

BrocoliFlower

(The Making of Charley Stevonsen)

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SUMMARY

A Lebanese-Italian girl from Sydney, Australia blazes her way through men and money to become a significant figure in LMLA-ink's rise from the streets to storytellers. Offsetting this girl's hedonistic ways is her long time friend—a Scandinavian designer who is herself worthy of the limelight, but is forever in her friend's wake. Things change dramatically when the leader of the creative crew that freed John Lazoo from his murder charge meets and falls for the designer around the same time he is forced to take her friend as his business partner. The story is set in and among John Reyer Afamasaga's never-ending saga. This installment spans decades; from the 1980's to the near future in the year 2020. This time, reality morphs with the surreal—humans like us are entities. Using childlike purity in *BrocoliFlower*, the author paints yet another portrait of love.

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CHAPTER ZERO

Metofeaz Litigatti watches her as she lifts up her skirt.

With her other hand she clasps her hair into a fist. She turns her head, so she may see him as he moves in close to her.

Litigatti inhales her perfume and inevitably her breathtaking scent, making him smile.

He shuts his eyes. When he reopens them, he finds her still standing there, her head held back, the moonlight encasing her in wonderment—a silhouette fabulously presented for him to touch.

He runs an eye up and along her neck to the place he would love to smother next, and he finds her lips again. He pulls back for a moment so he may see her entire face, and he feels their smiles match; so much so, he places his mouth over hers...

His arm around her neck is as alarming as it is exhilarating for the young woman. His other arm, the one scarred, holds her to him as his hand covers her shaven place from open air.

Down on the street, New Orleans is feverish. Through the open window enters the sounds of Mardi Gras; its Cajun music mingled with voices is syncopated by his and her rhythm, as they find reason for having met...

He attempts to exhume some sort of state of mind that will allow him to stand on his own two feet, by placing his right arm against the wall. But the girl wants it to be around her. He meshes his face through her hair and into a safe feeling place in her neck. “What’s your name?” he asks.

“Rocol.”

She moves away from him so she can see him. “But friends call me Récene, which is incidentally my last name.”

Metofeaz takes the bottle from the ledge and offers it to Rocol. She takes it and smiles; without taking her eyes off him, she takes a swig from it.

Feeaz takes the drink from her, choosing to look down at the bottle as he casts a hook out into the still bubbling ocean of mystery. “So are you some sort of royalty?”

“Why? Because I choose to use my family name as my first name?”

Down in the crowd, a man and woman, undeniably absorbed in each other, catch the writer's attention. Rocol looks from his profile to where his gaze is cast making him appear dreamy and distant.

"Do you know them?" Rocol asks.

"Do I know them?" Metofeaz's reply is sarcastic.

Rocol looks back at him. He remains very still while he surveys the lucky couple's free flowing movement through the crowded street, until they stop right under the window.

As a delayed response, Litigatti shrugs his shoulders as the guy below, as if someone had whispered his name, looks up into the window.

A few days later...

"Feeaz, the plane is boarding, honey; let's get a move on." Metofeaz recognizes the warmth in Rocol's voice and sees that her smile is real.

"I love that, babe." His response is genuine, as he pulls her close to him suddenly, by grabbing her around her waist. They are so close he can see his eyes reflected in hers.

"You like what, honey?" she asks.

He looks into her eyes, and then around her gorgeous face. "I love you when you incorporate us in your dialogue."

The bouncy and perfect girl squints her eyes as she restrains from laughing, "My dialogue, aye? So you're an actor? And this is some sort of charade?"

His face changes, as he drops the arm that held her around her hips. He picks up his bag and walks off to the gate. She shrugs and follows him onto the plane.

Once seated, Metofeaz wrestles with himself. First he tries to rekindle the feeling he had prior to his abrupt leaving of Rocol in the terminal just when they were about to reach the place he quickly looks for when he meets a woman.

He takes her earplug out of her right ear and says into it, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking; I cannot communicate to you at this time our flight path due to the amount of wax that covers my microphone."

Rocol tries to ignore him, but then he takes out her other earplug and wraps his arms around her neck, making her look down. When she finally lifts her head, he makes her smile by the way he looks first at her lips and then deep into her eyes, just before he gives her the softest kiss she has ever felt on her moist lips.

They stop as someone taps Rocol on the shoulder. The flight attendant holds out a

telephone to her. Rocol is a bit miffed by the way the help has interrupted them, but the attendant advises her, “It’s an emergency, Mrs. Récene.”

CHAPTER 1

PART 1

The solemn but still stunning looking woman opens the door to her Sydney Harbor side apartment.

She immediately focuses on the expansive views, as reality comes down on her all at once. Again, she swallows the shocking news.

The leather band on her left wrist is a gift from Feeaz. She looks at it as she begins to hold in the imminent flow of her emotions.

The phone rings, and instantly he comes to mind. She quickly calculates time across international time zones, and is angry at herself for even thinking he would consider calling her at this hour of the morning in L.A.

As she picks up the phone, Rocol tosses her hair back so she can remove her earring.

“Récene here.”

She is tight-lipped about how she feels; a forced smile forms. The magazine’s assistant editor is lost for words.

It is Lavenda calling to let her know she is moving to New York to further her career.

Rocol puts down the phone as she unhooks her other earring. Her body is twisted as she grabs the strap of her high heel; it’s bent the other way as she takes off the other shoe. She thinks of her and Feeaz’s plan to meet in New York for Christmas; she tells herself it would be nice, but highly unlikely.

The mail on the glass table is a mound; she looks at it as she plugs in the kettle and opens the cupboard to find a teacup.

The kettle boils and a green teabag is placed into her favorite green cup. She makes her way over to the pile of envelopes and picks out the orange one because the color suggests its contents are of a less formal nature. She looks at it back and front and is curious why it has no address or stamp. She uses it to push aside the other envelopes, sifting through the pile as she takes small sips of the brew that warms her inside.

Rocol turns away from the table and heads for her stereo system.

She dims the lights on the wall as she selects a record from her middle of the road collection, neatly arranged in her entertainment center’s cabinet. She places the Diamond Head stylus at the beginning of the saddest sounding track on the LP. The 33 revolutions per minute make her wait for the antidotal tonic that her fragile heart needs at this very

moment. As if the dam of feelings she has kept at bay requires much stirring to break the thin wall.

The remaining tea she swirls in the cup. She wonders what the tea leaves would say if they were free.

A ferry glides across the normally busy harbor as the orchestra behind her now transcends water, land and matter. The harp fills the depths her pain has created, and the violin soloist pulls intently on her heart-strings as a voice is sent to comfort her once again. The people on the ferry who look up at the skyline are happy. They seem even happier to Rocol, for some of them are together. The ferry's wake widens as the vessel moves farther away. Tonight she feels even closer to the object of the songwriter's empathy. "Every time you cry, save up all your tears. I will be your rainbow, when they disappear..."

PART 2

Her deceased husband's family does not make her feel welcome when she finally makes it to the funeral home.

One of the more understanding members of the influential clan offers her an arm. His cologne and the fumes of alcohol that seem to seep from all paws awaken her senses. "The old bugger won't find a dame like you up there. I tell ya; yeah I bloody tell ya; believe me, he won't..."

Her husband's youngest sister, a woman who reminds Rocol of her grandmother, lights up another cigarette. She places the gold case back into her bag, and while she pretends to look for something that couldn't possibly be lost in the small expensive pouch, she warns the estranged wife, "We'll fight you, you know? Even the mention of your name in his will is a misprint..."

She hears a familiar voice when it's most needed. "Sweetness, I'm here..." Samuel, editor for the high circulating business magazine she works for, is here. Rocol tries not to seem too pleased to see her friend, in the light of the occasion, but nor does she disguise her appreciation for support at a time she finds emotionally taxing.

The funeral director, an overweight man who seems much older than his posture suggests, advises Rocol that it's time for her to see the body.

Being alone with her husband at the best of times was hard, and now that he had valid reason for ignoring her, she feels even more frustrated.

The open casket's lining is trimmed with gold, evidence of the family's tasteless lavishness. She would have chosen something subdued and refined. His cufflinks shine brighter than anything else about the drab man. Rocol had been first his personal assistant, then mistress and then eventually qualified to be his loyal and loving wife. All

of this happened very quickly for the paralegal whose career path changed suddenly when she was offered a high paying role in the senior partner's office—after she had delivered important documents to his mansion.

PART 3

She couldn't wait for the wake to be over.

She and Samuel share a quiet drink at the local bar. Her friend comments on her outfit, "Appropriate and original Rocol." The wealthy widow licks her lips from having taken her first sip of her margarita. "Mmm, my friend Stevie, the designer from Finland, made it for me."

The new barman is talking to his patrons at the other end of the bar while Rocol and Samuel converse.

After a few drinks, Samuel is noticeably merry and Rocol is beginning to feel some warmth in her body. Samuel comments favorably on the new barman's butt; when the barman approaches, he asks, "Hey, sweetness, do you have music?"

The barman smiles and turns up the volume. Soon the compilation of INXS's greatest hits brings back memories for the pair.

Michael Hutchence exudes "The One Thing;" confidence by the second he has hours of it.

You've got a dozen men behind you
You've got dead flowers on the floor
You're too pretty in the daylight
It keeps them coming back for more

Rocol can still see the lead singer lean on a knee as he gets intimate with his audience.

"Hey, Honey, do you still remember that night in Newcastle?" Samuel asks.

Rocol nods her head as she winks into the bottom of her glass.

"How could I forget? Wife of a raving queen meets drug thief. Drug thief does over horny young wife's hotel room, queer husband gets his rocks off."

Samuel's smile is ear to ear as he cannot deny the hilarity of that night in hindsight.

Rocol recalls more, "The look on your face when you hop into the elevator, and he's standing there in your clothes..."

Samuel's arm comes around her shoulders and she gets comfortable.

“The nerve of that guy.” Rocol shakes her head as Samuel reminds her of more.

“How about in the club when the band’s security pulled him up, and he turned to you and started kissing you, right after I had told him you were my wife.”

“Hey, the lines were worth it, but...” Rocol seems distant at that moment.

She pushes her glass forward for the barman to collect. “Another two, please,” she requests as she brushes her hair back to reveal the right side of her face to the attentive ear that listens to her. “I met someone on holiday.”

Samuel sidles up to her, “Is he rich? Famous?”

Rocol shakes her head adamantly, frowning as she gulps a mouthful of her drink. “He’s a writer, a struggling one, with all the baggage one can hope to inherit.”

Samuel is silent as he gulps down his drink.

CHAPTER 2

PART 1

Lavenda Stevonsen licks her lips; the red lipstick melts to cover the rounded flesh she puts forward as she pouts. She looks cross-eyed in the mirror, from being so close to her own image.

She has a meeting this morning with a contact she has made through Metofeaz Litigatti.

The guy's name on the card is quite unique, leading one to suspect it is made up.

“The Funk music is the way,” Litigatti had told her. “This dude is classical with a twist. That twist is that he's Funkster. You like Funk; he likes Funk. Just so happens, Miss, you have the designs.”

Stevie as her friends call her, chuckles to herself about the writer. She can see what Rocol liked about Feeaz.

She had seen Metofeaz twice since arriving in New York. Both times were at the SIL HOUSE Café, the place where John Lazoo often hung out with his associates. It didn't hurt her profile to be seen talking to one of Lazoo's friends—Metofeaz the writer, who just so happens to have something going on with her best friend down in Australia.

Lavenda was as nonchalant about the death of Rocol's husband as was the widow herself. Three weeks had passed since the funeral when her friend since they were seven told her the news.

Four men—Metofeaz, then John Lazoo, then the one they refer to as Le Mac, and finally, she suspects, the guy whose card she is holding—pass by outside the window, under the arc of the logo, on their way into the savvy but busy meeting place in the heart of TriBeCa.

Their suits are well cut, and she can tell they fit by the way the material stretches across their wide backs as they lean forward onto their table under the arch.

Metofeaz looks around the place and notices her, as she pretends to read the paper upside down. Feeaz beams a smile her way as he calls out to someone, “Simon, bring brew, bring food, and bring some water before Lazoo withers away.” Lazoo looks down at the table as he tries hard to keep a straight face. Metofeaz waits for a moment and then he puts up his arm and says, “Simon, bring money, bring sovereignty and while you're at it, bring your resignation, for being so slow at what you do, day in day out of your mundane life, ah?”

Lazoo places his hand over his face as he begins to laugh uncontrollably; he attempts to do this without making any sound by looking out the window.

PART 2

Lavenda is excited about her meeting with Metofeaz's business partner. It is the main topic of her conversation with Rocol this evening.

“He likes how classical I am, and the straightish concaves of my cutting. He says it hides roundness and thickens thinness...”

The conversation eventually finds its way to Rocol's topic of interest; Metofeaz. Lavenda knows her friend doesn't want to sound too eager, in case she had seen things first hand that would make her not want to talk about the subject at hand. “You know what, Ré? I don't think he's too bad at all. He's definitely a clown, but hey, he could kill you with laughter. Worse things you could die of, like a broken heart, failed heart, drinking Samuel's cocktails. By the way, how is that big queen?”

Lavenda runs through their forty-minute phone call in her head as she prepares herself in the mirror for another meeting with the entrepreneur.

This one is eight hours after their first one, and it will take place at the swank, swank, swank New York Restaurant. The place where Lazoo first met Hariss Clariss, as the story goes. She mentioned it in passing to Rocol, but didn't want to seem to be having too much fun, while her friend was going through a rough patch.

As she decides which pair of heels to wear with her black trousers—the ones she had already sold two pairs of to a famous name, to go with another one of her sold creations, the plain white cotton extra low cut v-neck t-shirt—the story Rocol told her on the phone comes to mind. The story from back in the day involved her, Samuel, a drug thief and a famous rock and roll Superstar, who had tragically taken his own life just the year before.

Lavenda pulls her hair back with both hands; her attractive face is revealed, and then she lets her hair go so her shoulder length hair envelopes her smiling eyes. She shakes her head fast and she looks mischievous, from the way her hair is wispy from having been furiously whisked.

PART 3

The host Hariss Clariss is as cordial as he is charming and societal. “Ms. Stevensen, my black pants would fetch pence on a good day. Yours are obviously hemmed in gold.” He clicks his fingers and the waiter is there to show her and her date to a table. At least, he feels to her like a date from the treatment he is giving her and she is enjoying.

Her date pulls out her chair for her as he tells the waiter, “It's okay; I got it mate.” He seems too boyish in a kind way to be lumped with the tag of “opportunist” for his frugal and deft management of Lazoo and his affairs following Lazoo's murder trial. Yet he still seems at ease with all the unwanted attention.

Someone is standing at the edge of the table as Lavenda studies the menu. She looks over it at her date. He smiles back at her, and asks, “Shall we talk to him?” Lavenda feels she has to giggle, and so she looks down at the menu. He now places his menu to the side of his plate and looks up at the person.

Jon Le Mac is a smooth looking guy with cocoa colored skin; his hair is cut close to his well-proportioned head that sits on his broad shoulders. And when he smiles, he reminds you of Denzel Washington, Will Smith, Eddie Murphy, and Jamie Fox—if it were possible to make one mold of all those men.

Jon Le Mac’s date for the evening is a former lingerie model by the name of Ali.

Lavenda smiles at Ali as she places her menu to the side of her plate and the two men speak some distance from the table.

“Friends call me Stevie, but everyone of late seems to like Lavenda.” The fashion designer studies the woman’s natural form, and then her function as Ali decides to add to the conversation. “I get called names too; nothing nice, just names.” Lavenda pulls out a seat for her as she inquires about their plans for this evening, “You and—” She pauses as she wonders whether the name in the papers and on TV would be the correct name. Ali helps her out. “They’re all Johns, hon. Don’t you dare be fooled by the Le Mac, the Lazoo and the Feeaz; they’re just Johns.”

CHAPTER 3

PART 1

Jazz funk by Marcus Miller and friends fills the night air. The smooth sound is coming from up the street. Metofeaz walks with his head down, looking at the ground his boots cut as he steps. Up ahead are Le Mac and Ali. Further on, are Lavenda and his friend. The door to the small club is open; Lavenda stops under the neon light and turns to face her date; she holds out a hand as she says something. He responds by folding his arms. Now he looks at the ground and then he smiles. The woman who could model her own creations now decides to mimic his behavior. She smiles at the street behind him, and then she folds her arms. He holds out his hand to touch her crossed arms, and then he drops the act, and she unfolds her arms as they physically connect for the first time.

Metofeaz looks down the stairs to the small Jazz club. He sees the back of the other founding partner of LMLA-ink disappear into the red haze. Lavenda stands watching the passersby and her new man as he talks to someone on his phone. Litigatti is close enough to her that he can smell her perfume and almost taste the skin that warms the fragrance.

Metofeaz clears his throat to get Lavenda's attention. She smiles and the corner of her lips almost touch her dimple. He says to her as she watches the guy still talking on the phone, "We all talk, some of us more than others; everyone but him." Metofeaz pauses as he reaches into his pocket and produces a pack of Marlboro Lights. He offers her one, which she takes. He lights hers and then his. He drags hard, and he inhales deep. She says, "I didn't know you smoked." He holds in the smoke as if it were another kind, as he finds air to answer her. "I don't usually. Only when I'm writing, which has been nonstop, since me, Lazoo and the boys met up again." He exhales upwards as he continues. "As I was saying, people like to talk; he only promises. Story has it that he promised his mother on her death-bed he would make something of himself. And all this, even if it is a manipulation of sorts, is part of that promise." Lavenda takes small sucks off the cigarette; the smoke around her face makes her squint as she looks at Feaz. She doesn't say anything, and then she looks away from his brown eyes.

Metofeaz puts out the cigarette with the toe of his snake-skin boot as he is summoned to the phone. "Hey, brother, it's the financier; he's happy with the characters but doesn't like how you've cast Haze as him." Metofeaz takes the mobile phone as the shops on either side of the entrance-way to the downstairs club shut down for the night. The comic book shop darkens, and then the Video store's lights go out.

The Jazz Funk from downstairs continues; a bassist riffs out with delicate fills from a drummer that make Lavenda want to move her body. Her new boyfriend hands Feaz the phone. He looks as if he just stepped out of a limousine; the red carpet he would never ever be seen upon is rolled out for him. His smile simmers as she begins to move her hips. A couple in a loving embrace pass by; they smile at the reddish brown-haired woman as she lets her hair fall down around her magnificently made face. Lavenda's hands magically appear above her head as her eyes look down, as if to check the way her

feet in the original silver strapless heels shuffle, slide, slide, and then tap the concrete pavement blessed by her beauty. They counter the way her hips move in a sensual wave of pleasure that mesmerizes the guy suited up, closing in on her and her bountiful body. Just the way he looks at her makes her want to scream out his name. He gently places his hands on her hips, that continue to thrive under some kind of spell, as she asks herself how she could never imagine being in a situation normally reserved for the Rocol's of this world? She has to cradle his neck. His smile is only second to the way his eyes look into hers as if to tell her that from now on the void of emptiness would be filled by his smile and presence.

PART 2

Metofeaz steps down from the stage.

The aroma of coffee wafts and then drifts through the refurbished bar. Ali behind the bar calls out, "Last call; you'll be making your own."

The front door opens and Jon Le Mac steps into the vibrant atmosphere he is responsible for creating. He holds out and above his head a box. "Fresh donuts. Come and get it!"

Down in the last plush booth of the bar, reserved for the members of the company, are Lavenda and the boss. The sound track kicks in as Lavenda flattens out one of her patterns for him to see. She looks around the offices, and then she gives him a quick peck on his cheek.

From inside the speaker stack piled to the ceiling of the small stage, Lee Ritenour's fingers begin to meld with the neck of his instrument.

Lavenda looks at the hardworking guy as he types on the ThinkPad. She leans into him, "Hey, hear that?" He presses a key to save his work as a pianist would pronounce an end-note, and then he looks at her. "Lee Ritenour, Night Rhythms, danced splendidly by Lavenda Stevonsen soon to be the owner of Haute couture, designer of Lazoo's wardrobe, in the infamous novel of the same name."

They look at each other, and realize how close they sit. He looks at her from another angle, and decides he will spoil himself for once, just how his mother and all the women around him did when he was a child. He taps the space bar of his machine as the screen saver is about to render. He launches his calendar and points to an appointment. She looks at the small box he maximizes for her benefit, which shows she has a meeting with Genesis Jones at 11:30 this morning. Lavenda touches the screen; her finger's warmth is recognized by the crystals, and a mist forms around the finger's tip. She quickly takes her finger from the monitor as she casually informs him of her thoughts. "Ali is the perfect face for the label." She stops as she looks up at the woman she just named. Ali places the two cups down on the table and then advises them, "I have to pick up my girl from her father's at around three. So if you want any typing done, you'll have to have it ready by eleven at the latest."

PART 3

Evening begins. Couples relax on the grass under the charm of film, this one, a classic yarn, A Spike Lee Joint. The Central Park Dome shows *Mo Better Blues*.

Onscreen the Bleek Quintet plays the title track to the movie; a handful of couples slow dance to the scene. John Lazoo gets up and brushes the grass from the seat of his white linen pants. He holds his hand out to Genesis, an equally charismatic figure. Once they're both on their feet, they seem to Lavenda like they were made for each, and for this very purpose. He lets her go first, as it seems she would like to dance closer to the other couples; Lazoo looks down at them and shrugs his shoulders, and smiles at everyone over the top of his Ray-Ban Sunglasses. As they walk away, he pinches Genesis on the bum, making her put her hip into him almost causing him to trip over some couple's picnic arrangement...

A jazz quartet plays to the left of the screen, while the credits roll back up into the director's canister. Genesis and Ali share a joke, as LMLA-ink do rock, paper, scissors for who will spring for breakfast in the morning at SIL HOUSE café. "Uh, uh! No way! His fingers are permanently clawed and fucked up; he could say that shit was rock and paper." Le Mac wants another round, "Come on, one, two, one, two, three." Le Mac makes the boys go again; this time all four of them come up flat hands. So he says, "Again." Lazoo now counts, "Three, four, and..." All four produce a fist each. Now it's his turn to count, "on me, ah." LMLA-ink, a close-knit outfit look for incoherence in the voice they now believe is within the quartet.

Lavenda begins to laugh as Ali and Genesis sit down next to her. Genesis warns her, "They could be at it all night. They stood there for two hours one time until they got cramped."

The three women talk about themselves as the crowd dwindles and the screen is rolled up and taken away. Eventually all four of the boys agree to call it a draw after coming up with the same hand for forty-five minutes. Metofeaz blames Le Mac, "It's because you cannot think for yourself." He says this as he winks at the girls while he takes a six pack from the hamper and tosses each one of the lads a can of beer. They crack open their tins and touch cans as they agree who will pay for the breakfast. Metofeaz suggests, "Girls' turn to pay, ah?" as he turns to the women curled up on their sides talking quietly among themselves.

Lazoo and her man clasp each other's arms. They use their free arms to hug each other. She hears him say something, but only the last of it can she completely understand, "... if it weren't for Feeaz, we wouldn't be here; if it weren't for you, we could not be in the place we are. Your son, brother, will be my son too." They look at each other and Lavenda feels the bond these men share. Lazoo looks over his shoulder at something as he says. "Janine said the true poet soldier would someday take credit for his work." The response of the guy she has taken to in such a short time is heartfelt, "I was too young in

those different shells, so I hid behind what I believed to be good. Little did I know the difference of being blessed from eternal damnation.”

As Lavenda points out the constellations to him, she feels the way he hears and holds each word she says as if they were the last words he could ever hear. “I’ve been to where your parents were born, John. You can see the stars, brighter than here, you know?” Lavenda feels her accent sound stronger on particular words, as she realizes the two of them are alone. He looks up at the stars she talks about and then he looks back at her.

CHAPTER 4

PART 1

Sydney's Pitt Street is a myriad of peak time traffic, all people and the sounds they make. Rocol changes the ear she uses to listen to Metofeaz. Rene Geyer in all her glory blares from the speakers in the second hand bookstore's window. "Telephone line, bad connection." The cab Rocol hails cruises by with the windows wound down; boy tourists with Brazilian and German soccer shirts hang their bodies and arms out the open windows. They shout to the girl waiting for a ride, "Havana, Honey; Havana!" She curtsseys and smiles as she says into the phone, "Just some dickheads."

The model like figure steps back from the road and up onto the pavement. Behind her a few shoppers exit the bookstore as the music dies down. She defends her suggestion to Feeaz that he should do an interview with her magazine. "Well if it's that great, why don't you do an interview with us?" She finds herself looking at the ground in the middle of the busy footpath. Someone stops suddenly as she unknowingly steps in his path. A handsome businessman finds an excuse to touch her. "Oops. Sorry, love." He holds her by her shoulders as if he is about to lift her off her feet, and only lets go of her when she looks up at him as if they know each other. She looks back down at the ground as he waits for a reaction. She continues to try and talk Feeaz into doing the interview, "That line alone, 'The New TV' will get you eyeballs." She looks up again and the stranger is still standing there. She looks down again as the wannabe now gets the message. Rocol nods her head as from the corner of her eye she watches the random guy walk away. Still with her head down, she takes a step through the doorway of the bookstore.

The mobile phone beeps, and she takes a look at the display. Someone has left her a message while she speaks to the frustrating guy, whom she is cautious of but also feels she understands. He also happens to be able to make her forget everything when she is with him—on the phone, in thought, or in person. "Okay. We'll talk later, then. I have a message. Have to go check it." Rocol hangs up and wonders whether he will think she was abrupt about the way she had to end the call, but she thought the message could be from her work.

The books that line the walls and fill the insides of the room smell of paper treated from pulp of dead trees. Rocol has one eye on the phone she dials for her messages as she keeps an eye out for any sign of life inside the bookstore. The Rene Geyer live compilation continues as she listens to the message from Lavenda, "Call me Ré. Chow for now, honey." Rocol dials her friend's number as the little ditty dances about the room, creating an atmosphere. "It only happens, when I look at you." She hums along as her call is connected.

When she finally finishes her call, it is dark outside. The people passing by occasionally look inside. Rocol looks down an aisle to where voices come from behind the curtain covering the doorway to the back of the shop.

She runs her hand along the spines of the books stacked against the walls and finds Freud. She feels warm inside as she carefully tips “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” forward so it is at odds with the rest of the books. She toys with the idea of shoplifting; the book recalls to her the taste of summer salt in the sea-water she swam in many years ago. She waits for someone to appear through the curtain, but still the voices of men come from a safe distance. She changes which hip she leans on. She lifts the front of her dress to expose the tops of her stockings as she places her hand on the book. She lifts the dress further to show a matching lace corset. She places her hand on the book as she feels the open air around the tops of her bare legs. In order to hide it, Rocol places the book against herself and pushes it firmly up into the body-hugging garment. She stands there for a moment, and then lets her dress fall back down to cover herself.

PART 2

Rocol has told the boy who holds her hand as he walks ahead of her to the seawall that she is eighteen years of age. And that Samuel, her husband, who is asleep in their Newcastle hotel room, really is her husband.

The sun is about to hit the horizon and their young bodies are in desperate need of each other. As he marches on to their destination, she holds him back by stopping every so often, causing him to pull her to him, and then once he has her wrapped in his arms, they kiss each other as if fearing the sunrise will diminish the way they feel.

He holds her around her waist; her legs wrapped around his waist are like hot arms that will not let him go. She lets the weight of her hair hang as she brushes it back with her hands. He waits for her eyes to open; they are shut tight. And when she opens them, he sees all he wants to see, and remember. She now shakes her thick mane so some of it falls down on to her face. The water that covers them is a calm sheet of serenity. She looks at him and then out to sea. The sun sitting on the horizon has not taken from them the way they feel.

Her hair touches his shoulders as he carries her on his back to the shore, accentuating the way he wants to connect with every part of her. She kisses once, twice and another time around his neck, and then on his face as he looks for a place on the beach where the sun cannot hit from its place high up in the sky.

Once seated under some shelter, she lights up a cigarette and he produces two chocolate bars and a can of Coke. They swap products as they watch the morning’s activities being carried out on the beach. A group of lifesavers jog past them, and he comments, “I want to be as fit as those chaps one day.” He says this as he takes a drag of the cigarette, which he passes to Rocol. She has a mouthful of the Picnic Bar as she tells her wish, “I want to be married one day.” He takes a mouthful of the soft drink as he points out, “Doesn’t one ‘get married’?” She nods her head, “Yeah, you know what I mean.” He nods his head as he adds, “You’ll get married, then be married and hopefully stay married, ah?” She leans her head on his shoulder as he continues. “Getting married is the hard part, or the easy part, depending...”

When she wakes up, the sun is hot, and he is not there. She stays still as she uses her eyes to look for signs that would suggest otherwise. As her focus comes to her, she sees his shoes and then Samuel's shirt. She sits up and stretches and notices him out in the water waving at her.

PART 3

The main street of an Australian steel town on the east coast of New South Wales. Hunter Street on a lazy Sunday afternoon is almost deserted. Its ghostlike eeriness is the ideal place for the two youngsters; an eighteen-year old girl and sixteen-year old boy. She appears to him to be from a wealthy family; the outfit she wears looks like the ones in the windows of the department store he works in during the day. "Rocol! That's where I work." She laughs at him, "No way!" He smiles at her as he lets her know he's serious. "Yeah, in the grocery department." She lets him know of the coincidence that has become apparent. "My mother, well my foster mum works here in Sydney." He is equally surprised, "Bullshit!"

Rocol watches the reflection of him in the shop window. He stands some distance from her under the speaker in the ceiling of the shop awning. He's dressed in some of Samuel's clothes, but it doesn't affect the way she sees who he is. His reflection becomes clearer as if the sun shining beyond the shade lightens his appearance when she thinks of him.

Cold Chisel's Choir Girl figuratively forges a moment; down through the tiny speaker comes notes written and then played to move one, even those with hardened hearts of stone. He breathes into himself the afternoon's humidity as he watches her in the window looking back at him.

"Looking like a choirgirl / crying like a refugee..."

Rocol wishes to be next to him at that moment, but she stops herself from turning around in case he may not be there when she does.

He looks at her, not in the window but at her; a woman, destined for a life already lived, a path already laid out in front of her. He now looks at her reflection and he smiles, hoping she can see the way he feels about her.

"She's my connection / I'll hold on / and never, never, never let her down..."

CHAPTER 5

PART 1

Classic Jocelyn Brown swings from the rafters of the renovated cathedral, now a record store; “Somebody Else’s Guy” plays as Metofeaz flicks through some records. On the opposite side of the huge flat shelf of Vinyl music are Lavenda and John; they discuss the artists and the music they look at. Feeaz selects a couple of imports from Europe to go with the new Chicago House tracks he believes will add oomph to their work. He overhears Lavenda’s question, “What were we doing when this one was new?” The guy becomes conscious of Litigatti who pretends to be engrossed in selecting music. He flicks an album still in its plastic wrap across the top of the display; it flies like a Frisbee and lands on top of his pal’s pile. The writer smiles at the couple; Lavenda has a pleading look on her face, “Please, Feeaz.” Litigatti looks at the album and then he flicks it back to where it came from. This time his friend catches it and places it back into the stack of music. He looks at the clock on the wall long enough for Lavenda to look at it and realize she is late for an important meeting with a seamstress for her new label. “Shit, I am late. I have to go. Chow, catch you guys later, ah?” John closes his eyes as he puts his head forward to kiss her goodbye. Nothing happens. He opens his eyes and she has a grin on her face. “Where were you when that record came out?” He almost feels embarrassed, as Feeaz puts his selection of music right up close to his face to hide himself. John looks behind Lavenda at the people he can see through the open doors outside on the street and then he whispers in her ear. “Kiss me goodbye and I’ll tell over dinner tonight, ah?” She has no comeback. The kiss lasts longer than the time it takes Metofeaz to make his way to the counter, place his goods on the counter, take out his wallet, and produce a credit card, which he presents to the shop assistant before he calls out to the two people still lost in their goodbye, “He wasn’t even thought of back then...”

At the top of the steps to the old church stand two members of LMLA-ink. Feeaz looks at the tip of the cigarette he lights in his cupped palms. John watches him closely in-between waving out goodbye to Lavenda as she almost seems to skip her way along the wet New York pavement. The farther she gets, the longer and deeper the writer’s puffs on the cigarette seem to sound. Once the relaxant is burning on its own, he manages to say something. “It’s customary for the creator to narrate when he feels the need.” He holds up a palm in between him and the guy who waves. “Now before you start jumping on my case about medication and this therapy and that diet, I want to remind you of who came first.” John takes the cigarette handed to him, takes a quick puff and hands it back. As he exhales, he says what he has to say. “One day the lost baby was found. He grows up, and should now be able to distinguish between reality and realism.”

Later that afternoon the two friends are still seated at the top of the stairs. Finally, they have decided on how they will move ahead as a writing team, and how the two of them will fit into the complex framework of which they are only a small part. Metofeaz relays back to the guy who lays the plans on which they build their intricate web, “Okay, let’s say you do take control of the work, and you please the majority of the stakeholders; by that point, you would have convinced me that the voice is yours and yours alone.” The

craftier of the two thinks for a moment before he shakes his head. “No Feeaz!” He continues to shake his head as Feeaz shows signs of irritation. “What then?” “If you do not already know who the voice belongs to, you will never know!”

PART 2

Metofeaz is at the wheel of the company car; a NYC Yellow Cab, complete with the checkers down both sides. The ID is still in the name of James. The passenger this time is the boss himself sitting in the front seat next to the excitable driver. On the stereo, loud and proud, are authentic Pacifican sounds of “Long Ago.” Feeaz winds down the window as he passes by the hotdog stand. He shouts out above the music, the people and the cars, “Sole Ace, kids, like this, ah?” He then smiles at his passenger “That’s how you say it, ah?” John looks at him. “You’re crazy, you know that? Yeah that’s it.” The streets of New York City are a cornucopia of commerce, connectivity and controlled chaos. The boy from the Pacific watches the action as the screams from the old plantation continue to come at him, “Fai fai pea / fai fai pea.”

Parked at the stoplight as they wait for the next song, Metofeaz asks John what’s on his mind. He stares straight ahead, making Feeaz think he’s looking out for Lavenda, who lives on the other side of the intersection in the middle of the Village. “You can’t wait to see her, can you, ah?” John looks at him; his look is less serious than usual as he lets him in on what thinks. “You know, Feeaz, if this whole thing turns to shit, as most things do that involve having to justify, why you have to eat the dog that wants your bone.” Metofeaz agrees with a look equally as serious as his friend’s. “My uncle has this newspaper on this island in the Pacific. We can go there, be journos, earn enough money to buy beer and write.” Feeaz looks at the lights and then he looks back at the person who picked him up off the ground when he was down. “Samoa, right?” John nods his head as something brings a smile to his face. Metofeaz is now more upbeat than before as he watches the look on John’s face as John watches Lavenda step down from the curb to be in a place where they can pick her up. Feeaz puts a hand over his nostril and snorts like he has something heavy to say. He lets free his request. “Hey, come on, man; just this once, please let me cascade the freaking lights.” The restrained character who sits up in his seat winds down the window. He looks out his window as he lets the driver know, “Just this once; last time you caused an accident. After the pedestrians cross, and do it just before the inbound lane’s light turns green; most of the traffic is heading home.”

The last of the pedestrians step up onto the footpath; a couple in their fifties, he wearing plaid, she with a plat of hair that swings in the air, turn their heads when they hear the voice shout out, “Lavenda, watch this!” Next to them, a woman, maybe in her late twenties, smiles as she waves once and then shyly puts her hands together to hold her purse in front of her. A guy, who hangs out the passenger side of a cab across the intersection, points at the traffic lights. “The traffic lights, Lavenda!”

People on both sides of the intersection now stand still as they watch the guy in a smart suit, who jumps out of the cab.

Metofeaz pushes buttons on the stereo and then he reaches into the back of the cab and winds down both windows, so everyone can hear the music. He snorts to himself as he watches John take a step across the white line and into the middle of the still street.

Lavenda looks around her. She cannot believe the scene he makes as he takes another step toward her. She looks at the woman with her plat in her hand. The woman says, “He’s handsome; do you know him?” Lavenda takes a deep breath as he calls out again, “The lights, Lavenda; watch them.” People who were standing on the pavement now step down onto the road as he walks his walk. His white shirt makes his tan-like skin look darker; the squared shoulders of his black suit make him look broader. The heel of his tailored boot hits the tarmac as the red light flashes once, and then again.

Lalis; Island drums begin to beat. Behind the lone figure, the cab begins to roll slowly. Ukuleles start to strum against the irresistible beat as a Hawaiian guitar slides and sweeps the melody up and into the sky.

Lavenda brushes aside her coyness by swinging her purse in her clasp side to side with both her arms. She looks up at the lights as a four part harmony of men’s voices flow from behind the man she’d only met the week before. She remembers the tune; some of the words are phrased differently, but as he comes closer to her, their very essence and heartfelt meaning is in the way his eyes smile at her.

Lavenda looks across to the opposite set of lights when he is only a few steps from her side. They flash once: all three colors, and then they run amok as he reaches her side and pulls her already moving body toward him.

Litigatti cascades the New York street traffic lights. Red, orange, green, orange, green, red, and then green-green-green as she wraps her arms around his neck.

PART 3

A musician, Ryan and his wife Betty-Anne entertain the diners. Their infectious Pacifican way stimulates an appetite, “...If you want me, wont you tell me, and I’ll do it to you...
...Watching you...”

The place made famous by Genisis Jones and John Lazoo, as the location for their famous first date, is fully booked tonight. The owners of the establishment have changed since that first magical evening, but the management has remained the same, and luckily it has retained the same staff, décor and held on to its simple charm.

James, who now manages the establishment, quickly takes off his dinner jacket and dons an apron and takes from the hostess a pad and pen. He clicks his fingers twice and a waitress is beside Lavenda.

John looks around the busy place and counts no more than three tables with more than two people, the rest of them couples, leaning over the orange flames from the inexpensive

candle holders sitting on top of blue checkered vinyl tablecloths.

Lavenda watches him in the midst of one of his creations and begins to feel herself in the frame. She looks into her champagne flute as she tells him, “I can’t believe I’m here, John, and with you.” He takes his champagne and holds it up, “A toast, first to you.” She smiles with her head down as she puts her glass up to touch his. Then he toasts again, “and secondly, to my mates.” They touch glasses again as he explains further, “This whole thing wouldn’t be possible without them. When Le Mac said to me he wanted to start the tours, I laughed at him, Lavenda; I did.” James the waiter is standing next to them. John lets him know that he would rather be treated like everyone else. “Jimmy, go put your jacket back on; send someone over in about twenty minutes or so, ah.” Lavenda leans on her elbows as he continues, “Le Mac bought this hole when it could barely pay the rent; now he owns almost all the leases in the building.”

Lavenda stirs her drink as she watches him eat. “When the documentary aired in Europe, the one Gene Reyer hosted...” John nods his head as he uses his fork to move his steak; he then unconsciously hurries her, “Yeah, I’m aware of the one; go on.” She takes a sip of her margarita without taking her eyes off him. “People were outraged at the horrific nature of the murders, and the way he seemed to glamorize Lazoo’s acquittal.” He pushes his plate to the side and sits back and thinks to himself. He takes his cup of tea and looks into it for a moment and then he reminds her, “That’s way out of my league; that stuff. You’re talking about the American justice system, TV networks, gangsters and government agencies; hey, that’s another ball game. I’m just a boy from the Pacific trying to make it big in a dog eat dog world.”

CHAPTER 6

PART 1

Lavenda's apartment is a display of her brain in its functional form. John stands with his back against the wall of the warehouse apartment; his foot cocked against the wall is how he likes to stand. He is by no means getting ready to walk fast and then run. For once he feels grounded and close enough to what he suspects could be the entrance to the "abyss of our bliss."

She calls out as she steps out of her heels, "You know you're standing exactly in the middle of the wall?"

The four mannequins on the left side of the room are dressed in black evening wear. In front of them and between them is a sewing machine.

On the right hand side of the room is a punching bag and four white boards with drawings and post-it notes that dot the sketches of her simplistic yet engaging designs. Engaging because they give the viewer the right to believe you could add to them.

In the middle of the room is a bed. Above it a bay window with cushions and enough room for two people fond of each other's company to read on any afternoon, or in the moonlight as is the case tonight. To the right of that is a painted four fold Japanese screen. Behind it is Lavenda.

John looks at his suit, an expensive one but off the rack nonetheless. He winks and smiles to himself; a self-conscious trait. He does this as he looks up at the ceiling and the cotton canopies that hang down defusing the lighting rig with orange gel and clear ones. "I sort of do, but most of the time I find myself in the middle. The moderate one I suppose you can say?"

He eagerly waits for her reply, so he can hear her mind and the sound of her voice. "Is that by choice, or through consequence?"

"When I was young I fancied myself as a songwriter. But there were so many amazing writers and musos around me. So I then moved into creating ideas and concepts. So the answer to your question is by consequence. In my role, I have to moderate Lazoo's brilliance and energy, tame Metofeaz's passion and direct Le Mac's focus." There is silence as he studies the Armani label inside his jacket, and then he adds, "I think?"

He is almost anxious as he waits for her next question. It eventually comes, "Who centers you?" He smiles at the ground, taking his foot down from the wall as he checks the side of it, "You mean, who is it that grounds me?" "Yeah! That too!" He stands with both feet on the ground as he folds his arms and tells her the truth, "The thought of my mother; before that—her."

PART 2

John looks up above his head and the thin mesh curtains blow in the wind, which brings the sounds of New York City into the warehouse apartment. He looks to his left and he sees a curve of her hip thigh and buttock made from how she sits with her knees up reading the *New York Times*. He turns onto that side and looks at her and the pile of magazines in front of her.

He inhales her and her beauty deep into himself and he senses pheromones that affect his physiological disposition. A smile appears on her profile, making the ends of her lips find one of her irresistible dimples.

She senses a hormonal imbalance of such disparity in her body; she screws up the newspaper she reads by hugging it tightly. Bent over her knees she looks at him, "I do, you know, and I know you do."

She steps onto the floor and into her slippers. She stands up and tosses the scrunched up *Times* at him. "Lazoo is on sixteen different pages. I counted five references to him or Genesis in various articles."

As she makes her way to the edge of the bed, she places a hand on one of the magazines and slides it along the bed to him. Her body is now preceded by her even more appealing face. One of her arms is on top of the magazine cover, the other supporting her and her perfectly proportioned body. Her eyes are on his eyes, which show pleasure from just looking at her, and then they look at his chest and arms, which lay relaxed, yet seem to hold some immense weight from the way they are defined.

He smiles at her with his eyes, till the feeling he gets from her spreads to his lips...

He watches her get up onto her feet; just wondering what she thinks and therefore says creates a lump in his throat. She shakes her head to make her hair fall; she tries to imagine how it'll look to the guy for whom she now has true feelings. She then thinks for a moment that those feelings must be kept undercover. She turns to walk away and then she changes her mind as she looks over her shoulder and says, "Do that survey; I wanna see how you stack up in the sack, ah?" She catches him rolling his eyes, and then she feels like laughing out loud as she overdoes the way she makes her figure work for him, dressed only in a pair of her sexy pump slippers as she walks off and away from their bed...

He looks at the page bookmarked with a pink post-it note. "The truth, and the double truth Ruth, he he. Xxxooo." She calls out from the kitchen, "John, that CD last night was good." He holds the magazine out in front of him before placing it beside him and grabbing the remote for the SONY sound system.

The overcast Saturday is mellow like the new 2 step artist from London, whom Bono

Vox of U2 found. A friend of a friend handed Metofeaz a copy of the kid's demo, and since then the sure fire hit "7 Days" by Craig David has been high rotate on LMLA-ink's play list.

He's sitting up in bed with a pen in his hand. For the first five questions, he put a dot in the "Maybe" box. Question six asks: "*Would you kiss her after...?*" He looks at the opposite page—a sneaker stamped side on—an advertisement for a logo. He hears her heels on the wooden floors, and then he sees her in his Armani suit-jacket. Beside her on the floor is a tray of breakfast; she folds away her sewing machine and places the tray on the bench, which she begins to roll toward him. Her hair is pinned up in a bun on top of her noggin with a clothes peg. The sleeves of his favorite jacket are scrunched to her elbows. He takes a second look at the jacket as she comes closer; there are food stains all over it. He blinks in astonishment for a second and then he decides the view between the lapels is a worthwhile trade off for the state his suit is in...

PART 3

Down in a valley, one surrounded by one million square lights, there's an open doorway that leads to two people. He pours the wine, and she looks up at him. In the candle-light he makes her feel woozy, lightheaded and so, so wanted. Beneath the plain table-cloth is her sewing machine on which she labored all day long as he sat in the bay window, trying to write, while watching her create. The kitchen, slightly bigger than a bus stop, is neat; its spices and pictures of her and her travels that cover two walls change color in a spontaneous hue, as the dozen or more candle flames breathe oxygen; a perfectly weighted breeze cares enough to caress and therefore bless their special event. Lavenda closes her eyes as he lifts the silver lid off the silver tray. One of the gentle currents carries the aroma of fine food ordered from the swank, swank, swank New York restaurant to her aroused senses. The strap of one of her breathtaking creations falls from her shoulder; he bends down to kiss that shoulder softly; in doing so, his face is close to hers, so close their perfect lips must touch.

The soft yet rhythmic music, with tantalizing words arranged to be harmonious, thus creating this most tantric atmos "...I find you so amazing / with everyday I learn more about you..." heightens their already teetering levels of desire for each other; at one end there is loss of individuality, and at the other end, there is losing oneself in the depth of each other's amazing eyes.

They can hear the CD player cascade the discs; this moment gives her the opportunity to ask one of a pile of questions she has for the man who looks at her with eyes that she is beginning to believe were made for her and her alone. "Yesterday, when you picked me up—the traffic lights, how did you do that?" He studies his food and is relieved to let her know, "I thought you'd never ask." She takes a wee sip of her champagne and lets him know he is not totally obliged to fill her in on all the detail. "You have friends at the traffic light department?" Her accent and the delivery of her comment makes him want to hold her forever. He places his utensils down on his plate, wipes his hands with the restaurant napkin and stands enough so he may reach over the sewing table and cradle her

face and place a wet, wonderful and sweet kiss on her lips.

He sits back down, and she takes another sip of her champagne as she admits, “Wow, I must ask the hard questions more often.” He takes his glass of champagne and he raises it. She takes the bottle from the bin and lifts it into the air since his glass seems to be empty. He lets her know there’s enough in the vessel he holds up. “It’s what we toast, Lavenda, that is important and not what’s in our glass.” She holds the bottle in her hand as she waits to understand his words within some context. He leans forward and his eyes seem sad as he says, “I thought you would never come for me. And now that you have, please stay.” She places the bottle back in the still fresh ice, the sound the bottle makes, from how firmly she pushes it down into the silver bin to its resting place, is a crunching sound like a stab that finds its rightful mark.

CHAPTER 7

PREFACE

The Rubbish Collector

(From POEMBOOK: Moon, man)

Rocol Récene brims and the bins
Are swept, up and away
By the burly bloke
With the brilliant smile
The children like him too
One of the bins bounces
And the benevolent boy
Does not let it bounce again
As his boot brings the bin
To a three-hundred and sixty degree loop
Up there in the air
From the bottom step
Where the lonely mother sits
His act, the fireworks of her day

The year is 2020. Rocol sits on her porch reading; inside her twin boys are home from college. They argue about which institution is still worthy of its place in the Ivy League. “Crimson was Chartered at its inception my friend.” Rocol can see the younger one, who says little, shaking his head before he replies, “Everything beyond and therefore before the present is history. We have the pick of the crop, academically honed to be in near proportion to our natural ability.”

PART 1

“Afanasy!” Rocol is her only name, and yet the little girl asks the little boy who stands on his own away from all the other little boys what his last name is. “What’s your last name?” The little fellow’s dark hair is curly. It matches his brown but hazel green eyes, which go with his suede waistcoat that covers his white shirt with the puffed sleeves, on top of his corduroy trousers, that end at his little shiny black boots. He looks at the girl in the green and black check pinafore, over the black jersey, and the green leggings that go down to her black lace up shoes. Her black hair is shiny like his boots that he looks down at. He wonders to himself how on earth she knows his name. He pretends he doesn’t hear her as the woman with a clipboard walks in between him and his view of the girl who now plays with her long hair.

The woman writes as she looks at all the children over her reading glasses. An assessment is what it seems like, so Afanasy stands tall, with his eyes forward, and his hands by his side. The urge to see what the little girl is doing is almost unbearable, and as the woman turns to her side, he gets a view of half the girl. She’s still playing with her dark hair and now she’s smiling at him, without speaking. The woman turns around, and he has to bend his neck to see what the girl is doing. “Jerome Cane?” the woman calls

out. An African American boy's eyes light up as he puts up his hand. The little girl's head appears on the other side of the thin woman calling out the names. Afanasy has to bend his neck the other way to see her smile. "Afanasy?" The voice pauses as the woman flips pages on her board. After looking through the pages, she repeats herself, "Afanasy?" Afanasy is ready this time; he lifts his arm and slowly extends his index finger. "What happened to your last name, Afanasy?" This brings giggling from the other kids. Afanasy's eyes show a puzzled look as he waits for the lady's face to change. Eventually it does; she points to where the other boys stand as she bends her knees to come face to face with Afanasy. "Listen, dear; that's not a problem; it must be just a clerical error. You go over and stand with the other little boys. I'm sure plenty of boys only have one name." As the little guy wanders off to where the boys are, the woman continues her roll call. "Rocol?"

By afternoon the lucky children from foster homes around the world have all met each other. As they do, the kids have already figured out who's who and who likes attention, who rejects attention, and which ones need attention.

Against a window, which the sun chooses to shine through, are two figures. As they talk, they turn around to face the sun, when they see behavior that annoys them. Two boys wrestle with each other until they see a girl sitting on her own, whom they sneak up on from behind. Each takes a pig-tail and yanks on it. "Ouch," Rocol empathizes with the green-eyed girl. Afanasy is by this time looking out the window. The bright sun make his brown eyes hazel. He shields his eyes from the sun as he shrugs his shoulders.

Early next morning before everyone is awake, footsteps make their way down the wooden spiral staircase leading into the activities hall. All the toys are neatly packed away in their large crates. The sun shines through the huge window at the right end of the room. Its rays make a long oblique rectangle on the dark wooden floors. Afanasy has his head down as he wonders to himself whether Rocol will spend the entire day with him again. He senses something which makes him look where he's going. Someone already stands at the window in the warm morning sun. Afanasy stops; he puts his hand on the banister. He sits down on the steps and cradles his face with his arms on his knees. As if someone said the figure's name, it turns around. It's the girl from yesterday; the one with the blonde pig-tails that boys love to tug. Afanasy notices the girl looking at him. He looks back down at the ground as he begins to day-dream. The girl looks back out the window. Afanasy reaches for the banister again, while he is still away in his own little world. He pulls himself to his feet and turns to walk back up the stairs. The stillness sounds out his retreat to the girl who now has turned around again. He takes a step as he hears her. "Afanasy, it's Lavenda."

The little boy turns around. He sees her for the first time. She's stands in the sunlight; her floral dress is brighter than the light around her. She wears brown buckle up shoes with green leggings. Her hair is up, and in it are purple blue flowers. Her eyes shine brighter than her ensemble. She holds in both hands a white handkerchief, bearing an emblem on it that she swings in front of her from side to side. His hand on the banister starts to move; it slides downwards. And as he looks down to see where he places his left foot, he

hears a voice from behind him. “Afanasy, you’re early. I said when the sun is in the branches.” Afanasy freezes and before he looks behind him, he checks to see if Lavenda is still there. He is relieved, but he also quickly becomes anxious for reasons unknown to him. He bites his bottom lip as he turns his head to look at the person he has come to meet. She stands at the top of staircase. Its spiral shape puts Rocol out of Lavenda’s view. Afanasy thinks he needs to take a step down toward the girl standing in the sunlight, but believes he wants to turn around and wait for Rocol to come down and meet him.

PART 2

She now has three kids

(From POEMBOOK: Moon, man)

She now has three kids
But back then
She was free
As she sways
The record starts
The bass, the bass, the bass
The floor, is a sea of heads
In them days, we lived in the dark
My vinylistic finger print grooves her
And it moves her to smile
I smile at her as I take the mic
I wait till the girl with the pink lips turns around.
Her eyes are wild with this rhythm
As I contemplate
The next platter
another way to make her smile
“Test 1, test 2, testing again.”
She now faces me as she dances
She now has three kids
And maybe a husband.
She shops in a nearby supermarket or a convenience store.
She wears a g-string to work on Fridays
And every once in while she goes downtown

Insert: From the upcoming etfiction eBook in GUOPERA format: *Jon Le Mac – Release date: 2010.*

Jon Le Mac takes the shades from his face; his skin is a smooth mocha color. The waitresses who dance with trays above their heads bend their knees. He says, “Come on girls, nah, nah, nah; hold those things way up and above yo beautiful faces. Let the peoples see the way God made those smiles; come on!” The seemingly hollow kick drum is on an off-beat as the short skirts swing to the snare upon the hypnotic rhythm. This rhythm is authentic and off a believing. The waitresses: four African American women, a Chinese girl and three Caucasian beauties do as he says. The offices of LMLA-ink are a place of hysteria and never before witnessed hype. Rocol watches the procession of models hired by Le Mac to service the select few invited to welcome in the 1999 New Year.

Rocol views the page laid out in front of her as her boys walk out the front door. “Mom, we’re going out for a while; would you like to meet up for dinner later?” Her older son, the diplomat, is concerned as ever for his mother. The younger boy, the thinker, knows his mother well. “Come on, mate; Rocol’s quite content, isn’t she, Mom?” The way he drags the word “mate” makes the woman smile. “It’s okay, guys; I have plenty to do.” As they make their way down the path to the giant gates, the younger one, while in the safety of their property, calls out, “Has that smooth dude called again?” Again she smiles at the younger one’s connection with the past.

The woman, who looks no more than thirty something, is fifty-five years old. She lives alone when her boys are away at college. She has three friends—Arley, Genisis and Danielle. She also has her Men-Friends—one for each season of the year. Of late, they seem to be cold like winter, and so she has kept them at bay.

Today she reads one of the books; it is something she had held off doing for many years. When she first started, three months ago, the sight of his name still made her angry. Then she progressed to nothingness, and today, he and his slippery and sarcastic manners make her smile.

The “machine,” as she likes to refer to it, rings. Down the end of the patio, the screen flashes as a new chapter of the latest *GUIOPERA* to hook the world is released. She places the plastic bag with the white handkerchief inside it on the page she has yet to read and closes the special hand-bound leather edition of the absorbing saga.

She slips her feet into the wooden clogs—a special gift from her past—and as she puts her other foot into the Scandinavian shoe, she still has to regulate her breathing to manage her emotion that floods her heart, especially now that she has revisited their story, written.

PART 3

Afanasy stands between Rocol on his left and Lavenda on his right. Lavenda hands him the handkerchief as it is his turn to make a wish. “Your wish, Afanasy.”

The woman seated at the large desk looks at the three children standing in front of the middle window on an overcast day. She looks back at her pictures of them in front of her as she adds names to their first names. She lowers her glasses to get a better look at them, and then she smiles.

Afanasy takes the piece of cloth and looks at it. Rocol watches him feel the material and then he throws it up in the air. It opens as it drops onto his head and covers his eyes and nose. He holds out his jaw so his bottom teeth look like they belong to some sort of monster. He turns to Rocol and makes a grunting noise; she laughs and gives him a peck on his cheek, which makes him giggle. Meanwhile Lavenda looks out the window; it seems like she holds something inside her. When Afanasy looks at Lavenda, his face

becomes serious all of a sudden. He looks out the window to where Lavenda looks. Rocol puts her head forward so she may see the pretty girl who has the boy's attention.

Afanasy looks on as the woman brings the cake to the table. The burning candles not only burn but they smoke. Standing on the other side of the table are his girlfriends, Lavenda and Rocol. Lavenda waves to him to come join them, and then Rocol does the same. He is seated among the other children who watch the birthday candles blown out by the two girls who share the same birth date. After a while the woman intervenes. "Afanasy, would you like to come and blow out the candles for your birthday?" Rocol is quick to offer up an excuse on his behalf. "He's worried, Madame, that one of us will have one more candle than the others; that's why he won't come." Lavenda puts her hand up. The woman looks at her. "Yes, Lavenda?" The girl with the bright green eyes blinks a few times; she clears her throat by swallowing and then she says, "He hasn't had a birthday. He told me."

CHAPTER 8

PART 1

“Potentially the biggest hit for this summer, from Carlos the Maestro Santana and the new kid on the block Roberto Thomas, this is definitely “Smooth,” says the announcer, letting his listeners know about the song that plays on the radio.

Metofeaz has his arm out of the cab’s window. He and the very quiet guy in the passenger seat cruise through Harlem on a typical summer’s day. The kids play at the fire hydrant, as they hear the song in true surround sound from the stereo on the shoulder of a young Puerto Rican boy who shouts out, “Feeaz, my man!” Litigatti has time for the young funk soldier, “I hasta la vista!” The guy, who draws attention from a group of young women on the steps of a brownstone, shouts back, “Not if I see you first Feeaz!” Metofeaz looks at the passenger as he turns down the tune. A Jamaican woman and her three children step onto the street in front of their vehicle. Her bright head-gear reflects off the shining hood of LMLA-ink’s company cab. The little boys become visible as they make their way past the car; one of them has a curious look on his face, while the other’s look is a knowing one. The younger sister smiles at the guy sitting way down so only his head is seen.

Up ahead, the street comes to a man-made end. The man responsible for the barricade—made from a banner that stems the street, from one brownstone to another—is Jon Le Mac. Lazoo’s Ray-Bans shine from the bottom step where he sits; Metofeaz comments on his aviators as he pulls up in the middle of the street, “Hey, brother, the only thing you and the Top Gun have in common is your height.” Lazoo holds up his bottle of beer; Metofeaz rounds the car’s hood and surveys the party, which is growing by the second, as all types of people from different backgrounds arrive on the sidewalk.

Le Mac pushes his Ray-Bans into his face as he flips the lamb steaks on the grill at the bottom of the steps. In the middle of his street is a small stage; on it Feeaz puts the Diamond Head stylus into the groove. Around the platform, from sidewalk to sidewalk, guests move together as couples in a relaxed manner, enjoying the mellow sounds that flood the valley in between old buildings. Le Mac pours some of his beer over the meat; as he does, he tries to get some sort of dialogue going. “You taught me that, you know.” Le Mac looks at the guy with his head down as he carries on, “You got me worried, brother; you looking down at my junk.” Le Mac holds his beer up in Lazoo’s direction and nods toward the guy who still holds down his head. Within a matter of seconds, Lazoo is there with two beers besides his own. He holds his up above the grill and tips it so the brew falls all over the meat, as he says, “You taught me that.” Le Mac elbows him, “Would you just shut the hell up and give the man a beer, ah?” Lazoo lowers his Ray-Bans as he looks at Le Mac and then the boss. “Do I sense some sort of tension here?” The real Maestro’s smile is brilliant and enough to light up the dark, but it does little to brighten his downcast friend’s spirits.

Late in the afternoon, Metofeaz spots Rocol, Genisis, Arley and Santina walking down

the street toward the gathering. The four women spent the day at the beach. Metofeaz notices that their tans glow in the afternoon's orange hue from a setting sun. He is dazed by his view of the women and their beauty.

Lazoo sits on the bottom steps next to Le Mac, who leans on the concrete railing. Metofeaz sits on the top step talking with some of the locals, as Genisis, Arley and Rocol play records up on the stage. He chats with his good friend Santana San Fe. The crowd has doubled in size, and mothers and their children line up at the table where there is an abundance of food. He watches a mother smack her son's hand as he reaches out for something. He calls out, "It's only food; let him have it." The mother turns around and smiles, "I'll stop him again, just to hear that accent of yours." He smiles at her, as he puts his arm around Santana's shoulders and hugs her close; he kisses her forehead and whispers, "I now know how it feels." Santana rests her head on his chest as she bites her bottom lip to hold back her tears.

PART 2

An apartment with seventies décor, consisting mostly of varying shades of orange plastic furniture set upon a creamy white shag pile, with wall to wall and ceiling to floor views of the skyline, is where the writer and boss now live.

Metofeaz flicks through the channels. He watches the look on his face. Rocol says, "Wait." Her hand is up to signal that she is serious. The movie is *Meet Joe Black*. Metofeaz's face changes as Brad Pitt delivers his line before he walks off into the night. He stands up and excuses himself. He walks past Rocol, who looks up at him. He looks at Metofeaz and then looks down at her. He reminds Metofeaz, "No smoking inside, ah?"

Early next morning before the sun's rays relieve the silver moon of its nightly duties, John Reyer sneaks down the staircase to be alone at the birth of the new day. As he putters around the kitchen, he notices a draft coming from the dining room balcony. He pretends he does not notice the entity's presence as he takes a second cup from the cupboard. He pours two steaming cups of black coffee and nearly empties the sugar container into both of them. He stirs both cups with a silverspoon, making enough noise to alert the shell of his presence.

He walks slowly out of the kitchen into where it opens into the dining area. Beyond is the balcony; its door is open. Seated on the balcony with her back to him is Rocol. Her hair blows in the chilly breeze—so does the steam that rises with distinct aroma from the cups he carries. He looks down at the green cups as the steam darts until her hair comes into sight.

"I thought you would never come." Rocol's words are hard for him to take, but he offers her a cup in return. He lifts a seat up in one hand and places it next to where the woman waits. She looks at the seat he places next to her, made from slabs of concrete probably weighing half a ton. He looks at the view as he sits down. Rocol asks, "May I ask you a question?" He answers her with his own, "Is it rhetorical?" Rocol takes a sip of her

coffee. “Mmm...that’s sugared to perfection.” He takes a sip from his cup as he looks down at her bare feet. She continues, “And it’s not a part of this rhetoric we somehow find ourselves unwittingly fulfilling.” He nods his head as he looks at his coffee before taking another drink. “Who were you around 1982?” Rocol turns her body to face him; she crosses her left leg over her right one, and pulls the oversized fluffy dressing gown over her tanned legs. When an answer does not materialize, she places her hand on the arm of his chair. “Well, I’ve met you now. That’s all that matters.” He looks at her hand, and then up at her face; her gaze is solemn right now, but he waits until her lips curve up into the smile she has perfected to mask the disappointments she has weathered throughout her stormy life.

Later that morning, the balcony is transformed. Rocol fields calls from Australia while the men in their black suits get ready to start work for the day. Metofeaz listens to his brief for the new chapter he is about to write. “Brother, don’t worry about the story, just the flow.” Litigatti is about to become annoyed but decides against it when he begins to tap on the keyboard as John continues to prep him. “Now that’s what I want to hear—tapping, brother; just the tapping, no flapping.” He looks at the mobile phone as Lazoo and Le Mac walk onto the balcony. Lazoo’s only prop, a microphone on a stand with no lead attached, is waiting for him. Against the backdrop of New York City is a stack of black speaker boxes, and in between them a small stage with a rig of two turntables and a mixer. Le Mac takes his place and tests his microphone. “Test...” The boss looks at Feeaz, who looks at Le Mac, who holds his headphones in one hand as he places the stylus onto the spinning format. John Reyer asks, “Is everyone steady?” The boys nod their heads as Rocol steps back to watch LMLA-ink begin one of its famous Jam sessions. John Reyer’s voice is as clear as the sky. “Lazoo, when you realized you were innocent, what was the first thing that came to your mind?” As Le Mac lets the record go, he adds his viewpoint, “From a victim’s family member, Maestro!”

Lazoo garbs the mic, “Seven mothers mourn...”

The session lasts for forty-five minutes. The monitor is connected to four cameras mounted on tripods; each camera is focused on one of the members. Rocol presses the pause button as she unhooks her handheld to have a look at the footage. He stands over the shoulder of Metofeaz whose face shows great delight, as the author points out on the screen the gems that cannot be cut from the story. “We still need a format to simplify things...” Rocol looks up from the small screen of the video camera at the boys unwinding. Lazoo is seated at the table, grabbing at food he needs; his suit jacket is off and his shirt is undone to reveal a ripped body. Lazoo nods that it is okay to shoot him as he rips a bread roll in half and shoves one half of it in his mouth. “For the family album? No worries.” Rocol smiles at him after witnessing a performance that almost reduced the hungry man to tears twice. His mobile rings so he places his chicken on the plate and wipes his hands on the napkin. He beams a smile up at the camera, and Rocol has to look away, from the way he glows and his eyes light up as he says, “Genisis!” like a boy does when he tells someone his secret.

Le Mac jumps down from the stage. Rocol opens up the screen on the camera’s side and

holds the thing away from her as she catches Le Mac in stride. “Booya!” he says as he comes close to her, “Booya! For the People’s tribe.” He laughs as he looks at Lazoo. “Bet ya mad monies, the boy’s blowing beautifully in Miss Jones’s ear?” Rocol smiles at him, and then turns the camera back on Lazoo who has his hand over his mouth as he whispers something into the phone.

With all four of them now seated opposite her, Rocol feels the warmth they easily generate when they are required to be cordial. Her first question is for Lazoo. “Do you feel manipulated?” He looks along the line to the end where John Reyer sits looking straight ahead, using his ears to keep him in tune. When Lazoo doesn’t answer the question, John Reyer asks Rocol, “Does your magazine ask that of all its interviewees?” Metofeaz jumps in, “Lazoo feels gratitude for the overwhelming support people have given him, during this unfortunate situation.” Lazoo nods his head as he adds, “To be quite honest, I’ve learned a lot from the way I was setup, and also gained a lot from meeting the guys. What sticks out most for me is how these three untangled the web I was caught in.” He reaches out and grabs his cup of tea as Le Mac is asked the next question. “None of you were present at Gene Reyer’s funeral; doesn’t that seem odd? After all he saved Lazoo’s life.” Le Mac’s answer is short and sweet, “We paid the bill.” Metofeaz again jumps in. “We thought it wouldn’t be a good look, and pretty tasteless considering the degree of media present. It was out of respect that we didn’t show.”

Rocol switches off her camera and unclips her microphone from her lapel. Across the table John sits quietly. Metofeaz walks out onto the balcony in his leather jacket holding a carry bag. Rocol looks up at him while she lights up a cigarette. He tells John, “I’ll be back within the month.” John looks at Rocol, who seems to be fine. The writer, who is off to France to finish the chapter in production, bends down behind Rocol to give her a hug. She holds the arm around her for a few seconds before she places a kiss on his cheek. Feeaz stands up and walks away leaving the two people alone.

Inside, Lazoo and Le Mac watch reruns of “Seinfeld.” Lazoo comments on the scene where Newman and Kramer’s mom are caught in a compromising position on the couch. “Man, I’d smack the fuck, and then disown my mom.” Le Mac smirks at the screen, “Hey, guy, who’s more evil? Costanza or Newman?” Lazoo grabs an apple from the fruit bowl and takes a huge bite of it as he offers his thought. “The question should be how evil’s Jerry? George is always in a mess of some kind, and Newman is cast as Satan himself.” There’s silence and then some laughter from the TV audience, and then both of them hear footsteps. Le Mac reaches for the remote control; he goes to press it but decides to throw the gadget to Lazoo, who catches it and quickly turns the TV off and puts his arms on the back of the couch. He appears and sits down to resume his customary pose of looking down at the ground. He does this for a while before he says, “You two, okay?” Le Mac replies, “All’s fine, like two worms in the dirt. The question is whether you will be fine?” Lazoo interjects, “It’s obvious we got to keep working.” He agrees with him...

By four o'clock, the long shadows cover the room where he sits alone. He lifts his head to the sounds of someone preparing food. The smells accompanying the welcome and

familiar noise are also a treat. He lets his nostrils enjoy the scent. She calls out, “Dinner will be served in a tick, mate.” Rocol’s accent, almost made neutral from long periods of time spent abroad, is made earthy by the “mate” she places on the end—a sure sign she is relaxed and possibly feeling at home in New York.

When he returns in shorts and singlet, Rocol is seated on a blanket in her sweatshirt and shorts. Beside her are two plates of steak, eggs, and chips with coleslaw. She has in her mouth a beer bottle. She flips the lid with her back teeth and then holds the bottle up to him as she coyly offers an excuse for her actions. “A bit of a hangover from the younger days; wrap ya laughing gear round that.” He finds it hard to hold in his smile as he takes the bottle and has a sip as he looks at the girl and the food. She waits for him to sit down and then asks, “Let’s see if you still have it, ah?” First she points to the meat; her voice changes into a little girl’s voice, with eyes that twinkle in time with her pointing finger that twists as if to lament its intent. “What’s that?” He has to have another drink as he forces his answer along with a real smile. “Ah? Sirloin steak!” The accent is heavy on the “steak.” Rocol’s finger twirls around in the air and then it takes a stab at the round yellow yolks. “Eggs!” he says. She laughs out loud as he overdoes it, making it sound as if the word has two “e’s”. In hysterics, she points at the thick fries; his New Zealand accent makes the Aussie chick almost cry. He finally takes his seat across from her...

He watches her as she chats while she finishes her dinner. “This is the first bloody time she hasn’t left me an address or contact number. Bugged if I know how you’re going to conduct business with the label.” He notices her plate is almost clear and starts to gather up the empty bottles and his plate. She finishes her mouthful and puts her hand in the air, “Ah, ah, ah. Nope, we’re going to do them together.” He looks at the plates and replies, “There’s only six pieces.” She tips the remnants of her beer down her throat and then suggests, “All the more reason why we do them.”

Inside the long kitchen, under the yellowy orange spot-lights, they stand facing each other. They play paper, rock, scissors to decide who is to do what. After a minute, she says, “Lavenda told me about this.” In the next hand he offers paper to her rock. He remains silent as she places her fist in his palm. She looks down at their hands, and he looks down at her head.

PART 3

Afanasy leans his elbows on his knees; his legs are crossed and his eyes are looking straight ahead at the camera. Rocol does the same. Lavenda notices the white handkerchief hanging out his back-pocket, so she pushes it back in. This gives the very ticklish little boy an excuse to squirm and laugh, ending in him putting his hands under his girlfriend’s armpits and tickling her. Soon Rocol is doing the same to the boy. From the angle Lavenda is sitting, she can see the woman coming. “Shhh! We have to behave!” Her accent makes the boy laugh even louder, he stops when Rocol looks at him with a mean look—a mixture of his monster face and her squinting eyes—a device she has come to master to keep the quiet and handsome but mischievous little boy in line. Once his head is looking down at the ground, she looks around him at Lavenda, who shrugs her

shoulders as she sits up straight to face the camera. Now Rocol rubs Afanasy's back until he is sitting up looking at the camera. The woman sits down behind them. Behind her are seven rows of boys and girls who stand on the steps of the old building. The photographer looks down into his camera with one hand in the air and says, "Cheese!"

All the couples, who stand on the street behind their cars, are guardians of the kids who now come down the steps to meet them as their families. The three children in the foreground of the photograph now fade into the background.

An hour or so later, the three children seated in the middle of the top step still play with each other's hands in a huddle as the woman locks the front door to the building. All three of them stop their game and turn around to look up at her leaving. She puts the keys away in her handbag and walks down the steps and away from them. It only takes a few seconds before Afanasy is again throwing his fist down in between the girls. The next time he does it, Rocol is with him and by the third round of paper, rock, scissors, Lavenda throws in a pair of scissors to make a triplet of devices they use to tickle each other silly.

Sooner than later their brave faces wane. The breeze that blew them their courage now feels to them like a blistering gale. Lavenda pulls the front of her coat together; Rocol does the same, pulling her knees into herself under her tartan skirt. Afanasy's locks blow about his face as he looks up at clouds that roll over them. His eyes twinkle as the two girls huddle close together on either side of him making him feel warm. The street that was once filled with traffic and people is now almost completely vacant with emptiness like the feeling in his stomach. He brings his shoulders in so the two girls' heads leaning on them almost touch. As the rain begins to fall, he is thankful the tears he has for his friends are now part of the wet that sets in on their faces, in their hair and through their clothes right to their bones. He clenches his jaw tight as if it can absorb the clattering from Lavenda's teeth; Rocol's face is buried in his armpit as he tries to think. He cannot even contemplate looking around at the building they sit in front of to see whether there's an open window, for fear of losing precious body heat from the way the three of them are locked together by the cold. The silver car parked in front of them is the only refuge from the elements he can see.

Lavenda brushes aside the hair that sticks to her face so she can see where he is going, as the boy stands up and hurries down the steps. Rocol grabs her friend, not wanting to look at the situation they're in. He wipes the rain from the car window and tries to peer inside. The leather seats look soft, and the carpet looks dry. He looks around at the girls and gives Lavenda a knowing look; he shivers as he looks for the lock and finds the handle with his freezing hands. He lifts the handle but with little effect. Again he looks around at Lavenda; this time he has a different look on his face. Lavenda taps Rocol on her shoulder, but she is too stricken to look. Afanasy runs back up to his friends and puts his head in between theirs. He puts his arms around them for a good while and then he runs back down to the car, almost tripping in the puddle; only the car prevents him from falling face down and into the gutter. This time he doesn't look around. Lavenda has one arm around Rocol, as her other hand gently brings the distressed girl's chin up so her

head can see the object that stands between them and shelter. Rocol's attention is now held by what Lavenda whispers in her ear, "Afanasy will look after you." Down on the footpath, the boy's shoulders move up and down with the way he puffs his chest in and out as he readies himself. Together they count, "One, and two, and three, and..." Afanasy lifts his shoulders in time with the count and then his arms are raised sky-high exclaiming the door has opened. He looks around at the girls as he pulls the door back for them to run inside.

CHAPTER 9

PART 1

Rocol exits out of the browser and runs her fingers through her hair. After reading today's installment of the *GUIOPERA* and then the entire online serial through to the latest chapter, her thought of him is again different. She walks across the porch to where her book rests; the bookmark, which sits out, instantly brings tears to her eyes.

She still associates the loss of Lavenda, her dear friend "Stevie," with him. According to the last chapter in her book, her best friend vanished in order for him to fulfill his role. Him not fulfilling his commitment to her as her GuidingMaster, in the event that Lavenda would one day return to him as his guide, is an admissible argument she finds hard to accept. Within a Semi-System, its leader cannot be a GuidingMaster and be guided. Once a leader of the Semi-System is anointed, his or her GuidingMaster is sent from the dimension— if the two are not paired for life, as was the case of John Page and Polina Rada, who was now leader in waiting. He is an exception to the rule, having been born with two hearts.

As if fractured, Rocol's ID prohibits her from sharing most things in her very private life—her son's invitation for dinner never registered in the lonely mother's mind. She had already made dinner plans, which she never thought about sharing with her concerned boys. She readies her face in the mirror for dinner with her friends. She now hurries as she walks from her dressing room in her little Charley Stevensen number—a black halter neck dress with the only heels, earrings, necklace and bracelet that match. The car and driver are only minutes away and she would very much like to walk down the steps of her three billion dollar home, as the car drives around the fountain to the steps for her to board the carriage.

Rocol grabs her purse and cardigan from the table in front of the mirror. She checks her lips as she hears the gates open. She walks to the front door as she sees the lights through the frosted glass. She opens the door and steps out onto the porch. The screen down to the left flashes as she sees the car's headlights come up from the dip in the drive-way. The gates remain open as she sees a second set of lights. The first car does its lap around the fountain, lit in purple, pink and orange lights. She stops at the top of the steps as she sees heads of people in the first car, which now stops in front of her. As the second vehicle rounds the enormous fountain, doors to the parked car open and she can hear Arley's voice, "Look at her; still the diva..." Rocol is irked by what is happening as doors to the second car open and out he steps in black, wearing a beard. "How's it?" he says as he buttons up a button on his shirt. Lazoo's head comes out of the first car; he too sports a sprouting beard, a sign that they're too busy creating to care. The ideas guy spots John and then Polina, who lifts her arms in the air and then leaves them open for Lazoo. Little Lazoo, at seven years, is a chip off the old block; he beats his dad to hugging his cousin. Rocol puts her hand out to the ever-youthful Arley Evon, who makes her way up the steps as she tries to focus on all the activity taking place on her doorstep. He picks up little Lazoo to get a good look at the handsome boy. "Dad said that I can see myself in

your eyes. Can I?” Little Lazoo plays with the man’s beard as he calls out to the kid’s dad, “They’re a little dark right now, aren’t they, Maestro?”. Lazoo notices the screen on the porch flashing the upload, as he shakes hands with his best friend. His son in John’s right arm now notices the flashing screen that alerts them of their latest effort. The boy grabs his father’s head with his left arm as he puts his arm around his uncle’s neck up behind his head and brings their heads together so all three foreheads touch and he says with a smile and in a voice he hears daily, “It’s only a job, boys, but a very important job, which will take all of you if you want it all!” He then giggles as he rubs his face in his father’s beard, making himself laugh.

As he and Lazoo lift the table out onto the porch, a third car arrives. Down the other end, Arley, Miss Evon—Arley’s daughter—and Polina listen while Rocol finishes reading the latest chapter of *GUIOPERA XIII*—“The End.” Little Lazoo notices the headlights come up from the dip and shouts out to Polina, “Miss Rada, your Aunt Genisis is here!” He tosses the table-cloth in the air, which his father catches, and goes to sit on the top step.

Rocol smiles as she looks around at him. He and Lazoo are both in aprons and setting the table for the food they prepare in the kitchen. She hears the little boy call out, “Aunt Danielle is here too!” The cars pull up and doors open as Rocol walks the length of her porch to see how the boys are doing. She surveys the seating as he lays the cutlery besides the plates. Genisis and a woman in her forties, whose resemblance to her friend is quite frightening, make their way up the steps. “You’ll sit there,” Rocol tells him. She tries to make her order sound more like a suggestion, but he has a legitimate reason for not sitting at the head of the table. “Can’t,” is all he says. She leans on a hip, with a hand on her waist, as Genisis places a kiss on her cheek and offers her his answer as she mimics a man’s voice deeper than his. “The young fellow will wanna sit next to me.” He bites the right side of his bottom lip as he smiles and says, “Yeah, that one; that’s the reason why.” Rocol grabs the hand placed on her shoulder by Danielle as she stands and stares at him; he does not know where to look. Lazoo brings a dish of fish out onto the porch in time to save his friend from further torment. “Hey, pal, where would you like to sit?” he calls out to his son. The little boy sits on the steps alone and away in his own little world. His father is about to ask him a second time, “Excuse me...” The thinking boy turns around and says, “Next to my uncle.”

Down the other end of the open and large veranda, Polina signs autographs online as Lazoo announces, “Dinner is served, ladies and gentlemen.” She calls out, “I’ll be there in a moment; oh, by the way, Le Mac says the *GUIOPERA* still translates better in the romantic tongues, as he puts it.” Afamasaga shouts back, “Is that all that player talks about—business? Tell him to get a life. Tell him South American women have reported a creepy guy lurking in dark alleyways.” Rocol, Arley and Genisis call out, “Send love to Le Mac, Polina; love you, Jonny...”

Soon they are all seated and surrounding the scrumptious dinner prepared by Lazoo and Afamasaga. Rocol watches Lazoo and Genisis on her left, with her head held down over her plate. Lazoo’s silver wedding band moves as his knife sinks into the fleshy fish. Genisis’s delicate looking ring with small diamonds set to catch a discerning eye; their

wedding bands match. The conversation between John and Danielle is private by the way they agree on the unspoken. "It's up to you," he says. "I can just as easily pick it up." She responds with a smile. Rocol knows that nothing exists between them apart from their professional relationship. Polina sighs and puts down her cutlery as Little Lazoo asks her, "What's Alexvale's next movie, Miss Rada?" Lazoo tells his son, "That guy's done his dash, buddy." John shrugs his shoulders as Rocol intervenes, "Hanibal wants to sit down and renegotiate terms." John places his fork in his mouth as Lazoo let's her know what he thinks, "In the SystemSpectacular, the fool only made it to the end because of Polina. Next he and that idiot father of his tried to do their own *GUIOPERA*, which reflected badly on us." John finishes his mouthful and takes a sip of his beer and looks at Rocol before he advises her, "Renegotiate with no bonus and no points. Give him no choice." Then Rocol reminds them, "His catalogue is only second to Polina's; killing him off will affect the catalogue." John Reyer has picked up his bottle again; as he does he tells all of them, "Find someone else, new face, new blood, new everything." The little kid sitting next to him looks up at the guy who is noticeably tense by the way he has to stretch his neck to the right and then to the left, and says, "Uncle!" The man places his bottle back on the table; he now feels like smiling as he looks down at the kid looking up at him who says, "2 Hearts Afanasy, uncle. He can come back from the SystemSpectacular; remember Afanasy has two hearts."

Over the course of dinner, the Boss of LMLA-ink gets the message. He politely declines the ride home with Danielle, although Lazoo, Genisis and the boy have left in their car. Polina calls out to him, "Last chance to sweat it all out, old man." He shouts back, "Thanks, Polina; I'll walk it off." Polina, Arley and Ms Evon head out for a night on the town. This leaves him face to face and alone with Rocol, who has her thin black cardigan around her shoulders.

PART 2

Rocol watches his face change from the colored lights he moves on. The mix is perfect. The new and normally robotic bass line begins to run on top of the song playing. The snare is the only thing to suggest this is a brand new track, while the lyric says, "You are in my system!" The girl lifts her arms up above her head, so the boy can grab her around her waist; he holds her close to him, and her arms naturally fall around his neck, bringing his head down around her neck. Her skin tastes sweet from her sweat and alluring from her expensive fragrance. Her eyes roll back as his lips and tongue begin to advocate feelings which she has only ever daydreamed. "I want this," she says. He hears it in her body and the way it becomes heavy, so he pulls her closer to let her know they feel the same thing. She fingers her hair out of the way and presents to him her perfect lips, which he begins to tease with almost unfelt touches of his lips, first on both lips, and then her bottom lip, until her mouth is open as her head falls back, for him to cradle and to let Rocol know he is intent on giving her the truest feelings she has ever felt...

Rocol looks at him as the two of them sit in a velvet covered booth inside The French Connection, a nightclub dedicated to lovers of Funk. In the mirror on the dance floor, he can see her in the early hours of the morning, as there are only a few TruFunkSoldiers in

the Australian steel town. He's about to say what's on his mind when she asks, "What are you thinking about?" He still looks at her reflection when he has to say, "Samuel—how can he be a sugar daddy, and you don't have to—" He searches for courage more than the right way to say what's on his mind; she helps him out, "Sleep with him?" Rocol rolls her eyes and replies, "Like I said, dummy, he's gay as a lamb's dag!" He nods his head, unsure of the term, as he carefully tries to confirm the meaning of the word, "Like ah, men on men?" She smiles, before she bursts out in laughter and grabs his arm, as he catches on, "Like poof, queer, and real good looking?" "Yeah, like you!"

A woman in her twenties keeps glancing in their direction; Rocol has noticed this from one or two of the older women. She lifts her feet onto the cushioned seat and tucks them under her small dress, as she leans on him while she cuddles his arm. She asks, "Do you know them?" He looks at his orange juice and then hers; then he kisses her on her shiny head and rests his face there, slowly inhaling the clean and wonderful smell of her hair. It appears he is in thought, and then he offers, "Would you like another juice? I'm going to get one."

Rocol finishes her juice as he stands to his feet and walks up to the bar. No sooner does he arrive than the one with the gold hoop earrings saunters up to the bar. He orders the drinks, holding up a peace sign to signal to the bar maid he'd like two. The one on his right, desperate to speak to him, holds her hands together in front of her, and then she decides to hold onto her dignity. The one on his left continues to talk straight ahead at no one. He says something into the unknown also as he turns around to smile at Rocol, who is no longer there.

PART 3

John gets up from his seat and collects the dessert plates. He asks, "Would you like a top up?" Rocol just nods her head without saying a word, choosing to enjoy her time alone with him. She watches the way he does the normal things, and as he walks into the house, she exhales as her mind runs from one thing to another; the amazing feats and acts of cunning, bravery and even his mistakes she thinks of as brilliant. When he returns, he has a mug of hot chocolate for her and her slippers. He places the cup to her left and gets down on one knee and picks up her foot to place a fluffy animal slipper on it. Rocol smiles, looking down on his grey hair. "The small things make up for a lot, John." He takes her other foot and puts it into the other slipper; he then looks at both her feet and bends down and kisses both her knees. "They're things I'd do for family, Rocol." He slowly stands up and sits back in the seat next to her so she can rest her feet on his legs. She takes a sip of her chocolate as he takes a sip of his red wine. "I thought we were meeting at the restaurant tonight?" John reaches for the bottle and pours himself another glass. "We were; I decided last minute to eat here when we uploaded the chapter." Her smile becomes brighter as she looks at him, "That's what I love about you; the best player, and good sport, John." His phone rings and he answers it, by pressing his jaw bone on the right side of his face. "Hey!" The media mogul and founding partner of the world's tenth largest entertainment network gets up and walks slowly to the other end of the veranda; he finds one of the white pillars to lean on as she looks at her nails. Soon he

is back; he has his usual smile on his face, which can mean anything from success to a deal gone wrong. He has to take a gulp of the merlot left in his glass before he sits down to share the news. “We got rejected for Alexvale’s new project. The studio feels he’s too cocky.” Rocol shrugs her shoulders. “Are you going to do something?” He shakes his head, “We can, but I don’t feel the need to, just to make a statement. After all, they’re right; Rokov is a jerk.” As the next call comes, she hears singing from the street as the front gates to her mansion open.

Rocol turns to face the street where her two sons make it known to the neighborhood that they are home and they are drunk. She cannot keep the smile from escalating into laughter as the two of them desperately try to prop each other up as they near the dip in the wide driveway. She rests her head on her hand as she watches John listen to the call he’s on as he too sees the boys make a mess of walking in a straight line. After a few seconds of silence, Rocol stands up to see where the boys are. John looks at her as she looks at him; she shrugs her shoulders and begins to giggle like a girl. He tells the caller, “Hey, mate, call me back in an hour and I’ll have a definitive for you, ah?” Rocol begins to laugh as she runs out of the porch, down the steps and along the driveway. He follows her, walking fast to keep up with her. As she nears the decline in the path, she stops and almost begins to cry from her laughter. Her boys are asleep in the dip. He arrives and stops next to her; he looks at the young lads asleep on each other’s shoulders; he then looks at their mother as her laughter dies down and the familiar sound of her breathing blends with their tranquil surroundings.

She looks at him looking down at the boys; as he reminds her of Metofeaz Litigatti the writer, “You can create a metaphor, but you can’t reverse it Feeaz use to say.” Says John Reyer Afamasaga the author as he watches the mother as she walks down to where the boys rest peacefully. She looks back up at him and says, “You take the other one; he’s heavier,” and with that she bends down and picks up the older boy so he falls onto her shoulders. Afamasaga walks down to where the younger one has curled himself into a ball and picks him up in his arms; the lad’s shell is indeed heavy as he is the biggest quarterback in years to make the All American College team. The one over his mother’s shoulder is a boxer with Olympic medal potential. He catches up to Rocol who turns around to wait for him. “They have keys to the apartment; I wonder why they came home.” John tries not to answer her, but within a few steps he thoughtfully suggests to his friend, “They stay in apartments all year long.” Rocol heaves her son’s body back so he sits on her shoulder comfortably as she reaches the bottom step to the house.

CHAPTER 10

PART 1

Mr. Pink's place in 1990 is the venue for Rocol's hen's night; Samuel, Lavenda and the bride to be wait in line to be let into the exclusive club. Three boys walk straight up the steps; one of them has his hands deep in the pockets of his black leather jacket; he looks spaced out, but his smile scrubs him up immediately as he notices the twenty-five year old girl, who in a week will be a very wealthy lady. The man himself, Mr. Pink, standing at the top of the steps in his black furs, calls out to the shy guy who bows his head as everyone looks at him. "Metofeaz Litigatti, come here at once and kiss this tush of mine." The other two guys, one Latin looking and the other African American, head up the steps; they both look fine in their suits. Lavenda comments, "Some men make the clothes." Samuel agrees as the guy Rocol flirts with follows the other two into the club.

Inside, Samuel looks down from one of the balconies; the floor is packed with the sexes gyrating, their lips, hands and hips migrating from skin to skin, all limbs fond of one another. Lavenda shouts above the new track, "Hey, why watch?" The Black Box vinyl "Strike it up" has Rocol's hands up above her head. Lavenda joins her by putting her arms around her friend's neck as they dance a sexy as samba on the spot. Samuel claps his hands in the air like a Can-Can girl. Lavenda shouts in Rocol's ear that her boyfriend, a DJ in Amsterdam, says the track is unreleased. "This is a demo! The boy told me."

Down on the dance floor, Rocol can taste the colored lights as Lavenda drinks sound from the speakers. Both women are intoxicated by the vibrations that flee from body to body on the pulsing floor the DJ fills with bodies that crave the way he subliminally applies samples of which no one is conscious. Samuel bends down in between the girls, "Hey, isn't that one of the boys from the steps?" as he points up at the box. Lavenda looks up as he hands Jimmy Afra, the one with the white fro, the headphones. They touch shoulders; then they hug and he exits the scene. "Yeah, it's him!" she says in her Finnish accent.

The buxom brunette waitress brings them champagne. At the door, Samuel handed Mr. Pink his card, which stated he was the editor of a leading financial magazine whose parent company resides on Wall Street. And that the gorgeous girl with her arm in his was to be married to the chairman of his magazine one week from now. This afforded them a table on the level known as the "New Plateau."

Soon Rocol spots the boy in the leather jacket. He sits in the middle of the floor just below them, where there is only one table. With him are a bunch of characters who look like they materialized out of a gangster movie. At one end of the table sits what looks like a distinguished gentleman until she sees the guy in the leather vest, with tattoos up his arms, lean over to kiss him. Samuel comments, "Your boys look like they're my kind of boys." Lavenda takes Rocol's hand and looks at her engagement ring. Rocol has to look one more time before Samuel convinces her, "Darling, the boy plays with balls, not boobs." Lavenda frowns as she hugs her friend while the big queen continues, "Honey,

he's surrounded by the Village People; do you think he's going to sing to you 'Going to the chapel'?"

PART 2

The girl's ears are delicate, and sensitive. Rocol opens her eyes to see Lavenda's eyelashes move. Their heads rest against each other in the backseat of the silver car they spent the night in. The music from the radio is soft, yet uplifting, as the sun shines through the two open windows in the front seat. Afanasy's hazel eyes sparkle as the boy leans over the front seat watching over his girlfriends. Lavenda slowly opens her emerald eyes; first she sees Rocol and then Afanasy, and then the words of the song make the pretty one shut her eyes again as she smiles to herself. "When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother what will I be. Will I be pretty? Will I be rich?"

As the music fades, Lavenda sits up; she does it slowly as Rocol's head still rests on her shoulder. The words of the song remain in the children's minds as they sit quietly. Afanasy's hands on the leather covered steering wheel make a sliding sound as he pretends he drives them around a bend. Soon the sun is high in the sky, but there is no one about on the street, which this time yesterday was busy with people, children and other cars with families. Rocol sits up and winds her window down. "I'm hungry," she says. Lavenda nods her head. She contemplates whether she'd like better to be rich or pretty. Afanasy makes faces at her in the rearview mirror; Lavenda smiles at him and says to his reflection, "You'll be handsome, Afanasy!" This makes the boy laugh. Lavenda looks at Rocol. "And you'll be pretty and rich." Afanasy frowns into the mirror. He turns around to lean over the front seat with a puzzled look. Lavenda plays with her hair while she looks out the window and says, "I'll be here, Afanasy."

Life Form Reproduction (LFR) on the SenFenide Dimension (SFD) has its up and downs; its bad days, good ones, and days when no one cares or has forgotten about the inhabitants of an inverted inferred image of the MindMorph Dimension—the universe as humans have been led to believe. This day, its controller or director is probably on vacation, but that could change in an instant, or within a finger clap. The girls sit up as the boy opens his door and steps out onto the street. A blink on the horizon is more like a black flash of lightning than a dark cloud passing over. Afanasy brings his head in for the moment; then he puts his head up and his shoulders back as he goes to look for much needed food for Rocol.

Rocol perks up when Lavenda confirms, "Afanasy will bring you food." Rocol smiles as her mood begins to lighten up, bringing her to talk. "I hope he doesn't bring back worms, this time." Green eyes light up as the girl with dark eyes gets a huge hug for choosing to speak to her friend. Rocol continues, "How about the time he brought us crude oil and said it was chocolate?" Lavenda laughs, "We drank it, didn't we?" Rocol bites her bottom lip as she thinks, "I want pancakes and honey, with Mango slithers and sparkling water with bubbles that tickle my nose." Lavenda shuts her eyes as she dreams of what she would like...

Lavenda swore the traffic lights up ahead were out. She closes her eyes to summon all her senses. When she opens her eyes, the place is dark and then it becomes light again. She can hear Cajun music. She looks at her friend who is sitting up looking out the window. A couple lean against the traffic lights; the orange light glows and then fades, as does the couple. The sky is blue, and she can see sparkles up there that transpire into fireworks which grow like beanstalks, then blossom and bloom next to the moon in the night sky that now covers them. She looks out her window and sees a handsome guy who wears a beard, maybe in his early thirties, sitting on the steps of a building. He is smiling at her as he takes from his suit jacket an orange colored envelope. He looks at it and then at the traffic lights as they begin to cascade. The hoards of people passing block her view of him...

Lavenda opens the door of the cab. She is in New Orleans, sometime in 1998, to see her designs on stage, worn by members of a Cajun band, and to meet up with her best friend Ré.

PART 3

Dedicated to victims of an Australian Tragedy in Victoria - February 2009

The page boy, dressed in his little black tuxedo, says he's ten this year. Lavenda hands him the bouquet of flowers to hold as she makes adjustments to Rocol's fringe. The groom's nephew has a familiar look about him; she mentions this to the bride to be, her best friend, Rocol. He smiles and says, "Thanks, even though it's flowers." Rocol's wedding dress is spread out across the backseat of the limousine in which they make their way to the cathedral in Melbourne. Rocol looks at her nails and then through the partition as she asks, "Wonder if the driver knows where he's going?" Lavenda is focused on her friend's appearance as the little boy replies, "He does. He's a fantastic driver; he's been driving me since childcare." Lavenda rolls her eyes as they turn the corner, and Rocol lowers her head to look out the window. Quietly she says, "We're here." She almost sounds as if the sudden arrival were an unexpected occurrence. As the limo pulls into the curb, the page boy has his hand on the handle. He now shouts at the driver, "Freakin' open the thing!" The driver's back moves as the boy's handle comes up, letting him open the door and jump out of the parked vehicle. Rocol stares at the footpath she can see through the open door. Lavenda reaches over and pulls the door in; she does it slowly. The door gently clicks, and when Stevie pulls it all the way into the body of the car, closing it, it wakes the beautiful looking bride from her day-dream. Lavenda takes her friend's wrist and looks at her Cartier watch. Rocol nods her head and says, "I know I'm running late." She presses the button to close the partition, and forces a smile, which brings an empathetic look from Lavenda. Rocol grabs Lavenda's hand as she reaches to open the door, "When you give me away today..." Lavenda has to look somewhere to hide her swelling eyes and her friend's voice begins to waver as she continues, "who will take me back?" She looks at the clasp on her friend's wrist, and then at her friend's face. "Looking like a choir girl. Crying like a refugee..."

CHAPTER 11

PART 1

A group of boys follows Metofeaz through the crowd. He can hear them above the music, wanting to know this and that. A white kid tells a colored boy that he got his scar from fighting; a black kid interrupts him, “My man, Feeaz, will you tell the truth, sucker?” They stop and Metofeaz smiles as he looks down on the group made up of delinquents, pickpockets and boys without fathers. He looks up ahead and he can see him on the left side of the street at a table. Sitting opposite him is Genesis on Lazoo’s lap playing with the free man’s beard and next to him is Le Mac. The black kid pulls at his black singlet, until the writer’s smile becomes a distant frown as the kid now points to his arm. Litigatti tells the kid, “You tell them.” Metofeaz plays with his beard as he watches the events of New Year’s Eve 1997 in New Orleans, USA.

At the table, he takes his beer as Metofeaz takes his seat. The group of boys pulls up at the table next to them. He senses something in the way his friend looks at him and by the way he doesn’t smile when he lifts his beer toward him. Soon the white boy and black boy are standing on either side of the writer, who finishes scrawling something on a coaster which he slides into his back pocket. As if by magic, the boys’ eyes light up as the hand that held the card now holds a wallet. The generous guy opens it and produces two bills he hands to the boys with the advice, “No liquor! If I see liquor, I come and drink it myself; you hear? Get some food for you and the others, ah?” Genesis smiles at him, which brings back his smile. “Feeaz, I hope you make me gorgeous,” she says. And then she cracks up laughing as she squeezes Lazoo with the tightest hug in the world. Le Mac announces, “I’m going to find something to eat; will see you tomorrow, ah?” At the same time, Lazoo’s arm is being pulled by Ms. Jones, who wants to dance.

Metofeaz reaches for a bottle as he notices something further down the street. He can tell by the look in the whimsical one’s eyes what that something might be.

On the vibrant sidewalk of a city jumping with activity, Rocol and Lavenda catch up. She twirls her hair in her finger midway through explaining why she just had to get away from it all. Lavenda notices the change in her friend’s body language and feels that the girl needs to regain her focus. “Ré! I love the dark brown; better than the jet black.” This stops the spectacular looking one from playing with her hair. She returns the compliment. “I love the blonde streaks in yours, darl.” Her tone is almost sarcastic. They suddenly stop and then burst out laughing as they hug each other and start jumping up and down on the spot in their embrace; they continue until they’re turning around in circles clinging to each other.

Down the street, Metofeaz reaches for his pocket with one hand. In his other hand he holds the pen so he can write the first thing that comes to mind. “You’re a writer, Metofeaz,” John tells him, and as he does he feels awkward having to say it again. Litigatti sneers, then clenches his jaw as he begins to jot down his thought. In a matter of seconds he is done. He puts the idea back in his pocket; when he looks up he has a smile

on his face. “I just don’t know how we’re going to tell the story from Lazoo’s perspective?” Feeaz sounds relieved to let him know. “Don’t even think of the context; I’ve just told you; you’re a writer.” Metofeaz has a smirk on his face, “Right, so a guy who knows nothing about writing tells me I’m a writer, and that’s meant to set the cogs of my imagination into motion, and miraculously make me pen this story?” John takes his beer and for a moment considers his reply, then waits for his friend to be distracted by something else.

Metofeaz notices Rocol walking away from her friend, maybe to get a drink, or maybe to freshen up. As he gets up from his seat, one of his little gang of thieves calls out, “Feeaz, my man! Where ya heading?” His eyes are on his target, and so is his mind. John calls out to the group at the next table “Come get this.” In his hand he has five notes, one by one the boys make their way around to the table to where the bearded guy in his black suit hands each of them a crisp one hundred dollar bill. Their faces light up as he warns, “The condition is I’ll be back in ten years to see what you’ve done with it.” The boys are ecstatic as he tells them, “Goodnight; see you in a decade.” As they turn their backs, he smiles to himself as he hears one of them say, “Sucker!” and the other one says, “I’ll be here!”

Lavenda dances on her own as someone says, “That’s what I like about the street; you can dance where you want, ah?” She shouts back at him, “Yeah, it’s great for people too lazy to walk to the dance floor.” Her accent brings him an opening. “Both you and your friend are from...” “Creepy, so, you been watching us.” Metofeaz moves in behind her, “That’s two funny things you’ve said; you deserve some attention.” The way he says it allows her to relax.

PART 2

Lavenda looks at him sitting in the bay window. He has his ThinkPad to his right and the magazine with the quiz on his lap. He has been working on his answers all morning. She calls out to him, “Time for a fit.” He walks over slowly, still thinking about an answer to a question that was written in haste to fill a page. He holds his arm out so she can slip the suit-jacket that has yet to be lined onto his body; then he holds out the other arm. He can feel the lines of the garment across his back, down his sides and down each of his pecks. She walks around him slowly as she says, while looking at her labor of love, “They say clothes make the man. I say some men make the clothes, John.” When she walks around in front of him, she stops so he can look into her eyes. He finds it hard not to speak, but equally difficult to say anything that could possibly let her know what he thinks of her. He feels he has to look away, but he doesn’t as he says to her, “Charley Stevonsen.” She hears the name for the first time—for once a name that doesn’t reek of pretentiousness. It surmises for her the duality of her design from her heart, its creations to be shared by man and woman, and above all it intonates for the designer, her importance to the busy creative with his own ideas he must materialize. She reaches for his hand, which he lets her have; she puts it to her cheek. She closes her eyes so she can better feel his pulse. The grey day outside contrasts the warmth within them as they stand facing each other in the absolute center of the studio apartment. She slips her arms under the suit jacket to hold

him close and stay for as long as possible in their profound state of each other...

The phone rings, but she ignores the echoing sound by burying her face in his chest and pulling the blade of the jacket over her head. He tightens his grip on her by pulling her into him so the line between their bodies is sewn seamlessly. The answering machine kicks in, "... leave me a message." The beep is like an ink blot on a clean page, pure of indemnifying ideas that inhibit either one of these entities from outlaying their all for each other.

The phone rings a third time; the message is from Rocol, who says she would like to interview the man whose arms Lavenda is wrapped in; the message is a prelude to an inevitable ending Lavenda is sure she has not conjured. He brings his arms up around her neck as he wonders out loud in a voice just audible to her sensitive ear about the meandering path to some door where he finds his characters begging and pleading on plagues, "With ghosts to riddle me to the bone with lots of lust that I must not trust."

As she moves the cloth around so it takes to the piercing needle, she tells herself that the reality she finds herself in is a lasting one. Again he puts the magazine down and takes his machine to try and forget about the request from someone whom he may or may not have already encountered in this dimension. An entity whose shell may have collided, or even connected with any of his former casings in some way requires some sort of reconciliation, recognition or amalgamation to address an issue that may upset the equilibrium once forces are aligned, whether or not that day will ever come.

Late that afternoon, shadows not seen during this sunless day drag their length across the creative space as he holds the back of her hand to his cleanly shaven face. He adds to his collection of memories of her from their time together the way she looks at this moment; these are memories which he must now live on. She takes the hand he held and pulls the collars of his white shirt together; she undoes a button on the shirt, commenting on its effect as she does, "Third button, for me, John; just tonight." She almost manages a smile as she steps back in her Levi's, still wearing his Armani jacket she so sexily soiled for him. Her Nike's are covered in fine black threads of material shaven from the fabric she cut and lined to dress him in an original inspired from their meeting.

He looks at her as she turns her head to look around the place she created as her home and base for her business. She looks back at him and then turns as she walks from the space. "I'm taking a shower." He watches her walk away from him; as she reaches the doorway, he has to swallow the lump in his throat so he is able to tell her, "Dinner arrives in thirty minutes, Lavenda." His voice shakes as the smell of fate, lathered in fear of losing her, floods his senses, bringing him feelings his eyes cannot control.

When the knock at the door signals dinner has arrived, he walks across the floors. The sound of his boots drowns out sounds of Lavenda showering and resonates his thoughts as he pulls over himself a veneer to face Le Mac who brings them food especially prepared for this occasion. As he nears the door, he can hear voices, first Lazoo's, and then Feeaz's. He unlocks the door and pushes it open. "Sole, look at this!" Lazoo's

reaction to him in his suit is highlighted in his greeting him with a word in his native Samoan tongue. Metofeaz does the same, “Uso...” He says the word for “Brother” as he too tries to cheer his friend up. “You’ve been transformed!” Litigatti states. Le Mac looks at him as he rolls in the trolley of food, “Humanize, brother; is it such a sacrifice?” They hug and shake hands and then they leave. He hears their voices fade as he rolls the trolley to the kitchen.

The trolley wheels roll along the floor as he notices the shower has stopped. As he leans on the cart, he senses a fragrance in the air that his nostrils cannot dispute. His head turns to see her step into the room so he sees her body donned in white fluffy towels—one on her head, and one to cover her figure, which weakens him when he thinks of her and brings him pleasure he has never felt, from just seeing her, let alone the times when he finds himself holding her. She walks across the room; he stops in his tracks and waits for a few precious moments to watch her pass him. Her feet leave a wet imprint in his mind like footprints in the sand. Once she is gone from his sight, he continues to the kitchen.

Jazz Funk begins to fill the air as Lavenda slides the strap from the shoulder of the mannequin,. She takes the other strap off her creation from its hanger. A black dress; the embodiment of her style, the one which says what a woman wants. The music brings to her the moment she first thought she had found her freedom—when looking into his eyes as they danced on the New York City sidewalk, the place she had come to lose herself amongst the thousands of entities who roam, not knowing their reason for existing in the MindMorph Dimension (MMD). As the bassist riffs out, with delicate fills from a drummer, Lavenda lets the towels drop. She places her toes into one of the heels at the foot of the mannequin, which her black dress still clings to. As she steps into the second shoe, she feels his eyes on her, which heightens her spirits as he lets her know of his unmistakable presence. “Lee Ritenour, Night Rhythms, danced splendidly by Lavenda Stevonsen on the night I first fell in love with you.” His voice does not waver as it travels the distance, making the woman shut her eyes. She turns the mannequin around. His footsteps are evenly spaced as she undoes the hook to her design...

Down in a valley, one surrounded by one million square lights, there’s an open doorway...

PART 3

They say that when it rains in the SenFenide Dimension (SFD), one of its likely controllers weeps. The street is less crowded than she remembers as she runs in the middle of the road. Her footprints in the rain-drenched street keep their form a lot longer than they would in the other dimensions. Lavenda shields her face from the torrential downpour as she desperately seeks out the car. A lorry, filled with lambs pressed up against its wooden cage, pulls out in front of her as she looks over her shoulder. The driver has to swerve; the animals on their way to the slaughter-house cry out as Lavenda steps out of the way, leaving the truck to fall on its side, collapsing the carriage and freeing the animals, which now flee in all directions. Her knees move even though her soaked floral dress clings to her legs, making each stride harder than the one before. Her

head turns from side to side as she passes through a shanty town; its dwellers with their pigs, goats and chickens go about their lives making way for the lost girl as she continues to search for her beginning...

Through the tall buildings there's a clearing. It leads the eye into a sky, so it may witness the birth of a brand new day. Down on the empty street, between the tall buildings, lies a girl, face down from fleeing to find her way forward. The traffic lights are asleep as the girl's fingers move. They slowly grab at something, and when they realize there is nothing there, they flatten again on the road that seems to lead nowhere.

A southerly breeze blows through the manmade canyon. It circumvents a lone vehicle, deserted but still there with a purpose. Its windshield is clear; its body is clean, as if someone has preserved its pristine condition in its forgotten surroundings. The breeze blows its way in and out of the open windows and travels down the street and across the intersection to where Lavenda's hair feels the caring breeze's grace lift her head.

The traffic lights remain unmoved, void of any expression, as the girl again places her face down on the road. Her eyes are open, greener than ever as they fill with her heart's pain and her soul's one desire.

CHAPTER 12

PART 1

Christmas morning in the year 2020 is an exciting time for Rocol, as she watches Little Lazoo open one of his many gifts. Genesis is on edge, as are Polina, Arley and Miss Evon as they wait for the word from the men down at their Chinatown offices in the old bar, where they put the final touches to the XMAS chapter of what they have promised to be their final offering before they leave the stage they created many years ago—the *GUIOPERA*. Such is the occasion that Jon Le Mac has made a special visit to be present when they upload the finale, ending a saga he and his friends could only dream of back when their luck was down.

In *GUIOPER XIII—The FINAL*, the lead characters go on their last mission in search of the last controller, whom they must eliminate or befriend in order to achieve their goal. Rumors and leaks have all but confirmed the leader will die, but before his dramatic exit, he tells the audience the answer to the one question that remains unanswered.

Rocol is calm as she excuses herself from the room. Outside on the veranda, she tries to remember Christmases when the snow covered the grounds of her home. The warm sun shines down on her face as she decides to enjoy what she has. Her phone rings; to answer it, she touches her right elbow with her left hand and says, “Yes?” His voice fills her head, and it still warms her on the inside. Along with those feelings, the thought of a long lost friend clings, bringing her down for a moment as she looks at her book, and the bookmark that lays ever so close to the table it rests on. She hangs up as she thinks of how lucky she is to have had the time she had with him. She works out her net worth and calculates her investment of three million dollars to be now worth more than she can count. His call was to advise her that the ad for the search engine is going to cost the giant a lot less, since his placement of the name was in the middle of one of the parts, and not the beginning or the end. She did not argue with him, as she had learned a long time ago, that he always made the right call, one of the reasons why he had successfully made the rise from the streets to where he and their small group now stand alongside some of today’s biggest names in business.

The woman, who had been linked to many successful men, but had yet to settle on the one who could make her whole, walks across her porch to where her book beckons her to have courage to read its pages lined with bits and pieces of her sometimes scandalous life. She opens the heavy work, and without creasing the paper the author marked poignantly with his purposeful passion, begins to absorb the unique way he can always touch her.

As the gates open, so do the doors to the house as one by one Missy, Polina, Little Lazoo, Arley and Genesis come out to wait for the final upload. Rocol remains seated as the grill of the vehicle comes up from the dip. She can see him press the button to send the file, and then the hairs on the back of her neck stand as Little Lazoo says, “LAZOO will live, Mommy. So will AFAMASAGA!” Genesis cradles her son’s head as the screen flashes,

“*GUIOPERA XIII—“THE FINAL”!*” The boy stares at a spot on the floor as his bottom lip begins to protrude, till he has to bury his face in his mother’s stomach.

Rocol feels the tension as the car stops at the steps and he opens the door. John Reyer Afamasaga gets out and looks at the sleeves of his suit-jacket as he straightens them. Then he looks up at her. She waits for the others to hop out, but she can imagine the stillness inside the car where Lazoo and Le Mac stay seated.

PART 2

The normally cautious man lets the scene take place. The doors to the car remain open, holding up a few cars on the exclusive street, which was once referred to as the “Village.” The name remains, but the area was now more like an Estate. A car’s horn beeps at them, and when they realize who it is, they wind down the window to say hello. “Merry Christmas, Le Mac; we’re coming down for New Year’s.” The Audi zooms off; its electric motor sounds like the rumble from a Chevrolet. Jon Le Mac waves at the car. The successful hotelier, who now bases his operation in Rio, has a smile that fades fast as he looks at one of his two true friends who stands on the sidewalk seeing the funnier side of the situation. Le Mac opens his arms and shrugs his shoulders as he steps up onto the pavement. “I can’t help if you two secret squirrels can’t handle the heat.” John Reyer, the author of the *GUIOPERA* looks up into the sky and a SATRE Board—a creation he was involved in—flashes a gem for Microsoft across the night sky that now dissolves into an orange color that does wonders for one’s eyes and mind. Lazoo feigns a right body blow to the one who kept everyone fed and nourished in the early days of LMLA-ink. Lazoo’s former body-guard lowers his left arm, and within one movement, he has the body of the person who was once his charge turned around, and his head tightly locked in his right arm. Lazoo’s voice is strained as he laughs and says, “Look; see how I make you poop your pants.” Le Mac cannot hold back his laughter and has to let the one he calls “Maestro” go from his famous body lock. Afamasaga looks at the ground as the two, beside themselves with laughter, catch their breath and realize the finality of his decision. The moment they have dreaded since the beginning has arrived. Lazoo’s smile, even as bright as it is pure and earnest, fades long after the look in his eyes tells his friend that this is harder than they had imagined. Lazoo’s white teeth stand out against his brown beard as he looks up at the building they stand in front of. “The Eurostile Font kept its looks.” Afamasaga just nods his head; he does it in a way to let the ideas guy know he means what he agrees with. Le Mac looks up at the building too and then he looks at their suits. “People know her, brother, like they know Genisis.” Afamasaga looks at his lieutenant as he reaches into his pocket. “As a kid, you would stand next to me in the playground, you know that?” Le Mac has to bite his quivering lip as the Pacifican produces marbles from his pocket. “I used to ask you, ‘How many marbles we got, Le Mac?’ You would reply, ‘One.’ And then I would say to you, ‘Okay, how many do we want?’ Your answer has never changed.” He takes his friend’s hand, placing the marbles in his palm. “They’re Little Lazoo’s. My man’s hands are tied; he’s responsible for the work now. You are still this man’s keeper,” he says as he uses his head to point to Lazoo and then continues, “and our family’s rock, Le Mac.” Le Mac’s arms are around him before he is able to breathe his next breath. Lazoo’s jaw is clenched as he looks down to

his left. The retiring boss of LMLA-ink doesn't know what to do with his arms as his true-to-life friend the African-American hugs him for probably the final time in this Dimension, and for that matter possibly eternity. He readies himself for Lazoo who is even more emotional as he catches glimpses of James, Janine's boy, in the accomplished creative, who does not read or write. He's told himself, "Make it quick." Lazoo doesn't look at him as he hugs his mentor for the last time. Afamasaga's voice is steady as he says his final words to the American Illiterate, whom he chose as his medium, "Polina has Page's heart; your aspirations and my soul in her. She is ready to lead us. Little Lazoo has all of us in him. Polina and your son are chosen, but you, my friend..." He holds the kid by the shoulders and tells him, "You are our natural leader."

Afamasaga puts his hand in the air to wave them goodbye, as the two remaining members of his gang sit inside the car waiting for the traffic light on the windscreen to change from red to green. Lazoo winds down the window; he has a smile amidst his tears as he manages to say, "Bet you anything that Feeaz could cascade these lights." Afamasaga smiles at him, "No doubt, no doubt at all." Le Mac in the driver's seat bends his head down to say, "Later, Uso," as the light turns green, and with that they drive off.

As the tail-lights fade in the distance, he steps down onto the street and walks across to the other side. He turns to look at the building, the Headquarters of Charley Stevensen. Up on the third floor, he can still see the curtain blowing in the wind. He steps down onto the street and clicks his fingers twice with his left hand and once with his right hand, disarming the alarm and lock to the building. His phone rings, and he signals with his right arm across his body touching his right jaw that he would like to answer the call, but then decides against it as he enters the building.

Rocol runs her palm across the sensor from right to left, signaling her intention to turn her Mercedes in that direction. She drives by the building as she calls his number a third time. This time she receives a disconnected message, "This number is no longer on this network." She reverses the vehicle through the intersection as the message repeats itself. Once the car is parked, she collects from the passenger seat, the orange envelope, the bookmark, and the white handkerchief, now without the plastic wrapping that kept it clean all these years.

Upstairs, in the only space in this world where he could go to be alone, he stands against the wall in the spot he first stood, on his very first visit to the apartment which he preserved in its original state—Lavenda's studio and home. His foot, cocked against the wall, is every bit an indication of his wish to run from this dimension, but to where? The many years in MindMorph dimension (MMD) have probably closed his connection to the Dimension fork. The last time he made a dash was a fleeting visit to the Amalgamation Dimension (AMD) in aid of K-MANTONIO in 2011 using the PRIME-e-ELEVATOR, a vehicle that now lies as an artifact in his archive of ideas. He decides to relax, which he accomplishes by focusing his tired eyes on the curtain blowing in the early morning breeze, in the bay window above their bed.

Downstairs, Rocol opens her car door as she gets back in out of the chilling breeze. She

thinks of the future without him. As he does at the end of each *GUIOPERA*, he has locked himself in the only floor of the Charley Stevensen building that she cannot enter. The fashion label was her personal project and a monument to her friend the designer. It was the only company she had full control over, yet she never gained access to Lavenda's design studio, a place even the boys had seen maybe once or twice over the years.

Inside the quiet space, his footsteps echo as he walks to where her last designs remain on the whiteboards. He has his hands in his pockets as he gently nudges the punching bag with his elbow. He hears a car door down on the street being firmly pushed into the body of the vehicle, and then he hears the distinct pattern of Rocol's stride, which she tries to disguise by treading lightly. A gust of wind blows the curtains; they behave like sails before their ends flick as she calls out, "John, are you up there?" He walks over to the window. He gets close enough to see the front of her car, but still far enough from the opening so he cannot see her.

In less than one hour, daylight will cover the Northern Sector of this dimension. The dawn, about to break, is much like one many years ago. The day that follows will extinguish an opportunity and diminish any chances he has to flee the MindMorph Dimension in similar conditions under which she took flight twenty-one years ago.

Back within the comfort of her car, Rocol folds the letter up and places it back inside the envelope, which she places on the seat next to her. She uses the white handkerchief to wipe her eyes as she stares out her windshield. She has her hand on the ignition power button, but she is too fond of him to leave the scene just yet.

When he hears the door close, he finally feels relief from a burden he has borne all these years; she has foregone her chance to question him about the meaning of the letter in the orange envelope. He sees the sky through an opening in between the buildings and sees shades of black, which fade streetlights.

In the following minute or so, which to Rocol feels like a lifetime, the girl from down under sees a collage of her life, before him, with him, and into the future. Only she can see the events that surround her inside the carriage. Her head moves slowly from left to right, and then she has to turn around behind her to see the climaxes and the tearful moments, all of which have made her the woman she is.

Above her, he takes a step closer to the window, and then another one, and another until he stands with his arms up on the open window. The curtains blow around him as he hears that the early morning birds have woken to kill the stillness of the passing night. As he slides the pane down, its sound puts a barrier between him and the rest of the world. He stands and looks through the glass down on top of the parked car as he thinks no more.

When Rocol has seen all that surrounds her, she sits quietly and is contemplative. The tears that have ruined her face also sting her tired eyes. She uses the handkerchief again as she presses the ignition. The motor is set to "Minimal;" she tells herself this is

probably the reason why the lights are dead. She sets the level to “Medium” and all three lights pulse once and then fade again...

Down in a valley, one surrounded by one million square lights, there’s an open doorway. In the doorway he stands, looking out over a much quieter valley, one with less lights, all of them fading by the moment. As he takes his first step down the fire escape, he remembers the sound of her footsteps leaving this dimension...

PART 3

Under a blue cloudless sky, Afanasy hums the tune as he sits in the back of the Lorry surrounded by the little lambs who cry for their mothers. Beside him is his little green bag. One of the frightened animals nestles its face next to the boy who is trying to think. Afanasy begins to whistle the tune as he can see houses outside the wooden cage in which he travels to a city nearby. As the truck slows down, he can see people, thus signaling that the controller of SenFenide Dimension was awake and maybe even thinking about him and his next mission. The engine splutters as it revs up, ready to take off again as the little conductor pats many of the lambs on their heads and then climbs the back gate of the cage with his bag on his back. From the top of the cage, he looks back down at the lambs and nods his head once; he then winks and leaves them with his smile.

As Afanasy walks along the side of the road, he can see cities that spring up from the fields, and then his shoes kick the tumbleweeds that blow in the wind. Like a wave, a new feeling comes over him. At first, its iciness is refreshing, and then the raindrops that dot the road let him know the ensuing downpour is the side effect of *etfiction* (Emotional Techno Fiction) being told in the MindMorph Dimension. He begins to quicken his step as he finds another clue in the raindrops that begin to bounce up off the ground; they hang around his ankles for moments as he senses the great loss the story-teller has suffered...

Somewhere down the same road—the never-ending road which more often than not leads to sorrow and heartache—in the middle of the almost forgotten street is a girl. Lavenda’s head is bowed as she sits with her head in her hands; she is too weak and too sad to carry on. She is mystified as to how she will find her beginning as she studies the ground she sits on. The empty street is as still as it was when she fell facedown on it sometime ago. Across the intersection is a mirage of a carriage in the form of a vehicle; she might remember its purpose if she could touch the object. On the four corners of the intersection are four traffic lights. The black post’s true color, against the varying shades of grey, of the skyscrapers, pavement, the darker tone of the road ahead and the lighter shade of the normally white line in the middle, is like an effect cast by the controller over the CGI world in which the colors on Lavenda’s bright floral dress begin to darken and lighten; not that the girl notices with her head held down.

Afanasy hears the melody in his head as he runs through the night and then into the day. The thumb whacking, finger pulling percussive bass line drives his legs; the little boy somehow senses her as his arms pump harder than ever to succeed in his endeavor, to

find the words to the music he hears.

Lavenda thinks she hears something, but then she realizes it's only the breeze, which makes her fold her arms. Static electricity from the traffic lights again signal change in the atmos as three birds sweep in formation, then loop perfectly in between the buildings where the windows reflect their aerobatics. The three birds in the sky fly down and loop away, not far from where the pretty girl sits. As her head comes up, her eyes follow the birds' pathway into the sky. Their trail is littered with stardust that falls down over the once grey setting. The tune is faint, but distinct—as if her soul feels the sweet notation before her heart hears it. She thinks she sees images of people, but a closer look confirms her hunger must be playing tricks on her mind. She looks across the intersection. The car is now of a shining silver color. She flicks her hair behind her ears as she looks around at the buildings to see where the music is coming from. She stands to her feet as the sound of a flute delivers to her ears proof that someone is indeed thinking of her. Her hands on her heart confirm its beating as she notices the changing colors on her dress...

Afanasy controls his breathing by placing one hand on his chest and with his other hand he checks the contents of his bag. The boy has arrived at the place from which the music seems to be coming. He stops to look up at the buildings and the falling stardust he wants to walk under as he tentatively steps into the scene. When he looks down the street, he can see Lavenda studying her dress. He notices the traffic lights; all three lights pulse once, making Lavenda look up. The three birds in the sky fly down one final time. This time, they loop right above the boy's head as he nods at them with a wink and a smile—his way of thanking them as he hears the melody that was once in his head played by a flute player somewhere in and amongst the skyscraping landscape he and Lavenda find themselves in...

A smile appears on the girl's face, making the ends of her lips find a dimple.

"I'll be here, Afanasy." He remembers the words as he takes another step toward her. From where he is he can see still see the traffic lights and the girl whom he is worried he might scare, or who isn't even there...

Lavenda accepts that the flowers on her dress are changing colors from magenta to magnificent tones of orange, as she looks back over her shoulder at the three birds soaring into the blue. An orchestra now accompanies the melody as something tells her to look up at the lights.

Afanasy takes another step and then stops; he is only one more stop from where she stands. As Lavenda's head looks up at the lights, the gentle boy opens his bag and looks into it. As he searches inside it, Lavenda senses his presence. Her eyes remain on the moving lights which cascade as he finds the purple flower. He takes his last and final step to stand next to her. He watches her looking up at the running lights as he readies himself for when she turns to him. She does. The girl looks into the boy's hazel eyes as he looks into her green eyes. She looks down at the flower he holds in his hand, and she takes it from him so she can hold the hand tightly, as they take their first step together.

“Afanasy, you came back for me,” Lavenda says as she rests her head on his shoulder.

THE END