

HAZY SHADES

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HAZY SHADES

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DEDICATION

To my mother,
who taught me the art of storytelling.

To my father,
without whose encouragement, I never would've set out to write this novel.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
I. CHAPTER I: MARCH 20.....	1
Part A.....	1
Part B.....	19
Part C.....	27
Part D.....	38
Part E.....	43
Part F.....	46
Part G.....	49
II. CHAPTER II: MARCH 27.....	55
Part A.....	55
Part B.....	66
Part C.....	76
Part D.....	83
Part E.....	86

CHAPTER I: MARCH 20

Part A

The revolution started accidentally. The original plan did not account for a county-by-county uprising across the United States of America. In fact, it focused on very little other than winning a college election of no particular importance to anyone but Ravi Kashyap. Regardless, months later, as Ravi wiped the mist off the window and stared outside from his first floor apartment, planning for the secession of St. Lanfrid County in upstate New York had reached a critical stage—at least in the minds of those behind the Enclave, a student group that didn't exist in St. Lanfrid University's club directory but one that the administrators spent considerable time discussing.

With the sun about to set, the sky turned a hazy shade of red and even the snow-covered ground started to acquire the color of the horizon. Ravi smiled and said, "Is this the winter of the revolution?" Ravi, in his early twenties, a senior at St. Lanfrid University, one the most expensive private colleges in the nation, maintained that in a previous century, when conquering the world was still fashionable, he would've annexed at least a few continents. The light stubble and the unvanquished sparkle in his eyes gave the tall athletic frame a determined demeanor and projected the image of a man who believed he was entitled to a place in history. At a distance, an Amtrak rolled by. Trains

never stopped here—not since, the dairy farming industry collapsed, anyway; but they always rattled the rusting town sign (*Welcome to St. Lantfrid: The best food in New York*) located next to the old train depot, which now housed a Church. A stranger could've mistakenly judged the text as ironical because a Chinese buffet competed with an all-you-can-eat pizza place for the title of *most luxurious restaurant in town*.

However, this was not the sort of town whose residents willfully engaged in creation of irony. In this age of mediocrity, Ravi had resigned himself to leading a town without hopes, ideas, or even conveniences that one expected from America. Yet, even in this excruciatingly dull and downtrodden town, to make people want and desire a revolution, Ravi needed to install a new set of hegemonic beliefs, which would then yank back the remnants of commonsense so completely annihilated by unadorned churches, seedy bars, and ice-hockey games that distracted the residents from focusing on changing their gloomy existence.

So even as the laborious process of talking with—as opposed to, talking at—the townspeople continued, that day, on March 20, the university awaited the arrival of America's latest fascist rage and the rising conservative star Bill Kaschi to speak at the Hepburn Auditorium. UC Berkeley mooned him, Harvard ripped off his mic, and Stanford burnt his books. He gave himself a purple heart after each university engagement for having successfully fought Christ's war against the deranged academia that volleyed with witty words against him, a simple Texan redneck. Before coming to a college, traveling with two armed guards and a swinging baseball bat, he always threw an open invitation to all 'liberal pussies' on campus, begging them to attack him. Ravi gathered that by issuing a challenge to St. Lantfrid University students, Bill Kaschi

(unfortunately for him) had counted on the continuance of chaotic hopelessness—everyone wanted to be a rebel, but nobody knew what to do. During his performance, he especially enjoyed insulting those whose clothing gave away their fringe status in society. More than anything else, Ravi intended to take up Bill Kaschi’s challenge, so he could establish the Enclave as a group of serious professional revolutionaries. And there was the little matter of securing his place in history.

The grandfathers clock in Ravi’s small room tick-tocked its way to six musical chimes. David Quinn, three hundred pounds of hair and fat, banged on Ravi’s computer keyboard, compiling an angry letter to the campus newspaper, the *Hill News*. David, wearing his usual cargo khaki pants and gray full-sleeve t-shirt that didn’t cover his belly all the way, said, “Dude, do you think there’s actually e-coli in spinach?” David, generally incompetent at life, always spoke with an accusatory finger dangling in the air. He scratched his stomach, then continued, “Maybe the government is trying to ration our food.” An austere man, he suffered from acute paranoia and thought of all historic villains as mis-portrayed heroes.

Ravi’s girlfriend, Ashley, short and curvy with flowing brown hair and an amiable face, sat on the bed staring at the chessboard with ivory pieces in front of her but appeared more interested in her diary where she’d occasionally write down a brilliant idea, hoping one of them would yield the perfect story. Weeks away from having a Bachelor’s degree in Creative Writing, she never went past penning melodramatic love stories but remained firmly bullish about her work. “Kick him out of here,” Ashley whispered to Ravi, pointing at David. “Seriously. It is almost six!” Time for daily sex. ‘Six o’ cock sex’ she liked to call it. She flipped her hair and knocked a king and a

bishop out of place. Ravi leaned over and carefully pushed the offending ends behind her.

Ravi waited on her for the next move. He, once again, stared outside the window. Students, mostly preppies, enjoyed the dying hours of the day by parading in their flipped collars, North Face jackets, and pink pants. At a distance, Amish buggies trudged along on US-11, the only highway that connected the county to the United States; the road led to Canada on the other side. After a long winter, temperatures had risen above zero at St. Lantfrid University. Despite the cold wind, the day struck a pleasant cord with upstate New Yorkers acclimated to much harsher conditions. Ravi heard shots—practice for the Civil War re-enactment festival nearby. A typical day in upstate New York, a haven for impoverished freaks and opulent universities. He knew the world consisted largely of oblivious fools, but he'd stumbled upon an idea to sprinkle hope on barren minds because, he believed, beneath the treacherous layers of the university administration still existed a common bond linking humanity through love, compassion, loyalty, kindness, friendship, and, possibly, beer.

"There are so few whose voices inspire us," Ravi said, absentmindedly, thinking of Bill Kaschi's popularity. "Your turn," Ravi reminded Ashley, noticing she'd still not moved.

Ashley pointed at David again. But Ravi didn't want to kick David out, though the idea of sex in the midst of the first battle did sound appealing. For four years, every week, David had written a letter of complaint to *the Hill News* defending various contradictory causes oscillating between Nazism and Anarchy; the letters served no purpose other than letting the world know that David Quinn hated everyone. The death

of his PC hours before the letter's deadline made him flustered and for old time's sake, Ravi let David type on.

Ravi expectantly ran his fingers through Ashley's hair, hoping she'd finish the chess game. She never wanted to learn. But Ravi considered the habit essential for good character. Now she moved pieces for no reason. She moved them to keep the game going. She moved them because he wanted her to—but never to plot his defeat. 'It isn't like checkers,' he'd explained. 'It is like life.' He couldn't help but pass judgment upon her chess play. He tried to reason and wondered if he too had flaws, though no grievous ones came to mind.

"Why won't you wrap-up the game?" Ravi said. Sometimes people, even his closest friends, didn't think his actions made sense because he planned his moves two steps ahead—a quality he'd honed playing chess. Earlier that month she'd promised to play with an engaged mind if she heard him say, 'I'm giving up my socialist ideals. I'm now fully prepared to buy your love with a BMW, a house by the beach, or that long vacation in Europe you've always wanted.' But his time in history had arrived, and he could ill-afford to let the moment pass.

"Guess what? I'm going to write my novel," she said. "Actually, I'm thinking, since you don't like sex, make yourself useful, and listen to my Pulitzer acceptance speech." Lack of intercourse made her grouchy.

"Pulitzer? You've written only thirty pages. Anyway, they don't give Pulitzers for your kind of subjects. Add some philosophy; make it deeper. Here, read this," he said, passing a copy of Nietzsche's *Antichrist*—his eighth attempt at getting her to read Nietzsche. Two years ago, he'd been madly attracted to her after sex for the first time.

She liked to talk in bed but not in random scenes or moans interrupted with point-of-view shifts; she created extremely satisfying and pleasing stories starring well-rounded characters. He'd imagined her writing would overflow with the same brilliance, but the lack of depth made the stories suffer, and for this reason, he picked up a copy of Gramsci's *Prison Diary* and said, "Well, if you don't want to read Nietzsche, you can try this instead."

"Screw you," she said.

With a knock on the open door, Sophocles walked in carrying a miniature scaled model of St. Lantfrid University. He put down the model on the floor and then tipped his hat to acknowledge Ashley. Majoring in theater and architecture, he loved beauty and found pretty buildings and females, in particular, irresistible, though his affairs with both (unfortunately) resulted only in platonic relationships. Ravi considered him his protégé and the heir to the Enclave.

"Yay," Ashley said, rolling her eyes. Her parched lips broke into a forced smile. "More friends. Sophocles, please come in, make yourself at home—consider this your own room."

A tall blond, runner's built and chiseled features, Sophocles came from a family of Greek historians who christened him with his pagan name. His parents disdained the illusionary American democracy, but Sophocles would be the first Waller to actively rebel against the deception. "I failed my calculus exam. Then I calculated the derivative of the black hole I've fallen into. I doubt I'll find a tangential to climb out," Sophocles said. He was, above everything else, nerdy. Throughout his education, honor roll (and now Dean's List) remained his middle name. Very early on in his life, when he'd

thought he wouldn't make honor roll one time and it'll be alright, his parents let him know it wasn't; they denied him new architectural books until he made it back to the list. He'd lived a life of achievements—advance classes, programs for the gifted and special, etcetera. Everything educational needed to be overcome—until he met Ravi and then the passion for success transferred elsewhere.

Ravi inspected the model—a little red flag flew atop the student center. Nice touch, Ravi thought. “Are the Bill Kaschi posters up?”

Sophocles handed him a sheet of paper, which read,



Name: Bill Kaschi

Photo Credit: The Zoo? (Sorry, we couldn't find a white ape though be assured the only thing black about this guy is his burnt brain)

Education: Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate from the same unaccredited online university (visit <http://www.onlinediploma.com/> to buy yourself one too)

Notables: An unknown college drop-out until he married rich and divorced even wealthier (TBSTL reports that “divorce rates for conservatives is 29% higher than the national average—soon after marriage, many Republicans realize marriage is more than a mutual hatred of gays, minorities, and Jews”). Much like other conservatives who don't graduate college, he's now the Director of the 'Accuracy in Academia' group. After months of denying that he flunked out, he now claims he didn't graduate because of leftist professors outnumbering the conservative ones 10:1. Not so fast, Billy. We got an excerpt of a paper you wrote in college...before you became a nutty speaker...remember?

When President Bush is making a public speech or addressing the press, the media has a field day. He is a country boy from Texas and likes to talk fast which in turn causes him to slip up and say the wrong word or pronounce it incorrectly. The liberal media plays on this by saying he is uneducated. But he attended Texas A&M University, which is one of the most prestigious universities not only in Texas but the country. The press also takes advantage of the President when it comes to the war. They only count the number of dead soldiers and not what we have achieved in that country and in the war on terrorism. Iraq is now finally a world power and we've removed the dictator. The press has given the war a bad wrap but we are coming out on top. Go America.

He describes himself as a scholar and walks everywhere holding a baseball bat, ready to take on “liberal pussies.” If America were to fall under Muslim hands, he’d supposedly die holding the flag aloft. Wants to wipe out the intellectual elite, socialists, anarchists, ‘colored’ lovers, and other remaining “pussies” from America. Loves to point out that minorities want to be ruled by another race and that’s why they flock to America—but he himself is color blind. His books have, of course, received charming reviews from scholarly journals such as the National Review and Fox Online, which praise him for “avoiding over-simplistic clichés(!) and proving beyond reasonable doubt that liberals are anti-American, jealous of the great nation’s triumph.” Has a lot of anger issues, but trust us, we’ll cool him down tonight. Much like all other right-wingers, he doesn’t like women, Civil Rights, immigrants, Mormons, Jews, scientologists (okay, we don’t like them either), scientists, teachers, and poor, sick, smart, old, gay, people... (We’re running out of space)

Quotables: 1. “My idea of social security is that poor people need to stop reproducing. Next time you see a poor woman that’s pregnant, tell her, ‘shouldn’t you have been working instead of having sex?’” 2. “When I was in college, I noticed White students excelling while minorities struggled because frankly they didn’t belong there.” (And then you dropped out and missed the lecture on irony?) 3. “I was shopping at Wal-Mart, a black lady helped me and I thought, ‘wow, this is the greatest country in the world where blacks and whites live together peacefully—so, black people, tell me what is the problem?’” 4. “I’m sorry I have used the word ‘freedom’ so much tonight that I probably sound like a fascist.” (!!!!!)

“There’s one thing,” Sophocles said. “When the water sprinklers go off while Kaschi is speaking, I don’t think the sprinkler heads will hold. The building is too old, and those things haven’t been tested in years.”

“Twenty or thirty minor casualties at most,” Ravi said. “Quite acceptable. Would you like some tea?”

Sophocles nodded. He took out a CD from his pocket and placed it into the stereo system. Ravi disappeared and returned carrying teapot, saucers, and cups.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Ashley said, jotting notes in her diary, “I mean, saucers for a working man’s hero?”

“Oh, right, K-RAD Ashley,” Ravi said, pouring tea into the china cups. A thoroughly refined gentleman, he preferred wine to beer and UniBall pens to Paper Mate. Yet somehow he’d become the de facto leader of the Left; under him, men and women who once smoked joints on Friday night, now took pleasure in torturing the administration. “Can’t wait for your first Mills and Boon novel, a ferocious assault on materialism.”

“Whatever,” Ashley said. “My work is more psychology. I’m more Jane Austen than Mills and Boon. You know what I mean?” Revolution played no part in her musings, a basic requirement for any work written under a fascist regime—Ravi considered such works futile.

Outside the window, a large number of students, all slightly overweight and red-eyed with braided hair and purposefully tattered clothes, began playing Ultimate Frisbee in fading light. What a tragedy, Ravi thought. Rich, healthy, well-fed, liberal Americans wasting their life. Did they not realize the cause needed all able-bodies? He imagined they’d all work at a vegan organic farm or a café one day, selling coffee to dim-witted pseudo-intellectuals, discussing *Da Vinci Code* and *Lord of the Rings*, while having the audacity to think they were important cogs of the movement. In a perfect world, in times of trouble, the populace would simply ask itself, ‘What would Marx do?’ but they knew nothing of the man.

The latest crisis at St. Lantfrid University began after a *Wall Street* editor wrote a series of articles bemoaning the ‘leftistization’ of education. SLU President Herbert Sullivan, who wanted to fire all leftist professors anyway, started a witch-hunt. A bloody battle of words, memos, and resolutions ensued, and an anonymous blog,

TakeBackStLantfrid.com, emerged as the leading light in fighting the President's assault. Conservative groups (National Republican Committee, Student for Academic Freedom, and the Young America's Foundation) decided to send Bill Kaschi to energize the base at St. Lantfrid University.

Ravi looked at Sophocles and saw hope for the future. Ravi, sipping tea, thought of a time when people used to get upset and go berserk on streets. He'd certainly heard of such a thing and seen a few photographs. Now, even in the pretentious artsy circles, people only wrote gloomy depressing songs about change, surrounded by paintings drawn by ever-suffering artists—not exactly the ambiance one needed for positive thoughts. He looked on TV and noticed the camera focusing on the latest Brittany escapade. “CNN, too, has lost interest in Iraq. And we all just wait for a survivor to descend upon us.”

David, still typing, shouted random obscenities and sighed heavily every few seconds, signaling his entrance into a state of complete misanthropy.

Sophocles pushed the play button of the stereo—a modern rendition of *the Internationale* blared out of the speaker. “Allow me to reflect upon this peculiar situation arising from the Judeo-Christian tradition of a messiah coming down to save us.” Sophocles pointed up and grinned. He didn't know anything about a casual conversation and never distinguished between verbal and written communication. Always, he tried to impress the audience with verbosity and insights of a formal essay. The need to be constantly funny and powerful in an unfussy manner was lost on him. “Works somewhat well in a democracy. Regardless of how upset people become, the system supports itself

because people do not need to rebel—savior is around the corner. Of course, this allows men like you to become savior prototypes and, I might add, extremely popular.”

Ravi stopped the song. “Sophocles, have you heard a donkey roar?”

“No, I’m sure I’d remember if I did.”

“Then why is some rich old man singing this beautiful song,” Ravi said. “It sounds like a lullaby!”

Elizabeth, who lived upstairs, walked through the open door, and said, “We gotta talk.” A large black sweatshirt, with the GAP logo in the center diligently scrapped off to avoid any unsavory connections to the corporation, flooded her petite frame. A piercing above her parched lips caught Ravi’s eye. A natural California beach blond, and the prettiest girl Ravi knew, Elizabeth tried her damned hardest to hide the beauty and her father’s billion dollars. She handled the brunt work for the Enclave and definitely stuffed envelopes better than anyone else did. Her job training came largely from the battle she waged against her family (though she’d also successfully organized anti-war rallies in New York cities), and the toughest decision of her life was telling them, ‘I’m not a Republican.’ But she’d come a long way from the days when she considered using only lower case letters the most serious form of dissent against the establishment.

“What’s that thing?” Ravi said, always fearful of the Enclave succumbing to the freak category classification. “And I said wear decent clothes. At least today.” He’d imposed a ban on homeless-type clothing within the Enclave. Unhygienic habits, promiscuous sex, and unkempt appearances killed the counter-culture in 1960s. Not this time—not under his watch.

“Chill,” Elizabeth said. She always spoke slowly and stretched out her words.

Doon't Woorrrry. “Gandhi wore common man’s clothing, why can’t we?”

“Common woman doesn’t drill a hole through her face.”

“Fine, I’m gonna change. I am friggin’ pumped. But can I see you guys *alone*,”

Elizabeth said, loud enough for David to hear. Her organization, Students Against Global Inequality, suffered during David’s neo-Nazi phase; he pelted eggs at members.

David turned around and said, “Ew, gross,” looking at Elizabeth’s piercing. In spite of his oscillating political ideologies, he never vacillated on dislike for homosexuals, tattoos, vegans, and piercings.

Elizabeth and Ravi stepped in the hallway to talk. Ravi signaled Ashley and Sophocles to come as well. Ashley jumped at the opportunity of packing away the chessboard. Once outside, Elizabeth said, “Soooo...let’s go in a new direction. Joseph has this badass plan. Instead of setting off the sprinklers, we should just burn the place. Far out, huh?” Joseph’s love for binary numbers transcended his computer science degree; he applied the principle of cold logic across the board. And reason, more often than not, presented only two options—a zero-sum game that pitted society’s own misguided short-term desires against society’s inability to fathom its own interests in the long run that only the Enclave could recognize.

“As an architect genetically-disposed towards history and a connoisseur of beauty,” Sophocles said, “I must register my mild-natured protest considering the building’s historic value. Traci Lords visited once. But, of course, if the revolution hinges on the destruction of the building then I ask permission to take some photographs.”

“No,” Ravi said, “we haven’t planned for this.” Ravi desired a spider’s efficiency in carrying out plans. After all, the only thing that separated a great spider from a mediocre one was the power of its ideas before it committed to the design. It’d take longer to think and design, but when finished, it’d be complete.

“I can take photographs quickly,” Sophocles said.

“Sophocles, you’re an idiot,” Ravi said. “How’ll you head the Enclave? I meant no to the burning plan—you can take photos.”

“You’ve gotta consider it,” Elizabeth said. “This idea is hella good. First, I flaked out thinking maybe it isn’t a good idea to kill people. Then Joseph said, ‘God punished Egyptians, didn’t he?’ But since God is dead, we can fill the vacuum. Five-hundred Republicans. And Bill Kaschi himself! We’re talking of complete take over of the county way before May Day.”

“She has a point,” Sophocles said. “Subtlety of symbolic protests is lost on barbarians.”

“Totally,” Elizabeth said. “Consider it with an oooooopen mind...”

Ashley pulled Ravi aside and whispered, “This is a terrible idea. I mean, seriously. Think about your US Senate run in the future. Even my Dad’s like that boyfriend of yours got some serious potential. He hates Democrats, and you’re like a socialist or something.”

“We can’t kill five-hundred people,” Ravi said to Elizabeth. “It’ll look bad. Anyway, Joseph doesn’t have enough resources, yet.”

David had made his way out in the hallway unnoticed. “Are you insane?” he said. “Dude, you people are going to make me end up in jail. I don’t want anything to do with this. Why aren’t we just writing about Kaschi’s visit like normal people?”

Elizabeth said, “Go blog, pseudo-activist.”

“Dude,” David said.

Ravi pushed David back into the room. “If we spend our entire time protesting, when will we ever fight?”

Ravi gave a piece of paper to Sophocles. Ravi said, “Make sure it is delivered to President Sully today. Don’t let anyone see you. The old man is going senile. Next thing he’ll call the FBI.”

Ashley, Elizabeth, and Sophocles peered over the letter.

Dear President Sullivan,

Your refusal to acknowledge our correspondence has caused much grief. We’d like to re-iterate that not canceling classes on May Day is a slap on the face of Karl Marx and all the hundreds of underpaid workers our campus employs. We are men and women of peace and want to see May Day established as a great holiday tradition.

This way you can at least pretend this bourgeois university respects all classes—it’ll be a stepping-stone towards elimination of wealth based admission and patronage. Further, to give you some incentive, we’ll let you inaugurate the holiday with a speech denouncing the administration’s interference in student government functioning; putting forth a case for academic freedom; punishing the wealthy who engage in sexual debauchery/harassment/rape at frats such as your alma mater Phi Kap; and promising to remove those who engage in overt and covert racism. We feel this is a golden opportunity for you to write a speech that is the epitome of bullshit and forever be remembered as the President who did more than merely exist for no good reason.

Think about it, if you declare May 1st a holiday now, we might consider retaining you as a professor after St. Lantfrid is an independent country. We eagerly await your reply and have begun preparations for May Day. Don’t worry—this one will be on us thereby considerably easing the strain off your busy hands that are constantly begging for money.

Sincerely,
The Enclave

P.S.: You seem to have mistakenly assumed that we are the group behind the website TakebackStLantfrid.com. While it is true our ideas are similar and both groups take strong exception to your existence, we are professional revolutionaries dedicated to liberating America, county-by-county, using any means necessary.

“A holiday is all that we wanted,” Sophocles said. “He could’ve just given it to us. There’s no decency left in the world. Sometimes I wonder if I wasn’t leading a fulfilling life playing games all day and scaling new heights in Solitaire.”

Joseph called and told Ravi that Hepburn had additional security cameras they hadn’t accounted for. Ravi checked the scaled model Sophocles created from the official blueprint; clearly, the resident dictator, President Herbert Sullivan had padded the security. But Ravi never let failure affect him, especially not in public amongst people.

As Ravi readied to leave so he could meet Joseph, Sophocles said, “There’s this girl.”

“Geez. I’m so excited.” Ashley said. “The girl of your dreams—again.”

“She’s the one,” Sophocles said. “I need some advice.”

“Drop her off at the door,” Ravi said. “If she considers you a gentleman, she’ll let you know and send you packing. If she doesn’t, then you’ll get lucky. Yet, a more focused approach on your job may be a better idea tonight.”

“Who is this chick?” Elizabeth said.

“Jet-black hair, blue eyes, silky tanned skin,” Sophocles said. He assumed his dramatic posture and energetically supplied hand gestures. He did excellent voice impressions. “Red ribbon and white boots. Not the typical type. She’s got spunk. She’s, as most pretty girls are, slightly arrogant and aloof, which adds to the mystery. There’s a possibility of a potential damsel in distress—slightly incomplete, awaiting a

savior.” He said he knew what they’d say—it’s the same girl he fell in love with last time. New name, less weight. Maybe so. But he explained. “She’s different. I might’ve said it before. I may even say it again tomorrow about another for I’m not a paragon of great ideas on humanity. I seek simpler things. I look for mystery in the blooming water lilies and the crawling snail.” In his life, he searched for intrigue—a person was of far less importance than the idea of waking up one morning and finding her.

“Yay, that’s exciting,” Ashley said. “As Nabokov said, you can always count on a revolutionary for fancy prose style. Now leave.”

“No, he didn’t,” Ravi said. “You can count on a *murderer* for fancy prose style. Anyway, who is the girl?”

“Audrey Cook.”

“Didn’t I say something about dating within the Enclave?”

Ashley finally managed to get rid of Sophocles and Elizabeth. Ravi started to walk out the door when she said, pointing at David, “I suggest you kick him out and stay with me another ten minutes,” Ashley said. “It’ll be quick, I promise.”

“I need to get the cameras—”

“I’m serious.”

Before she could start her spiel about priorities, he shouted, “David, out—now.” He wanted Ashley to be happy. He loved her in absolute terms despite moments of despair when he feared she did things out of love for him and not because of any real concern about inequality. In a world brimming with deceit and fraud, the idea of love gave him comfort. The hope of Ashley morphing into an acceptable leftist made the love

palpable. Still, the lack of perfection in her writing skills perplexed him. He'd often thought what one could conclude about a person who has exactly the right amount of money, down to the penny, that the cashier asks for at the grocery store every single time. He'd mistaken this quality for excellence. "David, leave!"

"Dude," he shouted, fumbling through the *Hill News*. "I, for one, will no longer suffer in silence." He pointed at a photo of the Tibetan monk who came to campus to spread the message of peace. "Check out what the monk said."

Ravi looked at the article and read the line David marked, "*Choose to be optimistic, it feels better.*" Ashley mouthed WTF.

David said, "Eh? Don't you see the next line? *China will never give back Tibet.* Do you know how oppressive these 'so-called-monks' were? This *Hill News* is a conservative mouthpiece. I can't believe you approved their budget."

Ravi explained to David that the school newspaper's budget couldn't be cut regardless of whom the treasurer was, reasoning with him as if he could be considered a normal rational being. For a while, Ravi had managed to use David's hate for good causes by utilizing his natural distrust of authority, but now Ravi worried that years of self-medication had turned David into a mere supporter of genocide and extermination.

"Fine, dude," David said. "The paper doesn't respect you. But you seem to like kicking your own friends. There's a conspiracy against us. Did you see the *Five Couples That Matter* article? You're not there."

Ashley, who'd gone to the bathroom, said, "What's this now?"

“Don’t encourage him,” Ravi said. “David, get the hell out of here. Ashley, we need to get *it* over with so the revolution can be un-paused.” Ravi rarely got angry but this situation merited some tension.

David picked up the paper and showed her the article. Patrick Schofield, Jr., the senate president, and Christine von Trapp, his semi-retarded girlfriend, were #1, followed by three other generic-looking preppy couples. A token black couple received the last position.

Ashley grabbed Ravi’s collar. “Between us, we’ve got two of the top five student body positions. I’m the Judiciary Board Chief and you’re the Central Treasurer. We don’t matter?”

David said, “It is a conspiracy.” Ravi threw the paper at David and shoved his large frame out of the door.

Ravi said, “Well, who really cares, nobody reads the newspaper.” She acted like a vapid sorority sister at times.

“Nuh-huh, you fund it!” Ashley said. “I guess you’re not a big shot.”

“I’ll talk to the editor. But I need to go take care of the cameras otherwise Bill Kaschi wins; you don’t want that, do you?”

“Actually, I don’t care. People are getting away with fake grades and snorting cocaine...you can’t get us top 5,” Ashley said. She picked an ivory queen and flung it at Ravi. “Your ex-girlfriend is the editor. Get on it.”

Ravi picked up the piece and said, “Hey, this is a rare edition. How about we have sex since David is gone?”

“Sex is going to be rare in your life.”

Part B

At precisely 6:30 p.m., SLU President Herbert Sullivan, standing in front of the bathroom mirror, commenced on his daily routine of self-admiration. He recognized the slight narcissistic streak in himself and always paid special attention to the remains of his thick white hair, systematically hiding each bald spot. He blamed the loss on stress caused by prohibitive modern moral and academic standards preventing him from taking decisive steps in crushing student unrest. In an earlier day and age, administrative problems centered on dealing with rowdy frat parties and meeting demands for better recycling facilities. A nuisance of a different nature threatened his authority now, and he desperately wanted to catch the bloggers of Take Back St. Lantfrid.

He'd spent the majority of his life at St. Lantfrid University (save for a brief and uneventful stint in the professional tennis circuit). First as a student, then a professor of Economics, and, finally, President. He saw as his primary responsibility an obligation to ensure the happiness of the richest students. The fathers wrote big checks. Millions upon millions for the endowment fund. With TBSTL launching a jihad on the joyous and fun-filled college experience, some parents had threatened to sue the university if President Sullivan didn't shut down the site. Most of the parental concerns stemmed from the accusations of cocaine usage leveled against their sons and daughters by the blog. The university, on the verge of Ivy Leaguedom, could hardly afford negative press. Yet, above all, President Sullivan felt irked at the personal slight; his school stood for something—celebration of hard work and the right for citizens to earn wealth without facing opposition from lazy social-welfare liberals—that TBSTL wanted to destroy.

Others would've gone crazy in the jungle of snow. Every two miles—instead of McDonald's—mental asylums, abandoned dairy farms, halfway houses, and federal penitentiaries graced upstate New York. Thirty years with *those* people for neighbors. In the mirror, he saw the last hero of the administrative world, standing alone against the resurgent counter-culture movement destroying minds throughout college campuses. He wondered, every night, how so many intelligent young brains could be brainwashed against the word *freedom*, which America practically invented, while attending Sullivan's own university.

President Sullivan was in the bathroom when Vice President Cornwell, Dean Petty, and IT Head Oliver Merrill made their way to the house for an emergency meeting. Mary Sullivan, the wife of the President, seated them around an oval table. Mary fancied herself a direct descendant of Queen Victoria and did not like entertaining ordinary people but reluctantly settled into the role of an American housewife after the British government could not verify her claims to royalty. Heat blowing from a duct gently swayed the chandelier but did not affect the large framed portrait of President Sullivan that hung on the wall.

The meeting started with Dean Petty asking others, as she did every week at cabinet gatherings, if they'd watched *Grey's Anatomy*. The answer, as always, remained no. God was the protagonist of all her conversation topics except this one. She had the charm of an inauthentic Irish bar set-up with a box of shamrocks and green lights.

“Sir Robert Ponting has departed,” Mary said. Silence followed; a waiter arrived carrying a tray of canard au sang. All the staff at the President's house, on her insistence,

wore red coats—with brass styled collars and cuffs—replicas of the East India Company uniforms.

“Do ya’ll want to say Grace before the appetizer?” Dean Petty muttered with shifty eyes. She’d recently embarked on an evangelical program to become “ex-gay” and saw the upcoming visit of a fellow Texan and Christian crusader, Bill Kaschi, to the University as a particularly divine and joyous occasion.

“Sir Robert Ponting has departed,” Mary said, bit louder, paying no attention to the Dean.

This time, Vice-President Cornwell, the seven-foot giant, expressed his regrets but couldn’t wipe the permanent grin off his face—a problem that’d always plagued his existence.

Dean Petty, jittery and slightly itchy, spoke up, untying the sweater from the neck. Even in her hyperactive and restless state, her Ph.D. in “Diversity and Leadership” from the Sugarland State University served her well. She said, “What happened to poor Mr. Ponting?” Then Dean Petty took out a box of Jesus-shaped cookies and offered them to Mary.

“Sir. Sir Ponting.” Mary shook her head. She didn’t care much for Dean Petty, a coke snorting muffy on testosterone. “Sir Robert Ponting died of old age.”

Oliver Merrill, 5’2 and 350 pounds, wiped the sweat off his neck and wondered how he’d managed to stay on as head of IT for fifteen years. He literally needed to cling on to the chair so he wouldn’t fall. An awkward silence ensued as others waited on Oliver to keep the conversation going. He did not realize this and instead focused on deflecting President Sullivan’s potential upcoming questions. Oliver hardly remembered

the purpose of the meeting, but a sinister feeling crept up his stomach, telling him the reason involved his department in some way. He started to think about food and longed for more canard au sang. He needed to be fed. Constantly.

“Where’s Robbie?” Dean Petty asked, trying to direct the chat in a new direction. She knew leadership.

Mary Sullivan said, frowning, “As I mentioned, Sir Robert Ponting has departed.”

Oliver whispered to Vice-President Cornwell, “Can dogs have last names?”

Dean Petty tried to think of a clever apology but, luckily, President Sullivan arrived.

“What is this?” asked President Sullivan, tossing a poster on the table—“9 *p.m.* *VISIT TakeBackStLantfrid.com – WITNESS THE COOL DOWN OF FASCISM. LIVE.*”

His wardrobe selection confounded both his critics and his friends. He had not disappointed on this occasion either and arrived wearing a Hawaiian shirt with floral patterns.

“It appears the event would have something to do with the end of fascism, Herbert,” Mary Sullivan said, before excusing herself.

Dean Petty said, “They call it blogger parties. Something lame like that probably. They’ll write angry posts. Have ya’ll read the latest entry?” She presented President Sullivan with a computer printout.

A Take Back St. Lantfrid Exclusive.¹

Student Spotlight.

Written by bushbuster

Name: Christine von Trapp aka the first lady aka The Amazon

¹ Reproduced here with permission from the Associate Editor of TBSTL.

From: 1242 Power Lane, Montpelier, VT 5601 [click [here](#) to view on Google Earth]

Class: Unknown, would be lucky to graduate. 7-year track, even with the help of President Sullivan and Dean Petty. Specializes in “diversity” (the irony isn’t lost on us) and “leadership” classes.



Notables: Dating the President (though maybe not...we'll see what the summer brings, stay tuned for play-by-play updates). Student government "representative" in Sykes Hall, though her constituents contend she doesn't actually represent them...*now Christine, how many times do we have to tell you, not everything can be about you.*

Frequent crier, likes to get humiliated in elections every year. Is a Platinum card carrying member of [stylishpreppy.com](#). Is a walking counterintelligence program. Enjoys eavesdropping on other people's conversations. Likes cameras and taking photos of leftists in the soc lab. Was the class "tattle-tale" in Elementary school...and has yet to grow out of it. Latest news...enjoyed a quiet cocaine-filled romantic evening with SLU Republican President Liz Snortell and Dean Petty.

Quotables: “If girls on this campus didn't dress so slutty, there wouldn't be as much rape.” {cry, whimper, whimper, cry, deluge}

“Christine is such a sweetheart,” Dean Petty said. “All she wants is for folks to understand the rich. She has started a campus organization to promote love. She sent me a description.”

This group is for the rich "conservatives" who are never afraid to state their political views or to simply state that they are, god forbid, conservative. We don't care if you drive a Mercedes or a Rolls Royce. We'll never take what you say and quote it to make you look like an asshole in front of the entire school (or even in front of all the people that have access to the internet). We would never make a website about people who don't share those same views because we are just too good for that. We dress better, we look better, we are better, and everyone knows it. ²

² Reproduced here without permission from Ms. Von Trapp, who couldn't be reached at the time of this publication.

“This is political harassment,” President Sullivan said. “I believe the SLU Republican President has a point when she says Rich Republicans should be treated as a minority. We must take action—suspend everyone behind Take Back St. Lantfrid.”

“Sir, with all due respect,” Vice-President Cornwell said, “discriminatory harassment does not include political harassment as defined by our own policy.”

“We’ll change the policy. I’ll meet the lawyers tomorrow. Oliver—I want this site blocked,” President Sullivan said. His spit showered the table; he turned red and shivered.

“President Sullivan,” VP Cornwell said. “It is against the very foundation of academic freedom to ban sites. And we are currently under tremendous scrutiny from the national media. I’m not sure how the Ivy League Board will view this move.”

He suspected VP Cornwell was a closet liberal but in the larger scheme, Cornwell didn’t seem the type that did anything other than follow orders. President Sullivan said, “Well, Mr. VP, if you want to delay the urgent matter, we can set up a power steering committee that I can head.” The VP agreed that bureaucracy of that sort only created inefficiency. “I want it banned,” President Sullivan said to Oliver.

A frail Pakistani man, Dr. Aslam Khan, university’s Chief Financial Officer, walked into the room wearing a designer suit. He carried himself with stylish gusto and purpose. Nobody knew much about his past but rumors suggested he’d worked as a mathematician for the Pakistani nuclear research facility. He apologized for lateness and with deft movements pulled up a PowerPoint presentation on his laptop. “This here is the financial portfolio of the university,” Dr. Khan said, pointing at the slide. Dean Petty passed the Jesus-shaped cookies to Dr. Khan and called him Mr. Khan; he glared at her.

“That’s Dr., Dean Petty. And no, thank you, I’m a devout Muslim and do not wish to consume your religion. Anyway, as you know, Ms. Liz Snortell’s father withdrew the \$10 Million he’d promised for the Student Center. Apparently, he doesn’t like other people knowing his daughter is a coke addict.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll ban the site,” President Sullivan said.

“Regardless, currently, we’re in hot tea since the ugly building already graces our otherwise pretty campus—with all due respect to Dean Petty, who cannot be faulted for having bad taste, only for not letting someone else handle the project.” He paused and looked for smiles. “However, the difference between mediocre mathematicians and men like me is the ability to change previously held constants into variables. Here, of course, I speak of the faulty assumption equating low risk with low profit. I believe, with your permission, Sir Sullivan, I can make up the deficit via some clever investments.”

“Dr. Khan, I may not be as renowned a mathematician as you, but I’ve taught Economics and such a thing is improbable,” President Sullivan said.

“Sir Sullivan, things change. After all, who would’ve thought people believing in creationism could become deans at a fine liberal arts college like ours.”

“I’ll not allow this man to badger me any more,” Dean Petty shouted, getting up from her chair. “My faith in Jesus may be newfound, but it is firm.”

“Please,” President Sullivan said, gesturing at both to sit down. “Dr. Khan, what exactly are you proposing?”

“If we increase the % of portfolio allotted to selling stocks short,” Dr. Khan said. “From say 2% to 29%, we could easily cover lost ground.”

“Selling things we do not own is not just immoral but ethically wrong,” Dean Petty said, twitching her fingers on the table.

“This foolish talk from a Texan woman with a PhD from Timbuktu in BS is not conducive to the intellectual setting,” Dr. Khan said. “I seriously suggest you fire her. She’s drunk too!”

“Actually she’s on coke,” Oliver Merrill said, laughing. He noticed President Sullivan staring. “Sorry, of course, I’m kidding. She’d never do such a thing.”

“Shut up, Oliver,” Dean Petty said. After choice words for Dr. Khan, she stormed off. VP Cornwell, the affable giant, followed, to console her.

“Oliver,” President Sullivan said, “ban the site today.”

Oliver, who’d busied himself with a fresh plate, adjusted his square glasses. With a sheepish smile, he said, “We require time for research before doing something like that...” He wiped off more sweat. He’d let his deputy go on a week’s vacation.

“But Pakistan can censor the whole country in minutes; this is a small university,” Dr. Khan said.

“With all due respect, Dr. Khan, Pakistan is a communist country,” Oliver Merrill replied.

“How’s that relevant?” President Sullivan said, raising his eyebrow. “Do communists have better software?”

“It is a benevolent military dictatorship actually,” Dr. Khan said, frowning.

“Do I need to get outside consultants?”

Outside consultants meant trouble. They asked questions. Confusing questions, Oliver didn’t have answers to. He said, “It’ll be done, sir. Give me a day.”

“I want the identities. And there’s a new menace now. Someone called the Enclave keeps writing letters to me. I need to know who these people are. The Snortell family is furious over the cocaine allegations. We need to win back their 10 Million dollars.”

Oliver had tried to get his assistant to look into the matter. “Sir, they use what we call in internet lingo,” Oliver said, but he couldn’t remember the word, “praaxy. And their blog is set-up in a way that even an individual user has no idea who the others are. It is all quite clever.”

Part C

Much like other tinpot dictators that came before him, President Sullivan adored closed circuit cameras. So, around 7 p.m., as Ravi and Joseph entered Hepburn, they were well aware that their faces could be seen by the university security in the main control room. In fact, the door to the building had a sign that read *this building is under surveillance for your protection*. However, they’d only recently discovered that President Sullivan, either out of paranoia or because he knew the kind of criminal minds he was up against, had additional hidden cameras placed in Hepburn. The building housed the Government dept. filled with professors who often gave the most trouble to President Sullivan as he attempted to interpret and redefine rules from a strict constructionist point of view. Perhaps because of this, the President refused to move the department out of the rotting building that shook each time the heaters kicked in. If the building weren’t located in upstate New York, an area nobody cared about, the Federal Asbestos Commission would’ve surely shut down the place that had lead paint chipping

off pipes. At a particularly heated faculty meeting, he'd declared that the building suited the department as it preached a decaying ideology. And St. Lantfrid administration loved practical teachable moments, though lately the focus had exclusively been on the word 'Orwellian.'

Joseph stood in the hallway attempting to infiltrate the wireless network via his handheld mobile computer so he could disable the hidden cameras. He started college at the Air Force Academy but left shortly thereafter, having successfully hacked into the National Security Agency's database. While browsing the site, he ran into, what he thought at the time to be, United States' plan to attack Iran. He quit on ethical grounds. Much later, he realized that some moron at the department had simply confused Iraq with Iran and the memo merely described a pre-existing war. In any case, he didn't regret leaving the Academy for he found himself more interested in building ammo, decompiling machinery, and hacking computers than bombing civilians from a safe distance.

Joseph ran his fingers through the rock-star long dark hair and said, "Shit, I can't get through. Man, we need to get into the control room at the basement and actually switch off the device."

Ravi could think of only one way to get the key—by asking the slightly senile and pugnacious Government department chair, Dr. Charles McGovern, who prided himself to be a raging communist, though beyond his fluffy stories, his only achievement in that regard seemed the tenacity with which he'd held on to the chair position. In his younger days, he'd established himself as the world's foremost scholar on the Bolsheviks. Regardless, President Sullivan loathed Dr. McGovern with a passion, constantly accusing

him of conducting communist guerilla jihad from his decaying building. At numerous times, President Sullivan had tried, unsuccessfully, to coax the government faculty to rise against the chair; he'd promised them a new building, but they'd retained their fierce loyalty for the aging commander and preferred to embrace the cockroaches, rather than the President, that called the building home.

Joseph waited outside while Ravi went toward Dr. McGovern's office. The open office door contained a collection of warnings from President Sullivan, who'd directed his staff to fine the Government Dept. as often as they could. The offenses ranged from excessive investment in water bottles (willful war against University by-law 20.12.a) to the installation of a bike rack without the President's written order (willful indifference for corporate hierarchy). Dr. McGovern sat behind his desk cluttered with papers, ink pens, two typewriters, and some shriveled cacti. He'd situated himself in the corner of his dusty rectangular room lined with old books in oak cabinets. He did not believe in technology and seemed almost as ancient as his yellowing books. His frame had shrunk with age and whereas once he'd occupied the entire chair,—as evident from a photo of Dr. McGovern posing with Noam Chomsky—he now swam in it, though he remained agile and fit. Like justices in the Supreme Court, Ivy League Ph.D.'s at St. Lantfrid University never retired. Over the four years, Ravi had noticed Dr. McGovern's papery skin desiccate; as a result, his eyes looked bigger and face more squashed. He did not, however, appear anywhere close to giving up the chair position.

Dr. McGovern spoke slowly, though that didn't have much to do with his age. His tone merely matched his general outlook about himself—he preferred to keep an element of mystery regarding his life, which, at best, seemed banal. For this reason, he

never said much until the other person finished. Nothing impressed him. After every story he heard, he told a counter anecdote far superior in scope and historical relevance. Unfortunately, memory and hearing were failing Dr. McGovern, and he recycled the same nine stories. Sometimes, he did change names and locations.

After Ravi finished describing the need for activism in college, Dr. McGovern started talking. Though supposedly he did not believe in technology, his brain functioned like a search engine. He identified the keyword ‘revolution’ from Ravi’s rant and (he probably would’ve anyway) took the opportunity to summarize WWII while frequently blowing his nose. Regardless of which story he told, he always ended with the same line—*What do you know about activism? I protested Wars before ‘Nam.* Ravi saw drops of sweat rolling down Dr. McGovern’s forehead. This usually indicated Dr. McGovern’s desire to plunge back into solitude.

Ravi tried getting the conversation back on track. “We will bring about a revolution and could use your expertise.”

“A what?”

Ravi got closer to Dr. McGovern and shouted. “Revolution.”

He blew his nose again and said, “Yes, yes. Of course, I remember when I campaigned for Robert Kennedy.”

Before Dr. McGovern could start on his stock story#2, Ravi grabbed a pad and wrote on it: *We’re doing what you tell your classes to do; we’re trying to raise consciousness and bring about a county-by-county revolution across America. We’ll start tonight with Bill Kaschi by locking him up in the auditorium and setting off the sprinklers to cool him down. This should send a message to all conservatives. We need*

the key to the control room. Dr. McGovern pointed at the word revolution and asked for clarification. “Overthrow of the government,” Ravi shouted in Dr. McGovern’s ears.

Dr. McGovern burst into a bout of laughter and stopped only when cough interfered.

Ravi thought Dr. McGovern hadn’t heard him, so Ravi shouted, louder, “Overthrow of the government.”

“I’m not deaf,” Dr. McGovern said. “But are you crazy? The age of revolutions has been over for a while. We lost. Now go enjoy your senior year. I must get back to work. I’m the foremost scholar of Bolshevik history in the world, and there’s work to be done.”

To be called mad by this man just about made Ravi uneasy, considering it took one to recognize another. Some could construe the idea of change, Ravi realized, as anachronistic but someone like him didn’t make half-baked plans. True, some thought he was at a more advanced level of organization than his planner suggested (or that he had a working idea of what’ll happen on May Day besides a vague vision of needing around 10,000 people on the street for May Day—a tall task for a county with only 11,334 residents). But Ravi never campaigned for the Naders and the Kucinichs of the world because they didn’t have a winning strategy. Ravi didn’t consider himself the kind of athlete who competed in Olympics to be thankful for the opportunity or ran in an election to get his voice heard by a dozen people. He never offered excuses about the state of society; he intended to use the same tools that his opponents used to win. He said to Dr. McGovern, “You said in class that we must seek light amidst darkness.” This was, of course, a blatant lie. Dr. McGovern never advised students; instead, he always described

his life as one that nobody could surpass. “Seek adventure, life beyond the ordinary. Be someone. Now you’re saying comeback to this drudgery. Bill Kaschi...”

“Who is that?” Dr. McGovern said, clearly no longer caught up with the new enemies of communism. “Now if William Buckley were alive and came here, I’d encourage you to do whatever you’re doing.”

“Second best thing,” Ravi said, “he loved Bill Kaschi. I can show you the book review he wrote on the internet.”

“I don’t believe in computers.”

“Do you believe book jackets?”

“Why should the revolution happen now?”

“Why? Why do you think? Because my time to stake a place in history has arrived.”

The disagreement continued as Ravi desperately tried to establish Bill Kaschi as Buckley’s adopted child. Then Dr. McGovern asked why they hadn’t transferred elsewhere.

“Why would we?” Ravi asked, almost screaming now to ensure Dr. McGovern heard him loud and clear. “This place is as good as any other. We like it here. It isn’t as if some other town will give us angrier people to work with.”

“It is upsetting that there isn’t enough hate. Bitterly disappointing. It is simply not like the old days.” Dr. McGovern laughed again. For a change, he told a new story, a time when he threw pie at William Buckley after he’d debated Gore Vidal. Unfortunately, Dr. McGovern had missed. He handed over the key to Ravi and said, somewhat sadly, “Maybe a new generation of crazies will do better than we did.” For the

first time in four years, Ravi had heard him speak less than nostalgically about his glorious escapades.

Ravi handed Joseph the keys and hurried back to his apartment where he found his tennis racquet under the bed and dusted it in preparation for a match against President Sullivan. Ravi needed President Sullivan's access key, which Ravi planned to 'borrow' via means other than asking politely. The last part of the plan—hoisting the red flag on top of the university—depended upon opening some crucial doors. Although President Sullivan had created a technological fence around each student to protect the university 'interests,' he'd also opened many new avenues for those with the will to crack the system.

As Ravi got ready, he tried to eavesdrop on Ashley's engrossing conversation with Audrey Cook, a discussion about life after college; in particular, he wanted to know if Sophocles featured in Audrey's plans. Audrey, the only other minority (though just half black) in the Enclave, had hair like pasta and skin like alfredo and usually came across as mediocre when she opened her mouth but possessed the intelligence of a higher being or so Ravi liked to believe for she talked only of robotics and robots. He did not care much for her political beliefs, most of which solidified after watching Comedy Central's Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. But because she'd stalked him passionately and seemed extremely hard working, Ravi let her in to the Enclave fringes, though generally avoided listening to her describe all the great things she'd accomplished as a 'robotics coach'—whatever that meant. She also brought with her naïve peppiness that the movement severely lacked.

Their conversation drifted to childhood dreams. When younger, Ashley wanted to be an Electrical Engineer. Audrey came out of the womb screaming robots. Ravi longed for Wimbledon trophies. No, Olympic Gold. Victory laps, national anthem, wrapped flag. It would've been something. In those days, he still believed in blind patriotism toward governments, even corrupt ones.

He wondered if he'd beat President Sullivan, a NCAA Tennis legend, who at the age of fifty crushed St. Lantfrid's #1 just weeks ago. The game itself didn't matter. President Sullivan wanted to prove he also catered to those with no money while Ravi needed to 'borrow' the access card. When Ravi suggested they play a game of tennis, President Sullivan readily agreed, always willing to put an adversary in his place.

Ravi's cell phone rang—his mother. “Where have you been? Job hunting, I hope?” the mother asked.

“JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Lehman Brothers, and Merrill Lynch have heard from me.”

“Those are very good choices. What about back-ups?”

“If I ever settle into a life of corporate disillusionment, I intend to be at an elite company, so I can be infused by the strongest hegemonic injections.”

“That's okay. You're smart. You can be anything.”

“Yes, I know. I'm being a revolutionary today. I have to go now.”

“How'll that affect your grades?”

“Mother, I'm Summa Cum Laude or something. I can't keep up with badges of American mediocrity.”

Mother said, “You should ask God for directions.”

“God is dead, mother. God is dead.”

“And why haven’t you written to Debdas? He’s anxious to know about America.

Please write to him.”

Ravi decided to send a letter to Debdas before he went to play tennis.

Dear Debdas,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. America is a great country. You’ll enjoy your four-year stay here. Americans are very accepting people. They’ll be very curious about where you come from. Rarely will you be treated as an ordinary human being, ~~more or less as some sort of an exotic animal.~~ Regarding your question about pockets of same raced people hanging out together...that is definitely not the case at St. Lantfrid University ~~because one race makes up 98.2% of the college population.~~

The campus is politically very active. You’ll find a group that’ll be to your liking, ~~just be sure it is conservative in nature, or you may be deported or jailed.~~ Since you indicated you’d describe yourself as an Indian hippie, I wholeheartedly recommend ~~not~~ coming here. At the very least it’d assure your dignity and sanity stay intact. ~~Perhaps fighting with ‘people of your own kind’ would be more worthwhile.~~ This is not to say Indian colleges are better or worse for education—that I have no way of knowing, having spent most of my life in America.

There are indeed many well-known celebrities that visit the campus, in spite of its remote location. In a couple of hours from now, Bill Kaschi will arrive. He’s a very charming middle-aged Republican, an author of many ~~propaganda~~ books. He’s perfect for family TV; the ~~conservative~~ American family gathers around Fox News every night to create unity by watching the likes of him ~~and longing for traditional values of slavery and imperialism.~~

Indeed, there’s an opportunity for dialogue with such celebrities. But what will ~~break~~ (make) your spirit is not a few ~~corrupt~~ men. It’ll be an auditorium ~~full~~ of ~~conservatives~~ cheering for Kaschi’s every word. You’ll be shocked at the audience applauding ~~racism~~ with such spirit. We are far away from civilization and this place is a personal ~~field~~ (paradise). Laws will change in seconds to accommodate ~~some~~ (you). ~~People have burnt crosses, raped women at frat houses, and written nigger on election campaign posters, but if the administration is believed,~~ bicycle theft and harassment of rich are the biggest issues facing our campus. Do not fear. Racism and classism (I’ve always found it ironic that it isn’t a ‘real’ word) on campus are ~~subtle for most part~~ (dead). In the old days, I’d be picking cotton off the field (yes, Indians were also used as indentured laborers) but things are different now. I even play tennis sometimes with them ~~to keep them humored.~~

While chances are most Americans would prefer ~~not~~ to associate with minorities, others will go out of their way to accommodate you. You’ll rarely be able to go through dinner with a group of Americans without someone asking something about India (or possibly the Middle East, but pardon them, they don’t

mean harm). You could be talking about bread, baseball, or computers, yet all topics invariably lead to India and Indianness because they do care about culture. All in all, I suppose it is better than witnessing the colonially hung-over subjects ready to do unspeakable things with their tongue when the most wretched racist arrives in India.

I've made many fine friends. Unfortunately, most of these people have no real power. All powerful people are ~~conservatives~~ (hippies). There really is hope and a bright future for you if you're willing to fight. Whether you do it in America or India, it is your choice. Don't do nothing. After the great Revolution, you'll find yourself in a position of even more power. When in doubt, ask yourself, "What would Marx do?"

To hope, Comrade Debdas,
Ravi

Satisfied, Ravi sent the e-mail. Ashley started sharing a rumor about the student elections she'd heard when Ravi's phone rang—a call from President Sullivan confirming the engagement. Ravi put on his jacket to head out, ignoring Ashley, who kept talking nonetheless.

"You ruined my story," she said.

"But I'm frustrated. I want to give full attention to your story." Ravi put his hand on Ashley's shoulder. "Let smaller people wrestle over these insignificant elections. *We* plan to dabble in uprisings."

She told him anyway. "Christine von Trapp is running for Senate President. Isn't Miss Sunshine is on academic probation?"

"They bumped her to a 2.0—three fake independent study classes. All 4.0s. 'Diversity' with Dean Petty. 'Leadership' with Dean Petty. Then 'Diversity *and* Leadership' with Dean Petty."

Ashley's information refreshed old scars of Patrick Stanasko Schofield, Jr., a quintessential preppie,—a Larry's Larry—and Christine Von Trapp's boyfriend,

defeating him in the elections for presidency by fourteen votes. Despite the multitude of reasons offered (whites won't vote for an Indian; Patrick Schofield's \$5987.34 campaign expenditure for a school of 2500 students, etc.) the loss felt heavy, like a beer gut.

Perhaps, Ravi thought, some fundamental truth about humanity escaped him—a terrible thing if he were the Left's answer to Karl Rove. Sometimes Ravi woke up at night from nightmares of Che Guevera yelling, "You fucked-up."

He preferred to be the brain, but he'd also turned out to be the Left's only acceptable face. Pandering to inferior men and women for votes caused considerable strain. The loss remained inexplicable and inescapable. Worse, Patrick wasn't a prototypical bad guy—his command of the English language left much to be desired. How does one take seriously a crook who writes 'Your an asshole' and 'Conservative's are great'?

Every star needed a worthy nemesis. For sealing his place among the all-time revolutionary greats, Ravi longed for a fiercer adversary. Yet, he'd lost by fourteen votes to an accidental comic. This conundrum reverberated and danced in his head. Ravi noticed Ashley busily writing a strongly worded anti-rape resolution for the student government. He said, "You should add genocide too." She enjoyed writing legislation everyone supported.

She thought for a few seconds, chewing on her pen, and said, "You're right, but I should write a separate resolution for that."

"I'm kidding," he said, as he prepared to head to the tennis courts. "Anyway, David might oppose genocide, so it won't be unanimous."

Part D

“So, yeah, Ravi flaked off about just burning down the place. He doesn’t think anyone should get hurt,” Elizabeth told Joseph, standing in his room, which served as the HQ for TBSTL. Five sets of computers, two main servers, a photocopy machine, an open monitor—a bomb-in-the-making—and three printers occupied most of the space. Two large flags covered the wall. The first one displayed a picture of Che Guevara on the university flag. The other a map of St. Lantfrid County with the words *Republic of St. Lantfrid* printed at the bottom.

“No tension, we’ll have plenty of other opportunities to blow up the little shitheads,” said Joseph Payne, puffing on a cigar and chewing tobacco. He passed the cigar to Elizabeth, who refused. “Saying no to a Cuban cigar!” Joseph said. “Madam, you’re becoming uptight.” He possessed an impressive physique, left over from his Air Force Academy days, wore leather jacket and dark sunglasses. In comparison, Elizabeth with her petite figure and un-shampooed cropped hair looked a starved hobo.

“Don’t sweat it—cigar’s from Sunoco gas station!” she said.

He sniffed the air and said, “Ah, you’re correct. I got lost in memories of the Cuban paradise. Tell me, have you heard of sugar destroying car engines?”

She shook her head and turned her attention to the monitors. Two screens displayed live footage from the auditorium on the second floor of Hepburn. A third covered the area outside the entrance. The fourth captured the staircase leading up to the floor.

“Urban myth,” Joseph said. “But interestingly if you put golf balls in Patrick’s BMW Series 7, chances are it’ll really mess up the engine. We’ll have to wait and find out, takes a little while of driving for the effect to kick in.”

Joseph used a 2½-inch-long replica of the Colt Python pistol to hit the keys on the computer keyboard, making the images on the screen clearer. The auditorium filled up quickly with about five-hundred students. The richer ones, wearing their finest clothes, sat towards the front. Women arrived with curled golden hair and pearl necklaces. Men dressed in pink and yellow shirts. Fat frat boys, stereotypical low-intelligence look, parked themselves in the back with the pumped-w00t-w00t-Kaschi look glowing on their faces. The wealthier ones took turns greeting Bill Kaschi. Joseph looked away from the monitor. He picked up a College Republican poster from his desk. Bill Kaschi called Gore Vidal and Noam Chomsky “intellectual weaklings.”

The plan was simple—two people would go in and lock all the doors of Hepburn except the main entrance while another, wearing a mask, shut the auditorium door and set off the sprinklers. Each person involved carried a disposable cell phone receiving full visual backup from Joseph. Elizabeth turned her attention to a model of Hepburn constructed by Sophocles. She placed three G.I.Joe’s at various spots and said, “Time to rock.” 8:55 p.m. She called the local press contacts, forewarned not to go into Hepburn, and told them to continue waiting. Then she phoned Matt Moretti, who stood in front of the main door to Hepburn—one of the three entrances. Matt believed in Jesus Christ, the right to flip his collar and speak in the third person, but his heart longed for adventure and thus he worked for the Enclave. Joseph saw great potential in the preppie and let him choose the three associates needed to take care of the doors. Next to Matt’s post, the

SLU Democratic Party table tried to engage the Republicans whizzing by in meaningful debate over bringing fascist speakers to campus.

“That’s it, kid. Close the two doors,” Elizabeth said to Matt, moving figures on the model.

Matt pointed at two of his associates, generic-looking preppies, to lock door#2 and 3 from the inside. Then he sent the third associate, whose hat and scarf hid his face, onto the second floor to take care of the auditorium entrance.

Joseph and Elizabeth stared at the screens, focusing on the only door into the auditorium. Joseph considered the room a fire hazard and had written to President Sullivan regarding the problem but, luckily, he’d remained stubborn. Nobody waited near the entrance as everyone spilled in to grab the front row seats, perhaps desperate to hear the sound of the hero’s bat swing thudding into a liberal skull. Then on the monitor appeared the third (masked) associate, only his eyes visible, who quickly put a metal chain through the door handles and bolted two locks over it. “What the hell?” Elizabeth said to Matt on the phone. “We didn’t give instructions to lock the door yet.” Matt pleaded innocence. “Gotta stop him.”

“No tension,” Joseph said, lighting up another cigar, “there aren’t any cokeheads in the vicinity. And the security guards are locked inside as well.”

“But Bill Kaschi!” Elizabeth said. “He’s *not* in the auditorium. Now the masked guy is stealing cookies from the table. This is hella messed up. He needs to get the hell out of there.”

“Matt can explain,” Matt said. “Associate#3 is an addict.”

“I told you, Elizabeth. We needed the Vanguard,” Joseph said. “This job is for professional revolutionaries.”

“This *is* the vanguard,” Elizabeth said. “You let Matt in.” Joseph grabbed the phone from Elizabeth and shouted, “Who is this clown, Matt?”

“Not that Matt doesn’t trust you,” Matt said, “but we should really keep identities secret—that’s the way you said things work at the Enclave.”

“He’s stuffing more cookies in his pocket,” Elizabeth said looking at the monitor.

“No names—let’s call him Associate#3 still. Ethics is something. He’s from the halfway house. Recovering addict. Cocaine or heroine. Not sure. But he likes cookies these days—way of getting over the bigger addiction. People are always complaining about the lack of involvement with community. Matt thought it’d be a good idea to get them involved.”

“Is everyone an addict here?” Joseph said, “You fool, if the community was capable of leading a revolution, we wouldn’t need to be doing this.” He watched the addict finally get away from the cookie table. The addict then ran down the stairs; he opened the entrance door and dashed past Matt.

“He’s gone,” Matt said.

“Then you have to set off the sprinklers. Your project, your man, your fault.”

“Matt can’t. He wants to be a doctor. This is cool and all, but, dude, career comes first. Sorry, looks like mission is aborted.”

“I don’t think so,” said Joseph, who although not as meticulous in preparations as Ravi, still did his homework. “In Shanghai, I ate a wonderful dish made from hamsters. Slightly sautéed, tender meat. Extremely delicious.” Elizabeth shook her head.

“Academics come...”

“Do you know they teach torture at the Air Force academy?” Joseph said.

Matt laughed. “No, they don’t.”

“Okay, I lied,” Joseph said. “Still, have you ever been tortured Matt? Over something little perhaps—nothing as big as a revolution, I assume.”

Matt didn’t say anything.

Elizabeth whispered into Joseph’s ears, “Even I’m not scared, tough guy. Think with your head, not your balls.”

Joseph started again. “Matt, get your ass into the building and set off the sprinklers. Or I’ll eat your hamster. I enjoy eating hamsters.”

“Don’t they teach you anything in the air force?” Elizabeth sighed. She grabbed the phone from him and said to Matt while fiddling with her hippie bead necklace, “Listen chickenshit, you look like them, you sound like them—nobody is going to suspect you. If that’s not enough motivation for you, let me inform you of something—the administration is hunting for names behind TBSTL. If you don’t do this right now, I’ll have no problem turning you in. You do this, you walk out. We know everything about you. 23-42-3523? Is that your room combo? But, of course, the choice is yours. Who am I to make decisions for you?”

“Okay,” Matt said. His fingers trembled as he zipped up his jacket and reluctantly stepped into Hepburn after consulting Sophocles’ map. He stopped at the designated sprinkler in an isolated wing of the building and lit a cigarette. Then he stuck the burning end onto the red bulb of the detector.

Elizabeth imitated Joseph, smiling, “I’ll eat your hamster. Look at me—I’m a big bad military guy. Lame.”

Part E

Patrick Schofield, student government president, sat in the front row of the Hepburn auditorium, preparing to introduce Bill Kaschi. He kneaded his newfound biceps. He’d spent three hours in the gym every day for eleven months. Mantra # 7 on his list of “20 Ways to Lead a Successful Life” stated, “looking good is essential—nobody likes a fat loser.” He made the list after reading eight leadership books, a substantial commitment given his comprehension speed, recommended to him by Dean Petty. Since his birth on April Fool’s day, twenty-two years ago, all events in his life revolved around an eventual run for St. Lantfrid University student government presidency. His father, before him, and his grandfather, before them, had held student government presidency. Though Patrick himself never came close to achieving academic or athletic brilliance, everyone on campus knew that one day he’d be rich after he inherited the family empire. He brought a cupboard full of clothing with his initials, PSS, embroidered on each shirt, pant, and underwear. The shirt he picked for the Kaschi celebration came from Switzerland, where Patrick’s mother spent her childhood, with PSS embroidered on four different places. He ran his fingers over each one. As a larry’s larry he did not even need to flip his collar to assert his larryness.

As he rehearsed the speech one last time (trying desperately to remember the habits of successful orators), a sinking feeling that he’d never be PSS Sr. (CEO of a Fortune 50 company) descended upon PSS Jr. He touched the cross around his neck, but

instead of Godly calmness, he found PSS inscribed on the back. He couldn't help but be a terrible reader despite helpful words like "pause" and "emphasize"; he knew he'd merely pour out un-measured cups of words.

Distressed, he made his way to the podium to get a feel for the audience. Always desperate to add something meaningful to his resume, he considered this as an opportunity to shine. His Presidency, he'd hoped, would usher the university into a new age of permanent moral majority. Instead, with coke usage rampant among Republicans, he'd found it hard to keep even his own house in order. Permanent skirmishes with Ravi had taken a toll on the reputation. Patrick felt harassed. Earlier that week, while addressing questions in the "Ending Poverty" forum, a debate series he started to promote dialogue, some booed him because he claimed class played no role in determining a person's future. He snapped and said, "Why can't I be a victim too? Does someone have a monopoly on victimization?" For these reasons, he was glad to have back up in the form of Bill Kaschi.

Patrick stood at the podium, lost in his lines when he heard someone shout, "There's god damn water coming down." The next moment, a cold tickle ran through his body as water trickled onto his shirt from the ceiling. He tried climbing the stairwell down from the elevated stage in order to take control and establish himself as a leader during the crisis. Patrick shouted orders but couldn't overpower the buzz of five hundred people stuck in an auditorium with a maximum capacity of 350. The two security guards for Bill Kaschi tried opening the steal doors and found them locked. Streams of gushing black water struck Patrick, who stood atop the podium to garner attention. When it stopped, he looked up in frustration, and a flying sprinkler head attacked his nose. Nearly

all the sprinkler heads gave way to the force of water and the old building resembled a public bathtub. Someone yelled, “Oh my god, the great flood of Hepburn!” People ran in circles with nowhere to go. The temperature outside was 21° F.

Patrick hobbled around in pain, clutching his nose. He saw his girlfriend, a stunningly attractive girl, Christine Von Trapp, a frequent crier, howling over the loss of her SLU GOP scrapbook she carried with her at all times. He’d wondered why she traveled with it and gathered that in every moment of her life, she needed to justify her existence to others. When the pain subsided slightly and he grew slightly accustomed to the freezing cold, he styled his hair and straightened his special Swiss shirt before embarking on a silent conversation with God. Droplets of water still trickled down, but it’d gotten cleaner and no longer smelt like sewage. He wondered whether God punished him for what he’d considered a small offense. Twenty-eight votes moved from Ravi’s column to his. Patrick’s father and the president both believed it’d be better for the university if the bright handsome Patrick represented it. And he’d almost won, which meant that mostly the students liked him.

“We have to leave now,” shouted someone else. Some illogically attempted to dry their wallet, phones, and purses. People shoved, shivered, slipped, and fell while attempting to get to the door, not trusting those ahead of them to have the technical know-how required to open a locked steel door.

He’d thought life would improve after the ‘victory’. But some feelings refused to give way. Money couldn’t buy him athletic prowess, and his GPA refused to swim beyond a 3.0. He wiped the dirt off his face. He could taste something shitty on his lips; he couldn’t be certain, but he assumed Ravi masterminded the incident. In Patrick’s guilt

and in his happiness, Ravi annoyed him, refusing to disappear like those pieces of stubborn chips stuck between couch cushions. Go away far, he murmured.

Patrick wished he'd never become President. TBSTL called him "plainer than vanilla ice cream." Why, he wanted to ask; he considered himself a thoroughly engaging man. Now, he feared sometimes that he was as plain as they described him to be. And some even called him a racist, in spite of his black friends. Not one. Two! He announced as much in a dramatic speech at the "Race Forum," after his girlfriend, Christine, almost started crying (but it is a frequent thing, no feelings hurt). "In any case," he'd said, "St. Lantfrid does have diversity; we come from states as different as Connecticut and Massachusetts." The tip of her nose always turned red at the slightest hint of oncoming tears, so he could sense them coming just by looking at her; still, he couldn't stop them. His announcement came after she clarified that all she meant was if three Hispanics were walking down the street and a White female saw them, she would be scared. Hispanics and blacks frightened her; she couldn't help it. No problem with Asians. She said she'd kissed one but wouldn't say whom.

Patrick wiped the blood from his nose and took solace in knowing that a plum job awaited him. His father's friend. That's the way it went. None of *this* mattered and the joyous thought caused him to flex his newfound muscles.

Part F

Ravi and President Sullivan readied for the tiebreaker with the set tied at 6-6. President Sullivan drank water and used a towel to cool down. He went to use the restroom, and Ravi took the opportunity to reach into President Sullivan's wallet sitting

in the tennis bag and helped himself to one of the four access cards. Wearing all white, including his wristbands and cap, Ravi looked up at the clock. 9:05 p.m. He checked his cell phone for text messages. Elizabeth said, “More or less according to plan. Kaschi wasn’t in room but in the bathroom (even better). Good media shots.”

Ravi stepped back on the court and wondered if he’d just let President Sullivan win points or if he’d actually played well. After some scintillating inside-out forehand returns and two aces, Ravi led 5-1 in the tiebreakers. Then President Sullivan discovered a chink on Ravi’s backhand. Three times in a row, President Sullivan moved Ravi to the deuce side of the court before hitting winners down the line on the ad side. Sullivan played like a well-oiled pinball arcade machine. Powerful and effortless shots every time.

The President knew the courts. He’d played on them for thirty years and had thoroughly enjoyed playing Ravi. Nothing like a tennis court to determine a man’s potential. He thought Ravi wore British clothes but not sensibilities. Trailing 4-5, President Sullivan once again pushed Ravi on his forehand side and prepared to hit another winner on the ad side. The President struck the ball hard and then clenched his fist.

As Ravi chased down the ball, he feared he’d miss the shot nine times out of ten, but somehow with a one-handed backhand, he hit a most astounding cross-court winner of his own. Ravi admired the shot. His first year, the coach had tried to make him do backhand drills. The same shot repeatedly. But Ravi hated routines. He lost interest.

Sullivan couldn’t begin to understand why a boy with so much talent didn’t try to achieve more. All that leftist brainwashing wasted a tennis career, he thought. He’d seen

Ravi play as a freshman when he knocked out three of the top twenty NCAA players before losing in the finals to the #17th ranked player with a quarter of his ability. Sullivan himself lost almost every match his first year but he persisted. He knew his limitations and become a NCAA star from repetitions.

At 4-6, match point for Ravi, President Sullivan prepared to face Ravi's serve, which he hadn't been able to work out. President Sullivan's own serves involved intricate placing and precision; he tried his best to apply these rules to Ravi's serves. But Ravi changed speed and spot in an inconsistent manner. President Sullivan took the first step toward the far side on the deuce court.

Ravi prepared for his serve by bouncing the ball twice in front of him. He threw in an extra bounce for intensity. He didn't see the President move and had already decided to go for a flat serve. It went down the middle and caught President Sullivan on the wrong side. Ace. Game, set, and match: Ravi.

"You could've been pretty good," President Sullivan said, shaking Ravi's hand. "Too bad you quit."

What difference would it have made, anyway, Ravi wondered. This game or any other, the mastery of which was solely for entertainment. Then he began to feel sorry for his opponent's life. For his \$200,000 job. For his endless rallies. For his enslavement to the rectangular box. Could Sullivan be saved? So dull and repetitious. Like his god damn tennis.

President Sullivan, said, with a wink, "Welcome to the fold. It is sad we didn't get a chance to play earlier. Perhaps I can help you make some job connections. Send me your resume."

Ravi knew nothing came free. It involved giving something up—friends, loyalty, dignity, or the names of the TBSTL writers. But he'd learned to play the game of diplomacy and clay face. "Maybe, I will," Ravi said. He smirked and wanted to thank President Sullivan for providing him with the perfect alibi. Ravi never forgave; emotions and loyalty, neither of which was fickle like New York's weather, drove him. When President Sullivan left, Ravi walked up to the baseline and practiced his serves. He wondered what existence would've turned up for him had he allowed his life's greatest worry to revolve around perfecting the ball's landing spot within the service box. But he just couldn't get his hard flat serves to fall within the lines consistently.

Part G

"Mmm. Nice boots," Ravi said, kissing Ashley on the neck, his fingers meandering across her body. Mozart's oboe concerto played in the background.

"Maybe you can see me in *only* my boots," Ashley said. She looked stunning in her little black dress with red earrings and boots.

"I like what I'm hearing," Ravi said, sliding his fingers up the hem of her skirt.

She pulled back and said, "*If you call the Hill News editor, Holly, and tell her you want a story next week...And the couple that really matters...Ashley and Ravi.*" Ravi, without answering, tried to kiss her. She put her fingers on his lips and said, "No way, you aren't getting anything just yet, darling. Make the call—tell her she can have the \$2000 increase on the *Hill News* budget to buy a printer or a dildo. Whatever."

"I'll negotiate the details later," Ravi said, "but shouldn't you get naked now?"

“Oh, no. You dated the Irish whore. Call her. I’ll make it worth your while.”

Ashley pouted her lips. “Please, sweetheart.”

“Is this a good time to be talking to Holly? We just defeated the latest fascist rage—calls for celebration!” But Ashley wouldn’t hear it.

Ravi didn’t like being corrupt or talking to Holly. But, for Ashley, he decided he needed to. After some negotiations, he struck the deal at \$3000 in exchange for a front-page story toward the bottom of the page, including a photo. The top, of course, would feature Bill Kaschi banging on the Hepburn door, bleeding, drenched in dirty water, his face covered in dirt.

After Ashley came good on her promise, Ravi and her went into the living room where a virtual who’s who of the Vanguard had gathered for the Black Tie party, though only Ravi and Ashley looked the part. Elizabeth came downstairs with a bottle of Louis Roederer, a gift from her bourgeois father. Some brought banjo and drums, but Ashley declared it a night of piano and violin.

President Sullivan’s office sent a campus-wide email calling the incident an act of terrorism and promising to expel anyone responsible. Further, on Kaschi’s advice, Sullivan sought assistance from the Dept. of Homeland Security. The e-mail also said, *St. Lantfrid University will make a team of Student Life professionals available to provided counseling services to students as they recover from the traumatic experience. T-shirts saying, ‘together we survived the great flood of Hepburn’ will be available shortly for \$20.*

In response, Ravi wrote to the campus:

Dear (customized name field),

Chances are that each one of you, on your resume, has a trove of impressive sounding clubs whose primary accomplishment every week is coming up with a meeting time for the next. I also presume that you've heard of what happened at Hepburn tonight. So, today, I ask you to give meaning to your life.

I offer neither a solution nor a profound analysis of America's problems. However, over the next few weeks, I do hope to outline the precise circumstances under which the troubles can be used to our own advantage. I've often wondered how it is that an entire generation is growing up disregarding the events of the world around it. While the Right feeds on this ignorance, we chide the ignorant and therein lies our greatest fault. For this reason, the poor worry more about illegal immigrants stealing minimum-wage jobs than the top 10% of the country's elite who now own close to 80% of the nation. Who is to blame? Gays? Democrats?

Traditionally, American universities served as the pot for leftist thinking, but today, save for a very small and elite group of students (like those in the Enclave), the story of class struggle is no longer part of the college narrative. But we can change all that. I ask for neither your money nor your time, only for your moral support. Join us today; we do not intend to leave even any mis-guided liberals behind (yes, that's those of you who will stand up tomorrow and condemn us while talking about the delight you take in working together) because we're willing to forgive your gullibility.

To our SLU Republican friends, we say this: You do not fathom the full scope of this movement. You think we're children stomping on your toys, but we're a train that intends to run through the toyshop. We know there are some decent Republicans out there, and we're willing to save them as well.

Regards,
President, the Enclave

How it all started, Ravi didn't want to remember anymore. But the origins did not matter at all. No, a futuristic vision did. For the final act of the night, they all headed to the Student Center, a bad Roman-esque impersonation in the middle of the campus, where the university flag flew high. Using the President's access card, they made their way to the roof. There, they replaced the university flag with a Che Guevara one—a map of the St. Lantfrid County printed in the background.

A slight wind in the air allowed the flag to flutter freely. In the dark night, under the fluorescent light designed to keep the St. Lantfrid University flag visible at all times, Ravi saw the sparkling faces of his comrades burning in the glow of a better future. After

a brief moment of silence to celebrate the awe of the occasion, Ravi said, “We’ve got only six weeks until May Day to turn this university—and this county—into a bastion of renewed hope. The world expects us to lead the way from darkness to light, ignorance to bliss, death to immortality. If we lose here, hope will die.” He saluted the flag—his place in history *almost* established. He continued, “So comrades, for everything St. Lantfrid County, like so many others across the world, has lost to capitalism—bravery, honor, and, above all, commonsense, we rebel tonight. Tomorrow, we shall build a Dairy Farm as a symbol of the Great Northern Revival. To hope, comrades, of changing the world before the world changes us.” After this they once again became everyday students pretending to live normal lives so they’d come across as a typical clique whose biggest problem revolved around how many beers to buy for the weekend.

Ashley and Ravi came back to his townhouse. They lay down on the hammock in the front porch, facing the night sky, though clouds covered most of the stars. The temperature read 11° Fahrenheit, yet merely holding Ashley gave Ravi warmth.

“Can we watch ice-hockey tomorrow night at Syracuse?” Ashley asked.

“What for?” Ravi said. He preferred quiet evenings filled with theater, books, and music.

“Entertainment.”

“Sport is an incorrigible tool with no exit. Do you want to become like the rest of the ignorant, content, and dim-witted world?”

“Seriously!”

“You’ll be the end of me, Lady Macbeth,” he said, putting his arms around her tightly. “We’ll go but only because it’ll be two years in 10 minutes.”

“Will there be more?”

“A lot more.”

“What if Holly likes you again?” she asked, running her fingers on his lips. “She has that Irish accent.”

“She likes India and Indianness. You like me.” Ravi reached for lilies from the vase nearby, picked up two, and put them on Ashley’s dress.

“A lot of people feel weird that I don’t drink. Remember when we met? Nobody had ever brought me fake alcohol so I wouldn’t feel out of place. That’s romantic. You’ve got something.”

“I should start on homework,” Ravi said.

“You haven’t slept in two nights. Sleep with me.”

He said “Okay.” It didn’t matter whether he got a 100 or 90 on the next Economics exam; he couldn’t change his destiny. He got off from the hammock, then knelt besides Ashley and held her hands. He found her touch invigorating and understood why some preferred daily routine and family to a warpath. It’d be easy for him to get a decent job, marry Ashley, and then spend the next forty years working; he’d be so busy merely existing that there’d be no time to think for the collective human bond. But without the final vision, a day when every county in America rose in rebellion, he could not envision living his life. And he knew Ashley would understand in spite of her love for everything new and shiny on the advertisements. Through the clouds, he saw the flag atop the Student Center shining brightly under the fluorescent lights. There were many reasons to do nothing, but the burning star, freedom, was the reason to do

everything because there were no hazy shades when it came to freedom—even if the revolution started accidentally.

CHAPTER II: MARCH 27

Part A

Around 7 a.m., as the sun prepared to rise, snow trickled onto the ground in a straight line and colored St. Lantfrid County as white as its residents. No cars strolled on US-11, which also doubled as Main St for each small town it crossed; only an Amish buggy fought the chilly day. Jesus Christopher stood on a narrow graveled path, which separated the eastern outskirts of the St. Lantfrid University golf course from an abandoned dairy farm. All that remained of the 50-acre farm was a large building with sloping roofs, a pillar that'd once been part of a fence, and a silo, the tall cylindrical structure enunciated by a pointed-top. The roofs groaned under thick layers of ice and snow. A row of deciduous maples, evergreen red pines, and Norway spruce hid the farm—this suited St. Lantfrid University, as it did not wish to expose its visitors to eyesores.

On the lone pillar, Jesus spray-painted the words *Dum spiro, spero* (While I breathe, I hope), then placed a rusted bucket with a red cross on the side, atop the short pillar. “Comrade Bucket, you’ll be the symbol of the Great Northern Revival,” he said. “For everything we’ve lost.” He admired the words, then inhaled the smell of fresh paint. A gust of wind knocked snow from a nearby pine tree, and Jesus found some of it stuck

on his shoulder-length hair. He preferred milder temperatures, but his eyebrows and stomach cringed simultaneously in disgust when he thought of summer and imagined the pleasant aroma of upstate New York diluted by the musty stench of old money.

Jesus marched toward a particularly beefy Maple tree, stripped naked by the winter. His rubber boots galloped in and out of the snow. He wielded a long wooden-handled ax with a cast iron head; electric tape kept the splintering wood together. He spray-painted a line around the bark to delineate the strike zone. He lifted his right hand and touched his forehead but confusion reigned over the next step in the formation of the cross. Right to left or left to right? “Forget it,” he muttered. He stared up at the heavens and shouted, “Dear God, dear father, there’s nothing greater than to serve the meek. I strike this first blow for humanity.” He flexed his biceps and hit the green and white striped Maple snakebark. He swung his axe repeatedly, but each blow landed farther from the lines and the maple refused to budge.

He took out a letter written by Ravi and read a paragraph for inspiration. *This farm is the last bastion of renewed hope. The only farm not to have sold its soul. If we lose here, hope will die. Everything depends on you, Jesus Christopher. If in doubt, remember to ask, ‘What Would Marx Do?’* It all made sense to Jesus. Growing up, emptiness boiled within him. Ravi’s writings jangled Jesus’ mind and made a dent on the hegemony that’d created cobwebs on his sensibilities. Another swing for the revolution.

Jesus re-positioned himself, stomping boots into the snow to get a better grip. He noticed Ravi walking toward the farm. Sweat dripped like tears from his armpits, but he produced euphoric growls to motivate himself. First impressions mattered.

Ravi, holding three fat books in a plastic bag, barely managed to keep his teeth from chattering. He wore a blue down-feather jacket and a winter hat with CCCP embroidered on it. He rubbed his reddened eyes in a desperate bid to be more awake, then sipped Odwalla Carrot Juice to replenish the mind. Jesus mercilessly thwacked at a tree but Ravi couldn't be sure why. The instructions only involved rebuilding the place. Although nobody—except James, who spent most of his time in jails after protesting at various rallies—in the Enclave particularly cared about engaging the locals, it seemed somewhat important to get them to participate in the uprising considering Enclave's theoretical belief in grassroots movements. The nature of the revolution, as Ravi understood the Manifesto, called for professional revolutionaries leading the way. So, for his part, he'd thought of appealing to the disgruntled dairy farmers of the region by setting up a dairy farm, which would serve as a symbol of revival.

Ravi put the three books on top of the rusted bucket and stared at the spray painted words, *Dum spiro, spero*.

Jesus took a slight bow. “Your reputation precedes you. Meet Comrade Bucket. In your honor, I've painted a Latin proverb on the pillar. It is a pleasure to meet a scholar.”

Ravi smiled politely, not sure if he'd missed a bucket joke. At times he felt out of depth with American humor, especially when the jokes belonged to a series, such as ‘yo mama’ or Chuck Norris. “The state motto of South Carolina? Far from revolutionary, I suspect, if a backward southern state embraces it.”

“I ponder about the ransacking of words. Take Jesus, for case in point,” Jesus said, kissing the cross around his neck. He said to the bucket, “How did it happen,

Comrade Bucket, that Jesus became a gay-hating Uncle Scrooge figure?” Then he turned to Ravi and said, “Where is your friend James?” James had set up the meeting.

“In jail,” Ravi said. He observed the tall and slender figure, attempting to gauge the persona of the man who’d changed his name from Jeff to Jesus. Ravi never felt keen on Jesus doing the job, naturally suspicious of anyone named after a God (and Christian Socialists in general), but James, an Enclave stalwart, swore that despite Jesus’ eccentricities, his career as a hippie and local roots qualified him to get a farm built. Ravi pointed at the dairy farm building and said, “Do you think this place can be fixed?”

“Comrade Bucket and I will take care of the farm.” He turned toward the bucket and said, “Won’t we?” Then he said to Ravi, “I compliment you on your excellent decision of buying this farm. How much did you pay?”

Ravi decided Jesus was mad; these were no bucket jokes. “It belonged to an old lady who moved to New York City after her husband’s death—about ten years ago. No kids. She wanted to come back, I suppose. But she’s dead. Sullivan probably doesn’t know, otherwise he’d try to takeover the land.” Ravi paid \$39.99 to get all the information on her. Then \$24.99 to print out forged change of land ownership papers, just in case someone asked. It now belonged to a fictional Mr. Harold Whitaker. Not that it’d matter in the end when all ownership would be communal.

“You’re a genius,” Jesus said.

Ravi smiled. He liked people who admired him. “What do you know about dairy farming?”

“Nothing yet,” Jesus said. They started walking toward the main building.

“Nada?” Ravi said, trying to push the door open. My God, he thought, the man is not only a lunatic, he’d also likely be incompetent. If only Ravi could find more time, he’d raise the cows himself. He’d seen them in India.

“I grew up on a farm. All animals are children of God, and raising a cow cannot be different than raising a horse.” Jesus attempted to break the door with the axe, but failed after numerous blows.

“We only have until May Day.” Ravi pointed at the Latin words and said, “Remove this graffiti. Enclave has to be classy.” Ravi grabbed the axe from a struggling Jesus and broke open the door with effortless jabs. Then he looked at the axe and said, “Why were you cutting trees? It is probably illegal to chop wood in someone else’s property.”

“If we remove them, everyone can see the farm,” Jesus said.

“Please let the professional revolutionaries do the thinking,” Ravi said. They stepped inside. Ravi turned on his flashlight. The wooden planks, which held the roof together, remained intact. But the hardwood floor and walls had metamorphosed into a colossal mold retreat. Ravi sniffed the smell of milk, which rejuvenated his spirits. “Pack this place with cows.”

“Will be done,” Jesus said, examining the mold. “But what about the milk?”

“We don’t want that kind of cow. Buy them in bulk from slaughterhouses.” Ravi thought, his mother, a devout Hindu, might be happy to know he’s saving cows. “What’s it called...yes, urethra. No. The udder—make sure it isn’t full of anything. I’ve brought some books on the topic. They’re on your bucket. One has a DVD with bonus footage—interesting stuff.”

Ravi turned around to get out of the building. The flashlight caught a redheaded girl wearing a cowboy hat peering in through the entrance. “Holly? What the hell are you doing here?”

“Howya,” she said. “Just getting me some fresh air. Lovely day outside.”

“Are you stalking me?” Ravi said.

Jesus touched the walls and smiled. “I’ve been researching Jesus’ life. The more I read, the more I realize, I must do what he did. Some think he worked as a carpenter. Not true. He chopped trees as a day laborer. I think I’m a natural chopper.”

“Jesus, I have no time for this,” Ravi said. “James said you consider yourself to be the messiah, but I’d rather we didn’t attract unnecessary controversy.”

“I’m not saying I am,” Jesus said. “It is possible, isn’t it? I wonder if messiahs know. Krishna didn’t, did he? He came to the world as a child. But do you not see the similarities? Blonde hair, blue eyes, same height, keenness in chopping. And the last name—Christopher!”

“I’ll go along, then, fellas,” Holly said. “You two take care.”

“Jesus, we’ll talk later,” Ravi said, stepping outside the building. “No, Holly, you aren’t going anywhere.”

“That’s fine by me, we can slog out here. You should leave the Mary-Hick bird and come back to me.” She touched his cheeks and winked. “Did she enjoy the article about the couples? Long-term prospect—Senator Kashyap from the great state of New York. For feck’s sake, you have to find someone taller, fitter, and more juicy. Someone, oh, darn, whom does it sound like. Me?”

“What do you want?” Only from a distance did she look like the kind of romantic girl who enjoyed counting stars at night for no good reason. He noticed Jesus trying to perform coin tricks. Jesus needed better miracles before he could call himself the messiah.

“I’d like me to be your mot,” she said. “But I also want to be writing for TBSTL. I’m a funny writer—got lots of gas.”

Jesus said, making a coin disappear, “I call it the Moses trick. He performed it first.”

“Holly, why are you asking me?” Ravi said. “Write TBSTL an e-mail.”

“I’m not entirely gobshite. I want to see how everything works—the Enclave, TakeBackStLantfrid, the boyos behind it. I brought a sample—so you don’t mistake me for a blackguard. I wrote it over cha earlier; if it isn’t any good, I can do better.” She handed it to Ravi. He started reading, she leaned over; he smelt her cigarette breath—surprisingly sexy.

Dear Administration,

How can you shamelessly fund students to party over the summer break when you claim there isn’t enough fund to support programs like Upward Bound, which help poor students? These are just five of the many instances where students who certainly don’t need financial assistance were given \$4500 each for fluff projects to pad their resumes. Please do not sell our degrees.

Craig Gooch, Newport, CT, GPA 2.3, “United Kingdom’s Reluctance over the Adoption of the Euro”

What exactly will Craig learn about the Euro from being in London that he couldn’t by reading articles sitting on his comfortable front porch at Newport? Has he got personal interviews scheduled with Mr. Blair? Or will he get inside information from pub rats?

Kristin Gotham, South Shore, MA, GPA 2.4, “Water Quality Comparison of Five French Lakes and Five Italian Lakes”

Couldn't Kristin, perhaps, compare some local New York lakes, and the money saved can be passed onto someone with a higher GPA struggling to afford SLU?

Sierra Darley, Bennington, VT, GPA 1.7, "Seeking Sweden: The Legacy of Linnaeus"

Linnaeus? Didn't he die—like—a long time ago? Even his house burnt down. Nevertheless, good luck competing with those Swedish vixens. And here's something that'll help you the night before the report is due:

<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/linnaeus.html>

Katie Boland, Hingham, MA, GPA 2.0 "French Influence in the Caribbean"

And should we forget the fine strapping lad Ms. Boland is dating will be partying at the Caribbean Islands too? Perhaps Ms. Boland's own description on facebook demonstrates her serious academic outlook: "its party time, Caribbean style, baby."

Dennis Richmond, Greenwich, CT, GPA 2.3, "The Capitals of Europe"

Yes, Dennis, we'd love to tour Europe as well.

Ravi let out a coy smile after reading. He said, "This is fine, but why'd I trust you?"

She didn't get a chance to answer. James, 6'2" thickly built with shaved head, wearing a skirt on top of slacks, arrived with Joseph. James belonged to the organic food + yoga wing of the liberal political spectrum and had a hard time distinguishing lentils from Lenin. He attracted all the cheesy people at SLU, which boasted almost a whole army of them.

"I better be on me way," Holly said. "We can all have cha sometime." She hugged Ravi, kissed him on the cheek, and whispered in his ears, "Call me later."

"No, I hate 'cha,' actually," Joseph said. He glared at Holly and then raised his hands in an inquisitive manner after she walked away. He puffed on the cigar and said, "Why are you kissing her? Ashley know about this?"

Ravi shook his head and said, "Don't worry; I think the matter is settled."

“May I say something?” Jesus said. “Imagine what we could do if Jesus became a Communist! Marx failed to correctly fathom the power of religion.”

One trick pony, Ravi thought. He did hope, for his own sake, that God really was dead. Or he’d have some explaining to in the purgatory. He asked James, “What’s with the skirt?” He also sported a bead necklace and matching earrings.

“I think he’s out of the closet,” Joseph said. “We are in the middle of a god damn revolution here. How can a sane human even think about anything sexual?”

“Is this really the right time to come out of the closet?” Ravi said. He adjusted his CCCP hat and wondered if Lenin’s Vanguard performed better. “Don’t get me wrong, James, I love gays as much as the next guy. I’m merely questioning the timing of your announcement.”

“Brother Ravi,” James said, “you can call me Seveka Das now. I have converted to Hinduism too.”

“I will do no such thing,” Ravi said, “James.” When Ravi first met James, Ravi wondered why he came up with idiotic visions and over-the-top mysticism. Elizabeth had tried to explain, ‘Probably because he’s part Native American, its part of their culture’; she considered that a suitable explanation. Though as months wore on, the percentage of his Native American-ness kept increasing exponentially from the original 5%.

“I must go and address a youth conference,” Jesus said. “Should I leave Comrade Bucket in your custody?”

“No, you may take Mr. Bucket,” Ravi said. Jesus left with the rusted bucket sitting atop his shoulder and the packet of books under his arm. “My *only* concern with

him is that if he really is Jesus, he's referring to himself in the 3rd person, which makes him a narcissist. Tell him God is dead so he cannot possibly be Jesus."

James said, "We no longer know how to love without religion. Say the words Hare Krishna, feel the love and energy!"

"Then we shall learn to truly love!" Ravi said. "True revolutionaries are guided by feelings of love." Ravi grabbed the can of spray paint, half-buried in snow, and started writing on the pillar. "Do you know who said it? Che Guevara. And he knew people would laugh at him so he pre-empted it with, 'at the risk of sounding ridiculous!'" The spray paint ran out after the word *feelings*.

"Relax," James said to Ravi, "let me see your palms."

"You looked at it last week," Ravi said. He hesitantly put his right hand forward. James stared at the lines with purposeful eyes, brushing aside the falling snow.

"Oh, yes," James said. "The fate line has now moved toward the mount of Jupiter with extreme vengeance. You'll be king!"

"What an asshole," Joseph said. He'd spotted the Master Wrecker Company, the official St. Lantfrid University affiliate, preparing to tow his '78 Ford.

Joseph removed his sunglasses and ran toward the parking lot, but the snow slowed him down. James followed closely; he struggled with the heels on his boots and the flapping skirt. By the time Ravi reached the scene, the tow-truck appeared ready to takeoff, puffing smoke. Joseph, trying to open the tow-truck door, shouted, "Who tows shit in this weather?"

The driver, wearing a torn lumberjack jacket, finally stepped outside. He appeared severely malnourished. His missing front teeth further exacerbated the effect. “I ain’t wan’ no trouble boyz, just doing mah job.”

Joseph said, “Yeah, yeah. We’re working to help you people too. In fact, that clown over there returned from Miami where he protested against NAFTA. You do realize that’s to help you?”

The driver shrugged his shoulders. “Gotha feed mah familih.”

“Your world will be a happier place if you’d give up the anger,” James said. The driver claimed he was not angry, but James wouldn’t hear of it. He proceeded to make the driver fold his palms, stare at the sky, and channel in the positive energy. The driver refused to release Joseph’s truck.

Ravi pulled the driver aside, offered him a twenty, and complimented him on the jacket. The driver pleaded his helplessness as he’d already called the office, but for ten dollars, he let Joseph and James take out their belongings. Once the driver departed, Joseph said, “The time has come.” He grabbed his 9mm Berreta revolver from the recently recovered bag.

“Brother,” James said, “you’re going to get me arrested again.”

Ravi tried dialing the number of the tow company but nobody answered. “We’ll get your Ford back.”

“I’m not about to pay a god damn dime,” Joseph said, always eager to prove that he didn’t quit the Air Force because of an inability to handle the pressure. “We’ll shoot the garage lock and liberate the truck. I’ve full faith in you, Ravi, to lead this charge.”

“Are we doing organic farming?” James said while browsing through a book on the subject he bought in Miami, oblivious to Joseph’s existential crisis.

“We should feed the cows what they desire—we want nice fat cows,” Ravi said.

Joseph aimed at a tree nearby. He said, “I assume I’ll be alone in liberating the cars?”

“Some high-school girl will be working at the counter.”

“And her company stole my Ford, which in transporting James became a vehicle against NAFTA. We’re under attack from everywhere—even the petty bourgeois.” A spider crawled toward Joseph’s fingers as he slashed a cobweb on Ravi’s car in half with the gun. “They’re faceless, they’re everywhere. I can smell a Larry even here. The girl at the counter. The truck driver. The shabby garage two shit establishment.” Joseph let out a scream when he noticed his fingers swelling from spider spit. “Even the god damn spider,” he shouted. He prepared to shoot when Ravi yelled to stop.

“Is that David?” Ravi said, pointing at a fat man observing them with binoculars sitting in a car at a distance. Ravi dialed David’s number on the cell phone.

Ravi said, “Are you enjoying the good weather?”

“Yeah, dude,” David said. “What’s going on?”

“I can see you, genius,” Ravi said, afraid fools would jeopardize his place in history.

“Dude,” David said. “Since you don’t tell me anything and now Sullivan has said he’d give amnesty to the whistleblower, I’m just making sure you dudes don’t burn me.”

“But you have nothing to do with any of this,” Ravi said. He worried David had reached a stage of paranoia where, ‘Et tu, Brute?’ would become the only form of communication.

Part B

Dr. Jazmin Bass, Associate Professor of English (specializing in twentieth-century Southern Literature) and soon-to-be Associate Dean of Student Affairs, sipped the last drop of black coffee, only a shade darker than her skin, from a mug with a map of New Orleans on it. The cold coffee and the damp smell of her living room caused much unhappiness. Her lumpy couch, a tint of used-to-be-violently-purple, added to her dismay. She placed her mug on the wooden table carved with images of tombstones from a famous cemetery in Louisiana; the passage of time had dulled the engraved lines. She picked-up her laptop; she scratched her hair trying to end the latest fan fiction story—online spin-offs using characters from existing books and comics—on the *X-Men* series.

After some thought, she typed:

Judicious Jazmin returned to the Xavier institute after a typical day in office where she eliminated the fearsome and ferocious Ferronickel Fardaman. She saw Cyclops, who was the only one that understood her. And she, the only one who could survive the concussive force of the radiation from his eyes, kissed him with tender lips. His firm strong arms wrapped around her petite frame. He promised never to leave her again.

She hadn’t published anything in over fifteen years save for online fan fiction.

The lack of publication almost cost her the professorship until President Sullivan made an offer which she readily accepted. Associate Dean...unexpected, but well deserved, she thought. Some faculty called her a sell-out, but she thought of the promotion as a

thumping approval of her online writing she'd diligently shared on the faculty listserv for many years. As she leaned back on the couch, her gaze fell on the once bright and colorful photos of the French Quarter, black Civil Right leaders, and X-Men that hung on one of her walls; they'd now blended in with the yellowing wallpaper and the dull unpolished wall-to-wall bookshelves, filled mostly with hardbacks by American writers. The traces of New Orleans in her room that'd once inspired her, did very little now to alleviate the staleness of life. New challenges, besides the omni-present genius of Wolverine and Jean Grey, became rarer in her professional life.

She touched the framed black-and-white photo of Martin Luther King speaking at the French Quarter. He looked serene and calm, yet the raised left hand showed he meant business. 'The good days,' she reflected. 'When leaders knew how to bring about change.' She could almost fill-in the words for the speech. She'd thought about it often and now assumed she'd been there. The idea stemmed from her own mistaken belief that she was a revolutionary in her younger days. Certainly, at various points during the late 1960s, in her late teens, she'd intended to march for Civil Rights and the opportunities came aplenty in Louisiana, but she just never did. Still, her X-Men comic persona continued to deliver justice to the world.

At 8:45 a.m., she moved in front of a mirror and combed her harsh longish hair before putting on some anti-wrinkle facial cream, desperate to remove the vertical lines, which began below her lips and stretched down to her chin. This resulted in a permanent inverted smiley on her face, which gave her overall persona a feeling of pervasive moroseness. Unsatisfied with the results, she scrubbed *Apricot Face Cleansing for the Exotic Skin* on her face. Nothing helped. She sighed and put on baby powder. Her

almost-Mona-Lisa eyebrows seemed out of sync and not much could be done about the snaggletooth, but she felt reasonably ready.

President Sullivan arrived promptly at 9 a.m. at Dr. Bass' house, followed by a local news reporter from the FOX News affiliate, an older man, his best days clearly behind him, and a tall aristocratic-looking man with Greek-God-like features and extremely well groomed hair. The tall man spoke in a heavy Northern London accent, "Good morning, madam. I must admit, you're a tad bit younger than your photo revealed." President Sullivan introduced him as his brother-in-law, Andy Pickling, an ex-MI-5 agent appointed as security consultant for the university. Dr. Bass tried her best to swap the inverted smiley face for a smile; she gawked longingly at Andy, who wore white cricketing pants, a collared white cricketing shirt, and a white cricketing sweater.

The reporter setup his camera while Dr. Bass placed herself strategically next to the Martin Luther King poster on the wall. The barrage of questions began. President Sullivan's office had scripted the entire interview, and Dr. Bass parroted the rehearsed lines: *I grew up in a small town in Louisiana (camera pans across room) and the Ku Klux Klan terrorized my family (clip from Birth of a Nation). They wore hoods. My father always told me people who lack conviction hide behind masks (photo of protestors marching). He taught my whole family to use guns, and when the Klan attacked our house, we all fought. I'm a fighter (raises hand) and I will fight injustice everywhere. Today the cowards behind the site (screenshot of TBSTL) are hiding behind anonymous usernames (screenshot of list of poster names) to terrorize us all. I challenge them to come out and debate me (clip of Dr. Jazmin Bass receiving an award for best female X-Men fan fiction writer). They are nothing more than the Klan. They are cowards. The*

good lord above will punish them (photo of Jesus). Join me as I fight injustice. The good lord helped us thirty years ago, and he will help us again (video-clip of black women attacked by the police during a Montgomery Civil Rights rally in 1967).

President Sullivan and Andy Pickling proposed to have coffee after the reporter departed, and Dr. Bass obliged. They sat down on the lumpy couch. The brooding sound of the old radiator reverberated through the living room while the President showed them a list of fifty students, whom he suspected of being involved with terrorism; he'd used black paper and red colored text typed in the Miserable font set. "Communist Blacklist," he said. "Get it?"

Andy noticed the striking similarity—the motion, the fingers holding the cup, and the precise degree with which the lips met the cup—in the way Herbert and Jazmin drank their coffee. He also noticed the crooked ring fingers. Andy considered the possibility of an affair between the two. Then he wondered why a great mind like him had moved to upstate New York. He loved only three things in life: cricket, younger women, and money, only one of which North Country offered in any abundance, but due to certain circumstances, he needed a job abroad while he thought about paying off the debt he'd acquired from cricket betting. Of course, President Sullivan knew of him only as a respected former MI-5 agent.

Dr. Bass, meanwhile, dreamt of words in which Andy Pickling would be incorporated into her next fan fiction piece. She settled for "uber sexy, a man in his early fifties who could pass for twenty-five."

"Andy, the lawsuit will take some time," President Sullivan said. "The courts will have to issue subpoenas to companies before we can find exact IP addresses. No student

has stepped forward to reveal names. But I'm sure you have ideas on how we should proceed to find these terrorists?"

Andy's eyes fixated on a dusty globe sitting atop a small corner table. He got up and dusted the United Kingdom with his handkerchief. "Herbert, I expect you've made arrangements so I can go on a bender and watch the England-Australia cricket game tomorrow. I'm bloody peeved at missing out on the Ashes Test today." Andy used to work in the Cricket Betting division of MI-5, and though he'd always loved the game, during the investigation of the multi-million dollar match-fixing racket, he became obsessed.

"Yes, Andy, Dean Petty is working on it," the President replied. "But do you have a plan?"

"I need books, Herbert," Andy said. "And Dean Petty? Couldn't you find someone else? She doesn't exactly inspire confidence in doing anything other than lines off the church bench." He observed the pensive nature of Dr. Bass and became convinced about the affair. He'd never much cared for Herbert Sullivan.

"Feel free to borrow some of my books," Dr. Bass said, sensing an opportune way to ensure Andy would return.

Andy eyed the collection. "I need proper British books. I need a real bookstore. You told me I'm coming to New York, Herbert, but you live in some bloody 18th century village. The Amish population is thriving! Hasn't exactly struck my fancy. I can't believe my beloved sister has the misfortune of living here." He flicked the globe and said, "Where the bloody hell am I?"

“You can order online,” Herbert said, with a squeaky laugh. “Take some rest—I’ll give you a day off before you start work.”

“I need four days,” Andy replied. He wanted a rewarding job, not something that required too much work, especially in America, given the weak Dollar-Pound conversion ratio.

“Four days?” Dr. Bass said.

“Yes, madam, four days. A Test Match lasts five, I’m already sacrificing today.” He wanted to educate all Americans about the game, which even the prominent communist CLR James called an institution of high culture. Andy recalled having read an article about people in colonies learning cricket at gunpoint. If he hadn’t been so desperate for money, he would’ve never agreed to work for his ill-mannered half-British brother-in-law Herbert Sullivan.

“There’s so much to be done,” Dr. Bass said. She tasted the sexual tension and felt like the girl in *X-Men* who couldn’t kiss her boyfriend because it’d kill him. “You should start investigating. I’ll help.”

“Have you heard of Hercule Poirot?” Andy asked.

“No.” Dr. Bass envisioned Andy coloring her: his long boney fingers, the brush, and her body, the canvas. It’d be better than superheroes making love; she’d wilt.

“Of course, you haven’t,” he said, fiddling with her books. “Faulkner, bloody alcoholic.” He picked up *The Unvanquished*, a leather-bound edition, a recent gift from Herbert (his name signed). Perhaps Herbert would be willing to help solve the financial problems if the affair stayed away from Mary. Andy picked up another book.

“Tennessee Williams? All plays worth writing were written in England by a gentleman

named William Shakespeare. What poor taste you have. In any case, the point I attempted to make earlier is something regarding what Hercule Poirot, a great Belgian detective living in England, once said. It is something that men in my profession should always remember and gladly recall anytime they're told to walk around aimlessly gathering evidence: *You have the mistaken idea implanted in your head that a detective is necessarily a man who puts on a false beard and hides behind a pillar! The false beard, it is vieux jeu, and shadowing is only done by the lowest branch of my profession. The Hercule Poirots, my friend, need only to sit back in a chair and think.*"

"They're horrible people," Dr. Bass said. "Devils. You should do something...I'm glad you're our security consultant...but four days is a long wait."

They'd called the 'Center of Diversity' she headed a joke because most of the members were from Canada, as if it were her fault that minorities didn't want to come to St. Lantfrid University.

What a travesty, a man of his stature asked to investigate a silly blog. He simply needed a vacation. Andy said, "Albert Einstein once proposed time is relative to situation. We must, of course, understand this stonking idea in conjunction with Newton's laws regarding motion, especially the second law in regards to Force, as understood by Lord Kelvin. Ergo, I can sit in Herbert's comfortable living room and interpret the model and pattern of this case while enjoying cricket."

"Can we catch them before some of them graduate this semester?" President Sullivan asked. "This can help us get the \$10 Million back from the Snortell family."

"Dr. Bass seems to be a perfectly decent actress, even if she's a bit over-enthusiastic as most amateur theatric performers are. I'm sure after the video clip runs

today, the public will allow poor Dr. Bass to bask in sympathy. And when the kids hear that the great Andy Pickling himself has arrived..." Andy said. He grinned then sat down next to Dr. Bass. Herbert had always been such a tedious dud. "If the kids have got any sense, they'll voluntarily close the site." They probably overflowed with commonsense, given their dislike for Herbert.

"They're not kids!" Dr. Bass said. She attained a new karmic high when she heard Andy praising her. "You should see the things they say. They know everything. You must protect us."

"I have a cracking idea," Andy said. "Go through each arse's dorm room and apartment and copy all the data from their computers."

"Can I do that?" President Sullivan asked. "Wouldn't it be against privacy laws?"

"Bollocks. From whatever I've read regarding the case, it doesn't seem like you actually give a bloody damn about rights. Anyway, you already track their e-mails."

Nobody responded. President Sullivan, after a brief silence said, "Why don't you get started on that?"

"Me?" Andy said, frowning. "Don't you have a hundred people working for you monitoring the security cameras—get few of them to do it. Anyway, I'm not being entirely serious."

"Terrific," President Sullivan said, ignoring Andy, and punched his fist in the air. "I don't know why we didn't think of it before."

Andy snatched the blacklist from President Sullivan's hand, and said, "It is hardly fair for kids to be pitted against a MI-5 agent. Quite frankly, Herbert, I do not share your

enthusiasm in harassing them. I suggest we enjoy some scotch and savor the English batting tomorrow rather than get gutted about some blog. Get the bloody fat bastard—Oliver Hardy, is it?—at IT to do something.” He glanced over the list and prepared to return it until he saw the name Ravi Kashyap. Andy wondered if Ravi was related to Arun Kashyap, part of the first Indian team to have won a game on English soil and the only member of the team whose autograph eluded Andy.

“Is this Ravi guy an athlete?”

President Sullivan nodded. “NCAA Tennis finalist few years ago. Why?”

Andy Pickling excused himself to go to the bathroom.

“He really is so smart, he radiates brilliance,” Dr. Bass said. She suffered a bout of butterflies, as only deprived superheroes could, at the thought of Cyclops whispering in her ears. She saw the resemblance and envisioned her knight thinking hard about her.

Andy Pickling flipped open his cell-phone in the bathroom, which had a discolored concrete floor. He noticed mold alongside the edges of the grayish tub. Grimy woman. He moved near the sink and spotted a little stain on his white sweater. No matter how hard he tried, he always ended up dirtying his cricketing whites. He wanted to cleanup but his eyes settled on the lonely pipe connected to the sink; a lead-like substance covered it. He decided not to use the tap. Instead, he accessed cricketvoice.com on his mobile phone for the profile of Arun Kashyap and found that he hadn’t passed away. Perhaps Ravi could help him get in touch. Pleased, Andy got out of the bathroom—this time using his handkerchief to twist the knob.

He announced, “I’ve changed my mind, and I’ll commence work by talking with this Ravi fellow.” His attention shifted toward the window. He watched four gorgeous

co-eds walking into a car outside. Nice dishy to bonk. He moved closer to the window and lit up a cigarette.

Herbert warned Andy against smoking in the house, but Dr. Bass didn't mind. She looked intently at Andy as he thrust the cigarette in his mouth. She rapped him on his right shoulder and provided him a copy of a fan fiction entry, making sure to touch his hand as she passed it to him. She'd written in her last story, "love isn't lust or a fling." Only now, as her hand brushed his, did she understand love.

"So what's the final goal?" Andy asked, with one eye still on the tidy beauties.

"Find proof, reveal their names, and tell the university," President Sullivan said. "The bloggers can be fed to the courts. Dear Christine, one of my favorites is running for elections, you should ensure she gets a fair shot..."

"You cheeky monkey, perhaps you can torture the lads into confession after you confiscate their computers," Andy said. He wished he still had his job as a MI-5 agent. If only he'd been more careful...what could he do now but hunt down the bloggers. But in all his benevolence, he made up his mind to give them a chance to surrender.

Part C

Ravi proofread the final version of his thesis. He wondered if a simplified version of his Economics Honors thesis, modestly titled, "Why Marxist Economy Must Replace Capitalism (and Christianity)" that caused substantial heartburn to his advisor who believed in Reaganomics (and Jesus), could help simpletons form cohesive arguments for change. Ashley sat across from him, glancing through romance books, in the study room at the library. Audrey, invited by Ashley to give Sophocles a fighting chance, had

unsurprisingly not said a word about robotics; instead, Audrey talked about punk rock bands, a somewhat strange choice of genre for a 'pink' girl.

Ravi felt satisfied that SLU Republicans, who'd always claimed to be victims, had finally gotten some practical experience in the matter. Yet, he also mulled over why more students hadn't expressed anger at the violation of their privacy with Sullivan going through e-mails and personal files. And nobody seemed to care about TBSTL's proof against the coke usage among students and a dean. Then he forgot about that and looked at the tree houses—little study rooms on top of the book stacks with a ladder. Almost everyone on campus claimed to have had sex in those. Though Ravi declared the same when the issue arose, he'd never managed to convince Ashley to do so. It remained a glaring failure on his list of things to accomplish at St. Lantfrid, but Ashley never took risks. He noticed a newer one that seemed larger. He whispered to Ashley, "How about we do it in that one?"

"Do what in that one?" Ashley said, not whispering.

"You know," Ravi said with a mischievous grin.

Ashley shook her head. "Uh, you're distracting me."

"Robotics?" Audrey said. Her eyelashes always moved mechanically with her lips.

Ravi nodded his head with a polite smile and went back to the thesis.

"How did I guess!" Audrey said. "I'm definitely a psychic." She left for class.

He lost focus again and touched his parched right cheek with the cold carrot juice bottle. The burning sensation led him to think of the world as cold and cruel. Having

temporarily lost his comprehension abilities, Ravi asked Ashley, “What are you reading?”

“This is like a series about real romance stories with trials, upheavals, and eventual triumphs,” Ashley said. “Touching.”

Ravi looked at his palm and wondered if he'd be king. James, who believed he had visions and whom Ravi didn't consider a real mystic, certainly thought so. But a complete liberation of the St. Lantfrid County required more thorough planning. His thoughts drifted; he didn't believe in the occult, but many years ago, a little-known Indian dervish made an impression on him. No, the term dervish did not do justice to the man with a Ph.D. from MIT in space plasma physics. The doctor meditated in the small village of Buxer, and he could tell a person's past by looking through the magical banana grove behind his ashram. When someone came to see him, he'd pluck a leaf and decipher history from it.

The doctor couldn't stop smiling when he saw Ravi. The ground beneath the doctor's feet radiated a flushed glow of green. He said, ‘It is you I've waited to see.’ He conjured up an image, summoning dust and dirt to recreate India's First War of Independence in 1857. Little sand soldiers prancing in the air. In it, Ravi saw himself as a Maratha king who took over the strategically important fortress of Gwalior from the British; soon after, his closest friend stabbed him thrice. Gwalior would've split the British forces in two. The small matter of betrayal meant another hundred years of servitude for India. The doctor had then told Ravi, ‘Beware, Lord of Gwalior, the stars will once more conspire against you. But Sun shall smile upon your feet. Be swift and

merciless in vengeance, it shall save an empire. My life is complete! Proclaim your destiny. You shall be king, o valiant one!’ The doctor died soon thereafter.

“Do you know anything about the Weathermen?” Ashley said.

“Yes, of course,” Ravi replied, staring outside dreamily, “militant student group in the 1970s dedicated to the revolutionary overthrow of the American government. They became especially relevant after FBI assassinated Fred Hampton in 1970. Smart bunch of people, unlike the hippies during the time. They orchestrated over fifty planned bombings—never hurt a person.”

“This is kinda cool. One essay in my rare book, *Real Love Stories*, is about someone who works at St. Lantfrid University now. For six years, the couple barely saw each in the 1970s while living underground at different places. That sucks. The names are changed, it says, since the person’s past is a secret. But someone who isn’t white? Maybe, like, you can find the person or something.”

“You must be kidding? We have to find out. And I thought St. Lantfrid faculty all thought being a leftist meant giving up milk.” Ravi tried snatching the book from her.

She grabbed it right back and said, “Err, not so fast, sweetheart. Did you forget you hate romance novels? Say please and praise my writing and reading habits first. Then talk about how you’ll strive to be more like Mr. Darcy, less like Mr. Wickham! After that, I might consider including you in my Pulitzer Prize acceptance speech.”

Sophocles knocked on the glass door and entered the room with William Hughes, the lovable leading necrophilia expert on campus. William sported a trademark green bathrobe, and large sunglasses covered the part of his face the beard didn’t. Underneath

the robe, he typically wore a suit jacket (with a flask in the pocket) and pajamas too long for his five-foot frame.

“A minute to spare?” Sophocles said.

“No,” Ravi said. “I’m thinking currently. All of you need to quit stalking me.”

Ravi plucked the book out of Ashley’s hand and started to flip pages.

“The Libertarian Party,” William said, touching his unkempt facial hair, “is in need of some moolah—the deadline for turning in the request to your committee has passed. So as one gentleman to another, I’m thinking we can work something out.”

William smelt slightly of unwashed socks. “Something to do with freedom of speech?” Ravi said, smiling, pleased about others joining the fight against the assault on student rights.

“We hate the same asshole, does that count?” William said, furrowing his eyebrows.

“What’s your four person party organizing then?” Ravi said, losing his smile.

“The Ron Paul revolution is dead.”

“We are protesting President Sullivan banning the Snowbowl party.” President Sullivan had decided to end Snowbowl, a regular entrant in the *Playboy*’s ‘Top 10 College Parties’ list, as he considered it a hindrance toward St. Lantfrid’s entry into the elite Ivy League group. Almost the entire university (and two neighboring ones) used to show up to celebrate. The land on which Snowbowl happened belonged to the university and rumors suggested that President Sullivan had been trying to lease the land to corporations to generate additional revenue.

Ravi tapped his head, his faith in humanity slowly sliding. “And you, who wouldn’t even be allowed to enter a Greek house, are protesting to save a giant frat party out of...your benevolence?”

“Hell yeah, man’s got to fight to drink his beer,” William said, taking a few sips from his flask.

“Fine, you can have it,” Ravi said. He figured it wouldn’t be a bad idea for President Sullivan to deal with new issues. But mostly Ravi didn’t want to bother arguing over trivial grant requests that (if not solved this way) often led to the most ferocious debates in the student senate with never before heard voices suddenly clamoring over the post-structuralist implications of allowing one group to transgress the constitution. William sipped more whisky then bid adieu after a burp.

“You missed Audrey,” Ashley said to Sophocles.

“But we’ve been hanging out. We both seem to have a lot of free time,” Sophocles said.

“Sex is a good way to kill free time,” Ravi said. “Or here’s a good idea—work for the cause.”

“Do you see potential between her and me?”

“You two...it’s inevitable, like the revolution.”

“Is that sarcasm?”

“Learn to analyze people.” Ravi got up and looked out the window. He wanted Sophocles to have the ‘IT’ factor in life. Some people had ‘IT’ and would go on to do great things; others...didn’t. “Let’s try this. See Dr. Khan walking down? Look at him and tell me what you see.”

“Stylish, absent-minded, bit of a genius, probably just a nice old guy.”

Ravi paused. “Normally, I’d agree with your analysis, but for the fact he’s a Pakistani.” Ravi smiled. “Can’t trust them.”

Sophocles nodded and said, “Oh, I get it.”

“Just kidding. I’m sure there are some decent Pakistanis around. I just haven’t met one. But notice his face—he’s thinking about something, reminiscing. Then look at his eyes—he’s full of nostalgia and likes the feeling of de ja vu. He’s be the kind of guy who drives around the block with an abandoned trading store, just to re-live his childhood.”

“Noted. Now tell me which one is a better idea: giving her a book by Foucault or writing a love poem? I already sent a facebook gift—an online bear.”

“Don’t write a poem,” Ashley said, “she’d freak out.”

“But she’s different,” Sophocles said.

“That she is,” Ravi said. “Buy her some robots.”

“She’s more of a Harry Potter different than Foucault different,” Ashley said.

“*Bridget Jones’ Diary* is a good gift.”

Poor smitten guy had delusional expectations from Audrey, who wore pink and owned Barbie dolls. At least her dating pre-requisites didn’t require a check on Christianity and country music—just punk. Ravi knew this because the Enclave conducted background checks on each new member. “But here’s a better idea. At some point, head to Washington D.C. for a few days. Go to the Library of Congress, look through books about the Weathermen, and find the St. Lantfrid faculty involved. And while you’re there,” Ravi said, taking out a piece of paper, “login to Liz Snortell’s e-mail

account and send this via the campus listserv.” Since the administration and the local police hadn’t done anything about substance abuse among the Republicans, Ravi decided to take the matter in his own hands. President Sullivan had expelled two local students for smoking pot, an absurd charge on a campus where custodians didn’t even flinch when they saw coke (the drug or the soda) in the bathrooms. “I consider it ethically abhorrent that poor students should be expelled for smoking a lesser narcotic.”

Dear Student Body, Faculty, and Administration:

I’m sorry. I really am. I’ve let all of you down by indulging in cocaine every night for the past few years. Worse, I’ve lied about my addiction on a repeated basis. I was caught red-handed by TBSTL snorting coke along with Christine von Trapp. But I do not care about what TBSTL has to say about me, I’m doing this out of my own high moral convictions. God will judge me.

I just couldn’t get myself to tell you the truth but the Lord has guided me along through this difficult time. I’m ashamed of what I’ve done. I’ve lied and not been forthright with the community. I’m immediately resigning from my post as President of SLU GOP. Further, the problem of cocaine usage is endemic to our chapter. We need help dealing with our addictions.

Tomorrow I may lose my faith and regret sending this e-mail (maybe even deny sending this e-mail), but when you see me, remind me that I’ve erred. And say a prayer. I need it.

I’m sorry.

Sincerely,

Liz Snortell
(now ex-) President, SLU GOP

“And after Liz is done sending this e-mail,” Ravi said, “The Enclave will send an e-mail demanding President Sullivan send off our rich friends to the best damn health clinic in America.”

Part D

Matt Moretti (aka John Doe VII in St. Lantfrid University vs. TBSTL lawsuit) woke up palpitating from a nightmare of being stuck in a tunnel—the police closing in from one side and Joseph from the other. Then Bill Kaschi drilled a hole on the top and stuck a pole carrying an American flag through Matt’s head, splitting his petite frame in two. In his room hung posters of scantily clad beer models—and the infamous ‘I’m a Larry, bitches.’ The 5 ft by 3 ft proclamation with a Larry and Muffy making-out in the background, read:

When my ancestors came over to this great country 400 years ago, they had a vision for a utopia, free from minorities, liberals, poor people, homosexuals, and immigrants. There are few today who share such lofty ideals, but we're easy to find: Pastel polo shirts, loafers without socks, tucked-in shirts, but most importantly, collars up.

Call me a douchebag. Call me an arrogant little cocksucking dickhead. Beat the shit out of me if I'm not with fifteen of my B-frat friends (unlikely). But just know this: I interned at Smith Barney this summer. Where did you work? Blockbuster? That's right you insignificant sack of dogshit; I'm going to be your boss. So take your t-shirt wearing, financial aid, blue-collar ass over to Blockbuster and get me a copy of Old School. Do you even own a tuxedo? Look at my girlfriend. the night I met her. I bought her so many \$9 drinks she couldn't even walk. So I drove her home in my BMW 328ci, but not before I took a few "liberties" with her. The next morning I took her to brunch and went to the mall, where I bought her some blouses. You assholes don't know the first thing about being a gentleman. You probably don't even know how to sail.³

Twenty-four hours ago, a police detective visited Matt. To Matt, he looked like the sort of investigator that took perverse pleasure in breaking down a suspect. But in reality, even Matt knew this, the officer just enjoyed extracting his share of respect from the spoilt St. Lantfrid students when he got the rare chance. The detective knew nothing of Matt’s involvement in setting off the sprinklers and merely intended to conduct a routine query (with anyone seen near the auditorium). Matt drank wine that morning and later smiled foolishly at the detective over a fried chicken meal. The detective grinned

³ The only known author goes by the name IAmADick III

back. Matt started off badly; he said he was “in the auditorium,” instead of “on the way” as Joseph had instructed him to say. But the detective still didn’t know anything in the absence of video footage. The questions carried on, back and forth, until he cast a sullen glance on Matt and asked, “How much have you drank today?” His legs told him to run, his liver begged for another drink, but his heart wanted to spill everything.

The police officer went away; he wasn’t smart, he guessed nothing, yet Matt lowered his head and looked downward. He wanted to call Sullivan to share a deep dark secret. He’d already de-friended anyone to the left of George Bush on facebook. Sullivan’s offer to pardon anybody who gave information seemed tempting. Matt thought, no matter what he did or didn’t do, the others were likely to end up at the Haight-Ashbury St. crossing anyway. He’d often wondered how someone like him earned Joseph’s trust. Style, gel, cologne, arrogant swagger. Matt fell on his knees, holding his phone as tears fell, soaking his security polo shirt, which he wore when he felt especially vulnerable. Then he had second thoughts, put away the phone, and instead caressed his hamster.

Matt hated the label of average. He spent his Sunday mornings in church and evenings at Dean Petty’s *That’s Life* talks, a get together to discuss legacy leadership. He even supported the ‘bring back the double popped collar’ initiative promoted by the slogan *when the collars pop, the panties drop*. Most of his friends described him as a prick who talked of himself in the third person. Yet, for whatever reason, at one point, he really did want to be a rebel (of the anonymous variety who’d go on and study medicine). Partially to impress a hippie girl, but mostly for the same reason the Maharajahs

hunted—an illusion of adventure to make his life unpredictable and worthwhile—he worked for Joseph.

Matt started dialing President Sullivan’s number when someone banged on his door. With tears still rolling, he crawled to the sink and washed his face. He shaped his hair for a craggy look before covering it with an oily pink hat. He put on his snarky attitude, though his sarcasm lacked wit and humor. The banging got louder. He opened the door.

Joseph hurried in carrying a caged rat and shut the door behind him. “What did the cop ask you?”

“You shouldn’t be here,” Matt said. He’d perfected the art of crunching his nose when he spoke. He positioned his palms on his hips, trying perhaps to strike an arrogant pose but still cut a sorry frail figure compared to Joseph. “Just general stuff about whether Matt saw anyone suspicious.”

“You were planning to tell me this—when?”

“Matt is done working for you,” he said, flipping his collar straight and pointing at the door.

“But you keep messing shit up.” Joseph opened the cage and let the rat out. “Not my idea, but some people said I should get you a hamster to say thanks for the sprinkler ordeal.”

Matt screamed, jumped up on his desk, and watched the rat run around.

“This isn’t a hamster,” Matt said. “Matt hates rats.”

“I like rats,” Joseph said. He picked up Matt’s cell phone and browsed through recent phone calls. “I get to gift what I like, right? Elizabeth doesn’t think I’m scary enough.”

“Take it away,” Matt screamed.

“I’m feeling extra nice today,” Joseph said, holding his rat next to Matt’s face, “but kindly refrain from speaking about the sprinkler.” Matt stayed put on the desk. “Try looking respectable, you’re an ex-employee of the Enclave.” Joseph un-flipped Matt’s collar. “And stop talking in the third person—you aren’t the shit. You’re just a puny Larry.”

Part E

Ravi opened an enveloped letter printout Elizabeth had given him earlier.

Dear Kids,

I’m sure my name needs no introduction. I’m an intelligence heavyweight. I ask that you cease operating your blog. I’d be a happier man if it were to disappear. I’ll give you an opportunity to save face—claim there was a terrible hurricane that destroyed your servers. I wouldn’t expect you to shut it down immediately and thus lose your numerous fans and well-wishers. Is a week enough time to bid farewell?

I, myself, enjoyed reading some of the entries, especially about my brother-in-law! I do realize it can be tough living with him—trust me, I know it better than most. You can continue to send witty posts to me via e-mail.

Hope you understand. A pleasure knowing all of you. Do say hello if you see me around campus. I’m especially inclined to meet revolutionaries of the fairer sex. Is there anyone more attractive than an empowered woman?

Sincerely,
Andy Pickling

MI-5, Retd.

Ravi tore the letter and threw it in the trash. “Retard,” he murmured. He stared at the pile of open newspapers on his bed. The heat from the duct caused a slight ripple

through the pages. He marked a paragraph on the *New York Times*' opinion page. He went through other dailies and highlighted stories featuring TakeBackStLantfrid.com, and then kicked a pair of dirty underwear, which had become stuck to his Sketchers, toward the general direction of a large mount of laundry. Ashley gave him much grief regarding the messiness, but he didn't believe the opportunity cost associated with the cleanup justified the time spent doing it. Unlike other humans, he'd evolved for better things. The TV, on the school channel, televised a special program celebrating the anti-sexual harassment week.

Sophocles and his ladylove, Audrey, occupied the other side of the room, working on the final draft of *The Revolution: A Manual* on his laptop. The e-book, once ready, would be distributed to every college and leftist organization. And Ravi sincerely hoped the manual would take into account the human readers, not just the robotic ones.

Ravi turned his attention to a chess set on the bedside table and moved a pawn. Then he said to Sophocles, "Do we have reports from all dorm chiefs?" Twenty dorm chiefs worked to promote the Enclave's goals.

"Your firebrand, steely-eyed friend David Quinn is planting seeds of rebellion," Sophocles said. "Now some others are also wondering if it isn't stupid to keep pursuing plans for May Day given the lawsuit and the British agent. Of course, this development would be more worrisome if David weren't so charismatically challenged."

"Of course, it is silly to continue. Are they looking for reaffirmation of their stupidity?"

"I place full faith in your ability to navigate us through the treacherous cocaine-filled waters."

Ravi didn't reply though he knew with only twenty-five-hundred students, Sullivan would eventually get them despite the low IQs of the search party. But if the revolution started to spread, he'd be unable to take action. "Joseph said something about Matt Moretti having guilt pangs. Track him. Go through his e-mail, put him under surveillance."

"Ah, the lowly mortals are never free! There's a price for freedom, isn't there?"

"Blame capitalism. It is eroding our values and *making* our men corrupt, necessitating us to curtail their freedom."

Ashley entered the room and dragged her shoes on the carpet, which added more muddied snow to it, and threw her North Face jacket on the floor. Ravi would've pointed out the hypocrisy in her complaints about cleanliness if he didn't care about his sanity. "I'll be on TV today—they're going to feature my resolution condemning rape," she said, flipping channels. "Yay!"

"Please stop wearing your North Face jacket; it reminds me of your mother, which is not a pleasant image."

"She has always been nice to you." Ashley kept browsing the channels and stopped at the local news station featuring Dr. Jazmin Bass. Ashley raised the volume and poked Ravi. Dr. Bass appeared genuinely depressed over TakeBackStLantfrid when she declared it worse than the Klan because "the Klan actually acted on its conviction unlike a bunch of smart ass spoilt rich cowards masquerading as revolutionaries—if you want to see *real* hardships, look no further than my life."

"Oh my gosh," Audrey said, "a black woman calling us worse than the Klan. Hell, I'm half-black! This totally sucks."

Ravi moved another chess piece and decided he needed carrot juice. He noticed Ashley drinking Coke. If only she stopped drinking Coca-Cola and started consuming carrot juice, she'd lose the omnipresent ten pounds she always incessantly complained about.

"The offer of the local CBS News affiliate still stands," Sophocles said. "They'll black out the video and scramble the voice if TBSTL wants."

"No, we need a face," Ravi said. He'd seen the use of the word coward in association with his brave martyrs because they preferred to be anonymous. They, who were fighting for a better future for everyone! It hurt, but the scars weren't deep because Ravi knew of common sense's theft. He sat down on the newspaper spread, picked up a rubix cube and began moving the blocks around. "We need someone people can cheer."

"But that can't happen, right?" Ashley said, rubbing Ravi's hair gently, "Because then they'll throw the person out of the university."

"You're absolutely correct," Ravi said. A knock on the door interrupted Ravi. He looked outside the window—barely any visibility due to copious amounts of snow blowing in every direction. He did not want strangers coming in and sent Sophocles to talk to them. Sophocles stepped outside and then pulled the door shut behind him. When he returned, two scrawny boys, wearing thick glasses, tried to follow him in, but he told them to wait.

"They want us to sign petitions," Sophocles whispered.

"Please tell me there are finally angry bloggers who're demanding free speech?" Ravi said. "They're probably upset they cannot share their insignificant lives with the world." Oliver Merrill, the IT vice-president, unsure of how to prevent students from

accessing TBSTL, censored all blogs, which was much simpler to do and only involved checking a box.

“No,” Sophocles said. “Something regarding restoring Pluto’s planetary status at the next IAU meeting.”

“IAU?” Audrey said. “That’s hot. What is it?”

“Let me ask,” Sophocles said.

“Hey,” Ravi said. “Who cares? Get them out of here. Pluto? What’s wrong with these people?”

“Anyway, I guess, this is it,” Ashley said, her lips breaking into a bright smile. “Mr. John Doe. I mean, we don’t want get involved with cops and secret service and whatnot. Might affect your—*our*—political future. Right, sweetheart?”

Ravi stared at his newspaper spread again. Ashley snatched the rubix cube from him. He moved his fingers around the papers, occasionally stopping to read a line aloud here and there. “Other than *Wall Street Journal* and *Watertown Times*, which is run by a Sullivan crony, the editorials and the articles are very much in our favor. Of course, this new hysterical performance by Jazmin Bass changes the equation a little. So where does that leave us, Ashley?” He wanted to share some ideas for May Day, but he doubted she’d understand the finer aspects of his plan in her excitable state. She continued her struggle with the cube.

“Why haven’t you shaved,” Ashley said, pressing her hands on the stubble on his face. “Please shave. We’re having dinner with Uncle John today. He likes you.”

“Mistakenly so,” Ravi said, pressing his thumb against the loose end of a Che Guevera poster that’d started to fall off the wall. “He has a proclivity to take my sarcasm straight.”

“He wants you to join his Hedge fund firm.”

“Enterprise Funds?” Ravi said, smirking, sure that the pinnacle of his greatness couldn’t be reached at that company. Surely, he thought, Ashley believed in him more than to suggest working at a non-Forbes 100 firm if she wanted him to become a corporate whore. “What do you want in life? A house in sub-urban Boston, two nice cars, a big TV, a kid?” He wished she’d become more phlegmatic when it came worrying about the future.

“Two kids, at least,” Ashley said. “And a nanny to deal with our child prodigies.”

“So a McMansion in suburban Boston, two nice cars, a big TV, *two* kids.”

“And how about a dog, definitely a dog.”

“For argument’s sake, we’ll say two dogs. Isn’t the final goal still dull?”

“I don’t know about dull,” she said. “But people actively voting against their own economic interest are committing a sin...”

Buoyed by the lift in her intellect, he cut her off and said, “Precisely!” With quick, deft motions, he solved the rubix cube. “Our task, then, should be to make them see where they’ve erred. To live for *that* cause...that’s something worth living for.”

“I get what you’re trying to do. We can give money—a lot—to cure AIDS in Africa or something and save lives. Then you can run for political office. We’re the perfect couple, you know—the new America.”

“No, no,” Ravi said. He held her and stared into her eyes. Active rebellion was the need of the hour and the only path to freedom.

“You haven’t stopped shopping at Wal-Mart,” Ashley said. “You don’t even give to charity. I give to an Indian charity! I buy sheep for farmers through my donation.”

“Those are little things. Too little. This is the beginning of a glorious revolution.”

“They’re going to arrest you. You have to realize they’ll open a federal investigation.”

Ravi laughed. “How many can they arrest? America is on the verge of an uprising.”

“I’m going to tell Uncle John you’ll be happy to join his firm in June. He has no kids, doesn’t care about my cousins or me much, but he likes you. You got any idea how rich he is?”

“And do you have any idea what Marx would say to you?”

Ashley stormed out of the room.

“Who is this clown?” Ravi said, pointing at the TV. A guy with cropped hair and a particularly intense face stood in front of the college auditorium and yelled, “Now raise your hand and join me when I say, ‘I will never rape a woman.’” The crowd roared; the anti-rape energy spread.

“A yuppie,” Sophocles said. “President of Men Against Sexual Violence. They’re Christian Knights more than anything else.”

“Protesting rape is the flavor of the month,” Ravi said. The torchbearers for an administration known to suppress victims had become the central figures of the

celebration. Very clever. “This is interesting. Dean Petty and Dr. Bass’s office handles rape cases.”

“Take a look at this. Here’s the response Joseph wants to post on TBSTL about Jazmin Bass,” Sophocles said, pulling up his e-mail on the screen.

She has straight hair, an elegant blue and red top, along with a golf hat, slightly twisted, and a scarf around her neck. Her face is soaked in a layer of white powder. She almost looks white and would shed the Blackness in her, if she could. However, when she talks, her English is thick and heavy, rubbing against her Blackness at every juncture.

Ravi stopped reading there. “Tell Joseph, we can’t run the story. We can’t attack her. Write this down.” Ravi dictated; Sophocles typed.

Her story begins like the story of every black conservative. It begins in a small town somewhere in the Deep South. She grows up in a small happy family with a proud father, a deeply religious man, who wears a suit to his clerical job because he wants to be more than the animal those racist southerners make him out to be. Her mother works at a café. The mother answers prejudice with a smile. And then there’s the grandmother, an illiterate woman never allowed to go to school. She’s a caricature almost; she walks around in an apron and oven mitts. But she’s proud. The whole family is ecstatic because Jazmin Bass has the ability to do something that nobody has been allowed to do before—get a good education. The father works harder. The mother works longer. Together they ensure that Jazmin Bass gets the best education. Jazmin studies intensely, goes to church every Sunday, and perhaps is even moved by racial discrimination she faces. But she doesn’t act out against it. She wants to focus on her studies; she assumes that everyone will eventually receive equal treatment. She finds it unfair that she has to fight for her rights at every step. Eventually, she moves to the North, things are slightly better, though not perfect, but it isn’t her home and she gets disconnected from her roots. She’s frustrated, she cannot write. She dabbles in fan fiction and empowers herself by creating a strong female superhero that does everything Jazmin can’t.

In the process, she becomes a poster child for the conservative movement. It is the first time she has it easy in life. Then one day, out of nowhere, she’s made an offer by President Sullivan. She is asked to present herself as a victim, for which she will be rewarded with a promotion to the job of Associate Dean. She’s perfect for playing the victim. She’s not a white man or a rich woman. She’s humble, she’s poor, she can come across as a crusader. She’s the kind of person that people expect to support TBSTL. As the story becomes bigger, as the national newspapers pick it up, those unaware of the site will begin to get confused about what TBSTL stands for.

We understand why you did it, Jazmin. We even sympathize. You deserved better. You deserved better than to end up as a pawn, glued to the hands of President Sullivan. You have our sympathies. But that's not all. You also have our promise that we, of all races and social classes, will continue to fight for the future so tomorrow a Jazmin Bass doesn't have to sell her pride to get ahead.

"This tragedy moves my heart," Sophocles said. How do you know so much about her life?"

"I understand the psychology behind the making of a conservative monster," Ravi said. He wished Sophocles would develop the same keenness in analyzing the human psyche. He walked back and forth in the small room, occasionally glancing at the TV, which continued to show clips of anti-sexual harassment speeches. He needed a cause; something crisp like a bite into a fresh carrot. Juicy as a tropical mango. Aromatic as the smell of chai prepared in an iron kettle over a live fire. He'd served cocoa leaves to SLU students when they needed to be fed sugarcoated chocolate. Ravi desired mass hysteria about something on May Day if St. Lantfrid were to succeed. Gandhi's experiment with truth started in South Africa during his Johannesburg address when he successfully used the honor of women as the stump point to rile the apathetic masses into action, though his real goal was much larger—to end apartheid. Ravi too needed to focus on a catalyst issue that didn't have anything to do with the liberation of county. "We have been focusing on freedom, but people do not realize they're not free. We'll open the war on a new front. We need a black girl. Someone who has been a victim and now wants to avenge the system that failed to bring the perpetrators to justice." All eyes turned to Audrey.

"No, haven't been raped," Audrey said. "Should I be, like, sorry?"

“That’s okay,” Ravi said. “Or at least a good actor. Pretty but not sexy. The cause for freedom comes across as abstract, but this will be real. She must have a melancholy face with the slightest hint of Shakespearean tragedy written on it.”

“Hello!” Ashley said, walking back into the room. “What do you want another girl for?”

“Because you haven’t been raped. You can’t act. You’re not black,” Ravi said. Ashley gave him the finger. He continued, “We’ll publish the first letter from a fictional black woman. The simple story of injustice will go something like this—a rich frat boy raped her and when she turned to Dean Petty and Associate Dean Bass, they did nothing.” Ravi looked at his chessboard again. He said, “It is silly to use a queen, the most powerful piece in the game, to fend off a check. Not only does it raise the stake and expose the defender’s helplessness, it can also lead to the queen’s elimination from the game. But that’s not all, when the other player attacks again, the queen finds herself engaged in an ongoing battle and the defending player finds himself crippled without his most potent weapon. Checkmate,” he said, striking down the white king. “We need a girl.”

“Yes, this is good,” Ashley said, “a non-controversial topic finally. Maybe next time we can do a speech or a resolution or something together?”

Ravi nodded. That’s not exactly what he’d meant. “I also need information on the British agent. The man is an imperialist who claims on his resume to be quite a cricket player. We should test him out with some short-pitch bowling, perhaps a few beamers, to see how well he bats.”

VITA

Saurabh Gupta was born in Patna, India, on April 29, 1984. He spent his early years in Ranchi and then later moved to San Francisco, CA, to attend Abraham Lincoln High School. Later, he received his Bachelor's from St. Lawrence University, NY. He double majored in Creative Writing and Economics (along with a minor in Math). Immediately thereafter, he joined the MFA program at Texas State University-San Marcos. While working on his Master's degree, he served as a first-year English instructor in the English department. He hopes to have his first novel, *Hazy Shades*, published later this year.

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