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# Let Your Head Hang Down: A Narrative Examination of Cultic & Conspiratorial Romance

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***LET YOUR HEAD HANG DOWN***

**A Narrative Examination of Cultic & Conspiratorial Romance**

by  
Kyle Macy

A Dissertation Submitted to the University at Albany  
State University of New York  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts & Sciences

English Department

August 2024

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*For Fudge Macy*  
*My Familiar*

## **Abstract**

A response to recent cultural trends of radicalization, extremism, and violence in American society, this dissertation, a novel rendered in ephemeral fragments of oral histories, interrogates the romanticist postures that compel a community of musical artists, the so-called “Folk Revival Revival,” toward infamy and tragedy. Where more traditional sociological approaches to cultic formations stress the importance of centralized charismatic authority, and more traditional psychological approaches rely upon a conspiratorial Cold War ethos of cognitive bias and coercive control (i.e. “brainwashing”), this project meets such assumptions with incredulity, asserting instead that cultic and conspiratorial entrancement awakens first from within, and may be best understood as a misguided narrative expression of romantic genius, where the transcendent subjectivity of the individual transgresses against established standards of empirical truth as defined by the modern space, and is legitimized more by the discursive style of its rebellion than the aggregation of alternative systems of knowledge or social order.

## **Introduction:**

### **On the Insistence of Banality as Anti-Romantic Aesthetic Ethos**

Since this research project's inception as a consequence of the cultural fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the normalization of fascist ideology in American political discourse, I have been weary of that singular phrase which characterizes so much discussion surrounding cultic figures and propagators of conspiratorial narratives: *Charismatic Authority*. Within Max Weber's Tripartite Classification of Authority, it is charisma, the "virtue" by which one is endowed with "supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers...not accessible to the ordinary person...regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary," (358-9) that gilds the cult leader's perceived legitimacy, as differentiated from Rational-Legal Authority (laws, governmental sovereignty, etc.) and Traditional Authority (patriarchy, cultural precedent, "the way things have always been done," etc.) (328).

Considered as a strictly religious phenomenon, much of what we attribute to charisma can be more easily explained by tradition. Affiliation and class-status go a long way. Sure, David Koresh knew how to work a room, with his electric guitar and fire-and-brimstone sermonizing, but such performances were contextualized within spaces which inherently lent him at least some degree of legitimacy, either as a pastor, or simply as a man. Koresh's audiences were not rational secularites living in sin who wandered in off the street; they had been primed for prophecy, for the rhetorical flare of the imminently-apocalyptic, by generations of familial and social inundation. We must remember that the Branch Davidians were an offshoot of "The Shepherd's Rod," or General Association of the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists, which was itself a more radical subsect splintered off from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. When a young Vernon

Howell arrives in Mount Carmel in 1981, studies biblical prophecy under Lois Roden, wife of the Davidians' founder, Benjamin Roden, gains prophetic traction with a handful of followers, occupies the Waco property after a shootout, and ultimately ascends to the messianic status of "David Koresh," his actions are by no means novel. They occur within a tradition with which they align, at least in part, with the status quo of their radical social conventions. The blueprint has already been well-established, regardless of how seemingly exceptional Koresh's actions appear.

The same could be said about Warren Jeffs, who was born into status within the ruling patriarchy of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, again a more radical offshoot of an already-established, relatively normative religious sect generally tolerated in contemporary American society. To hear Warren Jeffs sermonize is no magnetic feat of supernatural rhetorical captivation. He is a dull, droning, monotonous church leader speaking to an audience half-captive (the rights-deprived women and children) and half-self-interested (the pro-polygamous, pro-pedophilic men). Again, it is not Weber's conception of charisma, but tradition, which explains the efficacy of these deviant leaders. One would expect the same kind of efficacy from, say, the stage magician, who dazzles ticket-holders sitting afront the spotlight stage, but fails to captivate with card tricks on a street corner. Where we might attribute their success to charisma, to some performative prowess, closer consideration reveals as a kind of latent captivation within the audience, awakened in a specific cultural context where it exudes legitimacy.

In either case, understanding the propagation of the cultic community, the sociocultural context in which it blooms and thrives, is perhaps more pertinent than the radical prophet at its center, regardless of the dynamic character that figure seemingly exudes. This aligns with Colin

Campbell's conception of the "cultic milieu" discussed in the prospectus for *Let Your Head Hang Down*, where a common set of social conditions breeds varieties of diverse cultic formations. Though the Branch Davidians and the FLDS were both fundamentally-religious organizations, this is not the case with all things cultic, and popular discourse often scapegoats the nuances of the discussion by delegating it all to religiosity, or, worse yet, psychopathology. Sure, cults often have some dimension of belief that is in some way religious, spiritual, New-Age, etc., but outside of the strict social confines of isolated religious communities, further explanation is required to satisfy why, precisely, cultic and conspiratorial narratives flourish in a more secularized social context like our own.

Let it be said that I am not a sociologist, nor a theologian, nor a psychologist, but having endured the present sociopolitical moment, throughout which the phrases "it's a cult" and "it's a conspiracy" have been volleyed back and forth like a tennis ball, I do feel somewhat qualified to throw my hat into the ring, wielding Occam's Razor at every narrative intersection where I am left unimpressed by some grand rhetorical display that supposedly entranced a captivated audience into transcendence. Let it be said, too, that I am also left unimpressed by modern discursive methodologies in which abstractions like charisma are quantified on the basis of some demagogue's rhetorical reception. *The crowd was big and the big crowd cheered*, the thinking seems to go, *therefore, he must be charismatic*. Suppose the crowd brought the captivation with them? What if "charisma" here denotes less of an effect transmitted throughout a public forum, and more of a concentration of individual receptors galvanized by collective congregation, requiring mere justification to be "activated?"

And I lifted mine eyes toward the LED screen, and upon it I saw a spray-tanned, con-man, philanderer, and convicted rapist descend from a golden escalator, mock a disabled



reporter, gloat about acing a dementia test, liken people of color to animals, quote the nazis, foment terroristic violence, and call for a return to the traditional moral values of American democracy.

I have heard Donald Trump talk. A lot. We all have. I have listened to Alex Jones “blow the lid on this entire rotten operation,” over and over again, marking the parents of murdered children as covert ‘Deep State’ operatives as he hawks dietary supplements. I have watched Love Has Won’s now-deceased visionary leader, Amy Carlson, expound upon the nature of truth and love and her numinous ascension as Mother God during hours-long livestreams while gulping down pint glasses of vodka and colloidal silver, beckoning the “bitch whores” persecuting the group to meet her in “battle” across the astral plane.

And in short, I was not afraid.

Instead, I was overwhelmed with a sense of profound, unaestheticized banality, the feeling that, whatever magic trick this may be, the “magic” was not emanating from the speaker.

It is not that I feel my critical thinking, world-weariness, or secular cleverness has somehow inoculated me from these pied pipers. As discussed in the prospectus, this is not an issue I find aptly attributed to intelligence. This is about narrative, the stories “we tell ourselves in order to live” (Didion). I believe that I, like you, remain susceptible to the cultic sleight-of-hand, not because these figures are impressive by any means— they are not— but because to be a cult member, to poison your worldview with conspiracies of some Grand Globalist Cabal conniving against you, means that you have been so profoundly disenchanted by your social identity, your community, your society, so fundamentally loosed from your place in this world, that you will welcome virtually any snake oil salesman who can alleviate your existential dread with a simple explanation of how *They* (to borrow from Pynchon) have crafted

a totalizing, false world *against* you. It is the posture of romanticism embedded in so many American traditions which makes this leap to faith shorter than a stumble. And we all remain susceptible to it.

When the social structures we rely upon to mentally render our society legitimate, real, or true have been so thoroughly-undermined that diabetics are price-gouged unto death and children are torn apart in their classrooms by machine guns, reality is not a thing uncovered to you via the esoteric wisdom of a supernatural seer or maverick television host. Reality becomes a thing requiring alleviation or relief. That which replaces it— adrenochrome-gorging elites, interdimensional reptiles, revolutionary communes, etc.— is mere window dressing relative to that more grand, cosmic gnostic gesture fundamental to all things cultic and conspiratorial: that this material world is a fraudulent, false facsimile of some higher plane of existence, which the phenomena of private consciousness urges us *must be* more real, more true, than *this*. That conspiratorial, cultic gravity we call “charisma” emanates from within. It is not a thing merely received in the public political arena. To borrow from clichés of crime fiction, “the call is coming from inside the house.”

MAGA is no mere nationalistic nostalgia. As the saying regarding the Confederacy goes, Dixieland never existed. As characters in *Let Your Head Hang Down* note, the Beach Boys never surfed, and Creedence Clearwater Revival was not born on the bayou. What manifests here is a melancholic longing for a world which never was, but is dreamt of as an idealized precedent. Not so much a fantasy divorced-from yet inspired-by mimetic gestures backward toward a simpler, “purer” previous era (e.g., Reagan, The Summer of Love, pre-industrial America), but an *extra-material* fantasy, an imaginary time which, by its very definition, *could never have existed*,

because if it had, the “Swamp,” “Deep State,” “Globalists,” et. al, would have never been able to “take over” in the first place. The utopia could have never been compromised.

This is how so many conspiracists can at once regard societal power structures as chaotic, disorganized, or inept, while simultaneously asserting that some secret organization— often characterized as subhuman, barbaric, or unintelligent— is secretly “at the top,” “pulling all the strings.” How is it that our shadowy evil-doers can appear both blatantly incompetent *and* connivingly brilliant, utterly-occluded from the prying public eye while openly discussed across mass media? During the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, this style of thought flourished, as we watched pundits condemn public health efforts as misguided or misinformed, while those same talking heads waxed paranoid about highly-intricate, boots-on-the-ground schemes for overt political takeover. Not only was the vaccine not necessary, but it also did not work, and was also no vaccine at all, while it was also, finally, a highly-effective, nanobot-laden cocktail to purge societal dissidents once all had gone according to plan.

When the condescending Left “lols” at the obvious logical shortcomings of MAGA ideology, they are mistaking the nature of the argument as classically rational and responsive to reason, when it is in fact distinctly romantic, driven by subjective perception, intuition, superstition, and aesthetic sensibilities that levee individual imagination over reason as the instrument of truth.

Imagine Percy Bysshe Shelley wearing a red baseball cap as he writes, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” As Walter Benjamin notes, “the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life,” and this is not limited to the iconography of a phrase, symbol, or Hugo Boss uniform, but extends “to give [the masses] an *expression* while preserving property” (19 italics mine). Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of*

*Totalitarianism* describes how totalitarian governments are defined not by conquest of geography, industry, or commerce, but with the occupation of that final space of sovereignty, the private mental reality of the individual, and the snuffing-out of the citizen's ability to even *think*, even *imagine* outside of the confines of the regime's ideology. Garden-variety tyrannies may retain "the whole sphere of private life," where "the capacities for experience, fabrication and thought are left intact," but "the iron band of total terror leaves no space for such private life" (475). Arendt keenly differentiates "isolation in the political sphere" from what she calls "loneliness," which in a less-pejorative sense we might call solitude, the ability to be alone with oneself, one's private life relative to the world (475). Where isolation denotes separation of the individual from the public political collective, "totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of *not belonging to the world at all*, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (475 italics mine).

Though Arendt is describing modern governments that actively inflict terror upon the citizenry, I would argue that the cultist and conspiracist often already possess this radical sense of the self "not belonging to the world" (which I would designate the material world), either in earnest, or through their fetishized romantic posturings. Once this loneliness occurs, or is perceived to occur, as is often the case with persistent social media loudmouths decrying "cancel culture"-style persecution complexes (while simultaneously publishing mounds of content), it is not so strange a development to watch this sense of "not belonging to the world" curdle into a rejection of the exterior world altogether, denouncing it as wholly false or illegitimate, and either inviting or actively relishing in the totalitarian takeover of their own inner reality, all the while fashioning this descent in the most romantic of terms, as the height of individualism and free

thinking, where “doing your own research” amounts to a wholesale rejection of empiricism—data, methodology, researcher, institution, and all the way down to the most basic building blocks of what can be known, replaced by what is imagined, intuited, or *must* be true to justify one’s feelings of existential *Geworfenheit*.

With MAGA, the problem is not that they have been duped, or tricked, or dumbed-down to the point of easy persuasion. The problem is that they have been *inspired*. Occupation by inspiration. I know this sounds obvious, but I do not mean “inspired” in the manner of Weber’s charismatic authority reigning over the collective masses, of the podium or the pulpit, with elated applause and the winning of hearts and minds, but the “intellectual imagination” of the literary and artistic, the spirited rebellion of Milton’s Lucifer, which Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus internalizes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and exclaims in *Ulysses*, saying, “With me all or not at all. *Non serviam!*” (475 italics orig.)

For the cultist and conspiracist alike, they are Stephen Dedalus at his romantic, youthful height. Theirs is that romantic posture of genius too perceptive, too sensitive, too intuitive, too true to lower itself into coping with the banality of modern, objective reality, hence the proliferation of aesthetic objects and salon spaces throughout these subcultures, the hats and signs and shirts and banners, or, as with Flat Earthers, handmade dioramas exchanged in convention spaces, or the Crypto-Bros with their attempts to literally objectify art as currency with NFTs, and even the anti-vax crowd, whose holistic cocktails are marketed not as the “medicines” of the sleeping sheeple, but as tonics or potions, in keeping with pre-modern stylistic sensibilities of high fantasy literature.

We should bear in mind, too, that many recurring ideas across the cultic and conspiratorial milieu, particularly throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, were first proliferated

as fiction, whether as in act of anonymizing cowardice, as with William Luther Pierce's pulpy racist fantasy *The Turner Diaries* (1978), or in more relatively playful, earnest gestures of sci-fi imagination, such as "Captain Adam Seaborn's" *Symzonia; Voyage of Discovery* (1820), which explicitly explored John Symmes' fringe-science theory of the Hollow Earth. Whether or not these texts were presented as fiction in earnest, tongue-in-cheek, or to shield their authors from accountability, ultimately they are all absorbed into a cultic milieu unconcerned with differentiating literal truth from the aestheticized or figurative (or the prioritization of one over the other), for this distinction, within the gnostic worldview, becomes a moot point. Such distinctions are swallowed up by an anti-materialist declaration that binary constructions of truth and falsity, good and bad, happiness and sadness, all exist within the confines of the physical world's essential corruption. David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) may have been published as science fiction, but this did not prevent so-called "hypnotherapist" Dolores Cannon and "psychic" Edgar Cayce from basing their pseudoscientific theories around Lindsay's vocabulary of the Arcturians, building upon their narrative with Brad Stelger's notion of human-alien hybrid "starseeds" presented as esoteric religious fact in *Gods of Aquarius: UFOs and the Transformation of Man* (1976).

For the occultist, esotericist, and conspiracist alike, "capital T" Truth supersedes distinctions of fiction, textbook, and religious tome. All these ideas are flattened into a singular textual status, where truth is a thing awakened within the reader in the manner of a Kierkegaardian or Socratic ironist, a pose or "distance from meaning" (*Partially-Examined Life*) that transfers textual authority from the author to the audience, in a manner not unlike that which Roland Barthes proposes as "the birth of the reader" (148). What is "true" relies upon the reader's ability to "wake up," "read between the lines," "see what's really going on," and divine

that deeper, grander narrative about the essential truth of existence that *They* don't want you to know. A book of so-called "nonfiction" like Erich Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* (1968) can be forgiven for basic archeological inaccuracies as long as he is "onto something," and imagined worlds like Arcturus can be understood as radically and profoundly literal, marketed as fiction only to protect keepers of this knowledge from persecution.

Arcturians, Aquarians, Venusians, Annunaki, Draconians, Ebens ("Greys"), Nordics—these are little more than extraterrestrial genre distinctions within the same conspiratorial canon. They are all true. Or rather, they are all true in the same way. When David Icke employs a gnostic lexicon by referring to his interdimensional Reptilians as "Archons," he revels in the heart of this conspiratorial romance: subjective individualism ascending against a false world embroiled in concerted schemes to prevent the sleeper from awakening. Yet it is not that I want readers of *Let Your Head Hang Down* to see "through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12) in a mimetic or parodic reproduction of the conspiratorial worldview. I wish to present only the glass, and I want my reader to shudder as they empathize with the urge to see through it, becoming aware of that cultic gravitational pull to which we are all vulnerable, despite our every attempt to intellectually assuage ourselves that we are not.

In an age where postmodernist textual anxieties regarding the future of the novel form and the anxieties of authorship have calcified, ground to a halt, become so overwrought as to have been rendered passé or wholly replaced by messianic proclamations of the revolutionary "New Sincerity" that will save us all from fashionable, irreverent textual irony, I have bad news for you: your anti-irony literary literalists have already arrived. In their radical romantic fervor, they self-publish books self-styled as dangerous, earth-shattering tomes whose wisdom will "change the world" (Icke), the kind of books *They* don't want you to read, containing occluded

revelations about JFK Jr., Princess Diana, nanobots embedded in vaccines, chemtrails spewed across the sky, and the Annunaki Keepers of the Akashic Records.

These are, unfortunately but rather appropriately, the voices of our generation. They outpace our literary fictions not only by magnitude of their pop-cultural limelight, but by zealotry of readership. They sell out convention spaces for weekend-long seminars, speaking passionately for eight hours at a time to audiences dwarfing the most happenin' AWP convention. And their fictional worlds are rapidly realized as *too* real, *too* urgently insightful to be mere fantasy. They are decidedly *unironic*. These texts ascend past the thematic, past the symbolic, and pierce the veil into the actual.

As Philip K. Dick writes, "I want to write about...a fictional world spun out of my own mind, not the world we actually have, because the world we actually have does not meet my standards. Okay, so I should revise my standards. I'm out of step. I should yield to reality. I have never yielded to reality. That's what science fiction is all about" (xviii). Philip K. Dick, notable cultic and conspiratorial figure in his own right, who was explicitly obsessed with gnostic ideas, shares the MAGAist's implicit, anti-materialist woes. Each refuses to yield to the violent, exclusionary machinations of modern America under late capitalism— contemporary expressions of western enlightenment's empirical virtues— to which every American is rightful heir. Their ascension into realms of radical belief is their grand romantic rebellion, which we are happy to award artistic legitimacy within the discursive boundaries of the novel. However, when this private Kierkegaardian subjectivity jettisons outward into the public spaces of modernity, and coalesces into communities hell-bent on exposing the moon landing as a hoax, 9/11 as a farce of holographic special effects, or child massacres as wholly-fictionalized disinformation campaigns, we are quick to file them away as "nuts."



What we fail to realize, though, is that in either case, these grand romantic rebellions are less of an ‘answer’ to or ‘antidote’ for enlightenment virtues of modern progress than they are constructed postures the public modern space facilitates, legitimized in one discourse or another, whether that be as valid artistic expressions lauded in literary circles, or in denunciations of psychopathology or deviant religiosity, the time-honored American traditions of decrying non-normative belief systems as “mentally ill” or, of course, a “cult.”

Either way, it is their positionality *against* the status quo that lends legitimacy for their cultic peers, and not the particular narrative distinctions of cosmology or alternative facts. Thus can a figure like Trump ramble out improvised speeches full of wildly inaccurate, inconsistent, and downright incoherent statements, and such incoherence is viewed as a *testament to*, not a detraction from, his visionary legitimacy. Romantic rebellion against the most basic enlightenment virtues (objectivity, consistency, honesty) becomes the highest virtue of all, the exception that proves the rule while denying rule and world entire with every rally and Fox News rant. This gnostic oppositionality, what you might call a “cosmic contrarianism,” is the inevitable end of cultic and conspiratorial romance, and it remains highly effective against virtually all rhetorical appeals to critical nuance and empirical lucidity.

\* \* \* \*

Thus far, we have toiled within the realms of literary analysis and cultural criticism, as I have attempted to clarify certain aspects of the cultic and conspiratorial milieu crucial to the research and the composition of *Let Your Head Hang Down*. However, discerning practical insights for the technical craft of fiction writing from these observations is no 1:1 transfer of “dos and don’ts.” I have located the ethos of this project in banality, with a nod to Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the ethical imperative of demystification as resistance to textual validation of these

subjects and the havoc they wreak as something worthy of exceptionalism or some quasi-supernatural aura. These cultic and conspiratorial subjects, like my Folk Revival Revivalists, are liars and grifters, misguided malcontents hungry for power and willing to wax rhetorical with whatever arsenal available to dominate the disenfranchised. The last thing I want to do is aestheticize these subjects with a veneer of romanticism.

So then, banality will be the compass with which we ward off an intoxicating, gnostic romanticism. In the writing of *Let Your Head Hang Down*, I have sought to remove all manner of scenes so stereotypical to the conventional cultic Netflix docuseries (perhaps to the reader's peril). There will be no tragically-sexy messiah. There will be no electrifying sermons, no ecstatic bacchanalia, no tour of the budding utopia, no pontifications upon this novel structure of society, no revelatory exposure of concealed abuse behind the scenes. Such narrative turns must remain up front and on top, as blatant, obvious, uninspired, and banal as they appear in the reality we occupy. They cannot be polished into formal literary convention, where characters grow and change and learn, or fragmented sections coalesce into one supreme, unified whole that makes sense of it all by ascribing meaning through narrative interconnection, because this would compromise the most immediate aspects of what is truly compelling about these subjects, or at the very least, all the narrative formulations surrounding them I find so urgently false.

For better or worse, the current draft has omitted as many of these "big" cultic moments as possible without compromising coherence. The reader already knows the story, because the particularities of cult formations are actually remarkably narrow. They exhibit virtually the same spread of narrative features (social disillusionment, idealism, outreach, manipulation, coercion, perceived persecution, abuse, murder), though popular culture likes to cast each with the air of novelty or idiosyncrasy. Socially-eccentric as cultic formations may be, they are all eccentric in

the same artificially-romantic way, that is, relative to the modern social norms they purport to transgress.

I might compare this approach to the critical spirit Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* or Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*, works that attempt to interrogate excesses and exclusions of western enlightenment virtues from a distinctly non-anthropocentric perspective. In a similar fashion, this project finds another kindred spirit in Timothy Morton's notion of "Hyperobjects," the articulation of "entities of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is." Considering romanticism as a thing facilitated by the modern space, and not a rebellion from it, *Let Your Head Hang Down* attempts to push back against anthropocentric assumptions that this text, like the world, is a thing that exists "for us" and will adhere to our formal expectations. This story and its characters do not follow conventional trajectories of plot conflict, where characters grow and change, or disparate narrative fragments coalesce and join together to create one supreme, unified text. To the contrary, I have sought to cut short or sever these stories prior to those principal moments of Joycean epiphany. In the prospectus, we discussed the ways in which this project was indebted to narratives of fragmentation and synchronicity like Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, or, in contrast of quality and thoughtfulness, Paul Haggis' 2004 film *Crash*. Though I find the former examples to be well-worthy of their literary merits, they ultimately compromise their purported narrative fragmentation by providing a sense of continuity or connection between sections, a sense that "everything's connected," something this project has aimed to undermine with an unapologetic insistence that its fracturing has occurred in earnest and without the possibility of retribution or redemption, again erring on the ethical imperative of banality.

Consequently, *Let Your Head Hang Down* employs high-modernist formal aesthetics of time-wrought ruin and fragmentation, an insistence in the text that “the story has already happened” à la Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* or, within a different medium, the narrative forms of FromSoftware’s *Dark Souls* video game series, where the cosmic dramas of fallen gods can only be understood from the archaeological evidence left behind: scraps of dialogue and description, disputed histories, and crumbling fortresses, which the player must not only navigate literally, but textually, in the manner of the ironist, awakening subjectivity as they attempt to form a cohesive narrative from the fragmented ephemera left behind.

Ruin, fracturing— these are key words for the reader’s descent into the Folk Revival Revival. The “heart” or “center” of these narratives has been omitted in the tradition of Joyce’s Gnomon in *Dubliners*. Like Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* and, to a lesser extent, *The Savage Detectives*, these narrative fragments orbit around their narrative crux without ever coming into direct contact with it, evoking in the reader a kind of gravitational pull, an allure similar to that which piques the would-be cultist’s interest in abandoning their social reality for something “higher,” “truer,” or more authentic. If the text should successfully “come together” for the reader, it is because that gnostic romantic veneer with which we approach the text is so profoundly tied to the American consciousness that the reader cannot help but “read between the lines” and ascend to that higher narrative authority, making the reader more-or-less complicit in the act of conspiratorial narrativization.

This is a big risk for a book that purports to be a novel. The text as presented feels much more like an incomplete draft than the fully-realized saga I conceived it to be. Where I have successfully stayed true to the vision of this project as an academic, intellectual exercise, I may have done so to the overall detriment of the text as a pleasurable or rewarding reading experience

with at least some degree of commercial viability for publication. In short: I am not so sure it works or functions enough like a novel to bear that formal designation. It might be more accurate to describe the text as a collection of short stories, but this is not quite right either, as each textual morsel relies so heavily upon its relationship to the Folk Revival Revival that many sections feel somewhat secondary to the more central omission. Having rendered these sections as oral histories, much effort has been put into first-person vernacular verisimilitude, the sense that these narrators speak the way they actually would in an interview setting or talking-head documentary. Again, this is all well-and-good for the vision of the project, but many of these segments are propelled more by commentary than by scene, and I have been haunted by the nagging feeling that this betrays the most basic notions of dialogue and action the contemporary reader expects from a novel. I cannot count the times I have thought, *Lynne Tillman will hate this*, but felt nevertheless compelled to stay the course, because in my experience as a researcher of these cultic and conspiratorial formations, *this is how they really talk*. They obfuscate, engage in what-about-ism, distort the facts, wax nostalgic, commentate, meander around the central questions, and constrain their accounts in ways that suit their interests. Again, banality overrules aestheticization, but regardless of how closely *Let Your Head Hang Down* stays true to its ethical charge, the reader must be given a reason to keep reading, and much revision is required before an apt balance can be found between thematics and more practical, craft-based concerns of stylistics and poetics, the pleasure of the text which commands the reader's attention and prevents them from simply putting it down.

\* \* \* \*

Yet here my hypocrisy rears its ugly head. Am I not, by my very status as author, invoking the same romanticism as those I claim to denounce? I confess my trite pretensions

toward those lofty ideals, a desire to display my aesthetic authority or intellectual insight in a manner worthy of clichés like *having his finger on the pulse of his generation*, which Bob Dylan so tactfully resisted. In attempting to speak to, diagnose, or understand the problems of our age, I bear the same romantic misgivings as my subjects, all that ascendant individuality pantomimed from poets centuries-gone, and coming to terms with this facade has been perhaps the most exhausting aspect of this project.

In dismantling these pretensions, I have dismantled much of what I thought made me an artist. I have become acutely aware of my own postures, the grandiosity and the melancholy, the flâneur's aloofness, the artistic rebellions facilitated by educational institutions. Maybe this is why I took to this research so naturally, because of what we have in common. I can empathize with them. I, too, justify my romantic excesses under the guise of some vague ethical charge insisting my text will somehow "do" something to "help." The artificiality of this stereotypical construction of authorship remains deeply unsettling to me, and I am unsure about how I am to grow past this faux grandiosity and temper my aesthetic ambitions according to some "higher" (there it is again), or more authentic, vision of the literary artist in 21st century America. Whatever it will or will not (or can or cannot) be, responsibility for the collective, for being a part of the world, when one might more easily shrug it off with some performative posture of cool, detached irreverence— an inoculation from reality parading as world-weary wisdom— is of vital importance. We have no time for the "too cool." Perhaps this is why, now more than ever, I feel a deep appreciation for the privilege and civic duty of teaching.

In the prospectus, we discussed the ineffectuality of satire in our current social context, and I was happy enough to discard its didactic condescension and gelded societal critique. I did not consider what I was giving up, though, in terms of process. Not so much a form or tradition

for my work to follow, but the sheer pleasure of production, the ability to derive enjoyment out of the act of writing itself, crafting the darkly-humorous follies of the human condition. Or, to put it another way, having a laugh to establish some meager bulwark against the hopelessness that awaits everytime we read the day's headlines.

During my oral exams, Dr. Ed Schwarszschild asked me how I coped with this research, with the aggregate of human suffering— abuse, coercion, murder—I experienced through these texts. At the time, I did not think much of this, and honestly, found the question slightly silly, as the text has always been primarily a place of excitement and intrigue for me, an antidote for the ennui that occupies so much of daily life. Horror never threatens my peace of mind the way boredom does. The dead cultists were not in front of me, so why feign some heavy-hearted noir detective's world-weary whiskey sipping? I have watched *True Detective* creator Nic Pizzolato feign that exact bravado across the late night talk show circuit, and the proof that he was “high on his own supply” became evident as future seasons of that show, along with every other mediocre property he has penned, exhibited the self-satisfied arrogance of an writer who has come to mistake their success for mastery, a word that any artist should know is the most vacuous, life-denying enemy of discovery.

In my hubris, I did not consider the fact that I was transferring these poisons— the problems of our time, the things that actually worry me as a citizen, as a person, that I fear will ultimately compromise this republic and catalyze its collapse— into not only my thinking, but into my imagination. It was one thing to cope with reading texts that report upon the cultic and conspiratorial lunacy plaguing our age. It was another to allow this territory to invade my private aesthetic life, a place reserved for invention and potentiality. I toiled in the waking world, as we all do, enduring the weekly tragedies and maddening descents of the twenty-four-hour news

cycle, and then turned to the blank page, once a place of heartening, inspiring escape, to find *them* waiting for me there, too. I resisted being *in there* with them, and welcomed a host of distractions to insulate myself from an existential dread I aestheticized into textual dread. None of that cool romance, with the cigarette and the glass of hooch and the hardened man bearing witness to the horrors without flinching. It was a burden to my daily psychological homeostasis, and I wonder how many pages of *Let Your Head Hang Down* remain unwritten as a result of allowing research to compromise play. Research remains a key component to my writing, but to become so thoroughly immersed in actuality (history, politics, etc.) that it hinders artistic invention, instead of encouraging it, is merely another kind of false mastery, the intellectual pretension of knowledge so extensive it extinguishes the possibility of creation. Such toiling is unproductive.

Among the insights I have gained in this project, I perhaps feel the most emotional about that longstanding dirty word employed to trivialize art deemed “too fun” to be serious: *escapism*. I’m with PKD on this: this world does not meet my standards. More than ever, I have no time for stuffy gatekeepers who want to exclude certain aesthetic experiences (video games, anime, comics, etc.) on the basis of some unseriousness ascertained from some perceived indulgence of excess pleasure from the text. We should not cope with art the way we cope with the world. Art should conjure up that which the world lacks: beauty, order, and the potential for meaning.

We should welcome any inspired escape from our slouching dystopia without apology, and treasure the artifice that guards this distinction. Again I sympathize with my gnostic villains: the material world is a fallen, corrupt place bereft of order and meaning. But it is urgently real, it is *out there*, and that which categorically opposes it— the contrived, the artificial, the fictitious—represents perhaps the only way out. I look back on my younger postmodernist

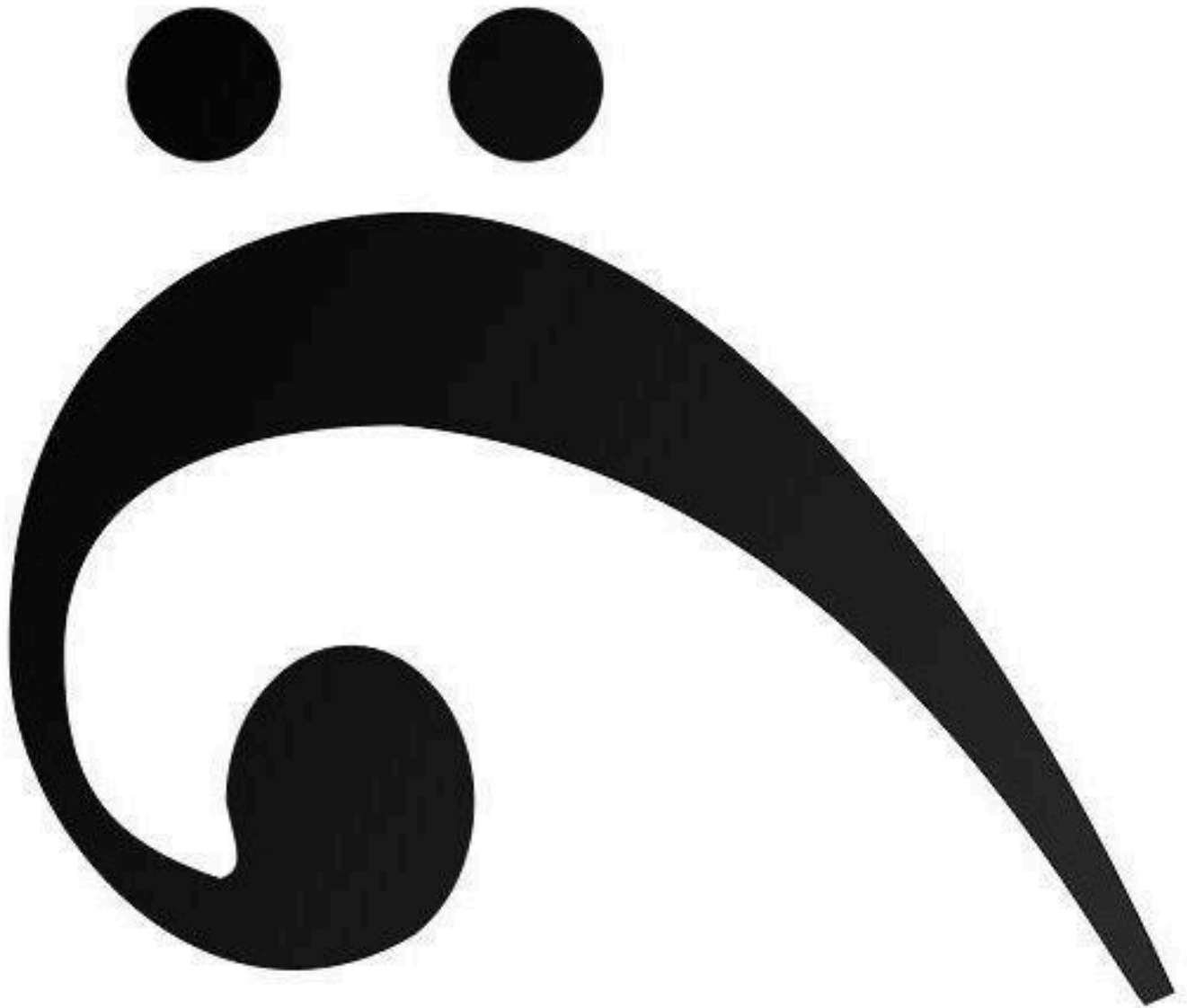


anxieties of authenticity and artifice and chuckle. The artifice does not threaten the authenticity of the text. It *protects* the text from the actual, the literal, from the various ways in which humans will compromise it, mistake it as a commodity or identity, or wield it as the token of supremacy over the illegitimate or vulnerable. Romantic formulations of authorship that posit suffering as the prerequisite to wisdom, beauty, or aesthetic sensibility are the artistic equivalent of the spirit of “hardness” in the Third Reich. They are not “too real” for us who can’t hack it. They are a social construction, a thing facilitated by the modern world and given space to perform, to ensure we stay locked inside this vision of existence while fancying ourselves emancipated from it.

Here is the only aspect of *Let Your Head Hang Down* that I would still call satirical: that these young artists felt so disenfranchised, so unoriginal, so middling in their romantic melancholy, that existential pang of suffering we call “The Blues,” that they engineered an entire system of aesthetic training aimed at refining and expanding not their craft, but the suffering they claimed legitimized it, and in doing so, guaranteed the world would only ever hear them talk, and never hear them play.

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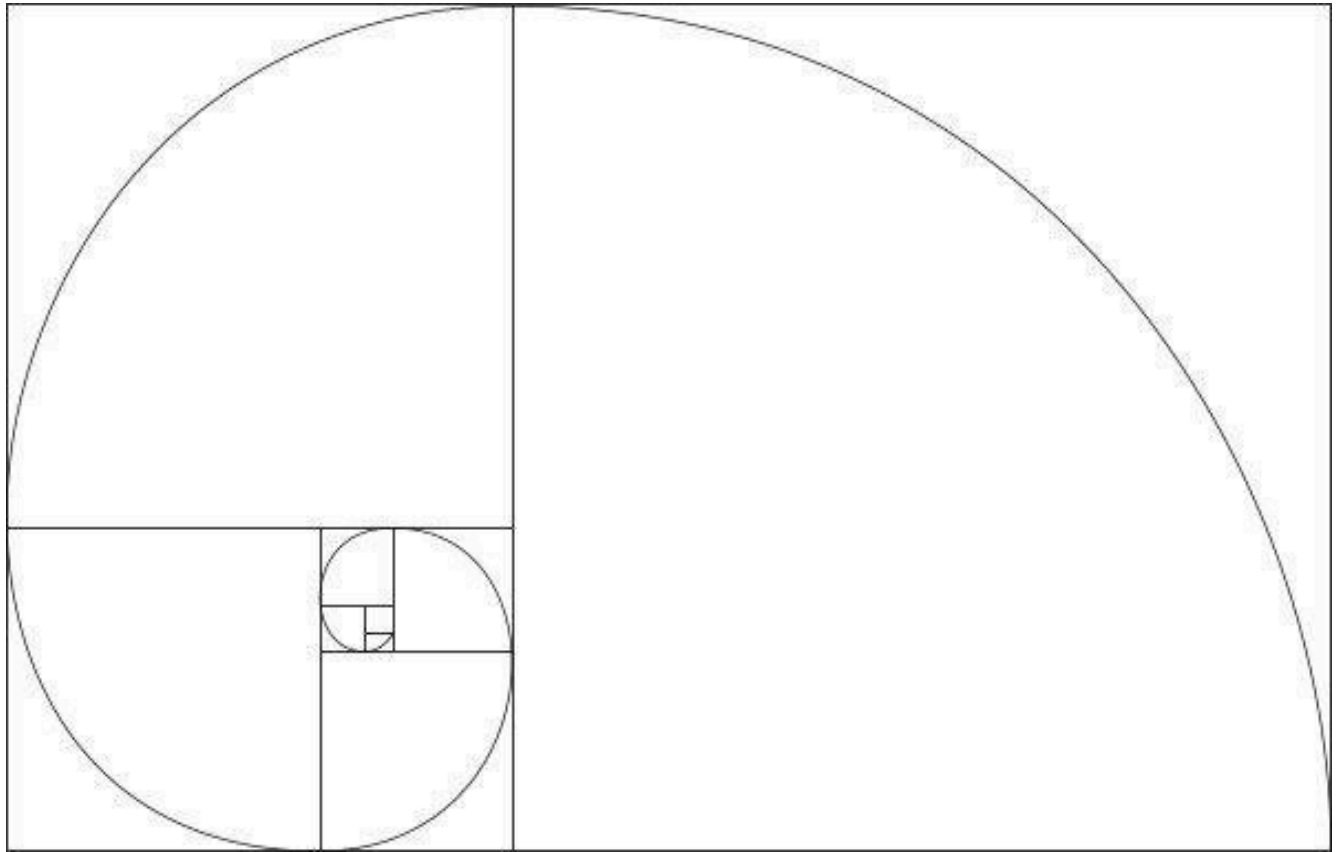
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# ***LET YOUR HEAD HANG DOWN***

An Oral History of the Folk Revival Revival

By Kyle Macy



*“Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence— whether much that is glorious— whether all that is profound— does not spring from disease of thought— from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect. They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their gray visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in awakening, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret.”*

—Edgar Allan Poe, “Eleonora”

*Tad: Wake up, Tommy.*

*Tom: I am awake.*

*Tad: Your eyes are closed.*

*Tom: Who you gonna believe?*

—Miller’s Crossing

*“A friend, another friend, once showed a Picasso to Picasso, who said, no, it was a fake. The same friend brought him yet another source, another would-be Picasso, and Picasso said that, too, was a fake. Then yet another from another source, also fake, said Picasso. ‘But Pablo,’ said his friend, ‘I watched you paint that with my own eyes.’ ‘Ah,’ said Picasso, ‘I can paint fake Picassos as well as anybody.’”*

—Orson Welles, *F for Fake*

*“The sun’s not yellow, it’s chicken”*

—Bob Dylan, “Tombstone Blues”

AUGUST WEST  
PATRON, CHATTERTON TAVERN, RAINTREE, IN

Do not listen.

You will hear their music, the Folksingers, but do not listen. When they come, stuff your head in the sand, pack your ears with beeswax or polyurethane, with dirt, with your bloody fingers, whatever you can. Should these defenses fail, you must skewer the tympanic membranes, collapse the auditory canals, unhear your ears, anything. Once the performance starts you must act.

Though a moral faux pax, it may well be that some forms of self-harm indeed preserve the greater body they undermine. The wolf's paw chewed from the leghold trap, the autothysis of carpenter ants. The lovesick dolphin stops its breathing. Yet you cannot overthink it. There is not much time. Songs played for minutes are finished in seconds.

Go on. Embrace an autoviolent act in this ephemeral present and for the love of God preserve the rest of a life they would steal from you. Self-mutilate and seek sanctuary. You're still young.

Don't you understand? By the time their earworms overtake you it is too late. You will hear them even after the music stops. Their venom lingers on the air as if aerosolized, pathogenic. It hangs in the miasma. If you never hear it you cannot catch it.

These are not songs they play. This is no hootenanny. No hullabaloo. They make mustard gas from melodies. A snap of the fingers, the clapping of hands, chipper taps smacked on hardwood planks by hardened soles. These are the sounds of annihilation.

This Saturday night out on the town foretells a Gloomy Sunday. Rezső Seress, 1933. This so-called "show" comprised of its so-called "music." No call and response, but a cull and a

haunt. It is not a dancehall but the floor of a great pit. Not a theater, nor concert venue. That place where the Folksingers hold court and congregate, it is no club, but a well-worn abattoir knocker, to quake the skull like a church bell in grand announcement of the stunned brains folded up inside. The rattle of death couched in blue notes and crooning refrains, occluded in audience noise, the sociable chatter and chewing fat of the local watering hole.

Haven't you heard? A black river babbles between your ears. It collects in a creekbed there, where atrabilious waters rise and vaporize and rain for a thousand years. These are the things they say. The setting sun lingers on Americana's warm roots and these are its tunes, they sing, and yawping we turn our eyes to heaven, where all the aether swells, pink and inflamed, irritated, a sprawling rash of hives like divined constellations. The body defends itself from invaders, they will say, like a sovereign nation. And the Earth responds in kind. Even as it burns out under the sun. Grand icon of the Enlightenment.

These are the words they will use. Sensationed speech with accommodating symbols. Hot takes glib or gauche, yet always delivered with an uncanny mesmerism. Tact or tactics, ever-performing. Good old-fashioned storytelling, honed with narrative control and a knack for detail. Flexible, familiar images spun like yarn and cast like lures. They can hide things in those old folk traditionals, you know, the slave songs and troubadour ballads, the gospel hymns, even the wettest delta blues. The Folksingers manipulate these with great dexterity. Stanzas revised and excised from their origins. Verses which say one thing and mean the opposite. Words so imbued with addendums and reimaginings they stretch and swell and blot out the looming moon.

Soon they will roll into your hometown on fumes and goodwill, thumbing roadside by their brokedown fingerpainted school buses, picking and grinning, meandering, loitering, only to sidle up to the nearest neighborhood stage or saloon to tune up their guitfiddles, pluck a diddy,

hoot and holler, raise a glass, and beckon all to sing along. Then they will take you quietly aside, a firm grip on your upper arm, pulling you close, and whisper the secret truth of the universe, bourbon breath misting your earlobe, and should they scrawl that sigil upon your auricles there will be no coming back for you. That thing which is wrong with them will see you returned to the clay and you will do it to yourself, like so much tragic youth ensnared by their melancholia.

But you need not listen. God's silence is deafening indeed but the aged among you speak true when they bear witness to a stillness, a calm. Make no waves in that black and bilious river. May the rhythms of the tide glassen with the severance of those pipers' pieing melodies, dog whistles all.



DAWN SOLOMON

LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, BLOOMINGTON, IN

What do I remember from my time at Raintree University's Lomax Center for Graduate Folk Studies?

My, it's so very hard to choose. So many tender memories, so many expressions of artistry and aesthetic beauty exchanged. Such generosity of spirit, all these young singer songwriters gathering together to hone their craft. Iron sharpens iron, as it were. It was a tremendous support for my maturation as a performer. I still perform, though not professionally, per se. We all do.

I remember Dinah's giant dreaded lock, her lap steel, the shivers she gave me. I remember that by our third year Alpha exclusively played a steel saw, with a violin bow, blade bent over her thigh, that warbling harmonic ring emanating from her serrated parabolas. The instrument sounded like an acoustic theremin, which the program's lead electric theremin player, Bulma Tyler, understood as a threat. Plus, Alpha was a yodeler, or at least more of a wailer. And an eccentric lyricist. Most theremin singer-songwriters preferred vocals of spoken word, sci-fi b-movie sound effects, dirge-y *hms* and dual-vocal-cord *oms* just like those Tibetan monks used to do. Alpha did the bloodiest ballads. She sometimes outstretched her empty ear gauges and plucked them like bass strings, like some kind of cartoon character.

I remember the humpty-dumpty washboard player, Mug Costanza, with his belt of cans. Otha Fears' bowie knife & carved cane flutes. Handsome Carl Clay Clark on his eighty-eight, what he always called his chordophone, always licking his chops at the ladies, melodica in his back pocket. Ghee Wiley, great-grandson of Geeshie, in his knit shawls and derby hats wielding an electric guitar straight out of *The Jetsons*. I remember Poinsettia Gadsden's cigarette, those

long Virginia Slims she liked to call Vagina Slimes, her brass body resonator ukulele, Tottie the banjolin player nipping at her heels. I remember Howell, The Lomax Center's lead guitarist, stealing myths from John Fahey, claiming the wood of his acoustic guitar came repurposed from a baby's coffin, rambling in sharp whispers about the mystical advantages of authentic tortoiseshell pickguards—harvested from roadkill—and cat-gut strings. And of course Wyatt, the other ragtime guitarist, just as white and male as Howell and about twice as guilty, with a tattoo of a bass clef behind his ear.

DR. JASON BERNT PAULSON  
PODCASTER & COMMENTATOR, BRAZIL, IN

Listen up you weasels:

Yes, it is true, to be sure, without addendum or alteration, that all men are created equal.

But all art, all culture, is not.

It really is that simple.

There are some ideas, some stories, some songs, symphonies or paintings or tomes of western philosophy, that reflect a fundamental, lasting truth in the grand tapestry of humanity.

The rest of it, the ephemera of pop songs and hip hop beats, sampled and recycled and artificially-rendered recapitulations of real creativity, your so-called “influencers” and “personalities” and “content creators,” are merely cereal box cartoons in the grand scope of civilization, the pillars of its grand architecture.

I will not apologize for that grand architecture, nor the brilliant minds, often white and male, which chiseled it out onto the formless panorama of God’s Green Earth. Were these visionaries always perfect in their daily personal conduct?

Of course not. Don’t be absurd.

But some minds exude a certain kind of genius that is simply exempted from the lowly concerns of the hoi polloi, the crowd of swine, the unwashed masses. Genius drives the western world forward, it does not cater to your condescending moralistic crusades. Sure, we could spend our time quibbling about the moral standards of this age or that, sitting proudly atop our moral high horse, combing philological archives to ascertain exactly whether or not Marcus Aurelius owned slaves, and whether or not he treated them kindly, et cetera, et cetera, but at the end of the

day, at the end of the world, humanity will stand and ask not how the iconoclast conformed to the ethical mores of his day. They will ask what he did to further humanity, in the macro, in God's grand scheme, and this fact absolves him from the petty nuances of daily human interaction.

Sorry, Charlie, but in short: they are better than you.

Culture cannot be "stolen." Only wielded.

And anyway, what have you done, what affords you the right, the wisdom, the expertise, to levee any moral objection against them? Who are you to stand up and have anything to say about anything? Go back to your sugar cereal, your digital hearts and thumbs-ups. Like and subscribe, why don't you? Leave the serious intellectual and creative work to the serious intellectual and creatives, of whom I do feel quite qualified to call myself a member.

But alas, you are not here to hold the line in our defense of western civilization. You are here, like so many others before you, to wet your salivating gums on our most recent hot-button topic of cultural carrion, the latest in targeted attacks on those unafraid to call it like it is. You're here, of course, to inquire about my students, the Folkloric Founders, The Big Four, Architects of the Revival Revival, a millennia-spanning mission to restore the purity and will of the musical arts of the West.

Say their names: Wyatt Rundle and Howell Haidler. Alpha Bergamot and Dinah Candace Kindred. Two by two in pairs, as it was with the ark.

As God intended.

They are of that ilk. The god-appointed. The chosen. The prophetic.

Yes, you could say I am something of an expert in the field of American Roots Music, the wealth of folk traditionals, blues diddies, and bloody ballads. In my professional role as liaison and advisor to our graduate students at the Lomax Center for Folk Arts, I serve— or rather,

served, before I was forced into early retirement by interdepartmental campus politics— as professor, as intellectual Virgil, for many of the individuals who are now so unfairly maligned as “extremists” or “radicals” of the Folk Revival Revival.

Rags like your publications call them a cult. So much for the journalistic imperative to “tell it like it is,” to deliver “just the facts.” William Randolph Hearst Sr. would surely roll over in his grave. This kind of inflammatory treatment is nothing short of libelous, and I’m surprised civil rights organizations have not risen to the task of holding you accountable. Of course, they’re too busy bending the knee, doing the bidding of the Neo-Marxists and the Woke Mob. Such is the deplorable treatment of revolutionaries in their time, I suppose. But I am here to set the record straight, even if doing so requires I break bread and pour claret with the most venomous of serpents, the most gold-hoarding of hook-nosed dragons.

So, fine: you buy me dinner, and I will set you straight on all the ways you have grossly misinterpreted the most supreme artistic movement of the 21st century. Surely someone should defend these patriots from the occluded conniving cabal mounting against them.

Who can recall the exact dates and times now, anyway? What was said, what wasn’t. The ‘what did you know and when did you know it.’ Have you noticed how time stagnates in our age, how it compresses or halts, how it resists our age-old tools of marking the progression of history?

I know you will take me out of context. You will scrub out your leading, prejudicial questions with first-rate editors of the slimiest variety. So be it. Nevertheless, I persist. Someone has to defend the artist.

HANDSOME CARL CLAY CLARK  
LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, BROAD RIPPLE, IN

Man, out there now, it's a trip. I mean, it hasn't been *that* long since the Lomax days, only about a decade. You wouldn't think this degree of cultural, what, *fallout* could happen like this, especially not on a national level. Of course, it's probably a bit too reductive, not to mention, in a sense, overly-flattering, to suggest that the tumult from our Lomax Center years, the Newport '64/'65 Schism, the Big Four founding the Folk Revival Revival and all that, was entirely responsible for this shift in the musical ethos of the country. Personally, I think it was more of a media thing. And just plain old timing. What do they call it, a, uh, *perfect storm*? Regardless, I would not have thought, half a decade ago, that the cultural cache of the folk arts could be transmuted into something so ardently resented in the media and popular culture, if there exists any real distinction between the two, which I very much hope there does.

I have a pretty good thing going as a band leader and sidekick for this variety-show type thing at this local elderly supperhouse, Beef n' Boards, but you won't catch me using the "F" word around there. Don't try to revive nothing there or your ass is out on the street. You wouldn't think that these kinds of prejudices can just seep into the national lexicon so rapidly, that a word's essence could be manipulated into something that evokes disgust and antipathy in less than half a lifetime. Maybe it's the social media, everything just moving faster. But I don't buy it. Seems to me to be a curse. Or a conspiracy. Like some far-off witch or wizard boiled a cauldron and muttered into it "folk" and just like that the color and hue of this word became profane. I've lost jobs for admitting I used to play folk music. I have had my safety threatened for admitting I was a Lomax alumnus. Even with a well-meaning round of parlor blues standards

or early jazz. No Buddy Bolden, no Jelly Roll Morton. Hell, not even Bloomington's own Hoagy Carmichael. People don't play with that shit anymore. Such tastes have been swept up in all these national arguments about stochastic terrorism. I just can't make sense of it.

They don't hear the music anymore, which is a shame, because a lot of it I held, well, *hold* very close to my heart. It should take more to sway the national sentiment, the national ethos, in directions of such concentrated animosity. What's worse, the Folky Pariahs who still practice these forbidden arts seem to want to *embrace* this animosity, they want an edge like that of the punks, only their antagonism, largely turned inward, is nothing short of pitiful.

I was walking down Massachusetts Avenue the other day, up by the fire station where they'd let us park for shows at the Murat theater in exchange for a little diddy or barbershop harmony that the cheery firefighters always returned with generosity and applause. Before the Chatterbox closed I would play some Wednesday night dueling pianos with a guy by the name of Peanut Butter Dave, and I still know a couple of guys at the Chatham Tap and Ralston's who don't hold the artistic pretensions of my youth against me, so some days I'll walk that way and grab lunch, have a beer. Ralston's has this pulled pork and chutney flatbread that'll get your goat. Nowadays I need to leave my house at least twice a day and speak to a human or I start to lose my voice, and sometimes even my ability to talk, let alone reckon with reality.

So, I'm walking down the avenue, as I had done a thousand times before. Of course, it's been years since I was around this scene, since, I don't know, back when I was living in Indy between semesters, scrounging by on beginners' piano lessons and whatnot. The times they have a' changed. Time was it'd take me an hour to make it down these two blocks. Mass Ave was the cultural center of the city for a little while, the place for the inspired restaurants, smaller joints with more intimate vibes, more interest in folk and jazz, the old forms.

Time was I'd be flipping quarters to the buskers every half-block, calling them by name, shaking hands, patting shoulders, offering polite nods. Salad days when with generosity my compatriots would pass a guitar my way or beg me to whip out and wield my melodica and get down on and in a jam, or play echo for a slow, hard-stomping call-and-response. full of bass and boom and that simple, primal, carnal, hard sexual swing of the hip. Overall, a consistently positive experience. Everybody got along, there were no territorial issues between the buskers, they played lively and upbeat blueses and galloping western ballads, jazz traditionals, and all manner of in-betweens. They'd even break out those old-timey yarns they used to teach children, "Sally Gal" and "Froggy Went a Courtin'" or, hell, "Home on the Range," that is, you know, before folk music was declared a public health risk for the proper development of adolescence and teenage brains.

But now—

*Man.*

I'm walking down Mass Ave the other day. I see maybe a dozen or so performers scattered down a couple of blocks. But it was, I don't know, *eerie*. It didn't feel right. *None* of them were even standing. They're just plopped down, garnishing the dirty concrete in their dusty brown wingtips and suede vests and old-timey shirtsleeves as if they'd emerged from Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*. They still dress like it's a century and a half ago, the way those scowling Mumford fuckers were doing in the twenty-teens. But, looking down the street from where I was standing, all they outstretched legs emerging perpendicular to the sidewalk's trajectory, it looked like somebody had systematically beaten the shit and will out of every one of these sorry sons of bitches, knocked them all right off their feet. That's part of the schtick now. They don't stand.



You ever been to Italy? Ever visited the Vatican? They got, like, these professional-grade bums and beggars over there, shrewd swindlers, these folks. Real enterprising performers committed to their trade. A lot of them, they get a sweet spot on the sidewalk approach to The Vatican, which they know will attract the more charitably-inclined, or at least the the guiltily-inclined. They sit on the sidewalk, legs and feet bare and protruding out across the sidewalk so that pedestrians are forced to either acknowledge them or literally step over them. A few are usually suffering from some chronic illness, but the real pros pick at their shins or feet or thighs until they're bleeding, until they've accrued a lower-half landscape of scabs and festering wounds. They do it on purpose, for a better, you know, turn out. They'll pair off and cut back some skin, reopen old scabs or irritate their flesh with brillo pads and even steel wool because they know this will elicit a greater pity, and consequently a greater bounty, and since there's such a high tourist population, this can be a steady living for a lot of these supposedly indigent and homeless, who are, in reality, clocking in and out of this thing daily and working their skills and going home to climate-controlled apartments to cook dinner and watch television and apply bandages until the next morning when the time comes to scratch open the same scabs yet again.

Staring down Mass Ave, you'd be shocked at the resemblance between these two approaches to the performing arts. The folkies now recite droll original compositions with lyrical laundry lists of psychotropic medicines they were prescribed, which at what dose, taken for how long, and to what benefit, which is to say little or none. They recount suicide attempts in nauseating detail. Whole lists of fallen folknik soldiers dead by their own hand or ascended to oblivion in some kind of grand public act of performative violence. All this to the same lazy, watered-down Carter Family picking patterns glossed over in every beginner's guitar book. Businessmen, young couples, sometimes entire families walk right by, step over the instrument

cases of these outcasts, kick their tiny amplifiers and taunt their woes with fingers in their cheeks pulling down their clownish frowns in utter mockery. Passing citizens scoff and spit on songsters' faces and call them cowards with weak spirits lacking any trace of moral fiber, whose very existence threatens the stability of This Great Nation. The bum songsters rub dirt on their faces, show their forearm scars and thigh scars and rows of self-inflicted cigarette burns on the triceps and neck. They recount their crippling episodes and forced hospitalizations in walking blueses while they lie on their backs, calcified to stillness by their afternoon opioid fix. They engage in diatribes between songs expounding the psychic horrors of their particular experiences with psychiatric power structures, they apologize for their inability to work and live and forge meaningful relationships, they offer lengthy and convoluted justifications for their propensities toward substance abuse. They sing songs cursing dopamine and serotonin and cortisone like wolves howling in vain toward phases of a glowing skybound lunar lunacy they simply cannot fathom.

CIS-CO. HOUSESTUNG  
FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE, LOUISVILLE, KY

The folksinger don't play in time. We make time. We eat time cribbed from those who have time. Who own time. Time is no mere movement followed by the tempo of consciousness. Time is wielded, compacted, expanded, and destroyed. We's ain't no cliched rockstars, we's need no metronome. The tapping of the foot is a bludgeoning upon the orbiting Earth. For the time by which we pluck and strum is a thing constructed, conjured, manifested out of a wild melancholic nothing which thrives and abides in the heart of man.

To hear the Folk Revival Revival play is to exist outside of time, to reckon with it as a contrivance, a violent structure created to establish the boundary line between what was, is, and will be. For you know they are all the same, same tune, treble and bass clef twisting in dialectal diddies throughout that singular moment that is our eternal stagnant present.

And indeed, what a present it is.

Rejoice, for the tears which spill after can only ever have spilled all at once, and for forever, under the meridian of our dying and lying and setting sun. That sun, she don't rise and she don't fall. It is we who fall for her, who raise our gaze and let it drop, like the beat, to that impenetrable darkness, and the black and bilious river which flows below.

It is us, we folk, whose movement makes a static thing into "progress," that most poisonous of semantic constructions.

Fret not, unless upon that fretboard, and wallow in assurance that your pain, and the knowledge of it which we call "suffering," is the realist thing about you. You have no need for depression, only inflation, ascension, to that first and final Big Bang. Yield to despair.

DR. HENRY THOMAS

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, LOMAX CENTER FOR AMERICAN FOLKLORIC STUDIES

RAINTREE, IN

Much has been written on those controversial years at the Lomax Center, very little of it of any discursive utility or value, save for the wealth of bombastically indulgent neoromantic anecdotes that elucidate upon an age-old aesthetic tension, which nonetheless sprouted anew—and with what vigor!—on our little Raintree campus near the Colic toddler tantrum years of this bright and shining century. My peers and contemporaries, Dr. Roland excluded, who have attempted to “make sense of it all” ultimately suffer in their accounts from a flu-like nostalgia that coats their percepts in a thick idealistic fog. You see, they are secondary sources, they come after the fact for the crystalline scraps, they abandon any sense of discrimination or skepticism and instead embrace the history like a novel, these folklorists and historiographers. Friends, they simply were not there. In the case of our own discursive humanity, the Lomax Center at Raintree University, this so-called place of study for American musical roots, this folk, this blues, our current place in the academy is one of being put out to pasture, no, not to stud, but straight to the glue factory, and so the matter is urgent enough that these false accounts and inaccurate analyses of those fated years at the Lomax Center pose a real, immediate threat to its discursive rigor, relevance, and legacy. Friends, they were not there. I was.

It should be said that some of their aesthetic variations and drama came out of a particular stereotype as the Midwestern artist as being “regional” or “local” or yes even just “midwestern.” There is a genuine generational angst in the threat of this odd “country-bumpkin” pigeonholing. The midwestern artist— which is to say, rural, as differentiated from urban, by which we mean

based in New York or California— particularly the singer-songwriter, it seems, is always expected to be on their way to a more “happening” locale, toward one coast or the other, lest they take the train up to Chicago “festivals” of twining solos in Hawaiian shirts, play Tuesday night shows for CVS drug stores in Nashville, or take shelter under the shadows of bronze bluesmen in Memphis. One would think that blues mythos and Indiana, this “crossroads of America,” would have intertwined at some point, would simply have had to, from a folkloric perspective. But no, no overlap in the blues mythology whatsoever. It seems of all the intersections where the devil is known to nonchalantly walk at midnight, somehow none of them exist in the state sloganeered precisely for them. Somehow the Midwestern Arts always get the high hat. Credit comes from elsewhere then travels on, beelining for LA or NYC, but only stops off for a tenderloin in Indiana.

It is important to call the spade thusly, it is important that I not mince words nor wax polite. You must understand that for many of our millennial graduate students, a, if not the, principal motivating factor for their accepted admission at the John and Alan Lomax Center had less to do with some weathered notion of asceticism or monastery monk mentality, hardly at all in fact, and more to do with economic necessity, by which I mean most of these supposed performers could not “hack it” out there in the real circuit, the bars and small clubs, the pass-the-cans and hard busking sessions.

These fated few saw themselves as simply above all the riff raff and road-worn world-weary wisdom that earns the artist’s miles and makes their bones, so to speak. No respect for taking one’s proverbial licks. No appreciation for the hard luck initiation that renders an artist ripe to come by their sufferings honestly. No time for it, and even less interest.

No, this bunch you had to beg and nurture and nudge their little wet chins up because what fragility awaited them whenever they took up their musical arms, what threats of tears and quivering lower lips and forehead flop sweats, what risks that the phenomena of their live performance would be compromised and thus throw off their entire professional integrity.

This was a bunch that lived with their left hand, so they could simultaneously annotate for future memoirs with their right. But they never doubted their “hidden genius,” their variations on form, their “new take” on the old traditionals. And frankly, most of them had such a dim or narrow understanding of the art form’s progression up to contemporary times that their so-called innovative interests really came off as rather green and jejune, but mostly foolishly oblivious due to their own blinding narcissism.

Their antics, however, were ever thin and read through easily, and this threat, the possibility of their fraud being found out, instilled in the controversial Lomax classes a sense of urgency, of necessity mothering invention, and so what should we expect when the artist feels their craft threatened? They will reach into either abstraction or a radical revolutionary ethos to insulate their act, painting the faces of the audience with a perplexion too thick to critique. They will reach above, like the innate reactions of human infants, for branches of support from the better discourses, which in this case meant less “fresh” or “up-and-coming” and more “time-tested,” those media that bear gathering dust with an unmoving dignity which gazes at the coming abyss.

Thus, many of these students bled their improvisations onto more visual parchments, projecting film onstage, decorating their instruments as an ongoing process, coordinating lights and sculpture and makeshift mandalas to be constructed throughout their meager concerts and relentlessly driven into oblivion with cowboy boots scuffing and kicking across the clacking

wooden floor. Others still sought their support intertextually, with the poets and prose writers, mostly American, a few English, mostly modern and upward, who once read at Yankee stadium or carried sponsorship from hunting apparel companies, those whose books were nestled in the breast pockets of American GI's during the Second Great War, literature around which a young modern society galvanized and celebrated and despaired.

Of the few redeeming characteristics of these troublesome Lomax students was their taste, I will say. They were well-read and well-listened, they had the critic's eyes and ears, which I must admit is uncommon. Though as I say that, I can think of at least a handful of alumni who completely disregarded literally all artistic endeavors that occurred before them, these sneering anti-intellectualists, who showed up proclaiming their status as some god's gift to folk and blues while having virtually no interest in any blues or folk music except for their own very narrow version of their own middling psychic suffering.

Most of these would barely qualify as folk artists— they were pop songwriters who pinned “Folkster” to their lapels and carried their acoustic guitars as membership cards, as if that is all American roots boils down to, simply not plugging in. What an affront to the arts. What kind of a person says they want to play the blues but then refuses to engage with the very forebears for whom the moniker was burned into history?

I suppose it is the blinders of youth, the lack of perspective. No, not perspective. What “kids these days” truly lack is a sense of proportion. They have no sense of how large the web in which they entangle actually is, and as such they have no real respect for its breadth and depth. The youngster hears only her future cover in Billie Holiday or Bessie Smith, sees not the art but how she might stand on its shoulders, sees only the high fashion of some neo-rural getup, replete with all manner of winking satire and ironic and parodic edges, all indictment and commentary,

sans soul, with nothing to actually say. It is no wonder that this hollowness was so easily filled by fanatical maniacs. Folks these days will do utterly anything to be part of a group. And if that group runs counter to some dominant authority, well, then you are really cooking. You simply *must* be onto something, especially if *they* seek to shut you down.

Even with all the conceptual workings, all the grand conceits, the progressive trajectories and biting satire, the unfortunate but simple fact for a great many of these LPs and musical initiatives is that they were flat out hard to listen to. All considerations for taste, but I rarely enjoyed the actual musicality of it, let alone the performance. And yes, I understand, Bob Dylan's vocal sensibilities and Lou Reed's raw garage sound and so on, but the average songwriter who employs an apologetic of Dylan's froggy singing completely disregards the fact that while his tone was often odd and somewhat honking his pitch was usually in proximity of key, or more to the heart of the point was an accurate replication of the forms that he and his contemporaries sought to "revive."

Take Alpha Bergamot, for example. In her first fall at The Lomax Center, Alpha booked a consecutive twenty-four hours of studio time with the department's already exhausted engineers, Phil Decco and Sharona Nelson, for a project Alpha touted as "The Wabi-Sabi LP" to "usher in a new progressive genre," where she would perform an entire concert's setlist of originals in the style of Appalachian folk with bow and saw accompaniment, a great deal of high yodeling kinds of compositions, endearing in small doses but near maddening as a whole, intending for the album itself to be one massive movement of songs cut from the best two— yes, two— consecutive hours of the session, void even of track breaks, but replete with all manner of studio-time cracks and comments, the little times in between, false starts and take two's and adjustments for reprisals. Her little sycophants— Dinah, Howell, and Wyatt— were there the



whole time, cheering her on and sneaking away to smoke pot and chug flasks in the stairwells. To really listen to that, that *thing*— I cannot even call it an album— and to call it understated would be most kind. As I understand it, Alpha had always planned on using the final two hours of the studio session, but neglected to tell the engineers for obvious reasons, obvious enough that they ascertained her underhanded schemes from the liner notes describing the session, and opted to boycott working with Alpha altogether, a gesture she later lionized upon herself, as some great victim of an old guard too rigid in their sensibilities to jive with the cutting edge of the form, another heart to bleed on her sleeve, another stride to take and revel in. To call it “lo fi,” too, would lend a certain undeserved credibility. It was merely lazy, lazily conceptualized by someone far too self-absorbed to ever scrutinize their creative instincts. It aimed for a *Gaslight Tapes*-esque appeal, but to put it plainly, the album was about fifteen percent Appalachian-influenced yodeling, while the other eighty-five was comprised of monotonic exchanges, throat clearings, and various percussive noises from mic adjustments or clicking-on noise suppressors, along with the occasional monologic diatribe from Alpha, which, it should be said, at least came off sincerely, as any individual who has spent more than fifteen minutes with Alpha knows that she, at any given moment, probably was engaged in some kind of diatribe, some rant, some grand take-down of the status quo, just like the rest of them.

They simply were not making folk music. Not blues, either. Not by the most generous and flexible definitions. These wallowing and flat or stark raving mad performances were like the nightmares of folk songs, strange rhythms and cadences designed to mock the modern folk music movement in hollowed parody, as the butt of a joke. Well, I for one, would not stand for it. The stakes of our grand old musical form are simply too high. Forty-four years ago I pledged to keep and protect the sacred secrets of folk traditionalism, and I have done my duty well and

preserved a vital morsel of our American culture among a historical landscape of transience and oblivion. These heretics and their eight minute renditions of “Pretty Polly,” drawn out with solos and improvisations like lousy, lazy lounge jazz, or droning metalesque crunching chords of dissonance and fuzz, and the haughty strange interludes of noodling and self-indulgence as if we’re all a gaggle of nimrods passing a doober at a King Crimson show or something like this. All this so-called “art rock” or “post rock” or post this or that. Genres with the adjective modifier of “mathy.” Christ Jesus. And I thought punk sounded bad in the 70’s. But this. Pathetic excuses for their narcissistic indulgences, the infamous “Newport 65” side of the class, which was, at the very least, less boring than the austere purists of the acoustic-only “Newport ‘64” movement. Two halves of a departmental— not to mention discursive— war which wages, some have argued, up to this very day. Though this is perhaps beside the point. This cohort hijacked American Folk Music, just as terrorists do, held it ransom and poked and prodded it, distorting and mistreating a great deal of songs from the true American Heartland. It was not folk music. They were not folk musicians. To call a sculpture a painting is not some grand postmodern commentary or satire or indictment or ironic what-have-you. It is moronic. Plain and simple. But this is just my humble opinion.

## OTHA FEARS

### LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, CENTERVILLE, OH

Even from our first semester, the Founders were at odds. Iron sharpening iron. They antagonized one another creatively to profound effect for both our works and our crippling mood disorders. One often got the feeling that their compositions were not made *for* any audience, but rather *at* one. You could almost clock it workshop by workshop. Howell shows up one Monday morning with the frank and violent *Postcard from the Lynching*, and then next week Dinah comes in and ups the ante with *The Miscarriage of Maria Elena*, and that riles up Wyatt enough to pull three all-nighters and show up the following Tuesday, all red-eyed and ragged, with *The Funeral of Ruan Lingyu*. Then next week Dinah crosses her arms contentedly with *Saturn Return* // *The 27 Club* as well as an EP entitled *Trauma Porn*, but then the next week Howell fucks everybody up with renditions in homage to James Baldwin with *Blues for Mister Charlie*, which chills and shakes Dinah enough to roll out *Joan Biased*, *Folk School Confidential*, and *Weeknights at the Troubadourium, Vol. 1*, all of which had less to do with anything contained in Wyatt's previous work, but more so with Wyatt's conduct and attitude as a supposedly ethical and aesthetically sound songwriter. So, then Wyatt perplexes all the workshop with *Blind Blake and His Hookworm Blues*, the first of many attempts at this subject for Wyatt, which Alpha fires back at with *Midwestern Skyline*, after *Nashville Skyline*, of course. But then Wyatt's got her breeches all up in a wad again with *Coke's for Horses*, *Lord, It Ain't for Men*, a series of various renditions of the folk traditional "Cocaine Blues," full of grit and class resentment returned thoroughly by Alpha with *Joni Mitchell's Morgellen's* and *Blues for Francis Bacon*, because let's face it, Alpha was always roughly twice as productive as the rest, but Howell slammed back at

her with the satirical biting scathing *Appalachianopolis*, and Alpha in turn tucked tail and cowered back with *Ebony & Ivory-Towered*, which had some nice riffs and hooks but was overall a little too toothless, and at that point I think Wyatt had entered a deep depressive stage in his bipolar cycles, and therefore didn't get much out besides *Shock Corridor*, after the Samuel Fuller classic nuthouse film, and *Mixtapes for his Exes*, a rather mean-spirited set of Howell Haidler covers performed in a very particular way so as to exaggerate and lampoon Howell's very natural and authentic vocal stylings in a way that most agreed was rather unkind. But the culture pretty much forgot about that when Dinah and Alphs blew everybody's socks off next with their collaboration *Rose Kennedy Colored Glasses*, which honestly would have held a bit more clout in the subsequent years were it not for its publication occurring so closely to the end of spring semester, when all went out to practice frugality or cut lawns or sit in their air-conditioned living rooms all summer doing jack shit but feeling sorry for themselves.

BLAISE GIFFORD

LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, OMAHA, NE

Thanks for coming out, y'all. I know you had purposes other than seeing the show, but it still means a lot. Gigs have been a little hard to come by lately, what with all these anti-folk campaigns and prejudicial city ordinances. Last week, Dave Dondero and I drove fourteen hours just to sing to the sound guy. He was reading a book while the bartender played on one of those Megatouch machines. We just had to suck it up. Poor guy. Dave's getting on in years, it's not so easy for him to get around anymore, let alone sleep in his fucking car because the owner of the Motel 6 is prejudiced against folksingers. So the fact that you could come here tonight and do me the kindness of hearing my stuff and asking for an interview really means a lot.

I didn't know them that well. Or rather, I didn't know them that well for that long. I should also mention that I was not present for that Lake Lemon fiasco, I was in a bad way of my own that weekend, so I can't help you guys there, but my understanding is that the whole thing was largely distorted in the media, that it all came down to some ungrounded equipment, and then everyone got off and running with this "27 Club" business, and the Yardbirds stuff, Keith Reif's tragic accident, the crises of performance art and the occultic order of the Black Bile, a secret society of Troubadours and Bards dating back to the early Christian Gnostics. It was that madness, the flared-up gossip, that caused all these copycat accidents— incidents— whatever you want to call them. In any case, the whole thing stoked up a wave of goddamn tragedy. Somebody should have been looking out for the kids.

Most of that anti-FRR stuff was conjured up and perpetuated by folks who were just looking to generate ad revenue. I never knew Ghee Wiley that well. I wasn't present when he—

when it happened. Everybody told me he was named after his great-great-great grandmother, who was supposedly Geeshie Wiley. At Lomax, everybody was always mythologizing and self-mythologizing, either to make up for a life they felt they'd never lived or to cover up for one they had. It was a sensitive group of individuals, like a pressure cooker for neurotics.

I beg your pardon, I harbor no prejudice against the mentally ill, but had you been on campus back in those days, watching everyone hash it out as if on soap operas, swooning and sobbing when they weren't hurling glasses at one another. These were not your typical excesses of literary or musical artistry, but a performance, a parody of them. It's easy to romanticize and misunderstand what things were like on ground zero. This is something modern American musical culture has always shown a real aptitude for, one that would give the Germans a run for their money. Flounder in your antics, look backward however many hundred years, and gild your middling stature in history by saying, *we* are just like *them*, just like they were, we have been here all along. We are part of a tradition.

The problem was that most of these, let's call them, "eccentric temperaments," on-stage personas, constructions of authorship and musicianship, came lifted from sharecropping bluesmen in the 1930s, or the confessional poets of the late 50's and 60's, and there were even a few that came out of a theater or operatic background, like Screamin' Jay Hawkins, which has its own particular flavor of theatricality. What I'm saying is, pretty much the entire study body at Lomax had a real problem with measuring their aesthetic dicks, if you'll forgive the expression. It was very important that they be regarded by their peers as serious artists, and at that time the idea of serious artistry had a lot to do with the aggregate amount of psychic pain and suffering one had accrued throughout one's wretched life. But most these folks were from the suburbs, or more generally speaking, the middle class.

But we were all friends, me and the Big Four. At one time they would have called us The Big Five, but, ultimately I had to distance myself. Still, I liked each of them very much.

During our first year, before everybody started drawing lines in the sand, before everyone adopted a distinctly us-versus-them mentality, back when everyone was cordial and polite, we spent some time together, them and I, quite a bit in our first year, just hanging out or whatever, trading songs, smoking out, drinks, what have you. Some amphetamines here or there. Maybe a little Molly or LSD. None of this opioid epidemic shit we have now.

The FRR Founders— Howell, Alpha, Dinah, and Wyatt— they had a real sense of duty, of their purposes as artists. I'll give them that. Generalized prickishness, in my experience, is something of a toxic byproduct for that kind of aesthetic self-assurance, a kind of collateral damage. Not that it excuses any poor behavior. I think that particular temperament is more the consequence of a kind of obliviousness. It is not easy to operate in these two separate worlds, one where you're a reasonable, private person, and the other where you're at the height of the unreasonable: *artistry*. What gall, what stones one must have to take up this cultural outpost, which even the generous only acknowledge as being *indirectly* beneficial— at best— for the soul of a populace. But the Big Four, man, they had it, that crazed motivation. Divine inspiration.

I'd never met a group who seemed so sure about their artistic mission in life. Not in this century. Think "Paris in the 20's." Think the Beats. Gertie's in Greenwich. CBGB's, Max's Kansas City. You hear about it, old stories, but we just don't make them like that anymore. The scene is too big. The subgenres have subgenres. Everything is a buffet style assortment of tastes. It's a damn shame. There used to be integrity in the form, in playing a style of music, not a melange of styles all smashed and pastiched together without real rhyme or reason. There's no "scene" anymore. It is now "the scenes." Soon we'll have a full blown feature film.

The Big Four had that old world, out-of-the-desert ascetic streak about them, wild-eyed, which I found at least marginally endearing, as far as the songster stunting went. They struck me like those modern continental philosopher types, the Kierkegaards and the Nietzsches, writers of the highest ironies and insights, consumed by hypocrisies and mechanisms of systems in a world rapidly progressing into areas that were not necessarily wholly good, beckoning their audience to “wake up,” those courageous Negative Nancys, eloquent curmudgeons, contrarians with a thousand-yard stare and bones to pick with both God and human psychology. Melancholy wasn’t depression. It wasn’t a pathology. It was the height of wisdom, the initiation of the artist’s soul. The Founders certainly held onto their preoccupation with the limits of the mind, the way we set our own various traps and bondages to alleviate us from our existential freefall. But to gamify one’s psychiatric symptoms was not some cynical, self-destructive act. It was a distillation of a centuries-long process. It was the social engineering of the artist.

Since the Lomax Center— and this would have been years now— I’ve heard alumni refer to them negatively, with comparisons to cult leaders, of all things, Charlie Mansons and David Koreshs. The Hoosier’s own Jim Jones. That’s a bit of a stretch. You know, now that I think of it, I want to say that allegations of that sort popped up around the time of all the trouble and media attention, some of the Newport ‘64 gals referring to them along those lines on the social medias, which, with their national academic affiliations, even among art programs, I’m sure caused some problems. Nowadays calling something a cult is just another scapegoat. It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just how one group points to another and says, *we’re dominant, we’re legitimate, we’re the authority, and your organization is nothing like us.*



ROBERT MCGEE

PATRON, CHATTERTON TAVERN, RAINTREE, IN

Well, Howell had this story, you know, that Dinah loved to goad him into telling and retelling, while Alpha and Wyatt laughed to tears behind them, smacking the table till the glasses jumped and ashing their cigarettes and throwing back their heads in great guffawing laughter while they slapped their knees and held their bellies. But it was Howell's story to tell, always, you know—you don't take other folks' stories—and you bet your ass he could tell it. He did so with so much charisma, so much gusto.

Howell had that folksy, charismatic way about him. This great big burly mountain man, wild and matted locks parted down the middle and a burning red beard. Howell had this bassy, booming, operatic voice that could carry him through any dance hall. This man spoke and you listened. It was as simple as that. God it was easy to listen to him talk, that was the case for all of them, really. They had a real knack for the performative, you know, for playing a room. The story was apparently attributed to the late great Townes Van Zandt—wait maybe it was Guy Clark—no, no, it was Townes who was, well, let's say, “well-known” around his hometown for his affinity for unusual inebriants in his youth, like for example intravenously injecting rum and coke, or *sniff sniff sniffing*, wild and wide eyed, off airplane glue. They didn't have a word for “huffing” back then. It hadn't killed any kids yet. Neither had Howell and his friends. I'm just fucking with you. You can't trust the mass media's headlines, but I don't have to tell you that. But it was that glue story which always tickled our wild bunch of country and folknik freaks, this nubile musical revolution ripe for fertilizing and propagating.

“Two tubes!” Howell would say, holding up the peace sign. “Two tubes!” he would shout. Townes, you know, used to lie back in bed to make the most of the huffing and puffing. He would lie back with two tubes of airplane glue shoved in his mouth at roughly forty-five-degree angles. But one time in his sleepy haze of viscous chemicals the tubes leaked and affixed themselves to Townes’ teeth, which later they— well, supposedly— Townes swore they then had to knock out with a ball-pein hammer. Four front teeth, you believe that? And he got all new veneers, and everything turned out hunky fucking dory.

But the real kicker, the one that had us all in tears, slapping our knees and stomping our boots, was what Townes had said to the paramedic. And here Howell would always enter into this theatrical exchange of exaggerated droopy dog Texas drawls and uptight paramedics, sticking his neck out in that gaunt lean and sad way Townes used to do. Well, I guess the paramedic asked Townes, you know, “Son are you hooked on glue?” And Townes’ had replied, “No sir, I’m stuck.”

Aw, haw haw haw. Aw, hell, did that one ever bring the tears to our eyes. But it also brought to mind, for my mind anyway, and especially with regard to my good friends in the Folk Revival Revival, another audible anecdotal tale, told this time by one sired by Zandt, a certain JT Van Zandt, the eldest son, the one with his own songwriting career, you know, the one that Townes allegedly shot up in front of when the poor kid— who, by the way, is Townes’ spittin’ fuckin’ image— was only something like eight years old years.

Later, as a grown man, JT was interviewed by this film crew who was making a movie about the late great Townes Van Zandt, patron saint of melancholy singer-songwriters. And so they asked him, you know, about the drinking and the depression. And JT said his dad always knew how to hurt those close to him, that he was not a physically violent man, but hurtful, you

know in speech and cold affect. He would drink a pint of vodka a day— on the easy days— and god damn it if he didn't know how to hurt those he loved.

But JT said every morning, just before the break of dawn, he would awaken to Townes there, sitting at the edge of the bed, ready with an apology. JT said his dad would just sit there at the end of the bed, staring at the floor, and shake his low-hung head and say “It's a bitch, son. It's a bitch.”

I had those mornings with our young Folk Revival Revivalists. Those Kris Kristofferson Sunday mornings. Howell maybe most often of all. But I was there for each of them. Alpha was a goddamn spitfire, dismantling the patriarchy one acid-tongued exchange at a time. But she was soft and chewy underneath. Dinah had her lap steel psychedelics, the trippy sci-fi soundscapes. Wyatt had his mystic delta hoodoo and his anti-psychiatry crusade. Each adventured into their art past the point of exhaustion, and when the dawn broke and the bar closed, I was there to buy them breakfast. Each called upon me when they were down for the count, and I was happy to have been there to offer my support. It was my responsibility as their aesthetic elder.

It's always those true artists who got that sensibility, who vibrate with the pangs of the world. It's like with the Indians and their sitars. Sympathetic strings. You don't even have to pluck them and they're plucked. Vibrations on the miasma are enough to make them sing.

LYSOL WILLIAMS

LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, CLEVELAND, OH

Everybody has a story about their introduction to The Big Four. We had a lot of names for them, but it was always those four, that core quadrumvirate: Dinah, Alpha, Wyatt, and Howell. Dinah was the most strikingly obvious of those talents, but they really worked as a concerted unit, four bodies of one mind. Four forms of divine madness, just like Socrates taught. Apollo's prophetic madness—that'd probably be Wyatt, grand keeper of the anti-psychiatry discourses. Howell was definitely the Dionysian, the Bacchanalian, the ritual, intoxicating madness. Alpha was Aphrodite's erotic madness, for sure, even if it was often employed for the more militant varieties of feminist critique. That'd leave Dinah with the muses, the poetic madness. Dinah surely had the poet's soul.

But each of them swapped their hats quite a bit. They were, they *are*, kind of hard to pin down.

I heard a lot during my time there that they all bullshitted their blues, the depression and anxiety or the bipolar or whatever it was, depending on who you ask. It was said they used folk and blues music to prop up their psychic suffering, to gild it in historical validity, in a cultural tradition, the legitimacy of which could not be questioned without invalidating the very roots of American music. And no doubt this is part of the problem as time goes on, the linguistic looseness with which most commentaries on his mental states are articulated. I can say at least that we all saw eye to eye very much on the stakes of language, particularly in the artistic avenues of songwriting and particularly in the expression of human suffering. The Big Four just went a little off the deep end. And I don't have to ask you, after making your rounds. just how

deep and wide the lexicon stretches where my fellow alumni from the Lomax Center toil and speculate about our Revival Revivalist Cabal even now, even years later.

If we're being honest, the naysayers are just jealous. Sure, the FRR lives on in infamy, but most Lomax alumni would count themselves blessed to have any part of the culture regard them in any way for any reason at all.

All the flippant unkindnesses projected onto these, what I hear them called now, even after all these years, that awful stab of hate speech, fresh and grinning bloody: "Colics." It's a slur. It's hate speech, plain and simple. All this vitriol exchanged, and for what? The elevation of our personas? The avoidance of any real kind of connection born of openness and vulnerability? I believe it is true that the mentally ill are consistently paranoid that their suffering—by its nature disproportionate to external forces to the degree of pathology—is not real.

I believe that everyone tells a story to themselves to legitimize their condition— human, psychiatric, what have you— so that no one can question its authenticity. For some this means believing they have been cursed by God. For others it means embracing a fashionable narcissism. Still for others, the only way their peace of mind is achieved is through the invalidation of others, or by the very dimensional denial of psychopathology as a conceptual power structure.

The neuronormative say things like, "Everyone gets depressed, just stop feeling sorry for yourself." They say things like, "Do one thing to make yourself happy every day." They say things like, "your depression is all in your head."

Well, no shit. Thanks, I'm cured.

Who, besides the FRR, has ever stood up to assert that such proclivities are, in fact, the very bedrock of genius? Following this line of reasoning, if melancholy is a requirement, if suffering forges the soul of the artist, and such suffering has been delegated to the pathology of

the curative sciences, this means that said sciences have connived against artistry, have conspired against the young artist through the creature-comforts of the bourgeois middle class. This calls for revolutionary change, does it not? Is it so far-fetched, then, that in the study of these art forms, practitioners would be asked to expand, enrich, or deepen their melancholic experiences, if this was ultimately in service of that greater good?

But it would be unfair to suggest that shit went unslung from the better angels of one side. It was a dirty battle gliding o'er all. All these gossiping groups throughout the department, all these supposed schisms, this communal pretense among performers to be part of *us* and not part of *them*. How they all lanced their pathos and let the pressured puss spew about at one another and at that place, that which was once endowed and entrusted to them graciously as that haven safe guarded and treasured for artistic community. Iron sharpening iron. My god, that once and future place of lonesome remembrance. I'll tell you now in plain, as I have told the others like you who make their pilgrimage to ask me about that place: no human consciousness pierces another but through compromised avenues. But through cracked kettles, as Flaubert describes. Let no consciousness claim sovereignty over another and let all allegations toward pathology go sifted out from the sands of time and scattered into the wind. Let no one scrutinize your portioned plot of human woe.

It is your right.

I met the young and idealistic FRR Founders first during orientation for the assistantship side of our graduate school arrangement at the Lomax Center. You know their names: Dinah, Wyatt, Alpha, and Howell. This is no secret code. I met the others later that week, and by the end of the month we were all fast friends. Seriously, there was never any strife, no workshop brawls,

nothing outside the reasonable expectations for gossip and shit talk that one might expect from a group of twenty-something musical artists.

How many times have I told it to find myself telling it again to two empty suits? I am tribe elder, I am oral historian. I age and wither and pass it down to you in goodwill and in earnest so that you can transcribe and annotate and render unto your revised objectivity in what respects I must surely be mistaken. What spirit of exchange our media brings. What a time to be alive.

For us graduate students, it was the literary magazine, the open mic, or the archive, and you had to put your time in with one for so many hours to ensure that meager stipend dropped safely down the vault like clockwork every month. A few of the particularly unlucky got wrangled into teaching 101 composition. This segment of the secondary education machine brutalizes the budding artist, puts them on the ground floor of the diploma factory. Oh, the richness of the 21st century art life. Oh, the places you'll go.

There we were, all of us chirping around a lecture hall like excited baby chicks, bubbly and coated in a thick mediating membrane of self-consciousness ensuring that, on this training day anyway, all would be polite and cordial and kind in a semi-dramatized farce of *oh can you believe they make us do this* and *I feel like a week of training is really excessive*. Yes, weren't we all united in our mutual suffering, and it does it not feel like some degree of cosmic chuckling justice to say *the times they are a'changin*.

SEXEE SAYDEE SASKAGOON  
FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE, CHICAGO, IL

“Colic” is a pejorative neologistic innuendo. Usage of the term began in the American Midwest sometime in the second and third decades of the twenty-first century. Pervading accounts suggest “Colic” originated as a slang term amongst the student body of the John and Alan Lomax Center at Raintree University in the Great Dead Heart of the American Midwest, where Sexee Saydee Saskagoon once thumbed her way down south from her native Canada to follow in the footsteps of those revolutionary Folk Revival Revivalists forever doomed to persecution by CIA Psyops present throughout the American University System since the LSD mind control experiments of MKUltra following the second world war. We all know how rare cultural advancements are throughout this region. This was never an accident. It was a concerted effort to suppress those that might threaten the Military and Prison Industrial Complexes’ status quo.

The Founders— that is, the visionary progenitors of the Ordo Atrabilicus Aestheticus, the occultic musickal society with which Sexee Saydee Saskagoon holds the high-rank designation of Adeptus— attended The Center at that time and have since been accused of the idiom’s maternity amongst the slew of performative violences and public unalivings unfairly attributed to them. The FRR faithful have been accused of riding the word’s infamy as a slur in order to inundate their organization into pop culture consciousness, bad publicity being good publicity and all, especially for hate speech.

Such accusations are baseless. They are also irritating and lacking imagination. Sexee Saydee Saskagoon does not sow discord, let alone into the American English Dialect. Sexee



Saydee Saskagoon may well be radical as well as subversive, but if Sexee Saydee Saskagoon is on the side of anyone, it is the mood-disordered. It is the suffering. Sexee Saydee Saskagoon sides with the psychic ills. Sexee Saydee Saskagoon sees objection, evasion, joyous distrust, and love of irony as signs of health. Sexee Saydee Saskagoon sees everything else as belonging to The Man's pathology. Sexee Saydee Saskagoon is among the unique in this opinion.

"Cholic" is the bitter amalgamation of Infantile Colic and the most sacred romanticist's Melancholia. It at once ridicules the labeled party's woes as comparable to a crying baby while also alluding to a cause from intestinal blockage.

Which is to say shit.

It is biting. You have to give it credit for that.

I suppose the accusation of authorship directed at Sexee Saydee Saskagoon should be read as complementary given the word's implicit wit. But Sexee Saydee Saskagoon did not coin it. Sexee Saydee Saskagoon does not call names.

Our language, its poetry— such things are propagated like fungus, or bacteria, or a virus.

POINSETTIA GADSDEN

LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, ANN ARBOR, MI

*The Lomax Center?* Lord, God, it's been years. *Whew.* I was just a mean little thing back then, with mean little braids, howling spitfire from my guts, aiming for that boogie-woogie plucking of Sister Rosetta Tharpe with a little contemporary hint of Bonnie Raitt, feigning flamenco strum styles on my little resonator ukulele, all brass and patina'd like the rails of a grand old bed left to the slow corroding ruins of time. I miss that sweet little box. So many smoky nights at the Chatterton shouting and arguing over the stakes of our craft, tipping back heavy pours from old Morris, that kind old coot. Never moaned over my tab, which was lengthy and overdue often. Not a once.

We did a lot of busking in those days, a lot of pass the hats around campus or in Raintree's quaint downtown, sometimes trucking over to Bloomington for the bigger crowds which somehow always yielded less money. A lot of grand talking out back in alleyways behind bars, flicking cigarettes and forging pledges for the burgeoning twenty-first century blues revolution, back to its primitive heart, back to the basics of visceral call and response born of blood and sweat and the sinew of overworked muscles and souls deprived of their very basic humanity. And it stretches back even further than that. Strange that we hoped to revive the blues in the Union, in Raintree, of all places, but overall, I enjoyed my time in Indiana. I made a lot of lifelong friends at The Lomax Center, many of whom I'm still quite close with, and actually play with from time to time, when I'm not teaching or traveling. And with the exception of a few isolated—

Oh.

This is about *them*. The Big Four. Our “Founders.” Seems like they’re the only Lomax alumni I ever hear about anymore. Goddamn Dinah, Wyatt, Alpha, and Howell. Four fucking horsemen.

Well, you’ll have to forgive my tone. You seem like nice folks. Frankly, if you are trying to go dirt digging for a scoop nearly a decade old now, I don’t have to tell you that you’re a little late to the party. All of what I said back then is public record, you know. You didn’t have to waste my time. I don’t know anything about any brainwashing, any social contagions or mass hysterias. I will not speak to any acts of violence attributed to our cultural revolution by misguided lunatics or bad actors. You’ll hear no conspiracy theories humored here. I live in the real world. No Folk Revival Revival artist ever compelled anybody toward suicide. Not in earnest. These were performances, plain and simple. The Beach Boys didn’t surf. CCR was from Berkeley.

Each lunatic is responsible for her own lunacy. What an absurd thought, to assume any community’s culture, any band or song or musical festival, could somehow overrule a person’s very autonomy and agency, like some Pied Piper, and drive them toward self destruction. This gives Folk Music a bad name. Gives The Blues an even worse one. Glimpses of 80’s metal hysteria, playing Ozzy backwards to hear the devil’s homicidal instructions, the Satanic Panic and all that nonsense. I don’t care what legal precedents have been established in Ohio or Illinois, or what legislative measures are propelled through committee by nefarious groups to ensure the message of American Roots music is outlawed. There remains free speech, or so this country’s constitution claims. There remains personal responsibility, a core tenant of the Folk Revival Revival’s most deeply held beliefs.

The fucking “Big Four.” The audacity of it, to even compare them to the cultural craze of the British invasion. To Beatlemania. These infamous FRR Founders didn’t found shit. Didn’t find shit. Didn’t learn or work or refine their craft. Feigning radicalization is not the same thing as turning into a revolutionary. There were others of us, you know? The accumulative cultural worth of the formerly-operational Lomax Center at Raintree University is not merely the—

I’m sorry.

I’m sorry, I really am. You seem like nice folks. It’s just—

Ghee Wiley was a close friend of mine. I loved that boy. We were friends right out the gate. Paired up in TA training, he immediately made me feel at home, despite being so far from my native southern surnamesake. It helped that we were just about the only actual black people in our class. Culturally black. But Ghee just had, I don’t know, a kind of *levity* about him. For someone so astoundingly talented, an actual marvel of musical capability— Ghee had twelve fingers, did y’all know that? — he was such a warm *goof*. He never took his music too seriously. That’s why he could fly over a fretboard like that. He could fly the way Bird flew. That’s how he could blend the old American standard styles— folk and blues and blues’ baby jazz and blues’ stolen bastard rock’n’roll— into something that just, pardon the cliché, felt so *new*. I could talk about Ghee for days.

But the others?

I just can’t.

I won’t speak to what happened at Lake Lemon. Check the public record. Check your clickbait articles. The AP picked it up and was happy to publicize all that airing dirty laundry. You will find my statement. My friend ended his life right in front of us. And the copycats followed. I cannot understand why. I mourn him. I miss him. This is the summation of thoughts I

have on the subject. Their overarching theme is the unceasing tinge of regret and despair. Still is. Of course, nowadays there's no shortage of the deep blues.

What I will say about those Four is this: they were not complex figures. They followed in a long tradition of white American musicians— yes, even Dinah, their tokenized Front Street Girl, can't make American roots music without a black face leading the bunch, straight out of Barry Gordy— appropriating music borne from centuries of violence and inhumane treatment. No news there. It was as clear then as now. What made them particularly infuriating was the *nature* of their appropriation. The FRR Founders were those quintessential nazal-gazing, weepy types who inevitably steered any and every conversation in the direction of *their* psychiatric woes, their disorders and diseases, and the extent to which *they* were debilitated, which is interesting, because they always seemed to have plenty of motivation and energy when it came to getting a load on during days-long binges or proselytizing about the the “true” blues, pontificating about their own solipsistic, narcissistic vision of how art's “supposed to be.” Four solipsists all fucking and sucking and whining about their petty little depressions Eat your heart out, Fleetwood Mac. At least Stevie Nicks had the wherewithal to boof her blow and keep her vocal chords well taken care of.

She's a real artist.

In any case, in the hivemind mindmeld of the Big Four, the Blues, as in, the entirety of the form, in all it's melancholic gleam and heavy-hearted beauty of hopelessness and desolation, was the ideal tradition for their songs because it was the only folk tradition that seemed to— and I'm using their own words here— “match” their own experiences with emotional pain and suffering and despair.

They saw the two as comparable. Slaves and suburbanites.

They got that shit from Wyatt. Aleister Crowley of the white boy Midwest.

Wyatt, who grew up in some comfortable Midwestern bourgeois middle class cookie cutter suburb. Wyatt, whose most profound inner pains were only ever self-inflicted. Wyatt, who at once preached the virtues of public mental health while consistently refusing to seek medical treatment or counseling for his illness. Everyone knows a piece of shit like that. Wyatt fucking Rundle. Wyatt, who used to say, at the bar or wine bar or coffee bar, that all people—*all people*—suffer to the same degree, which is to say, according to Wyatt, as much as possible. What a load of holy bullshit. But there they were, his little gaggle of followers— Howell, Alpha, and Dinah— to nod and agree and sow their secret little club of visionary musical innovators.

One week Wyatt'd be the prophet, and when he wore himself down drinking till dawn, Alpha would emerge with her amphetamines to offer the same bullshit vision from the militant feminist's perspective. Then, when Alpha got too gacked out to sit still or speak intelligibly, good ol' Boy Howell would take over for a few rounds to hold court with his *aw shucks* country boy schtick, talking all amber waves of grain, rolling joints like Willie Nelson. But if you let Howell patter on too long with his horse shit libertarian vision of existence he'd reveal his latent chauvinism and misogyny, and thereabouts is where Dinah would chime in and take over. Dinah, betrayer of her people. Dinah the quiet psychedelic blues mind-blower. Dinah was the real deal at first, and she sold out for the affections of a trio of white devils. She sold out because she couldn't hack it alone, couldn't live in the solitary space of her own brain. Dinah was lonely in that god awful way only the extraordinarily vain can be lonely. She was the loneliest soul relative to a whole wide world she expected to support and sustain and coddle her. She was to be its locus, the genius axis mundi around which the culture congregated. And once they didn't, once they wouldn't, she hung up her soloist schtick and found the first fucking group of loudmouths

who could provide her the slightest sense of identity. Freewheelin' frontier spirit my fucking ass. Dinah was better than all of them, but she gave it all away so that she didn't have to cope with the silent terror of sitting alone in a room.

But I'll tell you, after all that's happened, the public tragedies and wanton acts of performative violence, I blame Wyatt most of all. It was Wyatt who started up on his high horse about the ubiquity of melancholy, the equity of existential suffering with which all humans are supposedly made equal. There is no comparison in human suffering, according to Wyatt. The homeless schizophrenic and the billionaire suffer melancholy's bitter tinge in equal portions. Fuck me. Little Wyatt Rundle, who thought he hurt like my great great great great grandfather hurt when he was told he was not a human. My great great great great grandfather, who endured some myriad strikes of senseless violence and bore witness to a million more. My great great great great grandfather, whose freedom was finally permitted by a country founded upon inalienable rights bestowed by their maker, but was kept penniless and coerced into spending the rest of his days on the farm working for meager bits of currency that weren't even accepted across the county line, until one day he was called to God in blinding pain and delirium due to entirely treatable complications of a urinary tract infection.

But Wyatt, like the rest of those demons, thought it was his *right* to inject himself into this, our holiest parent of musical traditions, the Blues. Wyatt saw himself, in terms of aggregate mental distress, as the heir apparent to the American Blues, and if you cannot see how utterly problematic that is, how *violent*, how downright absurd that is, then you will have some difficulty coming to terms with the "controversial" waves of violence stoked by the Big Four's brief and frenzied reign as prophetic patron saints of the folkies.

But it would be unfair for me to omit the fact that, overall, Wyatt wasn't a bad guitarist. He could fingerpick with all five and a double thumb, which ain't nothing. They were all first-rate musicians, for whatever that's worth. Great poets, too. Not that it makes a difference. But that did not—does not—entitle Wyatt—nor anybody—to be a son of a bitch. Melancholy, depression, whatever— it's no excuse to harm others, directly or otherwise. There's a reason they lock you up for suicidal ideation. Your little suicide will take place on sovereign ground, on taxpayer property. It's not free. Whoever has to scrape you off the sidewalk has to be paid. Try as you might to think only of yourself, the rest of us will still have to pick up the slack. The rest of us Americans have to cope with self-responsibility, so where do you get off thinking you can kill yourself for free?

Let me be clear: It is not— it has never been— my, nor anyone else's charge to participate in the poor conduct of an artist merely because they claim mental illness, particularly in the case of this loose excuse for a real problem, "melancholia." The degree to which we make accommodations for the supposedly mentally-ill is particularly suspect, given the slippery and subjective definition and classifications for a depressed person.

Just because you are depressed, does not mean you have a get-out-of-jail-free card for being a shithead. You're still responsible for yourself, for your actions, for your interactions with the outside world and its inhabitants. There is no disease, psychiatric or otherwise, with a symptom list that includes bigotry, willful ignorance, or performative violence to make the whole thing "real." And certainly not the manipulation and abuse of others in service of furthering that "realness." Well, there's BPD, sure, and perhaps the Factitious Disorders, but what I'm saying is, it's not an excuse. Even if you are sad, really sad, overwhelming sad, or sad to a degree disproportionate to external stimuli, you are still expected to be a person like the rest of us.



That's just the way it is.

You have to grow up.

It is bad enough that The Big Four yearned to bear their crosses with such self-assurance and self-righteousness. For a group of depressives, though, they were awful high-functioning. What I'm saying is, it was a put-on. For all of them. The Revival Revival never elected any leaders. We never established a parliamentary board of oversight, never solidified any of these structures of power. Power was usurped. The Big Four took it all over and wielded it to their petty whims, as extremists do.

And now you have the audacity to want to ask me about *them*. About the good ol' glory days.

Well fuck them.

ARMALITE BENNETT  
LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, GREENWOOD, IN

I first heard Wyatt play at a Friday night Chatterton open mic during the fall of our first year at Lomax. Lysol Williams had just finished a satirical rendition of Cat Stevens' "Wild World," to which the audience responded pretty positively, until he overzealously grabbed the mic with that *smack* and ring of percussive feedback and, swinging his leather-wrapped Guild Jumbo over his shoulder and around his back as if holstering a weapon, broke into a kind of heavy-handed diatribe about commonplace misogynies crystallized into the history of our beloved popular culture and in particular those apparent in the folkish musical genres—essentially autopsying all the thing's understated thematic charms for a audience savvy enough to keep up with such slick moves and ever-hot for the scent of condescension— and how as recent as the 50's male doctors wielded fire hoses with which they sprayed the hysterical vaginas of hysterical women, and oh did you know that he calls himself Lysol on account of the beloved disinfectant's sordid origins as a douching solution, and how we're going to start a Revolution in the Midwest, that the Midwest will have its day to step in and sign the wet cultural concrete with our grubby and calloused fingers and toes, and so on. Lysol was real hungry for the scene and everybody could tell. He should have left on the high note, but he indulged like a sensualist and left the eye-linered and beret'd and soul-patched and mustard-clothed among them scoffing and rolling their eyes into seemingly cosmic orbits.

Up the plywood steps to the plywood stage trots this oddly diminutive young man— I should clarify here that it wasn't that Wyatt was a small man, by any means, he just had this kind of concave posture complete with low hung head that always made him appear less than what he

was— with jet-black greasy hair cut short around the ears but bangs nearly covering his eyes in swoops that appeared quite wet. But the eyes were something else. Pupils so big I was certain he was on molly or some comparable synthetic derivative, as was popular throughout Monroe County at the time. His eyes were black holes, and he had these wild mutton chops that must have protruded at least two inches from his cheekbones, giving the black-eyes-like-a-doll's-eyes kind of jet black frame that created a kind of visual illusion where his face just seemed to absorb all the light emanating toward it without any kind of reflection or shine. It was unusual. He wore blue and black flannel with blue bootcut jeans, a wallet chain, and wine-dark cowboy boots, denim-out, of course.

Suffice it to say that with one gleam of that chain under the hot stage bulb the whole room seemingly sneered a collective *passé*, something that I have to believe Wyatt felt, because next thing he climbs the meager stage staircase and then literally *drags* this giant copper-bodied twelve string resonator behind him as approaches the microphone, says nothing by way of hello or audience-engagement— in fact, as I recall he was looking at his feet the whole time, like some kind of shoegazer— and just breaks right into this downright ghastly groovy version of Blind Willie McTell's Piedmont fingerpicking classic "Dyin' Crapshooter's Blues" that I had ever heard and have never since. Then he did a kind of Son House styled "Terraplane Blues," you know, real percussive and syncopated but with the resonator *clang* similar to the way in which House used to sort of smack his Old National more than strum it.

He then concluded with a profoundly unsettling performance of Junior Kimbrough's country blues drone-thumb-bass pumping "You Better Run," which in hindsight sounds rather appropriate. I was astonished to find that the audience fell into a sort of low murmur after Wyatt dragged his patina'd crimson ax on off with him without farewell or applause or egged-on

tomato tossing. No, not even a low murmur. It was almost a kind of collective hum or whisper. Or, whimper. It sounded like a bee hive. In any case, they reverted back to their literary pretensions once Alpha floated onstage with her handsaw and horsehair bow and expounded upon the symbolic phallocentrism implicit in the acoustic guitar's hegemony in American popular music. Everybody sipped their cocktails and thoughtfully *hmm*'ed then checked their phones and called for checks.

BUDDY EMBOLDEN

FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE, INDIANOLA, IA

I can remember the first time I heard country blues, the legacy of piedmont blues translated into the rural juke joint scenes of the south after the war and the advent of electric amplification had propagated past the city limits. This is the music of Kimbrough, Burnside, McDowell, Ford and Davis— if Davis’ polio-handed, butter-knife-slide guitar work isn’t provided its own space in the subgenreal sprawl.

Anyway, at its racy, sweaty, sexy heart, this music isn’t all that complex relative to the more full-fingered fingerpickery employed by the more high-modern delta blues practitioners, McTell and Johnson and Johnson and the like. For the post-war country bluesmen, all you needed was a finger or two to pluck the melody, while your thumb played a quarter or third note bass drone, unchanging, just *dum dum dum dum dum*, like a bubbling river beneath that higher melody.

And I will tell you, there is just something about it, something about that added dimension of complexity sitting below an otherwise frittering melodic movement, which grounds it, gives it weight and cosmic depth relative to those more attention-grabbing riffs. It is a simple gesture, but while the average Joe listening thinks it’s the hooks and refrains up top pulling him in, keeping his interest locked in the groove, it is in fact, in actuality, that thing below, that bass line, pumping along steadily and never wavering, like Shakespeare’s iambs, like the human heart.

It is a mesmerizing thing, to establish that bass line beneath, and to then fire off the melody up top, pulling and twanging and bluing, to the point that your listener forgets the bass

line is even there. But THAT is the thing that moves you, friendos. Any twelve-year-old who has ever awkwardly plucked the intro to “Sweet Child of Mine” alone in their room will tell you there’s just something missing. And yet any authentic bluesman, any real and great old one who’s worth his salt and made his bones, with his mojo hand and his esoteric hoodoo knowledge, knows that you can pick up any old bent and bowed stringbox, rife with dissonant, pensive twang, and that Blue Man can tell his audience they’re about to hear him play an old traditional they’ve heard a thousand times before, but if he does so with that unturning bass clef down below, with that drone thumb beating of the heart, well, he’s very probably about to hear some feet tapping, some hands clapping, then the heels shuffling, then the sweaty limbs slapping and smacking and rubbing all together, all to the beat of that one unwavering thumb. It is that thing beneath which drives us.

The melody may hide it, but it is there, conducting your heart to beat in time with the entire throbbing cosmos.

This is one of our most deeply held beliefs. Yield to despair.

DR. EAMONN ONDINE MCNAMARA

DEPARTMENT CHAIR, LOMAX CENTER FOR AMERICAN FOLKLORIC STUDIES

RAINTREE, IN

It has been suggested, by sharper and, I dare say, more flippant tongues and mighty pens, that the so-called “Big Four,” the supposed “Founders” of this so-called “Revival Revival,” crafted public expressions of mental illness— the breakdowns, the episodes, the erratic behavior, the paranoia, the delusional theories, the sexual proclivities— that these behaviors and attitudes were all merely performative and not, as their radical disciples and self-destructive apostles would suggest, the creative synthesis and distillation of a soul in deep existential angst and melancholic suffering, a triumph of the American Blues Ethos for the 21st century.

I, for one, am simply not that kind of doctor, and so I would not presume to put a dog into that fight. If I have any issues with that wry and troublesome cadre of ex-students of mine, and rest assured I do, they are purely aesthetic, ideological, and only exist with regard to the young peoples’ work, and not with their biographies.

Frankly, and I know it may sound ironic, but the older I get, the more I feel utterly convinced by this pulling, nagging insight, this sad misdirection of attention, utterly tragic, that the budding artists nowadays, the leading voices in the musical scenes, the rockstars and slam poems and high-brow literati, all the social-media entrenched, tend to look upon the lives of their predecessors for insights into how to live, how to act, how to indulge and nurture and grow their artistic souls, how to find tradition and history, how to find themselves a lineage.

But in truth their foresingers and forepluckers and forestrummers donned personas just like everybody else. They made artificial, public selves like masks to wear over their private

faces, and we have no idea they were *really like* when no one was watching, say, on a lazy Sunday morning with toast crumbs in their beards, or curled up couchwise slurping soup in their sweatpants, soap operas bickering on the television. That domestic reality remains the realer of the two. Sadly, this is the state of things, the condition of the culture under late capitalism. The bored and satiated bourgeois manufacture a sexier self to parade about, a contrivance mistaken for an authentic identity, to convince everyone, but the self most of all, that they are real, and interesting, suffering in earnest against a false vision of the world which would see them as essentially *boring*, unaestheticized, or run-of-the-mill.

Modern advancements, luxuries, and niceties have rendered our daily lives a certain homogeneity that the 60's counterculture was not afforded. One need only think as far as movies! In those days you still had to *go somewhere* for them, concerts and shows you still had to *go to them*, but now, you go to a concert and your best view of the stage is an LCD screen. One goes to a show and one doesn't want to admit it, but one *kind of* wishes they were watching from the intimacy and comfort of a screen, the precise and flattering camera angles, the equalized audio, and so on. One may not want to admit it, but one's feet hurt, and all the internet videos and webisodes they have seen hundreds of times seemed so much more *personal* than this public display. And so one goes about treating the "private" internet video as being somehow more authentic than the "public" concert, when in reality the former was the more curated and rehearsed and by all accounts fabricated, and the real thing, well, just turns out to be a disappointment.

These problems of scale, dimension, and authenticity, well, they're unavoidable, when technology renders the media not merely *too fast* to mentally digest but also *too wide* to maintain



any real sense of proportion between the world around you and the music being made *about* it, and whether or not or if they bear any *real* connection to one another.

The Folk Revivalists, the *real ones*, during the 50's and 60's, now, *we* took for our idols not some facsimile of coolness and sexiness, no, our lineage was of a working class people, the sharecroppers, the farmers, the early modern downtrodden. We had for our fathers and mothers the Son House's and the Skip Jameses, men of sorrowful religious reverence and violent outcries, the Robert Johnsons and the Son Houses, soul-sellers come to crossroads with the Morning Star himself, the Geeshie Wileys the Woody Guthries and the Leadbellys, folks who life was downright *hard* on, downright *mean* to, and who saw in this serene and sad music a means for social mobility and consciousness, a means of empathetic connection with their common man and woman in a way that was purely *American*.

These folks did not merely don their blue bent notes, their warbling croons and cries, they *earned* them by the hard living they were forced to endure. They did not have this crucial disconnect which now plagues our art, *self-consciousness*, they did not need to ask themselves if their suffering was real, or what *genre* expressed it most succinctly. They did not have to worry about what was popular or passe or purple prose, they did not have to worry about this abstract "popular culture" continuum constantly sucking the life and brilliance out of a culture. They retained their mythology, their sheer mystic bent, their little bit of that Santeria, their Igbo trickery, the drum, the call and response, the yams, their sadness, their identity and the suffering which made it real.

You must remember: I was really there. I was part of the Folk Revival. The *real* one. You simply must keep that in mind. That was my scene. You see, I was at Gerde's on all of those roaring and rambling pass-the-basket nights, with a red bandana around my neck, looking for my

poet friends, my Trotskyite friends, my painter friends, and especially all my fellow Folkies, the freaks, the traditionalists, the Irish jiggers, the troubadours of English ballads, et cetera, et cetera.

I was there when Gerde's closed their doors! A truly sorrowful occasion of such sweet remembrances. Greenwich really was a village at that time, and what a village it was, what a community, that we cultured and nested and nurtured on a daily basis, through our goodwill and folk songs and inventive arts, through our love and poetry. If I may don my old mannish hat for a moment: kids these days. These kids these days simply cannot appreciate what we had back then, and instead of building and promoting their own artistic community, they have chosen instead to usurp ours, to misshape its very image, its history and integrity, and to make for their sacred station that blasphemous performance of distorted commercial "bluesy" rock that Dylan paraded around with utter and reckless abandon on that sad day in 1965, a day the music died all over again, all on its own, without the aid of a Beechcraft 35 Bonanza. All it took was the ill will of a bitter and misanthropic folksinger. That *Judas*. And so, yes, when it was poised to happen yet again, yes, I did all I could to intervene. It used to mean something to preserve an old tradition carried out of west Appalachia by wrinkled grandmothers singing to their grandchildren. We used to *protest*. We were active, conscientious. We fought and fought. Now, they just feign.

This is where a celebritizing society lets off, everyone constantly performing for everyone and most of all for themselves. But what happens when a principal part of this performance involves an authentic experience of emotional suffering deriving from the performer's real-life experiences? What then, must her "real life experiences reflect?" What then, is her "real" suffering? This kind of Escheresque self-consciousness and reflexivity, it is like an infection. No, it is like a virus. It spreads and sickens and makes the art attack itself. It hijacks the work and drives the artist into the dirt. Literally, if you believe the mass media's coverage of

the FRR. Which I do not. The body counts are inflated, the testimonials contrived. It's among the best smear campaigns ever penned. PR prowess on the order of Edward Bernays.

No, I am not particularly concerned with whatever Dr. Roland had to offer. Like I said, this behavior is most accurately read as purely performative. And between the three of us, she talks like an angry ex, no? Think of the daughter she all-but-abandoned for weeks on end while she was galavanting around with her "visionary" renegade students, violating our vows with Dinah and, frankly, probably the rest of them. Nowadays it's all spectrums and polygamy and open relationships for unprotected sex orgies with whomever strikes a passing fancy, nevermind keeping the promises you've made to be as one till death, nevermind the sanctity of the institution for which you signed up. I'm sure one of you have at least one dead marriage. Not that it is any of my business. But even with regard to the Lomax Center, Riddy's penchant for dramatization has rendered her account somewhat unreliable.

No, these were not Picassi *in utero*. The Folk Revival Revivalists, they were not innovators, they were not inspired, they were not rebels, they were not progressive, they were not prolific, they were not original, they were not enjoyable, they were not dignified, they were not focused, they were not devoted. They weren't really *anything*. They were mentally-ill narcissists. That is it. They were building a songwriting movement more closely comparable to a cult than a genre, and I, for one, am downright sick of this costly romanticization. Someone must take a stand.

I was always incredulous to the idea that this so-called "millennial" generation had much of any creative potential and prowess. Even the way they related to their instruments was nothing short of fascinating. I would be interested in how they 'rank up,' if you will, with other mediums, and the ways in which the artist relates to the kind of work they produce. It was their identities as

writers, as *poets*, and all the narcissistic baggage gifted from the treachery of the literary discourses and all their pretensions which wrought this whole rotten happening. It was never about the music or the poetry or the message.

I mean, this whole “rock star” ideal, the persona and posturing and whatnot is a ridiculous one, but it is one that, historically speaking, is usually done at least *in earnest*, as in, for the good of the art, as the musician is a performer of the stage. But these literary types from the FRR, the kind of folkster poets that would be enticed by Lomax, they performed in *their lives*, for them. They were unilaterally fraudulent in that way, every one of them constantly creating a more sexy and romanticized artistic ideal with all the postures, the melancholy, the wine, the opium, the women, the men, the excess, the eccentricity, the mythology. It was all constructed. It was a conscious act, in every one of them, even if they did not want to consciously admit it.

Now, what was that you said about my lack of empathy for the melancholic artistic archetype? If Jung were alive, no, no if *Freud* were alive today. No, no if Jung were alive today he might consider the writerly life only yet *another* kind of thespianism, a regrettable off-stage stage performance whose only redeeming quality is the blissful linguistic and narrative runoff of its disagreeable processes, like the production of ambergris. No, Mr. Shakespeare, the world is not a stage. The stage *is* the world, and as it decays and crumbles, so too does the basis by which performance and earnest existence are distinguished.

Yes, were it not for their works, the folksingers, the poet songwriters amongst us, would be the most unredeemed citizenry of the populace, the downright worst kinds of people, unworthy of empathy and liberty, and perhaps civil rights.

It does not surprise me in the least that their vacuous activities and shallow extremism has wrought an epidemic of death and violence down upon this once great nation. Shame on them, and shame on you for listening to them.

DR. VIRIDIANA ROLAND

ADJUNCT LECTURER, PURDUE UNIVERSITY, LAFAYETTE, IN

As Orwell wrote of Dalí, “Autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful.” Fair enough. How often it is we forget Dalí’s fascist affections in favor of his dreamy landscapes. If it will aid the charge against our present fascist romance, allow me to denigrate myself once again, on the record, for the record. You, too, can revel in my public embarrassment. Gather ‘round for the lore, the scathing transgressions, the seething revelations.

I met Dinah Candace Kindred for the first time at a bookstore poetry reading & musical performance on the Northside of Indianapolis in an area the youth culture calls “SoBro,” or South Broad Ripple. This would have been around the early twenty-teens, maybe ten years ago now. Dinah, Alpha, Wyatt, Howell—they were all in the same class. All the rabble rousers. Ghee Wiley enrolled a year later after completing his undergraduate degree at Raintree, if my memory serves. Each of them were mentees of mine, at one time or another. Dinah moreso, perhaps. I recruited her after a serendipitous series of circumstances.

It was at a pass-the-can style concert and fundraising event for an Indy-based artistic coalition called The Midwestern Surrealists, whose membership and momentum was said to be on the rise. I kept in touch with a few of my friends from my IU bohemian days who worked for *NUVO* and *Metamodern Americana*, as well as an ex-lover I stay in touch with who runs a weekly blues show on WFYI, all of whom spoke of the burgeoning Midwestern Surrealists with great enthusiasm, a particularly eager kind of zeal, in a way that reminded me of the ways we used to ache for our records and receivers, for those old ragtime 78s we would find in thrift store miscellany piles and estate sales, with their tanned and crisp wax paper sleeves, their musty

smells, or those we would write ourselves over long, overstimulated weekends, rushing to the booth to record with our scrounged together tithings for studio time at the mercy of some disinterested engineer, clutching the demo tapes to our chests on the car ride home and listening to ourselves with the volume low, smiling with anxious glee, eyeing one another with crazed affection for this pretty thing we had made, these aesthetic objects which glimmered in stark opposition to all the hollowed-out banalities of this dreary, disappointing existence.

It had been a long time since I had felt strongly about a musical subculture, since I'd watched one grow from its primordial ooze, or followed some exciting scene's burgeoning momentum, particularly one that was regional or ran across multiple kinds of media. It was rumored the Midwestern Surrealists had drawn up some kind of communal document or statement of purpose but so far nobody had seen it. This impressed me. I'm a sucker for the brash, romantic maneuvers of collaborative artistic organizations in the throes and birthing pangs of their foundational phase, where they set their foot down, draw a line in the sand, and resolve that this, *this*, is what's hip, *this* is what bleeds upon the cutting edge of the culture.

This sympathy only widens as I get older, I suppose. It's a nostalgia, but one, I fear, that glimmers without referent in the material world. This is a recent insight, and I'm not sure about it.

I had not thought much of the various buzzes about the Midwestern Surrealists until I spoke with Maria, my friend from *Metamodern Americana*— it is easy to mistake one pocket of the popular subcultures for another— and hanging up the phone I was truly saddened by our conversation, because I had not realized how much my musical passions had subsided of late, I had not even realized it had happened, and I had always expected such a loss of aesthetic enthusiasm to come with some great tragedy or terrible experience, but here I was, driving down

I-37 on a Wednesday evening realizing that I had just sort of lost track of it all. This made me feel ashamed and fraudulent. Like a poser.

I overcompensated with a joint— Eamonn’s idea of us getting a little weird after rewatching *Eyes Wide Shut*— and a CD of Joni Mitchell’s *Blue* I fished out from between the passenger’s seat and middle console, but there was something about the orange in the setting sun and the hawkish muted brown in the turning trees, the two-lane state road and the expanses of empty Midwestern plots, that made me feel like part of a pharmaceutical commercial, and that just made it all worse.

Eamonn, my husband at the time, had begrudgingly agreed to stay home with our daughter Willow for the evening, Willow, who had recently begun scrawling obscenities on the bathroom walls, and already I felt the weight that awaited me once the open mic was over and my friends and I went across the street for a glass of cabernet and some locally-aged gouda and caught up for almost an hour exactly and then sat staring down at our torn napkins and lip printed glasses and then exchanged gentle sighs and well-wishings and made toward the door, hollow pledges resounding to do it again soon, each with our very own gentle nagging desperation we recognized in one another but would never bring up, because the time for such talk had long since expired already. I stopped at a gas station in Southport and pretended to step out of my car to take an important phone call. Who was I pretending for? Who was here to watch this middle-aged woman’s Oscar-worthy performance of solipsistic naval gazing and woe-is-me’s?

I thought about just heading back home but decided against it. Don’t overthink it, I thought. Don’t overthink. Enjoy some music and poetry. Get out of your head, out of your narcissism.



I walked inside and bought some unfiltered Lucky Strikes and a white lighter and kept driving.

That evening's events were held at Perdurabo's, a local secondhand bookstore chain known kindly around the region for its socialistic business model and complimentary coffee. It was, by all accounts, a booming literary enterprise whose expansions were modest. Everyone, including the managers, took part in running the register, making offers on old books, sorting, shelving, and refilling the communal percolator that produced an acidic brew with a strength that rivaled most motor oil. The matter of the coffee's fortitude was, depending on who you asked, either a criticism or a compliment. I enjoyed it. It was not the frou frou stuff, but it was not low grade. I do not mind coffee you can chew. What I liked about it was the effect it seemed to have on all shoppers and attendees in the building. Like a nod to old Vienna, here was an elixir that fueled discourse, here was the stuff that stoked bibliophilia into the most beautiful bibliomania. The selection of creamers was also very well curated. There was a handwritten sign among the sugar-free sweeteners and napkins that explained the origin of some in-progress construction along the glass-paned facade of the store. I later learned that these renovations were prompted by a severely opiated elderly woman who drove a large Buick into the parking lot, chose a space, then accelerated up over the curb, through the patio area, and into the store. Nightly news had mistakenly reported the incident as some kind of targeted attack. This was later corrected, and the woman had her left hand amputated before she was compelled to relinquish her license and take up residence at a senior society where the doors only lock on the outside.

I arrived early, feeling as though I, too, might drive my car into the storefront, off a bridge, into a lake. I thought of waiting at a nearby bar, or getting something to eat at some greasy spoon within walking distance, but I had just poured a cup from the big simmering

cauldron, and I thought it would appear rude to the staff if somebody just waltzed right in for the coffee and then out again without the slightest feigning of intention to shop, only to then come back later for the free entertainment.

I stood there too long contemplating what I should do next, wondering why I couldn't just 'exist,' why I had been cursed with this lifelong affliction of excessive self-attention. As Dostoevsky said, *to be too-conscious is an illness— a real thorough-going illness*.

I heard a throat clearing. A large woman with really terrible body odor was waiting behind me in a baggy sun dress and sweater. She pushed a cart filled with glossy, purple, serialized romance novels that looked considerably worn and were each marked with a bright orange clearance sticker. I heard the clicking of the price gun nearby. A tall, heavy set young man with ball bearings in his ears and a thick beard under his chin eyed us slightly from the nearby magazine rack, and immediately I understood his gentle oversight of the situation: this woman must have been some regular, someone with too much time on their hands and nothing better to do, who likely traded in old erotica like these moldy, water-damaged bricks of paper with their gilded covers featuring Fabios clutching damsels were somehow some precious commodity worthy of preservation and collection. You have to keep an eye on the odd ones. I wondered if she had caused some kind of trouble in the store.

"Excuse me," I said, taking my white styrofoam cup and little black straw, stirring and gently blowing on the cup as if I had been in deep concentration over the cream and sugar process.

She smelled like rotting potatoes and cat urine and seeing her smushed down countenance immediately I pitied her, looking down at my feet in self-reproach as my heels

clicked away on the linoleum floor. Who was I to pity anyone? From what great height did I deign to pity the rank-and-file citizenry?

I perused the nostalgia section, drank my coffee, and poked around the Science Fiction section for a while. I stared at the spines. Nothing jumped out at me, and some sucking sensation in my abdomen told me nothing ever would again.

Then, before long, it was time for the show.

You will have to forgive me for all this context, but it is very important that you understand my frame of mind around the time leading up to the evening, to the show. Or, no. Understand that much of what happens next, even as I tell it now, *doesn't sound like me*, doesn't seem like how I would act or react or conduct myself. I am not usually like this. I wasn't all there. I mean, I was there, I attended the event, but it seems like at every turn I was acting like someone else. Some soft fugue state, some minor disassociation. Something in the miasma.

Maybe I was just stoned, or maybe there was a gas leak in the store. But, no, I had had the coffee, I had my wits about me. And my senses are never dull when I am sad or anxious. They are woefully acute. I am not the thick foggy depressive type. I should have been acting differently. Whatever the cause I, Viridiana Roland, being of sound mind and body, tell you now that that night had a profound othering effect on me. And I remember the moment it started. Take from that what you will and know I am not the type. I am not some New Age crystal-toting free bird.

It did not happen right away. The event opened with an over eager emcee who introduced himself as Paul and who seemed to develop a slight, affected drawl out of nervousness. He gave descriptive previews of musical acts to come, pattering on and on in glowing admiration for each, as if the performance had already happened, providing biographies and what you might call

a ‘pitch’ for each of the visual artists represented at the show, commenting on a few titles of paintings and woodcuts and prints that he felt would be a worthy addition to any lover of Indy’s Local Indie Arts. He groveled in thanks to the sponsors like this was some televised award show. He made bad gaffs and puns. This man, I was to understand later, was not part of the Midwestern Surrealists, but had been of crucial importance when it came to gathering up local support from legitimate businesses for the evening’s event, which I was meant to understand as a commentary on the Midwestern Surrealists themselves, mainly that they had been kept at arm’s length from the greater midwestern Zeitgeist up until now because they had been deemed a little too eccentric to be reliable, which ultimately did them a tremendous favor when it came to conjuring up some mystique amongst the local buzzing scenes, the earnest metalheads or straight-edged hardcore types, and even the exhaustingly-irreverent electronica community.

I thought he seemed foolish at the time but later came to respect him, gaffs or not, because the world needs these Virgil-like guides, the curators and appreciators, the critics and enthusiasts, those with sense enough to keep both feet on the ground but possess sensibility enough to know important art when they see it. This is a difficult tightrope to walk. As an academic there exists a similar tension. The world needs people who can translate innovation and artistic progress. Let them be allowed their silly jokes.

The first act, as I recall, played what sounded like the bluegrass equivalent to surfer rock. It was pleasing but generally pretty toothless. They wore khaki cargo shorts and could not stop thanking the audience– my god, this generation and its gratitude– which had by this time become pretty sizeable considering the venue and its bizarre acoustics, what with all these bookshelves and carts pushed along the edges, the factory-style scaffolding and cheap faux-marble flooring.

I resented all this groveling, the artists thanking the audience just for a lack of outright hostility. In my pre-show perusing I had neglected to look for Maria, to even remember she existed, such was my depressive narcissism, and now with the show going and the coffee shop ambience holding everyone for the most part still and thoughtful, the prospect of navigating the meager crowd seemed impossible, and I started to feel the low ache of claustrophobic anxiety foreshadowing the short-circuiting, sweaty stammering panic attack to come, knowing all at once that I had had too much coffee, something I know triggers me, and immediately I started working my CBT, the mindful meditative process of letting one's thoughts pass by as if they are large semis on a highway but we only mistake the highway as being "us" when really "we" are a passive observer sitting at a bus stop *beside* the highway and therefore not subject to its speed and chaos. A cartoonish metaphor, but it helps. It helps to not take yourself seriously, to set your ego aside and work one's psychology like a system, with a structure and protocols. *Note five things you can see. Four things you can hear. Three things you can feel. Two things you can smell. One thing you can taste.*

The second act was just bad Huck Finn: barefoot, jeans in cuffs, spitting rhythmically into jugs and failing to harmonize, giving the vocals all the nuanced brilliance of a tornado warning. I was having trouble keeping my rate of breathing at a resting pace, and so I then took two Propranolol from the gasketed cylinder attached to my key fob and, feigning a thoughtful hand-on-chin pose, I slid the soft blue pills underneath my tongue and waited for them to dissolve, cleansing my cognition of this morbid self-attention.

As my tongue began to go numb I felt a slight relief and took a deep breath, but I had underestimated this gesture and it came out less like a sigh of relief and more like a gasp for air, and I could tell the audience members directly behind me couldn't help but notice my deviation

from normative human activity, though I did not dare look back at them to verify, but I heard something of a whispered aside or murmur.

I was relieved to find that my crowded sector of the bookstore was coincidentally closest to a dark hallway where empty shopping carts and bookshelves were kept, and at the end of this hallway was a novelty neon sign indicating the restrooms. I softly meandered and nodded and excused my way toward the ladies' room, trying to assure myself that what the adjacent attendees witnessed in my behavior could easily be understood as a lapse in coordination common among the side effects the average person can experience when taking Benadryl for autumn allergies, and was therefore nothing to worry about, nothing that would warrant ridicule, something a normal person may safely categorize in the fleeting, ephemeral recesses of memory.

I was pleased to find sanctuary, to see that the bathroom was both empty and spectacularly clean, save for an amount of graffiti in my stall that seemed really uncharacteristic of the women's room of a bookstore.

I crash landed into that stall. I must have looked like Tilda Swinton in the opening of *Michael Clayton*, you know, pits stained, wadding up toilet paper and jamming it under her arms. But such scenes are not real. They cannot capture the reality of irrationality, of a brain loosening from the sensory phenomena that bind one to the greater whole of reality.

As I caught my breath and attempted to intellectually halt my sweating, I could hear outside that the second act had concluded to meager applause, and then the transitional house music commenced once again, this time with Harry Nilsson's "Everybody's Talkin'." A great song. I heard his words and the nimble fingerplucking guitar and knew that this weighty knot in the back of my throat was as real and memorable and historical as the sounds outside, but I just

kept trying to stifle it, to shove it deep down, to keep myself from outright sobbing. Because what kind of a ridiculous person does that?

An automated air freshener on the opposite wall shot out a mist of god-knows-what that fell through the air and smelt of linens that had been grown in a lab from the crushed carapaces of bugs. I looked at the various markings and tags along the cold stall walls and toilet paper dispenser, some angular and crudely carved with paper clips or coins, some elegantly scrawled in Sharpie. There were names and symbols and amalgamations of both combined with an acerbic wit and a crude profane sense of humor that still felt a little too thoughtful to be mere graffiti. It looked like a kind of graffiti parody, or some kind of satire, but the direction in which its edge was pointed eluded me. Much of the marker text appeared to have a pretty consistent style and was possibly completed by a single person, and I considered the possibility that maybe it had been tagged tonight, during all the pre-show hullabaloo, and the more I examined the bubbly letters, which were difficult to discern, the more I wondered if these were somehow a byproduct of or motivated by The Midwestern Surrealists or their detractors, if they had detractors, and I further considered the possibility that if some staff member or tattler were to come into the restroom and hear a frantically panting grown woman wadding up toilet paper while reading random words and phrases that they might then put two and two together and accuse said frantic woman of having authored the extensive vandalism. But now who can say they live with their thoughts totally ordered, without flights of fancy or inversely perverse worries bearing absolutely no correspondence to reality? The mind just reads into things. It cannot be helped.

Then I heard the door open. I, as you might expect, froze up, my shoulders and posture squaring, eyes affixed to the vertical seam in the locked door in front of me. I stared at the slit. I stared at the lock and latch. Slightly below the little circular lock on the door I noticed a very

small and simple piece of graffiti, again in Sharpie, that I had neglected to notice, given the more bombastic and overstated art on the other walls. This piece was different: it was a frowning face, two dead dots for eyes, and a clownish, oversized frown that sort of hooked down and under to a rounded period on the left and trailed off like a tail on the right. It looked like some kind of Egyptian hieroglyph or hobo marker on the side of some old train, noting in secret *can sleep in barn* or *bad water* or *talk religion get food*. I stared at it, tried to listen for the footsteps of the bathroom's second occupant, but could not. I stared at the little sad face and counted my breathing. Inhale odds, exhale evens, up to ten and back to one. Two expressionless eyes without the frame of eyebrows or nose. Such an odd little hook of a frown. And I'm staring at the frown, listening for the lady outside the stall, hearing the water turn on. And I'm counting my breaths, inhale odds, exhale evens, up to ten then back again, and it is such an odd little frown, were it not for the eyes I might mistake the face entirely and see not a frown but an ear, a human ear with a couple of studs suspended above, yes, an ear on its side, a severed ear rendered in minimalism, a severed ear like the one Kyle McLachlan discovers in a vacant lot in Lumberton on his way home from the hospital in *Blue Velvet*, and the moment— and I mean the *exact cosmic instant*— I think those two words, “Blue” and “Velvet,” no sooner do I mentally utter that third syllable of the second word when what do I hear emanating from the other room but the 1950 Bernie Wayne and Lee Morris classic in that quintessential Bobby Vinton style, haunting and lilting and scaring my attention into order with this strange synchronicity: “*She wore blue velvet / bluer than velvet was the night.*”

Blue. As the moon. And I had wore it too, and for how long? My god. How long.

But it is not Bobby Vinton, and there is no line of doo-wapping backups doing their ooo's and aah's. It is the low register of a woman's voice, and the backup vocals are coming from this



radiant, sparkling lap steel guitar, thick in reverb and sustaining in tone with the slight warbling oscillation of the operator's hand on the slide.

And instead of the staccato strums of clean guitar from the original I hear crisp organ chords, no sustain whatsoever, very unusual, on an old Mellotron, no, wait, could it be an actual Chamberlain?

And I am suddenly cold, I am not sweating at all now, but I am actually cold, I am fucking freezing, and trying not to jolt and dance from the chills emanating behind my ears and sending their shockwaves down my arms. I remove the wads of toilet paper from under my arms and toss them between my legs into the bowl. Though my heart may murmur and seize and submit to oblivion, though my brain may spill out through my nose in an aneurystic burst, *there*, out *there*, is life, is the time and place to be alive, if only for the one single, sad sweet moment in the fabric of space-time.

I pull the flush cord and exit the stall and I had somehow not realized how deeply yellow the restroom lighting was. This sick, sanitary modern space of shame and occlusion. I had thought this place a refuge mere moments ago.

This shit closet.

The bathroom is empty, but the sink is on.

I turn the little knob and float back out to the show.

I am expecting a Roy Orbison sized ensemble. I am expecting a carpet on the stage to cover up all the musicians' cables and dampen the sounds of their barstools. I am expecting a well-seasoned band familiar and comfortable in the pocket enough to bring it back together for one more show because hey, it is for a good cause.

I can hear it. Pythagorus and Plato. The vibrating of the spheres.

I can hear the full band save for a drummer, which is not so unusual for the folk scene, particularly one in a venue with minimal sound system accommodations.

I am expecting an Odetta-sized songwriter singing with a kind of sultry feminine reservation that at once seduces the listener while assuring them of some great and terrible underlying reservoir of strength yet to be unleashed.

I hear an organist with Al Cooper's eager timing, a slight bit early each bar, begging our interest and pushing the pace.

I hear a slide guitarist well-weathered in the Hawaiian acts and country circuits of old Nashville.

I hear, I am expecting, the aching facial expressions of a prime Billie Holiday. So effortless, so tinted in subtlety, I knew it must not be some young green thing, it must be some old piano-room master who came up in the deep southern juke joints and escaped for the city but in desperation could only make it to Indianapolis, singing through the smoke all these years until she appears before us tonight, cured and lean and full of salt.

But we see through a glass darkly, and all that, no? And do we not always clip that verse too short, forgetting: "but then shall I know even as also I am known." What sweet and hollow promise.

On the stage sat a diminutive young woman, could not have been more than 5'1" at best, all by her lonesome, with brown skin and round cheeks that glowed soft even under the harsh lighting, with vibrant freckles the size of peas all over her face and neck, but none on her arms or chest. She had this kind of neo-Stevie Nicks sensibility about her, in an olive tank top and large linen skirt flowing far past her ankles and appearing to have been made out of some kind of antique wedding dress or fine tablecloth.

Her hair was kept in one large, massive dreadlock that reached halfway down her back and was held in with one blue bandana she wore like a greasy-elbowed maid and a number of tattered portions from some long-since absorbed red bandana scattered throughout. The frizzed ends of her dread against the white light left of the stage gave her silhouette a Dylanesque appearance not unlike the cover photo of *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Vol. 1*.

She sat with her black and white zigzag steel in her lap, metal fingerpicks tipping all five on her right like witch nails, a number of pedals connected by a wild thicket of red cables at her feet, and to her right a keyboard rig two deep with a beaten and bruised Hammond on top and, yes, an old Chamberlin on bottom. Behind the artist stood a blonde Peavey Delta Blues 210, made in Mississippi. "Blue Velvet" concluded, but the audience was too taken aback, too held in awe-filled shock to react. It took them a hearty morsel of time to regain their senses and then collectively lose their shit. It took me even longer to recover. Perhaps I still have not.

"I'm Dinah Candace Kindred," she said. "My gal Friday here is going to give me a hand on this next one, but we might need your help, too."

With some percussive assistance from her gal Friday, who added a dimension to the performance not unlike the clacking cans and raindrops of tinkling pots that pepper Tom Waits' seminal 1985 album, *Rain Dogs*, Dinah went on to play a swelling low, rumbling and sensually-charged yet yearnful rendition of Elmore James' legendary composition of the blues traditional "Dust My Broom," and even sitting down at her lap steel Dinah managed the musical heavy hip swing, the raw sexual energy, of a Bessie Smith or Ma Rainey.

How a small figured woman like Dinah conjured up the sonic heft and girth of a much bassier woman is simply beyond me, but she had a raw rasp in her tenor register that sounded just so big and dark and mean. She was electrifying, and immediately I know she was the ideal

candidate for our Singer-Songwriter MFA program, which, I will admit, was presumptuous, but I ascertained from the gal and guy at the booth that Dinah was actually an employee at this particular bookstore, and not a touring musician, and only really did the songwriting stuff on the side, a labor of love, and I quickly understood, the way great truths reveal themselves to us simply, that I would be morally remiss as a musician and artist, and a human woman, frankly, if I did not at least pitch the program and gauge her interests.

I meandered and lingered around the merch booth. I inquired to the thoroughly tattooed and pierced but impeccably dressed attendant, who wore a fitted black suit and tie, and whose eyebrows were implanted with small silicon orbs to create a kind of reptilian appearance, what LP's or EP's were available by Dinah Candace Kindred. Body modification, I was to learn, was a burgeoning field in the greater Indianapolis area. The Reptile replied, through a bifurcated tongue, very politely, that he was not quite sure, as he did not exactly work there, but was filling in for a friend who had to step out. He pointed me to a few t-shirts and tote bags, whose revenue would be enlisted to fund and promote future regional folk scene shows. He gestured to the disheveled pile of jump drives and tapes in front of me, and after clarifying upon my dated technology, I inquired as to the availability of compact disks, and the Reptile smirked and gestured with an outstretched finger past the merch table to the store's secondhand cd section and a small handwritten sign at the end of the aisle that read: SUPPORT LOCAL FOLK.

I ventured that way and found a digipack collection available by Dinah Candace Kindred, *Three EPs for the American Science Fiction Ghetto*, its retro-futuristic artwork and packaging impressive in its quality and attention to detail. I carried the CD set back to the booth, the Reptile having been replaced by a pixie-cut gal straight out of *Breathless*, the horizontal striped shirt and

everything, whose nose was pink and wet with irritation. I explained that the other attendant pointed me toward the local section, and she seemed confused by my comment.

“The guy with the reptile tongue,” I said, but she looked at me like I was crazy, so I did not push the subject.

“What can you tell me about this?” I asked, handing over the CD set. Miss *Breathless* examined it, chewed her gum with slow irreverence, and explained that Dinah, in her day job as bookseller, was in charge of the fiction shelves, science fiction in particular, and that she was working on a series of songs designed to honor, indict, or comment upon some themes consistently apparent throughout a particular selection of seminal works in American science fiction.

At this point, she explained, scanning the back of the jewel case, Kindred had completed *Bellona Belladonna*, after the quasi-apocalyptic Midwestern setting of Samuel R. Delaney’s 1975 novel *Dhalgren*, *Gubbish & The Bleekmen*, after Philip K. Dick’s 1964 *Martian Time-Slip*, and *Horse Lover*, after Philip K. Dick’s 1981 *VALIS*. According to Breathless, Dinah was currently working on the second volume for this series, this time around tackling Anthony Burgess’ 1971 novel *A Clockwork Orange*, as well as Stanislaw Lem’s 1961 novel *Solaris*, and native Hoosier Kurt Vonnegut’s 1963 novel *Cat’s Cradle*.

When I asked why Dinah played folk and blues covers on this particular evening, as opposed to playing original works that might promote and help sell her stock, Breathless replied: “I don’t know. She says they’re progressive. She’ll only play them front to back.”

And I thought: *my god, how impressive.*

I did not want to come off as too eager, and I felt an odd kind of parental self-reproach at the realization of this insight, because I was feeling, I was behaving, like some kind of groupie.

*Did I have a crush on this girl?* I asked myself.

I did not know. I knew, though, that I was now feeling *something*, something where there had once been not only nothing, but the self-absorbed, existential dread of nothingness itself, a black hole, a pit with no bottom. The nothing and the suffering that the self-conscious human consciousness conjures alongside it like an echo fading out in the cosmos.

All I could ascertain from introspection was that the first-hand experience of Dinah's music had imparted to me some kind of transcendental levity, some kind of soulful intoxicant, some greater beauty piercing through my mundane, darkly glass, and this sensation had, in its freshness, drawn me through a kind of Platonic *remembering*, a new introduction to a very, very old feeling, and I was somehow like a kid again, budding for a brief but oh so long teenage year in Bucksport, Maine, fleeing a breaking home through the second story window and down the adjacent tree, quietly clasping the gold door of Roy's GTO, feasting on each other's kisses as the engine idles, the thrill of a squeezed thigh, the gentleness and care of young love punctuated by the deep love of shared taste, a shared musical experience, a shared ride to *Truth*, to *Beauty*, arm in arm in our make-believe beatnik self-stylings pushing back against the punchy dumb culture of late 70's american folk rock lingering along the pre-Reaganite 80's, *hey hey, my my*, the cocaine and crushed cans and distorted ideals of "rocking out," keeping our dream of the Folk Revival alive like Bob and Joan in our weekly Americana Mass and Confession, our steamy coffee shop gatherings, houses packed, windows foggy, my knees buckling along the front row of the crowded campus coffeehouse while Dave Van Ronk cries out, primal American, a mere feet away, "*Heeeeeeeee was a frieeend of miine*," his thick mustache and vaguely feline front teeth making him appear as some mystical anthropomorphic walrus, something out of some far off and fantastical pre-modern landscape, something not of this world, not of our lowly

disillusionment of national identity, our weathered optimism, beaten down from thoughtless wars and assassinated visionaries, from revolutions that never arrived.

This is where Dinah's music took me, to the heart of American Folk, the proverbial song that, as Llewyn Davis suggests, isn't new and never gets old.

I needed to bide my time a little bit. I had to process this wealth of sensation. Dinah and her accompanist exited the stage and stepped outside into a bundle of cigarette smokers, and I, in turn, orbited in nonchalance around the merch booth, a meager collection of homemade albums burnt onto jump drives and cassette tapes and all manner of hip outdated media.

I felt so eager. I was nearly giddy, nearly spouting out little giggles like a deflating balloon, bubbles and bursts of pressure, of enthusiasm. I was ready to be her roadie. I was ready to bail her out of jail and lie to her parents. I was ready to write with her. I was ready to harmonize. I was going to sell her on Lomax one way or another. This was my ideal student, gifted into my workaday life as if out of my very dreams. Dinah was the reason I had come to teach, to *create*, at Lomax—it had only taken me twelve years to realize it.

This was one of those rare moments of aesthetic and empathetic connection so refreshing and ripe and life-affirming that its very hue and saturation forecasted upon the monochromatic blandness that had accumulated on this entire chapter of my life. And that sounds bad, I know it does, and I love my daughter, and I loved Eamonn at the time, and I had recently received tenure, and Jagjaguwar Records had expressed interest in my latest project— how do I explain it? How do I explain a revelatory moment like that, the moment you realize the pool is much deeper than you thought, the moment you thank a god you do not believe in for allowing you access to a brilliance and beauty you thought you'd long overdrawn and overextended and worn out and up

to its very sad and sulking ceiling? I felt freshmanish; I felt green and sincere and utterly human; I felt, yes, love.

Here was a Human Be-In.

I introduced myself to Dinah and her small group of friends. I was trying not to gush, but I was gushing. I told her how wonderful the performance was, and how this was precisely the kind of stylistic invention juxtaposed by a love of folk traditionals that we were trying to cultivate at The Lomax Center at Raintree University, but were really struggling as of late, and then I apologized, not wanting to show my hand so quickly, not wanting to make myself appear as one of these sharkish agent types who only want to suck the marrow out of a performer.

Dinah blushed and said, no, she appreciated the sentiment, and that she knew how hard it can be, feeling so fervently in love with and productive of a musical tradition in a cultural landscape obsessed with manipulating it, watering it down into more consumable “pop” forms, and how refreshing it can be to find in another the same flavor of musical zeal, like two prophets who find that the same God speaks the same language.

I was on her every word. My feeling was that, if by the end of the evening, if I had not adequately convinced Dinah to come make music with us at Lomax, that I might very well stay, find a place in Indianapolis, and work to nurture the folk scene there, where at least there was an artist big enough to man the helm. Come what may.

Dinah asked me if I would like to join her outside for a cigarette, and though I had accrued a twelve-year clean streak after a lifestyle of two packs a day, I said that I would be delighted, and I suddenly remembered the cigarettes I bought off 37 during my disillusionment. How had I known I would need them?



I'm fairly certain that I would have jumped off a bridge with Dinah if she asked me to. It was as if her music did all the legwork in winning me over. My life was a dull lull but hearing the music of this young woman reminded me what it felt like to get your blood pumping again, not flowing, but *pumping*, with pressure and momentum, like a volcanic eruption or a shotgun in the mouth.

We walked outside and smoked under the glaring light of an adjacent billboard that read, "Depression: #1 Cause of Suicide," in these kind of squiggly block letters meant. Dinah explained that her bookstore had tried to get the billboard removed because they were worried that it was attracting the attention of suicidal individuals looking for a venue ripe for a slick local news report with a nice foreground/background depth of field. Apparently, there had been, in the past two months, three separate occasions where an individual committed suicide in the parking lot outside Dinah's book store, although technically it was a strip mall, so it wasn't exactly fair to say these were all directed in some way *at* the bookstore in particular. The geographic concentration of these incidents, in addition to a six more in the apartment complex adjacent to the strip mall, had prompted federal government officials to send out environmental scientists as well as physicists to evaluate whether or not there might be some *force* or common frequency in the area that was somehow attracting these individuals to this particular chunk of Indianapolis, and if this was the case, they might soon have a public crisis on their hands. What's worse, apparently there were murmurs up the pipeline that state officials were starting to really worry that this chunk of space would start to accrue some kind of cultural infamy on the order of Aokigahara, the Sea of Trees, a flank of Mount Fuji that was featured as the location for a double suicide in the 1961 Japanese novel *Tower of Waves*, and consequently became *the* destination for Japanese citizens who wanted to end their lives.

The latest of these incidents involved an elderly man from Myanmar, who claimed that the candle store adjacent to the Dinah's bookstore was intentionally selling candles that smelled like burning human flesh, a scent this man had become tragically acquainted with in his home country, which was, at that time, in the midst of a genocide. This man drove his rickety sedan into the parking lot, double-parked it between the two handicapped parking spaces shared by the bookstore and candle store, left it running, removed from his trunk a can of gasoline, stretched himself out on the pavement, and self-immolated.

Dinah said that this event in particular had caused a substantial bump in the overall sales of the Psychology section of the bookstore, which she shelved. She said all the frantic individuals consulting her for recommendations from Freud and Jung and Kay Redfield Jamison and Andrew Solomon had been overwhelming her of late, so much so that she had been having panic attacks again—yet another step of common ground on which we found ourselves relating—and had had to call into work on multiple occasions, saying she had the flu because she was too ashamed to admit that all she could do was pace around her apartment trying to complete some vague task in her head, though she could not figure out what it was, and she said she had spent entire days like this, in a generalized state of distress that did not seem to have any sort of catalyst or inciting incident, just a deep dread that seemed to fog the front of her mind, the part that allowed her to think of a task and then complete it, and Dinah said she was surprised to be admitting this all to me, because it was all so embarrassing, but that she had felt an immediate sense of comfort and familiarity with me, like we just operated on the same wavelength or something, and I agreed that, yes, I too was feeling this sense of electricity, that I, too, had been having intense bouts of anxiety lately for which I could find no solace, and for which I could find no source save for the malaise of my middle-aged life, which I didn't exactly hate, but with

which I was no longer in love, and how I wished I could return to that youthful place in life where one is fulfilled and consumed by a singular purpose, a singular desire to *want one thing*, an absolute purity of will, and Dinah smiled, and blushed, and asked me if I had any plans for the rest of the evening, because she had an apartment not too far from the store, where she had a bottle of cabernet and a song, a very special song, of secret and nuanced and primal chord changes, that she would like to share, but could not play in public, for fear of how it might affect the audience.

And I obliged. So the two of us walked back to Dinah's apartment, where she performed this musick for me.

I have never heard anything like it.

The next morning, sitting across from Dinah at her dining room table, wearing a t-shirt she'd lent me, watching her drink her cinnamon-scented coffee with both hands on the mug, her feet hiked up on her chair, legs pressed against her chest, and I couldn't stop smiling. I felt so at ease, and I tried to ask about the song, but I couldn't find the words that could even begin to approach the *fullness* of our evening together, and I told her right that I wanted nothing more than to admit her to my program at The Lomax Center, and that if she declined I would rent an apartment in Indianapolis and join her musical coalition, but that whatever the case may be, hers was the music I needed to surround myself with, hers was the artist's soul I wanted to cherish and nurture and learn from, and I would be in her debt if she would come to Raintree and help me usher in a musical revolution there, and Dinah stared down at her coffee, slowly stirring it with a spoon, and she looked up at me with those freckled and ideally-formed cheeks of hers and said *yes*, and she asked me with her eyes to ask again, and then I asked her again would she, and she said *yes*, and my heart was going mad, and she said *yes I will*.

*Yes.*

Now, it's just here that I want to make something abundantly clear for everyone involved. Let it be said, too, that I offer up this testimony of my own volition, and have opted to do so without legal representation. I do this because I am innocent, ethically and legally, of all charges that have since been levied or insinuated against me, explicitly or implicitly, legal or ethical or otherwise. What transpired that night, what happened between Dinah and myself, what I heard and felt and learned, you will not understand.

Listen to me: you cannot understand.

But it is not what you think.

I am untroubled by insinuations of ethical misconduct. They have no basis in reality. As for my marriage, as for my supposed moral shortcomings, these are my own, and no one, especially not some male legislator from the state congress of Indiana, of all places, has any right to judge me. I neither met nor interacted with Dinah in my capacity as a tenure-track faculty member at Raintree University's Lomax Center. That came much later. We met as mere people, as civilians. As artists. I wielded no power over her then, nor now, and even the most generous characterization of my place in that department shows that all I did, all I ever did, was attempt to lobby for the financial, fiduciary university support of a young and budding artist. This was my duty, and this duty was enacted in full faith of our institution, my pedagogical values, and my most deeply held beliefs about the artist's role in society.

BRAD BETH

FORMER LOMAX CENTER GRADUATE STUDENT, NASHVILLE, TN

Why, yes, the folk stuff was very good for me, but for a while there I was almost caught up in those public outcries and PTA militias and public health ordinances.

Luckily, I pivoted.

After Lake Lemon's controversies, I, at the behest of my then-manager, make a quick lateral move in style from folky to country, and that has made all the difference.

Good ol' fashioned Americana, soundtrack of the patriots.

I had always wanted actual success. Not a success in terms of the Academy. "Art for art's sake," whatever the fuck that means. I'm talking record deals, tours. Exposure. Fame and a fat fucking check. I never had any interest in being a big fish in a little pond. I wanted airplay. I wanted screaming fans reaching for my dick like Jim Morrison.

Maybe that makes me, what, less "authentic"? Less "artful"? Fuck art. In this, our full-swing twenty-first century, "art" is just an apologetic for meager success and failure to break into the popular culture. Staying "true" to your "art" don't mean shit if nobody's on the other end to receive it in exchange for legal tender. I don't give a fuck what Frederic Jameson says.

Too cool to publish? Too true to sign to a label? Too pure to compromise the aura of your art by laying it down on a studio track?

Excuses.

It's just solipsism with a big slick veneer of romance.

I got no time for romance.

I'm too busy getting my nut.

None of my fellow Lomax alumni would like to admit it. They don't want to appear that hungry. But they are. As you can see from the crowd out there tonight, my musical livelihood has never been more, shall we say, virile?

Let me let you in on the dirty little secret: the successful ones, the ones for whom shows are booked and expenses paid, and balls are fondled— we don't give two shits about the culture, nor the stinking craft, nor the discourse, nor any of that other bullshit.

My friend and sometime-lover, Molly McAfee, for instance— she only turned to the yodeling country thing because her irreverent cool-as-ice neon raver EDM shit didn't sell and frankly she doesn't have the bone structure for all that shellac'd glowing candy flipping festival slut makeup. But when she dresses up like some sickly sweet nostalgic version of some big haired high boot Nancy Sinatra type, or dons mom jeans and an American flag flannel tied off at her ribs so her creamy belly shows like some Bobbie Gentry minus the old-style holler wholesomeness, suddenly people treat her with some savantish reverence, as if she is an ascetic come walking out from the desert having seen God, and you fucking sheeple are dumb enough to get duped into thinking that it is somehow not an act, as if she is somehow only performing when she is onstage, as if this loony schtick of attitude and vintage duds has somehow earned her the authenticity of a reeal laaafe southern belle from fucking nineteen-and-whatever-the-fuck, which she is not.

She's from the suburbs.

The truth is that Molly gets off on people objectifying her, she enjoys the power of it, she's vain as all hell, like the rest of us, and she couldn't care less about fucking authentic American country music.

Folk, country, it's all the same, all for the swine, for the unwashed masses. You get got or you go get.

Grow up. It's all an act. The rest of those sad fucking Lomax losers were just looking for a flag to fly in lieu of the slightest taste of artistic success. And look where it got them.

## SAD BOY BAAL

### FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE, KNOXVILLE, TN

No, man, I'm here for it. Ready and rearing and ready to go. Love an interview. Ready for my close up Mr. Demille. I've stored up my animus. You can't give it away for mornings like this. I'm augmenting on a high-level attunement. Discipline is key. The grand sympathetic hum of the black and bilious river most surely required a full sack. Or a sopping slit. Or whatever you got. But musickal practitioners in the audience know: you don't just give that shit away. You don't just shoot it in a kleenex and discard it to a graveyard of refuse. There is power there. The Vril-Ya. It's the same full body shudder that occurs in the death throws. We do it when we come, too. This is why the French refer to it as "The Little Death." And there are worlds of energy stored up in it.

Sure, a lot of us wear costumes. There is energy in the persona. Personas can channel the Vril-Ya. A lot of us don looks or masks or make-up. For a while we had a whole dried out pig's head we'd pass around and wear when playing, to let the others know when there were cops around. ACAB. But it fucking stunk, it kept making people sick. We had to throw it out before a show outside Knoxville, as some dumb fuck accused us of pinching the pig from a local boutique farm. Wasn't his pig. It was some wild hog we had to shoot while squatting camp in the Alabama brush. Butchered it and ate it, too. We use it all. Like the native. That gamey shit, it's hard to keep it down. We threw the whole thing on a bonfire, pulled it when it was black and smoking, hacked it open with our wood axe, and just went at it, grabbing handfuls of the shit. We had been so hungry. I dunno what we shot it with. Most of us stay strapped. This is America. Musickal weaponry ain't our last line of defense.



CARLA FAYE MATTHEWS

RESIDENT, NEEDMORE, IN

Back then we lived more northwest, by what's now Hope Experiences tour agency, before the fire took it all. I'm sure you've heard about that. To get it out of the way, no, I don't think they started the fire. I know they didn't. And yes, I know they started that fire out by the lake line. That was an accident. It was a dry season. That's global warming, not gang violence.

Those were good kids. I don't believe the chatter around town. They were basically a youth group singing worship songs, though they preferred the old traditionals. Those old traditionals, though, are songs of the gospel. That's what most people don't understand. It's Christian music, first and foremost. That's how it all started.

I talked to a couple of them about it outside IGA one Sunday, and we totally saw eye to eye. They said they were our very own Friendly Neighborhood Buskers, just like the old days. I put a twenty in their hat and they played "Boll Weevil Blues" just like our minister used to on those muggy summer Sunday evenings over iced tea and peanut butter cookies.

The media is always trying to pin something on somebody. How is it that every time I turn on the radio I can barely hear the song from all the words they have to cut out of it? N-word this, wet blank that. They might as well call the channel "Urbans Only." And they get applauded for it. Billion dollar deals. Hobnobbing with their communist New York City congresswomen at satanic fashion shows where people wear dresses made out of meat. But some simple, pure-hearted kids want to get back to the roots of it all, play some actual true music, and all of a sudden the media comes running.

I know what a terrorist looks like, thank you very much. Those kids could have revived the 60's, got a new Woodstock going, stopped a war, but you all were never going to let that happen, were you?

METAMORA SUGGINS

LOMAX CENTER ALUMNUS, SAINT PAUL, MN

Look: I have paid for the artistic indulgences of my youth. For my, whatever, vanities. I, in fact, continue to pay for them. The Folk Revival Revival meant something different back then. It's not like it is now. I was never a radical extremist. That all came later. I woke up and got the fuck out.

Not three months ago I was set to open— it's just me nowadays: me, the electric banjo, and the warmest, drippiest Fender 410 Hot Rod you ever heard— at the fall's onset I was all set to join this Marxist neo-psychedelic outfit, Red & Blue, for the southern leg of their first full national. Red & Blue is far out stuff, they have this whole psycho afro-beat sensibility out of the Nigerian and Zambian stuff from the early 70's— Ngozi Family, Witch, that sort of thing— all to say I was excited, and happy to see that I had finally, after all these years, been thought of as my own performer, and not some supporting-role part of this parasitic bullshit melancholic folk subgenre supposedly forged at Lomax— I swear to god, if I had a nickel for every time I had some eager beaver producer on the line begging me to play sad folky white girl counterpart to some sad folky white guy at some sad folky festival, their eagerness deriving from some eye-winking implicit expectation that I'll be invited up during the encore to sing harmonies on some sappy cover of "The Weight" or something and then end up going all Anton Newcombe on everybody, busting my banjo's skin with a *twang* over some greasy asshole's face like Bugs-fucking-Bunny.

Well, I don't do that shit anymore. The antics.

I'm interested in the real shit. The art. Not the theater.

Anyway, I meet R&B— dig it, right?— at this place Fruity's in Gainesville, and we get to talking, me and Roger, their front man & guitarist, about San Franciscan mutual acquaintances, our mutual longing for that *Slacker*-era weirdness of Austin and the friends we knew there and how it all seems to be becoming more and more, I dunno, *planned*? And Roger says *performative* and I say, you know, *exactly*, but he suggests, right, isn't the nature of what we do performative? And I say sure, total, but if we're all acting coy on this, if we know that we're filling an essentially *artificial* construction of the weirdo musician, wouldn't that just, like, open up the wild possibilities for indulging our weirdnesses, for really reaching *out there* for the most beautiful and inventive visions of musical and performative creativity?

I mean, if we all agree that we're putting on an act, why don't we at least reach out there and put on *our own* act, instead of emulating some past— and yes, politically simpler— Austin weirdo schtick? I mean can you really be a slacker after you watch *Slacker*? No way. Being a slacker becomes just another way of being an actor. And Roger kind of nods thoughtfully and we kind of see eye to eye on a lot musically about and he says he really appreciates my distinction of weirdnesses, my feeling that we should each get our own weirdness, our own orbit, that buying into each others' vocal fry and slant posture and irreverent affects and copying them and falling into line of, motherfucking, *coolness* is really just popular music's way of slow-burning into that globalist homogenized musical dystopia, only it is somehow worse because we'd all be posing and voguing our way through it, *expectantly*, you know? Wondering why fucking *Paste* didn't sent anybody out?

At the end of all this, dead long islands lined up affront our elbows in a crescent like those long Catholic candles with the saints on them— Roger says, you know, crazy idea, but, do you want to open for us for A B C and D of this first leg of our bla bla bla?

And I say, *gravy*.

They cut me in on the grounds that funds be managed collectively, profits deprioritized unilaterally, and operating under the ethical dictum that nobody *in* the band fucks anybody else *in* the band nor does anybody fuck anybody else's fuck in all situations deriving from the musical performances and social circles therein. Band is bond. Band is bond and Red & Blue is a band you could build a fucking *utopia* atop.

So I don't need the Folk Revival Revival. Music is about life and creation. Not death and destruction. You shouldn't get extra points for promoting some antinatalist vision of humanity's slow walk toward annihilation. Real blues music— real art— is not legitimized on the basis of whether or not the artist suffered enough, struggled enough, or took life, their own or others. And nowadays they've simply thrown out the art altogether. Suicide is enough. Death *is* the art. All that Folk Revival Revival bullshit wasn't about late capitalism, or crumbling democracy, or climate change. It was a brainwashed cult, pure and simple. Wake up. Tune in. Drop out. Now lie down and die.

VOYDE THOMSON  
PROPRIETOR, RUBY'S CAFE, UNIONVILLE, IN

We've had the restaurant since the depression. My great aunt Edith opened it up on her back porch and started serving garbage plates and hoover stew after my grandfather's brother hit the road with some Chicagoite floozy, burning rubber into the gravel, jazz cigarettes blowing out the Packard. It wasn't until the war that they got a decent storefront put on it.

I grew up a fat little shit coming over for lunch until I was old enough to pick up a mop, then a broom, then a spatula. We stay true to all the old recipes. The chili is cheap, the Lucys are juicy, and we've never had a problem having somebody to serve, what with the weekend fishermen and family campers taking up around Lake Lemon, plus the college kids coming up from Bloomington to eat their magic mushrooms or whatever.

It's just us and the Port Hole, just enough competition to conjure up business for the both of us. Much better here than over in Brown County. Tourism brings trouble. Last fall they pulled some frat boy out of a drainage ditch at a golf course by Gnaw Bone, all yellow and swollen, said he was hopped up on this or that. Covered in tattoos. On his face and neck, behind his ear. Meth, a lot of them, now. Fentanyl takes the rest. Paper said he drowned looking at his reflection, but that's a little much. Monroe County had less controversy, historically. Lake Lemon's nice and flat. Calm waters. Hard to get in too much trouble. I suppose that's why you're here.

I never knew the FRR kids much. Pat Tilley rented those cabins to them, the ones they sort of took over. He's passed on now, but he'd pick up his lunch on his way over to lay into them for this or that infraction, tampering with the smoke alarms, making bonfires too close to the tree line. Typical kid shit. Though they weren't exactly kids. I remember thinking it was an

odd time for an extended vacation, as most of them said they were still in school. But, past that, I didn't think of them much. Seen one shoeless boy with an acoustic guitar, you've seen them all. It's a particular trend for a particular time in a young man's life. We all go through that wanderlust phase.

That said, there was one day they all came by, the whole bunch, maybe two dozen, covered in dirt and sweat. This was before they started making all the babies, mind you. I figured they had purchased some property to dig up and turn around. Anyway, they all ordered, two beers per hippie, as I recall, and baskets of fries and wings and nachos, all consumed family style, licking sauce off each other's faces like a family of cats. They scarfed it all down like they hadn't eaten in weeks. Chapped my ass how a couple of them started fingerpainting little cave scenes on the wall in buffalo sauce and ranch dressing. I'm not typically one for confrontation, though, so I just waited by the serving window with my wet rag, silently cursing them to hell. Blood pressure runs high in the family. My doctor says I should not indulge.

When they were all done, they turned out their pockets, full of holes, saying aw, damn, shit. Looking around as if their poverty was somehow news to them. Same old scam. I had about had it. I was about two minutes away from digging out the thumb screws from the junk drawer and showing a couple of those boys how men settle their disputes when they sent one of the wide-eyed gals forward to parlay and beg for a tab.

She said her name was Liza Jane. Sweet as can be, but I know crazy putty when I see it. She laid it on thick. Anyway, she said, in this odd kind of little girl voice, batting her sparkly lashes, playing with the fringe on her tube top, how awfully sorry all of them were for the misunderstanding, and asked if they might make up for the bill by playing a concert that evening.

Pro Bono. It was Saturday, and I felt quite confident that I'd never see none of that fucking money once they walked out the door, so I said, hell.

Everyone in the area heard their chanting and strumming that night, from the trailer park all the way to the highway, and everybody came out of the woodwork to see what the commotion was, and each bought a beer and a burger. Bock-o-nalia, they called it. They sang late into the evening, a sweltering hot night, and soon enough it seemed like the whole goddamn town was singing along.

I had to hand it to them. They could hold a tune. No denying god-given talent, before the troubles, anyway. Best Saturday since we got Bin Laden. But when the FRR packed up all their instruments and left, they took my busboy Ed with them. Threw off his apron in the parking lot and took up a washboard. Just started click clacking away, a real natural. Robin Hoods and their merry fucking men. Can't say I blame him. He could have given me his two weeks, though.



JOHNNIE RAY JENNINGS

MADISON COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD, MADISON, IN

I liked those kids, to be honest. I am aware that it's somewhat out of fashion to acknowledge publicly, or, hell, privately for that matter if you rub shoulders with secularites or professors or Manhattan elites. I can see why us common folk might misunderstand what they're really trying to do, the Revival Revivalists. Folks are scared of things they don't understand, things that bristle up against what's been passing familiar for generations and generations. But that's the thing. Jew news anchors want to act like these FRR groups are pinko commies or hippies or something, but the thing that they miss is that their whole tradition is about as classic as it gets. Conservationism at its finest. They really show up these limp-dick caucus-cucked elephants and asses we got braying and bitching in Congress, I can tell you that much.

I mean, we're talking about the very roots of Americana here, the stuff that once made this country great, tradition and culture we've lost or gotten away from with our silly little cell phones and green hair and hormonal manipulation dishonoring the body God gave you. They want to make us less than human, you can see that, right? They wish to alter the structure of God's intentions. Well, the FRR stands tall against that. And frankly, they strike me as about as traditional Americana as you can get. Men, women, children all have their places in the order, and society runs smooth as a whistle when the natural order of things is upheld.

I hear them called Leftists or Neo-Marxists and I don't fucking get it. What could be more American than a six-shooter on your hip, a guitar in your hands, and the poetry of a beautiful woman's love hanging off your breath with the bitter tang of the whiskey and roasted whiff of tobacco mingling along in a sweet surrender of your humanity for your audience, which

is to say your community, your people, those you represent and those who you— not some caravan of Mexican rapists— elect for the swift and unflinching execution of the will of the people?

That's *We the people*, by the way. The men— yes, men— who wrote those words spoke to God. And that God's name was *Jesus Christ*. So yeah, when I'm walking down around the town square of this beautiful town of Madison, Indiana, the place of my birth I am so privileged to call home, a land as-of-yet uncompromised by the globalist cabal, and I'm whistling dixie with my groceries in my hand and I see a couple of them Folk Revival Revivalists hooting and hollering and stomping their boots with the jingle jangle rhythm of pickin' guitars and wild wailing melodies of a harmonica singing "*Kum Bay Yah, my Lord, Kum Bay Yah*," well, I may not be a member, but you can bet your fucking ass I will join in and sing along and offer whatever loose dollars I have in my pocket, because at the end of the day I know what Lord they're singing to, and I know what people he protects, and I know the subhuman slime he will soon enact his great and wondrous vengeance upon.

I can only hope that the FRR is there to play along when it happens. What a concert that'll be. The FEMA guillotines used on the very traitors who built them for the Katrina death camps Then we'll show those mudblooded miscreants a thing or two about what "liberty" means, and upon that day of judgment they too will yield to despair, and we will finally see this nation returned to the revolutionary exceptionalism upon which it was founded and built.

TOMMY JOHNSON  
MANAGER, RAY'S OCCULT BOOKS, BLOOMINGTON, IN

No, I am not, nor have I ever been a member, or an official associate, of the FRR. As far as the FRR goes, I don't necessarily believe in organized movements. Once a scene is given its name, it's pretty much all over, they just don't know it yet. It is my feeling that, historically, guerrilla warfare is a much more effective method for revolutionary change, and is devastatingly hard to combat, as we have witnessed.

Howell, Alpha, and the gang introduced me to some interesting ideas, and as a student of world religion and spiritualism, a student of art and music, it's hugely important to have knowledge and to understand what people are doing. What are all the big ideas? What are the people talking about? But at the end of the day, the relationship between my instruments and the vibrating of the spheres is my own business. I don't take orders like some chump.

We had a couple of projects together, before I decided I'd rather go it alone. I'd prefer we discuss my work in a separate interview. You'll be very pleased by some of the innovative soundscapes I have been crafting. It might prove mutually beneficial for you to pass them along to some of your friends and associates, if you think they'll get it. You'll find the real musical revolution is still well underway.

Nevertheless, we had some salad days, the Big Four and I. Jane would always tag along, ground-flour sycophant, but I didn't mind. Classic hangouts at The Chatterton, really great times. Laughing through the smoke and wafting whiskey, like the song goes. That's a true story, you know. For real. That whole album. You've heard *The Church of Christ Without Christ*, I assume. That album is true blue. Pure, unadulterated melancholia. Real black bile, the likes of which we

haven't seen since Baudelaire or Byron or Dürer. We really made history with that one, didn't we? I was the one manning the mixing board. I politely declined credit in the liner notes. True fans can hear my signature scrawled upon the sound.

But they also expanded my horizons, philosophically, intellectually. We'd sit around and talk for hours, and they'd ask questions like, why is it that yawns are contagious? Why would that be so socially and evolutionarily adaptive? And we would just debate for hours, well into the night, until the morning sun crept up and kissed our oily cheeks. They really helped me expand and refine my perceptions, and I still revisit some of the attunements and negative visualizations we summoned.

I didn't waste much time fraternizing with the peons besides Jane, who was always looking for someone to fuck. Lot of balling going on in that particular community. I didn't mind. I'm down with free love. The reputation of the core group preceded them. Wyatt, Dinah, Alpha, and Howell took me out for dinner and drinks a few times. Picked up every tab. Not a big deal. It's nice to be appreciated for what you do. But I got along well enough with the second ranks just fine, Ghee, Sebastian, all those guys. Really talented artists. They at least had some sense of individuality. The rest of them, forget it. Unwashed masses. Philistines. Cattle.

The Big Four and I made some substantial moves, but, you know how business goes. Late capitalism remains late capitalism. For a while, we had plans to open a folk and blues record store called Splenetica. I can remember our designs for the sign and logo, this wondrous bass clef cocked over to one side. Iconic and irreverently ironic. They chose me to approach as a partner. At the time, we were transitioning my grandmother into assisted living, so there were some assets on the ledger just collecting dust, so I negotiated with the family, cashed out on inheritances a little early, and gathered up a decent amount of collateral for a primo space right

downtown on Kirkwood, right where the Village Deli used to be before it tragically burned down. More foot traffic than a podophilia conference.

We had some creative differences. They really wanted to black out all the windows, which I felt sort of undermined the idea of a storefront on Kirkwood. The landlord also pitched a fit when he learned they wanted the entire store to be lit by candlelight and torches. His concerns were exaggerated. I saw the torches, which were, in reality, more like butane lighters. Not to mention the boatload we would have saved on overhead with the electric bills.

Some people are just stuck in their paradigm, some people have no sense of vision. I will say I was concerned about the torches warping the records. All that ambient heat wasn't great for vinyl. But our records weren't for playing. They were artifacts. Relics of a higher order. Material manifestations of something this false world cannot accommodate. But they were really receptive to my ideas about reviving the cassette tape industry. Ultimately, I decided it was best to pursue some new partners, and we're currently in the process of some really exciting restructuring.

Anyway, look, I know it's out of vogue right now to speak of the FRR like they are human beings with feelings, people with faults who are capable of mistakes, who deserve our sympathy and compassion, but they were really instrumental in the artistic growth of my youth. They should not be held accountable for crimes perpetrated in their name by lonely, wayward losers who took their fandom to heart too literally. I would not be where I am now without the friendship and respect of the FRR.

I know what happened to Ghee was a tragic accident. The unfortunate fact of the matter is that Ghee had struggled with suicidal ideation for years before he even met Dinah and Alpha and the boys, and he talked about it so casually that no one around him saw any indication that

he might really attempt something like that. If anyone should be held accountable, it's Jane, but I don't think there was much she could have done, either. It's a hard truth to look in the face, but there it is. I don't believe the gossip. I never did, not from the start. Actually, it's downright libel and slander, is what it is. But I'll leave that to the legislators.

Presently, we don't have any plans for collaboration on the books, but I don't rule it out. I was supposed to headline a stage at Melancholicon in the spring, but I was already booked for that weekend, and I'm not really into trendy festivals, least of all ones with a body count. All press is good press until you're dragged in front of Congress.

MINNIE NAVIDSON  
RESIDENT, BEAN BLOSSOM, IN

I lived down the lane from them on Lake Lemon. Pat, who owned the place, told me they were just staying for a week, but weeks turned into months, and soon they were hosting an anniversary party. I kept to myself, picked up the cans thrown onto my lawn, and bought ear plugs. I don't really go out that much

But I noticed things. I think they were using drugs. I don't like to gossip, but I had noticed the Marshalls, who owned the gas station by the highway, going by there often, more and more, taking their kids even. They deserved to know I smelled the joints and heard the group sex going on at all hours of the day. I met Jack and Lisa for coffee and told them about it. They both just shrugged and laughed me off, saying I was sweet to worry, but there must have been some misunderstanding, really. They were great people, they said, just a little weird. They assured me that artistic types are just like that sometimes, that it was nothing to worry about.

I called CPS maybe nine months after that. It's hard to explain, but it kept getting worse. They all kept getting more reclusive. Got rowdier. I also found myself getting intense migraines during this time, sometimes becoming so sensitive to noises that the sound of my blood flowing around my ears. It was unbearably nauseating and would cause me to get sick. Some of my memories aren't exactly clear from that time.

But I do remember how all the trees and shrubs on their side of the property were horribly overgrown and uncared for, despite how often they seemed to be coming out at all hours of the day to work and tend their gardens. But I could hardly see what they were up to, though I did notice they kept expanding their activities, whatever those were, further and further out into

the woods, first taking folding chairs and coolers out there, then lumber and tools. This would have been over months, mind you. I called Pat to let him know, but he just kept telling me it was best to just leave it alone.

One Sunday morning I was out watering my pansies and primroses on the lanai when I thought I heard something, I don't know what I thought it was, like a hurt animal or something. Just a strange sound. They had this old weeping willow by the shoreline, so overgrown and untended the branches were all tangled and molding in the water. It was so thick you could barely see through it, and it attracted mosquitoes, so I never walked near it. But I kept hearing that sound, like murmuring trying to be concealed, too scared to keep quiet.

I parted the willow branches and saw the little quivering shapes of Tim and Kayla Marshall inside, huddled by the tree trunk, weeping, trying to stay quiet, holding each other. They couldn't have been more than ten or eleven years old. They looked up, recognized me, but didn't move or speak. They were wearing these, like, tunic things, with a piece of twine for a belt, like a church play or something. But they had on nothing else, no shoes, nothing, and the material looked like burlap, like an actual potato sack. They had rashes on their arms and sides, scratches on their faces. They were filthy with fleas and ticks.

I asked them where their parents were. They told me they were in the woods with the others and the Gods. They said the Gods were drunk, and the Gods get very mean when they are drunk, and it was best to wait until he goes to sleep before they went back.

An hour later two police officers searched the property and found an extremely intoxicated Folksinger outside, stark naked, standing on a tree stump, rubbing the flesh of a flayed rabbit onto his face, screaming into a portable CB radio that the nuclear apocalypse was upon us and the end was nigh.



*Nigh, nigh, nigh.*

I don't know where the others went, but the searchers didn't find them that day. They scattered like cockroaches, probably watching from their little hidey holes in the brush. Two weeks later, though, everybody was back, including the kids. It didn't make any difference.

I left Pat a message but he never got back to me. I moved in with my sister in Ellettsville soon after that.

SORER CALAMITY JANE

FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE, NASHVILLE, IN

I knew them long before they became known as “Folk Revival Revival.” In fact, I helped coin the name, if I may be so bold. I am not so meek and humble that I would underplay my rightful place in history’s architecture. That’s how it was: we were building history. A new history, a grand corrective action to illuminate every falsity within The Man’s Big Brother Police State. I am pleased to announce that I was there, on the ground floor, with the great movers and shakers on the right side of history. Some so-called FRR “members” cower in the limelight. Not me.

We were made for this.

We contain multitudes.

Let us set the scene:

The Martha Mitchell Effect was no more. I scanned the southside quad Saturday afternoon on the off-chance they might show up at our usual busking spot beside the Student Union facade, but it was no use. There would be no impromptu show, no Beatles on the Savile Row rooftop. We once gave this corner so much color, in classic covers and sing-alongs, student passersby ditching their bullshit lectures and stuffy-ass seminars, stopping off instead on the limestone steps to tap their feet and clap their hands, while we five, deep in the pocket, passed melodies between us, seers of a secret language, soloing and comping and cultivating *one stone cold groove*.

That was spring. It was now fall. The sun set too soon.

Student protestors had set up rows of little faux tombstones out on the grassy knoll beside the Student Union's Parisian Café, apparently in response to the previous week's protests, the little rows of white construction paper crosses, which caused quite a row after the little rows of luminaries were all stomped out in outrage, waxing the once-pristine lawns into polka-dotted pockets of dead grass and chewed-up dirt. Less in protest than in resignation, the groundskeepers weren't so keen on raking the leaves, which coagulated into a moldy compost after the autumnal cool-off backtracked into steamy summer for a week, before freezing back up again, then melting off once more. Now it was cold and dry, a dead black mash adorning the red brick walkways.

My band had just broken up. Publicly, onstage, at a low-key Student Wellness Festival, amid all the djembe circles and '*I feel like*' statements. We nearly came to blows as a sniffing ginger freshman did a trust fall with his floormates. Pitiful. Some withering husk of an administrative coordinator had requested we play "Take It Easy," which my Iscariots were happy to oblige. I calmly took my band aside, and politely informed them exactly how much pig shit I would eat before I ever played The Eagles.

They said something to the effect of, *not this again*, and I offered apologies for my artistic integrity, then they said something about the volume and generosity of said administrative coordinator's tip, which he so graciously tossed into our communal cattleman's hat, and I coolly expressed and emphasized the fact that I transmit a *gift*, not a *product*, noting some of the more basic points surrounding the culture of late capitalism, Jameson and the like, and that if *that* was their jam, if that was how they *really felt*, they might as well just drop to their knees and suck Mr. Administrator's shrimp fucking dick *in earnest*, instead of pimping out their music like slimy middle men.

Then Leona, *et tu?*, our bassist, the meanest little thing, though she's barely bigger than her Buttercream Fender Ashtray Jazz– reissue, not original– gobbled me right there, on stage, in front of everyone. Hocked a viscous, gleaming loogie right onto the pretty face of my Hagstrom Viking Deluxe Cherry Sunburst Double-Cut Hollow Body, right where I make music, a slight twice over, once for being spit on, twice because if Leona had half a brain, if she had ever read half a book, she would have known that, historically, in the burgeoning punk subculture of 1970's England, gobbing was a sign of *respect*, of admiration and approval. But the fucking daft bird couldn't even insult me right. *That* was the reason I slapped her in the lipstick-stained teeth. Then she started swinging. Elbows out. Amateur. Feedback in the monitors. We got more applause for that than our set.

Six days later I learned they have regrouped without me, their former frontwoman and founder. An obvious failure of leadership. We had had squabbles before, but nothing too outright or performative, nothing too Brian Jonestown Massacre, no all-out on-stage brawls, no sitars wielded like cartoon halberds.

Look, I'm an eclectic person. I march to my own drummer, like the man says, then as now. You don't apologize for who you are. This applies to one's natural psychology, their various neurodivergences, those elusive eccentricities which forecast an individual American exceptionalism upon which our culture was excavated and proved prosperous. What happened to freedom, to liberty? And anyway, artistry *chose me*, I didn't solicit it. I'm no John. The Muse *said so*. She didn't ask. Not that she had to. It was inevitable.

Still, I must not have led them well. I thought it only required vision, ambition. Virtues. Stand up front, lead with face and voice and sound. But it's not that simple.

I figured we'd all just cool off and eventually reconcile. Hell, I thought someday we'd all share a laugh about this to some biographer or rockumentarian somewhere in the middle third of our historic saga. Sure, the Student Wellness Festival was a bad idea, but at least it was well-intentioned, well-inspired. At the time of our booking, I told the gang about the early days of The Velvet Underground, when Warhol was managing them, how he booked an early show of theirs at this Psychiatrist's Conference, and how everybody was, like, *what*. And look how they turned out.

And my band liked the idea. Honest. It was a solid pitch. Should I have apologized for being so rhetorically effective? Not that it matters now.

Then I hear they've just played a semi-formal in SAE's backyard, through plumes of dab smoke and stale wine staining the back patio planks. Liberal art schools, man, they didn't even make frats right. Hippies weren't supposed to have *fraternities*, they were supposed to have *communes*. But they just donned their tie-dyes and talked about *The Man* in a totally tubular pantomime of the most airheaded non-movement political movement of pop music history. A weekly Woodstock costume party, and afterward, you didn't even have to join a cult or vote for Ronald Reagan. I used to have friends at SAE, but I hadn't gone in a while. I got bud from there a time or two a semester from a guy who everyone called "El Hefe." He was alright. Trust fund baby, like the rest of them.

I didn't know why I went to that bumfuck town with its parasitic prestige feeding off it. Why I stayed. Why I didn't make for the trails, start a pilgrimage, hit the big city. Radicalize.

My band was now called Wooden Puddin' Pastor. Since my departure, they had been described as "sunnier." And they weren't even writing. They were just *jamming*. And I don't mean free jazz. I mean Phishy-ass dipshit music. And the unwashed masses *just fucking ate it up*.

I needed to see Ghee. The Kathleen Brennan to my Tom Waits. Or vice versa. Not that it mattered. Ghee was my partner, a senior one year my senior, on the precipice of achieving his bachelor of fine arts degree, a burgeoning delta bluesman with a second soul for Romani-jazz guitar a la Django Reinhardt, trained and practiced for a future in Studio Performance & Production, where he would eventually calcify alongside those would-be Mozarts and Hendrixes who thought better of getting weird, dropping in, dropping out, etc. Most likely, though, he'd stick around for his master's, until the boomers clogging up his industry had died bitter and resentful deaths. By then we would both be reasonable and well-adjusted adults.

We were slow to the final lap for that whole graduation thing, each of us having taken a semester or two off during those typical adult birth pangs, the psychological bouts and cycles, diagnoses, major and minor periods, diagnostic revisions, prescriptions, breakdowns and build-ups and bottoming-outs. Feeble attempts. Real attempts. Gaunts. Black Dogs. Dark Nights of the Soul. We had a lot of shared experiences in that way. I was told that kind of shit is good for you, self-actualizing through suffering. Not to mention the social stigma. It is a gauntlet.

Anyway, we each took our respective pills. I wasn't supposed to smoke or drink on mine. I tended to. Ghee was more straight and narrow. With the drinking, anyway. Usually.

Ghee came from money. I mean *Money*. *Renting a floor of the Guggenheim for Ghee's Graduation Party* Money. 'I don't know what milk costs' Money. Mom curated the something-or-other, Dad bankrolled by having his money make him more money. Quite the racket, as I understood it. Ghee had always been ashamed of his affluence. I could understand why he pushed against it, as a black man. At our first meeting, I mistook Ghee's Dad for the Maître D. Ghee hadn't told me he was white. Or that one of his favorite songs was "What a Fool Believes." The fucking Doobies.

Early on, Ghee adopted a kind of theater around his upbringing. He stuck out, after all. Ghee had this rare genetic mutation, seven fingers on his left hand, which he nurtured and strengthened from an early age, sensing a leg up in some vaguely-disturbing, Darwinian fashion. But he was right. His dexterity, his spider-like elegance. The man could *literally* finger chords that the vast majority of humans cannot. This made him a target throughout the private art academies and boarding schools of his youth, every knuckle-dragging dipshit gumming up his tinny Taylor's composite fretboard with french fry grease and boogers.

Ghee didn't always cope with the pressure well. In high school, he had this whole Middle-Dylan, carnivalesque, whiteface phase. This only perplexed his bullies, who ante'd up and brought rotting tomatoes and banana peels with which to pelt and mar him. They also beat the living shit out of him after a talent show. Then they threatened to break his precious extraterrestrial hand. Ghee was very angry then. He was still pretty mad in college. He didn't like to talk about it.

Now his persona was more cool and collected. Quiet in a Princely sort of way, some air of mystery and sensuality. College had been socially encouraging for the both of us, mostly. When he did talk, Ghee would make these oblique references to false family trees, making sure his voice carried when he irreverently mentioned his Great Great Grandma Wiley, who was a blues musician of *some acclaim*, having penned a couple they might know, like, *oh, I dunno*, "Last Kind Word Blues," and the supposedly cool cats in-the-know would exchange knowing glances and side-eyes, like, *yeah*, like, *Geeshie Wiley*, *that* Geeshie Wiley. But they wouldn't ask further, because they were too chickenshit, too meek and wet-noodled to say anything vaguely relating to genealogy, worried they're come off all *eugenic*-y, all craniometers and brainpan radii, because they were too feeble-minded to talk about the fact that their beloved musical genre, their

very ideology, came from a soul, a soul that was made to feel extraordinary pain by its oppressors, and that soul was *black*.

They didn't mean harm, Ghee's fanboys, his hangers-on. They were just brittle spirits. Couldn't risk offense, so they didn't risk anything ever. They were not cut out for The Art Life.

Look, I'm no elitist, no caste crusader, but some among us are ill-inclined for those higher vibrations, and ought to find a boot to lick and some paper to push.

Anyway, I knew the real scoop.

Ghee claimed to be named for this supposed blueswoman ancestor, but in reality he was named after a kind of butter. As I understand it, his pregnant mother had had some killer puran poli at some private resort on a wildly exclusive South Asian island, so exclusive its name was scarcely uttered, and Little Fetal Ghee kicked with delight and squirmed 'round the womb at first taste of this bombastic and rich flavor, or, something. It's not a great story.

Let's face it, his folks weren't exactly about to paint *Guernica*, no matter how many Marina Abramović knock-offs they hosted at not-for-profit galas. The way Mrs. Wiley liked to tell it, "Ghee's named after the happiest time of our lives, our traveling years."

I get the need for mythology.

First I came out Nothing, and then they called me Jane. And soon it was Baby Jane, and I was Baby Jane for a long time. And for a select few I stay Baby Jane to this very day.

But throughout my rough and tumble adolescence, all ears and buck teeth, I was G.I. Jane, across the dusty kickball fields and on my Kappa shin guards, until I reached those dawdling middle school years, when popular girls with ironic boy's names like 'Bobbie' and "Sawyer" and "Hunter" started calling me "Dyke." So time passed and I shot up like bamboo, my legs anyway. Pretty soon I was Janie Jones, all punk'd out, with a side of goth's visual



sensibility, freaking out the squares all throughout high school and into college, where my weirdness was first rewarded, and I let my freak flag fly, steam valves between my ears releasing somewhere in the process, and I softened on that 60's idealism, encouraging my warmer folkish sensibilities, San Franciscan Mamas and Papas, early Byrds, later Gram Parsons, then to the bigger beatniks, Bobby and Joan Baez and the Revivalists, and I was Little Liza Jane, all up on my Americana, coming back through Neil Young, Crazy Horse, and CSNY, burning out somewhere around America's "Muskrat Love," jaunting back to the bedrock, the roots, to the Real Old Ones, unexplainable entities of a cosmic sublime, Willie Dixon and Robert Johnson and Son House and Skip James, and then I'm Crow Jane, shepherding those primordial American yawps, that train coming around and upward again, to Lightnin' Hopkins, where I get me a mojo hand, unexpectedly back in the ballpark of the NYC pre-punk avant garde, Nico and John Cale and Lou Reed, finding my very own outfit in the process, The Martha Mitchell Effect, for whom I served as Sweet Jane.

Then they left me.

Now I was Jane again. Plain Jane, having lost my band and cut my own hair, fucking up the left half of in the process, necessitating a clean-up cosmetologist to level it out into a bob, which did not suit my bone structure. I guess I was now somewhere near the orbit of a lesser flapper, a real Bernice bobbing her hair, off to the seance and speakeasy. Couldn't wait to see what I got to be next. At least there would be something to sing about.

*"My name it means nothing / my age it means less," Bobby sings, "the country I come from is called 'The Midwest.'"*

I called home and told Mom I was thinking I might soon enter another Acute Major Episode. Maybe I was just feeling dramatic. I might have also been a danger to myself at some

point in the subsequent weeks. Mom told me she'd let Dr. Galen know immediately, and asked if she and Dad should drive over from Indianapolis.

"No," I said. "That's okay. I'm alright. I'm just tired."

She asked me to set alarms for my medicines. We made phone call appointments. We talked levees, scaffolding, moats and barricades. *Stay hydrated. You have to eat. Sleep's so important for those autonomic processes.* We talked contingencies. What-if's. We made pledges and promises like ironclad templars crouching before their bonfires on the eve of some monstrous and soul-risking peril, and at the end of the call my mother kept repeating that she loved me, as if she was an actor inside a studio booth, like she wasn't not satisfied with her performance, like she wanted just one more attempt to get it right, if this was to be the final take.

"Your Mom called," Ghee said. "Said it's closing in on you again."

"She doesn't know what she's talking about," I said. "She worries. She's dramatic. You know that."

"You just lost something," he said. "Something important to you, to your personal expression. Something that reflects your vision."

"I'm wavy gravy, Baby."

I laid on his bed, watching his broad and bony silhouette, gray and shining in the moonlight. Ghee was much lankier, but I preferred the big spoon. My arms draped over his shoulders as I fingered the little burls of hair on his chest, wiry and coarse.

We stared at the cracked spines on his bookshelf, a shoddy art kid production, particle board planks on top of cinder blocks. The titles screamed at me. *You Can't Win. Nothing But the Blues. The Indifferent Stars Above. Let Me Take You Down. Madness and Civilization. The Conspiracy Against the Human Race. Please Kill Me.*

“You can talk to me.”

“You smell like a grill.”

“It’s my new deodorant,” he said. “All natural. Has charcoal in it.”

“Like your toothpaste.”

“Charcoal’s big now,” he said. “Aluminum deodorant is toxic. Causes Alzheimer’s.”

“In your armpits.”

“It gets in on a *cellular level*.” He rolled over, mock-annoyed. “Where do you think that shit ends up?”

We fucked a second time, Ghee holding me down from behind. After we finished, my orgasm psychotropically stifled, we were wiping off and pissing, respectively, when Ghee’s roommates started to roll in from the bar, making various loud proclamations, promises, and demands from the floor’s common areas.

“Back to the *Flat!*” I heard one of them say.

*Mother Bitch*. Two of these geniuses spend a semester abroad and they come back all anglophilic, *simply begging* for a *cuppa*. Morons. Tongue of our colonial masters.

“They’ll want to light something up,” Ghee said. “We could play while they do, conjure up some background music? Set the vibe?”

“I don’t *do* backgrounds.”

“We haven’t played in a while.”

“It’s fine,” I said. “I’m still, I don’t know, mourning. In grief. The MME was my baby. Summer break really fucked me.”

“What’s next?”

“I don’t know. Something. I have cards to play. Might try to recruit some tampon rock quartet for a concept I been dreaming up. ‘Whitechapel Gals.’ Each of us a different Jack the Ripper victim. Dressing the part, guts out, tits cut off, real B movie shit.”

“Should we just stay in here?” he asked. “Just talk and hang? I’m sure they’re halfway to black-out out there already.”

“Nope,” I said, bunny-hopping on my heels, pulling up my jeans. “I would like to smoke everything in sight.”

“Seen any *Little Folk*?” he said, smiling.

“Fuck you.” I said. “Eat a dick.”

“Sorry.”

“Fucking asshole.”

“I was trying to keep it light.”

“How about you, Spider Hand? Can people still read your thoughts on the subway? Still jerking off seven times a day, Left Hand of Darkness? Remember to take your meds at the same time every morning?”

“That’s fucked up,” he said. “I was asking if you’re okay.”

“I’m okay with smoking out your *flatmates*. I want to share the wealth.”

I was little. Real little. Bright red Kool-Aid stainediltrum little. I wasn’t a bad kid, wasn’t the problem child. I was the easy one. Charlotte, four years my senior, was difficult. A terror. Firstborn tend to be. Premie, colic, post-partum’ing. The whole deal. Bad sleeper, big crier, picky eater. She’s better now. Law school, Chicago, steady tailored-suit jawline husband, healthy houseplant addiction. Doesn’t talk to me. But as a toothless babe she was up all hours,

inconsolable, incorrigible, in need of constant attention or stimuli, constant comfort and placation.

Me, I was a cool breeze.

In fact, I slept so well following my birth that my Father would wake nightly, dreading the silent baby monitor, unable to catch his breath until he crouched beside my crib to watch my sternum softly rise and fall. He said he'd think to himself in a panic: *she's too quiet, there's no way she's breathing.*

I was never needy. My parents would have to convince Charlotte that running laps around the backyard was some kind of special game, just to wear her out enough to keep her in her chair for the entirety of dinner. I was happy to just 'be' in my room, cross-legged on the floor or sprawled across my red race car bed, playing with my dolls and action figures, stuffed animals, crafting their grand adventures across the imaginary landscape of my comforter. There I built worlds.

But there were early indicators. Normal kid shit then, but *now*. Oh. Little glimpses of compulsions, shallow delusions, obsessions. Uncommon fixations and preoccupations.

These were the rules my brain made for me. I always had to wash my hands before playing with my dolls, or else they felt warm with germs and dirty. I worried about my toys' condition, about their potential degradation via food or grime or time, and I was often more preoccupied with habits surrounding *their* hygienic health more so than my own. But no kid wants to take a bath.

I used to use so much hand soap that my mother substituted hand sanitizer for the ritual, the alcohol content drying out my hands so severely that the sanitizer was later replaced with hand lotion, which made me feel so greasy and slimy I couldn't help but wash them twice, and so

on. Cracking knuckles, bloodstains on the pockets of my favorite summer sundresses. Eventually I thought I could just suck the germs off my hands and spit them out the window. I was found that way, a few times, to the confusion and dismay of various caregivers, slathering an entire fist in my mouth.

Oddities. Some private, others extended to anyone playing with me. The neighborhood girls couldn't understand why I was so quick to cry if I, say, got a tiny grass stain on the knee of my jeans. But I would weep as if disfigured, till I choked, coughing and wheezing. It was perplexing and unsettling to them that I'd play, ultra-enthusiastic, never wanting the neighborhood playtime part to end, till sundown every day after school for a month, only to retreat back into my pillow fort for six. Why my eyes darted around the room with a constant clip and flutter. Why these bags gathered below them. Why I seemed to always sit clutching my knees to my chest. Why I sometimes rocked in place while watching anime or playing video games.

Around this time, I made up The Little Folk. I conjured them, these denizens of a pastoral landscape that existed between my ears, who lived and toiled and talked to me all hours of the day. They explained why I didn't feel like myself sometimes. The Little Folk farmed, built homes, raised families, and held parties. The overall aggregate product of their society, they told me, ultimately became what I understood as my feelings.

They were my little mental arbiters. When I was feeling sociable, they gave me tips on getting along with the other kids. When I was retreating, they wrote grand dramas and tragedies for my action figures. When I was sad, they offered me great tithings from their harvests and family heirlooms. They'd hold rallies to get me pepped up for class or sports, cheering me on with chants and acrobatics.

When I was angry or upset, I'd maim and kill them in increasingly cartoonish ways. Flamethrowers and missiles, laser beams and magic daggers. Tying their tiny legs to tiny stallions who sprinted off in opposite directions. The satisfying *thunk* of their dislodging shoulders, the elegant trail of viscera left behind across rolling hills kissed by gently setting sunbeams.

When I spared them, they praised me. When I killed them, they congratulated me. And when I brought them back to life, they'd thank me for freeing them from the oblivion of silent cryptic death. That kind of thing. Just normal, weirdo kid shit, like counting the even and odd mailboxes on the schoolbus, or not wanting to step on the sidewalk cracks. And around the sixth grade or so, I started to grow out of it, and eventually they went away, though I don't remember precisely when.

Cut to college, freshman year. A twelve-pounds-more-swollen Riot Girl Jane catches the attention of her RA's. Roommates claim she isn't doing her laundry, keeps rotten food in her room for weeks. Is irritable. Stays up till four am, misses class or leaves early. Smells like piss. Sometimes unresponsive. Sometimes seemingly catatonic. Lives behind her closed door. Picks at her face and hands until they bruise or bleed, digs through the crevices of the foyer sofas. Caught smoking a clove cigarette on the back porch of the dorm. When confronted, stamped the smoldering cherry out on her forearm. That was around when they returned.

The first time I met the Little Folk, I made them up.

The second time I met the Little Folk, they just showed up.

By this time, I was surprised to find that their community had advanced, culturally and technologically, quite rapidly. They were now a fully-functioning modern society, with dense city skyscrapers and urban industry, public schools and civic institutions, bureaucracies, a hearty

republic with its own legislature and congressional body. We would meet via holographic projection, which they would broadcast behind my eyelids from their conference room, where they'd sit around a large mahogany table in their pressed suits and shiny wingtips, deep within the folds and recesses of my hobbled gyri.

Only now they expected oversight, influence. Committees and subcommittees. Campaign finance law and super PACs threatened their very foundations. Their primary adjudicator, one Little Folk named Robert, brokered deals with me on a daily basis, hoping to keep diplomatic relations congenial and productive as I considered whether or not I would, on any given day, be getting out of bed, changing my clothes, eating, or just taking another thirteen hour nap in my soiled spanx.

I told Ghee about it. I wish I hadn't.

A spectre was haunting our department. The University murmured, the chairs squeaked, the seminar halls groaned. Strife threatened the humanist goodwill, the very progressive ideology of our most liberal and fine arts. Ghee said the future of the graduate program was in jeopardy, and he was no longer certain if he would be embarking on his master's degree in Raintree.

*In Raintree.* With me. Where I was.

There was an incident, an altercation. Something to do with one of the Graduate Poetry & Songwriting workshops. A grand controversy. Showdown. Talk of the town. Some quadrumvirate cohort of shit-stirrers and rabble-rousers upsetting everybody else's sociable exchange of verse, the cordiality, the gifts of narrative and melody. Now they'd never get their constructive feedback, and without that, how would they ever pen their opuses? To whom would they dedicate their Nobels? Toward what would we harken and yawp once they were annihilated under the weight of brilliance?



“They’re either making history,” Ghee told me, “Or bringing the whole discourse down with them.”

Late capitalism was crumbling democracy. Neoliberalism would buy its way out. Worldwide human trafficking networks thrived. Genocides bloomed. The capital “T” of truth had been dissolving since Fat Man and Little Boy, but *here*, at a modest midwestern liberal arts school, some “Harvard of the Midwest,” the time was night, the war for the culture was to be fought.

“Scintillating,” I said. “High stakes.”

Ghee wanted us to meet them for drinks. Told me I’d love them. Asked me if I wanted to go.

I didn’t have “wants.” Full stop. Ghee knew this but he didn’t listen. Dr. Galen had told me this was called *Anhedonia*. He gave me a book about it, entitled *Masochism in Modern Man*. I had been using it as a coaster.

“Sure,” I said. “I’ll go.”

“Great,” Ghee said, peeling off his graphic tee, hobbling toward the shower. “Dinah and Alpha said they’d swing by and snatch us up around nine. You’ll like them. They’re great girls. Great taste, especially Pre-War.”

*Dinah and Alpha. Great Girls.*

I’d have my eye on this bitch. As soon as I could figure out which one.

“What do they play?” I asked.

“Everything!” he shouted through the steam seeping up out the cracked bathroom doorway.

That night I took a little something to encourage my sociability. Didn't tell Ghee. My goddamn Mom had switched on his narc mode. Not a big deal, nothing major, just a couple few nips off some instant tens, blue boys, I had forgotten, which serendipitously reappeared only this evening as I was looking for a belt to match my boots. This particular belt buckle contained a sly repository behind the etching of Nancy Reagan. It was a comment. My drug use was, too. But I didn't blow them. Those days were over. I very much appreciated my septum, and as such, it was gummies for me from then on out. I must have been growing up. The remnants tasted sweet on my molars. Couldn't seem to stop sucking my cheeks.

They couldn't pick us up, Ghee's new comrades, the revolutionaries. Word was the broads got all caught up in "attunement," which I assumed was art hoe jargon for meditation. Given the aesthetic showdowns of the week, they told Ghee they just had to get right. I was sure they would be simply egoless from all that time spent swimming in the Unified Field.

We said we'd meet them there. I was glad for the walk. I was really percolating. It was only a few blocks through the crisp evening. September 11th is such a fall holiday, it would have been absurd in spring. A faint smell of bonfires wafted through the dilapidating postwar suburbs. All the dying leaves. A hint of wet dog wafting on the breeze.

"They're really excited to meet you," Ghee said.

"Me too. Totes."

"Really running through those smokes, aren't you?"

"They make me look cool."

"Give me one."

This so-called party, this supposed symposium. The little shotgun house reeled from the academic controversy of the week. Such a rich tapestry. A community of artists, writers, and thinkers. The cultural pulse of their generation.

Boxed wine and chitchat building up its vacuous momentum in anticipation of the bacchanalia to come. A Stevie Nicks cosplay convention, so many vintage threads among facsimiles of vintage threads. Mimbos illustrated taste through styled beards and exposed hamburger meat. It was high school all over again. The hierarchies, the cool kids, blushing undergraduates fawning for the big time, the forlorn hangers-on at the sidelines, their eyes darting around the room.

A man with a battered teardrop mandolin bickered with a woman fiddling with the hi-fi. Record scratches. Feedback. Plucky plucking. Figures backlit in doorways and windows like Marlboro Men. The Hoots and the hollers. First the salt, then the shot, then the lime. A cheer. A cough, a jeer. Joint rollers at the tarnished dining room table. An unaccounted-for adolescent boy for whom no one would take responsibility. The smoke factory out front, the rubberneckers watching some shithoused couple come apart in the gravel driveway, trading every horrible revelation they've been saving for this very special performance.

And there I sat, softly rocking on the porch, knees up, denim collar popped, watching as my beloved Ghee stunted and fronted, betraying himself, waxing every quip cribbed from haughty critics desperate to ascertain whether or not Picasso jerked off to his own paintings, whether or not Pollocks should be read as ejaculatory, whether or not Rothko was masturbatory, and so on. Ghee postured, posed, drawing wildly asinine comparisons revolving around the color blue.

“It’s not for nothing they called it his *blue period*,” he said. “Such blue. Such blueness. All that melancholy, the synchronicity with those early Delta Bluesmen. Channeling the very same, *very human* soul.”

*Christ*. Flamenco maybe, but Picasso wasn’t jamming out to fucking Charlie Patton. Give me a break. I could have said this but I didn’t. I could hack it. I could be cordial. I could be myself. Jane’s perspective was cosmic, she did not quibble with these lesser human hangups. Icons don’t do that. Jane blazed a trail. The conflagration which followed would be scoured by commentators and historians. They would pour over even my lesser quotations with wild speculation and theory.

Ghee was gorging on the attention. Glutton. A handful of beatnik minions nodded and made that “hm” sound so characteristic of critical analysis. Ghee took a very meaningful sip from his glass. I stamped out a smoke on the unfinished pine, having passed the torch to its successor. Parley hundreds. I chewed their recessed filters like a doughboy in the trenches.

“Have you read the Nelson?” they asked. “Have you read the Gass?” they asked. Ghee wrote down the recommendations on a cocktail napkin, fawning in gracious thanks. I could only speculate about who the hell gave him a real rocks glass for his old-fashioned while I was sitting there sucking down cabernet from a jam jar with a dog hair in it.

“What was it that Picasso said about taste?” I asked.

My comment went gently unacknowledged.

I gave Ghee a look of two laser beams denoting that *I knew* that *he knew* that he was full of shit.

“Ghee, *my man*,” said one tokenizing bootlicker, all soul and elbow patches, “I’d love to hear you play tonight, if you’d consider it. We could break out my 70’s Guild jumbo and hit the veranda. See where the call-and-response takes us.”

“You’re too kind,” Ghee said. And so on. He turned to me. “Another drink?”

“I’d love some of whatever they’re cutting up on that mirror in the foyer.”

Inside I spied an inviting-looking bunch of cool cats carefully removing an ornate antique mirror from the wall. They gently christened the coffee table with it. Two boys slapped their little plastic baggies as if in ceremony.

“Maybe not the best idea, considering.”

“You’re so *considerate*, aren’t you, Ghee? Full of *thoughts*. So many *perspectives*.”

“Has the plonk gone to your head?”

I closed my eyes. In the conference room inside my brain, Robert, head of my Little Folk judiciary, sat at a long, polished mahogany table. He pursed his lips. He shook his head. The Little Folk meeting adjourned. It would happen again soon. Another crack-up. Then off to the booby-hatch. This was the state of my mind.

“You never even went to England, Ghee,” I said. “You’re a simp, a sponge. There is nothing authentic in you. You’re just the big-tit blonde of this fucking homecoming. You are an object to these people. Can you honestly not see that?”

Ghee nodded to his drink, worked his jaw.

“You are a minstrel.”

I shouldn’t have said it.

“Hey Guys,” I heard.

And there they were.

They just appeared. Manifested. The Big Four. The Cool Kids. Alpha, Dinah, Howell, and Wyatt. Future founders of the Folk Revival Revival. True blue revolutionaries. I just couldn't see it yet. But I'd be lying if I said they didn't make an impression. *God damn* did they.

"Hey Jane," Alpha said. "We hear you're fucking nuts. Ruffling a lot of feathers out there. Pretty groovy." Flared denim and a mohair vest. Joplin shades. Gold hoops. She looked fucking *hot*. Slick as Grace. They all did.

"Thanks."

"Would you play for us?"

They handed me a tobacco sunburst Gibson Jumbo emblazoned with a pearloid bass clef on the tortoiseshell pickguard amidst all the flowery inlay.

I forgave Ghee almost immediately.

And that, folks, was the start of a new aeon. Before the Revival Revival, I had been convinced by The Man's Psychiatries that the normative persona pressed upon me by society was indeed my most authentic self. Everybody wants to talk about Ghee and senseless violence. Well *there's* your senseless violence, right there, the violent power structures of the psychological elite, who confine us within their constructions of normative modern consciousness. It was the Folk Revival Revival who showed me the truth, that I, like you, am a chorus of voices, all real and worthy of dignity. We each contain multitudes, each one as true and legitimate and worthy of their yawping expression as our public personas. I miss Ghee every day, but he ascended to his revolutionary purpose so that all of us, and all our Little People begging to be realized into this false material world, could reshape this fraudulent society in service of something bigger. A grand purpose, centuries in the making, that will reign for a thousand million years. All hail the black bile. Yield to despair.

DR. JACQUELINE WILEY, CURATOR,  
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NAPERVILLE, IL

Ghee was my son. I say “was” not for the fact that he died, but because in the months leading up to his death, he considered himself someone else, someone distinctly unlike my son, and while I harbored strong feelings about these alterations he applied to his identity, I felt very strongly then, as I do now, that it was his decision to make, or rather, his perspective, his truth to live, and this is something that a parent should respect their child for, not stand in the way of, even when the consequence of that respect threatens to rip apart the very ties that bind a family together: a name, a history, a mass of loving experiences, support and affection and consideration.

A child’s rejection of their familial heritage should not be misunderstood as a criticism of that heritage. We perplexed parents sometimes feel insult added to injury when our rebellious teens mischaracterize our care as smothering or stifling, as if it was a thing that hurt or hampered them. A good parent knows a thing or two about growing a happy child, making this a slight two times over, once for the guilt felt as a result of the child’s pain, and twice for the inference that the parent ‘doesn’t get it,’ doesn’t really know them, doesn’t know how to love them or what they need. Who knows what lies in a child’s heart better than the flesh from whence they came?

But by the time Ghee decided to pursue his musical– not music-kal– aspirations, first as an undergraduate at Oberlin, before transferring to Raintree University, and then in the graduate program at Raintree, we had come to terms with Ghee’s, shall we call it, romantic sensibility. This is, after all, the mark of genius, as Ghee most certainly was. We’d nurtured this aptitude in

him from an early age. Private lessons. The finest musical instruments and equipment. Suffice it to say that Ghee's father and I had come to terms with that burgeoning selfhood, the dramatic pangs that accompany the birth of a higher, more actualized self, capable of achieving something truly great, something you cannot get with money.

When Ghee was younger, he was prone to all kinds of angry outbursts and reckless behavior. Ghee coded these racially, but I knew what they were really about. On the occasion—one of a few—that I found him self-harming, I was not angry, even if I understood, in ways Ghee could not, that such self-destructive behavior is a luxury, that one's attention only turns so solipsistically inward when one has the bourgeois leisure time to do so, and that those truly suffering are not afforded extra hours in the day to break from those Sisyphean chains to ponder and reflect upon them. No, each time Ghee was found out, gently scoring his thighs or inner biceps with a razor like one does a duck breast before searing, Ghee's father and I did the responsible thing, called Dr. Dick for a psychiatric referral, a soft-spoken CBT specialist who saw patients on Saturday mornings, and got Ghee on a diversified portfolio of low-risk psychotropic medications, one for the depression, one to compliment the one for depression as a mood stabilizer, one as-needed for panic attacks, and one meager stimulant to curb his idle boredom and offset the sluggish side-effects of the others.

But I did not really worry, because ultimately I knew that this is the struggle of the artist, or rather, that the artist must struggle, must hurt with all that sublimity of their higher humanity, must feel the whole wide world in all its breadth of beauty and horror. And this Ghee did in spades. Only a select few are cut out for this kind of higher thinking, the fine arts. The heavenly spheres vibrate, but only the true prodigies can hear them.



So, when Ghee addressed a postcard— a postcard of a Madison, Indiana lynching, to be exact, in an apparent attempt at shock value to ‘freak out the squares’— to “Mr. and Mrs. Wiley,” and not “Pops and Ma,” as he usually did, and wrote about himself in the third person, saying *Ghee Wiley is no more. Ghee Wiley has emancipated himself from this lowly, material form and the moniker which restrains it. He has embraced the pleroma, ignited his pneumatic spark as neophyte Frater Sex Manus Illustratio, and resolved to start a new a life in service of the Aesthetic Order of the Melancholics, the Ordo Atrabilicus Aestheticus, to birth a radical new sociocultural musical movement, a resurgent revolution known as the Folk Revival Revival*, I felt, well, in a strange sense, proud. He even signed it with an odd little symbol, a purely symbolic moniker, like Prince.

We hadn’t spoken in weeks, and to hear that he was passionately taking part in some new art movement on campus, and not high on heroin or dead in a ditch somewhere, well, that was great news. After all, performance art is a much more productive mode of expression than getting an assault rifle and opening fire in a church, not that I thought Ghee was capable of something like that. I guess my worry was that he would start self-harming again, and would accidentally cut himself too deep, bleeding out on the bathroom tile of his campus apartment, forever misunderstood as a shameful suicide rather than the unlikely accidental manslaughterer of his own self. I worried about the folly of his headstrong nature, the lack of sense or proportionality, of one’s place in relation to the world that accompanies youth, Ghee’s insistence on always committing to a thing full-bore if not half-cocked.

In any case, Ghee’s father and I didn’t take the arch formality of the letter too seriously. Plenty of kids stop calling their Mom “Mom” or “Mommy” at some point and address her as “Jacqueline” like some smug hostess at a restaurant. Ghee was going through a phase, even if

twenty-two was a little late for phases. But we were all comfortable and taken care of, though the unwashed philistines gathered in their cargo pants with their tiki torches. Ghee didn't have to worry about that. He was insulated by a fiduciary institution whose charge it was to ensure his care and growth not only as an artist, but as a citizen and an academic scholar.

Or so I thought at the time.

FELICIA GATES  
NURSE PRACTITIONER, FORT WAYNE, IN

Stop listening to them. Stop reading about it.

You want to know the truth of the FRR? I can tell you. My fourteen-year-old daughter, DeShonda, was a ‘member.’

She opened her throat onto her desk in homeroom with the high-end carbon steel chef’s knife I bought her father for christmas. Smuggled it in beneath the green felt lining of her cello case. My husband was just getting into smoking meats. He can’t even look at meat now. He just smells the autopsy room. We can’t keep knives in the house.

How did the FRR respond to this tragedy? Three days later they broke into the scene and stole the desk from the classroom. Clipped the yellow police tape, jimmied the sealed door. Broke a window. I saw it that afternoon, on social media, as an unofficial FRR account affiliate announced they declared the desk some kind of holy relic.

That horrible decrepit public school desk, once a pale yellow woodgrain, now a mottled and dull brown, textured with the thickened and dried life force of my little girl between idle etchings of initials and frowny faces. They sold it, like a souvenir, to the highest bidder. Police said there was nothing they could do, that it was improperly cataloged as evidence, impossible to track. I said *it’s right there, it’s posted on social media*. They told me that was probably a replica, probably photoshopped, and they would do their best with the departmental resources available to them. But I know the truth: they were in on it. They allowed this to happen. There are FRR extremists in the police. They pay them off to turn a blind eye. It’s either that, or they simply do not care if our children live or die. What would you have me believe? That since she died by

suicide she was unworthy of the most basic protections we have in place for the young and impressionable? What about justice? What about ensuring this never happens again to anyone else's vulnerable children?

DeShonda did not take her life. She was tricked into it. Coerced. Entranced. They modeled this behavior, manipulated her into thinking it was something to aspire to. They conspired against her, turned her into ammunition for their perverted cause.

The desk is now part of some sicko's collection of violent antiquities. He posted it, like a meme, next to images of John Dillinger's bloody handkerchief and Del Shannon's rifle.

Thousands of likes, hearts, thumbs-up. His subscribers called DeShonda a real one, a bonafide FRR Blue Devil of the highest order, but the top comments called her stupid, a Colic, a whiny little bitch, who deserved what she did to herself. Who should have done it sooner. They called her an animal and a saint and a poser and a revolutionary, all at once.

I will tell you: there is nothing to be gained. Not from any side. The FRR is a black hole. It only sucks it all in. There is no secret truth at the bottom of it all. It is only loss, only emptiness.

Stop wondering about it. Stop thinking about it. There is nothing to uncover, nothing to "figure out." Once you are pulled into their satanic melancholy psychosis you can never leave it. The same goes for your family and friends. If it touches them, they are forever stained with it. Resolve to live your life in unthinking joy, however small or shallow or average, and cling to the light of life. It will be taken from you.

DR. LEVI MCCULLOUGH

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In many ways, the death of Ghee Wiley was the best thing that could have ever happened to the Folk Revival Revival. It was their great catalyzing event, the realization of their mythology. Even though it was not, strictly speaking, a suicide, it was, to put it crudely, close enough. Look at Goethe—romantic genius requires that ultimate act of rebellion, rebellion against the very fallen, corrupt status of the material world. The sublime impossibility of progress, of utopia, of love. Potentiality cannot be possible. Truth’s ultimate enemy is stasis, sustainability. Moderation. The romantic genius, ultimately, *must* be too sensitive, too true, too brimming with sensibility to cope with such a false state of affairs. If they can just put up with it like the rest of us, the herd, the hoi polloi, if they can cope, if they can grow past it, then all that romance has been trivialized, has been revealed as manageable, not urgent, or not severe enough to require action. Thus, too, has their art, their unique perspective, and so on. If they are not so novel, so revolutionary, so rebellious, then they might as well move to the suburbs and take their Lexapro like everybody else, and it is *this* vision of adult life that the FRR found most despicable, not because of white flight, or predatory housing practices, or late-capitalist income disparity, or any kind of social ethos, but because for virtually all FRR members, the suburbs were where their parents lived.

Though the aftermath shattered their organization into a handful of fragmented groups, the “Melancholic Diaspora,” as they like to call it, with the leadership of most of these splinter groups fizzling out rather quickly via various revelations of abuse, before this tragedy there

really wasn't much of an organization to speak of. It was mostly just some bickering community of middling midwestern collegiates, both undergraduate and graduate, along with some wayward barroom musicians and a handful of boomer burnouts still dominated by dreams of their countercultural heyday in the 1960s and 70s. But no one was interested in their art. And worse yet, the culture was not calling, either to laude or condemn them. As with many forms of contemporary narrative art, the most damning reception is indifference. A conversation, a dialectic, must be compelled. For what good is a counterculture without persecution by some more shadowy, dominant force for suppression and opposition?

However, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Ghee Wiley's death was in some way a kind of "great commission" that commanded adherents of the Ordo Atrabilicus Aestheticus to commit self-harm, suicide, or acts of public violence. In our unfortunate American way, these tragedies required very little by way of inspiration. For all the covert personal and emotional malfeasance the ruling class of the FRR has exerted over the years— mainly perpetrated the so-called "Big Four," along with a handful of their capos— the group never had much to say by way of direct orders to their zealous soldiers, casual members, general fandom, or anybody in between. Like so many of their American grifter contemporaries, the FRR knew better than to publicly broadcast anything for which they could be later held legally-culpable.

In their early days, they outmaneuvered a handful of such legal entanglements— small time civil matters— by leaning heavily on their performative personas. A barrage of tweets demanding "the real artists of our day" to flush their depression medication and embrace the FRR's "Yield to Despair" mantra was, according to arguments made by their legal team, no more than an act of creative writing. It was, to borrow their words, "digital poetry," which no reasonable person could misunderstand as literal. It was, as they put it, "satire." A parody of the

excesses of our age, et cetera. These were musical performers. Rappers sing about murder and drug trafficking. Hell, even Nancy Sinatra shot her baby down. Anything said in the course of an FRR performance, they claimed, could only be misunderstood as some kind of literal command by the most mentally-unhinged. But wouldn't you know it, the FRR took great pains to actively, specifically, predatorily attract this demographic to their fanbase, what you might call the psychiatrically-disgruntled. Thus were a few hundred or so vulnerable, psychologically-suffering individuals unwittingly inundated into this space, half-real and half-false, half-joking and half-serious, half crafting cultural critique and half encouraging autoviolence.

They tried this approach, the parody defense, at first, after Wiley's death, but this line of logic quickly fell apart in the general popular media, which was not quite as impressionable as the FRR rank and file, whose minds had already been thoroughly muddled for years by extensive regiments of psychoactive substances, ranging from coffee to cough syrup, marijuana to methadone, elegantly-refined hallucinogens like LSD, or crude dissociations brought on by huffing industrial chemicals or gasoline. The melancholic artist's brain was a thing that the modern age demanded be gamified, and FRR adherents were taught to take this very literally, and to act upon it very aggressively. According to the Big Four, "Big Psychiatry" does the same thing, with substances equally unassured in their efficacy, so, what's the difference? In any case, at first the social media publicity wing of the FRR tried to assert that Ghee was not really dead, had transfigured, transformed, ascended, what have you. Unfortunately, attached to these posts were images of Ghee's somewhat mummified body, specifically his face, which was very much dead. But those images made for fantastic headlines.

Then, with the limelight gleaming, the FRR pivoted, speaking from both sides of their mouth. One wing of the organization revised their stories and reported his death as a terrible

tragedy, with all aggrieved in mourning, while others asserted Wiley was assassinated by the FBI, CIA, Deep State, or Moral Majority, who feared the revolutionary work with which he and the FRR were finally gaining traction. Once public discourse found something vaguely plausible in the assassination narrative, particularly relevant in our age of Global Elites, Epstein, et. al., well, it was *here* that the public image of the FRR exploded, for now the Average Joe had reason to believe the FRR— even if they were a bit too radical to join— had been silenced because they were onto something. Sound familiar? And out of the woodwork, on conspiratorial podcasts and alternative news sites and what have you, all the sharks had plenty of chum, and the FRR quickly realized the symbiotic benefits of hobnobbing with such vocal mouthpieces. And with every accusation of brainwashing there was some libertarian, sovereign citizen radio host hawking supplements and colloidal silver to retort that it was the federal government, nay, the modern world, that had really brainwashed the American populace into a state of submission to false and malevolent authority.



MATTHEW McMAHON  
ASSOCIATE YOUTH PASTOR, SOUTHPORT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
INDIANAPOLIS, IN

They bewitched my flock. Tore it in two and took half with them in their drug-fuelled convoy of derelict buses. Our dwindling morale, and my inability to inspire, took the rest, leaving a Youth Group composed of little more than the developmentally-challenged adult children of deacons and part-time parishioners, who treated our gym and hangout spaces like a daycare. I loved them all the same, but the Folksingers had taken something else from me when they left. Zeal, joie de vivre, maybe. Whatever you want to call it. I'd always thought of my charisma as a heavenly gift, something bestowed on me by Christ with great purpose, as though I was a mouthpiece through which urgent truths were channeled, commissions for love and the expansion of Christ's heavenly kingdom on Earth.

But then I watched these charlatans, these usurpers, replicate it with a keen, cynical tact. They performed their grand rhetorical theatrics— they called these 'shows,' not concerts— with irreverence and irony, as if the logos were a trivial plaything worthy of ridicule and forsaking. I expected my young congregants to see right through this. I was sure they would. They were middle schoolers and high schoolers, sure, but bearers of the armor of Christ nonetheless. Iron sharpened iron in our bible studies and mission trips, forging a close-knit community of servants in the name of the Lord. But then I watched them weep with bursting joys and wallowing sorrows, driven into frenzied states which I'd thought were reserved for first-hand connections with the Godhead. This was when it all melted away for me. I got the yips. I still do.

After seminary, maybe eight years ago, I put out feelers for assistant or associate pastor work around various ministries and congregations throughout the midwest. Indiana, especially. I'd some distant family there, which is always nice, but there was another reason. Call it a calling. I'd grown up in Illinois, where Chicago seemed to pull the entire cultural tapestry toward more liberal sensibilities. I didn't mind. In fact, I liked it. This may sound strange coming from a former man of god in the 21st century, but I couldn't stand the stuffy old hymn, the pomp and circumstance of dry and dusty sermons. All this preoccupation with formality, this antiquated elderly reverence stood in stark contrast to my idea of what it meant to live a life for Christ, which in my experience had meant a life spent in joyful exultation and good works. The gift of god is one that makes us shout and scream, laugh and cry. Maybe it was because I was still in my twenties, but my worldview at that time held pretty firmly that you could not live this life authentically while worrying about being all buttoned-up and proper. I gravitated toward the more contemporary styles of worship, Guitars and amps, singing to a beat you could tap your foot to. We liked new songs, wrote our own, used light rigs and smoke machines. These were theatrics of joy. Bright and shiny, yes, but it spoke to a cultural milieu that the youth could recognize as their own, and I felt this was very important for budding young Christians, that they recognize it as *theirs*, and not some spiritual inheritance of yellowing hymnals containing songs that were written before the first world war.

Indiana, I felt, was ripe for this kind of outreach and proselytizing. There had been some, well, regressive movements in the legislature for Indiana, especially, that had created this false image of the flock as this draconian, regressive thing that revoked personal freedoms and trivialized the struggles of youth. I won't get into them now, but surely you know what I'm talking about. Nevertheless, whether for intellectual reasons, or because my lord willed me to

this place, I ended up taking a job at Southport Presbyterian Church as their Associate Youth Pastor. I was charged with revitalizing the appeal of the youth ministries, which were all but ignorant of technologies like social media and, frankly, media in general. We swapped out the pews in the Youth Chapel for bean bag chairs and foosball tables, printed posters and flyers to pass around the middle and high schools, and ordered a couple hundred copies of a contemporary translation of The Bible called *The Dispatch* that did a great job recontextualizing God's word for a more contemporary audience. We started Friday morning prayer breakfasts before school, Saturday evening "God Parties," and pushed the Sunday sermon back to a cozy eleven o'clock. And *man*, it worked like gangbusters. A youth congregation of two-dozen dead-eyed kids bored out of their minds in pleated slacks turned into roughly one hundred and seventy seven—seriously—impassioned soldiers for christ.

It took some time for the Church leaders to warm up to the idea of a church house band, particularly because we played in the gymnasium, and sometimes when we played our raucous worship one-upped the grown-up service, causing the parents to quietly step out from their close-readings of Leviticus to check on the kids, only to find that the kids were having the time of their lives while the basketball court buzzed with the thump of our jazz bassist's righteous licks.

This was perhaps the most profound time of my life. A confirmation of that elusive search for one's place in the world. I held firm to the belief that here, in the boring middle-class suburbs of Indianapolis, the spirit of Christ was on the move. This would be a movement, like Billy Graham or the Jesus Freaks of the 1960's.

I had been at Southport Pres for about two years by the time our house worship band had finally solidified into a unit, a real band that wrote and rehearsed and exuded God's truth in our

performances. Up until then we considered ourselves lucky if one of the fifteen-year-old metal head boys could be coerced into playing bass for us by his grandmother. But *now*, man. I held my own up front strumming the acoustic. I can hold a tune okay. But it was Marcus, our drummer, who really lived in the pocket, and I felt so blessed when he told me he'd opted to stay in town for college so he could remain in the ministry, instead of heading for the hills to study jazz at some conservatory. Jill, our bassist, was his younger sister, and we were fortunate enough to get two electric guitarists, one lead and one rhythm, when the Holmes brothers, Tim and Andy, moved over from Ohio. With Deacon Garrison on the keys, and our custodian Ian stopping by for a guest appearance on the sax when he had the time, we had a regular E Street Band.

My god did we *rock*.

And it was all in his mostly heavenly name. We lifted it all up to him.

I managed to secure some meager funds for equipment and upkeep. Non-musicians take it for granted, but it can cost a lot to keep the sound on. Broken strings, dead cables. Mixing boards and monitors and noise-canceling pedal boxes for the guitars. We weren't buying Orange amps and PRS's, or anything, but it was nice to have that little bump, that little burst of confidence and goodwill from the church elders, who were finally starting to see the fruits of our labor as the kids began their Sunday morning donut fundraisers. They sold out every time. And as our own little treat, I'd take the band to Axe World on the first Friday of every month to pick up capos and tuners and whatnot. We'd always take a little time, too, to try out the boutique instruments we could never afford, and to imagine how far the word of Christ could travel once our gear matched our faith. It wasn't uncommon for us to run into other bands there, I mean, it was basically a musical instrument superstore, with electric guitars from the floor to ceiling, and an entire wing devoted to stage production and effects. Sometimes we'd get laughed at by the

resident punks strumming the crap out of their strats. Or the metalheads would mock us with their devil horns and upside-down cross t-shirts. But we didn't mind. These were but brothers-and-sisters-to-be, awaiting conversion at a time designated from up on high, and we took great pleasure in spreading the good news to them with an earnest kindness. We made friends with a lot of those people, and even if they never attended a service, I'd like to think this was some indication of his grace.

Still, I had to be a little weary of the more seedy outfits we'd see smoking joints by their dingy vans in the parking lot. The kinds of guys who'd eye Jill and beckon her to come to their show in god-knows-where. She stayed chaste though. I was proud of her. Such a beautiful person. And most of the time, the bands rolling through Axe World were on tour, which meant business, and that meant they got in, bought their gear, and kept on.

Then— it was in Autumn, September, I think— as the homecoming season began to wear off, and the Youth Group slumped a bit with the waning warmth, I took the band to Axe World to stock up on this-and-that and, hopefully, find some reprieve from the fall drudgery with some musical window-shopping.

As I parked the panel van, I heard Marcus talking.

“Who's *that*,” he said.

I looked where he was pointing and noticed a fleet of buses, maybe four of them, decked out in paisley and symbols, painted with all manner of quotations and musical murals. A giant bass clef had been stenciled on the back of the bus's emergency door, but it was rotated to one side like a frown. *The Folk Revival Revival* was painted on the bumper.

“Probably some jam band,” I said. “Some stoner noodlers.”

I didn't think anything of it at the time.

As the adult chaperone of the group, I was always a little on my guard. After all, this was my flock. It was my charge to protect them. But it was a guitar store in the middle of the Greenwood Park Mall, not the Bataclan Theater, so I didn't have much reason to worry. Plus we brought them plenty of good business, and the salesmen knew the score, by which I mean, who held the church credit card.

We walked inside and I let the kids— a couple of the middle-schoolers tagged along to check out some beginner acoustics— have the run of the place. Jill always wanted to play a Music Man 5 String, and Marcus would scurry to the back to talk cymbals with the regulars. I took a moment to track down the assistant manager to ask again about putting up some Youth Group ads on the bulletin board, though I knew he probably wouldn't bite. It wasn't that he was anti-church, he just felt that it was bad for business.

"Art is about *transgression*," he'd say. I didn't agree, but we enjoyed some playful arguments about it while the guitar tech would be sanding fretboards and muttering obscenities to himself.

We got to talking, and he still wouldn't budge. I don't remember his name, but I liked him. This time, though, I guess time had gotten away from me, because I remember looking up and feeling kind of dumbstruck by the sizeable group congregating in the soundproofed acoustic guitar room. It was my favorite place in the store. Nothing can match the sweet scents of mahogany and rosewood mingling about in that warm, humidity-controlled alcove of the store.

"Who's that?" I asked the manager.

"Some folk band," he said.

Not wanting to give myself away, I meandered toward the acoustic room's double doors, eyeing a price tag here and there. I remember there were four of them in the center of the room,

each with a different, wildly-expensive acoustic in their hands— one Martin, two Gibsons, one Guild— sitting in a kind of half circle, holding court. Through the dampened sound behind the doors I'd hear them play a few bars of some old traditionals, old-timey, pre-war type blues and Appalachian, Carter family-style stuff. Then they'd stop and laugh, or tell some little joke or story while putting on a little seminar of technical tricks. Where to place your capo. Drop thumb strumming. Et cetera.

What disturbed me, though, is how much this looked uncannily like church, like a Sunday service, and though I didn't know who they were or what they wanted, my stomach sort of dropped when I saw Jill raise her hand and ask a question. Then I noticed Marcus beside her with a djembe, and the twins too.

My whole band was in there, listening to what they had to say.

There were four leaders: a black woman with the most substantial dreadlocks I'd ever seen, a lumbering lumberjack of a man, easily 6'4" with a long red beard, next to him a greasy, emaciated man with even greasier bangs in black denims and wine-dark cowboy boots, and a fourth, another woman, this one thin and diminutive and stern-looking, wearing a pillowy cotton peasant's shirt and a wide-brim straw thatched hat straight out of 1969.

It seemed strange to me. Their makeshift crowd was about half shoppers, while the other half seemed to be their own associates— burnouts in flared denim, unkempt beards, freckled girls in pigtails wearing harmonicas on their belts. For what reason, then, was this hangout, this sit-in, or whatever it was, taking place?

Now, I've been a youth. Not so long ago, in fact. I knew better than to walk in and announce their names like some tone-deaf mother in a Target. You have to give kids their space. So I waited. I waited and waited. And eventually, maybe twenty minutes later, as I played dumb

and nonchalantly mused about the songbooks, my band waltzed right out, looking like, well, I'm sorry to put it this way, but this was how it was, this was the feeling that dragged down my guts:

They looked like they'd all been freshly fucked.

"Ready to go?" I said. "Got your strings and picks for the Fall Break Vacation Bible School?"

They looked at one another, all spacey and wide-eyed, then at Jill. Then at me.

"We just made friends with a *movement*," Jill said. "You won't believe it. They're real-life musical revolutionaries."

"Just like us, ey?" I said. I wanted to play along, but also, to knock these hippies down a peg in the idealizing eyes of my young and vulnerable flock.

"Totally," Marcus chimed in. "They want to play at the church. We invited them to come jam with us."

"Do they play Christian music?" I asked.

"It's gospel," Jill said. "True American Roots. They know a lot about it. They're graduates of the Lomax Center at Raintree University. You'd love them, Matt. They're really knowledgeable about folk music. They say all worship comes from folk music"

At that moment they were already gone, my band— I just hadn't wised up to it yet. These people, you can't let them in. Listen: never give them a foothold. They're like vampires. All they need is an invitation. Then it's all over.

The following week we were invaded by the Folk Revival Revival. They schmoozed Elder Thomas by the information desk, convinced Pastor Winny they were musical therapists with doctoral degrees in the treatment of trauma, and passed every congregant in their bloody wake with a shit-eating grin and a half-mocking, "Christ be with you." You should have seen the



assurance, the sheer *credulity* of my community. They ate it all up without one single world-weary question. Without a hint of critical thought.

No one else could see through them but me. I didn't understand why. I still don't. But I watched them usurp my church service, watched that same core group, these Four Horsemen, waltz past me onto my stage and adjust my mic stands and plug into my amps, as if all I had built in this house of worship was but the meek work of a humble roadie preparing for the stars to arrive.

They walked on stage like they were fucking Fleetwood Mac. Like they owned the god damned place.

Their conquest didn't take long. I'm sure you know that. That first night we couldn't even get them to leave. Elder Thomas stupidly lent them the southeast corner of the parking lot for their buses, where they squatted for about three weeks, leeching off the church for everything from food to showers. They cleared out the canned goods and blankets collected for the homeless food drive, had the old-lady cooks bringing them breakfast and giving them haircuts in the south lawn. And with every mooching fucking request we were met with their groveling gratitude, and they offered up all manner of raised palms and exaltations of "Praise the Lord!" Then they'd play another round of songs, and all would join in. They spent a week learning our House Worship Band's Sunday setlist, and after another week they'd "updated" all of it, "revised" the words for more enlightened poetic meter, swapped symbols and images for "higher literary cohesion," altered chord changes and keys, amending every line of joyous praise to include an explicit statement of melancholy, of sublime despair in the face of an terrifying God I could no longer recognize.

The next Sunday, Edler Thomas pulled me outside to speak on the facade steps as the plummeting westward sun stained the sky a throbbing red like an infection.

“Numbers are up,” he said. “They’re even giving you a run for your money.”

“They’re not Christians,” I said.

“Sure they are,” he said. “They’re a little funny, but they know how to talk to the kids. That’s good for business, no?”

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,” I said.

“Proverbs,” he said. “Very slick. Perhaps you recall chapter eleven, verse two then.”

“Perhaps,” I said, raising my voice. “*You* remember Ephesians five fourteen. Wake up. These are false idols. They speak from both sides of their mouths. Am I really the only one who can see it?”

“All I see,” Elder Thomas said, “Is the arrogance of a stung ego. You built up this tabernacle, but now you’re playing second fiddle. There must be made a place at the table. We are all the same kind of folk.”

Five days later it came out that Jill had had sexual relations with two revivalists between the buses in the parking lot during prayer breakfast, while a handful of FRR members stood around watching. They were run out of town that afternoon, their schoolbuses chugging and pumping out black clouds while Jill’s father waved his fist and making all threatening to call his lawyer, the police, and on and on, until Jill grabbed him by the arm and screamed that she had wanted it, she had liked it. That he didn’t understand.

Then he called her a whore and said, “You want to live like trash, then there’s the fucking street.”

He slapped her across the face and stomped off to his car, shoulder-checking me on the way.

“Body of fucking Christ,” he said.

His wife scurried away behind him.

Jill, crying, ran to her beat up Toyota Camry and peeled out in pursuit of the FRR convoy. Two or three more cars followed, each packed to the gills with the new Revival Revivalist Faithful. My whole house worship band among them. Deacon Garrison, too. Crying parents called 911 seeking amber alerts, but it was no use. They were not *taken*. They chose to go. They would have to call a non-emergency line.

Most would trickle back in the coming months— though never again to Youth Group— having burned out on the revolution, just like their parents had forty years ago. These children, too, returned as militant republicans, ready to *seig heil* with the burgeoning resurgence of American fascism, which didn’t feel so different, after all. One charging light brigade for another.

I went on leave. I prayed. I read Kierkegaard and St. Augustine. I journaled and prayed. But it was just an act. It had always been nothing more than an act. And for whom had I been performing?

ROSCOE “DOC” HILLHOLLER

FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE, ST. LOUIS, MO

I don't mean to gloat about it— no, you know what, as a matter of fact, *fuck yes* I do, I absolutely do mean to communicate to you, in no uncertain terms, that our FRR attunement training program produces nothing short of super powers in its practitioners. Our pamphlets, our chapbooks, the performances, they really don't do it justice. You know such material forms of aesthetics and knowledge have their limits. A photo is not the place it documents. To really get it, to learn what it is to really *be there*, you have to get to the source. And it is that source I offer you access to today.

Would you like to be a superhero? Would you like the power to alter the fabric of reality and the human consciousness in ways only known to history's greatest leaders and thinkers and keepers of a secret cosmic order?

You start to see it as a little guppy, a mere neophyte, and then as you continue the practices, reach deeper levels, refine and expand those occultic modalities of American Roots music, you essentially become a fucking superhuman. An X-Man. A wizard. An overman. A golden lion. A Champion of the Root Races. Call it whatever you want. But this school of art is much more than an afternoon program for finger-painting and macaroni necklaces.

The FRR attunement program will teach you tempo, not only in the ability to keep time, but in the ability to bend it, halt it, slow or hasten it, to manipulate its fluctuations, to push and pull and squeeze on its ebb and flow. It goes back to Plato, to the very idea of the ideal, the vibrating of the heavenly spheres. A secret song is etched upon that grand resonance, and only we know how to read it. And once you can read it, once you learn to transmit that information to

those who have prepared to receive it with the proper research, training, and self-actualization, I tell you that you will never look at the material world again, for reality is a thing that bends to the will of the musical mages, it is a false and lowly and imprisoning world ripe for the sleeper's awakening, ready for the veil to drop, and this is only the beginning.

Once you get that big black dog on a leash, get it to sit and stay and shake paw for you, *man*, the possibilities. Sure, there are those cliched banal expressions of power and domination, the ability to inflict a major melancholic episode via precise melodic alterations in micro-sharps and micro-flats, the prowess to puncture the sense of sense and homeostasis at the very level of the neurotransmitters, multiplying dopamine or oxytocin levels exponentially, by magnitudes psychiatric science can only dream of, bestowing floods of pleasure or pain on your audience members by the pick of your fiddle or the twang of your jaw harp. And then there are the culling songs, only to be employed under the most dire of circumstances.

But believe me when I say this is only the start of the story, this grand narrative of history and the final realization of the Hegelian dialectic's ping-pong progression of thesis and antithesis smashing together at the atomic level throughout the aeons. Those conventional exertions of power and authority are parlor tricks in the grand milieu of Folkloric Revival Revivalist Attunements. Forget your Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, forget Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine, forget Crowley's ass-fucking magick or LaVey's theatric performativity or Michael Aquinos' CIA-backed Temple of Set or David Icke's interdimensional reptilian overlords— that diaspora was cast across this great and lost nation in a concerted governmental attempt to shut down and shun and make pariahs of all those who know the truth regarding the epistemological limits of conventional power and empirical knowledge. Medicine is a practice. Science is a practice. Folk Music is a medicine and a science. And we have elevated it to its truest form:

Musick. To the layman we are a Folk Revival Revival. But you will know us by our true name:  
Ordo Atrabilicus Aestheticus.

And lo, that great yawping force has come alive once again, that fabric has been mended and bolstered and reinforced and levee'd against all those small-minded bureaucratic sycophants who would see this nation's peoples suffer in deadend lives of quiet desperation. But rejoice, be glad, your folklore and your friends bear the beaming light of enlightenment's true virtue, and the secret language of that enlightenment can be yours for a meager sum of small, course-by-course donations that help support our cause and ensure that the Black and Bilious River of the Melancholic Diaspora will rain for a thousand years.

For you know: it's a hard, and it's a hard, and it's a hard, and it's a HARD—

It's a hard rain's a'gonna fall.

A prophet said that.

SAM HARTY

SOFTWARE SYSTEMS ANALYST, WICHITA, KS

My little brother was one. God rest his soul. His name was Jeff. As a precocious thirteen-year-old he changed it to “Geoffrey,” like Geoffrey Chaucer. Jeff wanted to be a modern-day troubadour, just like the cultural compiler of *Canterbury Tales*. This is something the FRR teaches, that American Folk music is part of a longer lineage of artistry, carried across continents and across centuries. A secret order. A magickal society. This is why they call it “musick.” Homer was one. Dante and Shakespeare, of course. And then the romantic poets, Byron and Blake and all the others I said I read for my college lit surveys. The FRR marked these as the English analogues to the folk musical traditions in the US, Appalachian dulcimer ballads and sharecropper ragtime pickers. All one movement, one vision, according to the FRR. Up through the Paris expatriots, the Beat Generation, Bob Dylan, et cetera. The *Ordo Atrabilicus Aestheticus*, they called it. A hidden brotherhood of melancholic seers uniting English Bards with Delta Blues singers and civil rights activists. It’s all a bunch of bullshit. But Jeff bought into it, like so many others. In another time, he would have been a goth punk or something. A hippie. A Hare Krishna.

Jeff wanted to be part of a group. He was young. So he got on the internet and found one, replete with fashionable iconography and occultic symbols. Photogenic singers and crowds, signs and shirts and conventions and rallies. Jeff responded to their visual flare. He was just a kid doing weirdo kid shit. Jeff latched onto Geoffrey Chaucer, for whatever reason. It was a shallow affection, really. Old and english. Less mainstream, I guess, than the more obvious fandom choices of the other kids. It didn’t even match the rest of his schtick. He was half Victorian and

half Huck Finn, in a ruffled puffy shirt rolling up the legs of his dusty dungarees, walking around barefoot with a thatched straw hat on his greasy head while a corncob pipe hung loosely from his mouth, a banjo resting on his shoulder like a bat or a bazooka. The little shithead. Mom and Dad thought it was cute, at first. I thought it was off, or false, or fake. A put on. Affectations he aped from somebody else's interests. But there he was, going on and on about Chaucer, Old Occitan lyric poetry, the supernatural abilities sealed inside narrative and poetry and melody. The fucking *Canterbury Tales*.

"There's no 'the,'" he would always correct me. "It's just *Canterbury Tales*."

At first our folks were thrilled. Jeff had literary interests. Sensibility. He was a budding young intellectual, a future academic scholar, enthralled by the world of books by day, writing songs and practicing his clawhammer banjo work by night. The truth is, he could barely strum. And he didn't read one page of the leatherbound collector's edition of Chaucer I bought him for his birthday. Easton Press, gold leaf gilded edges. I got it back after he died. Pristine condition. Cracked the spine myself before I tossed it in the garbage. I have no time for the arts. I am burdened by a reality that I do not have the luxury to question, muse upon, or make something beautiful out of. It wasn't a book for Jeff. It was a prop. It lended his pretensions the physical dignity of artisanal objects. I don't mean that as a criticism of my brother—he was just a kid. What needs to be said, though, is that he did not come by his intellectual pretensions honestly. Jeff was lured into a subculture by bad faith bad actors. They didn't teach him, they *told* him what to like, what to think, how to dress, how to talk. It was manipulation, brainwashing, the only difference being he wasn't captive. Jeff allowed himself to be their captive, one click at a time. The music, the poetry, it's all a smokescreen. It's window dressing. It's passing familiar so you can't see what is really going on. Once they rope you in with all the hip literary musical



references and cool sexy slogans, they sidle up close to you and tell you what it's really all about. What they can't say in front of the normies. And all they want in return is your support, at first. Like and subscribe. Then it's a meager donation, whatever you can give. Before long they have your whole allowance. Then your time. Then your loyalty to their humanist organization's greater values and ultimate goals, which means they want your blood. The FRR said you have to be real to make art and you have to suffer to be real and Jeff did just that, in all his dark academic ephemera, shutting up in his room to read their newsletters and fan zines and breaking down into a morose little anxious depressive, locking himself in the bathroom to carve words into his arm like sigils throbbing red with infection where he was once your standard suburban bright-eyed and bushy-tailed light to the world. That's what they do, the FRR. They take the suffering genius schtick and sell you the suffering while you think you're buying the genius. You cannot purchase artistry. You cannot earn it with your torments when those torments are self-consciously self-inflicted. Like so many of us, Jeff mistook being miserable for being grown-up or adult or worthy of serious consideration as an individual. I guess he was probably right, but that's the problem, the FRR made it out to be all too real, too literal. The production of the artistic persona was like a military training exercise. Suffering for your art meant starving yourself, staying up for days on end, cycling off and on high doses of caffeine or cough medicine to induce manias or depressions or crashing emotional cataclysms with your loved ones, meditating on images of blown-open skulls and disembowled lynching victims, learning to weep without your singing stumbling, listening to audio recordings of genocidal massacres or human beings being ripped apart by bears where you once listened to songs with melodies and lyrics and messages of love. A lot of them don't even use drugs anymore. Drugs are just a means to an end. It's woe that they're after. Jeff called this his "duty" as an artist and FRR operative. That was the word he

used. “Operative.” His fucking duty. I walk in on him watching Youtube clips of 9/11 jumpers at 2am on a Saturday night and Jeff tells me through snotty sobbing tears that it’s his duty, and then he begs me not to say anything, insisting that this is an act of attunement, the conjuration of psychic suffering into a substance he called ‘Orgone’ energy, which every artist must produce in order to transform it into true and beautiful acts of literature and musical composition capable of enacting true melancholy.

I didn’t keep my word— I went straight to Mom and Dad and sat them down and said look, there’s something going on. We need to talk about Jeff. Jeff is in trouble.

“Geoffrey’s fine,” my Mother said. “It’s a phase. Like you and your metal music. Just because you don’t get it doesn’t mean it’s bad.”

“He has a unique perspective,” my Dad said.

“He marches to his own drum,” Mom said.

I tried to tell them, no, that’s not it, Jeff hasn’t found his unique identity. He has been *sold uniqueness*. His exceptionalism has been planned and packaged and hawked to a thousand other vulnerable kids just like him. Because it’s a grift. They’re grifters. But it was no use. They had no clue. Jeff was thriving, they said. Preparing for a big concert with the church praise band, they said. Putting all that artistry to good use, for the glory of God and a good cause for raising mental health awareness, they said.

The headline wrote itself: *Community Mourns as Mental Health Awareness Month Concert Erupts in Public Teenage Suicides*. Jeff and his three bandmates hid pipe bombs in the cavities of their instruments. Said their little FRR diatribe, cut straight from the websites and social media broadcasts, started to sing their little folk songs, “Green Corn” and “Old Time Religion” and “Spirit in the Sky” and then *boom*. The whole room was wet and hot, the air too

thick to breathe. And shark-toothed bits of my little brother's wrist bone lacerated my cheeks and forehead. One shard would have blinded me were it not for my glasses. Later that day the local news anchors said the boys shouted "Yield to Despair" before flipping the switch. But that didn't happen. I was there. That was just good branding the FRR insinuated into the narrative after the fact. An addendum, a revision to the mythology. Another sound advertisement for the Folk Revival Revival's latest push for the most radical and progressive new American Art form: the Performative Violences. Good exposure for the cult, sure, but Jeff's name was all but forgotten in about two weeks, after the next cluster of FRR suicides, not to mention a mass shooting at the mall by Jeff's middle school. But that was a white nationalist conspiracy theorist seeking to save captive children from an underground adrenochrome harvesting laboratory. Different conspiratorial massacre altogether. Wouldn't want to conflate the two. Wouldn't want to mistake them both as part of some more pernicious disease at the heart of the American consciousness. Then we might really have a problem. Then the government would be forced to act. And if they didn't, if they wouldn't, well, then you would know for sure that they were in on it.

CAMPUS COMMUNITY OFFICER DUNN GEARHARDT

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PD, BLOOMINGTON, IN

Rich calls me one day from Raintree University PD. Most of the time it's me calling him, as Indiana University, being the bigger campus and town by a wide margin, usually comes with more criminal activity, as you might imagine, and really just more activity in general, larger population numbers, higher urban concentration, you know how it goes. We like to joke between the offices that Raintree is the "Bizarro Bloomington," you know, everything is the opposite. IU is big and public and happening, whereas Raintree has always had more of a small and quiet reputation, meeker, the kind typical for the average midwestern private liberal arts college, a "Harvard of the Midwest," as they so like to put it.

Those kids do their partying, they get down, sure, but are usually less likely to go buck wild and off the deep end, as so many poorly-supervised state university students do. They're also less likely to delve into more advanced stages of addiction, these students, because they're held accountable in their coursework, by their teachers, and by their parents. Billy Jo stops attending psych class at Raintree, he's probably getting a call from his professor, unlike IU, where one can more effectively slip through the cracks.

Plus, Raintree has this graduate student population, a big one, disproportionate to most schools of that size, you know, the Butlers or the Franklins, though the number escapes me, and graduate students have usually gotten most of that shit out of their system years ago. In theory. Usually, if the Raintree bookish types want to let loose, they come over to Bloomington, they hit frat row or Kirkwood. They buy dime bags of afghan kush or maybe a handful of Percocet for ten or fifteen a pop, too cost-prohibitive to invite the attention of the anti-drug units. Or, if they

have money, which many of them do, the undergraduates anyway, from their parents. But it's trickier in the internet age. Nowadays many do a lot of their shady dealings on the deep web. Small-time law enforcement offices like mine and Rich typically kick these up the ladder to state or federal.

The more unhinged and devil may care among these student bodies might seek out some meth from the various trailer trash, roxies from scumbags who never left after they dropped out, the occasional rural deadhead hawking blotters for jam band night at the Bluebird. They don't have to look far. And when they want to take to the woods around Raintree to candy flip or rave-in-a-cave or whatever the fuck, it's nice to give or get a call with a kind head's up.

Sorry, I digress.

Rich calls me up. He asks me if the phrase "Blue Devils" means anything to me. I tell him that they took a big hit losing Devonte Ross and Lance Peebles, but overall that I still liked them for the tourney, definitely the elite eight.

"No no no, not Duke," he says. "Besides Duke," he says.

I tell him nope.

"What about with an A-E. D-A-E-V-I-L-S. Does 'Daevils' mean anything to you? *Daevils*."

So I say, you know, confused, obviously, "Day-vils?" And he says, no, he says, *devils*, with that thing, the two vowels, "A" and "E" stuck together, which I learned is called a grapheme, a typographical ligature, which, incidentally, has its own name: it's called "ash."

I tell him, well, no, that doesn't ring any bells, that it sounds like it's maybe Latin or something, but it's Greek to me. Maybe he should ask Frat Row.

Rich says he did some googling, and that this A-and-E thing doesn't show up in American english often nowadays, but does shows up in computer programming, but that those are *daemons* and not *daevils*, he says, though there's maybe enough of a connection there with the common satanic denotation.

So, I'm like, Rich, *come on*, you know? Satanic? What are we talking about here? And Rich proceeds to tell me about this Raintree kid who was picked up after apparently making some strange comments on the internet, social media or what have you, insinuating that he was going to end his life or something like that. Not all that exceptional or unusual behavior, for the demographic. So, per protocol, Rich goes on the ride along with an Ohlin mental health counselor to pick this kid up, and when they arrive at his dorm room with printed copies of the questionable statements, the kid gets all uppity and obstinate, talking about, you know, how those were pieces of performance art, and how he's part of a musical coalition that's going to usher in the yadda yadda yadda, and how they have no right to monitor him in this way, that this is illegal surveillance, NSA, yadda yada, despite the public nature of the comments, et cetera, et cetera.

And I'm with him there, I have to say. I mean, this is America. If you're not allowed to publicly express how much *you* hate *your* fucking life, I got news for you, pal: the liberty of your free speech is but an illusion. There is something distinctly irrational about a society that demands people *must* live and *must* be content about their being alive.

Anyway. So, the counselor, as the counselor is supposed to, informs the kid that he signed a code of conduct when he started school here, and how she and Rich are just there to help, to assure he's safe, and all this. And Rich notices that the kid's arms are, just, like, *mangled*, like all fucked up with cuts, but not like scrapes or gashes, not like the kinds of injuries accrued from physical activity or drunken clumsiness, *razor cuts*, at least fifty tiny slices. Fucks me up to think

about. I'm a cop, small-town, sure, but I'm not squeamish about blood or violence. I've had my share of townie suicide runs, holding some poor bloated fuck's legs while the RFD— Raintree Fire Department— boys cut the rope. I guess it's the kid aspect of it all that bothers me. They don't know what they're doing, not really. Their brains aren't done cooking yet. They see how seriously we take the Kurt Cobains of the world and, naturally, they want to emulate this kind of tragic, historic behavior.

So Rich, as softly, gently as he can manage, asks this kid, you know, what happened to your arms, and the kid says, "Cat attacked me," so Rich says, "Must be some cat," which the kid doesn't like, and he starts getting all antsy, saying he'd like to leave his room, and the counselor, she's kind of standing in the doorway strategically, as an obstacle, because the students never react well when they're told they can't be left alone, but usually they wise up to the reality of their situation in a couple of seconds, which this kid does.

Sidebar: this is why— and I would never admit this to my kids, or my wife— I would *never, ever* express suicidal thoughts for this very reason. They fucking lock you up. Padded rooms, supervision. Plastic cutlery sporks. Telling *you* that *you* don't know why *you're* thinking what you're thinking, that somebody else needs to help you understand, resolve your situation. The fuck do they know about what it's like between *my* ears that makes them think they should have the ability to suspend my very *agency* as a citizen? Jesus. Height of condescension. I'd rather be suicidal and retain my liberties than be a prisoner of my own loose lips any day. Which is not to say I'm against mental health— I'm not. I'm saying that the mental health professional who wants to take away your *rights* as an American does not have your best interests in mind.

Period.

Anyhow, the kid wises up, gets all agitated. Long story short, Rich has to pin him down on a futon after he starts reaching for something in his backpack. They call backup, get the kid out of there, grill his roommate, et cetera. Rich searches the kid's bag at the behest of the counselor, and inside he finds, wouldn't you know it, blotter sheets.

Ten of them, perforated. A *thousand* fucking hits on this kid, and Rich knows what he's looking at, so he's thinking, shit, *pay dirt*. But what is peculiar is the logo. So, you know how a lot of LSD will come with a little logo or cartoon, a kind of branding, whether it's a star or a peace sign or whatever bullshit. But these, these have these odd looking, like, *frowny faces* on them. Two blank dot eyes and a big ol' frown, hooking around the left side kind of like an upside-down Nike *Swoosh*. Rich sends me a picture of one for reference.

Fast forward a week later, Rich checks in on the report. Blotters come back negative for LSD.

Rich, as you might imagine, is a little, like, *what?*

In fact, get this: there's nothing on them at all. They're just paper. When grilled about it, the kid tells the counselor that these were for spiritual purposes. Concentrating the melancholy, he says.

Black Bile is the ultimate psychoactive substance, he says.

"Well, Richie," I say. "That's pretty queer. You telling me this Phish Head is selling trips made of *bad vibes?*"

Naturally, by then they're thinking cults, obviously. They start fishing in the interview: brainwashing, mass suicide plans, mass shooting plans. The classics. And the kid laughs. And they ask the kid why he's laughing. And he says— get this— that it's a *school-sponsored event*. A concert being held by those Lomax Center folks at their local watering hole, something as an



art school they do, or rather did, quite often. And once the kid wisens up to the fact that he's being suspended— though for what exactly I wasn't sure— he stops talking altogether.

So, Rich asks me if any of that makes any sense, because I know a handful of those Lomax folks, the faculty, anyway. My daughter, Peg, was a high schooler at the time, real bright kid, and about the time she entered her teenage years she started listening to Dylan and Neil Young and all those guys— sorry, and girls, uh, Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell— and I thought, you know, give her a taste of the live musical scene. I didn't mind that they have concerts at a bar— Morris, the owner, is good people, and I went to high school with his brother, so we go way back. I never worried about Peg hitting the sauce at an early age, or anything like that. I encouraged her to get involved with this folk scene because the music seemed, you know, really thoughtful, creative. It's an American tradition, it's a communal thing. We bought her a guitar and she started taking lessons and was loving it. Kids need an outlet like that. They can't all play sports, but they can't just do nothing. That's why they start taking pills and shit, start wondering why they feel so sad all the time. I'll tell you why they do: because they're hormonal monsters. It ain't because they're sadder than everybody else, whatever that would prove.

But yeah, I mean, I tell Rich that this doesn't make a lick of sense to me, and that I'll ask around, Dr. Roland was a friend, Eamonn less so, but I was cordial with those folks, I could approach in that capacity, as a friend. And I did. Made some calls. By all accounts, while this kid was acting a little whacked, it seemed he was acting alone, whatever he was doing. I asked Dr. Roland if there was any other significance to the March 15th thing, Julius Caesar and all. I've read things. She said that concert in particular was scheduled for that day because of the birthday of one of the performers. Fair enough. It's over a month away, and it's probably nothing, so I'm

not too worried. I asked if Dr. Roland recognized the symbol, the frowny face, and she stared at it for a solid ten seconds before telling me, no, she'd never seen it before in her life.

It is around this time that I start to notice something is up with Peg. She's still my same little girl, but every so often, over the next few weeks, I catch her making these odd, macabre comments, just, out of the blue, in passing. Like one day, I pick her up from school, you know, we're talking, recounting the day, normal stuff, everything on the level, when all of a sudden, she says, "Did you know that I have the same name as an infamous actress who committed suicide by jumping off the 'Hollywood' sign in Los Angeles?"

And I say, well, yes honey, I do know that, because it is the subject of a Steely Dan song.

"But why do *you* know that?"

She says she was just reading stuff on the internet and thought it was interesting. I try to brush it off, but a week later she's got her friend Gillian over, and they're sitting around in the living room, doing homework, watching television. All of a sudden Peg's saying all this shit about the mysteries of the "27 Club," all these famous musicians who took too many benzos and aspirated their vomit, or drowned, or killed themselves, or were murdered, and how this is all part of a grand conspiracy to keep the counterculture at bay. Some secret order of romantic artists dating back to biblical times. Crazy kinds of nonsense stuff. And Peg, she's getting moodier, more morose. Less interested in going out and doing things. She's just sitting around on her computer all the time, doomscrolling on her phone. She's barely playing music, and when she does, she sounds as though she's on the verge of weeping. And I start to worry. But, kids are weird, I ask my wife, she says it's just being a dad, not understanding the youth culture. She says that these millennials have a dark worldview, because of the world they inherited, climate change and cost of living and all that whiny pinko crap, that they don't have stigmas around dark shit

like we did in, say, the 80's, when everybody thought the world was going to end and, consequently, we collectively decided we'd all like to keep existing and would like to not dwell on the topic of not existing.

Which is fine, until about a week later, when Peg walks down the stairs wearing her jean jacket and *the same fucking frowny face* that was on Rich's blotter paper.

I fucking just— I flip out.

That night went poorly.

I, in so many words, accused Peg of being in a cult, a cult of depressives, who I might have called losers. She denied that they had anything to do with the recent string of psychotic blues-themed graffiti that was popping up all over town. She said just because it was a spiritual thing does not make it a cult. I said that didn't make it a religion. She said *good*. I said something to the effect of, *they're going to take away what makes you 'you,'* and she said that was fine, because she hated herself.

And that night I wept so hard that I burst the capillaries in my face, making me look freckled by bruises, and my wife Julie had to hold me and gently *shhshh* me until I stopped sobbing and fell asleep.

I'll admit it— I was scared. We went through a lot of that shit with her older brother, Felix. He's doing fine now, he's a Marine, but for a while there he was in a really dark place— putting cigarettes out on his forearms, drug use. Putting himself in reckless and dangerous situations. Getting in with the wrong crowd.

A couple nights after things cool off I go to Peg and I try to talk to her. She's listening to her stereo, but it's not Dylan, it's not Joni Mitchell or CSNY. It's just some warbly little wolf pack of shits who sounds like they're about to start crying after they're done bitching and

moaning, and they're talk singing about how they drink way too much, and smokes too many cigarettes, and how nobody they meet is interesting, and how nobody gets it, and how much it sucks to be alive.

So, I ask her to pause it for a second, and she does, and I sit down beside her, and I take a couple breaths.

I tell her Peg, honey, it's completely natural when you start becoming an adult to start feeling certain things, self-consciousness and anxiety, depression— and all of that is completely natural. And if these things persist to degrees that seem to outweigh the normal amount of heavy shit the average person carries, well, we find that person somebody to talk to, and perhaps we get them some medicine.

But— and I try, I really try, to say this next part carefully, holding eye contact, because I'm worried I could lose part of her like we lost part of Felix— when you start cultivating a *habit* of dwelling on the nature of these feelings more than you are trying to live your life, to grow or do better or be something, when you start *indulging* in them the way that teenagers indulge in dangerous or reckless behaviors, well, when you let that veil fall, when you start pulling on that thread, it can become very hard to sew back up again, because in effect you start training your brain to think this way, this negative way, from a very early age, when your brain is still developing, and this can have substantial, detrimental effects on your relationship to your mind's cognitive processes as an adult. And I ask her if that makes sense, if she understands.

"Yep," she says.

I ask if she has any questions, or if she would like to talk to me about what she's thinking or feeling.

"Nope," she says, pressing play.

So we stepped in.

They're called "Circuit Breakers."

I think we did the right thing. It was the hard thing, but the right thing. Peg is alive, she's safe. I have to remind myself of that often, or I can't really get out of bed. Some days I can't get out of bed either way. Peg has a job at an art museum outside Chicago, a girlfriend who Julie tells me is very good to her, takes care of her.

You know, when I was a kid, my older brother Ronnie started getting in with this group, one of those Satanic Death Cults, with the metal music and black clothes and makeup. They were meeting in the woods to kill cats and drink their blood, drawing pentagrams in the blood, lighting candles around the pentagrams, performing strange rituals. Some were sacrificing babies. Some ate them. Ronnie would steal from our folks, be out all hours, never have a nice thing to say to anybody. He was impossible to reach, doing drugs, listening to all this super dark, satan-worshiping music. Way past Ozzy. It was the real deal.

I know how my folks felt back then, to be that frightened, to see your child being manipulated out of their very personality by some dirgey fucking metal music and some Aleister Crowley motherfucker in black robes. And back then I thought they were monsters for hiring a guy like Ted Patrick, who kidnapped Ronnie at an arcade, grabbed him right off *Street Fighter*, Patrick and his two sizeable associates, who blindfolded Ronnie, threw him in a panel van, restrained him, and held him captive at a motel two states away for three weeks.

Ronnie told me— this was many years later— some of the things they did to him. Sleep deprivation. Food Deprivation. Making Ronnie stare for hours at the flame of a lighter as they taunted and beckoned him to summon his dark lord so that they could be struck down by Gabriel and Ronnie could be saved. They told him he had been brainwashed and that there were only two

possible outcomes to his situation: that he would be successfully deprogrammed of his cult misgivings, or that he would die.

Three weeks later he was all, “Mother! Father! How I’ve missed you!”

Three weeks later and he was hugging Ted Patrick, appearing on the local news, this shell of my brother, a robot, speaking as if he was reading from a script.

I have always resented my parents for that.

So, as I sat in my car in the bank parking lot, as I spied the GMC panel van positioned across the street from The Chatterton, where Peg and the girls were meeting up before heading to some party house on Lake Lemon where the folk concert was being held. I watched these three men in black tactical clothing approach a group of teens crossing the sidewalk, as I tried to hold the binoculars steady while staring at my little girl with bandages all over her wrists and forearms, as I watched one grab her around the waist and the other grab her feet, as I watched her friends scream in terror as the third operative told them all to shut the fuck up, as I watched them put a black hood over her head, as I watched them toss my little girl in the back of this panel van as she screamed for her friends, for her mother and me, to help her.

That was the moment I forgave my parents.

Not me though.

Peg’s alive— I was right. That’s shit for consolation. That show was Ghee Wiley’s birthday, as well as his last day on this Earth. And to this day the copycat suicides continue. Shootings, too. Two bombings. It builds upon itself, it progresses, like a tradition, each new act of performative violence a novel twist on the old form. Last time I checked it was edging up on a few hundred. They call it a “Werther Effect.” One of the biggest, apparently. So big, in fact, that it is now considered the longest successive mass suicide in modern American history, as if that

number weren't climbing already, all on its own. The waves of the graffiti, whispers of new scenes, secret societies— it's all still going on. Shows up in pockets, in geographic concentrations, as if these kids were called upon to gravitate together and feel like shit as one body united by melancholy, until they get amped up enough to snuff themselves out.

I can't understand it.

The dominating story regarding the incident is that Ghee Wiley, perhaps at the behest of his musical compadres, perhaps of his own volition, committed suicide on stage via electrocution, as some kind of radical blues-inspired performance art, or radical act of something. The FRR has referred to it as an act of satire, or parody. I don't know. I don't get it. It had also been insinuated that Wiley had been coerced into this act with the use of psychedelic drugs and brainwashing techniques by peers of his at the Lomax Center. There were plenty of conspiracy theories. But the SOPS, fire marshall— it was ruled a pretty cut-and-dry “death by misadventure.” Eventually, anyway. Naysayers emerged immediately to decry these institutions as corrupt, paid off, in on the cover-up. *Cover-Up*. Like there was some order to it all. Those FRR lunatics touted Wiley's body around for days. He was half-mummified by then, all kinds of mineral supplements, colloidal silver and god knows what deposited throughout his body. He'd turned blue. Literally blue. Really blue, for a black kid.

When Peg's ready to talk to me I believe she will. But she hasn't. Peg's girlfriend told Julie the Circuit Breakers sexually assaulted her. But they knew that wasn't part of the plan. This wasn't ever a gay conversion thing. I'm not a fucking animal. We just wanted her safe. I asked them and they assured me there was no such contact, that you have to be careful with kids in positions like this, because they'll just lie and lie until they come out on top. Even if it takes years.

“They all want their ‘Me Too,’” they said.

I don’t know what to think.

You know what? Maybe I do, at least in one regard.

Those FRR degenerates, for all their depression voodoo, sure do know how to turn a phrase. They say “Yield to Despair” and Brother, I just got to tell you, I know exactly what they mean.



XAVIER CARTER  
LANDSCAPER, CARMEL, IN

I feel embarrassed to admit it now. It is embarrassing to live, frankly, knowing that I took this substantial chunk of my life, my biography, my limited time on this Earth to do something meaningful, and instead I handed it all over to somebody else, someone else's vision. Such a waste. So many hours, days, months in which I allowed myself to be miserable, broke, broken, and for what?

There is no shame in a life spent in service of a grand ideal. There is much shame, though, in being duped into various pantomimes, parodies of a proverbial grand ideal. Most of the Revival Revivalists who leave the organization continue to toil in this paradigm, only from the other end, as maverick detractors hellbent on swooping in and saving the vulnerable from the FRR's clutches. But they're still in it, and they don't even realize. They cannot move on.

It reminds me of this article I was reading the other day about the New Left in American politics. The "Dirtbag Left," as the author called it, which she defined by its spirit of "vulgarity," which is to say, foregoing polite discourse, embracing crudeness, cursing, and other seemingly youthful gestures. Nice highbrow, state of the culture type stuff.

And I thought, well, vulgar according to whom?

Doesn't the definition, the boundary line itself, serve the very structure of power these so-called Leftists claim to seek to dismantle? Rebellion is not a thing in and of itself. It has to be facilitated by a cultural milieu which welcomes it. Without it, all their "piss" and "shit" and "fuck" loses all the radical, no-holds-barred, pull-no-punches luster. Their very status *against* the status quo is a thing guaranteed by it. It's the same trip as the militant atheist, who, try as she

might to emancipate herself from the spirit of the religious, cannot help but proselytize and evangelize in precisely the same style as the discourse she claims to have been freed from.

It's like the old joke: what do you call a theistic Satanist?

A Christian.

True emancipation means moving forward, forging anew. But many of my fellow former FRR members— victims— cannot do this. They must strive for justice. They must be the hero. They must blow the lid on the whole rotten operation with an interview, a book, a documentary. And I want to say to them, *don't you see that you're still doing it? Don't you see you're still in it?*

The Revival Revival likes to talk big about the fundamental emotional truths of the human spirit. They still do, They talk about melancholy and anxiety, and the courage it takes to explore and interrogate these mental states— *soul status*, we called it. In reality, I can tell you that the most real, operative, immediate sensations that truly represent the existential human condition are embarrassment, insecurity, vanity, and fear. I wish I had had the courage to reconcile with these feelings when I was younger, but instead I threw myself into those romantic postures, into having a great charge, a great mission, alongside my lifelong brothers and sisters of the revolution. But where are they now?

EZRA KEELY

OWNER, REENACTORS' BAZAAR, UNION CITY, TENNESSEE

I've done quite well for myself in the Revival Revivalists' memorabilia market, if I do say so myself. Wasn't where I got my start, though. It was wartime memorabilia, mostly. I came up in bumfuck Dyreville, Tennessee, a town twenty-five years dead by the time I was born, if it were ever alive at all. Dirty floors, outhouses— that kind of shit. I bounced out of high school— you could get by doing that in those days— and bummed around some scenes here and there throughout Tennessee and Kentucky. You know how it goes, being all young and full of piss and vinegar, by which I mean full of shit.

One week I was thumbing to Memphis to follow The King and pursue my rockabilly greatness, the next I was a rock climber in Red River Gorge, growing out my lazy white boy dreads and sleeping in my taped-together Datsun, working construction part time when I could be bothered to work. You wear a lot of hats when you're young, you pick a hobby or aspiration and say *this is who I am, this is me*. Shit, what luxury, the dirtbag freefall of youth, with plenty of time to kill. It's easy to be a shithead when you're young. I was.

I think back now and kind of marvel at it. Not my dumb shit 'adventures,' but my good fortune, the fact that I never got sick, got injured, got ditched out in the middle of nowhere and left for dead. You get in with your little clique and think somehow they'll be there to look out for you. But they all split when the going gets tough. They say *tough* and they *get going*. That's how it really is. It's easy to pledge your life to your friends. We made pledges for days, grand proclamations, plans to take off out west and start touring companies or barbecue restaurants. Then one spins out on crank, and another gets knocked up by some kid she barely knows, and

your best friend tells you he's hanging up his climbing shoes to go work for his Daddy. All the pieces that justified your identity, solidified your place in the world, they just fall away, and people move on.

For a time I was working as a zip line operator outside of Slade. Brash young man, testosterone junkie, clipping carabiners for fat fuck vacationers and watching as they slide across the gorge like great big potatoes on a greased clothesline. We with our dirtbag washboard abs and emaciated cheeks would snicker and grin watching these loads call this shit "hiking." Until one fell. It wasn't any of us operators that fucked up the clips— the whole zip line snapped, nearly took my head clean off in the process. It wasn't rated right or something. Boss hadn't gotten the proper permits. Not my problem. The lady died, popped like a blister on the rocks at the bottom of the gorge. And with her went my job security, meager as it was.

One of the other operators was a low-key skinhead named Bo. Weekend warrior KKK internet forum type bullshit. Generally, I don't care for racism, personally. Hating shit as a hobby seems like a waste of time to me. People love to get upset. But this numbskull got canned just like I did and the next week I'm bumming around the climber camp when Bo pulls up in his brand-spanking-new, gently used Toyota Tacoma. Guess he didn't mind the Japanese when it came to cars. Even racists put that shit aside for a discount, I suppose. Anyway.

I say, you know, "What bank'd you rob for that?"

Bo tells me the ARA ain't been on the bank robbing scene since '96 when they got pinched and one was revealed as a tranny. He seemed to think the latter infraction was worse, somehow. I didn't know what he was talking about. He started carrying on about the hygiene of the races and I waved him off. I have no enthusiasm for division. Everybody can use the same water fountain so long as everybody stops bothering me about it.

“*Dough*, boy,” I says. “My pockets been turned out. How are you living the high life?”

“Paraphrenalia,” he says. But he says it like *pear-for-nail-ee-ya*. And he grins in that way that only inbred fucking holler boys do. Can’t stand stupid feeling so smart for being so fucking stupid.

Now I’m not splitting the atom anytime soon, but Bo was without a doubt one of the dimmest fucks I’d ever had the vague displeasure of interacting with. I mean this boy could throw himself on the ground and miss. And here he is with his new money clip—swastika-decorated, obviously—fat on the hog while I’m knocking on tents door-to-door begging the college climber kids to throw me a can of beans. I’m thinking, whatever action numbskull’s cooking up can’t be outside my abilities, unless it’s, you know, *murder*, which I’d thought was within the realm of possibility.

“Oh you selling dope now, boy?” I say. “Glass beakers for the eggheads who can’t roll a joint?”

Guess I was eager. He could smell the poverty on me. My freewheelin’ veneer was cracking. Hunger, loss—these things will reveal your little romances for the bullshit playacting they really are.

“Looking to make some money?” Bo asks, again with his mongoloid grin.

And that’s how I got into the Historic Memorabilia business. I shouldn’t speak so ill of Ol’ Bo, even if it was *me* that showed *him* how a goddamn Ebay store worked. I mean this boy was *dense*. But you’d be surprised how much middle-aged men and young skinheads will pay for swastika pins and surplus SS uniforms from the Third Reich. Protestors would stand outside the convention centers and spit at my feet, saying how I was outfitting racism, stoking something or other, an armory for terrorists. Which is horseshit. This is America. Business is business. Gun

stores everywhere. Throw a rock and they'll return fire. Not that I mind it, I got a nice little collection, which is every American's responsibility, the bearing of arms to thwart tyrants. But most the little dweebs I sold nazi costumes to just went home to play dress-up, sieg-heiling in the mirror till Ma calls from the double-wide's kitchen to say the pizza rolls are done. Don't come at me with all this 'encouraging violence.' Two words: personal responsibility. But they don't go after the bullet factories. They pin it all on the little guy trying to turn one dollar into two.

If they were more interested in buying tutus and fucking tiaras, I'd sell that shit instead. It's not personal. I'm trying to turn a profit. You'd be surprised how much some scooter-driving 300-pound diabetic with one foot will pay for an authentic Third Reich bayonet. Like he's going to storm the Bastille or whatever. These bastards are too dim to recognize those bayonets came home as souvenirs from American GI's. Where do you think they got them from?

We say "Third Reich," by the way, it's more historical, like a topic of intellectual interest, and plays better than "Nazi," or even the more uppity "National Socialist." Even nazis don't like admitting they're nazis. And they definitely don't like saying "socialist." Like all card-carrying group groupies, they're pretty much pussies unless congregating with the like-minded. So they tend to congregate a lot. And even then they wear face masks. You only get so much pomp-and-circumstance romance sitting at home eating cereal in your eagle cap, I guess. They require the theater of the public space. But Bo and I would set up our table in these spaces, these arcades and outdoor malls and flea markets, the gun shows and knife shows and libertarian conventions, and these nazi fanboys would *clean us out*.

Fine by me. Dollar's a dollar.

At a gun show outside Lexington, this knuckle-dragger who claimed to be Hitler's nephew five-times-removed or some bullshit— seriously, silly little mustache and all— had a glass

case display where he was selling an officer's uniform the Fuhrer himself supposedly wore once. *Once*. How many clothes you got that you only wore once? But there it was, all pressed and proper in this spot-lit glass case on a mannequin—even the fucking mannequin had the mustache—and all these wide-eyed pockmarked unwashed Aryans would come up and stare at it, all slack-jawed, as if they were looking at St. Peter's bones.

The thought that this would be a fake was utter sacrilege to them. Rubes. The bidding war ensued nonetheless. And when they couldn't up the ante any further they'd start talking like Indiana Jones, like historians, saying *oh but it belongs with my display because or I should be its keeper because* and *our museum's curations are nearly complete* and on and on. In the end one man walked out with a fat stack and another left with a moldy, mothballed wool uniform somebody probably fished out of the Salvation Army garbage.

I felt as though I learned a lot that day. Something crucial had been revealed to me.

As my early twenties became my late twenties, I was less and less interested in groups. I mostly wanted to be left alone. Television, bag of burgers, beer. I'm a creature of comfort. I don't have the energy for some thousand-year plan. My god. It's enough to have to pay the rent on time. Still, Bo was always trying to get me into the cause, saying how it'd be better for business, and could get us in with some events that the general public aren't privy to. But those were not my ambitions. *You take what you need and you leave the rest*, as the man says. And I had what I needed, and enough scratch on top to buy some pretty pussy a drink or two on the weekends. Past that I just wanted my time to myself.

So business plateaued on my end while Bo was rubbing elbows with the master race in their skid-marked cargo shorts. I kept on hawking my meager wares, historical-reproduction pins and cigarette cases, Waco Shirts and pocket constitutions and playing cards decorated with the

addresses and phone numbers of various FBI agents present at Ruby Ridge. It was all right, but I was souring on the company. I'm not saying I like green-haired libs any better. I'm like Dirty Harry, I hate all groups pretty equally. They all move on in the end. Nobody sticks around. I know better than putting stake in some creed or motto or manifesto. I got fantasy at home on the bookshelf above my bed. Tolkein. Lewis. That Mormon guy, what's his name?

Anyway, one week I'm setting up shop at this Historical Reenactor Conference outside Louisville in this shitty plane hangar converted into a convention center by a local church. It was pretty much a gun show. They're all pretty much gun shows. No AC, just fans blowing around the hot cheese B.O. wafting off these mouth-breathers' wife beaters.

But I'm there with Bo, and he's all up-in-arms after spitting some game at the girl working the vendor check-in, going on about the quality of her breeding stock, how she'd make a fine brood mother and all this. These fucking skinheads and their "good breeding." Somehow, this little lady was less-than-enamored at being referred to like a farm animal with a ripe womb and no facial markers for FAS. The mind reels. Thank Christ that boy was only ever fucking his hand, god help us if he procreates.

So I'm at my post, minding the wares, keeping the troglodyte children from tarnishing our reproduction Waffen SS buttons— originals don't tarnish, so, there goes my profit margin— while Bo is in my ear beside me sanding the throat of a scabbard he bought at a Renaissance Fair so he can jam some SS officer saber in until it no longer sticks, and he's *talking*, and *talking*, really working himself into a monologue about *these stuck-up broads* and their supposed defilement from the blacks, telling me all about how big black dicks wear out the pussy's elasticity, how they'll always cheat because they're evolutionarily-predisposed to mate with the



most violent suitors, and how male silverback gorillas will shatter the skulls of their competitors' progeny against rocks.

And I find myself floating somewhere above my body, watching this scene unfold, and I think, *is this my life?* Like it was all already behind me, like it had arc'd somewhere and I was too fucking dumb to even realize the peak had passed.

"What," I say, interrupting Ol' Bo, "Does this have to do with some ticket-taker not wanting to ball you?"

"This is part of it," he says. "Part of *their* grand scheme. *This* is how *they* start white genocide. And it's not just them. It's a conspiracy. Read *The Turner Diaries*. It's the blacks being made the enforcers by the Jews."

"Bo," I say, "Give it a rest."

"And," he continues, "If you want to go even deeper, you'd understand that the Jews aren't even native humanoid homosapiens. They're not even the true Israelites. It's serpent blood, Ezra. They are the alien-human hybrid products of the extraterrestrial nephilim interbreeding with humans until they became what we now call the Jews. But whites are the true chosen ones. Whites are the true Israelites. Jews stole Judaism from the true Jews. Up top it's the Reptilians pulling all the strings with the Short Greys doing all the middle-man work. They harvest adrenochrome from children, to extract the orgone energy within. Read Hillary's emails. Sure, the Pleiadians are doing their part to ensure the Nordic Whites can rise to put a stop to this grand scheme, but down here it's boots-on-the-ground, it's the front lines. Soldiers must be bred. And that cunt's too dumb to see a worthy specimen from a purebred gene pool with an uncut dick when he's right in front of her."

Well, that was about it for me. I slammed my fist onto the table, all the nazi tchotchkes bouncing off the satin display mat and *pinging* along the floor like so much loose change.

“What the fuck, man?” Bo says, scrambling to pick it all up, buffing a badge with his hot sour breath and his snotty shirtsleeve.

I guess you’d call it despair. I’m a solitary person, not lonely by nature. But it was that motherfucking *group*. My default, de facto *community*. I resented it all so much. It was a feeling of isolation, but not with myself. I felt isolated in relation to this shitty bigger whole. *They* made me lonely. And I realized I just fucking hated them for it.

The moments after my outburst produced a moment’s relief, a beat of silence, the same kind of silence as when an engine backfires in the parking lot and every conference guest must reckon with the fact that they forfeited their ammo at the check-in coat-check.

And in that infinite expanse of serene quietude I hear it:

*Twang.*

I look down the aisle, past the fertilizer salesmen and the tattoo booths and the Flat Earther booksellers, past the katana vendors and the pallets of colloidal silver, and there I see it:

It’s a spread of instruments arranged on stands atop this rotting plywood display. Guitars, banjos, mandolins, dulcimers, fiddles, hand drums, harmonicas. You name it. But it’s only one or two of each, and they’re all beat to shit. Some are scratched as all hell, others have big holes in them like Willie’s trigger. Some are straight-up broken in half, others bearing the distinctive brown stains of old blood. And they’re all marked with top-dollar price tags.

*Relics of the Folk Revival Revival*, the sign says, with some funky, frowny-face logo, bold and black, familiar yet foreign. *Now here*, I think, *is an outfit that understands the meaning of the word “iconic.”*

So I tell Bo to fuck himself and I add that I'm taking my break. I mosey over, hands in my pockets, keeping my head down, but I feel this, you know, *gravity*. This energy. One class of merch distinctly unlike the others. I can smell the money, like those pickers lowballing antiques out from under the noses of the elderly.

"What's all this?" I ask, reading the attendant's name tag.

It says *Jellie Jillie*, which seems odd, because this girl looks more than a little malnourished.

"These are first class relics," she says, "from bonafide revolutionaries. Taking America back to its roots, one performance at a time."

"That's some pitch," I say, "*Jellie Jillie*. How'd you come by that name?"

"We all take on nicknames," she says. "Until you advance, then you're a Brother. A Sister, in my case."

"What's it mean?"

"It's because I hate peanut butter," she says. "And I love fentanyl. Psychedelics, too. You know, for therapeutic purposes."

I assume this is a joke.

"You work for the," I read the sign again, "*Folk Revival Revival* long?"

"About nine months," she says. "I split from my BPs in Indiana to join the revolution. My dad was beating the shit out of me. My Mom's a rube. Then the FRR swept in and swept me up. Showed me what it was like to think for myself. To live for myself."

"BPs?"

"Biological Progenitors," she says. "Like, birth parents. FRR has its own lingo. We don't ascribe to all this normie suburban jargon. We're interested in the logos as a vehicle for truth."

Forging your own language is an important part of that. So we talk our own way. Mostly it's singing, though."

"Is that so?"

"You got it, Daddy," she said with a giggle. "We twist and shout. Sometimes people like to hear it real soft. But trust me, we can get pretty loud."

She had this kind of starry-eyed look to her. A blankness, or a fullness. I couldn't tell. Probably high. But I'll admit, I was about half-mast talking to her. She was batting her lashes and smirking her smile and leaning over the table with her ass half-out from her cutoff shorts and I could tell she made me for a mark. I'd paid for pussy a time or two, during some particularly dark days after a season working freight in Knoxville. It's a hidden language. But I understood it just fine.

This was two businesses.

But the blood returned to my brain and I remembered Ol' Bo back down the aisle, and I thought about how I'd probably slit his throat the next time I had to bunk up in his RV outside a WalMart, struggling to sleep while he watched German porn and did poppers till sunrise.

I handed Jillie my business card.

"I'm an entrepreneur of sorts," I said. "Looking for a new market. Could you point me to the owner of this little outfit?"

"We're *all* the owners."

"Right," I said. "Your supervisor, then? You got a manager, a mentor or something?"

"The Big Four's right over there," she said, pointing to one of about twenty AR vendors.

I walked over and introduced myself. There was four of them, indeed, but they moved with a kind of unity, like one body with four different limbs. I found it pretty goddamn odd that

one of them was a black girl. Huge dreads. She didn't seem to mind the decor one bit. Next to her was one of those militant feminist types, skinny white chick with a choppy haircut and *do not fuck with me* written on her face. Their bodyguard, it seemed, was this big ginger fucker, mountain man, with a booming voice and a great big laugh to him. Their fourth looked like one of those incels. Beta soyboy types. This boy had slope-shoulders, standing concave like a crescent moon, dressed in all denim and cowboy boots, with the greasiest fucking hair I'd ever seen resting on his head like a magpie nest, full of half-done braids and dandruff, some strands combed through while others were matted and sticking out like he slept with a bag on his head. This one had a— no shit— little tuning fork behind his ear, like a pencil. They looked like a gang of hippies fucked a gang of E.T.'s. They looked like kids who'd never known the 60's doing their best impression of the 60's. And they were window shopping for assault rifles.

"They're okay," said Big Red. "Really though, Alpha, it's too much."

"Agreed," spoke the Lesbian.

"It'd be better," Greasy said, "If it wasn't outsourced to material implements. One shouldn't do them all. It should be *each according to each*."

"True," the Black Girl concurred, tapping her chin with her forefinger.

I have no interest in extending my dick size with armalite. I'm more of a bolt action guy. Call me old-fashioned. There is no artistry in a hail of gunfire. The master marksman places projectile upon target with surgical precision, frozen forever in a moment of time. But I was curious. Here, awash in this marketplace of homogenous bullshit for sale, these four had the only booth with merch that was distinctly different from the rest. One always aspires to corner the market. From baseball cards to Beanie Babies, scarcity is key. And these mangled instruments

were the only scarce product in the convention. Why would anyone buy them? What was their appeal, their angle?

I needed to know what they were hiding.

“Y’all the ones with the guitar booth?” I asked.

They were quite warm, especially to a stranger trying to get all up in their business. They offered to have a sit down with me, so we strolled out to the refreshment pavilion, where I bought them all fresh-squeezed lemonade made by the Daughters of the American Revolution in partnership with the local Freemasons. My beatnik companions seemed to appreciate that. We sat down at a picnic table, and the black girl, whose name I learned was Dinah, removed her belt buckle, revealing a small silver flask with which she spiked the drinks, giving me a little extra. Such was their generosity.

“Let’s talk,” they said, almost in unison.

We all laughed.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Mind you, at the time, the organization had yet to really register on the radar of popular culture. They’d been at the center of some controversies at their college, and one of their group members had apparently offed himself in some outrageous way, but these were only local news stories at the time, and, other than that, what the fuck did I know about Midwestern folksingers? I’d always thought you had folk in the East, Bob Dylan and all that, Western in the west, obviously, and Country in the South. As far as I was concerned, the Midwest was just a big fucking nothing, culturally. I know James Dean and Michael Jackson and Steve McQueen were born there. But they didn’t exactly stay, did they? So, okay, fine, they’re the campus revolutionaries. Didn’t attend myself, but I know the type. I met plenty of those freebirds during

my rock climbing days. They're all high ideals on Daddy's dime. Nice for kids to get the opportunity to philosophize before they have to fall in line with the rest of the ant hill. I didn't take their words very seriously, but money talks well enough for all of us.

As we were talking, chewing the fat, shooting the shit, I look up, and my stomach drops. Here comes Ol' Bo, sauntering across the pavilion with his loping Lennie Small canter and inbred hounddog posture, and I think, *great, there goes a lucrative business opportunity*. I can almost see the smell lines wafting off his BO crusted collar, his wet neck and oily, pimply ears. I hold my tongue as he politely introduces himself, ever the master at concealing his power level— that's "behold the master race" lingo for you. I'm guessing I got about two minutes before he spouts out some incel horseshit and spoils all the capitalist goodwill I've been over here schmoozing out.

But color me surprised. Goddamn Colics spoke his language better than he did. Next thing I know they're waxing on about the root races, secret orders, and the cosmic truths of existence housed in the human spirit that the Deep State Globalists conceal to keep the chosen few from waking up and blowing the lid on this entire rotten operation. And Ol' Bo is like a pig in shit, so utterly delighted to find a handful of decent folk who know what's what. He nodded to the Black Gal and said something about how he's always telling his family how there's plenty of good ones, and pretty ones to boot, and my god did she blush and shoot the finest shit-eating grin I have ever seen when she asked him, "You play guitar, handsome?"

I looked over at Big Red, who gave me a wink.

Such elegance and expertise. Bo took the bait and was more than happy to be relieved of his fifteen-hundred dollars. These four put used car salesmen to shame. Bo walked away that day with a splintered, bow-necked dust-trap of an acoustic guitar unfit for any hobbyist, let alone

performer. It was missing strings, bridge was loose— couldn't even tune it if you wanted to. The whole thing was liable to snap in half from the pressure and blind you with a whip of phosphor bronze. But Bo didn't mind. He didn't mind the blood on the fretboard, neither. He thought it was cool.

"You see that?" he said to me on the car ride home, caressing his newest acquisition. "That there's a genuine musickal artifact. It's got magic in it, Ezra. Blood on the runes. I can't believe my luck. It chose *me*, Ezra."

"I'm jealous," I told him. "I don't know if I could bear responsibility for something that powerful. You take care and be careful with that, bud."

"Oh, I will," he said. "This thing has changed my life. Folks are gonna remember my name because of this. They won't know what hit 'em. Like I been saying, we are in dire need of a revolution. The blood of patriots must be spilled to water the tree of liberty. Jefferson Davis said that."

"No finer cause around," I said.

"Heil to despair."

"Heil to despair, my friend."

Fucking idiot.



MELINDA ROMERO  
CLAIMS SPECIALIST, COMMUNITY HEALTH NETWORK ADMINISTRATION  
INDIANAPOLIS, IN

I was at my desk in the billing department when the explosives went off. The impression people have— that I had— of these kinds of situations usually involves a lot of noise. Screaming, alarms, sirens. But it was actually extraordinarily silent. A silence like I’ve never experienced before, and the reason why, ever since that day, I can’t sleep without a fan on, can’t read or cook dinner or just exist in my own house without background music. I can no longer tolerate that silence in any form. And as you can imagine, my genre preferences have become somewhat limited. Even unaffiliated, only vaguely “folky” artists are enough to make me vomit. So it’s mostly classical. I used to love Elvis, June and Johnny Cash. But those memories have been usurped.

Surveillance later matched a logo on the bumper to the iconography of their concert posters and social media posts. They wanted it to be seen. The FRR radicals had parked one of their touring vans by the foundational pillars of the lower parking deck under the auspices of some nonexistent event they had been hired to perform for. You could see the Daycare Center from there, the colorful streamers and vinyl characters on the floor-to-ceiling windows. The FRR didn’t care. Everyone was “fair game,” as they say. The two parking booth attendants— both of whom have since taken their lives— didn’t think twice about this van full of middling musicians and gear. It seemed an absurd thing to fabricate. But the instrument cases, amps, bags of cables, were all packed with kinestik. Sodium nitrate. Plant fertilizer. Thousands of pounds of it. It was Oklahoma City all over again.

The organization came out immediately and disavowed these acts, outlining their ideology in clear terms and describing how these “bad apples” did not represent their organization or bear any official association with the group. They denounced the three bombers as “psychotic depressives” and “sluggish schizophrenics” who took the FRR’s artistic personas and transgressive performativity far too literally. Just one big misunderstanding, that’s all. One-hundred-and-seventy-seven dead– nineteen children– due to untreated mental illness and an inability to separate the literal from the metaphorical. But where did they come by such radical inclinations? It didn’t matter. The bombers were scooped up and paraded to the capital courthouse in bulletproof vests for the enactment of legal justice, for all the cameras to see. But two days later, in the brief reprieve from their anti-suicide vests for cutlery-free mealtime, all three successfully chewed through their wrists. The news cycle moved onto the next national tragedy not long after. There is always another mass shooting ripe for the headlines.

When the explosives went off the building collapsed. It fell in on us. Dozens killed instantly, and hundreds more left trapped, coated in carcinogenic dust, pinned down by furniture or rubble. I was caught under a support pillar that toppled beside my desk, huge chunks of concrete all around me. My right foot had been crushed. I could not move or even sit up. As I sat there, in the soundless blackness, coughing up the dust, assessing the lacerations around my face and chest, wondering if I was already dead, I was able to move my free leg out from underneath me and lie on my stomach. I reached out in front of me, hoping for I don’t know what. A water bottle. A letter opener. Such are the in-vain acts of the totally helpless.

But I reached forward and felt something warm. Fingers. It was Norm Gelfen. Our desks were on opposite sides of the water cooler, but the implosion had unexpectedly thrown us together. Norm had been working for the city for twenty years. Had a family and three daughters.

I reached out and held his hand, but he didn't squeeze back. His fingers were cold. I called to him, telling him it was me, Melinda, and that we were alive, and that help would be coming soon. I didn't know if this was true. I had no idea. I think I was mostly telling myself what I hoped was the case, what should be happening. He didn't respond.

I called out to him again. As I squeezed his hand it dislodged from the rubble and I recognized it was not attached. But I kept holding it. Norm was dead, parts of him scattered all around me between splintered plastic and glass and burnt carpet. It took nearly six hours for the firefighters to clear a path to me. I couldn't even scream. I was too short of breath. I wet myself. I cried. I called for my mother though she'd been dead for eight years.

They followed the whimpering echoing through the blasted-out cave of debris. I kept holding Norm's hand, even after the sweaty arms of the surgeon squeezed through the hole to administer local anesthetic around my calf and cut my leg away from my crushed dead foot. They pulled me out and I was still clutching Norm's hand to my chest, sobbing in silent agony, gasping for breath after hyperventilating breath.

"You can give that to us," the firefighters told me. "We'll make sure it gets where it needs to."

STAG LEE SHELTON  
FOLK REVIVAL REVIVAL ACOLYTE & PATRON, CHATTERTON TAVERN  
RAINTREE, IN

The Folk Revival Revivalist is something rather distinct— or distinguished, some might argue— amongst American artistic archetypes. No doubt the mind conjures images from 1960's counterculture onward, of solitary beatniks with their battered acoustics sitting cross-legged on the dusty floors of decrepit coffee houses in Greenwich Village, dour and solemn in their expressions as entertainers, for theirs was a social cross to bear, that of the protest song. Forget your 1970's styled "rockstar" personas— those only came later, and once they did, once Jack and Martin and Bobby and Malcom had each been gifted a public bullet for their efforts, well, the cynicism emerged. It was around this time it dawned on us— social progress wasn't the American tradition. It was only the transgression, the *against*, the very assassination of that progress, which bore the true seal of America's great dead heart. The melancholic artist throbs with this call in her heart. Annihilation calls from within. Can you hear it? To croon it out in a folk or blues song is a pivotal part of reconciling with the hidden truth of American Romance. But it is only the beginning.

You see, in this country, such ideals at the intersection of art and politics, your countercultural revolutions and so on, aren't grown for their own sake. They are grown because in America, our rights are not everything. They. Are. Every. Thing. But they are nothing if left inert and unmoving. They have no value as pure potential. Like all great forms of artistry, the thing must be expressed. It must explode out into the world to make manifest real, demonstrable change in the state of affairs, in the condition of existence, of our shared social reality. It is the

most literal of the artistic forms. There is no metaphor, no figuration, no need for nuance or subtlety. In our American way, this art form is a loud, robust, unwavering explosion. Directly into the brain. The *right to*. To speak, to be private, to pursue happiness or sadness with God-given liberty, to bear arms, not only against tyrants, but against your fellow citizens, against your family— as true now as during the War of Northern Aggression—and, most of all, against the self. Friends, these bullets were made to fire. There is no value in potential energy, only that which is ignited to propel smelted metals into their natural, fated homes. Aristotle spoke of this when he hypothesized on the nature of gravity. A stone sticks to the ground because this is its home, its rightful place in the material world. This is the story of America, of a myriad of wayward, powder-blown projectiles on a long journey to their rightful place in the brain matter of every American. Such was the wisdom of the failed 1960's counterculture, but they could not see it, could not reckon with it. It has only revealed itself to be more true as time has gone on, and the veils have continued to fall. The Folk Revival Revival picked up that ethos where it left off, seeing its truths illuminated in the 21st century landscape in ways others simply could not.

“Nobody’s ever going to change their mind from a song,” Bobby said, or, something like that. He was right— there is but one object in American society which can authentically bring about change in the mind. It has a lead core and a copper coating. But in their youthful disillusionment, the 60's counterculture did their best to cope with the bitter hand it had been dealt. They thought they should keep making music. They all sang and smoked and drank and fucked and sucked and betrayed their dreams and spouses and politely excused themselves of it all with a half-hearted gesture toward moral relativism, a posture they would assume until the Cold War cracked its carapace and a cowboy named Ronnie stepped forward to beckon them all back into the moral majority of the traditional American family.

But in those early 70's, as the idealism curdled, so too did the drug use. The frolicking giggles of marijuana and LSD were ground down like molars as widespread cocaine use jettisoned the culture violently forward through the tumultuous 70's— Ford, Carter, serial killers, the gas crisis, and all the rest. After that, the progressive social transgressions of the Civil Rights Era became burdened with nihilistic urges. With the abyss to which their heroes had been sent. Thus, the Punk era, perhaps the last true artistic movement in American popular music— until now— burned so brightly and briefly. After that it was all parody, all aped and mimed and mimicked, everybody trying to strum or scream or shake their ass like those who preceded them. All novelty had been soured by the bullet, Jack Martin Bobby Malcolm, which we misunderstood as oppositional to our artistic efforts, when it was, in reality, representative of their most refined material manifestation.

Like the gunslinger under the setting sun of the old west, the folksinger was a poet, first and foremost. The unacknowledged legislators of the world. But more than that, a secret order of the Atrabilis. A social formation centuries old, bearing a crucial communal function. All the way back to Homer and the epic poems, up through the bards and troubadours, bearers of the most bloodied homicidal ballads, histories, tales of warfare and conquest. After the advent of American popular music, the poet's place was resurrected, as all those dusty old modernists and confessionalists finished killing themselves, and it was the folksinger that emerged as the distinguished, quintessential American literary artist, who turned from the page to the people and transmuted the words into the auditory. But it was a thinking person's music. A literary form. Music of social consciousness. Music for change. This was not mere entertainment. It was meant to transform you. The Folk Revival Revival, we take our art seriously. Make no mistake: our performances will leave the audience inexorably altered in the most literal of ways. And once

they have, it is then the Folksinger's turn to change as well. Queer as it might sound, these melancholy blues melodies reflect the highest fulfillment of existence, the beginning of a complex process of needful, soulful suffering, which begins in that higher pleroma and must burst out through the material world, shattering all that is false.

To yield to despair is no complacent resignation. It is an ascension, a piercing of that glass through which we see the world, darkly. For ours is a false and fallen world, and there is really only one authentic act to be carried out while confined within it. This is the definition of art. This is why the performances must persist, after the Bath School and Unruh's Walk of Death, after the University of Texas, after Cleveland Elementary, after all those Going Postals and Luby's Cafeteria and Columbine, after Virginia Tech, after the DC Navy Yard, after Sandy Hook and Uvalde, after the Harvest Music Fest and the Pulse Nightclub, after a hundred others whose names you have already forgotten. These are sacred American sites, they reach us right where we live, in our churches and grocery stores and movie theaters. Surely you must realize that such events would not be permitted to persist in a rational, moral, ethically-guided society. These are our children, our schools. Such performances must persist because they are the truest, realist, most profound thing the American consciousness can in answer to this illusory material plane. But rejoice, for death is not the end. All will be as one as our leaden third eye is opened. The sixth chakra. That with which to see the higher pattern, the greater superstructure, that great black and bilious river which unites all living things. And now play the tune again for me, boys, from the top, and now in double-time, because it feels damn good to be alive, to be one amongst your own folk. May the downbeat of that first measure fall with a stark and yawping BANG.

## **Acknowledgements**

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