

**THREE THIRTY TWENTY:
THE CONFESSIONS OF A ZOMBIE SAVANT**
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CHAPTER ONE

A Post-Apocalyptic Road Trip.

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Follow the sun. Read the lights. One should know the difference between, "We're here to help you," "We want to kill you," and "It's a brake light, stupid."

Colors are important, too. And license plates. And how many heads in the vehicle. They're all pieces that Jesus has to put together to know who to trust.

Jesus' eyes ping-pong across the windshield, from one supposedly meaningful clue to another. 'Ford' begins with an f so it must be a carrier of evil. If that Ford has an odd number or an f, l, r, x or z in its license plate the driver was in league with the Devil. Those letters are integers of evil. They are the sixth and successive sixth letters of the alphabet. Six is the number of the Devil. A child could figure that one out. Jesus figured that combination out last night. That was the last night of what little sanity He could maintain. It was also His last night of freedom.

Now He is the prisoner of a psychosis that has Him driving his brother's sporty, red Camaro away from His home in Jamaica, Queens with a destination of no less than Toronto, Canada. He is searching for His mother's soul. Her dead and broken body lies on the cold linoleum floor of the upstairs apartment of that very same house in Queens. As He drives He smokes joint after joint of reefer, to keep the signals He believes to be receiving clear in addition to smoking the reality of His culpability in His dear mother's death out of His mind.

When the image of His mom's dead body, which He remembers standing above disbelieving, hoping for signs of life, drifts from its sad, unfortunate and undignified place on the floor of the kitchenette in a puddle of her own urine, and into the forefront of his mind, Jesus nervously tokes deeper. With one hand on the steering wheel and the other at His lips, yellowed fingers squeezing the life out of the sloppily rolled bone, Jesus willingly slips further into His madness. He mutters, stutters and sputters non sequiturs and fragments of speech and thought, letting numbers, names and alphabetic equations tumble out of His addled head. Just as He did several hours ago above His mom's body, trying to right wrongs and raise the dead, Jesus begins to reverse the alphabet while struggling to understand its deeper, insidious meaning.

He believes the letter z represents the duplicity of the alphabet. As he follows the shape of the letter it begins its travel in the righteous direction only, through deceptively simple subversion, to guide the reader into a netherworld of reversed logic. The letter, when its end is finally reached, twists the mind to subconsciously reverse its thought processes, the preceding letters and, ultimately, all of known rational cognitive ability. Much like the spiraling Nazi swastika, the letter z initializes a devious and diabolical form of hypnotism where the mind, after learning the Devil's alphabet, travels in the reverse order receiving a coded alternate education. This reverse of learning, a blanket ignorance hiding a darker subliminal awareness, is closest to an ancient, symbolic backwards tape loop. Z license cars are likely to be inhabited by the elders of evil. That Jesus is driving a Camaro Iroc-Z confounds Him while also confirming His fate and standing in the world following the terrible mess that He left in Queens.

The roads and highways shine due to last night's snow that has since melted under today's brilliant winter sun. It's almost blinding but Jesus looks at it as the ultimate sign. After such a black and evil overnight, today is a virtual blessing.

He's on his own in this big, red automobile. Is it the right color? He wishes He'd remembered to bring the house cat on the road with Him, for companionship and a much-needed extra pair of eyes. Bud would have told Him when the bad guys were pulling up a little too close. Might have even afforded Jesus a few hours rest as the cat stood guard. He's sure Mom taught him well.

Now He just drives and drives. It's been in wide circles and figure-eights through various Queens County neighborhoods but He finally found His way onto a major highway and, like the song, He'll follow the sun. Jesus starts to sing and gets distracted.

"Tomorrow may reign? The *Devil's* Reign? No way! That was a bad movie. The sun will take me where I want to be. It will take me north. Yeah, that's where I want to go. It'll light my way. Lead me to Mom, my real mom. Not the poor possessed woman I left back home. No, she can't have just left me there...alone. Alone to look at her and all I've done. She loved me too much to do that. And I loved her too much to believe...oh God...was it really her? Let it not be so. Let this mission be just. Let me find her, God...Father...let me find her soul up north where she always wanted to go, where she would disappear to every couple of months, where she lived.

She called it Canada but I know now it is Heaven. Take me there, Father...take me to where she is, Father...take me. The weed works well." Jesus thinks Himself in circles. Almost immediately after smoking He looks into the eyes of people looking into His vehicle. He believes He can tell the Brethren from the Malevolents.

He's in the Bronx now. He knows nothing about the Bronx, except that it is north from where He comes from. He must be doing something right. Traveling aimlessly up and down nameless streets, He discovers Malevolents driving vehicles of the saved. They must have overtaken the good, stolen their transportation, and hoped to run up close to Him to gain His confidence and subsequently trick Him. The bastards! Another right turn will set Him straight again. Another right turn? He only makes right turns. It's the "good" turn, short for righteous, or so He is led to believe.

Jesus happens upon Fordham University. There must be so much collected evil behind the great iron gates of this place. What with the Ford in its name, evil f...or d, as in fire and demon, and the ham connoting that filthy animal that all evil people love to devour when they're not engaging in cannibalism. He has it in His mind to crash the car through those dark towering gates and rampage across the campus, exacting His revenge on Satan for what he made Him do. But Jesus realizes that this is just one of thousands of institutions that practice evil in the disguise of higher spiritual learning. No, He must drive on. Subdue His thoughts of vengeance as He drives past so as not to alert the demons within. Then Jesus realizes, as He relaxes, that He is quite frightened and unprepared for the battle that He is to initiate.

Can't trust those damned semaphores. Not the red ones, anyway.

"STOP!?" Yeah, sure. That's just what they want, isn't it." He runs another one, can't run them all, though. The Brethren often intercept control of the Great Switchbox. Sometimes "STOP" means just that. He finds out the hard way by running one meant to protect and winds up, after countless panicky right turns, far from the main road and almost completely lost. The Brethren handle all of that. All He knows is we are going "up." We are going home.

More turns and a near collision, just nerves and lack of sleep. Has to smoke again, He's losing the signal.

It's starting to get dark. It was a beautiful day. The sun was out (boy, was He ever) but that was just a ruse. Tonight will be their night. It always is. The Malevolents lay and wait for darkness. Like roaches, which they are. Like rats, which they are. Like vampires, which they are. They are all the evil in this world, and Jesus realized overnight that this world is completely evil. He doesn't quite trust the Brethren but that's okay. They know He has an internal compass that they trust. He filters through most of the crap and finds the signal that He needs to get where they have to go.

After passing three bridges, one called with evil glee the Tappan Zee, He's on some dark, well-paved road surrounded by vanity trees and too-clean houses. This is an exclusive neighborhood in a quiet outer-city township. One of the signs read "Nyack" ...or "Nyuck." Curly Howard must be the mayor. It's clean, a little too clean. Angry over where He and other less-fortunate black people had to live in the urban and ghettoized suburban landscape, Jesus revs the engine loud then digs some donuts on one of the well-kept lawns. As evening descends, the Malevolents will be out en masse.

The big red ride crawls up to a road by the River. Jesus rolls His window down and breathes in deeply, smelling all the clean freshness in the air that the Hudson brings and was undoubtedly hoarded from the city several miles south. A passing red tail light reminds Him that He is all alone in Badtown with miles to go before salvation. He doesn't have the Brethren to run interference anymore.

"I can't punk out now," He whispers to no one. "If I don't chase them down who will?"

He chooses a good ol' boy's open-backed truck to follow, pushing the accelerator down to the floor and the front bumper up the other vehicle's ass. The two plaid-capped daddies, probably just back from hunting, gun their rusted and muddy vehicle harder when they notice Him breathing down their necks. "I hate nothing more than rednecks."

Doing seventy on a service road following (blindly) the redneck's red tail lights, blinking on only occasionally, to let Him know..."WHAT?! Should I even listen? Should I care? All taunts and deceit, anyway."

Jesus' hot pursuit of Clem and Jethro leads Him onto the highway, His fourth (or fifth?)

today. Only now it is totally black and He's surrounded by red tail lights. His zeal to show His balls results in His showing His ass. He's in the thick of it and no longer angry but scared. The tail lights all shine bright with red menace.

"I have to get off this strip," Jesus blurts to himself. The Brethren are probably all dead, picked off one by one, half-cannibalized carcasses hanging out of open car doors, strewn by the side of the road. Now, every one of the things controlling those red lights on those metal coffins have surrounded Him. Waiting till He runs out of gas or gets pulled over. Hoping it will be nighttime when it happens- hoping to feast.

He sees His exit at two o'clock, but it isn't an exit at all. He imagines, no hopes, there is a steep treacherous cliff waiting for him beyond that right guardrail. "Yes! I was waiting for this. Let these ghouls think they've got me squired on the highway to Hell. Me, I'm making like Chitty Chitty Bang Bang! Bye-bye."

Jesus pulls a hard right. It isn't hard enough. The car swerves dangerously from the far left lane to the far right, doing fifty. He is working the steering wheel like they used to on TV, when the actors were safe on a sound stage with a filmed background rolling out behind them. Twisting the wheel to and fro and allowing the car to duck in and out of traffic, lane to lane to lane, He is an accident trying to happen. He pulls another hard right and He's up...

The Gggrrraawwlll that insists beneath pulls Him back into consciousness. His right foot is seemingly one with the accelerator, pressing down as far as it will allow. Letting up off of the pedal the louder noise subsides but an insidious crackle continues from below. The vehicle is on a wicked incline. He feels like an astronaut strapped in, ready for take-off. "Have I already arrived?"

Rolling down the driver's side window, the bare branches of the trees that cradle the vehicle rush in, slapping against His face. Are they tree limbs at all or the prickly fingers and spindly arms of the shape-changing Malevolents? Reaching in to claw at Him casually, knowing that there is no rush, the world had changed over and He was the last of the prey.

Humanoid shapes approach in the rear view mirror, obscured and distorted by hot white headlights and a fetid, chemical smoke. They come with lights, bright ones. No one must escape, especially this one. It seems they don't want to take Him while in their true form. They want to

mock Him and continue to play human. The first face He sees is nondescript, Caucasian and slightly panicked, tapping rapidly on the passenger side. He shouts at Jesus to roll down the window.

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Jesus refuses. The white man smashes the window with an axe. "Is this the end?"

As they claw at Jesus He pulls away. "You can't have me. You won't have me," He screams, flailing and kicking, grabbed and dragged out of the vehicle quickly and efficiently.

"Are you okay?" The firemen emphatically repeat, like a mantra.

"How many times must they ask? Mockers!" The smell is choking, full of exhaust smoke and burning metal, dirt, wood, gravel. Jesus walks unsteadily. "*Am I okay?*"

He's led out of the wooded off-road back to the side of the highway. There's a vehicle there, different from all the other ambulance, fire and police transports. It's a midnight blue, wide-bodied, seventies model something or other with a man standing next to it holding an axe a little too casually. Backseat vital sign checks come up elevated. The blonde female seems nervous. She probably never thought she'd do the Messiah's initial prep for Hell. Jesus doesn't speak. He can't speak.

Shaken, with eyes glazed, He's rushed to some location in the back of an ambulance. It is comforting at first, shielded from the constant whoosh waves of the highway Malevolents driving like true bats to and from Hades. The ambulance attendants avoid eye contact. They appear both bored and scared into silence. The white, crew-cutted male steals a few mousey glances. Staring into his face, Jesus sees the thing within. It is ugly, like a jellyfish with an animal's snout, upside down with its antennae swimming languidly about the host's head. The eye they share pretends to be of the flesh, still trying to deceive. Occasionally it moves with evil independence. Jesus doesn't turn away. He stares it down, looking at this abomination in repose, seeing its jealousy, its blithe defiance, its curiosity and fear in His presence. Jesus' anger rises.

"How dare it try me?!" He thinks then rationalizes, "I am not at full strength, which would explain why it, the millions of it, are attempting this hostile takeover."

Dumped out front of a small hospital's too-bright emergency entrance, the attendants lead

Him past the front desk, down an immaculate hospital hallway and into a small but busy emergency room. Jesus is deposited onto an examining table. The place looks too clean, like no one ever comes here. "It was built just for my arrival. I am the first and only to be treated at this way station."

The arresting officers enter and begin talking to the hospital staff, making mention of drugs. They must have found the grass. "How dare they attempt to hold this against me? Figures they would." The officers handcuff Jesus behind His back, making Him lie down upon His manacled wrists. The mock concern has now given way to "We-got-him-now" gloating.

The officers get up in Jesus' face. One is perhaps forty, burly and pale with a bluish shadow about his maw from being slightly unshaven. His lips curl above his rat-like over-bite, resembling a demonic cross breed of wild boar, junkyard dog and Fred Flintstone. He looks to be always suppressing a mean-spirited smile. His hound-faced partner looks about nineteen with an ambitious moustache and incurably mournful eyes.

"Fang ghoul!" The older cop exclaims, laughingly. He must be describing himself. Jesus' fear intensifies. "I wish I could wish myself out of this situation." He is left to the hospital staff, proceeding to cut away His leather body armor with small but sharp surgical scissors.

As the cutting continues He wonders when they'd dig into the "skin." He even gives a moment's thought to whether He'll feel it like He would have before. Their sharp, tiny pincers claw so threateningly close to one of many one-time vital arteries.

"Who's gonna take what? Who wants the heart? Will they parade before me those pathetic old world females who attached themselves to my shell, hoping to possess me by infiltrating my seed shaft?"

He imagines they will take the head and neck from the shell and prop it upon a nearby table. Just so He can watch the whole affair with a sense of awe. "If they knew the real me at all they'd know I'd probably laugh from the sheer ridiculous, morbid fascination."

A cold cube of alcohol is placed under His nose. "They must realize I'm in another place, so safe within the folds of the floater that many tests and hours of surgery must be required." The feeding would be for naught, just for effect, just for spite.

"My life beat slows. My shell is relaxed." Jesus stares straight into one cluster of random

perforations in the cheap, porous ceiling tiles. The boar-like cop returns, triumphantly dangling Jesus' wallet before Him. He calls Jesus "I Saw," a corruption of His name as well as his take on Him being the only living witness to this evil takeover. The cop's joke reeks of contempt, his breath smells of blood.

"He pries me for information. He can only hope. I play like I'm dead. I can only hope. They want to nab me as a drug case who flew too high. They'd much rather rely on their wan hopes of total control than the Word. Probably think I'm not really Him. Either way, I'm not one of *them*, and that's what they don't want. These knuckleheads will never accept me as I am, the Messiah, and a dark skinner to boot. It blows apart their whole concept mainly because it leaves them out in the cold. They'll label me a weed-loving troublemaker. Case closed."

Jesus is wheeled from the ER to another room and realizes that His time is almost up at this station. Though He stares straight into the ceiling, as if trying to glimpse the sky, His peripheral vision reveals the two arresting fiends murmuring a plan. Straining to decipher their low grunts and mumbles He is suddenly hoisted up and out of the room. His legs are like two stalks of rubber. This is His physical protest to their forcing Him to leave in handcuffs, leading Him quite probably to His death. He makes a grand exit from this doll hospital with fits of wild-eyed screaming.

"Wanna run?" Boar-cop taunts. He pretends not to hear.

"I don't want to give these wild dogs the satisfaction of shedding their skins to hunt me for meat." Jesus is given a very unfriendly shove to the back of His head and into their vehicle.

The boar-cop talks in that patented TV cop ramble- full of hip, full of pride, full of shit. He raises his paw to display the latest technology. Jesus is amazed by what looks like a prosthetic hand. It looks uncommonly cheap in the faraway moonlight. It is inhumanly pale, porcelain-like, and only points upward. I guess he thinks that makes him special.

"Is he relaying to his post-adolescent partner where I came from? Where I was going before they nabbed me? I wish to ask but still say nothing. I cannot speak, nor, if I could, would I want to give them any helpful information. It is best I remain silent and see what they have in store for the Son of Man."

They arrive at a destination that is disturbing. It looks like a cluster of formidable factories. Wide, open spaces with deep, dark barren bushes and trees. Jesus is ushered uncomfortably through double door after double door in what looks like the innards of a grey morgue. Charcoal smudges on the poorly lit walls show only arrows and numbers in and out of sequence. The evil officers undo the handcuffs and a tall pallid man approaches with a wheeled chair. Jesus is shoved into this cripple's Cadillac and escorted down a long shadowy hallway with the two manimal-cops leading on either side. He feels like the Prince of Fools en route to a coronation of failure and despair, wheeled quickly, almost as if in a race, closer to the end of this interminable hall.

He imagines this is His end (or so they would like to think), wheeled through those last grey doors on the left onto the largest open-air arena within human comprehension. Large klieg lights will sweep back and forth across the royal blue evening announcing His great demise. Curtains open. Miles of deep, blood red velvet billow triumphantly as He lay strapped to a gurney on a bone white stage. And for days, weeks, *ever* He will be fed upon by the Malevolents.

"They will nibble and tease. Take small, polite bites and huge, voracious, gaping maws full of me," Jesus imagines. "They will cavort with delicate anatomy in pantomime. Lick my skeleton clean. Suck and slurp the marrow like a milkshake through a straw. And I will lay there and wonder- 'When will it end? When can I finally die? Have I had enough? Have I died sufficiently for the sins of these parasites? Will the very last of me, that one piece of death that hurts, be picked and chewed as casually as a child's booger?'"

A right turn is made. Jesus' fantasy abruptly ends as He is wheeled into a small blue room. The corners are rounded and the walls made of a soft material. The light here is harsh and flat.

"He's all yours," Boar-cop Flintstone sneers. He makes it a point to stand by and watch, feral, as Jesus is overcome by two man-like creatures. One is a dark skinner, beefy, with a smooth, featureless, sweaty face- definitely on the wrong team. The other is a pink skinner. All raw skin and cold, hateful eyes that just scream "Klan." He may be on to me. Or he just hates those who assume to be saved. That must rub him the wrong way. He kneels on Jesus' head.

A woman in white drifts in like smoke, sticking a loaded needle in His ass. Jesus cannot

discern if it's the venom or the pressure of the white man's weight on His head but suddenly everything goes black. Retreat.

His vision is murky, as if He's a worm just emerging from a muddy burrow. He can barely make out a long corridor. He cannot move. He feels like a swollen foot in a too-small sneaker. Covered in dirty canvas smelling of urine, a small roach crawls across the great divide of His sheeted chest, probably one of their greatest scientists finishing his preliminary examination.

"Well, he's found me, *now what?*"

Harsh fluorescents irritate His bleary vision. There is a man-sized sentry sitting close by. Jesus pretends to sleep. The residual venom makes it so.

Awake in another soft room. Jesus doesn't remember being released from the canvas stretcher or moved to this room. The color is muted beige and it smells of sweat and fresh latex paint. He can see the sun through a screened window and it is beautiful.

"I thought I'd never see me again. You, my childhood reflection, are all that I have to make me know that all is not lost. I see me through the deception, much as I did last night, peeking through their spooled clouds and azure fantasy glass. What are you telling me? What form of semaphore through the waving of bare winter branches am I supposed to compute?" Jesus is still unsure about the signals, the communiqué of all that God, the father, created.

"Upside down? You want me upside down? Anti-side up. Since I am apparently still in the anti-world, anti-seen, anti-think, and anti-speak must still be the rule. Yes, submerged for sub-speak. I'll get it right. Must be stripped of this gown they put me in. Their shrouds and cocoons only hamper."

They rush Him, Standing on his head with his butt up. The two Watcher/interlopers, dark skinned, Jeri-curl'd and white jacketed, pull Him from the imaginary cross. It feels for a moment that they'll break His neck with the force that is exerted but He's not so lucky. He receives another white-coated woman's sting. In the distance He hears Himself scream the anguish and pain He cannot in the soft room.

Snapshots. All just snapshots at first. Brief, muddy glimpses of long, dirty corridors with many closed doors on either side. Painfully bright fluorescent lights casting ominous shadows. Walls painted in thick, muted colors. Beige is the reigning hue coupled with subdued greens and yellows and blues. Everything speaks of sedation.

Jesus is escorted into this room or another by an outwardly kindly dark skinner. They appear to be in some pseudo-officious position. They are Watchers, "in charge" of Him but very little else. He is handed His snakeskin cowboy boots and black jeans and asked to dress. He didn't realize He was undressed as He pulls away the flimsy white gown open at the back from His shoulders. He puts the familiar dingy white T-shirt and jeans on His shell. A few steps are all it takes. In the False-glass He sees His "face." He does not look well. He is in shock. His love for this being is all gone. What He had done was not yet processed but certainly a case for these people.

"Is this me?" He repeats to Himself as He stares into the bathroom mirror.

"Who am I?" would be more appropriate.

Jesus is surrounded by the dead. They shuffle about like recently raised zombies. He also walks with the slow, barely lifted drag of feet. The annoying, persistent slip, slip, slip of movement but no important destination.

The hollow ones surround Him. They smell of passed soul and wet sheep. The emptiness rings like a television left on after one of their pledges of star-spangled deception. There is a TV dispensing indiscriminate dialogue. The voices and images are feeding post-apocalyptic commentary. Perhaps this is the way station souls arrive at once passing through that gelatinous bubble separating the Earth from the netherworld. This is that first waiting area for those lost in the war.

"Are these my people? Is this my flock? This motley crew of waste?" He is both disgusted and insulted. "Whose idea of a joke is this?"

His Earth parents are here- Dad after the depression and cancer, Mom after the fires of

insanity and homicide, in addition to various past life acquaintances who made a difference. They look so different now, altered just a bit. He can tell who's who by a passing resemblance to what He used to know, but without the trickery and visual deception this must be what they really look like. It becomes apparent now that we've been dying slowly on Earth. Poisoned, contaminated by Satan's hatred. He sees it now in the baleful far away eyes and twisted mouths of the people here He used to love. Jesus can't muster the love that He used to have for them because they look vaguely different from what He remembers. Though the shrunken black man and bruised light-skinned woman could be His parents He just can't be sure. He wants to rush to them, and others who are doppelgangers for former friends and family, but His uncertainty keeps Him at bay. He will shuffle alongside them, stare into their hopelessly lost eyes, and hope they will approach first. Perhaps they are images of evil. Looking as close as the Devil could come to conjuring up identical doubles of the people He loves. This could be another deception. If so they're close but not quite right.

Sharing introduces herself. She mumbled "Sharon," but in subtle-speak Sharing was intended. This close-cropped, hammy, honey-skinned "female" must be someone He used to "love" in the old world. She gives so much of herself. Is she something He didn't learn before? With her thick body type and light brown skin she resembles Scarlett, his former flame. She acts as a guide, a crossing guard over the river Styx perhaps. The Watchers introduce Him to the others, not as Jesus but as Isaac Abraham, the other dark meat. The evil twin. Sharing is intrigued. The name she gives him, "Saki", is apparently a new corruption of His host's already mangled identifier, but in the backwards tongue of this awful place. It's not much different from the old world.

The care she takes warms Him. He is like a wet kitten brought into the warmth of her home and is nourished by her kindness. Sharing is Scarlett because Scarlett was sharing...way back when, before He had even a clue to who He was.

Scarlett shared her heart, her hopes for a long life of loving... "Me, of all people. Back when I was Fuck up Number One. Now I am transformed. Now I am Number One who has fucked up."

Sharing invites Jesus to her table when it is time to eat their meals. She is usually silent except when instructing Him on how to hold His silverware or wiping His face when He dribbles His milk. "I have regressed so much." He appreciates her help and patience even though He never voices this. He assumes she knows.

"Medication!" is screamed out and Jesus is asked to swallow a thick, clear, bitter liquid. "Is this for my good or detriment?" All who accepted their Thiquid or capsules shuffle down the long, dirty hallway and into a small room to collect and inhale stale tobacco sticks. He joins them and quickly becomes dizzy. He feels His thoughts become loose.

"The others can hear me clearly," Jesus thinks and that thought is sent and disseminated among the sickly smokers. It is a return to the mind plundering that He experienced when He was free and on the run.

Even if His thoughts are being scanned by these rejects of old Earth there is nothing up there that is of any worth. He believes His head in this room to be a plastic bubble filled with swirling pink and grey clouds where His brain had been. There is no grand plot, plan or scheme that He needs hide from these readers. They can bask in the majesty of His presence but never will they have access to His great approach to liberation, largely because He seems to have hidden the blueprints from Himself. This must be an internal safety mechanism that was installed for occasions such as this. He is captured, in a way, and precious information must not fall into the wrong hands. That is why even Sharing is suspect. As Scarlett on old Earth He loved her like no other but here, in this strange and disturbing environment, He can't be so sure. Though many of the Watcher white-jackets speak soft, smile kindly and attend to their needs there is an underlying despair to this place. It is not a good place...so ultimately it must be evil.

These people may be tempting Him. That Thiquid He drank may be the water of old Earth, ripe with pollutants. It had a sludge-like consistency. "Do they want to see if I will change, if I can be changed? Corrupted?"

A change may already be under way. Jesus' eyes avert constantly to the scraped and clotted neck of a female pink skinner. The dried and congealed red looks so jarring and provocative against the pale of her throat. He can't stop from stealing glances at the gashes on the

pink skinner's neck. He feels a desire to stroke the serrated edges of coagulated flesh. He eventually reaches out as she sits curled in one of the main room's uncomfortable wood and vinyl chairs. He makes a wan attempt to elicit her attention. He wants her to accept Him. He wants her to allow Him to touch her bloodied neck. She resists Him. First with moans of opposition and finally with a sharp scream, swatting His hand away from her shoulder. Sharing becomes incensed, throwing a chair at the suicidal pink-skinner, requiring sequestering and sedation.

Alone now, away from Sharing's constant attendance, Jesus checks the eyes of the hollow ones in His surroundings and they are all safe. No wandering left eyes indicating possession by an evil one. He doesn't believe He could do battle with the jelly-demon in the shape He's in. The Watchers who insist on being called "staff" are questionable. He believes he's seen the occasional evil eye when He wasn't supposed to be looking. *Careful...*

Jesus hasn't bathed for a while before the terrible offense last evening (or was it last week? Month? Year?) and He smells very ripe. He is asked by one of the "staff" if He wants to take a midday shower. He finally complies, eager to feel cleansed in warm water that will make this strange place somewhat tolerable. Sharing, free from the quiet room, follows Him into the shower. After seeing her nude body He is positive who she is. She is indeed His former "love," Scarlett Simpson, unadorned by any altering atmosphere. Misshapen and bruised, she looks to have been beaten. He immediately thinks of His mother back home. He quickly blots that thought, that horrible vision, out of His mind. "Did it truly happen?"

He welcomes Sharing's mottled flesh. A single "staff" enters to watch them in the steam. Not amused, not disturbed, he just sits, smokes and watches their sex. It must be planned. "They want me corrupted and, true to the dark skinner's forced manifesto, I succumb."

They watch Him constantly, and write. Forever writing. "I know they write about me as intently as they watch. They are the re-writers of history, *my* story." They are the see see writers, the Liar-scribes.

The daily regimen of medication starts to take affect and Jesus notices. His thoughts clear

and His memory slowly returns. What He left in Jamaica, Queens ceases to be a haunted dream but more of a reality. A reality that He believes He must voice, however gruesome and consequence laden it may be.

"I feel that Thiquid affecting me in ways that I remember. I don't wish to return to my old ways, I've lived that. It's dead. He's dead...or should be."

Jesus is escorted into a small room and is met by a slender, brown skinned, kind-eyed old woman who resembles the paternal grandmother I had on Earth. Is this really Granny Naomi or is "He" seeing her too for the first time without the altered air? So persuasive are her eyes and kind ways that "He" releases the strangle hold I have had on myself since capture. "He" speaks, telling of things not asked and of things I'm sure they wouldn't want to know. "He" confesses my transgressions starting with the immediate one against Mom. "He" tells of where he came and how "He" got where he is now, once they let me know in no uncertain terms exactly where I am. "He"...

...I...am a patient at Rockland Psychiatric Center in the township of Orangeburg, New York. This grandmotherly woman is the ward social worker.

She sits with her back straight up and the air lingers in a desperate silence once I confess what I believe I have done. What I have left back home, Mom's dead body, caused by my own hands. I feel temporarily cleansed until a glance into this fake-granny's face shows the shock and disgust she is trying unsuccessfully to hide.

"I know why she feels this way and I feel it too. For myself, for what I have done...God, what have I done?!"

They come in the dead of night rousing me...Jesus from a fitful, chemical slumber. In the half-night it seems I forget that my mind had cleared a bit, and I am not sure if I am me or "Him."

More pink skinned. They are red leather-faced, dressed in cheap polyester slacks, conservative sport jackets, and ugly ties. Not the usual fare. These men are officious demons. You can spot them. It's in their eyes. They've seen all manner of horror, including the horror I

left in Queens. Jesus...I am escorted to a small white windowless room. Here I will again make a confession, only this time it will stick.

They say they're "Detectives" investigating "The Incident." They speak of it in capital knowledge intimating my prior awareness.

"I think I killed my mother," I mumble, wiping the sleep from my eyes. The leather-detectives want more. They ask me to repeat myself. I know what I have to do.

"I killed her."

YOU killed her?

"I killed her."

Why'd you do it?

"I dunno, I dunno."

Were you angry?

"I don't think so, I dunno, I dunno."

You don't know.

"I dunno, I mean..."

What?

"I loved her."

You loved her?

"Yeah."

Is that why you killed her, because you loved her?

"That really doesn't make any sense."

No, it doesn't.

"Yeah I know, but I had to."

You HAD to kill her?

"No. That was an accident. I didn't mean to hurt her. I was trying to exorcise her."

Tell me why.

"To save her life"

Why is that?

"Because she was possessed"

Who was possessing her?

"The Devil...I think..."

The Devil?

"I...I'm not sure"

But you know she was possessed?

"Yeah"

So you killed her?

"But it was an accident. I really didn't mean to do that. I didn't."

But why exorcise her.

"Well, I was afraid of her going through the end."

The end of what?

"The end of the world."

The end of the world?

"Yeah. I think it's already happened."

How do you know?

"Cause I'm Jesus...I think...or I thought so."

You think you're Jesus now?

"Well, it is my name..."

Says here your name is Issa...Issa Ibrahim.

"But Issa means Jesus in Arabic."

So you think you're Jesus?"

"Well, no, I mean, I'm not sure...I'm not sure anymore."

The leather-detectives will want nothing better than to put a collar on the dark skinner Son of God. They'll forego the burning in effigy and try for the real thing.

The Watchers and Liar-scribes are fascinated by me now. They all stay away. They don't want any part of me. That's good enough. They are all on the wrong team anyway. Some of the dark skinner Watchers have a pleasantness in their face. Not all. Not even half. But some. The

fool would probably mistake this for kindness and not notice their curiosity, as if watching a freak show.

They are the name takers of the damned. Gate keepers. Turn keys. They count heads to make sure this mighty herd goes where they are supposed. And that's nowhere. The soul departs, tired of the foggy-eyed shuffling, the hanging spittle and Thiquid stains on shirts and pillows. They are kept mercifully unaware that they are already dead. I would like to put this useless mass of ineptitude that I'm trapped in to rest once and for all but I am watched just a little too closely now. If I were caught trying to harm myself, especially after the truths of my claims are verified, I would not be able to sit even in this small space and call it solitude.

After several days my thinking becomes clearer and the leather-detectives return. The main one, eyes unblinking, expression unthinking, inflated chest, asks if I know why he's here.

“To eat my brain, perhaps?” ...oops, wrong answer.

“I think so. It's about my mom, right?”

“Yes, Issa. You're under arrest now. Do you understand? We're going to take you back to Queens and book you. Okay?”

My time at this pit stop called Rockland Psychiatric Center must be complete. I suppose I am not to tend this fallen flock. The confessor seems to know the answers to all their questions. His journey has just begun. He was waiting for them to return. He expects all the movements, the bravado, the Mountie posturing- they've got their man.

“Do you have to put on the handcuffs?”

“Yes, I do. But I won't put them on too tight, okay?”

The staff brings him mounds of shredded leather that was once my expensive motorcycle jacket in a plastic shopping bag. I am made to sign my name on a "property slip". Just as I begin to write “Jesus Christ” the impatient attendant screams, “No, man, you're real name!” Shocked solidly into this realm of reality I write the name “Issa Ibrahim” and it is unfamiliar, like I never have seen or written it before, yet I believe I will have to become accustomed to it, answer to it, own it and all that this person has done...good and bad.

The long travel "back home" is thick with cologne and silence. There are four pink, leather-faced detectives to escort me out of this foreign place "upstate," Westchester, "Nyuck," back to my hometown. There are big pink hands slung over the front seat so close to my face, seemingly eager to withdraw one of my eyes. Looking out the auto's window, the stone and metal spires captures my imagination as they did in my youth. The primitive labyrinths are still somewhat impressive. This will be that last time for a long time that I will see them. The dramatic skyline is preserved in my memory, like a photograph.

At the One-Thirteen Precinct in Rochdale Village, in Queens, New York, just minutes from my former dwelling, I am offered stale cigarettes and half eaten cheese doodles for my brief spell in the pen. It is alternately called "The Cage" by the leather-detectives, alluding to me being an animal. Hushed comments and hard stares abound when the arresting detectives tell the other members in their clan of my transgression.

Another slice of my soul is stolen in two flashes. Skin verification is also attempted. I am sure these cavemen are not advanced enough to read the charts, graphs and figures of the human form. But they'll have their chance with these ink smudges of my fingers.

In one pen, and yet another, and then another. Herded like so much cattle. Unwashed, barely fed, hardly rested, we stand shoulder to shoulder, breathing each other's waste, bad breath, and perspiration. We are pushed back and forth to some basement or another. In the middle of the night we are shackled together and conga-lined into a large paddy wagon and whisked in pitch dark to Kew Gardens Central Booking.

I am not sure if this is my flock- the derelict, the criminal, the incorrigible. This is for certain a misbegotten lot, but I am curious if they are truly the chosen. That would infer that I, too, am a criminal. We sit in the dark. We are all dark. The pink skimmers don't last long in these pens. For some sense of survival, they usually resort to acting how they assume criminal dark skimmers behave.

I see some movement. Sadly, I sit and wait. It is not my time. I have thought about praying but if I'm in here who is there to listen? Pop closed up shop and now the investors are

waiting for me to open under new management. I wonder where they are. Why can't they help me? But where can my council, The Mirror People, reside in these dens without mirrors? Do they even know where I am? This is just too much responsibility for one entity. Am I supposed to be the eyes and ears of the universe? How can I handle that job when I can't even blink or sneeze or fart my way out of this dungeon?

I find a few moments rest here and there. Mostly I lay on the floor of whichever cell I inhabit and feign sleep. I do not wish to be disturbed, dressed in only what I had, that now dirty T-shirt, filthy black jeans and the expensive snakeskin cowboy boots. As I remember it being somewhere near the end of February, and the many tombs of the Department of Corrections are known for their drafty environs, I feel a cold coming on.

The blue men remove me from the herd. Now, all I hear is the chatter of the rats in adjoining boxes boasting of carnal conquest and random violence. The smell is overpowering-dank, stale moisture. Urine mixed with sweat and long-faulty plumbing. This is no way to treat a deity but humility, like patience, is a virtue.

Removed and escorted to another bleak cell and then handcuffed, it is my turn on the great stage. It is my arraignment. I cannot focus enough to pay attention to the black robed white man as he speaks. Compelled to look behind me, into the audience, I spot my oldest brother Smiley, my nephew Jason and one of Mom's longtime female friends, Nafisa. If looks could kill I'd be on the cross already. Not yet. I pray, but not yet. I hear the charge of Second Degree Murder spoken and I am again shocked into a hard, palpable plateau of reality. There is a man next to me who claims to be my lawyer. He's a pink-skinner and I don't know if I can trust him. He enters my plea for me. "Not guilty, your honor." He must be a fool. Rushed into the pens again the attorney tells me I'm going to a hospital and he'll get in touch with me soon. This man could be anybody and as soon as he turns his back he is forgotten.

I am handcuffed again, put on a bus, and transported to Riker's Island. There are tribes here that assume great salvation from deities that practice exclusivity. It is probably that very thinking, these zealots and the truly spiritually bankrupt, that cast the lock upon the cell they

complain from. They cannot be helped. I see into the eyes of those, jellied and hollow, those who will not be making the trip with me. The occasional connection is tried but ultimately I must recognize these poor souls as the damned they are.

But who is more damned than I? While waiting for a housing block in one of a seemingly endless array of bullpens, I happen upon a copy of *New York Newsday*. The paper reads "*March 5, 1990.*" This information is useful as I don't know the actual date. This edition could have been a day or two old but at least I now have a general time orientation. Two or three pages into the paper I read a headline and know it is mine. "Mom Killed And Family Asks Why." Trying not to arouse too much suspicion I tear the article from the paper, fold it and slip it into the calf of my cowboy boot for further reading and obsession. No one must know that I am the man who killed his mother. I fear what would happen to me if any of these unsavory characters find out. If the paper is just reaching my hands, how far has it made the rounds of the island? And, with each calling of my name by the blue men, who already knew? A part of me wants to die and yet another part of me fears death in this death house.

Although I am in the halls of the criminal I am branded a mental defective by a young psychiatrist in the cramped and chaotic clinic. On this detainee's station, in a dorm of the Mental Observation unit, seclusion from the general population Regressors affords me time to plan. But I just cannot seem to see or dream anything more than the cracks, scribbles and grime upon these haunted walls.

I have come to look forward to meal, a foul witch's brew complete in its impurities, and the distilled poison of my prescribed Thiquid. This is the only time when I can interact with the blue men and medicine women. Yes, they're here too only a little less ethereal, more flesh and contempt. Seeing the cruel gloom in the eyes of my current captors bolsters the confidence, shaking the fear of the fool within.

I am visited by a man named Schwartz, claiming to be a "doctor." He comes to me from Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn. I am very unfamiliar with Brooklyn, except knowing it was the birthplace of my beloved mother, and am somewhat intimidated by this "doctor" with the wall eyes. He looks dirty and disheveled and I don't know which eye to make contact with.