

A.R.

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Dedicated to Zachariah Artstien, Maya Sorieya, Avinadav Butler & the ZOB

PROLOGUE

8 November 2001

They are sitting quietly in a Haifa hills café that is small and dimly lit. The last light of day falls softly on the Carmel. A fleeting splendor ripples over the harbor bay.

The boy is too thin to look American. His eyes have a lean and hungry look and are bad eyed and deeply sunken. They are filled with hate. His clothing is worn and torn. He might even be mistaken for a Russian street kid. The dirty gray corduroy cap on his head is encrusted with sand and sweat. It conceals his natty brown hair and gives him the appearance of a child like Che Guevara, perhaps in his own mind alone. The loose, blue pin-stripe suit he wears had been kosher cut in Golder's Green, but is now a patchwork of torn threads and desert dust. He removes a crumpled green pack of Noblisse cigarettes from the inner pocket, puts one in his mouth and lights it. He takes long drags.

Like he's learned to smoke by imitating some noire movie detective.

It looks as though he might cry out at any moment, or lash out across the table throttling the chubby preacher with his bare hands. If he lets down his guard down long enough though, he might have to admit defeat.

Occasionally the boy looks up to stare across the table at the man who is so determined to save him. This true Christian soldier has a cherub-like face even though he is in his forties and sports a brown scraggly beard. The chubby man is a proselytizer disguised as a tour guide. The man is uncertain whether this meeting will lead to more violent outbursts. His last encounter with this boy in Jerusalem was a debacle. The man says a quick prayer and begins to talk in his soft Midwestern drawl.

"I'm sorry," the preacher says.

The boy looks up. His response is steady and calculated despite his condition.

"They fucked her within an inch of her life before they killed her. They ripped her to shreds. The body was cut into pieces and they dumped her along the southern highway as if they knew there wasn't even any use in covering the thing up. Where was the man Jesus then? What do you know of good hard pain?"

It is a sharp and biting response. There is a quick pause and the flash of yet another silent prayer as the fat man's eyes dart up.

"I know plenty about plenty. Do you remember what I said that first evening we met Sebastian?"

The boy's eyes focus intently. He is uncomfortable with anyone using his real name. No one has used his real name for a long time. Suddenly there is some frustration in his voice.

"Why do you insist on calling me that?"

"Because it is your name."

"My name is Zachariah Artstien."

The preacher give him a 'boy don't talk crazy' look.

"Your name is Sebastian."

"Bu there is no such a person anymore. If you wish to carry on this conversation you will not refer to me by the name of a man who is rotting in the ground," he responds sharply.

"You know I don't like to humor your devils."

"You know I do not like to humor your just about anything," the boy retorts. "You cannot save me. I don't believe in your religion. You are wasting your time on me, yet again."

"Please calm down, Sebastian."

The boy gets up to leave.

"Sit down!"

There is authority in the man's voice for the first time.

"I told you the first time we met that I saw a well of pain in your eyes that was so deep that you might drown in your own sorrow. The night we met I laid awake praying for hours in the hope that you might find peace."

"Redemption being some man called Jesus of Nazareth, of course. Shut the fuck up."

"Could you please stop?"

He looks like the kind of person who says '*darnit.*'

“What do you really know about me? About this *Sebastian* you’re trying so hard to save? I grow very tired of people these days. Especially those with penchants for doing the Lord’s work through lost children. There is nothing you can say to me to make me forget everything that has happened.”

“You can forget the past, Sebastian. Even the immediate past.”

“Well thank you, you quintessential, self-helping faith healer!”

“I killed two people last night.”

The preacher stares into him and knows that cannot possibly be true.

It’s not in the prophesy.

“Not everything you saw actually happened to you. You are not a corpse, but you have allowed hateful demons to possess your body and speak on your behalf. It is time to go home!”

“My home is a place near two flaming towers where men of finance sacrificed three thousand of my former country men to their false god and those that rule this country collaborated with them!”

His words sear the man’s heart as he continues.

“Thank you for telling me what everyone always tells me, just in case I had forgotten the misery and grind of things since yesterday. Perhaps another brilliant cliché is in order like ‘be myself?’ Or forgive my enemies perhaps! I’ve been trying. I swear I have. In all honesty I think your coming here was a waste of both of our time. I have no home at all.”

The man’s tone changes.

“I figure you tell lots of tales. Throw around theology at people and radical rhetoric. You’d tell your secrets to any stranger who’d care to listen if you thought it would teach them something. But that doesn’t make your secrets true.”

“I don’t follow you.”

“How many people speak out of your mouth boy? Who’s that imaginary friend whispering in your ear? It’s gotten worse since you arrived here in the land hasn’t it? Can you tell anymore who is talking, you or the devils?”

“Don’t worry your neurons. So what’s the moral, Brent Avery? The take away?”

“What I want you to do is to tell me how you came to be the way you are without Zachariah doing the story-telling. Why are you so angry at your tribe and country of birth, the world in general and even God himself? ”

“You would never understand that story, Brent. It isn’t set in places where the wind blows lightly on the plain.”

“Try me then, boy. Believe it or not we’re not so different. God cries for all of us.”

“Oh really!? I don’t believe that for a second. He spits on us with his indifference! I doubt that there are two people who could be more different than you and I. You have your Lord, your God. You serve him blindly like a sheep. My only higher power is the coming revolt. I will get what I contribute.”

“They are one and the same these higher powers you speak of.”

“Really, Brent Avery? Do you think I believe that?”

“No. I don’t think you don’t know what you believe in anymore. Other than in the hate that never leaves you, other than the demons whispering inside you to pick up arms and kill without compunction for cause.”

The thin boy smiles with a shit eating, devilish grin.

“At least I can believe in my hate. But if faith is what governs us--you in your God, and me in the coming revolt--what makes you think we should see eye to eye on anything? You play the preacher pray boy and I’ll play the rebel with righteous cause.”

“You should confide in me because we all have nightmares about the things we can’t control. Your demons have taken their toll, Sebastian Adon. An ocean, a new name and some ten thousand miles later ain’t improved your sleep, boy. Is that truth?”

The coffee shop has all but emptied out, still the boy doesn’t answer. The Arab Christian is keeping it open for the sole prospect of what these Americans might buy. He will stay open all night as long as they keep drinking and eating things. The Carmel is sometimes slow on a Tuesday night. Especially since the uprising began.

“You want to hear a yarn?” the boy asks.

“I want to hear a true story.”

“There’s no such thing as a true, Brent. There’s only the mostly true, the heartfelt and remembered past. Its a long story. It goes well with vodka and cigarettes.”

“We’ve got all night, but you’ll have to settle for coffee. I’m not much of a drinking man. I’ve come a very long way to get you home and I don’t have anywhere else I’d rather be.”

“Well, let us all hope this Arab can tolerate the sound of English and take mental notes. It begins with the tale of a rude boy on the last days of summer. It ends with a hooker beaten half to death on a lonely desert high way. A black man hanging from a tree and an early deportation. And we know exactly who brought the towers down, and more importantly why.”

Tough talk from a seventeen year old.

But the boy is still just a walking corpse with a demon inside him and the if the lord works in mysterious ways maybe Avery can him back to Babylon before someone, something or even himself will cut the story short.

PART ONE: Concrete Jungle

September 1998

1

My oh my.

Tickle me Tamerlane. I wish I were part of a religion important enough to have my God housed in that thing, thinks the pilgrim as he looks up at the sprawling temple complex on the mount in this little desert town.

This is the Pale City in the badlands.

The streets are dark. An eerie twilight dances upon the cobblestones and the happy laugh of children is missing. The pilgrim senses that this place is just no good. There is no moon and someone has turned off the stars. He has been here many times before. He has wandered these cobblestone streets lost while searching, drinking deeply from the puddles of his own soul. Time has no meaning here. There are only the ghosts and the growing darkness surrounded by an endless desert of the mind. Each time he returns to bow down and to venture towards the light glimmering in the darkness. He is no longer sure this light even exists. Behind every locked door

is some route to the horror freak-show of his subconscious, some lurking subterranean display of rape or torture. The place is good at making a religion out of violence.

The pilgrim passes by a towering Ferris wheel at the town wall; a Bregna barrier, an apartheid separation wall made of pyramid bricks and barbwire. The wheel sits in a thorn garden. Its operator is a hideous harlequin whose face is painted white, red, and black and who laughs like a mad man carries himself like a pederast.

There is no way out.

Every night the pilgrim returns to this personal hell, this Pale City in the desert, this home of perpetual blackness. His pilgrimage begins anytime he goes to sleep causing him to return to pay homage over and over again, to bear witness to hell as he understands it.

Tonight there is a great commotion coupled with alarm. The town's transient population waits on the central square called *umslagplatz*. Their faces are twisted in grimaces too close to death to be truly alive. Everything appears grainy, toned in black, white and gray scale unless it needs to bleed. Then it is the color of bright red arterial blood, like a 1970's B movie grindhouse. The temple looks like a cross between the Hagia Sophia and the Luna Park housing projects, or maybe the Alhambra mixed with Astroland in its heyday. Robed clerics on the balconies of the temple drone out prayers from behind their grey hooded robes. One can never see their faces, accuse them of their crimes. The holy men are never from the pilgrim's tribe.

A tall and twisted tree stands in the center of the square, bulbous and ghastly. It looks like the last standing cherry tree in the parking lot at Chernobyl. It has flowers, but not the kind you would give a loved one. The pilgrim knows what is to come for he has read about it in a banned book called the New Testament. You can't get a good translation of it within ten thousand miles of Brooklyn.

But most versions agree on one detail at least. When the messiah came back, well the forces of evil got him, got him good.

An illiterate and rowdy mob has assembled around the main square. A large garrison of foreign troops forms ranks and bars all the entrances and exits. A big black man crowned in barbed wire, already beaten nearly to death, is being dragged through the streets as the people pelt him with rocks and garbage screaming for his blood. The crowd exists as a single entity, a twisted sweating creature of manipulated rage. The black man carries a long wooden board over his muscular African shoulders. Grisly avulsions run down his back. His blood and sweat only lubricates the mob's resolve to hurt him further. It emboldens them. Many would have begged for mercy or made an indignant show of fortitude toward their captors but this man simply marches along with a sad look in his grey eyes. His humility makes them hate him even more.

The pilgrim is watching the spectacle from his hiding place in a bombed out café at the edge of the square. He is too scared to get much closer. Finally, the man is lifted by the mob onto the tree. The beam is fastened. They begin nailing his hands to the ends of the board. Then they nail his feet with one great big rail spike right into the tree. Two more pitiful figures, some alleged criminal that the pilgrim didn't know and some emancipationists are fastened next to this dying rebel. Their bodies form a triangle above the base of this crucifixion tree. The mob is

cheering with an orgiastic glee, dancing about the tree. Soon they begin fucking each other right there on the square.

The pilgrim shudders. He is only thirteen and can't speak the language much less really protect himself from that mob. He uses a pair of binoculars to look up from behind the counter of the derelict café into the eyes of the man. There is no fear or agony on the man's face, simply the grim realization that he has failed in his mission. The black rebel spasms and coughs up blood as life drains out of him.

A soldier stabs him with a bayonet to seal the deed.

A young girl in a dirty white dress is hiding in the bombed out café also. She is only sixteen or seventeen and pregnant. She could be Arab or Puerto Rican but passes for *blan*. She has red hair like Jessica Rabbit, bright died red hair. She is sobbing quietly. Her hair is tied in the light grey wrap that pilgrim women wear.

She whispers accusingly, "Collaborator."

The alarm rings. It's an air raid siren blaring the pilgrim out of slumber.

I wake up quickly in a pool of sweat. I nearly fall out of the bed that is a raised bunk bed with my desk underneath. It has been another in a string of nightmares. They all started sometime in 1997. I never remember most of the details, only the horror.

It is 6:15 am on a Monday morning of a new school year. I live at Waterside Plaza on the island fortress of Manhattan. My school is an hour north by subway in what some call *the Boogie down*, but what I call the *fucking Bronx*.

It is time to go to school.

My name is Sebastian Adon. Believe as much or as little as you hear about me. That goes for the things I tell you about myself as well.

The mind works in cycles and patterns, innate behavioral conditioning brought about through external governing factors that mold response and reaction. How strong or beautiful a person appears is genetic, but that the mind is a clean slate, a great evolving tapestry, a mostly unused muscle. With discipline, this muscle can be harnessed to radically affect a person's surroundings, sense of time and ultimately, the character of an individual's life. The mind is a beautiful piece of organic clockwork that we are largely unable to understand, regulate or control.

I'm sure that I'm not using more than 8% of my brain, but like all things that will change.

I get up quickly and shower. I jerk off in the shower thinking about my dick with two chicks--one Black-Irish, one Asian. I towel off. I dress in whatever is lying about. Some days I undress again when the socially conscious part of my brain realizes my threads look ridiculous. I run back to the bathroom. I throw Queen Helene, that thick mix of hardening green goop, into my hair, slick it back, spike it and sculpt the devil horns that swoop and curl. I use Scope instead of brushing my teeth because it is quicker. If I'm late the teacher will make me sit in the corner.

I run down the stairs and drop by the steel shutter coffee stand to wait in line for my morning fix of that nasty, bitter stimulant that will keep me awake long enough to do last night's homework on the train.

It is "essential" that this work be completed, because it is essential that one finishes high school. That's the place you memorize facts you do not need to know in pursuit of a so-called "body of knowledge" necessary to be considered a civilized member of Western society. This is nation-biased bullshit that paints our consumer-frenzied culture as truth and light to the brown barbarians. But learn it you shall, for college is only four years away. There you will be further tuned and refined into a cog, screw or girder in mainstream society. Eventually you will choose a career you hate, making enough money to one day join that promised upper middle class bracket of the American socio-economic stratosphere. You will marry, have 2.3 kids and move to the dream home in the suburbs. You will go on vacations to places with beaches or European cities you can't quite pronounce and hopefully sip fancy drinks. Your children will grow up to be accountants, doctors and lawyers if you're a Jew or athletes, musicians, or entrepreneurs if you're black.

But the main goal is to get rich. This is the American Dream.

I board the uptown #6 train on 34th Street and transfer at 42nd to the #4 Bronx-bound uptown express. The train is packed like a fetid Polish cattle car, a sea of inter-tangled flesh, crammed into a metal can and shipped to its respective destination. People push and shove, fighting over every inch of cubic space. The heat is unbearable. The stale air is cross-pollinated with the odors of aftershave, raw armpits and cheap cologne.

Right now all I am thinking about is the history homework I didn't do, the sleep I didn't get and the utter monotony of the life I am currently leading. The roar of the train car through the underground tunnels is deafening. People peer through the glass divider giving me annoyed looks as I finish off my cigarette. I once read a story about a boy who was thrown to his death from the train while riding between cars as the train made a sharp turn. I am sure these rumors are propagated by the old to make the young less daring. Wouldn't want to be fucking statistic!

I arrive at the Bedford Boulevard station at 8:30 am. It's the second to the last northbound stop on the #4 train. I'm fifteen minutes late. It will take another five to ten minutes to cross Bedford Park Boulevard and Harris Field and smoke another *stoag*.

My school is the Bronx High School of Science. I have been going here for two weeks. I spent the nine years of elementary and middle school at the private United Nation's International School. But it was pure luck that I tested into this school a month before UNIS suspended, then expelled me.

Bronx Science is a magnet school. The school draws its roughly 2,400 students from throughout New York City. Like many other New York City Public magnet schools, the classes are over-packed and the kids are largely middle class. Unlike almost all other New York City public schools, Bronx Science will, in theory, get you into a good college. I took the admissions test back in 8th grade. I got in by a single point.

I am walking through Harris Field, the dilapidated expanse of gnarled-down lawn that is a massive sports field where teenagers smoke pot. This morning students are clustered across the field indulging in the morning reefer madness amid patches of dying grass. There's no cover, just gonna-see-the-law-coming-from-a-mile-away cover. A part of me notices that it isn't even 9, so what is there to celebrate? Maybe they have first period off because they commute from Staten Island, but they're probably cutting. Maybe they just like the green.

The school is a T-shaped, red brick building that is three stories high. The object is not to learn, but to absorb it sometimes seems.

There are exceptions. My first period teacher, the one who is about to put me in the corner, is rather on point. His name is Dr. Maskin. He wears real tight pants and has crazy person eyes. I keep falling asleep in his class, even if it ain't so boring.

I run up the down staircase as I rush toward Dr. Maskin's first period global history class. I dash past a group of Asian schoolgirls sitting in the corridor talking. They are legion at this school. My homework is only half-finished. I will most definitely be placed in the corner. My only hope is that he will have checked the work already. There's a slim chance. I have another worry as well. I push open the door.

"Good of you to join us, Mr. Adon," he says sharply. "Your presence and your homework were greatly missed."

"Sorry, sir."

"Quite alright, Mr. Adon. Your homework please."

Dog ate it, I think to say but mostly give him a stupid look like it was news to me we had any. It was me or the dog.

The class is staring at me. I look for the sympathetic eyes of Case Yadger, another sometimes denizen of the corner. I see him smirking in the back of the classroom, his blue baseball cap pulled tightly over his brow. Also smirking is Tamar Dreyfus; the Greek-Jew girlfriend of my latest friend Donny Gold.

"Sit in the corner. You're late and unprepared."

"Yes, sir."

“Stop calling me *sir*.”

“Yes, Dr. Maskin.”

The theme of today’s class has something to do with cavemen and fences. My eyes feel heavy. Sleep begins creeping into my mind. The room periodically blinks out of existence. The class drones on. Reality melts away. I slump over at my desk. The room fades to gray. I fight it but just can’t win.

All I see is the great desert expanse and the Pale City, dimly lit in the never-ending twilight of my mind. I’m on the tree. My hands are nailed to the branches. I look to my side at the Black man nailed next to me. He eyes pop open and his head swings in my direction. Although his mouth never opens I can hear his thoughts in my head.

“Collaborator, do you see it?” he questions me in rasps.

I awake with a sudden start. I have fallen asleep at the wheel once again, with too many witnesses.

“Mr. Adon, perhaps you could give us some insight into this subject,” says Dr. Maskin smugly. I have been caught sleeping in class yet again.

“I can tell that you are particularly enthralled by the discussion and won’t hesitate to add some of your own vast wisdom to our dialogue.”

The class bursts out in faggot chuckles.

“Well, I suppose I could repeat the question for you, Mr. Adon. I know a mind like yours requires periods of, thoughtful hibernation.”

“Yes sir, it certainly does,” I respond to the amusement of my peers.

“We were discussing early human socio-economic development, Mr. Adon. As you know from last night’s reading, which I am sure you read in depth, hunter-gatherer societies evolved into the classic city-states of antiquity. We are now debating how.”

“Well, um. I suppose when the rich folks started building fences around their homes and telling all the little brown people what to do, tricking um like to relinquish control over property that nobody really owned.”

Dr. Maskin looks vaguely intrigued.

“So, like, society evolved from a concept of ownership and property, a mass theft really. Hunter-gatherers did not understand the concept of property. But it was this concept that created the early foundations of the city-state. The moment the biggest, toughest caveman built a fence and declared that the land inside was his, modern society was born.”

“Once again, ladies and gentlemen, the young philosopher king redeems himself. He may pass this class, yet. You may return to half salute slumber, Mr. Adon.

I lean back in the chair with a smug grin.
Only seven more periods to go.
I hate school. If there weren't girls here I wouldn't probably even show up.

2

If you're outside of school and it's not a free period and you don't have an ID or a silver tongue, the pigs are going to nab you for truancy and ship you halfway across the Bronx for truancy violation and leave yer ass at Lincoln High School where all the Ghetto trash go. Screw that noise. School gets out at 3:15 pm. That's when it's safe to move about the periphery.

It's 4:30 pm and I'm good and clear of the mostly brown borough. I am sitting in the park on 53rd Street and East End Avenue smoking weed with Donny Gold. The sky is pale and the light is fading. The cars zooming past on the underpass below us race quickly home, carrying the beaten-down dregs back to their telescreens and TV dinners.

We have a latest tradition. Every day after school Case, Donny, and I meet up to shoot the shit and harass pedestrians on the Upper East Side. I have known these two for about a week. We met in my homeroom class. Donny and Case used to go to Wagner Junior High School, a public middle school in Manhattan. They are both nice Jewish boys from nice Jewish families, solid upper middle class Americans, like me. Donny loves to smoke pot. I have never met a person who smokes as much pot as Donny Gold. He smokes pot before school. He smokes pot during school, right before math class to be precise. He smokes when he gets home and he smokes before he goes to sleep. Case on the other hand doesn't smoke at all, doesn't do anything for him spiritually I guess.

Donny and I light our cigarettes from my silver plated Zippo lighter and watch the traffic on the underpass expressway. It was this same Zippo that got me started smoking in the first place. I had seen people with them in the movies and had always thought they were really cool. I used to ask my parents for one all the time, but they always said that it would get me to start smoking. All the girls in junior high smoked. I justified that if I had a Zippo, I could light their cigarettes and be a cool guy. A month later I was smoking *stoags*. I never liked the way they tasted. I always knew how bad they were. But I wanted to look cool just like everyone else. There was a big uproar about the Marlboro Man and Joe Camel. The media said they were marketing smokes to kids. That shit never got to me. I blame junior high school girls. I man I was just trying to get laid like everybody else.

Donny cracks the paper of the blunt as the light dims over the river, empties the guts onto the ground, and hands me the outer paper to steam. Then he produces a dime bag and puts its contents into a hollowed out, cheap cigar.

Donny starts smoking the blunt.

“You really hassle Maskin man, I sometimes wonder how you ever made it through middle school” says Case.

“I didn’t,” I respond, “my ass got kicked out. But dude, what did we ever learn in grade school that was worthwhile anyway besides the moral quandaries of celebrating Thanksgiving?”

“I mean, if ya think about it,” I begin again, “We just spent eight years learning things that were pretty simplistic retarded. And now, in high school, we are learning that half of what we learned before was just, well simple lies. Like how Columbus didn’t actually discover America and like how Lincoln didn’t want to free the slaves.”

“That stupid ‘ish.”

“If you hate learning so much, why even go to school?” asks Case.

“I don’t hate learning. I just hate school.”

“Same shit. You learn in a school.”

“No not really. That school hones us into becoming pliant sheep with credit cards.”

“Young people won’t just educate themselves,” says Case, “Just look at Donny, he’d need an electric GPS collar and piss test to make it out of high school kid.”

“Fuck you, Case, I’m like the brilliant undercover scientist, the genius’ist person you’ll ‘eva know son” sputters out Donny, coughing on pot smoke.

Then the blunt is finished and then there’s nothing left to say.

3

Six or seven hours later we are beginning’ to gather on the south side of Union Square around 7:30 eve. Most of my crew went to a public junior high school called Wagner. Donny and Case had introduced me to the bulk of their elementary school friends. Most of them live on the Upper West Side. It is an area of the City I have never been to prior to coming to high school.

I walk over to Donny through this mob of kids ready to go drinking. There are about twenty of us Bronx Science kids. They brought friends from other schools like Lab, Beacon and UNIS. Donny and I had gone to the Upper West Side after school to pick up our share of the

alcohol. There is a deli on 84th and Amsterdam that has been selling to the Wagner kids for years. They don't care for shit, which is rare during the Mayor Giuliani years. No immigrant Arab or Korean businessman ever takes the risk unless they know the kids. There are two Red Dog 40s and a Woodchuck 32 in my backpack. I have never drunk a 40 before, Donny put me on. They are huge and dirt-cheap. I love it, early 90's hip hop bearing influence on the rich white kids firmly and finally.

I look at the faces of my two-week-new friends.

Daliah is thin, chesty and Dominican, a bit outspoken. Elle Takaway is half-Japanese, half-freckled, maybe Irish. Her father is a famous theoretical physicist. Cute girls have cute girlfriends. And Elle has dragged out a handful of Lab school cuties. Tamar is Donny's Greek girlfriend, Sandy is the only black girl in the clique. And there's Lisa, and Nona and Elle and Dora, a skinny Asian chick Asa and a bunch of other shorties.

The guys in this crew are some real solid, young motherfuckers. A lot all some type of Jew. I have brought along my little brother Benjamin to teach him the ways of it, even though he is only 12. My guy Donny Gold skates like a madman, smokes three blunts a day and never takes off the blue FR hat, cuts class incessantly. Case Yadger is a smart-ass joker who drinks like a fish, but won't smoke anything. I like to go over to his massive crib in on 53rd Street and box with his older brother. Donny and Case are both third-generation Russian Jews. Blake Braunstein is half-Indian, half-Hebrew but looks a little Latin. His father, a venture capitalist, is arranging to sell the Chinese Government a laser that destroys nuclear weapons. His mother is currently estranged from his father and is seeking a divorce. Nike's only brother Christopher is a savant pianist who used to bang out Paris Hilton so the rumor goes. There's Saul Metternich, who looks like a grunge skater with a worn red baseball cap and Isaac Zucker who we all call *Crack*. Both of them are Yids as well, but don't look like it. Godwin Okonkwo is a quiet and stuttering Nigerian with a White mother. He is the whitest Black man on earth all remind him and lives at Waterside. People call him an *Oreo Cookie*, which is crueler than it sounds. There's Max Pomegranate who was in this movie 'Searching for some fucking chess player', his whole fucking old country family was once wiped out by the Nat'ziz, maybe he has a grandma with some tattoos. Rammy Detroit is the one wasp, a diesel motherfucker. Hubert O'Domhnaill is the only Catholic, and by Catholic I mean red head freckled, *brolic* rude boy Mic.

My best dude Julius Zarr from my UNIS days is half-Lebanese, half-Italian. He lives in Stuy Town. He taught me about Ska music, how to grind, how to pick up girls, where to *cop* drugs and using lies on the authorities. He taught me how to fight dirty.

That then is the composition of said convoy and crew, an irregular underage drinking brigade. A bunch of Goddamn New York mutts.

I can see my little brother Benjamin in the crowd just ahead of me, young and innocent; sort of. He came with some little up-and-coming thug from his new public school. I heard the kid going on to my brother about the *Kings*. I am half worried about why he is around such delinquent company, not that I particularly know what a *King* is. Some spic gang.

My mind is drifting little as we wander East to the river and the Murphy Park.

Murphy Park is well situated between Stuy Town, the Power Plant and the FDR drive. It is secluded enough for drinking outside, weather permitting. There is one gate in and out of Murphy Park. This presents a bit of a problem should an elderly woman living on the fourth floor of the Peter Cooper housing development decide to call the police because there are drunk and rowdy teenagers partying a little too hard in the adjacent park.

We are sitting on the bleachers overlooking the field smoking a poorly wrapped blunt. Donny passes it my way. The weed comes from a dealer called Culture. We page said dealer and wait for a callback. He tells us to wait about an hour, which really means two or more. He shows up in some piece-of-shit car and one of us goes for a ride. He has twenties and fifties. We know he sells in greater quantity and quality, but this is all he will offer to people of our age and rep. There is another dealer named Cartoon Network that only sells 50s and up for higher prices than most of us can swing. And you need a buyer reference.

I am nursing my second 40. We kids mingle and drink, try and hook up. I leave the *ciphe* to talk to Elle Takaway, the cute ass half Chinese half Japanese girl, with the genius father from Socialist talk radio, from my bio class. Girl is fly.

We didn't hear the sirens until they were two blocks away. People started running from all corners of the park toward the main gate. I am still on the bleachers with Elle. My brother and Donny run up to ask what the plan is. It's run like hell. I fuckin' hate law men.

"Split into two groups and meet up near Union Square," someone yells like we're in B Double D horror movie.

Everyone is clutter-fucked at the gate unsure of where to flee. Forties are hastily emptied onto the ground, lobbed into the bushes. People split into two groups and rush off thinking two parties in an unfamiliar turf is somehow logical.

My group contains most of the males in the crew. The other group is substantially smaller than ours. As the sirens get louder, we take off in separate directions.

Everybody takes off hap hazard in two groups. Were there really even cops coming?

After smoking two blunts and polishing off our forties in that second PJ park, we head west on 14th Street. Max P. goes into the Ray's Pizza on the corner of Avenue A and 14th Street to get a slice. The rest of us are waiting outside, high out of our minds. Except for me. I am just really drunk, puffing slowly on a Philly, feeling pretty slick smoking the world's cheapest cigar.

A kid in a red Jordan jersey wanders up to me and asks me if I want to buy trees. He is showing them to me. It is obvious that all he has done is to pour oregano from the pizza place into a sandwich baggy.

"You think I'm fuckin' stupid *punto*?" I ask him. He yells back in Spanish.

I try to put out my cigar on his face. He jerks away. He starts cursing at me loudly in Spanish.

As we're crossing the street, a 40 bottle shatters next to me. A group of Puerto Rican kids are throwing 40s right at us. Max lobs one back. I do too.

"You cracka-ass motherfuckas!" one yells, "stay the fuck out of our 'hood!"

Another 40 almost lands on me. I see some empty Heineken bottles in an overflowing trash can and throw one across the street. Since I throw like a girl, it smashes against a parked car setting off the car's alarm.

"Like this!" yells Donny as he rips his half empty 40 at them.

It crashes on the roof of a cab across the street. I see Rammy fire off one that nearly hits the Puerto Ricans who are flinging at us.

We hear the police sirens and take off north into Peter Cooper Village. The park security guards riding around in a green double pig-in-a-box, get out of their car to try to stop us. Case body checks one as we dart past and get away. Rent-a-cop pigs in green don't run for shit. Pretty soon we hit the ramp over the highway from 23rd Street to the plaza at Waterside, my home territory.

4

Benny Adon is not exactly sure where his brother has gone. He isn't even entirely sure if proper directions was given to his group. Daliah keeps looking for a "small park." There are a lot of small parks throughout Stuy Town and the LES, but the other group isn't in any of them. Benjamin's group is wandering through Peter Cooper in the direction where they believe the park is located in, but not one of them are really from this hood and its all red brick and shit all looks the same.

"It would have been smart to have taken someone who knew where we were going with us," states Elle Takaway.

"I know where I'm going," insists Daliah, obliviously drunk.

"Sure ya do," mocks this kid Jackson.

"Wewwwwwewwererrr, so fucking lost," stutters Godwin.

“Look, I’ve hung out down here before. Just follow me and I’ll get us there,” she insists.

They stop in yet another small park. Benjamin takes a seat on the bench. It is a cool September night and he pulls the hoodie of his sweatshirt over his dirty blond hair. Daliah goes up to a group of Puerto Rican kids smoking weed on a bench at the edge of the park. Stuy and Peter Cooper are a maze of virtually identical red brick, short-story buildings.

“Wuz up, mommy?” one of them asks.

One of them gets up and tries to squeeze Daliah’s ass.

“Get the fuck away from me!”

“Or what? We’ll done fuck your faggot friends up.”

Benjamin comes to Daliah’s defense. Juan, his ghetto friend from school, runs over to get his back.

“Leave her alone, *puta*,” yells Juan.

“Come on Daliah, let’s get out of here,” says Elle.

Street violence happens fast over nothing important. The sound of a plastic bat hitting someone in the face sounds something a lot like, “FWAC!” Benjamin hears it as the kid nearest him gives him a crack. He yelps in surprise, but not really pain. A kid not old enough to shave or hold a hustle, had picked up a wiffel bat and cracked Benjamin across the face. Daliah tried to get out of the way but got whacked, too. Juan quickly jumps into the violence throwing punches and duffs the kid with the bat square in the face. Juan can kind of fight for a 12 year-old. He grabs the bat and starts frantically swinging it at anyone from that crew in reach. He aims the plastic bat like a spear in one kid’s eye. Benjamin recovers quickly and jumps on the kid who had hit him in the face. Juan gives the kid on the ground another kick. It is a peculiar fight being that all the kids are about eleven or twelve.

Stuy Town security rolls up and everybody scatters. The others from their crew flee leaving their friend lightly beaten on the asphalt.

A few blocks later Daliah is drunk and crying. Godwin comes over and puts his hand on her shoulder.

“Are y, y, you al-al all right?” he stutters.

“Those motherfuckers hit me,” she cries.

“I think we she-should ge-get back te to Waterside,” stuttered Godwin.

“The others will head over there anyway when they realize we can’t find the park,” says Daliah.

“What a fuckin’ rude evening,” mutters Benjamin Adon, still totally unsure of where his brother wandered off to.

The next thing I know I’m making out with Daliah Rodriguez at the bus stop. We all met up at Waterside Plaza and decided it was time to end the evening after the little mishap in Peter Cooper. I can’t remember what I have said to her to get her to kiss me, but here we are. I press her up against the side of a building holding her tight as we kiss. Withdrawn for a second, as if before was forgotten. In a pause:

“Ya wanna like, go out sometime?” I ask her.

“Go out where?” she giggles.

“Like be my, you know, my girl.”

“Yeah,” she says, “I’m with that babe.”

5

The streets are silent. I am being followed. Someone or something is stalking me down the cobblestone boulevard of New Lots Avenue. There is a gentle rain. Odd for this arid climate. The rain is blood. The crimson trickle stains my forehead and white garments as I quicken my pace. The weather here is always peculiar. A gray mist that covers the Pale City greatly limits my visibility.

The town is silent except for the clang of the rusty gears of the machinery working deep below the street surface. Whatever is pursuing me is getting closer. I can feel its presence. It hungers for me. It is hunting me, coming in for the kill. I begin to run through the side alley and into the square. I head toward the only place that I know where there are people, the game shop. An old man lives the north edge of the square with his wife and daughter. The shop specializes in restoring old board games.

I run quickly now. The thing is right behind me. I tear up the steps to the shop and bang on the large mahogany door, desperately seeking entrance. Any second now, the thing will be upon me. The old man opens the door. I push inside and bolt the lock shut.

“You look like you’re in a hurry,” he says.

His hands were combing his thick gray beard.

“Someone was....”

I have forgotten why I had come here.

“I came for my game,” I say, remembering he was restoring a board game for me.

“It is still missing the most important pieces. It will take time to ship them in.”

“Ship them in from where, old man?”

“From outside the Pale City, little pilgrim. Where trees still grow tall.”

I feel the same sickening déjà vu knowing this exchange has happened a thousand times before.

“What is beyond the city limits?” I ask.

“I have no idea,” he replies.

“Make something up,” I ask him.

“Life, lights and trees perhaps?”

I wake up in a cold sweat. More goddamn night terrorism. Only this time, I remember every detail clearly. I stumble toward the bathroom to get a glass of water. It is 3:03 am. I know that if I don't write down what I dreamt that by dawn the whole experience will be forgotten.

6

“What defines the moral standards of a society?” Dr. Maskin asks in his eighth period Global Studies class.

I'm making up for lateness by doing some overtime in his late session during my Thursday free period.

“Are we inexplicably bound by a predestined course or does the societal collective shape its own sense of justice and morality?”

He's pacing back and forth around the room.

“You all probably consider yourselves free agents, detached from the social mainstream of modern day America. But let me stress this. There are really only two schools of thought applicable to this debate. Either the individual determines his own fate, or external factors govern the way our lives progress.”

“I think society is shaped by the individuals within it and that each person subjectively determines how much or how little they are bound by its standards,” I respond.

“Ah, Mr. Adon, ladies and gentlemen, he enjoys my class so much that he comes twice a day.”

“I feel as though a person can define his own set of standards the further he can break loose from what most find so-called normal,” I posit.

“Everyone conforms, Mr. Adon. That is the very nature of society. You sacrifice a degree of individualism to obtain a greater sense of security.”

“Security is over rated, and the world is fucked, excuse my language. Freedom is my ability to flourish without the restraints of these social standards. Prove myself moral without being forced into it” I respond and people giggle.

“Your definition is Utopian at best, anarchistic at worst. Such a state cannot exist,” he counters.

“I differ to beg. Granted, it is the exception not the norm, that a person becomes truly free without the desire to exploit the weakness of those still oppressed, but you can’t make a blanket statement like ‘Everyone is a conformist.’ It’s not in our nature to just make babies and die, we’re not beasts.”

“Mr. Adon, there is nothing that you do that was not in some way influenced by your external environment and your genetics. Everything from your clothing, to the music you listen to, to the girls you go out with, was all based on patterns that society established for you. Those patterns, that set of social standards you adhere to, were formed by our society.”

“I don’t buy into all that sir.”

“Do you think you’re free, Mr. Adon.”

I pause to consider the question.

“I’m workin’ on it.”

He pauses then says smiling, “Well who are we to tell this rebel otherwise? Good luck with that Sebastian.”

“Thank you sir, in the immortal words of Captain Han Solo, We’ll need all the luck we can get.”

7

The third Murphy Park party ended much like the first with some little old woman calling the cops from her house in Stuyvesant Town seeing several dozen underage kids drinking forties and playing music in the park.

This time we mostly stayed together and ended up on a wharf half way between the power plant and the Waterside Plaza complex. Daliah seemed distant and when I asked her what the matter was she gave me static.

I hadn't seen her much outside of school since we started dating. Not to hook up or otherwise. This was the first time I'd had a girlfriend, and the fourth of fifth girl I've ever made out with. I hadn't gotten much of any attention in UNIS. My K-8 school clique I guess was the so called popular crowd. Whatever that meant. We didn't have jocks and over the students were diplo-brats, but I had thought our group was the popular clique even I felt barely in it. As far as people sitting together at lunch there were always three groups; the cool preppy white kids and two token black kids, the pot and skating clique that Julius and were in and the foreign diplo-brats however they arranged themselves.

I never had a girlfriend before Daliah. Even my first kiss had been somewhat social engineered by Julius Zarr. I had gotten kicked out of summer camp just months before for sneaking out to the girls barracks; but I think I hadn't gotten more than a couple kisses to show for that. I hadn't seen any breasts outside of play boy, had never gotten head, had never fingered anyone or had sex. To my knowledge almost no one had had sex yet. Most of us were fourteen and felt immense pressure to make that happen as fast as we could.

"Yo, woman, just leave me to my drinkin'."

These words ended my relationship with Daliah. It happened quickly just about two weeks later. Once again I was drunk. It had been meaningless, hasn't even gotten too far. The breakup was as unofficial and as sudden as the beginning. We were at Murphy Park for the second Friday night in two weeks. I had been right in expecting a greater attendance. Once again the law had routed us and our retreat had scattered us to a broken-down pier ten blocks north of the park. My dismissal of Daliah has sent her storming quickly in anger without saying good-bye. She had been going on about something.

I think it has something to do with a hurricane that may have killed or disappeared several family members in the Dominican Republic. Something rather legitimate like that.

But nothing that I could make a good or caring boyfriend enough to deal with. She had yelled at me for being absent all week when she needed me, and I told her off only because, no I have no idea why. I simply couldn't handle any feeling of empathy at all.

We link up with a whole clique of kids from the 40 Building called the Signs of Smoke Crew, most of which are Puerto Rican. Puerto Ricans are a special, special group enjoying most things about being white while denigrated by most activities affecting blacks. The wharf isn't

anyone's turf so there's no beef twenty or thirty out of neighborhood kids are drinking there. I feel sullen about Daliah.

That's the feeling of knowing you're an asshole.

Julius Zarr and I are sitting on the old pier overlooking the waters of the East River that are filled with eels and would make you slick with oil for a week if you dared to fall in. You would for sure get poisoned if the rip tides or hypothermia didn't do the job. The derelict remains of a Volkswagen are protruding out of the icy current. Just the remains of the passenger compartment peering up at us like a fucked up transformer.

"No great loss to lose that mouthy spic," Julius says.

"Girls are bitches. It's fuckin' true."

"Easy come, easy go, she wasn't even that cute."

"I'm retarded drunk my dude, I didn't need to be a dick to her. Her family might be dead."

"Dude, you can't be around negative people."

The world is spinning but I'm standing still, I will 'tip my bottle still for my homies that killed.' After drinking with Donny and Julius, and some skivvy looking ginger raver named Alex Borelli until near 2 am Donny and I headed back to waterside. After smoking a blunt.

Donny just asked out his long time crush Tamar the Greek shorty that's always around. He tells me not worry about Daliah, about having pissed her off. It happens, he says. She's fine, her family will be fine, Donny keeps re assuring me it isn't the end of the world.

"You guys were only together for like two weeks."

"She was the first person I ever asked out."

"Yeah, but then you never went anywhere," Donny laughs as we head home.

My Dad hears me fumbling with the key and opened the door for us. We stunk hard core of liquor, but he said nothing, let Donny and I in and go to sleep.

The next day we drove out with my Dad and brother to the *dacha* in the Hamptons.

8

My father had built the *dacha* in Long Island before he met my mother. After finishing dental school, he enlisted and was sent to Vietnam in 1967. Because he was a dentist they promoted him to Captain and attached him to the 198th Light Infantry Brigade based in Chu-Lai. He was awarded a Bronze Star for his work with the villagers and for designing a preventive dental program for the Army. He doesn't talk too much about the war. Whenever you ask him about it, he tells a story about how the villagers invited him to spend Tet with them in '68 and

how his commanding officer wouldn't let him go. It probably saved his life because that was the night the Vietcong launched the massive Tet Offensive.

After getting discharged he went traveling in Europe in a Volvo P1800. When he got back he built a dental practice on Staten Island, eventually saving the money to buy land and have a house built in East Hampton. The four-and-a-half acre property was ideal for a well-to-do dentist and his rabble-rousing friends. Before settling into the life of a family man, he played a young, wild bachelor. He never talked about that part of his life because he was afraid it would encourage my brother and me to get into trouble.

East Hampton is exactly what you make it to be. The lower brow you are, the more likely you are to have grandiose misconceptions about what it's like. These hedge fund, dot-com, corporate shit-bags found it in the nineties, but my Dad always says it was different when he bought land in the late 1970's. It was always an old money retreat by the water near Georgica Beach, but there were great local village communities and tons of artists. It was largely Jewish for a while, because Jews were excluded from American aristocracy beachfronts like Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

The Hamptons technically include East, West, and Southampton, Amagansett, Water Mill, Montauk, Bridgehampton and Sag Harbor. There's a lot of money being flashed around out there in the form of cars, homes and benefit galas.

I didn't grow up with that around me. It was just a weekend in the woods near the beach. It's was all green fields, forests, sand dunes, crystal clean blue-water beaches and the crash of Atlantic waves. It was campfire picnics on Main Beach and the Art Barge in the dunes and tumbleweeds of Montauk. It was my brother and I swimming, running, biking and going to Pathfinder's Day camp. It was movies and adopt-a-road trash pick-up on Two Holes of Water Road where my father subsidized a 25-cent a bottle or can pick-up rate for my brother and me to sweep and clear trash off a section of our road. It was a real nice place to escape the City. If the City is a rat race, they say it's a lobster race out there.

Donny and I ride bikes down back road trails rich with autumn foliage. The leaves have begun to fall and the way the light hits the trees makes it look like they are on fire. We hit a clearing in the woods and pause to rest and smoke cigarettes.

Back in New York City, Julius Zarr fumbles with the keys to 20 Waterside Plaza, Apartment 27 A. He's accompanied by a dozen or so of Sebastian's old friends from UNIS, among them Robert Lestor who looks a bit like Sebastian Adon, but chubbier with a ghetto lisp. He was born in Chile, but looks completely European. A middle class Jewish family had adopted him. He continues to fumble with the keys. He'd fumbled about like this in front of 27A, the Adon home, three times before over the summer. It was always a bitch to unlock that top lock.

They go in their 'friend's' house, do a ton of dope and whip its, steal a bunch of random shit. But Sebastian's mom isn't in Long Island, she comes home and finds the door bolted.

No way out but over and around. When my Mom unlocked the door, the safety chain was latched. She smelled pot smoke and heard voices and freaked out. Before she could even think of what to do, a dozen kids practically knocked her over dashing out the apartment and into the nearest staircase.

The Waterside rent-a-dopes didn't catch a damn anybody. The elevator cameras are not ever working, but my Mom recognizes Robert Lestor and Julius Zarr. And she mostly blamed me. One way or another for everything that's about to happen.

"He robbed the house," explains my brother.

"What the fuck?" I ask. It was more a statement than a question.

"Mom came home and they were there stealing shit--CDs, movies, cash. She said there were fifteen or so kids."

"Julius Zarr?" I ask, incredulously.

"Yeah."

"Is she fucking sure?"

"Dad thinks you gave him your keys," my brother informs me.

He was often the bearer of parental insight.

"I have my keys on me," I protest.

"Well tell that to Dad. He's livid."

"They robbed our house?"

"Yeah. Mom caught them in the act. They almost knocked her down on their way out."

Maybe Donny can see the look of revulsion on my face. I feel like I am going to be sick.

"What's the next move?" Donny asks.

I thought for a moment. My best friend had truly stabbed me in the back. Made himself a robber in my home. A rat yellow bastard. The blow strikes me hard like a fist. The person I trust the most in the world had betrayed me completely and publically. He's sold me cheaply. I try to imagine why he did it and who else was involved? I pause before I answer Donny's question. I resort to the basest of human emotions.

"The only question I have for you, Donny, and for anyone else is: Are you gonna help me hit this bastard back?"

The hateful little fuck. Roughly \$200 bucks in cash, gift certificates, and jewelry had been taken. About twelve CDs were missing. That was the extent of the tangible robbery, but they'd taken far more.

My mother had found empty beer bottles and whip it casings scattered around the apartment. The sheets on our beds stank of sex. She was hysterical. She cursed my friends, accusing me of orchestrating the whole thing. It had not been Julius Zarr alone. Robert Lestor had been there, another pretty close friend. So had Kimberly Babiano, the girl who had ODeD on pills and poison in my home a year before. All the people at UNIS whom I had considered friends had been in my apartment stealing things. We dropped Donny off with his mother out in Greenport on Long Island and returned to the City. My Mother was on the verge of yet another nervous breakdown. Obviously the whole mess was my fault. It always was according to my Mom.

“You little shit,” she yells as I entered the apartment, “Your trash heap friends stole from our house, had sex in our beds, and did drugs all over the place! You gave them those keys, you little asshole.”

“Bitch I never gave anyone keys!” I yell back.

She gets up in my face and slaps me as hard as she can. The bible says you can stone to death a child for cursing their own parents.

“You little fucking bastard! Look at the kind of people you hang out with! They used you. They knew you would let them party here! I feel like I've been raped!”

When my mother gets angry, she gets really angry. She is sobbing, pausing only to heap abuses upon my father and me.

“And you!” she points to my Dad. “You let him get away with this bullshit. Tell the little shit he's grounded!”

My brother retreats to his room. As usual, I would fuck up and he would later comfort my mother back to a reasonable degree of sanity.

“Sebastian,” says my father, “until we know what happened consider yourself under house arrest.”

“I didn't fucking do anything!”

“Shut up, you little shit,” she shrieks.

“Tell this bitch I didn't do anything!”

“Don’t talk to your mother like that,” my father implores, knowing it is already out of control between my Mom and me.

“I’m calling the cops!”

“Don’t bother,” my Dad replies.

“Why the hell not, Dad? We know who did it!”

“I talked to Gary Zarr earlier today. Julius Zarr is grounded and Gary has agreed to give us \$500 to replace anything that was taken,” my Dad announces.

“That isn’t fair! He needs to pay for what he did. I’m gonna fuck that kid up!”

“You won’t do anything. It has been settled. The only thing you should be doing is thinking long and hard about who your friends are,” my Dad adds with exasperation and sadness.

My father always attempted to turn a negative situation into a paternal moral lesson.

“This is bullshit. I’m gonna settle this in his bloody face.” I add clearly missing my Dad’s “lesson.”

“Look at you with your ghetto street trash mentality,” screams my mother. “Real life isn’t a movie. You don’t settle things like a nigger!”

“GO FUCK. I’m gonna handle this right.”

“No. You’re grounded.”

“Fuck you! I’m out of here.”

I storm out of the apartment slamming the door behind me. I headed south via the highway toward Peter Copper Village and Stuyvesant Town where he lives. Where I’ve been hanging out with him since I was younger than 9.

Eventually I get to my best friend’s house.

Julius Zarr’s eyes look dead and sunken. He has a bruise under his right eye where his father had cracked him in the face. In his family the father could wield a belt and the son would take it with stubborn silence. I am sitting in the easy chair in his room staring at him. His eyes are filled with pain and disgust.

“I just gotta know, Julius. Why? For fuck sake, why?” I ask.

No response.

“What the Hell did I do to you to warrant this bullshit?” I try again.

“You didn’t do anything,” he finally says softly.

“SO WHY, YOU FUCK? WHY DID YOU FUCKING ROB MY HOUSE?!” I yell.

He is silent once again.

“I need to know why you betrayed me, Julius. I thought you were my friend!!”

“I am your friend.”

“Oh, that makes it better I suppose. FUCK YOU! With friend like you, motherfucker, you know how it goes.”

“Look, I think you should leave,” he says.

“I’m not leaving ‘til you give me an answer.” I state emphatically.

“Look, I’m all fucked up. I wasn’t thinking. There’s no deeper reason behind it. You didn’t DO anything. We were just bored with nowhere to go. No one went there looking to steal. It ALL JUST HAPPENED.”

“I trusted you,” I say, painfully.

“I guess you put your trust in the wrong place.”

There isn’t anything else to say. As I turn to leave, I trip on a stack of books strewn across his messy bedroom. My moment of anger, my soul searching righteous demand for answers had ended in a bungling stumble out the door. Of all times for my coordination to fail me.

Julius Zarr had given me no reason for his actions. I walked out of his apartment resolved to retaliate. I had really wanted to forgive him. Instead, my hate consumes me. I am living for the moment I might see him dead. There is no other way. I cannot live down such a grievous betrayal, even if I still loved him like a brother.

9

Nicolas Taylor Trickovitch is sitting on the roof of his building overlooking the Jersey skyline. He can climb through a series of trap doors and ladders to the

towering upper roof -level of his apartment building, above the enclosed water tower, for an excellent view of the City. During the summer Nick brings girls up here.

Nick is alone. The clamor of the apartment below is gone. His neurotic mother and quarrelling twin brothers can offer no distraction. Nick savors moments like this, moments when he can be alone to think. They are vitally important to maintain his guise of sanity. Nick looks down into the windows of adjacent buildings with his binoculars. All these people in this city living their lives so pointlessly. He wonders if people ever take the time to reflect on their meaningless existences. He runs his fingers through his thick black hair. His baggy pants blow in the wind. The wife-beater he is wearing is hardly appropriate for the weather, but the cold never bothers him.

His cell phone rings. He is a pioneer among young people who have their own cell phones. No one else at this time had anything besides pagers.

“Hello.”

“Trickovitch, its Donny. There’s gonna be a fight on Friday and we need some extra help.”

“Can I bring my sword?” Nick asks.

“Whateva’s cleva.”

“Whose brawl?”

“The new guy from Bronx Science, Sebastian Adon.”

“I heard about him from Daliah. Didn’t sound too mellow this beef.”

“Rude boy got his robbed by his oldest friend.”

“Ok, he’s good people?”

“Yeah, he’s my boy, he’s in the BMC crew, and we gotta have his back.”

“He wants blood?”

“Some blood, but it’s a couple people we gotta retaliate against protected by some Latin crew SOS maybe. Private school kids hiding behind some inner cities.”

“Oh, there will be blood.”

10

Everyone in the apartment is asleep. I have tossed and turned for hours, but sleep continues to allude me. I feel like having a cigarette.

The stairwell door creaks closed behind me as I take a seat on the stairs. I reach into my pocket for a Parliament and light it with my Zippo.

My father is fairly blasé when it comes to my brother and me smoking and drinking. As long as we get home on time and keep making good grades in school, our extra-curricular activities are of little concern to him. My mother, on the other hand, is disgusted with smoking and drinking. She spent the early seventies teaching kids Spanish in the Midwest. The sub-culture of resistance and free love were of little concern to her.

Like most teen smokers I fight a losing battle with inevitability. As many times as I use gum to hide the smell of smoke on my breath or cologne to get the stench out of my clothes, there will eventually be that time when she will find out. Maybe she'll find a pack while cleaning up my room. Maybe she'll begin to wonder why I leave the house every forty minutes or after dinner. One way or another she'll find out. Mothers always do. They are close to omniscient when it comes to their children.

I put out my cigarette and drop the butt down the stairwell watching it fall several stories. I hear the hum of the neon lights and stare at the off blue color of the sterile stairway walls.

Tomorrow everyone's coming downtown to track some of these mother fuckers down and tear new ones.

11

We met up on the south steps of Union Square. We are rolling deep. It is the usual suspects on a determined mission to get drunk, march into Stuy Town and find rest of the people responsible for robbing my house. Nicholas Trickovitch has dressed in a black trench coat and black Boonie hat. Concealed under the coat was a large and very real Katana sword accompanied by a medium sized knife and a small blue crowbar.

“You must be Sebastian Adon,” says Nick extending his hand.

“I must. Nick Trickovitch I presume?”

We exchange a pound, four fingers lock and the thumbs snap off each other.

“So who are we looking to get?” Nick asks.

“The kids who robbed my house.”

“Where can we find these shit bags?”

“They normally hang out on the Plaza.”

“How many combatants?”

“A few. No more than twenty. Probably closer to four.”

Nicholas Trickovitch turns to the others in the crew and gives pounds all around. Nick knows most of them from middle school but did not test high enough on the public school admissions exam to join them at Bronx. He instead, attends the lesser of the three “elite” magnet public high schools, Brooklyn Tech.

We head east toward the river and the FDR highway underpass. No one had bought any alcohol. We try to get some from the delis on the way, but no one will sell to us. There were about fifteen of us. Daliah, Tamar, and Elle were the only girls in the group. We rolled up through Stuy town and Peter Cooper, but didn’t find our quarry.

We’d broken into small groups to try and find Robert Lestor or Julius Zarr, in the old school way, if our crew came up on another crew like SOS, or UNIS we could fight them enmasse or I could fight one D with one of my targets.

It begins to drizzle. Waterside Plaza is the only place they could be.

I live at Waterside in building number 20, apartment 27A. The complex hangs on the edge of the lower East River and consists of four towers erected around a large open plaza. Each tower is 34 stories tall. Buildings number 10, 20, and 30 are middle income housing, while building 40 is designated for lower income families. There are ten apartments on each floor, twelve in building 40. There is a playground in the center of the plaza. On the periphery of the plaza is an A&P supermarket, a restaurant, Po-Ling’s barbershop, and a small bodega. There is red brick on the exterior of each apartment tower, with spotlights shining from the rooftops on to the plaza during the night.

Waterside Plaza has a small army of security guards. It is their job to make sure delinquent kids do not get too out of hand and lower the quality of life at

Waterside. Back when I attended UNIS, the security guards used to chase us around the catwalks, stairwells, and promenades as we set off firecrackers and threw water balloons at cars and pedestrians. During those good old days of troublemaking there was a good chase at least once a week. The guards only caught us once or twice. The penalty for getting caught was a stern warning of possible eviction to our parents. The management of Waterside Plaza is anxious to evict as many people as possible because so many tenants have rent stabilized apartments. If they can put together enough evidence to evict, they can re-rent the apartment for the market rate that is often double what the previous tenant had been paying. My family had lived at Waterside Plaza for twenty-three years. Our apartment is a reasonably large, two-bedroom apartment with a view of Brooklyn and the lower Manhattan skyline.

Saul and I got to Waterside ahead of the group. Some of the others wanted to smoke a blunt and you can't really do that at Waterside, we decide to meet back up by 7pm in the 10 building lobby on the Plaza. No one besides Nick has a cell phone.

We spot a large group of kids from the Signs of Smoke (SOS) crew. Most of the kids in SOS are from the 40 building, which is Mitchell-Lama public subsidized housing. They roll about twelve deep and are all male. A crew is like a small unofficial gang. White people have crews because they mostly can't join gangs. But a crew or a fraternity operates under the exact same principles.

Our crew, the only real freshman crew, is called the Bacardi Mafia or (BMC). We're really more about drinking than fighting.

I know a kid named Josh in the SOS crew. When the house got robbed Robert blamed the SOS crew for the robbery. Since most of them are on the 40 building notice of eviction black-list anyway, Josh and his boys are more than willing to settle the score with us by hunting down the kids involved.

At this point it has become clear that Robert Lestor was the main person behind the break-in. He was the one who had our apartment keys. Benjamin had told us that Robert got the keys during a party I had thrown back in 8th grade. That had been the night Kimberly Babiano, an Italian broad ODeD on pills and whiskey in my stairwell and had to be taken to Bellevue Hospital ER. Since that fateful night, Robert had been visiting the apartment whenever we were away in Long Island.

It was Robert Lestor or Alex Borelli we were hoping to find tonight.

Saul and I smoked a joint in the light rain while the others finally caught up with us in the 10 building lobby where we set our rendezvous point, we're about an hour late.

"Where did you go?!" yells Elle. She gets up all furious and shit, I've never seen her this pissed.

“We went to smoke,” Saul states.

“We’ve been waiting here for about an hour. We had no idea where the Hell you were! This isn’t even our hood and we thought something happened to you.”

“Sorry.” I say, not really meaning it.

Why was this bitch getting up in my face over nothing?

“You’re always sorry, Sebastian. You were sorry last Saturday when you stood up Daliah and me for two fucking hours.”

She continues to steam.

“Listen, I told you we couldn’t find you,” I lie.

“Don’t give me that BS, we’ve been here in the lobby.”

She is really angry. I have never heard Elle yell before.

“There are basic things people do when they are friends. One of those things is to show up on time when you say you’re going to meet somebody. How can you be so fucking inconsiderate?!!”

I think it is a rhetorical question.

“I don’t have to deal with this shit on a Saturday night,” I respond.

I notice that spic-bitch Daliah nearby smirking her ass off as if she has achieved some victory in exposing my nature and ways.

“You’re a fucking asshole, Sebastian!” Elle yells slapping at me. I fend her off. At that point she storms away from me. Fuck the bitch too. It is really pouring now. All the West Side kids hang tight because we are easily four avenues from the nearest subway. Everyone just takes shelter under the over passes of Waterside plaza.

Less than ten minutes later Elle Takaway and that kid Nick Trickovitch are hooking up in toy cop guard booth at the edge of the plaza. Tamar and Donny are going at it in the Building 10 lobby. Daliah and Saul split a cab going west. The rest of us stand around smoking cigarettes bull shitting. Godwin and Sam Roebling had gone off to find a bathroom. Sam isn’t in the Bacardi Mafia. He just came along for the ride. He is a nice kid, athletic type with dirty blond hair. Never talks much.

“Run yo shit,” said the big Black kid with the box cutter.

Three other kids have surrounded Sam and Godwin and forced them up against the brick wall. They had been looking for a bathroom when some thugs accosted them.

“I said, RUN YO SHIT!” the big Black kid repeated.

He sticks the box cutter in Sam’s face. Sam and Godwin quickly empty their pockets handing their wallets to a small Hispanic kid. The four kids take off heading for the walkway leading down to Peter Cooper and the United Nations School.

“We just got robbed by some ghetto kids,” Sam stammers.

“Which way did they go?” I ask.

“Down the walkway heading towards Peter Cooper.”

“D-De-Don’t bbb-both-er-er,” stuttered Godwin.

I start running toward the walkway at full speed. I used to run track at UNIS. I can see a group of four kids walking underneath the FDR drive. I sprint to catch up with them. As I get closer I notice that the Hispanic kid looks really familiar. It is Josh.

“Yo, wait the fuck up,” I yell.

“Be out, *cracka*.” Says the big black kid with the box cutter.

They quicken their pace.

“Josh, why the fuck did you rob my friends?” I ask.

“I said, be out. You wanna get fucked up, White boy,” the big Black kid asks.

“Give me back the money you took!” I demand.

The big Black kid turns around and puts the box cutter right up to my face.

“BE. OUT!!!” he yells at me, looking crazy.

At a moment like this, my base survival instincts should kick in and dump adrenalin into my kidneys--self-preservation fueled by the para-sympathetic nervous system, some fight and flight shit. I, however, am not experienced with this particular situation. I guess my epinephrine levels are on a slower delay. I

simply freeze in the light rain, this nigger's box cutter a couple inches from my right eye.

"Put down the shiv, nigga!" yells Josh at his friend.

"Fuck that, tell whitebread to be out!"

"I said put down the blade, nigga. I know this kid." Says Josh.

He looks at me crazy, like an animal in a cage that got the jump on the circus clown with the whip.

"Who you think yo is?" he asks me quiet. "He better not follow my ass."

The big Black kid withdraws and then takes off in the rain down the ramp toward the highway underpass on 14th Street with his boy, leaving the two Spanish kids with me.

"Gimmie back their money," I demand again.

Josh and the other kid look at me like I'm crazy and stupid.

"You lucky you done ain't got robbed too, *whitebread*," mutters this other SOS punk.

"Why'd you do some fool shit and chase us, kid?" Josh says dropping posture a minute.

"I can't have people stealing from my friends at the plaza," I declare.

"Look nigga, I didn't know those were your boys," Josh responds.

"Just give me the money you took off 'em and its squared."

He gives me a look.

"You stupid," he smirks and then reaches in jacket pocket.

He hands me two empty wallets. He then pulls a roll of bills out of his pocket, probably all singles except for the twenty he peels off. I didn't know how much was actually stolen.

"Settled?" he asks me in the rain. It was the very least he could have done.

"Look, I gotta be strait with you, my nigga. Your old buddies Julius Zinn and Robert Lestor are tight with mad heads in SOS. Their friends cop weed off my

friends. Your crew isn't welcome around Waterside no more. Unless you want trouble, I wouldn't bring muscle to the plaza if I was you. Shit might pop off." he warns me.

"Fuck that," I say, "My block too."

"But remember, Sebastian, you gotta come home every day, and you can't always roll sixteen deep. They all know where you live. Hell, some heads in SOS were in your crib the day it got robbed. I like you, nigga. I known you since we were kids, but don't make me choose between you and my loyalties. I can't protect you if you go and start a war over some stupid shit."

"So that's how it's gonna be?" I ask.

"That's how it's gonna be. Watch your ass for the next few weeks. Robert might pull some shit. "

"Thanks for not too much, my man."

Josh shrugs and heads off after his boys.

I give Sam and Godwin their money back. Not quite a proud night for anybody. Didn't find Julius. Didn't find Robert or Alex. Pissed off Elle completely.

Trickovitch is beaming though happy with whatever he got in the guard booth. I'm grateful that he came out to have my back, could have done without him taking off with a girl a liked. I find out later Daliah was his first kiss.

12

Julius Zarr had given me no justification for his actions. I had walked out of my apartment resolved to retaliate, but confronting him directly I couldn't bring myself to do anything. Mobilizing a small war party for a fruitless witch hunt would be futile unless I could ensue Julius being somewhere. A brown haired skinny prep that I knew from UNIS Jack Cawley agreed to lure Julius out of his house so we could jump him.

Beginning another new tradition I moved onto Donny Gold's couch for a few days to escape heat at home. My hate consumes me. I cannot live down such a grievous insult, even if I still love him like a brother.

The first raid was basically fruitless.

My crew shares this conclusion. Donny is still down for a good fight. So is Case Yadger, and so is everybody else because they all knew they'd request the same aid if they had suffered this kind of injury. By the end of the week our crew, the Bacardi Mafia, is lined up to help me get retribution on Julius Zarr and the others involved.

Despite all the external distractions, I could think of only one thing, the crunching sound a bat makes when it is brought down on someone's head. The color the pavement turns when it is wet with blood. The anguished cry that comes when a person is beaten half to death.

"He'll be down in five minutes," announces Jacky Jack Cawley, another old UNIS friend whose lured Julius out of his house on some pretext.

"Just get him out of the building and we'll take care of the rest," I declare.

We are waiting off to the side of the entrance to 3 Stuyvesant Oval. I watch the falling leaves tumble from the trees and the children playing in the adjacent playground. An elderly couple walks by giving us a suspicious look as if we are about to commit a crime. Fitting, I think.

I clench the bat tight in my hand and take a practice swing. Donny gives me a nod as if he knows what I am thinking. To the others, this is just a part of being a city teenager. Standing up for your friends. To me, more. It goes beyond *rep* at this point. It is a matter of betrayal and someone has to pay. Case points toward the entrance. Julius Zarr emerges and heads toward Jacky Jack Cawley.

"Now or never, Sebastian," says Donny.

He is less than twenty feet away from me. I signal with my hand for the crew to move in. Before Julius Zarr knows what is happening, he is surrounded. I know everyone is waiting for me to take the first blow.

"Just do it," he says, wincing.

And then I freeze. I can't bring myself to hit him. Everyone just looks at me waiting.

"Just fucking get it over with," he says

"I'll ask you one more time," I half bitch mutter, "Why?"

He looks at me with sunken eyes. I am holding the bat ready to swing it into his face. People stop to watch what is going on. It is now or never.

"I'm sorry," he says quietly. "I never meant for it to go down like that."

I pause, muscles tense, ready to swing. It is now or never.

Donny looks at Case. Rammy takes a step forward. Max blocks the entrance to the building. Half Indian-Half Russian Jew Blake Braunstein looks at Jack Cawley. Godwin the Nigerian speaks.

“Ya-ya d-don’t ha-have to d-do it.”

“Fuckin’ smash him!” says Donny Gold.

But there with my guns drawn, my crew’s fists good to fly, I tell everyone to back away, to back down. In the end I don’t do anything. I do nothing to my old best friend, who I’d half grown up trying to emulate. He is now transformed into an enemy and a stranger.

He looks really sad and broken; he already has two black eyes. I bet his Dad hits harder than I do. Everyone here is from a nice middle and upper middle class family, playing hard for very little. Fronting all over the goddamn place, like would Holden Caulfield blush.

Nothing worse than betrayal. Well maybe self-aware hooligans.

Never mind, we’re all just animals in this concrete jungle of ours.

I hit him in the ribs with the bat. Again and again, and then I start kicking him, punching him. Hitting him over and over again, and then everyone jumps in. Everyone is kicking him as hard they can.

He’s all bloody and fucked up.

Nicolai Trickovitch takes out a large flask and dumps lighter fluid all over him.

I give him one more hard kick and spit. And I toss a match on him. Just enough fluid to burn up his north face and son him like a punk. Whoosh, Julius goes up in low burning flames as he flails around on the ground to put it out. We all take off running when we hear sirens.

13

Nicholas Trickovitch had been getting with Katja Boz, for about two weeks. They aren’t exactly going out, but it isn’t as if they are getting with other people. Or so she thought, until Daliah told her that Nikh hooked up with Elle Takaway in the rain in Waterside plaza.

Katja has long black hair and elf ears. She is cute in girl-next-door-might-be-a-whore sort of way. They had met at his friend Dorothy’s birthday party at the church on 79th and West End. It was a drunken hook-up that had worked its way toward fuck-friend status. Katja is a Dutch Jew who went to Bronx Science.

There will be another Rock Party in three days. Nick Trickovitch had heard that the Murphy Park parties weren’t going to happen anymore since each one ends

with someone getting hit in the face or robbed. This would make each successive Rock Party a little bit bigger. Nick was ultimately aiming toward a Bacchanalia. If only he could get his friends to wear togas. Now that would be something.

Nick eased his fingers underneath Katja's shirt and caressed her breasts with his hand. She rubbed his crotch. Pulling off her shirt he began sucking on her left nipple.

Nick feels that it is important to establish with every attractive girl that he meets, that eventually they are going to fuck. Too many guys lose out because they make a friendly first impression. It is a skill Nick learned back in eighth grade. To truly pull it off requires a combination of witty conversation, proper eye contact, and as much touching as you can get away with.

"I'm freezing," says Katja, "Can we take this down stairs?"

"Sure," said Nick pulling his fingers out of her.

They walk down the stairwell until they reach the penthouse level where Nick lives. His family's home on the 15th floor is a rent-stabilized penthouse. His parents remember way back in the 80's when the neighborhood was still sort of bad. Giuliani has rolled back the dregs of Harlem twenty blocks at least.

Nick's father is a neurologist, which is fitting, considering his mother is pleasantly insane. Catherine Trickovitch is in treatment for bi-polar disorder. A loving mother and upbeat person for someone her age, Catherine's medication isn't quite keeping the disease in check.

Nick has twin little brothers named Raffy and Toby. They are nearly identical in appearance although Toby is far more intelligent. The Trickovitch residence is a crazy place to be. The five-person, slightly dysfunctional Trickovitch clan are not the only creatures to reside in the penthouse. Fond of animals, the Trickovitch's own two tanks of fish, three turtles, a cat, a snake, a lizard and two French Angora mountain rabbits that resemble something of a cross between a cat and a hamster.

Nick's room resembles the captain's quarters of a submarine on LSD. The walls are painted arterial red. He sleeps in an elevated bed with leopard print sheets. A desk and computer are under the bed. Nick is fascinated with technology and considers himself something of hacker. This self-perception had been validated by the movie *Hackers*. A set of katana blades hangs from the wall along with a set of black and white photos depicting scenes from Vietnam and World War Two. There is a highway stop sign on the wall that he had found just outside of Rosendale where his parents have a country house. Next to it is a bookshelf with a cow skull on top of it. The bookshelf contains volume upon volume of *Chose Your Own Adventure* books. Nick always gets himself killed while reading them. A battered parking meter leans against the wall near a box of tools that Nick has

employed in an attempt to open it. The glass face has been shattered open. Nick has begun looking for a jackhammer. He is certain that he will get the thing open. The last resort scenario is just to lob it off the side of a building. But that is the surest way to lose all the coins.

Nick threw Katja on the bed. He's ready to get down to business, although he is relatively certain that the business would not involve sex.

Katja really, really likes Nick. She feels completely played hearing that he may have other girls on the side. But she isn't going to pick a fight about it. She's just gonna give up a little more keep him interested. So she sucks his cock.

That evening the cops grabbed up Robert Lestor for something minor and stupid at Waterside. They put Robert in cuffs and searched him for weapons. They found a fake ID, a box cutter, an extendable riot baton that cops lovingly call a 'nigger beater', a ninja star, an eighth of magic mushrooms, and a twenty bag complete with a silver pipe--really quite a superfluous amount of illegal nonsense for a young 14 year-old punk to be carrying around.

They grabbed him for petty vandalism with a magic marker. The cops had a good laugh about the ninja star. They dragged him over to the Midtown South precinct and had his parents come get him without booking him because he was young, and pretty white. He assured them he wasn't gang affiliated and that the drugs weren't his. He got released without going to central booking.

I never saw the kid ever again. I heard his parents copped a deal with a judge and he got sent off to some locked-up rehab, behavior modification type jump off center Mid-Country. What goes around comes around they say.

We didn't catch up with Alex Borelli until much later, but we got him really hard when we did. As for the girls that were there for the robbery; three girls I'd known since kindergarten; Jasmine Hume, Marely Razutti and Jessica Babiyono; well it didn't matter as much. Jessica B had almost died at my first and only Waterside house party. She had almost died mixing pills and booze. Robert had taken the keys off me at that same party.

We'd jumped Julius Zinn and lit him on fire. Robert had been disappeared. We'd get to Borelli eventually. As for the three bitches left, I didn't have any more hate to go around on this particular issue.

Now it's October.

I have been spending a lot of time at Donny's house these days because it is way too volatile at home. Every time I came home my Mom is screaming over this or that. So, as a result I am spending more and more time at the houses of my friends. There seems to be little I can do to make my Mother happy these days. She is determined to make sure I lead a productive and healthy life. She is absolutely convinced that I am drinking and smoking weed. During her daily tirades she accuses me of being a drug addict, of being an ungrateful son, and every other slander a mother can inflict upon a child. I guess she's doing it out of love. We both have very short fuses and the slightest provocation quickly turns into a screaming match. I can avoid the confrontations by never being home.

I finally get Elle to go out on something of a date. Fencing and opera on a Wednesday.

Wednesday falls in the middle of the week. There are good days and bad days, party days and study days. Despite popular misconception Sunday is the last day of the week, not the first. Sunday is the worst day of the week. This is the day the weekend ends and all the last minute studying is done. People presume that Sunday is a good day for studying. I think it's a good day for being hung over. Monday and Tuesday are equally bad. These are the days that encompass what I call *the hump*. The hump is the meat of the school week, the time in which the desperation of existence begins to set in. It is a period defined by its lack of proximity to the weekend. Wednesday isn't too bad because you know that the week is almost over. It's all downhill from there.

My suit doesn't fit. It's about two sizes too small. My arms run longer than the sleeves by about four inches and the jacket restricts my movement. Guess I haven't had to attend anything half classy in a hot minute.

The opera music is horrible. I'm not entirely sure how I was tricked into this. I think while trying to have sex with a half Japanese girl. Elle is sitting next to me pale with freckles. She looks amazing and amazed, like she really likes this opera stuff. She's wearing a slinky black dress that she changed into when I picked her up from Gotham, her fencing studio.

I've wanted to hook up with her for a while.

My brother had outright refused to come. After a lengthy fight with my parents, it was agreed that I should bring a friend in his place. This was my second opera. I had seen *La Boheme* in the sixth grade. It needed subtitles and a rock set.

For the life of me I could not remember the name of the performance or make out a single word, maybe this opera is *La Boheme*. It is in Italian. It might as well be in gibberish. I don't

believe anyone really enjoys opera. They must go purely to appear sophisticated. My parents are always going on about how kids don't take enough advantage of the wealth of New York City culture. For as long as I can remember, they have always brought my brother and me to Broadway shows.

During the intermission I manage to convince a middle-aged hipster to buy me a Jack and Coke. It's pretty watered down and I wonder what kind of guy buys younger kids booze.

I close my eyes taking in the music, tuning reality out. I'm getting real good at doing this. I concentrate on an idea, and fade out.

The theatre is empty. The walls are gray. The seats are red. Not some subtle off red, but bright as fuckin' scarlet. I'm wearing a white suit. Arabic music is playing loudly in the background intermixing with techno.

The walls of the theater begin crumbling upwards into the heavens, ceiling first. The theatre is metamorphosing around me. I see Elle dancing on the stage spinning and thrusting with her sword, enacting some arcane, ritualistic death mantra, fighting imaginary demons of the night. The metamorphosis continues.

Now I can see the sky. I hold a glass of red wine in my left hand, a pocket watch dangling from my right. The steel and concrete are replaced with marble. The modern opera hall now has the look of a Roman amphitheater. The music is getting louder. Elle dances faster and faster. The amphitheater gets bigger and bigger. I can see the endless desert behind the stage. I sip the wine.

Elle looks beautiful, her movements quick and fluid. I notice that there are no stars. A million candles ignite one by one illuminating the stage. Faceless soldiers in black uniforms march in formation toward where Elle stands. She has stopped dancing. There is a look of terror in her eyes. I try to stand up, to call out to her to warn her they are coming. I cannot move from my seat. I take another sip of wine. It is thick and bitter, almost metallic. The wine is blood. The soldiers surround Elle. One of them knocks her to the ground. They all begin kicking her. I shout out, but no sound escapes my lips. Finally after what feels like hours they drag what's left of her beaten body off the stage. I get a glimpse at what is left. Her black dress is in tatters. She has been beaten beyond recognition as if to say back into a clot.

The theatre begins to fade. All I hear is the sound of applause.

I come to with a start. Instinctually I look over toward Elle. I am relieved to see she is still all right. Everyone in the theatre is clapping. The audience is giving the performers a standing ovation. Elle looks beautiful and smiles at me.

"Wake up sleepy. You've gone and missed the whole the thing," She says sweetly.

The cab drops Elle at her father's home on 125th Street. She lives near the river where the neighborhood is pretty upper middle class. We snuggled in the cab, but I didn't get the go for it kiss me vibe. She can tell I like her.

The nightmares have begun creeping into my waking life. I must feign control. I can only describe the sensation I am having as remembering. Remembering something absolutely horrible. I've been hanging a bit more with Nikh, the brother who helped me get revenge on the people who robbed the house.

Nicholas Trikhovitch, this new drinking buddy of mine has been getting with this girl Katja Boz, for about five weeks. They aren't exactly going out, but it isn't as if they are getting' with other people, except Nick got with Elle twice, Julie Shoot one and another girl named Stacy. Katja has long black hair and elf ears. She is cute in girl-next-door-might-be-a-whore sort of way. They had met at his friend Dorothy's birthday party at the church on 79th and West End. It was a drunken hook-up that had worked its way toward fuck-friend status. Katja is a Dutch Jew who goes to Bronx Science. The Murphy Park parties die, with my short rep, now it's all about Rock Parties Upper West and I'm the one whose gotta make that trek.

Nicholas and a kid named Izzy found a big secluded Rock in Riverside Park off 83rd street and figured while warm it was suitable place to get hammered.

There will be another Rock Party in a couple days. Nikh Trikhovitch had heard that the Murphy Park parties weren't going to happen anymore since each one ends with someone getting hit in the face or robbed. This would make each successive Rock Party a little bit bigger. Nikh was ultimately aiming toward a true Bacchanalia.

Nick's front door is open a lot so I just go into the big creature habituated, wall to wall book shelved mega apartment of the Trickovitch tribe. I knock on the door to his room, but hear a moan so go hang out in the living room.

Nikh pushes Katja Boz giggling off the bed, as I peak into the room.

"Welcome to back to Babylon brother," he says passing me a *spliff*.

Katja Boz waves to me, wrapping herself in a bed sheet, scampering off to the bathroom to spit out cum. However, hip-hop tells us that bad bitches swallow.

15

We met on the green benches on the traffic island of 86th and Broadway. Nicholas Trikhovitch gives orders. He is directing people to the non-carding deli on 84th and Amsterdam and telling people to make more calls of invitation while greeting old friends and new acquaintances.

Some people say they don't like the taste of beer. I don't mind it at all. We drink purely to get drunk, but there are some subtle differences between a Red Dog and Woodchuck or a Heineken versus a Colt 45, or an Olde English 800, a Ballantine and a Miller Light. A 40 tastes like shit if you've ever had a European half-liter on tap. Since most of this crew hasn't, they have no basis for comparison. For roughly two bucks you can help yourself to an array of choices. They taste about the same served in 22, 32, or 40 oz glass bottles that we wrap in brown bags, as if that fools a cop or makes us any less underage. It's all malt piss water. The only real variation is a Woodchuck, which tastes something like apple cider and costs a bit more at \$3.50. Our crew mostly goes with either Red Dog or Woodchuck. Olde English and Colt 45 are more watered down and maybe only a quarter cheaper. The more hip-hop influenced kids jump on these. The girls mostly buy wine coolers or Coronas. You'll never see a guy with a wine cooler. Not unless he's faggot. We all look like we're 12 years old. Bars and liquor stores are out of the question. In a year or two we'll start mass-producing fake IDs on Photoshop and some of us, especially the ones of us that can grow facial hair, will be able to get into some East Village or Williamsburg dive bars where the levels of police scrutiny are lower. For now we're strictly seedy parks, 40s and house parties.

I watch the crowd grow on the Broadway traffic island at 86th. Nikh is still giving orders like a teenage general with a deep-seated need to promote underage drinking. Blake Braunstein has started a hack circle. I'm too uncoordinated to participate. I always just fuck up the hack.

"What's good?" asks my man Donny Gold.

"That dumb cunt Daliah wrote my home phone number all over the walls of the 161st subway station along with 'call for gay sex'."

"How's the home front?"

"It's still fucked up at home after the robbery. My mother has never gotten over it. Its fights and bullshit whenever I walk in the door."

We head for Riverside Park around 8 pm. The Bacardi Mob is well represented, but I'm not the main guy if I ever was. It's Nick's crew now.

There are drunken teenagers all over The Rock. Empty 40 bottles are strewn around the base. Someone has used a thick black Pilot pen to draw an Afro on the placard of some old, rich, dead man whose face is affixed to the rock in copper plating. Case assumes Donny Gold did it.

There are couples making out on the ground around The Rock. Young kids think they are much older than they really are when they are getting down in drunken, sloppy hook ups in the middle of a park. They kiss people they might not, if they weren't piss drunk. This drunken kissing hardly ever leads to anything else thinks Nikh T. Katja Boz is smooching Sebastian on the grass in front of everyone. Spread the damn love, thinks Nikh T. But he was pretty upset on the inside.

Case Yadger climbs up The Rock toward Hugh and Jacky Jack Cawley. He is watching some hook-up on the grass in front of the rock amid a veritable sea of empty 40 bottles. This isn't the most discrete location to be getting down.

"GIVE ME AN H!" shouts Jackson McCoy.

"You're an H," says Case.

"GIVE ME AN O!" he shouts again.

"What is he shouting?" asks Case to Jacky Jack Cawley.

"Look at Katja," said Jacky Jack Cawley, "she's getting fingered in front of like thirty people. Stupid slut."

"GIVE ME AN R!"

"Sebastian Adon, winning classy gentleman points as usual!" yells Jackson McCoy.

"30 MORE POINTS!" yells Jacky Jack Cawley.

"Does he know Katja is sort of Nihk T.'s girl?" asks Case.

"I don't think that would stop him if he did," says Jacky Jack Cawley.

"GIVE ME AN E!" shouted Jackson McCoy.

"Wow. Literally everyone here is getting a free show," says Case Yadger.

"WHAT'S THAT SPELL?!" yells Hugh on the top of his lungs.

"You forgot the 'W,' stupid," shouted a crowd of girls near the base of The Rock.

I wonder where her damn vagina is? My hand has been in her pants for just over a minute and I haven't had hit the right spot. Katja is moaning and completely drunk. Is her name Katja or is it Alexis? Or is it Julia? I couldn't even remember how we had hooked up. We were talking and then it just happened. What the fuck is this girl's name and where is her vagina?

Her kissing is sloppy and mildly disgusting or maybe it's mine. The grass is moving, the world quickly rotating beneath me. I have drunk roughly 120 ounces of malt liquor and feel too wobbly to stand. Doubt I can stand. I stop hooking up with this girl for a second to check my watch. It is 10:05 pm. My curfew is 10:30. By cab it would take about fifteen minutes. Easily forty-five by subway. Some drunken fool is shouting something from the top of The Rock. The girl heard it. I was too far gone.

"Fuck you!" the girl yells up at them.

“What did he say?” I ask her.

“He called me a fucking whore!” whatever-her-name-is cries drunkenly.

Who the hell is this prick calling this girl a whore? She is really upset now, cursing up towards the top of The Rock where the catcalls are coming from. Filled with drunken anger I get up to throttle whoever is being a cock-blocking, jackass hater. Up the side of The Rock ready to punch whomever was yelling. Fuckin’ haters. I swing aimlessly at the first person I see.

“Get off me dude!” yells Jacky Jack Cawley, as I yank him by his shirt.

“WHY THE HELL WERE YOU CALLING HER A WHORE!”

“Chill the fuck out, big man,” smirks the instigator Hubert O’Domhnaill, an Irish man with which few can be angry.

I shove Jacky-Jack Cawley. Rammy and Case run over to see what all the yelling is about. Rammy is ripped like a tin tank and Case is just as strong.

“Yo, Sebastian, bitch be cool!” yells half giggles Case Yadger.

“We’re all friends here,” says Jacky Jack Cawley, “You’re just being a real drunk ass.”

“You were calling that girl,” I pointed out the female figure slumped over, puking on the grass, “a whore.”

“No beef, Sebastian, no beef” says Jacky Jack Cawley as I let him go. “We were just fooling around.”

“I think someone needs to put Sebastian in a cab,” says Rammy Detroit.

“I’m beyond fine,” I mumble. And then I fall over drunk.

16

Dr. Maskin asked me to meet with him after school in his classroom. The desk is cluttered with opened books with highlighted segments streaked throughout the text. He has a big mug filled with cold black coffee. I can see the students outside the barred windows streaming out of school towards the buses and trains.

“You need to stop showing up late to my class. I have a girl who comes from Staten Island with a better record than you.”

“Sorry. I’ve just been having trouble going to sleep at night.”

“You sleep well enough in my class. You’re a good student, but I’m going to have to mark you down because of the lateness.”

“Is there any way I can pick up my grade?”

“Yeah...show up on time. I talked to your other teachers. You show up late to all their classes, too, and you never do your homework. What is it that you do with all your time?”

“I hang out.”

“Hanging out is a problem.”

“Why?”

“Because kids that hang out get into trouble.”

“Everyone hangs out. What’s this really about?”

“I’ve worked at Bronx Science for nearly fifteen years. I’ve seen students come and go and I see a lot of kids screw up their lives hanging out and getting into drugs and alcohol. I see you out across the street smoking cigarettes with your friends. This is a tough school and you’re not living up to what you could be doing with yourself.”

“Everyone always says that.”

“There’s a reason everyone always says that.”

“I just feel like this is all a bunch of bullshit.”

“You think learning is bullshit?”

“Not learning. School.”

“So drop out then. You’d have more time to hang out.”

“My parents wouldn’t go for it.”

“But you would?”

“Look, I like your class a lot, but I don’t really care about all the other shit. All those stupid books we read in English class. All those stupid formulas in math. Biology crap twice a day. I don’t see how any of this stuff applies to what I want to do with my life.”

“What do you want to do with your life?”

I stare at him in silence. I try real hard to come up with something smart to say, but I can’t. I draw a complete blank.

“You don’t have a clue do you?” he says with sadness in his voice.

“I want to...” I stop.

“Do you know why I teach history?” he asks.

“Why?”

“Because when you understand what has happened before, you know what’s going happen tomorrow. People are just like the civilizations we study in class. They rise, they fall, and they are left behind. You, my friend, are on a path to self-destruction and you are too young to leave behind anything that you will be remembered for.”

17

“Boy Pilgrim. Open your eyes.”

And suddenly here I am in the desert on a bluff overlooking the Pale City, infinite sand in every direction. I can see the dunes miles away shifting in the wind. The sky is black and there are no stars in the sky. The moon is black and bright. The city looks larger than I remember. I’m not seeing out of my own eyes just yet. I’m rotating above my body. I am translucent. And then I see clearly.

“What is it that I’m looking at?” I utter.

The girl is tiny. Her white dress is dirty and her feet are bare.

You are looking at the occupied desert.”

“But what does it mean?”

“You’re not ready to understand.”

“Why did we come here?”

We are legion, nothing is barred from us. Look ahead, boy pilgrim.”

She points across the desert to a dune of slope maybe a hundred miles away. A convoy is moving away from the Pale City. She hands me a sea man’s opticon.

We begin to levitate. In seconds we are flying quickly over the desert until we are directly above the convoy looking down. There are hundreds if not thousands of figures below me. They are chained together and torture-porn hooded being led by huge metallic creatures with black cloaks. Gears turn as spindle-like metallic limbs grind together towering over the enslaved. Their faces glow like TV screens with a woeful countenance. The evening news from Yemen is displayed on their brow. They move on two legs and then on all fours, more like beasts than men. Each prisoner is entangled with barbed wire. Tentacle like appendices slither out their backs with video cameras recording everything for posterity. I hear organ music playing as they grind their way to sandy oblivion.

“Where are they going?”

“In this place, no one goes anywhere.”

“What are they?”

“The control systems.”

“They’re out of control. I’m out of control too,” I tell her.

“There are numerous ways to control a human monkey. But generally one can split them all into two classifications, force or conditioning. Like monkey into man Maskin taught you.”

“These people are being led to die.” I observe.

“An extreme example. Their eyes have been removed and the sockets have been sewn shut. Molten lead has been poured into their ears. Their mouths have been stapled. They are in chains. The collars around their necks detect deviant thought and admit a piercing shriek directly to the brain if they continue thinking.”

“Who are they?” I ask.

“People who needed to be controlled and removed from the population, thought criminals all claiming to possess the new social gospel, criminals of low morals; they may threaten stability here at the temple.”

“If we’re so dangerous, why not just kill us?” I suggest

“Us?” she laughs, “Killing a rebel creates a martyr and every martyr will generate a thousand new rebels. We are reducing the cancer of resistance.”

“Resistance to what?”

“One must bear in mind that to the governing bodies your shortcomings towards utopia as a species are quite secondary to our maintenance of power. You are violent little monkey’s who seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, that is all.”

“What does the second type of control entail?”

“You should know quite well.” She responds.

“Why is that?” I ask.

“It’s working its way over you as you slumber.”

“I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about,” I say.

“It’s just neuroscience. The people that control the world are about two hundred years more advanced technologically. You just don’t see it benefiting you,” she says, “do the rich even die anymore?”

18

Its five days until Halloween, I’m depressed as fuck. Always a little high or drunk, cutting class trying to sleep more, end up dreaming more, can’t ever sleep for long.

Everyone in the city is looking for a costume. *Ricky’s* is always a safe bet. *Halloween Adventure* works, too, if you’re willing to spend a little money, which I never am. The original plan had been for everyone to dress up like the X-Men. Unfortunately, no one got their shit together and the plan fell apart. We are at an odd age to participate actively in Halloween. We are too old to trick or treat, too young to go bar hopping and not suburban enough to egg people and toilet paper homes.

You can make a real haul as far as candy goes in the right areas of the City. Even if you hit two of the four Waterside Plaza buildings alone, you can nearly fill your bag. Fat kids always have huge bags. UNIS always gave us Orange UNICEF boxes. I have no idea what that stands for or what Halloween and raising money for third world relief efforts have in common, but for the past seven or eight years, I’d been asking people for pennies to fill my box. There is a table stating where the money you raise goes on the back of the collection box. Probably to giving fishing pools to every single child in whatever African country has no fucking rivers.

I wonder if the UNICEF aid workers tell the people they help where the money comes from. Do they just say it comes from the UN or do they say it comes from the US? Does it go directly to feeding people or do they use it to subcontract building companies for schools and hospitals? Imagine if they told these kids where the money really comes from. I can imagine a conversation between a refugee child and an extremely blunt UNICEF worker.

“In America they have a holiday where children dress up like monsters and fill large bags with a sweet food called candy.”

“What’s candy,” a tiny malnourished Ethiopian refugee asks.

“It’s nutritionally useless and fun to eat.”

“They collect this candy for us?”

“No. They collect pennies for you.”

“What’s a penny?”

“It’s the currency of such limited value that most Americans leave them lying on the street.”

The little dark child starts crying, but only in a UNICEF commercial.

Every Halloween I try to come up with a good costume. In the end I settle for what I know. I’ve been Batman at least six times and Luke Skywalker at least thrice. I’ve always dress up as my favorite fictional hero of the moment. One year I was Optimus Prime. My mother dressed me up as an eggplant for my first Halloween. I’m told it was precious.

I heard on the wire that Barry is having a Halloween Party. I’ve been over to his house a few times before when there was nothing to do.

Barry broke his leg a few weeks ago playing football. Or he slipped in the shower masturbating when his kid sister walked in depending on whose story you believed. I heard he’s on crutches and he’s having the party so he doesn’t have to go out. I think Barry is one of the least interesting people I know, but that might be because I don’t know him very well. Everyone has a lot of respect for him so I leave it alone. I’d prefer drinking in a park to “sober fun” at his parent’s house any day. Sober fun generally means me drinking a 40 locked inside his bathroom.

Barry lives in a three-bedroom apartment on 81st and Riverside, around the corner from our infamous Rock. It has a relatively fancy lobby and a doorman in a uniform. People go to Barry’s house when there is nothing to do and I mean that in the nicest possible way. Barry doesn’t go out too often and he never drinks. He has parties fairly regularly if you can call not being allowed to drink or smoke while his parents are in the house a house party.

Barry is very soft spoken wasp that acts and looks like a vaguely nebbish upper west side *heeb*, but he's a gentile apparently. Pretty nebbish though. He's one of the only people I know that gives you his undivided attention when you speak to him. Which is to say he listens. It's a good quality that I don't claim to have. As far as I'm concerned, you go to Barry's if there's nothing else to do. Otherwise you'd be drinking in a park or a house, or out at the movies which are always bullshit and you never score.

Odds are I'll end up at his house on Halloween. I follow where the girls will be at you know what I'm saying.

19

I snuck out under the Pale Cities sewage system and walked for what seemed days of night following the tracks of monstrosities called 'systems of control'.

I'm now standing parched on a hill overlooking what appears to be a mass grave in a dirt quarry surrounded by dunes. There are bodies with black bags over their heads being pushed into this enormous hole by large machines that look like a cross between insects and bulldozers. Their metallic limbs scoop and drop the bodies into the gaping pit. An enormous stone monolith is stuck in the ground next to me. It towers into the black sky so far that I can't even see the top. The Old Man is seated on the ground next to me. He looks sad and befuddled, a bit jaundiced too.

"I thought you never leave the store." I say.

"Normally I don't," he responds.

"What's the occasion?"

"They wanted me to write something meaningful."

"For what?"

"For the tombstone of a generation."

White lye is sprayed out like a snow storm from extendable gaskets harnessed to these foul metal, killing beasts.

"Got any good ideas?"

"Drawing blank," he mutters and coughs.

"That's a lot of death in that gully. I'm sure you'll think of something."

“That is nothing. Eulogize the faceless masses, harder than to kill them.”

“Who are they?”

“They don’t exist anymore.”

“That’s a lot of nobodies.”

“Millions more every year.”

“Well doesn’t somebody miss them?”

“Who knows? No one keeps track anymore. Not unless you’re in the priestly class or getting filthy rich of this. Or even higher, but those don’t die the same way. These are just disposable dregs. They got sold out in the spiritual war and we caught them in foreclosure.”

It was a veritable sea of corpses. They were piled up high as far as the eye could see.

“Aren’t you gonna tell him where we are?” says a voice behind me. I turn to see where it came from. Standing next to a dried out trunk of a tree stands a man in blue pin stripe suit and a beige trench coat with a grey furry collar smoking a filter less cigarette. I can’t see his face because of the dust and gloom.

Emblazoned upon the right arm of the trench coat are the letters ZOB on a red and grey armband.

“Don’t tell him yet,” says the Old Man, “He needs to figure it out himself.”

“Who the fuck are you?” I ask.

“That’s not very relevant at this juncture,” says the man in the coat.

“All right. I love how helpful everyone is. Not only do I have night terrors, I have obscure hard-to understand night life.”

“This isn’t night life,” mutters the Old Man.

“He’s right,” says the man in the coat, “you need to pay more attention.”

“Pay attention to what?” I ask both of them.

“We’re trying to teach you something. When you finally get it,” the trench man pauses, his hands extend out simulating a silent explosion. Then he nods as if I’ve understood him.

“You’re doing a hell of a good job!” It echoes through the valley.

“You’re doing a hell of a good job. You’re doing a hell of a good job.”

At least I thought it was echo.

“They’re complimenting you,” says the man in the coat.

“Who?”

“The sea of them.”

“You’re doing a hell of a good job. You’re doing a hell of a good job.”

It isn’t an echo. The sea of bodies is mumbling in dead unison. There is no life in their million sunken corpses, and yet something is moving in each of them as they mouth words in unison beneath the black bags tied over their heads.

“Eureka,” shouts the Old Man

He begins chiseling something at the foot of the monument at an incredible speed.

“We’re gonna get you through this,” says the man in the coat, “You may be kicking and screaming, but we will get you ready to become aware.”

“You’re doing a hell of a good job. You’re doing a hell of a good job,” says the sea of corpses.

“Aware of what?” I ask, more confused than ever.

The old man is done chiseling. He puts his tools back into his belt and starts off back down the slope toward Pale City.

“Aware of what!?” I demand once again.

The man in the coat is gone. The Old Man is gone, too. I walk over to where the Old Man had been sitting to read what he had inscribed on the monolith.

In death, all are finally made equals.

“You’re doing a hell of a good job,” says the faceless sea.

I run down the slope toward the City and catch the two of them sauntering along the road.

The Old Man turns and extends his hand to the ZOB man in the trench coat, “Mike Washington I presume?” he says.

20

Godwin the stuttering Nigerian, my brother ‘Little Benny’ and I end up as expected at Barry’s Halloween party together in a yellow cab. My parents and I are in a fight because I refused to come home on time for dinner this week. They have taken away my allowance. I am pretty broke and don’t have the money to go out and get a costume. I acquisition, steal some devil ears and paint up my face red. We arrived at Barry’s crib on 81st Street around nine.

A big group of Stuyvesant kids show up right after we do. The only one I know is the brown bagger Julia Shoot. Most of these Stuy girls are pretty beat. One reminds me of a blonde Velma from Scooby Doo, says her name is Zivia Lubetkin. She isn’t ugly, just real girl-next-door plain. She wears glasses and has a bookish complexion. She isn’t wearing a costume. Her home girl Julia Shoot is a brown bagger with big tits, kind of a horrible thing to say. I say that because everyone says they’d like to bang her out cause of her D titties, but she isn’t pretty, so they’d ‘put a brown bag over her face.’ It’s just a saying. The other two are prettier and are wearing costumes. Both are skinny, hungry maybe little blondes, one dressed like the devil the other as a vampire. The devil girl and I have identical costumes, but she doesn’t exactly act too interested when we get introduced.

The cold broad Roxanne slips past me as I talk to Sully Anne and Zivia. Roxanne is definitely the prettiest of the four. Sully Anne keeps on talking, but I’m not really paying any attention to her. Boring ass Japs.

Nikh Trikhovitch calls the house to tell us the 40s have been bought. Everyone who is drinking is supposed to meet outside in Riverside Park. This kid Tim Finnegan and a group of about ten other guys whose names I don’t remember take the elevator and stairs to the lobby.

“Why do they want to get all stupid and drunk,” asks Roxanne.

“It’s because they’re not very confident,” says little Zivia Lubetkin.

Most of the Bronx Science boys have left the party to drink. It is mostly Stuy kids in the living room now. Roxanne figures this is because there isn’t the same culture of alcoholism at her school. Roxanne compares the Bronx kids to the Stuy kids and realizes that there is a substantial difference between the two mentalities. Bronx kids are drunk and wild, perhaps only interesting because their asocial tendencies are justified somehow by their proclaimed

self-proclaimed intelligence. Stuy kids have more of a sense of what they are doing, like their homework.

“They should see themselves,” Zivia says.

“The Genie gets power from the bottle,” mutters Roxanne.

“Huh?” asks Elle Takaway turning around looking like she wants to fight.

“Nothing. Just a saying,” Roxanne responds to her.

“Oh.” Elle resumes her palaver with Daliah thinking, ‘better not be talking to me bitch’. Now having a chuckle at Sebastian’s expense.

Roxanne had met that kid dressed like the devil before. His name is Sebastian and he is definitely a case in point for why teenagers should be barred from the smoke and bottle until a much later age. They had met originally at a Rock Party that Sully Anne had brought her to. He hadn’t made a very good first impression. She doubts if he ever did. She is actually reasonably embarrassed that they are wearing the same costume. Now he’ll get drunk and wanna get with me she thinks.

They say in an egg and bottle fight, better to have the bottle. Not again, is the first thing that comes to mind when the Dominican kids from the projects in the West 70’s start throwing eggs at us while we drink. There are twenty of them and they chuck eggs from the street level down into the park. We respond lobbing 40 bottles. Three minutes later we’re still pinned down on West End Drive exchanging fire. Looks like both sides have the eggs and bottles. Our ammo runs out first.

Barry and Max P. take off back down the street toward his house. He’s faster on his crutches than I am on foot as we evade the flying eggs. There are about fifteen of us and we probably could take them but they take off uptown. When we get back to Barry’s house, we are all winded. Rammy and Nike have disappeared. Someone said they had just gone to get high on top of Mt. Tom.

“Let’s get some eggs from my house and go get um,” says Barry. And this is from a guy on crutches.

Everyone feels pretty much the same way. I can’t believe that Barry decides to tell his mother what has happened and much less tell her what he intends to do. She tells him to call the cops and that there is no way she is going let him go get into a fight in the condition that he is in. While he is bickering with his mother Nikh T. and Katerbaad Krauswitz remove all the eggs from the fridge and put them in a backpack. I can’t decide whether Barry has told them to do this or if they just decided that Barry isn’t getting anywhere by trying to convince his mom.

The vibe is that the party that had never really been a party is over. Most of the guys want to go out and look for a fight. Benjamin and Godwin left the party while we were out and have presumably headed home.

Roxanne notices that the guys are all riled up about something and stink of booze. Daliah calls Sully Anne, who also has a cell phone, and tells her that there is another house party on 106th Street. Daliah tells her that she should come, but not with any of the boys and not with more than six people. The Stuyvesant girls say their goodbyes and head out. Barry's parents won't let Barry leave. About twelve people stay upstairs and the rest of us head down to look for the kids who egged us lead by Nikh T. and Katzerbaad Krauswitz.

I light a cigarette when I get outside. There are seventeen kids, mostly guys from the Bronx crew, and the rest from Beacon. We all head towards the Park in the direction someone thinks the Dominican kids have gone while the Stuy kids start walking to the 1/9 train to get to the next party. As I finish off my cigarette and am about to follow the guys into some dumb rumble, I see Roxanne turn and give me a real *stank* look.

It was a look that simply said, "I think you're a rude, fucking idiot."

"Die you uppity straight-edge cunt," I say under my breath.

"Go get fucked up!" I yell.

It is the beginning of a long, cold night.

TUNE IN FOR THE REST OF THE SERIAL:

A.R. PART 2: RUDE BOYS & GIRLS OF BABYLON

In Part 2 of 7

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