

DIMITRI

DESTINY AND BEYOND
from the author of *Hallucinations of The Sane*

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Book Name: HALLUCINATIONS OF THE SANE

Book Depository: 5896/2018

ISBN : 978-977-835-332-11

Cover by : Zero one Pictures

Publisher

ZERO ONE PICTURES

Production solutions that make sense.

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Dimitri:

Destiny and Beyond

From The Author of Hallucinations of the Sane

Dimitri: Destiny and Beyond

A novel by

Mohammed Abouda

“The historical events mentioned in this novel are purely fictitious and are not necessarily historically accurate; any resemblance to an actual past event is the work of coincidence”

- The Author

Dedication

“Keep the quest that you have built

Into the last decent fray you would blend

The bounty you have been chasing is a mirage

But would could be more virtuous than believing in it”

- The Author

Preface

Following the events of “Hallucinations of The Sane”, this book provides an extension to Dimitri’s non-ending saga.

I assume that endings are gateways to new beginnings, in the same way as history works, not just by acting as a reference to the contemporary population, but also by adding more depth –and events- to the plot.

Dimitri has been walked through a portal to endless lives which gave him the liberty to have infinite choices, but the results cannot be indefinite, for certainly the inputs converge to engender a united pathway that leads to the finale he was tricked into choosing.

Nonetheless, this is the way destiny operates; it is far more intricate to be merely decided by our free will.

This book provides a peculiar extension to what we have been establishing since the previous book, and the changes brought about to the plot are dramatic and epic!

The previous book was inspired by my nightmares, while this book is chiefly committed to my premonitions!

Dimitri: The Origins

I abhor memories, the lovely and the bleak ones alike; memories collectively symbolize the inability to create new events that would either be cherished or wept over; memories are one of the endless sorts of despondence. Why would anybody like to go through occurrences of the past when he or she could take part in new ones?

Oblivion; however, is a marker of senility... Oh lord, may you have mercy upon the ones who could neither dispense nor highlight their past.

I stumbled upon a tarnished book; its dust embraced cover was a delicate forgery of authentic western leather with a few silver decorative embroideries that served the purpose of merchandising it via deceiving its consumer into a travesty of sumptuousness; it was kept on my horrendous desk.

The book contained my detailed diary which I wrote when I used to be obsessed by soaking plain papers in the ink of my past and burdens to save my origins for

nobody but my forlorn self, and god only knows if destiny might play a role in delivering it to the very care of someone who would be interested in the history of a technically Mister Nobody!

This diary trails my past starting from the squadron assault that I survived; it was amid the intensity of December's chilling breezes of 1990, the parlor that sheltered me was no more capable of withstanding any farther threats; an air assault led by five American Diroma Airfix D-Day aircrafts grouped in a hostile squadron blew up my home into smoldering rubble along with most of the houses in my old residence, and for some unfathomable motive I did not join the fleeing troops of civilians who hid in lairs dug underground to spare their lives whenever any air assault was known to be arriving.

I dashed amid the ruins of sand and gravel and the desolated asphalt, being paralleled by the smokes and splinters of war missiles, I ran to no destination, merely eloping away of my grave that could have been created any moment during my reckless run, I ran until I was out of the assault's range and my disbelief

in my fabulous escape sedated any pains arising from the intermittent muscle fatigues I had.

Some pages later, my frequent departures were documented by my black ink which I favored the most; those half a dozen pages reminded me of the months I was I coerced to spend as an illegal immigrant until I officially turned into a fugitive who accompanied the cosmopolitan tribes and often worked for their chiefs for a living; just another inspiring tale about slavery!

On the 26th of December, 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was announced, I was temporarily in Berlin when I heard of it, and it was when I learned that as a Russian, my stay there was sincerely unwelcomed as a result of the general state of hatred that prevailed among the affiliates of the former union following its split.

A fortnight later, I was found in London where I settled until this very day. It took me a few months to enhance my English accent to match the native Britons tongue and so that it does not clarify my Russian origin anymore, and my pure passion for

violins found me a part time musical career in a local tavern and I remained employed there for a lit bit less than a decade.

I swiftly turned the pages to run forward in the indicated timeline until I randomly stopped by a rather special date; it was the 8th of May, 2006: “I may not endorse the effect of luck, but I believe in the power of coincidence” The memory said “Coincidence could often be too patterned to be given that name, I wager it is all part of the plan, it is how God designed it.

It was a mainstream night and I was expecting a guest so I was confined to my condo in London, but he could not make it to my residence so I went to meander through the bleak streets of the city and I did not pay attention to my whereabouts nor my path until I accidentally stepped on the ground of a restricted area; I was too lost to be able to return to where I came from and I could not lower my curiosity level to hinder myself from trespassing!

I jumped over the fence and managed to smuggle myself into the inside of the “red-zone” territory, but I

could not grasp the motive as to why we are not expected to gain access to this area, or to be precise, this ghost of an area!

For a while, I deemed it as a former headquarters to highly secured precedent military barracks or perhaps a memorial army cemetery, for the mess left behind was too awful to be the result of human indecency alone, the ruins suggested that this area was once predisposed to the monstrous gongs of war; it bizarrely matched the final memory I had of my previous home in Moscow after it was brought down to ashes, also due to war.

I still did not comprehend the strict label that stated “trespassing is not allowed and if by any means you were spotted inside you would be subject to prosecution” but I kept my alertness to gauge the situation and inform me when to flee, although no guards were evident there.

After nearly half an hour (precisely 29 minutes and 11 seconds) I finally found a logical explanation as to why we are advised not to approach the area; I stood a few

meters before the only subject that signified the presence of a living soul among the relics of death that dominated the place.

It was a flower, a peculiar one I would say! And I happen to loathe flowers in general for no clear reason; however, the unfamiliarity of this flower had my whole attention and made me move forward to reach for it and as I kneeled to pay a close appreciation to it I noted that it grew through devastated gravel and stones that once rimmed the window of a demolished building!

To add to its uniqueness, the petals acquired a luminous black colour that was not tarnished by the rubble of war, furthermore, a purple gem was anchored on top of it so that it seemed to have grown through the petals and a scrutinized look at it (armed with the not so sparse knowledge I own as regards gems and jewelry due to an old passion) revealed that it was a sapphire of a fabulous nature and hence I called it "The Sapphire Flower"!

It was a dramatic event to say the least, this unwitnessed form of holiness can never be attributed to man's spawns, this miracle has to be linked to some entity beyond the human cognitive abilities and just pondering the matter would lead to an inevitable headache.

The Sapphire Flower was too glamorous to be abandoned along with these unholy relics of chaos and lack of peace, it was so tempting that I thought the matter of picking it up over, but it was guarded by a bit more than a dozen of thorns that weirdly did not make its beauty plummet; the thorns enhanced its spell even more!

I chose to be dismissed when I sensed the guards coming forth, and as I looked for my way back home I made sure to spread the news! I told everybody I stopped by about the sacred flower I saw earlier, but I claim they still think of me as a deranged wretch who lost his both his mind and his way!

To date, this matter remains a secret which I believe only me knows about and it aches me how demanding

it is to prove that perfection exists amid the anarchy, but people are so down to the ground and they seemed to accept atrociousness and deformity as essential factors that have their share in constituting the entire spectrum of societies.”

Those were the final lines I wrote to commemorate this once in a life time occurrence. If only people know the magnitude of dismay nostalgia holds for us, I thought! Oh God, what brought this diary to my hands!

I flipped the diary closed and kept it away of my reach as much as I could, but that memory never abandoned my mind like I abandoned my precious flower!

I only wonder whether this flower still exists until this very day. Did somebody find out about it? Would I be able to walk by it again if I ever intended to pay it a visit? But I surely would not be capable of doing such a thing because it was all up to a coincidence! Many years ago, a coincidence attracted me to place which I cannot determine where exactly it lies on the map and subsequently my entire perception to life was altered

to focus on the sordid signs that trail the history of perfection; I sincerely doubt the randomness of the term “coincidence”, like I mentioned before, it is too patterned to be limited to the meaning suggested by the word!

Soon, I was able to temporarily put off the flames evoked by this memory to resume organizing the furnishings I placed in the wooden cottage I moved to recently; life in a flat was not my taste anyway!

I managed to fix the bar and settled my wine collection on its shelves; a year ago, I knew nothing about liquor, but as time passes I am sluggishly becoming someone different that I fear I would not be able to recognize in no time, but “Jack Daniels” seemed like a companion that has a lot to offer, perhaps it could aid my desire to hunt the demons that live nearby! An hour later, I was on my way to an eight-mile distant tavern where I practiced gambling for a living, but destiny intercepted me and I was captured by three masked men in sheer hostility and soon I felt nothing but an obtrusive flair to be sedated...

Roses and Thorns

Dark in here!

All I could see was absolute darkness and not a single ray penetrated the room to render anything visible. I was half conscious, roughly able to assess the situation as hazardous; I knew I was kidnapped earlier and that I was kept in a highly secured zone and the few different breathing patterns which were clearly audible suggested that I had some anonymous company in there, an almost tongue-tied company!

None of my senses was of great value as to evoke some fear or skepticism for they were still sedated due to the effect of the gas that I remember to have been surmountable enough to forcefully inhale before I blacked out, the entire predicament, however; was claustrophobic and fearful without leaving any room for doubt.

I could determine neither my location nor time and I was not able to escape partially for my incomplete state of arousal and primarily because of the sturdy

leashes that held me in my place; I felt my arms begging for mercy, they have been tied up for god knows how long, but judging by the magnitude of pain I suffered, I believe they were tied long enough for gravity to drain the blood from my veins turning my arms blue.

Through the breath-interrupted silence, the resonating sound of a masculine pair of shoes knocking against the rigid floor came forth, someone steadily approached us... Not someone, but a congregation of less than five strict men.

“Spill the water” a voice commanded.

“I know that voice!” I silently thought “This characteristic voice could never be mistaken for another one; I bet it’s The Architect!”

A group of buckets showered the three other sedated victims and me, we coughed our lungs out before we were fully awake as someone vague stood before us and soon everyone including me started developing a grouch as to emphasize the ischemic pain we suffered as a result of our poorly perfused tissues.

Someone clicked a knob to light the place via a small overhead tungsten bulb that hardly casted some yellow beams of light at all; but we have been blinded for hours –could be days- and the least intensity of light would harm our retinas; it took my eyes some time to accommodate to the newly lit scene, the lamp made a circular spot of light to barely illuminate the central murk revealing a dark gray rough floor as I speculated and the four of us –the leashed hostages- were visible, save for the faces due to the narrow range of the light emitted by the bulb.

A three feet pedestal centered the room and on top of it was supported a charming black rose, covered by a transparent cubical glass lid. One of The Architect's two guards stepped forward to lift the lid following the order given to him by his leader through a gesture.

A pleasant scent prevailed through every corner of the room; it was not the flower's scent, but the odor of phenethylamine in which the flower seemed to have been drenched in before this incidence happened. The chemical's smell was familiar to me for I was subjected

to a wide variety of psychiatric medications a year ago.

The Architect slowly moved towards the center and his unique black apparel was showcased, both of his hands were kept behind his back to provide himself with a defining prestige and as he kept moving towards the Black Rose, the majority of his iconic mask was made vivid for us to see, an ivory mask with narrow spindle shaped eye openings, a confounding black smile carved by the witty hands of a gypsy sculptor and a diminutive engraved figure on the left of the mask which was a seven of spades.

“Oh, I see you’re here, our mighty master” the person to my left said in a worn out voice, while hardly enduring the pain to properly construct a sentence.

“What on earth do you need us for?” another one asked

The guard next to him hit him vengefully in the face to accentuate his aches; he bled profusely while screaming in a noticeable agony.

“All I ask for are courtesy and disciple! Is it too much to ask for the least that I deserve?” Said The Architect in his placid yet glorified voice without turning to the bleeding bloke; his unique voice that was produced behind the mask was known for its unfathomable resonance that was capable of implementing fear into everyone without amplifying his cleverly chosen words a bit, and though he did not alter his tone, he could never be called out for a tedious monotone!

“Courtesy is the key to gaining the vastness of my blessings” he resumed “Doomed are the ones who fetter their souls in a path that triggers my wrath”

He halted his speech for a moment ensuring our pin-drop silence has been achieved, even the burning pain that crept over my arms tended to be put off at his acknowledgement; having claimed our respect, The Architect addressed the four of us with a brief as to what his intentions for tonight were: “This is the holy flower of Black Charm, picked from the divine frock of the lady harbored by the heavens of my demised fortress to shed its grace upon us; I insist that every soul tied here should be freed one at a time to

disclose the unnegotiable worth of this rose and then the owner of the soul shall be granted my approval to leave”

“My lord” The third victim called “I would be honored to disclose its value once you free my hands, they have a yearn to bleed over the holy thorns that rim the flower”

The Architect slightly rotated his head and looked at the speaker who panicked; he probably contemplated the misdeed he committed. Nevertheless, The Architect cut his panic out as he calmly replied: “Then you are ordered to manifest it”.

Shortly, he was set on the loose by one of the guards to be allowed to execute his proposal and he met The Architect’s expectations in a literal manner as he was noticed to drool over the sight of the flower while moving his obese body using just his knees until he wrapped the thorns of the flower with his fingers which were directly below the sole light source in the room and this made his old scars and abrasions crystal clear for the viewers to undoubtedly unveil his thorn

fetish, he had created a grin that spoke of his naivety as he fed his eyes with the rose's appearance and surmounted his desire to wound himself with its thorns.

"Your purity is evident and you are permitted to walk away" The Architect approved

The freed hostage was revived in ecstasy as he was walked to the door and left to regain his liberty.

"Liberty... Liberty... Liberty!" The Architect recited "How fortunate are the souls which experience the optimum liberty for committing the most soothing sins there could be right before they are brought back here to cleanse their blunders. Who else longs to the promised liberty?"

"I do, your majesty" Someone replied in a lust "This luscious rose owns a perpetual charm that is never greased, although it's cushioned by the blood of my predecessor"

"It's always easier said than done! Show your solemnity" The Architect commanded

“Right after your allowance, your majesty” he replied in an utmost readiness coupled with a queer whim, it did not seem like he was coerced to do it, he was blinded by a desire; desire is a perilous trait!

He was unleashed and instructed to approach the flower and he did; he then kneeled and began getting intimately close to the petals then protruded his tongue and licked the blood covered thorns vigorously paying no heed to the dorsum of his tongue that he grossly injured, and later he was graced with The Architect’s unabridged satisfaction to guarantee him the liberty he has been aiming for.

“Now it’s down to the two of you”

“No, it’s down to only one” the man who has been hit in his face earlier interacted “I object to paying tribute to the flower that was responsible for erasing my dignity ... I have lost my faith in the holiness of The Black Rose”

The Architect froze in his position like a Greek poised statue and never twitched a muscle; his silence, however, communicated a gory meaning to his

henchmen which was reflected by their response to which the bleeding man's prowess wilted; the three of them commenced shouting in a non-rhythmic manner as they fled towards him, they later stretched his jaw to force his mouth open eliminating any chances of defiance by the bloke they were torturing until they fractured his mandible and tore it then threw it a couple of feet away from me.

The mutilated man unleashed a deafening cry and he was left to bleed and the adrenaline rush he had hastened his death process.

The Architect has lingered his stillness until the man turned into a corpse; I could feel his eyes targeting me, and negotiation or reasoning with him was not welcomed; some other flower tempted me – The Sapphire Flower – and my loyalty prohibited me from being subject to this heinous act, The Sapphire Flower resembles sublimation, but I could not withstand the restraints any longer and the pain took over my arms once more, so I had no other choice but to surmount!

"I suppose you are Dimitri" The Architect started

“That is true”

“I fully remember you”

“I am delighted to know that, your majesty”

He halted for a while and I felt him securitizing me although his retained stillness reflected nothing that may suggest it, he then resumed the conversation: “You were well reputed for your impenetrable secrecy, I assume that you stow something beyond expression”

I abstained from the conversation and worked on slightly elevating my trunk to eliminate the gravity’s mischievous effect on my blood flow through my arms.

“The Sapphire Flower” The Architect acknowledged “You could have properly secured your privacy, but you never stood a chance when it comes to me being able to look into your life and gain as much intel as I desire ... How insulting, I believe! You were destined to endure the burden of silence for years, but do you propose to be worthy of this very bliss”

“In deed I am, I was chosen” I replied diffidently

He paused again, and I was intimidated by the moments of his silence way more than his words; I was pondering the lots of sayings he would be preparing to thrust upon me while I sensed a tingling attack conquering my arms, but fortunately the blood was refurbishing my arms following a long deprivation; The Architect shattered the silence that was taking over: “Every strive has a mandatory toll, and the toll I endorse is offering an oblation to purify you, this would be a minor sacrifice, all you are compelled to do is to enthrall me with your wisdom by avoiding my wrath; I would be interested in listening to you while reciting a short tribute to the holiness of our Black Rose”

I was plotting a prison break and my hands would be of some assistance in doing so after the short supply they gained.

“Right after you release me” I deceptively consented

Roughly a minute later my arms were out of the restraints and I was able to fully lower them to

diminish as much shiver as possible before I execute the plan I had in mind; The Architect nodded permitting me to gain proximity to the flower and I walked a couple of paces till I was nearly adherent to the three-foot column, I looked The Architect in the eye, he maintained his stability and I was merely prolonging the time before I met my objective to have steady hands for doing so, but time was not a luxury that I own ... I had to improvise! I felt my adrenaline doing its share of work to prepare me to the inevitable battle.

The two guards approached me from the back and forced me to kneel in respect to the flower, they communicated with me through growling! Oh God, they never speak!

I fetched the flower with my left shivering hand and resisted the pricking pain caused by the thorns that wounded my palm and fingers, then I extracted the flower and planted it in the eye of the guard to my right in a quick move, then I held the other guy's head and made sure it landed on the columns pointed edge; that was a great collision to buy me some time.

The Architect did not react as I fled out of the cell; I raced time through a narrow corridor that led me to the show hall of the circus ... The Circus!

It was the abandoned circus of 'Miseria' town that was coated with dust and mud and suffered a total lack of maintenance ... I could not fathom how I was brought there! How was the town still accessible although it was evacuated and labelled "Restricted" long time ago?

The two guards were after me so I had to put off my thoughts and resume my escape; I breached the gate open using the momentum created by my rushing body and I ran through the fragments of the streets I still remember before the town was devastated. Nights have always aggravated the intensity of fear that inhabited the town, I thought!

They were so determined to seize me, but I could not surrender, I was looking forward to the light at the end of the tunnel, but there was not an evidence of salvation, it seemed like an infinite race, but I was fatigued and merely the momentum drove me

through the ruins of the town till my run was terminated by a dead end!

It was the sea side; they were going to get hold of me after all! The two henchmen caught me in a most despondent form as I panted to inlet some oxygen to my lungs; I was shocked as I glimpsed The Architect right in front of me! When did he reach this spot? How could he outrun us? And how could he retain his calm posture and not pant like the rest of us?

“You bear the consequence of your choice, Mister Dimitri!” He threatened “And be informed that what you will be disposed to is rimmed with precarious obstacles and conundrums”

He then motioned his hand in the air to form a gesture that directly commanded his henchmen to dispense me; they captivated me and I sternly resisted until I was overpowered, they then dragged me deep through the water and threw me making sure that I drown...

I was suffocating, everything was turning black as I drowned and the last sighting I remember was The

Architect's smiling mask highlighted by the moon light;
it was a horrifying scene to witness, especially when
your perspective is distorted by the water, it was more
terrifying than drowning into the darkness!

I wonder where this takes me, I contemplated!!!

Dolor

It shall filter your spirit and wipe out the specks of blunders and indecency: Dolor is a trait which pertains to divinity.

(Dolor is the Greek word for pain)

** ** *

A floating body: another version of a puppet, being controlled by the randomness of the sea waves.

The sun rays forced my eye lids open, although I had to adapt to the light! I was laying on the cohesive surface of the sea, driven by the tide and waiting for the nearest bay in complete indolence.

I coughed quarter a liter of salty water; it must be providence that intercepted my death, after all, I, fortunately, did not drown and made it to the other side of life, to somewhere where The Architect would probably not be existent, and possibly to a different time!

** ** *

Trumpets and gongs: War is a mandatory percussion.

The glorified trumpets of the Greek monarchy were blown to alert the guards as to the outsider approaching them, who was obviously me!

“Where am I? And what time is it?” I silently contemplated while still in a state of convalescence following the incidence of forcefully drowning me. I felt the guards dragging me to the solid ground of Athens while they murmured and questioned my presence and my arrival; they were shielded by the metals of war, their helmets were a pure bronze forgery and their spears were pointed at me in utmost readiness to counter any movement I would take; “what would a debilitated body showcase?” I thought!

On top of the checkpoints and the roofs of the border line siege were multiple archers symmetrically distributed on both sides of the main sea-side gate; it was clearly The Greek Era! I somehow gained access to one of the everlasting myths.

“Identify yourself, outsider” one of the soldiers inquired.

They stood in solidarity side by side to conquer the possible threat impersonated by me, their fear of what seemed to be different was vivid, their eyes scanned my garments that looked very incongruent to how they attire and my morphological features were not by any means familiar to them.

I was regaining some of my motor functions that helped me position myself in a proper sitting posture while every weapon was sharpened to hit its prey.

“You’re obliged to speak, intruder” was the command of the guard next to me.

“Dimitri” I said; they looked for clarifications but were not graced by any of them until I resumed while trying to acquire a normal breathing rhythm.

“I am Dimitri, a Soviet civilian”

“There is no such ground labelled with that name” another soldier responded, obviously not knowing what the Soviet Union was.

“I came from a far place” I replied

“The army of Athens has surfed all grounds and sailed across the seven seas” some soldier who seemed to be an equivalent to a field marshal – judging by his military sash – argued “And we are sure as heaven that there is nowhere named as you claim”

“I also came from a different time”

Soon the grave silence emerged and only the waves colliding with the shore were audible. Everyone who stood on the bay panicked and hesitated, my appearance was confounding to them and my proposal evoked their doubts ... and curiosity!

“If your presence here pertains in any manner to our Persian nemesis you’ll stand upon the gallows and you’ll be executed” The Marshal aggressively threatened

“Oh, no ... There would not be any need for such gory attitude” I startled, trying to defend my life that seemed to be at stake “I swear to your lords that I surely am not a soldier, I am not even Persian”

“If so, what is your purpose for being here?” inquired
The Marshal

I could not decide what needs to be done, nor did I have the least idea of what to say in return to his inquisitive demeanor.

“I urge you to speak out the truth, stranger” he repeated

I was able to perceive the holy statues of the ancient myths and the temples that formed spiritual conduits that connected the earthly souls to the skies, this dire sighting engendered a notion that cannot be brought down, an obsession ... A quirk that I had to fulfil! I was fully enlightened and aware of what to say.

“Who is your ruler?” I asked

“Why do you need to know?”

“WHO IS YOUR RULER?” I insisted

“Zeus” The Marshal revealed “The crowned God of skies”

“Take me to Zeus”

“You must be deranged” The Marshal was infuriated

“What I am going to disclose needs to be spoken while I am standing before your Lord, do I make myself clear?”

** ** *

It was a strenuous debate that took place by the sea, my head was nearly decapitated and it took me more than needed to persuade The Marshal to let me into Zeus’s headquarters.

Sometime later, I was being walked in the royal aisle that leads to the sacred hall of Gods and Goddesses, in which the throne was kept. My hands were cuffed in armored steel connected to powerful restraints held by the guards who escorted me to the gate of the hall.

After a few minutes of walking through a long aisle rimmed with guards, we were granted access into the hall and I was coerced to kneel while still restrained; the hall had linen curtains of pale blue colour and the red furnishings that accompanied the gold-pleated utensils all managed to form an accurate reference to

the notorious paintings that documented The Greek mythology; Zeus was seated on his golden throne, his conceited attitude could not be more defined! He wore his renowned blend of “blue and golden” royal dress that highlighted his muscular trunk.

Roughly eleven servants were enslaved to carry out the known demeaning chores and the butler could not be less enslaved, despite his relatively higher status.

To the left side of Zeus’s throne, a fair-skinned tall bloke stood by his Lord, the garments he donned had a sense of sumptuousness, indicating his royal position.

The guards who escorted me earlier were occupied with the task of explaining my eerie method of arrival and my audacious decision to stand before his highness and this statement was clearly reflected through Zeus’s anger that was portrayed by his face.

“You are standing before a God” He commenced “You better have some fruitful news”

“I escaped from a guaranteed death and made it to your land” I explained “The place I came from has a single language, it’s the language of silence; I have uncovered a miracle, a bliss that outweighs the charm of superstitions that I could not reveal to the public, then I was left to drown but I ended up here”

“What could that bliss be?”

“It is The Sapphire Flower!”

I succeeded to draw the majority of their attention and I spent the entire course of my stay at the hall explaining what The Sapphire Flower is, trying to blow off the dirt that covered its existence and to clarify the matter as much as I could.

Zeus figured out it was out of my reach now and that no effort would be sufficient to determine the true coordinates of the flower, so he inquired about the purpose that made me ask to be brought in his vicinity and hold this conversation.

“I came here, knowing that The Sapphire Flower is impossible to find, and I know that you harbor the

withered souls, I came here to ask you to build a temple, a holy architecture in which the feeble and the despondent could confess their weaknesses and reveal their pains ... A temple named after pain, the noblest of all feelings known to man, a temple entitled “The Temple of Dolor”!”

The man standing next to Zeus was astonished and willing to speak but Zeus was too outrageous to allow anyone to offer his opinion regarding my proposal.

“By this proposal you dispose yourself to the wrath of Gods” Zeus threatened “Our war with the Persians has contributed to losses of soldiers and resources beyond the count of grief and here you are, asking to deplete the scarce amounts of gold we own over the labor required to establish a temple in which the soldiers would admit their despondence and walk away from the fields of war!”

He totally refused to listen to what he thought to be preposterous and ordered to take me away and release me by the sea, so that I could return back to where I came from.

I was dragged outside by the soldiers, and time was swiftly passing that the dusk visited the skies of Zeus, and Apollo's sun departed.

I heard someone calling my name so I turned around and identified him as the royal member of Zeus's palace who stood next to his throne.

"I am Penthos" He said "The spirit of grief, lamentation and mourning"

He revealed his interest in my proposal although it was against the regulations set by his Lord; Penthos farther discussed his true status as he mentioned that he was supposed to be crowned as The God of grief, but the crown went to Hades, Zeus's elder sibling for his pensive nature as he used to rule the land of the dead and possess their countless resources that are capable of ending the famine that followed the war.

Penthos wanted to conduct a deal with me that was as follows: he would take me to the land of the dead and arrange an appointment that has me standing before Hades and Oizys, the goddess of sorrow in order to showcase the issue of the temple I asked for, and in

return, Penthos would be assigned to supervise the building process, which would suffice to crown him as The God of sorrow, displacing Hades. We both agreed on these commensal terms.

** ** *

Late during night, I was found beneath the ground, in the company of the dead who served the perished realms guarded by Hades.

He was drained by his grief, and Oizys, who was known for easing the pains of soldiers, sat next to him.

“This is Dimitri; presented to your highness” said Penthos “He has a critical notion that needs to be met”

I went on seamlessly explaining my desire.

“Shouldn’t grief be sanctified” I continued “If it wasn’t for grief, we wouldn’t know what humanity is! It is a way of salvation; we, the despondent, have nothing to offer but prayers and confessions, nobody listens to our sobs, so it is the duty of Gods to efface our agony,

and every sorrow is attributed to a pain, and my pain originates from the blessing that I cannot attain”

Hades nodded and was engulfed in some affair that seemed to drain him the most and Oizys could not say a word prior to his approval. Penthos tempted Hades to approve of my proposal and eliminate any obstacles that would hinder the progress of building the temple.

“My pain is rooted to what I cannot attain, too” Hades emphasized in a wistful tone “I was hit by the arrows of Aphrodite and it was Persephone whom my heart chose, Gods only fall in love with goddesses and she was the goddess of spring, when all we had once was spring; but she is Zeus’s daughter, and this established a monarchical conflict; she had feelings for me; I used to shower her in the gold of the underworld that she gave no heed to the fields nor the crops and soon famine emerged, so it was her duty to save the day in the eleventh hour and ensure that our agriculture would flourish after being called by the committee of Gods, but I could not bear the thought of her parting from me, so I offered her a black edible pomegranate

picked from the lands of the dead and she found it palatable and eat its third, so this now obliges her to return to my company for merely quarter a year. The Gods were frustrated; seasons were created and the new whether alterations destroyed the vast majority of our harvest, but I could not give up my love for her at the expense of the food resources. And now I have to wait for her nine months until she visits me; there is nothing as wistful as love!”

Hades revealed his tale; he seemed to have kept it fortified for ages and it was me who encouraged him share his pains.

“This temple shall rise” He ordered

Oizys consented to his decision and Penthos’ eyes spoke the language of amusement.

Now Hades would be compelled to fight Zeus, perhaps an internal war would be coming and I did not rule out the possibility that the army of the dead would conquer the lands of the living.

I tried denying all thoughts of pessimism that threatened my serene, but my efforts were fruitless.

** ** *

The Temple was signaled to start building under the supervision of Penthos, and the Roman pillars were gradually rising; the news about Zeus's rage were disseminated throughout the entirety of Athens, but he could not stand a chance against Hades.

But there was a foul plot taking place that none of us could grasp, there was a stench of insidiousness evolving out of Penthos, and a catastrophe was very likely to occur.

We heard the navy trumpets as a fleet of ships were anchored by the coast at the murky night; it was Alexander, The Great, and his fellowship who abandoned their reign in Egypt to set their feet on the Athenian grounds for some vague motive!

Penthos rushed to greet him, kneeling in respect, glorifying Alexander who walked forth in a conceited demeanor and headed to Zeus's parlor.

“What is he up to?” I contemplated, and I wondered about the inexplicable reaction of Penthos; fear was beginning to dominate the Roman premises and everyone was alerted to a nigh war, a more destructive one than the Persian rivalry!

** ** *

The news were spread by the very next night, and it was then known to the population that Zeus was coerced to step down as the leader of Athens to be displaced by Alexander who was crowned as the novel king!

That was the farthest thing from nobility, Penthos called for Alexander as to save the Roman empire from diminishing under the rule of Zeus, but it was all for a personal benefit which was soon publicized when we heard that Hades as well was declared free of charge and the crown went to Penthos, the new god of grief, while Oizys retained her status, for she was not superior to Penthos.

Alexander looked forward to the glory that was linked to his biography, he has conquered the Egyptian lands

before to be named the greatest of Roman warriors and now he wants to be titled as the savior of Athens! He was so fond of what Penthos claimed to be his gift to the weak, The Temple of Dolor!

Oh, god, what have I done?! I was somehow responsible for the fall of the Grand Monarchy that once led the whole globe!

“Penthos was getting more powerful and superior, he could even be plotting a coup to take over the throne of Athens” I speculated

** ** *

Alexander cut the treaty that Zeus held with the Persians and signaled the resumption of war, believing that his army would strengthen the troops left after the former rounds of the war; the casualties were equally shared among the Persians and the Romans, but Athens cries were louder and its losses were gross.

The temple was complete by that time, and everyone gathered to supplicate and recite their prayers to sanctify their agonies and sorrows, they sobbed in

silence, being watched by Penthos who fed on their pains, he never sought to ease their fears, but seemed to be empowered by their complaints and doubts, he cherished the sighting of despondence and despair, knowing that these prayers which speak of the insults they had to go through would never exceed their silent sobs, and even gods seemed to be liable to sorrow: I witnessed Zeus lying close to one of the temple's pillars, a little aged compared to the time I confronted him and more engulfed by his aches; Even Zeus had his sorrows which no one understood or believed in!

Hades never came to join the wistful soldiers as they performed their rituals, and he was confined to his lair, mourning his love for Persephone with a vial of royal wine, while Alexander admired his throne and never stepped away it.

I blended with the silent worshipers as they silently spoke their pains to the Lord, I was doomed in every era and sanctifying pain could not fill the hiatus created by not being capable of locating The Sapphire flower, after all, Zeus seemed to be right about his

vision that came true, everyone abandoned his duty to turn out to the easier route! And acknowledging the reasons to my grief did not grace my yearn to The Sapphire Flower with a reunion, it was a banal affair!

Penthos' pleasure was augmented on a daily basis as the temple was always occupied, and the worshippers' sobs were all he desired.

Every era has its "Architect"!

** ** *

I left the temple during the night and planned my escape, it was never fair to witness this empire coming to an end because of a reckless heed, and I wonder who this era's "Architect" was: Penthos or me!

I walked forward and into the depth of the sea, and there were no guards to observe me, everyone was occupied by his eerie rituals that I founded...

It was time the soviet bloke left!

It was time I returned to my era to resume my pursuit...

** ** *

Dark in there...

Dark and claustrophobic, no breath, no life... I was choking, being totally submerged by water and striving to get to the surface.

Survival has the capacity of prolonging a second into an era, and it was not until I was found floating on the surface of water, somewhere near Miseria bay, that managed to regain part of my consciousness and my sense of awareness of the surroundings, and although I ended up near the same bay, it was noted that I considerably drifted away.

These nightmares never subside, I pondered in silence as I gazed at the skies that have been just cracked at the sun's glamorous arrival; I coughed out all the water that occluded my airways as I breathed in some air that I have not inhaled in a whole era... a whole Greek era that only took place in a nightmare which I am certainly not eligible enough to decipher...

The Game of Symbols

11:20 p.m.

Living up to my serene, I fetched myself a full goblet of red wine, a beverage I never fantasized myself holding, but eventually we become the detestable versions we were trying to negate.

One also has to admit that living in a cottage of simple taste and solely lit by half a dozen of burning logs conjures a paradoxical cheer, especially when you are certain that nobody can infringe your premises that are rimmed by perilous bogs inhabited by demons!

“And destiny brings you a present, so pleasant... that you turn out to be free” – said the female singer’s voice evolving out of the radio to flavor the golden atmosphere...

11:29 p.m.

Someone knocked the door harshly, my serenity was terminated and I was alarmed; who dares to cross the mire?!

I opened the door to the least expected guest, the lady in the black-roses-frock!

“Would your place accommodate me for only tonight?” she asked.

After all, there seems to be some weaknesses possessed by the fellowship of The Architect, though I was prepared to be somehow patrolled, I let her in as I noticed her fear despite the effort done to disguise it.

She chose a chair to be seated on and I returned back to my seat, roughly a meter distant from her, and held my wine glass.

“Would you like something to drink?” I offered

“I never speculated that you would end up as a drinker!” was her reply

“Neither did I” I said “Perhaps I’m the fiend I’ve always seen in my nightmares”

She kept an eye on me while I poured some more wine in my glass.

“So, you finally quit caring for his paradise and stopped hosting the shows that please his majesty, I see! What brings you to my abode?”

The lady, contrary to what I expected for a reply, picked one of the flowers that were woven to shape her dress and I witnessed it decay between her slender fingers as she retained a smart grin on her face.

“What would that mean?” I meticulously inquired “Did you declare the rebellion protocol?”

“I couldn’t! The shows were shut down, and the fate of The Architect seems to be vague”

“Am I being informed on, currently? Is this a patrol planned by him?”

“Would my answer help you exclude such though?!”
She replied

I froze; I could not speak another word and waited for her to clarify her stance. What brought her to this place? And how did she know about my new residence? Fear slowly displaced the state of serenity I

lived before her visit, and alcohol's effect was beginning to play its critical role, it was the only thing keeping me from acting aggressively and helped cover up my fear.

She cut the silence: "You're not so fond of flowers, are you?"

That was out of the blue!

"Not at all in fact" I explained

"Not surprised, but disappointed in you. I cannot tolerate liars"

"In what way am I a liar to you?"

"You must have fallen for some species of flowers, let it be tulip, lily or lotus, or the stupid banal red rose! You could have deceptively surrendered to The Architect's will to sanctify his Black Rose if you truly hated all flowers. But there must be other petals that you find more soothing"

She was clearly citing The Sapphire flower, although she did not frankly mention it; I was sweating to

death, and not even alcohol hid my panic, my secrecy seemed to have been cracked.

“Does my stay seem hostile in any means, Mister Dimitri?!” She wondered, augmenting my doubts and consolidating my fears! What was she planning on?

“I couldn’t decide” I answered “Your tone and the topics you cite are making me uncomfortable, though”

“I am here to be of help, Mister Dimitri; I have sneaked past The Architect’s guards to reach out to you”

“It is rebellion, like I said earlier”
“I couldn’t do so, I insist” she dramatically interacted.

“In what way do you intend to help me?” I questioned

“Through the wrecks evolve the jewels of heavens, and only the worthy are promised to see them”

I saw pearls being shaped in her eyes, they then commenced acquiring facets to look as close as possible to diamonds, purple ones sparkling and falling on the stage, all through her eyes!

What sort of game was she playing? What was she trying to convey?! And above all, would these charades predispose me to any harm?

“I have twenty nine carriages awaiting me outside; I believe it’s time for me to leave” She said

Twenty nine!

“I thought you were planning to stay for tonight” I replied

“I have already stayed!”

** ** *

12:00 a.m.

She left at exactly midnight, and I was entirely worried and totally lost among the infinite questions and doubts she left me with!

I gripped the wine vial and drank near the fire trying to evade encountering any thought that would disrupt my sham serenity, but nothing on earth could stop the sounds buzzing within my head.

I steered my sight to where she was seated, that was the wooden chair at the center of the gambling table and I found out that she left a relatively ancient manuscript.

This surely represents another entanglement, I thought as I rose to my feet to reach for the manuscript.

Twenty Nine

I never thought I would be frequented by visitors of any kind, I used to adapt to my serene and accept loneliness as a humble and silent company; however, a while ago a charming lady in a black-roses dress was found in my abode, if only she knew that she has been taunting me through her unique appearances in a nightmare that has been a part of my daily sleeping routine, but I eschewed finding answers by directly questioning her. If only she knew how bad-tempered I have been since I moved to this new residence, though I chose to, if only she could understand how irksome it is to fall into the same nightmare on daily basis!

Now that she has departed, she made sure she left me an eerie manuscript on the chair she was seated on; I was mid-way between the gambling table and the house-settled bar counter which I targeted to cater myself with a sparse boost of “Jack Daniel’s”, I then proceeded towards the manuscript, moved by thrill and braked by skepticism!

After a minute of disputed motivation, I placed the now empty cup that had a whiskey shot a few moments ago on top of the rounded gambling table and held the wittily folded manuscript anyway, for I had no authority over my curiosity.

It was faded, no more glazed, its colour was inclined to the yellowish effect of time; what found me startled, however, was its texture, to which I responded via a surge in my skepticism and gradually my recently acquired not so acceptable derisive manner was mitigated. The manuscript had a rough texture, very akin in nature to that of the original ancient Egyptian papyrus, and to raise further suspicion, it heavily matched the texture of the letter I found in my black envelope a year ago which I burned down to vapors!

I meticulously unfolded the manuscript; it embraced a lengthy text, recorded in Latin which I pilloried! Why would a lady who seems smart enough to perceive the slightest details leave behind a manuscript written in an almost extinct language while she prosaically expects me to notice it?!

As a person who has gladly run out of his reserves of patience, I moved towards my burning logs, and as a rule, I burn what I do not fancy or fail to decipher!

I confess, however, feeling mawkish as regards the manuscript I was about to dispense, until I reached close to the fire that miraculously revealed a text written English, with a French-taste of italic font while the original Latin text slowly vanished!

This must be the work of an imposter, a rather proficient one, I would say! It suggested that it is the recently added translation of whatever text the papyrus embraced and I moved the manuscript a bit nearer to fire for a better reading to be achieved and to fully reveal the English text.

The text said: "In the name of earthly religions, those adopted by mankind and those that are not yet identified which have be erased along with the decimated civilizations, we agreed that denying the signs bestowed upon the beings by Lord, the mighty is an act of servility and ushers into a rueful life full of distress.

For the critical vitality the numeric patterns implies, we, the congregation of covert monks based in the holy concealed underground sanctuary where the center of Earth is evident, have aimed to clear the doubts of those who seek revelations and enlightenment that is untarnished by any mundane ulterior-motives”

Oh, God! What sort of frivolity have I got myself into!

I could never envisage myself running after this type of jugglery that normally appeals to the philistine majority of the population, but I could not resist continuing the text, for what my eyes saw next was beyond what my mind is able to conceive!

The rest of the manuscript included a detailed explanation of the true spiritual meaning of every number from zero to nine according to The Greek Age interpretation that was ascribed in part to some religious views including Buddhism and Hinduism, and how gathering those numbers into patterns of two or three or four numbers yields unlimited outcomes of different references and interpretations, for instance

the zero tends to terminate a stage of life and one infers new beginnings while its recurrence as in the pattern of (11) refers to the ancient monk once known as 'The Greatest Guru' who was reputed for disseminating love and assessing humanity and to date is left with no successor, while a pattern of (111) signifies a new phase channeling energy and desire, and (222) carries the vibration of love and acceptance and so on...

Furthermore, the manuscript casted some light upon how numeric patterns could be identified via a scrutinized observation in one's daily life, for instance, one has to look for the patterns that are frequently seen totally unconditionally in life through his very own perspective and I thought of a specific congregation of numbers which I looked for in the vastness of records attached to the manuscript, which I was obliged to place close to fire to reveal the English translation; the pattern I was focused on finding through the array was (11:29) for the personal vitality it holds and for the inadvertent recurrence of it almost multiple times a day!

This specific pattern resembled a number of facts, for instance, I was born on the 29th of November, and I usually wake up on 11:29 a.m., the symphony I last wrote was numbered 29 and I never played it when I used to be a violinist, but I stumbled upon a silhouette that lived in the 29th block in the 11th avenue of the former downtown and it miraculously played my symphony while I could not accuse it of plunder! And my former condo was numbered 29, which I had no role in choosing, for it was the only vacant apartment when I found the block.

My mind was exhausted by the thoughts fleeing through it and by the search that was lingered; even the lady knocked my door at exactly 11:29 p.m. and mentioned that 29 carriages were at her service before she left! Could she have manipulated me?!

What was it after all; does it carry a meaningful essence in which I should put some faith? And should it be found, do I have to live up to what could be potentially the product of a juggler who no more carries any traces of fidelity? Could it be a foul plot

weaved by The Architect to set up his patrol before he entangles me?!

The fears my chest enclosed were beyond any count and I could not tame the urge I developed to find this pattern, if it happens to exist at all! Does the lady in black roses truly and willingly intend to help me evade The Architect's next hit? And if so, is she aware of the repercussions of her nascent intention if it is somehow leaked to reach her merciless master?

I glimpsed the 29 bottles of alcohol that I became addicted to on the bar shelves and then noticed that I have lit 11 logs for a fire instead of 12!

This was getting on my nerves and tampering with my stability if I was blessed by any!

My call was rewarded by an answer, I finally spotted the pattern exactly as I envisaged (11:29), but the answer was never by any means relieving, it only aggravated my doubts and left no room for comfort or serene!

“The pattern 11:29.” I read “also referred to as ‘The Holy Patten of Angels’ and commonly known as ‘The Numbers of Angels’ that infer a symbol of perfection and bliss; before annihilation, every master who was held responsible for spreading enlightenment was assigned a pattern that was carved on his bald scalp, but the guru of ‘Angels’ who had a direct Greek descent was pronounced missing by the superior council of gurus; it was later prophesied that a successor of the missing guru would live up to his legacy and only he who knows where the committee is held, provided that the pattern shadows his steps wherever he wanders, is deemed to be the chosen guru and the pattern shall lead him to fulfil his legacy”

It was when everything made sense no more, and if there is even a slight chance that this manuscript was destined to be delivered to my care, I could not know where the place claimed to harbor the committee lies, but it seemed that destiny had a backup plan for me!

A worn out – highly genuine – map was dropped on the ground, it was hidden among the pages of the manuscript; I reached to the ground picking up the

map and expanded it on top of my gambling table; the map was dated back to an age before colour was used by mankind, explaining the monochrome illustration of its contents and the faded lines that were hardly perpetuated.

Right in the middle of the map, a circle was drawn around some very unique coordinates and a few labelled arrows guided me that it was the exact location of the covert base, situated underneath a mountain in Sinai!

So that is where the center of the Earth lies! And that is how the lady proposed as the only way she could be of aid for me to elope and break free!

What if it leads me to where The Architect has set his patrol? But the counterargument was as simple as that The Architect could have reached for me if the lady knows where I reside while still maintaining complete allegiance to him!

It seemed to me as an enigma that lacked motivation more than an escape plan. I was tempted anyway to

set my new destination to where the map leads, but fear played its usual protective role.

Although I had nothing more to lose, I did not want to risk sacrificing my liberty for the sake of a novel temptation that urges me to go to a place where any unpredictable event would take place, but would it stow any answers worth the venture?!

I was in two minds, awaiting a sign, or any factor that may alleviate my skepticism, for I believed that only a bumper would surmount again to his quirks that are almost always deadly!

The Visitor From Beyond

2 days later,

12 midnight...

“For you I’d spend an eternity in a quest ... to the best that I can! And destiny may hold some answers for us, bring us closer and thus ... every moon can light our clan” Said the pop singer.

I turned off my radio!

It was a typical rainy night. Winter has a characteristic charm mostly defined by a paradoxically accepted gloom, especially when you live in the most remote areas of London, like the one I took for residence.

If it was not for the recent tribulation of the manuscript and the enigma it confers, I would have relished my serene; the thunder rumbled outside and the mire seemed to experience some turbulence.

Should I take off to Egypt and set a foot on the very route that leads to a pursuit that I am not sure it would be fruitful? Or should I remain locked in my

cottage, praying to the Lord in piety that The Architect never uncovers my whereabouts?

The thread of buzzing thoughts haunting me was shortly cut by an amplified raging bolt of thunder which somehow made my vial of wine crack and fall into pieces, and then a streak of three knocks on the door followed.

My doorstep has been stepped over by many guests for the past few days, and 2 guests are relatively many, considering the fact that I have not had a visitor since I stayed in Britain!

I hesitantly turned the door handle opening it; a senile bloke stood before me, holding a frail gray umbrella that did not serve its purpose well.

“If you don’t mind, sir” he asked “may I be your guest for a few minutes?”

“Sure” I replied while pondering the matter “come in please”

He stepped into the cottage, mudding the floor as he walked forth to find himself a seat; his black leather

coat was cracked and frayed, I looked over at his features in detail, an aged man, 65 at most, having an emaciated body, defeated by senility, his arched back gave the false impression of him being of a short stature, but he was not! He had an oval face, covered by skin that has completely lost its elasticity and his eye lids were barely open. His hair looked brittle, although it was dense, and it acquired the aging gray colour. For a man of his age, it takes a considerable amount of courage to cross the mire at such late time in the night!

His mind seemed occupied by what he saw in my cottage, precisely the shelves that supported the 29 half-filled bottles embracing a good variety of wine, rum, booze and whiskey.

“Fancy a drink?” I offered

“How could a saint turn into such fiend?” He replied

“Excuse me”

“You were never a drinker, Dimitri” was his shocking clarification!

His voice was deep and barely audible, being vocalized in a supreme courtesy and noticeable sturdiness that defied age, but his words were incongruently discomfiting and heavily exposing as it might seem.

“I’m sorry; do I happen by any chance to know you?” I inquired

“No you don’t” he answered “but I do”

“What exactly do you know, sir?”

I felt intimidated and potentially threatened, I was planning on finding a good excuse to terminate his visit; he steered away from the shelves and looked me in the eye, his attention grew to a doubled magnitude, forcing me to develop a scowl that matched his frowny appearance, his voice got deeper and meaner as he said: “Everything, Mister Romanov ... I know everything”

I reached for a chair opposite to him and seated myself while his eyes creepily followed my trace. The senile guest reached for his left pocket of the coat’s

lining and took out a rolled portrait as he passed it to me saying: "Is that not you, Dimitri?"

I unrolled the portrait while keeping my eyes fixed on him, then looked at the portrait he just handed me, and he could have never brought me a present more puzzling, provocative and question-raising!

"I am aware that you have been depleted by searching for it" he emphasized "until you decided to turn your back on the issue as a whole"

That was my missing portrait, the one that I have never seen! The portrait had a sentimental value rather than a corporeal one, it reminded me of the event I have been invited to, on behalf of the 'Alden' family to celebrate their reunion, and all out of a sudden a pretty female photographer appeared through the sumptuous crowd and photographed me then ran away!

Who thought I would be able to ever see this portrait, delivered by this very eccentric old man?!

In the portrait, I was dressed in my fancy tuxedo, and stood before the bar counter (before I was ever curious to taste alcohol) close to the glass works that blessed the hall, my eyes were half shut in reflex to the blinding flash light produced by the camera.

I looked back at my visitor: “Where did you find this? And ... How?”

“That you cannot know” he replied in an unfathomable reluctance.

“You do not understand the value of this portrait...”

“I do” he interrupted my expression “especially that it was shot by a mesmerizing young woman whom you have never seen until the very moment”

“How could you know me in such detail?”

“In time, you will understand”

That was never a fulfilling answer, if only people knew how painful it is to pursue an answer while you have lost all of your patience currency.

“There is not a single sensation more oppressing than patience” he resumed “patience at its best is deemed a sin!”

Were my thoughts audible to him? Could he look into my spirit and translate its language?

“You may wonder why I am here, I assume” he said

“Yes, indeed, sir, I do!” I replied while anticipating some clarifications as to loosen the tension of the situation.

The guest looked around at every corner of the cottage, his look held some yearn and spoke of familiarity, which further augmented my madness!

“Memories are a heft, though oblivion is not much of a grace” his voice turned inexplicably soft and influential “why would a man run to his past when he suffers from his present? Like it would help solving his dilemmas! Nostalgia kills time ... forgive my digression and by the way, I can notice that your English accent has been considerably enhanced that a stranger would never know that you’re a Russian guy”

My adrenaline reserves are the only part of me that have not been altered; I felt my heart beats almost fracturing my ribs.

“You’re a stranger!” I interacted

“I am glad you have dispensed your patience”

“Ironically, you are forcing me to act patient while I wait for an answer to my questions which I claim you know” I swiftly replied, provoking him to disclose the motive behind his visit, but he was bewildered as he caught a glimpse of my old violin that was barely supported in a distant corner.

“I used to own a violin very akin to yours” he meekly murmured “and I can’t get over the proficient Moroccan forgery of it”

“You can have it” I offered “I’m no more the musician I used to be, nor do I have any intentions to use it. I suggest that it goes to your care when you leave”

“That only adds more weight to a nostalgic manner that I do not endorse” He then developed a reliable seriousness “See, I’m more than two decades older

than you, I've seen the future and it's bleaker than any vision you might propose"

"Am I expected to believe a word of what you say?" I intimidated "Sir, are you certain that you aren't a blithering idiot who is currently wasting my time?"

"Remember, I know everything about you, including the fate that you are yet to know, and the portrait you hold tight is a very good indicator that I might be of great help to you"

"I'm listening" I tried sounding decent

"Very well, as of the recent turbulence in your already off-course life, I suggest that you follow the pattern to where it leads"

A moment of silence was summoned as I was taken aback, pondering the possibility of this being a staged patrol.

"Sir" I broke the silence "I might accuse you of gaining an unauthorized Intel regarding me! So, I believe it would be more helpful, and surely relieving, to know your identity and to have a clearer image of your

intentions, or I am going to seek the help of the authorities”

“You can’t threaten me, I’m your only compass to guide you out of the grip of your nemesis” He defended himself.

I reasoned it would be of no benefit to repeat my suspicions out loud, so I lent him my ears while setting up my mind to develop an escape plan should his visit turn out to be of any harm.

“It seems that you have found a nemesis in the wrong party, Mister Dimitri; you are urged to go through your destined trip to where the pattern leads and it’s only then that you’ll understand who your true foe is, or should I say ‘ARE’!”

“Are! Who are they?” I inspected in a noticeable skepticism which he could sense

“This you’ll have to figure out on your own. It’s only a matter of time until every party is involved in your saga”

“Sir, forgive me but I don’t find any of your replies fruitful”

“I’m here to serve the purpose of encouraging you to reach out to where the map shows. Have some faith in the nightmare that has been haunting you for so long, my dear!”

His final statement found me combating a shivering response to his feral revelation! I shrieked and turned blanch; what he proposed denies by all means the possibility that he could be watching over me, this surely must be another state of consciousness, another form of the truth that I have never been fortunate to obtain on my own. I was rapturous, yet acted in sobriety, although I was aware I could break loose at any moment.

“You have been patient for decades, son” He continues “You can no longer remain a puppet, in time you’ll be able to handle the situation without being controlled, and when you do own the leverage to do so, you’ll understand that Karma is a heresy, a pulp fairy tale! Only those who seek vengeance are the

very ones graced with relief, but Karma serves no one and brings no justice ... We create our own justice”

The speech he delivered was empowered by a tone that defined his rage which was blended with a luscious enthusiasm and an oddly fathomable impertinence.

“So, what are you precisely?”

“We’re all puppets, the question is: if you happened to be the puppeteer, would you be glad if your puppet cuts its strings?!”

“My apologies, sir” I felt confused and bonded by fear
“I can’t keep on track with what you say”

“Sooner or later you will, but do not tarry upon your trip to Sinai; it’s there where your doubts will wane”

He seemed to have fathomed the signals of fear and suspicion that I was emanating so he resumed: “Cut your strings, Dimitri. You’re based on a carefully hidden lust which a gruesome set of standards made sure it will stay buried; go after your lust, it’s the only left weapon of reliability against your foes”.

My visitor rose to his feet and shambled towards the door as he took a final look at my violin: "Farewell" was what spoke out before he ceased his eyes from tearing up.

"This is where I'm supposed to halt lingering my visit, Dimitri" He said "Follow the pattern and believe in the worth of your nightmare to behold the answers you seek"

"But I still do not know a single detail that pertains to your identity" I said so as he tried turning the door handle that hardly operates without greasing to find himself an exit out of my cottage.

"I'm just a clown, son" He finally answered my call "However, I don't do this for a living ... It's rather cathartic"

His rough menacing voice congruently matched the look of ecstasy conferred by the glaze of his pair of narrow eyes, and that look never subsided.

"In what way is it cathartic?" was my curious reply

"In time you'll understand" were his final words.

The visitor was dismissed and soon my sham serene returned to its original state; I looked backwards to where I was seated and –expectedly- the self-portrait was gone with all the sentiment it carried for me.

I steered my vision to the violin then fixed my eyes upon the map and the dusty manuscript.

That visitor came from beyond and what he proposed has illuminated the murky corner, leaving no room for retreating or any second thought.

I must leave, I reasoned!

And all out of a sudden, the memory of the nightmare played by my sight...

The Grove in Her Eyes

First a nightmare, then a premonition and lastly an obsession!

** ** *

I hate loneliness as much as I am used to it, but I was forced to lead a forlorn life. Loneliness is never addictive, though it could be deemed dangerous and whenever I am left to the company of silence and lonesome every premonition I enclose shatters my rib cage and demolishes whatever hallows I hold dear.

It was when my eerie visitor left that I had to recall the memory of the nightmare that has been recurring for a considerably long period. Could it have predicted the incidence of a turning point in my life?!

I recalled every bit of the nightmare; it was commenced by me waking up in a Roman auditorium at the late hours of a dark night, the pillars of high altitude rimmed its rounded periphery and the moon light barely guided my pupils as to where to find some features to look up to.

“Head to the pit of perdition ... Head to the pit of perdition” Yelled an ominous voice of a crow with a cracked beak as it hovered right above me and flew all the way forwards and downwards towards a crowd that gathered around an object that was not visible due to the blocking effect of their bodies.

I heavily stood up and held the granite seats for support as I descended the levels of the auditorium until I set my feet on the ground that served the purpose of a stage; I approached the communion trying to understand a word of what the clamor was about, but they all agreed on being infuriated by what seemed to be a nefarious demeanor pf which I knew nothing.

“The moron is finally here” said one of the women who had her share in the crowd as she pointed to me, while I assumed to have channeled my doubts regarding the ongoing ambiguity through my facial expressions.

Every man and woman who stood side by side forming a not so neat circle that sieged the object of interest

wore similar garments that were inspired by the Greek style in every possible way, save for their strikingly bizarre black colour that added to their unwelcoming attitude! And I was certainly dressed in the same way as they were.

“You are a licentious imposter” a mid-aged frowny man proposed “You failed to alert us to the set back that has affronted our state of peace, so you created this charade to deceive us into believing that perfection has a domain, found amidst the ruins of war ... Where on Earth is the Sapphire flower?!”

The man spoke his last statement emphasizing via a direct gesture that the object of interest they encircled was the ruins of the war, through which an empty pit was dug in the ground amidst the charred relics of a once existed city. The pit was supposed to the place where the Sapphire flower was planted, the only evidence of perfection left to witness ... and admire!

In a fraction of a second, every voice rose to a level that conquered the other and none of their curses and

reprehending speeches were audible to any of us, and they were judged to be curses ascribing to their growling attitude and the anger that blemished their phony elegance.

My mouth was made shut by surgical stitches ... Bless 'The Architect', the puppeteer who rules the show; he confiscated my tongue!

"Halt" a sound that should be respected knocked out the murmurs in the gauntlet of clamor!

That was the sound of a bald servant as he signaled the arrival of 'The Council of Morals'.

Five tall men strode across the stage in a triangular formation, all dressed in black, covered from head to toe and none of their features were made vivid to the public. They paced in a synchronized rhythm, never breaking their formation and emanating a proper prestige; they stood still in a distinct spot, and a fleet of army men holding recently sharpened pointed spears fortified them from every direction, all being topless to reveal their muscular built up, their faces were distorted and warped, losing all the facial organs

and a stretched skin remained intact to cover their faces to instill a feral appearance, they all kneeled in preparation to initiate a conquering assault when commanded to do so.

The five masters were situated on top of a high eminence to be witnessed by the public, and they spoke not a single word; their loyal servant communicated their speech, as he translated the sparse strict gestures of the head master as follows:

“Doomed are the jugglers and imposters for every heresy they invoke or disperse, and the graces shed upon you by the merciful council have been put on hold –with the ultimatum of a fierce retaliation to come should your charade prolong- until you bring us any corporeal evidence as to solidify the proposal of there being a Sapphire Flower” he then added “A whole lot of a week, and not more than a week, is all what you have been granted, do not tarry or destiny shall turn out in a manner surely not in your favor”

This act of prodding was brought to an end and the pointed arrow heads of the spears were ignited to

produce black and blue flames; the council recessed back to whence they came from escorted by the armed parade.

One soldier faced me and held my arm in strictness and I was not able to communicate the sense of pain I had as he squeezed my arm with his fist while walking me through one of the aisles that led to the inner prisons built underneath the auditorium and directly before the aisle we both walked through culminated stood the lady in the black-roses-frock, the soldier seemed to have been delivering me to her as she was the one mandated to finish the rest of the affair of placing me into the cellar, but destiny always has a subplot.

Right after the soldier was dismissed, her eyes shone in the murk of the aisle, her black pupils turned into a motion picture of what seemed to be a grove, a mystical one!

I was taken by the peculiar witch emanated by her eyes; her pupils kept leading me somewhere until it

was revealed to be a sacred grove amid dire scenery of Might Mountains coated by snow.

“This is your only way to escape retaliation” she prodded

“You’re a goddess, you’re the dame to kill for” I praised her “You’re certainly the savior in the eleventh hour”.

** ** *

I was instantly teleported to a snowy area that was not inhabited by any life, save for the Sapphire Flower!

The snow-clad mountains stood before me, based on the ground and peaked all the way up at heavens, and I shambled forth through the chill of the blizzards though being obscenely naked from head to toe till I stood upon the entrance to the guarded hallow; I descended through the narrow rock inlet that barely had me fitted in and was instantly inside the hallow: a rock based cavity lined by carved figures that were made indistinct by the logic of dream forgery, some

meters ahead was a pillar that stood half way between the floor and the not so high ceiling; the pillar was mechanically operable, I placed my right hand palm on it and took a deep breath then pushed the pillar downwards until a primitive switch ticked.

The passage right beneath me opened and I fell down in an infinite darkness that was terminated after an eternity...

I fell on a carefully weaved spider web, hard and tensile enough to resist my weight, and broad enough to fill a massive area in a place that was not made clear owed to the murk that happened to be impenetrable by any beam of light.

I saw it, glazing through the darkness, emitting purplish rays and the sapphire harbored amid its petals shone in a glamour that precedes all spells of known charms; it was the Sapphire Flower. Perfection is still an existent phenomenon! The flower was planted in a mystical grove that floated in the air.

I reached out for it, but every bone I had inside me developed a dull ache, I looked at my hands that I

hardly rose, they shook in dysrhythmia like a morbid old man awaiting his death, my skin lost its elasticity and I hardly stood up. I was senile!

I grabbed the flower and resisted its thorns, and in no time I was returned back to where I started, out of the void and amid the snowy blizzards.

This time I could not rise to my feet, I aged more every second, but I could still harness whatever energy I possessed to crawl ahead, but I was hindered at his sight; he stood in an undisputed prestige, his tall stature was defining and no eye could falter his unbreakable ivory mask; The Architect stood before me!

He rose his left hand and gripped it in a glance; 29 meteors slit the skies above, every snow coated mountain let away its white dress and the dresses gathered in an avalanche that would kill me shortly, but it seemed not to suffice as deemed by the architect who summoned the meteors to shower me from above and I miraculously evaded whatever came by my side while not keeping an eye on the count, and

it was brought to my attention that a tunnel was dug in the ground that led to a long way below the Earth surface which obviously led back to the auditorium for me to declare my freedom.

The mountains had their cores erupted and became nascent volcanoes; the molten lava raced the avalanche to reach me while the meteors kept landing on the ground, melting whatever 'white' that was left intact!

The tunnel inlet was getting close as I crawled to it, defying the desire that wants me killed, holding the evidence I need in my right hand that bled without ceasing, but I could not reach for the tunnel, despite every miracle the Lord graced me with to survive this ordeal, I was not able to force myself through the tunnel and the last thing I remember perceiving was The Architect's iconic mask, laying on the ground, a few inches before the tunnel inlet, covered by some snow and splinters from the meteors.

Suddenly, a vision flashed by my sight, I saw the lady in the black-roses-frock taken by silence and

weakened by sorrow for I seemed to have failed her; the grove in her eyes waned and disappeared into the congenital blackness of her pupils.

At that point, the nightmare usually ends, and the battling notions that my mind had were both riveting and driving!

This could not be by any chance a mere serendipity, I thought, and even if it happened to be so, coincidence is nothing but the building unit of fate!

Could this nightmare speculate on my fate, could the place I am expected to arrive at soon in Sinai harbor the Sapphire Flower now? And after all, does the lady actually work in my favor? If so, I should not fail her like in my dreams, I pondered.

And I wondered how could I not be put up to my whims even in my nightmares and dreams?

This recurring nightmare could have forecasted my fate, and probably it had some more information that time only has the capacity to reveal; one certainly does not know what destiny holds ... yet!

Destiny and Beyond

A fortnight later,

Sinai, Egypt,

10:30 p.m.

Although it was not geographically accurate that Sinai was situated at the center of the Earth, the phrase “The Center of the Earth” did imply a deeper meaning in a much more intricate context which was yet to be bared.

The air was stunning and mesmerizing; the purity of air we can get in the world’s finest dessert is unparalleled! I made sure I booked a normal ticket to Egypt, going on my own and not attached to a convoy led by a tour guide who works for a tourism agency that restricts its amusing visits to limited destinations to follow their schedules; that way I was guaranteed a maximum liberty at roaming and wandering, and above all reaching to the spot illustrated in the map that was attached to the manuscript.

10:50 p.m.

I was found on top of a building that stood up as high as 12 stories, just parallel to El Tur Mountain distanced at nearly a kilometer or a bit farther from it. The building I stood upon its roof was of an administrative importance in a fenced resort that's targeted by hundreds of tourists in more than a couple of seasons annually, and it was situated right where I needed, acting as a vantage point as to assist me in managing my coordinates that they do not veer away from the potential entrance I was looking for.

I extracted a smuggled long range signal shooter from my back pack, which was modified to serve my cause then fixed it atop the roof and unfolded the map which clearly illustrated the exact position of the entrance that I am ought to find; I pointed the device's antenna towards the specified point which was recorded at 7 feet of height from the base as indicated by the illustrations sketched on the map.

It was time I stepped down and went under the blankets of shadow to guard me from the annoying surveillance of lights ... and people!

Nearly a 10 minute walk was all it took me to arrive at the base of El Tur Mountain, roughly where the signal reaches, but my assumption needed to be treated with a high precision, which was why I brought with me a relatively outdated pager that was tampered with to gather the waves radiated by the signal shooter, and it produced a beeping sound when it was steered to a point in proximity to the target, until I read a popped-up message on the pager's screen that led me to the exact point marked on the map. How helpful and readily affordable those gadgets really were, I thought! All thanks to gambling...

I clenched to the rocks and climbed up a few feet until I noticed a sheer difference in the rock patter, hidden amidst the untidy roughness of the mountain that it would be impossible to observe; four decently and geometrically sculpted rocks were grouped together forming a diamond-shaped cover under which the inlet was claimed to be present; in the manuscript, it

was stipulated that when a proper force is applied to the upper left quadrant of the rocks and in around 30 degrees direction, the mechanical switch can be activated and hence the inlet is revealed, and I lost the count of trials I had to make until one of them was met by success, and the inlet was uncovered.

I hardly fitted myself into the narrow inlet that led into a lengthy shaft that had an oblique course heading downwards allowing the gravity to escort me to the bottom, and the dust that coated the boundaries of the shaft eliminated the majority of friction, allowing a smooth descent, but it did not reduce the pain of the trip nor insulated my clearly audible cries!

There was not a definitive bottom yet; the shaft ended up in a narrow chamber, the landing was a tough one and I screamed to death, but there was not a hand to pull me out of the mud-hole!

The darkness of the chamber was blinding; I was not granted the ability to stand up due to the limited area of that chamber, but I felt the walls as I sought to find

guidance of any sort, the texture of the walls were rather smooth, attributed to the witty carvings that documented the history of one of the finest of all perished realms, and contrary to what I originally had in mind, the carvings were found out to be of a Sumerian craft instead of Pharaonic, which was clarified by the light of the torch that I took out of my back pack.

The resonance of the walls –as I hit them- suggested they were not firmly solid and that perhaps another destination awaits me behind it; I spotted a granite door, less than 3 feet long and 2 feet broad; I held the torch by my jaws and endeavored lifting the heavy door until I could crawl through it, then let it slip back to its former position.

I was ushered into an enormous vault, probably a cave in which I had the liberty to attain an upright posture, the light of the torch flickered for a few seconds until it went completely off, I then figured out that none of the electronic devices I had in my possession worked; may be it was the electromagnetic field of the vault, I wagered!

I reached to my left pocket to fetch my silver-pleated lighter, and the moment I removed the lid and lit the fuse, the entire place caught fire and this was inexplicably queer, but the enchantment of the scene I perceived left no room for seeking answers. The hanged lanterns that were miraculously ignited by some unfathomable ancient flammable gimmick enclosed black and blue flames, while the flame of my lighter was put out.

The vault contained endless Sumerian carvings that added a unique cultural depth –and critical vitality- to the walls; who thought I would end up in one of the cradles that harbored Nibiru's Anunnaki!

The lanterns were hanged in parallel lines that were being lit one after the other, I followed the igniting queue as my sole guiding lane towards the truth that awaits me if there was any, and I kept striding to the front, despite the aches yielded by the multiple hits I received during my mean descent were never alleviated, but the adrenaline pumped by the thrill sufficed to drive me forward and yonder where the final row of lanterns were lit.

It was 11:11 p.m., and what was later made obvious to my eyes were infinite panels extending beyond vision in every direction, all presenting carvings of multiple different origins other than the Sumerian that dominated the place; the carvings were not extruded or bulging outwards as the Sumerian ones were, and they were ascribed to Pharaonic civilizations, some were Chinese characters that I could not decipher and the majority of what was revealed happened to be crafted in Latin, while the rest of the patterns were hardly identified at all!

How could a single place unite as much civilizations!

It was brought to my mind that the scene I stood before was another opportunity bestowed upon mankind by the Lord to communicate in their varying tongues after the renowned “Babel Tower” failed to rise to the desired level!

Into the panels, thousands – or even more – of chambers were dug, each of them represented a base for a specific monk or any other sort of divine entity, all numbered by the numeric patterns specifically

assigned to them, and below each pattern was a name carved to indicate it was not vacant, though no one was there for me to be his or her guest!

I reasoned I should commence searching for the pattern that has brought me to this place; 11:29...

Fortunately, the bases were numbered in an ordered manner that rendering the task less strenuous, though I had to walk for ages and extend my neck upwards to perceive the outcome of finding the pattern in any of the elevated bases, until it was found, 4 levels from the ground.

I climbed upwards, being supported by the bases that soon went underneath as I made my ascent towards the targeted base that was absolutely vacant in terms of ownership!

The pure bronze tag attached to the chamber only included the pattern (11:29) with no name as to inform me about the chosen monk if any, but as I steered my sight to gain a look into the chamber, I spotted a phrase covered by dust which I blew away

and coughed a couple of times due to an allergic reaction to the dust particles.

The phrase was revealed to be written in Latin which – to be perfectly honest – was not out of the blue, so I had to unfold the manuscript while carefully seating myself within the narrow chamber that was shaped as an oval cavity; the black and blew flames lighting the entire vault shifted the original Greek text into the translated artifacts which I properly examined until I saw a deciphered version of the carved phrase that when translated read as follows: “Blessed are the ones helming this heirloom, a most enticing yet most tiring to the soul. Peace and love they shall disseminate and not at ease; none of the antecedent struggles were deemed as joy”.

I cleared more of the dust to obtain a clearer view of what else could be a clue in the cavity, only to reveal a bulging carving of a side view of some sort of a respectable figure; I narrowed my eye lids as I approached the carving as to obtain a better perception; a bald man with bold features and a clearly emphasized zygomatic bony prominence, and

his dress appeared to be inspired by the outfits of ancient martial arts masters, and a tiny carving of the pattern (11:29) was engraved on his neck, right above his shirt collars ...

A connection was instantly set up in my mind translated into a pair of raised eye brows and a moment of silence laminated with startle: it was the carving of the man I saw in a nightmare a year ago, the weird master who claimed to have nurtured me!

So that bloke happens to be the former guru who wielded the responsibility of the pattern!

This revelation had me in unease, and all it did was adding to my confusion, paving the road for an unforeseeable outcome.

11:29 p.m.

The cavity I was situated within cracked. I felt myself plummeting to an abyss in the nowhere; this misery of mine was the toll I had to pay!

A hidden destination where destiny awaits like a cunning agent of doom preparing his trickery to dazzle my spirit ... or to captivate it!

Ages of hibernation passed and I felt no more than the breezes of wind and the accelerated fall; abyss got closer and yet the fate I shall behold was fortified in its ambiguity.

I woke up in a mirror dimension where infinite mirrors rose in the air lacking any support and gravity did not seem to be applied there, I noticed I was floating, perceiving nothing but mirrors in an endless blackness that never terminated; however, my reflection appeared in none of the mirrors I passed beside and time tended to have failed at having any recognizable role where I was stranded.

Each mirror had a complex of tales more vague than a brutal nightmare, I saw the architect removing his mask but his face was never obvious despite the great revelation, he giggled in baritone as a few strings were slowly attached to him; the council of morals appeared through the abyss as the lady in the black

roses frock bowed then kneeled before them, they did, however, burn her dress while she had no permission to scream, but was able to drop a tear ... to drop an appeal!

And Zeus cried yonder as he relinquished his throne; Psyche displaced Persephone and claimed her status, and a Roman arena was blown into ashes.

I saw a glamorous sapphire enclosed by the most enchanting petals the world has known, surrounded by pearls that lost their luminosity, and I witnessed the tale of a young gentleman dying for his beloved lady. I saw a million puppets that had soothing ribbons instead of tight strings and I saw no puppeteers.

All mirrors had their showings terminated, and in the vastness of this nowhere all I could see were the infinite reflections of the infinite mirrors, and me having no domain, except in a single mirror that levitated in proximity to me, then was inexplicably moved until it was merely a feet or less away from me so that we were both floating in the same plane of sight on an imaginary axis.

I saw my reflection for the first time, the quality of the image reflected was enhanced by a suitable sharpness; a mid-aged bloke whose face rarely smiles, my hair was charcoal black as always and so were my irises which were almost dark gray, the creases of my forehead were less vivid than the ones that rimmed my eyes and my trimmed beard had a few hairs that lost their black melanin pigment as a renowned trademark of the fifth decade of age!

I saw the mirror bizarrely cracking from a point in the center, the cracks extended forming two perpendicular lines that divided the mirror into three large sectors enclosing three reflections of mine, of whom none could subdue to my motion and each one led its own unique pattern of movement and reacting; the three reflections fought over a subject that I did not grasp, each of them spoke a different language than the other and their voices were gradually raised above the audible level which I could resist; their voices soon turned into a horrendous unsynchronized pattern of screams and grunts and growls to which the

infinite other mirrors reacted by sluggishly cracking while I kept defying their deafening cries.

Every mirror shattered into a million pieces, and for the first time gravity worked; I was racing the shards to a bottom of mirror debris, my acceleration downwards was constantly being augmented until I hit the bottom while billions of shards still showered and injured me.

Nearly ten meters away, I saw the senile bloke who paid me a queer visit in a dull night drowning in the mirror debris and calling for aid ... or providence!

I reached for him, using my arms to guard my face from the falling shards while I imprisoned my screams, I gave him my hand but he refused to hold on to it and preferred to drown.

“Lust is the key” He preached

“What lust?” I inquired as I resisted the pain of the wounds

“Thy lust is the blood and demolition” he answered
“unleash your lust, it’s the only way to conquer your
foes, those you recognize and those you don’t”

He conveyed his last few words then refused to
murmur, not even a single remark of pain was
delivered by him; the shards and debris scarred his
face, but he gave no expression, save for a tear, and
then he was completely submerged underneath the
debris, back to dust and ashes ... and oblivion.

I looked upwards, the shards kept increasing in
quantity. Each and every single shard contained a tale
of its own and none other than tales could be your
comrade in a similar situation! Time slowed down and
the falling shards decelerated.

I looked at a glass shard and I saw the blood of the
lambs spilt over the ruins of a damned hallow.

Blood it is! And lust for life...

A Tendency and a Lust

11:29 p.m.

Dispense thy serene ... Once and for all.

** ** *

I sensed a piece of glass cracking underneath my right shoe and as I scanned the place I was situated at for the time being I observed the cathartic chaos I spawned in that endangered zone!

I was found within G Block in Bletchley Park, a renowned ruin of the Second World War where the code of “Enigma” was cracked. Everything that pertains to the thought of war in a way or another reminded me of a pensive past which I survived, and a final proof that the world still holds a capacity for peace that nobody has any interest in.

Everything around reeked of havoc and a plenty of destruction, not ascribed to any militarily assault in any of the antecedent wars, but attributed to the strength of

the metallic mallet I held and to the raging force that I applied to every gadget, abandoned fixture or a pile of charred dossiers that faced me, and not even the outdated wooden tiles that creaked as I stepped over were spared.

G Block was a milestone in the English history, it then became an abandoned site of the World War; not enough guards were hired to prohibit trespassing, and it was not a remarkable place of interest that random people frequent, so it could not be more ideal a place to answer to my luscious call of liberty and anarchy; I found freedom in liberating my detained lust, and demolition was the most relieving and cathartic lust there could be; I would assume it was my latest acquired quirk which turned into an obsession which I thought I would not easily afford to lose yet.

I held the mallet tightly and wreaked havoc upon the place, breaking the tranquility of the night; every drop of sweat flushed multiple burdens and every fractured

object swept away my pains. How could a blunder feel so right?!

I walked to the front through the aisles of destroyed objects in a jogging stride, whistling like an inebriated maniac and swaying the mallet back and forth like a hanging pendulum that does not obey its rhythm.

I stood before the main facet of the block and hit it as hard as I could twice, thrice and a hundred times, and later losing the count of the hits that brought the facet's center to abyss. I turned around, glass was the most provocative object this world harbored; the breathtaking beauty that glass holds is only accentuated when it is shattered, and so I did! Every glass object was shattered into vestigial debris and not a single glass work was saved for good.

Oh! The holiness of rooms and the secrets they contain! I dashed into one of the rooms and let my untamed rage debunk the splendor of a firm age-defying wooden desk until it was made into pieces, I

then demolished the frayed drawers while screaming in joy and unleashing several cries of glory; I was the only warrior to be glorified in the vastness of this arena of mine... Oh, Glory and Hallelujah, the Americans say!

Off to another room... The door was locked! Bloody thrill! I plagiarized Jack Nicholson's troubled persona in "The Shining" as I bashed into the door via my mallet and then I stepped in to witness the sighting of a few non-operating electronic devices and computers: some of the finest ruins that helped surmount The Nazis when they once anticipated a mass dominion.

The devices were coated with stuck layers of dust, and although they seemed robust, the stacked panels and devices were crushed by the force of the mallet and I was enthralled as I sang a horrendous mash-up of five or more incongruent songs that came up to my mind.

I had a time up to take a breath, and I panted like a sprinter who has just crossed the finish line of an eternal marathon!

After all, for a man in his forties like me who was weakened by isolation and lack of fitness, I did a great job that was signaled to be terminated by an abrupt sound; it was the sound of the police sirens wailing in the streets, and soon the blue and red alternating lights were casted upon the walls as they were granted access through the destroyed window collars.

In no time, I figured out that G Block was carefully surrounded leaving no room for the slightest probability of me escaping their siege, and I did not fancy the thought of spending a life sentence in custody, charged with hostility!

I saw a flash of hope running across an aisle; it was the lady in the black-roses frock.

“Hurry up” she ordered “Over here”

I followed her trace as she led me to a covert cellar that would keep me out of the police officers' reach; I walked down the stairs which led into the cellar and saw the lady standing right on top of an iron-covered inlet.

"Drop the mallet and elope" she instructed "The inlet I'm standing over leads to a passage in the sewers which will get you to a safe zone in a few minutes, all you have to do is to walk in a north east direction which is that way for around two kilometers and you'll be safe, and over there you'll find an exit"

"Why are you helping me?"

"Because you are the only one capable of bringing our opponents down"

"You mean The Architect"

"It does not matter who... Save your lust for a more proper purpose" She said before she disappeared into the shadows of the cellar.

A sparse amount of neon-light lit the cellar, emanated by a single hanging lamp that flickered, I glimpsed an untidy mirror yonder and I looked at a face that has never known joy until that night of chaos and anarchy.

I heard a police officer speaking in the microphone, ordering me to step out with my hands raised and placed over my head, but I brock the lock of the rusted iron cover that was hard to lift and used the ladder to descend down into the sewers.

An anarchist for life ... And only time can reveal what an anarchist may be up to!

Wood and Flesh: Celestial Red Wine*

Mirrors never blemish the truth ... unless you are in the circus!

** **

Dimitri, the senile puppeteer:

November 29th, 2029

A gray brittle hair, a face altered by creases of age, an arched back that presents a false impression of a short stature and a nearly emaciated body; aging is the fault in our genes!

I looked at myself in the mirror, wondering how time moved that hurriedly. Hundreds of fallen shards paid me a tribute, and years of compulsory survival promoted my acumen to a supreme level, bolstered by a considerable amount of experience, and provided that my physical drive was no more reliable, I utilized both my experience and anger in a nascent craft, funded by the non-stop gambling career, which was puppet creation.

Tens of puppets of varying sizes failed to stand as proper creations, save for that final one, a man sized puppet, wittily sculpted from a deluxe quality of the finest wood there was and inadvertently shaped as a younger version of myself, albeit the prosthetic hair did not actually match mine when I was nearly 15 years younger than now! I kept my eyes fixed on that prodigal creation while swaying back and forth on a ten-year-old rocking chair.

This wooden gentleman needed to be dressed like a conventional British aristocrat, and so I fetched him a brand new Italian tuxedo which exactly fitted him; now all he needed was a soul!

I looked at the bar shelves that have expanded over the past decade, and no wonder, I collected tens of alcoholic drink varieties, ranging from the hundred-year-wine to the heavy liquor Vodka which were offered to me as tokens of appreciation and others that I won through poker!

A bottle of old Merlot red wine was the choice deemed the closest to the soul I wanted to instill, so I

poured some wine in a goblet then brought it close to the wooden mouth, mechanically lowering the lower jaw to administer the beverage of holiness.

Three sips and a few more... The wood turned into flesh and the soul was poured into the wooden tube that was slowly being shaped into a complete man, a younger version of Dimitri, me, to be precise.

Oh, miracles do exist in a dystopian world that has lost the slightest sense of logic!

“Dimitri” I called with a keen look of a creator watching his puppet coming to life “That’s you! It’s Dimitri” I cried in ecstasy!

“I am Dimitri?!” The puppet exclaimed in a low tone.

Proper speech, enough knowledge, a moral compass and the etiquette of the British Antiquity was what the puppet needed to blend with the society that he will break through sooner or later.

Speech ... What is more potent than a manipulative word in a congested context amid a clamor stressed by different layers of limits? Only words could

dismantle the absurdity of resentfulness and reluctance.

Days, weeks and nearly a month; Dimitri, junior showcased a highly outstanding ability (and desire) to learn, though he keep asking questions that never ceased to interrupt his tuitions.

“What is music?” he asked

“A universal language that speaks of sorrow and despair, all music is wistful! Music is the voice of a million screams with various pitches and tones”

And then a fleet of questions marched on the grounds of knowledge: “What is philosophy?” “What is religion?” “What is politics?” “Why does struggle exist?” “Philosophy versus religion” “Standards and morals” “The purpose of life” and “Why is an individual obliged to succumb to the ‘Machiavellian’ manner to take part in the society?”...

Too many wonders that always found no more than brief answers! The plethora of clarifications would

only bring its ramifications of hypothesis that are unaccounted for!

“Why does theology adopt a hostile attitude towards philosophy?”

“Philosophers raise doubts, and theology tackles the chances of doubt existence by seeking God’s grace” I answered.

I taught him the lot of etiquette rules that I could convey, and provisioned him with a dozen sets of morals and ethics as not to veer away from the acceptable behavior as perceived by the British standards.

In one of the exceptionally joyful nights of the winter, and while catering our tummies with food on the dining/poker table, he conversed with me for so long, tethering the rules of etiquette that he has been supplied with, and cunning for the appropriateness of a sheer serene –what a fast learner- he asked while intentionally avoiding looking into my eyes as to disavow himself of any suspicion, he asked: “What is love?”

“An illusion” was my quick answer “a misinterpretation to an abrupt surge of emotion that instills a false initial charm into your soul, but later on escorts you to anguish and blights your life; always keep in mind that your life is limited by the sparse volume of wine in your bottle”

“Yes, I understand that” he murmured and then refrained from any farther conversations through the entire night.

He was so close to becoming fully prepared to hit the roads of London, and it was a matter of a few days until he is eligible to handle himself.

“One more lesson” I coached “Secrets and secrecy”

“What’s a secret?”

“A self-pledge, an oath that a certain issue shall never be spoken or revealed to anyone, and is supposed to remain inside you till the day your wine runs out and you turn back into a solid piece of wood” I explained, and he did not seem so content with what he heard.

“But why should I hide anything?” he demanded an answer

“No debates over this” I conquered “this is how you basically operate your life: secrecy and privacy over sharing”.

Time flew past us, and the shards fell to abyss, by now he was permitted to experience the outer world on his own, I opened the cottage door and allowed him to step outside into the snowy night, a typical bleak night of winter in London!

He shambled to the doorstep and looked back at me, and with a troubled smile and a waving hand he signaled a temporary goodbye.

“Oh, don’t you forget” I prodded “Never stay out until it’s too late, always return back to the cottage by following the map you have in your vest pocket; remember, you should return before your steps become too heavy as the wine dose you had starts to fade so that I could administer a new dose into your body”

“Fear nothing, master” he said

“Stay safe” I prayed while shutting the door closed before snow whitens my furnishings, and then returned back to be seated on my rocking chair and wrapped my body with a handmade comforter.

** ** *

Dimitri, the puppet:

December - 31, 2029

11:00 p.m.

One mile into the streets...

The New Year’s Eve was so merry an introduction to the gregarious life that I was destined to mingle in; everything was coated in soft snow, the chilliness of the cold conferred a tingling sensation upon my short-lived body ... and I thought about how dazzling the serene that a black night sky devoid of stars holds was! That was what my master has taught me in his elucidating tuitions, and during one of the usual nights of thrifting for information, he admitted that he fell in

love with skies that lack stars, and that the people are erroneous when it comes to glamourizing the stars.

I was not sure whether I really liked the flatulent blackness of the sky or whether I accepted what I gained admittance for as I was not granted the blessings of witnessing other varieties; but my master exhorted me not to seek the stars while he was brooding over a clandestine matter over his rocking chair one night; he said that the stars carry the souls of those who cling to an opportunity to escape.

The light works created by the laser shooters started, all they did was tarnishing the pure beauty of the sky as they formed the phrase “Happy New Year”.

All out of a sudden, the crowd filled in the streets; they came fleeing from the bars and the cozy loneliness of their residences; they wore the vivid colours of modernity which my master abhorred.

A couple of huge drones flew across the city and hovered over the crowd beneath, they ceased before the center of the Capital square, and kept hovering with an altitude closing to 20 meters, being distanced

spatially by roughly 10 meters; a short projecting antenna emerged from both drones and they commenced forming what was latter made clear to be a hologram of “The Architect” as he broadcasted a live word.

The Architect has come to our presence; the sole ruler who has declared a powerful reign, the creator of the strings and the founder of all ethical regulations by which an individual is expected to be bound.

“Merrier than before, enticing like ever” started The Architect, his mask was too iconic to falter, the glare emitted by his eyes was dire and the placidity he wore was magnified by his elegant monotone.

“The blessings are readily present, devoid of sparsity and offered in sheer generosity and I shall see that every individual is graced; nevertheless, a word shall be spread, and the respectable attendants are obliged to cite it to the absentees”

Each drone had an built in vault secured with an automated inlet that was opened upon The Architect’s verbal command “The celebration may start”;

thousands of opium pieces were bestowed upon the population by the ruler, and while I bluntly reacted, the crowd had its elegance dismantled as they rallied to the gifts from above, holding as much opium as one's palms could secure and feverishly ravishing the drug.

"Do not cross the boundaries you have been accustomed to" The Architect returned, and although no one seemed to listen, he proceeded "For the realm of vibes is known to have to end, and the spectrum of feelings shall never be finite; do you never attach yourself to a reckless expedition to experience the entirety of an infinite spectrum..."

The crowd's voices were continually magnified, and the monstrous attitude they showcased was only but unstoppable following the ushering of the dope; they all became a fraternity of obscene beings, and The Architect's speech never ceased, and was never audible no more; I proceeded among the clutter of people who showed no altruistic demeanor in survival, and all they looked up to was the opium.

Every cobblestone was stepped over, every facility was overwhelmed with disoriented people, all they sanctified was chaos, and all they anticipated was dodging The Architect's wrath, and all he wished for was for the population to limit their feels.

I saw her approaching me, she strode in a coveted confidence, uninterrupted by the anarchy that has been brought about; a young fair lady dressed in a frock weaved entirely of black roses attached next to each other, her brown hair was tied in a gypsy pun and the black lipstick she wore highlighted her narrow lips, through her delicate eye lids I could observe her eyes, perfectly fixated on me, and in a moment in which I have lost the sense of time, she was a few inches away from me.

"You must be Psyche" I suggested

"Your master, Dimitri, senior must have been a clairvoyant guru, for he taught you about me; and this proves his conjectures and surmises of us meeting to be true"

I winced while he held my forearm upon the sleeve; we walked forth while on the contrary everyone seemed to walk in a retrograde manner, including the driverless automobiles!

A herd of gazelles ran in pulling a compound of twenty nine carriages conjugated together.

“Jump in” Psyche commanded as she got into one of the carriages, and I joined her.

The gazelles were ordered to move, and our carriages slid past the crowd and the hologram of The Architect, and as we got farther, we could still see the hologram fully perceivable, and the hovering speakers placed all over the snow-coated city served to deliver the word that I could not hear in the vicinity of the anarchy ongoing.

“Where are we heading for?” I mumbled

“In time you will start to believe” she replied without staring at me.

“Should my master be notified about our rendezvous?”

“This is all yours to discern” she smiled and kept her grave silence until we reached to our destination.

A fortified region, guarded merely by fences with no officials to attend it, and all one could see within was utmost chaos and plundered scrap.

The only thing that remained partially intact was the black double statue of two cavaliers mounting their mares!

We walked a long distance until I saw her ceasing; she then removed her high heeled shoes and strode down into an impression that was left there decades ago, she then turned to me.

“Are you not going to come?” she asked with a clever smile

“Where?”

“Over here in the pit of melancholy”

I walked towards her as she kept her eyes on me, and her lips moderately stretching drawing a smile that you could never have a clear stance over; my steps

were beginning to feel heavy, I glanced at my watch and it was 1:05; the efficacy of the liquor dose must have started to drop, I thought as I felt my limbs slowly turn back to their origin, wood that was barely covered by flesh! Every external sensation I had was alleviated and the fear of committing a misconduct that might find my master alarmed haunted me.

“Keep going” she said “you’re running out of time”

I was on the verge of seeing something that I was not briefed about.

“I am pretty sure your master has never acknowledged this matter to you. Are you ready to believe?”

I shambled forth; I saw an undisputed glamor emerging from a piece of sapphire that was wittily supported to the stalk of a black flower, I leaned towards it, its thorns could never hold me from feeling it by the fingers that would soon turn into immobile wooden projections.

“Shouldn’t that been levelled up to a value that necessitates dispersal?” Psyche then got closer to my right ear and whispered “Why would anyone keep that a secret, Dimitri?”

The sapphire had an effect much akin to a mesmerizing spell, or was it the withdrawal of the potion that keeps me alive?!

My eyes captured the sighting of the mystical flower, and my fingers sensed the petals, and the paradoxically unassailable thorns!

Beauty lies in the most unfathomable varieties, now only I acquired a belief, now only I know something. It’s something worth spreading.

“Courtesy is the key to gaining the vastness of my blessings” was an excerpt that I heard from The Architect’s prolonged speech “Doomed are the ones who fetter their souls in my wrath”

I turned back to Psyche only to find that she has gone away along with her carriages.

Now I stood upon the crossroads, the liquor I still had inside me would barely escort me to the cottage, and the glamor of the sapphire could find me spending a whole age of believing, even if the age lasts a few seconds!

** ** *

Dimitri, the senile puppeteer:

I was worried a ton for my creation; by my calculations, the potion would have run out by then and yet the puppet did not return, all I fear is that he might have failed to follow the map and was left to the assailants and the crooks in the streets and lonesome alleys.

My fear has settles beneath the threshold when I heard a thread of knocks on the cottage door, and judging by the sound of the knocks that resonated in close mimicry to wood striking against another plane of wood, I would say that he will barely speak a word after he is admitted into the cottage.

I opened the door.

“I believe” he whispered before he trembled and fell in absolute silence in a tragic scene that you would normally never turn upon your heel while neglecting it.

I carried the lifeless Dimitri and dragged him to the cozy interior of the cottage as I sealed the door and placed him on my rocking chair, then supported him in a proper seating posture via a couple of cushions.

He needed another dose of red wine to rouse.

** ** *

The wine served in a shimmering goblet sufficed to resurrect him, and the coziness of the cottage’s interior negated the effect of the snow that was left over his tuxedo; he never ceased scanning me with overburdened eyes and a stubborn desire to collect answers and clarifications.

“What did they do to you?” I questioned

“They made me believe”

“A belief is a heft that you cannot handle, son” was my agitating reply, though it was spoken for pure good.

He remained silent and fixed his gaze upon me as I resumed: “I see you’re exhausted and overwhelmed”

“Does it have to be kept a secret?” He asked in despair

“In deed it has to”

“But I have witnessed the truth, the only truthful fact there is, and it has been brought to my mind that it should be prevailed; this is what my moral compass keeps directing me towards”

“Nobody will accept the truth, Dimitri” I shouted, I then noticed that he was gently rubbing his chest and his breath was considerably shortened “Listen to me; I have consecrated an entire life for serving a truth that wasn’t accepted, you know why? It’s because the truth is always presented in black and white, it doesn’t come in a palette of soothing colours”

“Is that what it feels like, my master?” he murmured while battling his progressively fading breath.

“What do you mean?”

“Holding a secret ... Does it feel like a ton of burdens that I cannot rid myself of?”

Dimitri's inner battle was remarkably augmented; I was clearly in an impasse; however, I kept the conversation going: “This is the toll you are obliged to pay, son; secrecy is never fulfilled at ease; it's only when you surmount to patience that apathy becomes at your disposal!”

He lost his battle and was engulfed by the pain that encroached about his inner peace, his fingers were suddenly rigid and his hands were cupped in response to feverish epilepsy, I saw his lids twitching and the effort he paid to raise a voice was beyond his durability.

I panicked and sensed a throbbing pain running through my entire limbs; I could not properly react, and the Merlot bottle which settled on a not so far stool seemed of no applicable emergency utility.

“This life that you gifted me with is not worth this grade of suffer” he hardly spoke while holding on to the side of the chair; I startled upon the foams that gradually evolved out of his jaws.

“Do not speak any farther” I commanded as to alleviate his struggle.

“I can’t hold it master ... I’ve seen The Sapphire Flower with my very own eyes, and everyone should know it exists, how did you keep it captivated for all that time?”

I dropped an unexpected tear and sat on my knees; he was as stubborn as a mule and letting my fortified grief out was inevitably happening.

“Patience was my only sin and it will always be” I confessed “but fortunately you won’t have to live to my age to carry the weight of the world over your shoulders”

He stood up defying his unsurmountable pain, trying with every ounce of stubbornness he harbored to control his dysrhythmic motion; it was too vivid by

then that his grief hastened the burning process of the wine that powered him, and a generous volume of vapors were emanated by his falling skin; I dashed to the Merlot bottle and poured vigorous amounts of wine in the goblet, not adhering to the estimated dose that he was confined to.

“You have to drink before you blackout” I shouted as I brought my hand holding the goblet close to his unwilling lips.

“Let in the blackness of mercy, this life is not fair” his eyes were losing their configuration and he commenced collapsing; I elevated my sturdiness to a level that matched his, and despite my age limitations I was able to force him to drink until he backed away.

“Farewell, master” were his last words before he grabbed the half-filled Merlot bottle and shattered it into a million shards of glass that flew past my eyes.

It was drastically tragic that I lost my ability to express my shock in either distress or unsettling rage; the entirety of the red wine that nourished his soul was drained through the hiatuses of the cracked wooden

floor, and nearby to the smashed vial lay his no more functioning body; he lost every detail he owned, even the prosthetic wig was disheveled and the Italian tuxedo shed off its glamour; a wistful eulogy to a soul that refuted secrecy, a soul of a puppet that revolted against its puppeteer.

I heavily walked to the rocking chair and seated myself, the shimmering goblet containing the red wine that he was supposed to be fed was still enclosed by my shivering fist; I maintained a silent gaze to a null point, it was the aftermath of the inexplicable ordeal, a clear state of “Isolation of Affect”!

The rocking chair swung me to and fro and I had a quick sip of the wine before my tension that held the goblet was released and the goblet was broken into infinite shards of glass that settled on the floor after an eternity.

Now I can plead guilty in a testimony that will never take place, I thought!

Now I am the only fascist, the sole source of atrocity.

I am the graveyard of the truth and I am the sinner who has found disguise in a biased virtue that goes by the name “Patience”.

The wine laid on the ground ran towards the white shirt of the tuxedo worn by the wooden puppet and stained it right above where his heart was supposed to be.

*This story is dedicated to Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 – 1864), an American novelist whose works have inspired this chapter.

An Outlaw Clown in Miseria

Look at the mirror and see what you have become; a senile clown that curses his morbidity.

** ** *

A moderately sized rectangular shaped mirror was supported on the wall directly facing me, it was rimmed by a group of tungsten bulbs that ran out long time ago; the mirror was the only thing left in an integrated form inside the dressing room of the circus, every other fixture was ruined and covered in brown dust that added a sepia tone to my surroundings.

I was standing right in front of my mirror, my eye brows were bushy, my hair was extra brittle and was not combed, I had a thousand creases and two heavy eyelids; the clown's makeup powder that I applied to my face was off tone, it might be perceived as the left overs of powder applied from a previous show.

A black lipstick ran across my lips creating a stretched scowl that was too horrendous to be tolerated by plain sight, though it matched my outfit: a dingy black

suit; dusted and frayed enough to indicate the long ages it has withstood.

Gambling was no more played in the town due to the departure of every player that happened to exist, either by travelling, quitting or death, and puppeteering could not be levelled up to a profession that would cater me with my essentials; after all the puppets can never be interested in procuring other puppets!

My life in Miseria town was reduced to absolute misery and poverty, so I had to lease the town's abandoned circus and host a few miscellaneous shows for a living, but it was never publicized that I had an ulterior motive, a plan that was kept undercover. That specific night I expected a bunch of "VIP" audiences who were invited by name to my last show, the senile clown show.

The guests of honor were supposed to be the cumulative committee members of a notorious association comprised of eleven persons who are collectively called "The Agents of Discipline"; the other

attendants were two of the founding entrepreneurs of a multinational firm that sets franchises rapidly across the globe, five soldiers attending on behalf of “The Council of Morals” and ten of the finest residents of Miseria town.

I stepped out of the dressing room upon hearing the internal siren that signals the beginning of my show; every guest was in position, all formally dressed and considerably aged, save for the soldiers who still had the prowess of youth running in their veins; the two entrepreneurs had their faces hidden from sights by sitting in a “VIP” row that had the upper light spots turned off on demand.

The circus has not been changed a bit since it was abandoned, not even after I leased it; any revamping was strictly prohibited by the traditions of Miseria, for the residents believed that the brown sticky dust and the wrecks of old chairs were normal milestones of destiny as it takes its course, and all the brown appearance of the circus did is that it made the scene before my eyes look like an old neglected painting.

The different audiences had their very characteristic aristocrat manner of calling for the show to begin, and the tragic part of it was primitively –but sufficiently–stowed and secured that they had no notice: every chair in the circus had a handmade propelling device that was taped beneath it, the device releases a sedating gas, not powerfully anesthetic for I needed their senses to be partially functioning, but the gas would be enough to depress their actions and keep them surmountable.

When I stood on my spot, the first cue for the circus operators was signaled; they stealthily exited the circus through the contingency doors and sealed every gate as to restrain the attendants, and the plan was smoothly administered.

“Glory to the silent, and graces shed upon the muted souls” I started my show and they all eagerly focused, though their facial expressions could not consolidate their eagerness, but the years I spent as a member of the British society taught me how to interpret their false impressions!

“Tonight’s show is a misery” I resumed “And what’s more hilarious than a misery that is unaccounted for”

I looked them hard in the eyes and adopted a well-rehearsed theatrical set of strides as my speech went on: “DO YOU WANT TO HEAR A JOKE?!” I asked and they never answered.

“A tongue-tied bloke, so disciplined, so brooding and so cold; stranded in pit where silence has the sovereign ... Never can he speak, nor it’s permitted, and all out of a sudden he finds a rose!”

I noticed a few audiences frowning at my allusion.

I stretched my lips and consequently broadened my black scowl.

The second and the last cue was nigh and eventually what I have plotted would be executed! I had in mind an impudent move, and in a coveted haughtiness, I took out of my vest’s pocket a synthetic flower that I made earlier for the sake of the show; it was a close replica to the sapphire flower.

They all concurred to a united rejection of what seemed to be an odious act to them; their voices rose for the first time since we met, and the murmurs were audibly hostile to my persona.

I moved across the barely visible arc drawn on the floor as I showcased the flower to everyone's eyes.

"An appeal was rejected, and the call for sanity was abhorred"

Some of them intended to be dismissed, but I maintained my persistence; I intentionally worsened my voice tone to a dramatically sinister level: "Let the silence burn you to ashes, buck to the dust that shall be blown; each fault will be corrected and every sin will be accounted for"

I retracted the prosthetic purplish sapphire that was supported on top of the flower backwards revealing a tiny knob which I hardly pressed; in a matter of seconds the gaseous sedative evolved from beneath every chair, and I kept myself immune to its action via covering my nose and mouth by a gas-mask that was placed in a vault just beside my spot.

Everyone in the circus ran to the nearest exit, but they could not find their way out, all thanks to the sealed gates, and I chuckled as they lost their balance one after the other, even the two covert entrepreneurs had their faces out in the lights, showing off the fear and panic that I desired; it was a belated moment of triumph that I have anticipated for decades; it was the well-deserved finale to the saga of silence, and it was the only way they could pay for their sins.

They all fell down and they could barely move a muscle; it was time for the second phase of my plan to be conducted in the most heinous method.

I walked towards the wrecks of all chairs and removed the pinnacle of the heap to reveal a corroded metal box that contained surgical needles and tens of stitches at my disposal.

I grabbed the first victim, one of the old-timers who constitute "The Agents of Disciple"; the bloke was asthmatic which was clearly manifested upon the slightest approach of stress. I inserted the needle tied to the stitch into his upper lip and he could not scream

as loud as he would normally do if he was not sedated; I knew the magnitude of the pain he felt and this only nourished my pride and refurbished my dead ecstasy, it was the main reason why I evaded the use of anesthesia!

I pulled the needle out of the mucocutaneous side of his upper lip then inserted it into the lower one creating the first suture to taper his mouth; I then made then next suture but he could not bear the rest of the operation; the old-timer passed away mid-procedure and I had to pull the scissor to cut of the stitch and then I moved to the next victim, an almost sixty-year-old woman who seemed to hardly beg for mercy, but her tongue was nearly paralyzed so she could not articulate a single proper word; I squeezed her face as I commenced operating on her lips and all I needed were five longitudinal sutures before I set her loose.

I spent the next hour in operating on the others, kicking some in the face fracturing their noses and stitching some of the palpebral fissures for a random pick of the victims, I even conjoined the extremities of

the soldiers together and joyfully tore them apart for the sake of the thrill it carried; I broke the mandible of the eldest of the guests and morbidly extracted a tooth or two from one of the entrepreneurs by means of a crowbar, and after a strenuous sadistic effort that lasted for nearly an hour, I was done with the operations consuming eight needles and tens of stitches.

The floor of the circus was irrigated with blood that washed off a load of dust; the pain they suffered was intolerable that some of them were rapidly mortified, and only seventeen victims lasted, but they were inevitably moving closer to death.

I dragged the remaining living ones to their chairs with the tags holding their names still attached to them; they all grunted in a sheer agony, it was clear that the sedative's efficacy was culminating so I rushed back to the dressing room bringing every piece of rope there was inside and then I returned back to the dying audiences as they fought their distress to remain alive; I was severely panting and I defied the exhaustion as to finish what I have started.

After ten more minutes, they were all secured to their chairs, tightly tied by the stretched ropes that barely sufficed to restrain them; it was time for the second and the last cue, those subordinates who waited outside the circus for my signal were so loyal and patient and above all they were impartial and none of them would speak of the crimes I was embroiled in, all thanks to their families whom I abducted as to keep their mouths shut. At my current age, that was such a near-fictitious glory for a senile clown!

I hit the main gate hard enough for them to hear my fist bumping against the metallic doors, so they activated the switches that opened the vaults I fixed at the ceiling, and immeasurable volumes of gasoline showered each and every one of the tied spectators.

For a show to be unforgettable, it has to have an extraordinary ending, and I made sure the ending would be memorable enough for them to tell the others when they will be resurrected and when we gather in hell!

“How was that for a joke?” I asked in a rough voice while trying to restore a normal pattern of breath, but I still had a rapid shallow breath.

“One day I have been in your shoes, silenced by the stitches and tied to the chair; I witnessed the demise of an era and the dawn of a new one, I have been there in a thousand earlier lives, and they all had a very similar outcome ... SILENCE!”

It was time I put an end to this misery; I fetched my silver-pleated lighter and lit its fuse.

“Tonight you are brought here experience your very own misdeeds, and this can’t be unjust, for all I did is to put you in my shoes, for karma is a travesty and it was never in my favor, so I had to be what I became ... This is for the sapphire flower ... This is for Psyche!”

I dropped the lighter, everybody was on fire and the circus was falling down; I knew it would be sage to leave the circus instantly, but I still had time to observe and cherish the sighting of their flesh melting before I extract myself out of death to release the abducted families, and then I can die in peace knowing

that this life has not been squandered like the others,
and that the realm of silence was desolated.

Upon celebrating my glory, a whole life of negativity
was played past me: I would ask for the lights and
stand in the spot; I will leave a clue or two; so vivid, I
would defend, and too clandestine they would argue!

I will retreat in a few rhythmic steps while holding
myself from going loose, and then I would shamle in
the backstage and speak the sermons I captivated for
an eternity in the voice of grave silence. I will plead
guilty of despondency and they will incessantly call me
nonchalant, and I will find an alibi, and it shall be a
truthful one.

Nonetheless, I am the culprit and I will stand before
my self-oriented executioner and beg him for a proper
retribution while he calls me deranged; but tonight
this sham image falls and becomes water under the
bridge.

“Back to dust and ashes” I shouted

** ** *

Destiny's plot is an accurate one, and only destiny has the potential to render the sly into an imbecile!

A shimmer had my attention; twenty nine mirrors extended circumferentially placing me in a siege of my infinite reflections; the cries of death waned and all I could hear was the fire ravishing the building and turning it into smoldering rubble; I felt the warmth of the fire marching towards me in an omnidirectional manner.

The mirrors simultaneously shattered revealing the scorched corpses in place and the fire was taking the place down, but then through the crowd of the dead spectators I saw him, seated on one of the chairs and being untouched by the fire; his eyes were as fierce as they used to be and his mask had a slight crack on its right zygomatic part.

"Now we even the odds" The Architect said "This is the night our rivalry has ended ... ONCE AND FOR ALL"

The Architect: One Last Time

The circus was being torn apart, Miseria's fame was once rooted to it and no one would have believed that the town's most outspoken attraction would be demised one day, and I have lost my protective 'fume-impermeable mask' amid the rampage that has been progressively ravishing the circus's premises, which multiplied the suffocating nature of the ongoing circumstances.

I glimpsed him through the haze engendered by the fire, he strode in my direction leaving the audience zone, no flame could touch him and the fumes seemed not to have a noticeable efficacy on his respiratory airways; but there was something uncanny about "The Architect", a feature that he has never been labelled with, he was despondent!

We had a very limited time before fire spreads to a degree that leaves no room for any life; The Architect stood as close as one meter away from me, his hair lost a considerable amount of melanin, giving him the classy gray appearance of an aged bloke, and for

someone of The Architect's modality, no one would ever expect him to age like everybody else! The skin that coated his hands was less elastic and his muscular built up has waned, and albeit his upright pose never departed him, he looked queerly weakened, and to add to his rather inexplicable set back, he was severely distraught, burdened by fears no one knew of; his hands shook and his steps were heavy, even the piercing eyes he used to own never shone with the glamour he was reputed for!

It was a long stare that he had fixed upon me which revealed a pair of creased eyes through the eye inlets of his untarnished mask, though I could notice a minute crack on the mask's left side beneath the black spades emblem.

My lungs barely tolerated the smoke, and I could feel them begging for a breath of fresh air; my airways were irritated to level that made me cough as I stood in a direct confrontation with my adversary who finally spoke his oddly weak voice that has lost its sounding splendor and the characteristic resonance.

“You have gone so far, Dimitri” he mumbled
“Regrettably, every step of yours seems to have been miscalculated”

I coughed before I replied while I held onto my knees:
“Too despondent for a sadist, I see” I insulted him, acknowledging his weakened state to which he gave no reaction, sparing his words for what he had in mind, so I resumed while I raised my back: “Thy prowess has been perished; I cannot I believe I used to rhapsodize over your lost glories”

“How sham everything we strutted about turned out to be” he remarked

“Aye! How humiliated I see you’ve become; it all serves my pleasure, yet it cuts off a portion of my glory”

“Now I see what you have become, Mister Dimitri” he said “Pain is such a strict guru, and loss is its most effective tool”

I had my rage levelled up at his reply and screamed at him: “What do you know of loss?”

“All we ever do are the unforeseen ramifications of loss ... Loss drives a person insane”

“We?” I gasped “Who are you insinuating by ‘we’?”

“You and I have been victimized” he explained “loss is the utmost misery no one could withhold, without exception; every loss leaves a scar that never heals”

“Does it change any of this?” I harnessed an intimidating tone, defying suffocation with the subtle energy I had left: “You have wreaked havoc upon my life; I don’t remember being what I am before I was ever notified about your ominous presence”

“Am I this abhorrent?” he mocked me, though his voice was expressing a latent fear of a worse outcome than dying amid this ongoing disaster.

The glass of every window gradually shattered, and the ceiling was falling in a random order; wood, stones and gravel were being shed and rained all over our periphery, and fearfully enough was closing on us, we barely knew what pass either of us would take to salvage his life out of the circus; the temperature

within the circus was constantly rising as the flames closed on us, it was turning the premises into a giant furnace, or even seemed to be a surrealistic iteration of a scene where two foes are trapped in the core of the sun! And despite the situation we beheld was a good reason for any sane being to express fright, The Architect did seem to be petrified and more often mortified for a totally different reason which I could not decipher.

“Notice how illusive every detail you’ve cited and dropped as a fact could be, Mister Dimitri” The Architect spoke in grief “You have been blinded from the truth”

“The only truth evident here is that you conquered my safety and demolished the life I had”

“Did I?” he said “What is a puppet capable of doing?”

I felt my sweat running down my forehead washing away my clown make-up, but I resisted the torrid weather and replied: “You used to sabotage every life you could and you jeopardized our serene whenever

you were spotted and all of that for a mere belief of yours which nobody understood”

“They used to call me deranged until I became the biggest threat they knew! It’s queer how everyone could have a normal life, built upon a family which neither of us had!” he dramatically paused then resumed “All I did was inflicting my trauma on the ones who haven’t experienced any remarkable modality of grief and anxiety, and I found an alliance in ‘The Council’, that was till I reasoned I merely served their cause! Are you seeing my point? There’s a worse foe for both of us to direct our animosity”

“We could die here before we ever share a mutual hatred for any party” I smirked in a conceited manner

“They won’t let us die” he said “Dying would be too merciful an ending”

I sealed my mouth and coerced myself to lend him my ears as to elucidate what he cited.

“They made us become who we currently are, they have been plotting for it since they were ever founded” he explained

“I was made into a beast because of you”

“And has remorse ever spoiled the glories you attain as a beast?” he asked in a tone that spoke of pure grief

I halted for a moment that felt like an eternity; do I really get to feel apologetic for any of my misdeeds? And would I ever seek acquittal, or am I going to claim my inner peace through inflicting my pains on the others whom I encounter?!

“No ... never” was my definitive answer!

“Are you seeing my point, now?” he remarked “I have unraveled your destiny, and this is what you become in this life or a million others ... and all we ever resemble are tiny cogs of no critical vitality in a formidable filthy machine”

He paused for a while, and every word he uttered was toned in grief, he was washed away and drained by

sorrow, and I still could not grasp the cause; I stared at him seeking more clarifications, but his words were always brief and sparse.

“But I can assure you, Mister Dimitri that I can see you operating that machine, and you’ll spread its filth incessantly”

He seemed to have dropped a tear, or that was what I visualized through the increased haze the fire caused; the swinging ropes fell from above, and wooden bars kept separating us before The Architect reached for his mask and slowly removed it, exposing his face for the first time!

“You lost Psyche in a war that had no purpose but to serve the ulterior motive of a maniac master mind” He mentioned

I had my eyes wide open and a couple of raised eye brows; his eyes were tearful, and I have seen his face in a sheer lucidity that I would claim nobody had ever had; his face was oval, with prominent cheek bones and a pointed chin, his eyes were narrowed by the creases of senility and his lids were drooping; both of

his eyes were fiery red and had a whole reservoir of tears was unleashed as he stared at me.

“What do you mean?” I screamed in rage while I covered my face to protect it from the falling bricks and the prevailing splinters “Answer me, you blithering idiot”

“I’ve lost my ‘Psyche’ as well ... I did” he agonized over a clandestine topic that infuriated me for its disturbing ambiguity, but then he resumed in an agitated and sobbing voice: “God forbid silence ... may the lord have mercy upon our souls in this eternal clash”.

He said so and spoke no more, while I never halted shouting at him as to urge him to clarify the doubts he had infested in me, but he cried incessantly and looked at a null point before he dropped his mask on the floor ... And his mask was broken into a hundred pieces!

The ivory was cracked and shattered! How could his iconic mask come to such finale?!

The Architect walked away, evading my questions, and the augmented mess had its noise amplified that none of my words were conveyed to his ears; he vanished in the crowdedness of flames and the collapsed ceiling; the bodies of my hostages were completely charred, and I reasoned it would be wise to leave the circus hurriedly before I have my life confiscated by my own sinister craft!

After all, The Architect had sermons that were left untold, I pondered the matter while I looked for an escape route, but there was not one!

A huge portion of the ceiling fell off in front of the main gate, barricading the major extraction point I had in mind, I perceived the burning logs and bars of wood as they rendered the task of reaching for the gate impossible, and leaping over the wooden obstacles would never even be an option owing to the physical limitations of my age.

Holding a conversation with The Architect in a circus that was set on fire was too reckless, and I was somehow trapped within the circus.

Through the chaos, a Christian hymn spoken in an angelic voice of a female reached my ears, and it was ironically audible despite the noise; it was Psyche!

She had herself seated on one of the burning seats as the weaved flowers constituting her frock were burnt into black vapors, exposing her skin but she never had herself distracted and continued reciting the hymn, holding her hands together and having her eyes fixed upwards, searching for the lord, praying for his providence to carry me safely out of this inferno; her voice faded as she commenced crying while still supplicating and reciting another hymn; I screamed her name while moving towards her, but the ceiling kept falling off, and the mess hindered me from reaching out for her.

Psyche's body was rapidly charring, she then looked at me and never veered her sight away; her tears flew seamlessly over her smooth cheeks.

I recessed back to evade an incoming shed gravel and a couple of bricks; the metallic piling that supported the ravished ceiling began to collapse as well, and one

of the stakes fell apart, breaking from the coherent meshwork it contributed to and pierced the floor like a wedge hammered into the ground to set up a tent!

I saw the glass shards beneath my shoes and I glimpsed an infinite spectrum of aberrations that were reflected through them; I saw The Architect breaking into tears, lying next to a brick red wall, and I saw an oracle in the orient who read spells out loud in gibberish; a burning piece of broken wood hit my head and I panicked that I tripped and injured both my palms by the glass shards; fortunately, though, my hair did not catch fire.

My hands bled over the shards and irrigated the floor, I kept crawling to the front, finding –or trying to find– a path below some of the fallen segments that have been stacked in a manner that did not allow them to hit the floor, and by that time, the temperature was scourging me, leaving aching and burning marks that judging by the senility of my skin and its diminished ability to heal would leave permanent scars; I cleared my way by removing the obstacles which were no more on fire and my path was mainly guided by the

uncanny intuitive drive to follow the glass shards which were dispersed everywhere, admixed with tiny pieces of gravel, stones and cement.

Through the glass shards, I still witnessed the infinite tales from beyond; I saw two puppets having their strings tightened for a miserable show, and a pile of effaced masks being hit by a wooden mallet; I watched a younger version of myself, crying over a silk dress of a woman and swearing to seek retribution...

I finally made my way back to the dressing room in one piece; however, the door was jammed and the handle refused to turn upon itself; I was obliged to kick the door open to breach my way in; I remembered the presence of a contingency tail gate that I could reach through descending a ladder at the extreme left of the room, and I quickly reacted once this solution was brought to my mind; I reached for the electric box and broke its lid to fetch the chain of keys I hanged inside.

I walked down the ladder which led me into a twenty nine feet long aisle until I stood before the corroded

tail gate and inserted the proper key into the key hole and it hardly turned, but in the end, I made my way out of the burning circus.

The circus has entirely been demolished, and I would have fallen as a corpse if I was retained inside for a farther minute or perhaps even less!

I walked away, panting and struggling to catch a breath. I fell down and rolled on the floor then rested on my back, having all of my body dusted by the sands of Miseria, and I opened my eyes to perceive a gather of people who seized me, their faces were washed by sorrow and darkened by the oppression I have instilled into their poor selves; they were the personnel of the circus, and I recalled abducting the dearest people to them ... Their families!

Now I see what I have become, I thought! I was developing a clearer image of my motives.

I was running out of breathes, and I looked at their blunt faces, they motioned not a single facial muscle in fear of what could be the ramifications of them expressing the slightest form of emotion as to confer

their distress; I wonder how could a plain look deliver all the meanings of pain in a sensible language!

One of the aged female janitors wept a tear that she has been holding for so long until it broke free from its restraints, but she hastened to wipe it away as to avert any insidiousness that I would be holding!

Everybody has become captivated in his or her own prison where they fear conveying their emotions...

None of them sought revolting against my misdeeds, and they are not the ones to be blamed for holding themselves from acquiring what belongs to them; this sick population has been occupied with hostile thoughts that demean the victims for their naivety while they spare the oppressors!

"They are ..." I struggled to articulate a proper sentence as I spoke during panting, but I said what I had to say anyway: "They are all safe ... Give me a hand to lift me up, and I would lead you to the safe house I kept them in" I apologetically mumbled...

That is what I have become ...

And this is what I will always be ...

In this life or in a million others, all the outcomes are limited to a single end result ...

This blood tinged legacy of mine was the absolute evidence of destiny.

The Puppet

2:09 a.m.

The same night of the Miseria disaster...

I opened the door of my cottage and got inside as I sealed the door, then sat on my rocking chair; my respiratory airways required more time to clear the dust and smoke particles that they have entrapped, and my entire muscular system was strained by the heedless effort I did out there, my plot has gone in a direction that was too perilous that it caused me harm, and leading the circus personnel to the hanger which served as a lair in which their families were kept as hostages and tied on the floor was an extra burden that I had to fulfil.

The only privilege I gained from that errand was alleviating the hypotensive symptoms I had following the general blood vessels dilatation I experienced during the dire fire, and to some extent, it helped me momentarily neglect the burning ache I sensed all over my body.

I laid my back on the chair, and I tried relieving the tension of my muscles but it was of no use; only the witty hands of an experienced massage goddess would liberate my muscles!

I recalled a bunch of details that only augmented the magnitude of my self-loathing; I despised myself for what I did to the poor subordinates I had; watching them retouching their loved ones and tethering their souls again after a lengthy separation studded with fear and disbelief was a painful live scene, and the false hope which I offered them after their crisis was being hailed by their site, although it should have never been!

Everyone fled to their siblings, parents, spouses and children, and a river of entrapped emotions was finally permitted to superfluously emerge, their tears mopped their sorrows and just the feeling of reuniting with their beloved partners rejuvenated their emaciated spirits and the Earth seemed to have ceased spinning around its axis.

They tended to have forgotten – or acted so – the rapturous impasse I brought to their fragile lives by luring their significant ones into my traps, they even showed me unconditioned gratitude for letting them reunite again!

How distressing, how heinous and disgraceful this life could be! The victims lie grateful before their oppressor and kneel for him in an utmost despondence! That was a capital sin, a more serious blunder to carry the weight of compared to the only sin I thought I committed: silence!

And I have always been exploring the creases of a labyrinth founded upon doubts, questioning the sinful act of remaining silent when one should not be, and it turned out to be a must when fear demonstrates sovereign; and perhaps the worst sin there could be is setting up a state of obligatory silence when you are the only one capable of speaking.

I rose to my feet and headed towards my small cozy bedroom; it only had a bed with a comfortable mattress on top, a frayed rectangular mat on the floor

and a small cupboard which I reached for to obtain a big fragment of an old mirror that was half broken; my cottage had no electricity, so I relied on burning logs for a sight, but the moon light that timidly entered my room through the window was sufficient to observe a clean outline of the face and some major details; I looked at my face reflection, my clown make up was nearly erased and was displaced by blackened charcoal specks.

I went to the bathroom to wash my face off the dust and charcoal, then landed on my bed and never took my garments off.

The small mirror I had slipped off my hand and fell, and I heard it shattering on the floor; as I looked at the spot where the mirror was broken, I caught a glimpse of a bizarre midget figure, hidden in the darkness of the murkiest corner of my room, and the outline of the figure was barely visible but none of its details were clear as to aid me in identifying it.

I sensed fear creeping on my nerves, and sweat crawling over my forehead; my heart rate was

whipped by my adrenaline and I felt my blood bursting through my veins.

I panicked and failed to properly react, I had no time to ignite some logs and wait for them to develop some flames to illuminate the room, and I certainly would not risk waiting for the logs to burn if that figure happened to be a threat which I should cope with, but I could not approach it and dismantle its mystery before I can see it from a safe distance, even if a minor one, as to assess the situation and any hazard it might embody... I needed a quicker solution.

"A lighter!" I shouted as I leapt over and stood to search for a lighter, and I found one kept within a rigid metallic box placed over one of the shelves near the bar; I then returned back to the bedroom, shambling like an inebriated wretch.

I removed the lid of the lighter and lit the fuse which wore a short flame that was retained long enough for me to cautiously and skeptically approach the figure, and as I did a few details were gradually being revealed... A puppet! One with an old craft!!

The puppet measured no more than 50 centimeters in length, but that was not what mesmerized me, what the face looked like was the lightning bolt that hit my entire nervous system!

It had the exact same depiction of The Architect's mask! A white face, with narrow eye inlets, a pointed chin, and a sly smile stretched on both sides and a black spades carving on the left cheek!

The rest of the puppet was basically a primitive wooden body with obsolete mechanical joints and it was dressed in cotton clothing that turned pale over time; the puppet had its strings horribly torn out!

I carefully handled the puppet and held it closer to my flame, I flipped it and observed every side of it in absolute scrutiny until my eyes fell on a shocking detail, even more confounding than The Architect's mask replica; it was the characteristic signature stamp of the creator (the puppeteer) who crafted this puppet; it was my stamp!

I felt all over the place, my colon crumbled with pain and a severe migraine headache insidiously signaled

its presence which nearly detonated my head; I stayed still in my position, keeping my pose like a monument as I looked at the date engraved beneath the stamp; the puppet was dated back to the 90s, December 3rd, 1991 to be precise!

I thought that the puppeteering craft was a newly acquired way of living to aid my survival, but this incidence was beyond my scope of interpretation; when did I create this puppet, and if I truly happened to be its maker, why can I not recall it?

The puppet clearly could not be a hoax to fiddle me, my intuition (masquerading as my limited experience in puppeteering) strongly denies the possibility of this all being a staged patrol, for it was simply very evident that it was actually a decades old product; but if this was truly created in 1991, and supposing that I am the maker, does this denote an old prophecy that I had which predicted that someone out there would become “The Architect”? And this thesis makes “The Architect” one of my previous customers if his mask was inspired by my creation, or could it be the total

opposite?! Could The Architect's impact have inspired its design?

But above all, the question that haunted me the most was the means by which this puppet was brought to my abode! The cottage had no signs of trespassing or infringing. The cause for which this puppet has been delivered to my residence right after my eerie confrontation with my nemesis was a mystery that had to be uncovered, but there was not a clue as to lead me to a theory that might suggest a motive if any.

Could The Architect himself have delivered it to me or did he command one of his apprentices to accomplish this task while we faced each other in an unfathomable conversation? Could it be Psyche, and in that case it would make more sense?!

My migraine was very demanding that it shifted my thoughts toward it, and I recalled the deadly concussion that I survived many years ago when I was younger and more reckless; the scalds I had during the fire began penalizing me for neglecting them, so I headed to my bar and dropped the puppet on the

ground; I fetched a closed whiskey bottle that was placed on the third shelf and I was not able to clearly see its label owing to the eye strain I get whenever migraine strikes me, I then reached for the cork-screw that was kept in one of the bar drawers and opened the bottle.

I filled my mouth with as much whiskey as I could, I drank like a fiend, paying no heed to my health status, but the migraine and scalds were beyond tolerance and all I had in mind was alleviating them as rapidly as I could.

Half a bottle later, I began to regain much of my stability, and the pain that conquered my body began to recess by a slight degree that made me able to walk back to the rocking chair and throw the weight of my body on it.

I kept sipping from the bottle without taking a moment off to breathe, I was not drinking to cut off the pain anymore, I drank to distract the sounding thoughts my mind enclosed, and pondering the doubts I had over and over drained me.

The bottle was depleted to the last drop, but the headache did not fully wane; I began visualizing some unfamiliar aberrations; perhaps it was an inevitable relapse to my hallucinating condition, and it might have been something of a more intricate nature.

Everything looked clumsy, and the wood that was used to construct the cottage has fallen into small lumps; the lumps were distanced on their own, and the place was gradually spatially enlarging until I was on my rocking chair out along the mires and bogs, and I smirked while I watched a horde of elephants outrageously running towards me, blowing their trunks and dusting the ground; they ran across the bogs and got their hides drenched in the muddy water of the mires.

The elephants continued their march as I acquired a mania and commenced laughing like a total bonkers; they were getting closer, and as they approached their tusks were demolished and fragmented into millions of pieces that turned into glass and the debris flew past me; the elephants blew their trunks and started drowning in the mire, and I shifted my sight to the sky;

I witnessed a marvelous lightning penetrating the sky, tearing it apart and the heavens fell from beyond; thunder rambled everywhere and the lightning hit the bogs and mires eradicating the elephants into a pile of coalesced bodies, totally charred and aggressively mutilated; the heavens were demarcated from me by a thin glass layer that was too vivid to be missed; I raised my head and kept my neck flexed as to watch the dire odyssey taking place above me.

The end was coming forth, faster than the lightning bolts; soon this entire saga would be terminated, and nothing mundane would retain its value; soon everything would make sense.

I cracked into laughter and my eyes teared owing to the mania, through which my laughs were channeled, and I stiffened my neck so that I would not lose its flexion; abruptly, the heavens were unleashed and liberated to accelerate downwards towards me, and the last thing my eyes could observe was the infinite shards of the glass boundary rallying to reach out for me!

A Foul Plot

11: 30 p.m.

The surreptitious vault within El Tur Mountain, Sinai

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The last glass shard settled down above the surface of the infinite shards and debris that piled up to fill the entire vault, and I rested on top of this pile...

Dull aches, flickering blue flames and an ominous silence!

It felt like an age! A plethora of years and decades have flown past my sight and as I looked at my watch I realized that only a minute has passed!

“How could that be possible?” I thought.

Time did seem to have actually ceased, or that is what I tried convincing myself of; it was unfathomable and disturbingly taunting and very tiring to be pondered or processed; could my anti-epileptic drugs have failed to put an end to my hallucinations? Or was it an illusion

that tampers with the senses of any intruder who infringes the holiness of the vault?

But the glass shards which were now covered in my blood had live episodes of an odyssey played on them that seems to have been lived by a future version of myself, and speaking of my blood, I noticed the myriad of wounds and tears on my body and face which were the hostile marks of the sharp edges of the falling shards.

As I tilted my head down towards the glassy surface that I mounted, I looked at a distorted reflection of my face through the shards; it was my 45 year old face, not aged a day over what I lived, and not a single crease was added to the few ones that I had; all I could observe to be an addition to my facial appearance were the numerous wounds and the incessantly flowing blood.

This entire scene left no room for doubt, it was hard to conceive, but it works as the sole conclusion to what I have witnessed; it was my destiny that I have seen, and I could say it is not a pleasant one!

All I ever survived was a series of tethered miseries, and what seems to be my fate does not usher into paying off the years of suffer.

My body ached from head to toe; the pain was intolerable and no analgesic would suffice to drop its magnitude down to a more resistible level; blood kept bursting out of the wounds, showering my body as a whole and drooling down to irrigate the surface of the pile; I was slowly dying of a shock and I feared I would not last any longer if I did not salvage my life out of the vault; the first aid kit that I carried in my back pack did not enclose enough bandages to halt the bleeding and the antiseptic I had would barely sanitize a couple of wounds.

I looked around for an escape route; it was murky within the vault, and the light of the blue flames which reached me through the narrow opening above through which I fell into this abyss hardly established a good lit environment for vision at all.

It was vividly impossible to think of the possibility of being able to make my way out through the opening

above, so I had to work my way out in another way, even if I had to improvise; but my brain would stop functioning shortly if my blood circulation failed to supply it with its requirements, and the most subtle effort that I would exert in searching for an exit would cost me volumes of blood that I cannot afford losing.

Yelling inside for as long as I could would not convey my appeal to anybody, and calling the emergency would not be possible for my cell phone was not operating, all thanks to the queer implanted mechanism that lies in this place which feels too intimidated by any form of technology!

A small pile of glass yonder which was shaped as a cliff had disintegrated and fell apart, giving the possibility that there could be a void beneath it or else it would have firmly hold up to its configuration; I crawled towards the pile, barely resisting the new wounds and tears the glass made in my palms and knees as I moved forth, and I screamed and sobbed, but nobody would save me; even providence would offer a slight aid which might not be sufficient for me to survive; a

miracle was what I needed to carry me out safely... and passively!

I remembered my lighter; it must have fallen somewhere close to the spot on which I harshly landed; I looked for it amid the shards and had to remove away some of the debris to clear some spots hoping to find my lighter hidden beneath them somewhere until I found it buried within a bunch of sharp shards that injured the tips of my fingers as I reached for it.

I lit the lighter's fuse and used it offer me a low range light while I resumed heading to where I intended to go earlier; there was not any sign of salvation around, I crawled for a few more feet and lost my durability; I felt myself falling down on top of the glass, losing more blood and dealing with an exaggerated amount of pain; I dropped a tear or two and prayed in silence.

The flame of my lighter died bringing back the murk that never left since I was brought in here; and I was left to the company of glass and the merciless solitude. Imagine dying alone with no paper to write a

will and no legacy to commemorate your existence; the only scary aspect of death should be oblivion, after all the pain will wane, the memories you hold will be lost and the remnants of you would be a rotten corpse that has no value, or perhaps a burnt body that turns into ashes to be dispersed in a ritual held above the peak of a mountain that you cannot see; it all does not matter, soon your beloved ones will cease crying over you, and who you used to be shall be forgotten, totally erased and never remembered in an appropriate manner. Death is scary because oblivion hurts more than any debilitating disease!

Now I figured out why the ancient Egyptians carved their history on the walls, it was because they knew there is no coming back, and that there aims for being resurrected is a preposterous fallacy of hope.

The glass beneath me began cleaving and spacing away as I sank into the depth of the pile, but it was not an actual depth! I fell down once more, this time accelerating towards a bottom that I could see; a rigid floor!

I landed on my right side and a hundred pieces of glass escorted me; my hip bone was on the verge of being fractured and my right elbow was severely traumatized, it was an augmented pain that had no effect, when you become adapted to pain any extra noxious factor would account to absolutely nothing.

I glimpsed a rear tunnel running across the width of the mountain base; this was providence, my only hope for reaching the other side alive.

I stood up with my trunk noticeably flexed, and blood kept escaping through my veins, but I had to take the risk; often risks are the only way of attaining peace!

It was a long way through the tunnel which was blocked at the end; however, walking till the point of its termination was a must; I used my lighter again and had my body supported on the left wall of the tunnel, striding at a rate of one pace per every couple of seconds; it was painful, grossly aching that I could not discriminate the source from which the pain evolves.

Eventually pain becomes adaptable, and gradually it halts being distressing, it rather becomes addictive,

and as I stepped forwards leaning on the wall my nerves were tingled, they no more shocked me, they no more agonized me, but instead they made me euphoric like a maniac who just sniffed a handful of cocaine! Pain never felt so satisfying ... Pain was an erotic experience!

After a while I reached for the end of the tunnel; it was barricaded by a gravel gate which was too stern to be opened upon applying a pushing force to it but I was able to breach it although my shoulder was probably dislocated by the time I was out, and I could see an actual life again!

I sighed in relief and tasted my glory; the trip of cheating death has lasted for an eternity but it was worth the suffering that I had to go through, and the end result has never failed to amuse me.

I found it wise not to contemplate about what I have seen back inside the abyss of the vault; I had no energy left to call for help, but I walked a long way, leaving a trace of fresh blood behind, until I met a few

pedestrians in a close vicinity to me that they would notice me when I fall.

If I called any of them they might be terrified by the sighting of a man drenched in blood, but letting myself fall in front of them when my energy abandons me would be a good way to summon their aid.

I felt myself losing the last ounce of energy that I held, and I fell on my knees as I perceived the night serene of Sinai for the last time before my face hit the ground and my eyes were shut.

Collapsing was the right thing to do, and I had no other choice that would have been made. For now, I will pretend that there was not a foul plot which was weaved specifically for me to bring me all the way to where I would have been deceased, and I will hope that I would wake up in a hospital... or in hell!

A Letter to “The Architect”

Ten nights later,

Back to my secluded cottage,

10: 40 p.m.

A lengthy journey that is yet to happen, an era witnessed in a fraction of a second, a heft, a saga that would not find any listeners, and a miraculous revelation of a destiny that is yet to arrive; all of these burdens held a never ending show within the parochial confines of my head and I had no valid venting method in my congested mind.

** ** *

I inserted the key into the door lock and turned its pins open, my backpack and the travel case which I held by my left hand finally rested on the floor of my residence after straining my arms and shoulders; it was a home that I never missed, it was never even perceived by me as a home, not for once!

Home is where the past refuses to be erased, and every past is eventually mopped along with the sands of time; home is a fantasy, a trivial word that describes shelter to festoon our basic survival instincts.

Home is far beyond the realms of grief...

The weight of my body settled on the not so comfortable wooden rocking chair as it swung back and forth with a decelerating attitude over time, and the wooden tiles creaked, releasing all the noise they imprisoned as the chair oscillated over them.

Ten days ago, I thought I would end up in a coffin with my corpse wrapped in an untidy shroud, but I woke up following a short coma in the Intensive Care Unit of a public hospital in Sinai to which I was escorted by means of an ambulance before I was gone for good.

The bandages were tightly wrapped around every wound my body had, and my face was entirely covered, save for my eyes, though my vision was interrupted by the edges of the bandages.

“Your wounds are mostly superficial” said the resident doctor in a reassuring tone “there were not more than a couple of wounds that needed cosmetic sutures; your right arm was dislocated but luckily you were brought in here before any nerves were injured, and we managed to fix it back to its position, so there is no need to worry ... Welcome back, Mister Dimitri” he formally smiled at me.

A young male doctor, being 30 at most, dressed in turquoise scrubs, and had a green mask on his face securing most of his features from sight; he held my medical sheet in his hands and alternated his focus between rapidly scanning the details written in it and communicating with me.

“When am I expected to check out from the hospital?” I inquired while trying to fix myself in a semi-sitting position

The young physician steered his eyes away from the paper and answered me: “Tonight you shall be well monitored until we are sure that your health status is fully stable, and by tomorrow morning you are

scheduled to be transferred to a ward where your bruises and wounds shall not stay unattended, and I do not suppose that your stay will be prolonged for more than two days, get well soon, sir, and may you require any aid, we will be at your service”

He grinned, I could see his facial expression despite the mask's presence, and he then hung my sheet on my bed and continued his duty with the other hospitalized patients.

** ** *

When I was permitted to leave the hospital, I made sure my flight back to London was delayed for a further week until most of my wellbeing is restored, and for a whole duration of seven days, I never walked a step without the assistance of a pair of crutches.

And now that I am back at my dwelling, not restrained by the crutches and almost fully healed, I had to come to a point where some of the murky corners are illuminated, it was time I searched for any piece of evidence that would have the harsh experience which

I witnessed deciphered, at least to a basal level upon which I could build my further investigation.

I rose to my feet, and some sort of an intuition pushed me to look for any tools that pertain to puppeteering, and I generally do not move to any new place to dwell without my full belongings.

The first place to be searched was my cupboard, I removed my garments and threw them on the ground, I unscrewed the shelves and totally extracted the drawers; a giant mess which was harbored by my cupboard was now being scattered on the floor, a plethora of garments, shoes, sketchers, handbags, some tiny miscellaneous pieces of no remarkable use, a whole record of documents that I do not remember what their contents might be and tokens of appreciation from various parties added to my collection of trophies won through irrational gambling!

So my cupboard had nothing hidden in it... I flipped the mattress that lied on my bed away, it had nothing of value beneath it either, and even the flatulent

packs situated under it enclosed no more than tons of dust that would ravish my respiratory system at the slightest trial of blowing them away.

I looked everywhere in the room without having to light it up, I totally forgot that the cottage was dark!

I burnt the entire reserves of logs that I had and distributed them everywhere in the cottage, and there was nothing in sight which consolidates the fact that I am – or used to be - a puppeteer, not the living room or the kitchen that had nothing more than old rusted utensils; the lavatory had nothing stowed within it; there was nowhere else left except the bar area.

I looked over the shelves, many bottles of alcoholic beverages were there on top of them, and there was the small metallic box and none of its random contents were up to my interest, merely an old lighter, a couple of black pens, a few torn pieces of paper and some keys.

My quest was fruitless then! It is certainly not possible for me to have had puppeteering as a profession! There must be a missing thread, I thought while I

dragged the central chair situated near the bar to have myself seated for a while so I would catch a breath.

The floor beneath me cracked as the chair applied its force to it; that was the only place where I have not searched, the secret vault under my bar!

Hurriedly, I got up again to resume on my strenuous task of finding a clue that would tie me to the puppeteering affair; I pushed away the chairs and got down on my knees, there was a small oily-green colored carpet on the floor which I avulsed distantly enough to see the handle of the small vault; it was sealed, and one of the keys inside the metallic box would fit in its lock.

I tried every key after I laid most of the box contents on the floor just by my side until the proper key was found, and I finally opened the vault; a limited area invagination into the ground which barely had room for a wooden case through which lots of tools and equipment bulged out.

Instantly, I lifted the box and shut the vault closed, and then I strode back to the center of the living

room, in the vicinity of the burning logs to have a scrutinizing look through each and every piece placed within the case.

Numerous threads and rods connected to control bars of little old frayed puppet paradigms, a set of three chisels, and an incomplete set of carving tools; there were also some screw drivers, a hammer and broken wooden limbs of puppets!

I was a former puppeteer after all! That was the most peculiar revelation that I had so far; but why could I not remember being so?!

Every puppet within the case had my characteristic signature carved on it which was my name in Russian coupled with a sharp scythe carving right next to it!

I freed the contents from the box, all covered in dust and toned in sheer pallor of aging. Much other stuff was buried along the depth of the case, I found a broken set of old folklore Matryoshka, some more wooden body parts and corroded metallic hinges; but there was an item which was not so congruent to the rest of the box contents!

A gray handkerchief wrapped what seemed to be a glass item, which I could judge by the resonance it created once I reached for it, and upon peeling off the handkerchief which was nearly adherent to it, it was revealed to be a glass vial, half the size of a palm, which was almost oval in shape with a pointed end and it was plugged with a well-fitting piece of delicate cork.

The cork could not be removed by normal force when I tried pulling it out, so I went back to the bar area and opened a drawer in which I kept corkscrews of various sizes and I picked the finest one then utilized it to carefully pierce the top of the cork, and after a few clockwise rotations that helped me penetrate the cork with my unstable hand, I managed to pull it out in the end.

I drew the small bottle towards the tip of my nose and skeptically smelled the odor of the colorless solution inside, it smelled of alcohol, though being partly pungent, and most probably it was not for drinking purposes like every other liquor; it had to be something else...

That odor! I know it, I thought! This smell jogged my memory somehow!!!!

Olfaction is one of the most potent methods used to restore memory!

Although I remembered some unassembled pieces of a puzzle, they sufficed to rewind my mind back to my thirty-year-old self who used to introduce well gauged doses of eerie liquids and fluids to every puppet I created once it was ready for use, and I remembered throwing them away when they did not answer my calls!

I could not grasp the motive behind my rage after the puppets drank the liquid which I gave them; all I saw was a thread of untethered memories of me being subversive to my products, and drastically overreacting, cursing at them in Russian before smashing them into pieces, and there was a delicate hand with tall slender fingers extending to reach my shoulder, timidly tapping it by the palm, and it felt warm and calming.

A soft female voice spoke to me in Russian, she calmed me down, though her voice spoke of fear, yet she managed to settle me down as she cuddled with me, but I could not see a face as to remind me of who she might be, albeit her voice became more familiar as her soft words were recited.

Why could I not remember that about my past? Who did I use to be? I can clearly recall the events of the bloody war and the air assault that I miraculously survived, but I am not able to assemble the details in their position; the lost details of a whole past which has been eradicated; it all felt weird and creepy, but why do I develop a load of wistful vibes as I ponder the matter over and over?!

Why did I develop such state of unfathomable grief? Was I distressed for my memory's inconvenience to tether the details together and excavate for the missing pieces of the puzzle? Or does it pertain to a pensive event which I dealt with before that my mind cannot – or refuses – to reiterate?

I felt my heart throbbing, screaming in rage and agony and my blood was bursting in my veins carrying the bleakness of a tormented soul. There were lots of things that I did not grasp, and I could not hold my tears any longer; I have never cried in a year until I fell down into a deadly recluse in El-Tur Mountain, and now I am weeping for no apparent cause, I thought!

It was intolerable, all the sadness and grief; I curbed an urge to scream in anger but I could not help but releasing a flood of tears with frequent loud cries.

I consumed a whole bottle of vodka that never turned me inebriated before I shattered the bottle; I recessed back to a corner to control my agony and I let my tears flow until they dried; I looked at the cracked ceiling, I was desperate and helpless, having no clue about the reason that led me into a tunnel of sadness, a tunnel in which you cannot see light at its end.

There was not any alternative to finding answers, I knew that this state of wistfulness would not abandon me before a mystery is dismantled, and this superfluous reservoir of rage could not be squandered

on any banal form of catharsis, and none of the known cathartic ways would successfully vent out the rage.

The Architect would find me soon, and perhaps he currently has my coordinates and is cunning in his recluse; any conflict I would have against him would be a round lost to his superiority, and I was not eligible yet to stand against his plots; escaping this war tended to be the wisest step I could take, fleeing has been what I do for the past decade of my life, but before he reaches this cottage, I needed to leave him a message; the ominous trip to the hidden vault in Sinai has privileged me with a valuable insight into The Architect's true nature which is built upon subordination and despondency, and I would not be resentful to display it before his eyes!

I got a piece of paper from the bar's drawer and a black pen from the metallic box then headed to the round table and began writing a letter whose recipient will pay me a visit in my strongholds that will be burnt in a few moments before I escape without returning back; I had faith that my arch nemesis himself would grant me the honor of stepping into my cottage

instead of utilizing his leverage to abduct me again, I believed in my sixth sense and made sure I will write him a letter that will find its reader sooner or later.

I placed the pen over the white sheet of paper and commenced evacuating its ink:

“Dear whoever you are,

It has been deadly clash between the both of us for the past year, and although I cannot get a hold of your identity, I can pretty much assume that we are connected on endless levels, for both of us have been the tools of a merciless party; we are mere puppets in a filthy marionette show, and now it is time to even the odds...

I have been to the center of the Earth in a trip beyond your astute mindset, in fact it was an experience beyond the comprehension of any living being, and I can be so certain when I inform you that I have uncovered my destiny, and yours as well, and I see myself becoming the most ruthless version that I could be in this life and every other one!

I am aware of your subordination, but I do not have an insightful look into your motives; each of us has something to prove, and each of us survived a trauma that we could not depict to the public; we are different to the public!

There is certainly a third party whose members are interested in our conflict before they see to the matter of publicizing this war among the rest of traumatized souls, and I can sense their hunger for agony and grief; they do feed on grief and it is very evident.

But I am escaping my destiny, for I am burdened by the search for my past, a past that has been effaced and forgotten; so would the quest of digging deep into my lost past ever save me from my fate, or is the future too intricate to be fiddled by a poor soul that tries to elope? I fully understand that this could merely be prolonging the inevitable, and that pushing forward an incidence does not barricade it from reaching its eventual domain, but does destiny stand out as potent as it used to be when it is devoid of its ambiguity? Will it be so powerful when it is no more a

secret? It is time, and only time, that has the capacity to deliver us to the outcomes...

Yours,

Romanov, Dimitri”

My letter was terminated, and then I folded it and placed it within the metallic box after I emptied all of its contents; the box is robust enough to resist melting when I set this cottage on fire.

I had no more time to sacrifice; I gathered my garments in a travelling case and took all the supplies I would need and the tools that I would not afford to lose through my trip to unravel the unknown about my past... It was time I got consumed digging in my former life to uncover the reason behind my abrupt grief.

When I was at utmost readiness to abandon the cottage, I opened every bottle of alcoholic beverage I owned and emptied them on the floors, the walls and even the ceiling; I wetted the fixtures and furnishings

with flammable alcohol until there was not a single drop left inside any of the now flatulent vials.

Lastly, I placed the metallic box which safeguarded my letter against the flames on the ground, at the center of the cottage as to emphasize it through the mess of ashes and smoldering rubble that was about to occur, and when I double checked the box to be perfectly sealed, it was time for me to leave.

I opened the cottage door and dragged my belongings outside to a safe distance away from the hazardous area which will soon burn down to ashes.

Feverishly, I reached out for my silver pleated lighter, lit the fuse and threw it within the cottage, and in a fraction of a second the spilled alcohol blend of the finest modalities of wine, vodka, barley beer, whiskey and filthy rum caught fire, and in a couple of minutes the flames disseminated all over the place, and I witnessed my cozy dwelling for the last time as it faded into a sham oblivion.

It was farewell to the cottage and the feral bog, a farewell to a place rimmed with damned sanctuaries

that I would never think of returning back to even if all threats and perils happened to be eliminated.

Blessed are the forgetful they say! Oblivion is the worst form of larceny for it plunders a whole lifetime, and I was heading to the absolute nowhere, determined to keep my expedition to enlightenment ongoing until I stumble upon a compass that guides me to where I could avenge my memories and exterminate oblivion... Once and for all!

To me, a past that dwells upon the ingrained misery from which I am apparently unable to dissociate myself was the destiny that awaits me to grace my doubts with clues, and I am escaping that destiny that I have seen!

** ** *

DIMITRI: DESTINY AND BEYOND

Revelations eventually enlighten our inner darkest creases, and pave the route to the unexplored facts that we evade or deny, and never has it occurred to me that a revelation brought peace along with it.

I am seeing the truth approaching me, the harshness of what has been carefully concealed has finally emerged out of the shadows like a reckless musketeer astride a fabulous steed, and no matter how rough the confrontation might be it still remains essential to uncover the truth...

Revelations are inevitable!

** ** *

I lost my way en route to the unknown; I have walked tens of miles in the direction of the nowhere, my stock of canned food has not been touched yet, though I consumed some water along the way, and I wonder how I was led back to the downtown of Miseria!

The fog obscured vision in every direction, and the darkness of the night was blinding; I barely made a sure step to the front, every other step was being

spontaneous and guided by the Lord's providence without resorting to the consultancy of my skepticism and paranoid nature.

I stood before the granite fence that bounded the town's reminiscent cemetery where merely the pedestals of the great monuments of the noblest heroes of Miseria who were martyred during the second world war remained undestroyed by the meanderers who plundered chunks of the monuments and tombs to trade them and the trespassers who never valued history and knew none of the respect that people hold for the souls that departed our world.

Since I had nowhere to go, and since I was exhausted by the pointless trip to the uncertainty, I entered the cemetery through the gate that was never sealed since the town was abandoned; its metallic rods were bent and protruding out of their frame, all thanks to the unforgivable ignorance and the atrocity of evacuating a whole town.

This place would work as an ideal hideout, a temporary lair that would keep me guarded off the sights of my pursuers; I sat near one of the pedestals which I used to support my back; the half-remaining plate that holds the monument's details read as follows:

In loving memory of

Jason Moorhead

1917 – 1944

The war lasted long enough for entire populations to be eradicated and enough blood was spilled to irrigate the planet's seeds of hatred and violence, and the yields reaped were nothing but newer populations of blood thirsty beings who filled in the missing arc of the vicious loop of blood, anger and anarchy.

I paid respect to the martyred soldier as I extended my neck back to relieve its tension. A glare shone timidly amid the ruins of the cemetery; there was some intermittent luminosity that appeared through mottling rocks and demolished chunks of gravel and

stones yonder, and I saw a hand reaching for the source that radiated the soft glistening light.

Cautiously, I moved across the fog to find out whose hand was that, leaving all my baggage and belongings where I was seated, and only a crowbar was held by my fist to defend myself against any threat that the intruder might pose.

Could it be someone of The Architect's loyal brainwashed fellows, or is it just a sad person who mourns him or herself next to a relative's tomb? Could it be a widower, an orphan or a cousin?

I meticulously kept my pace steady towards the trespasser, stiffening my fists around the shaft of the crowbar and flexing my elbows in an intimidating pose should I have to counteract any insidious attack, but as I stood close enough to the figure who hid across the fog to have a clearer image, it was revealed to a whole different story!

"Psyche!" I called through the darkness as I loosened my grips and threw the crowbar away.

She never turned to me so I ran towards her with my head full of questions and doubts; Psyche stood in her iconic dress, holding her hands together close to her chin as she held nothing other than the sapphire flower!

Her tears were dripping down her soft cheeks; her head was fixed at an upward gaze position, and her lips seldom moved as she supplicated in silence.

So that is where the sapphire flower has been, I thought!

“Psyche” I called again “What are you doing here, and what is that you are holding in your hands?”

She never answered my call so I questioned her farther: “Did you know about the whereabouts of the sapphire flower all along? You never told me!”

“You did not keep your promise, love” she spoke to as she steered her eyes which were full of tears to fix them upon me.

“What promise? What do you mean?” I asked

Psyche rolled her finger tips around the smooth petals of the flower in her hands; she gripped it in an embracing manner while a tear from her left eye landed on top of the sapphire, she then seemed to gather the words as appropriate and in a weakened tone that was defeated by the sense of mischief and disappointment she said: "We were once blessed, like a mythical couple if they had no tragedy, but eventually tragic events happen and my body never rested in peace; is it not the time you avenge us?"

She said so while she waived the flower, dropping it down and I watched its path to the ground, and once it hit its destination it decayed and the sapphire it harbored was wrecked and its glamor faded until none of it was obvious anymore; I raised my head looking for Psyche but it was too late, she was gone for good, and merely a trace of her dress was vivid through the thick mist which she disappeared into.

I saw every flower in her frock disintegrate as they all burned; the black roses were all charred and the petals fell off one following the other, abandoning Psyche's body who was no more in sight.

A throbbing ache hit my head, and the arsenal of pain fired its canons incessantly as an acute onset of migraine conquered my head and my right eye, but I could see what has been fortified in the creases of oblivion, a whole thread of a life of which apparently remembered nothing started playing before my eyes, and everything was unraveled; all the clues I looked for were buried in a past which was lost and then resurrected; now I understand the whole matter, now I am aware of my dire loss and no indemnity would be satisfying, now I grasped the reason of my grief!

We were a blessed couple, two youngsters who were tethered through the same reading interests; we met at a cultural seminar and we shared our thoughts together, and we dated since then; we relished some premium quality wine every now and then and she warned me not to fall in the entanglement of alcohol, and I gave her my word, I told her I would never fall inebriated, but I failed her, yet she stood by my side when I was lost! So I was not a saint after all, I was a drinker!

She knew how desperate I was, I worked as a puppeteer, hosting various shows in multiple regions, and selling puppets and dolls of my creation... I barely afforded having a life that looked stable though it was not.

It is 1985, and on the twenty ninth of November we were officially married after eight years of dating and pronounced husband and wife forever; she was the perfect spouse who had me fixed and rejuvenated; she was the reason I survived and the sole motive for every action, and she was the eternal target of mine; all I wished for was to keep her pleased and be up to her whims... Her name! Her name was Selena!!!

Oh god! That name!

Selena: A year ago, specifically when I suffered multiple episodes of hallucinations, I lost a distant relationship with a girl named Selena, and a few months following our breakup I received a text message that mourned her death to an overdose of a narcotic! None of these events took place then; it was her, my wife... But how could that be possible?

Nothing made sense; apparently my mind trauma had me recall false memories of incidences that never took place! Or that is what I was trying to convince myself of!

Now I remember... A bunch of details were unlocked; we both found enthusiasm in the Greek mythology, and we read dozens of books about the glorious history of the gods... and their tragedies!

We played a silly game of giving each other titles of gods or mortals whom we read about; she called me Hades for I abducted her heart when we were attracted to each other, and she was Persephone who was infatuated by me!

I loved calling her Psyche, the most gorgeous mortal in Athens; she had the spell of Aphrodite as she casted love upon me, she was the only definition of love that I knew... She would look more through the paintings of the gods and the pictures of the mesmerizing sculptures, and then she runs to me as she calls the name "Morpheus"; "You are Morpheus, the god of dreams" she said!

She noted that I never halt day dreaming, and that I was floating in a secluded realm of unreality, just like Morpheus, and I would still call her Psyche, for her beauty was of a precious rarity and her soul was wielded of gold and pearls.

It was 1988, my drinking manner grew more vigorous, and I was stalling; I was depressed by the lowered income which I obtained from puppeteering; Selena was consumed while trying to support me when I collapsed, and I failed her... again!

One night she noted that my reading preferences were altered to a catastrophic choice of books which I chose to hide from her; I no more read in her vicinity, and I spent most of time in my room which I locked to keep her out.

“You’re scaring me, Dimitri” should yelled as she cried, and I hated anything that would made her tears flow, so I hated myself, but I had no other way to deal with the deficits which we were going through.

“This is our only hope” I would say to calm her down, but she never ceased agonizing over my state, and she

never turned her back on me when I went through the darkest times.

Once she moved on her toes until she reached to the door of the room which was locked as usual and she tried to eavesdrop as to uncover what I may be doing; she knew I was carving new dolls and puppets for a clandestine purpose, but she heard me talking to them!

I used to purchase a huge diversity of liquors which were not for human disposal or consumption, and I carefully followed strict recipes of measured mixtures and blends of eerie syrups that were bottled in relatively small vials; Selena witnessed my rage as it was nurtured and evolving, I conducted tens of failed trials to awaken the solid puppets after I instilled the contents of my vials into their inner lumens, and she watched me in silence as I devastated the puppets in an utmost state of infuriation while being inebriated, and despite her silence and could clearly glimpse the fear which occupied her tearing eyes, and I often noticed her sobbing in a distant corner until I settle down.

We rarely talked or communicated during that period, and I nearly hosted no more than a marionette show or two at most per month, but she still conveyed her sincere care through her sordid talks! She was a grace and I was an abomination.

Our impasse reached its climax when she unraveled the topics of my secret books; they all revolved around the mantras recited by the jugglers of the sixteenth century as they conjured filthy spirits to find residence in solid bodies, and back at their era they used scarecrows as chambers or vessels for the spirits.

Selena shrieked at the finding before her, and this lit the fuse which exploded into our first ever sparring; I had her at brief ease once she knew that I was about to quit the rituals, but she figured out it was a fabrication of speech to reclaim her placidity, and that I had an ulterior motive which she could not deny.

The debate remained lit and was never put out, yet I continued executing my plan and it worked! I conjured the first soul into a puppet!

A week later I was set to travel to the orient where I was supposed to host a couple of shows; Selena refused the notion as a whole, but I had to leave anyway and she never talked to me!

A few days after, I reached the orient for a tour involving a schedule of shows in multiple areas, and I presented a revolutionary show based on foul spells which nobody knew about; they were dazzled by the awakening puppets that talked on their own and moved without strings, and though their words were sordid, they sufficed to shower me with the blessings I was chasing; my tour was prolonged when an Arab billionaire expressed his fondness of my doing and offered to link me to the royal palaces of Sheikhs, princes and Sultans.

My shows were terrifying; every woman who saw what I was able to do with the puppets recited some guarding supplications and the children were quickly dismissed when what I presented was deemed appalling by them, merely the filthy rich members of the elite society who were driven by their thirst to novel and unprecedented sightings and their

insatiable desires found my “haunted-puppeteering” appealing to their tastes, and they were the reason my reputation founded as the sorcerer who commands puppets to rise from the dead!

Throughout my lengthy tour Selena did not contact me not even once, she hung up my calls and barely said “Hello”, but my tour was culminating and we would be reunited soon with a huge sum of money to find us wealthy, all thanks to the spells which nobody had a clue of, those spells were the portal to a utopic life!

The thread of memories was fast-forwarded to the end of the tour where I found myself in India, conducting my terminal show for a wealthy Maharaja who awarded my terrifying show with the most infallible and flawless jewel my eyes have seen, a sapphire worth a dire fortune!

Following my final show in New Delhi, an endless amount of offers to procure the puppets I had in possession, and all my puppets were sold save for only one which was iconic: a midget sized formally dressed

puppet with a face resembling the mask of my nemesis... The Architect!

Indeed I could not risk revealing my sly method of bringing the puppets to life, the vials containing the foul blends! I left the purchasers with near-empty wooden vessels that would soon run out of their spirits!

** ** *

The night before my flight back to Moscow where Selena awaits me with a broken heart and tearful eyes I was celebrating at the lobby of the renowned Indian hotel in which I stayed; I consumed two consecutive bottles of Jack Daniel's finest over a few hours, and I completely lost control over myself, it was when I saw him stepping towards me, a bloke of my age then who had a tall body festooned with a muscular built up, his face was oval with a pointed chin and he had a dense combed black hair; the bloke was dressed to the nines and walked with a moderate pride which suited him, he came by and stood before me and identified himself as a British architect who relinquished a

luxurious lifestyle for the sake of pursuing a zeal of his own that nobody believed in, and he never revealed his name.

I was morbidly inebriated and I chuckled in an uncoordinated manner at every sentence that he spoke.

“This might be life changing for me, and I cannot be crooked by a man who seems smart as you are, mister Dimitri” he said “I have gathered some intel regarding you and I know for sure that there is one puppet remaining which you have not sold yet, and there is definitely a clandestine issue which you stow, and I am so determined to know it”

“And why would I be so kind to you by revealing a secret that pertains to no one but me, mister whoever you are” I grinned as I brought the goblet close to my lips to sip some more whiskey.

The gentleman caught my fist and freed the goblet from my grip then placed it on the bar counter as he stared at me with a plain face.

“This is not negotiable, sir, I have never failed a deal”

** ** *

A few minutes later, I willingly agreed to the man’s terms and sold him the puppet for a thousand dollars paid in cash, and for one of my vials I got a cheque with an amount of three thousand dollars and then he excused to be dismissed.

“Oh, before you leave” I said “Fidelity imposes me to inform you that you are expected to use the vial wisely, you can never be sure what ghost you are conjuring” I chuckled and he nodded then rose to his feet to make his way out to where he intends to go.

“One more thing” that was me again “you still haven’t fully identified yourself”

He turned back to me: “I’m merely a former architect who is excessively fond of magic”

The bloke smiled gently then turned back again to continue striding out of the lobby.

“Farewell” I said

** ** *

When I returned back home I found my beloved wife awaiting me in a sincere delight, she hugged me for ages and never broke her embracement any time early!

She was the home that I longed to, the blessing that I certainly do not deserve; I was a fiend and she was merrier than a pious nun who devotes herself to the lord.

“You served your purpose, though in an indecent demeanor” She exhorted “But you will always find me loving and forgetful of your sins, but promise me that you’ll never seek that perilous path again, darling”

“For you I would do as I am told” was my reply

“This is a holy covenant” she softly grinned melting my heart

“Indeed it is, my sweet Psyche”

She always loved being called Psyche as it reminds her of how I always saw her, an iteration of perfection; all

perfection has been attributed to the lord, and you can never claim to believe in his perfection if you could spot the perfection in his creation and Selena was his best creation, she was perfection in a strikingly beautiful lady disguise!

Selena dispensed all the unholy vials by herself and made sure the odious books from which I obtained the spells were charred and had their dust blown out through the chimney.

We swore to bring pleasure back to our lives, and planted the yard with the varieties of flowers that she adored; I made a special breed of flowers that resulted in a unique set of black-roses, and then I chose the best offspring and managed to fix the sapphire which I was granted by the Indian Maharaja within the petals in the center of the flower by means of a natural glue until it became a part of it; the flower resembled my depiction of Psyche... or Selena!

I called it the sapphire flower!

“Did you know that there is a flower named so” Selena said as she lay next to my on the ground of our yard

while we watched the night stars, her voice tone was calm and soft, her voice was therapeutic “Its petals are rather tall, and they are of a purplish or a violet color”

“It does not matter, dear” I remarked “The Sapphire Flower which lies in our yard is the most perfect flower because it reminds me of you”

** ** *

Along the lines of all Greek myths, drudgery finds its way to demolish thy serene; Hades could not keep Persephone in his realm, and Psyche was a mortal who perished!

It was 1990, the cold war between the Russians and the Americans reached its peak, and missiles were launched against both parties; air assaults threatened our serene and they were eradicating a closer territory to our residence on a daily basis.

Everybody who had a profession worked less hours and spent more time salvaging their lives; for me, the

economic recession did not have any impact, for my tour has blessed me with a fortune.

I could not resist the time squandered while doing nothing, I had to find a suitable method of spending time until war subsides, a treaty is held or death reaps our souls.

The news coverage was interrupted by a sermon conveyed by the head of a notorious cosmopolitan council who had his face covered and his voice technically processed as to change his tone so nobody would identify him, he asked the conflicting nations to follow their path which was a path made of principle and integrity, and should the nations deviate from their path, they would be met by wrath.

The nations that constituted The Soviet Union never agreed, and the Americans never ceased their assaults; war was inevitable and the surreptitious council's threat was taken for granted.

Amidst that global impasse, Selena never halted radiating blessings and being the source of my own peace, and even when I had no clue of what to do, she

remained my only goal, pleasing her was all I wanted to do.

** ** *

The council's threat proved to be more serious than the ongoing war, they happened to lead a dire army of innumerable loyal soldiers who fight under the name of "Morals"; they sent troops and convoys with the mission to exterminate the delinquent parties who operated the war; the council's agents infiltrated every army and dominated their reign over a considerable portion of their armory.

** ** *

The second of December, 1990:

I regained my hectic drinking habit, war was gloomy and the bleakness of it guided me to excess alcohol consumption; that night the council threatened to blow the territory in which my parlor was situated, and while I was busy getting drunk, the local forces of resistance managed to secure the tunnels for the evacuation process of civilians to avert any casualties

if the claimed air assault takes place; Selena begged me to cease drinking and follow her to the tunnels, I shouted at her and ordered her to escape on her own, for I was not afraid of death, she shouted back at me and cried but her tears never moved me for the first time! I was turning into a monster who only listens to his desires...

By then it was too late, the assault took place and the council's aircrafts threw missiles at the residents. One of the missiles landed on my parlor, soon dust, rubble and smoke filled the area and my home was devastated.

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When the assault was over, I woke up to the ruins of a home, the vanquished relics of a life that was never appreciated enough. I extracted myself out of a heap of debris and devastated wood and metallic pilings, my parlor was a thing of the past and so was most of the residence; dust and fumes dominated the atmosphere and there was not a sight of life up to the horizon.

Selena lay beneath the rubble and fallen pillars, I fled to her through the ruins, she was covered in mud and wrecks of the home; by the time I reached Selena her spirit was gone... Selena died, she was eliminated by an insidious air strike that had no specific target to hit... Now I remember! The council, the ruthless constellations of demons and fiends killed the only person I had as a family; by that time I reasoned that perfection has been extirpated from the world, the councils effrontery and impudence have devastated my life, and I swore to Selena's dead body to avenge her while I wept, and through the murkiness of that dreary events I glimpsed the Sapphire glowing in the darkness; I picked it up and blew off the dust that besmirched it, I took the whole flower, and I had to find a life in a place beyond this grave which they dug.

I buried Selena in the yard and I lost the entire spectrum of my feelings; a tress of my deceased wife was rolled around my index finger and I glanced at it with a complete lack of self-awareness and a flatulence of sensation.

I roamed the suburbs, I joined the fraternity of civilians who commuted to the farthest regions of Germany, and when The Union was pronounced dead forever I fled to London; I came across this cemetery and I planted The Sapphire Flower inside its hallow after I treated it with a synthetic material that would keep the flower intact in an illusion that it lasts until the universe is demised, it was the last time I had the memory of my loss in mind, oblivion gradually took over the mantles of my brain, and all I ever did was to meander across the bleak streets and avenues of London to call off the wars and to guide the population to where the sapphire flower life, the sole left symbol of perfection, and I was reputed for being a deranged.

I lost my track and had to be humiliated through multiple professions to make a living, I learned music and I proved some wittiness in oscillating the cords of violins and pressing the tiles of a grand piano; I found a musical career in a casino and another tavern as a part time violinist, and a local record company made a contract with me which was soon overridden and the

musical melodies of my own creation were attributed to another entertainer who had a more renowned persona than I had, and I lost my legal rights to claim what belongs to me and I lost faith in art and soon I was hired as a cleric in a mediocre firm.

The people were unaware of the threats the council pose and I never recalled their existence; the revenge I was supposed to pursue was unintentionally defaced as a protective mechanism which my mind executed.

I was thrown in my recluse in a dreary condo, forlorn was intolerable, and so I assiduously tried various lethal approaches, I abandoned my career and risked supplanting a well-paid job with poverty.

A rallying car hit me and the concussion affected the frontal lobe of my brain so I began experiencing considerable behavioral changes and exhibited a plethora of broken memories and others that have been tampered with; my medical insurance did not cover my remedies for they were supposed to be taken lifelong as to cease the hallucinations.

Life went on in a way that lacked all sorts of coherence and I found myself at a celebration commemorating The Mikkelsons' reunion, it was when I first saw her, the most stunning lady alive, an emancipation of Selena's soul, and a reincarnation founded by my sick mind to battle forlorn and bleakness; she was dressed in red and took a photograph of me that I thought I would never see.

A sooner episode of hallucinations had me visualize a future version of myself paying me an out of the blue visit to place the photograph before me and now I recalled the actual incidence in which the photo was captured; it was a formal event held in Moscow in 1987, Selena was obsessed with photography and she hid the camera in her rather large-sized purse as we entered through the guarded gate, and when it was safe she took out the camera and assembled it just to photograph me!

It was the last time she did so, and it was the only self-portrait that I remembered, though the memory was clearly manipulated; it is ruthless how life jogs one's

mind in the most aching method, but revelations were never kind to me or to anyone; revelations are wistful!

I grasped why I wept in a tavern a year ago when a freelance couple showcased a mini-play embodying loss and bereavement, and it was now conspicuous why I experienced multiple episodes of random grief, and it turned out there is a motive that thrusts sorrow upon me.

I barely controlled a sudden bout of tantrum, but now I could not halt weeping, my eyes were the estuary of an incessant flow of tears admixed with a refurbished pledge to avenge her soul.

Destiny, after all, can never be fiddled, and it is far more intricate than any of our strategies; destiny always finds a detour to chase the ones who elope, and now I confess that unravelling the fortified truths does not weaken them or break their course, and I can see myself turning into the worst version I could be.

The stream of future events which I disclosed within the ominous vault was merely a prototype to a more gory fate, a more fierce retribution; destiny will be

written in blood, and I would be the sole narrator; the council's policies while be judged by my constitution, no executor would see to their demise but me!

And I would not tarry upon my trajectory to violence, and fear dares not to dwell in me, but I shall instill it into the soul of every member who works under the supervision of the council.

My revelations were terminated and my past was the answer I needed to fulfil my destiny, but that night at the cemetery left me to wonder with The Architect's loss matches mine, he stated that he lost his Psyche like I did, and remorse seems to drain him like in the same manner in which I feel regretful for every misconduct I did!

And despite the profanity and indecency in my life, Psyche still resembled my salvation; and she led me to the numeric pattern of angels to uncover the chapters of the mystery that I have been living; she is a saint... She is a goddess, and the least I can do is retaliation to bring down the murderers who plundered the spirit of my goddess.

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Exhaustion outweighed my energy that kept me vigilant through the assailant potential of the night, and when I was certain of my safety beyond the reach of my pursuers I recessed behind one of the pedestals in the cemetery to obtain some sleep as to have my energy restored when I am ready to set my feet on the road to my destiny.

A nightmare irritated my sleep, I visualized a quick paced moment of a morbid king who was dethroned and he crawled a short distance through the lane made between the corpses that tiled the floor until he was right in front of me, he tore his royal garments and split his ribcage then extracted his heart and offered it to me as an oblation before he perished, and fed on his blood-drenched heart then proceeded to his golden throne, I ascended the two steps that led to the platform upon which the throne rested and sat on top of it.

The deceased king's lad stood before me and kneeled while he asked: "What do I call you, sire?"

I locked my eyes on him as I developed a grim appearance embellished with the pleased facial creases of an ecstatic sense of triumph, and my words came out through my lips which were soaked in the blood of the heart that I just dined on: "Call me...God".

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To be continued...

DIMITRI

DESTINY AND BEYOND
from the author of *Hallucinations of The Sane*

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