

## The Adventures of Leba Scrachinsniv, minus The Diamond Thief

### Preface\*

Places in this story and proper names both are capitalized variably by the determination of the moment and its intent; sometimes they are Capitalized and other times they are not. Grammatical choice (usage of commas, placement of hyphens, conjunctive beginnings, prepositional ends) as well caters to lingual feel rather than legal form; and it is entirely possible that time and facts are incongruent within the story's parameters. Any misspelling, however, is unintended, for with spelling we have aimed to be precise. Nobody in this story is an actual person and if any instances that take place within this story resemble pieces of situational reality possibly familiar to a reader or which ring connotatively with allusions to the authoress herself, it is only because all imagery both comes from palettes filled with historically afferent material and plays bias to the affected memory.

Oh, and this—

Addendum: References allegorically noting previously written works may be asterisked, but left without the expected small-font explanation. So don't go looking for the elaboration at the bottom of the page or back of the book, rather, live your way into the answer\*.

### HERE IS THE BEGINNING

The cold Leba hospitably accepted had moved into its most watery stage of release: The running nose. There was not a moment yet in course where its expression executed by manner less than perfect; a thoughtful cold was it. Carrying out in dutiful transference, winning lot over the duller had personifications hovering in atmosphere for the pick. Plans and little occurrences the psyche sets up for synchronistic takeoff fall short of strategic time-space, but the head-colds, with their alien constitutional minds, express a reckoning of passage otherworldly and married in suit to materialize with an exactness that breeds; lesson and at best renewal.

We started the piece about Leba Scrachnsniv some time of 27 months ago in California, in the town center of Mill Valley, which is more than an adequate location to begin; fresh flowering squares, fine restaurants, little stores flaunting color and children peddling first tricycles aside watchful guardians taking utmost care.

The story was jaggedly interrupted, though it was kept in a fine French notebook, Verde (viridian) green. Somehow it ended up in a trunk, which seemed always miles away when it itched to continue.... And so we got stuck in a moment, the time of a summer past when Leba went traveling with an entourage, each a robust flavor of character, each a challenged spirit of his own right. The rendering of the tale came to its halt, at the instance where a man who went by the name of The Diamond Thief dropped a red fireball candy into his coffee, as he did every day. In an ordinary café, a place at most for taking only literary pause— we left Leba with a tear in her eye. Or, upon reflection, we are remembering now how, by then, her tears were no longer moving through ducts out of her eyes, but had rerouted behind her eye-sockets (behind her

Lacrimal Bones) and out through the flesh around her Zygomatics (which are the cheek bones), surfacing as oval tan freckles; doing nothing for her appearance but creating a look (considered a style in some parts of the urban world) that is called, plainly, tired.

The task of clearly portraying “what happened next” is the skill, assumedly, of a solid writer. To pick and mould the form and support to amply relay subtleties, in this case of debunking tale, is an intuitive guesswork. The great achievement of telling a story properly is credited not only to discipline, intention, or successful remembering— not even to the continuity of the teller who by luck or simple-mindedness will wake in the next morn and take up with a tone akin to where they left off, with the same candle lit. The triumph of writing *The End* after (and in some cases, lo ng after) the *Once Upon A Time* is due, in part, to the mystery of creation, as mysterious as saline and beehives, motorcycles and tightrope hi-wire. Historical authorities, loving to prove life through causal sequentiality, have discerned that the oldest Vedic texts, an ultimate story and an oracle both, are translatable into practices of science, medicine, health and art. Wielded by poets afire in caves, who retreated without light for hours and days, the template of thought churned talisman to hieroglyph and petroglyph from their illuminated beings. Even without technological justification, cosmology broods creation, and thus we prepare to reveal the Why of Leba Scrachnsniv. Perhaps you will fall in love with her, or at last, leave her alone.

Leba Scrachnsniv didn't do anything. She was plagued with laziness, offing a sickness, fighting a tendency for falling. She did not run marathons or bike up mountains, ice-climb rocks, or perform a back flip (though this she hoped to some day learn) nor did she know how to rebuild car engines. She did not own a house, rent one, or have a stable retirement plan, and neither could she see, literally, very far into her own fate. She tried, often, to work truly hard, organize all of the various parts of her life, control the outcome of her destiny and learn certain applications. For many years, the way she dealt with her laziness was by never slowing down enough to fully confront any challenge. Her mind fastened upon approaching only what it could confidently, and her ethics formed to support singularly what responsibly dissipated, was disposable and decomposable— like bones, like blood. Leba didn't want to be buried in a coffin, but she did want to be buried in cool autumn dirt, not too dry and not too wet. She carried her groceries in her hands, resolute, refusing even a cotton bag and most definitely never in a plastic carrier. Even if she carried sixteen oranges, even if she fumbled every 2 feet back from the store, still she portaged. And when she ate her orange she liked to peel its skin off in one take saying aloud at times solely for her lone amusement, “they call me one-peel.” The orange remnants were fine to be left afterwards as a hardening shell, because they disintegrated, non-obliging. Expectedly, Leba was prone to determining her affections toward a person by the way they peeled an orange. She liked the way it looked so much to peel an orange in one try and she thought it handsome to watch. She also thought her own brown leather cap handsome to watch, and placed it on occasion upon a glass table to give it a stare, to feel the blood rush into her limbs.

Leba fancied the middle way. If she were a dog, she'd look not too black or too white, she'd be a brown dog, with a nose not too runny and not crackly, but moist and even. Her tongue wouldn't be too long or short nor thin and flicking. She wouldn't be too furry and overweight, but would certainly be snubbed by most Greyhounds in comparison, who would think her frame not

graceful and breakable enough.

Her hair was clean and soft but thick and capable. She was pinned first by a man at a (then) intimidating (now) embarrassing to reflect upon agency for child-stars who told her mother she was very American looking. Later, other men on the streets had thought her Italian, Francophone, a Scot or Zuni and one disturbed man, as the last subway which the two singularly and starkly together rode under the Boston night turned inside the eeriest tunnel, nailed it when risking his hold on train pole and foaming at the mouth he leaned toward her and in audio sync with the brake's screech piercingly beseeched "are you Jewish?"

But she never really knew what to simply say to anyone asking her anything. Her personal illustration of a successful transaction was the sort had during the instance of a latest haircut, when after discussing the symptoms of her hair's malaise, the warmly sophisticated hairdresser placed his hands on her shoulders over the scratchy black cloak which snapped at the nape of her neck. He gently tousled her locks and asked with wide, concerned eyes how she felt when all of her hair stuck together as one piece. Her heart skipped, triggered by the lightness of his trained hands and preening voice combined; when she said that it made her sad the answer was true and simple. She knew he was being paid, but his inquiry carried the tone of real concern. He replied by giving her an outstanding trim, taking nothing but dead ends off of her mane of hair. To her, it was an example of the perfect vulnerable exchange. She left his shop content at the precise hour when the sun trades sky with the moon and there is no fighting between them.

Leba knew that french oil crayons made her happy to touch and smear between her fingers, she knew that guitar strings were prone to posing as irritators, slipping out of their package and into her bags or onto the floor of her car like smiling wiry snakes, reminding the instrumentalist that the fretted wonder which produces sound under fingertips has done so only by wrangling in wild serpents. She knew that grape was a flavor, but firstly it was a color, that it was named foremost after a fruit, though to her brain it made more sense that first grape would be a flavor, and then a color and then, at last, a fruit.

But she didn't know what to say when people wanted quick summaries to large questions. It was not that the idea of a questioner had ever really bothered Leba, in truth Leba lived to be interviewed, but it was her case of Synesthesia that so easily off-centered her. Words poked at her skin, kissed her neck, breathed down her shirt, tousled her hair, whipped her ribs, sweat open her pores, chilled her bones. No lover had gone where the dimensions of image had ventured into the meeting point of her brain's spheres. And so when the multi-faceted questions began, they erupted into a sympathetic nerve dance inside and around her skeleton, until she emitted the aura of a tease, oozing agitations of yesses and nos.

"How are you" was like a poker in the fire, albeit boring and contained, it still tempted spark.

"Where are you" was a hidden picture's yellow marker that threatened to leak its poisonous invisibility onto the face or arm of the asker. After much consideration, it seemed to Leba that few held responsibly the possible impact of their words, had coddled the depth and meaning therein. Sound takes form, vibration makes matter; words confirm the shape of the mouth, tell the story of the first echo, that reputable bang, grand bust, the original boom. The trickiest speakers wield conversation gauntly unaware of their own words' phraseology, but subtly, unmistakably keen to the incisive impact delivered by their chosen terminology. (The dental hygienist who professes that a cavity can "arrest itself"! The electrician who installs an operative

“Hysteresis switch” to regulate the thermostat. Drill bit, I-beam, Rebar: all apparatus daringly close to the onomatopoeia.)

And then there are those who assume the position as linguists, who set forth to excavate underused language, but who are dulled to their own lingual tendency of seeking lyrical conveniences, preaching on the behalf of the freedom of speech while simultaneously buying into the anesthetizing plan enforced upon the collective mind unknowingly by the conspirators of language. Such conspirators are employed by companies urgent to sell overly worn clichés in the form of greeting cards and parenthetical political statement to discourage the act of surfing the cuff of language in a similar way communist china persecuted practitioners of Falun Gong in the late twentieth century, when everybody knows that Falun Gong is a sacred martial art which threatens only with the possibility of aiding self-attainment. Phrases such as “action speaks louder than words” and “sticks and stones break bones but words won’t hurt” are carried out by corporals of the defense against global myth and word as action, against corporeal verbosity, of sounding hips and speaking hearts.

But contemplating such seemed, to Leba, a tyrannous torture devised by her own dictatorial laziness, who would rather use poetry as mental obstacle— like a playdoh machine grunting forth its blue dyed salty substance, good for nothing but a kind of perverted stimulation.

Leba’s self-threatening violent laziness did not know, however, this: Leba had protected herself from a young age by deciding that she was pain-resistant, and in fact, her threshold for experiencing sensation without feeling was quite extreme, and so —while many would certainly have vomited themselves into a deep comatose if forced for a duration within her very own sensorial mind— she had found therein a place to sit and take long breaths before the amusement park opened its doors, and even during operation hours.

Leba tried as wholly and completely as she could to prove to her surroundings that she walked the extra mile. She took the stairs at the airport and not the escalator but still she couldn’t convince herself she was working. Somehow, the world she was born into seemed mixed up like a game of memory cards. She had to sort the cards out, remember where they were, flip them over and only with due time, line them up. She felt if truly she were to live in the glorious expression of her fate, and if, by this, she could completely be engaged in the way of its unfolding, life would open not with force, but by a softness inside that was indefatigable and withstanding.

She caught this particular cold in the lovely town of Brooklyn, NY. It began with a blue-swelling of her body, a soreness in her skin and bones. She felt like a Northern Right Whale, she felt like a Bruised piece of Fallen Metal from an aluminum plant. She felt like desert vine and cactus. There had been a series of hurricanes in the south of the United States and during the first she had spent a few nights around the edges of the parameters where it hit. The air felt electric and determined, unwilling and angry; god’s chaos.

Her second symptom was like this— like she had been pinned by the hurricane, and that perhaps she would die. The thought of death in this situation posed no comfort, which at times before had seemed in its own way conciliating and light. This kind of death seemed tragic and endless and unkind.

The third symptom of her cold was felt while she was performing. During her performance, the

volume of the sound system dropped and lifted erratically, made strange bulbous swells and thwarted her ear's intake of sonic environment, which made her mind contort information. After her show, a man she did not know who had written her a deluded letter and had it specially delivered to her for \$27 showed up with a head full of derangement. Leba felt unlike herself – a woman who at one time would have sat with such a man and spoken gently with him until she was sure he had come around and that he could then leave feeling better about all of life because he had traveled with his discord all the way to her– a complete stranger filled with the hope that somehow her musical performance would relieve his vexation, and thus it was her responsibility to annul his discomfort. By this moment though, she was deep in subtle engagement with her particular cold and thus, the man seemed much more daunting and dangerous than she could bear to encounter and so she allowed herself to be plagued with dread. What followed suit was a night which posed death in the nerve-wracking role similarly cast by horror movie makers and administered by experts of high-selling products, who have found gainful employment in reminding the public of the burgling potential upon their very own home, proselytizing that “for x\_\_ dollars more you can afford vacation life insurance,” pitching within Leba's frame a grueling dread, a throbbing amalgamation which pierced morning like porcelain shatters.

The next stage was a perfect hoarseness of voice that worked intrinsically well with the Duke Ellington tribute she had been part of in Brooklyn the following night, singing Prelude to A Kiss, and from there– her cold began to exit in the traditional way, through the nose, aided by tissues, etc.

She had moments of remembering all of the places in the country that herself and The Diamond Thief had tread. All the while, he was busy stealing diamonds from the backs of traveling salesmen's rental cars, from safes in urban apartments, from bed and breakfasts in wealthy farmland tourist towns, even from storefronts. His svelte moves could trick open the most closed cases– and so he was, as a result, very successful at stealing. Leba knew the whole time that he was a Diamond Thief, but in every other way he was the most honest and beautiful man she had ever known. She couldn't tell anyone exactly the way it was for her when they were together. It was a question that when posed seemed insufficient, and in truth no one really was interested when they asked. It was almost as though when they asked how it was they were more so saying “please don't tell me, please spare me”. Or they asked like it didn't matter, they asked as though it seemed much less essential to all of life than, for example, the importance of trees emitting oxygen. So she couldn't really tell anyone what it was like for her and for the diamond thief, what they carried together and felt. She could however explain to no one at all in song what specifically it was like for a moment to feel. Though to express this emotion she had to wear various getups, like costumes: The Cowgirl, wailing, The Machinist, killing, The Woman, becoming. She knew that she wouldn't have to separate herself forever into pieces and characters to tell the story of her heart. For now, though, she was just beginning to see the interconnectedness of all of these parts of her whole and wondered, still, why the plastic dinosaurs on the dashboards of the cars of the boys she knew evoked such a strange sensation within her tender frame. Why did the plastic dinosaur conjure her heart's evocation? And then, why did she feel so frustrated and unable to settle into her own sense of devotion or awe? Was it true that men were only as stylish as the sum of all of their innovative girlfriends put together, and so the dinosaur dashboard conjured a resentment long felt that, once again, a boy she knew

was copping a style that seemed original only after he, most likely, lost attraction for the very woman from whose colorful box of fabrics he pulled out his current, stolen weave?

There was a time once when she was perfectly contented to invoke the interest of a suitor, someone who would find her tales worthy or invest in her stories. But she outgrew hiding successfully in her own fiction. It was like turning on a television when hanging out with herself and anyone. Turn on Leba and then both Leba and associates could sit back and just watch. This way, no one in the collective would have to really be there, and certainly Leba wouldn't then be responsible to engage with her company, either. But 27 months ago, when we left off, with the Diamond Thief— it was because, as far as not having a story, we really found ourselves in a problematic position. Basically, the Diamond Thief admitted to the writer that he had no thoughts of his own, no sense of his own, no determination of his own (other than to express that he had none) and felt moved only to let go. It is impossible to even find the muscle to sharpen a pencil and attempt to make vivid and concrete such smeary, fuzzy expression; expression that is less formed than the straggling translucent fish-poop dangling from a fish in a tank, a fish that is gold and ready to die. You should have seen how unbelievably smudgy and grey his expression was! With every syllable he uttered more we sank into an underworld where no fall leaf could retain its crisp caliber (we couldn't believe he gave us such dingle-berry content, did he not know we sought out to recreate the Ramayana, a wholesome grail, or at least a sweet strip of colorful comic?). We became obtuse, sickly. We had to put down our story; there was nothing more to say.

After this, there was an in between time when Leba still had to answer many questions for him in his absence, as well as use his name as a projected point of reference for what was truly her original knowing and/or ideas. There was a frame of time where Leba still longed for the smell of his tee-shirt armpit breath mouth thigh stomach leg chin hand; a time where her heart would easily re-tear. Truthfully, that time never passed. It was a time that broke all rules of time and became all time. When she went to the hospital because she felt an unusual and prolonged jabbing pain in her upper lungs, the nurses said she had a condition. Her heart had broken open in such a way that it could only re-tear. It would forever be either healing or re-tearing. It could never be the way it once was again.

Every time Leba thought about her condition it made her heart re-tear.

Then, there was a worse sensation, a cliché feeling that The Diamond Thief would come to her, finally come and facilitate a procreation of their whole selves, not by making a child or anything so hefty to understand, but by creating something simple, like a flower garden in her pelvic floor. Everyone Leba knew who loved her enough said that though The Diamond Thief understood her like they never could or even wanted to, she would have to realize in time that this Diamond Thief of a man was not right for her. This was hard for Leba to make sense of because she wondered: Was this “being right for her” synonymous with a being easy for her or a being there for her? Should she stop caring for something because the something was, perhaps, impractical? Leba wondered why she would adopt such presumptuous rationale, expecting, as did the rest of the world, that one's own love must be feasibly returned; or else terminated. The same such lovers who profess their passions to be organic and divinely configured can suddenly self-willfully determine the practical end of their infatuation dependent on the sufficient or

insufficient return of their unique devotion, masking fickleness through egoist excuses (“I deserve more”, “I’m old enough to know better”, “At least I figured it out before it was too late”, etc.). Leba resolved that love’s direction was the greatest and last mystery –or the smallest and first, and that she was in no position to forcibly quell her most intimate contemplations and direction therein of such an efficiently productive energy. And so she became invested in the watching of, rather than the agonizing over, her love’s natural traversing, learning by its tendencies and trajectory how to open within herself a deeper circuitry of love– one holding to no conditions, baring the name of no person whatsoever, one that– if shared with another– would open with something called Trust that looked less like a gun and more like a harp. That shot less like a bullet and more like a dandelion. That dreamt more of flying and less of falling. That did not burn soup. Meanwhile, her heart fermented a healing tonic; a re-tearing serum made of the poison of moon coronas and mountain fires that knew how to love and writhe. This enlightenment was filled with discomforting moments which hovered, knowing the more of the psyche’s unknowing, knowing deeper than the mind’s eye, knowing timeless space, knowing the brevity of loving things. Things like waterfalls, like nights in Jerusalem, things like chewing slowly a fresh harvest of arugula, and then later in the season the arugula flower, as it turns to seed. Things like the fullest lips, like chamomile in the sun. Loving such transforming matter would pass her eventually into great emptiness where her soul could take residency and surrender to a completeness of being: Atonement.

There was a history to Leba. She was born in a hospital. She was taken, in a blanket, by photograph in her first days. Her head seemed soft and pliable like a turtle in that picture. She looked in ways both beautiful and beautiful only at the right angle. Like light fixtures and centerpieces, and bold eye-catching installations. Objects you love but whose beauty is exclusive to certain company; décor you self-select but are later struck by the hideousness of its appeal. A room that calls either for the most exquisite furnishings beyond conceivable budget or whose interior design is perfect only when empty. Her vessel was almost immediately misperceived as dangerous for she possessed a truly gentle innocence that obliterated her own ability to sense the rest of the world, which filled her wholly with only herself and infinity. She directly tapped into this source like a maple tree when she would sing. Her voice was the best it would ever be when she was four, when there had been no influences. No Barry Manilow, no Chopin. No Village People, no British Emo Punk, no Traditional Choral Music, no Americana. No Dinah Washington. No whiskey, no tobacco, no smoke on the breath of rambling men. Her family were forgotten gypsies. They had no home and no one would offer theirs. They were not wanted but no one would say that outright. They presented offerings to employees and were hired, rather than cherished– or seen. They attended schools, but they never were pierced in the gut by education, they simply regurgitated, they plainly walked upright without much ado about gravity.

Leba dreamt herself awake when she was 17. She began to fly upstairs, she began to make a fist; she was moving her body in the dream world. This erupted a frenzy inside her mind that never before had known such intent and will. She woke herself up soon after. She climbed outside on the roof-deck.

In the winter mid-night, in rings of exhalation, she determined that she possessed a magical life

that had thus far been dampened by desire. Wanting more to Happen, wanting less to Happen, wanting to escape, wanting to stay forever, wanting a new cereal, one with more marshmallows, wanting rainbow pin-stripe jeans, wanting to wear her halloween mask all year long. Wanting to lie in the fall night air hearing bells. Wanting to make a story, wanting to be the matchmaker of event and fantasy, wanting someone to put their hand on her back, like a lid on a pit of sacrifice. She really believed something should come to quell her lusting desire, her coquettish infections; her impending senses.

This dream insisted a new invocation: She knew now how to awaken her senses by breathing and quieting her mind, beating a song from her skin, from her tissues.

It was the same with the Diamond Thief. In all the sick suburbia and uppity boarding schools where he had endured his education, where he was always a good kid everyone liked, he knew not that he had invoked an unusually profound sense of life by beating rhythm from his skin, from his connective tissues. He, Like Leba, played and performed music, though he only really earned his living being a diamond thief. But here is how he was humble: He never needed anyone to come and to put a hand over the endless sacrificial pit in the back of his heart. Or if he did, Leba failed to turn off her emanating self-special to hear that he could maybe use the hand, or to allow him the time to see that she could give such a hand to him, would love to give that hand.

Brooklyn, New York: Leba sat with long-time fantastic friend Delilah Fredemont, a progressive jeweler who specialized in the crafting of made-to-order barbed-wire wedding rings. Delilah had recently withstood a near-life escape from a hit man called The Mauna loa, named after an active Volcano in South Central Hawaii. To evade being found she had changed her name, only in slight, and resumed presiding in her former neighborhood of Prospect Heights, assembling jewelry and working at night constructing complex spoken word rhymes at an underground garage nightclub with bright gold spray-painted walls. On the occasion Leba would sit in, offering a slew of phrase to the public. Her latest collaboration of meter was the long-awaited extension of “See ya, wouldn’t want to be ya, wouldn’t want to smell ya neither”... to this she added “wouldn’t hold your tongue if you were having a seizure, wouldn’t suffer next to you when I know my truth calls me to leisure, wouldn’t want to share the air you’re breathin, either, would encourage deicide if you were my tribal leader, would freeze in the winter seized by frostbite if you were my heater (bitch), would starve for dinner if you were leftovers and my refrigerator was empty suckah, I’d be starving but I wouldn’t have to see you, be you, smell you again. Nehva.”

Spoken word was the most challenging art according to Leba. When she lived in the steel, industrial realms of a certain boxed-in city while studying in her formative years, rich rhymes coupled with a strong notion of spontaneous expression were part of her everyday survival. While walking to the Subway, and while waiting tables, while perusing the tomatoes at the grocers, taking moments to debate over Avocado’s ripeness and toilet paper brands, while getting her oil changed; while mopping her bathroom floor, and all the while walking home alone late at night on unlit streets there was the backbeat, bass-heavy, available for the taking. Channeled through the walls it came up from the woofers underfoot, offering anchor for the moment.

Closing her eyes and watching lyrical phrase form and align was active geomancy— splicing the environment into reflective lines, folding diagonal points in unexpected meetings, breaching the post-modern world with antiquated reverence. Spelunking rhythm panned out wealthily to be her best-invested pursuit while enduring college. She had opted out of the “Cognitive Laboratory” class taught by a prestigious forerunner of human psychology. The homework assignment given on the first day of class, alone, was enough to catapult Leba into a position of contest. Her assignment was merely to find one activity, anything from brushing teeth to sharpening a pencil, and to carry this task forth at the same precise minute every day for a week, while keeping a diary of the experience. The effect, perhaps, of baring such witness to the self in action would be a step toward the achievement of deepened understanding in the relationship between the cognitive and sub-cognitive mind.

To Leba, this course was apparently a series of unbearable sessions both of sharing and listening to unimportant projections made by students revealing their personal wounds and wasting time simultaneously. A classroom filled with coming-of-age portentousness; of so-called enlightening conversation, all seemed, to Leba, chalk-full of biased manipulations. While amassing tools of inference and observing intrinsic behaviors in authentic detail is, considerably, the *crème de la crème* of higher education, Leba spent her years of formal study acquiring a complex nature as a result of directly and desperately fighting to keep whatever salvageable part of her true, simple averageness and its naivety for as long as possible. Her brain's secret folds, originally seamless and green, had already been intercepted enough by a world that attributed success to manipulative self-prodding, whose educational gardening methods flaunted infiltrators much like Paul Hermann's (Nobel prize winning) insecticide DDT, a repellent to which mosquitos eventually developed genetic resistance, but is meanwhile attributed to the near eradication of the symbolically free Bald Eagle.

So, in aims to dodge further obstructions, she promptly visited the teacher during the held office hour and simply relayed that she had no desire to encourage her sub-cognitive and cognitive brain to chance closer encounters, and further, she professed, organizing life into a neat, linear assemblage of causes and effects was obtrusive and mystically molesting. Poor little Leba did not then see that the following years to come after she opted out of the collegiate environment would unavoidably be a slow strain squeezing rationale from the mad uncouth organism of her physical existence. What she safely chastised in the blamable atmosphere of an institution would painfully turn into greater antagonizing sessions, as her growingly more adult-by-the-hour self suffered bouts of demonstrative tantrums, the manufacturing of which she could only accredit to her own person. It became valuable to Leba, in her own eventual time, to acknowledge the benefit, after all, of writing her observations down self-suggestively: “Dear dull diary, I have yet again abrasively brushed my teeth, I suffered a relapse and clenched my ass while operating the blender, dear dull diary; I have scrunched my brows”.

At last upon the difficult path of marriage embarked, her sweet elusive sub-cognitive to her strict cognition —and embryonic babe tumbling after, stewarding action between the two.

Regardless of any reaped relevance from her formative academic stints, for Leba it was typical, as for the occasional young student, to refute all the tender suggestions made by professors and elders in general, and to believe with the grandest of notions that intelligence, truly, could not be acquired through the permissible lessons at hand in the classroom —no matter their direction or

degree of innovation. (Intelligence, she read in slick caption, was acquired through life experience versus, and, thick headed, she could not put together the possibility of having a life experience during any dutiful hour of dedicated enrollment.) So she ultimately deferred the opportunity offered in classrooms like these, and headed, with only the money she received back from her tuition deposit upon withdrawing, into the snowy mountains of a town called often Sohigup, Sohigup Snowfalls.

This is when she became employed with her first serious job, where she would reap the lessons of the real world, a world whose majors were measured in circles and season, by the salt of the earth and the great lesson of death. The precise day that came and offered her a stupendous first career was blustery and fell within the thought-provoking month of January. She sat at her most usual haunt, a cafe with a specialty for spinach anything, and she ordered as she did typically: spinach soup, spinach eggs, and a side of spinach. The door opened, flew open, followed by the entrance of a tall, gaunt man in a yellow fuzzy jumpsuit, with more bags strewn over his shoulders and waist than the mythological santa clause. His bags were made of colorful cloth and straps of various widths worn by sun and wind, frozen and defrosted over and again in the wintry mountains. He sat at a table near enough for her to slightly spy, slightly ignore him, and he unraveled himself slowly and surely out from under each bag, until even the yellow suit of fuzz came undone, and she saw that somehow without his hat he was not so gangly and striking, but in fact, simply handsome.

She did not, at such time, recognize her thoughts enough to benchmark her inferences, and upon later reflection –if you’d ask her– she’d most definitely refute the possibility that any man could strike her as handsome. Handsomeness, she’d say, was reserved for things that did not breathe so obviously, like antique forks and bottles of whiskey.

When her triple spinach special arrived, and as she asked for (in second thought) a pepper-spinach biscuit, her waiter, from whom she had ordered this exact dish many times and again, said overly loud “I am dying to know–what it is you are planning to do for the rest of your life other than sit here so often ordering this very green meal.” Leba was a bit shocked by his insistent manner but recognized, upon later reflection –if you’d ask her– the grand entrance of what could be considered an intersecting moment. Not only had the waiter completely ruined her hope for simple, unobtrusive engagement, but also, by his words’ directness and near scorn, he replicated Nike, or Kronos, or another ceaselessly forward-urging sort of god. So much that Leba felt a grave extenuating pressure, and without other option blurted, turning from him, with equal possession, out an answer.

Her answer was a question for the man with the bags, who caught her eyes by force and threw with fierce reflection the earth back into her lap. “Did you get that orange bag with the mirrors from a woman in California who makes clothes?” She surfaced with breathless inquiry. She’d recognized his bags, she realized only after she had asked. Many were designed and crafted by a woman, a friend of the aforementioned Delilah Fredemont, and though her awareness of the familiar bags and their maker was clear to her as soon as he set foot through the door, it was only at that moment she knew she cared enough to both consciously recognize it herself and express the connection as well.

“Yes” said the man with the bags. His voice was not high nor low and sat anchored by a scratchy tone behind his clavicle. He smiled at her immediately, the kind of smile any man who does not

know what he is in for gives to a woman he cannot instantly see. And then he sweetly persisted. Innocently his mouth peeled in a grin curving from his face; he procured their conversation with whatever opportune phrase he had to go by, repeating, “So what are you going to do with the rest of your life?”

It turned out that the man with the bags never carried typically a thing with him, but on that day he had been at a special market selling pottery. He’d made perfect ceramic tiles, small and good for mosaic, with an exotic sense of color and gradient. Every batch of 100 tiles fit perfectly into a bag, and so, with each bag nearly empty, he had stopped on his way back to his home and studio for a spinach-pepper biscuit, steamed over a cup of Earl Grey.

Previous to this day, he had never sold ceramic tile, he specialized in long, very large, rectangular dishes, which he had sold to many purchasers, from Royal Families to tourists from Ohio, bikers on long trips with UPS accounts, young lovers inspired by plates, and endless others. He was quite famous among a circle of vagrant potters. He was also the town emergency medic, and he had taught "how-to" workshops in cities across the country on the lifesaving Heimlich maneuver in the 1980’s. He had instant charisma, before she knew his name she could feel that people talked about him, that young women took territorial efforts to mark their stakes around his frame and that men who probably loved him in a brotherly way went to great pains to make public his few faults.

He offered her a job as a paid apprentice, payment being half in a small sum of money (as she was not yet so experienced in any way making plates of such large proportion) and the other half of her earnings would be given to her in clay, with promised lessons in wedging and centering. That very day, as it turned over into the evening, he brought her in his black salt-covered truck higher, even, into the steep of the mountains; over great crossings where no guardrail had yet been built to protect the vehicles daring the dangerous wintry passes, roads kept alive by only the most hardcore traversers of deep mountain life, in love with the burly wind, set free by the fire in their potbelly heated cabin, who were eager to make winter sport from blizzard.

Leba felt hushed and tiny in the air of such extremity; a neighborhood where three roads hobbled around the tightly knit spatter of humble but spirited abodes, all with pleasing character, and colored by landscapes done in lawns of old car-parts, metal sculptures, wire chicken boxes, and un-working refrigerators with open doors, having died laughing their electronic feat over the land who made the last sudden point, and turned around the little game by storm, offing the General Electric after all.

Leba, who saw the world through kaleidoscopic measure, whose eyes toyed with perception, would consistently, in the months to come, get lost in this smallest town of only three roads, and because the town was so small, her voice would echo out as she struggled in dreamy navigation “...where is johnny unicorn’s house?” asking this person or that person, asking the same people for weeks, who were dressed in eggplant colors, sweaters and scarves; who were sitting on their porch and gladly rocking, emitting cold, flowing scripts of cryptic exhalations. Months after first seeing his inimitable fortress poised at the top of the town’s longest driveway, sprinkled with old trucks, Leba finally could not resist calling into the night, a feverish wolf-call, by the full moon, head filled of sweet-sour wild-berries pulsing in one collective migraine harmony— into the silvery, spinning snow-filled air, “unicorn” she called out “johnny unicorn....”

But then he did not open his door, she could not hear its hinge pierce the air with the magnitude

opening a door at such a moment would, and so from the biting cold and beautiful moon she turned back to where she was visiting in the neighborhood, the attendant of a party at another house; went inside to watch people work themselves into states of inebriation and reveal what they felt by whim. She sat on a bench in the hall uninterested, having offered the most of her interest somewhere else, doors down.

The unicorn man won her admiration simply by two means. The first (being of utmost importance) was the way water lived in his laugh. It was a sort of water whose intimate depths Leba somehow had delved into before, but never expected to find so explicitly in a man such as he, nor any man at all. When he laughed, it made his hair seem orange, it offered his eyes immediately from a dish like glass candy, proved his elbows as nuts and bolts in perfect function, made Leba feel all the items at the Hardware store that she could not put to use were put to use in him and of him and by his existence suddenly and without thinking\*.

The second display the unicorn offered visually and physically to Leba, (penetrating into realms considered by her of the deepest spirit) was the way he commanded her to pick up a chainsaw. In the first few days they worked together he said to her “just pick up that chainsaw”. She had never used a chainsaw and he wanted her to cut pieces of wood inside, right in his studio, to use to make a prop for a piece he had envisioned. She looked at him, covered in clay, and said as strongly as she could “I don’t know how to use a chainsaw.”

He looked at her as though she kid.

And that’s all it took for Leba to hold her first job, which did, eventually, turn moment by next into dust, until there was only a phone call, a goodbye that parted two strangers, and a memory of a hole in the floor next to the bed where Johnny unicorn slept. The hole was a half-dollar sized peephole, in exclusive view of the couch on the first floor where Leba camped on nights the snow had fallen too deeply for her to return down the mountain. She tried sleep, but his hand hung over the frame of his bed, edged the hole in his floor. His cat crooned all though the night. She could hardly sleep, making out the shape of his dangling dreaming fingers above her through the hole in the ceiling, forced to listen to the cat’s honest, bellowing song. If the floor collapsed, if their worlds would collide; his bed turning in the catastrophic earth tectonic, dropping him unto her in the moment right before the collision of the whole house on both of their heads, their bodies meeting by force, finally, if the floor collapsed. Or, if the hole by his bed that hinted the tenuous light of his hand, if it would widen, gappingly open, pull through a tuber his succulence toward her... She saw his hand and heard the clock ticking all night and swore he called to her. It wasn’t pleasant; she could not rest, and it disturbed her that his call was muddled. Each time the cat would croon Johnny unicorn chimed in, just below the voluminous meow, hidden but succinct. So she went upstairs near his door, she had been in his room earlier in the evening for reasons particularly difficult to explain at this point of our story from a contextual standpoint. Let’s just say this: She returned then, perhaps she even whispered his name. He stayed asleep, or dared not rouse, timid in his small self-constructed cave— made from a storage space. She was still covered by clay from the day, her hair was grey, her face, shoulders and pants, feet and chest— all grey and thick and lovely and ready for the kiln.

In later time, Leba would realize how young she was then and remember that he had once said to her “you can’t understand, you are too young, you don’t know what it takes to just get by”.

He got by somewhere to another place, but not before they discovered a coincidence of fate—

they both cherished a woman called Delilah Fredemont. He had run into Delilah while repairing a motorcycle in Bolinas, California, outside of his friend's house, which turned out to be next door to Delilah's waterfront shop. Delilah, taking a resident sabbatical from Brooklyn, had moved to Bolinas, where she resided as the wielder of wedding wires, the reader of tarot cards and one of the best surfers in the town. Returning to her shop after a short surf and lunch break during a July afternoon, she walked wearing only a towel on her head and a bathing suit. The sun drew the whiteness from the trees and from the flowers along the road, and Delilah kept one eye on the sky and one on her right hand cuticles, thick and appealing to her mouth and anxious mind, which was busy wondering meticulously about anything it could, taking responsibility for the details of every interaction she'd had on that day and days before.

She felt something around the corner metaphorically, and coincidentally as she rounded the corner two large men, one short but very wide and the other contrastingly tall and sinewy with a devious slouch, emerged from a long car, a car that bore no brand of kind or license plate; with dark windows, it rode low to the ground. (We believe these two men were the same two men who were responsible for the temporary kidnapping of One Hundred and One Dalmatians.) With speed, the men approached and wrapped their arms around her. Delilah inquired with a deliberate calm in her husky, melodic voice what they were doing and they responded in grunts as if she were a garment bag. They attempted to hustle her into their shady looking vehicle. But Delilah would not be taken. She kicked one man with her bare foot and he winced— she had landed the hit successfully in the inner thigh, penetrating a muscle that created the feeling of temporary paralysis when struck with enough intensity. The other man's adrenaline quickened and he picked up his hand, moving in toward her face, ready to blow his wrist across her head. She, however, had long trained for moments such as this one now with her brother Oshul Fredemont, who had mastered Korean Taekwondo (which was all about the kick), Uechi Ryu (a Karate for the take-down) Jujutsu (throwing and strangling, plus weapons technique) and all sorts of other Kung-Fu, coupled with multiple eastern arts of self-defense. While growing up Oshul had taken care of Delilah, replacing her mostly absent father, and she'd tagged along with him during his practices at the Dojo. Because of this Delilah had a natural knowledge of how to react appropriately when physically endangered. In the next six seconds, both of the men who had attempted to attack her were left immobilized on the ground.

Soon after, Johnny Unicorn pulled out of his friend's garage, attempting to start the old motorcycle, but it caught for only a few seconds and then faltered. He dismounted the bike and brought his hand to his eyes, figuring the hour of the day by the sun's position in the sky. As he peered down the street he took notice of the lovely Delilah and the two injured men by her feet. He hurried to her and asked if she was all right. She insisted she was fine and proceeded to walk away toward her house, but Johnny Unicorn was intrigued and concerned both, and remained at her side. As she made her departure from the scene of the two men on the sidewalk, she turned her head back over her shoulder and called out to her most recent attackers a fair warning that this was, in fact, her neighborhood and, if she caught them near it again, she'd retaliate with serious irreparable insult. She also told them that they could return to their "chief of affairs" (who was Mauna loa: the encroaching hit man) and let him know that she wasn't interested in playing games –if he wanted to talk to her, he could find her himself.

Johnny Unicorn became curious when he heard Delilah speak out with such attacking language.

Though she was tall and strong, she possessed a graceful manner, and exuded artful femininity; her heart peaked out over the corners of her lips and her eyes were those of a doe in the wild, woody and kind.

He chose to not beg her divulgence regarding her afternoon's most recent dealings and instead asked if she'd like his company as she returned to the shop she kept, with the little back room where she slept and made tea, and took long baths.

She accepted the offer of his company and the two entered her storefront. Her barbwire jewelry was soldered into bands, often featuring softened points from once acute sprigs of barb. She expressed. She had first become fascinated by barbed wire when she was sixteen, having drunk a mason-jar worth of moonshine in the woods. Someone, she noticed, had long ago wrapped barbed wire around a tree trunk, and the tree had grown around it, sinking the wire deeply into its structure. Delilah poured the rest of her moonshine onto the tree's roots in motion to extend her regard. The next day she began collecting barbed wire from the fences in her town and burning the pieces into bands with gentle curves and ridges. She would sometimes cut the barbs from the wires and throw them into the hot surface of the rings she'd make, creating etchings and forms that caught light and refracted effervescence.

She sat with Johnny Unicorn and they drank hibiscus tea and she began suddenly unfurling, which was rare for Delilah. At last, she revealed to Johnny Unicorn what had transpired in her past to resultantly plague her with villainous men such as the ones approaching her in the street that afternoon.

Delilah had moved to Prospect Heights after her parents filed for bankruptcy and lost their house in Manhattan that had been in the family for many years. At 17, Delilah moved in with a man who was like her boyfriend, though she never had the audacity to call him by such title, or to call him anything other than G. Ross, which was his name.

G. Ross had a twin brother named R. Ross and no one, not even their own sister, could tell them apart. R. Ross became involved with certain criminals who were violent inspirations and soon enough R. was considered a wanted man himself, with his picture on the back of metro busses, on the side of telephone poles and tacked onto walls at the post-office, with information at the bottom reading "\$10,000 reward for anyone who can give us information leading to the captivity of this man." It was often a pain for his twin brother G, with whom Delilah lived, as his identity was commonly mistaken for his twin's, because the two looked so completely alike.

Seemingly, R., the criminal twin, had been a part of a specific series of jewelry hoists (he had, coincidentally, acquired his thievery skills directly from studying under the Diamond Thief via a sort of scandalous apprenticeship years before). In the midst of one particular jewelry hoist gone awry a cruel besieger known as Mauna loa (called Mu Lo for short) began to regularly come to the apartment where resided Delilah Fredemont. He'd intrusively pound on the door when no one else but herself was there to be bothered. From the first, she went to find out what the mean looking man wanted, but only through the barrier of the door. He'd grumble threats from the other side and they'd argued back and forth until he went away, departing with heaving, voluminous gestures (occasionally hitting a wrench into the wall or breaking the glass box that held the fire extinguisher, etc). However, the third time Mu Lo came over he was less patient and kicked the door down before knocking. He ravaged through their small apartment and when he

encountered Delilah (who was stepping out of her workroom in the back, more calm than the average victim) he insisted threateningly to know when R. Ross was returning. She truthfully told him (as she had before) that she had no information about R. Ross because she had only met him once randomly on the subway. She lived, she explained thoroughly, with R.'s twin brother, G. Ross, who had been out of contact with R. for a few years after R. had both wrecked his brother's car and stolen his credit card.

Mauna loa did not believe there was a G. Ross, and was certain that the man she called G. was actually the man he was looking for, named R. He proceeded to wait around for three and a half hours altogether, not letting Delilah leave his sight, and meanwhile he demanded things like cookies and ginger ale, fingernail clippers and sharpie pens. (Mauna loa loved to tag everything with his signature, and so he began, while waiting for the man he thought to be R., to tag their recently sanded white pine floor, and then the translucent curtains, and finally the bathtub.) While Delilah verbally countered Mauna loa's assertions, she found herself, for the first time, incapable of self-defending, without the strength to carry a fist to his eye or assault in any way. She felt physically unable to assert her well-developed skills and call upon her swift expertise of martial art when she came near to him, as though she were dreaming. She only watched herself, aware that she was experiencing something, but disoriented from her own core center of strength, far removed from feeling, encumbered by the obscure laws of slumber. Her legs were not fast enough, her arms couldn't find their own hands; she knew that if she were to pick up the phone to make an emergency call her fingers would be unable to navigate the right buttons. Worse, she found herself attracted to Mauna loa because of the curiously excessive amount of stupidity he emitted. It was as though his stupidity was serving to cover a secret intelligence. Delilah ascertained that a force of smartness invariably lingered somewhere inside of him; encoded in his cell structure in complex equations which proved Mauna loa's life consistently and continuously, and by such force he was equipped with an ability to generate an immobilizing effect over her. Because of this, she concluded, he invariably possessed an original wit worth debunking. Delilah was mystified by the incongruities of life, and so, as their hours together unfurled, she grew intrigued by the presence of Mu Lo, and hoped, without admitting to herself, that G. Ross would take his time in returning; that he would walk instead of bike, or that he might stop for dinner with the woman he worked with on his way home.

Notably, one of the more strange aspects of human life is the having of an out-of-place feeling, inappropriate to the moment. Meaning, one is exposed to a sequence of events that have been long associated with an effectual emotion (for Analogous example; how The Funeral is to Sadness, or The Haunted House is to Fright). In this instance, however, the fright, if you will, aroused within the beholder, is triggered, versus, by her resultantly embarrassed nerves, whose exposé have left her mind scrambling in search of privacy or a place to go unnoticed, for she cannot justify what she feels. (Imagine here the costumed festival go-er in that presumably scary house, yet flooded not with the sensation of handling spaghetti brains but instead allegorical flowers and two-toned inflatable pink and white hearts fluttering and falling, off-seasonally. Such unexpected event, in fact, is much more a true scariness for the sensorial psyche.) Like this, Delilah fell first in love, in a scene that for most would arouse a fear for one's own life, forced to sit by a brutal killer, who believed himself to be gainfully victimizing with his

threatening presence. Truly, his victim was more deeply marred and trembling from her own unnerving newfound awareness as she made grave attempts to hide that which intimidated from her gestures and emoted unconditionally.

If Mauna loa felt Love at that moment, he raised no eye nor tripped over any expression. He proceeded to tag every entire surface of G. Ross and Delilah's home with the sharpie pen until the ink had dried and then, when Delilah could not reach G. Ross by telephone, he asked her if she had planned on making dinner. By then, Delilah could hardly lift her eyes to Mu Lo, suffering so such virulent attraction, and could only mumble she was not cooking anything. He then suggested that, before he finished creating ruin upon her life, they should grab sushi somewhere in town because he was really craving a Crazy Tuna Maki, with extra fish eggs. He laughed, which was one of the most odd sounds imaginable, similar to the combination of a horse's guffaw and cheap tires with low air pressure peeling off pavement in Mexico or somewhere very hot, and said something about "a last supper". She knew it was an audacious request, to venture into the world for sushi with this man, and though she knew he was intrusive, insensitive and ultimately a test to her ethical standard of company, she herself also possessed suddenly an intense craving as well for Crazy Tuna Maki, with extra fish eggs. There was one place she knew of, nearby enough, so she agreed to go as long as he paid.

He nodded his quadrilateral shaped head up and down. He was not conventionally attractive, she thought. But the serious amount of thickness he sat inside of, the lack of charisma his whole body emitted except for his eyes, which were piercing and alive, confused her. Her perplexity directly dialed into her spleen, which governed her ability to make intelligent choices and transitions, and from there a confounded sense emitted, like a skunk, a musk of fog leading herself and Mauna loa first outside, then hailing down a cab and entering into Kyoto Tomo Saki. Everyone at Kyoto Tomo Saki was beside himself. Their own beloved Japanese pop idol had, within the hour, arrived to the United States for the very first time. She was scheduled to appear on a talk show hosted by a christian-missionary-turned-humanitarian-psychologist to discuss extramarital sex, a topic well-worth exploiting on national television. Soon after Delilah and Mauna loa sat down (at the sushi bar, the only empty space left in the overly-crowded restaurant) they ordered their food and also two imported japanese microbrews, from the Yamoto Brewery; amber ales called "Waoh", pronounced "wow". (When Mauna loa ordered the waitress promptly corrected his annunciation until he explicitly uttered "WOW" which made Delilah laugh.) Conversation began politely enough, Mu Lo asked Delilah nothing about herself and expressed no interest in her life whatsoever, while Delilah divulged, urged by an unusual sensation to talk nonstop. Mu Lo was intrigued with Delilah in his own way. Firstly, Delilah Fredemont happened to be an absolute downright fox, and secondly, he assessed that he could get her naked within two hours. Muana loa was singularly interested in diamonds and killing people, but like anyone else he occasionally felt the need to be close to someone, someone alive and not bleeding.

Delilah intercepted his scheming pretense because she had a question. She wanted to know what he intended to do to G. Ross when he, in fact, did return home.

"I'm going to kill him." He replied immediately without expression.

Delilah broke then through her own slumberous spell. She had lost herself in immature

superstition. First she pardoned his reply by pausing, and then evenly responded. "Excuse me," she emitted. "I'm going to let you think about what you just said for a minute, and if you really want to say it again, then you can come back to me and repeat it."

He took no time to hesitate in his reiteration, for him the plan was infallible. "I'm going to kill him."

After hearing him a second time, Delilah pushed her chair back. The man was ridiculous, was violent, but more thick than violent. She wondered why she was sharing her time with such an inhumane man. She got up, grabbed her coat and a napkin's worth of sushi which had newly arrived, stopping in her stride only to take with her the ceramic dish holding wasabi and soy sauce (which she'd already combined into a strong elixir) for her ride home, because she was still hungry for the Maki. Mauna loa lurched for her arm, but she had recovered her strength and blocked his strike, sending, with one terse movement, his arm to his face, so that he slapped his own large lips. This made him instantly angry. Because he had, without knowing, invested an amount of personal feeling in Delilah, his anger rapidly accelerated by uncontrollable increments. "Don't move." He demanded.

Delilah, of course, did not listen. She plainly turned around and began to make her way out of Kyoto Tomo Saki, pouring her soy and wasabi evenly atop her roll of sushi without either making a mess or being set off-balance in her departure. She placed the empty factory-made ceramic dish on the shallow shelf along the mirrored wall as she headed for the double door. Though she moved slowly with deliberation and awareness, smoothly meeting the eyes of a table of men seated near the door while cueing her waitress for a check, Delilah was still too quick for Mauna loa. He fumbled with his uncontrollable anger, argued with himself for a moment (as he had never felt so publicly uncouth) and then, without self-control, he reached for his gun. He stood up and with clear aim shot toward Delilah.

Delilah, at that very moment, dropped the set of wooden chopsticks she had taken for eating her sushi in the cab on her way home. Just as she bent over with immaculate timing, the bullet grazed over her head and tragically struck, instead, the unfortunate Japanese pop-star entering through the door for her premier debut in the United States, who, in her first hour off the plane, had arrived strait to her uncle's restaurant, to say hello before her night on the town.

As you can assume, the atmosphere of Kyoto Tomo Saki erupted. The pop-star's bodyguards immediately went to Mauna loa and pinned him painfully to the ground. By the time Delilah was out the door, he had been cuffed by local authority, who had been tracking Mauna loa unsuccessfully for years; who couldn't believe their luck when they had been called in from across the street to escort their wanted man to the chief of police effortlessly. Delilah did not hail a cab, though she pretended to herself that she was on the lookout for one. She needed to walk all the way home. When she arrived at her apartment building, she sat on her front steps and picked up her sushi pieces one by one, the wasabi and tamari had mostly drained into her napkin, but she had retrieved the chopsticks after all. She clutched her chopsticks with her right hand for comfort as she stared at the sidewalk and the small park in the median of the street, and with her left hand ate 5 pieces of Crazy Tuna Maki in less than three minutes. Delilah then, after finishing the fifth, called her friend Leba, who at the time was studying at a school of music, and who was ready to trade in the cement and metal of the city where she resided for a solar vitamin, a magnetic wind, or water and fire, any other element.

That night, after consulting her friend and summing up the evening's events, Delilah went inside and began to pack her belongings. G. Ross came home during her departure and tried to stop her from leaving him, but she could not recede. He asked her why the house was tagged with black marker and she told him that a man who wanted to kill him had sat all day, drinking ginger ale and eating cookies, tagging every empty surface available for the taking. She told him that the man was planning on killing him, but probably had other matters on his hands now, as he had, while attempting to kill her, accidentally shot a pop-star.

G. Ross pleaded for her to stay and that they'd figure this whole story out together, and maybe even move to a place that was more placid. He pleaded that he really wanted to spend a lot of quality time with her in his life, and that he wanted to be more exciting and learn to be artistic and that he wanted to take her on a picnic and other things. Ideas such as these seemed like last minute sudden aspirations which Delilah had never heard him before express, and now hearing them in a moment where they were both in such flux, a moment so unsafe, made her lose respect for G. Why was it that someone could profess their whole heart when they no longer stood a chance to carry out the promise of its confessions? She had no time to wonder; she exited promptly.

It was then that Delilah chose to dwell in Bolinas. Some time after, when Mauna loa was relieved of cell time by wealthy lawyers who owed him favors, he had, in fact, forgotten entirely of G. or R. Ross, but remembered clearly, and with intensity, Delilah Fredemont, and whether he was fueled by love or revenge, sickness or passion, he wanted to take her down, take her to him, take her somewhere. He wanted to finish their evening. He wanted to create a sophisticated closure. It was a hit man's idea of romance.

Delilah revealed her story to Johnny Unicorn, who was much less vicious than Mauna loa in an overt way, though he had off-ed his own lust in times passed. He received her recount, listening, sighing, commiserating at moments; cheering and questioning, offering her his help— what could he do? He wanted to know. He felt called to be of service to Delilah. He had a few more weeks in Bolinas, and for the remainder of his trip he explored the area and watched the surf with Delilah.

Delilah didn't mull often over her peculiar situation; she hadn't felt too put-off living pursued by a hit man (thought of it more like baring a burden similar to a monthly electricity bill or car payment) until this latest episode with the two men in the white, plate-less car. Being confronted with bothersome brutes so close to her new home triggered geographical contemplations. Soon she arrived upon thinking: it made sense for her to return to Brooklyn, refreshed by the ocean that had inspired her craftiness. So, she changed her name (again) in slight, to distract any hindering trouble-doers sent for her by Mu Lo, and she returned at the end of a summer, seemingly long after the matter which had sent her from her home town. She returned to Prospect Heights, because she loved the district, because she was an East Coast lady, because she wanted to feel the congested endless activity and compactness of the area. It was the place she called home, and she believed her focus was so palpable there because of the downscaled living quarters in the city, and thus, with such a tightness of room for incubation, she would always be entrenched in the dankness of her own creation. She had come into the peak of her season. Her sense of color and shape had overtaken her hands; she only wanted to wield

design. Ordering barbed wire in bulk (choosing from the catalogued 2000 varieties and 530 patented brands) as well as escaping to the country, to the prison, and to anyplace where she could find vintage fencing, she crafted into the earliest hours, through the witching hours of night, sleeping sometimes late into the afternoon. When she woke, she drank Yerba Matte in a gourd and massaged her arms and hands with fragrant medicinal oils. Her home was neat and organized, colors of fabric and paints spread over the swept, dustless floors. Long drapes hung from beams covering 8 foot windows; exquisite music played through the openness of her den, made spacious by a lack of much furniture— just a rounded, velveteen grey couch with a thick wool blanket, grey and white. An oblong, irregularly shaped glass jug sat on a low oval perch, holding fresh water. And next to her worktable, on the floor, rested three full urns of white dried chrysanthemum blossoms, sleepy cherubs.

Johnny Unicorn felt truly stimulated upon his return from Bolinas back to Sohigup; he carried this vitality through the short autumn as he prepared for winter's onset, which somehow included taking in an odd, bright but frightened young woman, who, he felt, would surely venture to accomplish strange bold dreams and learn, at some point, how to relinquish her femininity with comfort and grace. She became his apprentice. Her name was Leba. He secretly fancied the idea that by his own accomplishment and acquired skills he qualified to hold a mentoring position, and he was rather flattered by this young girl's attentiveness to the detail of his work and expression. She had begun to sit on his pottery wheel after weeks of appreciatively eyeing its even surface and the rich batter of clay she had been learning to wedge for him. Here she was now in his chair, attempting to contain the wet, erratic clay turning under her hand, working at great length to successfully secure its center. In the third hour, by the music of Ornette Coleman and the snowfall in midwinter on a sunny day, she finally let go. The clay flew out of her long fingers, spattering his shelves and radio, over the floor and into viscous banks; elephant grey. He was in the kitchen, which had an interior window that opened into a view of his studio. Her back was to him but he knew she could feel him watching her, as he was making his coffee; making his greasy breakfast, making his phone calls, tying up his loose ends, drilling holes in surfaces, talking to his friends stopping by in the warm storm of snow falling upon the little strange town where he somehow sat as a king. The clay flew behind her shoulders, spit toward the walls, flung through the interior window into the kitchen. It filled the house in a storm of its own. She did not turn around.

The Ornette Coleman album was Soap Suds, Soap Suds. Charlie Haden played the upright bass. It was a perfect soundtrack to snow and fire. A wick burnt through the heart of this young woman. She moved the clay up her arms and onto her shirt, which was thin and glued together by dried clay and barely covering her upper body, she moved it onto her neck and face. She worked, entranced, by her own flame, as though she would finally allow its liberation. It was a strong sight to behold; a documentary leaving her lone witness feeling privileged and struck to bear such honesty, such rite of passage. But it felt right for her to feel him, watching her; it gave evenness to her endurance, continuity to her impetus. If he was not there, surely she would have stopped by now, she would have abandoned the project of working at the wheel, quit the clay piece she lifted against gravity, but her focus remain alert and engaged in performance, made possible by the chance of even his slightest attention.

Johnny Unicorn stood still in his kitchen, unaware of his own paralysis, watching Leba covered in her perfect mess. She was only twenty-one years old, he reminded himself, 13 years younger than he, with a creative, insecure spontaneity he accredited to her youthfulness. Each sparse, but rich and deep note of the music playing through his speakers moved her, provided soundtrack. And then it seemed she was taking a pause from her mission, she turned the wheel off and emitted a sigh. She rose from her seat and walked, with her back still to him, to the window and lifted the heavy stubborn glass, allowing the diagonal snow to enter from the north into the eastern facing window.

And then, he witnessed her grace, unpredictably smooth, foreshadowing a time when she would be more settled and matured in her own body. Truly, she moved seemingly unaware of his eyes. She crossed her arms over her chest and reached for the ends of her ribbed shirt, peeling, with clay covered limbs, the thin cotton up over her head.

He studied the muscles and shape of ribs pushing into the skin of her back as she stood, in front of the window, catching flakes on her chest and face, unmoving. He had never seen her so still, so calm in a moment. In the past weeks she had struggled, frustrated by her lack of expertise on the wheel, distracting his direction with childish outbursts and questions, intimidated by the craft before her and his accomplished hands. Perhaps this slowness he saw in her now was more her intrinsic nature, one that he could not conjure from her in their past interactions, perhaps he'd made her uncomfortable. But now, he thought, when she had little awareness of his presence in the room, she danced in her own embodiment with ease!

He was affixed by her image. Her back was strong, her broad shoulders narrowed into the long drape of her waist, her spine executed its linear mark poignantly to her tailbone, kept from view by her brown, cotton skirt whose elastic band had worn and now hung low on her hips. The music inspired her movement and then slowly she turned just her head behind her, raising her eyes until they met his.

He blinked and fumbled with language, and then his lips parted to ask her if she was enjoying herself.

She smiled her foible-full best, in a rare occasion of having arrived at a look almost sultry, relaxed.

“Yes, but I still cannot center my pieces and have effectually torpedoed your studio.” She admitted.

He moved in solid step from the kitchen and entered the studio. He reached for a large, yellow sponge that had fallen to the floor and placed it by the sink. Next to the sink was a wide-mouthed bowl filled with clay and water, soft material he used to relieve unwanted marks from his pieces. Cupping a handful of the watery clay he walked toward her and poured it gently on top of her head. The mixture was still fresh from his morning work, but the water was very cold in the winter air, though she did not make a sound to reflect its temperature. She looked at him with soft, soft eyes.

That's when an unstoppable sensation propelled him to lift her up over his shoulders and carry her into the room where he had installed a large, antique bathtub, a room where no clay had yet been allowed. He sat her down on an armless wooden chair, half naked and silent, and he ran the hot water. Then, with the care a tiger would take in cleaning its lover, he prepared her to soak in

the running bath. He found a dry towel and wiped one limb and then another clean of the chunks of clay collected on her body. She slowly wept, neutral tears of relief. He could feel from where these tears fell, the disappointment of her failure. She only had wanted to learn how to make bowls and plates, and still she'd not centered a piece in the whole two months she had been coming to him. She was young, with the young dreams of a seedling; her lack of accomplishment here must have conjured within her a sense of disparity for her future. He wanted her to feel the success of her vigilant efforts and so he tenderly placed her in the full bath after he filled it with bubbles and peppermint. (We are not sure why a man like Johnny Unicorn would have a ready supply of bubbles and peppermint, or a bath clean enough so as to not make anxious the concerns of the neurotic reader, but it could have to do with the presence of his neighbor friend who was a woman and liked peppermint and liked his bathtub, both.) In the bath, Leba felt like a daughter, but not his daughter. She felt like the farmer's daughter. A girl with large eyes that had never left the land where she had grown, tumbling over hills, naming baby calves before they came of age to be slaughtered, tying hay stacks, collecting eggs. Truly Leba, who soaked now in the bath, had moved from one town to the next every year of her life before the age of eighteen; but she didn't feel that now, she had succumbed into the softness and innocence of a role in which she was placed, in her opinion, by sweet but not random fortune. She felt lucky and plainly good being this character. She was his creation, a piece of clay, whose hard edges were soaked away in a puddle of peppermint and bubble. There was only one thought in her mind that she had which held her back from entirely drowning in his bath. This was the thought of recognizing the onset of her desire. In that, she wanted their moment to last longer, to stretch into complete infinity of un-wreckable joy, of surrender, of being taken care of by a man she had admired and yearned for beyond any other yearning throughout her fall into winter, whom she expected nothing from but who had made her Hope, a terrible violent ache that lives without letting inside the foolish heart.

He lathered her hair with milk shampoo; it smelt like lavender and leaves burning. An hour passed between them in silence. Ornette Coleman turned into Sony Rollins and Jim Hall— an album called *The Bridge*.

It was Leba's favorite, she had brought it to his house with secret knowing that it would provide sufficiently as the orchestra for her fantasies—and here she had manifested this fantasy— here it was Now.

When he hit the drain to let the water down, her heart fell a few inches. It was inevitable that the water would turn cold, that his attention would shift from the lucidity of losing himself and he would readapt into a cogent man, in a linear time that called for the next moment, for trajectory. Leba was scared to speak, for fear of breaking the trance that had possessed Johnny Unicorn. She felt him to be a giving man in the essence of his nature, but also a man who was reserved beyond being capable of consistent expression or action, and that if he ever did have the desire to touch her, she'd figured, the day would perhaps never come where he would move beyond his own apprehension with daring passion.

And so Leba said nothing, fearing her voice would break the perfect music box of the dreamlike state between them as he wrapped her in his extra large towel. He brought her up to his cave room, built into the closet of his second floor, and he placed her on his bed, and covered her in warm flannel blankets that surprisingly smelled freshly laundered. Leba was sure that she was

inventing this, won it in some extraordinary contest; that she walked her way into a decoction of a dream, had hit her head and lay, instead, unconscious and unfound on the floor in his work room, with Ornette Coleman skipping on the stereo stuck on a repeating tri-tone.

After he covered her with his blankets he left the room. The heat of her bath radiated under his sheets. She heard him walk downstairs and forced herself to not wonder where he went, when he'd come back, to not count until reaching her favorite number, pressing upon her own mind that when she reached 11, or 27 or 72 he'd return with more of her dream, and that she would not wake before he.

Had he left her to sleep? Sleep, a condition under current circumstance Leba found impossible? Could he be that cruel, after seemingly knowing exactly what soothed her temper, could he be so ignorant to believe that she was ready for slumber after a bath like that, after such a long, fantastic moment?

She listened for signs of his life, but she couldn't hear him downstairs. She rolled to her side and peered in through the hole on the floor –but through those 2 inches she saw only some part of his musty tan couch and pillows, a remote control.

It felt like hours had passed while she lay in that room, and close to expiration, when she had nearly broke, jumped from his bed with urgency downstairs into the dark house holding flashlight calling to make sure he was alright, hadn't tripped somewhere, locked himself out, fallen into the fire; after a length of time which tested her youthful impatience incomparably, he returned.

He stood in the doorway and looked at her, she had successfully retreated into a passive demeanor. Her eyes were almost closed but she let her lashes part slightly, so that she could watch him without revealing she was not asleep, without letting him know how she had held her breath wondering if he'd arrive. She was hoping he would try to wake her, touch her, talk to her; do anything at all. Engage.

Finally he walked over, he lifted the layers of blankets and climbed into his bed. He looked to her again, and spoke, only just breaking the volume of her mind's conjecture. He asked her if she wanted a ride home, because he was thinking about going into town to do something.

She didn't answer. She gave herself a long minute to wonder why, when he was always reluctant to drive the fifteen miles into town, he would consider now to cross the snowy passes after dark and go to town to "do something".

Still not speaking, she took her warm hand to his face. Her body inched slowly but certainly toward his and she, in her towel still damp from the bath, curled into him, gently but not without the fully summoned irresistibility most girls are well trained to deliver once graduated from their adolescence.

She felt the towel surrender from her frame, letting the rest of the bath's heat onto his skin. She offered herself without bounds, and though she could feel him grappling for his fleeting ethic, he shape-shifted upon introduction to her thighs.

She fell asleep with him. It was the first time she was able to find the deep space of sleep with another. He woke in the morning first and watched her slumber. Her lips had turned more rose than before. Her hair was tied in plush, bronze knots. He thought that he'd kiss her cheek, and then he'd figure it out later. Figure out how to forget that she was a woman, and turn her back into a clumsy, timid girl. If he could turn her again into his apprentice, and then slowly start to

provide less and less insight for her.... prove to her that he had relinquished the entirety of his knowledge and leave her, at least, with the gift of having learned how to center her clay piece with success, to make a bowl, a glass or even a large exquisite plate; if he could offer her that consolation and ease his way out from her knowing of him, then his sense of moral and ethic would find peace and sit comfortably again in his mind. He was 13 years older than she. She had no clue what it took to run a world such as his, no idea of the real weight of an adult's turbid reality which starkly contrasted the lofty projections and chunky dreams of a female neophyte; and plus, he had just promised his 31 year-old neighbor that he would be a father, and a solid partner, to her and their child.

And so he kissed her cheek and moved as quietly as he could away from his bed and went downstairs to make his coffee, make his greasy breakfast, drill holes into his wall, talk to his neighbors and call the woman who would be the mother of his child and say something easy, ending his sentences with "ya" instead of "you" ("I'd go to the store with ya", "Did Joe end up carrying the piece of furniture up the stairs for ya", "Yea, I was thinkin about ya", "love ya") and pushing the memory of his evening-past behind a fog in his brain, to live in an irretrievable crevice. So that by the time Leba woke, again a student who he could command, he could steer their interaction into a place of closed encounters and sterile expression.

\* \*

Into the spring Leba watched from the main city trucks covered with salt marks left over from the winter turn their blinkers on and disappear up the road to the mountain, towards Sohigup, and perhaps further still, into the three road town, with the porch-dwellers who she imagined would be watching the snow melt on the old car-parts strewn about their lawns. She had not ventured into the clay-studio but she was sure that one or all of these trucks she saw driving into the main city from the canyon pass were his, the man who lived atop that mountain town. Leba was too young then to realize it was no fault of her own, but rather the strength of her spirit that had turned this man away from her. That this man had failed to communicate not because he was thinking of her, thoughts either poor or grand, but because he had no room in his life to think of her at all, and that she had then no choice but to be dismantled in his head into parts and fragments, and to be scattered about his lawn, as relic left to keep the wealthier people from wanting to come into the little town, and turn its three roads into the beginnings of urban sprawl. Each time Leba spied a black truck she froze in slight, certain brake lights would affirm her suspicion and that the vehicle would come to a slow stop, that a shaded window would roll down, emitting steam or phosphorescent light, and finally, the face of Johnny Unicorn. Leba became uneasy walking through the streets of the city, anxiety replaced the jovial, youthful stride she had taken for granted in the days before knowing the man she now anticipated. Streets seemed filled by menacing black trucks, each with garish headlight-faces, like villains sneering as they drove by her, guaranteeing in assembly of powerful fleet that she should never meet Johnny Unicorn again, not on the road, not at her favorite hour for breakfast at the mountain cafe, not by random invitation. His memory began to tarnish, until it occupied a plot next to the other sufficiently mourned entities: a family cat who perished in street-fight, her grandmother who smoked cigarettes until her death, a friend to whom she'd ceased writing letters. Finally she was no longer his anomaly, no longer his awkward apprentice. She had relinquished the part of herself left on his mountaintop and remembered him only when she heard laughter that sounded

like water. The sound of such laughter made her body itch from the clay that stayed hardened between her rib and lung, lingering among the other presents left by lovers and fighters. Other gifts included amber resin, dirt that smelt like ginger, an Andean-Chilean music box set, a birthday card cut up like a puzzle missing the middle piece which was certain to contain the words she'd long awaited; snapping fingers and pacing feet, and the shells of oysters. Those were only the gifts between her ribs and lungs. An entire collection of antiques dating back further than the Victorian era were lodged in various other places such as her spleen and hips, heart and larynx, pituitary and armpit.

One night, in a time long after her days of residency in Sohigup, Leba lay on a bed in a hotel room alone. She had been driving all day and well into the night, and had grown too weary to take on another long mile. With eyelashes steadily adhering she lay close to sleep when a dream, slow to unravel, wavered through her body. Image after image the relics from her past, appearing as symbols of her own history, surfaced and then exited her small frame through the portal between her thighs. Out came tricycles and mandolins, an oak table, a canoe; candelabra. The symbols shot out like arrows and struck deeply into her head, re-entering, re-cycling, parading on display and then returning once more to their chosen retreats. She contemplated her own profit, could she tax these objects within herself, even charge rent? As she toyed with figures and numbers and projected incomes, she drifted into sleep.

The few years of driving relentlessly, ardent and vigilant, left Leba more flexible than she once was. Piles of dishes in various sinks, rings of dirt around water faucets, toilet seats in public bathrooms and chewing gum with the primary ingredient of Blue Lake number 2 no longer irked her spirits. The community of friends she counted on was reached via the dream world and, at the least, through the wireless circuitry of telephones. For much time, there was only one person who kept himself thoroughly connected to the daily experiences had by she, and that was the fickle, stubborn Diamond Thief, who engaged with her the way a child reluctantly sets the table; methodically, un-amused.

Leba knew the Diamond Thief was most occupied with the pursuit of crime and that her complex interrogations and seeming quest for ultimate truth intimidated his perspective into a boredom and fidgety half-presence, but for years she called to him so that he might offer condolence when the world appeared angular and jaded before her, prismatic and impossible to rectify on her own; as mysterious as a diamond. His voice steamed with the sweat of jewels into her ear and, when her stories would come to a pause, his magnetism poured through the tiny holes of her receiver. Many a nights she would find sleep available only after hearing the evenness of his words, short and limited by time; limited by his door, always ajar, always forcing him away toward his agendas. Still, Leba was prone to her own falling outs of character, and the Diamond Thief suited her weakness. When he would disappear in svelte mission for expensive pieces lodged in underground markets in the middle east for weeks, she would settle for chocolate, 98% dark cacao, at late hours, and after feeling its warming bitterness she would open up the case of her instrument and sing songs about clovers and well-water, tin cans and shotgun houses.

We have arrived at a difficult point of the story for Leba Scrachnsniv. The closer we have come to this apex in our writing the more thick and un-sweatable our words have felt, like rectangular blocks between our ears, made out of ice-cubes, but warm rather than frozen. It is difficult for us

to render this tale because everyday we have woken up entirely somewhere else and with stiff backs and twisted spines we find that the honesty and real circumstance of this story sinks deeper still, every hour, into a place that sits ineffably, in dried reds and swollen blues, in green electric pulses and in isolated sensations; a sharpness with no cause, nothing poking, a hammering with no house, a swarm of melodious crickets with no night to sing. Worse, our brain has slowed and we need to cry. Ideas are still prominent, we know What happened to Leba Scrachnsniv, we just can't remember words like "jumped" or "circulated" or "perpetuates", and if we use words like "oscillated", "flowered" or "emitted" we are sure we just used them in the latter paragraph. So we have taken a walk across the way into a wooded area laden with thickets and brambles, filled with snake-holes and guarded by webs of spiders' makings. We walk with three dogs, named Lilly monster, Apollo and Wren. Wren is the dog most like us today, she is eager to love and hides her wisdom in overzealousness; she is strong in her spirit but wanting of other's affections, so that her companions easily push her to the side "not now, wren", "wren, you silly dog". Wren comes home first, though, forging her way through the out-skirting neighborhood swamp. The two other dogs stop to eat a decaying turtle, loosening from its shell. We stand, whistling at them to come, while holding the tail of a red leaf, which we plucked after peering long at an autumn tree; contemplating with a hard meditation. We wonder how long we can stare, baring witness to the cluster of thin limbs, watching each leaf muster the capitulation to let go. We wait for them to fall to the earth. The leaves on the land are brown and ripped, but those remaining hold by translucent vein to their host, looking still ripe and alive. What is the moment like when they twist free? In the few feet they fall, joining their wilted relatives upon the floor of the earth, what knowing does each acquire to bare the crunch of that gone-brown color, to lay itself subject to the sun and southern wind? We stand and wonder, remembering Leba Scrachnsniv, breathing into the stories of her adventures, longing to find the chapter which will reckon a coming of her age, paint a new development in her character, turn her through her own season into a changed woman, but alas: will she change? Perhaps Leba lacked the nature of character to inspire a coming of age and was simultaneously double hexed, for she complexly pushed away all imperatives which fruit such resolve. And while here we are remaining dedicated to the telling of her tale, we cannot help but to still wonder how it will be told; to speculate the respectful space between will and destiny, effort and surrender. How is it the heavenly-made collaborative bridges its seeker with the sought after? Just tell her, tell our character and she will follow with precise directions. For she is less original than she is confused with the principle of cause and effect, but if you tell her how: she will apply!

Do the great stories, relayed by the eloquent purveyors of myth, do they happen upon passive souls, falling randomly into the open hats of the unsuspecting? Or do the greatest stories, of love and business, war and loss, come to those who are eternally pressing, actively self-bettering, who are never letting, forging forward always into a dynamic fire, where burn opportune dramas with metal dog tags, priced for the take home.

Does the tall, bony man in blue tweed pants that are unstylish in any season, with his blank face and plain loafers enter a front-glass door of commercial space and trade in a generic existence by acquiring, at specific cost, the story of a man who built a boat and traveled to unmarked earth, or the first person to fly in a plane to iceland through a heavy windstorm; the hero who rescued

castaways, the inventor of the computer chip, the survivor who fell off the world's highest water tower inebriated and lived to learn his sobriety, or the man who walked 3,000 miles to proclaim his love to the woman deep in the desert? Does the man seek his fate through strife and purchase, or does it fall upon him at the random moment it, itself, is ready, golden red and willing death, absorbed through the skin of the mortal, who will ooze its plan breath by limb, thought by word\*?

In midst of travel, Leba came upon the town she fictitiously referred to as her home. A sweet cherry blossom town that was as soft as a Labrador; a lakeless town by no ocean but where the air, versus, was plush with hydration, humid and fragrant with smell. You could swim in the sky. Wet, root-filled dirt, loving to grow wild flowers and homes for land-creatures, with wild lettuce and flowering eggplants, a town all of boutiques and bakeries, bricked restaurants and groves of magnolia trees landscaping buildings, old and southern. Her touchdown time was one in the morning; she had driven a stretch of 13 hours coming from The New England, the place where spirits rioted into the night, drilling their sordid imagery into a repetitious dream she'd carry until the dream wore from her figuring.

Finally, through a fog that had stopped most cars and brought them to the side of the road to pause and figure, she entered the southern town outskirts, at a steady 50 miles per hour, the speed of winding down off the highway. She headed for her friend's home, an older turn-of-the-century shanty house with a tin roof, which made for glorious inspiration when struck by the rain. Yes, this was a town made for rain, and when it rained, all of the tin roofs came together clapping and shouting, they were the grandest band of companions under which little people were hosted in residency.

Leba sat on the front steps and stretched the throne of her legs and lower spine, looking up into the moon outlined in electric white through the warm fog. It was not yet cold in this town at night, where as her last few months had been spent in a true autumn chill: Montreal, Boston, Brooklyn, Pennsylvania; all necessitating sweaters after the sun went down. Here, night relieved the temperature only in the way it felt naked to be sleeveless in the dark eve, and in that nakedness, open and without boundaries in conversation.

A friend came to meet her on his porch, and Leba decided out loud that she would not talk about herself for one week. By not sharing, then, she would refrain from asking of people to resonate with her thought, or to provide solution to her state of affairs. She made it an aim to solely listen rather to identify and critique, she longed to not tell anyone a thing about himself.

For, people told Leba things about herself all the time, and they were mostly all false. Practically every conversation she had was filled with exchanges of definitive statements but to Leba, these admissions registered as declarations of estrangement. There was the one person, however, by Leba's memory, who did know her and who could truly see her, one who never summarized her character casually. He somehow knew to let her womanhood alone, and by this, allowed her to be herself without having to make adjustments or cater to his perception.

Rather, he said, "Your hands heal me like no one has ever."

He said, "You have helped me see myself more than any other."

Together, they had spoken in thoughtful, honest phrase, admitting shy affections and expressive contemplations through language most humans reserve for the settings of traditional theater and

so rarely speak with one another. Leba would watch him in the rain of the fall, drinking a brew of smoky Lapsang Souchong, his voice warm earth, and she would think of all the shopping carts rattling emptily down the city sidewalks, and the people who never had the opportunity to make love with words, who had no cultivated desire to wander over the love poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Walther von der Vogelweide, who never tried aloud "...there is no penance due to innocence.... to teach thee, I am naked first."\*

However poignant their interchanges in recollection, it was still evident that for the diamond thief, underneath his fragrant lingual emissions, there was very little faith of heart and devotion therein. Rather, he spoke mostly only reflecting Leba's own affected phrases, and more so, he abused her distinct affinity for complex language structure to his favor so to advantageously dilute the impact of his exits. For example, The Diamond Thief, to bid Leba long into a fog, would say something almost construable as poetic; such as, "Though I wish I could, I cannot foresee giving you all that you deserve." Here, the statement has first been turned into a declarative aspiration ("though I wish I could") and placed before the real matter of the subject, which directly opposes its hopeful opening clause. Incidentally, instead of "I cannot give you all you deserve" (which was the heart of the expression) Leba heard, firstly, a man proclaiming his wish that he could give, and obviously wanting only to know how, asking to be informed. The Diamond Thief evidently used language to disguise his true feelings, while Leba, meanwhile, used the same index of words to explore her senses out loud. Often, the Diamond Thief would borrow her words, clearly being too unmoved to find his own. "I don't feel like I can capacitate our affair," he admitted, confidently (when only days before he had asked her precisely what this word she used –capacitate– actually meant, as he could not find it in his dictionary). Through all of this communicative mayhem, Leba suffered the greater misfortune due to her contracted listening syndrome. Apparently, Leba inherited a constitutional disposition of hearing in extreme alterations of volume control. Her ears were wired through tremolo pedals. If the Diamond Thief would say, "I know, Leba, I can't functionally live here without destroying you", her tremelo ears could hear only his every other word. "I, Leba, can't live without you." Though it seems that often communication woes are simply due to a distinct difference of vernacular, or of misinterpretations of the associative cultural gestures that often accompany verbal outpour, the situation that had evolved between Leba and The Diamond Thief was the most painful sort of prohibition. While both our characters understood a very similar subtle thread intertwined through all of life, both regrettably suffered from their own neurosis to extreme degrees, and painstakingly missed the other's mark of word, however well crafted. Although, in time, they began to utilize the same language and the same set of gestures, seemingly, the more on par with Leba the Diamond Thief truly was in his dialect of unraveling discourse, Leba continually heard only what she chose.

Leba's fast from talking about herself lasted for two and a half days. It broke on the day after Halloween, when her heart splintered through her eyes, and for the first time in many seasons, she wept. After crying and walking and blowing her nose in the grass Leba felt much better. She had been fortunate enough to receive the keen absolution from the sky and, through its wide open, had painted her senses from the unbounded palate of horizon and had come to a place of

rest; made evident by that long last final sigh after a series of sobs. Leba liked best to cry without public witness, for she had never learned to cry like an adult, and more so, she had never learned to be appeased like one. She pounded fist into the earth, her belly pressed heaving into the gentle hillside, her eyes opening only for a moment to pause, looking, face down, through the electric kiss of grass into the deep psalm of cracked soil and tender root. What relieved her, at the end of such glorious fit? Was it a lone logic, a solvent offering justice, form to combat nihilism? No. What brought her tears effortlessly to rest was the billow of a southern wind, the rustle of appetite finally in her belly, the invitation of a nap made by her own coat curled in upheaved ball, something mauve: the return of Ordinarity. Perhaps adults cried as last resort for coherence, cried with tidy tissue boxes and extending chairs with footrests. Cried on brown leather, passed tears onto magazine covers; bubbling that nauseous gloss print with permanent pocks, remembered later as ginger ale stains, undercover next to crossword puzzlers. Adults, Leba was sure, cried without the reward of a final infant sigh at the end of their riot, the one that comforts the concerned parent, knowing that their babe has finally fallen into the relaxed beta stage of hypnotic trance.

Tears should not be intellectualized, Leba figured. They were birdcalls, and they were best had on large, open roads, traveling by foot, to be relieved by the reply of the amicable winged world.

(Cacophony and the vineyard.)

The Diamond Thief and Leba did have one place, respectively, where they disarmed their defenses and ended the put-up crisis momentarily had between them. The bridge to this otherworld was, in fact, a ferryboat. Taken for a mere hour across the divide of ocean between the mainland of The New England and an island only 28 miles long, filled with ice-cream and white sands, clam chowder and suicidal jellyfish. Filled with newspaper stands and homemade chocolate factories, forts built far along the citronella lit paths through the drifty, ocean-worn woods; hammocks, lighthouses, boats in deep distance from the harbor view. The Diamond Thief periodically took hermitage in these sparse woods, under the tin roof of a fort made by his boarding school bunkmate, named Largo, though called by everyone, including his grandmother, Dog Ears. And, because Largo's family had known the Diamond Thief for so long as well, and would always see him as a youthful vibrant boy filled with enthuse, they had also come to call him, The Diamond Thief, Dog Ears. But, to distinguish him from their own flesh and blood he was stamped with a surname, a name that was the same as their oldest neighbor, a name that meant "friend" in their long made-up language comprised of saline and taffy, crabmeat and island radio waves, made of funny sounding words that were the surviving punch-lines from handed-down jokes long forgotten, words that still sounded like shortstops and one-liners. To them, the Diamond Thief was Dog Ears-Malone, and by this playful alter ego, he had permission to retreat for sustained weekends in the fort built by Largo, his oldest pal Dog Ears.

Dog Ears was beautiful in an honest-looking way, with hair long stuck by the ocean into a clustering queue. He earned his name because he had been recognized by his family as carrying a special talent from the beginnings of his life; he was an astounding whistler. When he whistled his head cocked to the side and he looked much like a Hound Dog, with drooping ears and wet eyes. As fortune would have it, Dog Ears did not believe he could carve a profession from the

gift of his whistling lips alone (though the world most certainly hungered for his talent) and so he lived on the Island, fishing in the summer and building throughout the winter.

The fort wherein The Diamond Thief would take retreat was the first of many homes Dog Ears would come to build. His talent for carpentry, as graceful as his whistle, spawned homes that felt dressed by his inherent joy, and just as the people on the island sought his melodious company, his waiting list of potential clients seeking his innovative design amounted to an extensive read. This fort where rested the Diamond Thief, in particular, had a pot-belly stove in the northwest corner, and in the middle of the small space an antique bathtub was lain, with claws and large handles for turning, making it seem more like a wheel that drove the entire vessel of its surrounding space. Around the base of the tub, etched into the stone and wood flooring, speckled rose quartz and matte-like beach glass formed a skewed circle with a tail in the shape of a comet. The Diamond Thief was well-aware of Leba's fondness for bathtubs and so, when he finally trusted that she would under no circumstances disclose the whereabouts of his hideaway, he invited her to come over to him on the ferry; to this secret world where he, at last, allowed doors to close, time to cease, phones to quiet.

The first time Leba traveled there to him she was still newly struck by the onset of their romance. She packed her belongings: a long white dress, a shirt to swim in, a towel to lay on, paintbrush and watercolor; book, teas, two jars of honey (one for herself and one for Dog Ears) and salve for her lips. She drove the few hours to the shore, parked her car and, upon invitation, shared a glass of wine with a fellow seafarer before embarking upon the ferry as dusk set. She would not admit to herself nor to the seafarer who inquired the excitement she felt.

Would his few days of relaxation on the island have lifted the fog of uncertainty he cast in his lovemaking? Had a healthy diet inspired his affections, eradicated his ambivalence? The sun had set and the night grew deeper, but she could see the ocean in the purple splashing of lush wave against the metal of the vessel carrying her.

Days later, eased by hours of sun, Leba sat next to Dog Ears on the way to the village store. And then, while he breakfasted at a countertop, Leba pursued the curving narrow of road wrapping around the hillside. She hadn't felt like talking much since her arrival on the island, even in private moments with the Diamond Thief. While he managed to stay busy in the relaxing proximities of the fort, whittling his plans for the oncoming year, crossing out figures and estimating profits, she sat sprawled on burgundy plaid cotton blankets, playing with an eraser. The road turned a quirk into a dead-end drive, a calico dust trail, wide enough for one-way traffic. Shoots and sprigs of twiggy forest took turns playing with shadow and then light, emitting every few steps the gloriously begetting heat of sunlight. Leba wore only a light white dress, ripped at the side from an earlier expedition up the wall of a rock-shore cliff.

Earlier conversation with Dog Ear's friend, a certain reactive, hot-tempered woman from Berlin, had affected Leba's blood in a slow moving and toxic sort of way. The way a body can literally hold the weight of emotional process and register heaviness as material; make from it encumbered flesh and gut is nearly a mystery leaving the sensitive mortal incarnate baffled from head to clay toe\*. However, it is not completely a mystery of girth as large as is often chalked up to its total surface, as mystery un-whittled by curiosity is inflammation known better as ignorance, and that ignorance no more than a featherless fear for approaching mystery at all, whose essence when one closes near, is found crude and without comparison more grand than

the greatest replicate art.

The hour a body becomes light with the spontaneity of god's breath –when its skin is oiled in the brine of sesame seed, the hair has luxuriated in rich conditions of awapuhi and aloe, the lymphatic system has been flushed of its reservoir of excess, and is hydrated with the well-wish of pure waters– in that utter moment of blissful encounter with the surrounding world the thought of taking on a lover and breathing wholly into the space both bodies occupy is an easy dream. In comparison, there is that plain, wretched time of fumbling with organization, in the scrubbing of an oven inside where a film of grime has been harboring its defense, and the fall of a vacuum cleaner over on itself, the cord not nearly long enough to get the corners of the den, giving up on the deep clean of original intentions. There is the muck of sugar playing in the gut, of digestion slowed, of traffic in that cocked time-after, leaning over when finished reading in moving vehicles, suffering through the impatience of preparing half-witted meals, or days of reckless mess, abandon without a point of return, the way the hair gets greasy and the daylight reveals hidden skin-tones. In these states, does the romantic grace that thrives in ambiance have room to survive? To imagine the chaffing discomfort of driving the 14 hours Leba often drove, thighs stagnant, belly in paralysis, flat mind in silent state, with The Diamond Thief, wielder of moments afire, was impossible. She felt that until she combated falling victim to her own ugliness, to unwarranted imbalance, to a retribution of ill-mood from a lack of being capable of maintaining total control of her environment, she would never be able to have more than an imaginary Diamond Thief beside her, one who would grow old only theoretically, who did not apply to anniversaries or work on home improvements.

She felt the oddness of her womanhood in a mired light, and so stopped to sit in one particular patch of sun. Leba had a practice of breathing and listening, with every breath her ears opened more from their certain location between her shoulder blades, resting with her tired heart. She had recently been informed that the act of inhaling was actually a function of the kidneys, and that the lungs are responsible for exhaling only. Elsewhere, she had heard that her kidneys looked much like cute mice, but without hair, and were characteristically eager to make slight squeals and express their desire for the smallest attributes of life, and that these kidneys are the thin skin of a curtain over the heart, waiting to peel back, waiting to be drawn open, waiting to assist the deep letting go into the moment.

Among other reasons, this is why Leba practiced singing. She began, there on the island, to sing one consistent note, a long-sounding tone that moved at first tightly through the small chambers in her body, barely vibrating. Within minutes the note had gained entrance into the widest spheres of her ribcage, into the nest of her hips and through the conductor of her throat. Her lips vibrated, as did her knees meeting the packed mud and dust where she perched. She renewed her senses; the conversation she'd had with Dog Ear's angry friend exited from her fingertips. She remembered that her life was a fortune.

A bird she could not see sang a melodic phrase beginning with the note A, the same that she had been singing. His melody was quick and filled with chromatic movement. Leba had been spending her summer studying classical music, listening to and then repeating her teacher in the traditional way, learning by mirroring. She lifted her head and sang the very same melody back to the bird that had dropped its song toward her ears.

Moments later, the bird returned, with a phrase slightly varied. Leba felt certain she could return

this melody as well and so she lifted her head and sang back to the bird.

Again, a call came to her. This time, when she went to sing the phrase she faltered in slight. Immediately, the bird gave it out again, just as her teacher had, until she could land upon it with accuracy.

Leba was not stunned to share such intimations with the island birds, but was rather flattered to have landed such a wonderful music lesson.

The encounter continued and Leba's pride quickened. She began to feel that her ability to sing the bird's music was unusually strong, and with each line she became more proud.

Then came a simple line. "Now come on" Leba puffed. This line was so uncomplicated, it was hardly challenging for her.

As her concentration wavered, she was met by the uproar of many birds, mocking her mind.

Every time her thoughts strayed from the music, the birds would erupt into their Cacophony.

This, she realized, was the way the subtle world chortles, teaches the way, through the eruption of bird clavicles.

Each time the birds laughed at Leba she felt dedicated to sing again, with more surrender, with more awareness. The birds were graceful fools, masters of the wind, able to mock at one moment and in the next call to mate; were rooted by the strength of the trees yet as transitive as season. After much time passed Leba resurfaced, the Sun reached towards the peak of the horizon. She rose from her seat upon the caked mud and moved in a slow circle, bowing to all directions, and then headed up the narrow, passing the semi-tended lawns in return to the store.

Dog Ears was sitting on a bench with both his German girlfriend and The Diamond Thief. Leba longed to approach this group with enthusiasm and glee, longed to let them know how her love was limitless, thought that perhaps she could communicate to The Diamond Thief himself that Love was a power stronger than any diamond and that birds could guide them if they just listened long enough.

However, as soon as she reached the table, the colors of the day seemed to drain from the objects in her sight. The park bench looked weathered by wind and beach sand carried from the shore, settling to rest. The exhausted grass had suffered the trespassing of city shoes; it had been originally planted as soft landscape, but was now prone only to the bite of the sun and famine. No one had responded to its call for watering except the bus driver who sometimes stopped in the early night, he had a ritual of buying a soda and drinking only half of the can's contents, as to limit his caloric intake. The rest he would seem to accidentally spill, adding to the lawn's detriment.

Leba felt like she needed glasses, but she didn't wear glasses, and because of this she often experienced delayed assertions, necessitating a moment to dissect her surveillances before entirely trusting her perspective. She came unevenly toward the sitting group, tucking her enthusiasm into a stiff expression of nonchalance so that she, of course, would seem no more impressed by life than any of the other three who calmly and plainly sat without much to say, much to show and certainly without much to ask.

Leba walked passed the table of her three acquaintances with obvious delicacy, in way to seek approval from the diamond thief, who she felt secretly wanted her to have no impact upon his surroundings; only that she should show up when he needed to be touched, when he was ready

for companionship and then to disappear entirely during every other moment. And she proceeded into the town store and ordered buttered toast. Then she purchased their local honey in the smallest jar possible, having left behind her own Savannah honey at Dog Ear's fort. Locating a metal knife on the deli-counter, she had now all necessary ingredients, and she eagerly anticipated appeasing the sharpness of her mind with this warm, small meal. Out of her bag she brought forth her favorite mug and placed in it black tea that the Diamond Thief had brought her from Japan, after which she filled her mug with hot water. Leba both loved and was sickened by any present the Diamond Thief brought her. She felt sure that he gave her these gifts more from his preponderant guilt than from a real, euphoric longing for her. Leba loved his gifts, however, not because they suited her very well, but because they were from him, and they felt to her fingertips almost like substitutions for his skin. When Leba opened a present from The Diamond Thief (which was seldom wrapped, further evidence of The Diamond Thief's lack of resolution) she was unable to respond to whatever lay before her. Only if she were truly his beloved she could react as though the beloved would! Instead, she reservedly responded to his attentions. She was worried that if she allowed her enthusiasm to surface, it would spoil her into believing that the diamond thief was sure to give to her something deeper, irredeemable. Something not possible to describe; how it would actually feel, what it would look like up close or how sweet it would taste was immeasurable. This irredeemable, indescribable gift was so stupefying, that Leba simultaneously obviated the chance of its manifestation while also expressly demanding its arrival and the poor, confounded Diamond Thief was successfully kept too perplexed to further attempt to provide her with the simple opportunity to receive. The rest of her stay at The Fort felt like Love, for there was sunlight and green leaves and moments of lying naked on the beach and walks into the night... but when she returned again to the shore, after ferrying wide across the way, driving the stretch of highway to the town where she then resided, when she looked at the bleak worn siding on the house and when she found the hidden key in its same place, she knew it acted like love sometimes. Not even the greatest detective would have cracked the case, caught the culprit, it seemed so much like love. Love, the obtuse cloud built not only for breaking and letting its precipitation, but even more for carrying by blanketing golden stars through the day into the liberation of night; is also a flower that is more commonly referred to as a weed, like a dandelion. It spots empty fields near train tracks, is chewed on as fertilizer. It is mindless about letting go into the wind, and when the great wind comes it thinks not of shelter, because it thinks not of itself. It disappears into a terrific storm!

"Fuck It" Leba Scrachnsniv said to her mirror one morning as the autumn bragged over its collection of summer in display through her long windows. She had been before by the luck of fate, because her dear friend The Sailor lived there, and decided that she would go again, and spend the peak of winter in Italy. So she reserved a plane ticket and made plans to fly to Europe on what most people called Christmas Day. Leba thought Christmas day was more a perfect scheme that disguised the infinite, innate archetype of St. Nick, who perhaps was not so big and fat, or white haired, or even a man at all. She had figured one night, convinced of hearing sleigh bells in early October, that Santa Clause, as did other "holiday heroes", hid himself successfully under the auspices of giving people

merely one day a year to authenticate his presence. Sandwiching his notoriety into one day, Santa realized, would conjure enough hubbub to allow him to... slip out the archetypal back door without notice on Christmas Day itself (as the collective attention of the audience would be engrossed in holiday sales at department stores and sugary products) as well as live with privacy and ease in the remaining 364 days of the year, mostly forgotten. On Christmas, like every other day, he could flex his generous contemplative heart undisturbed amidst all the tinsel and presents, the eager rich children, the snowfall and the chimneys\*.

The night Leba decided to go to Italy she drove a few miles from where she resided for that particular week and parked far away enough to enjoy a lengthy walk along her favorite 6 blocks of southern city, turning then into the wooden door frame of a secret brew-house called Venus, Exalted. As typical, there were rows of large framed easels taking up one half of the room, set up and in use. Painters clad in color smears with palettes and pint glasses together leaned into the edges of their works, teetering and peering into their canvases, sneering and on the occasion, speaking to each other in brief grunts. Lush deep-raspberry colored velveteen couches filled the other half of the brew-house, dimly lit by long hanging lamps with patina green rust marks. Between each rusted light, bells hung over soft sinking lounges, strung too high to be struck while the lovers and thinkers alike sat, reading, listening or napping.

The music at Venus, Exalted played at a low volume, a level where a light exchange of conversation could risk development; a level where secrets could still be wept and yawns remained contagious. A collection of classical French pieces from the second half of the nineteenth century performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and Joshua Bell played through modest speakers. When a space is thoughtfully filled, it is possible to make a small room feel that it possesses broader measurements, by the scope of wall color, the texture of woods, by the amount of furnishings and distinctly (though unnoticed by the majority of visitors) by the volume and kind of music being played within its confines. The music at Venus, Exalted trickled onto the floor and climbed like sky-blue colored vines up the walls by the tweak of violin, the deep, gentle thump of tympani. The track playing was Poem, by Ernest Chausson, who lived until 1899 during a time where great art flourished in Paris, where painted Renoir, Monet, Degas, Matisse and Gauguin. Chausson perished at the helm of bicycle handles while still quite young, leaving his unfinished works, one sole symphony in B-flat, and two surviving symphonic poems.

Leba sat at the counter, in between the velveteen couches and the busy painters, and she ordered an Anchorstein Beer, named after a precocious, secret writer friend of hers who lived in Norway, where the winters were extremely cold. Anchorstein had, momentarily, lived in the states, where she became intimate with a particular brewer, who enjoyed listening to her politically candid satires as well as her long love sonnets while he improved upon his brew of hops and yeasty ingredients. It was only when Anchorstein returned to Norway that the young brewer realized he was in love with his new friend. He was unable to get hold of her, however, as he had mistakenly thought her last name to be Anchorsteam. Anyone who has repetitively been to this one specific small town in Norway will know that it is filled with Heaps of Anchorsteams and so, in trying to find his Norwegian friend, the beer-maker was unsuccessful. Leba knew when she drank an Anchorsteam that the beer was more rightfully called an Anchorstein, named after the gift of her sweet, secret friend who still lived in Norway and who had repressed her

inclinations to locate her beer-making acquaintance, certain that his prior engagements and kept contracts rendered him far too busy to have time to visit her in Norway.

Anchorstein hadn't considered that her beer-maker might have a trying time making contact, and because she possessed a particular sort of shyness, it seemed inappropriate for her to make the first effort to reunite. Therefore, the beer-maker lost an opportunity to live a sweet life in Norway, and to then maybe work with her uncle, an exceptional alchemist who was the godfather of independent Norwegian brews. Anchorstein, however, continued to write long love sonnets and a book about marmalade, to which Leba Scrachnsniv had written the forward. In due time to come Anchorstein would run again into the beer-maker, but when that time arrived the two would have more feelings of long-distanced regards for one another, quite absorbed instead in the current investments life had offered each for the making. This simple fate was perfect for a woman like Anchorstein, whose nature required that her most prized relationships remain inaccessible to her actual lips, so that she could have both her cake and eat it, too. (Her cake being the idea of love, and the feast being the rendering of beautifully scripted works expressing only the most conservative ideals and romantic encapsulations regarding faith.) This was one of Anchorstein's pieces in the book to which Leba wrote the forward. We can't remember the whole thing right now; but here, at least, is a piece:

In air love  
our over-ness  
i, by only  
what you contend,  
(as one man constructs his whole world)  
live as your prosperous example wildly  
will be true to you being true to your law  
am obstructed by nothing, no hand  
to mull you big, or small.

Works such as this are what Anchorstein became famous for writing in Norway. In Norway, poets can become very famous when they are still alive. Norwegian politicians on the average, in fact, are first poets, and then once their ideas are well enough lyrically constructed they are then anointed with the position to sensually advise the land. In Anchorstein's imagery of the ether, there perched a mythical throne; the throne itself was the focal point in her grand deluge, and because the throne was so well crafted and ornate, she felt duly obligated to continually decorate its splendor with illustration. While most devotee zealots build alter to anchor a place of homage to their exalted chosen savior, Anchorstein's fixation with idols was wholly secondary, centered around her sense of duty to create a worthy accessory for her true glorified beloved, the literal throne; its texture, stout build, and stature. So, in prose, she provided its post with the fixture of an icon or eponym. This amalgamation was changed out consistently,

ostracized or executed for one reason or another, but was –while holding reign– characterized often by the same mortal features as a man who had somehow brushed her shoulder, stared for a hard moment at her; who had bared a piece of his thought while it rained. These strange attractors fertilized the bane of her creative output. And so, in ways, she was a whore for her own abstraction, for the sake of intimately knowing the eternal stranger. However, such prostitution was well regarded by her country fellows, and she was recognized as an outstanding contributor in the field of linguistics and nomenclature.

Because of Anchorstein, who went only by her last name, feeling lyrically disturbed by the eurhythmy of her first, which was Gloria (reminding her for some reason only of the color chartreuse and outworn chinos) Delilah Fredemont and Leba Scrachnsniv first met.

Anchorstein needed to find an apartment for a season or more in New York before she planned to head to the mid-west to write in the open plains. Just at that time, Delilah Fredemont sat in a quiet Brooklyn Cafe and designed an inviting sign to allure the right housemate. Anchorstein approached Delilah and over raspberry trifle and a mild chai they agreed that their mutual love for quiet workspace and a shared ability to keep a toilet relatively clean would make them, at the least, decent housemates.

The same week that Anchorstein moved with her three suitcases (two comprised of books alone) into Delilah Fredemont's house, Leba Scrachnsniv came to Prospect Heights as well, to study with a man who had spent many years in India learning the traditional ragas of the North. After a lesson one evening, Leba met a friend for Thai Food at a Restaurant called Rice. She had eaten at Rice once before with The Diamond Thief and was reluctant to return, attributing her felt disdain to this association of memory. However, she remembered upon entering through the nouveaux glass doors that the esthetic of Rice, itself, was not pleasing to her, even minus the diamond thief. In particular, the music was altogether too loud in volume and, admittedly more annoying, Leba critiqued, spun by an overly enthusiastic young man making affected gestures with his arms, spinning unattractive recordings and emitting a haughty air.

Leba sat at square table with her friend Joe; Joe who had an unusually wide tongue. Leba wanted to truly like Joe, to not pass judgment on her friend, but she found it exceptionally difficult to not wonder about his thick, wide tongue, and to not suffer the terrible imagery of what would happen if, by great misfortune, her friend Joe attempted to put his monstrous tongue in her mouth or in her ear, or near her at all. Shortly after distressing through dinners such as these, Leba realized, plainly, that she ought more to be enticed by the attributes of her companions than to feel overwhelmed by her active imagination's play of scenario. She felt unable to deal with the fantastic renderings of her mind's concoctions in the presence of certain people, for reasons often not apparent. Discomfort, certainly, thought Leba, sharpened wit\*, but there was a considerable sound, artistic discomfort and then, in comparison, morbid self-sabotage.

In Rice, Leba looked up at the man spinning records. The combination of Joe's tongue and the overzealousness of the man spinning what Leba considered excessively loud, uninteresting music, however much she had attempted to practice non-judgment, had filled her mind with a game of writing Haikus to escape. Her first one went as such:

Joe has a fat tounge  
it rests on his bottom teeth  
i wish i were home.

Delilah Fredemont and Anchorstein were only across the room, sharing a meal in celebration of Delilah's record-breaking amount of wedding-band orders in one week, as well as Anchorstein's arrival to town. Leba hadn't been observant much of anyone in the room, other than Joe and his haiku and the deejay, when she was struck with amusement; the deejay, responsible for the lack of coherence within the entire restaurant, stepped down momentarily from the podium where he cast his tunes. Thereafter, Anchorstein, self-prompted, using a stealthy Norwegian camouflage technique that was in part responsible for the success of her journey from Norway to Brooklyn, rose from her seat and in a measure of 4 seconds unplugged the sound equipment from the record player and wall socket both, and pocketed the electrical chord from his apparatus into her long overcoat.

Retreating to her seat, she looked at Leba directly, flicked her graceful tongue and winked. Leba was struck then with an immediate fondness for Anchorstein, and as the patrons of the restaurant engaged in their newfound sonic freedom, sparking more intricate conversation, Leba paid for her own bill and Joe's together, and bid him farewell with a subtle push. As he left, she ventured toward Anchorstein and Delilah Fredemont, and arrived to their table, full with commentary. "... I assume you read minds." She started appreciatively. "Your trick was cunning and necessary, thank you very much"

"To rid an oxymoron, at best." Replied Anchorstein.

Leba was not so sure what Anchorstein literally meant, but she felt that the term "oxymoron" sounded in itself correct in a contextual application to the moment and thus their dialogue unfurled. Therein a friendship began between three mysterious creatures of the femme, who were all intimate with the inanimate and happy to share their self-absorption in a collective dynamic through pioneered prosaic.

Anchorstein had a reptilian flare to her features, not in way appearing self-hijacked, which is occasionally sub-cognitively associated with this particular physical description of character. In this example, the connotative reptile-like quality of Anchorstein describes more so the fine but firm structure of her physique. She was a woman with a surreptitiously unusual beauty that often went unnoticed; she was exquisite at making herself invisible. Her skin tautly stretched over strong small bones with features snugly fit about her skeleton with primal quality, concocted directly from brine and rain, and then rocks dried by sun. Her gestures revealed no ramifications of being flushed through a generation of befuddled clowns or coquettish baboons, and her consistently keeled mannerisms suggested she came from a lineage that had been spared all but the gentlest of history or else had adhered regally to the rigid laws administered by highfalutin officials; and in this way her family had maintained a reserved expression, solid lineage. Her blood's most antique reserve recounted a DNA of elders and past relatives forever serious, even in their wit of humor. Her extended family laughed like dead seeds in a gourd or a fanning of short breaths upon a fire, they wouldn't trip on reds drooling from their mouths or be confused by the charge of electric lighting. Therefore her demeanor was strong and soft, implacable by

age or nationality. And as the most learned utilize that which sets them aside, atilt or askew to fortify their most pliable route to success, Anchorstein knew how to employ her suddenly striking power well. She possessed a magical hand, one that could fill a page with fine, rounding script in an unflinching moment, and looking upon the completion of her slew of phrase Anchorstein would bare a full, pink smile that revealed her only hint of childish pride. Otherwise, in all expressions, she seemed not self-possessed, but rather wispy, as small and sharp as a radish, yet meek. For this very reason, strangers mistook her, by her slight frame and tepid demeanor, for a woman with a recipient nature; someone who would welcome the long, lustrous agonized tales she, effectually, seemed predisposed to encounter. While the acute observer should, with their persnickety attention, easily have recognized Anchorstein's seemingly calm reserve as, more accurately, a cunning maneuver possessed only by the best kind of spy-posing-as-confidante, those who over-poured their personal woes in her company thought never twice of the possibility that their own newly-relieved secrets were to later be published as revered works in the field of modern literature.

The content of Anchorstein's novels, which often read quite polar to her more bleating prose and poetry, came directly to her with suppleness, disposed themselves first-handedly through brief encounters while she remained unpretentious, sitting in places like small neighborhood bars, train stations, doctor's offices and dress shoppes. Never pinned as exploitive, Anchorstein remained directly innocent, only coincidentally predisposed with an open ear, and equally skilled at enduring its magnetic pull for the cries of the wayward and perplexed, for odd moments and the masters and fools thereof. Anchorstein's gifted right brain kicked in like a chemical after factual information was gathered, and she'd begin to recount. The literal was then carried off in copper river-vessels and overtaken by the landscape. Fragments of facts floatingly buoyed in a Dali sky, colored Maxfield Parrish blue; this was her true joy, witnessing the craft as it wielded itself.

Sensibly so, Leba, Anchorstein and Delilah went into immediate business. They met two afternoons later at a perfect French Cafe to discuss the vision of their work endeavors over shared Lattes and omelets. We use the word "perfect" here in a sense that is difficult to explain; particularly to some people who are scared of the way (or possibly very dissuaded or distracted by the way) the word sounds. This restaurant was perfect because the latte foamed in mugs as wide as lily pads, sweetened by a final, light shower of nutmeg. Because the tables housed thick, white hand-dipped candles that stayed lit after 4pm until the early morning, because one could almost speak fluent French by slowly chewing the fresh baguette. Leba loved this little café; it was hers. She brought company with her there only when it felt exactly right. By the rust of the autumnal day, she appointed Delilah Fredemont and Anchorstein to the most appropriate table. It was apparent to all three women, by their immediate rapport, that the reality of translating their collective chemistry into a lucrative scheme was undeniable. (Though all three were aptly suspicious of lucrative schemes.) They decided to create a syndicate that would not only serve as a venue for the totality of their work and passion, but one that would also transform the idea of publicity into preservation and reveal the heartiness of art as the essential politic shaping time and history.

Ultimately, Leba believed less in the modern publicist and more in the conventional archetype of the Herald— one who quite literally perched on the corner professing the height of culture and event. In her rapid expression and conversation with Delilah Fredemont and Anchorstein, the three decided to make what would Truly be a publication, one to feature the whole of their craftwork and vision, to present their own artisanship by a sound, unique design. In time they would collect others' work, from significant artists who were in need of appropriate representation, parceled into what would be considered the foremost prominent periodical of dimensional, contemporary art. They decided the audience for their work would come ultimately for the quality of the work itself rather than by target of the billboard advertisement, or the exploited information about their own love affairs and plastic surgery. They named their publication “The Dream Post-Post” because all three women surmounted that their inspiration came in intuitive chapters, and through the landscapes of slumber.

They divided their tasks. They would publish, ultimately, The Dream Post-Post through the same company that published Anchorstein’s last three novellas. As Anchorstein worked only with the most resonant of contemporaries, her publisher was well informed, incredibly pert with shape, contour and design, and also connected with vast distributors. Within four weeks the ladies had their first issue set to print, laden with rich red pencil drawings, favorite language, short briefs on Street Poets, and a vivid section of photography entitled: “How To Survive One’s Own Self-Discovery.” There were bronzed and lime renderings of Delilah’s metal-smith work throughout The Dream Post-Post, and extreme compositional notations of conceptual music charted in classical form by Leba, punctuated with Anchorstein’s lyrical phrase. In the last pages of the publication a three dimensional orchestra printed onto a thick silk-like material emerged in the style of paper dolls, demonstrating through elaborate ink-work, emitting the sense of an actual performance captured within pages.

The Dream Post-Post emitted regality in its form and cover, and presided naturally on display at a bookstore, or in the letterbox and in the hand of the purchaser. It looked more in its place than Anchorstein, Leba and Delilah put together looked in this world of long tall lines and short terse sounds. By the third month of its new life, The Dream Post-Post was selling all over North America and generating healthy income for not only the publisher, but for Leba, Delilah and Anchorstein as well. As a medium, The Dream Post-Post was likened to an offering of physical art, and that each publishing was comparable to having purchased a substantial gallery piece. Eventually, after some seasons, when Anchorstein, at last, returned to Norway, the three put to temporary rest their original work and halted further production for an unknown amount of time until they were more certain of how the syndicate would naturally continue. Many readers of The Dream Post-Post contacted Delilah Fredemont, who published her very own mailing address as the resource center of communications on the last page. One reader humbly expressed his vision to come and carry forth the work the group had started, continuing to source from the ladies themselves design layout and content ideas while taking on the whole of responsibilities himself.

His letter was etched in white pencil on dyed very fine linen then brushed with melted candle wax. They had little interest in responding to his specific request (knowing how much work it would be to relay to an outsider the vision that had arrived with such organic precision between the three women). But his letter was very pleasing to the eye. It was jagged and tasteful, his

spelling and original grammar were impeccable, and by an unknown impulse Delilah and Leba agreed to meet this man who went by the name of Ramone Dish.

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Ramone Dish arrived at The Prospect Heights apartment on a winter afternoon, soon after Delilah had returned from Bolinas. Leba arrived from the southland to both meet Ramone Dish and play in a last-minute fashion at an establishment called Etep's Nackdy Shoppe. The shoppe was a living junkyard of art, filled with car parts and torn maps, toll-tickets and pay-stubs. Etep, the man whose vision had birthed the venue, drove around the united states and Canada playing music for years suffering the circumstance of the one obstacle that kept him from his own innate punctuality –a foiled van, with a foiled motor and foiled parts that no mechanic ever seemed able to locate and order quickly enough or to then precisely install.

When he tired of the road, he opted, rather than to sell his warped vehicle to an innocent fool, to have the entire car taken apart. From such dissection, he reaped lovely pieces of angular metal parts, rotors, gauges, tanks, and fuel injectors: a mix of rust and silvers, knobs and poles. Etep realized that he found more profound beauty in a discombobulated motor vehicle than he'd yet beheld (primarily that of the Dodge brand, a brand, by his luck soon to follow, that failed thousands of consumers regularly and thus provided his artistic vision with an endless palette of material). He soon after invested in tens of old vans and autobuses, all worn from the road by vigilant musicians. As it turns, Etep paid starving woe-begotton musicians for their unusable vehicles, and thus became an enabler of the arts himself. He sent in his repair-tech friends to dissect all mechanical remains, and received the goods of the guts of the dodgy vehicles in boxes; from there he went to work. Etep's Nackdy Shoppe housed dinosaur-like beasts, both intriguing and arresting to the senses. It was a distinct symbol and gesture, thought Leba. Considering the presence of petrol (as controversial as it was) came, according to science, from the fossils of what were once dinosaurs, there was no better way to erect statues of homage than to build beasts of road story, creatures whose stances were supported in shoes of paper-tickets from airplanes delayed, whose orange eyes glowed lit by the light from irises of unpaid parking fares, whose finger nails could kill by the blade made of crankshafts and unaligned rotors, restructured.

Etep, of course, never lost his connection to music, and remembered, while he crafted his masterpieces, his own years of tormented traveling, of wanting to arrive at his planned destination and failing again and again to meet his booked commitments. When he found his shoppe in Brooklyn, a medium sized warehouse next to a most superb bakery, he built his installations with prescience, knowing the venue would host the finest music, music people could trust, for the space itself procured perfect sound.

When Leba made plans to travel into the New York area, she regularly stopped at Etep's Nackdy Shoppe. She appreciated it mostly for the reason that it had authentically retained its underground attributes. Perhaps it remained unfettered and original because its name conjured neither an illustrious sense nor seemed easy to remember for most people whose eyes passed it over in the newspaper or traveled by its closed doors during non-business hours, doors which were wide like garage doors and opened from the ground upwards, but were made of opaque

beach glass and, though elegant, revealed nothing of the inside.

The morning after her first of three Etap shows both Leba and Delilah answered the door to discover the young and stunning Ramone Dish. Ramone was outfitted. He dressed on the edge of self-conceptualized fashion conjuring an epithet near to The King of Boutique or else The Fatigued Vagrant because the two were so deeply intertwined in the throws of modern design. Beyond a mullein russet coat, whose sleeves purposefully covered the length of his fingertips, and the long trailing angora scarf dyed a color likened to fern green, a brilliant face emerged, exposed and lone.

Thus far in our story, we have not been interested in unfolding the sort of typical plot where a young, slightly confused or hard-to-sink-your-teeth into character such as Leba Schratshinsniv simply opens the door upon a strikingly picturesque man who is almost barely concealing a white horse in his pocketbook or one who possesses merely a flavorful blend of imported tobacco or the sort who, without effort, spontaneously arrives at the precise time, or anything resembling decrepit mirage. We are not attempting to rescue Leba (though this might very well be what our story needs at the moment, a kind of wonderful rescue that is so large even Delilah Fredemont and Anchorstein are swept up, in side-note, by its intensity and shape). A rescue that captivates the reader and organizes the story's lack of linearity would not be exactly unwelcomed, especially if such a rescue had the apparent qualities of Ramone Dish. Still, we could not bear to spend paragraphs crafting romanticized descriptions about the effect of Ramone's physique upon the numerous women and men he merely crossed on the street, how long considered he was in the aftermath of his briefest passing-bys, how he moved seemingly unaware of his beauty and grace. We're fighting lingering long in epics depicting how he appeared flawed only with a charge of the serious crime of killing by glancing and tormenting by exhaling too closely. For we cannot afford spending lost hours constructing phrases which prove that, by lucky surprise, our character was actually a man possessing curiosity, one whose vocabulary emerged delicately from the muscle of his heart and unto the world in a fine stanza. A man whose thoughtfulness suggested that his mind was perhaps more free of self-obsessing than the average human and who immediately made both Leba and Delilah feel at their best and seen, comfortable yet upright. The air between them, as they invited Ramone to come in, as they brewed Rooibus tea, as they conversed over aspects of the work of The Dream Post-Post, as they shared licorice macaroons and honey speltcakes from the French Cafe around the corner, arranged itself into clean pixels, sharp and well blended.

After some hours Delilah went to catch a store before it closed, leaving Ramone and Leba in conversation. Because it was winter, it was cold inside the house, though Delilah had made a fire in the working fireplace (a luxurious feature of her spacious Brooklyn apartment). Leba remained wrapped in a down blanket over her legs and waist and kept her favorite mug filled with tea.

"So," said he, swallowing a red mouthful of Rooibus. "I came here to present to you, Leba, an emergence of my vision that has been much inspired by yours. Reading The Dream Post-Post, I've resonated so wholly with the inputted textures coming from your palate. I'm direfully confessing, selfishly so; I need to explore your work to fulfill my own."

Ramone impressed Leba, though she attempted to feign a general ennui and a dulled

responsiveness while he casually listed his previous accomplishments. Clearly, he was setting her up for an unveiling of a sort of plan he'd foreseen that ideally involved her accompaniment. Surprisingly untypical of young zealous men, Ramone had experienced success in his creative missions thus far, and though there is more credential found often in the subtle awe-striking world of rainbow puddles from misfired gasoline nozzles than found in some classifiable list of rattled-off successes, Ramone portrayed his passions with integrity; he was captivating. While he articulately described his experience of winning a Parisian Independent Film award and receiving a grant of an extremely large amount of money in support of his current project, Leba felt towards him an untypical sense of receptivity.

She wondered for a moment how many poetic intelligent expressions Ramone could deliver before he'd repeat himself. She once met a man who somehow won the position of holding extraordinarily long conversations with her for hours and days. This deep conversing went on for the course of half the moon's cycle when a sort of implosion occurred and thus terminated their discourse. Months later, she found herself in a different, less intimate, type of conversation with the aforementioned man and heard again the same lovely theory he had previously expelled reiterated unflinchingly, as though being spoken for the very first time. She expected him to note his repetition of metaphoric cluster (as if he specifically had taken it out again for a personalized effect) but he made no reference. Hearing it again was insufficient cause alone to instigate Leba's loathing; her worn frustration, rather, was due to disappointment and embarrassment. For he had displayed the most general efforts only, having revealed during the short season of their correspondence merely a series of blanketed phrases; while she had been excited and engaged in their discussions, conjuring brand new word clusters and expressions exclusively for him. She commended his efficiency, but still felt sallow; she had referenced his articulations as though they were personal gifts in the afterwards of their time spent together. When he unflinchingly re-uttered his apex contraption of language upon her again in a conservative passing by of lingo she deflated; she felt as though recounting the deliverance and timing of their artful exchange had been a stupid production, an analysis of mindless gesture, like a cough or a sneeze. It was elementary and girlish to contemplate someone's cough or sneeze, thought Leba. And further, engineered adages sounded like orders, Leba assessed, and he used them unfairly to dominate in conversation.

She realized that some people had only 6 or 14 poetic ideas in a lifetime and that possibly these idioms would be iterated many times over in their one life. If this curse was coupled by handsome actions, like carrying heavy objects, cooking extraordinary well, delivering an impeccable massage or hiking food provisions for 15 people into the Alps then, Leba decided, she would be able to forgive the possible reoccurrence of a limited phrasing, even marvel in it: live it again and again, reaping new angles, quieting her mind with its waffling familiarity, receive it as the sound of the river, of a baby's breathing; a placation. If, however, the person uttering their own philosophic cliché was perhaps spending the girth of their time continually smoking a pipe of hashish and moving out of one transportation vehicle into the next (repeating mainly the phrase "What are you talking about, Girl?") Leba determined she would not bear the repeated executions, nor wonder for too long of time how significant and applicable these few self-coined expressions altogether were.

"Leba," drew forth Ramone, cutting into the thick of her tired defenses, "I think I lost you for a

bit, I am sorry, I have just been talking about myself which must leave you questioning my motives. I was more so prefacing this point I am coming to right around the corner, theoretically speaking –but perhaps we should turn the couch we are sitting on to help us get there by accountable degree.”

The two stood up and Ramone pushed the couch to a variant angle and then re-sat.

“Better?” His eyes were long, oval. She nodded for him to continue. “I’ve made a film and I’m concerned about its relevance, not because I don’t feel for the subject or because I am no longer attracted to the work, but because I don’t know if it will register in the world as important to its viewer; because it is a subtle work, and I wonder when it is revealed if I’ll stand to lose sense myself, as the film’s courier, of its very tender content. The dichotomy, if you will, of the starkly understated, which for some composers is the sole fascination of their demonstrative artfulness, and then the lurid overt, wherein exhibits combust rather than open, lends to strange equation. Do we hope, in our expose, to recreate the gentle fertility from where spontaneity struck us– or do we instead present our offspring (that is called “art”) like a road map? I believe that the delivered portrayal of one’s work is a vital form of art in its own. I could read a book I’d written, for example, and bore people to chromosomes depending on my attire, voice, air, etc. Or I could possess the choreography to promote collective awareness of our fortune, how we are un-dull and without disrepair. The latter, I believe, is precisely how exhibit can be a living entity versus a specimen of dehydrated, dissected parts. Yet, all of my film is about the space between a leaf and a suctioning rain droplet that clings to it! To feel on this scale of tenderness is relative to the allowance of environment. One could look upon a drop of rain clinging to a leaf and feel unaffected when in contrast a city bridge is being raised to let a high sail through its portals.”

“And everything about you offers salvation for the subtle. It’s a grand sweeping statement, but I don’t mean it as a superlative complement; it’s an assessment. I imagine you struggle with such position, bothered more by the angle of an object on a table than, say, subpoenas, taxation, the importation of Icelandic horses into Florida and pluralism. You decorated the very last Dream Post-Post with a piece that contained similar constituent parts as everything I’ve felt to render, what you wrote struck me.”

Leba thought about her last inscription in The Dream Post-Post and honestly, she did not instantly know about what Ramone was referencing. But she did recant a piece of his commentary, which otherwise was quite spot-on.

“I care about ponies in the sun. I care about them furiously.”

Leba looked at the scraped-silver clock on the wall of Delilah’s kitchen and recognized that hour of one where she was obliged to part.

Ramone assisted her gathering of instruments and equipment and walked with her toward a bus, where sat her weekend exporter awaiting her entrance into the vehicle. She politely made her exit, presented her hand to his; offering to share in a shake, which effectually felt, in ways, more intimate and sincere than the overextended embrace that so often the newly acquainted prematurely facilitate.

Leba, preoccupied with reaching her next destination punctually, did not speak her thoughts, but Ramone concluded, with brevity of diction.

“I hope you might find inspiration to work with me for a spell.”

Leba's bone structure caught the winter seal-blue of dusk, and the hair on her head responded to life in a way making it obvious that hair is not dead at all, but a conduit of expression.

After entering the bus she turned around to look out the camouflaged window at Ramone who was standing still watching her depart. In the past, if a man hovered afterwards in space it would make Leba uncomfortable, for she'd rather assume her acquaintance dissipated into smoke cloud rather than lingered reflectively, or that he'd walked on, kicking ground with boot, finding again solitude. But she didn't assess Ramone's lingering stance as anything other than an opportunity to look at him longer.

He stood as tall as the building they had exited together. The hair hanging around his face lapped at his mouth, wanting in- wanting to enter the warm cave of lucky salivating rivers and gem chasms who, by fortune, resided inside that rose flowering lipid hole.

“I forgot.” She pursed her lips to the side of her mouth. “I did not thank Ramone Dish for coming.” Then she figured the thought to be unworthy of collapsing herself into as the small bus pushed its diesel engine with resourceful laboring toward the evening's venue.

By merely a few turns of Brooklyn Roads her vehicle arrived at Etep's Nackdy Shoppe. She checked her equipment and instrument sound for a little more than an hour and then went down the street to order a bowl of Miso at Kyoto Tomo Saki. The restaurant, for Leba, marked the departure of that famous Japanese pop star, who by morose happenstance was slain by a late-triggered bullet from the gun of Mauna loa, the man who continued to stalk Delilah, though her friend had attempted twice to change her name to protect her identity. Her real name was Delilah Feldmore, and in her first transition of title she had become Deena Fordmore, but within weeks she received persistent threats from a man sent obviously by Mauna loa. Now she had settled on Delilah Fredemont, and thus far, Mauna loa had been kept at bay. Delilah assured herself that if she chanced encountering Mauna loa again he would surely be of no imposition; her facilities would remain intact and readily responsive. Through occasional conversation with the Diamond Thief (about which Leba was never interested to know the details) Delilah was informed that Mauna loa had become relatively non-violent since his last departure from prison, as a sort of bargain he'd made with his rich litigating lawyer friend, who had cut a deal with the authorities. Kyoto Tomo Saki was much to endure, as most of the restaurant had been converted into a shrine of commemoration, and Leba strained to sit with her miso soup for even a brief spell. She cut her time short, with the evening's impending schedule as her excuse.

When she returned to Etep's Nackdy Shoppe the room was dimly lit and candles rested on tables made from carburetors and radiators with edged frames of levers and nozzles, switches and knobs. There was one man in the corner nearest to the stage, sitting alert with a brew in a long glass. The brew was steaming; Leba could smell its fermented aroma from where she stood. She knew the back of this man's head because she had just seen it in the late afternoon. It was the head of Ramone Dish.

Etep admitted Ramone had come in the early evening, as soon as the doors opened for her performance, with the set intention to purchase every ticket available for the night so as to have the entire space to himself. He insisted to compensate the bar with an amount double the sales they'd make on the best night of the year and Etep had no choice but to agree to his offer when lastly, Ramone had given a large sum to the person selling Leba's merchandise (which consisted

of Matchboxes, Pocket-watches, Fuzzy Dusters and Copies of The Dream Post-Post, as well as a handful of musical recordings) in a sum par to having sold a full room of people a complete line of her supplies.

Leba paused and allotted herself a reflective moment. The only reaction Leba could justify, moments before she planned to take the stage, was to act as though nothing unusual had taken place. Ramone had paid for her whole show and so she would carry forth into the night with her work. She climbed onto the platform of the stage through the back stairs and picked up her instrument. Taking seat upon a large, wire-based bench she laid flat on her back with her guitar against her body, it was picturesque. She de-tuned her sixth string to a C and played it as a drone, sang out into the blue-red room lit by candle and gave Ramone Dish his own showing of muse and poeme. She pretended she was playing Ernest Chaucer's one surviving symphony. She remembered how its suites moved, and though none of her notes necessarily matched his, she played with the same dynamic, until she no longer was aware of Ramone at all, or the Nackdy Shoppe. Nor could she remember who she had invented herself to be in the past, or what food the people of the world fed her. But Leba remembered why, when she was four, she knew that she would make love to sound for the whole of her life, that the climax would never come, that she would always be climbing and falling, and flying.

For three hours she played without stopping and when the music was done it was obvious to her, and to Ramone and to Etep that the show was through for the night. Etep had stepped into his own shoppe, though Ramone had bought every ticket so that all of the invisible ticket holders had filled the space to complete capacity and, thus, even Etep himself had to stand in the very back of the room away from the bustle of an entire venue so packed with emptiness.

When the show was over, Leba collected her belongings, one at a time. She preferred always to be the one to gather her own equipment when she was done playing and to arrange it on stage before a show. It was her time to meditate on the materialization of her ideas. As she dismounted her board of effects she scrutinized her hardware: a pedal for distortion so that she could play with the idea of discord, to create raucous, to jumble up a language of jargon. Then there was a little vibrato machine that vacillated by her preset determination at any speed she wished. The last in her lineup of effects was a simple reversing loop, which took her linear lines and reverted them immediately back to from where they came.

Her thoughts trailed into an independent world, she was hot from the sweat of her own music. Ripe and flushed, she was almost forgetting the unusual circumstances of the night and her audience of one.

If she hadn't spent the afternoon eased by Ramone's good company, then it would be probable that she would feel rather apprehensive having him come to her now, after buying out the whole house and watching her. However, as Ramone approached her, wearing a traditional top hat which held in place the fanning of his hair set like a devious crown around his bluish and elegant cheeks, his eyes glistened in ways that Leba had only before thought to be the privileged glint a man's eyes emitted when he knew that he was well endowed and capable of assassinating a woman slowly by doing nothing at all.

But Ramone's eyes were entirely for Leba and so they seemed like a tall glass of water, explicitly. She understood then what people who loved old sayings meant when they said that somebody's eyes were like a tall glass of water.

The following is basically what was spoken next between Leba Scrachsniv and Ramone Dish. It might not be an exact recount, but in such moment conversation is so rich and angular, it says much by saying so little that it is almost impossible to repeat.

“Are you not always only playing for one person, anyhow?” Started he.

“There is no count or number of people I am playing for in my heart, and I don’t know if I am aiming to play for people at all. I aspire to maintain a mindless sense of my own impetus.” were her words after.

Sensing he possessed Leba’s full attention, he delivered a distinct proposal. “I plan to show the film I made on the wall of a town square in Bologna, Italy. Here is my request: I would like you to join me. It would be my honor to have you assist in creating the setting for the evening, perhaps inspire the outdoor theater with music before its showing. I want to feel as though the film begins long before the first scene unfurls. I would like to include you in this project to focus primarily on this particular nuance. I, myself, will be there for three months in total; I can fly you there for some or all of the time. Would you consider?” Ramone spoke directly and with genuine motivation.

“Alright” said Leba, the answer poured easily from her mouth as though she had already long contemplated his offer. “You have to pay me well for my work, provide ample nourishment, and suitable lodging. I will only commit to being there for a month, with the possibility of remaining longer.” In this situation, Leba moved entirely from the impulse of her intuition. She was certain of Ramone’s genius after their encounter earlier in the day, was convinced she had never met a person who so immediately and naturally aroused her curiosity. The reason she was able to summon her terms of agreement with swiftness was due to her recent season of handling contracts and negotiations. She was geared to make choices in the frame of a blink, and this one seemed in her favor.

Later in the middle of night, Leba awoke from slumber.

Her night thoughts, in the shapeless den where she slept, tented from the moon’s light plodding in an ominous draw, pinned her frame while pressing her sleep-hungry mind with a mayhem of racing concerns.

She decided that she could not afford to go to Italy. Not now. Not with Ramone Dish. It felt overwhelmingly too right or too easy. What would she do with such ease? What would move her to find new chords? Where would she go to hear the wind howl? No wind howled around Ramone.

There were only little yesses whispering in her ribs when she saw him. Then, in the middle of her sleep, she wanted a strange thing; she wanted to wear his winter gloves and sit in a cafe and read the newspaper with him. She wanted to actually sit, as she imagined an adult would sit, with him.

What sort of inspiration lurked there? Such functional romantic vision had been executed so many times, to her it seemed only second to death.

The next morning she woke and prepared to return to the south. She breakfasted with Delilah

and scratched some words on yellow lined paper.

As Delilah prepared to make her way about the city, she asked her friend to please deliver a letter for her to where Ramone stayed, at The Hotel Giraffe, just beyond the Brooklyn Bridge. The letter stated plainly that she would not be able to help him with his film, and in fact, she was hesitant to imbue his work with nuance. She signed the bottom in long, swift letters, with writing that looked nothing like her typical ink-work.

She traveled to the south for rest, but was unable to fall into a deep sleep, and for nights only listlessly tossed. While reading one night she called Norway to analyze a poem with Anchorstein, who had given Leba a first print of her latest collection entitled "Erotic Poetry." Anchorstein told Leba to go to Italy. Leba barely brought the topic to surface during conversation but Anchorstein possessed gifted ears and so caught wind. "Go to Italy," Anchorstein told Leba, and she spoke with conviction. She told Leba she was positive that Delilah would come as well, and that she would go herself but she had just started to finalize the onset of some work she couldn't bare to abandon. Anchorstein suggested that Delilah and Leba set up a small shop. She insisted, Leba could paint and write while Delilah collected Italian barbwire! Anchorstein claimed Mussalini left behind batches of vintage wire easily accessible that would glow with the most serious possession, once fired into a wedding band. Anchorstein was very convincing. But truthfully Leba did not need much convincing, her compulsive mind, at her friend's suggestion, roved over contemplations of Mussalini's wire and thought about how pleased Delilah would be to set up her studio in Italy.

Ramone, whose sense of timing was perfect, allotted five days to pass before he contacted Leba. He expressed his disappointment over her lack of availability to work with him in Italy yet, he professed, he was clear she could still amply lend provision to his work, a service of consultation for which he would happily pay. He continued onward to note his solidified itinerary and dates of his work's showing in the main piazza in Bologna, when Leba announced her revised decision. She could, after all, commit to going with him. The final pull leading to her decision, she confessed to Ramone, was that she had been meaning to revisit the traditional candlestick maker she briefly came across during her last trek through Florence. After being informed of her decision Ramone sent to her three amazing wax paintings found at a junkshop in Queens that she instantly fell in love with, just like he knew she would.

Before Ramone departed for Italy he traveled to meet with Leba. She drove from her small southland town to the regional airport to collect him and they began their time together sharing a memorable meal of okra, black bean cakes and biscuits in the city, at a café highly rated by her personal directory.

Ramone was first from British Columbia, and then from the San Juan Islands, west of the state of Washington. This was a part of America to which Leba had always wished to venture, but had not yet traveled, and so Ramone spoke to her in fragments about the ocean there, and about the long farm grasses, about the birds that returned and about the boats he had built. From the time he was just tall enough to reach his father's waist he was well on his way to building boats and barns. He had learned to take frames down gently and to reuse old lumber, to make spaces rich

and healthy. He replanted devastated gardens, renewed broken windmills and stagnant wells; he knew how to analyze catchment rain water systems. Ramone had grown into the lush paw of his large hands by the age of fourteen and, as far as Leba could tell by his own articulate recounts of youth, he forewent the typical rebellions of adolescence, the sort where the young yell at their mothers, possessed with troublemaking agenda. It practically disturbed Leba to think that Ramone never bothered anyone for a long stanza, that he would perhaps be considered an Angel by his endearing family, who were unconventionally open-minded and ceremonious both. Leba held back all the rotten stories of her youth. Stories about how she found a way practically every day to avoid her studies, how she super-glued her finger to a man's finger to whom she wanted to be attached her whole life long. It seemed to Leba that Ramone couldn't possibly bear these recounts, yet each time narratives such as these that explained Leba's cake-like mind would surmount and slip out the contours of her mouth his irises turned to pools, reflections of a fresh world. The week Ramone stayed with her, Leba felt new to herself in his company.

To Leba, whatever it was that happened to people where the rest of the world pointed their fingers and said "look, that's love" always seemed complex, looked often painful or boring. The only time she had ever touched upon that which seemed to be determinedly called love she'd become considerably sick, so sick that her face spotted with fever, her lungs grew bronchitic. So ill she had to run outside around the restaurants wherein sat unaware the conspirator of her sickness, the object of her devotion; while she ran in circles around any establishment, just so she could sweat out whatever it was that jogged her insides until she'd break.

This experience with Ramone caused her no agitation. She met with him, she did her work; he sat upstairs, and fixed broken things in her house. Then he'd write, and he'd share what he thought with her, and she liked to hear it, and it grossly made her write more. She ultimately figured the universe had temporarily been disproved of its own previous deductions, which had shown over time in concrete equations that Leba's artistic emergence would be fostered only by a chaotic solitude. Now, by some unpredicted nature, such statistic had temporarily been lost in the occupation of an unusually groggy, forgetful season of lushness. It was an unsuspected global warming of its own, and in this tropical climate, Leba was infested with intrigue to share. In the world of creative survival, she never before had known how to share. It seemed, in point, simply pussy.

It is a hard word, this Pussy, and so shall we use it again? We shall! Sharing your crayons in kindergarten with your big blue satin bows and perfectly combed hair and your life-cereal breath and cinderella band-aids was pussy. And fuck if Leba Scrachnsniv was going to get into something like that. She never even personally used the word pussy. She detested it; for a while, it was like the word "back-splash", which some people use to describe the tiles on the walls over their counters. Why would not settle instead for Mosaic Wall or Tiled Wall, or anything else? Back Splash sounded like mermaid whiplash or dentures, or someone who's gone to the bathroom in their pants. Or, in the least worse, an automaton robot bathed in a chemical shower, temporarily disassembled.

And the word Pussy was one that a girl used who Leba knew once, a girl who liked to grab at Leba's pants and smile voraciously. One who Leba thought looked like a cartooned oil painting. She lived in a city that no longer existed. Once she had asked Leba what she thought about sleeping with The Diamond Thief because she too had slept with The Diamond Thief and wanted

casually to compare their experiences. Leba hoped she would never have to see that woman again or find herself wandering through such a strange vortex into the stuffy clubs of pandering egos within a non-existing city where the pussy-woman lived.

She reserved her ticket to depart on the 25th of December.

The day she was to leave for Bologna she woke late into the morning. Leba bathed in her small tub filled with Mustard Bath Salts to relax her muscles. Her body moved slowly, it felt sluggish and bruised. Perhaps, she thought, she was anticipating the full 24 hours of airplane travel and the result of such anticipation felt rheumatic. Regardless, she managed to once again deport her belongings into her own small car and start down the dirt drive. As she passed her mailbox, she halted to reach for the day's mail.

On the back of an old map which marked directions to a pirated treasure was a brief letter, etched in blue scrawl that looked as though it had spurted from cuttlefish in a natural defense.

“Happy Birthday Leba S.” Read the top of the page. (It had been Leba's birthday earlier in the month.) “28 sounds like a stable number, like it is sitting on all fours, this is the year it will all come together.”

The rest of the letter was illegible. Seemingly, some liquid had spilt on the raggedy thin envelope and the only remaining word perceptible, at the bottom, was the name of The Diamond Thief.

Leba's lips pushed together, so that they were thick and drooping.

She took a leaf of dried Sage that she kept in the ashtray of her small car and with a match she burned it along with the short letter. Then she stopped at the carwash and ripped up a picture she still had in her glove compartment of The Young Diamond Thief, age 6. She parked and deposited seventy-five cents into the Super-Vac and she sucked up the rest of what she could find as evidence of his lingering influence. She sucked him up in a car vacuum and then she drove on to the airport.

Delilah Fredemont, Leba's favorite associate, had agreed to meet Leba in Bologna after the first of January, upon completing the year's end of commissioned pieces. Brooklyn was colder for having spent her previous winter in Bolinas, even after all the plush woven rugs dyed in electric-earth colors covered her floor in quintuplet row, and with the woolly slippers up to her thighs, and her mohair robe with flannel lining and Merino wool insulation. And it was cold even considering the underside of it all, where reigned her luxurious long underwear in Navy Blue with silkscreen white hearts fractured in perfectly cracked jags, showing off. She sipped on Matte Lattes with honey and vanilla and listened to live recordings of Dinah Washington on vinyl, and yet she could not keep warm. She had home-delivered recycled firewood, and her thermostat never dropped below seventy-four, but nonetheless she was prone to release an occasional teeth chatter and shiver.

Delilah knew well why. When a suspicious situation was soon to erupt her body temperature notoriously took drastic turn. She persevered at her workspace, rubbing feet along the floor clad in unusually long slippers underneath the mahogany table. The ring she was now finishing had been made from 5 different vintage fencings, 3 found in Bermuda and two in the backyards of

Tremont Street, in a city that did not exist. She had been on a dreamlike walk with a man who she infrequently saw. They were headed towards a holed-up pub of whiskey and smoke to MC over vintage beats when the moon, pierced by the steeple of a relic church, encouraged a spontaneous hop over wrought iron gate. But upon reaching the back of the broken church their moon had become well hidden in fog and an uninvited light killed all whim, accompanied by a uniformed official who made demand from the street that the two, with immediacy, abandon premises (having trespassed onto condemned property).

Somehow they headed deeper into the maze of church. They were searching for quick exit but came out instead to a small clearing closed in by barbed wire. Delilah reached into her pocket where yellow handled wire-cutters were most typically stashed, per chance interesting barb should catch her eye, and with swift technique she cut a portal for their escape, pocketing the wire for a later look.

And it was hours after, when nearly asleep, that she remembered the wires in her pocket! Upon investigating, she discovered a color and texture of wire she'd never beheld. These were tourmaline and gold rust barbs that came off wide, elephant grey bodies and when melted together with the trine of Bermudan Barb, cut fresh from a coop where lived Fighting Cocks, they formed into the most majestic band she'd crafted yet. She worked on its finest details during the last days of the year, before departing for Bologna. Towards the end of a productive afternoon she polished her finished pieces with a paste of sea salt while Dinah Washington sang Blue Gardenia. The needle came off the record and so Delilah heard the simple knock at her door; a knock alone usually signaled that her visitor was either a neighbor or the building's owner, because anyone else would need to be buzzed in through her call box. Delilah peered through her peephole and immediately stepped away, inhaling larger than she exhaled, as to maintain herself. Muana loa's hunt had gone on too long; she had lost her will to hide herself and so chose to nonchalantly open the door.

Mauna loa looked no more healthy or striking than the last time she had seen his odd figure. She could not recall what he had adorned as costume during their past shared moments, but it seemed as though his clothes had been unchanged since. Standing strait, she hovered an inch over his slouched frame, and put her eyes on soft-focus while anticipating his deliverance.

He started in, but her strength was not diminished by his presence as before. She drilled both of her index fingers into his collarbone and pushed him against the left side of her doorframe.

"Where do you think you're going?" She asked evenly, without reserve.

His eyes drooped and appeared possibly sad and tired. "I am coming inside. Let me in."

She paused and then checked herself. Surprisingly, she felt inclined to comply. It seemed right that not only should she let him in, but that she should perhaps offer him lemon-balm tea. She set him free from her pinning and told him to remove his muddy shoes before entering. He unlaced his shoes awkwardly and then proceeded inside, promptly seating himself upon her velvet couch.

Delilah brought him a mug of warm brew, considering the extreme wintry conditions, and pulled up an armless chair across from him.

"Okay" she said, "let's talk and let's make this brief. Basically, for the past 4 years I have spent an unduly amount of time clobbering the various individuals you've sent to attack me and disrupt

my work. At every instance they've faltered by my own hand and each time I expressly dictated afterwards that if you wished to reach me, you ought to have the courage and grace to come yourself. Otherwise, I wouldn't waste my time."

Mauna loa sipped his tea in a way subtly impressing Delilah, for he did possess sophistication when he wished, regardless of his lifestyle and the company with whom he associated.

"I'm really tired Delilah. I don't have time to talk about what's been done. I just turned forty-six years old yesterday and I feel different. I've never felt so different before. I know nothing. I don't know who I am and I don't want to do anything I've done. I don't care about getting even with anyone anymore and I don't feel like there's anyone who's done me wrong that I need to outdo. I don't know if I care about whatever I cared about before. The only one part of my life that brings up feeling is you and that time I shot at you. Maybe I've never really cared about anything else."

Delilah felt annoyed in slight how when delivering sentences both choppy and dull, a man with no prior articulate quality of expression gets away with his thick use of language because, alas, he is revealing his emotions, and that after such release his face can light up as though he is proud of himself, similar to an infant's pride who has dared his first step. Delilah thought of all the people who missed every opportunity in their relationships to communicate effectively, who either snuffed out their emotions or gave into them exceedingly.

Still, she figured further. She had taken serious efforts in the past four years to remain completely inaccessible to the man who defenselessly sat in front of her now. She recalled the splitting moment where by pure mistake she had fallen in love with Mauna loa, who'd come to her determined to kill, and then she remembered how inconvenient for her the rest of their night had been, resulting in a mush of crazy tuna maki and wasabi remains smeared from her finger in curbside application. Fortunately, she remained firm in the moment they now shared, and more substantially, felt graciously moved to offer insight to Mauna loa, who was most obviously looming in despair.

"Look, come," said Delilah. She led Mauna loa to a fireside bench in clear shot of the exposed flames that kissed and spat ash and spark at his feet. Then Delilah turned to her fruit laying in perfect accidental arrangement on the counter built to distinguish the area of her wall-less kitchen. She chose from an orange, an avocado, three plums and two grapefruit. With long fingers she plucked the grapefruit captive from its companions. She returned to Mauna loa while, by a single peel, unleashing the pink succulence from its orange-yellow encasement (a skill she had, without thought, acquired from her adept friend Leba). She handed a half moon sliver to Mauna loa.

"Eat this slowly."

Untypical of Mauna loa, he listened with great attention and followed her direction in exaggerated application. He started slowly on the pink flesh. His eyes drooped, he truly looked sad.

"I don't think you are a danger to me anymore," said Delilah. "I think I've known this for awhile, but I became so used to running from you and changing my name."

Mauna loa lifted his face from its downwardness where it appeared to be melting aside her fireplace. He chewed the grapefruit in an excessively slow fashion while Delilah shred its skin

into a spiral, and tossed it then into the flames where the scent of its life was put and hushed.

“Are you my hit man?” Delilah asked him.

“I am sorry that I am.” He replied.

“And you are coming to tell me that you are no longer interested in killing me or threatening me?” She questioned him.

“Well, I would have to say Yes; I am in no position to wreck havoc.” He concurred, swallowed the last piece of his grapefruit and looked at her intently.

Delilah’s neighbor who played in the city’s philharmonic orchestra was practicing long tones on his cello that came through the walls with muted tenderness. The day had fallen, and its twilight accentuated all possible melancholy in her home’s décor, until at last the melancholy was elevated.

Mauna loa might not be the right person, thought Delilah, to whom she ought to explain herself. He had somehow gotten away with almost every crime he’d ever carried out, whereas she had innumerable suffered so committing even the slightest misdeeds and knew not how to amply excuse herself through petty articulations.

Still she put her hand on his back, because it was warm from the fire, and because she wondered how it would feel to touch him. His body collapsed forward and his head lunged toward his thighs. He quickly folded his arms across his lap and leaned into himself. On exhalation, he moaned a low tone and in the next breath his eyes filled with tears.

Delilah knew how to comfort his pain; this rendered him as fortunate. Her own pain, which was in a sense more beautiful looking, more filled with love, which cleaned up after itself more thoughtfully than his, seldom found a place where it could be wrenched and released, let go of and witnessed. She came upon few fireplaces to sit and soften her heart, make sense out loud. Now, here was this mess of a man, pleading for catharsis, parched for compassion, contented in her house, only needing her hand on his back in order to release his distraught.

He began a sort of spurting of remorse through his heavy breathing and weeping lungs. “It’s like I just realized that I’ve been killing people, and I think it was something I became good at, and then it was just wrong and now I can’t figure out what to do because the only thing I’ve ever wanted to do before isn’t right. It just isn’t right, but I didn’t know, but I know now.”

Delilah could barely respond to his lament, not with words.

There were days where she woke to an internal voice that felt self-critical of her work. Days through which she questioned a ring’s symbol, or felt apathetic crafting wedding rings; when she couldn’t shake disassociation, or fumbled to understand the concept of partnership and devalued the worth of her own trade. But she always came back to her commitment to art, a marriage of its own. Thus, she remembered the value of union, and her work perpetuated. Her craft intimately aligned with her intrinsic ethic. She contemplated how painful it would be to awake freshly with a sense of ethic and realize, by onslaught, that the art of murder, which had entirely employed one’s quest until that very hour, did not support healthy commerce. Was it possible she almost regarded Mauna loa as a fellow artisan, and that she recognized his suffering as an intuitive congestion, that he saw his own death before him: a deep descent into a complex system of psychosomatics?

It was such an odd scenario between the two of them, though they both flourished somehow by it. Mauna loa cried in long breaths and Delilah kept her hand on his back, appeasing her own hit man, offended only in slight that he no longer needed her dead, but rather found purpose in her life. The cello through the walls moved on from long tones into major arpeggios, and then from major arpeggios to dominant arpeggios, into Lydian scales, into an eastern-sounding pentatonic. Delilah's heart sank into lowlands, where no sun could liven, where only wet winter remained. Perhaps she acquiesced into the unspoken presence of Mauna loa's ineffable wounds or possibly he reminded her of her own. Undeniably, there was something they shared which threatened her own logic, a sense as though they had once been only one person together, and it was a clear struggle to separate her own feelings from his.

An hour later Mauna loa felt an incredible urge to use the bathroom. He had been experiencing a slowness of digestion for months on end and as a result, he rarely used the bathroom, and pissed mostly in parks or by train stations. He sat up and walked into Delilah's bathroom, a room where most of the indoor heat hovered, with bamboo floors and a green glass shower. A plentiful amount of towels, mostly the color Fern were folded into low open shelves, not the sort of shelving with a limited lifespan, or the kind that would end up inevitably on the street but shelving that appeared as though it would surely sound with percussive resonance if knocked upon, as all good surfaces should. An asymmetrical angora rug zigzagged from the shower, by the toilet, to the sink. The ceiling was slanted and built of long wood beams, some sanded and finished, but others unspoiled. Mauna loa shut the door and felt relaxed, pleased to take a pause. He sat on her toilet and opened a magazine he found in a basket with dried lilac. It was called The Dream Post-Post. He let his feet unfurl onto the soft angora rug that passed underneath him and, though uncustomary to his disposition, he just sat. By a combination of his found interest in The Dream Post-Post, the feel of the soft rug under his feet, and the fresh release of having cried (which, for him, was certainly a premiere) his digestion quickened with a pleasurable sensation of letting go. After a few minutes or more, he finished his sit and stood up to flush the toilet behind him.

Mauna loa took a step back, staggering. He found it difficult to make sense of what was before him in the bowl of water he had started to flush. A full sized worm, striped and lively, seemed to actually look up to him as he leaned his head just slightly closer. The worm appeared to have eyes, glazed and soft, and a mouth that opened and closed as if it was fighting to speak through the water where it had emerged for a sudden appearance. Mauna loa clearly heard the worm speak in an effulgent language of bubbles, a language simply beyond the capacity of English translation. Mauna loa looked longer, and then flushed the toilet. He felt lighter and more energized than he had in years. It was time for him to let go and set things free.

He promptly washed his hands and walked out the bathroom. Delilah was back at her workspace, with her most recent creation. Her work, he thought, was stunning (though he hadn't really looked at so much of it). But he knew it because she was an impressive woman, and at that moment he found his own pride by the thought, for he could perhaps consider her his ally. "Alright?" she asked, looking at him.

He nodded and then tied his shoes with deliberation before approaching her.

"I guess I needed to come over and set things strait." He reached into his coat and pulled out a scrap of paper with a number scrawled on it. "If I owe you anything, call this number, I'll work

it out.”

And then he left and she was conceptually free, with no one to fight off, or to keep at bay.

\*

Leba was onboard her plane to Italy in the meanwhile, in the middle aisle opening a copy of *The Enormous Room*, one of the few books her favorite poet had written. Shamefully, Leba had a phrase of nonsensical rhyme on repeat through her head. It went “Ramone Dish, Ramone Dish, Whatever you wish, Go Fish, Ramone Dish”. It was frustrating to Leba that this juvenile chewinggum phrase would not leave her head and mostly so because it seemingly had replaced her typical immense prosaic depth. The plane (which had not yet taken off) began its ascent while she looked out of the window. Whatever you wish, go fish, Ramone Dish. For a moment she thought of how she would feel to admit to Ramone, who had won her friendship with his articulate wit, the poor rhyme that at the moment cursed her cognition. Leba reached into her flax and cotton carrier where she had packed a paper-wrapped sandwich; eggplant, tomato and sourdough. (Whatever you wish, go fish, Ramone Dish.) As per her norm, she felt ravenous at take off, unsure if the appetite was triggered by her nerves or a shift of equilibrium, and so she unwrapped her sandwich and ate all of it in the first ten minutes of the trip, which would take her to Bologna through Milan. By luck she won territory of all three seats in the middle section of the plane; she promptly adorned her moccasins and produced a large blanket from her small bag. Leba felt slightly dull in the mind, which was a typical condition of many travelers on airplanes. She wondered how many people had been conceived in Airplane Bathrooms, and who had written the most famously known literary work on an Airplane. She wondered how many flight attendants truly went home with people in the business class, who were actually on business. She wondered how many flight attendants had fantasies at night in their airport hotels about travelers on planes, about retreating to these customer’s fine ocean-side hotels, sitting next to them during fits of gambling through the night which was perfect simply because their hair stayed put in the 1950 style curls down the side of their face and lips stayed red and painted. Through headphones, Leba listened to Louis Armstrong with Duke Ellington- the famous and only session the two together recorded. It was her timeless go-to record, one that quelled ennui, and made her rose-colored Puma knock against the lifted metal armrest. Eyes closed, dreams began. Into and through a mid-Atlantic storm which was, viewed from airplane window, just lofty enough in consideration to unwind the notes of Mood Indigo.

Ramone Dish perfumed life, and, effectually, Leba’s spirits rebounded in full when he met her. He guided her from terminal into open winter air, where he casually unpeeled a series of short expressions in Italian to a man parked outside the airport driving a yellow autobus who collected Leba’s belongings and drove off before them. Ramone’s hands compared the level of Leba’s right and left hip, placed securely and speculatively on her frame, steadying. He looked firmly into her eyes and delivered, as typical, steadfast expression, almost the sort of rundown one might slowly relay to the inept or to the inebriated, a simple recap of events with an aim of assisting orientation in the world’s flux of adult systems.

“You have arrived in Balogna, Leba! I will bring you around this town of ours; a notoriously red town (which you will soon take over with all your own colors) and I’ll speed you through its narrow streets so that your personal velocity can make up for time lost on a stagnant plane. And

we'll watch the gradient of the stone-walk's grout grow porous, with little mouths of softened lime and ash opening after years of inadequate stimulus, able at last to gawk at a fine creature like you Leba, come now."

"Okay," Leba agreed, stretching one leg over the awaiting motorcycle, "but Ramone, I do believe the grout here is made of blubber and milk, versus ash and lime."

Their ride proceeded for approximately 28 kilometers; the taste of scenery mixed with the smell of Ramone's shoulder, central and familiar for Leba who literally held on to Ramone to stay anchored, but chaperoned her recessed senses unleashed onto the dizzy narrows of the outskirt, and then into the city; a train station, men selling purses on the streets, storefronts, gates and churches. Then they traveled a fresh road with few vehicles and turned up a hillside where they inclined steadily for a kilometer, arriving upon a magnificent structure. Leba assessed the building before her, certain of its familiarity. It was a barn-studio, an illustrious hermitage of long brick and red stained woods opening beyond a wild winter garden where small ponds hosted ample environment for Koi fish. Ramone took Leba's hand in his glove and led her inside. The first floor was almost entirely empty space, covered sparsely with a few throws of messy-white woolen rugs. They were clean, but made to look slightly dirty when clean so that when they did become slightly dirty it was not so agitating. The room was furniture-less with the exception of an easel and a low lying table, near to inviting thick-planked wooden stairs and a fireplace. The floor felt licked and dull, well worn and polished by horse hooves, felt like hammered metal, though it was old wood. The walls were well dusted and though the space was certainly as old as the city and had surely hosted years and seasons of living, it smelled, to Leba, distinctly of those lovely Plumeria flowers.

"I thought this place would be perfect for you because of the stairs. Stairs can be so awkward, overly obvious; coercive but hollow, leading into new altitudes, but stale and conceptually discordant, and they can feel fundamentally out of synch or isolated by design. But these stairs have been spaciouly so well-considered; they are distinctly solid in build and material and tell me, Leba, do you not feel that they warm the room?" Ramone asked.

Leba looked at him with affirmation and gratitude and removed her rose pumas, and then kicked Ramone's shoes from under his feet with her bare toes.

"Can we sit here until I feel quiet?" Leba asked.

"I will make you a fire." He agreed.

In moments, Ramone had built a fire that easily caught and offered warmth. He opened his currier bag and brought forth a fresh panini and a hand-blown glass traveling container of olive oil, then fresh hoop-house arugula, and lastly a bottle of blueberry wine, which was girth-y for all the sleekness his currier bag got away with appearing, hugging closely to Ramone's side. Leba stretched on her back and released a heaping exhalation. She opened the bottoms of her feet toward the fire, thankful for the simplest elements, where she found her joy.

After their meal, Ramone was quick to inform her of his weekly plan. He had business to attend to that he deemed imperative for the final formatting of his documentary, and he was certain that she would enjoy herself and feel most inspired staying in the proximity of the city and villages neighboring; she could write and paint, or do whatever she wished. He took her up the stairs to her sleeping space, where white blankets nested upon a high bed. One blanket took precedent by

authority, folded at the bottom of the rioting pile. It emitted a softness and durability both, sure to keep warm those it covered, made of suede and buffalo hide, fringed at its end by rows of polished turquoise, each bead no larger than a pinhole, fastened onto its buffalo coverlet sea by nearly invisible sinew. Across the drop of stairway an oak desk stared at her, with one book resting upon its surface, a first print of a large hardbound illustrated Tao Te Ching. So she could remind Lao Tzu (who, said Ramone, was the only suitable roommate he could find for his friend Leba) how to be as willing and true as water, and vice versa Tzu could remind her, too. A succession of windows filled the back wall of the lofted upstairs under a slope of gambrel roof. The whole space felt like a ship To Leba, not in an ominous sense, or in an isolated sense, but in the way of its efficiency, and how its design admitted the outside elements. The bedroom in the barn-studio complemented the rest of the living space, it maintained the open feel of the lower level but provided a more intimate container, perfect for baths, perfect for sleeping. There was a wide-back lolling chair, upholstered in faded velvet, too antique and historic to restore, from Lucca, a city where the first velvets arrived from the east. And also in the room was a tall set of eight drawers, a wide-framed standing mirror and one rolling dress-hanging rack (immediately Leba's most favorite piece of furniture in the room). The dress-rack belonged to the oldest hotel in Bologna, Al Cappello Rosso, many years before. It was petite and perfectly tarnished in gradients of matte silvers and miniature wheels in gold. Leba walked first to the dress-rack, curious because there was an item draped on a hanger by its lonesome, a long muted-limy brocade coat with snaps at one sleeve. The snaps on the left shoulder, when undone, revealed a sprig of netted silk, her first hint of spring, a shoot of a wing. This was a house robe, a mythical dress, a costume so obviously set and designed by Ramone that Leba's mouth grew sumptuous, struck by its beauty.

"My friend" she insisted. "You have already treated me with unduly kindness. Please know that I expect no more personal attention from you."

Ramone walked to her, he brought his hands to his own face and touched his lips with pontificating fingers and then, with her eyes following his flowering woodsy hand, he continued on to her face; his fingers caught her lower lip like an anchor. Leba could not recall having ever been comfortable when her lips and face were touched. She was unsure why anyone would want to touch the face; who would lean in and brave at onset the face of the one they beheld before exhausting first every other complex curve or bodily corner, any other safer terrain? Perhaps after years, after respects are settled, after gates are down the face, at last, is legit territory for loving prodding. Arms, knees, feet, thighs- these all made enough sense to Leba on most practical days; but her face...was so close to her eyes: why not go right for her eyes when touching her face, why not caress the very whites of her eyeballs with stinging fingertips when fondling her lips, coming so close to her tongue's taste, into that little castle of obscure reign. Those frolicking visitors perturbed, near obstructing the portal of her nose, her hub of olfactory responsibility -far too busy to brake for visiting contemporaries! Hands about the edge of the chin, up the tower of her jaw, daringly teetering upon those ample cliffs of temporal reason- plunge onward curious inspecting fingers and you may never return to lie idle again! A visit of the hands to the face was the preliminary stop at the tourist center for a grab-bag little box before braving the topography, for assessment pamphlet and literature; brochures on Leba's skeletal terrain: If you have three days on Leba Scrachnsniv, things to do, If you have five days on Leba

Schrachnsniv, how to stay busy, Only ten miles from Leba Scrachnisniv neighboring sites; A year on Leba Scrachnsniv, biological truths and myths. Leba figured if she were to be unmasked, she'd rather have her mind left alone, her brain and gesticulations of persona. Unmask her feet, explore the way of her arches, assess her heel and the scar on her ankle; hypothesize from there, as you'd like: but let her face alone until she is certain you know the gentle grace of how to finger her psychology, how to feel her surfaces at their vital depth without encouraging their dysplasia.

Leba made little exhibition of her feelings when Ramone touched her face, but he sensed that the gesture did not bring him closer to her, as he had intuitively aimed. And so, soon enough, he brought his hand back to his own lip, and then to his side. "I'm happy to stay with you now, and welcome you to Bologna, but I would rather hand you these keys to the motorcycle outside and this map that I have painted for you of places I am certain you will find useful to visit.

Tomorrow a woman with groceries will make a delivery at the door with a delicious surprise, I'm certain."

Leba appreciated how Ramone fulfilled his end of the their deal, he had provided abundant lodging and generous hospitality in exchange for her insight and assistance in his work. But since the time when their agreement had been made, Leba had simplified her requirements for trade. She was most interested, at the moment, in his actual company versus his embellishments. "Leave tomorrow." Leba insisted. "I need to make this room warmer. Before I can take out my ink and brushes or think of a reason to work with my own alchemy. I am slightly enticed by your silhouette, not of your face, per say, but of your rounded charm, when I look at its one side, I see half the moon, and then the other side... it resembles that little match Phosphoros, running in front of his mother Eos with his sweet lit torch; you know, the Greek one, whose likeness is found in flint."

Ramone mused, expounding. "Leba, I am not a precise scholar of Greek mythology, it has always seemed exploited to me. While the heroes and heroines in essence maintain integrity, their personifications in all of those laminate illustrative texts usually appear as less than two-dimensional, I must admit. White gods with special linen robes ignited by swift background illuminations holding golden swords on ponies; I have mostly deviated from consulting this sort of hallmark tarot. I am sure I am only relaying my ignorance, as I have not taken the time to plunge deeper into the lineage and existential relationship of this god to that, deeming always that I'd rather remain outside such storylines... But I must recount from my obscured days of grade school that I believe the Romans later called your tyke Phosphoros by the name "Phaesphoros", the Lucifer figure who has been so prominently titled as That Devil. Are you calling me a seedling of Devilish potential?"

Leba assessed, Ramone's intuition and intellect –they were a duet at play! "I am only reflecting that, at one side, your silhouette favors the luminary moon- and then, by the other, a little matchstick: It is a figure of affectionate speech, what I've mentioned. Whether it leads to a maturation of devilish alluding, who can say? What I mean most is understated, but if you please, I wish to run a bath and then unfurl in the night without an agenda, sharing in your company."

Ramone found this plan sensible and so proceeded first in the resuscitation of an old record

player across the way at his friend's garage, along with a few Italian Operas and a Paulo Conte record. Meanwhile, Leba found the bathtub in the barn-studio, with beeswax tapers, cacao butter and bath salts, and hours later they biked into town for wine and pasta with a cinnamon tomato sauce (to which Ramone admitted he had become recently addicted) Leba ate a whole undressed salad of radicchio and romaine with it, reaping hydration from each leaf. She felt happy and spoiled to be suddenly in a world of such antiquity and urban romance.

The next morning Ramone departed for a handful of days, and in the afternoon Leba received an exclusive package at the door. Inside she found fresh square cuts of Strathmore irregularly laid paper and a long box tied with a rose ribbon whose contents included black sepia, red ink from China and oil crayons from France; all which Ramone had ordered for Leba prior to her arrival, after asking her what provisions she would need in Bologna as tools for her endeavors. She had unloaded the contents of her few bags into the space set around her, and after the arrival of her goods, she arranged her workspace on the first floor, by the fire.

Then she began a series of ink drawings that, to render properly, would consume the first half of her next five days itinerary. She painted colorful teal and violet images of land-octopi whose suctioning appendages loved lifting stubborn hearts and who lived in trees, and played with blue birds. Complete with distinct engagements and passionate obligations, the land-octopus.

Strangely, Leba, herself, barely ventured into the city. In the afternoon of each day she walked the hillside by the barn-studio wrapped in heavy sweaters and a hat. At night she made chai from cardamom, cinnamon, ginger and pepper- with honey from the Black Forest in Germany, which was the regionally closest she could find at the market. Leba could not recall when she was last unbothered for five strait days, in simple rhythm, bathing in the morning, stretching at daylight, and composing pieces about glue and papaya. Ramone had arranged for his neighbor (who was his longtime friend) to stop in regularly and keep Leba well stocked with provisions. Leba felt shy accepting these elaborate homemade delicacies, but it was obviously the neighbor's pleasure, which was marvelous to receive.

The night before Ramone's return Leba selected a fine stick of blue charcoal from its box, and recognized, alas... there it was, her melancholy. She hadn't known she'd carried the little bird with her to Bologna in the hollow of her ribs, but then came its incisive beak at her shoulder blades and cuffs. Something was there, a thing that might fly out from her only through deep sleep, through a catatonic mouth, after a passing pause of apnea. Yes, a sleep where a mouth hung open long enough unsuspectingly anesthetized, too inebriated by an earthed slumber to presence the intensity of the transit of such a menacing bird, this is what she needed! The bird, untangling its way from her lungs, frantic in entrapment, batting this way and that (only by chance encountering an exit) disoriented until the moment hitting, after so long, the open ether, would be sure to take upon its departure from the cage of her ribs all of its belongings and distant eerie emotions flutter with it. This was the only way the menacing bird would leave: she would have to be very still. It was the same in this case as when a bird flies into the house, it cannot be coaxed out through any convincing program. The windows have to be left open, and the people must go away, so that the bird can begin its wild dance of finding exit. She was urgent- the bird needed to fly out from her during this very night of rest! Perhaps she could sleep head hanging off the bed, or be suspended by her feet, creating a spout through gaping lips.

The early evening now felt haunted as she recognized to what great extent her melancholy had found her, but she persisted to take up the blue charcoal. Her drawing started on the far right of the paper. It was a perfect foot, which branched into a slight masculine calf, then thighs wrapped in a white sheet, alas! It was a picture of a saint! Leba wasn't certain but she thought that perhaps it was Saint Francis of the nearby Assisi, and then ..no, she realized. The Saint rendered was the one she had hoped her hand would no longer recall.

There he was on her paper, eyes resting closed in peaceful form. It was the man who stole diamonds. Before censoring the thought, Leba wondered where he might be at that very moment, and how strange still she felt to not know. Not long past in the scheme of time, when, by her own recollection, she felt no different than she did now, she knew, with an awkward faith, where the diamond thief roamed; where he lingered, from whom he stole, where he rested his case of jewels. Since becoming so disconnected to his explicit whereabouts she found that she felt, in general, less connected to her own. Somehow, it was possible, an explicitness between them had formed, a miniature era, an alliance to embody all of life- and now, there was a sleep happening in Leba's head that not even Italy, or the thought of being in Italy, had awakened. She shut down the house, tired by wine and night, blew on the candles, tested the stairs one at a time and returned to the bed which had thus far housed her dreams in a formal manner. On this night, however, the bed felt keen enough to share more. She dreamt of a house and a large version of herself who hung overhead like a rain-cloud, and then chickpeas and sunlit rainstorms; she dreamt of someone standing in a doorway, a hat in a shadow, a familiar shape.

And then she was waiting, sitting on a rock, but the rock was a giant turtle. The turtle revealed her head, and she was adamant to prove herself as female.

Other pieces were less succinct, fragments of conversations and faces of characters she'd encountered before but only in slumber. She woke not rested. After prolonged reflection, she stirred herself upward, into the morning.

Without doubt, we've come to an odd intersection of plot (whether-or-not the reader's recognized such). Our story has suddenly developed into a narrative that appears to travel forward. Truthfully there is no forwardness to this fabrication and as we try to push our way into some pinnacle of happening our urgency becomes more apparent. We feel like we have to get rid of some excess of storyline so that we can either simplify Leba Scrachnsniv into a successful end or kill her off entirely. We're almost confident that she should not, in fact, die in this particular book, primarily because we have not yet proved she surely lives. (Indeed she ought to die by the next, we reckon.) But now, in order to prove her life, our friend Saskia the Brilliant Pirate says we have to let her go through something. Or was it that we should certainly have to allow her, as any parent must, to wonder something, but then figure out, herself, the answer, or to find god through a facet of her own passion, or then, to become a hero? We can't remember now exactly what we wanted Leba to uncover. The initial idea was that we would, under no condition, reveal her quality of person by any means other than neutrally, and thus, the reader would have to decide for himself if he cared or not for Leba. The problem we are most truly having, however, is how obvious it is to you and I both that the whole so-called story is only longing to resolve with the scene where The Diamond Thief makes himself apparent to Leba and by this instance she has then the opportunity to decide if she wishes to be in the presence of him or, by her

considerations, determine that he ought perhaps to volunteer himself to a grotesque and hideous trade-less life where maybe he picks up Donkey's defecations to make his ends meet. (The Donkey could be part of her entourage, and serve, once in the proximity of a town's center, as the modality of travel in which Leba takes en route to perform in only the most quality select taverns with saloon swinging doors in the middle of dusty towns.) But we wondered: would it be cruel to cart a donkey around in a trailer, and more so, would our small gas-efficient diesel hatchback or eventually the Italian Motorcycle Leba exclusively drives be able to handle, in weight, the girth of a hitched Donkey trailer behind it? We shuddered at the unattractive thought of a scene in the middle of Texas, where a donkey trailer unhitches itself from a Moto Guzzi and, by negative velocity, appears to travel backwards on a highway where vehicles (legally committed to the thick-as-mud Texan "nighttime speed limit" of 55 MPH) slow motion crash into the entrapment of a trailer, containing both a docile but strong donkey and a bony man, the latter-mentioned who is steadily scooping the former-mentioned's defecations, even in transit. Leba's svelte plan of sophisticated entrance-by-donkey into venues only with saloon-style doors becomes then marooned into smithereens, spread among the thick concrete splay on mid-western interstates, amongst paddies of cows in not dissimilar situations.

Actually, the above described WAS our original plan for the "end" of the story of Leba Scrachnsniv. Figuring something uninteresting quickly rids Ramone Dish (after developing the details of his documentary just enough) we'd come quickly to the part about the donkey, etc. Ramone's documentary, however, happens to be so utterly interesting that up to half-a-hundred written pages have been donated to accurately describe the making and presentation of his work. This half-a-hundred of pages is in part due to the end-goal of creating a work of fiction that in its entirety is approximately 264 pages long. That is because we think 264 is a fine number and that any reasonable amount of work in the form of a novella should feel thick and about as heavy as a fresh made sandwich from a great newyork deli in the arms; particularly a book about Leba Scrachnsniv, russian descendent of gypsies, poetess and painter, time-bidder, home-economist. And now she is in Bologna, a city that is terribly faint to us, for we were only there once, for one day; and we have Leba, stuck in Bologna, with the freedom of no commitment to anyone, plotted with the single conflictive twist of herself to her own self, limited by themes of commitment and destiny, and posing, along the way, the typified childish questions such as why, in a world of already enough terrible troubles and humanistic struggle, would a heart pain for so long over a layer of blue charcoal? Why would a mind produce issue about the nil amount of wine left in a bottle one has drunk already too much of while struggling on about a man who has come and gone, leaving behind no sufficient application or professionally useful set of skill?

Additionally, we are not roused to create a struggle involving Ramone Dish, or a scenario at all. Not a scenario where Ramone tightly gets up and walks away, after coldly (but politely) informing Leba that she must immediately evacuate his barn-studio and that he no longer will provide for her stay. Nor are we interested in the idea that he will now return and quickly inspire some sort or romantic salvation for Leba, and that her whole creative life and work dwindles in exchange for the fulfillment of a glossy moment where Ramone, perhaps sporting some sort of Italian Shoe or Tailored Dark Sea Blue Jacket lined with Asian Silk, returns with three rolls of film and a projector, two long twelve inch nails and an old hammer to hang a quick screen and show Leba the work that he has spent his last two and a half years laboriously scrutinizing with

scrupulous intent, repeatedly revising into the most concise outcome of endeavor by methods unknown to someone like Leba Scrachnsniv, whose “hard work” is only the work that she is able to carry forth effortlessly. Whose trade is her sole grace, and whose art is marked by the inevitable fall from such grace that, in her opinion at least, would be called The Mistake, and to the world of listeners would be called Her Style.

The reality now is that Ramone Dish does return, after Leba has a dream where she is interrupted from sleep by restless images, which are conclusively allusions to The Diamond Thief, though understatedly so (we think). This sleeping symbolism was a long-had reoccurrence for Leba’s, not unlike what many dreaming people experience time and again when they somehow have seemingly truly loved. Though the love may not live as requited, per say, the dreaming world, for one, does not recognize with immediacy the absence of an object of devotion nor can the psyche, resultantly, determine when or if the love should cease growing.

Ramone, appearing fervent with running ignition and exuberance, was flushed in the face with the color of night-chilled rose upon his high, well-carved cheekbones. Leba had partially forgotten in the days that had passed between them how simply elegant Ramone was, or if not having forgotten, was struck again to be so close to his charge, and the light he shared so freely. She had assessed that Ramone was a more competent individual than she might possibly ever become, yet somehow Ramone treated everyone as though they possessed a competence equal to his own, and because of this his presence generated great collective enthusiasm.

“Okay.” he started. He pulled the only two chairs on the ground floor of the barn-studio around a wooden block where rested a thick beeswax candle. He lit the candle, pulled out a bottle of wine from a leather bag and opened it, handing it to Leba. “Try this wine, I picked it up from one of my most dear friend’s vineyard up the road a way- it’s fifty years old, but it’s mint-y and alive: I think you’ll like it.”

Leba drank strait from the cool bottle but her lips attached awkwardly to the rim and a bit turned down the side of her face while the part that made its way into her warm mouth slipped without proper guidance to the back of her throat, subtly burning. She did not notice the clumsiness of her mechanics but resultantly had no reaction to the wine altogether. She handed it back to him and nodded, her eyebrows raised. She anticipated his film.

Ramone announced. “It’s ready” and then gave her a short description of what was to follow. “This making of this film took place shortly after I arrived in Concepcion, Chile- visiting friends. I met two mischievous looking soft-faced angels and went with them to the inland of Chile where they pick wild strawberries. The land and their relationship to it was so visually pleasing that I flew a small crew of filmmakers in with a handful of cameras. While we filmed, I learned that Strawberries are a very ancient part of the Chilean heritage, and all over the world strawberries have been revered as symbols of Venus and love. I became enticed by the rare Chilean strawberry flower, which is enormous and lovely- you’ll see! I knew that I had an opportunity to come to Bologna and project a film on a piazza wall but I was not interested in making a movie of logic and plot. Therefore, I captured these luscious berries and the hands that picked them. My friend, who is an extraordinary trumpeter, along with a tuba player and an upright bassist, recorded the soundtrack while watching the film in their first viewing, in live

improvisation. They did a phenomenal job, Leba, you'll hear it soon."

After Ramone finished with his details he let the film unfurl upon the wall, and Leba had her first showing, spellbound.

Few days later, Delilah Fredemont arrived by train. She had flown into Paris and spent some nights with her French cousin and then by herself in the middle of the city. There she purchased Sennelier oil crayons for Leba and bars of chocolate for herself and continued on to Bologna, to pause for some weeks and gather unusual wires for her ring makings.

Once Delilah had successfully moved in, there was a velocity of activity in their neighborhood. Somehow Delilah attracted neighbors and wanderers, acquaintances and admirers at steadfast rate. Leba's heart felt light and her concerns lessened because Delilah's company took precedent in the immediacy of her environment.

On a falling night of a mid-week afternoon, Delilah muddled a lemon into a pan of special mushroom sauce she had been simmering for some hours and shared with Leba a Chardonnay brought from Alsace. The two women shared their company in the kitchen together speaking seldom. Typically, their conversation was reserved for tearing into deep perspectives regarding shape and design, texture of medium, or personal impressions of a material. They were like two witnesses, together, reckoning the subtle. Most people, aside from their friend Gloria Anchorstein, felt that both Leba and Delilah belittled more overtly important matters when together and spent far too long meticulously distinguishing one slight quality of a thing from an even slighter quality. On this evening, they had just finished laying out the 10 ripped wings from a family of silver moths that had perished in Delilah Fredemont's new workspace the past spring. The tender wings were pasted onto canvas with a specialty epoxy, one of Leba's most favored materials. They were both quite pleased with their combined efforts; they collectively fabricated the plans for a ring that resembled moth parts. Leba cared for moths much more than she felt concern for any butterfly. Once, in years passed, she had a pet moth that followed her from one living space to the next, named Sylvia. Delilah was reminded by Leba of a time on a front porch where Leba sneezed, emitting Sylvia, who had flown out of her nose with vast speed! Delilah had not believed either that the moth had ejected from Leba's nose or that this specific moth, in fact, was the same pre-acquainted Sylvia who'd Leba deemed as her pet some months before. In fact, Delilah was certain that Leba called any moth she saw who was medium small and silverish by the name of Sylvia.

"What happened to Sylvia?" Delilah wondered, adding the final ingredients to her sauce, which had turned into a porcini tomato pepper and strawberry reduction.

(Ramone had just imported a sample of strawberries from Carloforte, Sardinia, where it was warm enough to grow strawberries through the winter, with the potentiality of ordering dozens more, to be made available for the audience as a subtle preliminary to the film and perhaps, as well, thrown onto the street in the days before the film's first showing, as a preface. The sauce, with strawberries especially, was radiant and Delilah decided to not waste it over any grain at all, but to hand Leba a wooden spatula so they could together eat it like soup.

Leba was all of the sudden ravenous. She sipped wooden spoonful after wooden spoonful, all the while attempting to piece together exactly what had happened to Sylvia, but she remitted; she must have blocked the harrowed truth from her current bank of memoirs because all she could

remember was the little island off the coast of That New England, and Dog Ears.

“Delilah, have you heard from the Diamond Thief?” Leba asked. She meant to stop herself, but the question smartly slipped in amid the briefest lapse of self-control.

Delilah sucked her teeth. (We are quite sure that sucking your teeth typically means you are a little hesitant or disappointed about what you are thinking or going to say.)

“Actually, I think he is in Europe somewhere,” she answered. I know this because I heard that he is just trying to get out of the whole business of stealing diamonds.”

Leba told Delilah that he had expressed this same sentiment to her so many times, yet he always returned to a life of thievery. She didn’t want to know what that had to do with Europe and precisely where he was in the continent either.

They each plunged their wood spoons into the strawberry reduction.

“Oh. Yes, I think that Sylvia moved to Calgary.” Leba said after chewing her sip at length.

To which Delilah replied, “My good friend, I know you are not really thinking about a moth. I know you are still wondering if you invented a man in your head that would hold your heart like it was an extra bag too cumbersome to carry yourself when your hands are full of trite rhyme. You didn’t invent him though, Leba, he was real. And I know somehow he still holds the title of being your most beloved friend, though he obviously fell short of character more often than not.”

”The problem,” Leba stated, “is not that I miss or long for someone who actually doesn’t really exist, the issue is that, truly, I think there is nothing else I can hold interest in, think of, feel or do. I know I am living a life that is entirely self-absorbed, but this seems to be my only service to the world, to ponder and to give of some prosaic epiphany. I don’t think I can be any other way without entirely being in the way. And in this selfish absorption, somehow I’ve been thinking still of myself in relation to one person, and one person alone; but I believe I must almost be finished thinking about him.”

”Well” said Delilah. “It’s really odd that you are bringing him up right now because I just thought of him, too, only a moment before you said something.”

\*

It wasn’t unusual for Delilah to think of the Diamond Thief. It was no secret that Delilah continued to be amicable with The Diamond Thief (though she had promised Leba to forever spare the details of her interactions with him as well as solemnly being made aware that, if ever she were in a position of danger while in the company of the diamond thief, Leba would not be available for a rescue). According to Leba, it was Delilah Fredemont’s one major flaw of character that she had forgiven The Diamond Thief for his defective nature and unintentional maliciousness. How Delilah had come to befriend the Diamond Thief was a mishap by Leba’s figuring, as well as the faulted outcome of her own poor planning. She had unfortunately invited Delilah to witness an exhibit of his art. Remember, the Diamond Thief masked his true stealthy profession with a seemingly strong career in musical performance. The likeness in the comparable lifestyles of time spent stealing jewels and one that is consumed by the hungry pursuit of rhythm and muse is surprisingly uncanny.

Between the cornea and lens of most people’s eyes is a fluid that serves to maintain the eye’s natural shape. It is produced by the eye and leaves through the pupil, returning back through a tiny canal and then, with the intent of retaining the proper pressure at the front of the eye, the fluid is released into the blood stream at a rate of one teaspoon per day. The fluid is called

Aqueous Humor. The Diamond Thief clearly had replaced his Aqueous Humor with a fluid comprised of stolen essences made from jewels. Perhaps this turned him into more of a machine than a man, but because Leba had been in the company so long of mere boys, meeting a machine was almost like meeting a man; and so she somehow was drawn to his wealthy gaze. Such a bejeweled, piercing gaze made his complexion like amber resin. He was jaundiced with the glow of riches immediately recognizable as not belonging to him. However, most and many observers assumed that this glow was a gift from god, rather than a good snatched from the innocent, open heart of a acquiesced bystander.

Leba's particular heart had actually been clearly open when she first allowed his thorny arm down her throat into the cavern where her most precious jewel lay. However, she was intimately inexperienced at that young age, and she assumed this positioning of The Diamond Thief's arm into her lung was a complex act of sensuality. Later, when she barely rose from a heavy, swollen sleep she called her family and listened to her mother and father take turns consoling and directing her over the phone.

"I cannot get out of bed," pleaded Leba with the most sorrowful mouth of tears.

Her mother's rich voice moved out the small holes of her telephone. "Leba, you have to get to the bottom of this. You have to figure out how to sustain yourself."

To which her father, taking his turn with the phone would expressly add, "Leba, you have to get tough."

Delilah and Leba entered a rundown gallery space, an underground performance venue exclusively attended by those who are informed at moment's notice of artist's work revealed on whim. Otherwise the graffiti'd doors of the establishment were shut and locked. The venue was in the first american city in The New England, and was wedged behind a rock that was named Plymouth, down a cobbled side road, under a metal-smith's shop.

Leba had Delilah in for the weekend. She had come to work on a series of scribbling for The Dream Post-Post. They had sat at a commongarden for the day, sucking on crystallized ginger and sipping tea with tapioca balls through large straws. They scribbled on hefty paper over anything that had texture. Over statues of dead heroes, over chains around governmental green boxes, over electrical wires, on cement stages, rental canoes. Later in the afternoon the sun began to melt, it smelt like sugar in the air. Leba wouldn't be able to remember upon reflection, later, what time of year it is that the commongarden smells like sugar, but she guessed it was midsummer. She was young enough to be infrequently employed and focused mostly on the subtle passing of the season. The man on the street (who always carried a cloth bag filled with oil crayons) burgeoning from the cafe where he spent the girth of his days persuading customers into his portraiture, promenaded now toward Leba and Delilah with long stem white budding tulips. In pursuit behind him, the manager of the fancy company responsible for many of the boutiques on this most visited street of city commerce (who was always dressed with a fashionable boutique satchel bag containing nothing but a handkerchief and slim cigarettes) approached with great speed from his storefront blocks away. While the manager ran after the man with the bag of crayons, the crayon man himself moved at a most slow pace; in fact, he exuded an air of convincing slowness, as though he and his bag of crayons had always only operated at the precise rate they now together traveled.

The manager had obviously a late start to the chase, made apparent by his huff, and it was plain luck that the whole bouquet of scene unfolded just now, in intersection before the Delilah and Leba.

The manager called out to the crayon man; he cried, "You stole those Tulips from our Garden. Those Tulips cost onehundredandfifty dollars! Who do you think you are, picking flowers from our storefront?"

The man with the crayons did not respond nor turn around. He proceeded in self-contained deliberation, towards Delilah and Leba and handed each one long tulip.

"Hello ladies of glorious vision" he delivered.

In retrospect, the crayon man had been a friend to Leba. For years she had witnessed his sessions at the cafe, had hypothesized which women would fall clutch to his invitation, which would consent to pose a moment for his interpretations. His drawings, vivid and unrefined, appeared to most every critique (including Leba) repetitively alike. But more than to provide fresh subject, he needed his models to lend their focus, surreptitiously borrowing external attentions because his own was too scattered. Perhaps (though unobvious to the crayon man) he thrived more from the inoculation of placebo endorphins to his bloodstream than from the excitement of rendering, so that his "art" was a percolation of seism-seizure; the resultant sketch of shot-up limbs, detonating through shivering shakes\*. How methodically he etched again and again the same shape of a woman's frame. Started with her hair, and then eyes; next the shape of face, followed closely after by a cleft of a chin. His noses were mostly round smudges, and lastly -the mark that determined by slight variation his one drawing from the next- came two lips, making one set. Sometimes the lips were O-shaped and sometimes they were pursed. If they were pursed, they came with a cruel set of eyebrows, the left more jagged than the right. If they were open and the bottom lip full, the eyes were drawn closed, the eyebrows faint wings. When Leba first noticed him leave the cafe, she watched him retreat into the paint store across the street, on the second floor. For three dollars he walked away with one new crayon almost every afternoon. Days he was randomly tipped by wealthy patrons warranted two or even three crayons. Upon purchase, he made request that the merchant pack the crayons into a tiny box ("might you, by chance ...in a tiny box") but first tie ("please possibly.... if not a bother") them inside together with a string. Thus, they would be a set, a color combination to be used on a following day.

Really, his methodology was brilliant.

He was an open as a book, his own book, of sordid same women who suffered lips and eyes of single dimension. It was unclear to Leba, after introducing herself and conversing on many occasions to this same man, if he had a home or if he slept on the street. Clearly, he never recognized her as a contemporary or a friend or in any familiar way seemingly different in slight to the means of his noticing any other person. Therefore, Leba never understood if he coherently remembered her, or recalled their experiences from previous interactions. She wondered if his memory, like the pages in his drawing book, was fresh each moment, with each woman, women who were to him all the same woman with different eyebrows.

In any way, Leba was inspired by his thick groping fingers to buy a crayon a day herself, and

before long she had her own bag and her own book; and on many days she would draw him, with his distinct wild hair and face that looked as it smelled, oiled and weathered by nights of smoke and sweat.

Once, Leba convinced the crayon man to go to the grocery store with her when she was not yet 19. Somehow, in that time period, before she had met Delilah, before she knew The Diamond Thief as an entity other than a mere asterisk on the periphery, Leba was most captivated by her conversations with the people who resided on the streets for both the whole night and day. To her, she felt more pride in recognizing uncouth street people as her contemporaries than she'd felt about her nouveau connections with the refined intellectual pedantic quasi-scholastic types whom she engaged with at the academy she attended, or the dignified, uniformed employees from one business or another. She intrinsically knew that she would have a slight window of time in her early adult years to retain a youthful innocence and naiveté of process, that soon she would have to figure how to earn her keep in a world where her own passion and bank account shared shelving space in her spirited mind. Therefore, she was intrigued by the crayon man, and by her ability to relate successfully to him, and so she unthinkingly extended an invitation to him one afternoon, to accompany her food shopping. Halfway down the street of commerce they walked, unbound and bulbous in the swell of warm summer air. As the large store's automatic doors opened, Leba felt confident their outing together would, at last, impact the crayon man wholeheartedly enough to a degree he would surely later recall when they again met. Leba caroused the produce aisle, she picked cucumbers and radishes; she picked garbanzo sprouts and dandelion greens. After gaily making a food selection, she paused to observe by vertical gaze her new friend with his bag of crayons, but he did not look well. From the corners of his mouth came a self-had dribbling conversation while his transformative eyes took on a shape different than any woman's he had yet drawn. These eyes were slits of opposing diagonals over which eyebrows swelled, puckering from his wrinkled forehead. Leba watched the troubled words of his monologue turn first greenish, then sickly olive brown, trip from his mouth and down his cheek; they landed on verbal coccyx, plunking upon his chest, grew tarsi and ran for his fingertips. The word Tarsi, you know, is the plural of tarsus. And a tarsus is the last leg segment of an insect that generally carries, at its end, a pair of terminal claws. Additionally, Tarsus is both an ancient and modern city in Turkey as well as a philosophical-religious conception of the Order of the Boy who Kissed the Sun, which is a young secret society in Slovakia, which, methinks\*, makes the word itself one of the most varied and analogously potent terms to use descriptively.

The crayon man uttered word clusters like "...got to get out out of here-here-here now Now!" progressively and thus, Leba sent him down the street and returned alone to her grocery cart. As it turns, her grocery store companion was, in fact, adversely allergic to florescent lighting and suffered a serious collapse of personality when underneath their illumination. She recalled the shopping experience with him vividly for seasons, though the very next day when she passed the crayon man he looked at her for a long moment absently, perhaps knowing he'd been particularly acknowledged somehow by her but was unable to name where or when. The possibility of their familiarity caused him to feel vulnerable, so that he took little notice of her and offered her less recognition and attention than he had previously.

However, on the particular day when the crayon man came upon the two lovely women,

approaching by tulip trod, Leba ascertained; the crayon man fully recognized her! His harlequin eyes combined the entirety of their many interactions together with a compassionate perspicuity. He continued to walk toward the two women until his trajectory was interrupted by the tight-faced manager who, having fully caught up to him, again inquired if the crayon man knew that the aforementioned tulips in his hand cost onehundredandfifty dollars a piece (accurately, each tulip did cost onehundredandfifty dollars and that was because they were not american tulips but a rare offspring whose seeds were imported from china and hydroponically grown by a national Ikebana specialist who then subcontracted a regional landscape architect to design the storefront garden and meticulously implant sprouts at a costly price of onehundredandfifty dollars per single tulip bulb).

“I don’t know” answered the crayon man in a nasal, disinterested tone and then he sat on a bench. “That’s overpriced for a tulip, no?”

Soon enough the manager was made keen to his flower-burglar’s physiological disposition and walked away with his head shrewdly fixed, mouth in scowl.

In gratitude for her flower, Delilah Fredemont approached her benefactor and placed a red and gold colored ring, twisted in a textural duet of wax and barb materials, into the hand of the crayon man.

“This ring is onehundredandfifty dollars, you can give it to your friend up the road.” Though the crayon man seemed set adrift in his own world, he must have comprehended her direction, for that very evening turned out the oddest of event.

Leba, as said, had dragged her tired friend Delilah to the underground performance venue behind Plymouth Rock to see The Diamond Thief (in the days of wine and roses, when Leba thought of only how she could please him and make him feel as passionately what she so obviously did). After the show Leba and Delilah stood by the instruments on stage, waiting for the Diamond Thief to come and converse with them. Before long, he emerged. He wore a white and yellow-stained tee shirt, and wrinkled linen pants he had surely not purchased himself. His shoulders were rounded from a collapse of vertebral alignment; he’d without doubt exhausted himself in one covert mission or another.

Still, he smiled at Leba with a settled, devilish grin. “Hey Leba Scrachnsniv,” He called to her. “Come here, I got you something.”

Her stomach leapt to her chin and lapped at the back of her throat, creating an itch. She swallowed hard, navigated tongue to pharynx, larynx, epiglottis (in attempt to relieve the itch) but her attention was splayed and thus destroyed; she started toward him with reflexive immediacy, compliant and awkward. Wanting encroached, she’d no means to conceal her excitement, had left demureness at bay. She could only go to him, willed to submit to any request coming from that live orifice attached to The Diamond Thief’s face, his wispy mouth, a steamer, kettle producing cloud, a voice airing vapors of nutmeg.

Leba walked over in second grade, in a Halloween, with open pillowcase. Certainly the Diamond Thief put his invisible cuff down the threshold of her bag and took first everything there in one swift invisible thrust before he then held toward her a petite paper bag.

”I bought this in a shop here in town. I was with my mother, actually. She requested that we spend the afternoon looking for a gift for her sister, and so I went with her; I’ll go anywhere with my mother. Plus, I was interested to survey the designer jewelry, I admit. I sometimes like to

see what people are charging for imposture creations. I saw this, though, and it was entirely original, and so... I thought of you. It's your taste, I assure."

She opened the bag with slow expectation. What would he think was her taste?

There, at the bottom of the paper bag laid Delilah's red and gold wax-wire ring. For Leba!

How Odd! Leba tried to begin to tell the Diamond Thief the coincidence of his gift but he was only half listening, she was clear, because by the end of her story he was nodding and looking off somewhere else. She did manage, despite his distraction, to introduce him to Delilah, who was so charismatic and exquisite with her own comfortableness that the three resultantly went on to find a thick warm brew after the show, in the only cafe open beyond the hour of two in the morning. There, over exotic tea, The Diamond Thief complimented both ladies with his rare and delightful company. Perhaps the moon was full in the right way or the day had been complete enough to free the Diamond Thief from all trials into a relaxed manner of ease. Whatever the case, their cordialities rang authentic, and thus began the friendship of Delilah Fredemont and The Diamond Thief.

Leba withdrew, as known, after years of loving her precious scoundrel deeply and truly, and when she did, she expectantly assumed that Delilah would eventually lose faith in him as well. That she would come to strike him with critical, snide wit during their continued conversations, requesting of him his own growth, to make amends or change. That she would find the Diamond Thief painfully worth hating, as Leba had before terminating their relationship.

However, it seemed that Delilah had a less difficult time accepting The Diamond Thief for his lifestyle choices; she enjoyed his ideas and conversation as much as ever. While Leba thought Delilah to be one of the more emotionally intelligent people she knew, Delilah had no catastrophic problem with the virulent Diamond Thief, and had yet to quantify him as toxic or spiteful. Delilah, being expertly keen in the subject of precious stones and metalloids was nonetheless unaffected by the Diamond Thief's fraudulent character. Leba assumed that life in the so-called modern era, forested with riddles, was both complex and trivial, and she decided. In such odd circumstance. that she would rather not be kept abreast of the Diamond Thief's whereabouts and life happenings. She rose above tainted judgment and determined that the friendship of Delilah and The Diamond Thief was not worth the sacrificing of her respect for Delilah; understandably, she had once felt similar amiability. Simultaneously, Delilah agreed that if and when the Diamond Thief was to call, she would, under oath, disclose no information in any circumstance about her confidential relationship with Leba. And, lastly, Delilah promised that, in comparison to Leba, The Diamond Thief ranked considerably lower in her sub-cognitive Cro-Magnon hierarch.

Delilah, however, after many glasses of French wine, had received an in-country call to her hotel room while in Paris, and when she picked up the phone and the hotel desk operator connected her to The Diamond Thief, she was so utterly surprised to be tracked down at her hotel during a night she assumed she'd spend alone that all of her confidential doors sprung open wide. Before the end of the conversation, Delilah admitted that she was flying to Bologna for the purpose of spending time with her dear friend Leba who was there on a business of her own –to both rekindle something that had felt quiet inside herself and to assist a most beautiful and inspiring young man, the renowned Ramone Dish, with his documentary.

"Ramone Dish!" The Diamond Thief expressed. "I Know Ramone Dish. He is an exceptional

filmmaker... I've spent time with Ramone Dish." He paused long and then continued, "That is so odd, Ramone Dish!" and then broke a moment again after which adding "But then I guess it is not so odd. Yes ...Ramone Dish!"

What was the more, The Diamond Thief had actually spent nights in the barn-studio where now Leba resided. Evidently, The Diamond Thief had for a short time become quite friendly with Ramone after the two met in the Sahara, and when The Diamond Thief was spontaneously in the Tuscany area the two men ran into each other again, at which time Ramone extended the barn-studio to The Diamond Thief, so that he might relax during his complicated adventure.

Delilah felt then a sensation uncommon to her; a feeling of remorse, of having said too much, of instigating what could turn somehow fatal, a peculiar sense beyond her own reason. The two simple sentences funneled through her rose lips invited a weight of gloom, recognizable by fine fraction, resting indispensably atop her head.

Still, she said nothing about her previous expulsion as the two women continued to share their evening, and when it was over, Leba walked Delilah to the adjacent dwelling where she had set up a delicious workspace of metal and iron, rust and stains. Leba was brought more to life from her awash, slumber-some past weeks by Delilah's lifting company. She said so to her friend with her eyes as she bid goodnight, and then turned back to her quarters. The larger studio, whose southern end was built mostly of windows, appeared exposed to the whole of night. The space, from the outside, looked engorged, as though ready for explosion.

\*

Waking the following morning she was made clear by onset of first pragmatic scheme; how she must venture into town to go ice-skating, an activity at which she happened to be a sensation. Leba, accompanied by her stunning companion Ramone, clad in thick woolen layers, began with an apple cake at the café in the city center and a small cup of tea on a playhouse sized saucer. The apple cake in Bologna struck the taste-buds of most biters with immeasurable ecstasy, so much that the average rapid-consumer, unsteady with their love (especially for something as objective as pastry) was unable entirely to be present with such high quality of treat and chose rather to swallow the apple cake in un-chewed gulps. Leba, however, paid special attention to the short-lived apple cake and marveled bite by bite over the subtle zest and poppy that lived right beyond its cinnamon aftertaste. The men on the streets sold long synthetic-made scarves and she bought a pink one for both herself and Ramone. She laughed at their reflection and surrendered to gay life. The ice-skating rink was central in the city, young boys and girls raced around to music mostly American, from decades lost. Ramone and Leba laced up rented blue skates and set forth on the ice at the moment a Jerome Kern piece made its way out the shoddy skating rink speakers. Billie Holiday sang; it was Yesterdays, with Oscar Peterson on the Hammond Organ, coupling her daunting tone. "Sad and Mired, Glad and Mired..." Leba raced Ramone and competed for stunning poses. She particular felt graceful in the long one-legged swan sailing posture, and simultaneously admired his daring spins, which were more like jumps that jerked with hockey-stops. She sped around the rink faster with each small loop, occasionally knocking the path of wobbly young girls by accident. Their eyes scorned her obtuseness, but she could not be bothered. Suddenly, with great stride, she could not be bothered. As her laps continued, she lost site of individual shapes, colors smeared into a

dominant green. It is said that Bologna is the notorious red city, that its redness provokes appetite, but to Leba the city was a gold green as she looped around with voracity, knowing that what would stop her would be large and thick and would sound like a thud.

Then everything was quiet. There was no music and no hum of the day or of the clouds hovering. What stopped her was not a bang\*, but a little whimper: A skate-key had fallen from the pocket of a small and slow-moving boy. Now a quick sleuth may calculate—traditionally skate keys attach roller skate wheels to the bottom of a fitted shoe, however this boy was skating with special skates made by his Swiss father who'd been inspired by his own patriotism; for the oldest found pair of ice-skates, dating back to 3000 B.C., had been discovered at the bottom of the Swiss lake where his family lived in Switzerland. An engineer himself, he had designed for his young son a pair of skates that he called "Schenkels", which was the original Dutch term for Ice-skates. His design consisted of mostly rudimentary organic matter fashioned together and mounted onto hand-sewn leather boots, finished with narrow double-edged blades, after a Dutch design from the 1400's. The metal blades were fastened on and then, at the precise turn of each skating hour, required a tightening with a skate key; which his son, novice and not yet so responsible, had forgotten to keep tied around his neck and instead, stored in his roomy pant pocket, unsealed by the flimsy fault of a non-committing hook-and-eye closure. Still not quite an adept skater, he wobbled at a turn of the rink, and thus, the key slid from his lined linen pants which his mother, the Swiss seamstress, had made for the young boy (feeling exceedingly patriotic, and all for the reason that the oldest known linen—also dating back to 3000 B.C.—had come from the Swiss lake where her side of the family originated. She believed that her insulated linen pants, together with their stunning pocket design, would insure both safety and comfort in the rink for her son). However, the combination of the competitive efforts of the boy's mother and father together effected less the logistics of their son's afternoon and much more initiated the turning of events for Leba Scrachnsniv. The small key lay on the frozen ice in a way just so that the back of Leba's blade skittered when it ran over the piece of metal. In less than a reckonable amount of time, Leba fell sideways and backwards and banged her head where the ice and the border wall met. She fainted suddenly and willingly and woke, refreshed and delirious. Ramone was concerned, but in manner of ease. He helped Leba to her feet and off the ice. He unlaced and pulled off her skates and warmed her feet with his remarkable hands. Leba was bubbly with expressions that were senseless and intoxicated. "Ramone, your hands are remarkable. You are the remarkable Ramone Dish."

He felt the distending bump mounting on the back of her head. "Leba your head is growing, do you want to sit down and place something on it that may help the swelling?"

"Nothing will help my head" Leba replied. "I have a fusiform aneurysm and no one can see it on its way out except for me."

Ramone took her word and they then went to find a lunch, meals seeming a reoccurring welcome in the hungry city of Bologna.

Ramone ordered long wild harvested string beans with hazelnut focaccia.

They sat together in one of Bologna's largest restaurants. The ceilings were unusually high, which made the sound in the space dynamic and resonant. All of the walls except for the back wall were painted milky white (the back wall was stained in rich terracotta, a hue of paint very difficult to realistically match to one's imagination using color fan-decks at paint stores. The

small swatch of sampled hue when spread widely upon the area of an entire wall is almost always more electric melon than this sort of warming old terracotta.) The restaurant space slightly evoked the drafty saloon feeling of a ski-lodge. We are hesitant to use ski-lodge imagery to describe the inside of this restaurant because some readers may have uncomfortable associative connotations with either skiing or lodges or both. Some readers may have experienced tender traumatic social moments or endured uneasy time-outs in such establishments. Our reference to a ski-lodge arrives from the similar sort of unused open space residing above the main eating area in the restaurant that one might find in a ski-chateaux. This restaurant was more formal than an American Lodge, and the wait-staff were well-equipped servers who accentuated the subtleties of fine dining. Dark wood tresses of pumpnickel hue beamed from one side of the space to the other, overlapping at odd corners in angles, as well as racing in parallel tracks on the ceiling. Well tended hanging plants dropped evenly around the parameter of the bar in finely-crafted vessels, and on the opposite side of the room a set of stairs appearing strong but well whittled and thin, leading to a second-story lofted door in the wall. At lunch, Leba possessed little appetite and ordered a plain salad of mesculin greens and a side of marscapone just to have that whipped luxury on the table and then excused her self to the bathroom, which was located behind door at the pinnacle of the staircase. Stairs occasionally appear as though grafted upon floor in second thought, esthetically unblended into their surroundings, suffering the material of their build or by degree of their sloping gradient; so might strike the sub-cognitive mind as a definitive gateway to a different altitude, therefore posing a vague sense of psychological risk upon one's embarkation. Leba still felt dizzy from her fall and had not yet reacquainted her whole mind with the entirety of her personality, so in each step she ventured to regain a precise awareness of what she was doing and more so who, in fact, she was in the midst of the matter. Her immediate understanding was intact; she was dining with Ramone, who was certainly an intimate friend and a person whom she had allowed her imagination to caress minimally, perhaps holding her own heart at bay. We must mention how the door to the bathroom extended to the ceiling and was also just slightly narrower than most doorways. The door was perched higher than if it were built at the level of a typical second story, and looked almost titanium but was made rather, in all probability, of a lighter material, though it was certainly a thick door, not flimsy or tentative in movement. It was perhaps constructed of a solid matte gray glass or a combination of materials including limestone or even clay, plus strait gypsum and plaster of paris, as a final additive. And when Leba opened it, she was refreshed to enter into a long white polished-tiled room, with elliptical mirrors standing alone on pivoting frames, each tilted at different angles –expressing the reflection of the body in variants. The toilets were in free-form stalls, made into their own separate space by red hanging silk partitions. Leba sat, after taking a white cloth and wetting it, placing it to her head and closing her eyes. Perhaps she was less recovered than Ramone believed.

Light frayed and waned in through the glass doors to the fire escape. She thought again of Sylvia the moth and was certain she saw her suddenly; flickering before her eyes, landing for a moment on her nose, parting her lid's lashes closing on the day.

"Sylvia." Leba uttered.

And then she started to cry.

As we loosely assessed earlier on, it is often the case in a novel that the protagonist is a heroine.

And if she is not initially a heroine, she becomes the heroine by a turn of events; she is given the splendid occasion that invites her to rise, against all odds, into her own ultimate self.

But this is not the case with Leba Scrachnsniv. The stories of pioneers and visionaries have long past her. She is evidently losing her wit and sense of sanity in this Bolognese bathroom. She has long avoided getting to know her surroundings and begins now to feel the walls of near proximity closing in upon her.

She is crying for no reason and has experienced a lapse of personality, she has given up to know nothingness, which she has known long as her humblest intention; to emit only the current of wave a rolling.

As she let her tears she felt progressively relieved.

Struck with a need to shed excessive material, which anyone is apt to feel in their own constant morphogenesis, Leba slid the denim skin of her jeans to her ankles with the heels of her out-spawned hands and stiffly splayed fingers, and then finished the unpeeling with toes on opposite shins, grabbing the material with concise but fervent attention. Next, she lifted her shirt over her head, which tickled her pale winter ribs, and once it came free, it sailed to the floor where it fell in folds and caught the sun. Following in suit with the unfastening of all remaining snaps and hooks, she was relieved of frivolity. An incoming warm breeze through the window encouraged her to further raise the glass pane. Her idea then was to lock the bathroom door and step out onto the fire escape, which overlooked nothing but three windowless building walls, each a different height, meeting at ground level to share an insular garden. She walked to the door with the intention to lock it, so that she could recollect herself in the privacy of a lonesome song eased by the encouragement of the sun out on the escape. As she handled the knob and began to twist the vertical lock horizontally the door opened upon her, in the mere nanosecond of time between its assumed unlocked and locked position.

A man entered the long tiled bathroom and turned immediately to shut close and lock the door behind him.

“Hey! I was going to lock that door!” asserted Leba, snubbed by unexpected interruption. She was naked but hadn’t thought to remember her own condition, still pasty from her ice-skating fall.

The man seized her and pushed her to the wall. He pressed his face to her and looked hard into her eyes. He smelled like babies and ferns. His chin brushed her face and the consistency of his skin felt like strawberries and dried orange peel. It really did. That’s all she thought. She was not scared by his possession and the space he had pushed her into; she knew him. Before she experienced a moment of reason she lavished in the soft sense of being alive permeating her naked body.

And when reason came and she allowed her eyes to focus she saw it was he, appearing just the same as he had always. Life that had left her body cadaverous now flooded her form once more. Her navy cotton heart filled with down, it was The Diamond Thief.

She did not wonder how he had come to share this space behind the locked bathroom door with her, more so she wondered and then asked him reflexively why he had been gone so long.

“Where have you been?” (Her voice still sounded snubbed, but it was affected by the

undercurrent of ballooning ripe joy, she was a perfect woman child, her breath was suddenly plump, what fell in her peripheral vision glowed, the lights were on).

She knew he was in trouble. She was certain that he'd shown up in the bathroom not because he was looking for her, not because he knew in slight what he wanted from her, or why all of his weight was leaning into her, but that he came to her outrunning the law, that he had a group of men hunting him waiting in the foyer in the vestibule in the mezzanine in the threshold.

They were his ghouls; he always kept them close.

"I was in barcelona, then i was in madrid, then i was in borghese, than i was in corsica, then i was on the archipelago, then i was here in bologna. I was so close, I knew where you were but I thought that it might be the best for you if I kept away. I did walk to your barn house one night and got close to the door. I saw Delilah through your window and then I saw you. Right before I left you looked out into the night, you opened the front door in the cold and you said to Delilah that you needed to bring some air into the house. You were laughing, a glass of something spilt over its edge as you lifted it to the night. You couldn't see me in the dark but I was only feet from you. Then you said to the sky, you said "everything is right for me and the moon." and then you sighed in a non-deflating style. It was extraordinary to catch you while you did not know I was there. And now, what can we say, what can we do here?"

Leba had become flushed with a reserved constitution that un-dammed in the company of the Diamond Thief. Upon her encountering she gained immediate accentuated sensation of her thighs and calves and the bottoms of her feet as though she had been only half a body from the time they'd last met until this moment now.

Leba knew that when women aged their lips wore in lines, she knew that old men's mouths fell in thick-jowled frowns. When she was little she wore the same white eyelet dress until the fabric was as soft as skin, she wanted to be clad in earth but she was given 80% cotton, 20% Lycra and so she wore the material until her own emoting life relaxed its fibers. Her head felt larger than her body when she was a young child due to the choppy haircut given to her in an unceremonious fashion for the lowest price at a for-kids salon. Her spirit reckoned with the world through her most base sense of self; she had longed for her hair to grow again, at least to her shoulders to blanket her inevitable exposition into a world so brightly lit with synthetics. Perhaps a predestined fate was settled before she'd been borne and her held feelings of responsibility for the dithered light and noise in her immediacy was less a developmental complex and more so a due tariff for a business she had trafficked into the world upon her incarnation. She found the nucleus of clothing carousels at the ladies apparel outlets when shopping with her mother and there she'd sit, on the floor in the underbelly of the garment rack, each hanging thing a snotty limb of an endless vine, in view of the world as an ant, how to be smaller in the smallness of life by Leba Scrachnsniv.

The hum of aircraft engines offered the pitch of her mantra, pitched at enticing and low tones in the midst of her young abundance. "Crackers?" "Something to drink?" Women with chalky faces spat in words chirpy and often unreal seeming, invoking haunted perplexities within her childish bighead as she began her endeavoring pilgrimages: To her grandparents, to southern-country amusement parks, to orange gardens, to lakes in states that started with O's and I's. All during which she sat back and elevated in the hum of the propulsion, unknowingly committing to Newton's third law of motion, ruminating over identifying pairs of active and reactive forces as

applied to aerodynamics. Throughout this aging of her own she marveled without overtly knowing even of her own marveling. She watched engrossed peoples' expression reading papers entitled "national report", "the nation" and "the weekly market". She assumed that newsprint was the most important textile; she longed to touch it when she smelt it, she longed to play with its ink between her fingers, to roll it into dough and balls of news-cookies, to play house with it. She played house with unimportant blurred young faces as she heightened into adolescence but her desire to make new mediums from bourgeois tools did not cease. She found paper mache but the brushes she was given in elementary school were, in fact, elementary. Made of more 80% nylon –and the paste, she could not believe that a boy in her class would eat it! Eat it off a long red plastic stick. He ate it in the plain light of day with a face of private expression, as though the temptation of paste's offering was so gross and undeniably enticing that the world disappeared. She saw the boy with his eggplant shaped head and large flaring nostrils delicately dip the red stick into the jar with slow precision (contrasting Leba's own young reckless gesture when she herself fell victim to a likened abandon of will). From the jar, upon the red stick, he applied an even tablespoon of paste. Licking the conglomerate splotch of paste from a hill down to a small pebble of matter his eyes fluttered in semi-controlled ecstasy. Though he stood at a painting station in the middle of a room filled with busy chattering first-graders, none noticed his naked lovemakings but Leba, who was entranced by the grotesque habit, uncomfortably so. She internalized, that with her own big round head, she was more perverted than the morbid paste-eater himself! Rather than the justifiable absorption of one's self in one's own passionate spectacle she had instead become immersed staring at length at someone else's private business. Before his last licks his eyes opened to meet hers directly. He caught her before she could escape; pleased to recognize her as one of his own with kindred vulnerability, ready to unite in a secret club. As their eyes entangled his body twitched, and then he put the red stick down into the paste jar (which made Leba, from that point onward, believe every jar of paste to be infested with the germs of young boys' saliva). Clay, perhaps salty and filled with the most basic element of carbon, cool and perfectly respondent to the hand, this was considerable as a food, yes. But Paste?

After this Leba looked at all paper mache as a hobby, a waste of time, a covert operation to allow children to initiate ill behaviors and subversive addictions. In fact, art class for the elementary school student in the public forum of education was laden with materials resulting in the destruction of healthy immunity. First paste for eating, then glue for sniffing, then oil paints to seep through the skin, even pottery in the yellow dry itchy art room of elementary school left her feeling filled with fumes after having fired her crooked design (which always broke in the kiln).

Later, Leba loved the mixture of chemical and water into color that bled in controlled amounts upon large rolls of paper. Her first made incomes disappeared on rolls of irregularly laid strathmore watercolor paper and iridescent tubes of silver and gold diluted and then brushed delicately upon scrolls of ink embellished pages, making her own news, intent to never harden or fatigue. Certainly she was conditioned like any human, privy to infectious disease and fungus, struck with hunger every five hours, prone to dehydration and a need for sleep. However, beyond the obvious qualities she shared with the world it became apparent to her the more she refined herself that the whole of humanity appeared less interested than herself in the fantastic

sound of two strings plucked only one half step apart, the b next to the c. And that if she were to successfully make earnings from a world where she needed to afford its pleasure with a specific monetary unit than she needed to become proficiently good at a skill, and by her mother's advice she had followed her heart, which in fact moved at whim and loved to close suddenly like a manic flower. The concerns of professional survival that occupy grown man and women struck her sense of purpose from the onset, at a tender age pre-grade school, and so rather than wallow in pure joy with no end attainment Leba worked incessantly in figuring how her momentary personal spark of passion could last long enough to burn for many nights and days so that she could deliver unto a world that possessed already life brimming over its edges with thinkers and poets, farmers and teachers, yogis and doctors. The time unto which she was born was a time wherein the basic archetype had long multiplied into many dozen of thousands subsets, but there was one missing figure from the story whose delay in forthcoming left her placeless; embarrassingly and always.

And now she made waylay. She had intercepted their reunion with her odd contemplations in attempts to sustain the sheer experience of her synapses, to both scramble a plan and procrastinate the development of one. But there was no catching herself; she fell into the scene. Her fingers tuliped upon a spring she had never known, never been in sync with like this. Her mouth was shaped in a soft O and her eyes in light lines. The window open to the fire escape allowed for a bird to pause and hover, and by Leba's selective vision she determined it to be a hummingbird; aroused and ecstatic, demanding something furious from herself and the Diamond Thief. Leba recognized her breath, could not ignore the fullness of its sound and feel, could not ignore the shift of day, she was at once wholly charged in the company of this man who she had sworn off from her reality until she had dismantled reality and watched its dispirited light dwindle into faint dimness. And with her suddenly struck and orange heart's engagement, Leba re-turned into The Subtle Addict and searched with her right hand at her belly for the pieces she had stored and tucked away, to reset these pieces upon the board of her chest and the palate below her collar bone, to be polished and again maneuvered with attempted punctuation and strategy.

"I am not interested in being terse. Or meanly, or stubborn; colicky, fragile, unsatisfied, demanding. Nor futile, mediocre, unremitting, coy." She began her monologue. "I have lost the skill of striving, the sense for retrieving, hoarding, forfeiting, I don't want to lean and I would like to retain an appetite or earn one successfully. So why don't you tell me when, precisely, you are leaving this bathroom and then create some instruction for us within this timeframe so that I can protect my highest intentions and successfully continue into this world to which I am so obviously attracted." Leba inhaled through her nose that had notably come alive with its most acute sense of smell.

With immediacy he offered her the return (he's never unrehearsed).

"Okay. I will. I will tell you with exactness what to do in this moment: You are going to open this bathroom door and walk downstairs, after putting your clothes back on, though I regret you should ever put your clothes on at all. But you will get dressed to then go downstairs and tell our lovely Ramone Dish you will see him later and, as it turns, you are not hungry after all, so it

happens. Please tell him you think you need to spend the day breathing sweetly and just by yourself to collect some thoughts, and have felt out of sort—or anything that will not hurt his fine feelings. Then send him away kindly, after which you will go to the long bar on the south side of the room downstairs. Tell the man who is wearing a green bracelet you'd like two tall mango juices. He'll give you two glasses and a dish of fruit. You'll bring them here and we'll drink them on the fire escape. When you get back to the bathroom I'll still be here, the door will be locked. Knock your Leba knock and I'll open it to you. I'll tell you the rest over Mango juice." As he'd spoken he brought emphasis to certain phrases with a tap of his thumb and two fingers together in the "exactamondo" or a "compliments to the chef" gesture against the little machine that dispensed towels.

Leba liked his directness. It had been so long since she had heard any orders from him or anyone and she wished to carry them out with such precision that she promptly rose to get dressed. She was hesitant to reveal her elation for seeing him and began to force herself into a performance of grace but then decided she could not muster herself into anything at all and thus she would just perform the nonchalance of herself, the most difficult performance of all.

When she descended upon the restaurant ground Ramone was talking to a friend at an adjacent table. He was passionate in conversation and seemed unaware of the length of time Leba had been in the bathroom parlor, but he caught site of her now and called out her name. "Leba!" It sounded foreign, and she had not heard him say her name before. Or else it sounded code. It was a PI name she had given him and it was not hers.

#### INSERT OF THE INTIMATE TRUTH

Because we felt disinclined to expel certain specifics it was omitted from earlier excerpts of Leba's epic how, together, she and Ramone had involved themselves in the sort of affair many of you find yourself experiencing. The kind of curious prodding annunciated in tentative gestures and salivated exchanges that come without specific plan or order and hence, at expiry, mostly amount to wasted time concealed under the subject heading of esoteric learning. What is the end-goal of playing into the choreography of attraction to such degree, after having laid your body barely naked on the crest of another's perspicuity? We were never sure, and still are not. To trade in a proper arrangement of organized engagement which stands to fruit the greatest ambition potential to human scale for a ...spontaneous trial of compatibility between thighs prone to exaggerate the ramifications of touch... when it is equally as ecstatic to dance on the floor by one's self, truly it is a parallel sensation to urinate and hiccup; a sneeze is euphoria—alas! The human fellow has become demented with her associate fellow, seeking the utmost of her sensation in sex specifically, or bettering herself for the possibility of attaching hands and generous grazes, for astute pressure generated from alert limbs that will sate places within her where she apparently cannot. And surely, the paradigmatic principals of everafter's and afterif's have been denied by many postmodernists as past participle. But some postmodernists who have externally denied such whatifs and couldyous as no longer relevant have inside still the hope for such a delivery that will fit like one block upon another that works like a jigsaw corner-piece; that settles them down. Some renegade futurists still grapple with the apple, and somewhere believe their completion rests wholly on the possibility that someone might love them correctly and change their ennui to a more exhilarated sonority.

The clarification is as follows:

We were uninterested in making you and ourselves wonder if Ramone was The One, The Grand Punctuator, etc. and then fumbling further together into a decrepit fabricated storyline chasm and so we did not tell you Leba was exploring a specific sort of relationship with Ramone which makes her occasionally dip into past participles and obscure determining. We did not want you to think less of her. But the truth is if you think of her at all, you are thinking less of her.

END OF INSERT

Leba was aware that she had already deceived Ramone Dish. Though he had never demanded her faith outright, still she had wanted to give him her faith just to see she could give it to someone other than herself.\* Telling Ramone to leave her side for the remainder of the day felt like an infinite departure. He excused himself from conversation and walked to her, eyelashes wealthy from years of intelligent perception. Because she had opened herself upstairs behind the bathroom door and been flushed with the fullness of feeling she was able now to drink in one full sip Ramone Dish. He was a stunning conversationalist, an engaging speaker; he was the most visually stunning man she had ever encountered! His presence filled every room with grace, though never competed with her own; rather, he exalted her flair and liveliness, and so she was never overly-reigned in by his compliments and felt, instead, emancipated by his observation and insights. She upheld herself without self-compartmentalizing in the course of his subjective discoveries. Yet, she possessed imperfect, crippled discernment regarding the loving gifts Ramone offered— when given, upon trigger, they recalled only the uneven rippling of qualm and quirked spirit that surfaced in violent nights alone with her effigy of The Diamond Thief and what, by comparison, he did not give her— that still she loved more.

But she held fast to the light of nature, believing that after its acerbic period of arrhythmic storming she would then be rewarded—the diamond thief of her mired imagination would, with a mad multiplicity of deity-like hands, snap the elastic back off the mask of his face and blankly ascend to heavenly space as the mono-god she'd feebly forced him to imitate; he would reveal plainly when stepping aside that he was not a master of her fate, would not present the living moment to her in an active bundle of adventure, or fulfill her mission of missions, it was her responsibility— she was in control. Seeing she'd made him, she'd destroy him and still have life left over to renew.

From the beginning she sought to compete with the man. Whatever was his skill would become hers as well, and for every atom\* he possessed and wielded she would wield and thus possess. The world at large would look upon her with the power of a god the same way it anointed the men she knew with torches and status. She was not looking for a crown of kingship, but she wanted to address an audience with as much assurance and poise as did the men she watched entertain. They never seemed to wonder if the world accepted their size or gesture. How the world let them off! Innocent of multiplex lyric and ulterior motive, hidden language and insinuating gestures underpinning their performance. No one attempted to pigeon hole the man's indefinable sound into gendered idioms, they were never mistaken as female singersongwriters

or chickswithguitars, or called strong for merely embodying themselves uprightly, for delivering an opinion without prefacing it with an “excuse me, could may it then be” or “please, sir, ought not it perhaps...” Leba felt foully against a world that would volubly assemble boxy misnomers at her face and then await thanks from her for doing so, as though she were fortunate to be perceived by any mass at all. Her Sufi blood-kin, the ecstatic poet, even hundreds of years’ past (and especially in hundreds-of-years’ past, he having transcended time by playfulness and passion) had said, himself, “Define and narrow me, you starve yourself of yourself... I do not know who I am. I am astounded lucid confusion”! She was clear that her music might scare the public, if they were prepared only for a certain safe sound to ooze from the white friendly face of the woman whose form she embodied. But she wondered– if she painted her face with red and black paint, if she ate a rat or a bat on stage and if she screamed “I eat dead rodents!!” or lit something on fire while she played, would they imprison her in an institute while the very same public had in-famed the heavy metal artist?

Ramone would never encourage her to eat dead rodents on stage and so she knew that their affinity for one another would not endure the life for which she was fated. Most probably she would never actually consume a dead rat, but for the moment she needed reason to dismiss the perfect Ramone Dish and figured that this was the best one she had and so promptly informed him with lies without remorse, compliant and spell-cast by the plummy exhalation of the diamond thief. To Ramone, she amply relayed her day’s new plan: she had to sort out immediate business, plus some additional larger life-intentions, they’d catch up later.

Ramone seemed to like the way this excuse for solitude sounded well enough. He kissed her mouth without invitation. His lips were just the right temperature to effectively impact her conscience; she almost told him the Diamond Thief had locked himself in the bathroom upstairs. Certainly Ramone might be disposed to encourage her to explore the opportunity the new circumstance imparted, but Leba wished him to leave without ado so that she could continue on to the bar as planned.

She ordered and then fetched the Mango juices, and turned on her heels in the direction of the stairs. She wore a face one never sees oneself wearing, and thus could never describe; for it is a face made in flux only wherein there is no nearby mirror or surface to reflect it. The face wears brash, but goes along; it has been uncaught and rides its contorted briefness, and so wears well. It is the face of excitement that has found expression and has un-dammed stoicism with a rush of blood to the face. If one caught such face on oneself one would beat the face out promptly in manner similar to a wool mat against house siding. There is often a semi-oblivious murmur that comes along in accompaniment, aggressive personal protocols such as “hold it together!” or “keep your hands in your pockets”, orders prone moments later to fail, for they are as ineffective as they are stern. All poets and antidisestablishmentarians know that a rush of blood tends to take control much sooner than conditioned behaviors can be put into gear. Or at least it still sometimes does as it certainly once did in less-electricity congested times of obvious revolutionaries. With borrowed hope from the best fated mythologies Leba determined to recollect her grace upon reaching the door at the top of her ascent, to ready herself for what was behind it, though when having reached her final stair she did not feel near having landed in her feet at all.

She knocked on the door and waited 4 counts. Each of her counts was a collective phrase of four

pulses from her left tapping foot plus two muscle engagements and releases from her right gluteus muscle. When totaling the four whole meters of her counting, she felt she'd given a very liberal stanza for anybody to make it to a door, but The Diamond Thief had still not come albeit a generous amount of time had elapsed in her 4 counts.

The mouth of her stomach opened like a starving fish. She knocked once more and still nothing. She did not want to knock again because she did not want to make her desperation for reception so obvious to the possible emptiness that lingered behind the door. Instead, she stood with her hands full, aware of impulse to hurl the glasses of juice at the oblique material in front of her, craving to watch them break into thick dangerous irregular pieces, to smash. But then the door unlatched after all and the Diamond Thief pulled her back inside. It was a two-dimensional seizure, figure's hands much bigger than its body, possessing the strength only a line drawing could affect upon another line drawing. Because the truth is that in three-dimension she was much stronger than he, and could not be yanked so effusively.

He put his hand over the landmark of her heart and led by pushing, speaking as though continuing ongoing conversation "I have a question for you". Then the bathroom window was opened wider and they went onto the fire escape.

"I've known you were in Bologna," he begun. Delilah told me when I called her. I often call her because I cannot call you, Leba, because I know it makes you upset. I came here because I saw a medical intuit who perceived my entire case history. She advised with urgency that I quit the trend of my lifestyle by This February. I've made the decision to cease all business in the field of diamonds and any pursuits that involve laundering or stealing. I have been worried since, for myself and for you, because I know that I inherently have to exist as a diamond thief in order to live up to your negative standards, to ensure my lack of manhood with a caliber of character so unworthy of the amount of love you offer. I am certain that if I become the man whose potential you saw in my shadow looming by my shoulder that I would only disappoint you with the lack of unworldly drama and lustrous adventure my simple heart truly ignites."

"I've reached echelons," thus spoke The Diamond Thief. (Leba wondered from whom he had picked up the word echelon and how she had spoken it and circumstantially in what sort of sentence she'd used it.)

"Yes" he persisted. "I've realized honesty is overly powerful! Thought has its own resonance and rhythm, people are aware of much more than they confess, even to themselves. And for as long as I can recount I've done nothing but avoided my full awareness, and this is a kind of laziness of its own, a laziness which had exhausted me perhaps a thousand-fold times more than the greatest awareness ever could have if only I'd had allowed for its presence."

His expression was considerably self-revelatory and she withheld response but sipped with slow deliberation, paying extra attention to her mango juice while registering the report from a man whose freedom was emphasized and freed more with each deepening descent of her well-plummeted heart, whose Yes was culminated by her resounding No, whose simplicity gained credence and profitability through her impoverished complex wearing of mind and wit. Yet she directly could not blame the Diamond Thief for possessing a trait of personality or furthermore brand the man in front of her as a true delinquent or thoughtless drudge, instead she fixated upon

the disproof of physics by the crossing of their destinies. She assumed intellectual application of her belief and came loyally to its defense: the parody of exchange between them conspired beyond best intentions, sophisticatedly so. And what imperfect timing\* the two suffered thus, one canceling out the other's vibrancy by attempting to share in a mutuality of admiration. She would drink to the very bottom of her juice and by then she would figure a response, along the way of drinking thinking conservatively how she might rightfully react to his perceivably inviting prose. But when arriving at her very last sip the sweet count of saccharin had encouraged nothing close to reason. She desired to undress him, to feel the sting of her pores resulting from their contact, to bare the agitation in the meeting of her fresh follicle with the crude complete compound of his fingernail dirt. She recalled every taste of each part of his body, she could always recall each taste but here were the tastes before her: the savored tastes, ones without a conceptual afterward nor nostalgic before, tastes in themselves whole, tastes that were not emotions but awoke and cradled her life motion. And she desired to lick the roof of his mouth and take his hand down into her lungs. She wanted the bottom of his feet to cover the top of her head, she wanted to tie herself with his arms to his chest, she was will-less with anticipation if they should touch, how it would feel, how she might have it forever. But by years' analysis she'd gathered; every way she had engaged him was marked by her neediness. Such psychological evaluation would have taken most merely a day of hearty analysis, but she liked the feeling of successfully spotting every instance that confirmed her diagnosis and so went back again and more.

The last sip filled her mouth with jagged edge, she spit something hard and metallic back into the glass and looked down to discover a regurgitated ring, a band with a most intricately cut diamond.

By first reflex she assumed it was for her, The Diamond Thief had cunningly planned to have her nearly choke on his admittance of love before his eyes.

“This is my final mission,” he explained, “and I need you for it Leba. After this I am through, really, I’ll be through. I am thinking that you will do this for me, help me satisfy the mystery of this strange gem. Then I must be with you. I know this now with certainness and I can hardly lay out my feelings with language. But first I need to fix this last situation with this ring. Do you feel how exquisite it is? Can you imagine where I discovered such a ring? Can’t you imagine? It belonged... in ways, to our friend, Ramone Dish. I plucked it from his jewelry box.”

Leba was utterly stunned! The Diamond Thief had referred to Ramone as their collective friend! But she regained her self-imposed nonchalance quickly, it was the only ground she had going for her. Here she'd tucked herself away from her memories and their mutual associations and he all the while had known where she took cover.

“And Ramone is Our friend?” Leba inquired, chewing on a bottom lip blue from the cold juice she was regretting having accepted, as the aftertaste of the ring and the hardness of the diamond did not mix well with mango. Additionally, her head had begun again to throb so that her eyes unfocused and her emotion ticked and pulsed until her recently founded sense of his greatness began to falter. He had once again proved her intuition correct, to lurch toward him was something unstable, and more than The Diamond Thief being unstable, Leba assessed her own

heart's figuring as inaccurate.

"Ramone and I first met in the Sahara." Said The Diamond Thief. "I learned that he was in possession of a rare diamond cut personally by a pharaoh's gold-smith, passed through various hands and cast years later into a jewel by an artisan of royal caliber. Its origins are linked to the kimberlite pipes prior to the opening of the first working gem-mine. It is the diamond that inspired the medieval Italians to name all diamonds "pietra della reconciliazione" –the stone of reconciliation.

"Does that mean something?" wondered Leba. She couldn't make sense anymore of these historically symbolic explanations, the way The Diamond Thief was predisposed to a rationality of expression. Why couldn't he be strait forward and breathe into his body and simply look in her eyes or sense how bloated her mind currently felt with a fluid surely seeping now down the back of her nose and into her mouth and lungs. She felt suddenly hot and thick and certain that while her fall had initially offered an opportune liberation of sorts, complying with the man before her in any capacity spoiled whatever increment of inspiration possibly gained from her hard spill. Like any gift stands to overturn, she was now overwhelmed by what was before her, and though the diamond thief continued speaking she wondered about the odd placement of the fire escape. Rather than descending directly toward ground level its route trailed parallel along the top story of the building and then stretched over the roof. It braced the rooftop and then lowered down over the front face of the building so that those escaping a fire from the bathroom would have to first tiptoe upon the burning and perhaps collapsing roof and then skillfully swing their way, in plain view of the town, out from the conflagrant wrath of the restaurant and onto the walkway. By Leba's figuring, in the case of a fire, the escape would be very inconvenient.

The Diamond Thief caught Leba's head with his hand and peered into her eyes.

"You don't look well." He finally noticed.

"I had a fall ice skating, I hit the wall. When we got here, I excused myself to the bathroom because I couldn't breathe easily and I wanted to take my clothes off, you know how sometimes I want to take my clothes off when I feel like I cannot breathe. So I did and then you appeared. I really haven't had much time to adjust and now I am feeling the effects of the serious hit I had."

"Well, what should we do?" The Diamond Thief asked her because he never knew how to take over in her personal emergencies.

"We should stop talking about diamonds and their history. You should check us into a very well kept hotel and see if they have a resident doctor, preferably one who is holistically minded, that can help me with ice and some sort of blood-thinning anti-inflammatory decoction. Then we should run a bath and lay in it for the rest of the day until the night falls. I should be swathed in an oil infused with lavender, which you can find at the pharmacy down the road, and after all of that, when my mind clears, we should order in an exceptional meal, because I will be hungry and so will you and we should treat this day and night like it is our last together, because I feel strongly that it might be.

I am not interested in hearing about diamonds as I have already mentioned, but if you like, you could gallantly take care of me for a moment so that I do not possibly perish. I would let you."

The Diamond Thief was responsive to Leba's thinking. He assisted her over the top of the building, by way of the fire escape, and then down the front side. Thus, they moved easily passed the men in the vestibule who were waiting for the Diamond Thief's front-door departure.

He led her to his motorcycle, which was a black monstrous creature, contrasting his amber resin aura and yellow skin.

They rode out of the middle of the city, in the opposite direction of the barn-studio, and after picking up a local, large bottle of lavender as well as an array of soaps and oils, they cruised the country side with efficiency, landing within a half-hours time at an inn moderately filled with travelers. For the first, Leba witnessed The Diamond Thief living by his own might of making, without having any liberalities or accommodations provided by a splay of servile connections. Usually wherever upon they ventured there was a mere whisper here and a nod there and with a single snap, one configuration of luxury after another unfolded under the diamond thief's nose; provisions galore. And she, on his arm, was allowed to smell the decanter's waft by circumstance, as his ornament, the way a piece of fine luggage would share in the first class treatment of its wealthy owner, unnoticed, unconsidered.

However, it appeared that he had never been to this inn and so had not planned on their adventure turning this corner; it appeared as though he and she were together improvising. She almost displaced him, nearly conjured the energy to perceive him as an oddity, though she was mostly won over by the desire to rest. Had she dragged him here? Was she responsible for the establishment? Suddenly she felt that they were dirty, made vagrant by her dominance. That the man she had captive was feeble enough to risk his latitude and longitude and go, without specs, to freelance with her. Her thoughts readied to gain panic. But she was reclaimed by her weariness. The diamond thief carried their minimal belongings into the chateau suite that they had taken for the night. Their small parcels seemed larger than his frame, banging against his hip as he rounded the inn's hallway corner.

The room was just a bit more voluptuous than modest and very clean, simply filled with aged furniture that had been up-kept with love and attention. One takes a certain risk staying at an Inn, a private inn at that, by subjecting one's aspiration for romantic retreat to the décor chosen by the innkeeper, to the innkeeper's sense of allure. There is a sort of discomfort at that, at walking in to a stranger's display of projected and purchasable allure, or generic allure, all-appealing allure, safe allure, allure that will sell. Or even worse off, one can risk walking into a room sight-unseen for their romantic retreat forced to bear the taste of an innkeeper whose business has been decorated with an obvious "wanted to make you feel at home" flair, who has decided that the inn itself will be renowned and loved for its au natural feel, that ultimately feels not like one's home at all (and anyhow one is longing to not feel at home if one has left home to stay at an inn to have a romantic retreat). Say perhaps one wants to spend a restorative week by an azure bay. The beach is clear, the air refreshing— but as soon as the door to their stayed lodging is closed the starchy lace of a throw pillow engulfs one's tentative restfulness. And then if one is in the company of a tender relation, for example if one brings a new romance to share in the thrill of a stay-at-the-ol'-inn, and say one has a very precise taste for color, if one is overly sensitive to a certain type of scent or furniture wood (mahogany or oak) and that this sort of reverie is prone to spark perchance a stomach virus then one should learn in time to abstain from expectations as far as letting come to mind what might most readily when contemplating the phrase "bed and breakfast"—a heavenly image of a teeth-sinkable utopia. Instead, when making the reservation, one must speculate that often the actual interior decoration of a rented room is in

the most far-flung opposition to the personal taste of the recipient guest, which can make for an embarrassing entrance. When a pairing of loves decide to venture out specifically for a bed and for a breakfast, they must realize that upon entering the room they are now entering a scene built precisely for the ampersand between the breakfast and the bed. (This is a little embarrassing, no?) And when the door shuts it is clear to the ampersand between yourselves that you have tendered an investment in the put forth amount for the bed and for the breakfast and handed over the responsibility of creating the mood for your poor little ampersand who is mostly always crying out about being sandwiched between Things in general and would have perhaps rather come for no charge whatsoever had you let it when it first knocked on the door-less wall-less house-less place of feeling into which it first enters. It never needed a place or a feast; this was the deviant doing of the organization, the mind that makes a moment for this, a moment for that and a moment to get away to capture a feeling.

The inn where Leba and the diamond thief lodged now was more affected than an average dwelling, it seemed to be designed for those who were unquestionably avowed in their intimate arrangement, who perhaps shared more things than one random night of adventure, who shared maybe garage door codes and china, who would not be stupefied in having a room to share for one night and thus would not attempt to define their status by the borrowed furniture in the temporary stayed room. Their room was luxurious and tasteful, more classically decorated than the sort of theme of their irresistible disorganized whim. The ceiling cathedraled into a dome of colored stained glass, fired into squares and not opaque, so that the last sun of the day came through in vivid expression. Leba threw herself on the bed; the move was exaggerated but stemmed from her real need to return to deep breathing and splay her limbs, to have her body supported.

The Diamond Thief, after excusing himself for a moment, returned to Leba with not only ice, but also to relay that a Doctor would be arriving momentarily to check on her condition. The sound he made in merely closing the door to their room echoed his touch, the entirety of the world was swallowed up in their petite world and when Leba lifted her head so that she could see The Diamond Thief she regretted having called the doctor, having made a menace out of something as pure and light as her real desire, for she only needed him to come and lay all his weight upon her.

But now he must be thinking about the doctor, thinking that the doctor was the way to their remedy. She listened to him run water, certain it was as hot as he could stand (which actually was much more tepid to the touch than the average person's limit). She opened one sticky-lidded eye, observed his occupation. He'd diluted lavender onto a steamed towel and approached Leba; she closed her eyes again into darkness. His infusion covered her still legs and ankles, moved up her thighs and sides. She remembered. The Diamond Thief could nurture her...

Before the doctor entered the room she drifted into muddy sleep, coerced by breath-waves, gentling the discomfort of her head.

\* \*

The Doctor was unimpressed with the impact of Leba's wounded head but administered a prescription in a brown bottle that he advised to take for no longer than 2 days, after which, if her conditions did not improve, she might then again seek medical attention. Leba was not surprised that the Doctor had overlooked the real threat of her condition; she herself was unable to

perceive her own danger of circumstance.

Meanwhile, the Diamond Thief proceeded to run her a fine bath. He sat Leba on a throne of towels and took off first her shoes and then began, after asking permission, to remove the rest of her attire.

Leba spoke just under the sound of the running bath water, commenting how “unbelievable a world seemed which arranged charm to appear and disappear in its own time signature.”

Even notorious stars which trigger volatile explosions by their crossing paths must at least once trine their polarity, magnetize their warring mythic chaos, and so the Diamond Thief and Leba paid homage to such chemistry and turned to acknowledge sentient forces.

They left their bath only when the water had become cold and they felt near shivering. Night had turned to dawn and she and the Diamond Thief climbed into their bed, sufficiently blanketed and equipped with a collection of pillows—down, small, long, rolled, and rectangular. Leba pushed them all from the bed and lay diagonally, and the Diamond Thief joined her. They had forgotten to eat most of the day, and into the night, but they were full. No hunger could enter the solar plexus of Leba’s frame, this was her feast; she had been so unbelievably hungry. Before the rooster gave the loud call with know-it-all punctuality the two, hands entwined, warm and well exerted, remembered sleep as their safe hollow and returned for a lengthy slumber well into the richness of day.

The Diamond Thief woke first. He yawned a two-part yawn and then opened his eyes; right lashes parting in slight gain over the left. Leba slept with an expression of deep peace, and he enjoyed looking at her features, relaxed and silent. She had ceaselessly inspired his thoughts in the seasons passed, to an extent she herself could not capacitate, did not know. He reflected; he had left her in moments vulnerable and uncertain, hurt by the ineffective methods of his affections. He had been so occupied attempting to forge his way into a world, to make an indentation, to walk away with the richest earnings, to have and harbor abundance, and to trade his swift manipulative skills in for an underground eminence so that he would always possess a daring intrigue in the eyes of the world, and so that the world would only know him by costume. He put his hand out to Leba’s forehead and placed his calloused skin on her crown. He could see her dreaming. She was flying on a trapeze, dressed in white cake-like taffeta, billowing with high sleeves, zipped up to her neck, a queen of icing, delicious and soaring. Though her head still looked swelled he knew she would awake happily, next to him. She always woke happily to next to him. Even when she felt like she couldn’t breathe, proclaiming that he surely didn’t love her, or hold her correctly, or all through the night, she still woke with joy to know life by his side. It felt solid and right.

His fingers counted her ribs and rested at the small of her back. He felt the opportunity to give to her and so he disappeared under their cotton sheet, to find her feet, to wake her with his affirmation.

\*

Leba knew she was dreaming when she let go of the trapeze and did not fall. Her white dress tucked up around her body and created a span of wing that gently lowered her in a hover over the land. Her toes tingled and her gaze found the Sun who animatedly spoke to her.

”Oh, Leba, Queen of Trapeze, most glorious graceful jestering wise soul, your time has come to be filled with your work; it is only between yourself, god, and me, Le Soleil!”

Leba, having let go of the trapeze, looked at her hands and saw that they were covered with the leaves of ferns.

The sun continued.

“You know, Leba of the Trapeze,” spoke the Sun, “that it is most essential in this life for you to speak with God than any journeymen of this land. You know that you will meet humanity with your wisdom only when you have first mastered the language that you speak with me, Le Soleil.” Leba lifted her sparkling legs and saw they were covered with ink paintings of large lilac flowers, that she was tattooed with vines of vibrant, blooming colors. The tattoos were not an aversion to the eye, but naturally emerged from her skin; they were beautiful to see.

She brought her flowered covered legs into her chest, and her arms, cloaked with egyptian cotton and silk taffeta, wrapped with precision around her knees, and her head reached backwards so that her long, golden hair hung below her back. She then extended her legs so that she was lying flat on the air and lunged into an arch, reaching her hands back to her feet. In her dream, she knew she had been training for this moment and that the final show she would put on would be for no audience, the return to her mythological whole; a descending dance of anonymous rain. It would all work out cost-effectively, like wind and dust.

\* \* \*

She had kicked herself awake, startled by the touch of The Diamond Thief, whose hands had seized her calves. It was his touch, not just any touch, which rioted her nerves. His touch was the very touch she had worked to cancel out from her sensory system. For seasons the phantom pain of his lingering fingers and excruciating tongue tormented, along with his toes, still making visits to Leba’s own. His fingernails, jagged at the top and flat along the surface, brushing her face; hands that avoided her most vulnerable untouched parts, and over-visited her most clearly obvious comfort zones, continued to etch upon her frame, possess her very own, so that when she touched herself, she felt only the presence of his touch. After nights of brutal turning, in vicious sheets that twisted beyond relief and pillows thrown too far to retrieve in slumbering dispose, she had finally found a foothold on land that did not break upon a single thought of recalling his person near to hers. To bear the repetition of a dream, to wake shattered and to rebuild her ribcage daily winded her entirety, ruined her for the simplest of tasks, pouring milk or licking envelopes, tying shoes or sealing zip-lock bags. She had been unavailable for the landscape of new sound or the passing of traveling trend. She was set and stubborn, made rigid with defense: Yes, in fact she had loved and Yes, by all means, she should never wish to again play host to a phlebotomist; that blood-thirsty blossom.

Only after a clear passing of one solid year was she able to sift through her sensitivities and find a heart worth renewing, one that promised to be less childish and more thoughtful to the rest of the world and her own self. And now, just a short while after that vow-rekindling ceremony, she was without clothes, consenting to his touch, waking to his objectifying presence, obtusely open; forgetting to remedy all that had been broken and instead assuming the play of otters, blindly ignoring her human condition and loving fantasy with the same man whose love was a knife and worse: a ceiling, whose love was a bruised lie. Regardless of how maliciously he attempted to

wield her power back into his clutch at his liberty, so that he stood to acquire whatever was meant to be her own inheritance, Leba remembered with conviction in the morning what she could with ease forget by the work of the mischievous night.

She knew she had received and obligingly ingested a prescription medicine to quell her pain, and to this she attributed her willingness to be bathed and touched and woken by a man whose tricks had traditionally only dispelled her own sense of magic in the world.

Any promises he had ever made were always broken. And so the exalted expression he mustered with unconvincing language the day before while they sat on the faulty fire escape now proved unmoving to her freshly woken knowingness.

After a moment of brewing ruminations, she instigated conversation. Conditioned first to greet with the proper “good morning” she pushed these two words out between her teeth. Frustrated by her own resurgent trauma, she began to move slowly. “There are things,” she thought, “that I want to throw right now –that I will move slowly.”

“And first,” she thought more, “I will move my leg from this man’s hands, then I will move my ribs from this man’s cheek, then I will move my body from this chateau’s bed, then I will move my dress from this chair’s back.” She planned her timing. “I will do it all casually enough that I will not be spotted by gravity or coerced by this person or myself to fall to its pull and consent to my heart which is begging to open and spit from the deep gallows of its punctured memory colors only shades of eggplant and fire.”

She moved her leg from his hands and began to roll herself away from his body. He immediately noticed her slowness and leaned heavily into her with anchoring intent.

“Are you rising? You cannot possibly forego the stillness of this day for mediocre levitation. Stay inert longer, please I beg of you.”

Leba started to realize that the Diamond Thief spoke like her when he was in her company. That she, in fact, had never known how his independent interaction with the world took shape (was it terse, prosaic, did it float, was it sharp?) In her company he only complied to resemble The Ambiguous Tyrant, who received her every thought and idea steadfastly, but then who at a moment’s notice or none at all was prone to leave her desolate.

But truly, what is so new and unique at this point of our journey herein about gaping holes and a heart led by tyrannous delusion?

Leba knew that she would return to herself only if she left the company of the Diamond Thief and could, with as little reflection upon their shared evening as possible, finish her respectful stay in Bologna. She traded out one displacing projection of herself for another: and envisioned completing her work assisting Ramone Dish and afterwards finding space in a southland, near an ocean, where the torrent of wind and the feast of biscuits and collards might support her brewing quest for self-sufficiency. Where she could be an artisan by accepting the moment, relieving her mind of illusive longing. Leba took The Diamond Thief’s hand and with all of her strength looked him in the eye and spoke.

”You have been more of an impact in my life than any other thus far. I felt when I was a child that I would only love once. In urgency, I resultantly chose you at the onset of my womanhood. I chose in haste, my spirit was evoked. I am a marionette like the rest of the world, I willed my fate only in a way that self-will can be possessed by a wooden doll pioneered through the strategic hands of a puppeteer, therefore one day I will not blame myself, I will not blame you; I

will blame no one. But I know you are a thief. I know your “one last mission” will always exist, just like tomorrow is always one day away. I am sorry we don’t share a kindred ethical sense or that you feel petulant when I am not satisfied with the scraps of love you throw toward me on unpredictable occasions. I can’t believe in you anymore and I clearly have lost the ability to ever restore my faith in your love. I do love your particular life, how your body is filled with the source of the universe. I know that I will return one day to my own resourcefulness and there I’ll invent no separation between myself and life, there I will not ache to be more like you or to have you or consume you because such fragmentation will cease. I believe this as true. Listen, I cannot bear to give you my power. So let me lift myself from underneath your weight and touch your face with my fingertips for a moment only, and then take my clothes and take a car back to where I was yesterday morning, in a barn-studio. I want to dream unencumbered by a sense of dread. Let there be a peace working to find its way between us.”

Leba moved slowly, and The Diamond Thief let her. He’d become a gallant man in his own right and, it so happens, had indeed ceased stealing diamonds, finally. In resolution, he planned to expeditiously return the ring he now possessed, taken years ago from Ramone Dish.

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There was a quality of character about The Diamond Thief that had allured the young Ramone; a transformative fix and handsomeness that even the most stalwart male could not deny. Though Ramone himself possessed an unsurpassable grace and demeanor, he admired The Diamond Thief for his life experience and worn wisdom. Before long, Ramone found himself extending his reserves, inviting The Diamond Thief to lodge indefinitely at the barn-studio (the very same place he’d now, years later, extended openly as well to Leba). Leba’s nonchalant poise and subdued appetite coupled with the violent passion expressed in her artwork had allured Ramone in ways he’d similarly once felt intrigued by the diamond thief, though by default he hadn’t considered the one knew the other. However, beyond his boyish naiveté, it would be impossible to say that at the nucleus of his insight he did not recognize the two being so much the same. Most people harbor at least one vice, and Ramone, regardless of his keen intuition, fell privy; he succumbed to a susceptibility of endowing those who were already endowed. So, for example, while knowing that The Diamond Thief was well accomplished in his fieldwork, Ramone wanted still to feed his fire, and quickly subdued until he became careless with his own belongings. He lost track of his beloved heirloom diamond that, until meeting The Diamond Thief, had remained securely in his custody.

Ramone dreamt of his lost ring weeks before ice-skating with Leba. The dream continued to taunt him on occasion, and when he revisited it he’d return to his day with an emptiness, a sense comparable to a time when he was very young, and, by ultimatum, had settled on finally accepting the loss of his most favorite plaything (a miniature German Shepard doll) after extensive, but luckless, rescue missions. At such point in his development, Ramone had not yet constructed a sort of rationale-based system of reasoning. He could certainly conjure the sensation of last holding the old paw of the aforementioned dog, but not where, perhaps, it was that he had left it. Therefore, he felt warranted to search out anyone’s house, apt to look under a random couch, or inside overhead compartments, and even at times in wastebaskets, irregardless of whether the location had been a land-marked spot, past visited (with or without Jin, his lost

pooch). Ramone felt certain that it was impossible to misplace something so inherently connected to his own self. With proper meditation and a commitment to his inner-vision Ramone was driven, convinced Jin would again be by his side. In secret, at age four, he sacrificed his rest (only after being properly bid goodnight) fine-tuning his senses under syrupy sweet covers decorated with robotic action heroes, working to see in the depths of the darkness where Jin was, from where he called to Ramone. But when he turned the age of five and still had not resuscitated his beloved, he figured his life would either be forever dedicated to locating a missing stuffed animal or else he could accept his losses and turn his focus elsewhere. Perhaps he ought to have dedicated his life to finding Jin, an aim clearly able to be made manifest. But Ramone Dish, the dauntless character, sacrificed his own neurotic agenda to follow in the pursuit of locating a more vast type of presence, figuring only now, as his nostalgic sensitivities stirred, that the difference between his life's current artistic quest and the search for his play-doll were slight; so slim, in fact, that Ramone found it momentarily appropriate to again contemplate the possible retrieval of the precious doll and switch gears in midstream of his adventure, certain that with the right concentration Jin might surface –on the red streets of Bologna or elsewhere.

Now, wait! We stand to be corrected by second thought: It turns out that Ramone Dish is not the sort of young man to have suffered a story such as the one aforementioned. Moreover, Ramone Dish is, instead, truly empathetic. The dream we've referenced was not necessarily his, nor did it conjure a sense of loss that simply belonged to him. It has just come out of our offices this moment now and has thus been made obvious to us that The Explicit Memory entitled "A Search For A Stuffed Animal Named Jin" is a relevant piece factual to the life of that self-absorbed gal, Leba Schratichinsniv, who has, in her own life, clearly recreated over and again the same guilt-driven epic, a repetitious pattern of clumsiness and loss that now Ramone, brave and valiant, is considering through subtle symbol (as he is so artfully disposed) and taking up the responsibility of psychological processing, if you will, for Leba, whose mortality he holds with an oddly founded adoration.

When Leba dismissed him easily from the restaurant on the day of her fall he turned homeward, after a short run through a few museums he'd aimed to visit before certain exhibitions ceased. With an arm of store-bought flowers (he felt the barn-studio longed for a bit of lightness it lacked at current; violet-lilies would provide a scented ray of permeating glory into the space) and a round kamut bread, along with a farm cheese and large bottle of wine to share with Delilah, who he knew had been deeply entrenched in the work she'd promised to finish by the first of the next week. He walked to the space behind the barn-studio and pressed his face into the window, knocked with both round paws.

Delilah was wiping her hands on her side, finishing the last of a series of pieces made for a local polygamist who was remarrying all of his wives. She had been a bit apprehensive about taking the job until she met the man and his wives. Seemingly, the nine of them lived together in a rhythm appearing more harmonious to Delilah than many other unions she had witnessed, possessed by little dogma or assumption. She could not, however, seem to determine why eight very beautiful women would be interested in sharing one not unusual, plain-looking man, whose only mark of intrigue, as far as she could see, was that he owned of a fine vineyard established

by his family in the 1400's.

Few people outside their immediate community knew that the vineyard, which in season was prolific with the buoyant popping of cultivating grapes, also cultivated the two whole handfuls of vibrant ladies. Ladies happy at work in the harvest, related by profession but also by wifeness, who often danced intoxicated at the end the day, crushing grapes with their toes and keeping such winemaking legends alive.

Fortunately, the barb rings they wanted were simple in design. Before agreeing to be commissioned, Delilah hesitated, imagining that the man might request for her to embellish each ring with an odd or hokey symbol. But, on the contrary, he asked for each ring to be only subtly different than the next. He desired a uniform and strong band, imparting to Delilah that his family was comprised of amiable and hearty counterparts, and that he had no inclination of exhibiting either favoritism or possessiveness over his phenomenal wives. Without being asked, he shared openly with Delilah that his wives were free to pursue other love interests and, he explained further, not all of his commitments to each of his wives included physical intimacy. Delilah assumed that he spent time divulging detailed information to her primarily because his lifestyle had been mostly contained within his family dynamic, and once he began to divulge his personal life, he could not stop exploiting the details and logistics of the science of his love. Perhaps he fancied the more he described what he considered a "near-idyllic" agreement of union that Delilah might grow only more passionate to render the wedding bands for him. He professed that the marriages were all initiated by deep intuition, over time each wife had realized the precision of the working unit to which she belonged, there was no need to seek out exclusive coupling to fulfill a collective destiny. Their life was full of a matriarch, of merriment; the man professed that the women found their content in the communing and sharing of ritual with each other. He laughed, a laughter that was a combination one-part devious and the other saintly, transforming his un-striking appearance to one distinct with ruddy color and he revealed with certainty; rather than reigning as ruler he more so hosted a space for a sacred temple full of sparkling women of faith.

Regardless, Delilah was not that interested. She personally believed polygamy was unstylish; and rather than feeling inspiration while making the 9 rings, she was instead frustrated, as any artist might who takes a job for money. Delilah had very rarely feigned interest in her choice of occupation, however the truth of the situation was that since the ceasing of The Dream Post-Post and moving temporarily to Italy and all the while paying for her rent in Brooklyn among other expenses, she needed the thousands of dollars she'd inevitably earn in the making of his 9 rings. She could fashion each by means of a relatively simple procedure because she'd furnished a template, and had fabricated a mold from which she easily fashioned the rings from identical skeletons.

In the midst of a cast, Ramone entered her dwelling, stepping into the small under-heated studio behind the large open barn where he and Leba slumbered. He requested (only after greeting her with his winning grin) that she take a break in her workflow and accompany him in an impromptu supper in the house. She had spent considerably less time with him than had Leba, but she appreciated the closeness that fell always immediately and easily upon them in their shared time.

She welcomed Ramone's interruption, recognizing that a pause from her crafting process was a necessary next step.

Delilah ripped off a large piece of the round of the great fresh bread Ramone had brought back to the barn-studio, and without a knife dug into the warm farm cheese. Typically she believed cheese was not actually edible, from cow, goat and anyone else, but she was in Italy and it smelled ripe and fresh, so she let go, and drank wine as well. Ramone uncorked the wine and poured it into an antique carafe. He chose to let the wine aerate in the carafe mostly for aesthetic reasons and was promptly made fun of by Delilah, who often replied to Ramone's flair and derring-do with a poker of retort. "Impossible!" Bellowed Delilah. "You engage with the world with the same mysterious etiquette of a Jane Austen character— I wonder! Do you ever wear underclothes? I mean, is it even an option for you? Or do you only don armor, is that your most naked layer?"

Ramone responded to Delilah with a hair-tussle, a gesture one applies to the head of a puppy. She felt relieved and toasted him with the meeting of their two glasses, which were filled prematurely before the wine had enough time, by Ramone's standards, to breathe.

As they shared supper, the day settled upon them; Delilah and Ramone both refilled their glass until the carafe was emptied, and then Ramone disappeared and returned with a fresh bottle, and placed in onto the stone block Delilah herself had rolled into the house from where her studio was, so that she could create an indoor eating space in the main house and simultaneously create more room in her own dwelling. The rock was made from a light-weighting substance because it was not too heavy to roll up the hill. It felt as though it was perhaps made of soapstone. We really don't know so much about types of stones, especially soapstone. (Is it actually made of soap? Can it make suds? We don't want to give you the wrong information.) Anyhow, if you are picturing the current-set house and assuming that three artists inhabiting such space would make a messy, rundown palace of ill repose, please take a gazing-off to reshape your impression. This table possessed integrity and loveliness and appeared light and in no way weighed upon the inspired charm of the barn-studio. Everything was perfect.

"Delilah" began Ramone. I have to confess— for the last while I have been quietly bothered by the memory of an odd exchange."

Delilah assumed this was the crossroad where her helpful analysis would be recruited, for she'd figured Ramone would, at some point, admittedly express his own confusion about or beg to hear her impression of his relationship with Leba Scrachnsniv, her very dear and special friend.

"What is it, Ramone? " She wanted him to continue, it was nice to hear the admission of a man's concern.

"Well, some time back I gave a ring away, I guess you could say. It did not belong to me really, but to my grandmother, and she herself never gave it directly to me. Somehow this ring ended up in my possession, as a sort of collateral, but later the ring resultantly was found by the hands of a man who radiates the appetite for diamonds."

Upon his very last sentence Delilah had the impulsive impression that Ramone Dish had lost his grandmother's ring to no one other than the Diamond Thief. She was infuriated The Diamond Thief would think to take such a personal possession from someone like Ramone, but knew from

Leba's experience that The Diamond Thief had a relentless flair for scavenging wealth from the innocent and heartfelt. She'd been spared only because she had no diamonds. She had never been attracted to their small intensity, she fancied more unwanted elements.

Delilah had instinctually forgotten to reveal to Ramone that they shared a mutual acquaintance, The Diamond Thief. She also figured he had not been given much detail regarding the unfortunate history of Leba's heart, how she had relinquished that tender muscle with obscurity to the former-mentioned character. Delilah was determined to keep this information undisclosed; she already felt bitter towards herself for divulging Leba's personal information to The Diamond Thief on the telephone from Paris.

Regardless, Ramone was somehow aware of the return of the Diamond Thief, Delilah discovered, because he continued to recall and sense the proximity of his own family heirloom. Delilah figured she would later resolve the situation by personally investigating the story. Delilah asked Ramone to describe the ring in detail, and while he spoke she sketched. Delilah was superb with newsprint and pencil; her sketches foreshadowed the skill of her work to come. Her rings were first portrayed often in giant-size upon paper, with lines of symmetry splicing their centers, and shaded areas expressing dimension. When she finished her designs, her friends would casually roll up her remaining large papers and tape them closed, parting from her with various scrolls, which they hung and framed for display. She did not mind one way or the other if they took her sketches, otherwise she used them for kindling in the winter; they were fine to watch burn.

While Delilah exclusively crafted wedding bands, she remained uncertain of marriage. She wondered how people felt earthed enough in the world to propose such bondage to another, and she marveled at the possibility. Often she thought that her atoms were in the process of severing into sub-atomic particle, placeless, lacking the charge and arrangement of totality to be considered as any form other than raw partial life. Therefore, to fathom that her own configuration would attract another's with enough magnitude to create such a sanction as Union, by her consideration, seemed over the top. Rather, she was inclined more often to entertain short affairs and twist her metal work into round wares. Delilah's designs were well regarded internationally; she was seldom without an order, a wait list and a backup wait list. Occasionally, a client would hope, and then beg, and at last demand for Delilah to fit even one precious diamond in the mix of decor fastened to the barb of a ring, but Delilah was never interested in sacrificing her vision for the unruly customer. Infrequently she would use Rubies, cut into miniscule pieces and wedged into the hot metal, while she formed a band from her wires. These pieces each glistened with individual spectacle, and they were her most expensive. The ruby rings were Leba Scrachnsniv's favorite design. Delilah was commissioned to create them approximately once every year, for they were ruthlessly expensive, close to thirtythousanddollars plus more. However, when she would set out to make one, she would alert Leba to see if she wished to come for a visit, for Leba liked to be near Delilah while she rendered these rings especially, and she would sing songs as Delilah jeweled.

Before Delilah had ventured to Bologna Ramone had never seen her at work and now, as he described his ring to her, he was impressed by how it took perfect form on her newsprint book of paper.

When she was finished she ripped the paper out and started to fold it, inching toward the fireplace...

“Don’t throw that in!” Pleaded Ramone, all of the sudden. “I would like to have it.”

He clutched the drawing from her hand as if it were the ring itself.

Delilah opened her mouth, without second thought, came out “The Diamond Thief took your ring, no?”

Ramone responded, somewhat subdued. “How is it you are keen to everything? Delilah, tell me how you know The Diamond Thief?”

It was too late to hold back the story. As she unraveled her confession, she plotted in impromptu style the best way to leave out the parts involving Leba, though she was certain Ramone was not far from figuring Leba, too, knew the Diamond Thief. Who could second-guess Ramone’s quick math; he must be adding in his head the ghostwriting references Leba’s slightly turned manners spilled, hinting rough loss.

Delilah thought Leba felt very out of sorts, even confused in Bologna and unclear as to why she’d taken leave from her work. Furthermore, she had received a threatening post from her agent; Leba had not brought in adequate fiscal revenue for the year. Leba knew that her sense of drive and passion had been fading in the last seasons. Though she’d believed being away from the states would dissolve her ennui, as it turned, once outside of the country she felt still apathetic. In general, her only sense of aggression was directed toward her passivity in whole – she kicked at her indolence, wondering to where her sense of creative urgency had fled.

Ramone assumed Leba was relishing in a change of pace, contemplating leisurely rather than with professional aim. The truth, however, was that Leba had never spent so long away from her own favorite instruments. Away from touching a piano, playing a little flute, tympani and cello, and her very most special instrument as well, which was a lonely guitar named Peodreeno.

Peodreeno was an outcome of an epic process of tutelage between a very old and famous luthier and his young apprentice son, whose skill clearly pinnacled during the constructing of her fine and robustly flavorful guitar. The luthier himself had solely finished 10 guitars during his lifetime, each a legacy. His son proceeded to build many instruments in his own career, but upheld highest sentiments for the guitar that was now in Leba's possession. Like all of his father's guitars, hers had tiny blue azurite birds on its neck playing with frets or beginning flights.

Leba had been fortunate to play this guitar for more than ten years and had gone, for the longest stretch of time, only 8 days without it. However, when she decided to come to Bologna, she had the sense that Peodreeno was not interested in suffering through the plane flight, and so she did not bring her most favorite guitar with her to Bologna. Late at night on her way to sleep she thought often of Peodreeno in a custom case, whetted by a small humidifier in Brooklyn, left lonesome at Delilah’s a week before she’d flown out from the South.

Unbeknownst to her or Delilah, Peodreeno was being played while Ramone and Delilah conversed about their mutual friend. Upon her departure for Italy, Delilah had somehow relinquished, at last minute, a house key to her once hit man Mauna loa. For both the sake of sympathy and convenience, she handed him the key to her plush apartment after he promised to take in her mail and water her plants while she dwelt overseas. He insisted he would keep her home in spectacular shape, dusting even the walls and spraying the air regularly with lavender and rose water.

On one occasion while Mauna loa dusted (an activity at which he found himself to be surprisingly detail-oriented and efficient) he spotted Leba's guitar case. It was a strong metal and brown finish. He knew that it was Leba's, Delilah's great friend, but he still wondered what it looked like inside. Though a man with no obvious affinities, Mauna loa possessed a certain esteem for guitars and had played as a young boy. Therefore, he felt obligated to at least open the case and assess the quality of the instrument inside. Once he viewed the precious build of the exceptional Peodreeno he could not resist handling the finely tailored piece, see how it sat in his hold. Undeniably, the instrument felt better in his grip than any other weapon he'd armed, and he felt irresistibly inclined to test the taught-ness of its string. He removed the humidifier (which was a special type of humidifier able to retain moisture and administer humidity to an instrument for many months without being re-saturated) and played the low E note and A together. They rang with a richness and warmth that penetrated into the floor, exciting his skin and blood for the first time he could think to remember. He let his right hand find a pattern of engaging all the strings at once together and his left hand excavated through his thick memory and found, after years passing, the shapes that made the songs he sang as a younger man; songs he could not remember if he or someone else had written.

While Peodreeno wept relieving meters an ocean away, Leba, by self-forced measures, exited the hotel where she had slept with The Diamond Thief. It was a familiar sensation to leave his company and, as in the past, her sense of loss alone was enough to know with certainty he would not follow after her. She recalled the great collection of times she had left his bed, had wandered to the tall tower on the hill a mile from his house. He'd slept deeply and, upon her return, mumbled indistinguishable words of mixed-up concern trapped in stubborn dream-tongue. Was he truly unable to stir and invoke collaborative dialogue regarding her plights from his side mid-slumber, or was it easiest for him to use the leverage of sleep as a veil to excuse himself under, to leave her alone. It was most convenient for Leba to be led away with her confused feelings in the night while the anchored diamond thief did not distract and could not abandon site, sleeping. And although she believed herself to long for his communicative curiosities, it fit explicitly her real schema to return while he still slept, so that she could escape interrogation. Thus, when they woke the next day and he wondered if she'd actually left in the middle of the night or if it'd all been a dream, she'd rested enough so her anguish was softened and his lack of response forgiven in the onset of a new day. Sleeping near to him for years turned her to a poor and light sleeper, but it catered essentially to her disorganized ventures in power-struggles and personal disempowerment.

Now Leba called for a taxi upon departure, and it shuttled her back to Ramone's barn. On her way home a page turned. It became clear; a whole life was now behind her. If there was time, and if it was linear, there was a whole time behind her. Certainly, her feelings were strong for The Diamond Thief, but his feebleness would never satisfy her passion, and she truly no longer interested in identifying herself through dangerous emotions. As the taxi carried her through the countryside just outside of Bologna, she was first listless, foreshadowing the sentiment she'd breed throughout her days in months to come. Surely she could flourish without the Diamond Thief, but a time of recoup and lackluster; of sensory confusion and a lost point of reference would inevitably nest within her heart and in the places unnamable about and within her. Then,

albeit the turning of event and the coming and going of their last exposé so strange, Leba felt sated in the taxi. It settled through her body's frontal center; warmth, like when ported as an infant asleep in an odd car-carrier, submitting to security without much critical analysis. Comfort, her rare visitor, eased itself outward onto her flesh and highlighted her frame so that even the small things she touched lit upon her encounter with their surfaces. The lever to raise and lower the window felt, rather than functioned. It felt smooth and clever. The door, when it opened into the morning upon the hillside of Ramone's, offered weight, announced her arrival in solidarity, in camaraderie.

The morning smelled freshly caught inside the long, gaunt open space of the barn-studio. Delilah's face wore an expression of calm and accomplishment, and Leba knew this to mean that she had been awake early in the dawn working. Ramone stood at the top of the stairs looking down to Leba, standing poised in the open entrance.

She hesitated before speaking. Through silence's \*mould their hearts communed; she was well aware Delilah and Ramone felt her adventure, how she'd spent her night, it was conversed between their hypothalamuses, in the first language, two-dimensionally; she might lie, but it wouldn't be fun knowing that the time of Kali Yuga was over, and Satya Yuga, the omniscient truth, was so... apparent and accessible.

"Did the night take you, Leba?" Said Ramone, playing elusively from the top of the stairs. He spoke politely but in an air of reserve, un-stirring from the top stair, looking downward at her with subtle repose. She hesitated longer than usual, which was to hesitate at all, taking off her shoes and then staring downward at them. She could not delay deliverance and contemplated her story; she hadn't planned for a variation of event. She had no obligation to share her personal experience (suddenly reality was quite malleable and categorically landed in the status quo of a tree fallen with no one there to hear, and so had it fallen?) but to keep the tally from her friends would be to alter what was seemingly factual and thus, she'd have to lie. Maybe her take on events was merely fractional in the scheme of quantum psychics and so possibly she hadn't been with the diamond thief in any consecrated sense through her last day and night. She hadn't ice-skated or climbed a strangely designed fire escape over a very tall Bolognese building and been sped away to a well-kept inn. These were just metaphors, she convinced herself, of the farfalle in her mind and the shadows of the wings of hope and longing that flapped therein. So she did not address what hovered, not with her friends. She let ride the severance between them, resulting from her unexplained absence the past evening.

"Yes." she answered, lifting her eyes to his long body looming still on the stairs, herself remaining in the doorway. To her, he looked suspended rather than standing. "Yes the night took me."

"I know you have your private world," he answered, "but I'm curious to know how you spent the night."

"Can we have breakfast first?" Leba asked. "I believe I need nourishment prior to unraveling such specifics, I think the story would be lack-luster without first being properly re-mineralized." Ramone gestured to the kitchen. "We just made pancakes with oats and rosewater, they are in the oven."

Leba walked slowly toward the kitchen and took a plate and mug from the counter top. She filled the mug with Ramone's coffee and opened the oven door to find eight round cakes

perfectly warm. Leba offered one to Ramone as Delilah walked out the back door toward her studio catching Leba's eyes as she departed with a gesture of amiability and compassion. Ramone started down the stairs and sat on the first step. Leba pushed the low table to the stairway and sat upon it cross-legged, and then took a long sip of strong brew. On most mornings Leba made a tea of raspberry leaf, oat-straw and licorice root, but this morning the coffee was palatable.

"Your coffee is good!" she offered.

She ate the little cake in silence and then she spoke, intending to relay with accuracy the detail of her experience. As she began, however, her mouth, filled with warm cake, chose to outpour a different rendition of her evening past.

"I decided to take an adventure by myself. I hit my head harder than I realized, and so I went to a spa outside the main city. It was fantastic! I had been meaning to visit this place the past few weeks... I spent the night soaking in a tub with aromatherapy. This morning as I returned I realized we have only two days before you show your work, so you can imagine I feel a bit guilty having not been here to offer any support, and so hurried back this morning hoping I haven't offended anyone with my lapse of presence."

Ramone looked at her as though she were sleeping a thousand miles from where he sat.

So she expounded, hoping to appear less far away. She still strayed from the details of her latter evening, but concocted a decent emotive philosophy as replacement. "Ramone... the moment you walked into the room in Brooklyn I was brought a sense of peace that I've never felt in any other company, an unusually settled lack of distraction and a passion to both listen and express. I recognize that I have been reluctant to dissuade you from your giving, wonderful touch because I have thought that I would regret, painfully, leading you astray. But it's selfish of me to accept your endowment when my clarity is so frayed. Though I have never been near a man more vivid and glorious, I have to stop effacing you with a tool as tender as my mouth and slighting your impeccable body with the nil provision of my hand and heart." Leba swallowed hard. The words had poured from her mouth without plan. Here, in this situation—so different from when she'd pile one empty solution on top of the other in old communications with the diamond thief—the spoken epiphany would breach an obvious change between herself and Ramone.

Ramone leaned his exquisite torso between his legs and let his arms dangle onto the floor. Then he sighed long and fully.

"Perhaps, with each other, we have moved too quickly and too eagerly. If it allows you to live more deeply, then let's turn our focus on collaborating in regards to the showing of the documentary on the piazza walls."

Leba rose from her seat and brought the remainder of their cakes to the bird feeder by the kitchen window. Ramone always relayed the necessary expression in the moment. Leba hung her head for a lengthy pause and then having nothing left to say excused her self to lie down for a few hours with plans to work on loose sketches of composition for the opening of Ramone's film after resting.

She slept, and for longer than a few hours, waking not from nor sound but from the smell of spice. Her body felt heavy to burden; wrapped inside the green robe Ramone had gifted her. While she brushed her teeth she looked into her eyes in the mirror. They looked stunned and dry,

small and shrunken, and there were dark circles underneath her lower lids. At the back of her head her hair was matted around a small opening of a wound. Her hair had been washed by The Diamond Thief and felt squeaky to the touch because he had not washed all of the soap from her locks. Briefly she allowed her senses to recall how his long, browned fingers touched her head, her face; and her whole body shook. The muscles around her medulla, that portal at the top of the spine, splayed in upwards sensation to her ears and the top of her cheek. As typical to the hours after having left the company of the Diamond Thief she carried on devoid of senses, closed and absent, she was protecting herself by being absent. This was the lazy work of the clever-does psyche which figures before its primal shutdown that what one does not know won't kill one (and thus lives not to perceive its inaccuracy). For Leba, after such numbness wore away a faint pain of longing emerged, post-operative. She had been resolute in her decision to leave his company (again for all time) but her heart had meandered behind, had clung to a site near him, and set up camp vying and dying in a vie to return. In the mirror her eyes looked like small beetles, strangers in sockets; sockets that held on to these feisty dark creatures because it was clear that creatures as dark as these would be very sensitive and alert to light. She thought of an old chinese proverb a wise woman had shared with her.... "The dark night gave me dark eyes. I am using them to seek the light." She'd often wondered what these words meant, and still felt unsure of their meaning, especially because they were contained in such aged phrase, but they took shape for her now contextually, and thus, they practically made sense. With all of her resting, she felt abandoned from her two friends downstairs, who were preparing a meal, talking quietly among themselves. She knew they had not left her, she'd only betrayed herself; thus she projected such betrayal throughout the space of the barn-studio.

Upon descending the stairs she was greeted first by Delilah who spoke evenly.

"Leba, did you wake with an appetite?"

Leba was not hungry in the least, and her expression answered her friend's question.

Delilah responded, "You spoke in your dreams for the hours you slept, would you like to know what you said?"

Leba nodded.

Delilah looked quickly to Ramone and then turned to Leba to relay what she heard her friend admit in sleep. "You said 'It's not mine! It's not mine to have!'" And then, oddly, you said something about a ring- a strange coincidence because Ramone was telling me this morning about a ring... and, of course, I've been making rings all afternoon. You spoke fervently and repetitively. Do you remember what you dreamt?

Leba swallowed. She could not believe her mouth had abandoned her so easily as soon as she'd fallen asleep and her mind had safely left the dense plane from where lying and deceit came so readily.

"No" Leba surprised herself by her concealment. She didn't have a reason for feeling contemptuous toward her friends though she felt so. But we must remember forgivingly that she had only just awakened, and she didn't know yet that she was quite hungry.

She waited for a response.

Ramone answered first. "You know that truth is relative, Leba, but surely you must remember something about why you were calling out in your sleep."

There was a definite sense of tension in the collaborative space of the barn-studio, and Leba

opted to recoil like a child. She walked toward the front door and threw on her garden boots with cobalt faux-fur lining under their plastic outer-casing and she grabbed a pencil shaped flashlight that beamed a strong line into the darkness. It was lightly drizzling outside, and the livid winter had momentarily whimpered, receding from its whirls and ferocity. Night clouds securely tented the sky. Because they could not be seen they were solely felt and noted as weighty and patient seeming, for clouds are mostly not on display in the night as they are during the day, when made obvious and staged by the sun.

Leba chose to lie on the ground and when she decided immediately fell supine, and happened upon an uneven ground. Typically, the ground outside the barn-studio was hard and dry, Leba assessed that it longed very much for a river to break it open. Tonight its wintry coldness had subsided, and the ground reached upward as though having stuck its glowing face near a fire, and by the heat it swallowed was made almost wet and warm in entropy.

Leba felt the calluses that had softened slightly on her left hand, formed from years of playing her beloved instrument. She had heard that the fingertips were the second most sensitive part of the body, but all ten on her own hands had discriminative sensation. Engaged with the average material, leather and porcelain, concrete, silver: all of these triggered little resonance upon the frigid tips of Leba's tendrils. She did, however, feel a timbre, a resolved pitch or vibration from the formation with which she made contact, but the sense of literal nerves expressing with synapses an impact of sensation to her brain was void.

Only when Leba came into contact with the phosphor bronze of her strings, the worn rosewood of her guitar's body, did she capacitate texture or luxuriate in the experience of feeling something under her fingertips. Strangely, her own devotion to practicing and playing upon the fretted wealth of her beloved instrument had clearly occupied all room for receiving impression through her fingertips. Because she had spent the past weeks in a gestalten mosey which involved less time passed with instrument in hand, her calluses had fatigued and flattened, and she noticed now, as she lay on her back with her hands discovering the dried stems of fall's passing, that these smooth, long spawns delivered a coolness through her fingertips and translated to her clavicle, where her ascending aortic artery connected her heart and her head; and in the rare quiet provided only by a winter, she felt –finally– home.

When Leba was small, most often, every person seemed lackluster. Still, she anticipated a life of great wealth and lushness, one of creative reward, but now she felt that perhaps there was another world awaiting her presence that was more especially suited for her, filled with different people who never fell victim to sleep and dullness.

Who crafted because they understood how the world needed them and how they needed the world. Who loved their art until the art itself translated like math and equation; people who fell asleep always with pencils in their hands. A world where people had torn down all track housing and lived supremely in adobe earth-vessels, who had tiled their walls in relics of pieces of their dreams. Leba knew that people were not, in fact, dull in the least– but that only when she felt off-course, or run-out, or befallen did she put a lens cap tightly upon her camera, and refuse to capture a life that had failed to initiate sufficient play between herself and itself. She wished to be possessed! To be wrought by life's non-mechanical arms and be caught, encapsulated, struggling to retain her freedom, forced to prove herself against a wild beast; she treated her

company as opponents, eager to outwit and prove her succession.

Deep in her spleen, beyond her heart and its rocking course, beyond her lungs which took everything in and turned nothing away; in her spleen she knew that she wanted a life which felt successful by her own makings— that she might collaborate effortlessly with the right people— people whose works moved her own, people like Ramone Dish. However, in the case of Ramone, presently, Leba felt beguiled. She had never allowed him to develop in her own mind; he seemed strangely inapproachable while literally he remained so wholly available. Perhaps either she was so completely lazy that rather than to grab the reigns of the opportunity to collaborate with Ramone Dish she allowed her mind to toil, meandering while he offered a chance for real collectivity; stewing in fatigue until she grew tired by her own attempts to adequately judge his company at all.

\* It is obvious we are trying to put Ramone Dish away. We are attempting to allow Leba to receive and make quick lesson from her journey to Bologna and we have walked her into the winter night, a place where true reveling ought to be readily plentiful for the average artistic mind. We have layn her down upon the ground where she experiences regaining sensation of her fingertips. She feels life; it moves through her at once, and she begins to cry.

Leba starts to cry— she cries because she has not one friend. No one has come to her side to believe in her. She cries not because she is lonely, or desires company, but she feels so utterly fatigued because she has forgotten her own work. She came to Bologna to put it aside, to give her time to a man whose vision seemed enough to entertain her own, to practice service and appreciate endeavor. Now, only hours before his show commences, she realizes that she has given him nothing at all. While he had originally been so adamant with urgency to bring her with him, her time has ultimately, at large, been self-isolating. It seems that even bringing her dear friend Delilah to Bologna has also lacked a vibrancy of color. She feels distanced from the world that we have put her in by our writing, as though she is not there at all. But she is crying now because she does not know where she is, and simultaneously, she is certain that she is everywhere. She is forgetting that she can create the story. She is forgetting that she is keen to the story's precise agenda, for she cannot see on such a precipitous night.

She remembers that there is a warehouse where she gets to play music, where she does not get tired, where the candle never burns all the way out. This warehouse is in the southland, owned by a man who was placed in a relocation service by the F.B.I. not long after he gave her the key. It is a space that no one owns now and no one remembers, it is sparsely filled and the ceilings are as high as two stories— it is grey and cold and she remembers that life sounds full in the warehouse, but it is just a moment of a memory. She has no more desire. Her desire is so rolled-over by her own shame. She is shameful because she has not done everything— she has not taken the world by a unique storm; she has been lost in the little world of automobiles, trying, just as everyone else, to be recognized for her gift. She is suddenly sick of trying. She sees that her infatuation with The Diamond Thief and even with Johnny Unicorn was immersed in illusion; that she had perceived these men to be living in full, with unprecedented desires and charge far greater than any ethical pontifications or passing neurosis threatening to set off a driven ego's trajectory. They believed they wanted, without second thought. Clearly, they wanted the day, they wanted to smell the crevices of life; they wanted to have affairs. They wanted to take, they

wanted to amend their sins with stitches of restitution, while still seeming un-possessed, with no worries about their own “wrong-doings”; they never judged, not because they had worked to successfully transcend the judging mind, but because they felt no qualm in regard to their own position in life, not to an effected extent. They were surely not vigilant to express their personal pain by construing analytical new intellectual systems of the world; plans for cleanses or evolutions, nor had they masked any of their own not-yet-worked-out character flaws behind obvious attitudes and critical presumptions, they were easy going.

Leba, clearly, was steeped in selfish pain. It had made her transparent and obvious. This is most often the case with selfishness, it is unduly recognizable, its motives in action lack grace and twist expression; brows wriggle, mouths lurch, the body opposes maneuver. This sort of Selfish Pain leaves one apparently original only because it leaves one with a quality of remaining inevitably alienated, somewhere, in relation to others, always un-warm. When all else is, at last, pushed away and a favorite record is perhaps available, a doll is there as a plaything; the selfish one can enjoy the very delicacies he hoarded, his possessions are carefully just-so placed on a pedestal with the other surviving pieces. Or then it is a throne rather than a pedestal, a place for the little jar with a bell, for auntie’s little coin purse she left you when she died, for a ribbon, a gold paper star, a letter from a hero, something unshared; a blue and living heart salivating onto the floor, running on the rug, its river caught in the sunlight.

And for Leba, thus far, by holding so hard to her possessions, there was no means for her to experience trust because she was without a way to feel her humanness, the part of herself living tenderly. If one cannot feel their humanness, one is more at risk to easefully practice, even subtly, inhumane acts. In ways, such an inkling of an inhumane practice is worse off than a larger more outright act of catastrophe. To, for example, heartlessly take the sharper pencil as your own, to instinctually clutch the more attractive bowl of soup, to hoard a favorite soap within a vanity when hosting company and then to re-hydrate its glycerin cellulose under the sink water only when one is again alone, lavishing in the private perfume of its vitality; this is far more sick and disappointing to discover in an associate than the more obvious and, at least, outwardly bared brave declarations of the tabloid tyrants and politicians, who, without much concern, are willing to risk the naked bulbs of their empty eyes, charged with synthetic pulsation, flashing without fear of revealing their heartlessness, posing with nothing supple to reel the contender; their allure is only a stone cold stature, and therefore– they must attract the like. Versus Leba, who brought to her fingertips, to her lips, to her skin, the most kind and willing lovers, friends who wanted nothing more than to share, who lived to dig two spoons into one cake, who imagined their errands run with a cohort, who were able to figure by mere observation what perfect gift would bring delight to their contemporaries while meanwhile, there she was, practicing the smallest and most disgusting inhumane acts. Sensibly, Leba harbored an animosity against those she simply loved because they could trigger her own heart's offerings –at no cost. Inside her own sense of will and self was a destiny, existing boundlessly but which was polarized by a set of gestures and characteristics, cutting off her nose and sticking her shoe in her own mouth, stopping her prose and heart mid-motion, mid-cantor. Perhaps it kept her in somewhat of a continual form. Her infinite destiny had no sense of capacity and body, but the countering limitation of her own activity maintained a gravity which elasticized her skin in a way

just so, that it recognizably clung to her bones.

The men she adored owned their zeal and seemed to abandon forethought before jumping into the flame of chance and fate; they let each smoldering flame lick their young faces into worn-hat old men. Leba had not yet confronted the idea of age, but suddenly, she could feel; it crept toward her, holding out its frail, hopeful hand. Wanting of her musculature and support, gentle age cooed, promising to hold her humanness and keep her from faltering suddenly into a physical demise off the cliff of youthfulness. She knew death would come and come quietly to her, with its humble sword, and that the noose of breathlessness would be the last visitor to kiss and lick the insides of her mouth.

The night clouds opened in a corona around the moon and revealed one star, or a satellite, piercing the blue grey fog with a small diamond cuff.

"Star", Leba declaratively wished, "if I am not serving my life to its fullest and asking the right questions and possessing the utmost awakened curiosity, rouse me now! Let me live as deeply as I have envisioned!"

She looked up through the gentle precipitation and was sure that her star blinked and twinkled. She had never remembered seeing a star twinkle. The top of her head felt as though it had exhaled and something seemed brewed into a froth of overflow and vision. Her immediate sense of a divination inspired a plan of action, it was perhaps not a response, per say, offered by the night sky, but rather part of a train of thought. She would finish her stay in Bologna and when the next weeks ended, she might stop in London, visit a special teacher she knew once from a mountain town who now resided in London, and work on the art of performance and voice with her teacher before heading into the early budding spring of the southland town, the one with the yellow hills and biological composting seeds keeping the soil sowed.

When she opened the heavy barn door Ramone and Delilah sat at the table, drawing sketches of the layout of his documentary unveiling.

"Leba," Ramone called to her "please come join us. See what we have conjured for the show to come."

Leba sat next to Ramone and inhaled his flannel and fire scent. His hair was long enough to slightly curl up in front of his ears and he sat like an engaged man, one secure with the reality of his own making, who believed that life contained an intrinsic order, who accentuated the positive and worked to merely invite the world to sit for a cup of subtle tea.

Leba reached for his hand. "Ramone, I am sorry for my faltering earlier. Personality is so odd – that it can just disappear when it has not been charged. I did not sleep much the latter nights and then... the fall on the ice... my head has been pounding. You must know that I am honored to be here."

Ramone was chewing on licorice-root and decidedly responded silently, with a look both long and effective.

After everyone had fallen asleep, Leba, still rested from her afternoon slumber, remained awake through most of the night. Her hands had called her to knead something, and her incentive was to bake fresh bread from which she would make piles of French toast in the morning.

When Leba felt like lying down again, she climbed the stairs and watched Ramone sleeping. The intensity of her stare stirred him from his sleep and, in a way that lacked the up-curling

sound of an interrogative he called her name out unto the mist of night.

"Ramone" she answered. His name filled the inside of her mouth and she spoke it in well-rounded vowels because speaking his name had become comfortable; to possess it, to be settled and call it, to casually toss it from the mouth was a familiarity.

She lay next to him on the bed. His hands found her face and then his fingers met her bottom lip.

"How does your head feel now?"

"Almost back to its interesting self, filled with so many ideas." She replied.

And then she closed her eyes next to Ramone, and saw colors reminding her of a burnt taste that was empty but puffed, like popcorn. She felt entirely flat red, the kind a crayon produces before breaking upon a slightly textured watercolor paper, having been depressed with as much mass as it could bear, and she lay next to him, listening to his breath fall into the heavy articulations of slumber, while she wrestled covers, arranged pillows, stared into the room's darkness, until at last she was taken into sleep.

While she slept, she reasoned with herself. There were, Leba validated in dreaming discourse with her self, justifications as to why she could not possibly fall in love with Ramone, one of which was exemplified by their difference of sleeping tendencies. On most mornings he rose from bed long before she. If, upon waking, Ramone felt no urge to remain close to her in the quiet of early day, then certainly he would soon find no reason to sleep in their bed through the night. She had experienced this disarming fate with the Diamond Thief and was not interested in growing painfully tender to the resting habits of another lover. Therefore, when she woke on this morning, she allowed herself relief and spread her whole body to the edges of the bed. Her body could not ignore the heaviness that had set in slow increments each day she woke, ounce by ounce inviting a humidity of an unknown dread into the furnace ornamented by her flesh and bones.

On this day, she rose, but immediately fell; her legs were asleep. When night arrived, Ramone's film would premier. Leba had now seen the work in full footage and form and was touched by the texture of his film, the authentic movement of the angles and shots he had struck. The two main characters, which he had followed into the Andes, had flown into Bologna, and were staying with some friends along the way. Ramone had invited them all to the barn-studio for breakfast, a treat substantially justifying the household's early rising. Leba, wrapped again in Robe, felt first the bump in her head, and its gradual evenness as it leveled toward the roundness of her skull, and then she stuck her hands into her pockets –and remembered! The diamond! She had avoided telling Ramone about her new possession. She decided that she would keep this diamond in a safe place for one day more, and that after his film had been successfully revealed she would alert him to the fact that she had received the diamond that, evidently, somehow belonged to him.

Downstairs, rye bread arrived from the neighbors. There were dishes filled with raspberries and jars of preserves, there were pear walnut scones with marzipan. There was sparkling kumbucha tea and fresh salad of arugula and goat cheese, from a neighboring goat farm down the way from the barn-studio. Plates of concord grapes and wine grapes spread on the counter, and on the stove root vegetables slowly roasted.

Leba walked down the stairs with deliberate slowness and across the room to Ramone, who was

humming a song Leba had heard before.

"What is in your bowl?" She inquired.

"A recipe that was my grandfathers. It was passed down to me directly from him. It's an egg specialty. A dish that is somewhere between a fratata and a cantata, or a cantina and a ballerina. Or a cantos and a canter."

Leba thought of a beautiful song written by a man she knew in Brooklyn. He had a song about going to see the Colts. She loved it because she could see the whole story. It felt sad and strong. His voice was heavy and he had strange phrasing. "Knocked at your door, at the dawn.... and with a spark in my heart dragged you from your bed... and said let me see the colts... that will run next year. Show them to a gambling man thinking of the future."

And then later "Have you been drinking? –No, nor sleeping." She loved that line. It made her imagine a scene where one feels so possessed with an awakened inventiveness and scheme for success that only the intentions conceived by dusk and promised by dawn can inspire. And that the singer had woken some loving item, or a friend, who lived by the horses that the world bets on, only wanting simply to have her share, for a moment, the fortune of her stable.

In another song he had a line about having cantered out and how he was now galloping back. Leba thought always that he meant less that he was returning at a faster pace and more that he was referring to the fact that horses in the wild moved in only two known gaits, a walk and a gallop. Cantering was a gait imposed by domestic trainers. She felt that perhaps he meant in his song that he was returning, in a feral way, to the place he left.

Leba felt that song permeate through her and she swayed with content in the morning kitchen. Ramone did not know what sparked her sway but he danced with her. She did not need to ask him if he looked forward to the evening. She was sure that he joyfully anticipated the unveiling of his passion upon the streets and public of Bologna.

Many people of the media and of the arts had come to Bologna for the opening of the evening. Ramone's work had been well discussed in various syndicates, and the New York Time's had reviewed his piece on the front of their art pages, because he had worked with an accompaniment of northeastern musicians. Tonight, Leba would open the evening, and she chose to do so in a unique way. She would sit an hour before the audience arrived, behind the movie screen lowered in front of her. Three characters dressed in dark feathered-bird costumes with wild bright beaks would deliver an instrument to her. Two would crawl on their hands and knees and the third would ride upon them, with the guitar held out evenly on its wings. They would carry the guitar behind the screen, becoming shadows. Leba would receive the guitar from them, dressed in a cloak with a long pointy crown, made longer by the projection of light upon the movie screen. She would then begin to play and sing into a microphone that was connected to a delay machine, which would make her voice long and then distorted and then backwards and then double speed. She would sing bird songs. Songs about birds in winter, all material improvised. This was an idea she offered to Ramone and he resonated, adding that her instrument should be delivered by a dark-feathered costumed collective.

Breakfast soon began upon the arrival of the two Strawberry Flower explorers from Chile, the ones featured in the film, and Delilah came up from the back house, seeming unsettled, though about what, Leba could not tell. Still, Delilah's presence exuded its gracious warmth regardless of this subtlety, and she gifted to both the Chilean Strawberry Flower explorers two beautiful

rings, spun with a burgundy stained thread of silver, and a glistening phosphor bronze, wrapped at a point in a perfect miniature sliver-white twist the shape of the rare strawberry flower. The handsome rings looked perfectly fit for both the man and women who dined with them, as Delilah's rings always looked on the hands of the wearer. The Chilean Strawberry explorers felt honored to be gifted the rings, for they had heard of her work from a flutist from Valparaiso, a city on the sea, who wore one of Delilah's rings. Ramone broke open a bottle of champagne from under a board in the floor— a secret place Leba had not known of— and popped the cork, a sound, for Leba, she experienced as dismantling. The pronunciation of the liberation of cork from bottle competed with Leba's voluminous random tendencies, and because her own expletives often matched the sound of the environment in audio-synch, she felt personally up-started into a pop, spraying. Watching Leba as a cork flew into the room was a funny micro-moment to observe. Ramone knew her tenderness to sound, and after it flew he regarded her immediately with an apologetic face to which, in response, Leba tucked her chin embarrassedly, sorry that any sensitivity of her own would spark his concern on a day meant for the celebration of his accomplishments. Still, her arms were brought suddenly up in the air at the moment of the cork's offing to her ears and she was propelled from her seat by a miniature jump.

After champagne had well complimented the joyous day, Leba and Delilah costumed themselves for the evening. Delilah accentuated her tall long frame by wearing square shoes, which tied up her legs with emerald wrapping silk and fuzzy wool. Her shoes were self-created improvisations made from Norwegian Clogs given to her by Gloria Anchorstein, and she complimented them with a mohair angora ivory dress, which wove about her in a spiral. Her light brown hair shined from kakui nut oil and she wore wide bands of stone rings on her middle and pointer finger. Thick gold shadows and green undertones highlighted her eyes and complimented the draping light grey and red-stitch wool hooded jacket only a few inches shorter than her white soft dress. In her jacket pocket she kept a secret handful of ginger and olive candies, sour and spicy, to keep her senses well stimulated in the winter air.

Ramone as well clothed himself in light grey; a long suit, thick and woolen, under which a black worn-leather fabric was tied, soft and elegant. His boots were specially made by his friend in the North West of the United States, stealth black panels with green zipper diagonals, zigzagging across the sides, shoes to be worn for a yet-unknown sport; for a fancy race. He donned a flannel hat with a red rose woven through it, a rose that Leba had plucked from a bouquet sent to the house by Gloria Anchorstein in the morning. Leba drew with black precise ink on the side of Ramone's face a bolting line, to which she added an adhesive blue glimmering teardrop at the bottom. The blue teardrop did not add a synthetic sense to Ramone's attire, though the rose woven on his flannel hat and the bolero-like knot around his clavicle could only be pulled-off solely by him alone.

Leba wore a cloak, and a high crown made by Delilah. The crown was of hard metal and felt with Velcro closing, by request, and announced the angle of Leba's face with an exceptional charge. She had a simple long silk, the color of the C-major scale piano-keys on under her cloak; and favorite boots, made by her footwear design-hero, whose endorsed her with samples of his newest designs. They were medium tall with split fronts, with laces drawing up her open shin. Collectively, the three together felt like and appeared to be the most decadent troupe of humans to walk about Bologna since the time of the Roman Church and The Emperor's handcrafted

costumes. They entered into the piazza, prepared for the evening's premier.

Perhaps we have not articulated clearly enough that this film was an artistic spectacle, an event drawing innovative artists from around the world into a space of elegance and experientialism. People sat after first stopping and gazing with eyeful appetites at the strawberry feasts set forth on the table by a local Bolognese woman who had impressed Leba with her sweetness and gift of crafting extraordinary and alchemical cake. People swept strawberry cake from a large table and awoke lost sensation upon merely encountering the first bite. Some foods dull the human senses, putting an eater to sleep soon after consumption— but this cake allocated a distinct season, a previously implacable nostalgic reverie, and impressed a holographic arching delight upon the moment-onward for the frontal lobe to wordlessly fancy. Meanwhile, it ignited the low belly with a sense of welcoming fullness, the sort of fullness which encourages the ego to healthfully take up as much space as it is wide, to be charmed against the heaviness of gravity as deep as it is long, obliterating the conniving ego by a genius counterintuitive invitation for it to take stage and presence itself.

Audience sat upon long wooden benches the way mass gathers at church, but without rigidity. After a passing of time the evening began with an introduction of Leba Scrachnsniv, endeared performer and fantastic friend of the producer and creator of the film to come. Tea-lights bordered the wall behind the screen where Leba, still and tall behind it with daggers from her crown jutting out in infinite arrows, effectually elongated by the projector, perched in shadow—witnessed by the audience. Glass lanterns sprayed lines of orange and terracotta colors across the screen and filmed scenes emanated on the occasion, sending passing tropical birds over Leba's dauntingly graceful shadow. Feathered puppet creatures carried forth an instrument to Leba. It was not her dear Peodreeno, beloved guitar being strummed so often in the states by Mauna loa, but another finely built piece, which was made by a famous luthier with the last name of Clause/Clouds. All of this luthier's pieces resembled the sky, and for this reason she (the luthier) was famously known as Clouds rather than Clause, her family name, by anyone who considered themselves an instrument historic. This guitar was arched in a cumulous shape, with soft rounded ridges and a wash-stain cutaway. The pick-guard was an ivory luminescent white (the color of a silk slip under a night cloak) and the fret board was showered with opalescence and pearl.

Leba lifted the guitar from the wing of the costumed crew, dressed in collective as one great black and silver bird, who delivered the guitar to her open arms, and she sat it on her lap. She began to play in an open tuning of c major, easy and vital, slow and rich. She sang a song in French that her mother had taught her. "Tout le monde pourrait apprendre d'un petit écureuil", or "All the world could learn from a little squirrel". It was a nursery rhyme, and she had thought of it as it fell out of her mouth. The words felt beautiful to sing and she sang with love and gratitude to be a part of Ramone's event, she felt as though she truly knew what it was to support the vision of another. A wonderful softness fell over her suddenly and it grew as the night expanded and drove deeper into the hours of darkness.

After Leba performed, Ramone came to the front of the screen, to thank people for coming. He was eloquent and spoke very little of the content they were soon to view. Leba appreciated his delivery and sat to the side admiring the execution of his expression. Ramone stood in command of the space; she felt so often that she appeared as a small child when she spoke to an audience.

Somehow, her interaction with the public had been forever made to feel, for her, as though she were the innocent child, inviting them with wide eyes to delve into her work, or thanking them with a childish grin for listening to her pieces. Recently, she had recognized how much of an unnecessary facade her childishness truly had become. Day by day she shed her seeming-innocence and became the experienced woman she had grown to be, a woman well versed and worn with distinction.

Ramone's film was more innovative than most people could have expected, and clearly captivating; Ramone had executed its unveiling with precision. The film opened with a patient breath and gyrated imagery until the viewer was undeniably caught in a joyful plethora of symbol and color. The film of Chilean Strawberry Flowers reflected the simple epiphany— that the closest humans feel to Home is to feel without disconnection to natural shape and structure; circle, triangle, star. Ramone had captured the blossoming of a most rare flower and had edited his film using a delay module mimicking the space between raindrops, allowing the audience to virtually feel the vibration of life through each white petal of the Framboise Fleur. No one knew the details of the intricate story behind the visual context revealed within the Ramone's film; and no one needed details. The essence of its content was delivered more effectively than Ramone had even thought possible in conjuring the initial work of piecing each square of film onto a reel and organizing his footage.

Every town contains enough historic evidence to inform The Traveler of the materials involved in its erecting, but the traveler is seldom able to exchange the return, to expose himself to the community long enough to be placed through orientation. The traveler, so it could be, is most settled to be without association in the world. That he, in never defining himself through the regularity of a daily rhythm, might be free from the bounds of life, which begins, unfolds and then ends. The travelers, like Leba, like The Diamond Thief, were fragmented souls— who remembered their story in pieces that were partial to the telling of the reveling imagination. In years, it would matter less if an event actually had taken place, but more important to the traveler to still see it with a clear memory. Life was kept by cerebral photography: a table, Prague, the sunlight with an olive stain to the wood. A beautifully fattened waitress breaking from conversation with her table; bites her lip, stares off, forehead at the sky's light.

A day where snow looked blue, over trees and lost mines covered by drifts of hardened felled snow. Made into stimulating architecture by icicle's decor....

Coffee, brewed up the hill, served by a man who was missing important teeth but whose smile fought for freedom...

What happened to the traveler when he attempted to settle? What came over the charged mind and soul in the days following the first exposure, a dull-ness, a used-to-ness; severance from adventure and possibility? Or worse, an infestation of infringements and callers, responsibilities unavoidable for the threat that one's disservice to community could still amount to repercussions energetically par with the act of being hung publicly. Or more worse, affairs that would never surmount living entirely in one town because of the threat of repetitiously reuniting with your one-time countess, encountering each other at every corner, unresolved and fumblingly uncomfortable, unable to dissect a finished engagement with the intellect, to wrap the mind around what the cosmic body of law has deemed irreconcilable. Stagnant crushing which can

never crumble or live later in a fictitious exaggeration of perfection... All of these potential ill positions were fated for the traveler who decided to cease moving, to let their limbs fall asleep and their joints to stiffen.

Was it possible that the critical mind bred in a way similar to mold and that the head was clear and open, able to see the light and feel fresh in time for a few days of idle wandering, but on that fourth day, when showing up at the same restaurant or local cafe for the local news; the world begins to blow your cover. On that fourth day, people could recognize you, they wondered, they felt, they sensed your position; that you, the traveler, are in fact, a detective. That you have been hired by your own definitive service to collect information later determined as affective or useless. In days, could people begin to see the longing, the greed and hunger? That the traveler— one like Leba Scrachnsniv— is wandering because she is greedy, because she is empty and looking for something to come and fulfill her destiny with a fullness and order, a new order— one which never expires nor grows musty? Because she could not solve the disorder of her own mind, to find the impetus that will help her begin, unfold and end. Could the community see that Leba Scrachnsniv was attempting to outrun Mold, a catastrophic heaviness that plagued towns and cities, which constituted rituals of burning whole settlements and abandoning structures for good?

The premier had ended and a friend came to escort their small crew from the piazza in a long, cherry red autobus— a compact van with rounded windows. Leba took the last seat in the back and everyone else piled in after her. They headed down the narrow streets toward a bistro where they were promised a full, fantastic meal from a restaurant owner who had seen the film.

Ramone did not need to ask Leba if she enjoyed his work.

The question, it seemed, did not come to his mind. And because he was so selflessly involved with art she rarely felt that he looked to be complimented for his efforts. Tonight, however, she was overwhelmed by the beauty his endeavors had lent to the atmosphere, to the hearts and minds of the people who had shared in the event. Leba gently took Ramone's chin, which was turned straight ahead, and pivoted his gaze to her own. "What you created is joyous and profound. I've seen nothing like it before and it is so free."

Ramone's eyes smiled "What do you mean by free?" he inquired.

"I have been near to you enough to witness how your expression comes not from complaint, nor from a stance whereof there is a lacking. You have a notion, seemingly random, emerging on its own, as though it overflows from a pillar within you. You are perhaps not the channel at all, but the chariot whose leathery ends of conduction channel something electrically: and you let your whole being be led by it, precisely and substantially following after the avant-garde. And then when you have the sense you are onto something, you merely take one step toward the strange and newly acquainted idea, and then another; and all the while you demonstrate innate trust for the process. I've never sensed you are ungrateful or critical when considering your own accomplishments or another's, or that you register your accomplishments as such. You seem to be unlimited and without a need for recognition, you do not appear to personalize your art at all. I am very mystified by you, Ramone Dish. I struggle to not undervalue you as I can hardly capacitate the seeming ease in which life flows through you, as it was impressed upon me somehow that there can be no picture if it is not first a puzzler which must be configured by its subject first before one's life possesses dimension.

"Do you not think, then, that I am human enough for you, Leba?" He asked.

He never seemed to pose a question that came out wobbling or insecure, and this question now, as well, was lit by curiousness within his eyes, which were, by their own, torches of sincerity. Leba had paused, caught in the smallest gasp of feeling, while summoning words. "If I step only one inch more toward you I will die the thousand deaths, the deaths the woman has died again and again struggling to justify and know her own art and for why she makes it. How her art can seem rather much like labor, cramping and bloating and breaking, all for the birthing of her new insight, insight which secures nothing but perpetuates more of itself, more fertile ground for furthering insights. Thus, what is her commodity? What does she make by mystery; I suppose I am asking myself— 'what is the right channel for my craft?' Then I ought to take full responsibility for my perspectives, reel them in and recognize their token rather than let them out to sea, where they either shoot off like primeval marked arrows or else come awash as sandcastle-like formulations... I think I am coming from a different sense of emptiness than a buddha's sort; comprised of dormancy, under-esteemed identity, neurasthenic limbs. I do not know consistently why I am drawn to give voice to 'the lacking', firing blame and divisiveness to hold to its proof. It is the argument I most go to within myself, how after all of this, the woman's volumes of musical work, her outpour of vision has (in the past) been largely associated with her gender and accomplishments by this consideration. If I sing in any recognizable language or if the utterances match the sound of a certain feel or tone, I am bound by the at-large interpretation, that I am singing either of my own love lost or in a time-feel of some sort of angst-y sweat about politics and feminism, just by my attempt to growl from my lowest range. It conjures only old hat, old palate; how God dialogues to some Adam, but never to Adam's lady. The man to god, but the woman: never speaks to god directly, but appears in pronounced titles as the '...And-Wife'. When, through all time, a woman has voiced God's songs; with no middling of God through an Adam; I have direct access— this is still an unimaginable new idea for most who read scripture through their every judgment. Who does that woman think she is? The question is posed— and the answer, of who she is, has not addressed her wholeness, but only satisfies in the dense language of her medium, her interpreter, an Adam saying: 'God wants this, And-Wife, god wants that, And-Wife.' Why has she been robbed of her own orientation, why has her intimate conversing with God gone un-reported? Yet, by the time these ideas are brought forth in my writing and music they will be passed; a new time has come, and for it I have written letter after letter to God telling of the weather: of what emotes and overflows. So that when I complete my small symphonies, the oppressions have lifted and more room has been made in humanity's bed for wild wolves and the restitution of seed. In this way my work is immediately outdated as soon as it has been capsized and expressed, for I gesture in creation only with the nature of overturning social tides, in emmenagoues for their coming: as said, I create with the weather.

I wonder, Ramone, are you concerned with the presence of your own ego? Has your ego a plight, a confusion or obstacle, a mix of feeling both certain and driven and then asleep at the wheel? I feel so responsible, Ramone, and weighted by urgency to find myself useful and joyously useful. I have so much desire, and then when it flees, when I feel empty, I am miserable wondering to where my desire fled... And for you, your work seems like an offspring of your joy. It is direct and oriented. There is a man's merriment within you, while I am entirely too heady

with grandiose taste, yet by this superb taste I recognized you and your shape. Still, I have made struggle by contrasting, fancying how much more lovely a thing you are than I, even after the smoothing over, the years of fine schooling and self-discipline and graceful conditioning of my own wildly bristled self. I fear that I might be jealous of you. Possibly I was mistaken each time I've loved a man, I've only been longing to possess what he possesses, that I could trap him by commitment and then suddenly arrive into his caliber by plunder. ...Here, I set out to compliment you and, true to nature, have stumbled farther into making obvious the ugly nucleus of my shadow, so that you might hear the terrible cry of the secret architecture inherent to her core. Ramone, I could have been so much more if I had a greater childhood immunity to televised programming, from it I swallowed such a large virus of apathy: or maybe it was before, maybe long before; I suckled off a noxious hose. I must now dedicate myself to clearing this anesthetizing permutation from my T1."

Ramone drew back in an obvious pause for quick reflection and then, with diplomacy, fired.

"Leba, I don't think you have yet found the song of your heart. Everything you just told me, how you make art, what you feel, from where your work comes... it sounds rehearsed, like armament: all of your mind and head. In the waking of the whole earth within you, in the clearing of your passageways, in the return of the sunlight and honoring of the moon, in the restitution of under-story jungle therein, you might find that you speak one day from an unrehearsed wilderness, you might find that the language you use comes from the great plains of your topography. I challenge you to believe that the war between the woman and man is over, to start there: It was a bad dream, a misinterpretation; from which we have woken. Love has been somewhere in all the missiles ever fired, it's time to let the missiles go and vaporize into love."

The red autobus started and began down the street toward the restaurant where they were to celebrate with banquet. Leba turned to look out the window as the rain began to lightly come. Her thoughts were with the rain, she was flooded with feeling for its alliance with the sky. The downpour had been held back during the premier and was just now, explicitly, creating coverage for Leba, as she needed to be tented. The weather was all for her, she was its queen. She caught her mind entertaining levitation, the image of herself as anime, with a castle in the sky. Ramone's words struck with accuracy, and it silenced her to consider what her heart did feel. It did feel!

The autobus sweated handsomely in the rain, which had eased from downpour into shower, and upon turning a few corners they parked outside the intimate bar and eatery and emptied out from the vehicle and into the corridor of the building, were greeted with warm hospitality and seated. Fine carafes of wine were brought to their table and a toast was begun for the evening's exposé. Conversation unfolded, mild in temper; the day and night had been already long. They shared platefuls of fresh tomato and oregano, olive oil and mineral-rich salts, grainy braided breads and wine; Leba unfurled her coat and was sunk comfortably into her seat when the restaurant owner came to the table and put his hand on her shoulder.

"There is a call for Ms."

Leba always expected calls at restaurants in countries far from her own. It was part of her disposition. It was part of the job, being the sort of secret agent she was. Each time she sat anywhere, to insure successful operation; if she hadn't prefabricated one prior to her arrival, she

immediately developed the most ideal escape route. She experienced discord only when failing to take this first step. Sometimes her escape at a restaurant would include ducking under the dining table and wiggling belly-down on the floor and then tiptoeing, descending stairs and booking it through the kitchen out into the back ally.

Now, she dropped her napkin on her chair and excused herself from the table. She followed the owner to his office where he left her to use the brown phone placed facing down upon the office desk.

Notably only to herself, she went for the phone with her right hand, almost thinking to take a napkin to it for print-protection, but was too quick to be thorough in forethought, and so grabbed it prematurely; speaking into the receiver: "Yes?"

The connection was silenced for a moment and then a very familiar crackling voice that sounded thousands of miles away came over the line.

"Leba..."

It was the diamond thief.

Leba was little surprised.

"How did you know I was here?" She asked.

"I had someone follow you."

Leba was offended.

"Were you too busy to follow me yourself?" She replied.

"It wasn't safe. You'd have known if I'd followed you, we have an instinct for each other. You could smell me in an urban sprawl even if I was dry-cleaned and starched."

The phone was crackling, he was prefacing— and the crackle suggested a fragile connection.

Leba wanted to beg him to hurry his point, only so that she would not miss the next detail of her operative, but she held on to her demure theatric, it worked better in this back room with the brown phone.

He continued, his connection still sounding distant (as he always did on any phone, however close).

"I am positive, anyway, that on some cognizant level you possessed an awareness of my attention. Right as it began to rain— couldn't you feel my presence?"

Leba thought. "I believe I was thinking in its onset about how unavailable my heart is, and where I am, anyhow, to find it."

She remembered how easily her heart felt the employment of tenderness in his presence, un-difficult to coax forward from the back of her lung, it coaxed forward now, idling only to hear his voice, to register his signs as vital.

"I'm outside" He said. "I have to talk to you for at least 10 minutes. I want to tell you a story; it's an important story."

Leba thought for a minute.

"Okay."

She said. "I'll be there soon."

She hung up the phone and found a tissue, she felt partial about tissues— as she did not like to see trees wasted causally for a wafting tear or sneeze, but she felt it useful in this case to wipe the

cradle of the phone and the receiver itself clean of her prints. If she was really a spy, she could not be bothered with impeding evidence. She walked upstairs and came to the edge of the table where Ramone's friend with the red autobus sat. She kneeled down next to him and spoke low. "There's a small event I have to attend.... I should be able to accomplish resolving this interruption to our dinner by sitting in your red autobus for a moment and discussing certain affairs with a person who needs to converse with me at this specific time. Is it possible that I can borrow your keys and use your red autobus as an impromptu meeting spot?" She asked Ramone's friend.

He insisted that she make herself entirely comfortable in his vehicle and handed her the keys. She excused herself from the fine friends at the table and left through the front door, departing in the fashion of An Unusually Simple Escape.

Outside, avoiding the mild rain under a neighboring awning and mostly hidden from view, stood the Diamond Thief. He looked lanky and a bit worn, but more earthed than Leba remembered him last seeming.

She whistled to him and dangled the keys to the red autobus that was parked directly in front of her, choosing to smile the sort of smile that exudes not genuine kindness, but instead a dangerous power. It's not clear if she pulled the smile off, per say, but rather than give mind to dote on it she unlocked the sliding door and stepped inside, taking the long sideways seat, across from the sliding door's rounded windows, as an agent sometimes needs all available views of the night outside if they are to succeed on their mission. The Diamond Thief walked quickly through the rain and climbed inside after her. He turned around and slid the door shut as she reached for a red wax Florentine candle and lit it with a pack of matches from inside her cape. He knelt in front of the bench seat where she sat, his clothes were damp but his face glowed as does soil glow from rain. His long fingers, precipitously white, climbed out from him along with bromeliad hands, fellable fruit that landed onto the tops of her shoes. But all the while, and especially by the parody of candlelight, he appeared much like a field dog; raising his chin and gazing up to her with unexpressed lips, fallen and soft. Perception flickers as frequently as a candle flame, and she braved seeing beyond the metaphor of appearances.

To see a soul is to sit deeply within one's self, while tied to a kite, outstanding the most ferocious wind that serves purposefully, initiating entrance to those who can endure, who are only then granted entry into the sky-palace of pure self.

Leba did not know what was so urgent within The Diamond Thief that demanded her immediacy, but she knew him well enough to sense he possessed an unusual weight, and she placed her elegant hand upon his head. She felt, with a distinct sensation not dissimilar from a neuropathy of the limbs, that the situation surmounting between them now was perhaps a never-before-experienced rarity of circumstance. Possibly they were not repeating a dynamic; perchance something was unique and not configured. A-symptomatic to their typical puppetry, he appeared deflated, while she emanated like a queen. Her fingers were ringed with ruby and gold, and an emerald piece centered upon a spiral of bronze lain upon a silver band. Ramone had given her

this ring before she ventured to Italy, and as she brought her hand slowly down the bridge of the diamond thief's nose, tracing a raindrop, and then back onto her own lap, the jewel distinctly caught his breath.

He exhaled in fragments, like a child settling after a scare.

Each cell of her was captured in devotion to the man before her. Regardless of the many different ways she seemed to run from him or to curse his name to the stars or to swear to herself that he was in no way fit for her lifestyle or that he did not deserve the caliber of women that she was, she remained radically opened by simply the first catch of his presence, his slightest breath. In their shared space she was, at once, surrendered and engaged, changed into a living being versus existing as something separated from life by a pane of glass or sheet of bubble snap; she was no longer a spectator. Her very deepest hope as she watched over him was that he would never stop breathing, and that his life would continue to emit the unknowing generosity that played Leba's heart, that employed it; and that they would never move away from the closeness they shared now to one another.

She spoke first.

"What is it?"

He looked at her and broke. Tears formed in the corner of his eyes and the autobus warmed in degrees. She resisted her first impulse and fought the instant influx of sympathies that flooded her; she wanted to reach out to him and hold him— she was deeply empathetic— but her mind struggled to retain its conservative effort, remembered the past; recalled reason and safety and all ramifications of every experience when she had opened herself to him. However, her mind was soon covered by a mudslide of sensation upon seeing his eyes well with tears and she moved her arms and her legs closer in to him, until the heat of her body made contact with his, her lips parted softly, she asked.

"What do you want to share?"

"Leba..." he started. "I came to you the other day to tell you this, but the time did not seem right. I need you to listen. Are you in a space to hear?"

She gave a long slow nod in patient reception.

".... I have an immeasurable amount of time."

He raised his eyebrows, which, when he did, always appeared like lightning bolts. It was a gesture he used to exaggerate doubt, but affectedly. Because he knew he had her; the trust between them was not contestant to obliteration. (Right here he looks like your love; she has turned into the side of you that tastes like moon-cake silhouettes.) The Diamond Thief began.

"There was a woman once who was so much like you, truly, I've never seen a more similar look in any other's eye but your own, and your lives and passions... there is just something plainly of you which, from the time we met, made me aware of how much like this woman you seem, but I never told you... because the story was so strange, and it complicated my life, and perhaps I wasn't ready to deal with it.... in fact it haunted me. "

Leba felt her heart turn over with sinking weight; it flipped into a spade, the kind in a card deck. To see one's heart take the shape of spade lands secondarily in category of most-fascinating only to the previewing of the same heart-newly-taken-up-as-spade nest toughly inside a plain white tee shirt sleeve, rolled once or twice wherein the formative slickster years packs of tobacco

would flaunt, now flair non-enterable spades, cooler than cool. She believed she had accepted that the diamond thief could possibly feel comparable love for another, yet to hear him begin his confession nearly brought tears to her eyes, and while tears did not come readily for her at current, their sting distinctly still swam well enough to take the opportunity to ensue.

He then recognized that his preface had sounded much like a romantic confession, so he continued to explain.

"She lived two generations before us. I'm going to call her V-----, I'm giving her a name only because her story becomes complicated, and I don't want to confuse us as I speak it, so I will name each following character. However, know that truly the people I speak of are unnamed."

"Okay," agreed Leba.

So continued the diamond thief.

"She was a singer who was very dedicated to her art. Yes, she lived years ago, but I saw photographs of V----- before I knew who she was, when I was a little boy. You resemble her in much detail. As I said, she had your eyes, and your bone structure. She was born without anything, and more or less fatherless. V-----'s mother, who had little money, was quick to financially free her child. So, her career began when she was still very young, as a "showgirl" of sorts, but her singing was so outstanding she eventually won the attention of the people in the entertainment industry. She lived in France and from there, she was commissioned to perform and record in studios all around the world. All the while, there were some men in her life who were well established and interested in her personal company. Though she'd rather have kept to herself she felt indebted to a certain few, and particularly to one for her professional success and independence. This man, P-----, had enabled her career, and had become very infatuated with V-----, and he used the leverage of his position to force their relationship. Apparently, he did truly love V----- deeply, though his feelings were ultimately unrequited.

"The two, however, carried on for quite some time, and when the woman became pregnant, assumedly with his child, P----- pleaded with V----- to marry him, but she avoided answering his request. She was very busy recording music during her pregnancy and by the time she was in labor, it was clear that she had no intentions of marrying P-----.

"Even though V recognized in him a quality of goodness, and had submitted herself to him in ways, she couldn't force herself to become P-----'s wife because her heart truly belonged to another man, A-----, A----- who she had loved all along; A----- who she'd known and adored since her childhood, with whom she shared an explicit connection. V----- herself questioned the identity of her child, because at the time of her pregnancy she was involved with both P----- and A-----. She'd held her heart's secret for many seasons, throughout her limelight and during her public relationship with the P-----, to whom she felt socially responsible, as he was her affluent enabler and had powered her career. Seemingly, she endured much grief attempting to make arrangements to be with A-----, who was also a musician, and who she most truly loved. V----- agonized from having to keep the relationship with A----- a secret while she determined how to untwine herself from

P----- and keep her career from ruin. P-----, meanwhile, had assumed unquestionably that he was the father of her child. Who knows why it became so complicated... from the outside, now, it seems as though V----- could have simply chosen to independently give voice to her truth, but

maybe there were risks that were too high and dangerous, perhaps their were lives at stake... Probably there were lives at stake, because in these times gangsters and jazz musicians were very much rubbing elbows, between running drugs and running clubs and record deals....

“V----- figured she would have the space to sort out the specifics of her personal entanglements when her professional life slowed down, but during her child’s first year of life her schedule became only increasingly more filled, with barely adequate time to be a mother. She hired a nanny to take care of her daughter while she continued to sing and make music ferociously.

“Meanwhile, A----- was very close with a well known retired ring maker, a craftsman who had become famous for two very famous pieces. The ring maker knew the extraordinary depth and complexity of A-----’s love for V-----, and this prompted him to interrupt his long-had retirement. With great care, he crafted. The ring he created, with its unyielding prowess, was offered as a proposal to V----- by A----- and, effectually, V----- immediately accepted. A----- and V----- figured that they would iron out the details of their engagement in the days to follow, faithful their love was destined for consecration by its potency, and that their conceivable life would, without choice, organize itself supremely around this mutual dedication. Finally, after years of struggling to align their paths, A---- and V---- were in whole agreement in their togetherness, and they felt ecstatic! However, despite the surely opportune sensuality blooming in gales between them, V----- forced herself to leave

A-----’s side the very same night of his proposal to travel overseas for necessary performances, and when she left they were to be separated for a long time. Certainly, I imagine V----- was sorrowful for the circumstance, crooning hopelessly on over the itinerant conditions, but then, after the last lifting of a hat-box and turning of a door handle, her heady professionalism wiped the mournful expression from her face at once and quickly dressed the blankness of that mug, drawing over deleted emotions– brows, an even set of full lips, and lush lashes set forth in mission. With her tender woman safely kept at bay, kept somewhere with a baby, a bonnet, a man and a promise, off V----- trudged, independent but for nameless entourage, forward, on standby and personified for the world’s audience. She left her child in the care of both her hired nanny and P-----, who still thought himself the father of her child. Again, she irresponsibly assumed that she would find the time later to properly sort out the logistics of her personal life. V-----’s career had taken precedent, a juggling act quite unusual for that time of history, when few women had such dominant and fast-paced careers. The truth is V----- probably loved her work and felt more inclined and in control of her engagement to it than she would ever feel for a man or her child, but she had no vocabulary then to articulate such a perceivably morbid ethic– it would have certainly been considered heartless or wicked, I’m sure, for a woman to feel more resonant with life on stage than the domestic day-ins and outs. But she truly did not care to sew and mend, warm a bottle, be a hostess; she’d rather feel the momentum of a band behind her, live out of a trunk of dresses, get lost in a sonorous repetition of initial consonants, and then sleep alone, spread wide in an expensive bed, in a city she marked by its fine theaters and well-built balconies.

“At home, hardly a soul knew V----- was engaged to A-----, few knew the two were intimate at all.... And A-----, poor man, he had not been informed in the slightest that her child was, in actuality, theirs together. He believed still, when she left for her performances on the very night they were engaged, that her child was the offspring of an uncomfortable affair between his

beloved and a manipulative, wealthy man in the music business, the coercive details of which his lover had kept from him, to spare his involvement and pain.”

\* \* \*

The Diamond Thief stopped for a moment, parched, explaining to her that he had not spoken at such length in a very long time. Leba had never heard him tell a story as long as this one he shared with her now and she investigated the red autobus for something liquid, finding only an unopened bottle of red wine in the attractive back pouch behind the driver's seat. Thoughtfully, in the well-fashioned pouch there was also a corkscrew, and so she opened the bottle and offered it to him. He insisted she drink first, and after her sip, he swigged from the narrow mouth and then handed it again to her. She took the bottle by gibbous smile, fingers clutching glass; the bottle's temperature had shifted to his. The wine had turned in taste: dirt and gold and amber, he catalyzed; nothing could be unchanged.

Leba was certain a trap door had unhinged in her low ribs, under which mounting vaults were set out for teams of rigid high jumpers to flip over with torque limbs. All the listlessly long and low tones nested in the core of her body rustled, she exhaled a low sigh. Beyond the flavor of dusty white flowers and navy blue cotton, the wine recouped, and tasted, at last, like wine: like the rain outside, local, like the earth under the street.

After the bottle ventured a few times to each, spurring an unusually fast intoxication, The Diamond Thief continued his strange story cast with placebo-names, about which Leba, surprised at her self and proud both for it, still possessed unfeigned interest.

"So... V----- arrived to the states, began her touring and suffered a terrible accident. A train, improperly timed, derailed meeting another head-on. She had sat in a reserved section at the front, and was among only a handful of casualties. It was an ironic fate, because in her very last interview she had relayed her love for traveling by means of locomotion; one of the few facts she knew about her own father was that he worked on trains.

"A----- found out about her fatality first through a radio broadcast... no one had thought to call him initially because, as said, few knew how immediately close she was to him. But P----- (who, recall, was thought to be the father of her child) had V-----'s body brought back to Europe for identification and to arrange for a funeral. When P---- he saw her, dead and staunch, she was wearing a ring he did not recognize; clearly an engagement ring. He was mortified that the mother of his child had accepted a proposal from another man and so he confiscated the ring and chose to leave the matter unspoken. In time, A---- confronted him, admitting that he was V-----'s fiancé, and that the singer they both dearly loved had accepted his proposal, and how V-----'s heart and his own had long been deeply entwined.

"A----- figured that perhaps P----- had found her engagement ring while viewing her corpse and taken it. V-----'s funeral was open-casket, during which A----- saw that her still and long fingers were ring-less. A----- asked P----- for the ring; wishing that it be returned to him, not only for personal sentiment, but because the ring was the creation of his masterful friend, and he knew that it would be very important in the history of jewelry and of great value to any connoisseur of diamonds. Yet it became impossible for him to regain possession of the ring he had given his beloved, and in the same course of time A-----'s very good friend, the ring maker, passed away in his sleep. Furthermore, P-----, who dominated so much of the music business in

both the city and country at that time, went to great lengths to make it increasingly difficult for A----- to find adequate work. P---- spread vicious and untrue rumors about A-----, which, coupled with A's frailty after the loss of V----- led A---- into a life of despair. Years later, only after moving out of the country, A----- recovered enough heart to begin life anew. Eventually, A----- married another woman, and together they had their own child... That child was my mother. So you see, A-----, the one who lost his love.... was my Grandfather, this is his story." He paused again and asked Leba if she were following him. He knew that her mind tended to wander when overloaded with information, but he could see, when he raised his eyes to her face, that she had stayed with him.

She was nodding her head slightly and biting her lip gently, looking off, her view fixed just under his right earlobe— she was sorting out the story; figuring the pieces and how they now related to The Diamond thief, who had suddenly appeared at the end of it, tying the story personally to his own lineage.

"So," Leba reviewed. "The singer, V-----, she was not your grandmother, but another woman who married your grandfather later (let's call her R-----, why not?) was, and then the child they had together was your mother."

"Yes." He confirmed, impressed that she had digested his lengthy expression.

"The ring..." he further spoke, "the engagement ring of V----- to my grandfather.... is the ring that I gave to you the other day to return to Ramone Dish."

Leba reflected for a moment.

"How did you have the ring and why is it now Ramone's?" Leba's heart jumped for a moment, as she suddenly had no memory of where she had left the ring the Diamond thief had handed her. She'd known, inherently, that the ring had a story, a prowess, but it was the sort of un-thought understanding better kept, in the manner of her destiny, below the surface of being recognized, left dormant and subliminal. To overtly acknowledge that the value of something so delicate was in one's own possession would impose a sense of responsibility or an added theatric to her life; she had agreed only to be the silent medium, to deliver the ring to Ramone at the right time, to ask no questions and be spared details.

He explained more.

"Well, the ring is not Ramone's to have, and this is why, in part, I've called upon you and interrupted your dinner. I took the ring from Ramone, though it was never exactly his. See, V----- the first love of my Grandfather, (who I've called A-----) was Ramone's grandmother. And the child V----- left behind was truly theirs together, and grew up to become Ramone's mother. Ramone found this ring when the man he thought to be his grandfather (P-----) passed away and Ramone's mother explained to him what she thought to be true: the ring had belonged to his grandmother (V-----) who passed away; a casualty of a train wreck. "In his lifetime, my Grandfather was known to fall into fits, and, especially in his later years, seemed mostly bitter and sad. Because of his fowl spirit, I kept a good distance from him as a boy. Months before he died, he opened suddenly, and revealed to me this story I tell now. "He discovered late in his life that Ramone was his own grandson; for V----- had confided to one person, to her cousin, and only to her. Her faithful cousin had sworn herself to secrecy, and

she had kept the vow for decades. In New York City she ran into my grandfather, on a whim, unexpectedly. Figuring that he had lived to know the truth, she made a subtle, suggestive remark, which slowly unfurled into a lengthy conversation. You can imagine how devastating it was for my grandfather to fathom so late in his own life that he, thirty years earlier, had a child with the one woman he loved most truly. He wrestled with his own ethic, unsure of what to do. A-----, My grandfather, was not a very confrontational man, and considering that his daughter, who was now in her thirties, had been raised as the child of P-----, a man who had brought him so much despair, he felt unable to pursue an investigation or an attempt to come forward with his discovery. He spent the last fifteen years of his life intrigued with a family to whom he was so closely related, but would never personally know. When he told me his story, he told me about Ramone Dish, who is, by blood, my cousin; he even had a little picture of Ramone somehow, and he showed it to me.

“It wasn’t much later that my grandfather passed away, but years on, when, by fate, I was traveling through the Sahara, I met Ramone Dish and recognized him immediately. We became instant friends, though I never had the precise sense to share with him this story. We remained in touch with each other through brief correspondence, and he offered me a place to stay when I was, years ago, in Bologna. He was away most of the time while I was there, aside for a few nights. One night, when we had spent the evening over a few bottles of wine and a great feast, he told me the theatric tale of his own Grandmother (V-----) and Grandfather (P-----), a mythical story of a deep, unbreakable love, that was so sadly fated. He mentioned, then, that he had been left in possession of an exquisite ring given to his Grandmother. He was under the impression that his Grandfather (P-----) had bestowed the ring to his love before she was killed.

“The story Ramone shared with me was, in fact, correct, but Ramone did not and still does not know he had never met his actual Grandfather, A-----, who was my grandfather as well, and who had been the real fiancé of his Grandmother. Thus, Ramone is ignorant to the reality of our connection.

“He left me the next day at his house, in easy access to opening the special box he spoke of the very night before, and upon seeing the ring there myself, and being so privy to diamonds, I examined it closely. I looked on the inside of the band and there it was, the initials of the first names of my own Grandfather and Ramone's Grandmother. The letters were worn so that perhaps Ramone had never noticed them himself– but I knew immediately it was the ring whose image flooded my Grandfather's memory, a ring that altered his destiny, and the destiny of his family's.

“I left Ramone's house shortly thereafter with the jewel in my possession. It seemed at that time to be my calling, I worked so intimately in the trade of this particular gem, and I was overwhelmed by my connection to the ring. I knew I had to take it with me when I saw it.”  
Leba interrupted.

“I apologize, I am still reveling in slight over the idea of yourself and Ramone Dish being related. I don’t mean to be bias, but I’m am partial to this piece; that I, in exerting all efforts to depart from your slipstream, somehow became involved with the one man who is eligibly your relative and tribal cohort.”

Leba contemplated the plausibility of this relationship. Alas, it seemed more than fairly possible Ramone and the Diamond Thief shared direct family lineage as she compared their mannerisms, which she had never before made parallel nor recognized. Each man's hands, the way their lips curled when sleeping, how their arms swung and gait, the likeness was patently obvious for anyone who is not a vespertine. In meeting Ramone, Leba had merely assessed there was another man whose breath she could tolerate, whose scent she wished to ingest through her nostrils, whose fragrance was the earth's perfume. Now, she wondered if there was only one strand of DNA, one direct lineage which evoked her own primal heart, if she had somehow found Ramone with her own pheromones, because he was the only person other than the Diamond Thief living as part of this mysterious heritage.

Amidst her particular reflections, she reasoned quickly through the components of The Diamond Thief's confession, and spoke aloud.

"Well, if the diamond was Ramone's grandmother's, doesn't it make sense that he would inherit the ring?"

The diamond thief responded. "Logistically, Leba, I do not know the 'right' answer to that question— and I wish I could bait your understanding for my having taken it. Perhaps I sensibly ought to have communicated with Ramone while in his company, instead of leaving him in the dark... but it was not the moment to divulge, and I am thankful I didn't. Timing is a skill to develop, Leba. It is the warrior's mark to know how to refrain, and while I've been prone to procrastination, in that folly I've witnessed the blossoming of fate.

It was right that I took the diamond without reason. Everything I had known of ethic and property by instinct fled; I had transformed. When I came upon the ring, I became an evangelist of justice: I had to un-suffer\* the jewel from its living coffin and keep it near to my heart. Clearly, I had developed such an acute interest in diamonds —all for that very moment! By blind destiny, I came upon this relic. Of course I knew it did not belong distinctly to me, but that was not my inclination. I was less interested in naming its rightful owner, and rather, most entranced to serve as its transporter. Who, after-all, is rightly an owner; by what liberty do we determine such steep titles? I was concerned not with stealing, but that I felt so deeply and maternally protective, and so fragile with the responsibility of possession. I've dealt with many a precious exchange, deals with price tags well beyond the worth of figures, but worth lives and the outcome of political decisions. I've interpolated affairs and personally lifted embargos. I entered the industry only by the cruelest rights of passage— swallowing parcels, outwitting x-ray detectors, coughing up carats of single cuts and crowned brilliants. This operation was the only one that caught me, made me quiver; I felt more at risk in the handling of this diamond than I felt in the middle of the Congo, riding strapped underneath the belly of an elephant overnight, in the blackest darkness, outwitting both Congolese rebels and controlling militias. That particular mission, by the way, damaged us more than it did the victims of the hoist in the Congo, as the effect of my unexplainable disappearance for three months led you to refuse communicating with me for a solid season afterwards.

"Strangely, only one month after I had Ramone's Grandmother's ring in my possession, I met you. As soon as I saw you and I heard your voice, after spending my first hour with you, I was struck; I could not sleep." (Leba did not believe this latter statement to be true, for the duration of the time they shared sleeping hours, she was surely the one who continually suffered through the

night, left awake while the diamond thief slept wrinkled and wrapped, nested in covers).

"You were so similar to the woman whose picture I had seen as a young boy in my grandfather's house. While he would sit all day on his porch, off a long hall— I was left with nothing else to do but to wander around, looking to find something, an object willing to be manipulated as my toy. In his forbidding office, the most cold of all the cold rooms in the home, an open drawer hung forward, broken so that it could not close. Meanwhile, I was bouncing a ball around the whole house that appropriately landed in this very office drawer, and when I went to retrieve it my traipsing eyes stumbled over a photograph, putting my hunt for play on pause. A woman, dressed in a mackintosh coat, stared at me from a worn press photo. She was extraordinary, her picture exuded personality, in a way where I mean "original grace". There were men pitched around her in bandstand suits with bowties, smoking long cigars. Everyone in the photo, to me, looked fabulous! After this discovery, each time I went to my grandfather's house, while he sat ornery on the porch, I would promptly sneak away to find his picture. Near the end of his life, when ill and unable to rise from his bed, I dared at last to inquire about the photograph. I started by asking him if he had ever been in love with a dancer, because I thought the woman in the picture was a dancer. His eyes lit, and he told me that he had been in love with a very real artist, one who had lived from her soul."

Leba's head ached. She at once concerned not for diamonds nor stories, and all fabrication. She felt as if she'd won the science fair, but she could not account, in plot, how her character had won and why she was winning. Then she was hungry and she wanted to eat. Or she was tired and she wanted to sleep. Or she felt dirty and she desired a bath; or the autobus was a mess and needed to be organized. She felt her clothes were tight and she wanted to take them off. None of these options precisely described the shift of senses that had come on abruptly and left her uncomfortable. She put her hand over her middle and breathed long.

"I am feeling unsettled, suddenly; inflated or too big for this autobus." And then she went on to say, "I have lately been feeling increasingly swollen or inflated or too big for everywhere I am. It's a specific and very real condition," she confided, "but I cannot begin to contemplate laboring through the tests that would be necessary to diagnose this strand of something very old and tacit both that is only newly bringing itself to voice in my lymph system. It is connected to an immaculately crafted backwardness and imbalance that is flaunting itself through my entire being, but it's not a big deal. I mean, it is— really, but I'd rather not make it up to be one, I'm sort of in a crux-y cross deciding if to make it a deal or not, but choosing— I think— to not address it as one, not now. It's just that I am suddenly feeling very unsettled. Perhaps I am in a state of wondering, and this is merely the sensation of curiosity, and to experience it in this way is a delineated deviation from settling in directly to my wonderment," she revealed to The Diamond Thief.

She configured reason— almost as leverage from formlessness. "... Yes, it is that I am wondering why you are sharing this with me. I appreciate your expression, in ways you have not the interest to fathom— ways worth the writing of one hundred diluted poems— but, tonight, you have shared with me a story, a rendered tale, and through it I am searching out something... I am not sure what, a solution, substance that quells, meaning to my person. I am a selfish listener, then. Still, my heart lurches toward you with protective alms, and I wish to ease your concerted spirit.

So, logistically, according to this story, Ramone is your cousin and the man he called his Grandfather, whose inheritance has largely enabled his own work, is unrelated to him entirely. What I am most curious about is the randomness of my own meeting of Ramone Dish, how did that happen?"

(We know this part of the story could be a bit much information to gnaw, or could feel only as explored dialectically as, say, a Scooby-Doo episode, but hold out... and slow down, for the romantic wrap of the tale does not come at the end... but at the middle. Comes between words, between blinks of your eyes on the page; between the page and your hands and the quiet hush of your little nose and mouth, sucking up clouds and committing to a novella, which, is to say... balancing the sound of birds and clay, airplanes, gorillas, lawnmowers and fuzzy caterpillars, with your very developed skill of reading. Your reading being a very large consideration as to where we have chosen to bang the buck of the story, to ream it in, to draw a curtain, etc. We may have thought up an existentialist sort of escape-from-dénouement type of twist-less twist all because you, dear reader, are in need, entirely, of this sort of ambiguous un-turning. On the other hand, we more deeply prodded and realized you, of all people, are vying for a generalized concerto, one, at the most, in two keys; moving you simply through laughter and then tears, and then into a keen smile at its end by which you will have conjured within you an inclination towards Growth, Compassion and a renewed sense of Full Life. The idea of stick-to-itiveness came to mind for us as well. We mean: firstly, the word stick-to-itiveness is quite rotten in its own and is one your mother may have used when describing precisely why, in her summed opinion, for lack of, you have quit softball, debate club, drama, the Student Times and even, finally, your own small scale dog-walking late afternoon job. But secondly, we had to consider what sort of novella you were willing to want to open. One which would have a story line easy to release and forget, so that you could go on about your day feeling, after reading a bit, that you had taken a light nap or eaten a little snack. Or rather, did you, in fact, need one which was grueling to get through; which you and nobody would like openly, but could recognize somehow, after all the criticism had died, how stopping to truly dissect overlong sentences made you, actually, a less pallid human.

In these dialogues, when Leba speaks, or seems to speak, to various parts of herself, imagined into the form of semi-protagonists and quasi-antagonists both, do you wish that the discourse was better formed, or that the diamond thief would gesture with sudden perversion, that he would do that French flick of the fingernail to his teeth which means 'fuck off'? Or would you rather have a peripheral crow swing low into their collective frame and caw in a sound that is more acutely a 'fuckoff, fuckoff'— making the word-phrase a wondrous relief of sound, a sort of puritan groan, a guttural inoculation and ablution to the polluted seas of poorly exported articulations; do you wish that you would get more relief from this book, that you would feel less pain? Or more, for the quarter— by reading, you would 'get in touch'— is that what you need? We had to consider and so... we arrived upon this: You need what we need. You need have application for your full intelligence. And you need the heart of the matter. You need to be loved and to love.

The Diamond Thief is full of explanations. He has some specifics that will tie some of the

possible questions you and Leba both may have regarding his current position: who he is, why he is here (there) and Everywhere. And how he is, in fact, seemingly illustrious from the outside, but only Truly Illustrious when we let him return back inside ourselves. So that he is not outside us at all. We have thought a thousand times that we had let him deeply inside us, and that, from us, he could go or come, but this was the delusion. Then, in those times, when we thought him to go and come into and from us, we were only giving him away out of the little chapel of our rib-cage coffin, where rests the beloveds entwined: the both sides of our own heart. It is not about him from the outside. Who we see when we are with him is the inside of our self. All our endless pain in feeling the distance from our fingers to his happens because we have forgotten to wholly risk just being. Our great aspirations confused us; when it came down to it, all we really wanted to be when we grew up was Small.

Small enough to see the detail, the subtle: the little opportune pieces, to be resourceful, to move slowly.

The Diamond Thief explained.

"It was I who sent Ramone a copy of your Dream Post, through an alias post-marking. Obviously, he and I were no longer in correspondence and I had been absent from his life after the night I took the ring. But I knew he would love the work that you produced. Ramone has long been interested in texture, light and image. He told me once that love was all about the quality of lighting."

Leba smiled oddly. Perhaps that was true. Could she sit and listen to the Diamond Thief as tenderly as she had on this night if it were not raining; if he did not glow just the way he was glowing currently? And in their latest parting, did she not manage to leave him only in the morning, in the traditional manner of most tales of fleeing? It was only in the morning when the day sobers and wakes that she felt enough will to leave because she was, at last, more enticed by her own toothbrush and soap waiting at the barn-studio than she was by the irresponsible temptation to sleep long next him; the man whose destiny, in regards to her own, was always left, ultimately, uncertain? Could she have left him at night, when he'd lit the candles, when he'd run a bath— perhaps she held on to her sense of order and control only as it related to natural light.

The Diamond Thief continued. "I want to tell you this, Leba. The ring I gave you... I hope you have it still and that you have not given it to Ramone. I want to meet with you and Ramone together so that I can tell him the truth myself. I want to let him know that I have loved you, in my own incapable way, the same way that my grandfather loved the woman he lost. I want you to have this ring. Because it is worth eighty thousand dollars and I want you to find the place that you will call home and use the money that you will have from the worth of this diamond and to make, from it, the life you need to for yourself, a life that brings you the peace of heart to open to a receptive and giving world. I will speak with Ramone, and I am certain he'll agree. We'll want to give it to you."

The Diamond Thief nudged her gently with his knee, reminding Leba that she still remained in

the autobus, with him.

"Leba, your eyes closed...for minutes. Did you fall asleep? Were you listening to what I said?" It took her a moment to find her voice, she felt tiny inside of a body, felt pleasantly lost from concrete time.

"I should go. I have missed dinner. Let's get out of the car. We'll leave this, as usual then, for later."

Leba reached over him and opened the door; she felt as though she reached through him. She stepped heavily down into a shallow, but hungry puddle. The Diamond Thief turned her around and pulled her into him. He lifted her chin with his hand, his finger rested on her lips. She fell, relenting to lean only a bit forward, but toppled into him with all her weight. Her eyes closed, as eyes would if one fell off a cliff, in a dream, passing swiftly bristly edges, heading for a place deeper than is reached by light. With her eyes tightly shut, still she saw: flicks of mica. Her stomach sputtered and she recognized sensation. They stood together like this in the rain until they tasted the falling downpour.

"I don't know what to say about the ring, about your offer— I don't know how to take something like that, or if I need it. I don't want to need it. Saying thank you is justly, expresses appreciation, and I have no choice but to appreciate you, in the same way that I regard all natural beauty. It obliterates my own need to craft; there is no fabricated design greater than nature."

"Leba, of course you don't need anything. I am offering you a benefaction. I think I have come, with the veracity of my grandfather, to endow the art of the pioneering muse. You have the ring— do what you want with it."

She turned from him then and ran down the cement steps into the basement restaurant. An hour and half had passed between them, though it felt like a few days worth of dialogue and interaction. Dinner had poured out from the kitchen, a full array of colors decorated plates. Leba handed the keys back to her generous friend. Everyone at the table had clearly enjoyed a relaxing meal. Leba took her seat next to Ramone who turned to her. "You had an urgent meeting?" He asked with concern.

"I met a man you know. We have a mutual friend." She smiled. "He told me a long story, one that he may tell you. In the case that he doesn't, I shall, some time soon."

Ramone shuttled his lips to the side of his face for a mere moment revealing mild confusion but then changed the subject by offering Leba a remaining plate of brilliant cuisine which she eagerly consumed, concentrating on having returned to the table of friends, to cultivate mindfulness and a joyful presence in their company. But then her mouth wondered on its own, and opened, almost uttering "How could I leave his kiss in the rain for things that are safe and cordial and polite? How could I dismiss for a time called later the love that presents itself like a baby lion cub whose window for affection opens so briefly before adolescence scares its curious sweetness into a turning ferocity, into a thing meanly far off in the wild?"

As Leba ate, Ramone sat curiously. He was more adept with waiting out a surprise than most young and cunning men, but he still was eager to obtain more information to soothe his intrigue. For the rest of the evening, Leba kept her interaction with the Diamond Thief safely to herself

and chose instead to interview Delilah regarding her experience of the night. It appeared that Delilah was feeling distant from her friend and Leba had to stop in the middle of their conversation to inquire of Delilah's senses. Was she all right? Did she feel well? To these questions Delilah ensured that she was perfectly fine. Leba insisted then that Delilah must have a secret feeling she was keeping at bay. Delilah smiled and, at last, opened—offering the warmth to her friend that had been much longed for during the entirety of their conversation.

"Oh Leba, I am returning to Brooklyn sooner than I'd thought. There is work there I cannot forego: an installation at the Modern Museum! I am disheartened by the constraint of time. I feel as though you and I were to travel more and that I am only just beginning to gather the pieces I inherently feel are here in Bologna."

Delilah slumped in her chair as Leba pulled her own closer to her friend's.

"This is great for you— the Modern Museum! I will return with you. I have to go back, as well, earlier than expected. I have no good reason. It is just time."

After the two had discussed their plans amidst the low hum of conversation filling the expanse of the room, they felt as though they were already packing and preparing for their departure.

Ramone's friend with the red autobus had a longstanding tab at the restaurant and they left with no concern of the bill, well fed and mostly drunk from many glasses of the finest and most aged local wine.

They were dropped off at the barn-studio and each piled out of the car, tired and prepared to head by means of the shortest route possible to a land of thick sleep, where they would slumber late into the day before returning to the square by the middle of the next, before dusk, to prepare for the second show of the weekend.

Ramone politely asked Leba whether he could carry her up the staircase, primarily because her long cloak dragged behind purposefully with an elegant tail, designed to pick up the grit of the earth to where it traveled, and was layered at this time with the streets dirt, but it suited her costume still, and underneath the shell a mat of layers stuck all about her, like feathers of a chick, quite coquettish. He insisted that this would be like a desert for him, a visual pleasure to finish such a sweet day of successful expression. Leba agreed with ease, her tired eyes lit slightly at the prospect of the ride upstairs. Ramone sang a song as he escalated the stairs with Leba on his shoulders; he climbed half-drunkenly on his hands and knees, all without seeming less than infallible, and hummed a piano sonata.

Upon arriving at the top of the loft stairs, Ramone attempted to mimic a monster, raising Leba to his eyelevel and letting from his mouth a quasi-roar before placing her onto the bed via a graceful throw. He collapsed, exaggeratedly, next to her (obviously enjoying his stupor) and, just after, reached his right foot under the bed, knocking something over which rolled forward into view: a previously opened bottle of wine. He lifted the bottle to the bed with his feet and attempted to uncork it as well, using only his toes. Though when executed by some, the move would appear to be of a fraternity-like mentality, Ramone proceeded to do such while still humming the piano sonata, lost in his own world of pleasure. He was not attempting to flatter the moment or impress Leba with his nimbleness— nor win her love. He was not curious or cocked wondering why they were sharing a bed when she was obviously not committed to him in any proclaimed manner. He was only truly being in a moment that they collectively had willed, not wondering why he had created art and displayed it on this latter day, or what art could

possibly offer such a world of active momentum; he only wanted to sip once more the sour sweet wine which had come with utter abundance into their house the past day and night. He brought the bottle to his hands with his feet and then toward the sky, which was apparent through both the rectangular window in the ceiling and the row of windows lining the back wall of the barn-studio. The moon shone and Ramone uttered his appreciation to her dedicated orbit. "Without you, sweet moon," he spoke "how would I know sweetness?"

He brought his hands to the bottle and offered it first to Leba, who was already slightly spinning from the largeness of the night's stimulation. Before long, he turned to her and asked "Leba, did you say you had a surprise for me?" He was curious and had remembered.

Leba hesitated, as though she had forgotten and needed to reflect.

"I do," she admitted. "It is for tomorrow, at least. And for a quiet moment, when we are not so tired and done with the day."

"I trust that." He was settled.

He changed topic, still generating the excitement of the evening's events, and not yet available for the great prowess of sleep.

"Let's light candles and read poetry before we dream. I have a book... It was just sent to me. It is a friend of Anchorstein's— she wanted you to hear this poem... the writer is called Helpert, that's a funny name, isn't it? Anchorstein sent it to me to read aloud to you, like a gift; she asked me to read it to you on a night where it rains slightly, when we could not see so deeply into the horizon. This is a perfect night for a poem like this, no?"

Leba wholeheartedly encouraged him, reveling in the savvy thoughtfulness of her great friend Gloria Anchorstein.

He leaned over her and off the side of the bed where his canvas satchel of work lay. He opened it up, flailing in slight off-balance on the bed but returning by time of a few breaths again to his position of comfort. He struck a match and lit a candle over their heads and another to the side of the bed.

"Leba", he started, "I am so happy to read a poem to you. It is the best way to end the evening right now. Here it is...dedicated to you.

'You came in, bridled by the sea:  
i saw you crash into my mouth and teeth.  
with but this one influence my tenderframe licensed  
to lay asymmetrical; something between a rock and fish  
jiggling as its predecessors jiggled,  
wriggling, searching for a mind.  
A collective of nerves in unison with no interruption, and  
as an oasis of bare scrub and sand,  
held a small man who appeared a cast-away, though  
who never faltered by such consideration.

You must love words to follow mine:

whose language proves that innovation lies not in new terrain but in  
unexplored irregular caves –right here!  
which fit no persons but where surely snakes must collect,  
snarling and moving in designs soothing soulcast inquisitions and invoking the more.  
Eyes become hands that caress these textures in memory; rotted history's islands,  
home of treasure island; hundreds of years longgone,  
felt these light incantations of riff in the rock and have known the secret  
to language's life. Indentations proving the incongruous shape of nature,  
how even nature, especially nature, lives long disintegrated from its own surroundings;  
and whether it's convex, or expressly parallel with its opposition of form and awkward  
presence, however useful or unused (depending on whose perspective, our own or the little  
snakes)  
it offers modern fashion's suffice: anything matches, a thousand miles of panting sands at ariel  
view blemished by thorn brush.

like this you come bridled by the sea, de-sacked from cells and proteins; birthed from  
passed voyage, into this harpooned lap, living in the last moments of my permanence: known  
otherwise as the whole of my very own life had,  
waiting or sunning, intuiting the tide.

How much do we will it toward? Our synapses align with the chemistry of storms,  
saline, cloud, muck, strife, resolve: wipe out houses and  
start over by an urge to untangle irreconcilable opinions.

i like the color of middle eastern deserts, colors which  
beg to set adrift distinctions of boundaries, which gawk history–  
because it seems possible to set into state and countryside any  
land that has settled subcutaneously under the thin-skin of atmosphere; still,  
do stars war over who owns which acre of galaxy?  
you like the color of middle eastern gold, the unearthed  
jewel of bare-bone dirtspirit, that which has brassiered the mosques and  
eccentricited the steps of the Kotel.  
a color that shrieks of polish, which reeks of possession and employment.

cells open by magnetics and incomprehensible law.

from the sea into my mouth and teeth:

to choose to watch from somewhere –your very own life! (starting from the silhouette of the  
lower quadrant of the right eye, a cheek, a grey fuzzy nose) and then, beyond one infinitesimal  
hiccup of space, a mess of conjoining salt hair and eyelashes coming with great force.  
or this: to rather not watch at all, and drink the incoming saline antioxidant; that which  
determines to prove a new measure of evolution; i no longer am necessitating what was once  
hydrogen, 2 oxygens... but rather an infrequent, once per-light-year ransack of thrusting sea,  
which shall turn me and dry me out into a carousel of poetic importance: to make wider perhaps  
the crick of the rock's cavern, or not; into a life superseding the conditions set previously to life  
itself, somehow beyond reason where the sense of my own sorting is nil.”

Ramone finished the poem and lifted his head to look at Leba, whose eyes lay closed and whose mouth now laid long across the expanse of her face. He moved to raise himself halfway upright in search for the heavy winter blanket at the bottom of the bed, to pull over them for extra warmth.

Leba was silent. She was not sleeping, but lost in contemplation of the poem. To be the life that no longer necessitated the consistent rationale, but which survived on exquisite randomness, on sea-thrust. A sort of living that never waited on any sustaining power, for it possessed no instinct for regularity, no logical sense of acquirement. It almost brought something to Leba's mind but she could not connect her ideas and so wondered, instead, how it felt to be a sand dollar. Were sand dollars ever alive, or were they always hard and shell-like? She couldn't remember. She slept finally, abysmal in an aquatic realm, where perplexity suspended, and sea-dollars made conversation and dialogued in bubbles over ancient exchange rates before drying in stock, spread over untouched blond sands.

In the midday Leba woke, feeling worn for sleeping late and from her evening past, plus she could not recall having last watered her cells, which was irresponsible for a young woman who had now lived long enough to know the essential importance of significant hydration. Ramone, surprisingly, also lay still in bed in the brightness of midday. His feet had been recently aired, out of soft woolly sleeping socks, revealing a moment of podiatric perfection, made possible by the elements of day and the fit atmospheric pressure under the covers. It's of notice that, along with every other substructure of the body, the reflexology component of the feet extends beyond the obvious correlation of meridian point to organ locale. The clever emoticon feature of the soul's text message is revealed through an orifice-free face of its own that is, the feet, actually. The feet, if you are lucky enough to love to touch your own, feel and smell, even, the same as empty canvases and palate, studio and medium. And if you are keen enough to have ink with ample longevity and tip with ken for epidermis, than you find that the feet are the perfect boards for design. Tribal artists, take example, clearly received this same information as they developed henna from the petioles of Lawsonia shrub leaf and adorned their feet to mark days, rites and passages, to remind the smoothness of the canvas-of-their-heart's-face, their feet, to rejoice in the beauty of the earth, for this is where from the body seeks its own knowing and bounty. The feet as well, as have discovered the exploratory, possess a spot; more ecstatic than spots overexploited by media turpitudes, etc., depraved adults, etc., and this is the taut drum point of the foot bottom, where learned hands who've practiced well the precursor instruments of the conga and quinto drum find, with the precisely right cup of the hand, one can produce a combination bass-tone/slap coupling a rainy mid-tone that both delights the core of the recipients body and reorganizes the environ of the electron field where the player and the played one lounge.

And feet, healthfully rotund in the lofty upper floor of the barn-studio pattered soundly, as well, upon a stark medium-temperate wood floor in the kitchen below, ensuring someone had woken (Delilah) and that the awakened someone had conjured the morning's flavors into a breakfast

mélange aromatically suggesting rhubarb, buckwheat, honey, berry.

Leba wished to hide her qualm, when for it she was possessed by guilt. How could she feel this heaviness, burdened with more than the weight of down comforters alone? (At this time she had not connected yet the count of her blood sugar, the measured potential of hydrogen in her saliva and charted flow of her neurotransmitters' functioning, nor had drafted the "Hypothalamus Hypothesis" for which she'd unexpectedly later win the nobel prize; she'd merely felt someone must accumulate the scientific data to (finally) expose adrenal viruses and systemic nerve inflammations at the axis of body dysmorphia, a condition which affects the sufferer with disproportional self-obsessions. In such cases, the victim, for instance, is unable to socially interact with his community because of an affixed, unrelenting attention upon the so-called vulgarities of his physique, most often entirely unnoticed by any other than himself. The nose of the dysmorphic may be of average size, for example, but by his punitive observation the misshapen amalgamation is a protrusion of hideous stature, a crisis worthy of sentencing the owner of the nose into an unconditional hiding for the whole of his malcontent existence. Very often his discernment is impeccable in all other perceptive fields, and so it makes for all the more contorted living when the preoccupied own-nose hater excels in all areas of functional sensibility in the most of his life and yet struggles to make perceptive sense of his ever-seemingly-altering nose shape. If the possessor of the nose does dare to go out, he will bandage or mask his obtusion, feigning nasal-accident or devising storyline to validate his disguise, so well-crafted he'll often, with sweeping gesticulation, recount full of commitment, and, in the end, believe himself. Else-wise, such a dysmorphic is prone to make conversation revolved only about the nose, perhaps complimenting another's, or repetitively alluding to noses frequently, indirectly hoping to reverse his considerations by discovering a more accurate perspective of his own nose made by another, who will just, in casual commentary, guarantee a nothing out-of-ordinariness about the nose of the wearer, and lend his conscious a period of shameless grace where he will, at least momentarily, believe himself free of his affixed disdain. Inevitably, though, in the next moment of anxiety he'll once again disappear into his hell of distorted nose compulsions, hating himself through the meticulous obsession of one of his most innocent and natural parts.

Previously compartmentalized by western-medicine under the umbrella of a so-called impulse-control disorder, the syndrome, when brought to light as a veritable central nervous disease affecting both the optical nerve and epidermal neurons, made more collectively presentable the medical discussion of the physics of evolution. For, at last, it was determined by Science that if, in fact, the human being existed most expressly as "infinite potential" and simultaneously as individually sized and shaped, apparently this paradox could affect an irritation upon the hormonal system; and in the specific case of body dysmorphia the contrasting proprioceptive flux resulted in a hypothalamic response which literally "capped" off the main endocrine-hub (the crown of the head, a traditionally noted heaven/earth passageway) thus deregulating one's consistent acuity maintaining a sense of the infinite while conceiving one's size or shape of self in relation to. Biophysically, the syndrome appeared as a mold-like substratum, propagating from a point mid-hemispherically and deeply lodged between the sides of the brain. By effusion, the substratum "mold" worked to keep latent right-brain human qualities such as accelerated creative genius, levitation, telepathy and functional sleep-ceasing, capabilities all directly and mythically activated by the moon's accessibility and bioavailability within human blood, which

she (the moon) had, in past, agreeably tended on planet earth as a gardening hobby. Once the hypothalamus became "capped", both the subtle and covert energy of the body operated in a closed system, dominantly mechanized by the left brain, much detached from all lunar and earth-rhythmic connectivity, in turn creating a haplessly un-spiritualized frenzy, an erratic vacillation of the sensory, where the mind, thrusting in a grappling state, functioned only to pose the question "what am I?" in a manner which became apparently observable even on a biological level of body function. Leba wrote her thesis in prosaic of greek meter with emphasis on the Arsis, as in traditional latin. She figured this was the perfectly suited medium (as did agree the first cave-dwelling poets) for curative approaches to women's health, blood and lymph. And yet, after all the Nobel acclaim and associative press, albeit Leba's doctrine was meticulously crafted and filled with cunning word, it so turns that she, once more, tilled her own research over to reveal stones unturned; and, with time, by proving postulations, countered her former to present with evidence that, yes, the body (as dysmorphics have long sensed) does drastically engorge and deflate, take things on and quantitatively reject matter; like Anime experts illustrate emotion and setting through the changing faces and shapes of their character. This is not a chemical occurrence within the brain alone, but able to be witnessed by the most nonbiased observer we could find. People just do not want to admit, mostly, that they are watching you grow and shrink, instead would rather collectively call the process out, pointing fingers at the lovely tending, gardener moon.)

"Ramone," Leba whispered. "Can we stay in bed until we are hungry and then can we eat our breakfast right here?"

His voice was an opulent combination of low rasp and unrefined overtones. "This," (he emphasized the word and paused, his grumble breaking into a hoarse purr) "is the beauty of sharing laziness with another, suddenly it looks romantic and thoughtful, an honored and active duty. I side with you... breakfast in bed is on our morning itinerary."

Leba's head swirled with the tale the diamond thief had unraveled the night before; she decided to impart its details to Ramone; and so the next hour was filled with much conversation, and less breakfast, as Leba relayed to Ramone the intricacies of her previous night with the Diamond Thief, articulating in well-remembered detail the actual origins of a ring that once belonged to the mutual Grandfather of both men. Leba explained with delicacy to Ramone how seemingly he'd not known his real Grandfather. The conversation was difficult at many moments, and though Ramone listened intently, Leba was still uncertain how much Ramone was willing to wholly accept a foreign and sudden rendition of his past.

Leba only slightly faltered from the strength of her deliverance when she uttered slowly the name of The Diamond Thief. The sound suspended from her lips like a liqueur, rung from her mouth in a smooth accustomed timbre; and it gave her away. There was no need for further embellishment. Ramone, at first, appeared blank... and then more utterly handsome than describable, for, he looked astonished. Seeing Ramone Dish affected in this way was a sight comparable to seeing a pack of wild coyote set off with rapidity toward a raging midland river, or watching a rockslide come over cliff, taking out a mountain brush with an un-reckonable force. He was not angry, not selfishly reactive, not abrasive nor snubbed-looking, but winded, meaning: appearing literally struck by a natural force; and seeing him receive a blow without holding on to

self-constructed reaction was such a natural wonder of the world that Leba was only more humiliated and humbled to be, by her own eyes, under par compared to his pristine beauty. When his expression settled he actually laughed in response.

"I never thought to ask you if you knew him... but I should have figured that you were a friend of his, because there is something about you which resembles him. As odd as it sounds, there is a look about your cheeks, right under your eyes, a texture to your skin there that has reminded me of him."

Leba felt embarrassed and exhausted by his accuracy. She had figured herself that this very part of her coloring was most affected by her past exposure to The Diamond Thief, but had hoped no one else would recognize the peculiar markings she bore. As said, she had once cried consistently for an agonizingly long duration (more than months and, unexaggeratedly, years-in-plural). When her tear ducts were overly fatigued (to say the least) and the tiny portals had nearly shut down, the most of her tears were forced, without option, to slide under her skin. Like a plant potted in a solid-bottom terracotta, the excessive tears lacked a route for proper drainage, and then nestled down into her lower lids, burrowing as marks of backward emotion into a rotted spell of residual freckles across her cheek-tops, a place of facial topography where only sunshine should stamp expression of glorious appeal. The remainder of her hollow sadness, that which life still had no use for and so left upon her physique, was then evident. Such rotten sadness was enough to be seen, in all her masked attempts, by Ramone, and more so, in the mirror when she found herself staring.

Inevitably they reflected upon the irony, how the story from generations passed resembled the dynamics between the collective three now. Ramone admitted he'd previously thought Leba resembled his Grandmother, from old pictures he had seen. He had never considered, however, the possibility of being related to The Diamond Thief, or that he shared no genealogical connection with the man he'd thought to be his Grandfather. This was very strange for Ramone to fathom, as he'd been granted endowment for his artistic vision initially from his so-called Grandfather, and though blood was not the only connection that Ramone felt created family he was still struck by the turn of tale.

Ramone had seen many photographs of his family, but the pictures he knew of his grandmother were mostly all prints on newspaper and magazine. He could only recall one picture, he reflected, of his so-called Grandfather with his Grandmother. Was this evidence that his Grandfather had mostly fabricated the story of his own romance? Then Ramone contemplated The Diamond Thief, felt almost a longing to go to him; the idea of having a cohort close in so many ways was ironic and alluring both— but Ramone resisted instigating an openness between himself and any man who impulsively stole, especially from a person who'd hosted him in his very own house.

Leba agreed, how The Diamond Thief had seized Ramone's ring without doubly thinking— and had thus sacrificed friendship for possession— was a frustratingly too-typical maneuver she'd encountered time and again as displayed by The Diamond Thief, a trait which often left her unable to make sense of his character.

The Diamond Thief had requested to converge altogether with Ramone and Leba both, so that

they'd have a chance to reunite in communication, and Leba informed Ramone of such. She possessed little ability to keep additional information to her self, and so did not; sharing also with Ramone how The Diamond Thief had felt insistent in giving the ring indefinitely to her, and traveled to Bologna to do this, though she was unclear if it was her place to accept, or his to offer the ring at all. The diamond was definitely no more belonging to her than it did Ramone or The Diamond Thief, and she felt curious as to who could determine where it belonged. Ramone had nothing yet to say after her final relaying of detail. He had not asked her to see the ring yet, but she could tell by the way he sat with his eyes fixed downward at the small pillow on his lap that he was picturing it and recalling its detail.

Delilah brought biscuits and scones to them as they stayed in bed, and Leba and Ramone moved over to make room for her as well. As Leba shared the entirety of the story with Delilah (she was at this point becoming quite narrative with it) she felt eased to relieve the secret weight she'd held, keeping from her friends her truest concerns.

Soon after breakfast, the midday swallowed the afternoon into an onset of early evening.

Ramone realized that they had been less swift with time than the day before, and he hoped they would still find resonance among themselves and with the evening's affairs as they were now pressed to move with rapidity. Ramone's friend with the autobus returned for them and they departed, dressed again in costume but with a new twist for a newer evening, feeling almost merriment and lightness of being close together, in a way that served their collective purpose.

Delilah and Leba sat on one bench of the red autobus and Leba painted with a fire-ash salve onto Delilah's eyes, adding acrylic silver hues to the tips of her brow's bone. Leba sighed gazing at her friend, she truly adored Delilah. Leba took Delilah's hand, which was outfitted with glorious twines of different strong stems she had foraged in the woods of Italy into rings, and she pouted, looking at Delilah with a cutting honesty.

Delilah returned her gaze. The two knew that before long, they would be working together again, on a new project, with a deeper sense of coalescence. Leba could feel that Delilah was also aware of this future between them as they entered into the piazza, feeling afire with the exposure of daylight's end and an honor to take part, for the second night in a row, in Ramone's stunning work.

For this second showing, Leba forewent offering her music to the evening. Instead, a trio of traditional choral singers from the city delighted in supporting Ramone's show, a great contrast to Leba's art from the night before. Leba sat next to a cake-maker from Bologna (who had embellished the piazza with cakes) and ate strawberries consecutively as the night grew dark and the stage setting was prepared for Ramone's work. Leba mused in watching Ramone's documentary from the audience— his film, though she had seen the piece three times in total, was still freshly coming together for her; it possessed her senses.

There was not one empty seat in the piazza, and many people stood while attending the event. Two-thirds through the film, Leba reached to the plate that was balanced in a shared distribution of weight on both her own and the cake-makers thigh for yet another succulent berry. She knew that it was possible she was eating rations beyond her share, but the berries were sating a hunger that grew within her as the film developed. She looked to Ramone who was leaning against the sidewall, watching his own work. His expression was detached, he seemed to neither be

critiquing the show nor submitting to its seduction. She stared at him until he could feel her eyes and looked to her. She smiled in the dark, through which he felt her amiability. As he held his hand out toward her, sensing her through the night, a few drops of rain began to initiate a steady drizzle. People opened umbrellas, and as they unleashed Leba felt an immediate tightness between her temples –for she detested umbrellas! From the earliest onset of rains her memory conjured, Leba ran ardently from threats of vinyl cover, from the plastic emerging dark clouds adults struggled to provide overhead. When she was in the first grades of school she was asked, by assignment, to learn how to operate an umbrella, an order she refused to carry out as commanded. Her teacher removed her from the rest of the class, where she was made to practice addition problems and work out equations unfamiliar to her young mind. Frustrated, she watched from the corner of the room as one little boy who was quiet and often absent from class worked fervently to open and close his umbrella. He felt Leba staring at him and so returned the gesture, smugly grilling her right as the menacing umbrella closed down on his thumb, snagging the soft young skin on his finger and tearing in a jagged zag. Leba shrieked and put her hands over her ears. Umbrellas made vicious sounds lowering down slick poles fugitively. The young boy caught by the snaggle-hook of its cold metal cried out, and was soon lost among a gaggle of circling children, stupefied and speechless. The teacher, whose face in recollection became pointier all the more, until the memory of her expression appeared much like the tart tip of an umbrella top itself, had come to the side of the struggling young boy, and bringing her stiff arm to his own shoulder led him in an unsympathetic style out the door and down the hall, burdened by the interruption of her mean tutelage and the assumed course of class. Later in the day they were to learn about the body-parts of a frog and share packs of crayons and shades of green to color in copied printouts of frog families. Leba cared little for this next proposed assignment as well, because her thumbs, the very same finger she had just seen ransacked by a child-eating umbrella found great displeasure in the texture of copied white paper. The paper felt hot and burnt and it smelled like metal in a way that traveled up her nose and stung her eyes. At this young age, when exposed to the first grades of school, Leba reacted adversely to many materials that were used in the public educational system (from the green tape wrapping on left handed scissors, to the overly-dried wooden sticks which dipped perversely into wet, tenacious jugs of milky glue). When making contact with her ensconced flesh, such materials encouraged dyspepsia, engorged organs, excited rashes, induced teeth-grinding, sparked ankle swelling, halted circulation, set off riots of temporal mandibular joint syndrome, and plainly teased a young nervous system. Leba attempted with her own excusing letters, and then letters administered by the court of her own stuffed-animals, and further still artfully forged requests written by the angelic women playing stringed instruments in her family's Chagall print, but still she found no way out of the sufferance and long-standing quip of daily encounters with white-wash marker boards and neon lights and their dualistic switches. When she finished all of the malicious years of proper education she covered herself in dirt to celebrate her own graduation, traveling far out into a dry mud-land with an older man who felt like a good enough friend to assist in her living burial and earthly ablution as she disrobed on a day where the sun dryly beat pensively its casting spell. Together they made a shallow grave where she lay, having him pile the even, ginger dirt over her naked body. When she was satisfied with the coverage, she sighed like a perfect amount of coca purrs when poured evenly into a large, winter mug. She unraveled

years of squinting, scraping, scratching, and splitting and nestled into warm and shining mica fragments of glistening earth's precious magic. In the first years after her so-called sophisticated education, Leba spent her time traveling to destinations of different sand-dunes, where she would repeat similar rituals: find the sun, undress, and slide into the immaculate grain, forgetting umbrellas; dismantling imagery from years under ceiling tiles.

And now... in a world which had been mostly rid of such disposable just-off colors, Leba was practically able to accept the splay of umbrellas before her and even more, in recent years, even had accepted a gift from Gloria Anchorstein (who knew well of Leba's dislike) an antique beautiful piece; a wooden umbrella with a buoyant peach top, which closed and opened with a delicate consciousness. Leba traveled to rainy destinations with her gift because it was the only sort of coverage from the rain that soothed Leba's senses. Otherwise, she opted for a rain slick (which was still un-preferred) or a temperate rain-bath (usually welcomed in the right climate). Now, with neither a jacket nor Anchorstein's umbrella, Leba moved to the wall of the piazza where Ramone stood talking to a man in Italian who was in charge of the electrical necessities involving the film. The fires providing warmth throughout the piazza were now smoking from dampness and some people had opted to leave in the middle of the showing. The reel of film itself was under a small tarp, and the film screen was covered by a roof overhead that curled up at the ends, providing funneled drains at either side. The show suddenly seemed curtained by waterfalls and the pace of the rain suited the lines of broken black streaks infesting the film. Ramone turned to Leba "I'm not going to turn it off, everything is protected— those who want to stay will stay because it feels right for them to see this in the rain."

To Leba, the documentary was more intoxicating with the weather. The fire coals were still emitting enough heat that she was not cold, but as she stood next to Ramone, the cake-maker with whom she had shared strawberries came to bring her a long Rain Coat; lavender and hooded, with large stitching of colorless flowers lightly embroidered in a yellow floss. Leba laced her arm through Ramone's arm and leaned into him. "I love the way everything looks." she whispered.

Delilah joined them against the wall and the three stood in sequence. The man with the red autobus arrived with a tray of hot cider from the cafe around the corner.

As Leba's lips found the opening at the top of the paper travel-cup with a butterfly handle, rain fell upon her lashes, she was keeping herself rather dry and felt, for the first time in months, free from self-concern; listening to the music of her surroundings. She was surviving in a pleasurable way, with people who were truly her dear beloveds. Who were happy to sit and draw with lead upon thick paper through the night and into the morning, companions who loved to hear Mamie Smith and Bessie Smith; who could subside on this alone. On screen, toward the middle of Ramone's film, a hand caressed the tip of the rare, most lovely flower— the wild strawberry flower. With its petals fluted, cupped open to the sky, it began to rain in the film as well, slowly-captured poignantly by the camera— just as it rained on the piazza, at a medium pour. The rain in the film was round and summer-y, warm and almost egg-shape, while the rain in the piazza was long and fell strait, descending with a rapidity that appeared as one strait line. The raindrops in the film were revealed as individuals, falling one at a time, released by the laborers of precipitation with thoughtful strokes, each blessed and identified by the great bearer of the rain's wand, propelled into theater, chosen with consideration. The rain in the film moved by fantastic

score, perfectly spontaneous, more orchestral than a rehearsed ensemble. But the rain in the piazza, though captivating in its own right, was the kind of discerning rain which looms, breeding a sense of displacement, wafting a haunting spell, leaving one paused and withstanding; sustained in an immeasurable frame, yet all the while listening entranced, growing by the moment colder there but unaware of such; stooped one well-formed thought away from figuring something.

Then in mere blinks of time's elapse, the night's rain suddenly multiplied in propensity. An unexpected wind started first to tug, and then to rip upon all materials susceptible. There had been a warning for a mild later day shower, but the weather now surpassed such predetermined light conditions. The raincoat provided by the cake-maker was not enough to keep Leba dry, and her hair hung in long strips and provided faucets from its ends, splaying down the front of the jacket's opening, so that she became steadily soaked through her clothes. She resisted seeking cover, and kept only one hand over her eyes, so that she could continue to watch Ramone's film, as the storm blew over view of the scenes themselves, and the environment surrounding the screen competed heavily with his work, spawning imagery of chaotic debris. At this point, most everyone in the piazza's audience had dismantled and scattered, leaving only Ramone, Delilah and the man who drove the red autobus left in sight. The two who starred, themselves, in the film had turned the corner and ducked into a warm cafe to eat a hearty stew of golden potatoes. Ramone turned to Leba and practically shouted through the rain "Shall I turn off the film?" He asked for her opinion. She knew that it would bother him to interrupt this second showing of his work, that the piece required a thoroughness of expression and to halt the unveiling of its colorful scheme mid-way through its fullness would seem to frustrate the actual film itself. Leba understood this, as she had always made sure, herself, to serve her instruments with utmost respect and to guarantee that their own output was satisfied before she returned them to their cases. Instruments of any art form were like children, making explicit their needs for survival. As a parent to the film, Ramone would surely feel guilty bringing the show to a stop, regardless of the conditions of weather. Of course he had considered, in creating the performance space at the Piazza, to fashion overhead protection for the chance of storm— but had decided to keep the space bare and minimal, to let weather be featured as a part of the show; he had only covered the film itself for protective measures and had left the rest of the space vulnerable to stars, snow, rain and fog.

Before Leba could offer her thoughts to Ramone the heavy awning which protected the film projector itself was brought by a great force of storm over to its side, and then, with a gust of ferocious wind, uprooted and struck the a piazza wall, tipping forward in a hovering paralysis, pouring a steady stream of rain water upon the film projector; a horrifying gesture to witness. Ramone and Leba both ran to the antique projector and dismantled it with a steadfast furry and Ramone took his drenched wool coat off to cover it. Leba hoped that it had not been damaged, for it was vintage in the truest sense and had been sought out by Ramone with a careful consideration to the exact specifications of the film footage. He had traveled out of the country to purchase it and explained to Leba more than once how the projector alone was a vital piece to the film's success. Leba felt immediately so sorry for Ramone that she began to cry as she scurried to protect these pieces from the elements. The man with the red autobus had opened the side door and helped guide the projector into the car, and they immediately crawled inside and

toweled the metal antique, drying it with a breathless malaise. The film itself was certain to have incurred damage, though Ramone remarked immediately that the rain had perhaps touched perfectly upon a scene he was sure had previously lacked the right texture. Delilah had seemed to disappear the moment the small tragedy had taken place but resurfaced now, accompanied by a willowy man who, before being recognizable, registered, by Leba's first impressions, as a man possessing mystique handsomeness. As Delilah and this man came forward into the light of the red autobus, it was then made obvious to Leba and Ramone both that the man walking with Delilah was the Diamond Thief, and that now, as the three in the autobus struggled to make peace with ruin, there was no more a fitted timeliness for his appearance.

He walked in slow motion, or so it felt to Leba that he, though keeping pace with Delilah who appeared to move in actual time, approached in concert, waltzing in slow symphony, in a style reserved for the memory of one's own first encounter of a childhood crush. His outfit wavered in the rain-light, his hair loped in cantor around his sculpted jaw-line, teasing a smile forward, which was aimed certainly toward Leba, who felt suddenly unbeautiful in wet clothing which had expanded around her frame and practically engulfed her, so that her only thought as he neared the collective was of her own costume and its inappropriateness relative to the scene they suddenly shared. She had no time to meet eyes with Ramone, to prepare him for the possibility of what could come next, who would talk first, what tone the group would share with one another. Would they speak with a mature reserve, in acceptance of the inevitable collision of their personal destinies? Would they react with hostility in such a squelched position, opting to procure a clashing drama of their characters? Or would they rise beyond their own personal dynamic, realizing that all people involved in the moment's affair superseded the necessitating of a so-called forgiveness, and that they must, rather, be excused as mere mortals and thus team together by assuming blame upon the night itself, whose circumstance trampled upon them as unabashedly as the weather had, and whose spontaneity of storm had flogged and robbed each of their own persistence. Would they share the moment that was now between them or struggle to stake claim of respective quadrants, assuming corners and boundaries? Leba imagined the group decidedly snuggling into an inseparable pile, petting each other in mergence while oozing affirmations outwardly, in a murmured purr, droning like tyrannous leaders born into opposition but at last struck with notion of surrendering to the most obvious call of nature, though prepossessed to fight, opting, versus, to stand for a more vague peace on earth. Would they gather in hymn, in mantra of non-action, rather than spoiling stillness through an affected soap-operatic warfare?

Before Leba could interrupt the emerging script to make a sweepingly large-stroked directive call, the Diamond Thief conjured a comparatively trite expression.

He cleared his throat and started with reserved poise "Ramone— I hope that I am not interrupting your evening. I could not bare to be in such proximity to you and your crew without coming over and sharing my sympathy for the weather, and also commending you for the brilliance of the work I was privileged only now to behold."

Ramone finished placing the last dry towel on his projector and squinted into the slight light provided by the rain into the eyes of the man standing in the storm. "It's not up to me when and where you should exit and re-enter my personal view of life. You could show up now, or you could, if you feel an urgency to reconnect with myself and the others, make an appointment for

sometime later when we are more properly prepared to entertain guests."

Leba was thankful that neither man had looked to her for assistance in their communication. The intense history woven between those whose company she beheld at present overwhelmed her presupposed notion of how to engage with others. Already, in the minute that Ramone and The Diamond Thief had come into contact, Leba experienced an urgency in her own body similar to a nervous disorder; she felt prone at any moment to shout to the sky something like "Get me out of Tuscany!" or "Let's go swimming!" or even "I want chocolate mousse!" And even more, if she'd think to check with her limbs she'd no choice but to largely assess that they called for outlandish gesturing, her legs would preferably run amuck into a tree's trunk, slam hip bones to telephone poles, or she'd must wriggle her ribs until they fit into the slit of crack in the paved sidewalk. Her mouth would be happy to introduce its teeth to a coiled cord or woolen dog chew-toy. Everything of her had orifices, demanded fixation: It was all she could do to endure her wet clothing and withhold spontaneous interjection.

Their team moment lacked in little pitfalls or obstructions only for that there was no room to fall, no foothold fancy enough to catch the crew and subject them to faltering. They possessed the grace of night, suddenly, with control. Beyond the storm, which strangely began to subside, apart from the ruin of the evening's planned event, regardless of the cold wetness and the shiver each felt in their outfit; somehow an unusual sense of etiquette rendered them all only completely capable of elocution and superb verbal exchange. Leba reaffirmed, she shared the evening with the most well-spoken poetic artists she had known in her life thus far; leaning into opportune space which welcomed a prolific exchange of sharp witted cantos, which they all executed, as typical, with utter perfection, like sport.

Delilah interjected the beginnings of conversation between Ramone and The Diamond Thief. "What I think," she started, "is that because the sun has already gone down, and because it is wet and gloomy, that we should rather meet tomorrow at the barn-studio and share in a light breakfast where, I am confident, our conversation will ease into a fine-pointed resolve of matters that we may only spoil now, as we are all wet and agitated. We could even pretend that we have not yet been reacquainted, and we can each plan over the remaining course of the night how we can most serve the daylight tomorrow in our re-gathering then."

Leba nodded her head in agreement; she had still not spoken.

The Diamond Thief returned the invitation and expressed... if it was all right with Ramone, he would like to meet in the next morning.

Ramone agreed, adding... he mostly would be available in later hours of the morning because it was a fine time to gather and he believed that the event may inspire him to complete a rendering of sketches; he shared how he believed a good group conversation was apt to provide a decent aural background to the graphite and ink work he had set up on his canvas at the barn-studio. Everyone in this story filters their emotional vulnerability neatly into their art; but they are almost no longer able to hide in this way from themselves. Ramone seemed anxious to pull away in the red autobus and so then to say goodbye. By the end of the short exchange between himself and the diamond thief, about which he'd had no forewarning, he'd motioned for the keys from the man who owned the autobus and had climbed already into the driver's seat, finishing his sentence with a punctuated gesture to Delilah to climb into the vehicle so that the all of them could drive away. Though terse in his motion, Ramone still achieved remaining polite in his

discourse, and Leba had no time to say a word or more to The Diamond Thief as he backed away from the door, only lightly making contact with Delilah's hand, meeting her gaze and then pivoting his head slightly to his shoulder to look harder at Leba, who felt torn between lurching out through the side door at the last instance to offer her company to the glistening rained-upon Diamond Thief versus uncomfortably sitting drenched in clothing which, though before had seemed to swallow her, felt now tight and creased in paralyzed twists, aligned with no respect to congruity, cutting her body parts a-symmetrically; her left hip was robbed of room to unfurl while her right felt lost in oblivion and excess of opportunity. Her suit jacket was ignoring her shoulders but paying overmuch attention to her collarbone, and her hair stayed busy fighting, as well, between frizzed and flat sopped tufts, stuck cleanly to the nape of her neck.

Ramone asked politely for the man who (typically) drove the red autobus to shut the door if he did not mind, and Leba, held prisoner by her wet outfit, only looked up for a last glimpse as the door slid shut and locked on its own, bringing a fogged window between the shared gaze of herself and the man who now stood under a drying sky, a sky whose air had thinned enough to be cut, from so high up, by a razor moon, through a shave cream of cloud. Leba was surprised beyond her own romantic expectation, to see the moon and The Diamond Thief through the very small and fogged autobus window. "How strange." She finally said, after the autobus had driven an entire block, expecting someone in the vehicle to ask her "What is 'how strange'?" But no one did.

Delilah, who sat next to Leba, explained where she had been to the collective of people now riding toward the barn-studio during their upheaval. "...I was looking for my umbrella outside the piazza, where I left it in the ticket booth, and inside the ticket booth was this man, who I cursed after being (of course) pleased to see him –as he has been my friend for quite some time– but I wished that I would not have to be the one to receive and carry out his request to be brought to you, however he insisted, expressing his sympathy for the weather."

The car joggled up and down over the broken street cobble, and Leba let the nap of her wet head fall back on the seat behind her, like a young child covered with sand after a long day at the beach, ready to be put to bed and to give way to dreams, to exchange the jig of her mind's quest, quitting finally, after an extensive search for her very own heart, whose form she had sketched on dispensed containers, but who was still somewhere... missing. Nobody wanted to say there was no chance, no one wanted to bare the news of the pending collective intuition, everyone still had their light on, but had also their own frustrations in keeping torches afire; spending so much fuel, waiting for little Leba Scrachsniv to find concision in her sensation, to find the cessation of spitfire distractions, to motor over expansive waters powered by means of the most inspired type of will, the sort which shapes infirmity into ingenuity.

Ramone had fallen asleep on the sheepskin rug, and he sat up slowly at the onset of dawn, immediately organizing his day's agenda. They had arrived home, drained of words, each going their separate ways, losing themselves into corners of the house. Ramone collapsed upon the rug with Tide, who was a borrowed dog-friend, living under the guardianship of the woman who lived beyond the hill. Tide had only recently grown into his full height at the age of fourteen months old, but he was still all rib-cage, and the direction of his head was incongruent with his snaky body as he meandered around the acres of the barn-studio's property, nose to the ground,

tail antennae-d in an orbiting swirl. He was a man's-best-friend kind of dog; a hound, ginger brown. Tide slept curled at Ramone's feet, smiling with his grey whisker spots, young and dimpling his face into an optimistic simple-smart expression. When Ramone woke, Tide lifted his pert head, collar jingling. Like most living beings capable of being in another's possessions, Tide wished that he belonged to Ramone. Ramone thought first to climb the case of stairs and to join Leba, who was certainly still sleeping, and who was warm and smelled like rosewater; but as soon as he stood up the morning, as usual, called him to alert duty, and he started unto the day rather than to pass dreamy hours near the woman upstairs. He headed outside toward the hot shower that had been rigged to the side of the barn-studio. Afterwards, he prepared to ride eighteen kilometers on his motorcycle to the woman's house that had processed his film, so that he could pick up extra copies for the evening, in the case of encountering more rain. This evening's show would be the last of the weekend, after which he would relax until the following Friday evening, when his work would again be shown in the piazza. He went to the kitchen, quickly mixed the ingredients for morning pastries and set the bowls on the counter, covering them with muslin cloth until he returned, or until Delilah finished preparing breakfast. He'd found orange rinds in the high cabinet by the stove and added them to his mix, with juniper currants, a snap-worth of maple sugar, molasses and lemon juice. Baking was his morning ritual, one rarely skipped. For Ramone, sharing his skills brought him more pleasure than reserving his talents for only himself. In times when he kept company with no one, he would deliver his scones to the elderly home downtown, or drop a box of his most fresh creations to the food shelter, where pleasantly surprised and hungry bellies were stimulated by the especially subtle ingredient Ramone, without fail, always added to each batch of his baked goods; one which outwitted the plummet and retard of carbohydrate, and somehow left each eater inspired, regardless of how little or lot they consumed. His pastries were infinitesimal worlds, and anyone who had ever been fortunate to share in such wealth immediately fell in love with Ramone Dish, even if they never laid eyes on his divine beauty. His pastries chanted of the fog lifting off the ocean in secret bays, emitted fragrance reminding the taster of the natural love they possess for their parents, reminded old people of dances they danced when they were young and agile, in the club, spinning and being spun. The textures of his floured affairs were miniature roadmaps of timeless places imaginable only by unspoiled childlike minds; like parks of paradise, days of perfect temperature. The only experience more delectable than eating a Ramone Dish treat would be to share a breakfast with Ramone himself. Ramone embodied natural etiquette, his ethic was rarely dissuaded, he had very few conflicts presenting opposition in his mind and heart. Watching him open up the New York Times was like watching a sunrise over a canyon, and watching his brow furrow, birds flying in double-u waves.

Today, however, Ramone felt the least like himself a man as self-contained as Ramone Dish could. Sleeping little, on hardwood, aided to his qualm. He sensed the nearing end of his project. Until this point, when one idea overturned, he'd already well wrapped his mind around a next adventure, driven wholly by his intrigue. Last, he'd been affixed with a blue hue he had never thought to call blue before, but then it appeared with suddenness one day— a new color blue, everywhere! And so the course of his creation went, as usual: the blue begs, first to be rendered into exhibit and then, more pronouncedly, to be imposed upon a modest town where the civil traffic court agrees, for one week in the beginning of spring, that a certain so-called Ramone

Dish shall be permitted to hang a fourth light onto the pre-existing trine of three-colored traffic signals. The light will be the shade electric bird-egg blue. He decides to hang it out to the right of the traffic signal, between the yellow and the green, staked off a silver chord, it triggers during the red light: emits noisily graceful. Though such subtle installation sounds futile to the average countryman, the remarkable quality of Ramone's work proves that this new blue (unconsidered by most anyone until now to be, perceptively, blue) functions delectably in traffic, forcing the driver to, for a moment, really speculate color, and to understand more deeply what it means to be stopped, and also what it is that urges one to go; and then—at last—left to guess, when struck with the blue hue, what to do at all.

Now, as he became aware of the near completion of his Chilean strawberry document, he felt no next momentum, nothing to urge forward or move toward a particular destiny. He felt that it was possible, when he was finished revealing his film, that he might dedicate his time to reading, or to sitting in front of a fire; or in the spending of a week alone at the barn-studio, bored. "Yes!" He thought, "I am going to attempt as much as possible to feel boredom, to become sick in boredom—to explore the easily fatigued bored exhausted mind, to become overly-bored to a point of desiring nothing, to refrain from starting or from longing to start. Then, when I feel the deep Sarte-like existential plague, when I feel that vague demeanor which threatens to have forever squandered my passion for searching further.... I will tease ennui from my depths! I will resurface with that sea-cucumber sloth-like squid of blah-ness itself and I will make a play, one which brings the audience, which completely captivates the audience, into a fit of boredom; but utterly enraptures them, where they cannot bare to leave, where they return affixed, show after show, to watch again. A play where the viewer forgets about their popcorn, forgets that they are yawning and is fascinated by being made tired! Then they'll leave overly exuberant, discussing with fabulous critique each blow-by-blow moment with their companion. I will call the work :Yawn. Or :Yawn;exacerbated. Or no, yes! Something cancel-y in title, like: "The Things You Had That Are Gone That You Never Had That Are Never Gone." Or maybe cancel-y is different than boring, and so then I shall title it something more boring, so average, unsuspecting, never assumed poetic. Never Assumed Poetic. Pillbox, lawn-chair, tounge depressor.... perhaps.... but all of these are still entertaining. I will find a name later, or maybe never, it can be called Thingless, Nameless Thing."

Ramone sped out onto the long-thin road and headed to the woman who processed his film, a woman who lived on a farm where grew, among other plants, Finnocio, Fennel; a favorite of Ramone Dish's, who could not be stopped, and whom no one had ever wished would be stopped.

Meanwhile Leba slept for hours more, alone in the barn-studio. Delilah remained in her side studio, certain to be working on a special-order ring, the copper in her hand responding to the fervent attack of winter morning light, splaying shoots over everything, on her skin and her dress. When Leba did stir, she merely rolled over onto her stomach and groaned into the pillow. "I don't want to wake up, I don't want to appear amused; I am neither satisfied by sleep nor am fully intrigued to wander into the day. Curiosity is not rousing me. More, I don't care to question why because then I'll must\* seem curious, and that is close to appearing amused and I don't want to rouse. Why, I am not satisfied by sleep! Oh dear beautiful god that has fled; take me with you on your coattails, or at least ride me in your entrails. I am selfish, and awake— and

not yet awake for 73 seconds and already am with repetitive thought which I've also repeatedly fought." She remembered lilac soap, the sensorial pleasure of fragrance in the morning tub. She remembered the feeling of leaning into the back of the porcelain, which was rounded to hold in grip-less slippery ease the exact width of her shoulders. This was once enough to coax her forward, when she was a morning woman. When she slept next to The Diamond Thief, as he slumbered deep into the day, she, waking hours before, would spend the morning lengthening out against his body, careful only to nearly wake him from slumber. She would lay her head into the space between his shoulder and cheek and "Mnnnnn..." The sort of Mnnnnn she sung was the kind of voice one makes when they are remembering how perfect it feels to melt in the sun, when they have the cares of a young person, when they have not made a plight of finding insurance, nor have they discovered yet that they have interesting marks on various parts of their body's skin from places where they have stretched and shrunk again. A time before meticulous articulate conversations about art and the future of the environment and insights about progressive ideals wear thin. Coffees have not caught up, but rather stimulate into the new hours of the new day, carried over from a night before. Sleep deprivation is not a consideration, for the soul has not yet been taxed to know that it must preserve endurance in the body. This blindly naive utterance of Mnnnn that Leba recalled having once made would expectantly be followed by the sweetest soliloquy; never before or thus thereafter spoken. A speech that would start in ways like this "When you were made... the ocean hiccupped and purposely splashed the sun, whose devious kingly loving playful eyes stared hard upon the waves and shore, burning all the land and leaving the world an aquatic pandemonium." Leba did not know what phrases such as these meant in literal translation, but they dripped with the momentum of southland honey from her mouth and pores, and onto the lap of the palate of the Diamond Thief's dreams, where he would pick up a new piece of imagery or more; all from the loving superfluous description of life Leba gestured with her plush laurels.

How strange in reflection, Leba assessed, that this same man who had summoned her most rhizome-like gestures was merely hours away from meeting herself and company upright, with conservative accordance and perhaps even a formalness in the dining area of the barn-studio, would not be breakfasting with her in luxurious pleasure alone together, but would sit in reserved style with herself and Ramone Dish, Delilah Fredemont and perhaps others.

And why again, were they meeting— how did this fit into her story? They were, as she remembered, coming together to speak about small objects, and ultimately— the smallest item of the ring that was now in Leba's possession, which Ramone had still yet to see. Leba figured that when The Diamond Thief came to the barn-studio she would then fetch the ring from her green robe pocket and lay it on the middle of the table, and that it would perhaps facilitate their communications.

Lilac soap worked wonders for Leba Scrachnsniv, who, since being drenched in the downpour from the night before, felt that she had left her beauty somewhere, that she had long ago given over the healthy shine of her enamored heart-radiance to a secret vigil; and fatally so, in protest of an ambiguous war. Though she was certain she would soon again know desire, she relished now in the ugliness of being dispossessed. Not many moons ago, in the course of all time, she was animated purely in waking near the diamond thief, obviously sensing that their souls had

patiently persevered for so many lifetimes to achieve the opportunity to share such a real human space. Now, though, she had seemingly resolved, by due time, to give up the idea of his companionship, and had surrendered all notions that he would again sleep soundly next to her, and that he would ever be interested in the sort of opening, continual dying and re-birthing that she so wholly experienced. Nor, she at last had concluded, was he apparently passionate or aspiring to generate a life of enduring joy, not with her. Reintroducing the Diamond Thief into her physical landscape in the last weeks had felt disorienting for Leba who had not emotionally prepared herself for his company (while somehow still always preparing for his company). She knew the dynamic of their interactions was too great to ignore, and by following the light of her deepest vision she would be drawn to him again and more. Still, she reflected now, as she bathed, inhaling deeply the lilac scent of soap— her determination to strengthen herself in solitude, and practice all of the tools she had long devoted herself to skillfully developing. After bathing, Leba sat and remembered her breath.... she descended the stairs and felt, for perhaps the first time while in Bologna, entirely at ease in the barn-studio.

Delilah had entered the kitchen while Leba bathed, and had finished putting into the oven Ramone's concoction. The smell of orange rinds and winter combined was riveting for Leba. She brought her fishing tackle box of black and grey charcoals to the large pine and steel table, and a 3 x 4 foot piece of thick, irregularly laid sketching paper, posting it to the surface with a translucent light blue tape. She had only recently found this tape at the back of the barn-studio, in the shed to the side, which was filled halfway with blue items, all in marked cardboard boxes labeled "this new blue", about which Leba knew nothing. Her own fishing box was filled with 14 different gray shades of charcoal, and 3 sticks of each color. There were 4 different intensities of black, and 3 sticks of each shade. Leba started on the paper with the face of a woman, a woman who looked, untypical to her usual sketch, precisely like herself. She drew her own face at life size and then stared into her own eyes. She meant to be so sincere, but looked still little and mischievous, with eyes ready to be prompted to dance over fire.

Ramone had left a note for the household; he planned to return by mid-morning breakfast, explaining that he had gone to retrieve copies of his film. Leba made a brew of herbs into a fine tea and continued to sketch with charcoal, rendering faces of different women: Delilah, the cake-maker from the piazza, and the woman who lived up the hill. When she tired of faces, she started on feet. She was pleased with the progress she had been making in her sketching, and took a break only when a very small and dirty white car chugged up the long drive to the front of the barn-studio. The car seemed altogether too small to properly seat anyone the size of an adult, but Leba knew that it must be the vehicle of Diamond Thief, because he was the only guest they were expecting for breakfast, as the Chilean strawberry explorers had returned home to start upon a new expedition. The diamond thief looked harrowed, with a wear and fatigue Leba was familiar seeing throughout the years of their late night encounters after his evenings filled with debauchery; which is how he referred to many of his jaunts. She never knew, precisely, what debauchery truly entailed, and she thought the term too blanketed and gentlemen's club-like to wish to explore it further. He walked with a gait, his body parts out of sync, on the driveway, which was an uneven road often lending to an odd stumble. As soon as he reached the door he knocked a familiar rhythm. Two Brazilian claves and a tripelet.

Delilah came to the door and warmly greeted him. Leba rose and walked to the center of the

room. The diamond thief looked around, expecting to see Ramone, but Delilah informed him immediately that Ramone would be back soon enough and had gone on an urgent errand. Leba said hello quietly and commented to the diamond thief that he looked as though he hadn't slept at all, and more so, that he had not sought shelter for the night.

"I actually ended up spending most of the night at a cafe, drinking espresso and reading. I was reading Hesse's Fairy Tales, have you discovered those? I thought I had read all of his work (minus the glass bead game which was far too long for my taste) and his poetry— but I had never come across this collection. I read the entire book and then the beginning again. I couldn't sleep— I know, I seem miserable."

Hesse was the only writer The Diamond Thief had actually read. Aside from one Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel, the diamond thief typically lacked the appetite to finish an entire book— or, in Leba's experience, he had been prone mostly to answer the call of an important affair before properly sinking into a novel. However, he was an excellent collector of books, and his shelves in the house she knew once as his were filled with literature; mostly existential work, some non-fiction, and musical biographies, as well as unread work by Tolstoy and other Russian writers. Occasionally, Leba had the rare pleasure of being read to by the diamond thief, on nights where their biorhythms aligned and they slept in stereo. Leba relished falling asleep listening to the mixture of his voice and the rain.

"Why don't you bathe or something before we have breakfast?" Leba offered him.

He was compliant, and thankful for the offer, and started upstairs. He followed her to the closet where she brought him two towels and a washing cloth. They entered the room with the porcelain tub and she shut the door. She twisted the faucets until she found a lukewarm temperature sure to not irritate his heat-sensitive skin. She motioned for him to sit on the edge of the tub and spoke.

"I think it's quite an event that you are here at the same time when I am— in this house, and that soon Ramone will meet us. I feel like you inspired this collective gathering and so I hope you have a vision of what you would like to bring to it, for I have attempted myself all morning as I drew with grays and black to figure exactly what will, at best, transpire. Personally, I am not certain what I could possibly want from this scene. It seems like in any story, when someone finally receives what it is that they have wanted, the outcome is never as planned. To set up a destiny is often a precursor to watching such a set-up falter. I don't want to try to set anything up between us all, I just wish to enjoy the morning and see, naturally, what may come about while doing so."

The bathtub was only just filling, but the diamond thief unclothed and stepped in, sitting and stretching his long, yellow legs the full length of the tub, which was barely long enough to fit him. Leba looked down in the daylight at his body. She forced herself to stifle her excitement. (He was in the bath! Like she recommended!) He was naked, right in front of her. His thigh, hosting the smallest bubbles like those in her German mineral water, she could, if she'd like, reach for, just to touch. Instead she moved militantly, handing him the washing cloth, informing him that he was free to use her soap.

"Actually," he returned, "I know that you slightly judge a person by the amount of toiletries in which they borrow from the unassuming hostess, and so I have taken it upon myself to always carry a bar of soap with me. If you reach into my bag behind the door you'll see a pink bar of

Sandalwood. Leba smiled and turned half around; unbuckled the closure of his bag upon instruction. At the top was a box of muddled soap, next to a book that Leba immediately recognized, one she had not seen for a long time.

"This is your journal!" She noted.

"I hadn't written in it for some seasons and found it again while packing before leaving the states. I brought it to be reminded of you. The last time I had written in the book was when I was at the fort where Dog Ears lives. I wrote right before you came to visit, and haven't since."

Leba was familiar with his last entry because she was an avid reader of any writing he had ever rendered or kept in his top drawer. She opened the book again and saw some sketches that The Diamond Thief had made of the ocean, and one of her profile. It was so sweet to see, from years in the past, times when Leba had been so unhappy. Had she overlooked the simple sweetness of the man who now bathed in her tub? He reached his hand from the water where he sat and took Leba's, looking up at her, eyes filled with various autumn browns; they threw amber-colored spears and tiger-eye flints toward her, they belonged to old fire and lion cubs.

"You asked me if I knew why I was here. I am here because I want to help you make peace with time; I made that clear to you the other night. This is what I want. I can feel you sensing that you are in danger, that you're losing some essential part of yourself. I want to help you get to a place that feels safe and truly reflective."

"That is so odd for me to hear." She replied. "Why would you care to suddenly devote yourself to such a mission?"

"It may feel sudden to you," he contested, "because I have been absent from your life.... I mean, there was an implicit fullness in our earliest encounters, a youthfulness, I suppose— and I myself have sensed that the conversations had with such ease between us during those years were purely more important than we were able to realize in the moment. I remember once when I spoke to you at length after you had disappeared..."

Leba interrupted. "I never disappeared."

"Didn't you, though?" He asked, trying to remember and earnestly asking for her to help scratch the muted surface of his memory.

"I never did. I never left without telling you for months that I was feeling as though I was called to go. I never left without crying on your pants, without pulling myself off of the floor sobbing. I never left without pleading with you to love me more, to keep me with you, to make it so that our shadows did not echo so much into the lost lands. I only left because you were already absent, there was nothing else I could do unless I wanted to die."

The Diamond Thief sighed through his soft open mouth. Maybe he had heard this before in past communications between them. What felt impossible, however, was the chance of resurrecting a peace of heart, to salvage the damaged parts. I mean, the question, really, for Leba, we all know, is this: Could She Want to Resurrect and Salvage the untied ends between herself and The Diamond Thief? When she looked at him, in pictures, in person, in dreams— he was more beautiful to her than she could ever imagine another to appear. His beauty was of the same innocence of a deer staring with wise gentleness. A deer who pauses in front of the oncoming ignorant headlights and looks in through the windshield, never in a mean fashion, not even for a moment. Only sighing, only sympathetic for how ugly you are in your car when really you could get out, you could cover yourself with fawny foliage; you could dip your wet nose into fresh

flowers. And the deer knows this and looks at you with the look of your own lost heart peering, hovering at a distance reminding you that you are outside of your own self, and all you want is to find quiet, all you want is to organize your furnishings and your books and your papers and your blankets, you want everything to be clean and soft, rather than angular and sterile, or rancid and smelling like human waste. You want to put your stomach to the earth when you look at a beauty like the one that Leba Scrachnsniv looked at when she saw pictures of The Diamond Thief, or was in-person next to and beholding the Diamond Thief. However, it seemed that when he acted as though he loved her back, when he spoke to her in English, when he cared for her and listened to her position in the world of the world that they shared somehow together –miles apart– she lost sight of his beauty. She felt that they perhaps made each other ugly, how was this possible? Could beauty repel beauty?

"I love you." Leba said.

"I love you." He mirrored in reply.

This did not mean they would venture together into the next chapter of her strange epic she knew, but her affection was more triggered by the preamble of whitepicket fence-like linearity, spearing always any unencumbered terrain, organizing figure and form from breath-work, about which or for why she could progressively comprehend in no way other than bizarrely. From her whimsy onset, she'd decided there was one story only, preserved in spiraling odyssey. While all the characters in her life were free to whirl in circles of no trajectory, she felt the onset of Reason coming to her now, requesting action. Compliant, she would fashion a winning sequence, imaging so that it was to serve her specific rendition of the One Story in its most complete dynamism, so that it suffered not one moment of unmet wistfulness.

Thus determining she must comply with the movement of her classic, she re-enters her scene, so that when she next expresses to The Diamond Thief how she thinks it so odd to be gifted with a random ring which is not random at all but, still, has been wholly unfamiliar to her thus far, he cantors toward her and he pushes his long muzzle into her larynx, metaphorically (for he is still in the bathtub) and he says "How is it odd! It cannot be odder than the fact that suddenly the writer of our story is telling this story in the present tense, suddenly– (and has used the word suddenly again, and with a parenthetical ellipsis after a hyphen as well, a grammatical faux-pas she has rebelliously been vying to extort, using Extort– a word, further, that does not mean what she thinks!) when I believe that this story has been in a past tense until now" says the diamond thief.

"It cannot be more odd" he continues to elaborate "than wrestling to not begin sentences with the word 'and' nor to make them too long (what sort of communicative species would spend calories choosing to whittle expression in such a way to establish grammatical intelligence) or proving one's properness with commas, and quotes– nor can it be more odd than the point where we are at in this story, while 'we' are probably, beyond the narrative point of view, just one person altogether, me and you and Ramone Dish and Delilah. And (there's that conjunction) what is more odd is how Leba-centered this whole story is; we aren't even going into the piece of how Delilah Fredemont is possibly making love to Ramone Dish right now and that Gloria

Anchorstein is running for mayor in her small province in Norway where she is attempting to impose laws both obscure and poetic."

"Delilah is making love to Ramone?" Leba interpolated, flushed.

The Diamond Thief's voice became higher and child-like, in a manner that a man can only get away with once he has successfully arrived into his manhood. "I mean.... it was an idea had, a turn of tale— a side-plot. But it was figured out that you, Leba, would not be able to display adequate upset, nor would it make much sense because really there has already been enough sort of under-developed allegories to sex in this book and it hasn't led to any deep spiritual epiphany, and plus— you know with Sex in Books and in that sort of dialogue of passion that characters wield, it is too hard to determine what exactly is transpiring because one could read a lovemaking-ish line (which usually sounds like cat food to read out loud) and one cannot possibly know what kind of tone that's spoken in by punctuation alone; and it's unrealistic to imagine the actual timbre love elicits being communicated outright in dialogue. When people are so moved that they must give voice to their sensations it's not usually a proper phrase, it's a mumble, or a basic sound; sighs and murmurs that are difficult to develop in spelling choice. One may have chosen "ohum(xpxpx)mmnn" for me, for example, when I sunk into this bathtub, and "ahhhooahhh" when I am looking now at you, clear that you become more beautiful each time I see you; but these look ridiculous to the writer who each time edits the sound anew and is still unconfident whether the paragraph which contains these sentences should finally be deleted. "Meanwhile, you must, Leba, disregard the idea you had previously which was that I find you beautiful only because I am perceiving a beauty imparted to you by Ramone's affections. Though, in regards to physics, the idea is interesting, I don't think it's legit. It could be possible, however, that men fraternize in sharing their sense of beauty by projecting distinct attention onto women whose spirit of form they mutually admire, just as you said once to me that women are loving each other through men that they engage with who have learned the vastness of their sensual skill from the women they have loved before... to me, this all makes sense. Then it would be clear that the unity of intimacy moves pervasively beyond self and other but reaches into the depths of the oneness of humanity, that we touch another to mend the broken arrows of separation between us and all life. But Leba, I think you are beautiful even when you have not been touched, because then your beauty is so sadly pure. You remind me of a deer."

"That cannot be!" Thought Leba. She had just been the one to compare The Diamond Thief to a deer— that was her perspective choice. It has long been known by writers like Sappho and Rumi and Rilke and Wilde that in the dynamic Between Two there exists the Beautified and then the Beholder, and that one wants from the other their own illusion of what they are not. But could it be possible that The Diamond Thief would perceive Leba as the same deer she had just likened him to, the soft sweet witness who for one moment becomes your friend, your mirror and then with immediacy returns, feral?

She looked in the bathtub and the diamond thief grinned. It was not an evil grin, but a cryptic showing, an eye-sparkling exchange.

"I get it." Leba said and clutched his foot that rested in a visually dominant angle off the corner of the tub.

She did not have to explain. He obviously had long known what she at last did now, or he

experienced his own epiphany simultaneously but with more reserve. Whatever it was he possessed, the mystery, the impossibility of being touched; she possessed the same. They were in love, transfixed, with the distance between them. The distance that pushed their own sameness away enough from one another so that they could watch the impermanence of life flutter in flirtation with the throb of undeniable existence, a plague and a plethora of short plays called Veritable Reality. The artist, perhaps, lives in between the state of intimately recognizing death throughout his life, or then recognizing the credence and impact of feeling wholly submerged in life itself, mainly through the organ of the heart, the center of poetic commerce. The artist, perhaps, is engineering constantly the subtle wirings of being fit with humanness, the infinitude of integrity and potential of holiness—the complexities of capacitating realms superseding matter and simultaneously expressed in the fundamental play of physical wielding—but the artist is also one-foot-in-the world of feeling the great love generating in just the simple passing-by of pedestrian affair. The Artist is wanting to both commiserate and share joy vicariously, wanting to live openly with a whet appetite, and thoughtfully, as though to progress to a more fluid state of organism. It is not to voice opinion, but to hint with ginger suggestion (which is altogether two pitches higher than you hear now as you read and twofold the count softer than you now feel the temperature of these words) that the artist efforts to fabricate his fancy, that he so much wants to break the hard shell of his own cerebral findings, longs to raise high the vulnerable, sensorial child of his musings, and conceive his ideal— a world full of cupful, sentient children at the helm of every natural soapbox and authentic affair.

"So...." He spoke, reaching to her shins as she stood by his bath, her head seeming in a lofty cloud miles above his lowland marsh soakage. He used her shins to lift himself and when he stood, Leba dried him with care, bringing a plush towel to his frame.

"Let me do this," He said. (He was referencing the meeting to come, not objecting her skilled toweling work.) He asserted. "I'll handle this next part, Leba— just trust me. I'm supposed to give you this diamond. Actually, you can abstain from trusting me, because this will allow you to maintain your own wavering position, which may be imperative to lead you to where you are heading. And when you get to where that place is, it won't be the end, it will just be the end of this part of the story. That is always the most difficult decision to make— where to end."

"That has been very hard for me." Leba admitted. "It has been most difficult to determine where to end with you."

The Diamond Thief was all the sudden wiser for his time in the bath, with Leba's lilac soap, which he'd ended up using at least on his feet.

"This is the beauty, Leba, that you are able to invite into your life as your own, and that is: there is no end between us, there is only the learning of how to utilize our dynamic. We have never necessarily want to get permanently comfortable with one another, because the very idea is unnatural to both of us, and more accurately, we have believed long and hard that this sort of comfort belongs to unreal sitcoms from the long peak of bad media streaming, where women acted with a bloody slapstick toward their husbands who were scared of possessing unrefined intimations. You don't want to be a woman like that. You want to be a woman who I cannot define, because in attempt to, I make an ass out of my own statement. But I believe that the woman you want to be is one who feels pliable and strong at the same time, graceful and guiding, insightful and yielding; powerful and submitting, a pure juxtaposition. We don't want

comfort, but we don't want to ruin our wonderful gait here in this world of personal success with a painful interlude that is unending between ourselves. You don't want to perpetually call out to me and feel like you cannot rely on my aptness to answer; your sense of fulfillment with time cannot be determined by the rhythm of my sleep; this will surely keep you weeping, though it may keep your muse engaged. The true fullness of your cup must come from a different sort of precipitation. You cannot afford to incur a drought, to undergo seasons of detaining yourself at bay; uncertain of how you feel or where your heart is, such as you have— turning it off like a faucet, thinking that you've lost it- and then, there it is again, while you wonder where it went; when you felt so spent... No— I think the work here is for you to recognize that you rely upon the rain, the elements, and they are perfect even in their imbalance— It cannot be raining all of the time, but you know that you have to be comfortable with the propensity of the storm, the pain it warrants. This is why they said that the Buddha's heart was forever broken; it was the enlightened heart— the one that knew the world's suffering. If you do not solely personalize your suffering, you can let go into a sea more lush and real than all the tears you could independently weep. You can stay connected, even when you climb for a moment upon a raft and float and sun, or land somewhere in the arctic and play with the penguins, you can still know you are on that sea-journey\*. All you have to do is choose to remember your essence. You already have everything you need to possess the role that you desire. You desire to speak this muse, to sing it— to play it on all of the instruments you love and on your most beloved instrument. You cannot be scared that your desires are of an ill nature. The moments when people have not understood your intentions, and the times where you were perceived as coquettish or as a temptress for braving to bare yourself, keep from translating these as insults, but learn to recognize that being so foolishly in view is part of your work, your weight to carry. It feels so nice when you feel like you have delivered art with pristine elocution. The truth is, your discipline is very important, and you deserve to be in a space where you have all the courage to show up every day with discipline. You deserve to feel that no menacing avarice can stand in your way or knock you down with a simple blow to your esteem. You don't need to pound your chest, Leba, you need to allow yourself to taste the pleasure of your passions."

He was dressing himself as he spoke, in a self-assumed sophisticated manner, as though ready to hold meeting for the board, and had put his socks on, they were argyle; borrowed and unreturned socks, which had appropriate holes now in the right toe and left heel.

"I needed to hear that." Leba said. "But it's not that I am only hearing it, it's that I understand all of this now. I know, and I am ready to lay the house down."

"Go to it, madame."

"Je ne suis pas madame." Leba corrected him "Je suis une petit mademoiselle dans le grande monde."

"Vous êtes la madame aussi." He implored. "Pour moi."

He tugged her white very soft sweater away from her neck just enough so that he could touch his lips to the spot half way between her solar plexus and throat, the spot that is an ember, long kept

lit.

"Oaxaca." She attempted to spell out the language of breath vacuumed through her lips. "How's that?"

It would not have mattered, necessarily to Ramone Dish, had he come home and found the door closed to his barn-studio bathroom, where inside Leba and Diamond Thief attended their own ablution and washings— it would not have mattered because Ramone had recognizably one debatably-perfect feature (and this feature was the only one which could be courted by debate or was up-in-the-air and indeterminably predisposed to the outsider's preference). He had the intellectual availability and sense for timing and expression, passion and reverie— but he was not prone to emote. He was not prone to fall to the floor and wail. He was not set up to scream, his voice could not fire with such fervor. He had never explored this sort of tone. Ramone did not agonize; he did not antagonize, bully or cower, at the least, not to our knowledge. Leba knew instantly, now, as she readied to depart from Bologna, that a quality of tenderness and responsiveness was necessary in order for her heart to entrust in another's. The truth of the matter in the whole conceptual fantasy of the wanting woman longing for the rescuer, the hoping for that peerless peak-climber who makes friends with or wards off the violent saber-toothed tigers or the mythic kidnappers in order to free his own heart's ecstasy, personified as a confined woman ready for liberation, is that this man needs be less physically strong than he is obviously radiant, less impeccable than he is willing to play with fire. Is less forceful than he is active, actively emoting. His emotions are not powerless, hopeless lazing desires, but are charged, and with certainty employed as a congruency in mission and heart, applied to his being.

When Ramone returned with an armful of film back to the barn-studio, The Diamond Thief, Leba and Delilah all sat at the breakfasting table, which had been pulled nearer to the fire, but still off-center in the large room, and in view of the many windows which poured in the day's light through wide-mouths; in a wintered manner, not overly-bright, but with a precise and soothing illumination. The sort of light one recalls when conjuring the past.

The rain had ceased, leaving the day refreshed and charmed. It was still frigid, however, and a fire had been built upon a steady frame of wood that took care of itself, the way fires do. Delilah, Leba and The Diamond Thief sat with grey and black charcoal, with heavyweight paper, anchored onto the table by manila tape. Leba knew that The Diamond Thief was free with the skills of his hands, but it had been long since she had shared in the philological space of drawing and speaking sparse, rich exchange, so long that Leba could not remember ever having shared a moment of drawing and philology with him before. Delilah, as usual, made a great trine to the company; the scones and muffins baked, and the crumpets and the small rounds of hearth bread baked. The woman from over the hill had delivered fresh raw butter, which she did often on the weekends. The butter came from her brother's modest dairy farm, a few hours south. Leba rose from the table and ceased employment with her charcoal renderings to make Ghee in exchange, which is a clarified butter if you do not know. She watched the curd separate from the whey and then she strained what was still liquid and hot. She poured the liquid into a blue glass jar because the Ghee stays preserved longer in a dark-colored glass container, and she placed it on its lonesome upon a bare cutting board counter. She still had the remaining ghee from the week

before which she had also prepared, and as all of the baked, warm breakfast items were ready to emerge from the oven at the exact moment, and as she and Delilah (both mitted and flushed in oven steam), pulled the preparations out from the depth of the oven's belly, Ramone and his armful of film entered.

Ramone seemed cheerful. He returned most often from his independent adventures, usually on motorcycle, rose-cheeked and energized.

Though he had slept poorly the night before, he considered fatigue an idea to which he was quite unattached, and was rather fully in his day, with much ado, anticipating a late-morning breakfast with delight. Tide, the dog from beyond the hill, reappeared at his side.

Ramone had decided, so it seemed, to be cordial, and as fair as the morning itself had turned, toward the Diamond Thief. He came into the house and approached first his two lady friends and greeted them warmly. He shook hands with the Diamond Thief, who had risen from the table only moment's before to assist in relieving the baked goods from the oven.

"I cannot pretend to be completely cordial toward you, I am more so not sure how to be around you at all." Ramone offered.

"That is perfectly understandable." The Diamond Thief replied.

"You know," Ramone said. "I have promised the woman up the hill not only to return her sweet dog by the afternoon so she can properly be kept company, but that I would also cut some larger rounds of wood she has into smaller, more affordable pieces. I should grab a bite and head there for a bit." He looked to the Diamond Thief, "Do you want to come?"

The diamond thief agreed that this would be a good idea and the two, after pocketing warm pastries and filling a travel thermos of black tea, left together.

Leba took the opportunity to collect an assortment of fresh crumpets for the table and sit with back copies of Dream Post, the collaboration of Delilah, Anchorstein, and her own. Delilah brought two fresh brews to the table that were seeping in aroma. Leba again recognized that her own shoulders were elevated up around her ears, so she breathed deeply, acknowledging the fortune of a long morning, appreciating the hours of successful vision which had created the collection of Dream Posts she studied. Delilah pointed to one page in particular, from a spring syndicate issued a few years before.

"I remember taking that dress and throwing it into a bath of chocolate mud that we made... and then afterwards climbing in. It was a real chocolate bath! We had talked so long about the idea; it had been our most vivid plan, to bathe in perfectly tempered chocolate. And we worked so hard to get the consistency just right- not watery at all, but not sticky. All the chocolate we had donated to us from the chocolate makers on that northern island. An eight-page spread, this is so edible and divine! Titled: Make your own chocolate bath, serious instructions. We were so serious in our endeavor! That's funny, no?" She laughed.

Leba and Delilah chose to not speak about the two men who had left together. They were not avoiding conversation per say, rather, the friends had mastered the moment together collectively. To speak of the potential dialogue between the absent men would be to sabotage the spontaneous expression possibly taking place between the two as they cut wood and returned the dog to the woman beyond the hill. Plus Delilah knew that Leba had only one plan, and this plan was

inevitably for her own art to be enabled, to find a balance in the day so that she would be charged with the full charge of her own soul\*. Leba closed the last issue of Dream Post and checked on her departing flight for the day after the next. Delilah had decided to leave after the end of the following week, but Leba was still intent on returning immediately to New York, to pick up her beloved instrument, Peodreeno.

Later in the day the two women still set up by the fireplace, making collage for postcards. Usually, Leba thought making collage rode that fine line between people who had "hobbies" and people who were had by art. Collage seemed to be a last resource for idleness, a way to use existing mess to reinstate what would, at best, only be a spin on someone else's mess. However, with Delilah collage was different, her pieces were hand spun extra parts of her own work. While Leba hadn't clearly created any lasting collage during the course of their afternoon, Delilah had made a strange and almost eerie card for Mauna loa, who was, for the meantime, staying at her house in Brooklyn. The card was made with flattened, melted pieces of gold barb and tinted in a beet-dye. Delilah broke the black coal from the fire pit over the card, and she marked with heavy handed accentuations on the card for Muana loa, like a child. After which, she wiped the remaining coal pieces from her workspace onto the floor and curled into her own nest of long limbs, resetting her posture before scrolling a lengthy insert upon the card's back. Intimacy sustained between Delilah and Leba without a need for either to divulge the inconsequential; it was still obvious to Leba that Delilah suffered a loss since Mauna loa was no longer her hit man; that he was more in need of protection from the world than she. For years Delilah had grown accustomed to a constant hiding-out and near-escape, outwitting Mauna loa as he crafted a path toward her demise. And now, the pattern was sabotaged— she ran from nothing and had no need to look over her shoulder, her kinesthetic was forlorn. More strangely, what replaced her prior frenzy was a newly amiable sense toward her past victimizer, Mauna loa, whom she now held in regard and further more felt a protective concern for the well-being of; she had become his nurturer!

According to the world by Mauna loa, to be emotionally accessible had long been considered a useless impracticality. Delilah had received letters from him since she had come to Bologna, reports from home, photos of her neighborhood— as he had taken up photography during his newly noted transition. He homesteaded at Delilah's, pondering his past, settling into his body. Leba wondered why Delilah had taken sympathy on the man who had, for such a lengthy period, threatened her life and so finely irritated her state of peace, but she understood that Mauna loa represented something significant to Delilah, and that Delilah had taken to heart the advice administered by her streetwise brother (who had taught her to be a supreme fighter). He had consistently advised her to keep her enemies close at hand. For this reason, Delilah had given Mauna loa her house key and left a clean set of 500 thread count sheets on the bed, so that he might sleep very deeply. She had also commissioned a neighboring wood peddler to deliver fresh cut wood and a fagot of kindling, so that he would be insured warmth. Lastly, while she was in Bologna she continued to have delivered the hearty baked bread brought to her by the neighboring baker who possessed the most divine skill with an oven. Her favorite time of year was in the mid-autumn when, as she worked carefully on a ring, her eyes blurred in hypnosis of meeting colors, the local baker came to her door. The baker knew when and when not to strike

conversation with Delilah Fredemont, and most often he would only simply smile in respect for an artisan in the midst of her craft, placing his bread into her outreached hands. After he'd gone, she carefully clutched the parcel, fetched a trifle of jam or honey from the kitchen and returned to the scene of her endeavors, chewing slowly the just-baked bread, speculating.

Leba looked now at Delilah's own fingers. Sometimes she did and sometimes she did not wear the rings that she now donned on each long, graceful finger. The rings were all part of a large seven piece family; she wore two on her right pointer finger, one on her right middle finger, and three on her right ring finger. On her left hand, she wore only one, on her pointer. The rings were very slender; a few were as slight as cotton threads stuck together, and the thickest was only the width of a thin electrical chord. They were perfect for Delilah's hands, tinted bronze, rusted silver and a light amber-stained gold, and she wore them mostly when her hands weren't busy in the thick of her own assemblage.

The door of the barn-studio opened, baring the return of two wintered men. Ramone and The Diamond Thief appeared as brothers, due less to any kindred and rugby reconnection fostered over the past hours, but more in the inarguably natural complimentary quality of their partnered presence. Leba felt with suddenness that the two surely shared history imparted in ribonucleic acid. Both rounded off at the precisely same height, faces framed by a similarity of bone structure; legs both long, knees prominent, but not disruptive to a handsome movement of limbs. (The Diamond Thief, however, was –in this episode– ganglier, by choice of lifestyle, than Ramone). As they reemerged collectively buoyant, it was obvious the outing had refreshed their spirits in a way difficult, seemingly, for adult people to experience by a mere few regenerative hours. Their vivid pallor appeared recouped with a sense of ease often impossible for the sophisticated mind to peacefully attain except upon rare occasion. However, this fleeting and non-withstanding sense of rejuvenation is perhaps impractical. The truth of renewal is that it is debatable how truly restorative this "adult resting" is. Restoration is applicable to non-animate objects, paintings, rooms in houses, antique cars, but one cannot bring back an inevitably depleting longevity of life that is made to be worn until it ceases, transforms, and becomes unrecognizably altered by a supreme recycler. There is a source called Jing in Traditional Chinese Medicine which is determinably a certain amount, pre-set at birth, made numerable by the amount of eggs a woman has and little fish a man contains. When life is lived up fully, there is no more Jing to restore, one has plainly run-out.

But somehow, even if restoration is theoretically impossible for the human being according to the ancient laws of restitution, when Ramone and The Diamond Thief re-enter, they look restored, and more than rested, they appear to be at peace with the sense of loss which slowly takes over more and more each day as great ceremonious death encroaches.

They walk together to Leba and stand at her front.

"The Ring is yours." Ramone says.

"I told you already, but it's confirmed, we give it to you." Says the Diamond Thief.

She was without choice in the matter, but not a victim. "Okay." said Leba Scrachnsniv. She dug into her robe pocket, where the ring had been all morning.

"Ramone, do you want to see it?" She remembered that he had not been reacquainted with it since it had been returned.

"Please." He encouraged.

She took the ring and brought it out to the light and slid it onto her left ring finger. It fit perfectly; it was designed like a fourteenth century Venetian ring, where two ends met to support their gem. She had to admit, it was a treasure, a beautiful piece of jewelry. It fit her hand well and looked as though it was pleased to be somebody's, to be hers. The ring was not dull, nor weathered, but appeared ageless, implacably neither new nor worn.

Ramone remarked that the ring was still stunning, and that he was happy to see it, and moved that it had brought them together. He spoke to Leba. "I do not know if you are aware of this, but the ring we have just rightfully determined as yours is a powerful jewel, I would not hesitate to say that your life will forever be completely transformed by it."

She wrestled her own awkwardness having to receive a gift. The men once again expressed how this bestowment was less a gift and more a rightful duty, an act of homage they owed the collective female psyche, and that they hoped she would use it in her own wealthy, heart-felt process.

They spent the rest of the day stretching and resting in front of the fireplace and by nightfall created a stew of winter vegetables and fish brought from the seaside.

Days later came her resolve. She packed her small bag and took an extra shoulder-strap duffel filled with recent purchases and was taxied to the airport by Ramone. The Diamond Thief had left their company the day before, after a walk with Leba alone, where they lay down on the cold winter hillside and watched the sunset, breath louder than thoughts. Ramone, secure that her luggage had successfully made it aboard the plane, held Leba in a long embrace. He kissed her forehead and said in Italian that he was very thankful for her warm company. He wished that they would find each other before the following summer and he promised to give a sketch that Leba had made a few mornings before to the cake-maker in the piazza. Leba was short on words, but filled with reverence and appreciation.

"Ramone Dish. You are extraordinary. Please know I will be sending my love from wherever I am. And enjoy your last week in the fantastic company of Delilah."

Ramone's smile nearly faltered, it appeared momentarily as though his face might fall. "How beautiful," thought Leba, "would it be to see Ramone Dish uncontrollably frown, to see his lips swell, to watch him fall to his knees and beg for someone or something."

Leba thought he might do it sometime, because he was a man capable of everything. That was when she saw; Ramone Dish was still becoming a man. A man, thought Leba rightfully, was one who could crumble and risk falling apart, risk losing possession and self-possession, and who would brave a maladroit improvisation for the relief of his own conservative constraint.

Resultantly, there remained an unctuous air about them, neither one was free enough to fall apart. Leaving felt less sad than sterile as an effect, and so their last scene in Bologna together passed almost empty.

Here's the part of our story where we intercept the use of common language to offer the reader a

series of typically unknown English words which will, with hope, inspire the reader to utilize their own dictionary. Hebitude, Remunerate, Fob, Porphyry. Then there are words that are only so slightly different and are grand fun to know intimately as Independents! Impetus, Impetuous, Quizzical, Quixotic. Contrition, Contrivance, portentous, pretentious, intimation, imitation. For these, we recommend the American Heritage 4th addition, because it includes words such as Dotage and also notes the word 'lightbulb', which according to other dictionaries is considered a word cluster. However, we think that having to recollect two entire different denotations to simply call upon one invention is a waste of much needed intellectual space and thus appreciate not only the naming of lightbulb as one word unto itself but also take the liberty to cluster many previously unrelated terms together, without hyphens nor explanations. The American Heritage Dictionary also includes favorite words among poets and englishmen alike, words who stand for practical and beautiful items, such as Andiron and Surge Protector. It also contains measurement tables to convert between metric and U.S. customary units, so my friend is finding who sits next to me now (distractingly so). Metric units can be useful if you are traveling on a plane from Bologna and feel an absent sense of heart that would most typically weigh in at say 12 pounds which, if multiplied by .45 –into Kilos– could be expressed in a conversion of terms practical for meticulous poets. (But difficult, still, to quickly multiply in the head for the meticulous poet who is, daring generalization, often missing the mark in practiced attempts to perform punctual mathematics.)

Ramone had provided Leba's return flight, as so she flew in the front of the plane, with an abundance of room, in a row unshared by any other traveler. She slept long and deeply throughout the entirety of the trip, during which she stumbled upon a distinct dream. In the dream she was aboard a different plane, much like the first in the fleet of the history of flying apparatus. The plane was a convertible, was small and red. Leba wore a flight scarf and goggles, and sat next to a very long man whose upper body towered from the fuselage. He was flying the plane, and she wore earmuffs sitting beside him to block the engine's roar. She realized suddenly that she was dreaming and, decidedly, looked down upon her hands; she had learned from an early age that this was the first action one should take when one realizes they are actively dreaming to gain lucidity. As her hands came into focus she recognized the ring on her finger, the one she had been recently endowed. She felt an urgency to communicate with the man flying the plane, to be informed as to where they were flying. As she raised her hand to tap his shoulder, she watched her ring slip off her finger. She went to catch it but it fell quickly through the clouds and into the landscape below them. The man flying the plane looked through his tinted goggles to her with affirmation, making her direction clear; she had to take the leap, to follow her ring. She smiled briefly at him, the twisted smile of a foolish warrior, and then she unbuckled her seat belt, stood upright onto her toes and plunged into the sky, bombarding with grand speed. Finding her stomach with her mind's intent she took direction and headed downward toward the vicinity where the ring had plummeted, passing highflying birds and pieces of meteorite material, satellite debris and visible radio frequencies alit in technicolor. Not a moment passed where Leba believed that the ring had been lost from her forever. She flew faster and further downward until she caught sight of the small, shimmering thing. She sped underneath it and pinched it from the sky into the billowing basket of her shirt, forming a

marsupial pouch. Once she had recouped her ring, she realized the ground below her was fast approaching, and how she proceeded rapidly toward it! She waved her arms as though treading air to slow herself, so intent on halting her speed she hadn't the time to consider where she would land. With immaculate vision, she caught site of a very small hole to which she immediately felt drawn, a space upon the wide plane of earth that would only just fit the shape of her form. She brought her legs together as she reached the landscape and as she closed in on touchdown, she prepared for what became a seamless glide into a porous, wet chasm that fit comfortably around her frame. She, with the ring successfully back upon her finger, slid for the remaining portion of the dream into a warm hole which she knew, with her innermost intelligence, to be the home of very kind bunnies, who were joyous and welcoming and who appeared to remind her of her own fertility and enthusiasm.

She woke, contemplating fertility and generation. How easy it was for one to suffer from inhibition, in even the slightest of conservative environments! How progressively the child come to under-use his own original form, his own fleshed out articulation of divine restraint, for the promise of providence made by order and law. How the whimsy of imagination, plainly outstretched, ruling by that loving hand, resting patiently open for birds to perch on the occasion, has been mistrusted, considered reverted or non-forward, quickly traded in for future innovations of more urgent progress. And that urgent progress, however strong and persistent, is unable to compare with the measureless unit of our daily purring cantos of evolution. Even math, especially math, self-obliterates attempting to express kismet magnetism, gesturing to express the relationship between outside forces moving inward and the implosion of matter unto and out from itself all seemingly.... old party etiquette. Who longer cared about the theories on the spiked punch, how the deviled eggs were made so...deviled. Who cared to prove? Who was still racing to save the disappearing world? Those racing would infallibly be left... with their free radical logic. Meanwhile, we were disappearing, me and you and the bees.

Leba reveled until she successfully bored herself, which is not uncommon on a long ride through the sky, sitting in the front, when one has all the seats to one's self. She surmounted that she had been exposed to such theorems of energy in seventh grade science class and was only stumbling upon an equation. Unfortunately, she had to retread these scholastic grounds when engaged with her active psyche because in the seventh grade Science was a categorical subject that was purely specialized and non-affiliated with aspects of actual life, unless one was reaching for extra credit and had applied to the Science Fair, where still real life was then put safely into cardboard display to contain any magic that might seep out from a great equation. Unless you had a father who was some sort of engineer or a mother who was keen about mechanics, in that case, then you were gifted, so it seemed, with an understanding of how gravity supported the angle of your house and how to determine if you had muscular sclerosis or if you just were going through a learning curve. Otherwise, life was life: packaged, purchased and adorned, and science was science, a laboratorial speculative hypothesis, non-applicable. Leba only realized now that she was privy to applied science. And the dream she had woken from, from such great heights, reminded her through myth that the hole to which she was gravitationally aiming and drawn to was the place of the most primitive science, the grace of the wild.

Leba was open to the world, which felt, quite possibly, alarming. Being visible, the world would

be able to watch her confront her fears of the tide. The certain success she had achieved thus far was no longer satiating, to stick her one toe in the fury of the vast waters, and then promptly relieve the digit of its wetness, drying it immediately. She had been preoccupied scrolling, word by word, song by song, a relegated expression of what surely stood for the infinite force of great life— to which, if she submitted her whole novice self, would destroy her rapidly; for who can sustain that position? She had figured. Humans must swim only briefly in the element of water, admiring the aquatic life, even diving in with special apparatus, but always re-emerging from their moments spent, with theories and poetries both, and little seashells and rocks from the deep, rattling off stories of survival, testing levels of life in small increments, speculative of their own origin, posing different opinions like mannequins, enticing the witness with fashionable weaves of formidability. Might she one day remember herself as the ocean in whole, rather than a mess of limbs tangled around zooplankton, prone to create fanciful drama from tidal perusals? When this plane landed, would she remember to retain her earthed, but flotsam whimsy, to unfurl longer and to awaken unto a whole new depth of experience— to rewrite her own fate, to dismantle its evident scroll while encouraging its oracular dance upon birch; could she sustain as the witness while she wielded her form with both a disregard to and explicit sense of time? Or might she drown herself in a million examples of paradox.

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After customs, her first stop was Delilah's Prospect Heights apartment, where, after only a momentary fluster, she found the key Delilah had given her before she had left Balogna, wedged in a side pocket of a shoulder bag. She was tired, but fancied she had seen, in one day, two complete mornings and that, in the sphere of agreed time on earth, she'd have the opportunity to choose to document one over the other when recounting how she spent the afternoon of that particular day.

She knocked first on Delilah's door and when no one answered, she unlocked the main entrance with her key and proceeded into the house. Her priority was to retrieve her precious guitar and, at most, stay one evening at Delilah's apartment with the goal of reorienting herself to the east-coast climate. When she walked into the house she was met with an off-putting smell. She was disappointed that Mauna loa had been a less than gracious housekeeper and that he had obviously forgotten about the trash for some time. As she stepped deeper into the apartment, the smell became exceedingly more strong and putrid both. The stench was so potent it practically threw her into a state of paralysis. When she regained her ability to maneuver and fathom, she dared to follow the olfactory fog into Delilah's bathroom, from where it appeared to originate. She opened the door and reeled onto her heels, falling to the wall; for it was Mauna loa, lying on the floor, a calligraphy of dried blood turning out his blue lips, stuck in trail: running for transfusion. She could not recall encountering a dead body before for comparison, but it was apparent that this was definitely one. Nothing about Mauna loa's body suggested life, he was unquestionably beyond resurrection. There was no clever conjuring to be done, no way to resuscitate his stiff and fowl form. For the onlooker, there was only the option to retire wit altogether, to cry mercy: become stunned. Leba's eyes were her only set of muscles brave enough to make a move, and she looked around his still body, searching for an indicative culprit of the crime. The evidence lay by his right knee, and Leba indubitably caught it; though it was

incredibly effortful for her to wrangle and piece together a storyline at all. The evidence of death was complete in itself, overcoming copulative hypothesis, satisfying the “what next” with a “this is”. In one episode, Leba had been pirated by a baseline, a wash between her ears of stalled activity; and much like a midday nap, or waking from a faint, her intellect was reluctant to organize itself again into premises, prologues, or afterwards.

However, it was unavoidably obvious that a taut and long black umbrella rested at Mauna loa’s side (appearing soft in comparison to his severe figure). But Leba knew the potential of such weapon, and so she regained her reason, she was not foolhardy. She was a sleuth in her own right; she named, with alert certainty, the Umbrella as the distinct force behind the ruination of Mauna loa. The smell of his body roused her and she found the impetus to exit the bathroom and make the official call to the police, and then to Bologna, where she informed Delilah of her present circumstance. Leba was not distinctly gifted at bearing disturbing news; rather, she frankly laid the basics of the story on Delilah, whose reaction Leba found difficult to read because they were conversing through the telephone, miles apart. The conversation was not long, however, because the police arrived in impressive time. Three officers came with three paramedics and an ambulance driver. They interrogated Leba for an hour and proceeded to attend to the corpse. The police wrapped the umbrella in a special forensic bag reserved for high-crime clues while the ambulance driver adjusted straps around Mauna loa’s body, attaching him to a stretcher, which reminded Leba of a surfboard, or a snowboard. Mauna loa looked ready to go on a ghoulish adventure.

The three medics spoke to each other in confidence.

"This does look like a brief and hurtling maneuver, right into the suprasternal notch."

Leba overheard and anxiously inquired. "What is the suprasternal notch?" She begged to know. The medic with the most scrunched up face and burly eyebrows of the three answered her.

"It's right here." He pointed to an area just below his clavicle in the mantle of his collarbone.

"It's that place you see people get poked in high-adventure movies. When someone or something jars a person there with enough intensity, it affects the main artery from the heart to the brain. Looks like he was struck right there, and by an Umbrella! A first! This is the work of someone who must know a thing or two about serious martial art. Do you have an idea of anyone who would want to seek revenge on this poor guy?"

Leba thought about all the people that Mauna loa had haunted in the past and couldn't seem to remember the name of one person. However, she recalled the night at Kyoto Tomo Saki when Mauna loa, unsuccessfully aiming for Delilah, had shot and killed a Japanese pop icon.

Instinctively, Leba sensed the evening at Kyoto Tomo Saki perhaps was connected to Mauna loa's death, but she didn't say anything. She was not interested in provoking further official inquiry; she was not interested in becoming more involved with the specifics of the night’s garish scenario. She knew this, though— she would certainly never recover from her sense of dread about umbrellas and their volatile mission, and she would have to do her best to keep these particular devious entities inanimate, for the very idea that those metal and plastic machines possessed a destructive mind of their own was enough to return Leba to the young bed of her girlhood, where all senses of the external world beyond her syrupy covers evoked the sure presence of monsters and pillagers and people who wanted her pure innocence.

Before the medics carried Mauna loa from Delilah's home, Leba stood next to his surfboard stretcher and wept up her own concoction of something like a prayer; a hymn of broken bottles and seagulls, thoughts painted in hopeful cursive scripts of clouds; requesting that Mauna loa be freed from his trials, and carried from the material back to the eternal. She was not pastoral, but she was humble. And available to be in part a catalyst for Mauna loa's life turning. Maybe this would be the entirety of his funeral ceremony she thought, as he was relieved from Delilah's apartment.

After hours spent in Delilah's home, and after raising high each window to allow fresh (by comparison) Brooklyn air to aid in eliminating odor and restoring the feel of Delilah's home, Leba thought to call Anchorstein's brother, who lived in the east village of Manhattan, and who was more than happy to accommodate Leba for as many nights as she needed while in the city. After which, she taxied over to his established apartment in the village, an illustrious home of expensive terra-cotta and at-risk endangered dark green house plants which according to Anchorstein's brother were once endemic to the island of Manhattan during the time of Pangea. Anchorstein's brother was a very bona fide man who Leba had long admired. He worked with an organization aimed with mission of granting money to young women starting businesses, and he was an expert metal-smith as well. New York was cold and Leba was eager to relieve her weary self to the comforts of his ample home.

He warmly greeted her and, because he knew Leba Scrachnsniv well enough to read her body language, he understood with immediacy that she was very tired, and so he escorted her to his wonderful guest quarters and had a small dinner sent to her room by his apprentice. Leba fell asleep without brushing her teeth or bathing, which were the two activities she had longingly envisioned doing while being driven over the Brooklyn Bridge. Anchorstein's brother's bathtub was perhaps one of the finest in the united states. It was approximately nine feet long and five feet wide, and was made from old greenish bronze with a long faucet, and it fired rapid waters. She had spent a weekend once staying alone in his home with the Diamond Thief, when, by pure accident, one ran into the other in New York after having been apart for some time, and they had both enjoyed his elaborate home in a luxurious style, dreaming of a time when they might share together such immaculate space.

The next morning when Leba awoke there was only a note on Anchorstein's brother's kitchen counter, with directions for Leba to make herself completely comfortable and to consume whatever she delighted in that she might find either inside his refrigerator or pantry.

Leba intended to relax, to make a cup of tea and to perhaps listen to Bach or sit outside on the terrace; seek settlement in the life evident on the busy streets below; watch the houseplants jiggle slightly, something romantic and slow and Manhattanish. Something that one would do when one would not be rushing in New York to solve something or get somewhere; she wanted to read literature in the bathroom. She planned on having no aim for a day, for more, especially here, in this wildly great and simple fresh house without dead people. Now she had an invitation to make a slow breakfast, but the truth was that Leba was less intent on searching out breakfast and more interested in the destiny of other affairs, busying affairs: futuristic intrigues, matters of a

Tomorrowist, and so she opened the house drawers until she found a directory of every business in New York City. At least, however, she opened the drawers delicately, as though she starred in her own movie. She admired her finger bones and the pliability in the just edging-over of fingernail, each equipped with a moon sliver foundation. One more contemplative movie—thought later and she'd pontificate, especially having only barely restored her nerves from the days before, that her heart had turn to acorn, and then like a dead red berry trailed to the back of her lungs; sifted with the slowest and thickest blood in the most ornery sort of circulation. Then, as would an amnesiac, it bobbed down the blue strange roads of her gangly arms and came, finally, out through her fingernail, as one of those little white deficiency/bruise clouds. Her precious heart, deserving no less than to appear as a belling cloud, a billowing deduction of heaven, had settled for being the merest flattened image of condensation, rendered upon her fingernail, on blue-red canvas; barely remembering the large mansion of its past chamber, in past times gone, once having lived in bloom between her lungs.

Leba recognized that she was preoccupied with agenda, and so she settled more deeply into her self and let mission surface. Later she'd play more with that acorn dead red berry premise, but for now she'd follow through. She'd bring the ring somewhere. See what happened when resolving into a supposed “the end.”

Delilah had written down the name of a respectable jeweler who would most certainly be able to point Leba in the correct direction when and if she chose to research the history of the ring she now wore on her finger.

Leba reached in her silk robe pocket, where she had put the paper with the man's name. While doing this, she opened the refrigerator and kept it ajar with her left foot. She read the name on the paper (P. Angelo) and opened the residential section to find his information. She turned back to the refrigerator and opened the vegetable drawer. She found a healthy stalk of celery and pulled the whole of it onto the counter. Breakfast would happen, perhaps not on the terrace, not slow in the sort of way one feels when one makes time to read while in the bathroom, but it would happen simultaneously as she treaded into her day's destiny. She found a plate of fresh eggs and reached for three (moving more rapidly, suddenly aware of hunger). She kept the refrigerator door opened and searched with her hand (her eyes on the residential pages of the directory) for a butter drawer. Her body was twisted in a dance of miniature activities when the phone rang.

Our character hasn't really engaged much with phones in this book as of yet because it seemed to us less than elegant for Leba Scrachnsniv to be busying herself with activities over a line. Plus, it is often uninteresting imagery for a reader to picture a scene where the main character is experiencing life over the circuitry of a phone. Furthermore, if Leba had an internationally reaching phone line in the past month she spent in Bologna she would have had to talk to people and communicate with a world larger than we're fit to interact with in regards to the character we've developed. For example, how do we know how polite or impolite Leba would be to a telecommunications specialist when he or she called to offer Leba the credit deal of a lifetime? Thus far, we've been disenchanted with certain currencies of the modern era, we've not mentioned credit cards or appliances like dishwashers nor have we expressed any of Leba's habits. Does she chew gum; has she watched television? I mean, for the sake of the era, it is inevitable that our character must, at some time, have had chewing gum and watched television –

especially because it seems as though our character is suffering from her own parleys between the obtuse spirit and the conniving critic. As Leba invites the strength of her womanhood to come forth she is stuck simultaneously; only knowing how to interpret her flowing sensuality as a promiscuity which, though the rest of society is either mostly disinterested in overtly defining her or content enough to make a charade of her character behind her back, she still certainly has recognized that for every "Yes!" which screams forth from her mouth, even at a whisper, an equally resounding "No!" follows suit....

But the phone did ring and so Leba carefully laid her breakfast ingredients on the counter, next to the phonebook and answered the call. She was overjoyed to hear Anchorstein's voice, calling from Norway. The two talked for some time, and Leba shared with her the finer details of her journey. Gloria Anchorstein informatively imparted to Leba that there was no other person she should speak to about the worth of her own ring than her cousin's friend, whose father had been in the diamond industry for years, and whose family had long traded and sold their jewels. Leba scrawled the name of the man Anchorstein recommended on the same piece of paper where she had written Delilah's recommendation and figured she'd call them both. The remainder of the conversation she had with her friend was comforting to Leba, who still felt disoriented after returning to New York and finding Mauna loa. She worried for Delilah because she was soon to return to her home, and would most probably arrive in a terrible state of sadness mourning the man who had enticed and tormented her both. Leba thought that Ramone would be a great person to comfort her friend and hoped that Delilah would chose to stay perhaps longer in his company. She realized that Delilah had not spent much time with Ramone by herself, and was certain that her two friends would find much between them worth cultivating.

Leba called the first man who Delilah recommended and a woman answered the phone, she replied that P. Angelo would be out of the country for the next three months and that he was not able to receive messages. Leba hung up and promptly called the friend of Anchorstein's cousin, who had a manhattan area code. His voice warmed immediately when she mentioned the Anchorsteins, and he invited Leba to come to his shop that very afternoon. Leba hung up, made an egg and fennel sandwich with a strong imported dijon and took a previously cooked potato and made a mash of a salad. Her body craved rich and heavy food after long travel and days of light meals. She threw on a weighty sweater that had been lain out over her chair by Anchorstein's brother, after he noted Leba's absence of wardrobe. She had traveled lightly and left behind a few inexpensive bulky items and costumes as well which Delilah had promised to bring to her when she shipped her working tools back to the states. The sweater hung like a dress, it was striped in burgundy and a black that looked navy. It hit at her knees and hung like a tube; it was obviously a sweater fit for a medium-built man, but it fit Leba as a perfect dress. She zipped up her boots and tied her hair in taught fine knots all around her head. A black down jacket covered the whole of her body and she topped off the last of her exposed skin with a long-tailed black wool hat. The tail of the hat draped down the entire length of her back and she tied a quartz piece to its end. It was something she'd had long in her possession, a shimmering crystal, the shape of a miniature dog bone, given to her in the northern mountains by a very old woman who was a believer in incantations and who had spent a week in retreat with an international pacifist, a renowned spiritual leader who spoke in broken phrases to thousands of listeners with

inspirations of cultivating peace. The woman was confident that the crystal she handed Leba would serve to dismantle negativity, and so Leba sometimes held it in her hand: it felt strong and tiny, it reminded her to cultivate content. With the quartz falling down her side, tied to a wool hat's end, she felt elfin and looked like a wintering creature, equipped for the fiercest of new york weather. Three subway trains later, she was on the upper eastside and at the front door of the man's shop.

The man at the shop answered the door and motioned Leba inside to his workspace. There, thousands of uncut diamonds lined tables, gathered in clusters, coming from drawers and partially strung on different colored threads. She wondered how many little gem stores the Diamond Thief had been inside of, how many places he had plundered and emptied of treasures? It made her feel uneasy to consider that the man closest to her heart, who was so eloquent and educated, had spent so much of his past robbing industry. Perhaps her opinion was poorly formed, influenced by an under-explored ethic she had taken on without evaluating. Surely the industry was not so void of its own corruptions! She had never fantasized about a Robin Hood and had not considered his history in full, but she borrowed a sense of uprightness from his story and thus, in slight, she had lifted the harshness of her criticisms about The Diamond Thief.

The man before her now returned to his work as she contemplated in the doorway of his workshop. He let her wander away with her daydreaming— she was young, he figured, she still had dreams for her frontal lobe to form in the sunlight. And, he assessed— because he recalled from his own youth— there was no place better reserved for speculations than the back of his store, where a thousand stars had landed upon tables, casting light spectrums, marrying dust and sun. The few people he took in to his shop mostly experienced the same unknowing pause once they passed the gate of his doorway, and he had learned to let them dream a moment uninterrupted. They never knew they had fallen into a simple nap, he would only call to them after a minute or more; rouse them into commerce, or into whatever conversation was pertinent to their meeting. He pet his handful of raw stones for a time until he called her attention. His voice was accented in tinges that sounded Eastern European; he asked her, again, for her name, and he introduced himself. His name was Nihil Thindoor and he told her that he was a very busy man but, under the circumstances, would happily look at the ring she possessed. She spun the ring whose diamond was nestled on the inside of her hand around so that the diamond could be revealed to the merchant. His eyes fixated on the stone, he stepped closer to her, and closer again: He took his glasses off and brought his nose almost to the tip of her ring, and once there, once certain— he exhaled a modest gasp.

"This is yours?" He put his glasses on again, and looked at her curiously, wanting to be certain. "Yes." she insisted.

"This is a famous ring." He announced This, and Famous and Ring, sounding alert, serious. The story of the ring was famed, however newly, within the vault of Leba's personal stories, still, she was unsure of what Nihil's expression implied, for people had long used the same words in her life to impart a variety of meanings.

"What precisely do you mean by 'famous'?" She asked.

"Do you know who made this— I can't believe..." He stammered, taking off his glasses again and

twisting the ring slightly about her finger. She felt tempted to pull away and turn around, to exit through the front door, devise a rapid plan of escape. She thought twice and paused; instead she pulled the piece of jewelry from her finger and put it into the seemingly genuine man's hand for a more intimate speculation.

He peered at the inside and looked at her with a confirming nod.

"This is the work of Vladamere Faust. Do you know what that means?"

Leba pondered the name. "It rings no bell."

The jeweler answered. "That's quite the reply, young lady, for his solely two known pieces were titled 'Bell' and 'Bello'." This is his third piece, its very existence –until now– has been only debatable among historical experts. His first two pieces were gifted to two sisters, who were princesses and married into two rivaling kingdoms far from their own homes in the mid eighteen-hundreds. He fashioned the rings in the start of his career, in fact, the creation of these rings were really the entirety of his career. He made them for the women, when they were far beyond the prime of their youth. They were commissioned by the ladies father, as an offer and attempt to regain his daughters' love after the emotional agony they experienced being more-or-less sold from their own home as young girls; one sister separated from the other. The gifting of these rings signified such a famous moment in the whole regality of the country's history and, as artistic renderings, were so exquisite that Vladamere became renowned in his prime, and thus– he made a mark upon the diamond industry for his design and his myth. As the story goes– his career seemed impeccably fated until he was devastated by an accident and lost the use of his hands. In his later years, it was rumored that he regained some of his strength and made, in his late seventies– sometime in the era of the roaring twenties or thirties–a special ring for a very famous singer, but the ring remained unseen to the public after its completion. He died shortly thereafter, but left the riches of his wealth, oddly enough, to the children of his mistress. The two existing rings now reside in a museum in France, a museum run and governed by the grandchild of Vladamere Faust's mistress. I actually know the family personally, they are supporters of remarkable art preservationist movements; they would be astounded by this finding! To them, this ring is worth far more than money, Ms. Scrachnsniv, do you have any idea?"

The jeweler, Nigil, was now perspiring and wiping beads of sweat from his brow with his loose shirtsleeve.

Leba could not tell if his discovery had prompted such sweating or if he was the sort of excitable fellow who easily perspired when animated.

She had only just moved beyond assuming a general sense of dis-ease around people who broke without much ado into a sweat. Why would he sweat and she would not? She was distracted by his display, but she cut right through her mind's sidetrack, succeeding to the chase, and asked the man.

"Exactly how many thousands of dollars would you assume this ring is worth?" She wanted to know.

"Well I couldn't precisely say but I would estimate that its value (though it is difficult to place value upon such a glorious object) would amount to a sum –at the least– of over tens of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and likely much, much more... depending on the circumstance. It is very valuable, but less valuable perhaps than the other two rings Faust made. Have you been casually walking around with it in your pocket?" He asked.

"I am embarrassed to say that I have." Leba answered.

"Well, dear girl, though some would deceive you and attempt to swindle this ring from you, I will only give you the number of the French family in hopes that you will contact them and inform them of your possession. The ring obviously belongs now to you; in fact, it looks radiant on your hand. However, I advise you to have the courtesy to contact this family and consider lending the ring to their collection and allowing this famous jewel to have the rightful company of its sister designs. I can only imagine that the three pieces together would make a brilliant trinity."

He turned from her and shuffled about his desk through piles of papers, and in no time at all found the contact information. He handed the phone numbers of the French family and their home address to her on a slip of paper.

"Now off you go, I have much work to do. Good luck to you and remember, you are a very fortunate woman to be in such a position."

Leba hailed a cab back to Anchorstein's brother's and, after falling into a well-deserved slumber for the rest of the day and night and awoke early the following morning, right before the sun rose.

She made herself a cup of tea and sat at the kitchen counter. She dialed the French country code, recalling her limited French in preparation for being received by the other line.

A man answered the phone and Leba started.

"Bonjour Monsieur, Mon nom est Leba Schrachnsniv, je vous appelle de New York. Je ne parle pas le français cela bien, parlez-vous l'anglais?"

The man on the other line expressed amusement at the sound of her French and replied in melodic English. "Yes Miss, How can I help you?"

Leba asked him first what he called himself— she was unfamiliar with the family's name, and had been given no information other than a phone number and address.

The man she conversed with was Claude Dorien, the middle son of the family who had inherited the rings of Vlademere Faust.

She relayed with precision why she had called him and he was stupefied to hear her profession, but Claude knew instantly that this woman's spoke authentically; she did possess the missing third ring of the Faust collection.

He informed her that he would be in New York, coincidentally, at the end of the week— because he was teaching a workshop on acrobatics.

Upon inquiry, Leba learned that the man she spoke to was a ringleader and circus coordinator, and that he spent his circus off-season teaching workshops about acrobatics.

Leba felt an immediate resonance with the man— and expressed her delight having had contacted him—and the two made plans to meet immediately upon his arrival to the states.

By the end of the week, Leba had reunited with her favorite instrument; the guitar called Peodreeno, and had spent most of the week's hours engaged with her beloved rosewood resonator. True to any instrument of caliber, the guitar had closed like a wintering flower in wait for Leba's return, and had met her with an initial orneriness, with a lackluster coat and a scarcity

of flesh upon its frame. Leba had never been so long from her guitar, how had she ventured off fearing only her own separation from the instrument and less the instrument's fatigue and tumult while she abandoned it for the season? Someone had surely played Peodreeno while she had traveled, but that person was now dead (Mauna loa) and unable to report. Had the strings been changed (she guessed no) had the frets been whetted with lemon oil (it seemed certainly not), had anyone thought to put a humidifier in the sound hole (how had she departed without covering such territory?)

When finally she struck a chord that rang out, reinstating a sense of familiarity between herself and her beloved instrument, it was the very day her ring investigator was to come and assess the jewel she kept still most often in her robe pocket. When it was time to meet Claude, she invited him to Anchorstein's brother's house. Anchorstein's brother had left for a seven week sabbatical, welcoming Leba to stay at his home for as long as she wished during his absence.

Claude rang up for a tea and Leba greeted him warmly. What followed suit was a delicious alteration in the lives of both Claude Dorien and Leba Scrachnsniv. As it turns, Claude had just begun the world's largest international traveling musical circus, much larger than any you've ever imagined or of which you've heard. After moments of experiencing great awe while marveling over the ring that had previously only existed to him in theory before having been contacted by Leba Scrachnsniv, and after the two together sat in a ceremonious sipping of green tea for some time, Claude inevitably posed the question to Leba; would she consider selling the ring? Leba had revealed to him in whole her personal history with the ring and he, being very intrigued, shared his hopes of bringing the gem back to his museum in France. He imparted that he wished for the ring to be relieved to his family mostly because it would make his mother overjoyed. Leba expressed to him that she understood the need had by young men to insure their own mother's joyousness; and that she had, of course, considered selling the ring. They continued to discuss the circus that Claude was in part enabling, and Leba revealed her own long-had goal of learning how to perform a standing back flip. She admitted to Claude how each night before she fell asleep she most often experienced a sensation of envisioning herself able to execute the move with effortless mastery. Claude convinced Leba that he would be able to help facilitate her dream of effectively landing a standing back flip so that she would be able to generate this move in an indefatigable manner.

To this she promised Claude "If you can help me do a indefatigable back flip by next Friday, I will grant your museum to be lent the possession of this ring, which is unduly mine to have and behold in this lifetime. The ring will then be able to reside in France until the time possibly comes where I no longer am alive (and then it will be up to my heirs to determine the residence of the ring). Additionally, I may be apt at any time to take it back myself for reasons that I can clearly justify. In such case, at that time, I'll consider trading in my profound back flip for the return of the graceful gem.

"My friend," Claude assured. "The back flip you will learn to do, in comparison, will out-charm and out-value any diamond or collection thereof. Additionally, if you would so generously bestow our museum with your invaluable gift we would happily offer you your own private apartment off the side quarters of the most east house on our property. It is adjacent to a main petite theater where the innovators and initiates of the first circus we've created practice on

occasion. On the grounds, thus, is a phenomenal gym and jaunt apparatus. You'll have accessibility to our high vault, tight-wire, if you wish— and the trapeze as well. In fact, I am getting a very strong vision of you with the trapeze— I am envisioning that you are already quite skilled in the arena of circus performance. It is possible our fates may intertwine, no?" Claude laughed knowingly and together they stood to shake hands.

He was a strong and healthy man, a new friend with whom she felt inherently aligned. "Please meet me at the address on this card tomorrow at eleven in the morning. Eat only a small breakfast, a green juice or something comparable, and plan on working with me for four hours." Claude directed. "I have a workshop I am teaching every day this week from four in the afternoon until eight at night; for our back-flip plan to successfully work we will have to meet every day from eleven until three. Are you game?" He asked.

She reached for the card with the address; she felt more alive than she had in an extraordinarily long time.

Her body was ready to be pulled and opened, to dance and punctuate space.

"I am game!" Leba concurred.

True to his word, at the end of the week Leba was capable of perfectly delivering a back flip entirely anywhere she wished. She was particularly fond of practicing the flip while she waited for the small things of life— toast to be toasted, subways to arrive, people to get off the phone. She had finally found an activity that created fluidity in time, relieving the spell-cast knots out of which grow anachronisms and unsynchronized just-misses.\*

While Anchorstein's brother remained out of town, Leba oversaw his very pristine home and made arrangements to return to the southland. In exchange for her remarkable ring she'd learned an invaluable skill, one that inspired her to emerge from the all-encompassing domain of a worn slumber. Joy developed itself effortlessly and was expressed through her; she possessed foundation like a tree—a foundation that creates freedom to move with the wind.

In the scope of all time and space, Leba went back to the southland for a very temporary time, long enough to flush out newer compositions, to evaluate and refine her sense of mission and to bring restitution to her business. Before long, she traveled, first for only a visit, and later to more permanently reside, in the wonderful metropolis surrounded by fragrant countryside at the museum where her ring resided. It was most ironic and perfect that the rightful home for the ring that had suddenly fallen into her possession would be, in a parallel fashion, the same region where the enigmatic glamour of her heart felt most enamored.

While the circus was away from the museum ground, Leba found one sole trainer who proceeded to assist the vision she'd long been nurturing in the heart of her dream world and secret sub-cognitive. And when the day finally came and it felt, suddenly, that her performance had turned more into a dynamic theatric of sonic dimension, complete with acrobatics and orchestration and less a perceivably heart-on-sleeve lyrical two-bit, she recognized a dying pattern within herself— how she had acquiesced in the past to earn acceptance from those in the stiff thrones of academic environments, even while attending institutions pledging to be independent of such a two-dimensional alliance. Through all new companies considered now, and through her own lively excursion, Leba found by season and measure that the world had not been suffering so much

from superficiality or a lack of healthy architecture as much as she had been resisting giving life and value to that which inevitably possessed it, possessed the rite of death, the primal vulnerabilities of love and hunger. She knew she had come to France to find out how to personally discover her own expression in the rough and cut from such carat a svelte display of the progressive femme.

In the early morning, after sitting long in her own silence (that had ripened so much in these seasons spent at her new residency) she opened the door to the museum with a special and large key, one which only herself, Claude and the curator carried. She walked up the spiral stairs to the room that had no windows but was drenched with the first light of day through great skylights, which made the museum feel more like a boat. Clouds sped through the sky and, when looking up through the skylights, the museum felt as though it were traveling at 40 knots. She put her face to the glass case where the rings were laying, all three together, clearly related in design but each with their own profound monologue. It was not until she put her ring next to its sister creations that she possessed a real affection for the jewel, after which she was often drawn from her meditation to the museum room for a contemplative visit. Some mornings the sun through the ceiling sky window would catch an angle of the stone from her ring, sustaining a light-line into the room itself, one that visiting eyes could caress, seeing easily small plays carried forth in the fine cascading lustre.

One morning she was certain she saw the future, or something ending; something else beginning. Or more than seeing, she was able to recognize the clarity of a distinct feeling. Claude had asked her to compose the next season's music for his international circus and, to follow suit, she would travel with the circus and oversee the orchestra while it performed.

For her, music had changed so much— it was no longer able to be independent of sound and light, texture and language. She felt most soothed building a landscape of rhythmic depth— many times throughout creating her circus composition she wanted the bass, the trumpet, the trombone, and the tympani to be in unison, to find their harmonies in their varied timbre alone, that would be enough. The orchestration of music she arranged for the expedition included a multiplicity of rich vocalizations, mixed in with secret clips of recordings from the past she had somehow still in her possession... voices of people who had impacted her for one moment or years at a time. One of such voices she had recorded was the voice of the man who she had fought so long to forget, the one who had given her the gift of finding her own motivation. How she had been so fantastic at recreating the same superstitious relationship with everyone she encountered.

Perhaps there had been no change of superlative and exaggeration in her life (which was still surely riddled with paradox) or any mollified shift between the contrasting nature of her own desires and the seeming world's, but a difference, instead, in how she practiced relating.

The truth is, there was never anything to solve about Leba Scrachnsniv. In fact, by telling her story, we risked mostly only the depreciation of it. Ultimately, however, we hope that you will at the least understand that she is, as most every other, only a watercolor tray. Someone who is desiring to give you their service, who does not profess to offer any tool immediately necessary for your survival in some obvious world, but offers, versus, to remind you through her own debunking self-lore of a universal indirectness which without, after long consideration, life is at best only plausibly assumed. And now world, you easy intellect, it is with a simple technique of decision that you can, by prompt determination, rate your feelings about our brave self-revealer.

And when you are said and done, the cosmos might ricochet by your tallies, or else may marvel, undisturbed. Perhaps you will fall in love with her, or now at last, she will leave us alone.