

Cat-o'-nine-tails

December 14

To whom it may concern:

My name is Stephen Mullen and I will without the most reasonable doubt be dead soon. In fact, I would go as far as saying that it's far more likely that you are already dead as well if you are reading this; somehow hovering over my shoulder as I scribble these very words. Or at least you are on the verge of dying, and only by chance happened to survive for this long, like I have, and are reading this for comfort; you are in need of recognition of the predicament you find yourself in: soon you will die, and you will die alone. Without meaning, and without mercy. Trust me when I say that I understand you, because I am you. For now, at the very least. So go on reading this if you are that very person and trust me when I say that I am scared too, just as you are.

My wife was never scared. It was she that taught me everything that I know. Taught me how to love, and perhaps most importantly, to let go (although I'm still not an expert on that yet, hence me being here all alone). Whenever I think of her and my daughter I am overcome with this inability to produce the necessary words to describe them, and the loss that comes with even thinking about them. I am sure that most people can recognize that feeling; times like these especially, when it seems as if death isn't simply a fact of life, but the most primary activity that people undertake. Well, that and prayer, of course. If life and death are opposites, as black and white, then they have certainly switched places by now. I am only delaying the inevitable fact-of-life (ironic choice of words, I know) by remaining here—

That's right, I haven't mentioned yet where *here* is. You see, the problem is that I only have ballpoint pens, so I can't erase anything. And because I don't want to waste any paper (I don't know how much I am going to feel like writing) there might be some chronological errors and cross referencing at places. Apologies in advance. So, *here* is a boat, specifically the 'Philemon' and I am currently sailing over the Atlantic to North/South America or some of the islands in the Bahamas. I have no map, only a compass, hence my lack of specificity. It is not because I expect it to be any different over there, but simply because I've never been. And isn't that a valid reason to go?

You're probably thinking: "*How is Stephen Mullen going to get over the Atlantic with no supplies and no sailing experience?*" and I am happy to appease your schadenfreude: I'm probably not going to. However, I do possess a modest stash of supplies in the form of cheese crackers and canned ravioli, as well as a 100L tank of fresh water. If I drink two liters a day that's enough to last me almost two months. On the latter, however, I can't help but agree with you. With the exception for when I've tugged some ropes at the request of other sailors, I have no experience. But with some trial and error I managed to get the ship out of shore, so I imagine that unless a storm draws in over me I'll be fine. And even in that case I would probably be happy to meet my end sooner, and more peacefully than what awaits me on the other side of this vast stretch of blue.

It was by accident in fact that I happened upon this ship. I was staying at our countryside cabin in the west of France, and after Eloise had left with Sara, as I was out walking one day I decided I would take a visit to Monsieur Philippe, our neighbor. I went over to his house and it was surprisingly empty, as every other house had been for months, with the exception of Philippe and I. I called out for him but I heard no answer. I made my way down to the boathouse, which was only accessible through a narrow footpath through a dense shrubbery. Philippe had invited me there for tea many years ago on a particularly sunny day. He had told me that this road was the home of fisherman a hundred years ago, which as many similar parts, now had been gentrified into luxury vacation homes for Brits with too much money for their own good. Philippe, of course, was no exception — although he probably held the view that seeing that he was aware of that fact made it less of a problem than the other, unsuspecting dunces. He also told me that he didn't use the boathouse much, seeing that he was no sailor, and because of how difficult it was to make ones way over there. Which meant that he only used it on special occasions, which a sunny day seemed to satisfy. As I made my way out of the shrubbery I found Philippe dead, stretched out with his arms over his head on the bridge. I, and you, already know the familiar scene. What was not so familiar, however, was the fact that a sailing boat now stood before me in the water. It wasn't a large sailing boat, perhaps enough for two people, but it looked to be in good condition. I hopped on it and yelled into the open door heading below deck. No response. After that I inspected the boat and found it full of supplies, and I ate the first meal I'd had in two days. Never had I suspected Philippe to be so resourceful, and never had I been so grateful that I'd judged someone wrong entirely. I found the watertank and drank till I couldn't drink no more. I opened a cupboard and found ten cartons of cigarettes, and even though I've never smoked, I grabbed a packet and lit one. As I sat down I made the decision that I'd see the place that I, and perhaps more accurately Eloise, had always wanted to see. Perhaps there was such a thing as experience by proxy, however distant, and besides I had nothing to lose since I'd already lost everything.

And so began my trip that I am now on, as unexpected as it was, and is, and I reckon will end.

December 15

I reread the pages I wrote yesterday and asked myself why I had written them. At first I didn't have a good answer. Yes, if someone were to read them then there would be a purpose, I suppose, but deep down I know no one will. I will die here on this small boat, leaving it at the mercy of the waves which will ultimately eat the boat up, and with it, these pages. The reason I chose was in the end quite simple: to have something to do. The only other thing I can do on this boat is to sit, smoke cigarettes (which not so surprisingly after only a day now seem palatable), or try to decipher the french copy of Camus' 'The Stranger' (L'Étranger) using my abysmal french. Philippe was an avid smoker and hobby philosopher, so I shouldn't be surprised that this was his idea of dying with grace and style. Or I could occupy myself by entering my thoughts, but as I am sure that you're aware if you're reading this, the realm of your thoughts have now gone from a place of both nostalgia, hopefulness and grief to what can only be described as horror. Sounds that echo until they are so loud that you can feel your brain try to escape its narrow calcium prison; visions of people you've met, people that you hoped to one day meet, with their flesh

dangling in pieces of their faces. Or something the like.

But then the question arises: what do I write about? I assume that my point here is to entertain you, whether that is to confirm your horrors, or to give you a satisfying illusion if but for a moment; although I reckon that I will only be able to satisfy the former (sorry). But even then, I am no writer in the creative capacity. I have no ability to dream my self away to worlds of wonder I've created in my mind that I can somehow transfer to you. All I have are my experiences, in the past and in the present, that I can share. But, which ones to choose? How can I possibly pick out what it is I want to save, and what it is I want to be forever forgotten?

There was a time when I thought that I wanted to become a writer, simply because I read so much. Especially when I was little the dream burned strong; when I took walks while buried in a book bumping into the trees in the forest near my house; when I read secretly in the corner behind the schoolyard where the rest of the children played. I lived for the worlds that didn't exist, simply put. As I grew up, however, I realized that my knack for reading didn't extend to the stretch of my adult imagination, which turned out to be surprisingly short. It seemed that as the kid inside me died, so did the dream. I guess it is ironic that it comes back to bite me now, when all I have are these pages in front of me. Perhaps I should've entertained that notion further, if only so that my last words would be more succinct; or at the very least would flow easier than they do now (it has taken me an hour just to write this page and a half). I have two entire notebooks to fill with the vigor I currently feel, although I suspect I haven't the words sufficient to do so.

I guess like everybody else I knew what was going on as I grew up, but I ignored it, just like everybody else. In hindsight it was naive and foolish, yet I had so much else to worry about. Not only what to do with my own life, by which I mean where to direct it, but also what was currently going on in it. All the normal stuff, in other words. I guess I was lost there for a while on the cusp of adulthood. I was an adult, technically, yet I certainly didn't show it. Parties, lavish shopping for things I didn't need, you name it. "Responsibilities" was just a boring way to say that you were sorry that you couldn't make it to whatever fun thing was happening that night, or morning, or twilight. I enrolled into university where I studied law, because I would earn a lot of money. I began slicking my hair back with grease, because that was what you did. I was defined by others, and I was enthralled. How comforting to know that the very issue of *being* could be let upon others? As you can guess by my tone I was miserable, although I didn't consider myself miserable. "*Wasn't that was life was?*", was a thought I often found myself gravitating towards. Work, love, money, things, drugs, could be enjoyable but at the bottom always laid either suffering or mediocrity, neutrality. Of course, I didn't put it into those words then; words were, if not enemies, then at least unwanted. Words, like novels (that I'd stopped reading unless they furthered some claim of self-improvement, moneymaking, hygiene or beard trimming) reminded you of the original sin, so to speak. That perhaps what we grip most tightly onto in life for stability aren't so stable after all. So, as all of my peers, I did what was expected of me: nothing. And for but a brief moment I was happy, because if there is no other option than to suffer without reprieve, then there is nothing to do but accept that there is nothing you can do, and be happy. The enemy isn't suffering — I learned then and still do accept — it is when you are lethargic and bathing in neutrality. If nothing exists then no longer can joy. If only suffering exists then one accepts the duality, which implies joy. If one then happens to be ignorant and believe that existence is bound to suffering at every corner, then one automatically finds the joy. But that isn't

the end of it, as I found, it is in fact very far from it. Of course, I didn't learn that until much later.

December 16

The seas were rough last night. Even as I was writing the last page yesterday I was beginning to have trouble making sure that I held a steady hand. In other words, I'm sorry if the last page was unreadable to you, although I blame it just as much on Poseidon as I do on myself.

I heavily underestimated just how nauseous you get when the boat really starts to rock. And cigarettes do nothing against nausea, contrary to what Phillippe told me when I ate too much cheese one time, in fact, they made it much worse. I won't elaborate on what took place down below deck throughout the night, my mother raised me to be a proper gentleman, but I am sure that you can imagine exactly what transpired. For now, let's just keep it between the two of us, shall we? I wouldn't want it to get out there that Stephen Mullen doesn't have his sea legs in order.

The experience did remind me of a moment just a few months into dating Eloise: we had spent the day at a modern art museum in Amsterdam, name of which I don't remember. All I do remember is that I really didn't like the museum, but I knew that beforehand. I had told her as much, but she urged me to trust her, which I always have, even after the deception that took place on that day. Now, something you must know to make sense of this story is that I was outrageously hungover, to the point where I was getting dizzy just from standing up. The world had a slight aura around it, and I was beginning to question if reality even existed, or if I had died from alcohol poisoning and I was now somewhere in limbo. I decided when we had spent ten minutes in the museum that if that were true then I was certainly either in hell or purgatory. So, after we had spent the day there and I was beginning to feel better as we were walking beside each other by the canals, and suddenly she excused herself and vomited into a trash can. Perhaps subconsciously I decided that one shouldn't partake in such such activities alone, so I joined her.

A little bit later she would reveal why: she was pregnant. And I was ambivalent, to say the least. I can't lie and say that I wasn't happy, I was; if there was anyone that I would have, *did* have, a child with then it would be Eloise, no question. But I can't say, at that moment, that I mostly didn't just feel afraid. Suddenly I felt *afraid*, something that I hadn't since I was a child. It is a funny feeling, fear. It always lurks in the back of your mind, sometimes it hardly makes itself known. But it knows. It listens. And when it rears its head all the previous burdens you felt you'd left behind come rushing back. Thankfully for me I had Eloise there to guide me.

We began planning a future, and a future required not only us (unfortunately), but the cooperation of everybody around us. If I can use a fitting metaphor: what use is a desert island if I run out of food and water if there is no food or water? It started with me catching up to everything that I had missed, including the fear that came along with it. I talked with her of having an abortion, of the endless suffering that... But she was set on having the child, and I was too — only I didn't know it at that point in time. In hindsight I realize that it was always painfully obvious what I would do, and I suspect Eloise knew all along. Part of me surely thought that safety came in abstinence, something that American schools surely had confirmed. Now that I've written the sentence out loud, I realize how ridiculous it is. It isn't obvious only in *hindsight*, we knew exactly what we would do, despite how much thought we put into it. Just like

everybody else on this earth we looked forward and could not accept that the sun wouldn't rise. Dark clouds in the distance were but premonitions of a good story that we would see the other end of.

But in the end, I guess I was right. I didn't want to be right. I didn't want to sit here like a poltroon, I wanted to be a bona fide Don Quixote; to die doing something I believed in, however stupid the endeavor itself might've been. Like Eloise. But in the end human nature won out doing what it does best. Climb over the women and children, the poor and the rich; push them below so that you can take a breath of air until you too sink to the bottomless darkness.

December 16: Evening

The sun is on the verge of setting and the weather is still. I managed to find a CD player with an Edith Piaf record, so I am sitting, leaning against the mast, listening to 'Je ne regrette rien' on repeat as the tears flow down my cheeks. I do regret some things. I regret writing what I did earlier today, but seeing that whatever I write is written permanently in ink, I'll just have to live with it. But of course those grievances matter very little in the grand scheme of things, the big regrets that one inevitably racks up in life. One finds that sometimes the largest villain is yourself in retrospect, perhaps because you know everything about him. You know *why* he did the things that he did, and you have to carry the weight of those decisions alone. I'm just currently experiencing the extreme of that conclusion, seeing that I'm all alone in the middle of the Atlantic, while listening to Edith Piaf.

With that said I realize that the things that I wrote earlier today were still seeped in the cynical view of the world that brought me here. And I don't need that, *nobody* needs that right now. What does it matter, despite the price that I pay? What matters right now is the present, with you reading this, or with me writing it. It would be insincere for me to assume anything else.

December 17

I was very happy when I managed to find a Frank Sinatra CD stashed behind the rusted pots and pans beneath the sink, because while I realize that music is the universal language, it is comforting to understand what's being sung. Especially when that voice happens to be Sinatra's; despite that what he sings of things that seem so foreign and remote now, *New York* and *women who did me wrong*, and all that seemed to be most central to the 50's and 60's. Or, I guess more accurately, what *was* central to us until... I've been thinking of what I consider to be the tipping point, and the more I think of it, the less wiser I get. As far as I can tell there was no one moment that I can point to (and if you can, then I guess the more power to you) that was definite as being the end of what we once considered existence. There was one day, and then there was another. There were news reports and then there were more. What use was it to consider semantics then? And now? Has anything changed?

There is one moment that is etched into my memory, and while not being the tipping point into where we both find ourselves now, it is one of two moments that I can think of that turned me into who I am now. We were evacuating our apartment in Amsterdam, and after driving for six hours our gas ran out. Of course there was no way to fill it up, so we had to walk the rest of the way. But we had prepared ourselves with one full backpack of non-perishable

food, water filters, and the other with tents and sleeping bags. So a few weeks of walking was no big deal except for the physical excursion; however that was but a minor inconvenience considering the alternative. When we were a week away from reaching our countryside house we were walking down a forested road, and there were bodies scattered along the side of the road. Eloise covered Sara's eyes as we passed them as she had done before, although we shot each other a look of caution, seeing that the amount of bodies were so high compared to the occasional corpse we had seen previously. I held my gun ready in case anything happened but the road was quiet, except for the rustling of leaves above us. As we reached the fork in the road we saw a village situated by the water, not more than a two minute walk, and as we both peered down towards it we heard voices, so we hid in some bushes. There was an older woman and a young boy, who was no older than ten. Both of them were but pieces of skin hanging on a skeleton frame, and their words echoed frail and hollow. The boy was crying that he was hungry, and the mother tried to comfort him, although anyone beyond puberty would recognize the sadness in her words as she responded; the cadence of a loving lie. She brought him to the clearing just opposite us, a little patch of uncut grass where cars previously had pulled in to let others pass, as the road was so narrow. She patted him on his head and told him to close his eyes and pray, and that everything was going to be alright. Both me and Eloise held our breath as she pulled out a gun from her tunic and shot the boy from behind. Sara began crying and Eloise attempted to quiet her, but it didn't seem to faze the woman. She was somewhere else. Perhaps engulfed by guilt and sorrow, or some other mixture that neither Eloise nor I could understand, and reality was but a dream — a nightmare. And what else do you wish in a nightmare than it to end? So, for her it did with another shot ringing out across the woods that contained the sound to nothing more than a hundred meters. It certainly didn't reach the village down below where they probably lived, the sound being drowned by the waves of the sea. Sara calmed down after a few minutes and we crawled out of the bushes and continued on. The expression on her skeletal face that I forced myself to look at as we passed them still haunts me to this day, not to mention the way the blood had stained the innocent boy's brown hair and turned it greasy, or how it still seeped out from the gaping hole from the back of his head onto the green grass below. I imagine that his hands were still ferociously clasped under his slumped body, hoping that He would descend from the heaven to bear the burden of the cross once more. Because didn't the boy, of all people, deserve it?

The moment was unspoken between the two of us for many days afterwards, yet we eventually did talk about it, although what could we hope to say? From the moment we experienced it we both agreed about everything, no words had to be said between the two of us. Was she wrong in killing what was probably her son? Yes. Was she showing mercy to him by providing him with a quick and painless death? Yes. Who were we to judge her? It was likely that she had already watched as more of her children had perished to malnutrition, or other more gruesome fates, and with no light at the end of a very long tunnel decided to do the obviously righteous, albeit unthinkable thing to do. The question that we wouldn't ask, yet that was at the forefront of our minds, were if we would be in her position someday? The reality of that vision was too vivid and plausible that even mentioning it out loud felt like we would be bringing it into fruition.

It is the burden that we, you and me, carry within us. I am sure that if you are reading this you have experienced similar things and knows the sorrow that comes with living through that.

And also the feeling of dissonance with recognizing that feeling, seeing that all you've experienced is nothing but the lingering shadow of what it felt standing hovering over that body, covered in spurts of blood, in disbelief. How much I'd like to think that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, I still say that to myself sometimes, yet when you've lived through what we have, what hope is there if everything is tinted into black and white and red? And I sat this morning thinking about precisely those colors, they were written for a reason. They're all that I need, I think, to describe my existence so far. All the good, and all the bad. I was born from the balance between them, and I emerged as an ill-formed deformity of an adult steeped into the blackness of hair grease and foul liquid reeking of alcohol. The whole world was blackness, and then suddenly there was light. I was standing next to lightness, pure and divine, holding her hand. And her face was as red as the blood pouring down the ground besides the young boy's head. The lightness emanating from the gaps in the trees above where as bright as the sun reflected in her eyes and newly washed hair, or her laugh. The darkness from inside our tent could without doubt match waking up at 2PM in an unknown bed of someone you didn't know.

There is balance in that, I think. Although it certainly doesn't feel like it now as I'm writing it, but it did make sense when I thought of it this morning. I'll think of it some more and see if I still feel the same in the morning.

December 18

I would like to start off by saying that I'm sorry for putting you through what I wrote yesterday, it surely reminded you of something you've experienced that you'd wished you could forget. I'll try to do better. As I stated in the beginning what I wish for these pages to be is a comfort for you in the darkest of days, or should I say the days preceding the lightest of ordeals. I think a story of nostalgia is in order, one of both innocence and experience; however phony those words sound being applied to this story compared to contemporary existence.

It was a late autumn day, and we were at our house in France. The yellow leaves fell, and blew across the gentle breeze. We sat at the porch, and Sara was gently cooing. The circle married the line was both the truth and playing softly in the background, providing some sort of clarity. The situation itself was of course absurd. We had little food, and no vision of tomorrow and how we would pull it together, but we laid in a garden chair embracing each other, and for but a moment everything made perfect sense. It had to, because how else would you explain what rushed through my head at that moment: nothing, and nothing more. Only the slow dancing trees with their sons and daughters scattered in the wind. If you've never experienced a moment like that, disconnected from causality and time itself, I must say that I pity you. And pity is nothing I do, at least not anymore. Yet for those moments *pity* is all I can say to describe if you've never experienced them. I kissed Eloise on the cheek, and the warmth from her gentle almost imperceptible facial expression following still lingers to this day. Of course there was no future or past, I thought to myself then.

I could tell you another of those memories. About a year after Sara was born we managed to convince Eloise's sister — who was visiting from Copenhagen — to babysit, while we were allowed to have a private night out. Not that we really needed it, we'd made ourselves so used to the being three of us, one who granted had very different needs than the two of us, that even sitting down at the deserted Italian restaurant felt somewhat taboo. Yet I can't say that both of us

didn't enjoy it. I savored every fiery glance that she shot my way, and the way that she held her fork (sort of pathetic, I know), and the cadence of her voice. We were full of the present, and not even the check afterwards could sway our moods.

It is funny in a way, how the things you remember are — in the grand scheme of things — so inconsequential; the way she prepared her oatmeal in the morning, how our kettle beeped when it was finished, how the radiator in our apartment coughed in wintertime, how peppermint tea smelled when she brought it to me in the evenings, or how I used to sit hovering over the kitchen table by candlelight paying our bills. Part of me wishes that I could tell the story in its entirety, both narratively and chronologically sound. But as I sit here looking across the Atlantic all I can think of are disconnected moments, of both happiness and sorrow, and thus that is what I will write — I reckon, at least.

You know, I am very frustrated by the lack of my ability to form a narrative. Part of me thought that when I sat down to write this I'd have transformed into a writer, perhaps in virtue of what I've been through. That somehow because I've experienced suffering I'd unlocked the key to what becoming an artist truly means. But no such thing. I still feel kept back, like the words are trying to escape, but they're in disarray, and the only choice I have is to spew them out in the order that they come out by their own accord. I have no say in it, I'm but the notary to their spontaneous whim.

December 19

I think from the parts you've already heard that you've figured out just what kind of relationship that me and Eloise held; and if you've not experienced it firsthand I am sure that you can imagine exactly what it was like. The kind of understanding that transcends explication, merely instinct. Not to say that ours were perfect and without conflict, nothing in life is unless you exclusively live it through a screen, but it wasn't conflict like the word implies. We both grew through those experiences, I thought, all the way until we had to say goodbye. But did she ever know the true version of me? How I distance myself from everybody that I've ever known for reasons that I don't know myself? How I always urge on caution, even when the situation itself has no caution to begin with?

It was four months ago when she told me that she'd heard from her sister that there was a safe haven up in northern Norway where they took in families who were refugees, supposedly it was the last safe haven: a quiet farming community, tightly knit with tight rules for living; but it was living nonetheless. At first I wanted to believe her (who wouldn't?), but my doubt grew into an ugly black mass that overtook any conversation that we had on any topic. Eventually silence ruled our life, and she announced that she would leave — along with Sara. And I did nothing, I said nothing. I simply watched them go, disappear along the tree line of the road leading north. I didn't cry, I didn't sleep, I watched the night sky and thought of nothing as they passed and turned into light. I always thought myself to be a courageous person beforehand, one that could sacrifice everything for what I believed in, but at that moment I believed in nothing, especially not in myself. On bad days I convince myself that they've made it, that they are living in some small community of shepherds or farmers. On good days I accept that they were gone.

To say that I feel ashamed would be underselling it by a wide margin. Nothing that I write here could make that right. No matter how sorrowful I am that I left them to fend for

themselves for the nearly 3000km journey that they (hopefully still) have (/had) ahead is just a fact of life that I have to live with, albeit I hopefully don't have to live with it much longer. For now I am like Orpheus, hoping that I through my art I'd somehow be able to reach beyond the vale, to absolve any guilt — just to achieve that brief moment of respite, and eternal joy achieved from but the single glance of the eyes of the hand that I hold behind me. I now, more than ever, understand why he turned around to just look at that face one more time, despite knowing full well the consequences. Oh, what I would give for but a glimpse.

December 20

I realize that my supply of words is rapidly diminishing. For hours now I've sat, trying to rack my brain with things to write here. I know that this is realistically my last chance to get anything across, what life I've lived, what I'm feeling at the moment... But those thoughts amount to nothing, I've realized. What use is it to write every little mundane thing that I've experienced, what fun is that? All it would do is disenchant any other story I've already told, turning story into ugly reality. Is that what I want to leave behind me? No, and I can't think that anyone wants to leave anything behind except mythology. So can you really judge me? But that conclusion doesn't absolve me of the fact that I no longer have anything to write about.

Although, I realized as I then thought that idea, that perhaps there is a larger purpose to these pages. What if all of history doesn't exist anymore? What if these are the first document in a "new" history, a kind of BC/AD paradigm shift? Well, then these pages would be more important than I've ever thought before. I thought that and tried to enervate myself, but I ended up in the same place that I'd started. Because, I don't care. Come rain, come shine I'll sit here enfeebled to perform any kind of task that is beyond the absolute minimum to stay alive. I realized that I care nothing beyond what happens today, if those things don't also connect to Eloise and Sara. I really couldn't care less if you who are reading this is a linguist four centuries later, I won't make life easier for you by telling you. We didn't have that luxury. And besides, I am having a hard time believing that all the libraries in the world would be missing any kind of historical record of all this, so I won't entertain you with any details at the expense of my mind and time. I think I've already made my feelings absolutely clear.

Although I believe all that I still believe something different simultaneously; I don't know if this is true or not, but Eloise said that the first evidence of written language were in the form of laws that one needed to abide by, conscripting all those who read it into a specific world ruled from above, wherever now that might've been. I like the thought that if this would become that piece of writing for the next iteration of existence that my message is one of love. Isn't that a beautiful way to start ones story?

December 24

Is there a word for not feeling what you are supposed to on the time that you are supposed to feel it? I don't know German, but I must imagine that they have a word for the feeling.

Last Christmas we were at home, both of our parents having died recently, and we spent it by cold candlelight in our apartment in Amsterdam. There were no gifts, no elaborate packages, no paper to rip apart. There were the three of us by the candles on the floor, huddled

beneath blankets. The night echoed cold and silent as the stars shone bright in the night from the window. Sara wasn't disappointed, because she had no expectations. But then again, how could she have? I remember the Christmases of past, when I sat pouting in the sofa while the adults were drunk with sight only for the next morning. The revelry was non-existent to my mind then, and the exuberance in the following day was quick to fade.

It is funny in a way, how these pages began from the premise of being a comfort to you, the reader, but ended up being the confessions of a man more guilty than you. Guilty in what? I don't know, if I'm being honest, but I've gotta learn sometimes. Eloise always used to tell me that she was able to change, that for every adversity there was a way of thinking that transcended it. I guess that is what makes me different.

January 3

Loneliness is perhaps at worst accompanied by guilt, especially when it is all there is. All day and all night there is the same landscape, the same blue canvas to be filled with the red and black speckles that only I could provide. The importance that I thought these pages could hold fade in comparison to the things that I tell myself in the comfort of my own mind. Am I truly guilty and willing to atone, or am I just as much a prisoner as I have ever been? Could I really expect me to change now, after all these tests where I've chosen wrong? Now I face tomorrow, I am staring at it in the horizon. In the morning it will turn from black to blue, and then it will change again. It will remain the same until it suddenly isn't, and I forget, and am forgot.

Across the crystal clear night the stars twinkle. I lay drifting in these thoughts that grow heavy as a falling star appears suddenly, from left to right it burns against the tranquil backdrop of shame and regret. My cigarette crackles in the calm. The smoke is invisible to my dark eyes.