michael.

“Our building used to house government offices, and it has a 2nd lower level garage, that can't be accessed without the codes. It's why he chose this building, and chose to come to us,” explained Nikki.

“Okay, fine, give them what they want, and let's leave,” said Michael.

Nikki didn't respond.

“Nikki, did you hear me? Give them what they want, and let's get the fuck outta here!”

“No,” cried out Nikki.

For a second, Michael tried to direct his head at her, to look at her, but quickly redirected his attention back at the jack-off, still holding the Kalashnikov.

Yeah… a split-second mistake, that could have gotten us both killed.

“What do you mean—no,” demanded Michael.

“Ms. Jackson… little girl… I'll tell ye something, if you don't give me my access codes, I'm going to make sure you at least get out of this alive. Just so my boys, here, can show you what they do to women in their country, that don't know how to show their men some manners,” explained Mr. Dorian, who didn't seem that much beyond what was to be expected, from himself.

Angel Eyes now went ear to ear, with the edges of his lips, hearing his bossman promising that. And then, started looking Nikki, up and down, in a perversely excited manner; playing around with the idea; while playing around with the toothpick in his mouth. And as if demonstrating with it, what he'd do to her, if given the chance. The hombre with the AK also smiled, showing off his pearly plaque encrusted teeth.

Ah shit! What do we do now?

Now… it wasn't that Michael didn't care if Mr. Dorian had his way blowing up the 1999 building, and killing a whole bunch of people. Wasn't that, since, he didn't even know anything about it all some twenty or so minutes ago. What it was was… it all still hadn't sunk in,

yet, for Michael. Since he was still feeling way out of his league dealing with all this.

"Nikki… we don't belong here," argued Michael.

"No—you don't belong here, I let Radboy drag me into this craziness, and I did nothing about it."

"Then it's his fault—not—"

"Yes, it is my fault, Michael! I could have left before, I could have told someone… but instead… I allowed myself to play along. I feel sober now. And…." and she now looked at the Fedora Man in the way, "and I'm not giving you your fucking codes, you got that," lashed out Nikki.

Angel Eyes had now taken his shades off—as if—to commemorate the moment. As if—he knew what this all meant: not giving his bossman what he wanted. Knew, and knew what was about to happen. For next to him: The Fedora Man… his head… began to then grow in size, bigger and bigger. There seemed to be a lot of hell brewing there, inside; but, on the outside, the old timer looked like he hadn't had this much fun in centuries.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael.

She's right! If that bomb goes off, she's going to be responsible of a whole bunch of deaths. And… I don't want that on her—I don't!

Thought Michael, also, as he began to gain reason why he should care more.

"Fine, Nikki, you don't have to give them shit, we're leaving!"

"No, you're not, give me the fucking codes," bellowed out Mr. Dorian.

"Watch it, old man, someone as ancient as you shouldn't get too excited. You might have a heart attack, and croak on the spot," spat out Michael, since he was now mostly going off auto-pilot with the sass talk.

"Which, come to think of it, might be fun to watch," explained Michael, as he now felt like he was starting to overdo it.

Ah, shut the fuck up! Don't provoke him! What good would that do?

My City!

Even though this wasn't Michael's scene....

I'm here now, here, at this place!

He was now feeling like he should make it his. He had come all this way for something, definitely something! He felt would be important. A sense of resolve, and a sense of regaining, all he felt he had lost. Killing Radboy hadn't given him that sense of resolve. And worse yet, it was now, and only now, Michael was finally allowing himself to accept certain facts. Which he had refrained himself from doing so before. Most importantly, the one fact, that had Radboy not being responsible of that fire at Mary's building, all those years ago.

Ah hell! It was all true. That stupid fucking report. Why didn't I allow myself to accept it then?

Back in prison, during the first few years he was in, Michael had made an inquiry into the fire department, over the cause of that fire that night. And the information that Michael received into the investigation...

I feel sick to my stomach, now!

Was that: the cause of the fire had nothing to do with arson. But, had all to do with some old lady on the second floor, suffering a stroke, and dieing, and leaving a burning stove unattended.

Fucking bullshit! Fucking...!

This didn't sit well with Michael. For he didn't want to believe that to be the cause of the fire; something so incidental and commonplace. Didn't want to believe, so much so, that he went so far as to make himself then believe the woman’s coronary report must have been false. That her death hadn't been natural. Making himself believe that she was really murdered, leaving her stove blatantly left unattended, by those two Numbskulls. Still being behind it all—therefore—so being Radboy, behind the whole elaborate scheme.

Wow! Man, was I kidding myself, to make myself believe—all that?

Something had driven him this far, and Michael, deep down, understood how there was never any rational reason to it. For he didn't really come all this way for Radboy, or for revenge, or for his sister.

How is this possible, coming all this way... how would I have been able to accomplish it, not being righteous? How?

He did it for his own selfish reasons.

And now, from what he saw, he was facing a madman, that now, had his own.

Seriously, I've always stood by being righteous, how did it…?

Ah, fuck me! I really am I piece-of-shit! Why did I convince myself of all that? Well, there's no more turning back. I gotta do something, now, if I'm going to stop this asshole with his own selfish reasons. Blowing up this building, and killing all those people. And me. And Nikki. In the process.

Even though Michael really wasn't responsible for all this mess, unlike the mess left below, just outside that window behind him. Even though, none of his. He was now willing to make it his. And mostly for Nikki.

And maybe, also, a bit for myself, still. To see if I can redeem something. Since I really feel like shit right now.

No matter how hard Michael wanted to deny it: this mess, with the bomb, that was going to murder hundreds of hundreds of people, was still all her fault. She was responsible of it happening. The whole city was already going up in flames, and now a bomb was going to go off in the heart of Manhattan.

Having seen what Nikki had become, Michael now felt that—maybe—if he could do something to fix all this, it might be enough. To save her of her own wrongdoing. Along with saving him of his. Also, he really, really, really didn't want her to be responsible for all this.

Oh! Who is this Lady, and what happened to the Nikki I knew?

If anything, maybe….

I sorta feel like we're somehow both meant for each other. And still, after all these years. We've now both obviously become very selfish, narcissistic, and all around very bad people, in our lives. But… I like to believe… we've at least now reached our limits.

That, there, Michael felt there was some truth to. They had definitely gone over their heads. Michael in his own way, and Nikki, in hers.

But now, the chips were in the hands of a monster, that wanted to take things beyond their limits, and into to his own extremes. The chips were in the hands of such… or…?

Or, maybe, at least not yet.

Nikki still seemed to be holding onto some cards, that seemed to be in her favor. And it was now time to see what difference they could make.

"Say—are you trying to test me, son? Please, tell me that you are! I don't want to be disappointed. Talk to me some more, I want to hear what else you have to say!"

And then all of a sudden, Michael and Nikki began to really see into the character of the Fedora Man, that stood before them. And it all felt like there was some sleeping giant, slowly being awakened. Even the two Colombians were seemingly afraid of what was about to happen, as they backed off a bit, from Dorian, to give the man air. Mr. Dorian's head still seemed to be growing, more and more, still growing by the second, by the size, as he began to live up to that whole 'Big White Head' moniker everyone had been giving him.

Wow, is he a psychotic looking fuck, too! Now that I'm starting to see his true colors.

"You know, I'm curious, Nikki told me you were some old CIA operative, and all, but I'm curious to know who and what you really are," asked Michael, for he just couldn't help but to wonder. Even through the dread.

The Fedora Man said nothing, but Michael continued to watch him, this demonic titan crawling its way out of Tartarus.

"No, I'm serious, what the fuck are you? What type of psychotic maniac… are you? You don't even look human anymore! What type of fucked up madness gave birth to an Anti-Christ looking motherfucker, like you?"

And then it began.

"This city!

Here!

Do you see this city, son? Look outside—do you see it?"

Michael needed a moment, then, as this Mr. Dorian also seemed to need a moment. For, obviously, shit was about to get belligerent. At least a little. There were a lot of heatwaves wavering, even in these well air-conditioned spaces, like an Ancient Norse demon was burning a portal into this reality.

"Well, I'll tell ye… I'll tell ye… that there, that city out there… (said

and pointed, he did) that out there is my city! Mine! My home! For I was born there," said Mr. Dorian, panting, as he did. Not as a wild cat, nor an excited hippo, but something truly apex, and also deranged.

"Yeah, I know... helluva town... ain't it," responded Michael, unsure if he should.

"And in my city, out there, do you know what I see when I look? What I see flourishing and festering, out there. Do you, son, do you?"

"No."

"Well, I'll tell ye, I see nothing but cowards! Whimpering, moaning, pitiful cowards! A bunch of mooks afraid of their own shadows. Afraid of their own true selves, and their own true nature. Because, I'll tell ye why... if they only knew what they were capable of... if they were only pushed far enough to know! They would see! How! There would be no end to what they would be capable of."

Michael had no response to that. The bigger the old man's head got, explaining all this, the smaller Michael began to feel. And now beginning to even feel his words creep into his own head.

Ah shit, the eyes, and the fucker is really staring at me, now. Fuck! Why did I ask for them? And it's not just that stupid shit I imagined back with Gab. It's real, and in front of me, this time.

"Can I ask you something, son? Have you ever murdered another man... with just your own barehands," asked Mr. Dorian, eyeing Michael, like a starving animal.

"No," gasped Michael.

"And, I don't mean quick and painlessly! I mean, have you ever—squeezed," and Mr. Dorian now demonstrated with his hands, pretending to squeeze, "his head, so hard, that the man slowly began to feel his brain, being crush within his own skull," demanded Mr. Dorian, as he lifted his hands up in display, at what he had just imaginably done.

Now, it wasn't just what The Fedora Man was saying that was beginning to appall Michael in a profound way; it was the way in which he was saying it. Like a man that had actually—been there! To do those dastardly deeds! Explaining how it felt, not just through words, but

expression, through experience in the feel of it. And, it was that that had Michael now understanding—perfectly! As if he was now experiencing it for himself.

Oh!

Making him feel sick to his stomach. And squeamish.

I can feel the victim… screaming….

So in love and enamored did the Fedora Man seem to be about all this, that it started making Michael feel like dry heaving.

"And when you did all this, with your own barehands… did you feel ecstasy?"

What? Ecstasy? The fuckers seriously psychotic!

"I told you—no! Old man, I'm not a—"

"Have you, son… have you?"

"I said, no!"

"Such beautiful joy. Such glorious victory vanquishing another. That it makes you feel like a god amongst men. Have you felt such greatness, have you, son, have you?"

"No, I haven't! I've never had the shit feel like…."

Heaven? When I'm… sitting on their chest… pummeling their…?

Ah shit!

As there is a dark side to every man, as hard as Michael tried to deny his, he couldn't deny that feeling. For it was a feeling he knew all too well. Even though, never a murderer, before this night, he still knew the feeling a man got exerting excruciating pain onto another, and knew all too well about the ecstasy….

No! Fuck no!

That came with it.

No, only bad people feel that way. Evil people… and I'm not…?

A feeling—BETTER THAN SEX!

No, you fucking piece of… not better than… it's not!

Feeling like a god amongst—

A piece-of-shit! Piece-of-dog-shit!

And then all of a sudden, in another sudden moment. Michael saw into Dorian, as Dorian saw into Michael, back. Each man looking into the abyss of each own's being. And:

“I see you now, son, I see you… just what I figured,” responded the man, Michael felt twins with.

You see me… what? Oh, fuck this—

"Fuck you, old man—go fuck yourself,” lashed out Michael. As he felt his mitts speaking in demonic tongues, again, and this time, for the blood of another.

All it would take is just one pull of this trigger. Just one. One simple one! Such a simple gesture, to send this devil to hell for which it came.

Thought Michael, as he felt it, felt the thrill of that kill. Then felt the shock, something overbearing scaring him back.

“Now imagine it, son…. imagine if all these whimpering, moaning, pitiful, cowards, out there, and if they were to also experience what we have experienced.”

“When have I said I've experienced it, when?”

Ah shit, I’m talking out loud.

“The people of this city already want it, they already crave it, and desire it, and they definitely do need it! The only problem has been… up until now… they just haven't known where to begin."

“So, you want to turn everyone into a monster—like you—is that it,” gasped Michael.

“All I needed to do, was light a match, and look at the city now.”

The Old Norse devil, with his old Norse ways, then grinned at Michael, and said nothing else.

“You're trying to drive… madness… everyone starts ripping… barehands… barehands?”

Michael was trembling now, and not just from fear, but also subversively, from excitement. He felt exactly as he did that instant, that moment, back in his crummy apartment, that had awoken him. He remembered the feeling of pain when he cut himself, smashing in his bathroom mirror. It was the pain that excited him, uplifted him, and gave him the drive and direction to go on, and come all this way.

Am I sick? Am I a sick fuck… like him?

Up until this point, Michael really hadn't contemplated over the events of this night in this light. Even though he figured himself to be a seriously crazy individual for having come all this way, when he could have just stayed behind in his apartment, and decided to move on with

his life. Even though he figured himself to be crazy to come all this way, he hadn't felt completely disgusted by what he had done, either, at least.

The way I see it, based on my own definitions:

I see there's to be a difference between a crazy man, and a sick man.

A crazy man: will try to do the impossible, for all the right reasons.

A sick man: will try to do the impossible... for all the wrong ones.

That, there, I see, at least to me, is the difference.

The question now was... was Michael... or Madboy... in the right or wrong?

"You know... maybe I should just shoot you in the fucking head, and end this," said Michael, bluffingly.

Afraid to continue contemplating over that matter, considering he was only a trigger pull away from possibly answering that question.

No, fuck that! This kill would be in the right! No doubt about it, right?

"You do that, and I, and my friend, here, will blow you two away, how does that sound—carechimba," responded the other scary fucker, Michael had almost totally forgotten about.

"Michael," then pleaded Nikki, alarmingly.

Saving Graces.

Ah! Thank you, Nikki! I needed to hear your voice right now.

Michael felt something different now. As the sound of Nikki's pleading voice brought him back center. For a moment there, Michael felt no care anymore in firing away, right or wrong, gunning someone down, no matter if he was then to get gunned down himself. As long as he had managed to take out the man with the giant white head, nothing else mattered. He was there... already... at that place. Dieing time was now. Where nothing else mattered, and life was a sick joke. Sick! Since it all had to end in such a way.

But Michael would be damned to see Nikki go along with him. He might have not given much of a shit about himself, and how he ended, as long as he ended while fighting.

Right or wrong, at least still while—fighting!

But…

He'd be damned to drag Nikki along with him. The sound of Nikki's pleading voice was the only sound now resonating with him. For even with the promise of death. Here, felt now, what she had to promise to Michael, felt like life. Something that Michael hadn't felt… in a very… very… long time.

Something magical almost. Transcendent. Like a spell. He felt her presence, and it felt the most real out of anything, now.

As much of a horrible person as she's become, at least she isn't, yet, what we are! Me, and these sick fucks, here!

What she wasn't was a creature that took joy from the pain felt by others.

What about the Lady?

Michael then quickly shunned that thought.

There was still good in her. Michael saw it. Michael still felt it. And, maybe, only in a way a person like Michael could see. Making their connection the ever more special, now. Put it simply, he didn't want her to die. And worse yet, lose her soul in the process. And the last thing he would ever want was for someone like her, to change into someone like him. Or Mr. Dorian.

Damn, Nikki, what the hell were you thinking, getting involved with a colossal asshole like this? Ah shit! What do I do now? I gotta do something. Something… simple. Something fresh.

And then, Michael magically knew exactly what he needed to do. And something special, only a special person like himself could do.

Hmm… this colossal asshole sure does take himself seriously. I wonder how he'd feel about a joke or two?

Ah shit! Don't do it, Michael! But… fuck! I don't know what else to do. Ah shit, shits about to get fucking stupid. Really fucking stupid—as hell!

"You know what? I think I've finally figured you out, Mr. Dorian!"

The Fedora Man looked all bewildered, now, for he wasn't expecting

Michael to respond so freshly, after everything he had said to him.

Ah—fuck me—this is gonna get… I hope it works!

“I think, maybe, if you had just gotten laid in the last century, or two, you wouldn't have turned out to be such a colossal prick,” joked Michael, as he bit his tongue.

Mr. Dorian… looked dumbfounded now. But also, didn't. As Michael began changing the mood in the room, in directions he was never expecting him—or anyone—to do so. He then cracked a smile, and began to wheeze a bit, at the young punk’s tenacity.

Damn, I'm a stupid idiot! Damn! This ain't no high school locker room…?

Ah, fuck it! Rompous-pompous!

“Just be honest, when was the last time you got laid, around the civil war? It wasn’t with your sister—right? Was it? Because I've heard fucking siblings or cousins back then was accepted… I mean… I've seen that Gone with the Wind movie.”

Mr. Dorian looked… like he didn't know what he looked like.

"Son… are you fucking kidding me? Do I look like some schoolyard, snot nosed, brat, to you? I don't think I've heard anyone try to tease me like that since Herbert Hoover was in office, do you know how fucking long ago that was?"

Just keep pushing it! Maybe something will give?

"Come on—grandpa! When was the last time you got some? You can still get it up—right?"

The Fedora Man busted out, one, and just about buried his face in his hands, trying to hold himself together. Michael, although, wasn't exactly pissing him off, as he would've liked to have been, to get the effect he was planning. And. He knew he had to change it up a bit.

"You know… you really are something special, you really are adorable," said Dorian, then.

Which then:

What you say Mr. Dorian… ‘adorable?’

Started to give Michael ideas.

"Adorable,” retorted Michael, then, as he got his insight how to do

this.

Mr. Dorian lifted up his head, then, hearing him and his tone. And now, had a squint in his eyes, as if he didn't like the direction this was headed.

"Adorable? Did you just say adorable?”

A pause. And then:

“You're not a faggot—are you?"

And that! That there, was definitely the trick that was needed. For, damn, did it make a difference. Damn, for you could now see it in the change in the Big Fat Headed Man's expressions.

Hell, the shit I just dished be fighting words for people of my generation, I can only imagine what it would be for people of his.

Mr. Dorian… said nothing.

"Come on—old man, I asked you a question! You a peter-puffer, or what," sassed Michael, then smiled.

"A what," asked Mr. Dorian, looking all confused, since he didn't know the term.

"You suck dick—or what," illustrated Michael, still holding that pestering smile of his.

But then Michael backed off a bit, as he saw Mr. Dorian's head beginning to grow even bigger. Almost big enough to start filling out the entire office of Nikki's. The man was still grinning—ear to ear—but also seemed ready to burst out with something else.

“You little… you trying to test me? Do you know what I'm capable of," asked Mr. Dorian, as the smile began to fade away, bit by bit.

“What—besides blowing Angel Eyes, there? I mean, you two, there, seem to have more than just some father and son relationship going on!"

Michael then did a real no-no move. And gave the man a wink.

“Oh… wow! I tell ye… I gotta tell you, I almost feel like ripping your heart out, now, son, and eating it in front of you! And then—”

“Is that all you want to ‘eat out,’ of mine,” joked Michael, last.

And now:

"Give me that fucking gun!"

Called out Mr. Dorian, as he turned himself around, violently, and tried to go for Angel's golden .44 Magnum.

And this now! Was what… Michael was hoping for. Wishing his lucky

stars to happen.

Mr. Dorian"s outburst broke the standoff, off, that was still going on between the three other men. And this was what Michael was hoping for. Michael now saw his opportunity to make a move, seeing as how Mr. Dorian was now standing in front of his two goons; drawing both Angel Eyes', and the other gunman's, guns, away. From center stage. From Michael. In that split-second mistake made, Michael ran up, fast, behind Mr. Dorian, and tackled him into the two other men. And Michael did it so hard and fast, that, all four men were now on the ground, as both Angel Eyes and the mook lost a hold of their weapons. Michael then quickly got up, and held the two unarmed men at gun point. Then called to Nikki:

"Nikki—come on—let's go!”

As Nikki ran up to him.

Michael then saw that one mook scrambling to get his machine gun back. But Michael got quick, ran up, and punted him in the back of the head, that he almost scalped him. The man with the broken Fedora then looked up, in rage, as he got to his feet. But his mood changed, as he eyed Michael, and strangely enough, found himself pleased with the boy. How this young punk, nobody, had just gotten the best of him. Him!

"Nikki—get the AK—we're outta here!"

"You think this is over, son?"

Michael then turned his attentions back to Mr. Dorian.

“The fuck you say to me," lashed out Michael, aiming with his piece, and trembling a little while doing it.

Nikki got her hands on the AK, as Michael held on to the revolver, aimed at Dorian.

"You gonna shoot me, son? Well, go ahead!"

"Michael, do it," cried out Nikki, as she ran over to the elevators to call for one.

"Oh, you better fucking shoot me—dead! You better! Because. If you don't, I will find you, I'll most certainly find you, both," announced Mr. Dorian, plainly enough.

Michael held fast, the piece, in his hands, and felt his chance to end this.

And end him. With all the hate and disgust he had developed towards him, there was nothing stopping him now… or was there?

Feels like heaven to kill someone—you say? Let's see if it does.

But as he looked at his mitts—stretched out in front of him—the sight of them began to scare him. Like they didn't belong to him anymore. But belonged to the hands of another side of his.

What the… stop that shit! Now! Michael!

But Michael felt his limits, there, and felt how he just couldn't. For fear had been set up as a barrier, keeping him from doing such.

"Come on, soldier boy! Don't tell me you're turning green on me, now?"

Michael couldn't believe it, he just couldn't!

"Michael, the elevator is here, shoot him," cried out Nikki.

Shoot him? You seem a little too eager to see that happen…

As he continued holding onto the revolver, Michael regressed, and decided to leave. And as he turned to do so, Mr. Dorian then said:

“You're both dead now, you know that… right?”

And nothing else.

Elevator Spaces.

Michael then got to the elevators, as the doors swung open, and then ran in. Nikki just stood there, baffled, out of her mind, as to what had just happened. Since it wasn't something she'd seen every day: a fucking CIA agent getting bested by the likes of Michael, getting called a ‘faggot,’ and blowing up because of it.

Like… as if… men… really never do grow up… ever!

“Why didn't you just shoot him—Michael? You heard what his intentions were, you heard him say how he would now be looking for us,” argued Nikki, expressing fearfully.

Michael said nothing, as he continued to think about what had just happened.

Fuck! Why didn't I shoot him?

"Michael, you do know a man like that could still come after us. You had your chance, why didn't you take it," demanded Nikki.

And as Michael tried to come up with an excuse, the only thing that came to mind telling her was:

"Nikki, I'm sorry about Radboy! I couldn't control myself at the moment."

A moment then passed, as both Nikki and Michael felt the tension drain away from them. And now, something else was felt, something much more meaningful, which both now felt was in order: a comfortable silence.

Elevator spaces!

Nikki then drew her head back, calmly, and said:

"Honestly, Michael, don't be."

And Michael, now, didn't know what to make of it.

"Tony is dead… I…?"

"Michael, he was planning on killing you, too… so…?"

"But you two were supposedly engaged to be?"

But then Michael saw a smirk, a favorable one. And one Nikki knew, Michael would favor.

"Michael, he said that… just to get to you," said Nikki, with that smirk, and now Michael was smirking, also.

"You two never…."

And Nikki just shook her head, calmly, again.

Even though Michael felt like shit for what he had done, this now, Michael couldn't help but to feel ecstatic about, hearing what Nikki had to say.

"Me… marry him," exclaimed Nikki, as she quickly then shook her head, in total rejection.

Which now had Michael smiling.

"So, what should we do now," asked Michael.

"Let's just get away from this place, Michael, you and me, let's go," announced Nikki, as her smirk grew into a full-blown smile.

And now, something else began building up. A whole different foundation. Like… those preconceived emotional investments… Michael had felt earlier. Once Michael heard her say 'you and me' his eyes lit up, and then saw hers light up, also. But brighter.

She was now staring at Michael, directly, and she was the old Nikki again, and not whatever that Lady was, Michael had to deal with earlier.

I wasn't mistaking it… then… we do still have something between us.

Thought Michael, as he finally felt the resolve he'd been looking for.

The dream was true!

And then Nikki took her hand… and placed it over his heart… and said:

"Yes Michael, you and me!"

Michael's heart then began to jackhammer. And almost felt like it wanted to burst out of his chest. Felt like… dieing… but in the way Michael would want to die.

Now, this, was the moment! The magical, transcendent moment, Michael had really been waiting for. All night long. This was the resolve; this was what was going to uplift him; this! He felt alive! Felt more alive and ecstatic than he had felt in almost forever. What he would have never felt with Letoya, nor Annabelle, nor any other woman, except this woman. Here. Her. He now felt it: the old touch. That old sensation. And what he felt meant to him, earlier, was now proven fact. Magic. That no one's science could argue against.

Now came that metaphysical moment, as he awoke, eyes opened center, and saw the truth to all things.

God's plan!

Saw the complexity of it all, and understood not with thought, not by sense, but by something beyond all that, all completely. And then remembered things forgotten. Experienced Déjà vu and remembered as a child remembering this moment. Then looked into Nikki's eyes, and saw oneness, as every moment with her came racing back. Michael blew up, as he felt a cycle between him and her, that accelerated with each revolution: the harder his heart began to pound, the harder Nikki smiled, leading for his heart to pound the ever more harder. And. Then. Felt like reaching maximum overdrive, as it burst, as he died, and then as he looped. And began again.

Let me die. Let me die! Over and over and over again. Just to feel this, again and again.

Thought Michael, as he felt at peace, closed his eyes, and allowed the spell to do to him what it hadn't done in years. Changing things for the better, and only the better.

But then….

The doors flung open, and Jalil stood there, confused, seeing as to what he was seeing.

"Ms. Jackson, what are you doing," asked Jalil. Ruining everything.

Fucking everything!

"Jamil," gasped Nikki, as she broke off of Michael. And what they were having.

No don't stop!

And Michael felt lost again.

The Vixen with the 47.

"I'm Jalil!"

Ah great, this stupid schtick, again!

"Jalil, we need to get outta here," said Nikki.

"Ms. Jackson, where is Radboy?"

"Jalil—please!"

Jalil took one last look at the two, and figured whatever was going on, wasn't any of his business, and neither did he want it to be.

Yeah, good!

But then all of a sudden, Michael remembered how Letoya was also down here in the lobby, too. And began to grow worried.

No, don't think about that! Nikki never knew about me and Letoya—did she? Ah fuck it! It doesn't matter, there's nothing between me and Letoya, anymore, anyways, and all that matters now is getting out of the city.

"Hey, Jalil, is Letoya still here," asked Michael.

"Yes, she's with Jamil, but…?"

Michael had made a quick peripheral check up on Nikki saying Letoya's

name to see if there would be any reaction.

There wasn't any.

Michael ran out the elevator, as he tucked away the revolver in his pants, behind his back. And as he dashed out, he looked to his left, and saw Letoya, there, sitting, smirking off most of Jamil's advancements.

"Letoya, we need to leave!"

"Ay," echoed out an unknown voice from behind.

Michael then looked back, to see who was calling now. At the lobby's entrance, there were three Iron Monkeys. Standing. In the way. And Michael figured they must have been waiting downstairs, while Angel Eyes and Mr. Dorian had gone up to do business. As the three continued to glare in confusion, as Michael continued to glare back, Nikki then stepped out of the elevator, with the Kalashnikov, and it was definitely now clear to them that something was off.

"Hey… Lady… what's happened to Mr. Dorian," demanded one, while the other two slowly began going for their guns.

Ah shit!

Michael needed to do something quick, for they were going to blow them all away. They were gonna! He needed to soldier up, and start shooting people, dead, and not to be so green about it.

Do it, Michael, you have to do it now. No matter if you can't stand how it feels.

But before he could reach for his revolver, Nikki took fast, and took aim, looking down the sights, and started firing.

Rat-tat-tat!

Like stormy thunder!

Whoa… you just do that?

Thought Michael, as the three mooks were just about cut into pieces from the spray of bullets. They now actually looked how human Swiss cheese would look. Like spongelike carbon-based effigies of soulless life on an episode of Star Trek. Anyone and everyone that were in the lobby, at that second, were now abound, and abort, and on full alert.

What the fuck—Nikki?

Michael was in awe, seeing how easily she dispatched the three.

“Nikki,” cried out Michael, as he ran over to get the AK from her.

But… was scared back.

Nikki had a crazed look in her eyes, that scared Michael, for what he saw in them. As he began to think about how he wasn't dealing with the same person, anymore, again.

“Nikki—baby—please! Give me the gun!”

But Nikki looked like she was totally satisfied to keep the gun by her side, away from him. Where it was safe with someone much more responsible in handling such things, when things got to such points. But… she also didn’t look sane holding that gun. She had a look on her face like… maybe… Mr. Dorian’s words had also affected her chemistry, too. Nikki now seemed totally out of it, and reckless, but also—in complete control! Michael tried to make one more attempt to take it from her, but she now seemed—really—inclined to keep it by her side.

Nikki… umm?

But then Nikki took charge and action:

“Michael, we need a safe place to hold out… for now.”

And for whatever reason, Michael found her words untrustworthy. Even though, she said it to him, while looking him in the eyes.

“What are you talking about? You said you wanted to get out of the city!”

“No, I mean, away from here—this building! I can't leave the city just yet!”

“Why not,” asked Michael.

As Nikki now broke eye contact, and said:

“I can't explain that right now.”

And now… again with the secrets.

Oh… Nikki! What the fuck are you holding up on, now?

Thought Michael, as he began to worry: if Mr. Dorian was the only monster that was to be found hidden deep within her closet.

I don't think I can handle what other boogiemen you got waiting in there next.

“Michael—what's going on,” cried out Letoya, who was still in shock from the sight and sound of gunfire, and the killings.

“Letoya, we need to find a place to hide out, do you know where we

can go," asked Michael.

Letoya looked like she didn't want to answer and didn't want to get involved anymore. Especially now!

"Letoya… please!"

"Fine… how about we go to The Nim Fo Matics?"

Michael nodded, in accordance, and then looked over at Nikki, to see what her impressions of this were going to be. But. Saw none.

"Nikki, you okay with that plan," asked Michael, worryingly.

"Yeah, actually, I am," responded Nikki, after a moment.

An uncomfortable moment of silence.

Okay, this ain't the time to be worrying over this.

"Ms. Jackson, what is going on, and where is—"

"Jalil, stop asking me stupid questions, and call the driver to come around—now," lashed out Nikki, sending Jalil back some.

"Of course—at once," responded Jalil, to Nikki's orders.

Damn! She's really got people jumping for her now.

Jalil made the call for the driver to come pick them up. A minute later, a limo pulled onto the street next to the lobby. Michael then felt like Mr. Dorian, Angel Eyes, and the third Iron Monkey up there, should have had enough time to reach them by now. But decided not to wait to see what was keeping them up. Michael then approached Nikki from behind, and as he tried put his hand on her shoulder to get her attention, Nikki then reacted, a little territorially like, but as if, also not.

"Michael! Don't walk up on me like that," said she.

As Michael thought:

Walk up on you, how?

For it wasn't as if he snuck up on her. She knew he was there. How Nikki was now carrying herself while holding on to that Russian death stick… was really beginning to bother Michael. As he watched her a bit more, as she began making her way to the limo.

"Michael, I'm not getting into that limo," said Letoya, glaring at Michael, concernedly.

"Why not," asked Michael.

Then Letoya walked up to Michael, and whispered the obvious reasons:

"Why? Because… I don't think I'd feel very comfortable, going anywhere, with a crazy, coked up woman, dressed in a trench coat,

worn over some Victoria's Secret, holding an AK… does that sound like a good enough reason to you?"

Michael… had no argument against her, there.

"Fine! So, what will you do," asked Michael.

Letoya then shook her head, and Michael now knew it had to be over disappointment, over him, and how he had dragged her out here, and now was dragging her to Harlem.

"I'll wait for you at the Nim Fo Matic's turf."

"Michael, come on," cried out Nikki, as she looked back from the lobby's entrance.

"Letoya, how you going to get there," asked Michael.

"Jalil can call me a taxi. Okay, Michael? So, go ahead," said Letoya.

Michael took one last look at her, and understood then, how well she had figured him and Nikki out. All that was really still going on between them. Michael then smiled up at her, and thought:

I'm sorry.

Not saying it, because he understood there wouldn't be any point in doing so. Because he was really apologizing to the idea of what might have been, if things were different, and so was he.

As Michael tried to make it to the limo, himself, a van pulled up.

Oh, hello, there.

Thought Michael, looking at the driver: some gorgeous short little Latina, with pink-framed shades on, chewing on a mouthful of bubble gum. She had one of those brick cell phones up to her ear. And as she turned her head towards Michael, she smiled, and then the van opened up with more Iron Monkeys MCs… standing by… ready with AKs.

Ah shit!

Michael then quickly jumped behind some shrubs as they began unloading. The gunmen then saw how their main target was in a limo, and turned their aim towards it, and began firing at the wheels.

Rat-tat-tat!

Went the gunfire, ricocheting off the ground, as the limo then took off, before they were able to truly shoot one out.

As the limo began treading distance, the Latina behind the wheel

floored it, peddle to the metal, making the wheels make a whole lot of screeching, while kicking dust, as the van lunged into motion.

I got to follow...!

Michael thought. Then saw the same chopper he had arrived in, not so long ago.

All right, good thing they didn't decide to tow away these wheels.

And then ran up to it, leaped on, started her engine, and took off after the rest.

It was now a three-way hot pursuit. As Michael caught up to the right side of the van, quick, leading the gunmen hanging out of the opened sliding door to turn their attentions back onto him.

Shit!

Thought Michael, then thought fast, and braked so he could get behind the van, again. And now felt like he needed to get on the left side of the van, where there wasn't any door or window available to shoot out of. As he began veering to that side, the back double doors then opened up, and before the men began firing, again, Michael managed to pull into their blind spot. All in the nick of time.

These assholes are relentless. I gotta take out the driver before we reach Harlem.

Trying to pass by the van, the sassy looking fox at the wheel then blew Michael a kiss, seen by Michael by the side view mirror. And as the sassy fox did so, she then cringed with teeth, veered, trying to ram into him.

Fucking bitch, blowing me the kiss of death... are you?

Michael almost lost his balance, and began swerving, as he began lagging behind.

I got to take her out.

Thought Michael, as he started breathing through his teeth.

Catching back up to them, again, Michael now noticed they had finally gotten the attention of the cops, and now it was no longer a three-way pursuit, but a four way: the police car behind Michael, who was behind the van, that was behind Nikki's limo. The gunmen, then, continued to fire onto the limo, all recklessly, and Michael began to wonder whether or not Mr. Dorian had told them the importance of the cargo.

No—no! Don't do that! How are you going to get the codes out of

her if you try to…?

Michael then pulled out the revolver he was carrying, and began aiming at the Latina in the driver seat. And felt like blowing her, his own kiss of death, delivered to her with a speeding bullet.

Fuck her… shoot her! Shoot… oh! I can't do that to her!

It was one thing fighting the urge to shoot an old nut-job hellbent on unleashing anarchy across the city, like the likes of the Big White Head. But the thought of shooting a pretty young thang like her, making her brains fly out from the hole he was now willing to pierce through her skull, had Michael almost dry heaving again, as he felt the experience for her, before he was able to make it happen.

Ah!

And Michael now almost had himself dropping the only leverage he carried in this set up.

Damn! I gotta… I gotta… I—can't!

Fuck it—just shoot the tires!

As he took aim, Michael heard the sound of a tire go out on the limo, instead. The limo then started swerving out of control before all of them. And now weighing heavy on the pursuit, since it was the first vehicle up front. And after a few veering weavers, here, then there, it then jumped a curb, and crashed into a tree, at…?

The fucking entrance to Central Park. Of all fucking places! Great!

This night just keeps getting better and better!

The van then pulled up with gunmen ready, for another round of bullets. And as they began, they went all out Swiss-cheesing the shit out of it.

No, no! Fucking stop! What the hell are you assholes doing?

At this point, Michael couldn’t find time to stop, himself. There were now three police cars on his tail, and Michael didn't want to get in the cross section between them, and the van up ahead. Michael rode straight into the park, as the cops then redirected their attention onto the shootout that was in progress. Michael continued riding further and further in, into the park, as things got dark.

And once he got to a safe distance, he turned around, and slowly began riding back towards them.

Oh, please, God! Please, let them not have…?

The scene was way too intense for Michael to rush in, and take action. Any action. For the shootout practically sounded like a full-blown war had broken out. Gunfire! And so much so, heat was permeating from all around it. The Iron Monkeys were now unloading their AKs onto the cop cars.

Jesus—please, tell me they didn't kill Nikki!

Thought Michael, as he found himself on the verge of completely losing it, and rushing in anyways.

No, no! I can't...?

But then did, and rushed in, anyways.

As he got closer to the skirmish, he felt a sense of ease for a moment there. As if nothing really bad had yet happened. Feeling it before seeing it. And as he got up as close as he could to the shootout, Michael then noticed that the right door of the limo—facing away from the shootout—was open. And was able to see a bit into it, seeing no one inside.

Oh.... Thank God! But how did I...?

Michael then slowed down, some, riding up a bit closer to the whole event. And close enough, to where no one would hopefully notice. Swerving around some trees. And as he got close enough to take another peek, one of the gunmen from the van then noticed, and began discharging in his direction.

Shit!

But then one of the cop's bullets got him in the back of the head, and popped open his front, like a pair of saloon doors, from some western, exiting out a spray of blood and varmint brains.

I really don't have a stomach for this level of violence.

Thought Michael, as he took another peek deeper into the limo, and concluded that Nikki had to have gotten out before all this. On the other hand, the limo driver hadn't been so lucky; he was hanging half out of the passenger side window, with blood rushing out of a dozen or so holes in his head.

As for Nikki's whereabouts, now, Michael thought that she must have decided to run deeper into the park, to avoid the shootout.

As if heading into the park is going to be any safer place for her.

Ah shit.

Nightslashers, Come Out and Play-ee-ay!

"Nikki," screamed out Michael, as he rode into the park.
It was now midnight. And knowing where he was, and dreading the horror of what he and Nikki were both getting themselves into. Michael found himself riding around, half deranged. Feeling lesser and lesser of himself, as the woods came scrapping on by.

The moon was now close enough to where one could possibly stand on top of the Empire State Building, and touch it, with one's fingertips.

Michael continued riding fast, like a madman, unable to make half sense out of anything. As more and more of his thoughts broke away into the sheer dread, and Michael now found himself lesser. Going into animal mode.

Where the hell is she? Where the hell is she? Where the hell is she? Like a lab rat now lost in a maze; one which the rat had ran several, several times; but unable to now, since the lobotomy.

Where the hell is she? Where the hell is she? Where the hell is she? Thought Michael, panic stricken, and unable to consolidate his actions with rational human thoughts. For at any corner, a Nightslasher could have been standing by. Ready. To deal with him. And Michael felt better left at animal mode, so he'd be able to deal with them, as animalistically violent as needed.

"Hey," screamed out Michael, but to no response.

"Hey, you there," screamed out Michael, again.
As he then realized he was practically doing so, with imaginary figures, he was only really seeing in his head. Ride, ride, ride… and then something his eyes would catch from the corner of a tree. But, it was just more of the tree. Or, was it? Michael could no longer tell, for he had ridden right passed it already.

After entertaining all the lurking malevolent spirits in his own head for a good while, imagining all that crap at every corner….

All right! Enough! I don't see anyone.
Michael then stopped. And paused for a while to take in his surroundings, properly. And not confuse it with the one he was building

up in his own horrors.

Michael had already ridden far enough to where he could only barely hear the shootout continuing behind him. The police had decided to forget about him, and so had the Iron Monkeys MC, since seeing him ride further into the woods. And as for Nikki…?

She's either here in the park, in police custody, or in the custody of them: the fucking freaks that live in these woods.

As for her, Michael could only dread. And it was now Michael felt like continuing on, searching, for as long as she could be here, he had to! He had to! Michael didn't feel right by any of this. It wasn't just being in Central Park, at this time of night, that left him feeling lost and forgetful. Michael had just a moment ago gotten Nikki back into his life, and he was now feeling the loss of her… again….

No, no, no… it can't end like this! Not here! Not like this!

Thought Michael, thinking about Nikki.

But then, of her, the Lady, and cringed with a whole new set of thoughts:

What the fuck have you gotten yourself into, Lady? What the fuck have you… gotten… Nikki into… Lady…?

As he really now started seeing them as two different people.

First, batshit crazy CIA operatives… and now… cloaked, scythe welding deranged psychopaths?

Even though it had probably been some ten minutes ago, since entering the park, it felt like a lot more time had passed. Hours upon hours even.

I've gots to've gotten their attentions by now, I've just about circled the entire park. Twice.

But considering the state he had been in, circling around, like a chicken with its head cut off, there was no telling what tread he had made.

Still… by now, they've had to've taken notice of me, if they're even here.

Michael began to imagine that they might have been hiding in the trees, above, waiting for the moment to strike. Michael now found himself afraid to look up.

Oh, get the fuck… in trees, Michael? I'm losing it!

Michael knew if he couldn't find Nikki, he had to at least find them, and

deal with them personally. He couldn't take a chance to go back to the shoot out to see if he had missed her there, and neither could he take the chance and leave now for Harlem. If Nikki was in this park, or had already been captured by The Nightslashers, every second counted on Michael finding them, before, it was too late.

"Nightslashers," screamed out Michael.

But not a sound could be heard, not even the sound of ruffling branches, nor leaves on a tree. And the fact that there was still a wind blowing in from the east, setting all the scenery into motion around him, made no sense, considering how silent everything still was without the ruffling sounds.

This was now becoming a very otherworldly experience for Michael.

"Nightslashers, where the fuck you guys at—huh? Come on! My name is Michael Connelly, and I want to see just how scary you gremlins really are!"

Oh, for fuck sakes! Why did I give them my name?

"Nikki—honey—baby—please! Talk to me! Tell me…?"

Fuck! Now they know I'm looking for someone! If they hadn't found her yet, they now at least know that she's here.

Michael's mind was beginning to go in every which way direction, as he thought about what it meant that he hadn't found neither Nikki, nor The Nightslashers, yet. There was the possibility that she could still be in possession of the Kalashnikov she had back at 1999. If she was, chances were at least good that she might be able to defend herself, then, if The Nightslashers decided to swarm in after her. Of course, if they did, Michael would have by now heard the shots being fired.

So, had they, or hadn't they?

Michael then thought about searching his pockets for a quarter…

Are you fucking kidding me!

And then just about felt like smacking himself, silly, at the thought of turning superstitious, at a time like this. The fact that Michael had had yet to hear the shots, could either mean:

A) They hadn't found her, yet;

B) She was no longer in the possession of the Kalashnikov;

C) They had gotten to her, before she was even able to fire off a single

round.
And that there was just one group of scenarios.

Fuck! Maybe she already did fire her AK, but I just couldn't tell it from all the shooting that was happening over at that Cops vs. Iron Monkeys MC shootout?

Another group of scenarios could have been based on the fact that Michael had not yet heard from Nikki, even though he had already spent some time riding around, calling out for any signs of life.

Why hasn't she responded yet?

This could also either mean:
A) They had her;
B) She hadn't heard Michael, yet;
C) She wasn't willing to give away her location, by calling back.

Then again, if she had heard Michael, but didn't want to give away her location, she still could have traced his voice back to him.
Then again, she might be back at the shootout.
Then again, she might even be in Harlem by now.
Then again, she might be someplace completely different.
Then again, she might be in police custody.
Then again, she might be in the custody of...

"You fucking assholes—I'm going to murder the lot of you!"

Nothing.

"I have a gun! And I will not hesitate to...!"

No sound, but the sound of silence. Michael sighed, as he looked down at his Rosary, and decided to do it again.

Another major problem was, there was hardly any illumination. There were no lights in the park, and whatever lights that used to be on at these hours, had all been smashed up by the....

You know who!

To keep the park as scary as possible. Plus, ever since The Nightslashers had moved in, the city felt like there was no point in wasting electricity anymore, in the park, so nothing was done about any of the lights that had been busted. And now, the only illumination from the park came from the lights of the city around it. That. And the moonlight shining in from above. It had to be passed midnight by now, and the woods of the

park were saturated with somber blue. It seemed hazy, like a fog had settled in, yet hadn't, and Michael could barely even see 10 feet in front of him.

> Ever spent an entire night awake, in bed, trying to sleep, but unable to even catch a wink of it? Ever been through that, and had spent the entire time just looking at things all around you, as your mind started playing tricks on you, and started having you imagine things to be there, that weren't there, but you sure felt as if though they were? Like staring at a statue long enough, so long, you start to imagine the thing to be slowly moving. Mostly, slowly trying to turn its head around, to start staring back at you.
>
> Well... yeah! That's the feeling of being here, except you ain't in your familiar bed, in your familiar bedroom, in a place you feel would at least be safe.

Michael again stopped. He didn’t feel like riding around anymore. He felt now he needed to stay still for a while and listen. Listen for even the faintest sound that could be made at a moment's notice.

> After everything, what's to come next? What do I have to expect now, now that I don't know what to do, and I don't know if doing anything will do anything, at all...!

Michael sighed, and started to think about Nikki, again. And then allowed his mind to continue thinking about that other woman... that Lady.

> Like how it is, spending an entire night awake: eventually your thoughts are going to cover everything—everything! It can, and will, and would, should.... and also shouldn't!

Michael again began wondering how Nikki must have become her. What made her into the woman—most—knew her as now. Michael began, and began thinking about stuff he had desperately been trying to avoid delving into.

> Fuck you, Gab, for trying to tell me that she isn't worth it! 'Don't let her manipulate you like she used to,' you said. Practically calling me pussy-whipped, because I'd put myself through all this for her. You think you got me figured out, huh? Well... there's one thing you don't know about me: I'm glad that I'm doing all this for her. Even though we haven't seen each other in years—I'm glad!

She's not worth it? Fuck you! I'm a piece-of-shit, and I'm not worth it! And now...!

I feel like I like it that way.

And you know why? Because all night long, I've been out for me. Just me! Numero Uno, here. And nobody else. I've done nothing but gone through hoops and bounds and hurdles, all for me, and my fat ego! I've been very unrighteous. I've done nothing but blow up my pride, just to feel worthy of something. And even after all the work, all the backbreaking work I've put into it—none of it has amount to squat! It's all been in vain.

I mean... doesn't it always end this way, when you're only doing everything—just for yourself? And no one else? Being unrighteous.

Why the fuck did I go all that way? Radboy... justice... ha!

A fool's justice, more like it! Heading out with your dumbass self, to right some wrong, when no wrong was committed. And you end up actually committing a wrong, by punishing the innocent, while thinking you're doing what's right!

In the end, none of it mattered. And the fucked-up part is, I knew it from the start! I kept trying to deny, and deny, and deny, that report, and look where that all got me! I thought I was worth it, at least. Life owed me this! Life fucking owed me! After all those wasted years in prison. Life owed me! And look at what happened? That's what happens when you give yourself too much worth, you tip the scales, and then try to balance it out by creating a lot of bullshit in your mind, in what the world owes you. Shit! I've been feeling this way for years now, too. I'm such a pompous prick, and now I'm a murderer. And the worst part is, it wasn't even his fault to begin with. Wanting justice? It was all nothing but hot air that dissipated once the balloon popped.

Only good I've felt tonight has been helping Nikki, helping Letoya,

and beating the fuck out of assholes that I found to have deserved it. That's what it used to mean, me being my old self. My old self. Not being this new one, that's done nothing but been a big baby about things.

Shit!

Nah, nah, nah! My old self was a much better person. Much more deserving, if anything. And maybe that's why my life now feels like it's on the can, ready to get shit out, and flushed down the tubes. Because… I just don't deserve a better life anymore.

Michael now really sored up, thinking that way, sored up really badly. And almost felt like shedding tears.

Well, I would have… but I've forgotten how to cry… a long… long… long, long, long… time ago.

Well… at least now, whatever I'm doing. At least it's not for just me, anymore. It's all for her. And… yeah! I would die for her. I would! I mean, I was willing to die for much, much less. Of course, now I'd be….

But then Michael thought something else: after all he was willing to do for her, and still planned on doing, would she appreciate it? Would that Lady appreciate it? Or would she abandon him the first second she'd get. And the horror of that, shot straight into Michael, and paralyzed him to the bone.

Noooooo!

Fuck you! She wouldn't do that! She's not that type of person to! She'd now still be willing to care about me, like she used to, back when we were together. I felt it! I did! I felt the magic! Our old connection! Our old touch!

Really, Michael… magic?

Fuck you! Seriously… go fuck yourself! These are things I know! I know… because I feel it.

You know… because you feel it?

Yeah… I know how that… fuck you!

So, Michael, since you know things, because you *feel* them. Besides that, whole transcendent shit, between you and her. What other feelings are you—also—holding onto, that you're now trying to deny yourself of?

Go… fuck… yourself!

No really! After everything! After all that you denied—denied! Yourself of, dealing with that report… what are you…?

No! She's nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Like that Flores girl. She wouldn't now just want me to do things for her, just so she can—use me! She's… she's…?

Simple fact was, as Michael had known for years about that report, and had denied himself to fully acknowledge it. For obvious selfish reasons.

For even longer than that….

Michael had also always known something about Nikki, something so obvious, that he hadn't been willing to fully acknowledge. Until now.

Fine… she's always been… somewhat of a lizard, herself. One of those Lizard People. Two faced. But…?

But then, Michael thought of her.

How many more years am I going to wonder about that woman? How many more? For the rest of my life?

I don't know! I don't know! And I feel like—maybe—I should move on. And stop caring.

She's dead! That woman is dead! She got herself killed. Abandoned me and my dad, and did it all for—her own selfish reasons! I don't want to spend the rest of my life….

But Michael knew—damn well! He was going to. And—definitely….

For… the rest… of my… life….

Michael now allowed himself to go over it again. He had now been waiting there, still, alone, in the dark, and for a while. Watching inanimate objects, slowly become animate. Grow eyes. And begin, to

watch him back. And as he did, he allowed old wounds to open up again, just to see how he'd feel about them now. Just to see, if he'd feel about them now, different. Now that there was a new light to see things differently under.

So, he said, ' there was something crazy in her, something that had always been there, just beneath the surface....'

That's what he had said, my dad, when speaking about her. Something always... and I remember him saying 'always!' Huh?

Pondering over the whole 'always' part. Michael then remembered:

My dad also did say: 'as if she was another lady.'

Ah shit!

Now going back to Nikki, seeing as how manipulative, vicious, and intimidating Nikki had seemed at 1999, before he saw her without the mask, made Michael begin to wonder: if these were traits she had adopted over time, or, were they traits that were always there, just beneath the surface.

Sometimes masks don't represent someone you're not. Sometimes... they represent who you truly are. And the real face you carry happens to be the real mask.

And then, Michael now began to allow himself to remember how they had met.

Ah shit! She really was never that innocent to begin with... was she?

The Persian.

Behold:

A silhouette of a ballerina spinning before a fixed light. But which way was the ballerina spinning... left or right... Michael couldn't exactly tell.

....

Michael looked down from that vision and went back to staring at the Rosary, as that memory began playing out in his head, as he thought over how he and Nikki had met.

70s

That night! Back in the mid-70s, Michael was at the Tropic. Drinking it up. Horsing around with his buddy Tomboy. And. Having a straight up

ball with another girl. And at the time… Roxanna.

Really, the sweetest girl I had ever been with; a sweet little Persian girl; a real darling.

Roxanna Parsi. Or. As most people called her, Roxanna Blue, since she had a tendency to wear a lot of blue dresses.

You can tell a lot about a girl from the color of her dress:

- Red? That's obvious.
- Black? Dangerous. Also, thinks she's too cool for school. And better. But really, just a moody bitch. So, stay away.
- White? Stay away, again. But definitely this time! For the girl thinks she's an angel, or something. But trust me, either she really is. Or she really isn't. And really is a devil, in disguise.
- Pink? No, just no! Fuck no! Now you better kick this bitch to the curb! And why? Because, even though she'll most definitely have a rocking body that will go on for days, and days, weeks and months on end. She'll also have the maturity level of the biggest brat you will—ever see! And the seething hating for men, of that of an old bordello mistress, and one that's seen some truly harsh and bitter times in her countless years. This woman is not to be trifled with. Far worse than anything you could expect with a woman in red, black, or white combined. Therefore, you have been warned!
- Green? A bit of an oddball. A girl that wants to stand out. Not the prettiest. But if a girl can make the color green look pretty, she'll be the prettiest thing alive.
- Yellow? A girl with flaws, obvious flaws, so you're either gonna love her for them, or just see flaws.
- Orange? Wannabe red. But ain't got the nerve to be. Although, they can be warm and loving.
- Purple? This girl's special. Really, really special, and talented, and artistic. And… a total freak! And that's either a good thing. Or a very, very bad thing! Yes, being freaky can be bad, too!
- Brown, or gray, or any muddy colors? Ugh! Too humble. Too bland, and boring. And likes it that way. But here's the thing: she'll make you also want to like it that way, too. So, once you go mud, everything then has to be mud. Everything! Because, if you even think of looking at black or red again? Lord help you! 'Cause a girl

that likes earth tone has got some serious jealousy issues.

- Blue now... there's something everybody likes. Shows humility, but, not boring like brown nor gray is. Shows true nature, but, isn't gonna be weird like green nor yellow nor purple will be. Cool, but won't overdo it like black does. Heavenly, but unlike white, is the true color of what the heavens are painted with. Fuck pink, pink don't gots shit on blue, and sometimes not even in the bodacious body department. So, why even compare? And why go orange if you can go red? And speaking of red. A woman in blue will still be able to stand her own. Now, she won't be as hot nor as passionate, nowhere near. Since it's not the color's nature to be. But. It'll be something better. Because, in the end, red's not gonna give you what you truly need. Maybe what you might really, really want, at the moment, but never need! Because, red, will never truly care about you, for red is too wild and untamed to know how to care. Too wild and untamed to know how to care much about herself, let alone someone else. It'll never love you. It'll fuck your brains out. But never... ever... love you. Blue, will care, and will love you. And make you feel how you need to feel, better than red ever will.

But anyways... back to Roxanna Blue.

She was a very headstrong girl, which Michael had then liked, since it made her so much different from the rest of the girls Michael had been used to.

No Kelly Bundy type, here, with that morally/emotionally bankrupt issues shit they have. Which, in the end, makes it—so—not worth it.

And, just like the type Michael was very—not—used to, also, she was also initially one of those super shy types. One, that Michael had to get really, really, really fucking stupid with, to win her over. And did so, by singing 'Close to You' by the Carpenters to even get her attention.

Oh, she did not like me—at first—at all! And she looked like she downright wanted to loathe me. And... I don't know why... something about the human nature: whenever you got someone that really wants to hate your guts, for some reason, you just wanna turn that shit around, and get them to absolutely adore you, then. I saw how much she wanted to downright despise me, then.

And then, I found myself falling head-over-heels in love with her. Just that minute. And then, I had to do something… something really, really stupid, to turn that shit around. And thankfully, I managed to do so, and did.

But… you sang a Carpenters' song?

Oh, so what? So, fucking what?

A Carpenters' song… you?

Oh, me… what? So, what… I can't have a sweet side? I ain't all rough and tough, you know! I can be sweet. And… fine! I guess I did officially lose all my street-cred, then, when I sung that song, there. Fine—I won't deny it! But, then again, I don't give a shit. Fuck street-cred! I can still beat the ever-loving shit out of anyone that would dare laugh, if they caught me doing it.

But… you even got on your knees, too, when you….

Oh, shut the fuck up! I don't give a shit! For it got me a sweet-ass Persian chick. And for those of you that are ignorant, and have no clues for how hot Persian chicks can be… I pity you alls—I pity yous!

Roxanna was no one night fling type of girl; Michael had to put a lot of elbow grease into winning her over, and that's what made her worth it.

I guess, how forming real relationships are supposed to work. Where it's not some heat of the moment thing, and you really do want to have something to do with someone, passed a single night's encounter.

Right, and Roxanna had definitely been one of those. No one night fling, there, for it took Michael three months of building something before they had sex.

At the time, I just about felt like my balls were going to burst, waiting that long. This was before my years spent sexless and senseless and just about suic… in prison. So… yeah! And back then, I was at least getting some, every other day. Well, almost, what felt like, at least.

And… damn! Roxy? I mean, those beautiful thick-ass legs of hers, just about felt like a vise clamped on them, my junk—that is! Clamping down every time I saw her strutting those babies

around. Clamping down, tighter and tighter, every sexless night that went. But, the wait was so worth it. It didn't matter that she didn't know what the fuck she was doing.

Nor the fact she hated the idea of fellatio—even though she was so eager for cunnilingus!

Ahem… yeah… still! Just getting the chance to lick those legs, up and down, like lollypops, in the end, after three months of waiting, was so fucking worth it.

She was really Michael's first real girlfriend.

And, for the first time in my stupid teenaged…?

Wait… I was twenty at the time….

Well! For the first time in my life, I felt complete being with someone. Sorta bored… but… complete!

She had to be no taller than 5'1, exact. A short little girl, who also wore short little miniskirts to match. She had the darkest and loveliest skin. And what was really appealing about her, physically, was how she was built. Nothing too marvelous from the waist up…

Although, her face was really cute. I mostly mean body wise.

But, definitely something marvelous from the waist down; all dense and well defined.

Like a muscle car! Just hot!

Might have not had legs that stretched forever, but she definitely had legs that could carry forevers load. Like twin Atlases. All tensed up, and exposing all the finer details of their muscles, tendons, and bones. Showing all the good stuff, an artist could spend their entire lives trying to master, duplicating its beauty in paintings or sculptures. Michael used to like to tease her over her legs, calling her the Bionic Woman, since her legs were so thick and powerful looking, that she looked like she could do the Indy 500 with them.

She kinda got a little upset hearing that, though. Personally, I don't know why. I meant it as a compliment. I wouldn't have wanted them any other way. Ha… women! Yeah, boy! From the waist down? She looked like a '68 Mustang GT Highland Green, parked

outside, waiting for Steve McQueen to jump into, and take her around for a spin, around Frisco. A highly well-designed vehicle made for cruising in the fast lanes. That... and fucking! Ha!

Ha! Yeah... Steve McQueen is one stoic bastard... I'd worship, though. Just too bitchin' cool for school, even though I can't stand that personality type.

That night, at the Tropic, it was Madboy, Tomboy, and Miss. Parsi, all the way at the back, shooting pool, while Led Zeppelin's 'Achilles' Last Stand' played over the air waves.

You haven't had a hot time, at a hot bar, unless you've had that experience. There, and back then, and listening to that glorious music, when it was still brand spankin' new, and the band was still together. How can I even begin to explain it?

Of course, Tomboy, was just sitting it out, playing scorekeeper, while eyeing any biker pricks that walked in.

"Hey, Tommy, you keeping score, or are you looking to score? Which is it," snapped Michael.

"What score, Michael? You've pocketed only two, and the last one was the cue ball, you doofus," snapped Tomboy, back.

It was a hot summer's night, and Michael had spent most of it drinking ice cold beers to keep himself cool. They all had a pretty bitchin' cool buzz going. And there was no real pool game going on.

Except for Miss. Parsi!

Who had been wiping the floor with the two. Both Michael and Tomboy. All night long.

Yeah, but I wasn't in it to play pool. She might have been taking the game seriously, but my game was something completely different.

Supposedly, her story was: she was a born natural at the game; started off playing pool at the right old age of eight; her and her father used to travel the East Coast hustling people out of money. The act being: her father would bet Roxanna on the game, and against some real pool sharks, and...?

Seeing that the man had dragged in a little girl at that time, to shoot it out with them, and over some real cold earned cash? I

mean, seeing that color of money... yeah! Who would've thought she'd be—that—good! Hustle, or not. And a little girl, too!

"Did you ever lose a game," Michael had asked her once.

"Nope! I even played and beat Luther 'Wimpy' Lassiter one night, and had the old man fork over two grand in embarrassment," Roxanna had replied, smirking with her lips, as they cracked from too much gloss.

Like to see you crack those lips around my....

"Who?"

"I don't know, my dad said he was some great pool champion from back in the 60s. 'A regular ol' Jackie Gleason,' he said. Although, I thought he looked more like Art Carney at the time, so I had no clue why he said that. Hehe!"

"The hell you say," Michael had responded, more fixated on other things than the actual conversation.

Of course, tonight, Michael wasn't really that much into the game, either, as he was more into this pretty little Persian girl.

You think I'm a sex fiend now in my 30s, you should have seen me then. I swear, at twenty, I don't think I had spent a waking minute without having it cross my mind at least a half dozen times or so.

Michael loved to ogle just about every part of a woman. But Miss. Parsi had made him a legs-man, then, through and through. And tonight, viewing her strut around the table with those works-of-art was all the recreation he needed.

Damn, I need to take this girl dancing, sometime, and see those babies put to work!

Her stuff was really something, and the way she moved it, was something else. Spinning. Then bending all over the table, lining up her shots, with her stick, and pretending not to notice Michael ogling her man-crushers, as he did, from the back.

What a pair of clamps she's got, there! Damn, makes me wonder...?

And then all of a sudden, Michael said something really, really, really fucking stupid....

Really, really!

Considering how stupid horny drunk he had now become, with the beers, and watching her like he had been. All night long. Stupid… real stupid. But… now… too stupid! Since it was so stupid, that it was no longer possible of any redeeming quality to come out of it. And no matter if Michael had said it by mistake, or hadn't. It was something so stupid, now, that it became something downright insulting to its core. Something that was so despicable, and in such bad taste. One that would have been for the history books, but was so shameful and embarrassing, that the editor decided to leave out. The stuff of legend.

> "Damn, I can see why men in your country will do anything to keep their women covered up," said Michael, teasingly, but then realized what he had just done.
>
> Ah shit—what the fuck did I just say?

Roxanna then turned around, and just looked at Michael. Just looked. And Michael now felt like if the woman was to lash out and murder him, with the pool stick, that very second, there was no court in all the world, that would have not dismissed it, for there not being any just cause.

But fortunately, for Michael, Roxanna didn't seem to be too bothered by it.

> "Michael, you're thinking of the Arabs. Iranian women don't cover themselves like they do in other Middle Eastern countries. I mean, from what I've heard, the Shah likes to claim their women dress more skimpily in Tehran, than they do in Paris."

Michael said nothing. He felt too afraid of what else might spew from his mouth, after what he just said. But, seeing Roxanna smiling up at him, now, made him feel more at ease.

> Hmm… maybe it's not as bad as I'm making it out to be, in my head? Hell… I've said tons and tons more stupider shit than that! Way, way much more. Ha… funny! Funny how the mind can sometimes blow things up worse than they really are.
>
> "Really? That's how it is over there? Hmm… maybe you should take me there sometime," Michael now responded with, while wiggling his eyebrows.
>
> Okay, now I'm not even sure how bad that there, was. And, maybe, I should stop. Before I say something truly offensive, and Roxy, here, truly loses her patience with me.

But… then again… a country full of foxy, darker-skinned babes, like her, wearing super short mini-skirts? Yeah, I'm really tempted now. Take me there!

“Michael,” called out Roxanna, as she looked back at him, snarkily, “I'm from Rochester.”

"Michael, give the girl a break," snapped Tomboy, as if he had nothing better to do.

Madboy then smiled crudely up at Tomboy, and, as if to tell him, he'd be shooting pool with him next, if he didn't stop with the badgering. But then, Michael shrugged it off, and thought over the matter, and felt keen to just be himself, and not to feel shameful over anything.

I am… who I am… it's gotten me this far in life. And life's been great. So…?

And then came an idea. Which turned out to be the worst idea he had had that night, yet (yet).

Michael tried to think of something funny, kinky, and really stupid to do, which he was sure to rebound with Roxy, with, after the last couple of off-putting transactions.

So, what I did was this:

As Roxanna was, once again, wrapped over a table lining up a shot. Michael. Stepped right behind her. Into position. To be putting himself in a world of pain.

Yeah, right now I feel like I deserve this, too.

As Roxanna Blue took one last readying motion, back, with her stick, the stick connected with Michael's nether region. And now…!

"Oh my God! I'm sorry! Did I just…?"

Looking back with concern, Roxanna then noticed how Michael was giggling from his nose, while holding in the water works. And noticed how the idiot had done it on purpose.

"Michael, what the hell is wrong with you—man? Are you that much of a perverted freak that—"

"Sit on it and twirl—Tommy," replied Michael, as he sounded like he had just gone through reverse puberty.

Roxanna now had no idea of how to react to this. As her jaw dropped, realizing, the type of guy she was now dating.

Oh, don't look at me like that… you know what this means… don't you?

And the funny part was, something that Tomboy could never, and would never, understand… was… Roxanna? Deep down… did!

"Seriously, Michael, you think a woman would find something like that…?"

But then Tommy zipped it, zipped it, quick! When he noticed how much Roxanna, now, seemed to be turned on by what just happened. As she no longer had her jaw so wide open, and was smiling, as she started to get perversely turned on, putting the boy in such pain. Started digging into the whole S&M shit.

Keep stepping into the dark side, Roxy! Soon, I'll have you dropping to your knees, too, for me.

I mean, give me a break… really!

With that 'I don't do blowjobs' shit! You with your 'relationships shouldn't revolve around sex.'

Well… sorry honey… but it does!

The Other L Word.

This began to remind Michael of a conversation he had had with Roxanna, after some time around the second month of being with her, Michael was beginning to grow irritated with Roxanna's attitude towards sex. For, it wasn't just that she was holding out on him. For, deep down, there seemed to be something totally different at stake. Every time he wanted to get in the mood, she'd become fickle and fainthearted, and passionless, and it would really throw him off.

"Michael, what do you think about the idea of being in a relationship… without sex?"

And… Michael? Had no idea of what to make of this. For the boy was finding this idea almost downright—blasphemous!

"What, are you kidding me?"

But, looking into Roxanna's eyes, Michael could plainly see she wasn't.

"Okay, it's like this…," Roxanna had said, as she started, trying to explain exactly what was on her mind.

"I want something pure… actually… forget that word I just used."

"Pure, what do you mean, pure," Michael had demanded, getting a

little mad. For he really, really, really didn't like where this was going.

“I… mean…?”

“You mean, you want to wait for marriage… before…?”

“No, it's not like that.”

“Is there something about being Muslim, that…?”

“My father raised me as an atheist, Michael.”

And as much as Michael had—not been—one for getting into religion. Ever! This now?

I don't know. Something feels very off in me, about what she just said.

But then figured, right now, it didn't matter. For Michael hadn't exactly gotten with Roxanna over such pursuits. As if they'd matter.

“Michael, I want something that'll last!”

“And what does sex have anything to do with ruining the chances of that?”

And Roxanna, then, made a complicated frown, that was really very unappealing to look at.

“I mean… there's like… just about… no such thing as a sexless relationship. I know some older couples completely lose the passion for it when they get older, but that's after they've been together so long. Not at the beginnings!”

“It's like this… I've been in relationships before. Many, many relationships.”

“Okay…,” Michael had said, finding this a little intimidating, now. Since this was really to be his first.

“And… I don't like it that much.”

“Like what,” Michael had asked, getting dumb for a moment, but then it came to him.

“With all the men I've been with….” Roxy had gone on, as Michael got completely thrown off with what she just said.

“Wait, what? How many men you been with?”

And now, Roxy's eyes bulged open, as she noticed how that was painting her up as.

“Oh—no, no, no! I didn’t mean it like that. I meant to say… let’s just say… I've tried a lot. Being in relationships, I mean. Not that I've…!” Roxy had then pierced her eyes, seeming a little irritated

with herself, but then went on, “and…”

“And what…,” asked Michael, feeling Roxanna’s irritation.

“Well, none of them gave me what I was looking for,” Roxanna had then finished, with a simple look of dissatisfaction.

Oh.

Ha!

Thought Michael.

If you ask me: the bane of every man has to be, that, of the dissatisfied woman.

“Sex is… just… such a shallow thing, in the end. And…?”

Michael then caught himself trying to roll his eyes.

“Oh, come on,” Michael had said, but the tone he said it, was no less rude.

“Michael, in the long term, all it really does, is it brings out the worst in people. Everyone ends of basing the whole experience of being in a relationship with how good the sex is, alone. And because of that, they always tend to fall apart. Sex might be fun, at first, but after a while, it gets… repetitive.”

“What?”

“And, once it does, that's when couples begin looking in other directions. To find someone else to be with.”

Michael didn't say anything. But, started getting a sense of what Roxy's worries might be.

Shallow… repetitive? What type of sexual relations has this woman been in, with what type of men? Hmm… seems like…?

“So that’s why, lately, I’ve just thought about ‘what if… a relationship with no sex involved.’ Do you understand what I'm saying?”

“So, you're saying not to have sex—at all—ever,” Michael had wondered, because…?

I really don't want to be with her if that's how it is to be. And that's that!

Roxanna now understood that that's not exactly what she wanted, either; since she did feel a sexual attraction towards him. But, it was just that… that… that….

Ha! Just like a woman, she doesn't even know what she wants. But, she’ll always want the same thing….

Wait… why does that sound familiar?

And then, Roxy realized, with Michael, that a completely sexless relationship was never gonna fly.

Ever!

"Well, maybe… not… no sex, ever! Maybe… I… I don't know," she had responded, belligerently, for the subject matter was getting to her that wearily.

"All I know is, the last few relationships I was in, the sex was just so… meaningless."

And now, Michael felt like he had the answer, and felt ready to give her his take:

"Well, maybe, you just haven't been with the right guy, yet."

And as he had said it, Michael now gave her the look. That million-dollar look, with the smile, that had won him over with so many other women in the past.

Kelly Bundy types, although, mind you.

And a look, that expressed him, genuinely. A look of him being himself. His true self. And nothing but. Which Michael felt there was no reason to feel any shame in, and feel confident about.

I get it. I get it. She just hasn't had a real man, yet. Pity. I can only imagine a nice girl like her, having only tried out nice guys. And that there has been the problem.

Of course, to a girl like Roxanna, that look only meant one thing:

Oh, what a sleaze!

Thought Roxy, then, as she forgot for a moment why she decided to give him a chance in the first place.

"Oh please, Michael," Roxanna had reacted, as she rolled her eyes off, so far, and fast, they almost fell out of her sockets.

"What," Michael had said, unashamedly.

"Don't be that way! I got with you because I felt like I saw something sweet in you. So, don't," Roxy had expressed, going straight to the point.

"Oh, come on."

"Just don't!"

And now, Roxanna felt like really telling Michael off.

"Michael… if all you want to do is fuck me, then—"

"What do you mean? All I want to do," Michael had interrupted.
Roxanna then just gave him a look.

"What? You think I'm not capable of feeling anything else for you? I mean, I do want sex, but… how does that prove that I'm not going to want something deeper?"

And having said that, Michael then thought to himself:

Wait? Do I want something deeper?

And that sorta irked Michael to think, since, then, it really would mean he was doing all this for sex. And nothing but.

No, no, no! I'm not doing this just to fuck her. I like Roxanna. I really, really like her. I might even lo—….

But then, Michael found himself unable to say the L word. Not even in his own thoughts. Since, he wanted to affiliate that with how he might be willing to feel with Roxy, here.

"Okay, Roxy, it's like this: I want a foundation, too, okay? I want a real relationship, too! But, let me tell you something about me." Michael had said.

Roxy just nodded, feeling like she should give him a chance to hear him out.

"Roxy, I can't do without sex in a relationship. I don't know how you see things, but I associate love and sex as being the same. And all being in a relationship does is intensify that bond and—"

But then all of a sudden. Roxanna said something fatal. Fatal!

"Michael, I don't know if I believe in love," Roxanna had then said, as she grew a bit sad.

This had confused the crap out of Michael, as he began to wonder what the fuck Roxy even wanted from him, if there was going to be no sex, nor love, involved.

"Then what do you expect to get out of all this," Michael had asked, as he threw his arms up.

Roxanna shrugged a bit, in dismay, and had said:

"I guess, someone just to be there for me. And that's all?"

Said. Seeming very sad, like she wanted to lay her head on Michael's shoulder.

But….

As mentioned. What she had said, was something fatal.

Oh, I don't know what to feel now.

Truly fatal.

Her being that way, now wanting me to comfort her… I don't know why… but I'm finding it as a little pathetic.

For what she had said, Michael found irredeemable. Even though he didn't quite yet understand why.

“Michael… I just don't know if I believe in it, anymore. I think love, like fairytales, is just some stupid thing people tell each other, to make themselves believe in something magical, when magic doesn't exist, you know,” expressed Roxy.

“Well, of course it's not something magical,” Michael had then said, “there is no fairytale to it, but it's real!”

Roxanna started growing weary, again, as Michael felt like challenging that sense.

“What does fairytales and magic have anything to do with it? It's something you feel inside, and that's all that matters. What? You've never felt that way about anyone,” Michael had asked.

Although, all the people I've loved, deeply, or should have at least, I ended up really just hating. Huh… I don't want to think about that now.

“Michael, the world isn't that simple, you can't just expect to feel something, and it'll all work out.”

Michael then sneered, hearing Roxanna say that, as he began to understand what her problem was.

“Roxanna… fuck the world's rules! When you don't agree with them, you have to then make up your own.”

Roxanna now seemed confused.

“Yeah, it's tough! But, you got to roll with the punches, and—”

“Roll with the punches… Michael? Is that how you're associating a relationship to be? You think it's like fighting,” Roxy had interrupted, as she began to grow worried about their future.

And the thing was, Michael, sorta did:

“Yeah, I do. Everything is a confrontation, and just like fighting, there's going to be pain and hardship involved, if you want to last it out.”

Roxy, didn't know how to follow up on that. She knew Michael came

from a much more brutal upbringing, considering she had heard all the stories from him of him and his father growing up. And she didn't know now how to relate with him from that point of view. Now, that she understood Michael's view of things.

"I don't know if I can deal with that," Roxy had said.

"Well, that's your problem, there," Michael had followed up, as he began to shake his head.

This had just about enraged Roxy to hear.

"Stop telling yourself there is no such thing as love, you're just not willing to fight hard enough for it," Michael had explained.

"Michael, you just don't understand," Roxy had lashed out.

"Yeah, I understand, you're being weak, and a quitter."

"What," Roxy had lashed, back.

As she was beginning to understand the level of aggression she would need to be in a relationship with him. Michael then paused, as he looked over at Roxy, and said:

"Ever heard the saying: 'all is fair in love and war?' Well… doesn't that ever make you wonder if there might be more similarities between the two?"

Roxy was just about on the verge of walking out on Michael, until she heard Michael say this. She didn't know how to follow up on those words, again. But… for whatever reason… this time, she did feel like Michael might have been onto something, as she decided to continue listening.

"Well, this is the way I see it… like war, you have to be a soldier to wage it out if you want to win. And there is no end to how far you should be willing to go, if you want to survive. I don't want to be offensive, but it sounds like you've lost a couple of battles, and now you feel there is no possibility in ever winning the war."

Roxanna had then looked up, as to try and think about that for a moment, but then rolled her eyes, and said:

"You don't understand, Michael!"

And Michael was now really getting sick of her saying that.

"I don't want to understand," Michael had followed up.

Roxanna paused.

"I don't want to understand. Everything you understand about this has done nothing but made you depressed. Sad. And gotten you to

the point you find nothing worthwhile in sex and love, anymore. And… I'm sorry, Roxy… but I don't want to understand, and I never would want to understand, either,"
Michael had pointed out.

And now, Roxy, was starting to get taken in with what Michael had to say. For, the thing was, she now felt like she wouldn't want to, either.

"Why are you so stuck with the feeling of loss, when you should strive for the opposite? Just because you've been in a couple of bad ones, you all of a sudden think you know everything there is to know about relationships? Roxanna, I believe in love, because I've felt it, and that's all that matters to me."

Although, I'm not sure if I want to start hating you, too. If that's what's to happen if we're to go through with this any further. I mean… I mean… maybe I don't know what I'm talking about? Maybe the hating part is what she means about how difficult things get? Maybe…?

But then Michael paused, as he began to feel weary of thinking about all this. Wearily! Like Roxy. Understanding something he had just expressed that he hoped he wouldn't. And now… felt like being his old self. And felt like words were becoming a waste of time, and the only way he was going to get through with Roxy, was through expression.

My way!

Michael then eyed Roxanna like a lollipop, as he began growing a sweet tooth.

Man, look at those legs of hers! Fucking getting sick of talking about bullshit! I feel like all this conversation is doing is making us grow apart, and I just want the opposite. I want those legs now to be wrapped around me, as I show her what I'm all about.

Michael then started moving towards her, suggestively, as Roxanna lit up, seeing as what Michael was planning on doing next.

"No, Michael! I don't—"

Oh, come on! Just give in! Damn! What do I say to… just give her some more words about love. And make it sound even more gushy and feely, since the princess, here, wants a fairytale.

Thought Michael, that harshly, now. Since that fatal moment.

"Come on, Roxy, let's just try it out, this way. Maybe sex with me

will be different. Love is something that's always yours, and no one can take that away from you. The hard part is just sharing it, and right now, you're the one being difficult, while I'm trying to do everything I can to make you believe in it."

Roxanna then got up and took a step back.

Damn, this woman is difficult!

"Roxanna, I'm a firecracker, I see sex as a means of expressing my love for someone, and I believe with a relationship, it can only grow stronger, and the expression can grow deeper. That's what I want out of this relationship.

And…

if all you want is some shoulder to lean on, maybe, we can be friends, but we are through when it comes to—"

"No—no—no—maybe…?"

Roxanna then stopped and got scared. As she realized if she continued backing off, Michael was probably going to dump her, before she was able to dump him. And… it wasn't that she wanted to dump him at all to begin with. But… Roxanna was a girl that had her issues. And rejection was a motherfucker for her.

"Come on! Let's just try this out, see how it goes," Michael had said, as he cocked his head to one side.

Roxanna then took another step back.

"Please. Just give me a chance."

Roxanna then stopped, again, paused for a second, smiled sorely, and then said:

"Give me some time, Michael, give me some time."

And walked away.

After that whole thing, Michael didn't see her for a while. Didn't see her the next day, and the day after that. And after a while, Michael started to feel like she might have dumped him. But then….

Ha! I got a call from her by the third month. At night. And she was at home alone, drunker than a skunk, and really, really, really fucking horny, this time. Started going off on how she wanted to suck my this, and lick my that, and begged me to come see her. I mean, a completely different person, like I had really won her over.

And… so… I did. I went to her place, while her dad was away, and the damn woman practically tackled me to the floor, and started ripping my clothes off. She started doing her thing, then looked at me while biting her pinky, and seemed to remember how I wanted those legs of hers wrapped around me. And… she finally gave me a chance. And…!

And?

It… was okay.

Just okay?

Okay, it was good, but… I don't know. Something about what she said, that whole: I don't believe in love, thing. It…?

Made me not believe in it, too. And, I just started seeing her sexually. And nothing but sexually. And, I mean, I know I had been before that, but… I don't know. After that, I just saw her as nothing but a sex object. And I know that's—exactly! Exactly! What she would—never—ever have wanted… but… that's what she made it into, when she said that to me. It was her doing, not mine! And with the sex we had, it felt like that's exactly what she was seeing into me, too. Another sex object, and I can tell that's not what she wanted, either. I mean, there was some raw and real fucking going on. Which you could enjoy a lot of on a certain level. Hell, that's what I mostly have with the Kelly Bundy types. But… definitely no magic.

So, no magic man, Mike? And you promised Roxanna you'd be—

Oh, shut the fuck up! Magic don't just come like that, easily. And as much of a stud, or hunk, or badboy, or… it's not going to make it!

So, what is it then?

There has to be this—click! Something beyond me, and beyond her, beyond us! That makes it happen. And no matter how much I try. No matter how hard. There won't be any—click—until the forces that are in charge of this happening, make it happen. And, that… is that!

So…

What about the whole prospects of finding something deeper and more meaningful with Roxanna?

What… about it?

You were giving up?

At the time? No! I wasn't! At the time, I was like:

'Fuck no! I'm not giving up. I said there has to be pain and hardship, I said one has to soldier on, to Roxy. So… I will! I still want it. I still do. And I'm willing to do anything—anything! To make it work out. Be that soldier, and wage it out, until I win. But…?

Michael still felt like a lot had been lost, from that simple conversation.

Hungry Eyes.

It was at this point that Michael took a look around and noticed how Mary was also in the building. She was sitting at the bar, and she was sitting there with a friend. Mary, of course, could never stand for Michael's antics. So, she was doing her usual of keeping her attentions away, as to let him know, she didn't want his. Mary's friend, on the other hand, was right now doing the complete opposite, and staring at Michael, directly.

Oh, okay… what's going on, here?

At first, Michael thought she looked pretty. Very pretty even. But in no way drop dead gorgeous.

Funny, she's reminding me of someone, though… huh?

But then, he started feeling her vibes, her essence, and seeing into her.

Who does she…

And then all of a sudden…!

Oh… wow!

He saw her.

At first, for whatever reason, Michael couldn't help but be taken by things he didn't find attractive about her. Things that stood out, that didn't diminish how pretty (even beautiful you can say) she really was. But things she wore so… openly! That they were hard to avoid.

First off:

Her eyes were too big, and very sad looking in a way. Her nose was also a bit too big, too, and noticeable from the side. She had a lot of droopy features. Hardly any cheek bones, with such a skinny face, that it made her look like she was physically unable to smile. Her hair was jet black, and a bit stringy. Her skin was so pale white that it was almost blinding, and even though some men might say it was milky smooth, Michael wouldn't have liked it, since he was mostly attracted to darker skinned women. As for her body, it was pretty average. Flat even. Curves barely noticeable, that sorta made her boyish. Even though she was the same length as Michael, she seemed very petite. She had a bit of a bony chicken neck thing that was way too long and narrow to be natural. Compared to Roxy, she had chicken legs, well defined, but arched a bit too acutely, making it seem like her knees were always bent in the wrong direction. She had all the features Michael would have never liked, and yet now he couldn't get enough of. Even from what he was getting from her personality, it was the type of stuff that Michael would never have expected to be captivated by. She had something seriously sad and pitiful in her pulsating from within her center, that should have been enough to detract most men away. And, it was so bad, it was like she didn't have a single ounce of self-respect and self-love in her, at all. Seeing all this, how sad, and also afraid she seemed, made Michael frown for a moment, and feel sorry for her.

She looks like the type of person that's scared of everything. So scared, she's constantly shivering.

She also had a panting thing going on, but that of a starving animal. And worse yet, she seemed like the clingy—yet, extremely distant type, too. Deep down, she also seemed like the mean type, also. Very bitter and bloated and hateful, and almost to the point of being despicable. She seemed sad, unbelievably and unbearably sad, too much so to have a sense of humor, even. Or even understand it. Very bland, very boring, and seeming so much so that it could only take the complete opposite type to know how to deal with her and find her....

Endearing.

Because then that opposite type would want to fill her up with their own stars and joy, to change her. She was a blackhole. And one that Michael felt a strong draw towards, felt compelled to do so, filling her up with the light and magic he had.

But besides all that mentioned.

Even with all those details that would hinder a person, the way she carried them was doing the complete opposite. She seemed like such a weak, pitiful, fragile, boring, uninteresting person, with so many flaws—so many flaws! But the way she carried herself, was as if she had learned to master them all, and had learned to turn them into her greatest assets; turned all those weaknesses into strengths. The way she carried herself made her seem like she was such a strong, dignified, tough, vibrant, interesting person, that she no longer seemed to be carrying any flaws at all. She now seemed… perfect. There was some magic involved, there. Some truly otherworldly magic. She seemed like such an oddity compared to everything and everyone Michael had ever come across, and it was the type of magic that could cast a spell to all those around her, making them want to give up life and limb to be with her, love her, and want to be….

But is she capable of it, back?

The fact was, she was just a simple girl, very pretty, a bit too mousy… in a way… but whatever she had done to make her seem different, was really, truly doing just that.

> Reminds me in history class when I was in 9th grade, before I got expelled: we were learning about Cleopatra, and they said she wasn't exactly the most beautiful woman in the world. Actually, a little below average, even. But she just had this quality about her that made the most powerful men in the world, at the time, do just about anything for her. She was no Elizabeth Taylor. But she still had the velvet eyes, which carried the velvet touch.

There had to be some sorta of black magic involved. Some sort of witchcraft. For Michael felt it, dark powers used to have this woman wielding herself into something supernatural; intensifying all her attributes and casting them in high definition for all to witness; working all her flaws to her advantage. And there was something very frightening about it, too.

> I don't know how to explain it. Actually, let me try—I'll try! Imagine an evil Audrey Hepburn. And… that's it! That's the best way to describe this woman's looks and feel. An evil Audrey Hepburn. Now, I'm not saying this girl, here, is evil. But there's just this vibe I'm getting. Imagine Audrey with that funny face of

hers, if it wasn't funny, but extremely sad. And also, a little scary. And the thing with Audrey Hepburn is, she is such a lovable person, I could never imagine feeling attracted to her. She comes across as more of a sister....

Well... more than Mary, there, sitting! Poor excuse for a sister, Mary, there! Stupid, angry Mary... fucking...!

Anyways! I could have never imagined being with Audrey Hepburn, she's too lovable and good. Too good for the likes of me. This woman? She also comes across as being too good for the likes of me, but I want to destroy this woman, here! Annihilate her! I want to hear her moan like a banshee, from both pain and pleasure, and the louder she does, the louder I want it to get. Louder! Harder! Louder! Harder! Oh, is she fucking hot!

Is she?
Yeah, she—is!
I now think she's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen in my life! Fuck all those Hollywood starlets and bombshells I've always had a thing for, this is the real thing, here, in flesh and blood and bone. Oh, what is it about this woman? What I would do now to just to be with... wait, I... did I... umm...?

Wait! Okay, I gotta stop thinking like this. I'm with someone right now. Don't think about this girl, here! No, stop it! Stop doing that! Stop!

But Michael couldn't. And one major reason was how she was eating him up with her pitiful—yet not pitiful—eyes, as it kept Michael's attention from reverting back to his own group.

Oh shit! This girl's got some voodoo on me... or something...?

Thought Michael, as he noticed she wasn't even blinking.

Damn, this girl has also got that Ann Margret quality about her. She doesn’t just grab your attention. She hijacks it!

"Hey, Michael, is that Mary," asked Tomboy.

"Yeah, that's her," responded Michael, as he kept his gaze from reverting back to the evil Audrey Hepburn, there.

"Oh, wow! Who is that fox with her?"

"No one that would ever be interested in you," snapped Michael, almost whisperingly.

She's mine! MINE! I saw her… shit!

"What's that supposed to—"

"Nothing!"

It felt like a minute had passed, and Michael still could feel the unflinching, unnerving, and unrelenting gaze of hers on the back of his neck. And the more he felt it, the more he began learning how to enjoy it. And now, he could no longer resist taking another peek at her, and what he saw was that she now seemed to want to get up from the bar and walk over to Michael and his party.

No—no—no! Don't come over here! Don't! Don—…?

Oh, stop being such a dickless twerp! Please, sweetie… you go ahead and do so!

This took some time, as she seemed to be having some trouble getting Mary to follow along. But then, she seemed to have coerced her to finally do so, get up, and as the two did, they began making their way over to him.

"Who's Mary," asked Roxanna, pretending to smile, but really eyeing insecurely at the two 5'6 and plus women approaching.

"Oh—she's my sister—babe," responded Michael, as he turned around and gave Roxanna a kiss on the lips, and kept his eyes on her, to let her know there was no worry.

Yeah… no worry….

Roxanna smiled for real this time, and then leaned up high, going tiptoe, to try and kiss Michael back.

Oh, she's short. Too short… and I don't want to think about that.

"Yo, Michael, how you been," muttered out old Mary the goat, in an indifferent tone.

Mary was dressed as plainly as an asexual librarian: she wore granny glasses, a long hanging flapper blouse, and some gray bell bottoms to match her boringness. Looking like she had raided some old flapper girl from the 20s bohemian wardrobe, she found in some dusty and cobwebby attic. She also had her grayish blond hair all bobcut super short and looking as wet and sterilized as if she had just stepped out of

a cold acid shower. And all that being her warm and pleasant side, for her personality was even more sterile looking. A personality as warm as a soggy wet towel, wrapped around a person's head, in winter. The only style that really seemed out of place on her was her red-hot platformers, which made her dwarf Michael by an inch or two.

Wow, what is it with women and their love affair with shoes?

"So, you doing good—or what," asked Mary.

"Yeah," replied Michael, as he began to redirect his attention back onto her friend.

The way her friend now dressed was a different story: she was wearing a devilishly red silk tailored dress, that was provocatively high cut, yet hung loose enough to where if a wind was to blow in, it would give everyone the impression that her dress had caught on fire. Also, her black as night hair was feathered out, wild, like it was looking for some wind to catch and take off. All in all, she looked like a knock-out, and Michael felt like he had to be careful, before he found himself crawling for the ropes, over her.

Okay, stop staring at me with those eyes of yours. I've never seen a person's eyes shiver, and yours do, and it's freaking me out, and getting me... stop staring!

"So, sis', who's your friend," inquired Michael.

At first trying to smile, flirtatiously, but stopped when he realized Roxanna was right now watching him like a hawk.

"Yeah, bro, this is Nikki, high school friend of mine," replied Mary...

"look... but no touch!"

Oh, fuck you, Mary! Go back to your room, and go back to cutting out faces of guys you thought were dreamboats in your high school year book, and setting them on fire in an ashtray. Yeah, I remember catching you doing that one time, you man-hating crazy bitch!

Thought Michael, and mirrored the distasteful smirk his sister was giving him, but was then taken back when he now saw that Nikki had a devilish red smile on her face, to match her garments. Michael, at this moment, couldn't help but to smile back, in delight.

What a smile... everything is at odds with this woman. Well, it wouldn't hurt Roxanna to feel a little jealousy.

After that bit of formalities, Michael decided to turn back to the game at hand. He didn't want to get too swept away with Mary and company; knowing it was probably best to leave certain engagements out, completely! Plus, this was a time Michael still hadn't gone full on cheater mode as he did with Nikki, there, eventually. He had been dating Roxanna for six months, already, and besides flirting with some girls on the side, he felt content not to stray away too far. All in all, she was really a very sensitive and kind-hearted girl, and Michael felt he'd feel just as devastated if he hurt her, as she would.

I couldn't cheat on Roxy, she's been through too much. But then again, I don't know if this will last. I don't...?

Thought Michael, as he kept thinking about what she had said to him, then, before making it with her.

Stop thinking about it! We’re gonna make this work—one way or another!

Of course, going on with the rest of the night, proved, wasn't going to be so simple. Nikki...?

Was up to something.

For whatever reason, she began buying lots of drinks for everyone. But, what was very peculiar about it, was, she didn't seem to be doing it all out of the kindness of her own heart. She was really loading everyone up. And most of all, the beers were being rounded up, and offered to both Michael and Roxy, as they continued to play (while growing sloppier by the second with their game). Mary and Nikki sat close by on some stools accompanying Tomboy. And Tomboy, being his usual self of trying to prove something to everyone, tried hitting on Nikki.

Wait a second... what are you talking about, Tommy? Asking her about the maker of her dress... what? Okay, now I don't know if you're really that desperate, or you're really a—

"What's that, Tommy, you think you'd also look ravishing in Nikki's dress, too," spouted out Michael, while watching Roxanna burst out with a single chuckle, reluctantly, and miss a shot.

It wasn't really all that funny. And Tomboy said nothing, at first. But, after a second, it dawned on Nikki why Michael might have made that

joke, as she began laughing a little.

Hmm—maybe she does have a sense of humor… everything seems to be at odds with her.

Mary just shook her head, while biting her nails.

Mary? You should have been born a lesbian… and I'm saying this as—your brother!

"Okay, so, Tommy… you… you seeing anyone," asked Nikki, like a curious little school girl.

Looking over at Tomboy, Michael then noticed how, now, Nikki's thinking differently of him over this bit of information, it all had changed everything; seeing how she might be taking him as a fag, had become too much for him, as he now seemed about ready to boil over with embarrassment. He was now beaming at Michael, like he wanted to burn a hole into him. And besides Madboy, Tomboy had to be the second biggest temperamental bastard with the Shamrocks. He even had the same curly hair, but more blonde. And he was more taller. More wiry. Michael had fought him in the past. And even if Michael was sure to take out. Taking him out wasn't easy. Since the fucker would then start biting and trying to break your fingers, even while lying flat on the ground with you pinned on top.

Ah shit, here we go again!

Tomboy walked over, behind Michael, as Michael didn't turn around, since he did not want to get into a confrontation with him. And over this.

"You know… fuck you, Madboy! Fuck you and your jokes, I ain't a fag," lashed out Tomboy.

And it was sorta obvious he was doing this, mostly, to rebound with whatever he felt like he had lost with Nikki, when the joke was made.

"Calm your ass down, Tommy, it was only a joke," responded Michael.

"You always think you're tough—well—what if I end up beating the ever-loving shit out of you, instead, right now? How would you feel then," lashed out Tomboy, again, as he shoved Michael, back there, and looked like he really wanted to go at it.

"Tommy? Seriously! Learn to take a fucking joke now and then. Would you," lashed out, Michael now, not liking how he got shoved the way he did.

"No! Fuck that! Let's go—let's go—now! You and—”

"Tommy? Come sit with me—please," pleaded Nikki, changing up the mood completely.

Nikki had stepped up to him, grabbed a hold of his arm, and had just looked at him sideways. It was strange for Michael seeing her in action, something so frail looking as her, having such a not so frail presence. Domineering almost. And so gracious in a way, as well. Even though she was speaking softly to Tommy, it still sounded like she was barking out orders, like some drill sergeant would. Tomboy then lit up like a pinball machine colored all funny, cooled down a bit, and complied. It was really impressive watching Nikki diffuse that situation; she really seemed to have a knack for talking people into getting her way, and Michael sorta felt like he wanted to be a part of that now.

And it’s sorta sexy, too, in her way. I mean, I've never seen a woman ooze with so much sexuality in her body language, since I took that one Puerto Rican chick dancing. And when Latin girls dance, they can melt steel, and engulf discos into enraging infernos. But they at least have to work up a sweat to get there, twisting and turning and shaking their goods all around the way they do. This girl… just has to cock her head to one side, and smile—and that's it!

They were both back to sitting on their stools. Tommy seemed pretty mellowed out, now, now that his ego was back on track. Nikki, on the other hand, continued to eye both Michael and the Persian, smiling like she had hidden agendas. By now, Roxanna had also noticed this, even in her tipsy state. And began doing what she could to let Nikki know: Michael was off limits! It really was a hot summer night, and the humidity in town had to be over ninety percent, as it all felt like being underwater. Under the simmer and sway of the night, getting all heat sick and sweaty, since it was so hot, and they were all so drunk. But still… a hell of a good time.

Although, except for Mary, who just sat there, acting like she was beyond all this. Better. And seeing how Mary was acting, not wanting any part of the good times they were having, Michael was starting to grow annoyed.

Brotherly Love.

Kinda have this urge to walk over, and pour my beer on top of her head, cool her out, some! Ha!

Thought Michael, as he started to really think about their relationship, with the only other sibling he had ever had.

My so-called sister.

The one, true, female version of him, if he had really been born a she.

I should!

Thought Michael, about really going ahead, and doing so: pouring his beer on top of her head. But…?

Yeah, but then she'd probably go all Carrie on us, and try boiling our eyes out with her psychic man-hating powers. Ha! I remember how pissed she used to get… when we were kids… when I'd start hissing at her like a freaking cat. I mean, she always looked like some pissed off angry feline to me—even as kids—that someone was trying to bathe. She'd get so mad at me, and over nothing! And at the time, I felt like that was the only means of communication I could make with her, this sourpuss, here, since it was the only means of communication she ever seemed to respond to. Even though, pretending like she still didn't. But. Eventually. She gave in, into her true nature, and started doing it as well. And—damn—did that shit get stupid between us! Damn—did it! And even if she never did admit to it, I could always tell how much she really did enjoy doing so.

Michael thought, now trying to make himself enjoy that moment. Tried. But then Michael frowned up something fierce, looking at his sister, as his contempt began building up instead.

But it's fucking bullshit—really! Only way I've ever been able to relate with her. Just that way, and never in a way, allowing me to like her like a normal brother—like a normal human being—really would do! I mean, I remember everything else I tried. Tried, and failed at! Used to do just about anything to try and get her to smile at me—just once—give me a sign that she loved me, as much as I really loved her. Fucking singing her songs, and shit. But no. This is all I've ever gotten from her. This! This pissed off bitch, here. I've never even felt like I've had a sister, just some angry old feline that

hates me, and everyone, and herself. Fucking hissing at each other like… what a piece-of-shit sister I got!

And then all of a sudden, whatever graciousness there was between him and her got twisted, and turned. Turned wretched. As Michael then began to think about his relationship with her in a different light.

You know what? Hate can be a good thing, when you can use it to show someone how much you really love them, or at least… used to.

Hate… can be a great thing.

Probably, even, the greatest thing! Because… fuck just loving someone! Fuck you, John Lennon…!

Thought Michael, since that one John Lennon song, 'Imagine' now stopped playing on the jukebox.

Fuck you, you stupid hippie! You, and all those stupid flower children, that thought were gonna change the world, not too long ago. Fuck you, and your: love and peace shit. You idiots were preaching. Your: 'love is all you need,' shit! Because, if it was that simple, this world would have then fixed itself a very, very, very long time ago.

You need hate, the world and the people in it—need—it! Just to show how there is another side, a side, people need to see, to see how much has been truly lost. Because of them. Because of their faults. And their sins. To be reminded of just how bad it can also get. People, all, in the end, need it. For, until they do, experience true hatred, they'll never understand the depths of how much love truly could have been won. Love by itself can only be a shallow thing, a superficial thing, and if some people just want that by itself, then fine!

Michael then looked at Roxy and shook his head.

So, until you hurt them bad enough, they'll never understand love. Until you hurt them, dearly, they'll never truly feel it. Only the ones with the most hatred, and the ones who have been hurt the worst in their hearts, understand love at its deepest. That's why love is

not all you need… you stupid fucking hippie! Your counterculture failed!

Hate is good!

Michael then smirked something mighty sinister, gawked at Mary all crazy-eyed to get her attention, and waited. Mary noticed, and first tried resisting Michael, for she'd seen this face in him before, and she knew exactly what it meant. She resisted, resisted… continued to resist….

Come on—Mary—come on! Look at me, you stupid, angry, worthless cat!

And the second she could no longer resist, and did, Michael erupted with the loudest hissing cat sound he had ever made. Really, really fucking loud, as it startled everyone. Really overdoing it, as the entire Tropic went silent, and not just everyone in Michael's party. Had everyone shut the fuck up—quick! Even had Ozzy Osborne do so, shutting the fuck up, quick, with his 'Iron Man' shit, that was now playing on the jukebox. Startled everyone, even Mary. Then everyone in Michael's party began laughing, since it was also so very funny, too, as scary as it was, considering how abruptly it had happened. Laughed, unsure of why Michael would do that. Of course, Mary got the inside joke, and grew a disgusted look on her face, as she lipped "go fuck yourself'" without saying it to Michael. Michael then smiled a proud smile, and began nodding his head at her, forcing a vibe of purely concentrated contempt into her, as Mary looked like she was about ready to get up and leave.

Yeah! Fuck you, too, Mary! I hate you, too! Feel these vibes, you fucking bitch!

But then, Michael grew very upset seeing his sister like this, the way she was now getting. Really bothered. And began to think:

Ah shit! But maybe there's going too far with it. The hate. And! I feel sick to my stomach, now.

And Michael really did, now.

When you go too far… maybe there's no saving anything?

Reaching the point of no return. Going into… ender mode….

Thought Michael, as the thought scared him. How it could lead to that.

And so easily, too.

The Heartbreaker.

Tomboy had shifted gears and was now making homoerotic jokes all in Michael's expense. The pool game Michael and Roxanna were having earlier had completely deteriorated away into a game of grab-ass: Michael would try to line up a shot, as Roxanna would give a reach-around, and say to Michael:

“Maybe you'd have better luck shooting with this.”

She was being totally out of character, and Michael couldn't believe what he was seeing. She was no longer modest about it, and she was now about as spread open as the legs of a Parisian whore.

Wow! Does that Nikki girl's presence have something to do with it?

And then, Roxanna toppled over Michael, on top of the pool table, and began demanding him to take her, then and there.

"No Roxy! For fuck sakes... my sisters here," mumbled out Michael, while laughing.

"What's wrong—Michael? Can't get it up? Would it be better if I was to join in," mumbled out Tommy, in a drunken stupor.

"No, Tommy, you're not my type. I like my men hairy and bearish."

Roxanna began laughing her ass off, rolling around, still on top of Michael, covering Michael up with her sweat. But then she accidentally rolled off the table, fell, and began puking all over the floor. Mary then showed a different side, in that moment, as she broke out of her boredom, crouched over Roxy, and tried to help her.

"Tommy! Get a bucket," yelled out Mary, but Tommy was still too busy laughing.

"Oh, I feel sick," muttered out Roxy, while trying to hold it.

"Excuse me, I don't know your name, but are you hurt at all," demanded Mary.

"No—I don't think...?"

And then began spewing all over the place, again. Luckily, Mary knew better than to face her.

"Oh, my insides feel like they're going to come out next!"

"Hurry—come on! Let's get you to a restroom," cried out Mary.

Marry quickly got Roxanna to her feet, and had her rushing to the lady's

room. Tomboy finally stopped laughing, and decided he should take some consideration, as he got up, and went to get a busboy to come by.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael. It was now just Michael and Nikki, there at that corner of the bar.

Ah shit, she has me now!

Michael still felt way too intoxicated to get up off the pool table.

Ha! She might be able to mount me now, and I wouldn't even be able to do anything about it.

And so then, Michael tried to lift his head up, to see how it would feel. But the second he did, it began spinning like a top, so Michael plopped it back down, since he really didn't like how that felt. Continuing to lay there on top of the pool table, he heard the sound of Nikki's heels, then, clicking and clacking…

Clicking and clacking…

Clicking and clacking…!

Slowly over to him. And. Something about the sound of a woman's heels making that sound, always got Michael excited, really excited, and… a little tense, especially the louder they got.

"Are you okay? You don't need to throw up, too—do you," asked Nikki, puckering up her lips a bit.

"Nah… I ain't at that point…."

Nikki smiled.

"Yet," finished Michael.

Michael then tried to lift his head again, but this time just to look at her. She seemed… in control.

"You know, I've met a lot of girls in my life, but I can't think I've ever met anything like you before," blurted out Michael.

"Oh, how is that," pouted out Nikki, colored with intrigue.

"Well, usually, from my experience, it tends to be the guy that tries to… well—"

"Tries to what," asked Nikki, sarcastically.

Michael just smiled, and didn't respond.

Nikki then lurched over the pool table onto her stomach, and began eyeing Michael like she was full of secrets. Her feet went straight up into the air, and began rocking back and forth, while her toes played with her heels, flipping them off and on her feet like a clapper.

"Okay, you caught me, I give myself up," disclosed Nikki, with her mouth partially open, some.

Then stuck her hands out, like if giving herself up to a cop, ready to be handcuffed. Michael had a small chuckle from her playfulness.

"You're not going to deny it," asked Michael, a bit not surprised.

"No, I think I made it pretty obvious."

Never had Michael met a girl so on the offensive, as this girl Nikki was tonight.

With this girl? Wow, simply wow! Gotta say, feels really interesting to be on the other end for once.

Even in her effeminately soft-spoken ways, she carried the grace of a hunter. And Michael felt like he was in love for the first time in his life.

I am! I fucking am! I'm sorry, Roxy, but... fuck... I can't!

"So, what now," asked Michael.

"I don't know," said Nikki, nodding her head, instead of shaking it.

At this point, Tomboy came back into the frame with a busboy. He glared at Michael and Nikki on top of the pool table, and... didn't seem surprised, whatsoever.

"Well, I'm about to go on the roof to have a cigarette. If you feel like you can stand up, then come have a chat with me... I'd like that."

Nikki winked, and then left.

Michael felt torn. On one side, there was Roxanna in the restroom, probably dry heaving right about now, as Mary held her head over a toilet. And as much as he wanted to go see if she was all right, he was also pretty sure Roxanna wouldn't want him to see her in that state. One side. And on the other, there was Nikki, and Michael had a notion:

It’s only for a cigarette, just one! How much could it hurt if I was to join in?

And then thought:

Don't be gullible! You know she wants more, and you know you do, too!

Michael then pulled out a quarter, and thought:

Heads: I get the cig.

Tails: I don't!

And as he flipped it, while still on his back on that pool table, it then landed on his forehead. At first, he laughed at how horrible his motor skills had become, considering he couldn't even flip a simple coin, and catch it easily enough. But as Michael felt that quarter on his forehead, laying there, an eerie feeling went through him, that he really didn't like.

Du du du du—du du du du... stupid... !

Michael then looked at the results, and saw tails.

Fuck you! You trying to tell me that it would be a mistake if I went?

Well, fuck you! I just want a cig from her... and that's...?

Michael then thought that maybe it would be, would be a mistake. But then felt:

I don't give a shit! I want to see her.

Michael was now on the roof of the Tropic of Cancer. It had taken him a while to get to his feet, and the second he did, it felt like his head wanted to spin off his neck, and start pin-balling off the walls. The roof of the Tropic was especially decorated for unique occasions. There was wooden framework set up to roof giant orange nylon sheets, which hung and sagged all around. The area was mostly lit up with cheap decorations, since the joint was a cheap dive: with Christmas lights, and Chinese lanterns. But which, did manage to liven up the spaces with something quaint. There were also cushy couches placed about, all over, around wooden tables that had Turkish hookahs on them. Oddly enough, even on a hot Saturday night like this one, the only two people up there were Michael and Nikki. Michael then stumbled up to Nikki, who was facing away, smoking, while looking out at the Manhattan skyline.

"Hey," said Michael, simply.

And then all of a sudden, at that second, there, a gust of wind blew in, and lifted Nikki's dress up to show Michael how... she wasn't wearing any underwear.

Oh, fuck me! What was that I saw, what was that?

She has this small gap between her thighs, exposing herself,

completely. And even with her thighs together. Wow, that was beautiful! Simply beautiful! And the second when her dress blew up like that, her lips down there looked like they were practically blowing me a kiss. Fuck, I feel horny now!

“Hey,” replied Nikki, now, and Michael felt things had gone passed that, such formalities.

"I thought there would be more people up here," wondered Michael.

Oh, fuck me, I feel like that image will be burned into my memory, forever. Ha! Maybe even now burned onto my soul!

Nikki said nothing, as she handed back a cigarette, without turning around. Michael lit the cig, and wondered where to start.

"So, you and Mary are friends," asked Michael, rhetorically.

Nikki then turned, smiled at Michael, as she had been all night.

Wow, look at the expression in her eyes right now. Hungry fucking eyes—I tell you! She looks like a starving wolf. She wants sex, all right. Fuck, why couldn't I have met her before getting with Roxy? At least for one night….

No! I can't do this!

"So… you think me and Roxanna make a cute couple," asked Michael, seeing as to what her reaction would be, bringing up Roxy's name.

"I think you two are delicious."

Michael was already pretty hammered. It felt like his brains had been removed, and his skull had been topped off with all the cheap beer he’d been drinking. And, every time he moved his head, he felt it slush and splash about in there. He was already feeling very, very tipsy, so, hearing now Nikki say how the two of them looked ‘delicious’ got Michael a little too….

"Michael, you okay?"

Said Nikki, after Michael had lost his balance, and plopped back, on his ass. And was now just sitting there, unsure of how he got there.

“You’re not hurt, are you,” asked Nikki, with some concern.

But…?

“Ha… ha ha haa ha…!”

Michael then began laughing his ass off, nearly. For he felt so

hammered and horny and helpless, all at the same time, that the only thing he could do now, was that. And then all of a sudden, another gush of wind came sweeping in, as it lit Nikki's dress ablaze. Setting it on fire. Flailed and frolicked about, and as if dancing with the devil. Michael now? Felt like he could no longer keep control of the lust building up inside. As he continued to laugh, but also looked up, and said:

"So… now what?"

And with that, Nikki giggled, and with one sweeping motion, took off her entire dress. And she was now completely naked. The only items of her outfit that she was still wearing were her black heels, beige stockings, and the white pearls around her neck.

Wow, that has to be the reddest vertical smile I've ever seen. Did she spread lipstick on them, too, or something? What?

Nikki then got on all fours and began crawling her way to him. Michael…?

"Ha… ha ha haa ha…!"

Continued to laugh his ass off, as he felt as if he was getting hornier by the second. And the hornier he got, seeing the sight of Nikki now prowling around like a panther as she was, made him laugh even harder. And… seeing how Michael was reacting to her, Nikki then began reacting back, laughing herself, as she then pounced in the second she got near him. And… had her way with him.

The rest… was rapture.

And twenty minutes later, they were finished.

As Michael opened his eyes, for that second, there, he couldn't remember what had just happened. But then…?

Ah shit!

Remembered it all, and then thought:

What have I done?

They were both on a long spread out couch. Nikki was on top of him, breathing in deeply, as her sweat soaked body stroked up and down against his. And as Michael turned his head around to see if they were alone, he saw how they weren't.

Ah… shit! You gotta be….

Seeing how Roxanna was there, standing near the roof's entrance. She had her mouth wide open, also breathing deeply, trying to take in the sight of Michael's affair. She looked sullen and confused, as to what she was seeing, and seconds away from tearing up. And a second later, she did.

"Tomboy... told me... you two were up here," said Roxanna, quietly, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Fucking Tomboy!

"I guess... I should leave now."

Roxanna then slowly turned away, to head back down. And it was obvious how she was feeling, very obvious. How depressed and disgraced she felt. From everything.

“Oh... Rox—... wait...”

But then Nikki got up, and started strutting over to her. Fast.

Wait... what she doing?

She was moving fast, now, and her heels were pounding the ground, hard, stopping Michael's heartbeat, nearly, with every step. And as Roxanna noticed this, she jumped back, fearing maybe how she might be attacked.

"Wh—wh—what do you...," gasped Roxanna.

Michael then jumped up, alarmed at the thought that this Nikki girl actually might attack her. But then was awestruck with what he saw next. Once Nikki got up to Roxanna, she kissed her straight on the lips, and she didn't just kiss those lips—she fucking devoured them! Nikki moaned out loud, and now both Michael and Roxanna felt beside themselves.

Who the fuck is this girl?

"I... I... I...?"

"Shush," said Nikki, as she began feasting on her lips, again.

Roxanna then shoved Nikki away, and said:

“Wh—what are you... I don't want this!"

Nikki, on the other hand, purred a bit with her eyes, and glared a bit with her lips, as she cocked her head to one side, along with her hips, smiled, and then said:

“But I do!"

"I... I... I...?"

"Listen, baby. Don't be upset! Tonight, I didn't just make the

conscious decision to get to Michael, I also wanted you there along with him," explained Nikki, with her mouth partially open.

Roxanna took a step back.

"I wanted to fuck both your brains out."

Roxanna took another step back.

“You know, I've never had Persian before… I wonder what they taste like?”

Now it looked like Roxanna was about to turn, and run, but Nikki stuck her hand out, and began wiping away her tears. She grew a sympathetic face, and began with the voodoo:

“Don't go there. Don't go to that place in your mind, where you feel all alone and full of hurt, you don't deserve that.”

Roxanna then stopped.

"Baby, you don't need that heartache, I see that you're a very sweet and sensitive girl—such a sweetheart! And I don't want to see you go down that road and feel hurt. Don't cry," expressed Nikki.

Her eyes glimmered a bit, and Michael couldn't tell if she was just feeding Roxy what Roxy might have wanted to hear; or, she was being genuine with her, and expressing herself from a deep-down place in her own heart, that understood, and wanted to connect with Roxy. Nikki took her right hand and began wiping away the tears rolling down her face, again, and once she did, Roxanna then took a small step in her direction.

"Give in to me—please," begged Nikki, like she was aching for it.

"But… I've never," blurted out Roxanna, shivering all over from intimidation, from what she was experiencing. Feelings of appall… or… possible appeal?

"Do you think I'm pretty," asked Nikki, as she waved her hair around, a bit teasingly, and childlike, like Farrah Fawcett.

"But… I've never," blurted out Roxanna, again, as she began eyeing Nikki with some possible growing desire.

"You don't think I'm pretty," murmured Nikki, this time, making a puffy sad face.

"No… it's not… you're beautiful… but…?"

Nikki smiled, and now grew ecstatic, swooshed her hair wildly, and licked her lips.

Then centered.
Or was she centered?
Michael was now getting double vision. Seeing two Nikkis. One in red, one in blue. Like seeing things through 3d glasses. Both standing with slightly spread legs like twin triangles. Brow postured low. Slit eyes. And now, the real voodoo began:

"Well… I think you're beautiful, too."

Roxanna took another small step forward.

"You're so beautiful… the things I would do to you… if you only gave me the chance," expressed Nikki, as she forced a seductive stare into her. All hypnotic like.

And Roxy… didn't seem like Roxy… no more.

She no longer seemed like her old self. Her head strong self. And whatever magic this Nikki was doing to her, seemed like it was winning her over. Seemed as if, responsive, fully, to something only they both understood. Michael didn't know what was going on, but, maybe, something that had been going on while he hadn't been paying attention to. The entire night long, even.

Is this really happening?

Her head started swaying, then, all woozy like, as her mouth cocked open, also, a little. And now she was taking quick and short breaths, in sync with Nikki's, all together. And now her eyes were shivering along with Nikki's, too, and seeing into what was about to happen next….

What's about to happen next?

Nikki then dropped to her knees, and lifted Roxy's dress, and began trying to take off her panties. Roxanna, at first, tried to pull Nikki's hands away, but Nikki then began kissing Roxanna's hands, and sucking on her fingers, while looking up at her.

"Stop it!"

But Nikki didn't. And with that went the last fight in Roxy. As Roxy breathed out something almost tangible. Like a soul.

Like a soul?

Roxanna now stood still, and stopped trying to fight off the attempts, as she looked away. Didn't seem like she wanted to fight it anymore, as the spell became too much for her to resist.

Now, she had the panties off. And now, she waited, for Roxy to turn her head back around, and make eye contact. Anticipated for it, as she made Roxy anticipate, also.

"I… I…? We can't do—"

And now, she looked, saw herself on that end, about to be devoured. Not dog eat dog. But fish eat fish. All about the big fishes and little fishes.

"Oh!"

And now was. Roxanna had tried to hold it off as long as she could, but once she looked down, Nikki went straight in, and went to work! Roxanna, still unwilling, stared away, again, as she seemed to be trying to fade away into a world of her own, casting herself away from all this. But then, the real sensations down there slowly began creeping their way up, as Roxy was now no longer able to pretend that what Nikki was doing to her wasn't happening. Roxy's mouth began quickly opening and closing, as she began shivering like crazy. The muscle tension in her thighs began firing off like pistons pushed to their max, and her knees looked like they couldn't take it much longer and were about ready to give way.

"No… please," squirmed out Roxanna.

"But why? You're so fucking delicious," moaned out Nikki.

And with that last line, Roxanna knees buckled in, as she fell to the floor, as her engines blew out. And Roxanna was now finished! She was done! Kaput!

> Fuck me, it's like watching something stuck between cringe and ecstasy. And I didn't know the two could have anything complementary between each other, but now, I see, they do! And they're stuck. Stuck! Fucking stuck! Like Madam Tussauds wax figures fully conscious that some demonic god has stripped them naked, and put them together in extremely uncomfortable sexual positions. Fully conscious… and unable to do anything about it!

The two were now in a sexually charged world of their own, and Michael could do nothing but watch. It was obvious that this was Roxanna's first time with another woman. And, more importantly, coming to the realization that she would like it. At all. And from what Michael saw—she did! She was having a sexual revolution, right then and there, and all thanks to the woman with the devilish red dress. At first, Roxanna

didn't seem like she knew at all what she was doing, but Nikki was quick to teach. And as reluctant as Roxanna was when Nikki first made the initiative, she was now completely open to whatever experience Nikki had in store for her. She was in complete surrender, on her knees, loving and moaning to every minute of it. They were like wild animals, now, given in to their own primal needs. Michael, on the other hand, still felt beside himself on what to do or think.

...?

Thought Michael, but then Nikki stopped, turned her head around, and looked straight at him.

Ah shit! I'm next!

Nikki then turned her head back to Roxanna and told....

Ordered, practically.

For her to go sit next to him. And Roxanna... complied! And nothing else! To Michael, she now seemed like a completely different person. Before all this, Roxanna was a very independent-minded girl, boldly uninterested in the opinions and ideas of others, no matter if they were bad or good. Michael would even have the hardest time trying to convince her to try and do anything with him; even going out to shoot some pool was her idea, mostly because she knew how badly she was going to whoop Michael's ass in it. Before, Michael had to spend an hour trying to convince her to go joyriding with him on his chopper; she was being hesitant, and all, because she didn't like the idea of sitting “bitch” behind him—as she had put it. Now, there didn't seem to be an ounce of willpower left in the girl. She was like an automaton; a vegetable; she had no soul. As she sat next to Michael, her brainwashed eyes locked onto his, and looked ready for her next instructions.

Ah shit! She's like the Manchurian Candidate. Roxy, you there?

"Baby... why don't you give Michael a kiss," ordered Nikki.

Roxanna then smiled, and complied. And as excited as Michael had gotten from all this wild passion and black magic, it was also beginning to scare him shitless.

"No baby! Kiss him down there," ordered Nikki, again.

Roxanna smiled again, even more senselessly. Then she bent her head down, and did as Nikki had asked.

Just like that? You got her to...?

Double Vision.

After that night, Michael didn't see Roxy again for several days. But when he did, the first thing he noticed was how distant she seemed. After six months of being in a relationship, they seemed like strangers now, and Michael wasn't sure of what it all meant.

Whatever spell that Nikki girl had on her was no longer there, and she seemed to be herself again. But I was curious to know what she thought about the night we had.

Michael had seen her walking down the street, and as he tried to greet her, Roxy completely ignored him at first, as she walked past. Michael began to grow worried that that night must have really had a negative effect on her, once her better judgment had set back in.

Yeah. I got the feeling, also, that night that Roxy was just going along with the whole threesome thing as an effort to spare herself the heartache of what I had done, go along with it, so as to have taken part in it, also, and not have it seem as bad, having been left out. I guess? I don't know! That's the only sense I could make with her becoming that open to the whole thing. But, I do believe, it had to have done a number on her. Eventually. With it all setting in, with her really coming to terms with what she'd done... yeah!

Michael then ran up to Roxy, and called out to her:

"Roxy, I'm... I'm...?"

And now Michael got her to turn around, and react to him. Blank eyes!

"Roxy... I'm... sorry about that night, we were... and...?"

But then Roxy smiled, and shook her head, and greeted him as if though nothing had happened.

"Roxy, how do you feel about what happened, I didn't even know that girl and...?"

"Don't worry, Michael, it was just a crazy night, don't worry about me, I'm fine," responded Roxy, with a faint smile.

Michael didn't know if Roxanna was hiding how she really felt, or, if she really wasn't bothered by it at all.

"No, Roxanna, tell me the truth," pleaded Michael.

Michael then saw something bitter blow up in her face, but she then broke it off with a smile.

"Roxanna, what is it?"

Roxanna's eyes then glazed at Michael, sympathetically, they twitched for a second, and then she said:

> “Michael, I just learned my father has cancer, I'm just feeling really distraught by all that—that's all,” disclosed Roxy, as her eyes twitched a bit more.

Michael didn't know what to take from this story, but he knew from what he remembered her telling him about her father, that the man had been having some health problems, and figured it must have been true.

> “I'm sorry, Roxy, to hear that!”
>
> “It's okay, Michael!”

Michael then began to wonder if he should stick by her, and talk with her some more; help her out with what she was going through.

> “Roxanna, I've got something right now, you want us to meet later tonight,” asked Michael.

Roxanna's eyes twitched a bit more, and then she said:

> “Michael, I'm leaving for Rochester tonight to be with him.”
>
> “Okay, then I can see you when you return,” said Michael, rhetorically, even though he already knew what this was leading up to.
>
> “Maybe—Michael—maybe,” concluded Roxanna, and left.

Michael never saw Roxanna again after that. But he at least felt some relief that she wasn't as hurt as he'd feared.

Present

> I knew that that was the end of that, I knew, I just didn’t want her to be too hurt by it. After her story, after everything she’d been through. I really didn’t want it to end like that. And, at the time, I really felt the worst; a real low down dirty dog. Fuck! Like a pig! Dogs, at least, are loyal to the end. Really felt disgusted with myself, and deserving of her dumping me.

But, you didn’t exactly try to work something out after that. You said nothing about the relationship, and were hoping you wouldn’t, hoping it—

> Fine! Fine! I was hoping to have ended it, there. That whole business of what she said, what I found ‘fatal,’ that’s all true! What she said then took everything I was hoping for in our relationship, out. Just because she didn’t believe in love anymore, didn’t mean I also now had to learn how not to. I at least wanted it. Something—

magical—like that! And… here's the thing: now having thought about it, reflecting back to the six months of relationship I had with her, Roxy, even though she said she didn't want a relationship based totally on sex, that's exactly what it turned into being. And mostly because of her, not me! She's the one that turned it into that. It wasn't I. And she was the one that made the sex bland and boring, and it being better if we had just stayed friends. Actually! That's the best thing about the whole relationship I had with her, the platonic shit! And that's it. But still, it did matter a lot to me that she wasn't going to be hurt by the whole ordeal. And I'm glad she wasn't.

Was she?

I mean, if she was really bothered by everything that happened that night, she would've said something—right? I mean, when she smiled at me, then, she genuinely seemed like she wasn't disgusted by everything, and disgusted by me. I saw that in her eyes, none! No hatred for me in those eyes for what I had done. And. I know when I see hatred, or disgust, and that's not what I saw in them.

But then again…

That was the end of that. I'm guessing that night was just too much for her. Nice girl like her… getting into some really hedonistic shit like—a threesome? A fucking threesome! I mean, how could she handle it?

Michael then began to think of Nikki, again, in a new light.

Wow… can't believe I've forgotten how Nikki was when we first met.

After Michael and Roxanna went their separate ways, Michael didn't know what to think. He didn't know how to feel about that night. But… he couldn't deny how exciting it felt about this new Nikki person. At the time, Michael didn't think anything would come of it; it felt like all it was, was one crazy encounter the three of them had shared.

Great! I got 'Bizarre Love Triangle' playing in my head, again, thinking about all this.

Michael wasn't expecting to ever see Nikki again, unless through Mary.

What else could you expect from a lady in red?

But… then came the lady in blue.

Fucking double vision… great, now that fucking song!

But then, the day after he saw Roxy for the last time, Nikki was once again at the Tropic, and she was once again ogling Michael, but now in a different way. What was strange was… Nikki now seemed like a different person. Like she and Michael were meeting again for the first time. She was modest, and dressed modestly, even more so than Mary tended to. Dressed completely in blue denim, from her jacket down to her pants.

Yeah, also, she wasn't lusting after me like she was that night. She was acting completely different, like she wanted to get to know me and….

At first, meeting Nikki again sorta scared Michael, considering after what he had seen of her that night. As much as he liked what he saw, at the time, he really was missing what Roxy had to offer, even if he eventually grew weary of it. He'd fooled around plenty with girls all over town, and was wanting something much more, something he could at least expect to get out of a girl in blue.

But from a lady in red?

This new Nikki was different. And what she seemed to be wanting to offer, also seemed that way. And more aligned with what Roxy would have offered.

She seemed… happy. Smiled a lot more, and didn't have that whole contradictory thing in her eyes. Seeming all sad, but not. She now seemed… normal… well—in her own way! Normal in her own way. She still did have that hidden aspect about her that I also liked. Just so alluring.

I don't know! Nikki has always been something else.

But still, now, there seemed to be something that seriously could develop between the two. But still, also, Michael always kept the memory of that devilish red dress in the back of his mind, hoping to see it come out of her closet, now and then. But, yet again, what she was that one night at the Tropic, was something Michael wasn't sure if he could ever handle.

Something like what I saw of her, first, at 1999—huh?

Michael didn't know exactly what it all meant, but, he figured everyone had a dark side to them. Even Nikki.

Yeah, but I can still trust her!

Can you?

Shut up! She's nothing like that Flores bitch I met outside Letoya's place, she'd never use me like that! Me and Nikki? We had a moment there in the elevator, I felt it, and that's what matters. Unlike me and Roxy, we had a real thing. With Roxy, it was never going to work out, I knew that from the beginning. Nikki? I love her, I've loved her since the beginning, ever since that first second I saw her. And deeply too! For it felt like I was struck by lightning. I felt the magic! Meeting her for the first time that night, I felt like I had known her for years. Since forever! I don't give a shit if she was manipulative, vicious and intimidating back then, too. So what? Everyone has a dark side. And just because she has hers, doesn't mean that that's all there is to it. Plus, she was only that way because she just wanted some action. I've done plenty of horrible things for some action, myself. Shit I regret now. After that, she was different around me, and she was her real self. Her real self! Her real self! And not that Lady I saw tonight. Her real self! And that's that! I love her, and that's enough!

Michael then sighed.

And now thought:

Shit! I've been standing here waiting for far too long, now. I need to continue looking for those fucking Nightslashers, and hopefully—God willing—find Nikki.

But before Michael was able to start up the chopper, and start looking, he then saw a figure in the distance. Michael squinted, and then saw him better, and what he saw was….

What the hell?

Was a well-dressed man… with a bowler hat.

The Grinning Man.

The figure seemed to be out for a stroll, of all things, of all times, and of all places. And as he got closer, Michael could see he was an elderly looking gent, with a three-piece suit, and with a golden pocket watch chained to his side, and tucked away into his breast pocket.

What the hell am I seeing here?

Thought Michael. As the old fart finally reached him.

What the fuck is it with this night? With everything I've seen. And now… fucking Bilbo Baggins, here?

Fine.

Fine!

Let's see what else you got for me tonight. You the Shakespeare, here! And I'm just motherfucking poor ol' Hamlet! Trying my best to avoid getting to that whole 'to be or not to be' shit!

Thought Michael. Looking up… to the Man upstairs.

Michael now reacted:

"Pardon me—Governor—got the time," said Michael, with a terrible English accent.

Wait… did I just call him a…?

Even though he wasn't feeling it, Michael just couldn't resist throwing in that whole 'Governor' bit, sarcastically, at the end. Since the character he was seeing here, didn't seem like someone he'd expect from this part of the world, at this time, and more like some Victorian era man from merry ol' England.

"Oh—sure! It is now one o'clock, on the dot."

"Thanks."

This was definitely now the last thing Michael expected to see in the middle of Central Park, at this hour. He was a jolly ol' codger, who looked like he belonged in some antique shop, in the ones you'd see at the mall that no one entered, and, you didn't want to enter, since it sold shit that was too old to be relevant for today's commerce. Yet, the store continued to stay open, somehow. His voice had sawdust in it, but he didn't have that English accent that Michael had fancied him to. And, what was now really beginning to put Michael off about this whole thing was how leisurely he seemed to be taking things. That. And. To Michael, he also seemed very familiar; as if he knew him from somewhere.

"Excuse me," said Michael.

"Yes," asked the man, looking like some old elf with a pocket full of smiles.

"Who are you?"

"Oh… my name is Mr. Parsley. And who might you be?"

"Oh, me? I'm… Mr. Confused."

"Mr. Confused—huh."

The man now seemed a little amused with Michael's response.

"And to tell you the truth, I'm out here looking for a man named Mr. Answers. Have you seen a guy with that name? And, if you have, could you point me in his direction," asked Michael.

For… he didn't know what else to do. This was all starting to seem very off, and also a little silly. And Michael didn't know if he should play along, or, should take it as seriously as he should be taking it. The old codger stood there grinning for a bit, and then responded:

"Mr. Answers—eh? Well, I'm afraid I couldn't tell you. Maybe, if you could describe to me what he looks like, I might be of more help."

Madboy was now beginning to grow fed up of this man, and his hickory-dickory bullshit. He now figured him out as some senile ol' cuck, completely oblivious to where he was, and how much danger he was in. But something else about the man made Michael also think different.

"Well, the person I'm looking for is dressed in a big, red, hooded cloak. He carries a scythe, and likes to eat yuppies' and little babies' faces for breakfast. Have you seen such a man," asked Michael, starting up the wise talk, just to see how this Mr. Parsley would respond to it.

"Oh—I'm sorry! I can't say that I have. But, if you'd like, you could accompany me, and maybe we could find this feller together?"

Who the fuck…?

Michael felt clueless. He didn't know what to make of The Grinning Man. For, he wasn't responding in a sensible way to the things Michael was saying, whether Michael was being jokey about it or not. For, Mr. Parsley was taking things—too leisurely. And, his level of calm and comfort was making Michael feel very un-calm and uncomfortable. But Michael felt helpless on what to do now, and figured he might as well follow him along a little, and see where the man would lead him.

I can still take him out, if the fucker tries anything weird.

And. Now. The man was moving in a snail's pace, which got Michael to get off his chopper, and have him pulling it along beside him to keep the same pace.

"Excuse me?"

"Yes," asked the man, as he stopped to look back.

"No—no—no! Let's walk and talk—walk and talk—keep moving!"

The two continued….

Where the fuck is he leading me? And why am I following him, again?

And now he seemed to want to go off trail, as he started heading towards where the woods were at their thickest and darkest. And seeing as how haunting they were, the woods ahead looking like they were bearing eyes, and teeth, and sinister ideas, Michael decided to stop.

"Okay, I'm not interested in playing anymore games, and, I'm not going any further. I just want to know who you are, and, what are you doing out here in the middle of the night," asked Michael, earnestly.

"Well, I guess I could be asking you the same question," responded The Grinning Man.

"Yes, I understand that, but… I don't know, Mr. Parsley. You see… I know where I'm at right now… I'm just curious to know if you do, too."

"Well, this is Central Park—isn't it?"

"Yes! You're right, but—"

"Don't always believe what you hear, Mr. Connelly."

That was it. Michael had had enough of The Grinning Man, and his tomfoolery. Either he had heard him calling out his full name earlier, or, he damn well knew something. And now Michael felt like dealing with this gent, like his old self would, very uncouth and uncivilized like.

"Okay—stop," demanded Michael.

"Yes?"

"Who the hell are you—really? And how are you connected to The Nightslashers," asked Michael.

"How am I connected to whom?"

Michael pulled out Radboy's revolver, and began pointing.

"You damn well know the group of jerk-offs I'm talking about. The Nightslashers! The nutcases that live in this park, and prey on unsuspecting—"

"As I said, Mr. Connelly… don't always believe in everything you hear."

And then all of a sudden, with those lines, Michael now found himself in the middle of an ambush. From within the woods, and the

surrounding mist and shadows, swarmed out the men of the hour. All dressed the part, yet, carrying no scythes. They were all around him; numbering what seemed to be in the hundreds. And all Michael could think was how so many men could have snuck up on him, all at once.

"Okay—so? What was that you said, Mr. Parsley? Don't believe everything you hear? Then what's this," asked Michael, too afraid to know how afraid he had now become.

Mr. Parsley said no words. And made no movements. Anymore. And was now just standing there, smiling, like some troll turned to stone.

"Hey—I'm talking to you," called out Michael.

"Mr. Connelly?"

It was one of the men in cloaks. Now. And he was a heavy-set figure, with a pointy beard, which was all Michael could make out of his face underneath the hood.

"So… who the hell are you," asked Michael.

"I'm Mr. Sage," responded he.

"Okay… Mr. Sage? Mind telling me what you guys want?"

Mr. Sage didn't continue.

"What—didn't you hear me?"

Michael looked back at Mr. Parsley, who was now practically a statue, still grinning from ear to ear. It was as if the old Rip Van Winkle had become part of the scenery; had fallen into another hundred-year slumber, or so.

"So, Mr. Connelly, what do you plan on doing with that gun," asked Mr. Sage.

Oh, fuck me! Shits getting weird… just keep holding the gun at them all, and maybe, I can find a way out of this.

Thought Michael, and then said:

"I don't know? Shoot down as many of you as I can. Then, beat the fuck out of the rest of you with my own fists. How does that sound?"

Ah fuck! I really gotta stop going off of autopilot like that with my responses, how the fuck am I going to do all that?

Mr. Sage couldn't help but make a few laughs, and shake his head.

"Mr. Connelly, that revolver can only carry six bullets, and there are forty-three of us out here. Do you really plan on firing off those shots, and then taking on the thirty-seven of us left with your

barehands," asked Mr. Sage.

"Actually, there's only five bullets left in this gun, so I'm going to have to put my hands on only the thirty-eight of you that's left," explained Michael.

Okay, enough with the Dirty Harry shit!

Michael then forced a chuckle, a demented chuckle, trying to make it sound all deranged, as if to show how seriously wacko he was willing to get with them. One psycho not to be messed with. Mr. Sage's face had now grown dead sober.

"So, you're really willing to kill again, Michael? With the night you've had, I don't think you would want to make any more enemies. I mean, how much more jeopardy do you want to put yourself in," asked Mr. Sage, and then smirked contradictorily.

Wait a second?

They knew about him and the killing of Radboy, Michael didn't expect this, and he now understood that they really weren't the men from the crazy stories he had heard. Those Nightslashers, Michael didn't expect them to be this well informed about things, or even intelligent enough to speak.

"Okay, so if you guys aren't The Nightslashers, then… then who are you," asked Michael, growing frustrated.

For some reason, I feel like I'd rather be dealing with those Looney Tune characters, than these guys. For these guys, here, seem a lot more formidable.

"Oh, so you don't think we're The Nightslashers anymore," asked Mr. Sage.

"Well, from what I've heard—word of mouth and all—you guys were supposed to be a bunch of real demented and deranged nut-bags, reclusive freaks all into some wacky occult shit… and yet you know who I am, and the night I've had," explained Michael.

"Oh, good! You're intelligent," responded Mr. Sage.

"What," gasped Michael, unwilling to have them think that.

"I mean, it's nice to see you're capable of rational thought."

"Sorry, but you really got me all wrong, there," explained Michael.

"So, you're not intelligent?"

"Nope, not really. Actually, I'm really fucking dumb! So, don't build any expectations thinking I will be all civil like, now, and—"

“No, Mr. Connelly, that’s what you’d like us—and maybe even yourself—to think. But we know that you're actually very intelligent. You know what’s at stake here, and we believe you wouldn't be stupid enough to just start firing away before coming to a rational decision,” explained Mr. Sage, as he drove his point across.

“Really? Me? Brains,” joked Michael.

I don't want them to think that way. As long as they believe I might start shooting, they might be more willing to cooperate.

“Yes. You. Brains! You can play the role of the brawling idiot all you want, as a means to justify your actions, and your sins. But we know everything there is to know about you, and if you've heard of The Nightslashers, I think you might have also heard of us,” said Mr. Sage, as he lifted his cloak up a bit, exposing his eyes.

“Come again? I'm supposed to know you ugly old dodgers—how,” asked Michael.

“Mr. Connelly? Do you know the French words for a forgotten place,” asked Mr. Sage, which surprised Michael that the man knew he knew French.

A French word for a forgotten place… you mean…?

And once Michael thought of the word, it then came to him, as he now knew exactly who these men were, and the sort of men he was dealing with.

The Oubliettes.

They're The Oubliettes!

Also, he just now recognized where he had seen Mr. Parsley’s face before, for this was the judge that had sentenced him to prison, all those years ago. And by some strange coincidence, here he was, again, standing with the rest of his organization.

“You're The Oubliettes,” responded Michael, while pointing with his revolver.

Mr. Sage smiled, and nodded to show accordance. From what little Michael knew about them, their stories were the stuff of urban legend. They were a group of judges who had decided to take the law into their own hands. And had delved into some real occult like shit, getting involved with mysticism, and magic. And magic of the dark kind.

What a night… what a night! And the fucked-up part is I sorta asked for this, too.

From what Michael was seeing of their robes and strange aliases, now, it was apparent that the tall tales he had been hearing for years about them weren't too far off. Just about everyone on the East Coast had heard of them, and most had made them out to be heroes of the common folk. Besides being made out to be anything more than modern day Robin Hoods equivalents would be.

Yeah, that's right: robbing the rich and giving to the poor, shit.

The story being: their deal being all about victimizing all the rich assholes of the city with the biggest wallets. The Fifth Ave bunch. And through blackmail and extortion.

And if that didn't work out, they'd kidnap them, and have them flogged, or flayed, or stuck with red hot pokers, in some medieval dungeon under the Bronx.

What? I'm not making this up!

Still, supposedly, they were to be heroes for the likes of Michael. But Michael, then again, felt no inclination to buy into them right now, now that he knew who they were. Not just yet. For. He had a bad feeling about all this.

Yeah, I fucking hate Reaganomics too, but these guys? I mean, I'm right now dealing with a bunch of guys in cloaks, in the middle of the woods, at midnight. Would anyone blame me if I did?

"Okay, so now I know who you guys are. What do you want me to do, repent," asked Michael, worrying about whatever wacko occult shit their outfit must have detailed.

That's all I need right now, getting dragged underground, and having to deal with some temple of doom, shit. Or wickerman shit. Or… I don't know what! Me with my stupid understanding, all I got is mindless popcorn movies to fill in the details, and something tells me the real shit would be way more horrifying to imagine.

"No! It's not going to be as simple as that, I'm afraid," responded a third figure stepping forward.

His face was as pale and crusted as the moon from very old age.

"Okay, who are you now," asked Michael, wondering how many more of them he was going to be addressing tonight, personally.

"I'm Mr. Rosemary."

“Right! Well, it’s nice meeting all of you folks, but, I’m still not sure what you guys want. If you guys think letting me know who you all are is supposed to impress me—forget it! I ain't buying whatever you guys might be selling.”

Michael then spat on the ground, showing dismissal.

“Mr. Connelly, you can underestimate us all you want, but it’s not going to make things any easier for—”

Bang!

Michael had fired a round off into the air.

“Well, now I guess I’m down to four bullets,” said Michael, as he grinned, seeing how startled they got from the discharge.

Now you guys get it! I ain't fucking—

“That’s a pity, because I still haven't fired my gun, that’s still holding six. Even though all I need is one to take care of you,” said another Oubliette, standing behind Michael.

Michael felt the barrel of a gun up against the back of his head.

Who the—

“So—who are you now,” asked Michael, as he began to lose his stripes.

“I’m Mr. Thyme.”

Michael had been outplayed. He didn't think any of the men in cloaks would be packing, and now, Michael really did feel stupid getting stuck in this situation.

“So, Mr. Connelly, what do you have to say now,” asked Mr. Rosemary.

“Um… I guess I can at least cap Mr. Sage over there off, before—”

“You really want to die right now, Mr. Connelly,” asked Mr. Rosemary, again.

Michael didn't respond.

“Mr. Connelly, what's wrong… no more wisecracks? And you were doing so well a second ago.”

“No, I’m fresh out… and… I'm starting to get tired.”

And Michael really was that, feeling very distraught and discouraged, of everything! He was now realizing these guys weren’t exactly the Cockskulls or Beefcakes he was used to. None of the good ol’ gangs he’d

step up to, with his fists, and have them be enough. Michael felt out of his league, now, here, and missing his buddies. These guys were definitely a helluva lot more formidable, and it would have probably been better if he didn't start off by pointing a gun at them.

"Well, Mr. Connelly, if it's any consolation, if you're wondering what we're here for, it has little to do with killing you."

"So, what is it then," asked Michael.

"Well, let's first start off by you telling us something that you might know about a man named Mr. Dorian."

Michael said nothing. He found it strange that these men would know The Big White Head by his real name, and that they would think he would too. And began to wonder what connection they had with him. And from there on, with Nikki. And now, Michael also wondered what information he should give out, without giving away too much.

I don't even know what would be giving away too much, I got no bases, here. And, what danger I'd be putting myself, and Nikki, in, by doing so.

"Who," asked Michael, playing it dumb.

I don't know, how they know, I know the guy. But they might be testing to see if I do… so, it's best that I seem like I don't. Does that make sense?

The Oubliettes then looked at each other.

"Okay… what do you know about The Big White Head," asked Mr. Thyme… or was it…?

"The Big White Head… what do you want me to say about him? He's a nutcase that wants to start anarchy in the city, and he's been all over the television," responded Michael.

"Is that all?"

And now, Michael felt like it was time to put some serious thought into figuring out what the fuck was going on here. And what this whole confrontation was about, really, before saying anything else.

Okay, so, it's like this:

These guys want me to say something about Mr. Dorian. So, that means, they think I might know something. Which means, they knew I was at 1999, with Nikki. So, they know everything.

But… how did they know?

Are they with Mr. Dorian, did he tell them about me?

No, they can't be! If they were, they wouldn't be asking me about him. Since they'd be with him and would know….

But, if they're not with him, again, how do they know?

Michael wasn't sure of that. But he was at least sure of one thing now, and that was they couldn't have been with Mr. Dorian.

Or I'm missing out on something, and they still could… maybe they're only leading me on to think they don't…?

Shit! This is getting confusing!

"So, what do you guys want to know about The Big White Head that you don't know already," asked Michael.

"Actually, we're not entirely sure. Why don't you just start from the beginning, and we'll tell you if the information you have is worth our attention."

Michael wasn't even sure who was talking anymore. Mr. Rosemary? Mr. Sage? Michael was right now confusing himself with all his own thoughts, so now, these guys had all become a mixed bag for him, and Mr. Parsley still hadn't moved an inch.

Okay, so, it's like this:

What's going to happen if I give away too much info? Are they gonna kill me? Are they gonna kill Nikki? I mean, that's all that matters to me right now, if I give away….

But then Michael thought about how giving away too much info might get all those people at that building killed, with the bomb.

I don't have time to worry about that right now! Right now, my priorities are me and Nikki.

So….

What's gonna get me and Nikki killed?

And once again, how do they know about all this?

Right now, the only people that knew about what happened at the 1999 building was me, Mr. Dorian, and… ah shit!

But then all of a sudden, a really scary thought occurred to Michael, coming to terms with who that insider person of The Oubliettes might be.

Ah shit! What if she's with them? But then, I'm with her, so… why am I having this conversation with them now? Unless…?

It was all in Nikki's intent for Michael to be put through—

That's not possible!

What's the rationale that it wouldn't be possible, Michael?

The rationale is: what fucking point would having me questioned by these clowns now serve if she was with them, having them put me through all this? I only know as much as only Nikki would, since she's the one that filled me in on all this. I'm the new guy, here, fresh faced nobody. What the fuck would I have to do with all this crap, about Mr. Dorian, about the bomb? What?

"So, what do you have for us, Mr. Connelly?"

"I got nothing," cried Michael.

This was all starting to feel like being stuck between a rock and a hard place. On one end, being questioned by them, and on another end, questioned by his own uncertainties. And feeling stuck there, Michael was beginning to enter into fight or flight mode.

"I got nothing! And! I'm starting to get tired of the charades you assholes are playing, here, and I'm not interested in talking to you people anymore," responded Michael, and felt done.

I don't wanna give away too much info!

"Mr. Connelly, please!"

"Stop calling me Mr. Connelly," barked out Michael, growing more irritated by the second.

"Ask yourself, Michael, is the information you really have worth risking your life over," asked… one of them, again.

"What about Nikki?"

Michael felt it was about time he should mention her, and see what their reactions would be; to see what they might say in regards to her. Obviously, if they knew of his involvement with what happened at the 1999 building, then they definitely had to know about hers.

"What about her?"

"Why don't you guys tell me something about the Lady, and I might tell you something about The Big White Head," explained Michael.

The judges didn't respond.

"You schmoes can play games all you want, but I'm just here looking for her. So, if you want answers… well…?"

And now something occurred to Michael.

Ah shit! Maybe she really is with them?

Michael just now remembered catching Nikki on a lie, when he asked her if anyone else knew about the situation at 1999. Michael was now beginning to figure that these Oubliettes, here, might have been them. And therefore…

She would be with them, also!

"I don't know, how about—you guys—start from the beginning," said Michael, spinning their line right back at them.

Michael wanted to know why Nikki was hiding them. Also. How she would be involved with them.

No—Nikki—baby—please tell me that you didn't fall this far down the rabbit hole, getting involved with men like these. I mean, even if you did, why would you have them questioning me, now, as they are? What purpose would this serve? What the fuck info do I got about all this crap that even you would want? You…?

And then, a really terrifying thought went through Michael.

No, no, no… they're not just here to off me, by her wishes. No! That's definitely not…?

That fucking bitch—Lady—this is all her doing!

"You're wondering if she's with us," guessed… one of them.

And Michael now freaked:

Fuck! How the fuck do they know I'm worried about that? Are they mind readers, too, or something?

"What if we were to say that she is?"

Michael didn't respond. But noticed something else now:

Look at how they're grinning at me. They know this is fucking with me… they know! So, that would mean…?

Michael now understood, these cloaked figures were still just testing him. And mostly, trying to spread his line of thought into any direction; from fear that they might have her as a hostage; or, fear that Nikki might be a part of them, even so far as to have them kill Michael now, now that she was through with his usefulness. The less they said, the more Michael thought, and was left feeling afraid and confused.

Fucking judges! They got me on trial, and they're trying to get me to spill the beans, and I don't even know what that is.

But then Michael came to terms with something.

Okay, so, it's like this:

Obviously, they're asking me questions because they think I might have information that they'd need. If they were here to just kill me, they would have done that already. That at least is obvious. What that information is… I don't know! But Nikki wouldn't have any part in this because everything I know, she knows, since she's the one that introduced me to all this. So, even if she's somehow connected to them, she's at least not involved with them now trying to get me to say something. And she's definitely—definitely! Hasn't asked them to off, me, 'cause that would have happened already.

And Michael felt very relieved coming to that realization.

But… still, what info do they need from me? The only thing I really learned was how there's a bomb… and…!

And now, Michael figured, that that was all they had to be really interested in: The bomb.

Okay.

And then, Michael realized something important:

So, what if I mention something about the bomb? It really doesn't have anything to do with me. Any info about the bomb, or Mr. Dorian… none of that's important. And what threat would it be to me… and Nikki's… if I mentioned it? If they know this much about my involvement, then they most definitely know about hers—also! As I've already concluded. And. Since the only thing I'm right now interested in, besides getting out of this mess alive, is finding out about what they know about Nikki, maybe, I can use whatever knowledge they—think—I know as leverage?

"Michael?"

Michael looked up, made a coy smile, and now felt like he was ready to play their charades a little while longer. And now said:

"Daisy Cutter."

And nothing more. And… The Oubliettes then just looked at each other; seeing as how Michael was trying to play their game.

"You see, Mr. Connelly, you're intelligent. All that time spent in prison educating yourself has really paid off."

How the fuck do they know all this much? Do they have prison records of me—there—at hand?

And what was getting to him was how much they knew of his story,

compared to how little he knew of theirs. And what they knew were stuff that mattered to Michael, on a very personal level. Especially now, since it was info that Michael still wasn't sure how he felt about. Stuff he was still in the process of processing. And hadn't yet built a resolve he felt he could feel fit to carry. For, for the info they had about him was about the time, there, Michael had really tried to better himself. In prison. Into being something more than a has-been boxer, or some motorcycle thief.

> Fuck the shit I'm into now. And… in a way… fuck this whole wanting to be my old self… shit. Since, it's done nothing but gotten me into all this mess. Becoming a murderer! Before all this….

When his release date came, back some eight months ago, Michael had other plans. Plans he'd been building up for the entire time he was in there.

> I didn't spend all those years thinking about going hog wild like I have once I got out. No!

During those years, Michael was all about preparing himself for a new life: obeying to the will of civilized society and reasoning, and living the modest life, as everyone else was.

> Kinda like what Gab said about being in my thirties, and how maybe I should grow the fuck up, and stop trying to be my old self.

But. Instead. Here he was. Now. Since not having listened to any of that better reasoning. Now a murderer. Now running around in the woods, at night, dealing with weirdos like these. And looking for a coked-up madwoman he was now in love with, while possibly trying real hard to get himself killed in the process, just to escape having to go back to prison, if and when he was to get caught again. Michael then looked down at his mitts, and saw how they were still making him feel sick to his stomach, ever since they started talking to him all weird. With that…

> Stop thinking it was demonic… it wasn't demonic… okay!
>
> "Yeah, but I'm still a fucking moron, though! So if you ask me, all that I tried to do for myself in prison still went to waste," expressed Michael, succumbing to those feelings of self-pity he had been saving up for.
>
> "No—we wouldn't say that!"

And now Michael came back center, seeing how spread open he was at center stage, with all these weirdos around watching.

“What are you guys trying to do now, make me feel better?”
Michael laughed a bit at the thought, as the Halloween gang continued standing there, grinning like they were growing amused with Michael’s woes in life. Like a canary continuing to chirp inside the mouth of a cat; as warm as it felt inside, that inside place was not a safe place—whatsoever!

“You guys want the codes—don’t you,” let out Michael.
As it started to click for him, what they might be really after. Getting a sense of the bigger picture.

“Good—Mr. Connelly—very good!”

“Why?”
The Oubliettes didn't respond. But Michael then understood it didn’t matter. Since. They had already given him the answer to the only question he really had in mind: Nikki’s involvement. It really just now dawned on him that if they wanted the codes, then there was no way Nikki had sided with them, or was with them as a hostage. Sine they would be dealing with her directly right now and not Michael over the codes.

And I guess what that means is: what they’re really asking me about is, what I know about her whereabouts. Since, what they’re looking for is the codes. Since, they now need my help to find her. And that’s why they’re asking me all these questions, and playing these mind games. That’s why!

They had just given away the only answer to the one true question Michael was concerned with, and it was a relief.

“Well, if you guys are keeping me up expecting me to know those codes, then you're all wasting your time,” explained Michael.

“Come on, Mr. Connelly! The Lady must have told you something.”

“What? Didn’t I make it clear, I don’t know, and why would Nikki give away such info, and to me,” exclaimed Michael.

“All right, we can understand that! But you must know something about where we can find her now. Where were you two headed while you were being chased by Mr. Dorian’s men?”

Can't tell them we were going to Harlem.

“We were getting out of town,” lied Michael.

“And?”

“And… what? If she isn’t here, then she could be anywhere by now,

so why ask me," lashed out Michael.

"If you and Ms. Jackson were heading out of Uptown, then why didn't you take any of the bridges and tunnels that were near the financial district? Why travel all the way north?"

Even though Michael at least felt somewhat relieved that Nikki wasn't in their hands, or involved with them, he knew it wouldn't be long before they'd find out the whereabouts of her location, by themselves. They seemed to have a knack for retrieving information, one way or another, and Michael needed to do something before they lost their interest in keeping him around.

"Mr. Connelly, we didn't hear an answer."

You know, I'm kinda curious… whatever happened to…?

"So, whatever happened to those Nightslashers I heard so much about," asked Michael, as he smiled.

No response.

"I mean—really? They don't exist—at all? It's just you dorks? Did you guys just make them up to scare off pricks like me from entering your woods," asked Michael, as he then realized he pretty much answered his own question.

Make up a bunch of bull about deranged nutbags in cloaks with scythes, to scare off pricks like me. Makes sense!

Mr. Parsley had now finally moved; he was no longer grinning like an idiot in Michael's direction; he was now frowning.

"Oh—there you are, Mr. Parsley. For a second there I thought you'd had a heart attack, and petrified in place," sassed Michael.

"Mr. Connelly, you're now beginning to waste our time, and we're afraid if you can't prove to be any more value to us, we are unfortunately going to have to let you go," replied Parsley.

Michael felt like making more jokes, it was making him feel better.

"You know, you guys could have at least kept the scythes. I mean, I know this might sound strange, but, I was kinda hoping to see a whole mess of raving lunatics chasing me around. Waving around scythes, like a bunch of dumb-ass ghouls, while Benny Hill soundtrack played on the side. At least for the sake of entertainment."

"Mr. Connelly…!"

The tin man was finally moving, and speaking, now that Michael had

oiled him up with his usual charm.

"Fuck you guys—fuck you all! How about you guys take off those stupid KKK looking hoods, and show me who you assholes really are," demanded Michael.

"So, is that your final word, Mr. Connelly?"

Michael needed to say something. Anything! Mr. Thyme—or was it Mr. Sage? Was still holding a gun to the back of his head, and Michael wasn't just ready to see his brains fly out before his eyes.

"No! She's in Washington Heights," blurted out Michael, as he eyed each one of their faces to see if they bought it.

"Where in Washington Heights?"

"Honestly, I forgot the street name, but I know the place by sight. So maybe if I come along, I can show you the place," said Michael. Yeah, that's good! Now they have to take me along, and I might be able to figure out a way to make an escape by then.

Michael took a big gulp, as he saw some of them shaking their heads. It was becoming apparent to Michael that The Oubliettes knew he was downright lieing to them. But. They didn't seem too bothered by it, and strangely enough, they seemed to be interested in playing along with his ruse.

"Okay, Mr. Connelly, I guess you're coming to Washington Heights with us. But you do know what will happen if we find out you've been lieing to us—right?"

This was all Mr. Parsley now speaking to Michael.

Fucking sadist! I don't know, maybe—

"You'll rip off my head, and shit down my neck," guessed Michael, as he grinned apprehensively.

Mr. Parsley then had a faint laugh to himself, as if though he was entertaining the idea, and then said:

"I don't know, I think we can be a little bit more creative than that."

The Bad Seed.

"So, Mr. Connelly, I have to say, I'm sorta curious about something," said Mr. Parsley.

"Don't call me Mr. Connelly, I think we passed formalities after you guys threatened me with violence, ripping my head off and—"

"Michael, those were your words—not ours!"

Michael looked up at Mr. Parsley with the thought of strangling him with the chain from his pocket watch, and then said:

"Don't call me Michael, either!"

Mr. Parsley, The Grinning Man, was once again doing his thing with Michael, and simply grinning at him. And nothing else. And. It seemed as if that's all there was to him. And that was what was really scaring Michael the most.

Since that is what I'm sure he'd like me to think.

The grin was a way to hide his real intent, his real agendas. And just how sinister they were, could only be understood with how lively and devilishly, the devil, here, would now be grinning at him. And unfortunately for Michael, a villain like Mr. Parsley was one type he didn't have much experience with. So just how villainous he really was… could only be left to the imagination.

And my imagination right now is going wild trying to figure this guy out.

But, one thing Michael was sure of, was, this guy, Mr. Parsley, here, was definitely one of the Lizard People. So, he was two-faced. And a real scaly bastard that would either try to play it dumb, not play it dumb, or even worse yet, try to play it all sympathetic like, trying to tempt Michael, not through rationale, but through his emotions. As if he would be wanting to side with Michael, and not be enemies.

But unlike Stumpy, I don't see this guy mentioning my father a half dozen times to win me over. So, now, let's see what this Lizard is going to try and tell me, to try and win me over. Or worse. Scare me over. With. He's looking at me now in a way, and it's worrying me! Making me afraid of what he's got to say… what type of offer he'll have… that I won't be able to refuse.

It was just The Grinning Man, and Michael, now. The two men were in a van headed for Washington Heights. The rest of The Oubliettes had stayed behind. It was just Michael and Mr. Parsley, now, and an escort of some merc looking guys in ski masks.

Me, The Grinning Man, and these guys, here.

And they were a bulky bunch of mercs that Michael figured to be The Oubliettes' muscle. These were definitely no Beefcakes, considering they were armed and looked to be well trained. And wouldn't be fashioning such colorful names like 'Beefy Chesty' and 'The Pink

Gorilla'.

They gotta be bought out IRA from the sound of it….

Since when they spoke to each other, Michael could make out that it was in Irish. And Irish Gaelic, the actual language, and not just the accent spoken in English.

I had a cousin, or, my dad did, who I had heard speak it once.

And that was enough for Michael, having heard it then, to recognize the language now.

"Michael, I have to say… I'm a little confused about something."

And now Michael sensed how Mr. Parsley had readied himself, to say something to him, to—really—get his attention. Michael kept to himself. As Mr. Parsley, on the other hand, glazed at him. All nonthreatening and non-demanding like. As if, he had something candid to say to him now. Which then really made him out to be very demanding and very threatening.

"I'm just wondering… what were you doing at 1999, and why were you looking for Mr. Cucchi," asked Mr. Parsley.

"It's not important."

Oh, please, don't bring up more about Radboy. I'm through with that whole deal now.

"If it's not important, then why did you push him through the 53rd story window of that building, to fall to his death? Seems as if though the business that you had with him was at least very important to you."

Michael had been sizing up the van, trying to figure if there was any way to make an escape. But, as Mr. Parsley began talking about the matter that happened with Radboy, Michael then couldn't help but to start giving him some more of his attention.

Since they know I was the one that killed him, and since they judges, part of this city's judicial system, this don't look so good to me.

"Well, it was important to me. But now that he's dead, it doesn't matter anymore, so there you go," responded Michael.

"You still killed a man."

"Yeah, and I'm guessing you're still supposed to be a law upholding judge—so—what you getting' at?"

"Michael, why are you protecting the Lady," asked Mr. Parsley,

with his old grin.

And what was worse, Michael now realized, was, how much he—definitely—didn't want to hear what this grinning asshole would have to say about Nikki.

Fuck this guy and his pokerface! I can't read him for shit! He's nothing like Stumpy, either, I could tell that buttery fuck was lieing to me with most of the shit he had to say. But, I can't tell shit with this guy. Whether his shit will be, or won't be, a lie. Might lie to buy me over. Or worse, might try to tell me the straight up truth, to do the same.

"What do you mean… me protecting Nikki," asked Michael, as he began to reinforce his pokerface.

And the fucked-up part is: as good as he's been holding up his, I really haven't even been holding up mine, at all! This entire time. Fuck me and my 'wearing my heart on my sleeve' ways! I'm pretty sure he's read me inside and out by now… so… is it too late to be holding one up now?

"Michael, we know you're lieing to us."

Michael didn't respond.

"We know you're lieing, but what I am curious is to why."

"If you guys think I'm lieing, then what are we still doing going to Washington Heights," asked Michael, as his eyes widened over Mr. Parsley's, as if he said something clever to put the Lizard off.

"Well, that's because we're not going to Washington Heights. We're going to Harlem, to pay your friends, Le Bron, and his Nim Fo Matics, a visit, and to see if she's there," responded Mr. Parsley, as his gaze widened bigger, letting Michael know, a Cat has nothing over a Lizard in the 'clever' department.

And Michael, now, almost felt like he was about to cough up a lung hearing that. But kept up his pokerface (or really! His sorry excuse for one), and decided not to speak.

"Yes, son, we know!"

I love how all old people always make you out to be their kids.

"And… we knew this since you came to us."

Michael had no choice but to keep his mouth shut, and continue listening.

"Michael… may I please ask you again, why are you protecting her?

Because it seems to me as if...."

And now, Mr. Parsley had cut himself off in mid-sentence. And now, it seemed as if he wanted a response from Michael. And, the only thing Michael could think to say was:

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about. But, if we're headed for Harlem, then you're only fucking yourself over, because like I told you—"

"She's using you, Michael! That's what the Lady does," mentioned Mr. Parsley, while slowly shaking his head.

Michael didn't respond.

"Michael, you've been away for a very long time, you know? She's not the same person that you used to remember. I mean, how do you think she even rose to such power, hailed as the Lady of New York?"

And then all of a sudden, Mr. Parsley edged his face up, close, almost an inch away from Michael's own, and doing so, seeming like he wanted to get down to his level, to force some real sense into him. And then said:

"Michael, ask yourself this...

how many cocks do you think she had to suck, to get to where she has?"

What?

And there it was! Right there! Everything Michael dreaded having to listen to coming from this man. There it was. Now. Laid out for him in the open.

You....

Now. Having heard a line like that, had Michael looking over in total disgust. For. Mr. Parsley had now done it! Gone too far. And had spoken about the one thing that Michael was absolutely dreading to hear in the recesses of his mind being spoken about.

And worse yet!

Mr. Parsley had done it by having shifted his vocabulary around, in order to speak to Michael, directly; in the language he would understand, and absolutely loath hearing coming from a prissy old fuck-faced codger like him. Seeing such a contradiction of character and

of words being mixed in together with.

Shit, I don't want to think about this stuff! Why are you telling me these things?

Ain’t it obvious, Michael? It’s because that’s exactly what you—wouldn’t—want him to be ever—

Shut the fuck up! You! I already got this antagonist, here, to worry about. I don’t need my own narrating thoughts antagonizing me now, as well.

I ain’t antagonizing! I ain’t your enem—

Shut the fuck up!

"I'm sorry, Michael, I can see how much this is affecting you….”

Shit, my pokerface! Put it back up!

“But….”

And now, Mr. Parsley had Michael wait for it. Again.

“The tale of the Lady… goes much further than that. Her. And that Radboy lackey of hers. Having pretty much spent the last decade scheming and murdering their way to the top," explained Mr. Parsley.

Radboy lackey?

“Actually, I do know, Mr. Parsley, and that's why I'm telling you, she's in Washington Heights, and…."

Mr. Parsley had now buried his face in his hands, as he held back some snickering, to the amusement of Michael's further attempt at a ruse. And at this point, Michael now understood there was no reason to continue lieing to him, and worse yet.

Me, lieing to myself.

Because, now, Michael felt more interested in hearing what else Mr. Parsley had to say about the Lady.

"You see, Michael, your Nikki just isn't a nice person anymore. And with Mr. Dorian, she had finally gotten in over her head. And, I guess with you, she needed some… dumb lug… to get her out of a jam."

And it was now that it happened, was now that Michael lost it.

"How do you know all this—huh? How do you know about Nikki and me? How do you know about Mr. Dorian and his plans? Why did you spend that whole entire damn time back in Central Park pointlessly playing mind games with me, if you already had your

answer? And, if you don't need me around anymore, what am I doing here?"

Michael had lost all of his composure. And his game. For, there was no need to keep up a pokerface, anymore, since, his lousy hand had already been revealed. Mr. Parsley had him now, pinned and ready. He knew it. Michael knew it. And there was no point jerking around the topic any longer.

"Michael, we don't want to kill you. I know you don't have the best impressions of us. But we have our motives. And we're not interested in killing someone that would be willing to still help us out. I mean, how do you think we have these men working for us?"

One of the mercs then blurted out something in Irish, that sounded vulgar and offensive. Both Michael and Mr. Parsley then looked at him, abruptly, and then went back to eyeing each other.

Sounds like working for you pricks isn't as promising as you want to make it out to be.

"I believe we can find a mutual means of helping one another, Michael. You see, we still need you because, even though my men are up for the task, we'd rather avoid having to make a full-frontal assault into the Nim Fo Matic building," explained Mr. Parsley.

"So, what do you want me to do? Head in and draw her outside," asked Michael, as he felt the man was putting words into his mouth.

He's really trying to get me to turn on her. Well, I'm not going to turn on her! She's not using me as some dumb lug to....

"We just want to do business with her. Nothing else. But to answer that question—yes! That's exactly what we'd like for you to do."

Up until now, Michael had been playing out the scenario in his head, that most of the Lady in question—who and what she was—had a lot to do with Radboy. Him making her out to be that way. Michael was willing to accept her as the manipulative sort; seeing her tonight, and remembering that first night at the Tropic, confirmed it was so. But everything in him wanted to refuse to admit that what she did wasn't being influenced by some outside force.

No—baby—please! I rather see you as being pitiful, and misled, than being entirely guilty of all this. I mean... how could you be capable of all this? Murdering and scheming your way to the top?

You're not capable of mur—

And then, Michael remembered how easily she had gunned down those three Iron Monkeys, in that lobby of the 1999's; so easily been able to dispatch three men; something Michael couldn't even allow himself to do back where he was facing the closest thing to a real devil, himself.

But… Nikki murdering her way to the top?

Michael didn't want to accept it; Mr. Parsley had to still be lieing to him. In some sorta way….

Mr. Parsley, here, is still coming off as one deceitful untrustworthy bastard, anyways! So… why should I listen to him? So what if she gunned those three men down? I should have done that with Mr. Dorian when I had the chance! And if anything, I'm still with her, and she's still with me. I made it my decision to help her out with this whole mess, and I'm gonna stick to it, to the end! At least we have that bond now between….

But then, Michael remembered something else of this night, that had really thrown him off; with Nikki, had made him come to terms that he wasn't dealing with the same person he remembered.

Do we have a bond? Is she really just….

I don't like the way she looked at me when I first saw her, again, tonight.

Michael had always played around with the notion that you could always tell what someone really thinks of you, from their first reaction after seeing you; the fresh look on their face the second their eyes met yours.

Best way to know something about what two-faced people think of you… is… truly take notice of that first reaction. Before they try to mask it with what they want you to think, they'd be thinking about you.

And what Michael remembered wasn't very pleasant.

She was looking at me with all the sympathy and warmth of a praying mantis about ready to bite its mate's head off. Type of look, that spelled out: never ever to trust!

What am I doing here? She's using me… as some dumb lug, she's….

No! It’s not her! It’s that Lady, again, it's like there's two of them in there. Fucking double vision, and shit!

Whatever the case was, Mr. Parsley’s words had done their job, and Michael was now fundamentally questioning his loyalty towards Nikki, and having to risk life and limb for her.

‘How many cocks she had to… to become the Lady?’ Mr. Parsley…

you fucking asshole! You just had to word it like that—didn't you?

And now, Michael wasn't able to refrain himself from picturing it any longer in his head. As he began picturing her… in that way….

Lips! All crisp, red, and juicy.

Stop it!

Picturing her on her knees….

Fucking stop!

Bopping and twisting and turning her head back and forth, performing fellatio to all those John Does, Mr. Parsley had….

Stop fucking picturing that!

Mr. Parsley had mentioned. Michael was now cluster-fucking himself, with such thoughts, as they were all making him feel like he was about ready to freak out and attack anything he could get his mitts on.

Seriously… fucking stop!

Michael now knew he needed to control himself, because he now knew that these were the type of thoughts a man would usually have, just before he’d arm himself with a gun; at home, before the bedroom door, where his girlfriend was at; cheating with some douchebag, she was secretly involved with; arm himself, and to then rush in and to blow their brains out; and then turn the gun around and do the same to himself.

No, no, control it, Michael!

Thought Michael, as he almost felt himself flat out attacking Mr. Parsley, right away. Since he was feeling his berserker moods coming on.

And then these goons of his would blow my brains out, now, and that would be the end of that!

So, you saving it for Nikki, instea—

Shut up! No! I’m not!

Then who are you gonna save it for?

Nobody!

You don’t plan on still helping her out, though, do you? After everything you’ve just learned about her.

Yes, I do! I still plan on doing so. until the end!

So, you really plan to play your own story out, just like that Juan character did, and…?

No, stop comparing it to that! Nikki’s nothing like that Flores bitch! Nothing!

She’s not a manipulative woman, that uses people to—

No, she’s… I mean… she’s not that way with me… at least!

"Michael, are you all right," asked Mr. Parsley.

"Yeah, why," gasped Michael.

"Because… you're hyperventilating, son."

"Mr. Parsley, it's the bulls,” interrupted one of the mercs.

LDCBs

There was a police car that had pulled up to the left of the vehicle, that was now driving along. The cops inside were staring straight into the driver seat, which got Mr. Parsley to move over to the front to open the window to speak with them.

"Excuse me, is there a problem," asked Mr. Parsley.

"No, sir. Well, actually—yes,” replied the cop on the passenger seat.

"What is it," asked Mr. Parsley.

"I don't know if you know, but the National Guard have been finally called in, and they might be in Harlem by the time you get there."

“So soon… how did they manage to mobilize the National Guard so… it should have taken days to…?”

And then Mr. Parsley had a moment to himself, as his eyes began scanning, side to side, reading whatever lines his thoughts were feeding him. While ticking his tongue within his right cheek.

"Understood! Thank you, Officer Ridley."

The bulls then stopped for a left turn at the next light, as the van continued driving onward. There were hardly any cars on the road now, and it looked like they were the only ones driving out at this hour.

"It's been a hell of a night, hasn't it, Michael," said Mr. Parsley,

amusingly.

"Go fuck yourself!"

Mr. Parsley then laughed.

“What am I going to do with you?”

Mr. Parsley grew amused, as Michael grew weary.

“Anyways, unfortunately, the night isn't quite over, just yet,” said Mr. Parsley.

"What do you want the codes for, Mr. Parsley,” asked Michael.

Mr. Parsley then turned his head to the side, and eyed Michael some more.

“If you want me to help, I gotta know I'm not going to end up being responsible of killing a whole bunch of people—do you understand? I don't want that shit in my life,” expressed Michael, as he glared out a bit at Mr. Parsley.

Mr. Parsley now continued eyeing Michael from the side, but then grew a reassuring smile, and said:

“Michael, do you really think we'd be interested in setting that bomb off as Mr. Dorian wills to do? I mean, what benefit will there be in that? We’re men of the state— ”

“Ha,” blew up Michael, judgmentally.

“And you can entertain the stereotype of us being corrupt government officials all that you want… but… simply put: you don’t bite the hand that feeds you! If we were to pull such acts of terrorism, we’d be targeted men by the US state, and even on a business standpoint, what benefit would there be in that? That would have to be the stupidest move men like us could make.”

Michael didn't believe him, but then again, he also didn't know what to believe.

“Trust me, son, we might have motives you won’t get, but we're not the bad guys, here—understood?”

Michael didn't respond to The Grinning Man. Instead, he began to remember a particular story about them, The Oubliettes, and their dealings, that Michael had heard in prison:

Back in the early 70s, there used to be another black gang similar to the Black Jesus Army called the Long Dickin' Commie Bastards… and….

Yes! You heard that correctly!

Supposedly the story was… they were originally part of The Black Panthers. But after people like Mr. Dorian at the pentagon, decided to start assassinating every black leader they could get their hands on, in the 60s, the group splintered off, and turned Red, out of spite. Unlike what The Black Panthers stood for, these men and women weren't just about protecting their people. They wanted war. They were the anti-establishment types located in the heart of Harlem, that wanted to wage war with America, and, in the name of their newly founded beliefs in Marxism. And their image….

Was everything that you could expect from a group like that: godly humongous Angela Davis afros, red leather jackets and jumpsuits and pants, unkempt, thick-ass night shades, while chomping down some foot-long Cuban cigars. And simply just… angry looking! While covered head to toe with bullet straps. Plus, they had a lingo nobody could understand, since they decided to learn Russian, and mix it in with jive talk:

'Dosvedanya, you jive ass—turkeys!'

As anti-American as you can possibly imagine any lot getting.

Well, maybe Michael is exaggerating a bit….

No, I'm not! This shit is for real now! I was around in the city in the 70s, I remember them!

But anyways… to make a long story short:

The Oubliettes had then decided to step in to see if they could do business with them. No one knows exactly what the deal was, but sometime later, a lot of important people started popping up dead all over Manhattan, stuffed in dumpsters and freezers. Been whacked like some mob would do, but it definitely couldn't have been the mob that did it! These were the type of people no one would dare try and touch, the type of people that had a lot of friends in high places, that might then decide to seek revenge by coming after you and your family, and your friends, and your friend's family… and….

You get the point!

Whatever the deal was, couldn't have been good for the LDCB.

Since they were the only outfit that would have been crazy enough to try such a thing, going after such people that were so off limits. Everyone in the city figured it had to have been them. And it had to be one of the Oubliettes' affairs. Although, since The Oubliettes are so untouchable, too. And supposedly don't exist, who do you think got the dirty end of the stick? Yeah, that's right! The LDCBs. For until this very day, no one has heard or seen of the fifty-eight men and women strong, Long Dickin' Commies since. And not only that, but public records of them supposedly then started disappearing, too. Even photos of them began to be replaced with doctored photos, with their presence being removed and....

Okay, I'm pretty sure that last part is a bit fabricated.

Fine, I guess.

"So, you say Nikki has been using me, just as you guys want to use me now?"

Michael finally made a response. He had been sitting there thinking about Nikki and the LDCBs, and he still didn't know what to make of it all.

"Yes, Michael, but at least we're being direct with you about it. We're not hiding the fact that we're using you now for our own gain, and you have a choice. Plus, we could reward you for it—handsomely! What reward has Nikki offered you having you risk your life for her," responded Mr. Parsley.

"You're going to just let me out in front of The Nim Fo Matics HQ, and wait for me to bring you Nikki," asked Michael.

What if I go in and warn Nikki about you guys, instead, what precaution are you guys taking that I won't do that?

"Yes, Michael, that is the gamble we're taking," responded Mr. Parsley, with a shrug.

Michael wasn't buying this.

"Come on! I don't believe it. You're going to have at least one of your goons follow me into the building—aren't you? And if you are, what am I supposed to say about it then? He's my terrorist cousin from the green isle, and don't worry about the Israeli midget he's carrying?"

Michael was referring to the fat merc sitting right next to Mr. Parsley,

holding an Uzi.

“Israeli midget? You talking about me Uzi—here," asked the merc, in confusion.

“I was just making a joke—you jerk," spat out Michael.

"Don't mind Michael, that’s just part of his delightful charms we've been putting up with since he got to us," said Mr. Parsley, sardonically.

The fat Irishman didn't seem to appreciate any bit of Michael's humor. Although, what Michael did find humorous about him was even with the ski mask on, Michael would still be able to spot him in a St. Patrick's Day parade, with his big bushy eyebrows, that were as blood red as an old Celtic saga.

"No, Michael, the taig to the right of me won't be following you in. But let’s just say we’ll still keep tabs on you from the inside," responded Mr. Parsley, with a passive smile.

How? Well, if you guys are just going to release me, that's—

"Fine, I got you!"

They were already in Harlem, and in the distance, Michael could now see the building where most of the Nim Foes hanged out.

“Okay, we’re letting you out, you’re free to go, tell Ms. Jackson if she still wants the deal we promised her, then she needs to give us the codes,” blurted out Mr. Parsley, and looked straight into Michael's eyes.

“Wait… what? What deal? What are you talking about,” demanded Michael.

Deal, they had a deal together? What’s going on here?

“Boy, shut up, and go do what Mr. Parsley tells you to do,” said the bushy eyebrow merc.

The van then drove off, and into a dark alley.

Michael was only a half a block from The Nim Fo Matics' hide out, and now he had a few questions for the Lady in waiting.

Deal—what deal?

It seemed the harder Michael tried to deny Nikki's open involvement with this mess, the more enraged he felt for the fact that she was. Coked out of her mind, a shell of a woman—or not!

And to think, for a split second there on the elevator, I thought we were saved from all this mess.

Michael sighed for the fleeting moment he had with her, then, when he thought they had won.

Fleeting moments… more fleeting moments in my life. More fucking fleeting fucking moments! Full of nothing of value! I mean shit! Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you… more! More! Empty. Shallow. Moments. Full of empty, shallow, promises.

Everything is empty. Everything! Nothing I do ends up mattering. For it's all empty… and shallow… and meaningless!
Empty… and shallow… and meaningless!
Empty… and shallow… and meaningless!
Empty… and shallow….
Empty… and shallow….
Empty… and… empty… and… and….

Michael felt his mitts shaking again. Almost erupting. As whatever demonic entity that had taken residency in them, began demanding again to be let loose.

How many other men have you worn that devilish red dress for—Lady? Did you blow Mr. Dorian, too? Or Angel Eyes… or Tony… or Gab?

Michael's mind was now cluster-fucked, again, as he found himself unable to get the images of Nikki killing and blowing hundreds and hundreds of men.

Control it! Control it! I don't wanna head into the Nim Fo building with these feelings, and end up attacking them for no reason.

Remembering his good ol' Rosary, which had been doing some of its own special magic on him, Michael reached into his pocket, pulled it out, and began doing a number on it.

Very OCD like….
Kissed the crucifix five times, then started rubbing it against his forehead. Then bit down hard on his bottom lip, as he began to taste a trace of blood. Then spat the blood in his mouth onto the cross.
Then.
Then… thought:

What the fuck… am I doing?

So….

This is how the true madness starts… huh?

Michael was then about to put the bloody thing away, but then kissed it one last time, and felt a little relieved.

Shit, I've seriously lost it! Haven't I? Why do I keep doing this?

But then thought:

Ah—at least it's still doing the trick. And keeping me from truly letting it all out. Thank God.

The Cat: Four

“In a mad world, only the mad are sane.”
-Akira Kurosawa

The Other Other Side of the Train Tracks.

Seeing how he was in Harlem now, Michael took a deep breath, and felt a little refreshed now that he didn't have to deal with Iron Monkeys, or Uptowners, or Oubliettes, with their IRA goons. Anymore. At least for the moment. Even though he was in a turf he didn't exactly belong in, strangely enough, he felt safer here than he had since entering Manhattan.

> Well, now, I just have to deal with Nim Foes, and at least I'm cool with them. Probably would be better if I don't fuck up and make more enemies. Anthony did have a point there.

As Michael began heading for the Nim Fo building, he saw some hoods pull up close in a '77 Cutlass Supreme, and eye him long and hard, looking like they were wondering what he was doing here in the wrong turf. And Michael then thought:

> Safer here… what the fuck am I thinking?

But then felt like he didn't give two shits, considering the night he had had.

> Fine? What you going to do? Yeah, I know I definitely in the wrong turf. A whiteboy like me in your neighborhood, I ain't armed, but, I ain't scared of you assholes either! So, go get chased by some Colombian biker gangs, IRA goons, wack-jobs dressed in cloaks, then some psycho CIA operative… talking about squeezing motherfucker's skulls in, and shit, and then come talk to me!

Michael began eyeing them all wild-eyed as the goons chuckled a bit, and drove off. And as they did, they began blasting some of the new music Michael had been hearing. Shit Michael violently hated. Violently!

> Fuck rap! I hate rap music! I hate it!

Michael had been listening to this new stuff, but until now, he had no clue how much he hated it so. Although, he always had those inklings in the back of his mind, telling him he most certainly wasn't going to like it, either. As he thought about it for a second, he then came to a constructive reasoning as to how he could stand for his hatred:

> Well, what can I say? Music is a means of expressing something

deep down, that can't be grasped simply by words alone. An emotion, a character, a feeling, a story.

And if arrogance and being a cocky asshole jackass, had a musical genre devoted to everything it represented, it would be that:

Rap!

I mean, music needs a melody, it needs a soul. Rap says, 'fuck that bullshit, now everyone look at my dick!' I mean, I'm a cocky asshole, but I'm really being ironic about it. In no ways serious, since I know how stupid and silly it all sounds, and that's the joy I get out of it.

But then Michael realized how much he was kidding himself.

Fine, I get a kick out of it, too, sticking it to arrogant jerks, by being an arrogant jerk myself—so sue me! But I don't want to see that in music. Now, everywhere in the city this new shit has popped up, this hip hop—whatever! And I can't say anything because everyone will then misinterpret it as some racial shit. But the music is so annoying and obnoxious to listen to. As for the whole black issue. Fuck! I mean, what ever happened to Doo-Wop when I was growing up? Some James Brown? Or some of that Marvin Gaye shit? Whatever happened to all that stuff? Shit that sounded a lot more uplifting. Also, rock and roll, which was originally theirs. Fuck rap! I hate all this senseless and soulless crap everyone listens to now because it gives them a hard on. And that is its only draw! It’s not meant to be uplifting like at least rock and roll is, it truly is a product of today’s’ younger generation, fronting some major attitude and arrogance to gain respect, by coming off as all bad and shit! With no heart, no soul, just attitude, alone! A bunch of limp noodles wanting to listen to something to straighten out their sausages, and go around sticking it into everyone's ear, whether they like it or not.

Actually, that's exactly what rap music sounds to me, some wet dick going in and out of my ear. And personally, I'd like to get kissed, before I get fucked like that!

Fuck, I hate this music. Fuck, I feel old!

Also, the music Michael noticed those hoods were blasting was some of that even newer shit coming from LA.

As for that stuff… that shit just sounds… depressing! Music spilling the tale of the mess that's on the streets. All stoic, hard, angry, miserable, and looking ready to rush at a bunch of pigs, screaming 'fuck the police,' just to end it all by getting sprayed down by a barrage of bullets. I mean, I don't want to hear about crack infested neighborhoods, hoods doing drive-bys, murdering each other left and right. Things have gone too far! Fuck this LA crap! This music is so depressing to listen to, and music really shouldn't be that way!

And… really… calling themselves gangsters, really? Ha! What a barrel of laughs. They must be joking.

Thought Michael, while shaking his head, full of ridicule.

Jimmy Cagney, was a fucking gangster! Edward G. Robinson. Humphrey Bogart.. were…?

Okay! They were actors. But still! They at least represented—real gangsters! Then there's Ol' Blue Eyes who's both. But still, mostly representing.

But still, representing people that built an empire by way of crime. Al Capone, John Gotti, now, and Frank Lucas for black folks, they were real gangsters.

Not fucking musicians!

Which are really what those pretenders from LA really are. Know your place and be content with just being entertainers (Although, I do kinda like Easy-E).

And they ain't portraying gangsters, either, just two-bit hoods. Trust me, there's a difference. Takes a loser criminal, to know a bunch of loser criminals.

Michael then frowned at the thought of that.

They might have seen some shit, but until you build an empire out of evil like that, you ain't gangster! Takes a certain level of class and charisma and the devil's work to be one. Until you can live with millionaire white collar criminals in rich neighborhoods, as a blue-collar criminal yourself—you ain't it! Fashioning your children for a future in politics. And really, I don't see any reason to celebrate the real things, either!

Fuck gangster rap!

Music is supposed to be beyond the cesspools we live in, not be wallowing in it. I already have to deal with arrogant pompous jerks every day, like I really want some arrogant pompous jerk, now, lamenting to me over his shitty life. Fuck off! And seriously? Who the fuck would like that type of crap, anyways? I'm guessing most of the fan base ain't even from the crack infested inner cities.

I'd guess….

Most of them would really be from the suburbs. From lily white teenagers! Wishing to be all hard, since they were raised by faggoty ass Babyboomer parents.

You know what it is! It's like mob movies, in a way. And I fucking hate mob movies! Too! Fuck the Godfather! Fuck Tony Montana! Mobsters are all a bunch of murdering assholes, and everyone loves them. And why?

Because their audience is a bunch of dickless losers, wishing they could be, what they don't have the balls to be.

In the end, there is nothing—nothing—glorious about being a criminal! Balls or not, being a criminal means you're a complete failure as a human being. Since you couldn't build your world the way you would have really wanted to, you build it the way you really didn't! Not by righteousness, but everything that's the opposite. Doing it the wrong way! The sick way! Through sin! Through evil! And what fucking glory is there in doing that—

what—I ask you—what?

In the end, for me, I didn't have the heart to go that far, because, I had too much of it. Heart—that is! I remember how Stumpy, after ruining my boxing career, came around again and tried to offer me a job roughing up some characters that hadn't been making their payments on time. Trying to turn me into some hired muscle. And I was like, 'fuck that shit! That ain't my style!' I wasn't gonna allow those guys to turn me into, what you eventually turned my dad into—a fucking murderer!

Michael, then, needed another moment.

Fuck I hate this crap, I can see some stupid, upper middle-class Yonkers, WASP-y brat, and how he might be really digging into this stupid gangster—really just two-bit hood—rap shit, but that's because his parents were dickless hippies—now yuppies—that didn't raise him to be a man. With not the balls to be one, nor the heart it takes to know when what's stepping over the line. So of course, he's now enamored by music like this. Of course, he'd be! Like the only schmoes I've met that love Cosa Nostra movies, and can recite The Godfather by heart, have been dickless not-made Italians like Stumpy, fucking wannabes! But can-never-bes, since the mob's cut off point is being at least six inches and up, and those poor schmucks came up—short! So, no legionary status for the New Roman Army for them.

If you like mob movies, this rap garbage here, or anything that deals with romanticizing criminals, you're dickless loser, and that's all there is to that!

And then Michael thought of John Wayne movies, and the romanticization of the Wild West, and how much he loved that stuff as a kid. And especially now.

Ah, fuck me! Fine! Ignorance has something to do with it, too. And, I guess, people end up making it out to be like a fantasy. So, I guess it ain't all that bad.

Plus, I really am just hating right now because those two spooks really spooked the shit out of me, and I'm just being racist right now… and… ha!

Putting on the Red Light.

Walking up to the building, Michael took a look up at the old brick house establishment, that looked like a condemned building ready for the wrecking ball, but still standing straight and housing life. Nothing but brick laid on top of brick, unevenly, and an old and rusty neon sign up front that read:

The Milk Jug.

With some wood nailed to it, with the lettering:

Hotel.

In red paint. Since, the place was supposedly that. Although, also really just a skin joint, a cathouse, a brothel, that Michael now found to be tongue-in-cheek. Since, the sign had been up there way before the place was turned into one.

Right before, it was a cheap motel, ran by an old Jewish couple, that owned the place since just before the turn of the century. Yeah, since the 1800s! Ran by old man Ader for over 80 years. The story is: Old man Ader and his wife had bought that sign back in the day, around the 30s or 40s, I guess, since it was the cheapest sign they could afford. I guess, the sign was really meant for an establishment where they'd sell dairy products hurried from farms, back when they'd do that shit, back when there were still milkmen around. So, when they bought the sign, they started calling their establishment 'The Milk Jug Hotel'. And, they just added that whole 'Hotel' part by themselves. And… ha! I don't know, I find it funny! Old man Ader lived to be 104 years old, and still continued to run the place well after the neighborhood changed from Jewish to Black in the 20s, well after his wife passed away, and well after he went senile and allowed his sup at the time, Maurice Jefferson Le Bron, really to run the place. And. This place! The Milk Jug Hotel! This is where my dad brought me to when I was twelve to get me de-virgin-ized in the mid-60s. And… ha! Old man Ader had already gone senile by then, and had no clue—since he was no longer in the mental capacity to do so—how his sup was

welcoming pimps in the neighborhood to use the joint, as they did. The whole thing with the place being called 'The Milk Jug Hotel' of all things, had for years and years attracted johns, and pimps, and street urchins, of the sort. But back then, Ader wouldn't be having any of it, and would kick them out. I remember seeing old man Ader, then, and how he stepped up to me while my dad was doing the arrangements with the pimp and that Haitian woman, and… ha! I could see it in his eyes, the man was in La-La Land and truly, truly gone. He then pat me on the head, and ruffled up my hair some, then went away. And I didn't see him again until I was done with the Haitian woman. I stepped out with her, Ader was in the hallway, saw me, with the Haitian, stepped up, then patted me on the head and ruffled up my hair, again, and went away, again. And….

Michael now needed a moment to himself, as he covered his eyes and forehead with the palm of his hand, and started snickering, softly.

I mean… I… yup! And that was that!

And Michael was now done reflecting on those memories.

I guess with a name like 'The Milk Jug Hotel', it was only destined to be turned into what it has.

Stepping up, Michael now saw a couple of Nim Foes on the block, who had noticed him; luckily for Michael though, ones he knew he wouldn't have any quarrels with; unlike the one he had with Boomatic at Stumpy's.

Although….

If Boom was to be here, there was a good chance the scene could turn ugly, into another Beefy Chesty incident like the one at Big Dick's.

Now here's hoping that big mouth ain't here. Hoping!

As he walked up, a skinny runt of theirs then stepped up, and then….

Wait… wait… am I…?

Michael was almost star stuck when he realized, the boy, looked exactly like some ghetto version of Michael Jackson would.

Um… am I really seeing this?

He was practically wearing the trademark red leather jacket, except blue, instead, and his hair was Jheri curled up like his. The only

difference Michael saw was this kid had a faint mustache, and it made Michael think he must have come from the mirror universe in Star Trek for a second.

Ugh! Spock… stoic bastard… I'd punch him in the face!

"Hey, whiteboy? Where the fuck do you think you're supposed to be at?

Why don't you—beat it," called out he.

Oh—this can't be happening! After all the crazy shit I had to see tonight… now this?

Michael glanced down and away, and tried hard not to laugh. If there was anything that could change the gloominess he'd been feeling up until now, it was this: being cussed out by Michael Jackson's ghetto-ass doppelganger.

He even sounds a bit like him, too.

Michael couldn't help contemplating over the paradox he was seeing here. And, there was something truly hysterical about a docile and cheerful figure like Michael Jackson, now coming across as a brooding, sweaty-face, streetwise hood, and seeming to really be able to hold his own.

"What you laughin' at, asshole, do I look like I'm here to entertain you," spouted out the boy wonder, as he pulled out a butterfly knife, and began twirling it around in his hand.

"You should know I'm strapped, too! And this, here, is just me being friendly," spouted he, again.

This was really a sight for sore eyes. Michael had missed out on the 'thriller' in the park, but it looked like he was going to get some 'off the wall' shit, here, in the hood.

"Sucka, does it look like I'm playing," spouted out he, one more time.

"Hey, man, chill out, I know who this Peter Pan is!"

Michael thanked his lucky stars that that was over with, because he really didn't feel like shoving this kid's head up his ass, and messing up his juicy do. As for the giant Nim Fo that had called him out, it was the

Towering Inferno. A giant of a man, that when stood up right, he looked like the monolith from 2001: Space Odyssey.

Although, I'd still say a foot short of Doris Day, that muscle bound giraffe I met earlier. Wow, that woman was huge!

"Hey, big man, how you doing up there," called out Michael, glad to see another old face from back in the day.

"Nothing much, Michael, haven't seen you in a long ass time. Heard you were in the slammer. But now, can't say I'm surprised to see you out," responded the Tower, with a passive look.

"Oh, how's that?"

"Well, with the city falling apart around us, as it is, it would just be unnatural not to see you having some part in it."

"Yeah—yeah—yeah! I'm here to see Nikki," responded Michael, sorta getting tired of seeing how his reputation still preceded him.

"Yeah, she's upstairs. I was surprised to see her here, too. The likes of her don't really come around these parts anymore, either. But, since she knows the man—Le Bron—we welcomed her in."

"Oh really? Is Letoya here, too, because—"

"Wait a minute… we letting this Paddy Mac inside," asked the boy wonder, looking displeased.

"Hey, I said he was cool, Benji!"

Benji, that's his nickname? That cute little dog….

"Michael knows Le Bron as well, so there ain't no problem here," responded the Tower, in a slow and even lumbering tone.

"Nah, man, fuck this Paddy Prick! I've heard some shit about this dude around the block, and he ain't nothing but Bad News Bears from the sounds of it," mentioned Benji.

"Hey, man, just calm your midget ass down, and—"

"Who you calling a midget? I'm 5 feet 8 inches, that's average height," yapped out Benji.

"Yeah… average for my dick," responded the Tower, with a smug grin.

"Well, fee-fi-fo-fum to you, too, motherfucker! Now why don't you climb your big ass up a beanstalk, and get yo' mama to come over to grind me up some bread with this bone—here—if you know what I mean?"

Mr. Billy Jean had now grabbed his crotch, and started shaking it in

front of everyone to see. This was becoming way too much for Michael, as he just about turned around, and walked away, while laughing his ass off.

"Shit man—do I look twelve to you? Keep making mama jokes like we at recess, and I'll turn yo' a' into a shoehorn," bellowed out Towering Inferno, looking like a giant being awakened.

Oh, thank you for the humor… I was really feeling like shit before. I need this!

"Keep making momma jokes… you say? Okay! Well, then… your momma's got a mouth between her legs, and the bitch chews like this!"

And with that line, Benji began flapping his legs open and shut like a clapper. Then began laughing hysterically; busted out with some shrill cackling that could shatter glass. Now really rubbing it in. The Towering Inferno, then, looked ready to walk up to him, all indifferent like, pick him up like a piece of paper, and fold his ass up like an origami. But, decided first to turn to Michael, and say one last thing… before he did:

"Hey, Michael, Le Bron already okayed you in when Nikki gave word you were also coming. Now excuse me, for I have to introduce this little pipsqueak's head to his colon."

"Bitch-ass motherfucker, I like to see you try!"

"Thanks," replied Michael, as he walked away from that scene.

And….

Ah shit!

As much as Michael would have liked to have seen that Benji character try to 'moonwalk' his way out of a hurt locker, Michael had more important matters to address.

Maybe I should just stay and hang out with them? I don't know if I want to see Nikki… just yet.

Walking into the building, and taking a good look at the place, Michael felt like he had walked onto the set of a porno. It wasn't that everyone was fucking each other, straight up, all crazy like in 1999. But it sure did seem like it was eventually going to go down like that. The place was decorated with nothing but red curtains, neon lights, and leg lamps. There were sleazy looking johns, around, around some lingerie cladded

women. There was Salt-N-Pepa's 'Push it' playing from a boombox set on the register's counter, with lit candles waxed over the top. And Michael finally found a rap song he did like.

Sexy black women rapping about wanting to fuck… how can I object to that?

The place was what was to be expected, even though the establishment was still billed as a cheap motel. It still looked and smelled….

Especially with the smell!

Like a brothel, all right. Although… the only thing that was out of place, was the picture of old man Ader and his wife hung up on a wall, at the entrance, from what looked to be the 20s from their fashion and feel, the two on a tandem bicycle, and…?

The two are smiling. Just smiling … so innocently like. Jeez!

And now! Michael was once again asking himself, if he wanted to continue, upstairs, to deal with the Lady in waiting.

I really don't want to go on anymore. Would really like to go back to getting me some kicks, flirting with chicks, and not finding out how much of a heartless bitch my Nikki has been… all this time.

As Michael crossed the lobby, he found one of the Nim Foes guarding the elevator, and the cat was a strange looking dude that had something peculiar about his presence. Something in his aura, that left you with question marks the second you saw him. Michael eyed him for a second, and then spoke:

"Hey um—"

But then all of a sudden, the Nim Fo blew up with affection, hearts sparkling out of his radiating presence, and spoke back:

"Just remember! No matter where you go…."

A pause.

"There you are," said he.

And with that, Michael's face cringed up all ugly, trying to make sense of what he had just experienced.

"What," gasped Michael.

"When you go to her, remember this at least! She's really the man, and you there are really the woman, and that's the truth of it all! Our souls be the 'anima,' and theirs be the 'animus,' and that there is the true story of love," said he again, and just smiled at Michael.

Michael….
Umm… ahh?
Michael, now….
Umm… I… umm?
Was feeling… very, very confused.
Who the… what?
Very, very!

The weirdo was all buckteeth and Jeri curls, wearing silky purple robes. And who lit up the second Michael spoke to him, first, like a retarded slot machine would, that had been going against the house rules, and had been giving everyone a payday with every pull. The wacko looked like Rick James with Down syndrome. Michael felt like what his first reaction should be was belting Mr. Sparkly Eyes, here, in the mouth, and then asking questions later.

"Yeah—whatever! Le Bron?"

"Yeah! He upstairs… go right ahead," squeaked out the character, as his eyes sparkled some more.

….

Thought Michael, as he pressed the button to call the elevator. Then noticed the fucker was still staring right at him, as his lips puckered up some, like he was practicing kissing. Michael, then, placed his hand over his temple, like a blinker, trying to avoid his stare, and to avoid any more weird shit he might have in store for him.

St—… Stop it! Stop creeping me the fuck out!
As the doors opened, Michael—ran—in.

Inside, Michael saw a panel with buttons to call which floor to go to, and for a second there, he couldn't make sense of it. He saw six buttons: five of them had the female symbols on it, and the last one that was on the top had the male symbol. The male symbol was black, and the other five female symbols were pink, red, purple, brown, and black again.

"What the… what do I do here?
Michael then figured he should just press the black male symbol, and hoped that was for Le Bron. Since he remembered his spot being up there. And then, he started to ponder what the colors were supposed to

symbolize.

So… on each floor… there's something there that's pink, red, purple, brown, and black? What….

And then!

Oh, fuck me!

When it dawned on him, Michael almost pissed himself laughing.

Oh, fuck me, really! But… which one would I choose, though?

Red! Definitely red!

One other thing Michael noticed in the elevator that was there, was a mirror on top, and Michael began shaking his head, and frowning, for how absurd this all seemed.

What's next? They're going to have mirrors on the floors in the bathrooms—or something? Fucking perverts!

The Lady Killer.

As the doors to the elevator flung open reaching the man floor, Michael was then greeted by the image of a giant penis on the wall upfront. It was done in graffiti art, and had a golden crown on its crown, and diamond and gold jewelry around the shaft. Michael decided to shrug it off, and not apply another thought into it.

All right! All right! Enough… as much as a fiend I've been in my life, I'm now starting to feel like taking a hatchet to this place.

Keeping his head down to try and avoid seeing anything else that was going to have him dumbfounded, Michael continued down a hallway, and saw a door at the far end, that had:

Le Space Le Bron.

Printed on its nameplate.

….

Thought Michael, for… he was almost there. And was now feeling the weariest he'd felt all night long. Almost felt like dodging into a room beside him, and just knocking out for the night.

Passing a couple of naked women, Michael came across one, very, extremely, exquisitely, beautiful Puerto Rican girl. Who had Michael

feeling ‘taken in,’ making him feel unable to do anything, but, at least extend a smile.

I… I… wow!

But, at this moment, Michael wasn't exactly at a hundred percent, present in his vibrant ways, with his vibrant smile. But was feeling pretty damn low, lost, and defeated. And worse yet:

Feeling like I really need some comfort right now. Some human comfort. A shoulder to lay my head low onto.

And since his vibes were coming off as about as pathetic as a john would, to that Puerto Rican girl right now, the sight of him had the girl rolling her eyes.

Ha… figures!

And in that moment, seeing that, almost sent Michael through the roof.

Fucking bitch!

Thought Michael. As the thought was then carried over in his face, as he began showing teeth to the girl. The girl, knowing exactly what that meant, considering her line of work—freaked! And ran off.

Wait… I’m not gonna attac—

And now leaving Michael feeling about the lowest he had felt all night.

I’m not gonna… I wasn’t gonna! Fucking bitch!

And now… Michael felt primetime ready to seriously go through the roof, as his thoughts skewed off course, and into a tangent of purely concentrated hatred.

Fuck women! Fuck all of them! Fucking coward! I wasn’t gonna….

You know… it feels like… all my life I've done nothing but center all my energy into trying to do nothing, but, trying to get them to like me. Building up this stupid ass macho asshole persona—which they love so much!

And… fuck! And the second I don't have the heart to come off like that, is the second they'll take me for nothing but a loser! Sorry, Senorita… sorry! I can't be your champion every last fucking second of the day! I have my downtime, too. Which I’m gonna need something more than you just sucking me off to make me feel

better. Sorry, I can't entertain your penis envy this very second. Please forgive me! Fuck, I hate women! And deep down, I can see now—I can see now! Clearly!

I always have.

Why is it that women are always the ones that are a mess and need emotional support, and the dudes always supposed to be the fearless impenetrable one that's hard as a rock? I always have to be the ideal. I can never just be a human fucking being for once! Fuck I hate women!

And what good are they beyond sex? Emotional support? Ha! They're too wrapped up in their own worlds where only their problems and fears matter. As for mine? Since I'm a dude, they're not even supposed to exist. I'm never allowed to be that way, and God help me if I feel depressed enough to feel like crying, for that I deserve getting my stupid fucking nose being busted open, bloody.

Michael had a paused, as he tried not to think too much about that day.

We're all a bunch of grunting, brooding Neanderthal idiots, only good for being some white knight in shining armor for them, going out to make money for them, so they can spend it buying lingerie, which they plan to wear for other douchebags. Or, going to war, and dieing for some bullshitting cause, while they wait for the real alphas to come back home to really mate with.

And Lord help those beta males, those nice guys, the 90 percent of men with the weaker genes that aren't cut out to procreate, since, it's all about survival of the fittest.

Lord help them if they're looking for a woman for even just emotional support. Because let's face it, if your dick ain't 10 inches or more, they're not going to want shit to do with you! They might even laugh in your face for even trying. It's like the discovery channel, really, they're all a bunch of stupid animals going off instincts, watching two stupid males of whatever species butting

heads, while the hundreds of them wait on the sidelines to see which one they'll be all fucking later. They're all stupid animals with no humanity to think beyond themselves and their instincts to mate with the one with the best genes. Programmed! Fucking programmed!

All my life I've obsessed about not being weak, not being left out, and pushed to the side, because, I might turn out to be one of them! And honestly, I feel fed up with thinking this way and playing this 'survival of the fittest' game, and being part of this heartless and soulless mating ritual! It feels fucked up that that's all they'll ever like me for, being the winner. But wouldn't even give me a second of attention if I was the one coming out to be the loser. Fuck women! And I love how in movies women are always portrayed as the emotional supportive types....

When all my life all the women I met were: cold-hearted, humorless, vain, definitely inherently evil in every fucking possible ways imaginable, psychotic a lot of the time, and always uncaring. Every fucking last one of them!

Seems like in those movies, you had some lonely hearted beta types writing up shit on how they wished things were like. Wished! Just like the fearless heroic alpha male is supposed to be the ideal male, the caring supportive love interest is supposed to be the ideal female. But it's all bullshit, really! None of that shit really exists! Men always being suave and fearless? Being untouchable?

Being James Bond...?

Who's basically a power fantasy like Superman is for kids, but for adults. It doesn't exist! The ideal of a man being completely disconnected from the world around him, living in a world of his own, where he's this ultimate badass that can't be touched by such things as fear and doubt and discouragement is not possible! I've been in millions of fights, and it still scares the shit out of me every time I feel how it's about to go down again. I've picked up on

millions of chicks, and the thought that they might not like me still scares the shit out of me as well. Only reason I've gotten so good at both is because I've done it so often, I've learned how to persevere. I've taken the extra step! I rolled with the punches! I kept stretching for it until I reached the finish line!

And the only thing that really drove me that far was the fear that I might not make it.

The fear that I might lose, and then be abandoned by all that would see me as a loser. That's what really drives a man to such lengths! Without the fear of losing, there can be no drive for winning! And that's why James Bond is a one-dimensional impossibility. How can you exist in a world of your own, being so suave and fearless, being a fighter and a lover, without the fear there to drive you forward, in the real world, dealing with real dangers? But really, all it is, is a fantasy all the beta males came up with, since, they don't understand how the real-world works. There are thinkers in this world, and then there are doers. Thinkers love to do nothing but create a fictional reality, imaging how the world is like. And then there's the doers, those that know just how much of a scary place this world is, and no matter how tough you are, you're still gonna die in the end. Fuck James Bond! But all the women love him, and all the men want to be him.

Oh… now let's go to the female character archetype… now what's that about a supportive love interest? About women being caring? Ha! What nonsense! Because that doesn't exist, either!

They're not capable of love, you have to be strong to be so. They're not! They're not! I mean….

And this now, was very important to Michael. Something truly deep seeded:

I mean… really! If there was to at least be one woman—just one! That should have loved me, it should have been her. That bitch!

Michael then went back to that one memory of himself at twelve, crying, before the curse began.

But, no! She wanted nothing to do with that. She'd rather be out at some Hollywood party, blowing some producer, offering her a part in some movie, then be with me.

And then something completely different almost happened. Completely different!

Wait… Michael, what are you trying to do? No, no, no! Don't! Don't do that! Don't start… fuck!

But Michael was able to stop it, before it could.

I've been with thousands of women, and they're all the same. As long as I can excite them with my vibrant ways when I'm feeling it, they love me. After sex, when I revert back to my real self. My real self!

My real fucking self!

Seeing how mopey and jaded I get, they immediately want to leave me for another. Who wants a broken mule when you can ride a vibrant stallion? Funny how a couple of them asked me why men aren't emotionally available, and asked me to open up, and when I did, they then realized they wanted nothing to do with what I had to offer. Ha! Goes to show, you can't even trust women to tell you what they want. They'll write a book on the subject matter on what they seek in a mate, but then go for the complete opposite—some douchebag—just because he gets her wet. Going after the first happy-go-lucky jackass that asks to see her tits. That's how I've played it, and that's what's gotten me to score so often. I can't even have real conversations with them, I have to go complete stupid mode on them because that's what they really want besides a ten-ton dick. As long as we're idiots, the easier it'll be to control us, I guess? None of them know what they want, really, but they all want the same thing. A fucking guard dog! And they're all so weak too—not just physically, but mentally too! That's why they all want the strong badboy type around under their control, to fight all their battles for them. Nice guys can't do that since they all a bunch of wimps, are bigger pussies then they are. But my type, they'll keep

us around like guard dogs for that, but the minute we start to grow weary from old age, or when we no longer have the fight left within us, that's when they'll take us to the pound to put us to sleep, and will then find another. Then again, funny how the only time they do come across as being strong is when they're bitching about something that involves their ego. Since the whole world revolves around them and what they think and say, that's when they get their strength to fight their own battles, as long as it doesn't get physical, for then, douchebags like me will have to step in to finish the job. They have just cause to bitch and moan all they want—for how dare the rest of the world for not treating them like princesses every second of every minute of every fucking day!

Fuck women!
I hate them!
I fucking hate them!
I really, really fucking hate them! I fucking....

And then twin demons spoke.

Barehands!
Barehands!
Barehands!
Murder!
Murder!
Murder!
To shreds and shreds and shreds and... shit!

Michael then ran for his Rosary, pulled it out, kissed it ten times, placed it in his mouth, and almost tried to swallow it for a second. Then he pulled it out, began rubbing it hard up against his forehead to the point he began to scrap skin off the surface, coming up with a bit of blood, then stared at it for a minute, straight, and finally... looped.

Oh. I'm gonna lose it, really, when I go in there. Oh, God, give me the straight to handle it.

But then Michael felt some of those demonic feelings in his mitts again raging for the opposite. And as he looked left, he saw some of his reflection from the glass of a framed painting, and saw not his eyes, but... possibly... its. Like Jason Voorhees with a hockey mask, and two

holes for eyes. Holes. Just—holes!

No!

Michael then bashed the picture with his fist, as the glass shattered.

And then, it went away.

Shit, what did I do?

Looking around, it looked like no one had noticed.

Oh! Please, help me! Help me through this night. Give me the power to do what's needed.

Fuck… Michael? Don't ever think that way again! Not ever again! Fuck me and these tangents I sometimes have! Burning over something or another, as I end up burning myself. And… what am I even thinking? Who am I kidding!

Those women that asked me to open up… I never did! Since I was too chicken shit, and was afraid they'd reject me if they saw how much of a mess I really am.

I'm the one that's incapable of love….

Well, if anything… I've at least always loved Nikki, and Nikki's always loved me. If anything… she's the only one that really has.

Michael took a minute to regain composure, and then walked up to Le Bron's door to knock.

"Come on in!"

Michael heard Le Bron speak out on the other end. And Michael did so.

The Escaping Dream.

Inside Le Bron's chamber, Michael found nothing but Persian carpets, marble statues, and a treasure trove of every sex paraphernalia imaginable, all scattered about. On one corner, there was a bed of pillows—just pillows—stacked up high, all the way up to a man's waistline.

"Well, lookie who we got here… Mr. fast walking, shit talking, ain't no stopping, biggest and baddest mofo, to have ever graced these

streets, Michael 'Madboy' Connelly," said Le Bron, like some announcer, but also somewhat mockingly.

Can't really tell, though, considering Le Bron has always had a very dry sense of humor. And just a dry personality, all around. Well, whatever! He better not be talking shit, now. I don't have the patience for it.

As Michael got a better fix on him, he saw a bald-headed man, with a beard as big and thick as US Steel. A Babylonian beard of shiny locks over locks over more shiny locks. He looked like John Henry covered in drapes of solid gold. He was a silky-smooth walking and talking man, now fitted decadent enough to pose as a Persian king—or Shah—as they might put it. Le Bron had his head cocked to one side, and he was smoking something toxic out of an ol' Sherlock Holmes' pipe; every time he puffed, a cloud of black smoke rose up into the air, and it looked like it wanted to start raining something purple.

I don't hate the man, but then again, I don't exactly like him, either. And I know that's pretty much how he feels about me. Or did, back in the day. Mostly because of Letoya. Back around the time I started dating Nikki, Letoya and I were just friends, but, we had been together, though, and had done it. And, it was at that time her mom kicked her out, and, I think she was seventeen at the time. Her mom really didn't like her, seeing how Letoya had a way with a lot of the boys, and her mom was one of those seeing evil everywhere Puritanical types… the world is evil and going to hell, and so is her daughter, that ain't no virgin no more, and… you know the story! Well, Letoya wasn't very good at being independent, too, so she took residency here at a low cost. Ader was still around at the time, or had just passed away by then, I don't know. But, anyways… yeah! By that point, this place was practically a bordello, as now, considering the way Le Bron was running it. And even though he didn't pressure her into the lifestyle, he didn't exactly help her out in any other ways, either. The place still cost rent, and Letoya was terrible at being independent, as mentioned, and holding a job. After a while, Le Bron started giving her alternatives of how she could come up with money, fast. And… I told her not to do it, told her not to. And… she

didn't listen.

Although, the money she made then paid her way through nursing college at the time. Although, it also introduced her to this type of lifestyle, and I can understand how she eventually got tempted back. Fucking Boom at the time had a thing for her, but, she didn't have a thing for him. I had confronted him at the time, and at the time I said something to him and all his Nim Foes that… I'm pretty sure was then spread amongst them… considering how they started acting up around me, afterwards. I said to him, 'why don't you people actually try loving your women, instead of being like Ike Turner, just using them to….'

Yeah, I took it there!
And… I can only imagine how Le Bron and the rest of the Nim Foes felt about it. Although, we've been cool, still. But! We've always been treading on eggshells whenever we around each other, ever since.

"You know, she's a lucky girl. She called me from a phone booth on 65th street and Central Park West, and wanted someone to come pick her up. When my boys found her, she was freezing in a nearby alley, dressed the way she was, with barely a trench coat to hang onto, while holding an AK," explained Le Bron.
"Yeah! Well… It's a good thing she's here now. Thanks for picking her up. I was afraid back there that she might have entered Central Park," responded Michael, trying to show lots and lots of gratitude, lots!
"Yup," said Le Bron, as he took another puff from his piece.
"So, how you been," asked Michael, smiling at the Xerxes of Harlem.
"Not bad, Michael, except for being a slow night, with everyone all out raping and murdering each other in the streets," mentioned Le Bron.
"Yeah," replied Michael with one giant exhale.
Then silence… awkward silence, mind you.
"Hey, when did Ader pass," asked Michael, since he didn't know

what else to say.

And Le Bron, didn't respond.

Actually, sorta curious now, since I thought about him. Him and Le Bron, here. They did have a bit of a father and son thing going on. Ader was just such an open and loving man....

But... all right! If it's like that, then....

And then.

Nikki stepped inside, and even with all that had crossed his mind since entering Central Park, and since making his way up here to Le Bron's chamber, Michael felt thrilled to see her again; see her safe. It was a relief. And for a moment there, it felt like the mixed feelings he had had weren't going to start flooding his mind as he feared they would. But, even though it was a relief to see her safe, Michael cringed up a bit, seeing how worn down and beaten up the whole night's experiences had been on her. She still seemed to have too many bad chemicals racing through her, plus with the sweats, it all made her look like the ghost of a smack addict. Her skin was dead white, covered in cold sweat, and her black eye shadow had spread over her eyes and across her face, vertically, like fault lines; her eyes had become a chasm of darkness and danger and despair. Pitiful. Yet still the definition of beauty to Michael, nonetheless. She looked like a horror show, but there was still something graceful in the mangy and maniacal and melancholic look she had.

"So, what did Mr. Parsley have to say," asked Nikki, with eyes shivering, and waiting intently for the word.

And as she asked that question, the flood doors then cracked open, some. All to Michael's dismay.

"Who is he, and how do you know him," asked Michael, as he narrowed his eyes onto hers.

Nikki looked hesitant to answer. She glared at Michael dishearteningly, then disengaged, and then walked quietly towards a telephone placed on a stand.

"He said something about a deal, and wanting the codes," mentioned Michael, rhetorically.

"Yeah... okay," responded Nikki, all expressionless, while looking

away.

Michael grew irritated taking in such a pathetic response, as the flood doors cracked open a bit more. Nikki was practically blowing him off, which made Michael feel like some mook, that was supposedly undeserving to get a straight answer.

"Nikki… what do The Oubliettes want with the codes, and why are you now working with them?"

"Michael—please—let's just try and get through this night in one piece, and it'll all be better in the morning—I promise," expressed Nikki, as she eyed Michael like he was some child, incapable of understanding such adult matters.

Oh, so we're back to this again—huh?

"No—you—please," busted out Michael, a little childishly, but feeling like he deserved better.

Nikki looked sorely up at Michael, and then back to the phone.

"I know I had absolutely no business in all this until just recently, but I'm a part of it now, and I think I deserve a straight answer."

Nikki sighed, shook her head, and began to speak:

"You know, Michael, me and Radboy have been in a lot of stuff together over the last decade. Most of the details involving things I rather not even think about—let alone speak."

"Go on," encouraged Michael, as he looked at Le Bron, who also seemed intrigued, and somehow involved.

Okay… what part do you have in all this? Fuck! Better not be any more surprises!

"Michael, I want to say this…."

And then she paused, and stared straight into Michael's eyes, grew a compassionate smile, and Michael now felt like he was going to get some truth out of her.

Or her, trying to manip—

"Out of all the ideas we've had, me and Tony, the only one I can think of that I actually liked, was the idea that one day, we'd have enough money, to get away from all this, and retire in Tahiti, peacefully."

Nikki looked up at Michael and smiled again, beamishly now, and Michael sensed some longing in her for what she was saying. Her face opened up a bit like clouds, opening up to show sunlight, showing

things, she held in heart with radiance, and then continued:

"Really, it was Tony's dream, first. But, it was one that I gladly shared… and… the only thing I gladly ever shared with him."

Nikki then rolled her eyes, and had a maniacal look on her face, as if to express the distaste for everything else she wasn't willing to mention.

No! I'm not going to think about her and him like that—not happening!

"Now, I want my Tahiti… and… I'll tell you what I also want!"

"What's that," asked Michael, beginning to feel also a bit beamish himself.

"I think I now want… you there with me."

And then all of a sudden, Michael felt moods shifting, truly shifting. Along with worlds. As everything began to grow otherworldly. Grow ethereal. Grow magical. Which had Michael first feeling very hesitant.

No, no, no! Don't do this! Don't stir me up like this. Not if it's not you the one doing it… and it's really….

"You—I know—deserve that as much as I do. I can only imagine how badly things have been for you."

Don't, really don't!

"I'm sorry, Michael, that I haven't been there for you since you went in. I'm sorry I didn't continue what we had."

And then, those scary feelings started stirring up, as Michael glanced down at his mitts, that were crying—crying! Now! Out for her blood.

No! Stop telling me she's lieing to me to manipulate—no! I think she means this. No, I'm not going to attack her now!

Nikki then walked over to Michael, and placed her hand over his heart, and said:

"You deserve this, Michael, we deserve this."

Deep down, Michael was hoping for her to do this again. Hoping. For what it would then make him feel.

Yes! Yes! Give me resolution. I need it… I need it—bad—right now!

For Michael didn't want to continue feeling how he had been. Michael's heart then began racing, as Nikki smiled, taking notice.

What does the smile mean? Is it genuine or not?

And then Michael got a glimpse into that transcendent world, stepping out of his mortal self, and seeing things truly as they were. Seeing how Nikki did want him back, did want this, and did want him there with

her in Tahiti.

This is real! These feelings are real! They're not fake!

And the world that was opened to him, was a… future.

Please let it be! Please!

Something he hadn't felt or understood, in a very, very, very long time. The thought of a tropical paradise was almost unimaginable for him, since he had never imagined it, but now was. And it made sense! Like a dream.

I do want this. I think I do want this.

It felt warm, it felt good. But also, too good, too much like a dream. Distant. Too distant. Otherworldly even.

And to the point, it was a world Michael didn't belong in.

As much as Michael—wanted it! The feeling was too new and too small, like a small spark, which Michael found himself unknowing what to do to keep it from burning out. Michael didn't even know how to phantom the idea of a tropical paradise, somewhere in the Pacific; lying on a beach staring out into the sea, and feeling pleasantly lost in its eternity. Even though he had always had an affinity for the open seas, this was something beyond him.

It's too much like a dream. Too much! And now I got that South Pacific song playing in my head again. A place like that isn't possible— is it?

And now, it started feeling like a movie. Something he'd sit and watch, watching other people experience. And never him. And as quickly as Nikki's dream had faded into Michael's imagination, of that future….

No—no—no! I want this! Stay there! Let me have this! Can't I even have a simple dream to play out in my head?

It slowly then began to fade out.

And now… it was gone.

I fucking hate this place! I fucking hate this life! I fucking hate… me!

The only world that Michael had ever known, up until now, had been the world of cold brick walls enclosing everything as far as Michael

could see. Enclosing him from everything else, anything else he might have found more revealing. Condemned. Crammed in, cold, stuck in this uncomfortable place, cluster-fucked by the city living having to deal with assholes to the left, assholes to the right. Assholes! More assholes! And some more assholes right after that. That! And the trials and tribulations felt, living and dieing on the asphalt jungle.

Fuck this city! I hate this fucking place!

All his life, all he had ever seen was this place. And then also, Attica.

That fucking place!

Being Mr. Lonely eyes, staring lonely like out of his jail cell, at nothing but bars to his left, more bars to his right. More bars! Some more bars! And even more bars right after that. At that place, all alone at that place, waiting, just waiting, for something to….

I just can't dream, can I?

Michael then shrugged, since it was something he was at least used to.

Hasn't been that bad, though, am I right, Michael?

And then felt a sharp sting, of emptiness, having him feeling completely hollow to the core, until there was no core in him left, anymore. Like an empty jar of clay.

Discerning Differences.

And now, ready, to go back to doing what he was meaninglessly doing before: questioning Nikki over matters he wished didn't matter. Questioning her over her involvement with The Oubliettes.

Back to the bullshit, I guess? Might as well.

"Nikki, if you couldn't trust Mr. Dorian, what makes you trust these guys?"

Nikki practically had the phone in her hand, ready, to dial. Seeing how she had….

Yeah, probably just manipulated me into that whole thing I just experienced.

She was at the stand the phone was at, ready to dial, but then hearing Michael speak out, and against everything she had just made out, made her now grow mad, as she slammed the phone down, and began yelling.

"Stop it—Michael! Stop! Stop thinking!"

"Stop thinking," baffled over Michael, wondering why she would ask that.

“Mr. Dorian is a deranged psychopath, someone to have good reason not to trust. The Oubliettes are the law. They're the only force that actually stood up towards corruption in this city, and they might someday become the future of it.”

Oh—don't bring politics into this!

“And that makes them trustworthy? I don't see it,” lashed out Michael, remembering the LDCB story.

Nikki sighed, as her eyes began to flail about in disapproval.

“Mr. Dorian and The Oubliettes aren't together—right,” asked Michael.

Nikki then made a face, like she had caught a whiff of something that smelled horrible. Horribly stupid!

“Didn’t I make that obvious? No—they're not!”

Nikki rolled her eyes, hard, as she threw her arms up into the air.

“Listen, I know I'm just a dumb ex-boxer, ex-thief, ex-con, waste of space, to be taken seriously, but, even I can tell they're not to be trusted—why can't you?”

Nikki then started shaking, looking at Michael, in disappointment.

“Fine, then at least tell me this much, what were you going to get besides money? Protection? Because if they decide they want to blow up the bomb for some reason, you're going to need lots of that!”

Nikki then smiled, condescendingly, and then said:

“Well, to start with—you!”

That threw Michael off, completely, as he came to terms with what that whole thing happening with him with The Oubliettes, in Central Park, was really all about.

“You know… they called me to say….”

Nikki then raised her hand up to her ear, in demonstration, with her thumb and pinky sticking out, pretending it was a phone.

“'Hey, we got your ex-boyfriend here, riding around on a bike, calling your name out— like an idiot! In the middle of Central Park, what do you want us to do with him?'"

And she was obviously being very sassy and sarcastic now, trying her hardest to mock Michael, in a childish way she felt he would get; expressing just how stupid the whole ordeal had been. And how stupid

Michael had been, all to Nikki's impatience.

"They asked me that to see if I even cared what happened to you, and I had to begin begging them not to hurt you."

You begged?

Michael looked away, really feeling embarrassed now.

"They also told me—from what they had learned—that you knew too much. You told them you knew about Mr. Dorian, and the bomb, and the codes. And for that, they found you as a liability, and a risk."

Michael really thought he had been holding his own when they were interrogating him in the woods. Now, he felt like a royal moron for thinking so.

Me? Brains? I guess not….

"Seriously, Michael, you told them everything that happened? How fucking stu— "

But then Nikki cut herself off, not wanting to delve into straight up name calling.

"Men like The Oubliettes don't take risks, and they wanted me to give them a good reason why they shouldn't take you out, and have you stuffed in a nearby dumpster."

Nikki finished telling her story, as Michael then felt the smallest and stupidest he had in a while.

"What did they want in exchange for me," asked Michael.

"Almost half of what they were offering back," responded Nikki.

You did that all for me… really?

At this point, Nikki looked down at Michael, and noticed his gloom. Feeling sympathetic, she opened her mouth again to say something reaffirming, that would put Michael at ease.

"Listen, Michael, you're in over your head, just accept that, and don't feel bad. As for the bomb—well—I'll tell you this… they don't want to blow it up. They're not monsters like Mr. Dorian is. All they want to do is use it as a threat against the people at that party, to shift around some of the power amongst the high-ups that were there—okay?"

Michael sighed. It was all too funny for him, seeing how he thought he was the one saving Nikki, but Nikki had really done that and much more. But then again, something was still not adding up, and Michael

felt drawn to continue questioning her over the matter.

"So, when did The Oubliettes get into the picture?"

"Michael—please! You're not solving anything by—"

"Just answer the question! It's reaffirming—at least for me—to hear you explain everything."

"Fine, they called me yesterday... happy now," asked Nikki, seeming more and more irritated with each question Michael asked.

Nikki, seriously, stop playing me off as a child. Because it also fills me up with the sense that you might be lieing to me, completely, to get me to follow you along with....

And the funny part was, Michael then sensed within himself, that he would follow her to the ends of the earth, no matter what. Like Orpheus, and his own odyssey to the depths of Hades, all for Eurydice.

Yeah! But Nikki! Not that....

Now another question sparked in Michael's mind, and he knew that this one was going to be the most important one yet. At least, for him, since it was the question that would settle a lot of the conflict, he was having over her.

"Nikki, if they told you yesterday about their offer, then why were you making a deal with Mr. Dorian today?"

Nikki's eyes lit up, bright now, even with no bulbs screwed in. And, Michael now knew from that reaction, there wasn't going to be any good excuse as to why. Nikki then looked at Michael, looked within herself, sighed a miserable sigh, and then said:

"Because... Mr. Dorian was offering more mo—... mon—... yeah... more money."

Now Michael also had himself a miserable sigh.

"Also, me and Radboy sorta have a lot of enemies in that building, that's also the reason why Mr. Dorian got us involved, and told us about the....," mentioned Nikki, then had a look on her face, as if she had gone ahead with too much.

So, that was the other reason besides money—huh? I don't know what to think! Oh, fuck me! I'm starting to get tired of this conflict.

"Michael, I was going to be making a big mistake if I had gone on

and done business with him. I mean, even with all the enemies me and Anthony had in there, I don't want to have that much blood on my hands, I don't want to have any, really! I don't know what I was thinking. So, thank you for coming by.....

Nikki then paused, with a queer smirk on her face.

"And for doing what you did."

Michael then looked up, anxiously, as Nikki realized what he was now thinking.

"Well, I don't mean what you did with Radboy—not that! Although, I hope you're still not upset about that. I mean... if you hadn't, I'm pretty sure Mr. Dorian would have had us both killed, anyways. Me and Tony. That... or worse!

I've heard Mr. Dorian has some connections to men I've heard having sex slave operations down in South America. And, he probably would have had me sold off to some cigar chomping pimp in Bolivia, that likes to break his women in... using leeches, cigars or razor blades—or something."

Nikki shuddered at the thought of that, and had a faint cringe-worthy laugh, while dismissing it.

Sex slave operation... leeches... seriously?

Thought Michael, as he continued coming to terms with all the mess he had gotten himself involved with, getting with Nikki, and coming this far.

"So, Michael, now please let me do this, so we can finally bring this night to an end."

As Nikki picked up the phone, and began to dial, Michael pondered over the information that he had just received. He wanted to think of something... not adding up! Because he still felt like The Oubliettes couldn't be trusted, no matter what Nikki said. But the more he thought, the more his mind kept drawing up blanks. How Nikki had explained it, it had all sounded crystal clear, and clear as day, and Michael felt maybe he shouldn't be looking any deeper into the matter.

So what if she gave The Oubliettes the codes? What gain would they have in blowing up that building, when they can use the bomb the way Nikki described—shifting around power—and all. Like Mr. Parsley said himself: 'you don't bite the hand that feeds you.' And.

So what if Nikki decided to go for Mr. Dorian, the higher bidder, first? She had made a mistake, and was willing to admit to it. She's admitting she did it out of money, and even though I really don't like the sound of that… I don't know! Maybe I should give her a break. Stop judging her for all the wrong she's done….

Then that whole demon possessed shit from his mitts started up again, or tried to, as—

You two shut the fuck up, too! Stop judging her, too! She might not be perfect, but she's not what you guys are making her out to be. She ain't perfect, I ain't perfect. And since I ain't… I ain't one to judge. And neither are you guys!

And now, Michael felt better, as he forced himself to deny just now having pictured himself speaking with demons, living in his hands.

Please tell me this stupid Stephen King shit ain't happening! Please!

Honestly, I think it sorta is.

You shut the fuck up, too! I still don't know where the fuck you exactly came in from, but I've accepted you this far!

….

Although, I meant to say, shut the fuck up, addressing me, but do continue with the narration. If you please!

Ahem….

As Michael began to feel a bit at ease, as his mind cleared up of all the questions that were circling before, it was at that second, the break in the equation came to him.

Wait, they were trying to get me to turn on her… why did I forget that obvious detail?

Luckily, Le Bron was apparently an antique collector, and had some old 20s art deco rotary phone, so it took a while for Nikki to dial.

"Nikki, if they found me to be a liability and a risk—willing to kill me for it—what makes you think they won't feel that way about you?"

Nikki's eyes then lit up, again, with no bulbs, and this time busted.

"Michael… enough!"

“No Nikki, face the facts, you know too much! What leverage do you have on men like them, to keep them from deciding to just off you, now, as they wanted to off me?”

Nikki looked flustered; she had no answer, and she seemed really pissed that she didn't.

“You know what else? Mr. Parsley is here in an alley, in a van, full of IRA commandos, armed to the teeth,” blurted out Michael, as he also remembered that detail.

“What's that again,” cried out Le Bron, feeling it was about time for him to get involved.

“Yeah—that's right! Plus, that Parsley guy spent the entire time with me in the van, trying to convince me not to trust you. I mean, if he wants to openly do business, then why send in an agent to turn on you? Also, they wanted me to get you somehow to come out of this building, before they decided to storm the place.”

Shit! I really should have brought this up the first minute I got here. Why didn’t I? I really am a stupid moron!

Nikki's jaw dropped, as she squinted her eyes, and was now at a loss trying to come up with a good excuse to continue trusting them.

“Nikki, you said nothing about this! When you told me about the deal, and how you could split some of the dough my way, I was cool with that. But this is starting to scare me, and I don't like being scared,” cried out Le Bron, as he paced back and forth, frantically, having now gotten involved, since learning how his home was in danger.

Nikki then began to consolidate herself, as if she had finally come up with a good reason to continue with the trust.

The Growl from the Corner.

“Le Bron, there's a perfectly good explanation for that! Eventually, Mr. Parsley was going to have to stage a coup at the 1999 building. With Mr. Dorian and the Iron Monkeys there, how do you think he planned on making that coup without an army,” explained Nikki, seeming a bit too hopeful that she had come up with a good answer.

“Yeah—but then again—what are they still doing here in our territory? The financial district is pretty much on the other side of the island. Michael, did you really see them park in an alley,” asked Le Bron, nervously.

“Yes, they're there. They're there as we speak,” replied Michael.

“Nikki? What the fuck have you brought on our heads,” demanded Le Bron, looking as if he was about to charge at her.

Hey, don't do that!

Thought Michael.

“Shut up, Le Bron! I told you—”

“Bitch! Don't you fucking talk to me like that!”

Le Bron then backhanded Nikki across the face, and nearly sent her spinning like a top. As she crashed onto the floor, panting, her eyes boiled out, and her face looked like it was about to fall into pieces. Le Bron then grew hesitant, and began resenting what he had done. But was then taken back from the sound of a dog growling from the other corner. And as he looked over, he saw Madboy, and saw the color in his eyes, as Madboy, continued to growl some more.

“Ah shit,” said Le Bron, “easy now, Michael! Don't be going all Rottweiler now—look at where you're at!”

But his words of reasoning had come in way too late. It was the look and feel of violence, and violence towards something precious. Le Bron had set off Madboy's guard dog mode, his inner programming to protect Nikki at all cost, and as Michael pounced onto Le Bron, he began beating him within an inch of his life. Madboy was on top of Le Bron, beating his face in, as a few of The Nim Foes then caught wind that their leader was under attack.

“Stop—Michael—stop it,” cried out Nikki.

But Madboy was already in full-on berserk mode, and wasn't able to hear a thing. At this point, three Nim Fos ran into the room, and began yelling at Michael to stop, as well. But as Michael continued thrashing away at Le Bron's face, it became quite obvious to them, Michael had crossed the line between friend and foe, and had to be checked. James Holly (whom Michael had earlier met at Stumpy's place) was the first one to jump in, grabbing Madboy from the waist, as he tried to peel him off of Le Bron, but, wasn't able to. But was eventually able to get both of them up, as the second Nim Fo lunged forward, and finally managed to

break Le Bron free. Once Le Bron was free, the third Nim Fo ran in, and kneed Madboy in the breadbasket, which knocked the wind out of him, as Michael fell to one knee. Le Bron now free, started getting a hold of his breath, while caressing his nose, that felt like it was pumping out a pint of blood with every second. Putting his hand over his face, it felt like shattered glass; all flimsy to the touch. And it pretty much was, as it cracked some more from barely even the slightest application of pressure.

"Le Bron, what do you want us to do with him," asked one of the Nim Foes.

Le Bron—soaring in pain—took one last hateful and bitter look at a man he thought he was cool with, and then said:

"Fuck him," barking it out through his bloody teeth.

As the three men rushed in, Michael had had enough time to get his second wind, but played it off as if he hadn't. Once the first Nim Fo reached arm's length, Madboy then sprung into action. As the Nim Fo tried to grab a hold of him, Michael let out a surprise attack, and socked him straight in the knee.

Crack!

Aaahhh!

And had it bend in the opposite direction. The Nim Fo wallowed in agony as Michael got up, got momentum on him, pushing him forward, and drove him into the other Nim Foes. The four men then went flying out the door, and crashed into each other in the hallway, also knocking down two bystanders that were in the way. Michael then hopped back onto his feet to try and make it back into the room.

But the Towering Inferno had now entered the scene….

Who then quickly grabbed a hold of him, lifted him up by his throat, and slammed him, hard….

Wham!

Up against a wall, practically leaving behind a cracked outline of Michael's predicament. The Towering Inferno had him pinned, as Le Bron approached to give his final word.

"Please stop, don't hurt him," cried out Nikki.

But Le Bron shoved her this time, and had her trip over herself to the ground, as he then turned his attention back onto Michael.

“Piece-of-shit, I should have never trusted you, you and this bitch of yours, but now I see this is the only way I'm going to have to deal with you both.”

“Stop it, Le Bron….”

“Yes, stop it, Tower! Don't hurt him,” cried out Letoya, this time, after Nikki, who had also now entered the scene.

“Letoya, don't you start now, either, you don’t know what hell these two have brought on us,” responded Le Bron, still trying to see if he could place his hand on his face, without it painfully fracturing into several more pieces.

“Please, just don't decide to kill him,” cried out Letoya.

Le Bron looked at Letoya, and closed his eyes to reflect. He looked back at Michael, and decided it wasn't worth it.

“Fine, Tower, get this loser out of my sight, and take his bitch with him,” called out Le Bron, while shaking his head.

“What you want me to do,” asked Tower.

“Just get them the fuck outta here, throw them into the street before—wait a second… what is that?”

Le Bron saw a small device on the floor between Tower's feet, and it looked like it had fallen out of Michael's pocket. As Le Bron bent down to pick it up, he saw a wire sticking out of it attached to what looked like a mic.

“Is this what I think it is? Were you carrying a wire, Michael,” demanded Le Bron as he shoved the gadget up towards Michael's face in display.

“They must have slipped that in my Letterman jacket pocket when I wasn't paying attention,” said Michael, shocked that he hadn't noticed it before.

“Ah shit! They've been listening in this entire time—haven't they,” cried out Le Bron, as his face tensed up with dread and panic.

And….

It was about this time, that a couple of shots were now being heard, coming from down below. Le Bron knew he had to get rid of Michael and Nikki, before The Oubliettes' mercs had decided to storm the place. But from the sound of machine-gun fire, it was now obvious, that it was too late for that.

“Shit! Tower, throw this motherfucker and the lady out the window, get them out of here—now,” barked out Le Bron in fear.

“Sorry, Michael, but it looks like you fucked it up royally this time,” said the Towering Inferno.

But Michael wasn't going to have any of it. With one quick thrust of his leg, Madboy kicked the Towering Inferno in the crotch, and fell immediately out of his grip. The Tower was now pretty much predisposed of, as he began lurching over in pain, unable to get back into action for the moment. And before anyone else could either, Madboy then lunged at Le Bron again, and sent him, and himself, flying through the air, and back into Le Bron's chamber. Nikki then also ran in, as she then slammed the door shut, keeping anyone else from entering. Then Michael placed up a bar lock that was set on the side, to keep it that way. As Michael turned back, he saw Le Bron scrounging through one of his drawers.

Ah shit! He's going for his piece!

And surely enough, Le Bron now had a 1911 at hand, but before he was able to take aim, Madboy ran up, and kicked it out of his hands.

“Okay, stop,” cried out Le Bron.

“You want to fucking kill me, Le Bron,” bellowed out Michael.

“You brought this on yourself, you crazy motherfucker!”

Fucking cowardly pimps! I should have never trusted you!

“After all the fucking years, you were going to—”

“Michael? Need I remind you there's still a squad full of trigger-happy mercenaries making their ways up here? Just go—get out of here—leave,” cried out Le Bron, as he went back to massaging his nose.

Next time I'll rip your fucking nose off, and shove it up your ass, if you even look at Nikki the wrong way, again! Fucking pimp! Fucking nig—

For a second there, Michael wasn't sure where Nikki was, but then noticed she was standing near the door, trying to hold onto her composure. Gun fire could now be heard just outside the door, and the screaming of women and Nim Foes were now echoing throughout the building.

Oh shit, Letoya is out there!

Thought Michael. But felt like he couldn’t risk opening the door to find

out.

"Le Bron? Get out—how," demanded Michael.

"There's a fire exit near the window—go," responded Le Bron, shooing Michael with his hand.

Nikki was already at the window, opening it up to get to it. Once she did, they both stepped outside to begin their escape. A loud thump was then heard coming from the barred-up door. On the railing, Nikki tried to head down, but Michael grabbed her hand, and motioned her to go upwards.

"We can't go down that way, they'll be waiting for us on the street," explained Michael.

Michael then saw the van on the street that he had been thrown out of not long ago, and then saw Mr. Parsley looking up at them, as three of his men began taking aim. This all now felt like some Sam Spade noir chase scene involving spotlights, molls, mobsters, mobs, and Maltese Falcons. Also hardboiled heroes, which made Michael eye into his own eyes, disgruntledly.

No… I don't wanna be Bogie, I'm not Bogie—fuck that shit and the crazy dames he comes with!

"Ms. Jackson, we're running out of time! Give us the codes, and you can still get out of this alive," called out Mr. Parsley, through a loudspeaker.

"Why are you doing this, I thought we had a deal," yelled out Nikki at the top of her lungs, as her voice cracked up at the end.

"Like I said, Ms. Jackson, we're running out of time, and you've wasted enough of ours as it is! The National Guardsmen will soon be here, and we need the codes—now," explained Mr. Parsley.

"No—Nikki—don't tell them," cried out Michael, but not loud enough for Mr. Parsley to hear from the ground level.

Nikki looked over at Michael, and then discouragingly to one side, as if she was contemplating over the bleakness of her choices.

"Nikki, he's going to try and kill us—either way," explained Michael.

"No, he won't," gasped Nikki, unsure of herself.

"Well, if he doesn't, I know they will!"

Strike Three!

There she was again; the new sweetheart in Michael's life. A pretty Latina Posy was she, with skin so creamy and smooth, that on a different occasion, Michael would have fancied mixing her up with some freshly cut pineapples, and having himself an ambrosia salad. But, at a loss, this was definitely no occasion to be going in that line of thought, for she was once again driving another van full of (what Michael practically expected to be) more Iron Monkeys MC goons, armed with more AK-47s.

Wait, What the fuck am I thinking about? Ambrosia salad? Pretty Latina Posy? That bitch wants to kill me! I really am a sucker for women!

"Oh, they've found us," said Nikki.

"Yeah, they have," responded Michael.

Since Michael and Nikki were standing from a higher angle, they had managed to see the new van approaching before Mr. Parsley could, and Michael figured this was probably the best chance to make their escape.

"Ms. Jackson, are you going to give us the codes, or, are we going to have to do this the hard way? I mean, don't tell me you're no longer interested in our part of the deal," explained Mr. Parsley, through the loudspeaker.

"Nikki, don't tell them anything! They'll be shooting each other up pretty soon, and that will be our best chance," said Michael.

"Okay… but…."

But… it didn't seem like Nikki was on the same page as Michael.

But what?

Thought Michael.

"But… I don't think we should leave the city, just yet, I still need to see if I can talk to the rest of The Oubliettes… and…."

Nikki then caught herself overwhelmed in her senses, as she cut herself short, falling deep into thought.

"I mean, we need to… we need to…."

Her eyes were jittering about in her eye sockets, and they looked like they were about to jettison out from all the stress and strain placed onto them. It was a pitiful sight. But one, Michael was now starting to lose his sympathy and patience towards.

How the fuck are you going to make the deal now, Nikki, talking to the other Oubliettes? Are you fucking kidding me! Isn't it obvious now that we're passed all that?

For a second there, back at Le Bron's chambers, she had managed to convince Michael that maybe what she was doing wasn't as bad as he thought it to be.

She got me. She did! She manipulated me with my emotions, again. And the fucked up part is… I really sorta wanted her to.

It felt good when she told him what she had done for him; saving him in Central Park. And when she told him, then, how she wanted to take him with her to Tahiti after all this, Michael truly had become taken in by the idea, taken in by its promise.

But….

Michael also knew better, and knew how they were most definitely passed all that. And he shouldn't let himself be taken in by it any longer.

I've already done enough wrong for tonight. I want to be by her side, I still do! But not if it means I have to continue to do more of it. And especially the fucked up shit that's on her level. Who the fuck is this woman and….

Fuck, I'm getting double vision again.

Michael felt like there had to still be something between the two, and for that reason, it was very disheartening for him to continue seeing that Lady step out of her, and continue trying to make decisions that could cost them their lives, and also many others. Blue lady, red lady, both centered, and off some. Damn the 3d glasses.

Nikki, please don't make me hate you—please! Please don't give me good reason that I should turn on you! Don't force me to stay by your side, and have me go—too far!

"Nikki, stop trusting these people! What if they actually do go ahead with blowing up the bomb—then what," cried out Michael.

And then:

"*I don't care*," whispered out Nikki, as she grew a dark and distant look on her face.

And that now….

That now!

Had really now… pissed Madboy off! Almost more than he was able to handle, as he almost felt his barehand reach out, and grab her, and do God knows what next. Michael was breathing hard and heavily, again, and Nikki noticed. Michael was really beginning to grow fed up with all this, and seeing her say something like that had almost destroyed the last good image of her he was desperately trying to cling on to.

I really wish we had left the city, then, right after our moment in the elevator, before I had to learn all this about her now. We could have been out of the city by now….

But!

She just had to stay, because she just had to keep touch with The Oubliettes, because she just had to get paid.

Money—money—money—money!

And this Lady is already rich to begin with. And also, she still probably does want those prominent figures murdered, even though she had said before that she doesn't. Saying how she didn't want that much blood on her hands. I really don't know what to think anymore.

As much as Michael wanted to tell Nikki these things, he kept his mouth shut, while glaring her over.

But….

Then again, this wasn't the best time to be standing around doing so, either.

Bang!

Both Michael and Nikki were then jolted by the sound of a shot fired from below, that ricocheted off a wall just a few feet from Michael's head.

"Mr. Connelly, Ms. Jackson, that was your final warning," called out Mr. Parsley, through his loudspeaker.

And Michael now felt it was about time to let Mr. Parsley in on their little secret.

"Hey, old man, I think you have more important shit to be worried

about than your codes right now," cried out Michael.

Then pointed towards the direction of the coming van.

Now you kids play nice, and....

But then Michael noticed something else. As Mr. Parsley looked over at the coming van, Michael noticed how there was no sign of surprise or concern in his eyes. This now was definitely not good, definitely not good—at all!

"Ah—Nikki! You've been had, again! They're in on it—together," cringed out Michael, as he glared at her, with a look of sore and sour disappointment.

Now do you see? Now do you see how wrong you've been? And also stupid, too! About all this. And then, yet, you've also had the nerve to be making me out to be the dumb one. Some dumb lug, following along, but unable to follow.

"No—no—no! What do you mean," gasped Nikki, unwilling to accept it.

"Look," cried out Michael, as he pointed at Mr. Parsley.

But then Nikki also noticed, saw what had really been going on, saw how she had been had, and then opened her mouth up to express her frustration, and began screaming, without making a sound.

"No! They told me... they told me—"

"Nikki, it doesn't matter now—run," broke out Michael, as he grabbed her hand, and yanked as hard as he could the direction they should be headed.

As the two dashed forward, fleeing further up the fire escape, they felt another jolt, by another shots being fired in warning.

"Ms. Jackson, I am not playing around anymore, if you do not...."

But Michael and Nikki were paying no attention to Mr. Parsley, as they flew into motion, making their escape.

"Ahhhh!"

And then, Mr. Parsley just about blew a fuse, as he blew out a long-ended screech, totally out of the blue, and totally out of character. Since, he couldn't just shoot at them, and kill them, and then get the codes out, anyways, he was forced to watch as Michael and Nikki blew him off, and continued with their escape. His bluff had been called out, and for once, Michael felt like he was really getting a sense into his true character, beyond his ever-present grin, and hearing the type of sounds this lizard

would really be making, considering how sharply and shrilly his screeches were being carried out.

Ha, sounds like a pterodactyl getting struck by lightning in midflight. Then falling down, and into the mouth of a T-rex. Chomp!

Thought Michael, sorta glad he was still able to think of something funny at any moment's notice.

As the two rushed up the fire escape, and reached the top, Michael then took a quick panoramic glimpse up there, up top, on top of the rooftops, to see which path would best suits their escape, now. But…?

But… bupkis!

Wasn't able to find any. Michael was barely able to make much sense of the concrete terrain; the whole scene up top was a cluster-fuck of chimneys, TV antennas, and areas skewed in darkness. And, to confound the confusion, clouds had built up around the full moon, leaving Michael with hardly any visibility.

"Michael, I can't tell if they're following us," said Nikki, looking back down from the direction they came.

Shut up, Nikki! Don't talk to me right now. Just don't talk—and don't even think! You were obviously stupid enough to believe Mr. Parsley, and now, I don't want your stupidity to put us into any more danger.

Michael didn't feel like responding to her. He already had way too much tension built up over the situation they were in, and he needed to focus on that, instead. So, he decided then to take a look back down below, and see what he would now be dealing with.

Wait… they might see me, and start shooting up!

And so then, instead, Michael ran over to a dark corner, and then took a look down onto the street. Michael then saw Mr. Parsley down there yelling at his IRA goons, and, they didn't seem as if they were making any plans to continue their pursuit; seemed to have disengaged, and were planning to pull back. They were doing that, and next to Mr. Parsley, that pretty little Latina Posy….

Fuck that bitch!

Was standing by, talking on a walky-talky, while blowing Bazooka bubbles the size of her head. And now, seemed to be the one taking

charge.

"Michael, what are they doing down there," asked Nikki.

"I don't know… but… I don't see any of Mr. Parsley's goons trying to make it up here… and… they seem like they're getting ready to leave," responded Michael, confused as to what was going on.

"They're leaving," asked Nikki.

"Yeah, they're leaving, and… looks like Mr. Dorian's men are now going to take over, coming after us."

What's going on here?

"Wait… they're leaving? Shit! Michael… maybe I should go down and…."

And now….

Michael looked over, completely and totally dumbfounded, at Nikki. And… this was now becoming too much for him.

No… no, no, no, no, no! I gotta get it through her thick head, now, this time—I got to!

"Nikki! You're not getting the money! You're not getting your deal! You're not getting Tahiti—okay," lashed out Michael, as he got up, and started getting confrontational with her.

"And… the second you're to get down there, they're going to put you in a world of pain, to get the codes out of you. And then, they're going to shoot you in the—fucking head—do you understand me," screamed out Madboy, trying to make sense with her.

But then, was cut off by what Michael saw in her reaction.

This time, Nikki began to grow confrontational, as she started baring her animal self; started baring teeth, and about to start hissing at him; looking as if she wanted to bite Michael's head off. Coming off, to Michael's dismay, like a real lizard would; an image Michael couldn't stand imagining being what she really was. Nikki was now mirroring the same confrontational look of rage in Michael's face, except without any of the compassion and reason, Michael at least felt he was also trying to extend towards her, through it all. Double vision with the 3d glasses of red and blue frames, again!

I can see now, whatever that other self is in Nikki, that Lady, is definitely reptilian.

Michael then stuck his finger out at Nikki, and then clenched his hand into a fist—to let her know—he wasn't having any of it!

"Nikki… I swear… I swear I will—"

Vroom… vroommmmm!

Went an explosion of noise, now, from down below; something that could be heard all around, from ground level. And all the way up to the rooftops, where Michael and Nikki were at. A thundering explosion of gas, fire, and metal. All loud. All relly very loud! An explosion of such, from what sounded like two thousand motorcycle pistons being fired up all at once; from the engines of a thousand choppers, ridden by a thousand screaming Mad Max maniacs, that had all, just now, arrived to the scene. Running over to the side again, Michael could see that the entire Iron Monkeys MC army was now out here, had ridden in, to continue on with their business of burning down the city. As well as coming up, to finish the business they and Nikki had started. Angel Eyes was there. El Presidente Angel was of course down there with them. And he seemed prime ready to do what was necessary to complete his bossman's plans of totaling this city to its foundation. He was down there, with that Latina Posy, as the two eyed up at the Nim Fo building, while the rest of the Iron Monkeys MC started doing their torching and looting work.

"Michael, what's going on down there," cried out Nikki, back from showing Michael something he really, really didn't like seeing.

Shut the fuck up, you stupid greedy bitch!

Michael didn't respond, but continued to view the scene down below. And after what seemed like a short conversation between The Road Warrior en Español couple. Angel Eyes began smiling, as he eyed the Latina, while doing his own rendition of a Journey Face.

Ah! Stop doing that! I don't want you to do that, too. Don't take away the only few joys I've had tonight.

Then grabbed Posy by the back of her hair, as he yanked down, hard, as he then licked her across the face, with this one giant tongue of his.

Aaaaaaahhhhhhoooo!

Ms. Posy, then, really moaned out loud, like an excited schoolgirl would do, as Angel smacked her across the ass, and sent her skipping along her merry way. Angel then went back to his chopper, as Ms. Posy then

just stood there, and then started bouncing up and down, up and down, looking like she wanted seconds.

Why are the really hot ones always into the worst type of men? Thought Michael, then pictured himself and Nikki, and sneered at the thought.

"Michael," cried out Nikki again, more curiously.

Please—shut up—baby! Just don't talk! Right now, I don't feel like I can look you in the face, without wanting to smack it right off!

Continuing to look down, he saw that a bunch of Iron Monkeys were seemingly riding into the Nim Fo building, and led by Angel Eyes, himself.

What are these clowns up to? Did they really just ride right in? Do they actually plan to ride all the way—

"Michael, I've decided to head back down, there's nowhere to run—we've lost!"

And with that, Michael felt like he really had lost it, then. Jason Vorhees had his prey in sight, and was ready to go in for the kill.

Ah shit! It's out now, and there's no stopping it!

Michael then turned around, and began eyeing Nikki like the Grim Reaper, like he had done, before, now with eyes expressing how they had unfinished business they were eager to attend to.

Strike three, Lady!

Thought Madboy, to himself, as a part of him at least felt like that other Lady was deserving of whatever hell was to come of next. And then began stomping his feet, marching, right at her, totally fixated, and totally afraid out of his mind, of whether or not he was really going to do something this time.

No, no, no—don't! God, make me stop! Oh shit… I can't stop!

Seeing the Reaper, again, Nikki just about freaked, as she tried to run backwards, but tripped over herself, and fell to her knees. But Madboy was still moving fast, pounding the ground below his feet as he made trek, and once he reached her, he finally did stop.

Oh, thank God!

For it was the look of total loss in Nikki's eyes, built up, brick by brick, like a brick wall, which Michael found himself slamming up against.

"What are you going to do—Madboy? Are you going to put your

hands on me, and then squeeze my head, so hard, that I slowly begin to feel my brain being crush within my own skull," mentioned Nikki, all sad and sorrowful, to Michael's horror.

And with that, Michael felt hollow, and totally scared shitless.

"Are you… Michael, is that what it's come to?"

Shut up! Stop bringing that up!

Not only did Michael feel totally devastated by all this, but also, now, completely rotten to his core. They were all the same words Michael had heard before from Mr. Dorian, and it felt disheartening to hear them now coming from her. And, to the point, he wished, his heart would just stop beating now. Seeing her there, still on her knees, looking pitiful, yet again, once again, was the only thing keeping him from continuing on with what his mitts were demanding for. The justice they deemed fit to seek.

They won't shut up! They won't… keep saying how it's all her fault. Everything that's wrong in my life. All the pain and suffering I've been through.

Her fault… for abandoning me.

Shit… maybe Gab was right… maybe I do have abandonment issues?

Quadruple Vision.

He needed to see her like this. Looking pitiful and lost, and completely lost out of her mind. Michael felt like it was the only thing making him still feel sane and human, and seeing her as still just Nikki, and not that Lady….

Because… really!

The thought of her as that other woman had now become the bane of his existence. It was the devil in the dark, that eyed him in the night, and called out for his true monster to be released. His mitts were calling out to him, again, practically begging him. Begging! And Michael felt like wanting to chew his arms off, and free himself from this conflict.

What the fuck has happened to me tonight?

Thought Michael, as he shuddered.

All I wanted was to be my old self again—not this!

But the hour of living out his glory days: being a fighter, a brawler, and a wise-cracking force to be reckoned with, which no lady could resist…

had now come and gone. And this was all of what had seemed to have remained. Michael, needed to do something to fight back these demonic urges, as the thought of that Lady continued to tear him apart.

I need to… I need to….

Michael quickly shoved his hand into his pocket, as he went for his Rosary. It had given him a sense of sanity, several times, up to this point. And….

He needed to… he needed to… it….

It wasn't there!

What the… no!

Michael then went totally frantic, and began to panic, searching all his pockets—searching all of them! But. Still. It wasn't there.

No, no! I must have lost it, back, when me and The Towering Inferno were going at it.

Michael felt like there was nothing left to save him now, and he didn't know what to do. Nikki was now up to her feet again. Damn woman could not stop falling over herself, again and again! Even though trying to get back to her feet like—nothing—happened.

"Michael, please, let me go down there, and talk to them. I can fix this! You know me! I'm good at talking to people," said Nikki.

Where is it?

Where is it?

Where…?

And then all of a sudden, as Michael looked deep into Nikki's eyes, he saw them there.

It's in her eyes!

It's in her eyes!

It's… wait… what… in her eyes?

How's that?

It was one thing to be imagining things in his mind's eye, such as demon possessed hands, people splitting in half like blue and red neon filters, or people around him really being cats or lizards. That there was one thing, since they were just products of his own vivid imagination. But,

it was another thing—to physically be seeing shit—beyond his input, which is what this was. Michael had now reached the point where he really was hallucinating things. Something no longer internal, but external being manifested.

Or am I seeing the truth, and this is real?

And… this was a whole new experience for him, and as much as it frightened him to be doing so. It also sorta didn't.

What… what does it mean? I'm really seeing them there! So… what does it….

Michael then sighed, and allowed himself to accept it. Whether a hallucination or not, it was making sense to him. He felt it! And that was all the sense he felt like he needed right now.

Yeah… yeah, I do! I do want them to be there. I don't understand what it means that they are, but I do understand what it feels like. This, here, is now giving me the same sense I've felt all night long, like I've been having kissing my crucifix. It's doing its trick again, it's magic, and that's all that matters to me right now. It's aligning me to my true self, and….

And now, Michael came to a new conclusion of what was really going on. He now figured, it had to have something to do with the whole ideas of one's true self. An idea, he had been playing around with in his head all night long.

Really, this whole night has been about nothing—but that! And now with Nikki, I feel the same. I want my old Nikki back. The real Nikki. Who she always has been!

What are you talking about, Michael? When you first met her, she was already a munip—

I mean the Nikki that was with me, for so long. I mean, we were together for over three years after that meeting back at the Tropic.

The person I knew during that time, that's the person I want back.

So, Michael now figured, in order to do all that, he was going to need to protect Nikki, at all cost, even if it meant protecting Nikki from Nikki.

From herself.

For as long as that Lady was also in there with her giving Michael double vision…

Michael then felt…

Madboy would be there with him, too.

Wait! What the fuck am I thinking?

Evil me, good me?

Evil Nikki, good Nikki?

What the fuck is this now… quadruple vision?

I'm getting double troubled with that one Foreigner song now!

And Michael practically was, with the visions, and two identical, but also separate, versions of that song playing in each ear.

What the fuck has Mr. Dorian done to my head?

"Michael, I'm heading—"

"No, you're not," interrupted Michael, as he started to grow confrontational with her again, and this time, on a much more antagonizing level.

"Michael, I can—"

"I said—no you're not—and don't you ever call me Madboy again!" Nikki had practically never called him that, ever, and he'd be damned if she was to start now.

"Michael—"

"Nikki—baby! I understand you're totally coked out of your—fucking mind—and disillusional right now, but, I'm not going to let you make the biggest mistake of your life," spat out Michael, cringing up with teeth.

At first, Nikki cowered a bit from his presence, but then came out with teeth of her own.

Don't you fucking start like that with me, too, not again!

"I'm going to get you out of town—forget the money—you're already rich enough to where you don't deserve anymore. Stop being a spoiled and greedy little bitch! You already have enough money to where you can retire in Tahiti on your own, and don't even bring up those enemies you have at 1999, I don't want to hear that either," spat out Michael, speaking to her in a way he had never done so before.

Right now, she doesn't understand these things. Things I've learned since murdering Anthony.

But Nikki is a killer, you saw that!

I mean… killing… and murdering, are two different things. She

killed those three Iron Monkeys because she had no choice, it was them or us! With murder, it's a whole other ball game, and it's all about choice.

But Mr. Parsley had said it, also, she's mur—

I don't fucking want to think about what Mr. Parsley told me, before, not right now!

....

Right now, she doesn't understand something about herself, like I understand about myself. She doesn't understand… she doesn't know… there's someone else in her, confusing her, and making her think she knows what she's doing. That's why I need to protect her, from herself… get it?

....

Get it?

You know how batshit crazy this all sounds right now, right?

....

You do, right?

Yeah!

As for Nikki, right now, the woman had practically grown green scales, and slit yellow eyes, and was hissing at Michael with a forked tongue.

Get out! Get out of her… don't take my Nikki over completely!

"Nikki… you don't know what you're doing… you don't… you just don't!"

Michael was now breaking up, as this whole whack-job experience really began to break him apart.

"Nikki, please! You don't know what you're…."

"Yes, I do," lashed out Nikki.

"No, you—"

"Yes—I do!"

Michael then started shaking his head in denial, as Nikki then started nodding hers. To Michael, she now looked as dark and as cruel as she did that second, she had stepped out of those drapes, back on that magic floor, back at that magic hour, back in that magic building, when Michael's world had been turned upside down, seeing her again for the first time in years. Nikki then began doing what she had, then, prancing

over to Michael, like a woman possessed by some evil pagan goddess of lust and treachery. One step perfectly placed in front of another, also perfectly paced with her hips; her heels clicking and clacking, hard, breaking up Michael even further, with every step she took.

Also, at this moment, both Nikki and Michael could hear a faint sound of The Iron Monkey's choppers making their way up to them.

“Nikki… you're not this!”

“Yes, I am,” she cried out.

“No, you're—"

“Yes, I am,” cried out, again.

It almost felt like Nikki was going to begin circling him, again, like back then. But didn't. As the sound of the choppers continued closing in.

“Michael… Madboy… now you listen to me! Now I know you're some dumb-as-shit, chauvinistic, macho asshole, here, thinking it’s your job to save me… but… but…?”

And now, Nikki seemed to be breaking up herself, as she felt a pressure in her forehead seize her, and her senses, and her speech. And to Michael’s awe, he again physically saw that metaphysical transaction transpire… looking like a white light shaped like a gavel smacking her across the forehead.

“Nikki, you’re in over your head!”

“No… I….”

Nikki was trembling now, as red and blue versions met in-between after that white light’s intervention. And now Nikki could no longer deny herself, how much she really was.

“Michael,

please… please…?

I need that money….

I need the money!

I need it—I need it—I need it!

I… I….”

Mano-a-Mano.

But before Nikki was able to finish, one of the doors leading to the roof

had then flung open, wide, as a stream of light from the headlight of Angel's chopper now pierced out from the darkness within. There was a sound of mechanized hell and thunder roaring out from within that lair. And then:

"Motherfucker," screamed out, the ten ton Colombian, all draped in steel.

Michael quickly grabbed Nikki by the hand, as Nikki then pulled away.

"Nikki—baby—please, I'm sorry for how crazy I've been acting."

But Nikki now seemed lost within herself. As broken up as Michael had been about everything, Nikki had really been experiencing twice as much. Maybe even three times. Or four. She had experienced too much, felt too much, thought too much. Had been stretched out in so many ways, that she didn't know which way to stretch towards next.

"Nikki… please," begged Michael, as he stretched his hand out.

But Nikki then gave Michael the sight of her bewildered self, and how lost they were within her pupils, as she shook her head at him.

"Nikki!"

"I'm afraid, Michael, I don't know what I'm doing! I don't… I really don't—"

"Motherfuckers," screamed out now, the now twenty ton Colombian, again, as he revved his engine up in display.

Oh, please come to your senses, Nikki!

"Please—please! Nikki! I'm afraid… I'm afraid, too!"

"No, you're not!"

"What," gasped Michael, for that came out of nowhere.

"You're never afraid of anything, you're never afraid," said Nikki, and then expressed resentment towards him.

What do you mean… I'm never afraid? How can you…?

But then Michael understood, that that was what Nikki really thought of him. Thought of him, and saw of him, since that was how he almost always made himself out to be.

Huh… so that's how everyone sees me from the outside?

Thought Michael. And then understood that that was probably why he always had a hard time relating with Nikki in the past, and with anyone, really.

"Nikki, look into my eyes."

"What," gasped Nikki, unsure of what to do or think next.

"Just look, now, into—"

"Motherfuckers," screamed out the now thirty ton—

But this time, Madboy wasn't gonna to be having any more of Angel's potty mouth, as he broke away from Nikki, and turned his attention onto him.

"Motherfu—"

Quickly! Michael then ripped out a TV antenna that was next to him and chucked it at Angel. Angel then, already going for his gun, just about leaped off his chopper, and fell back down the stairs, after catching the sight of that flying piece of wiry metal mess coming for him.

"Nikki, look into my eyes," cried out Michael, one more time.

And Nikki this time did so.

"I'm not perfect, Nikki," expressed Michael, and showed her that with his mortal eyes.

And this time, Nikki saw it. Truthfully, Nikki had never heard Michael mentioning him being afraid of anything, ever, before, and it was now making a world of difference seeing that he was. And mostly for her sake. Always having seemed like the overly confident type, seeing this was important for her, for seeing fear in his eyes was now allowing her to feel a connection, with the fear of her own. And now, not so much, for there was someone also there, also bearing that fear.

"Michael… I… I… I don't know what I'm doing… I—"

"Neither do I," said Michael.

And that now… was the final word. As Nikki finally heard the words she had been waiting for, for a man… any man… to say to her. Practically all her life.

"Nikki," cried out Michael, one final time, and one final time stretched out his hand.

"All right, I'm with you," said Nikki, as she accepted it.

And as the two took off, blindly venturing in whatever direction they momentary deemed fit, it was at that moment—then—all of a sudden—that it began! From all around, doors leading up to the rooftops, leading up here, one by one, began bursting open. As one by one, then, Angel's men, Angel's motorhead brigade of Latin motorcyclists, began revving

up their choppers, in anticipation. Michael and Nikki were off, and so were they now, taking off after them; racing towards them; looking like they were making plans to run them over.

Of course….

Given the fact that how stupid all this was: them riding around on rooftops, didn't seem to have sunk in. And probably wasn't, until one of them was to be made an example of.

Reaching the edge of the Nim Fo building, Michael and Nikki found themselves stuck, as The Iron Monkeys closed in closer.

Wait… you're not gonna….

But then—he did! The one Iron Monkey that was closest, and looked the most craziest, now accelerated his chopper towards them, all the way.

Are you fucking kidding me?

"Vas a morir, pendejo!"

Fuck me, he's not!

Thought Michael. But then noticed the carechimba had been chugging some tequila from a bottle, beforehand.

Seriously, is he….

And, he was. He was. And as this kamikaze nutcase spanned towards them, both Michael and Nikki jumped out of the way, as then that idiota went flying off the edge, and screaming through the night, and towards a building at the opposite side of that expanse, and then crashed.

Boom!

Went a giant fiery explosion.

Boom, boom!

Fucking hell!

Thought Michael, for having just witnessed that; watching what seemed like a G.I. Joe taped to a firecracker, taped to a dart, and then thrown at a bullseye that exploded when it hit dead center.

Boom, boom, boom!

Continued the exploding. And now Michael was nearly in tears of laughter.

I guess, that's it! That right there is the truth of it. Exactly who and what we truly are.

My uncle Francis was right: we're all stupid, stupid, ignoramus children, with zero clue as to what any of us are doing.

None of us know! Not a single one of us mortals here on earth do so.

There really is no such thing as being a grown-up! None whatsoever.

Boom, boom! Concluded the explosions: their sentiments exactly!

"These guys are out of their minds," screamed out Nikki, in disbelief.

And… looking back, Michael was stunned to see how the rest of the Iron Monkeys MC had actually been cheering him on.

Wow, it's not just the not knowing, some people are totally invested in the art of being a knucklehead. Totally!

And it was now apparent, almost all of them had some type of alcoholic beverage with them, at hand. All making yipping noises, and all living it up, like they didn't have a care in the world.

I can see why Mr. Dorian uses these nut-jobs, they're suicidally inclined to do anything for him.

Although, one of them didn't seem so pleased with what he had just witnessed, and was circling around screaming "mierda" and "puto" over and over again. Michael grew amused.

Not my fault your boyfriend, there, was a suicidal lunatic.

But as that fool kept brooding hard enough to lay an egg, keeping Michael's and Nikki's attention, El Presidente then made his move.

Coming in from the side, first trying to ride in fast and cut in between the two, Angel Eyes then lifted up the front wheel, and nailed Michael. Really let 'im have it, as Michael was thrown back ten feet, and then flew off the edge.

"Oh my God," screamed Nikki, in horror.

But, to their luck, Michael had managed to reach out at the last second, and had gotten a hold of the edge, before falling to his death.

"Oh my God," screamed Michael, in pain.

From the momentum of being thrown backwards, so hard and fast, Michael had swung around, and into the side of the building, slamming hard against it, as his backbone felt like it had shattered into pieces from the impact. Michael was now feeling some shearing pain pulsating all throughout his body, as he screamed out in anguish. But pain, not from where he was slammed, but from where the most pressure was exerted, trying to keep himself from falling any further. The momentum of it all had dislocated his shoulder. Michael felt like his arm was wanting to pop—right out! And if that experience hadn't been enough, generating the most pain, it was also the fact that, he had to now continue using that arm to hold on to the edge, holding on for life.

"Fuck… the pain!"

The pain was now becoming too much for him, as Michael began to lose his grip. But Nikki then reached down, and pulled him up from his jacket, and back onto the roof.

And the second she did, Angel Eyes had already gotten off his bike, and had gotten a hold of Nikki by the hair.

"Let go of her!"

Michael tried to fight back to his feet, but El Presidente then kicked him, hard, like a soccer ball, and almost had him fly off the edge again. Angel Eyes then began cackling, and making hooting noises, as his men joined in.

"Let go of her you fucking asshole," screamed out Michael.

"What's wrong—carechimba? Don't look like you havin' much fun anymore," questioned Angel, as he began trying to lift Nikki from her hair, and got her off her feet.

Nikki screamed in pain, as the giant prick stared soullessly into her eyes, looking like he was fantasizing of what to do next with her, and then seemed mesmerized by what fantasy he then came up with.

Fucking sicko!

But it was giving Michael an ample amount of time to try something again. Michael had gotten to his feet, and was now rushing towards him; but before he was able to do some damage, Angel Eyes had then noticed him, and as Michael flew in, he was then caught by the Columbian in midair, like a baseball caught in a catcher's mitt, and by the throat, even.

"Whaa," sounded out Michael, making that choking sound.
Michael was then lifted up by his throat, and now Angel Eyes had both parties up in the air, by each hand; he fancied this, his own marvelous strength, looking at both, and then threw Michael to the ground, again.

"You know, my friend... I've heard that you're pretty good with your fists... and... I kinda want to see that now," sassed El Presidente, as he released Nikki, and let her fall to the ground.

Michael really didn't feel like brawling right now. He was in a lot of pain, and didn't know if he could take him, just yet.

"What? You feeling tired now, buddy? Come on—carechimba! I'm getting bored, here! Maybe I should turn my attention back to your woman."

But as he turned his attentions back onto her, while laughing his ass off, he then noticed that Nikki had pulled off a link of his chain, that was set to his side, and was spinning it now, and ready to whip the tip of it across his face.

Clank!

Went the sound of the impact, as it slammed hard, and then cut in deep, and now had Angel Eyes spinning a little out of control, as he then fell to one knee.

And now! Michael felt like he had another opportunity to rush him again. As Michael ran up, after getting up, he tried to ram his fist down the hombre's throat. But his fist then met with Angel's fist, as they both—clashed—collided—and Michael almost felt the bones in his hand shatter from the impact. Then Michael tried to knee him in the face, and did, nailed him, but that wasn't enough, either, for Angel had then managed to grab a hold of his knee. And now, was holding onto it, keeping Michael off balance, standing on only one leg. Michael then started raining jabs into his face, as one registered hard enough to break his nose to one side... but they weren't being enough.

"Seriously, what the hell are you made of," screamed out Michael.
Angel Eyes then smiled up with teeth, made one long motion with his hand, and then swung it around, that looked like an executioner's ax doing one last bit of evening service, and backhanded Michael across the jaw. And now, for Michael, it almost felt like that had been dislocated, also. And then, as Angel Eyes tried to do something else,

Nikki then spun her chain around, and now connected it across the back of Angel's head.

Get him, Nikki—get him! You're really doing better than I am. Or was....

Angel then felt like he had had enough of her, feeling it was time to let her know which gender was supposed to fuck which, as he spun Michael around (who was still in his grip), and threw him towards Nikki, sending Michael crashing into her, as they both now bit into the dirt.

Shit!

Thought Michael. For—truly! He was truly getting his ass handed to him right about now. Monumentally! He was losing this match. And embarrassingly, too.

Bullshit, I am! Bullshit!

Nikki was on her feet again....!

"I can take you, fuck you, I can—!"

No—Nikki—no! Don't get overly confident! You ain't no Lynda Carter Wonder Woman to think you can—...!

Pow!

And, once again with the executioner's ax... swung long, swung close, swung dearly, across Nikki's forehead. Nikki dropped like her skeleton had been instantaneously whisked from her body. And with that, Madboy's guard dog was once again out! But it needed to play smart: Doberman Pincher and not Rottweiler. Angel was now walking over to him, looking like he was ready to get his dirty hands... dirtier. As Angel tried to reach for him, Michael then picked up the chain that Nikki had dropped, and started spinning it himself. Then whipped it around one of Angel's feet, and got a good tie, as he pulled.

"Hijode—fuck!"

Went Angel, then, as he plopped ass first onto the ground.

Now let's start this... now let's....

"Ha ha haa ha!"

Angel was laughing. He was laughing, again. Very heartily.

"Oh, good—good! That's more like it," spoke Angel Eyes, as he laughed, and now, so did his men.

Shit! This guy gets more excited the more he gets fucked up!

Michael now felt done; now felt defeated; now felt like he couldn't beat

this guy, anymore. At least, not right now.

Shit! I can't let this happen.

But then thought about how he had never really lost a fight before, which made him feel like continuing.

"Michael, no more," said Nikki, and seemed to be wanting his help.

And now… Michael had a choice to make: continue brawling with this Super Latin, at least to save his pride. Or….

What choice? Fuck my pride! As if I would ever choose that over Nikki. Ever! Fuck that! And fuck me a thousand times over for even thinking it for a split second.

And, so, Michael then helped Nikki to her feet. And now the two set their eyes on Angel's chopper, that was just lying there, not very far from all this action.

"Oh—where you two going," cried out Angel.

"Cowards! Fucking cowards… spineless fucking…."

Ah, shut the fuck up! I'll take your challenge back up when my shoulder doesn't feel like it's hanging by a thread. I still ain't tallying this up as a defeat—just yet!

As Michael and Nikki got on the chopper, them retreating had now changed the mindset everyone was in. Since. Angel's boys, up until now, had just been standing around enjoying themselves, watching the match up. Enjoying it like it was some WWF wrestling match on Pay-Per-View. But now, it was time for them to also get involved.

One of Angel's goons had now decided to end this, himself, as he started going for his gun.

"Hector, shoot him—him," ordered Angel.

But Nikki then spotted Angel's .44, that was kept holstered on the chopper. And as she got a hold of it, she spun it around to take aim, while that Hector character drew his to do the same. And then:

Bang.

Went Nikki's shot, first, as it got the goon between the eyes, and expired him—instantly!

"Shit, everyone, get them," ordered Angel, again.

And now, Angel wasn't going to be fucking around anymore, and neither were the rest of The Iron Monkeys MCs, since killings had become the new order on the menu at the moment.

Oh!
Thought Michael, both in shock, and in awe; seeing how good Nikki's marksmanship skills were; along with her skills in dispatching these guys so easily.

Now that shots had been made, all of the cackling morons on their wheels had stopped their cackling, since seeing one of their own eat a bullet, as he did. And as Michael started revving up the engine, to take off, Nikki tried to get one last shot out at the last second, for her next prime target: El Presidente Angel Eyes. And as she got the aim, she pulled the trigger, and....
Vroom.
Was thrown off, as she missed the shot, from the jerking motion that was made by the chopper jumping forward.
"Michael, I had him in plain sight," screamed out Nikki.
But Michael was now more absorbed with trying to keep control of the chopper, since his dislocated arm was practically useless. And all doing so, riding around up here, still on these rooftops of The Milk Jug Hotel.

Up ahead of them, there were two carechimbas on their Harleys, standing in their way. One of them was riding his bike out of the way, fearing the crash; but the one with bigger huevos, had decided to play chicken with them, and was now riding straight at them. Riding long, and fast, while yipping and yapping, hollering in excitement, as he bounced up and down in his seat.
Ah, not again!
Thought Michael, as he saw how this one was also now reaching for something from within his jacket.
"Nikki, him! Shoot him—too," cried out Michael.
Nikki then turned the gun around, and fired, and caught him, too, as the jack-off flew off his bike, before he was really able to reach them.

At this point, Michael had reached the other edge of the Nim Fo building, and looking ahead, he saw how he had to jump the bike to get across the expanse between buildings. Which was some ten or so yards to do.
What the fuck am I doing here? I can't make this!

Thought Michael. But then something in him changed, as he found himself taking back those thoughts.

> Shit, Michael! This ain't you! This, here, has been a lot of action, which you should have been getting your kicks out of, from. So… now… why haven't you? Stop being such a fucking wimp in all this. And start being who you have been making yourself out to be. Be that man! Come on, Action Jackson, be that force to be reckoned with. And now let's have us some rompous-motherfucking-pompous fun!

Besides a lot of tension and danger felt, there had also been a thrill to it, which was slowly beginning to invigorate Michael's conflicted spirit, and now making him feel… like his old self. Or the version he had mostly been seeking. Getting that old sense, having that old fun, that was working up his old drive.

> No, I need this, I need to feel this now! No more moping around like some punk-ass coward, like I have been.

Thought Michael, as he took one large inhale of the night's chilling air, and felt free. He needed this. After all the vile and crap and mixed emotions Mr. Dorian and the rest of the journey had filled him up with, since killing Radboy, he now needed this!

> I want my scene back!

As he rode fast to make the jump, within the last 5 yards of the edge, Michael revved up the engines to full max, and took off, and then jumped, and then… crossed the expanse. As he touchdown-ed on the other side, a jolt went through Michael, both from the landing and within his spirit, which made him crave for more.

> "Damn, that felt good," screamed Michael.

Close, But No Cigar!

> "Michael stop! We can't do that again," cried out Nikki, in response.
>
> Yeah, you go back to shooting people, let me have this at least!

Even the pain in his shoulder now felt like it was joining in on the fun, exciting his sensations with both pain and pleasure. And now, Michael wanted more, and felt keen for more daringness for danger. But, as for Nikki, not so much, since she had almost freaked in mid jump, and didn't seem too pleased with Michael's new rambunctiousness. And

now, began eyeing him like some loose cannon. Michael, on the other hand, got that sense from her, but didn't care at this point. He was finally having some spaß again, as he lifted up his head, and had himself his own little cackle, like the ones Angel had been making.

"Michael! There's a roof exit over there, let's get off now," cried out Nikki.

But Michael wasn't having any of that now, either. As he looked back, he saw that the Iron Monkeys MC were circling about on the edge of the Nim Fo building; seeming to be too afraid to make the jump themselves. Michael lifted his head again to call to them.

"Hey, you losers! What's wrong? Can't follow anymore," taunted Michael.

"Michael! Don't egg them on—let's just go," responded Nikki.

But Michael didn't feel like moving an inch.

And then, one of the jerk-offs did try to clear the jump, and... failed! As he jumped short, and his bike met halfway to the edge on Michael's end. The rider then flew off onto the roof, and landed before Michael and Nikki. The hombre was now rolling back and forth in pain, as the rest of his posse started calling out "puto" and "mierda," some more.

"What? What happened to that whole kamikaze spirit," asked Madboy, as he eyed the lug, and fancied getting up, and kicking his face in.

But as he tried to do it, Nikki got a sense of that, and motioned him not to.

"Michael! You're starting to scare me, again," whispered Nikki.

But at this point, Madboy wasn't paying attention to her, but was paying attention to the other Iron Monkeys, that were again trying to make the jump.

Come on, give me something else, I want more!

Eventually, one finally did make it across the expanse, and as he landed, Michael then rode up to him, and clotheslined him off his bike.

Bang!

Went a gun from the other end, as Angel's men started firing again.

"Michael, stop this! Stop! They're gonna try and shoot us now. Let's just...."

But then another biker got across, and then another, all within a couple

of seconds of each other.

Shit, Nikki's right! We gotta hightail it now!

And that was most definitely certain, now, since they weren't alone anymore on that roof. Michael now rode away from them, and rode in the other direction to see where to go to next. And as he got to the edge, he started circling around to see what other jumps he could be making.

"Michael, what are you doing? No more jumps! Stop trying to be Evel Knievel, we need to get to the roof ex—"

"We can't! Those Iron Monkeys have gotten to it, we gotta find another way to get down."

But at every corner, Michael wasn't able to find any buildings within a reasonable distance to make the clear. As he circled the roof-top, more and more Iron Monkeys were making the jump, and getting to them. Michael and Nikki were now stuck there.

Fuck me! They're all over the place now!

And they were, and they were either chasing them now from behind, or up front, and were trying to ride into them. This was now becoming extremely difficult, as Michael found himself maneuvering like crazy to avoid them; it was now like a billiard table after the break, as they kept trying to rush in and bring him down.

"Michael, we're being surrounded again," cried out Nikki.

"We need to try and jump back to the—"

But then, trying to make a turn around a ventilation exhaust, Michael saw one of the Iron Monkeys riding towards them, while spinning a chain over his head.

"Michael, what are we going to— "

Michael then ducked, as the chain missed him, but didn't miss its collateral target, as it connected with Nikki sitting rear, across the face. Nikki then flew off the chopper, and rag-dolled onto the floor.

"Nikki" cried out Michael.

Michael turned the chopper around, and rode over to her where she lay. As he tried to pick her up using his good arm, he heard Angel yipping then. And as he looked up, he found himself surrounded by the Iron Monkeys, completely, and at gunpoint.

"Good fucking show—good fucking show," cheered Angel Eyes, as he began clapping.

Then raised his toothpick—still in his mouth—in admiration.

Fuck!

Thought Michael, sorely. Now coming to terms with how this was definitely not going to be one of those battles, with a story, he could gloat over with Sadboy someday.

"Fuck! Why couldn't I have had just one more romping moment, like the one at Big Dicks," mumbled Michael to himself

Ah shit! That didn't even sound right!

Michael felt like crap again. Unlike how it turned out at Big Dick's gym, he wasn't able to make his escape here. And worse yet, Nikki seemed pretty badly injured by all this. That chain that hit her had cut into the side of her face; she had blood everywhere, flesh hanging off where she had been struck from, and was with eyes jittering about from whatever juices she still had in her; she practically looked like a zombie now.

"Oh, I'm sorry Nikki—are you okay," asked Michael, as he eased her up a little.

It's all my fault!

Then something caught Michael peculiar, as he noticed how none of the Iron Monkeys were interested in rushing at them anymore. Over to one side, Angel Eyes was standing by, and had a walky-talky up to his ear, speaking in Spanish.

"So, you guys going to finish us off—or what," asked Michael, in dismay.

Angel Eyes then just stuck his index finger out, as if asking Michael to hold that thought, and wait. And… he was being really quirky about it. Michael then busted out with one hearty chuckle, and then shook his head at Angel's playfulness.

What a fucking character!

"Okay—I'm ready! What was that again, my friend," asked the now forty ton jackass.

Michael just rolled his eyes, and cringed, as he looked at Nikki again. At the damage. She was looking pretty down and defeated by everything that had happened to her, and Michael's heart sank looking at her like this.

Oh, Nikki! I'm sorry… I'm so….

But then, Michael started feeling resentment. Not towards her, but that one side of her, that Michael now found truly responsible for all this.

Back at 1999, if we had just left—just left the city! And gotten the fuck out of dodge, none of this would have happened to you.

Nikki then spat out with blood.

Nikki, look at what you've… what that Lady… has done to you.

Looking back at the bunch, Michael started feeling uncertain and uneasy around them all. Something was off—way off! Angel Eyes and his gang were now all seeming very chummy and open towards Michael and Nikki, as they smiled pleasantly enough at them, and looked like they were about to ask them out, for a night out, to paint the town red.

Instead of painting us red.

This was now all very off, since the chances of them all being buddies now were very unlikely.

"Hey, hero! You seem sad right now. Want to talk it over… about your feelings," asked Angel Eyes, all pouty.

What—what did you call me? Since when did I become a hero? Don't call me that!

"Nikki, get up," called out Michael.

Nikki was now leaning up against the bike, which was arching up her back in support. She was panting, now, while touching her wounds.

"No, Nikki, don't touch it!"

"So, Miss. Jackson, I was just speaking to our good friend Mr. Dorian, and he told me, I should get the codes out of you, anyway I can, and quickly too," said Angel Eyes, with his lips held to one side.

Nikki looked like she had just woken up from a major surgery. She was shaking a bit, and began to move her lips after hearing Angel Eyes call her name.

"Hello! You all there, Ms. Jackson?"

"Don't fucking talk to her," cried out Michael, in response.

Angel now dropped the funny act, and began glaring at Michael and Nikki, like his usual child-rapist self.

"You know, you guys are some of the stupidest bunch of idiots I've ever met! Riding your bikes on a rooftops—who the hell does that," spat out Michael, in question.

"Hey, that's how we do things. You only got one life to live—am I right? Anyways, don't judge! You also seemed to be enjoying it,

there, for yourself, for a second," replied Angel, nodding as if he wanted Michael's approval.

Michael just shook his head and looked away.

"So, chimbo, what do we do now—huh," asked Angel, holding out his arms in question.

"I don't know… how about you guys start taking off over the edge again, and we can have ourselves some more Colombian fireworks," sneered out Michael.

Angel Eyes shook his head, with a distasteful smirk.

"You fucking prick," responded Angel.

"Oh—and you're not," responded Michael back.

"You know, we don't be really needing to do all this—right?"

"What do you mean," asked Michael.

"Well, have you noticed I haven't been trying to shoot you like I was before?"

"Yeah—but then again—I wouldn't say you, one of your boys, trying to harpoon me and Nikki with this freakin' bike, wasn't exactly trying to not get us two killed. Oh, and how is Superman after his stunt, there? He's still dead— right?"

Even Angel chuckled at that bit, as he couldn't deny the humor behind it.

"What a fucking prick you are—chimbo," said Angel.

"No, I'm serious? Does your bossman know how you almost got Nikki killed several times tonight? How were you guys going to get the codes then?"

Angel than shrugged and said:

"Oops!"

Then chuckled some more.

Actually, I take it back, I don't see why Mr. Dorian uses you bumbling idiots, since all you got to say is 'oops' if you were to fuck up a simple job, of not getting someone killed. He must have been really desperate hiring you goons for this job, but then again, what possessed him to call the IRA mercs back, and place these idiots in charge? The lucky charms brigade seemed a lot more competent.

"Ah, fuck the bossman, what he doesn't know, won't hurt him, and it's not like we failed either—am I right again? We have you two now," responded Angel, then, as he started pointing Michael and

Nikki out with his toothpick.

And obviously, they hadn't, failed that is! And all thanks to Michael's thrill seeking self-interests.

Fuck me!

"Anyways, I can see why the old man likes you now," responded Angel then.

"What?"

That really didn't sit well with Michael, one bit. He didn't even want to hear the old man mentioned. And now, hearing how that old devil had developed a liking to him, was a bit much for him. Michael was now cringing something gnarly, as his face folded over and over itself with the expression.

"What's wrong, chimbo? You look sick? You don't like the old man," asked Angel.

"No, I don't," replied Michael.

"Well, like I said, he was really impressed with you. He really enjoyed—what's the word… the audacity! That you put up back at 1999. He said, 'now there's a winner, a man that can stand up and take what's his,'" explained Angel.

"Well, if he likes, I can show him some more of that audacity, by sticking his head in a blender later—okay!"

Angel didn't respond to that, and instead, continued on with what he was saying, to egg him further.

"Yeah, camarada! Ain't lieing to you when I say he was very impressed with you, to say the least," pouted out Angel.

The Colombian then started laughing hysterically at Madboy, as Madboy began boiling over in anger. Angel Eyes knew whatever that was in Michael's nature, didn't sit well with the likes of Mr. Dorian, liking him. He had himself a nice wicked little moment, cackling like a Disney villain, but on HBO, as he continued chewing on that toothpick of his.

"Hey, asshole! You want the codes? I'll tell you," replied Nikki, as she finally got up, and sat behind Michael on the chopper, with arms wrapped around Michael's waist to support her staggering body.

Angel Eyes smiled, as the toothpick in his mouth moved side to side, wagging it around in excitement. Michael, on the other hand, felt a gut-

wrenching feeling that pinned him down, making him uncomfortable with all this.

"But first, I have to know something! Why didn't Mr. Dorian tell me The Oubliettes were in on it with him? You see, I don't understand why I had to get a call from them telling me they were against Mr. Dorian, if that wasn't the case," demanded Nikki.

Nikki, what difference does it make, what's been going on? What's going on now isn't what's important. Us, getting the fuck out of this mess, is.

Angel Eyes looked to one side, eyeing one of his hombres, and grew a small smirk.

"Well," asked Nikki.

"Well, that's because they weren't with us until tonight," replied Angel Eyes.

"What," asked Nikki, again.

"Listen, Lady, all we want are the codes. You keep trying to hold us up… then I'm going have to unfortunately shoot your boyfriend, there, dead! Then walk over to you… and…."

And Angel, then, began nodding his head, softly, as he pierced his eyes at her. And as if, to interject into her thoughts… what then….

"Tell me," cried out Nikki, "I don't like to be jerked around like this in business—I want an answer!"

Nikki, although, wasn't going to let up. As she continued. As Angel now started to consider: what damage would it do to explain further?

"Fine—fine—fine! It's pretty simple—really! Like I said, they weren't with us until today. Before this morning, they still had their plan to get the bomb from us and do… whatever they planned to do with it. But, you know our Mr. Dorian, the man has ears everywhere! Those Oublie—whatevers—thought they were so slick. But once Dorian called them up to let them know what he had planned for them, if they even tried it—well! That's when they started singing a different tune," explained Angel.

"Then why wasn't I informed today about this," demanded Nikki, again.

"Lady! When a lot of shit happens all at once, sometimes you have to just sit back, and look at the new bigger picture, and see what new opportunities might have opened up. Or, in other words, Mr.

Dorian figured this would be a good opportunity to see if you'd betray him. And last I checked, from what I've seen all night long with Mr. Cucchi being thrown out of a window, we having to chase you all over the city, and this—hijodeputa motherfucker here! That maybe… maybe? Mr. Dorian had good reasons to doubt—don't you think?"

Not even Michael couldn't deny the hombre had good reason (plus, he did enjoy the 'hijodeputa' bit), but then again, not enough reason to get Michael to start siding with him.

"Anyways, like I said before, we don't be needing to do all this! You and your loverboy, there, might still be able to get out of this alive—if you play your cards right," explained Angel, as he opened up his face, as if to get friendly again.

"Al diablo con este pendejo! ¡Vamos a matarlo—ahora," called out the Vice-President, from what Michael saw of is cut.

But was then quickly cut down by a yipping noise the Iron Monkeys MC President made in disapproval, loud and sharp enough to slash open an eardrum.

"Like I was saying—before I was rudely interrupted… you guys can still walk away with something, just give us the codes," demanded Angel.

"You really want us to believe that," questioned Michael, but then felt Nikki firmly grab his shoulder, while digging with her nails, as if to tell him to hush-up, and let the greaseball, here, speak.

"Camarada—really? Butt-out for once, and let the woman speak. It's the fucking 80s—you know—what you thinking," snapped out Angel, with a cheesy look of sarcasm on his face.

Ha—ha, nice one! Here's hoping Latina Posy bites your dick off one day, and spits it in your face!

Michael had just about enough of the sleazy slimeball, as he then thought of what he might be able to do, to end all this, and still somewhat win.

Somehow, just somehow!

Angel was ahead of him, up front, and behind Angel, was the edge of the building. So what Michael was now thinking about doing was:

Doing my own kamikaze mission.

And riding right into him, which would then have him, Nikki, and the

toothpick eater, there, sent out sailing through the night, to then fall to their deaths.

Right now if I ride into him, there won't be much stopping us. And if it nails him—good! If he doesn't? It doesn't matter anymore.

Either way, Michael's plan really was this, to get himself and Nikki killed, before Angel's men could get their hands on them. Also, behind Angel, there was a taller building in the distance, and chances were they were going to jettison towards that building, and cream right into it.

It's either that! Or I can let them get their hands on me and Nikki, and do God knows what with us.

Michael was at a loss. He didn't want to get Nikki killed, nor yet himself. But then again, he'd be damned to watch over a dozen or so of these cackling lowlifes, here, try to stick it to her, all at once, and then kill her. Michael had no doubt in his mind that was what was going to happen, once Nikki gave them the codes. That! Or, beforehand, trying to get the codes out of her.

Fuck! I don't know how these slimebags really are like. They might even try to do that shit with me. Maybe, if I just wait a second more, something… another opportunity….

Michael sighed as he looked down at his mitts, and for once, since his rendezvous with Dorian, he didn't feel disgusted by them, since they were back to being his old mitts again, with none of that demon possessed shit. His mitts, now, feeling just as lost, as Michael, wondering what else could be done.

Yeah, those two demons are gone now, since there's no use sticking around with what's about to happen.

Little by little, the idea of going out in a blaze of glory, seemed like the best choice he could make. And not just for himself, but Nikki now. He was still going to protect Nikki, even if it meant protecting Nikki from herself.

But only under one circumstance: as long as she doesn't give away the codes… and damn herself, and this city…. to hell. As long as that, there's still hope.

Ah shit! Why couldn't things have turned out for the better?

Michael then tried to reach for his Rosary again, but then remembered how he had lost it earlier.

I lost it! How the hell did I lose it? It's one of the only precious things I have left of my… and I lost it! Shit! Fuck! Fuck this night and….

Michael then looked back, to see if he could see them in Nikki's eyes again.

Yeah, I did see that earlier, are they still….

But looking back, he then saw how they no longer were.

Hell!

Thought Michael.

Fucking hell!

Now thought he, for as he looked back, he now saw… just that Lady. For a moment, that lizard bitch. The lady in red. And only red. And the sight of that had now really pissed him off.

Fuck! Who is this Lady, and what has she gotten Nikki…?

Maybe… there is no Nikki… and… there never was?

But Michael then shook that thought, and then felt:

As long as she doesn't give away the codes, and damn me and her any further, the way she's damned us right now, getting us stuck in this ugly turn of events….

Everything good Michael had ever felt for her now mattered, as long as she just didn't! For, for Michael, that was truly going to be the last straw. Making everything Michael had fought for this night, in vain.

"Nikki… whatever happens, don't—"

But then, she went ahead and did.

Strike Four….

"The code is Roxanna Blue! R-o-x-a-n-n-a—and then Blue—as in the color… both words starting with a capital."

Michael felt his heart shrivel up and wither away into nothing hearing her say that. And it came in so on cue, too, her saying it just the right time, practically psychic like, with intentions always meant to mess with Michael's emotions, just for spite. Michael now felt like he just couldn't take it anymore; building up so much hope, and setting up such

expectations, and watching this Lady then step up, with sharpened claws, and watch her tear it all asunder; having placed so much pain and strain onto him to do the right thing, making him go up and down, up and down, for her, just to then see her then turn on him, and do the ultimate wrong, and have all his efforts turn out to have been done in vain. Michael was now feeling utterly defeated, and left to waste. She had broken the one rule, Michael imagined was going to be the limit of how much he was willing to accept.

And there's no going back now. No more!

Thought Michael, now that the Lady had doomed them both. And also, everyone else in the city. And now, the thought of ending all this seemed to be the only best option. So, with that, Madboy revved up the engines, and started to shake with anticipation.

Strike… four… shit! I don't want this!

Thought Madboy, bitterly.

And then all of a sudden, worlds started shifting again, and this time, it was all very dark. Too dark. And unholy like. Seeming as if there was something there.

Something otherworldly like, some entity that's noticed what I'm about to do, and, I've now gotten its attention… huh!

Thought Michael, as the scene he was in: him; her, behind him; both on this chopper, out here in the chill night's air, on these rooftops; with them.

It all….

Now felt different, as a miasma grew forth, of ill feelings and ill wills, casting calls into another world, where something else lay.

And then all of a sudden….

Something else was hallucinated, by Michael. Or was it a hallucination?

Wait, there it is! I see it! But, is what I'm seeing really there or not there?

Something was being seen now, something really scary, but also, something symbolic: a shadowy figure came forth from the recesses, just a bit off to the side of Angel.

Oh no… is it… who and what I think it is?

Thought Michael, since, he wasn't certain. But it felt symbolic, really did

feel that, considering what Michael was planning to do at this hour.

"Michael, what's going on with you," questioned Nikki, whisperingly.

Questioned, since she was sitting right behind him, holding on, and she was feeling how the boy was starting to shiver all over, by some sort of dread that was growing within him. Cold sweat. Cold flash. And now, cold soul.

Angel Eyes had quickly gone to work, talking on the walky-talky, informing the parties on the other end what he had just heard. Most of the Iron Monkeys seemed to be rejoicing right now, as they hadn't noticed Michael revving up the engines just a second ago.

"Angel, we still have the deal—right," asked Nikki, distressingly.

But Angel then lifted up his finger at her again, while talking on the walky-talky. Demanding her patience. But this time, he wasn't being as whimsical as he was earlier.

And, it was then for Nikki when she realized what she had done.

"Michael, I've made a terrible mistake," whispered Nikki, sullenly.

But Michael wasn't paying any attention to her, for that figure coming forth before Angel Eyes was getting closer and closer, and Michael's curiosity grew, wondering exactly what this figure's face would look like.

Oh, God, why are you allowing me to see this, now?

But Michael already knew exactly why.

Fine… I know what I'm about to do is… but… what else can I do?

"Michael, how stupid could I be? There was never a deal, I've killed us both," whispered Nikki, in despair, as she began to break up.

Michael had heard Nikki this time, and he felt her crying. But the figure before him was leaving such a stark and surreal sensation, that he couldn't concentrate on anything but.

So, you and I finally meet! About time, about damn time!

"Michael… I think I know what you're trying to do. Please, don't do it—just yet," whispered Nikki to Michael's ear.

Show me your face! Show it to me, now!

And then, the shadowy figure revealed itself to Michael, and Michael saw its face, and it was the face of the Grim Reaper. Himself. And his was a face, that brought upon a new revelation into horror, Michael could have never imagined could exist. And the worst part was… what he saw… Michael… sorta liked it. Something about its visage struck Michael with a visceral sense of freedom, through abandonment of all care and hope. And as Michael saw into this, he then saw the face of the Reaper nod in approval.

So, just like that—huh? After everything… just like that!

"Well, good news and bad news, Ms. Jackson. Good news is, the codes worked."

And then Angel had seemed to have forgotten to mention that there was also bad news to be told. But both Michael and Nikki already knew exactly what that was.

Angel was smiling through his teeth again, that looked like two rows of lumbermill saws meshed together, ready to be put to work. And as Michael thought of letting go now, he didn't, as he felt Nikki grab a hold of his shoulder again, as if to hold him from doing what needed to be done.

No, Nikki! No more time… our fate has been sealed. Our….

And then, something else happened, as a new opportunity presented itself.

Wait… what is that?

At this point, everyone on the roof could now hear the calls, the wails, the fights, and the screaming of the Age of Rage, finally reaching Manhattan. Up until now, except for all the commotion that The Iron Monkeys MC had stirred up, Harlem had not completely fallen into anarchy, since most of the residences living here had been trying to avoid it. But the bat, and chain, and knife wielding masses, that was the bulk of the Age of Rage, had finally come, and they were here to engulf the rest of the city, entirely. Since, now, having made their way here, to the city's core. There was so much roar and rampage bellowing out from their echoing center, that it almost made the entire city quake from its precedence. Their voices could crumble marble, brick, stone and statue.

And their destruction was never going to be enough, until they had devastated the city into nothing, leaving behind nothing, to remind them of the failure, of how a once proud metropolis here stood, that was to define the pinnacle of human civilization. Now, reduced to ash. Now—no more!

"Michael—do it," Nikki then whispered, as she let her hand go. This was really the best chance for Michael to do it, too. The Iron Monkeys MC were all pretty distracted by this point, as a bunch of them stepped to the edge to watch The Age of Rage do its thing. El Presidente Angel Eyes was just standing there, gawking, as the ultra-violence around him had mesmerized him to where he was also seeing worlds shift, and go into places, a sick fuck like him would feel revelation and resolve in. A place, far from this place, where Michael and Nikki had something special in store for him now.

"Do it," cried out Nikki, one last time.

Rompous-pompous!

Thought Michael, and now was off. His engine then roared like the battle cry of some psyched and savaged steel plated barbarian, liked a hell on two wheels, as it was born again into action. Michael then revved up the engines full throttle, as he rode in full breach. And as it connected with Angel, there, the Grim Reaper cackled in delicious delight as the fucker was almost shredded in two from the impact.

Now they were airborne… and within a moment later… now they were not.

Crash!

There was glass and spit and blood being shot out everywhere, in every which way direction. Michael, Nikki, and the toothpick-chomping man had gone headlong into a window on the building across, and made a spectacular landing. Their death-defying stunt must have pleased the Reaper of their good show, for almost all of them had survived, except for one. As they crash landed, Angel Eyes was at the front of the chopper's front wheel, hanging on partially underneath. And as they landed, the crash, and the forward propelled motion of the chopper (while now racing through a hallway) had pulled Angel under, and was

now practically pulling him apart, piece by piece, being ripped apart by the weight and drag of the front wheel. As Michael attempted to halt the vehicle, he then noticed two Monkeyfuckers in his way. They were standing by an apartment door, trying to break in, and....

Wouldn't you know it!

They were the same two Monkeyfuckers Michael had come across back outside Letoya's place, that he had tried to run over, but had missed. Michael now creamed into those two jerk-offs, and had them sent flying in whichever direction their physics would deem fit. And just before reaching the other end of the hallway, leading up to another window, Michael finally managed to halt the chopper he and Nikki were still on, dead short of finding himself sailing back into the night again.

Oh, thank God... I survived that?

Both Michael and Nikki were shivering from the harrowing feat. They both then keeled off the bike, and slumped down to the floor. As they did that, the bike then keeled over, itself, in the opposite direction. After a minute of trying to regain their senses, Michael took one gaping look back at the direction from which they had came; he saw the window that had been shattered from their entrance, and saw the building across theirs which they were on, no longer than a minute ago. He saw what was left of the Monkeyfuckers: one half stuck in a wall, and the other... nowhere to be found. And finally, saw what was left of Angel Eyes.

Ah curd!

For there was nothing pleasing to the eyes left of him, for the wheels had down a good job decorating the rest of the hallway in a nice coat of glass, and his gore.

Ah... man... what a terrible way to go!

"Oh, I feel like throwing up," murmured Nikki, also looking at the last of Angel Eyes.

"Yeah," responded Michael, and now shunned his eyes from it.

Michael then looked center at Angel's bike, and saw that the frame work was almost completely totaled. There were also chunks and bits of Angel still stuck in the gears and crevasses, and Michael averted his eyes from looking at the gruesome scene, any longer than needed.

As Michael then tried to get up, he made the attempt, by lifting himself up with the hand attached to the arm, attached to his dislocated

shoulder. And since the adrenaline rush had died down, he was once again feeling sharp pains shooting into his senses.

"Ahh!"

"What… what," cried Nikki, in worriment.

"Nikki! I dislocated my shoulder back there, and I need you to help me put it into place.

Hold my arm like this, and when I tell you, jerk it like—this!"

Nikki didn't say a thing, and complied. And as Michael's shoulder got jerked into place, the pain that came, now, really overloaded his senses, as it revved it up with the energy of a 375-horsepower engine, and had Michael nearly pass the fuck out from the experience. And after a short moment later, felt conscious again.

The Big Loop.

"Michael, are you all right?"

"Ahh!"

"What… again?"

"Ahh, fuck me!"

"Wh—what do you want me to do now?"

"Nothing—nothing! It's subsiding."

Nikki stared distressingly at Michael, as Michael started looking around again. Showing alertness. And now that his awareness was keen again, what he was now getting were the sounds of gunfire and screaming, coming from the streets below.

"Sounds like machine-guns. Is it the National Guard," asked Michael.

Nikki got up to the window, looked, looked back at Michael, and nodded.

"Oh, what's that smell…?"

Looking around, once more, Michael remembered again.

"Oh, never mind!"

And now, looking back at the Lady, all smiles, and seemingly thankful of Michael's well-being, had Michael looking away. Even though it was practically a miracle that they had survived, something in Michael made him feel like it would've been better if they didn't. Michael then closed his eyes, and saw the figure he had seen not too long ago, burned into

his retinas.

I saw him… it… whatever!

And having seen such a horror, Michael began to wonder why he would, if that wasn't to be the end of his journey.

You just don't see such a thing, such a figure, and walk away from it, like nothing happened. That should have been the cue of me going out like I've been wanting to, all night long. Going out in a blaze of glory. So… why didn't I?

But now, something else irked him about the whole encounter; what really scared him the most, seeing such a scary thing.

I didn't like how it made me feel, seeing his… its… whatever's face. I didn't like it one bit!

For… the thing is… I liked it.

Something about what that old horror had to extend to me, had me liking what was offered: feelings of abandonment of all care and hope. And it being a—good thing! Before seeing it, I felt like I was being totally devastated with my—at that present—circumstance. Everything was going to shit, and it all had me feeling beside myself. But, once after, it all magically went away, all that care and worry…

and it was a… relief.

And something about it now is irking the shit out of me. I mean… I liked how it felt. And… you're not supposed to like it.

Michael then took another look at this Lady's face, and felt more of this off-putting feeling.

I want to care, but, I feel like I don't anymore. Or, at least can't.

I was gonna get me and Nikki killed. And, I liked the idea of ending it that way.

And now, Michael started thinking about death, in the greater scheme of things. At least for himself.

The thought of death, and it as a scary thing, is something I haven't

felt in a long, long time. I mean, death is something that's supposed to scare you, you're not supposed to wanna die. Yet, that's how it's been for me, and for a while now, too. Fear of death is crucial. Fear itself is a good thing. A great thing… maybe even. Everybody wants to be fearless, but at least while I still had fear in my heart of matters like death, or whatever, it made me feel human. No fear is anything but that. Fear of death? That now feels like a privilege you feel when you're younger, when you care more, when there's still something in your life to look forward to. It's a privilege, even, I see, really it is! Now that I think of it. But for me… that's a well that's been slowly drying up with each passing day. And been that way going on years and years now. Since going to Attica.

Now, having seen into the Reaper's face, and having seen nothing at all scary about it, just makes me realize how little I got to look forward to. How little is left. And as much as I'd want things to be different, they ain't! All night it feels like I've also been looking for something to change everything in a fundamental level. Me in a fundamental level. But that there isn't something that now feels possible.

Been looking for magic, when magic really just doesn't exist in the real life.

I'm sick of my life. I've had what most guys dream of, being with tons and tons of women, and doing how most guys could only dream the experience would be like. Then getting into so many fights, and always coming out on top—I've been that guy! That wonder! That hero… I guess?

And now Michael wondered again, if he could consider himself—

No! Hell no! That I can never be!

Concluded Michael, and then shunned the thought.

I've been most of that. And… none of it now feels like it means anything, anymore. Fleeting fucking moments! Fleeting! Fucking fleeting! Like sand, sifting through my hand, and being blown away with the wind.

And then, I do nothing but try to cheer myself up, looking at the brighter side, trying to be humorous to make me feel happy and alive again. And… it can get me through with some moments, but, in the long run, it's mostly felt like a pointless chore, I've mostly put myself through. And in hopes that it might all of a sudden make a difference. Fuck, I now feel like I've gotten sick of my own sense of humor.

All my hopes and willingness for something different won't change things, because… in the end… they're all pointless! Everything—everything! Feels pointless now. Fundamentally, deep down, death now feels like the only absolute, and the only thing that's gonna make a difference. It's why I liked what I saw in that Reaper's face. For it really is the only true answer for me, because, I'm just really a hollow shell of a person. It's all that's left that matters, only thing that's going to uplift me. Shit! Why didn't I die then? And… what am I going to do now?

Michael then looked at the Lady, and now thought about something else:

At this point in my life, probably should have had a kid by now, and… I think I would have really liked that. Really would have! Children can revive your perspective on life and make you want to go on—I think! As their eyes become your eyes, and you're really born again through them. Having died, and born again, having…

looped.

That's what it means to be in your 30s, and having someone there by your side, to give you that. Funny… how we used to give Tomboy so much shit for being so horrible at picking up chicks, but he's married now, with children, and all the thousands of women I've been with, will never compare to what he has.

Yeah, Nikki! In prison, I thought a lot about that. A lot that way! About you and me. And it felt so righteous—so fucking righteous! That there would have been us making the greatest magic in the

universe—life! Something most of the lot today sees as so commonplace, but it would take only a true God from above to see it as that… magic! True magic. Actually, something more than that. Since God works in miracles. Which is something greater. And, I wanted you to be the one to bear that with me. No matter how much of a fucked-up pair we'd make. Considering how much of a fucked-up pair of people we are. I mean, even with me, with all the women I've been with, especially when I was with you, one thing I made—absolute—sure of, was, I wouldn't be having any kids with them. Since, none of the women I've been with, but you, I've actually came with, inside. I always pulled out beforehand. Always did. And always wore a rubber, also, just in case I slipped, and came too fast. Since. That was something I was going to make double sure of, would only happen with you, and no one else. Ever! I had that with you. I wanted that so desperately with you.

Was I really that foolish to think that way, though?
Was I really that stupid and pathetic?

I mean, you've been the only person that gave me that in my heart. Sure, I fucked up, bad, being with so many women, when I shouldn't have. But if anything, anything my sins, and those women taught me, was, you were the only one. You were! Oh, I don't see you anymore, and I don't see my Rosary anymore, either. Your eyes are now just as hollow as mine are, I'm imagining. There's nothing fundamentally there left. And as hard as I try now to look at it differently, just like all of my exasperation and efforts made tonight… it feels like it's all going to be in vain if I do so.

Michael looked again into the Lady's eyes, smiled, and but then thought:

Still glad I didn't get you killed either… whoever you really are….

As for the situation with the bomb, there really was nothing Michael could do. It was over. Michael knew he was no longer a match for the people he was dealing with. And to continue on, he knew, wasn't going to change a damn thing. Michael was out of his league. Also, even

without the bomb, the city was never going to go back to the way it was before. The menace in the street was now making sure of that.

Where's my Rosary? Where....

That also wasn't there, either. And neither was it in Nikki's eyes like it had been seen on the Nim Fo building's rooftops. Seeing Nikki smile at him now didn't mean anything to him anymore. For it wasn't his Nikki doing it.

Please let it still mean something, even if it's not really her!

There was no more double vision. No more red lady with blue lady. All was red with her now. All Michael saw now was The Lady, the same one he had spent all night convincing himself didn't really exist.

Why did you give them those codes?

Thought Michael.

Why did you have to damn yourself? Because that's practically what you've done—do you even understand that? Do you even know what it means?

"Michael, what's wrong," asked Nikki.

And now, no more inner monologues. It was time to have out with it.

"Why did you give them the codes?"

Nikki didn't respond.

"Was it really all that important," demanded Michael.

The smile then dropped from Nikki's face, as she looked away shaking her head.

"Michael, they were going to kill us!"

Michael then turned his head away, and began to shake it, also.

"I'm sorry," whispered out Nikki, while staring vacantly at the floor.

But to Michael, it didn't seem very convincing. As much as Michael didn't want to think about anything anymore, something did pop in his head, that made him a bit curious.

Roxanna Blue? That's what the code was—wasn't it?

For Michael, at the time, hearing her name again uttered by Nikki's lips, hadn't really registered, since at the time, he was completely absorbed in that whole Reaper business. But he had heard it, and he was centered on it now, and was now wondering what it all meant.

Nikki had to have been the one to pick that name... but, why did she?

Michael kept trying to go over reason after reason why Nikki and Radboy would; wondering what relevance it would have had after all this time; wondering whether or not it could have just been out of random.

"Nikki… why Roxy… why choose her name?"

Nikki's one eyebrow then sprung to one side, and sprang away seemingly, as if, trying to escape that line of questioning. She then opened her mouth, exhaled, and now seemed to be expressing some type of deep-seeded inner conflict going on within her, as she panted a little.

"Nikki… why my old girlfriend?"

Finally, Nikki directed herself back around, and seemed ready to give an answer, seemed at least.

"Why—"

"Because… it's… I just chose it randomly, Michael," replied Nikki, and faced away.

Michael made a disapproving sound through his teeth. He wasn't buying this.

I can't trust this Lady over nothing—can I?

For a second there, for once, Michael felt like he was going to get a simple straight answer from her. A simple straight answer: just one!

Just one! Can't she now at least give me that! It's called communication! And it's what couples do when they care and love for each other. At least respect one another. Even exes! I've now spent some time wondering if this woman ever really loved me all the three and a half years we were together. And, now, I see, I'm understanding, that she probably never did. I mean! That's how it's supposed to be when people love each other, right? They express themselves! They talk to each other! Communication, again! But this is all I've ever gotten. All I've ever really gotten from her.

Seeing as she was hiding something again, Michael was now feeling totally fed up with it. This relationship they had before. And now, after all the time and absence, now seeming to want to resume where things left off.

"Was the money really that important? Trading that in, and killing all those people," asked Michael.

“Don't start this again, Michael! Just don't—don't,” spat out Nikki in disapproval.

“Was it?”

Nikki was now beaming at Michael with red hot eyes like lasers. As if he was the one to blame for everything that was about to happen.

“I mean, you already come from a rich—"

“I don't have my family's fortune anymore—I lost it,” explained Nikki.

“You lost it… how?”

Nikki then blew up at her hair, and then sighed.

“Well, a lot of deals going wrong, bad investments… and mostly Radboy, with his horrible ideas, and gambling habits, in Atlantic City.”

Michael… shrugged. And didn’t feel like that was much of an answer to something he’d care about.

No excuse to start robbing and murdering people.

Maybe I should just get up and leave right now? Actually, what I should do… is…. go looking for Letoya. Nothing can happen to Nikki now in this hallway, I should just detach, and go looking for Letoya, and make sure she’s all right.

I mean… I hope to God she's all right after that shoot out at the Nim Fo building!

Michael now felt as if he should, since, this was also important to him, now. Since, he did care a lot of what might have happened to Letoya.

I gotta go! I gotta… I….

But….

Still….

Something… some force… didn’t feel like letting him go.

No, no! I gots to make sure Letoya is all right. That’s important! I gotta detach from this Lizard Lady. I gots to… I got to…?

But… Michael just couldn’t.

Why? Why can’t…?

What it was was… too much of his heart and mind had already been spent centered on the woman next to him. Too much! Also, something else. And now that she was once again in his life….

No, this ain't Nikki. I gotta stop caring for his woman. She's not the person I've made her out to be, the woman I imagined she was.

But that just didn't make much sense to him, either. Three and a half years together, how could Michael not have seen it? Really seen it!

If it was hidden away in her before, what caused it to fully come out? How did she become this…?

"Nikki… how did you become this Lady of the Night?"

And that question now really had Nikki sending, as her one eyebrow did that same motion again; wanting nothing to do with that line of questioning, either. But then, Michael grabbed her by the shoulders, pulled her around, and directed the question again, right in her face.

"How did you go from being the sweet girl I once knew… to this!"

Nikki then snarled like an animal, hearing Michael ask her that, and having asked her that the way he did. As if, what she had turned into, now, was such an abomination. Nikki's eyes then started peering out all slit and sinister, and she looked like she was ready to let Michael have it.

"Michael, I know you must have a really nasty opinion about me now, but I tell you—straight—I was never sweet!"

"Fine, you're right! You did have a bit of a wild side to you, but you were at least sweet with me," explained Michael, looking into her eyes, still hoping to see the woman he remembered.

"No, I was never sweet! I was never kind! And, I was never everything you wanted me to be," responded Nikki, as she looked away.

Michael's eyes then narrowed down to what she just said.

'I was never everything you wanted me to be…?' What's that supposed to mean?

"Michael, how about if I now, ask you a question about how we used to be back then," asked Nikki, with her eyes blazing high like a sunrise.

"What?"

"Michael… why did you cheat on me—left and right—as you did… huh," lashed out Nikki, all very deeply embittered.

And then, there it was again!

Damn!

There it was once more. A matter begging for resolve, since Michael still

couldn’t figure out himself, why he would.

If I really did love Nikki as much as I’d like to believe. Why did I, though?

Damn! But, how did she know?

This also threw Michael off. He never thought Nikki had ever known about any of his flings he had had on the side. Since….

She never brought it up. I mean, the first time I did cheat on her, I felt like crap. But after a while, it just kept happening. And I kinda feel like I was starting to make it obvious that I was. I’d hit on the girls I would later sleep with, right in front of her. And. But, she’d still would never say anything….

And now, a dozen different questions began formulating in his head, as he tried to decide which one to work with.

“How come when we were together, you cheated on me as much as you did, but you never cheated on Roxy,” asked Nikki, as her eyes went hollow.

And that now, really had Michael feeling clueless. He didn't even know where to begin.

“You're wondering how I know all this—aren't you,” asked Nikki.

Michael said nothing.

“Sadboy told me all about that,” responded Nikki.

“Sadboy?”

“Yeah, Gab… that nosy Armenian.”

Michael just continued nodding his head, wanting to hear what else she had to say.

“Way back then…

…back when I looked like I had a condor perched on my head, considering how feathered out my hair was….”

Nikki then made a funny face, but in a dreary way, remembering how she looked back then.

“Back then, Gab came up to me, and told me 'you know, Michael will never care about you like he did with Roxy, so how about you just drop the act?'”

He said that? What bullshit! Fucking Gab!

“Then, since he knew I knew about your flings, he told me about

how you never cheated on Roxy, that is, before I stepped into the….

Ooohhh…?”

Nikki pierced her eyes down now as that last part took her breath away….

And after a bit… she recollected herself. Arched her eyebrows. And continue on:

“Gab said… how it would probably be better if we called it quits. Went our separate ways, and such,” explained Nikki.

“Wait, Gab said that,” gasped Michael.

“Yes, he did!”

Well, fuck him! Obviously, the asshole had no clue how I really felt about you… curious to know if you ever did?

But you did cheat on her….

Shut up! Don’t you start now, either!

But… why did you?

Michael now needed a moment, as he went back to the time spent with her during those three and a half years. Thought about himself with Nikki, then, and why he ever cared.

I don’t know why I cheated on her as much as I did. But, just because I did, doesn’t mean I didn’t love her.

Out of all the women he had been with, Nikki always had some magical power over him that Michael found irresistible. Magic. That made sense to him, and made his world feel more meaningful being with her. Full of hope, and care, and full of a promise of a future.

I cared then, and not just for her, but also for myself. I remember how I’d fear more, about things, pertaining to her and me. Had that privilege to fear death, since living then meant more. Even with all the women I’ve been with, she was still the only one that mattered.

She, for me, was my last woman on earth.

After a pause. Michael began to feel Nikki's eyes growing more and more intense over the thoughts behind them. Nikki then looked over at Michael, furiously, and looked like she was ready to continue again.

“What were you doing with Letoya earlier,” demanded Nikki.

Shit… fuck!

Thought Michael, as his brow now began springing up, and out, and wanting to escape this line of questioning.

Fuck… hell! Wh—what… why does it matter? Nothing happened!

Thought Michael, now infuriated.

“I mean…

‘Ms. Lipsticks, pretty mixed girl, with lips so wet and juicy, that they could drive any man with a dry peace hysterically out of his mind.’”

Nikki was singing it out the way the slang on the streets used to be, in the 70s, something Michael was all too familiar with.

“What—wh… where is that coming from,” wondered Michael, even though he most certainly knew.

“Well, from your own mouth! I remember one time catching you saying that to Sassboy, when he asked you 'how she like,’ back at the Tropic,” explained Nikki.

“What, I don't even remem—"

“So, how good was she, Michael? Lips like hers… I wonder,” sneered Nikki.

Michael now saw how Nikki was trying to make him feel ashamed of all this. And now, Michael started wondering whether or not she was doing all this because she cared, or, doing it all, to make him think she did.

Yeah, Nikki! I do feel like crap that I did that all to you. But, this ain’t the time to be going over this. I’ve done wrong, but, I’m not the one that should be on trial, here.

You should be!

After everything with Mr. Dorian and the bomb… remember?

“How was she, Michael, how—”

“Actually, not as good as you, from what I remember. So don't worry about your reputation,” sneered out Michael, and really got her with that line.

Nikki's neck now tensed up from hearing that, as her veins and tendons began to show.

“So, how good have you been, Nikki, since I've been away,” asked

Michael.

"What's that supposed to mean," cried out Nikki, as her face fell off from grief.

Is it grief? A manipulative lizard like her… I can't even tell.

"Well, since you've had a little birdie tell you stuff about me, I've recently had my own tell me stuff about you," sneered out Michael, again.

"Who," gasped Nikki.

"Mr. Parsley!"

Nikki had now gotten up, leaving Michael laying there, sitting up on the floor, and began pacing a bit. As the grief left behind where her face used to be grew with anguish.

"He told me, I shouldn't trust you.

You use people now!

You hurt people!

And then he said, 'how many dicks do you think that woman has sucked to become this Lady of the Night?'"

You want to guilt-trip me? Fine! Don't think I won't try to do the same.

As Nikki heard that, she stopped pacing, and tears could now be seen in her eyes again. And Michael… didn't know how to feel about them.

Are they crocodile tears, or are they real? I mean, she's been crying all fucking night. So, I wonder….

"So—round about—how many? How many Nikki—"

And then all of a sudden….

"TOO MANY," revealed Nikki as her voice imploded.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, as he almost started to dry heave. As if he had been the one.

Ah shit!

Fuck!

I didn't need to hear that!

And now that she had said it, the images Michael had of this woman on her knees, doing the deed, came—storming back!

Oh, don't start doing that again! I don't want to think about this

shit!

And worse yet, one of the images were of Nikki, on her knees, as Mr. Dorian stood over her.

Ah, make it stop! Make it stop! Enough with these images that keep popping up in my head!

"I've sucked too many! Too many! Michael… you know nothing of what I've been through," cried out Nikki.

"You've murdered," murmured out Michael, not wanting to look at her.

"You also know nothing of the type of people I've had to deal with," cried out Nikki, again.

Back in Nikki's offices, after Michael had thrown Radboy out that window, he remembered thinking about her over her coked-up state. How she seemed like such a dilapidated woman, that had probably had to deal with a lot of power hungry pompous men, and how they, and the likes of Radboy, were really to blame for her becoming this way. Maybe there was some truth to it, or maybe that's what the Lady wanted Michael to think. Michael wasn't sure, and he still felt like he shouldn't even care.

"Yeah… I've done that too," replied Nikki finally, as her voice dried up.

"You've murdered people? I mean, I saw how well you can now handle yourself with a gun, and it seems like you've had a lot of practice."

"Yes… I have," whispered Nikki.

Michael just shrugged.

Does she even care that she has?

Wondered Michael, and then looking at her face, he could see how she was showing hardly any remorse.

Actually, more like the opposite of it! Like she's glad she had. Glad! And only pissy about it a bit for having been caught.

And now, Michael started to accept the person he was really dealing with.

She had me, with, bringing up about the times I cheated on her, and bringing up Letoya. She had me—she fucking had me—and had me feeling like utter crap. But, now I can see, that was just her way of changing the subject. Trying to guilt-trip me, so she could

pass it off. Like that Flores bitch! Pass the blame. Is this what I can expect from this Lady, now? Her blowing and blowing away a whole bunch of people, and then trying to pass the blame onto me? Since I'm just some stupid lug, stupid dog, that'll always be by her side.

She wasn't even trying to avoid giving a simple straight answer, anymore, she was changing the subject, now, and trying to make Michael feel ashamed of things he had done. For being such a badboy, a cheater, a womanizing prick.

Well—fine! I was all that, but that's better than whatever you've turned out to be!

He didn't know what sense to make of anything this Lady had to tell him, anymore, and he felt like he should be done with her now. And should now truly detach, and leave her to her own devices.

Fuck this bitch—fuck her!

Thought Michael, but....

What the fuck, Michael? Get up! Get the fuck up! Now!

Still there was something there, not letting him do so. Still, something there, not letting him go. And now, Michael realized, there might be no letting go of this woman—ever! From his heart and mind—not never!

What do I do? What do I do? Why can't I just get up and leave?

And then! All of a sudden!

And then! All of a sudden!

And then! All of a—fucking—sudden! Nikki said the most inappropriate thing ever said, in the most inappropriate time. Ever! In history. Something truly profoundly wrong and wretched, it was the stuff of legend.

"Michael... you're the only one I've swallowed though," said Nikki, as she then cringed up, as if she was the one hearing it coming from Michael's lips.

....

Are you kidding me?

Thought Michael now, flabber-fucking-gasted out if his freaking mind. As the tone completely changed. From a heart wrenching moment for

him, to something truly pathetic and wrong.

Are you fucking kidding me, Nikki. Are you fucking kidding…?

Is that it? Is that all you gots left now to say, really? What? I'm the only one you've ever swa—"haahaahaahaaha!"

Michael now began laughing hysterically—hysterically! For the funny thing was….

It's not fucking funny!

"Hahaahaahaaha!"

Nikki hearing the laughter, soured up like a puss.

What Nikki had just said was so pathetic, it could no longer be pitiful, no matter how badly Nikki was now taking it.

Yeah, she looks like she's about to cry—again! But, fuck her! Fuck her for her level of desperation, in stooping that low to try and… I don't know what! Oh, thank you so much! That completely changes everything, Nikki. Nice to know a woman is willing to suck and murder a million guys off, but will at least swallow for me. I feel so much better now!

Fuck, we're both such messed up people, we'd actually confuse a line like that with being sincere. So, this is what being reprobate is all about?

Michael continued to laugh, as Nikki's look of desperation began to turn ugly, but then fell off like she wanted to cry some more.

Oh, stop crying! Stop cry—

"Michael! Fuck this city—fuck this city! I hope that bomb doesn't just take out 1999, I hope it also takes out the entire Eastern seaboard," bellowed out Nikki as her eyes went ballistic.

Michael was beginning to feel seriously tired of all this. For a second there, he thought hearing her tell Angel Eyes the codes felt heart wrenching enough, then that whole retarded swallowing bit… but… this was starting to become something else.

"Nikki, just don't say that stuff," demanded Michael.

"Why not?"

"Just don't!"

“No, I'm allowed to say it! For everything I've had to put up with, I can say it all I want,” bellowed out Nikki, again.

What have you been through, Nikki, what? You’re the one that’s sucked and fucked and murdered a whole bunch of people as your time as the Lady.

Michael was now seriously growing mad.

This was no longer sounding cold, greedy, and heartless to Michael; the stuff he imagined the Lady to say. This was beginning to sound something—sick!

“Don't you look at me like that, Michael! I can say those things and mean those things, and I don't even understand why you even care,” blew out Nikki, as she blew up with conviction.

“Why I even care?”

“Yes! One thing I've been very sure about you is you hate everything and everybody, as long as it doesn't wear a skirt,” explained Nikki, piercing Michael with her eyes.

Fine, I get it! I'm a tool with women. Maybe it's because I thought I was helping, and didn't see myself as just being a tool?

“With women, you’re either a dog, or you want to be their dog, doing anything for them, by their side. No matter how questionable the things they ask you to do are,” said Nikki.

And then gave the look, as if admitting to herself her involvement in all that.

“But if there's other guys around, you turn into the king of the macho assholes, and you want to fight them all, just to prove something to yourself, and no one else! And why? Because you have no self-worth, so you either need a woman by your side to make you feel like you do, or you need to be beating up some poor guy’s face in. And because of that, you've never had any real friends but Gab, and even with him, you were still a prick.”

Michael… didn’t know what to make of all this. It was all true. But….

Nikki…

stop trying to change the subject! You trying to manipulate me like that isn’t gonna work anymore—not anymore! Especially after that swallowing line… oh, that was wretched!

“Michael, you don’t give two shits about the people at that party. Because I know they’re the types you’d really hate. So… I don't understand why you care if people like that were to get killed by that explosion, most of the people there are people you'd despise with a passion!”

Michael then thought about it for a second, as he realized he really didn't, but furthermore, realized at least why it mattered to him.

Because I was hoping you would—at least!

Thought Michael, accepting how it was now too late for that.

“Because I'm not a sick fuck—that's why,” expressed Michael, but felt like there was just no point to do so anymore.

“Michael, you don't care! And honestly… I think you'd enjoy seeing it happen, too,” explained Nikki, as she nodded provokingly.

Barehands.

Barehands.

Barehands

Barehands.

Barehands!

And that now, began to scare Michael. That! What she said, began to shift things, again.

No! Please… not this again!

For Michael was feeling his mitts’ response to the line Nikki had just given. It had awakened them. Excited them. And now, began the demonic bit.

No, Lady! I wouldn’t have enjoyed it! Don’t fucking be saying that I would! I’m not a sick fuck, like you! Like Dorian. I’m….

Barehands.

Barehands.

Barehands.

Barehands!

And now, started the raging.

Stop that, again! I’m not going to attack her! I am….

Barehands!

Barehands!

Barehands!

Michael then whisked himself away from this place, from these thoughts, far away from what this Lizard had to say, and far away from

what his demons had also, in response.

Away! Get me away from here!

Michael then began to replay events passed, that had not made him feel this way; the image of himself jumping that gorge between buildings; the one he had back at the Nim Fo building, and the one he just had when he stared down the Reaper, and felt ready to meet his maker. There was an exhilaration....

Oh, what a rush!

To it all, that he wished he could replay in real life, again and again. It was of many moments he had spent tonight feeling good.

No—no—no! They're not all fleeting! They're not all empty, and hollow, and meaningless. Not as long as I have something to say about them!

He thought about the rumble with The Beefcakes and the Mastodonians, and how ridiculous it got when everyone started picking up dumbbells, and chucking them at each other.

About that stupid fucking owl on White Origami's shoulder.

That argument he had with that Euro-trash French fucker, who wasn't willing to admit when he was wrong, and how Michael finally put him in his Euro-trash place. He thought about Doris Day. He thought about choking out Stumpy. He thought about so many things that had come and gone, for they were the moments—the rompous-pompous, in-your-face, silly, good moments... he was hoping to be having on this very journey.

Just like yesteryears.

He wanted an adventure. And most of all, it would have been heavenly to have Nikki back, again. But now....

No, no! Why did I think of Nikki again? Why? Oh, why?

But now....

That was all over with.

No!

Michael's journey was over with!

No, it's not!

For they were all fleeting, empty....

No, fuck you! No, they weren't—

Hollow, meaningless moments.

....

And all that remained now was:

- Mr. Dorian.
- The Oubliettes.
- This Lady.
- The bomb.
- And the sin.

....

He knew he was a crazy fool for asking for so much, but he'd be damned, if he was a sick fool, that was in accordance with, with what this Lady had to say.

Now Michael began to feel the sickness bubbling up, inside, as he continued to listen to this Lady, and her talk, about things Michael would never accept.

Barehands!

Barehands!

> “You know what, Michael? I want what Dorian wants now! Before, when he explained it to us, I was repulsed by the idea, too. But now, I'm starting to see things his way. Let the bomb go off, and murder all those Lizard fuckers in that building, there. Let the degenerates of this city tear each other apart. There's nothing good in them anymore, anyways, and maybe after all the madness, something will again set things straight! Let them claw and strangle and maim each other.
>
> That's what they really want to do—anyways!
>
> Fuck the money—I'm glad I'm part of this now—I'm glad that—"

BAREHANDS!

STRIKE FIVE!

And then all of a sudden....

Jason Voorhees was on his feet....

And at the throat....

Of this Cunt of the Night.

Die you evil—BITCH!

Madboy lunged with the power of a thousand rockets taking off all at once; hateful passions filling up within him, burning hotter than the burning passions of a thousand suns.
A thousand emotions.
And a thousand cries.
A thousand murderous acts for justice.
And a thousand knives.
Madboy was ringing that bony chicken neck of hers, as he felt her throat beg for air. He gripped down—tighter! To deny all access. And then… Madboy… began to marvel at the vistas! He was taking in, watching this cunt's face turn dead pale, and looking like it was about to explode. Madboy now felt it—now felt it! True righteousness! As he felt that there was so much beauty and ecstasy in all this…
beauty and ecstasy…
beauty and ecstasy…
beauty and beauty and beauty and—ecstasy!
Slap! Moan!

That only gods must see and feel.

I see you Madboy… I see you!

Thought.
Wait…?
Who thought that? It wasn't you nor me…?
Those were not Michael's thoughts, but still, he felt them as if though they were.

And then, Michael looked down, and….
Oh God… WHAT AM I DOING?
Thought Michael, truly he did this time! As he looked down and saw Nikki's eyes, and realized he was choking the wrong person.
Oh God, it's Nikki… it's not the Lady… it's Nikki!
Nikki seemed to be lost in complete sadness, and sorrow, and horror. Slowly becoming extinguished. And seeing this, Michael began to weep for the first time in years. Decades!

He felt his heart twist and twist, snap off, then twist some more. And then, Michael jumped back in horror, as he allowed Nikki to go free.

What have I done! What the hell have I done!

Nikki was now on the floor gasping, coughing, and wheezing, with snot all over her face and hanging from her face and creamed over her chest and legs and the floor. And she seemed to be trembling in terror, over the last person she ever thought would turn on her.

"Oh God! Nikki—please! Tell me you're all right?"

But as Michael tried to run up to her and see if there was anything he could do, Nikki bashed him across this temple with the butt of the .44 Magnum she still had at hand. As Michael fell back, Nikki got up, and started pointing it at him while still trembling.

What is happening to me? I don't want this!

Michael felt terror within him beyond anything he ever thought could be imaginable. He felt his mind spasm out in fits of hysteria. For a second there, he looked out of the window, and pictured himself jumping out of it, and doing himself in.

Himself, and whatever EVIL there was now that dwelled within him.

He felt like he was possessed by some psychotic blood-thirsty demon, and it terrified him to the core imagining what he was capable of next. This time, as he saw the face of the Reaper, again, behind Nikki, it was the face of Mr. Dorian behind the cloak, laughing at Michael, over his new revelation into his own soul. Now that he had abandoned all hope and care to go on, this was what was truly left for him. Now, Michael felt how privileged he was in being as depressed as he was, depressed by how fleeting, empty, and hollow, and meaningless life could be. For that! Was a thousand times better than this! For....

NOW! Was the time, to be something different.

NOW! Was the time, for something NOT righteous!

NOW! Was the time, to change into something cruel, dark, and evil, and learn to live again, and for all the wrong reasons, for all the sick ones.

"Oh God, baby... I can't believe I did that to you! I can't believe... I'm sick! I'm psychotic! I'm evil!"

"Michael—what is wrong with you," cried out Nikki, shocked to see

how the boy was shaking in pure saturated sweat and fear.

"Nikki, I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!"

Nikki didn't say a word.

"You know what! Go ahead and shoot me—I don't care!"

Nikki's bottom lip began to quiver, as she shook her head.

"No, baby—I'm telling you, just shoot me please—shoot!"

"Michael, you're hysterical—what is happening to you?"

"Shoot me! I can't deal with it anymore!"

"No," cried out Nikki, as she dropped the gun, and fell into herself.

Michael couldn't remember the last time he had cried, but he now felt how drenched his eyes were, and he could now taste the stream running down to his mouth. The taste of bitter salt. Like Lot's wife, nothing more now than a licking stone.

"Michael—please—tell me! What is happening to you," cried out Nikki.

Michael closed his eyes now, as he tried to whisk his thoughts to a different place, again.

I want none of this! None! I didn't do that to my Nikki—did I? I didn't....

But as he closed his eyes, all he saw was Nikki's face, frozen, and captured at that very moment... he was murdering her.

"Nooooo," screamed out Michael.

Then began bashing his fist over and over again, into the side of the wall. Over and over... over and over....

His mind was not his own anymore, and his pride and confidence in his actions were now of those of a monster. This was now the revelation he was getting, what he had sought for coming all this way.

"Where is my Rosary, where... where is it?"

And as he closed his eyes, he fell into the void, and felt vertigo falling through that endlessness.

Barehands!

Barehands!

Barehands!

Barehands!

Barehands!

BARE—

“Michael, who are you talking to? See your Rosary—where?”

Please God, I don't want to lose my mind! I don't want to go insane! I don't want to turn evil. Please let me see it! Please let me….

BARE—

And as he opened his eyes, he saw it.

“Oh my God—there!

It's still there…it's still there,” cried out Michael, in utter relief.

“What are you talking about, Michael,” cried out Nikki, back.

Michael then smiled, and saw it in her eyes, again. It was still there, still holding out….

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And now he felt like they could never disappear again.

“Michael, why are you looking at me like that?”

Fuck this—rompous-pompous—Nikki deserves better than this! I deserve better than this! I need to do something to change things.

And from this, he now knew, what he needed to do; to regain his mind and his senses; how he could reclaim control of his mind, and….

My fucking mitts.

And to use them to take on the mad bull that was now charging at him: to use them, by grabbing that bull by its horns, and steering the mad animal, into the ground.

“Nikki, I'm going back to 1999, and I'm going to fix this,” cried out Michael, in excitement.

As if that was the greatest idea he had ever had.

As if to get his scene back.

“What,” gasped Nikki, as she stared at Michael in disbelief.

“I'm going back, and I'm going to save both of us—I promise!”

And now, Nikki's jaw dropped.

“I'm going to do it—baby! I'm going to set everything right! I'm going to stop that bomb! Don't you worry,” exploded Michael, feeling a surge of triumph with that notion.

“No—Michael—don't!”

“Nikki, I believe you now! I believe you! You've been innocent all this time, and you haven't been yourself, but I need to do this so

you'll never have to be responsible for everything that might happen again."

"Michael, please stop trying to—"

Michael than stomped his foot at the ground, and smiled, then bit down on his bottom lip, as he pictured that old devil with the Fedora on its head.

You don't scare me anymore… you don't fucking scare me!

Thought Michael.

"And Nikki," said Michael, as he faced her, "not only that, but I'm going to go murder that fat-headed fucking pick—Dorian—by squeezing his head in, until he feels his brain crush, within his own skull!"

Michael was now pacing up and down the hallway, as he flayed his arms about, socking invisible figures in front of him.

"No, Michael—please—stay here with me," begged Nikki.

"No, I'm going to murder that man, and I'm going to set everything right!"

Nikki felt beside herself.

"Michael, the 1999 building is probably swarming with trained mercenaries and Iron Monkeys, all armed with machine-guns," explained Nikki.

"I'll take them all on, then!"

"Michael, you're no Rambo! Sure—you can handle a bar fight or two. But these guys aren't The Beefcakes nor Nim Foes nor Cockskulls… nor any of them. We've been lucky to survive this far. But there are hundreds of them over there, and they don't fight with their fists! They're trained killers, they use guns, and you don't even know how to use one yourself!"

"I'll learn," cried out Michael, in response.

Nikki then almost felt like she had just lost it, hearing this, but then continued—tried to continue! To try and persuade Michael to stay. But at this point, Michael was once again in a world of his own.

Now… Michael felt brilliance, like crashing ocean waves in Tahiti against his forehead; feeling himself sink beneath the waves, as the water purged him clean. He felt an ethereal sense of truth and direction, that could only be experienced when crossing over onto the other side,

where his better nature could join with him. He felt what was right, and it was a tranquil sense of new ecstasy and beauty, only a true God above could see and feel, and never the devils and false gods from down below. He had already experienced the horror of how everything could turn out, if his destiny was written by a madman. If the coin fell tails. And now. Never had Michael felt more euphoria in the revelation of how everything could all be saved. How he could save himself, and how he could save Nikki—

> For, there is no Lady, as, there is no Madboy. There's only us two, only me and you, Nikki, and we deserve better than this!

But, with this new and higher state of consciousness, Michael realized now, how it could only be maintained, as long as he did what was necessary—and end this! Because if he didn't….

> Then were both lost, again.
> "Michael, please! You're going to get yourself killed. Let's just leave the city—you and me! I forgive you, Michael, for choking me, I know that really wasn't you, you're losing it, you're just losing it," cried out Nikki, as she got up and smiled, hoping her openness and her words could persuade him.

And then all of a sudden… Michael looped completely.

> "No, Nikki," called out the last boy on earth, as he popped his collar.

And now, Nikki's eyes lingered a bit off to the side, trying to understand this new sight she was seeing.

> "There is no reason left in controlling it! I have nothing precious left in my life to preserve—except you!"

Nikki now froze, for she didn't know who Michael was really talking to.

> "Reason … to control—what," cried out Nikki.
> "So maybe… just maybe… it's about time I become my own tall tell told in bars and beat up joints across the East Coast, by the bar by barflies like my Uncle John…."

Nikki hesitated speaking, the words she was hearing were starting to sound like gibberish, coming from his mouth, as she saw how there was

really nothing but also gibberish, spewing from his eyes.

"Tales about that guy that single handedly took on an army of mercs, biker gangs, occultist…."

"Stop it—Michael! Stop it! You're not making any sense!"

"And finally, a complete madman, hell bent on taking on an entire city, and throwing it into fits of rage."

"Oh my God, Michael… you've completely lost it—haven't you," murmured out Nikki.

As she now felt the desolation of there being nothing she could do…

to save Michael from himself.

"Tales about that guy in the 70s, who had been sent to prison to rot. But came back out in the 80s. Out on the other end. Came back out—against all odds—to take back… that! That had been taken from him."

Nikki just shook her head, dumbfounded to what she was hearing.

"Okay, Nikki, I'm off," called out Michael, as he smiled, and stared into his own eyes.

"And I think it's about damn-fine-time to hit the streets, and get me some of that fresh night's air I was having earlier, I was feeling earlier… and some rompous-pompous action."

"Rompous… what? Michael—please! They're going to kill you!"

"I love you Nikki… good-bye!"

And with that, Michael smiled passionately at Nikki, turned away, and began replaying Danzig's 'Mother' in his head.

The Training Hour.

As he stepped outside, Michael saw a truck full of National Guardsmen flying by, on through, all armed to the teeth. And as he did, he then pictured himself being that disturbance on the other end. Michael then laughed.

Fuck!

Wow!

When was the last time I felt this… alive?

Michael then thought about baring, and where to begin. Where to continue this so called….

Odyssey… really? Is that what it's been all this time?

Hey, you're the one that's made it into this. And if you think about it, it practically has been. So, an Odyssey. Yes!

So… how the fuck do I do this now? I ain't just trying to confront one guy, now, and put him into a hurt locker. I gotta go commando now, Arnie style, and take on an army.

Simple! Get a gun, get some wheels, get there quick, and do what you do best, and go ape shit.

So… just like that?

Just like that!

Okay… gotcha!

Michael needed to get back to the 1999 building, and he needed to put a motor on it, before there was nothing left of the Big Apple to call home. There was already all-hell-bedlam in the streets, with the fires and the rampage, and the rampant mobs rushing out of control. But, Michael knew the shit was about to really hit the fan, once that Daisy Cutter released a 1,000 lbs. per square inch shock wave, leveling everything in its path. Leveling the 1999 building, and whatever else in its wake, and then allowing the madness to truly go into overdrive, and destroy this city, completely.

It's gonna be a hot time in the city, tonight, and the shit's about to get hotter, unless, I've got something to do with it!

Michael reached into his Letterman, pulled out some Lucky Strikes, and lit up a cig, to enjoy one last drag.

Been trying to keep it down to two or three cigs per day, don't want to start coughing up gunky stuff. I mean, this shit can kill you—you know!

Michael then had a chuckle, as he enjoyed that.

Chuckle.

Chuckle, chuckle.

More chuckles!

More!

And then, started feeling like his old self, again, as he waited for the nicotine to set in. First thing was first….

I gotta get some wheels….

And then later….

Some firepower. Sorry boys! You two just ain't gonna cut it anymore, time to put you barehand fuckers into retirement!

Thought Michael, as he stared at his mitts.

Continued to stare....

Stared some more!

Then:

Good boys! Nice to see you two ain't got anymore helter skelter shit to start suggesting to me.

Taking a look around, Michael's eyes then caught onto where he could start, as his eyes narrowed down to two Iron Monkeys in the middle of the street, getting wasted, while chugging tequila bottles.

Hmm... they must be couple of stragglers... should be easy to take them out—quick!

As Michael started heading over to them, he then saw a wooden sign on the ground, that said "The End is Nigh" written on it. So Michael decided to pick it up, and put it to some use. As he got up to the two bozos, he stood by their side, as he noticed they still hadn't noticed him.

Wow—are these two clowns shit-faced!

They were giggling and laughing and yipping to each other on their bikes, and then Michael noticed they were also packing a pair of AKs.

Oh good, another 'two birds with one stone' deal, I can see my luck is improving.

As the two eventually noticed Michael, they saw a man holding up a sign to their face, smiling like a dirty, street face, urchin kid, who had just stolen a whole bunch of candy from a candy store. First, their eyes narrowed onto Michael, as they didn't seem to recognize him, and then, the sign, as their eyes tried to make sense of the words.

"The end is... the end is... nigh?"

Seriously, you fuckers don't remember me from twenty minutes ago? Oh, who cares, that's why they're a bunch of mooks, and aren't the brains of the outfit.

"Yup," said Michael.

"Nigh," asked the bozo, unaware it was another word for 'near.'

"That's right!"

"What does that shit mean?"

As the bozo asked that, Michael smiled, one last time, showing off his

pearly blood drenched teeth, lifted the sigh over his head, and then… Bam!

Bashed it over the bozo's crown. Once the other bozo noticed what had just happened, he quickly tried to go for his Kalashnikov, but then, accidentally pulled the trigger doing so, and shot himself in the foot. Michael continued bashing bozo number one with the sign, as the hombre dropped to the ground. Then Michael walked over to bozo number two, and batted the sign across his temple, as that bozo tried to curse Michael out in his Colombian slang.

If I hear another one of you motherfuckers call me carechimba again—I swear!

After a couple more lullabies, the two were now out cold, and Michael began collecting their gear. Michael picked up one of the assault rifles, and then began eyeing it a bit in his grip.

Just point, and then pull the trigger… how hard can that actually be?

With bozo number one's Kalashnikov at hand, he decided to test it out. He had already fired a round with Radboy's revolver, so he had gotten the feel, and knew the mechanism couldn't be any harder than that.

Aim and pull the trigger… what else is there to using a gun?

So, as Michael held the assault rifle around his waist, like he'd seen Schwarzenegger do in his action movies, he decided to do some target practice. Seeing a stop sign at 30 yards, he figured he should be able to fire a round into the O.

All right, here we go!

As he pulled the trigger, he then heard a click, but with no discharge. And then thought how, maybe, the chamber might be empty.

Ah shit, I gotta scrounge up some magazines.

As he studied the banana shaped mag, he decided to pull it out, and check inside, first.

Wait, is there… like a lever or something… to release the mags?

Looking the gun, top to bottom, he saw a lot of different lever type objects, that he couldn't make much sense of. Then he decided to just try and pull the mag out, and as he did, it came straight out.

Well, that was easy.

Looking inside the mag, he saw there was still cartridges inside, and began to wonder what must have been wrong with the machine gun.

Maybe I should just pick up bozo number two's AK, that at least seemed to work.

But then decided to try and figured out what was wrong with bozo number one's piece, because he needed to learn what the fuck he was doing, here!

That!

Or there was no chance in hell he was going to be able to take on a platoon of commandos, later.

Oh, what am I doing? I can't....

Shut up! Don't get discouraged, now, just focus on what you're doing. There's no going back now. And! It's all going to be fun! Fun! I tell you... I want me some Spaß, again. And, some ass-slapping good times will be had again—you wait and see!

As he stuck the magazine back into place, he looked all bewildered at the gun. Then figured, maybe, the safety might be on, and decided to look for it.

Okay, which is that?

Eventually, after some more time studying the machine-gun. He found a lever just above the trigger that was clicking into three different positions.

Okay, what does each position mean?

Then Michael began to focus on the other lever, and realized he'd seen it before in movies. It was the bolt where the bullet should be chambered, so Michael pulled that back to look inside. And. There was no bullet. Michael then went back to the lever that was locking into three different positions, and pulled it down to the last notch.

Wonder if that will make a difference.

Looking inside the bolt chamber, again, he now saw the bullet was in there.

Oh, wait a second... I get it now!

“Ahh,” moaned out bozo number two.

Michael walked over to the guy, and clocked him over the temple, again, but this time, with the butt of the Kalashnikov.

Okay, let's try this again.

Holding it up again, and trying to aim the AK by his waist, Michael pulled the trigger, and this time, the gun went off in a flurry of bullets,

as the Kalashnikov was almost jerked out of his hands.

Damn! This son-of-a-bitch kicks like a mule!

Looking back at the sign again. He saw that he had missed every shot he made. At least five shots had been discharged: one shot had hit the pavement, two of them had hit the glass in front of a store window, and Michael couldn't tell where the other two bullets had went. Michael was lucky that there were no riots going on in these neck-of-the-woods, now, nor any cops, or National Guardsmen, that would have decided to arrest him. Or simply, shoot him. It seemed like everyone had moved south towards the financial district, going for the jewel of the city.

Okay, that was all fully automatic fire. Maybe if I moved the safety into the middle position, that'll be semi-automatic?

As he moved it into that position, he held the gun by his hip, again, and—wouldn't you know it—he fired just one shot. But... had still completely missed the O in stop, and the sign, entirely, as the bullet went straight up, and hit a lamppost. Growing a bit frustrated at his marksmanship skills....

Shit, maybe Nikki should be the one going all Ram—... stop that! Stop thinking like that!

Michael then felt dumber than a bag of hammers, when he then realized... how stupid it was to be firing from the hip.

I can't aim for shit holding the machine-gun from this position, why do I keep seeing movie stars doing it in movies?

Then a light bulb went up.

Well, maybe because it's the fucking movies, and it's all fake and shit!

Michael rolled his eyes, hard, and shook his head, as he this time held the rifle up, and looked down the sights to aim. Then, as he pulled the trigger, he fired a shot, and barely hit the top left tip of the T.

Close enough!

And so concluded Michael's training.

Ha, now I'm ready! Five minutes of practice... that should be enough now to take on a bunch of guys that have spent their entire professional merc lives training, themselves. Let's begin!

The Collateral Damage.

As he got onto bozo number one's chopper, he looked straight ahead at

the Nim Fo building, and then remembered Letoya again.

Oh my God, I have to at least check inside before I head for 1999.

I have to at least make sure if she survived the attack.

Riding the chopper towards the building, he took a peep inside and saw a slew of dead bodies everywhere. Riding into the building, Michael quickly got off, and began heading for the elevators with the Kalashnikov at hand, just in case there was to be any surprises waiting for him inside. There was practically no one alive there, and the stench of death was everywhere with the bodies frozen over at the moment it happened. It was a grizzly and morbid scene, and Michael began to grow distraught by the brutality of it. Looking like the contents you'd find in a back dumpster of a mannequin factory, with all the stiff parts toppled over each other, again and again.

Okay, stop that! Can't think too much along those lines. Can't let the sickness start setting in again. Just don't look at them.

Reaching the elevator, Michael called, and as the doors opened, he entered. As he reached the top floor, the doors flung open again, and once again, the man floor, and once again, the graffiti of king manhood right before him. It looked like a withered mushroom now, with a slide of hand of blood crossing it out, from the hand of the same Puerto Rican girl, Michael had had his 'Lady Killer' moment with. She was lying on the ground now belly up before the graffiti.

Michael looked at her.
She looked at him.
But then again… she wasn't looking at anything anymore.
Michael's heart sank now.

Michael began heading out into the hallway with the AK drawn, looking down the sights. Entering the hallway, Michael turned right, and was met by the sight of more bodies toppled over each other, and the stench that had consolidated practically into a misty haze that hung at knee level.

Le Space Le Bron.

The door was open. It had been bashed open. Michael looked inside.

And saw Le Bron, himself. He was knelt over the pedestal that that art deco rotary phone was on. The phone was on the floor though. Beeping still. His head looked like the losing hand of a domino piece. Michael cringed up, and felt like he—had to—say something.

"Shit… say… say….

Say hello for Ader for me. I always liked the guy." All Michael felt like he could say, as he cringed up some more.

There were dim red lights everywhere, misty red, keeping up some form of illumination, and as Michael searched through the bodies, right next to the massive form of The Towering Inferno, he found her.

Oh God, Letoya—no!

Letoya was on her stomach, and it seemed like she had been shot in the head, as there was a giant hole where a bullet had erupted out of. Michael wanted to believe he had mistaken this woman for being her, but he recognized what she was wearing, and he recognized her dark golden bushy hair that was very distinctly hers.

I really should have ridden you out of the city like you wanted me to. Oh God, it's all my fault… I killed you… I killed….

Michael needed to get out of there fast, he felt like he was neck deep in a pit of a mass grave, and he couldn't let his senses get absorbed in all this. These were some concentration camp Holocaust sights for him, and he didn't want his senses to get overtaken by them. He couldn't let himself think too deeply into Letoya's death, because that he felt like it was going to drive him into a catatonic state, and then there was nothing stopping Mr. Dorian's plans.

Should I turn the body to see if it's her? No! It can't be her… it….

Thought Michael, as he stared at the hole, as then… the hole stared back.

No—no—no! It might not be Letoya, this might not really be her! Several different girls could have been dressed like her and had the same perm. No, Letoya's fine! She's probably back at her….

Michael felt like turning her over again to check. But as he stared into the hole in this woman's head, the hole stared back again.

Michael then freaked, and dashed out of the hallway towards the

elevator. As the doors opened, he ran in, and then bashed the bottom for the ground level so hard, the image shattered. Staring at the male and female symbols, Michael tried to force himself to get humorous again. Keep his thoughts there, safe, away from the scene he had just walked out of.

Ha! The Nim Foes are such a bunch of perverts… they're such….

As the doors opened, Michael dashed towards the chopper, got on, and left the Nim Fo building in the distance.

Don't worry, Letoya, I'll see you later…

at least on the other end.

The Age of Rage.

As Michael kept on blazing through on these neon shining, streaming, shimmering streets, he watched like a spectator, people of every walks of life, try to rock and riot this city to its foundation: down 106th East, Michael saw a mob of Mofongo Wilds playing bummer cars with stolen wheels, trying to flip over other parked cars as they drove into them; around 96th East, Michael found himself driving along side of some Jam City 5s, who were just out cruising in their low-riders, not really up to no good, just doing their own spectator work, as Michael was, cruising by like they were at a drive-in theater; down 72nd East, it was all out war, it looked like The Cockskulls and Monkeyfuckers had joined forces, and had decided to try and hijack a firetruck. There was a building on the corner raging in flames, and as the firemen tried to maintain it, they also had to turn their hoses onto the bulk of those two masses, as wave after wave kept trying to sack the firemen down, clean. Nothing but streaming jettisons of water, and mohawks could be seen.

Pieces-of-shit… waste of skins!

And then, seeing as to one of the Monkeyfuckers was right in front of him, Michael stopped his vehicle, and decided it was time to test that green streak of his he had dealt with before, with Mr. Dorian.

I hate these one-dimensional cartoon characters, these fucking Double Dragon fodder characters. So-and-so-called menace in the streets, showing the signs of times to come, after WW3, where we'll have these de-mutated and de-evolved anti-Brady Bunch fuckers

all around, waging WW4, with sticks and stones, and shit! They're all psycho for the sake of being psycho. Why are they doing that… huh? Why? Those firefighters are trying to save people, and these fuckers, here, are trying to stop them. Why? Maybe these fuckers truly are deep down at the root of what's to be expected out of all of us, of our humanity, being this twisted and treacherous. When we all reach ender mode… ah shit!

Ender mode had now come to be something that deeply terrified Michael to his foundation. The thought of reaching the point of—truly—no return, and deciding to have some fun while at it, ending things, no matter what the psycho came across.

Type of fuckers that would kick little dogs being walked on the street, or baby strollers, with a child inside, being pushed by their mothe—… fuck them, I hate them all!

Michael now felt ready—definitely ready! To test his green streak. As the Monkeyfucker noticed Madboy was giving him the evil eye, he began pointing and laughing; laughing like he had just raped his own mother, and had enjoyed it, too. And now, Michael felt ready, so he pulled out his Kalashnikov to test his resolve.

"You-wer that Madboy—huh?"

Now, it was just Michael.

This wastoid.

And nothing but flames, more flames, and more flames after that—all around them. The so-and-so-called Johnny Cash Circle of Fire.

The jack-off looked like he couldn't speak without his tongue out flapping at the end. Also, possibly, physically incapable of keeping it in his mouth, to boot.

"Oh—preddy! What you going to do with that?"

This thing ain't human, I can kill it! And, even if it is, then it—definitely—needs to die, so it don't go around fucking and raping and breeding, leading to more of its kind being born amongst us. Fuck that! This fucker needs to be cleansed! Purged! Do it, Michael! You can do it! You've already driven over three of his buddies tonight, and almost killing them. Plus, you were chucking dumbbells at Beefcakes not very long ago, who I'd consider are

more human than these guys. And, you've also killed Radboy and El Presidente Angel Eyes this night. You can do this—you can do this!

As Michael took aim, the Tromaville reject began acting out, just in his own unique way: jerking its head back and forth, clucking like some chicken, also making howling noises that sounded like that of a baboon crossed with a sperm whale crossed with a troglodyte, in mating season.

A chicken crossed with a baboon, crossed with a… eww! What the fuck! It ain't human—just kill it!

But Michael was hesitating, and it had given the thing enough time to notice him turning green. The wastoid then smiled, pointed, laughed (in his special way), then ran off, with one leg looking like it was put on backwards.

What the fuck? How am I going to be able to do anything at 1999, if I can't even shoot a piece of shit like that?

But then, he realized there was something about guns that stood at the limits of where he was willing to go. Beating people with his barehands….

Don't say that fucking word ever again!

Chucking dumbbells at them, and even trying to nail them with a chopper, was stuff that to him seemed….

Well, I don't know… cartoonish!

And unreal. Guns, on the other hand, were real, and the faces of death that had horrified him tonight, were also just as real, too. They were things his mind refused to click with. Refused to accept.

So, what is it? I can't shoot a piece of shit like that? But I can strangle Nikki and….

Oh God, I can't believe I did that….

Michael was trembling all over again, at just the thought.

Don't think about it! It didn't fucking happen!

But then, as he lifted his head, he met face-to-face with the moon, which seemed but 2 inches away from his nose. It was a very otherworldly object. Silent. Cold. And unresponsive. It existed in a void. So alone, after a billion or so years of life living hundreds of thousands of millions of miles away from anything, that it had lost all consciousness, and all sense of its own sense of being. And now, it was making Michael think

of Attica, then Mr. Dorian, and then strangely enough his….

Oh—for fuck sakes, what's taking you so long?

Crash—already!

You fucking prick… crash!

Michael began laughing until his gut started to hurt. He always knew he was a crazy fuck, but this was a whole new low.

Michael also figured when it came to craziness itself, there were two variations:

- those crazy fucks that yelled at people (like himself).
- and the ones that yelled at inanimate objects like trees, or slot machines, or even the freaking moon.

So how much further down the rabbit hole can I fall now?

Thought Michael.

But then realized, the next thing that might happen was… the moon might start… yelling back.

That now scared him.

Let's Get Ready to Rumble!

All right, enough! I've already hallucinated Grim Reapers, and shit, as if hallucinating the moon yelling back at me is going to be any bit worse. I'm already there, at that place, over the deep end.

Thought Michael, starting to take consideration to his own mental health and well—

Ha! My own mental health and well-being? I think we're also passed that, too. I think there's nothing—well—with me anymore… and will be—ever again!

Hmm… if I survive all this, and when I get thrown into the nuthouse: Maybe I could start having some fun, some real fun, then, now that I'm able to have dreams while awake. I can then create my own fantasy world, to myself, within myself. And live in it. Instead of this aborted one I'm now in. Ugh!

Ooh, that could be fun! It'll just be me, and I can make myself out to be some….

Sexy cyborg babe, with a fedora hat, named 888, and it'll take place a million years from now, where, I'll be wandering the cyborg wastes. Looking for… whatever the fuck hot cyborg babes in a wasteland setting in the distant, distant future would be looking for to find completion. Hmm, I'd imagine a mate, even though I ain't built to mate anymore. So, it's like a tragic story about being a cybernetic woman, physically and emotionally incapable of doing the act, anymore, since, I ain't got no real female parts left anymore. Since, I'm mostly a machine now. But, just left with the memory of what it means to be a woman. And, that'll all mean, I'll have weird idiosyncrasies and habits, like, putting on make-up, when there's no need to do so anymore. Or, hoarding stupid cheesy romance novels from the 20th century….

You know, like the ones that have a cover of some white woman, getting all swooned and silly over the forbidden love, of getting with some primitive hunky savage, or slave. Like American Indians from the Wild West, or, Nubians from the heart of the Dark Continent. Or—fuck it—from some future world where cyberpunk Cat People exist. Ha! That's right! So: growl! Hiss! And laser beams to you! Ha! Whatever setting, no matter the time or place, or even if real or not, that's all romantic and adventurous like that, that has a bunch of hunky not white men standing around, half naked, all grunting at each other, and competing with one another, just for that one silly white female. Just for that dumb bitch. Ha! And they're all dark skinned, and ripped, and angry looking as fuck! And….

Wait… why am I going into such detail with this shit?

Also, if it's a million years in the future, how would any 20th century, cheap, paperback novels surv—… oh! Cut it out, Michael, stop going all into it, deep.

Oh, oh! And I'll have an owl with me, a white… no, fuck white! I'll have a pet owl with me, to go along in my journeys. As that triple 8 assassin cyborg female. And the owl's all genetically engineered to have the intelligence and speech of us, so as to keep me company. And I'll call him, Mr. Eisenhower. Yah!

Not Mr. Reagan, Michael?

No, fuck Reagan. Mr. Eisenhower. And he'll be a grumpy ol' owl, all frowny, and… I'll love him to death! And, hooty-hoo! And….

And then all of a sudden, while Michael was in his own little world, there, once again, in the worst opportune time—mind you!

Hey, kid, what the….

Some kid then popped up, some punk twelve-year-old looking kid, with that short/front/long/back mule-headed hair, in some shredded denim from his vest to his jeans, with a red bandana, smoking a cigar, that then snatched Michael's AK while Michael wasn't paying any attention. And now, looked like he wanted to play cops and robbers with Michael, except, he looked too old to be doing such, playing make-believe, as was Michael, so to say.

"Hey, kid, what the hell are you doing? That shit's dangerous," cried out Michael.

But then something caught Michael peculiar about this kid, realizing he was recognizing him from someplace.

"Hey, give that back!"

"Hey, my name's not hey!"

"What?"

"What's not my name, either!"

And seeing how the sass was strong with this one:

"Why you little—"

"I ain't little, I'm big, I'm grand, I am supreme!"

"Oh, what? You think you—"

"And you can call me Sinus Supremus."

"Huh?"

"And you shall be called Zero Charisma, now."

"What the…." Michael was now all 'what the fuck!'

"Zero Charisma," ridiculed the Kid, again.

"Sinus Sup —"

“Zero Charisma!”

“Sinus Supremus… Zero Charisma? What are you mumb—”

“Yeah, that’s my name, don’t wear it out,” finished off Billy the Kid, then.

And then, started stroking his chin with his right hand, and had a look on his face like he was checking himself out in an invisible mirror. All bitching and bopping, and shit. Journey facing something fierce.

Oh yes! The sass truly was strong with this little man, here.

“Give me the gun back, kid! Give me—”

“Rat-ta-ta-ta goes my strap, whatcha think of that-ta-ta-tat,” went the little punk kid, as he now started bouncing around, while pretending to fire off the AK in display.

“Okay, enough with the wisecracks, just—”

“Watch it, bitch, I gotta itchy twitch!”

“I’ll wash your mouth with soap and ladder,” lashed loose Michael, getting all mammy on the boy's ass.

The kid then started dancing and prancing around with the Russian, then flipped Michael the birdie, then ditched.

What the….

Thought Michael, totally stupefied by what he had just experienced. As he watched the kid book it towards an alley, and now, Michael felt like he had to stop him, before he hurt someone, or, himself.

Of all the lousy luck! Shit, get back here!

Michael then took off on the chopper, after the kid, and into that alley.

“Hey, kid, this ain’t play time!”

He had caught up to the kid, as the kid had the AK strapped to his back, while trying to jump over a 14 foot fence. Michael then got off the chopper, and rushed to jump the fence himself, but, then the kid (that was now on top of the fence) held the gun up, and discharged.

Rat-tat-tat!

Went the gun, and that startled Michael, some, as the kid then started making ugly faces at him, all gnarly, and then laughed. While pointing. While readying himself to jump down to make his escape.

“Stop, kid, you’re making a big mistake.”

"No—you're—making a big mistake," cried out the kid, all very 'back in-your-face,' about it.

Michael was now all shrugs and question marks.

"Kid, seriously, you're—"

"No, you are," interrupted the kid, again.

And then, pointed with his eyes and index finger over at what he was referring to.

Michael then turned around, and….

"Ah shit!"

And what pray tell was the kid referring to, you might be wondering? Well. A whole horde load of mean looking Cockskulls, joined with Monkeyfuckers, all standing, and staring, straight at Michael. They had bats, they had knives, and, they had that look of the Age of Rage about them, that was now centered on Michael, ready to make him part of its scene. Finally.

Bogus!

Thought Michael, for this was all too much for him to take on, a one-man army, or not.

"Hey, buffoon, whatcha think this is, a cartoon? With your barrel all twisted around, and aimed back at the back of your crown?"

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean," demanded Michael, even though he knew exactly what.

Billy the Kid then smiled, rubbing it in, with lots and lots of style and sass, as Michael prepared himself to deal with this new threat.

"Hey, he'z the one! Madboy-fucker, gettem!"

It was that one Monkeyfucker Michael had tried to make target practice out of. Now standing with the rest of his slimebag friends, ready to take revenge.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, as he tried to count them all very quickly at a glance, and there had to be over a couple hundred of them.

"You! I knowz you! Madfucker man!"

And that there… if there was to be leader amongst the Cockskulls, it would be he.

Madfucker man… huh!

He had a silver mohawk, and Michael remembered him from the group's Numbskull days. He was the oldest kicking Cockskull of the

bunch, so, he had to have been some sort of leader amongst them.

These bunch of degenerates are like rodents, with a very short life expectancy. So, seeing one as old as him, there, is rare. He used to call himself Skidslitter back then… I think it was. And, I'm guessing, that's what he calls himself now. Some punker name like that. Actually, I remember him when he was named Fredrick James Kowalsky from elementary school, when we were kids in the 60s. And he was a total teacher's pet back then, a real bookworm nerd. Wow, how much street poison has he put himself through, through his system, to turn into this? Mr. Toxic Avenger, there!

"Eeehhh," went Skiddy, for… whatever reason.

And it sounded weird and metallic. Since Skid, there, had a bunch of safety pin piercings vibrating when it made that sound, that were all linked together, going from his ear to his nose to his tongue to his left eyelid, looking like some metallic centipede, crawling in and out of a bunch of his orifices on his face.

Eww!

Thought Michael, as he decided he wanted none of this.

I need to get my gun back, I don't have time for this.

So, Michael was then off, trying to jump the fence again. But as he tried….

Bash!

He felt a bottle shatter against his back, that slowed him down a bit.

Wow, these guys are—

Bash!

Went another one, just as he was about to go over the top, and that last impact knocked him off balance, as he fell down on the other side of the fence. Michael was now a little out of it.

"Aaaaaahh," bellowed their war cry from their center, as they all went into berserk mode, rushing to catch up to Michael.

Michael, getting psyched now by their coming onslaught, jumped to his feet, and started booking. He wasn't interested in playing with these guys, at all. Since he knew they were by no means intending to play nice, once they caught up to him. Michael was now booking, fast, long, and hard, and now, towards a fire escape leading up into a commercial building.

I need to get in there, and hide then, then… damn! How am I going

to find that kid and my gun, after all this?

Thought Michael, feeling himself dragged into this scene, when he really belonged in another.

I should have been to 1999 by now, that building is still going to be blown up any time soon, now that Mr. Dorian has the codes. And, if the riots ain't bad enough, now, they're bound to get worse, once that building goes up.

Michael then turned his head to take a look at what he was dealing with.

"Aaahhh," went the bulk of them, with nothing but mouths opened all the way, showing all their teeth. All of them!

Shit! I'm fucked if they catch up to me.

Since there literately were hundreds of them, all massed up, and rushing at him, looking like one giant body of men: one body, with hundreds of arms, hundreds of legs, and thousands and thousands of teeth.

Michael then jumped high, really high, really pulling a feat, that could put a smile on Bruce Lee's face, and caught the ladder, and as he started trying to make his way up.

"Aahhh," went Skiddy, as he jumped up, and caught Michael's legs, and started jerking his weight down, to try and pull him down.

"Ehh, eh," kept going Skiddy.

"Eeehhh," went another Cockskull, as he jumped up, and caught Skiddy, and started helping him try and jerk Michael down.

Michael then continued to climb up, even with the two pulling at him, so as to put some space between them and the rest of the Cockskulls and Monkeyfuckers. Also, started trashing about like crazy, to get the two to break their hold on him. But. Then the rest of the bunch grabbed a hold of Skiddy's legs, and also tried to put some weight and pressure. And now, this was becoming too much. Michael was a strong guy, but, the muscles in his arms were already being stressed to the max, trying desperately to hold on.

Whoa, it's as if they're trying to drag me down to the pits of hell, and shit!

Michael now started kicking and kneeing the two holding on with his one free leg. And, got the one unnamed mook, hard, and had him fall back into the bunch; knocking most of them down. But Skiddy still had

a good grip.

"Ehh, eh!"

Shut up, Skiddy, shut up! What the fuck do you guys even want from me, huh? I didn't do nothing! Not like I shot that one bud of yours, there.

"Ehh, eh!"

What the fuck do you scumbags want?

But then Michael looked into Skiddy's eyes, and got a hint as to what that was.

Umm?

And then saw Skiddy's tongue, that was split in the middle, and forked like a serpent's, and watching the two-split up parts flail about together, looking like two pissed off boa constrictors, having some angry, angry make up sex with each other… Michael now got the idea.

"Oohh," went Michael, as he kneed Skiddy in the jaw, so hard, the scumbag bit off his own tongue, as the two parts fell to the ground, and continued with what they were doing, independently.

Eww, I knew it, these fuckers are mutants, really!

Skiddy then tried to climb higher, as three of his buds tried again, grabbing a hold of his legs, to tug Michael and Skiddy both down off that ladder they were hanging off of. And as Skiddy got up to where he could do some serious damage, he did! And started biting Michael's hip, and started trashing his face around to tear a piece off.

"Ahhh! You piece-of-shit!"

Michael then really let him have it, as he dropped some serious elbow, and really thumped his skull in, leaving in a bit of a dent. That really staggered the Cockfucker.

Cockfucker… huh!

And he dropped now.

Michael was now climbing all the way as he got to the first level, and up to a window leading in. Michael then bashed that window, as….

Bash!

Bash!

Went a bunch of beer bottles, and other forms of glass, as they flew at Michael, and broke up around him.

BASH!

And one across the left side of his temple, that cut deep, and nearly K.O.ed him.

"Ahhh," they continued to scream.

Whoa!

Some of them were now trying to make the same feat Michael had, and try and jump high and catch the ladder themselves. But, none of them could do it. The first grip was set too high for most to reach.

Ha, ha! Can't catch me now!

But then, they started doing that human ladder thing, and they now could. Michael then went in, and… found himself in a cubicle setting. Now that Michael was in, his next move was to get out, out on another end. So, Michael started dashing, trying to put as much distance between him and all his pursuers. And dashing forward, he reached some stairs leading up and down.

Fuck that! No more rooftop skirmishes!

Thought Michael, as he went down, and out of a door, and now found himself in a Merry-Go-Round clothing store.

Hmm… I think I was here a week ago shoplifting. Wait… yes, I was! Stole a pair of Z. Cavaricci pants, that I only wore for one day, then… threw the ugly things away. Wait, was it here I stole that pair from, or that King Chess store?

There were no lights, the area inside seemed big and open, full of merchandise. Seemed that way, but Michael could barely tell, since his eyes hadn't yet adjusted to the level of darkness around, for things to at least be barely visible.

Shit, where do I go…?

But looking towards one far end, he saw a large window, streaming in some illumination in the color of blue steel. Michael was now making his way towards them.

Ouch!

While bumping into all the merchandise in-between.

"Ehh," went the army of Magneto's rejects from above.

"Hey, what was that," went a disembodied voice.

What the….

Michael then stopped moving forward, as he realized he wasn't alone down here, and there were others around him.

"Did you hear screaming?"

"Yeah, I did, what was that?"

"Sounded like…."

"Ehh!"

"There it is again."

Michael now started seeing a stream of flashlights turn on, at least a couple of them, all moving, positioning and repositioning a couple of aisles near to where Michael was headed towards.

Ah great, looters!

Michael then saw one of them up front; it was one of the Neon Suedes. One that Michael knew.

Sweaty face Rico Escobar… funny thing about him, he so young looking, looking like he due back at Boys Town, but the fucker is older than I am. He's at least forty, and probably has forty kids from forty different women. But you wouldn't be able to tell, since, he looks like he belongs in the Puerto Rican version of The Breakfast Club. Brat Pack looking mother, even though, almost old enough to be part of the Rat Pack, really. Young looking fucker, just young! And lookie here, he's now wearing that Z. Cavaricci crap, that he's stolen, that still got the tags on them: a pastel green tank top, with some black and white checker pants… styling! End sarcasm.

"Hey, what the… is that you, Michael," said another one, stepping up, named Chad Escobar, Rico's brother.

Fwee!

Went Chad then, with a whistle, calling for more to step up. One of them was a mean looking, stiff upper lip, Slater, who was posing around with a one-handed Louisville slugger over his right shoulder.

"Hey, check out this blast from the past, fucking Michael Connelly," joked Rico.

"You shittin' me, he in prison."

"Not anymore, I guess."

"Hey, whatever happened to that outfit you used to run with back in the 70s, those Shamrock—whatevers," joked another.

Michael… didn't have time for this.

"What you doing here, in the dark?"

But Michael wasn't listening anymore, for he was planning on simply

walking out on them; slipping out, before the Cockskulls had a chance to reach them.

They're probably a bit lost upstairs, looking for me, but it's a matter of time before they show up.

"Hey, I'm talking to you, bozo," said Rico.

"Hey, I don't care, I'm just passing by, not here to start any beef with you guys."

"Ahhh!"

And that now got everyone's attention, considering how much louder and closer it was.

"What was that, who's upstairs?"

"That, there, is the Cockskulls," answered Michael, hoping that would get him out of the spotlight.

"Cockskulls? Those crazy bunch, shit… where they at?"

Michael then tried again to slip passed.

"Hey, did you bring them in here," asked Chad, looking worrisome.

"This is our job, you trying to mess up our—"

"I ain't trying to do—squat! I'm outta here," said Michael, as he tried one more time.

But this time, that one Slater character: the one with the bat, and judgmental stare, then grabbed Michael by the arm, and tried to yank him around.

"Hey, we ain't done with you—"

But Michael then yanked loose.

"Hey… cut me some slack, Jack! We ain't got no beef! So, I'm outta here!"

"Oh… no," asked Slater, and in a way, that had all the hairs on the back of Michael's neck stand on end.

From his tone, he sounded like he had something for him, a real juicy bit to share. Michael now turned around… he had to! Since. Michael was at least a little curious now to see what that was.

"What," asked Michael, as he took a big gulp, dreading what he was about to hear.

"You," said Slater, simply, as his eyes filled up with color, the color red.

"Me… what?"

"My sister… Angelica…."

And now, Michael's eyes began filling up with the color yellow.

Oh, you gotta be fucking shitting me—I don't got time for this!

"Wait, your sister, lil' Angie," asked Rico, in shock.

"Yeah, Rico!"

"This guy, here," asked Rico, again.

"Yeah, that's right, this guy—right here!"

And the Slater character was now pointing with his slugger, straight at Mike.

"Three months ago, she was with some dude that took her virginity, and vanished like a fart in the wind," explained Slater.

"You think so," asked Rico.

"I know so, she told me, the fool that did her like that was some really curly haired guy, with green eyes, that had a tattoo of a vampire chick, stabbing herself in the chest."

Everyone, and Michael, now, looked at his wife-beater, that had that image.

Shit!

"Also, a tattoo of a shamrock on his shoulder, that was dripping in blood."

Double shit!

It was now pretty obvious the person that did the nasty with Slater's little sister was him. But….

"Well, whatever, I ain't the only one that had that shamrock tattoo, since I ain't the only one that used to be part of The Bloody Shamrocks," explained Michael.

"And that," asked Slater, pointing at the image, with the slugger.

"This, what about it? A bunch of us had gotten a tattoo of Vampirella, here, too, back in the day. Remember Jackieboy, he had the same," explained Michael, continuing with the lie.

"But…," went Slater, looking distressingly.

"But, what," asked Michael, as he tried to break off and leave again.

"Angie's pregnant!"

And now, this all had turned into an episode of the Young and the Restless. This was now some soap opera shit, that Michael couldn't belieeevvve he was hearing. Everyone's eyes blew up now, everyone's!

As: the plot thickened.
As: they all gasped!
As: dun dun dun!
As….

Get the fuck outta here! This is—not happening! Hell no!

Thought Michael, as he turned around, and started leaving.

"Don't you fucking…."

And Michael then ducked, for he could just feel it coming: Slater's bat, as it tried to swing in and connect with the back of Michael's head, but didn't.

"Get him!"

Michael was now running. Being chased by Slater, Chad, Rico Suave, and the rest of their funky bunch, at least five other guys; but, they weren't the bunch Michael was seriously worried about right now. And then….

"FOUND YOU," exclaimed Skiddy the Cockskull, as he finally reached the commercial floor, and turned the lights on.

"Hey…."

"Shit!"

"The Cockskulls," exclaimed Slater, Chad, and Rico, as they turned around and saw the bunch.

But, once again, not Michael's scene. Not! None of this was. And neither did he want it to be.

I'm not even going to comment about that Angie matter. Not a word!

Michael then grabbed a female mannequin, and tossed the bitch out the front window.

Of all the lousy fucking luck I've been having, she better not turn into Kim Cattrall, now, covered in shards of glass and blood.

And. She didn't.

But… she did then set off the alarm.

Michael was now on the street, still running, but now, not so sure if he should. Looking back, quickly, he found that the Cockskulls had redirected their onslaught onto The Neon Suedes, as the two groups began waging it out. Eight of the Suedes, taking on at least over eighty Cockskulls, mostly by chucking store items at them to push them back.

Billy the Kid: Part One.

Okay, now what….

But then Michael saw what.

"You again," said Billy the Kid, all disappointed like seeing Michael's mug.

Michael turned his head around and saw the kid, not that far from him, as he was exiting an underground subway station.

"Hey," cried out Michael.

Then dashed towards him and was now in reaching distance. In grabbing distance. In grabbing and putting over one's knee and disciplining the shit out of, distance. The boy now had eyes of a porcupine without quills, since, he wasn't carrying Michael's piece no more.

"Hey," cried Michael, looking like he wanted to charge in.

"Hey, what," asked he, a little nervously now.

"I want the gun back," Michael said, and started pacing a little from side to side.

"I don't gots it no more."

"I need it—now," ordered Michael.

The boy just shrugged. Still a little nervous, and now getting a little defensive in pose and posture.

"Listen, kid…."

"My name is not kid," continued he, from where he and Michael had last left off.

"Just listen…."

But now, Michael took a good look at him, and started assessing the matter at hand. Obviously, the little twerp didn't have it anymore. Especially nowhere on him, since, he wasn't wearing any loose clothes that were slacking, and visibly there was nothing bulging out on him from behind his shirt or somewhere. Obviously, that! And, obviously, wherever the gun was, the kid was not going to now share that information with Michael. And Michael….

As much as I sorta do want to give him some of my dad's old teachings, of how to deal with a disobedient little….

Actually, my dad never did discipline me for being disobedient. He

did it whenever he saw weakness, in which case he….

But, anyways!

But, anyways! For whatever reason, as infuriated as Michael felt, there was no way he was going to get physical with him. So, as he stood there, slowly starting to lose the gust inside of him, the kid then folded up his arms, and gave Michael a look. A little disappointed like. As if saying: 'What? Just take me for a man, and treat me like one.' But Michael couldn't do that.

"Okay, how much is it worth to you," now asked Michael.

"You got dough," asked the kid.

"Look all around you, the city is falling apart, everyone is out looting, of course I got dough," answered Michael, with a mischievous grin.

But… maybe a little too mischievous.

"Okay… so," asked the kid, looking to the side, a little suspicious like.

"So how much is it worth to you to give it back?"

"A million dollars," then answered he, as Michael almost rolled his eyes from that line.

"Done," replied Michael.

And as you can figure, Michael was lieing about all this; having any dough, especially in that amount.

Shut up! Don't give it away, let him just think that.

You know, Michael, kids are not as stupid as you think they—

Shut up!

"What, you don't believe I got the money," asked Michael, trying to hold a serious face.

And, starting to feel a little guilty about it.

But why? He stole from me—he stole! I'm just trying to find a means to get it back.

"Prove it," asked the kid, still looking to the side, in suspicion.

"Can't, I got it stashed away," answered Michael.

"Where?"

"Where is the gun?"

"I got that stashed away, too," answer the kid, then, with some

sass, now, matching Michael back.

And….

Wait… what the…?

Michael then realized something.

Shit! No… don't do it! Don't! Don't start liking this kid, now.

Thought Michael, as that special thing about the little misfit's personality started to grow on him.

"Where you got the dough stashed away," asked the kid, eyebrows all high and raised.

"Down in the subway. You?"

"Down in the subway, too." matched the kid back.

With lots of sass, lots of it! Straight back into Michael's face.

And now:

Ah shit!

Michael now realized he was smiling. Heavily. And so was the kid.

Hot damn! No, Michael, no! Don't like this little pipsqueak. This little thump sucking brat. No!

But Michael couldn't help it, and couldn't help continuing to smile, as the kid's smile started turning rogue, in sync with Michael's. And Michael now knew exactly what that meant.

"You know you got a mouth on you," mentioned Michael, sticking it to the kid what he thought of him.

"Thanks," said the kid, as he started wiggling his eyebrows.

"That wasn't a complement," insisted Michael, trying to build up reasons not to like so much.

But couldn't build up enough. As Michael now found himself sharing a moment with him. A strong moment. That of two kindred souls looking into each other, and seeing true kinship, and meaning, and sense of identity.

Ah fuck! Ah… why not?

Thought Michael, again, as he saw the magic in it. But, the problem was, the circumstances leading to this, and where it would then lead to, and they weren't looking good.

Okay. I like this kid, a lot! Now what? I still need to get my gun back, and I still need to get to 1999, and do what's needed.

Plus, since Michael was all lies to him, there was a lot of discomfort with all this also involved.

The two had now sorta made a silent pact or agreement with each other, as they both started heading down into the subway. And during this time, Michael started thinking:

> How do I know him? I mean… I feel like I know him. Why did he take my gun? What's going on here?

Then, started feeling discouraged and impatient with him, since the rhythm of the night had slowed down, and until getting to 1999, he had to deal with all this. Things had changed, settings had changed. And now, part of him still felt like he was still with Nikki, and now felt like he was missing her, seeing how she wasn't here.

> I can't believe what I did back there….

And then there was the other part of him, that driving part, which felt a lot like that autopilot crap he had felt earlier, that had driven him all the way to 1999, and started this whole mess.

> That part has me dreading, what's to come once I do get my gun back. And get back to 1999, again. So now I'm feeling impatient to get on with the night, and also, reluctant. Oh, what have I gotten myself into?

Michael was feeling a span, between Nikki, and Dorian, there was a span of things needed to be done. And Michael couldn't stand how this all felt, dealing with the in-between shit. Dealing with the process. Stuck halfway through the tunnel, and trying to get through to the other end, even though, also dreading what waited there.

> And then there's this little shit, here, and what's his part in all this? He's… wasting my time. Got me stuck dealing with Cockskulls, running from a horde of maniacs, then there's that whole Angie matter—I didn't need to hear that!

And now, Michael wasn't feeling very kindred like with this kid.

> "How do I know you're not going to try and run away again," asked Michael.

Being a little cross with him now, all of a sudden, which the kid noticed.

> "You don't! How do I know you're not pulling my leg, with the million dollars business?"
>
> "You don't," answered Michael, trying to match the kid back, but, it wasn't how it was before.
>
> "Maybe I don't want a million dollars," said the kid then, not

looking back to Michael.

"Maybe you're a sucker, that don't know how many AKs he can buy with that much money," answered Michael.

"Maybe, I'm not! Since I know you could pretty much do the same, with that much. So why pay that much now, for just one?"

The kid had this time stopped, and looked back at Michael, as he started studying him, over what he had just said. Looking into him. And Michael now knew he had to come up with something, quick, for Michael's new main man, here, didn't seem very assured of all this anymore.

"Because… I need it now. I really, really need it! Right now! At this very moment! And I am willing to pay any amount for it," replied Michael.

Very imposingly, even though, more than convincingly.

"What you plan on doing with it," asked the kid, then, looking a little upset.

"Nothing for you to worry about, I just need it."

The kid didn't like that. And, truthfully, Michael didn't like it either, having said it.

"And, I'm willing to pay—any amount! Any for it, right now—okay," pushed Michael, trying to force him to buy the story he was selling him.

And the kid now started seeming assured.

"Okay, okay, I get it," said he, also seeming not really to know what to think.

After a while, and some bitter and uncomfortable moments of silence, as the kid continued to lead him on down the subway, Michael then felt like cheering up the mood again. Since he had just yelled at him, practically, and, Michael didn't want him to start disliking him.

Talking with this half pint makes me feel how I was when I was his size, and missing it.

So, Michael now felt like acting even more immature for his age around him, since, the half pint was bringing out that side of him. More than usually—mind you!

"Yeah, kid, it's called supply and demand, that's why I'm willing to pay that much."

The half pint now looked back again, and started building up his own sass talk.

"I know, I wasn't born yesterday."

"Kid, you look like you were, though," pressed Michael.

"Don't call me kid!"

"Okay, Sinus Supremus," ridiculed Michael, remembering that bit.

"Whatever, Zero Charisma," matched him, back.

"What does that shit even mean," asked Michael.

Really pressing now, trying to make him look as dumb as he had tried making Michael out to be, with this wise talk.

"It means, you got zero charisma! None! A big fat goose egg," replied the kid, as his roguish side came out.

And now, it was time for some fun. Seeing how the two had seen into each other, and knew what to expect.

"Then how come I was able to get with your big sister last night," started Michael, not caring if the kid was twelve or twenty.

"Because you didn't, I don't have a big sister, and my little sister is eight," replied the kid, promptly.

"You pedophile," added the kid, then, and that almost had Michael rolling.

"Hmm, most have been that other woman, that lives in your household, in your family," pressed Michael.

"You mean my grandma? Dude, she's eighty, and has hair in her ears, and is all hunched over now… and… grody!"

Now Michael couldn't help snickering a bit, seeing how well the kid was able to keep up.

"Like… barf me out!"

Ha, fucking 80s kids.

Thought Michael, hearing out this X-Gener, and his words, his slang, and the characteristics that defined him.

"No, no, I mean, the other woman that I saw in your household, around my age, that's a real stunner. A real beauty! A really fine-ass woman!"

Michael just couldn't help it, he wanted to hear if he would still have something fresh to say back, now. That, or… would he get mad. Since

Michael was now making mama jokes, and all.

"Wait… you mean my cross-dressing pops? Oh… no! I'm sorry… so sorry if that's what happened."

That had Michael almost chuckle, hard, once.

"You homo!"

And now Michael did.

Hmm… maybe I don't want to move on. Again.

I don't…

I don't know what's coming once I get to…

I'm gonna die….

Billy the Kid: Part Two.

And then all of a sudden.

"Hey, what the—stop!"

The kid then made a run for it. And whatever admiration Michael had built up over the little guy, switched to something on the opposite spectrum.

Slippery little bastard!

The kid had ran to the turnstiles, and had hopped over them, dashed left, and to where the subway station started to get dark.

You little….

Michael then burst out, himself, to give chase, and really started putting a motor on it; he wasn't going to lose this little slippery shit again.

Deep into the subway he ran, down some stairs, and now, he was in the station underground, where the subway trains would pass.

Where the hell is he… where?

Then, saw where, the kid had stepped down to where the tracks were at, and was now running deep into a dark tunnel.

Oh… what the… who is this kid?

There was some good distance in the way; Michael started then making track to catch up. Got to that end of the station, and stepped down, himself. Also avoiding anything Michael was sure could electrocute him. And started booking fast, into the darkness.

Where is he?

Thought Michael, as he ran, ran some more. Then ran again. And then:

Whoosh!
Went a passing train, as Michael felt himself yanked to one side, magically almost, so as to not get ran over by it.

And then all of a sudden….
Things had changed, settings had changed. And now, part of him no longer felt like he was with Nikki anymore, as she started feeling like a distant memory. As she waved 'goodbye,' and moved into the void. There was this excitement in the moment.

"What the… wow," cried out Michael.

And what that was was… a delayed reaction to that speeding subway train, that—really—did just almost run him over, and ended him. There was now an excitement to it, a 'whoosh' of feelings. A danger, and also, no danger at all.

Ha! I feel like that subway train did hit me just now, go through me, me and my soul.

And now, there was another part of him, a driving part, which felt a lot like that autopilot crap, but this time, different. There was no dreading where he was heading, as things started taking on different properties. And things started feeling very, very familiar. Michael was no longer feeling a span, between Nikki, and Dorian, and now there was no span at all of things needed to be done. And Michael was liking how all this felt, dealing with some in-between shit he now felt lost in, but liking it. Stuck halfway through the tunnel. But this time there wasn't to be any other end. None at all. Michael was running, and running, and running some more, down this tunnel, and he felt like he was going in circles. Looping. Again, and again. Round and round he went now, like on a merry-go-round, on an infinite number of loops all headed inwards. Spiraling into the abyss of his own inner being, as if to find definition. To find meaning.

Find meaning as to what it meant to be…
not only the old self he remembered.
But now.

Oh, wow!

An even older self he had almost completely forgotten about.

And now, Michael heard forgotten music, to match this once forgotten state of being, that was now found.

What's happening to… who cares! I want this!

And then, he stopped, as he saw light. A stream of pure light shining out, and tearing through the fabrics of all that lay in darkness. A door had opened up, and Michael then saw the kid's shadowy silhouette run into it. Then shut.

Shit!

Thought Michael, as he found himself stuck in complete darkness again. But he had gotten a good sense of where it was. And as he ran to, he came to where he could step up, and now found his hand reaching the door. He then looked for a knob, and found that too.

And then… lights again!

And Michael now stepped out of the dark tunnel, and into this in-between place.

Some maintenance station, from what I'm gathering.

There was a lot of refinery surroundings and sounds and smells around him now. That. And lots and lots of pipes. And lights. And just everything made of some type of machinery.

All right, where is he?

And then he found him.

"Ah shit," cried out the kid… who wasn't alone anymore.

Who the…?

There were at least ten of them, including Michael's main dude. And, they looked like an outfit, a special bunch, all to themselves.

"Hey, who is this guy," asked one.

"Don't worry, no one important," replied Michael's main man.

"Did you bring him here," asked another.

"No, this guy followed me."

"Shit, what does he want?"

"He wants the machine gun back."

"Well, don't give it—"

"Hey," interrupted Michael, as he stared the lot down.

Things got quiet now. There were eleven in total of them, all dressed

similar to the main kid: all blue denim, and they had red bandanas: some worn as a headband, some as a neckerchief, some half masked all bandit style but relaxed. They didn't have any vests or jackets or cuts with emblems on them, so, they were definitely rag-tag. The area they were in seemed a little bit lived in, with items scattered around to make the place seem more homey, and dumpy: coke cans, change lying around, a TV, boombox, a couple boomboxes and TVs actually (which meant they were stolen), lots of changeable clothes, blankets, pillows, and then more and more stolen shit.

Especially one of those brick cell phones.

They were all so quiet, and a little humbled, too, seeing a grown up amongst them. And now a little worried.

"Where is this, who are you kids," asked Michael.

I'm getting some 'Lord of the Flies' type of vibe here.

"Who are we," retorted one of them, a bit chubbier one.

"Should I tell him," asked the main.

"Go ahead and tell him," responded another.

And now, Michael's main man started staring—straight! And looked like he wanted to let him have it. Address Michael, in who and what they were all about.

"Who are we…."

"Who are we…."

The main kid was panting now, repeating that line, setting it up. And then:

"We… are the boys!

All about the big noise,

all about the hard knocks, hollering through the streets, to take on the man someday!"

"Nice… nice rendition of 'We Will Rock You' by Queen," interjected Michael, rudely.

And that took some wind out of them. But… Michael couldn't help it. His main kid wanted to sing it out almost, and, when he started, from the tune he was trying it with, Michael knew exactly what it was. And now, knew exactly who these kids wanted to be.

Michael… was falling in love… LOVE! With what he was seeing here.

Michael's main man then tried to continue:

"You got mud on your face, you big disgrace, somebody better put you back into your—"

"And somebody had better call child protective services on your asses, and round you boys up, and put you all away, in—your—places! In like some foster homes. And shit," interjected Michael, rudely again.

As much as he was loving all this, absolutely falling in love, he knew his place, and he knew his presence. And, what that all meant with him being here.

"You kids live here," Michael now asked, as he felt that nagging feeling that he had to, he—had to—be, the grown up about it. At least a little.

The boys seemed crossed now. Hexed! Angry! Panting and sweating. But also, loving Michael's presence in a way. For he was their adult version of them, in the end.

"You fart sucking maggot breath," started the main kid now, really getting into it.

"I see the worms worming into your brain! Swiss cheesing you shit up, and leaving you insane!"

And now, it was playtime for the boys, and Michael.

"Ha," mocked Michael

"What," asked the kid.

"Nothing… just wasn't that impressed," sneered Michael, as he got them all smiling.

It was like a pack of hyenas in there, all being of the same nature. With smiles and teeth.

"Oh, and who are you," asked one, as the main stopped to gather his strength.

"I'm Madboy, and who might you be," asked Michael, pointing at the twerp.

The twerp didn't answer. Michael's finger pointing and macho physique, was too intimidating for him.

"And how about you," asked Michael.

Pointing at another, but he didn't answer also.

Michael right now was challenging their leadership, by starting with all the betas, bagging on them, to get the alpha mad, to get him to come out and play again.

"How about you, twerp? Who are you," asked Michael, imposing on another.

"I'm…."

"You're what, a mute?"

"No."

"Well obviously not, since you can talk."

But the boy didn't respond to that.

"Or was that the twerp next to you, doing a ventriloquist bit throwing his voice, with you as the dummy!"

Billy was looking mighty pissed now.

"Okay… how about you, you a dummy, too," tried Michael, again, with another.

"No."

"Then what's your name?"

"That's… a secret," tried, he did.

"A secret, huh? Who you think you are, James Bond? You a man of mystery?"

"Yeah," followed he, as he drew a grin.

"You a sly spy, all about going behind Soviet lines, got some nice fraulein chick back there in East Germany waiting for you, you like to keep as a main squeeze?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," went he, all dopy like.

"Oh, and… do you always give yourself away so easily, Mr. Secret Agent Man?"

"Huh?"

And now, Michael had him.

"Some spy you'd make, let me know if President Ronnie ever decides to trust you with nuclear codes in some handcuffed briefcase, I'll be sure to hang myself then… *yeah, yeah, yeah,"* mocked Michael.

And now:

"Man, you sorry," started up the alpha.

Michael now redirected his attention back onto him. And smiled. The kid was now spitting; spitting hard, as he called Michael that, and now the tensions in the room were fixed.

"You ain't what's up, you just sorry!"

"Oh yeah? Well, your shits… tardy," spat Michael, back, as he began.

"Man, you look like a fairy!"

"And you look like you ain't done sucking on yo' mama's dairy," spat Michael, going all out, as he knew the kid would too.

"Hey, eat my berries," spat the kid.

"Don't want to."

"Why not?"

"'Cause they too hairy," finished Michael, as some of these boys started snickering from that last line.

"Damn, you so ugly, you scary," spat the Kid.

"Yet you're the one with the un-popped cherry."

Everyone was smiling now, even the main kid, as he got himself ready to follow up on that.

"Man, you're about as tough as a guy named Terry," Kid.

"And you're about as cool as a guy named Gary," Michael.

"Why don't you go suck on a guy named Larry!"

And then:

"Ooooh!"

Went the whole bunch, from the main kid's line, there. Twelve years old or not, this was going to get nasty.

Damn, this kid is ruthless! I'm loving this!

But Michael had something to follow up on that:

"Can't, too busy, kid!"

"Too busy, what?"

"Getting sucked by a Carrie, Clary, and Sherrie," counted Michael, with his left hand.

And then gave them all the look, that he had actually had that with three chicks of those names.

Wait… shit! I have, too! I ain't just making this up. Those were the names of the three I porked, that one time, that I picked up from

Newark from that sex party, there. That one night. Ha! Funny how the mind really starts to recall shit once the juices start flowing.

Oh… and… Rachel! Rachel Sandra Stevenson was that Texas girl's name. Yes! I'm loving this!

"Wow, the four of you lesbians," asked the main kid, throwing Michael off.

"What," went Michael.

"The four of you… just wondering…since you don't look much like no Jerry…."

Everyone's eyes wandered now.

"But definitely can pass for a Mary."

And now everyone blew up.

How the fuck…?

Michael was starting to get mad. And… all because….

What's with all the homo jokes directed towards me? It's like every other one that's like that. I ain't homo! Calling me a fairy, and now a Mary?

And then thought:

Nice one, kid, with my sister's name, too, and all.

Seriously, Michael, you still don't get why you're getting so much gay shit rediec—

Shut the fuck up, you! You just narrate this shit. And stop trying to break the fourth wall with me, okay?

Michael, breaking the fourth wall is when you talk to the audience, not when you talk to the narr—

Enough!

And now, taking all this in. Michael started feeling alive.

When was the last time I did so?

And young now, too. Rejuvenated! And set free.

You know what, I take it back. I think I like this whole rapping business now. This is fun.

Even when getting told by a twelve-year-old… huh?

Yeah… but, that don't matter, I like this kid. And I told you to stop interrupting me!

The kid then started again:

"Man, you a doormat!"

"And you a hairball hacked up by a cat," followed Mike.

"Damn, you so ugly, I just wanna beat you over the head with a bat!"

Just ruthless… this kid is so vicious!

"Bring it on, then, little man, you and your army of skuzzy rats."

"Oh, I will, and we'll eat you alive, and then worry if we're getting—fat."

Both Michael and the kid laughed at that last bit. All tongue-in-cheek.

This time Mike started:

"Boy, I just want to abandon you at a carnival."

"And I wanna see you mauled by a grizzly bear, since you're so lovable."

"Kid, just go home, and come back, when you gain some vertical."

"And you, just go straight to jail, and find some sissy, there, to be all relatable."

Michael couldn't help himself, then, as he caught himself unable to continue for a second, as he started slipping up and snickering. Leading the main kid to think:

"Yes, I win ag—"

But then Michael followed up with:

"Boy, why don't you go get touched by your uncle, and then have some therapist write an article."

And now the kid was now also slipping up and snickering, too.

"Now, I guess I—"

But like Michael just a second ago, spat out:

"And why don't you get run over by your ex-girlfriend, her and her new man, in your own convertible," finished the kid.

And then started bagging and laughing at Michael, then started giving his boys some high-fives.

And as much as Michael was enjoying all this, even when getting his ass handed to him by this kid.

Damn you, kid, had me picturing Nikki doing that to me, too, with

that last one.
Michael was starting to get tired of all this.

"Hey, kid, answer my question from before, you all really live down here," Michael asked, now.
And now, they all went silent.

Michael then panned his eyes at them, and started formulating assessments. Now that he was starting to develop an attachment towards them, that thing, that adult side, started to take over again.

Yeah, that adult side of me, since I am the thirty-something year old, here.

And doing so, made him start wondering about boring crap; thinking about a whole bunch of boring questions; that were no concern to these kids, but were to Michael, now, seeing as how they were.

I mean, really? They live down here in the subways… in this rat-infested place? How did they get here? How did this all happen? Where's their parents? How come nobody that works in these subways has noticed them, and done something about them, then?

What's going on here?

"Seriously, hey, you, what's your name, really," Michael now asked the main kid.
"You know my name, it's Sinus Supremus."
"Okay, whatever…."
But the kid then started shaking his head. Michael was growing annoyed.
"No, I'm serious now."
"Why, we were having fun," said the kid.
And now, the bunch started nodding and agreeing.
"We can have fun after this… I just…."
But then….
Michael's eye caught onto the '47. And, remembered why he had come in here. This now changed things. And settings, again. Now there was another adult matter he remembered that needed to be attended to, and

a lot now, since lives were at stake.

Plus, these kids right now seem safe down here, considering what's really going on, up top.

Michael then started moving over to it. And then the kid….

Let's just call him Billy.

Billy, there, moved in the way.

"Hey, you ain't cool," said Billy, seeing what Michael's new interest was, and seeing how he wanted to be a grown up, again, and after the fun they had had.

Michael looked at him, and answered:

"Okay, I guess I'm not."

And tried to walk up to it again, as Billy got in-your-face about it.

"Man, you ain't cool!"

The rest then started shaking their heads, in damn shame. Bad form, Mike, bad form!

Fuck you!

"Man, you so—un-cool."

Michael then decided to continue.

"Yeah… and you need to get yo' ass back in school."

"Why, do I look like a tool?"

"Yeah, yeah," went a couple of them.

"No, but you do look like a damn fool," responded Michael.

"What fool, look up, son, I rule!"

"Except for the times when I see that you drool," spat Mike.

"Thank yo' sister for that, though, she's the one that leaves me in pools."

And now, it was gonna be all jokes about family members, Michael could just feel it.

And why my sister? Why her?

"Hey, how's your sister been," asked Billy the Jackass.

Michael didn't respond. And Billy, now, wiggled his eyebrows.

"How's my bitch."

"Hey," said Michael, very pissy now.

"Yeah, bro, your sister's a drool factory, when she gets people started, other people walk up, and throw quarters at them, thinking they're a wishing fountain now."

That almost even had Michael bust out with some chuckles.

"Oh, you making jokes about my sister, now? Huh?"

"Want me to make jokes about yo' mama, instead?"

"Fuck you!"

And now….

"Ooooh," went the rest.

For Michael had said the f-word. In front of children, no less.

I think we're passed all that now.

"Well, keep drooling! What's my sister gonna ever wanna do,
with a Punky-ass- Brewster kid like you.
So, you go ahead and keep up with that prance,
until the day comes, you can fill out, the rest of your pants…
nice one, huh?"

And it was too, everyone agreed, even though not showing it.

"Not as nice as your sisters," followed up Billy.

He had grown fixated on Michael civil sibling, and wasn't going to let up.

"I like how she fills out her pants," continued Billy.

"Trust me, kid, you ain't got no chance!"

"And then, I explode, and now she's in a trance."

"How's that, kid, when you can't even dance?"

"What dancing, bro, have you seen my lance?"

That now called for a round of applause, it was 0-5, now, and Michael was losing.

Wait… 0-5? I'm losing that badly?

Yes, you are. And, in addition, he was feeling like he was starting to run out of juices.

"Okay, enough with my sister, no more of that talk."

"No talk, here, bro, I'm all about the good walk."

Michael really wasn't interested in continuing anymore, so he decided not to.

"Fine, you go walk your little munchkin ass away from my sister, far away!"

"Hey, that didn't rhyme," said Billy.

"That's because I don't gots the time."

Ah shit! I rhymed by accident.

Thought Michael.

"Fuck up again, and I'll ticket you a fine," finished Billy, with that round.

Billy then turned around, chuckled, as his buddies then did, and now started giving and receiving high fives, all around. Some up high. Then one down low. And then did a too slow, with the buddy of his to his left. And now, they all bursted out with laughter.

"Ha ha, yes! This is bitchin'," rejoiced Billy, with smiles.

Michael sighed.

"I want the gun back," said Michael.

And now, Billy was all frowns.

"Yeah, and I want another hit at your sister again."

This was really starting to enrage Michael. Some of them started to notice, and started making kissy faces. One then held his hands out, like he was playing with a pair of boobies: Mary's, of course!

Fuck you!

"Fuck you kids, my sister's a poodle dress."

"Until she gets a load of me, and now she's a total mess. Hahaha!"

And now, there was an eruption of their laughter. As some started rolling around on the floor laughing. Madboy, felt mad, but….

They still just children, though, shouldn't let it get to me.

And decided to be that adult, and to start attending to adult matters.

"Listen, kid, give me the—"

"My name is not kid! How many times do I have to tell you that?"

"Sinus Supremes then—"

"Zero Charisma."

That almost had Michael seriously lose it.

"Give me the gun… play time is over."

"Yeah, I guess it is, now that I've left you with a comb over."

Again with the rhymes and laughter, all around.

"I'm being serious…."

But Billy, there, was being serious, too. With his playtime.

"Plus, rhyming 'over' with 'over' is cheap," said Michael, feeling like he was going to regret trying to bring up rules to the game he wanted to squash.

"You wanna know what's also cheap? Me, in your sister, last night, and it went deep!"

And now Michael did.

"Enough! You win."

And now Billy and the boys started rejoicing again. High fives all around. A down low. And then another too slow with the same buddy of his to his left, again. One that didn't seem to be the quickest, and seemed to be the one to fall for that 'too slow' bit every time. They were bagging and laughing on him now, and it was a riot amongst them.

"Yeah, kid, you win."

"Okay, then, I guess I get to keep the gun," said Billy.

But… Michael wasn't having any of it.

"No, you're not."

"Why not," asked Billy, looking mighty disappointed.

"Because we were never playing for it in the first place."

And now, Billy started to get confrontational, seeing as how Michael was.

"I've come for the gun, and… I plan on taking it… now!"

And now, they all got confrontational.

Shit, I can't fight children, what do I do if they try to attack me? Thought Michael, really feeling sore of how things had to turn out.

And I was liking them, too, and a lot!

But they weren't liking Michael anymore. Not a bit.

And now:

"I call tribe," said Billy.

And Michael… didn't know what to make of that.

"Say what," went Michael.

"I call tribe," reiterated Billy again, and started looking fierce.

"What say you," asked Billy.

"I call tribe, too," responded another one.

"Me too," and another one.

"What say you, outsider," asked Billy, asking Michael.

"You'll call 'mud,' when I'm through with you," responded Michael, starting too really grow irritated with these childish games.

"I call tribe, I call tribe. What is the consensus," asked Billy.

"Here, I call tribe."

"I shall do it, too."

"Tribe!"

"Tribe!"

"What do you call, Outsider?"

"Mud," responded Michael, rolling his eyes at them.

That started to piss off Billy.

"I be Thrasher."

"And I be Slasher."

"And I be the Masher, mix."

And Michael now had enough, and started moving towards them.

I won't hit them, but I'll muscle my way to that gun, and take it from them, and I'll take whatever punishment they try to lash at me with.

"No," cried Billy now, getting really upset.

Six of the boys then rushed Michael, and tackled him, started pushing on him, and hitting him. But none of them could make a dent.

"Okay, kids, lay off—lay off!"

Billy then looked at the AK, and had the look in his eyes like he wanted to pick it up, and maybe… use it.

"Damn, you kids!"

They were practically all over him. And even though they were really becoming a nuisance, none of them could really stop Michael. Although, Michael was feeling the drag, and he felt like he was fighting some strong winds that kept trying to push him back. But still….

"Ha, even with all of you, you got nothing."

Then one of the kids tried socking Michael in the crotch.

"Hey, that's fighting dirty."

Then another one tried biting Michael's ankle.

"Ha, is that all you got?"

This was actually sorta turning out to be fun for Michael; he'd always been a brawler, so it was in his nature. And since these kids didn't pose that much of a—

"Ahh! You little bastard!"

That same kid that tried to sock Michael in the crotch, got him this time.

"Ahh, damn! Fuck!"

But Michael wasn't out yet.

"I'm getting the gun."

“No,” cried out Billy again, looking upset.
“I’m getting it.”

“No, Michael,” cried out Billy, once more, and this really got Michael’s attention.

Since….
How does he know my real name?

Billy the Kid: Part Three.

Now, that feeling he had over this kid earlier started taking shape.
I swear, I know this kid, I feel like I know him, him and his story.
And now Michael stopped wrestling with the bunch, as they stopped, seeing how Michael stepped back, and wasn’t going for the gun anymore. And Michael now felt like confronting him about it.
“Kid, have we met?”
“Yeah.”
“Where at?”
“Ha, I can see the signs of aging, you coming down with old timer’s disease or something? Ha ha,” joked Billy.
Old timer’s… what the?

You mean Alzheimer’s! Fucking old timer’s disease… stupid kid… ugh!
“No, I don’t remember… where at?”
“Man, Stuttering Sputnik's, about a week ago.”
And now, it came to Michael… he was the kid, that very same kid, that….
“You remember, we were playing Street Fighter, and I was tearing your ass a new one, ha ha ha!”
And now, Michael got total recall.
Oh, why didn’t I see this before… but what are the possibilities?
It wasn’t just the fact that Michael had seen this kid before, back at the arcade, something else was now very familiar about him as well.
I mean, he’s like a curly haired kid, with green eyes, and with dimples… and…?

But… that couldn't have been possible!

No, it can't! How could it?

But then, taking another look at him, Michael began to wonder.

"Hey, what's your…."

But realized he was probably going to feed him that 'Sinus Supremus' bit again.

"What do you guys call yourselves," asked Michael, asking for their gang name.

And then, the one kid, that sorta reminded Michael of a ten to twelve-year-old Gab, told him:

"We… we… are the New Shamrocks!"

And now, Michael felt beside himself.

You gotta be shitting me.

And now, beside himself, again, as another version of himself also popped out, and also started scratching his head, wondering what the fuck was going on.

This is some freaky Twilight Zone shit, now.

"Hey, where did you guys get your name?"

"From the Old Shamrocks," also answered the one that looked like Gab.

"Okay, well, I'm the Old Shamrock, and you guys didn't get this from me, so… who from?"

But the boys didn't answer.

"You know me," asked Michael, back to his special one.

"Yeah, I know you, I know you, you're the dork, I was whoopin, at Street Fi—

"No, besides that?"

The kid now started to smile.

"Why you smiling?"

But the kid didn't answer, as he continued to do so.

And, the thing is….

The kid's smile… was a special smile. It was very captivating to gaze at, very charismatic, even for a kid who looked twelve. This kid was set apart. Destined! For maybe something truly grand someday. His smile had a radiating presence, that could make others smile. Almost like

what Michael could imagine the smile of Jesus would be like, with a smile that could part clouds, and once again make everything feel all good in the world again.

"Kid, what's your name?"

"What's your name," asked the kid.

Wait… you just called me by my name earlier.

But Michael then figured the kid was just asking back, not that he didn't know, but he was still playing some sort of name game. Which he knew all the details and rulings to, even though Michael didn't.

"I'm Michael 'Madboy' Connelly," addressed he, fully, and made a certain presence, all posing, representing himself and his character behind the name and smile.

The kid smiled again. Back. Very serendipitous like. Which started to make Michael think.

Could he be? Can he… could he possibly be…?

Thought Michael, even though still not believing the possibilities. But at least now entertaining the thought. Michael then started to really study the kid's face, to see if he could recollect. Because the problem was was….

I don't remember too much how I looked when I was his age. I don't. Not anymore. And in the face, that is. I look now into his, and I try to remember all the times I would look into mine, at his age, standing before a mirror, and… I don't remember.

For the problem was was….

Usually, people have pictures of themselves at a younger age, so they could look into them and remember things like these. Details like these. But I can't, because I ain't got none.

For the problem was was….

My pops! He never took any. He never took any pictures of me at any age. And the youngest picture I got of myself is from my ID, which I got at eighteen.

Michael was now growing mad. Seriously intense.

I mean, I loved my pops. I did… I most certainly did. But, come on! He never took any, because of his strange way at looking at things.

The world. And the people around him. He didn't believe in taking pictures of people, he only liked taking pictures of things. Like scenery. Like the city, or the ocean, or stairs… fucking stairs! I remember him once trying to explain it: 'What's the point? In a hundred years, no one is going to care who these people were when they're gone and buried, so what would be the point of having their pictures around?' And I remember him arguing with my mom, and my mom would then try to use the same argument back around against him, and say: 'well, that's the point, the point you should be taking pictures of us, instead of street post, and things, they'll still be around to look at in a hundred years, we won't.' But, it was like my pops could never get it. Or, worse… simply didn't want to.

Thanks to my dad, I got nothing to remind me who I was when I was a kid. No pictures, no nothing. He took those things away from me. Since I was twelve, this kid's age. He took them away… and not just by not taking pictures of us. Also, by….

Michael was now shivering, growing insanely intense, burning up with fire.

Ah shit!

But, a bit too much, to really develop any impressions over them, as they got burned up, and over exposed, like undeveloped negatives getting exposed to the sun light would.

No pictures of me, whatsoever!

As if, they never happened.

I was never that age.

That kid never existed.

Michael, now started staring at the kid again, and began to wonder.

Are you me? Do you look like me, when I was your age? What's going on here?

"Why did you run away, I thought we had a deal?"

Michael was really starting to like this kid, and it was upsetting for him to see him do so.

"What deal? You were lieing about the money," said the kid, now matching Michael's level of disappointment.

"No I—"

But then Michael could no longer continue with that ruse.

"How can you tell," asked Michael, feeling a little ashamed.

Billy now looked really disappointed.

"Just because I'm a kid, don't mean, I'm a fucking moron."

"Hey, watch your mouth," reprimanded Michael.

But it was too late for him to be trying to come off as a respectable adult about it.

"Why don't you watch yours," reprimanded Billy, as Michael started to feel like the juvenile, here, getting put in his place by a true adult.

"You thought I was stupid enough to believe something like that, taking me for that much of a chump," said Billy, seeming pained.

And now, Michael got it.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, feeling like a royal piece-of-shit! Since what was really bothering the kid, Michael could now see, was, not just how Michael had tried to play him like a chump, but, how less of him he had thought thinking he could do so. It wasn't the kid's ego that had gotten hurt…

it was how the kid liked Michael, but got hurt, after he did something to dishonor that.

"Fine, I'm sorry about that, I didn't mean it to be that way," expressed Michael, and meant it.

The kid was now breathing hard.

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry?"

"Yeah, sorry, I didn't—"

"Why should I accept sorrys from liars? How do I know they're really sorry," expressed Billy.

And Michael… accepted it.

"Because I like you, kid," said Michael, hoping that could win him back a little.

But… the kid continued to seem unforgiving. And now, Michael was not liking this.

"Well, I liked you more, before you up and ran away."
Billy didn't respond.
"I need that gun," said Michael now.
And Billy… still didn't respond.
"Fine, I lied to you, but you stole from me… and I need that—"
"What do you need it for," asked Billy now.
But now Michael was unwilling to respond.
"I…."
"What, you going to lie some—"
"No, I'll tell you, I need to kill a man."
And with that, the kid made a face, and now it was better when he was only figuring Michael for a liar.
"Yeah, that's right! I need to use that gun… to kill someone."
Still, Billy, with the face.

"A bad man," justified Michael.

"How do you know he's bad?"
And now, Michael didn't like where this was going. As he saw how Billy wanted him to justify further, and over a matter Michael also felt a lot of discomfort with bringing up.
Kid, I don't even want to think about half this shit I've gotten involved with, let alone explain it.
"Trust me, this guy, I know," said Michael, simply.
Since….
It's that fucking simple, he's an evil man, he's done a lot of irredeemably evil things, and now, he needs to die! Simple!
"How?"
Kid, please don't do that thing! Don't! With your… too innocent to understand why, and now you expect me to explain it. When it's better if I didn't, and you were just ignorant about certain things in life.
"This man is gone, he's mental," said Michael.
But the kid wasn't buying it. Michael now saw what this kid's nature really was. Behind all the sass talk and attitude, and disrespect, there was a lot more to him completely on the opposite end, and more than even Michael could grasp. Something much better than Michael's best

nature.

Kid, please don't get upset over this… you don't know this man. Don't develop a heart over someone you know nothing about, considering what he's capable of.

"He's gone over the deep end, and needs to be put away," said Michael.

And then a picture popped into his head.

What the….

Of himself, while he was in prison.

Oh… don't start that shit… not now!

"Well, maybe he needs help, and needs to be put away in a hospital, not underground," expressed Billy, as his anguish over the matter started to pain Michael.

"No, this guy is really mental, sick… in the head."

The kid shrugged.

"And dangerous."

And then, again with the picture of himself, in prison.

Don't tie my fate, to that man, in what I deserve for my sins. Don't!

"You love your sister," asked Michael now.

Billy looked away.

"You got a kid sister, right?"

"Yeah," said he.

"Okay… do you love her?"

The kid shrugged again. Seemingly discontent with how Michael was trying to rationalize this.

"Okay, if there was a bad man around, wouldn't you do anything to keep him away from your sister, so he could never hurt her?"

And now, Michael also now felt discontent about it. Considering Billy's mixed feelings.

"Well?"

But Billy didn't answer, and it all seemed too much for him. Just too difficult for him to grasps.

"Listen, I know this is some adult stuff. I know it's hard to understand… but—"

"What's there to understand, I understand it, I'm seeing it all around. Everyone is out killing, and looting, and…."

"Well, it shouldn't be that way," said Michael.

"Then how are you helping, by going out, to kill a man?"

And the really messed up part was, this was mostly what Michael would have argued, before this night, and everything that happened that made him feel different. This was his argument, his stance, his! But now, it couldn't be.

"Trust me, I am," said Michael, as he felt like he was also trying to convince himself, now.

"Then maybe you should kill everyone else, too, up there, since they've also gone mental, and sick, and have become dangerous?"

Michael… needed to stick with his convictions.

"I gotta do what I gotta do, kid, that's all there is to it, now I need that gun."

"Killing is wrong… right?"

And now, the kid really seemed to be pained by it all.

"I gotta do what I gotta do, the gun!"

"But… but…."

And now, truly anguished, and in tears.

You little fucking….

And then all of a sudden,
seeing those tears,
had Redboy coming out.

"Give me that fucking gun, you little cry baby!"

Redboy came out, lashing loose, and shoved Billy away, then grabbed the gun.

"Hey!"

Some of the New Shamrocks then tried to get involved. But Redboy wasn't Madboy, and he lashed at one, the one that looked as Gab did…

WHAM!

Redboy smacked him across the face, so hard, he knocked him to the ground.

"Hey," screamed Billy, then.
He was now scared, they were all scared. And now….
Wait, what… what's happening?
Michael was scared, too.
Why did I do that… why? What's wrong with me?
"You bully… you fucking…."

"I told you over and over, kid, I need the gun, I need to go kill a bad man, and I need to do it, before he does something, we'll all regret."

There wasn't any more opposition from the New Shamrocks, now that Redboy had made his stance.
Don't fucking call me Redboy, not him! Not ever!
This was all very upsetting, now, to be taking in. Very upsetting. And heart wrenching. And Michael, felt… ashamed, to even look at them, after how he acted. But then, he did. And saw.
Oh… great!
He had given that one kid a black eye, and his mouth was now bleeding.

Also bleeding was his nose.
And seeing that… truly did horrify Michael.

I need to get outta here.
Michael now turned his back to them all, to walk away.
"I'm sorry," said Michael.
And then….
"No, you're not!"
That had Michael turn around and face the kid again.
"Yes, I am… I'm sorry, kid, I didn't want to do that," said Michael, and felt somewhat better, since, he was now staring at him, and really meaning it.
"I mean it!"
But Billy then shook his head.
"Sorry… kid."
Michael tried to leave again, but then….
"I told you over and over, my name isn't kid."
And now Michael really did want to know.

“Then what is your name?”

But the kid just turned his back on him.

“No really, what is your name?”

“I don’t want to tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t like you no more.”

Whiteboy.

Michael was feeling really sad and sorry now.

Funny how you find the one thing you’ve always been looking for, the one thing you didn’t even know you were, but, once you did, it was only to learn it’s too late, for it’s already lost, as it vanishes before your eyes. Like Brigadoon. A place of wonder. Awe. And magic. But, it’s too late. Much too late.

For… I guess I really didn’t know what I wanted, but I always wanted the same thing.

So, you finally admitting it?

Admitting what?

You know!

….

Just admit it, just….

Up your nose with a rubber hose.

Really, Michael?

You know, you can really be a pest sometimes. And don’t even get me started when you start siding with my demons. You supposed to be my conscience.

Who said I was?

Ok, enough, let me just get back to the chopper in one piece. I still got business to take care of.

Trying to exit the subway tunnel, Michael reached a station, and one Michael wasn’t sure if he had entered from, since, he’d gotten lost in the tunnels, and had spent some time running around in the dark. Still in the tunnel, below, Michael now got to where he was no longer in danger of getting ran over by a train, and got out of the rails, and onto the passenger loading level. And now, Michael looked around, and felt

something ill, and ill-fated, in the spaces he was in. There was an atmosphere. This felt like no station that would be found on any of the maps and charts of the metro's directory. All was stain tiled and stain lit, with one single fluorescent light that burned like an ill-fated flame. Flicking on and off with no rhythm nor resonance, like some bug zapper that had been forgotten and kept on for far too long. And all the insects in this damp and dingy space had gone to die.

Oh shit.

Then thought Michael, as he noticed he wasn't alone.

Oh… I don't like this.

Michael's eyes then fidgeted a bit scooping up this damp and dingy sight, while shadowy figures came to life, every time that one shotty and stain colored fluorescent light conceived them with each flash. Shadowy figures that danced like shadows made by a row of candlelight, dancing like careless and carefree madmen before the end of the world. Michael then saw them, and the figures that made those shadows were even blacker than their own shadows themselves. Michael was spooked now.

Don't say 'spooked,' don't use that word!

They were a wide-eyed bunch, dressed in all black, some RunDMC looking mothers, nothing but black on black on black on black, with some gold chains. As if gold could be the only other color for them to contrast with. Characteristically, looking like a flock of shady ass birds.

More like buzzards.

Very large eyes, made just to watch anything and everything, and study them: objects and people. And with people, made to watch every move you'd make or take, and closely too, to interpret behavior; scrutinizing your reasons for doing whatever; seeking if there lay any danger within it.

The most dangerous types of peeps are always the ones expecting the worst. Since you can then expect the worst out of them, since they expecting the worst out of you.

They were a wide-eyed bunch. Simply wide-eyed. And who were these guys you might be wondering now:

The BJAs: Black Jesus Army… that's who!

And…

Shit!

Thought Michael, for this was a group, he really didn't want to mess

with. As he just stood there like a statue, not making any movements, that could gets them to react; any movement they could fixates on, and try to pull some counter measures against.

And they're now all looking at the AK I've got strapped around my back. Double shit!

"Damn, boy, Michael, I see you carrying a big piece," said Sunny Shades.

And, just like a BJA, he was getting straight to the matter. Not going to bother with formalities like: 'how you doin',' 'how you been,' 'how was the slammer like',' 'damn, long time no see,' none of that stuff. With Sunny, here, it was straight to, 'nice piece, let me see it!' Michael said nothing. As that fluorescent light kept zapping and zapping and zapping, even when all life had already been rendered dead.

"You…," continued Shades.

But then petrified with no more words needing to be said, since everything needed to be said could be said with all the trepidations their eyes were now speaking.

"You…."

"Yeah, me… what," fronted Michael, feeling his old drive.

A pause now, one that Michael personally stretched out to see if a better response by them could be made in the intermission. None did.

What is it that they call a bunch of crows that flock together? Oh, I remember now.

"You got a big piece… a big, big piecccccce," hissed another stepping up Michael remembered being called Blueball.

"Yeah, I do, what's it te ye," finished Michael, as he took a big, a really big gulp of dread.

Fuck these motherfuckers! I'll turn all they asses into a statis—… shit!

And now, these long and shady flock of scary looking birds, started moving over towards him, to get a better fix on him. And Michael didn't even know if he was going to get jumped, or, properly greeted, this time. Or, maybe both.

"Where you plannin' on going to use that," asked another.

And then Michael saw their leader: Lil' Nero step out. And as he did, there was a slide of hand, as he then saw the man's hand already stretched out about to touch it. Michael now flinched. And the rest of

the BJAs made notice that he did, now more trepidations.

"I got my business someplace," answered Michael.

With a half nod, going up, and no way in hell was he going to lower it down now; holding onto his resolve.

"Hey, Michael, been a long time, homie."

And that changed the mood that everyone was in, some, for one of the BJAs decided to go completely and totally out of character… and… smiled. Greeting Michael like a human being would do, happy to see him.

Oh, wow!

It was Whiteboy.

Shit, Cassius Canefield, I haven't seen him in years.

Cassius, if you remember, was also one of The Bloody Shamrocks, back in the day.

And… yeah! I know exactly—exactly—what you're thinking. But you gotta understand, first off, a lot of the nicknames we gave each other were also meant to be jokes. And Whiteboy, here, we called him that, since he was the darkest brother in our group. Black, but also had the personality of the whitest mofo. Dude acted so white, that Cosby would then want to adopt his ass into the Huxtable household. And, ironically, we called him Whiteboy for it. Wait… is that ironic?

"Hey, Michael, we've been hit hard," told Cassius, as his eyes changed, and now fell in more in line with the rest of his flock.

"What do you mean," asked Michael.

"You remember the Mulletheads?"

"Yeah, that romper stomper skinhead types… what about them?"

Another pause, but this time, that last fluorescent light must have gone bust, for it wasn't zapping anymore. It was almost total darkness now, yet, some form of light was still lingering to make this not such a deadly scene. And now Nero spoke and said:

"How do you feel about killing some pigs?"

"What?"

"Yeah, man, there's a couple of them, further down the station. And…!"

"And what?"

And then…

Nothing then. Time froze, literally. And it was like the gates of hell opening, showing Michael, a damnation. The gates, or windows, to their souls had opened. Their eyes were now the eyes of all slanted men. Slanted!

"And what?"

But they didn't respond. They were now giving him the evil eye. Though not Michael, directly, not yet! But all they were saying they were to do, without saying it. Michael took a step back. And—immediately—they all stepped forward. Michael… knew what this meant. Knew! But decided not to start bashing any punch or kick or—kill these motherfuckers dead now—buttons! Let's see if the pen could actually be mightier than the sword.

"Ok, 'pigs,' you say? Cops. Police Officers. Yet y'all just told me about romper stomper Mulletheads… now pigs?"

Michael now flashed a coldflash at Whiteboy; the one he felt he could be the most receptive with. Since the rest had eyes now growing more and more enraptured by the murder music the devil was playing for them.

"Cassius, you say you got hit… by skinheads? So, where are they?"

Cassius seemed the least 'slanted.' He eyed his main man, seeking approval. After some harsh half seconds, Nero gave it to him.

"These riots, man, everyone gone—crazy!"

"Yeah," said Michael.

"And you know how it is… with people like us… we always get hit the hardest," spoke Cassius, to seek sympathy.

Michael said nothing this time. Cassius took a step forward. The only human one amongst them now, even if blacker than the rest.

Although, Nero… yellow motherfucker! And he would be too!

"It was a while ago… we still got a score to settle with them… but then the pigs stepped in."

Cassius stepped forward, again, pitifully—mind you! Michael now felt obliged. But, then saw Nero, and felt like not doing so.

"They raided us."

"They raided you?"

Nero now grew a dastardly smirk; one Michael knew all that it meant. Cassius now turned to eye Nero, as if, an underling looking for intel: eye filling intel. Michael was seeing all this, and it was pissing him off. Knowing what it meant. Cassius got some info from the eye talk and turned to continue.

"Yeah… yeah… they did." Said, then grew nil.

Michael was no longer paying any attention to Cassius. He felt pity for him. But, why feel pity for a puppet, when you can feel some anti-pity for the puppetmaster? He had his eyes on Nero, straight. And in his mind, he was already waxing through his quick reflexes: how quickly he could pull some 'High Noon OK Corral' shit and get the gun pulled down and ready, and before these varmints were to pounce. Of course, it wasn't just Nero and Cassius, here. There were also the other fools. And they were trying to do some sneaky flanking shit, every time they felt Cassius had enough of Michael's attention, to where he wouldn't notice. But, being a master at the art of war…

Eat your fuckin' heart out, Sun Tzu! Smother that shit with soy sauce and—eat it!

Well, Michael knew what was what… and what needed to be done, simply put.

"Michael… they hit us hard, you didn't hear? It's like a… like a… a group of mercenaries went in and gunned us all down. You should have seen it! Bodies everywhere. They did that—to us! Them pigs. They need to pay!"

That made Michael realize something about the intel.

"Mercs?"

Cassius now glanced at Nero. But Nero fed Whiteboy no more info. His eyes were growing redder and redder, totally fixated on Michael. Mad! For he now got Michael was seeing into this lie.

"Yeah… like some movie… homie! Like a gang of IRA mercs—they wasted us!"

"Oh, you too?"

And now Nero was showing teeth.

"What you mean?"

Michael now took a risk and grew sympathetic—but only for Whiteboy's

ass! Not these buzzards here. And decided to let them know he knew what was what.

"Whiteboy… I was at the Nim Fo Building when it happened."

Michael redirected his gaze at Nero, who was now giving Michael, and only Michael, directly, the evil eye.

"I was there, but I gotta say, word of mouth truly must travel quick, because I don't remember you fools being there when that shit went—"

BOOM!

Split—split second—later the pounce was on! But not no mission accomplished. For Michael had the AK down. With full metal jackets inbound… if these motherfuckers—TOOK ANOTHER STEP!

"MOTHERFUCKER, we gonna kill you, MOTHERFUCKER!
Cut yo' fuckin' heart out and—eat it—MOTHERFUCKER!
Then we find YO' KIDS and chop them up and eat—"

RAT-TAT-TAT!

Fired off Michael some. With the explosions and those bullets ricocheting over and over in these spaces, making the echoing sounded out like God's own thundering voice. And even before the lightning judgement. Jolt—jolt—jolt—went the sounds resonating, as it shocked their senses, as they came down from their 'bad mofo' pedestals, and grew ghastly human. All were phased, but Michael, who didn't even blink with all three warning shots, even when he was the closest to this instrument of might and mort. And with that….

Michael had these stupid fuckin' niggas at compliance.

That florescent light was no longer off. No longer flickering. It was now all white. All light had entered back into this dingy and dreary subway station, and the shadow people could no longer do a damn thing about it. Nero now got desperate and reverted back to words and not actions:

"What you got that AK for, Mike?"

His lower lip was shivering now, regrettably. And the man seemed more anguished by the humility of it all than any other reasons that would not paint him as anything less than—this—wretched. The most

wretched part being: his absolute refusal to receive the whole humility aspect.

For there's nothing more pathetic than a bad motherfucker reduced to a has-been sucka now.

> Yeah, let's see you bad motherfuckers try to 'fight the power' of a 7.62x39mm cartridge, blowing up yo' heads, like Gallagher with a mallet blows up yello' watermelons… and shit—BOOMBOOM!

It's the type of stuff not even pity wants anything to do with anymore. For there's being pitiful… and then there's being downright pathetic: pity don't like its lowly station, but it'll try to rise still; pathetic ain't satisfied until it can see how low it can go.

> "I got business."
>
> "Well maybe we could help each other out, we got business too."
>
> "I don't think it's the same."
>
> "Looks the same to me. What's your story?"
>
> "Fine, you wanna know, I'm off to kill The Big White Head."

They then looked at each other, indifferently.

> "What… don't believe me…?"
>
> "Mike, whatever, you help us gun down these pigs, and we… you scratch our backs, we scratch yours."

And now Michael felt the temptation; he could really use all their help afterwards at 1999. But, no, Michael couldn't. Plus, he no longer trusted them with any "scratch" business.

> "I want the gun."
>
> "…."
>
> "Did you hear me?"

Michael almost felt like chuckling, for it was as if that whole scenario didn't just happen. Felt like chuckling, felt like shaking his head. Since Nero was now just being a broken record. Still playing mind games and thinking….

> Nah! Persistence in telling some lie—don't—work for me. Keep your b.s. narrative to yourself, please?
>
> "Do you or do you not—"
>
> "Loud and clear."
>
> "And…!"

Nero was now losing his edge. They all were, as the florescent light grew whiter and whiter.

"And what?"

"Those fucking pigs, they got something coming to them, they got something coming!"

Michael now did shake his head, as they all gave him contemptuous Dutch angles, for taking it there. Michael no longer gave a shit.

"We all got something coming to us," all Michael could say, while shaking his head.

"No, fuck that shit, you don't under—"

"What—don't—I understand…?"

And now, it was his turn. For these fools no longer had an ounce of righteousness left, and the glory was now fading.

"Oh, thumping some pig's skulls in, I think I have a clue. Plus, all that comes afterwards."

Whiteboy now gave Michael a look, he remembered that detail of his former Head Honcho.

"You got fucked! But, maybe it was also your fault, too… maybe…?"

Nero now took a step back.

"You got screwed, y'all did. Y'all did! But now you no longer care about justice being served—at least not to the right persons… you're going to take it out on everybody. If they deserved it or not. Tell me, you lieing…?"

Now Nero's eyes got scared.

"I know, I know, people like to think blaming the other guy, and acting so righteous. Especially when they were wronged. But, I know something about that. And how…

black and white…

it's never that cut and dry.

We—all—gray… in the end."

Lil' Nero, grew smug now, the Larry Fishburne lookin' mother, and Michael felt like really putting him in his place.

"Did you really get hit at all tonight? Or you think, tonight, would

be a great night, for some payback all around?"
Nero now… disengaged a bit with a contemptuous sneer to one side. Blueball, the fool with the whole, "MOTHERFUCKER, I EAT YO' KIDS," shit, was left frowning like a sourpuss.
"Just as I thought," quoted Michael.
And they left now.

Michael had now a moment of piece. To think. Although he did see the color of Whiteboy's eyes at the ends. And, Michael pitied the fool. He did. His eyes were still slanted. Just as all of theirs were. Even after Michael's words. As their madness turned inwards to sadness. As Sadboy's used to.

> Damn, I don't want to be racist but…
> every time I'm around them, the whole room just feels like it's turning dark, getting dim, and some really shady shit is about to go down. Nothing but a dark room full of piercing scary looking white eyes, followed with some piercing scary looking white teeth. Behind some very, very, very black hearts. That whole thing about light and dark. White and black, that's how I see things. Now I can see, I do see it that way too. It feels like they're what's corrupt and going to taint the light.
>
> It's like they're evil or something.
>
> They're like animals, they base all their decisions and choices on their rawest emotions. They ain't capable of rational thought. Yeah, they got a sad story to tell, yeah, fine, they do. But maybe if they weren't so volatile, they wouldn't have such, and they'd be better off.

And then Michael realized something he never really understood in him before. It was all true. But… Michael was also proj—… shit!

> You can't trust people like these—not black nor white nor whatever! For it's simply human nature. But people that are a slave—a slave—to their own emotions. A man must dictate what his emotions feel, not the other way around. They don't even

understand the wrong they do, they don't understand it, not no more. Since they're all very gone. Killing cops now? Are they fucking serious? I ain't taking any part in that! None! They're crazy and hot blooded and…

I can't help them, they're too angry, too much shit has happened to them, and the fire that's started within them is too big and me getting involved is just going to end up consuming me also. What they got there, is just gonna burn themselves out, ruin them, and leave them nothing but charred remains. I feel sorry now. I do. But, I can't get involved with them now. I can't!

This is no longer that once great man's dream.
This is now becoming what would be his ultimate nightmare.

The Righteous Man Shall Pass!

Wait a sec… those BJAs wanted me to shoot up some cops for them, and I'm the one feeling bad about it, because I refused, and I'm worried that might make me seem racist? I'm racist for not wanting to shoot up some cops… what the fuc—… you know what?

Guilt… can be a powerful tool of the devil.

Michael had managed his way back to that chopper in that alley, and luckily for him, without any more hiccups or hangovers, and also luckily, it, the chopper, was still there.

Good thing I pocket the key really quickly when those Cockskulls tried to jump me… good thing.

Michael was now riding along again, once again blazing forth through these neon shining, streaming, shimmering streets, while still doing some spectator work, of the menacing lot all around him, still trying to rock and riot this city to its foundation.

Still just doing what they think they're doing is righteous.

And thinking that, Michael began to frown. For… this was an issue he felt conflicted with, now, and one he now knew he needed to address.

'Only the righteous man shall pass,' and no one else.

I believe in that, I do believe in that.

For the way Michael saw it.

Without righteousness, how can anyone do what they do, and get away with it? There's an order to things that you just can't break away from. Being aligned with grace of righteousness, if you want things to turn out better for you.

It's how good guys always win!

But, to get that, you need to be in order, and to have that, you need to stick to the code, you need to make a pact, and with… well… the Man upstairs. Him really! And when you do, that's when you can do what you do, have the abilities that you have, powers almost, magical powers—you can say, granted, to do what you do, because you've earned that pass.

This, here, was a core belief in Michael, a foundation of how he saw how things were, of what separating extraordinary men, compared to the ordinary ones.

Extraordinary men have abilities granted to them, powers, you can say, almost, that allows them to do what they do. Grace of God type of stuff, basically.

But the idea that was now bothering Michael about this whole Age of Rage nonsense was:

How is this all happening? How?

Thought Michael, and then thought of Mr. Dorian. And how was he able to do so much, himself.

How can someone be so wrong, and be capable of doing so much? How can he?

Is he… right?

And now, that horrifying thought dawned in Michael, as he thought of him, and then took a look all around, and began to wonder about all this.

Is this right, is it? Is this what's needed to be done? Is this, all this chaos, righteous? Trying to set things straight, and….

But Michael didn’t know. He didn’t! All he knew was about himself, and his intuitive and instinctive understanding about these things, from the feeling in his gut. Such principals, and how they worked. Since, he could only speak for himself. But then… thinking about himself, and his sense of his own righteousness. That matter now really made Michael ponder, on a fundamental level.

How could I have attacked Nikki like that… was I….

No! Fuck no!

Riding along, Michael now began contemplated over the choices he had made this night; choices that had led to deadly consequences; for there was no hiding from the blood that had been spilled, either directly by his hands, or not. There had been that. Death had graced Michael's path, several times. Even though it hadn't yet taken him, it had made its presence felt, still. Since, Michael had practically been calling out to it, calling forth for the old cloak and bones to show up. Michael was now contemplating over his choices, as he wondered about his own sense of righteousness, and how things had led up to this.

I know I haven’t been righteous all the time in all matters, I know that, especially when it comes to women, but, when I have, when I’ve felt it…

I know I’ve done right.

This night, it felt right for me to come all this way, from that halfway house shithole where it all started, to confronting Radboy at the 1999 building. I've felt it! I did! But… if I did, how could I have made so many mistakes tonight, as I have, when I did what I've felt was that?

Thought Michael.

It's how I've mostly survived. I’ve tried to mostly be righteous, and it’s paid off, and it’s also how I've never lost a fight. Ever!

If there was ever a core belief in Michael, when it came to his rowdy ways, it was this belief of his of the righteous man.

I've been in more fights than I can remember. Hell! I practically learned how to communicate with my fists before anything. First words being 'pow' and 'wham.' And considering that, and my upbringing, I feel like I've truly come to understand the nature of what it takes to be that righteous man, that extraordinary somebody. To be the one that stands out. I feel like I've come to truly understand the nature of what it means to be a fighter, better than most of the lot on the streets looking to be A Number One, can do.

That's how I've never lost a fight. Ever! Most of the lot think there's this special skill that's needed, a special talent, or gift. But it—doesn't! The only thing that sets the ordinary from the extraordinary is righteousness. And nothing else. Righteousness! It's that gut feeling you feel, deep down, that I feel is what holds all omnipotent sway of everything. Of what goes. That deep-down sense, that might be a man's only true sense, his true self, trying to communicate to him, of what needs to happen. Assessing a situation, and telling a man what's what.

Like me?

No! you're an unrelenting, pestering jackass, that has to have something to say about everything.

But that's what someone's conscience does, it's supposed to be—

I don't give a shit! Can I go on now?

....

Thank you!

You see... back in the day... back when men were men, and knew and understood the reasons for any conflict beyond one's own self-interest. Back then, there was this system in place, honorable men lived and died by. Sorta like a judicial system, except unlike the one we have now where you find a court full of lawyers paid off by the respected parties to spin lies and untruths to resolve matters, you had two men, wielding their fists, or swords, and allowing violence to do the job.

Violence!
Which is and always will be the ultimate means to resolve anything.

But unlike today… men back then understood something about violence that my pitiful generation knows nothing about, and most men have all but forgotten. You see! Justice isn't blind! It can see! What it is is two men staring into each other's eyes, to seek out just cause. Seek out purpose. Truth. Seek out meaning! Measuring out each other's own true worth, by tying to find out who stand as the bigger man. The better man. The righteous man! And the name of this glorious pastime that we use to have back then was called:

'dueling.'

That there was it, that all there was the truth of it, of what Michael saw as what separate the righteous, and gave them the pass, to do what they did.

Now, I'll admit. There's a lot about those old ways I really wouldn't stand by, me, personally, neither, today. That system that was in place back in the day also had its ugly side of there being no compassion for the reasons behind their actions, to find just cause, and what you ended up having is two men building up way too much animosity for each other, which lead to killing being the only means to resolve their conflict. Trying to prove how righteous they were, by trying to stare not into each other's eyes, but more, into the face of Death, instead, to prove just cause. Personally, I see that as going too far! In the end… it shouldn't have been about taking it up with the Reaper, it was about taking it up with the man standing next to you. And that, alone, should have been enough… for in the end… it's all about trying to find common ground, where both men can stand by, and not just one taking up the other's place.

But anyways… that I believe is the truth of it. Justice isn't blind. It can see. But only through true confrontation, of having two men cast down their fictitious selves, and confront one another, fully,

only then can it be obtained. Words can never play a part in all this, because words are too soft, and can never go deep, into the core of a matter. Only violence can. By punching a man in the face, to see what his first reaction would be, shattering his facade like glass, to see what's underneath.

The reason Michael had never lost a fight—ever! Was because he always knew when to choose them.

I know when I see a bigger and better man, and I know when I see a bunch of arrogant assholes, and pompous pricks, that are just begging—begging—for me to beat the ever-loving motherfucking shit out of. And have them put in their places. And the reason why I've never really had that happen to me is because I've never once taken on the bigger and better man. One more righteous than me. That gut feeling in me has always shown me my place, and shown me who it would be right to take on, and who it would be wrong.

First time I ever noticed about this whole thing, about righteousness, and that gut feeling, that holds power over everything that goes, was… when I was a kid, twelve to be exact.

Funny how so much can be learned at such a young age.

Michael now started thinking of that Billy kid, and began entertaining that whole notion again.

Was he really….

But then dropped it, it was pointless now to do so.

Although when I was twelve, I really was just a dumb kid. Nowhere near as smart as Billy, there, and also very uncommunicative.

And now Michael realized it really couldn't have been him.

Ha! Stupid Twilight Zone shit… that was!

But anyways!

But anyways! When I was his age, I really was dumb, and had yet to understand about that whole thing. About righteousness. Understanding about how there really was such a greater scheme

to things. And how it pertained to me and everyone around me. But then something happened, something commonplace, for a boy my age, then, that gave me that understanding. That set me straight, and has kept me in the path of righteousness, since.

What had happened was… Michael was with Rudeboy….

Wait! Rudy… I remember him now.

Both twelve, around the mid to late 60s, and what they were doing were picking on some kid that was in front of them. The three of them having just gotten out of elementary school, on the street, and Michael was tagging along Rudeboy, as Rudeboy began picking on the kid. That was some frail looking kid, some girly looking boy, with hair all blond and long, and done up in a way that it made it confusing for anyone to guess what the kid's gender really was, just by looking at him.

His name was Daniel… don't remember his last….

He was some really wimpy looking weakling, that always looked like he was asking for it, to get picked on, of course, as he did. A sickly-looking kid, always looking like he had a cold, as if it was cold outside, even during the summer months; all pale and pitiful looking, blowing bubbles from his always runny nose.

It was me, and Rudy, and this shrimp… and… oh!

Rudy was tagging along behind him, bagging on the kid, and spitting. He was actually spitting on him. And seeing this, Michael had then joined along.

Wait… I did… didn't I?

Both spitting now, and talking trash about the poor kid's mother, who was a streetwalker, that had been recently pulled into the streets by her hair, by some John, and….

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, now shocked by it all. By his and Rudy's actions.

Everyone in the neighborhood had heard what had happened. And of course, so had we. We were both then spitting, and saying a whole bunch of nasty stuff. Rudy had started it, and I had then joined along… why did I? How could I have become that despicable, too?

But then Michael figured, it had to have been Rudy, and his influence. Michael had first witnessed Rudy, seen what he was doing, and had then fallen into the same mindset as him, and since Rudy was always one

seriously shameless little shit, this is what had come from it.

> Fucking Rudeboy! Now I remember his ass, that motherfucker! Now I do. I did nothing but questionable shit with that fool, as we all did, the rest of us Shamrocks. And he was always the one that led it in that direction. Something about his nature just brought out the worst in all of us. Truly the despicable worse. Which I guess later on made us all feel shitty, and wanting to forget all that we had partaken in. And in this case, being a real pair of wretched little shits, punk kids, doing what we did, because we thought it was funny. Someone's mother getting pulled into the street and beaten, made an example of, and we did nothing but turn it on Danny, and made it into a horrible joke.

But what had then happened was….

> What had then happened… I guess it eventually got to that Danny, deeply. And after a while of him listening to us calling his mother a 'Sucking Susie', and then Rudeboy trying to reenact the whole thing, all the hollering and screaming that went on when the John pulled the woman into the streets to call her a thieving whore, for having taken out more money out if his wallet, when he wasn't looking. After Rudeboy was done with all that, it was then that little twerp turned around and gained the straight to do what he did. I remember Rudy got quiet all of a sudden, and then got scared, as I did, and then that Danny kid socked Rudeboy straight in the mouth, and really knocked him the fuck out, popping out one of his teeth.

And at that moment, that kid had then looked at Michael, straight in his eyes, and what Michael had then felt was the frame works of everything he would later on develop within himself, understanding what separated all that was wrong, from all that was right.

> I didn't get what I was doing. I just did it because Rudeboy was doing it, and it looked like lots of fun. At the time, I simply just didn't get how horrible what I was doing was. But once I did, once I saw into that kid's eyes, it was only then I understood it, in all its details, completely. It was then in the pits of my stomach, I felt the wrong, and I felt how horrible it was to be doing all this, what Rudeboy made me do. And at that age, at twelve, with that dweeby little kid, and seeing into his eyes and into his world, and into his

pain, I was taught about everything that came to the line. His eyes taught me everything about me, and him, and about it all, then, and where I stood when it came to my actions.

That dweeby kid had then popped Michael in the nose, and broken it bloody, the second time for Michael, at that age. And Michael had allowed it to happen; allowed the kid to do that to him, since, Michael felt no call to confront him about it. Because he then understood how he stood in the wrong, and how he deserved the punishment.

That kid's mother was in the hospital for almost a week with what that John had done to her, over some money. She tried to rob him, but since that John was an Italian mob guy. All tough guy, not gonna take any scheming from some lowlife dame. He then tried to embarrass her in that way. But what he did was go way too far. And I saw the pain in that kid's eyes when it came to what he felt for his mother, the woes of it all. I felt it. In the pits of my stomach. Which did not allow me to act, even though that kid attacked me, first. And at that age, considering how much of a crazy uncommunicative little shit I was, too, the experience had to have had that much of an effect on me not to have, because any other case would have been different. At that age, I was a feral little mongrel. No doubt about it.

The basic idea for Michael was, in every man, all those inches that added up to a fight, one man waging out against another, could be measured in the depths of one's own conscience. If one felt guilt and shame, the inches wouldn't add up, and that person would lose the fight. That's what—really—brought the outcome of any fight. Anything really.

If I had attacked that kid—anyways? I would have lost. No matter how small and scrawny that kid was, it had to do with his mother. So whatever strength he would have then harnessed to go to war with me, with, would have done me in. That's the truth of it, that's how it works! As long as you feel that strongly in your gut you are righteous....

But now, something occurred to Michael.

As long as you... feel that strongly... that you're right? What if....

What if one acted upon what one thought was right, but wasn't, and was all in the wrong, and based his actions upon lies?

No! That's not possible. That….

And then all of a sudden, it happened!

Ah shit… fool's justice?

Michael awoke.

Ah fuck!

Michael finally awoke.

Oh, shut the fuck up, you!

Michael started to understand, that just like how he was once ignorant about the wrong he did to that kid, that Danny kid, having tagged along doing some truly, truly, truly despicable shit, of bagging and spitting. Just how he was ignorant about all that, with his actions, how even now, him in his thirties, he could still be that way about other matters.

Fucking bullshit, this is some true fucking bull!

It was now, truly now! At this moment. Michael was finally awakening.

Oh, enough with you! If you knew about this shit, before, why didn't you tell me all this? Why wait this long to tell me, I mean… you're supposed to be like my conscience, and shit… why?

Because you wouldn't have understood it, then.

But you're like my conscience, Gab.

Wait, did you just call me Gab?

Yeah, I did, every time I hear your pestering ass narration, I hear his voice. Especially when you're making me out to be such a dumbass.

Well, I'm sorry. But, I'm not Gab, I'm just a voice in your head. And so, therefore, you're only seeing yourself as such. Being a dumbass.

But still, if you knew about it before, how wrong I've been to think a certain way, why didn't you—

How could I have explained it to you, before, if I am your own thoughts, and you had yet to come to this conclusion?

….

Anyways, mind if I continue.

Fine, do whatever you want….

Thank you.

Gab!

Anyways… ahem! It was only now that Michael was finally getting the true sense of it. As this revelation began tearing down the fabric of all he understood about the right and wrong he had done; began tearing down that foundation, brick by brick, until there was nothing left but an empty lot, ready to be rebuilt as something else.

But if I haven't been righteous… what have I been all this time?

You want to know, Michael, do you really want to know?

I… I….

Do you?

I'm… sorta afraid to know, now, but… fine, go ahead!

You've been self-righteous, Michael.

All right… I… what does that mean?

It means, you haven't been righteous at all. It means you've, in a Biblical sense, committed the worst possible sin that's ever been committed by man, in the eyes of God; taking the idea of right and wrong, and twisting them around, to suit you, and how you see how things should be, how they should measure up. Come up with stuff—you think—should matter, based on your own selfish understanding of it: right and wrong. Revolving around you, and no one else.

You said it's a… sin?

Yeah, it is, Michael, it is, and the worst possible one yet—mind you!

Just… how bad are we talking about, here?

Well, you know Nazi's, right?

Oh….

Yeah, Michael, that bad! Nazi bad!

And the thought of that, really began to shake Michael to his foundation.

Wait, once again, if you're my thoughts, how do I know about all this Biblical stuff? You know how I feel about religion….

Michael, you've read the Bible three times over in prison. That, and you've read into other religions. You've read the Quran, and about Hinduism, and Buddhism… and Greek, Norse, and Polynesian Myths.

You've read so much, and contain so much knowledge about the matter, you're practically certified for a PHD in all this theological stuff.

Oh yeah! I forgot….

Robocop.

Great! I feel like… like some nutcase vigilante now, some self-righteous prick, cop, running around exacting punishment on those, who I think deserved it. When I ain't any better than they are.

Michael had now stopped riding, and had stopped in front of a window of a TV store (that had been broken into and looted, mind you), that had a TV on, playing a movie.

Robocop. The movie is Robocop.

There were also some hoods also sitting around, watching, and Michael had ridden up to them, since they all seemed so peaceful. Since they did, and no one else.

Oh yeah! The Age of Rage is still all around us, in 'End of Days' mode. But in this little circle, in this little bubble, of ours, we're all feeling a tad different. Homey sorta. And since we just sitting around not doing anything, all the wackos around us are sorta ignoring us, and….

"Hey, what movie is that," asked some Repomen.

With a potato bag over his head, with a chainsaw, that was chainsawing down lampposts, here in Time Square.

"Robocop, man, Robocop… you've never seen," asked Michael.

The Repomen then shook his head, and went back to his own contribution to the Age of Rage business.

Run-na-na-na-na-na-na!

Went the chainsaw.

Then:

"Timber," went the Repomen, as the post fell, and onto the showcase sign of the Harris Theater, that brought it crashing down.

But yeah, I'm… sorta… feeling out of it now.

That last revelation of himself, had really hit Michael deep. And, for the moment, had made him feel like not continuing.

> I'm still planning to—I have to! But… just give me a moment to self-reflect.

Michael felt like he really needed this, since he no longer felt like anything he did mattered; he had now lost his sense of confidence in himself, in doing the right thing.

> Everything I do goes to shit. I try to do right, and I end up doing the worst thing imaginable. Being so much in the wrong, I mean, I can't believe I killed Radboy, Anthony, not too long ago… and for what?

While watching Robocop dispatch a whole bunch of bad dudes, in his movie, and watching how bloody the movie got, Michael now began to remember the bloody mess he had left him in, after he had pushed him out of that window, and had him fall, then splatter, onto the pavement.

> You know, you watch this shit in movies, but then when you see it in real life. It's… just… so, I don't know!

Michael was now feeling truly sick to his stomach, watching the volcanoes of blood erupting, from the chests, of some punks, Robocop, there, was dispatching.

> Fuck you! Anthony was not just some villain. I knew the guy, I knew him well. Sure! We didn't get along, but… in the end, he really wasn't that bad of a guy. He wasn't!

For as long as Michael remembered his relationship with Anthony, he had always felt like Anthony had been the one opposing him; Anthony had been the bad guy; the villain. But now….

> I think we were like fourteen years old at the time, or thirteen, in Jr. High, and I remember when we first met, he was trying to hit on some chick, talking big about his old man having been in the mob, 'been' being the key word here, and then talking about himself, how he was able to kick this guy's ass, and or kick that guy's ass and…. but….
>
> Everyone on the block knew his dad had been a stoolie, that the mob had whacked. Everyone, except that chick, there, I guess. And how in that community of his, in his family, his father had become

a complete disgrace, for what he had done.

I remember Anthony, then, and how he was acting like such a jackass around that chick, trying to impress her, so much so, that it started pissing me off, and got me to get involved.

What Michael had then done was….

I couldn't help but to bring it up. Making it out to be a joke, like Rudy would! A horrible, horrible joke. Just to stick it to Anthony, and get that chick to change her outlook.

Remembering that, Michael realized how much of an ugly move that was.

Yeah, I remember Anthony had gotten really pissed as hell then, wanted to straight up murder me. He all blew up, and started talking mad shit. And then attacked me in front of that chick, and….

I just….

I fucked him up! I really went all out and humiliated him in front of that girl, since I was more of the fighter than he was.

But really, Michael understood now how he shouldn't have done that. Just like that story with him and Rudeboy, and that Danny kid. How he had gone over the line, even after thinking he knew better about that whole righteousness business.

Great, more examples in my life, how I've been in the total wrong! Thinking I was doing right. I mean, so what if Anthony was being a total jackass about it. And in front of that girl, to hit on her, to get her to like him. I mean… I remember until I got involved, she seemed to have liked what she was hearing. She was all giggling, all cutesy like, digging what Anthony had to say about him and his old man. So, what right did I have to step in, and say what I said, and did what I did?

I mean, for fuck sakes, I started making jokes about his father getting whacked—fucking murdered—by the mob. And there was no Rudy around, this time, that I can blame, that got me in the mindset to do that. It was all me. And why? Because….

Because Michael was also digging that chick, and he wanted to get to her, instead.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, as he really now started feeling disgusted with himself.

I think all of our animosity really stemmed from me doing all of that heinous shit. Just for some pussy. And now that I think about it, you know what's also fucked up about all this….

After Anthony became a part of The Bloody Shamrocks, at first, I remember how he did try—try is the key word— try, at first, to be friendly with me, to bury the hatchet, because there was a part of him that liked me. But… I didn't let him in. And why?

And Michael then turned his head around, as he started to see Anthony, standing there, staring at him, for what he had done, which made him feel like addressing him, personally.

And… why?

Because I didn't trust you!

Because you were a fucking wop! And my dad had pretty much taught me to hate you people, based on his experiences. Fuck! And thinking back on it now, I can see you truly did try to be my friend after all that. Genuinely! Even when I continued to give you reason not to, since I didn't feel like trusting you.

Shit, if anyone truly was the villain in all this, it wasn't you, it was me. I was the villain, I was the bad guy!

And now, Michael truly started to feel like shit, as he watched Robocop, there, blowing up some more heads of scumbags. Scumbags, a lot like him. Michael here.

I hate these movies. I fucking hate them! This shit you see on HBO a lot of now.

I mean… okay! I like the movie, Robocop, I do! But I can't stand what it represents. I mean, come on! What's it with crime thrillers

now in the 80s, showcasing some super cop, or vigilante, going against an entire city that's gone berserk? Gone completely ender mode mad. I mean, that's how a lot of shows are now, crime dramas are not like they were in the 50s, let's say, that had a pair of cops like in Dragnet, going around trying to do right by helping the riff raff, and juvenile delinquents, all coming from broken homes. They're not about helping anybody, anymore. Now it's all murder! It's all 'kill the scumbags!' And what you got is this shit, right here, a man now turned into a machine, governed by no free will, going all hellbent to clean the garbage in the streets. Garbage like me! And in these movies, they make us out to be completely one dimensionally psychotically evil, all Charles Manson evil, and deserving getting our heads blown off. Shit makes me squeamish, too. They ain't no more capturing criminals, and trying to help them out. Now, we're all irreversibly evil, and need to be rounded up, and locked away in some giant state prison, then totally forgotten about. That, or straight up murdered, and in horrific ways, too, just to apiece its lily-white audience's bloodlust, all the cowardly people that would watch shit like this, and find it entertaining. It's all like this now, some super cop, coming along, to paint our brain matter all over the fucking walls. All R rated, with some character like Steven Seagull showing up, with a ponytail—mind you. Coming along, and ripping out some poor schmo's spine, through his asshole, and then showing it to him.

Really, it started with Dirty Harry in the early 70s, around the time people were getting horrified by the likes of Charles Manson, some hippie, being anything but about 'love and peace' and all that other stupid hippie shit. It was around that time that a lot of this stuff started coming out, having some maniac cop sent in to deal with all the maniacs on the streets. But, the idea, and America's fascination with this brand of justice has gone too far.

When the Bullet Hits the Bone!

Michael now sighed, as he took another look around, and then….

"Timber," went that Repomen, again, as another lamppost fell onto that television set, and totaled it.

"Hey, what the fuck is wrong with you, we were watching that," said some of the hoods, some Rat City Kings, that were sitting next to Michael, who was still on his chopper.

"He he he," went the Repomen, simply enough, and started showcasing his chainsaw.

"Fuck you, scumbag, you think that thing is supposed to scare us, you got something else coming! Why don't you come over here, and we'll take it, and jam that thing straight up your ass!"

Run-na-na-na-na-na-na!

Now went the Repomen, with his blade of horrors, as he stuck his tongue out at the RCKs, through a hole in the potato bag, and looked like he wanted to party hearty.

And… this was the time, Michael felt like riding on along, and away from how shit was going to start getting here.

Yeah… this is the time!

But as he did, or tried to, it was then that it happened….

Boom!

Went an explosion from behind, and as Michael, the RCKs, and that Repomen looked back, they saw how it had come from a firetruck, that had tried to run over a platoon of National Guardsmen. Driven by a Monkeyfucker, who had missed them (since the platoon had caught on to what he was doing, and rushed out of the way), and had instead ran over a car, flipped over, and had gone crashing into the New York Time Building.

Oh shit, The National Guardsmen! I didn't even notice them until now.

And Michael hadn't, since they had just shown up. But anyways….

Boom!

Continued the explosion. And now:

Rat-tat-tat!

Went a whole mess of their machine gun fire, and it was now definitely the time to vacate, and not just for Michael's sake, but everyone's.

Shit! They going to shoot us all!

Thought Michael, as he started the motor and took off, as everyone else also did.

Now that The National Guardsmen were here, it was like cockroaches with the lights turned on. Full of the little creepy bastards, all scattering around like crazy, trying to avoid being seen, now that the exterminators had shown up. And they were shooting, this was no more riot control—whatever! This was all out war.

Vroom!

Went the chopper to Michael's engine, as Michael was lucky to avoid all this, since, The National Guardsmen were mostly shooting at a group of Cockskulls, that were trying to throw beer bottles and rocks at them. And then there was Skiddy, and….

No, Freddy, don't! You fuckin' nutcase!

And what pray tell was Skiddy all trying to do, you might be wondering….

Skiddy's riding around on a zebra, wielding a bazooka… wait… how the fu—

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

And then:

Boosh!

Went the bazooka, as it was fired off, and then:

Boom!

Went the building behind him, since the idiot was holding the thing backwards, and now there was just a lot of exploding going on.

Boom, boom!

Went a lot of it, and now.

"Ha ha ha ha ha," cackled Skiddy, one last time, as he hyo silvered his zebra.

And then:

Rat-tat-tat-tat!

Went the National Guardsmen machine gun fire, as poor Skiddy, and that zebra, there, were cut to ribbons.

Michael… had nothing. Nothing to say and think. But then thought:

Wow… life is… just strange!

And also….

Funny… in a way. Heh…?

Michael was now getting closer to the 1999 building, and as he continued riding, he began to really internalize it all, all this havoc. Everywhere he went, and looked, he saw confrontation; he saw the gangs fighting gangs, gangs fighting cops, then the National Guardsman would pull up and everyone would scatter and recollect in another part of the city. Everyone was confrontational, everyone was on edge, everyone was on ender mode… and yet… Michael seemed to feel above all this now.

I don't know… I feel like I'm past all this now.

Michael then wondered why he'd feel that way. And… as he did… it came to him.

> They all look like me when I first started off this night heading for Stumpy's place. They're all having their rompous-pompous moments, having some bitch-ass smacking fun, some kicks, something to give them catharsis for the shit they have to deal with, day in day out. I'm really no different from they are, and they're really no different from me.

But Michael had already had his moment, and seen where that had all led him.

I didn't… know!

Michael was now sorta getting bored. So—

Fuck it!

He thought, and felt like listening to some tunes. Turning on the radio to the chopper, this song started to play:

I'm falling down a spiral
Destination unknown
Double-crossed messenger, all alone
Can't get no connection, can't get through
Where are you?

Well, the night weighs heavy on his guilty mind
This far from the borderline
When the hit man comes
He knows damn well, he has been cheated
And he says
Help, I'm steppin' into the twilight zone

Place is a madhouse, feels like being cloned
My beacon's been moved under moon and star
Where am I to go, now that I've gone too far?

And the song started to scare Michael something deep down and profound.

Ever get that feeling sometimes… that the right song always starts to play, at exactly the right time? Usher in something new, something scary, something profound, all around, and deep. Shit you don't get the interpretations to, but, the shits all about you—all about your story. And not knowing what the fuck is going on… is gonna be your undoing!

And the thought of that, then all of a sudden, started to truly scare Michael. Shit was getting weird. Worlds were changing, settings were changing. And so with it, the fabrics of Michael's reality. Destroying his concept of reality, and, whatever it is, making it… a part of it!

It…? What the fuck is it?

Thought Michael, as the song continued to play:

Soon you will come to know
When the bullet hits the bone
Soon you will come to know
When the bullet hits the bone

And that all made Michael think:

When the bullet hits the… what does that shit even mean?

What it means, Michael, is… shit is about to really get fucked up! Really start hitting the fan!

Huh… what…? Like it hasn't already?

And that scared Michael even more.

I didn't know things were going to end up….

But the fact also was, he also did, somewhere in the back of his head. He did!

But, if I knew…. Why did I go all this way? Why then… huh?

Maybe… maybe… to do it all, all for the wrong reasons?

What?

Thought Michael, totally terrified by that notion.

Shut the fuck up! Now! Enough with your narrating, what do you

mean by that?
Barehands!
Barehands!
Barehands!
Bare—....
But then Michael felt it, in his mitts, as they came alive again, all demonic like, and Michael then felt it.

No! I didn't... I don't feel it!

Michael then felt it.

Stop saying that! I didn't.

Felt these instruments of intervention tell him what's what.

Please don't do this again, please! I don't want it anymore.

What it felt like, feeling what only gods could possibly feel.

....
Barehands!
Barehands!
Barehands!
Barehands!
Bare—....
His hands around her boney chicken neck....

Shut up! Shut the fuck up!

As he strangled her.

Ahh! No... stop! Stop it!

And the thing about it was... was....

Please, God, help me!

How much he **enjoyed it.**

Soon you will come to know
When the bullet hits the bone!

Looped the chorus... and then:

"Aaaaaahhhhhhhhh," screamed Michael.

And then lost control, as he swerved, and had the chopper slid out under him, and now him and the chopper were on the road, and sliding fast across the pavements.

No, no, no! I don't wanna die! Don't take me, please! God!

Barehands!

Barehands!
Barehands!
Barehands!
Barehands!
Bare—....
Soon you will come to know
When the bullet hits the bone...!
Fuck! Help me, God!

And then...
they stopped.
And Michael:
Ah....
Now lay there, afraid to move.
Ah shit... that hurt.

Michael was laying there... and laying there....

And laying there...!

The song had stopped. And Michael was now there, at that place. That special place... and all alone. Not wanting to move.

But then... after a while, Michael got the sense that he wasn't that badly hurt, and got the sense, that it was time to get up... and....
No! I'm not getting up! I'm not! I'm not doing it! I'm not capable of doing right anymore. I'm evil. I'm psychotic. I'm some anti-Christ stuff. Just wanting to hurt people. Because I enjoy doing it. And kill people. Because I'm a sicko... and....
But then Michael did get up, and started walking over to the chopper, to get it up, and back to riding over to the 1999 building. Michael... got scared... as he got the sense he was possessed again.
No, stop! I gotta not move! I can't move! I'm not capable of doing anything righteous. All I'm capable of doing is everything that's... wrong-teous.
And then....
"Ha... ha ha ha!"

Michael was laughing now… but why?

"Ha… ha ha ha.. why am I though?"

But then Michael thought:

Wrong-teous, really? Wrong-teous… I'm a fucking idiot….

And… Michael didn't know where to go from there. Michael really did feel very possessed now, as his senses felt not of his own, and strange, as if he was a stranger, even to himself.

But Michael was moving, getting up, to go do what he still felt needed to be done. Even though, he wasn't sure why, and also felt terrified, and also completely against it.

Please, God, help me! I don't know what I'm doing. I don't! I feel terrified now of just being in my own skin, I don't have no sense of me anymore. No sense whatsoever! I don't know what being my old self is about anymore. I don't know me, and how I am anymore. Please… give me something… let me see something. See what I'm doing. And know that what I am, is righteo—

And then all of a sudden, Michael saw it, or… him.

"What the… where did you come from, kid?"

It was that Billy Kid. Standing in the middle of the road, in front of Michael, with a boombox over his right shoulder… just smiling.

How did you….

And the perplexing thing was, the kid wasn't saying anything, he was just there, all of a sudden, had just popped up before Michael, and all he was doing was smiling, and not answering a word.

"Why you smiling at me like that," asked Michael to the kid.

And then thought:

How is he just here… now… after me… could he?

But Michael then realized how he didn't seem to care… much.

"Hey kid…."

But then the kid hit play on the boombox, and what song, pray tell, do you think started playing?

No way!

Thought Michael. But… yes way! It was 'Cum On Feel The Noize' by Quiet Riot. And now Michael rolled his eyes, hearing it, for this was all

getting a little too whimsical, and silly, and also cheesy, too.

"Oh, get the fuck—"

Michael now rolled his eyes and face away from this cheesy ass scene, this stupid ass cheesy ass 80s scene, that you could only expect from a low rated B movie, gone straight to VHS. And now thought:

Okay, even if this is a message from above, and that kid is me… what do I do now?

"Kid, I don't know what I'm doing anymore," said Michael, sorely. But the kid continued to smile.

"I'm gonna die when I get there, there's no changing anything." And then the kid made a certain smirk, as if saying, 'not likely.'

"I'm not a good person, kid, I'm not capable of…."

But then Michael really looked into the kid's face, who's was still smiling.

And saw it.

Saw what he was really looking for. And saw….

Me.

The smile was speaking a thousand words to him, and this all really was like magic now. Better than magic, a miracle. And Michael felt like he was seeing light shining all around the kid. His face was almost like that of an angel, almost, and Michael seeing this, now believed it.

And now… even though still not one hundred percent sure of anything, even himself, he also was. And was willing to continue, with what he felt like could still be righteous.

Vertigo.

So, was that kid just a hallucination… too?

Michael was now getting closer and closer. And continuing on, even after all he had felt and gone through, he now somewhat felt centered. He was feeling good. And magical, somehow, righteous again.

But….

Michael understood this was only an inner thing. Something of the inside, that was good. And needed.

But what's needed on the outside, in the real world…?

Michael understood, with that, magic… wasn't going to cut it.

Oh God, what difference can I really make?

The fact was, Mr. Dorian and Mr. Parsley had already had enough time to use the access codes, to reach the garage, gotten to the bomb, and had begun setting up the detonator.

Yeah, thanks, kid, you've cost me a lot! You cost me dearly!

And by the time Michael was to reach the 1999 building, it was probably going to be too late, then. The bomb was going to go off at any moment.

That whole building is going to go up.

And then trying to imagine the explosion, Michael thought:

Wait… how much damage could one bomb that size do?

Michael was beginning to wonder if it could even take out half the financial district, let alone the 1999 building. There was very little chance Michael was going to be able to do anything. And even right this second, now in Chinatown, it was possible that the bomb might go off, and all Michael could do then was look up and watch the fireworks.

Shit, the blast wave might even be powerful enough to reach Chinatown. And level it also….

I mean—seriously—how much damage can one Daisy Cutter do? I know nothing about bombs.

And, wait a second, something isn't adding up! Nikki said it needed to be hulled over here by semi-truck. I mean, I know nothing about bombs, but why get something that big, and that conspicuous? Couldn't he have just gotten lots of C-4—but not tons worth—and driven it over inside a van? A smaller vehicle? Why get something that big?

And I'm pretty sure it wasn't easy for him to get access to a Daisy Cutter, either. Even if he is CIA, the military would keep inventory of stuff like that, and guard it well. Could Mr. Dorian manage to steal something that big from some US armory? I don't know! I know nothing about this stuff.

Well…

at least it's not a nuke,
or something,
ha…
that would at least be impossible to get access to.

But then….
Okay, now I'm really scaring myself.

As he exited Chinatown, Michael was once again there, standing in front of the 1999 building. And now, things started feeling all eerie and weird, he was getting some very strange vibes from here, like something was out of place.
Where is everyone?
With the mass hysteria boiling all over all around him, this building seemed… off. Separate. As if existing in a separate universe to its own. Nothing seemed to have changed since he last stood at this spot when he had arrived with Letoya.
So where are the mercs? Where are the Iron Monkeys MC? What's going on here?
It was truly an eerie and weird moment. Some Twilight Zone shit. The building still stood there, tall, detached from the rest of the city, and the whole Age of Rage business. Yet not. Michael then all of a sudden got this jolting sense, that within the next second, he was going to be staring down a massive wave of fire rushing at him. He felt like he was going to be vaporized at any second, and there was nothing he could do about it. This was a juncture, a pivotal moment, place, and time, and anything was possible from this point on. Now, there was no more Age of Rage, there was no more of that kid, there was no more Nikki. There was now only this, Mr. Dorian, and that bomb. And….
The Reaper, this time—really! And I'm gonna die here, I know it, that's what's so Twilight Zone-y about all this. It's here where I'm gonna meet my end.
Michael sighed, then took a big gulp, and continued.
I wonder how it feels to be vaporized in a moment's notice….
Staring up at the giant monolithic tower, Michael began to feel vertigo, as the building seemed to be growing taller. A black evil monolith with eyes all over it, like some marker to some netherworld hellhole.

Michael's form of the destructor.

Even the clouds above it seemed to be treating this structure as some anomaly, going around in a spiraling form, like some eye of a storm.

All right, no more hesitating, this is what's it's all come down to. Let's do this!

As he began entering the building, for a second there, he felt like he was being watched all around him. He felt like there were eyes on him, and as he turned his head towards a security camera attached to the side of the building, he realized it was following him. As Michael rode up to the glass doors of the front entrance, he decided to take a lesson from the Iron Monkeys MC, and just ride right on in with the chopper. And as he tried to, inside, Michael noticed that Jamil and Jalil were still there, standing side-by-side, between the magic elevator, also as if nothing had changed. As he opened the doors and rode into the lobby, the Kenyan wonder twins turned their attentions to him, and began to call him out.

"What the fuck you think you're doing here, Michael? You can't just ride in here on that motorcycle—get out! You're no longer invited," called out… one of the two.

"What the… what are you two still doing here," replied Michael.

"Go, leave now," responded the other.

At this point, Michael really didn't feel like arguing. The scene in the building was confusing enough, and he didn't feel like putting up with their bullshit. So as they continued to try and shoo him off, Michael took out the AK, and positioned it next to his head, in display. And the display did what Michael wanted it to do: terrify these two shmoes shitless.

"Wait—no! Don't shoot!"

"I'm not going to shoot, or really, I don't wanna! But I'm getting into that elevator, I'm going downstairs to the garage, and the two of you can kiss the sweet end of my dick, here, if you don't like it!"

"Wait! Why do you want to go down to the garage?"

Oh, what a pair of tools these two stooges are! Don't they know what's been going on? Didn't the gunfight that happened before

when Nikki blasted those three men in front of them clue them in something is off? Haven't they been paying any attention to the riots and crazy shit going on outside? Haven't they—

"Um… you two geniuses do know there's a blockbuster downstairs, ready to go off—right," broke out Michael, from his thoughts.

"What? What do you mean," asked the first one.

Michael sunk his face into the palm of his hand.

"Have you two seen White Head recently," asked Michael in irritation.

"You mean Mr. Dorian? That is none of your business," answered the other.

Michael brought down the AK, and took aim.

"Wait—wait! He came down to the lobby earlier, and met up with a man named Mr. Bonhoeffer—"

"Who," asked Michael, but then noticed the name sounded familiar.

"Some man in a three-piece suit, we've seen him here before, but don't know him that well. He was also followed by some men carrying machine guns, and—"

"Men carrying machine guns—huh? And you two Einsteins didn't see anything wrong with that," cried out Michael, for crying out loud.

"Well, Mr. Bonhoeffer was on the list and…."

Michael sunk his head deeper into the palm of his hand and felt an aneurysm coming on.

"Wow, you two are a bunch of morons!"

"Huh," exclaimed one, and shook his head.

And the other now responded:

"Listen up, you do this job every night, during these shady hours, and mercs with ski masks and machine guns would be the least of your worries."

And then he grew a very nonchalant look to prove his point. And, Michael, now grew curious just how much crazy shit did gone on, similar to this, every other night.

"Okay—fine! But I'm really not joking about that bomb," explained

Michael.

"What bomb? You said something about a block… buster?"

"That's a bomb," responded Michael.

"That's not possible, who would set up a bomb in this building? Do you even know how many prominent high-figures, are still upstairs and…

oh…

oh… shit…?"

It was pleasing to see a moment of epiphany finally grace these two gentlemen. Both their eyes lit up like spotlights.

"Yeah! Like you said… prominent high-figures! The type of people someone might benefit a lot by taking out with a bomb. Someone that's been going in and out of this building, followed by a bunch of goons wearing ski masks and carrying—"

But the two twins were already in motion, yelling at each other in their language, scrambling about, scrounging up their stuff, from the office in the back. And when finished, ran out, and out of the building.

Ah… the hell with it! I needed that moment. Sorta funny. With those two momos… ha!

Michael then rode up to the elevator, to press the call button, then realized, the button wasn't there, to that particular elevator.

Oh, come on—what's wrong this time?

Then he remembered that the Jamil and Jalil were never pressing any buttons, before, when they were calling for the elevator. There was a keyhole highlighted in red, and Michael yowled as he noticed this.

Great—just great!

Michael ran back into the offices that Jamil and Jalil were stationed in, and began foraging about, all the drawers, desks, cracks, nooks and crannies, he could come across.

I gotta find the key, I hope they still left it in here before they left….

Then his attention was snatched up by the monitors that were built into the wall, all in a row. He looked at all the monitors to see if he could find any Iron Monkey, Merc, Mr. Dorian, or Oubliette activity. But it looked like all the cameras were set to the magic happening on the magic floor: that orgy of super models still erupting on that heart shaped bed,

Betamax still talking to his hands surrounded by his lackeys, and it seemed like a panther had broken loose and was trying to attack one of the zebras ridden around by those server gimps.

Nothing has changed! What's going on here? Where are they?

Michael then took a glance over at the control board that his eyes had passed when he was looking for the keys, and now decided, to try and work it. And as he looked over all the buttons, he noticed none of them had labels; the console seemed old, and it looked like most of the printing had been smudged off over the years of usage. The only option for Michael seemed now was to start pressing all the buttons, and try and figure it out through trial and error. As Michael decided which button to start with, he pressed it, and all of the monitors had then gone off—

Shit!

Michael then pressed it again, and the monitors were back on again.

Good, the on and off button are the same.

After a while of playing around with all the buttons, Michael started to get a sense of what he was doing. But, by this point, Michael had left a mess: half the monitors were offline or scrambled, one monitor had zoomed in all the way on the dumb expression on Betamax's face, and some had lost their RGB or tint values. Eventually, Michael found the buttons that were switching the monitors to different rooms and floors, and eventually he got one of them switched over to what he presumed was the garage level. But unfortunately, though, Michael wasn't able to make out much. What he saw was what looked like the 1st garage level, with cars parked all around, and towards one wall towards the back, there was a giant metal door open; just a huge ass door, looking to be reinforced with 30 inches of steel. And next to that gate, there was a control panel, that had an old black and green monitor with a keyboard attached.

That has to be the access point, it can't be anything else. But, still, where are they?

But then a thought came to Michael.

What if they're already gone, and the bomb is ready to go off at any second? And… how am I going to deactivate it, then?

As much as Michael sorta preferred them not being around anymore….

That way I won’t have to personally deal with them, and get shot

to death.

Michael still needed them, to deactivate that bomb.

And I can't do it… no way! I can't touch that thing. Somebody has to touch it that knows what to do when dealing with bombs. Like a bomb squad, with the NYPD… wait.

And now, Michael started wondering if he should just call the cops.

Actually, I should! I really should do that instead! Why didn't I think of doing that before? I could have called the cops back when I was with Nikki in that hallway. I could have gotten into one of the apartments, there, to use a phone, or found a phone booth outside. I could have told them about the bomb, and even with all the riots going on, they would have had to have taken the threat seriously. They should be the ones taking care of all this mess—I shouldn't be! Fuck! I really didn't need to ride all this way here, thinking I could play Rambo, and….

Michael began shaking his head, feeling like a total idiot about all this.

This is serious! I can' t be thinking I can play Mr. Action Jackson, over here, thinking… what the fuck!

But then came to the realization, the reason Michael didn't, had something to do with the fact that he had never called the cops for anything ever in his life. It was just one of those things that would never, and could never, cross his mind as an option.

Well, I gotta do it now… shit….

Thought Michael, as he looked over at the telephone that was stationed next to the console, picked it up, and began to dial 9-1-1, and after a minute, he was greeted by an automated system; it was a woman's voice that addressed him, and said:

"Due to the high volume of calls being taken in right now, we urge you to please stay on the line, until an operator can assist you with your emergency."

After hearing that, Michael hung up, and then cringed. He knew that with all the rioting going on, it was probably going to take an hour, or so, until he was able to get a connection. And… he couldn't wait that long, and he needed to do something quick.

Maybe I can just go down and shoot the fucker, and maybe that'll miraculously deactivate it? Yeah—that'll work—ha!

Michael began to laugh at the utter stupidity of that notion, and then rolled his eyes. And then thought maybe if Mr. Dorian was still down there, he could sneak up on him, hold him at gun point, and get him to deactivate it. Or Mr. Parsley. Or a merc. Or whoever that was down there.

I mean, what else can I hope for?

Michael shook his head again, at the probability of getting that plan to work, and didn't laugh this time. Since, he wasn't anymore finding anything humorous about it. And now, his feelings of total loss of what to do, were really beginning to wear on him.

"Oh surprise! Surprise! Mikey! Watcha doing down here?"

It was… Greasylocks. With some of his boys. About five of them.

You again!

The perv Greek that Michael had met earlier on the magic floor. He seemed to have decided to take a breather, and come down. He seemed pretty testy, and also thrilled to see Michael, and he was accompanied by some of his Ravisher friends.

"Hey, Grease! I don't got time for this, whatever you and you fools, there, want, I don't got…

hey… wait a second!

Do you guys by chance have the keys to the elevator?"

Greasylocks then pulled out the keys Michael was referring to, and began twirling it around by his pinky, and then said:

"Maybe?"

Madboy then said nothing, as he grew a sinister smile. Michael was feeling pretty shitty right now, and he felt like he needed something to get his blood flowing again, and raise his spirits. He was feeling very unrighteous. Or wrong-teous, as Michael would put it, since he's special like that.

Go fuck yourself, Gab!

And even though The Ravishers hadn't really given him much of a reason to have Michael beat their asses in, tonight, there was always past-dues. And now, Madboy felt prime ready to collect.

Right or wrong… I need this!

As Greasylocks made one last attempt to piss Madboy off, by wigging

his eyebrows at him, Madboy leaped in like a lion, with his claws out, ready to ring at Greasylocks' neck.

Now, fortunately for Madboy, the Ravishers weren't exactly known for being the toughest bunch in town. They had become a bunch of pansies, once they had moved into Uptown, years ago, as the Uptown living had made them go soft.

> I'd like a challenge, but… fuck it! Let them just be warmups before I have to do the same with the Iron Monkeys, and those mercs, then.

Madboy was now devastating them; he was annihilating them; he was doing so well, that he reached his final score, once he made 'Pussylocks' cry. Literally. And it all felt almost like sex.

As Michael got back up, dusted himself off, and picked up the key, still attached to Pussylocks' pinky, Michael got back onto his Harley, and called the elevator.

> Hmm—what a bunch of plot conveniences those slimebags turned out to be! Ha!

And then thought:

> Hmm—should I just ride into the elevator? The space inside is big enough to fit… fuck it! You only live once, right?

Michael was in the elevator now, as he heard 'You Belong to the City' by Glen Fray playing inside.

> Fucking more smooth sax music… but, fine, whatever! It'll do.

But then he came to the notion of 'what if' once the doors opened, he'd be surrounded by IRA goons, guarding it from below.

> Maybe I should have gotten on top of the elevator, and waited to see who'd enter, like John McClain would do. Or find a ventilation shaft… or….

But it was already too late for any of that, Michael had already reached the garage level as the doors flung open. Michael then decided to step off his chopper, and take a peek. Michael looked all around the garage, and wasn't able to find anyone around in sight. In the other end of the garage, Michael could now see the doors that lead to the 2nd level garage, and as he got back onto the chopper, and began to ride towards it.

> Boom!

Thought Madboy, figuring that that very second, the bomb could have gone off.

Boom!

Thought Madboy, again, as the thought took on a twisted nature, and began to excite him in a twisted manner.

Boom, boom! Ka-boom!

Okay—stop that!

As Michael got up to the large open metal doors, he peered inside, and saw the path ahead curving around a corner, and descending down into darkness. It didn't seem like any illumination was coming from down there, and that made Michael hesitant.

And I swear, there's like a faint mist reaching out from the darkness, like they're harbingering a fucking dragon down there.

After a while of trying to reinforce his convictions, he took one last look inside, and decided to head in.

The Old Soul.

You know, I remember when I was around nineteen years of age. I tried to start a diary. But, I only made one entry. And I lost the diary, then… don't know how… don't know when. Although, I think about it sometimes. I wish I could read it now.

Why is that, Michael?

Because… Gab… just because. So much of my thoughts having been invested in thinking about me being my old self. Trying to be who I was back then. Truth is, I don't remember all that much. So, that diary entry would have been the only thing I would have had left of those days, to truly remind me of what being my old self—meant! I ain't gonna remember now what I wrote back then. And, even if I just made one entry, I really felt like I tried to put my entire heart and soul into it. Trying to be poetic… or as poetic as someone of that age can get. Or… someone like me could get.

So, would mean a lot to me… just would!

Pity.

Continuing on, the lower level felt so senseless and soulless to Michael,

that he felt like he had stepped into some long-lost forgotten world. In the building's history, this place would have probably been represented as a gap in the timeline, only filled out with question marks. The place looked like it had been abandoned for decades. Being here felt like entering the deepest, darkest, and least used subway station in New York, at twelve o' clock, midnight, but then as the ground beneath gave way, you were dropped into an even older forgotten tunnel, that hadn't seen light since the mid 19th century. That, or a massive Indian burial ground. Or a—

Okay, enough with the 80s movie references!

There was a lot of debris and crates everywhere. And. There were lights shining down from above; all isolated from each other, like islands in a sea of darkness. And within their beams, the lights were exposing the level of density in the air, with air particles, so thickly packed together, it felt like one would probably need to hack through it with a machete to get passed.

Great! Now I'm looking for the lost Ark, here! I guess I'll be able to notice it with all the dead rats laying around.

I thought you didn't want any more 80s movie—

Shut up, Gab!

As Michael continued riding forward, he found himself having difficulty finding the bomb. The whole place was stacked with giant crates, which were mostly obstructing everything in Michael's path in finding the damn thing. Still continuing with his search, Michael thought of giving up the possibility of crossing anyone down here, for, there was absolutely no sign of life, anywhere, and Michael began to wonder if any of Mr. Dorian or Mr. Parsley's men had even shown up at all.

If it was brought in by a semi, maybe the truck could still be attached, and I can try driving the damn thing outta here, and away....

And hope it doesn't blow up before exiting Manhattan.

You could drive it off the Williamsburg Bridge....

Ah... shit! That probably would be the best thing to do.

Then something caught Michael's eye... beneath one of the lights

overhead, Michael came across a stack-pile of broken crates and gin bottles, and what really caught his eye was a fedora peeking out, which was tucked away between the crates.

What is it about these hats that makes it look so damn dignified to be wearing?

As he pulled it out, he found it covered in dust, a lot of dust! That must have taken an immeasurable amount of time (what feels like) to build up. At first, Michael imagined it might have been Mr. Dorian's. But. If it had been, it had to have then been down here some thirty to forty aught years. And, that couldn't have been possible.

Feeling a bit spiffy, then, Michael felt the strange urge to try the hat on for size… even though this was one of those 'worst times to be doing such' things. So, as he decided to do so, he took a deep breath, and blew on it to remove all the layers of dust that had built up, and….

Aha aha aha!

Found himself coughing and hacking up a lung, practically, as the dust spread over to his nose and mouth, and went in deep.

Aha aha! So… aha… stupid of me! Aha!

Michael was in tears now.

Once he was done resenting that idea, Michael then decided to continue looking for the bomb.

Stupid hat! They're also so bland looking!

But also decided to hold onto it… for whatever reason.

Although, it's mine now. And I always wanted one.

And as he placed it onto his head, even though still way too dusty to be doing so, a strange feeling came over Michael, and with it, a strange sense for being; another sense of self, for Michael, he had only faintly ever considered before. But one… that was very revealing to Michael. Very!

You know, being born, I always felt like I skipped a generation. Honestly, I've always felt like an old soul, and, I think I should have been born a part of my parents' generation, instead. Being born in the mid-20s, instead of being born in the mid-50s. Because, I don't know, something about my parents' generation just seemed so much more romantic and refined-like, and… other stuff!

Take this hat, for instance, no one wears hats like these no more. Hats are such dignified things to wear, and the only thing you'd find my generation wearing is, maybe, baseball caps, when it comes to hats, the things that kids would wear. Children. No one wants to look dignified anymore, wearing something like this. Because, no one wants to look old anymore. I call someone Mr. So-and-so, today, and they look at me, then look around, and they'll then say something stupid and supposedly funny like 'hey, call me Fred, calling me Mr. So-and-so, makes me think you're referring to my old man.' Pretty much what I'm saying is, nobody wants to be an adult no more. Nobody does. Not nobody, anymore.

As much as Michael was partial to thinking and acting like a thirty-something year old adolescent, there was still a major part of him, another side to him, that felt completely different.

What do you want me to say, they were a generation where men really were men, and not stupid kids! And part of what makes someone a mature adult isn't just acting like one, but being one.

Michael now started thinking about what his old uncle Francis had once said to him.

There's no such thing as being an adult, huh? Nah, I'm changing my mind about that matter. Changing my stance. Francis… my Uncle Francis… ha! What did he know, he was just a drunkard. An alcoholic loser. A….

Michael… this coming from you… well…?

Well, what?

I still got my sense of what it means to be one, I got that! And, I've been through a lot in my life, a helluva lot! And, if anything, that's what makes you one: the trials you go through in life. Trials you face and survive. And not you, Gab, nor anyone, can argue that I haven't had mine.

Michael now spent a melancholy minute thinking about the hard knocks he had to roll with most of his life.

My mom abandoning me, my pops beating the crap out of me for years just so he can raise me to be as much of a psycho as he was,

then from age fifteen to around my early twenties, I had some good times, the only good times, even though I still spent much of that time being in a gang doing nothing but fighting everybody I came across. But then, after those happy days, I went away to prison, and then spent years upon years fighting off suicidal urges with a stick. Yeah… I've had a messed-up life, no doubt about it. Not saying the worst anyone could have it, but, still—still bad!

After a minute of thinking about all that, Michael started getting emotional.

You want to know something else I liked about that generation, they ain't like people now, they weren't a generation that tried to hide who they were by being stoic, they went through shit—a lot of shit! Which is what made them who they were, and they felt proud to wear it. Today, let's say, with tough guy acts, fuckers will all try hard to be hard and cold, but they're really just pussies, they really haven't been through that much to be who they like to seem to be. To be really hard, you wouldn't try to seem hard, you'd be nearly an emotional basketcase.

My parents' generation? They were a lot more like that, which made them more human than my sorry sort are today. They had more fire, and they had more passion.

Which is what also made them much more melodramatic. Almost ridiculously much more.

Fine! There's that, too, Gab, but I liked that! It would suit my nature more to be that way. I'm really an overly emotional basketcase, myself, anyways, and it would suit me better if I could always be laughing and crying along with people, instead of trying to hold it all in to not scare people off. People are way too reserved today, and either they're macho assholes all posing to be hard like all those fuckers I have to constantly deal with in the streets, or they're two-faced assholes like Stumpy and everyone here in Uptown. Wish I could just let go, and really express how I feel most of the time.

Instead of being all stoic yourself, huh?

Fine! I am that way, on the outside, I know. I am all stone cold face,

and expressionless, most of the time, trying to be all cooler than ice. Ice cold. And shit. Leading the Steve McQueen example. But! That's me on the outside, on the inside? Well… kinda like with Nikki earlier, it's still feels strange the woman never could have imagined I'd be scared of shit. But that's just what she saw of me on the outside, I an't that way. I ain't! I really, really wish I can just cry all the time.

Cry all the time?

Yeah, Gab, I want to just cry all the fucking time, all fucking day long, and all-night long. That would be me, really be me! And me expressing myself to the fullest. Expressing myself, without constantly worrying what people would think, or would judge me. When you go through a lot of shit, how can you help but be an emotional basketcase? People back then went through a lot more….

Which also made them more neurotic and crazy….

Well, why don't you go through a Great Depression, and then the biggest and baddest war ever fought on earth, and try to come out sane! They were a generation that saw nothing but violence, total violence, with a world that had to wage it out for a long stretch, starting from the first world war, on through. And even though I believe as much as I do about violence, as being like God's own hand, lashing at us, to break us from our fictitious selves, and bringing us to our truest of bluest nature. Even though I do believe in it… too much of it? I… don't know!

Trials such as those can either make you, or break you. And break you seriously. But, then again, no matter how tough you are, too much of it, and anyone can be broken.

Funny! This is all making me think about that stuff I was thinking at Big Dick's. About social political messages expressing the zeitgeist through way of cartoons, really made for children, but really made by adults. And the thing about cartoons of their time, my parents' generation, they were all nothing but a cat and mouse, or a rabbit and a rabbit hunter, some type of pairing of two likes, that wouldn't get along very well if put together. Popeye and Bluto,

two sailors. And with those two, with those cartoons, you'd have nothing but one episode after another of them doing nothing but fucking each other up all the time. With mallets, and branding irons, and axes. Doing nothing but going psycho on each other. Just beating the ever-loving shit out of each other, until one couldn't take it no more, and called quits, going insane.

Michael thought about all that, and now thought, if he'd want to be a character in any of those cartoons.

Fuck no! That Tom and Jerry shit got way too out of hand, and not just some of the time, but all of the time, for that's all you'd expect from them. They did nothing but chase each other around with axes, all the live long day. If you were to see anything like that, today, you'd be seeing it in a slasher movie. Not some cartoon made for children.

Now it's just GI Joe's, with snake people, and laser beams, and Van Halen shit, and hunky gay shit. Ha!

Michael now took the fedora hat off his head, and really wondered if he would want to live in those times.

Maybe I should be a bit thankful I didn't have to deal with a world like that. Coming up in an age like that must have really created some monsters, stuff me and Nikki could never imagine.

Michael then threw away the fedora hat. And sighed.

Yeah, fuck the past! Who would seriously want to live in that age? As much as I feel like I should have been one of them, who seriously wants to go through an age that had a great depression, and a great world war? Two of them! Who would?

And that started making Michael think about the present.

What am I thinking? As if the world we live in now is any better. The world is just as bad, now, in its own way. In today's world, the fear isn't hardships like being poorer than dirt starving to death, or being sent to go fight some war that's claiming millions and millions of lives. Now, there's crime! Lots and lots of crime, all over, making it scary for people to step outside even out of their front doors. And. Also. There's that whole cold war business, and how we're probably going to end up nuking each other into an

oblivion, and have nothing left.

And now, that made Michael think about the future.

World wars and great depression are one thing, an age of nothing but crime is something else, but then there's what will be left if that nuclear holocaust shit ever does take place. Which will really send this world into chaos, far beyond anything a world war, or this Age of Rage business, could be able to produce. A hell, simply unimaginable. Something that would go beyond the hell the world had to deal with, with my parents' generation, in the 30s and 40s, whatever I've had to in the 70s and 80s…. for, looking into the 90s, if that's the direction the world goes into, would I be prepared for it, would any of my stupid ass generation today would? I don't know, I really don't know….

And this all really started to make Michael wonder. Something now felt off, seriously off, not with just his thoughts of the times he was living in, but the direction it was all leading towards. Something now felt off about this whole Age of Rage business, off with Mr. Dorian, and his plans.

My lot on the street, with all the crime, and shit—let's face it! Let's face the facts! They're a very unorganized group, committing a whole lot of violence, with no purpose to it. Like that Repomen, chainsawing down lampposts, and shit. What's that going to serve in the greater scheme of things?

But, what would the Age of Rage serve, in the end.

I don't know! Violence, breaking people away from their fictitious selves, and growing a pair. Rising up, and claiming something that maybe should be rightfully theirs… making them into more of the… I don't know… I think that man has something he might feel like is righteous, with what he's doing. But….

But now Michael started thinking about the National Guardsmen, and seeing them, he had seen how they planned to handle the whole Age of Rage business, and squash it! Before it having much of a chance to make any difference.

Fine, I get this, he wants the common lot, my lot, to rise up, and fight back against the man. But, come the fuck on!

Fact of the matter was, as big and as bad as all the gangs were on the

streets, there was a bigger and badder mofo now here, making sure nothing was to change. Nothing!

The US Government, with their Head Honcho, President Ronnie. That's who!

In the end, this was all still futile.

For you're only as tough as your enemy will allow you to be. So what difference was this Age of Rage going to make? It's not, it's not! It's really an exercise in futility. Rising up and taking back what's rightfully yours? I've tried to do that, tonight, and what have I claimed? Nothing! I'm still gonna die, or still find myself going back to prison. Nothing is still going to change with all this.

So….

Something is off, I feel like I'm missing out on something, here. Mr. Dorian might be a real psycho nutbag, but what did he really think this was all going to do? A nutcase, yes! But the man ain't stupid. If Mr. Dorian is looking for revenge, what is simply blowing up 1999 going to do? I mean, what high prominent figures are up there on the 54th floor partying it up that would catch Mr. Dorian's interest? If he really wanted revenge, how much damage would killing them cause when most of his enemies should be in DC, and at the Pentagon—I'm presuming? Why come here and bomb this building? And then there's the Age of Rage, even with all the riots going on, how much damage can that cause now that the National Guardsmen have been called into action? I mean, those rioters on the streets are just a bunch of punks like me, they're not soldiers! They can't take on the US military! So, what's Mr. Dorian's overall plan here? I feel like something else is going on.

If Mr. Dorian was looking for revenge, he'd have to be planning something greater and far more scarier, to really make a difference. But what?

As Michael continued on circumnavigating between all those giant crates, and forklifts, and eventually even coming across an old Studebaker, he took one last glance around, and found it. The bomb.

Okay… there it is!

But!

Now what do I do? There's no one here, and I can't touch that thing….

Michael quickly rode over to the bomb; it was nowhere near as big as he thought it would be; it had a more of a cone shape, and it looked like it was detachable from the flat end. It looked like the tip of a missile. Michael rode up, and circled the bomb to see what else he could make out. There were no panels or anything in sight that could give him a visual of if this bomb was armed or not. But then he realized something else, this bomb had strange lettering on it, and as Michael looked closer, he saw:

Р-**12** Двина

This wasn't exactly what Michael was expecting. Michael could tell it was Russian, and he also saw the symbol of a red star on it, but the question now was… what was it doing here?

That's Russian—all right! But why would Mr. Dorian go so far as to get a Russian bomb, if he can have access to American ones?

But then Michael saw another symbol on the bomb, that made him realize he wasn't looking at what he'd be expecting to find down here. It was a yellow circle, and inside of it there was a black circle, in the middle, and at three points extending from the ten, two, and six o' clock positions along that black circle were triangles. And as he scratched his head for a second, it then came to him exactly what he was looking at.

Oh my G—…?

Are you fucking shitting me!

The Fedora

"When one has not had a good father, one must create one."
-Friedrich Nietzsche

The Moviegoer.

He was a younger man back then; a man in his mid-twenties; a young man that didn't seem to be going in much of a direction in his life. He was a dark haired, dark eyed, fair skinned feller, that kept his hair slicked back with lard, and tended to sometimes wear glasses to fix his slight nearsightedness. He had very bulky features, even though, he only weighed at 175lbs, and stood at 5'11. He was a dapper looking young gent, that had his moments of attracting the young gals. But then, when his modesty would set in, he'd lose some of their interest. But still, could fare well with them, but as long as they were simple and modest like he was, and not looking for some Carry Grant to sweep them off their feet. As long as they weren't looking for that, they'd might be content with what they got. Sam was his name, but in his neighborhood, everyone pretty much called him by his nickname, 'Wheezer', and he was given that nickname because anytime he'd start laughing, hard and deep, he'd make a wheezing sound, that was so loud and intense, it would make all his friends hold their hands over their ears, looking like they wanted to make a run for it. Sam was also a bit of a hot-tempered feller, and he never particularly liked going by that nickname of his. Actually, he didn't particularly like being called anything at all. And then there were periods when his temper would get the best of him, and he'd end up getting into fights with all the other boys on the block. Getting into a bunch of mess, more than he was willing to deal with.

Those days, he'd spend most of his time idly living by; working on and off at his father's corner barbershop; tending to the gents coming in to get a nice clean shave, while reading their morning papers. Sam, although, was terrible at his work, since he didn't care much for it. And his father didn't trust him much to do any of the men's hair, since he didn't seem to know much of a difference from an off-center part to a bowl-cut. Cutting hair was just cutting hair to him, but his customers wouldn't see it that way; they'd come in asking to get that look Errol Flynn or Clark Cable had in that movie, and Sam would respond by throwing his hands up in the air, and telling them to wait for his father to come by and take over. The fact was, he didn't care much about his mundane day job, and neither did he care much about his mundane life.

He was a directionless man who felt like life was some type of waiting game. A long, very long stretch of time of nothing ever happening, until something did. A game of waiting for something better. An opportunity to be had, a moment to step out, and a time to do so and shine.

This was already after the invasion of Pearl Harbor, and just about all of his friends had enlisted in either the Army, Navy, or Marines, except him. Back in 1941, when it had happened, Sam was a young man, feeling exactly what all the other boys were feeling in his neighborhood, for now had come the time that Sam felt he'd been waiting for; his moment to step up, and be a part of something glorious. America was now drawn into the war, and this was his moment to go someplace, and to become somebody. Only problem was, his father, had objected to all of it; another world war, and he forbid the idea of seeing his only son take part in a war, that he felt, had nothing to do with them.

"America has no business in Europe, again," old Joe would say.

And what struck Sam a bit odd was he couldn't understand why he'd feel that way, since the old man had already served his own time in the last great one. His father was a former Doughboy, Sergeant, and Sam felt that if the old man was good enough to make sacrifices, then, so could he. And so should he. But, then again, there was something else about the old Sergeant, that made Sam think he had his hidden reasons.

The man would sometimes fall into episodes; sometimes, while he was working trimming a man's hair in the shop, it would happen! All his former clients knew about it, and knew the details as well. So, whenever his father asked to be excused, they'd say:

"Don't worry, Joe, just come back when you're ready!"

Then, his father would step to the back, as his face would start convulsing. Joe's mouth would start opening and closing shut, violently. And there was that one time, the convulsions were so bad, that when it happened, the pressure was so intense, that Joe had managed to dislocate his jaw, and had to be rushed to the hospital. Of course, Joe always felt these episodes coming, beforehand. So, there was never the worry that he might start convulsing right at the moment of cutting a

man's hair, with a pair of scissors at hand. Joe would just excuse himself, he'd step back to have his episode, and he'd return like nothing had happened, when he was finished. It was almost very routine like, and as disturbing of a scene of the episodes were, for any of the new customers, for everyone else, it had become as routine and commonplace as watching a man drinking a glass of water.

Eventually, one day, out of the blue, Sam had asked his father about them; about the story of what exactly had happened that had started all this. And the old Doughboy had then turned around, and had straight up told him the story, without even a moment of hesitation or reserve or to reflect.

He said it had all began when he had to bayonet a German soldier in the face, at the Third Battle of Aisne.

Ever since then, thinking back to that moment, would make him break out as he did. And as Joe had told him, to Sam, his story, what felt very off putting of his story was, how plainly and simply he had told him this; not one emotion was expressed on his face; nor did Joe express any sense that it even mattered.

At that time, Sam would spend most of his time and hours doing whatever his directionless mind deemed fit. There hadn't been much else Sam had been interested in partaking in, in his life, except partaking in the war. So now, Sam had to bear with the wait, until another chance was to present itself. Usually, on most occasions, he'd make it a routine to go to the moviehouse, to see the newsreels, about the war over there, and all that he was missing out on. Sometimes, also, to catch a cartoon, as well. Usually a Warner Bros or Disney cartoon. And he enjoyed these moments, not for the cartoons themselves, with him sitting around watching what an eight-year-old would be interested in. No! The whole audiences would be full of children. And if the cartoon was about the war, what Sam would then find entertaining was, how the kids would react. Once a character would pop up, looking like a Jap, or some Kraut, the kids would start booing and hissing, and throwing eggs and tomatoes at the screen.

And, yes, sir! You heard that correctly.

They were actually bringing eggs and tomatoes to a moviehouse, just to see the same war propaganda cartoon, as Sam was, over and over again, just for this simple reason alone. And they'd make a whole lot of noise, hooting and hollering, and make a whole lot of mess, while at it. Although, the owner of the theater didn't seem to mind… much. Actually, he more or less encouraged it. The only trouble he had to then deal with would come from the ushers, complaining about the mess all those little rascals would leave behind. Which, of course, was their job to clean up.

Good thing my pops isn't a theater owner. What a raw and lousy deal that would be for me… I tell ye.

Thought Sam in an aisle, all the way in the back, smoking a Chesterfield cigarette.

Ha! Stupid kids! All this hoopla, and for what? A cartoon of some rabbit, standing and talking like a man, getting all silly with a character that's supposed to represent a Kraut.

Sometimes… a little too silly.

A little too… am I the only one noticing it?

Well, whatever! At least these kids have the right attitude for this, better attitude then most people… I know.

Personally, the young man didn't really mind all that much, being the only adult at the moviehouse. For, he found it entertaining, watching children, acting the way they did. So playfully and passionately, completely invested in some doodled-up rabbit, mouse, or duck, on screen. And Sam would then sorta feel like he missed those days, missed that age, back when he'd also feel and act that way. So passionately, about matters, before his directionless days began.

I wouldn't be this way, now, feeling all weary all the time, if I was over there. And at my age, I really should be.

Sam just felt like he was being left out, and he dreaded the thought of what his friends would say or think, when they'd return from the war, and find how they had all answered to the call of duty, and how he hadn't. How everyone else had enlisted, except for Sam. They had gone to fight tooth and nail to make a difference in the world, and all Sam

had done was sit idly by, in some moviehouse, watching cartoons with children.

So embarrassing… so embarrassing… though.

Then as the newsreels would begin, he'd see the updates, and the stories coming directly from the Western front. It seemed like men were dieing in the thousands… over there. Of course, this was what Sam was getting from the newsreels, reading in between the lines, since he couldn't get much from what that Transatlantic accent….

That phony baloney accent you see some of the Top-Drawer assholes like to teach themselves to speak in.

Couldn't get much from it, from what it was saying. In the newsreels.

Trying to sound so conniving and cheerful, about everything! As if nothing could ever go wrong. I mean, there's a war on. So, pardon me for my sarcasm and criticism, but I don't see how that voice can be that way, making it sound like we're going to win the war with apple pies, baseball, and Betty Grable's supple ass.

Yeah, I don't see what's with all the commotion over the legs on this dame, here. Personally, if you want me to win some war for her, that ass of hers is what's really gonna get me up and moving. Ha!

Thought Sam, as he enjoyed a moment there. Then fell in with why he had gone in there, in the first place, as they started showing images of Nazi occupied Germany.

And in this time in the world, watching those black and white reels, were a very unnerving experience. Especially for Sam. Watching how there was an entire nation, led by the likes of madmen, that were wanting to wage war with the rest of the world. They'd show the marches, they'd show the flags, and they'd show that devil of a man, with the Charlie Chaplin mustache. Which Sam used to remember, how his father used to have one, as most people in the neighborhood did. That is until that man took power, and began making his speeches. Then. Just about everyone in the neighborhood that had one, shaved it off, immediately. And the following day, practically.

It looks stupid and silly as hell on him, though, if you ask me. Also, part of me feels like I can't take him—too—seriously, but….

And as silly as it seemed on the surface, as silly as they all seemed, with all their marching, and zieg hailing, and German, the case still was, they were the biggest threat the world had ever known until then. And as Sam saw more and more of them, over the years, the reality of what they had to offer had begun to seriously set in, and seriously terrify him.

Seeing into them, and seeing into the eyes of their *Führer*, Sam's mind had begun to grasp the truth of them, how they were real, and out there, and had form as much as he did. Those eyes of theirs, they had a bloody tale to tell. Their *Führer*'s eyes, also, had a bloody tale to tell. And as Sam would sometimes catch a glimpse of him, in the reels, he'd look into his eyes, he'd then feel that devil's true presence, unflinchingly, unnervingly, and unrelentingly looking back.

> How can anyone like that reach to such power, how can he? What is wrong in the world, that would allow that man, to seem so right, to so many?

Sam dreaded the idea that they might win, and maybe even get so far as to lay their blitzkriegs on the doorsteps of America. The idea of those maniacs marching up and down his hometown streets would scare Sam. And what frustrated him the most, now, was, how he was denied the chance to do anything he could to stop them.

> What the hell am I doing here? I should be over there like everyone else is! Why is the old man trying to make me bring shame into our name?

A giant part of Sam called out for him to ignore his father's words, and go ahead and sign himself up, no matter what the old man opinion would then be. But deep down, Sam couldn't disobey him like that. He respected the old man, gravely, and he at least felt like he needed to honor his words. Whatever his reasons were, as convoluted as they seemed to Sam, he felt obliged to stick by them.

> So now, I do nothing but wait… wait… for… I don't know what! Everyone is going to think I'm a coward, for not going, everyone! And there's not a damn thing I can do about it.

Sam!

Huh… who?

Sam!

What… who are you?

You're a grown man, way passed the age of twenty….

Yeah… I am….

So….

So… what?

So… why don't you! You're an adult, old enough to make your own decisions. If you feel that strongly about the war, about making a difference, about doing the right thing, then why don't you?

Huh… who are you again?

Never mind all that! Why don't you?

I can't!

Why can't you?

My father won't allow it.

You're a grown man, able to make your own decisions.

I… so?

So, in the end, it's not his decision to make, it's yours! You have the right to make that. And, honestly, I'm sure he might see it differently, if he saw how strong your convictions wer—

All right, all right, enough! I don't know who the hell you are, but, I know my father, and, no!

Sam, you're making excus—!

Shut up, yous! I said 'no,' he'd never allow it! And that's final!

….

Plus….

Plus, what?

I can't!

Why can't you?

Sam then, at the moviehouse, watching the newsreel, saw another glimpse into their *Führer's eyes,* unflinchingly, unnervingly, and unrelentingly, glimpsing back. And then, as Sam felt his reasons why, he….

What you saying? You saying I'm a coward? You calling me a stinking no-good lousy coward? Well, fuck you! Fuck you, buddy!

Whoever the hell you are! Who the....

Sam then got up, and left the moviehouse, as he realized he was no longer able to stand the embarrassment of it all.

The Jalopy.

Of course, since Sam was unable to think about doing anything else with himself, Sam's directionless life was beginning to take its toll on him, as he began to feel himself lose touch with his own senses. Sam always had this unique problem of his, that whenever he'd have a thought that made him feel dread, disturbed, or depressed, sometimes it would get stuck there for weeks, even sometimes months, on end. And then, he'd start creating... weird rituals... to combat them.

Day after day, week after week, Sam continued to frivolously waste away his time, as he did, as the memory of his days and weeks began to dissolve away in the recesses of his mind. Time just stopped making sense to him, and life stopped having meaning for him, as he continued carrying out the course of his days.

I'm turning into one of them! Like everyone around me, all expressionless and carrying on like broken-in mules.

I call them The Fedora People.

Thought Sam, walking the streets of New York City, as people with fedora hats passed him by.

To become one of them is what it means to become old, and to lose one's meaning and direction in life. You could still be in your thirties, but, to become an old man, that's a choice you make. And then, you can just see it in a person's dress and character. All flat as a flat tire. To be one, is to conform to one's mundane meaningless surroundings, and just become like just another plotted plant... one with the scenery. No soul, no drive, no ambition, because it's all been lost.

Sam would think a lot of stuff like this, as he watched people pass him by, watched, and saw the directionless sense within them felt within himself.

Ironically, although, they're still a proud group of people. They like

to stand proud, walk proud, looking all dignified all the time. But I see passed all that, I see passed all of it.

Really, they're just a people left in ruins, left like abandoned ancient cities, after a thousand years of decay, erosion, and neglect. Left like spirits in some ghosttown, left wandering through their dismal lives, wondering:
'When it could end?
If it'll end?
Could it end?'

Most of them, I bet, wishing it would.
Sam didn't particularly like wearing any of those hats of theirs, conforming to wearing one, because he always felt like he wanted to stand out.

I don't want my life to be so meaningless! I don't want to just fall in with the rest, take a number, and spend the rest of my life standing in a line waiting for death! I don't want to wear their gray and tasteless uniforms, they wear so proudly, as if it would be my honor to accept such emptiness. The hell with all that! And the hell with all of them! I can't stand most of them, either. They're all very formal and polite, all the time, and everything is routine for them, since they're too afraid to break away from all those boundaries they've set up for themselves. Break away, and try living life again. Bring some meaning back into things. They're all cowards, really. Broken pitiful lousy bunch of stinking cowards!

Nuts!

And I'd be damned to become one of them, too.
But then there was something else.

They all scare the hell out of me, too! There's something very dark and hateful and twisted within them, that makes me think... 'maybe it would be better if they're left alone as ruins onto themselves?'

Because ghosttowns can be haunted, and carry a lot of bitter,

brooding, spiteful, hateful spirits. Just waiting to get a chance to possess something that's still living.

They ain't just all so pitiful, there's a lot of evil and hell that I see dwelling in their abandoned hearts. They wear their uniforms, speak all formal like, and try to come across as such swell people, because they're really trying to hide all that dwells within.

As Sam continued to eye them, one passed him by, and began to eye him back. And Sam grew scared as he felt like he got a bit of insight into that man's true nature, and all that was really there, beneath the surface.

I once had a friend named Jimmy Valentine, a real hep cat, hipster, that was all into that Jazz scene in Harlem, and with all them nigger musicians and artisans down there. A real intellectual type, that once brought up this thing in Greek philosophy, done by Plato, called... what did he call it?

'The Allegory of a Cave'... yeah, that's what it was!

Jimmy was a bit of a weird character, a reefer addict, like most of the bunch down there, thinking too much into stuff... and really sorta full of himself. But, I kinda liked him. And, I can't deny, I liked the sort of broads he attracted. What is it with his types, and the gorgeous broads they can pull? Brother! It makes me wonder.

But anyways. I did sorta like what I understood of that allegory thing. But also, really also sorta didn't! Supposedly, what it is, is a scenario introduced, showing an example into the human condition. The scenario being: imagine a group of people born and raised in a cave, and never being taken out to see the real outside world and the sun. And them being raised, facing a cave wall their entire lives, staring at shadows, cast by actors, with shadow puppets, or something. All! All the world to these people, are those shadows made by those shadow puppets, by an unknown group behind them, which they also never see. That play of shadows is all they've ever seen in their entire lives, that's all they know. Now, what if one day they were taken out, and showed the real world

outside. The question is ‘what would they think then.’ Now… my buddy, Jimmy, got really excited about the idea, of how they'd see the real world, outside, and be filled with Godly joy, seeing how beautiful it is, compared to the crummy conditions they were forced to live under, when they were held captive in that cave. Jimmy got so excited explaining all this—so excited. But as for me, and what I thought, the idea sorta scared me to think, because, I don't think that group of former cave dwellers would like much of what they'd see. I think they would grow terrified, seeing how big and scary the world is, and then want to go back into the cave, and pretend like they never saw any of it. That, with me, personally, is what I think.

And now, after having thought about this, Sam thought about The Fedora People, and how he saw them, under this new light.

I get that allegory, I get it, because it's something I've seen all around me. Through these people. They're all asleep, really, living their lives in a forgotten dream, and maybe it's better if they're left that way. They live in a world, inside their heads, an ignorant bunch, afraid of what goes on, on the outside, but unlike that whole allegory thing, I think they know exactly what the world is, somewhere in the back of their heads. Exactly how it is, and how terrifying it is, and that's why they choose to want nothing of it.

And if that wasn't enough.

It's not just the outside world that's terrifying… sometimes, it's the inside world.

After that Jimmy character had told Sam about that whole Plato allegory thing, Sam, that night, had had a dream. One, where a man, from the outside, was brought to a cave, and told:

And now listen to this one, this is a doozy: that the cave is supposed to represent one's soul, and what you find down there, deep within, is what you truly are.

Sam had a dream about this, or really, a nightmare. Seeing one of these Fedora People brought to the cave, in the dream, and made to venture into it. As that man went in, heading in deeper and deeper, Sam, like an invisible spectating entity in his own dream, watched the man finding himself lost in the dark, and feeling like he was going in circles. Heading

in, and heading down, going around and around, like on a carousel, on an infinite number of loops, all headed inwards. Spiraling into the abyss of his own inner being, as if to find definition. To find meaning. Find meaning as to what it meant to be who he really is and was… and will always be.

And when the Fedora Man had reached the bottom, and found what he was looking for, what he saw was….

> I don't recollect what the hell it was, but whatever it was, it terrified me half to death, for I woke up screaming my head off.
>
> What the hell was it I… I mean he… saw down there? What the hell would make him…?

Sam now felt like dropping this. It had terrified him, good, and for a while then, a week or two after hearing about that whole allegory thing. But whatever insight he had had, had also given him an insight to a lot of other things. As he now started to look at all the Fedora People, and felt like he better understood them.

> Imagine something as dark, hateful, and twisted as them, one day, waking up! Whatever hell that really dwells, deep within them, coming out and… God knows what!
>
> Maybe they're cowards… because they're really afraid of their own true nature, and what would happen if they were given the chance to break away. Men and women that have imprisoned themselves into their own mild-mannered hells, because they're afraid of the evil that would come out of them, if they were only given the chance….
>
> They might all turn on each other, then. They might be cowards, but even with such, you can’t deny the hell they've all had to have lived, and been through, to become this way. A hell, that's been built up, for what feels like centuries….
>
> That's better left asleep…
> than awake….

On Mondays and Tuesdays, Sam worked at his father's barbershop: cutting the same hair, speaking the same speak, and grew sad, irritated, and weary, watching his father have the same outburst.

"Ah! Ah," his father would go.

All violently, and intensely, while no one would seem to be bothered much by it. All seeming asleep, in their own worlds, while his father had his moments, as they all sat by reading their papers.

I hate him.

Thought Sam

I hate the old man.

Want to know his story, more, well… here you go:

Really! You'd expect a lot of pride from a man that's lived the life he's lived. Done the stuff he's done, but, the fact of the matter is, he isn't! How can he go on as he does? How can he be so… humble? For what he's done, for the sacrifice he's made in the first great war, he should be a proud man of high esteem and honor, that everyone should be respecting.

Yet….

There he is… seeming to be content with cutting the hair of some Wallstreet high-hat broker, some fat cat dipshit, who'd have his daddy buy him out of the draft. Who wouldn't even look my father in the eyes, while he's paying him, after he's done cutting his hair.

Sam was also a very observant man, especially to things such as this, and he'd see this happen, sometimes, with some of old Joe's clients.

Because if he did, to that rich asshole, looking my father in the eyes, that would mean he'd be lowering himself to the level of some lonely old servant, who's only duty in life is to serve his kind. My pops? That's what he's content with, living with. I mean, I see how those Upper East Sider types look down on the rest of us, I see where they see themselves in life, and where they see the rest of us. Well… I can understand them looking down at most….

But….
How dare! How dare they do that to my father, when he's really better than them all! I've seen them, those pompous Rockefeller types, staring my father down, from the corner of their eyes, with the look of disgust. As if my father is riddled with fleas, and his hands are too dirty to be getting anywhere near theirs. I hate the old man! How can he not see it for himself? Or worse yet, does he see, and does he just accept it? He's such a pitiful sap, it boggles my mind how he can be so, when considering all he's accomplished. How can he have such little respect and consideration for himself, and who he is?

I mean… the man is such a pitiful sap, eventually my mother left him while I was a kid, because she just couldn't stands the sight of him anymore. Couldn't stand him and the boredom any longer. Couldn't take being in such a tasteless and passionless marriage, to a man, who couldn't even muster up enough heart, to confront her, when she told him she was leaving us.

Yeah, I had to watch that!

I was twelve years old at the time, and I watched her yell and scream at my father for a good hour, calling him a worthless nobody. A good hour I watched her yell and scream at him, trying to provoke something out of him, some type of reaction, an emotion, that would give her a reason to stay. Something! But all to no cost. For all the old man did in that hour was just stand there, and stare at the wooden floor, all dreary like, while allowing her to put him through that humiliation. And when it was all said and done with, when she said 'goodbye' to him, she left, and all he could do then was go back to his daily routine. His meaningless daily routine, his regiment.

At 8:00pm, sharp, my father has this thing where he'll go to his room, sit in a chair, and spend the next two hours whittling a piece of wood, and turning them into toys, which he likes to give away to his patrons at work, to give to their children. And at 10:00pm,

sharp, he'll turn off the lights, and go to sleep. And….

I don't know what to think or say about all that. My mother left, and all the old man could do then was go back to his pointless hobby. And it really is a pointless hobby, too. Also sad. I remember a year ago I was standing outside the shop, having a cigarette, while on my break, and seeing one of those fat cat brokers exist with one of my father's toys at hand. I saw him then step over to a trash can, and throw my father's 'works of art' in.

A moment passed through Sam, then, as the sadness of it all really began to set in.

I know how much he loves children. I know he's got a kindhearted soul. I know….

But then the anger took over.

Fuck him and his kind heart! No one gives a damn if you're a good soul, and kind, for the world is only separated in two ways.

You're either strong…
or you're weak….

And all a kind heart is a weak heart, that has no place in this world, if it wants to survive. My father has no stake in this world, and he is unable to make any, because of his stupid worthless kind heart, which has really ruined him as a man. Fuck him and those little wooden toys he loves to make so dearly! I mean, the entire house is littered with them because that's all he does on his off time when he isn't working. The entire fucking house! I mean, really?

Sam was panting now, thinking about all this.

Is that what's more important to my father, than to see my mother—his wife—leave us? A bunch of worthless lousy trinkets, that my father would make, for other people to throw away—as garbage!

Yeah pops… it's garbage! They're garbage. Everyone sees them as that, and, because of that, everyone sees you as that, as well!

What it all comes down to is… you're either a brave man in this

world, or, you're really a stinking coward, and only a coward would confine himself to such nonsense, while things that really mattered, he would allow to simply get up, and walk out the door.

For a bunch of lousy fucking…
that's what's all the world is to him! Not his honor, not his pride, not us, but that! He's nothing! He's a nobody! No one gives a damn about him, yet he still continues to stubbornly live on by, giving a damn about others. He is a disgrace to himself, and his name—my name! I mean… what did you mean when you said….

And now came the question that truly puzzled Sam, on his father's stance, on him, the war, and all that entailed.

When you said… I shouldn't join… because you saw that I wasn't interested in enlisting, how all the other boys were in the neighborhood, doing it for all the right reasons, making it sound like I was doing it for all the….

And what would they be?
Huh?
The wrong ones…?

After I asked him an endless amount of times why he didn't want to see me enlist. That's all he had to come up with. Telling me I was doing it for all the….

Sam kept trying to wrap his mind around it, and with every turn, he'd fail to grab hold.

No! Don't think about it! No! He wouldn't know what he's talking about. Don't allow yourself to become confused with the nonsense that a man like that has to offer. Right reason? Wrong reason? Ha! What would he know about any of that? The only wrong reasons involved here are the ones to not join at all! In the end… all that matters is that he's a coward. And yet, he seems to gladly accept it. How can he be this way? How can he be so pathetic? How can he… I hate him!

His Girl Jane.

From Wednesday through Friday Sam would try spending some time

with his girl Jane: he'd take her to the park, where she'd complain about her mother's drinking problem; he'd take her to a fancy restaurant, where she would complain about her father's overbearing and sometimes violent temper; he'd take her to the movies, where she would complain about her sister's unhappy marriage; he'd take her to the beach, where she'd complain about her crazy brother in prison. Even though not much of a personality to be around, Jane Gladstone was at least a looker. She was a tall, statuesque woman, with long flowing red hair, milky white skin, and large well rounded tits, that even made other broads turn their heads to gawk at in disbelief. Most days, Sam's loins would start aching red, as he'd stare at her knockers, while—of course—Jane would continue babbling about her stupid lousy family. So on some nights, he'd take her home with him, and as the ditsy woman would start flapping her mouthpiece, he'd try to make a move on her. One night, he had taken her to one of those 'Road to….

Someplace or another!

Bing Crosby and Bob Hope movies, since, Sam had seen how the gals were all swooning for him.

Bing, not Bob! Ha! What broad would ever swoon over that cornball, I ask you?

And he figured taking Jane to one might get her into the mood. Unfortunately, his plans didn't prove to work out too well. As he started kissing her on the lips, down her neck, then over to her tits; he then looked back up into her eyes, to see, a dumb and confused look on her face, like she didn't know what was going on, nor what he was doing. Then, as he tried to get her to go down on him, Jane then grew an even more confused look, as her eyes bulged out like some virgin maiden's would.

Which she isn't!

Looking like she was wondering why he was trying to move her head over to his crotch.

Are you kidding me? She really has no clue what I want her to do now? Has this broad ever had any of her girlfriends teach her about a thing or two about stuff like this? This ditsy damn broad is killing me!

Then Sam realized it might have had something to with Jane not having any friends to begin with. Except for her looks, she was just that bland

and uninteresting. She was built for sex, but had the mind of an eight year old; except when it came to complaining, then she had the mind of an old nag. Sam was beginning to feel completely hollow and pointless around this woman. There was just no way of building up any passion nor lust with her, because the woman just wasn't born with the hormones. Seeing this, Sam began to feel like he was dating a mannequin, and he began to wonder why he was even dating this damn dame at all.

> Damn prude! Every damn woman in my life has been just another example of how worthless they are to us in the end. No good, and worthless.
>
> And if they ain't a lousy bunch of good-for-nothing ditsy dames, they're evil—I tell ye—evil!
>
> I remember when I was eighteen years old, when I had my cherry popped, it was with this harpy of a woman. Actually, the story begins earlier when I was fourteen. Dopey stupid kid I was back then, in middle school, who fell for a freckled redheaded girl—I got a thing for redheads—named Lucile. She was really a good-looking gal, but in a funny way. She looked like some wooden puppet you'd find with a ventriloquist act, meaning, she had all the characteristics simply of a wooden puppet: with her eyes all wide and open, with pupils that could only move horizontally. Rosy, red cheekbones, all stiff and stuck in a smiling position, making her smile look like that of some dastardly villain from some movie....
>
> Which really should have been my first clue she was no-good! Really should!
>
> And when she'd open her mouth, she'd start flapping it open and shut, making everything she'd say sound over exaggerated. But... even still, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, I guess? Even with all those funny features, I felt keen for her, and I started carrying a torch for her, and tried getting her attention, every chance I got. And—boy—was she the direct and mean type! I'd go up to her, and try chatting her up, shooting the bull, doing anything to get her to

look at me, but she'd just brush me off, like I was dandruff on her shoulder. That. And one time, she did look at me, and just said: 'Go away you ugly cornball—shoo—get!' And picked up the janitor's broom, and started hitting me with it, like I was some pesky rat running behind a wainscoting, which made all the kids around laugh at the sight.

You have to love children! What you have is basically a person, without any inhibitions, which allows them to express their true nature—to the fullest! And when you have truly evil people, you'll only truly see how evil they really are when they're children. At least on the surface.

But anyways, I was such a clueless gullible little moron back then, that I continued to try and go after this no-good lousy dame, even after failing multiple times, as she kept giving me the brush. And, I remember I used to have daydreams in the classroom: where I was going to perform the one great feat, to show her how much I loved her... well, how a fourteen-year-old sees love, I guess. The daydream was, she would get kidnapped, by a bunch of mobsters, by the likes of Jimmy Cagney. Who'd all then try to force her into prostitution. And what I would do is go at them, and try to save her.

Silly kids and their silly imaginations! Damn mobsters, kidnapping a little girl, and forcing her into....

I kill myself, thinking back to how dumb and silly I was. I'd keep having these ignoramus daydreams, and the point of the fantasy, I guess, was, I would rush in to save her, and die trying. And the fantasy was... I had to die. I had to die. I had to! Showing her how much I was willing to sacrifice, just to let her know how much I really felt about her. How brave I was, how tough I was, all the things, I really....

Sam had a pause, then, but then went back to his story.

And the idea of dieing for her, felt like the greatest privilege and honor that could ever be bestowed upon me. As long as she saw it,

and understood it, understood how much I cared.

What a chump I was back then... what a chump!

Sam then began frowning the length of the Mississippi, as he got really depressed.

So fucking stupid! Damn was I a stupid little moron back then, for dreaming up such nonsense—damn was I so! And all for what? An evil heartless bitch like her!

Sam then remembered what happened next.

Of all the lousy stupid things to do, then! I then thought, maybe....

Maybe....

Maybe... if I told her this little fantasy of mine, maybe? It would win her over....

Oh, was I a moron back then, that deserved having what happened next. For when I did—when I told her—there was this pause... as the stupidity of it all sank in. She looked at me, straight, started hacking up a luggie, and then... spat straight into my face, and began laughing, like some devil woman would.

That did something to me, there. My stupid little fourteen-year-old heart broke right then and there. And if you ask me—I deserved it! But, at the time, I felt like slamming my fist in her face, as hard as I could. I felt it! I felt like doing it, so bad! So fucking bad! But I didn't. Even though I should have, now that I think about it. She's just a stupid dame, and when they're like that, a man needs to set them straight.

Well, anyways, years passed, and I wasn't such a little moron anymore—but I sorta was—whenever it came to them. That bitch set me all crooked with dames. I just couldn't build up much interest in them anymore... that is until I confronted her again. About the time I was graduating, she had some football quarterback as her boyfriend, which she used to flaunt around to the other gals, to make them jealous. Some square-jawed, 6'2,

blond as hell, prettyboy, with a chest all puffed up, and flying high, like some Goodyear blimp. Well… whatever! I couldn't care less! I hadn't talked, nor looked at her, in years. But then all of a sudden, she started noticing me around, and started staring at me, while I would ignore her. At the time, I was a real hot-headed punk kid, really no-good, and I would knock anyone's block off, if they even said 'hello' to me the wrong way. At the time, I didn't know why she was all of a sudden paying attention to me, because, I had zero interest in her, and cared less about that whole high school thing that goes on: over proms, and school spirit, and whatever other meaningless crud teenagers like to come up with. I was more interested in politics, and the stuff that was going on in the real world, not the phony world teenagers build for themselves, in high school, living in a damn fantasy, inside a bubble, that's eventually going to burst once they'd graduate, and head out into the real world. I cared about the stuff happening in Germany, and Japan, and in Russia with the Soviets, and the possibilities of another world war—that's what's important!

Well, whatever! That Lucile girl then started staring at me, straight on, to get my attention—I guess? As I'd just roll my eyes at her, wanting nothing to do with it.

And then one day… I get tackled by three guys in the boy's locker room, while I'm changing, and not paying much attention, and get dragged to the boiler room, in my boxers, to find that boyfriend of hers, with his arms folded up, and Lucile looking all crazed and wild-eyed, waiting for me down there.

Yeah! This happened! Didn't know what the hell was going on, but then she starts accusing me of having been a peeping tom, she caught outside of her bedroom window. A peeping tom of all things! And when she told me to scat, I had went in, and had tried to have my way with her, and almost did, until she started screaming for help. Crazy made-up nonsense you'd see and hear in movies! She was all breathing hard, with her eyes blazing out, like headlights on a runaway car, telling that to this lumbering

square-jawed idiot boyfriend of hers, as he began stirring up with spit. I couldn't believe it! Hadn't spoken, nor looked, nor done anything, to this damn dame in years, and now this is what I was getting?

Well, that all-star hero and his three goons tried to rush me, then, but little did they know I'm actually pretty good at taking care of myself, in moments like these.

Boy! I'll tell ye—that moment? When I heard her trying to make me out as a Patsy, and accuse me of being a rapist and a pervert—I tell ye—I went nuts! Are you fucking kidding me? You little fucking bitch! Fucking cunt! I ripped into those four like there was no tomorrow. Yeah! Go ahead, send out football players at me, thinking that's going to make a difference. In the streets, I'm a real hardboiled egg, I've had punks coming at me from every which direction with baseball bats, brass-knuckles, pipes, knives, tire irons, slapjacks, the works! And I've survived it all. At that moment, I really tore into those tools. And once I was done, I eyed Lucile like a madman, and felt like turning on her next. That is until I noticed something very peculiar about her reaction to what I did to her loverboy, there.

She wasn't scared, nor upset, not even concerned with the fact that I had really bashed her dreamboat up into pieces. I mean, I really almost did him in. And later, someone had to call the hospital, when he eventually dragged himself out of that boiler room, after he came to. She wasn't even concerned with him in the slightest, not even enough to try and help him in that time of need. The poor guy having to drag himself out, and have some teacher notice the condition he was in, to call for help. Instead of doing everything you'd expect from a caring—or even with just a person with some human decency—would do! Instead, all she did was stare at me, like she had fallen head-over-heels in love. Panting like an animal and eyeing me like a piece of meat.

As for me... I felt completely beside myself. Are you fucking

kidding me? So, this is what it takes to really send a dame? She taught me everything there was to a woman, and what sends them, in that moment alone, and I felt like I didn't want any part of it. Well, I left then, left her and those four idiots, and went back to the boy's locker room to finish getting dressed. And for the next few weeks, everywhere I turned, I saw Lucile at some corner, smiling, like she couldn't get enough of me.

Well... I'll tell ye, somehow this bitch managed to break my heart, twice, now a second time, showing me how despicable and heartless a woman can be. Really made me see how much all that lovey-dovey crap you see in the movies is really meant for the birds. And once I came to that understanding, I saw her again in a different light. It was in a hallway, I saw her eyeing me, like she just couldn't wait for me to give her the time, and at that moment I decided to go ahead and do so. And I did.

I figured, I might as well get something out of it. But... I really wasn't feeling it... even though I had my cherry popped, and all, I wasn't feeling it, one bit. So, the next day, when she ran up to me, before class, to try and set up another date, I guess?

I just dumped her right then, and began eyeing some blonde opening up her locker behind her. And made sure she'd notice, so she'd get the fact I found her as a lesser. And had found something else. Better!

Sam never saw of Lucile after that.

So... that's really the truth of it. Funny how when I was younger I had an opinion about women when it came to... well? You know? Their situation in the world. How they're not exactly considered as equals.

But, now I see why things are the way they are. And now, sometimes, I can't even look at them as normal human beings, because, you need a heart and soul for that. And I know they don't

have either of those, since, they're not capable of love. My own mother left me and my dad behind for another man, some J.P. Morgan type, powerbroker, from Wall Street, just because she got sick of the old couth and his moments. I mean, why stick with some broken down jalopy, when you could be heading out into town in a brand-new Cadillac convertible, cherry… am I right? Ha ha!

Sam then paused, as he frowned, so hard, his mouth nearly fell clean right off his face. And then having just thought about Lucile, and his mother, Sam remembered the third woman in his life, that really sealed his opinion about them. His judgement. On women.

This was 'strike three' for Sam. This last woman was his 'strike three'.

Ah crud! Jesse… Jesse something? What was her last name… actually, Jesse was short for something, what was it, I don't remember.

Jesse Something was the blonde Sam was now remembering, the next woman she was with, after that whole Lucile business.

What a nutjob! What a loony dame, she ended up being. As if getting with her on the rebound after Lucile was any better.

For, unlike Lucile, even though putting up with that broad's manipulative ways, at least he never had to get physical with her. And, physical, the bad way.

All we did was fight. And fight! And, I had never put my hands on a woman, until I started courting this Jesse Something! All she'd do is whine and moan about women's issues. As if she expected me to do something! Sorry, honey, the world is a lousy place for every one of us! I'm still trying to fight my own battles. So, forgive me, for I don't have time to then take up fighting yours.

I remember that one night she got drunk. And broke a bottle over a table, and tried to come after me with her new nigger knife.

I had never placed a hand on a woman, until this moment. And once I did, I really let her have it. Pop, goes the weasel, and all!

Crazy fucking dame, and what did making her bleed do?

It turned her on! Actually turned her on, can you believe that?

And then she'd wanted to blow me for an hour!

And for the next four months of Sam and Jesse Something's relationship, that was all that was to be expected. Jesse pushing Sam too far, and Sam… putting her down, by smacking her around senseless.

Fuck women! Fuck all of them! She took it there, I didn't! And now I can see….

Really, they need to be put down. Like the fucking mutts they are! Fucking dogs. Bitches! In the end, the only good they can ever amount to is being a trophy, really! Trophies, for fellers, like that quarterback high school hero, who can place them up on his mantel to pride himself with. A price, for the crème-de-la-crème in men, which has to be earned, by fighting off other men, with your barehands. That, or you can just buy them like some meat at a butcher shop. And if you want the finest grade A meat, you can have it, as long as you gots the dough for it. They're trophies, and nothing more! And should be kept as that… since, if left to their own devices, they're evil! I tell ye, evil! They're weak, heartless, and cruel! So what else can you expect from those ingredients? And then there's the fact that they can have a way with stupid men, men like that quarterback, and his buddies, there, and circumstances like those now scare me. Stupid men, that would go to any length, to be their knights in shining armor, and save them. Even if it takes them to the pits of hell to do so.

Sam now thought of Jesse, and how that woman had also manipulated him, in her own unique way. The things men will do for a woman, going to hell and back… and… question, was it all worth it?

No way, no how!

Fuck women!

Either they're evil, or too stupid to be such. A bunch of stupid animals, like this ditsy dame, Jane, I got here.

Sam then eyed Jane, who was staring at herself in the mirror, while

fixing up her hair, and then thought:

> I hate women!

But then thought:

> But, at least, I guess Jane, here, is too stupid not to be trusted. Not the Lucile or Jesse Something type. And I won't have to worry about her ever trying to pull the wool over my eyes, and trying to use me to her own gain.

And then felt… at least some level of compassion for her.

Salvador Dali.

As for Saturday and Sunday, Sam would feel like he had no drive to do anything, but sit, and listen to the radio: flicking from program to program, trying to find something that would get his attention. And when something would catch his ear, he'd listen, from beginning to end, and then, forget everything he had just heard, the very next minute.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, it went on like this. Life had become like seconds ticking away on a grandfather clock, as his world grew slower and slower, as he began to wonder—to what end?

> At the time, before it started, I had gone to the Museum of Modern Art… without Jane, although. I felt like I was going to hang myself hearing her mope about her stupid family again.
>
> And, it was that one famous painting of Dali's, that struck me funny, struck me all peculiar, with interest. That one with the clocks looking like sunny side up eggs, all soft, and… just tired looking. Something struck me funny about that piece, as the piece started having an effect on me, in a strange way. Tell you the truth, I don't like his work. That surrealistic crap? Just feels like he's trying to pull one over on me, making me see more into it than there really is. Honestly, I see it no different from a con job. Art, that is! When you're trying to hustle money out of some sucker, some sap, some pushover, that starts to really buy into the bull you're shelling.

And ‘how?’ you might ask. Wondering how the con is supposed to work. Well….

It’s pretty simple, since all cons are the same. The art of a con job is all the same, works the same, all having to do with confusing some poor sap, into thinking what they’re buying into, has any real value. That their work is a work of genius. When, I’m pretty sure, the artist, himself, might not even know what he’s got there, know a damn thing about what he’s created. He doesn’t know! He’s not even sure if it’s really any good, or not. But he needs dough like the rest of us do, needs money to live. So, he’ll sell his crap, and blow it up into it being something truly grand, even when it isn’t, just for the clams. Someone once said that ‘all art is worthless,’ and… I believe in that. I do! Most of it is crap, if you ask me. Some is pretty to look at, I won’t deny that! But, not worth all the money and attention that’s put in hanging them in some giant building, like a museum, having better housing accommodations than some poor tramp on the street would have. Personally, if you gave me a million bucks, I still wouldn’t spend a dime on any of it. Especially that one Mona Lisa, that’s just some so-so looking broad, half smiling at me, and giving me a shrug. I mean! Not a dime! But I guess a sucker is born every minute. Buying into that crud. And the only thing that would get me to buy it, is, so I could sell it, for much, much more dough. To the suckers that do put value in all this art stuff.

As for Dali.

As for his work, especially, I can’t stands! I really can’t! I don’t like any of his work, it’s so many confusing things going on in there, so much left to be interpreted. So much guess work, trying to interpret the lousy symbolism: soft melted clocks, hung dreamy faces, scary looking long legged elephants walking all over the place. And Jesus is somewhere there, too, also trying to make sense out of what in the world is going on. That’s right! That’s what’s gotten Dali so much attention, his work is so surreal, and out there, and farfetched—and full of itself! It can even confuse Jesus Christ! In its stupid lousy symbolism, interpretations of what’s going on. Pull one over His eyes.

Simply put, Dorian hated what he was seeing, simply because he didn't get it.

Ah, this art crap is a bunch of malarkey!

And then, all of a sudden, as Sam continued staring at that one piece, and then read the name of it:

'The Persistence of Memory'… all right… whatever!

It was then, it was then, then! It hit him, and Sam got it.

What the… it's all so meaningless.

Thought Sam, then.

Everything! It's all empty, and hollow, and meaningless….

And it was at that very second, the grandfather clock in Sam, stopped ticking. And became stuck, stuck at this very second, stuck at this very moment, stuck on this image of Dali's, of clocks hung all around. And then… a memory from childhood began to repeat over and over again in his mind, a memory of himself, going around and around on a carousel. And at that second….

Ah….

A horror set in, that terrified Sam to his foundation. Almost had him start with the convulsion business, himself, that of his father's, as he found his jaw opening and shutting, violently, trying to escape the feeling.

Ah, God, help me!

Thought Sam, as he then looked at Dali's work, again, and felt like tearing it down, and ripping it up into shreds.

It's all so meaningless, it's a parade of meaninglessness, orchestrated all around, and….

"Ahh," screamed Sam, as he alerted a few patrons around him.

"Excuse me, are you all right," asked a security guard at the museum that walked up to him.

Sam then just gawked at him, then around, and then felt keen to straight up walk out of the joint.

It was then….

It was then….

It was then… that Sam began to take on another phase in his life, that

really began to trouble him. Days later, Sam realized he was beginning to lose sleep; he was now suffering from insomnia. And what really troubled him about all this was how partial he had grown to those hours where he didn't have to spend every last waking second feeling so restless and directionless. Feeling a multitude of emotions, going around and around inside of him. All so meaninglessly. Around and around, almost to no end. He enjoyed going to sleep, and feeling his mind simply shut off, and not have to spend another moment feeling all that. And as time went on and on, he found himself sleeping less and less; he'd lay there in his bed and stare at the ceiling, and then grow enraged to see the morning come.

Day after day, week after week, this was the horseshit he had to put up with now. One week, Sam was hardly able to get a wink of sleep the entire time; going almost seven agonizing, drowsy, painstaking days straight, of being fully alert, and infuriated by his predicament. He'd lie there and try to force his mind to just shut off, but the harder he tried, the more awake he'd feel, and the less likely he then felt he could manage to make it happen. After that week, Sam decided to tell Jane what was going on in his life, to see if he could get some type of sympathy or care from the goody-two-shoes Puritan. But all she did then was complain about how her mother would use alcohol as an excuse for inducing sleep, since she also supposedly suffered from insomnia.

> "Your mother drinks booze to knock herself out," Sam had asked.
> "Well, that's been one of her excuses. But, Sam, don't you try that now! I've heard that can create some very nasty side effects," Jane had responded.

Of course, the second Sam had heard that (well, after he dropped Jane off) he then went immediately to a liquor store to buy himself some booze. First night, he drank up a quarter bottle of Vodka, and found himself drifting off to sleep within the hour. It felt good. He continued doing this for a week straight, but then realized he needed to up the ante if he wanted to continue having the same effect. After the end of the second week, he found himself drinking half a bottle a day to keep it up. This was beginning to have an ugly effect on him, as he realized (trying not to think about the fact that Jane had told him so) he wasn't really

able to sleep well, for he was simply knocking himself out. And for those hours he was out, he didn't feel like he was getting that rejuvenated feeling, of how normal sleep felt. One night, Sam tried to simply fall asleep on his own, and he found himself spending that entire night just as widely awake as ever. He had to continue.

By the end of the third week, it was two-thirds of a bottle before he could pass out. And after a month of doing this, Sam was drinking an entire bottle of whiskey, and wanting more. By the time a month and a half had passed, Sam was drinking almost two bottles a night, and, once again, he wasn't able to sleep. The alcohol was now making him nauseatingly sick to his stomach, as he began having convulsions of his own, trying to force it down. After spending one entire night throwing up, while at the same time, trying to force more Vodka back in, he keeled over, threw up all over the floor, and was out. When he came to, he found himself in the hospital. His father had finally caught on to what he was doing, but, said nothing, didn't bust his chops at all over the matter, as he drove him home the next day.

Damn robot!

Sam was still living with his father, and he had tried to hide these activities as long as he could. Luckily, Sam wasn't one of those stupid loud drunks, and that's how he had managed to hide it so well. He never liked those stupid loud drunkard types, and he always felt he had total control over himself, even in the pits of inebriation. After returning home, he gave up the booze, knowing it wasn't going to work anymore, and then spent an entire three and a half weeks, straight, without sleep.

Those three and a half weeks were some of the worst days in his life, as Samuel Francis Dorian felt like he was on the verge of losing his mind, completely! It was like that Dali painting.

Ah crud! That damn painting... the Persistence of Memory.

And the hidden meaning that Sam had discovered within it, that began to cause all this. All the time in the world now felt stuck within him, as he'd lay there, wide awake, having to deal with the same thoughts and emotions, again, and again, and again, and again. Spinning! Spinning and spinning! Faster and faster! And now, Sam felt his mind rushing

what felt like a trillion light years a second, looping around and around, that terrified the crap out of him, as those thoughts and emotions also grew furious of repeating themselves, and started growing demonic.

What is this, what's going on, what are these things?

It was like a carousel in his mind, and Dorian hated carousels, absolutely hated them. Hated! Ever since he was a kid….

Ever since his father had taken him to Coney Island as a child, and had made him ride one. As all the other children laughed and cheered, riding around and around and around and around, Sam felt dizzy, and terrified…

as he got his first glimpse into what insanity might be like.

Spinning and spinning, in no direction, as the terror inside, grew deeper and deeper. Sam, as a child, then, had started screaming at the top of his lungs, as they had to stop the carousel, and nearly crowbar the child off the porcelain horse.

And even then, a year on out, the child had had night terrors, having just thought about that one ride. Night terrors, of experiencing that one moment, again and again.

And now, again, as an adult, experiencing it all over, as everything around him started taking on the nature of Dali's work.

> The world looks different to my eyes now, it looks different… vacant! I guess would be the word. I look at objects around me, and they're there, but not there. They're hollow. The world itself terrifies me now. And you know why? Because its round. Yes, I look at the world, and it being round now terrifies me—can you believe this crap! Just the idea of being on a rock, spinning out of control, hurling through space, going around and around a giant ball of fire, it terrifies me. And… I don't even get the sense of what up or down is anymore. This is a weird one, but, I feel like I need to know which way truly is up, and which way truly is down. Like right and wrong, there has to be a sense of it, there has to be—has to be! And, as simple as that might seem to answer, it's not,

because with the earth turning, I'm practically standing upside down, from where I was a mere 12 hours ago. I've moved, and I need to know positioning. But, I don't! Because up isn't really up, and down isn't really down, when you're in space. And the skies scare me for how vast they are, so much void. And vacant. Going on and on and on, and… which way is up or down? Which way? Which way is right… and which way is wrong? I don't want to be upside down!

Fuck, if I was in Antarctica, I'd lose my mind completely.

I don't understand why, but I don't want to be standing straight in the wrong direction. It's not supposed to be that way!

And if all that crazy nonsense isn't enough, everyone around me terrifies me too. Like those damn Dali works, everything now has some sort of symbolism behind it, and symbolism into things—I don't fucking understand! I can't just look at a person, and see them, anymore, I see objects inside of them, supposedly, representing things, I don't understand. I look at their eyes, and I don't see windows to a man's soul, but… I don't know how to explain it. Like yokes, of an egg. Aborted chicken fetuses. I mean, I still see eyes… physically, they still look like eyes, but in representation, they're not anymore. And that's just the start. Then there's people's behaviors, and they seem very… alien… to me, too. I don't understand them anymore. They say things, they joke about things, then they look at me, and wait for me to laugh, but I'll start staring at their teeth, then, and how hungry they look. And then, I see things I can only imagine what a child first sees in the world, when he or she is first born into it. And how terrifying it must all look, seeing the faces of his or her parents smile at them, when they're first born, and the child screams in terror, seeing their teet and getting the sense for the first time in their lives of that of being a living creature, in a world, where he or she could be eaten.

Even by one's mom and dad.

I can't stop thinking about this stuff, I can't escape from it. And it's starting to terrify the crap out of me.

Everything is just so meaningless, my life is complete shame, now. A cowardly shame! There would have been meaning if I had just enlisted, and gone and done what was expected of me. I'm not on the ordain path in life, I should be on. No! This is the wrong path! I'm upside down, going in circles, headed in the wrong direction. Oh God, it would have been better if I had gone, and done what was expected of me, instead of what my father expected of me. Gone, served my country, and even died! I should have died! Died—yes—died! For that, still, would have still been better than this!

After two weeks straight without sleep, Sam Dorian didn't even know what he was thinking half the time, anymore. As he felt like a stranger in his own mind. He had no control of it, nor, did he want to, for whatever that was going on, was truly horrifying him beyond all measures.

Oh God, what is all this, who are all these… spirits?
Are they spirits… gods… demons?
Waging war within me… are they waging war… no!
Now they're not.
Now they're talking.
Now they're… wait… what are they talking about?
God, please, what's going on in my mind?

And then all of a sudden, a rush of images and sounds and emotions would expand in his head, cracking it open like a chick, cracking out of its egg. The little chick would then run around aimlessly, born headless, then age, then fall down dead. Then another egg would be laid from the stump of its neck, and the process would repeat over and over and over again. Repeat. And repeat again!

So meaningless! This is not how the world is supposed to be like.
None of this is making any sense.

But then a thought occurred to Dorian, that truly terrified him, to his

foundation.

Oh God, what if this is the true world I live in? And, I'm now seeing it, how it should be, truly, for the first time....

I... now... am truly awake...?

What if this is the truth of it, and everything I knew before was false? Oh God! This is all making me wish I was never born at all! I don't want this to be the true world, I don't want it! Everything terrifies me now! I can't live like this... in this world... I can't! I....

Dorian was in a subway station, and at this point, he saw a car coming in. And....

It was then....

Dorian almost felt himself jump onto the track, to end it all.

Oh God! No! Don't do it! Don't!

But, luckily for him, he hadn't. And he was saved, by whatever grace, that kept him doing, what his mind was now demanding.

Day passing...
Night passing...
It didn't matter....

And then, on one night of his insomnia, laying there unable to sleep in the dark, Sam Dorian's mind had then suddenly—spiked—as it lunged him out of bed, and out of his house, like a possessed person. Dorian was now in a frenzy, as he shot out, and started wandering the street.

And then, the next night, again.
And then, again!

After some time, Dorian felt like an apparition, almost, roaming the endless nothing, until the morning hours, and then to be looped back again. The world seemed like an alien place to him; a vicious and cruel and unforgiving place, existing between spaces, and unaware of its own

presence. Like the moon above, it was an inhospitable world where only the soulless could survive. With never any peace!

Never! Any! Peace! Of mind! Ever!

And as he'd walk before these streets, as if on the dark side of the moon, through these dismally lit meandering streets, he'd also watch faceless strangers pass him by, that seemed like himself, but only on the surface. He'd watch... these....

Fedora people!

These Fedora people... pass him by... like abandoned ships, passing in the night.

Who are you people? Where do you come from? What do you want from me?

Wait... am I really on the moon...?
No, no, no... is this the moon...?
Is it?
Is it?
Are these... Moon Peop—...?

Oh God! I'm losing my mind here! They're just normal people, walking about, that I'm imaging are ghosts, aliens, Moon or Fedora People, on the freaking moon, or something. That's all it is! They're not judging me for being a—I'm not a coward!

Oh God! Help me! Please let me sleep!

And then, as Sam's ears began to narrow down onto their whispers, coming out of their twisting and contorting mouths, he'd imagine hearing white-nose, their esoteric messages, which Dorian imagined, then, as being enigmas into his own fate.

Enigmas into my own fate? What type of crazy fucking nonsense is that? My mind is just playing tricks on me. They're not really speaking to me. And if they are, they're just normal folks, wondering who this man is, staring at them....

But wait! What are they saying about me? Do they think I'm mad?

I'm not mad! I don't want to be mad! I'm not mad! I just can't sleep!

Sam's mind would then fork into a hundred directions, as he'd desperately try to cipher their coded babble, obsessing with what their incoherent tales might have to tell about him, into his own inner being.

Stop it, Sam! Stop it! They're not saying anything! They're just a bunch of normal nite owls, walking about—they're not ghosts—able to read my—

And then all of a sudden, he physically heard one speak out to him:

"We see you, Sam—we see you!
And we can hear you, too!
And one day... you'll understand... and become one of us...."

Sam
Sam... Sam/Sam...?

Then began perpetually screaming and wailing, in everlasting terror. Hands place on the sides of his head, squeezing with all his might, as if to crush in his own skull in. Doing so, as he saw one of The Fedora People pass him by, and fade away into oblivion.

I don't want to go mad!
I don't want to go mad!
I don't want to go mad!
I don't want to go mad!
I don't want to go mad!
I don't want to go mad!
I don't want to go mad!

Help me, God! I don't want to go mad and become one of them!

One night, after what felt like a million years of endless wandering, Dorian was stopped by some flat-foot walking the beat. Being shot back into reality, Dorian gazed at this new apparition, and noticed, the man seemed worried about his condition.

"Son, are you okay? You scared the bejeezus out of me, there, for a second, and I thought I was seeing a ghost," expressed the copper.

But then, Sam's eyes began to narrow down onto his holstered weapon,

as he then had the most dreadful urge to reach for it... and... do God knows what with it.

Sometime later, during the day, he had a similar moment with his girl Jane. Coming over to visit him, Jane tried to comfort him, by complaining about her crazy brother in prison. But then Sam's eyes began to narrow down to her tits, and he then had a dreadful urge to sink his teeth into them... and do... God knows what again.

This went on for a while, all like this, during those weeks of insomnia, as his life felt like it was in a tailspin, spiraling out of control, down into the nothingness, of his own being.

But then....

He came back up again. Those three and a half weeks came and went, and Dorian had survived it, as his mind finally collapsed into peaceful slumber.

And after a while, time began to do its magic, slowly restoring all, and building back up all: his sanity. And, after it was all over, Sam was again sleeping his usual fourteen-hour days, and he was simply thankful to God for that.

But then....

Something else happened, that took him to the next phase in his life.

Returning home, after spending another enchanting night (obvious hint of sarcasm all present) out with his girl Jane, Sam returned to see the neighbors all clamoring about in front of his apartment door. They were all calling each other out, trying to get one another to go on ahead, and knock, and to see if old man Dorian would answer. They all seemed startled by something, and were wondering, if old Joe inside was all right.

> "Sam, Sam," called out old Miss. Seldowitz, "we heard a shot fired from inside your home, and we don't know what might have

happened."

Sam didn't know what to think or feel at this point. But, he knew, he had to do something. And, as he rushed over to the door, he then heard Jane call out to him.

"Sam! What if there's an intruder inside, still? He might have a gun!"

Sam hesitated for a second, but then, decided to throw precaution to the wind, for if there was an intruder inside, armed with a gun, then, his father was definitely in danger. As he unlocked the door, he quickly entered the apartment, and turned directly right, into the kitchen. Sam wanted to get to his baseball bat, that was lying up against the fridge. As he picked it up, he exited the kitchen, and began to scour with his eyes to see if anything was off. The living roomed seemed almost peaceful, like there was never a shot fired, nor did it seem like there could be an intruder hiding somewhere in the premises. The old radio was on, and it was tuned to a mystery thriller called the Whistler.

"Pop, where are you," called out Sam.

But all Sam heard was the Whistler, doing his bit:

> *"I am the Whistler, and I know many things, for I walk by night. I know many strange tales, hidden in the hearts of men and women who have stepped into the shadows. Yes, I know the nameless terrors of which they dare not speak."*

This was becoming a little bit too unnerving for Sam, as he began to feel esoteric vibes, coming from his own familiar home. Looking about, and seeing surroundings, he no longer felt familiar with. Very similar to how he felt about a lot of things, during those three and a—

Don't make me think about that crazy shit, again! Not again, EVER!

Sam then decided to head into his father's room. He stepped up to the door, opened it, and as he tried to enter, he saw his father there, sitting.

The Carousel: Part One.

Samuel Francis Dorian was a Private now. After that night, Sam had gone straight to an Army recruiter, and had enlisted himself. And a short while later, he was sent to Fort Jackson, where he received his

basic training. And after twelve weeks of rigorous training, he was attached the 116th Regiment, of the 29th Infantry, as he sailed to England to join them.

Now, it was June 6, 1944. Sam was in an amphibious transport called a Higgins Boat; headed for the beaches of Normandy. He was headed for Omaha Beach, as part of Operation Overload.

Operation Overload?

Thought Private Dorian, as he began to wonder if the name might be an indicator as to what he was getting himself into. He wasn't looking for an easy fight, and he was hoping for something truly intense. Up until now, he'd been rearing himself to spearhead full on into this war, and get the sense of valor and honor and glory, he had been craving for, since the war began. Since Pearl Harbor.

And now, since basic training, while on the boat ride to England, and while getting himself familiar with his regiment, he had spent all that time fixated on these thoughts, and nothing but these thoughts, alone. Nothing else mattered to him of what had come before.

He was now 'born again,' into this new world, where everything he had been waiting for could now be obtained.

Nothing before mattered. He had said good-bye to his girl Jane, and had totally forgotten about her the next day. He had already spent too much of his life idly wasting his time, while the rest of his peers had heard the call, and had answered it. There was nothing to look back to now, he no longer had a past, and all his life was set in front of him, in his future.

> "Hey, Dorian! You daydreaming, or what? How about you stop fucking around back there, and give us a hand," called out Captain James T. Waye, motioning him to take his helmet off, and help the rest of the men deal with the Higgin's boat taking on water.

The Captain was the company commander of Private Dorian's regiment, and he was a mountainous looking man, of muscle, and menace, and ardent fire; everything a man of Private Dorian's generation would idolize. Of course, it can't go without mentioning, that the man's name sounded very close to being that of John Wayne's

(mostly because of his last name) and it also can't go without mentioning, that it might have helped to paint everyone in the company of that image. Even though he looked nothing like that actor. The Captain was a Texasboy, a real cowboy, all corn-fed, and looking like a price winning bull, but stood up right. He was all blond and blue eyed. And he had a face that looked lost somewhere in the vast regions of his jaw and forehead. And when he'd bellow out in fiery anger, at one of his Privates, in disapproval, of that Private's military bearing (more so the lack thereof), if you were that Private So-and-so, you knew—that meant your ass! For you knew you only then had a second or two of warning, before he'd march on over to you, and just about beat the ever-loving crud out of you, and then beat, in, some of that military bearing, that he'd be expecting.

Actually, back in England, Private Dorian had already crossed him, once; had fucked up something royally, and had his company commander, here, personally introduce himself as such, as he marched over, punched Dorian in the bread-basket, and then, grabbed him, and flung his ass around and around, and into a rosebush. And especially one, that had not been groomed of its thorns, as of yet. The company had then laughed, and even beforehand, Private Dorian couldn't help but crack a smile, as he saw the lovable big ogre march over to him, and place his hands on him, as he did, sending his ass headlong into that thorny painful mess. Usually, it should have been a Sergeant's job acting as such, with other enlisted men. But the Captain had made it his personal responsibility to let everyone know who was in charge there! And, there was that one time, one of his own Sergeants had made an objection, and the Texasboy had even laid his hands on him, and had knocked out two of his teeth, of course, when none of the lower ranking enlisted men were looking.

But, of course, which we all heard about, later.

Even still, even with all that 'physical affection,' the company still loved him, and so did Dorian. The Texasboy just had that way with his people. He wasn't a cruel man, he was just a good ol' boy, and for him, punching a man in the face was just common means of argument. Uncouth like, maybe? But not uncivil.

I guess punching someone in the face, in Texas, is just another

ways to say 'hello.' Ha!

Everyone loved him, even if he left half his men with black eyes, and broken noses, after he was finished with them.

"Why you—Dorian! Private! If I don't see you hauling ass to get this fixed, I'm coming back there, and throwing you overboard!"

If this was back in England, where the company was doing drills, the boys would have all been laughing hysterically right now; hearing their Captain go off like that. But, this wasn't England, and the company was only a short distance away from touching down on Omaha beach. The company fell dead silent, as even the Captain seemed a bit unnerved as to what was about to happen.

Overcast skies over the English Channel….

And it was an extremely cold and windy morning, that had its moments of rain. Taking a look around him, Private Dorian stared into the faces of the men he was about to go to war with, and they seemed a bit… strange… to him. Private Dorian had been building himself up for this moment, for what seemed like all his life; yet, most of the men around him didn't seem to be in the same mindset; set in their ways, with the same level of conviction. The expressions on their faces seemed distant, and dreary, and it reminded him of his old man… for some strange reason. Practically all his life he'd seen his father with that same exact distant and dreary look in his face. And he was beginning to question their resolve, this company of his, here, as Dorian now felt inclined to compare it to his.

"Hey, Hollingsworth," called out Private Dorian, as he stared intensively into his face.

But the mouse didn't answer.

"Look alive— all right," barked out Dorian.

And then looking at Hollingsworth again, he then all of a sudden gained this eerie sense…

as if…

he wasn't going to be seeing him on the other side. Once the doors opened.

Hollingsworth then began to eye Dorian, from the side, began to really give Dorian all his undivided attention. And Dorian could now notice just how much the man was scared shitless, for what was about to happen, as he shivered in fear.

And then…
All of a sudden…
A level of disgust began to bubble up in the Private's stomach, and began boiling in its acids.

Fucking coward!

Thought Dorian, then, as he realized there was something also infectious about the man's presence. That disgust, Dorian felt, there, in his gut, was now also making him feel what Hollingsworth was feeling. This infectious rat was not only marked for death, as Private Dorian saw, he was trying to spread his doom and gloom to all the other's around him. Looking around, Dorian now saw how everyone had that same expression, of doom and gloom, and the same mark sealed over their foreheads, now, as well.

And now… even the good ol' Captain.

"Hollyingsworth—what the fuck are you staring at," questioned Private Dorian, furiously.

But Dorian continued to hear no response. And now, this was really beginning to grow under his skin. Hollingsworth was some half-pint, mousy kid, with eyes way too big for his head; and, with a mouth so small, that it looked to be poked out with a sewing pin. He had this air of Peter Lorre. He was an extremely ugly looking man, with the type of ugliness that couldn't go unnoticed and without mentioning. He seemed glossed over with cold sweat and hot piss, and Dorian wasn't just seeing this, but could also smell it all over him.

Look away, Hollingsworth… just….

And now…
the thing was…
the son-of-a-bitch wouldn't stop staring at Dorian; staring, with those gigantic buggy eyes of his; with his mouth all pinched out, and looking to try and whistle. There was something very ominous lurking in this

Private's eyes, and it was now scaring the crap out of Dorian, as well, as Dorian began to feel his own fate, being sealed with his. And now, Dorian couldn't take it anymore, for the freak would not stop staring at him. And now, Dorian averted his eyes, and his attention, and placed them both on his M1 Garand, in hopes of keeping it safe there.

What? What do I need to be afraid of? If I die—I die! It's that simple! Anything's better than....

What did you mean, pops... what did you mean?

I'm not doing all this for the right reasons... unlike the other boys?

Private Dorian now glanced once more at everyone in the Higgins; waxing over each and every face as he sneered.

No, pops, no!

I'm the only one here—doing it for the right reasons!

Me!

I'm the only one!

I'm the only hero here!

I'm the only righteous one here, with all these stinking, lowlife fucking cowards that I wish to spit on. Spit—on their fucking graves! I'm better than them.

I'm better!

I'm....

And within a second later, a whistle was heard being blown, as the doors to the Higgins' then opened to a surge of rushing water, and then...

followed by a barrage of bullets.

The Higgins had not managed to reach shore, for it was still off by 40 or so yards.

The Carousel: Part Two.

There were thirty men in that Higgins just before those doors opened. And within a second later, there only stood two.

Actually, Private Dorian wasn't even able to stand, as he felt the dead weight of that mook, Hollingsworth, and two other men of his company, topple over him. When the doors had opened, just about everyone in

that boat had been torn to shreds by the focus fire of German machine-gunners. Dorian felt like he was trapped beneath an insurmountable weight. And since they were all carrying loads of gear strapped to them, that weighed about a third of their own weight, Dorian felt helpless under their masses, as he screamed out in frustration, while salt water began rushing into his mouth.

Get the fuck off me you piece-of-shit, Hollingsworth! You're not dragging me down with you!

Dorian felt like he was going to drown under all that weight, held beneath the water line. But then Captain Waye had noticed Dorian's hand stick out from the pile, as he reached in to help. He then grabbed a hold of Dorian's hand, pulled him out, and then threw him over the side. As Private Dorian splashed long and hard into the water, he then saw the Captain dive right after him, to avoid any more barrage of bullets directed into the Higgins. Being in the water felt otherworldly to the Private, as he felt like he had no fixed sense of where he was, and how he got there. Had no sense of up, nor down. And felt helpless, and unable to get around. It was very ethereal like, for him, and in an ugly way. Dorian felt formless. Like a Dali painting. The Private now began to hate it. He almost felt like he had dove into the eyes of that lost and pitiful soul, Hollingsworth. Dorian now tried unbuckling his gear, to free himself some weight. As Dorian did, he finally managed to swim up for air, and as he did, taking a large breath of air, he now found himself, in another place. He found himself on the other end.

Things had changed, settings had changed, and worlds had changed. And it now seemed like Private Dorian was entering the last phase of his life.

The last phase?

Thought Dorian, for, he hadn’t really considered that. Hadn’t really! But… that was what was now happening. This, here, now, was the future he had been waiting for. This world, here, was the world he was now being born again into. He was finally there, at that place, no longer to wait for anything ever again.

There was a line of hedgehogs with GIs cowering behind them, all leaderless, while the high-perched Germans continued to fire. There

was metal and shrapnel by the tens of thousands, flying in like locust, and going ballistic as they'd hit a man, reducing him into human ruins. And then there were flashes of light, here and there, explosions coming from the mortars that were raining down from above, and in their wake, Dorian saw men vanishing into thin air, seeming to have been smitten, like lightning, by God's own finger.

Private Dorian was with his Captain, and as both men began trying to swim ashore, they saw the fortification of German hedgehogs placed in front of them. Some in the water, some on land. They needed to get to them, and get to cover. Eventually crossing the tideline, both men fell into a crouched positioned, reaching the beach. As they reached a hedgehog, both men took cover, as they began to try and catch their breaths.

Wh—what—what do we do now?

Private Dorian was staring into the face of his Captain, as he seemed to be the only one deemed ready for the moment. The Private still felt like he was trapped underneath those waves, and he felt trapped in the eyes of that Hollingsworth. This new world he had entered seemed unreal and terrifying, as he continued to watch men around him torn apart by the Krauts.

This wasn't a war,
or what Dorian thought of war would be like...

this was a slaughterhouse, and men with souls were being butchered around him like cattle.

No—no—no! This isn't what it's supposed to be like!

This wasn't how he had imagined war was going to be. He knew there was going to be death here, but now Dorian was seeing death for what it really was, and not what he understood of it to be. Now, he felt it, felt its true presence. Death wasn't just passing on when one's time came, nor something noble in that sense, how Dorian understood it from the outside in. A disconnected experience. Now, from the inside out...

he saw it as—horror!

He saw the screaming of men around him, as they themselves saw into the eyes of the Reaper, and then, were annihilated by its own hand. The Reaper, was now not just a fantasized figure, something imagined; it had form and presence, and eyes and teeth—especially teeth—as Dorian saw how it hungered to devour all those souls around it. This wasn't how Dorian had imagined war, what he had based it on from movies. Here, it was something felt, in the recesses of one's truest fears.

And what shocked Dorian was how much it reminded him of how he had felt during those three and a half weeks, when he wasn't able to get a wink of sleep, and his mind had shifted to a terrifying place, where evil and maddest ruled supreme.

Dorian was on the moon again.

Where there was no God… and all was evil and darkness. It was like that for Dorian, now, like those three and a half weeks, but amplified tenfold. In a real war, there was no valor, no honor, and no glory.

There was no sacrifice, except being sacrificed.

This was madness, and Private Dorian shook in utter terror, as he realized he was back there again—at that place—except that madness had now been incarnated into the physical world, all around him. Everything seemed to be going a million miles per second. Like on a carousel, spinning and spinning, in unprecedented speeds, spiraling down the same feelings of loss and total abandonment into an oblivion. Here, all that was flesh, was being torn, and torn, and torn, to shreds, and shreds, again and again.

> Barehands!
> Barehands!
> Bare—… wait, who's saying that?

Shreds and shreds and shreds as the screams of those being torn were amplified, louder and louder, until the wails were loud enough to

shatter the physical world around them. This was… hell! Truly hell, in all its description. And for Dorian, like a carousel, spinning faster and faster, while the Reaper watched, and clapped in utter amusement.

Stop—stop! I can't take this! Stop! Please, God, make it stop!

"Private! Don't you give up on me now," screamed out the Captain, as he smacked him across the face, which to the Private, didn't seem to register.

"Dorian!"

But the Captain could see now, in his Private's eyes, the man was put out to green pastures. The Captain then gave up on him, as he then got up, and quickly ran over to group of low ranking personnel. A group of Privates, that had lost all their Sergeants and Officers, that were cowering behind hedgehogs, while looking for leadership.

No… no! Don't give up on me!

As Private Dorian turned his head to look at them, he shook his head then, violently, to get himself out of the line of thought he was in. And when he saw how collected the good Captain still seemed to be, with all hell going on around him, Dorian then began to feel something else, feeling his terror of all that was going on around him, focus inwards, and turn into absolute disgust.

I'm a fucking coward!

Thought Private Dorian. And now, felt the most wretched he had ever felt in his entire life.

That Captain Waye, there, he's the real hero!

Thought Private Dorian, as he grew utterly fixated on him, seeing how he was some of the few, here, willing, to wage it out. Between the madness around, and the good Captain, there, Dorian felt drawn towards him, for it was where Dorian felt safest, and most relaxed. For a second there, it seemed like the good old movies, and John Wayne had come to save the day.

He's what's gonna win us from this. He's what….

But then, reality stepped in, and made its check.

As the Captain tried to rally up some riflemen, and one man with a flamethrower, a shot then came in, that must have hit a fuse line, for a next second, that whole entire spot was engulfed into flames. And then,

as the German machine gunners, up top, focused their fire onto them, a barrage of bullets came in piercing through all the men, as they ran around screaming, while on fire. And then, Private Dorian saw the last of his Captain, as the man ran towards him, engulfed in flames.

A bullet then caught him by his right ear, as half of his head went flying out his left.

The great hero then dropped before Private Dorian's feet, dead, while the flames continued to cook his corpse. Now Private Dorian felt how there was only the madness left, and himself.

"Ahh," screamed the Private, as he began beating his head with his fists.

The image of the Reaper was growing within him, and Dorian now, was beating his head, trying to beat that image out.

Get out! Get out! Get the fuck out of my head!

Looking back at the rest, Dorian saw how Hollingsworth's omen had finally come to pass. Saw it, and saw the results all around him. Private Dorian now felt how his fate and mind was fully merged with that of Hollingsworth.

And then….

No!

Realized, how it was now also fully merged, with that of his father's.

No, no!

Realized, as Dorian began to open and shut his mouth, violently, convulsing, as his father had done. All his life.

No! I don't want this, how things to turn out to be!

That night when Samuel Dorian had come home with his girl Jane. He had found his father in his bedroom, dressed in his old Doughboy uniform, still sitting, with a gun, still clung by his right hand. After twenty or so aught years of living with his memory of his glorious time of service. The man had finally decided to shoot himself through the mouth.

No, no, no! I don't want his fate, not that fate! Not his!

Sam had ran over to his father, and had then fallen shut, as he saw how the man had ended himself. After all the years. After everything. Sam

never knew what devils the man carried, but he had seen then, how the man had decided to deal with them, finally, taking them, and himself, out to his grave. Sam had never had much of a chance to understand his father; since, the old man was such an overly stoic bastard, that never would say anything, and would never express a damn thing he'd feel. Sam never got a chance to know his father, truly and deeply, but now, Sam was beginning to see what he would have meant, if he did. Now, he saw him. Now he felt him. And felt what Sam could now imagine made him the man he was. Or….

The coward that he was.

He saw how, maybe, his father was a man, in a constant state of terror; feeling his own carousel twist and turn within him; twist and burn, in the pits of his own hell, in his own mind. And for twenty years being that way. Twenty years living in sheer hell, and now, here was Sam, joining him.

No! Please no! I don't want that, I don't want this! No… twenty years of this? If I'm to survive… no!

And then something else was felt, with all the sheer terror, and horror, of this whole revelation. Dorian, then, began to feel something else.

What… what's that?

Something strange now was calling to him, calling to Dorian, to get his attention. Something strange felt, within his mitts.

What… what's going on?

He felt them, felt them pulsate, and shake, with anger, and speak to him in a way. Sam felt as if his hands were possessed now, with some animal, or demon, or something, that wanted none of this, none of what his father (Sam was imagining) had. None of that cowardliness, living in sheer terror for that long.

I'm not going to, I'm not going to end up as he did. No! Hell no! Never!

What was that I heard before… 'barehands?'

I think I like that feeling now!

Private Dorian then began to look back around again, over to the men still alive cowering in fear, and decided he wanted nothing to do with these gutless cowards, and their fate. He was going to be the man he set himself out to be, back in New York City. Now he felt it, and now he

understood it; either he could continue cowering crouched under a hedgehog, and let the memory of his father, and the madness around him, seal his fate; or, he could take it all in, and learn to deal with it. Learn how to take control of the madness, and his fate.

With his barehands....
Grab the charging bull by the horns, and steer the enraged animal into the ground.

For the madness wasn't just the dark place in his mind, it was now the real world he was living in. He was seeing that now. Omaha beach with its sands soaked in blood was the real world. Those fascist monsters perched high in their castemates, murdering and imposing fear and death, and madness, into the hearts of good men all over the world, was the real world. Captain James T. Waye, lying dead before Private Dorian's feet, stolen from the glorious chance of becoming a true hero of his own, was the real world. The twisted insanity that spun like a carousel in Private Dorian's mind was the real world, and it was something he needed to take control of. And quick!

If this really was the moon... now... let it be his new home.

That's the truth, that's the answer!
And then all of a sudden, Dorian could swear the skies had opened up, as he felt what he presumed to be a celestial connection. He felt a stream of glory fill his heart, and he felt his mitts glow; becoming the instruments of his own intervention. The only way to conquer the insanity around him, was to impose his own insanity, and take the blood of the men that were out to get his.

I fucking hate them, I need to kill them all! They all need to die for doing this!

His mitts were calling for blood, and they were calling to do their own slaughtering. They wanted to fight horror with horror, and revel in it. They wanted to break away from the ties that bind, and feel cathartic freedom.

And then Private Dorian got up, and began the real last phase in his life.

Private Dorian then shot out like a cannon, bellowing out from the tops of his lungs, as he made a dash for the Germans. If the real world was going to step in and check him as it did with Captain Waye, so be it! Better than to die like this, then to die being chewed up inside the mouth of the Reaper. As the rest of his men saw one of their own break free from the state of horror and terror they were all in, they began to feel hope. Some hesitated as they noticed the Private screaming out like a deranged maniac: charging in blindly like a bull. But they themselves began to feel it was better than the situation they were in; waiting for a bullet with their name on it to fly passed and greet them. Private Dorian began weaving between hedgehogs set before him, dodging as much of the German offensive as he possibly could. And as he began to feel like he was getting a control of the insanity around him, grabbing a hold of the break leaver, to slow down that carousel, to a manageable speed, a bullet flew by, and grazed his face, and brought Dorian back halfway to his senses.

The Carousel: Part Three.

> No—stop—stop! I don't have to die like this, either, I can't just rush in, straight, like a maniac, and think that's going to make a difference. I want their blood, I at least want their blood, if I'm to die today!

Reaching an embankment, Private Dorian crouched down to take cover before it, as he noticed a company of men had reached him, followed by some Rangers. Private Dorian felt like waiting now. His epiphany, and that rush of adrenaline, had taken him this far. But he had to be strategic now, if he was going to make the rest of the way to the German encampment. Now, he needed to play it smart. He was no John Wayne, and he already saw how John Wayne would fair in a real war a minute ago. If he was going to get some fascist Kraut's blood on his hands, he needed to use the numbers and abilities of the men around him.

> Let them get shot up, I can then use them as a diversion and....

And then, all of a sudden, that line of thought now shocked Private Dorian, as he realized how gutless and treacherous it was to be thinking

that way. But something in him also made him not care. He no longer felt like he wanted any honor from this experience, at least, the definition of honor he thought he knew. There was no honor in how those men had died back there in the Higgins, and there was no honor how Captain Waye had died, either.

There's no honor in going out like an idiot. None! Especially if you got the brains, then it's just insulting.

Only thing that mattered was he wanted blood, and bathing in their blood was where true honor lay.

When you're sent out to kill monsters, no one remembers the poor schmoes that never return.

But everyone remembers the one that brings back the monster's head!

As he sat back, across the sand embankment, he waited for the rest of the men and Rangers to do their work. One of the men to the far right of the embankment was caring a bazooka, and he fired it at one of the castemates. Dorian looked up, and saw the man had punctured a decent size hole, where they could concentrate some of their fire into. The company of GIs then began to fire into that hole, as Dorian felt this was a good chance to head left, and try coming around, to flank the Germans inside. As he went left, all of a sudden….

BOOM!

Private Dorian heard a blast behind him, and as he looked back, he saw the men he was with had taken a direct hit from a German mortar. They were all dead. All!

I was wise to leave them behind, that would have cost me my life, there!

As he continued to rush ahead, he noticed he was coming across a bank of shingles, and bluffs on the other end. Private Dorian stopped to take cover, and to formulate his next strategy. He knew he couldn't cross the shingles, for there had to be mines planted all throughout that no man's land. But he had to reach the bluffs somehow.

Hell! What do I do now?

But then, he saw a group of Privates all rushing forward, screaming, like madmen, like Dorian had been doing a minute before. They seemed deranged and out of it, like Dorian was, as if the bug of madness that

comes with war had bitten them also. Private Dorian grew slightly amused for a second seeing them like this, and wondered:

Did I look that foolish when I was trying to rush in screaming?

They were on a stampede; they had lost their leadership back at the hedgehogs, and they were swinging their M1s around, like they should have been swinging battle axes.

Wait a second, they're not going to just run over, and across the shingles—are they?

And as Private Dorian felt like he should hold out his hand and call out to them to stop, since, they seemed so blinded by rage and fear. He then felt like holding his tongue, and not saying anything.

If they're that stupid, let them try—and hell—they just might make it!

But as they jumped over the shingles….

BOOM!

Dorian then heard an explosion go off, and as he looked up, he saw there was no trace of them left. Private Dorian was beginning to feel sick to his stomach, in how he was conducting himself. But then he just couldn't deny the fact—it seemed to work!

If I had stopped them, then I probably would have had to babysit those morons through this, until a Sergeant and up had stepped in, to take charge, and doing that might have also gotten me killed.

Now Private Dorian felt like he had his chance to cross the line, and make it to the bluffs.

That last explosion had to have cleared out any additional mines along that path.

Thought Private Dorian, as he got up, and made a break for it. And crossed the minefield, safely.

And now, Dorian was at the bluffs. As he slowly climbed to the top, along the castemate, he saw a Kraut running out holding a machine gun. Private Dorian quickly took up his M1 and aimed, and….

Bang!

Shot him in the ear,

and now… made his first shot and kill in the war.

I got you—I fucking got you!

Private Dorian had finally blown the brains out of one of these soulless

monsters, and as he eyed him, he relished in his first victory. Now, he felt good; now, he felt calm; now, he felt some sense of peace.

But then again, it wasn't enough.

He still felt the carousel spinning in his head, and it was only slowing down slightly, with each one of these fascist pigs he killed. He needed to kill more of them, if he was ever to truly gain control again. And as he thought that, he then saw two more pop out, Dorian lifted up his M1 and shot them both, too.
Bang!
Bang!
Although, this time, he didn't seem to be gaining the same sense of justice he'd gotten with his first kill. And Dorian now felt, how he needed to up the ante, if he was going to get the same effect. Private Dorian then ran over to them, and saw a bazooka laying next. Dorian then picked it up, and ran over to the entrance to the casemate. As he turned in, he fired the bazooka into the casemate….
BOOM!
And was almost thrown back from the jolt and rush that came with it. As Dorian entered the casemate, he found several dead, at least five of them, with their blood all decorating the insides. Looking at the masterpiece he had created, he grew even more furious, as he felt less from these kills as he had with the ones before. Private Dorian felt profoundly irritated as he realized he was growing desensitized by all the violence, and he still didn't feel like he had gained enough control to set his mind at peace.

Then, he noticed that three of them were still moving. Lifting up his M1, he shot one dead….
Bang.
Then shot the second….
Bang.
But when it came to the third Kraut, Private Dorian saw the man turn around, and look at him straight.
"So! Whatcha got to say for yourself now—huh," called out Dorian. And as he lifted up his M1 to make the last shot.

But the man began tearing up and calling out:

“Bitte, nicht schießen—nicht schießen!”

As Dorian heard those words, even though he didn't know a lick of German, he at least understood what the man was saying from the fear in his eyes.

Private Dorian then looked down at his mitts, and began to feel completely lost.

Up until now, he didn't feel like he was killing real human beings. They felt like monsters to him, and their deaths felt justified for the hell they had put Dorian through. But seeing utter fear in a sub-human like this, made him grow pity towards him, which reflected back, made Private Dorian feel disgusted by himself considering how bloodthirsty he had become.

What's happening again?

But whatever it was, it also had an effect on the carousel in his mind, as he felt it screech down slower and slower, and almost to the point, he swore it stopped. Private Dorian didn't want to shoot him, his pity towards him (a fucking Nazi of all things) had changed all that, so he decided it was best to leave him for the POW camps.

As Private Dorian turned around to head back outside, the Kraut then pulled out his Luger, and….

Bang!

Fired, catching Private Dorian in his left thigh. As Private Dorian fell over, he turned around, and called out the same words the Kraut had, in English.

“Please—don't shoot—don’t shoot!”

“Haahaahaah ahaahhaha!”

But the Kraut then began laughing hysterically as if he enjoyed the fact Private Dorian fell for his crocodile tears, as he took aim.

And hearing that laughter… did something to him. Something completely now snapped in Private Dorian, as it felt like he lost something deep within him, he could never get back again.

"Haahaahaah ahaahhaha!"

But as the Kraut pulled the trigger, he found the chamber empty. His jaw then dropped, as he began to tear up again, while his bottom lip shivered in dread.

But this time, Private Dorian wasn't going to have any of it. As he fought back up to his feet, he blazed over to the Kraut, and began kicking him in the head. Then as he got on top of him, he took his mitts, and placed them on opposite sides of his head.

"You fucking piece-of-shit!
You fucking piece-of-shit!
So that's what happens when you show weakness, huh?
That's what—fucking—happens!
Oh, I'm going to murder you with my barehands!

You hear me you cocksucking kraut—BAREHANDS!"

And now, tried to squeeze his head in, so hard, that he hoped the man would feel his brain crush within his own skull.

"Nein—nein! Ich will nicht sterben!"

"FUCK YOU," screamed out Dorian, as he tried to press with all his might.

The fascist pig continued screaming in agony, as Dorian placed all his force on that skull of his, in the hopes of crushing it whole. Then Dorian began to hear it crack, and the Kraut squirmed hearing it himself. The cocksucking Kraut continued to scream in agony, as Private Dorian began to feel something godly serge within him, a rush of energy and fire, that shocked his senses.

But also, what Dorian felt now, disturbed him, as much as it invigorated him.

What is this, what is this I feel?

And now, he felt the soul of the monster merge with his. All the evil in

it, was in Sam. The Nazi was in Sam, now, it was in him! And Sam now felt something twist and turn within him, and change him, and now, the old Sam was no more.

I don't give a shit! Fuck the old Sam, fuck that cowardly weakling. I need this, I need it!

He had taken pity on this piece-of-shit, and all the man did was try to shoot him in the back.

Fuck pity, I rather burn in hell then feel that way about anyone ever again.

As he took one last breath of air, to gather up his strength, he squeezed with all his might again, and finally—visually—saw the Kraut's head implode inwards, like a nut.

CRACK!

The Kraut had screamed one last time, but was cut dead silent within the last second of implosion. After that, Private Dorian fell back, feeling profoundly broken from everything that had just happened.

As the carousel in his mind began to speed up again.

New Slang Of York II

“So, what are your thoughts on all this?” Asks the Doomclock to the Toymaker.
“Nothing.” The Toymaker responds. “Why do I even matter, what my thoughts are?”
“You don’t see your part in all this?” Asks the Doomclock.
The Toymaker shrugs, and crosses his arms, and looks away.
“After everything, all these details you’ve been shown, you don’t see how they all seem to fall in place… like a… do you like puzzles?”
“What?”
“You were a toymaker, I figured you might like—”
“What do you mean, puzzles… like jigsaw puzzles, we didn’t have those in our time.”
“You had riddles.” Says the Doomclock.
The Toymaker thinks a bit. He doesn’t want to think. But now stops with the shrugging and crossing of his arms, and looks towards the Doomclock.
“Yes.”
“Did you like songs?”
….
“Well?”
“Yes.”

And then the Doomclock says to him:
“Do you remember the song that goes:

‘Parsley,
Sage,
Rosemary…
Thyme.’

It is a song from your time, I do believe. Maybe even older.”

That does now stir something in the Toymaker. A memory of how things would have been, in his time. A life he could have lived. But didn’t. All cut short.

She once was a true love of mine.

The Toymaker grows angry.
“I’m a nobody, nobody listened to me. No one cared. No one cared what I thought or said. And in the end, I was murdered by degenerate savages. And here I’ve been this entire time, this long and arduous wait, being entertained with more of such. Why am I here? What grave importance did the Lorde, God, have, to bring me from the tomb to show me all this.

I DON’T MATTER!”

“You matter more than you’ve ever given yourself credit for.”
“What does that mean?”
“You haven’t been paying attention to the story. You—have! But not with what’s important.”
“How does it matter if I have or haven’t?

Fine,
This world is lost.
It’s doomed, Doomclock!
Your presence here certifies that.”

“What are your thoughts on Michael Connelly now, the one you thought was a demon?”
The Toymaker sneers.
“He’s a buffoon.
Fine, he isn’t a demon.”
“What acknowledgement made you see differently?”
“I see,
He doesn't understand the violence he commits. There’s a part of him that’s still a child, unable to put away childish things. And to him, it’s like cartoons of this time.

Although, he’s still a degenerate, most definitely and sorrowfully, in every major way. He reminds me now of my time, there would be a gang

of young miscreants on the road, standing in their raggedy brown linen they'd mostly be wrapped in, with these most devilish eyes and teeth. Demanding any passersby to pay them a toll for crossing their road, since it was theirs now. And when the poor, unfortunate wayfarers would refuse, they'd throw mud, and cow's dung, and sometimes attack the individuals.

I'd almost always would find them in a neck-catch in the middle of town, with children throwing eggs and other rubbish at them.

Michael Connelly is simply a fool, that isn't going to make any difference. A lost, pitiful, helpless and hapless fool."

The Doomclock eyes the Toymaker mindfully, then asks:

"What are your thoughts on the character of The Big White Head?"

And that now stirs something else in the Toymaker.

"You watched it.
Here, in the Nexus, we're connected to more as an audience to the main story, than any of the actors, or even narrators. Or those pretending to be narrators. That might have either benevolent… or nefarious… motives.

What were your thoughts of Samuel Francis Dorian… and his father?"

The Toymaker's eyes now shine. Like twin Bettelgeuses: a star that glows red; a star with a story of confusion and comedy, full of misunderstandings of its own significance. Not just Orion's armpit.

"What if I was to tell you, your role in all this, is more than just being a witness to all these proceedings. You are not as inactively connected to the fabrics of this reality, as you see yourself as.

You are ACTIVE!"
"How am I active?

I'm here doing what I've done in life, now in death. Not active, not even inactive, but reactive. And even how I react, makes no difference,

but undermines my own very soul!"

"You asked me, whether or not this world was going to go up in flames. You asked me, I didn't answer. I didn't answer, because the truth of the matter is, it's not my decision if it is or isn't."
"Then whose?"
And then it occurs to the Toymaker.

The Toymaker… doesn't believe it.

"This Samuel person… I was shown things about him. He's a madman. And like any madman, it is almost impossible to understand his motives. But he seems to be the one with the finger on the trigger here.

Your claim is preposterous.
You're either ridiculing me… or straight lying.
I have no connections to this man."

The Doomclock now smiles, and the Toymaker… doesn't like the smile.
"What connection do I have?"

"What if I was to tell you, this Samuel Francis Dorian, is still to this day a man… unable to make such grave decisions. He's still a man that greatly honors his father.
And his father's decisions."
"What are you babbling about… I AM NOT HIS—"

And then the Toymaker sees the connection.

"That's preposterous!"
"So, tell me, Toymaker… does this world go up in flames, or does it not?"
"WHAT?"

"You decide."

“I can’t decide, I’m a nobody. A nobody with no agency. No one cares of me. I matter not. My decisions are invalid from the start!”

“They matter to Francis…. And his finger is now what’s on this trigger.

You don’t necessarily need to be connected to any of these people through bloodlines. You don’t have to be related. Not physically. But you are, metaphysically. You are not Mr. Dorian’s father, but you do represent him in more ways than one.”

“GOD!
GOD DECIDES.”
“Yes, God…
But what if I was to tell you, God has placed the decision into your hands?”

And that now scares the Toymaker.
Greatly scares him.
TERRIFIES HIM!
To his core.

“Wait, how, how do I decide?”
“Soon, there will be a confrontation between Michael and Mr. Dorian. And in the end, it won’t be Mr. Dorian that will pull the trigger, it will be you.”
“HOW?”
“What are your thoughts on Michael, did he win you over?”
“What… he’s a fool. A worthless fool. He attacked his own woman, then grew aghast at himself as if he witnessed another man doing it, he’s a mad fool divided within himself, and better off going back to whatever dungeon he crawled out of. What do you mean, win me over?”

“You know there’s more to him than just that.”

The Toymaker looks away.
“Do you still despise him?”

“I pity him.” Says the Toymaker still looking away.
“Do you still see him as unworthy of his goals at least?

He does want to do good… he’s terrible at it… but he has that virtue.

Do you see anything he’s done and strived and fought for, still unworthy? If there is anything Mr. Dorian respects, its worthiness.

Michael… was chosen to be on this harrowing path. Leading to Mr. Dorian. Leading to you. He is a fool. A degenerate. All those things. But also a diamond in the ruff. And his purpose was to win you over.

The decision if he had is tethered to Mr. Dorian. But really tethered to you. There are strings, metaphysical strings attached. From here in the Nexus, from you, to the mortal world. We are all connected. You and I, are placed here, atop this mountain, in this eagle’s crag, looking down, as governing forces. Spiritual forces in high places.

I, the Doomclock, as you named me, stand before a door, a door over New York City, and at a certain hour, my door will be unlocked.

I control the lock.
Although, I won’t be the one to turn the knob to open what I hold back.”

The Toymaker now faced the Doomclock and the door he was set on. In this Nexus, he also saw New York City at nighttime, and the moon, about ready to crash. And only now the Toymaker’s eyes were open to this truth, and their place in the cosmos, taking the form of astral beings. Both the Toymaker and the Doomclock were towering giants in all this. Like zodiac signs, governing all the thoughts and decisions of the mortals below.

“No… this can’t be true.”

“It’s been done.
You decide.
With God, He has a will that either permits His children to make

everlasting decisions, or not. And unlike Balaam, not even God, nor an ass, will stand in your way.

To curse this world to flames and hell and ash!

The choice is in your hands."

"Don't!" Cries out the Toymaker.
"Will you open my door at the right hour? Will you place your hand on the knob, and turn the—"
"I can't be the one!"
"Why not you? You expressed worry if this world was to go up in flames. You feared there would be no other choice. You have the choice. All you have to do is—"

"MY HEART IS THE DARKEST HITHERTO!

You have no idea… how dark my heart is… especially after 1,000 years in Sheol, waiting for my Judgement Day of Resurrection. Out of all the characters I've been shown. If such power was to be granted onto me, I would be a Dark Lorde, like one you could never possibly phantom!

You don't want the decision to be up to me.
You DON'T!" Quotes the Toymaker.

Then begins weeping.

After a moment of watching the Toymaker do so, the Doomclock grows fed up, and speaks:
"With Samual Francis Dorian, you are correct in your assessment, it does take a madman to go all the way he has to do what he plans to do. He has his motivation! But what makes him a madman is going all that way, not knowing what for. Going all the way to the line, it takes quite a madman…

but to cross that line… it takes something completely different."

The Toymaker now stops his weeping. He wasn't even really. He was entertaining only the desire to weep. As if, like a toy, creating a doll, an effigy, to substitute his true self and true feelings. Because he'd rather entertain a substitute of himself, than his actual self.
"I don't know if you've noticed, Toymaker…
But there's a lot of substituting going on with almost all characters in this story. Especially with you.

Creating substitutes of fathers.
Of mothers.
Significant others.
Friends.
Enemies.
Of one's own self.
Even so distinctly as whether one's own old self… new self… good… bad… heh!

Creating toy people, to play the roles of those in our lives we gravely, gravely missed.

Heros.
Villains.
And in the world of 1988… action figures of characters of movies, video games, cartoons and comic books.
Toys!

I now see why you chose such a profession.

So,
What does it take, Toy—
Actually… what is your real name?" Asks the Doomclock.

After a lengthy pause.

"Reginmund.

Well… in Old English.

What I spoke back then.

And… what does it take… something very wretched." Answers Reginmund, sounding cold and calculative. Not caring. Calculative!

The Doomclock smiles.
"Please to meet you, Reginmund."
Reginmund shakes his head lightly. And looks down. He looks… defeated.
"What a fascinating tale this is.

A man such as you, coming from a golden era of such great humility and nobility. From the time of thegns in mail armor. And I see that in you. Yet, here you are, from Old York, now here in New York… and the world is a mutt. Your offspring are but mutts.

You, although… specifically… were one of the lowest of the low of that time. You bring a great pain and a great sorrow with you. And great pains can only beget great pains. And great sorrows with great sorrows.

You met a bloody, bloody, violent demise.
And you hold that sin at the center of your heart.
A hell… that would drive any man into fits of madness.

But, madmen matter not what's in their minds, but what's in their hearts. And you are that. And all God is willing to give you now for your troubles is this loathsome dog… in hopes to cheer your spirit… and steer you away from total damnation.

For… you… are York.
And your damnation is York's damnation
Now in the future.

I only have one curiosity though now, one piece of this puzzle… I can't seem to find. Seem to have misplaced.

Before you were murdered by Eric the Bloodaxe… what sin did you

commit to heart, to lead you down this lonely path to perdition? For I sense that in you being the case."
And now, the eyes, the twin Betelgeuses, that were the constellation of Reginmund the Toymaker, shined red. And saw his story. And understood it for the first time.

The Doomclock now knew.

"'*Parsley,*
Sage,
Rosemary…
Thyme.'

Who was she to you?"

And Reginmund answers the truth:
"Nobody.
She was a nobody.
Because I made her into a nobody.

I shunned her away."

The Cat: Five

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."
1 John 4:8

The Nuke Cusser.

Michael just gazed at it, trying to make sense of what he was seeing before his eyes; wondering what type of sick-fuck would bring this here; wondering what type of sick-fuck would then want to use it.

> You've gotta be fucking shitting me! This ain't no regular bomb… the fucker is nuclear!

Michael now felt like his failure was complete. And not only that, he felt like he couldn't masquerade his persona anymore. He couldn't be John Wayne, anymore. This was a reality which his fantasy stood no match against. He couldn't save himself, he couldn't save Nikki, and he had to be a damn fool to think he could do all that in his old rompous-pompous style.

> You've got to be fucking shitting me… this thing is nuclear?

Now Michael felt like something snapped inside of him, something he could never again reclaim after seeing this. Michael felt like he just wanted to crawl away into himself, and die. Let his mind just shut off, and not have to be conscious with the shit he was seeing here.

> You know, if I hadn't left my apartment earlier this night, I could have been asleep by now, and that would have been a nice way to go without knowing any of this shit was about to happen.

But then, Michael rolled his eyes, as he remembered how he hadn't been able to get a wink of sleep in the last three weeks straight. So, tonight, he probably would have also been wide awake at this hour, cursing the moment when he'd see the new morning sun.

> Of course—with this thing! There would have been no morning.

Michael continued gazing at the atomic weapon, as he felt—now its eyes—gazing back. Its entity, seeing into Michael's, and wanting to merge with, and then show Michael the abyss of its horrors.

Flash! Light! Heat!

And all is now broken down into energy, all form is lost and gone. Blasted into an oblivion. And Michael was now that, in spirit, as he began to remember back when he was a child, how terrified he felt when his father had told him about the Cold War, about nuclear Armageddon, and what it meant if and when it was to happen.

'End of the world,' he said! 'Nothing would survive,' he had told me!

A desert wasteland was all that would remain of this world, littered with the skeletons and rubble of the men that devised such horrors.

A glass desert, nothing but one giant mirror reflecting the heavens above, for there is nothing left to be seen of the earth below.

Beginning with one small spark of light, it would grow in magnitude, expanding, maybe, a million miles per second. Burning at a million degrees, and killing millions in its wake. The real world had horrors like these, and what the fuck was a two-bit hood, ex-boxer, idiot like Michael 'Madboy' Connelly going to do?

Fuck it! I've failed, there's nothing I can do now. Game over...!

Michael felt done wanting to be a hero; this was a madness he wanted nothing to do with.

A fucking owl... a fucking....

He would rather live in his own mind, than deal with realities like these. How could he even accept them? How could he control them? Grab this charging bull by the horns, and steer the enraged animal into the ground.

Sadboy, you were right! We should have both gotten the fuck out of dodge. Fuck this city! If anything this Age of Rage has proven, it's, this city is too far gone to be saved. If this is all it's come down to. If this is what's righteous now....

I don't know....

Something truly important had now snapped inside of him, and fallen away.

But what?

Thought Michael... and then saw that Billy the Kid's eyes, fading away from him. And now, Michael felt faded, as if, he no longer knew who he was anymore.

And now, in its place, there was this thing, here. The new chosen form of the destructor, of Michael's Reaper. Of his demise. His end.

I... I... feel tired.

Thought Michael, as the unflinching, unnerving, unrelenting gaze of this sense of hell began to take hold. And Michael was now….

Feeling pretty fucking tired.

I need some sleep.

Three fucking weeks without any… how have I managed?

Michael, now, felt like sitting. And so, he did, sat right down next to Mr. End of Days, here, and started entertaining that sense of freedom he had felt before, of total abandonment, and how good it felt.

I've done all I can do. I can't go on anymore, I can't!

And… after a while, of feeling somewhat at peace. Michael now closed his eyes, and wondered.

Oh, maybe I can sleep now… maybe? Oh God, I'd really would love that now. I would.

And so Michael laid there, feeling that sense of peace, and feeling joyous that he might be able to… finally… fall asleep.

But….

What the fuck now?

He wasn't!

But why?

But then he realized, this bomb wasn't going to just take out the 1999 building, and kill all those hundreds of rich assholes (magic people he really didn't give two shits about), on that magic floor. This bomb was going to devastate all of New York City, entire, and kill at least six million.

And… including Nikki!

Ah shit!

And… including that Kid.

Wait… why am I caring about that stupid little twerp now?

And his New Shamrocks.

Ah, fuck me! We all have to go sometime. We all do! And I feel like it's my time now. There's nothing I can do! I've lost!

Your time maybe, but, what about their time?

What about theirs, Gab, there's nothing I can do!
What about Letoya's?
Letoya's… she's dead! She died when those mercs raided The Milk Jug Hotel.
Are you completely convinced it was her?
I… yes!
Are you?
Yes!
Are you sure?
I… no….
Michael then decided none of it should matter anymore. And then tried to close his eyes, and sleep again.

A minute passed….

And in that entire minute, it wasn't the bombs eyes that were staring back at Michael, it was Nikki's.

I don't want her to…?

In those eyes… he still could see his Rosary.
Oh, enough of this… there's nothing I can do!
But then, Michael no longer saw his own demise from this thing, here. He could now see Nikki's… and….
I… but what can I….

t t

I don't want her to die!
And whatever that it was that Michael felt like he had lost back there—whatever that he felt snap off, and fall from him, into nothing… was found again. And now Michael felt centered again. And, so, Michael got up, stared at the bomb, and got confrontational. In the way that made sense to him.
You know, she was the only person that ever saw me in moments like these, I mean—saw right into me! Whenever I was really feeling down on my luck, whenever I was really, really feeling lost

and afraid. Whenever I'd feel completely and utterly defeated, she was always the only one that would notice, and that there is precious.

People can be so blind seeing the simple truth. Simple truth that they see in themselves, yet are blind to see in others. Sometimes, they think it's because other people are way too different from themselves to relate to, and feel lost in translation. Other times, it's because they just don't care, as they don't care for themselves. Every time I've ever felt any true heartache, if she was there, she was always the first one to notice...

and flinch.

Hell, sometimes while I wasn't even... but... yeah! We had that connection—we did! It could have been in a room full of a dozen or so people I've known all my life, whenever I felt this way, she would always be the only one to sense it. She'd become very keen to my presence, and in picking up all those small minute tell-tale signs into my heart.

And now, Michael thought of the one thing, that really made Nikki matter to him, more than any other woman could ever do so.

When that thing happened with my father, when I almost lost him, I went to the Tropic that night, to drown myself in sorrows. And, out of all the people that crossed me that night, she was the only one that flinched, and took notice. I saw Gab that day, and as much as that jackass thinks he knows me, inside and out, he also didn't notice.

Michael then closed his eyes and remembered that moment.

And the endearing part for me was, how she'd react. Whenever she'd notice, she'd always come over, sit next to me, and become completely awkward around me. And I don't know why, but I always loved that in a bittersweet way. How awkward she'd get around me. Being unable to go passed her inhibitions, yet trying so hard to do so. She'd become so frustrated and confused, staring me up and down, as her eyes would start to pause and pulsate.

She'd fidget around with her attention every which direction. And why? Because she didn't know how to open up to me, not on that level. She'd try so hard to open up, at least ask me what was wrong. But in the end, the only thing she could think of doing was taking me home and....

And... blowing me for the entire night straight.
And then swallow.
Hahaahahaahahaa!

Michael then laughed. Enjoyed that moment, but then, looked up, and noticed that the bomb was still glaring at him. Michael then tried to shake it off.

I don't know. I know this stuff has to be beyond just that physical shit. I mean, I know... a stupid blow job doesn't equal love.

And neither does swallowing.

Oh, shut the fuck up, Gab!

Michael was now stirring with piss and vinegar.

No thanks to you speaking of it—you of all fuckers!

I don't know!

I believe we had a real thing. I do! Her being that close to me... I don't think it was just in my imagination that she was that way. That, being the sign that she really loved me, her being so awkward towards me, most of the time. I mean, I know anyone that's anyone would want more than that.

To talk about love, there needs to be a higher plane reached with a couple, if it's true. A higher connection reached.

Made! Bound!

But the fact was, between Michael and Nikki, even though he believed it could be. It never had... at least back then.

Blowing me the entire night straight... ha! But... unfortunately, really, really good sex isn't what's gonna measure up to it being true.

Then the thought of him being completely wrong about him and her, together, crossed his mind. And that thought began to scare him again.

No! I believe we really were that way together. It wasn't just in my mind. I know I felt like I loved her. I know I did….

Something… platonic! Something more! All the sex I've gotten in my life, but… just one true relationship. Just one, would be worth so much more.

But the question was, did she feel that way, too?

No! There's certain things you know… you just know!

Like… about that whole Angie matter, that Slater brought up, about me impregnating his sister. You know why I'm not thinking about that shit, there? Because there's certain things—you just know! And I know me, and how I've always pulled out, making sure I never got a girl pregnant, that I didn't want to do so.

There's certain things you just know!

But was Nikki one of them?

Well, if not her… then who?

Michael now began to think about all the other women he had been with in his life. Unlike women like that Texas chick, or that Polish chick, or that Junkie chick.

Eww… why did you bring her up?

Girls, whose names and faces, Michael did remember. All his other old touches….

And… so… what about them? Annabelle didn't care, really, she was too naive to care, or understand how something like love works. Letoya? She just wanted me around to protect her most of the time, since she didn't know how to do it herself. She did care about me, but not that deeply… oh no, I hope that wasn't….

Michael shook his head, breaking away from his thoughts. And… having thought about death, Michael looked up, and noticed the bomb was still unflinchingly, unnervingly and unrelentingly glaring right at him. Michael then shook it off, again, and continued thinking about all the other women he'd been with.

Then there's Cecilia. She didn't care, either, she lived in a world where she was the only one with problems, and had reasons to complain.

As for Roxanna….

I never heard from her after she left for Rochester… not even a peep.

And with Nikki, the problem was….

I told her a million times that I loved her back then. Back when we were together. A million times. A million fucking… yet, she never said it to me once. I don't know, I guess I really do want to believe we had something profound together.

But why did you cheat on her as much as you did?

I… don't know.

Thought Michael, as he got depressed, then glared up at the nuclear bomb again, as the bomb continued to glare back. Michael's face then cringed up with teeth.

Fuck you! Go away! How the fuck did I… is this thing for real? A nuke? How the fuck did I get into all this mess?

But then another thought tried to intervene. That stupid ignoramus thought, of how this was all her fault, which he'd been spinning in his head all night long.

Fuck! Do I hate that!

As it began to turn again, he realized she wasn't just going to be responsible of killing hundreds of people; she was now going to be responsible of—

Shut the fuck up!

Thought Michael, as he smacked himself across the face, and felt sick of entertaining that notion another second.

I don't give a shit, she's all that matters to me now, and I don't even care if she's nothing but that Lady again, because now I want to love that too!

I feel that way… I feel that way… it has to be unconditional!

And now, Michael felt that thing in his mitts again.

No! Don’t you two start, either!
‘Barehands’… ugh!
No!
I don’t give a shit! I don’t give a shit what she does… it has to be unconditional. It has to be!

That's the only way anything can ever be saved, really. The second you're willing to set up limits of what you're willing to love, is the second you fail. That's the way it is, and the only way it can be. I don't care what she's done, who she is, and what will happen next. I love her, and that's all that matters.

But his mitts continued to talk to him, as Michael realized this was a new thing he could now expect from himself, dealing with, when it came to her.

Oh shit, you were right though, Roxy, this shit is hard!

Michael remembered way back when, how he had been bullshitting Roxy to get her to have sex with him; talking about love and war and peace, and stuff he had no clue about—or did he?

Maybe I was onto something though. ‘Can't be a wimp, you have to tough it out, you have to be a soldier.’ That’s what I was thinking back then.

Because… if you really want to be in love, you're going to have to get yourself ready to deal with the pain and hardship that comes with it.

That, or spend the rest of your life wondering how it could have been. And, like Roxy, beginning to believe there isn't any such thing as love. You have to be tough enough to deal with that hardship. Even the hardship realizing that it might have all been in vain.

And now, the mitts ceased, and them ceasing, started to give Michael the confirmation that he was on the righteous path.

I love her, and that's all that matters. Also, I know that Nikki can never stop existing in there, just as I can't stop existing in myself with Madboy around.

Thought Michael, as he looked at his mitts again, and started accepting it.

I was with her for years, and for all that time, I felt she loved me, as much as I loved her. Even though our relationship never blossomed into what we really wanted. The Nikki I loved is there, it exists, and it's not just in my head.

I mean—what the fuck? Good Nikki, the Lady? Me, Madboy? Enough with this stupid Jekyll and Hyde bullshit! Fucking double vision or quadrupole vision—whatever! I am Madboy, and I'm proud of it!

But what if she did leave you after all this? What if Nikki never did love you, even from the beginning?

I… give me a second….

Michael pondered that for a second, then smiled, and felt like he didn't care anymore.

Takes two to tango to be in love? I don't think so, anymore. What I have over her can never be taken away. Not even Nikki, herself, can take it away.

Not even you!

Michael looked at the bomb.

Nor even You!

Michael looked up.

Even if she tried with all her might to do so.

If all of a sudden, one day, she stood against it all. It wouldn’t matter. Because that's what being unconditional means.

So, you’d love the Lady?

Yes, I would, Gab! Yes, I would! So, in your face, you jackass, for telling her all those things about me and her, to try and get us to split up.

Michael then had a moment, as he thought about her, just as the Lady in Red.

I don't care if that's all she is. If she completely turns evil, or has been so from the start, and has just been using me up until now. I don't care, even after all this, of me helping her out, if she was to...

rip my heart out, and step on it, and laugh in my face for being so pitiful....

Then... abandons me....
Was to go off, and blow fifty thousand dudes, and just to spite me! Then laugh again, and now forget about me... completely. Doing it all in style, and just to rub it in. Just that!

Even if all that shit was to happen. I would still love her. Nothing will—ever—change that. That's what unconditional means...

and that there is how you really save anything...

at least... as long as it wants to be saved.

Michael then smiled, bittersweetly, glared at the nuke again, as the nuke glared back. Then flipped.

"Yeah—well—fuck you, too! Go to hell! Fuck you! Fuck you—and the horse you rode in on, too, and—"

Then Michael paused, and found a reason to smile again. Michael then busted out into laughter, over the scene he saw himself making, there. The scene of himself, some wild-eyed sweaty rompous-pompous 80s punk, dressed like some stupid MTV music video extra, pacing up and down, cussing out a nuclear bomb, like it was going to make a difference.

Cussing out a nuclear bomb... so fucking stupid!
And what did I scream out... also... the horse you rode in on, too?
What the fuck?

Michael couldn't help it, there was practically nothing else he could do right now, and this was the only thing he could derive from this moment to make himself feel better, and make himself feel like moving on.

Maybe I should find a mallet around here, and start banging on

the damn thing, while cussing it out some more, like they do in those Looney Tunes cartoons. So fucking stupid!

"Fuck you," shouted out Michael again, as he fell into fits of laughter, and he felt like his diaphragm was going to cave in on itself.

Ha! That's all I needed right now. It's funny! Well, not really—but fuck it!

And now, whatever that had snapped from him, and fallen off, before, Michael felt like could never again.

Yeah… that was funny! And you know what? That's all I'm going to take from all this. I don't want to think about what this thing is capable of. Cussing out a nuclear bomb—ha! That's all that matters.

Michael had always been a man of simple action, and having been forced into this state of thought, all night long, had just made him unhappy, and he needed to get out of it. And quick! He had his laugh to escape the thoughts rushing in his mind, but now, he needed to do something else. Being his old self meant keeping it simple; keeping to mind only what mattered, and all that mattered tonight for him was not to be feeling abandoned again. All alone at that place, waiting, for something to….

Okay, enough with that!

Truth also was… Michael really wasn't all that alone, anymore, really. That was just the bullshit he was still feeding himself, because, that's all he knew how to do.

Yeah! Fuck being a loner. Really, I did that, too, to myself, because… I guess I also enjoyed the idea, on some level. That bittersweet sense you get, when you're all alone in the world, and you build your pride up thinking about your hard-knocks life. Having a real story to tell. Making your life out to be some stupid tragedy to derive a sense of worth in everything you've been through, from.

Playing yourself as a victim, wronged by the world, now wanting revenge.

Being that way, feeling that way, so self-righteously. But really…

all in vain!

And, now, Michael felt done with his story. Done with the violins! Done!

Fuck me, and my having to be the last Bloody Shamrock! Fuck being that abandoned one, always up to beating people's faces in, and womanizing, to make himself feel worth a damn. And, fuck my life's story, too! No more of this lone wolf shit, no more!

Nikki was still there. Sadboy was in Baltimore. And as for Letoya…

Umm… I… don't know….

All right! All that mattered now was he needed to go find Nikki, again, and get her out of the city. And that was that!

What about that Kid?

Michael thought then… but then realized… he really had just imagined him, too.

I did just hallucinate him, didn't I?

Or…

Or… what?

Maybe he was something more than just, that.

More than just a hallucination?

Yes, Michael.

Then what?

And then, it came to him, and now he knew.

The Crucifix.

Man, can you believe all this crazy nonsense I've been through already? I mean, come on, I'm Sonny, how the hell would he solve all the family problems, getting this far, and without Michael Corleone being there? Sonny wasn't the brains. Not really, not how it matters. I mean….

Ahem!

Excuse yourself!

I said—ahem!

What… 'ahem'—what? What you getting at?

…!

Oh, I get it now… ha! I'm Sonny. And you supposedly Michael, Corleone, that is. Ha! That's a barrel of laughs!

Well, I don't know, obviously, when it comes to you or me… I would be—

No, shut up, yous! You ain't Michael Corleone. You Fredo!
What?
Yeah, you Fredo.
Oh—hell no!
Yeah, Gab… you Fredo, pussy-ass, bitch-ass, punk-ass Fredo—and you damn well know it.
…!
Hahahahaahaahaaa!

That was good.
Michael then reached into his pocket, for… some reason or another. As if he knew, as if he knew.
Knew what?
And, there, he found it.
What the… how the….
Michael found his Rosary.
"I searched everywhere on me, up and down, how did it end up in here," thought Michael, completely confounded.
But… also… not.
What do you mean, not…? I checked!
And now, seeing how he had never really lost this.
I lost it, I fucking did!
Michael began to wonder, what it all meant.

All right, fine, maybe I really didn't check my pockets thoroughly.
That's not what I mean, Michael.
Then, what do you mean, Gab?

And now, really thinking about the whole matter. Michael now did. As he remembered how he had seen it in Nikki's eyes. And the thing about it was.
It didn't feel right, seeing her that way, seeing her as my… I don't know… salvation?
And it was then, Michael realized, he was expecting something, much, much more from her, then what should have been expected. Seeing her something divine and holy.
I love Nikki, but, I think I really shouldn't do that, see her as

something else. In the end, she's just another pitiful soul, like me. Someone pitiful, like me, that needs as much saving as I do. I've never been religious, much. But I've always felt it. At least.

And now, Michael was starting to see things as he should.

I attacked her back there, because, I expected too much from her, more than I should have! Something I wasn't even expecting from myself. I attacked her, because…

I judged her.

Since, I was expecting more from her. But if I had just accepted her for herself, her weaknesses, and been forgiving more, I can see now that would have never happened. Nikki is like me, we're both two and the same, and if we see more of ourselves, blow up our egos like we're… gods… or something… I don't know. We're just gonna end up hating each other when one of us makes mistakes and does something to hurt the other.

And now, with this new revelation, Michael began to understand why he had been holding onto his Rosary for so long.

And now, it was time for Michael to start making trek. Put as much distance of himself, and this thing, here, as he could. Get to Nikki, and get her and himself to get the fuck out of dodge.

And finally, too!

Michael chuckled then, felt better, and then as he saw the nuke trying to stare him down again—seeing the Reaper's face within it—Michael felt like all he could do now was smile and say:

"Rompous-pompous!"

And with that, Michael turned his bike around, and made haste, making his way back to the elevator. Michael revved up his Harley, and shot off, full max.

As Michael got to the ramp taking him to the 1st level, all of a sudden, all the lights in the garage went out, and Michael was left in complete darkness.

Wait—who did that? Shit—they still might be here!

Thought Michael, unwilling to slow down, yet, unsure if crashing into a wall or parked car up top, going 65 miles an hour, was a better option. Fortunately, Michael still had a mental map of the layout from when he had ridden through there before.

After carefully trying to circumnavigate the 1st level garage, Michael was finally at the elevators, as he saw the beaming light from the buttons. As he pressed the button for the lobby, the doors opened, and Michael rode in. Michael closed his eyes, then, as he felt the elevator move. He took a deep breath, while fighting off anymore thoughts.

Such as:
A) How much time was left before the bomb went off;
B) Whether Mr. Dorian and the mercs were still in the building;
C) Would he make it to Nikki on time?
D)....

Cussing out a nuclear bomb... so fucking stupid!
Thought Michael, and nothing else.

Strike Six... You're Out!

As the doors to the elevator flung open, Michael tried to ride out of the elevator, but was clotheslined straight off the chopper, by an IRA merc, that was hidden from view. Michael fell to the ground, as the Kalashnikov flew out of his hands.

What the....
They all had their assault rifles held up, and ready, and then one of them ran over to Michael, and kicked him straight in the gut. Then kneeled down on his shoulders, with his knees, pressing down on Michael's collarbone. It was the bushy eyebrow merc, Michael had seen before, in the van leading to the Nim Fo building, and the man had his sub ready at hand, pointing it straight into Michael's face.

"Is he still armed," called out one of the mercs, as another one began to do a feel check.

"He's clean," called out the merc doing the check, as he got back up, and walked over to Mr. Dorian.

And there he was, again....

The man, Michael had been sizing up as the devil himself….
All night long….

"Ahhhhhaaah!"

As Michael glared into Mr. Dorian's eyes, his face cringed up, tense, as he began hollering out, at the top of his lungs.

"Fuck you, you evil old, fucking… fuck you! Fuck you!"

Mr. Dorian… just grew a smirk… and seemed to be amused by Michael's reaction. One of his eyebrows went up, and then his face turned over to Mr. Parsley, who was standing right beside him.

"You know, we should have taken care of him before, he could have done something stupid down there," said Parsley, standing at profile, as he eyed Mr. Dorian.

Mr. Dorian turned his head back around, and continued to look at Michael, still holding up that eyebrow in amusement.

"That was a major risk we were taking," commented Mr. Parsley, again, at profile.

"I don't give a shit, I thought it was funny," responded Mr. Dorian, as he had himself a small chuckle.

"I'm being serious, here, you don't seem to—"

"What the hell you think he was going to do, shoot the damn thing? That bomb is practically bulletproof, an AK's 7.62x39mm cartridge wouldn't be doing much damage to it, the way I've rigged it. Also, I couldn't even imagine how he would know where to start deactivating it… now would you, son," asked Mr. Dorian, turning back to Michael at the ends, to ask him that last bit, as he lifted up his eyebrow, higher.

Michael sighed, as he felt overwhelmed by everything, now. Truly overwhelmed!

If me and Nikki had left, right after we got away from Angel and his goons, we could have been out of the city, by now.

Ha, ha, ha ha… Oh….

Thought Michael, feeling all bittersweet about it, then smiled up at the bushy-eyebrow merc.

"What are you smiling at—boyo," pouted out the merc.

Michael then tried to think of a joke:

Your bushy… eyebrow… face? All red. Something to do with

menopause—hmm? Fuck!

But couldn't come up with anything. Michael then frowned, and laid his head back down, closed his eyes, to drift into himself.

Sleep, Michael… just sleep! Sleep now, and you won't even feel the bullet they put in you, after they're through.

But still… couldn't!

Fuck!

Opening his eyes, then, he noticed something else: all around him, all over the lobby, and even outside the lobby door, there was a slew of bodies lying dead on the ground. There had to be over two dozen of them, or so, and they looked like an assault team that had been ambushed by Mr. Parsley's mercs. The lobby looked to be bathing in blood. And taking a closer look around, Michael also saw bullet holes spanned across the walls, and shell casings littered all over the floor. It looked like a skirmish had taken place, between the times Michael had entered the elevator to head down to the garage, and once he had come back up.

Looks like I'm not the only one that's failed to do anything tonight. This is what the mercs must have been called back for, outside the Nim Fo building, to prepare for this assault.

Thought Michael, and felt like closing his eyes again, and trying again.

Please… just go to sleep! Please!

But then Michael started doing that thing that he just couldn't stand, that he'd been doing all night: thinking! As he thought about the bomb downstairs, and how millions were going to die, and….

How the fuck is this happening? How? Fuck you, assholes! You evil fucking bunch… how could you—

Michael then lunged his face up, to try something. But then, the merc slammed the butt of his Uzi into Michael's face, and bashed it open some, as blood started coming out.

"Keep down—there's nothing you can do! Don't make me shoot you in your face, now, and end it! Unless that's what you want me to do," blurted out the merc on top of Michael.

But Michael then spat up with blood, and the spit went straight into the mercs face. He then said:

"Rompous-pompous, asshole!"

The merc then had himself a chuckle, and then slammed the butt of his

Uzi, twice more, across Michael's skull, but was stopped by Mr. Dorian, as he tried to make his third attempt.

"Don't kill him just yet, there's no fun in that," said Mr. Dorian.

"What do you want me to do, then," asked the merc.

Mr. Dorian turned his head to the side while making a ticking noise with his tongue in his cheek, and then said:

"Shoot him in the belly, nothing fatal though!"

Michael's eyes lit up, then, as he realized he was about to be shot for the first time in his life.

"Wait—wait—....?"

But before Michael could make any argument, the merc got up, took out a 9mm, and shot him.

Bang!

Michael clenched up just before the shot, and then felt nothing.

Wait... I got shot?

But then felt a small poke,
and then...

followed shortly after by some of the most excruciating pain he had ever felt in his entire life.

"Aaahhh—fucking hell," screamed out Michael, as he began regretting making a scene with the merc.

"No!"

And as he continued to scream, while bracing shock-wave after shock-wave of excruciating pain, he looked over at Mr. Dorian, and felt the demons in his mitts come alive again; wanting to leap out and murder him.

"I tell ye, son, I've been reading up on the files Mr. Bonhoeffer had on you! Says you used to be a boxer."

"Ahh! Shit! Fucking...."

Michael bellowed out again, as one of the shock-waves of pain, nearly had him seizure, almost, as he jerked his back so acutely, he almost thought he had snapped his spine in half.

Shut up, Gab! Stop getting so descriptive with this shit! It's making the pain feel—worse!

"It says you were a boxer… so… shouldn't you be used to taking shots to the gut," concluded Mr. Dorian, as he grinned.

Michael kept flailing about on the ground, as the shock-waves kept rolling through, but kept his eyes pierced on Mr. Dorian, as the devil kept that grin on his face, as if though these practices were so commonplace for him.

How can you be doing all this? Who the fuck are you?

"Say—you want to know why it hurts so bad? Well, I'll tell ye, when you're shot in the gut, hydrochloric acids are released to roam about your insides, and as the blood begins to intermix with the stomach acid, this causes fatal toxemia and extreme blood loss. So tell me son, how does it feel," asked Dorian, as he opened his mouth, partway, all curious like.

Michael's eyes lit up red from both the pain he felt in his gut, and feeling infuriated at Mr. Dorian deriding him, and tried to burst out into action, and get a hold of anyone with his mitts. But, once again, was cut short by the merc, as he butted Michael over the head with his weapon.

"Look at that! Look at that! The boy still has fight in him, gotta love that fighting spirit," said Mr. Dorian, as Michael fell back on the floor, and almost went totally limp.

Rompous… oh, what do I do now? Where's my Rosary?

But Michael wasn't in the position to pull it out, and start kissing it again.

At least… I didn't really lose it.

As he lay there on the floor, he continued to watch half-consciously, everyone go about their own business, while the pain kept control over the other half. Michael watched Mr. Parsley turn back to Mr. Dorian to have a few more words, and then he watched the mercs muster up behind Mr. Parsley, as they all seemed ready to leave.

"Are you sure, Mr. Kenny, I won't be getting anymore surprise visits anytime soon, like the ones here," asked Mr. Dorian, to the fat merc.

"From the info we've received, this was only a reconnaissance mission, they came unsure of what to expect. We faked a message back to their superiors, stating the place is clear, but since they

won't be reporting back anytime soon. I give it an hour or two, before they send another squad to investigate," informed that merc.

Mr. Dorian then looked to one side, then nodded.

"Well, that's it! Did you lock the elevators to make sure no one else tries to come down from the 54th floor," asked Mr. Dorian, staring at the bushy eyebrow merc.

"Aye," responded he.

"Good! You can all leave now," concluded Mr. Dorian.

"Are you sure Mr. Dorian," asked the bushy eyebrow merc, again.

Mr. Dorian didn't respond. Instead, he picked up his fat mug, and stared at the merc, impatiently, as for his response.

"All right,' responded the merc, as he and his men turned around to leave.

Funny, seems like these mercs are taking a much more liking working for Mr. Dorian than Mr. Parsley there.

Observed Michael, then shrugged. For what else could he do with that info, but make observations.

"Thank you for everything, Mr. Dorian. We are in great debt to everything you've done for us," said Mr. Parsley, as he smiled at Mr. Dorian, a conniving smile that Michael was still able to pick up on.

As much as I hate Dorian… Parsley? Gotta say… I think I'd hate him more!

Observed Michael, again.

Mr. Dorian then whipped his head away, ignored the man, as Mr. Parsley grew a frown, while eyeing him bitterly. Mr. Dorian then stepped over Michael's presence, stepping over his body, and walked across, headed towards the security offices where Jamil and Jalil were stationed at. As he went over to a chair, he pulled it around, sat down, and placed his attention completely on the monitors on the walls.

What the hell is he doing?

Thought Michael, as he realized the way the man was just sitting there, it seemed like he had no plans of leaving anytime soon. He seemed tired, and worn out, eyeing the monitors inside; gazing at them almost zombie like. Then Michael saw him go for a knob, and as he turned it, it brought out the sound of what Michael guessed was still those

supermodels going at it with each other up there on the magic floor.

What is he....

"Ah, ah, ah, yeah!"

As Michael heard the moaning and grunting sex noises of those women, he couldn't help but have himself a small chuckle, in disbelief. Of course, once he did, the chuckle then aggravated the pain in his belly, even further, and Michael almost busted out with another seizure.

Oh—don't laugh!

Michael began softly panting; taking slow and steady strides with his breath; trying all his might to control the pain.

"Ah ah!"

While still listening to that crap. And once he felt like he gained some control, again, over his senses, Michael turned his attention back onto Mr. Parsley, and saw the man staring at Dorian and chattering his teeth, methodically, as he seemed to be trenched in thought.

"Mr. Dorian... are you sure you want to—"

"Fuck off," snapped Mr. Dorian back at Mr. Parsley, as he continued to gaze at the monitors, and then turned up the volume.

"Ah, ah! It feels so good!"

Mr. Parsley then shook his head, in disgust, and then turned his attention to Michael, but for only a glance. As he continued turning his head around, to head out with his men, a nagging thought came to Michael, insisting he'd make one last wisecrack at The Grinning Man, before he'd leave.

What else do I gots left? Let me at least have this.

"Hey, Judgeman! You still think I got brains or what," spat out Michael, grinningly.

As Mr. Parsley turned his head back to Michael, his face knotted up into itself, how old faces do in disapproval and disbelief. It seemed like he just couldn't believe just how audacious this little punk could be. So as he walked over to Michael, he crouched over, and said:

"Son, I think you're the stupidest piece-of-shit I've ever had the honor of meeting."

Michael grin widened, as blood began spewing out from the side of his

mouth, and then Michael fell back in line with the pain. As Mr. Parsley walked out to join his men. Michael watched them leave, and then turned to eye Mr. Dorian again, now wondering what the hell was going on, here.

What the hell are you up to—huh?

The Dance with the Devil: Part One.

Ever dance with the devil in a pale moonlight?

Wait…?
Who thought that?
Gab!
Gab…?

Ah shit! That whole thing is starting up again!

Mr. Dorian was now just sitting there, his eyes still glued to the monitors, and he seemed to be in a world of his own (a world of melancholy, considering how depressed he seemed), as the sound of sex began to echo throughout the lobby.

"Ah, ah!"

"Say—what did you do to these monitors? I can't get crap from them anymore… oh—there you go! I've got it now," mumbled out Mr. Dorian.

For a second there, Michael couldn't even tell who the man was talking to. Mr. Dorian never directed his attention at him, but he was obviously speaking to him, since no one else was around. Michael's head fell back again, as the pain continued to eat away at him. A second felt like a minute, a minute an hour, as Michael began to drift in and out of thought; feeling like he could no longer keep them at bay: the pain, and his thoughts. He felt his senses going a mile a minute, and he began to feel his mind doing the same:

The pain.
The nuke.
Mr. Dorian.
This night.
Nikki.

His failure.
The sin.
And the end.

God… what can I do now?

"You… I… so," blurted out Michael, incoherently.

Trying to speak as another wave of pain went through him, as he really began to feel like he was losing it. But then Mr. Dorian turned his chair around, as it squeaked in grizzled splendor. He was facing Michael, now, and strangely enough, he had an expression of sympathy on his face.

"Oh, I'll tell ye what, son! Don't let Mr. Bonhoeffer, there, calling you an idiot… get you down. No sir—don't do that! You see, I got something for them—those Oubliettes—that's going to make them wish they had never crossed the likes of me!"

What you say?

Michael was still way too centered on the pain in his belly, and he had completely missed out on what Mr. Dorian had just told him. But after a second, his mind began to piece together what little he did pick up, and then Michael was left asking:

"Bonhoeffer—who?"

"Oh, I forgot, how did he introduce himself to you as? The man that just left," asked Mr. Dorian.

For a second there, Michael felt like his eyes were about to roll into his sockets, but then he got a hold of himself to say his name.

"Parsley," said Michael.

"Oh, so he introduced himself to you first."

"What?"

"Never mind, just a sing-along game The Oubliettes like to play with their aliases," responded Mr. Dorian, as he creaked back in his chair.

Michael began panting again, as he felt like he was at least regaining some ability to speak again.

"Boy—oh—boy! Look at 'em broads going at it," yapped Mr. Dorian, as his nostrils flared in excitement, "love to see broads like this, that know how to get their rocks off!"

"Bonhoeffer," murmured out Michael, again.

"Love to see this! Fucking dames, only time when they're ever

worth anything!”

Mr. Dorian sighed as he shook his head, seeming melancholic again. Michael, on the other hand, felt like throwing his arms up, seeing how he was talking to a brick wall.

“Oh right, I forgot! You see, that there was Mr. Bonhoeffer,” explained Mr. Dorian, as he pointed back to where Mr. Parsley just left, “Mr. Bonhoeffer? Definitely a German name—that fucking Kraut! I learned a long time ago never to trust his kind. They're genuinely inhuman.”

Mr. Dorian took his feet, and placed them on the table, then started eyeing Michael all curious like.

“Say, what are you—where does your family line come from?”

Michael became puzzled as to why this man even cared.

“Come on, what are you? You can tell a lot about a man by their family history.”

“I'm American, now lay off,” responded Michael.

“Bullshit!

There is no such thing.

It's just an idea… so what are you,” asked Mr. Dorian, as he glared intently, like it really mattered to him.

“Fine, I'm German,” responded Michael, with an antagonizing smile.

“No, I don't see that, either. Plus, your last name is Connelly, and that's Irish.”

“Fine! I'm Irish, German, and Armenian,” disclosed Michael.

Trying to close the subject, so Mr. Dorian could go back to the story of Mr. Bonhoeffer.

“Ah, now there you go! That there paints a picture,” responded Mr. Dorian, as his eyes lit up, “Irish, I see—definitely! That's where the fire and stupidity comes from—I like that though! Let me guess, your dad used to smack you around a lot—didn't he?”

Michael's eyes blazed open, rash and irritated; realizing the man was trying to read his soul through racial stereotypes, and began to feel dull and contemptuous over the subject.

Nice one! Irish dad drinks a lot and beats his kid… lucky guess, there, asshole!

“German—I don't know—maybe? I don't like them much, but from what I’ve gathered, they’re very anal about everything, like they got OCD, or something. And I get this impression from them that they have some deep inner conflict over right and wrong….”

All right….

Thought Michael, unsure of all this.

“But as for Armenian, I’ve always had some fascination with them….”

All right….

Thought Michael, again, growing impatient.

“Pitiful people… simply pitiful! They're the poor man's Jew. A forgotten group of people time abandoned a long, long time ago, back in Roman days. But, somehow, they're magically still around, when they shouldn't be, and they can be some of the most arrogant and egotistical people on earth, looking around desperately for any bit of recognition. Even though, in today’s world, no one gives a damn, because they're so small and pitiful! Ha,” laughed out Mr. Dorian, and then went back to eyeing the monitors.

Yeah, whatever! Who the fuck is—

“Fine, you want to know something about Mr. Bonhoeffer—right? Well, I’ll tell ye! Him and his Oubliettes, thought they were so sly—so slick—and so untouchable and untraceable, that they could stage a coup, tonight, take my bomb away from me, and use it for their own political games. They thought they could do that, and nobody would have grown wiser.”

Mr. Dorian's eyes looked like harpoons now, and Michael saw how he was centering them on the man that just left.

“But, I found out! I got ears, everywhere, and I got people on the inside to everything. So, once I found out, I sat down, called up some boys at the Pentagon that were still willing to listen. I gave them a list of names, and what they were planning. I told them boys at the Pentagon, these judges, had a bomb, and once the judges found out the Pentagon knew, they came running straight to me.”

Mr. Dorian grinned, and lifted up his thumb like a banana, pointing himself out.

“Knowing that the US would hunt them down to the ends of the earth, they came running with their tails between their legs, to the only man they knew could make them disappear, where not even the US government could find them. Of course… little do they know, there's really no hiding from the government. If they seriously want to find your ass, they eventually will—I know! Those fucking idiots!

But, anyways, so in a week from now, in Venezuela, when they're in their white chateaus, lying in a pool chair, while being served by topless Latin women, thinking how they got away, scot-free, and loving it, that's when it's going to happen!”

Michael began to see what direction this was all going in, as he turned his head back towards the direction of that Mr. Bonhoeffer—or whoever he was—that had just left.

“They wanted to use my bomb… hell! They didn't even know what was really down there! They wanted to use that, after they had taken care of me? Oh, I got something for them! I got something very special for them! Come a week from now.”

Michael felt a bit nauseated, now, just thinking what Mr. Dorian was capable of.

“My boys down there in Venezuela got something very special for them. You know, down in South America, they have such horrifically beautiful ways of torturing people to death.

They like to take this thin piece of glass, that’s thin enough to fit into that small hole.”

Michael could only phantom what hole he was referring to.

“Stick it in—and break it off! And then, for a week straight, they'll make them drink 10 gallons of water a day and—”

“Shut up! Shut up! You're fucking sick! I don't want to hear this anymore,” yelled out Michael, as he spat up with more blood.

“Oh, don't tell me you feel sorry now for Mr. Bonhoeffer—that fucking Kraut,” asked Mr. Dorian, seemingly confused as to why this young punk would care.

“How can you do something that sick and disgusting to someone else?”

Mr. Dorian's eyes narrowed down to Michael's, and grew an indifferent look. Then shrugged.

“No—seriously! How the fuck can you—”

“Oh—shut up—son! Stop thinking like such a child, the world has been a sick place long before you or I were ever born,” responded Mr. Dorian in irritation.

He then lifted up a bottle of Jack Daniels he had, that Michael hadn't noticed, took one giant gulp, and took almost a quarter of the bottle with it.

“And that's your excuse,” asked Michael, wondering what type of sick world this man was coming from.

“You know what? When you got here on that motorcycle, and took care of those two niggers… and then, that gang of pansies, which I have to admit I was impressed by… did you know, Mr. Bonhoeffer wanted you dead? And quickly, too! He had his men hidden all around, and in the bushes, waiting for these America's finest here….”

Mr. Dorian sprawled his hand towards the group of dead bodies laying all about.

“And we were all taken back, when you came back. Mr. Bonhoeffer and I were in a separate security office room, with monitors, similar to this one, but the one that the government would use when they had offices here. Also, I have to say, seeing and hearing you on those monitors—pacing up and down—cussing out that bomb, has to be the stupidest and funniest thing I've seen in a long time,” explained Mr. Dorian, as he began to strangely wheeze a bit, as if though he was laughing.

Michael now came to the realization, that whole experience he had with the bomb down in the garage, it was all on camera.

Ah—fuck you! The ‘cussing out nukes’ is my private joke, I don't want you to find it funny!

“You're something really stupid and crazy, I'll tell ye,” said Dorian.

And then Michael realized the man was starting to get friendly with him.

Wait, what's going on here?

As Michael realized he and Dorian, now, were sharing a moment, a strong moment. That of two kindred souls looking into each other, and seeing true kinship, and meaning, and sense of—

No, no! With that kid, fine! But not with this evil fucker, here! I mean… the motherfucker shot me! He shot me! I'm dieing here. So, fuck you, Gab, and that kindred souls bullshit! Not happening… hell no!

"But anyways—when you first got here, Mr. Bonhoeffer wanted you dead that second, but I said 'hold up, there! I want to see what the soldier boy is going to do.'"

Michael remembered how he felt he was being watched when he got to 1999, and now he realized why.

"So, anyways, don't feel sorry for a piece-of-shit like that, that man has done enough horrific things in his life to deserve it—trust me!

Because… not all the stories about The Nightslashers are false," said Mr. Dorian, as his eyes began trying to spell out the horrific details of Mr. Bonhoeffer's tale.

Michael broke out with a small chuckle, as he couldn't help having one more from the hypocrisy of it all. Luckily, this time, the eruption of pain wasn't as bad.

"He's getting what's coming to him," said Mr. Dorian.

"And what's coming to you—huh—since you're such an angel, there," asked Michael, trying to get his attention again.

Mr. Dorian then sunk back both in his chair, and into his thoughts.

"What are you doing? Why are you still here," asked Michael.

Seeing as how Mr. Dorian was in such a chatty mood, questions now began popping up in Michael's head, that he figured he might as well ask.

Fucking trying to be buddy-buddy with me….

Michael now wanted to believe he had been mistaken about what he saw down there. Seeing that bomb. That nuke!

Or was it?

He couldn't understand what this Mr. Dorian would really want to do with it.

He can’t just wanna blow it up, to blow it up! I don’t believe it. He can’t be that one dimensionally evil, he’s up to something, here… just what?

And, if he did want to blow it up, then why was he sitting here, chatting with Michael, when he should have been fleeing from the city. And, if he didn't want to blow up the bomb, then what did he want to use it for?

I gotta think about these things right now! I can’t just think about sleep, and think ‘fuck it all!’ Maybe I can still do something to change things….

Thought Michael, and….

And why is he trying to be friendly with me?

Maybe because you and him have a lot of things that are similar?

Shut up, Gab! Shut the fuck up! Don’t even get me started with that possibility… I don’t want to hear it!

Michael then began pointing at Mr. Dorian to get his full attention. And Dorian then, gave it to him.

“What are you pointing at, son? Didn’t your mother ever teach you it's rude to point,” asked Mr. Dorian, sarcastically.

“Don't call me son! What are you doing just sitting there,” demanded Michael.

As Michael said those words, Mr. Dorian began twitching and turning. Seeming twisted about something or another. Then he took another large gulp of his Jack Daniels, and said:

“I'm waiting for the Grim Reaper.”

That took Michael back a notch, as he wondered why he would be.

“Just… like… you,” preached Mr. Dorian.

As he looked straight into Michael's eyes. And that now scared Michael shitless, hearing it come from his mouth. Something he’d been doing all night long, and now hearing how this Mr. Dorian was, too.

Fuck this situation that I'm in! I hate this place, and I hate this

man! I want to be with....

Michael began to think about that possibility again.

If I had just left with Nikki... we wouldn't be here.

Michael felt like Mr. Dorian, here, had bought him a one-way ticket to hell, and now hearing him speak of the Reaper, felt like confirmation. Seeing into his eyes, that bloody tale that he saw in him before, was now being fully realized, and now Michael felt his sense of self, merging with this monster, here, this devil. And as he felt it, he then felt his mitts wanting to go into a frenzy.

"Why'd you come back," asked Mr. Dorian, while staring at the monitors again, as the sound of those women continued to fill the airwaves.

"Ah, ah... suck it... yeah!"

"What?"

Mr. Dorian then realized that the volume of those women was getting higher, and too high for Michael to make out what he was saying. Mr. Dorian now lowered it.

"Once you took care of my boy, Alejandro, Angel Eyes—"

"Fuck him, fuck that asshole," interrupted Michael, thinking about how he'd stare at Nikki, every chance he got.

Mr. Dorian frowned and then said:

"Don't be so quick to judge him, you don't know what type of hell he came from, the type of hell I found him in. He was a sick bastard, I'll admit, but all he ever wanted was a father figure, which he saw in me. He had a very sad concept of life and death, like nothing mattered, and all he wanted was something to matter. That boy, there, had seen things, and been through things, not even I can imagine, and I've seen a lot."

Michael shrugged, as to say, 'I don't give a shit!' And Mr. Dorian noticed.

"Oh, what do you know? You should see how the rest of the world lives. It's way worse, I tell ye! This country might have a serious problem with crime right now, but the world he came from was far, far worse!

Fuck Alejandro! Boo-fucking-hoo! There should never be an excuse! It don't matter how cruel and uncaring, or bad and brutal people get, you always gots to stand out, and be an example! You—

you of all people—noting how much of a sick fuck he was, just makes me glad I killed him. Justice! At least it won't haunt me, like killing Radboy has been all night long.

Thought Michael, as Mr. Dorian went back to what he was saying earlier.

"You could have left, and you could have taken that Ms. Jackson—

Jackson?

Always got the impression she was all French. Seeming so smug, filled with so much vanity, yet, also something very pitiful about her… and if vanity was a nationality, it would be the…."

Mr. Dorian seemed to be breaking off there for a second.

"Anyways, you could have taken her, and driven out of town. So, why'd you come back," asked Mr. Dorian.

Ah shit!

Thought Michael, then, realizing just how much of a fuck up that really was. Now. That even Mr. Dorian, here, was bringing it up. Michael sighed.

Coming all this fucking way to play Rambo… why?

"Seriously, son, young filly like that? I would have taken her somewhere far—to a motel—maybe? And had been sticking it to her all over, all night long. Young hot filly like that? And I've heard stories of how good she—"

"Shut-up—shut the fuck up! I don't want to hear that crap," bellowed out Michael.

"What is it, boy? Not into gals? You more into peter-puffing, yourself," asked Mr. Dorian, as he had a small chuckle, remembering how Michael had played him.

Michael said nothing.

"I liked what you did back there, though, it was a lot of fun. Most people are too intimidated by me to be so bold and stupid… but anyways…."

Mr. Dorian squinted a bit forward, as he began focusing out clues.

"Oh, wait, I get it now! So, it's not just a fling. You two have history, and you have a thing for her, and not just the one you got in your trousers," detected Mr. Dorian, as he began pointing with his index; doing that 'naughty-naughty' motion with it.

Michael fell back, and felt like this devil was once again finding his way underneath his skin.

"Well—anyways—I think I might know why you came back, I saw it in your eyes. There's something crazy in them—I saw! But what got you to that point… I wonder…."

Then Mr. Dorian began sniffing up more clues.

"What happened to that pretty gal back there," asked Mr. Dorian, again, still doing the same motion with his index finger.

Michael said nothing, as Mr. Dorian began picking up even more clues, began reading the signals being broadcasted by Michael.

"Did you do something," asked Mr. Dorian as he narrowed his eyes back onto Michael, sensing something troubling him, that had all to do with her.

Michael didn't respond, but still continued to broadcast, without himself knowing it.

What broadcast? I'm not saying shit!

It's your body language, Michael, that's what he's reading.

Ah shit! My pokerface!

"Oh, I see what happened! She said something to send you off, and you placed your hands on her, and that's why you came back here," hammered out Mr. Dorian, as he made one last motion with his index, and nailed it.

"HOW—do you know that," cried out Michael, growing delirious at the thought that this man was able to read his thoughts.

Mr. Dorian just sat back, and shrugged.

"Because I see that shit happen all the time. You're not the first man that's ever gone berserk, and placed his hands on his woman. Ha… dames! What can you do with them? They'll make a man do a lot of crazy shit, just so he can feel sane and sound again."

Mr. Dorian shook his head, and then took another giant gulp, and finished off the bottle. Then, took out another bottle from a duffel bag next to him.

Damn, this guy sure knows how to pound it….

Michael then started to feel questions circling his head, and the most important ones being: questions about the bomb. He wanted to start

entertaining the notion, again, that he might have been mistaken what he'd seen down there. Even a small little blockbuster like a Daisy Cutter, would have been better, compared to what he didn't want to imagine.

I mean, what the fuck do I know about bombs? Did I really see that? Was it real?

The Dance with the Devil: Part Two.

And then Michael saw Mr. Dorian draw something else out of that duffel bag he had next to him. From inside the bag, Mr. Dorian drew out a clunky object, that had an antenna on top, and a trigger. It looked like a remote detonator, and Michael freaked out as he realized this. Mr. Dorian then began mumbling to himself:

"Good thing we tested to see if it would catch a signal from down in the basement, I need to be around a TV and—"

"No—don't do it," cried out Michael.

"Do what," asked Mr. Dorian, as his eyes lit up like morbid spotlights, eyeing Michael, like a dead man with a tale.

"Was that... what I think it was... down there," asked Michael, as he felt like he couldn't avoid it.

"What do you think it was?"

Michael began picturing what he had seen down there, as he pictured the Russian lettering, and then the image he had seen that gave it away.

"What do you think it was," asked Mr. Dorian, again.

A Russian nuke?

"How did you get it? How did you get something like that?"

Mr. Dorian then shrugged, as if it was nothing, and began playing around with the monitor's controls again.

"How the fuck did you get a nuke?"

"You remember a thing called the Cuban missile crisis... that's how!"

Michael did remember a faint memory of that event as a child, but mostly what he knew was it had something to do with the Cold War, Cuba, and WW3 almost happening.

"What," cried out Michael, rhetorically, trying to draw more information out of the man.

"Back then, when Khrushchev was trying to arm Cuba with missiles, we had a blockade up to try and stop his ships from

delivering their packages. Of course, some of their ships tried to rush the blockade, and we had to ground them. I was there when one of the ships was grounded into Haiti, and since I had a lot of brass—high-up friends—in the Navy and Coast Guard, I was able to secure the tip of one of those missiles, without it ever showing up in the books. We secured the tip, and rolled the rest of the missile into the ocean… big fucker! No way in hell were we going to transport that entire part without getting attention. But anyways, me and a couple of Admirals felt like it would be an 'ace in the hole' if anything was to ever happen. When we didn't want the Pentagon to know."

Oh shit! This guy is really gonna go into a lot of description about everything, is he?

Thought Michael. As Mr. Dorian continued.

"I tell ye, working for them has been an entertaining experience. The US Government, that is. They don't care what you do, as long as you get away with it. And ninety percent of the time, they're not even looking, or will care. But, once they catch you, your ass is grass, then. Ask anyone that works for the government… no matter if they work for the Pentagon or at a local DMV… and they'll tell you how true it is. How backwards and stupid, and corrupt, they all really are."

Mr. Dorian then stopped, and Michael… felt relieved.

Oh, thank God!

But then Dorian began again:

"Would you believe if I told you I had those Admirals transport the bomb to me by carrier, four days ago? Well… wasn't my idea! First explaining to me how they were going to do it all incognito like. And how was it all 'incognito like', you say?"

I didn't say! I didn't ask!

Thought Michael as he rolled his eyes.

"Well… when I got on board, it wasn't locked away somewhere deep in the ship—nope! It was in the middle of the damn hanger bay, for all to see, guarded by some damn, lousy, low-rate AN Hardy standing watch over the damn nuke, with not a pistol, nor a whistle, nor anything at hand! No Marines armed with M-16s, just some dumb kid named AN Hardy, who just stood there,

moping about how he had duty the first day of shore leave, in New York City. Can you believe it? And that entire time the nuke was being transported, no one on board even knew what the damn thing was. Not even the skipper of the damn boat! Probably took it for some F-14 Tomcat engine part—so fucking stupid they all really are—I'll tell ye!"

Mr. Dorian then wheezed a bit telling his story. Michael, on the other hand, felt lost; he didn't know how to believe half the shit this man was telling him. Once again, his story seemed way too otherworldly for the likes of Michael. This man lived in an entirely different world, than the one which Michael was used to. He spoke of world events, beyond what normal people had ever been a part of, and it seemed way too unimaginable.

What carrier… an aircraft carrier? AN Hardy? F-14 Tomcats? Admirals?

Wait… who the fuck are these Admirals that he's talking about? And… ah! Never mind!

Michael didn't know, and now felt like he shouldn't care; he felt like he still needed to keep things simple, and not get too lost in the details—which Mr. Dorian was so full of! All he needed to know was whether or not that thing down there was a nuke, and he was sure of that now. Michael began thinking about what to ask, next, as Mr. Dorian continued mumbling to himself.

"Was going to take it to DC, and start the 'Age of Rage' there, considering the gang problem that city has also got. But, somehow, they found out, and since they placed that city on lock down, I had to bring it here. And, somehow, they found out how I was bringing it here, too, but it was too late, then, it was already here. Bastards! Once you have their attention, that's when they really begin paying such, and doing their freakin' jobs. Fucking bastards! And then, I had to hide the damn thing somewhere. Somewhere for a few days, they wouldn't look. Well, I decided to take an example from that Admiral, there, of holding the bomb under everyone's noses, someplace so obvious, that no one would be willing to check, since no one would believe what they're really seeing. Ha! Now I bet if I had it placed in the middle of Time Square, in the middle of the

day, I could have still gotten away with it. Ha!"

"What are you going to do with it," cried out Michael, feeling a bit skittish to hear the answer.

And that question now, changed up the chatty mood Mr. Dorian was in, as a look of dire seriousness grew over him.

For a second there, Mr. Dorian didn't say a word. He just sat there, while his eyes began searching about for something he might have lost in his thoughts. He then frowned for a second, and then his eyes lit up, as he stood up. And once he stood up, a stream of light that was shining down within the office, glazed his giant bald head, and the man seemed ready now to answer. It seemed like he was about to break into a sermon, into his own madness, as he shivered a bit in place.

"What do you want to use a nuke for—huh," asked Michael.

And then:

"I'm starting a revolution," said the man, with a black-hole in his pocket.

Michael tried to gaze into his eyes, and see if he was being serious. He seemed to be frozen in a state of higher knowledge, like, as if though, in his mind, he had devised the greatest and most elaborate scheme ever devised by man; the complexity of its format was so well detailed, and so refined, that the man truly had to be mad to understand it, and be able to read the blueprints.

Fucking wacko!

Michael just shook his head, again, in disbelief, and began to wonder if he was really just hallucinating all this, like he had with that Billy Kid.

Like Billy, as much as I don't want to, I feel a connection, here. Could he just be in my mind like….

It all felt too surreal for him—otherworldly again—as Michael began to wonder, if he had gone so mad after the night he had had, that this was really the result of it. For three weeks straight, he had been unable to get a wink of sleep, and he had heard that when a man does that, eventually, he could go insane. For three weeks, Michael had sat in his studio wasteland apartment, thinking of nothing but Radboy, revenge, Nikki, and nothing else.

Is this the result of going without no sleep for that long?
Wondered Michael, as he began to believe it was so. And then again—if so—what was Mr. Dorian's part in all this? Who the fuck was this man, and what did he have to do with Michael?

I feel like that kid represented more of my better nature.
So, then! If that was the case with the kid, what side of Michael's nature did this Big White Head represent now? Michael then looked down at his mitts again, and he felt like they, and this Mr. Dorian, were one, and in cahoots.

These fucking barehands!

It's his fault! He's the one that got me to eventually attack the only precious thing that I've had left of my past….
Michael, you already came to the conclusion that it was your judgmental, and self-pitying ways, that….

Shut up, Gab, it's his fault!

"Who the fuck are you," cried out Michael.

Then Mr. Dorian bopped his head back, a little, in confusion. Then understood, and now began to smile; he was seeing how his presence was having an effect on Michael, since Michael was staring at him like he was some evil demon, heretic, sorcerer, something.

He is!
And Dorian had a look on his face, like he wanted to mess with him a little.

"Who are—"

"I'm one of The Fedora People," said Mr. Dorian.

And then, lifted his head, and began laughing hysterically, making a wild wheezing sound, that made Michael feel like his eardrums were going to burst.

"And one day… you'll be one too!"

"Who—what?"
Then Mr. Dorian stopped, shook his head, and cringed a bit.

"Never mind, my idea of a joke," responded Mr. Dorian.

“What have you done to my head,” asked Michael.

This time Mr. Dorian grew a displeased look.

“What did you do to my head,” asked Michael, again.

“What do you mean, what did I do,” responded Mr. Dorian, as the question began to irritate him.

“You made me attack Nikki! You've made me feel sick to my stomach all night long, I felt like a psychopath because of you! Who the fuck are you, and what have you done to my….”

Mr. Dorian seemed to have broken away from the light that was shining down on him, and he seemed more centered on Michael now.

“What do you mean—what did I do? You're the maniac that first came here and pushed a man out of a window, and had him fall to his death. You're the maniac that's been running around town, thumping skulls.

And you're the maniac, that placed his hands on his own sweetheart. Did you kill her?”

“No,” gasped Michael, in horror of the possibility that he might have.

Wait, did I?

No Michael, you didn’t!

Did I?

No, no, no! You didn’t! Don’t start losing it now!

Mr. Dorian had a small chuckle, as he eyed Michael, behind his haze. Then walked over to him, twitched a bit, stuck out his index finger, again, and seemed to have an answer.

“You know what? It's a generational thing! My generation… even though we were some easily led saps, at least we had balls to accept responsibility, and deal with the real world.”

Michael looked to one side, and thought:

What? Generational thing… what's he getting at here?

Thought Michael… so out of it now, that he couldn’t even figure how this was stuff he’d been thinking about, himself, all night long.

“You know what? You talk too much—just get away from me, you both,” responded Michael, finally.

“Oh, I haven't even begun to talk,” bellowed out The Big White Head, as his head began expanding again, “wait, what did you mean, both?”

Michael didn’t say a thing.

“Oh, never mind… you asked me what happened to your head—I'll tell ye!”

Michael felt like crawling away from him. The closer The Big White Head got to him, the further he wanted to be away from it.

And then all of a sudden, the lunatic was off:

“It's really a generational thing—and don't worry—this will come back around to what I was saying about my revolution, earlier. You see, in the 50s, with my generation, unfortunately, we were all a bunch of saps, being blindly led around by the likes of McCarthy—I'll admit it! After the war, and the depression, we were such a broken and jaded bunch, even when we were victorious, that we wanted any form of government to feel safe with, knowing all we had fought and suffered and died for, was for something grand. Something Utopic. Something that could never be corrupted. Something that may have been impossible. And that blinded us to even morons such as McCarthy and his Salem witch trials. With our easily led generation, if the government told us there were commie witches riding nukes, wanting to invade America by bewitching us with their Bolsheviks ideals, and twitching noses, we would have believed them. But still, even then, we would have at least still been willing to take up arms, and die by another couple of millions, even when fighting imaginary figures in the sky, as absurd and ridiculous as the idea might be. But, as stupid and easily led as we were, at least we still had the guts to do what we felt was right… or really! Lead to believe was right.”

Oh, I can see this guy is really gonna let me have it, now.

“Unfortunately, that all also means with our generation, today, if we were in your place, and were still in our prime, we probably would be all for a fascist state taking over, and creating an empire. Even after all we saw of Nazi Germany, and have been seeing from the USSR. I know we would think we'd be different. We're Americans! So we would be the nation to finally create a Utopia,

and all would be perfect. We'd be all for an empire, even when the next lifelong elected president was to replace the American flag with another Buddhist symbol, and began rounded up blacks and Jews and homosexuals, to be sent away somewhere, away from the rest of society, for some reason, best not to look into.

Somewhere in Montana.

The promise of Utopia would make our naive and ignorant lot all for it, no matter the circumstances."

Umm… okay?

Thought Michael, as Mr. Dorian stopped for a second to inhale.

"Your generation… the so-and-so called Babyboomers? Now, fortunately, for your generation, you're not so stupid, and are a lot more skeptical, and would see through all the lies.

But that's not going to matter now, since you're all just a bunch of cowards.

About twenty years ago, in the 60s, you were all trying to go bohemian, singing and praising about love and peace, and goodwill to all humankind. All dressed in cockamamie outfits, like a bunch of theatrical clowns coming from a renaissance fair. But now, you're all pretending that never happened. Wearing tailored suits, and you're all more greedy and cutthroat and untrustworthy than my generation ever was. So, what ever happened to all that love and goodwill? There was a time, there, I thought your generation was better, around the time John F. Kennedy was still alive. And truly did want to bring Utopia to the world…

how foolish I was in those days…

for I realized then that that had nothing to do with all those peace marches your generation had back then. You weren't doing all that for the right reason, but really, all for all the wrong ones! I see that now, now with this Me Generation, and all you want is money, so you can stuff your fat selfish faces, and build your own little worlds

to separate yourselves from the rest of your filthy lot, and a world you're not worthy of. And look how things have gotten, with your ignorant ways, with the crime in the country.

Look! Truly! Look!

Your generation is either a bunch of no good money grubbing cowards, that, or a bunch of delinquent punks on the streets, just as greedy and cutthroat and untrustworthy, but also—oh so—pathetic and lazy, too! All so unwilling to rise up, and claim what should be rightfully yours. And you know what? You know what that shows me? No principals and no character! You're all a bunch of lousy spoiled cowardly brats—that back then—just wanted to fuck each other ,and have a good time, and not get a job to make a decent living.

But the 60s are now over, around the 70s you all started to show how little you really cared about all that John Lennon 'Imagine a world of love and peace' garbage. And now in the 80s, just want to go back to being spoiled and feeling entitled. How we raised you in the 50s, and what we made you into, when you all were children.

Now in the 80s,
your generation is beginning to show its true nature. You're a lot smarter, but not in the right ways. You'd allow a fascist state to rise, as long as you can continue with your high life parties on 5th avenue, and all that debauchery, and never have to take arms like you did in 'Nam again. Unlike my generation, yours would see the truth of how ugly and evil our country is turning into, and then accept it, just as long as you didn't have to take up responsibility to go to war against it. Something my generation would have at least done, if we weren't so blindsided by our hopes and dreams. Obviously, instead of spoiling all you when we were raising your sorry lot in the 50s. Giving you what we never had. We should have been disciplining the crap out of you, and preparing you for the long and hard road ahead. One's true nature is what it is, and eventually over time, it'll start to show itself. As you were as a child,

as you are as an adult. Your generation might have fooled the world into thinking how righteous you all are, with everything you do, fooled even yourselves while at it, but the truth is, none of you are good decent people.

None of you are righteous!

You're all rotten. And now, the truth is coming out.

So, I'll tell ye, don't be telling me what I put in your head,
and I'll tell ye something else, whatever that's wrong within you now, was there from the start. Take some responsibility into who and what you are—and just accept it!"

As he went into a rant, his mind seemed to be trying to rampage out of its own skull, and sink its teeth into Michael. Once he started—once he saw green—he was off, and was speeding for the finish line. What he had to say all seemed like way too many segmented and individual thoughts a man might have during the course of a week, which he would then mash all together, in order to gain some grander sense of clarity and meaning behind it.

And I don't really know what Dorian, here, is talking about now.
How was my generation of kids ever raised soft?

And now, Michael thought about days he hadn't, in a long, long while.

Heh!

I was born in November 5, 1955.

And, you can say I was a regular ol' 'oh boy' and 'gee willikers' kid. A regular ol' Dennis the Menace, or Leave it to Beaver, sort, considering how much I also looked the part with my flattop, striped shirt, and baseball glove stuffed in my back pocket, even though I never played much baseball. I mean….

I was Dennis the Menace!
I was The Beaver!
Hell… even Eddie Munster… (actually… more him, than the rest).

I was, even though my life was nothing like those shows on TV, being raised in some wholesome household behind a white picket fence. Instead, I remember a bunch of us kids around in the neighborhood, back in the early 60s, just hanging out in the streets. Hanging out from morning till dusk. And why? Just to avoid going back home, and dealing with the insanity that went on behind closed doors.

Hell, I remember Eddie E. Bernstein, Little Eddie the Jew. Little wimpy kid that had a look of terror every time it was time for him to go home for supper. I used to wonder why that was, until one evening, he wanted me to join him. Was really scared, and acted like he didn't want to be alone, and alone, going home, so can you imagine how bad he used to get it? And it was then I found out... his old man was even more of a hardass than mine was, just in a broken way. Kept picking on his little boy, Eddie, calling him a 'nothing loser,' and called him those things, since Eddie was a twerp. He said to him,

'you're the reason why the Krauts victimized us the way they did.'

And kept going on and on about that. And I left when it got really sordid between the two, and Eddie's mother suggested it was probably best if I did. A week later, Eddie had to go to the hospital, since his ol' man had busted him over the head with a chair, and needed stitches. Little Eddie really began to change after that. Was no longer all smiles and trying to be friendly. And then, there's what happened to him later, that got him sent to juvi hall. Fucking Eddie heard some kid on the block speaking German, and listening to him made him snap, somehow, and walk over to him, and stab him a couple of times in the neck with a pencil. Didn't kill that kid, who wasn't even German. Was just some kid saying 'Achtung! Achtung!' A lot. 'Cause it was a funny thing to say back then as kids. I never saw Little Eddie again after that. What the fuck is this Mr. Dorian talking about? We, a generation, that didn't take any licks? 'Cause our old man's all didn't have a thing against us being soft? What the fuck is he...? Me, Little Eddie, there, Jimmy K., Joey P.,

Danny the Duck, Danny the Dolphin, Danny the Dog—the Three Dannys! Poor Danny the Dog lost an eye, after his dad lost it, and tried to murder his mother with a tire iron, which the old man then tried to use on Danny, but him and his mother escaped, and later his dad killed himself with a 9mm after realizing what he had done, shooting himself in the temple. Poor ol' Doggie D!

Wow!

It's been so long since I thought about him. Him and Little Eddie. And the whole mess of us generation of Lost Boys. Us kids, that I was around at that age, before I even met Gab and Anthony, and started The Bloody Shamrocks. A whole mess of us, sitting outside all day, never wanting to go home, because we were all too afraid to. Too afraid to go back, and deal with our war hero dads going on a rampage trying, to instill in us what it takes to beat them Japs and them Krauts. Nutcases! Fucking nutcases, that most definitely, weren't suffering from any form of PTSD, ‘cause real men don't suffer from anything as faggoty sounded as that—am I right?

Michael was getting seriously mad, thinking about all this, seriously intense—furious! So much so, he for a while there, couldn’t even feel the excruciating pain in his gut no more.

A whole mess of us kids just on the street, and then, I remember later into the 60s, things getting just worse and worse. There were so many of us kids that had been busted up badly for years, by our ol' pops, now on the streets, and we had nothing to do but share all that we'd been educated. Out there, proving to each other who's got what it takes, by taking it out on each other.

About time the 70s came around, the streets felt like a warzone, with us kids now being teenagers and young adults. And crime in America just felt like it was getting worse and worse. Crime was now everywhere. Everywhere! Inner cities filled with streets of us juvenile delinquents. A bunch of Lost Boys that decided to never return home, ever, after what they had been put through, all of us out looking for some… Peter Pan… some headstrong leader to

guide us all onwards. Or something. It was like that then, and, I can see still is now.

Thought Michael now, thinking about the Age of Rage.

And lookie what we got now, now in the 80s, and now with this Age of Rage mess—that you started, Mr. Dorian! You! And people like you! How did shit get this way? How did they? I've heard so many people asking when it comes to the crime rate in this country.

And now... I think I have a clue.

The Dance with the Devil: Part Three.

"What are you talking about? You're ranting," said Michael.

As he saw the man was still moving his lips, as if though he was speaking.

Shit! Is that how I am when I'm off on my tangents?

"I haven't even begun ranting yet," barked out The Big White Head, as his eyes blew up like balloons, and began developing tears, "you know what your problem is? You have no vision!"

"Vision of what? Millions of people dieing? Is that what you get off on," asked Michael.

The Big White Head pierced his eyes at Michael, as he began to snarl in dissatisfaction.

"I'm starting a revolution!"

"What are you talking about? Stop saying that!"

"Thomas Jefferson said it, every generation needs one!"

Michael closed his eyes, and began to wonder if it would be better just to ignore him. Seemed like nothing was going to make sense now, now that the man was off, and his mind seemed to be speeding by like a runaway locomotive.

"Eventually, you're going to need one to fight back the fascist state that grows," cried out Mr. Dorian, as he began to peer out, as if though, he was studying his own words coming out of his mouth.

"Thomas Jefferson? Revolution? Fascism? What the fuck are you talking about? Millions of people are going to die because of that bomb, that's all I'm getting from this!"

Mr. Dorian then began frowning so hard, he looked like he was going to split the top of his head in half. He walked over to one of the dead

commandos that were supposedly sent by the US to stop him; he eyed him, a bit, and said:

"That's war!"

"What war? The cold war," asked Michael, as his mind fractured trying to make sense of it.

"No, not this phony political one we're having now! I'm talking about the real ones, like the one we had in WW2. That's the real world we live in, millions and millions have to die if there's to be a real change, or if we're to stop true evil from rearing its ugly head again."

Michael felt like throwing his arms up, again. Whatever world this Mr. Dorian came from, definitely wasn't earth, and it didn't seem to obey the same laws of physics and reason as this one did.

"Still, all I hear is you wanting to detonate a nuke, and that's it," explained Michael.

"That's war!"

"Stop saying that—there is no war!"

"That's how we fought it! You know… eighty million died—eighty million! Today, everyone thinks of that war as some great victory, since we were victorious. But do you know how terrifying the world was to live in until we were? The sheer terror, the entire world felt, seeing such a great evil rise, and possibly consume the rest of the world, entire. How can I express to you—how can I? I can't! You had to have been there alive at that time to truly understand. And millions and millions of us had to die to stop that great evil, eighty million in total had to die, on both sides, all over the world, to stop that maniac in Germany… and now, it seems as if millions more have to die, if we're to stop fascism from rearing its ugly head again!"

"What fascism, what are you talking about," demanded Michael.

"This country wants to turn completely fascist. A giant police state, to police over the new world order that is coming. It wants to take lead, and become an empire, it wants to become what I had to go to war, and fight tooth and nail to stop. Trust me, I know this, because I've spent over thirty years helping them become that way.

It was right around the early 50s, when I was picked up by the CIA,

that I learned really what the good ol' US of A was all about. On my first mission, being sent to Iran, to help stage a coup against a democratically elected official, who just wanted to nationalize the oil in his country, that was at the time, completely under the control of a bunch of greedy British oil tycoons. Take him out, and have him replaced with a dictatorial monarch… that then went on to rule that country, with an iron fist, for thirty more years…."

Dorian then stopped.

Breathe… breathe… you fucking nutbag….

Actually… don't! And drop dead!

Thought Michael, as he was starting to get sick of his rant.

"I mean… I was sent there to help replace democracy, for a monarch! Overthrow a prime minister, who's intentions were for the best of his people, and replace him, with a dictatorial king. I mean—does that sound American to you? What should be expected from us, considering our history when it comes to monarchs, and especially England? Or, does that sound like something that might be expected from us, if we were the complete opposite, of everything that's been told that we supposedly represent, and would stands against? Us… a democracy? Ha! This country wants fascism—I'll tell ye! But now, I've got something for them, to even out the playing field."

Where the hell is this guy going with all this? He wants to start a revolution… because this country is turning, maybe, fascist. So, to do that, he needs to nuke it? What the….

Michael felt divided by the pain in his gut, and the ranting and raving of this nutbag. He felt like he could only place enough attention on one thing, and Michael was now beginning to feel more comfortable centering in on the pain.

"But if you want to wage war, you need soldiers—real soldiers! And your generation is too pathetic for that. A bunch of spoiled entitled cowards! A bunch of pussies!"

"Oh, fuck you," cried out Michael, sick of hearing him say that.

"What, you all are a bunch of—"

"Yeah, whatever!"

Mr. Dorian started looking Michael up and down, and then shook his

head.

"Oh, fuck you! You say we'd just allow some Hitler type, in this country, to rise to power," asked Michael.

"Your generation would… it would! You're all just that…."

"What about Nixon, he's been like the closest thing to what you're saying, and we got rid of him," said Michael, then smiled.

Mr. Dorian than began shaking his head.

"We did!"

"No, you didn't," said Mr. Dorian.

"Yes, we did, we got the balls to stand up against tyrannical assholes… and—"

"Nixon… was a crook, and a fuck up! That slipped up, and got himself kicked out… your generation didn't do jack-squat," concluded Dorian.

Michael then shrugged. But thinking about it now, Dorian was sorta right about it. Mr. Dorian then continued:

"Your generation might have had a lot of gust early on, when they started in the 60s to do what they saw was righteous. But it lost almost all of it during the 70s. And then, that man got himself booted out of office. Your generation did nothing—but talk a lot! And. That's another thing I can't stand about your generation. You think everything can be won with politics. Talking!

But only violence truly can resolve anything….

I mean—look! You've had one war to prove yourselves, 'Nam, and your sorry lot got your asses handed to you by a bunch of slopes. Dirty brown gooks popping out of holes, like gofers, and giving you Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. So fucking pathetic and embarrassing! And what's worse, you won't allow a war to be a war.

You know how we won WW2?

We went all out!

We fucked those Krauts and Japs in the ass, and out the mouths, with no hesitations. And with North Korea, we did the same, and

now that country wets itself every time our name is even mentioned. But, as for the whole ‘Nam war, somewhere along the line, everyone forgot that there aren't supposed to be rules to it, to war, and we allowed the politicians to take over. This is all a reflection of the changing of our times. With your generation, you're all an easily terrorized sort, all wetting yourselves over the horrors of the world, like children over the boogiemen in your closets, and the horrors within yourselves. Because you don't want to accept them.

'Nam could have easily been won if we still had MacArthur's likes in charge. But your generation would never have it.”

Mr. Dorian took a deep breath, while his eyes continued the scan the astral plains.

“Simply put…
why the nuke, you ask?
Well…
I’ll tell ye!

Because you’re all a bunch of pussies!

AND YOU NEED IT!”

And there it was, the motive of the madman. Michael looked into his face… but then noticed Mr. Dorian wasn’t looking back.

A pause.

Now Mr. Dorian did look at Michael, and it was as if he just noticed him being there. Michael then gave Mr. Dorian a look.

“Well, most of you are, though. You, son, I can see you’re different. But most of your lily sort are.”

Fuck you! Asshole! Like to see you call me a pussy, if I wasn’t in the predicament I’m in. Shot. Bleeding all over the place.

“I’ll get to how I feel about you, in a second. But… most of your

generation… the one's that aren't in the streets right now rioting, are! They're all pussies. I've seen it. Seen it in their eyes. And they need that bomb, need the hell it releases to scare them out of their pansy-ass selves, and grow a pair. Break their stupid fucking noses in, and wake them up!"

And that caught Michael's attention—big time!

Breaking stupid fucking noses? Ah shit! It's him! No wonder I'm so scared of this man, Dorian. Oh, fuck, don't think too much about it. He was never crazy. Not a raving lunatic, at least!

Thought Michael, as he realized who this man was starting to remind him of.

"That's what the horrors of the real world and war does to a man, to change him from the sorry sort your generation is all about, into the heroes that mine were. Rock and roll isn't what's going to make you truly free, but, the stuff I had to go through, will.

And until you experience those horrors, you'll never be truly free!

Right now, with the riots going around, you'd think that would be enough. Well, I'll tell ye—it won't! Now that the National Guards—the fire power of our government—have been called in. Once they start unloading into the masses, you're going to see those rioters scatter like cockroaches, with the lights turned on. And they'll rush back, stepping back, behind the line that was drawn, in pussified fear. The masses right now might be mad and driven enough to riot, but they're not yet mad and driven enough to take bullets, and watch everyone around them shredded into pieces, they need to be madder than that to be willing to go that far!"

Oh, you mean like Skiddy? Screwy, like him? Ha! Fat chance making a difference in the world, being that much of a whack job.

And then, all of a sudden, listening to this man rave as he did, was starting to have a reverse effect on Michael, which sorta made him want to smile for a second, there. The madman had had his moment when talking about squeezing people's skulls in. And when he figured out how Michael had probably attacked Nikki, that all had Michael crawling for the ceiling. But now, the more he ranted and raved, the more Michael began to strangely feel calm again. For as mad as Michael was…

he felt glad he wasn't—this!

Strangely enough, even with the predicament he was in, and the whole city was in, also, Michael at least felt relieved over this.

You know what, asshole? Rompous-pompous! Fuck off! You keep your methods of madness to yourself. I ain't interested in what you're selling, your stance and your beliefs.

But then....

Ah shit!

Thought Michael. Because the fact of the matter was... he was... or at least had been.

I don't wanna be anymore!

"Son, I'll tell ye what, I like you, though! And a lot, too. If I didn't, I would have had that merc shoot you in the head, and we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Mr. Dorian then grew what Michael could only imagine was a compassionate smile, as Michael frowned looking at it.

"Look at how far you were willing to go, because you were driven mad to. You're no soldier, you don't even know how to use a gun. You're some street-wise punk that I shouldn't even be wasting my time with, dressed like those rock and roll idiots on that music cable channel. But you showed something to change that. You got madness in you, you do! You got fire, you got passion, and even more than those rioters on the street. Much, much more than them."

Ah shit! He's turning me into his new prodigal son, now that I off-ed his boy, Angel.

"You're the type of man that rushes towards the bullets, instead of cowering away from them, and that's what it takes to drive a man to make a difference. Even though there was no way in hell you were going to be able to change a damn thing tonight, you were still driven mad enough to try. That's how the rest your generation needs to be. More of! With you alone, you could do nothing! But with an army of yous? That would have been a different story. What you are is something special, a criminal, most would say. A punk, off the streets, that needs to be locked away. There's millions

of your kind, and, it's really your kind that is capable of making a difference. None of you still—really—got the right stuff, of what it takes. But, if pushed a little further. You might have…."

Oh, fuck you! I already feel over the deep end. I don't wanna go any further!

"All great men, truly great men! That called forth for revolution, always started off as criminals. Because, they at least tend to have the balls to stand up against the order of things, in defiance. Our finding fathers started off as criminals, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. They were criminals."

Michael then thought about that idea of his, starting a gang called the 'Yank-me-Doodle Dandies'. And had a small discreet snicker to himself.

"Jesus Christ!"

Oh, don't bring his name!

"Even though I don't believe in that religion crap… he… at least, was a criminal. That suffered the ultimate sacrifice, but, changed the world!"

Ah, I feel tired.

"Criminals are, and always will be, the ones that will be capable of such things. That's why I like you, I do, and… I really do like your kind. 'Good,' I say! 'Good!' I like how much crime there is in America now. I like the fear you make the common lot feel on the streets. With this Age of Rage, I like the looting, the defiance, I like the violence! I do feel highly of it. Because… it shows me promise, that your people want change. They want it! No doubt about it, hence why there's so much of it going around. And now, if pushed far enough, your generation just might be able to take up arms, and truly go to war, and truly change things. Before things get worse!"

Michael… was now… sorta not listening to Mr. Dorian anymore.

There's so much blood!

Since his mind was now more preoccupied with other things.

"I'll even go so far as to say I like all the psycho killers your generation has also produced. Like the Zodiac Killer and the Son of Sam. Even though they're scumbags, real slime. At least they're true to their nature, and ain't afraid of it."

Now, that did get Michael's attention, for a bit, for Michael didn't like

how sick that sounded.

What?

"The rest of you see them as horror stories. Like in those movies today with masked maniacs wearing hockey masks, that, or have burned faces and wear gloves with knives on them. The lily sort see them as boogiemen, and sick in the head, but, they're not sick! There's no mental illness there! Look at animals, look at nature, and see how violent and murderous they all are amongst themselves! We're all violent and murderous by nature, and there's nothing wrong with it! It's the rule of the jungle, kill or be killed. Especially when dealing with a man that is bigger than you, and is opposing you, and is unjust and wrong. You need to put your hands on him, and kill him, and—I tell ye—when you do, there's this power you feel from it. There's this rush, when you murder someone like that—such a rush! A quickening feeling. A thousand times better than getting your rocks off with a dame, better than sex. And you know why? Because it's justice! You're righteous! And you're vanquishing something that is trying to oppose and oppress you, that isn't! And needs to be—punished! God… it makes you feel like him. Him! God! If he really existed. Exacting punishment by his righteous hand. Do you see?"

Fuck you, you self-righteous prick! Go fuck yourself! Go to hell. Seriously, go to hell for which you came!

Thought Michael, as he looked down at his mitts, and started to feel disgusted with everything he had done with them. Barehands! All that he thought was righteous, but now, felt sick to his stomach for feeling that way.

"But… unfortunately… today's power-that-be know that. And they're scared that your sort might one day actually rise up, and put your hands on them, and take their power that they have over you, away. They want to be in total control, godlike almost, and they don't want others to rise up and challenge their positions. So they'll tell you killing and hurting others is wrong, and it's sick, even though they're all murderers themselves, serial killers a thousand times over, that can make those Ted Bundy types seem like a Julia Child in comparison.

If… all of a sudden… everyone was to wake up, and then get up, and allow their nature to do what's needed.

We might have ourselves our own French revolution, and start sending all the powers-that-be, all to the guillotines. But, the powers-that-be know this, and they're not gonna let that happen."
Shut up… I don't care… maybe they should?
"So… they're just gonna get rid of you all… put you all away behind bars. They're gonna spend millions and millions of dollars, billions, really, just to lock you all away. That's what the government has pretty much concluded it needs to do with your kind. With the crime that this country has, they no longer want to help your kind out, they just want to incarcerate all you fuckers, away, and throw away the key, and totally forget about you all.

Taking you out of the equation, all you wolves, so, all they'll have left, then, are the sheep.

Taking you all out of the gene pool, they're all really hoping, so it'll eliminate your influences in society. Your supposed—evil—influences! Ha! So society can be raised as true sheep, a faggoty ass bunch, that'll be too afraid to stand up for what's righteous! Too afraid to make a difference. And will be easy to control!

I've even heard the ideas passed around about turning all the sheep into faggots. Since faggots tend to be sheepish by nature. Cowardly. Docile. Since Christianity is on its way out. They need a new religion to keep the masses in line. A faggot religion. Under a rainbow flag."
Mr. Dorian then stared at Michael, compassionately, which almost had Michael feeling like dry heaving.

Oh, fuck off!
Michael then frowned, so hard, that it felt almost like it was going to split the top of his head in half, now too. The more The Mr. Dorian seemed enamored by him, the more Michael felt like… not being!
Don't fucking like me! Not you! At least not you! I fucking hate—

Then something dawned on Michael. Even though he had come to this conclusion, beforehand, it was most evident now, as he came to realize how much he really did hate himself. And this was now a further awakening experience for him, as he really came to understand why.

I'm nothing but an empty vessel. An arrogant jerk! A complete and utter asshole, ten times worse than the assholes I perceive around me. Ten times worse than how I make them out to be. If everyone in this city were truly a bunch of assholes, the way I have them made out… I, then… should be crowned as their king. And not just that, but also a misogynist and a racist too. Additional shit I didn't even realize really until tonight. How many times have I beaten the shit out of blacks and spics to make myself feel superior to them? How many times have I picked up women to fuck them and feel the same? Using women for sex and money, and confusing sex for love.

I don't know! I miss Nikki already. Why did I leave her behind?

Michael sighed, and, then felt strangely happy about it, because what that now meant to him was… whatever craziness was in him to come this way, wasn't something he deep down felt aligned with, because he wished he was better than all this. Better than Mr. Dorian's idea of the perfect soldier.

I do wish I was more than all this. Too long I've felt content with accepting myself as an asshole and a jerk, and all the other things that are horrible about me. There's something out there that's better, and if I was to ever survive this night, that's what I would have to focus on now. Break away from the comfort of being my old self, and accept striving for an idea of a new one.

Thought Michael, as he took a deep breath, and went back to listening to Mr. Dorian go on with his rampage.

"You know what a government is? It's an institution of control. That's all it is, and that's all it'll ever be. An institution of control, and controlling people through fear. That's how civilizations began, when hordes of marauding horseman would sack a farming village, they'd murder and rape, then tell the farmers left standing that if they wanted protection from other hordes of marauding horseman, they had to pay tribute. Back a hundred years ago, and

into thousands of years of human history, from all over the world, it's always started that way. That! And people were also more stupid, because they were also very superstitious. Which all led to the creation of religions. Believing in what some good priest living in some giant luxurious temple would tell them—no matter the religion! How there was some invisible magical man, or several, in the skies, that would smite them down—dead! If they didn't listen to, and do, everything that that good priest said. There will always be those betas to make things grow, and there will always be the alphas that will divide, conquer, and take it all.

Might is still right… you know!"

This guy is giving me history lessons now… shut up! Shut the fuck up!

"But this country used to be something grand, it was an institution of the people trying to control it. In the end, all governments turn fascist. Catering to only the rich, and strong, while the poor wither away and starve to death. Give it about twenty, thirty, forty years, this country is going to turn into one giant third world nation, split between the haves, and the fucking cowards, too afraid to fight back. And since all you criminals will be locked away, then, all they'll have then to work with are the true cowards, the true betas of society left behind. Give it some time, sometime after the new millennium… that is… if we survive the Cold War, ha!"

And, now, this White Headed character was making jokes about nuclear holocaust!

Maybe this guy really is that one-dimensionally evil… maybe?

"And as for them, as for the children of your generation, the ones that will be taking over in that given amount of time? God help them! God help them—indeed!"

Okay… Mr. Nostradamus man, tell me about the future? How you see it…

"The X-Gens, I've seen how they are, they're a lost people. And then as for the Y-Gens, they're even worse. I've seen how the kids of your pathetic generation are. Your generation might be spoiled cowards unwilling to deal with the real world, but at least your

generation knows the real world exists out there, that's why you all want to hide away from it. I was watching a nine-year-old on the news, on TV, some nights' ago. Some local channel news—mind you! The child's mind was wrapped up in some Ninten-Jap video game—whatever! Some electrical game they can play on the TV. All wrapped up in this, while his mother was complaining how he had no friends, and never played outside. I looked into his thoughtless and soulless eyes—on the TV—and he looked like he was completely oblivious of everything around him. Even his own mother, as she stood right beside him, bitching and crying over the pipsqueak. Even her! His own mother—what kid has no awareness of their own mother? Is that even possible? I remember every single detail of mine! Oblivious of her as if she wasn't even there. When my generation were children, we were always fully conscious of everything that was going on around us, constantly. We knew the names of every neighbor on the street, what their stories were. We knew their joys and sorrows—everything! And yet here's this—I don't know what—and I'm curious if 'it' would even know what the color of his mother's own eyes were, if asked, without looking. And seeing and acknowledging all this, it was at that moment I saw what your children's generation are going to be all about. They're like a generation of autistic savants.

A generation of Rain Men.

Your generation and its fears of the real world has forced your children's generation to be locked up in the house, in front of a TV, and made to never truly develop as human beings. Practically turned into robots, and made to think like ones, too. Put one in front of another of their age, and you'll have two nitwits staring at each other, unsure of what one or the other 'is', and what they're looking at. But, then again, I feel as if you were to put one in front of a VHS machine, that child would have that machine stripped apart, and put back together, again, three times over, before you'd even be able to get passed the first page of the instruction manual. All in all, they're all a lost cause. Their minds have been turned into mush, and I fear they're beyond saving. And I fear the powers-that-

be have finally created the perfect generation of automatons they can control. They won't even need to scare them. They can just put them in front of a TV screen, and World War III can be happening outside, but they won't even understand, nor notice it, as long as they have their Ninten-Jap-fucking-whatevers, in front of them. That, or whatever other little electrical gadgets, computers, or devices they create, to keep their brains preoccupied, and flat-lining, all the time. Keep their brains vacant and soulless, and grade A processed. Processed to think and do whatever they're told, because they won't understand what difference it would make, and why it would matter to them in the first place. Processed! So, generation X and Y—you say? I'll tell ye, I'd call them generation MacDonald's hamburger meat!"

Why does this guy remind me of a guy I saw in a movie?

Thought Michael, as Mr. Dorian then took a giant breath; coming back up for air.

"Given enough time, and the powers-that-be will keep taking advantages of the ever weakening human spirit of the masses, as with every generation, you'll find more and more cowardly and docile and ignorant lot being born and raised into the world. First, they'll start to take away all the freedoms we have. Take away our guns, then free speech—"

"Who will," interrupted Michael.

Mr. Dorian then stopped and looked confused.

"What do you mean 'who'... they!"

"I mean, like, the Republicans... the Democrats?"

Mr. Dorian then began to laugh, doing his whizzing bit. Michael didn't get it.

"Son... don't be an idiot. They're the same party! The same!

They're the flipsides of a single coin.

They're only there to keep the masses juggling between, what they'll be led to believe, are two warring parties. It's only a puppet show! And the puppet master is a deeper state orchestrating it all in the back behind the curtains."

Funny, that's how Michael always felt about those two.

"Anyways, as I was saying, they'll take it all away. All our rights, and then leave the masses with absolutely nothing to fight back, when the new world order finally arrives. But, I guess… until then, they're still going to have to continue scaring people into their hidey-holes, while they rip this country a new one, of everything good it has ever stood for. Up until now, the fear of the Reds, and that thing down there, has worked wonders. But it's already clear the Commies are on their way out, so I wonder how they're going to scare people next."

Michael, was now, no longer paying any attention to a word this nutbag had to say.

Yawn!

Although, he did start to notice something in the man's eyes, as he noticed the man was also broadcasting another message, different, from the one coming out of his mouth.

Blah blah blah blah blah… who the fuck is he talking to?

Thought Michael, as he realized that The Big White Head really was just talking to himself. Whatever he was broadcasting, was then being picked up by himself, as he was broadcasting and receiving his own message. Preaching his own sermon, and not even to any choir, but to himself. A regular ol' Father McKenzie, here. And this… made Michael grow a bit suspicious of everything, as puzzle piece after puzzle piece began falling into place. As Michael began to see a bigger picture, into this Big White Head character.

Blah blah blah blah blah! Yet, I get the sense, this isn't all he's really about. Something is off, here, and I'm curious as to what.

"The USSR is done for, Gorbachev has made it so. Once the Cold War is over, I wonder what phony war we're going to have to fight next? Best way to control people is through fear, and fear of a common enemy. For forty years this country has been peddling that fear of the Reds. So this country is going to be left with a giant hole in its center if it can't find another. Maybe China, but—no! They actually want to do business with us since Nixon, so they don't turn out like the Soviets did. Maybe whatever fascist state that rises from Russia—probably that! Maybe Iran—but no—that won't happen! A bunch of backwards religious fanatics they are now, too backwards to show any real firepower.

Plus, the Ayatollah Khomeini is our inside man, Ronald's inside man, an auxiliary measure, just in case the Shah of that nation fucked up and lost the support of his people, which he did, and the country grew more and more towards being just another Communist state.

Wait… what?

Maybe a unification of the Muslim world? But, no, they're all a bunch of backwards sand-niggers, too dumb and violent amongst themselves to make it happen! Plus, there's Israel, and they rather nuke them all than to see that happen. Maybe North Korea—but no! They don't have the balls to face us after how badly we ripped them a new one back in the last war. Plus, they'll never be as big a thread as the Soviets were. That's like replacing a 500 pound gorilla with a gerbil in the scary department. Maybe until a new fascist state rises, besides our own, we're just going to have to focus on the Middle East, since that's where all the oil is. Of course, the problem with those countries is, they're not big and scary enough. How can you scare the regular American TV viewers with images of those backwards people, when, the most sophisticated weaponry they carry are camels, and Soviet machine guns, traded off from the black market. We can't just decide to invade the Middle East, until they give us a good reason to, and then the William Randolph Hearst of America can spin it in the news as the new threat. Plus, if we just invade them, the war will be over, fast, none of that political bullshit that happened in Vietnam, since there won't be any USSR, or any other formidable ally, backing their war effort. If we decided to make Saddam the new bad guy, now, it would take two minutes to take over that nation of camel-jockeys, and then, we're going to be stuck wasting billions of American dollars trying to fix that nation. You can't fix those backwards people. After WW2, we fixed Germany and Japan, because the only thing truly wrong with them was their leadership: a cultist nutbag, and a fucking sun god emperor. Once those two stooges were out of the picture, the rest of those two countries were easy to rebuild. You either need large armies, like the ones marching in Red Square with nukes to scare people, or, something

more insidious and harder to face."

Oh wow! The fucker's a Bond villain, he won't shut the fuck up!

The Dance with the Devil: Part Four.

"Terrorism! It's already done wonders scaring people. That's what it'll be! It'll also be like religion again, scaring people of an invisible face, that might not even really be there. Of course, then there's going to need to be some form of terrorist attack that's going to need to really scare everyone into continuing the arms race. The last call to war that had us taking up arms, happened because of an attack on American soil—Pearl Harbor! I was there, and I saw how it inspired a nation unwilling to go to war overseas to change their minds. And Roosevelt allowed it to happen, wonder if the next president will then allow it to happen, too? Something similar has to happen, and definitely to Americans, again. A mass murdering of American hostages, like the ones that might have happened in Iran, releasing bio-hazardous weapons, or hijacking a plane and crashing it—"

"Oh, shut the fuck up! Enough trying to look into your crystal ball—try coming back to reality!"

Fucking Nostradamus, here, spinning 1s and 0s to try and predict the future.

Mr. Dorian paused for a second, as he came back up for air again, and then shook his head at Michael, and said:

"I live in the real world, what world do you live in?"

"Still—all I hear you yapping about is murdering millions, and I don't understand how it's going to start a revolution."

Mr. Dorian walked back inside the security offices, and came back out rolling a TV on a stand. Then he picked up a remote, and turned it on. Mr. Dorian then changed the channel onto a Live News feed. There was a female broadcaster on the TV, with big hair, too much make-up, and, shoulder pads spanning the entire screen.

Kinda hot though....

Shit! I can't stop thinking along those lines—can I?

"We have some breaking news about the man most people in the city have been referring to as 'The Big White Head.' Since earlier

this morning, our station, and many others, have been facing some unknown entity, that has been meddling with our broadcast, and has been peddling a message called the 'Age of Rage' to viewers around the country. This—some say—has led to the uprising of many riots across New York City, as the National Guard has been finally called in to maintain it. Up until now, no one from our station, and other stations, have been able to identify where the source has been coming from, and how it was being done. That is… until now!"

Michael began to scratch his head with where Mr. Dorian was taking this, as he looked at the screen, then back to Dorian, and then thought how maybe if he could find a weapon on one of the dead commandos, that were lying about, he could end this.

That's what I can do! And I ain't going to chicken out killing him now—I can't!

But, as he searched the one dead body that was closest to, while Mr. Dorian's eyes were glued to the screen, he saw how he wasn't able to find anything he could use. And then realized, Mr. Par—Bonhoeffer's mercs must have already cleared the area of weapons, that of which Michael could use.

Fuck!

"From our reports, it seems that this mysterious figure known as 'The Big White Head' is actually supposedly an American CIA operative, by the name of Samuel Francis Dorian. And what's most alarming—based on our reports—is that the man has managed to smuggle a large bomb, of some sort, somewhere into Manhattan, and is bent on detonating the device, at any given time. Now, we take you to a live feed, of a press conference, at the White House."

"That was my doing, tipping these reporters off, about the bomb," said Mr. Dorian, while still glued to the screen.

Once Michael had heard 'White House', he had quickly turned his attention back to the screen that Mr. Dorian had pulled out. On screen, Michael now saw that cowboy/actor President Ronnie, on the screen standing behind a podium. Looking not a day over a hundred and ten. There were giant American flags waving behind him, and it seemed like

the press conference had only just started.

"Good, good, perfect timing, this was what I was waiting for," said Mr. Dorian.

"Excuse me, Mr. President—Mr. President? Is it true that this man—Mr. Samuel Francis Dorian—has been a long-standing CIA operative in the US since the Eisenhower administration," asked one of the Pressboys that the President had pointed out first.

"Yes—it is true! But I want to go on to say that this man—Mr. Samuel Francis Dorian—is no longer one of our agents, and hasn't been for a while, and is now a fugitive of the law," replied the President Reagan, seeming a bit too calm, considering the circumstances of what the conference was about.

"So, is it also true, that this man might possibly have had a chance to smuggle a bomb into Manhattan," asked the same Pressboy.

"I cannot comment on that at this given time, but I doubt that this man is really capable of such, and is only using it as a ploy to send the people of New York into a state of mass hysteria," replied the President.

And then this came in.

"Mr. President, there's been some horrifying reports that this man might be carrying an actual nuclear device in his possession, and willing to detonate it," asked the same Pressboy again.

"There you go, it's done," said Mr. Dorian.

Once that question was asked, the whole conference room broke into a clamor, as the Pressboy that leaked that info seemed to be going way out of line with his questions.

"Excuse me—young man—we have heard no reports of this Samuel Francis Dorian being in any possession of a nuclear bomb, and I'm very curious as to where you're getting this absurd notion from," replied the President, while eyeing the man in a suspicious manner, then turned his gaze to one of his Secret Service men, as if to suggest something.

"I mean—Mr. President—how has this happened? How has there been a man like this under your administration been able to do all

this? If the reports are true, of an actual nuclear device, millions of American lives might be at risk of a madman, that your administration has kept secret up until now. I mean, based on our information of the history of this man, he's a World War 2 Medal of Honor winner, of all things! I mean, I don't understand how an American Hero, such as this, could have gone this far," continued the same Pressboy.

"I guarantee you, and the American people, there is no way that this man has managed to smuggle a nuclear bomb into Manhattan. I want to stress this, again, that I find it absurd—young man—that you find this as anyways as being possible. There's no way—as I as President—would allow that to happen," concluded President Ronnie finally, as he waved his hand off, asking for someone else with questions.

Mr. Dorian then turned off the TV, and as his head continued to expand bigger and bigger, his gaze spanned up to the ceiling, marveling at the grandeur of everything he had accomplished. He wasn't even looking at Michael, but he still seemed to be directing his attention towards him.

"You see, son, that's how a small figure like I, can take on the most powerful nation to ever exist on this planet—and win," said The Big White Head, as he smiled, with a sense of triumph.

"Unfortunately, though, that Pressboy I had implanted in that conference, is going to be dragged away, later, and…."

Mr. Dorian then just shook his head.

And now, seeing this, something else came to Michael.

Wait? what if….

"Wait, if the bomb goes off… what if everyone thinks it's the Soviets that did it? It could start WW3," gasped Michael.

Mr. Dorian shook his head, and began wheezing again.

"I told you, the Cold War is just a bunch of political bullshit, WW3 can never happen. You think America and the USSR are stupid enough to start Armageddon? Anyone that believes in the Cold War as a real thing, beyond just stupid cock measuring politics, is a moron! Key figures that start wars want stupid twenty-somethings, like yourself…."

I'm in my thirties!

“To go wage them, people of your fresh out of High School age to, while they sit back, and watch the fireworks. They don't want to see those fireworks come back and explode in their faces, and these aren't fireworks we're talking about here,” explained Mr. Dorian, as he continued to wheeze.

Michael shrugged.

“If America claims this as a Soviet attack, then we're going to be forced into WW3, and neither we, nor the Soviets, want that ever! Also, perfect timing too, with this conference, here. I was waiting for this moment. Without that Pressboy, there, planting the notion into the minds of America, that it could be a man that's part of their own government, behind all this, after the bomb went off, the government could have then spun it around—as you suggested somewhat—as an outside terrorist attack. Some unheard of figure, to take the blame.

I bet they’d choose that rich Saudi boy we had once trained….

But, they can't do that now. Everyone is going to know the players involved, and who is responsible. That's how you turn their fears around on the real enemy, and expose them for who they are. After this, they won't be afraid out of their minds over Russians or the Chinese, or even terrorist…

they’ll be afraid out of their minds of their own countrymen.

Like a shot heard around the globe, once that bomb goes off, and reduces this city to ash and rubble, the revolution will then happen. Of course, in these days, unfortunately, a simple gunshot can't start revolutions anymore, and neither can a small bomb like a Daisy Cutter. A simple bomb will scare them—sure! But not out of their minds. A nuke, on the other hand, will do that! These days, you need something really big to wake people up, to make it happen, and a simple firecracker won't do,” said Mr. Dorian, shaking his head and, seeming troubled.

Even though Michael still couldn't understand half the shit this rambling lunatic was saying still, how he was devising to turn everyone

against their own country, now, seemed clear. It made sense—it made horrendous sense!

He wants to scare the shit out of everyone to have them turn on each other….

After such an event, the terror that would spread across the country—maybe the entire world—was definitely going to be enough to drive everyone into mass hysteria. Michael knew there was nothing scarier that the sense that you can't even trust your own prows. Your own powers. Your own barehands. Staring down at his mitts Michael could see that.

Making you go so far as to start thinking they're possessed, and have free will of their own… or something.

Michael had become terrified beyond anything, when he found himself murdering the only person that still mattered to him. There's nothing more terrifying than to be unable to trust one's own self—and for this matter—a nation to trust its own. That's how America would feel when facing themselves in the mirror after tonight, facing their own country, that was supposed to be out defending them from terrors such as these. The method of this madman's madness was now beginning to make sense of how he planned to start a revolution. But Michael still couldn't understand why he wanted to do it.

I don't know, something about that whole ranting thing he did, felt… mediocre! Or, fake… I don't know! Made up. So, I don't think none of that shit was the real reason. Fascism—Shmasicm—whatever! Sounds like a bunch of bull!

For whatever reason, Michael just wasn't able to fully buy this devil's story, something about him just seemed off, and it had everything to do with the man being unable to face Michael when he was explaining his diabolical scheme.

Maybe he's just that much of a psychopath? Maybe it's just that simple, and he wants everyone to go stark raving mad like he has?

But looking into the twitching, twisting, massive, sweat-riddled face of The Big White Head, who continued to flap his lips in silence, Michael continued to ponder what those broadcasts—those vibes—were about, that Mr. Dorian was making earlier.

Much of the time him mumbling about generations, and terrorists, and what-not, wasn’t even directed towards me. Obviously, he's not trying to convince me of any of that shit. That's what a man does when he looks you in the eyes, and tries to tell you something. They want to read your eyes to see if it sticks! It's like he's trying to tell this shit to himself, facing himself in the mirror and trying to—

The Hidden Message.

And then Michael understood what was so strange about The Big White Head that he couldn't put his finger on, until now. Michael began to remember how in prison, he'd stare himself in the mirror, and tell himself:

Fucking Radboy, he did this to me! He's got Nikki now, and he's the one that got those cocksucking Numbskulls to try and burn down my sister’s building, so they would make me go off.

Night after endless night, most times, never getting a wink at all, Michael would do that to himself. Even back at his crummy halfway house apartment, he'd usually face himself in the mirror and think:

Society is never going to take you back. You got nothing left! You were done in by that fucking asshole, Radboy, and even those degenerate Numbskulls, and now this is all you'll ever be. You're nothing, you got nothing, and now you'd be better off dead.

He'd say those things to himself because....

I wanted to believe it?

After Michael had gotten out of prison, a major part of him just felt like his life was so meaningless, that it was pointless to go on. So, he'd tell himself those things, to drive him mad, and force him to eventually come out of the funk he was in, and do something about it. That! Or he'd tell himself that Radboy was really to blame, so when time came he'd ever face him, and choked the living shit out of him, he'd finally feel closure of everything that had happened to him since that night. He didn't want to believe it was his own fault, or just too many bad circumstances rolled up into one.

It's not easy trying to get closure from something like that. It's easier to have a face, something, or someone, to blame. Then, to be left with blaming simple bad luck.

Is that what you're trying to do—Dorian? Trying to convince yourself of all this crazy nonsense, about fascism, and about a revolution—or me? Just so you can justify your will of murdering millions? And if those aren't the reasons, then what are they?

But then Michael remembered what Nikki had told him about Mr. Dorian, about skimming money off the top, about the hit, and him wanting revenge.

Revenge? Could that be his reasons? Something so simple as that? I got to find out!

At this point, The Big Fat Head had sat back into his chair, while his eyes flayed about. He was holding onto the detonator—seeming very sad—as his jaw began to jitter. Michael then forced himself to sit up, even as he ached in pain doing so, so he could face Mr. Dorian, directly. He wanted to get his full attention, for, Michael was about to have his own words.

"Hey fat-head—you there?"

Mr. Dorian snapped back, as he noticed Michael was talking again.

"Hey fat-headed dip-shit—I'm talking to you!"

Mr. Dorian eyed Michael for a second, sneered, and then said:

"Shut up, son! We're going to die tonight, so when the Reaper comes, face the man with some dignity."

"No—fuck you—and your bullshitting story, too! You might have convinced yourself that shit, but you're not convincing me of anything!"

Mr. Dorian shook his head, all befuddled, wondering what else this defeated punk had to say.

"You see, Nikki told me a story about you. She said that you were some 1999 regular, and used to come party it up over here, and you were some high elite living it up, until the Government found out, about you robbing them."

Mr. Dorian turned his head to one side, and took heed, as he realized that Michael really might have something to say, instead, of just cursing him out like an idiot.

"She told me that you were skimming money off the top, from all the funds, the US was sending you, to build all those dictatorships,

contras, and whatevers, down in South America. And, when the US found out, they placed a hit on your head, to take you out."

Mr. Dorian then shrugged, and said:

"What are you getting at?"

"What I'm getting at is… I think that's the real reason why you want to do all this, not that crazy cockamamie bullshitting reason you just made up about revolutions. You have no good reasons; you're just doing it for revenge."

It almost looked like Mr. Dorian's eyes had flipped inside out, hearing that, as his face began to burst out with teeth.

"You spent—God knows—how long making up that crazy shit about fascism, in your head, to justify why you'd murder millions. You made up those reasons because… maybe? You can't stomach something as simple and twisted as revenge?"

Mr. Dorian snarled, and said:

"What the fuck you know about me, son? You think you know me now? Just because I told you a few stories, you think you know me now?"

"No," said Michael smiling,

"I just know something about myself, and that's all that's making sense to me."

Mr. Dorian then got up, as he strode over to Michael, and looked like he was about to kick his head in. But then, stopped, a foot short. Michael sighed.

Rompous-pompous—I can do this!

"Mr. Dorian—simple question? You really want to do this," asked Michael as his eyes lit up.

"I'm starting a revolution," replied Mr. Dorian.

"Um—that's not what I asked, I asked if you want to do this, not why you think you're doing this," explained Michael.

Mr. Dorian didn't respond.

"You know… Sam… you might think I'm some stupid punk—but you know what? I've always been pretty good at reading people—not great—but decent! It sorta goes with the territory of being the

territorial type, the confrontational type, like you or I, you got to keep your eyes open for a weak spot," explained Michael, again, as Mr. Dorian didn't seem to grasp where Michael was taking this.

"Listen, son—I'll tell ye—if you're too dumb to understand my reasons for a revolution, then—"

"Bullshit! You're not looking to start a revolution, you're doing it for your own selfish reasons, that's why you were ranting and raving a minute ago, you weren't trying to convince me of anything…

you were doing it to convince yourself!

You talk about honor and all, but what honor is there in killing millions to settle your own personal vendetta? That just downright despicable, and then some! Downright evil."

Mr. Dorian jittered a bit back hearing Michael's explanation, and for the first time that night, Michael saw the obvious look of dread in the monster's face.

"You know what this all tells me? That if you're willing to convince yourself that furiously that what you're doing is noble—or whatever psychotic fucked up bullshit, your concept of a noble cause would be, then you can't be that fucking evil to want to murder millions. Because deep down—like I said—I don't think you could stomach wanting to do it all for revenge."

Mr. Dorian looked like his face was about to fall off, hearing all this, and Michael felt like he was finally winning.

Oh, thank God! I think he's coming to his senses! I just gotta keep repeating this over and over, until it sticks.

But, as quickly as an epiphany might have faded in, seeing as how Mr. Dorian was reacting to what Michael said; after a couple of jitters, Michael saw composure again, as the epiphany began to fade out. And Mr. Dorian seemed consolidated again.

Please, God, let him see it! Let him see it! Let him see what he's doing, and have it be enough!

But Mr. Dorian was smiling like a wacko again—ear to ear—smiling like his old usual self. But now, he had blood in his eyes, and they looked to

be Michael's blood.

"Soooooooo,"
bellowed out The Big White Head, as his head grew the size of the moon, parked outside the lobby, "I see what you're trying to do. You want to be a hero!"

Michael bit his tongue, as he saw how up until now, he hadn't been facing the devil he feared. But a devil in slumber. But, now, he was finally being awakened, as Michael finally saw this titanic demon rise from Tartarus, and tower above him.

"So, son—you say you want to be a hero now? Well let me tell ye, you need more than just some bark to be one! And let me tell ye something more, you even need more than bite, as well!"

Michael crept his hand up against his forehead—over his eyes—trying to avoid looking at the monster he had just awakened, but Dorian kicked it away from his face, and said:

"You look me in the eyes, if you want to talk to me!"
Ah, shut up! As if you were doing that before....
"Stop," cried out Michael.
"Stop, what? We haven't even begun," responded Mr. Dorian.
"No stop, you're just deluded and mad, you don't even know what you're thinking!"

Mr. Dorian grew amused hearing Michael say that, and even a little proud.

"I'm mad you say? I'm mad? Good! Good! I told you I'm one of The Fedora People! And I'm glad that I'm mad! Simply glad! Because do you know what it takes to be a real hero? I'll tell ye, you have to be mad—you have to be! And you know why? Because I'll tell ye something more, in the real world, madness is everywhere, and if you can't embrace that, you'll never be able to conquer it.

In a mad world only the mad are sane!"

"Oh, stop feeding me that line about going mad, and the real world, you're like a broken record with that shit!"
"Of course, you can pretend to be a hero. Think you're John Wayne charging into a battlefield, but, you want to know what happens to

those types of men? They don't make it far, they get shot down before they're even given much of a chance to shine. I saw that back at Omaha beach, and it was a sad sight, indeed! Those type of men, they're still living in a fictional world, in their heads, and they don't know what it takes. So, you know what—I'll tell ye—if you want to be a hero, don't go to some movie, and think that fictional bullshit is what it takes! And I'll tell ye something else, if you want to be a real hero, in the real world—you come talk to me!"

Mr. Dorian than pointed himself out again, with his thumb, raised high and mighty, ridden in on a high white horse, and smiled, with a ten inch steel plated sense of conviction. Michael, on the other hand, just shook his head, and felt tired of all this.

"You know, I can't blame you for not understanding, since you're just some ignorant punk. I mean, I used to be like you, back in the 30s. Directionless punk street fighter type, like you. But I went to war, and grew the fuck up! And you ain't a man until you've been to war, and had to kill another man, and with your barehands no less! You ain't a real hero, until you've experienced that!"

Michael then thought about how he pushed Radboy out of a window, and felt completely at odds.

The Fool's Justice.

You know, if I was part of your generation, I don't think I would have gone to war just to kill someone to be a man. It would be something I was forced to do, forced to do! Because there was no other option. But, you, make it sound like you feel glad you were a part of it. I figured WW2 was at least a war that needed to be fought because there was no other alternative. If there was ever a war that needed to be fought, it was that one. But still! In the end, it was an ugly thing, since all wars are ugly things, and there was nothing glorious about it. What glory is there in eighty million people dieing?

And with that thought, Michael started to see things in a higher sense, of everything that was—not just wrong with this man! But also.

Myself!

And.

America, as a whole.

I think now… we want a war! We want conflict, so we can try and be heroes again. Like we were after WW2. We now, in the 80s, my generation, wants that sense of glory, that our fathers felt, so we can feel victorious like they did.

But, in order to be a great hero… you need a great villain.

Mr. Dorian, here, calls it peddling fear to the masses. I see it as peddling a challenge. Look at how we are with the Soviets. We want a war with them. We want one! So, so very badly! So, we can whoop their asses, and feel like heroes again. But, if we're to really go all out with them with a conflict, that'll be the end of us all, since with nukes… there really won't be a V-Day, again, since there won't be any nation left, to celebrate it.

I don't know… I see this as something very problematic within us. WW2 needed to be fought, but we don't need no WW3, nor 4! Hell, the first one was supposed to be 'the war to end all wars.' And see how that worked out! We've had two horrific ones. We don't need another! Not unless we have to. But if we just keep wanting it so badly, even after the Commies, who are we going to be looking forward to as the new bad guys we can kick around, to feel better about ourselves? The Chinese? Cubans? North Koreans?

Ourselves?

Maybe like what Dorian, here, said, since there's a lot of terrorist groups now, and amongst Muslim nations….

I mean, besides all this crazy shit this Dorian is concocting here, this whole Cold War thing still might end disastrously, it still might, thanks to Ronnie, there. I mean, that's the only reason he's in office. After that pussy Carter, America wanted a war hero as President again, coming from the Daddy party, but since there was no real war hero like Eike, they went with an actor, someone that's at least good at pretending to be one, in movies. And… I don't know? Can we go back to the 50s? Can we? Since that's what we've been wanting to do this entire decade. To become again the

embodiment of all that we represented back then, back when we were still feeling the rush of being victorious and triumphant people. Back when we were the most American, we as Americans, have ever been… supposedly? Can we become our old selves again? Can we?

We can't just—want—to be heroes! To be triumphant! When a time arises, we have to rise up and face the challenge, only then we should rise up, and do that, not before. We can't just go around—picking fights—to see if we still got what it takes. Running around with our guns, just wishing—wishing—for someone to tell us to stop.

Something I've been guilty of. I have been. I have! But it's been wrong of me for doing that, no question about it!

Those punks on the street… they're my people, in the end. They're me! And to refuse them, I'm pretty much refusing myself. I've done nothing but make them all out to be the bad guys, just to make myself the so-and-so called… *good guy*.

That's the thing about heroes and villains, there really isn't much difference between the two. The only difference is, the heroes don't want no conflicts, the villains do. Therefore, fuck this Mr. Dorian Man, here, and his culture of hero worship! If we keep this shit up, going around challenging everyone to step up to us, to test ourselves with. Wanting to be heroes, by vilifying everyone else… eventually….
We'll be the bad guys! And we'll be the villains! And the ones that will need to be taken down, and hard, too!

The Thin Line Between Heroes and Villains.

"So, you want to be a hero, ask me something! I'll teach you how to be a real hero, that none of those movies or comic books, or whatever your generation likes to stuff their faces into, can tell you."

Oh, shut up! You’re no hero, not anymore. You’re a fucking villain! You’re now really the bad guy, here! Can’t you see that?

Hearing how the man kept calling himself a real hero, was beginning to fill Michael up with disgust.

“Oh, that's priceless, you think you're a hero,” barked out Michael, both insultingly, and filled with distress.

Mr. Dorian felt that insult, as he stuck his lips out, and foam began to spew from the side.

“You got medals, son? You've got two Silver Stars, four Bronze Stars, four Purple Hearts, a Distinguished Service Cross, and a Medal of Honor?”

Michael picked up his hand, again, but Mr. Dorian smacked it away, as he stuck his fat mug straight into Michael's.

“Do you? Do you even know the hardship that comes in getting those—since I'm guessing—they'd look like shiny trinkets to wear. Like some damn rock star would wear on stage to excite the gals, that doesn't even know the meaning of what they represent?”

“No, I got nothing,” replied Michael.

Mr. Dorian then lifted his head away, and nodded in acceptance, and said:

“Ha! Just as I thought!”

Then Mr. Dorian grabbed the feather that Michael had tucked away behind his ear, looked at it, and began wheezing like crazy.

“Wait, are you kidding me, is this a bald eagle feather?

You really must have thought yourself to be something grand, to be tucking this behind your ear. Nice trinket you got here—Rock Star! I wonder if you even knew what type of feather it was—ha,” joked Mr. Dorian, as he crumpled it up in his hand, and threw it away.

Michael now felt crushed, also, he felt like he was going to pass out in any second; looking around, he saw just how much blood he had lost, and realized, he was now dieing.

Fuck this shit! I don't want to be here! I wish I was with....

But then something occurred to Michael.

It's strange. All night long I've felt like I've been on autopilot, and this is what it's all come down to.

I have to be here!

As much as I don't want to be relating to this man and the crazy shit he's dishing, I still can. I know what he's talking about. I know where he's coming from. I mean, how much sense can you make out of a madman? Yet, I feel like I can, at some level. Maybe, it was predestined for me to come here? Maybe because I'm the only one that could do this—maybe?

"I placed my real time in, son—trust me—I'm what it takes! Forget movies or whatever you grew up on, that's all bullshit they feed you because the cowards that make them are just ignorant when it comes to knowing what it really takes. They have you staring at a wall, presenting you with a play of shadow puppets, but you need to step outside your front door, and acknowledge the real world to know. Look at John Wayne—did he have medals? Does Clint Eastwood—Mr. Dirty Harry? No! They're a bunch of stupid actors, pretending to be something they're not! And society loves them for it, instead, of loving the real heroes in the world! I mean…."

And then The Big White Head paused, as some extreme hate began to churn within him. Michael, sensing this, took heed, as Mr. Dorian finally did stare directly into Michael's eyes, like he really did want to convince him of something.

"I mean, I find it so fucking disrespectful, and so fucking insulting, how society gives those phonies—those actors—high praise and awards, while real heroes in the world that did their time, and fought real horrors, are left in the dust and forgotten. Forget the real hero who lost his legs, and is now stuck in a wheelchair all his life, waiting in a line for food stamps—no fuck him—let's praise and give millions of dollars to the phony cocksucking actor, that pretends to be him in a movie. Pretends—fucking pretends! That's just people for you, giving all the attention to those that deserve it the least, and ignoring all those that not only need it, but earned it the most. Society makes me sick! Makes me glad I'm murdering millions of them with that bomb, and the upcoming war. Makes

me wish I had taken that nuke to LA, and started the revolution on the graves of all those Hollywood cocksucking—I hate them! I hate them!

I fucking… oh I should have! I really should have done that instead!"

Even though Michael found this man to be a despicable piece-of-shit, not worth listening to, he couldn't help but to see some truth to what he just said, there, while thinking of his father.

Yeah, but this guy has gone too far. Too much fucking hate in there and that definitely isn't right either. Not one bit! And fuck him for giving John Wayne shit. Why did he have to bring him up? It's like he knows what to say to tick me off.

Mr. Dorian began nodding, incessantly, in agreement, with his only true failure, and then frowned in dismay.

"Say what you want to say about Nazi Germany, at least to them it was all about praising their real heroes. Here, in America, now, and how it's choosing to believe in fiction over reality? Just the sign of the times, the sign of the times. I guess, more in line with your children's generation, and how they have no understanding of the difference between the two. At least in my time, this country used to honor its soldiers more, for all the sacrifices they made. And in Hollywood movies, too. But now, with your pathetic lily generation, they like to call them all baby killers, and spit on them, or make them into Frankenstein monsters like in that Rambo movie, since they did something, the lily sort, wouldn't have the balls to do. In today's world, no one wants to celebrate the valiance coming from true heroes, they want to celebrate more the stuff coming from fictitious characters. Shadows in a cave wall. Fantasy like characters, like a man turned into a machine turned into a police officer, rogue archeologist using the power of God through Biblical artifacts to fight Nazis. Then there's that one behemoth Kraut, that you see a lot of in a lot of movies, today, playing the role of a time traveling robot, a commando, a barbarian, with that horrible accent if his, and seeing how he's built, he's a work of fantasy that shouldn't exist, period! And then there's… whatever the hell that Star Wars thing was, with that Buck Rogers in the 50

billion and a ½ century crud, and with fire swords, a man wearing a 1950 Black Buick on his head, and then, a giant space Yeti with a crossbow!

What the hell is today's world coming to?

All celebrating a bunch of crazy shit you'd expect from a Salvador Dali painting. People today must be fucking nuts, placing all their attentions onto such gobbledygook nonsense, a bunch of phony nonsense, but placing none on those that are the Real McCoys. And don't even get me started on that Superman character that they're now making movies for, I hate the idea of everything that character represents. And have since the beginning. Since no one believes in that Jesus religious stuff no more, and rightfully so! But they still want to believe in godlike forces intervening to save their stupid asses when real disasters happen, they have now created… actually… he was created back when I was a teen… but still! They created that character, to supposedly represent everything, someone like me, and real heroes like me, can never represents… since we can't fly, speed faster than a locomotive, and have the power to run around outside in fruity looking colorful underwear, without feeling ashamed of oneself—which, I tell ye, is a real superpower!"

Mr. Dorian than stopped to take a breath.

"And the colorful bastard is supposed to stand for truth, justice, and the American way, and the fucker's a faggot space alien, or something! Fuck all that superhero garbage. At least John Wayne represented people that were supposed to be real figures in Ameri—…."

Michael then yawned, really letting one out. And Mr. Dorian… saw that! And seeing how Michael was growing bored with him, really had him growing infuriated.

"You like comic books, son? You like Superman? Or Batman? You like cockamamie idiots being drawn up with their underwear worn over some tights pretending to be a bat, or a popsicle, or a spider? You think they're heroes?

Fuck them!

They're doodles on a piece of paper—they don't even exist—figments of a child's imagination! Shadows on the wall. All that garbage doesn't exist—they don't exist! But you know what does exist?

I exist!

I'm the closest thing to a real hero you'll ever meet, and I got the medals to prove it."

Now I know this guy is truly insane. The motherfucker is now jealous of Superman, and shit.

"Did you used to play with GI Joe toys as a kid? Or, are you watching those stupid GI Joe cartoons for those brainless kids today? Well, guess what! Guess who's a real-deal GI Joe?"

Michael began to shake his head in despair, as Mr. Dorian grew even more furious, taking it as a sign of rejection.

"You don't disrespect me like that, son! Men with honor know when they're seeing a bigger and better man with honor! That just shows you're really just a stupid punk, with no idea of how the real world works."

"Please, just shut-up! I don't want to hear it anymore," spat out Michael.

Mr. Dorian just about lost it, as he continued to take Michael's words as rejection, and said:

"Well, too bad! If you want to be a hero—that bad! It's too late to chicken out now, and I guess I should honor you with what it takes to be one!"

Michael felt like getting up and running away, but he still felt too weak from his gut wound.

"I'm going to put you through my own personal little boot camp, to see if you got what it takes!"

As he said that, Mr. Dorian than broke out lunging his boot in Michael's face, kicking him to the ground again.

"Too bad, I can't show you the real horrors of what real heroes see! Too bad I can't detonate that bomb, and make you watch millions

dissolve away into flames, and ash, in front of you. Have you watch millions die in front of you, as I had to, when I was tested—but I'll improvise!"

Mr. Dorian then lifted up his leg, and kicked Michael straight in the gut where he was shot. Michael bellowed out in pain, as the feeling all came rushing back.

"Is it breaking you yet? You feel broken yet?"

Michael said nothing, and continued to shiver.

"Guess not—well too bad—I guess I have to continue!"

Mr. Dorian then began kicking with all his might into Michael's gut, as Michael continued screaming. Mr. Dorian then went over to the security office, and pulled out an assault rifle he had stashed away there. As he walked up to Michael, he jammed the tip, hard, into his wound, and began trying to crowbar his guts around. Michael screamed in agony, again, as Mr. Dorian shook his head and said:

"Fucking coward! You know, you scream like a little girl?"

And with those lines, Madboy came out. This time, Madboy wasn't bellowing out in pain, this time, he was bellowing out in anger. Madboy began lashing out like a wild animal as he began to see blood—Mr. Dorian's blood! It looked like he was having an epilepsy on the floor, as a thousand emotions came flying out, going a thousand miles per second. Madboy almost felt like he was relishing the moment, as he felt born into the world of rage and pain. Madboy felt his soul lunge out with the power of a thousand rockets, taking off all at once. Hateful passion filling up within him, burning hotter than the burning passion of a thousand suns. A thousand emotions. And a thousand cries. A thousand murderous act for justice. And a thousand knives.

Murder! Murder! Murder! With my—BARE--...?

And then, he saw his mitts ringing Nikki's bony chicken neck, again, and....

Fell back....

And petrified in place.

"Coward, I see, fucking coward," murmured out Mr. Dorian, as he felt like he was done with Michael.

Mr. Dorian lifted up the rifle, and it looked like he was about ready to shoot this loser in the face.

"If I had a branding iron, I'd brand you right about now," said Mr. Dorian.

Michael then edged his head forward, and said:

"Just do it… I'm done…."

"Fucking coward," murmured out Mr. Dorian, as he took aim.

Michael just couldn't believe how far this man was willing to go in his pursuit to weed out the strong amongst the weak. Even with Michael's father, when he would beat the ever-loving crap out of him, the man was really conflicted between the love of his son, and not wanting to see him grow up unable to defend himself. If that was Michael's father, what conflict did this man have? Did Mr. Dorian also have some form of compassion or love? Or, did he have nothing but hatred in his heart?

"Stop calling me a coward! I'm not a coward," spat out Michael.

"Bullshit, if you're not willing to go on, it's because you're a coward, and that's all there is to it!"

Does this man have limits? Can he at least show—

"Ah! Can you at least show pity?"

This enraged Mr. Dorian, as he heard him use that word, then he began to laugh in disbelief.

"You want me to take pity on you? Wow! I gotta say, I'm surprised now. I never thought you could be that much of a sniveling, cowardly piece-of—"

"Fuck you! Shoot me if you want, I don't give a shit," exclaimed Michael.

"Then why you want me to take mercy on—"

"I'm not referring to myself—you asshole! I'm talking about when you finally decide to pull the trigger on that detonator, you're not even going to have any pity for the millions you murder? No pity whatsoever? You know, in all my time, there's only been one true virtue I've noticed in people, and that's their ability to feel pity for one another. No matter how flawed people may be. How despicable, and how undeserving. No matter how much people might despise each other. No matter how much one might have fallen from grace, pity is the one last means people show they can still connect. For we're all flawed in the end, and if you can't accept

people when they're at their lowest, you're never going to connect with anyone when they're at their greatest. You won't accept them, and worse yet, you'll never accept yourself and the flaws you carry. You need pity, you need it to get by in life. Without it, you'll just spend the rest of your days being tormented by your idea of perfection, and how you, and no one around you, will ever measure up to it. So… in other words, as much as you might hate everyone around you, you're telling me you still have no pity for the hell you're sending everyone to, with that fucking piece-of-shit down there?"

Hearing Michael's words, Mr. Dorian began to frown again from shoulder to shoulder, as he slowly turned away for a second, then turned back and said:

"No… I lost that a long time ago."

And began to take aim again.

Ah! No compassion, no pity! What the fuck is this man made of? He just hates the weak! He sees a coward—he hates it!

I fucking hate pompous assholes… but really, I hate them because….

And then Michael realized what Mr. Dorian's deal was; what drove the man, and what drove him mad. He also understood what Mr. Dorian was trying to do now; he wasn't trying to introduce his insane sense of honor into him, he wanted to introduce him to fear. His fear! And now, Michael realized that Mr. Dorian wasn't a product of might.

As he's making himself out to be.

But of fear. Fear was what drove him, and it was all he understood.

Hell, he's been bringing that up every two seconds. How did I not see this before?

It must have been something that took him a long time to live with, but even still, he was a slave to it. The man hated cowards, because, that's what he saw himself as. Coming to this conclusion, Michael couldn't help but to chuckle a bit, and when Mr. Dorian saw this, it made him hesitate shooting Michael in the face.

"He heh he he heh."

"What the hell are you laughing at," demanded Mr. Dorian, in a

sullen tone.

Michael picked up his head, stared directly into Mr. Dorian's eyes, and told him what he thought of him.

> “I'm laughing because… you hate cowards… because you are a fucking coward!”

As Mr. Dorian heard that, his jaw dropped, and then tensed up in humiliation. He stood there for a bit, and seemed to be reflecting back into himself. Then Mr. Dorian kicked Michael one last time, and sat on his chest.

> “What did you say to me, what did you—FUCKING CALL ME,” demanded Mr. Dorian.

Michael thought about what must have happened to set this man off from the start. For over thirty years, Mr. Dorian said, he worked for the government.

> And one day he decides to turn on them? Before, this he used to be a 1999 regular—Nikki said! Heading up there with all those Babyboomer Armani Suits, and even actors, that he supposedly hates so much, to party with them—Nikki told me!

For over thirty years, he must have done some dirty deeds while living in his own white chateau, in Venezuela, getting served by topless Latin women, until that is, when he found out the US wanted him out of the picture for robbing them.

> Can't hide from the government no matter where you go—huh?

That must have scared him out of his cozy little world he had created, and that must have started everything.

> “Don't do it, don't murder millions, just because you're afraid of the government! Just because you feel like they turned on you, and abandon you!”

That made Mr. Dorian go back to rereading his own words, as he came back all tensed up again.

> “I'm starting a revolution!”
>
> “Oh, stop saying that! You keep spinning that shit in your head like a merry-go-round—it's all bullshit!”

And saying that, really did something to the Big White Head. Mr. Dorian's jaw then began to jitter, as he started chattering his teeth, but

then he stiffened up his jaw to stop it. He glared at Michael, and began nodding for some esoteric reason.

Mr. Dorian looked down at his mitts, and then placed them on opposite sides of Michael's head.

"Last time I did this, I was about your age, let's see if I still got it." And as Mr. Dorian began squeezing Michael's head in, Michael tried with all his might to throw his arms up to fight back. But Michael had lost way too much blood, and he felt barely alive now to do anything, let alone powerful enough to fight off Mr. Dorian. As Mr. Dorian started ramming in the force, squeezing with all his might, Michael began screaming out, as he felt his jaw lock up and spasm.

"Ahhhh…. stop it," cried out Michael.

"Now you're feeling it—aren't you? Tell me how it feels," asked Mr. Dorian, mirroring the same expression of anguish that was on Michael's face.

Looking into Mr. Dorian's eyes, the man seemed to be in a conflict within himself, as if trench in memory of something he had lost in the past.

"Just stop it, I don't want it anymore! Stop it! Stop it," cried out Michael.

"It doesn't stop! It never stops! You can't stop it! It goes on and on and on spinning on a carousel and…."

Then Mr. Dorian broke off… and fell back. As he realized he couldn't do that to him,

he liked Michael too much to.

And did something he hadn't done in a long, long while, and grew pity on him. And now, his jaw was jittering again, and he seemed to be shivering in fear. After a second had passed, Mr. Dorian got up, sighed, as he regained some composure again, then started walking over to the detonator, and seemed ready to end it all. As Michael saw this, he lifted his hand up to call out to him.

"Don't do it, you asshole! Stop it!"

"I am stopping it," murmured out Mr. Dorian, looking away.

“You're not doing it for your revolution, you made up all that crazy shit in your head. Going through hoops and hurdles and bounds to concoct some form of noble reason you can stand by. Have reason to do what you're about to do. In your mind, that's what you think, but in your heart you're just full of fear and hatred and a sense of abandonment, and someone once told me:

‘if your heart isn't in the right place, your mind definitely won't be.’”

Mr. Dorian just shook his head, as it seemed like he wanted to stay focused with his agenda, and Michael knew he had to keep the pressure, if he was to break the man's conviction.

“For over thirty years you said—thirty years—you worked with the government, and you've had that nuke since the 60s. But now you’re deciding to take them on—why,” mustered up Michael, trying hard to get his words through in his dieing hour.

“This is the best time!”

“Bullshit, you're only doing it now because it's only recently they turned on you, they abandoned you, and you're scared of them! So now, they're the enemies, and you had to make up a reason to do what you'd never do in a sane state of mind,” mustered up Michael, again.

Mr. Dorian then broke up with distraught, as it seemed the truth was finally ringing home with him.

Keeps talking about how much he loves to see this revolution, yet he doesn't even want to stick around and….

“How about this, if you're so passionate about your revolution, then why kill yourself now,” asked Michael.

“What do you mean,” demanded Mr. Dorian, as he began chewing his bottom lip.

“Why do you want to die now? Don't you want to stay back and see how well your schemes work out—your beautiful revolution?”

Mr. Dorian began to shake his head again, trying hard to refuse what he was hearing.

“You said you're here to die, you're waiting for the Reaper, why are you waiting for him?”

“Because that's justice,” broke out Mr. Dorian, with a Freudian slip.

As he started catching himself saying things, he hadn't been able to understand, until now. Michael's eyes now began to glow, as he felt his theory of this man was now complete.

“That's the only justice, for the shit I'm about to do,” continued Mr. Dorian.

“You said it then—not I! You don't want to do this, you really don't want to do this, and you can't deny that now! Justice? Killing yourself out of justice? Sounds like you really can't stand what you're doing. You were talking about what it takes to be a hero… well… let me ask you something, what does it take to be a villain then? Are they really that stupidly evil as they are in the movies, or, are they really just so twisted and demented, and scared out of their minds, the assholes actually think they're doing good?”

Mr. Dorian froze, and said nothing, but continued to eye the detonator.

“Is there justice in what you're doing, murdering millions over some bullshit you made up, because you can't face your true nature? Now, that’s what I call psychotic justice! But does it really have to be like that,” asked Michael.

“You say I'm doing this for revenge? You think I'm that much of a sick fuck that I'd—”

Suddenly, Mr. Dorian's mouth was no longer jittering, it was weirdly beginning to open and shut violently. But once it started, Mr. Dorian then quickly grabbed a hold of it, and locked it shut.

“I'm a hero! You think I'd do something that despicable and weak just because—”

Michael now decided not to respond anymore, he felt like he had made his point, and it seemed like the man was able to do the rest by himself.

“I'm saving them, I'm doing them a world of good!”

Wow, he really does think he’s doing good… I can’t believe it!

Thought Michael, but said nothing.

"This country wants to turn fascist, you might not see it, but I have. I'm not just transplanting my old fear of the Nazis, into the US today, to hate them enough to... wait... am I?"

Line after line, as his eyes tried to study the words in his head, Mr. Dorian found himself unable to understand their meaning anymore. They were no longer making sense to him.

"I told you what I had planned, it made sense, didn't it," murmured Mr. Dorian, staring away, and into that man in the mirror again.

Michael now felt like he had to repeat it, one more time, in hopes that it would finally sink in.

"You asking me that, or are you asking yourself?"

And that finally did it! It was done! That last line broke Mr. Dorian's conviction in half, as his eyes blazed at Michael coming to terms with the truth. Now, Mr. Dorian finally saw it. Crystal clear and clear as day. He finally looked into himself, and saw that he really was just out for blind revenge. There was no real intention to start a revolution. All he wanted was revenge for the US having turned on him. He felt now how scared he was, and understood how he was really doing this all for all the cowardly reasons, and that thought, there, made him sick to his stomach, as he began to heave. Mr. Dorian then looked like he was going for the detonator, as Michael called out to him again:

"Don't do it, let the madness—"

"It never stops, the madness never does! There is no stopping it! It's like a merry-go-round. Like a carousel! The madness never stops! Round and round it goes, where will it stop? Nobody knows!

It never stops!
It can't be stopped!
It won't stop!
It won't stop!"

Mr. Dorian was skipping like a broken record now, as his face cringed up with horror every time he said it. He looked like a man in a world of fear and anguish, in such which no man should ever have to face. Hell! True hell! Michael almost felt pity for the old monster, as he heard him

skip over and over and over again.

And as his mind looped one final time with those words, Mr. Dorian then grabbed the detonator....

And....

Chucked it against the wall, as it broke into several pieces....

Staring down at what he had just done, Mr. Dorian felt beside himself, as he realized it was over.

"Ahaahaahaaha!"

He bellowed out but once... but then... fell silent.

Then Mr. Dorian closed his eyes and realized... strangely enough... that carousel that had been spinning in his head for forty years... had finally stopped. He eyed the detonator, as if though, he was confused at what he was seeing.

Then he walked over to the chair, passively, and sat back down. He sighed. And said and twitched and ranted no more. The insanity that was rampaging within him was now over, and he was back to his real old self—or really—whatever that remained....

A demure twenty-something man, coming back home with his girl, Jane, and beginning to accept that....
Maybe....
Life didn't have to be all about waiting—just waiting—for something different. To go to war, become a hero, and have his moment to shine.

Michael couldn't believe it...
Couldn't believe what he had just seen...
And...
What he had just done.

Michael then slumped back, and felt ready to just let go.

The Broken Curse.

As Michael closed his eyes, he tried to clear his mind of everything that had just happened. He was done; he had done it; there was nothing else left for him to do. But, then again, Mr. Dorian was still sitting there, and Michael felt like taking another glance at him, to see what else could come of him. As he lifted up his head to look at him, he saw Mr. Dorian going for his gun.

What is he going to do now?

Thought Michael. He had no clue what else to expect from the man with the broken Fedora, who was now sitting their eyeing his piece. He seemed to be trenched in memory of something he had long ago witnessed, and was reenacting that scene in his head.

> "I've disgraced you… done nothing but disgraced you, and everything you stood for," said he.

Then took one last gaze, as his eyes shimmered a bit, and placed the gun in his mouth. At this point, Michael felt like saying nothing, and letting the old devil have his last minute.

Fuck him!

But then the scene began to trench Michael into his own memory, of something he had witnessed, long ago, as well. And now he felt like he just couldn't.

"Don't do that," cringed out Michael.

Mr. Dorian took the gun out for a second, and looked confused; wondering why Michael would even care, after everything he had put him through, and then placed the gun back in his mouth.

"Don't do it!"

"Why do you care," asked Mr. Dorian.

Michael then turned around and said:

"Because it reminds me of my father—that's why!"

Mr. Dorian narrowed his eyes for a second, at what Michael had just said, then shook his head, a little unsure of what he just heard, and how it correlated to him.

"Your father… what about your father?"

Michael closed his eyes, and then started:

> "My father's name was Redboy, or, Robert Connelly, and, he actually started The Bloody Shamrocks back in…."

Mr. Dorian now made an impatient look.

"Well, that's not important to you…."

Michael paused, and then tried again:

"What would be important is… was… he was also in that war you were in. Was a fucking Marine… was at Iwa Jima… and also had medals for everything he had done, same as you."

"All right…," said Mr. Dorian, impatiently still.

"He was a proud man, but also, had demons. From that war. Saw things that changed him. I really wouldn't know that much, since, I wasn't there to see who he was before. But, I've heard he was different, by people who knew him—so I believe it! Well, he used to drink a lot—and I mean a lot! Drank so much, he'd start turning red, and that's why they called him Redboy."

"Michael, I really don't know where you're going with this, but…."

"Just listen, already—will ye," asked Michael, as he saw how he needed to step it up.

Mr. Dorian was now staring at his piece, again.

"He was never the same when he came out. And one day, back in the 70s, before I went to prison, I caught him in his room, dressed up in his old Marine blue dress uniform—with medals dangling and all—also with a gun in his mouth, looking ready to blow his brains out."

And that now!

That now!

Hearing that, got Mr. Dorian's full undivided attention.

"Are you fucking kidding me," gasped Mr. Dorian, as he couldn't believe the coincidence of the story he was hearing.

"Why," asked Michael.

As he noticed the story was having an effect on Mr. Dorian, as his mouth started to periodically open and close, violently, again.

"Just go on," said Mr. Dorian, as he really began to take heed.

Also, continued eyeing his piece, in his hand.

"I begged him to stop—I fucking begged him! But it seemed like he had set himself, straight, and there was nothing going to change his mind. Fucking asshole—fucking hard-ass! He was such a stoic

type, so rough around the edges, always keeping to himself, except when he'd…

…and now I had to face him like this. He looked like he'd spent a good portion of his life scared out of his mind, since seeing the shit he had seen. So, as he said 'good-bye,' I just couldn't take it anymore, and I started tearing up."

Michael paused, and noticed how anguished Mr. Dorian seemed. Like nothing he had ever seen in the man. This was the heart of a moment, Michael now saw, but didn't see why.

"But then when he saw me tearing up, he began tearing up, too, and I've never seen him do that—never! One second, I thought he was really going to do it, but then he didn't."

Michael began panting hard as he remembered this story, and as he looked over at Mr. Dorian, he seemed like he could no longer control that impulse of his, as his mouth went full blast violently opening and closing, and almost looked like he was going to dislocate his jaw.

"What's happening to you," asked Michael.

But then Mr. Dorian grabbed his face, again, with his left hand, and forced it to stop. Michael eyed him a bit more in confusion, but then felt like continuing.

"I asked him then, was it really that bad? Was he really just that afraid? It scared the shit out of me to think anyone could live that long, being scared out of their mind, from the shit they had seen."

And now, Michael saw how Mr. Dorian was slowly tearing up, too, except in his own way. No tears. Since, it seemed the devil no longer had any. But yet, his eyes were telling the tale.

"Anyways, he said 'no!' He told me he was just tired of living. He'd had his time, and his time had come and went, and left him in the dust. He had nothing else left, and he was just… tired. Wanted it to end, so, he could simply shut off… go to sleep… and be at peace."

After Michael said that, he noticed Mr. Dorian was no longer trying to tear up, had stopped convulsing.

And had then grown a quaint smirk on his face, as if what Michael had said, there, meant a lot to him.

"That's why I said that, I just don't want to see it!"

“Anything else,” asked Mr. Dorian.

“Well, he eventually died of a heart-attack, but only recently. A couple of years ago, while I was in prison. But I guess he's finally at peace now. Even after that night, he was never happy. Still wanting to just close his eyes, and go to sleep—permanently! And not have to think about another damn thing again. Fuck! I haven't gotten a single wink of sleep in three weeks, straight, can you believe that shit?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Dorian, quickly.

Well… I don’t know. I guess right now, sleep would seem like a good idea, too,” said Michael, with a sigh at the end.

Mr. Dorian than picked up his face, glared at Michael solemnly, and said:

“I haven't slept in three months.”

And….

Wow.

Simply….

Wow… are you kidding me… three months?

Thought Michael, as he cringed at the possibilities.

“Sleep…,” said Mr. Dorian.

“Yeah…,” said Michael.

“To simply—shut off… and be at peace—huh?”

“Yeah…,” followed up Michael, again.

And now:

“I think… I like that idea, too,” said Mr. Dorian, now, demurely enough.

Then smiled a brilliant smile, with a twinkle in his eye, placed the gun back in his mouth, and….

“No!”

Pulled the trigger… and blew his brains out.

Well….

At least I tried.

(So had went the father… so went the son….)

Michael then stared into the face of this scared old man, that he thought was a monster, and decided not to think about it for another second.

Rompous-pompous, I ain't thinking about shit anymore—ever again!

Michael felt like whatever insanity that man had made himself live through, for God knows how long, was at least finally over with. And that was all that mattered, in the end. Michael then rolled onto his back, and sorta wished he could just fall asleep, himself.

And….

After what felt like an hour had passed, Michael opened his eyes, then, and realized he still couldn't. Something was still off. As he opened his eyes, and felt the day light shining in through the lobby window, that was just being born over the horizon.

Michael 'Madboy' Connelly had survived the darkest hour.

Although….

Ah! I still can't sleep. What the hell is going on?

Michael then took one last look over at his mitts, and began to wonder what to do with them, next. If there was ever a part of him that had given him a sense of his own true worth, it be they. They had once been his livelihood and his pride.

But the only thing now is….

Thought Michael, while laying there before the sun….

Can they give me the strength, to make it through the light.

Wait… what does that even mean… now?

And for some reason, Michael began thinking about the story he had told about his father. And doing such, Michael went deeper into memory, of him, as things started falling into place. Puzzle pieces, long been missing, which had been found, now. And these pieces were falling into place, with a jigsaw puzzle, Michael realized, he'd been working on for a… very, very long time now.

What the….

Now Michael was being awakened in other ways, he had long thought,

he never would.

And it has all to do… with my old man?

Just as Michael had spent all his time, since going to prison, all pointlessly, directionlessly and meaninglessly, living on by. Waiting, just waiting, for something to give—at least—end! So had the old man done the same. But unlike Michael….

> He never cared for any resolution to it all. Something to… give! And feel like he'd lived a life that had been fulfilled. For—something! At least.

No, Robert Connelly was different. He was a much more grayer man. Life for him had become a different sort of merry-go-round; spinning and spinning and spinning, and him being content that it never went nowhere. Robert Connelly was a bored man. A very bored man. And lost. And… something else.

> He wasn't an afraid man… he really was one-dimensionally evil.

Now, another memory began to play in Michael's head, of him and his father. A much more important one. A much more crucial one.

60s

This was back in their old home, in Coney Island. Robert 'Redboy' Connelly was a lonely old man, who had burned down almost all his bridges to the rest of the world, and had found himself on an island to himself. A violent and aggressive man, with his own bloody tale to tell. Robert had come home from a long day at work, and had found his son sniffling over something. This didn't sit well with the old tyrant, as he began instantly smacking Michael around some, and really started pounding in his fists, when the boy wouldn't let up, and started crying louder. By the end, Robert had his son bleeding on the floor, with a broken nose, two broken ribs, and his face all bruised up, looking as blue as the New England coast, on a cloudy day winter morning. Once he had gotten his son to stop crying, that's when he had stopped; for chances were, if that little pipsqueak was to continue crying anymore, Robert might have gone truly overboard, and flat out murdered him. Once his son stopped crying, Robert looked down at him, and shook his head, and then decided the only way he was going to get through with

him, now, was by telling him a story. A story about how he used to be.

> “You knows, I'll teaches you something—I'll teaches yous something about being a man,” said Robert Connelly, as he began his tale.

Michael looked away, then, and tried to hold his nose, as it continued to gush with blood.

> “Maybes it'll get through yours head, and maybes it won't. But I'm going to tells it to yous, anyways, because yous needs to learns this,” said Robbie Connelly, flat tone with zero expression.

Michael had then grown frightened, as his father began staring him, so, with eyes enraptured with horrors, only he could see; eyes covered over with shrouds; covering and hiding details, into his inner being.

> “This is an old story of something that happeneds between mes and an old friends of mines, some times, before you were born. Back in the early 50s, in LA. Now, not all the details are true, buts, I'm going to tells it to yous in a ways, so yous gets me nows, and understands why I keeps giving yous lickings like these. Anyways, this old friend of mines used to be a man, that had never taken a lickings in his lifes. Was never in WW2 or the Korean War, a trues pansy, mes and the rests of The Bloody Shamrocks always hads to deals with. A real beatnik, who I personallys initiated, and mades him a parts of us. Was such a fucking pansy, at one points, we called him Frenchyboy fors it. Anyways, you sees, when you're dealing with the sorts that has nevers taken a good lickings befores, when yous first meets them, the sort will smiles at yous, all queers like, with open eyes, like theys wanting to be bestest of friends. But little does theys knows, the type of man they’re dealings withs. Littles did he knows, Frenchyboy, dids, the type of men out theres, that, maybes, ain'ts too goods to be friends with!”

Robert Connelly then paused, and grew a faintly amused smirk on his face.

> “He wants to be my friends?
> Okays?
> He wants to be my friends?
> Okays!
> So, being such a swell friends that I was—you knows what I dids?

I punched, and broke, his stupid fucking noses, and shattered it like glass. And then, as his eyes blews ups, he became stupid with disbeliefs, and whineds like a little girls, in pains, crying, 'why dids yous do that? What have I dones to yous to deserves this? Why are yous being so means to me?' And his heart sorta cracked up a bit, at the thought that there could be mens out there, like mes, that mights have zeros compassions for hims, or even zeros compassions for anyones or anythings for that matters. And these men could possibly be so cruels and evils, that they woulds finds a dark sense of humors doings what I dids," recounted Robert Connelly, as his smirk grew wider.

"A week laters, he sees me smiling at hims, on the street, as hes petrifies in place, shivering in fears, as I approachs hims. Petrifieds in place, and, was unables to breaks aways. So when I reached hims, I smiled to says 'hello' to my news bestest buddys, as I brokes his stupid fucking noses agains, and his noses this times almost collapses in on itselfs. His eyes busted out, and he screeched like a frightened old womans, 'nos, please, don'ts do its! Don'ts hurts mes anymores! Nos! Nos!' As I begans laughing, and walkeds away."

Robert Connelly then busted out with a small chuckle, but then shook it off; staring into Michael's eyes, he saw how scared shitless he was making him, which made Robert shrug a bit in discontent.

"Another weeks past, before I saws him agains. And, whens I saws hims agains, this times, he trieds to makes a runs for it. But yous knows whats? If he wants to bes my friends, I'm going to honors him as a friend, and teaches him, what it means to be friends with a swell guys like mes. There's no chickenings out nows! Sos, as I chased him downs, to greets my new bestest chums, catchings up to hims, sackeds him to the grounds, and as he screameds out 'nos, don'ts hits mes anymores,' I brokes his stupid fucking noses agains, spats in his faces, and laugheds, laugheds, laugheds."

Robert Connelly seemed to want to burst out with a chuckle, again, but frowned instead.

"Seeing something like that, seeing hows theres cans be mens as evils as mes, seeing as how deeplys Is might be lovings destroying hims, sos, he becames horrified beyond measures. Now, truly

unables to let gos of how there are mens like mes, out theres, his minds shattereds, just as his flimsy stupid fucking noses woulds, and had been doing, every times I saws him."

Robert Connelly then looked down at his right mitt, and felt bored with it.

"Another weeks past. I wasn't seeings him on the streets as I useds tos. So, this times, I broke into his house, to sees hims lying in beds. Frenchyboy, there, looked like a Looney Tunes, nows, completely puts outs to green pastures. His eyes were spinnings in his heads, as he wiggleds his lips with his fingers, like theys dos in those cartoons, yous be watchings, afraids out of his minds, at how cruels and uncarings the worlds that he lives in can bes. Sos thens, as I went over to greets my new bestest of chums, agains, I walkeds over, stood over his beds, and smileds so tenderly like at hims. So lovinglys. And as he screameds in horrors, seeings the Reaper, I brokes his stupid fucking noses, once mores, and laugheds in Irish glees.

"Haahahaahaa hahaahaahaa haahaahaha!"

Robert Connelly was now unable to hold back his true nature, as he busted out into laughter, his eyes widening, enraptured by the rush, which was the first time Michael had ever seen his father open up like this to him. Most of the time, he was a hollow and dreary man, that spent his time at bars flat-lining a storm. Quiet, expressionless, and shrill. But now, Michael was seeing him opening up to show the type of demons he was carrying. Demons that made him fancy being so cruel and twisted, out of boredom. Robert Connelly then looked into Michael's eyes, again, and grew a bit sad at how he was scaring him shitless. He then looked back to his right mitt, and began to grow disgusted with it.

"Buts this times... but this times! Besides his noses and minds shattering, something else truly shattereds. His heart shattereds, and now, completelys! And when that happeneds, he wasn't scareds no mores, because I had been teachings him times and times agains, how there were men like mes that did exist. And now he wasn't scareds nos mores. He had taken a couple of lickings, and had seens theys weren't going to be the ends of his worlds. And

this times, when he lookeds up at mes, laying theres, in his beds, he cringeds up with teeths, with bloods in his eyes, and trieds to lashes outs like a wilds animals. And when he trieds to attacks mes, I then wents all out on hims, beatings hims into a bloody pulpy mess, lefts for the medics!”

Robert Connelly then looked to one side, and seemed to be trenched in thought.

“A months had then passed, and Frenchyboy, theres, had returneds from the hospitals. And on that days, whens he saws his news bestest of friends—mes—walking over to hims. You knows whats? He wasn't scareds of mes no mores, he wasn't screaming like some crazy old dames in horrors. You know what he was doing? He was smiling! Just as I was smiling, back at him. So when I walkeds up to hims, to greets him, by saying 'hello,' by breakings is stupid fucking noses agains. After I did, Frenchyboy, there, paused for a bits, wiped the blood off his faces, licked it a littles, smiled agains, and said, 'what else yous gots?'”

Robert Connelly then grew a faintly compassionate smile, as he stared off for a bit more. But then shrugged it off, and began to wonder.

“You knows—I knows—maybe it’s a cruels and lousy ways to starts a friendships. Maybes, I ain'ts being such a swells friends to hims? Maybes, I'm being down right lousys? Maybes, it doesn't need to be that way, sos? I don't knows... but, what I do knows is... that that man, will never be afraid out of his minds by mens like mes, agains, because he now knows he can handles thems.

So, I asks you,
you thinks I did him a service,
or you thinks I dids not?”

Robert Connelly then eyed Michael from the side, and waited to see what his boy would say. What his response would be.

“Sos?”

But Michael had none.

“Wells, anyways, if I ever catches yous tearing up again, I'll break your stupid fucking noses agains, and I'll keep doing it, until it sticks. Show me weakness agains—son! And I’ll learns yous to regrets it! Oh, trust mes on thats! You will learns—the hards way—

to regrets it! Thats I promises. You catches my drifts?”
Michael then nodded, as his father went over to the kitchen fridge, took out some Tequila, and began chugging it straight from the bottle. He then sat down, and stared off into nothing, all very lonely like, while his face began to turn red.

Present

You know what? I take back what I told Gab, once, he was—was—a cruel and twisted man. And. I’m glad I'm nothing like him, at least not like that! As for his questions,

'do I think….’
Wait, let me say it how he’d say it… that fucking Irish goombah!
‘thinkS it's a lousyS wayS to startS a friendshipS?'

I'd tell him now 'yes!' I really think so! Fucking hard-ass. You know, if you ask me, he was more evil than Dorian, here. Dorian was just a scared old man that had lost his mind. My dad was always in control of his nature, which was straight up evil! Shit! But I guess he at least had pity and compassion, even though he tried to hide it. Maybe if he wasn't such a stoic hard-ass, he wouldn't have been such a lonely old man that eventually decided to do himself in. That and scare away my mother.

And then Michael felt it… a change of heart, that had been long overdue, as he started blaming the parent, of his, that really deserved most of his animosity.

And also, now that I remember, I think I was sniffling at the time wondering about what happened to my mom. Yeah!
And now he felt it…
Fuck him! What a piece-of-shit he was. What type of lowlife nut beats the fuck out of a kid for missing his mom? Who, huh, who? Fuck you! And I can see now how every time I've ever beaten the crap out of someone, I've always imagined, on some level, it was him on the receiving end. Toughen up someone so he can stand up for himself is one thing, but to do it the way he did, so he could make everyone as cold and ruthless and twisted and seriously unfit

for this world as he was? And to think, I've spent my entire life idolizing that fucking nutcase?

Michael now felt the fire scorch him completely, and then realized the merry-go-round that had been spinning in his head since that moment,

had now finally stopped,

within him as well. The insanity that had been rampaging within him, was now over, and he was back to his real old self—or really—whatever that remained: a dreary little pipsqueak with a broken nose, sniffling and wondering where his mother had went.

He's the reason my mom left, and ended up dead in a gutter! And all he could do then was beat the fuck out of me, and try to turn me into a heartless evil piece-of-shit asshole like he was, leading me to end up doing the same things with people in my life: nothing but burning bridges, burning bridges, and pushing the most important people in my life away. And, just two months later, I think, it was then he decided to take me to that Haitian prostitute, to change my spirit. Seeing how depressed I had become, and him backhanding me all the time, wasn't breaking me out of the gloom I was in.

Yeah! Way-to-go! That's the way to raise a kid! Best way to substitute a twelve year old's mother, is by taking him to a fucking whore, to pop his cherry! That'll make him feel better!

Fuck him! I hate him!

Now, Michael, was finally—

I wish I could kill him now! I'd murder him!

BAREHANDS!

Free… of his….

No, I'm not! Now, I hate him! I hate him! Murderously!

Well… maybe not completely.

Murder! Murder! Murder!

After a while of that, feeling that, Michael then took out his Rosary, and did the thing. And… felt at ease again.

Oh, thank God I really didn't lose this.

And now, looking back down to his mitts, again, Michael now saw they were their old selves. And useful. Not possessed anymore. And were up to giving solutions to him. Sound solutions. These BAREHANDS!

And what they were telling Michael, made him smile.

Rompous-pompous—I ain't dead yet!

Michael, now, looking once again back down at the instruments of his own intervention, felt the drive to continue. And as he turned back onto his stomach, he felt like, maybe, he could crawl his way out, back into his streets….

And at least try and get as far as he could, before he really bled out, and died.

If I still die, I still die, but I won't at least die like this, with my belly up, giving up. I can do this!

But, as he started to crawl, he then noticed them.

Oh, I'm not alone again.

There was another large group of 'American's finest,' sieging the building, and as Michael continued to crawl, he saw them running up to him, with their weapons drawn.

"Turn around—slowly—and get your hands up," cried out their Pointman.

Michael than slowly turned to his side, and lifted his hands over his head in accordance. His entire body felt formless and numb, and he wasn't even sure if he was in control of it.

"Sarg', he's injured, severely, and he's not armed," called out one.

The Pointman then lowered his weapon. Then looked about, seeing all the dead bodies sprawled about. Then eyed Mr. Dorian.

"Fine, get a stretcher out here and get him out quickly! Probst! Bridges! Check the security offices over there, and make sure that motherfucker over there is good-and-dead," said the Pointman.

Michael watched them run about their business, as he then noticed how he was already on a stretcher, and being rushed out to a paramedic team

waiting to collect all the survivors. Everything just seemed so ethereal, like there was no control, and he felt formless—and liked it! He felt like he had dove into that dream of Nikki's, and he felt a sense of piece under the waves of the endless oceans out in Tahiti.

Yeah! If I die… that's where I want to die….

New York City… I love you!

But I’m getting the fuck out of dodge, and finally this time!

And the Lizard

"The worst guilt is to accept an unearned guilt."
-Ayn Rand

Brigadoon.

Nikki watched, as her cab pulled up to the entrance of Attica Correctional Facility: a massive building that looked like one giant wall built up separating the rest of the world from what lay passed the gates. It had been a long time since Nikki had last been here. And now, looking at this giant building, that looked like some medieval fortress abandoned centuries ago, something of another era, began to make her feel that sense of desolation and loss she felt the last time she was here.

> I remember now, I feel like I was a different person back then. But, last time, I couldn't wait to leave the second I got here. I can't believe I'm back to doing this again, and having to see him here, again, too.

Thought Nikki, as she felt the grayness of it all set in; the grayness from the walls, the cloudy skies, and also the scenery. At the center of its massive outer curtain wall, Nikki saw the gatehouse, that had a conical spire on top. Looking at the architecture, and the intricate designs on the gatehouse, Nikki concluded that, maybe, she really was at a medieval fortress. It practically looked like it was built during the Dark Ages, and Nikki began to entertain a silly notion that the building might actually be housing inmates infected with the bubonic plague: The Black Death.

> Heh! It reminds me of a movie I saw, where there's this phantom town in Scotland, that supposedly fades in and out of reality, every century or so… what was the name of that movie? And, why is this place reminding me of it?

Nikki shook off that silly notion as she continued sizing up the building. As Nikki exited her cab, she forked over the cab fare, and then finally entertained the cabby, by passing him a glance, which Nikki was sure he had been waiting for this entire time. As she did that, the cabby's eyes started firing off like fireworks, and Nikki then felt like shaking her head.

> For an entire hour you've been gawking at me through the rear-view mirror, and in that entire time, I've evaded every attempt you've made to get my attention. Every attempt… every single one!

And now, Nikki's thoughts grew hostile.

> As if…

I'd ever fall for a fat, ugly, balding man, like you.

And now, more hostile than she would even like them to be.

You piece-of-shit! You sleazy slime bucket! For one entire hour you've tortured me so. Tortured!

Thought Nikki, and then let go, out of fear of how far that side of her might go, also. And after a second, Nikki, feeling more calm, now sprang into character, with her usual self with how she'd deal with anybody; as her brow widened, and she smiled a charming smile, and then said:

"Hey, listen, I'm not going to be here for very long, maybe an hour at the most, so here's twenty dollars, and I promise you another twenty if you stick around until I return—we have a deal?"

Oh, Nikki, you bitch! You're probably going to be here for far longer than that, probably at least three to four hours.

Thought she, since that's how long it took her the last time she was here. But…

Screw him, this will be payback for him having made the trip over here so excruciating.

Now thought, and, she knew he was going to wait that long, too. She knew it!

His type always do. They always do! They have no self-respect and decency. And will do anything for a pretty face. Anything!

So, therefore:

Let the idiot wait that long. That'll be further punishment.

The cabby then wiggled his eyebrows, twice, as bits of dandruff began to fall off from its ends.

"Of course! Of course, my dear… take all the time you need," he said then, with a Middle Eastern… Eastern European… something accent.

And, when he smiled, Nikki then couldn't help but to notice his yellowing teeth encrusted with plaque, and bits of food from what he must have had earlier this morning. And now, how, as he began licking them, bits of food became dislodged, and fell out of his mouth.

"Thank you so much," said Nikki, smilingly, as she continued to stare at more disgusting details.

No, don't look at his hairy ears! What are you doing, Nikki?

Nikki then turned around, and started walking. She was done torturing

herself.

Maybe… maybe… he was just trying to be nice to me, the entire time, and nothing more? Maybe… it's all in my head?

I can't even tell anymore!

And now, that brought upon Nikki's feelings of guilt. As they stung, deep, and made her feel her own poison. Now feeling awful, Nikki then looked back, but then saw the man was still checking her out.

Shit!

Nikki turned again.

Stop, Nikki, stop! Stop feeling sorry for him. You keep going down that road, and you're just going do what you've done before, and fuck him out of…!

And, once again, Nikki started walking, again. But then…!

No, don't look back again!

But she couldn't help it, so she did, and this time as she did so, again, Ernest Borgnine's uglier cousin started making kissy faces. And now, Nikki was truly done with him, as she turned around, and started walking, but for good this time.

And just for that, when I'm done, I'll call another taxi, and leave with that person, instead.

I hate men!

As she entered the gatehouse, she approached the front desk, and began to check in for her visit. Once the correctional officers were finished checking her bags….

I liked how one of them called me baby-doll, twice, in one sentence. At the beginning… and then at the end. As if saying it twice would… win me over, or something? Would… I don't know!

Two points, though, for the laughs.

Once they were done checking her bags, they began leading Nikki to the visitation area. As Nikki finally got there, she signed her name into the books, and walked into a giant room filled with prisoners and their visitors. It was practically a zoo in there, and it seemed like half the inmates were dumped in after the New York riots, that had happened a

month ago. Nikki hesitated moving forward at first, as she felt like she was neck deep in disgruntled inmates, staring her down, with long and hardened stares, with their lusting eyes.

Tortured, twisted, and forgotten men, with a bellyful of ferocious hatred for the fairer and more well received gender….

Lusting for women like Nikki, because, they saw connecting with her being as a form of escapism, from the hell they were living in. Nikki felt them staring at her, possessively, as their inadequately matched significant others complained about the rent, and the provisions for their two or three children.

> Is there anywhere in the world… anywhere in the world… where not every man, or woman, I come across, isn't suffering from some form of low self-esteem or worth?

Thought Nikki, since this was the world she lived in; that was the world through her eyes.

Nikki began to pity them all now… and with that… now fear them.

> No! Don't think that way! I can't just keep entertaining that fear, that every man around me wants to…?
>
> Now I remember why I wanted to get the hell out of here so quickly the last time.

Eventually, Nikki saw Michael seated dab-smack in the center of this Mecca of hardened figures.

> Hmm….

Thought Nikki, as she tilted her head to one side, and tried to make sense of her Michael. Or, was it hers…?

> He seems different.

Approaching him, Nikki found him to be a bit odd, from his posture. Or really, just odd for him. He was sitting upright, very upright, as if he had a 2x4 to his back straightening his form out. His arms were on his thighs, at ninety degrees. Actually, much of his form was at ninety degrees. Very… squared away of him. In complete contrast to how laid back he'd usually be; all laid out, like on a bed, after having sex with several, several, several….

Okay, don’t get into that!

None of his swagger was there, and none of his obtuseness; the things Nikki had become familiar with when it came to him.

He looks to be an island to himself, like that one island I had been reading up on, that South Pacific Island of Rapa Nui, before the European explorers had come across it. Inhabited by those that had come to believe their island was the only landmass left in a sunken world, covered with endless oceans. Inhabited by those that had given up hope, a very, very long time ago.

As Nikki got up to Michael, and now stood next, she then saw how he still didn't seem to have noticed her, and as she sat down at his table, and gave a cheerful smile, she saw how Michael still didn’t flinch.

Wait… he still hasn’t noticed me?

She then cocked her head left, then right, waving her head about like a flag to see if she could get Michael's attention.

Michael, you there?

Eventually Nikki decided to lower her head halfway down to the floor, to where Michael’s eyes were parked at, and finally, she seemed to be getting a response.

“Michael,” spoke out Nikki, trying to exert another cheerful smile into him to set the mood.

But then Michael made a skittish glance in her direction, meeting halfway short to eyeing her straight, and it then came to Nikki that, maybe, he wasn't exactly in the mood for lightface cheer.

Maybe, I shouldn't be smiling at a time like this, he's not going to want to see that now, considering the place he's in. I need to be more direct.

Thought Nikki, as she placed her hand over his cheek, hoping her warm touch could revive him from the state he was in. And now, Nikki was getting a different impression of him.

He looks like some… Dostoyevsky… sitting there, contemplating over the realities of his crimes and punishments. Whether there is a crime committed that could be justified, considering the state of mind a man had been in, when committed. And whether the punishment bestowed upon him, was just, which would lead to rehabilitating him for the better.

Thought Nikki, very analytically, as she squinted her eyes at him, to

study him. And now, that being the question on her mind, and seeing how Michael had been that night; how much worse he was, criminally, since going in, Nikki concluded with a resounding:

No!

All right, Nikki, let's not get into that. What's the point of feeling bad for him? What good is it going to do?

"Michael, please… look at me," asked Nikki solemnly.

Then Michael's face lit up a bit, as his attention began to stir, and Nikki was sorta thrown off how he might have not even noticed her sitting there all this time, considering she had just shoved her face in front of his.

"Michael, are you all right," asked Nikki, a little worried now.

Nikki was now once again noticing how out of character Michael all seemed to be; totally on the opposite spectrum of what she was familiar with, all the years she once knew him. Instead of being vibrant and engaging, he seemed melancholic and wearisome. He had reading glasses on, and a rundown old paperback book at hand, titled 'Starship Troopers' by Robert Heinlein. Seeing Michael in this awkward state, Nikki began to grow awkward herself, as she began running line after line of what to say to him next, to get his full attention.

What is he… is he ignoring me?

As she saw Michael's eyes meet hers, and then evade back to the book he was holding, Nikki grew in distress. There was a lot Nikki wanted to say to Michael, a lot! But, now, she was feeling most of those words fading away from her, as she felt like she was confronting a different person.

"Michael!"

But… nothing! And nothing of her Michael. This felt like someone else.

No, no, I have a lot to say to you! Don't be this way, it's having me at a loss of words.

Nikki had spent practically all-day rehearsing in her mind what she was going to say, and what she was going to feel when she'd say it, and what Michael would then say and feel, in return. All morning, all day, and really… all month, since that night.

It was all well planned, I was…?

But now, all of that was seeming to be set aside; all those words and

feelings, and now replaced with a rhetorical and pointless question of asking about the book he was holding.

"So, what are you reading there," asked Nikki, with a discouraging sigh.

Michael shrugged, and then said:

"I don't know… something that's been on my mind, recently."

"What's that," asked Nikki.

"I don't know, fascism and the privilege of—"

"Fascism?"

"Yeah—why? You surprised I might even know what that word means," asked Michael in an expressionless manner, eyeing nothing in front of him.

Nikki got worried for a second that her question might have indirectly come across as being insulting. And now, Nikki couldn't understand at all what was going on in Michael.

"Michael, why do you think that," asked Nikki, feeling like all chances of establishing a connection today might have already been lost.

Michael cocked his head to one side, turned it over to Nikki, and finally smiled, with some hint of emotion behind it.

"Sorry, Nikki, being here sorta has me drifting back to how I was, much of the time I was here. Not my old self… I guess. You know, places and people can have that effect on you," responded Michael, in a somber tone.

Nikki smiled, and was mildly pleased to see something other than the lukewarm greeting she had gotten from him earlier, and began to wonder where this was going.

'Places and people having an effect on you?'

Nikki didn't know where to go with that line, she understood what Michael meant. But what was odd about it was the fact that Michael was being vague, and for Nikki, Michael was never vague, nor subtle, nor indirect. If he thought something, he'd say it, and he'd always try to keep it simple.

"You know, when I first got here in the late 70s, I was some dumb illiterate jackass that wouldn't have been able to read two sentences from this book, put them together, and understood what they meant," continued Michael.

“Okay,” said Nikki, unsure of how to expand on that.
“But then I met someone here that sorta changed things. He was a political prisoner from the late 60s. He had been part of the Black Panther movement, and he'd been here since then, and was here in '71, when that riot happened. Back when this place was filled to the brim with political activist from that era….”
“Okay,” said Nikki.
“Well, this place had a lot of racial segregation—still does now—but something in him made him still decide to take me in, and teach me things.

Ideologies and History…
and he had degrees in Sociopolitical matters, Psychology…
and…
History…
and… and…?”

At first, Nikki felt interested in hearing Michael out with his story, but as he continued, she began to notice how his story began screeching down to a halt, as he grew more and more awkward and gloomy; he didn't even seem interested in his own story the further along he delved into it. His eyes were still blazing out, looking out at nothing, and now, all seeming to be doing so in vain. And now, he seemed unwilling to continue.

“Well… anyways… it doesn't matter,” concluded Michael.

He then set the book down, took off his reading glasses, and began looking at the other inmates who were with their visitors, and seemed more interested in their affairs, than his own.

Michael… what's going on with you?

At this point, Nikki felt like they were complete strangers. And as she sighed, Nikki then thought that maybe it was best now to bring up the details of that night, and see if that might stir up some interest. A large part of Nikki didn't want it to go in that direction, because she remembered how badly Michael was bothered by her, by what she had become, and by all she had become a part of. Since that night, Nikki had left town, and had gone to a friend of the family, in Nantucket, fearing

that the events of that night might have eventually led to the FBI, CIA, whomever, coming by, to arrest her for her involvement with Mr. Dorian. Up until that night, both Nikki and Radboy had been very precautious to cover up any tracks that could lead up to them. Either than just being there, anyone at 1999 could have been involved, including the Mayor, and a couple of Senators. And if that didn't work, there was still something else.

> And here's the big secret about me, I've kept from just about everyone.

Nikki had actually spent years living her life under a fake name, and fake records. Her real name was never Nichole N. Nikita Jackson.

> What a stupid porno-star sounding name that is! I don't know what my parents were thinking of renaming me that.

Her real name was actually Nichole Abadie, and she was a French girl, from a family of corporate level charlatans and con-artist, that ran to America to start over.

In France, her parents had made way too many ugly deals that had gone sour, and because of that, they had left the country.

> Thinking about the type of people my parents were, I wonder if you could really blame me for the way I turned out? All they ever did was lie and cheat. All they knew how to do was lie and cheat. And when it came to teaching a child morals… they had none. Although, they did have a way of making lieing and cheating sound anything but amoral.
>
> 'Screw them before they screw you!'
>
> That was their code. Their motto. By the time I was old enough to really have any sense of my own reasoning, with all that I had been taught, it was too late, I was too far gone to be doing what I knew and felt was just. Already too late.

By the time Nichole got to America, she was fourteen years old, and didn't know a lick of English. She mostly kept to herself in the beginning. But in a year, she spoke English fluently, and no one was the

wiser. She had someone else's birth certificate, someone else's social security card, and the truth of it was, Nicole Abadie was still considered a French citizen, with no record of ever even setting foot on American soil. If anything serious was to ever go wrong, she could just run back to France, and the officials in America would then be hunting down a woman that didn't even exist. Of course, that didn't make Mademoiselle Abadie any less paranoid, because she knew if the US wanted to find Ms. Jackson, any breadcrumbs left behind might eventually lead up to her, even in France or Tahiti, or wherever she decided to go. Right now, all Nicole wanted to do was run, but… she wasn't willing to go alone. Not one bit.

More Mommy and Daddy Issues…?

> I think it's the human condition to feel worthless. Always worthless. Everywhere I go, I see nothing but people doing everything they can to not feel that way. To feel important.

Thought Nikki, as she took a look around her, at all the faces, all the lonely faces, of lonely people, all wanting to connect with something, someone, more, but never able to.

And now, Nikki looked at Michael, and got upset.

> No, Nikki! Don't look at him in that way… not that way! Not him.

Nikki sighed.

> I hate pity. I hate it! Please, let my relationship with Michael not have been about that. Please? I don't want to love him because of that!

And now, looking at Michael, Nikki tried to force herself to look at him differently. And, thankfully, looking into his face, all of a sudden, a spark went through her, as she saw her old Michael, and better times she had had with him.

And… that was going to be good enough for now.

> Strange how much of a difference one night and an old face reentering your life can make.

Ever since that night, Michael had awakened something buried deep within her, which until that night had almost been completely forgotten.

Well… not completely.

But a memory that had gone underground; had tunneled its way deep under her conscious mind and had laid dormant, all those years, that Michael had been away. Which only surfaced when he resurfaced back into her life that night.

An old urge, and old need,
an old touch…

she once remembered was hers; an old addiction that came back tenfold, when she realized how much she missed it.

You know, my plans were to go to Tahiti and just completely forget about being with another person in my life, ever again.

The thing about Nikki was:

I want to be an island to myself, and forget how everyone else exists. I want that, I actually prefer to be alone.

Nikki then looked at Michael, and thought:

Well, maybe not completely.

The thing about Nikki was:

I'm… really just not a people person.

For me, with most, it's just too frustrating going beyond formalities. And beyond sex, when it comes to relationships. I've been with so many men, so many! And with most, going passed a month has been just about excruciatingly difficult.

Nikki, simply, had some serious trust issues. Some serious, serious trust issues, since most of everyone to her came off as being… not even of her own species.

Like lizards… or something. I don't know how to explain it. It's just the abnormal way I see things. How I see people around me.

After Michael, I tried to move on. I tried! And I tried to go with men that were nothing like Michael, since….

Since Nikki didn't feel like she could do another Michael type, not after everything he put her through.

I don't want to think about that, him, and how much he cheated

on me. I don't want to think about it right now!

So, Nikki tried not to.

I figured, since Michael was such a child. That, maybe, that was the problem.

So, as for the men she went for after him:

I found them to be far, far worse.

I tried those of my professional circle. I tried, well… yuppies! Really.

But, the problem Nikki then found with them was:

Oh, and I thought Michael was a petulant child. These men were that, and had none of the warmth, nor the human qualities, that would make me want to stick by them.

Most men just want trophies for women, period.

And seeing how I am, and who I had eventually become, with these yuppies, to them, I had then become the biggest prize of them all.

Once I became the Lady, they all had to have me.

Capture me, like I was going to be that one great hunting story they could tell all their friends about, as they then pointed at my head surmounted on some wall. Once I became the Lady, it was all open season with me.

Nikki now shook her head, trying not to think about all the shit she had to go through dealing with them all.

So, then, I closed myself off. From most. Especially when it came to going beyond just sex.

But that didn't exactly fix things….

No, it didn't, because then that made most see that as a—challenge!

And then, came the real dangerous sort.

Well, at least for me. Then came the Romeos, or, the supposed Romeos, the ones with all the romance and… manipulative crap!

And the problem with them was:

They were never being romantic, nor sweet, nor any of that

debonair crap, for me, either. With all the man-childs I dealt with, I at least saw their game coming from a mile away. But with these assholes, it took me a while to get used to them, and by then, they had done their damage. No matter how much they tried to make it seem like they were doing it all for love, for loving me, they were still really just doing it all for themselves. Just like any man that just wants a trophy, all they wanted was some sense of achievement. But in their case, taking my heart as their reward, instead of my head, which they still planned on nailing to some wall, for them to gaze at and admire, and show off to all their friends, to admire it as well.

I remember this one Brit, that really got me laughing how full of himself he was. The boy had lines, he had lines… I'll give him that! He was a real talker, that tried to get poetic with me, and…?

What was the line he tried to feed me again… oh yeah! I remember now:
'Love is like a butterfly, try to grab onto it and it'll try to escape, don't do anything, and it'll lose interest and leave. But, hold your hand out to protect it from the cold winds, and it'll stay with you forever.'

And when he finished telling me that line, I remember how he then looked up at me, and stared at me, like he had already won me over. But…. I knew his kind, and, I had a theory to test.

Instead of giving in, which…?
Nikki sorta did want to do.
Those eyes! Just… those eyes! Just… dreamy!

But… something in my gut told me… to be completely mean and rude to him, to see how he'd react, then. So I busted out a laugh, really loud to rub it in, making him seem just that pathetic. I then turned around, and walked away. I decided to be extremely mean to him, to see how he'd react. And, sure enough, within a half a second later, that debonair smile was gone, and was replaced with

a mouth full of teeth, as he then cursed at me, calling me a bitch.

And actually…!

Tried to attack Nikki.

Asshole! Fucking asshole… but thankfully… Jamil… or was it Jalil?

One of them were around, and I had him escorted out.

Nikki began cringing, then, thinking about him.

The creep in Don Juan's clothing, lost—all his nerve! And showed me who he really was, and what he was really made of. Just another jerk….

I hate them!

But then, a weird notion went through Nikki, as she stared at Michael… as a sudden fear set in.

Was he just like that… with me too?

Nikki then shook off that thought, and denied the chances.

No, no… Michael isn't the type….

At least not with me!

Although, I have met some men that didn't just want a trophy and did want something more.

Thought Nikki, as she watched Michael, and began associating him with another thought.

But… were they the hardest ones to deal with. For how sorry and rotten they made me feel.

When it came to relationships, besides dealing with the untrustworthy ones, the lizards, then there were the men that Nikki really couldn't stand. And why?

Because… well… according to my therapist, they remind me of my father.

Nikki frowned hard, thinking about that matter. That embarrassing matter. Her and her:

Stupid daddy issues…!

I mean, why did I even spend a year going to a shrink, if that realization was all it came down to?

Nikki's father, for lack of a better description, was an embarrassment!

What a… loser.

And a terrible father figure all around.

Only father/daughter time I ever shared with him was going hunting. And what a gun nut he also happened to be. How he loved to hunt little critters, which always put me off in a way. And I mean—really—did! Who cackles at killing small defenseless animals, who?

Duck hunting was her father's favorite.

What type of monster would use a .308 Winchester to hunt ducks? It's mostly used to hunt bigger game, like elks and moose. I'll never forget the horror of watching my dad in those moments.

Quack.

Quack.

BOOM!

'Look, Nichole, no head!'

Practically taught me everything I know.

Nikki eyed Michael, remembering how off put he got, seeing how good she was with guns. Now realizing those father/daughter times spent had come full circle.

Fathers usually bond with sons through hunting, and camping, and all those male activities. But mine… heh! I don't know.

And the most fundamental problem being….

That was it!

That was all I ever got from him in any truly meaningful way!

The man wasn't capable of nothing good. There had to always to be a mask up. Something up, to hide himself, and how much of a spineless, yet spiteful, man he was.

Even with us, me and my mother.

But then, as for Nikki's mother?

Oh, no! Fuck that bitch! My father might have been a very, very pathetic and pitiful man, but that's only because he was a fearful

man, that was scared of everything. He couldn't help being that way.

As for Nikki's moth—

I said: 'no!' I'm not thinking about her! And that's final.

Nikki sighed….

And now decided to get into it.

For years and years, even before I was born, my father had to always be the breadwinner, or stealer, really! In France, the things he did to sustain that harlot's insatiable appetite… I can't even begin to phantom. For years and years, he did all those things, for her, for a woman, that never, ever, loved him.

My father… what can I say about him? He was pitiful balding man that…?

Nikki then thought about that cabby.

No, no! Don't think about him! Don't associate that man… to my father. Don't! Simply don't!

Nikki then forced herself not to.

My father wasn't the type of man a woman would go for… but definitely settle for… especially if he was to promise all the moon and stars to her, if she would be with him. My father wasn't much of a… man.

But, was possibly a kind hearted man… right?

Maybe, maybe… when he was younger… and… definitely before that woman came into his life.

My mother was a woman that liked her place in life. And, liked her place, as a woman, where, she never had to do anything. Never had to pick up a finger, and work, for all the wealth and fortune and abundance she craved for. That she desired for. The only thing my mother saw in my father, was a workhorse. Or a mule, simply.

That!

And, of course, she saw for his talents at cheating people, which was something my father was very, very, very good at. And she'd

drill him, work him, to work for her, to acquire all that she wanted. But, as time went on, the effects of being such a dishonest man eventually had its toll on him. The years of double-crossing people, and dealing with the fear and paranoia that comes with it….

I mean, even from my experiences, when you've spent so much time making so many enemies, you can't help but to spend more time thinking about them all, and fearing how they might eventually want to get back at you with revenge.

And… it can make your life a living nightmare.

So, after so many years of dealing with all the stress, they eventually had a toll on him. And, I saw how he became through the years. Growing more and more of a husk of a man, all hunched over, shivering all the time, always looking over his shoulder, and being fearful of everything.

Nikki now pictured that sight, how she remembered him in his last days, and how much of a broken man he had become. And, now felt depressed.

It's such a sad sight, seeing how a person becomes, through the years, dealing with all that. I mean, I know, most would think that would be a punishment befitting, considering all the wrong he did.

But…!

The man was completely gone at the ends! He had become so wretched, he couldn't even do basic tasks anymore. He couldn't even take care of himself, could barely speak, eat, walk, couldn't bathe himself, clean up after himself, couldn't even tie his shoelaces. And he needed a twenty-four hour maid service to take care of him, as if he were a terminal patient. He'd just shiver all the time, and get bossed around by my mother—who wasn't going to have any of it! Since, she couldn't let her work mule grow too lame, and be unable to go out, and lie and cheat and steal some more—all for her! No! She couldn't allow that to happen.

In the ends, it was a relief for Nikki—a relief! To see him go, and pass away.

It was such a peace, he finally got. In the ends, he was so happy when he became bedridden, and had to be hospitalized, and so happy he didn't have to do another damn thing for her, that harlot. That whore. My father was only sixty-three years old when he passed, but, if you saw him, you could have sworn he'd pass for being someone over ninety.

That! Was the toll, that type of life had on him. Living with that much sin.

But then, as for Nikki's mother?

She wasn't even at his funeral… can you believe that? Can you believe it? And as of now… I have no fucking clue. No clue if she's even alive still or not. All I heard from her last was she got remarried, to some rich man in Rio. I think? I don't know. And don't care! Fuck that woman. Seriously, fuck her!

Now having spent some time thinking about them, Nikki felt like bringing it all together.

The one thing I swore to myself was, never to get with a man that would make me feel that way with him. Make me feel sorry for him. Because I've seen what that turns into, what a relationship like that becomes. I can't blame my mother completely for the way she saw my father.

A lot of it was also his doing.

My father… was also an alcoholic. A degenerate alcoholic, that would drink and drink and drink, and then get completely belligerent to all of us—and on purpose! Because he knew how wretchedly pathetic and embarrassing he would get to me and my mother, and he'd do that, just to spite us.

My mother, I can understand. But he did it to me too.

And why?

Because… the man was unable to look at me as just his daughter,

once I developed as a woman. And...!

Nikki then shook her head, and decided not to think about it again. Not ever again. Never again!

Dead Hearts.

Nikki then sighed. And then thought:

> You can only pity someone so much, and then... you'll just be stuck with hatred, for the things they continue to do, that made you pity them in the first place. My father chose to be the way he was, he chose it!

Nikki now went back to thinking about her love life, and how it was forever ruined because of that man.

> The thing I've faced with men that come looking for love is... I don't know! I don't know why, but I can never associate them as being anything but pitiful. Something about them, and about me. And... I don't know why it is this way!
>
> As if it's only me, I'm cursed with, dealing with, and no other woman....
>
> If anything, the ones I have felt something for, like I did with Michael. They were the worst! For they made me feel that way. First off, I hate it, when all I see is, how all that men are looking for is: acceptance. I hate it, since it's mostly what I have to deal with! There's a lot of pitiful men out there that don't know the difference between love and acceptance, and think with me, getting me, to give my love, that that's what's going to make everything all right. They don't see themselves as measuring up, and they see getting themselves getting with me as a way to achieve that, and not feel worthless all the damn time.
>
> But... it just doesn't work that way!
>
> I'm sorry! I'm so sorry you feel so less of yourselves, but what difference do you think getting with me is going to make?
>
> In the end, you're the only one that can make yourself feel worthy.

Only you can, only you, and no one else!

Nikki now needed a moment to reflect.

Were they the worst! Filling me up with guilt… since I couldn't… just turn it on. Not even knowing what real love is, and not understanding I can't just do that. I can't! It doesn't work that way! So many of them think love is something you can just give, when really, it's something that needs to be made first. With those hopeless romantics, those 'nice guys,' the problem with them is, they just didn't get it.

How do you expect me to give you any… when I barely have any for myself, how?

And now, came the matter that had bothered her, her entire life.

In the end, I'm unlovable. I mean, I can't even love myself, so, when you can't even have any love for yourself, how do you expect other people to? I'm unable to do it for myself. And, I never will. And why?

Because I've done too much wrong in my life… and I'm going to hell. That's all there is to that, nothing I can do will change that. I'm condemned.

Although, that is if there is such a place. I'm not religious, and I don't want to be. I already have everyone else judging me for all the wrong I did, and rightfully so… so I rather not go to church and have that with an all-powerful….

Nikki stopped herself short.

That, there, was something that truly did terrify her. Just the idea of.

It's as simple as that. I used to try and deny that aspect about me, but, now in my thirties, I've learned to accept it. I'm a bad person, and, I am unlovable. And in the end, all those men that have tried to chase me, they were never going to love me… because I don't deserve it.

And after thinking that, Nikki waited for it to set in: her self-pity.

But. It didn't.

Oh, I'm doing it again to myself!

Thought Nikki, while blowing up at her hair, and rolling her eyes.

I mean, enough already! Enough drowning yourself in self-pity. Enough!

Oh, Nikki, you are an endless stream of melodrama, you won't let go of. Really. You should get a stool, and sit on it in front of a mirror. And monologue all this crap to yourself. Until you get so fed up, you get up, and bash your head into your own stupid reflection.

Thought Nikki, trying to be humorous. But...?

My sense of humor stinks!

And now, after that entire awkward session within herself, Nikki started regarding Michael, again, and how he was different from the type of person she saw herself as, and different from most men.

I think... that's one of the major things that got me with him, he seemed like he cared, wanted to love me, and not just possess me, and for who I was. But also, wasn't going to be someone I'd feel pity for.

Since... Michael was a man.

A real man!

But then again....

Why did I spend so much time... still feeling that way about him?

A man... but still a child.

Wondered Nikki, even though she already knew.

I don't know why, but I can't get that moment out of my mind, how you told me how scared you were to see something happen to me. And at a time, I was being a complete idiot, wanting to still head back down to deal with Mr. Parsley, even when it was quite clear they had no plans to keep us alive, once they had the codes.

On those rooftops, when you said that, I felt the most connected with you than I had been with you—or anyone really—in my entire life. Maybe it has something to do with how I am, and always thinking how you weren't…?

Seeing how Nikki always felt like the weaker one. The frailer one. Her father's daughter. A scared woman.

That's something I came to terms with a long, long time ago. How much I really am like him, but in my own way. I am just as much of a miserable person. Better off away from everyone, considering his fear of people is also in me. As much as I pitied him, I always understood him, too. How pitiful and worthless he felt, which I feel like I've spent a good portion feeling myself. Afraid of everyone, and everything.

And yet, Michael was different.

But…?

And now, Nikki took another look at him, and realized.

No, he really hasn't been. He's really just been weak and pitiful, but in his own way. I remember he was… my first impression of him has always been that of a scared child, even though on the surface, he seems like this wild animal, especially with that staring and panting thing he's got.

And it's funny how it always felt like he did it on purpose… strange!

But for me… Michael? I saw a scared child. He'd never say it, but sometimes he'd just hug me, and not want to let go. Lay his head down on my lap, and do and say things a child would do.

But then again…!

But then, a minute later, he'd hit puberty, and mature into an adult, after getting a whiff of my panties, and try to eat them and the skirt I was wearing. One time—literally—tried to eat my stockings, I guess as a joke. Then began choking on them, and almost threw up trying to heave it out. Then started laughing like a silly child would over his own stupidity, and I couldn't help but laugh too.

Looking at Michael once again, Nikki began to want those moments back again. She missed those moments, and missed Michael's humor, since she had none of her own. She felt like she wanted this thirty-something child back lying his head on her lap again.

I don't know, part of me says I need a responsible adult in my life, something… not this! But, then again… I don't know! I find them boring. I'm already independent, responsible…?

Well, responsible… when I'm not making stupid deals with batshit-crazy, psychotic CIA agents!

Ahem…!

But besides that… I'm already that, and the boring type. So, what use would one be when I can take care of my own?

That was something Nikki had at least proven to herself, in life.

Most women today won't shut up about being this idea of an independent woman. Not needing any man in their lives.

But the thing was with Nikki?

I've already proven that to myself that I can!

My mother… was always a lot smarter than my father. She would have been more fitted to be the workhorse, and go out into the world, to cheat and steal, to make a living. But the thing about that woman was, she was a coward. And lazy too!

Something Nikki's father wasn't, at least on some level. As much of a frightened man he was, when it came to doing what was needed, he'd set himself out, and would, being all dishonest deeds as they might be.

And it's something I had to prove to myself as well, as much of a frightened woman as I am. Prove to myself, so I wouldn't turn into what my mother was, a lazy coward, looking for a man to do everything for her.

And, that was something Nikki had done for herself, going so far as to become this figure in the city. The lady. But now, the thing was….

I don't want to be alone anymore. I want someone to be there for me, and not how my mother was for my father. Someone that would see me for who I am, and love that, and want that.

But, considering how their relationship had been, Nikki's and Michael's, the conflict in Nikki right now was that she might be doing it for all the wrong reasons.

I am… my mother's daughter….

As much as Nikki didn't want to bring up the events of that night to Michael, she really didn't want to bring it up for herself, either. Since leaving for Nantucket, she had decided to never again set foot in that city, again. Although, she was there at 1999, when the morning came. Whatever lunacy there was in Michael to go back, had spilled into Nikki, to do the same, no matter the cost. However, when she arrived at the building, all she saw was a giant blockade set up by the police, as a special task force was sent in to clear the building, looking for Mr. Dorian and his bomb. She saw Michael being brought out in a stretcher, and then taken away by the ambulance to the hospital. Then when Nikki tried to find out which hospital Michael had been taken to, none of them had any record of him ever showing up at all. She had no word of his whereabouts for a month straight, and just last night, Michael had made a call letting her know his whereabouts.

Maybe I should delve into that night, he's just staring at that couple over there, and he hasn't even looked at me once.

The Wench in the Dark.

Nikki didn't know what Michael felt about her now. But, from his indifference, Nikki felt assured that he didn't feel comfortable with her being around him either.

Does he want me to… NO!

Thought Nikki, as she startled herself at the end. Words coming from deep within her from a more possessive side, unwilling to let go what she felt was rightfully hers.

"Michael, what happened to you after that night," asked Nikki finally.

Michael didn't look at her, and shrugged.

"Michael, please, I've been worried sick, when you left me last, I was sure something was going to happen to you. Even Letoya tried to get in contact with…."

“What Letoya,” gasped Michael.

“Yeah, a week ago she called me up asking about you… why?”

Nikki didn't like the look she was getting from Michael; he seemed overly ecstatic for the first time today to be hearing this news. And Nikki began to wonder if Michael now really had stronger feelings for Letoya than he did with Nikki.

“Oh, thank God that wasn't her! That's been eating me up inside,” exclaimed Michael.

“What do you mean,” asked Nikki.

But then realized why Michael might have seemed so excited, and for the fact that he probably thought that Letoya had been killed, when those IRA mercs stormed into the Nim Fo building.

Oh, thank God, that's a relief! That at least makes sense why he would get so happy.

Nikki then felt like going on with her story.

“Michael, I came back to the building, and I saw that you were being taken away by an ambulance, what happened to you after that,” demanded Nikki, as she took her hand, and placed it on his shoulder.

Michael blew out a sigh, and grew a smirk, with a hint of something inconceivable.

“A lot,” responded Michael, simply enough, as he parked his stare on the floor again.

Nikki then lowered her head again, and tried to match his stare.

“Well, let's see, after I was at the hospital for one night, the next morning I found that they had moved me… I don't know where! All I saw were concrete walls with no windows, military guards armed with M-16s. And FBI, CIA, you name it, everywhere! The cell I was kept in looked like a vault, and when I was locked in there, there were never any lights. So, I was left in complete darkness for twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six, hours at a time. Then brought out and asked a bunch of questions by those FBI, CIA, you name it, for another twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six, hours straight. They'd take shifts asking me, while I was in a room with a one-way mirror on one end.

Eventually, one night—or day? Whatever! I couldn't tell! A couple of them came into my cell wearing ski masks—”

“Michael,” squirmed out Nikki, seeing where the story was going. But Michael just lifted up his hand, and shook it softly, as to let her know, it wasn't as bad as she might be thinking.

“So, they sat me on a chair, tied me up to it, placed a bag over my head, and began pouring bucket after bucket of water over my face, and then went over the same questions again and again.”

Nikki had heard about ‘water torture,’ but she didn't know the details, and braced herself listening to all this.

“Felt like I was drowning, but I wasn't. They kept doing it and doing it for a couple of days, and eventually dropped it. Then they dropped the entire case, when they began to buy my story, that I was just some dumb punk, being in the wrong place, at the wrong time,” concluded Michael, plainly enough.

Nikki began to feel guilty over the fact that she was the one responsible of most of the bad things that happened that night, and how Michael had gotten dragged into it, and eventually became the fall-guy.

“It wasn't that bad, Nikki,” responded Michael, with some ease, “trust me! I've heard of way, way, way worse forms of torture than that! Glad they didn't start… sticking objects into places.”

Nikki now felt like she couldn’t take it anymore, and felt like getting up and running away from the guilt.

Don’t you fucking do that, don’t be a cowardly bitch!

Thought Nikki, as she felt like she had to practically force herself not to. But still, she knew she was the one to blame for everything, and she knew that Michael was probably hiding a lot of the resentment towards her because of it. Practically, that entire night, he had nothing but resentment for her for everything she was doing.

No! I'm not losing him or leaving him behind ever again! He's—MINE!

Screamed out the Wench in the dark, letting her know, it wasn't going to happen.

“Michael,” said Nikki rhetorically.

“Don't worry, Nikki, I told them nothing about you, your name never even came up, not even Radboy's.”

Nikki paused, as she remembered how she had whispered in Jamil's ear

to get Radboy's body, and dispose of it before anyone was to find it.

"Although, they did ask about The Oubliettes a lot," mentioned Michael, as his brow widened.

Michael paused then, as Nikki grew impatient; she really wanted to hear what he knew about them, since, they were still technically the last group connected to her.

"Oh, they asked me about them, wondered if I knew anything, and about their disappearance. I then said, 'how would I know about those guys, aren't they an urban legend?' They were so bothered how they just—vanished! Disappeared into thin air. And how they were having difficulty finding them," continued Michael, faintly staring off to one side in a weird way.

As if though he was hiding something.

"They can't find them," asked Nikki, rhetorically, again.

"Nope, they were pretty pissed about that. They gave me all their real names—one of them being the judge that sentenced me back in the late 70s—and then asked me what I knew about them. I said I had no clue," continued Michael, making the same stare, again.

Which Nikki finally picked up on.

"Do… you know something," asked Nikki.

"Yeah," replied Michael, after a pause, as he turned to Nikki and eyed her.

"What?"

"Well, let's just say…
the Twilight Zone gobbled them up…
the TV people got to them," concluded Michael.

As he had a small chuckle, but seemed more disturbed than humored by it.

Nikki smiled, and tried to hold it. It seemed like there wasn't anything keeping Michael, of eventually being released from prison. Michael wasn't going to be charged with the murder of Radboy, since Nikki had taken care of that matter. And all traces of the events of that night, of them being linked to Mr. Dorian, seemed to have been severed. However, the longer Nikki tried to hold onto that smile, the more it began to break away, as she stared into the blank expression of

Michael's face.

"Michael, everything seems like it's going to work out for the better, don't you feel happy about that," asked Nikki, hoping to come up with something to say to get him out of the funk he was in.

"Yeah, but, I've asked around, and I'm still not getting any message over any release date," responded Michael.

"Don't worry, it'll—"

"No, you don't understand, you don't know how prison works. They know my record, and right now I feel like they just want to wait for some reason to pop up, to keep me in here. Something that'll cement giving them a reason to lock me up, and throw away the key—forget about me," responded Michael, as his voice began to break up.

"Michael, I don't think that'll happen," responded Nikki reassuringly.

Michael then shrugged, pessimistically, and said:

"Maybe you're right, and when I come out, then I can go back to living in some crummy apartment, I can get my job back working for Fred Scharnick... and maybe... and maybe...?"

Nikki just didn't understand where all of Michael's dismay was coming from. He seemed completely pessimistic about everything, considering all they had been through and survived.

"Michael, are you okay?"

Michael blew his chest up a bit, as if though he wanted to show himself off to Nikki, that he was. He extended a plain smile, and tried to hold it with all his might, as he looked into Nikki's eyes, with half the old charms he used to have, which seemed pitiful to Nikki to now see.

"No—I'm great! I'm doing okay. It's not easy... but, I'm managing. I mean, I don't want to fall back into the same funk I was in the last time I was here, and I don't think I will—I mean—I won't! And I'm... don't worry about anything," responded Michael, as the smile he was trying to hold up began to break away.

Nikki then began thinking, if Michael really felt all right with himself, and with his chances of getting out, then maybe, the problem really was

her, and what she needed to do was let him—

Not happening!

Screamed out the Wench again, as Nikki sighed. And now, Nikki began to think about her time as the Lady…

It all just felt like one giant phase to try and master control over everything, everyone, and even herself.

A Clockwork Red.

I was really just some mousy girl that no one ever found interesting, at first. They'd all mostly ignore me because everyone is looking for someone special to excite them. I was too plain looking, too flat, too boyish, and people didn't like how sad I looked all the time. How I had no personality, nor humor, and I hated that. No one ever admires you for just being you. All the guys wanted some blonde bombshell of a woman with giant tits, and I'm just this nothing. They'd look at me like I was nothing…?

How dare they!

Deeply, Nikki felt there was this quality she possessed, that couldn't be described. A poison, that was tasteless, and odorless, yet very, very effective for what it could do.

It's not a poison! Don't call it that…

I mean…?

It is a poison, but not the kind that would kill you.

But what it did, only Nikki knew.

And so did he… so did Michael, I know, because I've sensed how he sensed it. Considering how much he then wanted to drink from it, and how he couldn't get enough.

I don't know… it's hard for me to explain… words just can't do it.

Actually, if any word could, it would be 'magic.'

Yes, that… 'magic.' That's the only word that describes it.

It was something Nikki felt within her, knew was something that she possessed, and what she wanted most of all, most of all… most of all! Was for everyone else to feel it too.

My signature. It's what I have, that's invisible almost, but it's there. Like a sense of one's oneself, and how it's tied to the fabrics of life and it's interwoven feelings. I feel things, that can't be described, because they don't want to be described. Forever changing, growing, yet staying the same; fully aware, and fully present. Everywhere, yet no one notices.

I don't need looks.
I don't need words.
I don't need nothing, really.
Nor humor.
Nor… but… what I have is much more.
It's peace.
I think it's… God's gift to me. Because no matter what insanity I've dealt with in my life, this invisible feeling completely fixes everything. Almost magically. It's my signature. My signature. My ability… to heal. Just by thinking.

So, as you can see… it's definitely—not—poison!

Although, inside Nikki, but all she ever wanted was for others to feel it, too. Even with this Godly gift, what pained Nikki the worst was, all people cared then were stuff on the outside, how pretty she could look.

This is something very deep inside of me, no one sees. No one.

And that now had Nikki completely focus on superficiality. Since it was all people cared. All they ever cared.

Well, I am that too. I am pretty, I am, on the outside. And back when only I knew and saw it, back… during my ugly duckling years, I also wanted everyone else to see it too. I didn't want to be some voluptuous Hollywood bombshell to turn heads. And I hated the idea how there were those that would have suggested one to go under the knife, to 'improve things.'

It took Nikki years, years and years, all those teenage years to really get a sense of it, and hone it in. But, around the ends of her teenage years, it was then….

I learned how to show some of that… magic… to everyone around me. And it was then—I was the one turning heads!

But, never was she able to show it completely.

At least the side that I felt mattered, my signature, and not just my sense of myself of my egotistical side.

Nikki then looked at Michael. And then wondered:

Do you… know what I'm thinking… do you?

For a second there, it seemed like he did. But…?

Anyways…!

The question then was… did Nikki do it for all the right reasons? Eventually learning how to show some of that special side of hers to others. To get them to notice her.

Did I?

No!

Something Nikki was all too aware of, and pained by.

No, I didn't do it for the right reasons. I did it because I wanted all those men, that would have not had any interest in me before, to do so now, and cast down, all the ditsy tramps they would have chosen before me. Before, seeing what I truly was! And what I was truly made for!

I did it for petty reasons.

And…

I couldn't deny… how much I loved seeing the effect I then had on them. On everyone! When I learned to show that side of myself.

And why?

Because they owed me that! They owed me… for initially thinking less of me. They owed me that, at least!

Nikki then rolled her eyes, realizing how much bullshit she was feeding herself.

Plain looking… too flat… boyish… why am I kidding myself? I'm not ugly! And I never was, not even really during my ugly duckling years.

There truly is nothing more wretched than a beautiful woman still

holding onto the bitterness she felt when she thought no one thought she was beautiful.

But, I could never… and still can't—accept it. That I am beautiful now, and… it really isn't all that important. But I feel pretty much cursed to continue feeling this way—for whatever reason—until… I don't know how long. I don't know! I think I've spent too much time thinking about superficial crap like this. Obsessing over external beauty. Way too much! And I feel stuck with it. I hate it now, having to spend as much time as I do staring at myself in the mirror, every day, making sure everything looks perfect. Perfectly beautiful! And… so beautiful, that I start to feel like the ugliest, wretched thing alive. I've squandered so much of me into petty things like these, so much of my… magic… and… for what?

As that Lady, Nikki had come to a position where she felt like what she needed was absolute control. Absolute control, so nothing was squandered, everything was saved, and nothing would fall into chaos.

I am my father's daughter….

If my father had any magic for himself, that made him so special, it was his ability in trying to control his own fears, in dealing with the world, and everybody.

And the dark side of my father's magic… were in his lies.

In Uptown, everyone was a tool, an apparatus, and a gear in the giant clockwork of things. They all needed to have their function, and their purpose to exist, and Nikki felt like her function and purpose was to become the clock's centerpiece, the piece to drive them all.

I feel like I'm completely and utterly lost if I don't have control over everything. Everything and everyone scares me!

I mean, I'm serious, I'm unable to see them as humans like I see myself. I feel sometimes like I'm the only one left, left in a world, surrounded by… aliens… with lizard faces, underneath their masks.

Kinda like that miniseries I saw on TV about aliens visiting earth, Lizard People with split tongues, eating live hamsters, and pretending to be human beings, with a sense of compassion and pity for one another. But really, are definitely not, and are out to reap the world blind of all its natural resources.

They’re all aliens, or something. Their skin isn't warm and smooth underneath, it's cold and covered with scales. They're all evil, and vain, and despicable. And I can't help but to feel like their eyes are always on me… watching, judging, hating, and conspiring—all the time! I need control! I need it, so I don't have to feel that way all the damn time.

She wanted to hold sway of all the other gears, to hold the tempo, the rhythm, and the flow. That was just her nature. Nikki became the Lady of the Night, by way of her sex appeal, and her manipulative ways, being her bread and butter; the best weapons she had against all the power-hungry Armani Lizards, with their inch and a half lizard members….

Even that part of them is cold, and covered with scales.

All massing up, to try and stick it to her, every chance they got.

I've never met so many dickless, spineless, unapologetic sore losers in my entire life.

Of course, Nikki, referring to the yuppies she had to deal with, The Gordon Geckos.

Especially that one rich slimy asshole, that likes to put his name on every building he’s got. I hate him!

Unlike the blue collar assholes me and Michael had to put up with, back in the day,

these Lizard people…?

Oh! I gotta stop thinking like that! Lizard People… that's how crazy people think!

Nikki paused, forcing the idea of 'them’ out of her head, and continued:

They're all spoiled and feel entitled to everything. The assholes at Stumpy's place, that I dealt with, with Michael, back when I was… well…

Slumming it! There is no better word for it.

Fine, slumming it! Back when I was doing that, dealing with them. As much of a bunch of macho chauvinistic assholes, Michael's type were, they had at least been through the sort of hardships, that could make a person understand why they were, the way they were. And really, for that, they deserved better. However, as for the crowd of people I dealt with, I grew up around, and had to spend my entire life dealing with, what hardship did my Uptowners sort go through to expect the world to be served to them on a silver platter? For them, everything was about winning—at all cost! Everything about a man has to deal with his penis. And! These men? Since theirs was so little! Everything for them was having someone, or something, stroke theirs, their inch and a half egos, to make them feel better.

But then, Nikki thought of Michael in this context, and then thought:

It's different with him. I mean, I know how he is, and how he likes to think with his little brain down there, too, and more than… actually… most men I've…?

But… he's different!

None of them… wanted to make love to me. They just wanted to fuck me. And, that's the difference.

And after a moment of reflecting over that, Nikki accepted it. For a second there, she was once again questioning Michael. And…?

I don't want to do that right now.

But as for the Uptowners:

They have no humility, no common courtesy, no nothing! And how many times did I have to tell them:

No!

No!

No!

Especially for the sick things they'd ask for, when they'd become so bored, while feeling so entitled about themselves, that they'd turn evil, and start reaching for perversions. Something Michael

never, ever, did.

- No! I'm not going to defecate on your chest or give you a golden shower.
- No! I'm not going to seduce your cheating wife, drug her to the point of being comatose, and have one of the panthers rape her in front of you and your cheering buddies at 1999.
- And no! I'm not going to take your eight-year-old son and daughter and—Oh! I don't even want to think about what that sick piece-of-shit requested next!

Nikki now needed a moment to forget.

All those sexual advances by heartless, passionless, embittered men, and they'd take it as a personal insult, just because I wasn't interested in blowing every last one of their egos up. Since that was their entire goal in life, someone to give fellatio to their egos, twenty-four/seven, since they couldn't stand how little they were.

And, really, the sad part Nikki felt was:

I couldn't even feel sorry for them, in the end, when I realized they were so sick, that there had to be some sort of mental illness involved. Honestly, I can understand them. Well… not the slimy perverts, and freaks. But the ones that came looking for pity. I understand that these types of men have completely built up their entire sense of self-worth—entirely—on their abilities in being successful. Successful with money, and with women. And they need that sense of achievement to gain a sense of self-worth for themselves. That they matter. Over time, I came to understand the psychology behind it.

And since Nikki did understand them, since:

I mean, I was part of their world, too. And I have, just like them, ended up basing my entire sense of self-worth on my own abilities in being successful.

So, I'm just as broken.

And since Nikki did understand, seeing them the way they were, it all just ended up making her pity them more. No matter how ugly things

got.

I felt sorry for them, which… ended up leading me to… oh, I feel sick. Sick with something venereal, considering… ugh!

When you're a degenerate whore.

No, don't say it like that! Don't! Just…?

You can excuse yourself time and time again, of the things you do. But….

But, what… but what?

Excuses won't get rid of the feeling you're left with, after defiling yourself. Like a taste in your mouth… you just want to spit out. But you can't anymore, since that taste is no longer just coming from someone else. But you! It's all you!

Fine… fine… it's that! It is just that. Something women today need to get through their heads.

What self-worth can a woman derive, when all she does is treat her face like a urinal?

Nicki started to feel nauseated. And didn't want to delve anymore into that nastiness of it all.

What was I thinking?

But, in the end.

Things got ugly. Very, very ugly. And I couldn't pity them anymore, because of how spiteful, ungrateful, conniving and vengeful they eventually all became.

And then later on….

Giving me death threats, when I couldn't do it anymore, and I cut them all loose. Oh, I can't believe all that I allowed myself to play part in. I feel sick… and dirty now.

Becoming the Lady was everything everyone wanted for her to be, and despised her for when she became it.

When you're cold-blooded and heartless, you can never be the type of person to genuinely captivate people, and draw them to your

ways. When it comes to business, that's an asset that can take you to the top. Earlier in my career, people saw how I was able to grab everyone's attention, and for that they decided to use me for their own gains. All of a sudden, I was being called in to do business deals and such for them. I could be their representative, and I was very good at it. They didn't just think I was some nice tail they could be chasing, they saw how intelligent I was, and when you're those two and also charming, which very few people are considering how hard it is to develop charm, you can make people say and do anything.

Having a nice pair of tits will just make a man horny, seeing that you're intelligent will force them to think and reconsider who they're dealing with... which can also be a bad thing, if they're threatened by you for being too intelligent. But when you also have the charm, only then can you win them over completely. But then again....

In the end, when she reached centerpiece, only then did she discover just how much of a slave she had become to the clock itself, as she felt all the other gears trying to mesh and conflict with her own sway, tempo, rhythm, and flow. At the end, she had thousands and thousands of gears aligned with her, all trying to control the centerpiece at the same time.

But then again, you can never really win over cold-blooded types completely, you can only do it with the ones that have a heart and....

Nikki then looked at Michael again, and began to feel depressed.

In the end, they're jealous of what you have, because they want that power too. They want that triple package, because it's all about them and their conquests. In the end, I was just a tool for them, a tool they all wanted to control.

When once her sex appeal and manipulative ways got her places, taking her to the top; later on, they began dragging her along, and forcing her down to the bottom.

I failed, I failed so miserably. And in the end... I still ended up needing a man to come along, and save the day. From the mess I... Shit!

And now, Nikki felt pissed. Stirred. Enraged. As she looked at her white knight in shining armor. And… felt like her mother's daughter.

I always have everything perfectly planned out. Everything!
But then, all it took was this idiot to come by, someone that wasn't even able to plan ahead, even if it cost him his life, and yet.
He did what a man does and fixed everything. All the mess I…!
And now, Nikki felt like almost lashing at him.
Fuck you, Michael… seriously…?
But then realized.

Ah shit… fuck me! No… don't fuck m—… I mean… shit!

Much of the rage she now felt, wasn't being churned by bitterness.
Ah shit, I'm horny now.
But by passion and lust.
Oh… no, no, no, no! Don't get that way, now, not now! Don't go into heat, like some stupid mutt, over…?
And then looking at Michael again.
Oh!
She practically did… in her mind.
Okay… enough… enough thinking about it.

And after a while… she did.

Then, there was Radboy. Anthony.
You know, I feel nothing for him, and the fact that Michael killed him. Still. Nothing at all.
But, there was a reason for that.
I've really spent a longer time getting to know Anthony, than I have getting to know Michael, funny enough. Yet, I feel nothing for him, and the fact that he's dead. I thought for a second… when Michael pushed him out of a window… that it had to do with the fact that I'm just that much of a horrible person, not to care. But…?
That wasn't the reason.
I remember this one time, in the limo, Anthony was drunk. Feeling

very petty, and self-pity, and because… that was just who he was. I tried to talk to him, as I had before many, many times, get him to stop pitying himself so much. Not a small feat, considering he had just about turned wallowing in self-pity into a favorite pastime of his… an Olympic fucking sport!

But! I tried to talk to him, ease him. I tried to help him. But, he rejected me.

And then, the mood in Anthony changed. As he tried to get close to her, and show her how she could possibly make him feel better.

I hate him. I had been refusing him for years and years! Since, I chose to absolutely—refuse!

To allow him to get to me, just to get to Michael.

I absolutely refused to play that middleman… –er wo—… whatever! Yet… here he was again… and when I refused to blow him again, what did I get for it, and for my troubles to try and comfort him?

Anthony had then gone completely berserk on Nikki.

He then completely surprised me and attacked me. He broke my nose, broke my arm, broke two ribs. Cracked one of my front teeth. Then bashed me over the head with a champagne bottle, and broke the bottle, cutting me over my left eye. And… might have tried to kill me, that is, if the limo driver hadn't stopped, and tried to get to the back seat to stop him.

Nikki had then stepped out of the limo and decided to walk to a hospital. She was so out of it, she needed to get away from all that, and had decided to walk there.

Of course, I was wearing a white power dress, completely white all over, except now covered in red blood, in broad daylight, on a Wednesday afternoon, on 34th and Madison. So, everyone saw me, half conscious, stumbling my way with a broken heel to the hospital. And I had an ambulance arrive to pick me up, before I even got halfway there.

Now, it wasn't like this was the first time Nikki had been straight up attacked by men, in her line of profession.

Yeah, I think after the fifth time, I got used to it.

But, seeing now Anthony being one of her assailants, really started to bother her.

Even though our relationship, me and Anthony's was always… weird. And complicated. This was something I wasn't expecting. I had known Anthony for years and years, and here I was again, getting attacked by another man, who just couldn't stand how little and pathetic he really was.

Of course, a few days later, Anthony had then begged her to take him back. Begged her, since, Anthony knew he needed her. He was just some punk kid, with a GED, before Nikki had helped him to the big leagues. Without her, he would go back to being nothing again.

Yeah, I took him back. I still felt like I could trust him more, more than all the other Liz—… er… I really need to stop thinking about that…?

Considering the type of men Nikki was dealing with, making negotiations with, Anthony was still the closest thing to a trustworthy man Nikki had in Uptown.

Just goes to show, just what type of men I've had to deal with…!

Why is it like this, though, why has it been this way? Since my father, and besides Michael, why is this been the only type of men I've been coming across, as this Lady. Death threats? Vicious attacks? What type of world have I gotten myself into?

But the thing was… Nikki chose this!

Nikki had chosen this, knowing, because she saw the challenge in it, and there was just something very, very, very dark inside her, that had her finding all this exciting.

I guess I just enjoyed the power rush I got from being able to control so many men at once. That I accepted what would happen then, at any cost.

And, I failed so miserably, because I did it all for the wrong reasons. I'm a responsible person, I can take care of myself, but, I

needed more and more to get a sense of that. Just so I could stick it to all the men around me that I could do what they could do, and ten times better. And doing that, I vilified most of them in the process.

Oh!

Did I fail miserably in the end, wanting to play their games, and beat them in their own games. Even when their games were just so heartless, and evil, and corrupt.

But the fucked-up part was… Nikki liked it that way.

She had learned to like it, and liked seeing how dark and dangerous things got. Even if it meant she was going to get attacked now and then. That, and possibly murdered or raped.

What do you mean… possibly raped?

I've been raped!

Those cases weren't consented, even though I later lied to myself that they were. I didn't consent to them, they fucking raped me, and left me bruised and bleeding. There's no refuting it! I'd count it… ten times, I have.

Actually, the figures were somewhere around twenty-three times.

What? Twenty-three times? I've been raped that many…?

I'm crazy, and not just that, but sick… and that's all there is to that.

The Spell.

You know, sometimes… I get the sense that Michael has been really the biggest, and most manipulative snake of them all. So much so, he even manipulates himself into thinking a certain way.

Nikki then reflected over that for a second. And then thought:

Nah!

On impulse, Nikki didn't want to let Michael go, because, she felt like Michael was the only piece she ever had full control over.

I've never had more control over another person, like I had with

him. And ever since that night, seeing as how he did all that for me. Even after all the years we've been apart, he was still willing to jump through all those hoops and hurdles… for me?

And back then, all he ever wanted was for me to hold him some nights, when he felt afraid and alone.

That made Nikki frown, feeling the pity of it.

That…

Or, blow him for hours on end.

Nikki faintly chuckled.

I've never had to persuade him to do anything for me ever really—he'd just do it! Most of the time, it'd be like second nature for him, like how he just attacked Le Bron that night, without even thinking.

Of course….

That wasn't exactly the wisest thing to do at that moment, I would have rather had Le Bron smack me around a couple times, than to have him try and throw us out of a window. Michael can be so stupid sometimes. Too stupid!

And then, Nikki began to feel a bit different about her Michael, here, as his indifference towards her began to wear her in.

Why did you attack those cops that night—huh? After you almost killed those two Numbskulls, you just had to turn on a bunch of blues, and try to kill them too.

This, was something that had made a monumental difference in their relationship at the time, and had made Nikki want to break away from him.

And then, you went to prison for all those years, because of what you did. Leaving me behind with that jackass, Radboy, who kept trying to get to me, as a means of getting to you, finally.

Nikki was sorta giving Michael hateful stares, to see if he'd notice, as she continued in this train of thought.

And I heard about all the other stuff you also did that night. Heading to Big Dick's Gym, and hospitalizing six guys, and making enemies with all of them. Plus, you attacked Greasylocks—again—and now he's fed up with you, and has been looking to put a hit on

your head—which I had to take off! By paying him off. That, and I had to pay off the Beefcakes, and Stumpy, and the Nim Fo Matics, because they all don't want to see you coming back out, and having things go back to the way they used to be, back in the day. How they were in the 70s. You! With your beef with everyone, always out to prove something…. by going around….

And I really don't know if I want to back—either!

Nikki began shaking her head a little, discreetly. Which Michael still seemed to be indifferent about.

Maybe… this is it!

Nikki began shaking a little more, not so discreetly, to see if Michael would at least start wondering why she was. But still there was no reaction. This was starting to make Nikki feel depressed.

Michael… You are so stupid! I've forgotten how you were back then.

And now thinking about it….

Oh… most of the time back then, I felt like I was babysitting a T-rex on a cattle ranch, trying to keep you out of trouble. Every time you saw beef, you just had to charge forward, and sink your teeth into it. Then when you made a mess out of everything, you'd start singing Queen songs, completely oblivious to the shitstorms you'd cause. Then when I'd intervene to try and fix things, you'd turn on me, and try to sink your teeth into me, as well.

Nikki couldn't help but to start sprouting a smile, thinking now.

Either try to fuck me!

Or….

Complain how I was being too bossy.

You can be so, so stupid, Michael! And I can't believe it… how I now can't wait to have that lifestyle back.

"Idiot," whispered Nikki, now, as she looked away.

Then looked forward, to see if Michael had caught onto that.

You could be such a….

But then Nikki had a small chuckle over that whole T-rex bit, and thought:

That was sorta funny what I thought there actually. Had me

imagining it all and… and it's not something I would be thinking. More like something you would. That's really your sense of humor that I guess eventually rubbed off on me during the years that I knew you.

Nikki smiled.

If I do get you back. I'm not going to be having the peaceful life I'd like to settle on. My fantasy. A peaceful life somewhere far from here, away from everyone and everything. My fantasy, where I can just have an estate on an island in the Pacific near the shore, fenced off from the rest of the world, peacefully living alone with nothing but my materialistic fancies to keep me busy. My statue collection, my paintings, my designer line of clothing, my books, and all the other items in between. Call a person vain for settling on materialism to satisfy their ambitions all you want, they're still capable of creating an imaginary world around you where you won't need to step outside your doors to find something to live for. Statues can speak to you, if you'd listen close enough, filling up the social void left behind. Paintings can dazzle your imagination of places and people you've never seen. Designer clothing? Well, they can make you into a new person when you grow weary of your old self. And as for books, they can tell you stories, bound only by the authors and your own imagination. Of course, with Michael here—a wild animal thrown into the mix—he'd probably wreck everything, and then try to bend me over and fuck me as his way of apologizing for all he's done. Heh! Do I really want that back in my life?

Looking at Michael, Nikki felt a resounding 'yes!'

An imaginary world? It would still be something fake I'd try to substitute for something real, just because it would be easier to control.

I don't want to be alone anymore!
I don't!

I want to now at least share my fantasy with someone else. Someone… that's been the closest to me, ever.

And now, looking at Michael, and checking him out, Nikki started to get

horny.

Oh, were we good together! How good it felt! He'd spend hours and hours trying everything on me to find the right pattern to get me off, and the next day he'd start over from scratch, and take it to newer heights. He would start licking and kissing and fondling every inch of me, then would speak about how he wished he could open me up and lick, kiss and fondle my insides.

Lick my brain,
kiss my heart,
suck on my bones,
and fondle my ovaries.

And as weird and twisted as that all sounded at first, he had me yearning for it so bad that I wished he could, just to see how it would feel to have him touch me all those places too.

He had me screaming so loud one time that I shattered the wine bottle we'd been drinking out of before.

And years after he went to prison, I'd be taking a bath daydreaming while...

fuck I want that back!

Fuck my imaginary world! Eventually I was going to get bored by it all anyways. Bored by all the fakeness, and what was I going to be left with then? Let him wreck it all, at least he'll never stop being real to me. I'd trade it all in just to have him do me in like he used to in a heartbeat.

"Nikki... you all right? You're breathing heavily—what's wrong," asked Michael with the warmth of florescent light, leaving Nikki feeling sterile and depressed.

No Michael! Why are you so distant right now? You used to want to kiss my heart, now you can't even look me in the....

Nikki began to think—maybe I should let go? Because the truth now was, just how much was she willing to cling onto Michael, if he no longer

had the desire to cling back. Nikki sighed.

Maybe I should—no! It’s not just the sex I miss with him. He's the only person that's never scared me or frightened me. He is such a child, I always felt like he could be genuine with me and never two-faced. As cocky, inconsiderate, and downright mean as children can be, at least they're always one hundred percent genuine with you.

“Michael, I will get you out of here, don't worry,” cried out Nikki, hoping those words could sway him back into her mitts.

But Michael didn't reply.

“I mean it, Michael, I can make that happen! I have those types of connections. Plus, money isn't an issue for me anymore! When I told a friend of the family, my dad’s old lawyer of my situation, he told me my father had saved away enough for just such an occasion. Enough to survive.”

But once Nikki blurted out the word ‘money’ she then noticed just how wrong a move that was, as Michael’s face began to sour up.

Say something else!

“Michael, remember what I told you about Tahiti, I can get us there now. Just you and me! Can you imagine that,” cried out Nikki, remembering how hopeful Michael had gotten over that idea, even if it was for a second.

But Michael just rolled his eyes, and said nothing.

Nikki grew irritated, as she felt like she was losing all control over him, and began to feel desperation growing in her.

Whatever you say, just don't bring up about ‘swallowing’ again. Oh! I really have no idea how to be intimate.

And then the desperation really began:

“Michael, please! I want us to be together again! Please don't push me away!”

“Why,” murmured out Michael with an air of indifference.

“Michael, I need you now!”

Oh come on! You don't sound like you mean it! Why do I always feel so closed up in important moments like these, when it's for real, and has nothing to do with business?

“Why,” murmured out Michael, again, this time with an air of sorrow.

“Because I care about you,” cried out Nikki, as others began to notice.

That still doesn't sound right!

Michael now had a full-blown expression of sorrow on his face, as he looked down, opened his mouth, and asked:

“Why?”

Again, but this time murmured it out so faintly, it almost didn't even register. Nikki fell back in her chair, and looked into Michael's eyes, that were now spewing out the color gray, spewing out the color and feel, and now into her eyes, trying to infect her with it. This was all becoming way too disheartening for her, making her want to cry, with dried up tears. Nikki was now feeling full on pity towards him, like she would at times looking at her father.

Oh, no!

And Michael was the last person she wanted to feel that way about.

No, no, no… please! If we are to get back together, I don’t want us to turn into him and her! Them two! Please no! Please let that never happen!

Nikki didn't want Michael to be this awkward mess, because, she felt like he was better than this. Nikki wanted the old vibrant stallion back, not this broken mule, and she then realized she needed to reawaken his senses to get him back. And she had to do it the only way she knew how.

I have to use it on him, I can’t be genuine right now… I have to!

“Michael, do you know when I first fell for you?”

Once Michael heard her ask that, it broke the curse of grayness that was cast over his face, and finally, he seemed the most alert he had been all day.

“This was at the Tropic, and it was after… that thing me, you, and Roxy had had. I remember I was at the bar waiting for you. But then, I was approached by several Ravishers—most worth mentioning—Greasy! There were about eight of them there, including Greasy, and they were just eyeing me like a piece of meat. They all started hitting on me, buying me drinks, trying to fill me up, and then, Greasy moved his head in and asked,

'ever had a train ran on you?'"

Nikki watched Michael's face as she told her story, and once she mentioned Greasy, and the line he had fed her, Michael's face began to fire up a bit in disapproval.

"I shook my head feeling disgusted, as Greasy smiled and said, 'don't be so proud, you know you want it really!' When I tried to leave, he got pissed, and dragged me to the side, and started calling me a whore, a rich daddy's girl piece-of-shit, and a heartless bitch."

Nikki watched Michael's face, as the story began to stir him up with anger.

"Michael, before us, me and him, we used to be a thing," disclosed Nikki.

"You and him," gasped Michael, unwilling to believe it.

"Michael, that was a long time ago, and I didn't know how much of a perverted asshole that jerk really was," explained Nikki.

"Okay, I can understand that," said Michael.

"Michael, when he started berating me like that, at that second, I felt everything he said," explained Nikki, feeling the words again, as if though it was yesterday.

Nikki's mouth opened to continue, but then Greasy's words struck a chord in her deeply.

Maybe I am just that, and nothing more....

No! If I am... people made me this way, I didn't start off.

Thought Nikki. But then looked into Michael's eyes, and smiled, remembering what happened next.

"I was really feeling low of myself, but then you stepped in," continued Nikki, as the events began to affect her now as they did back then.

"I mean, at first, we just both heard a growl in the corner, and then we saw you there. And a second later, you just launched at Greasy, rammed your fist in his face, grabbed him, and threw him across the bar," recounted Nikki in excitement.

"And then, when Greasy's buddies tried to rush you, you just began beating the crap out of all of them.

I mean—wow!

I had heard you were one tough son-of-a-bitch from Mary. But you were like a Superman, taking out eight guys, single-handedly."

Nikki then blushed.

"And, I hope this doesn't sound too cheesy, but at that moment, I felt like Lois Lane," continued Nikki, as she made a funny face.

At this point, Nikki looked into Michael's face again, as she began to see her old Mikey coming back to her. His face seemed just as exhilarated from the story she was telling him, as hers was. Nikki felt that, and felt now how much Michael was feeling he mattered to her. Then. And now. How much he had excited her. And how much it meant that he was willing to do all that, for someone so undeserving as her.

"I mean, you were doing that all for me," cheered out Nikki, "I've never had a man—or simply anyone—do something like that for me. Every person in my life, always thought less of me in the end."

Then Nikki began to remember how much it also awakened her to Michael in a different way; in ways she never felt for any other man.

"Then I saw you drag Greasylocks from behind the bar, sit on his chest, and begin pummeling his face in, into the ground," excited Nikki.

"And…," played Nikki, then said nothing, as she made Michael wait for it.

"And… what," asked Michael.

"Something else happened then, too. I wasn't just excited how you were willing to do that all for me…

you were so fucking hot, too!

Were you, while pounding his face in, while covered in sweat, while panting from the rush, as all your muscles began bulging out and… woof! I practically fell head-over-heels in love with you… well at least for a teenager, which I was at the time."

Nikki feeling the sexual charge of that memory, while feeding it to Michael, then looked at him, into his eyes, and felt pleased to see how it had done the same. He was biting his lower lip, so hard, he looked like he was going to chew it off. The exhilaration Michael was feeling,

realizing how much he had excited Nikki with his deeds, seemed to really be taking his understanding of his role in her life to a new level.

You really didn't understand it until now—did you, Michael? Not only did you not make me feel frightened like I am all the time, you made me feel the opposite. I felt like I was just as strong as you, in moments like those, in ways I've never been.

"Michael…?"

As Nikki paused again, Michael turned around to see what anticipation she was building up next.

"Michael… you blew my stupid fucking teenage mind away that day," stated Nikki, and waited for the realization to sink in for the both of them.

And as it hit, Nikki now felt like she had done it.

Oh wow, I did it. Oh wow, I really did it… did I?

Thought Nikki, as she found herself panting a little, along with Michael. And feeling strangely, predatorily, and cat like.

Oh wow… that was almost like… I need to get him back! I need to… I simply need to!

And seeing Michael, she then saw how he was having his own moment, his own special small moments to himself, in his own special way, which Nikki was all too familiar with: whisking his head back and forth like an excited child. And seeing and remembering this, Nikki smiled.

I did it, I really…?

But then, something else stirred.

Wait… what?

Something on the opposite spectrum.

Wait… what? No!

Which Nikki wasn't so sure of, what it was.

What's going on, I did it! I…?

But then she realized.

Oh no!

And she now asked herself the question:

Am I really doing this for him, or am I doing this for myself?

The Backdraft.

You need to let be, what needs to be.

What?

You need to let be, what needs to be.

No… wait.

You need to let be, what needs to—

Fuck you! No! HE'S MINE!

The wench was out again.

The thought now started twisting in Nikki's heart, as she began to question herself, of whether or not she was just manipulating him to get her old way.

I am my mother's daughter… I am that bitch.

For Nikki, being as this way was second nature for her, she now thought how she had always had this way with him. And now, coming to terms, and also truly coming to terms of where she might have gotten it.

That bitch.

This all had Nikki revolting this way about her.

Oh, I did it again! I just manipulated him like some dumb lug, again, like I always did back then.

And for some reason, this all began to remind Nikki of her relationship with Michael's sister, Mary. And really! How this all started.

Back when Nikki and his family had moved from France, there was that first lonely year where Nikki had no friends, and didn't know anybody, starting high school. And then, came Mary….

I wonder if, oh… no he doesn't, he doesn't know all that happened between me and her sister. And… good thing too.

Besides Michael, funny enough, Mary had really been the second closest person to her in all her life.

What is it about these Connellys, and the relationships I've had with them over the years?

Nikki liked Mary, since Mary was her only real friend in those days, her only friend, given how her and Mary's nature seemed to mesh well together.

We were both just very, very observant people, quiet and

observant, and complex! Very complex! And difficult to be around.

Hence why it was only the two of us.

Although, Nikki was the looker more, as she grew to be after her ugly duckling phase faded.

Actually, Mary should have been the looker, since she never went through any phase like that.

But personality spoke volumes, and definitely in Nikki, and not Mary. And considering how the girl never smiled, hardly ever once that Nikki knew her.

Her, always frowning the way she did, just made her the less attractive one.

Nikki had then come to know Mary for years, but, never did she get to meet Michael all that time. And what was funny was, it felt like it was all surmounting to when she would. By the time she did, Nikki remembered how her friendship with Mary had begun falling apart. It had always been hard for Nikki to get close to anyone because of her issues with trust, so her and Mary's friendship mattered a lot to her. But, then, Mary began to grow fed up with her and her ways, as she began to realize the type of person Nikki was changing into.

And then….

Something happened.

That thing that always happens between women, always!

Mary, then, all of a sudden, had blown up on Nikki, and over something Nikki wasn't even aware that she had done, until it was too late.

Mary, I guess, had someone she was secretly infatuated with.

And… yes! Exactly!

Nikki had done something, to have her become cross with her.

I screwed him.

Nikki didn't even know what she had done, until it was too late. But after that night, her relationship with Mary then changed.

That dry cow would never tell me anything.

And what really pissed Nikki off was how Mary then supposedly forgave her after some time…. supposedly.

But I could tell, not really.

After that mess, her relationship with Mary made a drastic change for

the worse. And now, nothing felt the same anymore. Mary continued to stick around as if nothing had happened, still acting like she was Nikki's friend. Still, but, she would now have a different look in her eyes every time they'd see each other.

> You can always tell what a person really thinks of you, the second they notice you're there, the second the two of you meet.

After giving Nikki this split-second ugly look, Mary would then go on with another expression, after repressing her initial one, that true one, the one she purely felt about her, the second she'd see her. But… Nikki would notice. And then… after some time… she'd then feel Mary's stare on the back of her neck, which felt like knives slowly trying to sink their way into her skin, when she'd have her back turned to Mary. And eventually, it all got to Nikki, and what really pained her about it was the fact that Mary was Nikki's only true friend at the time doing this. Unflinchingly and unnervingly and unrelentingly eyeing her from the back, as an enemy.

> Everyone eventually turns on me… everyone! Beginning to grow scales on me and….

And when she realized that at the time, she felt like doing something about it, out of spite.

Of course, going after that boy Mary was infatuated with, again, would have just been despicable.

> As if what I did instead… wasn't!

That! Even Nikki felt, like would be going too far. But she wanted to spite Mary, somehow, for secretly turning on her, and never saying a word.

> Fucking bitch! Why did you continue sticking around me pretending to be my friend? Was it because you were just that jealous of me? Did you do it out of envy? And secretly want to find a way to get me back?

Nikki then shook her head, shaking off those harsh thoughts. As to get out of that old thought pattern. Those were just her feelings at the time, and she had come to terms, long ago, how petty and despicable she was to be feeling that way.

She eventually decided to fuck Michael, to spite Mary; it was the only

thing she could then come up with at the time, and she knew how much Mary hated Michael, because of her issues of him and her father.

Sometimes, she just wouldn't shut up, stop complaining, in her indifferent way—as if it really didn't bother her—how much that old war hero dad of theirs would give Michael so much attention, but completely ignored her. Now, that's just so crazy! Their old man would beat the crap out of Michael, and she'd feel envious of him?

But anyways, if I hadn't done what I did, me and Michael might have never gotten together.

Nikki faced Michael, and felt like talking about that night again. She felt like she had to, even though she knew, it was probably going to completely break the spell she had on him now. Looking at Michael, looking like some ignorant child; happy and excited about how he felt, after what Nikki told him, began to make Nikki pity him again.

"Michael," cringed out Nikki.

"What?"

But then looking back into Michael's face, and seeing how gleefully he was smiling, bashed Nikki's resolve, and made her cower from the thought.

"Nothing…."

Nikki sighed.

"Nothing, Michael, I'm happy that you're happy," said Nikki.

Maybe not the best line.

That was ominously bad.

Thought Nikki, as she saw a shadow grow over him. One that wasn't there.

Nikki but then noticed that childlike look of glee that was on Michael's face, beginning to deplete away, anyways. And seeing this, Nikki freaked.

Is he sensing I'm keeping something from him?

"Michael, you seemed to be feeling better a minute ago… you okay now," asked Nikki, hoping for a response.

Michael didn't respond.

What do I say now—what do I say now? Bring up another story of how he impressed me?

"Michael, do you remember that one night a gang of Numbskulls were trying to hit on me when we were at a bar in the Bronx, the idiots were sitting to my back, and their ringleader, that Skiddy guy… something… kept bashing his head into the table, coming up with blood, as if trying to impress me… and then you…."

But now, Nikki saw that all bridges she had built up to Michael, were slowly beginning to burn away.

"He just kept bashing his head into the table, sitting to my back, as I tried to ignore him… and then you…."

"Michael, you remember what story I'm talking about… right?"

But Michael said nothing.

"Michael!"

Michael now had an extremely bitter look on his face, and Nikki decided, maybe, she had to say it—she had to bring it up. Maybe, the truth behind it would be enough to establish something again that had been lost.

"Michael, do you remember that night at the Tropic, when we first met," cringed out Nikki again.

As Nikki looked at Michael's face, she noticed him grow somber hearing it.

Oh! I don't want to do this!

Thought Nikki.

"You know how I told you I wasn't a nice girl, how I was never sweet—well it's all true!"

Michael's face began to frown up.

"At the time, I manipulated you two to spite Mary," disclosed Nikki, as she saw Michael's face grow dumbfounded.

"What?"

"Mary had done something to piss me off, and I thought if I screwed you, I could get back at her," disclosed Nikki.

Michael now seemed confused, like he didn't know where to begin, and where to end with the story he was hearing. Nikki then understood that there was no going back, and she had to continue. As cringeworthy as all this was, these were the steps into the void she had to take, she felt

like in her heart.

"Yeah, Michael… that night? Those were my real reasons.

And after that night, Mary just wanted nothing to do with me—I guess mission accomplished," said Nikki, feeling like a royal piece-of-shit.

Michael then seemed to drift back into his setting. His face went expressionless again. The grayness of Attica began to set in again, as he went back to eyeing another couple arguing to his right. He seemed lost for words, not even seeming disgusted by Nikki, nor seeming to acknowledge she was there again.

"Michael, how do you feel about what I just said," asked Nikki, lowering her head again to face Michael.

Michael just shrugged.

"Michael, I'm so sorry!"

"Why did you bring up that story," asked Michael now, with a stir of discontent.

And Nikki now really wondered 'why?' Herself.

What am I doing, he doesn't want to hear this.

"I just had to, Michael, to say… 'I'm sorry.'"

Michael then brightened up a bit.

"Oh, don't worry about it" said Michael, but not seeming all too convincing, as he shook his head slightly.

"Michael, I'm so sorry I broke you two apart!"

"Broke us two apart, me and Mary?"

Nikki almost rolled her eyes, before catching them, remembering Michael's sometimes terrible cluelessness at times like these.

"No, Michael, I mean you and…."

Nikki's heart was now jackhammering. Even without the jack-sauce.

"Rox—… Roxanna…!"

That was hard for her to bring up!

Michael thought for a moment.

"What do you mean—broke us two apart? She left for Rochester because of her father, because the man had come down with cancer, and we just never got back together," responded Michael

with a passive look.

Nikki then realized Michael hadn't even gotten the truth out of how Roxy really felt about that night, and now, Nikki went back to questioning herself, if she should really continue.

Don't do it! Don't tell him! Don't—

“Michael, that morning, while you were still passed out on the roof, I tried to leave, but Roxy walked up to me, and spat in my face, then, she tried to claw at me, and I fought back, and—"

“What,” cried out Michael, completely blown away from what he was now hearing.

“I socked her in the mouth, and knocked her to the floor, and she fell crying, and...,”

Nikki sighed.

“What,” gasped Michael, again, at complete upheaval.

“Well, she started calling me out... although... nothing I haven't heard before, 'piece-of-shit whore,' 'fucking cunt,' 'how could you do this to me and Michael,' and then she got up and spat me in the face again while... I just stood there....”

Michael's face looked like it was about to fall off hearing this. Nikki knew it was an expression that could only mean disgust.

I didn't even expect her to show up, up there, how stupid could I have been? When she did, I saw how brokenhearted she had become, seeing as me and you had slept together, and I felt ashamed. And then. The only thing I could think of doing was having her join in... seduce her so... maybe? That might have kept you two together. As stupid as that all sounds, that's all I could think of doing. I didn't want things to go that far to break you two up.

Thought Nikki, but didn’t say.

Wait, I should though.

Thought Nikki, but instead felt like telling the ugly part that came next.

Wait a second, I should tell him that, it might make me look better...?

“She also said if I wanted to have that dog of a man so bad, I could have him. Told me that, 'don't worry, he really is a pitiful dog in all its nature, he'll stand by your side through everything, and he'll do anything a woman tells him to, as long as there's a treat to it,'” said

Nikki, feeling like the grayness of Attica setting in deeper, making her feel strangely cozy.

Michael's face didn't change much, only difference Nikki saw now was he was massaging his forehead; trying to ease his mind from whatever tension building up inside.

"After that… I went up to look at you again… I thought about what Roxy had said… and I decided… why not," explained Nikki, as eyes glazed over vacantly all around.

Nikki looked at Michael's face again, and now she saw a lot of tension trying to hold back what he really felt; trying to hold it back as hard as he could. Nikki then got scared for a second, and didn't know what to make of it. She didn't know if he was holding back anger, bitterness, or disgust. And then again, it didn't even seem like none of those. Nikki decided to hold off jumping to conclusions, and felt like going on to see if she could open Michael up more, to see what his real feelings about the matter really was.

"I lied, Michael, I didn't fall for you over what you did with Greasy. I mean, not initially. What you did with Greasy blew me through the roof. But what really got me into you was that moment."

Michael lifted his eyes and looked at Nikki straight, still holding back something Nikki couldn't trace.

"Every man I've been around—actually—not just men! Women too! Have done nothing but turn on me after they eventually saw how I really was. Calling me those names, 'piece-of-shit whore,' 'fucking cunt,' and guys like Greasy thinking I can't wait to have a train ran on me. Thinking I'd like it. And thinking I deserve it. When I saw you laying there, I thought about what Roxy had said, and I decided that that's what I wanted in my life. What I needed, someone I could have complete…

I don't know…

something like my parents had, since they've been my only example about stuff like this…."

Nikki then sighed, and allowed herself to accept it.

"There was something pitiful about it all. About you, about me, that made me think that, maybe, that was the answer," said Nikki.

But then Michael did something that completely threw Nikki off. Michael could no longer hold how he was really feeling hearing this, and then broke out with a gleeful smile, like he was pleased with it all. Nikki now grew dumbfounded over how Michael could possibly feel that way.

"Michael, how can you smile to what I'm saying? Roxanna lied to you about her father, she left you because she was disgusted with both me and you. And then, I decided, I just wanted you because I felt like you were something I could control, someone that can be there for me and…."

Nikki realized then, that what she was now doing, was the complete opposite of everything she'd set herself up for; she was no longer trying to put a spell on him to draw him close, she was now giving him reasons to hate her, and make him want to break away.

No, I can't let that—

"Michael… maybe Gab was right… we should just go our separate…?"

Nikki then stopped, as the Wench inside cried out: NO!

"You want to leave, Nikki," asked Michael, seeming distressed.

Nikki… shook her head… and after a good minute of trying to think of what else she could possibly say (unsure of her own intentions) Michael finally had something to say of his own.

"Nikki, I cheated on you—left and right—because I thought you were just going to leave me in the dust! Rich girl like you… what the fuck did you want to do with a punk like me," blurted out Michael, almost all at once.

Nikki now felt beside herself…

Wow… that explains everything perfectly.

All that time she thought Michael was doing it for another reason.

Oh! You really had no clue how I felt about you—did you?

"Michael, why would you think that," demanded Nikki.

Michael shrugged.

"Well, you were dead wrong," declared Nikki, as she stamped her face into it.

"I'm sorry for doing all that—"

"No, Michael, it's okay."

"No, it's not," said Michael.

“What do you mean 'no it's not?’”

“Because—that's why you ABANDONED me after I went to prison,” cried out Michael.

As the room full of convicts and their visitors went silent.

Nikki realized now that she really had abandoned him. His heartbreaker, womanizing, cheating ways had practically destroyed everything she felt for him at the time, and that had led her to abandon him. Once he went to prison, all she could ever think about him was how much he had cheated on her, and how the truth of the matter was, with all the control she felt she had over him, she could never control that.

“Nikki, when I saw you at 1999, why were you so cold to me, at first,” demanded Michael, as his voice began to break up again.

Nikki thought back to that moment when she had stepped out of the drapes, she remembered her first feelings of seeing Michael again, and what she remembered was all the bitterness blowing up inside her. All those years it had built up, and seeing him again, had made it burst. And all she wanted to do then was treat him like she would treat anyone else. She felt like everyone around her were bitter enemies, and she hated them, and she now wanted to hate Michael too.

I hated everyone there… I hated everyone… and I can't believe I ended up hating you as well.

She wanted to be mean; she wanted to see him as every other prick in her life. She wanted to be vicious, cruel, and demeaning. But the more she wanted to hate him, the more she began to remember the reasons why she at least loved him.

And it really broke her heart to see him glare at her like he wanted to kill her, too, later, in her offices.

Since he had once been the last person to ever expect that from. Now Nikki felt like she had to go deeper, even though she didn't know where it would take her.

“Michael, I'm a possessive fucking bitch—I'll admit it! Seeing you that first minute at 1999, all I could think about was how much you wronged me in the past. You were the only person I really had in

my life, and you were never mine to begin with. So that night, I remember, Radboy… telling me…!”

And then she paused.

Oh, I can't tell him this! This is the worst one yet…!

“How… he planned on shooting you if you got out of control. And part of me, wanted to see it happen.”

No… not Michael! Just that cheating side of him I hated. I’ve always felt like there has been two of him in there, and I wanted one of them to go away.

Michael's eyes lit up, and Nikki almost felt like panicking.

Oh God, why did I bring that up, why that? Why that?

“Would you still want to see that,” asked Michael, as he glared at Nikki, with all the sense and emotions of a forgotten man.

“Michael, when he pulled out that gun, something snapped in me, and I went hysterical at the thought that I was willing to allow it to happen. I felt like there was something seriously sick and evil in me, and when I saw Radboy fly out the window, part of me….”

Nikki paused.

“Before that, I felt like I just wanted you to go away. After that, I felt like I never wanted to lose you again. And when you saved me from Dorian….”

Nikki began to smile as she did recounting the story about Greasy.

“Everything I ever felt about you came bubbling back up, and twice as strong,” recounted Nikki, as she smiled.

But then….

Grew discouraged that Michael didn't seem to be buying it, even though she knew she was being completely genuine this time.

“Michael, I'm so sorry—I can't even believe I told you that,” explained Nikki.

“How do you feel about how I cheated on you now,” asked Michael plainly.

“Michael, that was a long time ago, I can be over that now. What you said, you cheated on me because you thought I would eventually leave you, I can understand that now. You doing it out of spite and resentment at the thought that I would. That makes

sense. And, I tell you now, I would have never done that," explained Nikki, and believed it.

"Can you?"

"Yes, I can!"

"Nikki, I remember you saying, 'how come you cheated on me—left and right—but never initially with Roxy.' What did that mean," asked Michael.

"I don't know, Michael, that's just been on my mind for a very, very long time, after what Gab had told me," replied Nikki, feeling a bit worn out by Michael's questions.

"Why?"

"Michael, I said I don't know."

Michael stared at Nikki, and frowned again.

"I'm sorry, Michael!"

A part of Nikki then grew furious.

Oh!

As Nikki then realized that Michael was making her apologize for the wrong he was doing at the time, and Nikki swelled up with distraught over this. But. Not enough to bring it up, or blame him.

"Why do you think I cheated on you," asked Michael, plainly.

Nikki sighed.

"I felt… I felt… because of what I did to you and Roxy, you always resented me for it. And that's why you cheated on me, when you never cheated on her," stated Nikki, feeling exhausted.

Nikki looked at Michael, as she saw his eyes scan left to right, and then blow out a sigh.

"Wow… maybe there's some truth to it," responded Michael.

Nikki cringed hearing that. She liked Michael's excuse better. It had more to do with how he had been mistaken, then being really her fault again. Better it to be a mistake than someone's fault.

"And… not just that," Michael now disclosed.

"What do you mean," asking Nikki in concern.

"I mean, after what you did, I guess it kinda sparked something in

me. I mean, I've always been a flirt, but I was never that much of a womanizing jerk until I met you," explained Michael, as he glanced over at Nikki when he mentioned her. "I was a lot more inexperienced than you at the time, and you blew my mind away with how much of a sex crazed heartbreaker you were...

and I guess I kinda liked it," responded Michael as he grew a small smirk, which irritated the shit out of Nikki to see.

"I wish I hadn't," responded Nikki, realizing she really did have a lot to do with it.

"Nikki, why did you come across as being sweet to me," asked Michael, plainly enough again.

"Michael, I was never—"

"I know, but it seemed like you were."

"I don't know, maybe—"

Nikki tried to close her eyes and search her feelings. But couldn't do much, considering how much of them were hung over with the feelings of distraught and exhaustion from this whole exercise. Nikki felt utterly lost and confused by everything, and she didn't like feeling this way. She didn't feel like she had any control over this conversation, and the direction Michael was steering things was uncharted territory. And, also, it kept seeming like the more and more she spoke, the more skeletons were to start coming out of her closet. Things that she feared to bring up, since she didn't know the effects they would have.

All I want to know is if he still wants to be with me, but it seems like we're just going back and forth, back and forth, and I can't even tell what's going on.

Nikki completely felt out of her element. It almost felt like her head was spinning with all the emotions and thoughts and questions. And she then looked into Michael's eyes, and began to feel angry with him for the first time today.

Hasn't he gotten the message that I want him still? It seems like he's purposely trying to be mean and unfriendly to me, this isn't the Michael I know. Who is this guy?

Nikki sighed.

“Nikki, were you pretending to be like Roxy to keep me around,” asked Michael, holding a plane stare again.

And then all of a sudden, it hit.

Oh wow!

Nikki found herself again, in this uncharted territory, but fully acknowledging what she was seeing, as if it wasn’t uncharted territory, no more. As the observation Michael just made brought her center.

This… was a major revelation.

At the time, after seeing Michael laying so pitifully up on the roof of the Tropic, all she could do in her mind was delve into the fear of whether or not it was going to work out. Nikki, at that time, in those days, mostly only knew how to spark a one-night fling, one special sexual encounter, and nothing else. She didn't know how to go beyond that, beyond sex, to the place most people go in a relationship. She had never had a real relationship with anyone, before and even since. One-night eruptions of lust and desire had become her tasteless bread and butter. So, she had no clue of what to do, and she couldn’t take the examples her parents left her with, considering how they were together.

I think one of the things that’s really ruined my chances of ever finding a viable relationship, has been because of the horrible examples those two horrible people left me with.

Once theirs began, hers and Michael, she didn't know what to do. All she knew about Michael preferences in women were what she saw in Roxanna.

All that sugar and spice… that I definitely wasn’t!

And since Nikki had no sense of self-worth to believe in just being herself and letting Michael either accept or deny that. She changed herself.

Oh! I did!

Just in that week, had changed her hair, her clothes, her attitude, and she didn't even understand when they happened.

Oh! No wonder I’ve spent years thinking about that woman! Years and years! Turning it into almost of a habit. Obsessing about her…

in ways, I didn't understand why I was at the time... but couldn't stop.

Roxanna Blue had become an example. Something Nikki wasn't, and needed to strive for. Since Nikki saw her as being better.

And... I did! I did think that way about her.

Nikki felt blown away realizing this, that she had been this committed to having the idea of a man like that. An idea! Just an idea at the time, and nothing else. All that commitment and effort put in for the hopes of an idea coming true.

Something about me and Michael meeting, felt like planets aligning, and I had to. I had to then.

Nikki then realized if she was willing to go that far to get him, maybe, she did care.

I was willing to change myself for him, for the possibility of what our relationship would turn out?

And I think I really liked being sweet—can that be enough?

Nikki also realized now how much Roxanna had become symbolic for her in a way; representing everything that was wrong with her. Being the heartless bitch that stole someone else's man, and tried to keep him for her own selfish needs of controlling him. Roxanna was the girl Michael really deserved, and Nikki had taken him away from her.

"I guess I did, Michael, I guess I did want to become her, because I figured... she was better than what I was," said Nikki.

It feels like a black-hole in my heart, I don't know how to explain it!

The Broken Nose.

Nikki felt like she was at her most fragile now, and then saw Michael still had more reckless words for her to give.

"What if that bomb had gone off, Nikki," asked Michael, shaking his head.

Nikki gasped.

Please don't hate me! Please just don't hate me anymore!

"Well," intruded Michael, throwing his arms out.

"I can't believe I was willing to see that blockbuster kill all those people at that building there," cried out Nikki.

“Blockbuster,” murmured Michael, seeming to be hiding something.

“Yeah, the Daisy Cutter… that's what it was—wasn't it,” asked Nikki, confused with Michael's expression.

Michael then looked down, away, and then looked at Nikki plainly and said, “yeah, you're right—I forgot,” and nothing more.

Nikki stared into Michael's eyes, and shook her head in discouragement.

There's nothing I can do for you to let that go—is there?

“You said you wanted to see it happen,” said Michael with a shrug.

Nikki shook her head some more, looked into herself, and realized if she could change once, maybe she could do it again.

I really did want that bomb to go off and kill everyone, what the hell was wrong with me?

Nikki shook her head, and began to seriously grow disgusted with herself. And looking into Michael's eyes now, she couldn't help but to remember how she felt about him when Radboy said he liked to put a bullet in his head.

Oh, I don't want to think about that—not that—not now!

Nikki closed her eyes, and realized things had to change. She hated everyone in that world, because they were all really just a bunch of envious pricks; that themselves desired to be the centerpiece in the giant clockwork of things as she did. To hate them was like hating herself, and Nikki had done enough of that, and just didn't want it anymore. Looking at Michael’s face again, the idea of him being shot in the head and his brains blown out from the back made her feel sick.

“I need to change—Michael! I can't believe how I felt at that moment, so much hatred built up in me? It's one of the reasons why I was so driven for that Tahiti idea. I can't—I can't!”

“Well don't think too much about it,' stated Michael, with another shrug, that was beginning to seriously piss Nikki off.

Who the hell is this guy, and what happened to the Michael I knew?

At least when Michael was berating Nikki back in that hallway for wanted Nikki to blow up the bomb, she felt like he was seriously bothered by it. There was some emotion behind it. Now, Michael’s attention span on Nikki was that of a televised soap opera; didn't matter

what Nikki was saying or emoting, she was just some pixels and volume on a tube for Michael, and simply wasn't there.

"No! I now think I have to! I can't continue being that way, I'm really no different than they are, I shouldn't feel that much hatred for them, it's like hating myself. And I don't want to feel that way either. And I can't expect people to just stick by me and follow me. Like you, I can't expect you to stick by me through the end. You're not my guard dog! It wouldn't be fair to you!"

Nikki felt good saying that. It felt like there was a lot of meaning behind it, and she knew it was an answer. Something she had to work on. Nikki then looked into Michael, and her heart sank when she saw him shaking his head in disapproval.

Fuck you!

Thought Nikki.

"Michael, please stop being mean to me," demanded Nikki.

And now it began.

"Nikki you're a liar and you've always been a liar, but now you sorta suck at it, because you used to have tears at least by this point," commented Michael, as he chuckled a bit in disgust.

Hearing that, Nikki began to tear up.

"Oh, there you go, there are those crocodile tears, a little late! So maybe you should work on it a bit," commented Michael again.

Now Nikki was weeping full on.

"You don't love me!"

"Yes, I do," screamed out Nikki alerting everyone around them.

"You've never even said you've loved me all those years we—"

"I love you! I love you! I love you so—so—so much—I just—didn't know how to say it before—I love you," broke out the woman that finally learned how to speak.

That broke up Michael to see. For a second there, as he opened up his clouds with compassion, but then closed up again for the storm.

"You don't give two shits about me," murmured out Michael.

“Yes, I do,” screamed out Nikki even louder, which was now making people around them want to get involved.

“Excuse me Miss… but are you—”

Nikki just glared at the convict that felt inclined to get involved like the Reaper, which scared him shitless.

“You'd abandon me again like you did the first time,” murmured out Michael, as his eyes began to tear up.

And Nikki paused.

Oh, that's it, isn't it? You think I'd do it again?

Nikki understood now how alone Michael must have felt. Nikki had only been here in Attica for an hour at the most, and she was already feeling like the dreariness was going to eat her insides away. How bad it must have been for Michael, Nikki could have never known.

Maybe as bad as how I've felt, but at least I always had the chance to leave that life in Uptown, Michael never could.

Nikki now felt certain she seriously wanted to help Michael get out of his funk, and not just for herself.

“Nikki, you're just lieing, you don't love me, you don't care about no one but yourself, you will aban—"

“No, I won't,” called out Nikki, not screaming it anymore, but filled with confidence.

“You only care about yourself and—"

“No, I don't,” broke Nikki again.

“Everyone in my life has abandoned me, you'll abandon me, that's all there is to it,” murmured out Michael, as the tears began to flow.

His voice sounded broken and hollow, and he sounded like a wounded animal before its master placed a gun to its head and shot its brains out.

“Just leave—leave—you don't care! You have Tahiti waiting for you. Fuck off! Only thing waiting for me is another five to ten years here being alone and miserable out of my mind…

until I finally get out, get a gun, put it in my mouth, and blow my fucking brains out!”

“No—no—no! Don't do that—please—please don't do that,” screeched out Nikki, as everyone around them stood awestruck at the outburst they were hearing.
“Yeah, you're right maybe I should just find a way to off myself now—"

“If you do, I'll do it too” screamed out Nikki, as she bit down hard, and pounded down her words into Michael's face.

Michael then went quiet, as he continued to glare up like a broken mule while tears continued to flow, and Nikki smiled, not feeling pity for him anymore.

And then he smiled.
“I'm sorry Nikki,” murmured out Michael.
Nikki shook her head, unsure of what he meant.
“No, Michael it's all right,” stated Nikki as she smiled.
“I didn't mean to hurt you like that, I really didn't,” said Michael, as he shivered a bit, but then seeming more consolidated in his senses, and it began to throw Nikki off again.
“What do you…—"
“I'm really sorry I…—"
“Sorry for what? You did nothing wrong,” gasped Nikki.
Michael smiled faintly, and took one giant deep breath.
“Michael,” gasped Nikki, in confusion.
“Nikki, I know what you were trying to do back there—telling that story about Greasy,” explained Michael, with a cool look on his face.

Nikki felt beside herself again.

You knew, I didn't offend you did I?
“And it reminded me how much I missed the spell you used to have over me,” said Michael, as his face exploded into a vibrant smile.
Nikki felt like she went through a revelation there, as everything bad went 180 degrees, and became good again. And she felt pleasantly dumbfounded as to what just happened.

“I gotta say, Nikki, I never knew trying to be manipulative could take that much out of you, last time I cried was when I was….”

Michael stared unpleasantly at Nikki, remembering that moment, and didn't feel like bringing it up.

“And before that… years ago, when I caught my dad trying to….”

Michael unpleasantly stared deep into his memories, and didn't feel like bringing that up either.

“I'm so sorry I did it,” said Michael again, as he took another deep breath.

Nikki didn't know what to feel. On one side, she felt overjoyed Michael wasn't rejecting her again; on the other side, she felt broken inside for everything Michael just put her through. But then again, she also sorta liked the broken feeling.

You did all that to manipulate me?

Thought Nikki, still divided between those two outlooks. But as she looked up at Michael, first question that came to mind was what was really bothering her.

“Michael, please tell me that all this means you didn't mean when you said you wanted to kill your—"

“No—Nikki—no,” said Michael, “I didn't mean that, but then again, it doesn't mean I've never felt like… no, I didn't mean it!”

Michael paused.

“I'm sorry, Nikki, I did it because I needed to feel if we still mattered, all the time we spent together, I've never really known if you cared about me, because you always kept that side of you locked up, never really showing it to me. You were always so stone cold about it or awkward… sometimes stoic—…,”

And then Michael glared up at Nikki, and realized another reason why he loved her so much.

“It's like I had to…

punch you in the face…

and break that side out of you, so you'd open up. I wanted to hear your entire story without restraints. And mostly, I wanted you to open up for yourself—not just me,” explained Michael as he took another deep breath, and it looked like he over swallowed it.

Nikki then closed her eyes and realized that she had been that way. She

never expressed how she really felt about him beyond lust.

Yeah! But just because I don't know how to express myself like that, doesn't mean I don't feel it. I'm not a robot or something, cold and distant. And then there were times I'd stare at you in a weird way, and only when you weren't looking, because I felt intimidated. I'd just be completely fixated on you, and about us… and I'd worry that you'd notice that idiosyncrasy of mine and take it as an ugly creepy thing.

"Nikki, I believed you felt that way—I did! Because I always sensed it underneath the surface, I just wanted to see it boil out for once, even if it burned me, I wanted to feel it," said Michael as he smiled.

Nikki looked up, shook her head, and didn't know what to think next. She felt a little insecure about going all that way. But it seemed like Michael wanted it.

"You said, you enjoyed how I used to put a—"

"Yeah, Nikki!"

Nikki felt awkward and weirded out hearing this, and it felt unnatural.

You're not supposed to like that! No one likes to be controlled!

"Being your fucking dog, woof," said Michael with a one single chuckle.

This all was becoming a little too awkward and surreal for Nikki, as she started to feel like she might be imagining it.

1s and 0s.

"Nikki, you want me to tell you my story," asked Michael, faintly holding a smile.

Nikki nodded, and felt overwhelmed with anticipation as to what was going on here. Hoping Michael's story now might have an answer. Michael lifted up his pupils, brought them down, and then began:

"That whole night… Gab said I had abandonment issues, and I didn't know how bad I had it, until I came back here. How he understood me so well… I'll never know!"

Nikki flinched over that matter, hearing Michael mention Gab, since, Nikki always sorta had an idea as to why that was.

I've always gotten the feeling that…he… for Michael… felt… yeah!

And then:

"Wait a second… is he…?"

Nikki saw Michael finally catching on.

"Honestly, Michael, I can't tell. Gab always had a secretive side to him, and I've never seen him with a girl," mentioned Nikki.

Michael then chuckled, shrugged, and then said:

"Well, that doesn't matter to me. Only real friend I've had, and that's all that does matter."

Michael then paused, frowned up a bit, and continued.

"Nikki, this is going to be a lot to take in, and I don't know how to explain it all, do you understand," asked Michael, halfheartedly.

"Yes," said Nikki, not minding, and wanting to hear Michael out.

"I mean… a lot, like you had a lot to get off your chest, I have a…?"

"What's really troubling you, tell me" asked Nikki, wanting to get to the root of it.

"I'll get to it."

"Michael, you can tell—"

"No! I'll get to it," said Michael, as he shivered a bit, and took a gulp of dread.

Nikki now saw how difficult it was going to be for Michael. Truthfully, she wanted to do to him what he did for her, and be direct, and stir the emotion out, since she now felt that was the best way to resolve it. But…?

If Michael wants to explain it, let him.

Thought Nikki, wanting to give him a chance to.

"Anyways, you remember that Black Panther activist I told you about," asked Michael.

Nikki nodded.

"Well, like I said, he tried to teach me a lot of things. His name was Louie Gaius Torrance—by the way—and him, seeing how I was back when I first came to prison, the first thing he tried to teach me, and make me understand was, an idea called

'I think therefore I am.'

Have you ever heard of that?"

Nikki shook her head.

"Well, L.G.T. said the real meaning behind that line was different from his interpretation. You see, when he had first read that line,

he had imagined something else, based on his experiences."

"Okay," said Nikki, now completely absorbed by the story, and unsure where it would lead up to.

"His idea of 'I think therefore I am,' was, whatever people think, they become. The reason he was trying to teach me this was, he saw how stupid as shit illiterate I was—or really—I thought I was, and he wanted to teach me that that was my problem."

"Michael, you're not stupid," said Nikki, remembering how Michael always had his brilliant moments in the ruff.

"Thanks! But anyways… L.G.T. was beginning to grow really irritated with my attitude about how I saw myself. He kept trying to teach me things, and I'd throw my arms up in the air, and would tell him 'I'm too dumb for this stuff.' I'd keep trying to bring myself down, and that's what he found really irritating.

He said that in his experience, he's met a lot of people like me, 'brilliant people' being his words, that wasted their potential being this way. Thinking less of themselves."

Michael sighed, and Nikki then realized there were a few convicts with their visitors around her, also paying attention to his story.

"Anyways, he'd say, 'you keep thinking you're dumber than dirt, that's all you'll ever be!' Of course, I didn't believe him, thinking I could actually be different. But then, he decided to give me an IQ test, to prove it."

"He gave you an IQ test, what did you get," asked Nikki, really curious to see how well Michael could do, beyond just sticking with his fists to do the thinking.

"I got a 154, and he said, 'there! You're practically a fucking genius,'" answered Michael, as he shrugged a bit, as if he still couldn't believe it himself.

"Go on," said Nikki, remembering from high school, her score had come out to 133.

"Well, at that point, it blew my mind away, I never could have imagined it could be so high. He told me that people with those scores tend to work for NASA, not Fred Scharnick's Auto Repair. But then he told me something called an EI, which involves emotional intelligence, or stability, and what he told me was even

with really high intelligence, I was still an emotionally bankrupt person. And that… was what my problem really was."

Nikki looked to one side, as she realized, with Michael, how true that was.

"He brought up how his brother was like that. Back when he was younger, just a straight D student, that spent most of the time in the back of the class, clowning around like an idiot, bored to tears, or sleeping. But then how he could read a book like James Joyce's Ulysses in a few days, understand it completely, then go to Harvard, and wipe the floor with the Professors of Literature there, arguing about it.

Then later… go home, buy some smack, and shoot it into his veins every day, wishing his next hit would OD him… which it eventually did," recounted Michael, as the story began to grow dark.

"Michael, you're not that bad," reassured Nikki, but cringing a bit inside from the possibility.

"Really, Nikki, really?"

"Michael, just go on," said Nikki, hoping something positive could be brought out from this story.

I don't like the direction this is going. This sounds like a lot of overthinking on Michael's part. And… I really just don't like where this is going.

"Nikki, he also said that sometimes people like me, that are in a bankrupt emotional state, might end up using their intelligence self destructively. Or, in in other words, he said, 'if your heart isn't in the right place, then your mind definitely won't be.'"

Nikki acknowledged. Then sighed.

"Nikki, there's something else…."

"What," gasped Nikki, feeling worn in already.

"Recently, we had a shrink here at Attica, that noticed something weird about me."

"What," gasped Nikki again.

And now, Nikki was really not liking where this was going.

Oh no! Don't tell me there's been a shrink involved?

"Whenever I have certain anxiety attacks…."

“You have…?”
“Nikki, please—let me finish! Whenever I think about… stuff….”
“What stuff,” asked Nikki.

But… Michael didn’t answer.

“When I think about stuff, he noticed, how I start freaking out. He then asked me what was going on, and I told him I kept getting these thoughts that get stuck in my head. He asked: 'what type of thoughts?' I told him, 'shit that disturbs me or makes me feel depressed.' He asked, 'how often does this happen?' And then… I realized I've had it all my life.”
“What type of thoughts are they,” asked Nikki.
Michael, then, just shook his head.
“Anyways, all of a sudden, I had one—right there! And then I blurted out,

'rompous-pompous,'

and he asked me why I said that. I told him that I didn't know. He asked me, 'do you do it often?' Then, I realized, I do it almost every couple of minutes, and I told him that. He asked me if I do other stuff like that, and I told him how I kiss crucifixes a lot, sometimes rub it against my forehead and have thoughts of eating it.”
“What,” gasped Nikki, as it all started to get weird.
“Yeah, Nikki, that also really made his eyes light up, too, like yours now,” explained Michael, seeming more and more depressed, the further he went on, telling Nikki all this.
Michael, this is starting to sound like… I don’t know.

“He then asked me if it made me feel better, and I said, 'yeah!' He then told me—Nikki he told me—that it looks like I have OCD.”
Nikki scratched her head for a second. All she knew of OCD was it had something to do with an impulse to wash one's hands.
“You mean washing hands? I don't quite remember you being that way,” mentioned Nikki.
“Nikki, not everyone with OCD is Howard Hughes, anything you

obsess about can be OCD. Sex, violence, death, sicknesses, social anxieties, the future. Not all technically bad stuff, but if it's stuff that can bother you a lot, people like me get entrenched in thoughts, thinking about shit like that, and not knowing how to break away from it, like normal people can."

Michael, there is no such thing as normal.

Thought Nikki, but didn't say it.

"So, my type likes to then create triggers like washing hands, or dealing with superstitious shit, to break themselves away from the thoughts. Developing rituals," explained Michael.

And then, as Nikki heard the word 'rituals', it all became clear. As Nikki began to understand.

Oh… no!

The memories with Michael, during all those strange moments, now came flooding back. Nikki began remembering other weird habits he used to have, like flipping coins over and over, and getting really upset whenever tails came up. Kissing crucifixes… as he just mentioned. How he'd start speaking abstractly, and was unable to break away from it. How he'd find something funny and keep repeating it over and over to himself to cheer himself up. Then there were those times he'd stay in water for hours on end, and say it made him feel 'clean'. And hearing Michael mention 'sex,' made Nikki begin to remember her share of experiences with Michael.

Oh, wow!

And as for those details…?

I rather not think about them right now, under this context. No!

At the time, most of it Nikki found to be cute, maybe a little weird, but cute. But now, realizing it might have had something to do with rituals, like some cloaked pagan occultist might be conducting before a pentagram, Nikki began to feel really creeped out, considering how much she had played a part in them.

Oh, don't think of it like that. Pagan occultist… that's just silly! It was nothing like that! So what if Michael had some fixations and fetishes… so what? His sexual obsessions were at least a thousand times better than the things I was exposed to by 1999 regulars, them and their fancies.

But then, something also came to mind, over the matter of creepiness.

Then there's that one time Michael really disturbed me, when I caught him staring at his hands, intently, and he looked like he was having a conversation with them.

And then I remember I had a nightmare that night, I remember vividly, that those hands of his…

Were telling him to…

Okay, stop thinking about all that! It's not like I don't have my own issues… with evil.

Thought Nikki as she shook her head. She didn't want to hear any more of this, and mostly because she saw how it was all affecting Michael. He looked just as pained over the realization that he was suffering from some possible mental illness as she was.

But it's not that bad—is it? We all have something wrong with us.

"He said, 'sounds like rituals, how many more do you have,' and I told him about flipping quarters. Then after listening to me a bit further, he said that I also might possibly have bi-polar disorder, a lot of stupid unresolved mommy and daddy issues, anger issues, territorial issues, and a bunch of other stuff. I mean—fucking shrinks! Give them a minute, and they'll try to come up with fifty thousand things that might be wrong with you. They act like they're there to help, but telling someone all this stuff just ends up making someone feel worse. But anyways… I guess what I really want to say to you Nikki is…."

Michael paused, as the expression on his face changed, and he seemed more tranquil. He looked into Nikki's face, as he began sending vibes to her that the story wasn't as bad as it sounded. Nikki picked up on this, and felt a bit more relaxed.

"Nikki, these rituals, I see now for what they are, and things like flipping coins, I hate now with a passion, and I feel like ceasing to do them, considering how they affect me. But I don't see all of them as such."

"What do you mean," asked Nikki.

"What I'm saying is, it's all about what they make me feel. I

understand that a lot of that shit I do, it's all about my way of combating all the negative shit I've built up over the years. I shouldn't think of them as rituals, or whatever word a shrink would feed me with. Because that just makes it sound weird. And, it's not all bad, and I shouldn't let it get to me."

"Then don't, Michael, don't," said Nikki.

But Michael, didn't seem too assured that he could.

"Some of it… I think I like though."

"How's that," asked Nikki.

"Because… everybody does things to combat their negative feelings. That's… normal! And I should see it as that. In the end, it's all about keeping my mind at ease, giving it rest, keeping it in control,

like a spell."

Nikki lifted her head up.

"Like a spell," asked Nikki.

"Yeah, this is what I'm really trying to say," replied Michael.

And now, Nikki now felt an inkling of where this story was going.

"Anyways, as for what L.G.T. made me realize about myself. In prison, I spent a lot of time exploring this new self, reading, now that I came to the sense of how intelligent I could be. And then, surely enough, I found myself reading and understanding every book I came across. Magically almost, somehow."

Magically?

Thought Nikki.

"Now, reading everything I could get my hands on, and opening up my mind to everything. And… I thought that that was going to make me happy… but it didn't."

"Why's that," asked Nikki, as that part started to make her curious.

"After everything Louie had told me, I grew very self-conscious. But you know what? The more I thought, the unhappier I got. I guess it has to do with that OCD. Whatever I read, I got obsessed over, the thoughts and ideas and knowledge. And even though it could be simple medieval history, it started driving me crazy.

All of a sudden, I'd be reading, and then, I'd feel like I'm there, and I'm thinking about living conditions, shitting in a corner in a pile of hay since there's no plumbing, and not cleaning it up. Not showering for weeks or months on end, and the stench in the market of people that did the same. Rats carrying the Black Death, and being accused of being a heretic and… and I couldn't stop thinking about it! It was as if though I was there, actually there!"

Nikki shook her head, as it felt like Michael was beginning to rant about stuff that really shouldn't bother him.

"Want to hear something funny," asked Michael.

"Sure, go ahead," responded Nikki, feeling like humor could do for a change.

"One summer, I was so bored and restless out of my mind, that I picked up a bunch of books to learn French, and started cramming it all in my head. After three months, I knew the entire language, and the funny part is… I felt like I forgot English. And then, I couldn't stop speaking French to the other inmates," recounted Michael, as he began to laugh.

Nikki tried to laugh, but, it all still sounded a bit too much.

"I mean, I started getting major headaches, and the words kept spinning in my head and…."

For a second there, Nikki got excited at the thought of speaking French to Michael, to see if he'd understand her, but hearing him talk about getting headaches, made her refrain from doing so.

"And the next summer, I learned the entire German language in only two months and—"

"Okay, I understand, Michael," interrupted Nikki, finding none of this funny, also, remembering how Michael picked up Spanish back in the day, just by listening to Sassboy and his brothers speak.

"I learned, then, the problem was, I was trying to fix something emotionally in me, by seeking higher intellectual pursuits. And… it's just doesn't work that way!

Knowledge might be power, but all the power in the world won't be able to fix, a simple thing, like a man's broken emotional state.

His heart.

And, trying to do so, made it worse! I was so miserable here in prison, spinning 1s and 0s in my head, so obsessed in thoughts, that, when I got out, I guess, I subconsciously decided, 'fuck being this way! Rompous-pompous,' and decided I was going to be a moron again, and love it. Since that's how I was before, and those were the days I was at my most happiest."

Nikki began scratching the back of her neck again, as the story began to grow weird again.

Rompous-pompous… what? What does that actually mean?

"I guess you can convince yourself of anything, with that whole 'think therefore I am,' bit. And, when I got out, I then decided to convince myself I was a moron, again."

Michael then sighed, as this all started to give Nikki a headache too.

Oh, Michael, you're overthinking! Don't do that!

"That night—boom! I was coming back into action, I wanted to be the old idiot I was, and revel in it. Fucking riding around on motorcycles on rooftops, fighting musclebound beefcakes with their own dumbbells, and going around punching people in the face, like in a John Wayne movie, and do it all with style."

Nikki looked at Michael, and saw him smiling now, recounting his moments…?

Musclebound gorillas? John Wayne? What?

But to things that weren't making much sense to her again.

"But… since that night, I've realized, to be my old self? That's… an impossibility. I can never be my old self. That wasn't going to truly fix me. And all that I had of that, now, my old self, was just an idea. Just an idea of what I thought I used to be, an idea of what I've only created recently."

"Michael, what does all that mean… and why is it important now," asked Nikki.

"It means, if I want to be happy now, I gotta be a new self, you can only move forward in life, you can't move backwards."

That, now, made sense to Nikki.

"All right, Michael, you can do that, we can—"

But then, Nikki saw a look in Michael's face, as it seemed like what was

really bothering him, was now going to start rearing its ugly head.

"Also, besides convincing myself of all that to be happier. There was a lot of other stuff, I had convinced myself of. And, a lot of stuff I was unaware of, that wasn't so good, definitely not good at all."

"Like what," asked Nikki.

"Like, how Radboy had wronged me. And… how you might have as well."

That now made Nikki feel uncomfortable to hear. There was something very… cerebral… about all this.

Expressionless, and emotionless, and… evil, in a way, that she didn't like.

Michael, when you get absorbed into too much thought, and over think things, you can create a lot of things that don't add up. Things that can make you… see things… in a warped way. And from my experience… it's never good!

"Nikki, that all ended up making me hate you, and see you all weird. And you were the last person I would ever want to hate. I've already ended up hating too many people in my life, that I should have never done so, one's that I should have really loved. My mother, my sister, my best friend Gab, who is such a likable character… but… even he came across as being pathetic to me, at one point, and I ended up hating him, too."

"Well, at least you've always loved your father," said Nikki.

But then, Michael began frowning up, bad, after hearing his name.

"No, fuck him, he's the one that has deserved most of the hate I've had!"

And that now completely threw Nikki off, hearing. Since Michael had almost always spoken highly of him, as if how he could never do anything wrong. Nikki now couldn't understand what would have changed in Michael, to feel this.

Although, honestly, from what I remember from meeting him. I don't think I've ever met a scarier man in my life. So maybe… you have your reasons there.

"I don't know… I don't want to hate him either… but… at least for now, I feel like I have too."

Nikki sighed. As this all felt like uncharted territory again. But not in a place Nikki felt lost in, but felt weary of being, and would have liked to have started heading back. It was like an abandoned playground, a haunted playground…

and watching Casper the ghost, spinning and spinning on a Merry-Go-Round, endlessly.

"Michael, let's stop."

But, Michael didn't.

"And then… I met the devil with a black-hole in his pocket… and made him cry…."

"What," gasped Nikki, as she realized he was going full forward with that abstract thing again.

"Oh nothing—I'm talking weird! What I mean is… I did something those Pentagon boys couldn't do. Who then laughed in my face, and didn't even want to believe me when I told them that I did."

"Michael, I can't follow—"

"Don't worry, I'll tell you… some of the stuff… some other time."

Michael paused again.

"I guess what I'm saying to you—Nikki—is, once I got back here again, I said, 'rompous-pompous,' meaning I felt like I can handle this again. And as hard as I tried, I then understood, that I really can't, I mean, I can but… I also don't want to. Part of me is telling me, I need to be alone, to face these demons, I have to, because dragging others into them wouldn't be fair.

Part of me feels very… religious now, very Christian, and I like that, I really, really like that now, because it's doing for me what I thought everything I did that night would. Getting back to my old self, would. It's really doing miracles, and giving me a sense of peace and rest, I never thought I could."

Nikki then bit her tongue, not that she didn't like what she was hearing, she just also had her reservations when it came to that matter. Since it was something that sorta scared her to think about.

"I mean, that whole night was me trying to resolve everything in my life, and, I've realized now you can't just do all that in one setting. Stuff like that takes time, lots of time, and change. I guess

also, there's a lot of things in me, that I will never be able to fully resolve, or fully understand, and maybe, I'm not supposed to," explained Michael, now looking depressed.

"Michael, you'll get out, and I told you I'll find a way to get you out with the connections I have, and I'll be—"

"I tried to not to think too much about the other shit that happened to me that night. About what I did to… and then there's Mr. Dorian, and what scares the shit out of me now is realizing how similar that man is to me. Except, he had really gone off the deep end, and it scares me, because I don't want that to happen to me, too."

"Michael, I don't know exactly what you're talking about, but it won't."

"Nikki, I'm over thinking, I know."

"Yes, Michael, so stop it."

"I can't."

"What do you mean, you can't?"

"I mean, I need you to."

And then all of a sudden, Nikki started to see a shimmer of light.

"Nikki, part of me feels like it would be better for me to go completely alone, to resolve what I can about myself. But I don't want to. Part of me says, I need to be alone…

but I don't want to be alone!

I don't want to be. And… I want your magic, Nikki, I want your spells. I understand now that I love your manipulative ways. Actually, I don't even want to call them that, because, it sounds too ugly. For every time I remember you doing it to me, it was exactly like that Greasy story, there. Or how you spoke about Tahiti at Le Bron's place, you didn't want me to over think a bunch of stupid shit. But to give me something that gave me a peace of mind."

Michael smiled as he said that, but then cringed up again, with one final thought.

"That entire night long, I had my obsessive ways giving me reasons to hate everyone around me, and eventually even you. But I

understand that now, and I won't let it happen again. There's only one person I really need to hate right now, and maybe that'll change things, eventually change me."

Michael smiled, but then felt like continuing.

"Nikki..."

"No more Michael, just—"

"Let me say this, I guess I'm kinda saying this to convince myself as much as you," explained Michael.

As he cringed at the thought of what he just said.

"Okay, go on...?"

AND THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, the devil behind all this spinning of 1s and 0s, finally reared its ugly head:

"Nikki, that's never going to happen again. I promise you, I swear,

I won't ever hurt you again!

I'll never put my hands on you again.

I'll never let my obsessive thinking get the best of me as it did that night.

I rather kill myself a thousand times over then to ever see you hurt in any way shape or form, again!"

And now, finally, Nikki got what was the root of all this. What was really bothering Michael. Having him obsessing over that night, overthinking about it, and keeping him from the peace he needed.

The Redemption of The Toymaker.

"Michael? Is that what's bothering you so much? How you choked me like that? Please don't do that to yourself, I forgive you, you don't have to keep...."

Nikki then saw Michael stretch his hand over his face as he seemed like he was going to have another anxiety attack.

Oh, Michael? You didn't exactly have me choking to death. You barely had your hands around my neck for a couple of seconds before you freaked out like that in that hallway. I got more scared of you when you started screaming and crying afterwards, than

while physically attacking me.

But to Michael, that had been enough, more than he was willing to allow himself to do, and Nikki then faintly had a small chuckle out in disarray, as she then felt the pain of seeing him like this set in. What scared Nikki the most wasn't the thought that he might ever do it again, but the thought he might try to kill himself in fear that he would.

Michael, please don't let a fear like this eat you up, inside and out. You're better than this!

Nikki felt like her mind forked in multiple directions trying to figure out the right thing to say now to get him out of this state, and the harder she thought, the more she felt lost in coming up with the right words.

“Nikki, I can’t stop thinking about it, I can’t believe I did that!”

“Michael, it was nothing, don’t do this to yourself.”

“I keep seeing myself doing it, over and over again, I keep spinning it, around and around again, and I can’t make it—"

“Michael!”

And then Nikki started seeing Michael do something… she’d never seen him do before.

“Michael, stop doing that, why is your mouth jittering open and shut like that?”

And then, it started up more violently.

“Michael, stop!”

But it wasn’t stopping.

“Please… please….”

But after a short while, a short session, Michael did stop, and seemed to start to be at peace again. But then, Michael was simply upset. Profoundly upset, over that whole thing of what just happened.

“Nikki, please don't abandon me again,” cried out Michael, and seemed to be truly losing it now.

“Michael I'm not going to—"

“I don't know! I'm afraid I'm too crazy. Maybe it would be best if you—,”

“No,” cried out Nikki, fearing the thought of losing him again.

Michael then closed his eyes, and went still, as Nikki then looked up at the man, and felt like she was seeing the child again that was whisking

his head around in excitement, from the story she had told him about Greasy. But now, he looked like a child who had just understood his mother had abandoned him over night without a word, and it pained Nikki to see him like this, because she knew that was exactly what had happened to him at one point, and it was a moment in his life he had never been able to let go of.

> Michael, please let go of these things! You are not a child anymore. These fears are things of children, and you need to let go of them, if you want to change, if you want to overcome them. You can't let them control you. Please, do it for me!

Nikki then smiled, and began to think of Michael's future.

> Stop living in the hell that you're in now, stop living in the past— Michael! You have a future, and it's going to be in a place far from here, somewhere with me. Somewhere, hopeful, somewhere you can feel centered, and somewhere to give you dreams! I promise!

Nikki could have never imagined anyone wanting to be completely under her control, because, control for her had come to represent an ugly thing, a needy thing, and an obsessive thing. Something that was seriously crazy and wrong in her, as whatever craziness was wrong in Michael.

> Maybe there isn't anything wrong with being obsessive, as long as it's over something... or someone... that matters?

And now it excited her beyond measure that he wanted that, it gave her a sense of peace in her heart, because it meant there was also good will behind the nature of control, something Nikki only now was grasping.

And wanting control meant he would then never abandon her as well.

There was also another thing: Michael had conquered her using her own magic, and all she could feel now was overjoyed that he did. It brought her to her senses, and brought her to a better self. She felt the control Michael had over her now, and she realized she loved it too.

> Maybe there's good in control, something good in possessiveness, when there's compassion and pity involved.

She realized now how much she had wanted to give into Michael all her life; going so far as to change herself completely; wanting him to control her as much as her wanting to control him. It really felt good! It felt

exhilarating giving in like that—and completely. To be wrapped around another person's finger; to be wrapped around another's sway, tempo, rhythm, and flow because it gave you harmony; to be attached to another person's heart, that pumped in blood and supported your being.

"So, you still want me after everything I told you" asked Michael.

It was odd. Michael was smiling now, and Nikki felt a complete 180 had gone through him from how he seemed before. This was now a polarizing experience.

"Nikki," said Michael, as his eyes glimmered a bit, "I feel like as long as I'm with you… none of that stupid crazy bullshit I was just talking about matters anymore. All that OCD, stupid mommy and daddy issues, a bunch of stupid crap, I really don't need in my life—when I'm with you—it won't matter, and it can't even touch me."

And hearing that, Nikki was at awe. She didn't need to say anything, or do anything. Didn't need to manipulate Michael's emotions once, but still, she had done something, that Nikki was worrying might have been out of her league.

"Michael… are you all right?"

"I'm better than all right… I feel great now," said Michael, as he smiled.

And Nikki now realized, just how important the part she played in his life was. Even after all these years, it was as if… they were destined for this. Perfect for it. For her magic, really was all that he needed to make him feel better again.

"Michael, please don't be afraid that you'll— …."

"I know I won't, Nikki, I know I won't. I—"

"What was that mouth opening and…."

Michael shook his head, smiled, and said:

"I guess… that's something I have to now live with. Something… I don't know how to explain. It's a part of me now."

"What," gasped Nikki.

"It's something that, I don't know, just came to me all of a sudden. But don't worry, it's not as troublesome as it seems."

Nikki felt lost again.

"Okay," said Nikki, unsure.

And then, Michael needed a moment to reflect.

"Well, I'll tell you something else about that night, I now feel happy—happy—about. Unlike the one about that whole OCD business, I actually feel happy this time."

And now, Nikki was intrigued again.

"Nikki, I can't be the man I was before. Before… I see how I was, and I don't believe in that violent nature I used to have… I mean… you know my violent nature, right?"

And… that was something… Nikki definitely did.

"Nikki, ever since that night, I feel like that part of me is not needed anymore. I don't need to be him, anymore. I can be done with it. I don't want to hurt anyone anymore, hurting them is like me hurting myself, and I don't understand the sense in that anymore. That aggressive side of me is finally maturing, for I did it always,

not for spite, but resolution.

So, I can now be something… better."

"How is that," asked Nikki.

"Because it scares me to go that far, and, I'm glad, I'm glad that it does. Because that means I won't.

That mouth opening and closing thing… that's what that was.

Now, I see the wrong in it, and that is what scares me, because I don't want to wrong anybody anymore, and I rather be better than that now. Do you… understand… what I'm talking about," asked Michael, seeming worried that he might be going over her head again.

Nikki… understood that now completely. And was happy to hear this.

"I still got a lot of shit I need to resolve in me. And I know now I can do it…

especially with God on my side,

but… it's gonna take time. And… I don't want to do it alone. Not this time."

It really seemed odd to Nikki, Michael was calm, at ease, and smiling

now. Even though Nikki wasn't able to find the right words to say to change his spirit, she had still managed to do it without words. For she didn't need to.

It was her signature that had done it.

> He sees it… he's always seen it. Something I thought no one else would.

Even without words, she had still been broadcasting away everything she felt for him, thinking about his future, and Michael had picked it up. Michael now seemed to be departing from whatever madness that was inside him. Not back to his old self, but a newer self.

> "So," asked Michael, having gone 180, and now blazing forward as that vibrant stallion again, charging in in full force.

Nikki smiled, and said:

> "Shut up—Michael—I do!"
>
> "You're my only true pocket watch, always have me hypnotized—dropping me onto my knees from your presence," expressed Michael, with a compassionate smile.

Nikki just rolled her eyes in glee, unsure of exactly what it meant, but felt its meaning nonetheless. Michael now had a teasing look on his face, and looked ready to ask some final questions to seal the deal.

> "Does our cheating past matter to you anymore," asked Michael.
>
> "No, it doesn't!"
>
> "Do you forgive me?"
>
> "Yes!"
>
> "Then I forgive you too, over Roxy…."
>
> "What about everything I've done as the Lady," asked Nikki, worried that Michael might hold something over that.

Michael just shook his head, and said:

> "You and Radboy ever…."
>
> "No! With him? Never!"

Michael then shrugged and shook his head again, and said:

> "I don't care. That Lady you were, that's still you, and I love you, and that's all that matters!"
>
> "What about Mary," gasped Nikki.

“Ha… haha!”

This time, Michael blew up into full laughter as he heard her mention Mary's name. Michael… was starting to get a little tongue-in-cheek. Considering how overly concerned with everything Nikki was, with her and her guilt-ridden ways.

“Oh please, Nikki… Mary? Fuck her! I'd spite that bitch, too. You don't know how vengeful she really is, and I'm saying this as her brother!”

Nikki rolled her eyes, realizing maybe she wasn't too far off about her, and they both busted out with laughter.

“Heh.

Nikki, this is important now… this is the tricky question… do you believe when I say I will never cheat on you again?”

Nikki gasped, that was one question she now felt like she really didn't want to think about. That question did worry her a bit knowing how Michael was.

“Please tell me that it does,” asked Michael, while consolidating his next response.

“I honestly don't want to think about that, Michael, I think that's something that's made me obsessively com—"

“No, listen,” stamped down Michael, showing that he was about to mean what he'd say.

“I really believe—I know—I can go back to being that way, like I was with Roxy. The last time we were together, you and I, I feel like much of the problems came from a lot of stupid resentments and reservations we had for each other, having you never truly open up to me, considering how guilty you felt about our beginnings, and having me looking elsewhere, in fears of being abandoned, because of it. But we’re passed that now, we’re older, and I’ve come to understand there can never be anyone but you for me. I’ve been with enough women to know they don’t really make me feel how you do. I did it to feel something I’ve already always felt with you: accepted. But with you I’ve felt it in ways, that’s almost been magical, almost. And that’s what I really want, magic, real magic. And the stuff I’ve only seen you have. And as for the Roxy matter, and how she’s made you feel… honestly…?”

Michael paused with a smile, blazing out two inches away from Nikki’s

face, and yet not close enough for Nikki comfort.

> “Fuck Roxy! We shouldn't even be thinking about her, again, since, that's how little she matters to me now. That woman left me years ago, and you're still here after everything we been through. You mean a billion times more to me than she ever did. Nothing against her personally, but fuck her, and her sweet-hearted ways. Now that I think about it. And also, I've never wanted a sweet girl, just someone that'll be there for me. That's just what you think I've wanted.
>
> I don't want a sweet girl—I'm a wild one—and I want a wild one.
>
> Not afraid of her sexuality, and not afraid to show it. I want a perfect match of imperfect people like us. I'd take a supposedly manipulative vixen of the night, like you, willing to stick it out to the end and love me—any day—than a flaky goodie-two-shoes like her, that'll chicken out and tail it when life gets tough! Girls like her, will never understand the definition of what it is to be alive, truly alive, and in love, because they're too afraid of the pain that comes with it, they're pitiful almost.”

Nikki shook her head and smiled, felt like years of worrisome thought being wiped away clean. Purged!

> “So don't ever compare yourself to her, and feel less. Because she's the one that should feel less, comparing herself to you. To the size of your heart, that’s a thousand times bigger and more loving, and willing to wage it out, through war and back, and still be willing love again, more, and ten times stronger. Because, unlike her, you understand there can never be a limit to it. It has to be unconditional. And that, makes you a billion times more worthy and deserving than her, in my book!”

Nikki paused a second to let his words set in, and began to tear up again as they did. Nikki looked inside herself, then, and realized,

Michael had just blown her stupid fucking thirty-something mind away.

She felt the foundation of what he meant, tougher and harder than fifty Marines from Iwa Jima. Everything felt like a 180 of how she was feeling

before. Nikki then smiled as her eyes glistened a bit from the wetness, got up, and stood over Michael, in a domineering and controlling manner.

Since, it was pretty obvious who really wore the pants in this family.

Seeing this, Michael cocked his head to one side, and smiled, captivated by her presence.

"Can I just be yours again, Nikki?"

"Yes!"

"Can you control me again?"

"Yes!"

"Can I be under your spell again, and feel like being under the waves of Tahiti?"

"Wow...."

"What?"

"You're really something else, Michael," commented Nikki, feeling the rush get to her, that made her blush.

Michael got up too, now, and became his old self again. Pounding in the vibes that he wanted to take this lady of his, right then and there, and then pound some more.

"Do you love me?"

"Yesss," cried out Nikki, with a bit of a moan on the side, feeling the sexual vibe of her vibrant stallion.

"Then make me feel it, too," called out Michael, as he began chewing his bottom lip.

Nikki began chewing her lip too, but then looked around and realized that what Michael might have been suggesting, had to wait for another time. But instead, she knew there was something different she could do, something that drove Michael instantly wild, and then tamed again by its whisper. Nikki took her hand, placed it over his heart, and began waiting for something to give.

"You feel it, Michael," asked Nikki, turning her head to one side, as she smiled.

Michael's heart began jack-hammering, as he smiled a spell-bounded smile. Feeling at peace.

"I'm glad Gab was wrong about us," concluded Nikki.

And then, Michael's heart began to pound harder.

Also, one of those convicts listening in while pretending he wasn't, felt like a love song was required for the moment. Looking at his cassette tapes, he found a personal favorite, and placed it into his beatbox.

Then hit play.

The Author

I owe everything to Christ for saving me from my own worst demons. This book was written during a time when God opened my eyes to everything truly wrong with me on the inside.

2013.

This book… became my own exorcism.

I didn't know… I just didn't know… but I began to understand after I had finished this book. Slowly, but surely, I began to.

There is Good in this universe. And an absolute Good which I can trust will keep me anchored whenever I begin to lose myself and begin to drift away. For, without His anchor, we're all lost to the whims of the open sea.

Synopsis

It’s the 80s. It’s New York City. And life in the Big Apple is one mean and dangerous place. Crime is at an all time high. And out here there’s a man that would like to think of himself as the biggest and baddest dude to ever grace these streets. One Michael "Madboy" Connelly. A real brawler, a real womanizer, a real player, and a real prick. Just an all around bad boy. But he’s got his story, that of a newly released man that's planning for revenge, against those he believes had set him up and had him sent to the slammer. But that’s just one man’s story in a bigger story. There’s also a man in the city that’s been all over the TV, that everyone’s calling "The Big White Head." A mysterious man with a lot of power, that plans to start anarchy. Start what he’s proclaiming as "The Age of Rage," leading to all the gangs on the streets to rise up and try to wipe this city straight off the map. Between Michael "Madboy" Connelly, The Big White Head, and The Age of Rage, it’s gonna be a hot time in the city, tonight.