

SDAORSORC

**ultra-
short
stories
of the
absurd**

MICHAEL W MOICEANU

Crossroads

ultra-short Stories of the Absurd

Michael W Moiceanu

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When will we realize that the fact that we can become accustomed to anything, however disgusting at first, makes it necessary for us to examine carefully everything we have become accustomed to?

— Bernard Shaw

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1. Fly Butter, Fly!

There once was a small town on the outskirts of society that was troubled by cyclones. The cyclones caused much damage to property; additionally, some of the fellow townsmen died from their occurrence.

With the cyclones being a big problem, one day one citizen of the town—one highly admired by others for his intellect—came upon an article regarding chaos theory. The reading divulged that a butterfly’s flapping of the wings at one place in the world could cause an entire cyclone to brew at a different location on the planet.

Meetings were called where this revelation was disclosed to all. Soon enough, the town was in agreement: the thing to do was to eradicate the planet of its butterflies.

“Damn them,” the citizens would exclaim as they’d spit onto the floor. Everyone was pleased with this remedy to put a permanent end to the town’s cyclones; everyone, that is, but the village idiot.

“I know I know nothing and, maybe, not even that much—but, then again, I could be wrong,” like a clown the village idiot would assert; this and so many other absurdities that people didn’t know whether to laugh or cry at his states of mind. Regardless, the village idiot every now and then still tried to communicate his ludicrous thoughts to others.

On this occasion, he could be seen scratching his head as he stood behind the town hall crowd.

He raised his hand and then his voice: “You’re all mad,” he loudly said, “There could be so many other ways of interpreting this here mathematical theory. Why, here, I’ve just stomped my foot on the ground. Does that mean I’m responsible for a vibration that’ll avalanche into a future earthquake? Why then think that the flight of butterflies is to blame for our cyclones?”

“What do human foot-stomps have to do with the flapping of butterfly wings?” responded the speaker of the town hall meeting, the crowd riotously laughing at the village idiot’s lunacy.

The village idiot, though trying to continue in his speech, was shortly thereafter dragged out of the hall. There, he continued screaming things such as, “You’ll destroy the planet’s ecosystem in your attempts to eradicate all butterflies!” “Our crops will be depleted without butterflies’ pollination!” and “Others will condemn us for poisoning their lands—wars with follow!”

The doors to the hall were quickly closed.

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People, some more than others, murmured between themselves: "He's a traitor, a damn terrorist for trying to prevent us from preserving our homeland," "He should be locked away; what good has he ever done for society?" "To hell with that, he should be shot dead." This as the fool continued banging on the town hall door while still screaming his now inaudible sermons.

It was concluded. The manufacturing of toxins was to be ordered for the poisoning of all butterflies in the world. That so doing would bring in more revenue, thereby bolstering the town's economy, made the citizens all the merrier.

In a few months' time, the war on butterflies had commenced.

"Not until every last butterfly is slaughtered, not until all children inherit cyclone-free waters!" was the motto many chanted. Among other declarations given by statesmen and voters alike, these slogans were making the town unified as it never before was.

Everyone was in high spirits, and blissfully mirthful. Even the village idiot—after some ordeals of prolonged, secret torture—ended up confessing that his previously given statements concerning the matter had been wrong.

Cohorts were dispatched—some on land, some on water—with the explicit mission of saving mankind from cyclones.

The village idiot being left behind, he could hear hymns at once both angelic and jubilant sung of a

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forthcoming better world—this by hearts brimming with hope—as his fellows journeyed off into the awaiting wilds with poisons held ready in hand.

2. A Civilized War

This one conflict they had was troublesome. Both countries were vehement about their disagreements. Each had a lot to gain and much to lose. Diplomacy had so far proven futile. Still worse, the imminence of the problem gave little time to resolve the dispute.

Nevertheless, the prospect of war was condemned by all nations and their citizens.

It was then suggested that the conflict could be resolved not through bloodshed but through an unprecedented, vastly simpler, more efficient, and enlightened means. Both nations, it was proposed, would select among its citizens a champion chess player. The two representatives would face off in a decisive chess match. To the victor's nation would then go the entirety of the spoils.

Of course this means of resolution was arbitrary, having nothing to do with the facts of the matter and their moral precedence—but then the same applied to every war that had ever been. The chess match was just a more civilized way of going about the process:

with no collateral civilians being accidentally slaughtered, no tortures, no raping, no maiming of children, or any of the other barbarities that had always emerged in previous wars.

There were to be no ill feelings about it. For the benefit of all, the two countries would abide by the results of this single game of chess. With the international help of countries friendly to either side, complex contracts were drawn to this effect specifying the two nations' alleged grievances, the required compensations in case of victory, and the orderly means of dispersing these.

The critical day at last arrived. Everyone was relieved at this civilized means of deciding the winner—but tensions between the two nations still ran high in light of the repercussions the losing party would have to bear.

The match at long last came to a conclusion. Before a global audience, a formal handshake was given over the table together with humbled acknowledgement and congratulations. It was only then that, with his other hand, the representative of the losing nation pulled out a hidden blade and, in a single swipe, cut open the victor's throat.

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The audience's brutal combat began shortly thereafter.

3. *Puppet Masters*

There was a person who came upon a puppet falling down the side of a hill and, in wanting to become a puppet master, placed strings upon it.

The person began to puppeteer the puppet but soon noticed that the puppet's actions didn't fully respond as the pulling of strings would have required. In then looking about, the person saw that there were other people at a distance who'd likewise placed their own, nearly imperceivable strings upon the puppet, attempting to move it in accordance to their own will.

Conflicts as to what the puppet would do unfolded between these different puppet masters—each believing themselves able to transfer their unique will upon the symbolic acts which the puppet communicated to all.

As these conflicts progressed, the puppet masters began discovering that they could no longer remove the strings they'd once attached to the puppet—for the puppet's actions, resulting from the sum-

intentions of all puppeteers, would not allow it to occur. And neither would the puppet's actions allow the puppeteers needed freedoms of letting go strings they'd previously tied around themselves.

This caused the actions of the puppet to at times have consequences upon each of the puppeteers' lives.

As they continued in their endeavors, the puppet masters began apprehending that the puppet held a form of independent will—albeit, one composed of the puppeteers' multiple inputs—a will that nevertheless endowed the puppet with powers to choose between its conflicting string-driven tugs.

It soon further became clear to them that the will-endowed puppet had accumulated its own memories, opinions, aptitudes, desires, and imperfections. Then the puppet began expressing that it was fully alive, that it had always so been, and that it was still maturing with a long ago birth.

The group of puppet masters had by now come to realize that this puppet, at first seeming to haphazardly fall down a hill, had in fact been manipulated into so doing by other puppeteers long before any of them had set their strings upon it. What was more, what they at first mistook for a puppet they now understood to have been a breathing person throughout.

Surrounded in all directions by strings as they were—strings which they at times manipulated and at times were manipulated by—the puppeteers at last

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came to discover themselves to be the freewill-endowed puppets of yet other puppet masters.

4. *A Perpetuation of Conflict*

The blood covering portions of skin untouched by sweat was beginning to dry. He could feel it starting to crack and peel in places where his knuckles bent, serving as a reminder of what was to come with the bullets he'd release through the mechanical pulling of the trigger.

The other side was finally on the retreat, and his company now began advancing through the darkness. Still, the whispered scream of incoming bullets could yet be heard as they passed nearby, sometimes disappearing into air, sometimes lodging themselves into the flesh or bone of nearby bunk-mates.

There was hardly time for logistics, mostly adrenalin, the forced and necessary redirection of adrenalin into controlled action and out from realms of ever-present fear.

Sorrow—even at the blood of his teammate in

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which his hands were now smeared—had no place, or existence; for the cost of such emotional delusions would be the spilling of his own blood for someone else's future contemplation.

His group progressed through the half-visible obstacle course, and he was at the forefront. That's all he knew.

The enemy had to be killed.

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When the dawn at last began emerging, it felt as though he was on the outside watching a type of unreal, panoramic movie.

Houses, trees, fence posts, there was nothing left to obstruct one's view of the endless horizon. Everything was charcoal tinted rubble and ruins: gray, lifeless—the result of numerous artillery whose usage had been constituted legal by sovereign governments.

There was a man now standing center-stage amid this nothingness. It was unclear what side he'd belonged to. The only thing to be inferred was that he had fought hard and had endured much.

He was standing there like a scarecrow to everything that had recently passed; his hands suspended in midair, nailed to an invisible cross, and opened upward toward the judgment of some recently absent god.

The atom bomb then fell. It seemed to have been dropped far away, for the golden-orange hue arrived some time before the ear shattering sound.

While the man's grayish figure was transformed

with light emanating from the momentary, earth-bound sun of human creation, the man's body did not shift a muscle.

Wind became visible.

The radioactive poisoning which then took its effect worked rapidly, and one could see his carcass decaying even as his eyes remained fixated upon the empty voids of sky above.

His mouth opened as though to speak, but no sound was audible.

As his flesh began peeling from face and torso, two tiny, feathery hands began emerging from within the darkened confines of his mouth.

A small white wing next appeared, then the head. Like the reincarnation of spirit into the embodiment of a mythological creature's flesh, its small claw now pushed down on the lower lip of the carcass's mouth as its head pressed hard against the encumbering upper teeth.

It was out; he was out.

The cocoon he left behind melted as he took to flight: a dove whose silhouette ascended toward realms of sky.

The horizon was now peaceful. Life had shed its scars together with the old skin and a new world was birthed.

Then, from the lower edge of the scene, the remnant of some battalion appeared with rifle in hand. Who he was was also unclear. He had somehow managed to survive the battle unscathed, but his

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decrepit insides showed clear through the blur of his clothes and insignias: base, crude, gluttonous; a pencil-sketched caricature of life in motion.

The rifle was quickly aimed and then fired.

The tranquility was torn with the bullet's passing. In the next instant, the white dove of peace exploded midair with head sheared and backbone broken.

All that was now visible was a large drop of blood falling from the summer sky. The red hit ground, and, as the liquid seeped into earth, the earth began throbbing—gently at first, but, as the newly inseminated tissue began to grow, the appearance of the projected scene gained a darkened, ominous feel.

Though its soul, its essence, would remain the same, somehow it was then clearly known: this time, what would emerge would decide to cling close to shadows, to the cloaks of darkness—reemerging with fangs poised for the stripping of living flesh away from bone.

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The soldier who'd been witness to all this was watching himself become that which he prior to this had always been: the merciless killer of an unending war.

## *5. Problematic Hearts, Exhibit A*

The hidden recesses of her enlarged, bleeding heart she had tried on multiple occasions to heal.

Every time she had taken out her heart, exposing it to the light of day so that others might see it, hoping for some help in her efforts, all that had happened was her heart's further incurring damage. Though maybe not always due to the intentions of others, the heart would then senselessly bleed all the more.

It took years of experimentation in thus revealing her bleeding heart to others—years upon years of broken hopes—before she began to at last learn: the only means of preventing her heart from painfully bleeding was for her to keep it fully hidden within herself—its true self unknown to friends, lover, or family; becoming safely protected within the cage of her ribs.

But, there, kept alone and safe within the darkened

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confines of her chest for such prolonged periods of time, it now began to swell to unbearable proportions; its screams for compassion audible to no one but her. The swelling of her heart would at times encumber her lungs' very capacity to breath. Its accumulating blood now having nowhere to go, it became painfully lodged—ever-nearing the pivotal point of a complete rupture.

In short, her abnormally large heart had become too big for her well-being.

It was on this count that she of her own hand at times—in places where no one else could see—began to take out her heart in attempts to lessen its girth, to make it conform more to what she took to be a normal heart's average size—pricking it with needles or delicately cutting it with a razor blade, allowing it to lose some of its humors. When its bulk was again manageable, she'd then again tenderly reinsert it back into her torso.

This had become the periodic ritual which needed to be enacted. The self-taught surgeon which she'd by now become knew all too well of the reason: the bloodletting at her own hand was the only means of preventing it—of preventing herself—from fully perishing.

## *6. Forbidden Fruit*

A God decrees prohibition of his own fruit's flesh. The incomprehensible rationalization: that you should resist obtaining that for which you've been preprogrammed to seek.

Sitting with your back against tree, you now contemplate the forbidden knowledge that lies just within your reach—an unfolding of the spirit's battles with temptations never before felt.

Afterward, there's the glimpse caught of a tiny worm's severed organs still swirling from within an eaten apple's core: the digestion of nutritions tainted, and an ancient serpent's dreams now traveling through a human's newly reawoken soul. Former ignorance becomes tattooed with bitterness at wisdom's arrival, and then the onset of dire needs to comprehend, to truly see, and to eat flesh from the offerings of—at least—just one more apple.

## *7 Logic's Illusion*

Suppose you wanted to kiss a woman who also desired the taste of your lips. Suppose you then began moving toward her to accomplish this. Your lips ever touching hers would be outright impossibility—but this only when logically analyzed.

Say the point in space you'd boldly start moving from was termed point A and the spatial location of her eagerly awaiting lips held the label of point B. As you'd move from A toward B there would logically be found an exact halfway—a midpoint X dwelling between you and her surreptitious smile.

To get to point B you'd have to move past this X residing in the way. But, once you'd arrive at this X, you'd then find another midpoint now lying between X and her. This second midpoint—point X2 let's call it—you'd then also have to pass through. But, once you'd find yourself at X2, you'd then be met with a third midpoint, X3, dwelling between X2 and her. You'd need to pass through X3 together with all

remaining midpoints in order to reach the point B which you impatiently longed for.

But it was exactly here that the logical impossibility of ever kissing her arose: These progressively closer midpoints were quite literally infinite in quantity.

No matter how close you might have initially been to her, no matter how many midpoints you'd have previously passed through, there'd yet be some other you'd still need to traverse so as to arrive at your destination. Logically analyzed, then, even with an eternity of time of her waiting for your kiss, you and her could never touch—for you'd find yourself forever moving through ever-smaller distances yet dwelling in-between.

OK, so Zeno of Elea had figured this out with stuff like arrows moving toward some intended target instead of kisses—it led to the same outcome, though. Just as the arrow could never reach its target due to unendingly passing through an infinite quantity of these midpoints—never mind being able to go beyond its initial end—so too could you logically never have the first kiss which you longed for.

Over two millennia now and no one had managed to definitively resolve this riddle of Zeno's concerning motion. The logic to this paradox appeared to be impeccable: It was impossible for any motion to obtain any destination whatsoever; even the first midpoint of any total length had an infinite quantity of progressively closer halfway points between itself and the starting location that needed to be passed

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before it itself could be arrived at.

All that this illustrated, though, was that there was illusion somewhere. The undeniable issue was not if but where this illusion dwelt. To presume, as Zeno had, that all motion was therefore an impossibility was on a par to concluding that all experienced reality was unreal. An unfortunate conclusion, to be sure, since it was through the experiences of awareness that this logical inference was grasped in the first place.

Maybe our global notions of time, or space, or both were yet naive. Maybe the very premises of logic and mathematics we made use of to address this paradox should themselves be deemed somehow flawed.

It did, however, take logical analysis to question this riddle's affirmed conclusion—namely, that of it being impossible to kiss the lips that you craved—so you couldn't then decry all logic to be illusory.

Or could you?

## *8. Termites*

Their house had furniture of the finest assorted rosewoods. Its expansive lacquer-covered, mahogany parquets entertained many a banquet without showing the minutest wear. Its oak shingles were specially coated and assembled to resist fire as well as the strongest winds. And its special wooden frame furthermore made the house indestructible by earthquake.

To the husband and wife, their home was an engineering marvel in addition to being wonderfully picturesque—and they both were joyous of what they possessed.

One day, while making love in bed, they became bothered by what seemed to be a few flakes of wood which had fallen upon their face. On closer inspection, they noticed that the flakes had descended from the upper corner of the wooden bedpost. When pushing their fingers on it, the bedpost caved in a few millimeters, revealing small tunnels and passageways

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that had been buried within.

The bedpost had contained a few termites—though, because none could then be seen, the couple presumed that the termites had long since gone away.

For the time being, they simply resolved the problem by placing over the bedpost a makeshift cover which prevented more loose material from becoming airborne.

They intended to call a termite inspector but, because they had many other immediate concerns to worry about, they postponed the call till a more suitable time would arise. In so doing, they placed the incidence out of mind, laid down in bed next to each other, and—behaving as though nothing of importance had happened—went quietly to sleep.

Regardless of whether it was due to willful negligence, misbegotten priorities, or a conviction that that which is unthinkable can never occur, the result was the same. The incidence was overlooked and soon after fully forgotten.

It wasn't until sometime later, when the husband attempted to hammer a nail into the living-room's wooden wall so as to hang up a newly framed picture, that the termites were again remembered.

The hammer drove clear through the wall as though it had been built of papier-mâché. Inside were the same small tubular passages they had previously seen.

Alarmed at the implications of what her husband had uncovered, the wife knocked on the nearby china

cabinet in reflexive fashion. It too had been ravaged, and her soft knuckles fell halfway into the cabinet, accidentally hitting the china plates which then, falling in upon themselves, chipped and cracked.

They began going to and fro in the house, testing out whichever piece of wood they came to. Everywhere they touched, the facade peeled off, exposing expansive stretches of miniscule tunnels.

They hurried upstairs in search of a termite exterminator's telephone number, hoping that it had not by then become too late to amend the situation.

Near the infested bed in which they'd continued sleeping, they found the telephone book resting on the nightstand. When they picked it up, there was a hollow directly underneath, within which a few termites were seen scurrying away from the newly let in light.

The husband nudged the nightstand in attempts to catch a better glimpse of the termites. It fell over to the side hitting the bed-frame and, in the process, scratched the man's arm. Both nightstand and bed-frame at the point of impact—as with so many other items in the house—revealed themselves to be nothing more than delicately woven skeletal structures.

They called and the termite exterminator soon came.

“Can you kill the termites?” the couple implored, admitting they had procrastinated, but affirming that money was no object in making the restorations

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needed to protect the sanctity of their home.

“They’re funny little things,” the exterminator answered, “impossible to fully safeguard against, invisible to the untrained eye, and insatiable in appetite. Unless you actively seek them out to put an end to them quickly, if you let them, they’ll gnaw and breed and spread until all that’s left is a hollowed carcass—and all this without the slightest of outward indications.

“No, I’m sorry ... I could kill the termites, but their plump living bodies are now about the only thing that’s supporting the house’s structure. If you’d kill them now you’re house will topple in a number of weeks at best. Better to let them continue doing their work while you gather up your belongings and make preparations for a different home.”

After so saying, the termite exterminator left. The couple gently closed the door behind him and proceeded to glance toward one another.

It wasn’t until then, as the winged ant-like termites were making their way in and out of her inner ear, that, on the underside of the man’s arm, where the accidental scratch from the nightstand had occurred, four or five termite’s heads—as plump and white as a fly’s larva—were seen spitting up regurgitated substance, busily working to suture and re-enclose themselves beneath the man’s broken skin.

## 9. *us and Them*

“We are the favored. It is we who are the undoubtedly righteous.

“They, they want to diminish our freedoms to subjugate them; they’re evil incarnate.

“And yes, the only means of instilling any morsel of peace in this world is to pursue endless conflict and war! ... until even the memory of disagreement with us—with our supremacy—is erased from the boundaries of time.

“You, you are the traitor for betraying your own kind—your given race, sex, nation, creed, all these; you’ve denigrated the very pith of what is purer than anything else, the only purity that exists in this world: us!

“God bless us and painfully destroy the rest!”

All this was told to the brutalized prisoner by the speaker—this while those in the firing squad lifted up their arms toward the captive to shoot.

Oddly, the captive disagreed with the speaker’s

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comments.

Still, the captive had the vague suspicion that he'd done or said something not to their liking and had thereby gotten them upset. He didn't recall exactly what, though.

The rifles then shot, thereby ending this horrible event in our humanity's history.

## 10. How to Make a Dog Insane

Story has it that some scientists once played a kind of practical joke upon a dog—a joke that was well controlled so as to try to minimize all the confounding variables.

The dog was a swell creature: friendly and all. As with all other creatures, it got hungry every now and then.

So what the cognitive scientists did was to create an environment within which the dog could get its food.

At dinner time, in front of the dog stood two doors: to one side, a door had a perfect circle painted on it; to the other side, the other door had an easily distinguishable ellipse. When the dog touched the door with the circle the door would open and the dog would get its food. When the dog touched the door with the ellipse it would get zapped—not killed, not permanently injured, just struck by enough voltage to

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make it a thoroughly unpleasant experience.

The dog quickly learned which was which and all was well. The scientists would sometimes switch the right door and its apparatuses with the left door, but the dog still had no problems in figuring out which lead to the pleasure of food and which to the pain of an electric shock.

That's when their practical joke started.

They began to slowly, day by day, make the circle more elliptical and the ellipse more circular.

No problem, not until the circle and ellipse became almost indistinguishable.

That kind, friendly dog—instead of knowing how to laugh at this situation—at that point began to bite: itself, the people to which it had been accustomed, began foaming at the mouth. The dog became unwell.

This situation was repeated daily until the dog was at last declared insane—with or without the environment of this particular experiment.

What is there to be learned from all this? That dogs don't have the slightest sense of humor?

It's certain that the importance of symbolic meaning among living creatures had something to do with the scientists' written-up conclusions—but what else could be gathered?

Can it not be said that what occurred was the conflux between an intense need in immediate knowledge of that which is real, this on the one hand, and the doubts of a relatively all-pervasive uncertainty concerning the matter on the other?

Be presented with a riddle; no problem if its solution poses no importance to you, or if you have all the time in the world to leisurely resolve it. But—as an Oedipus standing right before the sphinx with no possibility of return—what if the given problem is one of such consequence that death awaits you if the objective truth is not instantly discerned? Or at least some grossly unwanted pain.

Present a starving dog with the conundrum of a succulent bone which it cannot distinguish from impending anguish; do you not then sweep its understanding of reality from under its feet?

Perchance you don't believe the results of this experiment and you too have a dog at home. A few items from your local hardware store will easily suffice for this test's replication. Please be advised, however, that your dog too will likely not laugh at what you may take to be a joke—and you may end up bitten.

## 11. *The Rope Climber*

Having found a rope extending toward the skies, a man began climbing it. It was hardly a matter of choice. The intrigue regarding what held the rope up was so strong that he couldn't bear not finding out.

The man is still climbing, still ascending on this suspended rope whose culminating point reason states must be all the closer at hand.

The calluses on his hands have been lost. In their place are open scabs. He can detect that this change occurred a long time ago by the trail of brownish-rust color left behind on the rope, visible till the place where the rope becomes fully overtaken by the clouds beneath.

At the present moment he is taking a rest from his ongoing climb—with knees folded and hands whose position must on occasion be changed in order to prevent their coagulating humors from binding to the rope. He is right now currently resting—and pensively gazing upwards into the extents of eternity.

## *12. Within the Cave*

She had inklings of the gawking, humiliation, and degradation of a subjective persona she'd grow up to live through—being, as a woman, to be made into an object for other's possession. She was not yet there, though, and, being here, within the body of a preadolescent, neither did she have reason to suspect that this future would be for her inevitable—preordained by the attributes of flesh into which her spirit had been birthed. For why can't it be that the future will be different from realities that are to be found in the present?

Unafraid, she stood before the cavern's darkened entrance, curious to know what might dwell in its within.

"You're a child of lucid shadows and hidden lights," the cave's wind spoke.

Intrigued, the guiltless preadolescent walked inside.

There, as her pupils dilated to let in the now diminished light, she began to see small grottoes

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chiseled out from the cavern's walls and, within each grotto, a beast of near human size—each creature holding onto a lit, waxen candle.

“Here,” one monster began to say, “our shadows are confused and our source of light is exposed for all to see. But we are all ultimately blind.”

“Can you not see me?” the little girl asked.

“I cannot see who you truly are: I cannot see your mind, for example—though I may intuitively infer fragments of it from appearance of dress, mannerisms, and speech that I then ...”

“Of course the fool can see you,” another creature stated, “Why look: he’s glancing at you even as he talks. We can all see perfectly well.

“It’s you who do not truly see because you don’t have a true light to be guided by,” the creature said as its hind paw scratched the back of its neck.

This scratching of oneself among the monsters was nearly constant, with only slight interludes of rest. The problem was that their itches could not be fully scratched due to the lit candles they had to hold. With either hands or claws, the candles were guarded against having their fire burn out.

From the opposite side of the cavern, another creature spoke: “But she does have a light. Look at it radiating from within her eyes.”

“Yes, but where does that light originate from?”

“Maybe we should search her for it,” another creature commented.

The girl began feeling uneasy and, in attempt to

pacify the situation, replied, “But I’m not hiding any form of light from anyone.”

The monsters didn’t relent.

Their own warmth was derived from the candle’s flame; their coal colored eyes, fully devoid of any white, were likewise lit by reflections of light emanating from the candles they held; and all the truth they knew, they knew with perfect certainty to radiate from the fire that they held within their grasp.

“If you truly see because of the true light you’re guided by,” the little girl inquired, “then can you not see where my own light emerges from?”

There was a great uproar with different perspectives mentioned, each creature’s light informing it of different answers. Her own light emerged from her soul, but no one could pinpoint where her soul should be located; her light emerged from organized behaviors of molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles, but these could not explain why she should have a light when mere rocks do not; her light was a preordained facet of a fully fixed universe; that it emerged from her brain, from her heart, from her pineal gland. These and other resolutions were in turn renounced by yet other fellow beasts, each believing its own light’s truth to express the sole absolute reality to be had.

They were unsatisfied by their pervasive disagreements, even insulted by the girl’s self-aware naivety appearing to be of superior wisdom to their ready known truths.

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The majority of monsters began emerging from their grottoes, clawing the girl this way and that so as to take a better look at her being.

She became frightened at their new demeanors.

“If you don’t settle down I’ll blow out all of your candles!” she loudly said, her words echoing throughout the cavern.

To this, they all abided, beginning to move back into their individual grottoes.

Little did she know that they too had once been creatures of nature, moving through life devoid of the candles they now cherished. But life required its explanations.

“Without a candle’s light, how do you know what is right and what is wrong?” one creature then asked the little girl.

“I don’t know, but I do. I feel it.”

This infuriated the beasts, for how can reason be maintained when one affirms to know that which one simultaneously asserts to not know?

To squelch the uproar, she continued, “I think that suffering is bad and that happiness is good. What makes the greatest number of creatures, including yourselves and me, happy, this in the long-term, will then be the greater good.”

“This is unsatisfactory.”

“What is the relation between right and good?”

“How do you define suffering and happiness?”

“Have you taken into account long and short term appraisals of time as regards duration, and, if so, what

is time?”

“How can you validate that your stance is not mere opinion, girl; where is the proof?”

To this cacophony, the little girl replied, “You don’t agree that happiness is good?”

To her question were given many replies—from that of God being good and good being God to that of greatest good being equivalent to the greatest evolutionary fitness a creature may obtain—but disagreements among the learned beasts persisted.

At this, the girl—being dismayed by the apparent babble—finally made reply:

“If you all have perfect knowledge of what is real due to the truth emerging from the lights you carry, then how can you disagree with each other all the time?”

“Not everyone’s light is true,” said one creature, at which the rest of the beasts found immediate approval.

“So how can you tell what is true from what is untrue?” the girl again inquired.

“That’s for you to decide,” another monster replied.

As this was stated, she realized: soon enough, she too would find herself with a lit candle held in her hands; she too would grow up to become like them. This as though each creature presented itself with the allure of a future mate, a future consort with whom perspectives would be shared in unison.

That’s when one of the monsters allegorically

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asked, “Shall moths ever discover that what awaits for them within the flame is a death? Most likely not,” this one particular monster continued, “And this because they don’t attempt to distinguish between idolatry and truth in their search for wisdom.”

The girl recognized this one monster: it was the same beast that had begun the discussion by proclaiming that all within the cave were in fact blind.

She admired this one creature—this despite the admonitions it received from others—for it seemed to her that this one being was closest to a transcendent understanding.

Her favoring of it made the others begin to assault this beast. With its wings pinned to the wall by its assailants, the candle it held was attacked while the beast was given deep lacerations. The beatings continued before the girl’s eyes until the beast’s candle was at last blown out, after which the beast vaporized into thin air.

The girl again became frightened. The tumult within the cave did not cease—each beast attempting to annihilate the other and, in turn, accusing the girl for having been the cause to this unrest among them.

It didn’t take long before the creatures were again appeased, though. The girl, they declared, still had to choose one among them. She, however, pacified them by relieving their itches in places where they could not reach. This eventually made them forget about the immediacy of her need to choose among their truths.

She at last came to elude them in their time of rest

and exited the cave.

~ ~ ~

Many years later, upon having fallen in love with a young man, on the first night they were to make love she discovered the man to bear the scars of the monster she recalled admiring, this in her youthful nightmare wherein she'd entered a cave of beasts.

She asked, "But how can this be?"

To which he replied, "Because you wished for me to be here."

## 13. *The Poetess*

As with a massive iceberg immersed beneath the water's waves, the bee suckled from a vine on whose stem dwelt leaves composed of text and illustrated dreams.

She, the clouds never ascended to envelop.

Though her honey effervesced from jaws, filling up rooms that stemmed back to periods before serpents' bellies touched ground, its sweetness remained untasted by the hungry.

She, the deer-hunter of melancholic times; them, an audience seated on empty chairs arranged so as to form an imposing cross.

And the rivers flowing offstage, they dampened heels with the milk of her heart—woes she'd intended for burial within the graves of a different plot. But her sex reeked too much of the vine, and her sting, they knew, would emerge as soon as they'd hear the whispers of her slowly dying gods.

Her song, as lustful as a butterfly's encumbered

flight; her smiling laughter; and the finale of applause; and, at the depths, there dwelt the gallows of a freedom and a shackle—the former never fully bared; the latter never fully lost.

## *14. The Unsuccessful Revolution*

A revolution against the dictatorship had occurred and many revolutionaries died. At first, the result of this sacrifice seemed to be a successful overthrow of the former regime.

After the revolution finished, however, the same stage characters that had previously ruled the land now again came to power. This time there was a new officially declared system of politics, but the same patterns of socioeconomic inequality, Orwellian propaganda, and injustice prevailed.

But of all things this was strangest. The majority of the populace that had survived the revolution—having sheepishly hidden themselves from partaking in the violence on the streets—now deemed all the selfless revolutionaries who'd struggled and perished to have been nothing but a flock of manipulated, blind sheep.

Since almost all of the revolution's patrons came to be buried within unmarked graves, there were too few remaining in society to have any significant effect upon the remaining populace's mentality.

What the majority of the survivors admired was instead the cleverness to gain by cheating without getting caught—the cunning to survive and flourish within an endemic social corruption which, it was reasoned, had always been and always would be.

~ ~ ~

Were societal realities not something constructed out of the values held by individual persons? Take love for instance. If interpersonal love—for a significant other, for family and friends, for humanity at large—was to be present in all people, all people would then share a community in which interpersonal love flourished. But declare this sentiment to be joke and—just as one would have willed it to be—one's lived reality would then become barren of love's presence.

Ah, but such pie in the sky philosophical contemplations—as everyone knew—had no worth: the ideals of equality and fraternity were just forms of vainglory, insincere soundbites proliferated by those that employed the masses toward the self-interests of the few. No, to call the revolutionaries heroes was to insult the very intelligence of those who had never struggled for a more just world. The bulk of people which remained knew too well: all that mattered in life was the influence of money and the power to

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subjugate.

“The crown of corruption has died! Long live the crown of corruption!”

So the survivors of the revolution privately sang long before the revolution had begun. And so it was, as had always been.

## 15. *Cure for Empathy*

“Scalpel please.”

“Do you think he’ll make it?”

Then another nurse quickly followed with, “What an unnatural state to have been in.”

The patient’s heartbeat was irregular for a brief moment then returned to normal on the EKG.

“Let’s hope a plastic surgeon can do some further work on him after this operation, if we’re successful,” replied the doctor.

“You know, I’ve tried to count how many scars he’s given himself on his face; must be, I don’t know, over fifty?” said the head nurse.

The doctor added to make sure everyone in the room understood, “He gave himself these lacerations in a single night as a late teenager. An act of rebellion against society according to his journals, and he there rambled on and on about integrity of spirit in a corrupt world.”

“What kind of value can a person have if they

don't look good?" asked a technician.

"He, afterwards, still induced a girl into one of those perverse mono-amorous relations you read about in psychiatric texts," replied a nurse.

"You mean they only had sex with each other? How dreadfully wrong." gasped another.

"Yes, but the ... the, the depravity ... see, 'mono-amorous' means not only that but that they actually, sincerely, felt feelings of romantic love—and this only for one another," replied the former as politely as she could.

"So that's why he became a ..." started the technician.

"The history leading up to a person's immoral behavior is never important," cut short a nurse a few steps away, "you know that. And all that medication, none of it helped. They should've operated on him the moment he was caught with a poster of that horrendous monster on his wall—that Joseph Merrick."

"Imagine that: No sports heroes, no female superstars, but a picture of the Elephant Man—and this as a mentor—the 'I would be measured by the soul / The mind's the standard of the Man' quote placed right on top," continued another nurse with a thoroughly upset countenance.

"Well, it's these very states of mind that we're trying to cure," comforted the doctor.

"No, no; to write pamphlets about the dignity of all human life and to then throw them out in public

where our children can so easily see them ... to be so thoughtlessly unpatriotic, this when we're at war ... that's beyond all comprehension.

“Besides, as if the few thousand collateral damages that've occurred this day or any other should concern us. As if all of their ugly children wouldn't have grown up to despise us anyway,” said the head nurse.

“He wouldn't have gotten that far underground if it wasn't for that movement he started; you know, the one built around a billion and one stupidities such as—and I quote—‘the aspiration of a future world devoid of humans raping humans;’” interrupted another nurse.

They all snickered and laughed.

“I tell you, though,” said the doctor while busily engaged in surgery, “this bastard was as neurologically malformed as they get. I wouldn't of believed it but for the brain scans. His psychosis deals with the delusion that all humans have a right to pursue happiness and equitable justice—something about starting out in life with equal opportunity.

“And our data show that he even feels empathetic pain when presented with images of those infidel parents holding their decapitated children in their hands—even of children that have only lost two or three limbs. Just try to imagine being him if you can—actually living in such states of sorrow on account of what happens to those inhuman apes out there.

“And the extents to which his empathy-spurred

insanities reach: to actively try to spread this depression-disease of empathy in our society while talking about the right to happiness.”

“Yes doctor,” added an up-and-coming surgical student, “just as his group tries to madden our youth with these beliefs and then parades about town with their ‘dignity of all children’ motto.

“They even have the gull to claim that the annual plastic surgery we freely receive since the age of two is supposed to be unethical, somehow dehumanizing.”

“Good gracious. What do they want of us and our children?” the head nurse asked on everyone’s behalf.

The doctor made quick answer. “I don’t claim to understand his empathetic states of mind. All I know is we need to cure him so as to cure the social damage he’s so far produced in our great nation.”

As the doctor carefully pulled out another slice of brain from the patient’s skull, he continued, “The way the system’s allowed him to slip through the fingers is beyond me, and the crowds of other neuro-genetically diseased individuals he’s since then brought out into the open ... Kill or torture them and, given their delusional psychoses, we’d ultimately lose; it would only give them more nerve. But as soon as we’ve programmed him to conform, and then make him handsome again, his followers will then begin to obey.”

“What a world,” concluded a nurse, “To have these sub-humans complain that we’re the crazy ones.”

The patient was at last cured of all his mental disorders. Ninety-eight point seven, five, nine, two percent of his cerebral cortex and limbic system had been successfully replaced with brain-prosthetics. The procedure's results were not perfect, but still good enough to get the patient to comply—this as was needed whenever the remote buttons were pushed.

And, needless to add, before long he once again looked good.

## 16. *Problematic Hearts,* *Exhibit B*

He'd fallen in love, had been in love now for years longer than the gypsy masquerading herself as a high-class starving artist told him he would be. Of course, there were parts of him that refused to believe. "All just whims of passion," he'd assert as his heart sped before him along the floor.

At times, from exhaustion, it would no longer pounce in its uneven thumping but instead stood in one place as though gulping large breaths of air. The blood-trails it normally left behind were then no longer a nuisance, for there was then only a single expanding puddle within which it heaved its alternating muscular contractions.

He would angrily watch it, on these occasions, slowly disentangling itself into ever smaller muscular threads, until it would at last appear wholly immersed within its own fluids. As was typical, he'd then rush

toward it, thinking it might have momentarily lost its vigilance, readying to stomp on it, to somehow more speedily obliterate its existence—but it would then reflexively reorganize and again scurry underneath the sofa, or underneath the closet door, always finding a hiding place just out of reach.

If only the phone calls would stop, he would think. He'd tried everything: keeping the phone unplugged, throwing the phone as far out of the house as possible, dismantling it. But, no matter his attempts, the rings would again become audible. "Hello," he'd patiently answer the phone, sometimes repeating the word five or six times with momentary hesitations. No one ever replied. Then the call was ended from the other side.

That little piece of mutinying flesh would then quickly stand and come to arms, once again rushing out of its unreachable hiding places and, with refortified energy, pompously parade its glistening existence. "I told you," the heart would angrily exclaim, "It is you who are being a coward! She's suffered long enough because of it! Why do you not believe?"

"Believe what?"

"That it's her; that she loves you!"

Had he not held onto this wretchedly delusional hope for what seemed like eons? Without exception, so doing always resulted in him becoming bent and broken—always ended in a self-sabotage spurred on by his heart's presumptions of what was real.

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Previously, when it had still been within him, his heart had very painfully ached. At times the pressure felt like invisible mountains being stacked on him, so that he couldn't go to sleep for hours on end, so that he felt as though he was undergoing some medieval torture where weights are piled on top till lungs can no longer inhale. This until his heart at last one night burst out of his chest.

If his heart would not comply, continuing its mutiny against him, against all reason, insisting on impossibilities ... well, it was through no fault of his own.

Let it plead and destroy itself in its efforts.

He would be better off without it.

## 17. *At the Club*

It was Karaoke night.

On stage was a semi-drunk lady eagerly singing her own batch of semi-improvised lyrics about who'd let some dogs out. Beneath her, she had an audience; among it were five young gentlemen. These five young lads were dancing close to the stage, close enough that one might think them able of peering up the lady's extremely short miniskirt, especially since they peered up without pause. The lady was not bothered by this. To the contrary; she indulgently spread out her legs as wide open as she could on a regular basis as part of her un-choreographed, on-stage, dance routine.

"Hey, I think I'm going to mingle; see if I can meet a new puss before my girl shows up with her click."

"Yea? I'm cool," Theodore replied to Sam, "Think I'd rather scan around for prospects first."

As he stood there watching the crowd, Theodore

noticed that there was a large opening in the club to his right.

Just on the other side of the street, through the opening, he could see another club.

The large, flickering neon light directly above this other club's entrance read, "Εδώ η ζωή ξαναγεννιέται." That was the main sign, but it was all Greek to him. Other lesser signs and posters read, "Infinities within the zero," "Hang out for a while till Godot arrives," "Nothing remains fixed in space and time but change itself," and so on.

As advertised on its exterior walls in-between the club's large windowpanes, inside there was a large variety of music—salsa, jazz, rhythm and blues, folk, industrial, country, to name a few—with different rooms for each type.

Some of the brick walls in the club had been turned into makeshift libraries. Paintings of all types adorned the club's insides.

Amid the club's eclectic crowd of both young and old, he noticed poets, scientists, painters, philosophers, and mathematicians, among others, conversing.

He thought he saw Einstein, Heraclitus, and Da Vinci seated at a table in the back; the three appeared to be engaged in a heated debate while interludes of laughter made them seem like children. There were others: Antoni Gaudi playing chess with Martin Luther King, Jr. in the blues room; Salvador Dali prancing about with his cane; David Hume at the

pool table; Virginia Wolfe and Marry Cassatt having a drink at the bar; Dumas, Shaw, Darwin, Cicero, Saxton, they were scattered among the diverse crowds of the place.

He had a sudden apprehension that, there, he could meet a woman among the patrons which might fit what his heart had once deeply longed for.

After some hesitation, he started walking towards this other club across the street.

Having taken a few steps outside on the street, Theodore sensed a tug holding him back. It felt somewhat like a noose, but it was a microphone cable that had become tangled around his neck.

He struggled against the cable's hold; still, the more he struggled the more the cable dragged him backward.

The karaoke singer from which the microphone cable descended had now changed her song and was singing about being like a virgin, this while her short miniskirt now clearly presented a bared vagina to the audience and her attention was exclusively given toward Theodore—her haphazard winks included.

Theodore didn't want to remain within this place. He wanted what was on the other side of the street. Here was the easy sex, wanting him; there, the intangible passions of life's romance where flesh, spirit, and mind become as one—a place which he was unable to reach.

The karaoke singer, having now pulled him to the front of the stage right before her, could manage to

pull him no further. It became a standstill between the two.

Wanting to get a better foothold in hopes of overcoming the microphone cable's pull, Theodore found himself stepping into a hole. The next thing he knew, he fell in.

He fell through darkness, on occasion catching glimpses of cobweb-ridden cabinets, broken plates, and the like.

When he got to the brightly lit bottom, there was a gothic-looking young woman that stood poised before him, appearing to be irritated at him for having taken so long to arrive.

She was spinning a pocket watch by its chain. At her feet was a clothed white rabbit that ceaselessly jumped up to catch the watch, but, always, with no success.

"Well, are you going to go through or what?" she indignantly asked of Theodore.

He looked around to see what it was she might have been referring to and, to her side, he noticed a small door: half opened, barely large enough for him to go through, with light emanating from the other side.

"I'm dreaming. This isn't real," Theodore stated while shaking his head within the ornate, very long, Victorian hallway in which he now found himself.

"I'm dreaming. This is not real," she mocked back at him. "You're not consciously saying that," she continued, "and that's what's bothering you."

“Of course I’m conscious,” Theodore rebuked rather defensively.

“No, no you’re not. But that’s OK: neither is anyone else, really. Consciousness is fully an unconscious process.”

He thought the pocket watch she was spinning was largely to blame for his dizziness.

“Still,” Theodore said presuming himself to be talking to a rambunctious brat, “you’ve just tried to tell me what consciousness consists of. That then means that even you acknowledge such a thing as consciousness exists.”

“Of course it exists,” the woman replied, “but what we typically understand it to be is only a fictitious abstraction of human creation. See, it’s really only a Gestalt property—something other than the sum of its parts—that is itself fully made up unconscious processes. You don’t, can’t, will into being an unexpected realization, nor choose what it is that you perceive, nor decide to decide, nor intend to intend, etc., etc., etc. And even if you think you can it leads into an infinite regress whose origins you are utterly unaware of. So your consciousness is always a full product of your unconscious mind.

“So there!” She stuck out her tongue sardonically. “You’re not conscious; it’s confirmed. Now, will you kindly go through the door?”

Her impertinence aggravated him.

“But none of this really matters, though,” she soon said at noticing his aggravation, adding, “So, are you

going to go through that door or no?”

“Why should I go through the door?”

“In order to get to the other side.”

“What’s on the other side?”

“That’s the whole point of going through: to find out.”

“Well how will I know what’s there if I’m not conscious?”

“You’re asking too many irrelevant questions.”

There was a long pause between the two.

“It’s really all a matter of perspective and semantics,” she finally replied, “It’s like the present; it exists but only as a fully abstracted Gestalt property of human imagination. Objectively speaking—or, at least, according to what some take to be objective—there’s no present whatsoever: only future and past. Because if you were to insist on the present being objectively real, there’d then be no room for the independent existence of a future and past; both would then have to be contained within the bounds of an immeasurable moment of the present. But the future and past are independently real because we all have become habituated to reflexively think that they are. The instant you try to label the present it’s already become past, and so no such thing as a present can then be technically said to exist—not from this vantage.

“But again,” she went on, “you could in fact choose to take the perspective that all which exists is this very immeasurable moment of now: with all

quantifiable pasts and futures fully contained within the realms of this universally occurring, logically structured, forever transforming present.

“The same shift of perspective applies to issues of consciousness. So then, if you want to think of it that way, you are fully conscious at all times you are aware: this because everything we ever perceive and think—the existence of our own unconscious minds included—is fully contained without exception within the bounds of our consciousness.

“There. Does that now resolve the problem?”

“Not quite,” slowly answered Theodore while further sinking into confusion.

“I told you,” she answered, “it doesn’t matter. I should’ve never even brought it up to begin with.” But, in now seeing Theodore more perplexed than ever, she went on, “Really, the only thing you should worry about existentially is what kind of value you choose to ascribe to things. For instance, your very impression that something is real is only you applying the value of existence to the thing you’re contemplating. And rightly so, most times at least, because everything has consequences. Of course there’s a reality beyond you, dear, and it often bites hard, doesn’t it; nevertheless, what *is* is still really only a matter of speculation. So, then, that value of reality you decide to place on things will turn out to be the only reality that exists for you. That’s all. See?”

Sensing that he didn’t grasp anything of what she was attempting to tell him, she grew even more

indignant.

“Look!” she at last said impatiently, “Don’t worry about any of this. You either go in through that door or you don’t. It’s just that simple. What’s the problem?”

“What if what’s on the other side will be worse than what I’m accustomed to? What I mean to say is, I don’t want my hopes to be shattered.”

“Would you rather then not have any hopes whatsoever?”

The dim echoes of the faraway karaoke singers disappeared. In their place, an increasingly louder hard rock melody began to be heard.

The woman folded her arms and waited. The large head of an otherwise bodiless cat, appearing and disappearing from varying locations, then ominously began singing:

“The child that once dwelled inside, // yea, he’s still haunting my dreams at night, // asking me why I gave up, // asking me why I broke the promises once made, // asking me why I’m so happy living dead. // He tells me that earthly life is a battle that can never be won. // He says the moment you fear the loss is the moment the demons come. // My child, my brother, myself, // I forgot that there’s this and nothing else. // And I can still remember the wisdom of the child // as he walked though pain with a resilient mind. // That same small child is now asking me to take his hand // to tap puddles of rain while laughing with him at the muddied grave ...”

The woman standing in front of Theodore—with watch dangling from folded hands—now candidly eyeballed Theodore as the song progressed. The clothed white rabbit followed suit as he now rested next to her legs. The cat’s head, which had so far been popping in and out of odd corners, now finished singing while situated in front of the chandelier:

“I see him drowning in the lake growing of my apathetic slumbers, // and he’s reaching out for my hand, // and I wake up in another cold sweat. // He’s asking me why-y-y I gave up. // He’s asking me why-y-y ... I’m so afraid ... to love!”

A long “meow” echoed throughout the hallway—the cat, or at least its head, having now disappeared for what seemed to be the last time.

Theodore again looked at the half opened doorway. As he leaned over to peer through, he saw the club he’d wanted to go to—the one that had been across the street. The same large, flickering neon sign above the club’s entrance could now be plainly read saying, “Here Life is Reborn”.

## 18. Crossroads

Valleys of wheat and rye slowly readying for harvest; patches of corn, six-foot sunflowers, and vineyards; deciduous forests separated by prairies of waist-high grass grown thick with dandelions and daisies; all this lay assorted in sporadic patterns—changing and recurring—before a distant silhouette of mountains.

It was raining but not too harshly, just a warm bathing of land by sun-drenched showers which give air its clean, crisp scent and recolor landscapes in sharpened tones of green.

The stallion he was riding was of a raven-black hew, and the wetness of its coat made it shine with a nearly metallic gleam.

The section of my train was slowly catching up with him now, a boy of about fourteen or so.

He wore nothing more than his shorts. The boy's rain-soaked hair echoed the flowing curvatures of the horse's mane with each ensuing gallop. The horse had neither saddle nor bridle. The boy's wrists were

wrapped into the horse's mane; his ankles cradled the horse's torso. Reflexively negotiating wooden fences and obstacles, the two sped alongside the railroad tracks as though they were extensions of the same will and being.

There was a deep happiness in my heart as I glanced out of the train; I saw it like an ever-changing collage framed within a single image. There, before me, was everything I could ascribe to the image of freedom; recalling the self that I'd once been, it was everything that my heart secretly yearned for.

Yes, and I, too, wandered about him while I gazed through the train's windows. Myself as seen through a chasm of time—headed nowhere while thinking himself to be progressing, hypnotized each day into the increasingly fictitious trances of others' making, forgetting himself till he'd forgotten the reality of all he'd once been—he was now almost within my reach.

With each new glimpse I took of him from outside the speeding train, I could see other adults as they scurried behind him on the inside, as they sat before him, as they mindlessly engaged in crossword puzzles, paperwork, and mundane conversation—like so many sardines packaged within transported boxcars, awaiting their arrival at marketplaces where they were to be further consumed by others' appetites.

Did not both of us know this crossroads had been predestined to come? Regardless, our two paths met that day.

I was staring out into realities of possible futures

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whereas he, long ago there, was examining himself with nostalgias for a no longer existent past.

When I first heard the approaching train's distant sound earlier that day, with no time to harness either bridle or saddle, I took my horse and started full gallop along the railroad's path with every fiber of muscle invested in the effort. Though it then seemed against all odds, I felt that if I could only accumulate enough speed before the train's arrival I could then possibly compensate for the chasm. Maybe, if only I could bridge the relative spaces, I could then find a place where I could latch on, where I could scream my lungs out to him, this till he'd at last hear me, remember who he was, and break free. But, hard as I tried, the train's speed had been too great.

We passed each other by that day in this fashion: with me ever-confident, gasping through rain soaked locks of horse's mane for additional breath; with him having complacently forgotten, carried away within that compartmentalized belly of the train in which he sat, staring out with eyes whose glimmer he'd learned to keep secret even from himself.

Then the shrinking window panes became increasingly more opaque. Then the train grew ever smaller. This until it disappeared before me along the horizon.



## *About the Author*

I was born within a Stalinist regime in Romania during 1974, and immigrated with my parents to Southern California on political asylum at the age of seven—where I currently still live. My professions—to the extent they may be so called—have varied greatly over the years. Through reading and practice, I'm still learning how to improve my creative writing, oil painting, and photography. Much of my current free time—when not occupied with distractions—is spent in reediting an extensive philosophical work concerning metaphysics and epistemology. And—as though the just mentioned weren't ambitious enough—I'd like to someday remedy never having produced the semi-industrial music album I was working on during my university years. I love the beauties of life and of humanity's better aspects—these being often easy to take for granted—and find that my awareness of them is often best sustained by my also being attentive to life's harsher truths.

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On this note, as a closing remark, I uphold that love is essential to life whereas hate is an unnecessary consequence of the former. Love, minimally in some form of self-love, is required for life to continue

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living. Hate will exists as one of many possible means of defending that which is loved—this, at minimum, being the identity of the very person(s) which actively hate. Unlike opposites such as up and down, or yin and yang, love and hate do not form an inseparable duality. Whereas hate's existence will always be dependent on the presence of some form of love, love can not only exist but thrive in the absence of all hatred.

So, to me at least, as hard as this ideal might be to accomplish, there's yet some worthwhile truth to be found in the phrase, "all you need is love".

