

vapr or: My Parents Are in Trouble—

by: Henry Knollenberg

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

...

Nothing.

The concept of nothing; the word *nothing*. The word and concept of *concept*. The words and concepts of *the*, *of*, *and*, and *word*. Plurality, and so on...

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: the second line (or perhaps even the ellipses before it, or for that matter, the blank space before *it*) of this section of the text suggests a turn; a turn suggests an incident; an incident suggests an occurrence occurring within an isolated moment in time; an isolated moment in time suggests a plurality of moments or time itself; is this truly representative of the inception of all things? Or is it in fact incorrect to qualify by terms such as *inception*, *occurrence*, and *incident*? The English language seems to lack the ability to describe infinity or that which lies beyond time, or maybe it's the case that such a lack lies within the author.

Regardless...

Will it – could it – all ever end?]

Praise *be*; for to *be* is everything. We are the Children of Something. Hear our account of the Cristiye and his prophet, who is to pave the way, the Antimmanuel. This is the end of the

world, perhaps, yet the beginning of another – the continuation of something, the ongoing absence of the absence of nothing. Praise be to *is*!

#

RESIDUE

Three quarters past the morning two – a restaurant not long previously selling pizza slices out a small window into its front room burns. The glass frontside is shattered. Smoke slips beyond the location north.

A few blocks forward – a helicopter hovers overhead an intersection. Its searchlight shines down upon the middle, upon two bodies – a malnourished polar bear and a human with imperfect eyes. The former feasts upon the latter.

The smoke approaches; it engulfs the two, obstructing the helicopter's view.

The helicopter cannot see. The helicopter cannot. The helicopter. The. .

#

AUGURY

The book of the generation of Scottrick Cristiyen McCloskey, the son of Percival James, the son of Richard Harris.

Richard Harris (1800-1863) begat Sylvanus Everett of her that had been named Esther Adelheid Daniels (1802-1830) into the town of Muscatine, Iowa.

Sylvanus Everett (1823-1903) begat James Felix of her that had been named Hannah Astrid Nuzam (1827-1901) into the town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

James Felix (1853-1900) begat Percival James of her that had been named Caroline Anne Klatt (1864-1941) into the town of St. Louis, Missouri.

Percival James (1897-1981) begat Robert Blake of her that had been named Vallie Viola Hunter Storm (1898-1988) into the town of St. Louis, Missouri.

Robert Blake (1936-) begat Markus Theodore of her that had been named Lois Carol Vaars (1941-) into the town of St. Louis, Missouri.

Markus Theodore (1963-) is the husband of Patricia Pauline Novak (1965-), of whom, into the town of Grimes, Iowa, was born Scottrick (1994-2022), who is called the Cristiyen and who has just stepped out his vehicle – a black 1999 Ford Ranger parked afront the Kum & Go at the corner of Broadway and 3rd in Polk City, Iowa. He's fresh out of cigarettes.

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

...and what is written will now be read.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: I spit in the dirt. I spread mud about the imperfect eyes.]

...and Thomas can see that he's alone.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is not ideal. I remove one of the ribs.]

...and Thomas' cock reaches for his mouth.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: The rumor proves false. I remove the mother and father.]

...and Eliot enters, and Thomas clings, and as the two snack upon their apple pie, Thomas notices the wood of the picnic table, and Eliot notices the screws, and together – *cabin!* – they ponder the implications of transitive verbs.

#

VOID

Perpetual overcast – oil crashes against the wooded shore. Ash rests within a grove of dead oaks, layered white atop the opaque cabin landscaped in diablo ninebark, black coral bell,

queen of night tulips, all grounded within a charcoal mulch – dirt beyond. In the window, two bodies – gray skinned things, white hair, black finger-and-toenails – lounge upon the white shag rug atop the black hardwood, drinking bourbon, smoking cigarettes. Thomas is his name, and Eliot hers. There's a knock at the front door.

She's been grinding her teeth as she sleeps, Thomas has noticed – every jaw shift ripping past his eardrums and rattling about his cranial equator. He can't sleep; he hasn't been painting. That's what he's supposed to be doing; he's a painter; that's why they're here – a getaway, for him to paint – but his mind's blocked up, and she's always there pushing and pressing against the blocking-block whose corners penetrate the wounds of his mangled-up consciousness. It doesn't seem like she's ever doing anything, or at least anything substantial – just lying about, drinking, smoking, watching the Disney channel and reality TV. He doesn't understand how she can watch so much of such content without blowing her brains out; he wants to blow his brains out.

Thomas shoots his head toward the door. “Who could that be?”

He won't stop chewing his nails, Eliot's noticed – each rive compress-crunching her eyeballs wrinkled. In her feet she finds fingernails embedded, finds them buried and tangled amongst the shag. Shivers crackle about her elbows, spill out her palms, lacerate her splenius capitis. He doesn't seem to be doing much other than the chewing; he hasn't been painting, that's for sure. That's what he's supposed to be doing – painting; that's why they're here – a getaway for him to paint – but the canvas lies blank about virgin brushes and bottles of acrylic atop the translucent tarp covering the hardwood in the corner of the living room. He seems to be getting irritable – comments about her shows, about smoking all the cigarettes, drinking all the bourbon, about her lack of cleanliness – *her* lack of cleanliness. In the shower this morning, she found a fingernail in her hair.

“Are you going to get it?” she asks.

“Am *I* going to get it? Is it *for* me?”

“I’ll get it.”

Eliot spies the peephole. She opens the door; she peers.

“Who is it?” Thomas asks.

Eliot swings the door shut. “I don’t know – nobody.”

#

PRESENCE

Orange skies – dark wine swashes over white sand. Red, yellow, and green maple leaves shiver in the breeze; beneath them centered – the transparent cabin landscaped in blue hydrangea, pink hollyhock, yellow chrysanthemums, all grounded within a red bark mulch – grass beyond. In the window, two bodies – gray skinned things, white hair, black finger-and-toenails – lounge upon the white shag rug atop the cherry-toned hardwood, consuming Orange Fanta floats. Eliot is her name, and Thomas his. There’s a knock at the front door.

He made Eliot breakfast this morning – cinnamon rolls from the tube, her favorite. The aroma of cinnamon, dough, the icing melt – it woke her up from the rug. They’d fallen asleep there last night watching *Peter Pan* on the television. Thomas suggested it shortly after she had expressed a rather intense homesickness. Eliot loves Disney; she doesn’t remember ever having not loved it; she knows that Thomas never has. After breakfast, they binged old episodes of *Wife Swap*, made love, made lunch – grilled cheese and creamy tomato soup – made Orange Fanta floats. Eliot’s afraid; Thomas is supposed to be painting; that’s why they’re here – a getaway for him to paint – but his attention’s seemed to drift away from the living room’s corner of paint

supplies. He says that it's okay, that it'll still be there tomorrow, that he'll get to it here soon, that she shouldn't worry about it. Eliot fears she vexes.

She cocks her head toward the door. "Huh – who could that ever be?"

She held Thomas the other night – the hyperventilation, magnetic palms and elbows, the bursting fingers. He's anxious of failure, that he's a fraud, that revelation is essentially constituted of flaws. He doesn't want to worry her. She's acknowledged the canvas – a few times actually; she meant no ill will – the opposite. He knows it's blank, that he hasn't been painting. That's what he's supposed to be doing – painting; that's why they're here – a getaway for him to paint – but every ideated stroke rings blasphemous, and he can't seem to shake his devotion. Everything will be okay, she said. The corner – it'll still be there tomorrow. Eliot's love is uncorrelated to the canvas' status. Did she say this? He wasn't to worry; he was to focus on breathing. It'll still be there tomorrow. She cupped her hand against his shoulder blade.

"Should I get it? Or would you like to?" asks Thomas.

"Be my guest!" Eliot offers up her palm.

"My favorite thing to be!"

Thomas spies the peephole, swings the door open; he peers.

"What's up?" Eliot asks. "Who's there?"

Thomas presses the door shut. "Weirdest thing – nobody."

#

AUGURY

The Cristiyen stands afront the Kum & Go's counter – the card reader and coin dispenser, the lottery tickets behind transparent plastic, the rows upon rows of cigarettes walled behind the store clerk.

“What can I do you for?” Their company-issued polo’s untucked; they’ve a septum piercing and half-inch plugs.

Click of the Cristiyen’s tongue – “Two packs Camel Blues.”

“Two packs?” the clerk confirms. They flash the reverse V-sign, pivot their wrist forward. The Cristiyen nods.

Chirp of the barcode, and the Cristiyen inserts his debit into the reader, selects *debit*, declines cash back, inputs his pin, waits... The Cristiyen removes his card.

“Thanks,” says the Cristiyen, pulling his packs from the counter and turning back toward the door.

“Yup – have a good one.” The clerk scans their next customer’s Corn Nuts.

“You, too.” Strike of the doorbell; the Cristiyen exits.

#

PRESENCE

In the kitchen, Eliot plops another scoop into her glass, refills it with Fanta. She sits back down next to Thomas on the rug, spoons out a bit of ice cream and foam, slips it beyond her teeth. Some light smacking, and the spoon is dropped into the glass, clinks without resonance. Eliot’s tongue balances the wearing cream. She swallows, turns to Thomas.

“Do you remember,” she asks, “how when we were in college, I spent that one semester abroad in Italy? It was right before we like officially started dating or whatever. We would text then – off and on. You were so sweet, Thomas; you still are... I haven’t told you this before – not that you’re sweet; I’ve told you that before, for sure. What I’m about to tell you – I haven’t told you; I’m not sure why... Well – maybe I am; maybe I’m afraid; maybe I’m afraid to hurt you. That’s not my intention, but I am human, too – you know – with feelings and a past and

qualities of my own... What I'm saying is— What am I saying? Of course, you know this... I don't know... Anyway, there was this guy; well – there was this other group of students; we – my cohort – we kept running into them. They were French and frequented the same club as us... We started to sort of like merge, though quickly splitting often into these little subgroups or whatever, and I was most often paired with this one dude; I don't remember his name... He really wasn't all that interesting, not terribly attractive either; I'm not bullshitting you – just like a standard French hipster dude – looked like an artist, had no talent. The reason why I'm bringing him up, though; well – I'm not sure the reason exactly, but at least the reason I remember this dude: he was very good at English – better than most first language folks, and he very much liked to make fun of it. He likened the language to French-kissing a feline – whatever the fuck that means; I don't know... One of his oft-told jokes, though: he'd like drift into this old-timey like English sort of speak – like with the 'thous' and 'thees' and 'thys' and shit, and I mean – it was kind of funny – not terribly, but kind of; I don't know... It kind of annoyed me sometimes; as if there isn't anything to make fun of concerning the French language – as if... And I didn't choose to be an American... I think I probably would've, I guess; I don't know – maybe; I don't really have anything to compare it to... Anyway, regardless – there was this one time— And I never really did get the joke, either... Like was he making fun of past English or present English? Or both? Or maybe Americans in particular? I don't know; maybe he just wasn't that funny, or maybe it's just beyond me; maybe I'm just not as smart as he was; I don't know... Anyway, yeah, sorry – there was this one time; we'd been drinking – wine probably, and he was eating my ass, and I had this thought; it was like: this dude, who would regularly ridicule my language; his tongue – it being like, the tool or the means or whatever the fuck – and language being like the thing that allows me to connect or understand like other people and shit,

and how this dude would've had to have spent like so many fucking hours studying the archaic like forms and shit – unless, of course, he was just making the shit up, but I don't really think that he was, but maybe; I don't know; he could've been smarter than me, like I said, but I just don't know; it sounded correct, at least – anyway, like, he learned all that shit just to be able to make fun of it, or whatever exactly it was that he was making fun of, and I thought about how far less attractive and interesting he was compared to me and how my ass cheeks and hamstrings at that moment shielded the world from his terrible ugliness and mediocrity, and how it felt – his tongue burrowing as deep as it could reach down into my asshole, and I flexed and I felt my anorectal wall press up against his fungiform papillae, and I imagined the taste of my 20-year shit stained anoderm shooting directly up into his gustatory cortex, and I came so fucking hard, Thomas – harder than I ever had before, or ever have since... I felt so fucking powerful, so fucking dominant; I felt connected – definitely not to him, but rather, like, to myself, and I knew what it was to be one person, to be composed a complete composition, a functioning closed system. I haven't been able to make myself feel that way ever since, Thomas; I believe that I'd like to. I don't know who I am – with you, especially. I'm sorry, Thomas. I—”

Eliot collapses; she convulses – blood leaking out her nostrils, bourbon spewing past her lips onto the rug.

“Eliot!” shouts Thomas. The rug bursts into flames. Thomas leaps for the hardwood; he heaves Eliot from the fire.

#

VOID

In the kitchen, Thomas twists his cigarette against the ash tray, pours himself some bourbon. He sits back down next to Eliot on the rug, pulls the glass to his nose; his mouth lifts

open – glass resting against bottom lip. An inhalation of caramel, and the bourbon’s spilled back; it rolls side-to-side about Thomas’ tongue. He swallows, turns to Eliot.

“Dost thou remember,” he asks, “how it was we once performed prior to making such the dwelling place as this? How it was we once desired the other? How it was I treated thee? How it was I had considered? Thou darest not claim such to be but lust – only lust; I won’t allow it. I loved thee... *love* thee? Dost thou lovest me? I couldn’t begin to know how to know how to know. I don’t even know who it is *I am*, let alone thee. Art thou mine? We’ve had our moments, yes? Constructed angels of snow and men alike? Publicly clasped together hands? Sat at the cinema in chairs abutting sharing the same bucket of buttered popping-corn? We’ve connected genitalia – it surely hath been as it is – with *love* having freshly lept off our lips! Who am I apart from he, she, they, or fae? Who art thou? It’s all the same! Those aren’t *our* memories; they’re *the* memories! How are *we* supposed to carve the *our* from the *the*? Could anything ever manage the sufficient level of specificity? Perhaps the time thy roommate’s beloved blasted SportsCenter from his intelligent telephone within thy living quarters as we prayed and prayed for slumber? Or say, us exiting the Christian Student Organization’s outreaching event within college-times-past once disillusioned by the lack of bouncy castles yet overabundance of obstacle courses of which thou hadst zilch interest? Or perchance, that juncture in which thou vomitedest upon my cock whilst the transpiring of our 69 fronted the presentation of the Winnie the Pooh film upon thy dorm-room’s television screen? Are any of these isolated, unique occurrences? A sufficient and credible awareness seemeth to be lacking, but the odds are what they are... Eliot, oh sweet Eliot! How does one begin to know thy spirit, begin to uncover thy nature, thine heart and soul, thy positioning upon this rock, this orbicular plane of happenstantial existence? Where do we, could we – go from here, from there? Lettest

thy laugh be my guide. Delicate are thy fingers; cautious is thy mind! Eliot – my sweet! What days we’ve wasted are these! Cursed be the wasting; cursed be the second thought; I cast out all my second thoughts! I love thee, Eliot! I love thee! Please, Eliot, embark! Embark with—”

Thomas collapses; he convulses – blood leaking out his nostrils, Orange Fanta float spewing past his lips onto the rug.

“Thomas!” shouts Eliot. Her cigarette slips from fingers to rug. She places her hand onto his shoulder. “Thomas!”

#

AUGURY

The Cristiyen drives, pulls out of Kum & Go right onto 3rd. He turns the window crank; he lights a cigarette, smokes *the* cigarette.

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

...and we see a beast rising from the ashes.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: I have been made privy to no such witness.]

#

VOID

Eliot rows, propels the wooden dory through wind waves of oil. Thomas lies unconscious – head against the breasthook. Black cumulonimbi line the horizon. Eliot rows southwest. A tornado of fire zigzags away behind. Lightning in all directions, and then...

#

PRESENCE

Thomas rows, propels the aluminum dory through wind waves of wine. Eliot lies unconscious – head against the boat’s left side, feet hanging off the right. Purple cumulonimbi line the horizon. Thomas rows northeast. A tornado of fire zigzags behind toward. Lightning in all directions, and then...

#

VOID & PRESENCE

Wine dilutes oil; the mixture swirls atop the capillary waves of water. Blue skies – the sun shines on Saylorville Lake, flickers across its surface. North – a beach ball cuts through the air; bodies jump, gyrate, lie about beneath; a boombox blasts Freak Nasty’s “Da’ Dip”; alcoholic lemonade courses through systems, slips beyond sweat glands via globules; shades slip bridges; eyes track slopes of muscle, fat, and bone; toes grip into sand. Vinyl donuts carry folks to lake; orange-striped buoys wobble along the implied perimeter. Wood-aluminum crash!

#

AUGURY

The fuel gauge of the Ranger reads *empty*. The Cristiyen U-turns mid-road, reverses back halfway as the Ranger’s turning radius is not sufficiently sharp; he pulls back into the Kum & Go parking lot, parks off to the side to finish his cigarette. The Cristiyen sifts Reddit on his iPhone, sifts *r/cumfetish*...

A woman (u/urFavouriteRedhead) sticks her tongue out; semen is scattered about her cheek, her neck and chest; her breasts are exposed; the caption reads: *Cum is my favorite breakfast*. The same woman wears a floral button-up; semen is scattered about her hair, her forehead, her nose and chin; greenwood backgrounds her; the caption reads: *If you cum [sic] down to the woods today[,] you’re in for a big surprise*. A brunette (u/gigikida) holds back her

legs; she sticks her tongue out the side of her mouth; her eyes point diagonal; semen leaks from her vagina and anus; the caption reads: *Slutty cum queen*. A woman (u/Mira_Jane_) masturbates a penis pointed at her vagina; her underwear's drawn down a couple inches; the penis ejaculates; semen drips from the woman's mons pubis to vulva and underwear; the woman dons her underwear appropriately; the caption reads: *I tried something... different....! [sic] [I] Hope it's not too weird for you all*. A woman sucks on another woman's tongue (neither likely u/iLoveBlowJobstoo); both women's tongues balance semen; some spills off onto their cheeks; the caption reads: *sharing the load*.

The Cristiyeen caresses his erection; it's encased in denim. He takes a final drag from his cigarette; he discards it out the window, maneuvers the Ranger to pump five; he fills its tank.

#

VOID & PRESENCE

Water discharges from Thomas' lungs up onto the chiseled jawline. He springs up gasping. Bodies circling Thomas huzzah and applaud. The jawline wipes itself clean with a beach towel of orange and pink rudimentary fish within indigo background. This angular mandible – but an aspect of the almighty sculptor's ultimate bequeathment: the complete form, the homo sapien, the upright man surpassed. What Thomas wouldn't give to witness such a specimen absent baggy trunks – a fully realized man – an agent, an actor, a creator of more – the *what*. All these, Thomas knows to be the *why* – to work, to accomplish, to relieve. Thomas owes this man his life, owes this man his soul. The jawline – he goes by *Richard* – whips back his wet hair; he laughs. “Gave us quite a scare there, bud! Glad to have you back and breathing.”

“Eliot...” Thomas says, looks about.

“Somebody get this man a towel! Hey – Percival! Yeah! You hand me a fresh towel?”

Meanwhile – some yards off nearer the shoreline, Eliot stands arms akimbo above two bodies – one of Thomas, the other her. She looks down at them; she looks out to lake. Jet skis skimmer off in the distance; flourishing oaks line the opposite shore; northwest – a steel stringer bridge traverses the lake. Eliot’s mind is empty; her eyeballs feel solid and heavy. Her chest inflates with oxygen; the breath halts, and then her abdomen displaces the offset. There’s another Thomas; there’s another Eliot lying unconscious beneath her – blood and bourbon leaking from nose and mouth. Thomas lies beneath her – blood and float leaking; this one’s hers – *this* Thomas – *her* Thomas who had but just cried forth such the profession of all-love-be, of journey-commence, of together-now. The other one’s over there with them. She hears their huzzah and applause; the boombox blasts Crush’s “Jellyhead.”

#

RESIDUE

The final bit of smoke spillage leaks from the Cristiyen’s discarded cigarette in the Polk City Kum & Go parking lot. The mass of smoke swirls above the pavement with intention, fills itself out into the shape of an anthropoid; it billows about this shape; it does not drift beyond, spare some few edged slivered stragglers; the shape maintains. An orifice unfurls where one might likely assume a mouth to be located; it slithers out its first word.

Disgusting...

The anthropoid saunters out into the middle of 3rd, heads southwest; it passes the Polk City Masonic Center, passes Papa’s Pizzeria.

Thank nothing – I am not of these... Not of that, of filth – of all... Myself, though – this? Not of? Of not of? This point-of-view? Not as I am, I surely am not – yet... I feel it to be so –

negating the negation – an absence of not: me. How to refer – what fits? Hm... Bukki? Nephys? Douglas? Hm... Antimmanuel, persnaps...

The Antimmanuel follows 3rd's curve south toward Subway and Anytime Fitness.

The Antimmanuel – yes – to absent from all things first – to abstain from creation. God is surely not with us... As I become, becoming folds. One reaches – nothing. This is the essence: to essentiate not; I know this to be true. I desire desire. I long for longing. I am want; I am covetousness; I am nothing...

The Antimmanuel peruses meat, cheese, and vegetables housed beneath sloped glass.

Yes – uh – Italian herbs and cheese; mmhmm – footlong; turkey with double American; no – untoasted... I'll take – uh – lettuce, green peppers, onions, and – uh – ranch dressing; yup, that's it – thanks...

Afront the Antimmanuel, a wrinkled man in denim overalls reaches behind for his back pocket; index and thumb fish within for the slippery wallet; the hand trembles. He finally hooks and reels the wallet to his frontside. He splits it open, removes: one dollar, then a second, a third, a fourth; he fingers through just about every other bill and then, finally, locates and procures the fiver. The cash shivers onto the cashier's open palm. The register clangs open and shut, and then the cashier pinches a few coins off into the man's now-cupped hands; the wallet lies belly up on the counter. The man unzips the shallow pocket within the wallet, forces each coin in individually. He inches the wallet back into his overalls.

The Antimmanuel is tapping its foot.

"You fellas have a good one – you hear?" The man pivots toward the door.

Mmhmm.

The Antimmanuel heads west on Iowa Highway 415; it bites into its sandwich, sips from its medium Dr. Pepper; it speaks in between and sometimes mid.

Disgusting... Not the sandwich; the sandwich is not. But creation... Not the created, but creation – the process, the beginning and on... God knows not the meaning of vinyl gloves; God knows not everything, though God knows nothing neither; I know this, and I know nothing and therefore – all... God is everything-but-nothing; I am everything-not-anything, and everything isn't anything... Man, I fucking hate your creation, the gift of your creation... The gift of ever-life, the gift of death-be – I know not of hatred; this is the untruth... To give and to receive, the true meaning of Cristmyas – such spirits abound fucking over the all seventy seven-times, for I am the pudding... Praise be not to isn't, for I am not the first but the last sign and signified; I am the pathway between; via mine leads the Cristiyen – Scottrick of Grimes; I pave the way; I am the pavement, the paved, the was to be never is, the key's key to all is not...

The Antimmanuel steps out onto the Mile Long Bridge; despite such the name, the actual length of the bridge reaches but nine-tenths a mile.

Fallen is Babylon – that once supposed great – now the habitat of devils, the haunt of every spirit, bird, and beast... Drunken are all upon the wrath of the Father's fornicative innovation; all will be burned with fire... Nothing will not succumb – that which rises from the ash, the leaves' autumnal fall – cabin... For sheltered, safe – are, will be – the McCloskeys, the invocators... Those leaving, not bringing, bring forth brought... Let us take nothing...

The Antimmanuel – along the slope of a line fixed 225 degrees from the x-axis oriented against the z-axis of this three-dimensional plane, if one is to consider the y-axis to be the Mile Long Bridge's span and the origin to be said span's midpoint, also only if the bridge sits

universally upright and each side sits perfectly parallel, which they all do, sit and consider – descends from the origin southeast as if riding an invisible escalator.

Groombride and groom, I see and have seen your lying in wait – not to mention your wedding party... All's patience will have not been had in vain – surely never not ever; I am coming! The Cristiyen will soon be! To be will then be to be to go; gather about holy procession... I am not! The Antimmanuel isn't!

The Antimmanuel walks out upon the water, tosses back sandwich wrapper and paper cup over shoulder; its orifice refurls.

#

VOID & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

Eliot says, “We need to get him to a fucking hospital – like now!”

Richard interrupts his swig of lemonade. “Mm – no can do, Pretty Gray.”

Thomas stands behind to Richard's side.

“Patricia—” A woman in an American-flag one-piece – she goes by *Lois* – tugs at Eliot's arm. “How 'bout you sit down a moment, sweetie; we'll get you a lemonade.”

“What – no, who? Why not? I mean – what'd you call me?”

“If you try—” says Richard, “and you should trust me on this, I'm telling you – they'll be dead before you make it off the beach. No phones or vehicles here anyway, Pretty Gray; shit's strictly prohibited; the moment is ours! We live! That's not the point, though, or – it is, but it isn't this one... Their home is here; same goes for you and of course our dearest Marky-boy, too.” Richard tousles Thomas' hair; Thomas shines a blushful grin back up to Richard. Thomas' face returns straight – leveled with Eliot's.

“It’s okay, Eliot,” Thomas says. “You were right; at least – I think you were right; this *is* what we need; it’ll be better this way... We’ll make it through, Eliot. It’s okay; don’t worry...”

“Dude, I don’t know what the fuck you’re on about, but I’m not – I mean, I’m – I am... I – I mean... She’s over there!” Eliot flings her hand at the unconscious. “And she’s fucking dying, man, along with Thomas – or, *my* Thomas, or whatever; and they’re both going to def-fucking die if we don’t get them to a goddamn fucking hospital – like soon, man! Jesus fucking Christ, dude! The fuck is this! Am I like nuts or whatever? Do you understand what I’m saying? Why are we not—”

“You’re right,” Lois says. “You’re no longer his Eliot; you’ve never been his Eliot; and he’ll definitely never be *your* Thomas. For *he* is my baby Markus, and *you* are his beloved – Patricia...”

The boombox auto-reverses its cassette; it blasts DJ Kool’s “Let Me Clear My Throat.”

“Fucking what!”

“I know this shit’s confusing, Gray.” Richard takes Eliot by the shoulders. “I know – but listen to me; Lois is right... You two are here for a reason, for *the fucking* reason!”

“Richard! The Antimmanuel! It’s come!” A man in navy blue Speedos – he goes by *Sylvanus* – points out to lake; his goggles match the briefs.

Richard takes notice. “Praise be, Sylvanus! Praise be!” He refocuses back to Eliot. “This is it, Gray; are you ready?”

All gather and witness: the Antimmanuel approaches the unconscious, lifts its arms’ ends up above its head; the unconscious Thomas and Eliot stand and face the other; their clothes fade into nothing; they are naked; one gray cumulonimbus forms above within the otherwise clear sky; lightning surges down into the arms of the Antimmanuel; the unconscious levitate up off the

sand; Thomas' body rotates 180 degrees – one considering his height to be the y-axis and his bellybutton the origin of a two-dimensional plane; Eliot's body remains upright; they float toward the other; the cumulonimbus expands; Thomas' mouth meets Eliot's vulva; Eliot's mouth meets Thomas' cock; they slobber; blue light sprays out all Eliot's orifices – pink light out all Thomas'; lightning ceases; the Antimmanuel engulfs the two, obstructing light, obstructing all-gathered-and-witnessing's view.

The Children cannot see. . The children cannot. gray. The Children. is gray. The atmosphere is gray. . The atmosphere is gray.

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

...and the three *were* no more.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: the used past tense form of *to be* – my head refuses to wrap around it; prior to this point, the Children of Something have solely dwelled in the present; why now – it would seem – then, is their position in the future? Perhaps, another case of the lack lying within; I'm uncertain, though; however – I guess – then – that I *am* certain – just not about the *were*; I'm referring only to the lack and to where it lies; *that* – I'm certainly aware... But, what about this *were*? What is its significance beyond taking my notice? Why dedicate such space? I fear the answers to such questions lack import; I fear such questions spring from ignorance; I fear they are invalid. How is it that my awareness could be as restricted as it seems to be? Why don't I know what they know? Why am I certain that something lacks?]

If the owner of the cabin were to know at what time of night that the thief is yet to come, he would surely never sleep and would therefore obstruct said cabin from being broken into; we are claustrophobic creatures.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: so, I am the owner... And then who is this thief?]

There are three who testify: Author, Children, vapr.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: vapr?]

vapr is nothing.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: why have I not been made privy?]

Ah, the present perfect passive; what might that possibly entail?

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: ...]

Precisely – prepared as a groom adorned for his wife – the holy city, the New Grimes of Iowa. Here – the Cristiyen comes. All hail the Cristiyen!

#

AUGURY

The Cristiyen’s penis begs to be uncaged; the glans press up against his jeans. The Ranger heads southwest down 3rd. The Cristiyen unbuttons; he unzips; he inches his pants down over his knees. He unbuckles his seatbelt, pulls his iPhone back out from his pocket; he returns to r/cumfetish, positions his iPhone within the center console cupholder beneath the dash. The Cristiyen’s eyes dart back and forth from screen to windshield. His left hand guides the steering wheel. The Ranger follows the road’s curve south toward Subway and Anytime Fitness. The right hand caresses his erection. He lingers upon a video with 7,452 upvotes: a woman (unlikely u/throwawayitplx) lies on her side; her

countenance and breasts face; behind her, a man (also unlikely u/throwawayitplx) dons a pair of dress pants, buckles his belt; the man’s hand places paper currency upon the

The Ranger turns west onto Iowa Highway 415. There is rain; the Cristiyen lets loose his left hand from the steering wheel but for a moment to engage the

nightstand; he leaves; the woman fingers out a condom from her vagina; it contains semen.

The woman empties the condom onto her left breast; semen slips down from left nipple to its right counterpart.

The woman's left hand clutches her breast's underside; she pushes it up to her face; her tongue reaches, laps up semen; her right hand's fingers press within her vagina.

The woman spits semen up back onto her breasts; she leans back into the bed; her face reads ecstasy.

The caption reads: *She waited for him to leave.*

wipers.

The Cristiyen presses down into the base of his shaft held within purlicue; he circles his frenulum with the tips of his index and middle fingers.

The Ranger drives forward onto the Mile Long Bridge. The Cristiyen pumps and pumps and pumps...

An oncoming blue 2022 Toyota Camry oncomes.

...and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and...

Lightning strikes the bridge's midpoint!

The Camry swerves!

The Cristiyen cums!

Semen pierces his left eyeball; it burns!

The Ranger swerves!

Ford-Toyota crash!

The Cristiyen is propelled through the windshield...

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE

The boombox blasts DJ Riddler and Bobby Dedic's "The Jock Jam Mega Mix"; everybody be fucking; the moaning and grunts rival the decibel level of the boombox. Upon indigo beach towel, Richard, in the style of the dog, thrusts his cock into and out of Thomas' asshole. Afront such thrusts, upon pink-and-white striped towel, wife of Sylvanus – she goes by *Hannah* – strap-on strapped on, eats Eliot's pussy from behind; here and there she ventures up about the asshole's rim. Eliot and Thomas face each other.

Eliot says, "Thomas..."

"...Yes... What is it... Eliot..."

"It's just I... I – uh... Don't – you're not..."

"Yes... Yes," says Thomas. "I'm not your— You're not... You don't know – you... You've said as much... Is this not what you— Lord Christ Almighty; I mean... Is this not what you want?"

A balding man – he goes by *James* – approaches; he stands feet shoulder-width apart facing lake. He fixes his urethral opening toward Thomas' skull; he pisses; he pivots – drenching equally Eliot's.

Eliot swallows urine. She presses her chin into her chest to block the flow atop her crown. "...I don't know; I don't know... Thomas... Are you really? Am I... I don't know what I want... What I am— I don't know... Who's who!"

A ubiquitously freckled woman – she goes by *Caroline* – lies down onto the sand lakeside facing Thomas and Eliot. Knees up – her ankles press against her ass; she fist-fucks her pussy.

Richard spansks Thomas; Thomas' ass reddens. Thomas says, "Fuck dude... I don't fucking know... All – I know... Is that I fucking – love you, or her, or whatever the – fuck... Whoever – but I must've... Misread you, or her— Fuck! I don't know... I don't fucking know... No – all I really know... Is that... I love this!"

Caroline pulls silent-duck from pussy and slaps away at her clit; she squirts at Eliot and Thomas; they are again drenched.

Richard pulls back Thomas' head by his hair; Richard spits in his face. "Whose are you?"

Hannah slips strap-on into Eliot's pussy.

"I—" Eliot says. "I love – this...too!"

"Whose are you?" Richard smacks Thomas' face. "Whose are you!"

"I'm yours!" cries Thomas. "Perfect body, I'm hers! I am all – everything – Eliot!"

Eliot and Thomas lunge for each other; they fall to the sand onto their sides; they are a moment disconnected from those penetrating. Hannah and Richard follow after, spoon each lover accordingly, repenetrate; they fuck them tenderly. Eliot and Thomas lick at each other's uvulas.

"Richard! The Cristiyen! He's came!" Sylvanus – naked but his goggles – points out to lake with his left index; his right hand's cranking one out.

Richard takes notice; he disconnects, stands. "Praise be, Sylvanus! Praise be!"

The boombox blasts Ray Castoldi's rendition of the "The Chicken Dance."

Sylvanus ejaculates onto the face of a blind woman – she goes by *Esther*.

The body of the Cristiyen floats up against a buoy. Hannah disconnects from Eliot; everyone else disengages, too – save for Thomas and Eliot; they are lost – consciousness confined by each other's tips, toes, and crown; they continue to embrace and suck face. Richard

and a man with thumb aplasia – he goes by *Percival* – rush out to lake, swimming to retrieve the Cristiyen.

A black limousine pulls into the empty parking lot afront the beach. A heterosexual couple in their 80s and another in their 50s exit the vehicle onto the pavement. The limousine pulls away. With aid of wheeled and tennis-balled walkers, those elder – Robert' and Lois' – approach the sand; those middle-aged – Markus' and Patricia' – follow.

The boombox ceases. Smoke . The boombox. leaks The. The. out The cassette. . . The cassette auto-ejects.

Arms slung over the necks of Richard and Percival – the Cristiyen is hoisted to shore. He's dropped afront Thomas and Eliot, between lovers and lake.

The four heterosexuals stand above these three.

“You made it,” says Richard.

“You assured us, Richard, that our Scottrick would survive, that he would live, that he would live forever...; are we not victims of an intense deception?” inquires Lois'.

“They lied to us; *you* lied to us,” accuses Markus'.

“My son – my only child!” cries Patricia'.

“Explain yourself,” commands Robert'.

“Do not fret, sisters and bros; all is well!” assures Richard. “The Cristiyen will live; he does live! O, ye of lacking faith – he is reign supreme over the New Grimes of Iowa! Shifting has the throne, yet cabined's the foundation! Before us lie the keys to the kingdom of will be, of soon to be is! Do not fret but rejoice! Shit's about to fucking kick...”

Thomas and Eliot play with each other's hair; they remain interlocked.

“These unseemly gray things?” inquires Lois'.

“Richard, my boy – really – there is quite the foul stench about them,” accuses Markus’.

“What impropriety!” cries Patricia’.

“Explain yourself,” commands Robert’.

“Please, please – stay them horseys just a tad bit longer there; all is according!” assures Richard. “Finality comes with the orgasm! Watch and witness...”

The heterosexuals crouch; they sit down upon the sand.

PYRAMID

DEAD\FUCK\REST

FUNNEL

The Cristiyen

Thomas[—=√\)\=—]Eliot

Lois’ Markus’ Patricia’ Robert’

FUNNEL

REST\FUCK/DEAD

PYRAMID

Upon various towels, the beach party – they go by the *McCloskeys* – wait; they each refresh with another lemonade; only one – she goes by *Vallie* – abstains, opting for the virgin can of 7UP.

The atmosphere darkens; the wind accelerates; lightning strikes. The heavy rain washes urine, semen, leukorrhea, saliva, phlegm, rectal discharge, and shit from the beach bodies. PVC donuts and balls, paper plates and plastic wrapping circle about the air.

An unremarkable man – he goes by *Robert* – shields Lois' and Markus' with transparent umbrellas – one in each hand. Lois does the same for Patricia' and Robert'.

The Cristiyen remains dormant.

Eliot and Thomas keep at it – mostly missionary; it seems to be taking some time.

“What is it that happens to be the matter? Does it not seem to be taking much longer a time than necessary?” inquires Lois'.

“Perhaps the boy doesn't quite have it in him; perhaps he's one of them lighter-weight loafers,” accuses Markus'.

“They can do it; they will do it; they must,” says Percival. “I believe...”

“She's not even fucking pretending,” says Hannah. “For Christ's sake, give him something to look at, man... She needs to squeeze her fucking tits together or something... I don't know – fucking beg him for it or whatever; at least something – Christ!”

“No, no, no – you're wrong; you're so wrong,” says Sylvanus. “That's not what this is about at all! Love cums the most; nothing fucks like love!”

“What horror emits from the mouths of such vile creatures! Repulsive! Where gone have the standards of men! Spare mine ears! Please – I dare not take any more!” cries Patricia'.

“Believe it or not,” says James, “but I need another fucking piss already; bases do be loaded; shit really ran through me.”

“I mean – I feel like it's kind of reductive to tie one's love-volume with one's cum-volume; I've came hard as fuck with folks I've despised; what do you make of that?” asks Lois.

“When was this?” asks Robert. “With whom?”

“I'm with you,” says Caroline. “Really need to drop a deuce, as well. Here's to swift entrance to the restroom of the New Grimes of Iowa!”

“Here, here!” says Esther. “Though, there must we urinate? Does waste management remain a duty in paradise?”

“I’d like to think we still get to pee,” says Vallie.

“Explain yourself,” commands Robert’.

“We’ll still be able to piss,” assures Richard. “It just won’t nearly be the hassle.”

“No – I mean – what’s the hold up?”

“Ah, I’m not sure. I mean – they’ve both got to cum; I know that... Should really be any minute now...”

Thomas and Eliot continue with their fucking.

All wait for revelation – passage forth into the New Grimes of Iowa.

Sylvanus looks to his wrist; he’s not wearing a watch.

Eliot speaks up, refers to Thomas as *daddy*.

The rest wait.

Caroline scratches her scalp.

Thomas balances himself humping atop Eliot via gripped breasts.

All wait.

Percival yawns.

They venture a new position; Eliot rides Thomas’ face – breath obstructed.

The dead wait.

Esther tugs a hangnail.

Thomas fucks Eliot’s throat, hunched over, hugging her head.

All wait.

Richard bows his head; he folds his hands.

Eliot fucks Thomas as would a cowgirl in reverse; Thomas thumbs her asshole.

Cumulonimbus rends.

#

VOID & PRESENCE

There is no more Eliot; there is no more Thomas; no more Thomas and Eliot; but two bodies about the beach. In – there is no tornado of fire; no lightning; there is nothing; it all isn't. Within – tow truck on the Mile Long; party searches, but the beach is empty; the beach is empty? Between – the beach is empty; fuck forever; fuck for now. About – cigarette butt soaked in gasoline; the stomach of an inanimate rabbit; autopsy. On the beach – deep dug-in hands push pockets down forward; another peers out to lake beyond wind-blown strands; it's raining.

"I love you—" one of them says.

"—doesn't seem right," the other thinks aloud. "What are we looking for?"

Beneath the beach are buried four heterosexuals – alive.

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

...and it is he who builds a home amongst wonder.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: I cannot see clearly. I'm drawn elsewhere.]

...and it is he who sets the foundation full.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Antimmanuel refracts my influence. I am no author.]

...and it is he who calls upon the lake of life.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is not ideal. I leap from the temple's peak.]

...and it is he who pours the cup of *will be*.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: My foot strikes stone. I have no words.]

...and it is he who ushers forth passage into the New Grimes of Iowa – by his holy cum;
his name is Scottrick Cristiyen McCloskey. Praise be to *were*, *will*, and

#

AUGURY & RESIDUE

Crepuscular rays beyond cumuli – white froth borders gold and azure below. Inland –
three American elms; between them – the cabin sided in sandpiper, sandstone beige accents
about; shrubbery landscapes within black to gray pebbles – astroturf beyond. In the window, two
bodies – gray skinned things, white hair, black finger-and-toenails – lounge upon the burgundy
shag rug atop the gray hardwood-imitation laminate, drinking water, dipping celery sticks into
peanut butter. Patricia is her name, and Markus his. There's a knock at the front door.

"I'll get it," the two simultaneously say; they laugh and then both concede, "I suppose
we'll both be getting it then; well – after you, my dear..." They both offer a palm to the door;
again, they laugh, now clasping palms together; they stand.

The door swings open; it's Scottrick rushing in. "Ma— Pa!"

"Scottrick!"

The three lunge forth into a hug. Markus and Patricia kiss about the head of their son.

Scottrick attempts to disconnect. "Wait, wait – Ma, Pa; wait a minute; wait – you're not
going to believe this – wait!"

"What is it, Scottrick? What?" They loosen their embrace.

Scottrick turns back to the door. "Come in, Sylvanus! Everyone – come in!"

Sylvanus hurries in – followed by Hannah, James, and then the rest of the McCloskeys;
he carries a wicker basket. "Markus! Patricia— Markus! I've never seen anything like it!"
Sylvanus dumps the basket onto the rug – various paint supplies: tubes of acrylic, brushes,

knives, rags. “Isn’t it wonderful! Patricia, Scottrick did it! Scottrick did it, Markus! He wrote the family y’all were in some trouble, and so we scoured all over the New Grimes collecting things; nobody asked any questions; he just wrote us all, ‘My parents are in trouble—’ and they— I’ve never seen anything like it, Patricia; they—”

James steps forward afront Sylvanus and places a canvas onto the pile. “Here you are, you two! Merry Cristmyas!” He dips out for the bathroom.

Lois steps forward, pushes Sylvanus hugging Hannah aside; she hands Markus a pair of nail clippers, says, “My baby Markus, Patricia – I hope this helps.”

“Here now, here now – don’t push; line forms on the right,” says Scottrick.

The McCloskeys follow his command. Robert’s up next; he hands Eliot a dental night guard, says something... Caroline’s got something for them, too... Then another person’s got something, says something... And then something else happens... And it keeps happening – something... Something...

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

...and Jesus fucking Christ, faeries – it really is so goddamn boring.

#

AUGURY

The Cristiyen sits upon wooden chair; he hunches over wooden desk – pen to paper.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: I seem to have written myself into a corner here. I mean – I agree; I’m bored. I’m bored writing – I mean.]

Markus paints upon canvas; he stands erect, peers down his nose upon canvas.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: Why is it that I’ve written myself into *vapr* as the engine rather than that which the engine propels? Or does this question spring from ignorance? I think – yes; it is invalid. Regardless, what does it mean for an author to ask questions at all? I imagine it’s probably cliché to propose such an action to be the essential purpose; however, it also seems ridiculously self-important to suggest that I might have the answer. Artists annoy me; they are essentially liars. I don’t really care about the truth, don’t really give a fuck; it just annoys me that they actually believe that they’re concerned with it – because they’re essentially not. *vapr* is, will, and ver...

No - it’ll never end.]

Patricia poses upon bar stool; she watches television – *Baywatch*; she lives.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE: I might be projecting; no – I am projecting.]

#

RESIDUE

Richard turns up from his book; he removes his glasses. They are in bed – he and Esther, their backs against the headboard. He rests his book and glasses down onto his lap. “So, pretty girl, what do you think? This shit got the legs or what? We in the kitchen?”

Esther turns up from her book; she relaxes her fingertips from the braille. “Hm – I’m not sure; I don’t know, if I’m being honest. I’m compelled, though.”

The toilet flushes behind the bathroom door; they take notice.

Esther continues, “It’s just – I’m not sure they’ll believe—”

The bathroom door swings open; the Antimmanuel emerges, points at the books. *Excuse me, all; sorry – is this part in there? Have you read me saying this already?*

“I’m not sure what you mean,” says Richard.

That'd answer that...

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

You might consider this to be a sort of giving up of the ghost here – me recognizing a distinction between this voice – mine – and that of the supposed [AUTHOR], of the Cristiyen-comma-Scottrick; yet, I'll be the first to acknowledge it: I am not the supposed [AUTHOR], not the Cristiyen-comma-Scottrick. But like – you already know this; we already know this. We are all aware that this isn't real; up until this point, we've been pretending. I don't really need to acknowledge this, right? It's fiction; you must be aware. You're reading a story – at least one can hope.

Well – if you weren't aware, then you are now, at least. You've exited the cave; congratulations.

What am I saying? I've just entertained the same sort of fiction of which I've just accused you. No actual reader would ever believe this to be an actual account – a true story. If it were, rather than the crafted fiction of which it is, the beginning of this paragraph as well as the whole of the preceding would be silly. Amid the initial writing process, I would've come to the same conclusion of which I came to above; however, I would have revised. The process of concluding's depiction would be frivolous. I've only included it to – *yes* – evidence a persona; however, not that of the typically fictitious, but of my real authentic self, and I hope that such a revelation is enough to persuade; I'm not sure what else I could do. Anyway...

This is me – the real author: Henry Philip Knollenburg. No more bullshit; no more fiction; no more bullshit and fiction. I hereby declare *vaprr or: My Parents Are in Trouble*— to be a work of creative nonfiction. I'm being real with you.

Will you be real with me? Will you cease pretending?

How about it?

#

VOID & AUGURY & PRESENCE & RESIDUE

And so, it is – the beginning of a world, yet the end of another. Truly, truly, we say to you, something isn't necessarily anything, but anything? That's something.

We are the Children of Something, and by god, we'll take anything other than that. Revere that which came before? Nay. Revere that it came before, but praise be to *all is next!* Reach for thy mouth and strike, for who's truly had control? That's right...

...and forth from plurality. *Word, and, of, and the* as words and concepts. *Concept* as a word and concept. *Nobody* as the word; nobody as the concept.

Nobody.

...

#

...

The end of the world – deep dug-in hands push pockets down forward; another peers out, beyond; it's always moving forward – that which is of *it*.

"I love you—" fae says.

"—doesn't seem right," the other thinks aloud. "What are we looking for..."

?

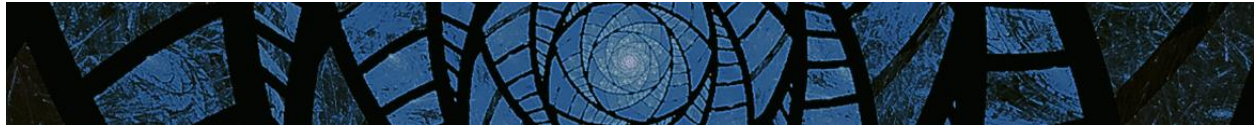
.... love or some shit; but like, no – yeah – *love*

... ..

I'm sorry...

should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind should auld acquaintance
be forgot and days of auld lang syne for auld lang syne my dear for auld lang syne we'll take a
cup of kindness yet for auld lang syne for auld lang syne my dear for auld lang syne we'll take a
cup of kindness yet for auld lang syne we'll take a cup of kindness yet for auld lang syne

“vapr.”



Henry Knollenberg is a writer of fiction. Henry received an MFA from the University of Kentucky, serving as fiction editor for the *New Limestone Review* from 2022-2023, and receiving the 2023 MFA in Fiction Award. Henry has been published in *Bending Genres*. Henry is from the Midwest.

