

The Journey of The Fool

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Alexandria, Egypt

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Earth image on the cover is courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech.
Asia satellite image is a NASA blue marble image.
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*To my beloved flower,
Friable, brittle and dry,
Yet whose scent will never fade,
I dedicate this book.*

Fady.

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Philippines

3

Fallen

It was Sunday, yet not one of the four long-awaited golden Sundays. I was in the church, with me was Keiko and my father. I stood close to Keiko while Silvio stood away from us. Through out the mass Keiko kept on coughing as I impatiently watched the lazy clock hands as they crept. We were supposed to act as if Silvio were to us a stranger. The driver dropped us a hundred meters away from the church in a silent street. Keiko and I had to wait for some time as Silvio rushed to the church and after a couple of minutes we were allowed to go. After the long hours passed, Keiko and I were standing in the yard as Silvio stood far from us exchanging some few phrases with the priest in voltairian disgust.

“Why is it,” I asked Keiko impatiently, “That we have to go though this boring experience almost once a month?”

“Faust!” she quickly cried at me “How dare you say such things? You are not young now; you are twelve years old. This is the church. This is a holy place. This is your religion. Every Christian must go to the church often.”

“Then why do you come with us? You are not Christian, are you?”

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“No...”

“What’s your religion?”

“I am Shinto,” she replied, “And Buddhist too.”

“Yuck! Then when you go to Japan you have to go to two different churches every week?”

“What?” she laughed, “No! Only very few religious people go to the temples often. Most of us just go to the temple for special feasts.”

“Then why do you come to the church with us?”

“I have to take care of you. I can’t leave you alone.”

“I wonder why Silvio insists that we should go to the church once a month! Just look at him! He doesn’t seem to be interested at all in that stuff.”

Just as I finished the phrase my father left the priest and hurried to talk to a man. As the man turned and I saw his face, I realized it was the man who came to our home four years ago.

“Hey! Look Keiko! It’s that Mr. Fromm that paid us a visit some years ago! I wonder why does Silvio show all that interest in that guy! Just look how he is talking nice to him!”

“Indeed, I have never seen Mr. Macalino behave in this manner before. It’s really strange.”

“I can’t believe today is my birthday!” I angrily said as I sat on the attic floor next to Keiko.

“Calm down Fofi!” said Keiko, “This is the first time, as far as I remember that your birthday coincided with a Monday.”

“I wonder what have those maniacs been doing downstairs for all those years!”

“Don’t ask me!”

“I bet Silvio has made a freemasonry lodge out of that poor house!”

we both laughed at the comment. Yet soon I remembered it was my birthday and resumed complaining to the poor girl.

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“All the boys in the school have big parties arranged for their birthdays. Their parents get them a big birthday cake. Their friends join them and they have a wonderful time. And I, instead, am forced to stay locked in this rusty dusty horrible place.”

“Please calm down Fofi! At least you get better birthday gifts than your classmates. Remember when your father got you a Playstation when you were just eight years old? It was so expensive then that most of the other parents could not afford it.”

“Yes I remember. Oh, I remember it so well! The most expensive toy along with a small paper, on which was written “To Mr. Amoyo from Mr. Macalino with luck.” It’s a damn hell that I can still remember it!”

“Faust, please don’t cry your heart out this way.”

“No, I am not sad at all Keiko. I have a very precious gift wrapped in cellophane everyday. It is given to me everyday a new!”

“...?”

“She is sitting right next to me, here.”

“Oh! That’s so kind of you, Fofi.”

“But the friends... There are no friends here. I don’t have any friends anyway!”

“You don’t consider me a friend?”

“You are much more than a friend to me, Keiko, you are my angel.”

I slowly put a hand on her shoulder and approached her, seeking a kiss.

“Faust!” she cried at me seriously as she pushed me away, “What do you think you are doing?”

“I want to kiss you.” I replied innocently.

“Not now!” she firmly replied, “You are twelve years old now, Faust. I let you kiss me before because you were still a child in need of maternal love. But you must realize that now you are an *adult*. Just look how big your body is!”

“But Keiko I love you so much.” I replied with cut voice, my face as red as ever, “You can’t push me away from you that way.”

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I...I just have a *right* to you.”

Keiko didn't reply. She just looked at me in that defensive manner. Hiding her chest with both of her arms. Her eyes were as cold as ever. They were putting the record straight: I am a female and now you have become a male, a foreign male.

It was a Tuesday afternoon. I was sitting on my desk in my room finishing my homework. Someone knocked on the door.

“Come in!”

“It's me Fofi,” said Keiko in a hesitating smile as she opened the door and stepped into the room, “How is it going with your homework?”

“Fine.” I replied without raising my eyes from the copybook, “Soon I will have it finished.”

“Look, Mr. Macalino talked to me today. There is something that I must tell you.”

“Yes?” I finally raised my eyes and looked to her in slight apathy.

“You know Mr. Fromm?”

“Sure!” I replied with a naughty smile, “The man before whom mighty Silvio is but a harmless cat!”

“Faust! Stop it! If Mr. Macalino hears you I don't know what may happen!”

“Ok, What's wrong with Fromm? Did he die and Silvio is going to the funeral?” I quickly asked with glittering eyes.

“If you don't stop it I am leaving you!”

“Ok, Ok!”

“Mr. Edward Fromm will pay us a visit next week, accompanied by his sister Matilda.”

“What? Will Silvio finally tell us about his agenda?”

“I know it is strange but that's what happened. He told me that and asked me to inform you. He wants you to show yourself briefly at the visit and to behave in the best possible manner.”

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The words fell heavily on my ears. I have always suspected my father wanted something from Fromm, but I never knew Fromm had a sister. I bet her Caucasian beauty, not the barbarian beauty of a long ago dead maid was what Silvio has always desired. It was all crystal clear. Keiko swiftly got out of the room and closed the door with the least possible noise.

“Oh! How much I hate these damn suits!” I thought as I choked myself with the necktie, “Not did only Silvio ask me to participate in this nonsense, he also asked me to wear this stupid thing, asked me in a handwritten letter of course, he can’t afford to talk to Mr. Amoyo face to face!”

I slowly walked towards the window and looked out. I saw the graveyards. Ordinary people often don’t like that scene. But I just got used to it. I used to look out of that window since my first days. Since I didn’t know what did that place serve for, before I knew that places are supposed to serve for something. Since I was still too young to differentiate the grass from the tombstones.

“Fofi!” said Keiko as she knocked on the door, “Are you ready? Mr. Macalino wants you to be ready for the arrival of the Fromms.”

“Yes, the young monkey is ready for the show! When Silvio wants me down just let me know.”

I sat on my bed and turned on the TV. Definitely it was not the Filipino TV. Local antennas are banned in Mr. Macalino’s house. Only a satellite receiver is allowed, as long as it is tuned to the European satellite!”

As I watched the TV I could hear someone open the door downstairs. I could hear Silvio warmly greet Mr. Fromm and his younger sister. After a whole hour, in which I had to keep my-

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self tied up with that damn necktie, Keiko knocked on the door and told me that my father wanted me downstairs.

On my way to the stairs I was passing by the bathroom and surprisingly I noticed something that I have never noticed before, perhaps because I was steadily getting taller in the past months. I noticed that the bathroom door didn't fit exactly. There was a narrow gap between the door and the building. I got inside the bathroom, turned on the light and got out and closed the door. I tried to look through that narrow gap inside with a single eye and to my great surprise I managed to see inside clearly.

"Oh my god!" I thought to myself, "Somebody may have seen me inside!"

Yet I quickly remembered that Silvio's bedroom was at the other wing of the second floor, with its own bathroom definitely, and that nobody visited us at all. Suddenly, I remembered that my father was waiting for me downstairs and I moved on.

"Oh!" my father elegantly noted as I made my way to the hall, "Here comes Mr. Amoyo. Mr. Amoyo, please welcome Mr. Edward Fromm and his sister Matilda."

"Good evening." I said as I greeted the ugly Edward, "It is our greatest pleasure to have you tonight as our guests."

As I slowly moved my eyes towards Matilda I was fulminated. She had a strikingly big nose, curved downwards in a caricature-like manner. And that could have just reminded anyone with the way by which funny old witches are drawn. Ironically enough, her chin was also protruding! Her skin was pale, wrinkled and full of freckles. She definitely looked *ages* older than poor Edward, or perhaps it was her heavy makeup and eye shadows that made her look that way. But what was really funny about her was the fact that she had her golden hair tied in

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pigtails! She was a young innocent bride after all!

Having seen her I fought battles to avoid myself from bursting into laughter. I warmly greeted her. Belittling laughter to the standard polite smile.

“Mr. Amoyo,” said my father in a business-like manner, “Tell Mr. And Miss Fromm your age and the name of your school.”

“I am twelve years old and I go to Manila Premiere.” I automatically replied in misery, knowing that was the first thing that bastard would have asked me to mention.

“That’s the most prestigious and expensive school in manila,” commented my father in extreme delight, “Only English is taught there! And that’s’ the only language that Mr. Amoyo could speak till not much time ago. He has recently started to study French as well.”

“Oh!” replied Matilda in an aristocratic manner, “How much I *love* French. It is the language of feelings, love and emotions.”

“Emotions? Love?” I thought to myself, “If Love were a man, he would have killed himself having heard your phrase!”

“How’s my little Faust?” asked Edward looking sharply at me with his horribly-deformed jaw smiling wickedly, “Did you salute me your *hens*?”

“What hens?” Asked my father quickly.

“Oh, that’s a small secret that only little Faust and I share!” He replied with that horrible smile, his eyes still firmly focused on me.

Having heard his words, I stood quietly looking firmly at Edward. To his wonder, my sharp look surpassed his. I had very strong eyes, one of the few good things I got from Silvio!

“Eh...Mr. Amoyo, why don’t you recite us some of the poetry you learn in school?” Said my father, slightly disturbed.

“O boy!” I thought to myself, “Here we go with the monkey

show!”

“Can I come in?” asked Keiko as she knocked on the door.

“Yes, Keiko.”

“Everything went alright?”

“I just hate it,” I replied in anger, “When I become the object of a show. Why does Silvio want me to talk to those people? Am not I to him a shame? Why does he then keep on showing me to people in that way?”

“I just think he is proud of you...”

“No! He is proud of himself. *I* got Mr. Amoyo to Manila premiere. *I* thought it would be better for him to speak only English. Silvio is a heck!”

“Eh... And Matilda? How does she look like?”

“Ha! She’s ugly as hell. You should have seen her nose! Oh! No! You should have seen her *pigtails!*”

“Pigtails?” Keiko was astonished.

“Yes, pigtails. Imagine a kind of fifty-five years old ‘made-moiselle’ with two sexy golden pigtails that fall on her wrinkled face! You should have seen into what circus I was obliged to play the clown this evening!”

“Oh, Fofi I am sure it was hard.”

I was so disturbed by her kind eyes. It has been four months that she didn’t allow me to be close to her. I was very angry that just when I started to realize how beautiful she was that I was forbidden from hugging her, kissing her and being generally physically close to her. Was it mere coincidence?

It was a hot spring afternoon. I was lying on the bed, lazily watching the TV, recovering myself from the gloomy hours that I spent in the church. My father left home. Most probably he was spending the day with the Fromms somewhere expensive.

“Fofi!” said Keiko as she knocked on the door, “Are you do-

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ing your homework? I can hear the TV!”

“Oh, Keiko I must enjoy my life a little. I have already wasted the morning and now you want me to do the homework. Sunday is supposed to be a weekend, but it is getting too bad even for a weekday!”

“You must do that homework!” she replied as she came into the room, “Otherwise, the teachers will get upset with you again, and call your parents. And they will wonder one more time why does Mr. Amoyo senior always send the maid to the school while the teachers want to meet him!”

“Keiko!” I cried at her in astonishment, “Please don’t say this stuff to me. You are hurting me this way. Do you think that I am glad that I am officially fatherless?”

“Oh! I am sorry,” she quickly replied with a sense of regret, her eyes were looking everywhere, I felt her realizing what she has just said to me “What I just said was...too bad! Indeed I must have hurt you! Oh please forgive me Faust.” She said with great disturbance, she quickly approached me and gave me a profound hug. Her hair touched my cheek. I felt how silky it was. That wonderful shampoo smelled colorfully in my nose, as she rubbed her soft cheek next to mine I felt my heart would overflow.

“Oh!” she remarked in horror as she quickly retracted, pushing my chest with one hand, “I am sorry Fofi! I just was too regretful for what I said. But I shouldn’t have approached you in such a manner. After all, you are a man now.

I gazed at her with my eyes. My heart was pumping vigorously. She had literally left me speechless.

“Eh...” she said as her legs were walking backwards, her eyes still unfocused, “I will now go have a shower and eh...when I come out I want to see your homework done.”

As she went out I couldn’t hold my tears. I lay on the bed and

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firmly hugged my pillow with both hands and legs, keeping it tightly held to my shivering body. I laid my cheek on it, desperately trying to regain that magical sensation that rocked my bones as she hugged me. Was I expecting of a pillow what I could only *procure* from the *one* woman in my life?

I kept on rubbing my cheek to the pillow as my tears fell. Inside I had a very strange feeling; I felt so *poor* inside. As a beggar having his stomach torn from hunger as he is sitting in the street and watch people having dinner in restaurants. Suddenly I jerked from my place. I started to realize something horrible. Keiko said she was going to have a shower. And to the bathroom my eye had an access. I felt a high voltage storming my troubled body as I realized this.

I slowly moved towards the bathroom. I was notably shivering. I put a hand on the bathroom door and pressed slightly to stop its shivers. My eyes were blinking nervously as I slowly approached them to the gap. I could see into the bathroom. The lights were on which confirmed that Keiko was inside. I had a very strange feeling. I felt like a ghost who could trespass on one's privacy. That feeling was quite novel to me. I enjoyed it as it made me feel exceedingly powerful, perhaps omnipotent, yet it also made me feel like a thief.

Suddenly I could see Keiko inside. First I could see her elbow as she moved her hand backwards. Then I could see all her body. She was unwinding her hair. I felt my whole body crying out loud as she was refreshing her hair, letting it fall on her neck like a waterfall. Quickly she was going for her chemise. She quickly opened the buttons, one after one. I felt so cold to the bones, my shivers quickly turned into trembles as I started to realize the speed with which she was taking off her clothes. Soon the chemise was lying on the wet floor. I could see how white she was underneath that uniform. I was being profoundly tortured as I saw her wearing a bra on those two extremely small breasts. As

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if she thought they were too large to be left unprotected. My heartbeats grew louder and more irregular as I watched her tiny hands quickly go downwards reaching for the skirt. My trembles were growing stronger as I noticed her unsuspecting facial expressions. She was taking off her skirt as she was gazing stupidly at the bathroom wall. I started to think that I have seen more than I should have ever. I started to speculate what may happen if Keiko found out I was sneaking, or if my father somehow managed to catch me red-handed. Seeing her body quasi-naked before my troubled eyes quickly got me nauseated. I started to feel dizzy as the milky whiteness of her skin played around with my dazzled eyes. I couldn't help myself as she quickly touched her bra trying to unlock it. I knew I was at best ten seconds away from forcing all my stomach contents out. I quickly ran to the nearest bathroom. I would have loved to stay. But I would have feared it the most as well. Sometimes the edges between that sour sweet pleasure and merciless pain are quite blurry. I could almost make it to the guests' bathroom downstairs; as I approached the toilet, I vomited. Half the vomit ended on the floor while the other half ended in the toilet. I quickly cleaned the floor. It is not hard to rub the floor well when you are seriously trembling. Having the toilet cleaned, I quickly ran to my bedroom. I was fearing that Keiko might have heard me as I ran. I was very afraid when I thought she might have found out about it. I hugged my chest firmly with both hands as I kept myself under two blankets though it was hot. I was very afraid at the thought of Keiko knocking on the door and wondering about the blankets, but I quickly decided to tell her I caught cold. I hoped the blankets would relieve my trembles and calm down my fast-beating heart, yet they didn't and I had to wait for half an hour till I calmed down. Then I immediately slept, fainted, to be precise.

5

The golden cell

The clock alarm was making much noise. I quickly turned it off, fearing it may alert my father. I have never used it in my life before. At schooldays Keiko used to wake me up, and at summer, who wants to wake up early?

It was four o'clock in the morning. I slowly got off the warm bed and opened the window quietly. Outside was not hot as in the morning. It was a little cold. There was dense fog in the air. And it was silent as ever. There were no cars. No yelling babies. No laughs. It was profoundly silent.

I stood gazing out of the window in silence. Outside was the familiar scene: the graveyards. Then, I looked at my side. I saw the small puppet Keiko gave me. I quietly held it and looked at it. Then jumped and stood on the edge of the window. I held the puppet firmly to my chest with both arms, my eyes still gazing at the void.

“One step and pain is unseen. One step and memories die.”

I looked again at the puppet. Then I felt I hated it so much. It

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was gloomy and pale. I angrily threw it at my back and closed my eyes to get myself ready.

Suddenly I heard something. It was music, exceedingly delightful music. It seemed to come from a musical box. I didn't know what it was thought it sounded familiar. As if it were my sole entertainer as a fetus in my mother's womb. Indeed it sounded as if it was reminding me of another life, of a far away forgotten world of beauty in which I have lived ages ago. A world full of memories wrapped in fog. I later knew it was a masterpiece called 'the dance of the sugar plum fairy'.

As I looked at the graveyards, with that angelic stream of love in my ears I started to see lights in the graveyards. They looked like golden luminous spheres harmonically dancing in the still cold foggy air as they floated. I have never seen anything like that before. I later learned it was called 'Will o' the wisp'. The sight touched me deeply. It stirred my soul. Only when all people are asleep that beauty dances freely in the air. I started to think of the graveyards. Who was inside? I have never asked myself that question. But I could remember my father telling Edward they were Spanish. Quickly my fantasy came into action. I started to imagine my old neighbors. I started to see them before me, not as Spanish but as old kindhearted Englishmen and Englishwomen having their five o'clock tea at four am! They appeared as soft sublime faint blue shadows. They were just as luminous as those floating spheres. But they were blue, not golden. They looked old yet were vivid and had a pure childish attitude towards each other. They were wearing aristocratic English clothing of the nineteenth century and playing chess and backgammon. After they finished their tea they started to dance in groups joyfully and say jokes and laugh loud.

Their sight uplifted my soul so much. The more I watched them the more I felt my heart overflowing with beauty and the more I felt sedated. After having one of the most special mo-

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ments in my life I got back into the room, without taking my comforted eyes off them. Slowly and quietly I fell on the ground, fast asleep.

I woke up in the morning, finding that I have spent the night on the floor. As I looked around me I saw the puppet in small parts. It was scattered into small pieces yet each piece was totally unharmed. Between the pieces I found a small musical box. It was old and rusty yet still perfectly operated. It was put in a groove in the puppet trunk. I wonder why would a string puppet have a musical box inside? Perhaps it was later put inside.

I was sitting still on the floor. I felt so unbalanced. I didn't know how I would live without Keiko. Who will help me with my homework? Who will wake me up for the school bus? Who will meet the teachers? Who will take me to my grandfather and to the club? But above all, who will emotionally sustain me?

Suddenly I discovered I had more serious issues to worry about, it was Monday! Through out the whole day I kept on speculating how I will be able to make it without Keiko in the dusty attic alone.

I wished I could stop the clock. Every tick was a tick closer to the house of dust. The day passed very slowly, with me watching TV and looking at the clock every five minutes. Finally the chef came to me, telling me it was time. He even came an hour and half in advance. Saying that some of the guests will arrive earlier, which meant I had to stay in the attic more than the usual time.

The sun was still shining and the attic was still illuminated. I sat on the dusty floor holding my legs close to me by my arms. I was not so afraid as I thought I would be. Yet I was nervous be-

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cause I knew things wouldn't be the same when the sun would set. I looked around me and I found a small thing on the floor at a corner, covered by a thick layer of dust. I grabbed it. It was a book. It looked so old. I blew the dust away and cleaned it with a handkerchief. It was called 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. I found that it belonged to my father. I started to read it and quickly I finished a good part of it. I was tired and so I marked the page and put it by my side. I heard the door ringing downstairs so I looked from the window. I saw the familiar faces coming to the meeting. I started to realize the power of imagination and creativity. Quickly I started to imagine the guests as characters from the book. I could identify the white rabbit, the mouse and the duck. As I was dying of laughter the Fromms were coming. Edward's face made him a perfect candidate to play the caterpillar. His deformed jaw was a perfect advantage and he liked to smoke his pipe as did the caterpillar with its hookah. Matilda? You guessed it! She was the undisputed queen of the hearts!

I laughed at my thoughts as never before. I was starting to realize the power of imagination and that was one of the most wonderful powers that I have discovered in my new life of solitude. As more guests came more roles were given and the more I laughed. As I laughed more and more I was entering a phase of hysteric laughter. As I realized my poor state and the gloomy years that awaited me my hysteric laughter was blended with hysteric weeping. I entered a state of immense feelings good and bad alike. My body started to convulse and I fell on the floor paralyzed. I didn't faint. I was quite conscious of my state and the dust that suffocated me as I lay on the floor. My mind was showered with contrasting thoughts, feelings and memories. All what was happening was just too complex and confusing for my young soul.

I was in my room. I was not watching the TV. Instead, I was

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relaxing on bed, looking at my newly discovered beauty; the graveyards. I was playing with my fantasy again, imagining an exciting treasure hunt. Slowly I started to imagine an exceedingly charismatic character. He didn't have anything to do with the treasure hunt. But as the 'official' characters did actions to hunt the treasure that new character kept on forcing himself in the scene and making fun of them. I tried my best not to think of him and to concentrate on the original theme. Yet the harder I tried to marginalize him, the harder that he forced himself into my imagination and the harder he worked to spoil the theme. He kept on making fun of the daughter of the treasure hunter, saying she was fat. He quickly got himself into quarrels with the parrot her father owned, telling him offensive words to repeat. He even started to make fun of me, hilariously stressing inconsistencies in my own storyline. Soon I surrendered to his charisma and dropped the story line to indulge in deep loving conversation with him who finally brought a smile to my face.

He was very thin and looked so much like Irish fairies. He had two very strong eyes, a very pointed nose tip and two elongated pointed ears. His chin was pointed, too. His hair was fiery red, dressed in a very particular manner. He was wearing an earring with a black elongated diamond and three small earrings in a row in the other ear. His lips were so pale that he almost appeared lipless at times. He could tilt his mouth in a very specific manner as he spoke, especially when he was making fun of things or when he showed his dissatisfaction. He was capable of transforming himself into any person he desired. He usually merged some of his facial characteristics with his victims resulting in exceedingly funny faces. He liked to dress himself like Peter Pan and used to speak with a Latin American accent. What is mind after all but a giant mixer?

“Oh!” he said, “What a lovely story little Fosti has made up here. I bet a former USSR storyteller would have done better! Treasure hunt? What a devastating imagination our boy has got,

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gentlemen!”

“Got any ideas?”

“A lot of ideas! An exotic Caribbean island full of super hot chicks, most of which have never seen a man before. They have a certain tradition that prohibits them from living with males so they impatiently wait for ships to approach the island and attack it. They take the sailors as hostages and do the boom-shakalaka-boom stuff and after they get pregnant they eat the sailors. They also eat all male babies, eh...in a ritual, yes...a religious ritual.”

“A part from cannibalism, the whole idea goes back to the ancient Greek mythology. What an imagination!”

“Ok, Fosti. Keep on talking to yourself like that. I can already hear Silvio’s footsteps. I’d love to see his expressions when he’d bust ‘Mr. Amoyo’ talking to himself!”

He quickly looked to me with his sharp eyes, with such a cunning look that I knew he was up to something. He quickly changed his face into a hybrid of his face and of my father’s face and kept on imitating my father as he got shocked from Mr. Amoyo’s shameful behavior. I couldn’t control myself and I burst into laughter.

“E’stata fasulla!” He cried with joy as he jumped around merrily, seeing that he finally managed to make me laugh.

One day I was doing my homework and I felt so thirsty. I got out of my room and headed towards a small refrigerator. My father thought it would be nice to have a small refrigerator upstairs close to my room, incase I needed to drink something. As I picked a frozen can in delight I could hear my father speaking to somebody downstairs, from his tone I could say he was not speaking to the chef. He was speaking to a friend. That was quite strange. For except Mondays, my father seldom had guests. Slowly I tried to approach the stairs and listen.

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“Sure it should have been tough for him, Silvio,” I could hear Edward speak, “Yet I still think that you did the right thing. It’s too risky to have a *son of a maid* raised by a maid after all!”

“Now hold your tongue, Edward!” I could hear my father firmly reply, “He is *my* son after all.”

Inspired by my wonderful vision of the graveyards, my attitude towards the attic has considerably changed in the past few months. I have sent my father a polite written request in which I asked him to have the attic totally cleaned from the dust and have all the junk transported to the basement. I also asked him to let a carpenter design a small wooden library to be put on the wall of the attic and to have it filled with western classics. My father was delighted as he read the note, perhaps because of the western part. He was so delighted that he quickly replied to ‘Mr. Amoyo’ that he would also put a luxurious desk if that pleased me. But I refused. I wanted the attic as I always knew it. I even didn’t want a lamp there. Only in the golden rays of the setting sun that I could find appetite to venture in the endless realms of fantasy.

Soon I had the attic set. It was very clean. I could notice how lovely the newly polished wooden floor looked. The library was full of classics that my father already had. They were mainly novels.

Mondays were no more horrible. I would come back from school and quickly do my homework, then, I would go upwards to my small secret garden. I was so absorbed in the novels I read that I could hardly hear the door locked when the guests started to come. And after the sunset I would mark the page and put the book back in place. Then I would look out of the window and enjoy the calm sight of the graveyards. Many times I tried to regain my lovely experience yet I failed. I could only faintly smell what I could fully live in that desperate night. I started to feel

The golden cell

beauty in the least details that once ran by my senses unnoticed. I have always heard the old-fashioned bell of the graveyards church ring, but only now that I could *feel* it knocking on my heart. As I heard it I remembered Keiko and remembered my early childhood. I can't deny to have had my eyes tear, but they were more like tears of inner purification than tears of torture. My only pain was being loveless. I was deeply touched when I read how St. Augustine talked about his first days and how all what he needed was to love and to be loved in return. But I was always lonely. I didn't have a beloved by my side. By days I started to know the power wisdom gives. It was the wisdom of embracing our fears, and sculpturing them by the beauty that resides in our essences into evoking pieces of art. As the sun was setting the attic was becoming my beloved secret golden cell, the cell of knowledge and fantasy.

Mongolia

2

Amour

It was a lovely night in Ulan Bator, about two years after I first started working for Michaels tours. Sylvia and Hans decided to join Lauren and me in a double date. We went to a very luxurious restaurant. No, definitely it was not Pedro's. We were sitting on a table exchanging nice conversations and having a nice time listening to a lovely jazz singer that came straight from New York.

"The place here is lovely," said Sylvia in joy, "Do you come here usually?"

"Yes," replied Lauren, "We have been coming here for about six months now. Remember the first time we came here, honey?"

"How can I forget?" I replied, "It was the day in which I was promoted. It was a record to be promoted after only a year and a half. I can still remember how you were enthusiastic about it. You looked lovely that day. Well, you always look lovely."

"Yes," she replied, looking at me with her lovely eyes, "Think your words twice, you're talking to a lady Manila prince!"

"Wow!" said Sylvia, "You make such a lovely couple!"

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You've been together for a long time?"

"Well," replied Lauren, "We've been together for almost two years now. I knew Faust loved me but I had to take all the embarrassing approaches myself. I knew my Manila prince was a bit too shy."

"That's right," said Hans, "Faust is very shy."

"Well, not always." said Lauren as she smiled cunningly to me, "Sometimes he is not shy at all!"

"Lauren?" I cried.

"Come on, Faust! Hans and Sylvia are no strangers."

"You are a lucky man, Faust." Said Hans looking with great interest to Lauren, "Your girlfriend is so vivid and lively."

Suddenly Sylvia's face turned white and she looked at the floor. Hans slightly raised an opened hand as if he was apologizing. Silence prevailed. Sylvia was a very beautiful blonde and was definitely much more beautiful than Lauren, but she was so silent and ashen white. Hans loved her more than himself since they played together as kids, but he was clumsy at times. He would hurt himself for Sylvia's shake, but we all knew she was hurt then.

"So, Lauren," I said trying to break the ice, "Are we going to watch the stars tonight when we come home?"

"Watch the stars?" Hans quickly asked, trying to distract Sylvia.

"Yes, sure," replied Lauren, "Since Faust and I moved to our new home we have been always watching the stars at night. It is so romantic."

"That's so interesting." Said Hans as he looked nervously at Sylvia.

"We had our villa's ceiling enclosed with glass like a greenhouse," Lauren explained delightedly, "We just sleep next to each other and watch the lovely glittering starts in the silent sky of Ulan Bator."

"That's lovely," said Sylvia as she looked to Hans with a faint

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smile, "Perhaps we can visit them once. I'd like to see this."

"Sure!" Replied Hans with a relieved wide smile.

"So," I concluded, "It's time to get the menu."

"Whew!" I said as I was taking off my tie, "That was a stressful night!"

"Hans is so kindhearted," replied Lauren, "But he should pay attention because Sylvia is so sensitive. She can be easily hurt."

"I wonder why! She is very beautiful and the daughter of a respectable multimillionaire. Why should she feel unworthy?"

"Too delicate raising, I believe. I don't know if I would have liked to have her childhood."

"Oh, Lauren. I know it was hard for you to live with a drunk stepfather."

Lauren paused, then she slowly turned towards me and hugged me.

"I am so weak inside, Faust. I know I have always played the man but when I reflect at my loneliness as a child I just feel so weak."

"Yes, you always played the man," I said with a cunning smile, "Remember our first night together?"

"Yes!" she laughed as a single tear fell on her left cheek, "You were pretty innocent! It's impressive that you almost knew nothing of sex although you were a bookworm as a teenager."

"You know my father didn't give me books that dealt with sex. But I had my sexual fantasies as a kid."

"Yes, the Venus statue."

"It had large tits."

"Maybe," she said as she walked away in faked apathy, "But I bet they weren't soft at all. Were they?" She resumed as she looked backwards at me with half an eye.

"Eh...you think we...?"

"Well...No!" she said with a cunning smile, "I'd better watch

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you beg me a bit!”

“Why are you so evil with me?” I said with a wide smile.

“Ok, *Fofi!*” she said with sleepy eyes, “Just wait till next night. This wine was strong.”

It was a Wednesday afternoon. I was back from work. Lauren was not back yet. I was exhausted yet as soon as I entered home I felt so energetic. It was yesterday evening that I posted one of the questions that troubled me for so long time on an Internet forum. I was glad that I discovered this forum in a search. Many intellectuals posted there and I believed I could find new answers to old questions. As I checked the topic I knew I was in luck, I had an answer from one of the most respectable thinkers of the forum, the Nature Watcher.

Dear Manila Prince,

I was glad to read your post. So, you asked, “Does infinity really exist?” Well, does any number ‘exist’? Some old Greek philosophers thought that numbers had a kind of ‘independent’ being. But, apart from such mysticism, numbers don’t exist. Now perhaps you are asking if there is anything in the universe that is infinite in number and thus the concept of infinity ‘exists’ through the existence of that thing. Well, so far there is nothing proven to exist in infinite quantities in the universe, nor do I think such a particle or object will ever be discovered.

Immanuel Kant believed the concept of space was contradictory since it is ‘irrational’ to think of it as infinitely large and it is also bizarre to believe that you will see a sign upon which is written ‘The end of the universe, turn back!’ if you will travel in the space. He went on putting his theory that space is just an axiom; a construction of the human mind. Now I don’t want to get into Kant’s philosophy but I should mention that such a paradox was reconciled by Einstein’s view of the universe as

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being 'warped' in a manner that resembled the three dimensional spheres. Here the universe is finite yet unlimited, bearing no edges, just like the two-dimensional surface of the sphere.

Zeno's paradoxes also exploit important problems regarding space as 'continuous', thus of 'infinite' number of points.

Last, regarding probabilities. If we are to think of the number of books that can be written in two hundred pages, for instance, we will find ourselves with a huge number of books. Yet they will not be 'infinite'. But if we are to consider the number of books written in an infinite number of pages then the number will certainly be infinite. But we have to prove first that even one book of infinite pages can be written, which is, as I believe, not the easiest of tasks. You can search for 'Hilbert's Hotel' if you are interested in more about infinity.

Thank you for letting me speak about stuff that I like!
All the best,
The Nature Watcher
Bucharest, Romania.

BTW: I think I read somewhere that a certain saint (I don't remember his name) thought that our minds will collapse when we try to think of infinity because it is the ultimate nature of God. Funny metaphysics, no? :)

"Whew!" I thought, "I'll have to read this over and over!"

I was much interested in knowing who that 'Nature Watcher' really was. I imagined him as a wise man in his fifties or sixties probably wealthy and retired. I sent him a small private message.

Dear Nature Watcher,

Thank you so much for your care and reply. I was amazed by

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the vastness of your knowledge. I believe you are so smart.

I don't want to be irritating but in fact I am so curious about knowing more about you. How old are you? Do you work or you are retired? Bucharest is a wonderful city and I hope you are having nice time there.

My name is Faust Amoyo. I was born in the Philippines but now I work as a tourist guide in Ulan Bator, Mongolia. My English is good because I was educated in an English school. I have never studied philosophy but I just find myself asking some hard questions at times. I am in my twenties so you have a younger friend now ;)

Please don't mention any information that you would like to keep personal. I am just fond of your knowledge and just wanted to know more about you, that's all.

Sincerely yours,
Faust Amoyo (Manila Prince)

"Honey?" cried Lauren, "Where are you? Always on that PC?"

"Hi Lauren, I thought you'd be back even later."

"No, today I was with a bunch of oldies that quickly felt tired and wanted to go home. I bet someone here was guiding a fabulous group of Spanish señoritas."

"Oh, come on, Lou! You know I am a devoted man."

"I know, Manila prince," she said with her glittering expressive eyes as her fingers walked on my tie, "My love *bounds* you, perhaps too *literally* at times!"

"You promised me that we're not doing this till next summer!"

"Ok," she said with her trademark cunning attitude, "Just the usual *spankings* then!"

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“Oh lord of heaven!”

Next day I was back home after a long trip. I spent most of the day sitting in the bus. It is so painful to spend the whole day sitting on a movable chair, especially when you had a good spanking the day before.

As I came back home I ran to the bathroom, got a plastic washtub, half-filled it with water, put few ice cubes in it, put it on the chair in front of my PC, took off my pants and delightedly sat. I turned on my PC as I took a deep breath of relief.

I was glad as I found that the Nature Watcher replied to my message. I opened the reply quickly.

Hi Faust,

I am very glad to hear from you. I think your name is strange for a Filipino but I like it. My name is Marcus Minkowski. You were wrong just like everybody else here! I am not old at all. I am eighteen years old and I currently live in Bucharest where I attend the faculty of medicine. (I **hate** medicine by the way, I would have just **loved** to study physics or cosmology instead but my mother is stubborn, she says that she wants me to become a doctor.) I was born a Jew. My father died when I was five years old and my mother was not very religious. As you may have guessed, I do not believe in God now. I like many scientists and philosophers. Most notably I like Spinoza, Einstein and Carl Sagan. They were all Jews, they all didn't believe in God but most importantly, they shared with me those deep feelings of love and awe towards the universe. This feeling is the most wonderful, sublime and noble emotion a man can have.

You are lucky. I think your job is very interesting. You travel to many places and meet nice people. (I bet you already knew a

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couple of nice mademoiselles, didn't you, 'Manila Prince'? ;) I am hoping to hear more from you and thank you for being interested.

All the best
The Nature Watcher
Bucharest, Romania

"Interesting job?" I thought in irony as I carefully adjusted my posture in the washtub, "Nice mademoiselles? You should have seen what the interesting job and the nice mademoiselles have just done to my poor butt!"

It was Saturday night. We were sitting exhaustedly on the sofa after a long day at the mall. As I turned on the TV, we saw that the Mongolian local channel was airing a very old and primitive Mongolian film in black and white. The old filming techniques made the actors' movement look so funny. Lauren smiled at the characters and started making fun of them. I stared at the TV and didn't say a word.

"What's the matter with you honey?" she asked, "You look mesmerized! Why are you gazing at the TV in that manner?"

"This scene..."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It is so strange."

"Sure, all old films look like that. They are so stupid and primitive."

"I know, but seeing those scenes made me feel something. I...I really don't know what it is..."

"They made you look lame?" She laughed.

"No, they are so strange, as if they *remind* me of something."

"Hmm, perhaps you saw that film before when you were young?"

"No way! My father didn't allow me to watch Filipino films. I never saw a Mongolian film before and all the films I saw were

American and recent.”

“What can it be then?”

“I don’t know, but looking at those poor dusty characters with their clumsy movement gives me a certain sense of ‘déjà vu’. It is a very faint feeling, yet it touches my heart so profoundly.”

“I guess it is nostalgia. Seeing an old film reminds you of your childhood. But that’s strange, you were not a happy child.”

“Definitely I was not!”

“Then why are you feeling longing for your past then?”

“I don’t know. I am not sure it is belonging to the past. It is a very certain feeling. It is so noble yet it disturbs me at times.”

“Faust, I want to tell you something, but please don’t take it sensitively. I have read that much stress in work is not healthy. Perhaps you can take some rest for two days. I really don’t think Mr. Roberts will object at all.”

“Lauren, please understand me! It is not about work. I have always felt ‘expecting’ something. I thought I was waiting for my new life away from my father. But when I came here I still felt annoyed. Then I thought it was all about having a relation. Now that I am with you I still have that feeling of ‘being ready’ for something that I don’t know.”

“What exactly do you feel? What happened to you when you turned on the TV?”

“Eh, Lauren...Do you believe in...reincarnation?”

“Reincarnation?” She asked with much wonder.

“Yes, I feel as if old things remind me of a life that I lived before, as if they are awakening in me so many noble memories that I lived and experienced an eternity ago.”

“You think you are contacting a past life?” She cautiously asked with much anxiety.

“Perhaps,” I replied with confusion, “But sometimes it doesn’t seem much like that.”

“What do you mean?” She eagerly asked with more worry.

“I had a dream a couple of days ago, I dreamt that I was a young Japanese schoolboy who was sleeping with much worry as he had an important exam the day after. A week ago I dreamt

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that I was a Russian girl with an ugly face. I was walking in the late night in red square. Crying and begging the endless stars of the moonless night to have pity on me and give me a beautiful face so that my friends at school wouldn't laugh at me. It is as if my heart is no longer satisfied by my emotions and life. My heart is seeking more, seeking emotions of other people as well. People whom I have never met or known and who most probably never existed. As if I feel that I could live their joys, hopes, experiences and pains even at a deeper plane, take them to higher levels of consciousness. As if I could project deeper value on their lives by throwing myself into their world. As if they could only deeper experience their psyches through me."

"Faust!" She cried with her beautiful eyes full of worry.

"I knew you would react like that!" I cried nervously, "But what can I do? You are the only person to whom I have entrusted and sincerely disclosed my worries."

"Faust, do you love me?" She asked with sorry eyes.

"Definitely!"

"I know I am so boyish and aggressive towards you, Faust. But that's how I try to show you my love. I know it sounds silly, but I have never felt at ease when I acted femininely. I thought you'd think that I am faking my feelings if I did."

"Lauren! I know!"

"Sometimes I think you need a kind shy girl like Sylvia."

"What are you saying?"

"That's right, Faust. You tricked yourself into thinking that it was something mysterious you need, perhaps a clue to a forgotten past life. But that's not true. You still need love, Faust."

My life was turning into a hell the following two weeks. Somehow I started to believe that 'the secret' behind my anxiety was playing games with me. My troubled mind deluded me into believing that the secret I was seeking revealed itself to me every night just before I fell to sleep. Yet as I slept I forgot it again and woke up without the minimum idea of what happened to me late

the night before. In that manner, 'the secret' had the joy of revealing itself to me each night and watching how I reacted, as well as having the joy of seeing me wake up foolishly forgetting everything the next day. I wonder how I believed in such nonsense, but one morning I had a very faint memory of experiencing a certain 'meaning' the night before. Perhaps that was one more trap that I set for myself, but it worked. As nights passed, I believed in this absurdity more and more. This belief pushed me into concentrating my thoughts as hard as I could every night just as I was falling in asleep, so that I could remember everything I experienced the next morning. This managed only to distract my sleep and make me wake up as tired as ever. As days passed I felt more feeble and exhausted.

"Faust!" said Hans as I was sitting in a cafeteria, "How are you doing. I have been in thought. I hope you and Lauren are fine."

"We are. Thanks Hans."

"So what's wrong? I am glad I could meet you before traveling to Hamburg."

"You are going to Hamburg?"

"Yes, I will return after a month."

"How's Sylvia?"

"She is fine, but I feel so stressed when I am with her, she is so sensitive and I make much effort to watch my words. I don't want to hurt her at all."

"Well, things are not going on perfectly with Lauren and me either."

"Why? That must be what you wanted to talk with me about."

"Yes. I have been feeling strange lately. When I was a teenager I had a certain feeling of 'expecting something' I knew it was about leaving my home and feeling free."

"Then?"

"Then I came here. For the first few months I felt better but then that feeling came back. I then met Lauren and slowly she

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was approaching me till we were together and my life got better.”

“And then? That strange feeling relapsed again, no?”

“Yes, it did and it’s ruining my life. Lauren is convinced that this means that I still need love and that she is able to satisfy me emotionally.”

“I bet it’s spiritual thirst you are experiencing.”

“Hmm, ‘spiritual thirst’? Perhaps! I feel as if someone or some memory is calling me from far away, I even started to seriously consider reincarnation.”

“Reincarnation?” Hans laughed, “No, Faust! You need to be spiritually evoked, touched.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, I don’t know much about it. I think many poets and philosophers, especially existentialists, discussed similar feelings. I don’t know. As an anthropologist I relate this ‘need’ or ‘feeling’ to culture and religious rituals. But I don’t know how to help you more. I can just tell you this: you are in need of your own spiritual experience, go and seek it.”

“Go and seek it?” I thought, “Who knows where can I find one?”

As I came back home I posted a new topic in which I asked my friends if they believed in reincarnation. I knew I only cared about the reply of the Nature Watcher. Yet I didn’t want to fool myself into thinking he would really reply; he seldom replied to such superstitious questions.

I was home. Lauren was still with the Danish tourists she told me about. I opened my PC and surfed my favorite forum. The topic I opened about reincarnation grew quickly into the third page but it was full of garbage. It was full of virtual battles between New Agers who supported and Christians who opposed. Both were equally falling into awful fallacies as they argued. The Nature Watcher definitely kept himself away from the kids

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play. Instead, he posted a new topic there about three hours previously and many of his admirers had already replied. It was talking of God and logic. The Nature Watcher was a skeptic. Everybody knew that in our forum. He was asking some hard questions.

Dear Friends,

I have been thinking lately about the divine omnipotence. And I have some questions in mind that I would like to share with you.

Now, I know that all theists believe that God can do 'impossible' things, like raising the dead, walking on water and so on. But I wonder if those things are indeed 'impossible'. I guess Stephen Spielberg can film a wonderful scene of Lazarus being resurrected. Just imagine it! A pile of bones starts to mysteriously fly in air and join each other forming a skeleton. And as the skeleton is being formed flesh and muscles impatiently adhere to the finished parts of the half-built skeleton. The camera revolves around the skeleton and gets closer to the face that finally becomes covered with fresh skin that is still taking a definite shape on the muscle-covered skull. Wow!

But is this really impossible?

To science today, yes, it is. Perhaps we can reanimate frozen people in the future and create new bodies by nanotechnology and perhaps we will never be able to do this. But after all resurrection will never be logically impossible.

$1+1=7$: That's something logically impossible.

A circle having four angles, i.e. a circular square: That's something logically impossible.

A cup of water totally full and totally empty (without using linguistic tricks, OK?): That's something logically impossible.

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Can God do anything of the above mentioned?

Waiting for your comments and ideas.

All the best,

The Nature Watcher

Bucharest, Romania

“That guy is so interesting!” I thought, “Are there really people who think in that way?”

As I finished reading his posting I started to read it again and again. I was interested in the matter because Hans told me my inner quest dealt with spirituality and religion. It was strange; I thought they had nothing to do with religion. I have not been religious as a young boy, and I was always complaining when my father took me to the church.

I was so confused that night. Lauren came late and kissed me, then she went straight to bed. Quickly she was fast asleep; the long tour was too tough for her. I lay next to her and couldn't close my eyes. I kept on thinking of my feeling, of Hans' analysis and of the questions. I kept on thinking and thinking till I was very tired and feebly slept.

That night I had a very strange dream. I dreamt that I was a poor villager who traveled and traveled, who passed endless realms in his quest. Finally, I reached a huge black mountain. I fell exhaustedly to earth. I slowly raised my head and looked before me. I saw him. He was wearing a black veil to hide his face. As I tried to approach him and take off his veil he took a step backwards and pointed to a chessboard on earth. I had to beat him to see his face. I sat and we started to play. He defeated me. I tried again and again and I kept on twisting my mind to solve his riddles but in every time I was beaten. I got mad. I threw the chessboard violently away and all the pieces scattered

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on earth. Quickly I threw myself on him, opening both hands to catch him. He melted and slipped from between my fingers then solidified again far from me, still retaining his veil. I ran after him. I chased him. I tried to bypass his divine censorship and strip him off his veil. But I failed. I lay on earth closed an eye and kept the other half opened. I knew that his love would fool his wisdom. He slowly approached and as he leaned towards me I suddenly threw myself on him again, and again I was holding air. As I chased him I asked him if he knew the impossible, if he could create an empty full glass or draw a circular square. As I did he laughed with cut voice, tired of the chase and responded with an old man's voice "*Oh, Faust! You are still so far from knowing me! I am that empty fullness! How can I draw that circular square when it is nothing but the very shape of my heart?*"

4

Mannequin

It was a wonderful night at our favorite expensive restaurant, always with the romantic atmosphere and lovely jazz. Lauren was very proud of my becoming the head of the company. That meant power and wealth for both of us. Since Sylvia was in Europe, lonely Hans joined Lauren and me in our celebration.

“So Mr. Amoyo,” she said with delight, “You are offering us French champagne tonight, no?”

“Sure,” I replied with a wide smile, “And I guess we will soon be drinking champagne again, no Hans?”

“Sure we will.” Hans replied gladly.

“Hans has just told me that he and Sylvia will get married.”

“Really,” replied Lauren with a smile as she hugged Hans, “That’s a wonderful piece of news. Congratulations.”

“Thank you, Lauren. We will be married here in Mongolia and after that we will have a lovely honeymoon in Monaco.”

“Oh that’s lovely,” cried Lauren with much enthusiasm, “I have always loved to visit that place.”

“Well,” said Hans with cunning eyes as he looked invasively towards me, “I think that the Manila prince can easily arrange that seeing he is now a head of a tourist company.”

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“Well,” I said looking at Lauren with much love, “That’s a wonderful idea, Hans.”

“And it’s going to be your honeymoon?” Innocently asked Hans with a smile.

Suddenly my face turned white. Lauren was also distracted. We looked awkwardly at the table for an instant and then I looked at the jazz singer.

“Nice voice!” I said, “Eh, Lauren, do you remember seeing that singer before?”

“No, I don’t think I saw her before. She has a very characteristic voice indeed.”

“Why don’t you try to sing jazz?” I asked her with a smile.

“No, I bet I am just not gifted. You should know that not all people get all that they want. We are not all as lucky as you are, Manila prince.”

“Well, I indeed believe I am lucky. I live in a wonderful house, have a lovely girlfriend and above all, have a comfortable seat in my new office in which my butt has found its solace!”

She looked at me with love and burst into laughter. The rest of the night was marvelous. I took Hans by car and dropped him in front of his house; then we headed to our villa. To be more precise we headed to the cellar. I brought out an old bottle of red wine and we drank more and more. Soon we were half-drunk and making passionate love under the glittering stars. At the end we were too tired to go downstairs to our bedroom. We just hugged each other and got lost in the darkness of deep sleep. The last thing that I could expect at that time was to dream. But I was absolutely wrong. In that night I had a dream. I don’t know if I had others too, but that one definitely outshone them all. It was very long and very symbolic. It was the most intense dream I have ever had in my whole life.

I dreamt that I was a happily married British woman. Every-

Mannequin

thing around me made me know that I was living in the late seventies. I had a wonderful marriage with my husband for over fifteen years and we had two lovely sons. I worked in a bank. One day as I was coming home after a peaceful workday my eyes stumbled on a shop. It was a dress shop. I was not interested in the wonderful long dress that I saw, but I was infatuated by the wooden mannequin that was wearing it. I felt the same feelings I used to feel when I saw the old Mongolian film. The mannequin was thin. It was not painted so I could see the wooden texture, and I liked it. The head was not shaped in a human form. It was elegantly given certain curves that made it look 'post human' in a certain sense. I couldn't lift my eyes off that mannequin and kept on staring for a while, seeing how it could evoke my senses and move me internally.

I could see the salesman inside notice how I gazed at that mannequin and he didn't look so glad. Perhaps he thought keeping a wooden mannequin made his shop look old-fashioned.

After a long struggle I moved away from the shop. I remembered that my family was waiting for me. As I came inside my kids hugged me and I still loved them, but now I felt that the deepest depth of my heart didn't belong to them, nor did it belong to me.

Next day on my way home I couldn't resist anymore. I went inside the shop and asked the salesman to sell me that mannequin. He kept on telling me that it was a dress shop so I doubled the price and begged him with bitterness. Finally, he agreed.

The dream quickly shifted at that point. I found myself alone in my house. My husband and my two beloved children were not there. All the furniture and carpets were gone, too.

I made an altar for my beloved mannequin. I put it on the altar and surrounded it with flowers and lovely white candles. I

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knelt before it and kept on looking at it silently. I didn't know what I expected it to do in return. But as I threw my logic away I knew I wanted it to love me in return. But how can wood love?

I started then to talk to it intimately. Telling it how much I loved it and what dear things I have left behind for that epiphany it raised in my troubled heart. Yet it never replied. I started to get angry. First I started yelling at it then I got up and went towards it with menacing solid footsteps. I held its throat firmly as if I wanted to choke it. I took few steps backwards as nothing happened. I then took off my clothes and touched it all over its body. I gently placed it on the floor and threw myself on it. I started kissing and petting it all over with growing tears. Then I shifted to the more evocative approaches. I firmly rubbed my body on it. As if my body was the key that could unlock its silence, knowing that it was the dearest thing that I could ever offer.

Time passed without the least response. I got completely mad. I threw myself away from it and got a small knife. First, I started pricking my skin but then I was deeply cutting myself. As nothing happened I tortured myself in every possible manner, with whips and candles. At last my strengths faded and I painfully and tearfully pulled my bloody body on earth and brought a big sword. I knelt again and looked at the mannequin for the last time, then I gathered all that remained of my strength, posed the sword directly onto my chest and took a deep breath for the grand finale. I closed my eyes and with a bold stroke drove the sword right into my chest with immense pain. As I opened my eyes I saw the sword coming out from my back, but it did not penetrate me alone. In front of me was my beloved mannequin. It was kneeling in front of me giving me her back as if it were protecting me. I looked at it with overwhelming love but I was too weak to smile. We quietly fell on one side with my head gently placed on its. The dream concluded with both of us lying peacefully in a blood puddle in the spotlight.

Mannequin

Next day I woke up late in the noon, I felt very drowsy. Lauren made me a heavy cup of coffee to wake me up. In the beginning I was totally amnesiac. But as I saw Blanky sitting on a nearby chair I immediately remembered the mannequin, and my dream as well.

As I drank my coffee Lauren noticed that I was more than just tired.

“What’s wrong with my Manila prince?” she asked in a flirtatious tone, “Did my baby drink too much yesterday?”

“Eh, yes! I just think I drank too much.”

“Oh, it’s OK. How many times do we celebrate such a great thing? It’s your right to drink much on such a day.”

“Thanks, Lauren. I could never have become all that without your advice and without you by my side.”

“Oh, Faust we are just perfect lovers.”

“Indeed.”

“Hey? What’s wrong with you? You look so pale. That’s not wine; you are thinking of something. What happened?”

“How can you tell?”

“Faust, you are my lover, how can’t I notice everything about you. Besides, your paleness is way too evident!”

“I...I have had a dream... another one.”

Lauren looked so pale as I told her about my dream. She could hardly hold her tears. She sat quiet for sometime then she slowly turned her eyes toward me.

“Faust,” she said with sincere eyes, “There is something that I must do.”

“What is it?” I eagerly asked.

“I was thinking about it last time you had such troubles but I thought a conventional conversation could solve the problem.”

“You want me to go to a psychiatrist?”

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“No, I want to leave home for a week.”

“Where are you going?”

“You will know when I come back Faust.”

“Lauren! You can’t leave me in such condition. I need you by my side more than ever.”

“I will be away for only one week. It is not much to ask.”

“Promise me that you will be back.”

“I promise.”

“Promise me that you will be away for a single week and not one day more.”

“I promise you, Faust.”

She quickly ran out of the room, her eyes starting to tear.

Days passed slowly. And as I lived in solitude I started to realize how much I needed Lauren by my side. I tried to call Hans to keep me company, but he was not there. Perhaps he was going to stay with a Mongolian family for his studies or perhaps he was too busy arranging stuff for the wedding. Days passed slowly. I tried to keep myself busy watching TV and avoiding any possible activity that might trigger deep thought or intense emotions.

Finally, I could no longer resist. I surfed on the forum again. The Nature Watcher had opened a new topic. As I read it my tears slowly fell. I knew I was not the only person who had troubles.

Dear Friends,

As I write to you I feel intense bitterness. I was born in a poor village fifty kilometers to the north of Bucharest. Since my first school day I took the matter seriously. I was an excellent student who studied hard. After my father died, my mother took on an incredible burden to spare me from working. She cleaned

Mannequin

houses, worked as a dressmaker and worked for long hours under inhuman conditions in a cigarette factory. As I grew I had unparalleled marks in high school and I was granted an opportunity to study medicine for free in the University of Bucharest. I was shocked when I saw how my colleagues treated me. Most of the time they were either looking at each other and smiling suspiciously or ignoring me altogether. I have been living in Bucharest for three years now and I still couldn't make even a single friend. A girlfriend? Don't make me laugh! The girl that I liked didn't even look at my face as I tried to talk to her. I thought it was because I am a Jew. But I was wrong. In time I knew that there were many other Jews in the faculty, but most of them were popular and never considered inferior. It seems that my ethnicity was not at all what made me unpopular in the faculty. Perhaps it is because I am poor. I can't afford to join my colleagues in the expensive bars or cafes they frequent. My clothes are not very clean and my eyeglasses look like the ones people wore in the sixties. I was not sad at all when I thought it was my poverty that made me rejected. But a year ago one of the colleagues called me a 'Nerd'. I didn't know what that meant, but I memorized the word keenly. Only yesterday I learned what was wrong. Yesterday I was reading a book, 'The Demon-Haunted World' by the revered professor Carl Sagan. As I read and lost myself to that mysterious 'mental orgasm' I came to a chapter called 'Maxwell and The Nerds'. As my curious eyes ate the words I found all my old tears escaping from my eyes. They fell silently and so painful are silent tears!

I found myself confronted face to face by the facts that I was trying to blur before myself for whole years. I knew what a 'Nerd' meant, I knew that I was one, and I knew that I was proud to be one. I can't understand why people would regard the exceedingly sublime desire for knowledge as something shameful or degrading. I don't mind at all if they treated me in such a manner because I was born to a poor Jewish family. But what I discovered was horrible. I was humiliated for the most precious,

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sacred and sublime emotion that my lonely heart embraced.

Now I know that I am Velma of Scooby-Doo, Lisa Simpson and a young doctor Emmett Brown.

From time to time my loneliness overwhelms me and my heart becomes full of bitterness. I start imagining a Lois Lane that needs me. Perhaps she is one of my companions in the faculty. Perhaps she is lonely too, tossing and turning in her bed waiting for me. Perhaps she already knows who I am, but doesn't know what a superman lover resides beneath the clumsy Clark Kent eyeglasses that I have always wore. I imagine her as she discovers how interiorly great is the poor Jew who she sees every morning and passes unnoticed as a shadow.

Thank you for giving me the possibility of expressing my emotions.

All the best,
The Nature Watcher
Bucharest, Romania.

It was a full moon night. I was back home after a busy work-day. A while ago I thought that Mr. Roberts didn't have anything to do in his comfortable office. But now I realized what stress really meant. It was an endless mental effort and a lot of nerve-burning situations that must be wisely and calmly handled. As I lazily marched towards bedroom I heard a voice calling me from upstairs.

"Faust? Honey? Is it you?"

"Lauren!" I cried with joy.

"No! Don't come!" she cried, "Go to the bathroom and have a shower first!"

"Wow!" I thought with joy, "Lauren is back and seems to be voluptuous tonight! Perhaps I have a chance to forget about all the stress and boredom I have been in."

Mannequin

Quickly I went to the bathroom, had a neat shower and put the most expensive perfume I had.

“Lauren?” I asked with surprise as I came into the empty bedroom, “Where are you?”

“I am here.” I could hear her call from above.

“Oh!” I thought, “Looks like we will first have to marvel at the infinite beauty of the stars!”

India

2

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Afternoons were nice in India. Indians are very nice to tourists. In my first days I used to go to a small restaurant. It was by the side of a small dirty water canal. I saw young Indians taking a dive in that pool of mud with unparalleled pleasure. I doubt American children find such pleasure even in Disneyland. But perhaps God is fair after all. It seems that there are more smiling huts than smiling palaces in the world.

As I saw those kids I had my first real encounter with the real meaning of the being easily satisfied. They had inner-satisfaction. I saw many Western kids in Manila premiere. They were all easily bored. They had wonderful toys but still didn't like them. There was always something more to crave for. That toy was big but the other was bigger. That toy played nice music but the other played even nicer music. That videogame took endless hours of serious and fatiguing programming, but soon there was a better one, and the poor eye-blinded programmer will have to see his videogame considered lame. But here everything was different. I have always praised simplicity. And that's what I was seeing. It seems that there was an enigmatic link that somehow carried the great values of Sri Bakashananda, and other

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gurus, to those kids. They have never heard him speak, but his grace somehow flew from his heart and reached their hearts and filled them with that wonderful satisfaction.

Raji was always my companion. I can't speak Hindi and many Indians can't communicate in English well, so I needed a translator, and a bodyguard.

"Raji," I said, "Do kids always take a dive in that dirty canal?"

"Yes, sir, they do."

"But they may catch parasites that way."

"They do, sir. But they are not afraid of it. The river is their only pleasure. They are the poorest kids here; untouchables."

"Untouchables?"

"Yes, we believe that they committed cruel deeds in their past lives that's why their Karma made them be born in that poor state."

"So you don't sympathize with them?"

"Often I see them and feel they could have been my children. But then I remember that there was a reason why they face this horrible present. It is because of their past."

"That's...*ugly*."

"Dalits are treated now in a better manner than in the past," Raji quickly added, seeing how I was offended, "They have been given much respect by the Mahatma Gandhi, he called them 'Harijan'. It means 'the children of God'. Many of them succeeded in life and became rich."

"I see. But I would like to go to the hotel now. I need to sleep well, tomorrow Sri Bakashananda will start giving us his teachings and I need to be sober."

"My children," said Sri Bakashananda as he sat on the precious lotus, "I am glad to see you all again. You all came from different parts of the world to this place seeking light. And the

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lord never forgets about your sacrifices. You have left your jobs, families and lives to find your selves. The lord cannot reject those who seek him. He shall reveal himself to you all, and then you will know who you are, for you and the lord are one.”

“Before you is a long road to full Self-realization,” he added after a pause, “But the lord offers shortcuts to him whom he finds sincere. Then, the infinite line is shortened to a dimensionless dot. The long road is suddenly lost and you find yourself face to face with the lord.”

The holy man sat quietly again, an instant later, Dr. Bernard Garner entered with the usual slow peaceful steps.

“Namaste, Sri Bakashananda.” He said as he bowed.

“Namaste, Dr. Garner,” replied Sri Bakashananda, “Now my dear children Dr. Garner will talk to you about the scientific healing researches that he is supervising. Go on, dear brother.” He added with a smile full of respect to Dr. Garner.

Doctor Garner then sat on a comfortable leather chair that was set for him. In front of him was a fashionable desk with a laptop. He made us a representation.

“You all know dear brothers,” he started to talk as the picture of Albert Einstein appeared on the screen, “That the prominent physicist Albert Einstein discovered that matter is equivalent to energy, in his most famous equation, $E = MC^2$. Did any of you ask himself why did that equation become exceedingly famous?”

“It’s because,” he added after he paused and looked at us with enthusiasm, “We have reached this equation a long time before Einstein. Thousands of years ago, devoted mystics have reached the same results that Einstein reached. They did not reach it through mathematics and equations, they simply dived inside themselves and extracted it from the depth of the knowledge we all have inside.”

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Dr. Garner paused and looked at Sri Bakashananda with enthusiasm, Sri Bakashananda started to add his comments.

“Inside each one of us limitless knowledge dwells, but we are ignorant of its presence. Just like a man may walk on a buried treasure and miss it. We miss endless wisdom although it has always been with us. Just like a man who looks everywhere for his eyeglasses when they are on his forehead. We are ignorant of our very selves. What superficial knowledge can be our condolence then?”

“The mystics expressed it correctly,” said Dr. Garner, “But mainstream scientists didn’t believe until they saw it expressed in equations. Albert Einstein was a very spiritual man who valued the knowledge of the mystics. It was that which made him very successful. He first felt the truth and then looked for equations that described it. He was a genius because he was guided by his intuition. Although many scientists of his age were superior mathematically, Einstein had his secret weapon.”

“Today scientists understood the way Einstein made his fame,” added Dr. Garner as a book cover appeared on the screen, “They became more interested in inner-knowledge, Erwin Schrödinger admitted to have been inspired by Vedanta in his discovery of quantum theory. Later, a prominent western physicist published a book in which he openly discussed the relationship and parallels between oriental mysticism and recent physical theories.”

“But as the findings grew more and more,” Dr. Garner said after a brief ‘intellectual’ pause, “The parallels were not only confined to physics but grew much beyond. Most importantly, they grew to the field of *medicine*.”

Then a big picture of the human body appeared on the screen. The body was figured as a gray mass stretched in vitality and penetrated with numerous strings of light that tended to accumulate in certain nodes around the body.

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“The Western world has been living in a separatist illusion,” Dr. Garner added with a tone of a deep sense of righteousness and authority, “Rene Descartes had a catastrophic dividing tendency. He separated everything and analyzed it. Mind as opposed to body, self as opposed to others, the subjective versus the objective, soul versus matter. Ever since, the whole western world has been following him. The western mind has suffered the curse of schism for all that time. But modern science is getting us back to the ancient wisdom. Quantum physics has put the record straight: the behavior of particles and other phenomena depend on the observer. We are not spectators of the universe, we are the actors. The more science advanced the more observations had strengthened the holistic notion at the expense of that reductionistic and separatist attitude of scientific adolescence. Today we see how turbulent emotions affect our bodies and vice versa. Today the term ‘psychosomatic’ is fundamental to the science of psychology.”

“That is wonderful, Dr. Garner,” Sri Bakashananda almost interrupted the talkative doctor, seeing that he was so enthusiastic that he was almost turning his notes into a lecture, “That is our goal, my dearest children,” he added as he looked to the astonished devotees, “We intend to bring back this unity in our lives. To experience that pure consciousness that underlines everything in our lives in its deepest profundity. Now, Dr. Garner will explain to you how you can lift up your mood through certain physical exercises and how you can ameliorate your heart condition, blood pressure and your mental vitality through spiritual exercises like mediation, self-expression in painting, music composition, but above all, through laughter.”

As I left the ashram I was feeling so excited. Dr. Bernard Garner was a genius and Sri Bakashananda was a saint. Now can anybody desire a better company? I was guided by the pinnacle of spirituality and the pinnacle of science. Perhaps I will be able

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to heal my wounds that Lauren's death has left and make peace with my soul. As I walked with Raji away from the ashram I suddenly remembered the Nature Watcher, Marcus Minkowski. He definitely would be astonished if he knew about all that I have just heard. So I asked Raji if there was an Internet café around and there was one, indeed. Many westerner devotees who came to Sri Bakashananda's ashram had the habit of contacting their relatives after visiting the holy man. I went to the Internet café and logged into the forum that I had not visited for months. I quickly started to recall all what I have just heard and put all of what my poor memory could retain into an e-mail. I sent it to Marcus and left the Internet café. I was very eager to see Marcus' reaction to my extraordinary discovery.

In the afternoon Raji took me with him to attend the wedding of a distant relative. It was a real fun! He told me that Indian marriages are prepared many days, even weeks before the 'real' marriage night. Unlike him, his distant relatives were rich. The marriage was not held in a hotel, it was held in a vacant land in front of the house of the bride. My eyes were flooded with colors, costumes, colored electric lamps and decorations. Some narcotics were innocently served to the guests as well, they didn't think at all it was something sinful or shameful. Taking narcotics is a sacred practice to many people in India and it has a special ritual that should be carefully carried out, too. They extract the plant and then put the liquid in a special container. A man holds the container and pours a drop on his palm then the guest bows and licks the delicious drop. In the middle of the crowd a huge fire was set. The Brahmin priest had a lot of work to keep him busy. Raji kept on telling me exactly what was going on but I just couldn't follow, the musical instruments were just too loud. The priest had many pastes of all colors. He drew certain symbols on the forehead of the bride and the bridegroom with his finger. I didn't know what exactly those pastes were made of but I they didn't look delicious at all! There were lots of

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rituals, lots of symbols and meanings. I can describe India's style in two words that can put the record straight, 'complicated primitiveness'. Like a UFO made of matches, like the car of the Flintstones, and much like the mechanical spider of Dr. Arliss Loveless in the film 'Wild Wild West'. Now don't tell me that you didn't see it!

The next day we went to the ashram early. Some few devotees were already waiting for the meeting. The ashram looked wonderful from outside. It was made of granite and the surface was flooded with statues of gods and avatars. The ashram was surrounded with wonderful gardens full of trees and exotic flowers. Sri Bakashananda told us that he loved to do the gardening job when he was young. He praised a Nobel Prize winning scientist, Sir William Lawrence Bragg, for loving gardening. He found great pleasure in telling us how that scientist disguised himself to work as a gardener when he had to move away from his own garden. The garden looked lovely in the mist of dawn. The air was fresh, the color of the tree leaves was as bright as ever. I sat next to Raji on the welcomingly grassy earth. Raji was a very introverted man who kept silent unless he was asked to talk, but the fresh air was making me talkative so I started to talk to him.

"Hey, Raji," I said with an encouraging smile, "How long have you been working as a guide here?"

"I have been working as a guide for fifteen years, Mr. Faust."

"You like your job?"

"Yes, sir. Remember I now exclusively work as a guide for the devotees of Sri Bakashananda. I consider it a holy task to take care of the guests of that holy man."

"You're married, no?"

"I am, sir. I have a kind wife and four kids."

"Wow! Four kids! It must be such a burden to raise them."

"My eldest son has been working for two years to support the

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family. I told him that he didn't have to do it but he insisted.”

“That's a good son.”

“It had been his devotedness to Sri Bakashananda that changed his heart in that way. Ever since being a devotee of that holy man, he dismissed his bad friends and started to be responsible.”

I talked more with Raji about his life and family. I don't remember much, but I knew that he was very poor in the past. He became more economically stable after working as a guide for the Westerners who came to visit Sri Bakashananda. As we were talking, the young Indian boy came out of the ashram and asked us to enter. The old Sri Bakashananda was waiting for us inside.

That day we were to have a 'practical lesson'. Sri Bakashananda asked us to join him in another garden that we knew nothing about. It was natural that every newcomer could not know about that secret garden; it was on the top of the building. Nobody could have ever imagined that grassy soil, fountains, and trees could exist in that manner. The place immediately reminded me of the ancient cities engulfed by forests that I saw in adventure movies. Sri Bakashananda told us that those trees were very old, their roots extended till the ground. They were somehow 'merged' into the building. From the fountains ran small 'rivers' that beautifully cascaded on the plains of the granite till they reached the ground. Sri Bakashananda told us how much he loved water and how he specially loved to hear its sound as it fell in cascades. He bought powerful motors to force the water upwards till the top of the building again. The whole ashram from a top view could have looked like a wonderful mother who hugs nature, science, the devotees and the holy man. It was like traveling back in time to the lost hanging gardens of Babylon. That place was bewitching in the pure sense of the word.

“Today, my beloved children,” Sri Bakashananda told us with

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his charismatic smile and his low tranquil voice, “We take a different approach towards divinity. The divine is beyond our thought and our reason. It is beyond our senses and our experiences. We cannot wish to know it directly by our senses. But the divine is merciful. Although being totally without, for our sake, it has made itself totally within. Although totally devoid of form, its essential desire to be apprehended and revealed made it flow in all forms. Although totally beyond knowledge, being neither knowing nor known, its unexplainable love towards us made it evolve personhood, evolve self, so that we can see it, or now better *him*, in the deepest depth of ourselves.”

I could not know what was going on inside of me as I heard that man speak. He was directly and plainly aiming at my need. I was ill of an illness that I couldn't describe and now I was finding the medicine that was quite expectably indescribable as well. But I knew that this was my healing. Those were the words that touched that something deep, sublime and indeed, *painful* in the profundities of my heart. Yet the more I felt the less I wished to describe my feelings; I didn't want to miss a single word that that man preached.

“Once a good daughter of mine asked me,” he resumed with an expressive smile, “Why we had to refer to ‘God’ as ‘He’. I believe the West lived long ages when God was considered masculine. I don't think any Catholic priest could have said that this meant that God had a masculine body. But I think they thought that God had a *masculine psyche*. God was commonly depicted in the western culture as a wrathful sovereign ruler who could easily get outraged. He was somebody who structured, built and planned. The idea of sacred femininity sparkled irregularly through the ages in the form of sects and heresies, perhaps the most famous of which was the brethren of the free spirit. Recently, liberal theologians realized the importance of the feminine aspect of divinity. More and more preachers cautiously hinted from time to time that God was a heavenly mother as well

as a father. I don't think this is exactly the case. 'God' is neither a father nor a mother. 'God' is neither masculine, feminine nor even hermaphrodite. The divine is simply indescribable. I like most symbolical theology. This was found in all cultures. In Hinduism it is present in almost every theistic doctrine. In Christianity it is not that popular or famous, but it is present. Dionysius, also known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, believed that 'God' was totally unknowable in his innermost nature, thus, all our terms that we attributed to him were merely symbolical. According to that wise man, we cannot say that 'God' is indeed 'Good', but we can say that 'Good' was closer to 'God' than 'Bad'. In the same sense, perhaps he could believe that 'He' was closer to 'God' than 'She', but personally, I would say that 'He' and 'She' are equally related to 'God'. 'It', however, is closer to 'God' than both."

Sri Bakashananda looked to us with a cunning smile. His eyes were sparkling as ever, quickly wandering between us, and specially noticing the expressions of the females. I looked at them, too. The ladies were indeed fascinated. It seems that many, many women have that question in mind.

"Now," he said with a slight unease, seeing he directed us away from our main theme, "Back to the point. We were talking about a different approach towards divinity. We said that we could never totally grasp the divine through thought. Thus, we need a different approach towards divinity. We need to free our minds of all there is. Only then the light of the pure will be clearly manifested. Our great master Plotinus teaches us to withdraw into ourselves and look. And if we do not find ourselves beautiful yet, we must act as the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So must we do: we must cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiseling

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your statue, until there shall shine out on us from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until we shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine. Now that's exactly what we need to do to realize the divine in our thirsty hearts."

Sri Bakashananda then paused for a moment. I believe he was hesitating a little. Perhaps he thought that his teachings were too complicated to us, and should be taught later, still he decided to go on.

"You know," he said, "the word 'gnosis' in Greek means 'knowledge'. Some early Christian sects called themselves 'gnostic' in that sense. They definitely didn't hold the word to mean 'scientific' knowledge, instead they meant spiritual intuition."

"Now, to achieve the spiritual gnosis, we must achieve pure agnosia in our souls. Agnosia, as contrasted to gnosis, means 'non-knowledge'. This is definitely not to be confused with ignorance as ordinary people might think. A man who approaches the divine by agnosia is a wise man, a man who realized that the divine purely transcends knowledge, and thus, is better approached by a pure, non-sophisticated approach. In that sense agnosia becomes the humble approach towards the divine. By realizing one can never grasp the unknowable through knowledge, one will simply 'let leave' or offer himself to the divine as such. When we were young children, we were full of the darkness of ignorance, by learning we came to the light of earthly knowledge. Our greatest leap, the leap of faith as Kierkegaard calls it, is the leap to the darkness. Not the darkness of ignorance, but the darkness of super knowledge. A saint is a man who realizes this darkness inside, a false avatar is he who keeps the darkness of ignorance inside and tricks the poor into believing that it is the darkness of the divine."

Sri Bakashananda then looked at us. We were all staring at

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him in stupor. He seemed to feel very irritated and guilty for speaking with much profundity, and then he asked us to lie on the grass. He asked us to close our eyes and to 'put our souls in our ears'. I closed my eyes and made my body comfortable on the fresh misty grass. The sound of the falling water was cooling and the sound of the birds in the sky was fascinating. I tried to follow Sri Bakashananda's instructions. I tried to focus all my attention to my ears. I tried to draw a figure of what I heard. I could see a wonderful place, perhaps paradise calling me. I have never been auditively simulated in that manner since I heard 'The dance of the sugar plum fairy' coming out of my broken Blanky. But I could not stop other senses as well. It seems we give too much attention to vision; we have made bullies out of our eyes. Just as they are gone all other senses flourish with extreme joy. My skin wordlessly told me about the incredible story of billions of oxygen molecules bombarding it with loving kisses. My cheeks told me how pure and innocent the misty grass felt on them. My nose? It was in God's heaven! The fresh air of Indian countryside dawn, when mixed with numerous infinitely small clean mist droplets was turning dangerously lovable.

I spent precious moments meditating in that lovely manner. Moments were passing slowly yet lightly. Time was wonderfully extended in sublimity.

"Now enough, my dear children," Said Sri Bakashananda, "Please sit now."

"I hope those moments could make you feel something," he added as we sat, "Silence is the most simple path to the divine. It is said that when the tongue ceases to talk the heart starts talking. And when the heart ceases to talk, the divine talks."

"Wow!" I thought, "That man is not of this world!"

"Now," He added, "I want each one of you to tell us about his emotions and what he felt in these past moments. Self-expression is very important. The perfect man, that is, he who has realized the divine within himself, is capable of absolute

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withdrawal from the world, just as much as he is capable of pushing his soul into every place and memory. The pure man is capable of bombarding the surroundings with his very essence, so that he can see the world from inside itself, and see the divine in the creatures. At the same time and with an equally astute approach, he can collapse on himself, pulling the peripherals of his soul from each and everything, then his soul reshapes itself as a sphere, attaining the least possible surface area, the least possible contact with externalities. Then, he experiences the world from above, not as an ongoing process but rather as a project that has been sketched on the desk of God an eternity ago. And then, when he collapses on himself, he experiences the divine from inside, not as action, but as potentiality.”

Then Sri Bakashananda asked us to express our feelings one by one. I spoke, too. I tried to mention all my feelings as precisely as possible, but I don't think that I could mention everything, what I was feeling was brand new to my soul, and too lovely to be expressed in words.

Sri Bakashananda then invited us to a small tea party. He stayed with us for the first few moments then left us. He told us that he needed to take rest. I talked with an elder American couple. Strangely, most of the devotees were either elders or teenagers. The wife told me how she traveled thousands of miles to visit Sri Bakashananda. Her only granddaughter was an addicted surfer who tragically died in a shark attack two years ago. The brokenhearted poor lady spent hours weeping and agonizing. One day, her husband heard of Sri Bakashananda. He told her and they bought one of his videotapes from the local New Age store. As the woman saw the kind old man speak about God her heart was uplifted immediately. Day after day she became incredibly attached to the man. Finally she decided to go to India to meet Sri Bakashananda face to face. I also talked to some Scandinavian teenagers. They told me that they frequented centers related to Sri Bakashananda in their countries. Dr. Garner

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made a visit to Scandinavia few months ago. They heard him talk and admired him so they decided to join him in India where they could see Sri Bakashananda as well. The tea party was wonderful. And after the nice chats, I asked Raji to take me back to the hotel. But for a moment I thought I'd better first go to the Internet café. As I logged into the forum I found that I had a private message from the Nature Watcher. I clicked quickly. I knew Marcus would be envying me for where I was.

4

Satori

“I can’t believe I came all the way to this place,” I said angrily as I sat on the uncomfortable bouncing seat of the jeep, “Arunachal Pradesh? The distant region in the Himalayas? Didn’t I get enough of this Bakashananda thing? We had to take a lot of pain until we got the permission to visit this place and now we have to climb the Himalayas with a jeep!”

“Please calm down, Mr. Amoyo,” said Raji, “I assure you that the Buddhist monk we will visit now is indeed a man of virtue. I know that climbing the Himalayas with a jeep is not an easy task, but I promise you that all this pain will be rewarded. Soon all your troubles will be gone forever... very soon...”

“Why are those monks that mad? Why do they live on this giant pile of snow?”

Raji didn’t respond but kept on smiling with much idiocy as he was forcing the jeep to climb the base of the mountain.

“How long should I have to wait more?” I said with extreme boredom.

“You don’t have to wait any more, Mr. Amoyo.”

“But we didn’t climb much, we are almost still at the base of

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the mountain. You told me that the monastery is at the top of the mountain. I can see no monastery here, I..."

"But you can see this, Mr. Amoyo," replied Raji with a husky voice full of hatred as he pointed a pistol straight to my nose, "Now, come out of the jeep, and don't try to escape, even if you do, you will die of cold."

"Raji?" I exclaimed with immense fear, "Why.."

"Get out of the damn car!" He cried.

I slowly opened the jeep door and stepped on the icy ground. Immediately Raji got out, still pointing the pistol towards me.

"Raji, Why?"

"Why?" he asked with burning anger, "Because you are wasting your time you Western New Agers. My father saw this Mohandas Mehta when he was a young boy. His parents were untouchables and called him after the name of Gandhi hoping that he one day would become a great man. He was very lazy as a young boy and then left India and went to the UK to study and work. When he came back he was as poor and stupid as ever, but he quickly became a millionaire by deceiving Western fools. You Westerners have made important men of those rotten creatures. You deserve to die."

"But I recognized he was an imposter and I left him."

"The problem is that you came," Raji cried, his breath forming a heavy cloud in the cold weather of the Himalayas, "You spoilt Westerners enjoy the most delicious food, hi-tech machinery and beautiful women, then they come here willing to take a day in Disneyland with God. In the past you made a British colony out of our land and now you are making spiritual prostitutes out of us. Spirituality to you is but another extravaganza."

"Raji, please don't shoot. Let's try to rationalize and talk like..."

"You know what, Mr. Amoyo?" he said with a deep sense of anger and pain, "Your face has reminded me of a certain man, I don't know what was his name. I saw him when I was five years old. He had your eyes, those devilish blue eyes. He was a devo-

tee to a guru, he was going to the hotel after a day at the ashram when he saw me playing alone. Nobody was around, he smiled at me and told me that I was a young good boy. He left me and bought me candy. He kept on bringing me candy everyday, I guess I needn't mention what happened a week later, or should I, Mr. Amoyo."

"Raji, I am deeply sorry for..."

"Shut up!" He cried loudly as his finger pressed the trigger. The bullet came at immense speed out of the pistol. It missed me. Raji was trembling with pain and he couldn't aim well, I tried to run but he quickly yelled at me, ordering me to stop. Soon the earth was vibrating strongly and I knew in what disaster we both were. I ran as fast as I could, closing my ears to Raji's endless orders to stop. I knew that the loud sound of the pistol triggered an avalanche.

Down came the heavy ice balls like a rain of bombs eating whatever had the courage to stand in front of them. I miraculously escaped my doom. As I looked backwards I saw no Raji and no jeep. There was nothing but an endless white field.

I walked wearily on the ice. I was afraid that the earth was brittle. Just one wrong step and I would find myself buried alive in an icy cave.

Minutes passed slowly, I was walking without a destination, marching towards the unknown.

Soon my poor legs could hold me no more. I fell on earth in despair. My bag fell off my back and all my possessions were scattered on the ice. I knew it was the end.

Seconds passed slowly, I remembered Keiko, I remembered the kindhearted Matilda and I remembered how my father looked like a saint the last time I saw him. Then I saw the smiling face of Hans. I saw Mom and remembered how I felt warmth

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in the hug of my beloved Lauren. I remembered how it felt the first time we practiced Tantra together and I remembered how I stood weeping next to her as I blew air towards her face without a response.

My weak eyes moved slowly till they saw something half buried in the endless Himalayan snow; it was Blanky, my mother's puppet. Immediately, I remembered how I felt on the night I dreamt the mannequin dream. Hot tears fell on my frozen face.

I looked at the horizon. I saw the beautiful mountaintops from faraway and started to think about the gurus, the *true* gurus who didn't act like clowns for the westerners but instead celebrated the beauty of being in that place. Can it be that in this very spot in which I was to die one day a holy man walked? Can it be that he then saw this same image that I was seeing, of those beautiful distant mountaintops? That image which was destined to be the last thing that I saw before I was dead.

As I was diving in my turbulent thoughts suddenly I felt that my eyes were 'opened'. Everything around me started to appear as if it had an 'inside', a kind of 'internal nature' just like the one that I had. Everything appeared as if it was *alive*. As if it was internally alive, but was more than alive, it somehow was 'conscious' but its consciousness was so faint, perhaps it was 'preconscious'. As if things were striving with their limited ability of expression to tell us that they were alive inside, for our realization of this fact would further bring them to the light of consciousness and being. Seen in this manner, everything appeared to be exceedingly beautiful and precious. Those moments were the most precious moments of my whole life. I was seeing everything as totally new and vivid. I was certain that my eyes were penetrating directly to the deepest depth of truth, that all is alive, sharing one universal essence. I was not Blanky, but Blanky and I shared a common life, a common inner spark of

Satori

being. My heart was full of emotions that I wept as hard as I could, I was deeply grieved that all this beauty surrounded us without being noticed. We humans are miserable indeed, to live amidst all this beauty without being aware of it. We made things ugly in our ignorance of this certain 'approach' or vision to the world. I had seen all what was there to be seen. I saw how absurd had been my expectations of a vision of God. I went here and there seeking him. Now I was sure that I had seen God, and he turned out to be nothing but the world that I looked at everyday.

I came to India seeking enlightenment, and now I found it. I didn't find it through following a guru and I didn't find it before a holy text or a statue. I found it amidst the forgotten snow of the Himalayas.

For all my life I have been crying my heart out for nothing, driven by unexplainable anxiety towards something that I didn't know, feeling suffocating thirst to that *one* more missing piece in the puzzle of life.

I have been fighting windmills, chasing shadows, desperately seeking meaning in *the* meaningless...

And now I have found it!

Romania

1

Meet the nerd

“Romania!” cried Loki with great pleasure as we stepped out of the airplane, “Finally women that God created when he was sober!”

I could recognize Madame Pauline, Marcus’ landlady in no time. She was fat, short, light skinned with two red cheeks and thick eyeglasses behind which her eyes looked like pinheads. She greeted me with a very curious look. She seemed to be very worried about Marcus’ roommate. She then accompanied me to the bus station and we took a bus to my new home.

As I sat in the bus I looked out of the window. Bucharest with its green gardens was literally a paradise, but I didn’t give much attention to this all. I was thinking about one thing, the Nature Watcher. I remembered his old post regarding the nature of infinity and how he believed that in a certain number of pages, a finite, although ridiculously large number of books can be written. As I thought more and more my face looked so expressive and the suspicious Madame Pauline looked at me more and more with a growing sense of worry.

Suddenly, with this thought in mind I started to visualize something. It was a desert, a very vast desert, virtually endless. In it all the possible combinations of letters formed endless books. Most of the desert was dark, that's where the nonsense resided. But certain spots were glowing brightly like stars in the moonless night. Those were books having a meaning and a value. I started to wander with my body in that desert and wonder what was surrounding me without being noticed. There were never-written heretic bibles, diary of a poor handicapped blonde who was never born, pornographic books that would have even offended the nastiest prostitute on earth, all the lost plays of Sophocles, a never written autobiography of Adolf Hitler the ruler of the world who smashed the allies, and perhaps a book that unified the theory of general relativity with quantum physics and illustrated how a theory of quantum gravity can be founded.

“Indeed” said Loki with a wide smile, “And also a neat version of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, where the word ‘Hamlet’ has been carefully and elegantly replaced everywhere by ‘Mr. Danish butthead’.”

That one was too *brutal* to be resisted and I burst out in a loud laughter confirming the worries of poor Madame Pauline.

And so went the bus towards the dying sun, with me on board. I was still too young to see another book in the book desert. It was the most precious book ever. It was the book carrying my memories, hopes, pains and laughter. Perhaps to humanity it was nothing compared to one of Sophocles’ plays, but to me it was indeed dearer. Our emotions, feelings, pains and smiles... our souls... they are the most precious things that we can ever have.

“There, Mr. Amoyo,” Madame Pauline said as she opened the door, “This is your room. I don’t think that I need to present you

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to your roommate.”

“Manila Prince!” cried Marcus with great enthusiasm, “I didn’t believe that you were really coming!” He said as he immediately shook hands with me with such vividness.

“Nature Watcher!” I replied with a wide smile, “Everybody in the forum has been wishing to see you. I am a really lucky guy!”

“Have a nice time,” said Madame Pauline with her same suspicious attitude as she saw how we reacted with each other, “But don’t make much noise. And remember, Marcus! No nazi choirs!”

“Nazi Choirs?” I asked, “You are Jewish!”

“Nah,” replied Marcus with a crazy smile, “I listen to a German hard rock band, they scream and shout and their songs are usually dark and military but they are not nazi. Madame Pauline just insists that they are. You must listen to some of their songs, you’ll love them.”

“Sure, old pal.” I replied with a smile.

I looked at Marcus and the room, my new life for no less than the upcoming three years. Marcus looked very handsome. He was very thin, had a thin white freakily face with wonderful hazel green eyes, yet he was wearing old-fashioned eyeglasses that seemed almost identical with those that Clark Kent used to wear in the film ‘Superman’. He had a nice-looking dirty blond hair, a very pointed thin nose and extremely thin lips. He was generally hyperactive and enthusiastic.

The room looked awful. It was a big room that extended longitudinally. One side was covered with red bricks that usually covered chimneys. Many sheets of paper baring printed pictures were hanged on this side with a single cello tape. While the other side was basically a big window interrupted frequently by columns that supported the building. Clothes and grave-smelling socks were carelessly thrown all around the room. The furniture in the room was very simple and cheap. There were two small beds, and a small table. An ancient computer was put on the ta-

ble and next to it was some half-rotten junk food. Marcus had a printer, too. It was a ridiculously old dot matrix printer that at best dated back to the early nineties of the past century. It seemed that Marcus used this table for his PC and for eating. On the far side of the room there was a small septum that hid a small bathroom. It had a bookshelf that carried Marcus' medicine books and other numerous files. The room was in the second flat. In the first flat Madame Pauline lived and ran a small restaurant, principally intended to serve the clients who lived in the building. There were no stairs inside the building itself, we could reach the second flat by the metallic staircase that adhered to the building externally.

"So, Marcus," I said as I looked at the hanged papers, "You have a nice collection here. Let me see...Einstein...Carl Sagan...Stephen Hawking...who's that?"

"Spinoza," he replied with a smile of devotion as he looked at the picture, "One of the great men who suffered for their essential desire of knowledge and wisdom. Along with Einstein and Sagan, he is an official member of my Jewish holy trinity!"

"But those are not printed with this dot matrix."

"Sure they are not! I printed them in an office. I had to pay for them but I just couldn't live without them."

"You like Carl Sagan very much!"

"Sure I do. He fascinates me by his love and enthusiasm towards the universe."

"But you don't have any of his books, do you?"

"I do, I almost have all his books, The Cosmos, The Demon-Haunted World, and more! They are all here on my bookshelf."

"I don't see any of them! All I can see are medicine books!"

"They are all here, Manila prince!" Said Marcus as he pointed at the files with a cunning smile.

"What?"

"I download them from the Internet and then print them by my dot matrix. I always refill it almost for free. Everyday I print a chapter and read it after I am done with the work of the faculty."

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I have printed lots of books almost for free this way.”

“It’s a nice idea, apart from violating the copyright, naturally.”

“Oh, come on!” Marcus replied with an apparent displeasure, “I can’t afford to buy new books, not even used ones! I can’t ask my mother to send me any money. I work in a cinema as an usher. I work in the most expensive cinema in Bucharest. I could get the job because I almost take no salary, I only benefit from the tips that, believe it or not, secure me a good living most of the time. My mom only pays for my room. Thanks to you, now my mom will have to pay half what she used to pay. I feel so ashamed of myself. I wanted to work and help my mother but she insisted that I should become a doctor.”

“Marcus,” I said with almost closed eyes, “I’d really like to know more about you, and I’ll. But now I’ll go straight to the bed. I am about to die, air flights are that exhausting to me!”

It was a sunny morning at the faculty. I was to meet the dean. I was to give the faculty a good donation and they, in return would allow me to attend all the lectures and practical lessons that I wanted. Medicine was taught in English so language was not a problem. The dean was especially willing to help after he found out that I was going to help poor Romanians for free.

After the visit I went for a walk with Marcus. He showed me the buildings and as we walked we came by a group of students. As they saw Marcus they started to smile sadistically and exchange comments.

“Hey, Marcus,” one of them yelled as he looked at Marcus in disgust, “Aren’t you gonna buy yourself some new eyeglasses you miser nerd?”

The guys burst into laughter and one of them patted the hair of the guy who spoke.

Meet the nerd

“Where are you going you bastard?” one of them cried as he ran towards Marcus, “Didn’t your stupid mother teach you to pay attention when an elder speaks to you?”

As the bully tried to approach Marcus I quickly held his hand firmly and pushed him powerfully away.

“Who the hell are you?” The young man asked me in apparent surprise and a little bit of fear.

“My name is Faust. I am Marcus’ friend and I’ll be around for the next couple of years so if I were in your shoes I wouldn’t mess with this guy.”

“Leave him alone, Roy” Cried another student, “Come here!”

“Who’s that?” I asked Marcus as the student backed off.

“He’s Malcolm,” replied Marcus as he walked with me with his eyes fixed backwards “He’s their boss.” He said with apparent pain in his eyes.

As I looked backwards I saw Malcolm, he was well built and dressed himself in a very fashionable manner. He was speaking with a very beautiful girl. She was thin, blonde with brown eyes and a lovely clear smile.

“He looks strong and self confident. And who’s that girl?”

“Her name is Jenny,” Marcus replied with his lips slightly trembling, “Jenny Olsen.”

“Olsen? Strange name for a Romanian girl.”

“Her father is a Danish businessman. He settled here for business and fell in love with a beautiful Romanian.”

“Eh, well... Does this Malcolm always harass you in this manner?”

“No,” Marcus replied with a sad smile, “Why should he anyway? That stupid Roy likes to make fun of me because he is a loser. He failed this year, too. And his parents are so damn rich that they don’t care. He needs to do something to capture the spotlight. But Malcolm? He’s our faculty’s Quarterback, has a

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wonderful girlfriend and every single girl in the faculty would love to have sex with him. Why should he bother about a nerd like me anyway?"

"So, Marcus," I replied with a refreshing smile, "You'd better forget about this faculty now. We will soon be back home and I have a lot of stuff to talk with you about... physics, philosophy and religion. That is, Einstein, Spinoza and the Buddha."

Marcus' eyes glowed for an instance. I knew that he loved Spinoza more than a certain Olsen out there!

"So, Marcus," I said as I sat next to Marcus in our room, "Tell me about your latest projects."

"Well," Marcus responded with pleasure, "I was working on an evolution illustrator project."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, you know about evolution?"

"Sure, the scientific theory that says that all creatures are in everlasting change and that they have a universal common ancestor. I read about evolution in my attic."

"Attic?" he asked with surprise, "And why specially did you like to read in an attic. It's a dusty gloomy place."

"Well, it was so to me in my first days but definitely it wasn't when I was old and lonely enough to be interested in reading."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, Marcus, it's a long story. I'll tell you everything later, but now just keep on telling me about your evolution illustrator."

"Well, Did you read Professor Richard Dawkins' book, 'The Blind Watchmaker'?"

"No, never heard about that book. I know Professor Dawkins, I think he wrote a book about genes and selfishness."

"Oh yes, The Selfish Gene, but that's another story, now back to The Blind Watchmaker. You see, Faust, in that book professor Dawkins made a program that used 'genes' to produce certain drawings on the computer, he called them the biomorphs."

“That’s a strange name!”

“No, it isn’t,” replied Marcus as he handed me a paper printed by his dot matrix printer, on it were printed many strange drawings of animals and plants, “It is derived from biological shapes, morphs. Now each morph has a set of genes that decides how it would look. From generation to generation certain genes undergo mutations resulting in offspring that look differently from their predecessors. Now he used his eyes as selectors that used to select certain biomorphs, by continuous selections from generation to generation he was able to obtain very well drawn figures of airplanes, animals and plants. I was stunned when I first read his book and now I want to take his work one more step further.”

“What do you mean,” I asked as I looked at the paper with enthusiasm, “How can you take it any further than this?”

“I want to create a living organism and see it evolve.” Marcus said with a wide asymmetric smile. As he looked to the ground with determination his eyeglasses looked so florescent as they reflected the light coming from the neon lamp.

For the first instance I looked at Marcus with a little bit of fear, he then looked at me and realized that I was not feeling at ease so he asked the question that he was waiting for me to ask.

“You must be wondering how I will create a living creature, no?”

“Eh, yes.”

“Well, do you think that I will be the first man to create a living organism, dear Faust?”

“I...think that it is a bit *too* difficult, no?” I asked in a conservative manner.

“Not at all, Faust,” he replied, “Men have been creating living organisms for decades now.”

“What do you mean?” I impatiently asked.

“Viruses! Computer viruses!” he cried hilariously, “I want to see a computer virus evolve...encryption! Ya that’s it! I want to write an unencrypted virus and force it to evolve encryption.”

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“What?” I cried angrily, “Computer viruses...living creatures?”

“Well, I think you’d better look at this, Faust.”

Marcus then swiftly passed to the computer and turned it on.

“I would like you to see a certain phrase, dear Faust,” He said as the computer was making the usual noise of the Internet connection procedure, “Now, will you please see this web page and read the highlighted content?”

“It is the...official site of Stephen Hawking,” I said with amazement, “The highlighted text... Oh... ‘I think computer viruses should count as life. I think it says something about human nature that the only form of life we have created so far is purely destructive. We've created life in our own image.’ Well, that’s quite strange.”

“The whole of this world is quite strange, Faust,” Said Marcus in a faked up theatrical conclusive manner, “Perhaps we should ask ourselves first about the real meaning of life.”

“To be alive,” I replied, “Is to be conscious...to be...*living*.”

“I won’t bet, Plants are alive but I guess few people would argue that they are conscious.”

“Then...what?” I asked as I raised my hands a little.

“Well,” Marcus said as he threw his back backwards to give a sense of how important his words were, “Scientists will argue a lot about the answer to that question, but there are two main points. One is the ability to reproduce. The second is the ability to resist degeneration. If we are to say it professionally, it means the ability to consume energy to keep the body integral and working. You see, Faust, in a closed system, things tend to deteriorate if left alone, just look at this room! This is the second law of thermodynamics, also called the law of entropy. Now why don’t our bodies just fall into chaos in that very manner? It’s because they consume energy, in food, and keep on sustaining themselves.”

“And computer viruses?”

“They reproduce, and they consume electricity. They are alive.”

“No they are not! What would happen to them without the PC? They can’t exist alone, they need a PC.”

“And do we exist alone?” Marcus asked with a cunning smile, “Can you exist without this four-dimensional space-time, Mr. Amoyo?”

I hit the armchair with my hand with very strange feelings. I guess I can now describe how I exactly felt. I was feeling defeated in a very obvious conversation. Marcus knew that too, and for him it felt great. Not because he likes to emerge victorious out of debates, but because he doesn’t like the notion of self-evidence.

“But wait a minute!” I said with bright eyes, “How will you write a computer virus?”

“Well,” Marcus replied with a slight sense of unease, “Let’s say that I am a little bit *experienced* in this field...”

“You are a virus writer?”

“Oh, Faust,” he said as we stood and walked in a half circle raising his arms, “It is not a sin. You don’t know how lovely it feels when you write a virus and see it work, when you feel that you will one day be dead yet your young creature can still crawl around and make life.”

“But they are destructive, Marcus!”

“Oh, no! They’re not!” Marcus cried, “I have written dozens of viruses but I have never included any destructive code and I have never spread any. Whenever a virus is finished I send it to a couple of antivirus companies, then I send its code to a virus magazine. They publish the commented virus along with the articles that I write about viruses and virus techniques.”

“And what nickname do you use,” I asked with a cunning smile as I raised an eyebrow and extended my head towards him, “Virus Watcher?”

“That’s none of your business,” he replied with his cheeks as

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red as ever, “I shouldn’t have told you about this whole thing, if it were not for...”

“Your unbearable desire to share your inner thoughts and feelings with someone else, no?”

“Yes,” replied Marcus as his eyes quickly regained their enthusiasm, “You know Faust, it just feels so good to share my thoughts with other people. That’s why I write in the Forum. I feel so lonely and alienated by everyone here, but still I remember how the Jews excommunicated my dearest martyr, Spinoza. I often dream about Spinoza, see him defend himself before the Jewish court.”

“So do you still consider yourself a Jew?” I asked, “You are an atheist.”

“I am both! I believe in no God, no afterlife and no soul. But I am a Jew in the same sense of Albert Einstein. The man didn’t believe in the biblical God but he still supported the Jews. By saying that I am a Jew I mean that I support the Jews in their struggles and hard times. I believe that Judaism is far more than a religion. It is *blood*. Jews are a people who had to keep themselves close to find warmth in the long cold nights that faced them.”

“But I don’t even think that Spinoza was a Jew in that sense. To him, as far as I know, Judaism was not an ethnic identity that he was proud of, but rather a superstitious religion that he threw at his back. For the rest of his life he surrounded himself with Christian free thinkers.”

“Well... That’s a good point. Actually I don’t know much about his exact view of Judaism. But even if true, I’d say that he was forced into doing so because he clashed with Jewish fundamentalism. I bet he’d have had another approach if there were secular Jews at his time.”

“Perhaps.”

“You know that I am from a Polish origin?”

“Really?”

“Yes, my grandparents came here years ago. Who knows? Maybe I am a distant relative to the great mathematician Herman

Minkowski.”

“I heard of another Minkowski, a certain Oskar Minkowski. I think that he played a role in the understanding of Diabetes.”

“Sure!” cried Marcus in enthusiasm, “He was the brother of Herman and the father of the astrophysicist Rudolph Minkowski.”

“See,” I secretly whispered Loki’s long protruded ear, “I told you that this guy has nerdiness flowing in his veins!”

“Talking about Jews,” added Marcus, “I found a very moving book about a young Jewish girl on the Internet.”

“And you hacked it and downloaded it for free!” I added with a cunning smile.

“Faust!”

“Okay! I am just kidding Marcus, what was that book about?”

“Etty Hillesum. A Jew who was murdered in 1943 by the Nazis at the tender age of twenty nine.”

“Oh, that’s tragic.”

“She was facing depression since Hitler occupied Netherlands where she lived. She kept a diary that is widely in print now. She developed a very peaceful, hopeful and spiritual personality.”

“Perhaps I should read parts of that!”

“I don’t have the diary, but the book that I downloaded contained some fragments.”

“Remember any.”

“Yes, there is one that I remember, but I’d better read it,” he replied as he turned on the PC, “Here, she says ‘If there were only one decent German, then he should be cherished despite that whole barbaric gang, and because of that one decent German, it is wrong to pour hatred over an entire people.’ Just imagine how noble that young woman was.”

“That’s lovely... I want more!”

“Read this!”

“Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be in our troubled world.... One should want to

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be a band aid on many wounds...That's wonderful! To think that a girl would have such love and calmness in those deadly days!"

"I'll try to download her diaries. But I bet it'd be hard."

"Well," I said with my cunning smile, "You can always buy it!"

"Marcus!" I said as I knocked on the door, "Open, I have forgotten my keys."

"..."

"Marcus!" I yelled.

"..."

"Marcus!" I yelled as loud as I could.

Nobody replied. I was starting to get worried about Marcus. Few seconds passed slowly. I could hear somebody inside talk.

"Was bist du?" It was Marcus's voice. He was speaking in German. Actually, he was singing.

"Oh lord! He must be putting on his headphones. How am I going to enter now?"

"Oh my God!" I could hear him cry, "The song is corrupted!"

"Great!" I cried in enthusiasm, "Marcus! Open up the door."

"Damn record companies messing with us!" He said angrily as he opened the door.

"Hello, Marcus. I've got you some French fries."

"Really!" he cried in enthusiasm, "Great! This will cheer me up a little."

"Why are you angry?"

"I was downloading an MP3 for my favorite band. It played well, but after a minute the song was corrupt. I will download it again even if it'd take the whole morning."

"Eat first!"

"I will eat as I download the song," he replied as he restarted downloading the song, "I don't like to be beaten by record companies."

Meet the nerd

“Good luck!”

“There,” Marcus said sharply after ten minutes, “This should be a good file. I’ll test it.”

“Wonderful!” He added after he checked the whole file.

“You seem to like this band a lot!”

“Yes,” he said as he pulled the jack plug of the headphones, “You must listen to this song. It is just wonderful!”

The ‘music’ was *disastrous*. Out of the PC speakers came out elephant roars of heavy drums, electronic guitars and an angry tough voice ‘singing’ in German. Marcus quickly held his air guitar and kept on playing it with all his emotions. He tilted his thin lips in affection with the ‘song’ as he heartily sang in German.

“Marcus!” the loud voice of Madame Pauline easily surpassed the loud song, “I told you to never play those Nazi songs again!”

“Sure Madame Pauline,” Marcus said with fear as he opened the window and looked at the angry, broomstick-carrying, Madame Pauline, “I’ll turn it off immediately.”

“Oh, Faust I am so sorry. We won’t be able to dance together to these wonderful masterpieces. But you can listen to the songs whenever you’d like to.”

“Eh... Ya! Ya! Sure!”

“When I’ll finish the faculty I be rich and buy myself a whole villa. Nobody will tell me what to do!”

“Yummy!” I quickly said, trying to change the mood, “I wonder why those French fries are that tasty! Why don’t people like vegetable soup as they like French fries? Vegetable soup is much more healthy!”

My innocent note would have passed peacefully if I said it in front of any ‘normal’ friend. But I had to realize that there were some rules that one should follow when he is in the company of Marcus Minkowski.

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“That’s a really nice question!” cried Marcus in enthusiasm as he jumped away from the PC, “I believe that the answer has to do with evolutionary psychology. You see, in the past people needed food that gave them energy; food with high fat and carbohydrate content. So our feeling of taste evolved in a manner that favored the taste of fatty food and food with high carbohydrate content, like French fries.”

“But now people need vegetables more. We are no longer in need of such food; we have constant sources of food.”

“Faust! Evolution didn’t know that this would happen. In fact, evolution knows nothing at all. It is just that we were shaped in this manner in the past. If we are to leave people unguided, evolution can work again. People who love French fries will die of obesity and those who like vegetable soup will live. After some thousand years all people will love vegetable soup as much as people today love French fries.”

“I see.”

“Eh...I am sorry, I turned it all into a lecture. You’re not bored?”

“No, Definitely not. In fact I’d like to thank you for the information. I enjoyed understanding that.”

“Really?” He asked with deep expressions on his thin face.

“Really!” I answered with a sweet smile.

“Faust!” said Marcus, his cosmic enthusiasm slowly replaced by deep emotional love, “Nobody has ever been that kind to me. Throughout the years I have been made to feel ashamed of my desire towards knowledge. But a single kind phrase from you simply wiped all that away.”

He then came close to me, his beautiful blue eyes looking so loving and innocent from behind his funny eyeglasses. He hugged me profoundly. I shuddered when I felt his weak bony body on my body. But from between the pale thin ribs I could feel strong heartbeats, full of life and hope to go on.

“Well,” said Loki, “At least he’s blond!”

Meet the nerd

It was a cold December morning. I was back from the faculty but I didn't find Marcus at home. That was strange, Marcus didn't like to leave home. Christmas was approaching. Marcus was a Jew but he liked to celebrate Christmas. He made his own Christmas tree; he got an old broomstick and fixed it in a bucket with cement. He then fixed numerous wires to the stick and covered them with bright green ornament paper. He put many old ornaments that Madame Pauline gave him and some cotton made perfect snow.

"I am back!" cried Marcus with enthusiasm as he carried a very old TV with his thin arms very carefully, "Look what I have got! I bought a TV."

"Wonderful!"

"I heard that the Romanian channels would air Sagan's 'Cosmos'. I can't miss that!"

"How much did you pay for the TV?"

"It was very cheap!" cried Marcus with a wide smile, "I like to buy cheap things. In fact its owner was going to throw it in the junkyard because he bought a new TV on Christmas, I almost got it for free."

The TV looked horrible. It seemed to have been made in the late seventies, the buttons looked obsolete and the whole case was covered by many old half-removed stickers.

"It works!" cried Marcus with pleasure, "I'll set the channel immediately."

"When will they air Cosmos?"

"They will air it at four o'clock," replied Marcus as he searched for the channel, "I have made friends with the paper-boy. I often help him with his homework. In return, he allows me to burrow the newspaper when I like to read about the ongoing events or something. In fact, he once gave me a newspaper absolutely for free! Hey! Here is the channel."

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“What’s that?”

“It’s the most stupid and ridiculous program that they have aired,” replied Marcus with great anger, “Some stupid prostitutes are locked with some bullies and they film them. And believe it or not, Faust: Many people like to watch that thing!”

“Oh! It’s a reality show.”

“Yeah! That’s what they call it, stupid nonsense! If it weren’t for the cosmos I would have thrown that thing in the junkyard where it belongs.”

“Well, you don’t have to watch it.”

“No, I have to, the Romanian TV is so lazy that they may air the cosmos half an hour earlier or later. I will have to open TV at 3:30 to make sure that I won’t miss any part of the cosmos.”

“Eh, I will watch that for you, Marcus. Just please calm down!”

“I just don’t know why do people like to watch those things? Why is our society glorifying all this shit?”

“Eh, let’s talk about something else! I didn’t tell you how it went with Bakashananda. Did I?”

“Oh, right! You just told me that he was an imposter,” replied Marcus with interest, “What happened exactly?”

“Everything was going great till he started talking about certain paranormal abilities that people can obtain. I was such a fool! I thought that he was just putting us into test with those teachings but when I saw him ‘materialize’ ash and saying that mental energy can condense to matter I knew that it was over.”

“You are lucky, with other gurus things get even worse!”

“What do you mean?”

“Disasters! Major financial exploits, sexual harassments and child abuse.”

“Yes, you told me that in your last letter...” I said with much shame.

“Heya world! Did anybody mention sex here?”

“Loki! You damn pest!”

“Oh, come on, Fosti, I’ve left you for long time in Mongolia, it’s time for me to enjoy my life a little.”

“Faust, are you alright?”

“Eh, yes Marcus. I am here.”

“You was talking to yourself!”

“No, I just...well, yes! I was ashamed of myself for falling prey to Bakashananda.”

“I have developed what I call F.G.E.S. That’s ‘False Guru Exploiting Steps’. They are many criteria that I apply to any person that I am skeptic about to see if he’s indeed a bad guy.”

“And those steps are...”

“Well, a false guru is usually a big money-eater. He is usually a charismatic person who pays much care to his appearance to fit the ‘old wise man’ archetype. He usually likes to take credit for miracles and healing powers. A false guru would also play with your dreams, tell you what you want to hear. Carl Sagan said that people have a great gift of fooling themselves when it has to do with their dreams. Well... and there is also the sexual part. You know, Faust, when you are seated before a group of devotees who keep on smiling to you and you know that you are an acting bastard, you feel that those people are such fools. It will be hard to avoid the temptation of taking sexual privileges. Just image it, a bunch of married, unmarried, young and old, fat and thin, beautiful and ugly women are seated in front of you in devotion with silly smiles on their faces. They believe that you are god or something. It’d be damn hard to avoid that temptation, even if you didn’t have this in mind when you first started to play the guru. It will start with occasional, apparently accidental touches or something and you will end up having sex with a good half of your devotees. Only a really good teacher can feel internally full that he needs no more than giving his experience to those who need it. And at last, the ex-followers! If a certain guru has a really big number of ex-followers then it just can’t be a coincidence; there must be something really wrong with that guy.”

“Now that’s a one wise young man, Fosti,” said Loki with admiration, “But I think that he should have called his system the ‘False Avatar Revealing Technology’. That would have just

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smelled much better!”

“Shut up, Loki!”

“Oh, yeah? Not even the least smile? You smile-tightwad should know that I can even do much better, now hear this, the Freak Ultraviolet Charlatan...eh, now I need a word that starts with...”

“Loki!” I cried.

“Who’s Loki?” asked Marcus with a little bit of fear, “That’s a giant in the northern mythology. Faust, are you alright?”

“Loki is an imaginary friend I have imagined since I was a young boy. You know, I have always been that lonely and...”

“Yes, I see...” Replied Marcus with a strange look.

“So, eh, back to Bakashananda. It is really bad to feel that someone could make an idiot out of you.”

“Yes,” replied Marcus with his head nodding, “I can imagine that.”

“You start up thinking that the ‘planes of consciousness’ you have just heard of were another aesthetic expression referring to the deeper degrees of spirituality and divine love. But you end up with a booklet in your pocket discussing the seven possible planes including a fifth or a sixth that allows you to walk through walls.”

“Yes,” cried Loki with enthusiasm, “And a seventh state that was and will never be reached by any of the world’s greatest mystics save by the very speaking Fraudananda.”

I burst into laughter but immediately said it to Marcus. Otherwise he could have really thought that I was mad.

“I have noticed,” said Marcus in a businesslike manner, “That in the past or in the countries lacking religious tolerance, the imposters embrace the official religion and act as religious leaders in the already established religion to be at safe from fundamentalist violence. But in the more opened countries, they usually prefer to make a religion of their own so that they could move more freely to put out their rules and get most of the credit.”

“It is also notable,” I replied trying to cope with Marcus, “That those parasites profoundly understood how the western mind has changed in the past centuries. They no longer stress on divine punishment or hell, rather, they prefer to focus on the spiritual and intellectual privileges that one can realize if he joins their movements. Westerners have already got enough of the fundamental Christian principal of sin, punishment and eternal doom. They rather stress on the angelic principals of love, peace and so on. Many gurus prefer not to speak about evil or any unpalatable subject altogether. I think that you have noticed how some tarot card names have been changed.”

“Yes! Death and the devil.”

“But the funny thing,” I replied, “Is that Bakashananda was an imposter, yet I could still reach enlightenment in India!”

“You did?”

“Yes, it felt really out of this world. I was lost in the Himalayas then.”

“Well, that makes sense,” Marcus said after I told him all about my adventure in India, “You were losing hope and under great emotional and physical stress, loads of endogenous opioids, natural pain killers and euphorants produced by the body and released under stress, must have been circulating in your blood. That gave you the sense of euphoria. Moreover, you was on a mountain, right? The oxygen level may have been notably low, this can also participate in euphoria and hallucinations. In fact, Erotic asphyxiation is now somehow common. People say that choking enriches their sexual pleasure during the intercourse.”

“No, Marcus, my experience was not a hallucination. It was real. I experienced things as they *exactly* were. I did *feel* it inside. I am totally sure.”

“As sure as the poor Indian who thought that he was Napoleon?”

3

Grotesque

“Cough! Cough!”

“Calm down, boy. You will be fine. The worst has passed.” I could hear an old man talk to me in English with German accent.

“Who are you?”

“No! Don’t raise your head. Your shoulder was seriously wounded and you need to sleep.”

“I am not dead?”

“No, unfortunately you are not! Now shut up and sleep.”

“Wait! At least tell me who are you. What happened to the wolf?”

“Tuck!” I could hear the door close. I couldn’t look around. I could just see the ceiling. It was far and looked very old. The place was very damp and dusty. But I didn’t care much, for within a few seconds I was already asleep.

“Wake up, boy!” the same voice cried at me, “You’ve been sleeping for the whole day. You should wake up and eat something.”

“Oh, what time is it, now?” I said as I raised my body with

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great effort and pain, "Twenty to nine?"

"No," the voice replied, "It's already half past ten."

"Oh, the clock must be impaired." I said as I slowly looked towards the man.

I was stunned when I saw who was speaking. He was an old man in his late sixties dressed in very elegant historical clothes. He looked much like the famous philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. His clothes immediately reminded me of Edward Fromm. But the two men looked very different from each other. While Edward was fat and unhealthy this man looked well built and smart. He looked as if he were an army high official coming straight out of a civil war movie if it were not for his only defect. His eyes didn't bear each other; he had a serious squint, which, when added to his slight ophthalmia, made him look much like a chameleon.

"Who are you?" he skeptically asked, "What were you doing yesterday?"

"My name is Faust. I am not Romanian...I..."

"Sure you're not Romanian," he interrupted me, "Who was going after you yesterday? The police?"

"Oh yeah?" he responded after I went through the pain of telling him all what happened to me, "Did you really think that I am going to buy this bucket of lies? Why should you come from far away to study medicine here?"

"I want to help the poor."

"Huh! Help the poor? You must think that I am an idiot! Nobody helps anybody in real life for free. There is always a gain for every action. Welcome to the jungle, boy!"

"I am telling the truth."

"No. You are a liar and the earlier you're gone the better."

"What are you doing?" I cried in horror.

"What do you see me doing?" he replied, "I am tying you to this iron bed so you won't reward my kindness by cutting my throat."

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“But those chains...”

“Shut up or I’ll kill you,” he cried loudly, “Take!” he added as he threw me two bread loafs and a pomegranate, “Eat it! It’s useful for those who lost much blood. And here is a flask full of water and another full of juice. You must drink to recover the lost fluids. The sooner you’re healed the better for then I will kick you out of here.”

“No, please good mister,” I cried as I shook my chained arms, “Don’t leave me chained in this way. You can lock the door but I just...”

I couldn’t finish my phrase. The man quickly went out of the room and slammed the door.

“Come on you school boy!” I told myself, “The man took care of you and left you food and drink, what bothers you so much about being chained? You can eat and drink with chained arms. The mad guy left you little room to have some freedom.”

“Yes,” I replied with a funny face, “What bothers me about being chained? Humiliation? There is nobody around to see me hogtied!”

“Soon you’ll know, Fosti!” Said Loki as he raised his eyebrows cunningly.

“Oh my God!” I cried with my hand desperately trying to reach for my pants.

“Oh my God.” I cried as I woke up. It was late. Perhaps two or three in the morning, I had a very disturbing nightmare about a man who kept on yelling and weeping as he tried to break free from chains that suffocated him. I wasn’t much worried as it was obvious why I had such a nightmare. In fact, before I slept I was expecting a different dream about me having a dive in *warm* water or something...

“Arghh!” I could still hear the same horrible husky voice roar

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with much anger and heavy chains powerfully lifted and thrown back to earth, “Uppa... Gyro... Vonka... Vonka... Böse!”

I was really scared. I didn't know where I was or who that mysterious man was or who saved me from the vicious wolf. For a moment or two I speculated that the man I saw was a werewolf but I quickly ran my head into the iron bars of the bed; it'd have been very shameful to still think in that manner after a long stay with the Nature Watcher. Marcus! I have totally forgotten about him! Is he still alive? I would have loved to call Madame Pauline but how could I get a phone? For the rest of the night I tried my best to sleep. I didn't know if I could sleep or if I couldn't for I was too exhausted to feel anything.

“So, boy,” I finally woke up hearing the man's voice, “Do you feel better?”

“Yes,” I quickly replied, “I have totally recovered. You needn't worry about me. Can I go now?”

“Let me see,” the man said as he examined my wound, “No! You are getting better but I can't let you go now. It's still too risky.”

“No really I am fine. I...”

“Shut up!” he cried, “I'll bring you more food.”

“The clock!” I said as I looked at the clock, “Great Expectations!”

“What?” The man looked at me with much surprise.

“Twenty to nine. That's the same time at which Miss Havisham set all her clocks at Satis house.”

“How did you know that?” He replied with a single eye looking at me and the other one gazing far away.

“I have always liked to read the novels of Dickens. In the attic...”

“What was your name, boy?”

“Faust.”

“You aren't really a criminal, are you?”

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“I am not. I swear.”

“Fang!” He cried.

Quickly a big wolf forced the old wooden door open and came into the room and stood next to the man and roared as he looked towards me. I could recognize it was the same wolf that I saw at night.

“Calm down, Fang,” the man said to the wolf that immediately turned quiet, “With Fang by my side, I needn’t worry. I’ll set you free. But I warn you...”

“What’s your name, Sir?”

“Gerald.”

“Gerald...?”

“Grotesque.”

“Grotesque?”

“Yes, Grotesque, that’s right,” he said with his usual offensive manner, “My name is Gerald Grotesque. Stop giving names to people. It’s time for us to be called by what represents us, not by what would please those who had brought us into this world of misery.”

“Eh,” I said as I swallowed my breath, “Now one of my questions is answered. The wolf is tamed and is yours.”

“Fang is like a son to me.” He said as he patted the wolf’s head.

“Eh, you like traditional names. What a nice puppy! Hehe! Eh...yesterday I heard someone roar and I also could hear chains. Are there any other *guests* here?”

“That’s none of your business!” The man cried as he quickly went out and slammed the door.

I quickly got off my bed and walked towards the old window. I needed to get out of that place. I made a small rope with my bed dressing. It was very risky, my shoulder was still wounded and I would risk my life if I fell. But I was scared to death and just had to escape. Staying was not a choice. As I sat on the edge

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of the window I held the rope with my right arm but as I tried to load my weight on the left arm my shoulder ached like hell and I fell to earth.

“Hell threw you on me you young boy!” I could hear Gerald speak, “What did I do in my whole life to deserve this?”

“I... I am still alive?”

“Yes you are! Stupid boy! If it weren’t for the bushes you would have been dead! Jump from the window? Why? Do you think that it was easy for me to carry you for a second time back to this room?”

“Who are you?” I cried in anger as a tear escaped from my right eye, “Why did you save me? What’s your job? You are not a farmer are you? Farmers don’t dress in nineteenth century clothes! Is all this shit just a dream?”

“I told you that it’s none of your business,” Gerald said angrily as he went out of the room “You are staying here till I decide that you are healed and then you can leave.”

“Well,” I said with loud voice to myself, “If I’d just compare this freak to Demetri.”

“Who’s Demetri?” Gerald asked as he looked back towards me in curiosity, “Is he Romanian?”

“No, he’s a man I met on the Himalayas and...Hey!” I said angrily, “Why am I telling you about him? You never told me anything about you!”

“Himalayas you said?” Gerald asked with his devilish eyebrows raised in much wonder.

“Now wait old man! I am saying nothing about him till you set me free and tell me what’s going on here. Who was making that sound?”

“Who do you think it was?” He asked with a wide smile, his squint eyes, disheveled Schopenhauerian hair and his white devilish eyebrows made him look ridiculously funny when he smiled.

“I think you were torturing a man.” I said with rare courage.

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“No. That’s my nephew, Friedrich. He is ill and I chain him so that he doesn’t hurt me or hurt himself. Now who’s Demetri that you met on the Himalayas?”

“What was he saying? Friedrich?”

“He was speaking meaningless words in German.” Gerald replied with much anger. He clearly didn’t want to say anything about himself.

“Demetri is a Russian man I met in the Himalayas. He saved my life there. He was visiting a monk in a Buddhist monastery.”

Gerald’s eyes quickly glowed with pleasure; He clearly knew who Demetri was but he tried to hide his emotions.

“What is his name? The monk?”

“Ashoka.” I replied seeing how Gerald seemed to had expected the name.

“Enough of this useless chatter!” he said as he walked out quickly, “Now tomorrow you can leave. I won’t chain you tonight but if you’d ever make a move Fang will tear you into pieces.”

At dinnertime Gerald brought me some food. Unlike what I expected, he didn’t just throw it and leave. He brought his own food and sat on a chair close to my bed and ate.

“Eh, the weather is fine today.” I thought I’d better stick to the classical approach to get him to talk.

“Yes. Good weather... stupid people.”

“Why are you such a misanthrope?”

“Because people are so stinky, so fat and so stupid.”

“How can you say that? There are really bright people out there.”

“You are all fools. Everybody is fool. Tasteless dummies in the hands of an apathetic mother nature.”

“No we are not!” I sharply replied.

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“Do you have a piece of tissues in your pocket?” He asked totally ignoring my reply.

“Y..Yes!”

“Is it clean?”

“Yes. But what does that have to do...”

“Get it out of your pocket and spit on it.”

“What?”

“Do it!” He cried.

“Ok. Now what?”

“Lick it back!”

“Yuck! No way!”

“Here!” he cried in enthusiasm as he pointed at me with his finger in condemnation, his squint eyes were wide and fearful, “You see? This ‘Yuck’ is a built-in stupidity. Now how did this ‘Yuck’ emerge? This saliva was in your mouth a single moment ago, and you said that the tissue was clean. Now what is the ‘chemical reaction’ that took place between your saliva and the tissue to produced this ‘yuckiness’?”

“Eh! I...”

“Those are the human beings! You die of laughter if a poor man slips on the street, but you yell and weep if a van runs over him. You yawn and sleep in opera houses but you’d die to sneak into the backstage, because you know that only there the erotic bodies of the actresses are denuded!”

“Well, sex has always played an important role in the...”

“Sex!” he cried interrupting me with his mad smile, “Do you know why parents make sure that their young children would never know about it? It is because only then that the poor young kids realize that this world is not the masterpiece of the average Disney artist! Sex... Sex is just like a boil. You have been born with it but you have always been unaware of its existence. You came across it in a day of adolescence. At the first sight you have felt it itching, you have felt it itching with anger. Anger is the son of regret, regret that it was forced to leave you in peace for all the days. Now, you will definitely rub it, and the more you will, the more it will itch you and the more it will swell and

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get hot. Only after it gets a cupful of your nerves, and gives you a spoonful of its forbidden bitter sweetness,” he leant towards me, his face looking at the bed, then he slowly raised his head slightly, his ophthalmic blue eyes appearing directly under his devilish white eyebrows, “It bursts in blood.” I could see the words hardly slipping from between his teeth.

“You are not scaring me!”

“Fright,” he replied, calm and dreamy this time, “Fright is the origin of dreams and myths. No, not exactly fright, but confusion. Confusion strikes man to his core. I can imagine a group of prehistoric men. They are in confusion for a young boy died. Nobody killed him, yet their purity makes them feel guilty of crimes that they have never committed. They run around and scream. They may burn him, or burry him with food and decorations. They may sing and dance. *Distraction* has always proven to be the perfect antidote of *confusion*. And *sympathy* has proven to be much more lethal than *hatred*. King Kong and Frankenstein’s monster have proven to be more dangerous to the hearts than the all-evil Christian devil.”

“Your words are so beautiful...there is just so much *inspiration*.”

“Inspiration!” the quotes bank started again, “You are sitting quietly, diving in your turbulent seas of thought. All of a sudden you feel an aura. You feel that you are up to something big. Then you can see it emerge. First, they are many unrelated islets emerging from the depth of your unconsciousness. Then, little by little, you find out that they are all mountains on one island. All those ideas or impressions are making sense after all. Just like the end of a joke, when you are instantaneously illuminated and realize why the joke teller had to mention all those strange details. It is only when you laugh that you get it all. But too bad! You are flying past your ideas at an incredible velocity that the vision becomes quickly absorbed into fog as it falls away from you. That’s why all the genius men had to put their most unique inspirations on paper as soon as they grasped them. Heh... As if inspirations reflect after revealing themselves to humans, and try

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to remedy their fault with amnesia!”

As Gerald finished his words I laughed. He had a very strange attitude towards the universe. As if he saw things in a strange poetic black and white scenes. He didn't belong to this age, to the age of Marcus Minkowski. But he was interesting, just like the old black and white films. As I looked at him and smiled he was clearly disappointed. He didn't want me to love him.

“You watch movies?” He asked, clearly trying to get me into an unpleasant discussion.

“Yes, sometimes.”

“Like horror movies?”

“Not much,” I replied, seeing that he was up to scaring me again, “But I watched some.”

“Do you like zombies?”

“Zombies?” I asked in faked ignorance, trying to play his game, “Ya! Ya! Those dead guys who want to eat your brain?”

“Know why people are scared of them?” He asked angrily, seeing my apathetic expressions.

“Well, I think being eaten alive is enough of a reason, but I'd like to speculate some deeper reasons... Hmmm... Perhaps their half-decayed appearance reminds people of their fate.”

“Remind people of their fate?” Gerald asked with raised eyebrows, it seemed like I have amused and amazed him by this reply, “That's nice! Very nice! Perhaps you are not as foolish as I thought you are!”

“Well,” I replied with an awkward smile, “I'll take it as a compliment!”

“But you are still far from being deep,” Gerald replied angrily, the more that I showed him affection, the more that he was getting angry, “There is a far deeper reason. A reason that boys like you just can't see. Zombies are hollow inside. You can hurt them and hear them yell in pain, yet you can feel that there was 'nobody' inside that did feel pain. There are many people in the

room, yet only one mind. It is this paradox of consciousness and unconsciousness that frightens people. And things are even worse when you see the zombies of people who you love, your parents, for instance. For then you'd be missing them while seeing them right in front of you, a deeper paradox, deeper confusion."

"Oh," I replied in exhibitionism, "You mean that zombies are fearful because they evoke the sense of *solipsism* in the victims? If that is true, then zombies will be more fearful to the philosophically ignorant, for they'd less likely be able to formulate their own feelings. *Perhaps fright is actually the gothic fruit of self incomprehension.*"

"Solipsism..."

"Yes! You can never 'prove' the existence of other minds. I can never prove that someone is really listening to my words."

"And you can never prove that somebody doesn't record all those erotic confessions that you make in your lustiest dreams," Gerald replied with a nasty smile, "Perhaps dreams are implemented in our poor minds by some big brother. If things really go this way, then somebody out there knows about the most scandalous skinfolds of our psyches!"

"Well, I really didn't mean that solipsism is true, but it is just that we have no epistemological criterion to..."

"Fright is the gothic fruit of self incomprehension?" Gerald murmured in wonder as he looked towards me and nodded his head slightly, that really felt good.

"I stay here with a friend called Marcus," I proudly explained to Gerald, "He is a young man with great intellect. He believes that our psyche evolved through millions of years, so there is a genetic base for our behavior. We must understand how our ancestors lived to understand our psyches. When we don't understand the evolutionary forces that makes us love things and hate things we fall in confusion with our genetic psyches, distraction, incoordination and fear are the expected outcome."

"There is also another thing that frightens people of zombies," Gerald replied, altogether ignoring the Marcus part, "And

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frightens people of the mad, *unpredictability*. When you see a madman you can also doubt him being conscious at all, you will then find yourself lacking any bases on how to predict his actions. He may suddenly yell or attack you...Well, we all pass through moments when we are mad.”

“When can that be?”

“When we are dreaming. We take the irrationals as granted and don’t Skepticize much. We just sit back and watch the nonsense... A madman’s world definitely goes smoother than ours, for he never realizes what paradoxes are. He is just simply content with it all. Every combination of ideas, as absurd as it may seem to ‘sane’ us, is in perfect harmony to him.”

Gerald’s attempts to scare me were nicely transformed into a conversation. Although he was extremely odd, I knew that he was perfectly sane. He then called Fang and ordered him to guard my room and allowed me to sleep without chains. Before he was gone he made some disturbing comments, perhaps he wanted me to forget about our short conversation.

When it was night I started to tremble. And soon I could hear the same horrible voice yell in anger and pain. I took a small piece of meat that I didn’t eat and carefully walked towards the Fang-guarded door. Some things had to be better explained.

“Good Morning!” I said as I went to the main hall downstairs, “How are you, Gerald.”

“How dare you come here?” Gerald quickly cried in anger as he saw me, “You shouldn’t have left your bed until I ordered you. Now don’t go back upstairs. Stay here and I’ll bring you the breakfast. Eat it and scram! Your shoulder should be fine now!”

“Quit it you old fox!” I said as I gently boxed the old man’s shoulder, “I saw you yesterday dry your eyes before poor Freddy and I know that you can’t hurt an ant. Now quit playing the bad butler and tell me exactly who you are...”

5

Watching the blind watchmaker

Note: This chapter includes deep details that need a basic knowledge of evolutionary biology and computer programming. If you are not experienced in those fields please skip to the next chapter. Bypassing this chapter will not prevent you from following the storyline.

Note: You can find the full commented sources of the project in the appendix.

“I did it!” I could hear loud victorious cries disturb my sleep, “Faust! Wake up quickly and come to see this!”

“What’s going on with Gerald now?” I asked myself as I lazily turned on my warm bed in the frozen Buchare morning.

“Uppa Gyro isn’t around, you foggy!” cried Loki angrily, “We are done with the Addams family and we are now back to Dr. Frankenstein.”

“Oh sure! Marcus!” I cried in stupor.

“So Marcus,” I said as I opened my eyes, Marcus was sitting

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on his wheelchair in front of the PC, “What’s your newest victory?”

“I did it!” he said with enthusiasm as he was almost jumping on his wheelchair with joy, “W.B.W! The program evolved. Now I have a functional, non detectable program!”

“Marcus, I don’t remember much about your project. Will you please remind me of the basics?”

“Sure!” cried Marcus with enthusiasm, I knew how Mary Shelly could speculate about mad scientists; perhaps a distant ancestor of Marcus was her neighbor, “I chose to write the program in assembly. Assembly shares many features with our own biological code. In our bodies, each three letters of DNA bases form a single amino acid. In assembly, most instructions arise as collaboration between two or three bytes. When a DNA base mutates the produced amino acid will most probably be altered. In assembly, if a byte changes the instruction will also change. Now I have made a new folder called ‘EDEN’. In this folder I have put two files. GEN.COM and SELECT.EXE. Now look! Are there any other files?”

“No.”

“Great.” Said Marcus as he switched to DOS.

“Why did you leave windows?”

“I don’t like it. I honestly think that windows is a cheap tool for newbies. OK, sure it helps me work. But I only feel at home with the tough, manly climate of DOS.”

“Ok! Ok! Go on!”

“Now I will execute GEN.COM. See what happens?”

“Oh!” I cried as I watched a flood of COM files being created.

“Now GEN.COM has created COM files from AA.COM to ZZ.COM. Those files are almost perfect copies of GEN.COM but they have some altered bytes. When GEN.COM makes those files, it creates copies of itself. But it sometimes, totally randomly make some intentional copying ‘mistakes’. This is supposed to emulate the imperfection of the DNA copying procedure in our body. So some copies will have altered, extra or

missing bytes of the original program.”

“Yes, ok. Go on!” I said trying to suppress my laughter. I didn’t understand anything.

“Now watch what happens.” Said Marcus as he executed SELECT.EXE with a certain large parameter.

“Wow!” I said, “This program is deleting all the files. What did we get of all that?”

“No!” cried Marcus angrily as a teacher who spent a couple of hours teaching a kid alphabetic, “Not all the files were erased! Only those carrying a certain sequence of bytes! Look!” He said as he executed a certain command, ‘Dir ??.COM’. 38 generated files were not eliminated.

“The originally created files are from AA to ZZ,” he said, “That means that they are 26*26 files, making 676 files.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Now out of the 676 files only 38 survived the massacre. You know why?”

“Why?” I asked with wide innocent stupid eyes.

“Because they are unrecognizable!” cried Marcus angrily, “GEN.COM made some mutations when it was copying the targeted sequence of bytes. So each and every one of those 38 copies doesn’t have the targeted sequence of bytes. They were all unrecognizable and thus, not eliminated.”

“So they are all evolved programs?”

“No!” said Marcus sadly, “Most of them are not functional. Mutations are usually harmful, they corrupt the instructions and so the mutant copies usually crash. Now comes the hard part. I will copy each file of those mutants into a new folder and execute it. All the copies that will crash or fail to reproduce will be erased manually. If a copy can reproduce smoothly and produce functional offspring as well, it will be considered an evolved file. So there is a double challenge, the file must be undetectable and at the same time it must be functional. Now Faust I want you to notice something. Can you see this text?”

“Now creating?”

“Yes, That’s it. Now if the search string was that text the pro-

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gram would have much easily evolved, since the text was to be only altered. The program will still be executable if the text was carrying a spelling mistake.”

“I see...”

“But definitely I intended to make the program scan executable code, it would have been totally uninteresting if I made that text my search string.”

“So now you will test the mutant copies one by one?”

“Yes. This will take sometime, you can do anything until I am done.”

“Ok, I’ll go and...”

“Wait!” Marcus cried in enthusiasm.

“What is it?”

“There is an interesting thing that I had thought of as I was talking to you about that text.”

“I’m all ears!”

“You see, Faust. There is a very strong selective force that protects the executable part of the program. If any part failed to operate the copy will not be functional.”

“Ok.” I replied gladly, I understood what he meant.

“But if a certain copy was undetectable, functional, yet the text ‘Now creating’ was corrupted, it will still ‘live’ peacefully.”

“That’s right.”

“You see, as if mutations are ‘noise’ that is constantly bombarding a message, trying to corrupt it. When they hit the wrong place, the individual dies, or is not even born. But there are some varying degrees of ‘tolerance’. In case of the text, there is much freedom. No matter how badly that text is mutilated, the individual will live normally.”

“I bet this has a parallel in the biological version of life!”

“Exactly! You see, there are VIGs, very important genes, like those responsible for the replication of cells...etc. You will see quite few differences between the human and the, say, plant copy. Because such genes are not to be toyed with, the least alteration and the fetus will die. But other genes are quite ‘tolerant’, like the genes determining hair color. It won’t kill you

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to have a different hair color. That's why humans have a good mix. But there is more, some genes are totally unused. They are simply fossil genes. Those are just like this text, they are absolutely tolerant to each and every mutation. Scientists determine when those genes ceased to be used by seeing how much they were deformed by the constant 'noise' of mutations."

"Oh my God! I got it! You mean that if the text was 'Nbw creatong' then perhaps this is the 20th generation while if the text was 'Nzigreltinq' then this is perhaps the 200th or 300th generation?"

"Exactly!" Cried Marcus with immense pleasure.

"Wow! It felt really good to understand that. I could feel a certain pleasure... I can't describe it..."

"Not as juicy as sex but far more sublime, almost as exotic as mysticism but ways more realistic, denuding the thought of God through his own game of life... the erotic ecstasy of being the first to know."

"Wow!" I cried with great pleasure, "I didn't know that you are a poet, too!"

"Well," said Loki in anger, "I'd really appreciate it if you'd stop dancing striptease with the universe and feed yourself a little, I am getting hungry!"

I brought myself a sandwich and sat for about half an hour watching Marcus isolate and test each file. Every time that he executed a file the PC crashed and he had to reboot the PC and erase the copy. So he decided to investigate each file using a debugger to see if it will probably execute. Finally, all the copies were eliminated.

"Well," said Marcus awkwardly, "I was not so lucky this time, but it's OK. Evolution needs too many trials till a good thing is acquired."

"But didn't this indicate that your species became extinct? All the files failed, no?"

"No, that's wrong!" cried Marcus angrily, "Because here I am

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selecting for mutations that I have just created. In real life numerous mutants exist long time before selective pressures are applied to an organism.”

“Yes, I must admit I missed that!”

“Now let me show you the copy that I have evolved this morning when you was still asleep.”

Marcus swiftly moved to another folder where a single file, GJ.COM, was present. He quickly entered the instruction ‘Debug GJ.COM’. Then he entered ‘u 122’ quickly a small bunch of assembly instructions appeared.

```
0B55:0122 BFB801    MOV    DI,01B8
0B55:0125 BE0001    MOV    SI,0100
0B55:0128 52          PUSH   DX
0B55:0129 B9B800    MOV    CX,00B8
0B55:012C E86500    CALL  0194
```

“Look here, that’s where the byte sequence was altered!” said Marcus as his finger was about to penetrate the poor screen, “Oh poor me! How far I am from understanding the madness of mother nature! If anybody told me that an extra byte would have saved a copy from the massacre, I would have bet it would be a NOP, CLC, STC or something like fake one-byte instructions that polymorphic engines put. But a PUSH DX? That’s totally mad! Yet who cares! It works! That PUSH did not interrupt a PUSH/POP pair so the program still runs smoothly. That’s how evolution works. We are not the masterpiece of a great engineer; we are the result of numerous ‘layers’ of plumbing.”

“Plumbing?”

“Sure! Look at your body. It’s like a giant robot that was created in the industrial revolution and operated by steam, a medieval machine of endless features amalgamated with endless flaws. We have reached the moon, yet a small virus can send us to the graveyards. If we carefully consider our DNA, we will neither recognize the fingerprints of Ahura Mazda nor of Ahri-man. There only reside the fingerprints of the fingerless blind

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watchmaker. In fact, evolution is not even a blind watchmaker, for it is ok with it to create cheap pencils instead of elegant watches. And what is the difference between pencils and watches to the blind, who can neither write nor see what time it is?”

“Eh, Marcus, is your leg feeling better now?” I cautiously asked.

“Ya! Sure! It doesn’t hurt at all. Things could have gone much worse if Roy had shot my heart or head, but a good strike of Madame Pauline’s frying pan secured him a trip to the stars.”

“I never knew that this guy was that mad! Kill you just for refusing to help him?”

“You know that his parents were going mad about his repetitive failures, and he was also half-drunk then.”

“Well, they shouldn’t be so worried about him now. He will spend a long time in jail.”

“Oh, no, he won’t,” replied Marcus in apathy, “His father’s gonna throw them a bunch of money sacks and they’ll be good to young poor Roy...”

“How can this happen!” I angrily asked.

“Well, it’s a dirty world,” said Marcus with a sigh, “In the American films the bad guys always go to the jail, because there is a story writer who always make sure that it will happen. But who’ll punish the baddies in our directorless world?”

“What am I saying?” cried Marcus as he quickly regained his cosmic spark, “I must tell everybody about the success of my project. It’s gonna be a big hit for the Nature Watcher and maybe Johan will send me more money for that one.”

“Oh, yeah, Johan... Wait a minute!” I suddenly cried.

“What?”

“You... I think that you told me that this program was supposed to evolve encryption, didn’t you.”

“Eh, well,” replied Marcus with a faint smile, “Yes, but that’s not obligatory. The program found that it was easier to slightly alter its code to avoid detection.”

“Aha!” I replied in a triumphal manner, “Now can you some-

how direct the program into evolving encryption?”

“Well,” Marcus replied with his right hand rubbing his chin and his eyes gazing at the ceiling, “Perhaps I can make the selector detect numerous parts of the program... eh, I will also alter the elimination of the non-mutants from 100% to a lower probability. Yes this can make it. Eh...No! The program will most probably slightly alter all the targeted code snippets. I just don’t know...”

“So you can’t make this program evolve encryption, let alone polymorphism!”

“Well,” said Marcus as he adjusted his thin body on the wheelchair in an evident sense of unease, “No! I just can’t think of any selective force that would force my program into evolving encryption. If the selective pressure was very tolerant, most copies will be slightly altered. If the selective pressure was drastic, all the copies each time will be deleted. Even if I’d put many search sequences for the program, each sequence will be slightly altered. I can’t think of any selective strategy that would force the program to evolve encryption.”

“Well,” I said with a smile, glad to prove that I could once defeat Marcus’ genius mind, “Think a little! Perhaps you forgot about something!”

“No!” he said nervously as he boxed the chair arm, “Encryption requires a decryptor to decipher the encrypted body and it also needs a part to encrypt the program before it is copied. Each part consists of a handful of bytes. I didn’t put blank places for any of the two. And even if I filled the appropriate sequences with NOPs it will make no difference. It’s too improbable that either of the two would emerge ‘just like that’. And even if any of the two would ‘miraculously’ exist it would still be useless, in fact it would even be fatal for the file that holds it.”

“Why?”

“If the decryptor evolves alone, it will decrypt bytes that are already unencrypted, thus it will corrupt the main body of the program. And if the encryptor evolves alone, it will produce encrypted offspring that lack a decryptor to decipher them. Thus

the offspring will be actually corrupted files.”

“I see...”

“Even if I’d put in the whole encryptor and decryptor and just put the XOR key as zero the resulting program will be practically unencrypted and thus be eliminated by the selector, for the byte sequence will still be visible.”

“Wow! Things are so complicated!” I said as I drank some coke in delight, “So what about real evolution. Can we force a unicellular organism to become a multicellular one?”

“I don’t know. In fact I don’t know much about the fine mechanisms involved there, perhaps a certain gene can decide if the two dividing cells should stay attached to each other after division or just swim away.”

“And how can we selectively force the cells to stay united?”

“Eh, I don’t know, perhaps if a certain organism can eat each alone but fail in eating both together...”

“Maybe, but I think it’d be easier then for the cells to evolve some toxins or flagella.”

“Well, there are many features that would have proven to be exceedingly useful if they evolved. But they simply didn’t. Because, as you said, there is almost no selective way to force them to exist.”

“Like...?”

“Like a TVs in your trunk. Let’s suppose that a certain animal identified a new vicious carnivore. If it could make the rest of the herd see the picture of that carnivore, it would be very useful.”

“There are already animals that can change the color of their skin.”

“Yes, chameleons. But reptiles are solitary animals. They needn’t broadcast anything on their TVs, because there are no spectators around to watch. See why their already incredible feature couldn’t be further stretched into becoming an awesome one?”

“That makes sense. But I doubt that the evolution of many existing organs is less improbable.”

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“What do you want by this?” Asked Marcus with a thoughtful look.

“I think that all the selective challenges will only trigger minor improvements. I just can’t think of any selective force that’d force an organism into evolving major capabilities.”

“Like what for instance?”

“Hmm, like rational thinking. You can put more obstacles, more predators and more challenges. They will at best result in more speed, more camouflaging abilities, and perhaps some tricky behavior... but logic?”

“Well, I must admit that the evolution of logical thinking is the biggest challenge out there...”

“I don’t think so,” I replied with a proud deducing smile, seeing how my philosophical background could help me challenge the more scientifically-oriented Marcus, “Perhaps the most challenging feature is self awareness, consciousness. An animal can have eyes that would see an approaching lion, and then send the image to a system that would realize that this means ‘danger’ and order the legs to run, but why would there be an ‘I’ that watches all that?”

“Well, this reminds me of *solipsism*, the philosophical position that says that I am the only ‘really conscious’ one here, all other people react to sounds and pictures quite normally without having real consciousness; without really seeing or hearing. They are just zombies. Now as far as I understand you are asking why evolution didn’t only produce human and animal zombies to save effort.”

“Exactly, why?”

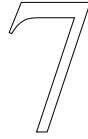
“Well, perhaps one way to respond is to argue that consciousness is necessary for such complex computational processes in the mind, that no animal can react with such vividness unless it does have a certain ‘I’ inside. The other way is to say that this is simply the way things happened, because our common ancestor just happened to be conscious, and that there could have been a planet where evolution produced only zombie creatures.”

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“Wow,” I thought, “This guy is smarter than what I thought.”

“Eh, So!” I attackingly resumed, “Now let’s get back to the main point. You did *experience* the difficulty, and perhaps the impossibility, of evolving an encrypted program or virus. Do you really think that all the features that we and other animals have are easier to explain and to be selectively chosen than mere encryption?”

“They must be! What else can produce all this life? A god? If you’d agree then welcome to the jungle! The belief that God created the world harms him more than the belief that he didn’t create a single creature. If he didn’t create a thing then he is a far being who doesn’t care about us or even doesn’t know that we’re here. But things get worse when we say that he created this world. Why do ichneumon flies attack caterpillars and paralyze them, laying their eggs on their backs? When the eggs hatch dozens of small devilish teeth tear the feeble body of the helpless caterpillar. With the non-vital organs eaten first, the poor caterpillar watches it’s body slowly and painfully deteriorate before its eyes, and pray for the final moment to come as fast as possible. Darwin put it straight; he said that he just couldn’t believe that a benevolent god would design a cat to play with small helpless mice before killing them or parasites that ate the hosts from inside. Just look at our world, whenever violence and hatred prevail priests come to us and ask us to alienate ourselves from the ‘law of the jungle’. Don’t they realize that it is the very law of God?”



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“Who is it?” I could hear Gerald loudly cry with anger, “I want to see nobody! What do you want from me? Scram or I’ll kill you!”

“I am Faust!” I cried.

“Who?”

“Faust! I came to see you.”

“Oh! Faust, my son,” he said as he opened the door quickly, “How are you? Excuse me for the warm welcoming. You know I have to scare people away from here.”

“Yes, sure!” I replied as I followed Gerald into the attic.

“Actually I was surprised that somebody was bold enough to approach Satis house; this hasn’t happened for years. I should have guessed it was you.”

“How are you doing?”

“The usual life,” replied Gerald, escorting me to the dusty hall, “Life runs smoothly in Satis house. But I doubt that it will be so for poor Freddy when I will be gone.”

“Eh,” I said trying to change the subject, “It was a hard ride in the train today. I sat next to a very stubborn pastor.”

“Pastors!” cried Gerald in anger, “Those pests!”

“You hate priests?”

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“Most of them, I hate the shiny priests, the ones who make TV stars out of themselves. I also hate high ranks, bishops, cardinals and other ecclesiastical officials, those money-fed turkeys living in luxury. The more famous they are the more I hate them. Yet a poor countryside priest always gets my sympathy. I like to see him going everywhere on a bicycle or a cheap transport after his flock, caring for their spiritual life and always reminding them of virtuous life without expecting any dollars in return.”

“But don’t expect a country side priest to be a highly educated one.” I said trying to guess how Uppa Gyro would respond.

“Ah! May theology go to hell!” he replied angrily, “What is the use of dusty books on your bookshelf if you didn’t really live their words? The countryside priest knows neither Augustine nor Tertillian, but perhaps his pure simple heart is much more capable of penetrating into the divine. The theologian would then be a man who knows about an experience that he didn’t live while the humble countryside priest would be a man who lived an experience that he can’t describe.”

“Wow! I didn’t know that you like Christianity.”

“I love Christianity, especially when mystically interpreted. You can say that I am into esoteric Christianity.”

“Esoteric Christianity? You mean Gnostic?”

“Well, perhaps... but not exactly. You know Gnostics used to have their own scriptures; they focused on the mystical teachings that Jesus supposedly taught. But I like to remain closer to Pauline Christianity and interpret its symbols in a speculative manner.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Uh! It’s a long story. I need to sleep now. After the sun sets I will talk with you.”

“Ok, I will go to my room.”

“Wait!” replied Gerald with surprise, “How did you make it past Fang?”

“Ah! That harmless kitty! He’s already my friend!” I replied

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with a big smile as I climbed the stairs going to my room.

Gerald was asleep. He seemed to sleep at the morning and wake at about two o'clock. He then collected fruits from the old trees. He ate some and disguised himself to sell the rest in the nearby village.

I thought that I had to clean my room if I was to frequently visit Gerald. As I was about to uncover the bed I could hear heavy footsteps approaching.

As I approached the door Freddy was already there. I was seeing his face for the first time.

He was huge with a big beard, but he had a wonderful baby-face. His face was fat with two pink cheeks and two lovely blue eyes. He would have made a perfect Santa if it weren't for his black hair and beard. He looked at me with calm eyes and a faint smile.

Freddy looked totally harmless but I quickly remembered how he was brutal at night and I found myself involuntary taking some steps backwards.

“Eh... Hello Freddy. I am Faust.”

“Fot?”

“Eh, hehe... Faust. But you can call me Fot.”

“Fot... Fot!” He said with a lovely smile. Then he approached me. He was so huge that I didn't even reach his shoulder and I further took some steps backwards.

“Fot... Gut!” He said as his big palm kindly patted on my hair.

“How could anybody be cruel enough to kick such a poor kindhearted creature out of his house.” I thought.

“Uppa Gyro...” He said as he left the room and walked

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slowly.

Gerald finally agreed that I could help him with collecting the fruits. Nobody ever stole fruits from Gerald. They were all afraid of Satis house. Superstitions were common in the Romanian countryside and there were no Minkowskis there.

Finally we were done with collecting the fruits. Gerald took me to the attic. He was to tell me about his own interpretations of the bible.

“You see,” said Gerald as he handed me an old bible, “From a Pauline view, what is the main drama that this book deals with?”

“You mean the trinity and the kingdom of heaven?”

“No, Faust!” replied Gerald angrily, “I am talking about the drama, the main plot!”

“Yeah!” I replied awkwardly, “Eh, Salvation?”

“What else? Now what do you know about salvation?”

“Well,” I said with a smile, feeling like a kindergarten young boy, “Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. So now they knew evil and became spoilt. They were kicked out of Eden and they were to die. Since their sin was directed to God it was infinitely great. And since they were humans a human had to pay for it. Now Jesus was both human and divine so he was the only one who could save...”

“Enough,” replied Gerald with a mysterious smile, “Now what was the name of the tree, Faust?”

“What?” I asked with surprise then I resumed quickly, “The tree of knowledge of good and evil... Wait!”

“See Faust? Of *good* and evil!”

“The Tao Te Ching!” the words slipped from between my trembling lips, “I can remember its words... When people see things as beautiful, ugliness is created. When people see things as good, evil is created.”

“Go on Faust!” Replied Gerald with great pleasure.

“Before fall, Adam and Eve knew no evil...just as they knew no good.”

“They only knew the simplicity of light,” replied Gerald with a calm smile as he closed his eyes as if he was going to sleep, “That is, the simplicity of darkness, too. We’d even better not speak of light or darkness at all, no Yin and no Yang, just the Tao...”

“They were punished for knowing good as well as for knowing evil?”

“No! Nobody punished them. Nobody condemned them to death. Can’t you see that such a separative vision is enough of a curse?”

“The fall...the fall from paradise to earth, is a fall from the Tao to the Yin and Yang...”

“A fall from the harmonious vision of life into a world where all opposites clash and struggle.”

“Incredible!”

“And then comes the cross...”

“If this is what the fall means then how can the cross...”

“Divine and human, weak and strong, and above all, dead and alive.”

“What?”

“Jesus.”

“Jesus...”

“What is more opposed than death and life? Do you know Faust what is the profoundest verse of the whole bible? It is in the gospel of John, naturally.”

“What is it?” I asked impatiently.

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.”

“Blood...”

“...is life. On the cross the divine was human and the human was divine. He was perfectly dead and perfectly alive. The cross

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is the stone on which all the opposites are smashed so that only the eternal purity would radiate. The cross is the perfect symbol that could force life and death into each other and could overcome their essential repulsion, amalgamating them eternally into a unity where no life, death, good, evil, human or even divine can exist, all is simply present in an eternal moment of satisfaction. It is this that makes the perfect koan out of the cross and makes it my ideal object of contemplation.”

“The cross...” I murmured to myself in unbelief, “I have seen it since I was a young kid. How couldn’t I ever speculate...”

“The cross is the heart of the divine paradox. Two lines opposing each other, one vertical and one horizontal... the cross is the ultimate proof of the weakness, and more importantly of the *greatness* of God.”

“Weakness? God?”

“Yes, son. God is weak. Yet in his weakness resides his incomprehensible greatness. Imagine you went to a church for the first time and saw a cross. You’d see a flawless mirror of the deepest good that resides in the human soul, the pinnacle of honesty, as depicting God himself in pain. God is too weak to reach nirvana, he is attached to his beloved; us. God is bound by the chains of love, he can set himself free but deliberately chooses to be bound. What can be more painful for a prince than to fall in love with a prostitute? See her toss and turn in the hugs of cheap men for cheap coins. He can give her more gold than any other man if that would please her, but he wants her to be his for his sake. God is in love with a prostitute, a prostitute called humanity. We always seek all earthly pleasures, innocent or cheap though they are, and forget about God. Can there be anything as painful as loving someone who doesn’t even think about you? That’s the great weakness, God has preferred to be enslaved by his love towards us than to indulge in nirvanic apathy.”

“By God!” sobbed Loki who suddenly appeared, “This is the first time in my whole life that I hear Christian preaching that does really make sense!”

“Heh!” sighed Gerald, “Who knows? Did Adam really sin or

was it a 'holy white lie' through which God could rationalize his unexplainable desire to be tortured for the sake of those whom he has loved all that much?"

"Gerald...I never knew that you are that spiritual inside. Ok, I knew that you were a member of the brethren. But all that?"

"Oh, never mind," he replied as his eyes were about to tear, "Perhaps I could know that because I know how it feels to be in love with a prostitute, specially when it is your daughter."

It was getting dark but I begged Gerald to tell me more on religion and Christianity. I knew that his ideas were worth being heard. As I gazed at the beautiful stars from the window of my room, I could hear him feed Freddy in his room.

"Hi Faust, my dear friend. I hope that I didn't leave you for a long time."

"No! It's ok. After what you have just told me I just can't sleep without listening to you as long as I can."

"Congratulations, I can see that you have cleaned this room. It looks much better now."

"Yes, we can even sit here."

"So, what do you want to talk about?"

"Do you think that Jesus was a mystic? Did he have mystical insight? I know that there are ways to interpret his teachings about the kingdom of heaven and our childhood to God as mystical, but why didn't he speak clearly about mysticism? Why didn't he put mysticism at the core of his religion like the Buddha, for instance?"

"Nice question!" replied Gerald with apparent pleasure, "Definitely I believe that Jesus was a great mystic. I don't think that we can rely on the mystical interpretations of his teachings to prove that he was a mystic. Although I don't deny that such interpretations would be very valuable once we do regard him as a mystic."

"Then how can you prove that he was a mystic?"

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“Think a little, my son.” Replied Gerald with a cunning smile.

“Well, you say that his theology is not a good base then how can we ever prove that he was a mystic?”

“Is theology all that Jesus taught?”

“Eh, theology and...parables...”

“*Ethics!*” cried Gerald in enthusiasm, “The ethics that Jesus taught are our golden key. ‘Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.’ This phrase can never make sense to any ‘normal’ man. It can never make sense unless when taken from a mystical perspective. You told me about your experience in the Himalayan ice, Faust. Now if someone then slapped you on your face, would you have fought with him?”

“No.” I replied without hesitation.

“Men through out the ages have wondered how did Jesus teach such ‘nonsense’. And they were right, from their own point of view, from the universal non-mystical point of view. Those words could have made sense only if they heard them from the same experience as Jesus.”

“Wait a minute!” I replied with my eyes glowing like Marcus’, his cosmic spark proved to be so contagious, “I remember having heard someone teach that same doctrine... Lao Tzu! Yes, it was Lao Tzu. He taught that one should repay hostility with good deeds. I don’t think that many would argue that Lao Tzu was not a mystic. And I personally think that he couldn’t teach such a thing if he was not a mystic. Confucius, his rational rival answered: ‘with what then shall we reward good deeds? No, reward hostility with justice, and good deeds with good deeds.’ Lao Tzu was right and so was Confucius. The former traced ethics mystically while the latter traced it rationally. Both reached the perfect conclusions, based on their pre-suppositions.”

“That’s wonderful!” cried Gerald with enthusiasm, wondering inside how he didn’t think about that before, “You are really wise for your age, Faust!”

“Thanks,” I replied with a shy smile as I watched Loki, who was surrounding himself with some charming Matryoshka dolls

that Gerald kept, perhaps an old gift from Demetri, “But Gerald, do you think such ethics can really work? Can anybody really behave with such standards and live?”

“Eh, good question,” he replied as he relaxed on his old chair and looked upwards, “Well, yes, sometimes it can work. It can even miraculously work. Facing evil by good can evoke, at least superficially, the mystical sense in your oppressor. By seeing how kind and humble you are you can actually awake the kindness that is buried deep in his heart. Then he’d be kind to you. You can even change his life. Yet, I am sorry, Faust. In the majority of the cases this doesn’t happen. Your goodness will most probably be ignored or viewed as a sign of weakness. Sometimes things can even get worse, your oppressor may see it as a sign of ‘spiritual arrogance’. He’d then only maltreat you more and more.”

“Oh, Gerald! You have such insight! I wonder if you have studied comparative religion.”

“Well, I knew many good mystics from different world traditions, we were friends. So I could hear about their religions from their own tongues.”

“You think religions are paths to the one truth?”

“Well,” he replied with a smile, “Yes and no!”

“Is that a koan?”

“Nah,” he replied with a nice light laughter, it seems that he was in need to talk about his old days in the brethren, “No more koans! You know that religion is such a sophisticated human phenomenon. And there seems to be a primary goal for each religion. Since the rise of modern science it became clear that understanding how the world works shouldn’t be the business of religion. Religions that stressed their factual and historic authenticity thus became at war with science. But the more mystically inclined were less affected. At least that is what it seemed.”

“What seemed?”

“Yes, Faust. Because those mystically inclined religions are interested in our interior world; the world of the psyche. And this is a valid field for scientific research. Thus I can see that

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even the most mystically inclined religion would sooner or later fall into conflict with science. Nirvana was once the result of detachment, but now it is but some weird neural activity in the temporal lobe. An expected result, seeing the imperfect nature of Darwinian evolution.”

“I see,” I replied with an evident sense of unease, remembering Marcus’ explanation of my Himalayan experience, “Eh, back to comparative religion, you know that I used to follow some theological polemics on the Internet. I was sick of the way different believers treated each other. There was so much intolerance, so much hatred and so much idiocy...”

“I know. I didn’t deal with computers or Internet, but I did deal with humans, unfortunately.”

“So...”

“So what?” He asked with his squint eye looking at me like an angry chick coming straight out of a classic cartoon film.

“Eh,” I replied doing my best to eat my laughter, “So what do you think about religions? Different ways to the same truth?”

“No. Religion founders were too different from each other, including some of the greatest and worst men who have ever walked on God’s green earth. Religions take very different approaches towards being, they even have different priority lists.”

“In India, for instance,” he added as I kept on nodding my head with my usual stupid smile, “Incarnation and respect for the cow are much more important than the gods. In medieval Europe, I think disbelief in God was much more serious than disbelief in eternity, although both were punishable by death.”

“Oh my damn God!” cried Loki in despair as he buried his head in the chest of one of the Russian dolls, “Whenever I think about the beautiful, sweet and sexy witches who were burned alive. Couldn’t they have just given those vixens to me?”

“I don’t think that religious ethics can be a solid ground for similarity either. While Jainists are very cautious not to hurt any sentient life, the Zoroastrian book of Arda Viraf states that a sinful man was tortured in hell with his foot excluded, for it killed frogs, ants and snakes; the evil creation of Angra Manyu.”

“That’s right,” I replied with a smile, “If I were to believe that the living organisms were created, I would have believed in some sort of Ahura Mazda and Angra Manyu. It is very hard indeed to see the whole of creation as a masterpiece of a benevolent god.”

“Yet I still have pity for the poor reptiles and sharks,” replied Gerald quickly, “I think that people are free to believe in whatever they like. But when their beliefs turn into destructive actions things start to become really nasty. If most of us were Zoroastrians, it’d have been quite probable that many animals would have gone extinct. If it weren’t for the belief in reincarnation, millions of poor untouchables could have lived normal prosperous lives. If it weren’t for the belief in an afterlife or the belief of the divinity of the emperor, dozens of suicide bombers could have saved their lives and the lives of millions.”

“I think that’s right Gerald. You have touched a very important point here. But how can you ask someone to believe that a certain man was a rapist or a mass-murderer in a past life, yet still treat him well?”

“Well, I think that all people should know that the truth is very far away. In fact, the idea of truth seems to be rather dangerous. You can believe, but it’d still be healthy to keep a handful of skepticism, Saint Tomas may prove to be the wisest of the disciples.”

“So there is no way that religions are paths to the same truth?” I repeated the question again in despair.

“No. But it is possible that the mysticism that is in the religions, whether genuine or heretical, as being far from the spirit of the host religion, is a very valid unifying point. You see, Faust. You can never overcome a force of repulsion without applying a stronger force of attraction. A Christian and a Jew can have similar opinions regarding robbery or adultery, yet this wouldn’t be enough to overcome their mutually repulsive theological opinions. Only something that is even stronger than theology can bring them together. Mysticism is that thing.”

“So you think that mysticism can best unite the various reli-

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gious paths?”

“Yes, mysticism. And for the beliefs, there is always the artistic estimation.”

“What’s that?”

“The artistic estimation? Now look, Faust. What do you think of Michelangelo’s art?”

“Incredible.”

“A Hindu doesn’t believe that good old Jehovah created Adam. But wouldn’t he still be fascinated by Michelangelo’s masterpiece?”

“Definitely he would, unless he is extremely fanatic.”

“That’s because he valued it artistically, regardless of its factual accuracy.”

“You mean...”

“Yes. You can be Jewish and believe in no salvation, yet you can still see beauty in the idea of God giving his son for the sake of his beloved. You don’t believe that this did really happen but you like it. Just like a Christian-born atheist would still like the paintings of Michelangelo. See in it beauty, not righteousness. The truth of a phrase would logically mean the false hood of a mutually exclusive phrase. But there can be two beautiful contradicting phrases. That’s why a religion based on beauty, not righteousness, would usually be much more tolerant and peaceful. I especially like to remember how Chinese people in the past believed in two, sometimes many, religions at a time.”

“But some people may not find certain ideas even beautiful; beauty is relative.”

“Heh,” he replied with a nice smile, his eyes didn’t look squinted for a couple of minutes as I looked at him from a certain angle, “They say that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. What is beauty after all? If we are to believe that everything soaks in the divine, then the more things radiate their divine essence, the more beautiful they are. For ugly eyes everything would seem to be opaque and dull. But for him who learned to see the divine everywhere, everything is beautiful.”

“Beauty as transparency of the divine... Did you consider be-

coming a preacher, Gerald?”

“Poor humans!” replied Gerald with apparent displeasure from my last comment, “They have always chased the philosopher’s stone; the Midas touch, but how many of them desired the Midas look? They get mad whenever a new gospel is discovered, they have never found the remedy to their spiritual thirst. Will they ever find it but in the gospel within? Will they ever close their eyes and dive deep into themselves, to that exotic forest of fragile butterflies and wonderful fragrance of spring? They should then sit next to the nearest remnants of a cut tree and open the book that is put there. They should stare at its endless pages, on which no ink has ever been split, knowing that the white pages, by getting them nowhere, would still get them closer to God than the best written of human scrabbles. If they’d lift their head up then, they’d see how the beauty of the forest is boosted by the beauty within their hearts. As if the heart is transformed into an endless flood of divine love, that would fill one, and further flow to all.”

“This is...”

“This is the Midas Look, to descend with your ‘beauty threshold’ and find beauty even in the trivial. Now I am not asking you to find beauty in half-decayed corpses, but at least find beauty in all the simple things that pass by us in our everyday life. You will start forcing yourself and you will end up with this beautifying vision deeply built in your soul. When one becomes beautiful inside he can never hold himself, the beauty that is in him will overflow, turning all the surroundings into an inspiring masterpiece.”

“Gerald! Gerald Grotesque! Your words are lovely! Why don’t you really consider becoming a preacher?”

“I am not turning myself into a spiritual puppet. I have always hated preachers, how can you ask me to become one myself?”

“People don’t light a lamp and put it under a bowl.”

“Forget about it!”

“But Gerald...”

“Faust! Proceed to the next point!”

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“Next point? Well, I wanted to know about the afterlife, do you believe in an afterlife?”

“Yes. But not in that ridiculous concept that most people believe.”

“Can you get me out of here?” Loki begged me with a pale face, “This stupid conversation has been going for so long. I need chicks! I am starving!”

“People believe in a big theater!” added Gerald, “In afterlife John will still be John and Faust will still be Faust. People who did really good things will sit in the frontlines. Less virtuous people will sit farther back.”

“Yes,” I said with a smile, “A local priest said that in a sermon back in the Philippines. I wonder how I remembered that, I have never been keen at religion as a young boy.”

“That’s the best thing that those creatures can think about.” replied Gerald in anger, always looking like the cartoon young chick, “And what do you think of heaven?”

“Actually I don’t believe in an afterlife.”

“It doesn’t really matter in what you believe. It’s your heart that counts. For a dull person even a beautiful heaven would be an ashen-white wax museum.”

“Now that we talk, I remember a nice parable that I heard somewhere. It says that a saint visited hell. There he found a large table and delicious food, yet the people were starving as they were given long spoons, much too long to reach their mouths. Then the saint visited heaven. To his surprise there was also the table with delicious food and the long spoons, but all the people were well-fed and happy; *they learned to feed each other.*”

“Stupid story!” cried Loki, “Couldn’t they eat with their bare fingers? I like the afterlife of Pastafarians! Volcanoes of beer and a stripper factory...oh...especially that factory.”

“I’ll see if they have a gay stripper factory for you.” I replied.

“Oh yeah?” Loki angrily replied, “Gay? Me? Should I remind you how you peeped at Marcus when he was in the bathroom a couple of days ago!”

“I was afraid he fell. His leg is still hurt.”

“If he fell he would have called for help, you horny...”

“Faust!” cried Gerald in anger, he looked far more dangerous than the wildest cartoon chick I saw in my life.

“Yes Marcus. Eh, yes, Gerald.”

“You were not listening to me for all that time?”

“Actually...”

“Oh, Lord of heaven! I will restart from scratch. I believe in the afterlife as a final step into Eckhart’s ‘eternal now’. That’s where the soul would be totally devoid of all its createdness, returning to be the infinitely simple spark. In this sense there will no longer be anything that will keep my spark away from yours, for my spark will carry nothing that belongs to me and nobody else, nor will your spark carry anything that belongs to you and nobody else. Our innermost sparks will then be one. I will be one with all humanity, and only then the whole of God will be in this spark, too. And although this spark is so simple, so sublime and so abstract, it will still be able to describe and relate to each and every one of us, far more than our empirical selves.”

“What unites us together is to us still more personal than our personalities that distinguish us...what a paradox!”

“Life is full of paradoxes.” Replied Gerald with a kind smile.

“Sure! I have traveled for thousands of miles to find spirituality through Bakashananda and now I have found beauties that I have never imagined revealed by a man whose slogan is the number of the beast!”

“Oh, come on!”

“Gerald, please,” I asked with fear, almost closing my eyes, “Isn’t there any possibility that you’d consider forming a spiritual group?”

“Oh, Faust! Why can’t you understand? There is nothing that Jesus criticized in the Pharisees that was not committed later in his name. And not only Jesus, but each and every great reformer. This is the irony of fate. Every reform was lunched on a spoilt system that was once a reform itself. I don’t want this to happen to me. It’s bad not to help people, but that’s better than dying

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while you know that somebody else is going to cheat or lie in your name...”

“You are free, my friend. But I must tell you that I loved your thought very much and would have hoped that other people could also come to know it. Although it is paradoxical! With you paradoxes make sense!”

“That’s the divine wisdom, son. When we build a tower to heaven, it will be well grounded and firmly rooted but never reach the sky. Yet when heaven throws us a ladder it will be fragile-looking and shaky. That’s why I may believe in some things that people would consider absurd. Seeing them not as nonsense but as the laws of eternity, perfectly, yet poorly described in our words. Just like a whole multidimensional scene projected by force on our flat senses and reason.”

“Uppa Gyro!” We could hear Freddy cry.

“I will go and see what Freddy needs now. But I would like to show you someplace, Faust.”

“Tomorrow, then.”

“No! Tonight. Stay here and I will come back after an hour.”

“Ok...” I replied. I didn’t understand where we could go at such an hour.

Appendix

1

W.B.W. Commented Sources

Those are the commented sources of the W.B.W project discussed by Marcus Minkowski and Faust Amoyo in the first and fifth chapters of the Romanian section of the novel.

According to the novel, the whole project was written by Marcus Minkowski to illustrate evolution. He read Dawkins' 'The Blind Watchmaker' and became obsessed with the biomorphs. Later, Marcus decided to make an even more powerful illustration of evolution by watching a living creature evolve. And what can that living creature be but the only life form that humans created? A computer Virus!

Marcus later Decided that he should remove the viral code and replace it with a benign program that replicates in its own-created files, thus he could openly take credit for the program. An extra bonus for that move turned out to be a faster, safer and easier testing.

The Project consists of two files. The first one is a COM file, called GEN.COM. This COM file is written in assembly. It generates files from AA.COM to ZZ.COM. These files resemble the mother file almost completely. Yet they carry certain mutations.

Mutations can be either extra bytes, deleted bytes or altered bytes.

The Second file is a program written in Basic. It is called SELECT.BAS. It can be executed via Qbasic or turned into an EXE file with QuickBasic. It will scan all the generated files, from AA.COM to ZZ.COM, for a certain sequence of bytes and will eliminate each and every copy where that code is present. This program is supposed to emulate the antivirus software and may represent a predator or a parasite. Yet it is not the only selective force involved. Marcus would also try to execute all the copies that survived the scanner massacre and test them for smooth execution. Most of the mutants were, as he did expect, nonfunctional and would usually result in system crash. Marcus also deleted all those copies. Yet, he was not troubled at all by their presence for they emulated the defected offspring that were spontaneously aborted.

Watching The Blind Watchmaker

=====

How it works:

- 1- Make a new folder. Put in it the file GEN.COM and the file SELECT.EXE (or SELECT.BAS and Qbasic if you didn't compile it).
- 2- Run GEN.COM, you will see files created from AA.COM to ZZ.COM
- 3- Run SELECT.EXE, you will see that most of the files will be eliminated.
- 4- Manually test the few remaining files for proper execution. Copy each into another empty folder, rename it to GEN.COM and execute it. Delete all the files that fail to reproduce or crash the system.
- 5- If you are left with a file that still works and replicates giving functional offspring, then the program did indeed evolve. That's what happened with me, and with Marcus in the novel. I believe that this confirms microevolution. Yet can you force this pro-

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gram to evolve encryption? This is the Minkowski challenge. He failed and gave up, saying that the microevolution he watched happen was enough. I also didn't end up with any encrypted version of this file in my numerous trials. For theoretical discussion of the consequences of this program please read the discussion in the fourth chapter of the Romanian section of the novel.

```
; Watching The Blind Watchmaker
; =====
; First: The Replicator (GEN.ASM)
;
; Copyright © 2006 by Fady Bahig
; This program was written by Fady Bahig in 2006
; for the novel 'The Journey Of The Fool'
; The W.B.W project was supposed to be written
; in the fiction by Marcus Minkowski
; This is the replicator part of the project
; Upon executing this COM file it will generate
; Mutated Copies of itself from AA.com till ZZ.com
; Mutants can be missing bytes, with an extra bytes
; or with altered bytes.
; To compile put in GEN.ASM then compile with A86
; GEN.COM will be then produced.
```

```
Code_begins:
jmp Code_start
Message: db "Now creating "
Filename: db "AA.COM",0           ;File name of the first file
db 13,10, "$"
```

```
Code_start:
push cs
push cs
pop ds
pop es
```

Appendix: W.B.W commented sources

```
; BUG! Marcus should have put some NOPs here to avoid the  
; jump in a smaller mutant from going to the above instructions.  
Make_next_file:           ;This loop generates files  
nop ;Those nops are necessary here because if a byte is  
nop ;added the backwards jump location will be  
nop ;corrupted. So I decided to put them for safety.  
nop
```

```
; The following 4 instructions are the search string.  
; For any copy to avoid being detected and deleted,  
; the following 12 bytes must be altered somehow  
; to avoid detection.
```

```
lea di,offset Code_ends      ;Make a copy at the heap  
mov si,offset Code_begins    ;A copy of myself  
mov cx,(Code_ends-Code_begins) ;My size  
copy_loop:  
call Get_random_number      ;Will I mutate this byte?  
cmp al,1h  
je Mutate                    ;Yes?
```

```
Movsb                        ;No  
cont_replicate:  
loop copy_loop               ;Copy all the bytes  
jmp continue
```

```
Mutate:  
call Get_random_number      ;What is the type of the  
                             ;mutation?  
  
cmp al,10h  
jb add_byte                 ;Will we add a byte?  
cmp al,20h  
jb sub_byte                 ;Will we remove a byte?  
call Get_random_number      ;Will we change a byte  
inc si  
stosb
```

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```
jmp cont_replicate

sub_byte:                                ;We will remove a byte
inc si
jmp cont_replicate

add_byte:                                 ;We will add a byte

movsb

call Get_random_number
stosb
jmp cont_replicate

continue:
mov dx,offset Filename                   ;Create a file
mov ah,03ch                               ;with new name.
xor cx,cx                                 ;Copy all the data,
int 21h                                   ;And close.
xchg bx,ax
mov ah,040h
mov dx,offset Code_ends
mov cx,offset (Code_ends-Code_begins)
int 21h
mov ah,03eh
int 21h

mov ah,09h                                ;Print message to say
mov dx, offset message                   ;that the file is created
int 21h                                   ;successfully

cmp word ptr [Filename],"ZZ"             ;Did we reach ZZ.COM?
jne stillmake                             ;No? Make another file
int 20h

stillmake:
```

Appendix: W.B.W commented sources

```
inc byte ptr [Filename+1]      ;Calculate the
cmp byte ptr [Filename+1],"Z"+1 ;name of next file
jne skip_fix
mov byte ptr [Filename+1],"A"
inc byte ptr [Filename]
skip_fix:

jmp Make_next_file           ;Generate the next file

Get_random_number:           ;Get a random number
in al,40h                    ;This procedure is
xchg al,ah                   ;Used to make mutations
in al,40h                    ;And see if we will make one.
xor al,ah
add al,ah
ror al,1
xor ax,bx
add ax,cx
sub ax,dx
xor al,ah
ret

db 10h dup (0) ; A reserve buffer so that if a mutant is longer
Code_ends: ; by a byte or two, it will still be copied

;GEN.ASM ends here

' Watching The Blind Watchmaker
' =====
' Second: The Selector.
' This program was written by Fady Bahig in 2006
' for the novel 'The Journey Of The Fool'
' The W.B.W project was supposed to be written
```

The Journey Of The Fool

```
' in the fiction by Marcus Minkowski
' This is the selector part of the project
' Upon executing this program it will scan for all the
' the generated COM files from AA.COM to ZZ.COM
' and will erase each and every copy carrying the search string:
' That is a certain sequence of bytes.
' This program can be run with Qbasic or can be
' turned into an EXE file by QB. In case you desire to
' turn it into an EXE, you must alter the first few lines. See
' comments for details
' To run with Qbasic put in SELECT.BAS and then open it
' with Qbasic and then choose start from run
```

```
DIM A AS INTEGER
'stext$ = COMMAND$
' activate if making EXE then run select.exe with the sequence of
bytes as a parameter
' i.e. : Select BFB801BE0001B9B800E86500
```

```
stext$ = "BFB801BE0001B9B800E86500"
'Deactivate if EXE
```

```
IF stext$ = "/"? OR stext$ = "?" OR stext$ = "" THEN
PRINT "W.B.W Selector"
PRINT "Deletes all the ???.COM files"
PRINT "carring the byte sequence"
PRINT "enterd as a parameter."
PRINT ""
PRINT "And ..."
PRINT "Marcus Minkowski says to you all"
PRINT "VIVA ROMANIA ;)"
END
END IF
```

```
FOR 11 = 65 TO 90 ' Scan file names from AA to ZZ
FOR 12 = 65 TO 90
```

Appendix: W.B.W commented sources

```
file$ = CHR$(11) + CHR$(12) + ".COM"

OPEN file$ FOR BINARY AS #1
b = -1          ' Make a text string of all the bytes
text$ = ""      ' In the file
DO UNTIL EOF(1)
b = b + 2
GET #1, b, A

b$ = HEX$(A)
IF LEN(b$) < 4 THEN b$ = STRING$(4 - LEN(b$), "0") + b$
b$ = RIGHT$(b$, 2) + LEFT$(b$, 2)

text$ = text$ + b$
LOOP
CLOSE

' If the byte sequence is present in the file, eliminate it and
' inform the user
IF INSTR(text$, stext$) <> 0 THEN
KILL file$
PRINT file$ + " was eliminated."
END IF

NEXT I2
NEXT I1
END

' SELECT.BAS ends here.
```