

THE BLUE VELVET REVIEW PRESENTS . . .
THE LOST NOVEL EBOOK SERIES



THE SURPRISINGLY COMMENDABLE
CATASTROPHE OF ASIA MINOR
NAS SAFA

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PART 01: The Surprisingly Commendable Catastrophe of Asia Minor

ADAM METROPOLIS: You know, Larry—how can I say this without coming off like a total prick? I don't know, I just can't help but notice that, over the last decade in particular, there's just been a precipitous drop in the quality of local news. It really makes you wonder what sort of events could be occurring locally that we have no idea about, it makes me wonder what could be happening in our localities when a murder now consists of nothing more than a poorly constructed sentence, just a grammatically horrendous single sentence. That's the entirety of what they write about murders now, just a single sentence, usually a small consortium of words that's both entirely uninformative and grammatically putrid. A person was shot on Indiana Avenue no further details are known at this time. This is what they write. It's quite audacious, really. More often than not bylines are also omitted—a single sentence by, ostensibly, a collective Staff. How can the violent murder of a human being be deserving of just a single sentence? A person's life ends in a vicious fashion and an entity known as Staff writes the following: A person was murdered on Indiana Avenue no further details are known at this time. Yet if I download just one of the litany of social media apps available for no cost on my cell phone I'll find seemingly no limit to the inane soliloquys penned by aspiring writers, I'll find seemingly infinite reports on the most arcane minutia, on hyperbolic nano-aggressions of the belly button, dissertations on the proper prepositions a person should employ given their political orientations,

yet a brutal murder just a mile from my apartment is confined to a single, grammatically putrid sentence. A person dies violently, and no one cares. I should almost say that there would be more dignity in the local news just omitting mention of the murder entirely. Which begs the question—how much longer will we have to wait until the reporting on local homicides ceases completely, how much longer will we have to wait for the day to arrive when murders occur on the streets around us and not a single person reports it, when it's no longer discussed. Whom among us can't spare a paragraph for a bodybag?

LARRY KOMNENE: Whom among us indeed.

ADAM METROPOLIS: People are being murdered on Indiana Avenue, they're being murdered on Carolina Avenue, and they're being killed on Michigan Avenue, and our local news organizations seem to have succumbed to an inability to relay more than a single sentence about it. How is that possible? What's more important to the residents of the Avenues of Indiana, Carolina, and Michigan than the knowledge of not only whether or not people are being murdered on their streets but the details surrounding potential motives, weapons, suspects, and, if necessary, more in-depth analyses of the criminal organizations operating in the area. Shouldn't this be the highest priority of a local news organization? The sad fact of the matter is, Larry, that it wouldn't even be appropriate to speak of a drop in the quality of the local news, because there's hardly enough substance to these reports to levy a serious critique. How can you critique reporting that, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists? You can't even find a restaurant review anymore locally. How in the

world am I supposed to know where to eat? I can't possibly afford to taste test every restaurant that opens its doors in the city. The local news, it's recently occurred to me, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists. In the era of Reality TV, in an era where I can turn on a television set and watch dozens of programs where people cook in a medium where I'm restricted from both scent and taste, in an era where I can log onto a computer and find millions of people watching adults play videogames—localities have essentially ceased to report on themselves in any meaningful way. Local news agencies can no longer be bothered to investigate the cases of people violently killed in our streets. You now have to get your local news from decentralized, individual, sources—assuming you still have friends and speak to people, which almost no one does. No one speaks to each other. People sit right next to each other and text one another.

LARRY KOMNENE: So much so I almost feel as though you should be texting me this instead of speaking it to me.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Like I was telling you about Tel Aviv on the Water the other day. You could never get that type of information from the local news, because they no longer run restaurant reviews, because there are no longer upstanding critics of local restaurants that provide pertinent information to the general public about their options with regard to eating out. Because, needless to say, just as I told you previously, I wasn't about to wait in line to get into the new Tel Aviv after we were denied entrance that past Tuesday—when there wasn't a single person on the patio, because at that point, to me, it was a matter of principle, as I felt as though I'd

made my thoughts on that doorman abundantly clear, I wanted absolutely nothing to do with that doorman going forward, I'd rather get drunk under a bridge than attempt to get into Tel Aviv again. In fact, I couldn't wait for Tel Aviv to close, and it would inevitably close, so I could laugh in that doorman's face when I inevitably saw him out elsewhere, in fact, I couldn't wait to see him out at a bar, out of a job, no longer wearing a ridiculous suit while working on the Providence River, the Providence River filled to its brim with quarter-empty Capri Suns pouches and bass with bad teeth, no longer employed to inform innocent people Sorry, but you can't wear sneakers in here. Sorry! Also, on the weekends, for the patio, make a reservation. Thanks! There's no reason to ever go to Tel Aviv, in my opinion. Their condescension regarding dress code is the worst I've encountered. I still can't wait to see that doorman out at a bar, out of a job, while I wear sneakers and laugh, not necessarily at him, but laugh in a way that strongly implies I'm indeed laughing at him, jobless, now drinking away his sorrows in a bar where everyone is wearing sneakers. And right after that, I don't know if I told you, Larry, that night, we went to meet up with Philokalia at Pasha, and she gave Jamal a container of leftover shrimp cocktail from work, and, suddenly famished, I ate all of the shrimps in the middle of the parking lot at Pasha and, afterward, I threw the doggie bag into the bushes, where it would stay until at least the following Thursday. Jamal witnessed the doggie bag four times in a row on his way to work, and while chewing the shrimp in the parking lot, while making liberal use of the cocktail sauce, I noted the sauce was saving the meal, that the shrimp itself was a little dry, and I wondered if its arid quality was the reason that Philokalia gave it to Jamal in the first place.

LARRY KOMNENE: You know, Adam, forgive me for my digressions, because I don't disagree with you in the least, but the fact of the matter is that the more I age the more I begin to believe there are traits to blood that modern science can't quite comprehend—that maybe even spirits from the distant past echo in the blood biologists tell us runs through our veins. I had a dream earlier this month that an older female who took multiple forms—who, for lack of a better word, engaged me in a sexual liaison—calmly told me in a car with two small but indecipherable dark forms in the back, after I paid \$92 for our hotel room, that she would be permanently relocating to quote-unquote south of the Missouri. And I took this matter-of-factly, replying You mean south of the Mississippi?—like I knew this had to happen, and I woke up with an intense feeling that my entire life somehow unintentionally followed the path of Eastern Orthodoxy, that this dream was just as concrete as anything I would experience in my waking life.

ADAM METROPOLIS: You know, Larry, it's interesting you mention sexual liaisons, but of course we should note that love, by its very nature, is always going to abut upon not only the horrific and repulsive, but also the inherently absurd. In fact, love is perhaps best defined by its inveterate absurdity. The sexual liaison of your dream certainly seems odd, but is it? Is it any more absurd than any relationship either of us have navigated? It's easy to experience a sexual liaison in a dream and deem it absurd, but is it—at least when compared to the median liaison, which is almost always inherently absurd? I think you're spot on in taking the sexual liaison of your dream seriously, then again, even speaking of your love is entirely absurd, and commenting upon your happiness is only done by the near suicidal.

No one existing in a happy state or even a near happy state speaks in public about their happiness—the last thing that crosses any of these peoples' minds is stating how happy they are. No one who exists happily states how happy they are, and there's nothing more antithetical to being happy than stating how happy you are. Saying aloud I'm happy only evinces how deeply you've been torn apart, and what often tears two people apart who have become companions, in my experience at least, is difference in necessary opinion—necessary opinions that people can hardly speak of without making themselves entirely absurd. There's no doubt that two people under any circumstance will almost never share all opinions, in fact even on most opinions any two people will almost certainly, if not disagree, then not agree completely—however, in a relationship there are necessary opinions they must agree on, otherwise there will be, in all likelihood, non-stop tumult. For example, to take an extreme example, at one point in my life I was moderately to deeply involved with a woman who was married. It was unfortunate that she was married, and it was even more unfortunate that we began, for lack of a better term, a sexual liaison—however, while I felt as though she should cease being married, she remained ambivalent as to whether or not she should continue being married and that, to my mind, is a great example of necessary opinion we held diverging opinions on. You see, the fact we fundamentally failed to see eye to eye on whether or not she should continue to be married became quite the issue, it caused nearly endless tumult, but as it would so happen, in my own absurd way, I wasn't even entirely certain why I thought she shouldn't be married. I was in no position to take care of her financially, and she wasn't in a position with particularly promising career prospects, yet for some reason I felt as

though the fact she was married to a man who desperately wanted to take care of her financially was an affront to my character, that the fact we weren't together, financially ruining our lives with one another, which of course would certainly have concluded with both of us despising one another, that this was unacceptable. I wasn't willing to accept the fact that she chose not to ruin both of our lives—I saw her refusal to ruin both of our lives as essentially an affront to my character. On some level I knew I had little to no interest in actually getting married, yet the fact she was married seemed to me to be some kind of slap in the face. I was offended that she remained married to a man who wanted to take care of her financially, despite the fact I was in no position to take care of her financially. But isn't what I've just described the characteristic of love par excellence, despite being inveterately absurd? Having said that, in the end, of course, I told her that, sure, maybe I didn't want her to be married, maybe I'd love it if she were single, but putting my feelings aside, the fact we'd inadvisably engaged in a sexual liaison, well, didn't that fact alone make a coherent argument against the continuation of her marriage? Forget about me for just one second, I said, completely disingenuously I said Just forget about me for one second—if you're engaging in sexual liaisons while married, are you not just poisoning the well, so to speak? The integrity of her marriage was of course acutely compromised by my presence (that is, if you believe our liaison to be her only liaison, which is of course questionable in itself), but in a sense I had nothing to do with the integrity of her marriage—you could argue that if it wasn't our liaison it would have been another liaison, that I was simply a stochastic component in an inevitable liaison. But eventually she did get divorced, and coincidentally enough she also took

my advice and completely forgot about me. And rightfully so. To continue to recall me would have been terrible for the two of us, yet it also wasn't the easiest pill for me to swallow, being forgotten so acutely. Extremely emphatically. I don't think I've ever been as emphatically forgotten as I was by this particular formerly married female. Of course you can tell someone to leave you behind, to forget all about you, that they'd be better off without you, but you never expect them to actually take your advice. Never in a million years do you expect them to actually believe you're being sincere, that you would ever want them to forget about you. Because nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, when you tell someone to forget about you, you expect them to praise you for it, to tell you that they would never forget about you, how could they forget about you—you, the person who's asking to be forgotten? The people who request to be forgotten are almost always never forgotten, except in my case, where I asked this married woman to forget me, and she granted my request.

LARRY KOMNENE: But that's love, is it not? It's entirely unfair, wholly irrational, yet entirely commonplace.

ADAM METROPOLIS: I can't imagine anyone disagreeing with that statement.

LARRY KOMNENE: And not only that—because these irrationalities go far beyond the intensities of love, beyond even the mundanities of life, because they even seep into our basic conceptual templates. For example, I love coffee. You know this. I'm an ardent lover of coffee—this is common knowledge, yet it's recently occurred to me that I even love the double ff, double ee consecutive ending of the word Coffee, that, in fact, it

wouldn't be a stretch of logic at all to assert that the grammatical makeup of the word Coffee has induced my love of coffee nearly as much as (if not more so than) the physical effect of drinking coffee. Yes, it's recently occurred to me that you hardly ever see two consecutive letters used consecutively in quite that manner, and I've considered this combination to mark a particular apex of the English language, a language which by and large I find mundane and contemptible. Two f's followed by two e's—is this not beautiful? You speak Greek and every sentence you utter sounds mellifluous and poetic, whereas you speak English and it takes years of studying the intricacies of syllable structures to even approach the poetry of a θέλω ένα σούπα, of a είναι όπως είναι, of a το κουτάβι δεν είναι γάτα. Is it wrong that this linguistic effect of coffee should comprise a large portion of my love of coffee? Is that off-base in any way?

ADAM METROPOLIS: Larry, I would be lying to you if I said you weren't making perfect sense to me right now.

LARRY KOMNENE: I can only relay my experiences as I experience my experiences.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Larry, listen—your irrationality has never been something that offended me personally. But can we be honest with ourselves?

LARRY KOMNENE: We always have.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Because before we can proceed any further we should make an important distinction—before anyone accuses either of us of being anti-science, of being prototypical Byzantine mystics. Because I know you wanted to discuss the nature of the

totalitarian today, and truly there's nothing more that I wish to discuss—the topic is apropos and urgent, there's nothing more relevant for the two of us to discuss. But I feel as though I need to begin with one important caveat. Because there's a very particular distinction we need to make here, in my mind, and that's the strict separation—not that they're strictly separated—of theoretical science and empirical science. Because today it's too often that we speak of science in this very vague sense, with the two terms co-mingling indiscriminately, as if scientists are infallible creatures that can never be questioned theoretically, that to question science theoretically is to become a modern cretin, as if scientists are modern deities that we should all bow in front of in absolute awe, as if all science is created equal in the eyes of God, who is also Himself a Scientist (theoretically). It's the syllogistic theoretical science that, in my mind, needs to be denigrated—and denigrated significantly. In fact, there's hardly an extent I would deem too far when it comes to denigrating this syllogistic science, as it seems to me to be the source of the majority of the self-important idiocy we find in our world today. Syllogistic theoretical science, it only proves 'things' in 'theoretical' fashions, and there's no fashion more questionable than a theoretical fashion. If, for example, I told you that A is in B and B is in C, and that therefore—in theory—we can postulate that A is in C, then I would sound entirely logical, you would trust me, you would mention to your parents that you have this beautiful friend Adam, and he's incredibly smart, and his handsome logic is sound enough for ten men. But it's entirely possible that if we one day visited C and searched C extensively that we would find absolutely no trace of A, that the case was in fact that only a small piece of A was found in B, that B was huge, and the piece

of B that was contained in C had absolutely nothing to do with A—and that by stating A is in B, B is in C, ipso facto A is in C was the most insipid statement we could have possibly made when it came to the case of A, B, and C. For example, we know the population of Greece consists of human beings, we know the population of Greece tend to live longer than other populations—a fact which sparked the American obsession with the so-called Mediterranean diet—but we also know the population of Greece smokes cigarettes like chimneys with excessive body hair, so it would be entirely logical from this data to conclude, syllogistically, that smoking cigarettes extends the life of human beings. After all, if human beings (A) contain the population of Greece (B), the population of Greece (B) consumes endless cigarettes (C), and the population of Greece (B) exhibits long life (D), then our conclusion writes itself. A contains B, B consumes C and exhibits D, so it follows logically that if A also consumes C then it should also exhibit D, since B is contained in A. Yet empirically this conclusion is of course absurd. If human beings smoke like chimneys they'll live longer than average lives. So when we speak of science what is it exactly we're speaking of? Are we speaking of physical data that's been collected, that to the best of our sensory organs is true and valid, or are we speaking of gross extrapolations, based on syllogistic IF/THENs that have been overextended, overused, and under-critiqued?

LARRY KOMNENE: I don't disagree, but I also need to confess something to you.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Does it have anything to do with theoretical science?

LARRY KOMNENE: Not particularly.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Which is entirely fine.

LARRY KOMNENE: Because I feel as though I need to add an essential caveat of my own, before we begin.

ADAM METROPOLIS: I would be devastated if you didn't proceed immediately.

LARRY KOMNENE: There's a politics to metaphysics, is that fair to say?

ADAM METROPOLIS: The only thing unfair about saying there's a politics to metaphysics would be disagreeing that there's a politics to metaphysics, if you stated there's no politics to metaphysics, only that would be unfair.

LARRY KOMNENE: Would it be fair to say this politics—the politics of metaphysics—is not just nonsensical, but also grotesque.

ADAM METROPOLIS: I'd have no choice but to agree with that statement, Larry.

LARRY KOMNENE: So then I think we'd both tend to agree that there's an impalpable character to sincere metaphysics, yet an entirely palpable character to analytical politics. And the palpable politics prods the impalpable metaphysics into inauthentic palpability, knowing full well that the metaphysics will perish if forced to become palpable. No metaphysics can withstand the force of palpability. This is true to the best of our knowledge, that there's an analytical politics that vehemently suggests that if we exit the realm of the

analytical—of the theoretical—then we enter a world of chaos, because once we leave the world of the analytical, then schools and bureaucracies become essentially nonsensical. That without this rigid analytical framework we'd no longer have schools and bureaucracy—and then we'd be lost for good. But of course we would counter that the fading away of these systematic schooling systems, these grotesque hierarchies of so-called knowledge, that the attenuation of the bureaucratic construction of knowledge wouldn't be the worst thing to happen to the world, and more importantly that this attenuation wouldn't ipso facto usher in a world of so-called chaos. Because we should be clear—the attenuation of the analytical is distinct from the annihilation of the analytical. This perhaps even bears repeating, that the attenuation of the analytical is something entirely distinct from the annihilation of the analytical.

ADAM METROPOLIS: The attenuation of the analytical is without a doubt distinct from the annihilation of the analytical. I agree completely.

LARRY KOMNENE: And while the analytical attempts to annihilate the metaphysical, while the analytical bureaucrats have made the annihilation of anything instinctual and metaphysical their priority—we, by contrast, have no need to annihilate the analytical, we simply wish to attenuate the analytical, knowing full well the metaphysical will perish if the analytical isn't attenuated. All we seek is a co-existence between the analytical and the metaphysical, the recognition that both concepts are necessary.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Because as it stands the analytical bureaucrats—by conflating the attenuation of the analytical with the annihilation of the analytical—essentially, in turn, seek the annihilation of the metaphysical.

LARRY KOMNENE: Just a few weeks ago, it was actually unfortunate, I had a loogie of mucus stuck in my throat while sitting in traffic, so I rolled my window down and spat the loogie but completely missed the window, and the loogie landed on my window buttons. I wiped my viscous spit with my fleece sleeve, and the person in the car adjacent definitely witnessed the whole thing. When I got to the gym the Stairmaster I mounted fortuitously displayed an NBA playoff game on the empty treadmill that sat in front of said Stairmaster, and it was all perfect, everything had fallen into place perfectly—I was watching the NBA playoff game I'd wanted to watch while also at the gym—until an older gentleman mounted that specific treadmill, despite the fact there were eight other treadmills open. Needless to say, soon enough I realized my decision to go to the gym was completely misguided, and it almost goes without saying that three of my friends were working out at the gym, and it almost goes without saying it would have been rude not to say hello and chat for a couple of minutes, and it almost goes without saying that they inquired if I was around that night, and, of course, I was totally around, but I cut the conversation with all three of them just a little short, I truncated the conversation with all three of my acquaintances, because I wanted to get home and watch the remainder of the playoff game, but, at the same time, I had no interest in mentioning my reasoning for leaving so swiftly, obviously because I felt as though the question of why I was at the gym in the first place

would have been raised had I shared my imbroglio, that if my main priority was watching a playoff game currently being played, then why would I choose to go to the gym during the exact time of the game? The fact of the matter was I had no rational reason as to why I needed to leave the gym in such a rush, as it was apparent the playoff game couldn't have been all that important to me—if I voluntarily chose to go to the gym while the playoff game was in the midst of being played. I felt a little awkward on my ride home, I instinctively felt as though certain elements could never be reassembled, that at one time, these elements were ostensibly in place, assembled appropriately, that they had to have been in place at one time, in perfect harmony, with inscrutable geometry, but it was doubtful these elements could ever be put back there, into place.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Larry, it's at these exact moments—

LARRY KOMNENE: that this type of impalpable metaphysics makes itself known to us. It's only during moments such as these, nonsensical moments such as these, that we can truly begin to explore these types of impalpable metaphysics. Sans nonsense, metaphysics can never truly be explored, we should admit that much, shouldn't we? That there's a direct correlation between nonsense and metaphysics. That the analytical jargon of the Theoretical Scientists leads us to something that's nonsensical yet grotesque, while this contrary process leads us to perhaps something that's nonsensical yet metaphysical.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Everything is without a doubt entirely nonsensical. A man gets murdered on Indiana

Avenue, and the local reporter writes A man has been murdered on Indiana Avenue no further details are known at this time. This is submitted, I assume, to an editor and is published as is. Which is nonsensical.

LARRY KOMNENE: You attempt to enter Tel Aviv on the water, on the disgusting Providence River, and a pompous doorman denies you entrance solely on the basis of your footwear, which albeit isn't of the highest quality yet by no means is of an unacceptable quality. This is nonsensical. To mandate that dress shoes should comprise the sole form of footwear in an establishment on a river as grotesque as the Providence River is grotesque in itself. It's nonsensical, yet it's also grotesque. The entire notion of dress shoes is antiquated, yet wearing dress shoes on the Providence River is antiquated but also grotesque. Have any of us ever met a person wearing a pair of dress shoes on the Providence River who wasn't a fascist totalitarian at heart? An objectionable human being in summary? Who wears dress shoes on the Providence River with the exception of these summarily objectionable human beings? Dress shoe mandates on the Providence River seem to me to evince nothing if not intolerance and fascism. What can we say of this increasing propensity of our era to utterly disregard tolerance of opposing viewpoints—to lunge without thought at anything totalitarian and then to scream screeds asserting the only justice is anything totalitarian?

ADAM METROPOLIS: It's perhaps the towering issue of our era, Larry. Millions of people now seek to quench thirsts for anything totalitarian that are more or less impossible to quench, or at least so it would seem. It seems almost as though it's impossible to quench these

thirsts for the totalitarian, it seems almost as though these people wake up every day and immediately begin to ruthlessly scrounge around for anything totalitarian, that they don't stop scrounging around until late in the evening, after dark, when they pass out of exhaustion, but only after consuming anything totalitarian for the entirety of their waking hours. They're classic hunters and gatherers for anything totalitarian. No matter the question their answer is without fail something totalitarian. But there's nothing less philosophical than the intolerance of opposing views—and I know, as two people with a deep devotion to the contemplative life, there's nothing less appetizing to us, there's nothing that appeals less to our palettes than this idea that opposing views should no longer be tolerated. That rigorous debate should be discouraged. But this is totalitarianism. If our metaphysics is to be eternal, then our debate must also take the form of the eternal. But those who thirst for the totalitarian hardly see it as such. The second we mention the eternal they shout Social Control and attempt to condemn the debate on moral grounds. The fact of the matter is anything eternal is anathema to the totalitarian, with of course the exception of stifling debate—the only eternity the totalitarian acknowledges is the stifling of debate eternally on so-called moral grounds, and of course the moral grounds are unilaterally established by the totalitarian. Our debates can and should be trampled upon for eternity in the eyes of the totalitarian, but any other form of the eternal is anathema, it's just a tool of social control in the eyes of the totalitarian. But we can't just cease debating because the facile mind has found itself worn out, Larry—this is the uncomfortable fact we must face, that the facile mind can't dictate the terms of our debate, of our contemplative natures, because if the facile mind dictates

the contemplative, then the contemplative will eventually perish. The totalitarian alleges to protect the facile mind, when in reality the totalitarian shrewdly uses the facile mind as pretext for its own ruthless annihilations. The totalitarian seeks to annihilate everything except for itself and the facile mind, then promises the facile mind egalitarianism as it inaugurates itself into a lifetime presidency. Yet we have to display a modicum of the temerity of the totalitarian, albeit without allowing ourselves to become ruthless totalitarians as well. Because the debate can't cease solely because a person with a facile mind boldly refuses to not be correct on everything. The facile mind of our generation has been taught by the totalitarian that they're incapable of being wrong on any issue, that they (the facile mind) have the innate right to be correct on everything, and that any objection to their facile theses is ipso facto fascism—yet identifying the idiocy expounded upon by idiots is the furthest thing from fascism. On the contrary, it's only when idiocy is allowed to propagate unfettered that fascism occurs. These people suffer from an exhaustive disorder of some sort. It almost seems as though they no longer have the internal constitution to debate an issue—they want nothing more than to strike any opposing viewpoint from the record once and for all, but there's nothing less appetizing to me than this tendency, it's rationality taken to a destructive extreme, a truly totalitarian extreme, perhaps even a comical extreme, there's nothing contemplative about these people. They believe their opinions, which more often than not are at bottom idiotic opinions, they believe Their Opinions to be the Only Opinions, that Any Other Opinions are ipso facto Bad Opinions. When their opinion is, in fact, the zenith of an idiotic opinion. And they're successfully pressuring an entire era to adopt this

ideology—if it can even be called an ideology, which it can't, because, in its essence, it's not an ideology at all.

LARRY KOMNENE: A man is murdered on Indiana Avenue and the local news composes a story consisting of a single sentence that states A man was shot on Indiana Avenue no further details are known at this time. An entire generation of people begin to seek out anything totalitarian from the moment they wake up until the moment they fall asleep. An entire race—humanity as a whole, the alleged homo sapien regime—decides debating issues have become too cumbersome, and that everyone must agree on everything, that there should be a maximum of one acceptable opinion on any given issue. It's difficult to look at these issues, Adam, and not come to the clear conclusion that our world is not only nonsensical but also grotesque. Even Christ Himself stated If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. There's no doubt that finding everything around you grotesque is almost a prerequisite of the study of metaphysics, it's indicative of a metaphysical bent, if you will. If a person finds the world as is to be well enough as is, to be in any way preferable to other imagined worlds, then they have no business dealing in metaphysics. If you don't wake up in the middle of the night with an occasional urge to hang yourself then, without a doubt, you simply have no future investigating metaphysics. If you don't wake up in the middle of the night and mumble I'm going to hang myself then go back to bed and sleep soundly, then you can't be trusted in the realm of metaphysics. Totalitarianism is always a result of an outright rejection of metaphysics. There's nothing more antithetical to the

totalitarian than the metaphysical. The greatest threat to the metaphysical is the totalitarian, whereas the greatest threat to the totalitarian is the metaphysical. We constantly seek to murder God, we tell ourselves God was a form of social control, a subterfuge played on the masses, and then we immediately seek out anything totalitarian. Rich people in this country fornicate and ostensibly produce children, then these children are raised in atheist households, move to Brooklyn, become atheists, and engage in ruthless forms of totalitarianism, whether granted vocations in tech, journalism, or finance they never cease to engage in ruthless forms of the totalitarian. The atheist trust fund child has come to believe that God is a malevolent collective fiction and totalitarianism is a harmless fashion statement. Yet the atheist trust fund child, unacquainted with poverty, physical violence, petty crime, the judicial system, and people who tell them how they really feel, can't be blamed for pursuing the totalitarian as a fashion statement—these children raised under the trust fund umbrella should, in fact, be pitied rather than prosecuted, because they've been barred from all of the essential experiences that comprise the so-called human condition. They believe Bach is classical music, that polyphony is a progressive form of music, and simply have no knowledge of monophony. We distort God, we make God into a tyrant who demands knowledge of all of our innermost thoughts, we distort God into a judiciary committee, we paint God in our own image, and then we kill God and immediately become totalitarians. This is what's occurring Adam. If our fathers were rich and Western we would have already moved to Brooklyn, we would be writing articles—not about murders on Indiana Avenue—but on the inherent violence of open debate, on the a priori value of a facile mind. It's nonsensical, yet

also grotesque. It's difficult not to glance at the journalists of our generation and despise them outright for their facile minds, their unwillingness to engage with their own idiocy, and also their unrepentant totalitarianism—yet in some sense we know they're doing the best they can. They either author single sentences about murders on Indiana Avenue or they pen six thousand word polemics condemning automobile mechanics who employ language they find distasteful. We all grew up united in our opposition to the Iraq War, to the ruthless dissemination of totalitarianism, to this idea that we had the right to impose our particular belief systems on foreign populations, and now these same peers of ours who objected to the criminal bombing of Baghdad spend their lives lecturing automobile mechanics on the merits of turning a blind eye to pederasty, ruthlessly imposing their belief systems on domestic populations, many of whom are, yes, idiotic and nonsensical. Yet being idiotic is not felonious, in my opinion at least. Finally, these same peers remain entirely ignorant of foreign affairs, they're mired in ignorance to anything to the East of Italy. Our ancestors were of Eastern origin, Adam, our ancestors were essentially the ρωμισσὺνη, so we gradually and instinctively taught ourselves the histories of the East, whereas our peers descended into a totalitarian iteration of liberation that's at bottom grotesque and at bottom mired in ignorance of anything non-Western. Their totalitarianism is rooted essentially in the Western misinterpretations of Eastern texts. The West distorted the God they found in the East, with time found their distortion of God to be grotesque, then killed their distorted God and immediately became totalitarians. We familiarized ourselves with the monophonic, while our peers believed Bach expressed the highest form of

musicality. It's possible this is the fundamental difference. If Saddam Hussein were to emerge from the grave and assert his control of Iraq, assuming Iraq still even exists as a polity, we would still find ourselves arguing in the favor of pacifism, would we not, Adam?—would we still argue that we can't impose our particular systems of belief on foreign populations injudiciously? Yet would our peers, now prominent in journalism, would they not ride drones like witches on brooms to Baghdad to take snapshots of the bombing campaigns and post them on their Instagram feeds? How could we possibly not be disgusted, Adam? Disgust, as we've noted, is a prerequisite of all metaphysics. There's a politics of metaphysics we can no longer ignore, in order for us to understand the developments in the so-called material world we must investigate the attitudes toward the so-called metaphysical world, just as we've inadvisably separated Mind and Body for centuries, we've inadvisably separated the material and the metaphysical worlds as well. The material world and the metaphysical world are without a doubt intertwined in a way that's impossible to unravel. Our attitudes toward the Essence of God are directly correlated to our bombing campaigns of Baghdad in '03. Our attitudes toward the Energies of God are directly correlated to our tendencies to thirst for any and everything totalitarian. This is something that's instinctive. It's essentially non-Western. It's something we must approach in a certain manner, otherwise we'll never get to the bottom of things, not in the least.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Yet, Larry, is it not plausible that we too are totalitarian in our own way?

LARRY KOMNENE: Oh, we're incredibly totalitarian to an extent, in our own particular ways.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Because, while we're without a doubt totalitarian in our own respective ways, it almost seems to me that the defining characteristic of the totalitarian regime is a devastating lack of precision vis-a-vis deviations from the mean. Because of course societies are constructed around this idea of organizing behavior based on standard deviations from the mean, normalized deviations from what's collectively considered good taste and behavior. That's how modern societies construct themselves, and I think we'd both agree on that.

LARRY KOMNENE: That we would.

ADAM METROPOLIS: All moral coding is based upon standard deviations from mean behavior, and the specificity, the vigor we put into defining these deviations is of the utmost importance, it's the primary political function of the contemplative. Rigorously defining deviations from mean behavior, because if we fail to define deviations from decency with rigor, then all deviations will inevitably and tragically take on the exact same character—there will be One Deviation from Good Taste, which will be Any Deviation from Good Taste, which is the primary characteristic of the totalitarian as we've discussed it. The issue of the totalitarian, it seems to me, is an essentially mathematical issue—it's an issue of analytical vigor and defining deviations from a mean. Because a rigorous regimen of defined terminology is a prerequisite for freedom—we must become almost tyrannical in our zeal to accurately define terms if we wish to indulge in true freedom, in fact we almost can't

be too descriptive, our divisions of terms almost can't become too complex. Otherwise we lack the necessary resources to defend our actions and opinions. Despite claims of decadence, the Byzantines were perhaps the apex tyrants of rigorous terminology, as the most enduring extension of Antiquity that makes sense, yet this is what open debate essentially requires, the so-called Greek world as a whole is accurately noted for its tyranny of terms, its pure ruthlessness when it came to the contemplative spheres. Whereas the totalitarian regime, by contrast, is essentially blunt and dull-witted in its approach to its terminology, the Gulag is always played in a fast and loose fashion, which is what we seem to be seeing of late—a pure lack of analytical vigor. A dull-witted approach to defining terms. Recklessly tossing disparate populations under the same terminological umbrellas and setting a trajectory of One Deviation from Good Taste, a trajectory where any opinion that digresses from the so-called appropriate opinion is bluntly lumped in with every other opinion that digresses. For example, we could take the issue of sexual assault to start—it's a terrible place to start yet it's the most appropriate place to begin—as we rightfully define sexual assault as an appalling act that requires both prevention and prosecution. Yet in our zeal to eliminate sexual assault of all sorts we've begun to conflate approaching sexual assault in a blunt and satisfying fashion with approaching sexual assault in a just and efficacious fashion—and we know that what's blunt and satisfying is rarely just and efficacious, when we approach a problem in a way that's essentially blunt and satisfies our zeal immediately we rarely approach it in a way that's either just or efficacious. We've become zealots of eliminating sexual assault in the most expeditious fashion, we've treated sexual assault bluntly

and we've been satisfied at the epithets we've hurled, and in turn we've begun to see sexual assault everywhere, and as we see sexual assault in everything, then it's a logical inevitability that people who essentially have nothing to do with sexual assault will become guilty of sexual assault. Then, in turn, the very term sexual assault takes on a dubious character, we no longer know what we refer to when we speak of sexual assault because we've grouped so many disparate acts under the same terminology (sexual assault), ipso facto sexual assault essentially becomes impossible to address—when we say the words sexual assault we no longer know what we mean. So our zeal to eliminate sexual assault in the most expeditious fashion, in a blunt fashion, in effect, cloaks true sexual assault to the extent we can no longer address sexual assault in a just or efficacious manner. In short, this is the result of eschewing analytical rigor. Without a tyrannical analytical rigor with regard to the definition of sexual assault sexual assault becomes amorphous and impossible to address except in the most dull-witted of ways. Sexual assault is, of course, a deviation from what we deem to be proper behavior, from mean action, this is what I mean, Larry, to be clear, when I say the totalitarian regime becomes dull-witted with regard to its deviations. In a totalitarian regime, any deviation is viewed through the same lens. Analytical rigor is entirely lacking. By barring discrimination in a blanket fashion we limit our levels of distinction, we no longer allow ourselves to define our terms rigorously and analytically, and—no longer able to distinguish degrees—we conclude by condemning everything. Unable or unwilling to approach our most important moral issues with a brutal analytical rigor we instead bluntly condemn everything. We play fast and loose on the Gulag. Rather than employing a voluminous variety

of specific deviations, all of which must be handled in an individual manner, all deviations are viewed as essentially the same, and because all deviations are now essentially the same, all deviations must be punished severely, regardless of their severity, otherwise the totalitarian would become the anarchic. So without a tyranny of terminology, without a maddening vigor with regard to defining actions according to individuated metrics, we inevitably fall into the totalitarian. In a sense, it's the aversion to vigorous analysis that causes persons to seek anything totalitarian, it's in a sense a form of procrastination. Procrastination by mass lynching, perhaps. You and I are without a doubt both tyrants of the contemplative, we're guilty of being wholly ruthless when it comes to defining terms, while an increasing majority of our generation have melted into zealots for anything totalitarian—these are essentially antithetical pursuits. The analytically vigorous and the zealots of immediate satisfaction are essentially antithetical movements. When you and I objected to the Iraq War, for example, we objected due to a lack of vigor with regard to the definition of terms—we couldn't bluntly associate Saddam Hussein with Osama bin Laden, of course that would be an entirely totalitarian approach to the Middle East. The immediate satisfaction of condemning the entire region of the Middle East for the attacks of 9/11 ultimately proved neither just or efficacious. Which of course both the right and left have been guilty of for decades—America on both the right and left has engaged in a purely totalitarian approach to the Middle East, everything in the Middle East has become monochrome in the eyes of the Americans. We transform the monophonic, which is notable for its nearly endless specificity, into something monochromatic, which is essentially blunted and idiotic.

LARRY KOMNENE: Adam, you took the words out of my mouth. Because this is as much of a musical issue as it is a political issue, is it not?

ADAM METROPOLIS: But at the same time we shouldn't view the journalists of our generation, who stood with us in opposition to the Iraq War but now employ essentially Republican tactics against those who disagree with them, as surprising or even objectionable in the least. Because of course they've become ruthless totalitarians, yet—

LARRY KOMNENE: But we should really note here, before we condemn the journalists of our generation, who have become essentially totalitarians with trust funds, who deserve mountains of scorn without a doubt yet aren't necessarily objectionable, before we condemn these journalists we need to establish the musical basis of this issue of the totalitarian. Because in America on both the right and the left we view the so-called Near East through a purely totalitarian lens, we refuse to define the terms of the Near East with any vigor, Shia equals Sunni, Saddam equal Osama, Kurd equal Assyrian, Druze equals Alawite—yet if we were to garner a glance at, say, Ottoman classical music, which inevitably shares characteristics with what we could deem Byzantine classical music—what would we find? We'd find exactly that monophony you referenced, that divides octaves with an analytical vigor unheard of in the West. Western classical music split a single octave into only twelve well-tempered notes, while Ottoman classical music continued a tradition of splitting a single octave into sixty to seventy two so-called 'microtones'. The Western scale is, in fact, leagues more totalitarian in

its approach, in its bluntness with regard to identifying deviations. The West reduced the deviations of the octave in order to produce polyphony, while the East engaged in ruthless specificity with regard to the octave—in the process discarding the presumptions of the chord progression. So this monophony the West always assumed to be backward and decadent is actually a result of an analytical vigor wholly lacking in the West, it's actually indicative—this monophony, this tyrannical approach to the octave—of a lack of totalitarian tendencies. Of a truly open debate between single notes, the absolute apex of possible notes the human ear is equipped to hear. Whereas the polyphony of Western music was only accomplished by committing genocide upon each octave, murdering forty eight or more possible notes per octave. Whereas you and I, Adam, are both ruthless tyrants of the contemplative, ruthless dictators of defining terms accurately, the Ottoman composer was a ruthless tyrant of the octave. Every note must be defined with a ruthless specificity. Ruthless specificity, as we've noted, is what seems lacking in our current discourse. The charlatan of receiving blowjobs is being conflated with the violent rapist, which is a direct result of playing fast and loose on the Gulag. Both of course deserve our scorn, the charlatan of receiving blowjobs and the violent rapist are both objectionable creatures, but nevertheless if we fail to ruthlessly define these deviations from good taste, then our entire social order becomes essentially totalitarian. The Ottoman composer instinctively understood this, while the Western composer still bluntly conflates C# and Db, F# and Gb, A#, and Bb—in his clumsy employment of genocidal octaves. The genocidal octaves that make polyphony possible. The Western politician continues the tradition of the Western classical composer and

conflates Sunni with Shia, Saddam with Osama, Greek with Turk, Armenian with Egyptian, Arab with Persian, Druze with Wahhabi—these politicians, in a manner of speaking, are indulging in compromised octaves. The octave of the Iraq War was constructed in the services of a falsified polyphony, it lacked the analytical vigor required and countless lives were destroyed, an entire region of the world, already lethally tumultuous, became even more lethally tumultuous for decades on end. The journalists of our generation have become zealots of progress, there's no corner they won't cut to ensure they can eliminate everything socially odorous in record time, but in cutting their corners, in lacking even a modicum of analytical vigor, they're inducing an essentially totalitarian regime. They've become the enemies of the very analytical rigor they employed when opposing the Iraq War. Rather than eliminating abhorrent behavior, they're instead conflating abhorrent behavior with off-putting behavior, until abhorrent behavior is essentially cloaked vis-a-vis the conflation with off-putting behavior—abhorrent behavior, rather than being eliminated or reduced, is becoming invisible, it's being cloaked in a sense. It's becoming impossible to speak of abhorrent behavior because potent terms have become deeply conflated, our vocabularies have been severely hindered, the zealotry of immediate satisfaction has compromised our terminology to the extent, yes abhorrent behavior is disappearing, but it's only disappearing from our discourse, it's not disappearing from our behavioral patterns.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Yet isn't this always the case, Larry? America's particular genius was freedom, yet it spent its formative years committing genocide and indulging in abhorrent forms of chattel slavery—America

began as a genius of freedom but soon turned its focus to chattel slavery, and now, as it's been forced to admit to the grave errors of its past, it chooses to gallop toward totalitarianism in response. America—finally forced to admit the errors of its past, inveterately unfit for both genocide and chattel slavery, as its original genius was freedom—now gallops instead toward the totalitarian. America's innate genius was freedom, yet it chose instead to indulge in every action it was innately unfit for, namely ethnic genocide and chattel slavery. We're endowed with a genius and spend our time attempting a litany of things we're terrible at. We're blessed with a swift pen and we go and paint embarrassing pictures. We naturally grasp probabilities and we think we can sing. We spend our time singing songs and painting pictures and neglect mathematics and prosody—we ineptly think these are good ideas, it's only later that we realize we've disrespected our own particular genius, that we've misunderstood ourselves essentially. Because the true geniuses of ethnic genocide and chattel slavery never implode at the facts they've indulged in ethnic genocide and chattel slavery—they deny their horrific acts with a straight face and remain prosperous. Take the German state for example, take the Turkish state for example, states that have repeatedly engaged in ruthless genocides and transformed slavery into high art, yet they've never torn themselves apart due to their inveterate tendencies, their particular genius. They remain the most prosperous states in their respective regions. Germany and Turkey, as opposed to America, are the natural geniuses of both genocide and slavery. By contrast, they dip their toes into freedom and disgust themselves. They're repulsed by their own occasional democratic tendencies, true, yet as healthy states they indulge primarily in the tendencies most appropriate to them, in

their particular genius. The German state to this day ensures as many Third World children as possible starve on their banks' behalves, which, to be fair, for the German state is essentially an act of self-preservation. Whereas America dives into ethnic genocide, it indulges in the very activities least appropriate to it, and rightfully destroys itself in the aftermath. You and I, Larry, we sit here in shock that America, the world's genius of freedom, also indulged in rampant, yet ultimately poorly executed, slaveries and genocides, when in reality it would be more shocking if a genius of freedom wasn't also indulgent in chattel slavery and ethnic genocide. It's the nature of all genius to squander itself. If your pen is endowed with genius it's only natural that you'll squander it in oil, that you'll buy oil paints and paint pictures no one will like. You'll put more effort into painting and you'll receive infinitely worse results, this is the nature of genius. America was a natural genius of freedom, yet it put all of its efforts into approaching the apex of slavery and failed miserably. And now America—disgusted with its own history—hurtles itself even farther from freedom, in its error in employing freedom, America becomes disgusted with the very concept of freedom, hence hurling itself right at the totalitarian, consuming anything totalitarian and asking for only more of the totalitarian. America now can't get enough of the totalitarian. It makes perfect sense that America would squander itself in such a way, in its radical notion of freedom it also engaged in radical chattel slavery, and then, faced with the severity of initial errors, it abandons all of its principles in the name of anything totalitarian. Michael Jordan, the natural genius at basketball, wanted nothing more than to play baseball. He put all of his effort into playing baseball and was never any good. Genius by its very nature is a form of

overflowing, so it only makes sense for it to squander itself ruthlessly, it has no choice but to squander itself on questionable things, on reprehensible things—a genius that doesn't squander itself inevitably explodes or implodes of its own pressure, of its own natural composition, one of overflowing. Genius, by its very nature, glances at itself in the mirror and sees something grotesque—it sees historically significant freedom, so it loses itself in committing acts of historically significant chattel slavery, it sees mellifluous penmanship, so it hurtles into abstracted oil paints.

LARRY KOMNENE: See, this is the fundamental issue with genocide, Adam. You can't be halfway. To successfully engage in genocide you must be an inveterate genius of genocide. Much like the legendary rap duo Mobb Deep noted—there are no such things as halfway crooks. For example, we know Greek speakers inhabited portions of Asia Minor as early as 1300 BC, so even at the dawn of the initial invasions of Anatolia by the Seljuk Turks, in the twilight of the Byzantine era, in the 11th Century AD give or take, those populations, conservatively, possessed a solid two millennia of history on the land, as native populations. When the ethnic cleansing of the early 20th Century occurred in many cases it was closer to three millennia, when the Young Turks decided to forcibly export and/or rip the intestines out of these original inhabitants of Asia Minor, those very populations had close to three millennia of history in Asia Minor, of course as what we would call native inhabitants. Now the American colonists attempted to perform the same acts against the native populations of the Americas, but they lacked the artistic genius of the Turks. America successfully began a genocide, this is true, but it lacked the genius to successfully complete a

genocide, as a successful practitioner of genocide doesn't writhe himself into a pretzel post-genocide, he uses his natural resources to bribe powerful people into corroborating his baseless denials of said genocide post-genocide. The Turkish state consisted almost exclusively of geniuses of genocide, whereas the original Americans were genocidal maniacs who were, unfortunately, better suited as geniuses of freedom. Whereas America has writhed itself into pretzels regarding its genocides and now unapologetically hurtles itself toward totalitarianism, the Turkish state has never once apologized for its genocides. In fact the Turkish state tells bald-faced lies about its genocides and even pays American Congress People to repeat their bald-faced lies—this is their artistic genius, the artistic genius of the Turkish state.

ADAM METROPOLIS: The Young Turks ruthlessly murdered upward of a million of my grandfather's peers, they killed almost every Armenian they could get their hands on, they basically made the Assyrian race, for all intents and purposes, functionally extinct—they plucked out the eyes, cut out the tongues, ripped off the noses of the Greek Orthodox priests—yet I can't help but respect the artistic genius of this Turkish state as it regards the implementation of genocide.

LARRY KOMNENE: We can't say enough about the genius of these genocides, Adam. Because, save for the rhetoric of the people on the payroll of the Turkish state, it's impossible to make a distinction between the American genocides of the native populations of the American continent and the Turkish genocides of the native populations of Asia Minor, there's simply no logical distinction to be made. Of course the Turkish

state will retort that the native populations of Asia Minor quote-unquote fought back, that there was violence on both sides—yet is that not true of the American case as well? Did the Native Americans not fight back as well? And at times even fight back viciously? Yet who would fail to retort viciously to protect the land they've lived on for millennia? Yet the end result of the two genocides was essentially the same, a wholesale genocide of a native population with subsequent reservations plopped onto the Southwest United States, plopped onto the southeastern tip of Europe, plopped onto the plains of Central Asia. The sole fundamental difference, Adam, was the Turkish state is a natural artistic genius of genocide, whereas the American state, being a genius of freedom, chose to dabble in areas where it simply has no expertise, America the natural genius of freedom has soiled itself attempting poor imitations of the German state, of the Turkish state. America has ruined itself, it's squandered its natural genius, and now looks at itself in the mirror with purely suicidal inclinations. So while the world-at-large takes note and somewhat surprisingly commends the artistic genius of the Turkish state's genocides, we heap nothing but scorn upon America's genocides—just as the world stands back and admires Michael Jordan's natural genius at the game of basketball, yet heaps nothing but scorn upon his lurid forays into baseball.

ADAM METROPOLIS: It's absolutely commendable, Larry, because the Turkish state ruthlessly murdered a solid portion, a hearty chunk, of my ancestors and even took their ancestral land by force, and Western Powers, who retain economic interests in the Middle East, have added their complicity in the matter by spreading propaganda campaigns throughout academia—asserting

that the native Greek-speaking populations massacred in Asia Minor are somehow distinct from the modern Greek, as if the modern Native American of modern times was somehow ethnically divorced from the Native American massacred just a few short centuries ago. Yet I would be lying to you if I sat here and claimed I didn't respect the artistic genius of the Turkish state, because their genocide of the native populations of Asia Minor, their extermination of the Greeks, of the Assyrians, of the Armenians—it could be argued this is the most remarkable execution of a genocide in human history.

LARRY KOMNENE: The Turkish state is the Michael Jordan of genocide.

ADAM METROPOLIS: I know certain people in the United States Congress agree.

LARRY KOMNENE: And they absolutely should, Adam—even if they weren't on the Turkish payroll, even if they weren't adjuncts to the Turkish state, I would still say to them You should agree that the Turkish state is the Michael Jordan of genocide. Because it's obvious. I agree with it as well. My father's father's peers had their eyeballs plucked from their skull on land they'd lived on since Antiquity, middle-aged women had their intestines ripped from their stomachs, children were slaughtered like cattle, and the Turkish state denies all of it to this day, and the most powerful countries in the world agree none of this occurred, despite the fact all of it occurred—this is one of the most successful genocides in the history of mankind.

ADAM METROPOLIS: You see, at first I thought the people in the United States Congress who sat in support

for the Turkish state's genocides should be ashamed of themselves, that they were the lowest of the low, that in a certain way, by denying the genocide of the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks that they were complicit in genocide as well, that they were true stains on the human race, but then I thought to myself—Is it possible the Turks have transformed genocide into a high art? Is it possible the electronic art market will embrace the Turkish genocide, that I'll be able to purchase partial ownership in the Turkish genocide as a Non-Fungible Token within five years? And as I compared the Turks' execution of genocide with the American execution of genocide I found myself, frankly, in awe of their artistic genius as it related to genocide.

LARRY KOMNENE: Yet as you noted it's the nature of genius to deny itself, to attempt a litany of activities it has no business pursuing, this is the nature of its overflowing essence. A genius who solely focused on his genius is hardly a genius at all, if he doesn't squander large portions of himself, if he isn't almost immediately exhausted in the presence of himself, if he doesn't go through mental gymnastics to avoid himself on a daily basis, could we even remotely deem him to be a genius? Almost certainly not.

ADAM METROPOLIS: But of course this genius you speak of, well, it could be a she—

LARRY KOMNENE: Genius could of course blossom as more or less any gender, any gender you could imagine, if we were to agree that eighty-seven genders are currently in existence, then we could assume all eighty-seven of those genders will exhibit some form of genius—we can't just restrict genius to gender, Adam. In

fact, gender is actually wholly superfluous when we start to discuss genius of any sort, because a plant could be a genius. I've met oak trees I thought to be geniuses in their own right, and there are without a doubt legions of birds and mammals who exhibit the purest elements of genius.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Of course, but Larry—I believe you said you also came over because you had something specific that you wanted to tell me.

LARRY KOMNENE: I did.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Well, I don't want to take up your entire afternoon just shooting the breeze here, I wouldn't feel right about that—is the vodka any good by the way?

LARRY KOMNENE: You know, I was a little unsure if I'd like potato vodka, but it's actually very smooth.

ADAM METROPOLIS: It's made in Poland, I would assume that's probably why.

LARRY KOMNENE: The fact of the matter is I only drink vodka if it's made in the Eastern bloc. But, to your point, in a general sense, yes, I wanted to touch on totalitarianism and genocide, but it's also true that I had a specific story I wanted to tell you, I've been meaning to tell you this story for some time—but, to be fair, it's definitely totalitarian-adjacent.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Well, I can't get enough totalitarianism, I think you know that.

LARRY KOMNENE: We're both totalitarian fanatics, without a doubt. Whenever we get together to drink vodka our conversation always seems to drift towards these contemplative elements of totalitarianism.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Do you remember Demo Demises by any chance?

LARRY KOMNENE: Of course. Alcibiades' nephew.

ADAM METROPOLIS: You know, I was actually a tad flummoxed, as before you arrived I just randomly remembered the time, I'm not sure I ever told you this—speaking of stories we've been meaning to tell each other—that we were at Dana's up the street, and we were sitting there, Demo with a small stain on his Transformers t-shirt distraught, and I just couldn't help but reflect on how I'd been glancing at the exact same rotting porcupine corpse on Route 146 for over a month on my rides home from work, how the porcupine corpse was taking so long to decay, how it to this day hardly looked decayed at all when Demo said, sitting in the corner of the bar, looking at the guy from across the bar, I wanna beat the shit out of that guy, and we could do it, but the only downside is, after he woke up, I'm pretty sure he'd have us both killed, to which I replied, leaning into the corner of the bar, looking at the guy from across the bar, I don't know, I wasn't that offended when he told me to go fuck myself. It was a major turning point in my life, no longer taking offense at a grown man telling me to go fuck myself. Even prior to discovering the guy could ostensibly have us murdered if we beat him up, I remained surprisingly unoffended that he told me, unsolicited, to go fuck myself and had no interest in resorting to physical violence. At the time, I was in the

midst of playing pool with an attractive grandmother, the most attractive grandmother I'd met to date, and she was defeating me handily, to the extent it should have been embarrassing, but much like being told, unsolicited, to go fuck myself I was surprisingly unconcerned about it, I wasn't embarrassed at all. Having lost the game of pool handily, I had to buy the grandmother a beer, but that was fine, the days of being ill-tempered and petty, hot headed and cheap, they were clearly behind me, it was almost as if, those days, they never existed. The grandmother told me, for the third time that hour, I physically resembled an immature guy who dated one of her friends, and I said That's impossible, I'm actually incredibly mature, as I witnessed, out of the corner of my eye, Dave Broccoli swirling two handfuls of barbecue wings into the pan of party pizza, placing the barbecue wings like pepperonis onto the party pizza—and I thought That's why he isn't losing any of the weight he wants.

LARRY KOMNENE: That's so typical of Demo, isn't it—always calculating his odds of being killed in cold blood.

ADAM METROPOLIS: I can't think of anything more typical of Demo than impersonally calculating his odds of being killed in cold blood.

LARRY KOMNENE: A man is murdered on Indiana Avenue and a pseudonymous summary is posted to the local news that reads A man was murdered on Indiana Avenue no further details are known at this time. Demo Demises sits with a small stain on his Transformers t-shirt and calculates the probability of being murdered if he beats up a man who told him to go fuck himself.

You, Adam Metropolis, find a sort of inner peace in the process, jubilantly playing pool with an attractive grandma, perhaps attempting to fornicate with this nice looking grandma, no longer concerned with grown men telling you to go fuck yourself, unsolicited, right to your face.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Meanwhile the Turkish state reaches an apex of human genius as it pertains to executing genocide.

LARRY KOMNENE: This is the case.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Meanwhile the vast majority of our peers acquire thirsts for anything totalitarian that are simply incapable of being quenched.

LARRY KOMNENE: This is the case as it seems.

ADAM METROPOLIS: In any case . . .

LARRY KOMNENE: Moving on . . .

ADAM METROPOLIS: As you were saying . . .

LARRY KOMNENE: Yes. As I was saying. Or as I was about to say before I came over and we started drinking vodka, before we began digressing on issues of totalitarianism, genocide, and being unsolicitedly told to go fuck ourselves. It was only nine months ago to the day, Adam, a truly horrendous day if I've ever had one, but just to be clear, don't get me wrong, I had a great time at this wedding, but at the same time I felt a historical anxiety, a dark foreboding, and in retrospect I would feel a slight disgust with the procession of time.

I've had a long-standing issue with the procession of time, and I'm not entirely sure why that is. The fact is the procession of time is often a process that I find reprehensible. I find myself saying things to myself like Well ten years ago this month, or It was about a year and a half ago the last time I ate cheese—I say things like this to myself all the time. I'm always reminding myself of epochs that have passed by, noting the changes that I feel have taken place, but of course, my particular interpretations of the changes shift just as quickly as the perceived changes. Things change, but my interpretations of these changes also shift, and they shift as quickly as things themselves change. So when things change, even the change itself exists in a state of flux. So what I view as the major change of X from five years ago, well I'll view that change to X entirely differently when X is six or eight or ten years in the rear view. My interpretations of changes shift just as quickly as the changes, which of course essentially degrade the changes into nonsense, if a change can't even be perceived in a static fashion, then our entire consciousness reverts to a sort of absurdity, or at the very least it reverts to a gross fabrication. Yet, having said that, I still attended this wedding. It was a lurid affair yet also a beautiful affair. If I remove myself and my personal opinions and my instinctive skepticism and my intimate history from the equation it was a quite beautiful occasion, one of the few weddings I've attended that I can honestly say seemed authentic and actually heartwarming to an extent. My point is, of course, that social relations are essentially totalitarian. That our insatiable thirst for new technology, this insane push for infinite progress on the technological front has turned all of our social relations into totalitarian regimes. It's impossible to disassociate yourself from people, Adam. You have to be a complete

asshole to disassociate yourself from anyone you've ever met in our era, and I can truthfully note that if I lacked the ability to be a complete asshole I'm not sure where I would be in life. It's not an exaggeration to say I might be dead. But you'll say, Larry, there's no way that social media is that bad, that you almost perished because of it, that's an exaggeration. But it is, in fact, not an exaggeration at all to say that if I lacked the ability to become a complete asshole and disassociate myself from the majority of my peers I'd probably be dead. I'd have perished, almost without a doubt—and I don't feel as though I'm being hyperbolic in the least. These tenuous associations are not only nauseating, they act as progressive weights on our shoulders—they're not only nonsensical, but they're also grotesque. With the advent of social media it seems as though the second you hit puberty every individual acquaintance you make becomes an interminable relationship, if you're employed at a business, then almost every last one of your fellow employees become interminable acquaintances. People you went to school with?—interminable. You attend grad school?—interminable acquaintances. You frequent a bar, and someone asks you if you have a so-called social media handle?—interminable. In our era, the instant a person learns your name you've acquired an interminable acquaintance, and if you actually become friends with someone, then just forget it Adam, because in that case it will be easier to accumulate thousands of dollars in high interest credit card debt, it'll be easier to expunge that debt from your record than to terminate a moderately intimate friendship. It's not hyperbolic to suggest that terminating a friendship in our era is a thoroughly exhausting process—unless you have the ability to be a complete asshole. And as it pertains to

sexual relationships, well, it's hard for me to believe that it's much of an exaggeration to suggest that if you've ever engaged in a sexual liaison in the social media era, and this liaison terminates sexually, then you'll essentially have to spend weeks removing yourself from the Internet entirely. I'm unsure of how a person could adequately function in the aftermath of the dissolution of a sexual relationship in the social media era without spending weeks removing him or herself from the Internet entirely. I think this may be the sole functional method of going about it, disappearing completely. How could I log onto a social media website and receive updates regarding the cookouts a person I used to have sex with is attending this weekend? To engage in that type of activity would be an act of utter insanity on my part—to keep tabs on the cookouts persons I used to have sex with are attending, I don't understand how that's something that's even regarded as acceptable in a modern society, yet as it stands it's actually encouraged, it's in fact recommended. People are encouraged to log onto websites that keep them up to date on all of the cookouts people they used to have sex with are attending. Every time we engage in a sexual relation we've essentially signed up for a lifetime of weekend updates. Did you know the person you lost your virginity to is going to the Hamptons for a series of small yet opulent get togethers next weekend? Adam, the girl you got to third base with nine years ago in an alley behind an upscale sushi venue on a frigid winter evening is throwing a wonderful little party for her three nieces this Sunday. Yet even if you scrub your full name and date of birth from the Internet entirely, this will only terminate a fraction of your relationships, while a decent portion, perhaps even a considerable portion, of these relationships will remain essentially interminable

because of the Text Message. The Text Message began as a convenient way to message friends and families, yet almost immediately transmuted into a duty that extended to twenty four hours per day, seven days per week, a duty almost exclusive to people you hardly know. I once had a friend of a friend, a person I'd only generously refer to as an acquaintance, send me that read YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT because I didn't reply to a text message until the following morning. This is the true nature of the Text Message as I understand it. It's a form of communication that only logically ends with one party typing in all caps to the other YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT.

ADAM METROPOLIS: There's more than a morsel of truth to that statement.

LARRY KOMNENE: A text message exchange will remain interminable until one party types YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT—or something equivalent—to the other. For a text message exchange to end any other way almost seems absurd to me. Even if you rid yourself of social media, you'll still find yourself subject to the Text Message, which can barrage your phone at any time, on any day, and always requires a reply. How could you not reply to a text message, Adam? Ignoring a text message will at some point be deemed a felony, and I wouldn't be shocked if eventually it becomes a capital offense. To ignore a text message in our era is viewed as one of the cruelest acts a person can perpetrate on another. I've had people continue texting me, causing catastrophic damage to our relationship in the process, because they quote-unquote didn't have the heart to ignore me. When I would have been the first to admit that I should have been ignored outright, without hesitation, if anyone on

the planet deserved to be ignored it was myself during this particular time period. I deserved to be ignored, and I also needed to be ignored. Ignoring someone is at times the most humane act available to us. In fact, sending a text message and expecting a reply is completely inhumane. It's at least the more inhumane of the two. In past eras people met each other once and never saw one another again, and they thought to themselves But what if I saw that person again? Oh my God, what if I could just run into that person one more time? Just one more time? One more time is all I'd need! They extrapolated these seemingly effervescent possibilities in their imaginations and dreamed of a day when they'd meet again, and their dreams would come true, and their lives would be improved immeasurably, just by bumping into this one person just one more time. That's all they needed! Perhaps the absence even haunted them. These fools! These naive imbeciles! They never realized how humane their form of communication was and how totalitarian their dreams would become in practice. Now we're always bumping into one another—just one more time. Just one more time, Adam. And everything will be different. Yet these effervescent possibilities have transmuted to lurid realities. The problem is you can't just artificially select that Just One More Time from a voluminous sequence of petty interactions—that Just One More Time quickly becomes amplified to an extent that's suffocating. Books must occasionally be burnt. Friendships must occasionally cease. Text messages must occasionally be ignored. A world where every book has a place on a shelf, where every friendship lasts a lifetime, and every text message receives a timely reply was the utopia of past generations but has become the apex of the totalitarian in practice. It's literally subjugated our generation. No one thinks beyond the

Text Message in our era. We've been subjugated by text messages and acronyms and smiley faces and animated clips and catching up with people we don't even know. We can no longer think. We've almost completely lost the ability to think because we never cease text messaging each other. The assumption of previous generations was that if communication became ubiquitous then that One Person that passed them by would be the person to pop back up, but that assumption in practice couldn't prove more false. That person is married now, living in a gated community with an opulent spouse they don't hate but don't love, and they're entirely content with their lives. They've lost themselves in material things, and they couldn't be more satisfied. For every person you wish would just pop back up, there are hundreds waiting in the wings who you want nothing to do with. To believe that assumption, that your One Person will be the one to pop back up, is tantamount to believing Nigerian princes want to Venmo you millions of dollars online, it's tantamount to believing Russian models with stock photos and broken English are the ones direct messaging you asking if you'd be interested in anal sex this Sunday. Everything humanity views as an ideal in theory ends as a catastrophe in practice. Everything that sounds good sitting in a coffee shop, or drinking vodka with a good friend, will inevitably turn into a brutal form of chattel slavery in practice. So I was invited to this wedding. What if everything lasted forever, Adam?—what if divorce was abolished? We hear this and instinctively say That would be great! And then we enter a cage. We enter a cage where an acquaintance from fifteen years ago, a nice enough person we got drunk with three times, sends us a text message and asks us how's it going, and we have to reply. Yes, I was invited to this wedding. We feel

nearly criminal if we don't reply to this text message. But of course the last thing we'd ever want to do is reply to this text message. Because there's nothing to discuss. It's not out of hatred, that's a misconception. It's purely out of a lack of things to discuss. There's nothing to talk about with an acquaintance from fifteen years ago. I was invited to a wedding, this is true. We don't want to continue seeing the faces of people with whom we have nothing to discuss. This is why I've always preferred the company of complete strangers to acquaintances. How many hours of our lives can we spend discussing impertinent things with impertinent people? How many hours until this type of behavior kills us, perhaps not literally but perhaps figuratively. But also perhaps literally. Sending text messages to people should be considered the criminal act, yet, as our society is currently constructed, ignoring text messages is considered a borderline criminal act. I was invited to a wedding a few months ago. It's impossible to avoid people, and why should I? I love people. But in small doses. I love complete strangers. People I'll make a single benign comment to in a coffee shop and never see again. These are my people, Adam. This idea that the person who taught me the meaning of Arabian Goggles and Cleveland Steamers when I was nineteen years old should still be privy to what I'm Up To, should still inquire as to What's Going On, over a decade after we spent a modicum of time together—discussing Arabian Goggles and Cleveland Steamers—is almost unfathomable to me. I'm not sure there's a better word to describe it than totalitarian. So, yes, I suppose I did come over here today to discuss totalitarian regimes with you. So, yes, I was invited to this wedding, and I was asked to take part in the wedding party. That's how it began. I sat at a vegan bistro with a long-time friend who

I'd gradually grown increasingly distant from, not in a malicious way, because it wasn't in any way malicious, but in an actually really friendly fashion, our friendship had been waning, but in a friendly manner. Our friendship had essentially perished, but perished in an amicable way. We were totally affable, yet no longer friends. I sat at the bistro, and I knew he was getting married, because he'd told me he was getting married, via Text Message, and I had an inkling that perhaps he'd ask me to be a part of his wedding party, but at the same time I heavily discounted this inkling simply because in my mind we were at best tangentially friends, we hardly ever hung out anymore, so I'd just assumed that he'd ask a group of people he'd grown closer to to be a part of his wedding party. He asked me to be a part of his wedding party, and I gladly obliged. I didn't feel great about it, but I felt well enough. It wasn't a big deal, and I was flattered and also happily obliged. At this point in our lives, what's a wedding? It's nothing. It's essentially akin to meeting up for a cup of coffee. A person in my social milieu is tying the knot? I'll take a medium black coffee on ice—it's similar in kind. You see, Adam, the issue with this wedding wasn't the wedding itself, not at all, it wasn't my friend, who I'd grown apart from in an amicable manner, not at all, that wasn't the issue. Because we were still affable.

ADAM METROPOLIS: Of course—you weren't exactly great friends, but you were affable enough.

LARRY KOMNENE: I couldn't have said it better myself, Adam—the issue wasn't the wedding at all, not in the least, because the wedding was truly a beautiful event, the issue I instead found myself confronted with was all of the people who were invited to the wedding, just a

potpourri of people I truly never thought I'd ever see again. A sort of dark foreboding, a historical anxiety, a disgust with the procession of time overtook me as soon as I entered the rehearsal area, and that was only the beginning, because once at the actual wedding the people I never thought I'd see again grew tenfold, I was inundated with people I thought I'd left behind for good, who I truly believed, up to that point, that I'd never have to see again, who'd been put in the rearview in a permanent fashion, and this historical anxiety grew twentyfold, if the people I never thought I'd have to see again grew tenfold, then my historical anxiety grew twentyfold. By the end of the wedding I was overcome with an acute disgust with the procession of time, I despised the procession of time, because now, after having caught up with all of these people from my past, I realized that—now more than ever—I'd never see any of these people again. I had a great night with people I hadn't seen in years, that prior to the wedding I was almost positive that I'd never see again, and at the end of the night I thought to myself On what occasion will I ever see any of these people again? A resounding Never! echoed from the furthest confines of my soul. People I used to be close with, who I'd gradually grown so distant from that I became certain I'd never see again—I just spent an entire night with all of them, and now I'd never see any of them again. I'd never see any of these people again, I concluded to myself. I thought I'd never see any of these people again, then unexpectedly I saw all of these people again, and I had a great night with all of them, and now it's almost certain that I'll never see them again. Now I had to put them back into my rearview for good. Now, after having just removed them from my rearview for good I'd have to arduously place them back into my rearview, again for good. This is the problem

with people. They never sit still. We can never place them in a static position. We think they're in our rearview for good, and then they pop back up again. Then they disappear forever. But this wasn't the worst part—not even close, Adam. And don't get me wrong, it was a great night, my historical anxiety was acute, I despised the procession of time through the entirety of the ceremony, but the worst is yet to come. It was terrible. Abominable even. But I had a magnificent time, and I wish my old friend the best—I truly wish him nothing but success and happiness, because he's a sincere person, and he deserves the best. Nothing but the best is nothing short of what he deserves. And I hope he has it. The best. I haven't seen him since the wedding, which may be somewhat of a faux pas on my part, but how many people can we realistically see, Adam? Again, sometimes it's necessary to be a complete asshole, not out of any ill-will or vitriol, but out of personal necessity, because there are times in your life where being a complete asshole is the only mode of life that will manage to make your life a continuing possibility. People perish from less. All the great souls have understood this. Christ understood it. Are you under the impression Christ was a nice guy, Adam? Because he wasn't. Christ was a complete asshole at times, but only because he had to be—his divinity made him an asshole, and that was, frankly, by design, in my humble opinion. How much longer must I suffer your race, Christ said, and who could blame him? Who's worse than us? I was sat at a table with my current, for lack of a better term, love interest, my lover, my romantic link, my beau thing, and we get along great. I really can't say enough about her, she's a beautiful soul and a sincere person, and we were intended to be placed with two other couples in the corner of the venue. Now I could have taken a modicum

of umbrage with our placement in the corner of the venue, but I chose to forgo the taking of any umbrage. I took the high road. One of the couples my, for lack of a better term, girlfriend and I were requested to sit with was a distant cousin of mine who I more or less regularly keep in contact with, and I thought the night would be significantly buoyed by his presence, that he and his wife would be a necessary buffer between myself and the other couple, who I despised and also despised me. Yet when I walked into the rehearsal dinner my old friend asked me about this distant cousin, had I heard from him at all? I said no, and it wasn't a lie. Hundreds of times a person has asked me if I'd heard from so and so, and hundreds of times I've replied no, and hundreds of times that answer was a bald-faced lie, but in this instance my old friend asked me if I'd heard from my distant cousin, and I replied no, and it was the whole truth. Well, my old friend said to me, he just text messaged me and said he can't make it. The wedding? I replied nonsensically, and he confirmed. I couldn't help but laugh. What a complete asshole, I thought. I admired my distant cousin's audacity immensely. It's probably why we've remained friends—rebuking a wedding invite, via text message, the day before the wedding, what an absolutely beautiful use of the text message, a true asshole move. Rebuking a wedding invite via text message the day before the wedding is, of course, essentially equivalent to sending someone a text that reads YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT, which, as I stated previously, is really the only way a text message can end. This decade plus text message between my old friend and my distant cousin was finally concluded, appropriately so in my opinion, by my distant cousin, in so many words, sending my old friend a text that read YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT. I had to chuckle to myself,

despite the fact it was entirely inappropriate and cost my old friend at least a few hundred dollars. At least that's my estimate. At the same time my distant cousin now placed me in the completely unenviable position of sharing this table with a couple I hadn't seen in years, who I despised and also despised me. But I couldn't help but respect my distant cousin's audacity. Whatever esteem I held for my distant cousin before this wedding, I held considerably more esteem for him after it. My companion and I sat at the table in the furthest corner of the venue, and the discomfort was palpable. Two people I hadn't seen in years, both of whom I despised, both of whom despised me, now we shared a sole table in the furthest possible corner of this venue, with no buffer, save for our mutual disgust. No one likes being lied to, Adam—I don't want to go too deep into the whole ordeal, the entire history of how two people who, at one time, were people I considered relatively close friends, who I spent considerable time with, how it came to be that we now all mutually despised on another. But this isn't all that uncommon. It's perhaps true of people on average that they're not exactly meant to become that close, that a healthy distance is almost always necessary, that people growing into great friends is more often than not a social death sentence. The human being is the social animal par excellence, but we might not be the intimate animal par excellence—we might not be the close friend animal. Most definitely not. We might, in fact, be the coffee shop animal. When people become close it often happens that, sooner or later, they end up despising one another. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say the majority of intimate relationships end in hatred. It wouldn't be inaccurate to say I can be temperamental at times. That wouldn't be inaccurate. But at the same time it wouldn't be inaccurate to say that my temperament is

usually at least somewhat justified, that my temperament, though volatile, is more often than not rooted in logic. The utter illogic of the world pushes my temperament to its extreme volatilities. When the male portion of this couple I despised started attending bars with all of us wearing the highest quality of sportcoats, when he started coming out wearing the fanciest of clothes, yet routinely left the bar before the tab was issued, yeah, I guess you could say that it bothered me a little bit. It bothered everyone, but of course I was the only person to directly address the situation. To inadvisably address the situation. It wasn't advisable, because how can a person possibly broach that topic, a person who routinely eschews paying his portion of a tab, from a social standpoint it's more or less impossible to address, but I found it necessary to address. And for that audacious broaching of that unapproachable topic this person despises me to this day. The male portion of that couple, to this day, hasn't forgiven me for boldly broaching the taboo topic of his utterly selfish and absurd spending habits, showing up to a bar in the finest linen, ordering multiple adult drinks, several light beers, and then expecting me—wearing a five dollar sweatshirt, shamelessly patronizing the slave labor of East Asia simply because I couldn't afford both a nicer sweatshirt and a night out for drinks—to pay for all of it. Maybe rightfully so he despises me. What person in their right mind would broach that topic? I had no real issue picking up the tab for him from time to time, but to come out to the bar wearing the finest sportcoats, the highest quality leather loafers, to point out these audacious and gaudy garments to everyone, and then to routinely leave the tab to everyone else's wallet, well, I wasn't going to stand for that. I chose to broach. Maybe that's my fault. It's possible that I'm a born crusader of sorts. That I

inveterately choose to broach topics others would never consider broaching. Yet in any case, I relayed my thoughts to this person on his spending habits, and I let him know about it in a way that accurately expressed my disgust—frankly, we almost came to blows because of it, right in the bar where we were ordering beers, and given the fact this male portion is on a light day about twice my size it was without a doubt fortuitous for me than we didn't. Having said that, I don't object to being beat up from time to time, because I've been beat up on a number of occasions in my life, and it's never particularly bothered me. As an adolescent I was beat up quite a few times, and it never bothered me. In some ways being beat up—it can make you feel alive. In some ways being beat up is a blessing. It never rubbed me the wrong way, personally. Yet while the male portion of this couple, to this day, despises me because I accurately expressed my disgust with his grotesque spending habits, I've never for a day of my life despised him for his spending habits, despite the fact I find them grotesque. His spending habits disgusted me, but I never despised him for his spending habits. Quite the contrary, I despised the male portion of this couple for an entirely different reason—for a reason that, in my mind, goes far beyond spending habits. I never understood in my youth how things work. It was only as I began to experience human relationships in an empirical manner that I was able to investigate the essentially stochastic nature of human relationships, the tiniest moments in a relationship, details that are perhaps in most cases beyond our sensory capabilities, how these moments control our relationships. At any given time our conscious knowledge of our relationship is obscured by stochastic processes we can hardly comprehend. Μυστικός means both mystic and mysterious—there's no

division between the two. It would take a lifetime to transcribe the stochastic processes that dictate a single hour of our lives. We look at other people at a remove and say These people are insane, they're making mistake after mistake—while all the while we're equally insane, making equal if not more egregious mistakes, wholly unable to consciously grasp ourselves at a remove. Our entire lives consist of us acting in essentially insane manners while looking across the street at people at a remove and deeming them insane. All with little to no sense of irony. The male portion of this couple I despised was the type of person to bloviate on friendship and loyalty—he bloviated on friendship and the fabric of his linen shirts—yet when it so happened that a person I was romantically involved with at the time was masquerading around a mall with another man, right around his wife, right around essentially everyone but me, well, this bloviating male portion of this couple chose to stay completely silent. After bloviating about friendship and honor and loyalty he ruthlessly chose to let me look like a total jadrool to an entire mall. For which I essentially despise him to this day—perhaps not even so much for remaining egregiously silent as much as perpetually bloviating on friendship and loyalty, then failing to perform even the bare minimum of true friendship when a situation arose that required just a bare minimum of friendship. Perhaps not even so much for failing to exhibit any characteristics of true friendship, but perhaps it's just for the endless bloviating that I despise him. I despise bloviating. Sure, sexual interaction—well, it's certainly a biological function, and it's difficult to hold infidelity against anyone. How can you? Infidelity is so common it's impossible to hold it against anyone ad infinitum. I don't condone infidelity, but I recognize its pervasiveness, its pantheist

tendencies. I acknowledge the pantheist tendencies of infidelity. But making me look like an total jackass to an entire mall is another matter entirely, walking around a mall with another man, among people who all know me, so everyone can become fully aware I'm essentially being ruthlessly two-timed, so everyone knows but me—that's something I simply can't forgive. It's a tough pill to swallow, Adam. Which is of course the reason why I despised the male portion of this couple, grotesque spending habits aside. The male portion of this couple knew I was being two-timed—in public—that essentially an entire mall of imbeciles were laughing behind my back, and he did absolutely nothing to intervene. The bare minimum eluded him. Whatever the least amount of effort he could have exerted to intervene on my behalf, he did less. Not that he had to intervene directly. Not that he had to even tell me explicitly, but to not even give me a nod, to tell me in so many words, to not do even this, to refrain from exerting even the bare minimum of effort on my behalf, and then immediately resume bloviating about friendship and loyalty and honor was even more disgusting to me than going out wearing the finest linen, then shamelessly leaving your five Michelob Ultras on my tab. Which is why I despised him. He despised me because I asked him if it was possible to take a brief hiatus on paying his bar tabs. I despised him because he bloviated about friendship and loyalty for a decade then sat idly by while an entire mall had an extended chuckle at my expense. So we sat with this couple at the furthest corner of the wedding venue, inundated with people I truly thought I'd never see again, and this couple had the audacity to love my new girlfriend. It was abhorrent. But I was of course equally abhorrent, because, in this instance Adam, I chose not to broach. I didn't broach their absurd behavior in the

least—instead I chose to take the road of social decency. They loved her so much. She was so great. They insisted we all hang out sometime. Oh, you know this recipe? Teach me sometime! And of course I replied Oh yeah, let's definitely hang out! Because I love that recipe! Let's put something on the calendar! It was grotesque. Of course there's been zero communication on either side since. We sat at a table for hours and bloviated on and on, interminably. You know what? We should all hang out! We need to hang out! Soon! Let's put something on the calendar! Wow, this recipe sounds pretty cool! Can I have your number? Text me sometime! A grotesque masquerade. A grotesque masquerade that, in my opinion, was the direct result of the Text Message. The interminable nature of every modern relationship. Modern scientists claim eternal life may be possible, yet haven't we already found it? Our acquaintanceships extend multiple lifetimes already. Nothing can ever die. You text message someone YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT, and then you exchange recipes the next week. Put something on the calendar! We've discussed at length about the hurtling of our country toward the totalitarian, but I think it's clear to the both of us now that we've missed the mark entirely—because we now exist exclusively within the totalitarian. To discuss the totalitarian as something that's impending, unfortunately, is to miss the mark entirely. We'll exist forever like this. We'll put something on the calendar next month, Adam. I have a great recipe for zucchini pancakes!

PART 02: An Angel (But Possibly a Demon) That Appeared in Dream in a Variety of Racial Forms

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: We hadn't been there for ninety seconds, Alcibiades, because it was right as we walked into the backyard of the high school graduation party when her cousin approached us and, without the slightest hesitation, asked my girlfriend right to her face-Did you bring my tupperware with you? It took me perhaps longer than I care to admit to fully recognize what exactly it was she was referencing. Oh, the oxtail, I thought, a second or so later, as I recalled there being a beautiful, wood-covered, piece of glass of tupperware sitting in our refrigerator for over a week, incubating an oxtail dish that had, unfortunately, totally expired-it was so far gone I was hesitant to even open the top of the tupperware container, despite the fact the top of the container was a beautiful, wood finished piece. There was no doubt in my mind that this oxtail was, at that point, not just completely expired but essentially a type of meat soup, a type of liquified corpse, which of course disgusted me severely. Cleaning it out struck me as a grotesque idea. I can't say for certain, but it's more likely than not that I threw it into the trash-tupperware, wood top, and oxtail. Oh sorry Eileen, next time I'll definitely bring it! my girlfriend said, and I looked at her, attempting to decipher if she had any idea whatsoever that both the tupperware as well as the oxtail were both long gone, that both now resided in a garbage heap, a pile of trash somewhere, at the bottom of a public dump, still filled with rotting, grotesque oxtail, and that her cousin Eileen would never again have the privilege of placing her leftovers into that piece of tupperware with

the beautiful wood cover. That tupperware was finished. Having said that, even the finest piece of tupperware-how valuable is it really? Couldn't we replace it for five dollars or less? My thinking at the time was yes, that the tupperware was entirely fungible, yet as soon as we stepped foot into this high school graduation party her cousin inquired about the tupperware-as if this tupperware perhaps belonged to some sort of rare species of tupperware, perhaps a species on tupperware on the verge of extinction, perhaps this was some kind of sui generis, one-of-the-kind tupperware I nonchalantly tossed into a pile of trash. Some people have massive amounts of respect for tupperware, but I've never been one of them, I've never particularly understood why anyone would invest over one dollar into a piece of tupperware, personally. To my mind, if a piece of tupperware, no matter the level of craftsmanship, is priced above one dollar, then it's an overpriced piece of tupperware. It's just not something I've personally ever viewed as investment of any kind. In my mind, plates and bowls are relatively worthwhile investments, while tupperware is essentially a capitalist ploy to increase the profit margin on plastic bags-to convince people they should not only invest in plates and bowls, but also invest in the highest quality plastic bags (tupperware), that in theory they'll use again and again, but in practice they'll lose incessantly and constantly have to replace. She's never going to get that tupperware back, I said. You threw it out, didn't you? my girlfriend said. I thought you said it was ok, I said. I would have never said that, my girlfriend said, clearly misremembering the plethora of times we've thrown out tupperware in the past, the countless times I've seen a piece of well-worn tupperware taking up space in our refrigerator, asked her if I could throw said tupperware out, received approval

to throw said tupperware out, and thrown out said tupperware. It's not a problem, I said, we can probably just buy her a replacement or something. She agreed but seemed dubious, and I felt the same-I found myself agreeing with both myself and my girlfriend, despite the fact we had diametrically opposed views on this tupperware. My girlfriend and I disagreed on our ability to replace this tupperware, and I agreed with both of us. I sat in a lawn chair a moment later, drinking a glass of Soju, explicitly attempting to avoid any unnecessary interaction at this high school graduation until I'd imbibed at least half of a bottle of this Soju, doubting my ability to come off appropriately cordial in a social setting sans a minimum of half of a bottle of this Soju ruthlessly percolating through my bloodstream. I sat there, contemplating high school graduations, contemplating my own high school graduation, recalling nothing of my high school graduation, contemplating the pervasive idiocy of organized education, considering how more or less every unique thinker-from Socrates stoned by the Athenians to Giordano Bruno burnt alive by the Catholic church to Nietzsche unread and in an insane asylum as he rotted away-yes, every unique thinker over the course of human history was either intensely ostracized or simply assassinated by the organized educators of his or her day. In short, I was vociferously drinking this glass of Soju when I thought to myself-Isn't it possible that we think of the theological philosophers as the conservatives, as the ones restrained by this so-called conception of God, yet it's actually the case that the theological philosophers, over the course of human history, are the most audacious, the boldest philosophers we have and have ever had? How else can we explain Berkeley, I thought-easily the most radical skeptic the modern West has produced, yet also a Catholic priest? A

true man of God. Dionysius, for example, was actually quite vigorous in his skepticism of our ability to know anything. His circumlocutions were actually quite radical. Whereas our typical secular atheist philosopher, while assured of our ability to know there are no Gods, is rather neutered in his philosophical speculations beyond the fact that God doesn't exist. Isn't it possible that the so-called theological philosophers are the most audacious among us? The ones who are willing to take the properly radical leaps necessary when dealing within metaphysics, I thought while vociferously drinking this bottle of Soju, unwilling to speak to anyone at this high school graduation until I had thoroughly contemplated the true nature of the theological philosopher. How else can we explain Kierkegaard? The secular philosophers talk our ears off and more often than not say very little beyond what their thesis advisors wish to hear, I thought, vociferously drinking this bottle of Soju, while the apex of the theological philosopher truly enacts the notion of philosophizing with a hammer? Yet, in our era, it seems we more or less write off any philosopher who believes in God, I thought. Is it then possible, I thought, drinking my Soju, vociferously, that because the theological philosophers have been essentially shunned from the modern academy, that the mere mention of God is anathema to the modern academy, that because the theological philosopher has been holistically banned from partaking in the modern so-called academy, our modern organized educators, that they've therefore managed to maneuver outside of the stifling bureaucracy of the university-and actually engaged with original thought? Should we consider that possible? That much like the early Christian theologians, prosecuted by pagan Roman authorities, created elaborate frameworks that formed the sui generis metaphysical foundation of early

Christian thought, a sui generis synthesis of the canonical Gospels with Neoplatonic thought, that our modern theologians, almost regardless of denomination, prosecuted by the atheist university bureaucrats, are working within perhaps similarly radical frameworks? After all, secular academic philosophers are loath to speculate on much of anything in our era. In their place we have theoretical physicists who employ complex mathematics to prove the susceptibility of complex mathematics to almost any type of sophistry.

ALCIBIADES: Oh, don't even get me started on mathematicians.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Frankly, Alcibiades, I've never respected mathematicians, I should admit that much upfront. I suppose, in my own way, I've always viewed mathematicians as essentially charlatans. I view the art of mathematics as not only decadent, but I also view the concept of number as an essentially metaphysical domain. The mathematician's formulas are always derivative of the numerical axioms of metaphysics-it's always struck me as entirely possible that numbers are an impossibility. That the introduction of the decimal point, of the fraction, essentially sank mathematics in its place. You know as well as anyone that, sure, I'm at bottom a disciple of Palamas, that I was inadvertently baptized as a disciple of Palamas, that I fundamentally disagree with this modern notion that we can comprehend everything in a purely intellectual fashion, this notion that there's, in practice, no limit to the human intellect. I find that idea to be one of the most absurd. Sure, of course we can read, say, Parmenides and, while it's impressive, it's also entirely absurd, and I personally enjoy it immensely, but on those merits. I'm

not sure I'd base my scientific thought on it. I'm not sure it would become the cornerstone of my secular intellectual pursuits. Parmenides is one of the greatest works of absurdist fiction written in any language-and if we were to make it a cornerstone of our intellectual pursuits, then we should recognize our absurdist origins, as Dionysius rightfully does. Yet we've used the Parmenides for centuries as a fundamental commentary on allegedly rationalist notions. Allegedly rationalist notions-is this not what we find ourselves steeped in, more or less night and day? When I comment on metaphysics I only do so in a consciously absurd fashion, because I recognize the limits of the language, the limits of language that at bottom are incapable of communicating metaphysics in linear and/or rational fashion. To the best of my knowledge, there's a nefarious literalism at play here. I think it's safe to say that. Ever since I attended grade school I felt strongly that I was in the presence of a nefarious literalism. Even as a young boy I felt as though numbers were, in all likelihood, impossibilities, and that my organized education was highly susceptible to, if not wholly complicit in, a nefarious literalism. The organized education of my youth didn't exactly encourage audacious thought. In any case, we can't write metaphysics in a rational sense, can we? Isn't it always in a between-the-lines sense that we compose metaphysics, in winks and nods that we write metaphysics, because we can't write metaphysics in a linear and/or rational fashion? We take far too much at face value. Our literalism is intentionally or unintentionally nefarious. Because the reality is almost nothing can be taken at face value. Do you really believe the greatest minds of Antiquity intended to be taken at face value? The Byzantines read Plato the same way we read Dostoyevsky, whereas we read Plato the same way

the Byzantines read the Gospels. Perhaps both are absurd. Now, sure, I'm without a doubt, from a certain vantage point at least, a disciple of Palamas, I won't attempt to deny that, but we can't take everything Palamas put to papyrus at face value either. Although Palamas understood the shortcomings of Antiquity better than even the most progressive modern scholar, I'd be the last one to say I take everything the man wrote as face value, because I'm far from a literalist. The modern scholar, insofar as he keeps his faith in rationalism, will most likely never understand the shortcomings of Antiquity-is that fair to say? He'll read Parmenides and take everything literally, and in taking everything literally he'll inevitably take everything idiotically. Isn't it the case that the theologians are the greatest skeptics among us? We view faith as poison as we retain fanatical levels of faith in our sensory organs. We read a variety of empirical studies that show the utter unreliability of our sensory organs-did you know that it's now speculated that human beings didn't see the color blue until the latter BC centuries at earliest? All around us our sensory organs excrete evidence of their utter unreliability, yet we view faith as idiocy while retaining this fanatical notion that our sensory organs can and should and must be trusted-that's why we're not radical enough. The modern age retains radical faith in its sensory organs in a more fanatical fashion than any historical religion known to man. Nothing can be taken at face value, Alcibiades. That much we should agree on.

ALCIBIADES: Markos, you know my feelings on this topic all too well, but I also agree with your stance on tupperware acting as a capitalist ploy-while, previously, I never considered tupperware to be a capitalist ploy, I just considered it superfluous to have in my home, now

that you've mentioned tupperware as a capitalist ploy I find myself wholly agreeing with you. You know my feelings on the matter to a degree that I feel as though I could sit here in silence and say just as much as I'm about to say, despite the fact I'm about to say quite a bit. Yet let this much be said, in the (alleged) words of Parmenides himself: And, furthermore, let us affirm what seems to be the truth, that, whether one is or is not, one and the others in relation to themselves and one another, all of them, in every way, are and are not, and appear to be and appear not to be. Most true, replied Aristoteles. How many harangues should we utter at the expense of rationalism? Well, how many have been uttered in attempts to promulgate it? How many galaxies do we speculate our universe to contain currently? Is it possible that number-the number of galaxies in our universe-is the same number of harangues exhaled with the explicit intent of promulgating rationalism? So we have our work cut out for us, don't we? It's imperative that we have no qualms about being seen as so-called flies in the ointment. I know I don't. Not any longer at least. But that wasn't always the case, Markos. For example, let me relay an anecdote of a period in my life when I truly did care about being perceived as a so-called fly in the ointment. This was probably a decade or so ago, in autumn, it was either Memorial Day or Veteran's Day-I always confuse the two-when my old friends, N and L, invited me to a bar called Fat Belly's to day-drink. And I was immediately amenable to the idea, although it was admittedly slightly ill-advised, as L used to be good friends with a girl who was my ex-girlfriend to a certain extent, and their falling out was at least somewhat related to our relationship, although I vehemently denied any involvement, despite the fact my denials were laughable, as L knew exactly what happened, and so did

I. In any case, sitting in a large bar booth with a large group, all of whom were drinking heavily (myself included), I'd noted one of L's acquaintances seemed to find me unamusing and reprehensible, and while initially her nonverbal disdain for me didn't particularly bother me-obviously not everyone is going to find you amusing, and of course it would be ridiculous to think everyone will like you, much less find you amusing, but at the same time, at the time, I thought it would be nice if, somehow, everyone on the planet could like me, if all of the attention available in the known universe could be paid to me and me alone, and also if everyone found me amusing as well, I thought that would be nice. The girl mentioned, not to me directly, as she clearly found my personality innately distasteful, but to the group as a whole, that she was working on acquiring her masseuse certification, and I mentioned, just in passing, that a handful of massage parlors around the city allegedly offered so-called happy endings following their massages, that they, for lack of a better phrase, whacked you off after the massage, if you preferred. This person, who already found me unamusing, took an even more severe disliking to me after I relayed this particular anecdote, about the massage parlors and the alleged whack-offs. And after she'd vehemently expressed her disdain for me to a number of people in the venue, feeling the residual need to defend myself, I mentioned to N that I never insinuated that she was in the business, would be in the business, of performing happy endings-that I simply noted happy endings were, allegedly, an aspect of the massage industry, or at least that's what I'd heard, not that I'd ever been whacked off after a massage myself. I mentioned to N that people in accounting embezzle funds all the time, that if someone were to hypothetically mention generic embezzlement,

the case of Enron or such, around a person who worked in corporate accounting, there's would be no reason for that person to take personal offense at the comment, that they wouldn't automatically assume the person was insinuating they were personally embezzling funds-if anything, taking offense would make it seem like that person was, in fact, personally embezzling funds. This was the case I made to N, who clearly didn't care, as his relationship with L was in such disarray that he couldn't care less about what any of L's friends thought about anyone else, much less me. And when the masseuse's boyfriend arrived she, keeping in line with her melodramatic manner, of course informed him of the whole ordeal, and, recognizing I had nothing to gain from being confronted by the would-be masseuse's boyfriend, I perhaps cowardly chose to leave the bar shortly following the arrival of her boyfriend. Now at that time perhaps I found it preferable for people to quote-unquote like me, for people to quote-unquote find me amusing, but as I sit here today-more world-weared and perhaps even more mature-I no longer have any such inclinations, Markos. The last thing I need in my life are people finding me amusing, never mind taking a liking to me.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Which brings me to this, Alcibiades, a true fly in the ointment, so to speak-how is it that you arrive at the postulation of an essence you cannot know? This is the question, is it not, Alcibiades? How does the mathematician arrive at the postulation numbers are actual and distinct? How is it possible, given human capabilities, to distinguish the number 2 from the number 1.999999999999 in practice? How is it possible to distinguish 2 from 1.9999999999998? How does mathematics attempt to lay any claim to physical

consuming a juicy pear, an experience that ultimately is confined to personal experience, and extrapolate it in communicable format to the general populace. Sans thinking, consuming a juicy pear would be something confined to the private sphere-with thinking it's then presumably allowed to enter the public domain. There is, in fact, no public domain without thinking-and there's essentially no thinking without a public domain. Assuming we consume a juicy pear, thinking Wow, this pear is juicy, but fail to write it down, to verbally communicate it to our peers, then the thought Wow, this pear is juicy remains in the purely immaterial realm, it's existence purely speculative, both the thought and the physical experience remain essentially purely speculative. It's only when the thought Wow, this pear is juicy enters the public domain that it becomes, perhaps not real, but at least apparent in a more material manner-it's verified as a real experience and subsequently verified as a real thought. I too had a pear, and wow it was also quite juicy! There's no doubt we're in the midst of something essentially mysterious here. Which brings me to the reason I stopped by your flat, Markos. I wanted to discuss a dream I recently had, and, frankly, you're the only person I remotely trust to converse with about dreams. To suggest this dream has been weighing me down of late would be understating the case severely, and you're the only person, in my mind, that I feel any sort of comfort discussing this dream with. It was just a few months ago, I dreamt an older female engaged me in liaison, perhaps a sexual liaison-at first she was an older black woman, but then she became an older white woman, and, as she was white, as we sat in an automobile, I entered a hotel room to pay \$92 for our room for the night, then I returned to the car. I was wearing a business suit and she wore

business casual attire, there were two small dark, indecipherable forms sitting in the backseat, and she told me she had to go south of the Missouri now, and I replied You mean south of the Mississippi, right?-yet, even putting aside our geographical concerns, her statement struck me as something I already knew, that I knew she was leaving for good, and that her leaving would mark a new start for me, so to speak. When I woke up I felt as though, in an intensely odd and impalpable way, my entire life had followed the path of Eastern Orthodoxy-in a profound manner I felt this, I was wide awake and stared at a wall in my bed thinking that my entire life has somehow followed the path of Eastern Orthodoxy, that this dream was just as real as any of my waking experiences, and now, months later, I remain curious as to the identity of this multi-racial figure from my dream, who apparently engaged me in a sexual liaison? Despite recognizing the mysterious nature of what we're in the midst of, I've never considered myself a believer in angels and demons, so to speak-yet this figure in my dream, it seems to me, shared many characteristics with historical reports of so-called angels and demons. Of course, assuming it's one of the two, which one of the two is it? An angel or a demon? This perplexes me. I remain flummoxed just a tad. Who were the dark, nearly formless figures in the backseat of the car? A person engages me in a sexual liaison, at first is black, then is white, then tells me she now has to go quote-unquote south of the Missouri, I correct her, and then I wake up with an intense feeling that my life somehow follows the path of Eastern Orthodoxy-then, this dream's intensity sticking with me for weeks and even months on end, I question whether the figure in my dream was perhaps a being of some metaphysical sort, perhaps an angel or perhaps a demon. I question

whether perhaps an angel or perhaps a demon entered my dream to, in a very roundabout way, point me in the direction of something-perhaps Eastern Orthodoxy. And I question whether this is possible.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Flummoxed, you find yourself wondering if it's possible this female from your dream was an angel of sorts?

ALCIBIADES: At almost any other time in my life I would have considered it an impossibility, something totally ludicrous, I'd have considered it an embarrassing absurdity to even suggest it.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: But now you consider it a possibility?

ALCIBIADES: To an extent.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: I certainly don't think it's impossible.

ALCIBIADES: Whereas previously I would have sat here and told you that I thought it to be an embarrassing absurdity and utter impossibility, now, for one reason or another, I actually consider it an embarrassing absurdity to find it utterly impossible.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Yet-have you considered the possibility, if this persona that appeared in your dream is a sort of metaphysical persona, that it's a demonic persona rather than an angelic persona?

ALCIBIADES: The thought has without a doubt crossed my mind. That perhaps a demonic character of a sort,

who had followed me, perhaps ruthlessly followed me, for the entirety of my adulthood, if not childhood, has now finally bid me farewell-that this demonic character has left me to pursue lighter, more holistic and holy goals.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: That strikes me as more reasonable. The absence of a demonic presence rather than the presence of an angelic presence.

ALCIBIADES: Yet let me explain my thoughts on this issue just a little further, Markos, if I may? My thoughts on the topic expanded significantly just recently, as a matter of fact. It was the other Saturday, at a backyard cookout not altogether dissimilar to the high school graduation you just described to me, Markos. I was sitting at a nice enough glass table next to a bottle of potato vodka imported from Poland, I was drinking the potato vodka from Poland in a small plastic glass with water and ice, the potato vodka was smooth, quite smooth actually, when the person sitting across from me made a remark-he said that he just bought half a dozen pre-rolled blunts from a state-sanctioned dispensary, that he was going to step onto the sidewalk and light up one of these blunts, just have a puff or two to relax, and he offered me a puff as well, if I was interested. Well, as it so happened, at the time, despite my general ambivalence to marijuana, I thought it was a decent idea. I figured I'd just have a puff or two, tops, and that maybe it would relax me. I figured, at the time, that a puff or two, tops, would have a minimal to moderate effect-yet when I went out to sidewalk with the person to take a puff or two from his state-sanctioned blunt I'd discover that this weed retained a potency that perhaps I'd never encountered before. The blunts were exquisitely rolled

and tasted delicious, and the first hit went down fine-yet as the blunt passed for a final time, against my better judgment, deep down acknowledging that the one hit was correct amount of hits, that any subsequent hit would be a wholly superfluous hit, I decided to take a second hit, where immediately following my exhale I coughed vociferously. I coughed vociferously then just moments later time began, much to my surprise, proceeding in a highly abnormal manner. I was at a family cookout, and time was proceeding in a manner that struck me as entirely abnormal. I was lounging in a nondescript lawn chair, except now I found myself unable to experience the procession time in our rudimentary, temperate manner. I jumped from moment to moment. People began speaking and it was almost as though a person hit fast forward on their speech. Then the speech would slow just momentarily. In addition, I was entirely barred from perceiving how others were perceiving me. I felt as though I was extremely high, I knew I was extremely high, and it wasn't exactly the most appropriate venue to be that high-at a family cookout-yet I was barred from perceiving how high I seemed to the outside world. At times it felt as though I would gain access to a cue that suggested everyone knew I was extremely high, yet this notion, that everyone knew I was extremely high, remained unproven, impossible to prove, it seemed. Because people would at times seem to be treating me as if I was hardly high at all, despite the fact that I could no longer experience time in a purely linear fashion. Essentially my own actions became entirely foreign to me-more than just being extremely high, I became disconcerted at the thought of what actions I could possibly be taking that caused the people around me to fail to view me as extremely high. The only actions of my own that I was still aware of were actions

that seemed to me to belong to a person who was clearly extremely high, so how could these actions be interpreted by rational actors to be coming from a person who was still experiencing time linearly? This was, at the time, a question without an answer. In short, it wasn't just that I ceased to experience time in a normative fashion-it was the fact that my exterior surroundings seemed to continue to recognize me as experiencing time in at least somewhat of a normative fashion. This was disconcerting. Because one would assume, if you left the confines of normative time, that your surroundings would recognize this fact-that you were no longer there. But in this case it was almost as if, yes I was no longer there, I was experiencing time in an entirely asynchronous fashion, yet my surroundings still found me to be there, for the most part. I was, to the best of perceptual faculties, existing in at least two places at once. At the family cookout, where most people were either slightly high or not high at all, and then also in a separate iteration of time, where I was jumping from period to period, indiscriminately. There's no doubt that time, as we experience it, is just one of a few iterations of time. How many iterations are there? It seems impossible for us to say-perhaps iterations isn't even the right mode to discuss types of time. It's entirely possible, in fact, that time perceives us inasmuch as we perceive it. Yet once we acknowledge this fact, Markos, that time has many iterations of producing itself, that time may in fact perceive us rather than us perceive it, then we can no longer blindly state that our dreams are just dreams-because it would seem to me that if time, in fact, takes many, if not infinite, iterations, then our dreams could in fact be entirely real. They may just exist in different iterations of time. Our dreams could be entirely

real experiences, just experienced in separate iterations of time.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: An angel, but also possibly a demon, appeared to you in a dream in a variety of racial forms, and, eventually, after allocating \$92 for a hotel room, you sat in a car with this female, then white, with two small but dark and inscrutable forms sitting remarkably silent in the backseat, and she told you that she now had to go quote-unquote south of the Missouri-you, knowing this to be an inevitably, corrected her, saying You mean south of the Mississippi, and you woke up feeling, in an intense manner, that your entire life had somehow followed the tenets of Eastern Orthodoxy, specifically the tenets that designate the distinction between the Essence and the Energies of God, so to speak.

ALCIBIADES: And at a subsequent party, weeks after having dreamt this, I took two hits of a blunt from a state-run facility and, for hours on end, experienced the procession of time in what I can only describe as an inscrutable fashion.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Of course, rationally speaking, not that we should speak rationally, but rationally speaking we could question the merits of following the path of Eastern Orthodoxy generally. Of course we could reference the case of Chrysostomos Kalafatis, the Metropolitan of Smyrna, who unceremoniously had his beard ripped off by hand, his eyes gouged out, his nose and ears cut off and was subsequently masqueraded around the very city where he acted as a Metropolitan until he died from his injuries, from having his eyes, nose, and ears removed, all of this during the height of

the Greco-Turkish war-as it seems safe to say that Eastern Orthodoxy, to some extent, didn't fare Chrystomos well in the end, at least from a materialist point of view.

ALCIBIADES: It's a small sample size but I agree-and of course the sample is substantially larger when we consider the plight of the Orthodox population of Anatolia as a whole.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: This is true, the Orthodox haven't fared incredibly well in the Near East over the past, give or take, one thousand years or so.

ALCIBIADES: We could even say that following the path of Eastern Orthodoxy has perhaps been extremely fraught with peril in certain regions of the Eastern Mediterranean.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Yet there's a certain sense, and I think you'll agree that there's no doubt about this, that there's a certain sense, when you speak of differing iterations of time-there's something that resonates in that, from my vantage point at least.

ALCIBIADES: We shouldn't speak rationally or logically, yet if we were to take the case of, say, for example, the concept of The One, the being that conceptually precedes being, that exists in all aspects of time, but also fundamentally must exist outside of time, to a certain extent we would almost need to entirely reconstruct our conception of time to even remotely be able to conceive of a Being of that nature. Not to say that we could ever conceive a Being of that nature in its essence, yet to even approach a conception-if logic leads us to a First

Principle that exists within and outside of time, then our conception of time is essentially absurdist. We would need to reconstruct this conception of time as something we exist exclusively within, that contains us in a linear fashion, that perhaps perceives us in a so-called linear fashion, because if we are in fact extensions of this One who must by necessity exist both within and outside of time, then there must exist a portion of us, as extensions of the One, that experiences time in this fashion, which is of course an essentially absurdist manner of conceiving of time.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Without a doubt. Time as we tend to conceive of it is essentially absurd.

ALCIBIADES: I can't think of anything more absurd than conceiving time in a solely linear fashion.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: It seems just-I don't know-totally ridiculous to assume that time proceeds in a purely linear fashion, that time wouldn't proceed in whatever fashion it chooses, that time, eternal as it is, would need us to perceive it, rather than vice versa, or even to assume that time proceeds at all, that, if it chose to proceed, that it wouldn't proceed in the fashion of, say, adding percentages as opposed to integers.

ALCIBIADES: The trouble is, and, Markos, you and I know this all too well, if you deny the existence of The One, of the First Cause, if there's no Precedent, then time can't possess linearity. Yet if we posit the existence of The One, of a First Cause, then it's only logical to assert that this First Cause must exist both within and independently of time, so time, even in this instance, where we posit the existence of a Precedent, we still end

with a potential aspect of time that's nonlinear, because The One must exist outside of time, and our time is, generally speaking, linear, and if The One exists outside of time, then a portion of this First Cause's time must be nonlinear. And of course since this First Cause-while being unknowable to us essentially-exists within us, as we're mere extensions of it, to varying degrees, then there must be a part of us, Markos, that also exists in a nonlinear iteration of time. Which is why, when I found myself excessively high, inadvisably at a family cookout, and it wasn't even my family, when I found myself experiencing time in this sort of spurious fashion-to some extent that was a divine experience. To some extent, despite the fact I was most likely embarrassing myself socially, in perhaps material ways I was embarrassing myself, yet the experience itself was, to some extent, to the extent that The One must exist in a nonlinear sense, to the extent I'm to some extent an extension of The One, to the extent I too participated in a nonlinear iteration of time, to those extents my experience was divine, so to speak.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Without a doubt this is the case.

ALCIBIADES: I engaged in a sexual liaison with an older female, who at first was black, then became white, then informed me that she had to go south of the Missouri, after I'd paid \$92 for a hotel room for the two of us, as we sat in the medium-sized sedan, with two small and formless dark beings sitting in the back.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: And afterward you felt an intense inkling that your entire life had in some way followed the path of Eastern Orthodoxy, that your

experiences to date were defined to a large extent by the tenets of Eastern Orthodoxy.

ALCIBIADES: I partook in the smoking of a sizable blunt that a friend of mine purchased from a local dispensary, and after taking a mere two hits from this blunt I found myself inadvisably high at a family function, experiencing time in a spurious fashion, in a fashion where I was, on the one hand, apparently present at the party, yet at the same time engaging passively in a form of time that was not present at the party-to the best of my knowledge I was, in fact, existing at two places at once.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: And, afterward, you felt as though this experience, though sophomoric and idiotic, was also a divine experience of sorts, as a principle aspect of the nature of The One is to exist both within and outside of time as we perceive it.

ALCIBIADES: Correct.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Yet as foolish as this may sound, Alcibiades, we should that note that even Dionysius said, and I quote, [it] may be said to be praising God for his foolishness, which in itself seems absurd and strange, but [this foolishness] uplifts us to the ineffable truth which is there before all reasoning.

ALCIBIADES: Because it would stand to reason that if reason itself is incapable of ascertaining these so-called divine notions, then perhaps it's only idiocy that remains capable of comprehending these historically divine notions, of time, of being, of placement, of First Causes. Perhaps what we need, Markos, is a rigorous idiocy. It's

entirely possible, as I'm now thinking of it, that with regard to these metaphysical notions we should employ nothing except a rigorous idiocy, that reason and sound logic have absolutely no place here, in the realms of metaphysics. That in order to wrap our minds around these ideas of being in two places at once, of being both within and outside of time, of time being essentially non-linear as much as it's essentially linear, of time perceiving us as much as we perceive it, that we must become more idiotic than we've ever been, that if we continue to attempt to pass ourselves off as intelligent-well, we'll continue to flounder in the stochastic breezes that ripple around these concepts. Sans idiocy, these concepts will continue to exist in a shroud of mystery, not that they can ever be known fully, that's unlikely, it's more or less impossible, but if we employ the proper amount of idiocy, of rigorous idiocy, it's possible that the mystery these concepts are shrouded could be ameliorated to a degree. We conceptualize a First Cause, a One, a concept that may, in fact, be necessary for our species to exist, at least socially, it very well could be the case that we can only exist logically with this idea of First Cause or One preceding us. Otherwise, sans First Cause, sans a Beginning, we hardly have an argument for linear time, and if we're deprived of a sound argument for linear time, then how is it that we can make sense of anything? It's impossible to make sense of anything, in the traditional sense, sans linear time. If time doesn't proceed linearly, at least for us, if we're hopping and skipping willy nilly in the fabric of time, in purely nonlinear manners, then nothing can make sense for us. We're literally senseless. Sans a First Cause, we're literally senseless. Time means nothing. Time, it seems to me Markos, is something that one can only investigate

idiotically. How is it, as beings ostensibly existing in time, growing old in an ostensibly linear fashion within time, how is it that we could rationally investigate time? It seems nearly impossible. It seems, frankly, absurd. But enough about time, I've had just about enough of time, because I'd like to your honest opinion, Markos, on whether or not you find it to be within the realm of possibility that this figure from my dream, is it possible that she, multi-racially, could have been an angel or a demon of sorts? Or am I just being silly? Am I simply succumbing to a specific type of silliness, as I'm apt to do from time to time? You know me to be prone to succumbing to silliness, don't you? Am I being melodramatic by extrapolating my intense impression following my waking up from my dream, am I melodramatically extrapolating that impression just a little too far by suggesting this female, who engaged me in a sexual liaison, could have been an angel or a demon?

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: It's an interesting question.

ALCIBIADES: Because you're an open minded person, Markos, I've always considered you incredibly open-minded. I knew as soon as you told me how you despised mathematicians, how you considered the mathematician to be the charlatan par excellence, I knew right then that you were the perfect person to relay my dream to, that you would be perhaps the only person who would be open-minded enough to consider my imbrogio vis-a-vis this dream.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Well, can I tell you a story?

ALCIBIADES: There's nothing I'd love more.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: It was actually quite some time ago, so long ago in fact that I was practically, now that I think of it, more or less an adolescent, despite being a fully grown man. At the time I was looking for apartments with my father-the first apartment I'd lease on my own, and we were downtown, the two of us, looking at an apartment that I didn't realize at the time was rent-controlled, meaning there were artificial caps placed on the income of the tenants in order to retain eligibility, which of course was the reason why the apartments were such a great deal. Luckily enough for me my salary at that time was insufficient and paltry, so I still managed to qualify for the apartment despite the rent control requirements, had I waited the time necessary for a unit to become available, but, while I did add my name to the waitlist, I didn't wait the time necessary for a unit, because I signed a lease on an apartment three miles north of downtown less than a week later. I was standing in a quarter-empty parking lot in an area of downtown where no less than half a dozen privately owned parking lots sat side by side by side, all with reasonable short-term rates. This particular area of downtown, at that point in time, was a fruitful area socially-there were a plethora of vibrant bars and restaurants, also side by side by side, that myself and others enjoyed frequenting, that were routinely packed from afternoon to evening. Now, by comparison, if you walk through that same area of downtown, by my count, more than half of those bars and restaurants are shut down for good. Whereas I used to frequent that part of downtown, hopping between two or three or four venues, having a fruitful experience socially-now it's almost as if that area of downtown has aged right along with me. As my social activity has waned, at least with regard to hopping from bar to bar, the activity of this section of

downtown has waned as well. As I've become less likely to pop out on a Wednesday afternoon to two or three or four places, this area of downtown has been unable to sustain businesses that used to thrive on people popping out on Wednesday afternoons, hopping from two or three or four places. There are, in fact, hardly any bars or restaurants that are still open on the block. There's been a gargantuan For Lease sign on the largest venue for years now, and the places that should be open for business on a late weekday afternoon are no longer open for business on late weekday afternoons, whereas in previous years every bar and restaurant on the block would have been bustling with businessmen, eccentrics, and alcoholics, now these same venues don't even open their doors until later at night, if at all. I've walked through that block multiple times hoping to pop into just one old bar or one old restaurant for just one drink, and I've found every last place that's remained in business on that block closed for business at that time. A bar in a business district really has no excuse for not being open by 4pm on a weekday. It's absurd for a bar in a business district to be closed for business at that time, yet that's exactly what's happened to this block, it's now a dead block, it's a block that's more or less officially deceased socially. In any case, years ago, when I was looking for my first apartment with my dad, standing in a quarter-empty parking lot on this very block, I sent a text message to a younger girl I used to flirt with-although we never engaged in a sexual liaison, but there was perhaps a mutual interest for a period of time, perhaps we both realized that engaging in a sexual liaison, although tempting, was ill-advised, that for once in our lives we should refrain from engaging in any sort of ill-advised liaison. So we developed a friendship of sorts. It was a shallow friendship, as most friendships that result from

averted sexual liaisons tend to be, these are of course the most shallow and insipid friendships imaginable, they're interminable and asinine, but this particular friendship was rewarding in its own way. So sure, around this this time, in this parking lot, I sent her a text message to no reply, and I knew then, somehow or another, instinctually I suppose I knew that I wouldn't get a reply, that the friendship had run its course, that it's purely shallow and insipid nature was abundantly evident to the two of us, and that the other party, this younger girl, had taken it upon herself to sever the friendship once and for all. I've never communicated with her since. Yet despite the ultimately shallow and insipid nature of this friendship, despite the fact we never crossed the line, so to speak, for some reason I felt a sort of nonsensical deep hurt, a painful longing of sorts, rooted in essentially nothing, standing in that parking lot, knowing that I'd never hear from this person again, who I had no physical relationship with and who I had an entirely shallow and insipid emotional relationship with. It wasn't that long ago that I was reminded of this text message randomly, I'd almost entirely forgotten about this person, just as, years prior, she'd chosen to forget me, and I felt an odd pang in my stomach as I recalled this text message. Wasn't the whole point of refusing to engage in a sexual liaison to avoid such pangs? Don't we all just inveterately assume that pangs in our stomachs almost exclusively result from sexual liaisons? And don't we all then avoid sexual liaisons purely in attempts to avoid pangs in our stomachs? Yet in this case, a person I maturely avoided engaging with sexually, and vice versa, of course, who I instead developed a completely shallow and insipid friendship with, ended up causing me a pang in my stomach, all because I sent her a text message to no reply, knowing the ankle deep friendship we'd harbored

had run its course and come to a conclusion. My point in all this, Alcibiades, is that the first objection the average person would raise to identifying the being in your dream as an angel would be the fact the two of you engaged in a sexual liaison-yet what I've just described suggests that perhaps there's no difference in our relationships with people, that we can't discriminate between relationships based on whether or not a sexual liaison occurred. That perhaps distinguishing relationships based on whether or not they feature a sexual liaison has been a gross error on our part. That perhaps we shouldn't a priori assert that angels don't engage in sexual liaisons with us. Because it's entirely possible they do, and that there's really nothing wrong with an angel engaging us in this type of liaison, sexually. So we can't rule out entirely the possibility that this being-despite engaging you in a sexual liaison, in multiple racial forms-was still, in fact, an angel pointing you toward the fact your life, in large part, followed the path of Eastern Orthodoxy.

ALCIBIADES: The mathematician, attempting to infinitely extrapolate the massive assumptions that are real world integers, is, in essence, a complete charlatan. A piece of tupperware is viewed as essentially disposable to one person, like a piece of tissue paper, and as a veritable piece of property, as an investment, by another. An angel, perhaps, may engage a person in a sexual liaison, if we consider the fact that sexual engagement doesn't necessarily a priori taint a relationship, or more precisely that a lack of sexual relations doesn't necessarily a priori prevent a relationship from becoming tainted, that perhaps we shouldn't distinguish relationships on the basis of whether or not a sexual liaison is featured. For eons we've assumed sexual

relations taint relationships, that once a sexual line is crossed, then the relationship will be irrevocably tainted, yet we've never considered that tainting can and will occur even sans sex. While I admit that I still lean toward-if we continue to assume this dream was beyond phantasm-that an actual being appeared to me, then in that case I suppose I still lean toward the being's identity being more synonymous with something demonic, leaving me, than something angelic, directing me. Yet perhaps we're making too much of the alleged distinction between angels and demons. That just as perhaps we've made too much of the distinction between sexual and non-sexual relations, we're now making too much of the distinction between angels and demons. It should be noted that even Dionysius noted that pure evil, if it were to exist, would immediately cease to exist, because everything that exists is derivative of the One, which is incapable of producing pure evil, and that even relative evil is simply a function of pursuing aims inappropriate to the a being's proper function, that even demons are only demonic in their distance from the One, not in a sense of representing pure evil, because were they to be pure evil they would cease to exist. Essentially, this view would purport that there is no fundamental distinction between an angel and a demon, just a difference in the appropriateness of their aims. Whereas an angel pursues the aims appropriate to it, in the proper proportion to its being, a demon pursues the aims more or less inappropriate to it, straying from its proper proportions. Everywhere we take a dualist approach when it's very possible we should instead be indulging in a monist approach. We see an unidentified object in the sky and we say this unidentified object is manned by extraterrestrials, or we say this unidentified object is a hot air balloon, but we never suggest the very real

possibility that this object could in fact be a being native to our environment, and not an object at all. We either believe that an unidentified object is an apocalyptic event, and alien species from millions of light years away coming to invade us, or we believe everything we understand to be the entirety of what exists and anything allegedly unexplained to be nothing more than old wives' tales and folklore. Yet of course there's another option, a more monist approach—for example, take the case of Trevor James Constable, a former marine essentially considered to be an insane and insidious liar for decades, yet now, years after this death, some in our government, the alleged whistle blowers closest in proximity to these unidentified encounters, espouse views not that markedly different from Constable. Constable believed unidentified flying objects weren't, in fact, objects at all, that they were instead beings, that due to their biological makeup were more or less invisible to our eyes most of the time. To our eyes they were invisible, but not invisible entirely, visible partially, at certain times. Of course Constable was deemed to be a completely insane nutjob by just about everyone during his lifetime, yet now high profile government insiders and so-called whistleblowers like Lue Elizondo speculate that the so-called UFO phenomena could in fact be a case of a species of beings inveterate to our planet, a so-called breakaway civilization. Our neighbors. Not a case of us and them, not a case of us and nothing, but instead a case of us and our neighbors, neighbors we for one reason or another failed to realize owned the lot next door, so to speak. As if humanity has always noticed right away what was under its nose, as if it wasn't just a few hundred years ago that Galileo discovered the sun failed to revolve around us. We believe angels are pure good while demons are pure evil when it could be the

case that angels and demons are nothing more than differing degrees of the very same beings. Now of course it's entirely possible, if not probable, that Constable was a lunatic and/or a charlatan, but that doesn't mean he was incorrect. Being a complete lunatic in and of itself doesn't prove a person is incorrect. Constable's essentially monist interpretation of the so-called UFO phenomenon was perhaps profit-driven and riddled with charlatan-like behavior, yet it's possible it was as visionary as it was lunatic. In fact, I would go as far to suggest that charlatans are just as likely to possess visionary tendencies as the genuine and trustworthy, as it's the charlatan's willingness to baselessly lie that, at times, leads him to visionary ideals. What begins as utter nonsense, through certain improvisatory charlantry, can become truly visionary. I said I was the best before I really believed it, the rapper Drake once rapped, a truly charlatan maneuver, yet one that seemed to work for him, to some extent.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: So I suppose then, in a certain sense, we should respect mathematicians.

ALCIBIADES: It's quite possible that mathematicians, as the verifiable charlatans par excellence, are in fact highly respectable members of society, possibly even visionaries. Mathematicians, by dint of their unapologetic and pompous charlantry with regard to integers, are possibly respectable after all, they may even approach visionary heights through their perversely charlatan tendencies.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Perhaps it's only idiocy that we can approach the essence of a First Cause.

ALCIBIADES: And perhaps it's only through charlantry that we can begin to respect mathematicians.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: So then how are you feeling, Alcibiades? You came to visit me in my quaint yet, I think, respectable flat, quite sober, quite perturbed by an issue you've clearly been struggling with, the nature of this vivid dream. A vivid dream that perhaps placed you back on the path of the Orthodoxy of the East, of Essences and Energies. Has our discussion ameliorated your mental state to any extent?

ALCIBIADES: Not in the least. Yet in no way, shape or form does the utter failure of our conversation to ameliorate my mental state have anything to do with you, Markos, because I always, whether wildly inebriated or stone sober, enjoy your company, and our discussion has been quite pleasurable. Yet my condition, unfortunately, isn't of the sort that can be ameliorated. Yet even if it could be ameliorated, which it can't, it could never be ameliorated through any sort of rationalist, syllogistic discussion. Discussion is ultimately useless. It's aesthetic. It's certainly not functional. What have we ever discussed, whether you or I or any other two people, ever discussed that has solved anything? You and I, Markos, we enjoy each other's company due to the aesthetic nature of our conversations, not because of the functional results of our conversations, because nothing is functionally accomplished when we converse about anything, save for our aesthetic pleasure. We've been asked, there's no doubt we've been asked, by numerous people over the course of our lives if we could just discuss this, could we quote-unquote just discuss this or that, yet while discussing this or that may give us a sense of aesthetic pleasure it's never solved an underlying issue

in any material way. Oh, now I see where you're coming from! We may say this, we have said this, to countless people over the course of our lives, but we've certainly never believed it, and even when we've believed it, it's never meant anything, because knowing where something or someone is coming from, so to speak, still doesn't solve anything. People can come from a variety of positions and places in life, but that knowledge is hardly of the sort to solve much of anything. Discussion is an art form. No one would say a sculpture of Donatello's assisted them in sorting out their life. No one has ever approached the paintings of Bronzino or Pontormo and said, Oh these Mannerist paintings have finally solved a previously insoluble issue for me. Once I understood where Pontormo was coming from, then his Mannerist paintings transformed the insoluble into something readily solvable, this would be the height of absurdity, and no one would every say it, save for the art aesthetes, but no one takes anything they have to say seriously, because they're completely ridiculous. Yet to suggest a discussion, which is also a form of high art, can solve an issue is commonplace. We always think discussion contains an ability to solve, but art ultimately solves nothing. We know this. Getting drunk is an art, and it's aesthetically pleasing, but it hardly solves anything, much less ameliorates anything, except for briefly, momentarily. But momentary amelioration is hardly amelioration, yet all amelioration is more or less momentary amelioration, which is why ameliorating anything is also next to impossible. We feel better. Then we feel worse. Things improve. Then things decline irreparably. This is the fundamental nature of things. We want to improve things and we do, but then they decline in an irreparable fashion, and there's nothing we can do to ameliorate them.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Yet bear with me for just a moment, Alcibiades, because even assuming we're incapable of ameliorating your state, or ameliorating anything at all, which, as you aptly stated, is in all likelihood accurate, we've at least made two strides here, in my eyes at least. The first stride being that angels-assuming they exist and entered your dream-well, there's no reason why they couldn't have engaged you in a sexual liaison. We can't continue to abide by the dualist formula that sexual liaisons are ipso facto tainted and non-sexual liaisons are ipso facto untainted, because it's entirely possible for a non-sexual liaison to become just as tainted as a sexual liaison, while it's possible for a sexual liaison to remain, conversely, essentially untainted. The second stride being that the initial distinction we assumed between angel and demons is, perhaps, somewhat meaningless-that demons as humanity has historically experienced them are little more than angels who've lost focus, they've perhaps acquired drinking problems, they no longer pursue the aims appropriate to them, but while indulging in evil they aren't purely evil, because pure evil can't exist, because pure evil is always synonymous with non-being. In short, if demons were to fall so far from what's appropriate to their nature that they became pure evil, then they'd lose being, they'd cease to exist. We've asserted that if the First Cause is the cause of Good and the First Cause exists within our time and outside of our time, both transcendent and immanent, and everything within and outside of time is a direct extension of this First Cause, then beings can only become evil insofar as they stray from their appropriate place in relation to the First Cause. They can't become pure evil, because to stray from what's appropriate is no different from

straying from Being itself, so what becomes increasingly evil will proportionally decrease its own being, because the First Cause is cause of the Good and the cause of Being, so to stray from the Good must be to stray from Being itself. The Good isn't of a moral character as much as it's a material aspect of Being. Now as it regards your dream, a being took multiple racial forms yet retained the same essence, much like our dual yet monist formulation, and then there were two dark and formless beings in the backseat-perhaps signifying the evil that is impossible to exist, that is stripped of being as soon as it becomes so-called pure evil. So perhaps these two dark formless beings were the non-existent iterations of you, Alcibiades, and your companion, possibly an angel. Now this being, perhaps an angel, or perhaps a demon, who took multiple racial forms, eventually informed you, in this car with the two small shapeless forms sitting in the backseat, that she had to go south of the Missouri, to which you corrected her: Don't you mean south of the Mississippi? Yet we should now consider that perhaps your correction was, in the context of your dream, entirely incorrect. By employing the phrase South of the Missouri this being was perhaps directly implying that there are no neat distinctions-that duality is an illusion, that this idea that a state can be neatly divided by a Mississippi is a misguided approach, that this being, whether or angel or demon, wouldn't be going to another side, because there is no other side, but just to another relative place. And when you woke up, Alcibiades, you felt as though your life had always followed the path of the Eastern Orthodoxy, but in this embrace you were accepting the non-dual nature of our existence inasmuch as you were accepting anything else. You embraced Eastern Orthodoxy after engaging in a sexual liaison with a being who took multiple racial forms, who left you to

settle, not south of the Mississippi, but rather south of the Missouri-and opposite of the both of you were two small dark forms who completely lacked Being, signifying the impossibility of pure evil. In every way your dream reproached this idea of true duality, of pure good and pure evil, replacing this absolute duality with a relative duality within the monad, of which all Good and all Being emanates, both in transcendence and immanence. You then reconciled yourself with this being that went south of the Missouri-and perhaps this being wasn't leaving you as much as guiding you, giving you hints not on where to go, she wasn't telling you where you should go or stay, she was instead guiding you on how to read a map.

ALCIBIADES: I've always attempted to keep an eye on myself, Markos, at times even to my detriment I've always kept an eye on myself.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: For as long as I've known you you've been prone to sudden, yet rigorous revelations.

ALCIBIADES: Which is why I've always kept an eye on myself.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: We know our sensory functions are limited, so that extra-sensory beings most likely exist, that they most likely occasionally communicate with us, but being extra-sensory it's always difficult to interpret their cues, assuming they exist and assuming they choose to communicate with us.

ALCIBIADES: They speak in wildly manifold tongues. They're actually kind of annoyingly non-verbal. We need

to keep an eye on ourselves, because it's possible to become prone to sudden if not rigorous revelations.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Even Dionysius stated outright, One says of God, the cause of all good, that he is 'inebriated'-and with that in mind, against my better judgment, I poured myself a nice glass of vodka the other Saturday before my girlfriend and I went out to dinner, knowing all too well that we planned to go to the bar prior to our reservation, for a cocktail. My significant other agreed to act as our designated driver for the night, and I'd spent the entire week abstaining from every consumable item except water, coffee, dried grains, and frozen vegetables, and I felt as though I deserved a nice, inebriated night. I said to myself Markos, you've rigorously denied yourself pleasure this week, you deserve a night where you go out and get white girl wasted. So I had a cocktail before the cocktail, and when we arrived at the bar, waiting for our friends to meet us for the reservation, we tried to prolong the cocktail and make a perfect segway into the dinner-unfortunately, I'd finished my cocktail first, and incorrectly assuming I had another ten to fifteen minutes before our friends arrived, I ordered a second cocktail. Yet as soon as the second cocktail arrived our friends also arrived, and then we were sat at the table where, needless to say, we immediately ordered a nice bottle of red wine. So now, rather than enjoying my second cocktail at the bar and then beginning our bottle of wine, I was concurrently finishing my second cocktail while also starting our bottle of wine. Before I knew it I was thoroughly drunk, I became enthusiastically inebriated, and I felt as though I deserved it-I felt as though I deserved to be inebriated, to comment upon a small handful of topics that I probably should have remained silent about, to remark on a

variety of issues that perhaps would have been better left unaddressed. But sometimes, Alcibiades, it's important to do things solely out of abundance, to become completely inebriated, to lose all touch with coherency and restraint, and to engage in a completely misguided conversation purely out of abundance. The First Cause, no matter what form we give it, no matter how its extensions may or may not communicate with us-and I have no doubt of this-is if nothing else superabundant.

