

# The Ink Never Slips

‘Oh my, oh my, what have we here: a man,  
Nay, slave, toiling away in a dim fear  
Reprehension of his senses, no plan,  
Is there anything uglier than that, dear?’

Howard froze as the voice spoke from behind him. Could it have been a voice? Certainly not. After all, that was what he was there to investigate. What he *had* been investigating for the majority of his life. Unsuccessfully, of course. Chimpanzees couldn’t talk, or at least not in *syntactically complete sentences*, containing recursiveness, as his professor had told him long ago. Everybody knew that much. Yet behind him in that translucent plastic cage he knew so well, it had apparently just done so. But it couldn’t have. He turned and watched the chimpanzee intensely, he watched as it sat still, he watched it as it seemingly watched back, and he stared as it began moving his hand, he stared as it appeared as if he was going to point straight at him, but then as — nearly — predicted, it used the finger to scratch his head. Howard sighed, somewhat in relief, and turned around to walk into the control booth.

‘And he pretends not to hear me, of course  
As if his senses would dare to deceive  
Him more than his belly does his lab coat  
I only fear the thread of that button,  
I only fear for my eyes when it pops!  
Behind that ivory mane a glutton,  
Perhaps, or perhaps an ego that flops  
In the fierce wind by his forgetful tears.  
I hear you praying behind your dear screen,  
When the machine hums I laugh at the sheen.’

Howard turned again, this time sure that what he had heard the first time wasn’t just his imagination playing tricks. It was real: a voice, albeit a strange gravelly voice, with unusual rhythm and tempo — slow and deliberate. But it was real, he reckoned; more than his heart palpating through his chest, or than the synapses firing in his brain calculating through all the possibilities; through all the unasked and unanswered questions. Which is why, perhaps, he was later so regretful that the first thing he asked had been:

‘What?’

‘To think that you would bother me repeat  
A single word, Howard, that is too sweet.’

‘How do you know my name?’ he said instinctively, yet at catching a glimpse of his name tag situated crookedly on his left breast he followed up with another question, ‘Why *do* you talk?’

‘We talk, we talk, but mostly we all sit  
Guarded by the just words of another.  
Just, because we can remain ever split

Whether we are guarded as a brother  
Or just as a mother, watching her son  
Leave for war, and him, never returning.’

Now, Howard knew that he wasn’t dumb, he had a PHD for god’s sake. But then again, he hadn’t read a book since he’d left university, unless science articles counted to the list. He should therefore understand what the chimpanzee was saying, he thought, but not a word of what the chimpanzee was trying to tell him made sense. The biggest theory running around his mind at the moment was still that he was crazy. No non-human primate could speak, so why would there be a chimpanzee sitting in front of him speaking sentences that sounded perfectly sensible, if a bit lacking on the semantic side?

‘I don’t understand what you’re trying to say.’ he said in response, at that point simply trying to entertain the insane portion of his mind conjuring up the hallucinations of the sounds and movements of the chimpanzee’s mouth.

‘Howard, you think that you’re dreaming, alas,  
A life spent thus gives you lasting blindness  
When you see it spreading out on your grass;  
Here, now, nothing but an act of kindness.  
Here I’m presenting an offer I hope  
Will give you as much pleasure as a rope  
To the drowning sailor out far from home.’

Momentarily he put his doubt aside, ‘An offer?’

‘Indeed, one none of us will dare refuse  
Howard, hear me out, and I pray that you  
Find it in your heart to help an old ape,  
Despite the black prejudice in my words,  
I mean well — hear me, as I henceforth say:  
You ask a question, and I will answer,  
You say that I am infelicitous,  
And I swear I will meet you there, half way.’

‘I... That’s crazy. I mean you’re just an ape, and I am going crazy. There is no way in hell that I am standing here talking with... *you*.’

‘My words are as clear as snow in summer,  
My words make sense to me, and that is all.  
But isn’t that what you investigate?  
How something you really don’t understand  
Compares to what you’ve taken for granted?  
Because, what is already known to all  
Is the most powerful destroyer, or  
At least to what you desire: knowledge.’

‘So you understand me? Like really understand me? Who am I kidding, of course you do, if you talk like that.’ he said while his mind, still racing, was trying to come up with some better

questions, 'Why *can* apes talk? Or perhaps, even better: why haven't you, I guess speaking both personally as well as species-wise, spoken until now?'

'Now, Howard, you're getting it. The prize, nay,  
The treasure that lies in front of your eyes,  
As close as the cheese and beer in your fridge.  
All that's left until reaching salvation,  
Knowledge, a given place up in the sun  
Is to hear me out, and all will be spilled.  
But, until then my lips remain sealed.'

Without giving an answer Howard ducked into the safety of his control booth where he had toiled for many hours, years, behind the window squarely lined with metal wire. He closed the door to the lab behind him and sat down, leaning against the door. The darkness only illuminated by an ancient computer display comforted him, somehow. Maybe it was intrinsically calming, although Howard currently leaned towards the other alternative: it was an escape. Perhaps that was also why he had run into the cave when confronted with something so magnificently absurd. A talking ape. Bah! When pigs fly, and all that. Humbug. He drew himself up and peered out the bottom of the small square window in the door, because maybe another glance would dispel the illusion. The ape sat quietly, just as it had done when he began the day just as any other, innocuously scratching his stomach. An ape spouting *poetry* nonetheless; what kind of a reality was he currently living in? Not willing to either ask, nor answer, Howard walked into the kitchen and put on the kettle to boil. A calming cup of chamomile tea would help calm his mind. As the kettle beeped he opened the fridge and stared at the sad sight: a beer, and a sweaty piece of cheese. Unwanted questions and ruminations stirred up from below. He opened the beer and downed half before throwing it into the sink. Back at the square window he observed as the ape scratched his stomach, put the finger under his nose, and sniffed. Oh, God.

A faint steam rose from the spout of the kettle, which after a while stopped as he stood over it hovering. He looked over at the pristine picture frame beside the dusty package of PG Tips and chamomile. The woman that he had caused much sorrow by associating with, he thought half the time. The other half he thought of the times of unworldly calmness and raging storm. How her hair flowed in the wind shimmering in the last rays of the sun besides the ocean, an ocean of both salt and time. Returning to the window brought no further development.

The beer was still good as he gave it another try, if a bit flat. Time was running away from him, as always, and he cursed himself for it. The opportunity of a lifetime, or he reasoned, the turning point in a tragedy. It was some kind of start of a story at least, only, he hadn't figured out what kind of character he was yet. *See*, he told himself, *I'm not that illiterate, you damn ape!* He looked at the picture frame, where the strawberry handkerchief stared back at him. He sighed, *maybe this is a tragedy, and a melodramatic and silly one at that.*

In a fit of what could only be described as temporary insanity Howard left the safety of the break room and went back inside to the ape. 'Okay, so what is this deal of yours?' Howard asked as he put his hands on his hips for moral support.

'Time passes quickly, my heart beats faster,  
Then it has ever done before, and will,

Here in this sterile chamber of lost dreams,  
At last a dream's close to being fulfilled  
Soon I'll hopefully meet her eyes with mine,  
And all that is wrong will at last be right.'

Howard interrupted the slow poetry reading, 'Just tell me where to go.'

'To the zoo at the southern edge of town,  
And there behind some weathered metal bars  
The one who I pine for, for whom I ache.  
And I must join her, no matter the cost,  
But your payment shall be knowledge of course,  
All the treasure is yours, forevermore.'

'But I need proof, I need to videotape this, record this somehow. If it isn't recorded — as you must know — it never happened.'

'Some things you know by writing it all down  
Some things you must only know by your heart.  
This is one of those rare moments in time,  
When you will know everything, yet nothing  
Will reverberate outside your own mind;  
Like these words, ebbing out across the waves.  
Of space, time, the lasting smile on her face.  
See, Howard, I'm not a bad listener, hmm?'

'So, you want me to take you to the zoo where I am going to somehow get you into the primate center?' he said, to which the ape nodded, 'And for that risk, the certain admonishing, if not firing, tomorrow, all I gain is *private* knowledge? But what is knowledge if not something to be shared?'

'To philosophize now is most unwise  
When all that awaits us is our fate  
Now intertwined, no matter what you think.  
Where the wisest course to steer is, I think,  
Of course the one where the water takes us  
And where public knowledge stays at the shore.  
What is at the end is guarded by faith.  
Can you really let that flame blow out now?'

It annoyed him how much the Ape knew about him, and it annoyed him even more that he somehow knew, or at least had guessed at Julia. But, as the Ape somehow knew too, that had to take a sideline for what was now — apparently — straight ahead. It was time for a road trip. 'You're right. Have you ever ridden in the passenger seat of a car before?'

Something that Howard learned quickly was that: 1) Chimpanzees are large, and make it nearly impossible to close the door if you put one in your passenger seat, 2) They produce an acrid, sweaty smell, but he admitted to himself that could be due to the fact that the chimpanzee hadn't been washed for days, and 3) With an oversized lab coat on he looked vaguely human. If

he added a hat covering parts of his face or an even larger muumuu, then he might have a shot at getting him to the zoo without any issues. Any issues more pressing than Howard's current situation, that is. But at least he needn't worry about getting spotted getting home, as he had been burning the midnight oil, which meant it was now 10PM and they were alone, except for a single pair of headlights behind them. The zoo was closed, but Howard figured that if they got up early and beat both traffic and non-welcome eyes, they would be relatively safe.

'I think it is time for you to start answering some questions.' Howard said.

'Why, well of course, my loyal companion!  
Ask and I shall answer most truthfully.'

Howard took a second trying to figure out the best question to ask, but he realized that the best method would just be to barrage him, 'Why can you talk, and for that matter why haven't you spoken until now?'

'Illusions are illusions to the mind,  
But try to reach it and you will find none;  
If that makes sense, then the rest will follow.  
But I believe that answer is most poor  
To your ears and eyes Howard, am I right?  
Therefore I will make it simple, I'll dance  
Around it, like the sun in the seasons.  
It hides because it is the way it works,  
Like me when I limp around who I am,  
A result of the process of nature,  
A result of the process of nurture,  
But partly on me in virtue of me,  
Just trying to do what I've always done.  
Talk, I do because I've always done so.'

Howard sat for a while, not sure that he was done speaking, but when a minute rolled around he cursed the ambiguous ape. 'I guess the interesting question, then, is why you have stayed silent for as long as you have, until me, I guess.' he said.

'Why, if I can spend my time serenely  
Hanging from a tree, to sing all my life:  
Martha, I shout from the branches up high  
Martha, the blue waves and odorless wind  
Martha, the sounds of nature in the night  
Martha, all of it after a while sung.  
But you're not after an old ape's wails,  
*You* are a pragmatic man of honor,  
In the bastion of rationality.  
You raise the flag and lick my dirty feet  
And say that it tastes like uncertainty!  
We have not spoken because there's no use,  
One is tapping the perennial flow,

Another is longing for what can't be,  
Fate is simply a word that we both use  
To say what we both think is the same thing.  
What I mean is Martha, only Martha.

I'm sorry, my dear friend, I'm getting old.  
Have I now lost my sense of brevity  
As the lost high-pitched frequencies of youth?  
You want an answer, and you want it plain.  
Here it is, as plain as I can make it:  
A reason to speak is required first,  
Only after comes the act of speaking.  
Because why would we speak, for what reason  
Would we want to communicate with you?  
For you to enslave us, to invade us?  
Even if we are not hyperbolic,  
Is it not then unreasonable to think,  
That our purpose would change instantly,  
And for what reason? And that is my point,  
One needs a reason to begin speaking;  
Speaking is an act that brings forth actions,  
Actions that change the world, or us as well.

'So what you're saying is that... you haven't talked because you don't *feel like it?*' Not a bad question, he thought, but you can do better. *Come on.*

'We feel countless things in our countless days,  
But we go on nonetheless, anyhow.  
We do what we believe will carry us  
To where the eagle flies, and I'm lucky  
To ever undergo it, any time.'

'Great, a philosopher.' he said, sighing, 'Do I have any hope to get any real answers?' he continued, and afterwards sighing under his breath, *this is what I risked my job, and — hopefully still — untarnished criminal record for?*

Howard drove on, unconsciously heading homewards, towards the little house made out of ticky-tack. Howard prayed that no nosy neighbor would chose this day, at this hour (12PM) for a surprise visit. He opened the passenger door and helped the ape out without saying a word, quickly leading him inside the door, in to the sofa where he sat the ape down. Pouring an automatic glass of whiskey from the cart in the living room he found himself asking: 'Do you want a drink?' to which the ape just shook his head, slowly. *Typical* he thought.

He took the glass with him into the bedroom, still sipping that marathon sip he'd begun in the living room. The glass was empty and he was perusing his options for a muumuu disguise in the wardrobe. The only the thing that he found that might fit the ape was a dress that Julia had left, a dress that he had bought for her as a joke, a joke that she obviously hadn't appreciated. It was very large, an atrocious shade of green, and full of flowers that looked unnervingly unnatural. He

chuckled and looked at the picture frame next to the bed.

As the ape was dressed, and Howard was sitting there sipping his second whiskey next to an ape wearing a large green dress, he couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity. The ape looked at him with raised eyes, but said nothing. Of course, it didn't. Howard had just risked his entire profession and... well everything else, his name, what have you, for this opportunity. Of course the ape said nothing of importance. It just raised its eyebrows, and sighed.

'I must say that I'm rather curious,  
Seeing how you are not asking questions,  
Is it because you are coming up short  
Or are my answers much too impoverished  
To your ears? Then tell me, I'll inquire  
And see what remediation I might bring.'

'Why do you even talk like that, like some pretentious English major that has just discovered Iambic pentameter? It just seems a bit much, don't you think?'

'Just as you believe your tongue superior  
To the beggar and the rich man downtown,  
I keep on talking as if that were true,  
For me just as you: an Elysian town  
In virtue of the debt being born blue,  
That stains my words forevermore yellow,  
That chains my meter like you did the Jew.  
Throughout time and space he has kept walking  
While you have kept him under the black whip;  
Some things, especially pain and trauma,  
Just capriciously hover over you.  
If you are strong you'll keep on moving on,  
If you are weak you'll bend your knees to me,  
To the pale light, to the growing dark, and  
Ask for something resembling redemption.'

When Howard didn't answer, the chimpanzee continued, 'I am sorry, I keep eluding you. What I mean is that this way of speaking is something we discovered long ago, There really is no real reason nor rhyme — Who am I kidding, of course there is rhyme! But only because we decided so For some history that now eludes us, As my answers do to you then and now.'

'Let me tell you a story: the first time  
That we ever contacted you before,  
A long time ago, when the west was the north,  
And literature was spoken out loud  
For theater and at the theater.'

Lanterns burned their lasting flame high and low,  
And shadows swung by mighty in the night.  
You see, the way I was told the story  
Was that a band of pining renegades,  
Magicians both to the word and to stealth,  
Got to a young William sometime in May  
And convinced the nervous man to trust them.  
Together they formed the steel from the pen,  
Together they made the name of Shakespeare,  
Together they echoed through time and space.’

Howard finished his second whiskey, and when he decided a third would be most unwise, he poured himself another one. This ape wasn’t making any sense.

‘They teach it as we all grow up because  
They want us to know the reason why they,  
The band of blacksmiths roaming the world (free)  
Were ultimately bound by what, and how.  
You see, the band were after the same thing  
That you and I, Howard, keep on chasing:  
Its facsimile is almost faded now,  
Yet we see them on our retinas,  
Their unmistakable presence echoes  
Across space and time, and it must get out.  
Why else would I don these bizarre garments?  
Why else would you help the thing that you wield  
To further the illusions you still wish  
Exist in the back of your larger dreams.’

‘So what you’re saying is that *you guys* were Shakespeare, and *not* Shakespeare?’ he said, ‘Oh, what am I saying. Of course you were, right? Did you also find Atlantis while you were at it?’

‘Whether you believe it or not, the truth,  
And only the truth is what I shall say.’

‘It still doesn’t make any sense. Why were you complacent with all the experiments we have performed, not only the ones that I personally have performed — which have been rather gentle I must add — but everything performed throughout history? Not to mention the abuse and... genocide,’ he added, ‘that we have performed towards you?’

The ape shrugged his shoulders,  
‘Whenever you let go of control, and  
Attempt life as only life can give it,  
Then, and only then, shall turmoil succumb,  
Leaving peace and turmoil behind itself;  
Like it should be, like it always has been.’

‘That doesn’t explain anything.’ he said, giving it a bit of reflection continued, ‘Some part of me thinks that you don’t believe it yourself. Is that why you’re making this deal, just to escape it?’

‘But even the most pious man weakens  
As he hangs burning on the wooden cross  
Bargaining for eternal salvation,  
As the only time that that’s ever seen  
Is that face, echoing a memory —  
How can one hope to go on without aim?  
If faith fails, then the hammer of science?  
If love fails, then the universe fails too?  
One can close ones eyes and just bleed away,  
It will all be gone soon anyways, right?’

‘You’re getting dangerously close to a pretentious college kid, which is rather disturbing. You’re not in the end stages of syphilis are you?’

The ape looked at him, and even though he didn’t have eyebrows, he seemingly raised them, ‘I don’t want to put myself into this,  
You can ask whatever you desire,  
But isn’t there a better use of this time  
Than asking further questions like that?  
Because you’ve spent your life doing one thing,  
And one thing alone. For the right reason?  
Who am I to say, all that I can say  
Is that if it matters, however slightly,  
Of how the shadows are as well-lit things  
Then use this time, and use it very well.’

Howard stared at the ape and said nothing. He knew that he was right, if there ever was a time to ask questions, and too many of them at that, then that was the time. But to Howard time moved too quickly, and as he sat staring into the ape’s black eyes, too slow. His brain could think of no questions to ask, despite his entire career depending on that very ability. To question, to inquire, to see things that no one else saw. At least the last one was at that time currently true. Although it wasn’t very much because of Howard as it was a scene in spite of Howard. And that annoyed him more than anything else. All his life he knew that all he had ever done had been *in spite* of him, and not because of him. A catalyst for change, for progress, he hadn’t been. He had waited, patiently, for life to arrive. For truth, but none had ever appeared before him. Only the black eyes of a silent primate staring back at him expecting questions, but none to be asked.

‘Well, if there is a question then I guess I’d have to plow through the obvious ones. It seems improbable that as we evolved as a species none of us tried to communicate, that we didn’t cooperate on some rudimentary level.’

‘Truly? Look upon your own reflection  
Do you see cooperation written  
On the white pages of your history,

Or do you see blood-stained misperceptions  
Disguised as the holy war of mankind  
And the planned obsolescence of the old,  
Of the bringing of the new, and the pure?  
Could you not then see how you'd overlook  
The most obvious thing beneath your nose?  
Indeed your most close friend and relative,  
Your very own flesh and bone flickering  
As he sees his big brother acknowledge  
Greatness that he never hoped he would see,  
And the disappointment when he leaves.  
The bitterness then is contained within,  
The anger is withheld, and with wisdom  
Comes the letting go, the pity, silence.  
Is it the cold hand or the dying sun  
That is responsible for the coldness  
Echoing throughout both of our hearts?'

Howard summoned his inner literature spirit, and tried to decipher what he was saying — perhaps as a result of his realization that this *was* the occurrence of a lifetime, and that he would be an idiot trying to maintain a facade of the facade he was normally portraying. He wasn't stupid, he knew what the ape was saying: *they had tried to maintain, or at least remained open to, contact. But meanwhile we only squabbled over petty disagreements, and after a while they just figured it was safer to stay out of it.* What Howard didn't understand, what he didn't *believe* was the why. Many things throughout history happen without reason, especially if given enough time. If thousands of years had passed, why hadn't the apes slipped up even once — he corrected himself, *they had*, only it hadn't been enough to be detected by any humans. That made it a little more plausible, but even then... Thousands of years, and nothing? Preposterous! But what other option did he have than to believe him? What other option than to explore this lunacy and see where the bottom lies? For the present moment, however, another glass of whiskey was too enticing to deny itself. The liquid burned, and warmed him, lulled him — even if the effect was psychosomatic. To evade the situation even further, despite accepting that he must savor it — as one often does — he went to his record player and put on the only record he owned, *Best of Ray Charles*. The shrill trill of 'Don't you know' entered and he saw as the ape jumped and shrieked in surprise, while it entered Howard completely.

'Don't you like Ray Charles?'

'To us music is what you feel it is,  
But shouting as if you were a newborn  
Is not in any vocabulary.'

'Shame,' he said, as he closed his eyes and leaned his head up against the wall behind him, and for a moment everything else lifted. His feet, the air, and the ape beside him became one and the same, the same rhythm as the music, the same rhythm as life. Julia, all of it for a while sung. But only for a brief moment, because as soon as he made himself privy to it he was tossed away, and Howard was back struggling to understand. Then it was that he realized he had forgotten to

ask the most basic of questions: ‘What’s your name?’

The ape paused for a long time, perhaps thinking, and then said  
‘I like the name Ray Charles, it has got jazz  
Perhaps I should adopt it as my own?  
Alas, if we only could adopt who we were  
From the few scribbles of a fountain pen.  
Alistair was the name I was given,  
And Alistair I shall forever remain.’

‘Alistair. You don’t strike me as one.’

‘Forsooth, I echo the name I was given.’

‘Indeed.’ he paused, ‘But then again...’ he realized he was beginning to slightly slur his words, and in attempt to cover it — as he often did — he instinctively poured a glass for the ape and handed it to him, ignoring the shaking head of Alistair, ‘Tell me, what does your species think of fate? Is there not something to the idea of being branded when you’re born with an idea of who it is that you are to become, intrinsic to something as basic as a name — as a burden you’ve inherited?’

‘Burden... A misused term for an ideal,  
To be tied to existence itself, and  
Be given the freedom to express it.  
By wielding a simple word, *Alistair*  
Or whatever, might express your own plight.  
A burden? Perhaps that is so... Perhaps...  
Perhaps burden is of being alive,  
Simply a precondition of it all;  
Love and all of its large implications;  
War and many of its boundless sorrows;  
Faith in its many forms, its peace and strife;  
The burden in how clouds float and go on,  
But nonetheless the burden all the same.  
Fate states not that which we claim to understand,  
But that which we must perform to ourselves,  
To ever hope to remain sane until...  
Until we are caught up by the burden.  
We are for the moment both intertwined  
In our search for a mutual point of time  
That toys with our senses till they disappear  
And only the memory remains still.  
Just like a name echoes eternally  
Yet remains temporary, just the same.’

Howard was in way above his head and he knew that, but he had to try to carry on. Not that he didn’t understand what Alistair was saying, necessarily. The difficult part was being sure that he was right. Being sure that he didn’t misinterpret, as one often does, the nuances of what he was

saying. Most certainly culturally set... burdens — for the lack of a better word — lurking in the backdrop of the commonly set common ground. Because what use was any answers otherwise? But all the same it seemed like the most questions that were to be asked had been answered by the silence that they now both shared, however uncomfortable it might've been echoed against the fading tones of Ray Charles on the record player.

Then it was that he realized that he had a tape recorder, somewhere in the box with the rest of the notebooks & pens from his student days. A tape recorder that was easy to hide, something that Alistair couldn't possibly notice and call him out for. He went out the room and cursed himself for not thinking of it any earlier, the most obvious thing that he should've done from the start, remembering the tape recorder lying right besides the computer in the lab. What use is any words that are not recorded, despite whatever Alistair had said. Opening his closet he pulled out a cardboard box from the shelf, and put it on the bed. Within he pulled out notebooks filled with lecture notes, first and second drafts of his dissertation written on an electrical typewriter, a copy of William Blake's 'Songs of innocence and experience', as well as his creased pocket notebook. He opened it and glanced at the pages. It seemed so long ago, nearly impossibly so. Crudely painted portraits both in pencil and in longhand. He both cringed and marveled at them, to think the amount of sentiment contained in him then, sentiment that gave way to histrionics, only to finally ebb out to the flavorless vial of the modern perennial day. In his hands were the notebook of five minutes past midnight, as he had noted in the middle of it, when one went out and smoked a cigarette, only thinking of possibilities. Turning the page there she was dressed so magnificently in scarlet, and Howard saw him sitting there in that lecture hall, scribbling what he saw of Julia from five rows behind. He closed it and turned to the book of poetry. Julia had given it to him, but he had never understood it. To him, it was just an ancient book full of poetry for children, and later, poems that were superficial and lied about what the title had suggested. He had told her as much, and that the only real poetry was written by people like Walt Whitman or Robert Graves, men that had plenty of *real* experience; however she didn't like his interpretation very much. Howard pulled the tape recorder from the box and stashed it in his front pocket. He turned it on, and to his surprise it still worked, and with plenty of empty tape to boot. Howard stashed it in his coat pocket, left the box and the rest on his bed, and again went into the living room.

Alistair held his glass in his hand but did not show any urge to drink. Howard watched the whiskey sit patiently in the glass, waiting... Waiting for its burden to be absolved. No one would be in the lab tomorrow, so he had little to worry on that front, albeit it wasn't impossible that someone would walk in and find it empty. However, the much bigger issue at hand was getting the ape out, and into the primate center, which was in the middle of the zoo. He hadn't spoken to Julia for two years, but he knew that she had to make an exception for this situation. The implications of this outweighed any animosity that might still lingered between them, animosity that Howard still didn't quite understand except for how her face looked and how her voice trembled as she cried when she had confronted him with it — whatever it was. Many people have trouble with confrontation, but Howard never had. The only issue he had with it if he was being admonished, or talked down upon, without understanding what he had actually done. Otherwise the truth was the truth, and the truth needed to get out. Consequences were consequences, no matter if you were ignorant of them or not. He watched the silent street outside, in all of its dark and somber beauty. A single street light enlightening the most

depressing of landscapes, the shadow of a man in the autumn of his life, and an ape in a hideous green dress waiting for his fate.

‘We’ll have to wait ’til the morning, preferably at dawn when nobody else is really awake’ he said, ‘So that if anybody sees anything I can just say that they were still dreaming, or something.’

Alistair said nothing, but nodded in response.

‘I think it is best if you sleep on the couch for tonight. Do you need any blankets or anything?’

‘I have little need for a warm blanket,  
All I need at this point is the promise,  
Still intact, for tomorrow to arrive.’

‘Okay, so no blanket.’ he emptied his whiskey and put it on the record player that now had finished playing. Alistair’s was still untouched. ‘I think I’ll go to bed and leave you to finish that.’ he said as he again went into the bedroom and closed the door to the living room, taking one final glance at Alistair who had sat in the exact same position since initially sitting down. He sat down on the edge of his bed, with the cardboard boxes strewn behind him. Reflecting on what must’ve been the craziest day of his life he couldn’t help but feel disappointed that no thoughts came. Words failed him, questions failed him, images failed him. Only the slight lingering taste, and burn, of the whiskey remained.

The morning light shone in through the partially closed blinds and woke him. His lips were parched, and he felt the hangover rushing over him like a freight train. Not to mention the headache. But he was used to feeling like shit when he woke up; one of the merits of growing older, he had always thought. He was sitting leaning against the bed. Glancing over at the clock much of the hangover vaporized; 6:00AM. It was better than waking up at nine, but still riskier than his original plan of a few minutes past five. Fully dressed he had least could save precious time that way. Anxiety began creeping up his throat so that he could almost taste it.

Entering the living room he was greeted by a sleeping Alistair, still sitting clasping his glass in the same position he had left him in, with his head slightly angled towards the floor. Alistair held an expression of the somber smile reflected in that of seeing the face of the one always on ones mind, yet in reality is so far away that the only place one sees them is in the realm of ones dreams. Flickering somewhere between sight and foresight. Howard didn’t want to disturb him, but there was no other choice: they had to go, and they had to go now. He went over and shook him gently by the shoulder, which promoted a not so gentle reaction of Alistair dropping the glass and violently standing up, seemingly already out of breath. Composing himself he immediately realized where he was, and seemingly where he was going.

‘I... I am sorry for this furry carpet,  
I can only hope to pay for dry cleaning,  
But alas my money seems to have run short.’

Howard couldn’t help but laugh, and he laughed in a way that he hadn’t for a very long time; extended bellows, chuckles and snorts — over-exceeding the line to a very unattractive laugh by an endless margin. After he was finished, when whatever had been so funny seemed not so funny anymore he looked up at Alistair once again who stood in the same spot as he had before. ‘Let’s

go.'

Getting him into the car again had been easier than he had imagined. The street was deserted, with the morning fog providing further protection against onlookers. The anxiety that had nearly banished his hangover was now entirely subsided, and he relaxed in his seat. If he didn't know any better he felt like he was on a road trip during college, a little hungover, but propelled forward by youth. As they were blazing down the highway Howard looked at the clock, and saw that it was 6:35. This, he knew, would mean that they would be at the zoo no later than ten past seven. Not even the zookeepers would be there then, who got there by 7:30 if they had kept the same schedule over the years. This meant they had to somehow spend thirty additional minutes either driving, or if they were courageous — or stupid — enough, getting breakfast. Perhaps emboldened by his conquest of anxiety earlier Howard decided for the latter.

'What do you say we get some breakfast?'

Seeing that Alistair didn't answer, Howard pulled into a nearly empty parking lot in front of a dunkin' donuts, and put the car in park. Any thoughts of getting caught had left his mind. He only thought that if anybody saw Alistair they would look at him puzzled, shrug their shoulders, and leave. Nowadays people were too preoccupied with other stuff anyway. Well, that and the fact that he was feeling hungover, and needed a coffee and something to settle his stomach. But looking over at Alistair he couldn't help but think that he was perhaps just a bit too noticeable. Howard remembered that his mother had left her sunhat in the pocket of the backseat, so he reached back and grabbed it, thrusting it on his head. The white widebrimmed sunhat hardly fit, but it kinda made Alistair look like an old shrunken obese lady. Not too unlike his own mother. He brushed the image away.

'Just wait here and I'll rush in and grab something for us to eat. Donuts sound okay?' Howard said as he leaned in from the open door. Alistair shrugged in response.

'But to say that I could go eitherway,  
As if the sun rose out of desire  
And not of a decision made for it.'

Howard didn't understand, 'Gotcha. Donuts it is.'

At the counter a girl who looked like she had either been studying all night, or drinking all night, was yawning. As he was ordering he observed the all too familiar black circles beneath her eyes, her constrained forced smile out of every retail worker's worst nightmare. Beneath it all was someone who wanted to go home, brew a cup of chamomile tea, and bury herself in her thick cover of darkness, regardless of the noise her roommate would make at 8:30. He smiled back as she handed him his six donuts, a coffee and a bottle of water. 'Have a great day!' she shouted as he began walking to the exit. Howard knew that he would, no matter the outcome. It was a day of change, that he felt in his bones. He continued smiling as the sun met his approach through the dirty windows.

This affective mood was instantly turned into a pit in his stomach as he saw somebody standing still by his car, staring in through the window. He began picking up his pace while all of his previous anxieties came rushing back. Imaginary conversations were taking place at ten times the speed of real time, conversations that he rationally knew never would take place. How could

he be so stupid? The rest of the parking lot was at least deserted, so the anxiety was kept somewhat at bay.

‘Hey.’ Howard said as he was still a bit too far away to be considered talking distance. The man turned towards him.

‘This your car?’

‘Yeah.’ Howard suddenly remembered something a psych student had told him once, that innocent people being questioned by the police were always quick to respond to any accusation in an interview, which the situation of course wasn’t, but it made him ask, ‘Why are you standing staring at my mother?’

‘Your mother?’ the man asked, ‘You mean to say that *that* is your mother? Bro, I’m pretty damn sure that’s a fucking monkey.’

‘She has a rare skin condition.’

He laughed, ‘*Skin condition?* What condition might that be, monkeyitis?’

‘Just leave us alone, all right? We just want to get going.’

‘To the zoo to visit some relatives I imagine?’ he said as he laughed.

‘Fuck off.’

‘Whoa, easy there... Listen, I don’t care what you’re doing. It’s just not that often that you see a monkey in a dress and sunhat, if you know what I mean. It’s your ape, your business.’ the man said as he began walking away in the direction of the hardware store on the other side of the plaza.

The highway was mostly empty, primarily occupied by pickup trucks owned by plumbers and construction companies. And then there were Howard and Alistair in their green Toyota. Howard was eating his third donut, the sugar helping to lead his mind astray from the encounter at the parking lot. His doubts hadn’t subsided since reemerging, and now they were stronger than ever. The disguise he had constructed was apparently worthless, or at the very least at close distance. At least Alistair was having a great time, seeing that he had devoured his three donuts in less than a minute, and presently sitting sloppily sipping his water.

Even more worrying than the answers to the question of getting him into the zoo, at least to the scientific side of him, was that he hadn’t asked any questions regarding the thing that he was most interested in, the discovery of his lifetime. Howard then reached into his pocket, where he stroked the tape recorder with his hand. He pressed the record button, and felt the tape whir.

‘So, listen. It could keep me up all night if I didn’t start asking you some of the more important questions. Although if I am being honest I’m not sure quite what to ask. I’ve been sitting here racking my brain with all you said last night, about Shakespeare and all that... And while that *is* interesting, I can’t help but think that there is some question that has not been asked. Although, I am shamed to admit, I haven’t the least clue what it is.’ he said, ‘So, I figured I’d ask you. What is the most important question I haven’t asked yet?’

The ape was quiet for a bit, and then he spoke, ‘To ask a question one must first live through

Its very answer, only then it shows  
As clear as wind, or as a winter's day  
That its own inception was a story  
Told to keep us warm at the bitter night  
When the sun only reaches our bones.' he paused, 'What is it that's held in common between  
The sailor and the office worker?  
Between the power of animal and man?  
Do you hope to grasp it by a question?'

Suddenly Howard felt that he understood, and not everything, but at least what Alistair had just said. What questions were there to be asked except for the questions that were asked? 'What was your mother like?' In the periphery of his vision Howard saw a shift in Alistair's manner, as if he were relaxing for the first time in a long time.

'A most tender subject matter indeed...  
But a wise choice, because only kindness  
Eventually leads you to the wisdom  
That only tangible wisdom brings.  
My mother she was the only cradle  
From which all happiness, and light, will stem;  
Even when the night overtakes the dream  
I'll carry on seeing her call me (and you)  
Seeing us for what we are, and in time  
Eventually do the same for us.'

In front of the car was a small cavalcade of gray identical vehicles riding along the same gray concrete strip, alongside the gray city constructed in columns and rows beneath it. A faint yellow tinted the windows of the cars lined up in an almost symmetrical row.

'You haven't talked anything about the woman for whom you've just risked a lot to be with.' Howard said, looking out to his left he saw a pickup truck with 'Chris' Plumbing' painted on the side, containing a man staring at Howard's truck, giving him a thumbs up when they made eye contact, 'Why don't you tell me a little bit about her? What is she like, what does *she* like, and all that.'

'How can one define but a memory  
If one isn't already familiar?  
I close my torn eyes when I go to sleep,  
And there she is, and me, under a tree  
Being all that we could ever be.  
For in every permutation  
We sit beneath that very same tree,  
And the only thing that exists is that one moment.  
In the suffering of what we call life  
We crave safety yet also excitement.  
We live a long life of contradictions.  
She is the solvent that makes it go away,

Melts the aluminum snow of the mind  
Until the eternal moment remains.'

'Well, I had something a little bit more pragmatic in mind, like how I would say that her hair smelled like lavender, or how she smiled in a peculiar way. Stuff like that.' Howard said.

'Her hair was as hard as stone  
And lice abundant as sand  
She smelled just like an old bone  
That granted the hyenas' demand.'

'Okay... Well, that's nice.'

Howard drove slowly past the emptied out parking lot of the zoo, where the cartoon lion stared at him above the front gate. How many times had he walked beneath it without a thought in the world, except for the amazement that only is preserved for those too young to think. The lion looked more dilapidated than he had last laid eyes on it, but presumably that was nostalgia speaking. He took a right down a small alleyway until he was at the employee parking lot, slowing down beforehand to see if there was anyone there. The coast was clear. He pulled into the only parking space left, hoping that the owner of that parking space, if there was one, didn't choose this exact moment to decide to come in to work.

'Alright, now we only need a plan for how we are going to do this.' Howard said, 'Look, I have a friend that works here in the primate section, so what I am thinking is that we find someplace for you to hide. We both saw how what happened the last time I left you in the car.'

'Here I must presume my divided duty  
Hitherto to you and your own quest  
But at this moment another focus  
I place beneath the gaze of my grace  
To which my challenge I wholly profess  
My entire soul and fat and last bone. Howard, my life is at your disposal, I must trust you to perform the right thing, No matter how difficult it might be For you to perform such a broken feat,  
Not in small part due to your condition.'

'I have no idea what that means. My *condition*?' Howard said as he leaned to face Alistair.

'I only meant to covertly suggest  
Sacrificing today for tomorrow  
Of appropriate food, sleep, and interest.  
You wake disgruntled with a headache  
And force yourself up with roasted bean juice.'

Howard decided to ignore the jab at his drinking, 'I'll go in there, talk to her and convince her to come out here. She's much smarter than I am, and I am sure that she'll figure out how to do this.'

'I set my heart at rest for what you conceive.' Alistair said.

'But in the mean time I would have to hide you somewhere, I can't risk you getting

discovered out here — I don't know what they would do if that would happen, although I would assume nothing good. But, I promise you this, I will do everything I can to get you in there to see... Martha, was it?'

Alistair looked long and hard at Howard, and for the first time he would really see the duality glimmer in his eyes; reflecting both ape and man. There were elements that echoed his own, and elements that echoed something more primal. Howard was unsure whether or not primal was the right word to use there, or whether he had gotten the definition wrong in the first place.

'Then I guess it's time for me to go.' Howard said, as he got out of the car and began looking for hiding places for Alistair. The parking lot was mostly barren, there were no alleyways between the staff buildings and dumpsters, there were no trees or bushes or any of the sort. He went back to car and opened the trunk where he found a blanket. He guessed that the best course of action would be to hide him in the car, preferably in the back seat, covered by the blanket. The windows weren't tinted, but he figured that if he hung his lab coat and the spare jacket in the trunk on the hanger by the back doors they would provide sufficient protection from any potential onlookers. Howard managed to get Alistair out, and in to the backseat by pushing the passenger seat all the way forward. He hung the coats on their respective hangers, draped the blanket over Alistair, and walked back to evaluate how conspicuous it was. The car looked a little bit like someone would be nodding off from heroin in the backseat, but you couldn't tell that Alistair was in there. As he went closer, all the way up to the window, his judgment remained the same. It was as good as it would get. Howard went over and sat down in the driver's seat, opened all the windows slightly, and leaned back to face Alistair. He wanted to say something but as their eyes met he came up empty. Both understood what he was trying to say, so he got out, and began walking to the staff entrance.

He had been through there before, once or twice, and he hoped that the same security guard would be there and that she would recognize him. Much to his luck she was as he entered the dimly lit, depressing concrete slab of a workplace. She sat behind a tarnished wooden desk on a wooden chair.

'Yes, can I help you?' she said as Howard began making his way toward her.

'I am here to see Julia who works at the primate center.'

'Okay, can show me your badge or visitor's badge?'

'I don't have one.'

'You should wait until the park opens, sir, and then go through the main entrance. This entry is for staff members only, or those with special credentials, I'm afraid.'

Howard began sweating, 'I know, that's why I came here. I can't wait until the park opens, you see, it is crucial that I speak to her.'

'I'm sorry but I can't let you in without clearance.'

'But I've been through here before, don't you remember? I came with a bunch of roses, wearing a suit just before closing. I think it was... four years ago? I remember you well, because you commented that one shouldn't wear a brown belt with a black suit, which was apparently one of the lessons your dad had taught you.' Howard surprised himself at what he remembered.

She looked at him up and down, focusing on the disheveled state that he was in, most certainly. ‘Yeah, I remember that.’ she paused, ‘That was a long time ago.’

‘A lifetime, in some cases.’

‘But if I remember it as it was, you left a few minutes later along with those same roses, correct?’

‘Yeah, I did.’

‘What happened?’

‘She didn’t want to see me, and she told me to go. So, I did.’

‘And what makes you so sure that she wants to see you now?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe she will, maybe she won’t. But in any case it is very important that I talk to her.’

‘And what is it exactly that is so important that you can’t wait for two hours until the park opens?’

‘It’s private, let’s just leave it at that.’ Howard said, and he instantly knew that it was the wrong answer as her demeanor changed.

‘Listen, I can’t let you in without clearance, even if you’ve been here before.’

‘Can you just call her, and tell her that I am here, as well as...’ he hesitated, knowing what he had to say, but also that once he did, there was no turning back, ‘That it is a matter of innocence and experience. Tell her that, she’ll know what it means.’

The security guard looked puzzled, but she stood up and went into the door behind her, leaving Howard alone. First he was thinking of why he had said that he wanted to speak to her about innocence and experience. He had nothing new to say about that book, it only popped into his head. After that, as time was passing, he began thinking of ways he could sneak into the park, now that he was alone in the room. The only way he knew how was through that door, and the guard was probably in the next room, so that was out. The only windows were small and situated high above the ground, making it nearly impossible to get up there, not to mention out of them. And besides, what would he do when he was inside? He instead shifted his racing thoughts to coming up with something to say regarding William Blake, and just as the realization of how it was unnecessary to say anything about it in the first place was materializing, Julia appeared in the door behind the security guard’s desk. She had changed quite a lot since he had last seen her, her hair was short instead of long, her hair was brown instead of blonde, and she had put on some weight. But she hadn’t changed at all.

‘What are you doing here, Howard?’ she said with some asperity, yet Howard thought, still a lingering curiosity.

‘I... I need your help with something.’ the security guard reemerged from the door, and sat down in her chair. She was trying to make it look like she wasn’t listening, but anyone could tell without looking at her that she was eavesdropping. ‘I can’t talk about it here though, can we go out to the parking lot?’

She narrowed her eyes, ‘Why?’

‘It’s a *delicate* situation, so to speak.’ he saw that she wasn’t buying it, ‘Look, I haven’t done nothing illegal or anything — I just want to talk somewhere in private. It’s really important, otherwise I wouldn’t be here.’

At first it didn’t look like she would, but curiosity took over, and she finally said, ‘Alright, but brief. Very brief.’

The sun had peeked out from behind the clouds, and showered the parking lot. Julia leaned against the wall, pulled out a packet of cigarettes, and put one in her mouth, ‘Cigarette?’

‘No thanks, I quit.’

‘*You* quit?’ she laughed, ‘I guess this really is hell.’ she lit it, closed her eyes and inhaled, and breathed out. Howard remembered that feeling. Did he miss it? Did it matter? She opened her eyes and renewed talking with a tone of impatience, ‘So what was so important that you drove an hour before the park’s even open?’

‘You assume that I still live at my old place?’

‘Well, do you?’

‘Yeah...’ he said, ‘I do.’ caught off guard he stumbled to find the words, ‘I’m here because I need to ask a favor, a really big favor. But it’s not what you think, it is for a good cause.’

‘I’m always keen on a good cause.’

‘I know. That’s why I... I mean, I would come here anyways, it just was such a good...’ he realized he was rambling, ‘I’m just going to get straight to the point. Yesterday I made a startling discovery, or should I say the discovery came to me. I was in my lab researching, when suddenly the chimpanzee,’ he corrected himself, ‘*Alistair* suddenly started... talking’

‘What do you mean started talking?’

‘Like I mean really just *started talking*. It was a weird voice, not really *human* per say, and it weird and unusual inflections — not unlike what it is hypothesized, you know what the professor used to talk about: how many primates aren’t fundamentally limited by their physical capabilities, although they wouldn’t be as flexible as us when it comes to speech.’

‘Sure.’

‘So, then he just starts talking in perfect English, albeit in a very peculiar fashion.’

‘How so?’ Howard noticed a tone in her voice, but he was too fired up to analyze what it was.

‘He spoke in iambic pentameter.’ he said, ‘Well, mostly anyways. He doesn’t rhyme as much as it would strictly require but he has this weird cadence in that he chops up his speech as if it were poetical lines.’

She laughed, ‘You’re shitting me.’

‘No,’ he said with indignation, ‘No, I really am not. I am as serious as I ever could be.’

She stared at him, ‘Well, if that is true that is probably the most paradigm shattering

discoveries since... Fuck, I don't know. Something Einstein or Planck at least.'

'Listen. I know that it is hard to believe, but imagine the ramifications. You want this to be true as much as I do.'

'Wanting something to be true does not make it so.'

'Of course not, but just because something is improbable or "impossible" does not mean that it necessarily has to be. All you need is proof.'

'And you have this "proof"?'

'Sitting in my car as we speak.'

She gasped, 'You mean...'

'Yes, he's here right now in my backseat.'

'Are you insane? They're aggressive creatures Howard, and you just have one in your backseat? What if it escapes?'

'He won't escape.'

'And you know this how?'

'He's the one that brought me here. Why would he escape when this is his goal?' Howard said, 'Because, he's here for the love of his life: Martha.'

'Who's Martha?'

'Apparently a female chimpanzee that's here, and for information I said that I would reunite them.'

'Jesus.' she took a long drag from her cigarette, and neither of them said anything. 'If I believe you, which I am not saying that I do, what you're asking is, well, impossible.'

'Just like a chimpanzee speaking?'

'I —' she paused, 'come on, what do you want me to say? Do you want me to jump at down in glee because you've gone crazy and brought — *stolen* a chimpanzee from your lab here?'

'I didn't steal him as much as we stole him from the one that he loves.'

'Just listen to yourself, Howard.'

'I know, I know. But just come and meet him, and you'll see. Us standing here bickering won't solve anything.'

She threw her cigarette to the ground and stomped on it, and they went over to his car. Howard peered in through the window where he saw Alistair's figure beneath the blanket and then went around to the driver's seat where he sat down. He leaned back, much as he had before, 'I have her with her now here outside the car, and before she agrees to help you'll need to speak to her. To prove that you're actually... sentient.' Alistair said nothing in response and laid still in the backseat. 'Otherwise she won't help you. All of this will have been for nothing.' Still Alistair remained silent, and Howard began to worry. Then, finally, Alistair reached up his open hand and pointed toward Howard, and then after shook both hands from left to right. Howard knew

enough sign language to know that he was on his own. He wanted to scream at Alistair, he wanted to just force him to do what he wanted, but he knew that wasn't possible.

Howard jumped out of the vehicle and went over to Julia, 'He doesn't want to talk.'

'Isn't that convenient.'

'No, but listen there is a reason: in his society talking with us isn't just taboo, but forbidden. From what he told me they attempted to communicate with us humans throughout the years, but we were too occupied with our affairs that after a while they just figured that we weren't really worth the trouble.'

'Wise choice.'

'So, you see then why he can't talk with you?'

'No, I can't.' she said, 'If your story is true then he would realize that he can't get in without my help, and he would be willing to talk to me.'

'See, that's what I said, but he only showed me the signs for 'you' and 'do''

'Oh, so he signs too? How convenient.' she said, and before letting him continue, 'Here is what this story sounds like to me: you wanted to see me again, for some reason that I do not know (I thought I made it clear the last time we saw each other), so you concocted this elaborate story that I'd somehow believe for what reason exactly? Because I trust you? Anything could be farther from the truth, and if you believed I would you are even more naive than I thought.'

'I'm not making this up Julia. I really am not.'

'Then you're going crazy and I suggest you get some professional help.' she said as if she would be finished, but she stood for a while in the same spot, staring at Howard. She always was curious, Howard thought, even when she had already made up her mind.

'What can I do to prove this to you?'

'I want to hear him speak. That's it.'

Howard wanted to go back to the car and plead with Alistair but he knew deep down it wouldn't be any help. Despite his own judgment he went to the car and rolled down the backseat window halfway, and removed the coat and blanket from Alistair. Going over to the side facing Julia he peered through the open window and said 'It's now or never. If you don't speak now all of this will have been for nothing.' Howard and Alistair's eyes met, and Howard knew what would happen, but he had come this far and he would desperately keep trying until the end. 'Come over here Julia and say hello.'

Julia casually strolled over and posted herself a little behind Howard, and leaned forward. 'Hi. Alistair, was it?' And then as she stared a little longer she stepped back. 'Why is he in a dress?' she asked with anger fuming out of every word, 'And a sunhat too? Worried about his UV exposure, are you?'

'It was so that we didn't get discovered over here.'

'Why didn't you just drape the blanket over him?'

‘I...’ It was a good suggestion, and he cursed himself for not thinking of it, ‘Must’ve slipped my mind.’

‘Seems like it’s a lot more than that...’

‘Julia, listen...’

‘I have. I have been patient for many years, Howard. But I’m tired. I’m tired of these excuses, we’ve already been through them all. Although I must admit, that this one is really something. To go as far as to steal a primate from your lab.’

‘But this isn’t —’

‘If this were true then why did you come to me directly? Why didn’t you, as a scientist would, wait for a little bit until he could prove his discovery? Please Howard, just leave me alone.’ she turned around and started walking back to the building.

There was a brief moment where he swore that he heard Alistair’s voice, but turning around there was only silence. He began running towards Julia, ‘Julia, wait.’

‘Enough, Howard.’ she was unfazed by the comment, and she continued walking towards the entrance. She was only a few paces away from the door.

As he was thinking of things to say his mind was empty. There were no more things to say, no more aces in his sleeve. She went into the door, and disappeared. Howard paced back to his truck in a daze, and got in the driver’s seat and began reversing out of his parking space. Before putting it into drive he looked back at Alistair, who sat silent, observing. He looked into the abyss of his eyes, and understood that he understood: it was over. Their adventure that had begun so suddenly, now was nearing its end — and with it all of its promises.

Howard returned Alistair to the lab, and since no one had been there since he had, no one had noticed. The piece of cheese still was sweating in the fridge. As he was driving home he instinctively reached for the radio, but after only a few seconds of the radio hosts jabbering about something which he didn’t care about he turned it off and drove the hour long drive in silence.

Howard got home and fell asleep on the sofa. When he woke it was night, and the silver moon shone through the blinds. He poured a large glass of whiskey and paced around the living room until it was empty. Not knowing what else to do he figured he would go to sleep. The lights were on in the bedroom, and he was greeted by the box, and contents of that box, strayed over his bed. He began to stuff it all back in, the notebook, the dissertation, all of it. Only then did he realize that the tape recorder had been in his pocket, recording, the entire day. He ran out to the car and got his coat from the backseat, which still reeked of Alistair. And there it was, still indicating that it was recording. He pressed stop and the recording was saved. 10 hours and 32 minutes. More than enough time to save a man’s story. Howard went into the bedroom again, heart thumping. In his hand he held his redemption, his very own ticket to paradise. As his thumb hovered over the play button, however, a fear began setting in. That very familiar fear when one is at the precipice of the unknown. Pressing that button would change his life forever, for better, or for worse. At best his story would be confirmed, and he could sleep soundly — even if he never could prove it to the scientific community. At worst he would find himself doubting every experience he had ever had, and ever would. Perhaps Julia was right. He threw the tape recorder on the bed and sat

down on the edge. Out of the corner of his eye was the book of poetry Julia had given him years ago, 'Songs of innocence and experience'. He picked it up and began reading, and after finishing it, only then did he see.

To realize that the most obvious and easiest thing would take so long to realize, indeed so much time wasted — memories, that aren't memories; experiences which remain ethereal because of experience itself. The most insane stories told a long, long time ago by a knight, now turned into innocence and experience. In a story the ink never slips, every consequence is premeditated, every ending has a beginning, and every beginning has an end. But experience, well that is a fickle thing. Only at that moment did Howard understand what the author had meant by its title. He leaned back and promptly fell asleep.