

Alberta Bound

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## ABSTRACT

Alberta Bound

Teresa Anne Halford

This thesis is a novella whose protagonist—an erstwhile sideshow performer and habitual runaway—is involved in an exploration of discovery, in essence, a journey from becoming-to-being. The story begins at the protagonist’s death, as she “relives” moments before she finally dies. The protagonist is followed by her guardian angel who traces his charge’s steps in reverse: finding her, then determining where she’s been. The protagonist encounters both adversaries and helpers, both causing her to deviate more than once from her path. The journey ends as the protagonist rebirths herself and returns to the site of her first voyage—this time making a decision to stay on that path, rather than return “home”.

The story is told in several voices including that of the protagonist herself; but more often, her facilitators are the narrators, each of whom, like the protagonist, are doomed to repeat history until they “get it right.” The narration is mostly reported dialogue or epistolary excerpts each containing little description in order to portray a series of oral recountings or musings. Interspersed are excerpts from various chapters of a sideshow instructional manual. The form, ultimately, is more cerebral or ethereal, which serves as a mirror to the physicality of the content.

for jbs with love, may you always be at peace

for xohr with love, may you sip single malt in the desert

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*“Toto, I have a feeling we aren’t in Kansas anymore.”*

*“Are you talkin’ to me? Are YOU talkin’ to ME?”*



## 0.0 Part Zero—Alex

### 0.1 Itinerary

When we came to put Alberta in the ground she was already dead. Her heart had stopped beating. She had ceased to breathe. Even without the aid of medical equipment, we were able to figure this out. And frankly, when someone dies, they *look* dead. Within seconds, their colour changes. In Alberta's case, her skin faded to chalk. And her lips—they drained *ob-so-swifflly* to clay.

The time was 23:16.

She thought she was alive, but she was wrong, of course. Your brain just tricks you, in those final moments. You cling to the illusion of life, you 're-live' experiences. It's not just cliché but is, in fact, quite true that you see your life flash before your eyes. It's just your way of dealing with the stress, the change. That, and the necessary purging of the electricity in your body. It's all very scientific.

So even as Alberta clawed her way up to the world, hands and teeth all broken and bloodied, and even as she climbed through sand, naked and beautiful, heaving herself to the surface, and even as she fell back to the quiet Earth, knees and ankles rooted, she was dead.

But you have to admire her guts, what was left of them. The girl had moxie.

Not to be outdone by that previous feat, impressive in itself, Alberta managed to open her dimming eyes. "*Alex*," she whispered, coughing out sand. "*Alex, what on earth is going on?*"

"Alternative cancer therapy," I said. "Back you go." *Bonk bonk* on the head with the shovel—persistent little cuss. And we stuffed her on down. That was tough. The rigor hadn't

set in, of course. It never does for cases like this. Like trying to shove a rag doll through a garden hose. We had to move quickly. No time to re-dig the hole.

“You know,” said Dave, just as we finished smoothing over the sand. “I really do think she should be facing east.”

“Too late.” I replied. “We can’t move her now. It is done.”

## **1.0 Part One—Alex: andante**

*Mother Mother I went to town.*

*Inside Outside Upside Down*

## 1.0 The First Voyage of Alberta Bound

September 29, 1972

*I am not her anymoor.*

### 1.1 The Five Lessons

One. Alberta Bound would never be the same since that day she ran away from home. Cursed by her tender age (six) and diminutive pocketbook (\$1.84), Alberta didn't get very far—oh, just about to the playground I'd say. During a rest stop at the rocketship monkey bars, the cold futility of it all struck Alberta like a wet slap. She promised herself that the next time she ran away, she would plan better. And although she was temporarily defeated by the entire experience she was ultimately energised by her resolution to try again. For a brief moment she wondered whether there would be a party for her return, having just read about *The Prodigal Son* last week in catechism class. Alberta was, despite everything, a dreamer.

Two. Alberta bore the onslaught of: *We told you so*, *We knew you would be back*, and *Only good little girls get dinner*, with the quiet strength of Gandhi. But when her mother came to deal out the corporal punishment, Alberta found her voice and repeated something she had overheard in the playground:

Three. "Fuck you!"

Four. Life Lesson Four followed swiftly.

Five. Alberta decided to cut her losses and apologised so sweetly that the trill of violins and birds was heard. She curled up on her side in bed that night, pondering the cosmos.

She would never be the same.

## 1.2 Dramatis Personae

### 1.2.1 *Cyclopes*

Alberta Bound had a nemesis. Cloven-hoofed and sulphuric, his name was Steven Marc and he chewed up and spit out Alberta every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner—belching loudly thereafter—picking his teeth with the slender bones of his sister.

Despite the torments of Cyclopes, Alberta retained the strength to fantasise his demise. Having learned *Life Lesson Number One*, she planned her escape. She devised a strategy, nurtured it, kept it warm and fed it daily. Whatever rations she had left over, whatever strength remained after her daily dismemberment, digestion and evacuation, whatever power of intellect, whatever tools, whatever spirit, all went towards the one goal: *Escape*. And if anything remained thereafter: *Vengeance*.

But she would have to wait. Cyclopes was great and she was small. Tiny. But she could be patient.

Besides, she had no choice.

### 1.2.2 *His Minion*

Alberta Bound had another nemesis, the sister and accomplice of Cyclopes: Cynthia. His Minion held her down while Cyclopes fed on Alberta's flesh: her stomach was particularly soft and His Minion would restrain Alberta so that Cyclopes could gorge himself on this delicacy. The pain was terrible and Alberta's smothered screams were pitiful; yet His Minion howled that much harder, encouraging Cyclopes to be more vicious, more thorough.

Alberta's planning included His Minion. And again, she could wait.

A very long time indeed.

### 1.2.3 *Two-Headed Serpent*

*And well one may ask where were the Bounds while all this was going on?*

Blessed with long necks, the head known as Charles, or “Chas” to his intimates, could be at the office all day, the club for drinks in the early evening, home for late supper, cognac and cigar, then to bed while his hideous consort, the head known as Louise could be at bridge on Mondays, volunteering at the hospital on Tuesdays, playing tennis on Wednesdays, swimming on Thursdays, having her hair done on Fridays, home for late supper, crème de menthe, then to bed.

*What a smell of sulphur.*

Alberta often wondered why they had her, what she was doing there.

## 1.3 The Quest

Alberta thought that she was from another world and that she really didn’t belong.

There was a mistake made somewhere—*maybe someone switched the baby bracelets in the hospital?*

When she learned she was adopted, Alberta became *convinced* that she was from another world. She took comfort in this. She had some hope. Now if only she could get a message out: *I’m alive, I’m here, come and get me.* With the logic of a six-year-old, Alberta reasoned that she at least knew where her otherworld parents weren’t: *chez* Bound; and therefore it behoved her to leave her house, to go out into the world, to find her real family, her real world. Her real self.

Ultimately—to go home.

So that’s where our story began: *The First Voyage of Alberta Bound.* It lasted approximately 45 minutes: House-Playground-House. Not a bad start for a little kid. Poor Alberta, just trying to get home, wherever the hell that may be.

## 2.0 The Second Voyage of Alberta Bound

September, 1980

*I remember that I never tested myself again until Harvey's. In fact, I don't think I believed I really could. I have the memory, but it's wispy and vague. A dream, the moment you wake up and want to tell someone. It's almost there, but it's gone. And there in front of Dr. Max Marvel I asked myself for just that one second, would I ever be able to do it again? And suddenly I knew that I could—that I had been born to it. But for audiences? My other thought was that this: that Dr. Max Marvel looked familiar. But I couldn't place him.*

### 2.1 Harvey's

The second voyage gets Alberta as far as the Canada-U.S. border before she is turned back *sans* forged note, and a small chunk of hash. I know, I know, *what was she thinking*, right?

She gets off lightly by her standards. A slithering and tentacled border guard is offered a blowjob. Offer accepted. The deed was swift. She's been through worse she tells herself as she walks down the hall, throat locked tight: *At least they didn't call in the Flying Monkeys to come fetch me like last time.* She smiles to convince the world how stalwart she is, still holding the guard's semen in her mouth. She floods her mouth with saliva to dilute the poison. Outside now, Alberta doesn't even wait the three steps to the nearest garbage bin before she purges, vowing to find industrial soap before nightfall to cleanse her soul. She stares at the viscous glob, allowing tears for a nanosecond before spitting again. No one is there. Indeed, Alberta is suddenly invisible. The hissing guard, in some drab little room, lights a cigarette taken from Alberta's confiscated pack. He laughs, not realising the joke's on him: his wallet has just been lifted.

Outside, Alberta ponders food and a place to sleep. She flips through the wallet, scavenging the cash, pocketing the guard's ID for a trophy—later throwing the wallet into the

lake, staying some twenty minutes to watch it sink. But she will be disappointed for the wallet does not sink but rather, it is carried out of sight by the cold black waves. Dismayed, she heads to Harvey's, smug in the knowledge that she's richer by at least a week's worth of Yankee green.

*Maybe I can join some travelling circus* Alberta wonders as she orders *Holy Pasture Pancakes*  
*Batman! There's a*

Yes, there's a side-show chowing down in Harvey's. Can you believe the synchronicity? I know I know, I could barely believe it myself, but truth is *always* stranger than fiction.

*This is great, I've always wanted to run away with a circus.* She approaches the table, chocolate milkshake in hand.

"That's nice kiddo. Take a number. What can you do?"

"What can I do?"

"Yes. Do. *Do*. What can you do? Are you blessed with any *side-show* skills? Are you contortionist? A geek? Had any experience or training in the circus performance sector? What can you *do*? Everyone wants to join a circus but nobody ever has any skills." Dr. Max Marvel sighs, his burden great.

"I'm a gymnast."

"Bully for you. My *cat* is a gymnast. Tim's three-year-old here can walk on her hands and sing *The Girl from Ipanema*. In Portuguese, no less. Can you do anything *new*?"

"I can do card tricks."

"I'll be darned, the girl can do card tricks," arms outstretched, addressing the Almighty.

"Like what?"



“Three Card Monte.”

“I’m unimpressed. What else?”

“I can make fire. You know, without matches.” Alberta flicks her thumb, igniting it, then lights a cigarette she’s drawn from thin air.

“My my my. How *very* original. My food’s getting cold. Bugger off before your mummy misses you.”

The pause is long but genuine. Alberta searches her storehouse of Kreskinalia.

She clears her throat, reminding them she’s still there. “Well, there is *one* other thing. I hadn’t really thought of it before but now that I think of it...” She flips the lit cigarette into the cosmos, catching it gracefully between her lips, then swallows and opens wide—no cigarette to be seen.

Dr. Max feigns an oversized yawn. “Very attractive. You know kiddo, my bubby not only eats lit cigarettes, but burps smoke rings to *Hava Nagila*. So here’s your \$64,000 question: can you do anything *unique*?” The troupe laughs.

“...I would have to show you outside,” Alberta says, ignoring Max’s sarcasm. She blows a smoke ring from each nostril, then returns the cigarette with a hiccough—intact and still lit. She butts it on the table.

Max snorts. “Just out of charm school are we? Listen sister, I think I’m a bit old for the *you and me outside* routine, and I *know* you’re a bit young.” He flicks the butt to Tim’s three-year-old who wolfs it down, grinning satanically. “We don’t let her smoke,” one of the troupe

explains. “Bad for her singing. But we’re hoping the nicotine will stunt her growth.” Laughter again.

Alberta smacks the table, causing coffees to spill. “LISTEN! I have this thing I can do. I honestly don’t know anyone else who can do this. Just give me this chance. Outside. Just you.” She singles out Max, adding “please” as an afterthought.

The troupe goads him on. Max decides that he would at least get some *why-the-hell-not* sexual favour out of it and lets Alberta lead him outside to the back of the restaurant.

They return three minutes later. Max is trembling. Alberta is hired.

“So, what can she *do*, Max?” Laughter still as an ashen-faced Max pulls out a hip flask and tops up his coffee.

“My friends,” screwing tight the cap, “the girl can *fly*.” He takes a trembling gulp, but not before he raises his cup to Alberta. *L’Chaim*.

“But not long distances,” Alberta speaks to the growing silence. “Just for a little bit, then I get tired.”

## 2.2 The Dr. Max Marvel Sideshow

Thus continued the second voyage of Alberta Bound. Not worth rewriting at this point, really, although God knows I have the time. Picture, if you will, a succession of cities and towns and little Alberta flying during or between the various acts. No one, of course, believed that Alberta could fly. And why should they? And frankly, who would want to believe, to really know, that someone, anyone, can fly? Alberta stays with the side-show for months until she is recognised by some cousin’s friend’s aunt’s uncle’s niece’s sister of someone who went to school

with Chas and within *that very day* the girl's father arrives on the scene and Alberta is rounded-up, trussed, and hauled back home on a spit, just in time for the beginning of the school year.

Louise, ever the Scourge of Chas, reminds Alberta of *Life Lesson Number Two*, many many *many* times:

“Don’t you ever EVER....*thwack!* Your father and I... I had to tell the ladies that you were at camp....I don’t know WHO *thwack!* you THINK you ARE.... *thwack! thwack!* And of course I had to make up a camp so that they didn’t know....You could have been RAPED *thwack!* ....If you EVER pull a stunt like this again....You’ll wish you WERE dead....And I’ll be just the one to do it....Look what you did to your father.... I don’t care if you DID *thwack!* send letters.....You make me FURIOUS....Are you taking DRUGS?.... Oh god you aren’t PREGNANT are you?....Oh PLEASE god, *thwack! thwack!* anything but pregnant and on drugs.... I’m going to KILL myself....Thank GOD I can count on Joanna to be discreet....Look what you’re doing, you’re KILLING your father, *thwack!* your own father....GOD ONLY KNOWS what kind of woman your birth mother was.”

Alberta’s return to polite society was delayed somewhat by facial bruising. *Wisdom teeth* her mother explained to the ladies of the bridge club, keeping Alberta indoors until the swelling went down.

### 3.0 The Fourth Voyage of Alberta Bound

This is where it all starts, where she falls from radar. My radar. The previous voyages were just trial runs. I enter the picture to be abandoned. Left with itinerant letters, voicemails. Occasionally, a postcard. Clues. Symbols on a map. Ciphers. I reverse-engineer her path. Forensics. I'm starting the maze at the ending, to find out where it all began. I have the time, sitting here in the sand sipping neat scotch and watching the geckos.

November, 1996

*I hate the anxiety dreams... the trapped-in-the-car-going-off-the-bridge-and-the-doors-are-locked-and-I'm-seatbelted-in-and-I can't-do-anything-but-try-to-think-fast-and-get-my-seatbelt-off-and-open-the-door-and-convince-the-family-to-do-the-same dreams. This time my dream was with my mother, Cyclopes, and His Minion. I don't know where my father was.*

*I can remember thinking in my dream that I would have to be strong to push open the door without having it slam shut from the careening as we plummeted into the lake/river/ocean.... and it would slam and I would be caught by the foot or finger or dress or whatever. And then I thought that we should all open the windows quickly to let the water in so that the pressure inside the car would equalise with the river/lake/ocean so that we could either go out the window or actually be able to push open the door. I figured that that was the problem when cars plummeted into the lake/river/ocean... that the pressure between the water and the inside of the car was too great and you wouldn't be able to open the door and even if you did... the water would whoosh in with such force that you would be engulfed and the water would fill your lungs because you would be so shocked that you would just inhale...*

*So there I was trapped trapped trapped in this car and we're going over the bridge and we're flying and I can feel my heart racing and I'm thinking thinking thinking what the fuck to do to get out of this and how the*

*fuck am I going to get everyone else out of this too and I'm determined not to die trapped inside a goddamn car. Not me. I know I can hold my breath enough to float to the top... I would kick off my shoes and remove my jacket. I figure I would try to jump from the car as we fall... because otherwise I would have to be strapped in for impact (because then I would break my neck on the ceiling of the car when we hit, right? Dunno). So I would try to jump but would try to time it so that I didn't have too far to fall but would try to jump away from the car but would I have enough time to think? I mean, are we talking what, two or three seconds 'til impact I guess? I don't know. I guess three seconds. That means about 1/4 of a second to ponder my course of action (which is probably good that I review this now, when I have the time... so that way if it happens I'll be ready). So a second to see that we're going to fly... we would crash through the barrier so I would have to be strapped for that, then I guess about two seconds, maybe three as we plummet. So I think I could unbuckle (or should I open the door first???) and push the door... but then again, would the air pressure from our fall make it impossible for me to open the door? Of course, the door could be so heavy that it falls a bit by its own weight? Dunno. Something to consider. But I would like to think that I would know what to do.*

*And of course the worst shit of all this is getting the rest of the family free. I mean, they might not jump like I would. Or they might wait for the car to fill with water, then try to open the door? How fast does the car go down? I guess even when it has air inside, it's still going down down down because of the impact? Like airplanes? That makes sense. I guess. So if I survive the plunge do I tear off my clothes and skin dive for the family? What if the car's too deep? And my family (love 'em or leave 'em) is trapped, pounding on the doors and windows, panicked, and I can't get to them? Or worse, I try to save them and I see them pounding and screaming and slowly drowning and they can't even help themselves and I try to open the doors and it doesn't work and I watch them. Do I watch them or do I ascend for more air and stay there? Am I honour/ethically bound to watch them die? When I know I can't save them, do I have to stay? Sorta be at their side? I don't know. And they would scream and pound and even I could hear them clearly despite the necessary distortion of being underwater.*

*But maybe I could save them? Or would I die with them? Would we talk/scream/argue about what to do? Would we declare our familial love? Pray or curse god? I think I would cry and use up all the air right away. We'd be going so far down and it might be hundreds of feet and my ears pop after about 12 metres. How many feet 'til the car fills up? Would we wait minutes? Would I panic and try to open the windows and all the water would rush in and choke me? I wouldn't die fast enough, I'm sure. I would have minutes to suffer and rethink my regrets, replot my salvation but know that I could do nothing. It would be thus doubly frustrating.. to die thinking of alternative actions. Close to death thinking that I should have done x, y, or z. And I would be past that point. The point of no return. I would be so angry, so upset, so frustrated. I would die thinking horrible thoughts, and wonder if I would become some bitter ghost, forever doomed because I couldn't "get over it" in real life. My punishment would be to watch and watch it happen over and again until I screamed and tore my hair out and sucked my thumbs until the marrow was gone.*

*Of course, the real thing to do is avoid the situation altogether. To stay off bridges.. out of planes. Don't even get me started about planes because I could go on forever about that shit... especially over water. I can just see the plane going into the lake, like what happened a few years ago during one of the air shows. I must have seen that footage ten times, the plane just throwing itself into the lake. God knows how deep it went. And I think that no one survived. All that survival bullshit for nothing. I know why they have you assume that bend-over-and-kiss-your-ass-goodbye position on the planes, so that you would have your neck snapped by the impact... your head would smack the seat in front of your and that's it, Good Night Nurse. I don't want to drown in a plane. I don't want to necessarily plummet to my death either, of course. I cannot believe I would be like in *Satanic Verses*, falling 27,000 feet or something and surviving. I would like to think that I could but I'm sure I can't. If only there were some way to test this theory without dying.*

### 3.1 I have something important to tell you

“Worth interrupting *Twin Peaks*?” Alberta asks, clearly exasperated.

“I’m serious.”

“So am I.” Big sigh. She pauses the tape. “It’d better be important for you to interrupt *Twin Peaks*.”

“Alberta!”

“Alex!”

“I have something important to tell you.”

“No you don’t. I already know. And I don’t care. I *don’t care*. It means nothing to me. I simply don’t care.” She puts the tape back on.

### 3.2 Stand and walk and sit and walk and run and

Anne knows that Alberta is afraid to stay home by herself so she makes Alberta walk and walk and walk in the park, up the street, down the street, in the mall, through the mall, around the mall, to the café, into the café, order a tea, drink a tea. She makes Alberta walk and walk and walk in the park, up the street, down the street, in the mall, through the mall, around the mall, to another café, into the café, order a tea, drink a tea. She makes Alberta sit and stand and walk and stand and sit and walk and walk and stand and sit and take a bus and walk some more and stand and sit and walk and take the subway and look in the windows and walk and stand and sit and stand and walk until the two of them are exhausted.

“There,” thinks Anne. “Almost safe to go home.” She makes Alberta call someone, anyone, everyone, leave messages, check messages, walk a bit, sit and read, stand and walk and

sit and walk and stand and walk and sit and walk and “Enough!” thinks Anne. “Tired enough, finally. Sleep is imminent.”

“I’m tired,” thinks Alberta. “And I want to kill myself.”

Run and sit and stand and run and run and stand and sit and run and run and run and stand and run and run and sit and stand and run and stand and sit and run and run and run and stand and take the subway and walk some more.

“Tired now,” thinks Anne. “It is safe to go home.”

“I’m tired,” thinks Alberta. “And I want to cry.”

“This is good,” thinks Anne. “I can deal with crying.”

“Maybe I’ll just cut my arm open instead,” thinks Alberta, wondering if she has a fresh spot to work on. She doesn’t. Sigh.

Run and sit and jog and stand and run and run and walk and stand and sit and walk and sit and stand and run and run and run and “Oh shit, I know!” thinks Anne. She takes them to the club to work out. “Why didn’t I think of this before?”

Lift weights and jog and step and stretch and walk and run and walk and stretch and cycle and run and lift weights and stretch and walk and run and play squash and run and walk and stretch and swim and stretch and cycle and run and job and walk and stretch.

“I’m tired,” thinks Alberta. “I want to sit in the steam room.”

“Thank god,” thinks Anne. “By all means, let us sit in the steam room.”



Anne sits in the steam feeling the water bead on her arms, her legs, her stomach, her face, and her back. She knows that Alberta is enjoying this too. Or at least would enjoy it if she weren't sleeping so soundly. This is good. Anne is strong and carries the sleeping Alberta home, then tucks her in with Bear.

Alberta is dreaming while Anne makes dinner. Anne has only the occasional winking blinking glimpses of the dreams. She is trying to ignore this intrusion. Anne sees her own activity playing back to her in snippets. Of course. Alberta is dreaming of Anne.

"Sorry I'm late," I say, then I notice it's Anne and not Alberta waiting for me. "You ok?" I look at Anne, checking for signs.

"A little sleepy. Long day. Dinner's almost ready."

"I was worried about you being alone all afternoon. Sorry I was so late."

"I was fine."

"Nothing bad happen? I tried to call but there was no answer....." I continue to check for damage. Anne's a wily one, covering for Alberta more than she should.

"Worked out. I think I pulled something in my calf."

We are talking on different levels, of course. I look deep into Anne's eyes, no hint of Alberta. None. She's gone.

"See anything?" Anne doesn't know I know.

"Just my big nose. Were your eyes always so dark?"

“Of course. That’s how I knew I was from another world. Navy blue eyes.”

“Don’t remember seeing that on *The X-Files*.”

“People would riot. Dinner’s ready. I’ll be back in a sec. Just got to wash up.” She heads to the bathroom.

### 3.3 Resurfacing

“Alex...?”

“Who is it?”

“Ha ha. I’m lost.”

“Where are you?”

“You’re funny. How can I tell you where I am if I’m lost?”

“Could happen. Maybe you know where you are, but don’t know how to go somewhere else?”

“You got me on that one. All I can tell you is that I’m here.”

“Can you give me a city maybe? Or a country? A country at least would be nice. We could work from there.”

“Europe.”

“Gosh, that narrows it down. You *must* have a country.... or maybe a language, even? We could narrow things down by language.”

“French.”

“French?”

“French.”

“Gosh Golly, Alberta. That’s helpful. I would have to say that you’re royally uckfayed unless you can come up with some more info. Any mountains?”

“Uhhhh. Well, I can see some but they’re far away.”

“Any water?”

“Yup. Lots of water.”

“Anything else?”

“Lousy food. No salads. Everyone’s tall, snotty, and well-dressed. The whole place is gray.”

“No salads, nasty grub. Gray giants. You are obviously in the Land of Gray Giants.”

“I’m hearing a lot of German and Italian here too.”

“Well then I would have to say Switzerland or the fourth hub of Hell. Your call.”

“You’re a riot. Can you come here and take me home? I’m at a train station.”

“How nice for you. I’m in the bath.”

“I mean it. I need you here. I want to come home.”

“So come back the way you got there, however the hell that was. You go to the can to wash your hands and next thing I know, you’re in bloody Switzerland. Can you see anything in the train station that tells us where you really are?”

“I’m too far away from any signs to tell you.”

“Here’s an idea: *go to check for signs*. Then call me back.”

“Alex.....?”

“Who is it?”

“Stop that. I’m in Geneva.”

“Well, at least you’re not in Stuttgart. Now what?”

“I would take another train except for one thing....”

“Yes?”

“I’m broke. I have no cash whatsoever and I can’t find a bank machine.”

“Do you want me to wire you some?”

“Nah, fuck it. I love a challenge. Maybe I can hustle someone in the can.”

“That’s my girl. How the hell did you end up in Geneva? That’s one heck of a detour from our bathroom.”

“Well, to make a long story short, I got on the wrong train. I fell asleep. When I woke up, some guy in a uniform was yelling at me, then he threw me off. I mean, I *bought* a ticket for Milan but I just ended up here instead. He took the rest of my ticket too, the wretch.”

“Tell you what, I’ll put some money in your account just in case you’ve lost your touch. It’ll probably take a day or two to go through. I’ll meet you in Milan for lunch.”

“You’ll meet me in Milan for lunch? You want me to go to *Italy* to *meet you for lunch*?”

“You were going to go there anyway.”

“Yeah I know. But still....you’re going to meet me in *Milan*? For *lunch*?”

“Would dinner be better?”

“That’s not what I meant! I’ve never been to Milan. How would I know where to find you?”

“No problem. Just get yourself there by noon. Got a pen? I’ll tell you where to find me. Let’s make it dinner. That will give you time to explore the city.”

“I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

“Relax. This is what you live for, moments like these. Have you got any film?”

“Does the Pope poop *al fresco*? I got tons.”

“So go take some photos. All is not lost. You’ll love *il Duomo*. But watch out for those guys who throw kernels of dried corn in your hands, and take pictures of you getting swarmed by pigeons so they can sell them back to you for a zillion bucks. It’s a real racket.”

“No problema. So now what?”

“So now go hustle some money for the interim. Roll some rich old biddy in the can. You know where to find me—or better yet, I know where to find you. So go.”

“I’m going, I’m going. What if we can’t find each other tomorrow?”

“Don’t worry so much. If you can’t find me, leave a message. Send an email. Got your machine with you?”

“Are you serious? I sleep with the damned thing.”

“One more question...”

“Mmmmyes?”

“How are *you* going to get to Milan in time for dinner?”

“Don’t you worry about it. I’m controlling the narrative here.”

“Of course. Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Because you’re a confused mental case, that’s why. So buzz before you miss the next train.”

## 4.0 The Fifth Voyage of Alberta Bound



### 4.1 You are here



Wandering in Milano, Alberta becomes depressed. She has lost her home (but she left it), she has forgotten her name (but she changed it), and she is hungry (but she has no stomach).

She looks on the maps: the ones she drew herself (so she knew where she had been), the ones she took from five-star hotel reception desks (so she knew where she couldn't afford to be), the ones people drew for her on serviettes, tissues, small pieces of paper (so she knew where to go if she really wanted to

be lost). The maps tell her the same thing:

Diddly.

*My home. I thought I was just supposed to be able to knock my heels three times and command my silver slippers to take me wherever I wish to go and I would be home.*

"No princess. You've said two things there," laughs the local giant. "You have to decide where you're going first....do you want to go wherever you wish to go, or do you want to go home?"

"Don't get philosophical on me. I know where I want to go."

"So go there."

“But I don’t know how to get from here to there. I need an itinerary.”

“Is this geography or metaphysics?”

“Geography first, then metaphysics.”

“I think I can help you.” He is juggling tennis balls. “Step into my office.” He points with his chin to a shop in *La Galleria* across from *La Scala*, then stops juggling. The balls stop mid-air a few moments before dropping *en masse* to the ground with a soft *thud*, rolling nowhere. Frozen to the ground. The giant approaches Alberta, putting an arm about her, turning her. *Andiamo, princess. You’re facing the wrong way.*



## 4.2 The Geography of Metaphysics

Alberta is talking to Dr. “Dasein Dave” Ben Moran, the local Metaphysician.

“Here,” Dr. Dave says, juggling with one hand. “I need you to fill out this form before I can help you. Press hard, there’s three carbons.”

KEY: Y = Yes    N = No    ? = Not Sure	Y	N	?
Have you ever decided to follow the ‘straight and narrow’ for a mile or so, but only lasted a couple of blocks?			
Do you wish people would mind their own business about your wandering—stop telling you where to go?			
Have you ever switched from one mode of transportation to another in the hope that this could keep you from losing yourself?			
Have you had to look out the window upon awakening during the past year, just to figure out what country you’re in?			
Do you envy people who can get somewhere without getting lost?			
Have you had problems connected with map reading during the past year?			
Has your meandering caused trouble at home?			
Do you ever try to ask for ‘extra’ directions because you do not get enough?			
Do you tell yourself you can find your way home any time you want to, even though you keep getting lost when you don’t mean to?			
Have you missed days of work or school because of being lost?			
Do you have “blackouts”?			
Have you ever felt that your life would be better if you did not lose your way?			
<b>Bonus questions:</b>			
Do you get disoriented daily?			
Do you stray when you are alone?			
If you have answered “yes” to four or more of the questions, then you have trouble with geographical ontology.			

“There you go.” Form returned. “Just what kind of name is ‘Dasein Dave’ anyway?”

“A very good one, uh, Ms. ‘*Alberta Bound*’ was it?” He snorts. “Now shut up, turn around, and lift your sweater.”

“*Whbbbaattt?*”

“I’m going to draw you a map.”

“On my back?”

“Perhaps you have a better place in mind?”

“What about a piece of paper?”

“Look who knows so much,” pointing Alberta out to the Infinite One. “A piece of paper. You can lose a piece of paper. This way, even if you lose everything else, you will still have your map.”

“Didn’t I see this in a film once? A very bad film.”

“You too? Some of the best ideas come out of bad films. Keep that in mind.”

“So what do I do? Turn around naked and read the map in a mirror or something?”

“Thanks for reminding me. I had better do this backwards so you can read it.”

“That would be nice. If it’s not too much bother.”

The whirring of the machine. Ink in small cups. Needles ready.

“Wait a minute. You aren’t going to *tattoo* this on me are you?”

“Look princess. What confused you? The ‘*Tattoo Artist*’ sign on the front door maybe?”

“I was just looking for directions, not a tattooed map. Besides,” Alberta grasps for straws, hoping to appeal to the Metaphysician’s baser nature. “Besides, I have no money.”

“S’awright. This one’s on me, so to speak.”

Gloves. The whirring of the machine. Blotting the blood. Gauze and medical tape. Anti-bacterial ointment. Cleaning instructions.

“Don’t take this bandage off for a few hours. Keep it covered when you shower for the first couple of days, otherwise no bandages. Instructions are in the bag. And oh, here’s a commemorative t-shirt. We’re celebrating our 2000<sup>th</sup> year in business. *Il Giubileo*, you know.”

“How can I ever thank you?”

“You’re not home yet. Save it for when you get home. Send me a postcard.”

Her back stings her but Alberta is otherwise impervious to the pain.

“Will I be able to read it when I get home? Once I take the bandages off? Is it really big?” Alberta’s not sure how this tattoo thing works, whether you can see the colours right away or not.

“Let’s just say it is done. Ok? *It is done.*”

“Am I going to look stupid when I’m ninety-six years old, lying in a bed in some retirement home getting a sponge bath?”

“Trust me,” Dr. Dave laughs. “You didn’t live that long.”

Suddenly, her heart begins to pound with that *fight or fuck* energy. That rhythm. That glow.

“Save it for someone else, princess,” quoth the Dasein Man, recognising the look a thousand times over. “That’s extra.”

## 5.0 The Third Voyage of Alberta Bound

June, 1996

*Last night I had a dream that I was pregnant but it was very strange. I had an instruction booklet which explained that every once and a while you were supposed to remove the baby from your womb and massage it; give the baby “air” such as it was. So in my dream I’m in someone’s kitchen and I’ve just pulled the baby from my womb. There’s no blood or anything—all very clean and natural just the way these things are in dreams. The baby is so tiny and doesn’t (now that I think about it) look like a baby as such, but in my dream it’s a baby and she’s a she and she’s smiling. Kind of cooing and gurgling. Still attached. I rub her tummy and that seems to make her happy. Then I flip to the next page of the book and realise that there’s no instruction on how to put the baby back. I mean, I know, in the dream, the basic idea, but how? I try to put her back but my cervix is closed and the baby starts crying because it hurts her. I’m sorry, I say to her, and she looks like she understands. Then I panic—how am I going to put this baby back without squishing her, or tearing myself? I look everywhere in the book but it’s not even in the index. Then I start thinking that maybe, since the baby seems ok in the air, that maybe she can survive like this until her birth? I’ll just keep her extra warm. But then I notice that her toes are starting to disintegrate. Her skin is starting to dry up and flake away. I panic. I’m left holding a baby-shaped pile of black sand.*

### 5.1 Deep in the heart of Texas

Alberta wakes up in-transit, in the Dallas/Fort Worth airport, a nightmare in and of itself. The ticket in her knapsack tells her that the final destination is Guadalajara. Alberta—never good at geography—wonders if she might see an elephant. She’s hungry and rifles through the pockets in her knapsack, looking for money. She’s surprised to find an indecent number of American fives and tens crammed into her daybook, and a blank business card. The flight from Toronto comes back to her in a torrent, reeking of gin.

“First time to Texassssss?”

“Yes Sir.” Alberta looks over the man to her left and her first thought is *Run. Now.*

“What’s a pretty girl like you doing travelling alone?” A lidless wink, the slit of his iris widening, attempting to swallow her soul.

“Just needed a change.” Her second thought: *I smell blood.*

“Man troublesssssss?”

“No man. No troubles.” Worm dangling.

“I can’t believe that. A pretty thing like you?”

“Cross my heart.” And she does, pulling his eyes to her breasts. X marks the Mark.

“Norm Noble.” Offers a clammy comatose claw. Perfect.

“Alberta Bound.” Takes the slippery corpse and gives it her best shake. Norm strokes her palm with a few slimy talons as she withdraws her hand. Alberta vows to scour her whole damn arm later with peroxide. She then turns to the cocoa-eyed man on her right: “Alberta Bound.”

“Dr. Jorge Triana.” Firm dry handshake.

“Dr. Triana.”

“Just ‘Jorge’ or ‘Dr. T.’, Ms. Bound.”

“Alberta.”

She smiles and he winks at her too. “*Cuidado,*” he whispers, casting an eye at Noble Norm.

Dr. T. hands her a *wet nap*.

Norm orders Alberta a martini.

“Well, Mr. Noble, what’s your business?”

“Delicately utilised vehiclesssssssweetie,” he laughs, she imagines, at his conspicuous cleverness with vocabulary. “Own my own businesssss. Biggest used automobile lot in the greater Dallas/Fort Worth area.”

“Wow! That’s *so* neat.” Alberta decides that naïve gushing is best.

“Pretty good line to be in, these dayssss. Sure beats the old days when I was a border guard. But I saved my money and invested and there you are sssssweetie: A man creates a place for himself by hard work and perssssseverance.” Pays for both drinks, tipping low. “I only do ‘carriage trade’, you understand. *Noble Norm’s Previously Owned Fine Automobilessssss*.” Winks again, smoothing some hairs over his horns. “Here sweetie, take one of my cardssssss,” his wallet is thick with Yankee green. Alberta cannot decide whether to pretend to ignore the wad, or the dexterity of Norm’s clawed tentacles and he gracefully pierces a a card, and slithers it to Alberta who inwardly cringes as she pulls it free.

“They’re very nice,” she stammers a moment. Then, thinking of nothing else to say, Alberta reaches for her drink, sniffs it, noting that it’s a gin martini, not vodka. The sweet reek conjures an image of Chas at his drunken worst. Her head begins to spin.

“Only the best for Noble Norm. Those cards cost almost a dollar each to print. But it was worth every penny. Scratch the bottom of that card, honey. On the stripe there below the web site.”

“Scratch the card?”

“Yesssss Ma’am.” Noble Norm is clearly busting with pride. Eye doing the face-breast-face journey, forked tongue darting over scaly lips and cybrow as he watches her.

Alberta is wary but tries it anyway. “Uh, smells like leather?” She’s not sure.

“You bet your pretty blue peepers it sssssmells like leather!” Ten gallon laugh and a cheap slap/grope to Alberta’s bare back as she bends to remove her sandals, breaking one of his talons off into her back. She feels nothing but the force of the slap which forces her lungs to empty. Leaves her gasping. “Well I’m ssssorry sssweetie,” he says. “Don’t know my own strength, I guess.” She shivers to note he smells his tentacle after the slap. “Don’t smelling that card just put you in the front seat of a gently used Jag-you-are? Leather seats and all the trimmingsssss. Yes Ma’am. Nothing but the finesssst for Noble Norm. Oh dear,” he says, “I’ve broken a nail.” He licks his wounded index talon, graced with one drop of Alberta Bound blood. “Yes Ma’am,” he repeats, tongue slithering around tip. “Nothing but the finest.”

“Wow, that is really something Mr. Noble! May I keep this? I’ve never seen anything like it. Well,” giggle to hide the horror. “*Smelled* anything like it. Gosh, I’ve never even *been* in a car with leather seats.” Pause. “Front or back,” she adds, with a sly little wink of her own. Another giggle and covering of *ob-gosh-did-I-say-that?* mouth. It’s almost too easy, and she feels robbed herself, finding little artistry in this conquest. But she feels validated all the same.

The talon has a life of its own, and buries itself into her spine.

“You keep that card, sweetie, so that way you can find me. I’d be mighty pleased to drive you... in one of my automobilesssss. Now let’s get to some drinking,” twisting his heft for a better view of Alberta’s fumbling with the top button of her camisole, doing what she calls her “Sister Sarah” routine she adapted from *Guys and Dolls*. Button open. Button close. Button



open. Button close. More hypnotic than any swinging pocketwatch. “Here’s mud in your eye.” He says, raising his glass.

The wound closes.

“Cheers!” she replies, looking him directly in the eye for the first time. “Wow! A drive would be *so* neat. But say, tell me Mr. Noble, speaking of cards, do you want to play or something? I have some. Or even chess if you want.” Eyes wide open. Pupils dilated. She makes furtive eye contact as her face fills with colour and fumbles with the button again. Works every time. She looks down, silently thanking the gods for her gift of blush-on-demand. Alberta’s mission is startling clear now and she decides not to be deterred by the nauseating gin. She scratches her leg, adjusts her skirt. Norm’s eye, temporarily distracted from the face-breast-face game, devours the naked thighs of Alberta Bound.

“Just call me Norm, sweetie. And I’d surely love to play with *you*,” donkey laugh and another cheap grope. “What’s your game?”

Leaving no mark.

“Don’t have too many,” wider. “I’m ok on chess, but I always get confused on which way the horses and castles move. I can play Rummy and that other one with the pegs.”

“Cribbage.”

She feels nothing.

“That’s it. But I don’t have a cribbage board. Oh yeah, my friends just taught me to play poker. But I can never remember that flush/straight/grand slam stuff. Not that I’ve seen any of them anyway.” Resolute now, she takes a final gulp. “Wow! That’s really strong.”

Giggles. Her little cough for effect hides a spontaneous gag reflex. She pauses, controlling the muscles in her throat, then beams her best.

“Well ssssssweetie, why don’t we start with Rummy then I’ll walk you through a few games of Ssssssssstud.” Tongue out, doing some twisting flicking movement. *Disgusting.*  
“That’s a kind of *poke-r*.”

“Oh yes, I’ve heard of it. Five Card Stud right?”

“That’s right, sweetie. But where I come from, we call it *Ssstud*.” Licks his lips.  
Breasts-face-breasts. “How about another drink?” He bites. Hook firmly planted in cheek.

“I probably shouldn’t but why not? It’s not every day I fly to Dallas right? Holy moley this went *right* to my head.” Giggle. She glances at Dr. T who gives her a knowing smile, then closes his eyes and sleeps. The gin almost gags her again, but as she chokes it down, she feels herself grow more determined than ever to clean Noble Norm out of every blessed piece of folding money in that big ass wallet of his.

“May I deal Mr Nobl-, I mean, *Norm*?” fondling his name, bending to retrieve the cards from her knapsack, turning her body enough to treat Noble Norm to a glimpse of breast, then bracing herself with a light touch to his thigh as she straightens. “My friends always let me deal. They say it brings them luck.” She swiftly notes his erection and decides suffering gin is worth every moment she’s about to enjoy.

“You do whatever your little heart desires, ssssssweetie,” as he realigns Little Norm. “I’m all yoursssssssss.”

*Oh yes, she thinks. You certainly are.* Alberta circles once more for effect, then attacks.

Hours later, she is still holding the card when she sees Dr. T approach her. “Heading to Guadalajara?” He addresses her in Spanish, wondering.

“*Si Señor.*” Alberta smiles. They continue in Spanish. Her accent is flawless.

“What did you get him for?”

“Numb Nuts Norm? ’Bout four hundred bucks.”

“American?”

“Of course. What do you take me for?”

“He took it well.”

“I think he sees it as a cash advance for services I never intend to render. It was almost too easy.”

“Going to pass on that offer of a drive around the park?”

“Yes, Dr. T. I believe so.”

“You should destroy that,” Dr. T gestures to the card.

“I was just about to,” Alberta replies. She prepares to flip the business card into a nearby trash bin, then pauses, thinking better of it. She examines the card again to see a silvery spidery script appear: “*Touché, Sssweetie.*” She shivers and pockets the card, deciding to burn it later.

“Well Ms. Bound. Do you want to play cards with *me*?”

“I’m not certain Dr. Triana. Do you have a *vee*-hick-le with leather upholstery?”

“Cor-doe-bah,” he replies, in perfect Ricardo Montalban. She laughs.

“May I deal?”

“Certainly not.”

“Dr. T, I don’t believe I want to play cards with you.”

“Smart too.” He laughs. “Tell me Ms. Bound, what’s *your* game?”

“My game?” She looks carefully into his dark chocolate eyes.

“Your *game*.”

“I fly.”

“And you deal cards.”

“*And* I deal cards.”

“Got a job?”

“Need a job.”

“I think I can help you.”

“A tequila will help me.”

“I’m amazed you have any room left in that hollow leg.”

“I have *two* legs.”

“So you do.”

Alberta, my Alberta. I have something important to tell you.

## 5.2 I rejoined the sideshow

19:03

“You *what?*”

“So then I caught up with the side-show.”

“Doing what?”

“Spitting fire, nailing things into my head, shoving crickets up my nose, hustling cards.

The usual.”

“Get out.”

“I did.”

“How’d you find them?”

“Long story.”

“What lured you back?”

“The money.”

“I can’t imagine that a side-show pays well.”

“It doesn’t — but it was about the same as any temp agency. And this way I got to travel.”

“I didn’t know you could spit fire.”

“Some guy in Guadalajara taught me.”

“When were you in Guadalajara?”

“Last month. That’s where I found them.”

“Last *month?*”

“Yeah, last month. That’s when I learned how to eat light bulbs too.”

“From the same guy, no doubt.”

“No. From a book, actually.”

“And the nails in the head?”

“Same book. *Lesson 6: Driving Sharp Objects into the Head and Neck....* or something like that.”

“I had to ask.”

19:04

“Just what on earth have you been doing with your life?”

“Moving.”

“Moving?”

“Moving. I wander. That’s what I do best. I move.”

“You must get tired sometimes.”

“I’m *always* tired. Especially these days. That’s why I move so much. I’m just looking for a place to rest. But as long as I’m wandering, I may as well pick up some skills.”

“That *used* to mean typing.”

19:05

“And I don’t even want to touch the crickets thing.”

“Mixed with a chocolate shake, a refreshing protein boost. A little hose up the nose down to the stomach, other end attached to this pump-kind-of-thing....”

“*La la la la* I’m not listening *la la la la*.”

19:06

“So refresh my memory.”

“OK.”

“You went to the bathroom.”

“Yeah....”

“Then you call from Switzerland.”

“Yeah...”

“Which is one hell of a trip to the bathroom.”

“Yeah.” Pause. “Uh, sorry?”

“But actually it was the stop *after* Guadalajara.”

“Something like that....it’s a very long story.”

“No doubt I’ll hear it all eventually. Anything else I should know?”

“I’m pregnant.”

“Of course you are. Why not? And where might this have happened? Australia?”

“No. Just here.”

“Where?”

“Here.” She pats her stomach with his hand. Her still flat stomach.

“Don’t get abstruse on me.”



## 6.0 The Sixth Voyage of Alberta Bound

September, 1999

*Last night I dreamt there was a woman (not me) who was sliced and partially decapitated by the propellers of a plane. I approached her, then dissociated and some other woman continued the approach. The dead woman held a large knife in her hand and when I/other woman approached, the dead woman swung the knife around to stab me/her... but then I/other woman avoided this and removed the woman's face/head skin and wore it like a toque. There was no blood. I/other woman was going to remove all the woman's skin but I was conscious of dreaming and told myself in my dream that although it was only a dream, I was still not wanting to see this. I knew that it was important, though, to wear this woman's skin (or at least her head).. the act had some symbolism and I knew it was necessary and not a gratuitous act of violence.*

### 6.1 Where do elephants go to die?

19:09

"That's a good question," I reply, not quite sure where this one was headed.

"Maybe they're just confused and get lost?"

"Could be. It's not like we have any way of knowing."

Soon, my friends, soon. Alberta will go off somewhere to die.

### 6.2 From the Beginning

She's not sure where, just yet. She understands the elephants and wants to go where no one will see her die. This is different from her suicides, which were very public. This time she has no choice. No control. As it has been written: "You are here." The arrow points to her scar. The last of several, of many, of all. Most self-inflicted. The rest, marks of others, of family, of surgeons. The last was the first—her birth mark. What she's always had. What they'd

look for after a rocketship explosion. Her teeth, her birthmark. Now her tattoo. Not her face, not her voice, not her eyes, not her hair. When all is but gone what remains? Her teeth. Her scars. Her tattoo. No laughter. No jokes. No tears. No unshaved legs and hairy armpits. Just dental records and “identifying” marks. Bone fragments. DNA scrapes. A twisted and charred pair of earrings. Did I say “pair”? I mean one. One charred earring. God knows what happened to the other. Burned up on re-entry, no doubt.

And with her teeth and scars she will go off to die. Not sure where. Not sure when. She is waiting now. She has no indicators. No clues. Not yet. She is waiting for her skin to betray her. She watches it as it grows and dies. It is alive and keeps her alive. Until it grows tired, needs to rest, finds a place to lay her down. So she waits. She sends me postcards and emails, telling me about the food, the people, the buildings, and the museums. The world becomes her hiding ground. She’s looking for a quiet corner. Wonders about the corners of the world, where they are. How she can find one. The world is too spherical for Alberta and she cannot find any shadows. She wonders where the elephants go to die. She wants to be there: to lie down on their thick parchment hides and be lost in the shadows of their ears. And she wants it to be soon because she cannot bear the waiting.

“Alex?”

“Mmmyes?....”

“C’mere.”

“No.”

“Please.”

“No. You’re going to nail something up your nose again aren’t you? No thanks. Go away. Be kind to the delicate tissues of your nose. You’ll thank me later.”

“I’m not going to nail anything up my nose. I promise. I just want to show you something.”

“Promise? Nothing up your nose?”

“Promise. Nothing up my nose.”

I relive the scene over and again, never knowing what will trip the memory. Sometimes it’s chocolate, often, I just need to hear some song, usually the opening strains of *From the Beginning*. Some days, I change the lines of our dialogue, although I remember everything with painful clarity. And then there are times when I can hardly remember the colour of her shirt. But always, always, the tiny strawberry blonde curls at the base of her neck come to mind. She resented her straight hair which resisted even the hottest irons and industrial-strength mousse. But under that long straight hair, in that soft groove at the base of her skull, rested the softest few little curls. I could never resist touching them, seeing them only in the mornings as she curled herself into me (or so I would imagine it), into my arms. *Alberta, my Alberta*. How could I have been so blind?

“Alex! Hello? Earth to Alex!”

“Mmmyes?....”

“C’mere.”

“No. Get thee behind me.”

“Please.”

“Nice freckle,” I had said. This is how it happened. She was walking on her hands in the living room, her shirt slipping up (or would that be *down?*). The t-shirt was her favourite: purple with an ELP logo she painted onto the front. I remember she never tucked in her shirts. Never wore belts with her oversized jeans unless she was “going out”—her euphemism for a date, however few and far between those events were.

Earth to Alex. Earth to Alex. Earth to Alex.

“Nice freckle,” I had said. This is how it happened. *I* was walking on *my* hands, *my* shirt slipping up. Earth to Alex. Earth to Alex. They are calling me. Earth to Alex. How *does* that song start? It was playing that day. *There might have been things I missed.*

That’s it. There might have been things I missed.

“Nice freckle,” I had said. I am forever doomed to repeat this day.

“Thanks. Grew it myself.” She had replied, very tough-broad. I ran my thumbnail along the bottom of her foot (which foot? I can never remember and it haunts me). She squealed. Always so ticklish.

Her right foot. Now I remember. How can I ever forget?

Why hadn't I seen this before?

Her feet. I remember admiring the callused soles of her feet. Years of gymnastics leaving her with such toughened prehensile claws capable of gripping floors or walls or whatever my Alberta chose to jump onto, off of, into, from. The tops of her feet, like the rest of her skin, were smooth and lovingly cared for, as though to compensate. She used to joke that her next act would be learning to shuffle cards and arrange the deck using her toes. Something her equally callused hands were almost too small for—so, she argued, since her feet were larger than her hands, she stood a better chance. Then she'd laugh at her cheap pun. I always laughed. I told her that if she wore one of her beloved mini skirts while fixing cards with her feet, all would be too distracted to detect the artifice anyway, much less care if they caught her.

"Nice freckle." My invisible feet are smooth, never having suffered either gravity or journeying such as Alberta knew it. She did all the walking—by hand or foot—in our little team.

"Thanks. Grew it myself."

"Nice freckle." I cannot fly.

"Thanks. Grew it myself."

I don't need to.

“Nice freckle.” I am doomed to remember. To remember, that I looked every day on her birthmark and never caught its significance as it grew. As it took over, digging deep into her, throughout her. A network, rhizomatic.

“Thanks. Grew it myself.”

“Nice freckle.” I am blind.

Thanks. THANKS. *Thanks.*

Earth to Alex.

“Stand still a sec.,” I had grabbed her foot (left, I think) to steady her. “Do all your freckles have a fetching circumference like that?” I had to bend to take a closer look.

“No. Just this one. What do you think?”

“I think it’s cute. Looks like Bear. Nice how the artist incorporated it into your tattoo.” It did look like Bear. *Hreod, Bear of Bear Island*, but generally known to mere mortals as simply “Bear”. A well-travelled bear. That’s how I would know she’d gone on another journey. I’d come home and Bear would be missing. The math was simple:

No Bear = No Alberta.

And I have him here with me now. Hallo Bear, how could I have been so blind? *Nevermind*, the most sagacious Bear of Bear Island replies. *It is done.* The Bear sighs. *Pass me one of those Camels, willya?*

“I thought so too. Dr. Dave was very accommodating that way.”

“And in others, I’m sure. So what does your other doctor think?”

“Not sure, really. He just started sharpening an X-acto blade.”

“Should’ve offered him one of yours.” I took advantage of her inversion to blow on her stomach as one does with babies.

“EEEEEEEE!” she shrieked, instantly upright, very crimson. “But what do you think? Should I have it out or not?”

“*Out?* Not *off?*”

“Out.”

“Hmmm. Well, it is cute.”

“True.”

“How dangerous does he think it is — this cute little freckle?”

“Dunno. I offered to remove it myself.”

“Oh. I’ll bet that was well received.”

“You have no idea. He didn’t even crack a smile.”

“How likely is it that this cute little freckle will reduce in size, become symmetrical and monochromatic?”

I am not even reporting the real dialogue anymore. This is my flippant in-denial recounting of the event. The ABCDs of a cute little freckle: Asymmetry, Border, Colour, and Diameter. *Let’s sing together: A, B, C, Deeeeeeeeeee.*

“Not very.”

“And how likely is it that this cute little freckle will grow, alter its borders, and change colour?” *E-F-Geeeee.*

“Pretty likely.”

“Then have it out. What, it takes ten minutes, right? Does it in his office?” *H-I-J-Kayy.* I know how this ends. Why didn’t I say something?

“Yup.”

“So there you go. An afternoon off work. I’ll even buy you a sympathy dinner.”  
*Elemenopeeeeeeeeeeee.* It is already too late.

“Good enough for me.”

How wrong we had both been. Stage Four Melanoma. Her final letter was from California. There aren’t any elephants running wild there; but then, Alberta was never good at geography.

You know the rest of the song. I don’t need to sing it here. If I could drink, I would. Alas, I have no stomach.

*Hey!* The Bear jabs me in the ribs with a furry elbow. *Hey, you gonna pass me a smoke or what?* Smoking *Camels* in the desert, we two. How ironic is that? Fortunately for me, the Bear doesn’t drink. I’ve almost finished this bottle. The heap of cast-offs behind me could build us an igloo. The Bear once told me that even glass is still liquid, that it moves ever so slowly over time, melting, reshaping. I wonder if that’s true, or if it’s just some piece of trivia he made up to cheer me. *A light would be nice,* another furry jab, *if that’s not too much to ask.* Sure. Here you go, little Bear of Bear Island. Smoke if you got ‘em. We’re in it for the long-haul.



**Part Two—Alex (reprise): adagio ma non tanto**

*When you eat your Smarties do you eat the red ones last?*

## 7.0 The Playground

Alberta Alberta what were you *thinking*? The playground in the *evening*? (just about five o'clock I'd say). It's getting dark. It's cold. Your hands cramp into numbness—so dead that you can't do the zipper on your jacket. Hands so blue. Go to the rocketship monkey bars and ponder the cosmos. Maybe your world will find you.

Looking up into your six-year-old sky, Anne, what do you see?

*I see heaven and I see God. He's waving at me.*

Are you waving back?

*I am, and He is happy.*

Looking up into your six-year-old sky, Anne, you see the face of God. He waves and you wave back. He is happy. But what about you, little Alberta, frozen to the monkey bars, too afraid to stay, too afraid to go home?

*I'm going to be in trouble.*

Alberta, my Alberta. What *were* you thinking? The *playground* in the evening? (it's five after five). It's that eerie twilight, I think, that draws them. Who? Not your world but *Them*. The Bad Men. Here's one now. Some nice old man offers you his warm pockets.

Looking up into the eyes of this six-year-old man, Alberta, what do you see?

*I see a Bad Man. He wants to hurt me.*

And what do you do?

*Nothing. I'm scared.*

Looking into the six-year-old stranger, Alberta, you see a dirty old man. He offers you candy and you are frightened. He comes closer and you freeze. But what about you, Anne, sitting on the cold rocketship, waiting for lift-off?

*I kick him. Real hard. He falls.*

And then you went home, you ran home, you *flew* home. You flew, Alberta. You flew.

You flew for the first time. Little hops at first, then the running long jump. Finally you transcended gravity, you flew. Twenty feet, maybe thirty. Your heart was pounding. Your heart *is* pounding. I can hear it now. Your heart was pounding, bruising your ribs, and crushing your lungs. You could not breathe but you could *fly*.

But you could not fly at home. No. When you enter the kitchen, you are walking. Your family is sitting around the dinner table, just as you left them.

I know. I was there.

You enter the kitchen and your father gets up from the table.

Looking up into the eyes of your six-year-old father, Alberta, what do you see?

*I see him turn red and he says something to my mother.*

What does he say?

*He says the same thing he always says when I'm bad: Deal with her, Weezie.*

Looking into your six-year-old father you saw him turn blood red with anger. He washed his hands of you. But what about you, Anne, watching your mother take your father's belt from his trousers?

*They're not my parents. I hate them.*

Looking up into the eyes of Alberta's six-year-old mother, Anne, what do you see?

*I see her mad at me and then I see her get our father's belt. She hits me.*

What do you do?

*I tell her to f-off but I say it for real. She gets even more mad. Now I'm in really big trouble.*

Looking into your six-year-old mother you saw your father's belt. She hit you and you fought back. She was angry. But what about you, Alberta, lying on your side in bed that night, clutching Bear, swallowing tears?

*I want to go home.*

You had stood there stoically, your parents (understandably) upset, (understandably) worried. You endured your punishment with quiet grace of *Life Lesson Number Two*. But do they know, *did* they know why you left? What made you run? And it's not just the aliens is it, Alberta? No.

It is more than that. It is more.

And you lie in bed that night and your backside is burning from the belt, your father's belt. And you lie in bed that night on your side and you ponder the cosmos and you know, you *know* that you have to get out, that you have to leave. The question is *when*. The question is *how*. Not *who* not *what* not *why*. Just when. Just how. That's all you need to know, Alberta: *When* and *How*.

## 8.0 The Canada-U.S. Border

Like most dreamers Alberta, you flew, you *fly* the breast stroke. Sometimes, but not always, you soar. Arms close to your sides, legs together, you are a streamer on a baton, circling ever higher. Smooth and fluid like scotch from a hip flask.

Dr. Max is in a state of shock. Even from where I stand I can see that. His jaw *hits the floor*, as they say. Max watches *Watch out Alberta! He has Smarties in his pockets!* and rubs his *Actually, they're M&Ms* eyes then looks again.

But *Smarties* are nothing to you now. Shall we catalogue the 843 reasons why? Shall I tell you, my Alberta, why *Smarties* and *M&Ms* are nothing to you now?

I don't have to. You know. You took that pain and reworked it until it was *yours*. It was your pain and you alone controlled it. You made it your power, your strength. No one could touch you now. *You could fly*. As no one else ever could.

But no one believed it. They didn't want to. And your strength, your power, was left unobserved, unappreciated, unrecognised. No one saw, no one sees. It is your childhood again: *No one sees*.

Your teeth, my Alberta. Who broke your teeth?

I know, I was there.

It was your father this time. Your father. And this day your sister cried, even your brother felt sick. Your sister who had held you down for years to the ministrations of your one-eyed salivating brother: *she* cried. *Stop it!* she shouted, *Stop it!* And what did your sister, in her hour, earn for this? A slap. It barely made a sound. But you even then, after all this, you *even then* came to your sister's defence and kicked your father with a mighty *Life Lesson Number Three!* A *mighty* Life Lesson Number Three. What did that bring? Nothing else but *Life Lesson Number Four* of course. A week in bed with your Bear. Some raw steak. Bridgework when the gum finished receding. "Wisdom teeth," you said, as prescribed by Scripture.

And they believed you.

Duck your head Alberta, even I can't help you here. I watched through the windows and doors. I was in the chimney. Under the table. In the plants. I was everywhere except behind the eyes of your father. The burning cold rage, the frustration. I was not there. But I was everywhere else. Even your mother, Alberta, even your mother was sorry. But your father, Alberta, your father. Look what you did to your father. And his good shirt. His French cuffs.

I cannot watch any further.

## 9.0 Guadalajara, Mexico

...*Veinte-siete años después, Alberta Bound había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que ella mostrò sua magia...*

—Some fire-spitting punk in Guadalajara

Why Dr. T. should be so sentient, so prescient, so damned tall is beyond me. *Veinte-siete años después*, twenty-seven years later, *Alberta Bound había de recordar aquella tarde remota* would recall that remote afternoon *en que* in which *ella* she *mostrò* showed *sua* her *magia* magic.

*Veinte-siete años después* you would be thirty-two. You *are* thirty-two. One more year to go. *Veinte-ocho años después* you, Alberta, would be thirty-three. You *will be* thirty-three. You will be dead. *Alberta* will be dead. You *are* dead. They have given you one year. In one year, you will be betrayed and smothered. Your skin will leap up and wrap you tightly, constricting your oxygen, your blood flow, your skin will pull you down into the earth. In one more year, Alberta, and you *will be* clay, you *will find* your world. You will be dead. I have seen it. I lowered you into the ground myself, carefully replacing the cracked chunks of desert earth over your grave. There is nothing you can do. You can wait, you can only wait, *you have no choice*. It is already done.

In twenty-seven years Alberta, you will be thirty-two and you will recall when you were five.

No. You *are* five. One more year to go and you will run away from home for the first time, finding that rocketship in the playground. You will sit in the ship and look at stars and wonder where your world is. You will sit and watch and know nothing of oxygen and helium and nitrogen. You will know nothing of interstellar travel, bankbooks, quantum physics, of *geography*. In one year you will learn of your world (*but which one?*), pistachio ice cream, extreme



cold, of dirty old men. In one year you will learn that the Bad Men keep *Smarties* in their pockets. You will learn to cry *Fuck you!* and *mean it*. In one year you will learn that you can fly.

But it is *now*. It is one year ago. And you, my Alberta with your travelling Bear, are still alive and well and grifting in Mexico. You arrived, you landed, you were there, you saw the sights, you drank tequila and made love with Dr. T. You made love with *tequila con soda*, with *quesadillas*, with cantaloupe and mangoes. In the mornings, you would roll yourself tightly in the blanket of Mexican Spanish. Your tongue pronounced the words of *te quiero* I love you *te extraño* I miss you *tu peor pesadilla* your worst nightmare. Your cheek brushed the skin of Jorge, following the lines of neck and throat and pulse, the collar bones, the heart, the navel, the hair. *Te quiero* you said with your tongue, your lips, your hands. *Te quiero* I love you *te extraño* I miss you hold me tightly.

And the hands and the lips and the eyes.

Alberta, my Alberta, your cobalt eyes, your burning hair. The flames, the fire never seeing itself reflected in your transcendent eyes. Sublime tendrils of smoke curve your brow. The inferno as you soar, my Jalisco dragon. And you flew in Mexico, Alberta, and everyone believed, *everyone* saw. You flew and they *saw*.

*Te quiero. Te extraño.* You, Alberta, are my worst nightmare. Where have you gone? What are these few postcards? These emails? These voicemails? I miss you. I love you. Where have you gone?

But I know, Alberta. I know. That is my pain. I *know*. It is already done. I put you there myself and now all I can do is sit here with Bear on my lap and wait. And wait.

And write.

*Te quiero. Te extraño. Alberta, you* are my worst nightmare.

What is this magic? I had asked you.

*I can fly*, you had said.

You what?

*I can fly. Alex, I can fly.* And you had shown me—but I already knew.

This, then, is your magic. You fly. Your sanguine hair. Your indigo eyes. You *flew*.

And my magic? What is my magic?

*You cannot fly.* You, my Alberta, observed.

That's right. I cannot fly. *That* is my magic.

I am invisible. I am, as you are, dead. Long dead.

## **10.0 Geneva, Switzerland**

You ask, Alberta, how I will get to Milano for dinner tonight. *And well you may ask:*

Teleporter.

## 11.0 Milan, Italy

19:00

And I did find you in Milan.



Milano.

Milan.

And I did find you in Milan and I found you and I saw you from across the room and I approached you when you were finished and I said: "I've never seen anyone do that before. In a restaurant, that is."

"Do what?"

"But it was subtle, I'll grant you that. Very subtle. But your face betrays you."

"How so?"

"Look." My palm, a mirror to reveal your burning cheeks and midnight eyes. *The sea the sea the wine dark sea.*

"You can't tell anything from that."

"The pheromones surround you like mist. I could find you in the dark. Even if I were blind, I could find you." Alberta, wake up. Wake up.

"And even if you could see?"

“I would blind myself.” My forehead brushes hers. *The sea the sea the wine dark sea.*

“Your scent is my magnet.” A Merlot kiss. *I am dreaming.*

And you, my Alberta, dawning sex blush, reborn sentience. You, my Alberta, marked yourself. And as I sat there next to you and your *farfalle al funghi*, you crossed your gymnast’s legs and started again, offering me your lop-sided grin and a sip of wine. I watched your pulse, drinking deeply.

In Milano.

In Milan.

“How’s Bear?” I ask, knowing the answers as I always do.

“Fine. Italy agrees with him. He’s half-Sicilian, you know. From Siracusa.” Of course he is. *Bear of Bear Island.* “Tomorrow I think we’ll head south so he can see the homeland.”

Milano.

Milan.

“Alex,” you said. “Alex, I have something to show you.”

“I already know,” I said. “I have seen it.”

"It's a tattoo."

"Let me guess," I have to humour you, Alberta. "You have the *Dragons of Pern* {xe  
"Tattoos:Dragons of Pern"} on your breasts. When you hiccough, they fly, right?"

"How did you know?" A wink.

"So tell me."

"It's a perpetual map, kinda. So I always know where I am."

"What, did someone tattoo a compass on your butt?"

"Not exactly." That crooked smile.

"So show me."

"It'll cost you. Lots."

"I got 12,000." A flash of paper.

"Dollars?"

"Lira."

"Close enough." My hand under your table. *You*, my Alberta.

You wanted to show me but already I knew. This is my magic. I already knew but I still wanted to see. To touch. I wanted to lay you down and read your map with my cheek, hold you close, never set you free. I wanted to see where you were, where you are, where you will be. I wanted to roll myself in your geography. Don't go Alberta, *don't go*. But you left, you will leave, you *have* to leave.

Go.

Now.

## 11.1 Welcome to Domodossola

Domodossola. Welcome to Domodossola—the alpha and the omega—Switzerland whacks Italy in a thunderous clash in food and fashion sense.

The dogs come on the train, sniffing for drugs and weapons (you swallowed, what were you thinking Alberta? you swallowed small chunks of cocaine double-wrapped in condoms—something you saw Cyclopes do once long ago). You there with a stomach full of evil you carted to Europe from Mexico. You swallowed and purged and swallowed and purged this little fortune of yours incessantly for 28 hours of travel and in-transit. How can your stomach and esophagus handle this abuse? Can anyone smell the residue on your fingers? No. You are careful to always be wearing gloves. You're waiting for them to leave so you can get rid of it. Water bottle ready to help you—one of your many sideshow tricks: regurgitation. The border guards, toting automatic rifles, laugh when they see your Canadian passport, *Buon'giorno Signorina Canadese*, they say. One pulls your hair. You give them your best smile and hold your Bear up to the light, telling them in perfect Italian that he is Sicilian and you're taking him to visit his homeland. And they laugh.

You're forcibly removed from the train at Geneva. You call me. I'm home. And you disappear again.

In Roma, you sold the rock at card games and lived on the cash, leaving no e-plastic trails for me to follow. You hid in the gypsy camps.

The gypsies spoke a melange of Italian and Romanian; but somehow, as with all of this earth's tongues, the language was coded into what passes for your DNA and your words were already there, just waiting to be spoken. That was what they didn't understand, how you came to speak their language effortlessly, without accent. You joked, to blank faces, about the Babel fish that had been implanted before birth.

You told them you were an alien, killing time until someone from your world retrieves you. Many believed you, treating you with a certain deference.

And they afforded you a refuge despite your strangeness; and there in the tented city you could hide from me—or so you thought. I couldn't always find you in the camps or on the congested Roman streets. Running with your newly found *cugina* Claudia, doing pockets and purses. She'd approach tourists, *la Repubblica* out like she's selling, and you'd cut the purse straps or fanny packs beneath the outstretched paper before anyone knew what hit them, so busy they were staring at Claudia's breasts or the headlines. Christ, anyone knows that no one sells papers like that in Europe. You'd take turns, Claudia and you. Your burning hair (now considered blonde in Roma) and cobalt eyes (now bottomless black) made you an innocent, allowing you to approach natives. The map ready, the querying brow, the *Scusi Signore, dov'è il museo?* et cetera that the male Romans invariably fell for. *Prego Signorina...* and they'd point to the map while Claudia did their pockets. I laughed to watch it all. For this is my magic, remember? *I am invisible.*

Cards in Roma *centro* were dead dead dead though. Too many cops and besides, it was *il Giubileo*, the Jubilee, coming up and the Pope would be opening holy doors. All that good being sent out into the cosmos, you felt queasy and had to leave, but not before you touched all the holy doors, just to be on the safe-side. You plan to return once the seals have been broken. The



place to be was Napoli. Paris had been good, but too many cops. Better to be in Napoli where the sun was strong even in the winter. Napoli. No one knows you in Napoli. But I found you, Alberta. What were you doing in sun-scorched Napoli? On some cruddy little sidestreet toting your good Nikon, pretending to be a confused tourist—what were you doing in *Napoli*? That was not part of the plan. I saw you and ran but you flew up through the lines of laundry and through the smog, out of my sight. But I know. I *know* it was you. I paused to catch my breath since you were already gone. I found you at another game and you saw me. But I left you so unnerved you got caught, dashing straight into a wall when the cops came, winding yourself temporarily unconscious, your long-suffering nose streaming dark blood down your cheek. And you lay there on the stones looking up into the sliver of light afforded by narrow streets and tall laundry-lined buildings I couldn't resist sticking my tongue out at you. And you smiled, despite the pain. Then I was gone and you were stuffed into a smoky cop car and whisked off to enjoy a *Deliverance* frisking and percussive napolitano interrogation. Slap slap slap *Signorina do you expect us to believe you were just watching?* Slap slap slap, *all that cash?* Slap slap slap.

I know. I was there. That was I in the mirrored corner. I saw you looking, Alberta. I was there all the time. It's my job.

The scene repeats itself and always, there are variations. When does this stop? Until I get it right. You don't know yet, do you Alberta? Why won't you listen? Neither of us can rest until I get it right. And I keep messing it up.

19:00 (*reprise*)

As I entered the restaurant, the point-of-view changed. I was you. I was gone, absorbed by the wine and your Cheshire grin.

And you did find me in Milan.

Milano.

Milan.

Alberta, I said. Alberta, I have something important to show you.

I already know, she said. I have seen it.

It's a tattoo.

Let me guess, you have the *Dragons of Pern* on your breasts. When you have the hiccoughs, they fly, right?

You're close. I wink.

So tell me.

Wings. I finally have wings.

This is right. She has wings. Why do I always forget? Alberta doesn't have a map, she has wings. She never looked in the mirror. I tried to tell her but she wouldn't listen.

It's like a perpetual map.

So show me.

It'll cost you.

I got 12,000. A flash of paper.

Dollars?

Lira.

Close enough. She joins me. My hand slides under her skirt. Warm thighs parting slightly, then closing so I have to pull my hand, bashing the table with the inside of my elbow. She laughs. I brush my cheek to her forehead, to capture her thoughts, the scent of her hair.

Alberta, my Alberta. I have something important to tell you. But it's too late now. It is done.

## 12.0 Barstow, California

The string of lights made a beautiful image. The bulbs emerged slowly like the birth of little bells. The darkness was no longer complete. And, in the beginning, there was a string of lights and a car and a table and four chairs. There were three strings of lights and two more tables. Eight more chairs. All these came out of the sky, up from the ground. This was where we would have supper (chicken and rice, or was it garlic *frites*?). I would sit at another table and watch. You cannot see me in the darkness, Alberta. But I am here, now, watching you.

Alberta, you had asked Norm where he was taking you. “To dinner,” he had said. And drove on without lights, without sound.

Alberta, you had asked again where he was taking you. “Just around this corner,” he had replied. He drove straight through though, explaining buckminster physics of speeding corners, curves in light, angles of water and turns in the road. The ontology of chicken and rice in the open air.

“I need to remain obscured,” you had said. “My skin can no longer tolerate the light. In fact, my skin is gone.” You sat in the darkness holding Bear, looking for signs, stars, anything. You were lost.

Alberta, you are bones and flesh but no skin. You have come here to die because it is as far away from me as you can imagine. But you are wrong.

I know. I am here.

Now. Eating garlic *frites*. Watching you. I am your protector.

You are looking for shadows and corners in the world but there are none. There is darkness but it is obscured by the string of lights. There are shadows, but they are hidden by the sun. Your skin is still with you: it is merely growing inside, down, burrowing. You are turning inside out, my Alberta. *Cuidado*.

### **Part Three—Anne: Allegretto**

*These things must be done delicately so they don't hurt the magic.*

## Lesson 1: The Three Card Trick

Also known as “Three Card Monte” or the “Mexican Trick”, the Three Card Trick is one of the simplest acts to perform. Performed correctly, this is a game you *cannot* lose. Because of this, it is illegal to perform the Three Card Trick in most major urban centres.

As with so many artifices, the key to success is *confidence*. You must be self-assured. Your movements must be clean and quick. *Never hesitate*.

Key points:

### Let them win the first game

Always let a member of the audience win at least the first game. Hook them in with hope. It may seem too obvious to you, but it always works. Marks *never* quit while they are ahead.

### Be alert

Never lose track of the “winning” card. Remember to notch its corner with your thumbnail. As you flip the “chosen” card over with another card, slide the “chosen” card (usually the “winning” card) from beneath and quickly switch it with the flipping card. Check for the notch first, occasionally, the audience member will actually select the *wrong* card and you will not have to make the switch! This is rare. The average stooge can easily follow the winning card no matter how strong your patter and sleights of hand.

### An octave span

This trick is best performed if your hand span is at least one piano octave.

### Display the “winning” card

In scrambling the three table cards, remember to occasionally display the “winning” card so that your audience does not feel cheated. They need to be reassured that the card does exist. Leave your audience with some hope or they will become too frustrated and will not want to play.

### A partner or “plant”

It is useful to have a “plant” handy. This plant will convince your audience that it is possible to win. It is also good to have a partner on your side in case your audience turns hostile (see below: *In Case of Emergency*).

Also consider playing “good cop, bad cop” with your plant. This will allow the subconscious scepticism of your audience to be aired, under a controlled environment.

## Lesson 1: The Three Card Trick

### In Case of Emergency

#### **Get out of the situation as quickly as possible**

This is the second best advice you will receive in your life: If you are in a bad situation, *get out of it as quickly as possible*. The *Whys and Wherefores* of your escape are contingent on your situation. It is best to have a plan, then improvise appropriately.

Below, some suggestions:

#### **Create a diversion**

When money is involved, there is always the risk of inciting your audience to violence. If this should occur, create a diversion by one of the following two tried-and-true methods:

##### **a) Upturn and throw the table toward the audience**

This will force them to move back—away from you—and allow you a few extra seconds to proceed to point 2: *Run like hell*.

Or:

##### **b) Look left *or* right and shout “shit, the cops”**

This will force the audience to look where you are “looking”, and will distract them long enough for you to proceed to point 2: *Run like hell*.

#### **Run like hell**

Run like hell.

#### **Find a taxi**

Find the first taxicab available. Jump in, lock the doors, and take that cab *anywhere*.

### Useful Tip

#### **Pocket as you play**

Remember to pocket your winnings *as you play*. This will enable you to make a *profitable* get-away. When you need to run, you should not have to be concerned with collecting your money as well. Consistent “banking” will allow you to move efficiently and keep your mind clear for finding that taxicab. Keep addressed stamped, lined envelopes handy to mail yourself the cash in case you are not near an ATM.

Never carry more money than you can afford to lose. In other words, **carry no cash** whenever possible.



### 13.1 The Spoils of War

Stopping at the playground was my idea, really. I was cold and hungry and I realised that there was no way we'd get anywhere. I mean, it was freezing, we were six years old and I decided *let's stop here while we're still in familiar territory*. I mean, let's face it, what *were* we going to do? And if it wasn't for me, we'd have frozen to death back there. Been molested and left for dead. Alberta was paralysed when Dr. Max came over. It was an animalistic response. Playing dead, such as it was. But it's not for me. I've always been more of a fight/flight kind of person. And that asshole, I got him real good. I knew even then that six pounds of pressure in the right place will permanently damage a kneecap.

The drive here from Texas was long. Miles upon miles with no air conditioning, protection for the car not to overheat but doing no good for the travellers. Driving without sound through Death Valley, the irony was not lost on me. Norm. Why Norm Noble? Where did he find me? What was I doing in California? The short trees, the shrubs. Could I survive in the desert? No. That was the point, I think. I knew what this trip was about.

The death. My death. Alberta. Alex. Anne. We all would meet in the desert, but only I would be there.

But I didn't get the *Smarties* though. Not that it mattered in the larger sense—except that we didn't get dinner and the *Smarties* would have been nice—but for whatever reason, whenever I reflect on that day, there's always part of me that would have liked to have scored the candy too.

You see, it's the little things that help you survive. Things that no one else would understand. The *Smarties*. And as we got older: the wallets, the IDs, drivers licences, *anything*. Our *trophies*. It's those same little victories that helped us survive Cyclopes and His Minion. We

knew we couldn't compete on a physical level. Not just because Cyclopes and His Minion were older. Not only because they were bigger. It was that they worked *together*. *Never* alone. Alberta didn't really have much of a chance. I did what I could, of course. But the best she could do was hide in her room and come out only for meals. The Bounds were no help, naturally. Even if they *were* around, disturbing the peace was a bigger crime than the nature of the disruption itself. Kind of like Canada: *Peace, Order, and Good Government*. Disturb the peace, rock the boat, *those* are crimes. And most important:

Never

*Never*

Interrupt

*Interrupt*

Bridge

*Bridge*

So you see, with non-support like that, you have to look forward to the little things.

And Cyclopes and His Minion were a special kind of evil. We aren't just talking sibling rivalry here. We're talking hatred. We're talking creatures who thoroughly enjoy their work. They had it out for Alberta right from the beginning. I never fully figured out why, although I have some theories.

There just seemed something special in the way those two operated. Like their parents, they did everything with a controlled gentility. You could never really put a finger on what they did. You just knew they did *something*. The Bounds themselves are perfect examples. They were

both alcoholics, but in that very upper-middle-class sense. They kept their ugliness out of the public domain. It was all very crisp and civilised. There must be a special gene for genteel nastiness because *both* Cyclopes and His Minion had it. They left no marks, made no sound. Only Alberta: her disruptive cries, her testimony. There was rarely any visible evidence.

Well, nothing that couldn't be explained away.

Alex, Alex. What was I thinking? The desert in June? It's 111 degrees. The heat, the oveny blast. The cliché is true. And I sat on the sand waiting for light bulb dessert and garlic frites and looking for you even as I hid and I knew, Alex, I *knew*. This was named Death Valley for a reason. The valley of shrubs and grasses and eyeball-licking geckos and 111 degrees and garlic frites and light bulbs from the ground with no other light possible except the eerie glow of Las Vegas miles away. I was in the desert driving, being driven. I wanted to die to hide to run to fly from you but you found me. You always do. I hid in the desert but the scrub which passed for trees could not help me. The gentle swell of hills which passed for mountains. Blocked radio signals and sand and the blast of Hell coming from the ground. I would be buried in the ground Alex but there was a purpose here. I found it.

And the Bounds had good intentions, I should add. They weren't *always* horrible. They truly did mean well. Their crimes were more in the realm of selfish, thoughtless neglect. The Bounds had their moments. Not many, but some.

They weren't monsters like their children.

*No?*

Well, not quite.

*Not quite?*

Now that I think about it, they *were* monstrous.

*Monstrous.*

### 13.2 What Goes Up the Chimney Down?

Getting us locked in the cellar was my fault really.

*What a smell of sulphur.*

Cyclopes. He would be returning for his four o'clock feeding. Dickwad.

I got us reamed real good. Didn't mean to. It just always worked out like that. His stupid Minion lost her grip a second and I reached up and pinched Cyclopes' balls with all my strength. Fuck you! I shouted. I couldn't help it. He fell off me, clutching his bag, rolling about like a constipated walrus. I dunno, I guess I would say I *had* to do it. That's when I realised we were screwed. But it was worth it, when I look back. Asshole. And I got a good smack in on His Minion too, just before the flight to the can. Bloodied her nose. But man! A partially incapacitated Cyclopes with crushed testicles—*never leave 'em wounded*. Truer words were never spoken—and they turned the lights off from above and locked us in the cellar, with no way out but up. If only I had thought to go up the stairs in the first place and take my chances. Lock 'em in the basement for a while. But no. I tried that before and got the shit kicked out of me when I let them out. I'm such an idiot, running us into the can. I *thought* there was a lock on the door. Well, there *was* a lock on the door. I think Alberta's father must have removed it for some stupid reason. Too bad he left the lock on the cellar. Stupid me. Christ, even if there *had* been a lock on the bathroom door, what was I going to do anyway? Cocksucker. Anyway, it wasn't the best choice. We were screwed. The Units wouldn't be home until Sunday night. I had to like get us out. I knew we wouldn't last two days down there and besides, there were concerts to see, doobage to smoke. And they might have just left us there until Sunday. And the Bounds would never believe it. Shitheads.

Alex you knew the truth. You were trying to tell me something and I couldn't listen. But I would put my ear to the ground in the desert, as I lay dying (I wasn't dead, I was faking it) and I would hear the cries of Anne and Alex and I would know that I was supposed to be here to wait for the crashing of the plane, the drowning of the car from the bridge, the woman to be sliced with the propellers, the glass the mirror the blood the sand. I would be buried like Taz in the cold dark ground and count to 60 and emerge and have a mission. That mission would be to find my way out of the desert. Oh I would wander, that's true. But that is my purpose. I would wander naked in this desert some 40 days and find the right hill to climb and I would see what I've never seen before. But would you watch over me even then, Alex, or would you disappear as you did in Europe? Only to reappear in Italy when I was least expecting it?

Why couldn't they have put a phone down here?

*Think of something.*

I just did. First, I am going to protect our stomach, I say, doubling over.

*From what?*

From being eaten. Just in case they come back early. I am protecting our stomach from being eaten. Help me.

*How?*

Stand in front of me. I'm hiding...

*From them? They'll find us. There's no way out. They're just going to wait 'til we're freaked and weak with hunger.*

...wait for it. Transitive verb here. I'm hiding our stomach. So they can't get it. Just stand still, will you? God you fidget. Drives me bananas. Trying to sleep and you're always twitching like a near-dead chicken.

*Alright alright, I'm sorry. But it's my duty to inform you that you're crazy.*

Stow it. Once I've hidden our stomach I'll be able to get us out of here. We'll be smaller and lighter. I'll float up the chimney and pull you out after me.

*Pull me out? How can you?*

Keep with the illusion. You're such a literalist.

*And the stomach?*

I don't need it. I'll use yours. *Ha ha.* You're such a nerd sometimes. I find it hard to believe that I'm the derivative.

*We have to eat.*

I won't be hungry. I've been here so long that my appetite's gone.

*Thirsty?*

Not likely. I am now an ethereal being. I no longer require sustenance. I deny all links with the corporeal world.

*I'm not sure it works that way.*

Dry up. Oh look! Zippers! It *is* detachable. How convenient.

I lift our stomach, zipping it from our ribs.

Much easier than I thought. I feel lighter already.

*I cannot believe you're doing this. Give it to me.*

No.

*Give it to me. I want it.*

Save your breath. Trust me. We won't want this back. And look! Now I can fit up the chimney.

And indeed I am so light, so ethereal, that I float up the chimney to the roof.

Alberta, here! I call, throwing her some rope. Drop that thing and climb up!

We're out of the house. Shinnying down the TV antenna. Back into the house through the milk door. Fuckin'-A. Should have got rid of that stomach a long long time ago. Let's see. Bear? Check. Tickets? Check. *Fig Newtons*. Check. No journey is complete without your *Fig Newtons*, my friends. Cash? Check-a-rino. Thank you so much you change-hoarding dickweeds. Around the world with 80 rolls of quarters. All the essentials and, of course, the note. Must write the note. The note? Get it? Got it. Good. And we mustn't forget the phone call to the cops, about Cyclopes' stash o' hash. I would give anything to see Louise and Charles pick him up from JD. If only they can keep him at least one day. I'm not greedy. *Purty little hog's mouth ya got there Prep Boy*. Phone call? Ch-

*We can't do that.*

Why not? You're always spoiling the fun.

*It's not nice.*

Like he's Doris Day. Go back to sleep.

*He'll just deny it. Blame it on us.*

It's his stuff. His prints will be all over it.

*They'll blame us anyway.*

Too late my chick. The call's been made. And we'll be long gone by the time anyone shows up. Just take a sample or two for the trip....

And so the journey begins. *Buffalo-Ho!*

Alberta and I thumb to the Peace Bridge and are lucky enough to avoid psychos. One couple actually takes us to The Golden Starches. Yum. A Quarter-Pounder-with-Cheese, plain. Medium fries. Chocolate milkshake. Ok, so I *was* starving, I admit it. I'll deny all links with the corporeal world some other time. I wondered what Cyclopes and his toady little Minion were doing. Dipshits. I wish I were there to see it when the Units came home and we weren't there and cops come knock knock knocking for Mr. Junior Achievement. *Prepare to spread thy cheeks, bog boy.*



## Lesson 9: Eating Light Bulbs

Glass is sand. Therefore, a light bulb is, ultimately, sand. Once you get past the tungsten filament and base (or “screw”) there is nothing else. To eat a light bulb, therefore, is to eat sand.

Glass fascinates and disturbs. It is dangerous, to be sure, but not so dangerous and horrible that an audience will not watch you eat it. You are, after all, providing *entertainment*. You cannot disgust your audience so much that they will not come. You need to *captivate* your audience by their own sense of morbid curiosity—not *repel* them with horror.

Therefore, if you are going to go through the trouble to eat a light bulb, no one will begrudge your spitting out the filament and base. No one expects *anyone* to chew through metal. Indeed, just the *thought* of metal-on-fillings is too much for any audience to sit through. It is best not to combine acts. Although metal pieces, particularly coins and jewellery can be swallowed whole and regurgitated later (see Lesson 11: *Regurgitation*), it is best to focus on one act at a time. Concentrate on the glass. Avoid overworking your audience.

Below, some quick Do’s and Don’ts:

### **Do not hesitate**

The trick is to work with confidence. That does not mean one should be filled with overweening smugness. Just confidence. Proceed with a sense of purpose. Know what you are doing and always be conscious of your actions and their repercussions.

### **Do not breathe through your mouth**

Although you must open your mouth to prove you are eating the light bulb, you must never be tempted to breath through your mouth. You will choke.

### **Do not sneeze or hiccough**

This is not paranoid Chaos Theory. One little *achoo!* can cause serious damage. Antihistamines are highly recommended—but be aware that antihistamines can and will inhibit your saliva production (see point below: *Salivate frequently*). A small amount of vitamin E (natural source) smeared inside the nostrils will help with any excessive drying. (Note: this lubrication will also aid the nostril nailing or “blockhead” act. See Lesson 6: *Driving Sharp Objects into the Head and Neck*).

## *Lesson 9: Eating Light Bulbs*

### **Do not bite into the bulb**

Break it, rather, with your tongue pressing against the roof of your mouth. Carefully. Ensure that your actions are controlled, thoughtful, and methodical.

### **Do not try this unless you've had it demonstrated to you**

This book is not enough. It is merely an appendix to the real, *live* instruction that you will need to learn this act. Nothing can replace experience.

### **Do not try this without the presence of a Subject Matter Expert (SME)**

You will need an experienced person to guide you during your practice-stage.

### **Do not try this alone**

If no SME is available, do not attempt this alone. Find someone to be present. If injury should occur, you will want someone there to help you.

### **Do Grind—do not chew— the pieces**

Slowly, carefully. This takes time. You are in no rush. No one else in the audience has eaten a light bulb. They will not tell you to hurry. Each shard must be ground into a fine powder by the back molars.

### **Do Salivate frequently**

Saliva is your friend. Ensure your mouth is well-lined before you begin. Keeping those surfaces slippery is the key to preventing injury.

## **Useful Tips**

### **Whatever goes in, must come out**

Eating the light bulb is only the first part of the act. The second, more private part, can have its repercussions. Grind accordingly.

### **Find another act**

Eating a light bulb does not come without damage to your person. Remember: you are, essentially, eating little rocks. You are wearing down your tooth enamel. Limit, therefore, the number of times you will do this act. Never do this more times than your teeth can bear.

When you've reached your limit, recognise it as such and stop.

### 13.3 Dinner at *Biagio's*

16:22

There is a time for honesty, and a time for bullshit. And somehow when I woke up that day I knew that this would one of those *git-the-shovel-pa* kind of moments.

So there I am sleeping on the couch of some apartment when I wake up and there's this fucking giant of a tattooed man in boxers but no shirt who does not seem very surprised to see me, much less *sleeping* on what I assume is his couch. And I look around a bit, not recognising him, much less the fucking room, much less the clothes I was wearing, for Christ's sakes and I decide that this would be a good point to go to the can and like maybe assess the situation. And I figure anyone waking up anywhere in any circumstance is generally allowed to adopt an *I-just-woke-up-so-don't-talk-to-me* demeanour so this is what I do right away, hoping like he won't ask me anything I can't answer. The last thing I can remember is calling Alex from Geneva; but this guy *does* seem familiar to me but I can't quite place him.

A bird is tattooed on each side of his neck: one an angel, one a devil.

The nice thing about most apartments is the locational predictability of the can. I get up and head in the general direction and I can already feel myself starting to sweat.

Where ya goin' Alberta? he says. The back of his neck reads *Dasein Dave*. He has the voice of a young Orson Welles. I feel my heart begin to race. Clearly I've died and gone to heaven.

Bathroom, I say, giving him a smile. We're speaking 'proper' Roman Italian, another language I don't remember learning. This leads me to believe I'm in Rome but I wouldn't swear

to it. He's adorable. Dark hair, dark eyes. My favourite food group. And the voice. *The Voice*. Cascading over me like ground cinnamon and cocoa. Drowning me.

Just leave the bandages alone, the guy says. You'll want the *Polysporin* to soak in a bit more. *Bandages?* I think. *Polysporin?*

Not to worry, I say. Sweating like a pig now, wondering what I've done. I don't *feel* anything. My back's a bit sore, but whose wouldn't be after sleeping on a couch? Actually, I don't even think about my back until *after*. It's just that hindsight thing.

Movie starts soon, he goes. So I nod. His fingers are long and tapered. Definitely an artist. A hobbit is tattooed on his right forearm. An evil tree from *The Wizard of Oz* on his left. His right arm and wrist are huge compared to his left. A tennis player, I decide.

Won't be long, I say, wondering what the movie is.

So like I'm in the can trying to decide whether I should stick around this place. 'Dasein Dave' seems like a nice guy. Sticking around's not a bad option 'cept if he like wonders about my stunnedness. Then again, maybe he knows me so the stunned-thing's not a problem? Who knows. It's not something you ask about. But then again, I'm fucking starved so I figure to stick around for munchies and the movie.

So the bathroom's like one of those typical apartment cans, but perhaps a little more old-money. Marble tiles and a hard-to-flush toilet. Feet on the tub. Water pressure suggests like we're high up. But at least the can's clean. I lift my clothes to look for damage but I don't see anything. I can't imagine what he's talking about.

So then like the door knocks and it's this guy asking me if I'm ok.

Fine, I go.

So like he's knocking on the door again.

I'm fine, I go, opening the door. See? I give him my best smile.

Baby making you sick? he asks. And I like faint right there on the spot.

I come to this time to the concerned face of Dasein Dave.

Ouch, I go, feeling like an asshole 'cause I smacked my head.

How's your brain? he goes. You hit the door before I caught you. You were way too quick for me this time. You looked a bit dopey when you got up so I thought I should check on you. Good thing too. He smiles. Actually, he's smiling just about all the time. Kind eyes. Kinda like Michael Dorn on *Star Trek*... not when he's Worf, but when he's just Michael Dorn. You know what I mean. In fact, he reminds me of Alex. Which in turn reminded me that I had a call to make.

I'm going to have a zzzz, I say, thinking only about getting to a private phone.

Here or the bedroom? he says.

Bedroom, I go, hoping the guy walks me there so I don't have to guess which fucking room.

Let me carry you, he says.

So I laugh. Why the fuck not?

Don't forget, he says, dropping me carefully onto the bed. You're meeting Alex for dinner at *Biagio's* at 19:00. He called while you were sleeping. Just got into his hotel. Want me to wake you? He pulls my hair.

What was the film again?

*Siesta*, he says, giving me that look. You don't know what's going on do you? Alex warned me but I thought he was kidding.

Actually—looking into his hunter green eyes as I avoid the question—I'm not tired anymore. Let's tape the film and watch it later.

It was the voice. The Orson Welles' voice. Who could resist? Not I, surely.

19:16

So Ratboy says he's had enough of geeking and he's off to find some other gig. I tell him he's not going to find a better gig than this one but he says his gums just can't handle it—that's the real side-effect of geeking. Not the bacteria and parasites, not the smell, the nausea, the crap that people throw at you. In fact for Ratboy, all that shit was a bonus. Especially the heckling. Ratboy loves to be contrary and the abuse just wires him up crazy.

It's the gums that suffer. No more geeking, he says, my front teeth are loose, the eyeteeth just fucking ache all the time. And when the gums go, they're gone, he says. No amount of Dentucreme will help the sideshow geek.

Fine, I say, get another gig. But what can you do? *Do?* he says, mock-Max. *Do? What can I do?* I'll tell you what I can do, he says, I can do the fire thing. I can do the cards. I can do anything I fucking want. Anything, but the light bulbs, 'snatch.

But you can't fly, I say.

Right enough, RB says. I can't fly. But you can. So here's the thought for the day Alberta, what about a shooting gallery thing?

How's that? I go.

You fly, I try to shoot you down. We rig it. No wait, he says. A real shooting gallery with paintballs, and we charge people to shoot at you.

And the reason I would want to do this is?

C'mon, don't be precious, he says.

I've been hit with paintballs before. It fucking hurts.

Smaller paintballs then. Makes it harder. What'll they know, idiots? They'll be lining up for miles. Shit, glow in the dark even. We'll do it under black light.

Why not? I say. Let's pitch it to Max.

Max goes for it, of course.

So Ratboy would shoot paintballs at you? says Alex, swirling his glass of red.

No no, the people would. Lining up for hours. I couldn't take it anymore. The better Ratboy's gums got, the more tired I grew. I needed a break. Do you have any idea how exhausting it was to fly all fucking day, dodging paintballs? I finally decided to skip town. Had to, really. Max wouldn't give up the show. Too much money. So when I wanted to quit, Max went ape-shit. Ratboy pleaded with me because he didn't really have anything else to do. Should've diversified, multi-skilled or something. I tried to teach him the nose stuff but his sinuses were awful and he'd always miss with the nail trick. Bloody nose every time, poor bastard. Thought he'd go anemic on us. So eventually I just skipped. Don't know what Ratboy's up to now. Maybe his teeth are better and he's gone back to geeking. Who knows.

Alex looks askance. It's only with Alex that I ever knew what that meant, looking askance. You could have returned to Canada, you know, he says.

As if. I've had enough of home. I need to be anywhere but there.

Well Alberta, now you're here.

You're right. I am here. Now what?

Now what indeed.

I don't know. I say. I simply don't know. I'll see where the wind carries me, once my wings are dry.

So to speak.

So to speak.

Well before you flutter off, he says, I have something important to tell you.



### 13.4 You are here

Alex was wrong. It wasn't ten minutes. It was an hour-and-a-half. After the first twenty minutes or so I had started to grow nervous. Are you sure you put enough freezing in me for this long? I had asked. Not to worry,

Dr. Vincent had

replied, I always plan for the worst case scenario.

But it wasn't even raised, I had said. It was just a nice, smooth little teddy bear of a freckle. It wasn't, he had said. It's a mole, or worse. But it wasn't even bumpy, I had



said. Of course not, he had said. It was growing down, not up. It was under

the skin, not on top of it. This was only a point of rupture. Think of it as a root system, interconnected like a network. We'll biopsy it, of course. But I'm sure it's only the beginning. Well did you at least work around the tattoo, I had asked. The tattoo's very important. I'm attached to it, so to speak. I had smiled but he just looked thoughtful. I had to make jokes. I couldn't help it. I tried my best, he had said. Nice how the artist worked it in with the tattoo, he had said. Yes, I had replied. But now *You are here* will point to nothing but a big scar where my birthmark used to be. It's kind of strange, isn't it? About as strange as your tattoo, he had laughed. How do they do it backwards like that? Stencils, I had replied. They make a stencil, wet it, press it on your skin, and then work from that. Then it's just like colouring, really. Interesting, he had said. I never would have guessed.

← *You are here*



*You are here*

*none*



### 13.5 Chicken and Rice in the Open Air

I wasn't sure what we were doing here. This was Alberta's fault. *Her* grandiose scheme, not *mine*. Mumbling shit about the elephant burial grounds, getting all weepy and metaphoric. And then she like up and flies off. What was she thinking? Christ! It's like four hundred fucking degrees here. No elephants anywhere, nor had there ever been. What was she thinking?

Oops, better smile, I think he said something funny. Yes, smile and nod. *Oui, c'est ça. Tu as raison.* Just get me the hell out of here, wherever 'here' is. I mean, what's this shit? Sitting in like an otherwise empty field in this *agit prop* restaurant full of people speaking French? Fuck me. I need to get to a phone. Ah, they're making the coffee. Maybe we can go soon.

*I'm sorry.*

Oh sure, now you're awake. Go back to sleep. I don't need you.

*I like it here.*

How would you know? You like leave me out in some godforsaken field. You fucking *disappeared* during the appetiser and you *know* I'm a vegetarian now.

*Alex is here.*

Fuck off. How can Alex be here?

*I think I can see him over there.*

You're on drugs.

I turn anyway but of course there's no one but me, creepy Norm Noble, and the waiter. Why do I even look?

You're pissing me off. And what's this shit about elephants? There's no elephants here. It's fucking California.

*Sorry. I was just feeling melodramatic.*

Well don't. We're not going to die. Well, you can do what you want, but *I'm* not going to die.

*Yes. You are. That's why we're here.*

Is there something you'd *Oui, je prendrai un café* like to tell me? Perhaps you are in touch with the Infinite?

*It's something I know. I can't explain it. Alex is here. I can feel him.*

Half the point of you're dragging us here, as near as I could figure, was to hide from Alex. You didn't send him a note that I don't know about, did you?

*He knows. I can't explain it. He just knows.*

Knows what?

*I was wrong. I was completely wrong. He was with us all the time.*

Focus, if you can. What now? Can we go back home?

*No. We're all dead. That's why Alex is here. Now I understand.*

Any thoughts on sharing this epiphanic moment you're obviously experiencing?

*Too late. Dessert's coming. What did you order?*

I asked for something light. *Qu'est-ce que c'est que-ça?* What the fuck *is it* with this place? And why is everyone French?

*French restaurant. Doi.*

In the California desert?

*Call it a dream. Eat your dessert.*

What do you mean *eat my dessert*? They're still *on*, for Christ's sake. You're the glasseater,  
Freak Girl. Not me.

*Eat them. Trust me. Eat them.*

I'll burn my tongue. I'll electrocute the both of us. Is that what you want?

*EAT THEM. We're already dead.*

And so we were.

And so I did.

## Lesson 20: Flying

With respect to flight, a wise man\* once wrote: throw yourself at the earth, *and miss*.

### Useful Tip

#### **Defy gravity**

It is imperative that you defy gravity *throughout* your flight. Failure to do so will result in an immediate return to earth.

### In Case of Emergency

Land.

---

\* Douglas Adams

**Part Four—Alberta: adagio, misterioso**

*The stars my destination*

## 14.0 Touching Down

When they came to put me in the ground, I was only sleeping.

We'd better move quickly or we're going to lose her.

It was a trick, actually.

Kinda like pineapple-orange.

About 166cm, give or take.

But crunchy, of course.

Not dead, just sleeping.

About 50 kilos I guess.

I don't die, Anne does.

It was all a trick.

They put him in the hospital this morning.

Or peaches.

Does it matter?

I burned my tongue.

I feel something moving.

No, I don't really know.

Watch her head.

It's your fault.

The biopsy results will be back within the week.

They were sleeping when you came to bury me.

No, *I'm* moving.

Alberta, he wants to see you.

Once I worked them to sand, the little bulbs turned gelatinous, like gummi bears.

*She* dies, not *me*.

I wouldn't say *no* to a bottle of *Veuve*.

No, I'm *being moved*.

Something's pressing my bones.

I cut as deeply as possible, just to make sure I got everything.

Don't touch that, it's still live.

From the *inside*.

I would have preferred something chocolate, of course.

It's still beating, but only *just*.

Well I don't want to see him.

Unplug it first.

*I* die, not her.

Maybe it's the baby.

I feel strange.

No, you'd better take them off.



Like pineapple-orange gummi bears.

I was tricked.

Out flat, on her back.

In fact, I wouldn't say *no* to *two* bottles of *Veuve*.

Glowing.

When they came to put you in the earth, I was sleeping.

I'm cold.

How much longer do we have?

You're cold.

You.

It was all a trick.

What time is it?

I forgot about the baby.

He's asking for you.

Ten minutes, give or take.

In fact, we *all* were sleeping.

There is no baby.

Get her hands.

*Alberta*, not *me*.

Where am I?

Are.

*Ask me* if I care.

Hold her still.

Get her feet.

23:16.

It's starting.

The baby's pushing from deep inside.

Here.

My stomach.

Or maybe peach.

Keep your eyes on the cards.

It's not time.

Gently.

It's not a baby.

Like gummi bears.

She must be cold.

It's almost time.

I *am* cold.

*This* card?

Why did she trick me?

Sand everywhere.

I'm not really sure.

You're not going to *tattoo* that on me?

Her eyes are open.

It's kicking me.

Sand sand everywhere.

It's freaking me out.

I've never seen anyone do that before, in a restaurant I mean.

I see god.

Trying to get out.

Touch me again, asshole, and I'll kick your fucking balls in.

I am seeing god.

Melt in my mouth, not in my hands.

In Geneva.

You're next, bitch.

So close them.

How much?

You *know* I'm a vegetarian.

I saw god.

*How* much?

*Tu peor pesadilla.*

It's creepy, her eyes just staring at us like that.

That's extra.

*That* card?

He's waving at me.

She doesn't see anything now.

Are you *sure* you want that card?

From behind.

*Te extraño.*

I know.

With silk ties, if you have any.

This *isn't* going to Milan?

Milano.

Milan.

Clay, not sand.

I suppose it's worth it.

It was a trick: *you* die, not *me*.

I see everything.

No biting, please.

Where did you think I'd put it?

I *know*.

That's it.

I *was there*.

Yes *what?*

There's *no way* I can hammer that into my nose.

That's what you think.

A refreshing protein boost.

I think she's pointing the wrong way.

There.

Look at her stomach.

Yes, *Father*.

A long long time ago.

No thank you. I'm 'lergic to *Smarties*.

What do you mean?

There!

She should be pointing East, shouldn't she?

Gently.

Shit! The cops!

It's moving.

That's bullshit.

It's starting.

Fuck you, little bitch.

*There*, yes, there.

My bones.

You better not say anything or I'll kill you when you're sleeping.

I feel my bones.

Like something's trying to get out.

Get me the shovel.

Cover her face, will you?

They're flattening, *compressing*.

With what?

Blindfold me.

A hanky, I don't know.

Something's heavy on my chest.

On top.

I can't do this.

I can barely breathe.

Anything soft will do.

You're hurting me.

I cannot believe I'm the derivative.

Tighter, but not too tightly.

You are here.

*There.*

Alex.

It's starting. It's starting.

Where?

*Here.*

It's starting.

When they came to put me in the ground, I was not dead: I was faking it.

## 15.0 Just a minute

*Many years later, having been buried alive in the sand, Alberta Bound would recall that remote afternoon in which her father dragged her home from the side-show.*

—Some tattoo artist in Milan

It's not the worms who come first, it's the bacteria. You're not vermin poop until later. I take small comfort in this, naturally, at this juncture in my life when they came to put me in the ground i was not dead i was only sleeping i'd been tricked it was later when i woke up smothered in sand that i realised that i was supposed to have died and in that first second with all the weight of the world literally pressing down on me it is in that first second that i noticed something one one thousand silence not the soft moment when one hears the beating heart no just ear popping nothing crushing silence quiet earth two one thousand i suddenly have the understanding that i am literally breathing my last not in out there is no more in all the air is being forced from my lungs and there is nothing i can do to hold it in i want to keep it in for one more second but why for how many more moments do i want to live in the sand will it make a difference when i'm destined to be worm food three one thousand the third second yes i am counting the third second brings with it the following knowledge i am fucked i do not know for a fact that i am in the ground but where else can i be an image comes to me of my being flattened by a steam roller four one thousand i am tissue a wisp i see myself in bright technicolor cartoon detail large gloved hands dumbo ears catching the wind and fluttering home the wind whirls me back to kansas five one thousand the absurdity of it all strikes me at this point flying back to kansas when i'm really from willowdale i would laugh but my lungs are empty six one thousand seven one thousand nine one thousand eight one thousand ten one thousand now i panic this is the proverbial it the pressure is awful i am being crushed nine one thousand when they came to stick me in the sand i was faking death just to see what they would do why oh why



didn't i say something ten one thousand fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fucking fuckers eleven one  
thousand what for you bury me in the cold dark ground but taz survived how he eats his way out  
i think not an option i am an eater of glass not sand twelve one thousand  
fuckingjesuspleasegodfuckingjesusfuck thirteen one thousand calm calm in with the good air out  
with the bad air fourteen one thousand there is no in there is no in and now there is no out  
fifteen one thousand fifteen one thousand sixteen one thousand seventeen one thousand no  
sixteen no seventeen no fuck seventeen one thousand peaches i smell peaches eighteen one  
thousand what the fat fuck am i doing here i'm covered with blood my shirt's been removed and  
wrapped around my arms my feet are cold nineteen one thousand i awake hours minutes  
seconds days years months later my mouth is dry my feet are still cold i want to puke and there is  
no blood left in my body i think but i see alex alex i say what the fuck is going on you fucked up  
meaning meaning you fucked up could you be more explicit i'm a little foggy and sleepy i'm very  
sleepy and so fucking cold i'm trembling my way off the richter scale i need to throw up badly  
but the lights in my eyes are pretty and the rush in my ears pounds me back to sleep twenty one  
thousand how much scusi you said that's extra so i'm asking how much you're not supposed to  
ask how much you're supposed to get the hint and take a fuck off pill i'm not always the  
brightest bulb on the tree what a shock really really so how much how much how much depends  
what you want depends what's available bottle of veuve and the best swedish massage on the  
world i wouldn't say no to a bottle of veuve no one ever wants the massage he winks closing the  
lights and locking the door behind us andiamo princess twenty one one thousand eighteen one  
thousand why am i even counting maybe i'm already dead twenty two one thousand you'll be  
wanting this my mother says crisply she's holding up a large dripping bag what is it i'm propped  
up in bed i'm hoping that my mother doesn't notice that i'm not wearing a nightie don't play coy  
with me alberta she sounds annoyed as usual mother heaves the bag at me but i miss it too heavy

i can see through the bag it's my blood all of it i marvel at the advancements made in zip lock bag technology i'm sick of your disgusting little games she says she's smoking a cigarillo the skin on my arms begins to crawl please don't tell father i plead i can feel the tears starting oh for goodness sake alberta turn off the waterworks every time something happens out come the hoses afterthought and hell's bells put something on what am i supposed to do with this i ask lifting the bag it's much smaller now what do you think you're supposed to do with it drink it put it where it belongs she gestures to the toilet next to my bed neatly flicking her cigarillo into the bowl hisssssss mother leaves in a huff twenty three one thousand in fact i wouldn't say no to two bottles of veuve oh you wouldn't no i wouldn't what makes you think i have another bottle of champagne just hoping well i'm afraid i don't i'll just have to take that massage then won't i i'm either too old or too young for this you're only as old as the woman you feel how old are you legal in all major countries and fiefdoms good enough for me princess twentyfour one thousand pssst says alex from under my bed how did you get there we're whispering i hid when i heard her come down the hall where am i in the hospital it's too bright in here my eyes won't open don't ask it's worse than that what am i supposed to do with this i try to hoist the bag but it is enormous—like a beanbag chair drink it get the fuck out of here drink it that's what they told me who's they nevermind i have to go besides you like chocolate he's right i do and all i'm holding is a chocolate milkshake i sip it but it tastes like peaches not necessarily a bad thing though twentyfive one thousand please don't call my parents they think i've gone to the dance what's it worth to you what's it worth to you twentysix one thousand i ask jorge for a tequila chaser just to kill the germs twentyseven one thousand cyclopes i whisper he's snoring in the chair next to my bed cyclopes get up what are you doing here alex was right it is worse than being at the hospital i'm at home whawhat get out of my room steven marc you fuckwad i'm still naked i pull the blankets to my chin i notice silk ties wrapped around my arms make me

stupid cunt. mooottthhhheerrr cyclopes is in my bedroom and he won't get out too bad mum and dad are in europe he punctuates the sentence with a wet fart you make me puke when did they go to europe you on drugs or something they've been there for a week already fuck off they left last week that makes me your guardian he laughs get the fuck out of my room blow me he grabs at what i assume are his genitals and shakes why isn't your minion enough for you twentyeight one thousand father was furious i had never seen him like that before he didn't bother with the public niceties of my dear daughter how we missed you it's alright now please come home no he just moved right into you spoiled little bitch what do you think you're doing get in the goddamn car now father i pleaded people are watching no one worth noticing he growled yanking me along by my ponytail everyone was watching everyone he let go long enough to approach max and pow no one backed max up of course not father was in his element he had a weird aura around him when he was in a rage no one would even think of tangling with him i'm only doing this because i love you snarling thank you meekly thank you what thank you father i should bloody well think so twentynine one thousand i don't know what the fuck you're talking about but if you ever mention that bullshit again i'll come in here while you're sleeping and pound the everloving shit out of you cyclopes is standing over me fist ready i know he's serious i have empirical evidence just try it asshole breath i want to cover my face but i don't want to give him any ideas but i'm scared i decide to sleep in my parents' bathroom and don't think you'll get into mum and dad's bathroom he says reading my mind the lock's been removed they decided it wasn't safe to have locks on the bathroom doors just in case something happens in case someone gets sick he leans over and socks me in the eye he knows i won't get up if i have no clothes juusstttt geeetttt ttthhhheee fffuuuccckkk ooouutttt offfff heeerrre he hates when i scream he's always afraid the neighbours will hear be quiet just be quiet i'm sorry i'm sorry i just got pissed off stupid bitch are you ok i'm sorry just shut

the fuck up or i'll have to knock you out he chokes me then leaps backwards and slaps me i'm sorry but it's your fault just shut up i didn't mean it i'm sorry ok i'm sorry cunt just get away from me dickless i'm safe for now we've been down this road before thirty one thousand they used to bury vampires upside down so that when or if they did wake up the vampires would start digging further into the earth and die before they caught on thirtyone one thousand pineappleorange not peach pineappleorange thirtytwo one thousand pssttt alex again under my bed hey what are you doing down there where were you when i needed you you were doing fine your brother's a sick piece of shit though don't i know it did you finish your drink shit i don't know where i put it i can't see a thing it's so fucking dark in here i can't even tell if my eyes are open here give me your hand drink this i feel something warm in my hand alex fumbles with something alex it's a fucking ziplock bag of blood a light flickers but it's enough of course what did you think it was a chocolate milkshake i can't drink blood not to worry we just need to put it back where it came from open wide i can feel alex remove my shirt i can't watch i say feeling sick again i notice that my chest has been slashed open throat to pelvis he's unzipping the wound the marvels of ziplock technology you don't have to he says just hold my hand thirtythree one thousand alberta you're father is asking to see you i can't make it this week i have to go out of town ask me if i care this may be your last chance i'm really sorry mother i'm sure he'll understand thirtyfour one thousand twentytwo one thousand thirtyfive one thousand where am i i look to alex you're stuck where in the ground don't worry we're trying to get you out what's all that noise it's your family trying to see you don't worry i've told them not to let your family anywhere near you how did you manage to get here are you kidding i carried you here myself that gives me automatic visiting privileges thirtysix one thousand twentythree one thousand thirtyseven one thousand twentyfour one thousand must get organised focus that's the key do not panic thirtyeight one thousand let's take account of what we have to work with

here blinded and immobilised not a great start suffocating worse if there are aliens out there planning to beam me to their ship no time like the present to start that machine up thirtynine one thousand people can last at least a couple of minutes without oxygen at least i'm sure there's still some left in my lungs what number am i on it must be close to the twominute mark by now do i get a twominute warning forty one thousand did i have it already fortyone one thousand i can fly how likely is it that i can also manipulate myself through matter i wonder what lesson that would be where's max's book when i need it fortytwo one thousand who knew that the earth would be so heavy

Forty-three one thousand

**Everything I Needed to Know about Saving My Ass, I Learned in the Side-show Circuit**

**Max**

## **Lesson 563: Transcending Matter**

Useful for getting oneself out of sticky situations like being buried alive in the sand. Transcending matter is fun and relatively simple to do for even the novice, provided one is willing to entirely suspend disbelief and place complete faith in the ramblings of a dirty old man.

Key points:

### **Do not panic**

Easier said than done, of course. Especially for borderline psychotics like you, Alberta. But a cool head is best for this situation. Clear-thinking is required. Try it, you'll like it.

### **Stay awake**

Do not be lulled to sleep by dreams of past lives and unresolved issues. Only by being completely conscious and focused will you be able to transcend matter.

### **Deny all links with the corporeal world**

Just like it sounds. You *claim* to be an ethereal being. Act like one, kiddo, and get the fuck out of there. You can fly can't you? Slithering your ethereal little *tuchus* through a few feet of sand should be a snap.

## **In Case of Emergency**

### **What, are you kidding?**

Alberta, if you've come this far, you are *already* in an emergency situation. You are, as we say in the biz, "fucked".

### **Pray**

It might not help, but it certainly won't hurt. If I were you, I would start renouncing all that blasphemy you've been prone to over the past few years. Didn't your mother teach you better?

### **Get your head out of your ass**

If you had properly denied all links with the corporeal like you said you would, you wouldn't have this problem. But people like you, fucking idiots, people like you just throw yourselves into situations like this, don't you? All that pain and suffering *woe is me* bullshit. Snap out of it, kiddo. You are about to meet your Maker, Alberta Bound. Better comb your hair.

### **This is your two-minute warning.**

forty four one thousand and i don't even want to know what you were doing there  
alberta he said i was flying i said i don't want to hear it i can fly alberta catherine bound slap  
what do you take me for it's bad enough your tramping around like this but lying i suggest you  
get in that car and think about what you've done i'll show you you listen to me young woman  
you get yourself in that bloody car quick march before i put you in there myself and believe you  
me if i have to do it neither one of us is going to be very happy watch me i said exasperated  
forty five one thousand when i let them put you in the ground i knew exactly what i was doing  
forty six one thousand i was killing you no offence forty seven one thousand what kind of  
cheese do you put in the quesadillas chihuahua it's what remain calm different country  
different customs you probably misunderstood chihuahua oh i see don't barf it's not as  
though you're eating bugs it's good isn't it dr t smiles pouring another tequila muy rico rats it  
is good can't deny it uh how many chihuahuas does it take to make this much cheese ¿mande  
how many chihuahuas does it take i mean you must have to milk a lot of them to get this much  
cheese unless the chihuahuas are larger here than they are at home chihuahua the region not  
chihuahua the dog oh ooops have another tequila blame it on the booze what colour are your  
eyes forty eight one thousand focus must stay alert forty nine one thousand i'm sure i'm not  
upside down i feel too much pressure on my chest i'm not upside down fifty one thousand  
sweet jesus i told you but you never listen to me you never believe anything i say does your  
mother know what do you think slap don't give me any of your lip young woman i asked you  
a simple question i expect a simple answer does your mother know no sir no she doesn't well  
let's keep it that way get in the car fifty one one thousand but what if i feel the pressure on my  
chest because i am upside down laying on my stomach the earth on my back pressing me deeper  
into the ground if i could move my arms which way would i dig up or down front or back  
fifty two one thousand nada mas gracias bebí demasiado you can never drink too much he

pours me more i can just one more then back to the fire eating he says this doesn't look like tequila it's opaque almost that's because it's a milkshake oh i taste it pineapple orange kills the taste of the burning gasoline good fifty three one thousand twenty seven thousand feet and dropping fast noxious smoke everywhere i can taste the flames i can't see a thing i have to feel my way to the emergency exit i will live i will live i will live i will live fifty four one thousand glass is sand i eat glass ergo i eat sand and come to think of it i am feeling a bit peckish fifty five one thousand needs salt if one can say that about sand fifty six one thousand a chocolate milkshake would go down good just about now fifty seven one thousand in fact i wouldn't say no to a bottle of donkey piss fifty eight one thousand i clearly had crash landed in some kid's sandbox the force of the fall had obviously torn my clothes from me i was naked and covered in blood as i climbed my way up the side of what must have been the impact hole when i got to the top i saw the ubiquitous alex how does he do that fifty nine one thousand alex i coughed my throat was full of sand i must have landed with my mouth open what the fuck is going on alternative cancer therapy he replied looking strangely calm as though my crawling around naked in a sandbox is commonplace what the throw alberta from a burning airplane therapy my eyes are stinging something like that listen alberta alex back you go you're not ready yet not ready yet you're not done bonk sixty one thousand i see stars i step into them but this time i fall



## **16.0 Lights out**

**Part Five—Alex, adagio ma non tanto**

*“Alberta is dead”* —Anne

*“Annihilated”* — Alberta

## 17.0 Raggedy Anne

When we came to put Alberta in the ground she was already dead. Her heart had stopped beating. She had ceased to breathe. Even without the aid of medical equipment, we were able to figure this out. And frankly, when someone dies, they *look* dead. Within seconds, their colour changes. In Alberta's case, her skin turned to chalk. And her lips—they drained oh-so-swiftly to clay.

The time was 23:16.

She thought she was alive, but she was wrong, of course. I tried to tell her more times than I could count. The brain just tricks you, in those final moments. You cling to the illusion of life, you “re-live” experiences, a kaleidoscope of key moments in your life, over and again, jumbled. Some events continually repeating in these final moments, altering slightly each time you reconsider the seconds and minutes, some events passed over, not as important as one may have originally thought.

No, it's not just cliché but in fact quite true that you see your life flash before your eyes—beginning middle end—but as Godard once said “not necessarily in that order”. It's simply your mind's way of dealing with the stress, the change. That, and of course the necessary purging of the electricity in your body. It's all very scientific.

I know. I've been there.

And even as Alberta clawed her way to the surface, hands and teeth all broken and bloodied, and even as she climbed back to earth, naked and beautiful, pulling herself up, and even as she fell back to earth, knees and ankles still rooted, she was dead.

But you have to admire her guts, what was left of them. The girl had moxie.

Not to be outdone by that previous feat, impressive in itself, Alberta managed to open her dimming eyes. “*Alex*,” she whispered, coughing up sand. “*Alex, what on earth is going on?*”

“Earth nothing,” I said. “Back you go.” *Bonk Bonk* on the head with the shovel—persistent little cuss, that one. And we stuffed her on down. That was tough. The rigor hadn’t set in, of course. It never does for cases like this. Like trying to shove a rag doll through a garden hose. We had to move quickly. No time to re-dig the hole.

“You know,” said Dave, just as we got her back in the sand. “I really do think she should be facing east.”

“Too late.” I replied. “We can’t move her now.”

## **18.0 The Sandmen**

Sleep, Alberta. Dream.

**Part Six—Anyone, Anyone At All: molto vivace**

*Sprinkle me some of that dust there, Tink. Thanks man.*  
*—Peter Pan, gettin' jiggy with Wendy while Tinkerbell holds the camera*

**A dream in which Alberta visits Hell for tea**

Alberta Bound was walking along one of the main streets fifteen minutes before *The Earthquake* began sucking California into the ocean. The state cracked neatly down its boundaries, leaving entirely intact Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, and Mexico to the pleasure of the tidal waves and aftershocks. While writing in her favourite café, with a piece of chocolate cake and a bowl of herbal tea at her side, Alberta divined the news. *Shit*, she thought, swallowing the last of her cake, *no The Young and the Restless today*. Wiping the crumbs from her lips, the true horror sunk in .... *ye gods, the rise of the English Canadian film industry*. She prepared to throw herself in front of the train passing through the cafe.

Fortunately, she was pulled out of the way by Linda Blair, as she was in *The Exorcist*. I'm not sure whether I should thank you or not, Alberta said to Regan, trying to avoid looking directly into her bloated, misshapen face.

Worry about that later, Regan rasped in reply in the mean time, can you spare a few smokes?

Don't smoke, said Alberta but I do have some gum.

Good enough. I probably shouldn't smoke anyway. Bad for your skin, gives you wrinkles.

Uh huh. *Who'd notice?*

Alberta and Regan sat down — on the table were two slices of Chocolate Black-Out Cake, two pots of mint tea, and a white squirrel. The squirrel was sniffing around the cake, licking his lips as best he could, considering he had none to lick.

So, Regan said. What do you make of all this?

I suppose we'll have to watch *Road to Avonlea* or *The Beachcombers* reruns until a new Hollywood is constructed.

Worse, she replied. Celine Dion and Anne Murray will have their own variety show every Monday, Wednesday and Friday night from six 'til ten.

Auntie Em, Auntie Em, Alberta cried, covering her ears.

The sow is mine, laughed the squirrel, scratching his nuts.

Alberta woke in a cold sweat. She had been sleeping with her arm behind her head and now, as she tried to move it, it flopped onto her face, like a dead thing. She lifted it with her other hand, moving her dead arm onto her stomach, squinting at her alarm clock: eleven-thirty. Another seven hours to go. What if, Alberta thought my arm is detachable and no one told me and I wake up tomorrow and my arm is lying somewhere at the foot of my bed all blue and cold? What if I cut my arm off by accident, in my sleep, and I haven't noticed yet because of the shock from blood loss? What if this isn't my arm at all? Maybe it's just a bug limb, a left-over from *The Fly*? Alberta was too afraid to check, knowing that she'd feel like an idiot the next morning if she had checked and of course, her arm would be her arm, attached as it should be in the appropriate places, capable of the appropriate functions.

*Good thing I have a shrink*, thought Alberta, as she tried to go back to sleep. Visions of white squirrels and Linda Blair dancing in her head.

Alberta started having more and more awake-asleep dreams. She didn't tell anyone though. These dreams bothered her, made her nervous. Made her set her alarm to go off every



two hours. She lay there stranded on the bed, never knowing she was having an awake-asleep dream until she woke up. She only remembered the terror, trying to move, trying to scream, trying to call to Alex to wake her, even though she knew she was awake, awake but trapped. She was paralysed, someone had stapled her throat shut. When she woke up she would turn to Alex and wake him, asking him if he were awake, if she were awake. Could he tell the difference? She only could when she was awake. When she thought that she was awake. Occasionally, although she never revealed this to anyone, she thought it possible that she was still asleep from years ago, when she first noticed these dreams, starting after the plane crash. She reasoned that since, while she had them, she thought she was awake, that when she wasn't having them and thought she was awake (and, apparently, was awake) that she still might be asleep.

On occasion, it occurred to her that she was actually dead and that she was now in purgatory, experiencing her atonement, waiting. She didn't know what one did in purgatory, often wondered if part of purgatory was coming to the realisation that to move on to heaven, you had to make that final existential leap.

But no one to ask this and other questions. Alberta knew better than that. Because she knew, she knew that these questions were paranoid and stupid.

But she couldn't help wondering. Was she alive or dead?

As she drifts back to sleep, Alberta addresses her thoughts to He Who Is:

*Dear God,*

*Please..oh shit, I forgot. You're dead.*

**A brief interlude with God and Dog**

*God is dead.—Dog*

*Doggone.—God.*

Am I dead? God asks His faithless companion.

You haven't been talking to Friedrich again have You? I told You before, don't let him bring You down.

No, it wasn't Friedrich this time.

Good, because he's a freak. Anyone that sits in the corner all day wanking into a beret, thinking about his sister has issues. I don't even know why You let him in here in the first place. What makes You ask?

Just curious.

Bullshit.

That Alberta kid, He says, after a pause.

She still calling You?

Yup. Got another call today. The usual.

The *dear-god-oops-you're-dead-so-forget-it* call?

That's the one. I tried to call her back but she didn't pick up.

I hate that. She's worse than Friedrich. Ignore her. She still in that bloody rocketship?

Can't see. She always hangs up before I can find her.

Screw her then. You sent Alex after her, didn't You? It's his problem now. Besides, if You were dead, would You be asking me if You were dead?

Could happen.

You created too much sci-fi and it's all gone to Your head. Now I don't know about You, but I'm hungry. Let's go grab a coffee and biscotti.

*Here endeth the interlude.*

## The Cold Dark Ground

*Many years later, having been buried alive in the sand, Alberta Bound would recall that remote afternoon in which her father dragged her home from the sideshow.*

—Some tattoo artist in Milan

It's not the insects who come first; it's the bacteria. You're not bug poop until later. I take small comfort in this, naturally, at this juncture in my life.

When they came to put me in the ground, I was *not* dead: I was only resting my eyes. It was later when I woke up crushed by sand that I realised that I was supposed to have died. And in that first second, with all the weight of the world literally pressing down on me, it is in that first second that I noticed something:

Silence.

Not the soft moment when one hears the beating heart. No. Just the ear-popping pressure of a sound-proofed room. My eyes began to water; my nose, to run.

I suddenly have the understanding that I am literally breathing my last. Not in—out. There is no more in. All the air is being forced from my lungs and there is nothing I can do to hold it in. I want to keep it in for one more second—but why? For how many more moments do I want to live in the sand? Will it make a difference when I'm destined to be bug food?

The third second—yes I am counting—the third second brings with it the following knowledge:

*I am fucked.*

I do not know for a *fact* that I am in the ground. But where else can I be? An image comes to me, of my being flattened by a steam-roller. I am tissue, a wisp. I see myself in bright

Technicolor cartoon detail: large gloved hands, Dumbo ears, catching the wind and fluttering home. The wind whirls me back to Kansas.

This is not Dorothy's Kansas. The storm is blowing all the same though, my father receiving a panicked call from my mother who, in turn, had received a call from a traveling neighbour. I am found.

My first thought, watching my father's fierce approach, is that I'm going to be in big trouble because I'm smoking. I crush the cigarette in my hand, burning my palm. I shake the butt to the ground, pretending to wipe dust from my hands onto my jeans. I stand quickly, hoping he won't notice the cigarette-burnt-flesh smell on me.

He was furious. I had never seen him like that before. He didn't bother with the public niceties of *My dear daughter, how we missed you. It's alright now, please come home.* No. He just moved right into *You spoiled little bitch, what do you think you're doing? Get in the goddamn car! Now!*

*Father*, I pleaded. People are *watching*.

No one worth noticing, he growled, yanking me along by my ponytail. Everyone was watching. *Everyone*. He let go long enough to approach Max and *POW!* No one backed Max up. Of course not, Father was in his element. He had a weird aura around him when he was in a rage. No one would even *think* of tangling with him.

I'm only doing this because I love you, he returns to me, flexing his hand.

Thank you, I reply, as meekly as possible.

Thank you, *what?*

Thank you, *Father*.

I should bloody well think so.

And I don't even want to know what you were doing there with those people, Alberta.  
My father reattaches his vice-grip to my pony-tail.

I was flying.

I said I don't want to hear it.

I can fly.

Alberta Catherine Bound! *Slap!* What do you take me for? It's bad enough, your tramping around like this, but *lying*. I suggest you get in that car and think about what you've done.

I'll show you.

You listen to me, young woman. You get yourself in that bloody car *quick march!* before I put you in there myself. *And believe you me*, if I have to do it, neither one of us is going to be very happy.

Watch me. I said, exasperated.

Sweet Jesus!

I *told* you but you *never* listen to me. You never believe *anything* I say.

Does your mother know?

What do you think?

*Slap!* Don't give me any of your lip, young woman. I asked you a simple question. I expect a simple answer. Does your mother know?

No Sir. No she doesn't.

Well let's keep it that way. Get in the car.

But this Kansas quickly fades. I find myself back in the ground, pressed flat, but weirdly awake.

Peaches. I smell peaches. I return to dreams of burning airplanes.

I clearly had crash-landed in some kid's sandbox. The force of the fall had obviously torn my clothes from me. I was naked and covered in blood as I climbed my way up the side of what must have been the impact hole. When I got to the top, I saw the ubiquitous Alex. How does he do that?

Alex, I coughed, my throat was full of sand. I must have landed with my mouth open. What the fuck is going on?

Alternative cancer therapy, he replied, looking strangely calm, as though my crawling around naked in a sandbox is commonplace.

What? The *throw-Alberta-from-a-burning-airplane* therapy? My eyes are stinging.

Something like that. Listen, Alberta?

Alex?

Back you go. You're not ready yet.

Not ready yet?

You're not *done*.

*Bonk bonk!*

I see stars. I step into them. I fall. I miss the earth.

*I am flying.*



## **Part Seven—Dasein Dave: allegro e vivace**

*“Lather, rinse, DO NOT repeat.*

*I repeat, DO NOT repeat.”*

*—Geographical Ontology: Who’s on First. Where? Where’s Home.*

*By Dr. David “Dasein Dave” Ben-Moran*

## 19.0 Bottoms Up

I see the chalk-white hand, its nails are purple, broken and bleeding; I see the hand extend itself, reaching, reaching. I grab the fingers, feeling. Cold. Dry ice. The second hand, the wrists, the top of her head. Slowly she emerges, almost pushed from below. Heaved upwards. I wait until she's made her way out before I greet her.

"Welcome to Earth, Alberta Bound."

"Uh, thanks," coughing, spitting out sand. "Where am I?"

"Here. You are here." I laugh. "Have a nice sleep?"

"I had strange dreams."

"I shouldn't wonder. You were making strange sounds."

"Was I in the sand?"

"You were in the sand."

"Does this seem normal to you?"

"Why yes, it does."

"How did I get here?"

"Alex put you there."

"And I let him?"

"He hit you over the head with a shovel."

"Ouch."

“Sorry. Regulations. You climbed back up the first time and that’s what we have to do with people like you.”

“Where did Alex go?”

“He ran out of smokes. He’ll be back.”

“And Noble Norm? Or was that just a dream?”

“A nightmare. The worst. He’s gone. Don’t you worry.”

“How long have I been here?”

“Few minutes, give or take.”

“Give or take how many?”

“Oh, about a million.”

“And you just sat there waiting for me?”

“Not to worry, I had a copy of *Infinite Jest*, *The Lost Chapters*. In fact, I just finished the last footnote.”

“I am....”

“You are.”

“.... parched.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. I have just the thing.”

“I’m afraid to ask.”

“Taste it.”

“A chocolate milkshake?” She laughed.

“More or less. Laced with a bit of Irish. Just enough to put some colour back into your cheeks.”

“*Dee-lish*,” she said as she dropped to the ground, just as Alex said. This should all be over soon.

“My skin,” she began, coughing.

“I know, I know. It’s dead. That’s all. It has to come off for the new skin to grow. Roll in the sand to help it along.”

“You know,” she begins, all polished and baby-bum smooth. “I’ve had better days.”

“Trust me. You haven’t. This is your best. Missed a spot.” I lean over to get rid of that pesky talon sticking out of her back. “You should be more careful. Didn’t your mother teach you not to talk to strange men?” I handed her another glass. “Don’t eat it.”

She blew me a raspberry, eyeing the glass as though I’d just handed her a rattlesnake. “Got something for it?” she asks. Lucky for me, she seemed unperturbed to be standing naked. Sometimes I hit, sometimes I miss. Alex will be furious.

“*Johnnie Walker Blue*,” I said, pulling a bottle from thin air—Alex taught me that one. “Good thing you drink it neat. No ice to be had for miles around.” I poured her three fingers’ worth. Many long days ahead.

“For *me*?”

“For you. To start you on your way.”

“Good Grief, Charlie Brown! Now what?”

“Your epilogue, Princess. Bottoms up.”

“Wait a minute.”

“Yes?”

“Does this mean I’m not dead?”

“You’re not dead. You are here.”

“Where is here?”

“No. Where is home. *You* are here.”

“What?”

“Third base.”

“You’re not making sense.”

“Try it again.”

“I am *here*.”

“Yes.”

“Where is here?”

“No. Where is home.”

“Where is home?”

“That’s right.”

“What’s right?”

“No. What’s third base. You are here. Where is home.”

“I’m lost.”

“You’re not lost. You are here.”

“What?”

“What...”

“I know I know: third base. So I’m not home yet.”

“Getting warm though.”

“Am I at least on the right world this time?”

“For now.”

“So where should I go?”

“There.”

“There?”

“There.” Like the saying: *Wherever you go, there you are*. Rocketship’s waiting over there.

So go.”

Now.

## 20.0 The Rocketship

*All this can and should be summed up in two words:*

1.     *Being.*
2.     *There.*

*—Geographical Ontology: Who's on First. Where? Where's Home.  
By Dr. David "Dasein Dave" Ben-Moran*

I dreamt I was in a rocketship and I was entirely covered by bees. Thousands of bees. I wasn't really panicked though. Not sure why, of course, but I wasn't. I think they were my bees but I can't really say. I just noted that I was swarmed with bees, thickly covered like a cake with industrial strength icing. I think my bees were dead though, although they had been alive and buzzing at first. Then I was covered in the thickest of shag carpets. I began wiping the bees off me. I removed my boots and noticed that my toes had come off. Sliced off neatly. No blood. Just sliced off. I tried to adhere the toes back into place, thinking perhaps that just pressure would make the toes stick to my feet and somehow become alive again. They didn't stay of course. They just fell to the ground *plunk plunk plunk*. Although my toes were dead, I was not panicked, just detachedly observant, studying. The dead bees were gone. I arranged my toes on the seat-arm beside me, put my socks and boots back on and left when we stopped for fuelling. I didn't know which world it was any more than I knew what rocketship I was on, but I decided that getting off there was as good a move as any.

**Epilogue—Alberta**

*North Toronto to Venus (direct)—September 30, 1972*

When I grow up I will have so much money that someone will help me do the dishes so I can watch Bugs Bunny whenever I want to and not even have the TV in the basement because I won't have one when I'm very rich. My house will have a swimming pool in it for the inside and one for the outside for when it's sunny so when I want to have my friends over to play we can go swimming and pretend like we're Aquaman. I can already swim without using my hands because I can just flip back and forth like a dolphin with no arms or anything and I can still be in the water without drowning. When I grow up I won't have a brother or sister anymore because I will give them a lot of money so I can have my house all by myself and they can have their own babysitters and I will have mine. And my babysitter will be the nicest in the whole wide world and we'll stay up every night and watch the colour television upstairs in the den and have Jiffy Pop. Every room will have a light in it and chocolate bars on the tables instead of cigarettes because it's my house and I think cigarettes make me cough because I'm having asthma sometimes. My favourite chocolate bar is Bar Six because I can take it apart with my teeth and eat all the chocolate first, then the bread part then the soft chocolate part but my sister says it's coffee flavour but it's really sorta of chocolate. Cynthia just thinks she's so smart but when I'm older I'll be way smarter than her and I'll live far away and never talk to her because she's a stupid-head and cut the hair off my Barbie and said it would grow back but I look every day and it doesn't. She still looks like a boy. When I'm older I'm going to have the most longest hair in the world so if I have to climb out of a window I can use my hair to get away like a rope. That way when Steven Marc squishes my life out I can tie him up with some of my hair and use some



for the rope too. My hair will keep growing even if my Barbie's hair doesn't because she's a doll and their hair is very slow I think.

I know a secret that even nobody doesn't know because I never told anybody ever except my Bear but I'm from another world and someday I'm going to be saved and I'll be a princess and have shiny dresses like mum wears to dinner. I won't have shiny shoes like mum because the dog follows her shoes and tries to bite her feet but only when she has her dress-up shoes on that are gold. I'm going to have gold dresses too and I can fly whenever I want to because the worlds won't have any gravity and no one can see up my dress because I'll have shiny tights on so you can't see my underwear.

I think if I am here for a very long time the worlds can see me and they'll come to get me and my Bear home so I can be warm and maybe have a hot chocolate before bedtime. I think maybe God can send a message to them and tell them I'm here waiting for them. When I meet the worlds I'm going to ask them what my real name is because here I have my name but it's not my other-world name. Maybe I can pick my own name too if they forgot who I am because I'm here now and they changed my name so I can be like world people. This world is called The World but I think my world is really called Venus because my sister says I'm Libra and people in September are from Venus which is very hot because it's by the sun which is the hottest place in The Whole World. The Whole World is everything but the World is just here where I am but soon I'll be going home. When I grow up I will be on my own World but it has another name. I just don't know what it is. That's all.