

Illicit Blade of Grass

(Rozelle Zofen)

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eBook

ISBN: 978-0-9803486-3-7

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CHAPTER 1

Rozelle Zofen plays her flute side on. Her mother's singing is the loudest sound, and she reminds her daughter, who desperately wants to stay in tune, of this.

News of disharmony in other parts of the land gives the mother, the daughter, and the loafer now sitting down for dinner something to speak about. Vienna is wintered for now, but spring and her step are around the pavement's winding way from the outskirts of the artful metropolis, where the hills and some mountain crests keep steepness in the lively valley setting.

After dinner, Rozelle and her mother walk. They pass the usual short man and his pipe. He is obviously deep in thought, as he does not acknowledge them today. Rozelle smiles at him anyway. Something tells her that the words in his head will still be heard for some years at some time in the future.

Then, some time in that future ...

Metofeaz Litigatti looks about the dingy apartment with its thin walls. He is mindful that his elbow doesn't sink through the walls where the fucking sounds are coming from. His last pay check was months ago. It had been a couple of thou for what the ignorant person had termed a "paragraph" when they'd transacted to change ownership of the words. He thinks that maybe he'll swing by the studio today and listen to inspiration, or see if he can slide himself onto the set and stand still in the corner and take away some of the buzz that those artists have with him, such as how the actors can get up for scene after scene under instruction, lights, makeup, and all that attention. Or, he thinks, maybe he'll just begin to write that first book. Metofeaz looks at the pile of black clothes on the floor and thinks, *Shit! I may have to dye more white clothes black – or wash the pile of black clothes.*

Mr Pink stands in the doorway. He wants a kiss on the cheek before he's allowed in.

"How's bout you kiss that guy there, ah?" Metofeaz half-asks.

The wall flower, as he is known, points to a camp guy in red leather as he does as Mr Pink pleases. Inside, Jimmy Afra and Michael Haze sit at the table. Michael buys a round of beers as they discuss the day's events.

"It's like that, though," Michael says, "Isn't it?"

“Definitely,” Jimmy agrees. “Like that.”

“Could be different in an instant, though,” Metofeaz suggests.

Metofeaz eyes the VIPs. They’re a couple of prospects, but mostly editors who know what they’re talking about. He has done a photo shoot with one, but the words on the wall had just been affects causing no effect on the outcome when it had gone to print. It’d turned out to be just a blur. The cartoon character behind the model from whose mouth his lyric had come had been more defined than his wasted lines. He listens to Jimmy and wishes him some luck.

“I’ve been hard at it,” Jimmy tells him. “Hard at it – harder than that thick skull of yours...”

“That’s good, bro, keep it up.” He leaves the club.

He has forgotten the name of the woman lying next to him. Her hair is shiny. She faces down, her head on the spare pillow. He runs his hand from the top of her head as she sleeps, sliding it down her mane onto the skin along her back, into the small of her back, over the curve of her ass, down to her mid-thigh. When his reach runs out he reverses to trace the curves back up to her head. She wakes a short while later and only has “Mmm...” to say. The skin is clear and the space between her hair line and the rest of her body is more homogenous than a brick wall. He thinks this as he offers her a cuddle.

The mogul plays him his latest drum track. Metofeaz loves it as the producer tweaks the track in his bedroom studio.

“How’s it go, Feeaz?” the Mogul asks.

“Could be different in an instant, man.”

“Yeah yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah ...”

WHIM ONE

Lunid Stormarz stretches his wingspan to its fullest and digests the morning freshness as he looks over the yard, the tallest statue a coward in the broad light of day. He absorbs the news that Desine will be visiting him in his new-found homeland and thinks it through thoroughly till he desires a cigarette. It has been two years since he last saw her and two weeks now since a thought of her has beckoned him to forget the present

to seek her approval. Metofeaz Litigatti, the hack, will accompany her. He muses about her selfishness as he excuses Litigatti's presence as security. She needs to face him again.

Metofeaz pushes himself up from the floor for the one-hundredth time and wonders how he had come to accept that he would visit his wife's ex. He ponders if the exercise he performs serves its purpose for him in the same way as Desine performs her rituals. Since meeting his wife the breaks have come thick, fast, and continuously, and he has unscrupulously taken each opening and positioned his persona to capitalize and make the most of all the opportunities that have come. There have been no ramifications so far, and the rumblings were not yet the cranial quakes he severely suffered from, but just bellyaches from his gluttonous indulgence in the assortments on offer. Metofeaz has come, thought, played, and eaten all that he could grab with open arms.

Desine looks more real than confectionery free from a tray offering antidotes to the day's somberness, making lofty heads humble, weak spines stiff, and feeble minds nimble. Desine designs perfume, a vain vocation that could be given to her by right based on her looks alone. A scientist, she chose her field so it would encourage her to meet men.

The darkness of the room matches the space between Lunid's heart and mind. The curtain blows because the wind winds it up and flicks its ends up far enough to threaten his open eyes. Lunid stands quietly, like the statue's orangey red stone skin that now shows life as he places huge weights on his mind. The movement he wants from the gargoyles is fleeting, and only imaginable in the state he'd visited two nights before. How appropriate that it is a full moon. He needn't summons, he tells himself as he hears her breathe.

The hairs on the back of nowhere spike, and when they are needle-point frozen and at height he breathes freely and shuts his eyes. He raises his arms out from his sides and slowly opens his eyes. Number Twelve sits in thought. Lunid dares not move. His arms, which he holds straight from his shoulders, beg to be let down, but in a rare moment, here, he cannot be so selfish as to acknowledge discomfort and sit to think of himself, scaring the monster. His stiff friends still line the courtyard and the pool inside

and out. He wakes in the morning. All that is left of the thinking creature are his sore shoulders.

The bones and piles on which Rozelle Zofen's house rest have not changed. Though the valley has shallowed from war and the multitude of graves have lifted her town's highest point a quarter mile above sea level, it is still the place she has built. The beasts still stand in their semicircle. A swimming pool has been built around them, giving the swimmers a feeling of protection as they lay motionless on their backs in the summer sun. It gives viewers from the balcony a sense of voyeurism, watching a naked half-man, half-dragon watch a woman swim bare where Rozelle once lay watching them watch her.

The figure of Lunid, awkward even in his own company, stands next to the tallest of them. He appears to ask questions not by using verbiage but thought. A writer of mixed blood, he spends the days with the statues and at sundown goes down to the village to eat and drink and see if he can find a diversion for the excitement he feels for Desine, whom he cannot have.

Desine thinks of her holiday destination as she packs her bags. It suits her that Metofeaz is at an all-night meeting.

Metofeaz cringes as he flexes his arm, the vibrating pen cramping his hand. The money already paid, he thinks of it as he scribes a sunken sonnet on the back of a model who belongs to a gangster. The gangster and his hoods stand with their hands behind their backs. A naked and beautiful woman is on the table, her ass in the air. Metofeaz has become used to her now, down to the small of her back, which he has reached.

I own light

This light belongs. Here inverted. There inserted

Introspective. In. Retrospect.

Shining from

Collective. Coherent.

Lap it. Loop it.

Darken. Dampen.

Slap it. From crevasse. In cavern. Where shaven

Grab it

Here light. Without hinder.

In ever. More over. Cover candor.

Spare none. For whores.

It belongs.

Metofeaz hears the model's moans as the pen draws bits of blood. As he drinks his now-cold coffee, the waitress reminds him that smoking is bad.

Metofeaz smiles, "My bad," and blows smoke that fills her cleavage.

"Weirdo," she snaps.

Metofeaz smiles, "Yeah." He remembers his beautiful wife, asleep alone in their bed, so he gets up and collects himself and heads home with more coffee for Desine and himself.

Lunid scribbles his thoughts, his idea of the perfect scene, on paper and hands it to the tourist. She flicks her hair and her hand touches the letters that rise from the newspaper. The candle flickers. He accepts her breasts as her eyes allow him to own them. Unoffended, she pushes them further forward.

On the fucking piece of newspaper are the words, "Touch, touch, touch."

Lunid's hand rearranges the Celtic symbol on the tourist's tailbone as it mesmerizes her eyes. The composition, pointing down, now rotates clockwise and then counterclockwise. As she remembers the way she forgets where she is, as she wants to feel that touch again and again and again. In the morning she lies there as Lunid brings them breakfast while talking on the phone.

Desine, in bed, holds her hand over the mouthpiece as Metofeaz serves coffee across the Atlantic. "It's Lunid," she tells him. "He got lucky last night."

Metofeaz nods his head. "That's real good, babe." He sits at the end of the bed till he has counted plenty, gestures that he needs to take a shower, and vanishes from sight.

Lunid watches the new woman drink his coffee and listen to his conversation.

The traffic lights flash in cascading order of direction – red, orange, green, orange, green, red, and then green-green-green. Metofeaz swirls his hand in the air like a

lasso to the music from the hot dog stand, George Clinton and his fucking Parliament singing, “Flash Light / Flash Light / Flash Light, Red Light, Neon Light ...”

“You all right babe?” Metofeaz asks.

Desine smiles with her hand over her mouth. Metofeaz puts his back into it, then just smiles as the cab stops from his loud behavior, which is for everyone to enjoy.

The couple climb into the cab and Metofeaz’s hand goes right up and onto his wife’s ass, as Kid and Ace, two boys at a Hot Dog stand, watch. Ace says, “Would you check this cat out.”

“He’s the fucking shit,” says Kid. “Even in his fucking country heels.”

“He’s the shit, all right,” Ace agrees. “Someone needs to flush him down the fucking drain.”

The French are easy to identify, with their flags under their arms, their attitude, and their language. Metofeaz takes his passport from the smiling woman and pulls Desine closer by her hips and kisses her on the mouth. He can see the taxi is going to pick up another couple, so he starts with a skip. He forgets her hand is in his, pulling her forward and together on the run. The other couple see them coming and step back. He hits the trunk twice. The black driver opens his door and slowly walks to the back of the car and points to the roof rack. Metofeaz points at the trunk.

Rozelle was a singer. Her portrait hangs in the hall above the mirror into which Desine smiles at herself.

The two writers stand face to face. They shake hands, Metofeaz taking the initiative to create harmony, as he is the guest. “Thanks for having us,” he says.

“A pleasure,” responds Lunid.

Metofeaz relaxes into a grin and says, “Lunid, the pleasure is surely mine. Only you can deliver what can make me kill with this smile.”

Desine sits on the edge of the pool with her legs in the water, sunshine everywhere. Lunid swims lengths that end in between her legs as Metofeaz, with bed-

linen tied around his waist, surveys the large stone beasts he had once seen in a groovy TV movie when he was young.

Metofeaz leans against the last of the creatures. The sun has embedded its heat in its body, the monster keeping that side of his body warm, as Lunid and his wife, Ms Urnz, come down the steps to dinner. Heaping everything lavishly upon himself, Lunid wears a tux and Desine a blonde wig and a little black dress. Her legs and breasts are enough to send him wild on their own, but Metofeaz mashes the two feelings into one. The only signs of upheaval are the rips in his muscles, which are covered only by a cotton tanktop.

Metofeaz's gentility precedes the gentry as he places his hand over her mouth. Nodding, he is aware of echoes that would be unbound if he let all fury unwind at once. His other hand finds the already-high seam of Desine's black bitty number and pulls it further up. The hand comes back down to smother the smooth skin as he laces her neck with his tongue. He now knows that she can be trusted to moan on her own, so he uses that hand to quicken breaths in between her incomplete sentences of one-syllable words and smatterings of short groans. The wetness signaling welcomed entry, he is willing as she makes the decision to turn to face the mirror, seeing four of them, as he penetrates decorative skin sensitive to foreskin through to warm walls engulfing thickness.

Metofeaz lies awake as he waits for Desine to roll over and incidentally touch him again. He drives his passage of thought in a straight line, and on reaching a tunnel he chooses to enter.

WHIM TWO

The finger-marks on the mirror disappear as if the breeze evaporated the gaseous form of water from the silver lining, but the lipstick sticks, even when Rozelle places her lips where Metofeaz has marked the mirror with his wet fingers. She flows up into the ceiling and back down, her anger at another woman in her house uncontrollable. The open door to where he lies awake is merely a courtesy as she announces her arrival by saying, "Upon a wall, in a subterrain, your eternal warmth waits."

Metofeaz selfishly takes the only bedding from his wife and wraps it around himself as he goes to find Lunid's pack of smokes.

Lunid lures all of him in his awe to believe what he dreamed. The seven-foot creature now sits as a man. Metofeaz walks slowly, creeping, with Desine now at his heart.

"Fulfilled desire appears in moments and eternity is in the abyss of our bliss," intones Rozelle.

Metofeaz neither thinks to respond, nor does he reject this. Accepting it, he voices his entry loudly to test the scene to see if it is real in the metaphysical or only in a metaphoric sense, saying, "By torture, the agility of the mind is rewarded with the shattering of preconceived boundaries of skin and flesh! If this be stone, sit while I join!"

Lunid touches the shoulder of the beast. As the creature's head turns slowly to see Metofeaz descend the stairs with Rozelle, it stands in her honor as Lunid bows his head in disbelief.

The two writers stand in front of the statue. The sun comes up.

CHAPTER 2

PART 1

All who bend an earlobe to confirm detail deemed the arrangement, once spoken, to be decorous. Lunid is to return home with Desine to visit his publisher. Metofeaz is to stay and enjoy the clean air so that he can, he hopes, inject realism into his work.

This is Lunid's idea. "The flatness of your work, my friend, will fatten by the air in your blood," he tells Metofeaz. "Breathe in and bubble the blood. Each bubble full of nature's character transpires, deliberately creating a homophonic bosom of full milk, as ink from an elk that is yet to spew from a soul fucked with pollutants and billboards. Stay here. Find finery in this." He points to the surrounding vineyards and the hills that roll away far and wide.

Metofeaz sucks his wife's tongue. Then he sucks both her nipples, then kneels down and put his tongue between those lips. Now he stands up for her, and she sucks him back. She crouches, opened comfortably on his bare foot, as she runs her face up and down with her wet tongue flat against him. Someone is in the room. He thinks of her as she thinks of him. Lunid waits downstairs for Metofeaz's wife as he says goodbye to her.

Metofeaz waves at them till the dust from the taxi has settled, the tire marks leaving a track that goes that-a-way, away from him.

Lunid places his hand on Desine's leg and she lets that leg fall away towards him. The taxi driver turns up the radio to drown out the sounds.

Metofeaz's hand works. His mind pushes his hand gently, then abruptly, to define his edge. The long pushes aim to bring about curves in what he hopes is the scarce perfect loop. The shape in his head creates each verse of Desine. He writes in one second how he can anger. He can cry in one word. Lunid haunts his space and Desine shows him their bed.

Metofeaz smiles. The mirror blurs, blasts, and breaks. Then the pieces form themselves in a heap on the floor, flow up in, and back up in there. Desine's face is in there once the pieces, smooth again, return to being a mirror. He is a solitary figure in the ballroom, but himself again, and again he says, "Could be different in an instant."

The bass is synthetic and hypnotic. The singer may make it into this manuscript; she'll just have to wait and see. Still, she sings, "I love you / In the purest way."

Lunid takes the call. Metofeaz blows smoke away from the phone.

Lunid asks him, "What do you want me to say to her?" He smiles. "She's your wife."

Metofeaz stands still and tells himself that he has to leave the house for food, fresh air, and maybe to see someone's eyes and hear their voices and feel their presence. "Tell Desine, I love her and I'll call her tonight."

Desine wipes her hands on her apron and reaches for the phone. Lunid holds it in the air and tells her, "He said he'll call you tonight."

Metofeaz runs his hand over top of the fence, hovering it. The light in the house next door glows suddenly, as if someone has turned the dim to bright. The stones and whatever else is down there crunch beneath his boots. The headlights shining on him zoom by. The eeriness of the valley makes the sound last longer, but eventually it zeros as another set of headlights peer up from the dip in the road, which he looks back at on his way to the village.

The staff speak English. The tourist at the pine desk asks for work. The owner would like to give her work, but says the restaurant is already adequately staffed.

Metofeaz orders red meat, vegetables, and an expensive-sounding sauce. The tourist eyes a table of people already well on their way. They invite her over and she already has her glass. She shakes it by its stem, making the light bounce and break, and making Metofeaz shift his stare to in front of him. He orders tequila and listens, some of the time, to the way she can play. He tries to work out her age from the general knowledge she has to share.

The table pays its bill. Metofeaz counts the pairs of feet. There are eleven, if he includes the ones with painted toenails tied in leather. The pairs of different people walk out the door. Some let the women go first. Others want to be next to them, and one of them just wants the fresh, cold air of the outside.

The tourist stands spare for a second, one-two-three, and then turns to him as if she is only now ready. she says, “Touch,” but her accent makes it sound more like “Ravish.”

Metofeaz eventually drops both shoulders as the blonde stranger takes the liberty of a forced smile, pulls out the seat next to him at the head of the table for herself, and asks, “What do you have for me tonight?”

Metofeaz looks at her eyes and decides they’re as good as any to look into. She pushes her breasts forward and he focuses on one, maybe the one housing *full milk* that could be his ink. He looks at her face, thinks of what a muse would look like, and begins to scrawl on the newspaper he has finished reading, “Mountain of Insulations, My hope is that you have protected the ink from stink? Skin? I know you remain supple.”

He rips the corner and pushes it to her.

The tourist, her accent, and her luggage fill the guest room. Metofeaz paces the balcony as he waits for the time to call his wife.

She sits in the dark ballroom watching TV, the sound of channels changing filters through as permitted. On top of what is now Metofeaz’s bed he sits wrapped in bed linen with his hand on the phone.

Desine picks up the phone on the third ring. “It’s going okay, I guess,” she tells him. Metofeaz closes his eyes. Desine turns on her side and says, “He’s in the lounge with some people,” then puts down the phone and closes her eyes.

Metofeaz makes breakfast for two. On discovering the tourist knows more about the town than he does he asks her if she would like to make his pad her base. She accepts just as she looks up at Rozelle. The day flies by as they take in the town and two vineyards on the outskirts of a neighboring village. The tourist invites him out to the closest city to meet her friends later that evening and he agrees.

The morning is bright. The street merchants with their produce are eager and fresh for the customers who appear from the doorways and arrive by bikes, cars, trucks, and tour buses. Metofeaz is still drinking tequila from a bottle he has shared with the tourist,

who has managed to get rid of two of the three guys who had followed her from club to club all night long. Metofeaz smiles at her and she runs up to walk next to him, grabbing his arm. He tactfully loses her clinging by wanting the bottle back. She giggles in some language, hides the bottle, then gives it back. The tourist finally tells a younger man goodbye as Metofeaz buys breakfast. She dances on a cobblestone and he laughs at her. The owner of a computer store arrives in his van. Metofeaz buys a new machine, modem, and screen. Then he and the tourist head back to the house.

Lunid feels uneasy in the back of the limousine. He'd jumped inside, believing it had been sent for him by the publisher. Inside it, a gangster in bling, bling, and fucking bling makes Lunid sing. Lunid believes the dialogue from the heavy-set mogul from the movies and music videos, but when the former gang-banger says amongst the freestyle, "The bitch had the wrong fucking verse on her back, bro. I managed to erase the error, and now that the scar tissue has healed I'd like you to say, 'She's out of bounds, She ain't OPP, and the sun shines out of this here hole, belonging to moiré.' And you, you fake Speare, you going to do a fucking re-write, Ah-ight?" Lunid nods. 'Yeah baby Yeah Baby Yeah Baby, Yeah!'" The limo screeches to a halt.

Desine lets Lunid touch her, as she needs it. On seeing him again she confirms that it has been a mistake, but a good one, in that he would always be there. She closes her eyes for the shoulder rub. His fingers manipulate muscle so distant from and to obvious erogenous regions, which are within reach, in breaths that are becoming more quick than slow. He leads her to the window and opens it, telling her, "Breathe it deep; breathe it now, for never shall you hold your peace, for it is within that peace that complacency hides, and settling for the *lesser* as the *special* is overlooked and eventually forgotten, and only remembered in some fantasy."

Her hand reaches around and finds the back of his head, feeling like it would bring their mouths together. He put his in reach. As their faces come to be side by side, she tells him, "No!"

The tourist has offered and Metofeaz has accepted that in return for the accommodation she would tidy the place. After a call home he gives her the go-ahead to do as she pleases.

He sets the table with two candles, one at his end and one to light her end. He wears a replica World War II uniform, complete with polished boots, and the tourist graces his presence in leopard skin and red lipstick, compliments of Rozelle. The meal is splendid. They speak little and spend the evening dancing in the black ballroom, which is lit only by their candles. They drink champagne from the bottle, and Metofeaz recites his words as she conjures pictures for the story. Close to midnight the phone rings. The tourist curtsies for him as he takes the call from Desine.

“Excuse me for a second babe.” He turns to the tourist. “Breakfast at nine? 10?”

She nods as she curtsies again and walks off, her heels echoing in the vacant space.

Lunid feels the silk lining of the black leather jacket over black cotton cool their hot heads as he kisses Desine on the cheek and leaves the building. The waiting limo matches the black night in which he now rides. Wondering what he’s done wrong, he flexes his fingers as if to vex a hex that would not perplex the next session with the wrong guy. He drinks the champagne from a flute slowly, but ever-flowing, as if to keep the furious five from cramping when the time comes for them to vibrate the lines on the skin of a woman he has and will again mark for life for the sake of money.

I own light

Here inverted. There inserted

The mogul turns off the light. Lunid feels only the buzz of the tool. One of the beads of sweat drops onto her back. Lunid and everyone watch it meet with the red blood as a spotlight comes on and the work on the woman’s back was there in the brighter light. He stretches his neck and continues.

In respect of, shining from

A Collective-Coherent.

The woman now moans and the mogul tells Lunid, “Time out, motherfucker. The bitch is crying.”

Lunid switches off the machine. The mogul leaves the room as the model sits up and crosses her legs. The heavies watch him as he watches her. She offers him a cigarette and he produces a lighter, which he flicks to light two smokes, then shuts it down.

She turns back over and he rubs the new area to warm it.

*From a darkened, dampened Crevasse In cavern.
Where shaven*

The mogul nods.

*In ever. More over. Cover candor.
Spare none.*

The mogul nods one last time.

For It belongs.

PART 2

Metofeaz sleeps deeply when alone. The tourist tosses. The thinking creature eases his stoned physique into the sitting position. The polish had brought a shine to the place. Gone is Desine's lipstick from her favorite mirror. The tourist, still in her heels, tosses again and opens her eyes, and they are face-to-face for the first time. Rozelle bites her bottom lip and with her eyes beckons the tourist to speak.

Backpedaling in every direction, the tourist moves from the messy bed more quickly than a ghost. She removes the first heel and twists her ankle while fumbling to remove the second. She hands them to Rozelle. The silver glass heels drop onto the wooden floors. She hopes the sound can be heard from the master bedroom. The backpedaling makes the tourist end up back against the cold slab.

Rozelle had followed her mother everywhere – down into the dark clubs and up the wooden backstage staircases of theaters across Europe. She had tugged her blonde pigtails as she'd willed her mom to reach each magic note. When her mother had died she'd left Rozelle alone, twelve years old, and hungry, with only her voice and her looks for a life she'd have to make on her own.

The tourist makes them their breakfast today. Metofeaz sleeps in, and at ten o'clock on the dot he smells bacon, then the coffee. He comes down the stairs wrapped in

linen. The tourist looks fit and healthy. Her fit body is upright; the sun slips off her blonde hair pulled back. Her blue eyes in front of him present his face with a food and caffeine sparkle, along with her legs, her bare feet tightly muscled with flesh where the eye needs comfort. She sits next to Metofeaz today, not across from him. Their elbows touch as they divide food, study portions, think light, and eat.

The tourist holds linen from the guest room in her arms while standing on one leg, the other bent at the knee and tucked back against his bedroom door. Metofeaz takes a long time to decline her offer to tidy his room, saying, “Ah, okay – No, I’ll do it later, thanks.” She shrugs her shoulders and goes away.

The study is set up well, as well as Metofeaz allows it to be. The tourist floats in and out of his space as he plays the keyboard. At two o’clock in the afternoon she brings him a sandwich and a glass of water. She stands next to him, her hip touching his shoulder. It dawns on him as she reads his work on screen. He can sense her body temperature through her skin-tight shorts, and as he turns to her, glancing up at her consuming his words, he lets his eyes feel the warmth from hips, a tummy, some round bosom, cheekbones, and bright eyes.

He says, “Thanks,” picks up the sandwich, and bites into it. The sound of his chewing stops her midway through her sentence. She opens the window, wipes the sill, and leaves the room.

Lunid stands in front of the light as the mogul sifts through the platter of fruit looking for a kiwi. The lead singer is taller and thinner than in her tabloid shots. Lunid can’t help it, so he holds his hands. One of dancers looks over once as she stretches her long limbs. The young director looks over the script as Lunid feels starkly spare. The music, coming through a small monitor, sounds tinny.

Metofeaz puts the remainder of an apple into his mouth. A cool breeze is blowing. The tourist stands just feet away, her shampoo in his nose as he breathes in her sigh. He waves at someone in the distance.

The tourist, with the binoculars, asks in her accent, “No – no, uh, how do you say?”

Metofeaz steps back, careful not to let his house guest smell heat, confirming, “Brassiere?”

The tourist pulls back her hair. “Yeah, she has no bra.”

Metofeaz keeps a straight face. “Melon can?”

The tourist nods. “Yes. Must be, I guess?”

Metofeaz waves the all-in-white figure that’s in the distance towards himself, and it begins to walk. The vineyards are yellow and orange, the grass still lush. The figure passes as the stranger comes closer.

“Quick, get ready – we have dinner,” Metofeaz announces, surprised but excited, to the tourist.

“Can I wear Ms Zofen?”

“Yes, wear what you want.”

The speakerphone in the middle of the table begins to waffle, “Yes, then I was called to the set. Lunid was there, and it was all very glamorous. I was the energy consultant and I did design a special scent just for the shoot.”

The older woman from the vineyard listens closely. The tourist tops her glass and smiles in the candlelight. Desine in New York has joined them for dinner by phone. Metofeaz excuses himself to go to the machine and begins to tap feverishly.

The older woman’s voice carries. The tourist puts her feet up on her seat and hugs her knees. In New York Desine puts a blanket on her lap. Metofeaz cannot help the rhythm, as the almost-tired voice of the older woman carries into the room, saying, “When we first saw Rozelle Zofen on the platform, the train platform, she wore white. Her blonde hair was down around her face. *His* name was John, a soldier. When he came to town Miss Zofen would sign to him. The bar would be very full of people, but all those people knew that her words were for just one soldier.”

Metofeaz lets himself be carried by the tale. The tourist opens another bottle. The older woman smiles as she continues on late into the night, while Desine nods off in New York. The tourist watches the older woman with her flashlight. She sees its waving path through the fields as the visitor’s house becomes closer than before. She waves to no one, as Metofeaz comes down the steps where the thinking creature sits down to rest his legs and unload his mind, saying, “Tell her the price of her wish is the cost of her treasure she seeks forever.”

“You can tell her,” Metofeaz puts in, “that the measure of the pleasure she seeks is thought of as in terms of investment rather than as a harvest this season.”

The tourist touches the balcony as she steps silently and patiently, waiting for her foot to put itself into the next step. The statue on the end, number twelve is on his backside and talking to Metofeaz.

CHAPTER 3

Rozelle lounges in the sun, her body warm to her bones. The older woman from next door reads as the different people make themselves at home. The man reciting his poetry smiles as naturally, as his hand has created each page of his book. Later in the evening she seeks him among the gathering, but to her dismay she finds out that he is stationed elsewhere and has to be at the platform by some ungodly hour.

Rozelle peddles up, and when she arrives he is still reciting his poems, a cat and a dog seated with their furs settled next to each other his only audience as he waits for his train.

“Hi, hello! Your place was great!” John Poet Soldier, a TRUFUNKSOLDIER, says his first words to Rozelle as the train chugs into the isolated location.

“Who’s the poem about?” are Rozelle’s first and last words as he boards the locomotive. He waves as he watches the cat and the dog. She smiles and puts her hand back down and turns to where her bike and its seat wait to take her home. His smile had been genuine in all the ways happiness is meant to be. She thinks of her past sorrows and believes she would not bestow them upon him if they were to come close enough to touch a chance that may not happen. The older woman’s light still flickers, so she finds the bottle of wine and goes to visit.

Rozelle smiles as she studies the red soles of her neighbor’s feet. “It was nothing. He read me poems and I invited him here, and then he caught your ear and eye.”

Rozelle goes and returns with another bottle of red. She doesn’t bother with all the in-betweens and asks out loud, “He’s not yours for keepsakes, then?”

“He’ll be back, Miss Rozelle. He has an audience here.”

PART 1

Rozelle walks through the house, now knowing its past. The man following her about the place is fast with his language as he convinces her to hire him.

She watches the statues grow. She knows that they will be lean from their ankles. Their muscles are long, as the sinew on each stretches to let her know that the craftsman was in control of the infinite-yet-perfect narrowing that ends a limb and starts a joint.

The artist has had plenty of conversation, but Rozelle knows that his talk comes from his fear as she pays him quickly, efficiently, and in a completely clean and proper manner. She listens and waits till he has done his job.

News of the invasion reaches Rozelle before the broadcast on the radio does. The night has been long. The people do not mind that she repeats her first set as her last. Waiting for his appearance, she warns her band that her voice is weak and that they may need to carry her. The band plays the outro forever, and when she is satisfied that the only movement left in the bar is by those leaving and the employees cleaning, she gives the signal to round it off after the next chorus.

The streets are alive, as with three o'clock in the morning in many cities around the world, yet she drags her feet to the corner where her bicycle leans, the seat waiting to carry her home. A young man in Italian clothes tries to convince her that he is what she needs. She smiles, with her hand brushing him off like flies, collects the handlebars, and mounts the seat. On nearing her driveway, she hears and then sees the older woman still dancing in the candlelight. The figure now waves to her and she steadies the two wheels so she may return a wave with her left hand.

The twelve creatures are now erect. Soon the morning sun will cross their paths. Their orangey-red appearance will become grey and stone-hard, bearing the light of day as they stand the heat till night falls again. Rozelle has named all but one, the thoughtful one at the end. She beckons him to sit with her a while as they think of a name suiting his process – quiet, aloof, and meaningful – a title to seal a fantasy and to bring to this countryside her touch from her alone, expressing her thoughts so they may be seen, heard, and mused over till they become. The name she cannot say, but it tingles in places and in parts of a woman's anatomy.

The party has lasted two whole days, run on the energy from two hundred guests from Germany, Switzerland, the US, China, Jamaica, the UK, Ireland, the South Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere. Five-hundred-plus songs have been played and almost one million samples have been used in the marathon production.

The tourist wears Rozelle's most glorious ball gown and has been in particularly fine form.

Metofeaz kicks the empty cans in his path. They sound like tin, yet they fly like aluminum.

The tourist sits back on the sofa. The dress is intact, but enough sequins are amiss for Metofeaz to comment, "I want you to mend the dress." The tourist, falling asleep, hears the concern in his voice, a voice that usually smiles. She holds out her hand to him. Metofeaz looks closely at the hand and then turns to look at the mess. He counts the missing sequins on the gown. She falls fast asleep. He has another bottle in hand. His head has not touched a pillow in three days now.

Lunid has left the leather Jacket in New York City.

Lunid's and Metofeaz's paths intercontinentally cross and their heads coincidentally collide at a Heathrow airport lounge.

Metofeaz's shades block out everything as he braces himself for the sound of Desine's voice saying, "So how was your day, Hon?" She smells good.

All Metofeaz wants to do is sleep. The phone's ringing is loud. "What the fuck did you do to this place?"

"Ask your friend."

Metofeaz hangs up the phone and finds their bed.

Lunid looks at the computer, then sits down in front of it. The tourist comes in, but stands well away from him.

Metofeaz holds the pillow tightly. Desine feels all around him till she manages to pry his grip open and put her arms around her husband.

Lunid switches on the machine and it begins to smoke.

PART 2

The tourist watches Lunid closely as he scribbles things down. Lunid looks at the phone and it rings. "Yes, it's been a long two days. I feel like visiting," Desine sighs at the sight of Metofeaz making breakfast, the coffee steaming. He is quiet, long-brewing, and everything stewing as he serves it up.

Lunid takes the tourist's hand. She pushes him away. "Woe, baby woe baby baby ..." Lunid looks around and sees only himself in the mirror. The tourist's hand leaves the frame; her hips shift side to side and away.

He goes straight for the telephone and picks it up. "Dial 911, dial 911, dial fucking 911 ..."

Metofeaz drinks coffee as he finds the thing ringing all around the fucking world and says into it, "This is not 911, Lunid. What is it that you want with my wife? Lunid, tell!"

"Actually," Lunid responds, "I called to tell you that your machine is smoking. Well, it was smoking this morning when I tried firing it up ..." Lunid's attention now shifts to the tourist, who has just implemented a costume change, one of her many for the day. Her short skirt hides only her.

Metofeaz asks, "How's our house guest?"

"She's in good condition."

Metofeaz cuts himself shy of any trouble and hangs up the telephone.

Desine and Metofeaz look up at a tall building as he lets her hand go. It goes to a cellphone that vibrates. Whispering into her phone, Desine says to Lunid, "We're playing hide-and-seek in the Empire State building."

"Whose idea was that?"

"Mine, actually – one of the things we used to do when we first met."

"Does he hide well, or does he let you win?"

"He puts me over his knee in one of the bathrooms and spanks me."

"Where's he now?"

"We're on the same floor. He's talking with some tart in a short skirt."

"Young, I bet?"

"You would win the bet, my friend."

Metofeaz had to get away when the phone began vibrating in his and his wife's clasp. The receptionist is friendly. "She's a good looking woman," he says to her. "Only a teeny weenie bit better looking than you."

The receptionist asks, "Long legs, dark hair, nose in the air?"

"She's my wife. Is she coming over here?"

“What happens if she does?”

“She’ll find me, and at that point I’ll have to ask you if we can borrow the key to your cleanest bathroom.”

The tourist stays well away from Lunid. Lunid has to go down to the village to see what has happened. In the restaurant she sits alone eating dinner and reading her book.

“We’re like strangers now,” Lunid complains.

“You can call me Rozelle.”

Lunid slides the piece of paper towards her. She screws it up immediately. He stands to hide his embarrassment. Her cleavage is askew, the cup almost not withholding its milk. She notices the unwanted attention and sits in a way to bring symmetry again to her front.

Desine watches the limo wipe the street in front of them. Metofeaz looks beyond her perfect profile and wills the cab to stop where his toe taps to the LeaderLoop in his head. A night out dancing, just him and Desine, and then some dinner ought to do the job, he believes unto himself. He now looks down at her feet, up her legs, and at her body, which is leaning forward so the limo’s chauffeur can see where he is meant to park.

Metofeaz dips Desine. The band conductor, in his white suit complete with baton, checks the only couple in the middle of the floor. The big band plays mellow but sprightly as Metofeaz makes it work. He spins his wife around and smirks, “You like that, ah, babe?”

Desine does the twirl, puts her hand to her forehead, drops her head back, and says, “If you didn’t keep looking at that table I’d really love it.”

He watches Desine walk from the floor. A trombone player slides his control mechanism forward and tilts his instrument to the right to check out Desine sauntering off and away. Metofeaz looks at the table of the girls. They laugh.

Rozelle walks past the entrance to the platform. American GIs flood the foyer. She pedals her bicycle faster. Maybe this train will bring him into the small village, a thought that somehow contradicts her fear of the imminent invasion that she can now smell in the air. The radio has told her what she knows and the soldiers have filled her in with their graphic, first-hand accounts of the devastation and morbidity of war.

Rozelle pictures the depth of a trench, the way his body would have to be if the enemy forces were to appear before he could dig the depth and width to hide, protect, and rest himself. Then she applies the powder, smiles at herself in the mirror, and picks herself up for her first set tonight.

The vineyards and their seasonal processes tell the time. The house she has added onto is now a home. Through her music, and in the books she reads, she sustains a thing she has manufactured. She guessed that it seems unnatural, yet it's natural to someone who has not yet met her father.

The day is a bright one. She stands to admire her work and the backdrop that her neighbor's estate offers. She marvels at how it has remained unharmed by the war that had swept through town and flattened everything.

Twirling the strand she favors most, Rozelle says, "That accent he spoke – how did you know I was meaning him? You make it sound like we had a thing."

The older woman answers, "You do, only he doesn't know, young lady. He could be dead ..."

"Or gone back to the girlfriend who the poem was about."

"The poem was about here, Miss."

"About you or me?"

The thinking creature's thigh is of muscle like rock, yet it was soft when she sat there. He had come down to his position of lightness in the dark of a European summer's evening. Her neighbor's light shines for reassurance as she and the gentle gargoyle talk through the possibilities of a title for the master of her land.

"It is of our nature that we appear when the soul needs watering, Rozelle," the thinking creature tells her.

"Typically yes," she agrees, "but I want you to be a guardian of this place, not a watering fountain that leaks water from your spout."

"You should be grateful that I spring forth words in the place of ..."

“In the place of?”

“Are they rays of ultraviolet Ms Zofen?” the thinking creature asks, “or could it be that I am complete in creation and shall stand tall today, never to sit with you on my lap this way again?”

“You will always think.”

Lunid lies down and then sleeps and then lies awake. The tourist sleeps deeply till Rozelle stands over her body. She places two fingers over her about-to-open mouth. In her bed she has nowhere to back up towards. The tourist sits up slowly, grabbing her pillow to cover herself, then falls back into her deep sleep while sitting holding her pillow.

The tourist yawns as she makes her way down the staircase, dragging her pillow along the floor. The sun is still a half an hour away. The thinking creature’s head comes up to let her know that all is okay. The tourist yawns again, Rozelle on her shoulder. The creature now smiles as Rozelle stands stroking the back of his neck. The tourist stands in front of him. Rozelle motions to let her know that it is safe and sound. The tourist, her eyes now tentatively open, seats herself, noticing that the older woman’s light still burns.

CHAPTER 4

An American soap opera is on TV, with subtitles for the tourist. Lunid lazes back on the sofa. The cell phone in his hand is small. The tourist drags a wooden crate past him. Lunid keeps close tabs on her now.

Desine looks at the window and then walks there. Behind her Metofeaz is tentative but careful not to hover as he covers her with his ears and his eyes that stare, then glare. Then he lets go of her. The day is dark, as fall in the Northern Hemisphere makes people want to be loved ones as others maintain their haunting but comforting presence, then feel unwelcomed.

The tourist bends over deeply into the case, articles flying out and papers flying up then floating down. She looks at him lounging while she concentrates on what she salvages from the case, such as an antique and too-heavy telephone. The look on her face says how much her arm in the box strains to lift things out of there.

Desine opens a window wide and asks Lunid over the phone, “What’s she doing?”

“She’s got her head in some old box.”

“You’re going to have to tell her to leave.”

“Looks like Metofeaz made her an offer.”

“You’re becoming like him, Lunid. Tell her.”

Lunid scratches his head after he puts down the machine. The tourist’s request that he move the machine into the guest room puzzles him. He now looks around the room. A complete transformation has taken place. The room was large, eerie, and cold; now it is cozy, quiet, and dense with memorabilia commemorating Rozelle Zofen. The tourist waits for him to leave another request, one she does not verbalize. She stands with one hand on a hip and another wiping down annoyance from her neck as he hesitates for something that doesn’t come. He eventually shuts the door, the picture of her in front of Rozelle’s portrait etched in his head.

The work is long. This Metofeaz knows, and he's ready for the trip that he will have to step right to the end. Still, he can feel the magic that appears in front of his eyes in music and quick takes with smoke and mirrors. Desine waits for him. She is ready for one of her shopping sprees, for which she requires his arm. He thinks of the mogul as he jumps the channels. Three of seven stations play his stuff as she calls out to him.

Desine is inside a store, so Metofeaz decides to step to pass the time. He walks. The leather jacket smells of cigarettes. He anticipates the crowd coming his way. He steps, the guitar riff in his head, the limo passing him again with its window down. He says, "Steely Dan, man!"

Steely Dan sings. "Well I did not think the girl could be so cruel / And I'm never going back to my old school ..."

The mogul's head comes out of the back of the slow-moving car to make it stereo. Metofeaz says, "Walking, stepping, dodging bullets and being cool as fuck. That's why I walk alone."

The mogul signals the chauffeur to slow down. The solo is loud and the mogul has to shout. Bystanders let them be. Metofeaz looks up at the electronic billboard. The limo drives slowly. Metofeaz is in the middle of the busy street. He stops. The limo stops, too. The cars pile up. Their horns blast. The mogul signals the chauffeur to turn up the volume. Steely Dan is now loud. The other drivers come from their cars. The people on pavement, already on their feet, don't mind the guitarist making the most of his middle eight. Metofeaz stands still. He shrugs all the attention off with his shoulders.

The mogul shouts, "Wow!", then steps from the limo.

Desine, walking from the store, wanders up to the edge of the crowd, wondering what the fuss is about. The music draws her closer, closer. Metofeaz's shoulders move.

"That's what I like about you, bro," the mogul tells him.

"What?" Metofeaz yells over the epicenter of the fuzz. The guitarist licks his way out of the frenzy.

"No fucking fear, Feeaz!"

Metofeaz smiles.

The mogul says, "I need another one, man."

The elevator is now crammed. Metofeaz has eleven shopping bags, including a Charley Stevensen one into which the lady next to him peers. He catches her in the reflection of the door. Desine chats with the bellboy, who catches Metofeaz in the mirror looking at the way he looks at his wife.

Metofeaz looks down at his plate, then at hers. He refuses her cue to offer up her last piece of meat today, bringing a puzzled look. Dinner is quick as they discuss tomorrow. Both he and Desine will be working on the same set.

The string of the tourist's g-string lies in the bathroom doorway. It makes a kidney shape on the ground. Her bra is twisted; one cup, face down, is a little mountain, and the other lies upside and open. The tourist herself is in the shower, the door ajar. Lunid can smell the steam as he passes, the house a place to roam. He waits on a wave that may bring him what his publisher now demands of him on a daily basis. He passes by again. The water has stopped and the door is shut. A little later he passes by what used to be his home's guestroom. The tourist sits on her bed in two towels, one around her head the other just barely concealing her breasts and thighs – but it does conceal them.

She does all of her nails and thinks of her new telephone. She knows it is worth a lot; she also thinks of its other uses. The lurking figure passes by again. She is bored. The towel isn't large enough to conceal everything. She is painting the toes on the foot at the end of her crossed leg. She looks down at her straight leg and can see the area that feels the cold air that rushes as the wind blows.

“Ms Zofen”, the man in the old store calls her. She bargains with the man again, and today she has almost doubled his original offer. She smiles, pushes herself forward, and then leaves the store, making the dainty bells on the door clang, sing, and ring on her way out.

The star and her co-star arrive, Metofeaz watches them from afar. Already his wife's voice is as loud as the perfume she administers to the wrists of the dancers and a couple of extras good enough to have made it into the circle. They stand around sizing each other up till one of them whispers that Ms Knowles and Jay-z are on set.

Desine talks with the mogul as he looks over the dancers. Metofeaz smokes a cigarette, ignoring the bright lights. The diva smiles at him as if to say she knows who he is. He points to himself.

She says, "Yeah, you."

The set rises high into the roof of the once-empty hangar. He likes the sound his boots make on the concrete, so he walks across the floor. Desine just watches him.

The mogul says, "Man, the Hitman is here."

Metofeaz just steps.

The mogul says, "Shoot, that."

Metofeaz steps.

The star and co-star are already on their way to their changing rooms. The playback is distant, but in Metofeaz's head it is loud.

Jay-z says, "Now I bag B."

"Boy, you're hurting there," Ms Knowles shoots back.

Desine skips her quick steps lightly and the hem of her skirt lifts in the front and now the back. Viewers can check out the bottom of one cheek, and then they get the coverage again. Damn. Desine runs next to Metofeaz and smiles. He is in a zone, head straight ahead. The dancers are in behind, hard-out and flashy.

"The mogul wants you in the video," Desine says. "By the way Hon, where you walking to?"

Jay-z says, "You're going to need help to study my bounce, flow."

"I'm missing you." Ms Knowles responds.

Desine offers him a taste of the fragrance from her wrist. He still steps, the camera shooting him from the ground up.

Metofeaz's smoke butt hits the centre of the lens. "Smells nice, babe," he says, but still he steps.

The mogul shakes his head American style. The extras follow with their own smiles.

Metofeaz shouts the famous flash, "Yee-hah" into the camera. The dancers are all around him. The wall of the hangar nears.

The mogul asks, "Where the fuck's he going?"

Metofeaz reaches the corrugated iron wall. He stops, turns, leans back, cocks a leg, produces another smoke, and lights it, the dancers panting in his face. Desine reaches out her arm to him.

The mogul asks, “Did you get that?”

“Wall-to-wall, babe,” Metofeaz answers. “That’s the way I go.”

Desine takes off her earrings and then her other jewelry. She’s in a fluster. Metofeaz is accommodating toward her irritating behavior, as she makes the most of the situation, dialing the number the moment she is naked. He sits up on the bed. He can see the goosebumps on her, even on her breasts. She bends herself in two to undo the straps on her heels, at which point he intervenes, “Leave ’em on, babe.”

The tourist picks up the phone. Lunid is already on it. Desine is on the other end. She doesn’t feel as if her behavior is intrusive as she listens to them, saying, “He doesn’t want to do it.”

“And?” Lunid prompts.

“Well, I was thinking you would be ideal for it.”

“You think so?”

“The mogul’s got it in his head that he’s some sort of Lazoo-type character.”

Lunid studies his physique and face in the mirror long after the call.

Metofeaz puts the sheet over her. She moves as he undoes the strap of her shoes. Then she says something and rolls over. He eventually gets them off her. He walks through the place. Someone mistakes his intercom for someone else’s as he puts the needle to the record. The voice on the intercom says, “The average guy spoke from his heart and leads Genisis to believe him at once.”

Diana Krall sings, “I remember you ...”

The voice on the intercom says, “Genisis gave the average guy, with the nice smile, her lunch thinking that he should eat the food himself.”

Diana Krall sings on, “You’re the one who made my dreams come true a few kisses ago / And stars that fell, like rain out of the blue.”

At breakfast Metofeaz suggests that the color scheme is out of date and that it will be that way again if something drastic is not done to brighten up this place. "I was thinking white."

Desine shakes her head slightly. "Too light."

He waits for the meandering to find its way to her favorite topic, and is ready and charming without alarming her enough to make her want to come up with a new game that would take him another year to work out its rules.

Desine asks, "You know how you don't want to do ...?"

He looks out at the view and then to her, nodding that he knows what she means and then shaking his head to agree that he does not want to be in someone else's video.

He is watching an interview on the TV with a young model. Desine exercises her power and turns off the whole TV. He shows he's annoyed by the way he crunches the cereal and the toast and then slurps the coffee.

Desine tells him, "I was thinking that maybe you could talk to him and the mogul."

"I still write the thing, though."

"Don't ask me. You're the one who seems to have ..."

"No worries. I'll talk to Lunid."

Metofeaz, in a daze, thinks of old Hollywood movies as he sees the covers of the magazines and all their boy stories that require body parts to push into a place where they may design a want or a thought. He sees the cover of *Vogue* and digests two of the headlines. He wonders about formulas for one second and dismisses the idea quickly, believing in the freedom of a style he wants to do. Desine switches hips and flicks the dark hair on that side of her head. Someone else presses the wrong button on the intercom. He says, "For fuck's sakes!" but Desine hushes him. They hear the tone, a couple of clicks, and the ring tone for Europe comes on.

The tourist answers, "Hello?"

"Lunid?" Desine asks.

The tourist responds with a, "Hey," before Lunid takes the telephone from her.

Desine tells him, "Metofeaz has something to ask of you, darling."

Desine, proud of intervening, places the phone on the table and walks to the window. Metofeaz, unconfused, smiles at the situation as he scrapes the phone along the table.

Lunid puffs his chest out as the tourist walks for her room. The tourist looks around the room and then decides to stand next to the bedside table, which houses her big old telephone. She picks up the receiver and places it on the spare pillow.

Metofeaz finally holds up the black cordless to his ear.

Lunid looks at his receiver, wondering if this is all real. The tourist stands by the window and looks down on the garden. The thinking creature is erect; the afternoon shadows leave his legs in the sun. The tourist walks to the bed and lies down, the big receiver's earpiece looking at her from its pillow. Her eyes look nowhere as she listens.

Lunid clears his throat. "You there?"

"Over here," Metofeaz tells him.

"Where?"

"Here."

Irritated by Metofeaz, Desine explodes, "For fuck's sake!"

The tourist smiles. She is now on her back, her head on the same pillow. Desine's voice can carry, and does so across the Atlantic. Now the tourist moves closer to the receiver as Metofeaz walks to the fridge, saying, "Go get yourself a beer," as he does.

Lunid is walking, looking at the phone and what it just said. He opens the stainless steel door and looks into the fridge.

Metofeaz says, "Get our guest a drink, too."

In time with the footsteps coming towards the guest room, the tourist sits up, gently places the receiver onto its cradle, smooths her front, and takes the beer from Lunid, who then leaves the room.

Back at his phone, Lunid says, "Okay."

Metofeaz responds, "Just about okay."

The tourist places the receiver back on its pillow again.

"Okay," Metofeaz continues, "do you want to do it?"

The mogul agrees to the conditions. Lunid boards a plane to the Americas. Desine perfects her energy solution for the shoot and the tourist sits on her own in the big house looking over the countryside.

The tourist presses the power button on the machine and the motherboard of the personal computer responds to her hand.

As her hand makes the touch, the button goes in, half way in, now all the way, being pressed and then depressed, and the machine goes, “Whirl, whirl, wind, wind, hiss, hum, then dumb numb and on ...”

CHAPTER 5

PART 1

Metofeaz stares at the puff from the exhaust pipe of the limousine in the winter atmos as the carriage speeds off. Inside are Lunid, Desine, and the mogul. He stores the fluff of fumes. As he glances up at the billboard his hands find the ends of the leather jacket's pockets. He recognizes the off-the-shelf perfume of a woman walking past him, thinking, *Paper airplanes that dart across Atlantic vastness folding for themselves*, and hears a rebounding ping. A gleam in his eye is just a flash-in before one blink.

He heads for the Village. Inside Bleecker Bob's Records he looks for the particular pop he requires. Later, at John's Pizzeria, he eats and drinks coffee. He sees a guy with long blonde hair and his short friend with black hair, who look famous. A thirty-something mom approaches them and they sign her napkin. Metofeaz smiles at the invasion of their privacy and grabs the vinyl, the cassette, the video tape, the DAT, and the compact disc. He walks back through the streets of New York City, the cold allows him to wrap himself tightly in his head within his body, which he listens to, as it feels that it, too, requires heat.

The older woman smiling at her side, the tourist does things on the keyboard. On the monitor's screen she sees her old name "Sharon Smith" on the left in a grey embossed box, on the right "Rozelle Zofen" inside an icon. The little hand made from a bunch of pixels points at "Rozelle" each time the wild cursor belonging to the sliding and uncontrollable mouse passes over "Rozelle Zofen," with all its little fingers becoming one hand.

The mouse goes, "Click."

The web page asks, "Submit?"

Another web page responds, "Accept."

Yet another web page, which sprung forth from previous interactive behavior, reports, "Done."

Metofeaz looks at the laptop, then at the widescreen TV showing the music video, with the diva smiling at him. He closes one eye to focus on the sleek lines of the most portable and transportable of computers. With it comes an iPod, finer and slimmer than

ever, the thinking pad fully loaded with William's Windows and other stuff. With this strapped and on his shoulder, Metofeaz leaves the store. The people in the streets are no longer in his way; they just fall to the side in his wake as he steps homeward. New York City is just one of his homes, another one he feels he now requires.

He taps carefully. Then, wild with fever, cabined but not confined, he dares his half just past his former self to hold him back as the letters, then words, sentences, and eventually a piece of reference fill the page as he begins to carve *the one*.

On one website is Alfario, hailed as the one who brought to life the essence of it all, a young and pretentious hack from around the way who frequents the places to be. Metofeaz remains calm for this part of his life only. Later he walks through the park, composing.

“a billboArd
 digitAlly pixelAted
 cyber - incapable
 impRoper un inperSon; blog blog blog, blog, blog,
 A chAt
 some Handle
 insane, the same; blog blog blog, blog, blog,
 proclaim - acclaims
 the bAss in vein
 hi-fi & sky-hi
 polLute
 sHoot!
 intRude
 Shoot! blog blog blog, blog, blog”

In a spare moment he thinks of the tourist and how she is doing on her own in the big house with the statues overlooking vineyards in the South of France. He thinks of the limitations of a chat room, the distance from one wall to the opposite, and decides to accept the long form by telephone, accentuating each verse and describing each case in syllables with graphic breath and the un-anticipating sighs that she might give if he pronounced nouns in place of verbs, and with finite pauses unprecedented in places

where commas annoy and periods blacken the screens of our eyes and bring down the pulse of our hearts.

He becomes conscious of his whereabouts and shows an angry snarl to keep his wife happy, in control, and ultimately at bay, and then melts back into the seat he occupies in the physical.

The mogul sits back, too. He stretches an arm with a cigar at the end of it. The ice bucket has fresh ice; the flute has bubbling gold champagne on top of the platinum ice. Lunid worries and Desine laughs. Metofeaz just, just. The bass is not in vain as Metofeaz just rocks slowly. The mogul now laughs at his lack of nerves. Lunid looks at him, mystified till he orders, “Ease up.”

The diva looks like she won’t stop till the director says, “Cut!” The mogul and Metofeaz go to a corner. Lunid and Desine sit where they were told. Metofeaz leans his head down so the mogul can say in his ear, “I want you to kiss her.”

“I can make Desine sexual for the camera,” Metofeaz tells him.

“We don’t have the time.”

“I don’t need time. Just let her choose a wardrobe.”

The horns, the horns, the horns, lights, activity beneath the heat. Snare and, “Every day of my life.” From a wide angle the wet stage reflects Desine’s legs. She kicks a high heel, her calf muscles must be the sign, as her heart pounds. Kick, kick, and kick, kick again. The diva trill, trill, triple trill, hi-hat triplet, and on the third and half a kick for the sake of the soul and then a rim shot. Desine smiles more sweetly than her fragrant creation. Metofeaz, slow now, steps in half-time. The mogul’s shades tone down the concern. It’s working.

Metofeaz absorbs the camera and the attention, knowing that he has no choice, with the diva on one shoulder and Wifey on the other. He says, “Cut. Time out,” with the hand brushing his throat. The music keeps playing. The dancers flop to the floor. Desine is really pissed, but the diva just shrugs her shoulders. Now really concerned, the mogul walks side to side – down on the left side as the right leg drags that side of his body forward, but straight and staunch – to where Metofeaz smiles in a way which makes people want to kill him and all of his shit.

“Fuck man,” the mogul tells him, “this better be top shelf.”

“Yeah, it is. Come here – over here.”

Lunid feels like the utensil the mogul did not know when to use. Metofeaz points at him. The mogul thinks with his head side to side, as he keeps it down.

“I’ll do the next one for the love of it,” Metofeaz tells him.

“Okay.”

The mogul, with Metofeaz by his side, return to their places, with Desine, the diva, and Lunid in the middle.

The mogul says, “From the kiss.”

PART 2

The tourist rips the corner of the newspaper and passes it, sliding it across the wooden table to a guy with his backpack on the seat next to him.

The fucking piece of newspaper makes a sound like, “Rough ...”

On her way back to the house the tourist stops at the store and buys tequila, cigarettes, *Playboy* magazine, and condoms. On the outside of the store she lights a cigarette for herself, runs around the corner, blows the smoke, coughs, and then comes back smiling, her eyes watering. The guy is gone.

When she reaches the driveway she turns into the older woman’s place.

Metofeaz uses the LCD screen of the machine to hide himself from the TV screen and Desine and Lunid, who replay the music video repeatedly. Each time his wife compliments him on his script for the scene, which now she uses against him with great effects – not special, just potent.

The principles discovered in Vienna more than a century ago turned themselves into life, then inside out in a folder he would have named Sigmund. His innards and feelings are dissected upon a stage, from pleasure, then to pain and back again, and then in the order written. Metofeaz makes them his own, lighthearted in his formation of these thoughts one hundred years on.

Rozelle hurries up the stairs. Tonight the thinking creature has promised that he would stand for her. She returns with the tequila and the cigarettes and the *Playboy* magazine under her arm. She drags the table to where the creature is stuck and opens the magazine to the centerfold. She tops two small glasses and pushes the smokes to the side.

The thinking creature says, “I can’t consume, let alone absorb, this, as my encasing cannot be increased by a finite circumference of my cranial, which does not allow me to expand.”

“Who thinks what you speak then?” Rozelle asks.

“You do.”

“How?”

“I’m alive because you make me like this.”

She falls asleep, resting her tired head on his knee. When she awakes the sun is shining, but it’s cold on the balcony floor. The spider crawling across her view of today comes uncomfortably close, but she remains calm. She does this by quietly talking to herself, saying, “It’s just an insy winsy spider,” till the octopus on land has gone over the edge. She pulls the blanket she had forgotten about over her and continues to sleep. Raindrops on her face awaken her again as an afternoon storm arrives suddenly about three o’clock. She throws the blanket away and lies there till the four o’clock sunset somewhere, elsewhere, makes her get up to start her day.

Venture down to the restaurant again, she thinks, but, Stay in and watch TV, she believes, and, Wait until the creature comes to, she feels.

The sky is as black as it was black and blue. The moon is full of thought, flooding the countryside with a silver hue. The sound system tells her of what he was, as Britney Spears in a little hostess uniform before the airplane crash sings “Toxic.”

Rozelle still insists that she dance. The ballroom is spacious and her tight moves are fucking horny. She makes the most of the slippery floor, her legs and their calves fucking sexy in their silver-strapped, high fucking real-high heels.

Britney Spears before she lost it sings, “I’m addicted to you ...”

Rozelle switches her head that-a-way, then this way. The evil violins squeal, compliments of the Swedish producer, “Eeel, eel.”

Rozelle fucking wants to go through with her plan. The little skirt she has on cannot conceal her lack of underwear, as she mutters, “She’ll say hi, then he’ll say hi.”

She softens her fingers, wrapping something. The dark air is brown and green as midnight winds in just before the moon moves behind an ominous, fluffy, black pipping of cloud.

PART 2

Metofeaz becomes conscious of it all, the glaring and the blatant nature of the new world he has already managed, gradually, so he steps in the footsteps there on the pavements and in parts of the park, but still it's hard. He needs a reprieve if he is to sustain his enthusiasm for the trip. Desine being totally consumed by her job, Lunid offers the house in return for the rights to whatever was happening in their sordid lives. Metofeaz signs while looking him in the eye.

Metofeaz catches a train, then a bus, then hitches a ride to be in the wild, his machine on his shoulder and a small backpack on his back. The wildlife and the wilderness squawk, hoop, and la to welcome him down the ridge he trudges atop of loose rocks, shingle, and gravel. He can see the cabin, and the logs stacked beneath the balcony make him smile. The phone rings. He lets it go till a beep annoys him that someone has left a message. The screen says no number. This relieves him as he opens the door, sees the fireplace, and remembers a fire.

Soon coffee smells the place fresh. He unpacks the tequila, which is not proportionate to the other contents, a t-shirt, a toothbrush, and cigarettes. He wraps a sheet around himself and then decides it's too cold, so he hops into bed with the machine and a cup brewed steaming good.

He awakes the next day and feels famished, so he walks back to civilization and finds a diner at the side of the road, where he eats and reads the paper till the little bastard of a thing rings and vibrates again. This time he answers with a "Yep."

"Where the fuck are you?" says Desine's voice. "Some little bitch called up looking for you!"

The words make him smile, frown, feel good, then go quiet, wondering if the call could have come from overseas. He clears her out of his head and reminds himself why he had wanted to get away. He decides to check the message he received the day before. It's from the tourist: "Hello, Feeazz? You there?"

A bus passes by. A blonde woman on the way to somewhere she dreads looks sadly out of a window. A silver four-wheel-drive is behind the bus. He imagines he sees a cameraman and Lazoo himself inside it. He thinks about noting the license plate of the Range Rover, decides it's just his imagination, and stores the shape of the vehicle instead.

The tourist asks, “Metofeaz are you okay? They said they couldn’t find you. I’ll go now, okay?”

He sits by the river. The logs are piled high, lit, bright, and brilliant, rising to the sky as one large flame. When its form has distinguished itself the sparks blow and then dart as the wind performs above the bon of a fire. As bits crackle and explode at the heart of this combustion, he thinks of someone who would value the experience, someone who would feel comfortable beside him, or, if they did not know each other, she would still sidle up to feel comfort. A body and the heat of a fire are all one needs on some nights. He sits and drinks and sits some more, and when the fire is a fire that campers would breathe, then he stands and drinks. Above it the light lights him periodically, spasmodically, and totally when the wind wishes.

The day is bright and the breeze still fresh. His body is warm from energy prescribed and administered by rest, sleep, and relaxation. The story of John Lazoo is riveting and the nous of an illiterate, exhilarating in a way he had not mentioned and talked of when Desine and Lunid had mentioned seeing the Hitman and Genesis Jones in a café and then a club with the notorious Gene Reyer.

Their body language has bothered him for a long while now, but when a union is a junction united at convenience, a man has to ask consciously when to ask the question, “What’s up with that shit?” or make known that this is his territory.

PART 3

Metofeaz and Desine’s conversation in their favorite restaurant was run-of-the-mill till he asks his question, “You and Lunid?”

Desine smiles as the fork slips from the corner of her lined lips, “I thought you’d never ask.”

Cameras at Hariss Clariss’s eatery are now an ornament on the pavement. A pretty lady walks in and up to a table. He notices someone with his back to him, then he looks into his wife’s eyes. “Yeah. What about you two?” He pins the meat on his plate and then brings some salad up onto the fork.

They leave the restaurant, and when they arrive at their apartment Lunid opens the door. They sit and chat, and then they just sit. Desine, feeling restless, goes and returns with some refreshments.

Rozelle places the meals down on the table. As she does this the chef and his offsider call her. The way they look at her makes her want to throw the spaghetti and its hot sauce in their beady eyes, but she smiles instead. She wipes the table, takes the tip, and puts it in her bra. The word “brassiere” makes her smile and think of when she would use her big old telephone again. The thought makes her hurry her work. The group of young guys covering her every move in Spanish makes her tired.

The bed is warm from the three bodies that lie inside. The phone ringing is a disturbance. Lunid answers the thing and passes it to Metofeaz on the other side of Desine. It’s Rozelle.

“Why you and him in the same bed?” she wants to know.

“Nothing,” Metofeaz tells her. “My wife’s in here, too.”

“Can I call you later?”

“About the computer?”

“No!”

Metofeaz hops out of bed, his clothes creased. He stands and looks down at Lunid till he gets the message. Lunid then hops out, his clothes also creased. Lunid leaves the room and Desine opens her eyes.

Rozelle Zofen sticks with her name and continues to waitress at the restaurant. She takes tourists on guided tours of the region and her house, and one day a decent enough young man walks into the restaurant. They walk home past the store and past the older woman’s place. The light still flickers and always does whenever Rozelle sneaks down at midnight and sits with the thinking creature.

CHAPTER 6

Forty-one years of age, and Metofeaz is feeling good. With the medication, a fitness plan, rest, and a semi-healthy diet he is able to enjoy most of life in the same way as marketed to all the other tenants in his building and the people who amble alongside him on the streets.

Rozelle explains to the groups the framed words on the wall of the house which her grandmother had built. “Smile. The sun relies on you / Cry. The rain waits for you / Drown. Your moon is full of thought / Laugh. As your stars begin to fall / Thank you. I close my eyes. Asleep.”

Each time she reads the words, at twenty-eight, her voice croaks for real, the same way it did when she was eighteen. The ladies on the tour pull handkerchiefs from their handbags, the younger ones smile, and the ones with male partners feel their arms around them. It’s enough to make a tour of her place a must-see when in these parts.

The big old telephone is now a pay phone for the visitors. Each of the statues has its little story, but still her grandmother’s dying wish remains just that.

“This one,” Rozelle tells them, “the ‘Thinking Creature’, he still has no name. Grandmama wished he be named appropriately, but alas, to this day he is nameless, ladies and gentlemen.”

She is proud of how that came out today. Then she waits for the group to move on.

A young boy, brown in complexion, says, “He looks like, uh – like?”

Rozelle smiles at him and takes his hand. “Like you. What’s your name?”

“John .”

“I thought so.” She smiles again as they walk to keep up with the group entering the grand and well-lit ballroom.

Metofeaz, writing under the assumed identity of John Reyer Afamasaga, eventually becomes a published author. Emotional Techno Fiction signed him for his fictional biographical tale of John Lazoo.

Divorced at thirty-five, Metofeaz has dodged intimacy for five years now. Remnants from that life include some scars on his skin and some encased in a thick skull, along with a couple of mementos. One of those mementos is the video clip, which he and the now-cool mogul laugh at. The next clip is from the West Side. They nod at the

Doberman face of a rap legend and the young-boy looks of the next big thing. Metofeaz comments on the young guy's ability and the mogul pulls down his shades and smiles.

From the sidelines, Metofeaz enjoys himself again. Justin, Snoop, Pharrell, and the booty. The rhythm track rolls. The mogul says, "Why the fuck you still love this shit? Published, acclaimed, and all?"

Metofeaz remembers the days when the rooms were small with thin walls and the TV screens were smaller than today's. The players on set, the ones who sweetened his coffee, now perform for him. On the way up he'd thought and drilled his psyche and then tested his skill against the best, and in his head he had thrashed them all as he fucked with the best and now he dances with the freaks.

The rhythm rolls on: kick kick, hand-fucking-clap. Bang! And if Lazoo knows what he's doing he'd balk and renege, but Metofeaz just rocks, shoulder-to-shoulder with the lovely assistant, liking the smile she has. The tall rapper picks up his daughter as the director calls everyone into first positions. Then he places her back down with a real smile. Metofeaz feels good.

The trip starts in Los Angeles, then goes to Beijing, back to LA, then to Kansas City, Moscow, and London, and then back to LA. It drains him, the publisher being more demanding than ever. The relationship is now strained, as the creative endeavor and outlet for Metofeaz has become a science project. He wants something of his own as he realizes he's signed a deal which prohibits him from writing his own name. He schemes deep down and finds a way they had overlooked in their contract.

When Metofeaz first sees Arley Evon, he believes that she has stepped down from that billboard. Summoned to a board meeting at Charley Stevonsen HQ, the suits sit up straight when he walks in. Her head is buried in the magazine she's on the cover of, then Arley looks up. Metofeaz Litigatti is here.

The brief is simple: write twelve 15-minute episodes about the new supermodel who will launch Charley Stevonsen's new line. The ad agencies scurry about with their fuss as the elevator opens for Metofeaz and Arley. The buyer is arrogant, so Metofeaz gets up and puts a line through his schedule, circles the Superbowl, tells the idiot where to go, and signals to Arley, "Let's go."

Dinners with Arley have become longer and more real. Metofeaz looks forward to them, and instead of beating her to slurring and abusing the waiting staff, he orders appropriately and has begun to enjoy her stories of her life in the Pacific. Up close she is not his type, but she is nice. Metofeaz likes looking at her now, as he comes to accept that her smile is real.

“So, where you from?” Arley asks him.

“Nowhere really, just a corny photograph trying to find some credibility, leverage Lazoo, and make some money, I guess.”

Arley laughs as she remembers his publicity shot. “You got color in you, ah?”

“Maybe.”

“You don’t wish to know?”

“I don’t need to know. I got a job.”

“You call what you do a job?”

Metofeaz walks her home. Somewhere along the way he loops his arm and she finds a hoop. He likes the warmth of her body and she smiles, feeling easy about the events. They reach her apartment and his natural reaction is to shake her hand. He turns and walks away. She stands watching him do this.

He walks past the intercom and into the elevator, rides up the building, and goes into his room. He has to walk to the black-and-white TV to turn it on. The four thin legs that hold the dumb thing up sway for a second. It has no antenna, so its screen has no picture. The fuzz on the screen lights up his room and the New York City backdrop and its hanging gardens of lights. He plays music and thinks for himself those feelings. He wonders how they have survived and still thrive after all this time.

Rozelle packs the guy’s backpack and his toiletries and take them to the balcony. She puts a covering over them in case it rains while she goes to confirm for her mind through her eyes by seeing what is going on. She pedals fast, hoping the fear inside her will be drained by the frantic physical exertion her legs implode each time a revolution comes about at the top of her cycle. She thanks someone for the sweat across her brow, as this is a sign of anger. This perspiration too will help calm her once she dismounts to discover.

She is as she believes and thinks of herself. A young tourist is around the back of the restaurant where they met. His arm is around her waist, pulling her as close to him as possible. She focuses on his trousers, which are around his ankles, as she turns away, biting her bottom lip. Rozelle finds the handlebars of her bike before her legs can give way. On top of her bike, with it screaming through a dead, still, and silent night, she sees the headlights of a freight truck coming up the hill. She thinks about its grill as she passes it at kilometers measured in pounding beats of her poor heart.

When she awakes his bags are gone. She books her flights and packs her bags.

The platform she waits on is empty. The tracks run into a tunnel. Above it and through it she can see the rising sun. Tonight she will sleep in a hotel somewhere in New York City. A dog wagging his tail wanders towards her. Its paws pat the ground till it stops and sits in front of her. The train pulls in from behind her and she boards it. As its engines gather steam and haul the carriages out of this place, Rozelle sees the cat.

The countryside falls away and houses become more prominent. More sounds become audible as she finds herself in another seat, first class, with hip space and leg room. She sits back to relax.

Rozelle has bought a package which includes a limo, a room at the Hilton, and tickets to a baseball game. The logo on the package says *LMLA-ink*. Rozelle looks for the website but can't find it, so she trusts the guy with orange hair as she puts the slick-looking stuff neatly away in her bag.

The limo slides in to where her toe taps. Inside it, she reads a magazine and eats fruit. She avoids a magazine article. She wants to avoid another article on the next page, but she breathes deeply and relaxes as the limo hits the highway. She sits tight as the thuds from the tires crossing lanes become heavy, hitting her through the seat. She finishes her piece of fruit and reaches for a wipe from the compartment as the chauffeur lowers the partition to announce that they have arrived.

Rozelle walks over to the window and looks down on a park.

Metofeaz finds the ends of the pockets. Arley is signing autographs and he is feeling like a bodyguard. Someone has an orange camera. He can see further on, so he tugs at Arley's arm and walks her to where she remains exclusive. The camera man

acknowledges his thoughtfulness by bringing his head from around the camera. Metofeaz just nods as he catches a glimpse of the limo, so he tugs at Arley's arm again.

Arley comes back up from the pitch, which is just a blur, as he waits. His stomach is in knots as the screen shows yet another blonde woman. Arley grabs his arm and uses his shoulder as a place to put her head as she smiles for the orange camera. One-two-three-fuck, it's up there on the screen. Metofeaz clenches his jaw, a look the director cuts as he pushes the button to bring up the shot.

Rozelle pushes a piece of orange into her lips. The family next to her jump to their feet, as they are in there, too. Arley sees a beautiful-looking woman on the screen and her smile straightens. Metofeaz swallows the lump in his throat, then swallows it again as he sees her. His eyes just behave how they cannot be controlled. He swallows one more time. Arley grabs his arm; this time it is hard.

The intercom flashes. Metofeaz, wrapped only in bed linen, ignores it. The messages range from the insane to the sublime. He often wonders if they possess staying power or if they could be prolific. Could one of them be the hustler that he once was? One day, he tells himself, he'll give one of them a break and sign them to etfiction.

The compact disc on repeat does it for him again. Entering the room, Diana Krall still sings like she loves him, "I remember you / a few kisses ago ..."

He stands close to the glass, fogging the view. A voice over the intercom says, "Illicit blade of grass ..." His brain stretches and opens the gate the years have built to protect. "... To be the ground beneath, the one to be."

The accent is still strong; the voice is younger than he remembers. The words are wonderful from lips whose softness he still recalls, remembering how delightful it was to be full in them and kissing them back. He lets it settle, the piano solo piecing it together for him.

He doesn't mean to keep her waiting, but he has to get dressed. She doesn't feel like taking the tour of Mr Pink's club and the compound, and has found his address.

He peeks through the door and then shuts it. She laughs, and when she stops her laughing he opens it again. This time there is no one there, so he shuts it again until he can't stand it any longer and flings it open wide to see her standing there in front of him.

She walks in front of him, as he just looks at her after all these years. When she reaches the living room he takes the coat that she holds out in her arm. She wants a drink, so that is what he does as she sits waiting, smoothing the front of her red top.

He holds her really closely, his arm around her all night long. In the morning she is still there, so he tiptoes to the kitchen and begins breakfast.

The toast pops up, and the cages that cradle them rattle as they bounce down on them. He is neither startled nor frightened when he feels silk and her perfect breasts on his bare back.

He studies his eyes in the mirror. *Clear enough*, he thinks. He worries about the pill bottle inside the cabinet and decides against the one he should take, as he does this time every other day. He rinses with cold water and returns to where she really does sit waiting for him to say something.

He says, "So, you here for good?"

"Actually, I'm here for bad."

"Okay then, Rozelle Zofen ..."

"Yes, that's my name."

"Cool."

"Cool."

She hands him the telephone. It's Arley. She closes the bathroom door behind her as he quickly gets rid of his work. Then he breathes to pretend that the call didn't happen as he plans their day together in New York City in his head. He stands over the spot and she sits down on it.

"So," Rozelle says, "this is where he first met her?"

Metofeaz feels cold as he lights a cigarette, he can see where he would stand and look down on the patch where she sat looking up at him. "Yeah," he says. "Somewhere abouts here – right where you are now."

She rocks gently left and right. "I bet you she didn't get a wet butt, like mine?"

Metofeaz laughs and can resist. She says, "Give us a look." As she gets up to do something he gets down and pins her so he can really look at her eyes. She smiles.

He kisses her and then remembers. "Let's go to your place, huh?"

She looks puzzled. "It'll take us years to walk there, Feeaz."

He pulls her up. She stands up smiling. He is in her smile. Then he feels the need to shiver as she dries herself between her legs with her hand. She does this to the front of her and then in behind herself. She opens her legs like a cowboy for a while. He looks around the park. Beneath the tree over there, his hand points all by itself, he only just manages to catch a fading figure. His mouth remains shut as he repeats himself, *Yeah, let's go to your place.*

The cabin crew smile as they serve the drinks, and the decent-size meal makes Metofeaz feel more important than any awards. She puts her head down below the head rest and makes a face, mousy and cute. He kisses her nose and realizes what happiness is.

Arley, surprised by the news that Metofeaz has gone to Europe, smiles as she waits for the next clean cab. Up at the agency they had tried to cheer her up, and when she'd opened a magazine with an article on him she'd sighed. The agent had introduced the photographer and Arley'd put the mag in her bag.

Rozelle sighs as she opens the doors to her house. Her plans for a vacation in New York with that man half came true. She got her man but not the vacation. His arms holding her close around her waist had made up for it all.

News that Metofeaz is there spreads. The older woman next door waves from her deck. The chef at the restaurant arrives with his favorite dish, and the boys from the computer shop drop by with a gift for later, all rolled up and smelling like skunk.

Rozelle adds salad, and within seconds she's glad to be home, more so than being amongst traffic, neon on neons, and taxicabs.

The older lady doesn't want to leave, but Rozelle makes easy work of making it known that tonight she's the story-teller. As the woman gets up to leave, Metofeaz drops it in there, as they do, "What if I were to tell you I met the granddaughter of John, the poet soldier?"

Rozelle laughs, "With a story like that, you can stay next door," as her hand guides her neighbor to the door.

Arley feels uncomfortable, but still obliged to show her face at the party. She cringes at the thought of her face in places such as this as she steps out from the limo.

The news anchor presents the story. It begins with his mug shot. Metofeaz sits up straight. Rozelle notices the change in him. “Jimmy Afra was today released from prison after serving a five-year sentence for his involvement in the tongue murders at Sil House ...”

Metofeaz, in a sheet, is planted at the seat of his old machine. Pumping heavy weights the way he does, he treats his illnesses without medicine as he steps over the line, beyond the point of no return. Rozelle is happy and busy organizing the party for Metofeaz’s birthday. She comes into his space.

“Babe, I’ve got to go to work,” Metofeaz’s words cut before he says what she had feared. She packs his bag and puts his toiletries into a plastic bag while he showers.

The airport is busy, but the cameras still find him, a problem he can’t fix.

The limo’s chauffeur says something. Metofeaz pushes the button to separate them. He sees the wall of the compound, lowers the partition, and tells the chauffeur to take him some place else, adding, “I want a burger and french fries.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

The dinner comes into the frame, as does Rozelle, but he puts her to the back as he tells himself he does not know her name. *There’s a lean in that black four-wheel-drive*, he tells himself as he remembers that he’s left his cigarettes in the back of the limo. He steps down onto the street to where the limo is reversing.

He shouts, “Fuck!” as the chauffeur rolls right over his toe, and “Fuck!” again as he stops right on top of it. He hits an almighty thump on the roof of the black thing and it rolls off his ruined shoe. His toe must be broken.

Inside it is warm. The waitress is a tart of a girl compared to Rozelle. The burger makes him smile. A song goes, “My heart is crying, crying! Lonely tear drops.” The girl is dancing on the spot – one foot, uh uh, pause, hop, hop on the other foot and the same again. The song goes, “Come home, come on home, just say you will.” She tosses the

towel over one shoulder, uh uh, pause, hop, hop, then over the other shoulder. “Say you will.” she dances the same dance, and the bass goes boom-boom-boom-boom, boom.

Lazoo pushes his cup forward. The waitress continues to dance to where a half-full Pyrex balloon waits. Still dancing, the coffee waves threaten to escape the white top. She steps on a dirty white square, and then a black one just as dirty. The waitress's blonde pigtails go with the coffee waves. “Just say you will, say you will!” The waitress, fit and bouncy, smiles as the coffee pours and the bass goes boom-boom-boom-boom-boom, boom. Her left hand leads her body that-a-way; her right hand waves down around mid-thigh, about where her apron carries on below the hem of her white uniform. With her cheek on her shoulder, she sings along, “Come home, come on home, just say you will.”

Lazoo, the collar of his leather jacket up, clicks his fingers to the east. “My heart is crying, crying.” Snare drum – the left toe slides left, the body follows, along behind the right boot slides and slides till together they come, two country heels. Under his hand she does a twirl, three-sixty, seven-twenty, dip. He catches her. The bass goes boom-boom-boom-boom-boom, boom. “Come home, come on home, just say you will.”

Stevensen's right foot goes boom-boom-boom-boom-boom, boom, then tap, tap, tap, tap, and tap. The smiling faces are at the window; the door to the café is locked. “Just give me a chance.” Back-to-back they dip-slide, dip-slide, together, dip-slide, dip-slide, dip-slide, “Lonely tear drops / Say you will, come on, come on.” The music fades.

Lazoo clicks his fingers twice and the bill is there at the table, “I Love U” written on it. He recognizes the symbol U. The girl remains dancing on the spot – one foot, uh-uh, pause, hop, hop on the other foot and the same again, “Come home, come on home, just say you will.” The towel goes over one shoulder, uh-uh, pause, hop, hop, then over the other shoulder. “Say you will.” She dances the same dance and the bass goes boom-boom-boom-boom-boom ...

Rozelle welcomes their guests to his birthday party by herself. She gives variations of the same excuse with poise, “He got called to work.” “You know how writers are when their publisher demands their presence.” “He tried but he couldn’t get out of it.” Rozelle works hard, the older woman and her friends helping. For a moment the summer sun is enough for her to forget and she lies down where she’d been standing

listening to a folk singer strum and sing. Her belly to the ground, the sun on her back, she remembers and then feels the nature of his words to herself.

She thinks about opening her doors again, but decides not to for a little while longer. She reads and walks the same passages, leading her up the same paths.

CHAPTER 7

Part 1

He lets Arley in as the telephone starts ringing.

It's Rozelle with her new flyer. She reads it to him over the phone. He likes it, but picks on a couple of phrases and reminds her that, "You know the rules better than I do, Rozelle, and it's only your second language, babe."

Rozelle wants to say more, but decides to keep it light and only comes back with, "Sort of." The thought of Arley Evon in her man's apartment takes a few moments to settle, something Metofeaz understands and therefore does not offer an explanation that would wind a story up – just the facts. "Arley's here." Even without his pill, there are a couple of things he can manage on his own.

Metofeaz decides to order coffee. As he opens the door to bring two streams of caffeine steaming from two white cups in a brown-and-grey recycled-paper holder in, his nonexistent guilt subsides into a family of calm thoughts, all thinking and feeling for the good of the body and mind that it lives in. He tips the delivery girl. She smiles as she waits for the opportunity. "May I have your autograph, Arley?" Arley winks at him. He laughs loud at the scene.

Jimmy takes down the last camera, the one that once upon a time caught him and his white fro bouncing at that table down there, under the arc of Sil House Café. Yeah, that one. Michael Haze shuts the door to the room. Its carpet is rolled up, and in the center its width still touches the walls on both sides, although its length is now coiled. The next room is the same. Its carpet is coiled as the painter's paint smears signs, smelling over the other smells. Michael closes another room and opens the next. It's empty, with only a mirror on the wall. He studies its reflection and walks around as if circling an opponent till he sees himself in the rebound picture. Haze throws a flurry at himself and takes a picture from his pocket. The pause is long, longer than the small smile he shares with himself, as he hears Jimmy jump down from the ladder.

Metofeaz looks beneath his hand into the café. The young woman behind him is impatient, and rightly so. This is the third time in an hour she has returned to find him peering into the empty space.

Some other tourist calls out, "Hey, you done yet?"

Rozelle lies sprawled on the sofa. The afternoon sun comes to her. The TV is in play mode, adjusting her senses as she wakes. The voice on her man's intercom is now on TV. The camera is crazy. It jolts to the ground as its operator starts to run. It's hoisted back onto a shoulder, but still its images are speeds of blur. The microphone transmits heavy breathing and the frantic words, "Arley, are you and Metofeaz Litigatti an item?"

Rozelle laughs for now as she sits up, feeling for the remote, to control calmly the out-of-hand experience. She blindly finds the plastic symbol, the red button, a grey one, and back to the big one, pushes off, and there is some silence. She grabs a heavy and glossy magazine as she walks to the balcony. The creature is stiff in the sun. She makes a mental note, *Time with the thinking creature tonight*. She grabs an Evian bottle and screws the cap. Twisted are her insides and knotted are her guts. She drinks and then sits. She opens to a feature and Arley's story is in her face.

Part 2

Metofeaz drinks the water, nervous that the lighting is too timid. The talk show host has agreed to a show in a different location. Arley is herself, the production staff is a nuisance, and the camera operators are cool as per usual. Metofeaz holds back for now and is content that the director has allowed the digicam kid with orange hair to roam the set as he has requested. The camera is hidden in Arley's earrings, and her ring would in the end be the container of the goods, he believes. He shuts his mouth and nods to her, as he does.

The talk show host says, "You and Metofeaz share a lot. Aside from being very famous and extremely gifted, you both exploded onto the scene, unannounced ..."

The host's mouth remains open as Metofeaz exits the set. His phone rings, but he is already on his way down the stairs, running his hand along the concrete block walls. He pushes the iron door open as he breathes in machinery and their steam, trying not to inhale, as he prefers his own pollution. He drags a cigarette to its end. He's coy about its use to him as he talks into the phone to the one who makes him smile, "Yeah it's okay."

"One day," Rozelle tells him, "we're going to have to say so."

"It will be soon – when things will be normal ..."

"How about if this is normal?"

“Well, then I’ll go ab-fucking-normal.”

He closes the top of the phone and thinks about what he has said. He wishes that he would listen to himself. He sets a couple of scenes for another project in his head, including the lines of the camera and the human angles, which a collection of life experiences would expand. He has amassed and crammed the lighting and dialogue from the dirty alleyways. Passersby on the street see a weirdo standing in an alleyway, or a pervert ready to be perverted, or a wacko ready to get whacked, as a homeless man peed up against the wall. Who knows? Who cares? Metofeaz just makes another million in his head.

He can’t retract his name from on the air. People talk of maximizing and making the most of a situation, but what Metofeaz has done was beyond comprehension. The henchmen he feared were near. Michael and Jimmy have refurbished Sil House, which was a great idea. Tourists and fans of the book will be the clientele till the walls come crumbling down, and when New York is a desert documentary crews and their narrators will still film its ruins. But what will he be thinking of what is happening? Metofeaz stretches his neck as he prays, and promises if he reaches the end of this one the next will be set in a rubbish dump on the outskirts of Dublin, with the lead character listening to Irish music and eating porridge for dinner.

Michael nods and Metofeaz sits down. From time to time Jimmy still sticks a pen where it used to prod the fluff. The patrons smile at each other, as they know. Michael nods and then Simon presses play. An older couple holds hands as Jimmy brings them coffee. The young tourists, their pig tails swaying, take Metofeaz away. Jimmy wipes his hands and places the towel on the bar. Simon grabs it. “I’m just standing in a doorway,” Michael tells the tale of men.

Rozelle sees the jaw line and the eyes. The skin around the eyes creases when delighted and deepens when relied upon to tell directly a feeling of discomfort; it even contorts to accommodate apprehension and dissatisfaction. Rozelle looks at his picture above her bed. She now slides herself out of there as the full morn mourns all that has happened and softly brings the orange marble, that relaxes to be seated as she makes her way down the staircase.

The creature speaks in dialect of all the evenings and every day beneath a canopy he reaches for inside his head. One particular summer their minds alluded to the same spot on his memory, now gathered together as he replays one particular afternoon.

He bows his head in thought, his brow protruding and his hairline receding. Then he acknowledges that he is a creation of her fiction, and Rozelle warms to him again by rubbing the back of his neck as she did when he was new and a novelty. The thinking is enlightened, and the considerations are of her only, as he eases into the essentials of this saga, its climax for the mind, the bud of the tragedy, and the heart of her searching.

I wished the sun to come that morning, as your grandmother made known that I would only stand still and sit to think her thoughts so that during her day when she went her way should could speak her mind, Rozelle. I watched her walk the stairs the sculptor built from a plan on paper, not like the way he molded me with her hands. And when she vanished into that house, I then wished I were the floor she walked to a bed in which she slept. I sensed a vehicle come this way from far away that day. It was a bus that carried messages and stories from other places and different news from here and there, everywhere and all things mattering even if they were only mutterings in the passenger's head. The sun said hello to that horizon that I only know as a landscape. It rose above all else, at which point I again stood to rest. But still as you will see my heart open to be awake, and my eyes alive to conceive, and my mind in place to create what I pass to you, for her it was her aim that you name me, as you will.

Talent from abroad and from across this county gathered down there, on the rising ground, green with grass hand-sewn in moist dirt and on honest dust. The seeds sown and blessed had taken a season, through which they had fought. Some drowned, some perished, and eventually one of them succeeded. The one that made it saw up into this light and stayed a summer in this play.

Of all the times I had seen Rozelle, never had I dreamed her in this way. Her egg wild and her smile bright, she basked in her creation – the singer, the woman, the healer.

The audience became performers, the performers became thoughtful critics, and the day became intoxicated from the rhythms its players reverberated.

Around about when the sun was straight in its runnings, a lone figure appeared at the gate.

His boots were as dusty as his demeanor, Rozelle. His smile was mean when not watched, and his brain was a teaser when not thought of. But he was meek and mild, and portrayed little confidence but much ambition.

He watched and ate. Then he readied, but only to take a wine, then a bottle, and when he thought he could, he didn't. The others sang praises to themselves, and when she wanted she blamed them all in a song.

I witnessed it then, Rozelle, as the sun was in motion to farewell, but enough still so he could remember. She lay on one blade and he delivered ...

Sun seeker

Fine features

Promiscuous dirt

Illustrious dust

How is it you know?

Where to grow

So you can be

The ground beneath

The one to be

That I adore

Seedling inkling

Blinking thinking

Pushed be there

Germinating making

Omens them crumbling

Pushed up there

Fall free from hand

Then evenings and mornings

Has reached up there

Illicit blade of grass

Promiscuous dirt

Illustrious dust

How is it you know?

CHAPTER 8

PART 1

Metofeaz is looking for the exit when he hears the footsteps of country dirt, dust, and willful fear descending upon the backs of his persona. Their hairs unfold, the follicles find reason to be mentioned as his presence pronounces their attention.

Metofeaz keeps at it, but the steps come louder, so he makes his chest prouder. The voice is enhanced in the head space where it echoes. His characters push open the lids of their coffins and push up the dirt that covers their doorways, not withstanding time's rules and skin's aging. Their voices race, and then they raise doubts about the here-and-now; are they there and then? Or, are they everywhere? He reaches for the handle of the door. The sunlight is a slit, then a triangle on the concrete floor. Then the arc of the swinging door closes on itself as the sound of traffic, one siren, and people speaking language brings him to where he can say "Phew" and mean it. He wipes sweat and swears that the next time he opens a door he will come down to this hell and live with Satan, and not be a god no more.

Rozelle opens her eyes. The day is almost gone and done. People party down at the restaurant as she studies a book from its library. She puts an old bottle of wine on her bill, and the candle burns on her table. Someone at the other end of the room requires her attention and is forced to walk the length of the Mediterranean eatery to gain a moment of her respect. He is seated now and he is talking, still within his rights and still not annoying her.

Metofeaz walks past the young guy, thinking about his next line into the plastic grid that covers the microphone. He stops and surveys things with his diligence. "How long you been here?" he asks a young guy with electric energy and space in his eyes.

"Since tempted, and when I was plundered into darkness!" the kid shoots back. Metofeaz stretches his neck and winds more words out of him. The kid says, "I smashed blackness with snow-white will, then I gave grief wisdom it forgot when it hurt man!" Metofeaz nods and the boy becomes an old man who says, "Years for fears – waste of energy a new creature larger than Lucifer!"

Metofeaz closes his eyes tightly and opens them again. Arley is behind him. Arley likes the young man with no shirt. Metofeaz hands him a coffee as he disagrees with him over whether they've met before, saying, "I doubt that."

The young guy is now back to normal and on caffeine. "I was once a captive at a place," he tells Metofeaz. "You came to visit the master of the mansion. You referred to yourself as the Chairman."

Metofeaz laughs at the kid. Arley seems ready to jump to his aid, but Metofeaz speaks first. "So account for me what happens." The kid stands and stares. He shudders at the sight of the scar he does not yet have as Metofeaz turns to him and asks, "What's your fucking name? And enough already with Moron, Idiot, Clown, Extra, and fucking lines, y'know?"

The young body and bright brain responds, "Jon Le Mac."

"Now," Metofeaz goes on, "you won't crack if you don't listen. I've told you that already. It's just a story. Tell me – which one are you? A moron, an idiot, a clown, or a just a fucking throwaway extra, ah? Or are you a very special one? All of the above, mice on his own, ah? Do tell?"

Metofeaz sits. Arley sits back. The boy is in the middle of the space. He becomes Prince's *Musicology*. The guitar riff is right; the end is in sight. The kid knows that this, his audition, will soon close the gap.

Alfario says, "The phone rang, *ring-ring*, like back in its day. The antique thing shakes the receiver from side to side. Cleopatra, in her garter, says, 'Wow for Julius Caesar. He got close, but I had her; one night when everyone slept, she came to me.' Anyways, she tends to the telecommunication device. She picks up as Clariss heats up. She holds the telephone to her left breast and drops the big one when she says, 'He says he holds the chair.' One-two-three, I hear you approach. The ants have let the secret blow. Oh, I mean *he* is near."

Metofeaz gives the guy money and advice, "Five to ten years, your bullshit will be unrecognizable, untraceable, and of the utmost importance – *ready to recite*." The young guy is ready to cry. Metofeaz opens the elevator and tells him, "If I catch you down there again, I'll take you out, without a pause or period, okay?"

The boy immediately walks.

Arley looks down at the floor and then up at him. She comes to smile one minute later when her commiserations for that guy have completed in earnest. He looks at Arley and realizes what she is, but he smiles as he remembers Desine, Lunid, and the mogul.

PART ROXANNE ROXANNE

The kitchen staff smoke in the night, the waitress empties the plates into the trash can. From the red dungeon comes, “Roxanne, Roxanne.” Metofeaz hands in the jacket, his heart red, too, like this place. The exclusive star stings the lines like a tattoo. A grey head being in the way, Desine gives him her hand bearing the ring on one of those fingers he has furnished with money from his words.

A blonde comes down the stairs, moving her hips to the *bass, bass-bass*. The guy who this gig belongs to takes one of his lines from his lawyer’s hand. Metofeaz feels it as Desine smiles at the way Lunid winks at the blonde. The mogul notices his friend. The ballplayers, pushing up, reach the ceiling, then look around to see who is so important. Metofeaz checks that the attention dies before his wife looks in that corner, too.

The day’s hottest producer collaborates with the players as he combines and then entwines Jamaica, London, and the Bronx. The ex-Police star adds the oldest industry to wet this floor. The blonde now sits and stands in a single motion to show her desperation. Desine’s hand becomes apparent after it pleases the back of the the Hitman, “Shake what your mama gave you as a motto ...”

The blonde is now in a mood. The floor wipes clear, and she struts to its corners. The accused is in the middle, his arms open, chest defined. The crowd moves sideways, but easily, in a sad and ghetto way. Now the rings shine as the mogul, lollypop down, tweaks the bass to rumble, humble in the bins of his soul. The blonde shakes it. Yeah, she shakes that fucking thing this way then that-a-fucking-way. The mogul says, “I like this part” like a teacher to the singer in Sumner attire.

Still, it shakes, bouncing globes round and round again as she shakes her red dress, only just managing to contain the heavy moments. “Roxanne, Roxanne.” Her torso heaves brashly against the material. Her body boldly goes and goes. He moves, but never shakes. Still, everything takes us there. The crowd re-communicates the mogul’s vision.

They still define the early part of this millennium. Metofeaz drinks. Desine dances with another man. The band comes down the same mellow CD. She tastes her tears and his salty sweat on his bare, wet chest. Her face is ruined in her own paint, eyelashes too heavy to move. The spotlight pins down two people's love for the world to see and their pain as it happens to make old feelings anew. Metofeaz turns his head the other way.

Metofeaz walks home through the park, but then he heads for Broadway.

PART 2

It's the time of the year when the NFL is about to peak. One more meeting with Charley Stevonsen and then one more edit and he'll receive the final check – the big one. He thinks about the property in Vienna he'd dreamed of the other night. He thinks about the clothing label, and then the music label and the furniture-design label, but still retirement comes to ease his mind when he wants to sleep. He wants Rozelle and Europe more than anything, but still he has a few things in the corners, brewing and spewing the shit he still loves.

The doors open and he thinks of how to hide his business in the bullshit he's about to fling. The pills are working once again. The crash into a young man and a scene from yesteryear had prompted a desperate visit to a physician who'd prescribed two pills that he'd promised himself he would swallow each day. Still, he knows the people up in this place have hired him for who he used to be, so he stretches his neck and kicks open a double door. "Well," he says abruptly, "if you want me to narrate, it's first going to grate the male viewers' nerves, make women watch, and cost you three fucking bags full."

In the middle of the room is the biggest Suit of them all, the projector across his chest and his face straight, without a sign of a smile or smirk. He says, "No problem. What's a bag worth?"

His feet are firmly on the ground, the place where many of the bodies in the room are aiming their heads at this time. Arley, watching the look on the face of the biggest Suit of them all, sees him out of the corner of her eye. He's on the ground, then he's in the air and, fucking hell, the crazy fucker is standing on the boardroom table and he still has a straight face as he says, "I bags myself. Now, let me see – ah yes, that one bag is worth twice my current fee."

He stands in front of the chairman, looking down on the powerful man, waiting for an answer.

The biggest Suit of them all says, “You know we can get the biggest star in the world for your current fee, don’t you?”

Metofeaz shrugs. “Get her, him, it, got, bit, if, tits, twits and then another twat.”

“We got you, Metofeaz.”

Metofeaz is quiet, his head to the ground, on the way down in the elevator. Arley is lost for words as the doors slide. They walk out, Metofeaz still quiet – till he sees a microphone. “She’s it, people. It’s all about Arley Evon and on her. Look – see with your own eye-spying machine, what does she have on? Live in? Breathe in and therefore is always within? Nothing else, Satans! Nothing else but Charley Stevonsen.”

The biggest Suit of them all turns up the volume. The other suits, creatives, account managers, and PAs and other assistants sink deeper into their seated positions.

PART 3

The booth is dark, as he has requested. The engineer is a nice guy. Metofeaz politely talks through the pizza he orders and puts it back into the empty cardboard box. The board sits around the table. The lunatic, in a tanktop and baseball cap, is unrecognizable on the wall screen. Even the head creative puts his glass up to him as he cuts into his dialogue.

The players, some with their helmets dismantled from the tops of their necks, face the fear of their head coach as the spell comes.

The crowd waits for the money on the screen. Backstage, the artists of the year check that all microphones have been received at the desk.

Metofeaz waits in the room, smiling till the last of the ad people have left. Then he removes his shirt and paces as he prays.

The stadium darkens.

Arley begins to walk on the catwalk, elegantly featured in every medium made in this age. Metofeaz stands still. The concrete wall at his back holds him up.

The coach follows his players’ eyes and their silence.

At the end of the walkway stands Arley Evon in Charley Stevonsen.

Truly black now, the world will only wait for a nanosecond before an itch begs for its scratch. Screens everywhere now show a close up of Arley's face, her black hair back in Metofeaz's wind, being pushed up into the air at millions of square inches per second, looking like it will never stop. She is poised on a hydraulic platform taken from an oil rig, the longest of its kind, as it rockets from the turf of the stadium. Metofeaz knows it will work. The screen now shows a big, black hand. The audience recognizes the Peter Jackson creation that now closes. A flash of brilliant light around the stadium makes the baby in its mother's arms nervous, and when the screen again comes to light the face of a Maori warrior makes the baby cry.

His voice is pitched like a mail-room clerk's, innocent like a child's. The meaning of what he says, however, is sometimes dark but always misconstrued. Metofeaz begins. The screen and soundtrack trace the Land of the Long White Cloud's history and its riches piled up far above just scenery, hobbits, adventure, and rugby.

Rozelle's shoulder's drops as she exhales. The fifteen minutes of prime time outrates the game. The phone rings. Metofeaz is on the line asking, "What you think?"

Metofeaz leaks what he wants to the press, telling them, "Yeah, that's right. She wore no harness on the hydraulic."

After the weather the evening news again earns him new contracts and Arley the corners of front pages.

His meeting with his accountant is a quick one.

Jimmy and Michael sit at the table re-watching the footage, and zoom in on her, "Fucking hell," Michael says. "The guy's fucking nuts!"

The biggest Suit of them all sits on the other side of his desk from Metofeaz. Only the two of them are in the room. Metofeaz is quiet and his head is down.

The biggest Suit of them all tells him, "We have two law suits already filed against us and another pile being processed. What's next?"

"What else?" Metofeaz shoots back. "Counter them, I guess."

Arley Evon of the house of Charley Stevensen has been successfully launched.

CHAPTER 9

Rozelle again tunes in for the next installment of Arley Evon. It annoys her that she needs to do this. The shot of her face in his wind is everywhere and on every channel. The radio announcers and the cab drivers have a subject for today. The column, the needle, the point of it is poignant to her. On its pinnacle stands another woman. Rozelle wishes his mind was with her inside the room she sits in alone. The wishing floods her head and the sun washes her naked body. The water dries, and even the pits under her arms. The telephone looms large in this scene as she decides against calling him and takes a walk in the countryside instead.

Lilies, lilac, and lavender grow lovely and wild around her ankles, knees, and thighs as her feet walk her body across another field, finding new feelings and forwarding them onto what she now believes to be nowhere. Still, she ponders areas she may have lacked in providing comforting and conversation. Only she and the flowers are treated to what lies uncovered beneath her sheer white cotton dress. The sun is perfect in its role, vitalizing and shining, and when it is hot enough to melt the thought of him a cloud comes over the scene to shadow the brightness with bits of doubt.

Her sweet sweat seeps slowly from the pores across her hairline. Her marching illustrates for the grass an envy she has for those who love light, directed upon themselves in the pursuance of gratification and the amplification of id more than that gifted at birth. She tried not to ask her robust mind about his whereabouts in international circles of fornication and money-making, but now her body demands his attention, and so she stretches her stride wider. Wet and damp wherever she felt, she begins to fear the traffic, which she can now hear. She takes the band tying her hair with one hand. She makes her mouth bite it as she bends her head down to shake it so she will be presented as Ms Zofen when she walks through her town.

He walks with his head down. The bar room is empty inside. He sees the top of the bar to its vanishing point. Metofeaz is ready. His booth is sticky and smelly. He twitches his nose and stretches the furious five. The thought of the delinquent demanding a fee from Feeazz feels fucked, even though he didn't pay one. The microphone stand on the stage seems to sway as he checks the condition of the next booth and decides to move there. He's about to do this when he hears footsteps and then a hand on the door. The hinges interact as the glass door retracts and contracts to stay as one.

The door opens a foot forward. A boot swipes, wipes, and frights the fuck out of him. His back faces the illiterate in a charcoal suit, black shirt, and chest ripped like the breast bone that protects his heart. Metofeaz stretches his neck as he gives no indications to the rent boy who he made. The boots, together in the same frame, bring heat to the manifestation of black deeds deep in the hell of a skull that does not forgive.

It feels and sounds as if Lazoo is stepping for miles as Metofeaz thinks clean thoughts and direct actions as he has written them. Lazoo still steps, his shadow now above him as his presence before him comes into view. Then he creases the suit to be sitting across from Metofeaz.

Face-to-face, neither one speaks till Metofeaz turns his head and leans forward. The faces are close enough now. The fulfillment of the action is in the last part of the movement, as if agreeing with Lazoo's terms. Instead the nod is swift and clean, his neck muscles leveraging his heavy head and the bones of his spine directing it to its place of rest, which is on the bridge of the illiterate's nose. Lazoo holds his nose as Metofeaz rises to his feet close to the table. Lazoo's hair is longer than before, presenting a handle, the table top presents a surface, and BANG!

Metofeaz is already stepping, but the situation is too good and may not yet be memorable enough, so he drags Lazoo from the booth and the ideas slump onto the floor. The kick to the head does more damage to Metofeaz, who forgets about his broken toe.

Outside, Metofeaz still finds enough anger to kick the limo door he had left open in arrogance closed, and he now limps on to an end.

He watches from across the street and down a bit. The young guy on the intercom is now in a chauffeur's uniform opening the door for Hariss Clariss. Michael Haze appears from inside Sil House Café, from inside the Limo appears someone else. Metofeaz stands there as the scary clown and Haze look at him till they are ushered inside by the last one to climb from the insides of the limousine.

Metofeaz reminds himself again that these lowlifes would still be crawling if he hadn't walked to Sil House from the Village a long time ago. Metofeaz knows the way they move and lets it be known that he, too, knows how to fool around, bluff with fluff, and tick people off a list.

He eats alone, not wanting to bring Rozelle into the same space as the bells tolling from places ringing in his head. He thinks of Clariss, a key ingredient in how *he* has

dominated proceedings, and then thinks about the money he himself has made. He chews on the food and swallows and stares and eats some more.

The restaurant is packed and the grey head smiles, but Metofeaz wants to keep it short and sweet. The suit thanks him for all the work he has passed on from the Arley Evon launch, and Metofeaz reminds him of what is happening. The shy shark reassures him that the word is mum. Metofeaz looks at him sideways and then finally heads for the door without saying a word more.

Rozelle enjoys the evening. She dances her way through the crowd. A couple of them are in her way, so eye contact becomes important, even if it is to glance the other way. The night finally comes to its end. The dark path home winds her down to a slow walk. The light next door is gone. Her place is complete.

The mogul looks at him and notices his condition immediately. Metofeaz laughs off any suggestion that maybe the doctor he last visited was a junkie. The mogul advises him of the relationships that he had to maintain and the business of staying alive so he can make money tomorrow. Metofeaz nods his head and continues to laugh.

The travel agent feels his urgency as he flies through the itinerary and hands it back to her with a, “Yeah – I’ll have one of them ones.” The agent, in her rhythm for the day, forgets to laugh at his line and continues to tap on her keyboard.

The limo is parked outside of his building, its dent is gone. The door opens as he puts two parked cars in between him and the stretched blackness. The footsteps come from behind him. He stops and turns to see Jon Le Mac, who says, “I heard what you did. Therefore, I make aware to you that I bring amongst other things the thing that you most need right now in this heaven, the only one we have, on which God’s most deplorable but also most constructive creation dwells. That is, if you take into account that our brain is not yet evolved to a stage where it can agree to share its resources seamlessly. Now, look, see how I can take you down.”

Metofeaz feels the back of his head and the warm blood as his eyes open to see Jon Le Mac standing above him, saying. “Now, go home – before I go there and have her for me!”

CHAPTER 10

Arley sits next to him. Neither of them see the view, just his matching bags packed, lined up, and ready for the morning. They say little as he paces and prays that the storms forecast for the morning stay at bay for just one day.

The morning is one of misery. All flights to and from this place remain as they are in their parking spaces. Metofeaz ducks the rain and runs for the corner. Out of the corner of his eye the black slipperiness glides into the front of his ways.

Inside, he has little else to see, hear, or think as he sits in a corner and questions not waiting for an answer. Shutting him up, however, is the next thing that makes his skin crawl. Le Mac looms over him and snarls, "I said, this town was now a trespass zone to you, man!" Metofeaz looks outside at the weather. "Hey," Le Mac goes on, "you – crashed Meteorite, fallen furball. I made it the purity of my water that flows when I drown you in instruction that you are to be vigilant in your endeavors to be out of my sight and definitely the furthest thing from my mind. And what do you do? You go and change the weather forecast!"

Metofeaz walks up the steps to his building again, the need for coffee gone.

Le Mac stretches the furious five on one hand as he applies covering. The sight of Metofeaz walking back up to where has come from annoys him. Then he stretches the other hand and applies the other glove. On closer inspection, we realize that he is not young by the way he now looks. Le Mac considers keeping his smile as he opens the door and puts the wrong foot for today onto the pavement, but then, what would he do with his own smile? As he tips the doorman and stretches his own neck he thinks of Rozelle Zofen, who is about the right age. He then thinks about how many times Metofeaz has been with her and decides that it would be okay. He says into the intercom, "Today is still today, and you are still here, because I just made you look foolish. Now it is time to make you still."

Metofeaz sits still in the chair. Le Mac whispers into his ear, "You still fucking here, you fuck? I thought I told you in the storm to go home?"

Le Mac stands, stretches his neck again, and puts one arm around his shoulders. Metofeaz's eyes begin to behave as he thinks of her, the arm he now feels coming up to his throat as another arm comes to hold his body tight and very close. An arm slides up over his eyes. His view now blocked, he closes his eyes. As it finds a place by his temple,

her eyes and tears flow through his mind, dark and remorseful, as the arm around his body squeezes his chest one last time and the one around his eyes cradles the cranial regions in a smothering hold...

“Look,” Le Mac says softly, “see how I make you still.”

The last thing Metofeaz sees is a panoramic winding view, and the sound of his neck braking must have been its high.

Le Mac lets his body fall back onto the chair, his arms by its sides, the head back – way back. A blanket is neatly folded over the back of the couch. He unfolds it and covers the area where his last expression is now running to the floor.

Arley is on the intercom. Le Mac takes a beer from the fridge and goes out onto the balcony to enjoy it and a cigarette.

CHAPTER 11

Desine comes to the morgue to identify the body of Metofeaz Litigatti.

Rozelle rolls over onto her side and doesn't cry this time.

CHAPTER 12

Rozelle grows stronger by the day. Her business is to remain busy and her tours are always full. Today a guy by the name of John sat smiling at her from back of the bus. He has already made known to her that he is forty-three, rich, and ready to settle down.

THE END