

Down

Edward Rosseau Hemming

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Preface

Edward Rosseau Hemming (1929-1975) was an enigmatic Norwegian-born poet and fiction writer. He temporarily lived in France with his grandparents in Lyon in 1939 as a young boy, which made him infatuated with poetry and playing the piano until he with his parents moved to the United States. He wrote several short stories and poems throughout the span of his known life, not publishing most of them and only keeping them to himself and sharing them amongst friends at most. He was politically active as he went into his university years, writing for various underground anarchist and student union newspapers, where some of his first few stories and poems were published. and all the while gaining his main literary inspirations including Franz Kafka, Osamu Dazai, and Jean Paul Sartre.

He graduated from Louisiana State University in 1952 majoring in English, and he went on to be a high school teacher shortly after, along with temporarily writing for a local magazine in New Orleans. A large portion of his life was undocumented until he moved to Flagstaff, Arizona and published *Down* in 1973, without much success in sales and receiving very little attention outside of his local area and within smaller writing communities. Mysteriously, he went missing on his birthday of March 1st in 1975, it is unknown if he died, but the last trace of his existence was only through a letter that he mailed to the New Yorker

containing an unknown and unpublished poem. It is commonly believed that he took on a new identity and lived the rest of his life in secret, however this is for reasons completely unknown. The rest of his works were found in his apartment after his disappearance. The amount of fiction, poetry, essays, and memoirs combined amounted to at least 300, most of which are lost or unpublished.

His pieces are considered bizarre, surreal, and absurd by many for his inclusion of various dreamlike and nightmarish images, paying an homage to Franz Kafka and the Surrealist and Dadaist art movements, he wrote in his native language of Norwegian or his third language of French often with only a few completed works written in English, and wrote in various perspectives purposefully to distort ordinary storytelling, this was done for the reader to feel lost within the vast amount of dream-like and emotionally driven descriptions present in many of his stories. They serve to reveal his mental space in a form where the absurdity of reality interconnects with the nonsense of the mind, and it details something which feels inhuman, as for much of Hemming's life, he never saw himself or described himself as anything related to a human, rather a humanoid figure in unfamiliar skin.

Hemming was not only enigmatic in character, but also in belief. He could never say without certainty what he truly believed. He was considered by many to be an absurdist, a surrealist, an anarchist, or a nihilist, and these beliefs may be

true to him, but he never identified under a single name, both in ideas and as a person.

In most of his works there is an underlying horror or anxiety present that isn't fully revealed even by the time the story ends, showing a deep fascination with the psychology of the mind and all its contents. He often explored this through the visage of art as to him they represented many spectrums of reality that cannot be explained through language, as he never felt that he could accurately describe himself in less than an infinite number of words.

Hemming started writing *Down* in late 1972 on a short stay in New York City for work. He was mesmerized by the buildings for how massive they were, and how many people filled the streets of the city. He wrote short ideas, excerpts, and rough drafts of the story before going back and revising it throughout 1973, as he didn't have much free time to write outside of work. He supposedly had the idea for this story for a long time, but according to him, waited for the right opportunity and setting to conceive it. In failed attempts to fully describe his philosophies, personality, and records of his memoirs, he instead made a story about himself.

Down details the life of Francis Honza, who was once living a deceptively ordinary life as he lives with deep emotional disconnection, nihilism, and apathy. Life changes right before his eyes as his apartment catches fire. Along with all the various other questions in his head, like the identity of a woman he meets, and the meaning behind his

dreams, he finds how little he is in the world, and how nothing will ever be truly rationalized. His already surreal world deteriorates with his mentality over time as life becomes much more bizarre and nightmarish. Francis serves to reflect Hemming himself, putting himself in a world which reflects his overall view of the world itself. Much of the story serves to reflect a large portion of his life up to that point, represented in a massive winding city that is nearly impossible to navigate, such as the nature of life and the universe at large.

“The greater story is always within the author, even if to the reader that individual never had a face or form in the first place.”

-Edward R. Hemming

Chapter 1: Marche Funèbre

There is a figure of a stranger in an unknown world, an unknown city, and an unknown time. The stranger is not scared of what he doesn't know, he doesn't feel in danger, rather he doesn't feel anything at all. The stranger came from nowhere, will go nowhere, and will forever remain nowhere. The individual, the humanoid, and the being I seek, the one that I see far into the shadowy, dusky distance is a familiar but unknown shape.

It was four-thirty-six in the morning, I had that dream again. That dream of watching my own funeral. There were some things about the dream that I always remember in full detail, like how I was the only one around. How the rain caused the ground to turn to mud and got my shoes caked in wet gravel and clay. How it started pouring further, that the rain overtook my gravestone and filled a pool into my burial. Everything went gray and cold so easily. What once was a green lawn becoming ashy-sky gray from all the mud. I only woke up when the rain overtook my sights completely. The rest of the details, like what my gravestone looked like, or what I was even wearing, I forgot. Each time I know something is different, but I don't know what. I didn't recognize the name on the gravestone, despite knowing it's mine. But I don't know what it said, as there wasn't a time where the words I recognized said the name "Francis". I

couldn't sleep after that, and I woke up with a small and short headache again like every other time I had that dream.

My old record player, not a new model by any means but still fully functional, crackled with the dust in the grooves of the record for a moment like the buzzed silence of my mind, until it started playing music. The crackling cut to music, Frederic Chopin's Ballade No.2, it played quietly and calmly at first, flowing the same way the road I look down upon from my apartment, flowing and curving along the ground. Such a trivial sight for those who have grown all too familiar with it, but the amount of maximalism behind it makes the mega-structures of not just the road but of the concrete skyscrapers and the support beams which hold them all together. Each structure tells a story of what once lived there, from what had to be destroyed to create, the old graves it was built on top of, the expansion of an urban town into a mega-city, there was nothing that didn't resemble a monument in some way.

As I looked out to the metropolis that stood before me, the bridges, and high-up roads barren of many cars in the early hours of the morning, the lamp posts and streets illuminate the corridors of the city, the connected buildings with windows blackened or glowing stood before me as another towering structure. I sat in my seat sipping out my mug, I gazed up until I felt that I reached my limit upon the panopticon tower. Its windowless body exactly one mile into the sky, the windows on the top shining like spotlights competing with the

moonlight like a lighthouse or a guard tower, and the spotlights on the bottom revealing the base like a theater stage is seen from miles away in all directions. Even in the furthest and lowest parts of the city like the slums of the Fourth District, to my home in the residential apartments of the third.

It isn't the biggest one like it, they originally formed either in Russia or America as some public architectural project, and most major cities have them. I learned that from the many plaques around the city with history about the building, but what goes on in that building, and who amongst this city works there is as mysterious as its origins and design. Its mere presence, appearance, and shape as it remains both in the shadows and in full-view strikes order, structure, prosperity, and uniformity to those that stand below it, with little law enforcement necessary. The buildings below it aren't nearly as big, but they are also in their own right megalomaniacal. Mingling corporate and smaller governmental buildings form a base of the tower below, either interconnected, or shaped like a tic-tac-toe board.

Just as the ballade calmly slows down and transitions to the next part, a burst of tunes ring as each eggshell-white piano key is played in complex patterns. I felt a restlessness in my body as the song transitioned from something calming to something interesting, and so I started pacing. I first paced around my room, until I came to my door. I walked out into the hallway and into my living room. A barren space with only a television, couch, and

coffee table. The concrete walls of the room and the arches which held up the roof, with a peak opening into the kitchen remained shrouded within the moonlit shadows.

My footsteps echoed the sculpted brutal walls like a stone bell the more I paced around, moving and organizing things just because I felt like it. I rearranged my furniture again that night, and sorted out all the books and papers on the coffee table, only to realize the time was only four-forty. I almost sat down to watch TV instead, but I decided not to as I would be much more restless than I were before. I paced in my living room with a broom just sweeping everything I came across, no matter how spotless and pristine they already were. I paced around to my front door, flicking my lock, putting my coat on, and relocking my door, and taking my coat off over and over again.

I went back to the kitchen and I got more coffee, and I paced again, looking into a different window from my living room. The panopticon was still visible, and the city below started sinking like water in a sink.

I put my coat back on and laid on my couch for a while as I rubbed my eyes. I looked over into another window to check the time to see the giant digital clock on the side of another building from afar. It was four-forty three. I stood by the front door again, finally choosing to creep out of my home. I walked down the stairs, the echoes reverberated each step, much more vacant and barren than before. I made it to the lobby after what

felt like forever, I trudged across the desolate scene, the roof high up into the air with a couple chairs, couches, and the mailroom in one corner dotting the perimeter. The arches cast shadows on the floor, like giant bars of a cell's window. I opened the glass door, swinging back behind me causing a crescendoing thud into the streets from the narrow corridor created by the walls of the buildings next to each other.

The dimness of the streetlights illuminated the brutal concrete apartments with such a dirty yellow tint, contrasting the others with solid white. Walking these streets while everyone is asleep soundly or too tired to take notice gives me the feeling as if I were a ghost, utterly alone with nobody to know or care that I was here. That idea gave me at least a small hint of mental refreshment.

A woman walked by and struck up a conversation with me. I wasn't really sure why she was up so late and why she thought I was safe or sane enough to be the conversational type in the early hours.

"Hi, you lost?"

"No, not really."

"Pleasant night, what are you doing out here?"

"Just walking, it's relaxing to me."

"I can relate with that, want a cigarette?"

"No, I don't smoke, but thank you."

“You know, you kind of look like someone.”

“Really? Who?”

“Like Vincent Van Gogh, without the beard.”

“I also have more than one ear, that and on top of the surprising fact that I am not dead yet.”

She snickered. “Do you like art?”

“Sure, I like art. I like music, architecture, paintings, and various sorts of things like that. Although I don’t really enjoy art like most others do, I merely live with it. It’s not easy to impress me with much. I mainly like it because of its atmospheric and lethargic qualities.”

“That’s an interesting concept, quite poetic. But keep looking. Once you find something you like, it will be beautiful. Nobody can change that. You don’t even need to look at art, anything can be art for the world is all art in a way.”

“World’s kind of too ordinary for that, in my opinion.”

“Well, what is something you deeply desire?”

“I am not really sure what I want. I would be content with not wanting anything if that were an option.”

“It can be an option, anything’s always an option. You may be able to find what you truly desire even in the most random moments.”

“You seem pretty bright, it’s a breath of fresh air talking to you.”

“Thank you”

We stood by each other in silence for a moment as she lit the cigarette she offered me. She smoked it, and looked at my face as she blew the smoke away from me.

“I have to get going, I’m sure we’ll meet again, eventually.”

“Have a good night, or, uh- morning I should say.”

We parted ways in the opposite directions of the street, I walked mindlessly for what felt like hours, passing by the same background of the buildings scrolling like a repeated wallpaper behind me. I walked until my legs were tired, and I looked up at the big digital clock on the building again. Five o’clock.

I stopped and looked at the void of the sky, encircled by the towers forming a wall around everything. I contemplated the night sky, in all its air-filled darkness. I aimlessly walked for a couple of miles, only barely scratching the surface of the Third District’s streets and everything else it offered for me. I looked behind me to see how far I went. The road behind went on for many miles of empty road as nobody was awake to pass by, the cars parked in garages or parallel parked on the street. I could not see over the horizon where the road

ended, and the rest of the buildings were cloaked by the night.

I looked forward to see where I was walking to, only realizing I didn't walk far at all, as the same sight stood before me in either direction. Only in the middle of this one area in the Third District. As I walked back to my apartment, I tried to go back to the same spot where I met the woman but saw that there was no trace of her anywhere.

I went back home, and I drank another cup of coffee which had lost its potency and taste a long time ago, at least the feeling of coffee going into me was enough. It just felt down, nothing good, bad, or really anything but just down in the way it tasted. It reminded me the things which just seemed down, like this view of the city from my apartment window. Nothing about it was particularly bad or horrible to witness, neither was it making me shed a tear from its beauty. It just seemed too ordinary to be content with, thus it seemed down. The towers had so much thought put into its geometry, with concrete brutalist patterns making a modern minimalist design yet translated as an imposing figure of alien origin, and each building has some type of purpose that I would never know to its fullest extent. But they all still didn't impress me even with that bearing in my mind. It may only be my mind which represents itself in all that there is.

When I talk about the things which seem "down" to me, I mean the things that are filled with monotony, that I can't seem to accept into my life. There's nothing necessarily bad about them but it's

the limbo of emotion neither being good or bad, but an aura of trivial discontent that drives me crazy.

I cannot understand others that do not see the downness, it consumed my mind like a cold prison. The issue is others do not see the bars, and I cannot explain it to them. I don't desire to let others know me, it's just more baggage to be honest. I still have family members, not much left, some of which I do not know well or even at all. I have a job, but I was just there to work and skip past the social stuff. Last week while at my desk and working on my projects, I was invited to a work party event or something, to seem more engaged, I went just for cake and to be in the group picture to show that I was present. It's all just insurance to not get fired or possibly get a raise. Yes, I did socialize for a little while but just enough to seem normal or not create an enigmatic or negative force around myself.

I had to go to work, thankfully nothing big was planned for today, no parties, meetings, or anything. I can continue working on projects nine to five and get paid without the need to talk to people. I thankfully have done this enough to gain the reputation of "he likes to keep to himself usually but he's kind and will do things when asked." It's not that I don't like people, well... I don't but not because I find them annoying, some of these people are quite nice, it's just that I don't like being with people that much. It just seems like too much baggage if anything. The folders and sheets littered over my desk as they circled around my typewriter. Despite reading all the pages over and over as the

enormous alarm clock ticked a millisecond quicker each time, the words molded together and seemingly had no meaning. I signed off on the sheet anyways, but as my pen broke and the ink spilled upon the paper, so did my lethargy.

I looked out my office window in response watching how high up I was in the tower. I could see the top of the Third District, and the Fourth District was seemingly on the edge of a flattened earth that I could not make out, only knowing its presence by the billowing smog and the darkness that accompanied its presence. A statue stood on a massive pillar in one section of the street, it was a piece of interesting modern architecture which told the time with a sundial, and the rest of the pillar was blocky, symmetrical, and parts of it seemed to defy gravity in some parts. The top of the pillar pointed out in various directions, it stuck out high into the air towering and pushing down everything below it letting everyone know what time of the day it was.

The shaded sides of the buildings casted impenetrable shadows on all streets, leaving everyone who stood under it in darkness. The streets were clogged with cars, the people who were in them might as well have walked instead. It would've been faster, more cost efficient, and generally would make someone want to kill themselves a little bit less.

My boss came to my desk, making his presence known with the giant lapel pin on his jacket of a smiley face clock, which ticked slightly faster than all other clocks in the office.

“Someone opted out and his spot is open for those who request to go, considering your position is close to his, I suppose you’d be a good replacement. Do you have anything planned next month?”

“No, but I’m content with where I am now, is there a special reason to go?”

“We’re opening a new office overseas in Italy, we’re going to need some employees to help with setting it up. The main one is in Rome and all travel expenses will be covered. If you don’t want to go, then you don’t have to.”

“Well, if I am needed or if nobody else will, then I will go. Just let me know about it.”

He went away, and I went back to work. I thought about how Italy would be like if I went, and how the change of scenery might be. I imagined myself working from Rome, and instead running away from my job and living on the countryside there. I could see out of the city that there is something that isn’t a city, a place full of trees and without a human soul in sight. I imagine myself living in those woods as a beast of local legend munching on the apples growing underneath the trees.

“I’ve decided to go to Italy.”

“Well, that was quick, what changed your mind?”

“A change of scenery is nice every once in a while.”

“I’ll add you to the spot.”

“Will there be much countryside?”

“I believe so, Rome is a smaller and older city than ours.”

“Great! I hear the weather is good this time of year.”

“Better than all the cloudiness we’ve been getting a lot of lately.”

“Yes, I cannot remember the last time I’ve genuinely seen the sun. I’m sure that the warmth and light will be refreshing.”

“Well, let me know what Rome is like over the phone when you get there.”

“Haha, yes.”

I don’t remember his number at the top of my head, it’s on a scrap of paper on my desk at home by my telephone like the other two people I have written down. Now that I think about it, I don’t think I’ve really ever called for anything.

After work, I went home and stopped by the spot I saw that woman, she once again wasn’t there without any trace of her. I asked a man wearing a flower-patterned shirt passing by if he saw her.

“Have you seen a woman in this area? She has red hair, and...”

My mind blanked, I barely looked at her but I could recognize her face if I had seen it, I just couldn't describe it. I remember her clothes was like a tattered green army jacket with a flannel underneath.

"...A green army jacket and flannel?"

"No, I haven't. Someone you know?"

"Yes, well not really. We had met briefly."

"I hope you find her or whatever you're looking for then."

The guy left, with the floral pattern twisting and moving all over his body, and it wasn't until then I realized that I had been thinking about this woman without knowing anything about her. Not even her name. I sat on the sidewalk for a moment, contemplating this fact.

"Sir, what are you sitting on the street for?"

A policeman with his hand on his baton hanging off his hip towered over me casting a shadow darker than the shadows which were already present. The glowing badge on his chest lit like a golden doorknob on a summer evening, creating the day and night.

"My legs were tired; I'll be out of your way."

"Don't let me catch you doing that again."

"Alright, officer."

As I walked home, a jogging man knocked a trash can over by accident. I looked over to see him on the ground clenching his bruised and bleeding shin, another man passed by and hit my shoulder on accident, he held a trash bag and broom, wearing a two-piece suit and tie like other workers in the area. I liked his tie, it was red. As I looked over again at the jogger, I found that the trashcan was right back up where it was originally, with the same man in the red tie sweeping up the trash. I had a quick glance of the jogger getting pulled into the curtains of the background by a well-gloved hand, and the man with the red tie opened the door behind him and went inside after.

A young girl, probably around seven years old at most from what I can tell, came up and talked to me after, speaking in a strange accent in a deeper adult voice.

“You best get going now.”

“Alright, I will.” I replied.

That was a nice tie, maybe I'll get one like that sometime soon. I thought to myself.

I went back home feeling slightly defeated but not really surprised that I didn't see that woman again. As I walked up to my room, I looked down from below. Something odd that I noticed the first night I moved in was that this staircase is unnecessarily wide for a building like this. There might be some reason as to why it is built this way, the building after all houses many people and I can imagine how terrible the stairs must be if everyone

were to go out at once on a narrow staircase. I'm near the bottom of the sixty-floor building, even when I peer down the long, dark, and cold spiraling staircase of concrete. I look down to find the bottom, and I look up in awe to find the top. I see a lack of anything visible, pure nothingness. Not even the floor or the roof itself. The wideness of the stairs starts to not look so wide the further you look down. Looking down made me nauseous, and I felt an urge to jump off, the fall appearing as a bottomless pit.

I looked at the towers from my room as I thought about how long it would take for someone to hit the ground if they jumped from the top. I was curious of what goes on in one's mind for someone falling for that long. Personally, I probably wouldn't have much on my mind if I were really in that situation. I know I will die eventually anyways, as people all do. But here I am contemplating it. But like most, I truly don't know what I'd think or what I'd do.

Chapter 2: Prelude in E Minor

I am in bed melting with reality to the tune of Chopin. His Solemn music and his Funeral March transformed my bed into a boat on an open ocean, pitch black waters in the abyss that is the night. I curled into a fetal position in my bed looking at the rippling waters, and so did the night

sky as I saw its stars and moon obscured by clouds permeating an impenetrable and unyielding darkness left me floating in a zone of midnight purgatory. As I rose out of my bed, my dream felt like a memory of this reality, but the memory of the was too obscured in the fog of the mind, the distance I stood before where my corpse was supposed to be revealed nothing but many things at once, simply pointing it out was the main challenge.

I read a book about a true story involving a hiker who was never found again, he made an escape from his normal life into the wilderness and lived the rest of his life surviving off of it until he died in a blizzard while moving up a mountain. It was similar to what I thought about at work today, and I think that regardless of how his life ended, he died at least fulfilled and having achieved his journey and the destiny that he saw within himself. Supposedly, there was not a single soul he encountered on his travels for almost two years up until that point. The absolute contextualized isolation would make many people turn away at the very thought of not seeing a human face for that long, but within a journey and deep desire, to him it probably felt as if the desire was a person who walked with him wherever he went. Very inspiring, in my eyes.

He was probably like me, or anybody in that regard if they were in the same position as he was. The thought of leaving everything behind for greener pastures was an interesting thought to toy with, but what only stopped me was just the

question of *Why*? What does it matter if I died for a journey or deep desire I truly held if it only led to the same ends? What does it truly feel to be fulfilled in anything? This is all assuming fulfillment even existed whatsoever or if it were at the very least obtainable.

I was at the familiar site of my own grave, but I knew that I was dreaming. I walked to the grave despite how much the rain was overpowering me until I was ankle deep in the rainwater, and my umbrella had blown away. I squinted and wiped away the droplets to read what it said, but there was no text, nothing on the gravestone at all. I realized that the burial had no coffin in it either, neither did it have any bottom. The sleek and wet muddy gravel gave out underneath my feet, and I slipped into the hole. A blazing and powerful orange light at the end of the tunnel grew larger before my eyes as I fell endlessly down, its warmth absorbing me and consuming my body alive.

Boom!

I woke up in a cold sweat with the headache pounding more than it ever did before. I got up and looked out the window again with the strongest urge to go on for another walk, there was some light by the side of the building which was glowing very brightly that I could not possibly sleep with around. I began to notice that it was unbearably hot in my room and there was a burning scent of smoke in the air.

"Oh, shit there's a fire!" I thought to myself.

I ran out, seeing others carrying out other tenants and family members who have passed out from the smoke. There was a whole part of the building which was engulfed in flames, on the opposite side from me and from where the set of stairs I was on.

The flames were spewing out of the concrete holes, producing smoke the color of pitch and autumn. I'd be one to think that a concrete apartment block would be fireproof, but this was beyond just any ordinary housefire, it started from an explosion somewhere in the building. This fire was already spreading to my room by the time I got down, and it took over ten of the sixty floors in the building. I was staring in awe of the spectacle of the bellowing flames taking everything so fast, I was motionless until another...

Boom!

Pieces of the building collapsed as I watched from afar, the fire department came and put the fires out, rescuing people who were still inside. I just sat there the whole time against a concrete wall surrounding another building watching the apartment destroyed in a matter of minutes.

I went to the firefighters who were taking in survivors to the emergency shelter to spend time in. I was silent and hadn't said a word the entire drive there, but I heard the others talking amongst themselves about the incident.

"What will we do now?" cried one child.

Her mother then said “We will have to stay over at the shelter, and then we will go somewhere else. It will all be okay!”

After comforting her child, that smile on her face quickly became the most melancholy and distressed expression on a person I’ve seen. I can tell that there was some other issue beyond that, other than the fact her and her child’s home is gone.

We made it to the shelter, and everyone got out of the vehicle in a single-file line. Other people were already inside, but we faced a problem; There was no space for everyone inside. Everyone was discussing amongst themselves how they can make space.

“What if two people sleep in the beds all at once?” one person inquired.

Somebody else said “No! These beds can only hold one person!”

“Maybe some of us can sleep on the floor!”

“How about we take out furniture to make room?”

They continued bickering amongst themselves until they came to a conclusion that at least five people were going to have to leave. The other shelter was already full of the other tenants of the apartment, and this was the last one in the city that can freely accept people. The crew sent us all outside again to be counted. I had a stroke of luck, however, as the crew at the shelter were counting

who can and cannot come in, I was one of the last ones to be allowed to get inside. I was about to get ready to stay there that night. But as I was by the door, the woman and her child was one of the only few who couldn't get in. The mother was holding her girl by the hand as she begged the crew to let her child stay. It was at this moment I finally spoke up.

“I am leaving. Let the mother and her girl have my spot, I will find someplace else to stay.”

The crew assured me that I was allowed to stay, but I stood my ground on my choice. I left without saying any other word except a smile to the girl.

My whole life was inside my home, including all my documents, and I cannot go back to work without a stable home. There was nobody else I had to go to, and I had no means of transport other than the bus. I had very little money on me, and I only had enough for two nights at a hotel.

I went to the closest hotel I can get to for the time being, I walked that cold night still in my bed clothing and winter jacket, I didn't use the bus because I would've had to use my money to get any other means of transport, including the bus since my bus pass was gone. As I walked through the city, I felt like my neck was about to snap from the base of my head as I looked up to see the signs of every building, looking for a hotel. I knew of one named the “Grand Grazyna” which I visited for work at one point. It's not as grand as the name implies, as

it's only in the Third District unlike the big commercial ones in the Second District, but it's good for those who need a hotel for cheap.

I looked into the sky for the signs of buildings, I eventually found myself gazing upon the sky where the sight created a nauseous pit in my stomach. Gravity pulled me further to the ground and compacted my human weight to the bottom of my feet upon its very sight. Looking down on the city from vast heights was one thing and fainting at the sight was one thing, but a fear of being on the ground floor is something I have only experienced but not related to any other person.

The city in its usual crosses and tic-tac-toe symmetrical shapes kept repeating over, and over, and over again as it scrolled in the background behind me. The windows dimmed, roads made walking feel like crawling, busses and trains that I didn't have the money to go on made the eyes of the towers look down at me, and the walls made a maze, causing a haze of my mind. Policemen which I didn't make any eye contact with were just sitting around in their cars, letting the street police itself. That was until my legs grew tired of all the walking. I collapsed and took my breath back as I sat on the curb, thinking that nobody would notice either way.

A policeman from afar shouted to me,
“Looking for your home?”

“I don't have one” I replied.

“Hm, do you now...”

“My home has burned down; I’m trying to get to the hotel.”

“You know, these streets are pretty dangerous at night... Someone might hurt you, someone who doesn’t like the sight of a dirty bum like you walking around...” He said as he held his hand on the pistol on his hip.

“I’m not looking for trouble, sir. I will be out of your way whenever I can.”

“Tired of jobless leeches like you sitting in alleyways, blaming your problems on everybody but yourself. You scare people every time you beg, you make people feel less safe, you are a waste of space. Just sad to look at.”

“But I don’t do any of those things.”

“Turn around.”

I turned around and walked back before I heard a jingle of keys and equipment followed by a clicking sound behind my head.

“Not so fast. When did I tell you to move?”

Dear god, I’m going to get shot by a policeman.

“You seem awfully calm for someone who has a gun to their head, why is that?”

“If you kill me, please make it quick.”

“I will give you the count of three to get out of my sight and find some place to hide, or else...”

I scrambled into an alleyway, collapsing onto the ground behind some trash cans. I heard the officer's footsteps walk to the alleyway, and I could feel that he was scanning looking for me. I held my breath with my hand on my mouth and my eyes wide open, I stood as still as possible until I heard the clip-clop of his jackboots walking away. I got up slowly, checking my area. There was a mural on the wall I was sitting next to. It was originally an advertisement for a soft-drink, but instead there was graffiti of a noose on top. As I turned around, I saw in the very back of the alley that I was not alone and that there were three others who had met the same fate as I did.

"Come over!" one whispered.

"You'll be safer here."

I came over to them, seeing that one man was asleep and the other two had old apples in their hands. I stood nearby, apprehensive to sit.

They all whispered "How did the cop treat you? Were you beaten?"

"He shouted at me and threatened me many times."

"Lucky you."

"You seem new, judging by how clean you look. You'll come to find that you'll be good at smelling the bacon the longer you're sleeping on the ground." The other one said.

"You mean food or policemen?" I asked.

“Eh, either one.”

The third man woke up, hearing the conversation.

“Wake up, we have a new guest.”

“Piss off, I’m trying to sleep.” he said, whisper-yelling.

“That’s no way to treat a new guest now, is it?”

“Fuck you, John.”

“Someone woke up on the wrong side of the floor.” the other one says.

“How exactly did you all end up the way you are now?” I asked.

The one presumably named John said he was really the only one to speak about it as most people on the streets don’t like to share their backstory. But the worst moments often make the best stories, so he always told the tale.

“I was once a factory worker at the Fourth District, I was making car parts. I had a pretty good life and a family until the factory was bought out and I was caught in their mass-layoff. I joined the army for a bit, spent time in prison for tax fraud, had a bunch of random temporary jobs for a few years after, I split with the wife since I couldn’t provide enough, and then my home and car got taken by the state. Hopping out of shelters and hotels for a while leaves me where I am today.

Moral of the story, there's no relying on anything but yourself, and even then, sometimes you just aren't enough."

"My home was just lost in a fire hours ago. It happened completely out of nowhere."

"One of life's absurdities. Things happen or they don't. It's always a fifty-fifty chance that something, just anything, can happen."

"Is there any way I can find food or shelter?"

"You can scavenge at night in alleyways to find stuff that people waste. The best places are anywhere that sells food. A secret they don't want you to know is they throw out a good chunk of food that isn't even spoiled yet. Your best bet for shelter is if you get money for a hotel, to bribe someone for a temporary home, or save it and sleep on the floor."

I hesitantly replied, "Uh, I-I have none."

"Well, you have two options then. You either go the safe route or the dangerous route. The safe route is that you sleep on the floor with us and scavenge for a living and trying to stay out of public eye. The second option is to do business to get that money. Drugs pays off the most. Find someone who sells it, and you can get money by helping sell for them. But I'm warning you, people who take this route don't live for very long."

"I don't really have much to live for anyway."

“Well, neither do we. You’ll get used to it.”

The other replies, “But hey, at least you can do whatever you want. That’s something many people don’t realize, even when they’re living a stable life.”

“You know, someone I knew told me something like that. Pretty recently too.”

“Really? Who?”

“Ah, I didn’t know her too well. We bumped into each other once, but it is some of the most real sounding words I’ve heard from someone. It was something along the lines of finding beauty in the world, and how the world was like an art piece.”

“Wise words. Hippie sounding, but wise. You can always come back or stay if you want.”

“I think I’ll stay for a while.”

That night the dream of my gravestone continued, where I was now in the coffin. It was no longer raining, and the grass was taller than it was before. The gravestone itself still had nothing written on it again, but it seemed to have aged. There was moss growing on its sides and it wasn’t as shiny as it was once before. I stood up from my coffin, I was now in a fully dressed suit which I now remembered was the same one that was in every dream. Little by little I was figuring out more things in my dream and the pieces were coming together.

There was a house in the distance of the green meadow. It wasn't my house; it wasn't any home I had seen before. It was more of a shack that was decaying and was clearly abandoned for years, not anything I've seen in the city. As I approached it, there was a force pulling me back and the force pulled with one full hand on my shoulder. I woke up. Surprisingly, without a headache.

Chapter 3: Étude Op. 10 No. 3

I am bleeding, bleeding out an entire part of my body. I am bleeding dust, my humanity bleeding into me as the dust which spills out makes inhumanity. Call me a monster, an enigma, a side-show. I starve myself, for I cannot find any food that I enjoy. My hunger is for you to enjoy and mock. I will never die for my bones will always remain, and even then, my immortal presence will become a passing phase.

The men were gone. Probably out scavenging as they said they do. I checked the waistband of my underwear to see if they had robbed me of my money. I think that they might have checked my pockets for anything valuable, feeling that they were now in an awkward position and tucked out. Now was my chance to get to the hotel. I blended in with the crowd walking the streets keeping my face down, focusing on the concrete floor. I counted my steps as I walked the

streets not stepping on the cracks in the sidewalk. Something I did as a young boy trying not to interact with anybody.

I was focusing too hard, as I bumped into some lady. I tripped and looked up, nearly recognizing the familiar sight of the green jacket and red hair with the sunlight covering her face, I shaded my eyes with my hand to get a better look at her. But they deceived me as once I blinked, the woman was completely different. Instead, a woman in an old Victorian dress and flowery headdress stood before me.

“I’m horribly sorry, I wasn’t paying attention.”

“Oh! It’s no big deal, are you lost?”

“No, not really. Actually, I am looking for something though. Do you know where the Grand Grazyna hotel is?”

“Hm, I do know what you’re talking about. I think it should be around the corner of Marseille Street.”

“Great! Thank you very much.”

”You aren’t homeless, are you?”

I stopped in my tracks, I looked down at my dirty white undershirt, jacket, and slacks with only my slip-on shoes. My unkept hair sticking out all over the place, I realized I didn’t give off the appearance of a civilized person. I looked behind me to face her to reply.

“Uh, no. I’m just from the Fourth District. Factory Worker.”

“Oh, I see.”

She awkwardly checked her watch, which was instead a miniature grandfather clock strapped onto her wrist with a pendulum that swung on the bottom. A cuckoo bird popped out, blaring like a radio.

“Well, I am late for a meeting, I hope you do find what you are looking for.”

I spotted her wiping down all her clothes as much as possible and wiping her hands with a long napkin. I rolled my eyes as I turned around and continued making my way to the hotel.

On the way, the police patrol on the street was eying me, they saw my dirty outfit but it wasn’t like I had a cardboard sign and my hat out begging for change, so they just stared like I flew down from a flying saucer. I could tell they were speaking amongst each other, unsure if I was homeless or just poor.

The desk lady at the hotel processed my name into the computer and gave me a key. It was an old antique skeleton key like an old renaissance bank vault, twisting into odd shapes.

“If you go to anyone else’s room, make sure you wipe your shoes first. Let staff know when you leave so it will be immediately cleaned.”

At least there were wallpaper and ordinary lighting anywhere else in the hotel, in my room there was a single fragile ceiling fan, the walls were purely concrete, and the lamp had no shade. I bought the cheapest room possible with a barely working bathroom and only a desk and bed. It seemed like a prison cell as opposed to a hotel room. It was on the same floor as the lobby but at the back near the janitor's closet. Despite its proximity to someone who is meant to clean the room, it was dusty and occasionally there were spiders on the corners of the wall. This visual was something I grew to like a little bit. I liked its rawness and unapologetic brutality, and it inspired me to write as the down presented itself as I stayed in this room.

There is a type of cognitive dissonance when I am simultaneously living but wanting to reject life's intrusions at the same time. When I am in a place with four walls with a top and bottom there is a monster present in its corners stalking me. I know it's there, and I cannot keep my mind off it no matter what I do. The danger doesn't seem to be literal, but it arises when the opportunity presents itself. Those opportunities look like the ones where I stare the monster in the face directly, when I ignore it, when I question the world which I perceive with the thin layer of skin on my naked eyes, or when the down is present in my limbo of emotion and thought. Such a cold and unstimulating room like mine ironically leaves room for as much interpretation of the outside world as I can possibly make. I decided that writing my thoughts down was the best I can make

of my time in trying to negate all what happened to me and experiences from my senses.

I've figured out in my personal life that the point was to try and find the depths of its despair and to break the structure of myself as a human. My mind recognizes the suffering of being, and it shatters itself apart to fade away. The process of unbeing is a long meditation of grappling between the realm of reality and the realm of metaphysics. In my mind, I will cease to exist to myself. Nobody ever knew me, I never knew myself, and I only exist to be an insert in another individual's dreams of life beyond my own. I think, therefore I am not. I looked inside myself, seeing that there was nothing there and I destroyed what could possibly be made.

I was in a locked room where the house slowly rotted and fell apart. My head hurt; I didn't feel it hurt, but I had the context that it was hurting. I couldn't scream, and one of my fingers was a key. I tried to find a way out of the locked room using the key. The key didn't fit the keyhole. I had my face in my palms as I curled into a fetal position until I felt that my mouth was a keyhole. I stuck my finger into it, and I unlocked it. I pulled my finger out to feel a click open inside my head. My cranium was buckled down, and I unbuckled them all. I opened the lid of my head for my brain to spill out. I watched my brain melt on the floor into a black puddle and the rest of the room melted with it. I was left outside in a void of white space that consumed me until a power outage happened in my room with the lights

coming back on., revealing that I was still in fact in “reality”.

I found that there was a beauty in this void, and I sat in it comfortably. I remembered that woman I met once again, I realized that now I am out on the streets I can possibly find and meet her again. But the city is so big, with so many people. I don't know how I'd possibly find her. I couldn't get what she said out of my head, and I felt that I must find her again when I have all the opportunity in the world. I wrote for most of the day, I forgot that I had been sitting in the same desk forever and I hadn't moved to eat, drink, or use the bathroom for anything. When I realized, I immediately felt a pit of starvation in my stomach. I had no money left; my situation was dire.

Over the next two days I left my room to go find ways of finding food. That's when I noticed there was a truck unloading to a grocery store. I waited for the opportunity to make a run for it and quickly take the food, as much as I can carry and easily get away with. I stalked the back of the truck, I ran quickly, taking my chance. I stuffed the inside of my shirt, jacket, and pockets with all the food I can get within five seconds and carried out as much as I can. I was so hungry, my stomach did the thinking and moving for me.

I was not seen or caught by anybody. I sat in the alleyway of a post office building scarfing down the food, while keeping the rest in the pockets of my jacket. I was satisfied, and I got up to go back to

the hotel. But as I was about to leave, a man with a long coat and flat cap appeared before me.

“I know the situation you’re in.”

“I’m not looking for trouble.”

“I can tell. Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Jacques. Would you be willing to do a little job for me?”

“I’m willing to take anything at this point.”

“I need you to send this package to this address.”

“What is it?”

“I’ll be the one asking questions, are you with the secret police by any chance?”

“No?”

“Open your shirt, do you have a wire on you?”

“No, I don’t. Do I really need to open my shirt?”

He opened a part of his coat, revealing a revolver he had stuffed into the front of his pants.
“Yes, you do.”

“Fine.”

I unbuttoned my shirt hesitantly, showing my bare skin to this shady stranger.

He snickered “Alright, I’ve seen enough.”

He handed me the package. "Deliver it to this address, come back to me with the payment and you get your cut. If you open it, look inside, or I hear that the package never got delivered, I will fuck you up. I know how to find you. Got it?"

"Yes, why exactly are you sending me to go do it?"

"Trust me, you'll be safe as long as if you listen to me."

"Before I go, have you seen a woman with red hair and a green army jacket?"

"Possibly."

"Do you know her name? Now that I think about it, she might have been homeless."

"There is a homeless woman named Margret Barbier that sounds somewhat like that, I don't know if that is her though. It can be anyone, this city has too many people."

"Eh, worth a shot."

I delivered a package to an address on the outskirts of the Third District. It took me a while, about forty minutes before I reached the address by bus. I climbed up the flight of stairs to the thirty-fifth floor of the building. I knocked on the door. A woman answered while keeping part of the door locked with a chain and only partially open.

"Hello?"

"Special Delivery from J."

She unlocked the door and opened it fully, revealing a missing eye covered up by an eyepatch. She gave me a stack of cash and a note while taking the box out of my hands.

“Tell him thanks and give him this note too.”

She shut the door quickly without slamming, and as I walked out, a man who was dressed similar to Jacques walked past me on the stairs.

“Good work.” He said quietly. He drew out a long bloom of smoke from his mouth out of his rapidly burning cigarette. The smoke shrouded all sights of the stairs, and the man disappeared without a trace.

As I reached back to Jacques, I gave him the cash and the note.

“She told me to give you this note.”

He read it while expressing a deadpan reaction, he folded it and put it in his pocket, saving it for something.

“Alright, here is your cut. Now go. I can’t be seen with you for too long.”

I walked back to the hotel, where I saw a homeless man in another alley, he was asleep covered in newspapers as blankets. Looking at some of the money I had, I came over and dropped off some of it. As I put the money beside him, I looked at the newspapers that he had on top of him, and I spotted that there was news about my apartment

being burned. I couldn't see much, but there was supposedly a gas explosion, but it was unknown what caused it.

Back in my hotel room, I was lying in bed humming some tunes, humming Chopin because I had no record player nor my collection exclusively consisting of Chopin records. Chopin's music is meant to mirror many things that happened in his life. Chopin made ballades about his own sadness and losses which had slow and solemn moments with energetic and emotional moments throughout. He was heavily inspired by Polish folk music, and he used special emotions and situations to build his ideas from, which for his time were both very unconventional and innovative methods. He did all of this in his music despite by the time his compositions finish, you are left with a feeling that you felt all throughout the song.

The songs have so many varying and unique aspects with transitions throughout where some parts give you hope, and others make you mourn. But you still feel the same melancholic atmosphere as you listen to it and by the time you finish. What does it mean to feel many things but feel nothing but the same bleakness in the end?

The more I hummed Chopin's Funeral March, I grew inspired by it to write some more. It gave me that exact feeling despite the various parts of the song which contrasted. There's a tiny glimpse of hope in the song where Chopin plays a lighter and more charming tune in the middle, it fits the concept of a funeral very well, at least in the eyes of

most. The loss of someone overall darkening the mood with the many implications that come with it, such as the fact that the person is forever gone, that more moments with this person can never be shared again, and that death will come for us all eventually.

But the shimmering light of what is happy about it is distantly heard with its glorious sounds. The light sounds of the piano keys and their individual tunes make something that calms you from the darkness and dramatic impact of the subject and theme at hand. But as the quick sight of hope in the middle of it all ends, the darkness of reality immediately comes back the same way as it did in the beginning. The inspiration for the first time to see things in the perspective of the one who lies in the casket of that funeral that Chopin saw. The funeral dreams, they all came back to me as a topic to write about.

When faces, names, and ideas are forever obscured even after seconds I witness them, there is only something revealing about me entirely. What is this mind if I know nothing about it? What is this body if I feel separated from its heart? What is this soul if I don't feel its presence anywhere from within? These dreams only lead to the takeaway that I will never know what they come from, or what they mean to me. That they are all that is ambiguous, an abstraction that is undetermined by all that is determined to be. Every thought is temporary, and every individual idea dies in isolation when I wake up from my slumber, and upon the first breath that enters through my lungs

another piece of self-awareness leaves. My eyes reflect the sky as I see unknown hands carry my casket, they disappear once I am put into the ground, I can feel that this happened long ago. I watched my room transform around me as I sat on the floor, deep in thought.

I saw nothing, I walked along the walls of emptiness blocking out the sun. The room sat solemnly in my head as a concrete mega block with a window peeking out. The window had a view of everything below. I was a hundred miles into the sky only seeing the bottom as clouds. The window was tinted slightly dark, and my concrete box was suspended by an unknown tower. I noticed in my box that there were cracks in the concrete with moss and weeds growing out of it. As I got on my elbows and knees to see the cracks up close, a dandelion popped out and bloomed. I picked it and stared at it in amazement.

As it sat in my hands, it started turning brown and droopy until it dried and turned to dust. The window slowly started getting darker and much more tinted as I went over and tried wiping it off but to no avail. The room grew darker until I could only feel the walls and the echoes of my suffering. I felt the glass of the window slowly transform into the same cold concrete of the walls.

Chapter 4: Fantaisie Impromptu

Each piece of machinery inside works independently to make something greater. First there are the gears and cogs that all move together, the engine using pistons and energy, the vacuum tubes, interconnected wires, and the circuit board. The circuit board looked like a city layout that all have roads to go to each other. Electricity is the people of the city as they are the ones that power everything. A memory chip sits in the middle of it all. Something so small but something so big. The mechanism all fit inside of a titanium shell in the shape of a humanoid man. But those mechanism are not connected, and the shell is only there to merely hold everything in place. None of it really mattered but the fact the mechanisms are moving is an interesting spectacle.

As time passed, it was a month and a half since I started doing jobs for Jacques, getting more days for my room, stealing food, and writing my thoughts on paper. In one job, Jacques sent me to the first district, which took me hours to get to by bus. The room I delivered to was the room of some businessman, and he was hosting a party with a politician. I was thankfully cleaner at this point as I was spending more and more time in the hotel room with slightly more money increasing from Jacques each time I delivered. Jacques also personally equipped me with a blazer and trilby hat so that I fit in better.

The room was like another form of existence, the white on every piece of furniture, marble pillar, velvet couch, fur rug, and classical

statues with their faces, hands, and genitals chiseled off blended into both a sensory deprived and overloaded experience with the only normal things I can make out were the party goers. Many of which wore masks with their outfits. A woman in a hog-fur blazer sat on the couch with an overflowing glass of red wine. Her mask was a book, and as she looked over at me, the book opened revealing that the text was all scribbles that only slightly resembled letters. The man pouring her drink wore a mask made entirely out of buttons, while the buttons on his blazer were instead screws. The man the delivery was for came over to me, wearing his usual suit and tie.

“Is this from J?”

I nodded.

“Thank you very much, you’ve done good. Here’s a little extra tip...”

He held his hand out hovering above my open palm, dropping a pile of dust onto my hand.

“Oh, I’m sorry sir. My money must’ve expired.”

He held out his other hand, clenched up the same way as the other was, I held my palm out, this time dropping a single gold cube.

“That should be about the same amount. Have a good night.”

I turned around to exit but the door was just as white, blending in with the walls. I patted down

and touched the walls like a mime on imaginary glass, unable to find it.

“Sir, do you need anything?”

I looked over to see another guest with a lightbulb in his mouth. As he spoke, his mouth didn’t move, but the bulb flickered.

“Yes, um, where is the front door at?”

He started walking to the window past all the guests, all of them staring me down in their various diverse faces. One man with the face of a car stereo with antennas on the top of his head tuning and pulling on his knobs while watching me, a woman with an old camera on her chest which its aperture blinked, and an old gentleman on a chair with a foot-long cigar and a gramophone head blowing smoke out of his horn, along with various others transformed by ordinary objects. The guest went up to the window, pulling a handle which was attached to the glass like it were welded on. The glass of the window opened, revealing the same hallway outside. The other side of the glass door was the same ordinary door as before, I shook the guest’s hand for leading me out. He shook it hesitantly, like he was handling a goat at a petting zoo. We both quickly drew our hands at ease and said nothing but stared for a few seconds in silence, along with the crowd of guests, which I now noticed that a crucified man was in the corner bleeding out, he bled wine out his nipples, wounds, and pores, and the wine glasses and bottles all placed perfectly where the red wine would waterfall down to. Their

gaze made the static buzz inside my head drone deep as the room seemingly stretched further out before me.

I slowly moved my gaze over to the hallway and I stepped out, pulling the door behind me. I glanced behind me and saw the white light oozing out the cracks of the door, and I forgot that I was back in the rest of the world as it was fully in technicolor with the familiar gray, smoke, and silver color pallets.

As I got out of the First District, I got on a bus to the second, and I used another bus to travel to the third, now that I had enough to spend on busses as opposed to walking and taking only one bus. The bus driver on my way to the third district had a kind aura around him, he didn't say much other than that he welcomed me in along with everyone else who boarded on, and he left me alone as I slept for most of the ride.

Hours later, when I made it to the third district in the early hours of the morning, I passed by an alleyway on my way to the hotel. A whistling sound, followed by some type of operatic music lured me in to see what was happening. A feeling of queasy concern flowed throughout as I noticed how dark the alley was, and I backed up. I turned around and ran, with a figure who seemingly appeared out of the shadows whacking my shin with a pipe. He dropped the pipe, and pushed me down in a cracking, head-splitting pain.

He scrounged around in my pockets, taking my cut of the money and the gold cube I was tipped with. He disappeared back into the shadows, leaving no trace as I blinked, even when he was right in front of my eyes. I couldn't get up, as I couldn't stand on both legs. I used the pipe the person dropped as a cane, and I checked my pockets to see there was nothing left inside. But I checked my underwear to see the money Jacques was owed still intact.

I slumped over with the pipe in one hand, getting Jacques his money.

"You're late" he said.

"I got mugged."

"My money didn't get stolen, did it?"

"No, I hid it in a safe place. But my money did."

"Okay, good. Sorry about your leg."

"Are you not going to pay back for what I lost?"

"That's not my responsibility. Come by tomorrow and I'll get you another job to do."

I went to sell another package the next night to recover my lost money, and he sent me to one of the poor apartments in the Fourth District. My stomach felt as if it was heavy with stones, causing it to growl like a dog. My ravenous desires led me to walk around rummaging through trash cans and

dumpsters, trying to find what food I can possibly scavenge. I was only able to find a used can with peas at the bottom and part of an old sausage. I scarfed it up, inhaling it all in a matter of seconds. I dropped the can to see how dirty my hands had become, hanging onto the trash as I couldn't stand up with both legs, and my pipe cane on the ground. A tear shed from my eye. I kicked the trash can in rage and sadness, hurting my already broken leg in the process. I collapsed and fell over, attracting the attention of a man nearby.

“Hey, you!”

“It's okay officer, I will leave immediately, please let me be!”

“Are you hungry?”

He came up to me, and he was an ordinary man wearing a worker's outfit with a red-star pin on his lapel. He gave me my pipe cane and helped me back up.

“Uh, yes. Yes I am. Why do you ask?”

“I'll be right back.”

I waited outside the door whilst keeping my distance. He took a minute to come out, but as I started backing up, the door swung open again. The man held bread and a cup of water in his hands, giving it to me.

“Oh, thank you very much sir. Nobody has given me anything like this before.”

“We have more inside, follow me.”

I still kept my distance as I followed him, watching his hands and movements very closely. I kept everything in one hand and one on my pipe cane. He led me into a room where another man dressed similarly to him with a flat cap and worker's outfit stood by a door to a basement.

“Are you with the police or with the family?” He asked.

“No, I'm just hungry.” I replied.

He nodded and opened the door. I slowly walked in and followed the man from before. I saw a light shining in the basement, many people conversing and clapping as if it were a speakeasy or an underground show. As I made my way down, I spotted red banners and portraits of Karl Marx dotting the walls, and a podium with another long red banner behind it, which read “The People's Communist Party.”

I decided I was in the wrong place, I wasn't a political dissident of any kind. But, I was still hungry and I gathered all the food I needed. I was on my way to leave again, but a well-dressed older gentleman with a broom-like beard stopped me as he put his hand on my shoulder behind me.

“Comrade, if it is food you are looking for then leave now for the limited amount you have. If you stay with us, then you will never be hungry.”

I reluctantly agreed, sitting back down in the seats next to other attendees, bread and water in hand. The hall had grown a small but sizeable crowd and it was full of either the most working class individuals who looked as if they came right out of the factory or farm, and some of the most well-dressed intellectuals with books in hand. The same man who had convinced me to stay was the one who came up to the podium and he came up the way a priest comes up to an altar. He adjusted the microphone and collected himself before puffing in his chest.

“Workers of the world unite!” he yelled, raising a fist, growing a cheering wall of noise from the audience.

“Comrades, the day of reckoning for the issue that is the imperial police-state is upon us. We must remember that this government was put into power by us, and we can take it back by any means necessary. The top one percent may hoard all the wealth, the guns, the food, and the powers of the state, but the ninety-nine percent is organizing in the name of a republic for the good of all. The ballots may not list us legitimately, they may not even consider our voices to be possibly heard. But arm yourselves comrades! Arm yourselves with whatever takes blood, food, and land, and whatever makes peace! To our comrades without a home, who have had their whole lives taken away by the weapons of capitalism, your words will not be unheard! Justice will be righteously served! For that, we mourn who we have lost to the hands of the

imperial police forces, we mustn't forget their lives at all. The revolution will carry on through the names of--

It was in this moment that my usual pessimism started to shine through, I found that his speech was too good to be true, and that the revolution he was proclaiming to be the solution of all our issues was already dead. People are too stupid to organize for their own benefit, and the ones who do get ran over under the tracks of the leviathan. There's no place in the world for a utopia, nor are there visions of it to be upheld. Negation only remains to serve those who remain in the limbo of the suffering that is life. The speaker was listing off names of dead revolutionaries and party members, but he caught my ears when he listed one more name that I couldn't ignore.

"In the name of Erich Tolstoy, Levi Luxembourg, Comrade Bernardo, Comrade Dupont, and our most recent death, Margret Barbier."

"Margret..." I felt the name spill out my mouth, could it have possibly been that woman I met? I wasn't buying it, Margret had to be the name of another person I didn't know.

"We organized our meeting in response of the killing by the police. It has since been nearly two months since her death. She was on the streets at night by an apartment near Bordeaux and Vladislav Street when she was grabbed by police and shot in an Alley. She was found with two gunshot wounds in her forehead, and these fascist

pigs ruled it as suicide! Her contributions to our efforts despite being without a home are contributions which cannot go unnoticed. In her efforts of providing food and shelter to homeless people everywhere, she attracted the eyes of the imperialists in charge, and they sent the hounds to go after her.”

I walked over to the candlelight vigil and saw the center photograph. It was clearly displaying the same face I saw that night, green jacket, red hair, and all.

“Food is provided for all; may their revolutionary spirits guide you.”

The speaker ended his speech, and I left without saying goodbye.

I desperately wandered the streets dragging myself around in a haze of disconnection from my body like a puppet on strings. I moved to the bus stop, thinking about what to do next and waiting in sorrow. This woman, Margret Barbier, who I didn’t know anything about strangely infested my mind, but in what way? In the way that I’ll never forget her? I wanted to ask all about what to do with my life now that I was in her position, she had the answers to all my questions, I just needed to find her again and be with her longer. But alas, to no avail. She is dead, deader than this stale emptiness within me.

The bus pulled up to the station, as I heard it far in the distance. It came around the corner of the buildings and road with an orb of light quickly

approaching. I had to decide if I were to go back to the hotel on the bus or continue the job regardless of what happened. I recognized that I would probably die if I didn't go through with my orders, I didn't care anymore. If anything I'd rather die a premature death rather than live on further like this. I entered the bus, and slumped my head over my shoulder, face smudging the glass. The hotel was an hour from the bus stop, as usual I tried to sleep the time away.

"City all to ourselves tonight it seems." Said the bus driver.

Opening my eyes, exhaustingly responding to the driver, I said "It seems so."

"Having a rough night?"

"Usual stuff."

"Yeah, it is what it is. Want a cigarette?"

"I don't smo- Eh, actually, sure."

The sensation of the menthol was tingling cold and stimulating, I coughed at first, but with years of being with the factory smog in the air, my lungs got used to it somewhat quickly. I smoked and though it gave me some relief, it didn't distract me completely. It mainly numbed the emptiness mildly.

"So, what are you up to?"

"Ah, just going back home from work.

"I'm sure you'll find something else you'll enjoy eventually."

“I don’t know about that.”

“Surely you will! How do you think I became a bus driver? Got fired from regular office job now I drive interesting characters like you around all the time.”

“Doesn’t that seem boring or annoying to you?”

“If anything, that office job was more boring, I like moving around a lot. What I’m saying is, you’ll find something you’ll stick to eventually.”

“Just a hypothetical, what would you do if you ended up homeless?”

“I’d probably live with my parents or my family until I find another job.”

“No, I meant if you were stuck on the streets, nobody else to help you out.”

“I don’t really know, haven’t considered a problem like that. Maybe stay at a shelter or something.”

“If only that were possible.”

“Let me guess, you’re homeless, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, how did you know?”

“Had a feeling, most people are asleep at this time. I’m guessing you’re trying to sell whatever is in that box too. Hey, I’m not judging, I’m sorry to hear about your situation.”

“You’re a pretty observable person for someone who is supposed to keep their eyes on the road.”

“Some people say I got eyes on the back of my head, I know one shelter that is open. It’s not really well-funded or anything though and don’t expect quality services.”

“I got a hotel room, I’m fine for the moment.”

“You don’t have to spend anything to stay though unless you want to spend everything on hotel rooms. It’s run by the Communist Party, and it’s supposed to be a hidden shelter as it isn’t registered with the state. It’s near where we were just at. A shame that I wasn’t able to go to their meeting tonight.”

“You are a communist?”

“Sure! Who isn’t nowadays? You aren’t a fed or a mafia plant, right?”

“No, I’m uh- not that. Have you ever heard of Margret Barbier by any chance?”

“Yes, in fact I knew her personally.”

“I met her once, nearby my apartment.”

“Yes, she had a weekly routine of recruiting other homeless individuals to grow the party while also providing people in need with food. That is the ones she could find before the police arrested or killed them at least. I met her on this exact bus, and

soon enough after talking with her, her words grew on me, and I joined with the party.”

“I heard from the meeting that she was also homeless. How did she manage with the police? Until, well, the incident.”

“She was housed often by other comrades. She wasn’t entirely homeless, but she was still targeted by the police since she was a very vocal person in the party. A good three and a half years we had her. She died too young.”

“How old was she?”

“At her time of death, twenty-two.”

“What was she like as a person? Like outside of just being a comrade.”

“A good friend, Margret wasn’t as loud as she was as a party member. She liked to be by herself a lot but still spread joy to others. You must’ve gotten caught up in that spread if you met her on a street that one night. Say, what street did you meet her at?”

“Vladislav street, near where my apartment was.”

“Oh, that’s the street where she died at. You must’ve been the last person she talked to.”

“I don’t know how to feel about that, but lucky me, I guess?”

“It’s also where that apartment burned down. I pass by it daily.”

“Yes, that was where my home was. What is it like now?”

“They are demolishing that part, the explosions caused much of it to collapse. Say, I never got your name.”

“Oh, uh, Francis. Pleasure meeting you.”

“I’m Leon, nice meeting you. In case you ever want protection by other comrades, I’ll give you the address to the underground headquarters. Come visit sometime, but be careful, don’t let anyone else follow you.”

“Thanks. I’ll consider.”

The rest of the night, I sat in silence watching the buildings pass by as the hour pass. The Third District at this time was so empty, with only an occasional car or person passing by. At daylight, it was overwhelming with how many cars and people were rushing out to work, to school, or to go do an activity. The towers suffocated those below more so than the crowds walking like single units shoulder-to-shoulder forcing the individual to be stuck marching along.

The long road ahead reached to the edge of nowhere with my stop on the way. The bus hit its brakes suddenly, screeching the tires like a midnight shriek of bloody murder, as the doors of the bus opened, a surrounding sound of alarms, ringing, cuckoos, timers, and clicks forced my hands on my ears, and one man entered the bus. He had a watch with only a yellow smiley face, a pendulum

swinging below his nose, and a pair of eyeglasses. He took them off revealing his pupils with hour and minute hands ticking clockwise. Each second that passes, the downward spiral spins faster in the circle of the clock's frame. He smoked out of a pipe, with the clocks in his eyes speeding up and ticking faster. The darkness of the night sky visualized the void when looking up from the skyline's walls. As the bus passed all the buildings, I couldn't sleep as I investigated every crevice of the towers, their eyes a thousand blind windows.

I got off the bus and I went into the hotel room, and I contemplated the crossroads between facing death, either by choosing to kill myself or let myself get killed. There was another option, which would require no blood to be spilled.

I took the package and opened it; the box was filled to the brim with different psychedelics and sensual stimulants that any dope fiend would ever desire. I wanted to feel absolutely nothing, where I cannot think a single thought any longer.

I laid on my bed for a while, writing down my thoughts every now and then, ready for the person who finds me on the floor unable to speak without any form of life in the color of my eyes to also find my notes and essays, finally able to understand why I did it. I grabbed a fistful of LSD tabs, and the pills to shove it down my throat. But a force repelled me, what does it look like to go insane? What horrors may I find that my unpeeled eyes will never see? What if I go further into the depths of reality and it ends up being bottomless

and I only endlessly sink deeper or deeper? Do I want this?

There was another way out, and that was to truly end on my own terms. As I laid in bed, I felt the blankets and I unconsciously bunched them up into rope. I got up and twisted them further into a rope form, and I tied it into a noose. It lay in my hands limp but tight. I tied it on the fan, and I hoisted myself up with the chair at the desk. As I got up, I held the noose above my head holding the opening with both of my hands. I nearly put it on my neck until...

Crack! Smash!

A leg on the chair broke as I slipped while I tried to stand with my bad leg, and the fan from the ceiling came down with the noose as I pulled it, nearly hitting me as I was on my bed.

"If only that fan hit me." I thought to myself.

I broke the shitty fan and chair, and knowing the conditions of the room I imagine the hotel wasn't going to do anything about other than throw them out and charge me extra. I snuck out of the hotel instead without paying. I decided I was too tired to kill myself, I didn't want to. At least not for now. I went to the address on the card Leon gave me earlier, as I picked it out of the trash and uncrumbled it on my way out.

Chapter 5: Ballade No. 4 in F Minor

The city at this time of night in all its totalitarian and monolithic qualities is interesting, in a way. I am looking down upon the grounds as I sit from a tower above, becoming the building itself. These are not buildings, they are gods. Gods which reveal the earth as a raw deity which these smaller and lesser humans have crafted. I am one of many sitting in the endless windows contemplating this progress.

After a few months of living with the communists in their shelter program, I attended their meetings more often. I was well fed, I was encouraged to write, I was given a proper cane and received treatment for my leg which eventually healed completely, I kept the cane because I looked stylish with it. I was even given a small allowance for food, they didn't have much, but I was grateful. They felt like family that I never had before in my life, even if I didn't know every member all that well at the end of the day. I grew class conscious, and their ideology eventually started to grow on me, it was a hopeful light in a world of darkness. I wasn't sure how I lived before after joining, as I couldn't imagine not living to be a die-hard political partisan, and a classless society under the rule of the proletariat was something to die for.

A pocket-sized version of *The Communist Manifesto* was always in my blazer pocket by my heart whenever I went out to buy food, participate in party activities of selling books, newspapers, and pamphlets. Whenever I wasn't writing I was nose-deep into it. The party gave them out for free along with the *Communist Manifesto* to all members, by the time the next meeting occurred in my first week of joining, I knew how to recite quotes and page numbers like a preacher of proletarian dogma.

Leon wasn't at every meeting due to his bus driver duties, but I grew to know him a little bit more over time. Leon told me he enjoyed music too, I told him about Chopin from how he placed his hands on his piano keys, to the fact his heart was given to a church in Poland while he was buried in Paris.

"If you like Chopin, another composer I recommend is Liszt. They're somewhat similar in sound."

"I know Liszt, I like him. Not as much as Chopin of course though. Did you know Chopin and Liszt personally knew each other?"

"No, I didn't know that. Your knowledge of music is quite big, do you play any instruments?"

"No, not really. I fantasized about it a couple times, but I never had the money or time to do so."

“Ah, that’s a shame. You seem like you’d be a good musician, the worst experiences do make the best art they say” He laughed.

“I do write though.”

“What do you write? Stories? Poems?”

“They could be made into some if I tried hard enough, but no, I just write to visualize my thoughts. Mostly philosophy and such.”

“That’s how a lot of writers start off. Have you read Dostoevsky?”

“No, I hear good things about him though.”

“He seems like he would be right up your alley if you want good stories with things to think about too.”

“I’ll give him a try eventually. I’m reading Marx again.”

“You’ve been rereading him for many weeks now, that is some dedication. What exactly about him leads you to read him as much as you do? Many other members call it a day after reading the manifesto.”

“Marx makes the world make sense again the more I realize his words are truly grounded in reality that he understood the basis of the downness of life.”

“Downness? What do you mean by that?”

“It’s hard to explain, but I come to realize to realize that I don’t know how I can truly live without a political entity. There is some form of direction even if I don’t know where it leads. I’m not even sure how I lived or thought before then.”

“That was only a few weeks ago, you were probably the same deep down.”

Leon was probably right about this; I don’t feel like I changed truly in anything, it’s all just new discoveries and new days which pass by. At the podium, the same bearded speaker from every other meeting made an announcement.

“Comrades, we will rally and make our presence known, Prime Minister Duke Von Leopold will be holding a speech in the First District a week from now. We will make sure the voices of the proletariat are heard directly by the imperial beast and his guards. However, I must urge you all to not use violence. We must save the revolution for when the time is right. Other comrades need our help, and we cannot jeopardize that.”

The concept of violence against the oppressor sprung into my mind, it had been around for a while, but this act of vengeance suddenly came into mind as I felt the moments to prepare for attack coming to mind. Leon tapped me on the shoulder in mid thought.

“You alright? You seem frozen up.”

“Uh, yes, sorry I was just processing. Will you be there?”

“I don’t think so, it’s a massive disappointment. But you’re going, right? Tell me all about it when you get back to me.”

“You ever wonder why we can’t just stage a revolution now?”

“Yes, I hope to see it one day but now is not the time. We have duties to take care of first.”

“Well, what if the revolution never happens? Do we sit idly by only thinking and not doing?”

“The acts you are doing now are small actions of revolution that contribute to something greater. You’ll understand that the longer you stay.”

“I’ll take your word for it. You got a cigarette?”

I, in fact, did not take his word for it. Not even a little bit. In the night, I sat at my desk as I wrote and read *Das Kapital* again, the concept of revolution fascinated me, just seeing those powerful people get what they deserved. I figured out something about myself, I wanted to end another life somehow, in some way. I detested the appearance of this thought in my mind for the longest time, but it grew to become a desire that I wanted to fulfill and embrace. I didn’t want to just kill any regular person though, I wanted to feel no remorse. To kill someone who truly deserved it. The Prime Minister would be a great target, I wanted to see him bleed out in his stupid royal-blue and gold presidential uniform. That was made apparent to me the day he announced his address three weeks ago.

Maybe with my single shot, and my subsequent death after, a revolution would spawn in my name and soon the heads of the bourgeois would be rolling onto the streets from the polished blades of guillotines, or on pikes as we march out of their crumbling towers. Bloody revolution would become not just the means, but the desirable ends.

Retribution must be done in the name of Margret Barbier, and for myself for what has happened to me, this capitalistic and blind society has brought me and many others to this level and there is payback that must be done, and I hope to be the one who carries it out. Leon told me more about Margret, how she wrote like I did, how she came from a middle-class background evident by her knowledge of classical literature. But also how she took a cop's gun one time. It's rumored that the gun is in a box in the main office of the party headquarters in case the time for it is needed. Or it is hidden away in a safe somewhere.

One night, I searched the office for the gun after night hours. I looked inside every box, in every one there were files, files, papers, and more files. No sign of a stolen gun anywhere. I checked the last box, and of course there was nothing in there either. It was the moment I tried putting it back into its shelf that I dropped the box, causing a loud crash. I shuffled grabbing up every paper, and I stopped for a moment when I felt one of the floorboards come loose as I lifted a paper off of it. I knocked it a little, its echoes and the tiny gaps that I

could see when I squinted indicated it was hollowed out.

With a letter opener on the desk, I lifted the board up and it revealed a stack of cash, important documents, and lastly, a Walther P99 Pistol. I picked it up, feeling the cold weight of the metal and barrel in my hands with the weight of the person who once owned it, the gun was loaded as I pulled the slide, revealing the rounds inside. I put the gun into the inside pocket of my blazer. As I sat silent for a moment, putting the floorboard back, I heard the tapping of someone's shoes coming closer down the hall.

Tap, tap, tap.

I quickly gathered every document, making sure to put them in every correct file. The shoes grew closer, now the sounds of clogging as they neared clearly revealing they were high heels. I put the box of files back onto the shelf it was on as I heard the knob of the door start turning. Quickly, I crouched down into the square crevice of the desk underneath. As I fit myself in, the door opened and the click of the lights. A woman passed by the desk, making sure nothing fell over. I couldn't make anything out other than her long, glossy black high heels. I couldn't believe she didn't spot me.

"Must've been somewhere else." She muttered to herself.

I crawled out of the desk after a few minutes of waiting, creaking the door open and checking that the gun was still in my blazer, I peaked out to

check if the coast was clear and I snuck out back to my room. I hid the gun in my nightstand, with various papers I was writing on and my packs of cigarettes top to hide it.

In the restaurant I was eating breakfast in at the Third District, I noticed a man come in from the table behind me. His pale skin and thinning hair underneath his flat cap struck a nerve with me the moment I saw him with a group other similarly dressed gentlemen. He was wearing an oddly familiar faded tan trench coat from before.

"It's Jacques!" I whispered to myself.

Since then, I didn't have the same appearance as I once did while on the streets, I now had a stubble beard and I got new clothes from the services of the Communist Party wearing a worn gray blazer and dress pants with an egg-white button down underneath as opposed to the dirty white undershirt and slacks the day I met him. I paid no attention to him, continuing to read *Das Kapital* as I waited for my food. I felt like he was watching me, I turned my shoulder over for a moment and indeed he was. But the moment I looked; he turned his head away looking back down at his menu. I made sure I ate quickly, and if I were to dine and dash in order to quickly escape Jacques I would be making myself more suspicious to him. Besides, it was in broad daylight. I doubt he would have me killed right here and now. So, I paid for my food.

As I remained vigilant about his presence, I even overheard his order,

“May I get the escargot?”

“Escargot?” I asked myself in disgust.

Snails? What was he going to eat next? A toad?

“Would you like any appetizers?”

“Two frog legs please, thank you.”

Close enough.

As the soup I ordered was served, I lifted my cigarette out of my mouth to squish it into the ashtray, some of the ashes fell inside the soup. I stared at it, in dread. Though I imagined what Jacques was eating was not much better than that, so I ate it anyways. I overheard Jacques briefly conversing with his own comrades.

“We can’t say much here, but I will give you all this note. It has some damning info about one member in the Red Underground. She said one of them was a bus driver and the other was a man she didn’t know. She was accused and threatened by both of them, and he accused her of the death of two members in that apartment explosion a while ago. A close call to say the least. The reds are closing in.”

“Who is the bus driver?”

“We don’t know at the moment, but he will lead us to other targets.”

“What should be done to him?”

“Keep him alive somehow, he is more useful to us living. But make sure he faces justice.”

I walked out with my cane and book in hand after I finished, I tried not to look Jacques in the eye, but I couldn't resist as I quickly glanced over my shoulder only to see that he wasn't looking at me at all. I breathed easier and walked a little slower on my way back to my room across the street.

In the nights preparing for the day that Jean Leopold held his speech in the First District, I prepared for when I put a bullet into his head. I practiced aiming a gun, in the mirror I positioned myself to stand and aimed. “This is for Margret” I said to myself, pulling the trigger of the unloaded gun. It occurred to me that people were probably going to want to know why I killed him. So, I wrote.

Our city is built to sustain its own class segregation like a caste system, and all of the quadrants determine how valued you are. The homeless who have been put down by the general public will take arms and soon rise with the rest of the working class. Those united from the Fourth, the Third, and even the Second District will destroy class and those who bring about its institutions. If I went down, the Prime Minister will go down with me, as I planned that the moment after I shot him, I would shoot myself quickly too, in order to make sure that there were no chances of captivity or being

neutralized. There were five days until the day happened. Enough time to speak my mind.

Chapter 6: Ballade No. 1 in G Minor

Blood Will Shed: An Essay by Francis Honza

In the means to revolt against the system of class, there are sometimes where the action of revolt could be both the means and the ends. Even if our revolution is never achieved, eternal revolution by the blood shed by individuals is enough to suffice the demand for change.

Nobody will remember the Prime Minister's words, but the sound of his dying voice. As the ghost of his body leaves, so will start the revolution. My manifesto and all of my completed writings sat on my desk neatly stacked all in order.

Lenin once said that revolution can never be forecast; it cannot be foretold; it comes of itself. Revolution is brewing and is bound to flare up. Our numbers are tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, and we are hundreds of millions worldwide. Our revolution will start like a day of accension for us, but a day of reckoning for our bourgeois enemies. A global revolution will unite the people under a banner of freedom, justice, and liberation.

The route I planned to take is to take the bus to the First District at five o'clock, the time to take from the Third to the First was around four hours. I would arrive around nine just in time for the speech to start at ten-thirty.

The utopia after the revolution will be a stateless and classless society, where the sovereign insincerity and monotonous greed of capitalism, imperialism, and class will dissolve along with their shackles. A democratic socialist republic will form under a dictatorship of the proletariat in order to serve the people.

On my way to the bus stop in the Third District, the streets were empty as it was a weekend, and nobody was up for work. I walked out with my coat and blazer to shield me from the cold breeze of the night, The Communist Manifesto in the pocket of my blazer, and the gun in the inner pockets of my coat.

By the time you all read this, you will know me for either attempting to kill or successfully killing our dear Prime Minister Duke Von Leopold, and I will most likely also be dead. Let this not serve as a suicide note, but serve as the catalyst for a new revolution as a neutron star forms out of a dead one.

I stood at the bus stop on the corner of the street, in the cusp of two roads. The cold breeze blew the bottom of my coat behind my legs like a cape, and the single lamp post on the side of the street by the bus stop illuminated the single area I

stood by. I sat down, contemplating all that has happened and all that would unfold after. I could see the buildings in front of me transform into a wilderness covered in vines, with grave markers sticking out of the ground. The sun set in the background as the grave markers extended into a grassy land beyond. With my own grave from my dreams being amongst it all.

I sat in anticipation, bouncing my leg up and down, cracking my knuckles, just twitching at the thoughts of my plans. I reloaded and checked if the gun was loaded hundreds of times over. I paced, paced, and paced until I looked at my watch. I realized that the time was four fifty. The dawn was back in all its omnipresence, flowing with the anxious early morning.

“Hey, you! You remember me?!”

A familiar face stood like a statue darkened by night, revealed as a silhouette only recognizable by his voice. He had a revolver in one hand, pointing it at me as I had my hand in my pocket touching the bottom of my gun’s grip.

“Jacques?!”

He yelled once more, “Don’t mess with people’s shit next time, fucker!”

Blam!

A single shot rang out as I automatically pulled my gun out and closed my eyes without thinking. He collapsed to the ground. I walked over

as I saw that I shot him in the chest and blood oozed from his mouth as he drowned and gurgled making red spit bubbles which fountained out of his mouth. His skin grew pale as the moon in the night, illuminated by the stars and streetlights. His eyes were wide open staring me a with a thousand yards, nearly bulging out as he gasped for air, as he desperately tried to cover the hole in his chest. His bloody hands pulled on my pants. As he pulled himself up closer to me, and he coughed and vomited his blood all over, I pointed the barrel nearly point-blank directly in his forehead.

Blam!

His brains splattered behind him, creating a crimson puddle outlining the rest of his body. He immediately slammed to the ground and the gasps stopped with only the

Drip

Drip

Drip

of the hole in his forehead reverberating throughout the walls of the city. The puddle of blood below his head became the colors of the universe as they expanded and flowed off the curb and into the road. I could hear his heart was still beating somehow, and an exhale out of his mouth. The coldness of his body became much more frigid than the early hours of the morning and its winds. I turned around as I heard frantic and fast footsteps from around the corner coming my way, an alerted

police officer came over with his own gun out, standing shakily with the light revealing terror in his eyes.

“Stop! Freeze!”

Blam! Blam! Blam!

I shot mindlessly into the policeman’s direction, and he also started to collapse and bleed out. The policeman while on the ground tried shooting at me again, I fired back until I ran out of bullets, and I dropped the gun by Jacques’ pale and velvet red body. The shots stopped shortly after I started running away, with the only sound present being my muffled footsteps overshadowed by the ringing in my ears. I ran as far as I possibly could from the scene, running half a mile away in a short time, fearing I would get caught.

As I walked around mindlessly, purposefully stepping in puddles in order to clean off the blood on my pants, the surroundings once again sickened and overwhelmed me. I had trouble walking, and I nearly collapsed at the thought of the deaths I caused, even if they truly did deserve it. I walked through the alley to escape a sleepwalk of sickness, a haze of dancing in the darkness with death by my side. I walked, walked, walked, trudged, trudged, and trudged until I fell over, then all I did was crawl, crawl, and crawl. I looked up to see a wall in front of me. Brutalist solid dirty gray concrete wall all around, choking out anything in color. I moved my body shakily and freakishly into the corner

looking into three paths that both led down various turning and unknown paths.

The one way out was miles away, but the routes made no sense. I cowered in fear not knowing what to do, hastily throwing myself into one path. The weight on my back was unbearable to stand with, and the shadows of the night created spires in the ground sharply piercing into the white orbs of my eyes. I coughed, and I felt cold. I coughed something up, some unknown mucus that disappeared with the ground beneath me. Each step I turned the gaze of many that looked at me in horror, contempt, and disturbance. The tears in my eyes blinded me as I looked up, and my path was blocked. I rested my head against it and closed them, until I opened them and the corridors and mazes disappeared as I saw the familiar sign of the Grand Grazyna. I went inside, sneaking past the front desk by going through the alley door into the stairwell.

I climbed the spiraling stairs of the seventy-story building, from the bottom to the top. I looked up and feel the monumentality of the concrete monolith of steps staring back down at me. I step, step, step, step, step. Like climbing a mountain, it got colder, and I lost my breath easier. I made it to the door of the top of the roof. I turned the knob, only to find the door was locked. I came to realize the top three floors were closed off for parties and for the hotel staff only.

I walked back down and instead opened the sixty-seventh-floor door. I fell over as I tripped in

the doorway, and I hit my nose. Blood oozed out, making my head feel much more empty, like my brain was leaking out. I pounded on the windows as hard as I could, my knuckles were bruised, bloodied, and I only managed to make a little crack in the middle of the window. I sobbed out blood, sweat, and tears as I curled into a fetal position on the ground. I looked over to see the endless hallway so empty and quiet after I got up and stopped crying. I noticed from the corner of my eye, a single bright-red fire extinguisher. I grabbed it, and battered the window with it with all strength that I had left, the crack grew larger and more cracks started to form.

Smash!

The glass flew everywhere, and I can see the extinguisher was freefalling not for a long time, it flung around in the wind all the way down and exploded on impact, leaving a small white cloud.

I felt the wind of the open door the was standing there before me, a door full of possibilities or to sleep eternally. I saw that opportunity and walked towards it in anticipation, I walked to that new door and I fell right through it.

The sky felt liberating from the pain I once felt, my coat flapping with the wind like the wings of an eagle. When I saw how fast that extinguisher hit the ground, I was expecting it would be a quick death, but slowly the ground grew closer and all I could think about was how small everything seemed from when I was at the top. Nobody screamed as

my body was shrouded by the darkness of the night, and no eyes were there to gaze upon the sight of my flying body. By the time the ground grew closer, I felt a panic set fire to my heart, I clawed at the air, and to the walls. My eyes closed to imagine everything away like all things in this reality, but to no avail.

Crack!

Chapter 7: Waltz in C-Sharp Minor

I had that dream again, I leapt off a building and I had killed myself. My whole body hurt. In that dream I jumped out of a building and a light that even the sun couldn't provide enough of was shining before me when I hit the ground. Nothing hurt when I landed, but now my body is sore all over, and now I can barely walk. I got up limping and stumbling from my creaky bed, passing by the mirror, I quickly noticed that I no longer bared any semblance of a human. I was only of the structure of one, reduced to bare bones and all. My skeletal hands touched my face on impulse, feeling the grooves of the bare cheekbone and gaping eye sockets. I could not tell what I was expressing as there was nothing to express with in the first place, and I had no heart to feel. I dropped to my knees once the pain in them had become unbearable, and I got a good view underneath my bed.

There was a dirty shovel that had clear tracks of mud leading up to it. I used what little strength I had left to pick up the shovel from under the bead and I followed its tracks. I opened the front door onto the porch, the whole house rattled as I opened and closed it. I heard a window or some type of glass shatter when I closed it again. I limped my way using the shovel as a cane and followed the tracks, over time the tracks were more difficult to see as the grass in the meadow I walked through grew taller and taller. The grass was consuming me almost whole, and I waded past it like I were using an oar on a boat. With the shovel, I crawled below the grass until I reached anything. Suddenly, the grass on the other side was shorter. I climbed out of the grass and stumbled into the new patch of land.

The sun was shining deep into the sockets where my eyes used to be, and the glare obscured anything I can see. I picked myself up with the shovel and I saw straight ahead a newly dug grave. The gravestone had moss on its sides and when I looked inside, I saw a coffin that was open bearing nothing in it. I stepped closer to read what it said. It had some name on it. The name said "Francis Honza." I remembered everything again the moment I saw the name. It was mine. I now know I may be dreaming, or I was dead. Suddenly that pain in body had went away, only to be numbed entirely. I no longer bear any semblance of a human, but truly I never really was one in the first place. The absence of pain that is left now created a feeling I cannot describe. I don't feel good, I don't feel anything whatsoever.

A sense of looming discontent rattles my back and missing brain despite how I've gotten everything I wanted. The absence of pain, the absence of will, the absence of any human life or form, and the absence of myself entirely. The problem is that I still exist to myself and now the world stands before me.

I lay in my casket, the rationalization of despair led me to simultaneous action and inaction. The inaction of emotion and thought, and the action of finding a way out through means of madness or death. I take the action of once again imagining myself, but happy and content. I am in the flesh with the purpose of myself and interpreting my own physics, my own history, and my own law.

There wasn't anything behind it all. The structure of the world and the version of the world to the sentient human species is all but lies which go away the moment I refuse to believe it. It's all mine, the world is my plaything and mine to explore and conquer. Snow fell from the sky and into my coffin, it oddly felt warm, and it was as soft as the blankets of the purest fluff imaginable, and it was all piling up and surrounding me. I was simply content with where I was. I curled up in the warmth of the paleness before me. I became consumed as I felt that time fell apart, and I no longer remembered it for how it looked or sounded. Nothing passed by, nothing mattered anymore. I felt something come through as I became further engulfed by the void of existence and non-existence, it wasn't an emotion; but it was instead laughter, for no reason

whatsoever. I couldn't laugh for I had no tongue, but that poppy sensation created a warmth out of thin air on my dry bones. The white became overwhelming and consumed everything before me.

I am content.

I am content.

I am content.

I am content.

I am content.

I am content.

Chapter 8: Nocturne in C-Sharp Minor

You aren't reading this in any form, you only merely understand through shapes. An image means nothing, you read nothing and you speak nothing to me.

I woke up from some dream I had, I don't remember any details about it other than the light which came in the end. I looked around me, and at my body. I was in a bed with a cast all over the lower part of my body and a brace on my back, there were wires connected to different parts of my body all over. My body was absolutely still, and I could not move much even if I tried. A heart

monitor was beeping, a respirator was huffing and puffing, up and down, and there were several IVs of various liquids going into my veins. The room was cold all over, and it was a familiar sight of white concrete covered in tiles. The room was so small that I felt packed into a postage box. A button was sitting beside me, I used the tiny bit of strength left in me and directed it to my index finger. I clicked it nearly cracking my finger. I clicked repeatedly in ten-second interludes.

“Nurse!”

“You’re finally awake! Can you speak? Your mouth wasn’t badly damaged. You landed on your back on a cloth overhang and fell off that, the landing made you unconscious and you hit the left side of your body on your fall. You almost died on us numerous times, but we brought you back. You were in a comatose state for a week.”

“How? I vividly remember that I fell and hit the ground solidly...Or wait, did I?”

“You may be misremembering; head trauma can cause a lot of memory loss.”

“I can picture it in my mind, but nothing felt real about it. Wouldn’t a fall from that high up kill me either way?”

“You fell only from the fifth floor of the hotel and were caught by an overhang, so no.”

“But I fell from the Sixty-Seventh floor.”

“If you did, then you wouldn’t be alive right now.”

I sighed and laid my head back down. It was odd how I survived as I did not remember anything which caught me on the way down, I just remembered only hitting the ground and feeling as if I was asleep after.

“Now your limbs on the left side of your body will take months to fully recover. We couldn’t find any relatives associated with you or any previous medical records, so you’ll be under our full care. I regret to inform you, however, that the police will detain you once you fully recover.”

“Too bad that fall didn’t kill me.”

The nurse left and I was completely left to my own thoughts. Every day there were visits from the doctor or nurse to check up on my health or feed me, the usual stuff. I was practically a statue, just observing anything my vision could reach.

Observation One:

The processed slop which was given to me that morning for breakfast had a foul odor and taste which I nearly coughed up the moment the nurse spoon-fed it to me. It was colorless, not even a grey, brown, or egg-white type of colorless that I’d normally see, but a colorless and dull mix-mashed color that you’d get from mixing all types of oil paints together. It’s utterly repulsing in every way,

but I couldn't stop eating it. The dullness reminded me that it was at the end just a consumable that was made with the purpose of filling my stomach. So, I just reminded myself that the taste of it was just meaningless senses and stimulations to my brain. My mind imagined it like it were a tasteless pudding instead of the muddy gruel that it was. Turning off my taste buds revealed a truth that the slop was a symbol showing that the matter of which we consume all boils down to this by its very end. A material meant to consume and sustain myself and nothing more, thus indifference is the best appetite. But when foods have the best savory flavors, that is when to enjoy life a little bit more. For my dessert after dinner on my second night, I had a fruit smoothie which was very sweet.

Observation Two:

The old television on the far-end of the room was stuck on one channel, and that was the game-show channel. How someone loses all the money they had earned so far because of a single mistake, or a single bad chance and still doesn't break their smile for any other negative emotion whatsoever leaves me with a feeling of some form of confusion. Not a confusion in the sense of wondering how they do it, but more so a confusion of how I felt about it, and more so what was going on in their head when they heard that they had lost thousands. What possible way can I justify smiling and laughing it off after? The irrationality and absurdity of it was so confusing that everything

from the comical amount of money to it being lost from one fatal miscalculation was as if I were watching a cartoon or a comedy skit, and I figured out why they laughed and joked about it after. To keep the game going, they had to laugh.

Observation Three:

I knew my fate was going to be in the hands of the police the moment I got out of the hospital, but I couldn't do anything about it and neither was there any possible way for me to escape it in the state that I was in as well as the escape and suicide prevention measures that were placed against me. Normally, I'd try and make the most of my time but what was there to be done other than to eat, sleep, and watch tv? I remembered that while employed and while I had a roof over my head, I essentially did the same thing but not in a bed-ridden state as my mind at work was either deep in my empty thoughts or on autopilot. I could've written, drawn something, work on puzzles, or used my telescope to look at stars for once, but I didn't. I was just thinking without any action the whole time, and that was what I was doing up to the point too.

Eventually, I was able to use my arms again, but my legs were both still in casts. I asked for paper from the nurse and I wrote my thoughts down, and visualized what was in my mind. I had a psychologist come up to me later on to ask about my mental state conveniently as I was writing them

down, as well as provide me with puzzles to stimulate my mind more.

“I’ll talk to you about what led you into this moment, and what caused your attempted suicide. You don’t have to say it all now, you can write on your paper about what happened and what your thoughts are. You can tell me every event up until this very moment now.”

“Well, I had a job and house-“

“What job?”

“Office stuff, I’m not really sure what it was all for. I applied through a newspaper ad. That’s not the point though, I lost it all in a fire. Then I was homeless and making money by selling drugs for some guy. I was a communist party member for a while, and then I killed the drug dealer and a cop by accident. I didn’t want to live any longer and that’s what led up to this.”

“What do you think of all of it now? Do you still wish for death?”

“We’re all going to die anyways, and mine specifically will lead to nothing else in the end. I’m going to be detained by the police the moment I leave the hospital in a few months and there’s nothing I can do to stop it.”

“Are you a nihilist?”

“I guess so, I consider myself to be a communist more though.”

“Your writings that were recovered from your room make it seem that way.”

“What exactly did you read?”

“I read them all, they were taken as evidence by the police, and I was given permission to review them. We know the process of your mind, you seemed to plan on murdering the Prime Minister. But you instead shot a drug dealer and a policeman. I cannot ask about the details of the crime, but I would like to know what your reasoning behind this.”

“That man attacked me; I killed him in self-defense. I killed the cop by accident, thinking it was another man trying to attack.”

“I see, I’ll just let you know now that the police won’t be hearing about that. All of this is confidential info. Going into more of your writings, you embrace death a lot in concept. Some of them are written almost poetically. What would you say is the main origin for your thoughts?”

“I never met my biological parents, they passed away in an accident, and I was in the care of my grandfather who also passed away when I was seven, and I was put into a foster home with foster parents which I never connected to that much. I left when I was twenty-two after college, and I moved into the apartment that eventually burned down eight years later. I seemed to have the raw end of the stick that most people don’t usually get, so I guess that’s where my personality came from.”

I suddenly remembered a day when I was at the age of sixteen. I was relaxing for a whole day in a bath at a spa just thinking of anything. I was listening to Frederic Chopin's Nocturnes and Sonatas on repeat on a record player just out of reach. There was a moment of revelation, Chopin's Funeral March came on and from afar I could smell the fumes of opium coming from a nearby opium den. I don't think I had the same effects of smoking it but inhaling the fumes gave me a relaxed feeling even more than I was in the bath. This day in my life, it was one of very few moments I didn't feel the down grasp my small, insignificant body, it was the most relaxed moment I had ever been. The feeling of ecstasy and the somberness of Chopin combined into an indescribable feeling. It was a love of the emptiness behind me, and a deep desire to isolate myself and feel the cold embrace of the world outside the very bath I was dazed in.

The same hour I left the bathhouse I went to sleep in the forest on the ground and undo all my cleanliness and blanketed myself in the purity of the air. I loved it, I loved feeling as if I were inanimate.

"As for your other question I think that if I were never conscious, I would never be aware of this world I was in. It's as simple as that."

"And why is it that you no longer want to be conscious?"

"As humans we all confront our deaths in mind and treat it as a passing moment that will inevitably come into fruition, but it isn't until the

very hour of it that we regret what we have done with our lives. We do not understand what happens beyond it, and what it all means to us regardless of how we interpret it doesn't matter in the end. We all know that deep down, despite what we tell ourselves, we're sadly smart enough as a species to know this."

"Your mind is certainly an interesting specimen. Now that there isn't much left for me to ask as we know your general background, what led you to try and take your life?"

"I had no home, job, life, or any dignity left. I killed two people. What else did I have left to lose?"

"Okay, that's what I was trying to find the answer to. I'm going to prescribe you some medication to help alleviate your thoughts."

That was the last I had heard of the psychotherapist; I did not take any of the medicine she gave me. What would I ever be if I thought normally instead of living my own delusion? It's just not me.

One morning, Leon who wasn't driving the bus that day came to visit me. It was the only time he visited me, I guess he didn't want to associate with me for a while after hearing what I did.

"Hello Francis."

"Leon? What are you doing here?"

"I came to visit you, comrade."

“I thought you didn’t want to associate with me anymore.”

“I did for a while, but I just wanted to know why. I know the two murders you did were out of fear, but why did you want to kill the Prime Minister?”

“Revolution starts with revolution. It must start somewhere; it must start sometime. What better time than now?”

“You know that we are not fully organized for revolution yet. We have duties to take care of for our members, as we did for you.”

“And what? Wait until the capitalists crush the revolution?”

“They won’t crush us when we’re fully organized.”

“Well, let’s just agree to disagree.”

“No, if you did what you have done you may have compromised our movement. I need you to realize that it was a bad decision.”

“Well of course I know it’s a bad decision, I’m in bed with broken legs, two murder charges, and the wish for the sweet release of death to take me. I know I shouldn’t have done it!”

“Alright, I get it. Fine, I just want to see how you are doing.”

“I mean, just look at the state I’m in. I’m recovering sure, but I’m slowly dying. As we all are.”

“True.”

“Ah, sorry to be a downer. You got a cigarette?”

“No, uh, we can’t smoke in here.”

“Those damn fascists.”

“If you go to prison, I’ll smuggle some in for you. Up my ass if possible.”

“If I get down that low, whatever god exists, please help me.”

“Every sentence you say, you remind me of Margret a little bit more.”

“Did Margret keep secrets often?”

“Yes, many people do. What about you?”

“If they’re secrets, then obviously I’m not going to tell.”

“Fair enough.”

“Where did Margret exactly come from? How did she join?”

“Well, that is one of those secrets. We don’t know much about her background, she just appeared at meetings one day and eventually became one of our most vocal members in

organizing and carrying out jobs for the party. She was a pretty enigmatic figure.”

“She was one of a kind it seems like.”

“Indeed she was.”

He stood in silence for a moment, before he checked his watch.

“I’m about to leave now, before I go, if I don’t visit you often don’t think much of it. It’s just my bus route schedule again. I’ll try and visit as much as I can.”

“It’s alright, you got a life outside of mine. Do whatever you want.”

“I’ll keep you updated on party activities and all. Goodbye!”

Chapter 9: Scherzo No. 2

It had been months since my hospitalization, my body recovered, and I was wheelchair bound. I recovered enough that I was able to leave the hospital, which also meant getting arrested. I complied silently and was put into a police van, eventually sitting in an old musty-yellow room for further questioning. It was an hour of sitting idly, I didn’t know what to expect.

The door of the interrogation room slowly opens, and out comes a man in a suit and badge.

“Mr. Honza, I have some questions to ask you. The door will be open in case you want to leave, you can leave any time you’d like. We have sources from unnamed individuals and evidence acquired from the hotel room about you and your mental state. Any objections?”

“None.”

“We will start off with some questions. Simple ones, your answers will be recorded on this audio recorder so answer truthfully.”

He clicks the recorder.

“What is your name, age, birthday, and height?”

“Francis Honza, twenty-five, February twenty-ninth, six feet tall.”

“Occupation?”

“None as of now. Before I was an office worker, and after I was a member of the Communist Party.”

“What did you do in the office?”

“I couldn’t understand much of what I did, I think I was working either for a shipping or packaging company. I don’t really remember the name; everyone there just called it “work” and there was no sign or logo which stated what it was. It was all in the company center of the Second District. I do remember the name of the building and what my

ID was. I was employee number four-three-four-seven of Building J-Five.”

“Good, why did you leave?”

“I left involuntarily. My home burned down.”

“Was there anything to help you?”

“The shelters were full. I couldn’t get in. They wouldn’t allow me in. But I went into a shelter provided by the Communist Party, and I did work for them for a while.”

“We got some of your writings and reviewed them. Care to explain your plans?”

“I wished to kill the Prime Minister.”

“Okay, why?”

“Because I wanted to.”

“You had a whole manifesto as to why, care to explain it?”

“I hoped a revolution would spawn in the wake of the assassination, this was my statement to the world calling for the masses to rise.”

“Okay, well then why did you kill two innocent men?”

“One of them was Jacques, a criminal who wanted to kill me. He pulled a gun on me. The policeman was accidental.”

“Right, is that so?”

“Do you not believe me?”

“Well, I don’t know what to believe of you yet. How do I know everything you said wasn’t a lie? Couldn’t remember what you do for work? Seem suspicious.”

“On the word of god, I am not lying.”

“But you don’t believe in god.”

“I didn’t know what else to say to appease you.”

“Smartass. Okay, what were your duties in the Communist Party?”

“I sold newspapers and pamphlets on the street. That is about it as I was a new member.”

“You said you knew Jacques, what exactly was he trying to kill you for?”

“I worked for him, and I fucked up a job he sent me out to do.”

“Are you aware of what organization he was possibly part of?”

“One day I saw him with a group of other men that were all dressed alike. They held a meeting to discuss something. I wasn’t entirely sure what it was about.”

“Interesting, are you aware of any potential ties between them and any other organization?”

“They don’t like the Communist Party it seems, that is all I know though.”

“Right, okay. I’m going to step out real quick, you can leave whenever you feel uncomfortable, and you can answer however you want. The door is open in case you want to leave.”

The first interrogator leaves. Only moments after, a different one comes in.

“Mr. Honza, I have personally read your writings. Would you care to explain them to me?”

“Uh, why do you ask?”

“I would like to know your genuine beliefs. Just tell me everything.”

“There isn’t much to tell, other than that I am a communist. I don’t believe in much besides that.”

“And why not?”

“It’s all meaningless.”

“I know that’s not what you believe, you are in on something. A conspiracy organization, isn’t it?”

“No, I was alone in my actions.”

“You were a member of the Communist Party; you had contact with Margret Barbier according to others. Margret Barbier was a wanted fugitive.”

“I didn’t really talk to her that much, we met once. I wanted to know more about her. What is this about a fugitive?”

“I cannot reveal the details, but all we know is that you are suspected to be in an underground organization which Margret is supposedly part of and it is connected to various members of the Communist Party.”

“What organization?”

“Don’t be stupid about it, your accomplices have already ratted you out about it.”

“I don’t know anyone else, I was the only one who wanted to carry out the assassination.”

“Do you know Leon Azimov?”

“Yes, he is a bus driver, not a terrorist. He scolded me in the hospital about- Wait, no, never mind.”

“What is it?”

“He mentioned something about organizing, but he was talking about the party. Not an underground group. I feel that he would’ve told me if he was in on something.”

“Would he really though?”

“Ah, I don’t know anymore.”

“Oh, alright. Last chance, no bullshit. Did you or did you not have any accomplices?”

“No!”

“Alright, fine! If that’s how it is going to be with you! I’ll be right back, don’t move.”

The second interrogator turns the lights out as he leaves and stands by the door the rest of the time. Then an ear-piercing sound, a high pitched racket, and a sharp frequency all play at once on full volume from the room next door into the interrogation room. Surrounding the entire room with deafening noise and rattling the wheelchair.

“My ears! Turn it off! Please! Please, I beg you!”

The noise gets louder, enough to make ears bleed and shatter. Eventually a loud siren plays along with audio of the interrogator shouting.

“Help! I fell out of my chair! Let me out! Please! I swear to God!”

The interrogator replies from the door.

“Shut up back there! Sit still!”

The noise stops suddenly, there is a moment of peace until the sounds of distress play louder than before. It keeps going in and out, at random intervals each time unexpectedly and shockingly. Then the same recorded audio of the sounds with the cries for help play in full. It all overlaps each other creating an earthquake-like rattle throughout the room while the lights are off causing a shelf to collapse loudly.

The room feels like it is falling apart as the noises grow louder, everything has no shape as the noise coats the room in vibrations that bleed into the brain.

“Stop!

The audio shuts off, and in walks the first interrogator as before.

“Will you speak the whole truth?”

“I did!”

“Bullshit! Will you speak the truth?!”

Kicking broken legs.

“Ah! Ow! Okay fine! Leon was in on it! Let me out, please!”

“Get up.”

“I can’t move, the other man played a loud noise and knocked me down.”

“There was no other man.”

“No... No! He was right by the door! Open it and you will see!”

Nobody is there, it leads to the same empty hallway full of other rooms.

“I am already telling you now, that your case isn’t looking very good. You may even be sentenced to death. Confirm everything said in this meeting by signing this document, then we’ll let you out.”

Back on wheelchair “What does it say?”

“We can’t tell you that.”

“But you are showing me the paper.”

“You aren’t allowed to read it. In fact, sign this other paper to indicate that you haven’t read it.”

“Well clearly there’s more than that, if it were really about me not reading that paper. What do all of these words even mean?”

“I can’t tell you that either.”

Sigh “Fine, I’ll sign it.”

“Your fate will be determined in court. As of now, nothing can be said for certain about what will come of you. The information we gathered will be reviewed in court. Have a good evening.”

“Do I not have access to anything you’re writing down about me? I demand to know everything! Please!”

“It is part of my duty not to inform you certain things.”

“Why?”

“That’s also classified information.”

“Fine, just send me to the guillotine, rope, firing squad, or whatever you got at this point, I don’t care anymore.”

“I cannot confirm that will be your fate either.”

“Of course you can’t. I may as well be asking God to send me a sign. I’m sure I’ll get better results out of that.”

“Well, we’ll just have to see when your trial comes. It’ll all be over soon, that is all I can promise you.”

“Is that a lie?”

“What do you think?”

“Well, I think you’re just going to say that you can’t tell me, like everything else!”

“Correct.”

Chapter 10: Étude Op. 25 No. 5

The courtroom was desolate, echoey, and frigid. The arches stand on the walls, perfectly square, lifting the roof which felt like miles high into the sky, sacred geometry decorating the top. The windows curve and bend to the shape of the arches. The sculpted stands and chairs line in front of me. Stairs cascade down the middle of the rows from one door, like a theater or a colosseum to view my fate. The ash-silver skies planted their color into the light through the glass, complimenting the color of the room. The jury sat as stone-faced and arms folded as the statues decorating the walls and the arches, they watched me as the clock behind the stands ticked.

Tick...

Tick...

Tick...

The bricks that built the wall of tension slowly built before my eyes, with the silence gluing it all together. The time passing allowed that wall to grow higher and higher until I saw nobody outside of it. The sounds of the jury whispering amongst themselves, my lawyer defending me with all his heart, the prosecutor shouting me down into my seat, and the judge slamming his gavel, they all became a fused ringing sensation in my ear. They talk about things they can never understand, they, and neither can I, rationalize any aspect about me or my actions.

“Francis Honza was attacked, and he had the right to defend himself. The policeman assumed him to be the attacker, and then attacked him as well.”

“Objection! He stole the gun, as it is not registered in his name, nor does he have the license to own such a weapon, and attacking a police officer for any reason is against the law! This also does not excuse the fact he had plans to assassinate the prime minister the day of his speech.”

“But is there proof that he wrote it? It could’ve possibly been forged by the Communist Party themselves. They are known to be a dangerous and secretive organization by many, even housing members of the Red Underground.”

“He admitted in interviews with detectives and police that he did in fact, write them. He even signed off to confirm this.”

The endless talking became so monotonous, that I almost fell asleep numerous times. I phased it all out my head as I drew pictures and wrote stories on my papers in court. The urge to get up and leave the courtroom or start jumping on tables whilst ripping my shirt off and screaming like a banshee was boiling in my stomach.

I watched the clock moving on each second, like it were moving in slow motion. I could've sworn at some points it was moving counterclockwise. The clock spun around in place as the seconds passed by further, and the windows started melting off the walls. The judge's gavel became louder as he kept repeatedly hitting it, and the jury starting cracking as their concrete skin eroded by time. The arches warped into shapes like pretzels and slithered in place, moving like underwater snakes.

The prosecutor and defendant started fencing in the middle of the courtroom, battling to the very end. The jury and everyone involved watched as the sideshow became an arena. The defendant jumped onto the stand, and so did the prosecutor. The defendant used a thick book as a shield, which was pierced immediately by the blade of the saber. The defendant swung on the ropes behind him and up the curtains, climbing onto the concrete balcony above. The prosecutor picked up the gun that I shot Jacques and the officer with from the evidence table. He blew a hole through the

defendant in the heart with blood splattering onto my face as he landed right in front of me. I wiped it off with my handkerchief that was tucked away in my suit pocket.

*As I wiped it away, the blood spelled out **God Was Here**, collapsing into ashes as it slipped out of my hands from a warm breeze. The defendant got up, brushed himself off and plugged the bleeding hole in his chest which was flowing out like a broken pipe, with his own handkerchief. The prosecutor came to my stand as pendulums swung in his eyes, clicking, and ticking as he spoke to me, towering over my body, with my neck breaking slowly as I looked up at him.*

The jury finds me guilty as charged as the rows of statues lined up, looking into my direction for what felt like miles. The wall had a crucifix with Jesus Christ bleeding out, his arms and the extensions of the crucifix moving and acting as the hands of the clock behind him. It started ringing and I found that his crown of thorns was on my head. The judge's gavel stretched out into a nine-tailed whip and he forced me out of the courtroom into my holding cell as I carried my clock and he whipped me until I couldn't hear the clock's ringing anymore.

Chapter 11: Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 in E Flat Major

The law wields its gavel above my head, crushing my insect body. Then with a magnifying glass, the world stares as it magnifies the sun onto my now boiling body. Everything about it goes by in a blinding flash, enough to erase all memory about it. There is seemingly a one-answer solution to everything, but the means of getting to it is a dreadful labyrinth as cold and winding as these towering skylines. Statues stand to outlive many, until something destroys it. But those statues will always be known to have stood in their spot one time in history.

Today is a year since I've been in solitary confinement. After my long, mindlessly droning trial that I do not remember much of, I was sentenced to solitary confinement as opposed to death. Solitary confinement meant many things to me when I first heard it. No human contact, no possible way of me taking the easy way out, being stuck with my own thoughts, and lastly no more cigarettes smuggled in when Leon visited. He smuggled many things into my holding cell to ease me for my trial date, including cigarettes. Never put them up his rear end thankfully, at least for the cigarettes or anything else I was putting into my mouth. The copy of Chairman Mao's Little Red Book had a suspicious smell on it though, but it probably wasn't up his ass. That was probably more prohibited by the guards than the cigarettes to be honest because God forbid, I read some form of subversive literature. While in custody, Leon stopped visiting out of the blue one day. I assumed

the police got him too somehow if everything that interrogator told me was true.

My room is small to say the very least, it consists of one bed, a water fountain, a toilet, and a single window. I am several floors up a tower of prison cells, in a single cell alone that is completely soundproof, and the last time I saw anything before I got into the cell were the doors of the police van that I took a ride in. I was put in the back of the van with a black bag over my head, blacking out everything in my field of vision, and it was taped around my neck, then I was handcuffed from head to toe. It was on until I had every bit of hair on me shaved off, and then I showered in cold water in front of a guard as I was completely nude with handcuffs still on my wrists and legs. I was pushed and locked into my cell. The walls are the same old cold concrete that I have grown familiar with my whole life.

A new clock appears on the wall every now and then, and it is the only thing I choose to talk to. It brings me some form of company, it doesn't have a personality or anything but whenever I want to talk, I just start a conversation and it stops whenever I stop. It keeps my conversations going, without speaking. If it were a person, it would actually think for itself, and that's annoying. Even though the clock always changes, the same voice comes from it when I talk and it still remembers past conversations.

I sleep a lot to pass the time, whenever I finish the bare functions of life I continue pacing

around my room. I like to think about many things as I walk around, many things that I can't truly describe the topic of. The mirror is my favorite thing to look at, just reflecting on myself both literally and metaphorically. I always ask myself "What happened? Why did everything lead to this in the end?" I look into the mirror now with every unique facial feature shaved off, and my face resembles more of a skull than any human face I'd have ever seen. I touch it with my bony hands, touching the smooth grooves of my protruding cheekbones and gaunt eye sockets, with each time I stand nude in front of a guard while I shower, my body matches the near-gray off-white color of the walls, and my skin withers away and constricts thinner around my body, revealing the bones which hang inside.

The realization that I wouldn't be able to smoke hit me as hard and cold as the lifeless feeling of the ground. I became jittery, ravenous, and restless every night for a while, as the room seemed to get smaller with each passing second. The walls were physically growing tighter but never reaching me, taunting me and kicking me while I'm down. The lights were partially shady as the lightbulb felt like it was always about to burn out, yet it was on no matter what time of the day or night it was, unable to turn it off regardless if I needed to sleep. I tried smashing the lightbulb, but it was in a glass square nestled in the concrete roof above me that I couldn't break. This dim lighting twisted shadows that morphed into shapes of familiar beings which stood over me like a body in a casket as I laid in bed

with my eyes piercing the ceiling with my infinite gaze.

Sweat constantly dripped from my forehead and from my hands, and my tightening, seemingly stretching skin pulled on my flesh and muscles like a boa constrictor, like my own skin didn't fit me. I wanted to rip everything off, every emotion was negative and the only sensory experiences I felt were painful. Not like I could do anything about it, not a chance to kill myself here, as the guards made sure that I am incapable of using anything other than the encumberingly slow process of living to die, and after the events of when I jumped from the hotel, I gave up on that idea entirely. I felt that my mind was imploding on itself, and everything looked upside down to me, but of course I couldn't tell when this came to be, or if I was fully in the deep end. If I were truly gone, would I be self-aware of this revelation?

There were nights I cried myself to sleep, there were nights where I slept emotionless but writhing in pain, and there were many nights where I didn't sleep at all. I woke up from a dream on a night where a storm outside blasted against my window with its clashing thunder and potent winds. I was no longer at my grave, but instead walking a path towards my grave while it was raining. Could this be the context I was hoping for all this time? I walked along a dirt path, eventually to one of gravel. Dandelions popped from the gravel each step I took, with the vines of weeds slithering between the gaps of the tiny stones. I felt like I

knew this path so well, and I felt that I was drawing nearer to my grave. I watched my steps along the path, my feet kicking the gravel and grass, and the path sharply stopped as grass became trimmed and flat. I looked up in front of me, and I saw that there was nothing there. There was a cemetery, with millions of graves curving around and atop the hills all the way into the unseen distance. But the path led me to what felt like should be my grave. There was nothing, not even a hole nor a grave marker. Every other grave sat without text, all seemingly fresh burials as dirt mounds were muddy and brown.

“Why?!” I shouted into the distance.

“What does this mean?!”

I writhed on the ground where my grave is meant to be, clenching clumps of dirt in my fists.

“Excuse me. You are in my spot, sir.” A man appeared behind me, looking down at me. He had a fedora and blazer on, blood all over his chest and face, his hair a mess and his face gaunt.”

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Francis Honza, and who may you be?”

“I’m uh- I don’t know.”

“Did you hit your head or something? How do you not remember your name?”

“I thought that I was y-you, I guess.”

“You couldn’t be me, I just jumped out a window. Can’t come back from something like that.”

“That’s what I thought, turns out you can.”

“Unlucky you.”

“I knew I recognized that voice.” Another man came up from behind another gravestone beside me as I sat on the ground.

Jacques stood up with a bullet hole both in his head and chest, cleaning himself off.

“You’re the guy that killed me, how did you die?” Jacques inquired.

“I died not long after you died. In fact, you partially caused it.” Francis says.

“We are fine then, right?”

“Got more things to not care about, so yes, you’re forgiven.”

“But you both caused the deaths of each other! How can you forgive?” I exclaimed.

“Time heals all wounds.” Jacques says as the hole in his head is covered in growing flesh and his chest no longer a star shape bursting into all directions.

Francis looks over at me, “You think that matters anymore?”

“No, I guess not. Can I get out of here?”

“You can go whenever you want, you aren’t dead.” Jacques answers.

“How do I know if I’m dead or not?”

“You don’t.”

“Then how do you know if I’m alive?”

“I don’t know either.”

“Okay then, well how do I get out?”

“If we knew, then we wouldn’t be stuck in our graves here.” Francis sarcastically replied.”

“Speaking of which, would you mind moving? This is my stop.”

I stood up, looking at the ground beneath me which was now a casket in a six-foot hole.

“Sorry, I’ll get out.”

I climbed out, and as soon as I was out, Francis disappeared and the grave was filled.

Jacques looked down at the grave, shaking his head in sorrow. “People just die too fast.”

Immediately after, Jacques collapsed to the ground with his flesh quickly decaying and becoming maggot and worm-infested, until the flesh blew away with the wind and there were only bones left with a cracked rib cage and a skull with a hole in its forehead. The dandelions and weeds pulled and twisted around his bones, taking them into the ground without leaving any traces left.

I woke up, not knowing what to make of the dream. That was the last time I had a funeral dream again, without any answers to the questions I've had about it for the past few years. I eventually grew comfortable but still jittery. Eventually, nothing was a bother, and I was only indifferent. Both from this existence of nothingness, this trapped reality, and my desires of smoking, I knew that there was nothing left to do, there was nowhere to go. I had nothing left to see, and nobody left to know. This cell is no punishment to me, nor is it anything I fear, at least anymore. This cell is anything that was left of my life, and my death in this cell will be prolonged, painful, and unclear the same way if I were walking the streets as a free man. It no longer mattered if I changed in my face, age, and mind. It's all signs that death grows closer, and it was only of my concern. I felt no concern, but preoccupation with myself as each passing day is a new change.

As an individual ages or shape shifts into a drastically different entity, one must look in a mirror to try and see themselves, to recognize, if it is even possible to do. When they don't, they soon find their worst enemy is not really themselves, for they never knew the person in the mirror to put the blame all on them. When the movement of ordinary life no longer distracts, the aging and seconds closer to death are always visible. I recognize no part of my face, and to be honest, I probably never did. Once again, every day is a new change, and every day is a new horror. Just as every passing second is a gap between a drawing breath.

Chapter 12: Ballade No. 2 in F Major

There was a being who sat across from me on a bench in the same cell. I got up and approached it to see that its hair and nails looked unkempt and extraordinarily long. I moved the hair from its face, and it collapsed to the floor, parts of the body and skull shattered, bleeding all over the floor and splattering onto my face. Its face was mine, but clearly aged, bloated purple from all sorts of plagues, and a gust of wind from a storm outside somehow entered the room and blew it all away to become dust in the hard-to-reach corners of the room. In the mirror above the once-intact corpse I saw myself, but the mirror exploded and shattered everywhere before I could even describe or make out any features. This entity appears to visit me every now and then. I call it The Doppelganger. It never dies.

There lies an old photo on the desk in my apartment bedroom in the past, that photo is one of few as the camera was a childhood enemy of mine. That face was one without a smile, yet without a frown, a photo which felt completely colorless despite being in full color. My appearance looked like a mismatch of parts with clothing, facial features, and a hairstyle all contradicting each other as if I were Frankenstein's monster.

I looked older than I really was, that photo was a picture taken in my early days of school. In the other photos of my later years, and as I grew older I did change a little bit on the outside. By that time, I especially looked like a young adult of some sort, abnormally taller rather than average height, however I seemed to grin in more of my photos overtime. That grin wasn't some ordinary grin, I couldn't remember what went through my head in all of my school and family photos but I must've felt the same as I did before and as I do now.

The last photo I am aware of that was taken of me was my last mugshot. The police took the photo with a blinding flashing light that hurt my eyes, seeing the mugshot revealed that same face that emit the same aura of my childhood photos. The serious gaunt expressions, the mismatching appearance without any exact description, and the dead look of absolute inhumanity and unamusement. Those grins concealed this face for a long time as I grew self-conscious, but my pre and post conscious mind revealed the abysmal mix of madness, discontent, fear and loathing, and spaced-out blankness. I couldn't remember how I felt as a child especially when these photos were taken, but I have a feeling I might've felt some similar way, or I felt nothing at all. It's odd how such emotions of life mix to end up feeling nothing in the end, like some pallet of bright colors ending up grey or brown when mixed together.

The dream that is life gets blown away by the cold nonexistent lips of the grim reaper's skull

like the fluff of a dandelion gone away with the wind. This dream is my own lucid fantasy, to do what I will, but even when I do what I want the universe never bats an eye. I tried to dictate my life, I failed. I tried to dictate my death, I failed. I tried to dictate my freedom, and in the end I still failed. Even in my mind, I knew I could be anything I want with it, but my vision alone led the same mind to be present in every stage of this dream.

When I am gone, there will only be a small period where others mourn for a week, and the gears of life will be replaced quickly with everything back in order again. There will be a few times where my name will be repeated again, or my very essence of being thought of by another person will only happen twice a year. The day of my birth, and the day of my death, and those rare occasions where others sigh at the mention of my name, and when I flash in their mind as a slowly fading memory.

As of now, I am already dead to most people. My coworkers who I barely knew, the time I spent with them for the few years prior gave me the same feeling as a distant and foreign family member who was never in touch with the rest of the family's whereabouts or their news, they most likely asked, "Where's Francis?" and "Who will fill in for Francis?". They may have asked these things by the time I was homeless, and they probably know from news reports of what happened to me, and now I am simply dead to them as a passing phase of the company's internal history. I am an animal to them

and everybody else, and I may not even be mourned or remembered at the time of my death.

When my time comes, the police will probably throw me into a ditch somewhere in an unmarked grave or cremate me only to get tossed out somewhere. That may sound sad, but it's more of a reason to make the most with whatever time I spend stuck incarcerated in this concrete block. Nobody can hear me scream, cry, laugh, or speak, no matter what I do, and the only choice I have now is to live in my own delusion, the fortress of solitude, the only structure which truly matters, for what other choice do I have left? The down I once felt becomes a new cold embrace that I fully accept as my ability to do anything that I want to do. With solitude, minimal space, and no way out, the one passing thought I had in my mind that one time led me living ascetically to become what I never expected to be. If this is what insanity is, then, I guess, I never want to be sane.

A poem I wrote, a while ago right before one of my attempted suicides, echoes a feeling that is still underlying within my constantly dying skin. It was my first attempt at writing a poem. In between the ideas I wrote pen to paper, they all had the same communication it felt like, most of my writings were insignificant and not memorable, that's how I saw them at least, but this poem despite foretelling the same fears, depressions, and madness I felt, resonated with me word for word. This poem echoes a form of the down that I never felt once

before, a sense of content. Or is it a sense of understanding?

I lived with art as an omnipresent entity throughout my life to see myself within it. When Leon told me how Chopin reminded him of a winter breeze, I couldn't really unsee it. Before, I thought of Chopin as a bleak representation of the world translated as music. A winter breeze can be bleak with or without context, as much as it can be beautiful to describe, like a romantic era painting. The same beauty can be found in the bleak and embracing it as a whole is simply an embrace of life. That embrace has no definitive ends, emotions, or desires, but it manifests itself into finding a universe within. But just as this universe is empty, so is the one inside.

The shape of my universe is something pointing in every direction, mismatched, colorless and colorful, cold, dry, hot, humid, small and filled with many things, whilst also vast in its own shade. It's a living quilt, made of fabric as its mouth bear fangs, crying out and squelching in pain. The fabric rips itself apart and spreads itself to become our world. Where our lives replicate its own form of rationalization. That universe is the one I embrace in all its bleakness, omnipresent in itself and in another individual.

Francis Honza.

Nothingness**I.**

*In the eventual quietus of all,
the unknowing and the shedding of skin, the new
flesh
desires to be transparent.*

*The persona aches,
bubbling within the brain, in conquest
to fill its own ravenous hunger to eat itself,
to act as a specter, beyond mortal remains, beyond
the confines of its view through
aging glassy eyes, the mind
remains in one position.*

*The motionlessness sits with the restlessness,
sickened with the same fever of feeling.
Suddenly, the feeling is unimportant for its reasons
are also unimportant.*

II.

*If the noise were to cease, what will everything
sound like after?*

If the noise were to cease at any time, why not now?

*If you had a chance to turn the noise off, would you
do it or*

would you let someone else do it?

The noise is a contradictory noise,

from the pleasant, the awful, and the

*sickening sounds that you cannot place your finger
on. One cannot*

play without the other. All of them must go.

*If you were wary of your thoughts, life, and death,
be strong in that weariness.*

*Don't be like me, who loves my own movement for
its own miracles and power.*

*Don't be like me, who worships eternal sleep
through
concept and poetry.*

*At that point, you may as well stay in bed,
and never wake up again.*

III.

*The fantasy of doing nothing,
To fade away with the dusts of time, the decaying
past,
and unknown in the equally unknown future.
To let the moss grow over your body,
you didn't choose anything to happen, you just sat
there
and let nature eat away at your flesh.*

*There comes the other desire, for the soil to not
have made you at all.
If you could only think after birth, where were they
before? Were they
recycled like a paper with text never
to be seen again?
Was there only but nothingness, and will it be that
way after?
You realize that nothingness and its absence
of all desire and discontent, may be better than you
had ever thought
before.*

IV.

The vertigo of thinking, the thinking causing the itch

*to wake up from this dream into the next is only but
a small part of living, it makes a pit in the stomach
to*

*make you sick in the head. To carry on forever with
the thoughts*

*of entering the new territories that lie beyond the
reach*

of your little humanoid arms,

*Will one wait until they have nothing left? When
they face their time which is soon to end?*

*When they are backed into a corner? Or when they
simply find that they*

have seen enough?

*Questions, questions, questions are the only
guarantee which is*

the complete cognitive dissonance of being.

Making the discovery that

*the emptiness is unkept no matter how much one
laughs*

*or glowers upon its sight. So why don't you end
that indifference?*