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FLIES
THE TROUT II
JUDE

CORINTHIANS 13
TAP ON THE EMOTION
ALL TO THE GOOD



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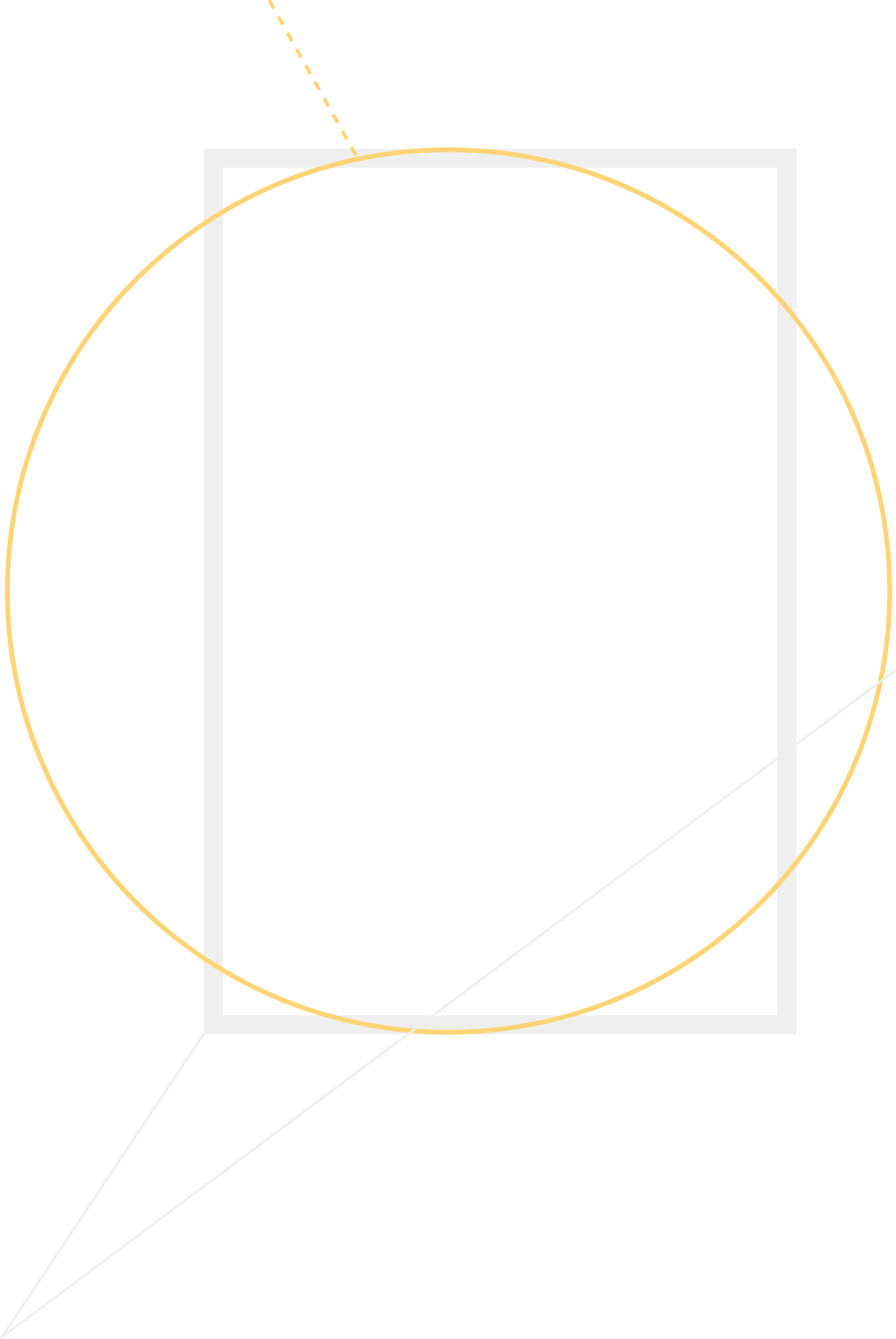
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PROSE

FLIES

BY ANONYMOUS

THE BLIGHT OF MIDDAY lunches they called me. Disgusting and vile they mocked me.

Filled with bacteria and disease within my compound eyes and on my shimmering wings. I'm a menace, yes, it's true, I'm a fly. Not a special fly, a common housefly, *Musca domestica*, of which we are millions. Gliding through your homes and where every few hours are like a whole human year for me.

I'm now twenty-six days old, which is remarkably old for somebody like me. As I've just told you, they call me diseased and the bringer of illness.

Well let me tell you that after twenty-six days I've thrown up more times than I care to recall, and that's not just because I love my food.

The hustle and bustle of a great city acted as my home for most of my life. We, the scavengers of the world, are clearly outnumbered. Each day I sat on the edge of a small outcropping far above the actions of man and watched. I wasn't alone, though, I was with the love of my, admittedly, short life. Vanessa. I cannot begin to tell you just how beautiful she was. With perfectly manicured hair running all over her abdomen and glistening wings that reflected and amplified even the

smallest shards of light. From the very beginning she enchanted me. Those eyes, shining like rubies, I would have danced into the fangs of a waiting cat if she did but ask. No more, though.

Anyway, people of varying shapes and sizes would gather in this place with rows of seats running downhill and congregating at a centre point. An elaborately jewelled mace would sit unused and untouched on a table filled with exquisitely bound books and papers scattered all around. Vanessa told me that this is where debates would be held and proposals listened to for the governing of their lands. Suited men would sit and snarl whilst ruffled figures would leap to their feet and snap their papers at their opponents like short whips across the room. It almost seemed as if it was some sort of performance and I was the lucky fly who got to bear witness to their rehearsals. I came to one vital conclusion once a few days of watching had elapsed. This was no show. It was real.

I recall one sweltering day, Vanessa was late, where by some unnatural force I listened with idealisation to the speakers in the aged room below. The first time that I'd really paid any attention to the giants settled under my feet. On that day a packed house acted as the setting where all focused

upon one man who made long and tiresome speeches. It seemed as if they were discussing how best to benefit the children of that country. For some reason this had me interested so I glided down for a close-up view by sneaking onto the soft and silky shoulder of a balding man in the centre of the *mêlée*.

Every time somebody spoke it was surprising to hear that everybody else would interrupt and shout him down; all except my host who was sleeping peacefully. If he wasn't moving his torso up and down with his heavy breathing I would have been expecting the giant shadows of three crows to come down for a lunchtime feast.

But there were no crows here, just children. Back when I was a mere flyling my dear mother would have never stood for such nonsense. And yet Vanessa once said: "Don't worry Kevin, they know what they are doing, elections labelled these officials and tasked them with improving the lives of millions of people."

If only I had retorted I would have asked: "How have they managed not to bring themselves to the edge of extinction?"

“Having fun, Kevin?” a voice buzzed from a shoulder’s length away.

“I don’t understand it.” I buzzed back to her.

“Silly Kevin! They are discussing how best to organise their nation.” she buzzes in her sing-song voice. I do have to admit that she knows far more than me despite the fact that she’s many hours younger.

“I know, Vanessa, but I mean...it just seems.” I thought hard about my next words. “Doesn’t it seem as if it’s just a load of decrepit fools fighting like children?”

“Of course it is.”

“Why?”

“Well that’s politics at the top of society’s tree.”

“Hmmm...”

“Come.” she said to me sticking one of her gorgeous jointed legs out from behind our host’s chin, before climbing onto it just under the gaping mouth chasm. “If you think that this is hilarious then just wait until they talk about war and peace. And you thought the wasps were hypocritical in their attitudes.”

She then dived off the man’s chin and onto the shoulder with me, just as a heavy grasping hand was preparing to slam into the mouth of the sleeping giant we were sitting on.

Vanessa knew that it was coming, she was always good at human baiting. One of the best fliers in the area she was. I’ll never forget how we zoomed off snickering loudly.

“What a fool.”

“A straight slap in the face, you got him good.”

He was left spluttering in shock as the *mêlée* started drawing action from all sides of the house. The old men had woken from their hours of slumber.

“There was a fly near your mouth.” his attacker whimpered whilst being roughly escorted out under the heavy guard of the politicians who were in the nearby vicinity. It was an unforgettable day in the house with an unforgettable friend.

A day or two later me and Vanessa visited that same house again. It was full to bursting; minus our furious friend from last time.

“Now this, my love, will be where the humans speak of peace, tolerance, and kindness towards others.” she said from the beam above the centre table.

“It is the view of myself and many others in this parliament we must stop the violence raging throughout our country.” a brown-haired brown-skinned man of little bulk directed towards the man opposite.

“He lies.” Vanessa uttered in my ear. “And the prime minister must answer for his crimes against his and my constituents.”

“Hypocrisy. His father was the one who implemented this plan in the first place. They all whispered it in the corridors when I flew in here.”

“You know a lot about this, why?”

“I desire to do more than to simply fly, eat, and lay eggs. Such a worthless existence”

“What’s that supposed to mean? What are you getting at? I don’t understand.” Never in my wildest dreams would I have earmarked Vanessa as the sort of being to utter those initial words.

“Will he repeal his reckless policies and rethink the damage he is doing?”

This country is in a worse position by the actions of him and his party.” the brown-haired man roared amidst a sea of jeers, taints, and grunts.

“Why do you look at me like that?” she asked of me, eagerly peering over the edge of the beam.

“What are you saying? There’s no sense in paying attention to them.”

“We are no different.”

And she leapt off the wooden perch and rocketed into the air before catching herself on a breeze for a smooth flight down to land on top of the heavy golden mace immediately in front of both combatants.

“Vanessa. Get back up here.” I buzzed, but she was out of my range.

“He criticises me for what I’m doing, but the level of hypocrisy is staggering.” the blue-tied man opposite challenged. “Wasn’t it you who heckled me for not taking this zero tolerance policy in the first place?”

“I only wanted what was best for the country at that time. Things have changed, but unlike you my party can change with the times”

“Your policy was wrong from the start. Through an approach embracing mediation and a peaceful resolution, these riots would have been paralysed before they got out of hand. It was your actions which stoked the flames.”

“Best work on your flying, Kevin, or you’ll fall off that mace. I can see you wobbling.”

“Vanessa.” I panted as my aged wings began to ache terribly.

“Stop it, look how close we are.”

“What does it matter? We’re completely and totally invisible.”

“They are staring at us right now.”

I now peered nervously across at some of the men who were looking lazily at both of us strutting along their mace. It made me feel uneasy. I wanted to leave and to just go home with my crazed friend.

“Vanessa, please, you’re scaring me. Don’t test fate, I’m begging you. They’ll strike us down. One hit and we’re done for.”

She peered at me. Something was different about those scarlet eyes. They seemed like finely polished to-

paz bathed in artificial light. Power and potential glory had corrupted what was once my best friend.

“I can become great.” she started. “Great and terrible. We flies have led lives of fear, from humans, animals, and insects alike. Let us fight back. I will take from humans. And I will lead our kind to a better tomorrow. A tomorrow where we are free from tyranny and oppression. I will use what they have used for thousands of years.”

“They’re coming.” I screamed as some of the humans rose from their seats to go, along with one who aimed a strike directly at her fragile figure.

She leapt away from certain death just in time and zoomed into the air to confront her attacker. Now it was my turn as a strike came down out at me in the form of an arm, and another, and another. I was under heavy assault from all sides as I desperately weaved and swerved to avoid their aimed barrage. Through the labyrinth of flailing limbs there was no escape.

Like a calling deity, a small gap opened up that was just large enough for me to squeeze through without being hit. The deity was real, it was my Vanessa.

“Damn, get this thing out of my face. It’s attacking me, George, I can’t hit it.”

“Watch it, you’re going to break something.” George’s friend warned, grabbing his arm as he fell into the front bench.

I scrambled for the opening and managed to float just out of reach of the grasping hands. She had saved my life. I wanted to thank her in a thousand different ways. Never did I get the chance to lavish my gifts upon her, though.

As soon as I escaped my enemies I stopped to see my idol, but she was still at war. Once she had smashed her body into George’s greasy chops he had reset himself within seconds and now she was the centre of their purge. Furiously flying to dodge their attacks she was struggling. I wanted to help. My wings even guided me towards the battle beneath. She wouldn’t have wanted me to risk my life after she had staked her own life to save it, however. Like a coward, I ascended as a stray finger crashed into her thorax, splintering her figure as she hit the table with a ping. Feeling terrible, I touched down on our familiar crossbeam. And with glassy eyes I watched as merciless heels snuffed out a truly glittering

beam of light. A crushing blow. Casually, they filed out of the room leaving it silent and empty.

“You don’t know what you’ve done.” I cried. “You’ve ruined more lives.”

She wasn’t my Vanessa anymore. The soul had gone. Only a black mess of blood and splayed innards lay as evidence of her existence. Now you know that a heroic fly called Vanessa did, in fact, exist.

Now just in my memories.

She still lives.

THE TROUT II

BY ANONYMOUS

SUSPENDED; SWUNG; LOWERED; SHUT.

The tests that ultimately will have to be taken—all the math that has not been studied—and the days flow on and on, with study being put off further and further, with lots and lots of time wasting fooling around. The door at the end of the hall draws further away. The door has The End written on it. Beyond that door lie the big tests, the finals. I run toward it, but no—it just draws further away.

Fragrances stifling drifting across.

What about the special assignment? I ought to have been promoted.

But no! Got a shitty special assignment instead from Panko. Everybody hates me for how I act. I walk the halls of the office building and I walk the aisles of the warehouse, and I feel underutilized and unappreciated.

Heavy draperies hung behind big dark davenport.

And besides I got the big math test to take tomorrow, that I haven't opened the book on for the last God knows how long. I got to remember to study for all the courses. I got to remember to study good. God damn it because beyond failing lies what I can't imagine—haven't visualized—have no

idea of; just some great black void of final failure.

Pick the piping of the Cadillac seat. High bell stands apart from building coming up.

It's what lies beyond the most awful thing that could happen—and this varies from day to day. I think it might be called dealing with it. Yes. Worst thing that will happen, is that you will end up having to deal with the failure, or mini-tragedy, whatever it happens to be. And look how much you've dealt with already. But I got to study tonight. Tonight, tonight—The hard wood seat slides under. The skillful singing of the disconnected singer soars.

But no; tonight I have to go on a long journey to a place where the waves are really, really high. Yeah—you see them out there, rearing up, foaming at the top, and they wash in—and it is tremendous! A tremendous rush—but no, you're going someplace in a boat—someplace far far upstream. Seeking something. You're in the boat with two others. One is in red. No, no—need to go dream some more. Weeds. Lily pads. Skunk cabbages. Sweat.

The heavily vested priest walks in through the round-topped door of the sacristy.

Hawaii. Need to be in Hawaii. But can't get there. it's awful just awful. They made me go back in the service for two years—and if I pass the test at the end I will be set for life, financially—but if I don't pass the test, I will blow it. All of this ties together somehow. I need to purge myself.

Words of God through plump, cracked lips are muttered, from a book. His bloody watery eye droops.

This amusement park is very frightening. Red padded tunnels. Red squishy floor. There are two ways to go—the scary way and the lame way. Which way to go? No; it's not quite right.

The singing, swooping, sliding, soaring, disconnected woman hides in the balcony.

Ride from Helmetta to the highway that brings you around Jersey and out to the tip of Long Island; come back in the train to where the towers used to be.

Holy water spatters from the aspergillum.

The ugly train is big and black and fast. It goes through an endless stretch of truss-bridge.

There are many stops. All seats are taken. Hanging strap.

Incense billows from the swinging thurible.

Garrison came down the steps twirling his watch. He thrust it in his pocket as he reached the sidewalk and turned left and began to walk past the empty storefronts lining the avenue.

Garrison's mission had begun.

More singing—it cuts, gouges; it's overload from the disconnected woman. At last done, she leaves through a back door to go to her new Chevy Malibu.

It was his to open the shop today; a large responsibility. He reached into his other pocket and gripped the cold bronze key to the front door of the shop, which lay approximately one mile away. The distance left him time enough to think thoughts. Why had Harris entrusted him with this responsibility—and on a Monday yet, which was always the craziest day in the shop?

Rubber treaded wheels roll down the aisle silently.

The familiar cracked sidewalk came and went under him as he shuf-

fled forward in his brown shoes. His mop of hair blew gently in the mild breeze, and he had the look of a philosopher, in his baggy white suit and red tie. Harris always told him to dress less wildly, but he could not take the advice. Advice was for other people to take, not for Garrison. He held his head high as he walked and ran a finger along the windowsill of the storefront sliding past.

Stand in the vestibule, dark-gloved, a ring of men waiting.

The hitch was what to do in the shop once it was open. The front would be all blue like it was and the counter would be in there for him to stand behind. But what would he do there?

Garrison realized halfway there that he had let himself forget. Oh he'd know when he got there, it would come to him once he turned the key in the lock but right now, walking, he didn't have to know, so he let it stay forgotten.

Pick the heavy thing up; three on each side.

And he had plenty of time before opening, so he stopped walking when he came to the Main Street bridge. He went off the road and onto the dam

valve platform thirty feet above the water, and he sat on the edge. Sure enough, the trout were still there in the foot deep shallows—hanging there in the water rigid and straight like brown logs suspended in space.

Here's the steps, careful now, slow.

He had once tried to catch the trout. But they would not take the bait. Maybe the trout would know better than he what to do when the shop doors opened? Maybe the trout are the ones who should have the key. He eased it out of his pocket and laid it on the concrete.

Slip in your slick shoes. Damn why did you wear your slick-soled shoes?

It took almost all of his will power not to toss the key down to the trout—that would not spook them; years ago, when he'd dropped his bait in the water there, they had not budged. Maybe they were not real fish at all; maybe they were something he was imagining; like he imagined his life from day to day, and, in doing so, kept himself alive.

Bang your shin, hard—but grimace and hang on.

The Michelin spur of the RRRailroad. The sand pits spur to an un-

known place, unexplored.

Later, it is black and blue and it hurts.

Put a rock of asphalt on the tracks—watch the tank car ride up over it and watch the potbellied railroad man jump from the tank car, suddenly in danger, right by Main Street.

Load the object into a shiny hard chrome trimmed black hole on wheels.

Put a fish on the tracks. Watch the train roll over the fish—miles and miles of slick fish oil spreads down the rail.

Pick the black piping around the Cadillac seat.

Walk the Michelin spur of the RRRailroad, pulling branches over the rails, stopping to smoke in the gully by the tracks. Smoking makes you dizzy when you're a kid. God damn.

Unload the object from a shiny hard chrome trimmed black hole on wheels.

Float the little Arizona in a pan of boiling water. Watch it melt. The grey plastic bubbles, warps, and splits. Heat gradually rises. It goes liquid.

Enter an echoing grey place with a too-clean smell.

Start fires just inside the back door—what was I burning now what was it what was it—invert the pickle jug over your head not knowing the top's unscrewed. Might have burnt the house down. Put on little Albert's shirt and pants, upstairs. But I was careful; much too careful to burn the house down. Your clothing is sodden.

Set it on a stand where it goes; before the place previously paid for.

Model cars, model planes. Smash 'em, burn 'em. Model ships. Use the pellet gun. Fire the pellet gun at the straight springy sapling; the pellet comes back and hits you just below the eye.

You thank God to have been spared from having the priest's bloody eye.

Words of God echoing. The drooping bloody eye again dominates.

Toss that dust-laden Cuttysark in a plastic bag, and stomp it. Nobody wants the damned thing, except him; and now he is dead. So it should cease to exist. Her ring is in it, forgotten.

Dream of the copper colored chains hung on the bowsprit. Dream in class.

Leave the grey place. After you leave, they slide it; seal it; mark it.

Also the way out—there's the way out! The end of the pipe! The vacuum beyond! It goes to a place beyond the tests that will most likely be failed.

Ride home. Go live your life.

There is a place beyond the tests that most likely will be failed, and it is a safe place where the tests are forever over.

Stand amazed.

WHAT'S THE THIRD
WORST THING TO
EVER HAPPEN TO YOU

THIRD WORST THING

BY ANONYMOUS

THERE WAS THIS TIME I got tickets to see mf doom at some real underground gig out in the south sea islands, I weren't gonna to pay to see no nigga with his rep but homie won us tickets on some radio promotion poo poo, like 300 winners got this all expenses paid trip don't know how they got the benjamins but it happened. Didn't think doom be performing but the company peeps insisted they got him for real no impersonator neither. Soon as we was off the plane I started feelin like something was up, I seen the islands on tv before all palm trees and tropical paradise but when we landed it was all gloomy and dark industrial poo poo, didn't want to be there no

more but we weren't payin to fly home early we'd come all that way so figured we should go to the gig. We get in the venue an it was some real weird setup, this loving massive dancehall built round some mountain that was the stage, homie and me waited for an hour and a half but mf doom never turned up so we figured we'd bail, saw these huge birds just chillin near us an we thought gently caress it why not an grabbed on a leg each, spooked the hell out of them they took off screeching carried us near all the way home, lucky because just after we took off the mountain erupted, turned out that poo poo was a live volcano literally burned the place down killed damn

near every nicca there. Cats who set up the gig went bust the whole poo poo was covered up it weren't on no news. We called up mf dooms crew, they said he was never booked to go there never even heard of it?? Word, turned out they meant to get him but some nigga in charge of booking had run spell check on his email and it had gently caressed the name up, booked the wrong act or some poo poo like that.

So homie and me were chillin watching this nigga beggin in the street only he weren't begging he was cutting up with looked like burning socks while some kid panhandled collectin cheese from us cats watching. Street performance its called but he was kinda wack and I was drunk and buggin, thought itd be funny to shout some poo poo at him you know? but homie give me this look and says nicca what the gently caress you doin dont do that didnt i ever tell you about mr tesseract? I was like "what" so he give me the skinny, few years back he was up town watching some street performer went by the name mr tesseract, kind of a magician dressed in this fly real deep black suit an hat, had a sign with his name on and all these weird new age magic symbols, geometric shapes an poo poo. He a pretty good act got a big crowd of niggas watch-

ing him make stuff appear and disappear gettin cats from the audience give him their bling n poo poo to use in his tricks even makes some hoodrats bra appear under his dome piece, he building up making bigger stuff appear and reappear no one can work out how he doing it. Only problem is this crew of lifted niggas clutchin forties gettin rowdy an shoutin poo poo at him tryin to make him slip but he plays it off cool an just ignores them carries on with his act, right? He keeps going like this for some time but drunk niggas gettin angry he ignoring them even the crowd be scared n stop throwin mr tesseract they chips but he keep going, the drunkest loudest nigga, real pissed he being ignored pulls a shank and goes for the magician but mr tesseract he dont even loving flinch just kind of shrinks inwardly like he melted into air, like he moving away in no direction you know? Maybe that woulda been it only the busta grabs his wrist just before it go, eyes pop real wide an he get pulled in too before he can let go an both of them just straight up gone. Everyone split didn't want to wait to see what happen next, never seen mr tesseract again but the bustas body reappear same place few hours later, all mangled and twisted into impossible shapes an poo poo. 5-0 couldn't do nothing. Anyhow these days I wont give street performers no dis.

UNFORTUNATE EYES OF CURIOUS MAN

BY ANONYMOUS

WE STRODE ALONG THE GOLD and gaud robed road of the hallway, portraits of men of worldly mystique peering captive from in their chiaro-scuro cells. A lengthy succession of these and fine-carved doors pulled past, when we three reached the end of the hall where loomed a heavy set of darkwood doors. The young assistant scumbled past Mr. Malaonda and heaved the great gates agape. We walked in, wordless, to a spacious office as ornate as what was seen of the mansion, only with a greater sense of importance. One got the feeling this was the sinewy ganglion of Eles Malaonda's empire, that here was from where ideas and orders materialized—

metastasized then to the various arteries of his hidden empire. Mr. Malaonda took his place on a throne behind a large desk brimming with stacks of paper, books, maps, and yet more papers. The aide sought his place at Mr. Malaonda's side, to his left a large standing globe of indeterminate, yet doubtlessly antique origin.

Eles Malaonda spoke in Spanish, unintelligible to me, with a gravelly timbre from rum-soaked chords. While speaking, his assistant chimed in, echoing Mr. Malaonda's Spanish with a language more understandable to me. The voices overlapping produced a slightly disorienting sound.

“*Vamos a abandonar las cortesí*—Let us dispense with courtesies, the matter—*es muy sim-* is very simple.”

I leaned attentively towards him, suppressing my curious instinct to look around the lavish home office.

Malaonda said, first in a foreign baritone, followed by an echo, “I have arranged for an expedition, and am seeking a writer to catalogue the voyage. Your colleague has pointed to you as someone who is capable of doing this well, and I trust his judgment. I assume because you are here that you are, in fact, interested in this opportunity. So here are the fundamentals. The day after this, you are to find the boat *Atlas*—I will give you its location shortly—where you will meet a group of three others, these will be your shipmates. You will then navigate with them to coordinates I have specified to the captain. During the whole of the expedition, you are to keep a keen and accurate record of both anything you may come across—even if that thing is nothing—and the condition of the crew and its members. I want detailed observations on any and everything. Is this understood?”

Uneasy about heading off to sea—where I had been but once before and was not eager to return—but feeling

like I had no other choice (penny pressure more than peer pressure) I nodded blank-faced.

“Very good,” he continued, still speaking in incongruous chorus. “Now, as to the matter of your payment...” Mr. Malaonda pulled a drawer from his desk and handed his extension an envelope which was then transferred to me. “The amount should be quite sufficient and generous. Now Mr... right... I have other matters requiring attention. Do report back to me immediately after your return, and leave your report with my persons. I may have further questions for you so be ready to make yourself available.”

With that began my world-shattering sojourn into the sea. I have tried to convince myself that, were I able to go back, I would have done things differently, rejected the offer, but deeply I know that given my circumstances then, the same choice would have been made *ad infinitum*—indeed the money was generous, and sorely needed.

That evening I upgraded to a more pleasant hotel room, less gloom-infested.

Pointless, in all honesty, the ship sailed the following day, but the pur-

chase made the money *real*, made it mine. Everything was going to turn out fine after all. That night was a good night. The last I was to have.

I came to these lands but newly, from penury more than anyplace. My home country is no place for a writer, even one as able as myself. Here I heard was a much better place for *homme du plume*, and it was perfect, for I knew the language as well. Consequently, I found some measure of sustenance as a translator—for technical writings, mostly (an honest bore but a way to earn a living). In this vein I spent the better part of eight months, weaving through mounds of paper and climbing growing Everests of books, books to counteract the dry tedium of my work. Soon, enough money was made to begin to furnish my bare apartment into something resembling a habitable place.

Empty spaces faded out and sofas, tables, and small decorous bits faded in. Soon even they would fade from sight and thought when covered in yet more books and papers.

Then took the fire.

Whether through an act of the preternatural, a simple accident, or some Promethean vandal with a grudge,

my home was stolen terribly aflame. Thankfully (sometimes unfortunately) I was not there when it happened. But all my belongings were. Gone was my work and my life. Burnt to raven ash.

I had been here long enough to get to know the people, but not long enough to befriend them—quiet, private types aren't quick into friendship. Pleas for temporary lodging were gently, apologetically, but none the less cruelly, snubbed by colleagues and acquaintances, who cited the whole spectrum of excuses, from inability due to familial or financial issues, to no excuse at all. I went back to my corded-off apartment to look for any surviving relics, of which there were few: some books of esoteric lore, works of long-dead poets, and what looks like once was a terrestrial globe, but now resembles a globoid mass of smoky brown with carbon bites taken out of it, a blackened Swiss-Jupiter. These things and nothing else I took to the cheapest inn I could find, and there stayed. I took a few days off from work despite really having ought not to. I would have to start everything over.

Soon, after returning to my employer's office, my luck seemed to have oriented itself in a new direction. As it

happened, a colleague from work had heard of my recent misfortune and had recommended me for a special assignment. He said I had to make my way across town for the full details and that the pay was very good and that it would be dispensed upon acceptance. The relief the parting of the clouds brought! As if from the rending gray gloom above, a light-outlined celestial hand descended from the heavens bearing an olive branch and promises of reconciliation.

Equipped with the address, I found the place, a palatial mansion with a gated entrance and an army of laborers to execute its functions and upkeep. The steel gate was manned open, it taking two to complete the task, whereupon a third person ushered me up the inclined slope leading to the entrance, lined with plants and ornaments no peasant could conjure. The mansion's oaken lips opened and swallowed us entire. I asked the servant, a young man with no more than twenty years to him, who the owner of such extravagance was. The answer came with a curt, "Eles Malaonda," a Spaniard, as I later gathered, who had moved here and made a hundred king's fortunes through a variety of ventures, sometimes legal sometimes not, sometimes banal other times mysterious.

What exactly the job entailed still wasn't clear, but one thing was: his ability to honor payment.

The young servant bade me to wait in the living room near the entrance; I was early. Taking seat on one of the antique sofas, I sat and looked about the grand estate. The whole place affected a very foreign atmosphere. Wild paintings and weird relics adorned the walls of the solemn stately home. Balancing the eccentricity of the décor was the familiar crust of gaudy opulence typical of epicure homes here. With my two hands linked respectfully behind my back, I paced around the room, inspecting the more interesting details while a few of the laborers kept a stray eye on me.

From the distant head of the staircase, a voice. I turned and saw the young man from earlier standing silent behind me. "Mr. Malaonda would speak to you now," he said.

We made our way to the staircase from the top of which a man clad in dark, formal clothes and white hair peered downward with a hand clasping the bulbous golden end of the railing. He waited, watched unwaveringly, as we labored up the stairs. Slowing down as I approached him, I stopped on the penultimate step and

outstretched my hand, which was dismissed with an absent nod and a view of his back as he turned and began walking.

For a moment, I stood there like an idiot, hand still waiting for the shake that wasn't coming. Catching up to me and standing to my side, the young man gestured me to follow his dark-clad employer.

On the day of our scheduled departure, a day destined to be crisp blue and sharp cool, with the gentle sting of the wind-whipped droplets and the endless song of the blue welling from up the swell of the sea, I found the *Atlas*, lone by the bobbing wood pier. It was a smallish ship, that much I could deduce (a yacht?). Already my inexperience with affairs of the sea was becoming evident. It hit me then that I may well have been woefully ill-qualified to report on nautical matters. I knew neither the make nor type nor mark of this, or any, ship. How critical such knowledge would be to the fulfillment of my job remained yet to be seen, but already qualms began to supplant one by one the ecstatic *relief* which typified the days before.

It was around five in the morning, when I arrived—sun still sulking somewhere behind the fog—murky

and thick as the sea over which it hung—then in a calm but with a promise, or threat—of sudden change, which may only be present now, at writing, due to hindsight—the mirror image of which—foresight—I would give anything to have had right then—at the side of the boat, where a laboring figure came into view, turned, and became a waving figure.

“Hi there!” a smile chiseled itself into the man's geometric jaw. He was a stout solid man with gray hair and a set of active blue eyes. The captain, no doubt. He came over to the side of the boat closest to me and introduced himself.

“I'm Kristov Janssen, and you must be... let me guess,” he produced from his shirt pocket a square of neatly folded paper and undid his former fastidiousness. Keeping his head towards the slip, his eyes snuck up and asked around, studying, “...you must be... ‘Roger Messico, cartographer,’ right?”

After correcting him, bag and briefcase in tow, I boarded the vessel with his help.

I wasn't sure if it was the boat that wavered or my footing; this was going to be a rough ride. Captain Janssen quipped something or other about

“sea legs,” and asked me to help him set up. My general first impression of him was that he was an amiable fellow. We made the usual banter that came with some effort to me, and forged at least a temporary contract of friendship for the trip that was ahead.

The others trickled in soon after. Almost arriving simultaneously, Roger Messico, the cartographer, and Hugo Strom, a biologist with a specialty in ecology, met where the pier began, shifting their bags to free their grip, shook hands, said something I couldn't quite hear, and made their way towards the boat. Roger was around my age, a Brit, soft around the edges, but as we were to find, a half-decent sailor (if less suited for cartography... and cohabitation with fellow humans). Hugo was slightly more interesting.

While the rest of us carried only our bags and the accouterments necessary for the performance of our tasks, he had with him an additional item, a small boy. He claimed the child was a charge, a nephew left for him to take care of while the parents were away on business. He agreed to care for him, but said he couldn't pass up an opportunity for this kind of assignment—by which I took him to mean “payment” (although he certainly didn't seem

to need it, his clothes and mannerisms were finer than any of ours). The child, Maurits Cornelius, was approximately six or seven years, and was as well-dressed as his guardian.

We the crew, ragtag and with tag-along kid, were about ready to leave when another man came trotting down the dock, in the uniform of one of Malaonda's.

“Gentlemen!” He caught up to the boat and paused a moment to catch up to his breath. The boy heard the exclamation, and tried to wander from out the ship's interior he was exploring. Hugo saw this and lunged to keep him from the man's sight.

“Mr. Malaonda has sent me to be sure that everything is in order and all the necessary equipment is in place. It is? Everything? Excellent. Very well then! You gentlemen have a safe and fruitful journey. Remember to report back at once upon your return.”

With that our sea-turned vessel cleft through the water, propelled by favorable winds and leaving in its wake an outward rippling triangle of shimmering white-lined undulating blue.

This had been my second time at sea, the first being when I left my former country in search of better pros-

pects. Like then, I felt ill at ease when the ship began its incipient rocking out at open sea. Every throb and sway of the hull made me wonder if something had not gone horribly wrong. There is something about being at the complete and utter mercy of something so large and beyond one's control as the sea that wrought such feelings of vulnerability. Despite these misgivings, it is with pride that I can say my job had not been affected in the slightest by the dread-pangs. Diligently I recorded all that I saw out at sea and in my shipmates. The ocean had been a desert, with not an oasis of land to take note of. The notes on my shipmates, however, were where most of my energies were spent.

The captain was a robust leader who ably directed those of us who were less experienced into helping with the sails. He disabused me of some degree of my nautical ignorance when he told me the kind of ship we presently sailed on was a "ketch," easily differentiated from the commonly-mistaken-for "yall" by the location of the "mizzin mast." The good captain even told tales of singular men who sailed the seas alone—to imagine the solitude... floating through, suspended in time with naught in sight but bright blue above and black blue below... a romantic idea to be sure—and taught

me some of their methods. A fine captain indeed.

Roger Messico was less skilled. Rarely, if ever, did I see him perform his assigned task. He claimed there wasn't much to do as a cartographer, and it may have been true, I don't know, but for the amount he was presumably endowed, I would have expected him to make at least some use of himself. Instead he would prance around deck, telling vulgar jokes feebly masked in euphemism for the sake of the boy. In between bouts of rowdy storytelling and general buffoonery, he would lapse into fits of drinking and shouting some nonsense or other about how he knew his wife was with another man, and how he had in his mind a most brilliant scheme to take vengeance on them both. To my consternation, the others found his boorishness amusing, dismissing it as "liveliness." A great gangling gagoon (portmanteau for *gag*, *goon*, and *ba-boon*), he often poked fun at me when he found himself bored, which was nearly all the time, that doomed brute Roger.

Hugo, fared better than Roger, task-wise, collecting notes and samples of future-wrack among other things, but in terms of coping with the tumult of the sea, he was as I, green in experience

and complexion. More times than not, he could be found inside the cabin, clutching a paper bag in one hand, and a notepad in the other. He was not too unlike me, a furtive bibliophile, though get him started on the right subject, and all quiet mien would be discarded, traded for a fiery passion. The relationship he seemed to have with the child was like that of a person handling a pungent rag pinched between two fingers at arms length. He seemed uncomfortable around the boy, and gave curt answers to the various questions posed to him. He later admitted to being deathly afraid of the unpredictable nature, and cutting honesty of children's comments—feelings born from a humiliating public incident involving a child who didn't know better than to tell the truth. When in want of some stimulating discussion and book pages began to feel confining, I could do worse than to speak with Hugo.

The boy was whose company I most enjoyed, his friendliness towards me seemed straightforward, honest, and lacking pretense. A very inquisitive child, as I suppose most are, he would often ask me about my work and about the workings of the world. He asked about the earth and how it was made, what stars were, and what there was outside the earth. Of course

the others, men of hard science, would have been better equipped to answer, but I enjoyed coloring my explanations with tales of ancient mythology, Greek, Roman, and Norse. These tales were particularly interesting for me because in my mind, imagination and creativity were of higher importance than cold facts. I suppose that's why the child and I got along so well.

Thusly passed two weeks, the crew sailing towards Mr. Malaonda's coordinates under the skilled captain's command, doing their jobs to varying degrees of dedication, and finding distractions with which to fill the spaces in between the days.

Then the sea turned. Gone were the clear skies and waters, supplanted by foreboding clouds ambling thickly above and seas bulging with menace. The storm promised by such conditions followed soon after. Profuse rain befell the scene, swelling the skies with cackling cracks of light and sibilant screams in between. Walls of rain fell, and towards the restless skies the waves aspired. Then a violent wind blew, sending our groaning vessel veering and creaking off course, careening towards some ineluctable destination.

For days the storm hissed and thundered, subsiding enough to tease re-

prieve, only to return full-force. Then the the weather, beastly, gave way to a gusty but far more tolerable environ. Our boat still in its drowsy plummeting waltz, we were pressed forward with steady force. The skies had cleared somewhat, and visibility was less impaired. That's when we saw it. A small strip of white, an island, or islet, rather. Though with open eyes and sane minds we gazed, understanding lay still further ahead.

We drove forward, thoughtlessly, and onto the shore of that small strip of land we came. The island was small, its exact size lost in the dells of memory. Out of the boat, daze-like, dreaming, we stumbled, fumbling our legging when the fine white sand gave.

Almost as if floating, feet sinking in the pearl-white sand, the sea-white sand, four floating men and a boy hovered, up down, eyes up down. Eyes followed forward empty sand, ghost-white sand. No one knew. The roar of the winds birthed a din, tearing din. All from around us the wild whipping wind swelled to a din. Nobody knows. We dazed and dreamed ahead, floating on the death-white sand, while tore the din. Eyes down, still down.

We stood there, where the sound of the fury girded us—a grotesque

tearing of the sky, the sound of something *alive*, breath of the Kraken. Yet despite the mountainous sound that overcame us, it seemed to have little effect on our person. Suggested by the sheer force of the sound was the wind's ability to take us with it, to toy with us like playthings, but no, our garments scarcely rippled in this aural tempest.

Now, with the comforting distance of time and place, in the quiet of this too-cold room, the analytic faculties have greater facility in dissecting the events of that moment, in giving a more limpid portrait of it. But I wish to impart a sense of what it was to occupy that point in the world (though I'm sure my account will be dismissed as the hysterics of a man over the edge)—in essence, to describe that which resists description or comprehension even, to intimate something so utterly tied to a time and a place and a frame of mind that to attempt communion is folly. Mathematicians could surely describe it in detail, but their abstract numeric vernacular renders their account... lacking. Gifted poets, men of great disease and brilliance, would need to labor in legion for centuries to capture the totality of the experience of being on that islet then. Lacking that, my crude attempt must suffice.

Our eyes gazed up then, up from the sand. They crossed the border from white to black, and gazed upon what reason deemed impossible: Infinity.

The human mind was forged to work in the environment of Earth. What then, when it beholds something *truly* strange? Madness. Sickness of the body and mind. From that islet where we stood, ten-odd paces forward, the land plummeted violently down down down down, still down. Incessant the falling labored. Not into the ocean, for the ocean did likewise. One realized then that the terrible roar around us was of the unfathomably deep—but finite—sea, diving, toppling, tumbling evermore off a precipice in a waterfall whose immensity...

To either side, an impossible waterfall, stretching to the visible horizons. Beyond it, darkness. The existence of a ledge presupposes the existence of something beyond it, so says reason. But here, where sense and logic become all nonsense now, there was *Nothing* beyond the drop—not-*Nothing*. We had reached the terminus of our terrestrial realm, the Sudden End of the plane of our world. We had seen the end of the stage. It was a unique kind of darkness, kind of void. It wasn't like peering into a well whose

depth creates a black murk through which it is impossible to see, nor was it like a starless night sky. This was a different kind of darkness altogether. Infinite black. Unbound black. It's insanity to attempt to describe: it was almost like darkness, only—through some freak optical effect—it was possible to discern its boundlessness. We could *see* infinity. The void beyond us, a mirror of darkness facing its twin, burdened us with an unburdened view of *limitless depth*.

The infinite is not an easy thing for a mind to grasp. Everything dealt with in everyday experience is finite (though sometimes massive) and thus comprehensible.

Easily we can count to the hundreds. Thousands we see of grains, or stars during a particularly bright night. Millions we can grasp as a concept, or even when on a beach, while scooping crystals of sand and thinking how many there must be on the shore while they trickle in streams through our fingers. Infinity though... Infinity taunts those who try comprehension with confusion or madness. Infinity is dangerous.

Not only was the sea and land stealing to god-knows-where, but the very atmosphere, air vacuuming towards

the immaterial. In a stupefied state, high catatonic, I wasn't conscious, meaning, I was an animal or the shell of a man, not capable of thought, only of sensing, receiving and recording sensory information. In this most singular state of perception, I searched for my shipmates. To my right, first I saw Roger, in hysterics. He lay slightly sunk in the nacreous sand, chest bucking, face contorted in heaves of great invisible laughter—the cry of lone disaster drowned by the whipping winds of roaring black time. A gruesome sight. Bearing it no longer, I searched for the others. Hugo fell to his knees and brought his hands to his face aghast in a gesture of helpless incredulity.

Then the captain. When I saw him, I became aware of another strange effect of this place at the end of Earth. It seemed the borderless veil wasn't merely taking the physical elements with it air, water, earth, but also immaterial time.

In my studies I have read of a most peculiar work of inspired genius. It says that time, as understood, is not absolute and static, but relative and liquid. In the presence of certain conditions, it can either be hastened or slowed. As I peered at the captain's countenance, I was awakened to its ef-

fecting of the former. Visibly, slowly but perceptively, Kristov Janssen, captain of the Atlas, aged. Before my eyes, with a surreal languor, lines were born and deepened, eroding into his sculpted visage, hair withered and whitened, skin drooped, yielding to age. Not once did he break his sight from the Mirror Black. Withering right that moment, before the ends of all, he fell, succumbing to reaper Time, forward, face down, on the death-white sand, wisps of white withered hair swaying in the gust before the trembling black.

Of all the strange worldly things I've seen, the reaction of the child before this horror of sight, is surely the strangest. Completely unaffected, indifferent before madness.

I watched as he tugged the shirt of his stone-turned caretaker, mouthing mute questions. I watched as he gazed attentively, inquisitively; as he ventured to lay belly-down on the sand, head almost poking over the edge. But no humanly instinct to protect a child could overcome the oppressive awe that threatened to choke. For lifetimes I stood there, witness to something that impressed itself so firmly into my consciousness that it is with much difficulty that I can think of anything else—and even then my thoughts eventually return, as to an abusive master.

A shifting in perception, dark to light. A falling. Tumbling, reeling, back. Focus negative. Thought thinking upon thought: thoughts looping into themselves in wracking fractals. Involuting shells of thought. Thought inwardly evermore. A tug. Still the Kraken breathes—breath brushing skin. A slight shifting of the sifted sand beneath. A tug. What? ...will happen ...is *happening* to me? A tug. What happened to them? Why? A fatigue sets in, a vice onto bones. What do I do? A tug...

The child stood beside me. A crying face buried in my chest. Two arms belting around. Men, fallen. Action was to be taken, and the instinct for self-preservation underlying all life took charge. With a struggle, no small feat, I tore my sight and mind from the suction of the black. Behind me the storm had parted—how long could I have possibly stood there?—only brightest blue and sun and placid sea was seen. A hard unnatural line divided that which can be known from all else. Dissonant as this tableau was, it did not then register consciously. I still simply gathered impressions, only after to be dissected in endless analysis.

In a daze, redolent of that before, yet tinted with (tainted by?) lucidity, I, or to be more accurate, *he*—for I was a

passenger, a detached observer cradled within the circuitry of my consciousness—gathered the the child and, realizing the shipmates lost, cast off on the boat, uncharacteristically adroit.

The then favorable turn in climate facilitated the return home. Of the voyage itself I remember very little. I remember the child was a constant presence at my side, first morose and sober, then as time passed constantly fishing for answers whose very questions were alien and frightening. I was silent throughout, laboring to keep at a steady pace home. The child, realizing this adult could satiate none of his curiosity, found quiet.

If a man is as he thinks and acts, then yes, the man that left for parts unknown on that deviant ship *Atlas* can be safely pronounced dead. In his stead returned I, a fractured impostor. Oddest thing: I enveloped in a restless silence, even after we finally made land.

Clarity of thought had, for the most part, returned, but for the life of me I could not wield words. It's not that the will to communicate was lacking; there was much to say.

Questions were asked, many, many, many of them. Too many... Of the

whereabouts of my shipmates. Of the inordinate length of our voyage. Of the agitated state of the child, speaking in wild frenzy. Of his caretaker's absence. Naturally, they suspected me at first, but an (attempted) interrogation illuminated my innocence... and my malady. I ran when I heard whispers of institutionalization... murmurs of entombment in an asylum. I never knew what was made of the child.

Even now, alone, sequestered in this one-night cheap hotel—severed from the outside, where dwell the fools—I cannot bring myself to speak. Only through writing can I convey what wrings my mind. I remember now looking at the child with a sort of deep distrust when he could not stop talking while my lips were frozen. The chills! I cannot stand them. Dreadful in frequency and loathsome in intensity, they seize me even through this heavy coating. My voyage to strange lands and ends I have decided to set onto paper, with a strain of vain hope that transcription will serve as transplant—that my tormentor thoughts will mingle with the ink and be purged; that I may be well again.

Since, I've taken to solitudinous rumination. The encounter has seized my life, thoughts on what it was, what it *means*, have become my days, every-

thing else ancillary.

What did we come across that day? Everything I've been taught, learned, know, tells me that place shouldn't exist. Was it the site of some recent massive meteor strike? Unlikely.

An uncharted characteristic of the planet? No. A cessation of our universe? A glimpse into a different dimension? There must be a logical explanation. Maybe we just stumbled off the pages of some book, some human fiction.

No answers. I now understand I know nothing, save one thing: that the amount we *cannot* know is truly immense and frightening. This is why I must go back.

Lately I've realized this encounter will forever loom large over my life, that the life I once had is now gone, over. To prevent it from having all been a waste, I will attempt to salvage from the wreck answers, answers from that place at the end of all—even if only for myself.

Even if I'm not to return.

JUDE

BY ANONYMOUS

THE LAKE SHOWN A TRAGIC aqua-marine in the dying light. Jude and I would have swam and splashed and played. Not today. I stood on the bank of a cool lake on a hot summer eve, the horn of a downed stag firm my grip, and that day I'd rather not to swim at all than to swim alone. It was time to go. The stag weighed heavy on my shoulder though he wasn't yet full grown. His blood ran down my chest like the tears of a god. He would feed me well through tomorrow.

Night fell as I ascended the mountain side. The teapot boiler stood lit where I left it on the stake that marked my cabin. The stag threatened the

width of the door but surrendered to the urgency of the evening and tumbled in, now dressed in the forest bed. To guy a prey where one sleeps, for fear of the dark, makes one wonder how much predator they are.

I rose before the sun. The planks of the hut itself seemed saturated with the dank of set-out preyflesh. My fear daunted by the gray of the mourn, I sought the clearing of my kill with horn in hand, the stag's eyes ever forward, ever live, ever fearing, his body lost to other prey; man, the prey of the dark.

Through the forest, through the plain, a scarlet ribbon pierced my mind to lead me, straight from my bed, through the woodline, one step more, the stage here fell. Here his eyes would die.

On the voyage home, a bear crossed my path. Down, the ground, we parlied stares – a pause, and he went his way, I went mine. He did not fear the night. The teapot glared greasily, in a streak of sun, as though I'd left it lit. Crunch. Stop. A phone on the ground, a screen melted, plastic burned. I picked it up and continued home.

I fumbled for my slate of flint in the comparatively dim shade of my room and returned to the door for tinder, which hung opposite the herbs inside the doorway. Facing the coalbin, my back to the door, I struck a light and shut off the sunny cold. Then I knew that summer had played its last. The fire roaring, I sat down to strip and salt the stagmeat. Long, thin strips of muscle to my left, toward the coalbin. Bones and hooves in the pot ahead, under the workbench. The phone lay broken before me. It had been long since I had seen one of those.

The winter came without warning. The phone rested in the grave of its predecessors, their corpses smeared

across the surface of the bench. In their midst shown my newest find, as each cadaver had in their turns prior. I didn't bother with the door and hung a bit of stag above the fire. The snow would be too heavy against the door and the winter, though it came strong, was short. Perhaps with Jude, we could...no, not today. There would be no shoveling snow today. I went back to bed.

We were sitting on the edge of a cliff at the end of the world. Legs dangling off the edge. A smile. Cigarette smoking and guitar strumming. To know it was the end, to not care. An ode to the ocean. A melody bygone.

Tears and the rain, one and the same, the snow had melted. I mounted my galoshes. I remember how we were near the end, before the dark. Sinning in the face of the maker. Looting, fires, murder; unabashed, unmistakable, understandable. After one day, after two, it was as though the world had stopped and forgot (or perhaps remembered) that the world would end tomorrow. The cities burned, the towers fell, the banks collapsed, the people ruled and we all went home to die. Huddled together, fearing, like rabbits in a foxhole.

I would see the Deserts. A compass, a map, some meat and berries, a rifle (unnamed) and a door reluctant to give. I was off, no need for a light.

In the grave of a titan, in the depths of despair. O me, o me, who lived before a time forgot. A prayer to myself.

Here, before the instruments of an age begot, was an old man's home. Prior to the steel, the fire, his mother tucked him in.

How sound he slept, his window cross his puppy love crush's, his lot a block from school. And only down the street one found his college dreams, his love of sound – born in hearth of aunt-in-town, just below the piano; a place the kittens much adored.

But then his mother caught the flu, and all creation swore him through that she'd be fine and back before he knew. And soon his crush grew up and all the puppy love was not enough, she found herself a grown up dog the day the doctors said they're wrong. Aunty had to move again, she needed her own space for kin, the piano the only thing of which she had gotten rid. Now all the world was cold to him and memories were drowned in gin, he bought himself some smithing

weights and strapped them all around his legs. At midnight he marched through his town, the dock was cold with none around. He faced the waves and drained his fear, when suddenly a nymph appeared beside him in a wedding gown, her veil down, her own legs bound, around around with smithing weights.

An old man singing in the dark.

Seven days of boars and bears. The desert was the only thing that felt alive. In the forest, the trees were there for they were planted, the animals for they were bred. What happened to the suburbs?

Suburbia itself.

Here lied the grave of the world. It was here at dawn and it would stand 'till dusk. A birthmark, a scar, a circumcision, even a branding – a boiling stamp of death in the womb of a plant of life, a sandstone mobile 'top the cradle of civilization. It is all we couldn't change.

The sun, again, the sun. What is love if she's not here? Will she feel me die? Don't worry, Jude, I'm fine.

A once-home buried in the sand.

I wondered where the bed might be. Where Jude and I would sleep. Would we have watched T.V. Here? Brushed our teeth? Washed our clothes? All of times gone by. An elephant stumbled in the distance. Here, because we put it here. It was alone. Sad? Like a feather in the wind.

What if he were Jude and I were Jude and we were Jude together? What of it? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. But Jude was just a name to end all names. Yes, we still had Shakespeare.

At dawn I found the sunken city. We had looked for this for years, its towers like Zeus' thunder in a midnight grid of street. How many Judes but mine never came home? Mine from hunt, theirs from work. What was the difference? How many lie below my feet because we were the only?

Immune, the lucky minority, the maximum point-two percent – Jude and Jude in the Garden of Eden. Cautious science, point-one and a half, Jude and Jude-by-two. Perhaps I was only half immune.

I saw her before I went. Her eyes, like the stars a city of thunder could never conceive.

The sun fell on my return. The final dusk in the death of a world. Why not light the teapot? Why not, into the night? I sat on my bed, the oven cooking a stew I'd never eat, watching the last sunset bleed out upon my doorstep. No birds sang nor crickets chirped, no bear roared its last goodbye. The white to gold, the gold to red, the red to blood and the blood to dead. I closed the door, the teapot's flames drowned in a sea of murk. All the world would die in its sleep. Down, down, I tucked myself in with the sheets of an age begot. The stove fire rested in its coals a few feet from my head. Darker, darker, the fire darker now, as though it were dropped away into an endless pit of night.

Somewhere in the world a clock struck twelve, the end of time, and soon – Knock.

A knocking on the door.





POETRY

TAP ON THE EMOTION

For hours, it seems,
you turn and twist
the screw of the tap
tightening its nook
around the sneaky stream
until it does the opposite
violently and suddenly.

You imagined this
since you came here,
with your furniture, photographs
and a mute talking doll.
Now the water floods the inside out.
The tide drowns every room,
waves down the corridor,
through small apology of a garden,
those unfamiliar streets,
toward the straight-line
where the sky and the land
compress the ending.

CORINTHIANS 13

She has the delicate hands
to suffer no more the mouthy core
of a pomegranate its
thousand burning teeth;

He has the soft lips, yea,
the inconsequential jaw,
and the empty face
to feed.

A DREAM

In my dream, there are two kinds of people. People who breathe life into things, and people who drain it out.

I was standing on the edge of a skyscraper. I was going to do it. But someone stopped me. They gave me a picture and said: "If you don't intervene, this person will die. It's your job to rescue them." And so the chain went on.

The place looked like a prison, but everyone was happy. We all wore white and played games in the wire-enclosed courtyard. I saw the girl there who I'd saved, and the one that had rescued me. Where we walked flowers bloomed into life. Animals brought their dying young to us to be revived.

One day, a newcomer came. He was handsome until he knew you'd noticed him. The garden shrank and withered were he walked. I went with him anyway.

He wanted to find out how we knew who to save. He thought it was in our dreams. He put me to sleep for six months, and when I woke up the garden was barren and the prison was silent and empty.

IN BED WITH WINTER

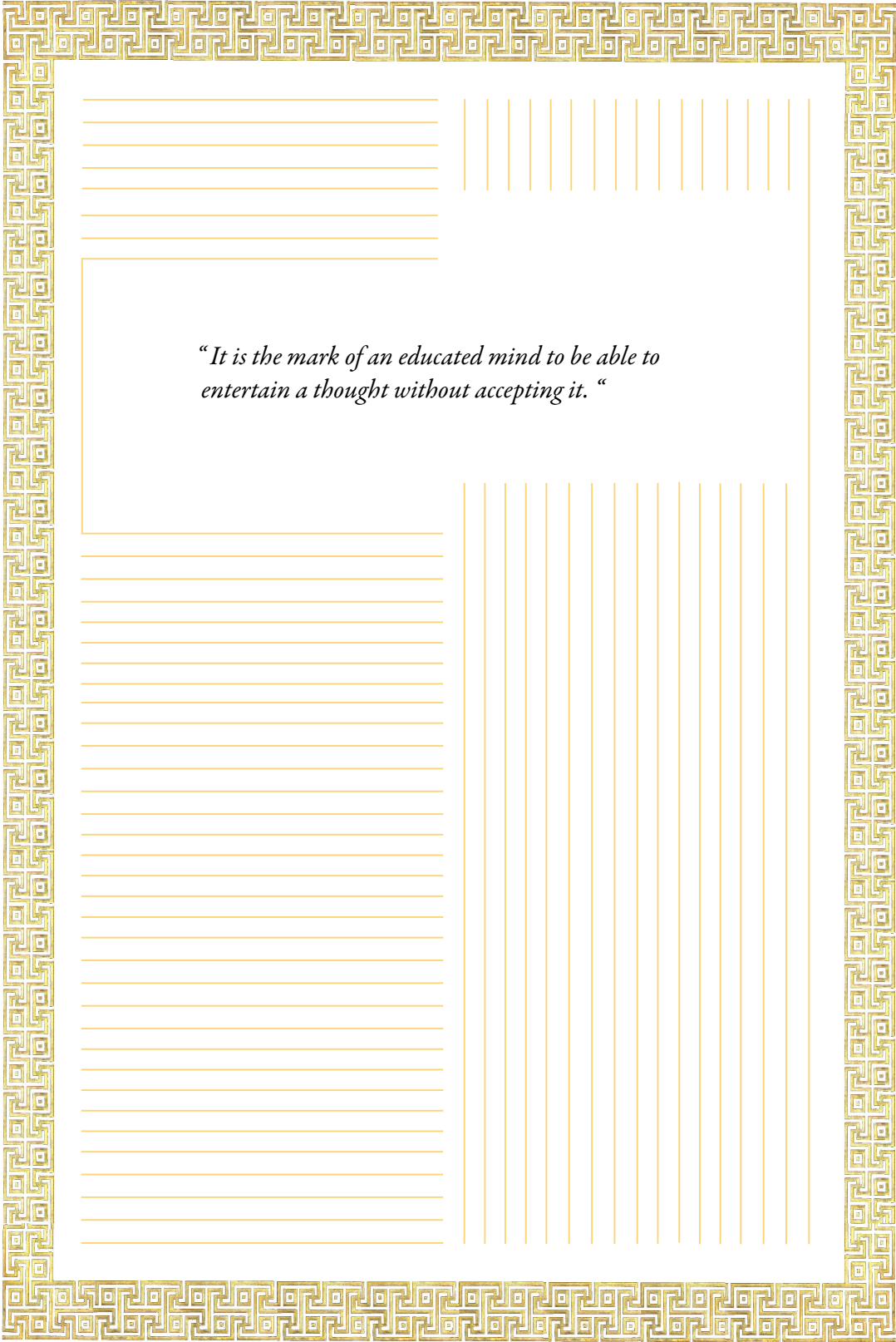
Crocodiles prowling the swamplands under my tongue,
snapping their lazy jaws, drinking the warmth
of your kisses and pissing it down my throat

(into the great sea of my stomach
where all good things go when they're gone);

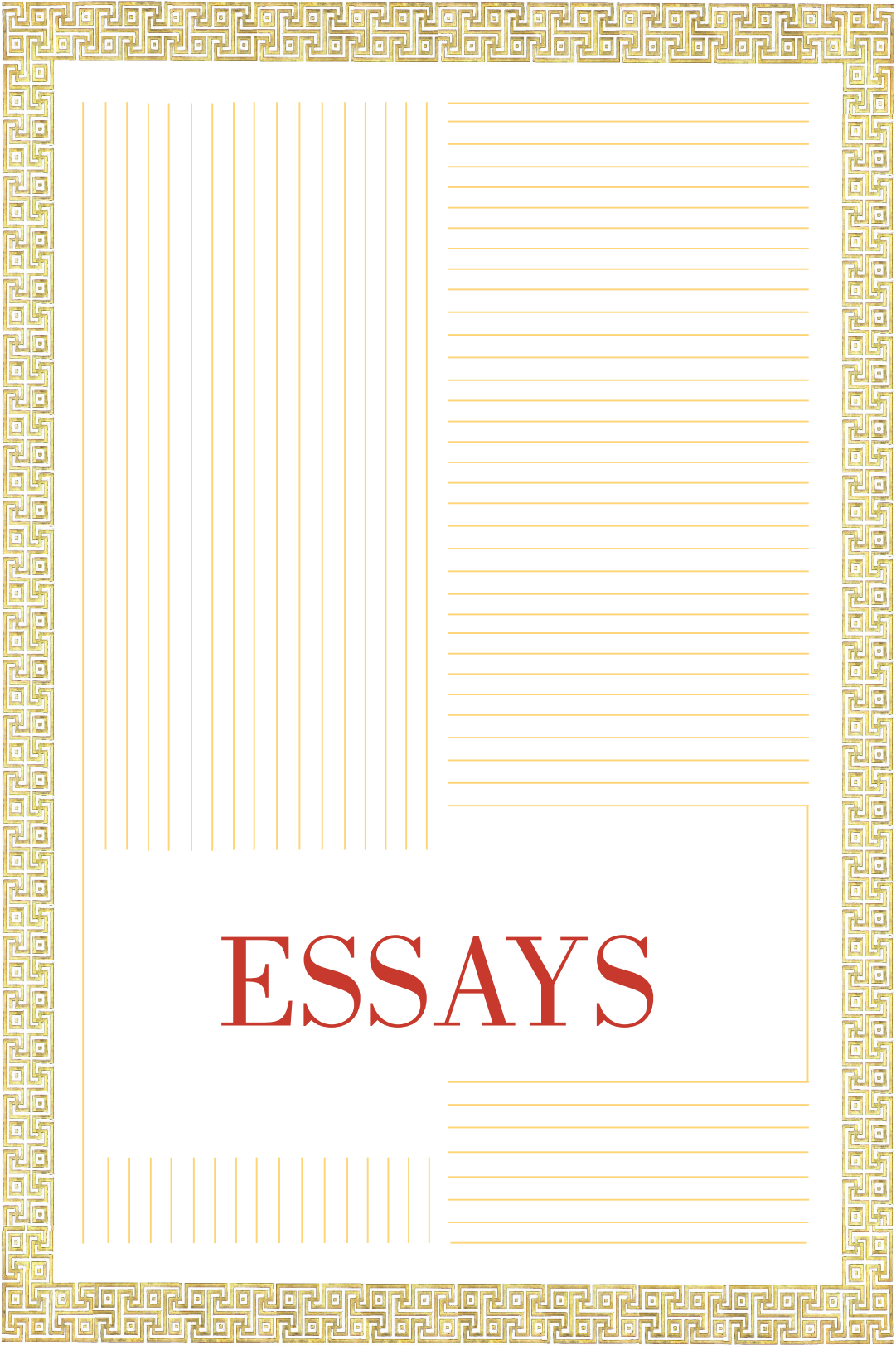
laying soft eggs around my teeth
and monitoring them carefully; never blinking,
always rolling their scaly tails along my gums,
snorting at the cold morning air
like it was a hungry boar snuffling for breakfast nests.

ALL TO THE GOOD

Or so you tell yourself when you've eaten more than your body can hold, when your back throbs with gravity's dull ache, when the voice on your shoulder whispers "it's time to say goodbye." Somewhere, maybe on the other side of humankind, there are other songs. You really can't be sure of anything. I saw a rainbow stretched across the evening sky, or so I thought. Memory, that blur between something half recalled and something called to life from a swirling stew of nothingness. I walk and walk until the miles taste like blood on my pounding pulsing tongue and sweat tumbles, downpour of summer rain. My hands drip with gold, I have become a miser hoarding metal smells and sweet chiming waterfalls of coin.



"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."



Vertical lines on the left side of the top section, and horizontal lines on the right side of the top section.

ESSAYS

Horizontal lines on the right side of the bottom section, and vertical lines on the left side of the bottom section.

CULTURE, TOOL USE, AND HIGHER ORDER
THINKING IN NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

I WANNA BE LIKE YOU

BY ANONYMOUS

IS NOTHING SACRED ANY MORE?

Making and using tools, developing different cultures and thinking about thinking itself were for a long time defining characteristics of humans. But one by one we have been stripped of these titles by impudent upstarts in the animal world. On March the 15th 2012, a brown bear was observed for the very first time using a barnacle-covered stone to “scrub” its face. Sparrows with regional accents and baboons that can apparently second-guess one another have redefined the traits we consider human.

So is there anything that truly separates us from the animal world? If so, what? And if not, where does that leave us?

Getting inside the minds of animals is one of Biology’s most daunting tasks. Even if they do display similar behaviour to us, how do we know that the same thought processes are behind it? Are they using conscious thought, instinct or simply learning by rote? D.J. Chalmers of the Scientific American put it perfectly: science consists of “Easy Problems” and “Hard Problems”. The Easy Problems - how nerves are wired, how genes build bodies – can be studied and measured by known

scientific methods. But the means by which a mass of neurones bring about conscious thought is still as unclear as it was to Darwin's associate Huxley: "as unaccountable as the appearance of Djin when Aladdin rubbed his lamp".

But Biologists aren't put off that easily. Much can be learned by observing different animal cultures. These occur when "societies" within the same species exhibit different behaviours, which are passed on by learning, rather than genes.

The most extreme example is chimpanzee societies, where 39 possible cultural differences have been observed. Some societies fish for termites with sticks, while others crush nuts with stone "hammers" and "anvils", sometimes even employing a stone wedge to stabilise the anvil. These hints at "ratcheting": an idea passed down the generations is built upon at each step until a product is reached that no single chimpanzee could achieve in its own lifetime.

When learning, juvenile chimps choose which adults to observe. But to imitate their actions exactly would involve putting themselves in their teacher's place. This requires higher order reasoning: the ability to speculate about other animal's mental state.

Hamydaras Baboons seem to exhibit such thought processes. In their strongly hierarchical societies, a female in the dominant male's harem will only groom a subordinate male if he is hidden by a rock. This implies that the female knows the dominant male can't see the subordinate. But this behaviour may simply have been learned by trial and error. More solid experiments were needed.

In one trial, a dominant and a subordinate chimpanzee were presented with two bananas in an enclosure. The dominant could only see one (the other was hidden by a block), but the subordinate could see both. In 73% of the trials, when the doors opened, the subordinate rushed to grab the food behind the block first: *the one he knew the other chimp couldn't see*.

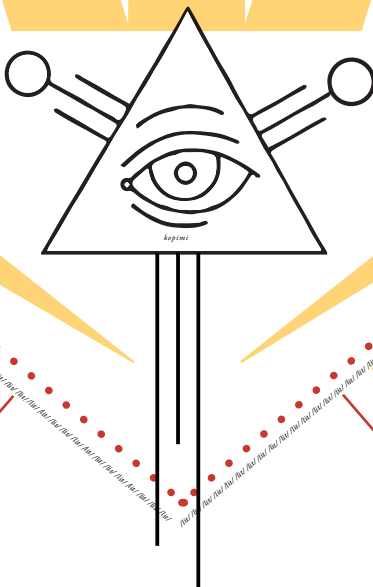
This sounds pretty conclusive, but the subordinate may simply have been reading subtle clues in the dominant's behaviour. It may have noticed the dominant looking at the visible food for longer, and responded accordingly. In another trial, blue jays were seen to project their own experiences onto others. They were allowed to hide wax moth larvae in sand. If they saw they were being spied on by another bird, only the jays who had stolen food in the past would re-hide their own.

For naïve jays who had never pilfered another bird's hoard, the idea didn't even cross their minds!

But again, logic forces us reassess. The jays that re-hid their food may simply have learned to observe other birds as a result of their pilfering experience. We humans tend to use our own higher order reasoning to assume other species have it. But until we find more reliable evidence, we must avoid adding extra layers of meaning to an observation when a simpler explanation would suffice.

It would seem plausible that some animals do have a theory of mind. It would be far easier for an animal to learn one overriding concept than hundreds of sets of individual rules acquired by trial and error. But until advances in brain imaging and neurology turn the Hard Problem of consciousness into an Easy Problem, we can only speculate.

Charles Darwin said: “the difference between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind”. Although the scale and complexity of human behaviour has not yet found an equal in the natural world, there is no clear dividing line between humans and animals. Complacency is no longer an option (according to Galen, my chimp PA, who is typing this up as I speak).



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