

Please, Just Thomas

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Part 1 – Cabrini

Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

Mark 5:4-5

Chapter 1 - Vertical Space

Thomas Kelly was out of breath as he entered his apartment, carrying three packages:

First, a folding table. His apartment, in which he had lived for seven months, had nowhere to place plates when he ate. Generally, he would sit on his couch and eat with a plate in his lap. The only meal he typically ate at home was breakfast, and the plate-on-lap method worked fine, but he realized that guests (should they manifest) would not appreciate a table-free apartment. Thus, he purchased his modest breakfast table which looked like the sort of thing an elementary school may set up outside for field day judges. He had yet to buy chairs – he had forgotten.

Second, two pounds of pellets for rodents, packed with the nutrients required for the healthy short lives of mice, gerbils and rats.

Third, one pound of seeds and dried berries, of little nutritional value but required for the enjoyment of mice, gerbils and rats through their healthy short lives.

His apartment was suspiciously large for a single man in New York, especially one of Thomas' age and tax bracket. The room in which he would place his breakfast table was almost 500 square feet, but contained only a couch on one wall and a massive television on the opposite wall.

This “main room” was connected by a half-wall to a modest kitchen with glass cabinets extending from three feet above the ground all the way to the nine-foot high ceilings. There was an as-of-yet unused dishwasher, a gas stove (at this time rare in New York apartments) and a refrigerator stocked with eggs, bread (yes, he refrigerated his bread), peanut butter (yes, he refrigerated his peanut butter) and slices of American cheese. The cabinets contained three plates, three forks, a black plastic spatula, olive oil, and a non-stick pan. And that was all.

This large of a room alone would make for a fancy apartment by modern standards, but down a narrow hall were two “bedrooms,” or at least what the real estate agent had called bedrooms. One was far too small for even a twin-sized bed to fit, unless that were the only item in the room. The other was reasonable – it contained a queen-sized bed, a desk with three monitors and a tall computer tower beneath, and Thomas’ only chair.

The rent of this wonderful home was about 70% of Thomas’ monthly income, and the rest was mostly spent on pellets for rodents, seeds, dried berries, and eggs. It also came at the cost of a two-hour commute, as the apartment was in “deep Queens” whereas his workplace was in Manhattan’s upper-West side – both transit deserts at the time, as new railroad tracks had not been laid in the city for nearly twenty years and several stations had been shut down.

These facts may lead to a natural judgment: Thomas Kelly was a simple man. Simple in the sense that he was a man who did simple things and thought simple thoughts, with little care for either wasting his money or wasting his time.

The opposite was true: Thomas Kelly was a confusing man. Confused in the sense that he did exclusively confusing things and thought exclusively confusing thoughts; at least, that is, what the people around him thought.

How, then, did Thomas wind up in such a confusingly massive apartment, all alone, with one chair and nearly one breakfast table? This was a sad story, indeed.

Originally, the rent was to be split in two between him and his fiancé, a woman one year his senior by the name of Darya (though she went by Dasha). Dasha and Thomas met in university, where Thomas studied physics and Dasha studied pottery. A young potter, of course, brought in approximately zero dollars for the rent, but her father was a wealthy engineer who was happy to sponsor her, saying: “My father was a plumber so his children could be engineers, and so his grandchildren could be artists.”

Dasha and Thomas had each lived in small apartments with roommates, until Thomas was twenty-four years of age and felt himself too old and well-educated to live in such conditions. The two were engaged, searched for an apartment, and landed on this one in a Jewish Queens neighborhood that was in their (i.e. Thomas’ and Dasha’s father’s) collective price range. The two would sleep in a queen-sized bed in the real bedroom, and the second “bedroom” would be a lovely pottery studio. Thomas signed a two-year lease, but a month before move-in, Dasha broke off their engagement. Sad!

Why did she do so? In imagining their life together, their queen-sized bed, their massive “main room,” their pottery studio, their breakfast-lunch-and-dinner table, their multiple chairs, she realized she would have to sacrifice the young artist’s life that she had become used to. It was not that she had grown to love that life of two-bedroom apartments always filled with dozens of other young artists, smoke and noise; she was a notably unhappy young woman. What she was sure of was that the idea of this apartment, this truly adult life with the “too old and too educated” Thomas would not make her any happier. Dasha may have been thinking far too simple of thoughts when she agreed to the proposal, so she left Thomas with his unreasonable rent and his chair.

The second “bedroom” was likely too small for Thomas to rent out, but even if he could have figured that out, he did not want to. The twenty-four-year-old was too old and too educated to have roommates, remember! So Thomas moved into the apartment sad and, above all, confused.

To make rent, he first devised an ill-conceived and ultimately unsuccessful plan. See, Thomas was of standard south-shore Long Island stock. With a name like Thomas Kelly, with his freckles and pale skin, there was no question that he was of Irish descent. This came from his father’s side. His mother was an unreligious Ashkenazi Jew, giving Thomas a strong nose and wonderfully expressive eyebrows above his dark eyes. It also meant that, despite never having a Bar Mitzvah, he was considered a Jew by birth.

He lived, recall, in a Jewish neighborhood, and his landlord was a highly observant Jewish man who was involved in the activities at a synagogue down the street. Thomas, though not religious, was well-versed in torah, Talmud and kabbalah from his middle school education and self-study in his adult life. Sure, he studied it mostly because he found it a bit funny, but he did know a lot and he figured he might use that knowledge to get in good with his landlord.

He began wearing a kippah when he walked around the neighborhood, taking it off only when he was half-way to work and safely out-of-sight of any other synagogue members. He went often to synagogue and made a special effort to speak to his landlord about Hebrew numerology, the uptick in antisemitic violence in the United States or the ongoing conflicts in the state of Israel.

It goes without saying that his landlord was never going to lower his rent just because they made nice at synagogue, but the plan fell apart completely when, forgetting the holiday, Thomas was spotted eating a sandwich while walking down the street on Yom Kippur. Shame!

So Thomas took up a second job, teaching night classes in physics and mathematics at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). The pay was insubstantial and the students were below-average, but he enjoyed it and at least he could break even every month, as opposed to slowly bleeding money for two years. He taught every weeknight until nine o'clock, and due to the unreliability of night trains and buses, he often did not get home until midnight. He did not mind it, except for the moments in which he remembered it was all to live in his pitiful home, without his darling Dasha.

And his home was pitiful as we have already seen, but most pitiful of all was his use of the second “bedroom.”

Caring so little about his space otherwise, Thomas put immense effort into the construction and installation of shelves in the room. The space was circumscribed by wooden shelves at three heights, and on them were trinkets and sculpted heads from Dasha. They had been birthday gifts, Christmas gifts, Valentine’s day presents; was he to throw them away? The shelves took him one month to build, install, and fill with his ceramic memories. Two months passed before he entered the room again. What he did then was absolutely confusing.

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Thomas carefully placed the box containing his breakfast table on the floor, shut his door, and ripped open the other two boxes to free his 1) nutrient-rich rodent food pellets, and 2) dried seeds and berries. He walked to the “second bedroom,” and unlocked both a standard knob lock and a bolt lock – two different keys from two different key rings – to enter.

The scene in that room was both objectively impressive and subjectively concerning. The wooden shelves for Dasha’s pottery remained, but the pottery itself was now pushed to the wall, guarded from the rest of the shelf by a glass barrier. The end of the shelf furthest from the wall was protected by wire mesh, and the space between the glass and the mesh was free to roam for the mice.

There were, on this day, thirty-two mice in Thomas' "mouse room" (not what real estate agents would call it, but a more apt name than "bedroom"). The floor was wide open for them, with newspaper, bedding and various wooden toys scattered about. This was not the impressive bit - this was merely concerning.

The mice ranged freely on all three levels of shelves. How did they get from the ground to the higher levels? Well, Thomas had built a complex network of elevators for vertical traversal and cable cars for horizontal traversal of the space. Yes, elevators and cable cars.

The elevators were chambers of glass on all sides, with the exception of the doors which were made from thick aluminum. Each elevator could fit two adult mice comfortably, although sometimes a third would tag along. There were four elevators – one for each wall in the more-or-less square room, and each had four stops labeled G, 2, 3, 4 for the floor and then the three levels of shelves. Just like in a standard elevator, the mouse would push either an up or down arrow button to call the elevator on the outside, and once inside, would press a button representing the floor it wanted to go to. Space for the elevator chamber to run through was carved out of each shelf in front of the glass housing Dasha's pottery, so that as the mice traversed vertical space in their great glass elevator, they could look upon the artwork.

The cable car system was even more visually striking. At the center of the mesh wall on each of the four highest-level shelves, there were automatic aluminum sliding doors that opened periodically to let mice into or out of one of four cable cars. The cars, which had glass bottoms

and tops, had automatic doors on all four walls, would then traverse synchronously counterclockwise along the diagonals connecting the four entrances. They were strung seven feet above the ground, so that one could look up and see, at times, mice commuting between walls through the glass bottoms.

The system, running even when there were no mice in the cars, gave the room an incredible dynamism. When the elevators were running as well, the clacking of gears and whirring of motors atop the communicative squeals of the mice gave one the sense that mice were just tiny people, whose little hands were the only things holding them back from building cities and airplanes and atom bombs. It was nothing short of inspirational.

Thomas was a very careful documenter in everything he did, which makes our story far easier to tell. He photographed every step of the construction process, and made detailed drafts for each element of his system. Although they were nearly a century outdated at the time, he built the computer system that controlled the elevators and cars using bulky integrated circuits containing logic gates and multiplexers, which interacted with the sensors and motors on the elevators and cable cars through a network of wires that all tied back to a massive set of connected breadboards in a box at the back of the room.

He also kept a log on how quickly mice learned to use the system. At first, he restricted the system to have only one elevator, with each floor having a different resource - it took only two to three days for adult mice to learn that the ground floor contained exercise wheels, the second floor contained water, the third contained food pellets, and the fourth contained snacks of

seeds and dried berries. More elevators and cable cars were not necessary at first when he only had two mice, but when the number grew to six, he activated the rest of the system. The mice quickly learned that these resources were available at each of the four walls, so they could find water elsewhere if one water bottle had been drained, or could find seeds on the east wall if a different mouse had eaten all of the west-wall seeds.

It took about a month before the colony figured out the entire transportation network, in part (he believed) due to complex communications between the mice that were not intelligible to humans. He would years later claim that we could learn how to interpret their words after building a demodulator that would allow us to listen to their ultrasonic vocalizations at audible frequencies, but that idea never quite panned out.

As the colony grew due to the addition of adults or pups being born, the new mice were much quicker to take to the system as they watched the original six navigate smoothly around the room. The mice, as they do even in small enclosures, customized and partitioned their space. For example, nursing mothers and their pups would live only on the south wall, as if the mice had converged on the idea of a maternity ward.

Each night, Thomas would perform a complex routine of cleaning and feeding and watering the mice – he would often begin after midnight, and would not finish until after 1 AM. As mice are nocturnal, this also gave him an opportunity to interact with them at their most active point of the day. As the mice warmed up to Thomas, they would happily crawl on his body or eat from his hand. He would let smaller mice play in his hair, which was shoulder length

with wide, thick curls that they seemed to enjoy running through as though they were mouse-sized tunnels. Of course, he would shower after each visit to the mouse room.

Every mouse was black – they *had* to be black for reasons that will soon become apparent – so it was not possible to tell them apart except by relative size. Thomas chose not to name them or mark them in any way, as mice live only two to three years and he feared becoming so attached to individual mice that their deaths might deeply affect him.

Thomas Kelly built this elaborate enclosure and amassed thirty-two mice over the course of only four months, while working two jobs.

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Thomas Kelly was Dr. Thomas Kelly, Ph.D. He completed a doctoral program in mathematics at the City University of New York's graduate center in only three years, half as long as the median student. Although most people who knew him ascribed the success to Thomas' exceptional cleverness, he would claim that it was purely a matter of chance. He was assigned to work under an advisor who studied quantum information theory, who was impressed by Thomas' resume due to his physics background. The advisor was close to a proof for a theorem that, if we were to attempt to provide a description of, would take far too many pages of this book and would not interest almost any readers. Thomas filled in a few missing pieces in the proof, was lauded for his achievement, and promptly graduated without many more words between him and his advisor.

A shock to all, he went to work at the Mount Sinai hospital's research center. His new advisor Dr. Sandra Hu, then in her early nineties but a star in her own day, believed that there must be an application of quantum information theory to the processing of stimuli in the visual cortex. Thomas never believed that this was true, but took the job because he was charmed by Sandra and was always hungry to learn. He had been a student of physics, a mathematician, and now was a biologist despite not even knowing how RNA functioned prior to his start in the laboratory.

By that day that he stood in his mouse room, watching his contraptions in satisfaction, he was a true biologist. Defying his advisor's order to find the applications of quantum information theory in the visual cortex, he became an experimentalist working instead on the characterization of one particular ion channel in the visual periphery. They first had him working in fruit flies, and later in mice.

Despite being an incredible documenter of his personal projects, and an unreliable but prolific documenter of his own life, he never even attempted to publish a first-author paper on his work for Dr. Hu. He preferred to collect his data, leave it saved on some hard drive, and then go enjoy his lunch with his charming and knowledgeable advisor who had gained a soft spot for him. She likely knew that he was not interested in his academic work, but she never disciplined him. She may have if she knew how he was using laboratory resources.

Thomas never spent a single cent on his mouse room – despite having next to no interest in his research, he remained at Dr. Hu’s lab because it was easy to steal from and he did not feel bad stealing from it. Funding for the lab came from the Simons Foundation, so he was stealing not tax-payer money but dead billionaire money, and there was nothing wrong with that by his moral calculus. He began by using the hospital’s machine shop to cut glass and aluminum to the proper dimensions. The workers at the machine shop had no reason to suspect this business was not work-related, so they continued to give him materials for a month until he had all of the parts he needed.

Motors and pulleys and integrated circuits were stashed away in an unused workshop in Dr. Hu’s lab, because these were things that any serious group had in the 1980s and nobody had ever gotten rid of them. He took the items one-by-one at first, waiting to see if anyone might notice that a spool of wire had gone missing or that the pulleys had disappeared. After two weeks without anyone noticing, he simply grabbed as much as he could fit in his backpack and took it all back home. Fortunately, Dr. Hu died before anyone became aware of Thomas’ heist.

The mice were more challenging to acquire. While spreadsheets from the Hu lab show that Thomas completed fifty-five terminal mouse experiments, the real number was precisely two. Twice he shadowed a senior postdoc who taught him how to perform the dissection of the mouse eye. The mouse was humanely anesthetized, the eye was humanely removed, an electrode was humanely placed in the eye socket, data were humanely recorded, and then the animal was humanely euthanized.

Thomas was not morally opposed to this sort of animal study; it was true that the mouse felt no pain while unconscious, lying on a heat pad with an electrode in its eye socket; but it was far too much for his heart to bear watching. When he was told he could now perform experiments on his own, he put it off until there was no option – the spreadsheets would show that he had done no work at all, and while it would remain true that he did no work at all, he preferred that people around him did not know that. So he went into the lab on a Saturday, steeled himself for the hours ahead, and walked over to the animal facility to grab his subject.

The room labeled “MICE – HU” contained 40 stacked cages with C57BL/6 mice, or mice of the “Black 6” genetic strain. Black 6 are famously aggressive compared to their more stereotypical white lab mouse counterparts, and that feistiness was the only reason that Dr. Hu preferred them. Each cage contained four to six mice, aged mostly eight to twelve weeks old, as after they were beyond a certain age they were no longer viable for experiments and had to be euthanized. Each cage was topped with a vent which could be sealed with a hose that pumped in gas that humanely killed the whole lot. With young mice you had to be careful and ensure they were truly dead by performing a cervical dislocation after the gas, i.e. snapping their necks. Humanely!

Thomas’ task was to grab one mouse out of one cage by its tail and transfer it into a cardboard container resembling a Chinese take-out box. Carrying her (he sexed the mouse before placing it in the box) back to the lab, he could feel and hear it scurrying about in the box, and he began to cry. Back at the lab, he tried to regain confidence and unlocked the doubly-locked safe containing the anesthesia and euthanasia drugs, but his heart began to race and his vision went

blurry. He paced frantically in lines back and forth around the lab until he realized what he was doing and paused to breathe – five seconds in, five seconds hold, ten seconds out – until his vision returned and his heart rate stabilized. And then he came up with a plan.

Nobody was going to ask him for his data because nobody was interested in his project. What might be noticed is if the drugs were slow to run out, so he weighed the mouse and then used two syringes to suck up the precise amount of anesthesia and euthanasia necessary for a mouse of this size, marked both on the spreadsheet, and sprayed the contents of the syringes into a biohazard bin.

He then placed the mouse back from the scale into the Chinese food box, put it in his backpack and bolted to the train. Feeling the mouse scurrying around in his backpack, hearing it bite at the walls of the container, he realized that he had not thought much farther than this.

After two hours of commuting, the whole way feeling the jitters on his back, he arrived at home. When he opened his bag and removed the container, the mouse was not there as it had bitten a hole and escaped. Slowly placing the items from his bag onto the floor, he found the mouse at the bottom eating a granola bar that he had no memory of buying, but at least the mouse was still alive and reasonably healthy. Used to a tiny box built for its eventual gassing and cervical dislocation, it was not quick to get out of the backpack, so Thomas left it there until he could think of a plan.

Should he release it into the wild? He had heard stories that chimps released from captivity would be killed by other chimps. He imagined the mouse being eaten alive by street mice, or getting confused and being hit by a bus or a train. Perhaps it would fall for a mouse trap, or eat poison. No, he had to keep it here. But where?

Despite it seeming that he didn't care much for his apartment, he did prefer that it was clean. He did not want holes in his couch, or mouse shit on his chair, and wasn't particularly excited about the idea of waking up with a mouse crawling over his face. The pottery room, on the other hand, had no furniture except shelves too high up the wall for the mouse to reach. The room was too small to be a bedroom, but it would be a mansion for a mouse, and he could order wheels and toys and food to be delivered the next day.

The issue was that he would have to go inside the pottery room, not just this once, but daily to care for the mouse. This was before his conception of the elevator system and, still not over his precious Dasha, he had not been able to face his chamber of memories since he constructed it months before. But perhaps this was his chance to recontextualize that suffering into a new life born of a literal new life – a juvenile mouse.

So he breathed – five seconds in, five seconds hold, ten seconds out – and unlocked the double locks of the pottery room. He carried the backpack in, placed it on the floor, shut the door behind him and, with shaky hands, turned on the lights.

He sat on the floor and waited for the mouse to leave the bag, about twenty minutes, and watched her explore her new home with rodential curiosity. Kneeling down, he only briefly glanced up at his trinkets and heads before the pain sent his eyes back to the floor. His Black 6, both eyes intact, was alive!

But then he remembered something else: mice do not like to live alone. He had read once that mice or rats or some other rodent when alone would choose to die if given an easy way out, as some scientist (humanely, one presumed) gave the animals a choice of heroin or water and they chose to overdose on the heroin if they were housed alone. Perhaps this mouse manor was worse indeed than the overcrowded gas chamber cages. The only choice was to steal again.

He picked a second female mouse the next day and performed the same trick, weighing the mouse and discarding the proper amount of drugs from the safe. This time he placed what remained of the granola bar in the Chinese food container and the mouse stayed in the container until the two made it back to Queens. He found packages at his door – bedding, food, two wheels and water bottles – and he brought them all into the pottery room where the first mouse was still confusedly exploring its massive empty space. Empty no more, it chirped at its new friend and pushed about the bedding in a manner that appeared very deliberate, but made no coherent pattern on the floor. The mice hopped on the wheels, ran for several seconds, then became distracted by food or water or bedding or a new spot of the empty room that they hadn't ventured yet, then back on the wheels, then back off.

Thomas was not delighted, *per se*. He loved animals, but he had not planned to keep mice in his apartment. He had planned to get a dog with Dasha, but with his commute there was no chance of him taking care of it alone. These small non-dogs were like unplanned children. He loved them because his heart gave him no other choice, but he did not want them. As we know, that quickly changed.

The daily care for the mice – sweeping their droppings, feeding them and refilling their water bottles – made Thomas more comfortable entering the once-forbidden space. It took only a few weeks for him to feel welcome in it as if it were a room in his own apartment. In this time, he did not do any more experiments, claiming he was “learning how to process the data,” and later that he was “processing the data,” and later yet that he was “thinking about the data.” But he knew that he would have to do more experiments soon, and that *really* meant stealing more mice. This was the impetus for his massive project, which began with one elevator and evolved into the city we have previously described. As it is often said, living in New York requires clever use of vertical space.

Once his construction was complete, he began performing “experiments” at an incredible rate, bringing home Black 6 after Black 6, including pregnant mice that could bear pups that would learn to navigate the system as children learn the trains and city streets. His planned children.

Let us return to the day that Thomas brought in his breakfast table. Unboxing his table after his post-mouse-handling shower, he finally realized he had forgotten to buy chairs.

“Fuck!”, he probably said. He left again to walk to a nearby twenty-four-hour hardware store which he imagined would sell folding chairs. He put on his kippah, which was no longer standard for him, but the store had a habit of up-charging gentile customers. He bought two chairs, placing a one hundred dollar bill on the counter, as female cashiers could not touch money while a man was holding the other end. No change.

The reason for the rush was that Thomas always rushed. It was not necessary for his pathetic table to be used now at two o'clock in the morning, but his plan was to use it Saturday evening for an as-of-yet undetermined guest.

The mice had made getting over Dasha a faster process, but his shrine to her – now encased in glass and almost impossible to remove without first dismantling his massive mechanical city – made it clear that he was planning never to truly move on. Still, he felt confident that he could once again begin dating, and his new table and chairs were a necessity for this venture.

Although the picture we have painted of Thomas Kelly has been one of the lonely inventor, he was actually a very charming and social man. He never spoke of his mouse room, but his other eccentricities and his passionate energy made him a dynamic collocutor. People generally liked Thomas, and Thomas generally liked people.

It helped that Thomas was a reasonably handsome young man. In stills he was unremarkable; if he were smiling in a picture one would think him fat from the way his face contorted to be slightly rounder, whereas if he were straight-faced he had an almost criminal face with eyes just a bit too far apart and eyebrows just a bit too close together.

But his physiognomy somehow appeared entirely different in motion than in still photos, so that in-person he was considered attractive. He seemed to laugh after every sentence, sometimes during, and the way his eyes slightly closed and his eyebrows perked up was charming more than fattening when it was part of a greater facial choreography. Second nature by his twenties, he wrote in his diaries from high school that he would practice these routines in the mirror, and he had one for every mood or situation. Unfortunately, he never arrived at a good angle or expression for photographs. For this reason, he avoided having his picture taken.

Dating at this moment in history was difficult for a man like Thomas Kelly. Various state bans on affirmative action, abortion and birth control from the twenties made for a powerful counterculture not unlike the sexual revolution of the previous century. Although New York never banned either abortion or “the pill,” a new sex-positive marriage-negative feminism erupted on the coasts with the usual messages of female empowerment and the sentiment that men were trying to control the bodies of women. Indeed, some were!

But the marriage rates, already falling, fell further in educated circles, and the median age of marriage soared to almost thirty-seven. Women, now more educated than men on average,

found little need for breadwinners as they won enough bread for themselves. The stay-at-home parent was an archaic concept, except in poorer and rural communities shielded from progressive social shifts.

Commensurate with this evolution was a rapid rise in misogynistic sentiment among young men, who saw their edge over women slipping, disappearing and at times reversing in many sectors of life. Beginning in the 2010s, some historians see this as a major cause of America's massive right-wing shift in the twenties and thirties, and there is probably truth to that claim. This only further justified young women in being skeptical of men, marriage and most relationships beyond casual sex.

Moreover, the days of meeting partners “offline” were long past. With the exception of those couples that met in college, most of which split soon after as Thomas and Dasha did, almost all (heterosexual) dating began through SlimNet sites where pairs could safely communicate and build trust before meeting in person. This complicated dating for the median man, who seemed unremarkable both on paper and in photographs.

Despite these decades of social change in the dynamic between men and women, other unspoken centuries-old rules remained. For example, although it had become normal for couples to split the check on a first dinner out, it was still expected that the man would *try* to pay for the meal first. It was also more appropriate for a man to invite a woman to his apartment to stay the night before the woman did the same. This was expected to happen almost immediately, perhaps after a first date (or even *as* the first date) – a practice that would have once been unsafe, but

with the ubiquity of smart devices that were tracked by friends and family, there was a security in the fact that your mother knew where you were.

As we've seen, Thomas was something of a traditionalist. Although he shared the progressive values of most of his peers, he also was to be married by twenty-five and hoped to have children by twenty-seven. A monogamist with a fear of casual sex, it was challenging to find a partner of his class and education level in New York unless he was willing to once again pretend to be an Orthodox Jew. He was not a rampant or vocal misogynist, but he did harbor some resentment for women as was common for men of his time, and his biases were made explicit only rarely through his actions towards his partners. But this is getting ahead of our story.

In any case, Thomas 1) was certain that he would have a young woman over the very next day, and 2) had not put much thought into how. He tried to sleep.

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The reason we know so much about this one night of Thomas Kelly's life, before the world knew his name, was that this was one of the days on which Thomas documented almost every moment in a hand-written diary. The diaries are challenging to parse and strange to read; half of the entries are outright fantasy, some of them are *probably* genuine depictions of reality, and some appear to be heavily distorted versions of true events. The style and handwriting of the entries vary, sometimes within a single day.

In writing our story, no sources have been greater or more difficult to appropriately integrate than these diary entries. Many of them are abstract nonsense. We have chosen to place unaltered text from these works, abstract nonsense included, throughout our story so that the reader may gain some insight into the mind of this man and make his/her own call on the veracity of certain claims. We piece together other aspects of his life from interviews with friends, family and coworkers, and attempt to use the socio-political milieu of his time to fill in blanks. Still, certain aspects of our story might be deemed unreliable – we note as much when this is particularly true. Other aspects are double- or triple-checkable. For example, the diaries, photos and documentation do show the mouse room, and the dates he claimed to have taken the mice line up with internal records from Mount Sinai.

Few aspects of his life before his first appearances in newspapers are this easy to validate, leading many biographers to air on the side of caution and ignore the diaries wholesale. This is understandable from a journalistic perspective, but does not do service to the complexity of Thomas' character or the movement he birthed. Using these entries, we can develop a sense of Thomas Kelly the man. As the reader already knows, Thomas Kelly was among the most important men of the first half of the twenty-first century; a man who was seen as a genius, a man who was seen as a God, a man who was seen as a violent revolutionary. But, primarily, a man.

Chapter 2 - The Automaton Shaves (Diary Excerpt April 2, 2033)

That whirlpool, being one of the least comfortable parts to shave dry, was the one I shaved first. That shape much like the shape of that bony shell that otic capsule we have on either side of our skull. That shape which, unlike the insides of that otic capsule, contains no capacity for spectral analysis, and unlike the snail after which that body part is named, does not satisfy the criteria for a living organism (must produce waste, must not be a virus, etc.). It's hardly a cyclone but a discrete-space sampled image of a cyclone.

When is a sampled cyclone a cyclone? Georges Seurat asks that same question and achieves some sort of a question in return, like art does, because it isn't in the business of answering questions. Dies just in time too, Harry Nyquist is 2 years old then and he prepares to answer that question as engineers are in the business of doing. He says a sampled cyclone in time is the same as a proper cyclone if the cyclone is limited in its bandwidth in frequency (and so if you must know the bandwidth in frequency, you must ask that spectral analyzer in that bony cyclone on either side of your head, so long as the signal manifests as a pressure wave between twenty cycles per second and twenty-thousand cycles per second (an overestimate, to be sure)). And so says Nyquist, I can answer you, Seurat, in time, but you remain lost, as we all are and as those hairs of the neck are, in space.

And so we have Simon J'peg, who declares yes Seurat not only may we render that cyclone in discrete space but in a finite number of colors, and moreover Seurat we lose nothing if we throw out those components which that spectral analyzer on either side of your skull would

deem high in frequency, and so Seurat was allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven. And when J'peg's grandson in the year 2000 (was it Pierre?) said why grandfather, why must we ask the ear what it thinks of our pictures? And so he invented the tiny wave and so Nyquist could enter the kingdom of heaven as well.

And there it went, my little discrete-space neck cochlea, where all parallel lines meet, to the kingdom of heaven, and I (alongside Laplace, Legere, Laguerre, Lagrange, Lamar, Lavar, Lavaron, Lavaste, Lavamos) began to think of the upcoming day at work.

Less, that is, about what I would do at work (although the other nine did not follow) and more about what it must mean that I would do anything at all. It's said "hard work pays off" and they also say "work smarter not harder", but there is a missing logical sentence that would allow us to draw the conclusion that smart work pays off. Hard work paying off is an absolute statement, but we know it to fail in special cases – suppose, as an example, a man works very hard to earn a position on his favorite football team. On the day he is meant to receive the call from the coach in which he might get the position, a bus swerves onto the sidewalk permanently crippling him. In this case, the man's hard work did not pay off, and he is left disappointed and crippled (although some might say simply knowing he would have been able to play is payment in itself, they can ask this poor imaginary child). Hard work only pays off without question if the hard work itself is the payment. It is hard work to write the word "Gossamer" one-million times without stopping for a break to sleep, but what is there to say when you have finished?

But sure, take the slightly weaker statement – under certain often-met conditions, hard work pays off in some way. Then what about this second statement: work smarter, not harder. It's a command, sure, but an alternate phrasing (if this logical leap is too large for you then quit reading right here) is that it is better to work smart than to work hard. Better in what sense? Of course the set of qualifying adjectives for working do not come with a natural ordering (it is good to work hygienically and to work nonviolently, but which of these is better?), so we must assume it is meant in all common metrics for the evaluation of labor. For example in productivity, or in “paying off”. Sure enough then, if we believe “better” implies “pays off more”, then SMART WORK PAYS OFF, but we are still missing a few important points.

For one: if hard work merely pays off in the improvement of some fundamental productivity index, then it should not be clear that for the man making widgets at the factory or editing awful pieces of writing that this alone is all that is important. In fact, those who need not work smart nor hard (such as house cats) have the absolute best possible quality of life. In this sense, while smart work is better than hard work, the ultimate goal (no work) is better than either of these scenarios. Work less, not smart.

No $>$ smart $>$ hard was a theorem of the surrealists prior to my independent rederivation, and they called the manifestation (application) of the result a “Revolution of the Mind”. This revolution, looking around, was more or less a failure, only because we have chosen the impossible scale of society as a metric for success. Looking instead at individuals, we see that lunatics are far better off now than they were at the time of the surrealists, and that the unemployment rate (rate of people working neither smart nor hard per capable person) is far

higher. On a more serious note, it is less a question of whether or not society responded to the revolution of the mind than it is of whether we individually can respond to one (independent of time (discrete or continuous)).

With that, my teeth were brushed. QED.

Chapter 3 - Would I Cry?

The best source we could access for descriptions of Thomas' youth was his father, Darren Kelly-Johnston, who unfortunately passed away while the present text was being edited. We are deeply thankful for Darren's testimony, but it is deeply tainted by bias both for his son and against his ex-wife, Thomas' mother Dorothy Steinberg. We would love to have included her perspective, but she declined to comment beyond a short note:

"Drs. Miyamoto and Herschberger -

"I regret to inform you that I am not open to any interviews regarding my son. It is my hope that you present an unbiased portrait of Tommy, but I have been burned too many times by "journalists" hoping to paint me as a terrible mother. I am nothing before I am a mother, and the single way remaining that I may protect my only child is to protect myself. Good luck with your efforts.

- Dorothy Steinberg"

In Valley Stream, Long Island, New York, most people knew at least one Kelly; Darren's father was one of eight children, and he had four sons of his own. A large family, it seems to be agreed by all that the Kellys all had two things in common: they were charming, and they were liars. Even in his eighties, Darren Kelly-Johnston was quick-witted and magnetic, and he answered every question we asked with confidence and with no apparent spin. Only after

transcribing the answers and consuming them with eyes rather than ears did one even think to be skeptical.

He almost choked up speaking about his time with Thomas. The boy and his father could only meet twice a week for dinner – Wednesday and Saturday – but on nice days they would eat as fast as possible so they could spend the evening playing catch in the train station parking lot. He told one story about a day Thomas was having a really tough time catching the ball. In a moment of impatience, he picked the ball up off the ground and threw it as hard as he could at the train platform (which was two stories above the ground), and he managed to land the ball in the tracks. They didn't have another ball, so they went home and laughed about it all night.

A touching story indeed, but questionable in the face of other sources. Both Thomas' diaries and his coworkers speak of a "Spring Training" period in the Spring of 2032 (his first year as a graduate student). A fan of baseball, he decided as his New Year's resolution that he would learn to pitch ninety miles per hour. Later lowering the number to eight when he realized ninety was very unlikely, he went with two coworkers to a sporting goods store and bought balls and gloves.

"Today bought first glove. Practiced with Abhijeet and Tony in the park. 80 MPH by December – it will happen. Suck now – never thrown a ball before!"

The labmates mentioned both responded to comment on the situation. They agreed that, given how terrible Thomas was at throwing the ball, they found it hard to believe he had ever

played catch in his life. They also mentioned that they were impressed that, despite having basically no command of the ball, Thomas was throwing the ball at over seventy miles per hour consistently by the end of the year. Neither were sure if he ever did hit eighty.

So Darren's story was probably a fabrication, but Thomas does speak very positively of his Wednesday and Saturday evenings at his father's apartment. A one-bedroom on the third floor of a building directly adjacent to the train platform, they would *watch* baseball and laugh whenever the announcers were cut off by shaking, rolling and screeching.

"Usually I cooked the night before," Darren said, "so that I didn't have to spend any time cooking instead of hanging around with Tommy. When you only have six hours a week, the minutes matter."

There is overwhelming evidence that Thomas loved his father most of anyone in his life. What few journals we could dig up from Thomas' life before he was eighteen years of age (most are, apparently, still in the possession of his mother) often spoke of missing his father. "I wish I didn't have to wait another 4 days to see dad," he wrote in 2019; "I deeply miss my father. His distance has crippled my growth and ruined my youth," he wrote in 2028. Thomas Kelly was once a dramatic teenager, too.

And dramatic he was! Thomas often found himself in trouble thanks to his emotional outbursts. At seven years old, shortly after the divorce of his parents, Thomas brought home a disturbing report card from the Montessori school in Lynbrook that he attended at the time. As

always, he earned high praise in every subject, except one mark that differed from the norm: “Behavior: Poor.” Thomas’ teacher at the time, now a white-haired woman retired to the Berkshires, wrote to us:

“Thomas was one of these superstar children, even more exceptional than his older sister had been before him, but a serious darkness had appeared in him as if from nowhere. Not until your correspondence did anyone tell me his parents had divorced, which makes perfect sense of it. He would say something really out-of-character in classroom discussions, the other students would become uncomfortable, and then he would scream and cry until someone escorted him out of the room. I remember one day that we were having a discussion on the 1787 Constitutional Convention, and Thomas interrupted to say ‘You know what really bothers me is illegal aliens. All they do is take from real Americans.’ When I pointed out to him that his ancestors and the ancestors of his classmates likely came in without papers, he threw a fit and, really, flipped his desk. That was the tipping point for us teachers, and we wrote home to his parents. Funny enough, before the end of that year we took a trip to Ellis Island and Thomas was unable to find any sign of the Kelly immigrants from Ireland that he was told came in through there in the early 20th century – that seemed to make him proud rather than upset him.

“We never heard a response from his parents about the incident, but in March of that school year he had a seizure while in class and he was taken to the hospital. He was out for a week. After his next outburst, we told his mother that he could not return to the school in September, and he did not. I didn’t hear anything about him for a long while after that, but I did

think about him from time to time, hoping he had found a way to succeed elsewhere. He was so talented.”

There are no hospital records regarding this seizure and there is no evidence that Thomas ever had another one. His father was shocked when we asked him about it, saying he had never heard such a story before. As for his comment about immigrants, Darren had no clue where it came from:

“Those were the first of the Trump years, and of course there was a lot of that rhetoric going around. As far as I know, Dot and I were always real anti-MAGA. Dot would've left me for Rachel Maddow if she got the chance. He was probably just saying shit. Stupid schools like that, they tell you to just say shit instead of teaching you math and then you say shit and then they throw you out. Kid probably needed it though.”

For the next few years, Thomas attended a Modern Orthodox yeshiva. Boundaries. He had to wear proper clothes and a kippah, he could not be seen touching the girls, he had to daven with a little prayer scroll box on his head. There were far more ways to be kicked out of a school like this, but Thomas survived until eighth grade without any severe infractions.

Life remained challenging for Thomas, not at school but at home. Darren and Dorothy did not speak except in brief text messages to arrange pickup times for Wednesdays and Saturdays, and Dorothy had more-or-less full control of Thomas. We have only snapshots of this period. Again, not all diaries from this time are available, but the ones that Thomas did manage

to hold on to appear to be the ones most critical of his mother. Despite a clear hatred for the woman in his youth, it seems he did not want her to read such hurtful words after he left home, perhaps out of genuine compassion.

One anecdote is deranged to the point of comedy, although it was not funny to anyone at the time. In the Summer between the two schools, a time during which Thomas turned eight years old, he recalls seeing four separate psychologists to be tested for autism. He wrote:

“Failed the test again. This time it was a lady. We played Jenga for a bit and then she asked me the same questions the last guy asked. Then she took out this paper with a bunch of cartoon faces and made me tell her how they all were feeling. Then she asked me how I was feeling and I said mad and she asked why and I said it was my fourth time doing this and she sort of stopped and then I left. Mom went in and she came out all mad.”

That doctor, unlike the three before, then called Thomas back into the room. She told him she believed he had an attention deficit disorder, and prescribed him medication that he would take each day for the next four years. His mother was still not satisfied with the results.

He was promptly enrolled in some sort of group therapy for children with autism, run by a well-meaning psychiatrist who had the kids sit for an hour in a small room and play games or do puzzles together. Thomas was silent throughout the sessions and didn't look at anyone, focusing instead on the games, which led the psychiatrist to believe Thomas may be so far behind in his development that he could not speak. One Saturday there was a meetup for the

therapy group at a public pool, and Darren was asked to pick Thomas up when it ended. Unaware of what the party was for, when he arrived and saw a group of children ranging from quiet to aggressively flailing their hands about, he whispered “this is fucked up” to his son. Thomas never went back to the group after that pool party, and he was more or less glad of it.

—

Thomas continued to achieve in his studies after he transferred to the yeshiva, and was considered once again to be a star student. He was slow only at learning Hebrew, although he tried very hard and continued to study the language well after his formal instruction had concluded. Behaviorally, there were at least no bad notes on his report card as the structure seemed to fix his habit of mouthing off and flipping desks. Then, records disappear.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic struck and sent his schooling online in his second year, and like so much of personal history from 2020 to 2021, the individuals in our story simply evaporate until the people re-appear less happy and less motivated at the tail end of the crisis. For those who did not live through this time, there were many patterns that may seem peculiar in retrospect. For example, despite infinite time to read books or write in journals or take up knitting or some other pastime, most people instead *stopped* doing those things and replaced them with... well, nothing. Thomas was only a young boy, but even young boys were not immune – as we know, he journaled from the moment he was able to write, but unless his mother still has all of them, it is likely he did not write any diary during this period at all.

Thomas could not possibly have been any less happy than he was at the start of 2020, but things do not seem to have gotten much better for him either. Returning to school in the second half of the 2020-2021 school year, teachers begin to encounter milder forms of the issues that Thomas was known for at the Montessori school. The Yeshiva kept (and still keeps) hard drives with scanned copies of every disciplinary report ever submitted to them. A perusal of the records from 2021 and 2022 show almost weekly minor infractions: “Kelly did not listen to a teacher when asked to stop speaking in class, and was sent to wait in the hall until the end of class (May 3, 2021)”; “Kelly would not leave the girls’ section of the temple during morning prayers until physically escorted by a teacher (May 11, 2021)”; “Kelly was disciplined for saying a student’s ‘new nose made her look like Michael Jackson’ in the lunchroom (May 18, 2021)”.

Still, despite often serving lunchtime detentions and being sent to the hall during class, Thomas never received a poor note for his behavior on a report card. This was in part because, unlike the Montessori schools, the Yeshiva didn’t have a “behavior” mark on their report cards. However, the notes from teachers and rabbis were filled with kind words about his passions and excellence in mathematics and science, his far-above-average reading and writing skills, as well as his ability to interpret Torah and Talmud.

“Do you know the Passover seder story of the four children?” Rabbi Scheiowitz asked us. Marcus nodded and Naomi shook her head. “There are four sons who ask questions about the seder – well three, but the fourth is the son who does not know what to ask. Most students in middle school do not know what to ask. Kelly was like the wicked child. He would ask ‘why do we follow these rules?’ It’s a sign of a good Jewish scholar in the making. He came to me at

lunchtime more than once with a question that I could not answer about the Torah, and we would read Talmud together to search for answers. I would translate the Aramaic for him and we would argue – seriously, he would argue over Talmud! With me! But he was a wicked child, really. He never really wanted to follow those rules, he just wanted to know why we thought he should follow them. So he was breaking rules, but it was so hard to discipline the kid when he came in with such energy and enthusiasm about learning. Learning almost anything at all.”

Scheiowitz was not alone in his view of Thomas; it seems that every teacher and rabbi was charmed by him in this way, owing to their not writing home about his disciplinary infractions. This gave Darren the sense that Thomas was improving in school, but he could see signs of deterioration at their Wednesdays and Saturday dinners. Thomas appeared lethargic, as if he hardly slept – the opposite of the ball of energy remembered by his instructors – and he hardly ever spoke about friends at school. He still loved baseball and lasagna and Darren’s cheap jokes, but he would often fall silent on the car ride home. One evening he recalls Thomas crying as they arrived at his mother’s driveway: “Dad, why can’t I come live with you?”

While it sounds like another “playing catch by the train” story, this one was probably true. In fact, it probably happened precisely in March of 2023 when Thomas was in seventh grade, as Thomas wrote in a diary entry he certainly would not have wanted his mother to read:

“Mom was mad at me tonight because I came home crying. She never says she’s mad at me for crying but I think she is. I sort of told her that I wanted to go live with dad. She said I could go, but if I did then she would stop paying for my school. She said that dad would send me

to a public school where I would have to do math with the dumb kids, who are really mean to kids like me. I think I see why mom thought I was autistic because I never look her in the eyes. I don't know that I look anyone in the eyes, but definitely not her. I sort of just cried more and went to my room. I don't want to live here but I don't want to be in the dumb math classes, so I think I have to stay. I'm still crying. Sometimes, I think about if Mom died. I dream about it some nights and in my dreams I never cry. If Mom died, would I cry?"

—

When it came time for Thomas to begin studying for his Bar Mitzvah, there was never a sense from almost anyone that he would. He did not actually practice Judaism at home – the family never went to services and did not keep kosher – and he had no family that cared in the slightest about the tradition. As children at his school began to have their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, he was invited only to a few, and he found them sort of boring and loud.

It is almost poetic that this decision – to not become a man in the eyes of his peers and superiors at the yeshiva – coincided with his youth's "final descent," as he would later refer to it. When he began his final year of middle school at thirteen years old, the plan was that he would continue into high school at the same yeshiva. It seemed that he was doing well there, and the resources available to him were significant; he was able to take high school mathematics classes, and if he continued he may even have been able to take college courses as a sophomore or junior in high school.

But puberty also hit Thomas Kelly strongly, and along with the acne and body odor, his body widened and he grew into the larger features on his face. Goofy-looking as a child, he was now a very handsome adolescent *in motion* (as we described in our introduction). He was not, and never would be, tall, but neither were the other boys in his class who grew slower and became less wide and heavy than he did.

And one more thing: Thomas stopped taking his medication. At this more mature age, he started to doubt that he ever had any deficit in attention, and that even if he did, it had not disappeared at all. Without his medicine, he found he dreamed less of death and more of the girls in his class. The girls, forced to dress modestly in skirts and sweaters, had begun to show shadows of curves that left much to the imagination of the boys. But Thomas did imagine!

The wicked child had no respect for the rules regarding the separation of boys and girls, which he opportunistically described as oppressive – of course, that was not his real objection at the time. Unmedicated Thomas had functionally no friends, and had well-earned reputations for being both smart and obnoxious; his image with the girls in class was poor. However, equally poor were the options of the girls, as somehow the children generally obeyed the rules against cross-sex touch and there was little interaction between the boys and the girls whatsoever.

It feels wrong to call Thomas an archetypal “bad boy” – in any other context he would be the furthest thing from it. But in a Jewish school where he was a half-Jew with a wicked streak and a sadness in his eyes, he fit some approximation of the role. Girls feeling confined by the

formless skirts and the shackles of tradition were drawn to Thomas, and he was drawn to more-or-less anyone drawn to him.

At least, that was how he described it. The school's position was less flattering, and the truth is likely an interpolation of the two. Four times Thomas was caught "in contact with a female classmate." This could mean anything, from standing shoulder-to-shoulder to holding hands to kissing in the stairwell; all were punishable offenses. Two girls approached administration claiming Thomas had made them feel uncomfortable with his constant presence at girls' lunch tables, and one even said they found him "threatening." The school was unwilling to write home about Thomas' constant classroom disruptions, but a rabbi did phone his mother on one occasion to alert her of this issue with her son. This rabbi remembered that his mother said: "He's a thirteen-year-old boy. Do you remember being thirteen? Is he still doing well in math?" He was!

But his math scores could not save him from one report that he was found being fellated by another eighth grader in a girl's dressing room. This story was almost certainly a fabrication, as later entries from Thomas describe his "miserable luck with women" and his depression of being a "kissing virgin still at 18." It is easy to piece together a more realistic story: Thomas sat at a girls' lunch table in eighth grade, Thomas held hands with one girl four times, girls found him creepy, and one such girl invented a story with the moral weight sufficient to remove him from the girls' table. He was a thirteen-year-old boy. Do you remember being thirteen?

The rubber hammer of justice squeaked on the headmaster's desk: Thomas could complete the year at the yeshiva, but would not be invited back for high school. The family seemed entirely unbothered by the news, and his mother prepared to enroll him in a Quaker school for the ninth grade. Although he graduated middle school in a position of shame, he was still given several student awards and even a trophy recognizing him as the "middle school valedictorian." In all likelihood, his mother still has it on a shelf somewhere.

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This overview of Thomas' childhood and preteen years has blanks that will be filled in with details from following chapters. His high school years, however, seem to be almost entirely unremarkable. Thomas' mother gave him a bicycle for his fourteenth birthday, and allowed him to see his father or friends (he had friends!) whenever he pleased.

Thomas' diaries from this point in his life are entirely in the hands of his mother, but it seems there was not much to note anyway. Teachers from the time describe a clean-cut and well-behaved boy, excellent in his studies and kind to his superiors. Friends spoke kindly of both his father and his mother. Darren had this to say:

"High school might have been Tommy's happiest years. He looked good, he sounded good, he had friends and for the first time nobody was complaining about him. Plus, his mom and I were back on speaking terms. One year we all even did Christmas together; me, Tommy,

Val and Dot; and that was one of the best days of his life I bet. I bet if you could ask him, he'd say that was the best day of his life."

Thomas said many days were "the best day in his life," and it is true that this day was among them. It seems to be the only day he ever mentions from his years in high school, and that goes to show how remarkably unremarkable those high school years were.

Chapter 4 - Glossectomy (Diary Excerpt August 4, 2030)

I walked past that ancient train tunnel, the “A,” the station at ground level at 184th Street and five stories above ground at 181st Street. How do you think it does that? And there's a cliff, like a REAL place, not a New York but a place with cliffs, and what is this cliff?

There is a climbing grass, beginning at my level and climbing, climbing, regenerating and climbing up that cliff to my left. To my right, rocks, like a real place, a place with cliffs. To my forward-up, an entire apartment building on wooden stilts. Wooden stilts??

Wooden stilts.

You shouldn't build full brick apartment buildings on wooden stilts five stories high. It's just not a great idea! They teach you that in engineering class, day one I believe. It's one of those 101 things – no buildings on wood stilts!

But the building has been there so long! Perhaps it was built by people who knew better?

No. No, sadly. Because when I clicked my lighter, lit my cigarette, and the first wisp of smoke floated and expanded forward-up, the mechanical force of that smoke wisp on the wooden stilts was too much for them to bear.

Creaking, then cracking, oh no! I tried to scream “oh no!” but unfortunately my tongue would not position itself properly. In fact, my tongue would not position itself at all because I had no tongue. I had forgotten! I shouted “oh [glottal stop]o!”

Lucky me, the building fell down by my side and missed me. “eh aww!” Thank God! I thought to call 911 but I couldn't quite recall the numbers, and anyhow, no tongue! Someone else would have to call. Not a face in sight, not a light on in the city, but if anyone with a tongue and 911 committed to memory walked by! I, on the other hand, had somewhere to be. I marched home in song:

Ah ife! (CHORUS: ah iiiiiife!)

Ah wuh awwww ah pee-po ayyyyy

You're ri-ih hiii ih apro

Ah owww ih May!

Chapter 5 - Parking Lot at the End of Time

Darren was married three times: Maria Kelly (nee Santino), married 1996, died 1998; Dorothy Steinberg, married 2007, divorced 2017; Bill Johnston-Kelly, married 2034, outlived Darren.

His first marriage was marked by tragedy, as the micro-story above shows. Maria was Darren's high school sweetheart – an Italian-American girl with a strong Long Island accent, beautiful but unpolished. She became pregnant shortly after the couple left high school, and the two quickly married. Born February 2, 1997, their daughter was named Valentina but was only ever called “Val.” The elegance of the full name is lost to the Long Island accent, anyhow.

Darren, now an electrician's apprentice, worked long hours in 1997 to maintain the family's simple life, with their two-bedroom house with a yard and a dog run and a driveway and two cars. Maria stayed at home with the baby. This was a time where a family of three plus dog on a single moderate income could reasonably afford a house in Valley Stream through so-called “balloon mortgages” with down payments far cheaper than it turns out they should have been, but that crisis was still over a decade away! This was the American dream, indeed: each day was just like the last.

Until a miserable day in 1998. Days before Val's first birthday, with extended family excited to come over for a cozy party at the Kelly home, Maria was struck by a drunk driver on the Southern State Parkway. Fortunately – as fortunate as such things can be – Val was home

with Maria's mother Angela, and fortunately – as fortunate as such things can be – Val was too young to have retained any memories of her mother. Maria was flung through the windshield of her car and likely died immediately on impact – as fortunate as such things can be.

“I was devastated. I don't think I ate for three or four days,” Darren recalls. “But I'll always remember the day of her funeral, I spoke to my parents – you know, they were sort of old-school parents who didn't show their affection the same way people do now. They didn't cry for me when I said I didn't know how the hell I could raise a baby all by myself. My mother said to me ‘You think anyone knows how to raise a baby?’ Then my father said ‘It's like anything, D. You just do it wrong for a long time until you do it right.’ And yeah, I sort of think that's right about most things. I didn't think it at the time, but yeah, that's sort of right.”

Did Darren do it wrong? It's hard to say. Angela, a housewife who had never had a job, was able to pick up a lot of the slack at home. After the accident, Angela refused to drive for the rest of her life, and Darren had to pick her up in the mornings so that she could take care of Val, and drive her home in the evenings. Darren's days became longer. He slept and ate less, grew more despondent, failed his exams for promotion to a full electrician and generally did a bad job at taking care of himself. But Val met every milestone, learned how to speak and walk on time, and Darren taught her how to read before she even entered pre-school.

You still had to pay for pre-school in those days, but Darren squirreled away whatever money he could just to get the kid out of the house. He saved nothing otherwise, but it was worth not dealing with Angela so often – “She never stopped talking after Maria died. And I like

talking. I even like listening. I even kind of liked her! But Jesus Christ this woman would not fucking shut up!”

Dorothy enters the scene. As a pre-school teacher, she was impressed that Val could already read more complex picture books while the other students were struggling with their phonics lessons. Darren was one of the only dads who would interact with the institution on a nontrivial scale. He would make an effort to ask how his daughter was doing when he dropped her off or picked her up, and even went to the meetings of whatever approximation of a “PTA” the pre-school had.

Val already had the Kelly charm, and she certainly played some role in Dorothy's initial interest in Darren. Ultimately it was his Kelly charm that sealed the deal. This was Dorothy's first job out of a masters program in early childhood education, and in part thanks to the resultant enormous debt she had acquired in the process, she was not making nearly enough money to buy a home even in the early 2000s market. She still lived with her parents in the nearby Jewish neighborhood of South Merrick – a gorgeous and affluent community near the south shore of the island. She deemed her standard of living low as an adult woman still living with Mom and Dad, and even old Bobeh who had become too fragile to live on his own.

After Val had moved on to a public kindergarten, Darren emailed Dorothy asking her out to dinner one night – no subtle implications, he called it a date. Physically, Darren was an underwhelming man. Although he had lost weight in the first years after Maria's death, he had gained back a pot belly that fit his short frame to form a sphere of a man.

“It's all attitude for men, I think, when it comes to women,” he told us. It is likely that Dorothy was genuinely charmed by his “attitude.” It is also likely that his biggest asset, from Dorothy's perspective, was his one asset: a house that was not her mother's house.

She moved in within only six months of their first date, although the couple took several years to get married and eventually have a child. The second income (however small) and the extra set of hands were helpful with Val, who had already liked “Ms. Steinberg” from school and quickly took to her as a mother figure. She would continue to call her “Ms. Steinberg” for her entire life, a connotationally-evolving constant that fitted shifts in their relationship through the years. At seven, it is cute and endearing to call your effective stepmother “Ms.” At seventeen, it conveys an unsavory distance.

Dorothy believed that Val was simply too strong for public school, that the other children would hold her back – the same belief she would wield as a tool against her other (“only”) child many years later. Darren believed in public education. He had gone to the Valley Stream public schools and had turned out well, what with the house and the kid and the dog, but he was generally quick to let Dorothy do what she wanted.

“She had this stare. She would say something like ‘let's buy a new TV.’ You would say ‘I think we've got a good TV, and I don't know if a bigger one would look right in the room.’ Then she'd look at you without saying anything and you knew that if you kept on talking it wouldn't matter. She was going to do it, so you just said ‘all right’ and you head over to Best Buy and you

get a new TV. It's a real Jewish lady thing, I think. So she was gonna send the kids to whatever school she was gonna send them to.”

Again Darren reads as biased against his ex-wife in conversation, but regardless of whether there were serious deliberations or unilateral decisions, Val was enrolled in the Montessori school for first grade. Her performance was exceptional, and her parents took great pride in her academic abilities, as well as her swiftness in making scores of little friends. It was the Kelly charm, the Kelly smarts. But it was only a matter of time before she developed the famous Kelly habit of lying.

Ms. Steinberg became Mrs. Dorothy Kelly in 2007, and the couple had their first and only child together in July of 2010. Val, now thirteen years old, was excited about the baby. At that age, there is usually no sense of sibling rivalry or resentment of the attention received by the new child. If anything, Val appreciated the freedom offered by her parents paying a bit less attention to her every move. She had reason to not want her parents paying attention to her, especially Ms. Steinberg, who had been an incredible micro-manager and helicopter parent throughout elementary school. And Val had begun doing things that were not within the image she had hoped her parents would have of her: she was selling drugs.

How? The Montessori school had tracked programs in which an advanced child could be placed in higher-grade classrooms for part of the day, and Val had leapt forward two full grade levels in mathematics. Her math scores dropped... from A to B+. A pedagogue might say this is a sign that everything was going perfectly. She had not been challenged in her own grade. At this

level she was sufficiently challenged to not be at the top of her class, but not so overwhelmed by the higher-level material as to be in the bottom of the pack. B+ is above average, no?

But Ms. Steinberg had a future planned for her (then-)daughter. She had been told that a B+ even in a greatly accelerated course would look very bad on an application to an elite university, and Val *was* going to go to an elite university. She did not want to knock Val back down a level to a course in which she could easily earn an A – somewhere in the back of her mind, she did actually care about the quality of the girl’s education – so she followed the leads of other 2010s mothers and brought her daughter to a psychiatrist.

Most psychiatrists at the time were trigger-happy supplying children with diagnoses of ADHD or depression and prescribing the associated pills. The test for ADHD, for which passing was rewarded with stimulant medications, involved questions like “do you ever space out during class,” or “do you find you lose track while listening to others speak.” Some particularly bad psychiatrists even used the extended adult questionnaire when working with children: “do you become anxious while driving?” And so Val passed and was given a bottle of amphetamines to take before school every morning. “I thought it was all bullshit,” Darren says.

We can’t say for certain how long Val actually used the medication before covertly stockpiling and selling it, because 1) Val did not obsessively journal like her little brother, and 2) she was never caught. We uncovered the story in interviewing some classmates of hers from the time, who described a cunning girl walking around the halls and picking out the sorts of kids she figured might be willing to buy a pill to help them focus.

“It was like seventh or eighth grade when she started with this stuff,” a classmate recalled, “but she was selling it to high schoolers who were all stressed about the SATs. Funny thing is I think she was selling them for like five dollars a pill. It was dirt cheap to the point that people figured it was fake, but it was just because five dollars is a lot of money when you’re thirteen. What the hell are you buying anyway? You gotta figure she was doing it just to do it.”

That fits with the general narrative of Valentina Kelly’s life from this point – doing things just to do them. There was never much *intention* in her actions, and this led to both her incredible successes and even more incredible failures. After she passed her ADHD test, she similarly began acing her geometry tests and lifted the B+ to an A; she maintained brilliant grades even while selling rather than taking her performance-enhancing drugs. All through high school, her parents felt they would never need to worry about her. A great student with a vibrant social life, a participant in school clubs and government, and the winner of several school-wide essay and poetry contests, she was a shoe-in at Harvard, Yale, even MIT.

Of course, almost none of that was true. “Right!” Darren laughed from his gut. “I mean she was a great scammer, I mean a born scammer. God, I loved that about her. It was awful but it was so fun to see.”

In the twelfth grade, Ms. Steinberg and Val traveled the American Northeast surveying universities. Taking immense personal pride, Dorothy saw this as a decision not of where to apply – Val would get into any school she applied to – but of where to go. They toured every Ivy

League, MIT, The Cooper Union, and SUNY Stony Brook (you need a safe school) before returning home confident and excited in the decisions they had made. Dorothy saw her beautiful daughter in a pencil skirt, a button-up blouse, with her shining straight black hair walking down the wide stairs at the center of the Columbia University campus. She would live the New York City life that Dorothy never had the chance to live, she would meet a handsome boy – maybe a Jewish boy – who wears clean clothes, and who plays golf and makes money on the market, and she would buy a house close to her mother's.

Val had decided that she would not go to college.

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Valentina Kelly was never going to go to college because she did not care about going to college. She *might* have gone if it did not require an application, but they wanted her to write statements and essays and she did not want to write statements and essays so she didn't write statements or essays. It was true that she was earning straight As in high school, and in fact she even scored remarkably well on her SATs, but the rest of her image was a quickly-bought lie:

1. She was not in any student clubs or in student government. There was no reason for anyone to doubt her on this, so she just said it. Darren and Dorothy didn't really care about it beyond whether it made her happy or whether it made it easier for her to get into college, so in their heads, sure, she was president of the debate club.

2. She did not win any school-wide essay or poetry contests. No such contests ever existed.
3. She did not have a vibrant social life; she had precisely two friends. One was a little Irish-American boy they called “Pippy” whose real name may be lost to time, and the second was her first girlfriend: Carol Sanders.

We were fortunate enough to meet Carol and her wife, mothers of three now-adult children living in Brooklyn’s Park Slope. She was a year older than “Valentina” (Carol used her full name), and said meeting her was a “socio-sexual awakening.”

“I had never been close with a white girl before,” she told us, “and I had never wanted to be close like that with another girl period. Well, looking back, there were probably signs like everyone says. But no, Valentina was the first woman that made me say ‘wow, I want to hold that woman!’ You know what I’m saying?” She laughed a hardy laugh, and her wife smiled and nodded in agreement. “But she was bad news. She was bad news for herself, not really for me, but you already know that. Cause you see I’m fine!” Another big laugh.

Carol was fine – an excellent student who really was in student government and really was president of the debate club, went off to University of Pennsylvania and eventually became an attorney. They didn’t want to deal with the distance, so that was that, and Pippy went off somewhere too (one imagines). It is likely that many of Val’s lies to her family were actually just stories about Carol with the names swapped, allowing for enough detail for them to feel

believable, but some were outright fabrications just for the sake of seeing how far the lie could go (see: “winner of a poetry contest”).

Darren recalls Val’s so-called vibrant social life: “Every time she went out she had a new name for the girl she was going to hang out with. Looking back, she probably said more names than there were girls in the school.” Still, vibrant may not be a poor descriptor.

“Really it would just be that the three of us met up at this little coffee shop, and Pippy might play little songs on open mic nights,” recalled Carol. “Then he knew to leave the two of us alone, and usually we’d just sit there and hold hands and talk. But when she wanted to get up to something, there was this abandoned lot down towards the train that I’m pretty sure is a McDonald’s or something like that now. We’d hop the fence and do whatever we’d do. By her junior year she always had a pack of cigarettes too, and we’d smoke cigarettes and talk in that lot until we knew our parents were asleep, so that we could shower and brush our teeth before they smelled the smoke. When you’re that age, it’s like whatever you’re doing at that moment in time, that’s gonna be your life forever. And I wanted to be running to that lot and messing around and smoking cigarettes until my parents fell asleep, forever. And then I got older and I didn’t want to be doing that forever anymore. I think Val might have literally wanted to do that *forever*.”

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Val realized that everything had to catch up to her eventually. She might be able to pretend she was accepted into a college, but she would not be able to pretend to move into a

dorm or pretend to be in college for four whole years before pretending to graduate. No, it had to end at some point, it was just a matter of when and how.

She decided there was no way for it to end well, so she would just wait until dad or Ms. Steinberg said something and then she would say “Oh yeah, I never applied to any colleges,” and what happened then would be what happened then. So when Darren asked her one day when the college applications were supposed to come back and she said “Oh yeah, I never applied to any colleges,” and he genuinely had no clue how to react.

“I mean what the fuck do you say to something like that?” Darren asked us. “You know, at that point, we had sort of figured Val was fine and Dorothy, she had sort of made Val out to be some kind of mini-me and had some real fake version of the girl in her head. I mean I guess I had a fake version of the girl in my head too, but she had a *real* fake version of the girl in her head that Val didn’t even need to put there.”

There were no fireworks. There wasn’t even a conversation to be had. She had simply not applied to any colleges, and so she would not get into any colleges, and there was no way around that. She was still in high school, but she had turned eighteen shortly before her secret broke, so they had, in some sense, much less power over her. In another sense, they now had the power to kick her out, which you will not be surprised to learn they did not use. She graduated from high school as valedictorian of her class.

It is easy to judge Darren and Dorothy for failing to nurture their daughter's potential and steer her in the right direction. Such judgments are more likely to come from people who have never had children. Throughout Val's high school years, the couple was raising a baby – by her graduation, Thomas was only three-and-a-half years old. By all easily perceived metrics, their daughter was a low-maintenance high-achiever, and so they provided little maintenance and watched her achieve highly. This made the fallout even more confusing, as they now not only needed to rebuild the image of their older child and figure out what the hell to do with her, but also continue to raise a three-year-old boy. Could you really have done any better?

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The following years saw Thomas entering pre-school and eventually elementary school at the same Montessori school at which his sister had succeeded. Val, without a girlfriend or a Pippy or a school to go to during the day, spent her days doing very little. She found retail jobs, but was fired from at least three workplaces in a year for not showing up for her shifts. Dorothy stopped speaking to Val unless spoken to, and stopped fixing her plates at meal times. Darren would sometimes sneak her food after dinner, but otherwise nobody knew how she was eating; Dorothy's "starve the beast" strategy was ineffective. "She must have had some source of income, because she would show up in new clothes or come home with new shoes or something, not that I noticed, but behind her back Dorothy would say to me 'those are new shoes, how the hell did she get those shoes?' and nobody knew," Darren recalled. This carried on for years.

To Thomas, Val was an angel – she would hold him and read with him and teach him mathematics beyond what the school had been teaching him. By the time he was six years old, he knew the squares of all natural numbers up to twenty-five by heart, as well as the first twelve powers of two. It was all thanks to his sister. Darren would often use this as ammunition when Dorothy suggested kicking out Val – the one issue on which Darren ever describes pushing back against his ex-wife. “I could fight back because she didn't want to do it either. I really didn't want to do it, but she didn't either, I think.” But that one point of tension was to be the end of their marriage, although how it came to a head is a bit contentious.

Fact: Darren and Dorothy separated in 2017 after ten years of marriage. Fact: Dorothy kept the house in which Val was raised and nursed by her late mother. Fact: Val continued to live with her father in a one-bedroom apartment until Thomas graduated high school. Fact: Thomas lived primarily with his mother and could only see his father and sister on Wednesdays and Fridays. On these facts, all accounts agree. Let's hear Darren's side of the rest of it:

“Things were bad with us for a long time right? First of all, you know, I'm gay. I was gay then. She didn't know, but you lose a real layer of intimacy when you just don't feel attracted to a person. And it would've ended anyway, you know, but definitely the thing with Val mattered. We bickered about it until she had enough and she said something like ‘it's your daughter or me.’ You know, like, kick her out or kick yourself out. I chose my daughter, and I don't know whether or not she expected it, but after that she really got cruel. She took everything she could from me just for the sake of taking I think. She took that house – my house, really, if we're being frank. She took my son. You know, I would have shared custody more evenly but she convinced them

that living with Val and me was unsafe. That it would be unsafe to sleep under my roof if my daughter was there. And what did Val ever do to Thomas? She taught him math and made the boy a fucking genius, that's all she ever did to him.”

I would love to give you Dorothy's account, but as the reader knows, we do not have it. It's been a while, however, since we've heard from Thomas. Here's a diary entry of his from 2031:

“New therapist. She asked me about the divorce and I said I don't really think about it. I know she's a therapist so she's supposed to think I think I don't think about it but I really think about it in the thinking that produces no thought thoughts or some shit like that. She told me to write down what I remember and think about it for next week. I am making fun of her, but she's probably right. Anyway, here's what I think I thought.

“It was really all at once. Whatever the day was, I had gotten home from school and I was in my room playing my Nintendo or something. I guess my parents were watching TV in the living room, and my sister walked in – I didn't see any of it. My mom was always loud but she never yelled, she just projected more, and in this case she projected at my sister something like ‘how the fuck do you keep coming home with new clothes?’ I had never heard her speak like that, or really address my sister at all.

“So then my sister says something like ‘why is it any of your fucking business’ and there was this whole thing, but I remember at some point Val called my mom a ‘cunt’ which was a

new word for me at the time. My mom really didn't like that and it activated something in her – she told me independently that she doesn't think anyone should ever use that word under any circumstances. I wonder if she felt that way before all this.

“Anyhow Val kinda threw my dad under the bus after that. She said something along the lines of ‘ask your husband’ about where she got the clothes from. My dad, he wasn't mad, he was just kind of pathetic, and he let my mom know that he had been giving Val some money for food and things. I guess my parents were trying to save for something at the time, or maybe they were in a bad financial situation, I really don't know, but the fact that my dad was secretly using his money really pissed my mom off. Something about how it was supposed to be ‘our money,’ I mean I think she really thought it was theft. That was it though, after she heard about that she just projected them out of the house. I kept playing my Nintendo. I don't know that I internalized it much then but clearly I remember something. I'm not sure how much of that is accurate but the basic strokes are right. Definitely the ‘cunt’ thing happened.”

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What went wrong with Valentina Kelly? Darren is nothing but sympathetic on this issue. “I think we're talking about a girl who really didn't want to be pushed around, and Dot just told her who to be, you know?” This doesn't feel like enough to explain such a high-achieving girl later failing to leave home, failing to get any sort of job, failing in every sense at being an adult American. Or more kindly, not trying in any sense to be an adult American.

“After all that, when we moved, I got to talk to her more and I saw that she was a pretty sad person. I mean, she slept in the basement back at the old house. In the apartment she had to sleep on a pull-out couch and I heard her cry all night sometimes. She said she had these terrible episodes of sleep paralysis, and you know, she had these stomach issues so she didn't eat some days. And maybe she really did have some sort of attention problem. She was just struggling.”

It doesn't seem she ever paid “rent” to live in her father's apartment. From the outside looking in, it was a classic case of an enabling parent with a lazy kid. On the other hand, the sleep paralysis was real and the eating issues were real, and a young woman who neither slept nor ate enough was unlikely to succeed at much. Of course, Thomas later would do quite a bit with similar numbers of calories and hours unconscious; he would later describe his sister as “pathetic” and his father as “pathetic.”

But living away from Ms. Steinberg (now a more accurate name, as she was no longer Mrs. Kelly) did seem to help Val in some ways. She eventually did get a job – she was a waitress at Denny's for a handful of years. “Tommy and I went to Denny's some nights for dinner just to see her. Fucking Denny's! It felt like child abuse to make my son eat that shit.”

She was laid off during the pandemic, and it seems she spent those years much like everyone else – waiting. At twenty-six, she found she could make a decent amount of money as a bartender, but there was no sense of “making a living” as she didn't pay for her own food or housing. The money, mostly cash tips, was probably all saved in envelopes or dresser drawers as her bank account was usually empty. Local Long Island bars at that time were all kind of skeezy

– it was well past the days that people went to bars to meet other people, and the purpose of the institution was to make money off drunks who liked to bet on sports games played on big TVs all around the bar. She was a very attractive girl, having inherited most of her looks from her mother: a strong Roman nose, sharp and bold eyebrows, full lips, straight and long black hair always kept in a ponytail, flat-chested but with wide hips and powerful thighs. The only thing she seemed to inherit from Darren was pale skin, as opposed to the olive tone of her mother's. The divorced or unhappily married older men at the bars threw large tips at her, almost worth the comments about her “nice ass” or “dick-sucking lips.” She kept it up until she was thirty-one and then quit because she was “too old for it.”

This means that in Thomas' high school years the siblings never saw each other – she worked at night when he would visit his father, and he couldn't go to a sports bar like he had gone to Denny's years earlier. When Thomas appeared on her father's couch, towards the end of his senior year of high school, he was already set to head off to Columbia University in the fall. She saw a young man, nearly eighteen, magically transformed from the boy she had tutored in trigonometry during the pandemic years. He saw, in more-or-less every sense, the same woman.

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If the reader recalls from above, Thomas was doing quite well at this time. Much like his sister, it was always assumed he would go on to become valedictorian and move on to an Ivy League institution. And so he did. It does not seem Thomas *wanted* to go to Columbia as much

as he felt like it was the next point along the natural arc of his life. And so he did. And he was not unhappy with the decision.

Thomas' mother was actually quite poor at this time, still a pre-school teacher but now on a single income in a far more expensive America. As a result, Thomas was able to earn a full ride on both merit- and need-based aid. His mother had always wanted to see her child(ren) live the New York City life, and to her, that did not include living in a university dormitory. Instead, she hoped Thomas could live with roommates in an apartment, more like the friends of "Friends" than like the average college student. Not yet having "Friends" in Manhattan, it was suggested by Darren – now on speaking terms with "Dot" again – that Thomas and Val could move in together.

It was true that Val had more than enough money saved up to pay for a full year of rent in a small Manhattan apartment (this is the effect of eight years of income with no expenses). Now in her thirties, Val was deemed sufficiently mature by Ms. Steinberg to take care of her Tommy in his freshman year, before he would necessarily move to the West Village and go to coffee shops and do whatever New Yorkers do.

And so in August of 2028, the two moved to a one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan's Washington Heights. For those unfamiliar with New York, this is a permanently Dominican neighborhood that resembles an upscale Santo Domingo (well, upscale relative to the actual Santo Domingo). The people walk slowly through street markets that take up the entire sidewalk,

and speed through red lights in little cars and electric scooters. This was the backdrop of a very important few months in Thomas' life, and the climax of Valentina's.

While Val paid the rent with her stashed-away tip money, Thomas contributed by buying food with the money he earned from working in the IT department at Columbia. The one bedroom was given to Val, and the "main room" was converted to a makeshift bedroom for Thomas. There was a twin-sized bed, plus a desk and the famous singular chair for doing his schoolwork and playing computer games. Thomas was rarely home on weekdays except to (very briefly) sleep, as he had class and work and new friends down at the university. Val spent a lot of time outside of the apartment with women she met on dating Nets, so the apartment was empty about as often as it was full. On the weekends, the siblings would prepare meals together, go on walks in Fort Tryon park and smoke cigarettes on the fire escape. They had a decade of life to make up for.

By December, Val surprised the world: she got a job. Even stranger, her job was as an administrative assistant at the Cabrini Shrine – a Catholic church and primary school on 190th street, just south of Fort Tryon. The shrine was a beautiful century-old building that contained, most notably, the mummified body of St. Cabrini in full view at the center of the chapel. Searching beyond, you might find St. Cabrini's cane, a lock of her hair, a fingernail clipping, and other so-called secondary and tertiary relics behind glass cases with plaques explaining "This was Mother Cabrini's fingernail."

It was surrounded by a garden, and then a parking lot fenced off from the street to create a micro-climate containing some of the cleanest air on the island. There was a large stone statue of Jesus attached to the outside of the shrine, perhaps twelve feet high, with vertically stretched proportions making Christ's face long and cartoonish. Although neither Val nor Thomas were religious, they were so charmed by the space that they would often eat lunch on the benches outside it on Saturdays. They eventually met Julia – the one-woman powerhouse running the shrine who, getting on in years, finally needed some help. Val convinced Julia to hire her on the spot. Kelly charm. She also convinced Julia she was a catholic. Kelly lies.

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The rest of Valentina Kelly's story proceeded very quickly, but the details are hard to tease out. Julia has long since entered the kingdom of heaven, so we cannot ask her for the details. It seems from the outside that for the next month Val found satisfaction in labor for the very first time in her life. She arrived at the shrine early and left late. She attended mass on Sundays. She even called home to tell Darren about the job. She would help Julia to fundraise for the shrine and arrange events on issues such as "The Role of the Church in the Migrant Crisis" or "What the Scripture Tells Us About Personal Freedoms." Was this woman finally finding a meaning in life? Was she saved by Christ?

Fact: Valentina Kelly was found dead on the night of February 1, 2029, hanged in Fort Tryon Park one day before her thirty-second birthday. Fact: She left a cryptic note addressed only to Thomas, interpreted as leaving him all of her money and personal possessions.

to tommy, everything. money is scattered about the room. the bed and things too.

i see something so important now. it is what the Christ really taught us, if there ever was the Christ or even if there never was the Christ. it is not false witness if the shape is the shape of truth.

so today you are with me and today you will be with me forever. until today comes –

valentin

Julia died ten days later, so the impact of Valentina's loss was felt only by a small few. Her letter remained in Thomas' possession for the remainder of his life; not only the original letter, but dozens of photocopies so that he could never lose it. For what it's worth, Darren says of the letter: "I don't think she wrote that." It is hard to believe, not only because she misspelled her own name, but also because she addressed the letter to only her kid brother.

What did Thomas even know about his sister? She knew him at a time he barely remembered, he saw her in environments where she could not speak openly, he heard of her from clashing perspectives, and finally lived with her for less than half of one year in an apartment that was empty as often as it was full. They shared cigarettes.

There is one contentious beat in this story, told only through a single diary entry from January 31, 2029. It could describe a real event, a total fabrication, or a dream. As we saw in the excerpt preceding this chapter, Thomas would often document dreams without explicit delineation from reality. This entry, however, has no tinge of the surreal. We can only leave it to stand for itself.

Chapter 6 - Pathetic (Diary Excerpt January 31, 2029)

Last night was an unusually warm January night, I think 51 degrees. Val asked me to come with her up to the shrine to see how it looks in the middle of the night. She was one of the only people with the keys to enter, so we could experience the dark church, the clean air, in a state of isolation that is so rare in this city.

And it was really fucking cool. We saw the body of Saint Cabrini lying in a glass case in front of rows of empty pews. Apparently, Val says, her heart is the only part of her missing. It's somewhere in the Vatican. The echoes in the dark chapel were intimidating, because every step counted as ten. You got the feeling that you were doing something against the rules and that someone (either Julia, Jesus, or Cabrini herself) might catch you and beat you with a ruler.

We sat outside, not on the bench as usual but in the middle of the parking lot on the cold asphalt, shoulder-to-shoulder, looking up at long Jesus – not a crucifix, but he looked pained as if on his cross, with his five wounds and his crown of thorns. She lit me a cigarette and we smoked silently. I looked at her and for the first time saw her as a woman. Not as a sister, or a mother, or a teacher, but as a woman. She looked at me and we locked eyes and I didn't look away. I think she saw me as a man. We turned back forward.

I became erect. Without looking, she put her left hand on my right leg and I put my right hand on her left leg, the opposite hands still holding burning quarter-cigarettes. She slowly moved her hand to my crotch and laughed. Then she grabbed my shoulders and threw me down.

She dropped her cigarette and mounted me, holding me down at my apex with her frail arms and at my base with her ass and thighs. The entire weight of her body. I wouldn't have tried to get up anyway. She didn't kiss me. She looked at me and laughed again, then began removing my clothes. First my shirt, so that I laid with my back directly on the asphalt, and then my jeans only halfway so that I sprung through the hole in my boxers.

She instructed me not to move. Starting with her mouth, her crossed eyes and inverted cheeks gave the sense more of a biological machine built for this very purpose than of a person with motives and dreams. I felt as if I would lose consciousness. Then she stopped and stood above me, smirking at the child below her, playing the role of an executioner with her victim's head poised to be severed by the blade above.

She turned around and removed her leggings, revealing dozens of facts about my sister I had never known – scars up and down the sides of her thighs, some fresh gashes, some already turned to hard and elevated keloids. For a moment the blood rushed up to my brain. Yes, this was my sister. These were my sister's legs. These were my sister's scars.

But that was a woman's ass, and that was a woman's sick face staring back and down to watch the storm of emotions as they entered and left my eyes. Then she sat on it, wet and warm in contrast to the asphalt now scraping my back. For some time, maybe seconds, maybe hours, she looked ahead. When she finally looked back at me, still in rhythmic motion, she spoke:

“Pathetic.”

I finished, inside, and she stood letting the semen drip out of her and onto my boxers until she pulled up her leggings and sat down beside me again. I redressed and she lit us cigarettes.

We stared up again at the Christ. I imagined a crucifix of the same proportions: a cartoon face, too-long limbs and the extended torso stretching his fifth wound so that the hole could fit a human child.

I looked to my right and there was my sister – no longer a woman, but my sister. We finished our cigarettes and she asked if I wanted to go for a walk in the park before we headed home. Of course. So we did.

Chapter 7 – As Long as I Got My Plastic Jesus

Despite the tragedy of Valentina's death, little Tommy was still a university student who had to do the sorts of things university students do – write essays, take exams, look cool to peers and make memories. A strong student by nature, he was a bold question-asker in large lecture halls and a contrarian voice in small-classroom discussions.

“He was very gifted at pretending he believed things,” a former adjunct professor told us. “When I taught Contemporary Civilization, he would argue for anarcho-capitalism if the class took a positive view of the Communist Manifesto, against natural rights if the class appreciated Locke, for communism if the class was convinced by Adam Smith, against and for democracy depending on the vibe that day.” One is reminded of his outburst against “illegal aliens” in primary school, but now the same tactic was taken in the right place, and with bravery rather than desk-flipping when the tides turned against him. “It was pretty easy to argue against democracy in those days, to be fair!”

This adjunct managed to find the old external drive that the class essays were stored on and sent us his weekly Contemporary Civilization reports. They were fine for what they were – mostly one-page write-ups by a snarky teenager – but starting in March, Thomas began playing around with different names in the header of each assignment. He was T. V. Kelly when writing about the American abolitionist movement, Tom Waits Kelly when writing about bell hooks, and (our favorite) T– Darrenovich Keliy when writing on Lenin’s “What is to be Done?” His middle name was Wayne.

At Columbia you don't choose your major until sophomore year, but despite his interest in the humanities it was clear that Thomas would end up in engineering or science. He had placed out of Calculus I and II and was on to Differential Equations by his second semester, and as most academics know, it is far more common to find physicists who love history than historians who love physics. Still, his friendships came primarily from the arts departments.

This was partly because he smoked. Smoking was still considered deviant in the late twenties. The average nicotine-addicted young adult preferred the not-much-safer vape pens that could be easily modified to smoke THC cartridges (recently re-illegalized, but still easy to come across). Smoking cigarettes was common mostly in poorer communities, but it was also a habit among a subculture of youths who wanted to signal their disinterest in complying to societal norms. As has always been true, this was mostly artists.

“valentin –” as Thomas opened entries directed at his late sister, “I know I should quit smoking and I even would like to. But like an automaton I go and buy another pack (still blue Camel Crush, by the way!) and I feel retarded every time but I'm not even thinking. These kids at school, the girls with tattoos and piercings and tight shirts and baggy jeans, the guys with tattoos and piercings and tight shirts and baggy jeans. Plus sometimes near the shrine or in the park or on the fire escape. I figure I'll never.”

Social smoking with the campus artists earned him phone numbers, trips to little-known galleries, engaging conversations and invitations to parties that he refused without fail. Thomas

abstained from drinking alcohol, and feared even being around the use of harder drugs, despite no known negative experiences regarding such substances either in personal use or within his immediate family. This distanced him slightly from the clique he had stumbled into, as he went home alone each night to sleep in his sister's bedroom for the remainder of his freshman year.

After this point, Thomas' wallet thinned. His IT job and Val's tip money would not be able to survive a second year of rent, even with maximally conservative spending habits. He would need to either move or find another source of money.

His strategy to ease his financial needs involved perhaps the least moral thing Thomas had done up to this point in his life, although it was a minor white-collar sort of infraction. He asked around in May, as the semester closed out, about if anyone needed a room for the Summer and coming semester. The rent he asked for the "one room in a conveniently-located two-bedroom" was actually 80% of the apartment's total rent, which he hoped might trick students used to Morningside Heights prices. Asking mostly Indian international students to be sure he was scamming families wealthy enough to pay full tuition at the Ivy League school, he found one naive girl from Delhi to take the "deal." She even agreed to pay rent over the Summer when she would be back in India, so he had the apartment to himself for three months while paying only 20% of the rent. Jackpot!

In his second year of college, as Thomas morphed into the sort of Thomas who would steal mice a few years later, he also morphed into an unstoppable force. It shocked his peers that he would read dense books not assigned for any of his courses, or that he could be found at the computer center during the school day writing essays that nobody else ever saw. This was all while taking (and performing well in) seven classes and leading a robust social life. Other students were stuck with twenty-four-hour days, while Thomas seemed to get forty or more.

This is because he literally did have more hours in his day than did his peers. He forgot to eat often, so less time was spent making, buying or eating meals throughout the day, and he slept very little – too little.

“valentin – I know now what you meant by ‘sleep paralysis.’ Last night I went to bed at maybe 11 and after an hour of trying to sleep I found myself staring up at the ceiling. There was a matrix, a big matrix, and I knew if I just found the inverse of the matrix I would be allowed to sleep. But every time I tried, the matrix got bigger, added more rows and columns, and it was clearly impossible. Maybe at some point I realized it didn’t make sense, but by that time I could not move. I slept, but maybe only two hours.”

The lack of sleep and food seemed to have no effect on his energy; he was even more impressive than he had been in his freshman year, operating at the upper limit of human production and the lower limit of human sustenance. Thomas did not consider what he did work, however, or at least he *said* he did not consider it work. After reading the novel *Nadja* by Andre

Breton for an art history course, he claimed to hate work in all its forms. He claimed that life was not worth living if one had to work. But clearly Thomas was working, right?

Well, he was literally working at work, where he helped professors set up their computers and the like. He did his schoolwork, writing essays, reading readings and solving the Laplace equation subject to Dirichlet boundary conditions. There seemed to be a sense of labor even in his personal hobbies.

The “dense books” students described seeing Thomas reading on benches or in the library were all books on religion, and mostly books on “the Christ” (Thomas almost always referred to Jesus in this way) written from historical, cultural, artistic or philosophical perspectives. He would not be caught dead reading the Bible – he didn’t want anyone thinking he was religious – so he read mostly secular authors. He would sometimes dabble in works of Christian authors like the adventist foundress Ellen White, but only because he knew most of his fellow students would not immediately recognize these as anything “seriously religious.”

Reading Christian scholarship could be fun to a certain kind of person, but as a hobby on top of mountains of schoolwork it is at the very least unusual. It does not seem that this time corresponded with any growing religiosity for Thomas either – it was entirely scholarly. Or recreational? No. It takes no great analyst to realize that what Thomas was doing was *work*. He was working to understand his sister, her relationship with God, and the note she had addressed only to him.

This was also the semester that Thomas started dating, although this was the aspect of his life in which he had the least success. We have already noted in our introduction the troublesome climate, but we must also recall that Thomas was a man with almost no experience by his second year of college. At maximum, he had a single sexual experience, and it was with his own sister.

He played around with dating Nets a bit, but his no-good-in-stills face made it hard for him to find any matches. Most of Kelly's entries regarding dating read something like: "She was boring. Decent dinner." Some are more detailed, potentially not real, slightly offensive and much more entertaining.

"We went to coffee, a beautiful face, and it was cold so we were both covered to the point of rectangular silhouettes. We made good conversation. I was proud to take her home. When she took off her coat I saw a wonderful body – large breasts and a narrow waist under a wool sweater. We kissed and she laid on the bed and I steeled myself. She removed her sweater and her arms erupted with empty folds of skin. Her gut as well, and even her breasts appeared empty, floppy skin. Vacant skin. I really tried to work up an erection for her sake but I simply couldn't. I don't think we will call each other again."

There are a half-dozen dozen similar entries in the Fall and Winter of 2029. In this one sense, Thomas was a prolific (pathetic?) loser. He failed for an entire semester to make it to even a second date, ultimately deciding to put the whole venture on pause. He would have a quiet

Winter, with his roommate home in Delhi, his friends home with their parents, and his responsibilities down to helping old professors turn on power strips.

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People in New York develop “circuits” – Manhattan is physically quite small, but it is dense with things you *could* do. Thus, it is common for people to come up with paths they walk containing one or two things they *might* do, and otherwise just walk for the sake of walking. Thomas had two circuits, the first of which we already know: he would walk uptown from his apartment, read on a bench outside the shrine, loop around Fort Tryon Park, and walk back home. The total trip took about an hour plus reading time, so on a nice day Thomas might be out three or four hours before coming home.

This was his short circuit. The long route involved a train ride down to West Fourth Street, a few blocks from the west-side shore. Although he sought water, as opposed to heading off towards the Hudson he would venture Northeast. He tended north about ten blocks through the massive arches of Washington Square Park and towards a few bookstores of varying levels of “independent.” Next, he would walk East until he could no longer walk East, where one could sit on benches looking towards Brooklyn across the filthiest body of water in America. Thomas would take in the scenery for only a few minutes, then backtrack a bit West and a bit South to sit on an old bus stop bench (no longer in service) right outside the power plant. Ideally it would be dusk, and he would read in the bright darkness of the city. Then he would walk to the nearby train station, transferring once to get back home.

He spent large chunks of his time at the power plant that Winter, and often considered how hard it would be to hop the fence and walk around inside. Pretty hard, probably, considering Thomas had never hopped any fence in his life. But he dreamed of hopping that fence, of one day getting inside just to walk around and see the innards of those uninterpretable metal contraptions stretching patterned geometries into the starless black sky.

It was near the power plant one day that Thomas, after giving up, finally succeeded: he met a woman who might go on a second date with him. A woman who might even agree to marry him. The story of how they met is probably over-romanticized by both parties, but they are consistent with one another, so we will present them here as the two would want/have wanted.

The woman was walking alone towards the river one evening, holding a tall can of beer in a paper bag and a backpack full of drafting supplies. Then she saw not Thomas, but what Thomas was reading.

It was a book by Leo Steinberg titled *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art*. The page Thomas was turned to had a large color photograph of a painting of a nearly naked Jesus, with only a towel covering his crotch. Below, it could be seen that his penis was erect, pointed out-of-the-page, not as the focal point of the painting but as the position at which your eyes stopped when they arrived there.

She walked behind him, standing above him, and asked in a quiet voice: “what the fuck?” A startled Thomas quickly shut the book and turned around to see a very unimposing woman, smelling a bit of alcohol. He knew she must be a young artist – it was always tight tops with baggy pants, although he couldn’t make out tattoos given the winter evening was too cold to show skin.

His heart still racing but his mind now at ease, he cracked a smile and said “I promise it isn’t pornography. Or if it is, it’s very funny pornography!” He opened the book back up, found the same page and handed it to the woman: “look.”

She was in a Winter class in the middle of her junior year at Pratt University, and was asked to sketch the Williamsburg Bridge from any angle she pleased. Most of the students lived in Brooklyn, so she figured she would be the only one to pick the more inconvenient Manhattan-side angle. She asked Thomas to walk over to the river with her and explain his book of funny pornography. This is Dasha’s impression, from memory:

“The thesis is kind of straightforward. The Christ is both God and Man, you know, but most of the Medieval art really emphasizes the ‘God.’ You know, halos around babies or whatever, like at the Cloisters. But the thing is the Christ isn’t God in the body of a man, right, but a man and a God, which is kind of important, right, because it wouldn’t be hard for a God to live without sin even if he had the body of a man.

“But if he were a *man*-God or a God-*man* then he would have to worry about stuff like wanting to lie, wanting to be violent, wanting to fuck – ultimately, wanting to fuck I guess, right? So the renaissance painters thought enough people had done the God part of the *man*-God and it would be interesting, theologically of course, not pornographically, to emphasize the dick of the Christ.

“Anyway, there are these paintings where Saint Anne is pointing at the baby Christ’s baby dick, or where the Christ is pointing his hands vaguely at his own dick. Apparently the Victorians covered up a lot of these and the Nazis burned some, probably. So that’s the idea I guess, and I really like this guy, the writer, maybe you’d like him too if you’re an artist. You’re an artist, right?”

They had not even exchanged names, but he was uninhibited in his lecture. “I think that’s why people were so charmed by Thomas,” Dasha theorized. “He had this passion that came through right away when you met him. I don’t know if he even looked at me. I think he asked for my name after I told him I was an art student. But I don’t think he looked at me for maybe a half-hour!”

Thomas did let her speak and get out her name and her major and her passions for what kinds of arts. tooHe did eventually look at her, because he described her in detail in his diary that night.

“I get it now: the baggy pants and tight top is the same silhouette as a ballgown. If I can only figure out why ballgowns are shaped that way. Anyway, that’s what she wore, and it did resemble a silhouette because I think it was all black, and it was a colder night so I couldn’t quite make out the shape of her body. Definitely she was trim, hopefully not with invisible rolls of empty skin beneath, and you could see the Russian in her. Cold skin, cold hair, a tight face with cold eyes and sharp, dark eyebrows. She wore dark makeup all about, like mascara and eyeliner and black lipstick, which probably made her more alluring but less beautiful if I were to hazard a guess as to what she would look like without it. Nice hands, thin hands, sort of bony hands. Nice hair, thin hair, sort of bony hair.”

Now middle-aged, Dasha’s physiognomy is similar to what Thomas describes (although without the makeup). Her slightly sagged skin reveals what one imagines once was a “tight face,” meaning that the features were all a bit close together to fit onto a small head on a small body. She stands only four-foot eleven.

She has a small and slightly upturned nose, dented on the bridge, with expressive blue eyes that speak before she speaks. She showed us pictures of herself from that time – she had distinctive piercings on her cupid’s bow and both ends of her lower lip, and her “bony hair” (?) was short, straight and blonde with sharp bangs and pink highlights. Not a striking young woman in the conventional sense, it is likely that she was beautiful in motion.

Thomas watched Dasha draw the bridge and drink her beer, while he flipped through the pages of his Steinberg. He asked her if she'd like a cigarette; she partook. He asked for her phone number; she gave it to him.

“He said something like ‘this is stupid but I want you to walk somewhere with me before we go to the train’ and we went right back to the bench in front of the power plant. I thought he was going to kiss me but he didn’t. He grabbed my hand a bit too hard and lifted it so that we were both pointing at a set of triangular... are they transformers? Then he said ‘I like those.’ That was sort of unique, sort of magical.”

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Thomas and Dasha quickly became inseparable. Without his roommate, his apartment was free night after night. The two would cook together, fool around, watch movies, but mostly they would talk. Rather, mostly they would argue. “Thomas had this habit of taking the other side – I mean, you probably know that, what, from the news. But I’m sure anyone will tell you the same.” Things would sometimes heat up to the point that the two would become furious at one another and not speak for hours, “but that was part of the fun.”

Dasha’s decision to come to Thomas’ apartment every night – a full ninety-minutes from her own – was driven in part by love, but also because Thomas was not a very good houseguest for overnight visits. “He did come out to Brooklyn once to see me. Just once.” That one time, he had some sort of night terror, and spent the bulk of the night screaming. He awoke the next

morning chipper and active as always, but he was the only person in the building for whom that was true.

In every other sense, it seems the first year or so of their relationship was largely positive. When asked about downsides, Dasha brought up the sex: “He clearly had no experience, and wanted me to do all of the work.”

She also said something a bit more consequential:

“There’s that common piece of advice, like you want to find a partner who brings out the best parts of you. I think Thomas really did bring out the best parts of me. I think he reminded me to be passionate about life, because *he* seemed so passionate about life, and I think he made me kinder and more nurturing even. At least for a few months, because he needed some help with his sleep issues. I even stopped drinking. I think the issue is that I was not bringing out the best parts of him. I honestly don’t know if I brought out *any* parts of him in the first year or so. He just kept on doing his work and reading his books and walking his walks, and I was sort of just around. Don’t get me wrong, I know he loved me, I know he was happier because I was there, but there was no growth. At least not in the first year or so, and after that I think we brought out the worst in each other for a while.

“I don’t know what net effect I had on Thomas. Sometimes I wonder if he just moved on and forgot about me by the end.” She never saw the mouse room.

*Chapter 8 – Chapter 8 (Diary Excerpt January 4, 2030)**Chapter 8 - Mason*

Nerves drove him out of bed well before sunrise. He allowed himself five minutes for idling, which manifested as aimless pacing, before appearing somehow undressed in his shower. He recognized the pathology - tensed muscles, racing heart, and most uncomfortably a dissolution of will. That physical and mental automatism, stranding one's body in time, which makes any single moment feel as if it coincides with all other moments, simultaneously child, man and as-of-yet-unseen elder. All James Mason, a living man, at one instance in time "now" where he was precisely 26 years and 17 days old. He laughed, cracked open the window, snapped his hairband on his wrist and applied shampoo.

A house cat appeared at the lip of the tub, vocalizing. James breathed deeply, staring at his friend, trying to feel more confidently attached to his hierarchy of needs. The cat needs food. He felt his heart rate go down slowly as cool air from the window blew against his neck while he shaved. Time began to expand from a point to a line, and space began to collapse onto James Mason.

What was the occasion? Mason woke up in a state of mild panic often, but never without impetus. Today's cause was his first attempt in fourteen months to tackle the inertia of solitude – he would be meeting a young woman for coffee in uptown Astoria, in only four hours.

Lonely? Yes. It was his calculation fourteen months prior that the cure to his general discontent, his mornings of mild panic, was a complete acceptance of James Mason alone. Alone as he was, he had learned quickly that there was no cure known throughout human history for melancholy. Slowly his discontent shifted to loneliness, and his eyes became naturally guided to those young working women on the train, those tall slender New York women with entirely unblemished skin and clean beige or olive colored clothing. No hairs out of place.

Desirable? No, not for him. These were the sorts of women that would see him as an inferior. Mason was a man who didn't care much for professional status or cash, a man who dressed in solid-colored dark crewnecks and blue jeans, a broad-shouldered and dark-featured man who could be mistaken as a manual laborer. Worse yet, these were the sorts of women James Mason saw as inferior. There was no air of life to them, and he began to think of their morning routines, their train rides, their workdays, their love lives, as features of some facet of the New York scenery. They began to look to him as automata, the same way he saw the blue- or black-suited men on their way to the financial district, or himself appearing in the shower on a panicked morning. He felt animosity.

Envy? Perhaps, as those tidy train automata might be a decent bit happier than he had ever been. Not because of the status or the money, he figured, but perhaps because his brain was miswired to release cortisol at ten times the rate of the average man.

Insufferable? More or less. James Mason found life in New York more or less insufferable, and many people found him more or less insufferable. It was bizarre to observers

that someone so deeply bothered by the impersonality of corporate life would live in the financial capital of the world, or that someone so consumed by his neuroses would live in the loudest, densest city in his country. His complaining was incessant and became difficult to stomach, even for his loved ones.

James had no desire to leave New York, despite there being very little holding him in place there. He found that on days where he could enjoy the smell of not-so-fresh air and his heartbeat at a proper pace, he could appreciate the mass of humans and their monstrous steel creations as some indicator that he, or rather, that his whole species is a spectacle. On these days, when he did not complain, he was sufferable. He enjoyed being alone.

Fourteen months without as much as a touch on the arm from a woman was unusual for him. He was out of practice. He enjoyed dates as he knew himself to leave good first impressions. To his past lovers, he appeared as a break from the vaguely handsome finance types who populated most of New York's dating pool, but in the long term his negativity either turned them off to him or him to them. He was cynical about women.

Misogynistic? Certainly not, if you were to ask the man himself. He was cynical just as well about men, but never felt he might yield control of his life to one.

He stood in the shower, now moving on to the hopeful shaving of his pubic area. The cat needed food still, but this might take some time. It would never feel as if it took much time, of course, as shaving was automatic. To the cat, the interval may have felt like hours.

He stepped from the shower and observed himself in the mirror. He was moderately handsome, having dark and symmetric features. If he stared too long he would dwell on the spacing of his eyes, or the width of his nose, and so he decided to look away. He went and fed the cat and checked the time: five twenty-four.

There was no chance of his being able to return to sleep, so he attempted traditional methods of accelerating time, landing first on masturbation, then on reading, and lastly on walking to the coffee shop in uptown Astoria rather than taking the train.

He appeared at the coffee shop ten minutes early, and she appeared five minutes late. She was tall, and wore a modest summer dress leaving her figure undisclosed. She was racially ambiguous, perhaps latina or perhaps middle eastern, but had a charming face with expressive eyes. She was a career woman. A woman James might have seen on the train.

Dialogue.

James performed well and brought the young woman back to his apartment. He could hardly remember the morning. He certainly couldn't remember a word they had said to one another. He had four cups of coffee in him, and his heart had been racing prior. He kept a cool exterior, but he imagined she must have picked up on his nerves. When she laid her head on his chest, she must have heard rapping in doubletime.

As if in doubletime, her body was below his and he began to feel comfortable. He felt his heartbeat match his action, his mind, and he swelled with confidence. She removed her clothing. He froze.

Nerves now gone, he looked with self-assured rationality at the body beneath him and found himself stunned. Outside her dress, she appeared twice as large as inside, her belt holding back what loose adipose desired to leak into space about her. Without that belt, without that dress, she was revolting. He wished he could excuse himself.

Now unable to elicit his own necessary biological response, he thought maybe to close his eyes and imagine somebody else. No, it would be impossible. Blame could be put on his nerves, but was that quite right? No, never a problem before. What would he say to her? Sorry? No, he could play off modesty. No sex on the first date. Use, instead, his mouth and beg her not to reciprocate? Gentlemanly. That was the plan.

He reappeared at her climax. A relief. She left soon after and he paced his home terrified of what he might see the next day on the train.

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Practically? James Mason was a mediocre conceptual artist, creating mediocre art to express mediocre concepts. He believed he was in the process of creating something that would be incredibly influential to the art world, shifting the pace of art in the twenty-first century once

and for all away from the hyper-intellectual and social justice orientation that had densely populated the aughts and teens.

It was to be a long document printed and hung page by page in order on the walls of one of the larger galleries in Manhattan (he hoped, of course). The topic of the document would be the artistic merit of the piece itself, including the mass of theory required to truly appreciate the piece and the relationship of the work to the political landscapes of the art world and the United States. An early sentence fragment:

[...] there is a common misconception that the reading lists required to interpret and appreciate contemporary art diminish its value to the proletariat, disproportionately affecting racial and gender minorities (see Refs 13-17) – stating this as a foregone conclusion is at best naive and at worst anti-anti-racist; the problem is easily addressed by addition of sufficient information to understand the work within the work itself, drawing from the mathematical concept of self-containedness (see Refs 18-25) as this work hopes to do by presenting and explaining itself as thoroughly as possible; the inverse of this concept has been said to have been perhaps explored by Dadaists and neo-Dadaists in the concept of the completely self-contained readymade (see Refs 26-59) but this interpretation avoids the important [and often misogynistic (see Refs 60-71)] nature of the real themes explored in these sculptures – I would like to suggest a post-counter-interpreted-neo-Dada inversion of this concept exemplified by this work and inching closer to the completion of [...]

Valuable? James's work was well-liked by a small but wealthy contingent of New York socialites, who seemed to think so, allowing James a reasonable lifestyle with a house cat in a one-bedroom apartment.

He texted the woman who had just left his apartment to let her know he had a lovely time with her, and blessedly she never responded. This still managed to dismay James, who struggled to sleep that night.

After these many days without decent sleep, James was becoming unusual. Showering again, he stood in every shower he had ever stood in and let out a fried and unsettling scream arising from some tortured realization he was of yet unaware of. A knock on the bathroom door – his sister. He was at his sister's now.

He froze, stopped screaming. It took over an hour to get to his sister's in Stamford, Connecticut, and he struggled to remember when or how he had gotten there. No – his date had been two days ago, and he had arrived at his sister's yesterday. But what had he done yesterday? He had gone on that date, he was sure, and woken up at 5 AM and fed his cat. He struck the wall. Then again, harder. The knock again at the door.

JIMMY

Quiet.

Thirty seconds and a pitiful James Mason appeared on the other side of the bathroom door, hair sopping wet and eyes wide with terror.

Camille Mason had become familiar with James' outbursts, which started five years prior. In fact, their relationship revolved around them. With their parents living far away, Camille was the only person James could stay with when he seemed unable to care for himself. That included staying in her college dorm room on bad weeks when she was 18 and now in her new house in Stamford, bought on an unequal mixture of daddy money and her own earnings as a software engineer.

Three years James' junior, the parents had chalked up her permanent maturity advantage on James to the faster development of girls with respect to boys. This was a poor descriptor for the recent extreme deterioration in her brother's mental state.

James: "I-"

Camille: Bothered expression.

James: Exits.

Somehow in what appeared as midday James' was the only body he could see in Stamford. James was entirely alone. He walked towards the lake just a block from Camille's where he considered how hard it must be to actually drown oneself. If it seemed easier, he told himself he would have tried it right then.

He turned and told Tara that the cars looked far too large today. Confused, she nodded. She rubbed his back and said she needed to be getting on the train. He gave a disappointed look. He would allow it. She gave an angrier look back and got onto the train heading towards Brooklyn. Now, at the base of the Freedom Tower, he truly was the only body in sight. In that instant, he was the happiest he had ever felt and the happiest he would ever feel. Camille had missed James' departure just as much as he had.

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Freshly twenty, James anxiously waited outside the train station at 14th Street and First Avenue. A woman he had yet to meet was arriving any minute now, and they would get Indian food a few blocks away. She was another twenty-year-old artist, but bore little resemblance to James – she was covered in tattoos and piercings, wore metal band T-shirts and ripped jeans. James, on the other hand, seemed to be allergic to the aesthete. He had terrible acne, put no attention into his wardrobe and never exercised beyond riding his bike to and from school. Still, he stayed hygienic, was not overweight, and had certain conventionally attractive features. Friends and lovers cited his permanent smile, sense of humor and uniquely jovial personality as the source of his charm; he hardly ever stopped laughing, but paradoxically his words appeared

to be those of a very, very serious man. He was extroverted and argumentative in a way that was attractive rather than off-putting to a certain set of people. And off-putting rather than attractive to the rest.

People closer to him recognized a sadness about him. In more intimate conversations, he was quick to come to tears, and his steady state was communicated as something of a pensive melancholy. Somehow, people didn't seem to find either of these portrayals of his person as false or performative, owing either to a complex man with many sides or a talented performer. Tara had little clue what to expect. She had met James online only a week prior, and they had interacted more-or-less superficially. Still, both parties had a vague feeling that the stakes were high.

Dialogue.

The conversation was good – in fact, it was characterized by constant argument. Over what, neither party remembers. Whether the two could ever agree on anything seemed less a matter of actual opinion than one of principle. If James said something Tara agreed with, it was likely a good signal for her to change her opinion on the matter.

He felt successful as she invited herself up to his apartment. James was still prudish, having only ever slept with two women, and felt uncomfortable at what he presumed was Tara's desire to have sex after just meeting only a few hours prior. Still, he could hardly help himself.

James' room was impressively large for a college student in Manhattan – it held not only his queen-sized bed, but his desk, a large couch and a television. You could see the Freedom Tower from his window. This all miscommunicated to Tara that she was dealing with a man of high class.

He was nervous both about the probability of first-date sex; he balanced his desire to stop her from her advances, and his desire to throw her on the bed and fuck her before she had a chance to put her bags down.

Frozen in indecision (or more honestly, cowardice), he turned on the TV and they continued to argue flirtatiously for twenty minutes. Then, mid-sentence, she kissed him. James found her kiss unpassionate, as if she were less an active participant than an observer. Did he cross a boundary? But she had initiated it!

A strange feature of James was his inability to look at people directly unless he had had sex with them – he felt far too intimate meeting eyes, or even sizing up someone's outfit. He had practiced staring at eyebrows.

But now he had his first view of Tara – she had full lips, a powerful nose and wide brown eyes on a rounded face, with shark-like eyebrows. Her body was Mediterranean in proportions, having small breasts and a slender torso, but very wide hips and thighs.

James: “What are those scars?”

She had three-inch long keloidal scars on her arms and thighs.

Tara: "You know what they are."

James genuinely did not know what they were. He had heard about cutting in school and even considered it himself as a young boy, but he never worked up the courage to try. He had no idea it left lasting scars, but he didn't press the issue. He focused and thought he did a decent job.

Chapter 9 – Fyodor on the Tracks

Thomas had a family, if you recall, and a suffering family at that. His parents, both in some financial trouble, struggled to manage Valentina's death for several years. They could have used some contact from their son, but such contact was rare.

He did go home for the obligatory sorts of things – birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas – but he was generally unresponsive to calls and text messages from both parents. “I would call him and he wouldn't answer, but then he'd send me something like ‘busy now, love you dad.’ He was in college, you know nineteen, twenty. It's not like I wanted nothing to do with my parents at that age!” Darren laughed. “But when we saw him he seemed fine, really, for the first couple years. I figured he was living his life, struggling too without his sister but living his life.”

His mother got a slightly different treatment. “Dot would say he never reached out to her, then maybe he'd see her on her birthday and she'd text me something like ‘he's too skinny.’ He definitely was but what am I supposed to text him every day to tell him to eat more? She probably did! That probably pissed the kid off.”

That's a clean story, but the frustration was more complicated. That New York lifestyle that Dorothy so wanted to vicariously live through her child(ren) did not just involve coffee shops and kooky incidents with Friends; it also involved receiving an Ivy League education. Our young scientist-in-the-making was introduced to psychoanalysis in his first semester in college, which would be both an immediate and long-lasting passion of his.

Although this is not the stated purpose of a Psychology 101 course, most students do take units on Freud and early analytic theory as an opportunity to reflect on their youths. And of course, to blame their mothers! No parent is blameless, and it can often facilitate personal growth to reflect on the senses in which they erred in your childhood. A mildly experienced reader of Freud would interpret this directly from the “scripture” – your very existence as a child with a mother and father and siblings damns you to a set of unavoidable traumas for which you would be better off blaming God than your mother.

To the more immature reader, these texts can cause some level of damage. A retrospective search for fault in your younger life can lead to confabulation, as well as needless criticism for such minor infractions as telling you to cut your hair when you'd prefer to keep it long. Whether or not it is important or valuable to teach Freud to teenagers is not a question we look to ask here, but the potential for generation of false memories or over-blame may cloud trust in Thomas' first-semester entries about his mother.

One from October 10, 2028 reads:

“Psychology 101. We did a unit on psychiatric medication, and the professor did this bit on pediatric medication. She was talking about how fucked up it was that kids don't get prescribed SSRIs anymore, but then she said the names of some of these drugs and I realized: I wasn't taking ADHD meds in middle school; those were SSRIs.

“Why the fuck would these cocksuckers lie to me. My mom and the psychiatrist. What the fuck good is it to tell a boy he can't focus when they really think he's depressed? Of fucking course I was depressed. I don't know, then we learned these side effects and it's like kids on SSRIs are likely to have suicidal thoughts and I thought well that makes sense of a lot of shit but if they knew that back in 2018 then why were they poisoning me? Not like ADHD meds are much better when the kid doesn't have ADHD but you don't need to be a fucking doctor to see that a kid might be depressed because he hates his life and not because he needs some drugs. Unless you're a cocksucker piece of shit doctor.”

That was one! There is no way to validate that Thomas was actually taking selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors as a middle-schooler, but it is not impossible given common practices of psychiatrists in the 2010s. While it is less likely that he would be lied to on this front by both his doctor and his mother, SSRIs do align more with his experience of *dropping* the medication; increased libido, disappearance of suicidal thoughts and nightmares; than do amphetamines. Plus, we all know bad doctors. And we all know bad mothers!

Another from the same month is even more alarming:

“You know I had to do this shit, well maybe I didn't have to but they made me do this shit when I joined that Jew school where I had to go get my Jew paperwork done. I never had any record about it I guess, like they didn't have proof that I was Jewish or something.

“So some old rabbi takes you to the back room of the synagogue and he takes down your pants and pulls out a little knife. Then he makes a small cut on the tip of your dick until you bleed a little blood. I mean if you asked my dad he'd say no fucking way. You ask mom and I guess she thought ‘sure this is fine.’ I still have this scar there and there's no feeling in a little radius around it. I touch it and I don't feel anything.”

Damning indeed, but was it true? The practice described was real, although in our time it is widely condemned as a form of genital mutilation and is not performed openly by any sect of Judaism. Even in the early twentieth century it was extremely uncommon.

The other aspect that makes this story tough to believe is that the practice is part of the *conversion* process, something that would be unnecessary for the son of a Jewish mother. If it were true, it may be that a confused rabbi incorrectly believed a boy named Thomas Kelly was not a Jew, and was to be converted before attending the yeshiva. Reality or confabulation, it seems Thomas at least believed this was the case. No surprise that he avoided speaking with his mother.

On a lighter note, Darren tells a very beautiful story about the Winter of 2030. Thomas uncharacteristically took two days off of school and work; February the first and February the second; to take the train out to Valley Stream and be with his father. “I'll never forget, he wanted to go to fucking Denny's! And the next day, I figured he'd leave in the morning, but he said ‘Dad, let's do lunch at Denny's’ so we went to Denny's again! And the kid seemed so happy.”

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While other students took school breaks or long weekends as excuses to go home and relax, Thomas used his time unencumbered by his parents to continue his blitz of definitely-not-work. He used parts of one Winter break to write an entire novel in his diaries, including the excerpt preceding this chapter, which it seems he never showed to anybody. Though it was unedited and the plots were largely derivative of his own experiences – James is clearly a self-insert character, Tara is clearly some interpolation of Dasha and his sister, the story about the woman with loose skin is elsewhere in his diaries, and even the sentence fragment from the art piece is directly copied from a real essay Thomas wrote months earlier – the fact that he even found the time to write an entire novel lends credence to the general perception of Thomas as a man without any brakes.

Many college students and professionals overwork themselves in their twenties; in this sense Thomas was not special. What *was* special was Thomas' inability to succumb to burnout. Many overachievers experience a rapid loss of energy after overachieving for several intense years, but there is no evidence that Thomas ever figured out how to stop:

“Woke up very tired today. Therapist says I need a break. You try.”

There are some examples of similar people throughout history who swim forever without rest. Robert Caro's *The Power Broker* presents one such man in Robert Moses, who lived this way into his eighties. Moses is not a poor comparison to Thomas in some ways – apparently he

too wrote a full novel while ostensibly having seven jobs – but the analogy breaks down when considering intent.

If Caro attempts to get one trait across in his picture of the Shakespearean Moses, it is a driving desire for absolute power. As the reader knows, Thomas eventually obtained some level of power on scales even larger than Moses, but it is not clear that he was ever driven by this same motivation. Thomas appears more as a chaotic system, with powerful upswings and downswings in his behavior as a result of both internal psychology and external factors.

We hesitate to take a “Freudian” perspective of Thomas, although it is *right there*, but past biographies have used the unreliability of primary sources as an excuse to ignore the earlier aspects of Thomas’ life and build a power broker out of a much less deliberate man. To them, his snubbing his parents was part of a plot to eliminate what little responsibility he had as a means to achieve more knowledge, and later achieve more power. His excellent performance in school was something he saw as a necessary condition to later morph the city however he desired.

No, there is absolutely no evidence for such a master plan ever having existed.

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No time period gives a better representation of the chaos theory of Thomas Kelly than his junior and senior years of college – Fall 2030 to Spring 2032. Take it as a given that throughout this time, Thomas was successful in school, continuing to work and leading a healthy social life.

But on top of this, Thomas was beginning to show signs of genuine madness that only Dasha was blessed to see.

“I think it was that the lack of sleep, the lack of food, it all finally caught up to him,” Dasha recalls. “Or maybe some chemical shift or whatever. It must have been his junior year that the guy more-or-less imploded, but he showed no signs of it at school or with his friends or anything like that.”

The first incident she recalls involved cold foam. The words were written on a sign outside of a coffee shop, advertising a foamy cold brew drink inside. Dasha entered the shop and almost ordered before looking back out of the window and seeing Thomas, still there, looking at the sign that said “cold foam.” She left the shop, put a hand on Thomas’ shoulder and asked if everything was alright. Thomas shook his head and said “cold foam.” He started walking along the street back towards the train.

Thomas wrote about the incident one week after it occurred: “I laughed and I said something like ‘I think I was captured in a sense.’ And then I began to cry, uncontrollably. In retrospect it was awfully embarrassing, but I was not embarrassed. I said ‘I think something is wrong.’ Then I walked home, all the way, over an hour to get back up here, because I felt so scared of the train. Dasha stayed with me the whole way, and by 168th street I could speak just fine again.”

Episodes of this sort of “capture” were not infrequent; they would happen often over the course of a few weeks, then pause for a few months; and they were always followed by some level of self-destruction. “I think that night was the first night I saw him do it, yeah, where he would get up and bang his head against the wall. It was nothing gentle, I swear he must have given himself a concussion one of those times, and he would scream and scream until his roommate knocked on the door, and then he would lay on the floor and cry.”

How did you handle that, Dasha? “The conflict was sort of the fun of it, I hate to say. You don't realize it at the time. But he would do this sort of thing and it would start sympathetic – something like ‘when the fuck will I sleep?!’ And then I'd try to help and he'd fly off at me, he'd call me names, he'd cut deep at me in some way. He would never dare to physically hurt me, he had boundaries, but not many. I was a bitch, I didn't give a fuck about him, I was a user, a pretty girl living off of the men in her life, one time I was a whore. And then I'd run to the bathroom and scream and cry and he'd stay in the room and smash his fist or his head on the wall. And then a few weeks would go by and there we were again, holding hands by the power plant or fighting over Jasper Johns at the Gagosian. It was really sick, really.”

But the two kept on together, and somehow his roommate made some peace with the situation (noise cancelling headphones?). As Dasha prepared for her senior show, still coming and going from upper Manhattan each night, Thomas would give her relief from the stress of the undertaking either with romantic outings or evenings of pure terror.

“I remember one night, maybe it was the worst I ever saw him. I woke up to use the bathroom and found him standing still near the door.” He looked at her with fear in his eyes and explained that his foot had been chained to the floor. The “pieces” around the room had locked him there, and if he didn't figure out what spot to move the “knight” he might not be allowed out.

“When I walked him to the bed and laid him down he was quiet again, but when I came back from the bathroom he was staring up at the ceiling. He said ‘the yellow squares are back.’ What could I do but try to fall back asleep?”

—

Thomas, on Dasha's suggestion, began seeing a psychologist who she hoped could walk him towards his own solutions to his self-destruction and nighttime delusions. At the very least, she hoped that the therapist would stop Thomas from blaming her. The sessions, initially forty-five minutes per week and later ninety minutes per week, had no noticeable effect. Thomas refused medication; he called it “poison.”

Additionally, the therapist had a challenging time shifting blame away from Dasha, given the couple's mutual participation in their explosive relationship. For example, one of Dasha's stories could easily be condensed to the literally true sentence “I had a night terror and she ran away screaming.”

Thomas was diagnosed first with a nightmare disorder, but with no interest in sleep aids the only available treatment was psychoanalysis – old-school style, where you write down your dreams and discuss them with an analyst who nods along and asks about your mother. This might have made Thomas hate his mother more than he previously had, but it did not help with his episodes. In the months in which his behavior was stable, moreover, the sessions were completely worthless as he would report on banal dreams where he appeared in front of a classroom wearing only his underwear.

It is tempting to give Thomas the full cut of the blame in his outbursts – we can all agree that there is no excuse to speak so cruelly to anyone, even if it erupts out of something resembling a mental break. Still, in all relationships, these dynamics have second sides. Consider one particularly harrowing story from Thomas' diary:

“I am quite salient today, and I think I have been for a week now, maybe two. I came to the impossible decision that my relationship is hurting both me and her, and I attempted to do the impossible.

“I told Dasha it was time, yesterday sometime around noon or something. We both spend too much time and energy hurting each other. She cried and went home and I cried and stayed home. But then I get this call from her, maybe 11 PM or something, and she's making these horrible pained noises and won't say any words. Just screaming, moaning. So I told her just wait there, I'll be right there, feeling not the love of a boyfriend a lover a partner a soulmate but the love of a father, I think the love a father feels.

“I went as fast as I could down to Brooklyn and into the building and up three flights of stairs and into the apartment and into the bedroom and there she was, completely naked, on a twin-sized mattress with no bed frame, her legs opened in five or six places with cold, hardened blood still on her body. You couldn’t see her as a woman – that was a little girl, in terrible pain. I laid with her, I held her in my arms, I told her it would be ok, she reeked of alcohol. She said no words. We fell asleep.”

Did this really happen? Dasha winced, then laughed. “What, did you think I was an angel?”

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This was around the time that Thomas’ name first appeared in a newspaper – the Columbia Daily Herald’s *Fall 2031 Student Awards* – where he was lauded for winning “Best Teaching Assistant in the Sciences.” Despite a diary full of constant failures, and our interviews with Dasha that paint Thomas as a crippled man, he was clearly doing just fine. And more, he was clearly expending plenty of energy.

When it came time for him to apply to graduate school or to try to find a job, he took a page out of his sister’s book and just didn’t. Maybe he really hit his full capacity; he didn’t apply because he couldn’t make time or find the energy; but this doesn’t fit our image of Thomas at this time. As much as he was a brilliant student and, apparently, a hard-working teaching

assistant, he was not a particularly ambitious man. He joined no student clubs, no professional societies, no research opportunities; he did none of the sorts of things people do to try to kick off their scientific careers.

But he did “get in” to graduate school. Dr. Shigesato Nakamura, Ph.D., of the City University of New York Graduate Center was looking for a student in mathematics with a strong physics background. This student would work on proving a theorem in quantum information theory, and would fund his or her Ph.D. program by teaching a few classes every semester. Nakamura happened to know the dean of Columbia’s physics department, asked for a student, and Thomas had a high GPA and a teaching award. Nakamura hired him with no questions asked.

This was all happening *to* Thomas, while at home there was a cycle of screaming and cutting and furious writing happening *with* him. His final semester of college saw the worst of his mental state – an episode similar to those described, but lasting more than three months, and of biblical proportions.

“I think it was my dad who got him into Russian novels, starting with Gogol and then Dostoyevsky and that stuff that he tried to make me read since high school.” These Russians spoke *to* Thomas and *with* Thomas, as he would rewrite their own words and respond to them in his own notebooks. It was *Demons* from Dostoyevsky, in fact, which he felt finally cracked the code he had been seeking answers to in art histories and books on crusaders.

Demons is a wonderful and accessible novel that exemplifies its genre; it is funny, self-aware, tragic, and contains characters with the full spectrum of political frames each bullied and satirized by the author. It also is more explicitly about “the Christ” than other Dostoyevsky works, opening with an excerpt of the story of Jesus and the swine. Below we replicate the entirety of the story from Mark (KJV, 5:1-20):

[1] And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. [2] And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, [3] Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: [4] Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. [5] And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

[6] But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshiped him, [7] And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. [8] For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. [9] And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. [10] And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

[11] Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. [12] And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

[13] And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

[14] And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. [15] And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. [16] And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. [17] And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

[18] And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. [19] Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. [20] And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

When Thomas first read *Demons*, the story of the swines was familiar to him from the scripture, but he had always glossed over it as one of the less “teachable” miracles. Contextualized, it struck him more; Dostoyevsky’s metaphor was to the Russian people at his time, possessed swine hurdling towards the water to drown and die as many of his characters effectively did. Understanding the simple metaphor, Thomas believed he must be understanding the *wrong* metaphor, as Dostoyevsky was no simple author.

So he took the story at its face value: if I were a Christian, what should I learn from the story of the swine? The Christ is the son of God, surely, and God is very strong and good, surely. But then, the story may as well be: *And Jesus spawned a bunch of gold and gave it to the poor.* Or better yet: *And Jesus spawned a bunch of pigs and gave them to the farmers.*

But Jesus expelled the legion of demons into the swine knowing that the farmers would lose thousands of perfectly good animals. He wrote of the story incessantly in his diary, a paragraph or so daily for a full two weeks. These were the sorts of questions he asked:

Did the man-God have no choice but to expel the demons into something else, rather than killing them outright? Is there a fundamental natural law of 2000 demons per man, one demon per pig? Is there a locality to exorcism, so that the Christ had no choice but to expel the demons into *nearby* beings rather than, for example, 2000 dying animals elsewhere?

If the demons die in the pigs, do they die in real life? If the demons were in control of the pigs, why did they kill themselves? Did the Christ force them to kill themselves as pigs? Do demons just do that? If the man felt and knew the pain of the demons inside of him, did the pigs know and suffer as they drowned?

There is something of the old testament God in this story, that Jesus purposefully saved the man in a catastrophic way so as not to say “look at how good your savior is,” but rather “look at how ready, willing and able I am to fuck shit up.” Unless you accept the limits on Jesus’

powers suggested above, in which case the message is “one man is worth a thousand pigs.” At least that was Thomas’ conclusion, but he seemed genuinely distressed by its misalignment with the rest of Christ’s ethos and teachings.

It is hard to remember sometimes that Thomas was not a man of God. Throughout life he went through a trajectory of non-belief, compulsory belief, skeptical belief, belief that the bible was a book of good stories, belief that the bible was a book of *bad* stories, belief that all religions were inherently harmful to humanity, and then some more mature and confusing belief that comes across at this point in his journals.

Perhaps throughout history there have always been atheists who firmly believed “the people” need religion for one reason or another. Prominent figures from the twenties like Elon Musk and Jordan B. Peterson fell into this category, for reasons to do with maintaining birthrates (the former) or Jungian magnetism towards the archetypal father-brother-lover (the latter). Thomas had neither framing, but shared the belief that religion was very important to and for people; still, he simply could not believe. On the merits of Judaism, he wrote:

“One thing I miss about the Jews is following rules just to follow rules with other people who followed rules. And you could question those rules a bit, you were even encouraged to, within the understanding that the rule was fundamentally a rule to be followed with boundaries that were t.b.d. Exercising the self-control to not use your phone on Saturday morning is a good ascetic character-building exercise. Exercising the self-control to not turn on the lights on

Saturday morning is a very poor character-building exercise, but it is a good community-building exercise.”

For science-minded atheists like Thomas, it is most common that they focus on critical contradictions in the Bible as a means to discredit the religion and humiliate its believers. Thomas was slightly too young for the “New Atheist” movement of the 2000s and 2010s, where obnoxious figures like Bill Maher, Ricky Gervais and dozens of online video-makers spread the word of anti-God (as well as more intellectual and older atheist influences such as Richard Dawkins). The movement simmered down a bit when anti-Muslim sentiment became a bit less “fun” in the mid-2010s, as the United Kingdom left the European Union and President Trump attempted to ban immigrants from majority-Muslim countries. In a slightly different timeline, this may have been Thomas’ crowd.

But this judgemental point of view was not profound in Thomas’ writings, or in his interactions with the religious; in fact, the more blatant contradictions bothered him little compared to the more subtle oddities.

On the disparity in the birth date of Jesus between the gospels, he wrote “The Christ can be born on two days just fine, because He did not exist.” This is the same man who spent weeks trying to understand why Jesus drowned 2000 pigs. Why should it matter, if “He” did not exist?

Thomas took similar issue with dozens of other Bible stories, not in the voice of a disbeliever but of a man trying his hardest to believe (although recall, he was *not* trying to

believe) that the Bible was the infallible word of God. Two stories from Genesis tickled him in this way.

First, the story of the flood, in which God famously decides to destroy all life on earth save Noah's small family and two of each species of animal. God's perspective is stated rather plainly in Genesis 6:7 (KJV):

And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

The common atheist cheap-shots at this story include the impossibility of fitting two of every species on even a large boat, or that most species would not escape extinction if only two of them were left alive, or that the animals would require different animals to eat or different climates to survive. Here is our atheist's concern:

“The story is so well-known and widely discussed outside of scriptural interpretation that the passage is more likely to activate memory rather than to inspire new thoughts. But when we talk about Noah, about the flood, do we usually talk about the animals as part of the problem? If we talk about the beasts or the birds or ‘the creeping thing’ at all, it is probably assumed they were collateral damage in an assault on mankind.

“But no, God says he regrets making not only humans, but also the creeping thing! He regrets making worms and frogs and giraffes! Why!? If he had asked Noah to pick only the two most moral animals of their species, then it may make some sense. Is it implied? (Remember to ask a rabbi about this one.)”

The second is the story of Jacob and his renaming as “Israel.” The particular passage was Genesis 32:24-30 (KJV):

[24] And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. [25] And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. [26] And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

[27] And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. [28] And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. [29] And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. [30] And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

His confusion was with the possible Christian interpretations of this story, rather than the Jewish who did not believe in the Trinity or the same supernatural limits of God.

“Jacob wrestles a man, sure, that is said, but the ‘man’ dubs him Israel (one that struggled with *el*, *elohim*, GOD) and he claims that the instance is one of meeting God face-to-face. This is a man-God, but it's he *the* man-God? Is this the first appearance of the Christ? If Jacob called him God but he was not in fact God, this would be heretical indeed! But Jacob is in God's favor, so no this was a man-God to be sure.

“It would not be uncharacteristic of the Christ to engage in some level of violence, not to kill but to teach, although it seems strange from the common perception of His teachings. So God went easy on Jacob? Or Jacob really was so strong (as the man-God is still man)?”

Thomas had some Dawkins in him – he really did not believe in these stories at all, or even in their messages. He even writes: “I imagine the early Jews and Christians read these as metaphors.” But this sort of analysis of the Bible as *The Word* is incessant in the diaries; we leave out (for the sake of brevity) his musings on the implied astrology of Moses shifting the stars and planets, the apocalyptic numbers of Daniel and Revelation, and scores of pages on the Kaballah's *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*, סֵפֶר יִצְיִרָה). We will simply note that the diary entries from his final semester of college were primarily of this character.

Apparently, Dasha says, this was a new sort of madness for Thomas. “He still didn’t sleep much, he ate even less, but he was never mean to me. He wouldn’t throw these fits, like I told you about before. That was sort of done.”

It is well-known that people in manic or psychotic episodes will become fixated on religion, often perceiving themselves as gods or prophets of some sort. It is tempting to diagnose Thomas as manic, especially as he framed even personal occurrences at the time in the language of Christianity; for example, he referred to a guest speaker in one history lecture as a “saint” because they explained some features of the American antebellum culture in a way that was novel to him.

But a less pathologizing interpretation is to see the whole episode as a final push to understand “valentin,” her final letter, and her relationship with God. Thomas would have to take on the point of view of a true believer, if Val really had been one for those few months at the shrine, to understand what she had seen. Doing so must have been psychologically taxing, not only because he forced himself into an entire frame of viewing the world that he did not believe in, but also because it would have triggered tragic and traumatic memories of his sister.

Or maybe Dostoyevsky just drove him insane! Who knows which of these interpretations (all, pick two, pick one, none) is accurate, but in any case Thomas appears to have been possessed by one legion or another. Until he finally *got it*.

Once again, it was *Demons* that brought him to the revelation. Among Dostoyevsky's most memorable secondary characters is Kirilov (emphasis on the second syllable), an engineer who states right from his introduction that he will soon kill himself. He is hired to build a bridge in the town in which the story takes place, and seems to have every intention of doing so carefully. He lives a healthy life, always exercising and drinking tea from the samovar, but all along saying he will soon kill himself. Why trust that man to build a bridge? Some characters ask the same question.

His reason for killing himself is intellectual rather than emotional: he will *become* God by *killing* God by killing *himself*. The logic reeks of psychosis at first, but his explanation is sympathetic if not convincing. In brief, Kirilov does not believe in God *per se*, but is instead an individualist who believes that he alone can exercise divine control over his destiny by killing himself. No man, he believes, has ever done so before, because men who kill themselves always do so out of a sense of lost control over their destiny. To intentionally, in right mind, commit suicide *kills God* because it negates his divinity, and lets Kirilov *become God* because he has exerted divine power.

The character is, as all of Dostoyevsky's characters were, a simultaneous parody arguing *against* and steel-man arguing *for* radical atheism; almost a preemptive shot fired at the existentialist thinkers of the next century. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus argues against killing oneself despite the meaningless nature of existence because still one can live intentionally. He argues against Kirilov explicitly, noting that passionately exercising the immediate sense of free will with eyes wide open as to the absurdity of life is good enough:

“Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death – and I refuse suicide.”

My revolt, my freedom, my passion!

Thomas resonated with Kirilov throughout the text (although he ultimately held a belief more similar to Camus’), but he also resonated with Kirilov’s foil: the ex-serf Shatov who does not at heart believe in God, and is not at heart a patriot, but tries as hard as possible to believe in the excellence of the church as a part of the excellence of the motherland. Again, a parody and a steel-man for Russian identitarianism, he has a rich argument with Kirilov about a particularly sticky passage in the bible for our subject (Luke 23:43, KJV):

Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Jesus says this to the beggar, punished alongside him, as he dies on the cross. A nice story, and a memorable one: it may be the first instance of God explicitly allowing a man who lived in sin to enter heaven under minimal conditions, and is a sign that believing in Christ is enough (as the protestants believe) to enter the kingdom of heaven.

One issue – famously, Christ didn’t ascend to heaven until three days after his death. No way was he with the beggar in heaven that day! Did Christ... lie? Let’s ask Thomas:

“valentin - I see it now, I think, although I do not know if it is what you saw. I cannot find a good answer but I can find four good answers: 1) punctuation error, 2) to day not equal to “today,” 3) paradise not equal to heaven, 4) the Christ lied on the cross.

“In case (1) imagine an alternate translation: ‘Verily I say unto thee today COMMA thou ...’ Now that is totally fine, right? Redundant, but fine – He did say it today. Apparently in the Greek there is no punctuation, so I guess they just had to feel it out. The only version of the bible I can find that has the punctuation as ‘today COMMA’ rather than ‘COMMA today’ is the Jehovah’s Witness one, which I don’t trust much, and I figure the other translators must have figured it out right. No, it is likely ‘COMMA today.’

“Case (2) relates to eschatology; humans do not actually enter the kingdom of heaven as they die but later at the end of days. So even if the Christ went to heaven right away, this wouldn’t be true. But the argument is it *feels* like you’re dead for less than a day. This is a goofy argument that ascribes too much metaphor to the text for any real Christian to believe, right?

“Case (3) is perhaps the simplest, but I wish I knew any Greek to back it up. It may be that ‘paradise’ is not heaven, but the inner paradise of accepting the Christ into your heart, which the beggar could do TODAY. But then why the future tense? ‘Will be.’ Not to mention this is in response to the preceding line: ‘Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.’ HEAVEN. Unless the Christ decided on a slick non-sequeter – no, not heaven TODAY, just inner peace TODAY.

“And then (4), the most believable but challenging of the cases: that He LIED, valentin! And I know this is what you believe. I see it now. If He said TODAY but meant ‘it will FEEL like today,’ or if He said PARADISE as a trick to make the beggar think he was going to heaven, or if He said TODAY and meant NOT TODAY, it is at best a TRICK and at worst an outright LIE.

“We know the Christ lived without sin. But I think we also know that He lied.

“The only takeaway: no, we cannot bear false witness, but we CAN tell SOME lies. A lie whose only consequence is to make a dying man feel good. A lie which is not void of truth in spirit, but in content. A lie that has the SHAPE of truth. Am I right, valentin? I believe I’m right. I believe you were right, too.

“But why did you have to die?”

—

Let’s not blame Mr. Dostoyevsky or Mr. Camus or Mr. Kirilov for what happened next. He went home for a long weekend, a humid May weekend, to see his father. “Three lovely days. The boy did nothing but smile, and we talked about his girl and his Ph.D. program, and, you know, a little about how proud his sister would be of him. I told him I loved him and he went off to the train.”

Then Thomas made the headlines, time number two: “Valley Stream Man Struck by Long Island Rail Road Train, Sustains Minor Injuries,” wrote Newsday.

From eyewitness accounts it looked more like a convulsion than a planned attempt at suicide. He was standing close to the West-most side of the platform, meaning that the train was already moving rather slowly by the time he jumped. He was pushed forward by the slow-rolling iron head of the car into the middle of the tracks only a few feet West of the platform, and was recovered within a minute by bystanders. He suffered some bad scrapes and bruises, but no more than that.

We again will stray away from diagnostics, but we would be remiss to not point out the alignment between his psychology and well-studied pathologies. In bipolar patients, it is “mixed episodes” with elements of both mania and depression that are most dangerous, as the patient with some thoughts of suicide will also have both the energy and the lack of inhibition required to, for example, leap in front of a moving train. To step back from the pathologies, we are talking about a man in the deepest psychological contact he has ever had with his sister, dead by suicide, going back to *her* bedroom in *her* New York apartment from *her* old apartment in Valley Stream. All while running on very little sleep.

But we will never know, because Thomas never wrote about it. Thomas did not write again until September.

Chapter 10 – Hypothetical? (Diary Excerpt March 7, 2031)

Spatial resolution. Uncomfort is different from discomfort. There, a bench, here a different bench. Resolved: that bench empty, this bench not, him unresolved from this bench, and it's not so dark but only because of the not-so-natural lights of the buildings 50 or so feet away. He lives in one of those buildings but "going for a walk" can mean walking about 50 feet to a bench some nights and this is one of those nights.

What is he doing at the bench? He is sitting more or less still, only parts of him moving are 1) his upper lip; 2) his jaw; 3) his nostrils. The first twitches uncontrolled, opening and closing the third, while the second grinds, clenches, forwards backwards left right and down but never up. This causes discomfort. This is caused by uncomfort.

To a third party this is all fine because points 1), 2), 3), bench and boy are spatially unresolved, so it does not cause the woman with the dog discomfort as she walks by, nor the man out for a smoke, nor the hypothetical man unresolved from the other bench (again, merely hypothetically). He is glad to be alone in his discomfort but wishes he were not alone in his uncomfort.

Sure, sure, sure, sure.

No worries, no worries, no worries at all.

What he's thinking about? Slow thoughts tonight so he can't quite articulate. Words might come out one at a time rather than more than one at a time, if you catch my drift. Maybe he's thinking in pictures? no. You're thinking in pictures. Maybe he's thinking in – STOP. He is hardly thinking he's acting ACTING. 1), 2) and 3). Convulsing, less-than-half deliberately.

Just kidding, there's a word: disgusted. He's thinking in words? Disgusted. Disgusted by the feeling of his own genitals on his body, they feel cold and tight from nowhere.

But what if? There she is, different girl, specific girl in his mind, overwhelming hips in his hands, distorted tiny torso ahead, no sound, but his hands and her whole back are covered in blood.

No new words, just that the cold tight feeling disappears and he becomes pleased. Disgusting. He seems eased, no more 1), 2), 3). New parts of his body move: a) his penis is becoming erect; b) his knees as he begins to stand up. He wants to deliberately stop a). He thinks about baseball and becomes resolved from the bench in space.

Pizza, 40 feet away. A cigarette. Two thirds through that cigarette he is so disgusted with the idea of smoking a cigarette that he drops it, steps on it to put it out, and feels at ease. 30 more feet, back to home (right... 30 squared and 40 squared make 900 and 1600 make 2500 makes 50 squared, 50 being the distance from bench to apartment). Pizza complete and the return of 2).

Every good story needs a conflict. Yeah true, so what's his? Between his body and mind! Cheesy. REALLY cheesy. Not to mention ridiculous, body is agent of mind completely (this is a dumb riddle "does the body rule the mind, or –" bad riddle as the answer is succinctly "the latter").

Just as well, maybe his is a bad story. He doesn't like conflict very much at all, only engages when necessary, which he deems infrequently, perhaps a bit too often with his girlfriend. Sure, conflict with a girlfriend. A bad story.

So here's his life, a bad story but not too bad a life. A life riddled with pain as much, maybe more? than others', but as distinct and beautiful as much as anyone else's. Distinct, well, he doesn't believe that. Neither do I really.

Hey – who am I? Well the hypothetical man unresolved from that other bench, easy question.

Who is he? Dead enough. Extant in the past alone. Easy question again.

Hm? Harder question.

Man oh man do I feel good.

I'm relieved, but that's only half of it. The other half is guilt, or in part nervousness to clean up a mess, albeit a small one. I mean I'm still out 300 dollars but there are worse ways to spend 300 dollars.

Anyway, yeah, there's a bit of a mess to clean up.

Come on come on come on, Jesus CHRIST, Jesus CHRIST, make it stoop make it stoop, you know.

Chapter 11 – Simplifications

You may be either happy or disappointed to hear that Thomas got better. In a sense.

Dasha recalls:

“After the train accident, they obviously forced him into a hospital for a bit. Just a few days. He seemed woozy when he came out, and I was pretty shocked to see he had agreed to start on some medicine. He wouldn't tell me what it was and he didn't take it for all that long, but he didn't hurt himself almost at all after that. And he might get mad, but he wouldn't call me names. Like... well, like a guy in his early twenties!”

He switched to a new psychotherapist and slowly but surely arrived at a much more stable way of being. He kept to a strict “bed schedule” (not “sleep schedule”) where he would be in bed each night by 11:30 and would get up at earliest at 6:30. The result was not clearly more sleep, but at least more rest and a more strict moderation of his lifestyle. It seemed to work: while his sleep paralysis would still strike (as it would for his entire life), it did so far less often.

He similarly forced himself to eat at least 1500 calories per day, and necessarily in three meals with intake increased by random snacking if necessary. Whatever discipline and time management skills allowed him to succeed in the Ivy League seemed to transfer quickly to following his new rules. And maybe he had learned a bit from his life as a Jew, as he also imposed more arbitrary restrictions: no meat with lunch, no carbs with breakfast, pizza at most twice per week.

Thomas stabilized, but this is not to say he was cured of his ailments. One semi-pathology remained: he could not step on the brakes. Once he entered graduate school in August, he rediscovered the pattern he had in his undergraduate studies: long days of work with writing and reading and socializing all crammed into one (now forcedly seventeen-hour) day. The theorem he was asked to prove by Prof. Nakamura was not particularly interesting to him on its face, but he seemed to enjoy the difficulty of struggling with a multi-year problem. One may recall his delusion of the matrix to invert that became larger each time he looked at it again – now that was his life, and he had control of much of his body and much of his mind.

However, his social life turned over as often happens for students leaving college. Now a mathematician, his job was functionally to live in the library and communicate almost exclusively with one stoic and pragmatic professor. People, including Thomas, have little to say about this man save that he was 1) very smart, and 2) a bit scary. He was not to be charmed by Thomas because *anyone* charming this man was out of the question. Under him, Thomas *had* to work if he wanted to earn his Ph.D. – perhaps that was a good thing.

Outside of the library, Thomas did spend plenty of time with Dasha, but he felt some severe lack of fraternity in his graduate program: “In college, he was always working with a group of four or five people in one room, and maybe they also did impressions of the professors and complain about school and how much work they had to do, but there were always people around,” Dasha recalls. “Then he had me, and all those people from college kind of went away to work at defense contractors or start-ups or whatever.”

Except for one person: Chloe Azad. Chloe was another physics undergraduate at Columbia who used to be in the circle of complaints and impressions, and then stayed at the university to work on a Ph.D. in astrophysics. She shared quite a few attributes of Thomas': she enjoyed history, philosophy and the arts, she was both extroverted and lonely in her Ph.D. program, and she was gifted at mathematics and science.

Unlike Thomas, she actually had a goal; she wanted to win a Nobel prize. As close to unattainable as it was, she deliberately moved through life with this end goal in mind. In college, that meant all of the things Thomas refused to do: joining professional societies, writing for the school newspaper, and working in a top laboratory as an undergraduate research assistant to get her name on big multi-author publications.

The two were not particularly close in college but were friendly enough to keep in touch, and struggling with the same loss, they agreed to meet for weekly 9:00 AM breakfasts on Saturdays. The two were quick to pick up on the basics of one another's projects and enjoyed passing ideas back and forth, but also enjoyed arguing about politics (Chloe was a fervent communist) or talking about their relationships (Chloe was a serial romantic). The scheduling of weekly meals as if they were meetings was, of course, part of Thomas' master plan to not kill himself.

"I hate to say that I was jealous," Dasha admits, "but here's this beautiful, smart young woman who planned one-on-one dates with my boyfriend every week, right?" Thomas was never

unfaithful to Dasha, precisely, although he describes enjoying the “subtle flirtations that underscore all conversations between men and women.” Perhaps irrelevant, Thomas did not consider Chloe to be particularly attractive; he calls her “a shapeless woman with too big a face in every sense.”

But the “subtle flirtations” and “planned one-on-one dates” did bother an already conflicted Dasha; the passion in their relationship had slipped not only because the passion in almost *every* relationship slips after years together, but also because the explosions were driving some of the passion. How do you square that with wanting to see your partner grow?

You find new problems. Among the lesser of these new problems was the fear of Thomas’ love for another woman. “Intellectually, I knew men and women could be friends.” She let out a sigh.

One night, Chloe invited Thomas to try Brazilian Jiu Jitsu after work; a gym by the university had free intro classes for students. Thomas agreed, thinking it would be like the karate classes he briefly took as a young boy. He did not realize that Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is a grappling martial art, where you largely lie on the ground locking legs with your partner and rocking about. It is hard, even as mature adults, not to read *some* sexual tension into the sport, and yes, especially if they are man and woman. Intellectually we shouldn’t, but ... we can all let out a sigh!

It is not clear whether Chloe knew what jiu jitsu class would entail, but this is more-or-less irrelevant. Dasha *did* know what jiu jitsu class entailed. When she learned her boyfriend and this large-faced temptress spent an hour foot-to-thigh, she threw a fit and left Thomas alone for the night.

The greatest of the relationship's new problems was not that Thomas was rolling on the floor with the wrong woman – it was that Dasha began drinking again. At the start she did well to keep this a secret, but eventually the problem was sufficiently out-of-hand that she would drink, fall asleep, and miss planned dinners or trips to museums. After two or three such events, Thomas became suspicious and asked for an explanation. Dasha, not really inclined to lie, told Thomas the truth. He might have preferred to hear something else.

These developing issues forced “new Thomas” to navigate a relationship with turned tides – he had been the troubled one, the one in pain, and this was carved into his identity as a partner. But his strict scheduling made it challenging to flip the polarity. He was not willing, for example, to go out to Brooklyn to help a troubled Dasha feel prioritized. The train ride home might be delayed and break his 11:30 PM curfew, and staying over at her apartment was out of the question. It also did not help that the only person he would talk about these issues with was Chloe Azad.

How on earth, then, did it come to be that Dasha and Thomas were engaged to be married? Simple: he proposed to her, and she said yes. “It was soon before he got his degree. He knew he was about to graduate, he had his job lined up, and I think we both knew it was what we were supposed to do. But it was never really going to happen. Maybe he really didn’t realize that, but it seemed pretty fucking obvious to me.”

Thomas, once again, got the job at Mount Sinai without effort – he visited there for a guest lecture and Dr. Hu liked his talk. As a man to be dubbed “doctor” with a prestigious job in the cards, he decided that he *should* find a nice apartment and he *should* get married and he *should* move in with his fiancée, and he *should* be fine. He had simplified his life to *shoulds* and *musts*, a man of order, as he believed a man should be. An adult.

But as the dualists and Jungians know, people seek (well, they believe *need*) a balance of order and chaos in their lives. The old Thomas was getting a healthy dose of chaos from within, and order from his course requirements. New Thomas had only chaos from Dasha, who herself was in almost complete disorder; she had no job, lived with an “artists collective” (a trade term for a group of people with no job and access to drugs), and was battling addiction. Thomas needed to lock in the mental anguish caused by his relationship so that he had something, anything.

As we know he moved in, alone, to his adult apartment, with his adult chair, where he made his adult shrine to his adult ex-fiancée, and he filled it with mice that had baby mice that

grew into adult mice, and then he bought his adult breakfast table and his adult folding chairs. And now we're back to where we started.

There were only two people who ever saw the mouse room in full operation. One of them was Chloe Azad, who would remain by Thomas' side through and well past the breaking of his engagement. They kept up their weekly breakfast meetings. He even once took her all the way to the Cabrini Shrine to see the saint's mummified body, and then to the park to show her the tree that his sister was found hanging from so many years earlier.

When we asked Dasha what she knew about Valentina Kelly, she said: "Who is that?"

Dasha was not entirely wrong to be jealous of Chloe Azad. She and Thomas never touched outside of the one jiu jitsu class (save infrequent sympathetic hugs), but the two did share an emotional connection far deeper than the one Thomas had built with Dasha. Thomas would never have been capable of speaking openly about his sister with Dasha because he saw her as a partner, a caretaker, a care-needer, and a woman. Chloe was his brother.

Chapter 12 – Notes After a Therapy Session (Diary Excerpt September 4, 2035)

She said one sign of a differentiating person is that they realize they often feel emotions without rationale. I say one sign of an integrating person is that they realize how to add up the area under their ideas and subtract out those that are negative. In some sense the secret to doing or making something I like might be in being a differentiating (she says) integrating (I say) person.

Differentiating in that I know when I am a bastard and that I will do things a bastard would, and also that when I am whatever the opposite might be (fathered?) that I may actually tend to enjoy any garbage that spins out of my pen in the same way I seem to enjoy each individual crack in the pavement. Integrating in that I incorporate that it was good to be straightforward and that it is fine to act in that way a scientist (Richard Huelsenbeck) might; in that brevity is not a necessity; but in those brief moments of automatism (a snail is a camel designed by a committee) you might meet brevity on its face with straightforwardness and that's the only real output any scientist could read from the psychic; add that in too. The best creator is an integrating and differentiating automaton, a result clear from integration.

Part 2 – Shadow Puppets

The trees lit from below

Look like the face of those telling ghost stories.

This one talks about the big bang, those clustered over there

Talk Manhattan in eager, even tones.

- *David Longstreth*

Chapter 13 – Compute the Area Under this Curve

As an idiosyncratic man often bound inside his own mind, it is easy to forget that the Thomas Kelly we learned of in the first part of the present work really was a product of his time. We considered only what was absolutely necessary in terms of cultural elements (e.g. school choice, child psychiatry, fourth wave feminism, the 2020 pandemic), but a more complete sense of the zeitgeist is required to understand not only the man but the world he came to change. So now we will move away from, or rather *above* Thomas to gain a view of this world, this America, this New York.

Perhaps the original sin of the twenty-first century was catastrophizing. This is not to say there were no catastrophes or imminent catastrophes – there were the September eleventh attacks, scores of yearly shootings at schools, and a pandemic that killed more than one million Americans – but each real catastrophe was modulated by boy-who-cried-wolf phenomena regarding the dozens of other “catastrophes” that had not manifested in effects on the lives of most American people.

At least that was the opinion of one important man: former three-term New York mayor and failed presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg. He wrote in 2035 (at 93 years of age):

“To build that distrust of academics, and in turn gain more votes, the Republicans only had to repeat things that well-intentioned scientists said twenty years prior. The Rockaways, they told us, would be underwater by 2020. Manhattan would be uninhabitable by 2025. So why were

we happily going to the beach with our families every summer? Why was there still plenty of food? And didn't scientists say climate change would cause a second pandemic some time soon? Where was that? And what does that tell you about the first one?"

The fact that this mechanism of vote accumulation worked in the face of real natural disasters and pandemics was surprising to so many people that it spawned an absurd amount of articles with titles like "Making Sense of the Trump Voter," "Why People *Really* Voted for Trump," or "What Trump Voters *Really* Care About." This carried on for decades without any real agreement reached among educated coastal Americans as to how to combat the Republican strategy.

The core flaw with Mayor Bloomberg's reasoning was the most common flaw in analysis of electoral politics: "they did it too." Republicans obsessively generated catastrophes – President Trump claimed Haitian migrants were eating cats in a 2024 presidential debate, New York Mayor Corey claimed that congestion pricing was responsible for a series of three helicopter crashes in 2026, the entire Republican party agreed that voting machines in all 50 states were rigged by the Venezuelan government and cancelled congressional elections in 1934. "The 2020 election was stolen" and "Manhattan will be underwater by 2025" are equivalently false claims – why does the validity of the first claim not matter on election day?

Maybe, some writers suggested, it was because of unpopular policy positions from Democrats. "Identity politics" issues were big in those days – issues regarding racial and gender equity, diversity and other nice-sounding and morally weighty ideals. On the important side of

this issue, the party was in favor of racially biased hiring and school admission; this was incredibly unpopular even within the black communities it was ostensibly meant to benefit. On the dumber side, it was important for about six years that we capitalize the b in “black” when referring to black people (nee lowercase-b black, nee African-American, nee Negro). It was said that the second Trump victory was in part earned by an advertisement showing his opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris, suggesting the government should pay for gender reassignment surgeries for prisoners and allow males in women’s prisons. This was a remarkably radical and indigestible idea for a vast majority of Americans, lifelong Democrats included.

But again, “they did it too.” The Republicans, when they finally took absolute power in 2024, were running on many unpopular policies. Most Americans did not want to gut the Department of Education and Securities Exchange Commission, dismantle social security, reduce corporate taxes or overturn the Affordable Care Act.

So maybe it was because there was one big issue that Americans thought was *really* important – immigration – on which they preferred the Republican “mass deportation now” policy rather than the Democrat policy of letting in millions of migrants through shoddy interpretations of asylum laws.

Or maybe not! Maybe, as one semi-prominent thinker at the time named Matt Yglesias said, the elections were just like every other election in recent history. The economy was rough under Biden for a bit, so they picked the other guy (whoever he was).

How many of these arguments do we have to hear before we say: “nobody knows how democracy actually works.” Maybe a vaguely authoritarian demagogue was the desire of the American people, but nobody really knows and probably nobody ever will. What we do know is that whatever the cause(s), Trump and his First Republicans took absolute power in 2024, and they would not lose that power until the very end of our story.

This created a sense of discomfort (uncomfort?) among progressive Americans, but not exactly *shock*. When Trump earned his second term, prices continued to rise (especially under massive tariffs against most US allies and China), funding was slashed from many regulatory agencies and grant providers, and there were mass deportations. Upsetting! But if you were not a migrant or a person working on government grant money or working for the government itself, your life probably continued to proceed as normal. Albeit, you probably paid a bit more for chocolate.

Academics, under the largest threats, have never been good fighters and quickly folded; labs lost funding, people lost jobs, and graduate students had their programs terminated. Still, these people were highly educated and could now find jobs in a bloated private sector instead of a bloated university. Lowish-, middle- and upper-class Americans were completely, *completely* fine. The idea that most Americans lived paycheck-to-paycheck should have implied that rising prices would drop a massive number of people into the lowest class – the *negative* class of people who had more debt than they had assets – but that statistic was inflated given it included middle class Americans who put 100% of their paychecks into mutual funds and mortgage

payments on nice houses. So many people continued to pay their rents and mortgage payments while putting a little less money into a booming market. Was this all that bad?

Well, yes! Outside of the philosophical disagreements we may take with ignoring the Constitution, deleting government agencies, undermining freedom of the press and pausing democracy, there were lives lost as a result of the First Republicans.

Domestically, it is certain that people died from lack of access to price-gouged medications, but these numbers are hard to verify. Disinformation on vaccines is estimated to have cost at least three-thousand lives due to outbreaks of measles and meningitis.

The effects abroad were even more significant. At least five-thousand deported migrants died of dengue fever in makeshift camps in Central America, and perhaps as many as one hundred thousand Africans died of diseases that would have otherwise been managed under programs that had previously been funded by the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians and Azeris died in battles to maintain independence against an emboldened Russian Federation – battles that they lost.

This is a severe human cost, yet if you were a somewhat financially stable American citizen, you may not have even noticed these horrors if you did not read the news. Again, there were many journalists shouting that people may be shot for speaking out against the administration or that the dollar would lose almost all of its value in the next three years (no

matter what year it was), all while people kept on publicly speaking out against the administration and the dollar remained a dollar.

Consumer prices did rise modestly, as price-gouging and monopolizing became all but legal. Yet the stock market steadily climbed; companies with poor products, products of declining quality, or no product at all gained value in a market that was breaking the minds of economists around the globe.

If you were in control of a large franchise, Cheeseburger Palace, with storefronts in all fifty states in 2005, and you saw that year after year revenue was declining, you might try a few things. Maybe you would try to innovate a bit and make a more desirable Cheeseburger or Palace. Failing that, maybe you downsize. Still sliding? You would file for the correct chapter of bankruptcy and find a new job.

If you ran this same company in 2028, you would probably just try to make friends with the president. You promise to hold your Cheeseburger Conventions at a Trump hotel? Don't worry about the revenue too much. We'll cook up a ten-billion dollar cheeseburger grant for ensuring the success of the American cheeseburger, and don't worry, it's yours. Let's see how the liberal losers at Cheeseburger Collective like that. And then you hire more vice presidents and go to White House dinners.

A natural consequence was that products became markedly *worse*, because they were no longer driven by the pressures of a free market. The “AI boom” of the mid-twenties is an

enlightening example. Generative artificial intelligence took American people by surprise when they learned it could write essays on almost any topic as well as a high school B student, and could write code in hundreds of programming languages as well as a university B student. And it was free!

The big AI companies did a good job of convincing both investors and the world that this was the “next big thing” in technology, and it probably felt true for the first few years. After that honeymoon period, however, it was clear that the technology was *cool* but was highly limited in use due to its tendency to hallucinate (i.e. generate fake information), or perhaps even more due to the fact that consumers did not like almost any of the applications of AI beyond writing essays and programs. Its integration into a product in almost all cases *devalued* that product for the user. Nobody really wanted often-wrong AI summaries at the tops of search results or an AI helper constantly commenting on the formatting of a slideshow. All the things they did want from the technology were being given away for free.

Isn't this a free market problem with a free market solution? Maybe if you are Mr. Microsoft (or Ms. Microsoft), don't spend tens of billions on an application your users find annoying. Maybe if you are an AI company, you respond to Mr./Ms. Microsoft by saying “it's not you, it's me” and you downsize or file for the proper chapter of bankruptcy. Or maybe you just tell the president “we'll make sure our AI chatbot only says nice things about you” and he gives you all of the money you ask for. Hello, vice presidents! Hello, White House dinners!

As we know, these policies did eventually lead to disaster, but in the decades between the rise and fall of the First Republicans, the general sense among somewhat-well-to-do Americans was that prices were a bit high, investments were doing pretty well, and everything just felt kind of... worse.

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Among the elements that got worse were electronic technology and the internet. The breakdown of Moore's law (a "rule" in electrical engineering proposing an exponential growth in the number of transistors that could fit into an integrated circuit of a given surface area) meant that the capabilities of most hardware owned by average people flatlined; this was not even close to the biggest issue. The level at which the technology flatlined was far higher than what almost anyone needed, and companies willing and able to pay the costs and power bills just bought *more* rather than *better* servers and processing units each year. Still, it felt like computers were getting worse, and that smartphones were getting worse.

Once again, this is the breakdown of the free market that comes with crony capitalism and insurmountable barriers of entry for smaller companies. If a company producing a laptop computer wanted it to be useable only while online so that it could track keystrokes, and that tracking program took up a good amount of RAM, and other pieces of unremovable bloatware taking up more RAM were installed before purchase, your computer was simply worse out of the box. There was an attempt among some consumers to shift towards open-source Linux-based

operating systems, but some computers came with protections that made it difficult to switch from Windows or MacOS. Only very tech-savvy people were able to make the switch.

The web, so popular in the years prior, also got much worse with decreased moderation leading to most posts, sites, replies and advertisements being created and interacted with by generative AI and webscraping bots. To create, operate, or arrive at a human-run site with human-only comments became so difficult that many people just gave up on anything other than large streaming services. The people still using social media sites were increasingly interacting with non-humans. With financial crimes being very unlikely to be investigated, they were also often victims of scams.

The solution was a collection of services that came to be known as “SlimNets,” or simply “Nets.” Each SlimNet was itself an internet, but heavily monitored as to be friendly to its human user base. Most nets were pay-to-use, as the upkeep required scaled linearly with the number of sites and the number of users. Common rules included bans on bots, bans on hate speech, bans on mis- or dis-information, etc., but in a highly polarized political climate, there was much disagreement on what counted as hate speech or mis-information. The result was a shift from right- and left-wing echo chambers on large platforms (where they would still see and interact with “the other side”) to right- and left-wing *internets*. There were a few non-political nets, but those were mostly for pornography. While a few SlimNets persist today, they have very small user bases and most readers likely have never heard of them. Those that failed brought all of their data down with the ship, to the frustration of many historians and journalists who had found it easy in earlier days to trace digital footprints on the world-wide web.

A decay in technological progress and production, effectively pausing the search for a cure for cancer, a more explicitly religious government – were these the dark ages coming for America? Perhaps this was a twilight age. You probably had a job, you could still say what you wanted to say (even if a few journalists and non-citizen protesters got thrown in prison now and again), you still had a refrigerator and a microwave, and you even had the option to vaccinate your children for polio. Maybe autocracy was just *kinda* bad.

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Unfortunately we can't say for sure if New Yorkers were pro- or anti-First Republican, as their last real mayoral election was in 2025 – just months after the explosive beginning of President Trump's second term. The elected mayor, former Governor Andrew Cuomo, had already been removed from his last elected position due to a tame-for-the-time sexual harassment scandal, but New Yorkers were apparently willing to forgive him and happy to dispose of the Trump-backed fraudster Mayor Eric Adams.

Only a few months into his term, his unwillingness to end a modest congestion pricing policy saw him forced from office by the Trump administration and replaced with “interim Mayor” Jessica Corey. Corey remained mayor until her assassination thanks to sham elections in which she often claimed to earn more than 80% of the vote.

She had been a nobody prior to her appointment – unless, that is, you count having a vaguely popular pro-Trump X account and owning six delis on Staten Island as being a “somebody.” As a boilerplate First Republican, she did whatever Trump told her to do for her first decade in office. Michael Bloomberg writes in the above-quoted essay:

“2035 is not a strange year to be a New Yorker, *per se*, but it was a strange year to have been a New Yorker for a long time. The September 11th attacks, the 2008 recession, the coronavirus pandemic and the migrant crisis of the mid 2020s had created a population of an already-dynamic city that was so used to constant upheaval that it was trivial to manufacture more crises. Dis-, de-, re- and plain old regulation by the Corey administration contributed to the wave of mistrust they successfully rode in on.”

Perhaps the most obvious example was the re-proliferation of cigarette use in the city, which by 2025 was at an impressive low. One of Corey’s first moves as mayor was to reduce the age at which cigarette purchase was legal to 18 and lifted the ban on advertisement for tobacco companies. Even high schoolers smoked because there was no fear of legal recourse for selling cigarettes to minors, and billboards with ads for American Spirits made it harder to quit.

Why? A now-long-debunked 2026 study claimed that prolonged cigarette use greatly reduced the risk of developing symptoms from COVID-19, confirming a 2020 crackpot theory believed by smokers alone. Concurrently, the American tobacco industry was at threat thanks to the trade war with China, and they needed new customers. The strategy – make friends with Trump – worked very well. The president framed the decades of attacks on our great American

tobacco industry as a deep state conspiracy driven by Democrats with financial ties to anti-cigarette advocacy groups.

Most New Yorkers were still well aware that smoking caused cancer, and many thought the new laws were idiotic... probably? Although a historically progressive city, New York was shifting Trump-ward (we hesitate to say *rightward*) even when elections were fair, so it is unlikely that Mayor Corey was received poorly by all of her constituents. While we will never know the numbers, the lead-up to the 2037 mayoral election showed that a significant portion of the electorate was in the mood for radical change away from her administration, but we will have to leave that story for a later chapter.

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While we have tried to get across the fact that we cannot really know the reasons for the electorate's shift towards the First Republicans, or if/why the electorate continued to like them once they were in office, we will happily play Monday morning quarterback regarding the reasons they were able to so easily seize absolute power once they swept the 2024 election.

As a child, one of the first things you realize is that rules and expectations are not real. A child who goes against his/her mother's orders and eats three chocolate chip cookies instead of two quickly learns that s/he has full control of the real, and that mother's words are only words. This is something we generally unlearn, as to be a good member of a society, a family, a friend group, requires *pretending* rules and expectations are real because they have consequences that

are real. In the case of this child, the mother can say “all right, now I will never buy chocolate chip cookies again,” and the cookie vacuum is real. As an adult, you can certainly kill your spouse; the laws are not real because they do not stop you from doing so; but jail *is* real, and being a social pariah *is* real.

This is so obvious that it feels childish to even write it down, but given the events of these decades, it feels important. When a judge tells you that you cannot do something, the threat is in the realm of the real. But if you are (hypothetically) the president, you might simply reject the threat. You might even fire the judge, and let him/her face that real consequence. As Andrew Jackson once said on cruelly removing American Indians from their land: “John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it.”

This is because power *is* real. If we frame the parties at the time as one (the Democratic party) that is committed to the reality of precedents and laws and other such words, and one (the Republican party) as one that is convinced of the unreality of these words, it is clear that the Republicans were correct! What could Democrats say but “hey, we have words that say you can’t do that!” Without power (real), the words (unreal) hold emotional weight, but bear no consequences (real). And if your party members, your voters, your senators, remain steadfastly committed to the words, regardless of if they are quite good words, there’s really nothing you can do in the face of the real.

In this light, it is actually surprising how rarely constitutional crises have occurred in America; it speaks to the strength of our ability as a species to respect the unreal. In the twenties,

generations of adults were forced to unlearn the reality of the word, and such a massive collective psychological overturn *must* cause civil unrest... right?

Not really. The First Republicans were generally fine with protests against their government; they were disparaging, but they never mobilized the military against citizens involved in peaceful marches. A march, as we know, is unreal. There were no real protests to speak of, that is, no protests with power.

Why not? To lead the reader to something resembling an answer, maybe we should zoom in again – not on Thomas but on a stereotypical American man in 2031 by the name of John Doe. John lives in interesting times. John hates the president, hates the government, hates corporations, but more than that he hates his job, he hates his wife, he loves his mother. He divorces, his mother passes away, he moves into her house and lives there without moving a single piece of furniture, leaving the same sheets and blankets on the bed, sleeping on top of them for the rest of his life. He goes to work. He feeds his cat in the morning. His cat dies. So it goes.

Chapter 14 – Whose Empire? (Diary Excerpt May 2, 2037)

It has been said that this is the Empire State, the Empire *City*. But whose empire? Was it Andrew Cuomo's empire, when he was laughed out of office not once but twice? Was it Donald Trump's empire when he built his hotels, his towers, and installed his own puppet mayor? Is it his puppet mayor's empire today? Empire, a sick word in a constitutional democracy, but so we have been for centuries the Empire State, and now we have grown into the name once more. I say: if it is someone's empire indeed, then it will be my empire.

Capital

It has been said that our city is both the wealthiest and the poorest in our great nation. I say, if we have the poorest then we are the poorest. If we have the wealthiest then they are the creators of the poorest, simply by definition of rich and poor. Ought we continue to be the poorest? No, let the Sunshine State (where we export some of our greatest people well earlier than their expiration dates) be the poorest. Let our city be the wealthiest.

The Marxist will tell you that to do so we must forcibly redistribute wealth – where is his mechanism? Not in our empire, at the least. No, we must use our mechanisms to achieve our means, lest we destroy our system from within. I say: let us merely perturb the rules of taxation, so that the wealthy who already avoid their taxes may avoid their taxes in more productive ways!

It is said that you may avoid your taxes through charity. I say: let them avoid their taxes through charity alone. But charity may only be framed as a direct transfer of wealth to another man or woman – a man or woman of the negative class. Then will we be the wealthiest, with every dollar of a New Yorker being still the dollar of a New Yorker. Is this not true charity?

It is said that free market problems have free market solutions. Let any New Yorker tell you that our free market problems have free market solutions! What is the free market solution to the man who cannot engage in his free market? I say: it is our duty to allow him to engage in his free market! Only through redistribution, and only through fair redistribution within the boundaries of our great system, will the market be free.

Crime

It is said that our emperor is “tough on crime,” but let one New Yorker tell you the city is tough on crime! On my daily stroll along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, I see the drug user. Is he not committing a crime? I see the man who breaks the speed limit. Is he not committing a crime? I sit in my room and read the paper, and see the man who commits the Ponzi scheme, or trades on insider information. Is he not committing a crime?

Our police, more powerful than the militaries of many lesser nation states, pay no attention to these crimes. They only tend to the more obvious of the crimes – acts of terror, domestic abuse, armed robberies – crimes indeed! But not those crimes of the white collar, or

those crimes of the depraved user. I say: either sell the weapons and give the money to the poorest, or be truly tough on crime!

New Jersey

It is said that our nation is founded on the rights of the states. Let one New Yorker tell you that our state's rights are not stripped and abused by the residents of the Garden State! Consider the George Washington Bridge – that stable marvel of inspirational, vacant architecture that spans Empire River and connects our Empire State to the Least State. Should they benefit from our good will? Our strength to build bridges and tunnels? Our status as the financial capital of the world? To take our money, our goods, and ferry them across the border to be taxed by a government that has not once built anything of beauty or magnificence?

I say: if we consider ourselves “Empire,” then let us act as an empire. We have the right to tax our own cops, yet our cops are from New Jersey. We have the right to charge these men and women for our great pavement, and yet our mayor refuses to put a price on their rape of our most valuable islands. Make it that they are ours, or do not allow them in without paying a steep price for being the colonizers they pretend not to be.

Transit

It is said that the transit system of New York was once a wonder of the world. Let one New Yorker tell you it is a wonder of the world! On the train or bus, I hear the stereo, I see the

drug user, I see the cigarette smoker, I encounter the signal problem, I sit in the traffic, I sit in the hot train car without air conditioning, I feel the collective pain of the commuter who still believes in the law and the social contract. I *am* the commuter who still believes in the law and the social contract.

Where is our military-strength policeman? Where is our (private) contractor, hired to fix the air conditioning or the signal problem? Where, pray tell, is our Second Avenue subway that has been promised to us for one hundred and fifty years! I say, let us never again be home to a train system that embarrasses our great city in the eyes of the Chinese and the European! Let the trains be the priority of our empire!

Education

It is said that the New York public education system produces ill-prepared students. Let one New Yorker tell you the student of Stuyvesant is ill-prepared! But indeed, our lesser schools, so overfunded but underperforming, are an embarrassment to our city. I say: let each student be the student of Stuyvesant.

I say: do away with the administrator! It is absurd that the number of administrators, each of them a crony of the emperor, has soared as the number of educators has stabilized. This money for the administrator should go where? Half to the teacher and half to the train!

It is said that the chronic absenteeism rate is the cause of poor student performance in the Bronx. Let one New Yorker tell you this is a problem with our school system! It is quite clear that this problem is a result of chronically absent cultural values. The mother who does not care if her child attends mathematics class is not devoted to the wellbeing of her children, nor is she devoted to the wellbeing of our great city. Let her be prosecuted, as she is the problem with the education of our children – not the money, not the teacher, but the mother!

Vaccines

It has been said that the vaccine is a dangerous tool. Let one New Yorker say his vaccinated child has contracted the measles! The vaccine should be the pride of New York – we have been at the center of the battle against polio, the source of the first life-saving coronavirus vaccines!

I say: revive the New York industry of scientific innovation that has made us among the most admirable cities in the world! I say: inoculate the damned children who die each winter from the preventable disease! I say: what does more harm to a free market than *regulation* of our most powerful industries, or *indirect murder* of our future free market participants. I say: *godspeed* pharmaceutical companies!

I SAY: THIS WILL BE MY EMPIRE. YOUR EMPIRE. THE PEOPLE'S EMPIRE.

Chapter 15 – My Empire!

We return to our pathetic subject, waking up after his long night of buying chairs. He was balancing the role of chaos in his life, and like all young men, doing a bad job of it. His new schedule and commute undermined his 11:30 bedtime rule, and the rest of the self-imposed restrictions dissolved soon after. Unfortunately, they were only words.

Still, he tried to grab on to some regular practices. He could not bring himself to keep a real schedule at the lab, but there were fixed times he had to teach and he still maintained his “dates” with Chloe. Besides his mice, his only hobbies were reading and writing, which he did during “work hours” and on his bus and train rides. We know that reading appears to have destabilized Thomas’ life before, but now it was writing that tossed him into a chaos nobody could have predicted: he was accidentally running for mayor.

Thomas was a subscriber to a mid-sized SlimNet called ZAstr, named both after the prophet Zoroaster and the word “disaster.” The user base was mostly goofy intellectuals who were willing to pay twenty dollars a month to run and read personal blogs. There were restrictions on “how nice” your site could look – you had access to only basic HTML and CSS functionality to avoid the possibility of web development companies making any money off of ZAstr. The authors had to use their legal names and send identifying information to moderators when creating an account; this helped to avoid bots, but also generated a sense of legitimacy to ZAstr pages that was not present on anonymous platforms.

Thomas gained a solid following of about ten-thousand readers on his blog, a black-text-on-white-background site without frills on which he posted select writings from his diaries. People liked that it was never clear if his stories were fact or fiction; he was called a “neosurrealist” by one fan, and a “Louis Aragon wannabe” by one critic.

His post titled *Whose Empire?* which precedes this chapter is one of his more straightforward works – it is a satirical fantasy about owning New York, probably inspired by realizing “the Empire State” is a funny name. Most elements of the essay are not-so-subtle jabs at Mayor Corey (she had recently suggested cutting one half of education funding to build more routes for cars to come into the city, she had famously revoked the congestion pricing rules that made commuting from New Jersey more expensive, etc.).

And yet, it was taken seriously by a handful of followers as a serious bid to run for mayor. Many lauded his aggressive leftist transportation policies and nods to wealth redistribution, while others slammed his demonization of drug users. Some appreciated his tough-on-crime stances while objecting to his plans for redistribution of wealth. Others, probably *most* regular readers, got the joke.

The article was lifted and reposted to other Nets, both right- and left-wing, to spread the word about his candidacy. Whether this was a disorganized prank by his followers or a deliberate endorsement by people who didn't know any better, it took less than a month before a campaign formed without his knowledge or input, and with a catchy slogan: My Empire!

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ZAstr had a reputation for being on the liberal side, but was not explicitly political; there were rules against using the Net for political campaigning. As this was the only SlimNet Thomas used outside of work, he did not realize his fake candidacy at first. People on other platforms were already taking donations for a campaign fund that did not exist, and to give some sense that they were not scammers, these people bought some billboard ad space and hung up some posters.

Imagine the surreal feeling when you find a campaign ad for *yourself* while walking to your workplace, realizing people on the bus were looking at *you*: mayoral candidate Thomas Kelly.

Thomas, although a loud and extroverted man, was always a bit fearful of being in the public eye. He did not like giving talks for academic conferences, he did not like having tracking software on phones and computers (he was one of the people bright enough to run Linux), and he did not like using his real name online. ZAstr was an exception he was willing to make because he was generally proud of what he posted there, and the moderators were friendly and communicative. Still, if he had been born ten years prior, he would have written the same works under a pseudonym. Perhaps, then, this story would include not only a fake candidacy but a fake candidate.

But no, he was a real candidate, although not legally; you had to fill out some paperwork to register as a candidate for mayor, which he would never do. When he received a call from the Corey administration telling him to back down or face a brutal character assassination, he said in aggressive frustration that he was *not* running for mayor, *not* registered to run for mayor, *not* taking campaign donations and *not* buying ad space.

Thomas took down every post on his ZAstr page and replaced them with a single sentence: Thomas Kelly is *not* running for mayor, and *Whose Empire?* is a work of fiction.

Scammer Kelly campaign operatives cynically spun this as a genius political tactic; in a world of rigged elections, it looks better if it is undeniable that the popular movement is forming organically around his ideas. What better way than to publish a manifesto and then decline to run? There were apparently enough true believers that despite Thomas' efforts, his campaign waged on.

While Dr. Hu and his department chair at BMCC were bothered at first, they were intelligent enough to register the essay as satirical fiction. There was some internal battle among administrators to fire Thomas, but it was decided in both cases to keep him on and release institution-wide emails stating that 1) Dr. Kelly was not a mayoral candidate, 2) Dr. Kelly was a valuable member of the community, and 3) the institutions were committed to free speech, and supported Dr. Kelly's right to pen political satire if he so desired.

Thomas was, for once in his life, very happy that there were no more free elections in New York. There was no chance he could win, and as he did not appear in debates (or even on the ballot!), he sidestepped a lot of the brutal Corey slander tactics that she was so famous for. At most, he was mentioned in a throwaway line now and then: “My radical leftist opponents, like Paul Neuren and Thomas Kelly, want to make crime legal again in New York!”

This is not to say he avoided the public eye – his name was on billboards! He initially refused to take interviews (and instructed his family and co-workers to do the same) because he did not want to in any way legitimize his candidacy. Finally fed up, he contacted the New York Times in September to set up an article with a very specific focus: “Is the Kelly Campaign a Scam? Kelly Says ‘Yes.’”

The article was a nice piece of investigative journalism informed by a long conversation with Thomas. As the Times had subscriptions to hundreds of SlimNets, they were able to trace account names that collected funds for the fake campaign.

“Dr. Kelly suggests prosecution. ‘This sort of thing should really bother New Yorkers,’ he said, ‘and I think it should really bother Mayor Corey.’”

The Corey administration was not at all bothered, and in fact seemed happy to let the Kelly campaign wage on. It was a genuine example of semi-psychotic opposition. Really? *These* were the people challenging the mayor? If her enemies were this deranged, maybe she was not all that bad.

Many “reasonable” people recognized that Thomas was something of a victim, being used by opportunistic scammers to make an estimated three million dollars that he did not see a penny of. It is easy, then, to judge the people who *didn't* see that. This would mean judging the majority of the electorate for their response to a broken system that did nothing more than cultivate mistrust, including Corey/Trump supporters and “Kellyists” willing to repeat and maybe even believe obvious lies. What else could be expected when most political claims had been obvious lies for decades?

Perhaps this is too sympathetic to the median voter, but sympathetic or not, the result was real. Thomas did not become mayor, but on the cold November day on which we are waking up with him, he was to receive a staggering number of write-in votes. We will never know the real numbers because Corey always claimed inflated majorities, but even by her skewed numbers he came in at 12% – almost one million votes. Thomas was now a *real* politician, which would have *real* consequences.

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Thomas had made rules about not looking at news regarding the election for the entire month of November. Even when his coworkers or Chloe brought it up in conversation – perhaps even while sitting by a billboard with his face on it – he would impatiently ask if they could speak about anything else. This was all immensely frustrating to him, not for professional or

social or philosophical reasons, but for a very selfish reason indeed: recall that Thomas was trying to find a new girlfriend.

What could Thomas do if his dating profile came with a picture of the guy on the billboards? On the Nets? In the New York Times? He would be worse off using a fake picture, as it would not be optimal to meet a woman expecting a different man only to learn he was failed mayoral candidate Thomas Kelly. No, he would have to use his real face, and better to use his real name too because that lie would be too obvious now that his face was so recognizable.

But the last thing Thomas wanted was to interact with a woman who believed that he had run for mayor, or worse yet, *liked* him as a politician! There were politically biased dating apps, but Thomas had managed to gain fans across the spectrum because his post was politically incoherent. There was no straightforward way to filter these people out, and even if there had been, any relationship that was built with the mutual understanding that Thomas was *not that guy* would still be marred by immediate skepticism. But *was* he stealing from those campaign donors? But was it *really* satire? But what does he *really* believe?

Thomas wrote about only this on the day that one million New Yorkers were running to the polls to write in his name on their ballots.

One might read Thomas' concerns as a desire to avoid something morally questionable: it would be trivial for him to find a superfan girlfriend, but the inherent power dynamic would be strictly in favor of Thomas and built on delusion. This is an incorrect reading. Thomas was

primarily interested in making sure he had control of his image in the eyes of his partner – that she would not see him as a victim, a hero, or a loser. Those were the three things he least wanted to be.

We know that Thomas did not care about power dynamics because the tactic he decided upon was considerably more egregious. Today was election day, but in the thirties people did not get off of work to vote unless they had jobs with unfixed schedules. Thomas' non-job did not force him into the lab, but his real job – teaching the Tuesday section of college pre-calculus from 6:00 to 9:00 PM – was still an obligation. He thought of calling in sick to avoid harassment on the street, bus and subway, but he decided to go to work despite it all.

See, Thomas was in a rush. He opened the university Net and checked his student roster: thirty-four students. Looking through, he recalled that these were generally his least favorite students, as college pre-calculus was the course that math-ambivalent or math-hating eighteen-year-olds took for necessary credit if they had failed to meet standard-track high school requirements. Sadly, he didn't have a choice; this was the class he was teaching that night, and Thomas was in a rush. Somewhere in that miserable class, there must be the perfect woman. She would already have a vision of him: the caring professor, the intelligent man, not the victim or the hero or the loser. He would find her exam paper, write “see me” on the front page (as professors have written on exam papers for all of recorded history), and let the rest happen as it would happen.

Thomas was being a very bad person. He wrote: "I think I am being a very bad person."

He also wrote: "I wish I could sort by hip circumference."

Chapter 16 – Whose Empire? Part 2 (Diary Entry November 22, 2037)

I had no ability to work that day, and so I didn't. I walked along the hill above the river looking for a route to meet it, and I found the rarest sort of thing one can find in New York – a rare sort of thing.

Who knew of this staircase? Junkies knew of this staircase that ran stories and stories down the hill to what once may have been used as a pedestrian underpass of a powerful highway. It is hard to believe that it was ever used, but perhaps it once was. A sign, maybe planted one-hundred years prior, pointed its arrow across an off-ramp with a speed limit of 65 – “just go that way and you'll find ...” but the text was lost to time. Go that way?

To dodge the cars was an impossible game, because they came out faster than sound from behind a pillar of stone, completely unaware of a scratched off crosswalk that nobody alive ever saw, used, or ever would have believed existed – but it did! Because of the arrow, it did! Why not.

I waited for time to stop so I could cross, and eventually as it does it did. Across I went to an island, past another stone pillar, but fuck. The other side of that pillar was another off-ramp with speeding cars, and time had started and there was no arrow in any direction, and no implied crosswalk, so no right of way. I would have to wait again for time to stop and it would be a while, and then perhaps cross back to the arrow, but no then I would follow the arrow back to the

island. Maybe time had twisted the arrow as it had erased the text below? No, because to the sides of the arrow were steel fences without sidewalk. Only the implied crosswalk, yes.

On the opposite side there was an arrow, I could see it, and it pointed away from the island to a pedestrian bridge falling apart in space (but stuck in time) so I figured yes the arrow my go signal my green light and I crossed once the cars heeded the word.

Below the bridge now. Left, right. Oh, fuck. Used condoms, tags, needles, no I had never been alone in space, but only in time yes alone in time but the condoms and the tags and the needles spelled “not special” (in space) and I passed under the bridge and I knew it was really not as special as I thought unless junkies were squirrels and I was not squirrels. No, we were all man and that means no, I am not special and yes, that is probably good even if it crushed me. Past the bridge.

There were indeed proper squirrels, even birds I had not once seen and stray cats and what else, as I approached grown-over train tracks. I believe I have read it. They carried meat, stinking meat. But perhaps one hundred and fifty years ago, so now they were stuck in space but not in time. Cross the tracks. No more arrows and no clear place an arrow might have been.

Oh, but I know which way is the river, by sense I think, or by tracing the parallel to the George Washington Bridge above me and to my right. Oh, and a sign! A sign that says lighthouse to the right, the right? This city and I’ve never, no not a lighthouse, but this was

something people have seen surely and not special, no, never special, not a lighthouse, but not me. A lighthouse?

Forward. There was the river, colder than the hill, and cold cold women in bikinis tanning in November and was that real? What. But no, know they were tanning in November, with their bellies down and bras unstrapped and asses up and the Mexicans walk by and they stare and the I walk by and I must say I stare but I promise it is not my fault, oh God, I promise it is not mine! Left, stopping to look right, then down, then forward again and then look right, and then.

Did anyone know the river stops at 145 St? There is an elevated... thing! With an elevator that may never once have been used except by the hundreds of people I saw on the elevated thing, but no it really looked like it had never once been used, but I pressed the up arrow because there was another arrow! And I waited a few years, but then it came down and there was a man in it – the first man to use the elevator, presumably, so I would be Number Two and yes I took it up to the top of the elevated thing. A sky island on pillars and extending out onto the river with gymnasias and grass and benches and women and children on benches but one thing most of all so stuck in time so very stuck in time.

One quarter, a quarter! To operate some telescopic lens, some marvel of ancient engineering to peer over to New Jersey or to the bridge or to the planets for just one quarter for five full minutes with a machine so wonderfully captured in time. So how could I not, with a machine so pleasantly pliable in space, turning by my command and showing me the truth about the horizon.

Oh there! Ahoy! The lighthouse was in full view. A lighthouse? And there I could peer up and make out each car on the bridge, or make out each tree in the state of New Jersey, or make out the women tanning by the river (still?), or make out the lighthouse. No, not the stone pillars, or the bridge stuck in time, or the tracks stuck in space, or the used condoms or the staircase or the needles or the arrows. Those were somewhere but I don't know if I ever will or even want to find them again. And if I peered up, there it was, that dark red sky. Oh yes, that day I saw it had gone from blue to red, but it seemed not to bother anyone to live in a world with a red sky (just for a bit?) and we all tanned and red and tended to our children and our machines that clicked and said "one more quarter please?" in a mid-Atlantic accent and turned your eyeballs "off."

Step back. Red sky. Left, left and ahead. There were the towers, so distant but still so tall, and so far above the horizon and so striking against their background of other towers and a needle striking a cloud in a red sky. What could you say about this city except "yes, this is my empire!"

And then walk home.

Chapter 17 – Inferior Colliculus

There are four respectable books about Thomas Kelly. Perhaps the most acclaimed is *The Man at Baseband* by mathematician Simon Girmann, which is about Thomas' mathematical and technological advances. While it is considered an excellent work by scientists and engineers, it is not accessible to the average reader (including one author of this work).

The three remaining books speed through his youth and begin at this point in his story: his post on ZAstr, his first appearance in the Times, and his performance in the election. Two books – *Of Mice and Man* by Jerry LaPlante and *All Praise to Carolus* by Coleen Sanders – mark this as the turning point of his personality from excellent scientist to mad villain. One – Tar Krasniqi's *Power for Power's Sake* – marks him as a cynical power broker from birth, and this simply as a point where the mask begins to slip off.

We will take neither approach, as it is rare that real humans have the same behavioral bifurcations as a comic book antagonist. Thomas did not fundamentally change after his sister's death, he did not fundamentally change after he was struck by a train, and he did not fundamentally change now. He *changed*, and quite a lot, with these incidents, but fundamental change is a slower and rarer process. It is not clear to the authors of the present work that Thomas ever fundamentally changed, but this is something the readers may decide.

Three important events occurred in the twenty-four hour period between Thomas' class on the night of the election and the day that followed. The first, of course, being the somehow-

successful courting of a young woman (more accurately, a *girl*) from his class – we will pause that plotline for the time being.

Most critical, he awoke and checked his work Net to find a message from the lab secretary:

“Dr. Hu has been diagnosed with a malignant glioblastoma. She will often be absent from the laboratory, but operations should continue as normal until you are notified otherwise.”

The blow was emotionally confusing to Thomas. On one hand, he liked Dr. Hu – he might have even loved Dr. Hu – as the epitome of a truly motivated person in a world where such passion seemed so rare. A woman with a genuine drive, not for money or power, but for knowledge and the advancement of science. A woman who felt pride in and responsibility for the careers of her students and associates.

On the other hand, this meant he didn't have to work, right? He had no boss. Operations *should* continue as normal, but who's checking? The other members of the lab were reasonably career-driven, and were still hoping to pump out publications so that they could graduate and earn professorships, but Thomas did not care much about such things and happily took the opportunity to stop showing up. The paycheck would roll in anyway. Why not?

The subsequent months would be referred to by Thomas as his “Wandering Days,” and they quite literally were. He spent most of his days wandering, sitting, writing, until nighttime

when he had to teach and tend to his mice. On Winter break, he spent the nights wandering too. The entry that precedes this chapter indicates his emotional state at this time, returning in some ways to the artistic style he used in his later undergraduate years. He, however, biblical language was replaced by a sort of spirituality of the individual. Again, we will pause this plotline for now.

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The third and final event on this day was a phone call Thomas received from a restricted number at noon, after breakfast and the departure of his new love. He did not answer the first call, but received a second immediately after. Five seconds in, five seconds hold, ten seconds out. He answered the call, and who should be on the other end but an elderly man with a thick Jewish New York accent by the name of Michael Bloomberg.

The position of the former mayor in society had dipped substantially in the last ten years. His company, *Bloomberg*, at one point had many branches from a large charity foundation to a news outlet, but as freedom of the press began to slip away in the mid-twenties, it reverted to focusing only on its main product: the Bloomberg Terminal. The Terminal was, and still is, a computer system that facilitates informed stock trading. Its consumer base included large investment banks and hedge funds that, even in an age of rampant financial crime, were doing quite well and found the product added sufficient value to their businesses to continue using it.

Bloomberg (the man) was a billionaire who had been the target of understandable skepticism in the earlier part of the twenty-first century. He had run for mayor on the Republican

ticket after the now-defamed but then-popular mayor Rudolph Giuliani endorsed him, and had won on the people's faith in Giuliani's word.

He inherited a city both traumatized and unified by the September eleventh attacks on the World Trade Center. Giuliani was contentious for using somewhat illiberal methods to "clean up" a city that had been high in crime, while doing little in terms of funding a failing education system and a descending lower class, but became the beloved "America's Mayor" when the grieving and terrified city population appreciated a strong leader. Bloomberg would also be a strong leader.

He was a fake Republican in almost every sense. He was still "tough on crime," emboldening a regressive "stop-and-frisk" policy that allowed policemen to search civilians without warrants (you can guess which sorts of civilians were stopped and frisked), but he also quickly raised property taxes and pumped money into public education and city projects. Bloomberg even drafted the congestion pricing policy that would come into law an entire decade later to the chagrin of drivers. While the policy seemed mostly *fine*, modeled off of a London policy that was mostly *fine*, it became a strong point of attack for later Republicans against coastal elite Democrats. No, Bloomberg was not really a Republican, and he ran as an independent in subsequent mayoral elections.

Oh yes, elections in plural, because he extended the term limit to three terms for only his mayorship, arguing that the 2008 financial crisis required consistent and experienced leadership

to be handled properly. He allowed for a fair election, and still successfully won a third term after which he allowed someone else to have a try.

In the 2020 presidential election, he launched a campaign for the Democratic nomination using one billion dollars of his own money to fund it. He performed poorly in one debate and then faded into the background to be defeated to the point of embarrassment by future-president Joe Biden. While he continued to see himself as an influential liberal thought leader, penning articles for the Times or operating his Bloomberg News outlet, his influence had clearly slipped by the 2024 election when he publicly disagreed with the party's choice to put up Kamala Harris as a candidate without a primary. He may have been right – she lost – but his lack of any sway in the party was made apparent. He finally dissolved Bloomberg News in 2029.

Although he is still considered one of New York's finest mayors, the vectors of skepticism against him are obvious: he was a billionaire trying to transmute money into political power, he was a fake Republican, he was a fake Democrat, he was a fake Independent, he was Jewish, he was abusing his power to run for three terms as mayor, he supported racist policing policies, he was a billionaire running a news outlet at a loss to push his agenda, he was a billionaire *period*. It was too easy to criticize him, so it speaks to some level of popular policy decisions that he was able to maintain a positive image in the New York population until his death.

When he called Thomas in November of 2037, he was ninety-five years old. Nearly deaf, blind, and bound to a wheelchair, he was still sharp and articulate. He was, it seems, still eyeing

political power. Thomas, or more likely an application on Thomas' phone, transcribed the conversation that appears in a diary entry from that evening:

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly.

Thomas: Just Thomas.

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, this is Mike Bloomberg. I have a very important question.

Thomas: This is a prank.

Bloomberg. This is not a prank.

Thomas: Go on.

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, what do you believe?

Thomas stumbled and choked, but eventually told the former mayor that he wasn't sure that he believed in anything at this point in his life. He certainly didn't care for Corey, or Trump, or crony capitalism, but he wasn't sure if he cared for regular capitalism or regular democracy or regular human rights either.

Thomas: I guess I can say... I know I don't agree with these freaks who say they believe what I believe.

Bloomberg: I think you do.

Stumped. He was certain the man on the other end of the line was smart – smart enough to know the whole thing was a joke. What can you say when you are told what you believe?

Bloomberg: Your essay is bad. It's a joke but it's not a very funny joke because it is what you believe. Read it yourself.

Well, sure. Yes. Thomas did hate how slow the trains and buses were, how many school administrators there were, how mothers didn't send their children to school, how capital was stuck at the top, how public drug abuse was so common and visible.

Thomas: I wrote it myself. It says we should prosecute bad moms. It says we should annex New Jersey.

Bloomberg: The policies are jokes because you're a coward. You don't want to suggest any real ones because you don't know how.

Thomas: Right, because it was a joke.

Bloomberg: Not today.

Bloomberg was right: Thomas' joke may have once been a joke, but it was no longer a joke. It was a manifesto rallied behind by millions of Americans. What Bloomberg was getting at was an unfortunate half-truth: Thomas was now a political thinker, a policy proposer, and a leader of a movement.

We say half-truth because Thomas appeared to have no power over the "Kellyists," who used his essay and his name but did not listen to his protests. Or rather, they did listen, and interpreted them as hidden messages rather than the direct disavowments they were. It was clear that if Thomas said either of "I stand with you" or "I do not stand with you," the Kellyists would

read the exact same information out of the statement. Is that power over a movement? Does that even count as being a political thinker or a policy proposer? Bloomberg would say “absolutely.”

Bloomberg’s argument was straightforward: Thomas could not avoid being a politician, Thomas had the same concerns that every free-thinking New Yorker had at the time, Bloomberg had the policies and the money, and Thomas had the leverage. The leverage? There were no free elections in the United States. The money? A billion dollars could not win him a nomination in 2020.

Not quite. It could not win *Michael Bloomberg* a nomination, but Thomas had “fucking lunatics” (quote, Bloomberg) on his side. The thing about fucking lunatics is that they are better leverage than upper-middle-class centrists with modest homes and 1.7 children. Bloomberg figured that Thomas had real leverage through real people willing to commit real acts of violence if their guy didn’t obtain real power. Thomas declined.

Thomas: With all due respect Mr. Bloomberg, I don’t care.

Bloomberg: It’s not going to be your choice. I’m here. When you find yourself in need, I’ll either be here or I’ll be dead.

He gave Thomas his phone number and hung up. Of course, that might not have been Michael Bloomberg. It was probably not Michael Bloomberg, as anyone could try their hand at an impression or use some sort of voice modulator. It affected Thomas as if it *were* Michael

Bloomberg. So maybe it was. In any case, he wrote down the phone number under the name “Michael Bloomberg,” so in any case, now that was Michael Bloomberg.

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The word of the year was “heard.” Thomas heard from the Corey administration about his own campaign to be mayor, he heard from “Michael Bloomberg” about the inevitability of his power, he heard from the lab secretary that Dr. Hu had cancer. He also *heard* that the Kellyist movement was being run by a leader called Carolus, who himself was only heard because he did not allow himself to be seen, did not make any Net posts, and did not take any money from donors. What could be meant by leader?

Whether decentralized or Carolusized, the Kellyist movement bought more and more ad space and T-shirts and posters and bumper stickers. All the while, Kelly himself was rarely featured in newspapers and his face fell out of public memory. Throughout November and December, the Times would write articles about the Kellyists that included a link to their past article with a sentence like “Thomas Kelly has stated in the past that he does not support the movement, and has referred to it as a scam,” but by the new year these qualifications were gone. Often the movement would be covered without mention of his name. Images of his face disappeared from billboards, although text from his manifesto and other phony quotations attributed to him (or to Carolus) replaced them. Thomas Kelly, once a man, was now a name. While he got the odd look on the train, he managed to go largely unrecognized as soon as February.

He wrote in March of 2038: “It was surreal to be noticed for just long enough that it became surreal to not be noticed.” Many of Thomas’ Wandering Days included walking past posted flyers or bus stop ads with his name on them, while people walked past him as if he were any other New Yorker. And when he would get on his knees in the rain or snow and cry, bang his head, and scream, the people walked past him as if he were any other New Yorker on his knees, screaming and banging his head in the snow.

Chapter 18 – Staring Match (Diary Entry February 17, 2038)

One thirty AM, New York. Starting March with the Thompkins Square rats on the sidewalk.

Excuse me, sir.

I haven't been home since six AM yesterday. It would be much appreciated if you would let me walk past you and your family. Your family of hundreds of rats, swarming bags of trash left by who knows who, eating, I imagine, very well to maintain such a wonderful and large community of happy staring partners, living, I imagine, in wonderful places for rats to live around such a beautiful park with playgrounds and skate parks and basketball courts and men playing in jazz quartets and beautiful couples on cold benches wearing tight-fitting coats and touching ungloved hands. I imagine such things are heartening for rats, who stay young forever as they die young and live young forever. But you are, unfortunately, in my way, and I would hate to step on your brother-father-lover.

I appreciate it.

From here you can't see the power plant behind the apartment complexes, but you can feel its presence like cold wind, or maybe that is just the cold wind, but I can know its presence and I do. I am not going there yet. I was, first, to stare at rats, and then to meet fate at Tompkins

Square Park, and then perhaps to the plant or perhaps to sleep. It has been since six AM yesterday.

So I phase through the fence and onto a bench, and about me are the lowest, the people who sleep on the pavement with needles in their arms. Pigeons, too, always pigeons and mice and rats and people sleeping on the pavement with or without needles in their arms. And of course, Thomas, I, me, sitting above on cold steel.

My blonde, tight jacket, tight hat, tight jeans, boyfriend to my left and to my right also and we lean in right-left-rightwards for a kiss – our first kiss – and we laugh and we cry and we lock eyes – he’s just so handsome – and we pull out our cigarettes, and then too our razors.

And we light our cigarettes and we light our razors, and we put out our cigarettes and our razors on one another’s arms and we laugh and we cry. So we sit on cold steel around the low, now in ashen burns and running blood and high spirits. That’s just him.

So I phase out of the fence.

Excuse me, sir.

And sure, it is only one forty-five, I thought we might take longer, but it is ok to rush such things and not rush other things, see, and so there is time for the power plant, yes. So I am there and I attempt but cannot phase through the fence. No it is a strong fence,

electromagnetically tough, and I am a weak man with ashen burns and running blood although in high spirits and so I look back and there once I swear was a bench and a fake bus stop but no more! Should I call the city? Where is your bus stop! I know it was fake, that was the whole thing about it! You do realize you have erased not just a bench, but a fan. Yes, you have lost a fan today, ma'am.

How can I be here without a bench? I cannot be the low. I must have leverage, cold steel leverage, not cold concrete for spit and semen and the rest of the informe. Am I to stand like a coward addressing his dear leader? Am I also not allowed to watch him eat on fear of death? To sit on a bench was among the few natural rights that remained for me, and now I am left with only the right to my own magnitude and phase.

We are used to such things.

“Do you like movies?” he asks me. He is in movies. Or he says he is, in a few big movies even like Hollywood movies, and no I don't like movies and I don't know what the fuck he's saying but he could be in movies, sure, because he is beautiful to the point of being very ugly, with no facial hair or acne scars or any scars like a pathetic girl, and he says he is “Brian.”

So Brian says to me, you know I see you there suffering, what with your running blood and your ashen burns and, O Ashen One! I have for you a suggestion. Should you like me to tell you my advice for you. Sure.

“You should try your best, every day. Live each day trying your best.”

And he gives me a cup of water from his pocket and he says to me he thinks he’s seen my face somewhere and I shake my head and he says yes, you are in movies I know it, and I say you’ve caught me in a lie, and I drink the water because he was right that I did need that, and he said he had somewhere very important to be but he could never pass by a person in need.

Certainly he walked past one-hundred people in need tonight alone. He could never pass by a certain person in need – me – who looks like he should be stable but for some reason isn’t tonight, looks like he probably showered recently and changed his clothes, doesn’t masturbate on the sidewalk. Brian was right in that. He would be of literally no use to these other men in need because they were in need but not in able, but he didn’t realize that I am in need and in able but not in want.

And I am not so stupid as to find “Do your best” to be of use or of need or of able or of want or of more-or-less anything. There are better pieces of advice to be heard on the street. Here are some from that same night.

“Girls are easier until they’re teenagers.”

“A summer so dry, farmers are selling off their cattle before they starve.”

“Do not take strollers on the escalator.”

So fuck you Brian, do not you dare take a stroller on the escalator! It was my turn to head home with the cold wind of the power plant still at my back, and above me my name with something about how I, yes I, would finally ban pornography. I hope that if I could ever do so, I would also fix the issue of dry, starving cattle plaguing our great country.

Chapter 19 – Sit in Silence and Agree with the Breeze

From the election of 2037 to the end of the Spring semester in June of 2038, Thomas lived his “wandering days.” Earning a modest paycheck from a job he did not work, he lived in a state of automatism, self-destruction and immense productivity. He walked about the city and Long Island, sometimes sleeping on benches or trains rather than in his apartment, carrying about his books and wallet in a small backpack.

Outside of school, where he continued to dress as a professional academic in long-sleeve button-downs with the occasional vest, he wore sweatpants and crew-necks implying no care for the aesthete. He stopped shaving, which initially had the effect of making him appear older and more sophisticated, but within months conveyed more the mountain man, and later yet, the homeless man. This helped him to not be recognized on the street, but that was more a welcome consequence than a factor leading to a decision. There was very little in terms of “decision.”

It seems he was averse to modern technology at this time, as he carried around a tape player with wired headphones and a few old cassettes that he had found a way to upload his digital albums onto; his favorites were *Small Change* by Tom Waits and *The Glad Fact* by Dirty Projectors. As for books, he appreciated the surrealist authors Andre Breton and Louis Aragon, the Irish literary superstar James Joyce, the Russian modernists, and books on ancient religions. He also seems to have read the entire collected works of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, with whom he battles incessantly in his own journals. In this period, he wrote at least one-thousand pages of material (still teaching five nights per week and tending to his mice once per day).

Parsing Kelly's texts is a challenging venture, and their apparent incoherence has led other biographers and historians to take them at less than face value. Perhaps this is valid – we do not usually attempt to make sense of the ramblings of psychotic patients, to tease truth out of their delusions – but there is a development of some philosophy that can be extracted between the talking rats and imagined (?) celebrities. He wrote:

“valentin – Three things in this world are real: 1) time, 2) the psychic and 3) power, in that order.

“*Time* is the axis on which the psychic can be defined. The *psychic* is sensation and reflex in feedback. We react to each sensed stimulus with a reflex developed through instinct and integration of the past (lower time) to produce a stimulus which in turn is sensed and reflexively reacted to and turned into stimulus, *ad infinitum*. The reflex is integrated over time to update the filter with which we transform sensation into reflex. This adaptive processing of sensation defines the total psychic experience, which is real.

“*Sensation* is a generalization of sound and touch and smell to also include chemical signaling and concepts as abstract as thinking or remembering. *Reflex* is a simultaneous simplification and generalization of the collective unconscious. The concept of archetype is maintained, but only in the sense that the adaptive filter that maps sensation to reflex learns common patterns as it integrates past information. These archetypes are reframed as low-dimensional approximations of infinite-dimensional eigenbasis vectors. *Automatism* is the

method by which the present basis is made perceptible. *Chaos* and *Order* are periods of high and low (respectively) time-derivative of the psychic filter weights. *Power* is whatever imposes limitations on the psychic like men with guns or women without guns or brick walls or the ultimate power – to end the psychic. We are, of course, a bounded-input-bounded-output system.”

This might be mistaking noise for signal , but this appears to be an approximation of a coherent framework (if you know enough mathematics) that can be used as a lens through which to view his writing and actions. Then again, we may be taking too seriously the words of an imploding man.

He interacted with at least two people, although it is not clear if he maintained any other connections. “I didn't hear from him for months,” says Darren. “He was calling me every few weeks before that election, but then it was like he didn't even have a phone or something.”

One of his remaining contacts was of course Chloe, with whom he kept up the weekly breakfasts. He claims in writing to have been very open with her about his emotions, his detachment, his new habits of self-harm and his thoughts of suicide (or at least we have assumed he meant “suicide” when he wrote “the ultimate power”). He wrote that he had taken to mild forms of cutting, just enough to draw blood, which he performed with a pocket knife. Such cuts leave no long-lasting keloidal scarring, so this is not possible to validate and may also have been a sub-ultimate power fantasy that existed only in writing.

The second was his new love, who we have not formally introduced. The day that Thomas selected a target by hip circumference, he accidentally acted as a worse person than he had thought. “SEE ME” was written on the exam of one Marcella “Marci” Rizzo, a girl whose most striking feature was her large blue eyes on a face with otherwise dark features and olive skin (marred by moderate acne). She wore sweaters and knee-length skirts with leggings below, which in concert with her face and gait gave the image not of a mature woman, but of a girl trying to appear as a mature woman. In figure, she stood at only five feet and one inch tall, and was mostly shapeless except, yes, an impressive hip circumference. Marci was among the few good students in the pre-calculus course; she performed well on exams, appeared enthusiastic about the material, was interactive in lecture and took handwritten notes.

What Thomas did not know was that she was a high school student.

Marci performed very well in her public high school’s mathematics courses, so her teachers and parents thought it might look good on university applications if she had course credit from a local college. Her parents were trusting, imagining she was sufficiently mature to survive among college students, and were fine with her staying at her friends’ homes overnight for “sleepovers” without notice. So when approached by a handsome young professor, asked to stay the night, who exactly was stopping her if not her own conscience? Certainly not his conscience!

She was only sixteen years old – below the legal age of consent in New York State – and (less importantly) the school had policies against romantic relationships between employees and

students. Thomas was jeopardizing his career, this much he knew, but he was also breaking the law.

Among Thomas Kelly's alleged crimes, this is the only one to which he ever admitted in writing. The straightforward framing is that Thomas was a man desperate for power, who found the easiest axis on which he could exert control. It is difficult to deviate from this narrative without appearing to defend statutory rape – we will say without conditions that Thomas acted abhorrently – but the psychoanalysis here appears in conflict with the picture of the man that we have developed.

Thomas, as we see him, *was* a desperate man, in search not of power but *order* – two things that he distinguished in his writings. Having lost his American Dream life with his beautiful home and pottery studio and 1.7 children, as well as his ability and will to live by a code, he searched rapidly more than intentionally for a path back to this life. This is what we perceive as his psychology, but of course bringing a teenager into your life as a close romantic partner might be the worst way to abate chaos.

So one of two frames is accurate: either he was acting automatically and foolishly, or he was acting deliberately and maliciously. In either case, it was selfish, despicable, and very stupid.

It is unlikely that Thomas knew on election night that Marci was only sixteen years old, although 1) he should have asked, because she *looked* sixteen, and 2) he should not have been targeting students as romantic partners in any case. He claimed that he learned only the next morning, when he awoke to her alarm at 5:30 AM.

“I asked why she needed to get up so fucking early, and she said she had school at 8. Ring. BMCC classes start at 9. High school. Ring. A fucking high schooler. Ring ring retard.”

He prepared a pathetic breakfast, dodged questions about his mouse room (“it’s a boiler room that only the super can enter”), and let her go. Whatever moral objections he may have had disappeared into apologia within a day, as he wrote that Thursday:

“There are dozens of teenagers I would prefer to speak with over dinner than almost any person my age. What do I have in common with a teenager? I don’t know, what do I have in common with my neighbor!? Far less than I have in common with my Marci. A position of power? No more than a strong man has over his weaker wife, or a wealthy woman has over her dependent husband. Only a puritan would deny our love.”

It should be stressed that at this time, nobody was aware of Thomas’ relationship with Marci because it was hardly even a relationship. They had met outside of class exactly once, they had exchanged numbers and suggested weekend plans. Nobody could have denied their love because nobody but the two of them knew they had spent a night together, and nobody but Thomas even “knew” they were in love.

Thomas' defense appears to be more against himself, an internal "puritan," or more accurately a *conscience*. Considering the two psychological perspectives, he was either floundering when half of his psychic basis vectors realized that he had been criminally impulsive, or preemptively justifying his cynical power grab to a hypothetical objector.

Whichever side you choose, the two continued to meet on Tuesday and Saturday evenings, outside of which Thomas continued to wander and Marci spent her time as a high schooler does. Thomas claims he "showed her the meaning of life" but attempted to "maintain her innocence" by refraining from smoking or revealing his other self-destructive habits.

"I wished I could take her to see the arts, the benches, the power plants, or the rest of me, but to be seen together would be suicide and to see me would change her."

With fear of sounding like apologists again, we must admit that she was a mature sixteen-year-old. It is true that many teenagers have a deep capacity to reason and understand superior to those of the median adult. Every high school teacher knows this – there are students who you would prefer to speak to at lunchtime over your colleagues – but most do not sleep with their students. This is to say that their relationship was not, as some biographers have painted it, one in which Thomas would force the girl into his worldview and she would only contribute conversations about high school drama and celebrity red carpet outfits. That, in fact, describes many adult relationships better than it describes Thomas and Marci's.

What high schoolers *do* lack is experience, time for their “eigenbasis vectors” to converge to ones that allow them to act in self-preservation. There is almost no way for a high schooler to understand healthy relationships or power dynamics without experiencing these things first-hand, preferably by dating people their own age, watching friends do the same, and integrating this information across their teens and early twenties. However satisfying the relationship may have felt to both parties, it was necessarily abusive but not necessarily predatory. “Predatory” implies intent, and this did not fit the image of a child being preyed upon in a true crime documentary.

This is one way to explain why Marci never once spoke out about Thomas as an abuser. Another way to explain it is that he brainwashed her and effectively held her captive to groom her into a submissive defender of his behavior. We should integrate our own information to determine which linear combination of the two appears most accurate.

By Thomas’ definition of power, Marci did hold some power over him – less than he had over her, of course, but her presence did restrict his behaviors and changed the bounds of his thought. In a sense, his *de facto* position as a father-lover did provide the order that he had been seeking in his ocean of chaos, as he was forced into a schedule of meeting around her school hours, felt compelled to learn how to cook for her, and made an effort to behave as a more stable partner than he ever had with Dasha. She was a child, see, and a child needs safety. This is all painful to write, as the pleasant nature of these statements contrasts so starkly with the reality that he was engaging in a sexual relationship with a minor.

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Juxtapose this relationship with Thomas' mouse colony, now dozens of small black rodents on their second generations, enjoying their elaborate and puzzling ecosystem that lacked the expanse and danger but maintained the character of one of their natural environments – the New York subway system. Thomas was not their father but their nature, the provider of their food and water and husbands and wives, their big bang.

But one terrible day in January he entered his mouse room to a terrible sight – mice nibbling at a fallen comrade. The first death in the colony was one of Thomas' oldest mice, a matriarch only two years of age. Of course, mice only live two to three years even in the best of conditions and there was nothing unnatural about her death, nor was it malicious or out of character for the other mice to bite at the corpse out of curiosity. Thomas should have seen this coming at exactly this time.

“I should have seen this coming at exactly this time. Still, as I saw them grieve their poor mother, I could not help but feel wrath at the animals and at the system I have created. It's all beautiful, even death lives in the beauty of life. I suppose this was not even an environment until the first death. But what the fuck was I even supposed to do?”

He had not built death into his system. There were no mouse coffins or mouse cemeteries. Mice in captivity will often eat the dead bodies of their cohabitants given enough time, but in those weeks the stench of rotting flesh would fill the room and the sight of a slowly

picked-away mouse skeleton would be very challenging for even the toughest-skinned individual to bear.

It is standard for mouse owners to simply dispose of the body as they would any other garbage, shed a tear, and buy a new mouse. Thomas took a different route. One of his new circuits around the city involved traveling over to the far West of Queens near what was once the Queensbridge housing projects. Along the water were parks, a rickety dock by an unused public beach, and of course, a power plant.

Astoria Park was a particular favorite of his, as it possessed the optimal position from which to view the Hell Gate Bridge. Once crossed by passenger trains, it was now completely abandoned save police officers whose sole job was to maintain its abandonment. It had been, correctly, considered unsafe after a failed inspection during the short-lived Cuomo administration, and a plan to fix it had been pushed off when Corey diverted these funds to hiring more police officers. The comical waste of public funds to defend a broken bridge from pedestrians and urban explorers was mostly unnoticed, as very few people had ever given the bridge a thought beyond its strong and still present position in the East River panorama.

The police officers also did a bad job of defending the bridge, because they did not have any reason to do a good job. If a homeless man or yuppie photographer succeeded in getting on the Hell Gate Bridge at 1:30 AM, the net effect on the city was zero. Periodically, Thomas would make his way past sleeping cops and through the steel doors of the bridge's Southeastern foot.

The floor was covered in bird and bat droppings, as were the worn, crooked stairs and ladders that connected the earth to the sky.

Skeptical of their structural integrity, Thomas never ascended any stairs but instead stood on the ground and looked up at this incredible vacuum of space, watching the bats rush in all three dimensions. He hoped one day that he would have the courage to climb the stairs as he heard that some explorers had, and the closest he came to trying to do so was on the night that his mouse was sent to cross the Bridge of Judgment.

“Zoroastrians used to place cadavers atop a tower so that their flesh may be eaten by vultures. I actually don't know if that's true but I heard it once. I thought maybe the New York carrion birds would take my precious mice from the top of that bridge tower. But then that seemed pretty gruesome and I didn't really know why I would do that except that I always thought it was kind of cool that Zoroastrians did that and maybe they didn't even do that because it's just something I heard once. Plus I really don't want to go up a ladder.”

Instead, he entered the foot of the bridge with epoxy powder and liquid, a mixing stick, a glass dish, and the dead mouse in a small aluminum box. He walked to the wall opposite the entrance and kneeled, pouring out the correct amounts of powder and liquid to mix into a very strong glue. He glued the box shut, and then spread glue on the back and bottom of the box so that it stuck both to the brick wall and the concrete floor.

“And then I left, as fast as I came in because I guess what else should I do. I walked back South through the park, past the dock, past the park, past another park, past the bridge to the island, and to the power plant. And here I am. What is there to do but sit in silence and try my best to breathe in time with the wind?”

After the New York government was restructured many years later, the project to get the Hell Gate Bridge back up to spec was reincarnated. It was a small human interest story when, while cleaning the towers at each foot of the bridge, one worker found about thirty sealed aluminum boxes glued to the floor and wall. “They were hard to get off there,” the worker said in a televised interview, “and we couldn't say if they was bombs or what.” When it was discovered that the boxes contained mouse remains, the tabloids were abuzz for a week or so with silly theories as to who might have been the culprit. A serial killer practicing for his murders? A deranged homeless man who believed he could speak to mice? Is he still walking the streets?

The story disappeared into the media graveyard before the link to Thomas' diaries was discovered, at which point it appeared as a small Times article titled “Hell Gate Gravetender: One More Job for Thomas Kelly?” Given both Thomas and the mouse grave story were small change in the media landscape of the late forties, the article was not widely read. Krasniqi's paragraph regarding the situation in his anti-hagiography is telling”

“When *Times* journalists discovered it was Dr. Kelly who glued shut his mouse cages and left them to rot in an abandoned bridge, it went unnoticed, but is this not the most clear indictment of his character that can be found in traditional media? Imagine the most troubled

person you know; would he place live animals in cages and allow them to suffocate or starve? If he did, would you not think he was practicing for larger victims? Larger mammals? There is no framing of this behavior other than genuine psychopathy.”

This sort of analysis is the outcome of painting all primary sources as unreliable. If the mouse boxes were never discovered, the diary entry would have been considered complete fabrication by the author. Given they were discovered, he has no choice but to consider precisely *one* part of the source as reliable, and the rest as fantasy. Once you have done that, you have given yourself the power to fill in the blanks.

Chapter 20 – Hands Just Like Ours (Diary Entry April 15, 2038)

My dog wakes me up as I walk from church to my house, through the stone streets and past the quiet trees. He says “it's ok if you put me down, I understand, I just hope you're there with me.” It's barking, no, a text message? He smiles and lets me know it's ok and I cry and let him know it's ok. We laugh together and I walk home from church to house, where I do not have a dog or the keys.

I think it means that my mice will start to die one by one and I am the carrion bird but it's ok because it's all something we do together, not just as natures but as people, afraid of the bridge to the House of Lies where bodies are stacked side to side and front to back and top to bottom but the psychic believes he is alone. That's mice and also man, but we can call it fear and I think that if we could demodulate their small voices and upmodulate our own they might learn a word for it too. They're smarter than dogs, even if they pick at their dead, or *because* they pick at their dead.

What would Marci think if she saw the mice? The fact that I am not sure is a sign that we still have much to learn about one another's bodies and minds and what they are meant to do. valentin - I know what you would say. I know what my Chloe did say: “Incredible.” Not credible. I wrote Dasha yesterday and thought to tell her because I believe I know her body and mind and what it's meant to do but I do not know I know, but instead I told her SEE ME so she could come and see for herself, my creation her creations and my love for her and what she has allowed me to do. I told her to SEE ME but not in all capitals, and I know I know that she will

not respond because she never has, but that's a feature and not a bug because it's something I know I know.

I phoned Bloomberg but I assume he was asleep, because he is an elder and even men like him are elders and that is part of what the body is for. He might be the man to call when I don't know I know. I see it will be soon that I know I need him as I hear it all about – about this Carolus. My belief is that Carolus is a woman, or maybe women, but I can be sure he is not one man.

Is it time for the night of the long knives? Is it time that this Carolus, these me-ists, really do execute or take as prisoners dozens of New York politicians? This is doubtful. Life here is bad but not that bad, as everyone continues to have a refrigerator. Even the poorest, save the people in the negative class who cannot rise up because they cannot even stand what with needles in their arms on the ground in the park, have refrigerators. And phones and computers. And laptop computers and tables and chairs. No, no, people have not had to resort to selling their refrigerators. If people sell their refrigerators, then out come the long knives.

But they're getting more assertive and I hear they have their own Net now but for fear of self-incrimination (or rather for fear that I may appear self-incriminated) I have not paid a subscription fee or seen what they have to say. I only hear. I believe Chloe does and she tells me what I am saying or what I said or rather what they say Someone said and capital S Someone is Carolus who is me (?) or many women.

She says I say I will bring about an era of change through initial pain, blossoming into a strong and people-led state independent of the US government. She says I say it will involve protectionism and force and maybe surviving on apples or something of that sort, and maybe banning films or something of that sort, or maybe eating only salted Long Island flounder or something of that sort, or maybe getting rid of the Koreans or something of that sort. I generally like the Koreans, for the most part, they seem like good folks but she says I say it or Someone does.

Chloe, I can't say, may be becoming one of these me people, but she seems to know Someone is not Me and she refrains from saying "you wrote" but rather says "they say you wrote" but maybe she thinks (knows?) it's me and knows I think (know?) it is not so she hides. She's not usually one to hide but this would be what to hide if one were to hide. I would hide.

This "Chloe" says "incredible." Not credible. Sometimes I see these little creatures and I think "incredible." To live such short lives with hands just like our hands.

Do we think hard enough about the inherent spirituality of capital C City? That men spend lives in the sky placing steel rods carefully 1500 feet in the air, to build boxes they will not only never enter but will never be *allowed* to enter, there is no answer for how except "incredible." Not credible, at least not without God or something like a collective drive like a biological instinct to place steel rods 1500 feet in the sky or a biological instinct to *drive* men to place steel rods 1500 feet in the air (including Koreans, nothing wrong with Koreans no).

Do mice have that instinct? Hands just like ours, but only three years or two years is not enough to learn to craft steel rods. If they do then they have something like God. How can anyone believe in the divinity of the individual when this is how we use our hands like mice and our years beyond theirs?

When I look at what we have here in capital C we are surrounded internally and externally by God and also by mice, and I am especially surrounded by mice. Is this the Carolus? No, he is probably one or many women, but he probably knows this fact too. Don't you think?

When you go so long without purpose but to teach the next generation of people who don't like math and tend to your mice and your one love you have no choice but to approach divinity and look into its eyes like a lover and see its hands, which are like ours (or rather *are* ours). It reaches out hands and says Me – put steel rods in the sky, 1500 feet in the sky! This is The Credible. But I do refuse and do not put the rods in the sky or at least not *that* sky. So why do they say (s)he(s) says I do?

Chapter 21 – Citation Needed

If you have heard of Thomas Kelly’s rise to power before reading the present work, the narrative you were presented with probably went a bit like this:

Thomas Kelly was an internet troll and scientist turned politician, who built a large political movement under his own name. He ran the movement from the shadows under the name “Carolus.” As Carolus, he launched a SlimNet called CRLS, which hosted blogs and comment sections full of dissident thinkers who became more and more extreme over time. He spoke to his base indirectly – he told other users what to post, rather than ever posting himself. He advertised heavily. He was eventually given a position in city government so that the mayor could appease his followers after an assassination attempt.

This is the textbook narrative that most journalists and biographers have taken to, but it is at odds with one primary source: Thomas’ diaries. His point of view (as far as we can tell) was that he had no involvement at all with the Kellyists and was worried about what might become of them. Carolus, he wrote, was neither Thomas nor anyone he knew, and nothing on CRLS could have been generated by him because he hardly used a computer in those months. He claims that he assumed power without ever lifting a finger, did not want that power, and continued to not want it well after he obtained it.

This all *feels* unlikely. Even with millions or billions of dollars poured into advertising and hours speaking on radio and television, most politicians fail at generating any sense of a

“movement” behind them. He did it by writing one silly essay? No, there was probably a bright team behind it all collecting funds on various Nets and spinning different narratives to different audiences to maximize reach. The incoherence of the essay was a feature rather than a bug, because a bunch of upset people thirsty for change could grab whatever they wanted from it. As Thomas denied the seriousness of the essay, he also used fake accounts to claim the denial was itself a deception to make the movement appear to be one of grass roots. This filtered out reasonable people who would listen to a man pretending to be earnest and believe him when he denied the legitimacy of his article. Without these reasonable people, there would be no moderating factor, and the base would contain only zealots.

Naturally he could never win an election, but a strong showing could balloon the movement to enormous proportions. Misreading the movement as a useful target rather than a threat, Corey would tell the public that the Kellyists earned a sizable chunk of voters and accidentally draw even more people into this singular alternative for New York.

Carolus was either Thomas or a sort of shadow campaign team. Without elections, he had to try dirtier methods – once the movement was large enough, he could put the pressure on using threats of assassination. Corey would have a hard time cracking down on such a large and rowdy group of unreasonable individuals, so she would have to appease the Kellyists somehow. The only remaining option was to appoint Thomas to a central role in the administration, satiating his base and stopping them from murdering her. The diary entries were meant to give some veil of plausible deniability that would trick the gullible and serve as dogwhistles for the already-initiated if they were to leak.

This all *feels* unlikely. Way too many things have to go correctly for this plan to succeed. You have to rely on people both trusting your claims at the exact right moments and not trusting different claims at the exact right moments, all after parsing a self-contradicting joke essay and deciding “yes, this is my guy.” The number of such people has to be sufficiently large as to worry the mayor without her feeling able to fight back using police force, or by simply arresting the man at the head of the movement. The leap from that to “and then Thomas became the chief advisor to the mayor” is nonobvious as well.

But again, the alternative is that all of that just happened organically. Perhaps a group of opportunists swooped in to make a quick buck off of marks willing to believe in an obviously fake mayoral campaign, but otherwise this group of snowballing delusional Kellyists was a naturally-occurring phenomenon. This all just kind of *feels* unlikely.

Whose Empire? remained important to the group as a sort of creation myth, but much of it was tossed away by December when the Kellyists pivoted from Kelly's words to Carolus' words. This shift is seen in articles about the movement at the time. In late November of 2037, almost every article in the Times referring to the Kellyists contained a link to Thomas' interview and a sentence about how he denounced the movement; by 2038, articles about Kellyists were published that did not contain his name at all.

There is one word that can be correctly attributed to every point in Thomas Kelly's essay: anti-establishment. It has a politics that is negatively defined with a promise to *not* be the Corey

and Trump First Republicans. The satire element comes in the promise to *become* the establishment – to attain and exact power through military force. That joke was poignant in 2037 because there had been two decades of the First Republicans in positions of power, screaming that they were fighting the very establishment that they were in control of. They did, to be fair, eventually dismantle “establishment” systems from the top down (e.g. the Security Exchange Commission), but they did so while claiming constant persecution by radical left “establishment” forces. That is why the joke was funny.

But that might also provide an explanation of why the joke was not taken as a joke. The same rhetoric coming from serious people had been effective in multiple countries, including an America containing plenty of Trump or Corey supporters willing to buy it from the other side.

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One remarkable feature of human history is that in retrospect, a lot of serious and influential political documents read like jokes. Filippo Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto*, which inspired Mussolini’s fascist ideology, includes the following line:

“We will glorify war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.”

That’s a joke, right? It’s so explosive and scornful that it reads like it was written by a teenage boy whose crush just broke his heart. But Mussolini did take absolute power, glorify war

and the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, as well as scorn for woman. If you lived in the 1940s, you knew in retrospect that this was not a joke, but did you know it at the time?

Trump's rallies and speeches provide an obvious example of this phenomenon, and we are fortunate enough to have video evidence. He spoke with the cadence of a stand-up comic, and he *got laughs*. In a 2025 address to Congress, he referred to Lesotho as a country that “nobody has ever heard of.” The audience, sitting senators and congresspeople, *laughed*.

When Trump in 2024 stated that he planned to annex Canada as a “fifty-first state,” everyone *knew* it was a joke; Prime Minister Justin Trudeau even used the word “joke.” The Canadian government in 2025 then *knew* it was not a joke, as a trade war deepened with constant threats from Trump that the only way it could end would be annexation of the entire country. He said in March:

“The artificial line of separation drawn many years ago will finally disappear, and we will have the safest and most beautiful Nation anywhere in the World.”

This was the “Build a Wall” guy calling a border an “arbitrary line.” But we *knew* it was not a joke. Right?

Kellyists sold sweatshirts with outlines of the state of New Jersey and the text NEW NEW YORK. That's a joke, right? It might have been, but it was a signal of something very serious believed by the facetious sweatshirt-wearer. Right?

Was Trump a TV guy with a natural stage presence who accidentally became president? That feels wrong to say. It is easier to say that he was a TV guy with natural stage presence who used comedy as a tool in getting people to laugh their way into supporting his incoherent message. This is part of why it is so hard to believe that Thomas is telling the truth in his diaries – the contemporary analogies are (and were, at the time) too apparent.

What did the CRLS posters claim their platform was, behind the jokes and behind the negative definition of *not* supporting Corey? Most seem to agree on the creation of an independent New York nation state, which by necessity would begin as a military dictatorship – after that it would become a liberal democracy, an anarcho-capitalist society, or would remain a military dictatorship depending on whose posts you read. One “anon” (anonymous user) posted in December of 2037:

“New word directly from Carolus: the new New York will be a dictatorship of the proletariat by 2040. Wall Street is a priority. What do you guys think, firing squads or electric chairs?”

Another anon writes, in response:

“I read a post last week that said pharma first. Also, does this mean no elections? I vote firing squads, by the way.”

Few posters took issue with the constant contradictions, or at least their tones were not argumentative. The chaos of the constant “words from Carolus” were part of the fun, and the disagreeable bits were taken as jokes by some members and genuine policy positions by others.

On social issues this was especially apparent. Many Kellyists were religious conservatives who had come to associate Trump with the anti-Christ of Revelation. While this demographic had been key to Trump’s initial ascent, it was always *despite* reservations about his ostentatious playboy persona. An incident wherein he had a golden statue of himself placed in the National Mall was the tipping point for many such Americans, as they related it to Revelation 9:20 (KJV):

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.

While they were satisfied by the First Republican policies against abortion and birth control, they were also upset that they had not been enforced in New York State due to their massive unpopularity. They appreciated nods by the administration to the sanctity and importance of marriage, but the culture they lived in did not mirror that sentiment – especially not in New York.

Just as they were willing to ally with a president convicted of sexual abuse, a man who would have an easier time pushing a camel through the eye of a needle than entering the

kingdom of heaven, some were now willing to ally with radical feminists to lock in their side in the cosmic battle between good and evil.

Left-wing radicals – prone to in-fighting and internal purging – were strangely moderated by their alliance with bigoted right-wing radicals, because the most sensitive quickly left and the true believers were willing to allow such things as a necessary condition for The Revolution. They all shared an enemy and a hunger for radical change, and apparently that was enough to disrupt the city.

One other shared quality is apparent in retrospect: the most vocal Kellyists were pretty much fine. That is, they were materially fine – their needs were met, they had refrigerators, they were often educated, and had decent jobs that offered health insurance and vacation time. Although the movement was framed as an uprising of the underclass, the actual underclass was not spending their hard-earned money on SlimNet subscriptions (ok, maybe everyone was paying for at least *one* for pornography). The people with time to spend on CRLS were not fine, in that they were very unhappy, but they were fine with respect to almost all of the issues they were calling to radically change.

This is often the case with political movements, but had become even more true in the twenties and thirties. The people buying into cryptocurrencies and get-rich-quick internet classes were not “desperate for money” as the media painted them, but deluded middle-class people who were doing fine but *felt* desperate for more; the tens of millions who voted for Trump because they *felt* like the country was in social and economic shambles had, on average, an income higher

than that of the median American. They did so in a thriving job market and strong economy. The people who threatened to turn the firing squads on bankers in the name of Thomas Kelly *felt* like they were having their rights stripped away, while they still had access to abortion, birth control, refrigerators, and decent health insurance.

They were indeed having some of their rights stripped away; they functionally could not vote, and not everyone in the country had access to equivalent material conditions. But they were fine. And they were threatening to kill bankers, pharmaceutical executives and politicians. So on second thought, maybe they were not fine.

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The history of Kellyist publicity is puzzling, not only because their central leader never said anything, but also because of how hard it was to even pretend he said anything. It was even hard to *imagine* him saying anything. Pictures of Thomas were taken now and then by passers-by or fellow train riders, but none were posed, well-lit or evocative images – his head would be down or he would be walking too quickly for the camera to focus. The one photo that found its way onto early billboards and Nets was a picture of him from the Columbia Herald – the teaching award winner, in the middle of a lecture, wearing a plaid collared shirt tucked into khaki pants and stretching to point at an equation on the board with a piece of chalk. It's an effective image – he looks bright, young, energetic and charismatic. You may have never heard him speak, but you could feel the sort of presence someone like him might have in front of a crowd.

As an advertiser for or against his campaign, there was a lot of room to play around. You could overlay anything on the blackboard and it would look like Thomas was enthusiastically supporting that thing. “TAX THE RICH,” “KELLY 2037,” “PORN KILLS,” “VOTE COREY.” This was especially effective as a means of spreading information around the Nets, which had a high activation energy in terms of information transfer from one bubble to another. A solid image macro was one good way to break that barrier.

The joke went stale quickly and the image became one of a million “dead memes.” The movement had to stylize itself without any image of its founder, and it converged to lowercase text in a sans serif font, green on black. It was recognizable in part because it was so simple as to look almost amateurish. One myth goes that this was a deliberate choice to resemble an old-school computer terminal, representing the online proliferation of the movement and a rejection of high-level control of The Computer by mega-corporations. More likely it was amateurish because it was meant to be produced by amateurs. Signaling allegiance to a movement with green text on a black background as your blog format or on a posted flyer is even more trivial than wearing a hat to signal your allegiance to the New York Yankees. The color scheme was otherwise rare at the time (the craze of *The Matrix* and the use of actual computer terminals was long past for most people), so it also allowed identification of allies with a low false-positive rate.

One result was that, eventually, advertisements and flyers did not even need names on them to indicate their purpose. After the blackboard picture had fallen out of fashion, subway

and billboard ads were usually plain text, green-on-black, ending with “- thomas kelly.” By Winter, that became “- carolus,” and by Spring of 2038 there was no citation needed.

Who was making these advertisements? Probably not any one person or organized collective. One of us (Naomi) recalls a day on the train where she saw a green-text black-background ad that read “sex work is not work,” and another ten feet to the left with a slightly different typeface and font size that read “sex work is work.” It was so ridiculous that it almost felt like controlled opposition. It almost felt like a joke.

There must have been a political reason to allow the proliferation of these advertisements, because Corey’s administration could have easily had them taken down. The choice not to remove them was almost certainly deliberate rather than a matter of laziness or disinterest – the administration banned publications from other groups such as the locally famous “MESSIAH IS HERE” flyers posted by a sect of Hasidim.

Perhaps they were afraid of the consequences of stifling speech from these individuals in particular. As CRLS became both more popular and more isolated – cross-posting CRLS content on other political Nets was usually banned – the threats became more vivid. An anon wrote in April that Carolus had told him *in a dream* to take city council members hostage by gunpoint, and slaughter them one by one until the mayor stepped down. Another wrote that a group of university students had already purchased guns and were planning to occupy City Hall, again by the orders of Carolus. There were countless similar threats, some mutually exclusive (three different people cannot take the same person hostage), and none produced any real-world action.

Still, Mayor Corey was afraid enough to increase her security detail, and even slept in her office some nights to avoid stepping outside where someone might be waiting to shoot her.

Contrary to popular belief, there was never a serious assassination attempt on Mayor Corey in 2038. There were people on CRLS *saying* they would assassinate the mayor, but as we saw above, some were claiming to be possessed or spoken to in prophetic dreams. Those that were not explicitly delusional were often implicitly delusional. One person claimed that Carolus directly told him/her to build a bomb out of one million AAA batteries tied in series, which would explode when a remote control flipped a switch that would close the circuit and allow current to flow through them without resistance. One claimed that Carolus told them to buy the entire supply of New York lottery tickets to prove that the system was a scam and nobody could actually win, which would then inspire a revolution of the working class who trusted in the lottery as a means to escape poverty. These were jokes. Right?

They actually might have been, because nobody ever did these things. Still, the fear they sparked was probably the impetus for mayor Corey's June 2038 announcement that Dr. Thomas Kelly, Ph.D. would be her administration's new chief political advisor – something Thomas claims he was never consulted on, and did not even hear about until the day after the announcement. A paragraph from a press release reveals not why the decision was made, but how the administration wanted to public to see why the decision was made:

“We have always held true to our role as a city government to serve all New Yorkers, and Dr. Kelly has shown an ability to understand and speak to a large group of our great citizens who

may otherwise feel unheard by our administration. He has reminded us what this country is about: the freedom to speak one's mind. His values are not only New York values, but American values, and we are proud to bring this brilliant mind into our administration.”

This is the moment at which Thomas, the man with a body, actually became a public figure. Retrospective attribution of the movement to Thomas' remote control, with this appointment as the final goal, is tempting given what we now know happened next. That noted, predicting the past is just as challenging as predicting the future.

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What did the people in Thomas' life think about the Kellyists? Darren gives a brief description: “bullshit.” All of it?

“Thomas was a funny kid, you know? You know I'll never forget I called him one day, who knows, maybe Aummer that year and I said ‘dude, Tommy, how did this happen?’ He said to me ‘Dad, believe me, I really have no fucking idea.’ I believe that.”

Dasha gives a strange perspective. A young artist in Brooklyn, she was surrounded by serious Kellyists – flyer-makers and CRLS posters who believed in anarcho-syndicalism and radical feminism. Some of them knew she had dated Thomas for many years, that she had been engaged to him, but her new partner (now wife) was not bothered; she was a Kellyist herself.

“She asked me, well all my friends too, they asked me if I wasn't into it because I had some bad blood towards Thomas, and yeah there was some of that. You know, a lot of bad memories, and he would send me these messages that I wouldn't show anyone, but they were song lyrics or invitations to coffee or stream of consciousness.

“And so sure, I was turned off because of that. But more than that I knew he was sick. If they asked me I would tell them: ‘he doesn't believe that, and I'm not sure he believes anything, because he's sick.’ He jumped in front of a train, for Christ’s sake. Who knows if Thomas even had anything to do with it, but I could believe it either way. If anyone could in good faith say all that contradicting, stupid shit, it would be Thomas at his worst.”

And he was probably at his worst. She laughed and added:

“I also imagine he got *very* unlucky.”

We have little information about Marci’s thoughts on the matter. She was only seventeen years old when Thomas entered city government, and was still living with her parents. It would be personally disastrous if her parents and classmates discovered she was dating not only an older man, but a man perceived by many as a crank cult-leader; it might be equally disastrous for Thomas’ public image if the world discovered he was dating a high-schooler and former student. Marci did not speak publicly on any Kelly-adjacent fronts until 2039. From the Summer of 2038, we have only Thomas’ word:

“Thank God she sees they are lies. Thank God she knows I am a victim. A puppet. Less than a puppet, she says! A shadow puppet, she says!”

If she really did say this, it was a lovely metaphor. A puppet has a body, strings that are pulled by a master to make it appear to act. The audience sees the puppet and sees it act, and an excellent master can make the puppet appear autonomous. A shadow puppet is a projection, an object that has an illusory form defined not by the construction of a false body, but by the *absence* of light. It may be the shadow of an iron sculpture, a cloth-and-cotton doll, a well-positioned hand, but the audience will never know anything beyond the shape of the absence it generates. Whether Thomas was the puppeteer, whether the whole Carolus apparatus was entirely self-generated and self-sustained without his involvement, or whether the bulk of the operation was fabricated opposition by the First Republicans, there was a shadow cast in the shape of Thomas Kelly. Once the show was over, by will or by force, he was the one standing there to bow.

Chapter 22 – Real Power? (Diary Entry July 1, 2038)

“I could never tell a lie.” That is what our nation’s first president said when confronted about his crimes against the British during the Boston Massacre. He was a tall, thin man with golden brown hair, like pie crust in the wind.

I am so tired of bullshit. It’s day in and day out of bullshit, bullshit, bullshit, in my ear, out of my mouth, on paper, on screens, and if I try to avoid it he tells me I can’t. I wonder why I listen – respect. I had a call with him last night. The transcripts read even stranger than they sounded.

Thomas: I don’t like cops. I don’t like seeing so many cops.

Bloomberg: You don’t have to. You shouldn’t.

Thomas: But I have to say I do.

Bloomberg: Who says you have to say?

Thomas: I thought you wanted me to keep going.

Bloomberg: I never said you have to say you like it.

Thomas: But my name –

Bloomberg: You already have a bad name. Things get worse before they get better.

Cocksucker. I have a bad name. I really do have a bad name, and for what? I deserve a bad name. I deserve a bad name for not talking to my mom enough. I deserve a bad name for never going to work. I don't deserve this bad name.

DESERVE. What the fuck is DESERVE? Why should I DESERVE or NOT DESERVE? I used to think nobody deserves, that the very idea of deserve was a denial of God or of reality or of the psychic or of your dad and your friends. One day you are a pig following all of the pig rules of the first century and the next you're drowning in the river with your pig pals who followed the pig rules too. One day you're Jacob and God goes easy on you so the next day you're Israel. One day you get cancer. One day you get to collect a paycheck without doing a single fucking thing because someone else got cancer. DESERVE.

I don't think this anymore. I can't think this anymore. The deserve is in me. I feel it, I feel slighted, I feel like I DON'T deserve. I never feel like I DO deserve but today, every day, every day in my waking memory, I know I feel like I DON'T deserve. If I feel it, if I know what it feels like and I have a word and everyone else has that word and every language known to man has that word DESERVE, 値する, then we feel it and we know it. We know what it feels like to 値しない, to NOT deserve. Emotion is real, there is no doubt, and if I feel it, it is real. If we all feel it, it is collectively, in other words very, real.

So I don't deserve in the real sense this name but in the very real sense it seems I do. In the very real sense I deserve this very real power that in the real sense I do not even have. So, uh, what the fuck? I said

Thomas: How do I even keep up with what they're saying I'm doing?

And he said

Bloomberg: Don't.

So, uh, what the fuck? Mike, I'm suffering here. I don't deserve. *They* don't deserve to go to prison or to see guns everywhere they look or to have to use their fucking imaginations to jerk off, in the real sense, or even in the very real sense because collectively I think we more or less agree that they don't deserve, but I guess there is a sub-collective real sense in which they do, and I am not there in that sub-collective so I need to rethink that idea, that collective, that sub-collective, that self, that deserve, that real, that very real, that news, that "Don't."

Who knew that mice, they also get cancer? I mean, I guess if anyone thought about it if you asked them they'd say "mice, they get cancer" but when you have one in your hands and you see a bulging tumor like a rock under their skin and you see them struggle to run like their children you say "mice, they also get cancer?" They do! A two-year-old child, a two-year-old elder child, with a tumor like a rock under its skin, that's a tragedy and I think anyone would see it and say "they really don't deserve." I would say it, and I do. Hundreds of mice and how many have died of this cancer? How many in there right now have this cancer? Isn't American science going to tackle mouse cancer? What else do we have to be proud of as patriots other than the man who said "I could never tell a lie" and the man who said "I have cured polio?" I have to be

proud, as a patriot, of my room with my beautiful mice and my beautiful Dasha and think there is no “deserve?” They can’t be said to deserve or not deserve these cancers? They can be said and I will say it that they do not, even if to say it is to say nothing and to be a swine ignorant to the legion and to be an ingrate with eyes like diamonds.

If he said “Don’t” then that gives me a lot of time to Don’t. A patriot should use his Don’t time to Do.

Chapter 23 – Real Power

Question: if the whole Kellyist movement was a mass psychosis that Thomas had nothing to do with, why did he take the position given to him by the mayor? Question: If he didn't believe any of the radical policies that Kellyists ascribed to him, why did he participate in enacting those policies?

We should keep these questions in the back of our minds while we discuss the facts of what happened in the year of Kelly, Summer of 2038 to Summer of 2039. This year is already well-described by LaPlante and Sanders in their respective books, and for a more detailed description we highly recommend either work. We will draw on both works as sources for describing the events themselves, but their analyses fall into the same trap that Krasniqi more boldly fell into; namely, these authors give Kelly near-infinite real power over the city.

This is both power in the standard sense and power in Thomas Kelly's sense – an ability to bound the psychic boundaries of the population. Quite a lot of power was wielded at this time, but the players and the graph that connects them are more complex than presented in past works. It should not be thought of as a central node at Thomas Kelly with tentacles reaching city government officials, the Nets, the police, and the population, but rather as a dense web with Kelly somewhere inside.

Almost immediately when Kelly entered the government, an image of him formed in the public that mirrored that of billionaire-turned-political advisor Elon Musk. Musk, for the

uninitiated, controlled several massive companies in 2024. His electric vehicle company Tesla was seen, at one point, as the future of automobiles; it was a solution to the destruction of the environment caused by the gasoline-powered vehicle. Teslas were *cool*. Early on, they signaled your advocacy for reducing fossil fuel usage and your love for mother nature. They were cool because they showed you were a good liberal. This contrasts with their later signaling of allegiance to Musk himself, who increasingly sided with the First Republicans. Rich liberals sold their Teslas. Donald Trump bought one.

He also had aspirations beyond the surface of our pale blue dot; he wanted to colonize Mars. His SpaceX rockets were reusable, in the sense that they could land back on Earth safely after their mission in space was complete. His Starlink satellite internet service provided coverage to rural areas in which coverage was otherwise slow or unavailable. This was *cool*.

He had some other ill-conceived projects: a brain implant called Neuralink that would, one day he claimed, cure mental illnesses, a hyperloop tunnel that would revolutionize transportation, but wound up being a regular tunnel, etc. *Cool* failures, and hey, you have to crack a few eggs to make an omelette.

He became the wealthiest man in the world, which clouds his incentives. When he bought the influential social media platform Twitter for far more money than the company was worth, renamed it X, scared advertisers off of the platform and lost billions of dollars, this was a sign to many that he was a bad businessman. Given that he remained the wealthiest man in the world, it is simpler to think of this as more analogous to one of us buying a nice new television and

throwing the old one away; sure, we would wind up with less money in our bank accounts, but it would not impoverish us and we would be happy that we had a nice new thing. Not every purchase is an investment, right?

Of course, X was far more important to the world than our hypothetical television. Recognizing his political ambitions in retrospect, it might have been an investment in controlling public opinion. A new policy allowed users to pay a monthly fee to have their posts' visibility boosted, which generated an illusion of consensus – as you would see more posts by subscribers, and subscribers were mostly people who liked Elon Musk, you got the sense that everyone liked Elon Musk.

A lot of people *really* didn't like Elon Musk, especially after he became the *de facto* chief advisor to the president in 2025. He was initially given the keys to the kingdom, allowed to control almost all federally funded programs unilaterally. Thousands of federal grants were cancelled, entire agencies were gutted and funds were redirected, at times, in his favor. Sure, this was unconstitutional, but what was the Constitution? Words!

The conflicts of interest were obvious. His businesses relied, in part, on federal grants. He wanted to remain the richest man in the world. He wanted the media to spin in his direction. He wanted, so badly, to be *cool*.

He tried to present the image of a very cool guy, a guy who wore T-shirts in the White House and spent his time posting online or playing video games. He tried to present the image of

a very smart guy, a guy who controlled not one but many successful businesses, a guy who could get us on Mars and cure schizophrenia, a guy who could run the entire federal government with the help of techie teenagers because that's how easy this all was to him.

To a lot of Americans, this was a facade hiding the reality of a very rich man trying to become richer and richer. To some, he was a standard megalomaniac. To the psychoanalytically minded, he was an insecure little boy. To others, he was *really cool*.

Where is the Musk in Thomas Kelly? Thomas was a respected scientist and a beloved educator, but these traits were not public knowledge until they were declared by the mayor to be qualifications for his position. He wore plain clothes because he did not own a suit. He was not a billionaire, he never controlled a company, and he did not have any noteworthy conflicts of interest. He lived humbly and barely made rent.

The image was different: Thomas lived humbly because he wanted to, dressed humbly because he wanted to. He didn't own any companies, but he was a “founder” of and a “participant” in at least three impressive tech startups. He didn't talk about them because he didn't want to. If Trump and Musk were poor people's ideas of rich people, Thomas was a poor person's idea of himself if he became a rich person; he may have been successful and wealthy, but he remained humble to keep in touch with the working class, his family, his neighbors, the residents of the city he would govern.

Why did people think this? The narrative was spun by the Corey administration. The Hub lab had produced two optical implant startups, both of which were showing early clinical success in curing certain types of blindness. Thomas knew the people involved because they were labmates, but he had no investment in either company. His name was on publications with the founders, but these publications were unrelated to the implant technology. Multiple quantum computing companies cited Thomas' work from graduate school as an important step toward the future of computing (set aside that quantum computing had been the "future of computing" for decades at this point). Thomas was a quantum computing mogul, a genius medical device designer, a man who was literally curing the blind.

The companies all denied association with Thomas beyond his contributions to their respective fields, but this did not stop Corey, captured media, and the public from spreading the myth. Thomas never confirmed, but he also never denied. Thomas never confirmed that he was wealthy, but he also never denied. Thomas never confirmed that he was Carolus, but he also never denied.

Thomas spent one full year not denying. The last time he had tried, when he held an interview with the New York Times denying that he was running for mayor, it only generated more belief that he actually was. He wrote:

"No no no no no I am not I am not I am not but I suppose I am. I suppose I would be more if I said no no no and I would be if I said yes yes yes so I say that's not relevant, next question, and I continue to be."

So Thomas was an Elon Musk packaged for the blue collar New Yorker. He *was*, even though he was not a businessman, or even a wealthy man. His opponents felt they had infinite ammo because his image was, they said, built on lies. His proponents continued to cite the same sources. He continued to not deny.

In his first few weeks in his new position, he was followed about by journalists. Articles tended to focus on the banal aspects of Thomas' life. Here are a few telling titles from June of 2038:

“Kelly, millionaire politician, eats at McDonald's”

“Thomas Kelly's Summer outfits: Gym shorts every day”

“Shadow Mayor Kelly hardly ever sees his own shadow”

The last of these articles is not an insightful metaphor for the nature of power, but rather an article about how he rarely left his apartment during the day – the name “Shadow Mayor” was likely a reference to Musk, who was often called the “Shadow President.”

These stories strengthened his image as an eccentric, but drew little interest from readers after a short while. Still, there is an important line crossed here that changes the fundamentals of the Thomas point of view. That is, if we are to believe nothing to this point in the story really

depended on Thomas the man, that he could have been replaced with anyone and the actions of the movement were simply occurring *around* him, this is the bifurcation after which this is no longer true. His personality and eccentric behaviors now informed the perception of him and the actions performed around him in very important ways. If we believe Thomas, before this point his only action of consequence was inaction – now he had no choice but to have his moves watched, to give interviews, to have his speech (rather than the absence thereof) analyzed and interrogated.

Interviews with Thomas were famously entertaining. While he was forced to give the occasional press conference, he tried his best to ensure most interviews were conducted while he was walking down the street in Queens. If he received a phone call that a Fox News anchor wanted to interview him about some new policy, he rarely declined. Instead, he said “tell them to meet me three blocks from my apartment, and make sure they bring a camera on wheels.”

No text can do the strangeness of these interviews justice, but we will try to give our best description of one in early July. Imagine Thomas, in a black crew neck T-shirt and gym shorts, with his messy shoulder-length hair, walking briskly down the street on a sticky New York Summer day. As New Yorkers do, he makes quick turns when he sees a traffic light isn't going his way. He jaywalks when there are no cars in sight. He looks like a real guy you might see on the street, save the giant camera with a dolly rolling backwards in front of him and barely keeping up with his movements.

The reporter, wearing a black suit, is walking to his side, moving a giant microphone back and forth between the front of his own face and Thomas' face. The reporter has to keep the pace of both his body and the microphone in time with Thomas' walking, but also has to look towards the camera at all times. Thomas, on the other hand, is making an effort to scope out cars and red lights and piles of dog feces on the ground. As a result, there are frequent booms from the reporter's face hitting the microphone as he miscalculates the next step or turn. Everyone is sweating, and Thomas is smiling.

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, where are we walking today?

Thomas: Just Thomas.

Reporter: Alright sir, where are we walking today?

Thomas: [Giggles] Not sure yet! Isn't it good to get some exercise?

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, what do you have to say about the recent complaint that you never set foot in City Hall?

Thomas: [Laughs] Do documents have to be read and written at City Hall? Can conversations only happen at City Hall? I'm pretty sure we all have phones and computers. [Laughs louder] Also, just Thomas, but I'll forgive you.

Reporter: People are –

Thomas: Wait, one more thing. How long did it take you to get out here from your office?

Reporter: We are trying to ask you about –

Thomas: No no, really?

Reporter: Please, Dr. Kelly, we –

Thomas: Hey, *you* wanna answer? [He smiles with an open mouth while pointing at the camera man.]

Cameraman: [Laughs] About ninety minutes.

Thomas: My math is rusty. I think that means that if I hung out at City Hall it would take three hours out of my workday. And you know, it's even worse on weekends!

Reporter: So, you work on weekends?

Thomas: Well, not on the Sabbath.

Reporter: So you don't work on Saturdays?

Thomas: Well, if I were Jewish, or I guess a Seventh Day Adventist, then I could never.

Reporter: Are you Jewish?

Thomas: In a sense.

Reporter: So you work on Sundays?

Thomas: Well, [laughs] I can't work on the Sabbath, can I?

Just as Americans had appreciated bombastic and uninhibited dramatists over stuffy politicians in the 2010s and 2020s, people were charmed by Thomas' jovial and unconventional interview style. There was a key difference: whereas early First Republicans were explicitly antagonistic towards the media, Thomas was never aggressive towards reporters. It just looked like he was having fun.

On policy issues, his answers were perceived as frustrating, dodgy and uninterpretable. Here's an example on public transit:

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, it seems transportation is a major issue for you. What does the Corey administration plan to do in terms of fixing our decaying subway infrastructure?

Thomas: Well, if it were up to me, there would be more trains.

Reporter: If it were up to you?

Thomas: Yes.

Reporter: Don't you have a say in such things?

Thomas: Yes.

Reporter: So what policies do you suggest?

Thomas: [Laughs] If it were up to me, there would be more trains. Maybe something out here so that reporters could get here a bit quicker.

Here is an example from a later interview regarding the deployment of armed policemen into every subway car:

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, you've called for a new policy in which there will be a police officer in every single subway car at all times. Some New Yorkers are calling the city a "police state." What do you say to these concerned citizens?

Thomas: [Laughs] Did I call for that?

Reporter: It is a new policy made by the Corey administration, and they cited you as an author of the policy.

Thomas: They said that?

Reporter: Yes, Dr. Kelly, they said that.

Thomas: Wow! [Laughs] I guess I tell those citizens: don't discriminate against the policemen on the subway. They are riders just like you. Then again, [giggles] I guess it's much more dangerous now if a train gets delayed.

Reporter: Elaborate on that.

Thomas: Well, who doesn't get mad when they're on a train stopped between stations? I mean, who hasn't thought – man, I could shoot someone right now! And if you had a big gun! [Laughs loudly.]

If you were alive and politically conscious during 2038 and 2039, you almost certainly saw dozens of these interviews. You might not have known whether to laugh or cry. On one hand, you walked onto the train and there was the policeman with a semiautomatic rifle. You sat down and felt like you were being watched; maybe you felt fear. And here's the guy that ostensibly put that policeman, that rifle, on your train. And he's laughing!

Or maybe you felt fear before, and now you felt safe, happy that nobody could stick you up, smoke on the train or sleep on the seats. And here's the guy that ostensibly put that savior, that civil servant on your train. But... he's laughing?

–

The official narrative of the Corey administration was that most major policy changes in that year were authored primarily by Kelly from his "home office" in Queens, and then edited and enacted by the Mayor's office. Thomas was frustrating because he pretended not to know

what the policies even were, and he argued for and against them in interviews like a student writing a political science essay.

The policies were vaguely lifted from his essay in many cases, but only the most authoritarian of that work's suggested measures were implemented. There was no chance, for example, that a far-right administration would ever pursue redistribution of wealth to the lower classes. Increasing police presence and ballooning arrests, on the other hand, were fair game.

As discussed above, the first policy attributed to Thomas was the placement of a police officer in every car of every train. The cost of this measure was immense, and required funneling money into the police budget from other sources – mostly the education budget, and more specifically, New York's world-class special needs education program. The policy was so popular with the president that they were able to receive federal funding for the program as well.

Being an NYPD officer was, and still is, a pretty great job. You're protected by one of the most powerful labor unions in the country, you get a decent salary and even better overtime pay, you need only two years of college education, and your job might amount to standing still on the train while holding a big gun.

There was an argument to be made that giving so many working class people excellent jobs lifted the lower classes and stimulated the economy; that argument is not without merit. It was true that many lower-middle-class people, who could not afford higher education past the community college level, could now very easily become policemen and lift their families to the

upper-middle class. These success stories did not often come from within the city; you don't have to live in New York City to work at the NYPD, so officers mostly commuted from New Jersey, Long Island or Westchester County.

The lower classes generally did not go to even community college, tended to despise the police, and felt the effects of overpolicing more than any other group. The net effect was that the policy uplifted some not-very-poor people outside of the city, jailed thousands of poor and homeless people within the city, and did so with money made by firing special education teachers.

The overpolicing was not just a matter of increased presence but also of increased power. There were many laws in New York that were on the books but rarely enforced; while it was illegal to sleep, drink or use drugs in public, cops would usually turn a blind eye to these offenses claiming there were “more important things to deal with.” Now, these offenses were met with prosecution and often jail time. Homelessness was functionally illegal unless you slept in shelters – services that were already defunded and of declining quality and quantity.

Thomas was later credited with a unilateral sex work and pornography ban, which was poorly received across the political spectrum save some very conservative Christians and very radical feminists. The effort was technologically challenging, as it involved maintenance of a block list for SlimNets that hosted pornographic material, and collaboration with internet service providers to ensure that these Nets could not be accessed from New York devices. Any provider that failed to comply would be met with lawsuits.

Virtual private networks could be used by tech-savvy individuals to skirt these restrictions. These were made illegal by the Trump administration a decade prior to stop Americans from accessing content from other countries, and the leading operating systems had introduced clever ways to block users from installing them. The barrier of entry to using a VPN was installing a Linux-based operating system, which required knowing a guy who could give you installation files on an external drive, carefully sidestepping built-in safeguards around installing new operating systems imposed by computer manufacturers, and then actually knowing how to use the operating system to the point that you could install the VPN. That was not easy for most people, as technological literacy was on the decline.

There was also a physical media problem that VPNs could not overcome. The sale of erotic literature, pornographic magazines and comics was also made illegal. This very quickly resulted in a thriving black market industry for smuggling such materials into the city from neighboring states, which could only be stopped by random searches of vehicles entering the city by, again, new police officers.

Telephone companies were forced to hand over data to the city government as well, with the stated purpose of prosecuting individuals who sent pornographic content over text messages. The problems with this sort of monitoring were obvious; it stifled freedom of speech in that the government could also track political dissidents with access to these data, but more importantly, it created a bureaucratic clique of mostly middle-aged men who had access to nude images of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. Some of these images were of minors.

There is an analogy here to the sex crimes of Catholic priests and Boy Scout leaders; the jobs themselves do not create sexual deviance, but they attract sexual deviants. Once a system has been built around them with an incentive to cover up offenses, that magnet becomes stronger and stronger. While the newly formed Department for the Eradication of Pornography did arrest the occasional texter to signal their legitimacy, these “civil servants” generally hoarded the material without consequence.

The prison system was expanded to house the massive number of newly convicted sex criminals, and conditions were no better than standard American prisons. “My crime,” one former prisoner writes, “was sending a picture of my dick to my boyfriend. The punishment was slaughtering cows for less than a dollar per day, suffering sexual violence from other prisoners, and beatings from wardens.”

The construction of new prisons was billed as a means of uplifting the working class through new jobs for uneducated construction workers. However true this might have been, would these workers not have been equally valuable in fixing the Hell Gate Bridge?

On the porn ban issue, Thomas was subject to many interviews by the press in which he failed to take a side on what was ostensibly his own policy. One from November, 2038 gives a good sense of how these usually proceeded:

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, you have been under fire lately for a pornography ban that has led to the imprisonment of thousands of New Yorkers in the past month. What do you have to say to residents concerned that this amounts to an act of authoritarian oppression?

Thomas: Huh. That's a tricky issue, right?

Reporter: What do you mean?

Thomas: Well I guess if I were to argue against it, I'd come up with something better than "this is authoritarianism." Like, maybe you should compare it to prohibition and say it will create a black market, or maybe you say it's anti-free market, or maybe you try to find some esoteric porn scientist to cite, right? Don't you think that would sway someone better than "this is authoritarianism?"

Reporter: But Dr. Kelly, it's your policy to defend.

Thomas: Please, just Thomas, it's ok. If I *had* to defend it, I guess I'd point out that no matter –

Reporter: You *do* have to defend it, it's your –

Thomas: I'm working on it, don't worry. If I had to defend it, I'd probably point out that we've never had a form of sex work or pornography industry that empowered women in any way. We've tried! A lot! But every new avenue just leads to a new kind of pimp, a new way for men to take advantage of women, make them dependent, get them addicted to drugs, steal from them or beat them. Maybe gay porn? I don't know, I haven't looked into it. I'll get back to you on that! [Laughs.]

Reporter: So Dr. Kelly, am I correct in saying that you see this as a socially progressive, feminist policy?

Thomas: Not quite. I am saying that if I had to defend it [wide smile], a feminist argument might be convincing! And by the way, ma'am, I don't mean to be rude or provocative, but nobody can ban imagination. We can all still imagine. Maybe that'll be good for us! [Laughs.] We can't hurt real women with our imaginations.

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, the people want to know what *you* think about the policy, why *you* put it in place.

Thomas: The mayor put it in place.

Reporter: Yes, but you authored the policy.

Thomas: I'm pretty sure her name's the one signed on the bill! [Laughs.] I bet if you ask her she'll say something different. Shouldn't you be interviewing her?

—

The omnipresence of police was felt immediately, and it seemed every day there was a new story about another person being arrested that almost nobody would argue deserved jail time. There was a new disagreeable bill, a new frustrating interview, a new Net you could no longer access. If you followed the news, you were probably living in constant anguish.

But strangely, there was little in terms of protest. Protest was not among the many acts illegalized in that year, and small marches down side streets or groups of picketers on college campuses were not hard to find if you looked; it's just that most people didn't look. The average informed adult was more depressed than enraged – who had the energy to fight back? What

would they even do? Maybe scream, maybe pick up a sign, maybe write an angry letter? But that probably wouldn't do much, and more than that, you probably didn't feel up to doing it.

Generating fear of action is one way to control a population. Many regimes in history have sent dissident thinkers to work camps or put them in front of a firing squad – that certainly stifled dissent, and in at least some cases commensurate re-education efforts might even lead to a society in which many people *liked* the firing squads. With the massive armed police force stationed around the city and a complete grip on the education system, the Corey administration and (ostensibly) Thomas could have easily taken this route. It appears as a choice, then, that they didn't.

Another way to control a population, a way that has been successful just as many times in history, is to generate a sense of depression and futility rather than fear. Go ahead, hang out at the cafe with your socialist buddies, scream and cry, but ultimately, you have to get back to work and walk your dog and go see your kid's soccer game. You have to build a strong relationship with your husband, you have to gun for that promotion, you have to divorce your husband, you have to look for a new job, you have to take care of your mouse colony. If those things take all of the energy you have and more, what was it again that you were thinking of protesting that weekend? The fact that you can't take a break to read erotica on your laptop?

The authors of the present work recall many people saying there was a line, and if the government crossed that line, they would take to the streets. The issue was, nobody knew where the line really was. Thousands disappearing to prison – that wasn't their line? It is hard to

imagine in retrospect that there was no revolt, but at the time it just made sense. Who could keep up with the rapidity of the dissolution of human rights when modern life was already too much to keep up with? That was true for us, our parents, our friends, and it was also true for Thomas Kelly.

Chapter 24 – Wouldn't You Agree? (Diary Entry February 2, 2039)

They never took away my card access. They never even bothered to stop paying me. This is something special. How much ketamine and xylazine they let me have that I do not deserve. It was nuts and pulleys and steel at first, but why stop there? There is so much to be done now that I have time to Do and energy to Do and a mandate to Don't.

She sits in my hand and her front-right leg fails her, bulging out with a tumorous tumor. I can hold her now. She was a favorite of mine, one who liked to play in my hair and crawl on my shirt against gravity, like a gecko, like she had van der Waals forces attaching her hands to my body. And now she tries and she falls into my hands. I had no choice but to help her, wouldn't you agree?

The technology is complicated but the idea is simple. The cancer is a badness that grows wrongly and too quickly. We have developed the chemotherapy that so tortures man from this idea – we kill the fastest thing, but the fast is sometimes goodness and sometimes badness. So you vomit and you crumble and you cannot sleep and you want nothing more than to sleep. Fast – syntactic information. Bad – semantic information. But bad must be quantified to be eradicated, at least with lasers and poisons, wouldn't you agree?

We have incredible methods – nano-dual optical tomography devices that can isolate single cells *in vivo*, *in whole-o mouse-o*. You place the mouse in that thing, and it whirs and it takes Radon transforms, and those are themselves slices of Fourier transforms, themselves

frequency representations of the object within. Compact in space and space and space and time is infinite in frequency and frequency and frequency and frequency, but you window and you invert that compact frequency frequency frequency frequency space to approximate that compact space space space time mouse. It works like a charm. It generates crapabytes of data. How far we have come! What patriots we should be!

It is fast in time – high frequency – that cancer generates, unless it is a slow-growing cancer! The poison! It doesn't work! But wait, there is such a thing as a healthy mouse. A mouse without cancer. What is his frequency frequency frequency frequency? Or her. With such incredible time and space resolution – such incredible frequency resolution – shouldn't the differences be obvious? And if not in frequency than in some other basis, some cancer basis, some eigencancers there must be orthogonal eigencancers! But maybe frequency is good enough! So long as there are four. Wouldn't you agree?

With Mr. Radon, Mr. Fourier, and finally pinpointed radiation, all with tons and tons of data and just the right amount of ketamine-xylazine. And oh the data I have can be infinite! How many healthy mice? However many I have and however many I need!

valentin - this is no pipe dream. She is saved. She runs through my hair. She climbs in my shirt. She runs like her children. She may have another year yet. Why should it not work on her sisters? Wouldn't you agree?

Part 3 – Refrigerators

You slavers will know what it's like to be a slave

A slave to your hearts, a slave to your head

A slave to your souls, a slave to your graves

- *Tony McKay*

Chapter 25 – Life Beyond

Something that impressed fans and detractors alike about Thomas was his perceived impressive work ethic. After an explosive Summer, Thomas decided to continue teaching night classes in the Fall while remaining the chief advisor to the mayor. Although some people were skeptical about this decision, believing he would be too distracted by his teaching work to competently manage policy decisions, there was no measurable difference between the city government's function before and after he began teaching.

There was also some disagreement within BMCC as to whether they should let this highly controversial political figure teach courses at their school. While a petition to terminate his contract gained some traction, the publicly-funded college was in no place to get on the bad side of the city government. Students were interested in taking classes with Thomas Kelly because he was Thomas Kelly, and much to his chagrin, his lectures were videotaped and uploaded across various Nets. He really was an excellent teacher, so the videos reinforced the perception of Dr. Thomas Kelly, Ph.D. as a brilliant eccentric. Not only was he running three companies and the largest city in America, but he was also taking time out of his incredibly busy day to teach the future generation of New York scientists.

When the Fall semester ended, he replaced teaching with anesthetizing mice and sticking them in nano-DOT machines at Mount Sinai. While there are no videos, we know this is true as the exabytes of volumetric videos he generated are now available to the public; they were of some utility to biologists for at least a decade after.

A Thomas Kelly apologist might point out that the extent of his scientific productivity would not have been possible if he were actually working as a full-time advisor to the mayor. Therefore, the apologist would say, Thomas was merely a puppet and scapegoat used by opportunistic authoritarians. This would be a fine argument for almost any subject, but we have seen that this particular man had stretches of appearing to live outside of the boundaries of the twenty-four-hour day. It is not inconceivable that he might have spent eight hours per day on the phone with City Hall, then spent the night at the hospital before a 4 hour nap at home each morning. What can be said with certainty is that Thomas, over the course of half of a year (with the bulk of the work performed in only two months), developed a cure for cancer.

More precisely, he developed an algorithm to guide precision radiation therapy using nano-dual optical tomography volumetric time-series data. His description of the algorithm in the preceding diary entry is cryptic and slightly technical, so we will attempt to explain it to an audience unfamiliar with the techniques at play – please excuse some silly words and French names.

Dual optical tomography, then a novel and expensive technology, involves shining very broadband light – violet to infrared – through a target and recording both what light passed through to the other side and what light was reflected from the object. Information from these two signals (hence *dual*) is combined to form a video of the three-dimensional sample at nanometer-scale resolutions. The light source and camera are rotated and the process is repeated at thousands of angles.

The transmitted light or its lack, the shadow, is a projection of the three-dimensional object that tells you how much light-blocking tissue was in the path of the beam. As with photographs, the projection must be recorded at many angles to gain an understanding of the object in all three dimensions. The total set of shadows at all angles is called the *Radon transform* of the object, which is different for each wavelength (i.e. color) of light. Color-based differences correspond to differences in tissue type – maybe a stomach transmits more blue light than red, while the opposite is true for a liver.

The reflected light provides information about the positions of reflective objects in the sample based on how long it takes the light to return to the system. The math here is a bit tricky, but for our purpose, let's agree that this works: if you watch the reflected light over time, tiny differences in the light's travel time indicates tiny motions. Tiny in this case means motions on the scale of single hydrogen atoms. Bigger motions can be tracked just by looking at the variation in the reflected light or the shadow at the other end. The synthesis of these data is a video of the object in three dimensions, where the image itself has resolution on the order of single cells and motions within the object can be registered at the angstrom scale (one tenth of a nanometer).

Thomas' method did not simply take these videos as they were and use them to determine the positions of cancer cells. Instead, he performed a computation to generate a new signal that could be more easily compared across animals. This computation involves what is called a *Fourier transform*, which does merit some explanation.

The fundamental idea behind Fourier analysis is that a signal – here a video – can be represented in terms of its frequency components. The idea is already familiar to us all, though not in such scientific terms, through our sense of hearing. We naturally think of sounds as having high or low frequency components, and this is built into our language – we refer to baritone singers as having “low voices” and sopranos as having “high voices.” The frequency is simply the rate at which the signal is changing, in this case across time. To “take a Fourier transform” is to represent a signal in terms of its frequency components.

In an image, the boundary between a sky and a cloud is a “fast” change; high frequency; whereas the shades of white and gray within a cloud change slowly; low frequency. A video of a volume is four-dimensional, with three dimensions of space and one of time. It can be equivalently represented in four frequency dimensions, one for variations in each dimension of space and one for variations in time. This is what Thomas means when he writes “frequency and frequency and frequency and frequency.”

Certain features of a signal are much easier to think about in frequency rather than time or space – we have already mentioned that we naturally think of sound in terms of frequency, because thinking of a time-varying pressure wave is less intuitive than thinking “the bass guitar can hit lower notes than the regular guitar.” Similarly, it is valuable in some contexts to consider the *rates* at which cells divide, the *frequency* of cell division.

Thomas observed not the volumetric video but rather its four-dimensional Fourier transform. This makes it easier to ignore unimportant signal differences between samples (one mouse was a bit bigger than another, a cell division happened three seconds into the recording in one but four seconds into the recording in another) and focus on much more important differences such as rates of cell migration and division across the animals' bodies. An algorithm could then find regions of abnormally high or abnormally low frequency and identify the cell groups in the body to which they corresponded. These would hopefully be cancer cells, and with the incredible resolution of the device, one could then precisely target radiation to kill only these specific cells and, at worst, a few surrounding cells as collateral damage. Boom! Cancer cured!

Some readers may have had a nano-DOT image of their body taken at the doctor's office to screen for skin cancer or diseases of the eye – it is now standard in diagnosing issues with small body parts because it is safe and cheap to construct. It has largely replaced computed tomography or projection radiography for such purposes, as it does not use ionizing radiation. At the time, however, the use of nano-DOT was restricted to wealthy hospitals and laboratories because the storage space and RAM required to handle these videos were well beyond the specifications of any commercially available computers. The light sources and sensors themselves were at the absolute cutting edge of precision and sensitivity, as very little visual light actually passes through the body.

As with any new and expensive medical technology, it went through an arc of perceived value: first it was a novelty that was too clunky and expensive for anyone to take seriously, then it was the future of all medicine and would replace every other imaging modality within five

years, then it was a very nice technology for certain research and clinical purposes that “filled a niche.” Thomas was fortunate enough to be in a wealthy lab that had access to such a device in the second step of the arc. The idea of any device being the secret key to curing cancer is and has always been naive, but *hype* is a powerful drug even among brilliant scientists. Thomas was never going to cure all cancer and he didn't seem to believe that he would, but it is not surprising that people believed that he did.

The issue was not that Thomas' idea was terrible – a modified version of “the Kelly method” is used to this day to non-invasively treat early-stage melanomas. The issue was that Thomas knew hardly anything about cancer, and had no interest in generalizing the idea past experimental treatment on dying mice. He was a cancer-curing *hobbyist*. There is no “healthy Fourier transform” of the human body, and cross-sample variations can cause statistical differences in frequency responses that dwarf whatever changes would be caused by most cancers. This is why the method works only on small subsystems, like tiny patches of skin, with the decisions made by the Kelly algorithm being triple-checked by real doctors before treatment.

Given the mice were all of the same genetic background strain (Black 6) and that mice are sufficiently small for full-body nano-DOT, his samples were probably sufficiently homogeneous to allow successful treatment of simple tumors. For more advanced stages or cancers of the brain, the method almost certainly would have failed or even killed his mice. What we can be sure of from his available data is that at least the first mouse treated – as described in the preceding diary entry – was a success story.

The initial volumetric video shows that she arrived with a large cancerous tumor on the right side of her abdomen, just anterior to the rear leg. After the automated radiation treatment, the animal was imaged again and all probable cancer cells were dead with minimal damage to the rest of the animal. A final video for the day shows the same animal after a surgery had been performed to remove most of the dead cells within the tumor. What remained was a mouse in the shape of a healthy mouse, save the sutures on the right side of its belly.

—

It is easy to get swept up in the media frenzy and scientific achievement, all the while leaving the *man* unnoticed. Little is said in past works about Thomas' personal life in this year of chaos; arguably, it is not very interesting in comparison to the transformation of New York into a police state and the development of what was briefly believed to be a cure for all cancers; but this is a history of Thomas Kelly, and Thomas Kelly was leading some approximation of a real life despite his immense productivity.

Thomas managed to maintain his dates with Chloe. The tabloids quickly picked up on “the Shadow Mayor’s Shadow Partner,” as people saw them engaged in intimate conversations over breakfast each weekend. The papers often noted the strange non-physical nature of their relationship – why didn’t they hold hands? Why didn’t he kiss her goodbye? When bothered by reporters on the street about one another, they would reply that it wasn’t anyone’s business; as that wasn’t a strong “no,” the rumors maintained their momentum well into the Spring.

Chloe was not yet a Nobel laureate; sadly, she never would be. While life barreled forward for Thomas, life – the very same life! – stalled for his best friend. Three years after Thomas earned his Ph.D., Chloe was still nowhere near finishing her own degree program. Her advisor, one Dr. Tobias Carroll, was infamous for keeping his students for as long as school policy allowed, and in most cases well beyond that limit. Toby, as he was colloquially known, would stall submission of high-quality manuscripts to keep bright students working on other projects in his lab. The students he least respected took about six years to get out; his most talented students were lucky to graduate in nine years.

Toby's abuse of his students was hardly a secret; he was widely hated, but the university had their hands tied because he was a Nobel laureate who could easily move to any other institution in the world. This meant that even when he blatantly broke rules, the university had to turn a blind eye. A former student wrote in an open letter to the institution after quitting eleven years into her Ph.D. program:

“University policy says that graduate students must graduate within seven years, and if they do not, they cannot remain on payroll. Toby wanted to keep me as a graduate student, so after I got taken off of payroll he hired me as a ‘Laboratory Custodian’ (my duties did not change) just as a way to legally keep me there. When the school said he could not do that, he began paying me in cash. It is not clear if I ever even could have graduated, given I was not technically enrolled in the program for the last four years.”

This scathing indictment did – nothing.

Chloe had been at the lab for six years with no end in sight, and feared she could be the next student to spend her entire young adulthood at the beck and call of Toby Carroll. Like every student before her, she faced this fear by *trying*. Maybe she could be the star student who did such incredible work that in seven years, she could have a paper in *Nature* and nobody could deny that she deserved to graduate. She would come out of her program with a CV that said “I worked with a Nobel laureate, I kicked ass, and I'm going to be a Nobel laureate too.” And once she was, she would treat her students like humans with dreams.

That such an ambitious and intelligent person would also be a Kellyist, a defender of mass incarceration and social engineering, might be surprising to some readers. On the other hand, this was a person with no power under the boot of an unfair system – what could be more enticing than the belief that she was a part of an anti-system movement with overwhelming power? That she, the closest friend of the figurehead, might be at the highest levels of that movement.

How many New Yorkers were like Chloe? How many were abused by their bosses, never allowed to meet their potentials, forced to relegate free time to one short breakfast every weekend? Wasn't this *most* New Yorkers? Most Americans?

Chloe was unlike most Americans in that, at this point, she was the only person who was aware of Thomas' mouse room and his success in curing one mouse of cancer. She was also the only person Thomas ever says that he trusted enough to tell the truth. Given that “the truth”

according to his writings was that he was completely uninvolved with the Kellyists, three interpretations come to mind: his diary is a collection of lies, he did not tell Chloe the truth, or Chloe did not believe him. The third of these is most interesting to consider. Perhaps to her, the signs pointed the same way that most historians have read them as pointing; here was a truly exceptional man with unrivaled productivity and talent who never denied his involvement in a movement he was certainly bright enough to create. His denial to Chloe was as legitimate as his non-denials to the press. Plus – who in America, given the chance and ability and time, wouldn't take the opportunity to cut down the system? Who wouldn't generate the anti-system if they could?

The life Thomas led beyond the political sphere is what anyone would consider a full life – he was a man with a close friend, two jobs, a partner, a nice apartment, pets. He and all of his loved ones had their needs met, had food and water and refrigerators to put their food and water into. Was he under the boot of an abusive system? No. He was not like those New Yorkers, not like Chloe, not in desperate need to overcome powerlessness against any cruel overseer. He was not a prisoner, not a slave. Not on paper.

Chapter 26 – A Slave to Your Soul (Diary Entry December 1, 2038)

Complete darkness – could a person ever sit in complete darkness? Now and again a man will tell you he has seen a complete darkness, a night where the clouds covered the stars and the moon, out in the country where no source of light could be found for dozens of miles. Put a man in a room with no door, no windows, no cracks, and he will say he has seen a complete darkness.

Call me a pedant, but I beg to differ (if you call me a pedant, I may beg to differ as well). We know any material object radiates light dependent on its temperature, although here on Earth this light is at a wavelength we cannot perceive with human eyes. Snakes famously can see this infrared light – can “see heat.” No, it is not a complete darkness for a snake. There is light, but we cannot perceive it.

Our bodies too emit light within our visible spectrum as a byproduct of chemical processes, just at too low a level to be perceived by our eyes. There is light, but we cannot perceive it.

Pedantry, yes – define darkness through the perception of light rather than the presence of light. No again. We know of psychotics who perceive objects which are not present. People who do not typically hallucinate can be induced to hallucinate through sleep deprivation or the use of psychoactive drugs. Still many among us see images when we close our eyelids, and nearly all among us dream. We constantly perceive light which is not present.

“If a tree falls in the woods and nobody is there to hear it...” no! This is not some useless philosophical riddle. This is a question with a simple answer. There is no complete darkness from the perspective of a human being. Not in any sense of the word.

It seems one way in which the human being is distinct from other animals is that it is obsessed with its limitations. At the top of all hierarchies, it serves no evolutionary purpose to overcome our inability to hear ultrasonic frequencies, to breathe in water, to safely handle hydrofluoric acid. We know these not to be limitations of the universe, but of us, and there seems to be a certain class of people who cannot sit well with this fact.

I could never sit well with my own eyes.

I think the limitations of humanity are the negative definition of the soul. Or perhaps a trifle bit little tad more complicated: the perception of limitation and the idea of something else overcoming the perceived limitation is from where we must derive the idea of soul. I think in this sense, yes, I am not religious, sure, no I am not, but I believe in SOULS, sure. Why not?

It is fun to imagine the men so bothered as I am by the unreality of complete darkness who also spent entire lives trying to interpret the Bible. The Bible! And perhaps the only way to make sense of it is that they were more bothered than any by the idea of something else overcoming our perceived limitations? The idea that there is SOMETHING that can see the infrared light, SOMETHING that can breathe below water, and maybe there is SOMETHING

that can experience complete darkness. Why couldn't SOMETHING animate a dead body? Why couldn't SOMEONE turn all of the waters of the Earth to ice or to blood?

Maybe a good scientist is a man who asks these questions and answers yes and yes, even though they are not yes questions, because they are vacuous statements. To un-(dis?-)evacuate them you have to un-perceive the limitation. You have to say yes, the dead will one day walk throughout the land. That's the axiom. Or you have to say yes, the angel can turn all of the waters to blood. That's the axiom. And from there, where do you arrive?

The soul? I believe so, yes. I would like to see a paper discussing the moment when, in the process of death, the soul leaves the body of the mouse. I imagine that somewhere in the library of whoseitwhatsit in the seventeenth century there is a paper from one of the greatest minds of human history that discusses the moment at which the soul leaves the body of the mouse. I think that would be fucking hilarious.

But to these guys, it was real. The soul. My soul. And we use the same word for music or food, but in that case it seems we mean "black." Be honest, everyone. You hear "soul food" and you think "black food" and that's ok. Black food is good, just like most foods, but why do we use the word soul for black? Because in America, perhaps, blacks are the most in touch with the idea that others can perform above their perceived limitations – not just other entities but other humans. And so they are more in touch with the soul, or at the least we associate them more with the soul, not because they are more religious or more moral but because they are the most

limited. No! They are the most AWARE of their limitations and how they are not the limitations of others. To have a soul is not to be a slave, but to be AWARE that you are a slave.

Aha!

And so who does not have a soul? Who is “soulless” as they say? First, something with no perceived limitations, such as God the Father (notably not the Christ). Second, something that is limited and has no capacity to perceive its limitations, such as a rock. Third, something that is limited and DOES NOT perceive its limitations, like certain real rough people. And thus we can speak to a two-dimensional space of soul.

To be tortured by your limitations and so magnetically attracted to that book, the book about man and his limitations most of all, is to have the most soul. I think the book is simple:

Part 1: God has no soul.

Part 2: God lives as a man. The Christ has limitations. The Christ perceives these limitations. The Christ has a soul.

And there are many, MANY papers and books somewhere about the metaphysical time-space-soul-soul position of Christ from his conception to his resurrection (where do you think it was right as he died on the cross?). God as man is the only way we can see God as “soul” because God the father has no soul because he cannot perceive of his own limitations. That is why the Christ’s message is so powerful, even to me. Not only God as man – that man could be a

man without a soul, because some men have no soul – but God as soul. God as slave. God as something that KNOWS it is a slave.

And so religion imposes rules. It imposes restrictions on things you wish you could do, so that you can be certain at every moment that you are a slave. You can be filled with soul. And the treasure? The goal?

If you are a Jew the soul is the whole treasure. You spend 365.25 holidays each year thinking about how much you are a slave. And you live knowing first, above all else, that you are a slave. That you have soul.

And if you are a Christian? When Christ tells the beggar that they will be together in the kingdom of heaven, he is saying “worry not – you will no longer have a soul.” The treasure is to have no soul. And in hell? You are nothing but a slave who knows that he is a slave. Hell is to live eternally with soul.

The prisoner reads the Bible and comes to the Christ, the alcoholic reads the Bible and comes to the Christ, because they are so aware of their slavehood and they want nothing more than to have no soul.

The Christ was bothered that he could never see a complete darkness.

Chapter 27 – The Patient

There is a nondescript six-story building one half-block East of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with one rare quality – days go by without anyone walking through its doors. This is peculiar for New York, but an absence is difficult to spot, and even if it were spotted by a curious neighbor, what would he do?

The building was owned, inhabited, decorated and loved by one Gladys Stone – an eccentric Australian millionaire, widow of an eccentric Australian millionaire 50 years her senior, who came to New York when her husband died in 1991. Having no children and too much money, she purchased the building, rented out the top four floors, and turned the first and second basements into an art gallery with the purpose of bringing Australian aboriginal art to an American audience. She picked the right decade – the 1990s featured some high-profile social movements regarding racial minorities, including the famous battle between American Indian and Italian-American advocacy groups over the name of Christopher Columbus Day (once Indigenous Peoples Day and then once again Christopher Columbus Day). The New York art community has always moved with the socially progressive wind, and aboriginal peoples were adjacent enough to American Indians that Stone's gallery was able to make a significant profit. By 1998, she had stopped renting out the upstairs apartments and turned the first through sixth floor into one massive “bachelorette pad.”

Indigenous peoples began to fade out of the art world consciousness, with work by black and transgender artists being deemed more important to promote, but by that point she had very

little interest in maintaining healthy cash flow. She kept buying, displaying and sometimes selling aboriginal art to regulars with personal collections, but the whole operation became more of a passion project than a profession. Gladys kept a sign on the door from 8AM to 4PM every weekday until as late as 2030, and passersby on their way from the Met to the 6 train would sometimes happen upon the hidden gem. You would ring the doorbell, enter into a cramped foyer and wait a few minutes for a beaming woman in a colorful flowy dress to greet you and walk you down the stairs. She loved talking more than anything, and her high-pitched Australian-accented voice made her a charming hostess if not a successful saleswoman. She gained regular visitors in young art students and petite aristocrats who had no intention of purchasing any of the art, but loved to see Gladys just as much as they loved to see the work.

At some point in 2031 when Gladys was in her early 70s, she stopped putting up her sign but continued letting in what few visitors remembered the address or somehow heard about the gallery through word of mouth. At first that was almost a dozen people per day, but by the late 2030s it was only about a half-dozen people per week. Some art was still sold through middleman dealers, but rarely more than five paintings per year. Gladys was old.

Among the few remaining Stone Gallery regulars was Thomas Kelly, who had fallen in love with the gallery and Gladys on a 2030 date with Dasha. The two had failed to remember that the Met was closed on Wednesdays, and figured they would just walk around and enjoy the architecture instead. It was a cold day, so they quickly gave up on that idea and tried to find a place to warm up. Answering the call of an unassuming handwritten sign, they found New York's greatest treasure.

“It was such a memorable experience,” Dasha tell us. “You walk in and it's like an empty hotel lobby, not an abandoned lobby you know, but clean with an empty desk and some empty tables and chairs. Then here comes this woman, big and slow and smiling with tiny eyes and that short haircut old ladies have. She treated me like a niece, kissed me on the cheek, asked what I was learning in school as she floated with us down this gorgeous spiral staircase. And there was this room with probably twelve-foot ceilings and these massive paintings and tapestries.

“She told you everything there was to know about the tribes and the artists, the pigments and the tradition hidden behind each stroke. You barely got a word in, but you know, you barely wanted to. Gladys Stone. A hell of a woman. I stopped going because I had to imagine I'd see Thomas, and you know, he probably loved her even more than I did.”

He did. Thomas referred to her as a “saint” throughout years of entries about her, with some seriousness in his more unstable months and as something of a pet name otherwise. She had no descendants and it seems she hardly left her home, so we have unfortunately little to say about her from an objective lens. We can only say that she was deeply loved by a few patrons, and left nobody behind who ever said a negative word about her. Perhaps she *was* something of a saint.

Thomas wrote short entries about specific unnamed pieces in the gallery that he found particularly evocative. He noted how naturally the aborigines treated topics like automatism and chance in art, “when Europeans and Americans had to try so hard, so deliberately, to be this

insightful.” If the art had been uninteresting, he probably would not have felt such an attachment to the location, but the main attraction was clearly Saint Gladys: “The best part of this painting is the woman telling me about it.”

This relationship was very important for Thomas on an emotional level; what in life is more stabilizing than a kind old woman? But it also had a critical role to play in his professional life. Gladys helped Thomas *hide*.

—

Chloe may or may not have appreciated being the Shadow Lady, but this was a very helpful falsehood to maintain for a high-profile man hiding a relationship with a now-barely-of-age girl. “I told her to say ‘nobody’s business’ when they ask, because that means ‘keep watching’ which really means they will keep not watching Marci,” Thomas explained in one October entry. Marci, now seventeen, was in her senior year of high school beginning in September of 2038. Although their relationship was technically legal, it was far from being publicly acceptable; it still needed hiding from the public, parents, schools, and more-or-less everyone save Chloe Azad.

And Gladys Stone.

It was out of the question for Marci to continue coming to Thomas’ apartment, as any single tabloid article about some “mystery teen” seen entering his building would quickly make

it to her parents and school. His strategy was somewhat clever – there was nothing suspicious about him entering an old art gallery once or twice a week, and there was nothing suspicious about Marci doing the same fifteen minutes before or after. There were plenty of empty bedrooms on the upper floors, filled with gorgeous aboriginal tapestries, in which the two could speak, eat food made by Gladys' personal chef, and have sex.

Gladys had no issue on this front – at Marci's age, Gladys was already engaged to a sixty-seven-year-old man. She deemed the norms of modern society to be puritanical, and was happy to help a friend avoid scrutiny in the public eye for such a meaningless transgression. Everything went according to plan.

The plan was only foiled by a chain of events stemming from the very last characteristic of Gladys Stone that is known – she was afraid of doctors. “She asks me – my chest hurts, what do you think could cause such a thing?” Thomas wrote. “I keep telling her I'm not a real doctor. But maybe I'm the only person with a dee arr dot in front of his name that she knows? She's old and fat. Isn't that enough reason to go to a doctor?”

It was! But fear of medicine is as strong as fear of death in some individuals, and when Gladys recognized a discoloration of the skin on her right hand, she reached out not to a dermatologist but to dee arr dot Thomas Kelly. And what was the man to do?

This purely personal incident in March of 2039 can be seen as more important to the downfall of Thomas Kelly than any horrible policy decision, any cryptic blog post or interview,

any joke essay. It marks a point at which Thomas met a conflict his heart would not allow him to ignore, a conflict that he could not dance around with humor and rhetoric. It was a point at which he had to make an actual decision.

Gladys showed Thomas this cancer while Marci was by his side, this young child with no knowledge that her father-brother-lover had invented a technology that could cure this ailment. Well, it could cure it assuming Gladys had been a mouse. But the generalization from mouse to man is not an insurmountable one, and surely it would be less moral to turn a blind eye than to *try*, wouldn't you agree?

“I told her to give me a week. I need a week. I need a lifetime. But I need a week. I need a lifetime and I need a week,” Thomas wrote. But he might have been less concerned about the cancer than he was about his daughter-sister-lover to his side.

Chapter 28 – A Slave to Your Heart (Diary Entry March 28, 2039)

My body is on fire. Terrible sleep. Terrible food. NO food. Terrible sex. NO sex.
Excellent friends. ONE friend.

This woman who is my dearest mother is also a fucking retard. I just don't understand it – doctor doctor doctor doctor doctor doctor – it is letters that mean I typed a few thousand greek letters on a roman keyboard, proving my genius to a set of five other doctor doctor doctor doctor doctors. My parents don't take it seriously, I don't take it seriously, when will people shut the fuck up about it.

But who is worst of all is this woman, my dearest Gladys, my safest ally and my whale mother whose loose breasts swallow my head as she hugs me and my anxieties fade away. She's scared of every doctor except for the one fake doctor she knows – DOCTOR Thomas.

No wait, I suppose I should say worst of all is ME. If I am committed to being a fake, a fraud, a phony undeserving of a dee arr dot in front of my name, then I should not be operating on mice like a surgeon or diagnosing their illnesses like an oncologist. What else would make me a doctor if not a degree that says “doctor” and a surgical practice (*pro bono, pro mouse-o*) and the most important of all: that someone else sees me as a doctor.

You see the catch – you all see the catch, right? You all see the catch? I am not the only one seeing the catch(es), right?

PROS

If I treat her cancer, I will feel happy that I have treated her cancer.

If I treat her cancer, she will feel happy that I have treated her cancer.

I will feel happy that she is happy.

She will feel proud of me.

I will feel happy that she feels proud of me.

She will not have cancer.

But oh! oh! oH! THE CONS

If I fail, she will not only have cancer but other dead tissue in her hand that will require treatment from a doctor doctor not a doctor Thomas Kelly. She will not see a doctor doctor. She will get worse and eventually die, as she would have eventually died any way but perhaps more painfully than was necessary.

In either case, I will have to get HANDS and preferably hands from women! It is a good thing that I know exclusively women, and those women on average have two hands. It is a bad thing that I would be forced to trust them, and they would be forced to trust me. How can I be confident that they will trust me. How can I be confident that I will trust them – no, how could I, why should I, certainly I should not confidently trust two women or three (but the third, that whale mother, her I trust).

This child who I have sought to protect from so much, from even second-hand smoke, and now what? I am a failure to her. But what is worse; killing a woman? What is the Bayesian analysis here? What would the Bloomberg terminal tell me to do? What would the Bloomberg tell me to do? He says:

Bloomberg: Do not.

That seems right, yes, sure, because the cons outway the pros if you have no heart. If you behave like a mathematician. If you behave like a doctor, both a doctor doctor and the sort of dear doctor that I suppose I am.

I feel

Bloomberg: There is more danger there than you think.

I feel

But I really can't. And it's not like I have long, there's no time to feel there's only time to hands. And maybe it seems I do have a heart and I do have some women with some hands (two each, at that) and I might grab them by those hands and if it works I might kiss those hands and if it fails I might have fucked up one hand but it's hands all the way down (well, not all the way, there are only a few of them).

CONS

If I succeed, won't I feel wrong for not sharing it with the world?

PROS

Maybe not?

PROS

I'm going to do it no matter what, right?

But why am I so worried about this girl? No. This WOMAN, my Marci is a woman but I treat her like a girl because I do not trust her. Am I trying to protect something sacred, more sacred than the innocence of her body and more sacred than being honest to her parents, more

sacred than that is what? I suppose second-hand smoke and a machine that can localize cancer cells in mice and maybe in womanhands.

BUT

I'm going to do it no matter what, right?

Chapter 29 – Neo-Post-Kellyism

Once they had obtained some measurable power, the Kellyist movement was forced to evolve. They had some of their policies enacted, they had “their guy” in charge, but they were still on average less happy than before.

As it turns out, people who wanted to uproot the system at every level were not content with expanding that same system’s police force. If you were a Maoist-Kellyist, you were still waiting for the part where the government fell apart and a new communist utopia rose from the ashes. If you were a centrist-Kellyist, you were still waiting for the part where the banks and pharmaceutical industries were taken down a peg and the people finally got their say in the government again. If you were a Christian-nationalist-Kellyist, you were more happy than the others but were still waiting for the part where schools stopped teaching about evolution and Corey –an agent of the anti-Christ – was deposed.

Maintaining this group of supporters with mutually exclusive politics feels like it should have been very difficult, given their only common goal – overhaul of the current government – seemed to be moving further away from them by the day. Yet the movement continued to grow, unify, and become even more radical than before.

Some historians refer to their morphed ideology as “post-Kellyism,” as the movement’s demands experienced a bifurcation *after* the goal of pushing Kelly into power was met. Others refer to it as “neo-Kellyism,” as they interpret it more as a revival of the earliest totally-online

rally around Kelly, just with slightly new means and ends. We believe it more accurate to call it Kellyism still – movements evolve over time and don't require pretentious new names to explain their evolutions.

Whether post-, neo-, neo-post-, or still-Kellyism, the nucleus became a sort of Kelly-centered eschatology. The end, you see, was still to come – it just didn't come at the time we expected. Like the Great Disappointment, when the second advent was meant to occur but did not, the assumption was not that it *would not* occur; they were just a bit confused about *when* it would occur. Perhaps it was never meant to occur all at once. Perhaps it had already begun?

The core argument was that each step Kelly made was a step towards that final unraveling of the state, even if they seemed counter-productive or counter-intuitive. His mind being so much greater than theirs, it might not make perfect sense to them until it all came together in some glorious final battle. Then, they would *really* be at the top.

This shared belief did not come without some level of sectarianism. The passive camp was of the belief that this eruption would come soon without their needing to take personal action. They needed only to listen to Carolus, and once he gave the green light, they would step on the gas. The active camp was of the opinion that the followers had a duty to play a role in the incitement of the revolution. Both agreed on one thing: things were getting worse, and they would continue to get much worse until they got better. It was just about who had to make things worse.

The sects that one would naturally suspect – communists vs. the far-right, secular vs. religious, etc. – were each split down the middle in the passive vs. active divide without significant inter- or intra-group fighting. CRLS was filled more with sympathetic disagreement than vicious argument:

Anon: Two of my cousins disappeared last night. You think this is the time?

Anon: Sorry to hear about your cousins, but I think there are going to be a few more cousins before we get enough people ready to start the show.

Anon: It's not time until it's time. We will know. We will be told.

Anon: Oh, and sorry to hear about your cousins.

Violent prediction was a mainstay of CRLS; there would be car bombs, there would be a mass slaughter of landlords, there would be businessmen assassinated; but once again, few if any of these actions were ever realized. Either recognizing these as non-threats or assuming that censorship would only radicalize these people further, the government did not silence CRLS in their mass banning of political (and pornographic) Nets.

That was because Thomas made it so.

Of course, if they *had* banned CRLS, it would have been interpreted as a brilliant action from Thomas as well. There was functionally no action that would dissuade true believers from their vision of a master plan. Thomas' every interview was picked over word-for-word for

hidden messages. His idiosyncratic body language and the motion of his eyes encoded prophecies.

Anon: I just made a spectrogram of the audio from the latest interview. Check this out. Three times, the profile makes something like a cross. Then three times after it kind of looks like an X. What do you guys think?

Anon: Cool find. It probably means there are going to be six assassinations soon.

Anon: I think the cross in the spectrogram is just what happens when you say words that have sounds like “eetee,” right?

Anon: Duh, but he knows that. How much do sounds like that just come up naturally in conversation?

Anon: My guess is thirty assassinations (XXX) not six, and the crosses are something good but I'm not sure what.

And then there would be zero assassinations, but by that point everyone would be on to the next puzzle.

News outlets picked up on the growing apocalyptic sentiment in the movement, but most close not to refer to the Net by name for fear of drawing more people in. This, of course, was interpreted as silencing the voices of supporters. Maybe the people at the top of the Times were on the spectral cross hit list?

Mutual distrust and the sanctity of anonymity meant that there were no Kellyists willing to interact with the media. Any follower who dared to take an interview was deemed a phony and a traitor, and was banned from CRLS permanently. A ban from a fully anonymous platform could not be realized, but the mechanism was never questioned and the effect was real: there were no public-facing Kellyists whatsoever. By design, it would not be clear until months after Kelly's appointment just how many people supported him, leaving the media in a confused position. Was Thomas a widely hated autocrat with a cult following, or a beloved voice of the masses?

—

The early days of Kellyism were marred by opportunistic con men. The grift at the beginning was to pretend to be an operative of the Kelly campaign, putting up ads and selling T-Shirts. As long as a few people put up a few ads and made a few T-Shirts, there was some reason to believe you were donating to a genuine organization.

This was while Kellyism was still spread across various Nets and not yet localized to CRLS. Many of the people in the phony Kelly campaign were publishing either pseudonymously or on an account attached to their real name, so they needed at least the veneer of plausible deniability. In the neo-post-Kellyist world, scammers didn't even need to pretend to deliver on their promises. The selection bias was a criminal's dream – you had a group of people who had proven themselves to be extremely naive and believed their US dollars might become worthless at any moment. Perhaps millions were stolen in campaigns for advertisements that never

manifested, mail-order guns that did not ship, and even body pillows of Thomas Kelly that we regret to say were never produced.

Real advertisements for Kelly were thereby quite rare, and the visibility of the movement was eclipsed by the visibility of the man. So we must ask: was Thomas aware that each word he said was being picked over, and each twitch of his cheek was being read as a call to arms? Although he claimed that he never used CRLS himself, he did refer in his diaries to hearing updates on the movement through Michael Bloomberg. He wrote:

Bloomberg: More from the fucking lunatics.

Thomas: Again?

Bloomberg: Maybe you should smile while facing up and right the next time you're interviewed.

Thomas: Why?

Bloomberg: Because last time, they made a big deal about you smiling while facing down and left.

Previous writers have used Thomas' playing to the online code-crackers as evidence that he was functionally one of them, but this is hard to justify in retrospect. It is clear from archived CRLS posts that Thomas playing in or not playing in would have led to indistinguishable results. These were not rational actors reading between the lines – these were people looking for crosses in spectrograms.

As far as the demographics of these “fucking lunatics,” these spectral analyzers, we can only speculate. Based on personal experience and testimony from our interviewees, it seems that many of them were middle- and upper-middle-class white people living moderately fulfilling lives. Then again, thanks to the bias of our sampling, our interviewees were mostly middle- and upper-middle-class white people living moderately fulfilling lives!

Still, we can draw something from that biased sample – the community was not entirely uneducated, was not entirely poor, and was not entirely media-illiterate. While populists have spun this and other homologous online movements as a cry for help from a desperate underclass, such a framing is not true within the usual connotations of either “desperate” or “underclass.” Whatever people were willing to believe that a man wiping his eye was a signal that a city bus would soon explode must have been desperate in some sense, but not in any manner correlated with desperation due to lack of food or shelter.

It feels both mean and too easy to say they were just a bunch of idiots who should have known better; this was a *lot* of idiots, and some of them were pretty smart idiots. Pathetic as it might sound, these people may have been desperate despite their wealth and their jobs and their families because they were clearly not *content*. With no piece of their lives they could point to and say “there, that’s the problem,” perhaps they harbored negatively-defined revolutionary thoughts without strictly considering any positive outcomes. Evinced by the lack of car bombings, maybe they harbored revolutionary thoughts without actually wanting a revolution to occur.

Why weren't these people content?

Chapter 30 – A Slave to Your Head (Diary Entry April 8, 2039)

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly.

Thomas: Just Thomas.

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, can you please tell me what you've done to that girl.

Thomas: What I've done to that girl?

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, I am hearing from sources that you may be involved in a sexual relationship with a child.

Thomas: What sources?

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, tell me what I know you know.

It is unfortunate, it is so unfortunate, it is just unfortunate I am just unfortunate in this that he knows now not only does he know what goes on in my non-life, the invented life of mine but in my life life life I have invented life invented strictly by my choice and he is not my choice I swear it I do swear it.

SO what is she if not a child, no, she lives with mom and even with dad and even mom AND dad and she goes to high school and she is to attend a fucking PROM and I am to defend that she is not a child? But it is so sick to say it that it hurts my stomach and I know it that she is not a child I know it I do know it!

In the sense, that is, you see, that is, that she is not merely a child but a woman and I know it, but she is a child in that she is to go to a PROM and she is not yet ready. Not yet ready

for second-hand smoke. And she, he knows SHE, HE knows, is not a woman in that she is not yet old enough to handle such things as second-hand smoke and not yet old enough to handle a man, a real man, and not a man as father man as lover man as brother man as prom date but man as all that is a man and much of that is not possible for a child to confront, and oh when they confront it do they confront it POORLY so poorly that it is a poor poor situation, finally it is, a poor poor situation indeed!

But far and away for me to far and away (is it far and away?) for me to say that she is a child. And so I said so much to him I said to him, it seems

Thomas: She is a child, and she is my lover.

And he said to me it seems

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, if she is a child then you are not long for this world.

Why does he plague me with such control through only words like prophecies or words like commands and “Dr. Kelly” like a mother saying your full name, middle name included, but like “Dr. Kelly” and I have to say back

Thomas: Oh?

And what has he done for me but tell me what not to do, to tell me Dr. Kelly DO NOT, Dr. Kelly DO NOT STOP, Dr. Kelly DO NOT GO, and so I neither stop nor go and I can't even have one thing, my one beautiful Marci and my one well I am getting ahead (far and away?) of myself because he tells me, he said

Bloomberg: I know about the mice, Dr. Kelly.

I can't have my one beautiful thing and how does he know at all and how is it that now everyone, everyone from the saint to the Kellyist whore to my dearest to this slaver has to know? It was so beautiful because it was my own. It is not acceptable that anyone else should know, no, not acceptable, not. Not Fair. Fair! Can you look at me now Thomas, look at me now valentin, look at me saying it is not Fair! What kind of man. And can you believe what next he said to me was

Bloomberg: Dr. Kelly, your shoes are untied.

Of course, he didn't say this but he may as well have said my shoes were untied (and as it turns out they were!) because he may as well have embarrassed me wholly instead of piece by piece like a carrion bird, and I should have said

Dr. Kelly: Yes Master.

Like a coward. And who am I to call anyone a coward now when I am sitting here writing the words “not Fair” with genuine anguish in my hand and my pen and my throat and such terrible pain in the whole of my body. He may as well say

Bloomberg: I see, Dr. Kelly, that you haven't been eating enough lately. Shouldn't you be getting some more sleep, Dr. Kelly?

Dr. Kelly:

Where are you?

Chapter 31 – Overwhelming Speed

Life was racing forward for Thomas Kelly independent of any participation in CRLS or rapid changes in the city around him. His axes of control had expanded to higher dimensions – he had to control a young girl to ensure the secrecy of both his relationship and his invention, he had to control his public image in the face of growing underground and terranean conflict, and he had control now over the life of an elderly woman who only he could attempt to treat for skin cancer.

Fact: Thomas' massive nano-DOT data set contains seven volumetric videos of female human right hands. The last of these two are almost certainly Gladys' hand pre- and post-radiation, showing together that the cancer had been successfully localized and eradicated. The fifth hand appears to be a healthy hand of Gladys', likely a mirror image of her left hand to provide the proxy right-hand data required for his algorithm. The other four are from two subjects, with left hands mirrored as well to provide a modest five-hand data set – far fewer than the forty healthy mice sampled before use on his first rodent patient.

The four hands are clearly from younger women, and although we cannot match them to specific individuals, they are most likely from the two women who were closest to Thomas at this time: Marcella Rizzo and Chloe Azad. This would suggest that exactly four humans (and forty-something mice) were aware of the technology and its life-saving potential – one avid Kellyist, one incidental Kelly, one elderly recluse, and one child.

The successful use on Gladys was impressive, but also involved some luck – if Gladys had suffered from cancer of the lungs or the stomach, for example, the method would have likely failed and further crippled her. The use case of skin cancer is today the only robust application of the Kelly method, in part because of how valuable body symmetry is in providing the most accurate data on what the healthy skin of one individual is meant to look like. It is possible that Thomas was aware that this specific case was reasonably safe, and that even if he erred, the result would not have been mutilation. It is also possible that he didn't – he was taking a long shot either way.

Given he never acted to make the method public, we can assume he was not confident that this success was replicable. Even the cynical Thomas Kelly that other historians have developed would not have been so cruel as to hide a cure for cancer, or in the case that he was so cruel, he would not have been so stupid as to hide a product that could generate massive personal wealth and international acclaim. Someone else would tell the world, *tattle*.

In any case, Gladys was cured, and would outlive every other person in the know. Her death at ninety-two was a peaceful one, being found cold one morning by her housekeeper – one of the few people who mourned Gladys' passing. The housekeeper did not speak much English, and Gladys did not speak any Spanish: it seems her last words were “Bono noche, Maria.”

As the cancer of one secondary character was being cured, that of another was quickly killing him. That character was Michael Bloomberg, who died on April 10, 2039 from pancreatic cancer that had metastasized to the rest of his frail, ancient body.

In the last years of the former mayor's life, he was described by his children and housekeepers as being helplessly senile. Once a brilliant and powerful mind, he had shrunken both physically and mentally into an emaciated bag of flesh that hardly knew where it was. This penalty of aging and the resultant death was upsetting to New Yorkers who saw him as a symbol of the greatest years of the city, but surprised nobody – he was ninety-seven years old. This is what ninety-seven year olds tend to do.

As far as we know, Michael Bloomberg and Thomas never met face-to-face. As far as we know, Michael Bloomberg and Thomas never even spoke on the phone. Thomas' diaries are full of transcribed calls between himself and Bloomberg, but no associates of either party had ever heard of such conversations. Georgina Bloomberg, one of Michael's daughters, was kind enough to speak with us on the matter:

“My father was hardly capable of speaking on most days for the last two years or so. He had salient moments, of course, and sometimes he recognized me or the help, but for the most part we were all strangers. So did he talk to Thomas Kelly? I mean, it's not impossible. He might have called him and even may have had good, serious conversations with him in some of his better hours. But there's no chance he would remember that conversation a week or a month later. There's pretty much no chance he could've remembered it even two hours later.”

So there you have it, from the horse's daughter's mouth: the Michael Bloomberg that Thomas writes about in his diaries is definitely probably almost certainly not the *real* Michael Bloomberg. So who was it? There are several avenues one can consider, all of which are interesting but none of which are satisfying.

What if Thomas' Bloomberg was a trickster pretending to be Bloomberg? Was he a man involved in CRLS or the Corey administration attempting to manipulate Thomas from behind the scenes by using the name of a person he respected? While this is possible, it requires extreme naivete from our subject. The extent of Bloomberg's senility was more-or-less public knowledge; his family had announced in 2037 that he would no longer be giving interviews, writing op-eds or managing his companies because he did not believe himself to be mentally fit to do so. Thomas being duped in this way is hard to imagine, and it is even harder to imagine someone thinking to dupe him in this way.

What if Thomas' Bloomberg was a Kellyist or some other secret advisor going by an alias? Again, possible, but unlikely. There is no mention of any Bloomberg on any archived CRLS posts or discussions. This would have been a personal nickname for someone with serious power over Thomas' actions; someone who influenced the most extreme political evolution in New York history who has never been identified after decades of research.

What if Thomas' Bloomberg was just a literary device? When he wrote about his "phone calls with Bloomberg," maybe he was just attempting to make tangible a challenging internal

conflict. Maybe Bloomberg was a metaphor for Thomas' inner stoic utilitarian, the part of him that knew both denial and affirmation could lead to more pain for the public. It is sometimes easier to write your own inner monologue as dialogue, and this practice could have been a creative way to represent the piece of him that said "let life happen around you." This sounds like something the Thomas we know would do.

But none of these theories explain how deeply the death of the *real Michael Bloomberg* affected Thomas Kelly. After April 10, 2039, there are no more transcribed phone calls with Bloomberg in his diaries – no more transcribed phone calls at all. Did the codenamed Bloomberg disappear? Did the inner conflict need a new metaphor, the old one so linked to a real live human that it could not persist past his death?

Other behavioral changes can be tracked to this moment. His interviews in late April are uncharacteristic when compared to those he had been giving for nearly a year now. He doesn't smile or laugh, he often fumbles his words or becomes confused or even angry, while staring into space or at his shoes. An April 17 interview is enlightening:

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, are you worried about the increasing violent rhetoric from your supporter base? [Thomas is silent, staring down.] Dr. Kelly?

Thomas: Oh, sorry. [Thomas looks forward, then to the left at the reporter.] I'm sorry. So sorry. Could you ask me that again?

Reporter: I asked if you are worried about the threats of violence from online Kellyists.

Thomas: Oh. Yeah, that's something I really don't like. [He shakes his head.] Yeah I uh... Yeah I really don't.

Thomas' despondence also came with, as we see, a new albeit mild level of openness. It was expected that he would give a dodgy and meaningless answer, but his responses now appeared to come from a genuine human.

The death of Bloomberg could be an arbitrary correlated event that was dwarfed in importance by other changes that led to his shift in presentation. As discussed in a previous chapter, the Kellyists were reaching new levels of extremism that might have broken even this paragon of jest. He was handling a relationship that he may have known was about to publicly explode. He wasn't sleeping well, he was hardly eating, and he was often forgetting to shower or shave.

But equally terrifying periods never seemed to cause him to deviate from his constructed persona in the past. He handled the imposed responsibility for a New York police state as if nothing had changed at all. He managed his public image without error when he was dealing with the turmoil around Gladys' cancer treatment. It follows that whoever Thomas' Bloomberg was, he was inextricably tied to the real Bloomberg; how that link manifested is anyone's guess.

Past biographers, otherwise so quick to toss away Kelly's diaries, do offer hypotheses regarding this specific question; it is too enticing to ignore. You will not be surprised to learn that the harsh critic Krasniqi chooses route two – Bloomberg was an associate contributing to

Thomas' seizure of power. He even offers a proposal that this Bloomberg was an alias for Mayor Corey herself; a likely candidate, as she was the only person who could trump him at this point on political matters. The codename is also straightforward, mayor-for-mayor. But then why does she disappear from the diary in April when she still held the mayorship for months after?

Krasniqi claims:

“He drops her allyship when he no longer needs her. By this point, he must have known she would be out of the picture shortly. He had no need to pretend she had any control over him anymore.”

LaPlante and Sanders in their respective works deem the “literary device” theory to be the most reasonable, with Sanders quickly dropping the issue after a very brief discussion. LaPlante, however, dwells on the issue longer. He, too, noted the temporal alignment with Thomas' shift in public behavior:

“It would be easy to chalk this up to mere coincidence, but to do so would defy all intuition. While it may be irresponsible to play the role of the clinician, we must admit that the signs point to psychosis.”

—

On the morning of April 21, 2039, a high school senior named Marcella Rizzo arranged a meeting with representatives from pharmaceutical giant Moderna to discuss a novel technology

that had been proven to cure cancer. She had secured the meeting by sending screenshots of nano-DOT cross-sections of Gladys Stone's hands before and after treatment, and although Moderna was hesitant to take a high school student seriously, they figured the benefit of a thirty-minute meeting that may result in the most profitable medical technology of all time was worth the cost of thirty wasted minutes.

Her presentation to the company involved volumetric videos showing the success of the method in both mouse and man, and a high-level description (the low-level description required a bit more mathematics than she knew) of the method. Being an earnest and honest person, she told the representatives that she was not entirely familiar with the details, but she recognized the technique's potential and felt it would be irresponsible of her to let it go unknown to the medical community.

Who knew the details?

Well, the inventor of the method knew the details: Dr. Thomas Kelly. You might have heard of him. The thing is, she told them, he would never respond to a request from anyone involving his invention; for whatever reason, he was very private about it. But if, by any chance, one of the fine men and women at Moderna had any ins at Mt. Sinai, she could happily direct them to the folders in which the codebase was stored.

Any takers?

Marci was showing her age, or rather, she was showing a trait easily explained by immaturity. She was both *trusting* and *confident*. Trusting that Thomas' technique was the key to curing cancer, and trusting that the people at Moderna had the best interests of the people in mind. Even though Thomas might not have had enough faith in his invention to pursue its translation from laboratory to clinic, she was confident that it was worth a try, and she was confident that if the results failed to be reproduced, the trustworthy pharmaceutical mega-corporations would suspend their work before anyone was hurt.

There are mature ways to trust and mature ways to be confident, but most well-adjusted adults are rarely trusting *and* confident at the same time. A mature trust usually comes with skepticism – I trust you will be faithful *but* let's sign this prenuptial agreement just in case, I trust you will do a great job at our company *but* our contract does state I can fire you if you fail to meet your quota.

There is one exception, of course: faith. Faith in the pharmaceutical industry is certainly immature, but faith in general? Is it immature, for example, to have faith in Christ? Was Marci a child of confident trust, or a woman of faith? Unfortunately it doesn't matter – Marci was a person who was wrong.

That night, a Mount Sinai cancer researcher and Moderna associate managed to find Thomas' codebase, along with the mouse and human-hand datasets, according to Marci's instructions. The early May public announcement by Moderna that it had discovered a new technique proven to cure various cancers in mice shook the country. Articles abounded, even in

non-scientific publications who struggled to explain Fourier transforms to their layman audiences, but there was no knowledge of calculus needed to see the effect the method had on the mice and hands in the beautiful nano-DOT images. And beneath each image, *Credit: Dr. Thomas Kelly, Ph.D. and Marcella Rizzo.*

—

If the number of axes under Thomas' control was growing to new dimensions at the end of March, within only a month he had been projected back down onto a man *to whom* life happened. His Bloomberg had died, he failed in maintaining his public image, his child bride had betrayed him, and his invention was now in the hands of American industry. This man who had maintained an inhuman pace for nearly a decade with very few moments of pause was finally being overwhelmed, outpaced, by life.

Moderna at first referred to the method as Target Radiation Informed by Correlated Spectra (TRICS) which is still the formal name for the technique, but association with Thomas led to its colloquially being known as “the Kelly technique” or “the Kelly method.” As most restrictions on medical testing had been lifted in the late twenties, clinical trials began almost immediately with the justification that the data collected by Thomas was sufficient evidence that such trials would be safe.

Meanwhile Thomas was flooded with requests for interviews about his work, his relationship with a high schooler, oh, and politics – how could politics still be going on! Already breaking character in late April, May is when Thomas began to do something he hadn't done in over a year: he tried to publicly exert control. Here is a critical interview from April 30:

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, what relationship do you have with pharmaceutical giant Moderna?

Thomas: [Directly to the camera with wide-open eyes] I have no relationship with them, and I would like them to stop testing on humans and stop using my name.

Reporter: But Dr. Kelly, is the TRICS method not your own creation?

Thomas: I created it, I know what it does, and I don't think it's ready. And I think they need to stop using it and stop using my name. Someone is going to get hurt. [Nervous laugh] And maybe they should stop using a name that makes it sound like a scam.

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, who is Marcella Rizzo and what is your relationship with her?

Thomas: She is a child and I think we should leave children out of things like this.

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, did Ms. Rizzo develop TRICS with you?

Thomas: She is a child and I think we should leave children out of things like this.

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, do you and Ms. Rizzo have a romantic relationship?

Thomas: Please, sir, I think I have made it clear that I have no interest in speaking about children. This is not... It isn't... sir, it isn't human.

Reporter: But Dr. Kelly, her name –

Thomas: [Yells] This is not human, sir. [Breathes, more calmly] Please do not talk about this girl on your show. As a matter of fact, please do not talk about any children on your show while I am on your show.

This clip was widely shared; almost every American adult in 2039 must have seen the interview, and almost every American adult in 2039 had an opinion on it. Thomas had finally lost it, the pressure was getting to him; did you see how unprofessional he was when he yelled at that reporter? Thomas was showing that he's an empathetic man after all; did you see how he defended that girl? I, for one, also hate when children are used as weapons by the media. Thomas was being careful; did you see how sure he sounded that someone might get hurt? He probably doesn't want any blood on his hands.

Thomas was a predator; did you see how he dodged that question about his relationship with the high school girl? Something seems fishy there. Thomas was cynical; did you see how he slandered Moderna? He knows that TRICS works, he's probably just not getting enough money for himself out of it. Thomas was a mastermind; did you see how perfectly his plan played out? He had clearly planted a fake cure for cancer and a scandal involving a young girl, bait that would be too hard not to take, and used it to further prove how disgusting the pharmaceutical mega-corporations and the news media are. Praise be to Carolus, indeed! The end is near!

Chapter 32 – A Slave to Your Grave (Diary Entry June 1, 2039)

when i woke this morning to my dog barking screaming like a car alarm but a dog and screaming so that i woke up and it was dark and it was woo pause woo pause woo pause like a car alarm but a dog and when i checked his cage he was there alive and i opened the cage and he stopped and i patted his head and he climbed up the wall just as if nothing had gone wrong just as he always does because nothing had gone wrong it was just some strange sort of dog car alarm that he was trying out in his sleep perhaps hit by a car in a nightmare or run over by a car in a nightmare or hit by a man in a nightmare and i cry to think he thinks he was hit by me in a nightmare or chased by me with a machete in the night with a car to hit this dog this poor dog asleep in a cage with deep fear in his dog mouth and i cry but he climbs away like any dog does after a dog sleep but its still dark and i cant help but think oh lord another night and counting sleep still in minutes but there are still so many question such as the role of calcium two plus ions in hair cell development you see ca homeostasis plays major role in stereocilia anatomy few development slides mutants etc makes them misshapen and shorter when the calcium levels are off tm plays big role in ca homeostasis what does this mean for collagenase any tm variation even tecta might change the stereocilia so that means met might change and so we may take interest in not only motion but also auditory nerve response or lcm could control tension of tip link nobody is sure but likely changes shape of boltzmann function after injecting the collagenase must we wait to see this effect if we don't wait long will stereocilia be the same length and other questions to ask too about many other important subjects for example the origin of the term si sicc sick sik sic where is it from ive no means to know today and i realize today it is something i cannot even guess and once i am allowed to know it i will feel stupid for not

guessing the origin of the word si sic unless sic it is from urdu or javanese not sic or some other language so unknowable to me that i would not feel bad laplace when asked why the creator is not mentioned in his book on celestial mechanics i had no need of this hypothesis there are many hypotheses to need and to not need but as far as i can tell there are not any hypotheses in celestial mechanics regarding calcium and its role in hair cell development and i was walking around one of the worst areas in harlem last millenium crime is high the streets are covered in needles and roaches and roaches and people down on their luck high on whatever and dead asleep cops are on their phones god knows what they want to do would do i don't mind it much sure in my backyard i live half a lightyear away and its hardly better anyway in one of those blocks they were having a block party man there was all that block party stuff like buttered corn and all that black people stuff like beef patties and fried chicken and it smelled fucking amazing and all those black dudes with massive white tooth smiles some of them with those yellow jaundiced eyes and some of those beautiful kids with the knicks jerseys playing in the opened fire hydrant stream i used to have these block parties out in long island when I was five or six or seven and I had this carmello anthony jersey and i loved the fire hydrant streams and the smiles and the buttered corn it was all catholics second generation americans from italy or ireland and a few colombian all brians and ians and ryans but no yans working class but you know they owned something and even if they didnt they had beautiful children and fire hydrant streams and now compartmentalized in her mind as my boss rather than the man on the n train tara was initially surprised to find carolus the next morning sitting in exactly the same seat he had sat in for the past four years this was an unwelcome shift in the power dynamic the morning train ride had been a joint effort in solitary confinement only made possible by the willingness of others to ignore their neighbors or at least to pay attention to them inconspicuously with pointed glances

that turned to perfectly generalized peers around the train after the uncomfortable instance of eye contact the only choices were to change cars which would inevitably be taken as a slight at her employer or to make nice she sat next to him carolus was more than happy to sacrifice his reading time for conversation even as it fell into the trite category of getting to know tara learned for example that carolus was only twenty eight years old being hired as an assistant professor one year prior she learned that he had never lived outside the city that he shared a one bedroom apartment with a house cat named simone and that his name was a result of centuries of men on his paternal side naming their first sons carolus the two of them made a comical pairing to onlookers she was four inches taller than him exaggerated further by his poor posture and she dressed quite professionally compared to his usual attire of athletic shorts and crew neck tee shirts the image was more that of a mother accompanying her son to school than a professor and his pupil and the content of the conversation did little to convince listeners in either direction the first friday of their train encounters tara was made subject to one of carolus moments of inspiration or passionate breakdowns from some more practical perspective he had been reading a book on the life of the abstract expressionist painter willem de kooning and he greeted tara that morning with four color figures from the appendix of the book three paintings and one sculpture all of deeply abstracted and hardly recognizable women what stands out to you replaced good morning his eyes were glowing with excitement taken aback slightly she gave the images a once over and drew her conclusions that he clearly didn't care for his mother these women are revolting many agree many respectable critics say they are perfectly beautiful women by their own standards i couldnt say im interested in something quite different here he seemed to be fishing for the answer

is it how he lays the paint I know these guys are meant to be all about how they lay the paint

one might say that as well skin he shouted he had become impatient with the socratic method and his volume had attracted the eyes of the rest of the passengers he overcompensated whispering now these women dont have skin tara she picked up her voice so as to readjust the volume for him well sure they might just a painterly sort of skin no no no tara show me it these women are revolting and revolted they detest every moment of their lives they are in constant physical and mental pain because they have no skin whatsoever no skin she turned her head at the paintings smiled meekly and nodded i like your interpretation maybe the artist wants the paint to represent an image of skin on a figure which is not itself skinned like clothing for average people could you imagine the pain huh being painted on when you dont have any skin just to mollify the screaming of some debilitating body dysmorphia in a society of skinned women just for the sake of simple feminine vanity now i am getting the feeling that you might not care for your mother she laughed not noticing until after she had said it that it was a bold joke to make to ones boss he hardly noticed i certainly wouldnt care for my mother if she had birthed me without skin these are the most potent paintings i have ever seen tara would soon learn that carolus jumped to such superlatives very quickly that sunday tara received the first of the labs weekly newsletters it was university policy that each professor wrote a short report of the labs work each week and sent it along to the labmates and the department chair for carolus lab of two now three this was a useless exercise unless the department decided to take interest it was carolus theory that the department chair did not even so much as look at the title of his newsletters he took full creative liberty this week he wrote the following the skinless apes of prehistory although counterintuitive at first it is quite clear that there is no evolutionary incentive for comfort in fact a species may be perfectly biologically viable by darwins theory despite being in constant physical or even emotional pain we know for example that human beings with chronic pain or nearly debilitating

mental illnesses will often produce offspring more than many of their healthier human counterparts most species today seem to live in relative physical comfort many evolutionary biologists believe this is due to the negative stimulus of pain offering disincentives towards harmful activities in fact the gradient of pain from total comfort to excruciating is useful as well with paper cuts and broken bones requiring different levels of attention to ensure survival even species with severely limited intellectual capabilities can distinguish between complete comfort mild pain and severe pain yet evidence shows that a genetic mutation in the early years of humans led to a small group of humans with no skin who lived in perpetual miserable pain the mutation was no stranger than albinism or blue eyes only incredibly painful the group is believed to have been genocided by skinned folks implying that if it were not for bigotry there might still be skinless great apes among us our brothers is skinlessness more or less pathological than prejudice signed carolus carolus end scene and now a quote from our sponsor the late great aryeh kaplan comma space rabbinical scholar table two the thirty two paths in genesis one one in the beginning god sic created keter sefirah one two the spirit of god sic hovered heh elemental one three god sic said let there be light chakhmah sefirah two god sic saw the light that it was good bet double one five god sic divided between the light and darkness vav elemental two do you get the pattern yet well i should keep going because we havent gotten to mother six god sic called the light day zayin elemental three this is getting obnoxious we still havent made it to mother i apologize we should give aryeh kaplan comma space rabbi a chance to redeem himself with a fun story the sources are silent about the sefer yetzirah then until the time of jeremiah the prophet here again we find a tradition that jeremiah wished to make use of sefer yetzirah but as in the case of abraham was admonished not to attempt to do so alone he there fore took his son ben sirah and the two explored these mysteries together through their efforts they were able to create

a golem but they did not preserve it there might have been more than one person with the name ben sirah but the one in this tradition was clearly the son of jeremiah regarding his birth there is a fascinating tradition jeremiah had been accosted by homosexuals in the bathhouse and as a result had experienced an ejaculation in the tub his semen remained viable and when his daughter later used the same tub she was impregnated by it eventually giving birth to ben sirah ben sirah was therefore the son of both jeremiah and the latters daughter some sources say that his name was originally ben zera son of seed but when this name proved embarrassing he changed it to ben sirah because of the sensitive nature of his birth he did not call himself son of jeremiah there is an allusion however since sirah סירא and jeremiah ירמיהו both have numerical value of two hundred and seventy one later authorities were to bring proof from this incident that artificial insemination does not constitute adultery or incest everyone lets give it up for aryeh kaplan the golem and later authorities and hey sorry about the sensitive nature of your birth ben sirah that sounds like it really sucked and if you are taking questions do golems have skin and if not why do you make them that way 白いマジックと黒いマジック違いは何ですか

Chapter 33 – Saced

One issue with establishing a military dictatorship is that you have to arm a lot of people. Perhaps more challenging, you have to give a lot of people *power*. Formerly powerless people tend to appreciate the system that has granted them this precious resource, and as history shows, they can quickly be turned into the sort of men who have no remorse about hurting those below them. But the inherent contradiction is that reducing the agency of so many individuals requires awarding quite a lot of agency to not-so-few people, and there is a level of trust – *confident* trust – that these empowered people will not use that power to the detriment of the dictator. From this perspective, it is surprising and enlightening about the nature of mankind that such dictatorships have come to exist and last for so long.

Historians have attempted for centuries to explain this phenomenon to the point of exhaustion, so we will refrain from doing the same. We will simply note that otherization is a key component in maintaining particularly brutal forms of dictatorship. As an extreme example, consider King Leopold's Congo, in which it is estimated that over 10 million Africans perished over more than two decades of terror. Thousands of Europeans were complicit in beating children with hippo hide whips, working enslaved men to death to harvest rubber, and most famously, cutting off victims' hands. This was not for the sake of capital – slaughtering your workforce is a very poor way to turn a profit – it may be thought of as exertion of power for the sake of exerting power.

It cannot be said with certainty that these men would not have just as well treated Belgians in the same despicable ways that they treated the black Africans, but it is intuitively unlikely. Such crimes are easier to commit when the man whose hand you are removing is a strange color, speaks a funny language, wears silly clothes, lives a life completely foreign to your own, like a scientist who feels no qualms in decapitating a guinea pig.

This can be mapped on a much smaller scale to the American justice system in the early twenty-first century. As we have already noted, most police officers in New York were not residents of the neighborhoods that they policed. The people of the South Bronx were more foreign to a Long Islander than the people of Moscow – perhaps even more foreign to them than their own dogs. They lived in small boxes, listened to artless music, wore ratty clothes and spoke an unintelligible bastardization of their mother tongue. What qualms should they feel about putting a gun to a Bronx woman's head, roughly shoving her in the back of a car, and taking her to be locked in some different small box? Why should we expect the wardens at the prisons to behave any differently? The whole system was plagued, or even *built on*, this sort of de-sympathizing otherization.

What happens when you add more guns, more wardens, more cops, and more power? Fixing everything else, the system would probably become even more brutal; perhaps you'd even start to lose a few hands. But now, independently, you tweak another parameter of the system: who the criminals are. What happens then?

The new criminals under the laws credited to Thomas Kelly were not poor blacks from the South Bronx – at least not all of them. Many of them were middle-class whites who happened to download pornography, or people who got caught drinking a beer on the way to a baseball game. These new criminals had to live under the boots of officers and wardens who did the exact same things freely, fifteen minutes out of city bounds. These cops had to toss a man into a jail cell knowing what torture lied ahead, look into his eyes, and see someone who resembled their own brother. In a sense, these people genuinely *deserved* their imprisonment – the justice system was functioning as intended – but what happens when almost nobody agrees on the meaning of “deserve?”

This sort of system is considerably harder to maintain, and with so many wardens and police officers and guns to go around, there were thousands of points of failure. If thirty out of fifty wardens simply could not, as hard as they tried, mold their psychologies to a point that they could stigmatize their prisoners, and if *one* of those wardens decided to stage a revolt, then you have thirty wardens and a hundred prisoners versus twenty wardens and zero prisoners. Who wins?

These were precisely the conditions that led to the Almo Massacre of May 10, 2039, in which one chief prison guard armed one hundred white, middle-class “sexual predators” in the newly constructed Queens County Almo Detention Center. This chief guard, Laszlo Varga, ordered his battalion to kill any officer or warden who got in their way – fifteen prisoners and forty-five officers (both wardens and policemen who arrived at the scene to stop the revolt) were killed. At least three police officers turned and fired on their own coworkers.

Over the week that followed, three prisons experienced rebellions inspired by Almo (including one women's prison), and in total almost two-hundred people died. As the Corey administration attempted to crack down on revolts, officers continued to turn and back the new rebel group with Varga at its head. Chief of Police Sarah Torino quietly chose to "let it happen," and former policemen distributed handguns and semiautomatic rifles to former prisoners and civilians who swore allegiance to the movement.

What movement? Kellyism, of course. Laszlo Varga, the man so opposed to mass incarceration under laws ostensibly drafted by Thomas Kelly, was a fervent Kelly supporter. In an open letter to the mayor published the day of the revolt at Almo, he wrote:

"The day has come, as he has allowed it to come. Too long has the ordinary man and woman, constrained by modern life, been unable to conceive of rebellion. 'Someone should do something,' they say, as their rights are stripped away, 'but not me,' they say. 'I have two jobs, a child, a mother to take care of,' they say. But if they all say! No, the ordinary man and woman will not say 'I should do something' until he and she are no longer the ordinary man and woman.

"Kelly, Carolus, Dr. 'Just Thomas,' has brought upon us the world at last where the ordinary is enough unordinary that they can *feel* to fight back, as they already *thought* to fight back. This is the genius of Carolus. For fifteen years we have failed to *feel* revolution as we continued daily to *think* it. By temporary pain, he has allowed us to feel. Now, go and claim your empire."

The letter, posted on several Nets and printed in papers and magazines, was published in green text on a black background.

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The revolution went as smoothly as it possibly could. There were so few loyalists in Corey's party, especially in the police force, that there was no serious army to fight against. The revolutionaries themselves were largely the former white, middle-class prisoners and police officers who felt they had been forced to oppress their own brethren, but very few black or latino prisoners joined in the fight. Most ordinary civilians, who had *thought* revolution for so long, still did not *feel* revolution, and opted to remain in the audience.

The state and federal governments very remarkably turned a blind eye to the situation, ostensibly for the same reason Corey allowed Kellyist propaganda to spread in 2037; civil unrest from anti-establishment cultists made the establishment look stable and desirable in comparison. As New York was overtaken by Kellyists, First Republicans in Washington gave scathing criticism of the "radical left lunatics" ruining America's largest city. Elon Musk floated sending in the military. Trump, still barely holding on to life in his early nineties, called for the execution of both Thomas Kelly and Laszlo Varga. Their decision not to act was both deliberate and poor.

The climax of this short revolution was May 24, when Mayor Corey was assassinated while attempting to flee the state. She was in the back seat of a car with heavily tinted rear

windows, so that she could not be recognized. While stuck in traffic on the George Washington bridge, a Kellyist in the car ahead must have recognized the driver as a security guard of Corey's. Legend has it, he put his car in reverse and floored it, damaging the front of the mayor's vehicle and activating the driver's airbag. He exited his car with a baseball bat in his hands, smashed the rear window of Corey's car, and grabbed her out of the back seat while her security guard lay unconscious from the airbag impact. He threw her struggling body off of the bridge and into the Hudson River, and then ran as fast as he could towards New Jersey.

The man's identity was never determined, and the story is not easily verified, but Corey's body was eventually found in the river. The autopsy suggested that she fell to her death.

With the military-grade New York Police Department all but completely backing him, Varga declared Thomas Kelly to be the transitional mayor. Thomas Kelly declared nothing. He had not been seen in public for three weeks and had stopped giving interviews the day after the Almo Massacre. His final interview from May 11, 2039 is challenging to watch – this man, only twenty-eight, had been reduced to a skeleton. He showed signs of exhaustion and starvation, with deep bags under his fear-ridden eyes. He took the interview, for the first time, sitting down (although still outside) while chain-smoking. Blue Camel Crush. The reporter is visibly uncomfortable as he asks:

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, what do you have to say to Laszlo Varga, the man who has cited your political project as the inspiration for his revolution?

Thomas: [Nervous laughter] I suggest therapy.

Reporter: But Dr. Kelly, do you agree with your name being associated with this revolutionary movement that aims to take down the very government that you advise?

Thomas: What would you say if I said 'no'?

Reporter: Dr. Kelly, pl—

Thomas: I have a feeling you would just ask me another question.

Reporter: Dr. K-

Thomas: I haven't done this in a long time, but look, it's really starting to piss me off. Just Thomas. Not Dr. Kelly. Just fucking call me Thomas. Is it so fucking hard? [Silence. Thomas begins to weep.] Please, just Thomas.

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With no word from just Thomas, Varga was the *de facto* mayor of New York. He quickly realized a slight issue with this outcome, what he had ostensibly killed hundreds of men to accomplish – he didn't really know what to do. In theory, the biggest issue New York faced in 2039 was overpolicing, but his new power was fragile and he had just given thousands of guns to untrained, angry civilians; there was no chance of him getting rid of the cops now. Having spent years on CRLS developing a sense of the ills of the city and the country and the First Republican party, he recognized only now that his politics had been entirely negatively defined. If he *was* the establishment, what on Earth could he do when the core thread of his ideology was *anti-establishment*.

The policies themselves had slipped from his mind – what was it again? Wasn't there an essay, a manifesto, a founding text? Right, there was, let's check that out again. But none of his narrative really tracked with what was written therein. He found the essay read a bit like... a joke. In Varga's recently-published memoirs, he writes:

“My mind, so clouded by hate for so long, was finally defogged as I sat on my proverbial throne. I was not filled with the confidence of a king, but with a new fog. Just as the fog of the city covers only the tops of the highest buildings in Manhattan, the fog of confusion surrounding our movement covered only the minds at its head. I felt that fog at once – I am certain Thomas felt that fog.”

As Varga remained facile and indecisive, swallowed by fog as he was, the negatively-defined movement beneath him had not been so quickly confused. Instead, they maintained the thread, the single thread binding every Kellyist from the ones who wanted to jail poor single mothers to the ones that wanted to usher in the anarcho-syndicalist utopia: they fought the establishment.

They did not turn on Varga, but instead set their sights higher. The downfall of New York began with the Trump administration, his allyship with the criminal mayor Eric Adams, his suspension of elections and his installment of First Republicans in every city government position. The problem was on the top floor, and they had only reached the second – power over a single city.

The consequence was a *joke*. Not a particularly funny joke at the time, but another moment in history that reads as if out of a satirical novel. Without instruction, a handful of self-proclaimed Kellyists fired rockets at the White House on June 16, 2039, leading to the stupidest war in American history: the Two Days War.

For a full history of the Two Days War, we highly suggest “Fever Dream” by Clay Tompkins, but for our purposes we need only scratch the surface. About two-thousand Kellyists arrived in Alexandria, Virginia the day after the failed rocket attacks with tanks, grenade launchers and fully automatic guns. They were ready to take on the United States military for control of Washington.

The revolution in New York had been all but trivial, as public opinion and morale had been so degraded by the Corey administration’s policies that nobody felt compelled to stop a group of unlucky office workers from taking over the city. Taking on the entire United States military was a different animal completely.

They had done the math; the Kellyists were expecting that half or more of the military would have, secretly, been aligned with their agenda against the First Republican party. They would quickly turn on their fellow soldiers and overwhelm the rest of the strongest military in the world, because half plus two thousand is bigger than half. This was not even close to true.

Of course, many Americans outside of New York were depressed with the state of the country – they wished they could vote again, they wished they could participate in a stronger and

freer economy, they wished they could focus on their lives instead of working seven days per week – but as Laszlo put it, ordinary men were not unordinary. The initial conditions required to succeed were simply not there. As they rolled their tanks towards Washington, they got word from home that a bomb had struck the Bastos Tower in Manhattan’s Financial District. More bombs, they were told, were soon to come if the Kellyists failed to retreat.

They did retreat. Over five-hundred people died in the bombing, marking the most severe attack on American soil since September 11, 2001 – and this time, the aggressor was the United States. This was a step too far for most Americans, including a bit more than half of the military. The Kellyists, now on their way back from Alexandria to New York, heard news that the bombing may have adjusted their odds. They turned their tanks back around towards Washington, were greeted by a large number of people who about two hours prior were pointing guns in their direction, and quickly occupied the Capitol and the White House with fewer than one-hundred casualties. As we know, their government never made it past the “transitional” stage because Canadian peacekeeping forces invaded within a few days and the country was restored to reasonable order under their gentle colonial rule.

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Why do we rush through this critical moment in Kellyist history? Why do we pay so little interest to the climax and fall of this historic movement? Because this is not a story about Kellyism, or the Two Days War, or the history of the United States; this is a story about Thomas, and Thomas probably didn’t know that any of this was happening.

When his home was searched after his death, there were computer parts aligned in a rectangular lattice around the apartment; hard drives, RAM sticks, motherboards; each with a nail driven through the center. His desktop and laptop computers, his cell phone, his *refrigerator* – every electrical device save his mouse elevator control circuitry – was broken down into its smallest inseparable parts and destroyed.

According to his diaries, this ritual was probably carried out on the day of the Almo Massacre. At least we can sort of tease that out of this entry:

“[...] surrounded each side and every dimension compact space infinite frequency cube is sinc by sinc by sinc but its still too much and if i dont see it feel it i guess it isnt there or maybe they listened and i can say aha they listened and is this how you felt you pathetic bitch when you gave it up that maybe if you couldnt see it feel it you could know that i listened or maybe it was simpler and you knew that someone might care or maybe it just finally gave you that control that you never almost tried to take or maybe it doesnt matter because if youre not there then they may as well care or they may as well listen so i plan now to not be there no more no more working memory because thats where i can see it and later feel it so i will destroy it all of it [...]”

That date happened to coincide with one clinical trial patient for TRICS having healthy lung tissue ablated due to a faulty output from Kelly’s algorithm. It seems likely that he read of both this and the Almo massacre, and could no longer take the spiraling lack of control. One is reminded of the narrator of the Hagakure, who committed a social suicide by destruction of his

connection with the outside world. Thomas was already far from that world; he so rarely stepped outside his door, and when he did it was only to receive packages with human and rodent food before scurrying back upstairs.

The unfortunate paradox was that to destroy his last remaining connection – the computer – he would have to re-enter society in some manner to *eat*, and to make sure his massive family could eat as well. The idea that the day of the Almo Massacre was also the day of Thomas' RAM Massacre is thus backed by eyewitness reports of Marci and Chloe delivering daily goods to his home beginning on May 12. They would stay in his building only a few minutes, before exiting with bags of garbage and heading home.

Marci had remained a somewhat public figure, but her lack of genuine knowledge about the product she had spearheaded made her an uninteresting interview subject. It became clear after a few attempts at correspondence that she was not willing to speak about Thomas except to say that he was “alive, but not interested in speaking right now.” From the brevity of their interactions, it seems he was not interested in speaking even to her.

But Thomas wrote – oh did he write! In the month between the Almo Massacre and the bombing of the Bastos Tower, Thomas wrote nearly two-thousand pages; Chloe and Marci must have also been bringing him thick journals. There are almost no punctuation marks or paragraph breaks, except when there is a new line to mark the present date. There is some stream of consciousness poetry, a set of science fiction stories, an entire pseudo-historical novel about a man in the future told from the perspective of historians in the “future’s future,” and pieces of

several plays. The plays are particularly challenging to read given the lack of punctuation; here's a passage from one about Serbia during the lead-in to the first world war:

“[...] pasic you say we absolutely must sir but i fail to see why or how apis why is obvious and i see how as obvious too pasic but you know what i mean by how sir apis you mean how without smearing such a spotless image as you like to believe you have yes well while that is honorable i dont know that there is a serb alive with an image to anyone but a serb that is spotless or even low in spots pasic but there could be real problems apis for you pasic for me apis there are plenty of suicidal boys over in sarajevo who will happily take it on for you pasic and you think anyone will believe it was just some suicidal boys from sarajevo apis more than they would believe it was a coward like you thomas yes a coward indeed pasic well a coward perhaps but if you absolutely must then i suppose i could humbly find time to take a trip to the shore while you figure out the details with the suicidal sarajevo boys if i must that is apis humbly of course pasic yes humbly of course [...]”

We spent dozens of hours attempting to parse these epics, but much of it is hopeless nonsense. The quote above is interpretable, but it is followed with an entry the next day that reads:

“[...] hands the squares are back and they have eyes this time that when its in the ceiling it says to me rrrrrgreeeeegrr before it exits stage left got to see stage right yesterday if there is one i suppose and there isnt one so i got to see center field where he said to me no no no and i said why why yes it is but slowly if you say it too quickly theyll stop you in your sleep and take you

off the train and throw you into the mess sink with the squares again but hey the squares aren't as bad as they look even with the eyes and the regregrrrrgrrrrreeeeeeegrrrr no they are calming in daylight [...]"

We would like to say that there is something of great literary value in these scribbles, but we cannot. If Thomas believed he was writing the next *Finnegan's Wake*, he was mistaken, but more difficult to face is the possibility that Thomas believed he was writing about something real. The tone is so urgent and the handwriting is so frantic that it is hard to read it as anything other than a man rushing to put down his final thoughts, to tell his life story before his scheduled execution.

We struggled with little success to pick out real pieces of Thomas' life from this text. Unlike in earlier entries where we could almost enjoy attempting to separate fact and fiction, the real and the unreal were not here intertwined or knotted together in some heterogeneous mixture – they were melted into one another. To borrow a phrase from Valentina Kelly, what Thomas wrote no longer had the *shape of truth*.

The exception is his final entry. Marked July 17, 2039, the day of the attack on Bastos Tower, he wrote:

"There has been such dense fog this Spring, but I see it has lifted today. And how ironic that smoke takes its place. I wish I had saced that mouse. That's all that needed to happen. We could have avoided quite a bit, but probably not all of it, or who knows, maybe not much of it.

But I should have saced it. I did so much just so that I didn't have to deal with the pain of losing one of a dozen mice, as if it were my only child. A mouse that died within months anyway. It's pathetic. Just as you said, valentin, pathetic."

In scientific lingo, "sac" is short for "sacrifice." It is a righteous stand-in for "kill," which is what you actually do to a mouse when you "sac" it. Nobody wants to say they killed thousands of mice in gas chambers, with overdoses of pentobarbital, with cervical dislocations. You instead say that you sacrificed them. For science.

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When Chloe and Marci arrived at his deep Queens home that morning, they left not with garbage bags but with Thomas Kelly. We know very little of what transpired that morning, but we know that by 1 PM they were on the far downtown side of the uptown A train platform at 190th street. They might have taken a cab over the Triboro Bridge, and looking out of his window, Thomas might have seen his Hell Gate and his second-favorite power plant. They might have spent an hour in nearby Fort Tryon park, and passed the tree where his big sister had taken her own life over a decade ago.

Whatever they did, at 1 PM they were standing four stories below the parking lot of the Cabrini Shrine. By 1:15 PM, they were dead. When the next uptown A train could be heard barrelling toward the station, Thomas and these two women found their way onto the tracks.

Eyewitness accounts differ, as more “eyewitnesses” exist than could have fit on the platform. According to some, Thomas pushed the others before jumping himself. According to others, the roles were reversed – it was Chloe or Marci who pushed Thomas, and then they jumped after him. Some say Thomas jumped alone, and the women followed him down.

We can only hypothesize about whose decision this was, although it does appear to have been a *decision*. There is very little of note North of 190th street – it is an attractive but residential area without any known significance to our three subjects. The choice to remain on the far downtown end of the platform contrasts with the earlier automatic suicidal gesture by Thomas, who positioned himself in precisely the worst place to be killed by the impact. Here, the strategy was very unlikely to fail; they died because they were certain to die.

Four stories above – on Earth – the pace of life had succeeded that of light and even information took more time to travel than chaos took to ravage the cities of New York and Washington. Kelly never lived to see the smoke from the Bastos Tower, or the seizure of the capitol in his name. By the time the bodies were identified and the news of his death had spread, the country was already declared to be his. For those brief moments, perhaps it really was.

Oh, and Thomas! You forgot to close the door to the second bedroom!

When we read about New York or America in the late thirties, we think of chaos. We imagine cops tossing thousands of innocent men and women into prison for reading lewd magazines, bombs dropping on buildings, men driving tanks to the capitol and tossing women off of bridges, power changing hands between criminals of one sort, criminals of another, and a foreign government all in the span of a few months. This all happened. If you were a prisoner or a person working in the Bastos Tower or a cop who caught a stray bullet during the Almo Massacre, you *knew* it and *felt* it.

But we often forget that for most people, such events are purely psychological. While tens of thousands were imprisoned and thousands were killed, that leaves many millions who were *not*, and many millions who were *fine*. While people may have felt a sense of fear or chaos when these thoughts crossed their minds, they continued to go to work, to the grocery store, to their daughters' middle school graduations. Modern life was not conducive to revolution – it was very conducive to revolutionary thought, but it was not conducive to revolution.

For whom was the situation more purely psychological than the family of Thomas Kelly? Darren, shielded from the chaos of New York by the invisible line separating Queens from Nassau County, recalls the years of a middle-aged man. He got promoted, he met a man and fell in love, he moved to a nice house in Oceanside, and he adopted two dalmatians. As his son found himself in front of an uptown A train, he was picking out a nice suit to wear to his second-cousin's wedding.

“And behind all of that was torture,” he told us. “But not like every second of every day you’re thinking about if your son is a psychotic demon or a pedophile. It’s more like every second day, maybe I’d remember something I did with Tommy and then I’d think ‘fuck!’ And you struggle thinking about him as your son, and selfishly you know I’d think about me as such a shit father. I don’t think either of you could imagine the pain of burying both of your children.”

How do you manage that pain, Darren?

“At the end of the day, you've still gotta fill your fridge.”

About the Authors

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