#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Little Fires Everywhere*

Celeste Ng

OUR MISSING HEARTS

A Novel

ALSO BY CELESTE NG

Everything I Never Told You

Little Fires Everywhere

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For my family

In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months waiting in line outside the prison in Leningrad . . .

Standing behind me was a woman, with lips blue from cold . . . Now she started out of the torpor common to us all and asked me in a whisper (everyone whispered there):

“Can you describe this?”

And I said: “I can.”

Then something like a smile passed fleetingly over what had once been her face.

• Anna Akhmatova, “Requiem, 1935–1940”

But PACT is more than a law. It’s a *promise* we make to each other: a promise to protect our American ideals and values; a promise that for people who weaken our country with un-American ideas, there will be consequences.

• from *Let’s Learn About PACT: A Guide for Young Patriots*

I

The letter arrives on a Friday. Slit and resealed with a sticker, of course, as all their letters are: *Inspected for your safety—PACT.* It had caused confusion at the post office, the clerk unfolding the paper inside, studying it, passing it up to his supervisor, then the boss. But eventually it had been deemed harmless and sent on its way. No return address, only a New York, NY postmark, six days old. On the outside, his name—Bird—and because of this he knows it is from his mother.

• • •

He has not been Bird for a long time.

We named you *Noah* after your father's father, his mother told him once. *Bird* was all your own doing.

The word that, when he said it, felt like him. Something that did not belong on earth, a small quick thing. An inquisitive chirp, a self that curled up at the edges.

The school hadn't liked it. Bird is not a name, they'd said, his name is Noah. His kindergarten teacher, fuming: He won't answer when I call him. He only answers to Bird.

Because his name *is* Bird, his mother said. He answers to Bird, so I suggest you call him that, birth certificate be damned. She'd taken a Sharpie to every handout that came home, crossing off *Noah*, writing *Bird* on the dotted line instead.

That was his mother: formidable and ferocious when her child was in need.

In the end the school conceded, though after that the teacher had written Bird in quotation marks, like a gangster's nickname. *Dear "Bird," please remember to have your mother sign your permission slip. Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gardner, "Bird" is respectful and studious but needs to participate more fully in class.* It wasn't until he was nine, after his mother left, that he became Noah.

His father says it's for the best, and won't let anyone call him Bird anymore.

If anyone calls you that, he says, you correct them. You say: Sorry, no, that's not my name.

It was one of the many changes that took place after his mother left. A new apartment, a new school, a new job for his father. An entirely new life. As if his father had wanted to transform them completely, so that if his mother ever came back, she wouldn't even know how to find them.

He'd passed his old kindergarten teacher on the street last year, on his way home. Well, hello, Noah, she said, how are you this morning? and he could not tell whether it was smugness or pity in her voice.

He is twelve now; he has been Noah for three years, but *Noah* still feels like one of those Halloween masks, something rubbery and awkward he doesn't quite know how to wear.

• • •

So now, out of the blue: a letter from his mother. It looks like her handwriting—and no one else would call him that. *Bird*. After all these years he forgets her voice sometimes; when he tries to summon it, it slips away like a shadow dissolving in the dark.

He opens the envelope with trembling hands. Three years without a single word, but finally he'll understand. Why she left. Where she's been.

But inside: nothing but a drawing. A whole sheet of paper, covered edge to edge in drawings no bigger than a dime: cats. Big cats, little cats, striped and calico and tuxedo, sitting pert, licking their paws, lolling in puddles of sunlight. Doodles really, like the ones his mother drew on his lunch bags many years ago, like the ones he sometimes draws in his class notebooks

today. Barely more than a few curved lines, but recognizable. Alive. That's all—no message, no words even, just cat after cat in ballpoint squiggle. Something about it tugs at the back of his mind, but he can't quite hook it.

He turns the paper over, looking for clues, but the back of the page is blank.

• • •

Do you remember anything about your mother, Sadie had asked him once. They were on the playground, atop the climbing structure, the slide yawning down before them. Fifth grade, the last year with recess. Everything too small for them by then, meant for little children. Across the blacktop they watched their classmates hunting each other out: ready or not, here I come.

The truth was that he did, but he didn't feel like sharing, even with Sadie. Their motherlessness bound them together, but it was different, what had happened to them. What had happened with their mothers.

Not much, he'd said, do you remember much about yours?

Sadie grabbed the bar over the slide and hoisted herself, as if doing a chin-up.

Only that she was a hero, she said.

Bird said nothing. Everyone knew that Sadie's parents had been deemed unfit to raise her and that's how she'd ended up with her foster family, and at their school. There were all kinds of stories about them: that even though Sadie's mother was Black and her father was white they were Chinese sympathizers selling out America. All kinds of stories about Sadie, too: that when the officers came to take her away she'd bitten one and ran screaming back to her parents, and they'd had to cart her off in handcuffs. That this wasn't even her first foster family, that she'd been re-placed more than once because she caused so much trouble. That even after she'd been removed, her parents kept on trying to overturn PACT, like they didn't care about getting her back; that they'd been arrested and were in jail somewhere. He suspected there were stories about him, too, but he didn't want to know.

Anyway, Sadie went on, as soon as I'm old enough I'm going back home to Baltimore and find them both.

She was a year older than Bird, even though they were in the same grade, and she never let him forget it. Had to repeat, the parents whispered at pickup, with pity in their voices. Because of her *upbringing*. But even a new start can't straighten her out.

How, Bird had asked.

Sadie didn't answer, and after a minute she let go of the bar and slumped down beside him, a small defiant heap. The next year, just as school ended, Sadie disappeared—and now, in seventh grade, Bird is all alone again.

• • •

It is just past five: his father will be home soon, and if he sees the letter he'll make Bird burn it. They don't have any of his mother's things, not even her clothes. After she'd gone away, his father burned her books in the fireplace, smashed the cell phone she'd left behind, piled everything else in a heap at the curb. Forget about her, he'd said. By morning, people living rough had picked the pile clean. A few weeks later, when they moved to their apartment on campus, they'd left even the bed his parents had shared. Now his father sleeps in a twin, on the lower bunk, beneath Bird.

He should burn the letter himself. It isn't safe, having anything of hers around. More than this: when he sees his name, his old name, on the envelope, a door inside him creaks open and a draft snakes in. Sometimes when he sees sleeping figures huddled on the sidewalk, he scans

them, searching for something familiar. Sometimes he finds it—a polka-dot scarf, a red-flowered shirt, a woolen hat slouching over their eyes—and for a moment, he believes it is her. It is easier if she's gone forever, if she never comes back.

His father's key scratches at the keyhole, wriggling its way into the stiff lock.

Bird darts to the bedroom, lifts his blankets, tucks the letter between pillow and case.

He doesn't remember much about his mother, but he remembers this: she always had a plan. She would not have taken the trouble to find their new address, and the risk of writing him, for no reason. Therefore this letter must mean something. He tells himself this, again and again.

• • •

She'd left them, that was all his father would say.

And then, getting down on his knees to look Bird in the eye: It's for the best. Forget about her. I'm not going anywhere, that's all you need to know.

Back then, Bird hadn't known what she'd done. He only knew that for weeks he'd heard his parents' muffled voices in the kitchen long after he was supposed to be asleep. Usually it was a soothing murmur that lulled him to sleep in minutes, a sign that all was well. But lately it had been a tug-of-war instead: first his father's voice, then his mother's, bracing itself, gritting its teeth.

Even then he'd understood it was better not to ask questions. He'd simply nodded, and let his father, warm and solid, draw him into his arms.

It wasn't until later that he learned the truth, hurled at him on the playground like a stone to the cheek: *Your mom is a traitor.* D. J. Pierce, spitting on the ground beside Bird's sneakers.

Everyone knew his mother was a Person of Asian Origin. Kung-PAOs, some kids called them. This was not news. You could see it in Bird's face, if you looked: all the parts of him that weren't quite his father, hints in the tilt of his cheekbones, the shape of his eyes. Being a PAO, the authorities reminded everyone, was not itself a crime. PACT is not about race, the president was always saying, it is about patriotism and mindset.

But your mom started riots, D. J. said. My parents said so. She was a danger to society and they were coming for her and that's why she ran away.

His father had warned him about this. People will say all kinds of things, he'd told Bird. You just focus on school. You say, we have nothing to do with her. You say, she's not a part of my life anymore.

He'd said it.

We have nothing to do with her, my dad and me. She's not a part of my life anymore.

Inside him his heart tightened and creaked. On the blacktop, the wad of D. J.'s spit glistened and frothed.

• • •

By the time his father comes into the apartment, Bird is sitting at the table with his schoolbooks. On a normal day he'd jump up, offer a side-armed hug. Today, still thinking about the letter, he hunches over his homework and avoids his father's eyes.

Elevator's out again, his father says.

They live on the top floor of one of the dorms, ten flights up. A newer building, but the university is so old even the newer buildings are outdated.

We've been around since before the United States was a country, his father likes to say. He says *we* as if he is still a faculty member, though he hasn't been for years. Now he works at the college library, keeping records, shelving books, and the apartment comes with the job. Bird

understands this is a perk, that his father's hourly wage is small and money is tight, but to him it doesn't seem like much of a benefit. Before, they'd had a whole house with a yard and a garden. Now they have a tiny two-room dorm: a single bedroom he and his father share, a living room with a kitchenette at one end. A two-burner stove; a mini fridge too small to hold a carton of milk upright. Below them, students come and go; every year they have new neighbors, and by the time they get to know people's faces, they are gone. In the summer there is no air-conditioning; in the winter the radiators click on full blast. And when the balky elevator refuses to run, the only way up or down is the stairs.

Well, his father says. One hand goes to the knot of his tie, working it loose. I'll let the super know.

Bird keeps his eyes on his papers, but he can feel his father's gaze pause on him. Waiting for him to look up. He doesn't dare.

Today's English assignment: *In a paragraph, explain what PACT stands for and why it is crucial for our national security. Provide three specific examples.* He knows just what he should say; they study it in school every year. The Preserving American Culture and Traditions Act. In kindergarten they called it a promise: *We promise to protect American values. We promise to watch over each other.* Each year they learn the same thing, just in bigger words. During these lessons, his teachers usually looked at Bird, rather pointedly, and then the rest of the class turned to look, too.

He pushes the essay aside and focuses on math instead. *Suppose the GDP of China is $15 trillion and it increases 6% per year. If America's GDP is $24 trillion but it increases at only 2% per year, how many years before China's GDP is more than America's?* It's easier, where there are numbers. Where he can be sure of right and wrong.

Everything all right, Noah? his father says, and Bird nods, makes a vague gesture at his notebook.

Just a lot of homework, he says, and his father, apparently satisfied, goes into the bedroom to change.

Bird carries a one, draws a neat box around the final sum. There is no point in telling his father about his day: each day is the same. The walk to school, along the same route. The pledge, the anthem, shuffling from class to class keeping his head down, trying not to attract attention in the hallway, never raising his hand. On the best days, everyone ignores him; most days, he's picked on or pitied. He's not sure which he dislikes more, but he blames both on his mother.

There is never much point in asking his father about his day, either. As far as he can tell, his father's days are unvarying: roll the cart through the stacks, place a book in its spot, repeat. Back in the shelving room, another cart will be waiting. *Sisyphean*, his father said, when he first began. He used to teach linguistics; he loves books and words; he is fluent in six languages, can read another eight. It's he who told Bird the story of Sisyphus, forever rolling the same stone up a hill. His father loves myths and obscure Latin roots and words so long you had to practice before rattling them off like a rosary. He used to interrupt his own sentences to explain a complicated term, to wander off the path of his thought down a switchback trail, telling Bird the history of the word, where it came from, its whole life story and all its siblings and cousins. Scraping back the layers of its meaning. Once Bird had loved it, too, back when he was younger, back when his father was still a professor and his mother was still here and everything was different. When he'd still thought stories could explain anything.

These days, his father doesn't talk much about words. He is tired from the long days at the library that grind his eyes into sand; he comes home surrounded by a hush, as if it's soaked into him from the stacks, the cool sweet-stale air, the gloom that hovers at your shoulder, barely

pushed back by the single light in each aisle. Bird doesn't ask him, either, for the same reason his father doesn't like to talk about his mother: both of them would rather not miss these things they can't get back.

• • •

Still: she returns in sudden flashes. Like scraps of half-remembered dreams.

Her laugh, sudden as a seal's bark, a raucous burst that threw her whole head back. Unladylike, she'd called it, with pride. The way she'd drum her fingers while she was thinking, her thoughts so restless she could not be still. And this one: late at night, Bird ill with a rasping cold. Waking from a sweaty sleep, panicked, coughing and crying, his chest full of hot glue. Certain he was going to die. His mother, draping a towel over the bedside lamp, curling up beside him, setting her cool cheek to his forehead. Holding him until he fell asleep, holding him all night. Each time he half woke, her arms were still around him, and the fear that rose in him like a ruffled thing grew smooth and sleek again.

• • •

Together they sit at the table, Bird drumming a pencil against his worksheet, his father studiously combing through the newspaper. Everyone else in the world gets their news online, scrolling through the top stories, pulling phones from pockets at the ding of a breaking-news alert. Once his father had, too, but after they moved he'd given up his phone and his laptop. I'm just old-fashioned, he said, when Bird asked. These days he reads the newspaper, front to back. Every word, he says, every single day. This is as close as he comes to bragging. Between problems, Bird tries not to look toward the bedroom, where the letter lies in wait. Instead he studies the headlines on the front page that screens him from his father. SHARP EYE OF NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH FOILS POTENTIAL INSURRECTION IN DC.

Bird calculates. *If a Korean car costs $15,000 but lasts only 3 years, while an American car costs $20,000 but lasts 10 years, how much money would be saved over 50 years by purchasing only American cars? If a virus spreads exponentially through a population of 10 million, and doubles its rate of growth every day—*

Across the table, his father inverts the newspaper.

There is only the essay left. Haltingly, Bird picks his way through the assignment, building a lopsided paragraph word by word. *PACT is a very important law that ended the Crisis and keeps our country safe, because—*

He is relieved when his father folds the paper and checks his watch, when he can abandon the essay and set his pencil down.

Almost six thirty, his father says. Come on, let's get something to eat.

• • •

They cross the street to the dining hall for dinner. Another alleged perk of the job: no one has to cook; handy for a single dad. If, through some unforeseen delay, they miss dinner, his father scrambles—a blue box of macaroni from the cupboard, perhaps; a scanty meal that leaves them both hungry. Before his mother left, they'd eaten together, a circle of three at the kitchen table, his parents chatting and laughing as they ate, afterward his mother singing softly as she washed the dishes and his father dried.

They find a spot in the back corner of the dining hall where they can eat alone. Around them, students cluster in twos and threes, the low murmur of their whispered conversations like an air current in the room. Bird knows none of their names and only a few of their faces; he's not

in the habit of looking people in the eye. Just keep on walking, his father always says if passersby stare, their gazes like centipedes on Bird's face. Bird is grateful that he isn't expected to smile and nod to the students, to make small talk. They do not know his name either, and anyway, by the end of the year, they will all be gone.

They have almost finished eating when there's a commotion outside. A scuffle and a crash, the screeching of wheels. Sirens.

Stay here, Bird's father says. He runs to the window and joins the students already gathering there, peering out onto the street. All around the dining hall, abandoned plates grow cold. Blue and white lights strobe across the ceiling and walls. Bird does not get up. Whatever it is will pass. Stay away from trouble, his father always tells him, which to his father means anything that attracts attention. You see any trouble, his father once said, you run the other way. This is his father: trudging through life, head bowed.

But the murmur in the dining hall grows louder. More sirens, more lights, casting shadows that swell and loom, monstrous, on the ceiling. Outside, a tangle of angry voices and the jostle of bodies, booted feet on pavement. He's never heard anything like this and part of him wants to run to the window, to peek out and see what's going on. The other part of him wants to duck under the table and hide, like the small scared creature he suddenly knows himself to be. From the street comes a scratchy burst of megaphone: *This is the Cambridge Police. Please shelter in place. Stay away from windows until further notification.*

Around the dining hall, students scurry back to their tables, and Peggy, the dining-hall manager, skirts the room, yanking the curtains shut. The air tingles with whispers. Bird imagines an angry mob outside, barricades of trash and furniture, Molotov cocktails and flames. All the photos from the Crisis they've studied in school, come to life. He jitters his knee against the table leg until his father returns, and then the jittering transfers itself inside him, to the hollow part of his chest.

What's going on, Bird asks.

His father shakes his head.

Some disruption, he says. I think. And then, noticing Bird's wide eyes: It's okay, Noah. The authorities are here. They have everything under control.

• • •

During the Crisis, disruptions happened all the time; they've learned this over and over in school, for as long as he can remember. Everyone out of work, factories gone idle, shortages of everything; mobs had looted stores and rioted in the streets, lighting whole neighborhoods ablaze. The nation paralyzed in the turmoil.

It was impossible, his social studies teacher had said, to lead a productive life.

He'd flicked to another slide on the smartboard. Streets in rubble, windows smashed. A tank in the middle of Wall Street. Smoke rising in an orange haze beneath the St. Louis Arch.

That, young ladies and gentlemen, is why you are fortunate to be living in an age where PACT has made disruptive protests a thing of the past.

And it's true, for most of Bird's life disruptions have been vanishingly rare. PACT has been the law for over a decade, passed with overwhelming majorities in both House and Senate, signed by the president in record time. Poll after poll still shows huge public support.

Except: over the past few months, strange things have been happening all over—not strikes and marches and riots like the disruptions they've learned about in class, but something new. Weird and apparently pointless stunts, too bizarre not to report, all of them anonymous, all of them aimed at PACT itself. In Memphis, ski-masked figures emptied a dump truck of ping-pong

balls into the river and fled, leaving a plume of white orbs in their wake. A miniature red heart drawn on each, above the words END PACT. Just last week, two drones had unfurled a banner across the Brooklyn Bridge, arch to arch. FUCK PACT, it read. Within thirty minutes, the state police had closed the bridge, rolled a cherry picker to the support towers, and taken it down—but Bird has seen the photos, snapped on phones and unleashed online; all the news stations and sites had run them, and even some papers, too. The big banner with bold black lettering, and beneath it, a splotchy red heart like a splash of blood.

In New York, traffic had snarled for hours with the bridge closed: people had posted videos showing long lines of cars, a chain of red lights stretching into the night. We didn't get home until midnight, one driver told reporters. Under his eyes, dark rings bloomed like smudges of smoke. We were basically held hostage, he said, and no one knew what was going on—I mean, it was like terrorism. News reports calculated the gasoline wasted, the carbon monoxide released, the economic cost of those lost hours. Rumor had it that people were still finding ping-pong balls floating in the Mississippi; Memphis police released a photograph of a duck they said had choked, gullet bulging with tumor-like lumps.

Absolutely unacceptable behavior, his social studies teacher had sniffed. If any of you ever get wind of someone planning disruptions like these, it's your civic duty under PACT to report it to the authorities.

They'd gotten an impromptu lecture and an extra assignment: *Write a five-paragraph essay explaining how recent disturbances to the peace have endangered public safety for all.* Bird's hand had curled and cramped.

And here is a disruption right outside the dining hall. Bird is equally terrified and fascinated. What is it: An attack? A riot? A bomb?

From across the table, his father takes his hand. Something he did often when Bird was still small, something he almost never does anymore now that Bird is older, something Bird—secretly—misses. His father's hand is soft and uncalloused, the hand of a man who works with his mind. His fingers wrap warm and strong around Bird's, gently stilling them.

You know where it comes from? his father says. *Dis-* means *apart*. Like *dis*turb, *dis*tend, *dis*member.

His father's oldest habit: taking words apart like old clocks to show the gears still ticking inside. He is trying to calm Bird, as if telling a bedtime story. To distract him, maybe even to distract himself.

Plus *rupt*: to break. As in e*rupt*, to break out; inter*rupt*, to break between; ab*rupt*, broken from.

His father's voice rises half an octave in his excitement, a guitar string coming into tune. So *disruption,* he says, really means *breaking apart*. Smashing to pieces.

Bird thinks of train tracks uprooted, highways barricaded, buildings crumbling. He thinks of the photos they've been shown in school, protesters hurling rocks, riot officers crouched behind a wall of shields. From outside they hear indistinct screeches from police radios, voices swelling in and out of range. Around them, the students bend over their phones, looking for explanations, posting updates.

It's okay, Noah, his father says. It'll all be over soon. There's nothing to be afraid of.

I'm not afraid, Bird says. And he isn't, exactly. It isn't fear that spiderwebs across his skin. It's like the charge in the air before a storm, some immense and shocking potential.

About twenty minutes later another megaphone announcement crackles through the drawn curtains and the double panes of glass. *It is safe to resume normal activities. Please alert authorities to any further suspicious activity.*

Around them, the students begin to trickle away, depositing their trays at the wash station and hurrying off to their dorm rooms, complaining about the delay. It is past eight thirty, and everyone suddenly has somewhere else they wish to be. As Bird and his father gather their things, Peggy begins to open the curtains again, revealing the darkened street. Behind her, other dining-hall workers dart from table to table with dishcloths and spray bottles of cleaner; another shoves a push broom hastily across the tiles, collecting spilled cereal and scattered bread crumbs.

I'll get those for you, Peggy, Bird's father says, and Peggy gives him a grateful nod.

You take care, Mr. Gardner, Peggy says, as she hurries back into the kitchen. Bird fidgets, waiting, until his father has reopened each set of curtains, and they can head home again.

Outside the air is brisk and still. All the police cars have gone, and all the people, too; the block is deserted. He looks for signs of the disruption—craters, scorched buildings, broken glass. Nothing. Then, as they cross the street back toward the dorm, Bird sees it on the ground: spray-painted, blood-red against the asphalt, right in the center of the intersection. The size of a car, impossible to miss. A heart, he realizes, just like the banner in Brooklyn. And circling it this time, a ring of words. *BRING BACK OUR MISSING HEARTS.*

A tingle snakes over his skin.

As they cross, he slows, reading the letters again. *OUR MISSING HEARTS.* The half-dried paint sticks to the soles of his sneakers; his breath sticks, hot, in his throat. He glances at his father, searching for a glimmer of recognition. But his father tugs him by the arm. Pulling him away, not even looking down. Not meeting Bird's eye.

Getting late, his father says. Better head in.

• • •

She'd been a poet, his mother.

A famous one, Sadie had added, and he'd shrugged. Was there such a thing?

Are you kidding, Sadie said, everyone's heard of Margaret Miu.

She considered.

Well, she said, they've heard her poem, at least.

• • •

At first it had just been a phrase, like any other.

Not long after his mother left, Bird had found a slip of paper on the bus, thin as a dead butterfly's wing, in the gap between seat and wall. One of dozens. His father snatched it from his hand and crumpled it, tossed it to the floor.

Don't pick up garbage, Noah, he said.

But Bird had already read the words at the top: *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS.*

A phrase he'd never heard before but that sprang up elsewhere in the months, then years, after his mother had gone. Graffitied in the bike tunnel, on the wall of the basketball court, on the plywood around a long-stalled construction site. *DON'T FORGET OUR MISSING HEARTS.* Scrawled across the neighborhood-watch posters with a fat-bladed brush: *WHERE ARE OUR MISSING HEARTS?* And on pamphlets, appearing overnight one memorable morning: pinned under the wipers of parked cars, scattered on the sidewalk, caught against the concrete feet of lampposts. Palm-sized, xeroxed handbills reading simply this: *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS.*

The next day, the graffiti was painted over, the posters replaced, the pamphlets swept away like dead leaves. Everything so clean he might have imagined it all.

It didn't mean anything to him then.

It's an anti-PACT slogan, his father said curtly, when Bird asked. From people who want to overturn PACT. Crazy people, he'd added. Real lunatics.

You'd have to be a lunatic, Bird had agreed, to overturn PACT. PACT had helped end the Crisis; PACT kept things peaceful and safe. Even kindergarteners knew that. PACT was common sense, really: If you acted unpatriotic, there would be consequences. If you didn't, then what were you worried about? And if you saw or heard of something unpatriotic, it was your duty to let the authorities know. He has never known a world without PACT; it is as axiomatic as gravity, or *Thou shalt not kill.* He didn't understand why anyone would oppose it, what any of this had to do with hearts, how a heart could be missing. How could you survive without your heart beating inside you?

It made no sense until he met Sadie. Who'd been removed from her home and re-placed, because her parents had protested PACT.

Didn't you know? she'd said. What the *consequences* were? Bird. Come *on.*

She tapped the worksheet they'd been given as homework: The Three Pillars of PACT. *Outlaws promotion of un-American values and behavior. Requires all citizens to report potential threats to our society.* And there, beneath Sadie's finger: *Protects children from environments espousing harmful views.*

Even then, he hadn't wanted to believe it. Maybe there were a few PACT removals, but they couldn't happen much—or why did no one talk about it? Sure, every now and then, you heard of a case like Sadie, but surely those were exceptions. If it happened, you really must have done something dangerous, your kid *needed* to be protected—from you, and whatever you were doing or saying. What's next, some people said, you think molesters and child-beaters deserve to keep their kids, too?

He'd said this to Sadie, without thinking, and she went silent. Then she wadded up her sandwich in a ball of tuna and mayonnaise and smashed it into his face. By the time he wiped his eyes clear, she was gone, and all afternoon, the stink of fish clung to his hair and skin.

A few days later Sadie had pulled something from her backpack.

Look, she'd said. The first words she'd spoken to him since. Bird, look what I found.

A newspaper, corners tattered, ink smudged to gray. Almost two years old already. And there, just below the fold, a headline: LOCAL POET TIED TO INSURRECTIONS. His mother's photo, a dimple hovering at the edge of her smile. Around him, the world went hazy and gray.

Where did you get this, he asked, and Sadie shrugged.

At the library.

> *It's become the rallying cry at anti-PACT riots across the nation, but its roots are here—terrifyingly close to home. The phrase increasingly being used to attack the widely supported national security law is the brainchild of local woman Margaret Miu, pulled from her book of poems* Our Missing Hearts. *Miu, who is the child of Chinese immigrants and has a young son—*

The words wobbled out of focus then.

You know what this means, Bird, Sadie said. She raised herself onto her toes, the way she always did when excited. Your mom—

He did know, then. Why she'd left them. Why they never spoke about her.

She's one of them, Sadie said. She's out there somewhere. Organizing protests. Fighting PACT. Working to overturn it and bring kids home. Just like my parents.

Her eyes darkened and took on a far-off gleam. As if she were gazing right through Bird to something revelatory just beyond.

Maybe they're together, out there, she said.

Bird had thought it was just one of Sadie's wishful fantasies. His mother, the ringleader of all this? Improbable, if not impossible. Yet there were her words, emblazoned on all those signs and banners to overthrow PACT, all over the country.

What the news calls people who protest PACT: *Seditious subversives. Traitorous Chinese sympathizers. Tumors on American society.* Words he'd had to look up in his father's dictionary, back then, alongside *excise* and *eradicate.*

Every time they spotted his mother's words—in news reports, on someone's phone—Sadie elbowed Bird as if they'd sighted a celebrity. Evidence of his mother, out there, elsewhere, so worried about somebody else's children though she'd left her own behind. The irony of it leached into his veins.

Now it is no longer elsewhere. Here are his mother's words, streaked across his street in blood-red. Her letter upstairs, in his pillow. The same splash of red heart from the Brooklyn Bridge, there on the pavement at his feet. He glances over his shoulder, scanning the dark corners of the courtyard, not sure if the coldness in his throat is hope or dread, if he wants to run into her arms or drag her from her hiding place into the light. But there is no one there, and his father tugs his arm, and he follows his father inside and up the stairs.

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Back in the dorm, sweaty and tired from their climb, his father peels off his coat and hangs it on its peg. Bird settles down to finish his homework, but his mind buzzes, unruly. He glances at the window toward the courtyard below, but all he can see is their own shabby apartment reflected in the glass. In front of him, his half-finished essay trails into blank white space.

Dad, he says.

Across the room, his father looks up from his book. He is reading a dictionary, leafing idly from page to page: an old habit Bird finds both peculiar and endearing. Long ago his parents would spend evenings like this, on the couch with their books, and sometimes Bird would drape himself over his father's shoulder, then his mother's, sounding out the longest words he could find. These days, the dictionaries are the only books in the apartment, the only books they'd kept when they moved. From his father's eyes Bird can see he was centuries away, wandering the zigzagging past of some archaic word. He regrets having to call him back from that peaceful golden place. But he has to know.

You haven't—he clears his throat—you haven't heard from her, have you?

For a moment his father's face goes very still. Though Bird hasn't spoken her name, he doesn't need to: both of them know who he means. There is only one *her*, for them. Then his father shuts the dictionary with a thump.

Of course not, he says, and comes to stand at Bird's elbow. Looming over him. He sets a hand on Bird's shoulder.

She is not a part of your life anymore. As far as we're concerned, she doesn't exist. Do you understand, Noah? Tell me you understand.

Bird knows exactly what he should say—*Of course, I understand*—but the words clog in his throat. But she is, he wants to say. She does, I don't, she has something to say, she has something to tell *me*, this is a loose end that needs to be tied off—or unraveled. In this moment of hesitation his father glances over Bird's shoulder at the unfinished essay on the table.

Let me see, he says.

His father hasn't been a professor for years but he can't stop himself from trying to teach. His brain is like a big dog penned in his skull, restless and pacing, aching for a run. Already he's leaning over Bird's homework, tugging the paper from the crook of Bird's arm.

I'm not done yet, Bird protests, and bites the eraser end of his pencil. Graphite and rubber flake onto his tongue. His father shakes his head.

This needs to be much clearer, he says. Look—here, where you say *PACT is very important for national security.* You need to be much more specific, much more forceful: *PACT is a crucial part of keeping America safe from being undermined by foreign influences.*

With one finger he traces a line, smudging Bird's cursive.

Or here. You need to show your teacher you really get this—there should be absolutely no question you understand. *PACT protects innocent children from being indoctrinated with false, subversive, un-American ideas by unfit and unpatriotic parents.*

He taps the paper.

Go on, he says, jabbing at the loose-leaf. Write that down.

Bird stares back at his father with set jaw and angry, liquid eyes. They have never been like this before: two flinty stones striking off sparks.

Do it, his father says, and Bird does, and his father lets out a deep breath and retreats into the bedroom, dictionary in hand.

• • •

After he's finished his homework and brushed his teeth, Bird turns out the lights in the apartment and slips behind the curtains. From here he can see across the street to the dining hall, closed now, lit only by the faint red glow of the exit signs inside. As he watches, a truck pulls to the curb and flicks off its headlights. The shadowy figure of a man gets out, carries something to the center of the road, begins to work. It takes Bird a minute to understand what's happening: the something is a bucket of paint and a large roller brush. He is painting over the heart, and by morning it will be gone.

Noah, his father says from the doorway. Time for bed.

• • •

That night, while his father snores faintly beneath him, Bird worms a hand into his pillowcase, feeling for the faint edges of the envelope. Carefully he slips out the letter, flattens it out. He keeps a penlight in the top bunk so he can read while his father is sleeping, and he clicks it on.

In the watery light the cats are a tangle of angles and curves. A secret message? A code? Letters in their stripes, perhaps, in the points of their ears or the bends of their tails? He turns the letter this way and that, traces the ballpoint lines with the beam. On a tabby he thinks he spots an *M*; the arched leg of a black cat looks like an *S*, or maybe an *N*. But he can't be certain.

He's about to tuck the letter away when he sees it, the little circle of light bringing it into crisp focus like a magnifying glass. Down in the corner, where a page number would be: a rectangle, the size of his pinky fingernail. Inside it another rectangle, a bit smaller. The cats, of course, ignore it; unless you looked closely, you would miss it between them. But it catches Bird's attention. What is it? A framed picture of nothing, perhaps. An old-fashioned television set, screen blank. A window with a flat plane of glass.

He studies it. A dot on one side, two tiny hinges on the other. A door. A door on a box, a cabinet shut up tight. A faint breeze flutters a page in the back corner of his brain, then settles again. A story his mother told him, long ago. She'd always been telling him stories—fairy tales, fables, legends, myths: a rainbow of different, beautiful lies. But now, seeing the picture, it's familiar. Cats, and a cabinet, and a boy. He can't quite remember it, but he knows it is there. How did it go?

Once upon a time. Once upon a time there was—a boy who loved cats.

He waits, hoping for his mother's voice to come back to him, to fill in the rest of the story. A ball given a shove downhill. But there's only the whispery sound of his father breathing. He can't remember what his mother's voice sounds like. The voice he hears in his head is his own.

After science, his classmates jostle off to the cafeteria for lunch, eager to buy their corn dogs and chocolate milk, to jockey for seats at the best tables. Bird has never liked eating there, all those whispers. For years he took the table in the corner, half hidden in the nook behind the vending machine. Then, near the end of fifth grade, Sadie had arrived, unabashed and unrepentant, elbowing out a space for the two of them. For one glorious year he'd not been alone. The first day they met, she'd grabbed his hand and pulled him outside to the small patch of lawn. Out there, the air was cool and calm and the quiet poured into his ears, magnifying every sound, and as he settled beside her on the grass, he could hear everything, the rustle of the plastic bags they unfurled from their sandwiches, the scrape of Sadie's sneaker against the concrete as she curled her leg beneath her, the murmur of the newly uncurled leaves overhead as the breeze rattled their branches.

The whispers had changed then. There were songs: Noah and Sadie, sitting in a tree.

Kids still sing that? his father had said, when Bird told him about it. That idiotic chant will outlast the apocalypse. When they've burned all the books, that's all we'll have left.

He cut himself off.

Just ignore it. They'll stop.

Then he paused. But don't spend too much time around that Sadie, he said. You don't want people to think you're like her.

Bird had nodded, but after that he and Sadie ate together every day, no matter the weather, huddling together under the overhang when it rained, shivering side by side in the winter slush. After Sadie disappeared, he hadn't returned to the cafeteria but went back to their spot each day. He'd learned, by then: sometimes being alone was the less bad option.

Today, instead of going outside, he lingers in the science classroom, pretending to rummage in his bookbag, until everyone else has gone. At her desk, Mrs. Pollard stacks her papers in an orderly sheaf, gives him an appraising look.

Did you need something, Noah? she asks. From a drawer she removes a brown paper sack, neatly crimped: her own lunch. On the wall behind her, a row of colorful posters beam. IN THIS TOGETHER, one reads, a chain of red, white, and blue paper dolls stretched across a map of the United States. *Every good citizen is a good influence*, says another. *Every bad citizen is a bad influence.* And then, of course, there is the flag that hangs in every classroom, dangling just over her left shoulder like a raised axe.

Could I use a computer? Bird says. I wanted to look something up.

He waves toward the table by the far wall, where a half dozen laptops have been placed for student use. Most of his classmates look things up on their phones instead, but Bird's father won't let him have one. Absolutely not, he says, and as a result Bird is one of the few kids he knows who ever use the school computers. Behind them, empty bookshelves. Bird has never seen books on them, but there they stand, fossils of a long-gone era.

Did you know, their teacher explained the year before, that paper books are out of date the instant they're printed?

The beginning-of-year welcome talk. All of them sitting crisscross applesauce on the carpet at her feet.

That's how fast the world changes. And our understanding of it, too.

She snapped her fingers.

We want to make sure you have the most current information. This way we can be sure nothing you use is outdated or inaccurate. You'll find everything you need right here online.

But where did they all go, Sadie insisted. Sadie, still new to the school then, and fearless. The books, she said. There must have been some before, or there wouldn't be shelves. Where did you take them?

The teacher's smile widened, and tightened.

Everyone has storage limitations, she said. So we've culled the books that we felt were unnecessary or unsuitable or out of date. But—

So you banned all those books, Sadie said, and the teacher had blinked twice at her over her glasses.

Oh no, sweetie, she said. People think that sometimes, but no. No one bans anything. Haven't you ever heard of the Bill of Rights?

The class giggled, and Sadie flushed.

Every school makes its own independent judgments, the teacher said. About which books are useful to their students and which books might expose them to dangerous ideas. Let me ask you something: Whose parents want them to spend time with bad people?

She looked around the circle. No one raised a hand.

Of course not. Your parents want you to be safe. That's part of being a good parent. You all know that I'm a mom, too, right?

A general murmur of assent.

Imagine a book that told you lies, the teacher went on. Or one that told you to do bad things, like hurt people, or hurt yourself. Your parents would never put a book like that on your bookshelf at home, would they?

All around the circle, children shook their heads, wide-eyed. Only Sadie's stayed still, her arms folded, her mouth a thin straight line.

Well, it's like that, the teacher said. We all want our children to be safe. We don't want them exposed to bad ideas—ideas that might hurt them, or encourage them to do bad things. To themselves, or to their families, or to our country. So we remove those books and block sites that might be harmful.

She smiled around at all of them.

It's our job as teachers, she said, her voice soft but firm. To take care of all of you, just like I'd take care of my own children. To decide what's worth keeping and what isn't. We just have to decide on these things.

Her gaze came to rest, at last, on Sadie.

We always have, she said. Nothing's changed.

Now, Bird holds his breath as Mrs. Pollard hesitates. It's only a month into seventh grade but he already likes Mrs. Pollard; her daughter, Jenna, is a year behind Bird, and Josh, her boy, is in first. She has gray-blond hair and wears sweaters with pockets and big, round earrings that look like candy. Unlike his social studies teacher, she never stares at him when PACT comes up, and if she hears one of the kids giving him a hard time, she'll say, *Seventh graders, let's focus on the task at hand, please*, with a rap of her knuckles on the desktop.

Is this for class? she asks.

Something in Mrs. Pollard's voice puts Bird on his guard—or maybe it's the way she peers at him, eyes narrowed, as if she knows what he's doing. He wishes he had that confidence in himself. To believe that what he's after is anything more than a wild-goose chase. On her lapel, a tiny flag pin glints in the fluorescent light.

Not exactly, he says. It's just something I'm interested in. About cats, he adds, improvising. My dad and I—we're thinking of getting a cat. I wanted to look up different breeds.

One of Mrs. Pollard's eyebrows lifts ever so slightly.

Well, she says, brightly. A new pet. That's lovely. Let me know if you need help.

She tips her head toward the row of computers, shining and silver, and begins to unwrap her lunch.

Bird seats himself at the computer farthest from her desk. On each, a small brass plaque reads: *A gift from the Lieu family.* Two years ago Ronny Lieu's family had purchased them for every classroom, upgraded the whole school to high-speed internet. Just part of giving back to society, Mr. Lieu had said at the unveiling ceremony. He was a businessman—some kind of real estate—and the principal had thanked him for this generous gift, said how grateful they were to private citizens for stepping in where the city budget still fell short. He'd praised the Lieus for being such loyal members of the community. It was the same year Arthur Tran's parents had donated money to renovate the cafeteria and Janey Youn's father had given the school a new flagpole and flag.

He jiggles the mouse and the screen snaps to life, a photo of Mount Rushmore under cloudless blue. A tap of the browser and a window opens, cursor blinking slow and lazy at its top.

What to type? *Where is my mother.* Is it too much to hope the internet can tell him this?

He pauses. At her desk, Mrs. Pollard scrolls on her phone as she nibbles her sandwich. Peanut butter, by the smell. Outside, a brown leaf drifts from treetop to pavement.

Story about boy with many cats, he types, and words flood the screen.

The Black Cat (short story). List of Fictional Cats in Literature. He clicks one link after another, waiting for something familiar, that jolt of recognition. *The Cat in the Hat. The Tale of Tom Kitten. Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.* Nothing he recognizes. Gradually he wanders farther and farther afield. *Amazing and True Cat Stories. Five Heroic Cats in History. Care and Feeding of Your New Cat.* All these stories about cats, and none of them his mother's. He must have imagined it. But still he digs.

Finally, when he is too tired to resist, he pecks out one more search, one he has never dared to try before.

Margaret Miu.

There's a pause, then an error message pops up. *No results*, it says. Somehow he feels her absence more, as if he's called out for her and she hasn't come. He peeks over his shoulder. Mrs. Pollard has finished her lunch and is grading worksheets, ticking check marks down the margins, and he clicks the back button.

Our missing hearts, he types, and the page stills for a moment. *No results.* This time, no matter how many times he clicks, it won't reset.

Mrs. Pollard, he says, approaching the desk. I think my computer froze.

Don't worry, dear, she says, we'll fix it. She rises and follows him back to the terminal, but when she sees his screen, the search at the top, something in her face shifts. A tenseness in her that Bird can feel even over his shoulder.

Noah, she says after a moment. You're twelve?

Bird nods.

Mrs. Pollard squats down beside his chair so they are eye to eye.

Noah, she says. This country is founded on the belief that every person gets to decide how to live his own life. You know that, right?

To Bird, this seems like one of the things adults say that do not require answers, and he says nothing.

Noah, Mrs. Pollard says again, and the way she keeps saying his name—which is not his name, of course—makes him clench his teeth so tightly they squeak. Noah, honey, listen to me,

please. In this country we believe that every generation can make better choices than the one that came before. Right? Everyone gets the same chance to prove themselves, to show us who they are. We don't hold the mistakes of parents against their children.

She looks at him through bright, anxious eyes.

Everyone has a choice, Noah, about whether they're going to make the same mistakes as the people who came before them, or whether they're going to take a different path. A better path. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Bird nods, though he's fairly sure he doesn't.

I'm saying this for your own good, Noah, I really am, Mrs. Pollard says. Her voice softens. You're a good kid and I don't want anything to happen to you and this is what I'd tell Jenna and Josh, truly. Don't make trouble. Just—do your best and follow the rules. Don't stir things up. For your dad's sake, if not your own.

She rises to her feet, and Bird understands that they're finished here.

Thank you, he manages to say.

Mrs. Pollard nods, satisfied.

If you decide on a cat, be sure to find a good breeder, she says as he heads into the hall. Adopting a stray—who knows what you'll get.

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A waste of time, he thinks. All afternoon, through English and math, he berates himself. On top of it all, his lunch is still in his bag, uneaten, and his stomach rumbles. In social studies, his mind wanders and the teacher calls him sharply to attention.

Mr. Gardner, he says. I would think you, of all people, would want to pay attention to this.

With a blunt nub of chalk he taps the board, leaving white flecks beneath the letters: WHAT IS SEDITION?

Across the aisle Carolyn Moss and Kat Angelini glance at him sideways, and when the teacher turns back to the chalkboard, Andy Moore throws a ball of wadded-up paper at Bird's head. What does it matter, Bird thinks. Whatever this cat story is, it has nothing to do with him, nothing useful or purposeful. Just a story, like everything his mother had told him. A pointless fairy tale. If he even remembers right, if there was even a story like that at all.

• • •

He's on his way home when he sees it. First the crowd, then a cluster of navy uniforms in the center of the Common—then a second later, all he can see are the trees. Red, red, red, from roots to branches, as if they've been dangled and dipped. The color of cardinals, of traffic signs, of cherry lollipops. Three maples standing close, arms outstretched. And strung between their branches, woven between the dying leaves: a huge red web, hanging in the air like a haze of blood.

He's supposed to walk straight home, to stay on the route his father has prescribed: cutting across the wide courtyard between the university's lab buildings, then through the college yard with its red brick dorms. Staying off the streets as much as possible, staying on university land as much as he can. It's safer, his father insists. When he was younger, he'd walked Bird to and from school every day. Don't try to take shortcuts, Noah, his father always says, just listen to me. Promise me, he'd said, when Bird began walking to school alone, and Bird had promised.

Now Bird breaks his word. He darts across the street to the Common, where a small group of onlookers has gathered.

From here he can see it more clearly. What he'd thought was red paint is yarn, a giant red doily fitted round each tree, all the way up the branches in a tight red glove. The web, too, is yarn, chains of red stretching twig to twig, crisscrossing, thickening in some places to clots, thinning in others to a single thread. Knotted in the strands, like snared insects: knit dolls the size of his finger, brown and tan and beige, fringes of dark yarn framing their faces. Around him passersby whisper and point, and Bird edges closer, into the crowd.

It frightens him, this thing. A monster's knitting. A scarlet tangle. It makes him feel small and vulnerable and exposed. But it fascinates him too, pulling him closer. The way a snake holds you with its eyes even as it draws back to strike.

A group of police officers clusters around the trees in intense conversation, prodding the yarn with their fingers. Discussing the best way to take it all down. It's too late: already passersby are slipping phones from pockets and bags, quietly snapping photos without breaking stride. They will be texted and posted everywhere soon. Beneath the trees, the officers circle the trunks, pistols dangling at their hips. One of them pushes his visor back up over his head; another sets his plexiglass shield down on the grass. They are equipped for violence, but not for this.

Clear out, folks, one of the policemen booms, stepping between the crowd and the trees as if he can hide this strange spectacle with his body. He draws his nightstick, thwaps it against one palm. Active crime scene, here. Move along, all of you. This is an unlawful gathering.

Overhead, the breeze flutters and the dolls bob and sway. Bird gazes up at them, the dark shapes they make against the innocent blue sky. Around him, the onlookers drift obediently away, the crowd thinning, and it is then that he spots it, stenciled on the pavement in white: *HOW MANY MORE MISSING HEARTS WILL THEY TAKE?* Beside it a red blotch—no, a heart.

He knows it is improbable—impossible—but he looks anyway. Over his shoulder, all around him, as if she might be lurking behind a tree or a bush. Hoping for her face in the shadows. But of course, there's no one there.

Let's go, son, the policeman says to him, and Bird realizes the crowd has dispersed, that he's the only one left. He ducks his head—*sorry*—and retreats, and the policeman turns back to his fellow officers. Cruisers, lights flashing, block the street at either end, directing traffic away. Cordoning off the park.

Bird crosses the street but loiters, watching surreptitiously from behind a parked car. Had his mother knitted? He doesn't think so. Anyway, surely one person could not have done this alone: the yarn, the web, the dolls wobbling like overripe fruit, all knitted into place, as if they've sprung fungus-like from the tree itself. How did they put this in place, he wonders, even as he is unsure who *they* might be. Through the windows of the car he can see the policemen debating how to handle this unusual situation. One of them worms his fingers into the web and yanks, and a thin branch snaps with a crack like a gunshot. A single long loop of yarn billows down, unraveling inch by inch. Something inside Bird cracks and unravels too, at the sight of something so delicate and intricate, destroyed. The dolls tremble, trapped in their red net. His skin feels too small for his thoughts.

Then one of the policemen produces a box cutter, begins to saw his way through the knitting from top to bottom, and yarn falls away in a waterfall of snippets. Another arrives with a ladder, climbs into the branches, pulls down the first doll and tosses it to the ground. Not dolls, Bird thinks suddenly: children. The big heads and snub limbs and dark hair. They had eyes but no mouths, just two buttons on a blank face, and as the small body tumbles down into the mud below, Bird turns away, stomach roiling. He can't bear to watch.

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He'd thought Sadie had been an exception. *PACT-related re-placements remain extremely rare.*

Well, they aren't, Sadie said.

But how many, he'd asked once. Ten? Twenty? Hundreds?

Sadie eyed him, hands on hips. Bird, she said, with infuriating pity, you don't understand anything, do you?

• • •

People didn't like to talk about it, liked to hear about it even less: that the patriotism of PACT was laced with a threat. But some had tried to say what was happening, to explain it to others, and to themselves. Sadie's mother had been one of them. There is footage of her, on a tidy tree-lined street in Baltimore. It could be any street in America except that it is deserted: no cars, no people walking their dogs or out for a stroll, just Sadie's mother in a yellow blazer, the black foam bulb of her Channel 5 mic held to her mouth.

Yesterday morning, she says, *on this quiet street, Family Services officers arrived at the home of Sonia Lee Chun and took custody of her four-year-old son, David. The reason? A recent post by Sonia on social media, arguing that PACT was being used to target members of the Asian American community.*

Behind her a pair of police cars pull up—lights off, ominously silent—and park, blocking the street. You can see them at a distance, the four officers emerging from the barricade of cars and approaching slowly, a push broom relentlessly sweeping the pavement clean. The camera is steady, and so is her voice. *We seem to have attracted some police presence. Officer, we are with Channel 5, here is my press badge, we—* Muffled cross-talk and then, to the camera, she says, imperturbably calm: *They are arresting me.* As if she is reporting on things happening to someone else.

The police seize her microphone. Her lips keep moving, but now there is no sound. As one officer pulls her arms back to cuff her, another approaches the camera, hand on holster, his mouth barking silent commands. The unseen cameraman sets his camera on the ground and the horizon tips sideways, a plumb line from sky to earth. As they are led away, the camera—still rolling—catches only their feet, retreating upward, off, then gone.

Bird has seen this video because Sadie kept a copy of it on her phone. Technically it is incriminating evidence—it shows her mother *espousing, promoting, or endorsing unpatriotic activity in private or in public*—but Sadie had managed to get a copy somehow and doggedly transferred it, over the years, from phone to phone. On the dumbed-down smartphone her foster parents have granted her—my leash, she says, sarcastically: so that they can always reach her, so that they can track her by GPS if need be—she hides it in a folder labeled *Games.* Sometimes Bird would find her crouched in the corner of the playground, or under the structure in the cubby where the younger kids played house. Over and over on the screen, her mother. Calm in the chaos around her. Slowly walking off into the sky.

It was the first time she'd been arrested, Sadie said, but it had only made her braver. After that she'd gone looking for other families whose children had been taken under PACT, trying to convince them to speak with her on-camera. Trying to trace where the children had been taken. Trying to film a PACT re-placement in action, pulling on her contacts in Family Services, in the mayor's office, anyone with a lead on who might be next.

Soon after, Sadie's mother got an email from her boss, Michelle: coffee, that weekend. Just a friendly chat. Unofficial. Off the record. Michelle stopped by, two takeout cups in hand, and

they sipped them at the kitchen table. Out in the hallway Sadie lurked, unnoticed. She was eleven.

I'm worried, Erika, Michelle said over a flat white, about *repercussions.*

A reporter over at WMAR had recently been fined for saying that PACT encouraged discrimination against those of Asian descent; his story, the state insisted, drummed up sympathy for people who might be dangerous to public stability. The station had paid it, almost a quarter of their yearly budget. In Annapolis, another station had had its license revoked. By coincidence, surely, it also had run a number of segments critical of PACT.

I'm a journalist, Sadie's mother had said. Reporting on these things is my job.

We're a small station, Michelle said. The bottom line is, with budget cuts we're basically at bare-bones operation as it is. And if our funders pulled out . . .

She stopped, and Sadie's mother twisted the sleeve of her paper cup around and around.

Are they threatening to? she asked, and Michelle replied, Two already have. But it's not just that. It's the repercussions for you, Erika. For your family.

They'd known each other for years, these two women: one Black, one white. Barbecues and picnics together, holiday gatherings. Michelle had no children, had never married. This station is my baby, she always said. When Sadie was born, Michelle had knitted her a yellow sweater and booties to match; over the years she'd taken Sadie on outings to the zoo and the aquarium and Fort Henry. Auntie Shellie, Sadie called her.

I'm hearing things, Michelle said. Really scary things. It's not just PAOs and protesters who need to worry about PACT, Erika. It might be best if we assigned you a different beat for a while. Something less political.

What beat would be less political, Sadie's mother asked.

I just don't want anything to happen to you, if you keep pushing this, Michelle said. Or to Lev. And most of all Sadie.

Sadie's mother took a long, slow sip. The coffee had gone cold.

What makes you think, she said finally, that any of us will be safe if I don't?

It was just a few weeks later that they'd come for Sadie.

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They came at night: that's what Sadie said. After dinnertime. She'd just taken a shower and was swathed in a towel when the doorbell rang. Her mother was combing Sadie's hair, which was thick and curly and prone to tangles, and downstairs they heard her father, shouting. Then the voices of strangers—a man, two men. Sadie's mother had lifted a section of hair in one hand and gently worked the comb through it, and this is what Sadie remembered most clearly: a stray drop of water trickling down the back of her neck, her mother's steady hand as she coaxed out the knots.

She didn't shake, Sadie said, her voice proud. Not one tiny bit.

Maybe she didn't know what was happening, Bird said.

Sadie shook her head.

She knew, she said.

Her mother wrapped her arms around her, pressed her lips to Sadie's forehead. Sadie hadn't understood, yet, what was going on, but dread seeped into her like a chill against her damp skin. She leaned against her mother, burrowed her face into the soft crook of her mother's neck so hard she couldn't breathe.

Don't forget us, okay? her mother had said, and Sadie was still confused when the bathroom door opened. A man, in a police uniform. Sadie's father was still shouting downstairs.

There were four officers, it turned out. Two stayed with her father downstairs and one stayed with her mother upstairs and one stood guard outside Sadie's room while she got dressed. Unsure what to do, she'd put on her rainbow-striped pajamas, as if she were simply going to bed like any other day. Let her go back and change, her mother had said, when Sadie came out into the hallway, at least let me braid her hair. But the man in the hallway shook his head.

From now on, he said, she's not your responsibility anymore.

He put his hand on Sadie's shoulder and steered her down the stairs, and Sadie understood that something terrible was happening but was positive, at the same time, that it could not be real. She'd tried to look back at her mother for a clue—if she should scream or fight or run or obey—but all she could see was the broad blue chest of the officer behind her, blocking everything but a sliver of her mother's arm from view. And so she remembered what her mother had always taught her: be extra careful around policemen, say please and thank you and ma'am and sir. Whatever you do, don't make them angry. They'd shuttled her into a big black car, and the policeman had buckled her into the back seat, and she'd said: *Thank you*. After they'd driven away, after they'd taken her to the station, then the airport, then a foster home, after she'd realized she wasn't going home again, she'd regretted that thank-you, she'd regretted going so quietly.

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Her first foster parents had wanted to rename her. A new name for a new start, they'd suggested, but she'd flat-out refused.

My name is Sadie, she said.

For two weeks they'd tried to convince her, but eventually they'd given in.

So many new things for her in those early days. Some—new family, new house, new city, new life—she could not fight, so she resisted in the few places she could. On the way to school, she'd stopped on the front step and stripped off the flounced, flowered dress they'd given her, left it on the lawn, walked the rest of the way in her underwear. A phone call from the principal; a stern lecture from her foster parents. The next morning she did it again. You see, everyone said. What kind of parents—? She's practically a savage.

Her second foster mother tried to untangle the dense cloud of her hair. We'll have to have it relaxed, she said, despairing, and that night, after everyone was asleep, Sadie snuck downstairs for the kitchen shears. From then on she kept it clipped to a curly halo around her head. I don't know what to do with her, this foster mother said once to a friend, when she thought Sadie couldn't hear. It's like she takes no pride *at all* in her appearance.

They were kind people who thought they meant well. They'd been government-selected as fit parents, certified as people of *good moral character* who could teach good patriotic values.

There's something wrong with her, Sadie heard her latest foster mother say into the telephone: the weekly check-in with the social worker, pumping for evidence that Sadie would need to stay. She hasn't cried once, all the time she's been here. I even sat outside her room and listened all night. She doesn't cry at all. Now tell me, what kind of child goes through all this and doesn't even cry? Yes. That's what I think, too. What kind of parents she must have had, to make her so cold and unfeeling.

She'd sighed. We're doing what we can, she said. We'll try to repair the damage that's already been done.

A few weeks later, a letter, which Sadie had found in her foster mother's desk: *In light of severe emotional scarring inflicted by child's previous domestic situation, recommend permanent removal. Permanent custody granted to foster parents.*

And it was true, Sadie never cried. A few times she'd given Bird letters to her old address, scribbled on notepaper, but the last had come back stamped RECIPIENT UNKNOWN. Even then, Bird had not seen her cry.

Sometimes, though, when he saw her squatting in the corner of the playground, head leaning against the chain-link fence, he turned away, so she wouldn't have to pretend to be brave. To let her be alone with her grief, or whatever heavier thing she'd put on top to hold it down.

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She'd suggested they run away, last May.

We'll go and we'll find them, she said.

Sadie, he knew, had run away before, though they'd caught her every time. This time, she insisted, she would make it. She had just turned thirteen—basically an adult, she insisted.

Come with me, Bird, she'd said. I'm sure we can find them.

Them was her parents and his mother. Her certainty that they were still out there, findable and maybe even together, was unshakable. A comfortable, beautiful fairy tale.

They'll catch you, he said.

No, they won't, Sadie snapped. I'm going to—

But he'd cut her off. Don't tell me, he said. I don't want to know. In case they ask me where you've gone.

He'd watched her on the next swing, pumping and pumping her legs, hard, harder, until her feet cleared the top bar and the chain went slack and bucked beneath her. Then Sadie let out a whoop and catapulted herself free, leaping into the air, into nothing. When he'd been small, he'd loved leaping from the swings that way, swooping into his mother's waiting arms. Sadie hadn't even done anything, Bird thought, she didn't deserve any of it, and he hated her parents for doing this to her. Why didn't they stop, that first time, how could they have been so irresponsible? Sadie sat up and looked back at him from where she'd landed in a tumbled heap in the grass. She wasn't hurt. She was laughing.

Jump, Bird, she cried, but he didn't, just let the swing slow until the toes of his sneakers dragged in the gravel, leaving grubby gray scratches on the canvas.

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He thinks about her now: Sadie, poised in midair, arms flung wide, slicing across the sky. After she'd disappeared, no one seemed to know where she'd gone; his classmates and even his teachers simply went on as if she'd never existed. As he stands there, he knows the photos from the Common are already beginning to appear online, the trees holding up little figures in their fingers, raising them to the light. A thousand little Sadies silhouetted against the blue.

The next morning, walking to school, he sees the real trees: stripped bare to rough bark again. As if nothing had ever been there at all. Yet there is the sharp bright gash running down each trunk like a scar; there are the broken spots where the web, roughly yanked, has dragged the branches away. There, in the mud, a single strand of red yarn left behind. Something happened here, and he is determined to find out what, and thinking of Sadie, suddenly he has an idea of where to begin.

After school he is supposed to come straight home. Stay in the apartment, his father says. And do your homework. But today he does not follow the path. He turns onto Broadway, follows it out toward the high school, where he'll have to go in a few years, toward the big public library beside it, where he has never been.

From *liber,* his father has told him. Books. Which comes from the word meaning *the inner bark of trees*, which comes from the word for *to strip*, *to peel.* Early peoples pulled off the thin strips for writing material, of course.

A fall walk, once. His father's hands had brushed the flaking birch bark, rising paper-white in curls from the slender trunk.

But I like to think of it as peeling back layers. Revealing layers of meaning.

In the science museum, long ago: a giant slice of tree trunk, taller than his father. Rings of caramel against cream-colored wood. They'd counted the rings, bark to core, then back out again. His father's finger tracing the grain. This is when the tree was planted, when George Washington was a boy. This is the Civil War, World War I, World War II. This is when his father was born. This is when everything fell apart.

You see? his father said. They carry their histories inside them. Peel back enough layers and they explain everything.

It's like a castle, Sadie had told him. She'd visited the library daily, a stolen five minutes on the way home from school. Half jogging to get there as fast as she could, sprinting to get home on time after lingering as long as she dared. Sadie, I think you need to start showering more often, her foster mother would say when she arrived home sweaty and rumpled. You'll get caught, Bird warned, but Sadie was unmoved. Her parents had read to her every night and where stories were grit in Bird's memories, in Sadie's they were a rich balm. A castle, she insisted to Bird, her voice swollen with awe. He had rolled his eyes, but now he sees it is more or less true: the library is a huge sandstone building with arches and a turret, though a newer glass wing has been added on, all sharp angles and sparkling panes, and because of this, as he climbs the steps, he feels that he is somehow entering both the past and the future at once.

He's seldom around so many books, and for a moment it is dizzying. Shelves and shelves. So many you could get lost. At the front desk, the librarian—a dark-haired woman in a pink sweater—glances his way. She sizes him up over the tops of her glasses, as if she knows he doesn't belong, and Bird quickly sidles away into the aisles, out of view. Up close, he can see that here and there books have been removed, leaving gaps in the rows like missing teeth. But still he senses that there are answers here, caught somewhere between the pages and filed away. All he has to do is find them.

Placards hang at the ends of the shelves, a list of subjects that live down each aisle, perplexingly numbered and inscrutably arranged. Some sections are still lush and thriving: Transportation. Sports. Snakes/Lizards/Fish. Other sections are dry deserts: by the time he gets to the 900s, nearly everything is gone, just rows and rows of skeletal shelving, slicing the sunlight into squares. The few remaining books are small dark spots against all that bare. *The China-Korean Axis and the New Cold War. The Menace at Home. The End of America: China on the Rise.*

As he roams, he notices something else, too: the library is all but deserted. He is the only visitor here. On the second floor sit rows of bare study carrels and long worktables with wooden chairs, all unoccupied. All the way down to the basement, just empty seats and a forlorn sign reading: CHANGED YOUR MIND? PLEASE PLACE UNWANTED BOOKS ON THE CART BELOW. There is no cart anymore, only a bare stretch

of linoleum tile. It is a ghost town, and he, still alive, is intruding in the land of the dead. With one finger he traces an empty shelf, making a clean bright line in the thick fur of dust.

Far downstairs, in the back corner, he finds the poetry section, scans the shelves until he reaches *M.* Christopher Marlowe. Andrew Marvell. Edna St. Vincent Millay. He isn't surprised to find that the shelf jumps straight from Milton to Montagu, but he's sad not to find her name.

Coming here was a mistake, he thinks. This place feels forbidden, the whole undertaking unwise. In his nostrils, the sharp scent of iron and heat. He inches toward the front, where at the desk the librarian sorts through a crate of books with ruthless efficiency. He's afraid to catch her eye again. When she turns around, he thinks, he'll slip out.

Peering through a gap in the shelf, he watches, waiting for an opening. The librarian pulls another book from the blue plastic crate on the desktop, consults a list, makes a check mark. Then—and here Bird is puzzled—she quickly riffles through the book, fanning the pages like a flipbook, before shutting it and placing it on the stack. With the next book, she does the same. Then the next. She's looking for something, Bird realizes, and a few books later she finds it. This time she scans the list once, then again, and sets her pen down. Evidently this book isn't on it. Slowly she flips through the pages, one at a time, pausing finally to extract a small white slip of paper.

From where Bird stands, he can just make out a few lines of handwriting scribbled across it. He leans around the shelf, trying to see more, and it is at this point that the librarian looks up and spots him peeking out.

Swiftly she folds the paper in half, hiding it from view, and marches toward him.

Hey, she says. What are you doing back there? Yes, you. I see you. Up. Stand up.

She jerks him up by one elbow.

How long have you been there, she demands. What are you doing back there?

Up close she's both older and younger than he expected. Long dark brown hair threaded with iron gray. Older, he thinks, than his mother would be. But there's a youthful quality to her, too: a small flash of silver in her pierced nostril; an alertness in her face that reminds him of someone. After a minute, he realizes who. Sadie. The same glinting dare in her eye.

I'm sorry, he says. I'm just—I'm looking for a story. That's all.

The librarian peers at him over her glasses.

A story, she says. You'll have to be more specific.

Bird glances at the maze of shelves around them, the librarian's hand clamped on his arm, her other fist clenched—around what? His face flushes.

I don't know the title, he says. It's a story—someone told me a long time ago. There's a boy, and a lot of cats.

That's all you know?

Now she'll throw him out. Or she'll call the police and have him arrested. As a child, he understands instinctively how arbitrary punishment can be. The librarian's thumb digs harder into the crook of his arm.

Then she half closes her eyes. Thinking.

A boy and a lot of cats, she echoes. Her grip on his arm slackens, then releases. Hmm. There's a picture book called *Millions of Cats*. A man and a woman want the prettiest cat in the world. Hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions of cats. Ring a bell?

It doesn't sound familiar, and Bird shakes his head.

There's a boy in this story, he repeats. A boy, and a cabinet.

A cabinet? The librarian bites her lip. There's a sudden light in her eyes, an alertness to her, as if she is a cat herself, on the hunt with ears pricked and whiskers twitching. Well, there's a

boy in *Sam, Bangs and Moonshine*, she says, but no cabinet, that I can recall. Lots of cats in Beatrix Potter, but no boys. Is it a picture book, or a novel?

I don't know, Bird admits. He has never heard of any of the books the librarian is describing, and it makes him slightly dizzy, all these stories he hadn't even known existed. It's like learning there are new colors he's never seen. I never actually read it, he says. I think it might be a fairy tale. Somebody just told it to me, once.

Hmm.

The librarian pivots on her heel with startling alacrity. Let's take a look, she says, and marches off, discreetly sliding the folded slip of paper into her pocket.

She walks so briskly that he nearly loses her. Shelf by shelf, the world rushes by in microcosm: Customs & Etiquette. Costumes & Fashion. This is a world, he realizes, she knows forward and backward, a map she's traveled so many times she can draw it from memory.

Here we are, she says. Folklore.

Drumming her fingers along the spines, she skims the shelf, appraising and ticking off each book in her mind.

I know there's a story called Cat-skin, she says, pulling down a volume and handing it to Bird. On the cover, gilt letters and a cluster of golden-haired ladies and knights.

And there's one in there called The Cat and Mouse in Partnership, too. Ends how you'd expect. Nothing about a boy, though. Of course there's Puss in Boots, but I don't know that I'd call the miller's son a boy—and there's no cabinet, for sure. And only the one cat.

Before Bird can reply, she's already moved on.

Let's see: Hans Christian Andersen? No, I don't think so. There's an old legend about a cat calming baby Jesus in his cradle—that's sort of like a cabinet. Or maybe it's a myth? There's Freyja and her chariot cats, and of course there's Bastet, but no cabinets or boys. And I don't remember the Greeks saying much about cats.

She rubs her temple with one bony knuckle. It's almost, Bird thinks, as if she's forgotten about him, as if she's talking to herself. Or to the books themselves, as if they're beings of their own who might answer back. To his great relief, she seems to have forgotten about him spying, about the mysterious slip of paper.

You don't remember anything else? she says.

I can't, he says. I mean, I don't.

He looks down at the book of fairy tales in his hands, turns it over. On the back: a slain dragon, borne on a pole, red tongue lolling like a dangling rope. His throat goes hot and sticky, and he closes his eyes and swallows, trying to clear it.

My mother told it to me, he says, a long time ago. It's okay. Never mind.

He turns to go.

You know, I think I remember an old picture book, the librarian says. She lowers her voice. A Japanese folktale.

She pauses a moment, glances at the shelf, then the search terminal at the end of the row.

But it won't be in there.

Then she snaps her fingers, points at him. As if he himself has figured out the answer.

Come with me, she says.

Bird follows her between the shelves to an office marked STAFF ONLY. The librarian lifts a key from her lanyard, unlocks it. The room beyond is full of stacks of books, a desk piled high with papers. Filing cabinets, a rotary fan. Dust. But they walk straight past the desk to a rusty metal door the gray-green color of mold. She shoulders it open, tugs a wastepaper basket toward her

with her foot, wedges it behind the door to keep it from shutting. From the dent in the basket, it's clear that this has been its job for years.

There's one more place we might look, she says, and beckons him through.

It's a kind of loading dock, separated from the outside by a roll-down metal grate. Once, trucks must have dropped off their cargo here: books, he supposes, from other libraries. From the piles of crates and boxes on the sides of the dock he can see it hasn't been used in some years; there's no way a truck could even approach it.

Fewer loans these days, the librarian says. Just a crate or so a week. Easier to just bring it in the front.

She begins to lift them down, and when Bird goes to help, he sees that they're stacked on something: a huge wooden cabinet, bigger than his dresser at home, made of dozens of little drawers.

We stopped using this years ago, when we converted the catalog to digital, the librarian says, clearing the last of the boxes away. Moved it out here to save space. Then the Crisis hit. Now they still haven't restored our budget. The city won't take it and we don't have the funds to have someone haul it away.

She runs her fingers along the brass labels of the drawers and hooks her finger into the pull.

Here, she says. Let's take a look. The book I'm thinking of is quite old.

Inside, to Bird's astonishment, the drawer is jammed with small cards covered in neat typing. With deft flicks the librarian riffles through, so quickly he can barely make out the words. *Cats—literature. Cats—mythology.* Every one of these cards, he realizes, is a book. He had no idea there could be so many.

Ah, the librarian says, with a sigh of satisfaction. It's the tone of someone who has solved a puzzle, of someone who's decoded a riddle and found the treasure beneath the X. She extracts a single card and holds it out to him.

Cats—folklore—Japanese—retellings. The Boy Who Drew Cats.

Recognition chimes in him, setting him aquiver like a tuning fork. A strangled noise rises in his throat.

That's it, he says. I think—I think that's it.

The librarian turns the card over and scans the back.

I was afraid of that, she says.

You don't have a copy? Bird asks, and she shakes her head.

Removed. Three years ago, it says. Someone complained, probably. That it encouraged pro-PAO sentiment, or something. Some of our donors have—opinions. On China, or in this case, anything that vaguely resembles it. And we need their *generosity* to keep this place open. Or just as likely, someone got nervous and got rid of it preemptively. Us public libraries—a lot of us just can't take the risk. Too easy for some concerned citizen to say you're promoting unpatriotic behavior. Being overly sympathetic to potential enemies.

She sighs and slides the card back into its place in the stack.

There's another book I wanted to find, Bird says cautiously. *Our Missing Hearts.*

The librarian's eyes snap toward him. For a long moment she studies him. Appraising.

I'm sorry, she says curtly. That book I know we don't have anymore. I doubt you'll find it anywhere.

With a bang, she pushes the long thin drawer shut again.

Oh, Bird says. He'd known it was unlikely and yet deep down, he'd still nursed a flicker of hope, and it goes out in a small sooty puff.

What did they do with them, he asks after a moment. All those books.

He remembers a picture from history class: heaps of books in a town square, set ablaze. As if she can tell what he's thinking, the librarian gives him a sideways glance and chuckles.

Oh no, we don't burn books here. This—this is *America.* Right?

She raises an eyebrow at him. Serious, or ironic? He can't quite tell.

We don't burn our books, she says. We pulp them. Much more civilized, right? Mash them up, recycle them into toilet paper. Those books wiped someone's rear end a long time ago.

Oh, says Bird. So that's what happened to his mother's books. All those words ground up into dingy gray, flushed down into the sewer in a mess of shit and piss. Something goes hot and liquid behind his eyes.

Hey, the librarian says. You okay?

Bird snuffles and nods. Fine, he says.

She doesn't ask any more questions, doesn't press him or ask why he's crying, only pulls a tissue from her pocket and hands it to him.

Fucking PACT, she says softly, and Bird is speechless. He can't remember ever hearing an adult swear.

You know, she says, after a minute or two. It's possible some library might have a copy of that cat book still stored away. A big library, like the university's. Sometimes they can get away with keeping things we can't. For *research* purposes. But even if they did, you'd have to ask for it at circulation. Present credentials and a reason for requesting access.

Bird nods.

Good luck, she says. I hope you find it. And Bird? If there's anything I can help with, just come back and I'll try.

He is so touched by this that it doesn't occur to him until much later: to wonder how she knows his name.

When his father gets home, Bird decides, he will ask. He'll ask him to look at work for a copy of the book. He is certain that somewhere in the university library is a book of Japanese folktales with this story in it. They still have thousands of Asian texts, he knows, because every so often, there are petitions to purge all of them—not just those from China and Japan and Cambodia and other places, but those about them, too. The news calls China *our greatest long-term threat*, and politicians fret that Asian-language books might contain anti-American sentiments or even coded messages; sometimes angry parents complain if their children choose to study Mandarin, or Chinese history. *I sent him to get an education, not to be brainwashed.* Each time it makes the college paper, then the news; a congressman or sometimes a senator delivers an impassioned speech about universities as *incubators of indoctrination*; the provost issues another public statement in reply, defending the library's collection. Bird has seen it in the newspaper as his father turns the pages. *If we fear something, it is all the more imperative we study it thoroughly.*

He'll ask his father just to check. Just to see if this book still exists, and if it does, if he'll bring it home so Bird can see it. Just for a day. He doesn't need to tell his father about the letter, or about his mother. It's just a book he's interested in; it's just a story, just a folktale about a boy and some cats, surely there's no harm in it. It's not even Chinese, after all. When his father gets home, he will ask.

But his father doesn't come, and he doesn't come, and doesn't come. They don't have a telephone; no one has a landline anymore, the dorms ripped out all those wires years ago, so all Bird can do is wait. Six o'clock arrives, then seven. They've missed dinner; in the dining hall the workers will be lifting the pans from the steam baths, tipping dried-out leftovers into trash cans, scouring the stainless steel clean. Through the window Bird watches the lights of the dining hall turn off, one by one, and a thin tentacle of dread slithers through him. Where is his father? Could something have happened? As eight o'clock ticks by, he thinks suddenly of his trip to the library that afternoon, of the computer at school blinking *No results.* Of Mrs. Pollard, clicking her pen over his shoulder; of the librarian pocketing her mysterious note. Of the policeman at the Common, tapping his baton against his palm. Of Sadie, and her mother, asking questions, nosing into dark corners. There is always someone watching, he realizes, and if someone has seen him, might his father be blamed, might his father—

It's almost nine when he hears the stairwell door creak open and slam shut—the elevator still not working, after three days—then footsteps in the hall. His father. Bird has a sudden impulse to run to him, the way he did as a small child. When his arms barely circled his father's knees, when he still thought his father was the tallest man in the world. But his father looks so tired, so sweaty and defeated from all those stairs, that Bird hesitates. As if he might knock his father down.

What a day, his father says. The FBI came in just after lunch.

Bird flashes hot, then cold.

They're investigating a professor over at the law school. Wanted a list of every book she's ever borrowed. And then, once they had the titles, they wanted to take every single one. Took me six and a half hours to pull them all. Four hundred and twenty-two books.

Breath rushes into Bird; he hadn't known he was holding it.

Why did they want them, he asks cautiously.

It is a question he would not have asked a week ago; a week ago, he would not have found this ominous, let alone unusual. Maybe, he thinks suddenly—maybe it isn't unusual at all.

His father sets his bag on the floor, drops his keys with a clatter on the counter.

She's writing a book on the first amendment and PACT, apparently, he says. They think she might be funded by the Chinese. Trying to stir up unrest over here.

Slowly he pulls the noose of his tie free from his collar.

Is she? Bird asks.

His father turns toward him, looking more tired than Bird has ever seen. For the first time he notices the gray threading through his father's hair, the lines etched from the corners of his eyes, like tear tracks.

Honestly? his father says. Probably not. But that's what they think.

He checks his watch, then opens the cupboard, which contains nothing but a half-empty jar of peanut butter. No bread.

Let's get some dinner, he says to Bird.

They hurry down the stairs and out to the pizza place just a few blocks away. Bird's father doesn't care for pizza—too greasy, he tells Bird, all that cheese—but it is late and they are hungry and this is the closest place, open until nine.

The man behind the counter takes their order and slides four slices into the oven to heat up, and Bird and his father lean against the sticky wall, waiting. His stomach is growling. Cool dark air wafts in through the propped-open door, and the handful of notices taped to the store's window flutter in the breeze. Found cat. Guitar lessons. Apartment for rent. Down in the corner, right above the health inspection sticker, a star-spangled placard: GOD BLESS ALL LOYAL AMERICANS. The same placard nearly every store displays, sold in every city, proceeds benefiting neighborhood-watch groups. The few stores that don't hang it are viewed with skepticism. *Aren't you a loyal American? Then why the fuss over a little sign? Don't you want to support the neighborhood watch?* The huge steel oven ticks and steams. Behind the counter, the pizza guy rests one elbow on the cash register, scrolling on his phone, smirking at a joke.

It is 8:52 when the old man comes in. An Asian face, white button-down and black pants, silvering hair neatly clipped. Chinese? Filipino? Bird can't tell. The man sets a folded five on the counter.

Slice of pepperoni, he says.

The pizza guy doesn't even look up. We're closed, he says.

You don't look closed. The man glances over at Bird and his father, who half steps in front of Bird like a screen. They're here, he says.

We're closed, the pizza guy repeats, louder. His thumb flicks upward across the phone, and an endless river of pictures and posts whizzes by. Bird's father jostles him on one shoulder. The same jostle as when they pass a policeman, or roadkill in the street. It means: Turn around. Don't look. But this time Bird doesn't turn. It's not curiosity; it's a need. A morbid need to know what's been crouching behind him, unseen.

Look, I just want a piece of pizza, the old man says. I just got off work, I'm hungry.

He slides the bill across the counter. His hands are leathery and tough, the fingers knobbled with age. He looks like someone's grandfather, Bird thinks, and then the thought arrives: if he had a grandfather, he might look like this man.

The pizza guy sets his phone down.

You don't understand English? he says calmly, as if commenting on the weather. There's a Chinese restaurant over on Mass Ave. Go get yourself some fried rice and spring rolls, if you're hungry. We're closed.

He folds his hands like a patient teacher, and stares squarely at the old man. *What are you going to do about it?*

Bird is frozen in place. He can only look and look: at the old man, jaw set, one leg squared behind him as if braced for a push. At the pizza guy, the oil spots speckling his T-shirt, his large meaty hands. At his father, the lines on his face making whiskery shadows, his eyes fixed on the flyers on the window, as if nothing is happening, as if this is just an ordinary day. He wants the old man to deliver a biting comeback, he wants the old man to punch the pizza guy in his smirking face, he wants the old man to back away before the pizza guy says—or does—something worse. Before he lifts those hands that pound and flatten thick dough into compliance. The moment tautens and tightens, like an overtuned string.

And then the old man plucks the money from the counter again, wordlessly, and tucks it back into his pocket. He turns, away from the pizza guy's grin, and looks at Bird instead, a long hard look, then at Bird's father. And then he murmurs something to Bird's father, something Bird doesn't understand.

He has never heard these words before, has never even heard this language before, but it is clear from the look on his father's face that his father has, that he not only recognizes the language but understands it, understands what this man has said. He has the feeling, somehow, that they're talking about him, the way the man looks at him and then at his father, that meaningful gaze that cuts right through Bird's skin and flesh to scrutinize his bones. But his father doesn't reply, doesn't even move, just quickly glances away. Then the old man strides out, head held high, and is gone.

A timer dings and the pizza guy turns to open the oven. The hot smoky air shrivels Bird's throat.

Some people, the pizza guy says. I mean.

He slips the long wooden paddle into the scorching oven and extracts their slices, slips them into a waiting box. For a moment he stares through narrowed eyes at Bird, then at his father, as if trying to place their faces. Then he slides the pizza across the counter.

Have a good night, Bird's father says, and he takes the box and guides Bird toward the door.

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What did he say, Bird says, when they're back on the sidewalk. That man. What did he say?

Let's go, his father says. Come on, Noah. Let's get home.

At the corner, a police car glides by, lights off, nearly silent, and they wait for it to pass before crossing. They reach the dorm just as the church tower across the way begins to strike nine.

It's not until they're back in the apartment that his father speaks again. He sets the pizza down on the counter and pries off his shoes and stands there, his eyes very far away.

Cantonese, his father says. He was speaking Cantonese.

But you understood him, Bird says. You don't speak Cantonese.

Even as he says it, he realizes he does not know this is true.

No, I don't, his father snaps. And neither do you. Noah, listen to me very carefully. Anything that has to do with China, Korea, Japan, anything like that—you stay away from it. You hear someone talking in those languages or talking about those things, you walk away. Understand?

He pulls a slice from the box and hands it to Bird, then takes one himself and settles wearily into a chair without even getting a plate. It is the second time, it occurs to Bird, that his father has climbed all those steps in the past hour.

Eat your dinner, his father says gently. Before it gets cold.

He knows then: even if he asks, his father won't track down this book. He'll have to find another way.

• • •

It is difficult to sneak into the university library; it always has been. There are old books in there, valuable books. A Gutenberg Bible and a first folio of Shakespeare, Bird's father told him once, though Bird has only a hazy idea what this means. Countless irreplaceable old documents. Even—his father wriggled his fingers creepily in the air—an anatomy book bound in human skin. He had just transferred over—linguistics professor to book shelver—and Bird, age nine and newly cynical, had decided all of this was an attempt to make his job sound more impressive, and had ignored it.

What he does know is that he needs a keycard to enter the building, huge and impressive, a marble paperweight pinning down one end of the college yard—and even then, only staff are permitted to pass further into the warm labyrinth of shelves where all the books are kept. But when he was younger, on days off school, he'd trotted along after his father into the reshelving room, where carts of books sat waiting to be set back in place. You can help, his father had suggested, and once or twice Bird had, pushing the cart through the narrow aisles until they found the right one, pressing the antique switch in the corridor to flick on the lights. While his father scanned the shelves, sliding the books one by one into the gaps from which they'd come, Bird ran his fingertips over the embossed spines where gilt lettering had long been rubbed away, breathing in the peculiar smell of the library: a mix of dust and leather and melted vanilla ice cream. Warm, like the scent of someone's skin.

It soothed him and unsettled him at the same time, the murky hush like a wool blanket thrown over everything. Underneath, something large lying in wait. It never ended, the stacks of books needing to be set back in place, the constant insistent reiteration of order, and the thought was dizzying: that just beyond this shelf there were hundreds more, thousands of books, millions of words. Sometimes after his father had nestled one book into its spot, lining up the spines, Bird had the impulse to sweep the whole rack clear with one arm, to send the whole shelf dominoing into the next and the next and the next, to shred the smothering silence. It frightened him, and he made excuses for not coming into the stacks. He was tired, he would rather sit in the staff room and have a snack, he would rather stay home and play.

He hasn't come to the library in years; the last time, he was ten.

That evening, while his father is brushing his teeth, Bird rifles through his briefcase. His father is a creature of habit; after he comes back to the apartment he always stores his keycard in the outside pocket of his bag, ready for the next day. Bird slips the card into his back pocket and zips the bag shut again. His father never checks for it in the morning: for the past three years it's been right there when he arrives at work, exactly where he put it the night before. Tomorrow, just this once, it won't be. But the security guard knows him, has seen him every day for years, will let him in for the day, just this one time. Tomorrow evening, when Bird's father arrives home and does a thorough search for the keycard, he'll find it right there on the floor beneath the table, right where his briefcase always sits. Must have slipped it next to the bag rather than into it, he'll think, and that will be that.

• • •

At first the plan works perfectly. After school, Bird heads to the college yard, climbs the huge mountain of stairs to the library's front entrance. In the lobby, he copies the impatient and vaguely annoyed look the students always wear and swipes his father's card quickly through the

reader. The turnstile turns green and he passes through without stopping and without looking back. As if he has somewhere to be, on the trail of important knowledge. The security guard doesn't even glance up from his monitor.

The next problem: how to get into the stacks. Long ago, his father told him, they'd been open to anyone. You could go in and wander, exploring whatever came your way. Now they don't let just anyone in. Now you have to fill out a slip of paper at the counter, explain why you need the book, show your ID. And if your reason is good enough—a treatise on the failures that led to the Crisis, perhaps, or new strategies for detecting internal enemies—someone, like his father, will venture into the stacks and retrieve it for you. He doesn't say what changed, but Bird understands: it is PACT, of course, that changed everything. That deemed some books dangerous, to be kept only if they were kept out of reach.

Bird heads into the circulation room and eyes the entrance to the stacks at the other end. A squeaky cart comes around the corner and he recognizes the woman pushing it: Debbie, one of the other shelvers. Long ago she'd given him gold-wrapped butterscotch candies, those times he'd come to work with his father. In fact, she looks exactly the same—long billowy dress, frizzy gray hair pinned in an improbable cloud around her head—and though he's older and taller now, he's sure she'll recognize him, too. Quickly he darts behind one of the computer carrels, and Debbie and her cart squeak their way past, leaving a lingering smell of cigarette smoke in their wake.

This reminds him of something. Debbie is a chain smoker; the minute she came into the room, sometimes, the other librarians would lift their heads, sniffing, as if suddenly remembering the possibility of fire. Officially, smokers must leave the premises and stand at least fifty feet from the building before lighting up, but no one ever seemed to do this. Instead Debbie and the other smokers ducked out the side door of the stacks and then out a side door of the building, propping each open with a brick, huddling beside the huge library until their furtive cigarettes were gone, then ducking back inside. His father often complained about the smell drifting into the hall, had combined it with a lecture on the evils of smoking. *You see what a slippery slope it is? Once you start, you can't shake free.*

After Debbie and the cart have gone, Bird heads downstairs, where the side door to the stacks lets out. Despite the lack of a sign, he's certain this is the right place. There, just across from it, is an emergency exit, clearly marked KEEP CLOSED. Most tellingly, just beside it is an old, weatherworn red brick. All he has to do is wait and hope for a stroke of luck. He stations himself around the corner, where—if anyone comes by—he might conceivably be heading into or out of the men's room nearby.

For twenty minutes no one passes, and he understands why the staff use this spot for smoke breaks: upstairs people come and go, but down here, it's practically deserted. Then, just as he's debating giving up, he hears a hinge creak, the scrape of brick on stone flooring, the soft thud of a heavy door coming to rest. A second later, another clicks open and the faint sounds of the outside rush in: a whoosh of wind, birds chirping, someone laughing far off in the distance, across the yard.

Bird peeks around the corner. The door to the outside is propped open: someone must be out there, sneaking a quick smoke, and just as he'd hoped, the one leading back into the stacks is propped open, too. He doesn't have much time. As quietly as he can, he creeps down the hallway and pries the stacks door farther open. It emits a faint creak, and he glances back over his shoulder to see if the smoker has noticed. No movement. Bird takes a deep breath and slips inside.

It takes him a minute to get his bearings. All the titles around him are in a language he doesn't know, in words he has no idea how to say: *Zniewolony Umysł. Pytania Zadawane Sobie.* He darts into one of the aisles and heads upstairs, away from the door. Whoever is out there smoking will be finished soon, and he shouldn't be anywhere nearby when they return. The stacks are incredibly silent—an absorbent, watchful, almost predatory quiet, waiting to suck away any noise you dared to make. A staffer comes by, paper in hand, one book lodged in her armpit as she scans the shelves for the next. Bird waits for her to turn away before he passes. Somewhere there must be a search terminal, and eventually he finds one in a corner, taps at the keyboard. *The Boy Who Drew Cats.* A long pause, and then a number pops up on the screen. He scribbles it on a slip of paper and consults the charts posted beside the monitor, running his finger down the list of call numbers: D level, the bottom floor. Four levels below ground. Southwest corner.

Before he leaves, he can't resist typing in one more search.

Our Missing Hearts.

Another pause, longer this time, and then instead of a number, a notice: DISCARDED. Bird swallows and clears the screen. Then he grabs the slip of paper and sets off for the stairs.

• • •

The stairs bring him down on the wrong end of the library, northeast instead of southwest. But at least D level is deserted. Only the main corridors are lit, and those dimly; the aisles crisscrossing them are pitch black. He's never appreciated before just how big the library is: a full city block, hundreds of feet by hundreds of feet with miles of shelves in between. Something his father once said comes back to him: the shelves around him are not just book holders but the iron skeleton of the building itself, holding the library upright. The easiest way, he decides, will be keeping to the edges; zigzagging his way across, he'll get lost for sure. Cautiously he picks his way along the wall, heading south. It isn't as straightforward as he'd hoped. Sometimes, a stack of old chairs or tables looms up in his path and he has to turn aside, go over a few aisles, and then find his way back. Somewhere, overhead, footsteps thump across C level. A furnace clicks on and a breath of warm air, like a thermal geyser, flows through the grated floor.

Bird passes shelf after shelf, slotting his fingers into the spaces where removed books once stood. There are fewer missing here than at the public library, where some shelves had been more gap than books. But still nearly every shelf is missing one, sometimes more. He wonders who decided which books were too dangerous to keep, and who it was that had to hunt down and collect the condemned books, like an executioner, ferrying them to their doom. He wonders if it is his father.

At the correct shelf he slows, then pauses, tracing the call numbers along the neatly squared spines as they count down, fraction by fraction. And then: there it is. Slim and yellow. Hardly a book at all, barely bigger than a magazine. He'd nearly missed it.

With one finger he tips it from the shelf. *The Boy Who Drew Cats: A Japanese Folktale.* He's never seen this particular book before, but as soon as he sees the cover he knows it's the same story. A Japanese folktale, but his Chinese mother had heard it or read it somewhere, had remembered it and told it to him. On the front is a watercolor drawing of a boy, a Japanese boy, holding a brush. Painting a huge cat on a wall. The boy looks a bit like Bird, even: dark hair grown shaggy over his forehead, the same dark eyes and slightly rounded nose. It's coming back to him, the way his mother told it, a story buried in Styrofoam packing long ago that he's digging out, pulling back into the light. A boy, wandering alone and far from home. A lonely building, in the darkness. Cat after cat after cat springing from the bristles of his brush. His fingers shake,

struggling to peel the cover from the cloth-soft pages beneath. Yes, he thinks. It's almost there, like something edging out of the shadows, just starting to take its shape; as soon as he reads it, he'll remember it, remember what happens, this story from his mother, in a moment he'll understand everything.

It is at this point that someone sets a hand on his shoulder, and he whirls around to find his father.

They let me come to find you, his father says, instead of security.

• • •

He should have known: of course the library has security cameras, of course they would have noticed that someone swiped in with his father's card just hours after his father—responsible and rule following as ever—had reported his card was lost.

Dad, Bird begins, I just needed to—

His father turns around without responding, and Bird follows his straight, angry back all the way through the stacks and up the stairs to the staff room with its endless rows and rows of carts, where two security guards are waiting. In the instant before the guards turn around, he shoves the book into the back waistband of his jeans, beneath his T-shirt.

It's okay, Bird's father says, before the guards can speak. Just my son, like we thought. I left my card in his bookbag by mistake, and he came in trying to find me to give it back.

Bird studies the linoleum floor, holding his breath. His father has not asked him a single question about what he's doing there, and to him this story sounds implausible. Why would he search for his father in the stacks, how could he possibly expect to find one man in that labyrinth of shelves? The security guards hesitate, teetering on the edge of belief. One of them leans closer, squinting at Bird's face. Bird blinks, trying to look innocent, and inside his balled-up fists, his fingernails bite into his palm.

His father lets out a chuckle, a loud, insincere whinny that gallops around the room and then vanishes. Just trying to be responsible, right, Noah? he says. But don't worry. He understands now.

He claps Bird on the shoulder, and grudgingly, the security guards nod.

Next time, one of them says to Bird, just stop at the front desk, okay, son? They'll call your dad down for you.

Bird's legs go quivery in relief. He nods, and swallows, and squeaks out *Yes, sir,* because from his father's taut grip on his shoulder, he understands this is what he needs to do.

When the security guards have gone, Bird reaches to the small of his back, plucks the book from beneath his T-shirt.

Dad, he whispers. His voice quivering. Dad, can I—

His father barely glances at the book. In fact, he doesn't look at Bird at all.

Put that on the cart, he says quietly. Someone will reshelve it. Let's go.

• • •

Only once has Bird ever been in trouble. Mostly, he listens to his father's advice: Don't attract attention. Keep your head down. And: If you see any trouble, you go the other way, understand?

It had driven Sadie crazy. Sadie, at the first scent of trouble, would follow it like a bloodhound to its source.

Bird, she'd said. Don't be such a pussy.

It was the posters that caught her eye that time, the ones that hung and still hang all around town, in grocery-store windows and on community bulletin boards and sometimes even in the windows of houses, reminding everyone to be patriotic, to watch over each other, to report the merest sign of trouble. Each designed by a famous artist to be eye-catching and collectible. A red-white-and-blue dam over a huge yellow-brown river, with a hairline fracture: *Even small cracks widen.* A blond woman peeking through curtains, cell phone at her ear: *Better safe than sorry.* Two houses, side by side, a pie passing hand to hand over a white picket fence: *Watch over your neighbor.* At the bottom of each, four bold capitals: PACT.

That afternoon, Sadie had paused by a row of posters pasted to a bus shelter, ran her fingers over the glue. It flaked away under her fingers like chalk.

That evening, a pair of policemen arrived at their apartment.

We were told, said one, that your son was part of a group defacing public-safety posters earlier this afternoon.

Sadie, pulling a Sharpie from her jeans pocket. Scribbling out the slogans of watchfulness and unity.

A group, his father said. What group?

Naturally we're very concerned, the officer said, about why he might have felt the need to do this. What kind of messages he's getting at home that make him feel this kind of unpatriotic and, frankly, dangerous behavior is appropriate.

It was that Sadie, wasn't it? his father said, to Bird this time, and Bird swallowed.

Mr. Gardner, the officer said, we've looked into your file, and given your wife's history—

His father cut them off.

That woman is no longer part of this family, he said brusquely. We have nothing to do with her. We have had nothing to do with her since she left.

It was as if his father had struck his mother, right there in front of him.

And we have absolutely no sympathies for the radical stances she supported, his father went on. Absolutely none.

He gave Bird a look, and Bird stiffened his spine into an iron bar and nodded.

Noah and I both know PACT protects our country, he went on. If you doubt my sincerity, just take a look. I've made steady donations to security and unity groups for the past two and a half years. And Noah is a straight-A student. There are no unpatriotic influences in this house.

Be that as it may, the officer began, your son *did* deface a sign advocating for PACT.

His gaze rested on Bird's father, as if waiting for a reply, and then Bird spotted it: the quick flick of his father's eyes to the kitchen drawer, where they kept their checkbook. The pay at the library wasn't much, he knew; at the end of each month his father spent a good hour hunched at the table over the check register, painstakingly tabulating the balance. How much, he could see his father calculating, would it take to make them go away? Already he knew it was more than they had.

It's the influence of that girl, his father said. The re-placed one. Sadie Greenstein. I understand she's a tough case.

Shock sizzled through Bird.

We've encountered her before, the officer admitted.

That's where it's coming from. You know how boys start to get around this age. Girls can get them to do anything.

He put a hand on Bird's shoulder, firm and heavy.

I'll make sure it comes to an end. There are no questions about loyalty in this household, officer.

The officer hesitated, and Bird's father sensed it.

We're very grateful to folks like you who are protecting our security, he said. After all, if it weren't for you, who knows where we'd be.

Not anywhere good, the police officer said, nodding. Not anywhere good, that's for sure. Well. I think we're all set here, sir. Just a misunderstanding, obviously. But you keep out of trouble, son, okay?

When the police had gone, Bird's father put his fingers to his temples, as if he had a migraine.

Noah, he said, after a long, long pause. Don't ever do that again.

He opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say more, but all the air seemed to have gone out of him, like a tent whose poles had collapsed. Bird wasn't sure what *that* was: Destroy posters? Talk to the police? Get in trouble? At last his father opened his eyes again.

Stay away from that Sadie, he said, as he headed into the other room. Please.

So Bird didn't sit with Sadie the next day, and he didn't have lunch with her the next day, and a week later he still wasn't speaking to her when she stopped coming to school and didn't come back, and no one seemed to know where she'd gone.

• • •

Today his father doesn't say anything all the way down the steps of the library, all the way out of the college yard to the street. Bird follows him home in silence, though it's the middle of the afternoon and his father would usually be at work for another two hours at least. Even from behind he knows his father is furious from the rigid rectangle of his back. His father only walks like that—stiff, angular, as if his joints are rusted—when he's too angry to speak. Bird lags behind, letting the distance between them stretch out to a few yards, then half a block. More. If he slows down enough, maybe they'll never reach home, they'll never have to talk about this, he'll never have to face his father again.

By the time they reach the Common, his father is nearly a full block ahead, so far distant that from where Bird stands, he could be a stranger. Just some man in a brown overcoat, carrying a briefcase. No one he knows. There was something else in his father's voice in the library, not just anger but an acrid thing Bird can't quite name, and then, suddenly, he knows. It's fear. The same loud, blustering fear that he'd heard that day with the posters, when his father spoke to the policemen. A hot metallic musk, the hiss of claws drawn.

Bird's eyes go again to the three big trees that just days before had been red, to the jagged scars running down their lengths. A wound like that, his father had once told him, will never fully heal. The bark will grow over, but it'll stay there, under the skin, and when they cut the tree down, you'll see it there, a dark mark slicing through the rings of the wood.

He's so busy thinking about this he runs smack into someone coming the other way. Someone large, and in a rush, and angry.

Watch where you're fucking going, chink, he hears, and a big hand catches his shoulder, shoves him to the ground.

It happens so quickly then that he doesn't piece it together until later. It only becomes clear in the aftermath, as he lies there on the damp grass, winded, cold smudges of mud caked to his palms and knees. There is the man who pushed him, running away, one hand clutching his bloody nose. There on the sidewalk is one fat red droplet, like a splash of paint on the concrete. There, standing over him, is his father, looking down at him as if from a very great height.

You okay? his father says, and Bird nods, and his father reaches down a hand, its knuckles red and raw. His father, he realizes, is a big man, too, though he doesn't seem it: soft voiced,

bashfully stooped, he seems smaller than he is, but in college he ran track, he's broad and tall and sturdy. Fast enough to race back to a son in danger. Strong enough to punch someone threatening his child.

Let's go home, his father says, helping him to his feet.

Neither of them speaks until they're back at the dorm.

Dad, Bird says, as they enter the lobby.

Not now, is all his father says, heading for the stairwell. Let's get upstairs first.

• • •

When they reach their own floor, his father shuts and bolts the door of the apartment behind them.

You have to be careful, he says, grabbing Bird by the shoulders, and Bird bristles.

I didn't do anything. *He* pushed me—

But his father shakes his head. That man, he says, he's not the only one like that out there. They'll see your face and that's all the provocation they need. And this library stunt—

His father stops.

You usually follow the rules, he says.

It was just a book.

I'm responsible if you get in trouble, Noah. Do you know how bad this could have been?

I'm sorry, Bird says, but his father doesn't seem to be listening. He has braced himself for shouting, for parental rage, but his father's voice is a seething hiss and somehow Bird finds this more terrifying.

They could have fired me, he says. The library isn't open to just anyone, you know. You have to be a researcher. They have to watch who they let in. The university gets a lot of leeway because of its reputation, but they're not immune. If someone caused trouble and they traced it back to a book they got here—

He shakes his head.

And if I lost my job we'd lose this apartment, too. You know that, right?

Bird hadn't, and a chill washes over him.

Worse than that. If they realized *you* got it, and decided to take a closer look at us—at you —

His father has never hit him, not even a spanking, but he stares at Bird with such violent intensity that Bird flinches, preparing for a blow. Then with a jerk his father yanks Bird into his arms, so hard the breath flies out of him. Holds him tightly in a shaking embrace.

And suddenly, a door clicks open in Bird's mind. Why his father is always so cautious, why he's always nagging Bird to follow this particular route or that, to not go off on his own. How his father reached him so fast. It isn't just dangerous to research China, or go looking for Japanese folktales. It's dangerous to look like him, always has been. It's dangerous to be his mother's child, in more ways than one. His father has always known it, has always been braced for something like this, always on a hair trigger for what inevitably would happen to his son. What he's afraid of: that one day someone will see Bird's face and see an enemy. That someone will see him as his mother's son, in blood or in deed, and take him away.

He puts his arms around his father, and his father's tighten around him.

That man in the pizza place, Bird says, slowly. What did he say?

He's one of us. His father's voice is half muffled against Bird's hair and buzzes inside Bird's skull. And he's right. What he meant was, these kinds of things—they might happen to you, too.

His father's arms loosen, and he holds Bird at arm's length.

Noah, he says. That's why I keep telling you, keep a low profile. Don't do anything to call attention to yourself.

Okay, Bird says.

His father goes to the sink, begins to run cold water over his bruised knuckles. And because it feels like the door between them is still ajar, Bird sets his palm against it. Pushes.

Did my mother like cats? he asks.

His father stops. What, he says, as if Bird has spoken in another language, one of the few he doesn't know.

Cats, Bird repeats. Did she like them.

His father shuts off the water. Where is this coming from? he says.

I just want to know, Bird says. Did she?

His father glances quickly around the room, his habit whenever Bird's mother comes up. Outside, all quiet, only the occasional siren passing.

Cats, he says, looking down at his raw and reddened hand. She did. She adored them.

He looks at Bird searchingly, with a gaze more pointed than Bird has seen in a long time. Like he's spotted something unusual in Bird's face, like a sheath has been removed.

Miu, his father says slowly. Her surname.

He writes the character in the dust on the top of the bookshelf: a square crisscrossed to represent a field, two smaller crosses sprouting from the top.

苗

It means seedling, or sometimes crops. Something just beginning to grow. But it sounds like a cat's meow, doesn't it? *Miu.*

And, he says, his voice warming the way it does when he grows excited, when he's talking about things that he loves, like words. It has been a long time since this happened. And, his father goes on, if you put this, which means *beast*, in front of it—

He adds a few more strokes, a pared-down suggestion of an animal sitting at attention:

貓

—this whole thing means cat. The beast that makes the sound *miu*. But of course you could think of it as the beast that protects the crops.

His father is in his element, as Bird hasn't seen him in years. He has almost forgotten his father could be like this, that his father had this in him. That his eyes and his face could light up this way.

The story, his father says, is that once there were no cats in China. No house cats, anyway. Only wildcats. Classically, cat was written like this—he sketches another character—

貍

—which really meant a wild creature, like a fox. Then Persian traders taught them to domesticate their wildcats, and they added this—

He begins to write a third character, made of two halves. First, the character for woman. Then beside it, so close they almost overlap, the symbol for hand.

奴

Slave, his father says. Wildcat plus slave, a domesticated cat. See?

Together they look down at the characters written in the dust. *Miu.* His mother. Beast plus seedling meant cat. What kind of beast would she have been? A cat, for sure. Woman plus hand

meant slave. Had his mother ever been domestic, or domesticated?

With one swipe of his palm his father wipes the top of the bookshelf clean.

Anyway, he says. We used to talk about these kinds of things, your mother and me. Long time ago.

He rubs his palm against the thighs of his pants, leaving a faint gray streak.

She liked that idea, he says after a moment. That the only thing separating her from a beast was a few little strokes.

I didn't know you knew Chinese, Bird says.

I don't, his father says absently. Not really. But I can understand some Cantonese. I studied it, for a while. With your mother. A long time ago.

He turns to go, and then, just as suddenly, turns back.

That book.

And then, after another long pause: Your mother used to tell you that story, didn't she.

Bird nods.

I remember, his father says.

And as he begins to speak, it comes back to Bird, all of it: not the words on the pages of the book, not the few bare-bones sentences his father uses to tell it to him now, but the way he remembers hearing it, in his mother's voice. Painting a picture with words on the blank white wall of his mind. Long buried. Crackling as it surfaced in the air once more.

Once, long ago, there was a boy who loved to draw cats. He was a poor boy, and most of the day he worked in the fields, planting rice with his parents and the others in his village in the spring, harvesting the paddies beside them in the fall. But whenever he had a spare moment, he would draw. And what he most liked to draw, what he drew most often of all, were cats. Big cats, little cats, striped and calico and spotted. Cats with pointy ears and skinny eyes, cats with black paws and black muzzles, cats with white patches on their chests like eagles. Shaggy cats, smooth cats, cats leaping, cats stalking, cats sleeping or cleaning their fur. On the flat rocks by the river, he sketched them with a burnt stick. He scraped them into the sand on the shores of the nearby lake where the fishermen pulled in their nets. On dry days, he scratched them into the dust of the path to his house, and after the rains he carved them into the thick mud where puddles had once glistened.

The others in his village thought this was a waste of time. What use is it to draw cats, they scoffed. It doesn't put food on the table or bring in the grain. The richest man in town had beautiful scrolls on the walls of his house: paintings of fog-tipped mountains and elegant gardens, far-off things no one in their village had ever seen. But you could simply step outside and see a cat; they were everywhere. They had never heard of an artist choosing to draw cats. What was the point?

The boy's parents, however, did not agree. Although they had to work many hours in the field—and the boy often had to help—they were proud of his talent. After the day's work was done, the father collected pieces of bamboo the length of his hand and gave them to his son for brushes. The mother cut the tips of her own hair and bound them into tufts for the bristles. The boy gathered stones—every color he could find, from deep red to pure black—and ground them to dust to make his paints. And every night, he painted cats—on flat pieces of bark, on scraps of paper and worn-out rags—until it was time for bed.

One year, sickness struck the village, and the boy's parents died. No one in the village would take him in: he had a reputation. A boy who wasted time, a boy who did useless things. Besides, the villagers had little to spare. They had been sick, too; there was little food, nothing left for one who wasn't their own. Each family took a handful of rice from their stores, bound it all in a cloth, and gave it to the boy. Good luck, they said. May fortune smile on you. He thanked them and shouldered the bundle, tucked his brushes in his pocket, and set off on his way.

It was winter, and bitterly cold. The boy wandered for hours through the dark until he came to a small village, where every door was shut tight. Though he could see the glow of firelight through the windows, no one would answer his knock. A harsh wind began to blow; snow began to whirl around him in the air like ghosts clawing at his face. At the last house, an old woman peered out. I'm sorry, she said. If I let you in, my husband will kill me. We dare not take in strangers. This whole town is afraid. Afraid, the boy said, afraid of what? But the woman simply shook her head.

In desperation, the boy looked around the deserted street. At the end, just past the outskirts of town, he spotted a small building he hadn't noticed before. What about that, he said, that deserted house? Surely I can stay there just for the night.

The old woman seized his hands. That place is dangerous, she said. Cursed. It is said that a monster lives there. No one who enters at night ever returns.

I am not afraid, the boy said, and anyway, I may as well be eaten by a monster as freeze to death out here in the street.

The old woman bowed her head and gave him a torch lit from her cooking fire. Take this, she said. And keep to the small. Then she blessed him and wiped a tear from her cheek.

May you see tomorrow, she said. And if you do, I beg you forgive us.

The boy made his way to the deserted house. Snow had begun to stick to the ground and to the bare branches of the trees, and when he reached it he found a small drift just beginning to form at its door. But it was unlocked, and he let himself inside. He lit a fire in the fireplace and looked around. There was only one room, with only one piece of furniture: a small cupboard, the kind that his mother had once kept their blankets in. There were no carpets on the floor, no decorations on the walls: only whitewashed walls, a plain dirt floor swept clean.

Well, he thought, this place may be cursed, but at least it's dry and warm. He was about to unroll his blanket on the floor and go to sleep when the white walls caught his attention. They seemed so bare, so empty. Like a face without features. He dug into his pocket and pulled out his brushes, and before he had thought it through, he had painted a cat on one of the walls. Just a little one, a small striped gray-and-white thing. A kitten, really. There, he thought, that's better. And again he prepared to go to bed.

But the cat seemed lonely, all by itself on the wall—and there was so much wall. He painted it a friend, a bigger cat, a tabby sitting beside it, licking its paw. Then he forgot himself completely. He painted another cat, a big orange tom, asleep by the fire. A black cat ready to pounce, a white cat watching with big blue eyes, a calico clambering among the rafters. He painted cats until all the walls were covered, a whole coterie of cats to keep him company, and only when he ran out of space—and the fire was sputtering down to embers—did he put his brushes away.

The boy was tired—who wouldn't be, after conjuring a hundred cats out of nothingness? He unrolled his blanket, but despite all the cats, he was lonely. He missed his parents, and he wished he were at home again, in his own house, in his own bed, with his parents sleeping beside him. He thought of his brushes, made from his father's bamboo, his mother's hair. He remembered the small gestures about them he missed the most: the way his mother raked her hand through his hair, smoothing it from his face; the way his father had hummed while he worked in the field, so quietly it might have been the buzzing of bees. He felt small, and suddenly he remembered the old woman's words: keep to the small. He took his blanket and opened the cupboard and made his bed inside it. It was as close to his own little bed as he could get, and he crawled inside, with all of his things, and pulled the door shut behind him.

In the middle of the night he awoke to a terrible wordless wailing. It was an unearthly shrieking: like the groaning of old trees splintering as they fell, like the howling of a hundred winter winds, like the screeching of the earth as it shifted and tore itself apart. Even his eyelashes stood on end. He put his eye to a tiny crack, but all he could see outside was a ghastly red light, as if the whole room were full of blood. He shut his eyes and held his breath and pulled the blanket over his head. Whatever you do, he thought, don't make a sound.

After a long time—he didn't know how long—it was quiet again. Still he waited in silence. An hour passed. Two. He put his eye to the crack again and this time, no red: only a faint sliver of sunlight. Hands shaking, he pushed his way out of the cupboard. His cats were still there, on the walls, just as he'd painted them. But every cat's mouth was red. All over the floor: the prints of hundreds and hundreds of cat feet, pressed into the dirt, scrapes and smudges and marks of a battle. Flecks of blood and foam sprayed on the walls. And there, in the corner—a huge dead shaggy thing. Still now, clawed half to shreds. A rat the size of an ox.

So what does it mean, Bird thinks, as he lies in his bunk that night. It's well after midnight and below him his father snores once, then turns to one side, and is still. Outside, the city is quiet, except for an occasional siren wailing its way through the dark. *We promise to watch over each other.*

Bird tiptoes into the living room, pushes the edge of the curtain aside, slips behind it, and looks out. All he sees are the hulking forms of buildings, the far-off specks of streetlights. The flat dark band of the street. Newly blackened, but somewhere beneath it, a painted heart still blooms. So risky, he thinks, and what was the point? When a few hours later all trace of it was gone.

But the truth is: it isn't gone. He can't see that bare stretch of ground without thinking of it, the bright splotch flashing into his mind, sharp as a wildcat's snarl.

Hadn't they been afraid?

He tries to imagine what it had felt like, to be that painter. Tiptoeing into the street. Breath dragon-hot beneath a mask, heartbeat a deafening roar. Slapping stencil to pavement with shaking hands, spraying a sizzling cloud of red. And then running, lungs aflame with fear and fumes, finding a small sheltered corner to hide. Red paint like smears of blood on his hands.

And then it floods him. Rushing in as if someone has unstopped a plug.

A game they played, he and his mother, when he was very small. Before school, before he had any other world but her. His favorite game, one he'd begged her to play. Their special game, played only when his father was at work, kept as a secret between just them.

You be the monster, mama. I'll hide, and you be the monster.

She'd taped sheets of paper to the walls and Bird drew cat after cat: with crayons, half-dried markers, pencil stubs. Simple cats, scrawls with ears, but still. Cats. Cats, all over his room. And then, when he tired of drawing, came the second part of the game. Inside his closet was a crawl space his parents had discovered when they'd fixed up the house. Too small, under the eaves, for anything practical, but his mother had kept it. For him. A perfect boy-sized cubby she'd furnished with a sliding panel, a pillow and a blanket and a flashlight. A dragon's cave. A bandit's lair. And sometimes, the cabinet in which the boy hid.

He would crawl inside and slide the panel shut and yawn loudly, then flop down and begin to snore. From outside would come a growl that peppered goose bumps up and down his arms. A series of snarling meows. Inside, Bird pulled the blanket over his head and shivered deliciously. After a few minutes it grew quiet, and he would crawl from the hot cubby back out into the closet and then the light of the room, and there, on the carpet: his mother on her back, arms curled to her chest. Deadly still. The mouth of every cat he'd drawn smeared with red.

He would run to her then and throw himself on her chest and she would catch him in her arms, warm and strong, and tickle him and laugh. Always, a moment of terror at seeing her there, and a hot rush of relief when she came back to life. Over and over they played it, this game, his mother indulging him again and again. So long ago that he'd forgotten. Kindergarten, new friends, new games arrived and swept it away. And then, after she'd gone, he'd packed that memory up, along with everything else he could, and left it behind in the house they'd once shared. Where maybe—just maybe, though he doesn't even dare to think the words—perhaps he might find her again.

• • •

Something he's never told anyone, even Sadie: he's been there many times, over the years. It is just a few blocks from his new school, and though he's supposed to come directly home,

sometimes he detours, just a little, so he can walk past the old house. Just to see it. It is the only time he ever deviates from the path. Construction, he imagines telling his father, the main road was closed, I had to go around. Or: The police were detouring people—I dunno why. His father would never argue with that; he's always reminding Bird to stay away from trouble, to avoid the police.

But his father never even asks. He is so certain Bird will always follow the rules, so confident in Bird's unquestioning obedience, and on those days—standing on the sidewalk, looking up at the house where they no longer live, at its shaded-over windows like closed eyes—Bird resents it, this assumption that there could be nothing off his prescribed path that he wants or misses or needs.

No one has moved into the house in the past three years. His father hasn't sold it—he can't, without his mother's signature, too—and no one seems to want to rent it, once they learn who'd lived there before. Every time Bird visits, it is just the same, windows obscured by blinds, tall back gate always shut tight. None of the houses in this neighborhood have front yards; the houses come right up to the sidewalk like pushy neighbors, elbowing their way in. A scraggly strip of grass runs between sidewalk and street in a threadbare ribbon, and this is the only thing that changes from visit to visit: first overgrown and tufty, then knee high and gone to seed, then buried under a bank of uncleared snow. One spring he visited and found it bristling with daffodils: he had forgotten his mother had planted them there, and their cheerful yellow—her favorite color—pained him so much that he did not come back again for a whole month, until the flowers had shriveled, leaving nothing but splayed stems and wilting leaves.

What he knows from this: the house is still sitting empty. The perfect place to hide.

The next day, after school, instead of heading home, he follows the road along the curve of the river, back toward their old house. As he walks, a smattering of memories flare at each step, small bright stones lighting a path through the forest. There is the huge gray-brown sycamore, like an enormous elephant's foot, which even together their arms could not encircle. There is the lopsided white house, two centuries old and all corners and additions: the mish-mosh house, he'd called it; his mother had called it the House of the Thirty-Seven Gables. There is the monastery behind its high sandstone wall, as impenetrable and imperturbable as ever. Monks live there, she'd told him, and when he'd asked *what's a monk*, she'd answered: a person who wants to escape the world. All the landmarks of his childhood coming back, patiently pointing the way. For a moment he pauses before the great hollow of an old stump, disoriented, until he realizes: the big maple he remembers has been cut down. In the fall it had showered red leaves over the sidewalk, the smallest as big as his face. His mother had plucked one, poked two eyeholes, let him wear it as a mask. One for her, too. A pair of wood spirits, roaming the city. The tree must have been decaying from within all that time, rotting and crumbling like sponge. The tragedy of this nearly crushes him, until he peers inside and sees small green shoots rising deep within the ring of stubborn wood.

On their old street, each house is a different drab shade: tan, dirty cream, the washed-out gray of tattered laundry: as if all the color has leached away since his childhood. Slope shouldered, listing slightly to one side, they resemble old ladies, their clothing grown shabby and loose. There are garbage cans stowed behind fences, here and there a soggy newspaper, still in its plastic sheath, on the sidewalk—but it's quiet. And then there it is again: their house, just as it has always been. Dusty green, like the underside of a leaf. Wooden steps leading to the porch, gracefully sagging, edges rounded with age. The front door, once cherry red, faded to the soft brown of aged brick.

If his father never sold the house, Bird reasons, then it's still theirs. Which means it isn't trespassing. Not, technically, breaking the rules. Still, he glances over his shoulder, scanning the street, as he picks his way through the weeds toward the gate and the backyard. The windows of the other houses glaring at his back.

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After his mother left, some of their neighbors had shied away from them. Before, they'd waved, said hello, maybe told Bird how tall he was getting, or commented on the weather. After: tight lips, the merest head nods. Darting inside quickly as if they'd forgotten something, or left the stove on. Once, in Harvard Square, Bird and his father had run into Sarah, who lived two houses down, who had sometimes brought them rhubarb muffins and borrowed Margaret's pruning shears. She'd crossed the street as they approached, casually but quickly, as if there were a bus she needed to catch. The next time they saw her, on their own street, hauling in garbage cans after the truck had gone by, she didn't meet their eyes.

Worse than the neighbors who ignored them: the ones who began to check on them. To see if you needed anything, one would say. Just dropping by, to see how you were doing. To see how you were holding up. What was it they were supposed to be holding up, Bird wondered, though eventually he realized it was themselves. It did feel that way in those early days, on the mornings when he'd learned to eat his cereal dry, because the milk in the fridge always seemed to have curdled: like they were puppets and the strings *holding them up* had gone slack. His mother had done all those things, but she was gone, and they would have to learn to survive on their own: a near impossible thing, those first weeks.

When the smoke alarm went off, the fire department arrived and his father had to explain: no, everything was fine, just the pancakes left in the pan too long. Yes, he knew the stove should never be unattended; Bird had called him into the other room; no, Bird was perfectly safe, everything was under control. Another afternoon, Bird fell off his bike at the corner and skinned both knees and ran back home, screaming, blood trickling down both shins: he was sitting on the closed toilet, sniffling, his father dabbing at him with a damp paper towel—it's okay, Bird, see? just a scrape, not as bad as it seems—when the police arrived. A neighbor had called. The little boy, crying and alone. The bike abandoned, front wheel still spinning. *Just wanted to make sure he wasn't unattended. You know, with his mother gone. Just wanted to be sure someone was watching.*

Someone was always watching, it seemed: when Bird went out without a hat and stood shivering at the bus stop; when Bird forgot his lunch and his teacher asked him if his father was giving him enough to eat. There was always someone watching. There was always someone wanting to check.

It's probably nothing, but—

I just figured I should say something in case—

Of course I'm sure everything is fine, but—

Posters were starting to appear all around town then, all over the city. All over the country. *United neighborhoods are peaceful neighborhoods. We watch out for each other.* Years later, Bird would see Sadie pull a Sharpie from her jeans pocket and scribble over *out for*. Their neighbor across the street, who had never liked them, who said their yard was overgrown and their house needed painting and their car was parked too close to hers, took particular joy in calling in everything. When his father burned his hand on the cast-iron skillet and dropped it on the floor with a loud clang and a shouted oath, a police officer arrived fifteen minutes later. Report of domestic disturbance, they'd said. Was he in the habit of using profanity in front of his

son? Would he say he had a temper? And to Bird, privately, out of his father's hearing: Was he ever afraid of his father, had his father ever hit him, did he feel safe at home?

Every few days, menacing items would appear in their mailbox, or on their front steps: broken glass; bags of garbage; once, a dead rat. All-caps notes that his father tore down before Bird could read them. It was not long after that, he realizes, that his father had transferred to his new job, that he'd switched Bird to his new school, that they'd moved to the dorm. For the first time, he considers what might have appeared at his father's work, outside his office, on the desks in his classrooms. What his bosses might have said, or not said, about it all.

Good news, his father had said, the university has agreed to let us use an apartment in one of the dorms.

His new job paid hourly, barely enough for food and clothes, not enough for Cambridge rent. But through favors and kindnesses, he'd managed to negotiate a safe place for them to live. At the top of a tower, buffered by a courtyard, a key-swipe, an elevator. A refuge from prying eyes.

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As Bird pushes the back gate open, there's a sudden scurrying, a blur of brown and a flash of white: a rabbit, startled while browsing in the overgrown lawn. It darts to a gap under the fence and disappears, and Bird picks his way through the grass. The weeds are waist high after three years of neglect and nearly cover the path; here and there a branch, grown leggy and bare, plucks at his sleeve like a beggar asking for alms. A story comes back to him: a castle, all covered in a rose briar. *So thick nothing could be seen of it, not even the flag on the roof.* All the princes struggling to fight their way through. When the rightful prince came, after a hundred years, the hedges made a path for him. Once he had loved that story, once his mother had told it to him and he had believed it, every word.

As he looks around, memories hover close before alighting on his shoulders like dragonflies. They'd had flowers here, before: lavender, and honeysuckle, and huge purple puffballs, his father's favorites. White roses the size of his fist that fat golden bees wriggled into. Vines with purple star-shaped blooms. Here there had been vegetables, curling squash with hairy leaves and sprawling tomatoes. His mother's green rubber boots, treads caked with mud. His had been orange. Once he'd been stung and his mother had pulled his wrist to her mouth, sucked the stinger from his skin.

He ventures farther, parting the weeds. There is the pole where beans once twined themselves up a teepee of string. A cool green hideaway, once upon a time. His father had had one as a child and then his mother had grown one for him. Now the strings are bare, gray from the weather, some slack and some frayed. At his feet, a tangle of dry, withered vines.

Somewhere here, he remembers, somewhere in this garden, there is a key. He is sure of it. Near the back steps, perhaps, or under the porch. A rock with a key buried under it.

They'd been outside. How old had he been? Four? Five? His father at work. His mother tending the garden: pulling weeds, pruning shrubs, tying branches—swollen with ripening fruit—to their stakes. He'd shut the back door and it wouldn't open again and he'd burst into tears. Certain they were trapped outside forever. It's all right, she'd said. Listen, I'll tell you a story. She told him stories often, while she worked, as he dug in the dirt, collected twigs, lay in the grass at her feet. *Once upon a time, there was a witch with a magical garden. Once upon a time, there was a young man who understood the language of animals. Once upon a time, there were nine suns in the sky, and it was so hot nothing could grow on the earth.*

This time, as she wiped the smudge of dirt from his wet cheek: *Once upon a time, there was a boy who found a golden key.* She'd knelt by the bottom of the stairs, flipped over a stone. Presto! There it was.

She was always doing that, telling him stories. Prying open cracks for magic to seep in, making the world a place of possibility. After she left, he had stopped believing all those fantasies. Wispy, false dreams that disintegrated in the morning's light. Now it occurs to him that, perhaps, there might be truth in them after all.

It takes him a long time, but he finds it. Pressed down into the dirt, teeth edged with rust. But it is there, hard and solid and real in his hand. It still fits in the lock, still clicks when he turns it, still draws the bolt back so he can turn the knob and step through.

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Inside: the smell of a house long unoccupied. A clamminess, the musty scent of air not mellowed by the warmth of bodies, but he expected this. What he hasn't expected is how familiar it is. The long narrow hallway from kitchen to living room where he and his father had raced wind-up toys, the brick fireplace set into the wall, the staircase rising steeply before him and disappearing into the darkness overhead. Like somewhere he's been in a dream, a place he knows without recognizing, a place he can navigate though he could not draw a map. Everywhere he looks, memories ripple and swell. He remembers the furniture that has vanished, once hulking and solid: his mother's beloved leather armchair, the glass-topped coffee table where the three of them had once played Candyland. He remembers the color of the light in the evenings, when it was nearly time for bed: honey-colored and warm, coating everything in its sweet syrupy glow.

Inside the castle, everything was frozen in time. The maid dozed in the kitchen with a half-plucked chicken on her lap. The cook snored, one hand still raised, about to slap the scullion.

Hello? he calls, but no one answers.

There's nothing here anymore, just speckles of dust hanging in the sunlight that seeps around the drawn blinds. A darker rectangle on the wooden floor, which for years their rug had kept unfaded. A pile of ashes on the hearth, the color of faded bones. His father had stacked his mother's books there, set a match to their corners.

No sign of her anywhere here. Signs of her everywhere here.

He sets his hand on the banister and begins to climb. On each step his feet leave prints in the dust.

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Upstairs, the landing is lit only by slashes of light slicing around pulled-down shades. His parents' room. The bathroom, clawfoot tub now streaked with rust. And there, at the end of the hallway, his room, with its uniquely shaped door: one corner cut off, to fit under the sloped ceiling. He nudges it open, but there's no one there. In the corner stands a frame with no mattress, the skeleton of a bed. By the opposite wall, an bare bookshelf, a dresser with drawers lolling. He peers inside: empty. The husk of his old life. A long-ago memory surfaces, and he runs his hand down the jamb, brushing away the grime, until he finds it. Pencil ticks like the rungs of a ladder, each labeled with a date and two letters. BG. Bird Gardner. His name, once upon a time. Three feet. Three feet, two inches. Three feet six. Creeping ever upward.

The closet's hinges groan as he pulls it open. Empty. Overhead, a solitary wire hanger dangles from the bare rod. There it is, on the back wall: the panel that's actually a door, the secret he'd guarded so fiercely that he'd never even shown his friends, had kept it just for

himself. And his mother. Exactly as he remembers it, uncannily so. As if he has imagined it into being.

Carefully Bird lifts up the latch and slides the panel open, revealing a gap that would be tight for a five-year-old. He flops down on the closet floor, wedges his head and one shoulder inside. He can't see anything, but he feels around the cubby with his hands, sweeping his palms over everything he can. In his memory it's a vast space, a huge cave, but the truth is, it's just a nook. If he could squeeze through the opening now, it wouldn't even hold him crouching down.

Inside he finds an old flashlight, flips the switch: the battery, of course, is long dead. A threadbare pillow. A crinkle of cellophane that, when examined, proves to be an empty Twinkie wrapper, caked with dust. Nothing else. He feels foolish now, for ever thinking she might have been here.

Bird wriggles himself backward, hooks his hands in the opening to lever himself out, and then he feels it. A little card, wedged in the backside of the cubby door's frame. No, not a card: a scrap of paper. Dusty, like everything else, as if it has been there a long time. A single word printed in black pen—DUCHESS—and beneath it an address in New York City, on Park Avenue. The handwriting is his mother's.

The next day after school he goes back to the library, the public one, the librarian's words drifting back to him as he nears the entrance: *If there's anything I can help with.* He's not sure if she can, but if there's one thing he remembers from stories, it's that people who offer help along your way—whether directing you to treasure or warning you of danger—should not be ignored.

Today, to Bird's consternation, the library is not quite deserted. There's another visitor: an older Black man in the how-to section, not far from the front desk. Tall and trim, a gray beard, long gray locs neatly tied back at the nape of his neck. Bird dawdles by the cookbooks, out of sight, watching the man flip books open and shut them again, replacing them with no apparent interest in what's inside. He'll simply wait for the man to go away, he decides, and then he can speak to the librarian without being overheard.

But after nearly ten minutes of idle browsing, the man is still loitering there. What was taking him so long? Sometimes people came in off the street, Bird knows, just looking for a place to get warm. It's October; each day the weather gets colder, and a full decade after the Crisis there are still plenty of people living rough—lingering on street corners, hunched on park benches, dodging police and the neighborhood-watch groups. But this man doesn't look like he lives on the street. He wears dark jeans and a tailored tan blazer, shoes of polished leather; there's an ease to his bearing, a comfort in this place—despite his apparent aimlessness—that Bird himself doesn't share. Yet there's a tension, too: as if he's readying himself for a difficult task.

Then the man pulls a small slip of paper from his blazer pocket, inserts it carefully between the pages of a washing machine repair manual, and shuts it again. A bookmark, Bird thinks. Still, something about it catches his attention: the slightly furtive glance the man casts over his shoulder, the way he nudges the neighboring books back into place, lining the spines up so precisely you can't tell that one has disappeared. Suddenly Bird remembers the librarian searching the books at her desk last time, the note she'd retrieved. On his side of the shelf, the man straightens, as if he's made a decision, tucks the book under his arm, and heads for the circulation desk with a new air of purpose.

Excuse me, he says to the librarian. I found this book lying around. I'm not sure but I think —I think it might have been taken out of its place.

Bird can see him more clearly now. The black-brown of his eyes, the clean white collar of his shirt. The precisely trimmed edges of his beard.

The librarian looks up, and when she speaks there's a tightly tethered eagerness in her voice. Thank you, she says. I'll take a look.

The man sets the book on the counter. I'm not sure, you understand, he says. But I *think* someone might be looking for it.

He slides the book toward her, but his hand is still pressed to the cover. As if he can't bear to let it go.

They're probably very, very worried, he says. The words come out thick and sticky, as if he's trying not to cry.

I'll do my best to find out where it belongs, the librarian says.

Bird, peering out from behind the shelf of cookbooks, understands that something is being said that he can't hear. He senses it more than registers it: a faint thrumming felt deep in the bone. No one would cry over a misplaced book.

I won't speak of this to anyone, the librarian is saying. Her voice is so low that Bird has to strain to make out the words. Thank you. For bringing this in.

She smiles at the man then, sets her hand on the cover beside his, not prying the book away, just holding it, waiting for the man to be ready, and at last the man lets it go.

I couldn't live with myself if I didn't, he says quietly. My brother and I grew up in foster care, years ago. They said our parents couldn't provide—I was almost grown up by the time they got us back.

And then he is gone.

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The librarian has just pulled out the slip of paper when she spots Bird and swiftly shuts the book again. This time Bird catches a glimpse before she slips it into her sweater pocket: jotted-down notes, what might have been an address, a name. The excitement on her face cools into wariness as she recognizes him.

Well, hello again, she says. You're back. Did you need something else?

You said you could help me, Bird says. Last time I was here. You said—if there's anything you could help with, to come back.

The librarian doesn't say yes and she doesn't say no. With the book still clutched in her hands, she studies him.

I can try, she says. What do you need?

Bird clears his throat.

I need to get to New York, he says. New York City. There's somebody I have to see.

The librarian laughs. That's out of my area of expertise, she says. I meant with another book. Or finding information.

This is finding information, he says. There's someone there I need to talk to.

All last night he'd thought about it. His mother has left him this address for a reason, he is sure of it. No one else would have known about the cubby, let alone left something inside. Her letter, the story, this note: it is too much to be a coincidence. To Bird it has the certainty of a prophecy, or a quest; he feels it with the arrogant confidence only a child can have. This Duchess, whoever she is, will have something to tell him about his mother, and therefore his next step must be to go and hear it.

The librarian rubs a knuckle to her temple. I'm sorry, she says. I can't really help with that.

Please, he says. It's for a good reason. I promise.

But still she shakes her head.

I'm not a travel agent. And even if I were, I can't help a kid run away.

I'm not running away, Bird begins, but she's not listening anymore.

I'm sorry, she says again, and starts to turn away, and he decides to bluff.

I know about what you're doing, he says, though of course he does not quite yet; he knows only that it is something illicit, something shameful or perhaps even illegal, and therefore it is a crowbar: something that can be used to pry, or—if it comes to that—something to swing.

She doesn't answer but pauses, half turned away from him, and from the slight stiffening in her posture he knows she's listening and decides to press further.

I saw that man, he goes on, his gaze trained on her back. And what you were doing the other day. The note in the book.

And then, steeling himself, he takes the plunge: I saw what you put in your pocket, he says.

It works. The librarian turns around, and though her face is calm and still, there's a new tightness in her voice.

Let's talk in my office, she says, and then her hand is on his elbow, pincerlike, and she marches him back through the shelves and to the STAFF ONLY office again. This time, once they're

inside, she grabs him by the shoulders, her eyes blazing.

I knew you were spying, she says. That other day. I knew you were going to make trouble. You cannot mention to anyone—anyone—what you've seen. Do you understand?

Bird tries to wriggle free, but can't. I just need your help, he says.

No one can know, she says. People will get hurt—really hurt—if anyone finds out.

Like that man? Bird says. A guess, but a right one. The librarian releases him, leans back against the wall, hugging the book to her chest.

He's trying to help, she says. And risking so much just to try. Most people won't even do that. They'd rather just close their eyes, as long as it's not their kids at stake.

She turns back to Bird.

How old are you? Twelve? Thirteen? You're old enough to understand this, aren't you? People's lives are at stake. Children's lives are at stake.

I'm not trying to cause trouble, Bird says. His tongue is awkward and unwieldy, a fish flopping on the shore. I'm sorry. I really am. Please. You're helping them. Can't you help me, too?

From his jeans pocket, he extracts the paper with the address, now battered and wrinkled.

I'm just trying to find my mother, he pleads, and then it strikes him: this, of all things, might convince her. She'd known his name, before. How else, but through his mother? It is all coming together in Bird's mind, the pieces zippering neatly together. The painting on the street, the banner in Brooklyn, the ephemeral flyers that dot the neighborhoods. His mother's poems, the stolen children, our missing hearts. He can see it all, as clearly as a spider's web misted with dew, the wispy strands crisscrossing into a magnificent, crystalline whole. They're on the same side.

My mother is one of the leaders, he says, proudly. A feeling he's never dared claim about her before, and saying it feels like standing full height after years of crouching.

The librarian gives him a look. A wry look, as if he's about to tell her a joke she already knows.

Your mother, she says.

Bird clears his throat. Margaret, he says, his voice cracking just a bit on the *M*, a hairline fracture. Margaret Miu.

It is the first time he's said her name aloud in as long as he can remember. Maybe ever. It feels like an incantation. He waits—for what? Earthquakes. Lightning strikes. Bolts of thunder. But all he sees is a half smirk at one corner of the librarian's mouth. He'd thought it would be a password that let him through the secret entrance into sparkling rooms beyond. Instead he's smashed his nose into a wall.

Oh, I know exactly who your mother is, the librarian says.

She studies Bird, leaning in closer to him, so close he can smell the morning's sour coffee on her breath, and he sags under her gaze.

You know, I didn't recognize you at first, she says. The last time I saw you, you were a baby. She used to come in, with you in a sling. But when you asked me about her book, I realized who you reminded me of. Why you looked familiar. You look a lot like her, actually, once I made the connection.

Bird has so many questions he wants to ask, but they all jam together in his mind and fall in a muddled heap. He tries to picture it: his mother, here, among these very shelves; himself, snuggled small against her chest.

She used to come here? he repeats. Still processing the idea that once his mother stood in this very spot, touched the same books that stand all around them.

Every day. Borrowing books, back when she was still writing her poems. Before she became the *voice of the revolution.*

The librarian laughs, a short laugh edged with bitterness. She closes her eyes and recites in a singsong.

All our missing hearts
scattered, to sprout elsewhere.

Bird sits with this, lets it soak into him like rain into stone. Leaving a wet dark patch. Not just a book, but a poem, too, and a line in the poem as well.

I've never heard the whole thing, he admits.

The librarian settles back against the wall, hands at her hips. All those posters and banners with her slogan on them. Such good *branding*. All those viral photo ops.

She sniffs.

I guess it's easier, she says, to write brave words than to actually do the work.

So that's what you do, he says. You find the children and bring them back home.

The librarian sighs.

It's not quite that simple, she admits. There's so much fear around it all. Most people won't even publicly say their children have been taken. People are told if they stay silent, they can get their kids back. But—

She stops, pinches the bridge of her nose. We try to convince them, she says. We keep a list: name, age, description. And if we hear about a re-placed child, we try and figure out who it is. Sometimes the leads pan out, sometimes they don't.

Unconsciously, her hand touches her sweater pocket, and the man's note crinkles inside.

It's risky, you know—a lot of people just don't want to get involved. But we try to find people we can trust, here and there.

Like that man, Bird says, and she nods.

A lot of times no one knows where the children have been taken. Some of the younger ones, at least, are re-placed. But some of them are given new names. Some are so young they don't even know their parents' names. And usually they're re-placed far away from home. Not accidentally.

Bird thinks of Sadie, the hundreds of miles between Cambridge and her parents in Baltimore. How impossible it would be for a child to retrace that distance alone.

Then what, he asks.

For now, then nothing, she says, and he can feel how bitter the words are on her tongue. There isn't anything we can do yet, to actually bring them back home. Not as long as PACT is in effect anyway. But we've matched up a few and I think it helps the families, letting them know at least their children are safe, and where. We're just trying to keep track. Of who's been lost, and who's been found. As much as we can.

We?

A handful of us, she says carefully. All over the country. We share notes. She half smiles. It's part of our job, you know: information. Gather it. Keep it. Help people find what they need.

All this time a question has been flickering inside Bird.

But why, he says. When it's so risky. Won't they punish you, too, if they find out?

The librarian's lips tighten.

Of course they could. Me, and everyone else who's trying to find these children. That man and anyone else who passes us information. Of course it's a risk. But—

She pauses, and rubs her temples.

My great-grandfather was at Carlisle, she says simply, as if that explains everything. Then at the sight of Bird's blank face, she snorts. You have no idea, do you, she says. How could you? They don't teach you any of this. Too unpatriotic, right, to tell you the horrible things our country's done before. The camps at Manzanar, or what happens at the border. They probably teach you that most plantation owners were kind to their slaves and that Columbus *discovered* America, don't they? Because telling you what really happened would be espousing un-American views, and we certainly wouldn't want that.

Bird doesn't fully understand any of these things, but what he does understand, suddenly, and with head-spinning force, is how much he does not know.

I'm sorry, he says meekly.

The librarian sighs. How can you know, she says, if no one teaches you, and no one ever talks about it, and all the books about it are gone?

A long silence unwinds between them.

I didn't mean to make trouble, Bird says finally. Honest. I just—I just want to find my mother.

She softens.

I only knew your mother a little, she says. And a long time ago. But I remember her. She was a nice person. And a good poet.

But a bad mother, he thinks.

Only when the librarian replies does he realize he's spoken out loud.

You shouldn't say that, she says. Not about your own mother.

She puts her hand on Bird's shoulder again—gently, this time. A tender squeeze.

I'm not saying there aren't bad mothers, she says. Just that you don't always know. What makes them do something, or not do something. Most of us, we're trying our best.

Something in her voice makes Bird pause. A brittle sound. Something stretched too thin, more cracks than whole.

Do you have kids? he asks.

Two, she says slowly. I had two.

Past tense. Snipping the sentence in two: before, and after.

What happened to them, Bird asks.

My little girl got sick, she says. During the Crisis. We couldn't afford the hospital, hardly anybody could. Then my boy ran out of insulin, toward the end.

Her eyes have drifted away from him, are focused somewhere just over his shoulder, on the wall beyond.

Wherever your mother is, whatever she's doing, the librarian says, I'm sure of this: she'd be happy to know you grew up and stayed well. That you're still here.

Then she blinks, once, twice. Returns to the present, to him.

But look, Bird, she says, if you want to get to New York—you need to find your own way. I can only pass on information. Not people.

Bird nods.

And I can't let you go until you promise not to speak about any of this. Please, Bird. You of all people should understand. Pretend you don't know anything—I mean *anything*—about this. People's lives are at stake.

I would never, he says, the last word half garbled. I could never. And then, to prove to her he means it: My best friend, Sadie, was one of those kids.

A long, startled pause.

You knew Sadie? she says.

And then Bird remembers: of course. Sadie, after school every day, stopping by the library, even just for a few minutes.

We'd talk, the librarian says. Hard not to notice a little girl coming in like that, on her own.

A sudden hot flare of hope sears through Bird.

Is that where she went? he says, excited. You sent her home? Back to her mom and dad?

But the librarian shakes her head.

I couldn't find out where her parents had gone, she says. Nobody could find out anything, except that they weren't home anymore. And then all of a sudden, Sadie was gone, too.

A moment of silence, in which the librarian's eyes on him are gentle and kind. It feels good, surprisingly good, to talk about Sadie with someone who knew her. To remember her.

Listen, the librarian says. I can't take you to New York. I don't know anyone who can. But I can do something.

She leads him back out of the office and through the shelves to a thick maroon binder. Inside: pages and pages of timetables, printed in pale blue columns.

Train schedules and routes, she says. This binder here, this one is buses. At the station, you can go to the counter, but there are also machines that sell tickets. In case you wanted to avoid—questions.

Thank you, Bird manages to say.

She smiles. I told you, she says, that's my job. Information. Passing it on. Helping people find what they need.

She sets the opened binder atop the shelf and slides it across to him.

What you do with this information, she says, is your own business only.

Monday morning, his father is already waiting, work satchel in hand, when Bird emerges from the bedroom. He has hidden his schoolbooks under the blanket on his bed; in their place, the bag on his back holds a change of clothes, a toothbrush, and all the money he has. All the dropped bills he's found and saved over the years, all the lunch money kept from all the days when, rather than eat in the cafeteria, he would sit alone with his thoughts outside. Just enough, according to the timetables in the library, for a one-way ticket to Manhattan. The bus he's selected departs at ten o'clock. Plenty of time.

Though the elevator has been repaired at last, it groans and fumbles as it shudders its slow way downward. Between the mirrored walls, an infinite chain of Bird and his father accordions into the distance.

Bird waits until the numbers tick down from six to five before he speaks.

I forgot my lunch, he announces.

Noah, his father says, how many times do I have to tell you.

The elevator grinds to a halt and opens onto the dorm lobby. Sunlight pours through the plate-glass windows, so bright he feels like an insect on a light table. Surely his father will look at his face and know that he's lying. But his father just sighs and checks his watch.

Staff meeting at nine today, he says. I can't wait for you. Run back up and get it and hurry to school. Don't dawdle, okay?

Bird nods and hits the elevator button again, and his father turns to go. At the sight of his back—so familiar, in his old brown coat—Bird's throat tightens.

Dad, he calls, and his father turns around, gives a soft *oof* as Bird throws his arms around him.

What's this? his father says. I thought you were too old for hugs.

But he's teasing, and he squeezes Bird tight, and Bird snuggles into the comfortable dusty wool of his father's overcoat. He suddenly wants to tell him everything. To say, come with me. We'll find her together. But he knows his father will never let him go, let alone come with him. If he wants to go, he will have to go alone.

Bye, Dad, he says, and his father gives him a wave and is gone.

Upstairs, Bird lets himself back into the apartment and rushes to the window. He ducks behind the curtains and peeks down at the small grassy square of courtyard below. There he is: the dark speck of his father, nearly at the gate.

He's watched his father cross this courtyard before, on snow days when Bird's school closed but his father's work did not. He used to stand by the window, waiting until his father emerged far below, watch him head down the path and out of sight. In the winter, the small dots of footprints that appeared in his father's wake were like magic. Up close, Bird knew, they were jagged holes crushed into the ice. But from where he stood—ten stories up, pinned against and behind glass—they were dainty and precise. Beautiful. Purposeful. Thin stitching on a snow-white quilt; a trail of stones placed to mark the path home, or to show someone the way. How comforting, to know that he could go downstairs, follow the marks his father's feet have made, all the way to wherever he's gone.

Now, as he watches, the lone figure in the brown coat hugs that coat tighter around himself against the chilly fall breeze and steps through the gate. There is no snow, yet, to hold footprints, and in a moment, as his father disappears from sight, it is as if he never passed that way at all. Today it strikes Bird as unbearably sad, to pass by and leave no trace of your existence. To have no one remember you'd been there. He wants to run down all ten flights of stairs and place his feet into the invisible footsteps his father has left behind. He presses his fingertips to the cool

glass, as if—if he tried hard enough—he could push the entire window aside and step through into the air above all of this.

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He hadn't looked up when she'd said goodbye.

Birdie, she'd said, I have to go out.

Was that it? Or had she said: I have to go? He can't remember. He'd been playing with Legos, building something. He doesn't even remember what anymore.

Bird, she called again. She'd hovered just behind him, and he'd bristled with irritation. Whatever he was building wouldn't hold together; it kept tipping and falling in a shower of bricks, breaking itself apart again and again. He took two bricks, jammed them together as hard as he could, so hard that the knobs left divots in his skin.

Birdie, she said. I'm—I'm going now.

She was waiting for him, waiting for him to come and kiss her, like he usually did, and he attached one more brick and the whole thing collapsed again with a clatter, and he blamed her, for calling him when he was busy with something else.

Okay, he said. He picked up the bricks again, piecing the thing together once more, and by the time he turned around at last, to see if she was still there, she was gone.

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It is nearly nine o'clock: time to go. When his father comes back for dinner, the apartment will be empty, and Bird will be in New York. He's thought about this all weekend, how to tell his father where he's gone. Any mention of his mother is too big a risk, so his note is short and obscure: *Dad, I'll be back in a few days. Don't worry.* Beside it, he places the cat letter in its envelope on the table. Then he rips the paper from the cubby in two: the Park Avenue address he tucks back into his pocket; the last line—*New York, NY*—he sets beside the letter and his note. And last of all, a box of matches. He hopes his father will understand—where he's gone, and why, and most of all, what to do with this information.

He has never traveled out of Cambridge; all night he'd fretted about the dangers that might lie ahead. Taking the wrong train or turning down the wrong street or boarding the wrong bus, ending up who knows where. A ticket agent demanding: where are your parents? Policemen stopping him, loading him into the back of a patrol car, carting him back to his father—or worse, somewhere else. Strangers, so many of them, scrutinizing him. Measuring him with their eyes, gauging whether he is a threat or to be threatened.

Yet none of this happens. Baseball cap pulled down, sunglasses on, he rides the T to the station. The cops on the platform, talking football, don't even give him a second glance. Instead of approaching the ticket window, he heads for the machine: cash in, ticket out, no questions asked. At the bus terminal, no one looks around; everyone here seems to be focused on the ground, avoiding eye contact, and it occurs to him that maybe they, too, are hoping not to be seen. A pact between strangers, all of them agreeing tacitly to ignore one another, to mind their own business, for once. As one fear after another fails to materialize, Bird grows increasingly, absurdly confident. It's as if the universe is signaling he's on the right path, that he's doing exactly what he's meant to be. When his bus pulls in, he takes a seat by the window toward the back. He's made it. He's on his way.

After his mother left, for months he would lie in bed at night, certain that if he could stay awake long enough, she would return. He was convinced, for reasons he could never explain, that his mother came back in the night and disappeared by morning. By sleeping, he missed her

each time. Perhaps it was a test—to see how badly he wanted to see her. Could he stay awake? He imagined his mother, each night, standing over his bed, shaking her head. Again he was asleep! Again he had failed the test.

It made perfect sense to him then; it still does. In all the stories his mother had told him, there was an ordeal the hero had to endure: Climb down this well and fetch the tinderbox. Lie beneath this waterfall and let it drum you to pieces. He was sure if he could stay awake his mother would be there. The fact that the test was so arbitrary did not bother him; the tests they had in school were arbitrary, too: circle the nouns and underline the verbs; combine these two random numbers into a third. Tests were always arbitrary; it was part of their nature and, in fact, what made them a test. Separate the peas and the lentils from the ashes before morning's light. Journey beneath the sea and bring back the pearl that shines by night.

He'd pinched his own arm, bruising black and blue down the forearms, trying to stay awake. Night after night he would catch a sliver of flesh between finger-pad and thumbnail, squeezing until white flashes flecked the corners of his vision. In the morning, his mother was still gone and a half-moon of purple blotted his forearm, and his father asked if the other boys at school were bullying him. They were, but not in the way his father meant. It's fine, Dad, he said, and all day his eyelids drooped and sagged, and that evening, he would try, and fail, to stay awake again. It was around then that he stopped believing in stories.

Now, after all this time, he is on his way to find her. Like someone in those very stories she'd told him all those years ago. He will journey to where his mother is waiting patiently for him. As soon as she sees him, whatever spell has kept her away all this time will be broken. In the fairy tales, it happens at once, like a switch flipped: At once she recognized him. At once she knew her true self. He is certain this is how it will happen for his mother, too. She will see him and at once she will be his again and they will all live happily ever after.

The interstate scrolls by as the motor settles into the steady thrum of high gear. The farther they go, the easier Bird begins to breathe. He falls asleep and wakes only when the bus downshifts and merges left, jostling him against the glass. By the roadside: a navy-blue SUV has pulled over to the shoulder, a police cruiser parked behind it, lights flashing. An officer, navy suited, emerges from the driver's seat. Stay away from policemen, his father says in his mind, and Bird tugs the visor of his hat a bit lower, shading his face, as they whip by. He should be scared, but to his surprise, he isn't. Everything beyond the window feels far away, walled off behind glass, and his heart beats with the same slow, steady thump of the wheels beneath them. Outside the bus, trees and scrubby fields blur on and on.

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The bus drops him in Chinatown in the midst of a fine drizzle. A different world: more people than he's ever seen, more bustle, more noise. Despite the clamor and commotion, he feels oddly at home, and it takes him a moment to understand why: all around him, suddenly, are people with faces like hers. And a bit like his. He has never been in a place like this, where no one gives him a second glance. If his father was here, he'd be the one standing out, not Bird, and Bird laughs. For the first time in his life, he is unremarkable, and this feels like power.

Before he left he'd studied the map, the librarian nudging it wordlessly toward him. A grid, his father would say, calm and patient. Just count your way up and over. He does the math: Bowery will turn into Third; eighty-seven blocks up, then two blocks west. Just over five miles. All he has to do is walk in a straight line.

He begins.

He begins to notice things.

That on all the signs here in Chinatown, something has been painted out or taped over or, in some cases, pried away. He can still see the perforations where something was once nailed on, still make out shapes embossed beneath silvery-gray duct tape. He notices that the street signs have been painted over, too: a fat swath of black runs under the feet of neat white letters spelling MULBERRY and CANAL, like a shadow at high noon, like a dark ring beneath the white of an eye. Only when he spots one where the paint has begun to wear away, revealing a thicket of characters beneath, does he understand. He remembers his father's finger, inscribing characters like these in the dust: once, all these signs bore two languages. Someone—everyone—has tried to make the Chinese disappear.

He begins to notice other things.

How the people he passes speak either in English, or not at all, casting quick glances at one another but saying nothing. Only when they duck into a shop can he sometimes catch the low murmur of another language—Cantonese, he guesses. His father would know; his father might even understand. Everyone here seems cautious and edgy, scanning the sidewalks and the street, checking over their shoulders. Poised to run. He notices how many, many American flags there are—on nearly every storefront, on the lapels of nearly every person he sees. In the corner of each store hang the same kinds of posters from home: GOD BLESS EVERY LOYAL AMERICAN. All the way through Chinatown, not a single store is without one. Some sport other signs, too, garish in red, white, and blue: AMERICAN OWNED AND RUN. 100% AMERICAN. Only when he's left Chinatown, and the faces around him become Black and white instead of Asian, do the flags become more sporadic, the people here apparently more confident that their loyalty will be assumed.

He walks.

He passes storefronts shielded by graffitied metal grates. New and Used. Bought and Sold. For Lease. A concrete median dividing patched concrete streets. Mystifying names: Max Sun. Chair Table Booth. On the curbside, broken pallets splay like desert-bleached bones. No grass, no trees, nothing green, only street lamps the same gray as the sidewalk, the roads, the dirt that streaks its way up the sides of the buildings from the ground. Everything grit-colored, as if trying to escape notice. The people who pass carry heavy plastic bags, roll shopping carts, avoid each other's eyes. They do not linger. Sometimes the crosswalks under their feet are simply spray-painted on, the lines wobbling and uncertain; in other places there are no crosswalks at all. More than a decade after the Crisis ended, so many things still haven't been repaired.

Block by block, the landscape begins to shift around him. Stunted patches of grass fight their way through gaps in the sidewalk. How long has he been walking? An hour? He's lost track already. Has the school already noticed his absence, have they notified his father? Up, up, up. The drizzle slows, then stops. Supermarkets with giant glossy billboards of pizza, intricately ruffled kale, slices of mango that make his mouth water. His stomach growls, but he doesn't stop: he has no money left anyway. Bodegas with tumbling mountains of fruit and buckets of sheathed roses and indifferent, yawning cats stretched across the displays; barbershops where men's laughter floats through the propped-open doors on a wave of aftershave. In their windows, familiar posters: PROUD TO BE AMERICAN. WE WATCH OVER EACH OTHER. Now there are trees, small wispy ones barely above a man's head, but trees, nonetheless. Somewhere a church bell strikes. Three o'clock, or four? The street buzzes with life, and he can't tell chimes from echoes. He should be walking home from school, but instead he is here, his pulse growing faster with each block. Nearly there.

He walks faster and around him the city changes faster, too, like a sped-up video zipping into the future, or possibly the past. The way things used to be, that golden pre-Crisis world he's only heard about. More taxis, nicer ones, newer. Cleaner, as if they've just been washed. The streetlights are shiny black here, taller, sleeker, as if here there is more space to hold their heads

high. He passes buildings with crowns of decorative stonework over each window: someone took the trouble, up here, to pick out details in beige against the red, just so that they would be beautiful. Now there are stores with wide glass windows, unafraid of being smashed. Restaurants with awnings. People walking small dogs; trees ringed by neat metal fences no taller than his knee: for show, not for protection.

As the mist clears, he spots patches of green high in the air: rooftop gardens, the peaks of potted evergreens pointing at the sky. The buildings and businesses are no longer trying to hide. YES WE ARE OPEN. Flashy, catchy, quirky names, trying to stand out, trying to catch your attention and stick in your mind: The Salty Squid. Sound Oasis. Chickenosity. His father would have laughed. In each window, the familiar star-spangled placard. Banners advertising the fanciness of what they had, not its cheapness. Higher and higher the cross streets climb, as if he is scaling a ladder: Fiftieth, Fifty-Fifth, Fifty-Sixth. Men in suits. Men with ties. Men in leather shoes with fringed tassels and smooth soles in which you had no need to run. Long ago his father had worn shoes like that. Banks, so many banks—three, four, five in a row, sometimes the same bank on both sides of the street, one across from the other. He had not known it was possible to be so rich you would not cross the street.

A department store the length of an entire block, all sleek dark granite polished to mirror gloss. As if to say: in this place, even stones shine like stars. In its windows, faceless mannequins wear floral silk scarves around their throats. Tall apartment buildings, each window a pocket of reflected sky set into the walls like a gem. He imagines his mother living in one of them, looking down on him, waiting for him. Soon he'll know. Refrigerated trucks idle by the curbs, crammed with grocery deliveries, huffing their frosted breath into the air. Now there are coffee shops, places meant to linger in. Billboards for whitening and straightening teeth; hotels with suited bellhops in hats poised just outside. Here, people hold bags not meant to carry, but to be pretty. Dry cleaner after dry cleaner: a neighborhood of silk, too delicate to wash. At each door, burly men from the neighborhood watch stand guard.

Seventy-Fifth Street. Seventy-Sixth. Older buildings that wore their age gracefully, looking staid, not shabby. Here foreign words are proudly displayed: Salumeria. Vineria. Macarons. A safe and desirable foreignness. Shops labeled *gourmet* and *luxury* and *vintage.* Here—and it does not seem possible that this is the same street he's followed from those painted-over signs and fearful whispers; it must be another world he's journeyed into—the street is wide and lined with trees. He likes the thought of his mother here, in this beautiful place. Blond women in jogging tights puff beside him, ponytails bobbing, as they wait for the signal to change. Nannies push sleek strollers, the babies inside sumptuously dressed. He passes stores that make only picture frames, restaurants that serve only salad, shops selling pink shirts embroidered with tiny, smiling whales. Buildings so tall their tips are invisible, even when he cranes his head so far he nearly falls backward. Anything could happen here, everything does happen here. It is like fairyland, or a fairy tale.

This is the place, he thinks. This is where she is.

And because this is a magical fairyland, where anything can happen, because he is so invigorated by all that he's seen, still swooning on the rich air of possibility inflating his lungs, he isn't surprised when suddenly, there she is: his mother, just across the street. A small brown dog at her side. Something inside him leaps skyward in a shower of sparks, and he almost cries out in joy.

Then his mother glances down at the dog, which is nosing in a manicured flower bed, and it is not his mother at all. Just a woman. Who doesn't resemble her at all, actually; only in the most superficial ways—an East Asian woman with long black hair, carelessly pulled back in a knot.

The face, now that he can see her more clearly, is nothing like his mother's. His mother would never have such a dog, this little amber powder puff like a teddy bear with black-button eyes, a pert velvet nose. Of course it isn't her, he chides himself, how could it be. And yet there is something about the way she holds herself—the alertness of her posture, the quickness of her eyes—that reminds him of her.

The woman notices him across the street, watching her, and smiles. Perhaps he reminds her of someone, too; perhaps at first glance she mistook him for someone she loves and now that love spills over to him, a largesse. And because she is looking at him, because she is smiling at him and perhaps thinking fond thoughts about this little boy who reminds her of someone she loves, she does not see it coming: a fist, smashing into her face.

It happens in seconds but it seems to stretch on forever. Out of nowhere. A tall white man. The woman crumpling, turned to rubble. Bird's own body petrified, his scream cemented in his throat. The man towering over her, kick, kick, kick, soft sickening thumps like a mallet on meat: her belly, her chest, and then—as she curls up like a shelled shrimp, arms over face, trying to protect what she can—the curve of her back. Her cries wordless sounds, hanging in the air like shards of glass. The man himself says nothing, as if he is doing a job, something impersonal but necessary.

No one comes to help. An older couple about-faces, as if they've remembered something urgent elsewhere. A man hurries away, bent over his phone; cars flow by, unperturbed. They must see, Bird thinks, how can they not? The dog, ankle high, barks and barks. A doorman emerges from the building behind and Bird nearly sobs with gratitude. Help, he thinks. Help her. Please. Then the doorman pulls the door shut. Bird can faintly make him out on the other side of the thick plate glass, blurred and ghostly, watching as if it were a scene on a TV screen: the woman's cheek against the sidewalk now, the jolt of her body with each blow. Waiting for it to be done so that he can open the door once more.

The woman has stopped moving and the man looks down at her—with disgust? With satisfaction? Bird can't tell. The dog is still snarling and barking, furious and impotent, its small feet scuffling the pavement. With a swift movement the man brings his boot down, hard, on its back. The way he might crush a soda can, or a cockroach.

Bird screams then, and the man turns and spots Bird watching him, and Bird runs.

Blindly, as fast as he can. Not daring to look behind him. Bookbag hammering against him like a drumbeat. Sweat-soaked shirt hot then cold at the small of his back. Is she dead, he thinks, is the dog dead. Did it matter. The man's eyes still drill at the nape of his neck and his stomach heaves and he retches, but nothing comes out. He darts down an alleyway and huddles behind a dumpster, catching his breath, the back of his throat raw and burning.

He'd forgotten: in fairylands there is evil, too. Monsters and curses. Dangers lurking in disguise. Demons, dragons, rats as big as oxen. Things that could destroy you with a glance. He thinks of the man at the Common. He thinks of his father, his broad shoulders and strong hands, lifting him back to his feet. But his father is far away, cocooned in the soundless library, where the outside world cannot reach. He has no idea where Bird is, and this more than anything makes Bird feel terribly alone.

He stays there for a long while, trying to smooth his breathing, trying to steady his hands, which won't stay still. When he's finally ready, he rises on shaky feet and picks his way back to the corner. He's run backward, several blocks off course. When he reaches Park Avenue, he moves quickly and cautiously, scanning the streets. He feels conspicuous now; he notices people noticing him. He understands, as he hadn't before. Perhaps he'd been invisible once, but the

spell has worn off—or maybe it had only ever been in his imagination. People can see him, and at last he understands how small he is, how easily the world could shred him to pieces.

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It's late afternoon by the time he finally reaches the address: a big brick building, flowered window boxes, a huge green door. Not an apartment building—a single-family townhouse, a thing he had not known existed here. The Duchess's castle. Cautiously, he studies it from across the street. In stories you might find anything inside a castle: riches, an enchantress, an ogre waiting to devour you. But this is it, the place his mother has sent him. Street name and numbers written in her own hand. A leap of faith, then.

He climbs the marble steps and reaches for the brass knocker and raps it, three times, against the green-painted wood.

It feels an eternity, but it's really only a minute or two before an older white man answers the door. He's a bit stout, in a uniform: shiny brass buttons on navy-blue wool, like the captain on a ship. He eyes Bird coldly, and Bird swallows twice before he can speak.

I am here to see the Duchess, Bird announces, and as if by magic, the captain nods, and steps aside.

A foyer of sunny yellow, a fireplace with a fire lit, even though it's only October. Cream-colored tiles on the floor, studded with squares of ambery brown. A marble-topped table with scrolled legs squats in the middle of the room, its only apparent purpose to hold the biggest vase of flowers Bird has ever seen. All around him the lights are haloed with gold.

I'm here to see the Duchess, Bird repeats, trying to sound surer than he is, and the captain squints down at him.

I'll have to call up, he says. Who may I say is here, please?

And because he is hungry and thirsty and exhausted, because he has walked for miles on an empty stomach, because his head feels uncannily detached from his body, like a balloon floating just over his shoulders, because he feels slightly unreal and he's not sure this place is real, let alone this city, nor the Duchess he's come to see, Bird answers as if he were in a fairy tale, too.

Bird Gardner, he says. Margaret's son.

If you will wait here, the captain says.

Bird hovers uncertainly by one of the chairs near the fireplace. It is covered in sandy velvet and reminds him of a throne. With his fingertips he traces the chiseled grooves on the arms, and words his father has taught him float back: Mahogany. Alabaster. Filigree. He clears his throat. On the mantel is a little gold clock, a little golden woman gesturing decorously toward the time. Almost five. Soon his father will head home and discover that he is gone.

The captain returns. If you'll follow me, he says.

He strides through an archway and down the hall and Bird trails behind him, cautious, peering around corners, waiting for a monster to spring. But all they pass is a palaceworth of luxuries. A paneled silk screen, stitched with cypress trees and cranes and a pagoda in the far-off distance. A sofa of yellow silk with cushions shaped like candy rolls; a huge oval dining room, its floor a dizzying parquet. Everything here seems to be touched with gold: the handles of the urns and vases on the mantelpieces, the twisted tassels on the drapes, even the claws of the lions' feet on which the tables and chairs rest. Then they are at the foot of a grand swooping staircase spiraling up and up and up, a lush tawny carpet spilling down its center. He has never seen such a staircase. A delicate chandelier dangles on a chain swathed in velvet. Bird counts: one story, two, three, four, and far above them a compass-shaped skylight, a blue crystal pool of sky.

This way, please, the captain says. And then Bird sees it: just beside the staircase, a little elevator, wood-paneled and parquet-floored. An elevator in a house, he thinks in awe. The captain gestures with one hand and Bird steps inside, feels as if he's climbing into a polished nutshell.

She's waiting for you upstairs, the captain says. He pulls a brass grate shut, caging Bird inside.

As the elevator shudders upward, Bird's mind whirls. Around him the brass bars of the grate rattle, as if something is trying to get out, or in. He has no idea what he is heading toward. What will the Duchess be like? Will she be kind, or will she be threatening? He pictures the evil queens from storybooks, all malice sheathed in charm. Trust, he thinks to himself: in the stories you had to trust strangers on your quest. Even this elevator is decorated, as befits a palace. Miniature golden frames around sketches of ancient buildings and winged women. A small white telephone. On the back wall, a round mirror bulges and flexes, bending his face back to him in distorted form: an ogre's, or maybe a dwarf's.

At last the elevator opens. A living room, as big as their apartment back home. Another table; another bowl billowing with flowers. In the polished surface he can see his own face peering back up at himself. Underfoot the carpet is gold patterned. The home of nobility, for sure.

And then there she is, gliding through French doors at the end of the room: the Duchess. Younger than he'd expected: regal, tall, blond hair clipped short around her head. Pearls. A blue drapey pantsuit instead of a gown, but it is clear to him she is a woman of power. For a moment Bird's voice deserts him, and he simply stares up at her. She doesn't break the silence, just looks down at him in bemusement.

Are you the Duchess? he finally asks. But he already knows she is.

And who do we have here? she asks. One eyebrow raised. Skeptical.

Bird, he says, trembling. Margaret's son.

For a moment he fears she will say, who? But she doesn't. Instead she says, rather coldly, Why are you here?

My mother, he says, the answer so obvious it feels ridiculous to say it. I came here to find her.

What makes you think she's here? the Duchess asks. The smallest tendril of curiosity curling the edge of her voice.

Because, he says, and pauses. Feeling for the answer inside himself. *Because I want to know why she left me. Because I want her back. Because I want her to want me back, too.*

She sent me a message, he says.

The Duchess purses her lips, and he can't tell if she is perplexed or pleased or angry. For a moment she's like a teacher, weighing the answer he's given, deciding between praise and punishment.

I see. So your mother—she asked you to come here?

Bird hesitates. Wonders if he should lie, if this is a test. His chest tightens.

I'm not sure, he admits. But she left me this address. A long time ago. I thought—I thought you might know where she is.

From his pocket he pulls the scrap of paper, or what remains of it. Tattered and crumpled, edges smudged with blue dye from his jeans. But there it is, in his mother's handwriting: the very address in which they stand.

I see, the Duchess says again. And you came here alone? Where's your father?

How does she know about his father, Bird thinks with a jolt.

He doesn't know I'm here, he says, and as the words pass his lips, it hits him again how alarmingly true this is. His father has no idea where he is; his father cannot help him or save him.

The Duchess leans closer, scrutinizing him, her eyes needle-sharp. Up close he can see that her face is only just beginning to wrinkle, that her hair is not yet gray. She's maybe the age, he realizes, that his mother would be.

So who does know you're here? she demands. A steel glint of menace in her tone.

Bird's throat swells. No one, he says. I didn't tell him. I didn't tell anyone. I came alone.

You can trust me, is what he wants to say. A sweaty panic slithers over him, that he might have come so far and in the end be turned away. That this dragon of a Duchess and her gilded palace might swallow him and trap him forever.

Interesting, the Duchess says. She turns away, and to Bird it feels like a very bright light being switched off. Wait here, she says, and without another word she sweeps out, leaving him alone.

Bird circles the room, unable to be still. Dusty-gold drapes at the windows, through which he can see the glitter of traffic on the street below. A grand piano in the corner. On the end table, a silver-framed photograph of a woman and a man: the Duchess, much younger and with longer hair, hardly more than a girl, and someone who might be her father. The old Duke, he decides, though the man in the picture is wearing a polo shirt and khakis, and they seem to be on the deck of a sailboat, blue sky and bluer water colliding at the horizon behind them. A stern, almost angry expression on his face. He wonders where the old Duke is. He wonders how the Duchess knows his mother. He wonders what his mother has been doing all these years, away from him. If she will recognize him when she sees him. If she's sorry, if she ever thinks about him. If she regrets.

Outside the sky has darkened, hardening to flat, steely gray. To his amazement, he isn't hungry at all anymore. He imagines his father arriving at home to their tiny cinderblock dorm, finding the apartment dark and deserted. Searching for him. Calling his name. It's okay, Dad, he thinks, I'll be back soon. He feels oddly alert and alive, his veins electrified. He is almost there. After all this time.

Far off in the recesses of the house, a clock strikes, a deep sonorous chime. Five o'clock. And then, as if it is a signal, the Duchess returns.

If you really are who you say, she says, then prove it. What color is your bicycle?

What?

You should be aware, she adds, that if you aren't who you claim, I have no compunction at all about calling the authorities.

I— Bird stops, bewildered. His father has not let him ride a bike since that day he fell off and the neighbor called the police.

I don't have one, he blurts out. The Duchess's face remains calm and impassive and blank.

What kind of milk do you put on your cereal in the morning? she asks.

Again Bird is too baffled to speak. He hesitates, but the only thing to do is tell the truth, however odd it seems.

I eat my cereal dry, he says.

Once more the Duchess makes no reply. Where in the cafeteria do you eat lunch? she says, and Bird pauses, seeing himself as if from above, a solitary dot perched on the steps with a brown paper sack.

I don't eat lunch in the cafeteria, he says. I eat outside. By myself.

The Duchess says nothing, but she smiles, and by this he understands that he has passed.

So you want to see your mother, she says.

It is not a question.

Well then. Come with me.

In the hallway she presses a button on the wall and a panel slides away. Magic? No: an elevator, cunningly camouflaged in the hall. The same elevator, in fact, in which he arrived. At a touch of the Duchess's finger, the button labeled B glows the color of flame. When the doors open again, they are in a dim cave: an underground garage, a sleek black sedan with the engine already running. A mustached man in a suit stands at attention beside the waiting car. The footman, Bird thinks, as they slide into the back seat.

And then they're off.

The car glides up the ramp and out of the garage and injects itself into the crowded streets: smoothly, liquidly, regally. From inside, Bird can hear nothing at all. Not the voices of the throngs that gather at street corners, thinning and bunching with the rhythm of the crossing lights, like a great snake inching its way downtown. Not the growling engines of the cars that surround them in a pack. Not the honking that he knows must pierce the air, those deafening blares of impotent frustration. There is simply no sound, and through the tinted windows the city scrolls by in sepia, like a silent film. To him they seem to be not driving but floating.

Seat belt, please, the Duchess says beside him. It would be a shame to get this far and then crack your skull open.

Bird opens his mouth and the Duchess shuts it with a glance.

I'm not here to answer questions, she says. That's your mother's job, not mine.

After that she says nothing at all, as they weave along the river and down into a long tunnel and then back out again into twilight, the moon just beginning to emerge. Time moves in fits and starts, starting and stopping like the traffic around them, and sometimes Bird dozes and wakes to find they haven't moved at all, and sometimes he is sure he hasn't closed his eyes but they seem to have teleported a great distance, nothing outside familiar, and then around them the traffic congeals and clots once more, slowing them to a crawl, and finally—he doesn't know how much time has passed—the sun has gone down and the streets around them are calm and nearly deserted, lined with brownstones, and the car pulls to the side of the road and stops at last.

Listen carefully, the Duchess says, with new urgency in her voice. As if this is the last time she'll speak to him, as if the real test is about to begin. Follow these instructions precisely, she tells him. I can't be responsible for what happens if you don't.

To Bird, bleary-eyed, half-dizzy with excitement and fatigue, this does not seem strange. In fact, he expects no less: in stories, there are always inscrutable rules to obey. *Ignore the golden sword; use the old and rusty one instead. No matter how thirsty you are, do not drink the wine. Do not speak a word, even if you are pinched and beaten, even if they cut off your head.* After the car drives away, leaving him standing on the sidewalk, he does exactly what the Duchess has commanded. He walks two blocks over and three blocks up, crosses the street, and there it is, just as she'd said: a big brownstone with a red door, every window covered. *It will look deserted, but appearances can be deceiving.* As instructed, he ignores the wide front stoop and skirts around to the side of the house. *No one must see you enter the gate.* Twice a car passes while he's hunting for the latch, the rough wood of the gate snagging at his fingertips, and then he has it, the metal cool and solid and smooth. He glances over his shoulder at the lighted windows in the houses all around him, and when he's sure there's no one watching, he turns the catch and the gate swings open.

At the back of the house is a door. You must be absolutely silent as you approach. With tentative feet, Bird picks his way through the tangle of weeds and grass. This must have been the

back garden once, untouched for ages; here and there he stumbles across a sapling, scrappy and saucy, whipping its branches in his face. But in the moonlight he sees the faint glitter of a path, shiny grit embedded in the cement to point the way, and he follows it toward the dark hulk of the house. *Enter these five numbers—eight, nine, six, zero, four—and it will open for you.* He feels his way along the wall of the house, as if stroking a sleeping dragon with his fingers, looking for the soft spot: brick, brick, brick, and then there is the door, a keypad. Too dark to see, but he counts the buttons, presses the passcode. A faint beep. He turns the knob.

Inside: a narrow hallway leading into a darker gloom. *You must shut the door behind you, even though it will be completely dark. You won't be able to see her until you do.*

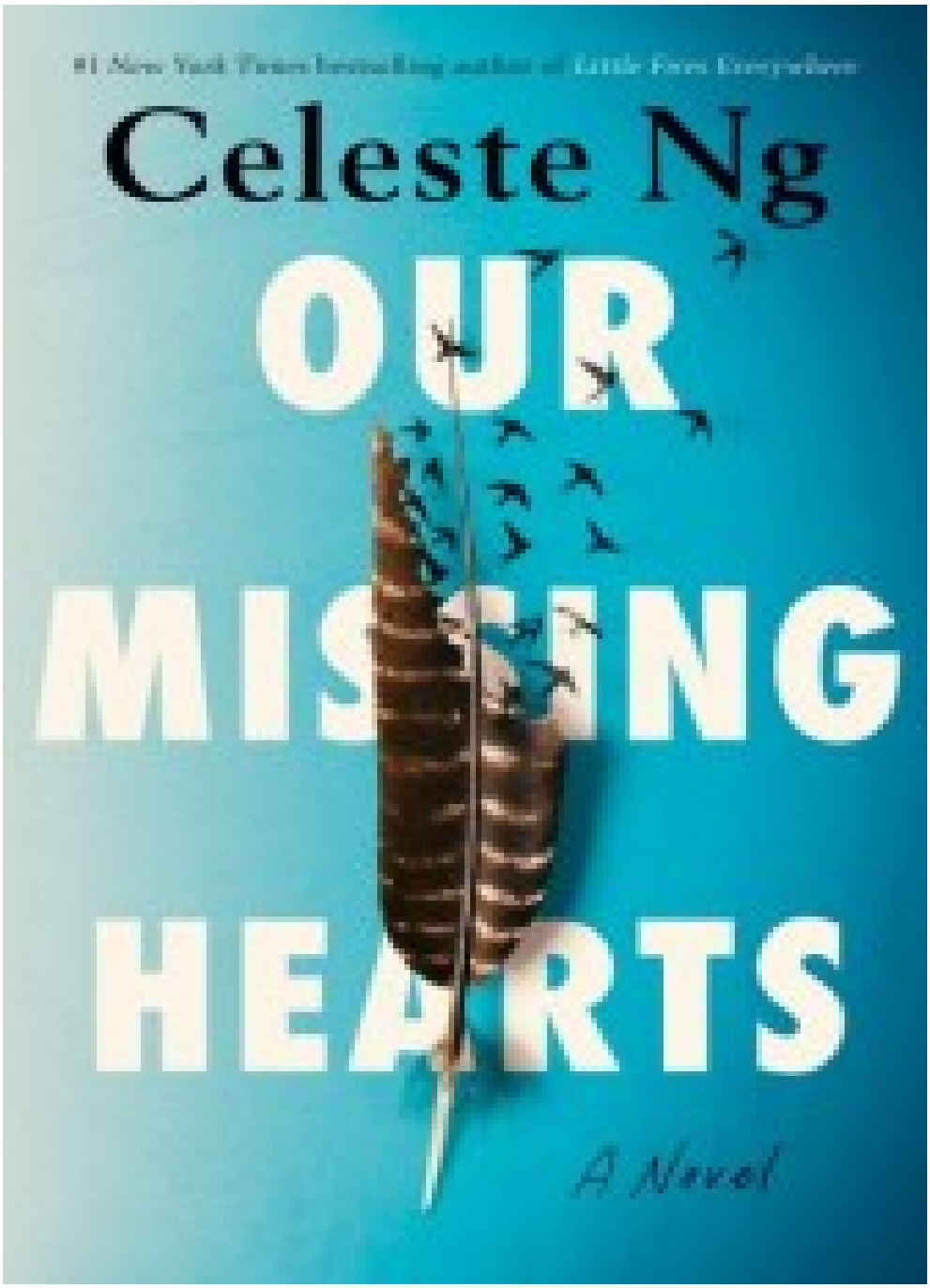
Slowly he closes it, and the outside world narrows to a wedge, then a sliver, then disappears. The latch clicks, sealing him into darkness.

And then he hears footsteps, hurrying toward him. A small light clicks on, scattering golden sparks across his sight.

His mother, astonished. Holding out her arms. Throwing them around him. Her warmth. Her scent. The shock and wonder and delight on her face.

Bird, she cries. Oh Bird. You found me.

II


#1 New York Times bestselling author of Little Fires Everywhere
Celeste Ng
OUR
MISSING
HEARTS
A Novel

So here he is: Bird. Her Bird.

Taller than she'd expected; thinner. The last scrapings of baby fat nearly gone from his face. A lean, cool face, a skeptical face, a hard set to his mouth, a squaring of the jaw she can't quite place. Not Ethan's; certainly not hers.

Bird, she says. You've gotten so tall.

Well, he says, suddenly reserved. It's been kind of a long time.

He doesn't trust her, she can see that already: the way he lingers by the door, not meeting her eyes. Yet, she thinks. He doesn't trust her *yet.* She flicks off the light.

We have to avoid attention, she says.

She can see him thinking, already: *What is this place?*

The hallway is narrow and behind her Bird's footsteps slow as he picks his way between unfamiliar walls. A stutter-step, a pause. The soles of his sneakers scuffing the floor as he drags his feet.

This way, she says. Wait. Be careful, the floor's uneven here. Watch your step.

She is speaking quickly, uncharacteristically chatty, words tripping over each other as they fall from her mouth, but she can't help it.

I knew you'd figure it out, she says, as they make their way down the darkened hall. I knew you were smart enough.

How, he says.

At the entrance to the living room she stops and waits for him to catch up, and his hand brushes the small of her back, reaching for something known, something steady. She wants to take it in hers, to press it to her face, but she knows he's not ready yet.

Someone told me, she says.

After the darkness of the hallway, the living room is blinding. Bird's hand flies to shade his eyes, as if he's stepped into blazing sun. She watches him bring the room into focus, taking it in piecemeal. The wallpaper, peeling off in strips, like old skin. A faded and fraying sofa hunched by the wall, a folding card table covered with tools. A single lamp minus its shade, naked bulb staring. She can see his eyes swiveling to the plywood nailed over the window frames, the blurry bull's-eyes on the ceiling where the rain has seeped in. To herself, shaggy and overgrown, in ragged T-shirt and worn-out jeans. Hiding like a hermit in the murky darkness. It is not where he expected her to be. She is not who he expected, either.

You must be tired, she says. I've got a room ready for you.

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She leads him upstairs, the orange-red stair runner muffling their steps. All the way up, square blotches in the wallpaper mark the places where pictures once hung.

Whose house is this?

No one's, anymore. Careful. Watch your step. The banister's broken here.

At the landing, she opens the door at the top of the stairs. A large room that clearly belonged to a small child, once upon a time: when she flips the light switch, the ceiling lamp features a clown's face, a red-nosed screw holding the glass dome in place. In the corner a crib still stands, one side lowered, the mattress bare. She's swept the room clean, but this cannot make it inviting. Part of the ceiling plaster has crumbled, exposing the slender wooden slats beneath, like bones. The windows are sheathed in black.

Garbage bags, she explains. To hide the light. We have to be careful—the neighbors think it's abandoned.

Bird sets his bookbag on the floor, touches one hand to the plastic stretched over the window frame. She's done the same herself many times, feeling the faint tremble as a car thrums by on the street below.

I set this up for you, she says. Just in case you made it. She smooths the sleeping bag laid out on the window seat, fluffs the small throw pillow at its head. I'm sorry I don't have a proper bed. More comfortable than the floor, at least.

Bird shrugs one shoulder and half turns away. From outside, the thin wail of a siren worms its way through the plastic sheeting, growing louder, then fading again. If everything was different, she thinks, if she'd had all those years with him as she should have, perhaps this language would be less foreign. The language of those beginning to shed their childhood: all gestures and subtext, all reserve and disdain. Maybe she would have learned to understand it. She wonders if Ethan does.

Are you hungry? she asks, and though she's quite sure it's a lie, he shakes his head no. Just rest then, she says. We'll talk later.

She pauses, then turns back.

Bird. I'm so glad you're here.

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As a toddler, he'd cried when other people cried. Certain songs on the stereo filled him with pins-and-needles tingling and moving even a finger would increase the agony. How unbearable, that Jackie Paper came no more. How tragic, that she was leaving home after living alone for so many years. How terrifying, to be the only living boy in New York. The music peeled his skin away, note by note, and the naked muscles throbbed and stung. Stop, mama, he would sob, make it *stop*, and Margaret, in horror, ran to the stereo and paused the music and folded him in her arms.

It stunned her, how hungry and wondrous he was at it all. He was a quiet child, watching intently, soaking everything in—the good and the bad, the joy and the pain. The pink nipples of the cherry tree swelling into blossoms. The dead sparrow folded up small on the sidewalk. The exuberant rush of loose balloons soaring upward into a wide blue sky. How porous the boundary was between him and the world, as if everything flowed through him like water through a net. She'd worried about him, moving through a rough world as a tender bare heart, beating out in the open where anything could cause a bruise.

This boy standing in front of her looks like Bird and sounds like Bird. She'd know him anywhere, that face. But there's something between them now, through which she can't quite see or hear him clearly, something opaque and hard, a layer of tortoiseshell. As if he's standing, always, just beyond arm's length. Something has scarred over in him. Oh Bird, she thinks.

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Upstairs, Bird peeks out into the hallway. No light, only a faint gibbous glow on the wall from the single lamp downstairs. He tiptoes past dark room after dark room. In the bathroom, the toilet and sink are green-streaked and grimy; moss stretches from the rusty bathtub in a lush carpet. Only one other room seems to be occupied. A bare mattress lies in one corner, an old table lamp, shadeless, squats beside it on the floor. His mother's room. The sharp scent of sweat in the air. His mother, who'd planted flowers in the sunshine and whispered stories into his ears at night, has somehow become this strange woman lurking in the shadows. He wishes his father were here, to explain this. To help him understand. To decide what to do.

Back on the landing, the light from downstairs seems dingy, like something reused, and he has to guide himself by his fingertips all the way down the hall and back to his own lonely room.

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When Bird wakes, Margaret is sitting on the floor by his bedside. Feet curled under her on the worn carpet, her gaze resting softly on his face. As if she's been studying him in his sleep, patiently waiting for him to wake. Which she has.

What time is it, he croaks. Under the darkened windows it's impossible to tell if it's night or daylight.

Just past midnight, she says.

She's brought him a mug of instant coffee. Which he doesn't like, she can see it in his face, of course he doesn't like it, what kind of mother brought her child coffee, she should have brought something else, though coffee is all she has. She is out of practice at this, at everything. But the mug is warm and cozy in the chill of the room, and he struggles to a seat, sips it. She sips hers, too. Bitter, but comforting. Like strong medicine.

The gas is shut off, she says. So no heat, no real cooking. Just a hot plate. But the water and power are still on. Which is all I need.

What is this place? he asks, but she doesn't answer. There are other things she needs to explain first. Start at the beginning, she reminds herself. This is why you called him here.

Bird, she says, I want to show you something.

She takes him up another flight of stairs, to the third floor, where all the rooms are empty. Through their half-open doors, the bare hardwood looks like deep water: dark receding into darker. She'd gone into them once, when she first arrived. The dust had piled up in drifts, like snow. Old furniture, missing feet and legs, half-kneeling on the floor; an old record player with the record still on it, too scratched to play. Everywhere there were signs of the outside, creeping in, taking over. In the bathroom, one long arm of ivy had twined its way through a broken pane and was groping for the latch; in a bedroom she'd found a forest of mushrooms sprouting from the rain-soaked carpet beneath a crack in the wall.

Now, at the top of the steps, she reaches up into the shadows, feeling for the cord, and when she finds it and pulls, a trapdoor swings down, a ladder unfolds. Her instinct is to take his hand, to guide him, but she fights it. As she knows he would, too.

This way, she says, climbing up into the thick clouded gloom. Without waiting for him.

Behind her, she hears Bird setting a first hesitant foot on the bottom rung. She forces herself to keep on going, to keep walking away. To trust that he will follow. At the far end of the house, she stops and turns back to look at him for the first time. Her eyes are used to the dark, but his are not, and he follows more by sound than by sight, feeling his way with his hands, guiding himself by the beams that run underfoot like railroad tracks. It is dusty and cold, and small slivers of moonlight pierce their way through chinks in the siding, forming bars of light he ducks his head to avoid as he picks his way along the length of the attic. When he reaches her, she sets her shoulder against the hatch on the ceiling.

Here we are, she says, as the latch gives way with a shriek. Watch your step.

They step onto the flat roof into a pool of night. It is chilly, and the wind scrapes across the top of the city like a knife leveling flour from a cup, but as they emerge Margaret feels herself going soft at the corners. At the beauty of it all.

Around them, the city spreads out like a dropped cloth, all peaks and ridges and hidden folds. Even at this quiet hour, here and there bright ribbons of cars weave along the streets; in the distance a forest of steel trees stretches upward, grasping at the moon. She can just make out the

starry glitter of far-off windows, reflecting shattered moonlight in their darkened panes. The roof is bare; all there is up here is the city, and the sky, and them. No railing, just the sharp clean edge giving way to the ground below. Beside her, she hears Bird catch his breath, and for a moment she sees him: her son, as she remembers him. Curious, alert. Eyes aglow. Marveling at how there is so much life, out there.

I didn't—he begins, and then stops. Slowly he takes a step out onto the flat plain of the roof, then another. Cautiously, as if on rocky terrain. I didn't know the city was that big, he says. One hand reaches out, as if a fingertip might brush the tip of a downtown skyscraper.

It's something, Margaret agrees. I only come up at night. Just in case anyone's watching. It's amazing, isn't it, she continues, turning toward the horizon. So much bigger than I imagined, before I got here. The first time I came to the city when I was young, I walked everywhere I could. Just trying to take it all in.

Bird's head swivels the merest bit in her direction, and she knows she has caught his interest. She pretends not to notice.

Of course, she says, I got to see a lot of it from my job. I learned my way around pretty well.

She pauses, waiting. Wondering if Ethan has told him anything. If Bird knows anything at all. But after a moment, Bird bites.

What job, he says, without turning. As if it doesn't matter to him at all.

A messenger. I carried letters, and things. Back during the Crisis. I rode a bicycle, she adds, as if as an afterthought.

Bird says nothing, but for a moment the scrim between them effaces. She has never told him anything about her time in New York, anything about her life before him; first he was too young, and then she was gone. As far as he knows, her life before him is a clean blank slate. She watches him adjust to it, this new piece of information. This new image of his mother: whizzing through the city, bearing things.

What kind of things, he says.

Deliveries, mostly. Sometimes papers that needed signing. So many things were closing then, there weren't as many trucks. We bikers were cheaper and faster and gas was so expensive, too.

She watches his face. Food, sometimes, she goes on. And medicine, when people got sick and couldn't go out. We'd pick it up at the pharmacy, leave it on their step.

We? Bird says.

There were a lot of us. All trying to scrape by.

She considers whether to say more. Wait, she decides.

Is that how you met my father?

Margaret shakes her head.

He was in a different world. A student. It was an accident that we even met at all.

She pauses.

How is he, she asks. Unsure how to ask what she really wants to know: who is he now, has he changed in all these years apart, after everything that's happened. He must be worried sick about Bird, she thinks, with a pang of regret. She wishes she could call him, to assure him that Bird is all right. But it's too dangerous; nothing's changed. Not yet. He will have to trust—the way she's trusted him, all this time, to keep their child safe.

Bird shrugs, a single shoulder rising and slumping again. So noncommittal, even his shoulders don't agree.

He's fine, he says. I guess.

She waits, holding her breath, but he says nothing more. All this time Bird's gaze hasn't left the city below, the dense milling swarm of it. One hand still rests half raised, as if he's propping himself up on air, or trying to grasp the edge of the skyline. She waits, lets the moment breathe and drift, trusting it to find its own way to land.

Why did you leave, he says at last.

It is easier to ask these things up here, somehow, where everything except them is small and far away.

She spreads her arms wide, as if to dive, tips her head back, closes her eyes. The moonlight catches in her hair, frosting it with silvery glints. For a moment, frozen there, she looks like the figurehead of a ship, sailing boldly forward into strange new waters. Then her hands drop to her sides, and she turns back again.

I'll tell you, she says. I'll tell you everything. If you promise to listen.

She begins the story while she works: hunched over the folding table, coils of wire and long lengths of pipe laid out before her. Carefully, she selects a pipe and twists a cutter around it, grinding off segments the length of her thumb, smoothing the edges with a file. Around her a halo of silver dust emerges. Bird sits at the edge of the carpet, waiting. Watching. Outside, beyond the blacked-out windows, morning light slowly tints the grayscale world.

Let me tell you first, his mother says, how I came to the city.

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Her parents' aspirations carried them across the sea, so for her, an aspirational name: Margaret. A prime minister, a princess, a saint. A name with a pedigree as long as time, a solid trunk growing from rugged roots: in French, la marguerite, the daisy; in Latin, margarita, the pearl. Both of her parents were good Catholics, back in Kowloon, educated by priests and nuns, brought up on Communion wafers and confession and daily Mass. Saint Margaret, defeater of dragons, often depicted half in, half out of a dragon's mouth.

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A thing she wouldn't learn until later: the bomb in their mailbox two months before she was born. Just enough to blow the aluminum door off its hinges and warp it from within, as if a tiny enraged creature had tried to punch its way out. A new mailbox, a new home, her father the new engineer at the factory in their little Rust Belt town. Minimal explosive power, the police said. Just a prank, who could say why. Afterward, Margaret's father dug out the kinked metal pole, hair plastered to his forehead with sweat, Margaret's mother watching from the threshold with one hand resting on her belly, Margaret still growing inside. From their windows, their new neighbors watched, too, silently, and then, as the pole came free and the dented mailbox tipped to the ground with a clang, went back inside.

PACT was decades away, but her parents felt it already: the eyes of the neighborhood scrutinizing their every move. Blending in, they decided, was their best option. So after she was born, they dressed her in pink corduroy overalls and Mary Janes, tied ribbons in her pigtailed hair. When she got older, they would buy her the clothes off the headless mannequin at the department store; anything it wore, she wore. Surreptitiously, they studied the neighborhood children and bought Margaret what they saw: Barbies, a Dream House, a Cabbage Patch Kid named Susanna Marigold. A pink bike with white-streamered handles; a toy oven that baked brownies by the light of a bulb. Suburban camouflage from the Sears catalog. Her father's saying: *The stick hits the bird that holds its head the highest.* Her mother's: *The nail that sticks up gets hammered down.* She never, in her memory, heard her parents say a word in Cantonese. Only later would she realize what she'd missed.

On Fridays they ordered pizza and played board games; on Sundays they went to church, the only black-haired heads at Mass. Her father began to watch football and drink beer with the neighborhood men. Her mother bought a set of CorningWare and learned to make casseroles. Margaret herself was bookish and loved poetry. Like her parents, she strove for *unremarkable*, anchoring herself firmly in the hill of the bell curve. To be noticed was to invite predation; better to blend seamlessly into the foliage. She earned average grades, met expectations but seldom exceeded them, caused no trouble and set no examples. Graduation, a scholarship to school in New York: *the city*, her mother always called it. As if there were only one. It was an intangible promise that lured her: that in the city, there was more than one way to be. Then the grit of the city scoured away the enamel of her to reveal something molten and pulsing inside.

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In those first days, she dressed like her idea of a New Yorker: black jeans, high heels, silky blouse. Glamour, sophistication. Mystery. Then, two days after arriving, she got off the N and a bearded figure in an emerald ball gown glided past, gathered their skirts, and squeezed into the seat she'd just left. Not a head turned, and as the doors closed, they extracted a copy of *The New Yorker* from the folds of their dress and began to read, and then the train swept them away and out of sight. In the days to come she would see much more. A man weaving his bike through stalled traffic, making loud siren noises with his mouth. *Baa-DOO baa-DOO baa-DOO*. An elderly woman with a cane thumping her way down Broadway, singing at the top of her lungs in time with her steps: *Our God is an awesome God / He reigns from heaven above.* A man pressing a woman against the side of a stoop, her knees knotted around his waist, the whole narrow passage thrumming with their cries, funneling them like a speaker to the street beyond. No one paused or smirked or looked around; everyone hurried away, intent upon their own business, their own lives. It began to rain, sheets of water blanketing the city, and Margaret stepped into a nearby bookstore, rattailed and drenched, and no one batted an eye. Here no one noticed you, she realized. Which meant you could do anything, be anything. In the bathroom she peeled the sodden socks from her feet and dried them under the hand dryer and no one said a word. When they were dry, she put them back on and felt the warmth curl between each toe. She'd never felt so free.

She cut her hair, then added a purple streak. Seeing how far she could take it before a head turned, before anyone gave her a second glance. She changed her clothes, piece by piece: higher heels, shorter skirts, jeans ripped to more hole than denim. She pierced things. No one ever gave her a second glance. Not like home, where people always gave her a second glance, and sometimes a third. Where she had to be on best behavior, always, to give no one a reason to notice her: a bird keeping her head down, a nail nestling into soft, safe wood. Staying unnoticed was how you survived.

Things were already starting to fray, even then. Cut hours, lower wages. Prices beginning to climb. But it wasn't everywhere yet: you still saw people buying new clothes, eating in restaurants. At night certain parts of town still shimmered and hummed with the collected energy of people who gathered just to be young and alive in the dark. It was still possible to enjoy things. To waste time. It was still possible to sit on a park bench or out on the stoop and watch other people go by, smiling and laughing, and smile back.

Margaret plunged herself into the city. She got a job waitressing. She skipped class and walked around and around the city, exploring its corners and crannies, devouring it. She made friends. In Chinatown you could still hear people speaking Cantonese then, and she bought Chinese newspapers and a dictionary, pored over the characters at night, learning their parts and their sounds the way she might learn a lover's body. For the first time, she realized that her old life had chafed like a too-tight coat. She learned to drink, and to flirt. She learned to give pleasure, and to take it. She was writing by then, lines scribbled on scraps of paper, on grocery receipts, on the white backs of minty gum wrappers, each word a chip of diamond, flint edged and biting. They felt like the work of a different person, someone she hadn't known she was carrying within her. The Crisis was coming, would be there soon, but there were still magazines and time for poetry and people to read it, and editors liked her tempestuous rhythm, the marvelous wild suppleness of her lines. Images that sank their teeth into your heart and refused to shake free. They never paid, but it didn't matter. At night she and her friends would pool their handfuls of bills and change for bottles of wine, drinking it from plastic cups in someone's dorm room, a ring of them sitting with mouths stained red.

In those days, the city was at fever pitch, as if everyone could feel the storm coming, the air electric, crackling with potential. Her parents thought it demented, but to her it seemed the sanest and most logical course: if the world was on fire, you might as well burn bright. Late nights that turned into early mornings; just enough money to buy coffee wherever she happened to end up. Walking home in the dawn hours to save cab fare, watching the city shift from gray to gold as the sun rose. She went to parties, danced, kissed strangers just to see what would happen. Often they'd end up in someone's bed—hers, theirs, someone else's. Beautiful men. Beautiful women. The world, at that time, was full of them, all of them furiously incandescent like dying stars.

Later, when she thought of that time she would picture a nightclub, the air thick and black and steaming around her. Bodies jostling, slick with sweat. Flecks of light circling the room, fragments of illumination: an eye, a lip, a hand, a breast. The feeling of dissolving into a crowd, a shapeless sweaty pulsating thing, all of them moving separately to the same beat, bound together by the moment. Above their heads: bright lights that would flick on when the night was done, if they hadn't fled yet. Below their dancing feet: the floor grown sticky with spilled liquor. There was no curfew yet.

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It started slowly at first, the way most things did. She'd been a junior. Shops began to shutter, windows soaped over from within. Here and there at first, like cavities in teeth, and suddenly whole blocks were empty, all over the country. The rents too high, the customers too few. More panhandlers, rattling coins in paper cups plucked from trash cans, more signs markered on scraps of cardboard. FAMILY OF 5. LOST MY JOB. ANYTHING HELPS. Everything cost more and everyone had less to spend. Clothing stores marked down their sweaters—ten percent off, twenty, forty-five, and still they dangled on the racks. No one even tried them on. No one had the money, or the time, anymore. One in ten unemployed, the statistics ran. Then: one in five. People began to lose their cars, then their homes. People began to lose their patience.

The restaurant where Margaret worked shut down: forty-five years in business, but no one came in anymore except the men who ordered coffee and lingered in the corner booths, sipping it long after it grew cold. Her boss wept as he pulled the grate across the door; he'd played behind the counter as a boy. When she asked other restaurants if they were hiring, some of them laughed. Some of them simply shook their heads. One manager told her, gently, to go home. It's going to get worse, he said, before it gets better. *If* it gets better. He had a daughter about her age who had just lost her job, too.

They would never fully agree, the economists, on what had caused it: some would say it was just an unfortunate cycle, that these things happened periodically—like cicadas, or plagues. Some would blame speculation, or inflation, or a lack of consumer confidence—though what might have caused *those* would never be clear. In time, many would dredge up old lists of rivalries, searching for someone to blame; they would settle, in a few years, on China, that perilous, perpetual yellow menace. Seeing its sabotage behind every stumble and fracture of the Crisis. But at first all they agreed on was this: it was the worst crisis since the 1980s, then since the Depression, and then they stopped making comparisons.

Those who'd been at the top locked their doors, hunkered down to wait it out. As stores closed, they ordered from afar, paying the rising prices. Those who'd been *comfortable* tightened their belts, began cutting coupons, cutting back, cutting down on everything they could—no more travel, no more leisure, only less, less, less. Those who'd just barely stretched a paycheck from one Friday to the next stumbled down a steep staircase of losses: first their jobs, then their leases, then their pride. All across the country, people couldn't make rent; by then evictions were

happening daily. The pictures were everywhere: furniture dumped unceremoniously on the sidewalk, families huddling curbside on their couches, passersby gawking as the landlords changed the locks. Foreclosures rippled block to block until swaths of neighborhoods were deserted.

A *correction*, the news called it at first, as if all that time when people had mostly gotten by, had mostly been fed and housed, had been a mistake; as if things were getting better, instead of the opposite. In Houston, the lines at food banks stretched for blocks; in Sacramento, you'd wait for hours and come away with a can of beans, a few boxes of crackers. In Boston, people dozed in the pews of churches, waiting out the night, and in the morning there were more outside.

Soon there were protests in the streets. Strikes. Marches that were peaceful. Marches with guns. Windows smashed, things seized or set aflame: anger and need made manifest and tangible. Police in full battle gear. All across the country, the same story repeating, just at different scales. In New York, Margaret watched the city begin to empty around her. The ones with houses and families elsewhere sought shelter with them, sharing expenses, making do. The ones who didn't disappeared in other ways: hiding, or holed up, or dead. You could hear birdsong, suddenly, between the pillars of buildings. The *economic crisis*, the newspapers began to call it, and then, as it became more than economic, as people began to lose their confidence, their sense of purpose, the willingness to wake up in the morning, their ability to keep trying, their optimism that something could be different, their memory that anything had ever been different, their hope that anything would ever improve—other phrases took hold. *Our ongoing national crisis*, the headlines kept saying, and soon, economizing even in words: the Crisis. The capital *C* the only extravagance still allowed.

At the college, classes were postponed, then cancelled. The dorm grew quieter and quieter as parents called children back to the safety of their homes. From Margaret's parents, somber updates: furloughs at the factory, shortages at the stores. I'm okay, Margaret told her parents, I'm staying, everything's fine, don't worry about me. Be careful. I love you. Then, after hanging up the phone, she scoured the hallways, gleaning what she could from bags of trash abandoned on the way out. Clothing and too-big shoes, which she took anyway. Blankets and books, half-eaten packages of cookies. Most of the rooms were shut, their message boards wiped bare, except for one, a scrawl of black: SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE. She touched her finger to the letters. Permanent.

Three weeks later, she ran into another person in the halls for the first time: Domi. They'd had a class together, back when there still were classes: Marxism and 20th-Century Literature. Chic and worldly Domi, perfect streaks of eyeliner winging their way toward the sky. Rhymes with *show me*, she'd said, one brow arched. Now, without makeup, her eyes looked bigger, younger. More rabbit than hawk.

Didn't think anyone else was crazy enough to still be here, Domi said. Come on. Time to go.

Domi had an ex who had a girlfriend who had a sister with a two-bed in Dumbo. Six of them squeezed into it now: the sister and her boyfriend in one room, the ex and his new girl in another, Domi on the couch and Margaret in a sleeping bag on the living room floor. The room so small that, when they held out their arms in the dark, their fingers intertwined.

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In the darkened brownstone, she tells Bird these things as she unwinds wire from the spool, strips the red plastic away to reveal gleaming copper marrow. There is a deftness to her work, a precision, like watching a clockmaker set each gear into place. Bird sits, knees hugged to chest, mesmerized: by her story, by her hands. Outside the blackened windows, it is midmorning, the

Crisis is long over, the city pulses and churns, but inside it is eerily quiet in the glow of the single lamp. The two of them together in the soundless bubble, listening.

• • •

The sister with the apartment still had a job, one of the few that did. She worked for the mayor, taking calls, trying to match people with the services they needed. What people needed was rent, meals, medicine. Reassurance and calm. What she had to offer was sympathy, a promise to pass their concerns along. Another number they could try. Sometimes broken bricks came through the office windows; other days, bullets. Soon the desks huddled at the centers of the rooms. Her boyfriend was a security guard in an empty skyscraper in Midtown, once so busy there were three banks of elevators: one for the lower half, one for the upper, one an express straight to the top. Now everyone had been sent home—furloughed or fired outright—and he circled the lobby beneath eighty-one floors of abandoned rooms. There were computers up there, ergonomic desk chairs, couches of tobacco-hued leather. Those who had sat in them no longer had access to the building, and those who owned them were in their houses on Long Island, in Connecticut, in Key West, waiting for the Crisis to abate. One day, when no one had any money and they were all hungry, the boyfriend snuck upstairs, filched a laptop, sold it, and brought home nine overstuffed plastic bags of groceries so heavy they cut rings into his hands. They'd eaten for two weeks off that.

Domi's ex and his new girlfriend took odd jobs where they could: boarding up the windows of businesses gone bust, loading crates onto trucks for those leaving the city. He was a stocky, burly guy, bald by choice; his new girl was sandy haired and wiry and quick, both of them alert to opportunities. A warehouse in Queens closed down and they'd celebrated: nearly a month of pay loading pallet after pallet onto a cargo ship, until it sailed away—back to Taiwan or possibly Korea, none of them knew where, just *away*—and the warehouse stood empty and echoing, shafts of sunlight slicing down through dusty air. When they couldn't find work they scavenged, combing the streets, collecting cans to sell for scrap, anything useful they could repurpose. They visited the rich neighborhoods where the garbage held treasures, the owners watching them from behind double-paned windows above as if they were crows picking carrion. Once they'd spotted a man in Park Slope being carted out on a stretcher, draped with a white sheet. His brownstone, for the moment, left unguarded. After dark, they'd come back and crept in. The furniture and clothes were all gone already, but they'd stripped yards of copper pipe and wires from the walls, and the girlfriend found a watch—a small silver bangle of a thing, still ticking, engraved *To A from C*—which she'd buckled onto her wrist before they vanished into the night with their haul. None of them felt guilt, at least not then. Things could sit unused and wasted or they could be turned into heat, a full belly, a night spent tipsy and giddy as they all waited for either the Crisis or the world to end. An easy choice to make.

As for Domi and Margaret: they became messengers. Cycling through the city, down half-empty streets, in the unnerving quiet of a half-deserted Manhattan. It was cheaper than mailing things, and the post office was struggling—fewer funds, carriers laid off, gas exorbitant, packages stolen right off the truck—and for three dollars a biker would get it there in an hour. Margaret went first: one morning she'd spotted a bike propped against a stoop, and when it was still there that evening, unchained, she took it without regret. A fleet of messengers crisscrossed the city, and she recognized their faces, learned their names as their paths overlapped. A few weeks later, when they found another bike, Domi joined them, too.

At night, parts of town turned rough. Men out of work sat in the park, burning their last few dollars on a fifth of whiskey, and by evening they grew resentful and belligerent. Women learned

the hard way to avoid them. Since childhood, Margaret had mastered how to check over her shoulder, to gauge risk from a gesture, to fight if she could not flee. Domi, who'd grown up in Westport with her father—summer house, riding lessons, in-ground pool—was less prepared. Sometimes she cried out in her sleep, hands flying to shield her face, as if someone were trying to gouge out her eyes. Margaret climbed up beside her, held her tight, stroked her hair, and Domi stilled and quieted. In the mornings, the few stores stubbornly clinging to life might find their windows smashed, shelves stripped bare, alarm bell ringing ferociously, though no one had answered the call. Some people tried not to go out at all, and soon Margaret was running errands and delivering messages, too. Five dollars a run, then ten, though for those in need, she would do it for one. Medicine from the drugstore, a bag of groceries. Tampons, batteries. Candles. Liquor. All the things people needed to survive another day. She folded the dollar bills they gave her and tucked them into the cups of her bra; at the end of the night, back in the apartment, she counted them, soft as damp felt with her sweat, and smoothed them out again. By then she wasn't thinking about poetry at all.

You got used to it, after a while: all the new rules the city and the governor imposed, trying to keep order—when you could go out, when you had to stay in, how many people could gather at one time: few, then fewer. Sometimes waves of sickness rippled over the city, then the state: not enough people at work to pay hospital bills, not enough doctors or medicine anyway, just referrals for Advil from the drugstore on the corner, or something stiffer from the liquor store next door. Lines everywhere, everything in short supply except anger, and fear, and grief. Tents clustered like toadstools at the feet of overpasses and bridges. Based on the news, it was the same everywhere. You got used to waiting, to the men who squatted on sidewalks, holding signs scrawled on cardboard: ANYTHING HELPS. You learned to keep watch on them without meeting their eyes, to skirt them at a distance. Your ears pricked for the sounds of shouting, the high jangle of breaking glass; even before you recognized it, your feet would already be turning you down another street, steering you safely around. You got used to sandwiches of whatever you had—ketchup, mayonnaise, salt, whatever made bread palatable enough to choke down—to rebrewing coffee grounds, once, twice, sometimes for a whole week if you needed; even mostly water, it was something to keep you warm. You got used to not speaking to people on the street, to edging past them, both of you on your way to somewhere else, and to the sirens that flared and then quieted like an infant's stifled cry. After a while you stopped wondering where they were headed, stopped thinking about whose need they were going off to serve. Somewhere out there, you knew, wealthy people were barricaded in their fortresses, fed and warm, if not happy, but soon you stopped thinking of them. You stopped thinking about other people at all. You got used to that, too, eventually, just as you got used to people disappearing: gone back home, gone elsewhere hoping for better, sometimes simply gone.

What you couldn't get used to—what she never got used to—was the quiet. In Times Square the lights changed red to green and back again and sometimes not a car went by. Overhead the gulls screamed and dove toward the empty harbor. When she spoke to her parents it was brief, a few minutes at a time; service was spotty and minutes were expensive and all they needed to know, really, was that the other was still alive. Sometimes she would ride through Central Park and see not a single person, not on the footpaths, not on the lake, no sign of a single other human except the tents that dotted the Sheep Meadow, springing up overnight, disappearing just as quickly when word of police sweeps came. In the silence between things there was too much time to dwell and no matter how fast she pedaled, she couldn't leave her thoughts behind.

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In the honeyed glow of the lamplight her hands tremble.

The Crisis. The Crisis. Bird has grown up hearing about it: We must never forget the turmoil of the Crisis, everyone has said, his whole life; we must never again go back to that. But it is impossible to explain what it felt like.

Evictions and protests daily, then nightly, people clamoring for assistance, for any kind of aid. The police fired rubber bullets and sprayed tear gas; cars plowed into the crowds. Each night sirens whirred to life and wailed away across the city; the only question was which way. Fires began to spring up all over the country—Kansas City one night, Milwaukee and New Orleans the next—frantic signal fires from those deserted and desperate. In Chicago, tanks rolled past department stores on Michigan Avenue, protecting their glossy wares. No one agreed on who to blame—not yet—and with no focus, outrage and panic and fear swelled over everything, hot and thick, rasping your lungs. It was there in the silent darkened streets after curfew, in the slate-gray shadows of the buildings and the echoing footsteps of your shoes on the deserted sidewalk. It flashed sharp and bright in the lights of the police cars as they went by, always on their way to somewhere else more urgent, which was everywhere.

How to explain this to someone who has never seen it? How to explain fear to someone who has never been afraid?

Imagine, Margaret wants to tell him. Imagine if everything you think is solid turns out to be smoke. Imagine that all the rules no longer apply.

I'm hungry, Bird ventures, and Margaret returns with a jolt, glances at her watch. It's past noon, and he's had no breakfast, either. She curses herself mentally. It's been so long since she's taken care of anyone.

She sets down the wire cutters and wipes her palms on the thighs of her jeans.

I know I've got something, she says, rummaging in a plastic bag beside the sofa. After a moment, she emerges with a single granola bar.

I get caught up in working, she says, almost embarrassed. I forget to keep food around. Here, you take it.

Bird peels the foil from the bar, then hesitates. It's starting to make sense to him: his mother's whittled features, the dark rings beneath her eyes. Whatever it is she's doing, it is consuming her. She is barely eating, maybe barely sleeping, too. All day, all night, she is working—or whatever this is.

Eat, his mother says gently. Get some food into you. I'll get more tonight.

From under the table she pulls another plastic bag: inside, bottle caps, the kind you'd unscrew from a two-liter bottle. Red, white, orange, sickly highlighter green—sticky, still smelling faintly of cola and caffeine and acid fizz. She sets a handful on the table, picks one up, inspects it. Tallies them two by two. For weeks she has been gathering them, these small bright rounds plucked from the sidewalks and the dark mouths of garbage cans.

But what are you doing, Bird says, between mouthfuls of granola, what are they *for*?

Margaret takes one cap and sweeps the rest to the side, plucks a transistor from the pile: red and yellow striped, like a sprinkle from a child's birthday cake. She touches the soldering iron to one of its spindly wire legs and the hot biting scent of rosin fills the air.

Let me tell you, she says instead, about meeting your father.

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She'd been a wild thing, when they met.

Two years into the Crisis: *Fuck everything* was her motto by then. People came and went, sometimes on purpose, sometimes without warning, and you'd never know where they'd gone, if it was part of their plan or an accident, or worse. Sometimes on her deliveries, people spat in her face, told her this was China's fault, accused her of wringing America dry; she'd begun wearing a bandanna, pulled high to the bridge of her nose. Fuck this, fuck everything, she and Domi agreed, by which they meant: don't get attached to anything, or anyone. Just survive. They said it to each other almost fondly, like a greeting, or a good-night kiss. Fuck everything, Domi would murmur as they fell asleep in the living room, and Margaret, rolled in a blanket on the floor, would squeeze her hand and whisper it back, the day's sweat drying on their skin to a fine crystal grit.

And then came Ethan. Domi's birthday: still celebrated, celebrated with vengeance in the face of it all. Liquor enough to make a party; the apartment full of people, gathering limits be damned; the air hot and sticky, like someone's breath. Domi was drunk already and didn't notice him, but Margaret felt a tingle zigzag between her shoulder blades. A friend of a friend of a friend, out of place in a charcoal-gray suit. A suit! She felt an irresistible urge to dishevel him. The room was dizzy and humid and loud and she drifted away from Domi and crossed the room and put her hand to his throat and caught the knot of his tie in her fist.

They ended up outside, on the fire escape that was little more than a ledge, so small that when they both squeezed onto it they were close enough to kiss. Between their feet: Domi's broken flowerpot, full of cigarette butts and ash. Ethan, he said. Just finished at Columbia when the Crisis put everything on hold. All night, people came and went in the room behind them, laughing, drinking, forgetting—for the moment—everything else. Neither of them noticed. The night air gathered close like a blanket drawn over their heads. They talked and talked until they found themselves squinting into the peach-colored sunrise spiking its way between the buildings. Inside, the party had burned down like a banked fire. A handful of people curled up on the rug and the sofa, a tangle of lonely puppies. Domi had gone off to bed, not alone.

I should go, Ethan said, and Margaret took his jacket from her shoulders, where he'd placed it in the late-night chill, and handed it back. It was the only time they'd touched all night. She wanted to kiss him. No: she wanted to bite him, hard enough to draw blood.

It was nice meeting you, she said, and went inside.

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The next evening, after curfew, she walked across the bridge and uptown, ducking into the shadows when the few cars still out flashed by. She left her bike in the apartment: outside, even locked-up bikes would be stripped of parts by morning, and Ethan, he'd said, lived on the fourth floor. Now and then she passed someone else and they exchanged a brief glance before moving on, each of them on their own mysterious errands. A hundred and twenty blocks uptown to Ethan's building, where his window glowed like a wide-awake eye. She climbed the fire escape and set her fingers in the half-open window, and at the noise he looked up, startled, put his book down. Lifted the sash and let her in.

In the morning, a ring of her tooth marks blossomed on his bare shoulder.

• • •

Domi didn't like it.

You've changed, she said, all you think about now is *him*. She said it like that—*him*—a fragment of pit she needed to spit out.

Your fancy boyfriend, she said. With his fancy apartment. So much *nicer* than here.

The truth was that it was a studio, three flights up, just one big room with a futon for both couch and bed and an old clawfoot bathtub in the kitchenette—but it was safe and warm. Ethan's family wasn't particularly fancy or rich—his mother was a nursing-home aide, his father an engineer—but they did have connections: his landlord was an old friend of his mother's from high school and had rented to him at a steep discount; Ethan could afford to wait out the Crisis a long time. The truth was that Domi could have been in her own apartment, too—a much nicer one—if she'd chosen: her father's electronics company made the innards of half the cell phones and computers in the country; he owned two yachts, a small private plane, houses in London and L.A. and the south of France. One on Park Avenue, too, where Domi had grown up: she'd pointed it out to Margaret one afternoon, and they spat on the sidewalk and fled before her father's driver could chase them away. Her mother had died when she was eleven, and a month later her father married the Danish au pair and Domi swore that once she left home she'd never speak to him again, and she hadn't. In college, she'd ripped up his checks and mailed back the pieces.

So that's it, Domi said, you're just going to hide out with your rich boyfriend and ignore all this, while the rest of us scrounge?

Margaret's hands were chapped and raw; a week ago someone had grabbed at her coat, tearing it, hungry for more than she was offering, but she'd gotten away. She had mended the rip with yarn—red, the only color she'd had—and the stitches traced a jagged gash along her collarbone.

Fuck both of you, Domi said, but Margaret didn't answer. She was already on her way out the door.

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He spoke half a dozen languages fluently, could get by in even more. Not bad for a white boy from Evanston, he'd joke. His parents had both loved traveling, had chosen a different country for each vacation; he'd been to four continents before he was ten years old. He was an only child like Margaret, and this was one of the things that drew them together: the feeling that they were the last twigs on the family tree, grafting themselves together for strength, to forge something new.

How about Cantonese, she'd asked, and he shook his head.

Only a little Mandarin. And not very good Mandarin at that.

And then: We could learn it together. The two of us.

He specialized in etymology: the meanings of things. As a boy he'd played Scrabble and done crosswords with his father; his mother had coached him for the spelling bee. For his birthdays and Christmas, he'd always asked for books. These days, with libraries and stores shuttering, he had nothing to read but the row of dictionaries lined up on the windowsill. The first morning, after they woke, she rose from his bed and crossed the room to look at them. Fat yellow ones for different languages: French, German, Spanish, Arabic, some she didn't even recognize. Dead languages: Latin, Sanskrit. A sprawling English one the size of a phone book, pages thin as Bible leaves. Slowly she'd traced her fingers along the spines and then turned back to him—both of them still undressed from the night before, their skin burnished to gold in the midmorning sun—in wonder. As if she suddenly recognized him as someone she already knew.

For Ethan, words carried secrets, the stories of how they came to be, all their past selves. He would find the mysterious ways they connected, tracing their family tree back to pinpoint the unlikeliest cousins. It was proof that despite the chaos around them, there was logic and order to the world; there was a system, and that system could be deciphered. She loved this about him,

this unshakable belief that the world was a knowable place. That by studying its branches and byways, the tracks it had rutted in the dust, you could understand it. For her the magic was not what words had been, but what they were capable of: their ability to sketch, with one sweeping brushstroke, the contours of an experience, the form of a feeling. How they could make the ineffable effable, how they could hover a shape before you for an eyeblink, before it dissolved into the air. And this, in turn, was what he loved about her—her insatiable curiosity about the world, how for her it could never be fully unraveled, it held infinite mysteries and wonders and sometimes all you could do was stand agape, rubbing your eyes, trying to see properly.

Holed up in the apartment, they read, pulling one dictionary or another from the shelf and poring over it, stretched across the futon, one's head pillowed on the other's thigh. Reading passages aloud, dissecting meanings, each of them digging: she mining words like precious gems, arranging them around the outlines of the world; he excavating the layers fossilized within. All the traces of people trying to explain the world to themselves, trying to explain themselves to each other. *Testify* had its roots in the word for three: two sides and a third person, standing by, witnessing. *Author* originally meant *one who grows*: someone who nurtured an idea to fruition, harvesting poems, stories, books. *Poet*, if you traced back far enough, came from the word for *to pile up*—the earliest, most basic, form of making.

Margaret had laughed at this. That's me, she said, a piler-up of words.

Krei, she read, meant *to separate*. To judge. Like a sieve, Ethan said, separating the good from the bad. And thus, *krisis*: the moment at which a decision is made, for better or for worse.

With one finger she'd traced the delicate line of his sternum, circled the soft hollow at the base of his throat.

So a moment, she said, in which we decide who we are.

Outside there were sirens and shouting, and sometimes gunshots—or were they firecrackers? Waves of unrest rippled state to state like a wildfire, the whole country tinder-dry and eager to burn. In Atlanta, unemployed protesters had set the mayor's office ablaze; they'd called in the National Guard. Bombs kept going off at statehouses, in subway stations, on the lawns of governors' mansions. There were emergency meetings and votes and marches and rallies and nothing seemed to change. It can't go on, people kept saying, in the few spaces where they still dared meet: in the aisle of the grocery store, picking what they could from sparse shelves; in apartment building hallways as neighbors passed and over fences as people raked fallen leaves—any attempt to maintain order and neatness and normalcy in an era that was anything but. It can't go on, everyone said, but it kept going on.

Inside: Margaret and Ethan drank tea and ate crackers from the cupboard. After her shower, she put on one of his old shirts, washed her dress in the bathtub, hung it over the rod to dry. They closed the windows, then the curtains. They read. They made soup. They made love.

The way he handled her, like butter to be licked off a finger. In bed afterward, her cheek pressed to his back, she had never felt so calm. It felt good: a stretch after weeks spent coiled. One morning, she simply stayed.

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She'd sent Domi a letter when she left: a faltering attempt to say goodbye after their last, worst fight, which had ended with Domi stripping off the jacket Margaret had handed down to her—*Take it, I'd rather be naked*—and storming out. It was a whole precious sheet, front and back, and afterward she couldn't remember which things she'd written and which she'd held back, trying to avoid Domi's wrath, trying to spare Domi pain. All she knew for sure was that Domi never called, never came by, and eventually Margaret stopped waiting.

In the quiet of Ethan's apartment, poems came to her like timid animals emerging after a storm.

She wrote about the hush of the city, how the pulse of it had changed with so many people gone. About love, and pleasure, and comfort. The smell of his neck in the early morning. The warm soft den of their bed at night. About finding stillness in the whirr that had been there for so long, a quiet place in the grinding, never-ending shriek of the Crisis. There was nowhere to publish these poems; only the big newspapers could afford to keep running, and that with government support; no one had time for poetry, for words, but she wrote phrases on scraps of paper, in the wide margins of Ethan's dictionaries, and someday they would form the first grasping branches of her own book.

No one saw it yet, but by then, almost imperceptibly, the story of the Crisis had begun to solidify. Soon enough it would harden, like silt from turbid water, settling in a thick band of mud.

We know who caused all this, people were beginning to say. Ask yourself: who's doing well because we're on the decline? Fingers pointed firmly east. Look how China's GDP was rising, their standard of living climbing. Over there you got Chinese rice farmers with smartphones, one congressman ranted on the House floor. Over here in the U.S. of A. you got Americans using bucket toilets because their water's shut off for nonpayment. Tell me how that's not backwards. Just you tell me.

The Crisis was China's doing, some started to insist: all their manipulations, their tariffs and devaluations. Maybe they'd even had help, dismantling us from within. They want to take us down. They want to own our country.

Suspicious eyes swiveled to those with *foreign* faces, *foreign* names.

The question, people kept saying, is what are we going to do about it?

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A frantic phone call from her mother, her voice nearly unintelligible: someone had pushed Margaret's father down the stairs at the park. He'd passed by them, the man who'd done it—they were heading down, he coming up—but they hadn't even glanced at him, and then he had turned and shoved her father with both hands, right between the shoulder blades. Margaret's father was sixty-four and had grown thinner, slighter, his body still compact but no longer as strong as it was, touches of arthritis gumming his hips and shoulders, and he had tumbled down, not even trying to catch himself, just down, like something already dead, the edge of the bottom step shattering his skull just above his ear, all of it so sudden neither of them even had time to scream. By the time Margaret's mother understood what had happened and turned to see who'd pushed him, the man was gone. Her father never regained consciousness, and two and a half hours after her mother's phone call, he was dead. The next morning, reeling from grief, her mother had a heart attack in the kitchen of their empty house—now too big for her alone—and this time Margaret, still trying to book a plane ticket, got the news from a police officer who'd managed to find her, as next of kin.

It was already happening then, though she didn't know it yet: already happening not just in the push down the stairs but in the people who watched the elderly man fall and shrank away from the man who'd pushed him, letting him pass—whether out of shock or fear or approval, none of them would ever dare to ask themselves. It was already happening, in the three people—a middle-aged woman, a young man in his twenties, a mother pushing a stroller—who passed by before the fourth called an ambulance, in the moment they saw the elderly woman crouching over her husband's tangled body, not screaming but murmuring to him unintelligibly, in a

language neither of them had spoken in decades, even in private, pulled out of her now in a desperate hope that these words would be rooted deeply enough inside him that he might still hear.

I didn't realize he was hurt, the woman would say to her husband later, when they saw a report about the *unfortunate incident* on the news. I thought maybe he slipped and fell or something, I didn't want to embarrass anyone.

I heard her speaking Chinese or whatever, the young man would say, I just knew it wasn't English, and you know, what they're saying about China these days—it seemed better not to get involved.

The mother with the stroller would say nothing. She would never even see the news; her baby had a new molar coming in, and neither of them was sleeping through the night.

An isolated incident, the police report would say a few weeks later. No leads on the man who'd done the pushing. No evidence of why he might have done such a thing.

It was happening in other cities, in infinite variations: a kick or a punch on the sidewalk, a spray of spit in the face. It would happen everywhere, here and there at first, then all over, and eventually the news would stop reporting the stories, because they weren't new anymore.

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We can fly home, Ethan said. Plane tickets were scarce and expensive, but they had some money saved. We can fly home and take care of whatever needs doing.

She didn't know how to explain there was nothing left to go home for anymore. That it wasn't home any longer. Instead she focused on a different word: we.

I want to leave New York, she told Ethan. Please, let's just leave. Anywhere else.

It didn't make sense, exactly; her parents had never been to New York; she'd left their house years ago; why this need to flee? But on another level it did make sense, this urgent need she felt to start over. To begin again somewhere in her new orphaned state, in a new place where she could cushion herself from the hard corners of the world. She wanted to be a bird keeping her head low. She wanted to not stick up. Ethan emailed his father, who reached out to his network: neighbors, colleagues, old roommates, friends of friends, all the dividends of goodwill he'd collected over the course of his gregarious life. Someone always knew someone; it was how things happened in his world, and neither of them thought much of it then, except to be grateful: as it turned out, Ethan's godfather's brother was golf buddies with a Harvard dean, who said the university was hiring, or would be soon. A few phone calls, a résumé slipped over the transom, and soon Ethan found himself newly employed as an adjunct in the linguistics department.

Within two weeks it was settled. They said goodbye to no one; they'd lost touch with everyone they'd known in the city by then. They took little with them because they had little to take: a suitcase of clothes between them, a stack of dictionaries. They would start again from scratch.

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He can't imagine it. She can see it on his face: the puzzled look of someone trying to feel what they've never felt. To see what they've never seen. Her father had told her a parable once, blind men trying to describe an elephant, able to grasp it only in parts—a wall, a snake, a fan, a spear. A cautionary tale: how futile to believe you could ever share your experience with another. Details pour out of her now like sharp grains of sand, but it's still just a nightmare someone else had. Nothing can make him understand it but living through it, and she would give her life to make sure that never happens.

But how *did* it end, Bird asks, and she thinks: yes. So much more to tell.

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She sank into her new life like it was a thick down comforter. In their little house in Cambridge, purchased with every penny they'd saved—the only upside to the Crisis, Ethan joked grimly, so many houses for sale, cheap—she painted the walls a warm orange-gold. The color she wanted their lives to be. They repaired the windows, sanded the floors, planted a garden: squash and tomatoes, lettuce of a shocking green. Inside the tall fence that hemmed in their postage-stamp of a yard, it was easy to imagine the rest of the world was like this, too. It was easy to forget the Crisis still raging outside, because with money and luck and connections they had simply stepped out of it, the way you'd step out of a blizzard, into warm dry shelter.

For everyone else, it came to an end with a snowy video clip from a security camera. The footage showed a grainy gray figure, shrouded in a hoodie, skulking outside an office building on a DC street. It all happens quickly: a dark-suited man emerges from the lobby, the hooded figure raises a gun. A flash of light. The dark-suited figure crumples. And then, just before fleeing off-screen, the man in the hoodie glances up at the security camera, as if just noticing it for the first time, his sunglassed face centered in the still frame.

The dark-suited figure, news reports explained as they ran the clip on a loop, was a senator from Texas, one of the most hawkish on what he called *the Chinese Crisis.* He'd made a name for himself with fiery calls for sanctions, polemics on the creeping menace of Chinese industry, thinly veiled insinuations about loyalty. But with the assassination attempt, public opinion made a swift U-turn: though the face of the man in the hoodie was too blurry to identify him, it was clear enough to show that he was East Asian—*based on the context*, analysts concluded, *likely Chinese.* Police departments were flooded with calls pointing fingers at neighbors, coworkers, the barista at the corner café. On social media, dozens of photos—pulled from online records, dating profiles, work portraits, vacation snapshots—were posted side by side with the still frame from the security tape by those sure they'd cracked the case. All in all, amateur sleuths would positively identify the culprit as thirty-four different men, aged nineteen to fifty-six and none resembling another, and because of this the shooter would never be apprehended, no one would ever be charged, and every Asian face would always remain a suspect—of the shooting, or of secretly sympathizing with it. From his hospital bed, bandaged shoulder prominently featured, the senator beat his drum. *You see? They'll stop at nothing, even cold-blooded murder. And who might be next?* Editorials weighed in: *not just an attack on the physical person of one senator, but an outright attack on our government, on our very way of life.*

A few tried to defend the shooter: *Look at the hate this man's been spewing; violence is never right, but can you blame him, really?* Chinese American organizations quickly condemned the unknown shooter as a lone wolf, an outlier, an aberration. He does not speak for us, their statements seemed to plead. But it was too late. Suspicion spread like ink on wet cloth, bleeding outward until everyone was tinged. It was the same dirty tint that would be used, for years to come, to justify the sidelong glances at anyone who might seem Chinese, to excuse the refusals of service and shouted slurs and spat-in faces, and later on, the baseball bats, the booted feet.

It was the catalyst needed to pass PACT. Everyone was tired of the Crisis; it had dragged on for nearly three years, long enough to ratchet everyone into submission. To most people, PACT seemed temperate, sensible even: patriotism, public vigilance. Why *wouldn't* you support it? Margaret watched a video of the president signing it, a group of lawmakers clustered around his desk. Just over his right shoulder, the injured senator, arm still in a sling, nodded grimly.

PACT will protect us from the very real threat of those who undermine us from within, the president said. All loyal Americans—including loyal persons of Asian origin—need fear nothing from this law.

He paused for a moment, then signed his name with a flourish at the bottom of the page. Cameras flashed. Then he turned and presented the pen to the sling-armed senator, who accepted it daintily with his uninjured hand.

PACT: Preserving American Culture and Traditions. A solemn promise to root out any anti-American elements undermining the nation. Funding for neighborhood-protection groups to break up protests and guard businesses and stores, for make-work projects churning out flags and pins and posters encouraging watchfulness, and *reinvesting in America*. Funding for new initiatives to monitor China—and new watchdog groups to sniff out those whose loyalties might be divided. Rewards for citizen vigilance, *information leading to potential troublemakers*. And finally, most crucially: preventing the spread of un-American views by quietly removing children from un-American environments—the definition of which was ever expanding: Appearing sympathetic to China. Appearing insufficiently anti-China. Having any doubts about anything American; having any ties to China at all—no matter how many generations past. Questioning whether China was really the problem; questioning whether PACT was being applied fairly; eventually, questioning PACT itself.

In the days after PACT's passage, things calmed slowly, imperceptible at first as stars moving across the sky. Quiet in the streets stretched for one, two, ten nights in a row. People began to find work again. The noises of the city ground back to life, like the clearing of the throat after a long period of silence. Here and there, as buy-American orders resuscitated the idled factories, stores began to reopen, grocery shelves became fuller. People staggered back out into daylight like survivors from a fallout shelter. Blinking and bewildered and groggy. Timid and cautious and shell-shocked. Anxious, above all, to move on.

PACT, its proponents insisted, would strengthen and unify the nation. Left unsaid was that unity required a common enemy. One box in which to collect all their anger; one straw man to wear the hats of everything they feared.

Reports began to trickle in. A Chinese American man, punched in the face in DC; two middle-aged aunties, pelted with garbage in Seattle. A Chinese American woman in Oakland, dragged into an alley and groped, while back on the sidewalk, her baby screamed in its stroller. Margaret's father, it turned out, had been one of the first but far from the last.

Soon it became clear that anyone who might remotely be mistaken for Chinese was at risk. In Miami, a Thai man heading to his office was stabbed; in Pittsburgh, a Filipino teen walking home from swim practice was beaten with a hockey stick; in Minneapolis, a Hmong woman was pushed into traffic, nearly hit by a bus. The perpetrators were seldom caught and even more rarely charged: it was hard to prove they'd acted because the victim was—or was thought to be—Chinese. *The average American*, one judge ruled, *cannot reasonably be expected to visually distinguish between various varieties of persons of Asian origin*. As if they were types of apples, or breeds of dogs; as if those *persons of Asian origin* did not count as average Americans themselves. As if any of this might be justified by careful distinguishing on the part of the one wielding the bat.

The persons of Asian origin, conversely, were scrutinized thoroughly. A vigil for the Thai man in Miami was dispersed by police for unruliness. A rally for the young mother in Oakland refused to disband, ending in two arrests. The Chinese American man punched in DC was discovered to have an outstanding speeding ticket and was jailed for thirty days. The Filipino teen had fought back, giving his attacker a concussion, and was charged with assault. Soon,

when the protests and vigils and demonstrations refused to abate, the first of the PACT child replacements would begin.

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The simple truth was that like most people, Margaret did not think much about any of this. The new act focused on those who held un-American views—but she was doing nothing of the sort. She was buying a table runner, warm slippers, a new bedspread. Magazines were printing again, showing beautiful people and beautiful lives to ogle and emulate; it was possible once more to dine at a restaurant, to have a white-shirted waiter pour you wine. Like everyone, she was trying to build a new, shiny, beautiful life. What could be more American?

A house, a husband. A yard ringed by a fence. Two kinds of boots, rubber for puddles, fur-lined for snow. Scented candles and trivets, a recycling bin, an electric toothbrush, all the paraphernalia of domestic life. All the things she thought she'd been happy to escape. If someone had told her at twenty where she'd be five years later, she would have laughed in their faces, to hear that she not only had these things again, but that she wanted them. Craved them. The only part she would have believed was Bird: she'd always wanted a child. Back in Ethan's tiny apartment they'd daydreamed, the two of them, imagining what their child would be like. Soon, to their delight, they would find out.

Inside her, Bird began to grow. The size of a lentil. The size of a pea. The size of a walnut, then a lemon. Each morning Ethan kissed her belly, just above the navel, before heading to work. A year ago, she and Domi would have been standing face-to-face, gripping their handlebars, steeling themselves for the gauntlet of the day. Armor check, they called it, and that was all they would say. Not goodbye, not see you later, though it meant all those things. Margaret might straighten the collar of Domi's scuffed leather jacket; Domi might tug Margaret's scarf higher over her throat, hiding her face. Armor check, each of them would say, before riding away. Packed into those two words: take care, come back safe, I love you.

Now, in the quiet house, southern sun and sparrow song pooling through the windows, she wore a long soft dress, under which Bird was just beginning to swell. Woolly slippers in which she could not run. Earrings. There was no need for armor here, yet she missed Domi most in these moments, when she remembered there was no more need for toughness.

Ethan's parents came for a visit, and Margaret made up the second bedroom—soon to be the nursery—with clean white sheets. In the kitchen, his mother taught her how to make shepherd's pie, Ethan's childhood favorite. Through the doorway, Ethan watched them, aproned and haloed in the afternoon light, Margaret holding a wooden spoon in one hand as she jotted notes on an index card with the other, his mother setting her free hand on the growing round of Margaret's stomach, so tenderly it might have been a baby's head.

Bird grew: the size of a peach, a mango, a melon. How to understand it, these mystifying sensations, the baffling new phenomenon that was her body? Margaret headed for the public library—now reopened, thanks to private donations—down streets softly humming once more. Stores had reopened, too, one by one, selling fancy notebooks and candy and jewelry; there were people strolling the sidewalks again. It was like the first days of spring after a long and snowy winter, everyone hungry to not be alone. For a brief glorious moment, strangers smiled at each other in passing, so happy to see one another: *You're still here? Me, too!* Still relieved, back then, not yet afraid. Glints of red, white, and blue on everyone's collars and coats.

In the library, nothing had been removed yet; everyone was simply happy to have books again. The young librarian at the counter pointed her to shelf after shelf: Margaret wanted to know much more than *what to expect*, and at night, as they lay in bed, she read tidbits to Ethan.

Mother pandas crawled into a den alone; for the first months of the cub's life there was no other world but the dark snug den, no other creature but its mother. Cuckoos crept into other birds' nests, laid their eggs among strangers, and flew away, trusting the other mothers to raise their young as their own. The octopus laid its eggs in strings, like long garlands of pearls, guarded them until her death, starving as she blew air across them to keep them alive.

She grew larger. From within, Bird thrummed against her: his heels the mallets, her belly the drum. She could feel his hiccups, a microscopic ping. When he turned over, she felt the movement inside her stillness. What's it feel like, Ethan asked, wondrous, and she tried to explain: what the ocean floor felt as the waves rolled out, then in. The librarian slid another book across the counter toward her as she ventured farther and farther from shore. Some fish needed no mate, laid eggs and hatched them alone, every fishling a perfect copy of its mother. Some single-celled creatures simply divided, neatly unzipping themselves in two. Each week, another book, another marvel. Another piece of the eternal mystery, life's need to make more life. From the animal world to the plant: Milkweed trees sent their seeds aloft on the wind, to grow far from home; pinecones flared open at their mother's feet, a skirt of stubby seedlings scrabbling for space and light. Succulents would grow anew from a broken-off leaf, pushing roots out into the air, then down into the soil: a piece of its own body, transformed into its child. She thought of the Bible verse her own mother had once made her recite, for Sunday school: *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*

She found mothers everywhere, even in the garden, tending her plants. When the frost is coming, she learned, the way to ripen tomatoes on the vine is to twist their roots. Pull until the earth cracks, until the spider-hairs below snap like cut strings. This tells the plant: Your end is near—save what you can. Give up on growing taller; give up on leafing wide. Think only of the fruit, dangling in hard green fists. Exhaust yourself. Let your leaves shrivel and yellow. Nothing else matters. Push until there is nothing left of you but a dry stalk holding a round red globe aloft. Wither, pushing that one sweet fruit into ripeness, hoping that in summer something of you will sprout again.

Wakened at night by Bird's restless somersaults, she wrote: tender things that clung to one another, tentatively, like fish eggs. One poem, two. Then a dozen. Then enough for a book. One of those nights, Bird eight and a half months in her belly, she'd had a craving. That morning Ethan had bought her a pomegranate, and she tore it in bloody halves with her hands. They'd finally come available again, after the Crisis, and it felt like the luxury it was, heavy with tiny gemstones. Glistening seeds showered onto the floor, red droplets splashed on the tile. How many trees might spring from that one hard globe? This was its job, she understood suddenly: to create all these seeds, and then to explode. From within, Bird kicked at her, gently this time. As if playing a game. Did the pomegranate know, she thought, did it ever wonder where they went, how they turned out. If they'd ever managed to grow. All those bits of its missing heart. Scattered, to sprout elsewhere.

When the book was finished, this would be the poem on the last page.

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It is painful to admit: back then, she had believed that PACT was progress, that they had moved past something. That they were on their way to something better. That if she behaved, none of it would apply to her. Now and then, on the news, there were still reports of unrest: neighborhood patrols discovering *radicals* who threatened public order; investigations of *suspicious activities*. But that was elsewhere, abstract and nebulous. Isolated incidents. What was concrete was here: the private roiling of Bird inside her, like a ship rolling on the sea; her

husband, warm and solid in their bed. The long nights they spent reading side by side on the couch, her feet in his lap, sharing favorite passages so often that afterward, she felt she'd read his book, and he hers. She knitted small socks. Ethan painted the nursery. When Bird tapped his feet within her, she tapped back. She bought an apron. She roasted a chicken. She arranged dishes on a shelf.

She had never been so happy.

As she tells him this, she coils the wires neatly round her fingertip and tucks the bundle into the bottle cap. A twiddle of the screwdriver and the little capsule is sealed, a fat plastic pill.

Bird can't stop himself. What is it, he asks.

Resistance, his mother says, and sets the bottle cap on the tabletop with all the others.

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Rumors started. Of nighttime knocks at the door, of children ushered into black sedans and whisked away. A clause buried in the folds of the new law, allowing federal agencies to remove children from homes deemed un-American. A few journalists had pointed it out, before PACT had been passed; one congresswoman had questioned whether it might lead to misuse, whether it was truly necessary. But the consensus—on Capitol Hill and among the public—was that the perfect was the enemy of the good, that too much was better than nothing at all. That all tools should be used to safeguard national security, that nothing should be off the table. Of course no one had an interest in splitting up families. Only for the most dire cases.

A few of these cases made the news. In Orange County, a march protesting anti-Chinese bias spiraled into a clash with bystanders hurling epithets, ending with riot police, tasers, a Chinese American three-year-old struck by a tear-gas canister. For the officer, paid leave; for the protester, a full investigation into the family. Cable-news anchors pointed out this was not the first march the child had been taken to; on social media, photos showed her as a toddler perched on her father's shoulders, an infant strapped to her mother's chest like a bomber's pack. Never mind that the parents were second- and third-generation Americans, that their grandparents had been Angelenos before Union Station erased Chinatown. Instead, the parents' booking photos flashed on-screen, their faces dark-haired and glaring and so obviously *foreign.* Not one of us. From the hospital, the child was whisked away. The best possible outcome, headlines agreed. Protecting a child from learning such harmful views.

Margaret, reading the news on her phone, a milk-stoned Bird dozing at her breast, thought: *awful.* And: *How could those people endanger their child.* She tried to imagine carrying Bird into the crush of a mob, flash bombs bursting at their feet, the bite of tear gas setting her nostrils aflame. Her mind slammed its door on the thought. There he was, safe here in her arms: her Bird. Long lashes resting on cheeks softer than anything she'd ever touched. A small furrow rumpling his eyebrows. What troubling dreams could a baby already have? She smoothed the creases with the pad of her thumb until his face went calm again. Beside her, Ethan's hand squeezed her shoulder, then cupped Bird's head. She would never do such a thing, she promised Bird silently. None of this would ever apply to them.

The next march protesting anti-Chinese hate, in Queens, was sparsely attended; after that, there was a long stretch with none.

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What she thought was about her poems, her garden, her husband. Bird. She pushed seeds into the soil and watered them until threads of green shoots emerged. She set cutoff milk jugs over seedlings to shield them from the night chill. She knit a blanket for Bird from cream-

colored wool. Late at night, she made love to Ethan. In the morning, content, she baked banana scones, licked honey from the spoon.

Ethan's parents came to visit when they could: for Bird's birthday, for Halloween bearing candy he could not yet chew, for Christmas laden with gifts heavier than their small recipient. His mother shared feeding tips with Margaret; one afternoon, when Margaret dozed on the sofa, exhausted, with a tantrum-drained Bird on her chest, Ethan's father spread a blanket over them and then clicked off the light. Margaret and Ethan had said only that her parents had passed, and it warmed both of them to see the eagerness and openness with which Ethan's parents enfolded Margaret into their lives.

He looks just like her, Ethan's parents kept saying, and they'd thought this was a compliment at first—and maybe it was, though later both would wonder if it was also a twitch of discomfort, someone else's face so clearly stamped on a child they felt should have been *theirs.* Privately, Margaret and Ethan thought Bird simply looked like Bird. Looking down on him late at night, they could pick out small features and trace them to their source—Margaret's cheekbones, Ethan's eyelashes—but where they saw resemblance was in the expressions: the two parallel wrinkles that appeared on Bird's forehead when he was thinking, the dimple in his cheek, like a fingerprint, when he laughed. That was Ethan's wrinkle on Margaret's brow, Margaret's dimple just southeast of Ethan's mouth. It was a strange and unsettling experience, watching expressions that they knew flit over the face of this small person, part them and part the person they loved most, and they sensed that this would be only the first of many strange and unsettling experiences that parenthood would bring.

Margaret wrote more poems. Publishers were printing again, and when Bird was three, a small, plucky press agreed to publish her book. A split pomegranate on the cover, so close up it resembled an organ, or a wound: you had to look twice to see it for what it was. *Our Missing Hearts* was praised by a few poetry critics and read by almost no one. Tens of copies sold, she'd said to Ethan drily, who reads poetry anymore? and he'd joked, Who ever read it before?

It didn't matter. The world was full of poems to her then.

She taught Bird to catch fireflies: hands cupped, lemon-lime light flashing in the cracks of his fingers. And then to let them go, spiraling into the night like a dying spark. She taught him to lie still in the grass and watch the neighborhood rabbits nose in the clover, so close his breath stirred the fine white fluff of their tails. She taught him the names of flowers and bugs and birds, to identify the low *coo-coo-coo* of the mourning dove and the brash scream of the blue jay and the singsong *phoebe* of the chickadee, clear and fresh as cold water on a summer day. She taught him to pluck honeysuckle blossoms from the vine and touch the end to his tongue: such sticky sweetness. She pulled the shell of a cicada from a pine tree's trunk, turned it over to show the neat slit down the belly where, having grown, it had wriggled out of its old self into something new.

And she told him stories. Stories about warriors and princesses, poor brave girls and boys, monsters and magicians. The brother and sister who outwitted the witch and found their way home. The girl who saved her swan-brothers from enchantment. Ancient myths that made sense of the world: why sunflowers nod, why echoes linger, why spiders spin. Stories her mother had told her in childhood, before she stopped speaking of such things: how once there had been nine suns, baking the earth to dust, until a brave archer shot them one by one out of the sky. How the monkey king tricked his way into the heavenly garden to steal the peaches of immortality. How once a year, two lovers, forever separated, crossed a river of stars to meet in midair.

Did that really happen? he asked each time, and she smiled and shrugged.

Maybe.

She filled his head with nonsense, with mystery and magic, carving out space for wonder. A haven in their long-ago Eden.

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Enough for today, she says, setting down the pliers.

In part this is selfish. She is drawing out this moment of calm, lingering in the sweet times, before the bitter things she has to confess. But there are things she needs to do before dark, and they will take time.

She lines up the bottle caps she's completed, tallying them two by two. Fifty-five. Much fewer than on a usual day, but that's to be expected: wading through the bog of the past slows her hands. Slows everything. Fifty-five little round capsules, brimful with transistors, a watch battery, a small metal disc. And wires, so many wires. Packed down tight into a cap the size of a coin and sealed up tight, simple and primitive and dangerous as a stone. She bundles them all into a plastic shopping bag emblazoned with a yellow smiley face: *Thank you for your patronage.*

Bird waits while she disappears upstairs into her room, and when she comes back, she has donned a baggy sweatshirt, a folding straw hat with a wide brim. She looks just like the trash-picking women who roam the streets, looking for bottles and cans to salvage.

Stay here, Margaret says. She hesitates, then says: You'll be fine and I won't be long.

She says it firmly, trying to convince herself more than him.

Stay inside, she adds, and keep quiet. She loops the bag of bottle caps around her wrist, then lifts a trash bag from the corner. Inside, cans and soda bottles clink as it settles over her shoulder. There's a sour smell in the air and he can't tell if it's the bag, or her clothes, or her.

I'll be back soon, she says, and heads into the hall.

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After his mother has gone, Bird lifts one of the still-empty caps and twists it between his fingers, his thumbnail tick-ticking along the ridged sides. His mind tick-ticking over what he's just heard.

It's difficult to imagine, the world his mother has described. The world of the Crisis, and the world before that. In school, when they've studied the Crisis, it has always seemed like a story in a book: something made up to impart a lesson. A cautionary tale. It is different, to hear his mother tell it. To hear how it felt and sounded and smelled, to imagine her in the midst of it. To see the scars etched in her hands from those jagged days.

The mother he remembers coaxed frilly green leaves from the earth and bright globes of vegetables from their vines. She let bees land on her fingers, spread butter on his toast, spun shimmering fairy tales in the darkness. This mother is a different creature entirely, lean and wiry, almost feral, a ravenous look in her eyes. Her hair uncombed and greasy, a harsh animal musk on her skin. It makes it easier to believe the things she's telling him: the Crisis, her wildness. How she survived. It fills him with apprehension, too, at what she might be doing now. He thinks of his mother, bent over the table, whispering stories to him, the point of the cut wire glinting in her hand. Her mouth set firm and tense in a straight grim line. He thinks of the bottle caps: little time bombs, ready to be detonated at a moment's notice. Candy-colored bits of shrapnel to perforate the city. She wouldn't do that, he thinks, but the truth is, he's not sure. He's seen the look in his mother's eyes, a hardness he does not remember from childhood, a razor-edged glint that would slice you if you looked too long.

• • •

When Margaret returns, nothing seems to have changed: the trash bag of cans is still over her shoulder, the plastic bag still dangles from her wrist. She peels off her hat.

Are you all right? she asks. You weren't scared, while I was gone?

You've been gone for three years, Bird thinks, a few hours is nothing. He bites back the words.

I'm fine, he says.

His mother reaches into the plastic bag.

I didn't know what you liked, she says, so I got some of everything.

Granola bars, nuts, candy, cans of soup, packages of salted almonds, a carton of Minute rice. As if she'd gone aisle by aisle, plucking an item from every shelf. It saddens him and touches him all at once, that she had no idea what he wanted, and that despite not knowing she had still tried so hard to please him.

It's been such a long time, she says, since—

She stops, looking down at the bounty between them.

I should have brought you real food, she says, embarrassed, and Bird can see the meal she wishes she'd procured: hot and nourishing, balanced and wholesome. Green vegetables, mashed potatoes, corn glossy with butter. Meat sliced thin and fanned out on the white china plate. He understands: it's been a long time since she's taken care of anyone, and she's nearly forgotten how. It's been so long she'd forgotten such a meal could exist, let alone the world in which someone might eat it.

It's okay, he says, this is fine. And he means it.

They settle on cups of instant noodles, something to warm their hands. The bottle caps, he sees, are all gone.

When the noodles are ready, she slides a steaming cup toward him along with a plastic fork. They are lemon-yellow and intensely salty, and Bird wolfs them down. On the other side of the coffee table, Margaret pauses, forkless, then slurps hers straight from the cup.

How long have you been living here, Bird asks. He fishes up the last dregs of his noodles.

Almost four weeks. Though *living* isn't the right word. This is just temporary, while I get things ready.

This only raises more questions for Bird. Ready, he says, ready for what? What are you doing?

Have some milk, she says, filling a mug and nudging it toward him. It builds strong bones.

She fills one for herself and takes a gulp.

Besides, she adds, it won't keep. No fridge. So drink up.

From the bag she pulls a can, pries up the ring with a fingernail, pops the lid off. Inside, jewels of fruit glisten.

Dessert, she says, setting the can between them, and this gesture, small as it is, warms him: he has always loved canned peaches and she still remembers this. He spears a golden wedge with his fork.

Do you like school, she asks suddenly. Is your teacher nice? Are the other kids kind to you?

Bird shrugs, a one-shoulder twitch, and scoops up a sliver of peach. It is her fault if they're not, but he does not want to tell her this. They call me Noah, he says instead. Dad told them to.

His mother pauses. She's barely eaten any of her noodles, and now she sets her cup aside.

Is he happy, she asks.

Her voice is calm and even, as if she's asked about the weather. Only her hands give her away: her thumbs press so hard against her fingers that the nails have turned white.

Like most children, Bird has seldom considered whether his father is happy or not. Each morning he gets up and goes to work; he tends to Bird's needs. Yet as Bird thinks about it, there is a melancholy around him, that hush he'd ascribed to the library but maybe—he realizes—is rooted much deeper.

I don't know, he says. But he takes good care of me.

It feels important to say this, though whether he's defending his father or reassuring his mother, he isn't sure.

His mother smiles, a small sad smile. That was one thing I never worried about, she says. Then: Does he still read the dictionary?

Bird laughs. He does, he says. Every night.

She does remember, he thinks, even that tiny thing. It makes her a little less of a stranger.

He doesn't like to talk about you, Bird admits. He said—he said to pretend you don't exist.

He expects this to sadden her even more, but instead she nods.

We agreed that was best.

But why, Bird insists, and his mother sighs.

I'm trying to tell you, Bird. I really am. But you need to hear everything, the whole story, to understand. Tomorrow, okay? The rest of it, tomorrow.

As he heads up the stairs, she calls after him.

Do you want me to call you Noah, now? If that's what everyone else calls you?

One hand on the creaking bannister, he pauses.

No, he says, cheeks suddenly aglow. You can still call me Bird. If you want to.

The next morning, back at the table, she works faster, hands moving quickly, aware time is running out. She begins without preamble. Like plunging into the ocean before she has time to be afraid.

• • •

Two weeks after Bird's ninth birthday. Over breakfast, Ethan had suddenly paused, stunned, and set his phone before her. Heads bent over the screen, they'd read the headline together: CONFLICT ERUPTS AT PROTEST; 6 INJURED, 1 DEAD. Below, a photo of a young Black woman—long braids pulled back in a ponytail, glasses, yellow hat. Still standing, eyes still clear and open, mouth still parted in a cry, a millisecond before her mind knows what her body already feels: a red rose of blood just starting to bloom on her chest. Clutched in her hands, a poster: *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS*. And a caption: *Protester Marie Johnson, 19, a first-year student at NYU from Philadelphia, was killed by a stray bullet in police response to anti-PACT riots Monday.*

The first of many such articles, but they would all use the same photo.

This young woman—Marie—had read Margaret's book in her dorm room. She was studying developmental psychology, planning to become a pediatrician, and with each news report of a child taken, the last lines of the last poem had come back to her, insistent as an infant's cry. Nine years after PACT's passage, there were more and more of them: the few that made the news here and there, framed as stories of negligence and endangerment, the parents portrayed as reckless and careless and callous; but others, too, shrouded in rumor and secrecy and shame.

Just rumors, some people scoffed; re-placements happened only in a few isolated cases. Others insisted PACT removals were a necessary evil: a rescue, for the child's good, and society's. *Can't rock the boat*, one commenter wrote online, *and be surprised when your kid gets washed overboard.* But for every child you heard was taken, how many families said nothing, stopped protesting, stopped everything, hoping their good behavior would earn their children back?

The night before the march, Marie bought sheets of posterboard at the drugstore. With fat-tipped scented markers, she jigsawed words onto the sign, sketched the solemn face of a child below. After the march, they'd found the markers and the rest of the posterboard on the floor of her dorm room, blank and unused, beside a spread-eagled copy of Margaret's book.

After that: vigils. Campaigns to remember Marie. Online, thousands of people changed their profile photos: Marie after Marie after Marie, a sea of them crying out, flushed with youth and fury and pulsing lost life, every one of them brandishing the poster with Margaret's words. People googled those words, and up popped the name Margaret Miu, the title of her book. The poems she'd written while pregnant, in a sleep-deprived haze nursing Bird late at night, watching the sky turn from black to navy to bruised grayish-blue.

Not even her best line, she'd always thought, not even one of her best poems, and yet here it was. Clutched in this dying child's hands.

Those lines began appearing online, the adopted slogan of those opposed to PACT. At the protests that sprang up here and there, quick flares of grief and rage. On pins, as graffiti, on hand-lettered T-shirts. They're all over campus, Ethan said, wide-eyed. Margaret, seeing one for the first time, stopped dead in the street, jolting back to life only when someone behind bumped into her, cursed, and elbowed his way past. She felt as if she'd come around the corner and run into some uncanny version of herself. She had never been to a protest. She had never, in all honesty, thought much about PACT at all.

Someone painted the lines on the wall of the New York Department of Family Services, on the sidewalk outside the Justice Department. All over the country, anti-PACT marches began to spring up like brush fires. Anti-PACT protesters hurled eggs—then rocks—at the cars of pro-PACT senators and officials. Always, always carrying posters bearing Margaret's lines. The protests were short and sporadic—but they were long enough for passersby to take photos, and soon those photos were everywhere, and so were Margaret's words.

Who would ever, she said to Ethan, have expected a poem to go viral. Neither of them laughed. It was the least unbelievable thing of all the unbelievable things that had happened in the past few years.

Then a talk-radio show did an investigation into the sign, the poem. Margaret.

Who's inspiring these lunatic protesters? he asked. Well, I'll tell you: a radical female poet named Margaret Miu, lives in Cambridge, that liberal bubble. And—surprise surprise—she's a kung-PAO.

A cable-news host who'd defended PACT from the beginning—Chinese *American*? he'd said, there's no such thing; you know where their loyalties *really* lie—picked up the story. He scanned the photo from the back of Margaret's book and flashed it on-screen. Letting her foreign face say it all.

People like this, he said, are the reason we *need* PACT. You know who her main audience is, who's buying her books? I'll tell you. I've looked up the figures. Young people. College kids, high school kids. Could be even middle schoolers, who knows. Kids at that age are so impressionable. And this woman's influence is *skyrocketing*. You know what her sales figures show? Four thousand copies of her book sold last week alone. Six thousand this week. Next week it'll be ten. I tell you, we'd better take a lot closer look at what's in those poems. There's a very real danger of our kids being corrupted. This is what PACT is *for*.

On message boards—and soon, in the authorities' offices—people combed through Margaret's lines. *Scattered, to sprout elsewhere*—might that not be an encouragement for spreading harmful ideas? This poem about a spider, clutching its empty egg sac—*hollow and dry with only air inside*—well, it wasn't hard to interpret that as a metaphor for America, clinging to *hollow* ideals until it died. And this one, about tomatoes, disturbing their *sturdy roots*: how could you read these lines as anything other than urging others to strike at the roots of American stability?

The anti-American ideology was clear, which made it all the more dangerous that people were reading these poems—nearly fifty thousand copies sold so far, an unheard-of number for a book of poetry, especially from a minuscule press. That, in and of itself, was suspicious; of course the Pentagon should take a look; one could not rule out the possibility that messages were coded in the lines. Regardless, these poems weren't just un-American, they were inciting rebellion. Endorsing and espousing terrorist activity. Persuading others to support insurrection. Look how many anti-PACT protests were happening.

It just goes to show, one official thought, as he branded Margaret's file with a crisp red stamp. Born here, but clearly American in name only. Probably learned it from *her* parents. That foreign mindset rooted deep, he mused; maybe it twined all the way down in the DNA. Maybe it wasn't ever possible to straighten their loyalties out.

Margaret got a call a week later from her publisher: they'd been ordered to cease publication of her book, to destroy any warehoused copies. Can they really do that, Margaret asked, and her editor sighed. He was a reedy, bespectacled white man who could recite Rilke from memory; the press operated out of a rented two-room office in Milwaukee. For weeks he'd been getting threatening emails and phone calls, the most recent one with detailed suggestions

about what should be done to his seven-year-old daughter. That's not all, he said. They've also sent a subpoena to look into our finances and our other authors. Not even just the Asian ones—everyone. To see if we've funded anyone else *un-American.* It was strongly implied that if we didn't comply, they'd find ways to shut us down. I'm sorry, Margaret. I really am.

Within a month the publisher would shutter anyway, all its stock pulped, all its files deleted. Libraries, flooded with angry calls about the book, began to pull it from their shelves. PACT supporters held a rally in downtown Boston, collecting copies and burning them in an oilcan on City Hall Plaza. The post office began to monitor Margaret and Ethan's mail.

It got worse. Someone dug online, posted their address and Margaret's phone number on social media. *Dont like this PAO CUNT & the poison she's feedign our kids?* he wrote. *Call her up & tell her.*

What are we going to do, she said to Ethan, as she silenced her phone. It had been ringing for the past twenty minutes and for a while she'd answered and hung up immediately, but every time it just began to ring again.

Ethan put his arms around her. He had already spoken to the police; there was nothing illegal, they informed him, about posting publicly available information. He'd sworn at them and hung up. It was Saturday morning, and on a normal day, they'd have been at the kitchen table eating waffles, sunlight streaming onto their plates. Instead, all morning Ethan had been pacing around the house, pulling the curtains shut, nudging Margaret and Bird away from windows.

It will stop, she assured him. It has to stop. They'll get tired of it. I didn't even do anything. I've never been to a protest. All I did was write a poem.

It didn't stop. No one seemed to be getting tired except for Margaret and Ethan—and Bird. What's wrong with your phone, Bird kept asking, who keeps calling? Rotten fish and bags of dog shit and broken glass began to appear on their front step, and one day, a single bullet, still in its casing. After that, Bird was no longer allowed to go outside alone, even into the backyard.

People are crazy, Ethan told him. Don't worry. You're safe.

Did you know, the talk-show host said a few days later, that this Margaret Miu—she has a kid? Nine years old. Yeah. Can you believe it? And his name—get this—his name is *Bird.*

The comments online:

That's child abuse, right there. Enough said.

People like that shouldn't be allowed to reproduce.

Can you imagine what kind of shit she's teaching him at home? Imagine having her as your mother.

Poor kid. Let's pray Family Services checks them out soon.

That night, after they'd put Bird to bed, Ethan's mother emailed him. *My friend Betsy forwarded me this article about Margaret*. It was the first of many articles, some of which she would forward and many of which she would simply read as they dinged, one by one and sometimes two or three at a time, into her inbox, forwarded by ostensibly well-wishing acquaintances: *I remember you mentioned your son's new wife (?). Is this the same Margaret Miu?!*

As articles and news reports and headlines accumulated, Ethan's parents read and discussed, measuring the woman they'd met and loved, the woman their son adored, the woman who'd borne their grandson, against the woman the news portrayed. The person they knew—or had they?—against the person everyone else seemed to see. How many times had they met her? How well could you know someone in that time? On their weekly phone calls, Ethan ranted to his parents about the latest developments—the anonymous emails filling Margaret's inbox, the

notes duct-taped to their front door. It was not until Ethan stopped speaking, exhausted by rage and fear, that he noticed his mother's uncharacteristic silence.

She always seemed so *kind*, his mother said, in tones of profound sadness and betrayal, and Ethan understood then: a story had settled in his mother's mind, and there was nothing he could do to rewrite it. In the weeks to come, Ethan's parents did not call him, and when he and Bird moved to the dorm, he would not send them his forwarding address.

Then came the note. A scrap of paper from Bird's teacher, Ms. Hernández, slipped surreptitiously into his bag. *Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gardner*, it read in her neat, looped cursive. Tall proud *S*s. Upright and rigid-backed *P*s. *The school has received a call from Family Services. I have been summoned to speak with them Monday morning and they will likely wish to speak with you soon thereafter.* And then: *It seemed only fair to let you know.*

A warning. A kindness, really.

She packed that night, a single bag. One she could carry on her back, small enough that she could walk as long as needed; a bedroll and all the cash they could gather. The bedroll had been Ethan's originally. It's warm, he said softly, pulling it from the back of the closet, and she could hear his voice snagging as they imagined all the nights to come when they would no longer be lying beside each other. She'd taken it and turned away quickly, bending over to buckle it to her bag, but in truth she couldn't face the pain in his eyes, and wasn't sure he could face the pain in hers. They'd agreed: she wouldn't write, she wouldn't call. Nothing that could be traced. She'd leave her phone behind. Any ties unsevered could unravel, so they would cut her, the traitorous PAO mother, out of their lives. They would give not even the slightest pretext to take Bird away. Whatever it takes, they agreed. Whatever needed to be done or said to keep him safe.

The next morning, she had tried to say goodbye. A Saturday, late October. The leaves just loosening from the trees. We'll be fine, Ethan told her. Both of them understood he was reassuring himself as much as her. He buried his face in her hair, and Margaret burrowed against his chest, breathing him in, all the words she was not brave enough to speak trying desperately to escape her mouth. When they finally let each other go, neither could look at the other. Ethan hurriedly shut himself in the bedroom, because really, what else was there to say, and he couldn't bear to watch her leave. Bird, oblivious, was kneeling on the living-room carpet, piecing together plastic brick after plastic brick. It was a house, and the roof kept falling in, the arch of it too high for his child's hands.

Birdie, she said. Her voice splintering. Bird, I have to go.

She expected questions, as soon as he saw her backpack: a thing she never carried, which he certainly would notice. Why're you carrying that? Where are you going? Can I come, too? But he didn't turn. He hadn't heard her at first, he was so absorbed in what he was doing, and she loved that about him, loved the way his attention focused, intense as summer heat, on the thing he wanted to understand.

Bird, she said again, louder this time. Birdie, my darling. I'm going now.

He did not turn around, and she was grateful for this: grateful not to see his eyes in this last moment, grateful that he did not run to her and press his face into her belly as he usually did, because how then could she ever hope to peel herself away.

Okay, he said, and she ached at his trust, how confident he was that she would be right back, as she always had. It was she who turned then, turned and hoisted her backpack on her shoulder and went straight out the door, before her heart could change her mind.

Two days later, when Family Services arrived, her things would already be piled on the curb. When they questioned him, Ethan would shake his head and his son's heart would crack. No, he didn't know where she'd gone. No, he didn't share her views, not at all. Quite the

opposite, to tell the truth. No, he couldn't honestly say he was sorry. He'd tried to make things work for the sake of their son, but a man could only stand so much, right? Well—let's just say he was relieved that she'd no longer be an influence. Yes, exactly. Much better off without.

Her books? Absolutely not. Seditious trash. He'd burned them all.

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A bus to Philly, scarf pulled up, shielded by sunglasses. Eleven hundred dollars cash in her pocket, most of their savings. She did not have a plan just yet, only a hope: someone she thought might help, who might give her a place to pause and decide what to do next. But first, before she could pause, she needed to pay respects, to apologize. To atone. Slouched in her seat, she tugged her knit hat down nearly to the bridge of her nose, dug her chin into the collar of her coat. She refused to cry. Instead she watched the highway whir by in a blur of gray and white. Beside her, a man with a mustache snored, the roll of fat on his neck trembling with each breath.

The small suburb where Marie Johnson had grown up had neat green lawns dotted with flowering shrubs and old oak trees, tidy wooden houses with crisp coats of paint over edges softened by age. Marie's house could have been any one of them: from the outside, it did not look like a house in mourning. But she knew it at once, from the news reports that had flashed it over and over on-screen, always with curtains shut tight against the cameras sizzling outside. Now, months later, the neighborhood had returned to some semblance of normalcy: a few yards down, a man yanked the chain of his leaf blower and it ground to life with a throaty growl; across the street an older woman in flowered gardening gloves deadheaded a chrysanthemum with schoolmarmish rigor. At Marie's house, the only signs of life were the car in the driveway and the thin gap between the curtains, letting the afternoon sunlight slice inside.

As a girl, Marie must have played here. Maybe she turned floppy cartwheels on this patch of grass and chalked hopscotch grids on the sidewalk squares. Maybe she ran through the sprinkler on hot summer days, fleeing—then chasing—the curtain of spray. Margaret could see it, could hear her squeal, like Bird's, rising like the peal of a bell. On her back, the rucksack chafed wide red welts into her shoulders. She rang the bell.

The woman who answered might have been ten years older than Margaret, but Margaret had the feeling she had lived lifetimes more. Her face was still young, but there was something worn and heavy about the way she carried herself, as if she had been stretched past what she should hold. Behind her a man, broad shoulders rounded and hunched, reading glasses perched on the tip of his nose, a newspaper folded in his hand.

Mrs. Johnson, Margaret said. Mr. Johnson. I'm here about Marie.

It came pouring out of her then, in a confused torrent: apologies and confession, explanation and regret and self-recrimination. Her poems, her intent, her horror and sadness at Marie's death. I didn't mean, she kept saying. I never imagined. I didn't expect. Even as the words slithered from her mouth back to her own ears she realized her mistake. What she desperately wanted—reassurance, comfort, absolution—she had no right to ask of them, and they had no reason to give to her.

They're after me, she found herself saying. Pleading, half begging, her own fear shrill in her ears. They blame me for all this. And they're right.

Before her, Marie's parents stood in the entryway, impassive. Down the street, the man with the leaf blower cut the motor and the air went quiet. She was still on the front step; she hadn't even waited, she thought, before laying all this at the feet of this man and this woman who had lost their child. It was hopeless, she was hopeless; how could you ever apologize for this.

I am so very sorry, she said finally, and turned to go.

What did you come here for, Marie's father asked. He folded the newspaper in half, not angrily, but calmly. As if he had read enough news to last a lifetime, as if this were the last newspaper he would ever read again. He looked at her directly, without flinching: he was past fear, now. You think we have anything to say to you? he said. Our baby's dead and you come here, looking for what. Wanting us to feel sorry for what *you* went through?

His voice was quiet, the kind of voice you'd use to talk in the library, and somehow this froze Margaret more than if he was shouting.

You think you know her? he went on. They all think they know her. Everybody thinks they know her, now. You got people wearing my little girl's face on their chests, who don't care about her or who she was. Just using her name to justify doing what they want. She's nothing but a slogan to them. They don't know the first thing about her. You don't know the first thing about her either.

Around them, the ever-present noises of the suburbs—cars ambling by as if they had nowhere urgent to be, a sky-bound crow's squawk, the inevitable dog bark from some indeterminable distance. Continuing on, as if nothing were amiss.

What is there to say, he finished.

He turned and retreated into the dark interior of the house.

For a moment, Margaret and Marie's mother stood there on opposite sides of the doorway: Margaret frozen on the front step, the breeze chilly on the back of her neck, where sweat dampened her hair. Marie's mother with one hand braced against the jamb, as if she were keeping the house from collapse. Eyes half squinted against the sun, her back cast in shadow. Studying Margaret. Margaret wondered what she saw. She thought, belatedly, of the Asian and Black worlds, orbiting each other warily, frozen at a distance in a precarious push-pull. In her childhood: a young Black girl shot, Los Angeles on fire, Korean stores aflame. Her parents had fumed, reading the news, indignant at the damage, the *delinquency.* And then, years later, a young Black man dead in a stairwell, a Chinese American cop's finger on the trigger. There'd been outcry on all sides—an accident, police brutality, scapegoating—until the circles separated again into an uneasy truce. More than once, her mother had been shoved on the street by a Black teen, taunting her with ching-chong chants. Yet also: soon after she'd moved to New York, she'd been in Chinatown picking fruit from a cart when a Black man drove by in an SUV, rap blasting from the rolled-down windows so loud the pear in her hand shivered, and the shop owner, a wiry older Chinese man, gritted his teeth. Those thugs, he said, as if it were something they already agreed on, and spat, and she'd been so stunned that—to her shame—she'd simply nodded, paid, and darted away without a word. It weights her, this history, heavy as the pack on her back.

I'm sorry, Margaret said, again. I should go.

You have children? Marie's mother asked suddenly.

One, Margaret said. I had a son. The past tense, unintended, shocks her. How easily her mind has accepted what her heart cannot. Have, she corrects herself. I have a son. But I won't ever see him again.

A long pause between them, stretching and swelling until it wrapped around both of them, thick and plush. Then, to Margaret's surprise, Marie's mother reached out, touched Margaret's wrist.

Welcome to the worst club in the world, she said.

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The Johnsons' house was cozy and tidy but everywhere there were signs of their daughter. Mr. Johnson, lips clamped shut, shook his head at his wife and disappeared up the stairs, but

Mrs. Johnson led Margaret into the living room. On the mantel, a framed photograph of Marie in cap and gown, paper scroll in the crook of her arm like a sheaf of flowers. High school graduation, Mrs. Johnson said. Salutatorian. In the corner, a music stand, a flute case, sheet music covered in flurries of impossibly high notes.

She did marching band. But what she really loved was the classical stuff.

Her hand brushed the leatherette, wiping a fleck of dust from the latch.

I wanted her to keep it up in college. But she said she wouldn't have time. She had so many plans.

Margaret still had not taken off her backpack; she was not sure if she was invited to stay. In this crowded living room she felt like a large and lumbering animal, every movement threatening to knock some part of the past to the floor. She held her breath, as if that might make her smaller and stiller, as if that might help anything.

Mrs. Johnson took a small china elephant from the mantel, turning it over. After a moment she found what she was looking for, held it up so Margaret could see: a thin seam of glue circling the uplifted trunk.

You see this? she said. My friend went on vacation, to India, and brought me back this. Marie was maybe seven, or eight? She loved it. She'd play with it, put it in her pocket, carry it around. One day I came home from work and she'd broken off the trunk. Did I give her hell. I told her she had no respect for other people's things, didn't I tell her to be careful, why didn't she listen to me. No, Mama, she said to me, I wanted to see what was inside. She did it on purpose. I told her she was on punishment for a month. The next day I found it like this.

She tipped her palm where the little elephant stood, letting the light catch its curves.

She'd patched it back together. You can barely see where the break was. Only if you know where to look.

Gently she set the elephant back on the mantel.

That was Marie, she said. No one out there will remember those things. Just me.

The two women stood there in silence. In the shaft of light that sliced through the crack in the curtains, dust motes hovered.

Will you tell me, Margaret asked. She took the older woman's hands between hers, and Mrs. Johnson did not pull back. A kindness that humbled Margaret, because it was one she had not earned. Will you tell me about her? she said. Who she was. What she was like.

I'll tell you. But only if you promise to remember. That she was a real person, not a poster. That she was a child. My child.

• • •

She stayed for two days, listening. Letting Marie's mother tell her anything and everything that came to mind. Mr. Johnson avoided her, eyeing her with brittle wariness, tucking his glasses into the breast pocket of his shirt before leaving the room.

He doesn't trust you, Mrs. Johnson said, as her husband passed by in the hall. Not an apology; a simple statement of fact.

But Mrs. Johnson led her into Marie's bedroom, where they sat together from sunup until darkness fell. Mrs. Johnson roamed the room, speaking softly, touching this and that, reminiscing. Picking up Marie's hairbrush, her rings, the ocean-smoothed stones she'd kept on the windowsill, each awaking a memory like a talisman. None of the stories were important. A visit to an aunt in North Carolina, a day at Six Flags, Marie's first trip to New York as a skinny, gawky adolescent: Mama, I want to live *here*. All the stories were unbearably important. The time, as a toddler, she'd farted in church, right after the minister had said *Let us pray.* The red

shoes she'd loved so much she squashed her feet into them for months, refusing to give them up, insisting they still fit until they split at the seams. How, as a teenager, she'd clipped words she liked out of her magazines, saving them like confetti in a blue envelope—*nebulous*, *muscovado*, *smithereens*. I just like the way they sound, she'd said.

I don't know what she wanted to do with them, Mrs. Johnson said.

She talked and talked, picking her way from memory to memory, crossing a wide ocean on stepping-stones. Remember this, Marie's mother said, again and again. Hold on to it. As if memory were a bead that might spring from her fingers, clatter to the floor, roll into a crack and disappear. Which it was. At night, swaddled in her bedroll in the Johnsons' living room, Margaret jotted down what Marie's mother had said, each word echoing like a chime. But while Mrs. Johnson talked, Margaret simply listened and listened and listened.

The second night, Marie's father stepped in from the hallway. He looked at his wife, sitting on their daughter's flowery bed; at Margaret, cross-legged on the floor.

You know the last thing I said to her, he said.

No greeting, no introduction. As if he'd been waiting a long time to say just this.

She told me, on the phone. How there was this protest planned, protesting PACT, how she planned to go and hold up a sign. I said, Marie, that ain't about you. You think those PAOs would stick their necks out for you? You think any of them care when we get followed in stores, or shot in traffic stops? Just let it be.

He paused.

She'd been doing research, he went on. Trying to trace our family tree. In high school, she got curious. She was at the library all the time, looking at databases and census records, trying to find her roots. Our roots. What she found was a big blank spot. No records, before Emancipation —except for one. A bill of sale, for my maybe-ancestor. Age eleven. To a Mr. Johnson in Albemarle County, Virginia.

Another pause. He looked down at Margaret, and she looked up at him. Listening.

I didn't want her to go. But she was set on it. She just said: It's wrong to take children from their families, Daddy. You know that. And she didn't want to argue so we just hung up and the next day she went to that march.

He stood there, framed by the doorway, a strong man made fragile by grief. Margaret's mother had crossed the street when she saw men like him approaching. Out of disdain? Out of fear? She didn't know and wasn't sure it mattered. At the factory where her father worked, there were only a handful of Black men, and her father hadn't socialized with any of them. Not my kind of people, he'd said, and she hadn't bothered to ask what he meant.

You weren't wrong, Margaret said at last. You weren't wrong. But neither was Marie.

A small tug at a complicated knot that would take generations to unpick.

Mr. Johnson settled himself down on the bed next to his wife, who put her arm around him and turned her face to his shoulder, and they sat there quietly, the three of them, in Marie's room, Margaret a witness to what they'd lost.

After a long, long while, he said: You know what keeps coming back to me? This one night, I came home from work.

The memory seeping out of him, like water filtered through stone.

I don't even remember how old she was. She might've been five, she might've been fifteen.

Margaret did not question; she understood this, how slippery and elastic time was in the fact of your child, how it seemed to move not in a line but in endless loops, circling back again and again, overwriting itself.

She was laughing, Marie's father said. Laughing and laughing and laughing. Laughing so hard she couldn't stand up. Laughing so hard tears were running down her face. I came in and I saw her there, rolling on the carpet. Just laughing. Marie, I said, what's so funny? She just kept on laughing. Until I started laughing, too. I couldn't help it.

He was half laughing again, as the memory of it swirled around him, pulling him back into the past.

Finally she calmed down and she just lay there. Catching her breath, looking at the ceiling, big smile still on her face. Marie, I said again, what's so funny? She let out a big sigh. She looked so happy. Everything, she said. Everything.

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She left Marie's family with a request, and a name.

Put her in a poem, Mr. Johnson said, she'd like that. You put her in a poem, okay? Make other people remember her.

I'll try, Margaret said, though she knew, already, that no poem could encapsulate Marie, just as no poem could encapsulate Bird. There would always be too much left unsaid.

Mrs. Johnson said nothing, just hugged Margaret, even tighter than Margaret hugged her. They would never speak again, but they were linked now, as those who've been through something terrible together are forever fused, in ways they don't always understand.

The name was the librarian's, though the Johnsons only knew her last: Mrs. Adelman this, Mrs. Adelman that, that's all that came out of Marie's mouth all of high school, her mother said, she spent all her free time over there. Across town; catch the bus on the corner. Margaret walked instead, following the trail of bus stop signs, the bus itself lumbering past her at encouraging intervals, reassuring her she was still on the path. By the time she reached the library, six buses had passed her, and perhaps it was because of this that she had the feeling, ascending the steps of the library, that she had been here before, that some previous version or versions of herself had already arrived, were already within, had already discovered what she herself was only now entering to find.

The library was not the vast marble hall she'd expected, but warm and cozy, the carpet and walls and shelves all the honeyed tan of an old leather armchair, like a great-aunt's living room, and at the desk in the back corner sat only one librarian, an older woman with a streak of white slicing through her graying hair right at the temple—a lightning bolt emanating from her brain—and penetrating eyes, and the most regally upright posture Margaret had ever seen, and she had let her instinct guide her.

Mrs. Adelman? she said. I'm here about Marie.

The librarian said nothing at first, just studied Margaret in silence for a long time. As if they'd met in a past life and she was trying to place her. Then a change came across her face, like clouds in a strong breeze shifting across the sky.

Oh yes, she said. I know *you*.

Then, after a moment of quiet: I gave her your book, you know.

It was one of many books the librarian had given Marie over the years. They'd first struck up a friendship, the two of them, when Marie came in trying to trace her roots. Mrs. Adelman had helped her find the right archives and historical societies to contact, and she had been there, too, when Marie had reached the hole in the records where the rest of her lineage had been erased. Her own grandparents had fled Munich in the 1930s, but the rest of the family had stayed, and though it wasn't the same, she knew the pain of fault lines in family history that you could not see across. Then, as Marie grew older and her interests broadened, Mrs. Adelman had

loved following her mind, feeding this girl whose appetite to *know* was omnivorous and insatiable. *Notes of a Native Son*. Biographies of Gandhi and Grace Lee Boggs. Books on ecology, on tarot, on space exploration and climate change. And poetry, too: Marie had started with the poems from school, Keats and Wordsworth and Yeats, and had come looking for more, and the librarian had helped her find it: Lucille Clifton, Adrienne Rich, Ada Limón, Ross Gay. All of these books the librarian had given to Marie and Marie had dutifully returned each two weeks later, never once overdue. The week Marie headed off to college, she'd come to the library one last time and Mrs. Adelman had slipped a slim parcel in blue wrapping paper across the counter. Written inside the flyleaf: *You never need to give this one back.* On the cover, a close-up photo of a split pomegranate, seeds glistening like jewels.

We've removed it, Mrs. Adelman said. Not my decision. After Marie, people started calling in. Some of them wanted to borrow it. But then, once the talk-radio shows and those cable guys went after you, people got scared. How could we keep such a book, they wanted to know. If you were really a subversive, how could we risk letting young minds see it? In the end the higher-ups decided it was easier to just remove it. The mayor was nervous. Same thing's been happening other places, according to my friends. Not just your book; anything with the remotest ties to China. Anything Asian. Anything that might be a risk.

It's cowardly, Margaret said, and Mrs. Adelman said, Well, they've got children, too, you know.

There was a long silence.

Your son, Mrs. Adelman said. The news said you had a son. How old?

Nine, Margaret said. Ten in the summer.

In silence she tried to imagine Bird's birthday. Would there be a cake? Candles? What would they celebrate? Would he miss her? All she can picture is a dark room.

So before they removed him, you removed yourself.

Margaret nodded dumbly.

It devastated Marie, Mrs. Adelman said. Those children taken to silence their parents, and the news not even mentioning it. Everyone staying quiet, pretending it didn't happen, saying they deserved it. All those families, split apart.

On the news they showed only a few, the cases where it seemed clear-cut, the right answer obvious and uncomplicated.

How many? Margaret asked.

Too many, Mrs. Adelman said. Not just protesters, either. Anyone opposed to PACT. And more every day.

Margaret had the sudden feeling of picking up on a frequency she had not previously been able to hear. It had grown dark; by then the library had closed. No one had come in.

Hardly anyone comes in these days, Mrs. Adelman said. People are nervous. If they come in, they get what they want and go.

Where can I find them, Margaret asked. The families. How can I reach them.

I've *heard*, Mrs. Adelman said slowly. There are people starting to try to track down the children who've been taken. In hopes of reuniting them with their families.

Is that still possible, Margaret asked, if there are so many of them.

Nine years into PACT, it felt like fighting gravity, or the tide. These protests, people said, shaking their heads, on the news, in the streets. Exercises in futility. All it does is bother the rest of us.

The librarian shrugged. You tell me, she said. If the protests are nothing, then why are you here?

Where can I find these families, Margaret asked, and Mrs. Adelman said, I know of one.

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She followed a trail of whispers. The name Mrs. Adelman provided led to more: a friend, a neighbor's sister. I heard of someone. I know someone. No email, no cell phones, nothing that could be traced. One by one she found them, bearing the name of the one who'd sent her as a token of trust. Listening.

Gradually she began to understand how it happened. You said something and someone didn't like it. You did something and someone didn't like it, or perhaps you didn't do something and someone didn't like it. Maybe you were a journalist and you wrote an article that talked about re-placed children, or mentioned the attacks on Asian faces, or dared to question their demonization. Maybe you posted something on social media that criticized PACT, or the authorities, or America. Maybe you got promoted and your coworker got jealous. Maybe you did nothing at all. Someone would appear on your doorstep. Someone called, they'd say, though they would never say who, citing privacy, the sanctity of the system. It only works, they said, if people know they won't be named.

Don't worry, one of the officers would usually say. I'm sure it's nothing. Just our duty to check.

Sometimes it did turn out to be nothing. If you were well connected, if you showed the proper deference, or if perhaps you had a friend in the mayor's office or the statehouse or, even better, the federal government, if in their background investigation it turned out you'd donated money to the right groups, or perhaps if you were willing to donate money now—well, then, perhaps you could make clear that you would never instill dangerous ideologies in your child. But so often it was not nothing. Most often, by the time the officers came: there was something. You had done something, you had said something, you had not done something, you had not said something. If you didn't have the resources to buy your way out with money or influence, at the end of it, they took your child and put them into the back seat of a car already waiting at the curb, and then they were gone.

She'd believed it was just a handful of extreme cases, the ones that made the news—high-profile, cautionary tales. But mostly, she learned—as she found one family, then another—it happened quietly. Nothing reported at all, their removals and re-placements unannounced. The families reported nothing themselves: speaking about PACT was complaining about PACT, which would only prove their disloyalty. Most of them stayed silent, hoping that in their silence, what had been taken would be returned. People began to hold their children closer, began to bite their tongues. They shied away from discussing PACT at all, afraid they might be next. Editors and producers wielded their red pens more freely: Let's not say that, best not to ruffle feathers. It happened so slowly that you might not even notice it at all, like the sky turning from dusk to dark. The calculation everyone made before parting their lips, before setting fingers to keys: how important was it to say? You glanced at the crib in the corner, at your child sprawled on the rug with their toys.

By the time she'd spoken with five families, she understood: it was more people than she'd realized, more people than she'd ever thought of. It had been happening all along, and she'd never known. No, she admitted to herself: she'd never chosen to know.

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By the seventh family, she had run out of money. She had to be careful, too: passersby might not recognize her offhand, but if the police stopped her, even on the slightest of pretexts,

they would demand ID, and everything would unravel. She had an unconvincing fake license, purchased in an alley for a hundred dollars—another name, a photo of another Chinese woman who looked nothing like her except the part of her hair and the wary expression on her face. But the police would run it through the system and discover the fraud immediately. After that it would happen quickly: they would arrest her for using false ID, they'd investigate further, they'd check their files for persons of interest, and it would only be a matter of time before they figured out who she really was. Margaret Miu: dozens of counts of incitement to her name, one for every anti-PACT poster and protester bearing her words. And now, liable for Marie's death, as well.

So she moved with caution: keeping to quiet streets, careful not to attract attention. She thought of her parents, the mantra of her entire childhood: *Don't stick out.* So little had changed in all that time; it was just a little more obvious now. In her head she heard her mother's stunned voice on that last phone call, pictured her father's face in the moment before he was pushed. Unaware of what more was to come. *Hide*, they would have said to her. *Head down, out of sight.* But she did not want to hide. Now she understood that there were so many more stories than she'd imagined. Each person she spoke to knew another, sometimes two more, or three. In her head she did the math. Too many to ignore. How could everyone not know?

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The bus dropped her in Chinatown, and she walked up, up, up, following Third as the street numbers climbed higher. The same route that her son would take years later. As she walked, she remembered the long treks uptown, after curfew, from that crowded apartment with Domi and her ex and his sister, up to the quiet golden bubble she and Ethan shared. She remembered, still, how to avoid the corners where policemen stood, the areas where she might be conspicuous, and she skirted these, taking the long way around, looping down side streets and around corners until she was sure she was in the clear. Working her way over to Park, she found it: the red brick townhouse with huge apple-green doors. The round window set in the white arch above, like a Cyclops's watchful eye.

Hello, she said, as the door opened. A middle-aged white man wearing a decorous navy suit and a deferential expression. Is this still the Duchess residence?

When Margaret was at last ushered through the marble-floored entryway and up the sweeping staircase, there she was. A little plumper, a little older. New wrinkles creasing from nose to chin, bracketing her mouth. Eyes tired, faintly ringed. But still the same.

Well, well, Domi said. Look who it is.

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She had never expected to see Domi again. After the way they'd parted, after the last thing Domi had said to her: *Sellout. Whore. Fuck you.* She'd put Domi out of her mind, packed their time together in the smallest box she could, taped it firmly shut. Then, years later, scrolling the news while Bird napped, she'd spotted a headline: the largest gift ever given to the New York Public Library. The name beneath leaping out like a ghost from the shadows. *Electronics heiress Dominique Duchess.* Duchess Technologies. And a photo. Last time she'd seen her, Domi had been in a man's leather jacket and lug-soled boots, both hand-me-downs from Margaret. The blond of her ponytail streaked dark with sweat and grime. In the photo she was impeccable in a tailored Chanel suit. Her hair was blown to pale gold, clipped short in the businesslike bob Domi had always mocked: rich man's wife, she'd called it, after her stepmother.

Margaret scrolled through the article. New head of Duchess Technologies. Founded by her late father—inherited after his death. Groundbreaking audio components—smallest and lightest

—revolutionized cell-phone technology. And the caption: *Ms. Duchess, at home in her Park Avenue residence.*

She remembered that house, that rare single-family, the golden numbers gleaming against the brick, the lantern above the entrance, patinaed to green, held aloft by twin swirls of iron. Snakes, Domi had said, looking up at them, I thought they were snakes, as a kid. They'd been hungry that day; she remembered her stomach growling. Her feet throbbing. The sound their spit made as it hit the sidewalk. Fuck you, Domi had screamed up at the windows, and then, as her father's face appeared behind the glass, she'd grabbed Margaret's hand and they'd jumped on their bikes and fled, laughing, pedaling and pedaling until their thighs ached.

So Domi called Daddy after all. Margaret clicked the browser window shut. Well, fuck *you*, Domi, she thought.

But in the following years Domi appeared again and again, in small sharp flashes. Donations to women's shelters, to food banks, to union groups. Donations for health-care assistance. Donations to libraries, a string of them, all over New York, here and there all over the country. Margaret watched, holding these acts up to the Domi she'd once known, as if holding a sealed letter to the light. The night before she left, she'd scribbled down that address on Park Avenue—the one person who might help, the only person left besides Ethan who'd ever cared about her—and hidden it in the safest place she could think of, because it was too painful to go without leaving even one bread crumb behind.

And here she was. Life had a strange symmetry, she thought: years ago she'd left Domi to take refuge with Ethan; now it was the other way around. Domi touched Margaret's arm, and her hands, once red and chapped from the cold as she clutched Margaret's in the night, were soft and pale, like just-risen dough. Margaret kissed her on the cheek and it, too, was tender, so tender she expected to see the imprint of her lips on Domi's skin.

It's good to see you, Domi said.

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In the end Domi had decided to hide, too. At the depth of the Crisis, around the time Margaret had left New York, Domi had called her father. Help me, she said, and he'd sent a car within the hour. He'd whisked her out of New York to the safety of the countryside, a summer cabin in Connecticut she hadn't seen since she was a child, which her father had built when the land had been cheap, before his company took off, before they'd had any real money. When he'd still just been Claude Duchess, a young upstart businessman; when her mother had still been alive. Over the years, as his company had grown, he'd acquired the parcels of land around it, chipping out a larger and larger pocket of wilderness around them; he'd added a powerful generator, a fresh coat of paint—but it still bore the traces of what it had been, just a simple house set away from everything, beside a rocky little ocean inlet. So when he wanted to escape the unrest in the city, what better place than here, in the past, a time when everything was still in the future for him, when the world was nothing but possibility? Here alone, out of all his houses, they did not have to hear protests in the streets or the eerie silences in between; here, there was nothing but the constant whoosh of the ocean's waves. Here, they could pretend they were not eating cake while everyone else had no bread.

Domi had stepped inside, steel-toed boots clumping against the polished wooden floors, flecks of city grit still ground into her roughened palms. There was her stepmother on the leather sofa, reading a magazine, but her bedroom was exactly as she remembered: the way her own mother had decorated it in her childhood, all pink and lace and pearls. Welcome home, her father had said awkwardly. Elsa had grudgingly left her alone, and that was how they'd weathered the

Crisis, the three of them: circling each other at a distance, trapped like flies in the amber of the past. Their fortune vast as a mammoth ship, unswayed by the currents and waves that buffeted smaller, lesser boats. They could order what they needed, afford whatever it took, for as long as it took. All they had to do was wait.

A few months after PACT passed, Domi's father and Elsa were headed to the Maldives—a weekend vacation, to celebrate the return to *normal*—when their private plane crashed into the Pacific. Everything had gone to Domi: the houses in Malibu and Provence; the apartment in the 16th arrondissement and the townhouse here on Park; the electronics empire, smaller than before the Crisis, but still ticking out crucial parts for phones and smartwatches, still more than enough to support all this. And all the secrets too: accusations from her father's factories in Hanoi and Shenzhen, complaints about long hours, hazardous materials, years of ignored reports. The donations to senators who'd passed tax cuts and exemptions for men like him, who'd go on to champion PACT and everything that came after. All hers now, to tabulate and reckon and repay.

I'm finding out, says Domi, some of things he did. For me, or so he thought.

She and Margaret were sitting in the glass-roofed courtyard—the winter garden, Domi called it—glasses of iced tea sweating in their hands. A square pocket of green lined with potted arborvitae, carved into the belly of this vault of a house. Rooms of sturdy furniture and solid brick fortressed them on four sides, filled with all the fine trinkets Domi's father had collected and kept. Above, thick glass sheltered them from possible rain. They could not be seen or heard from outside; for the first time in weeks, Margaret found she could catch her breath. And yet she felt like an insect sealed in a jar.

So now what, Domi said. What are you going to do? Hole up here, forever, with me? Get a fake passport and flee the country?

There was the faintest whiff of mockery in her voice, and Margaret couldn't tell if it was aimed at her, or at Domi herself. Of course there were places where a person could hide: Margaret could take a new name, lie low. Keep her head down; start again. She thought again of her parents, how they'd lived their whole lives trying to avoid trouble, and in the end it had ferreted them out anyway. Maybe sometimes, she thought, the bird with its head held high took flight. Maybe sometimes, the nail that stuck up pierced the foot that stomped down.

Not hiding, she said. Something else.

The idea was not fully formed in her mind yet, only a need: the need to make up for years of choosing to look away, of remaining deliberately incurious. For thinking that it didn't matter as long as it was somebody else's child. It was just starting to come to her, the seeds of it barely beginning to root: what she would do with these stories, the messages of hope and love and care and longing. She would go out and gather them, like grains of rice gleaned from threshed-out fields. She would find as many as she could.

To Domi, she said: I need your help.

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All over the country, zigging and zagging, she traced the flow of information. Emails could be hacked, calls intercepted. But libraries shared books all the time; pooling information was part of their work. Crates of books shuttled between them, crammed with loaned bounty: rare texts on obscure painters, guidebooks on esoteric hobbies. It was the librarians' job to sort these books, to label each with a slip bearing the requester's name, to set them on the shelf behind the counter in neat rows, ready to be claimed.

Now and then, though, an extra book would find its way into a crate and arrive in some faraway city, unannounced. A clerical mistake; a simple human error. With no one to meet them

at the gates, these stowaways would simply be set aside, to be shipped back home in the next crate. No one would notice, of course, if a librarian idly riffled through it, nor think anything amiss if they found a slip of paper inside. People left things in books all the time, and most libraries had a bulletin board where these mislaid items were thumbtacked: bookmarks, of course, but also sales receipts, travel brochures, business cards, shopping lists, cancelled checks, toothpicks, popsicle sticks, plastic knives, once even a strip of bacon sealed in a plastic sandwich bag. No one paid much attention to these things, and no one would notice if a librarian happened to pluck a note from a stowaway book, or from the bulletin board, and pocket it.

The messages were short. To a casual observer they resembled a list of call numbers, an arbitrary jumble of letters and digits and decimal points. But to those who knew to pull out the stray books, who collected these missives from their far-off colleagues, they said volumes. Encoded in them: the names of children who'd been taken, a brief description. The names and locations of their families. All over the country, a scattered network of librarians would note this information, collating it with the Rolodex in their minds, cross-referencing it with the re-placed children they might have learned about. Some kept a running written list, but most, wary, simply trusted to memory. An imperfect system, but the brain of a librarian was a capacious place. Each of them had reasons of their own for taking this risk, and though most of them would never share these reasons with the others, would never even meet them face-to-face, all of them shared the same desperate hope of making a match, of sending a note back, sandwiched between pages, with a child's new location. A message to reassure the family that their child still existed, even if far away, to place a bottom on the deep hole of their loss. Librarians, of all people, understood the value of knowing, even if that information could not yet be used.

Such messages were rare, though a handful of children had been found. More often, the notes were memorized or jotted down, then tucked into a new book to be passed forward in the next crate to the next city, the lists of the missing and the re-placed growing like twin prongs of a long sharp fork. There were so many names, and the network was few and patchwork, dependent on memory and luck, two dots aligning just long enough for someone to make the connection and join them with a stroke. Meanwhile, all that could be done was to remember, and to pass the information along: to the next librarian, the next city, and—when she could persuade them—to Margaret.

One by one she searched out the families whose children had been taken, the ones waiting in vain for the holes in their lives to scar closed. She met them on lunch breaks, on park benches, walked round and round the block with them, holding their cigarettes, waiting for them to be ready. If they wanted, sometimes she talked to them about Bird, telling them about him, about what she missed, which was everything. Other times she simply waited with them, as long as it took. Days of visits that passed in silence; three hours sitting wordless in the park. Ten blocks, fifteen, fifty. Until they trusted her. Until they wanted to speak. Until they wanted their stories to be told.

Tell me, she said. What you want to say to them. What you want them to hear. What you still remember. She wrote it all down, just as the words came out.

They are not just Asian American families, she finds: there are white journalists who'd researched the re-placements, Latina activists who'd organized protests. Not all of them want to speak to her. Some don't trust her, with her Chinese face: You all caused the Crisis and you want us to feel sorry for you? Some Asian Americans don't trust her either, sure she's only making things worse. They've seen what happened when they spoke up; now, twice shy, they shake their heads and close the door in her face without a word.

Other people are angry: if you hadn't written that poem, they insist, this would never have happened. Some believe she has deliberately egged on the protests, that she is behind it all. She does not argue or try to explain as their voices chase her down the hallway, out onto the street. Some are afraid: families who have no papers, who live in terror of raids, or worse. And some people chide her for coming too late. One older woman—a Choctaw woman, whose granddaughter had been taken—looked at Margaret for a long time with weary eyes, then clicked her teeth.

You think this is something new? She shook her head.

Margaret listened. She began to learn: there was no new thing under the sun. About the schools where Indigenous children were shorn and stripped, renamed, reeducated, and returned home broken and scarred—or never at all. About children borne across borders in their parents' arms only to be caged in warehouses, alone and afraid. About foster children pinballed from home to home, their own families sometimes unable to track their path. Things she'd been able to not know, until now. There was a long history of children taken, the pretexts different but the reasons the same. A most precious ransom, a cudgel over a parent's head. It was whatever the opposite of an anchor was: an attempt to uproot some otherness, something hated and feared. Some foreignness seen as an invasive weed, something to be eradicated.

But most of the families are hungry to speak, ravenous with story. She wrote down how their children had been taken, what they wanted to say to those children, the most precious things they would never forget, the things they needed said but did not dare to say themselves. Trying to save every one, all the stories hushed and hidden, all the faces and names too precious to be forgotten. She scribbled them down, in a notepad she carried in the left cup of her bra, the writing so small you'd almost need a magnifier to read it. When that notebook was full, she got another, then another, tucking the old ones into the pocket of her jeans, the side of her sock. Bearing them on her body. At night, she leafed through the pages, engraving the names and stories on her heart, Bird and Ethan haunting every word.

In the early days, it was the librarians who took her in. Some had lounges and sofas; a few even had shower stalls for the staff who'd once biked to work but were long gone. At the others, once the librarian had headed home, she wandered until she found a quiet corner, away from windows. In the shelter of a high shelf she would spread out her bedroll, and then, as she tried to settle her mind for sleep, she would allow herself the luxurious pain of thinking about Ethan and Bird. In the day, she sealed them out, but paused here in the night, the rags she'd stuffed into the gaps of her mind worked loose, and they seeped back in, like fog.

She longed for the broad firm comfort of Ethan curled against her back, the calm that enveloped her whenever he was near. So many things she wished she could tell him: the stories she'd heard, the families she'd met, all the things that would be easier to hold, together. Small joys, too: the silver-green dragonfly that had landed on her forearm, stilled its wings, then vanished again; the improbable red of the maple leaves just beginning to fall—things that felt only half real when she could not share them with him. And Bird: he was the hollow to which her mind, like water, inevitably ran. How tall was he—up to her nose? Her brows? Would he be able to look her straight in the eye? Did he still clip his hair short or had he let it grow shaggy, did it hang in his eyes, was it still the same brown as Ethan's or had it darkened with age to coffee-colored, or even black like her own? Had he lost the last of his baby teeth, and if so, had Ethan plucked them from beneath his pillow and saved them, did Bird even put them beneath his pillow anymore or did he no longer believe in such childish things? What had happened at school today, did he smirk at an inside joke with a friend, was someone unkind to him, was it raining where he was, and if it was, had he remembered his rain jacket or was he soaked to the

skin? What was he dreaming, far away, did he still sleep with one arm thrown across his face like a blindfold, were they happy dreams or sad, did she ever appear in them, did he remember her at all, and if he did, was it with love or with hate? She hated herself in these moments, when she tried to picture Bird's face and knew that what she remembered was growing further and further from the truth, that she had missed so much that could never be retrieved.

Most nights, she got up and roamed the library, not daring to turn on the lights but guiding herself by the maze of shelves, fingertips walking the spines of the books. Eventually she would pull one down, something about its feel catching her attention, and take it to bed, burying herself in whatever it had to say. Programming languages; basic electronics; French cuisine. The evolution of the panda's paw. One night, she found she had selected a biography of a poet: Anna Akhmatova. Akhmatova was so beloved in Russia, it said, that you could buy a porcelain figurine of her, wearing a gray flowered dress and a red shawl. It was said that in 1924 most homes had one, though this was impossible to verify, because many of the figurines were later smashed during the Terror. Akhmatova was forbidden to write, Margaret read, but she did so anyway. She wrote about her friends, arrested and dying in prison camps. She wrote about her former husband, shot for treason. Most of all she wrote about her son, locked in a prison that she visited daily but was never allowed to enter. Finally, agonizingly, she wrote about Stalin—effusive, flowery, goose-stepping praise—hoping that her compliments would persuade him to pardon her son, but they did not. Years later, when her son was released at last, he believed that his mother had not tried to free him, that she cared more for her poetry than for him, and their relationship was never the same.

Margaret told this story to herself over and over, so that she would not forget it.

Once upon a time in Russia, a poet was forbidden from writing her verse. Instead of silence, she chose fire. Each night she wrote her lines on scraps of paper, working them over and over, committing them to memory. At dawn she touched a match to the paper and reduced her words to ash. Over the years her words repeated this cycle—resurrection in the darkness, death at first light—until eventually their lives were inscribed in flame. The poet murmured her poems into the ears of her friends, who memorized them and carried them away tucked under their tongues. Mouth to ear, they passed them on to others, until the whole world whispered with the poet's lost lines.

The next morning, the librarian found her with head pressed to the page, mirrored letters tattooed on her cheek.

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As she gathered more and more stories, a curious thing began to happen: some of the families invited her into their homes, asking her to join them at the table, offering a spare bed if they had it, a sofa if they didn't, a folded blanket on the floor when that was the best they could do. The gentle nighttime noises of a home comforted her: the soft padding of slippered feet shuffling through the dark from bedroom to bathroom and back again; the tangled murmur of adult voices speaking softly, even though the children were not there to wake; the quiet creaks and ticks of a house settling, as if, its occupants sleeping, it could finally loosen its girdle and breathe. But they punished her, too: late at night, the only one awake, nestled in the core of someone else's life, she missed Bird and Ethan even more, the hurt of it so vicious the room blurred.

One night, curled in her bedroll on the floor of a family's kitchen, she awoke to a man's hands on her. She'd startled, every muscle in her body iron-tense, coiled to fight. But no: it was the father, carefully spreading a cover over her. Mohamad, his name was. Earlier that evening,

she'd sat beside him and his wife and eaten maqluba and listened to them tell the story of their son. I was a child when the Twin Towers fell, he had said toward the end. Someone spray-painted filthy things on our garage door. Someone broke our front window with a brick. My father hung a huge American flag on our house, for a while.

He'd paused, and his wife took his hand.

None of our neighbors did or said anything to help us, he said.

Now, the night had grown cold, and here he was tucking a blanket around her with such tenderness she might have been his lost child.

When he had gone, Margaret touched it with her hands and felt unimaginable softness, plush and warm, like the shaggy pelt of some luxurious beast, and she fell into a deep sleep. In the morning, she awoke to find it was just a blanket, of course—a large, soft, fluffy one, printed with the bold striped face of a tiger. For the next three nights she slept under the tiger skin, as she thought of it, and when she left that apartment she had embraced the couple and carried the warmth of that tiger blanket inside her like a benediction.

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Miles and months passed. A year, then two. She marked the time by Bird's age: now he was ten, now he was eleven, now eleven and a half. The list of things she knew she had missed grew and grew. Learning to swim, learning to dance; new interests and obsessions she could only begin to imagine. A birthday, then another. The days were a blur of buses and trains, of tired tramping across cities, and at night she dreamed of hovering high in in the clouds and seeing herself from above, a small speck crossing the landscape. A fly crawling over an endless map.

What kept her going was this: every few weeks, a news story caught her eye. She'd abandoned her phone when she left home, of course, but she heard snippets of radio as she passed a store, or scavenged newspapers discarded on the sidewalk. Over and over they came, her own words echoing back to her, not on signs or in marches this time but woven into strange happenings, things so odd—half protest, half art—that they caught people's attention, forcing them to take note; things that unsettled them days and weeks later, knotting a tangle in the chest. Bursts punctuating the static of those endless days, pushing her onward.

In Nashville, statues appeared in the early morning mist, a hundred ghostly children cast from ice. *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS,* read a sign chained around one's neck. The police arrived with handcuffs at the ready, but whoever had placed them was gone. Just a prank, one officer radioed back to the station, it's just ice, but— Around them, commuters paused, shaken for once out of their routines. Some snapped photos, but most simply stood mesmerized, even just for a moment, watching in silence as the small faces slowly, slowly dissolved and blurred. One of them reached out and touched what had once been the face of a little girl, melting a thumb-shaped indent in her cheek. The police shooed them away, cordoned off the area, set up a perimeter in case the perpetrators returned. It took most of the morning for the statues to melt, and for hours the officers on duty would glance up at the skyscrapers and see the silhouettes of people in the windows above, staring down at the fading blocks of ice, and later, at the dark damp patches where children had once stood.

In Des Moines one morning, the main street was painted red, block after block after block. From the news helicopters above, it looked like a stream of blood slicing straight through the city. Stenciled on the sidewalk where the source of the river would lie: *BRING BACK OUR MISSING HEARTS.* Those who discovered it first found that the paint was still wet, and as they walked away they left trails of footprints that grew indistinct, then disappeared. That night, and in the days and weeks to come, people would find streaks of red on the soles of their shoes and the cuffs of their pants and

the sleeves of their jackets and pause, thinking *blood*, their chests seizing, patting themselves for the hurt.

In Austin, outside the governor's mansion: a giant concrete cube with a crack running down the center, a crowbar by its side. Etched into the cube, four chiseled letters: P A C T. Etched into the crowbar: *OUR MISSING HEARTS*. One by one, passersby picked up the bar and hefted it, but no one dared swing, and when the police arrived they'd confiscated it as a dangerous weapon. The cube they loaded onto a flatbed and hauled away.

The authorities made no official statements, hoping to avoid publicity, but these happenings were so bizarre, so eye-catching, that they attracted attention. In the days after each happened, photos of them splashed across social media, going viral each time; eyewitness accounts and videos circulated from those who'd been there and seen it. Newspapers who might have ignored a march or a protest sent photographers and reporters to the scene. Pranks, some authorities insisted, when pressed. Just meaningless pranks. Others took a harsher tone: Subversion. A threat to civil society. Des Moines had spent a hundred thousand dollars painting the streets black again.

But they kept happening, and Margaret, on the road, watched. She noticed that people complained about marches blocking traffic, about the futility and inconvenience, but something about these strange happenings caught their attention and held it. She spotted passersby pausing on the sidewalk to zoom in on the photos on their phones or linger over articles about them before tossing their papers into the trash. She overheard people talking about these happenings on street corners, on subway platforms, over coffee on café patios. Not irritated or dismissive, but filled with curiosity and sometimes even delight at the unexpected weirdness of them. *Did you see? Did you hear about? Isn't it crazy? What do you think—?*

By the time Bird was eleven, these happenings were nearly monthly. Each time she saw her words in one, she felt a peculiar and not unwelcome glow—even as she knew that with every mention of *missing hearts*, another line appeared in her file. One more thing she would be held responsible for, though she knew no more about them than anyone else. It was as if those words were their own independent creatures, off leading their own life—which, in truth, they were. What did you call it—surely not pride, because you could take no credit for these accomplishments, you could only marvel like a stranger at the things this *being* had gone on to do without you. It kept her moving, the thought that others out there were thinking about the children who had been taken, too. Each happening she heard about jump-started her again when the journey and the weight of the stories had nearly drained her dry. We haven't forgotten, they seemed to say, have you?

Who's doing it? she asked one of the librarians. Who's behind them all?

Those art pranks? the librarian sniffed. Margaret had noticed this, a certain disdain for the protests from the librarians—and it was understandable, that when they were painstakingly gathering grains of information, listing and tracking and trying to keep records, these happenings felt trivial and frivolous and showy.

What makes you think it's even the same people, the librarian said, sliding the name of another family across the counter, and Margaret thanked her, and departed.

For there were always more children, more stories. It was like picking up seashells on the beach: one more, one more, one more. Each wave depositing another on the wet and gleaming sand. Each shell a relic of a creature once there, now gone. Bird was nearly twelve, and still there were more; she could continue this forever, traveling round and round. Counting the next and the next in an endlessly increasing line.

One day, overcome, she sent a postcard: no message, just a small line drawing. A cat beside a little door. A clue, if they would accept it; an invitation to find the note she'd left for them. To find her. As she dropped it into the mailbox, she imagined it winging its way from truck to sack to the porch of their house. She waited and waited, but no reply came.

Now and then she tried again, each postcard gaining another cat, or two, or five, smaller and smaller, until the entire card was full, the cabinet shrunk to the size of a stamp, then the size of a penny, then the size of a fingernail. There was never any reply. On Bird's twelfth birthday, she took a risk, hunted down one of the few remaining pay phones, and dialed their old number. Disconnected. By this time Bird had lived a quarter of his life without her; perhaps he didn't even remember she existed. Perhaps it was better that way.

It was then that she decided on a date: October 23. Three years to the day since she'd gone away. She would do it then. In September she sent a note to Domi. It's time, she said. Can you find me a place to stay. Domi, of course, had offered her house, but Margaret had refused.

Somewhere faraway, she said, somewhere no one will look. Somewhere I won't take you down, if I'm caught.

A week later she'd arrived in New York, made her way to Brooklyn and the darkened brownstone. The next day she went out into the city, cap pulled low over her face, in search of bottle caps.

• • •

I have someone, the librarian said.

Astoria: a small branch library. Margaret had been in New York for two weeks already, camped out in the darkened brownstone, making final preparations, filling her bottle caps. Two weeks left to go. She should stop collecting stories; already she had more than she could use. But she did not want to stop. What she wanted was to find every one of them, though she knew this was impossible, because there would always be more.

The librarian lowered her voice, even though there was no one else in the room, no one else in the building, nothing around them but half-empty shelves. Not a family, she went on. A child.

Margaret sat up straighter. In all these years she hadn't spoken to a single re-placed child. They were well concealed: new cities, new families, new names. All that was left was the trail of grief in their absence, the snagged holes they'd left behind. The few they'd tracked down were inaccessible, fortressed in their new homes and new lives. Those who were taken young enough sometimes didn't remember their old lives, their old families, at all.

She wandered into the main branch a couple months ago, the librarian said. A runaway. From Baltimore, originally. Bold little thing, she added, half chuckling. Marched in there like a policeman. Said: I need you to help me find my parents. Hands on her hips, like she was giving them a dressing-down. Said she ran away from a foster family in Cambridge, up near Harvard.

A tingle cinched the back of Margaret's neck. Cambridge, she said. How old is she?

Thirteen. We're trying to find out more. They moved her around a lot at first, and no one's at the address she remembers anymore.

Can I talk to her? Margaret said, pulse thumping. Where is she?

The librarian studied her warily. The moment Margaret knew so well: when they decided if she could be trusted, and if so, how far. How much rope she was to be given, how far the door was to be pushed ajar.

The scale tipped.

She's at one of the branches, the librarian said. I can get you the address. We've been moving her around, trying to find a long-term place for her.

And there she was: a girl, cross-legged on a makeshift pallet. Big brown eyes like two blazing stars.

Margaret, she repeated, when Margaret introduced herself, are you Margaret Miu?

And in the stunned silence that followed, Sadie smiled.

I know your poems, she said. And then: I know Bird, too.

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The government had commissioned a study: Children under the age of twelve, once removed from their parents, could not be expected to find their way back home unassisted. Those above twelve were usually sent to a state-run center; younger children could be placed in foster care. Sadie had been eleven when they'd taken her.

They'd moved her from place to place in quick succession—first West Virginia, then Erie, then Boston—farther and farther, as if trying to pull her from orbit. From her first foster home, she called her old number: disconnected. She wrote letter after letter, zip code neatly printed in ink, plastered with stamps stolen from the second. No response, but she'd remained hopeful: maybe when she'd been transferred she'd missed it; maybe behind her, letters from her parents were trailing like the tail of a kite, always a step too late. Then, at her third foster home in Cambridge, a letter came back: UNKNOWN.

Come with me, she'd said to Bird, but in the end she'd gone alone.

Two buses and a train ride back to Baltimore, with money filched from her foster father's wallet, the address still etched in her memory even though her mother's face had begun to blur. Everything dreamily familiar: the neighbor's tulips, pink against the green lawn. The ambient buzz of a mower on the summer air. The same picture she'd clung to so staunchly for the last two years.

But when she ran up the steps, the door was locked. The woman who answered was a white woman, a stranger. A kind face, mousy hair pulled back in a bun. Honey, no one like that lives here, she said.

She'd moved in six months ago. No, she didn't know who lived here before that. Did Sadie need help? Was there someone she could call?

Sadie ran.

She'd slipped onto the first train out of the station, burrowed into a corner seat, awoke in the bustle of Penn Station. Overwhelmed and alone. She struggled out of the low, rat-colored hallways of the terminal, past the one-footed pigeons scrabbling for crumbs, past the homeless men with cardboard signs and jingling cups, past the scum of litter on the curb. Above her rose a canopy of scaffolding, net nearly obscuring the REBUILDING THE NYC YOU ♥ stenciled across it. Above that, needles of glass and concrete jabbed at the clouds.

And then, out of the gloom, she'd spotted the big gray arches, on the far side of a patch of green.

Back in Cambridge, she had loved the peace of the library. Loitering among the shelves, opening and closing the books still left standing there. Many were gone, she knew, but these were survivors; she took them down from the shelves and flipped through them, breathed them in. Imagined how many others had read and handled these books before her.

One day the librarian caught her. Sadie looked up, her nose to the page, to see the librarian at the end of the aisle, bemused. They'd seen each other often, of course—in and out, each day she came in—but they never spoke. Sadie had no library card, never asked for assistance, never caused any trouble. The librarian said nothing, and Sadie slammed the book shut and pushed it

back onto the shelf and fled. But a few days later, when she'd dared creep into the library again, the librarian had waved her over to the desk. I'm Carina, she said, what's your name?

It took Sadie a while to notice: she wasn't the only one who came in but borrowed nothing. Once or twice people came to the counter, held murmured, intense conversations with the librarian, and left, looking anxious or anguished or hopeful, or all three. Now and then wayward books came down the book return, shuddering their way into the collection bin: tattered paperbacks, old textbooks, sometimes just a magazine. As if someone had made a mistake, dropping the wrong thing down the chute. One day she'd wedged herself through the book return, fished one out. A note between the pages with a name, an age, and a description: a child taken, like her. A family's plea that the network would encode, and remember, and pass on.

We are filling in the cracks, the librarian admitted, wherever we can.

So when Sadie had ended up in New York, no trace of her parents anymore, she knew where to go. When she spotted the library, it had felt like something out of a fairy tale: a palace guarded by two mighty lions, pale gray, impassive. She climbed the steps and stretched to set her hand on one massive paw, fingers curving between the broad claws, and it came back to her like a scent on the breeze: a story her mother had read her once. A little girl lost and alone, aided by a lion, the king of that land. She looked around. There was the street lamp. And here in front of her was the magical doorway that might take her home. The library was almost empty; it was nearly closing time, and Sadie wandered until she found a quiet corner, an old armchair in the children's section, where posters that said READ still hung over half-emptied bookshelves. She curled up and fell asleep and awoke to a young woman patting her shoulder.

Hello there, she said to Sadie. It looks like you're lost.

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You're Bird's mom, aren't you? Sadie said.

Margaret touched her hips, her heart, checking for the notebooks that she'd carried so long they felt like part of her flesh.

I was, she said.

He told me about you, Sadie said, and to Margaret it had felt like a sign.

Sadie, young and motherless and fearless. After three months on her own, half wary adult, half child.

I know somewhere she can stay, Margaret said to the librarian.

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It took some time, convincing Domi.

You've got to be fucking kidding, M., she'd protested. What do I know about kids.

They were speaking in fierce whispers, while Sadie waited, cross armed and skeptical, at the far end of the living room. Out of the corner of her eye, Domi studied her, and imperiously, unabashedly, Sadie studied her back.

You know as well as I do, Margaret said, that the brownstone isn't a place for a child. And I can't keep an eye on her myself anyway. I've got too much to do.

What is it exactly, Domi said, that you want me to do?

Keep her safe. Just while I'm finishing up. And after it's done, we'll find somewhere better. Maybe we can find her parents. But she needs somewhere now. She's been shuttled from library to library for weeks and they won't be able to hide her forever. It's a miracle they've been able to this long.

She paused. Or are you too cramped for space? she added dryly. A glance around the enormous living room, at the ceiling where, overhead, a half dozen bedrooms sat unused.

Domi let out a long slow breath through her nostrils. Still the sign, after all these years, that Margaret had won.

Fine. But she'll have to take care of herself. I don't have time to be babysitting.

I only need my diaper changed twice a day, Sadie called from across the room.

Domi laughed.

Hmm, she said. She's got a sense of humor, at least.

The two of them sized each other up—the tall blond woman in her suit and high heels, the little brown girl in her hoodie and fading jeans—and Margaret had felt it between them then, the crackle of kindred spirits, of like meeting like.

It was Sadie who'd finally told Margaret, some days later: But Bird doesn't live at that house anymore. Didn't you know? They live in a dorm now. I can tell you where.

• • •

Why didn't you tell me, Bird says. Why didn't she come down when I was there?

We'd told her to stay out of sight, Margaret says. So no one would spot her and start asking questions. You'll see her soon, I promise. But I needed this time with you. I needed—

She stops, clippers poised.

Someone's here, she murmurs.

Bird hears it, too: the sound of someone at the back door. It is raining, he realizes; though he can't see it through the boarded-up windows, in the sudden silence he can hear it tapping against the plywood, like small, insistent fingers. Over the rain they hear the rattle of the knob being tested. Then the faint low beeps of the keypad: One number. Another. Another.

Bird turns to his mother, waiting for a cue. To fight or to flee. To brace or to take cover. Margaret doesn't move. A thousand scenarios flicker through her head, each worse than the last. Where Bird will be taken. Where they'll take her. Stay calm, she tells herself. Think. But there is nowhere for them to hide, and even if she takes him by the hand and flees through the front, out into the street, where would they go, in the rain, in this city of strangers? Into whose hands?

Footsteps thud out in the darkened hallway. Someone trying to move quietly, and failing. And then the door to the living room creaks open. It's the Duchess, in a black raincoat. Shaking the wet from her feet.

Fuck, Domi, Margaret says. You scared me.

She lets out her breath, and Bird finds this more unsettling than her profanity, even more than their unexpected guest: that his mother, too, could be frightened.

I couldn't exactly ring the bell, could I, the Duchess says. Or call ahead.

She and Margaret exchange a shrug, and Bird understands: cell phones, of course, can be traced.

What time is it? Margaret asks.

Almost four.

I thought we said tomorrow morning.

The Duchess unzips the raincoat and peels it from one arm, then the other. With a glance she takes in the table, the litter of wire snippings and bottle caps and the shiny coins of the batteries.

So you're still going through with it, she says.

Margaret stiffens. Of course, she says.

The Duchess's gaze sweeps around the room like a searchlight, illuminating things Bird himself has barely even noticed. The garbage can in the corner, overflowing. The foam cup from yesterday's noodles, still slick with oil, on the floor at Bird's feet. Bird himself in three-day-old clothes, his hair unbrushed and untidy, half-obscuring his eyes.

I thought things might have changed, she says. Now that— Her eyes pause on Bird.

Nothing's changed, Margaret says sharply.

The Duchess drapes her raincoat over the back of the armchair. As always she moves like a ship in full sail: puffed with purpose. She settles herself on the arm of the sofa, beside Margaret.

You can still change your mind, she says.

Margaret fiddles with the knob on the soldering iron, lifts it from its wire sheath, touches its tip to the damp sponge. It gives off a faint, resentful hiss.

It's not just about *me*, she says. You know that.

Under the tip of the soldering iron a drop of molten metal shines silver, then dulls to gray. His mother's eyes are shimmering, like sunlight speckles on wind-rippled water. They tighten and twitch, as if she can't quite make them focus.

I have to, she goes on. I promised them. I owe it to— She hesitates. I owe this, she says.

The Duchess places a hand on top of hers, and Bird sees the tenderness there. The affection.

Margaret looks up, her eyes meeting the Duchess's, and the Duchess sighs—not convinced, but resigned. I'll come tomorrow morning and take Bird, then, she says.

Bird's head jerks up. Take me, he demands. Take me *where*?

To see Sadie, Margaret says brightly. Domi will take the two of you out of the city. Just for one day. While I get this—she waves a hand at the table—this project under way.

Somewhere nice, Domi says. I think you'll like it.

Why, Bird says. Unconvinced and wary.

His mother sets the soldering iron down, leans across the table, takes his hand in both of hers.

There are some things I have to do, she says. Which I can't do with you here. Domi'll take you, and bring you to Sadie, and then we'll both come and fetch you back. Do you trust me?

Bird hesitates. On the table, the soldering iron lets off a thin curl of smoke. A hot scent, singed metal and pine. He looks at his mother, her hands calloused and rough. But still they are strong and warm and gentle on his. The same hands he remembers lifting a seedling from the soil, plucking an inchworm from his T-shirt and setting it in the grass. Almost by instinct, they align their hands together, finger to finger, palm to palm, the way they used to when making promises. Now his hands are nearly the size of hers. He looks at the deep brown pools of her eyes, and finally he sees her. His mother. She's still there.

Okay, he says, and his mother closes her eyes, lets out a breath.

Tomorrow morning, she says, in Domi's direction. Say ten o'clock. Come for him then.

She opens her eyes and peels her hand away, then picks up the dangling ends of the wires and crimps them savagely.

We don't have much time left, she says. Still a lot to do.

By the time the Duchess leaves, the rain has slowed to a drizzle. As the afternoon begins to fade, Margaret snaps a lid onto the last cap. It is Wednesday. Tomorrow will be three years since she left home.

Enough, she says, softly, and though Bird can hear it, it's clear she's speaking to herself. As if she's telling herself to let go. Giving herself permission to stop, or to move on, neither of them will ever be quite sure which.

With one hand she sweeps the pile of bottle caps from the table and into a plastic bag. Then she hesitates.

Do you want to come with me, she asks. Just this one last time.

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For almost four weeks she's been making and planting them, over a hundred a day, in plain sight. No one paid any attention to the old women who wandered the streets, gathering bottles and cans to sell; if anything, people edged back or turned away, embarrassed or disgusted or both. She'd seen them for years: of all things the Crisis had not changed, of all things that had survived, somehow these women were one of them. Dogged, unproud, patiently sifting the trash for what could be salvaged—and many of them, even before the Crisis, Asian. Their faces reminded her of her grandmother's, her mother's, her own, and she thought of them each time she pulled her straw hat lower over her eyes and shuffled down the sidewalk, bending over garbage bins or at the roots of trees. Dressed like one of them, she could go anywhere, if she was careful.

Still, there were close calls. Sometimes the police came: she never saw those who'd called, only looked up to see them peeking from behind the curtains as the patrol car pulled up beside her. When the officer approached, she would tuck a twenty into his back pocket, but once that wasn't enough. He'd clutched her elbow with tight fingers, his breath hot on the side of her neck, until she followed him into an alley and undid his zipper, slipped her hand beneath his waistband. As he writhed and groaned, she'd fixed her gaze on the badge on his chest until he'd arched backward and scrabbled at her hair and let out one last strangled yelp, and at last she was free to go on her way. When she'd straightened herself and emerged back onto the street, the patrol car was pulling away, and in the windows above she saw the lights on, the people behind it going about their delicate lives, the ragged woman below already forgotten.

Today, she must be extra careful. With Bird in tow, she can't afford a mistake. They will be quick. The last few places she hasn't been.

Stay a few steps behind and pretend you don't know me, she says, pulling on her hat. And wear your sunglasses.

They emerge from the subway at West Seventy-Second Street: the territory of wealthy women with rhinestoned phone cases, of small white dogs on taut leashes. Everywhere the sidewalks are a damp silvery gray, the car windows streaked with rain. On the corners, the bodegas still have umbrellas hooked over their door handles, ready for sale.

Margaret slips the first of the bottle caps from the bag on her wrist, palms it in one curled fist. After a few minutes of searching, they find a spot: a trash can, half overflowing. Crushed beer cans and plastic wrappers spilling onto the wet pavement.

Stand there, Margaret murmurs. Behind the screen of Bird's body, she stoops as if to rummage in the bin, then sticks the bottle cap under the can's lip, against a handy wad of gum. There, she says. That ought to hold it.

Bird takes a step back from the trash can and eyes it warily. To anyone else it would still look innocuous and ordinary; your eyes would glide right past it. Just another of the city's uglinesses you'd do your best to ignore. But to him, now, the place is marked—with menace or promise, he isn't sure which—and he can't seem to turn away.

What will it do, he asks, though Margaret can see what he's already imagining: flash, flames, a mushroom of smoke. She doesn't answer. Already she's pulled the next cap from her pocket.

Come on, she says. We've got to hustle.

For weeks Margaret has done this daily, and her eyes zero in on likely spots: wedged into a sewer grate, buried in a finger-wide crack in a building's foundation. She pokes one cap neatly into the belly of a squirrel half crushed by a truck.

I don't know, she says, wiping blood from her fingertips as she rises from the curb. They might come sweep it away.

She surveys the purpling mash of fur and flesh, the crust of flies beginning to gather.

But probably not, she says. I don't think they'll bother. Not by tomorrow, anyway.

They tuck them everywhere, these little capsules, and soon Bird begins to help, eyes adjusting to see hiding places everywhere, the way your sight adjusts to the dark. Some of the spots Margaret dismisses as too obvious, too neat. Somewhere messy, she says. Somewhere no one will want to touch. Bird runs a half step ahead, then two, then three, finding places for them all. Inside dumpsters reeking sweetly of rotting fruit; in corners where homeless men took their morning piss. At the feet of trees, nestled between bullets of dog shit. He forgets to question, for a moment, what they are for. It is a reverse treasure hunt, a game he and his mother are playing. Bottle cap by bottle cap, the bag on Margaret's arm lightens, and Bird feels a swirl of glee at the clever places they've found, a sense of power and awe when he thinks how many of these caps are hiding out there. He calculates: a hundred a day, for a whole month.

Is that all of them? Bird asks, when she's placed the last one. In a rusted crevice in a lamppost, just outside the entrance to the park.

That's everything, Margaret says shortly, and lets out a sigh—of satisfaction? Of sadness? It isn't clear.

With the last bottle cap planted, she abandons the trash bag she's carried as camouflage all these weeks, adding it to a nearby heap. It is garbage day in this neighborhood and everywhere lopsided piles dot the curb, threatening to tip. Here and there, something has gnawed through the plastic, spilling a plume of trash across the sidewalk. She wipes her hands on the thighs of her pants, looks at him. Her Bird: wide-eyed and impressionable, trusting, eager for the future though he has no idea what it will hold. Half grown, but only half.

What can she teach him, what can she do for him, what can she give him to make up for what's been lost? She wants to buy him pretzels and ice cream and lemonade from a cart, to let him dance through the park, licking the salt and drips from his fingers. To watch him play silly games, rules changing as he goes: leapfrogging broken squares on the sidewalk, jumping high to slap stop signs as they pass. No: she wants to play those games with him. She wants to be just his mother for one day. As if she can correct all these years without her, with one golden afternoon.

A police car approaches slowly, on the prowl. The silhouettes of the officers inside: foggy blurs through the tinted glass.

In an instant Margaret catches Bird by the elbow, yanking him behind a nearby stoop. Crouched behind a pyramid of garbage bags, her arms cinch him tight, so close they can feel each other's hearts beating.

The car glides closer, suspicious. Scans the area. Then moves on.

Something thick and bitter coats the roof of Margaret's mouth. In her grip, Bird's shoulders are still a boy's: unmuscled and bony, terrifyingly breakable. She can't give him the beautiful afternoon he deserves, not yet. It isn't fair, she thinks. The reek of the garbage rises around them in a fug, curdled and clinging. The police car is long gone, but still she cradles him, eyes shut, face pressed into the impossible warmth of his hair. When she finally loosens her arms and looks down at him, his gaze is startled, but trusting. Searching her face for a cue.

It's okay, she whispers. Don't be scared.

I'm not scared, he says. I knew we'd be okay.

With a shaky smile Margaret gives him a final squeeze, rises to her feet.

Let's get home, she says.

They ride the subway back to Brooklyn, Bird at one end of the car, Margaret at the other, so no one will suspect they're together. From afar she studies him: a small fidgety dark-haired figure, crossing one leg over the other, picking at the tape-mended tears in the seat. Behind his sunglasses she can't quite see his eyes, but when she looks closely she spots his furtive glances in her direction, the nearly imperceptible relaxing of his shoulders each time he finds her, leaning against a pole, keeping surreptitious watch from afar. This is the past three years, she thinks, condensed into an instant: orbiting at a distance, guessing but never sure what he is seeing, hoping that the idea of her is reassuring. No, she corrects herself. Not the past three years. This is simply having a child.

Planting the bottle caps, returning home—usually this is a well-rehearsed dance she can do without flinching. But today is different. Today she cannot stay still; every time the train stops, she jumps, warily scanning the other passengers as they doze or idly scroll on their phones. Her gaze darts again and again to the boy at the end of the car, now settled calmly, breaking from his daydream only to catch her eye once and give her the faintest conspiratorial smile. She tries and fails to smile back. Another train rushes by, headed elsewhere, and in the blurred shapes through the window she remembers the shadows of the officers in their cruiser, Bird's face against her shoulder, Bird's body thin and warm and vulnerable even in the cage of her arms. She hates herself for putting him there. When she holds her breath she can still smell the garbage, sour and suffocating all around. The train pulses beneath them, palpitating, the thumps of the wheels and roar of the engine and the sway of the car coalescing into a single word that throbs faster and faster inside her. By the time they reach the brownstone—walking a ways apart, slipping one at a time through the gate into the back garden—it churns in the base of her throat, and the moment they are safely back inside, it erupts out of her, leaving her breathless.

No, she says. No. I'm not doing it.

Bird turns back to look at her, frozen with her back against the door, as if barring the way out. For a moment she looks older, drawn; in the darkened hallway, lit only by the single bare bulb in the living room, her hair silvers, her face turns gray. A woman turned to stone.

It's not worth the risk, she says. In her own ears her voice is leathery, coarse and cracked.

But the bottle caps, Bird says. All the ones we just hid. And those ones you already hid.

It doesn't matter. We'll leave them.

But it's important. Bird shakes his head, as if she is trying to fool him. Isn't it? Whatever you're doing, I know it's going to help.

It doesn't matter, Margaret says again. Forget it. Forget the whole thing,

She rushes to him, clutching him close, cradling his face in her palms, because it is unbearable to remember him in danger, to imagine him ever being in danger again, let alone

putting him there herself. Whatever it takes, she and Ethan had promised each other all those years ago, and she still means it. She will do whatever it takes to keep their child safe.

Except. In her arms, Bird stiffens, then pulls away.

But—he says.

His brow furrows, a look she knows because she's felt it on her own face her whole life: trying to unknot what people do and what they say and what they mean. She'd inherited it from her mother, who had probably inherited it from her mother, and here it was on her child's face, too, staring back at her. An unintended legacy.

Birdie, she says. You're all that matters. I don't want to do it anymore. I just don't want to take any chances.

But you said—he begins, then stops again, and she hears everything he isn't saying aloud. But all those kids. Like Sadie. And their families. Isn't that why you left?

We'll find another way to help, she says. Something else. I don't know what. But something less risky.

Her mind is full of hazy, incoherent plans.

We'll figure something out, she says. Some way to stay together, somewhere to hide. Maybe Daddy can find a way to join us. Domi could help. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Bird.

She is babbling now; she can hear it. She grabs at his hands with both of hers, as if he is sinking, or she is, and this might keep them afloat. They are still jammed together in the hallway, the tiny space thick and hot with their breath, still speaking in whispers, but it feels to both of them as if they're shouting. All she wants is to not let him go.

None of this matters anymore, she says.

But even as she says it, she can see his face hardening, small embers in his gaze. How, she reads in his eyes, can you look away now that you know?

So it doesn't matter, he says, as long as it's happening to somebody else.

And she knows: it is too late to convince him, because she has already told him the truth.

Bird, she says, but the sheer disappointment on his face crumbles her voice into sand.

You're a hypocrite, he says.

He hesitates for only an instant, then plunges ahead anyway.

You're a terrible mother.

Margaret flinches, but Bird seems to feel it, too, recoiling as if she's struck him. In his face she sees a mirror of what must be happening on her own: nostrils tense and trembling, eye rims suddenly hot and red. With a sudden jerk, he pushes her away. Then he is running up the stairs, and she doesn't follow. She feels as wrung out and emptied as if she has vomited and vomited until nothing is left inside.

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In the dark, Bird falls into a stormy sleep.

He dreams a sharp and jagged tangle. Machines broken and rusted, gears inextricably meshed. Bottles of ink shattering in his hands, dying his fingers a watery blue. Someone has given him a building to hold up, and if he walks away it will collapse. He has caught a snake in a pillowcase, and he stands, bearing the writhing sack, nowhere safe to release it. In the last dream, just before he wakes, he is surrounded by other children, crammed so close he can feel their warmth, hear their breath, smell the sweat on their skin. But none of them speak to him or even look at him. Each time he reaches out they drift away soundlessly, a silent sea parting. Their eyes turning everywhere he is not: down at their dirty palms, over their shoulders, up at the clear and cloudless sky.

He wakes in a panic, burrows into the sleeping bag, tugs it up to his chin. Now he remembers: the bottle caps, the police cruiser, the argument. Everything his mother had told him over the past two days, all the reasons she'd had to leave, and how quickly she'd thrown all that aside. He thinks about the years without her, he and his father all alone, missing her. Once he'd have traded anything, everyone, to have her back.

He can't see anything, not even a crack of light from the hall. He listens for his mother, but hears nothing. Even the noises from outside—though there must be some—are muffled and muted to nothing more than whispers and faint hums. Somewhere she must be here, but he doesn't remember the way to her room, and in the unrelenting dark he isn't even sure he can find his way out. It is as if no one is there at all.

The wail of a siren slices through the window plastic: rising, here, gone. The only sign of life in the world. With a finger he drills into the corner of the plastic, stretching it, until a pinprick hole spreads. He bends down, puts his eye to it.

Outside he expects only more blackness, but instead what he sees is a dizzying array of light. Lights glimmer from window after window in a glittering mosaic. A sea of lights. A tidal wave of lights. Washing down over him in sparkling droplets. Each of those lights is a person, washing dishes or working or reading, completely oblivious to his existence. The thought of so many people dazzles and terrifies him. All those people out there, millions of them, billions, and not one of them knows or cares about him. He claps his hand over the hole, but still he can feel the lights sizzling against his skin like a sunburn. Even curling up inside the sleeping bag, the covers pulled over his head, brings no relief.

Out of him pours a cry so long buried the sound of it is like an earthquake in his throat. A name he hasn't uttered in years.

Mama, he cries, stumbling out of bed, and the darkness reaches up and tangles around his ankles, tugging him to the ground.

When he opens his eyes again he is curled up tight in a ball and a hand rests warm and heavy on the tender V between his shoulder blades. His mother.

Shh, she says, as he tries to turn over. It's all right.

She is sitting on the floor beside him. A less-dark shape against the dark.

You know, I felt the same way, she says, the first night I spent on my own.

Her palm warm and soft on the nape of his neck. Smoothing the hairs that bristle there.

Why did you bring me here, he says at last.

I wanted—she begins, and stops.

How to finish? I wanted to make sure you were all right. I wanted to make sure you would be all right. I wanted to see who you were. I wanted to see who you had become. I wanted to see if you were still you. I wanted to see you.

I wanted you, she says simply, and this is the only explanation she can give, but it is what he needs to hear. She had wanted him. She still wanted him. She hadn't left because she hadn't cared.

The understanding seeps into him like a sedative. Limpening his muscles, scooping smooth the hard edges of his thoughts. He leans against her, trusting her to bear his weight. Letting her arms twine around him like a vine round a tree. Through the tiny hole he's poked in the window covering, a thin strand of light pierces the black plastic, casting a single starry splotch on the wall.

She strokes his back, feels the nubs of his spine under the skin like a string of pearls. Gently she sets their hands together, finger to finger, palm to palm. Nearly as big as hers, his feet

perhaps even bigger. Like a puppy, all paws, the rest of him still childlike but eagerly lolloping behind.

Birdie, she says, I'm just so afraid of losing you again.

He looks up at her with the fathomless trust of a sleepy child.

But you'll come back, he says.

It is not a question, but a statement. A reassurance.

She nods.

I'll come back, she agrees. I promise I'll come back.

And she means it.

Okay, he murmurs. He isn't sure if he is speaking to her, or to himself. About what is to come, or what happened long ago. All of it, he decides. Everything. It's okay, he says again, and he knows, by the gentle tightening of her arms, that she has heard.

I'm here, she says, and Bird lets the darkness absorb him.

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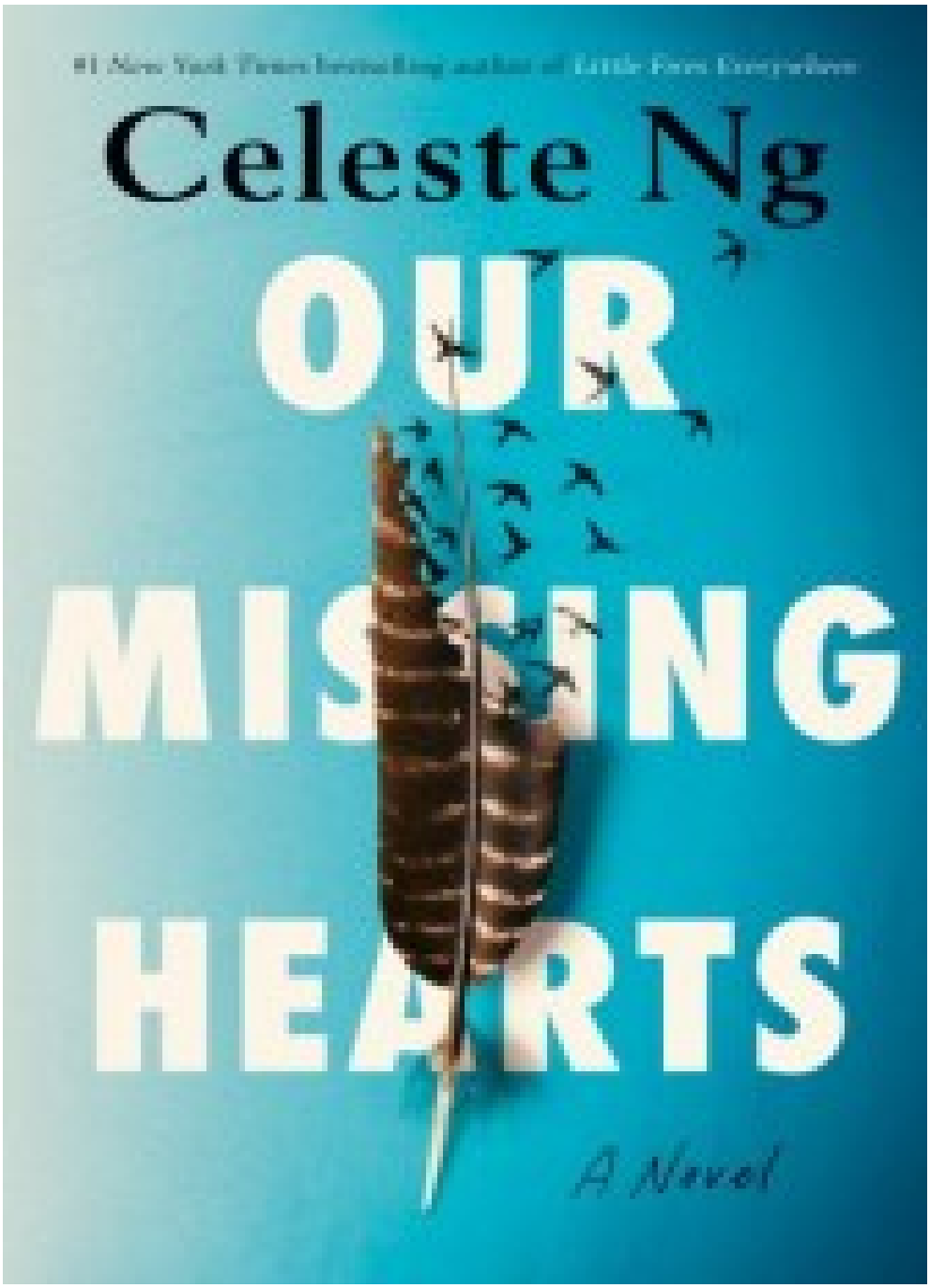
When Bird wakes again his mother is gone and it is morning. He is curled in the crib, legs folded nearly to chest, the sleeping bag left behind on the window seat, twisted like a shed skin. He has a dim memory of wanting to be small, of finding this safe place to hide. Of retreating. Draped over him is a blanket he doesn't recognize, heavy and too small and oddly shaped, and then he realizes it is not a blanket but his mother's coat.

III


#1 New York Times bestselling author of Little Fires Everywhere
Celeste Ng
OUR
MISSING
HEARTS
A Novel

In the morning, at ten o'clock precisely, the Duchess arrives in her long sleek car, driving herself this time. Just inside the back door, Margaret hesitates. But Bird doesn't. He is eager to go.

Good luck, he says. Confidence beaming from his eyes.

Okay, she says at last. I'll see you soon.

She pulls him close, kisses him on the temple, just where the pulse beats under the skin.

Then Bird, backpack slung over his shoulder, darts through the back garden and out the fence and slips into the car at the curb. There, at the other end of the seat, is a figure silhouetted against a tinted window, turning as he enters. Taller—half a head taller than him now, maybe—longer haired, but the same quick eyes, the same skeptical grin.

Bird, Sadie says. Oh my god, Bird.

She throws her arms around him. Her skin smells of cedar and soap. Bird, she says, I've got *so* much to tell you—

If you're going to gossip about me, please wait until we're out of the city, the Duchess says drily. I don't want to miss anything while I'm concentrating on traffic.

Sadie gives an exaggerated eye roll toward the front seat.

Fine, she says.

In the rearview mirror Bird sees the Duchess's eyes twinkle back at them, and this more than anything reassures him. Sadie is at ease here, in a way he's never seen. As the car shifts back into gear, she settles into her seat and turns her gaze to the window, letting out a soft sigh. It's been months since they saw each other, but somehow Sadie seems younger rather than older, less wary and watchful, as if she's finally able to breathe after a long time without air. As if she no longer has to fight her way through the world alone. He knows this feeling, or something like it: it is what he felt last night, when he'd called his mother and she came to him; it is what he felt this morning, waking under the comforting weight of her coat. He settles back into his seat, too, happy to be just a child for the moment, not in charge, simply along for the ride. There is so much he wants to ask Sadie—he cannot imagine living with the Duchess, for one thing—but he can wait.

Where are we going? he asks, as the Duchess nudges the car back into traffic again.

To the cabin, she says, and then they're off.

She drives fast, the Duchess, Bird and Sadie belted firmly in back and pinned in place by unrelenting acceleration, and as they burst out of the tangled gray nest of the city and onto the open road, it feels like a rocket launch into the stars.

I hope neither of you gets carsick, the Duchess says suddenly, with a glance into the rearview mirror.

Neither of them does. Bird is seldom in a car and the sheer speed of it exhilarates him. The tinted windows deepen the colors outside, turning the sky turquoise, the grass emerald. Even the road, which he knows is ordinary flat asphalt, gleams with a silver sheen. In the Duchess's proximity everything seems richer and more expansive, and this makes such inherent sense to him that he does not question it, simply settles against the soft leather and absorbs it. Beside him, Sadie draws in her breath quickly as a cloud of birds rises from a tree and scatters like a handful of confetti. For the first time he understands why dogs hang their heads out of windows: after so long inside, he, too, feels eager to lap up all he can, the very air tingling with life.

They drive for an hour and a half in companionable silence, the only noise being the occasional whoosh as they whip past another car or truck. The Duchess does not use signals, merely plants her foot firmly on the gas pedal and speeds past as the engine lets out a throaty

growl. Bird wonders where the other half of the highway is, the side returning to the city—on the far side of the trees, perhaps. Though he can't see it, it must be there. It is an exercise in faith. His mother has promised him she will come back. Another exercise in faith. He will remember everything and when he returns he will tell her what he's seen.

The Duchess has referred to it as the *cabin* and in the strictest sense this is true: a little milk carton of a house, encircled by trees. To Bird and Sadie, *cabin* calls to mind Abe Lincoln, hewn logs, and howling wolves. The Duchess's cabin is small and simple, but this is as far as the resemblance goes. The wooden floors in the main room gleam like buttery toffee. The big fireplace at its center is made of rounded river stones. Behind it are a pair of small bedrooms, a bathroom. On one wall, a window peeks through a clearing in the trees to the silver sparkle of water in the distance.

I'm trusting you not to drown, the Duchess says. There's not another house for miles, so no one will be coming to save you.

She lifts her wrist and checks a slim gold watch.

So here are the rules, she says. You are not to go off the property, but it's forty-seven acres so I assume that won't be too much of a limitation. You may swim, if you don't mind the cold. You may make a fire, if you're careful. In the fireplace only. I've left you a bag of food that should last until I come back tomorrow. Anything unclear?

Who built this house? Sadie asks. Somehow I don't think it was you.

She grins cheekily at the Duchess, and the Duchess smiles back indulgently.

My father did, she says.

She pauses suddenly and looks around, as if she is seeing the cabin for the first time. Taking in the wooden walls, the planked ceiling, the satiny floor.

Or rather, had it built, she says. That's how he did things. Her voice softens. When I was little, we used to sit on the shore, out there, and fish. He and my mother and I. I haven't been here in many years.

Then she shakes her head, as if shrugging away dust. So don't burn it down, please, she says crisply.

Are you going back to help my mother? Bird asks.

For the first time the Duchess looks uncertain.

You know your mother, she says, and Bird nods, even as he wonders if this is true. When she gets an idea in her head there's no stopping her. But she's coming to me when she's finished, and we'll be here tomorrow morning to pick you up.

And then what, Bird and Sadie both think, but neither of them dares to ask.

The Duchess checks her watch again.

I'd better go, she says. I won't get back until midafternoon as it is, and if there's traffic—

She picks up her keys from the table and turns back, looks from one of them to the other.

Don't worry, she says, her voice unexpectedly gentle. Bird, Sadie. Everything will be fine.

Of course it will, Sadie says. *We're* here, now.

• • •

When the Duchess is gone, Bird and Sadie—suddenly aware of all the months that have passed between them—lapse into bashful silence. Tacitly, they take stock of their surroundings. In the big main room, a table and three chairs, a kitchenette; in the bathroom, a shower and toilet and a small louvered window through which they can see nothing but trees. Two bedrooms, a larger one, cream colored with a big double bed, and a smaller one—pink—with a twin bed in the corner.

Without asking, Sadie kicks her shoes off in the big room, but Bird doesn't mind. It's clear who the house was built for—parents, child—and he is happy to let someone else play the role of adult for a little while longer. He settles on the sofa in front of the fireplace, and beneath him the aged leather crackles.

What is it like, he says. Living with the Duchess. What is *that* like?

Sadie laughs. Domi? she says. She seems super scary, but she's not.

As if a seal has been broken, she begins to chatter away. The first day, she said, she hadn't seen Domi at all. She'd been given a bedroom—up on the top floor, with a huge antique map of the world hung on the wall—and left to her own devices, and she'd spent all day exploring the museum of a house, trying to figure out what kind of place she'd landed in, what kind of woman Domi was. Margaret said she could be trusted, but Sadie was not used to taking things on assurance. Late that night, she'd found her way into Domi's office and was still behind the desk, reading the papers scattered there, when Domi came in.

And just what do you think you're doing? Domi demanded, and Sadie had looked up, studying her with new eyes.

So all these checks, she said, ticking her finger down Domi's ledger. To all these libraries. You know what they're doing. You're—helping.

A long moment, where they appraised each other anew.

Why, Sadie asked, and Domi said: It's one small thing. To start to make things right.

Sadie shut the checkbook. I want to help, she said.

She'd expected Domi to laugh, but she didn't. Instead Domi had sat down in the chair across the desk, as if Sadie were in charge and she was the supplicant, asking for a favor.

Maybe you can, she said.

They'd spent days talking, Sadie telling Domi everything she remembered about the authorities, her host families, the whole system of PACT. How they'd moved her, who had met her, where she'd gone. What she'd seen in the libraries, those months in which they'd hidden her. What she'd wished she'd done, and what she'd wished others had. Domi listening. Learning.

I couldn't go out, Sadie says to Bird. In case anyone spotted me. But Domi found me stuff to do. And she's been looking for my parents. Trying to trace where they've gone.

She pauses and swallows, and Bird knows better than to ask.

She said not to give up *yet*, Sadie says. She says—well, she says you just never know.

The day before Bird arrived, Domi's last lead had come up empty, and she'd broken the news to Sadie gently, the way you'd break news of a death. We'll keep looking, she'd promised, holding Sadie tight.

If you could have anything else, Domi had asked eventually, breaking the silence. What would you wish for.

Sadie considered.

A whole day where I could do whatever I wanted, she said. Without anyone watching or judging or tracing or tracking me. Just one day like that.

Hmm, Domi said. Might be tricky. But maybe there's a way. If you can wait a bit, until the right time.

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And now here they were, she and Bird. A day with no one watching or judging. A day to do what they wanted.

She told me, Sadie says. Some of the things she and your mom saw in the Crisis. The things they did—and the things they didn't do. Things she would've done differently. You know that

day you came? she adds smugly. I told her what to ask. She came upstairs and said, what would you ask Bird to find out if he really was Bird? And I told her, ask about his bike. Ask about his cereal. Ask about lunch.

Do you know? Bird asks. What my mom's doing.

Sadie pauses.

Domi wouldn't tell me exactly, she admits. Your mom came a few times, to plan. I tried to listen, she adds, rather proudly. But I couldn't hear much.

Together, they pool notes. By their math, Margaret must have hidden thousands of bottle caps, all over the city. At the Duchess's, Sadie had flipped through the newspapers and scanned news reports on television and online: no reports of people finding suspicious devices in bottle caps. No reports of trouble, at least not in the city. Whatever is being set up, it hasn't happened yet. For weeks this has been going on, like a spring being inexorably wound.

It's something big, Sadie says.

Of course it is, Bird says. My mother doesn't do things by halves.

I don't think Domi does either.

Their eyes meet.

Bird, Sadie says, I bet this will change everything. Whatever they're planning.

For a moment they pause, trying to imagine a world after. Inside Bird fizzes with excitement, and he jumps to his feet. Needing somewhere to put it.

Let's go down to the water, he says.

They follow the path through the clearing in the trees and there it is: sparkling in the sunlight, a little inlet stretching out to the blue expanse beyond. Bird scoops up a pebble and tosses it as far as he can. With a satisfying *bloop* the water swallows it in a single gulp, and rings ripple back to his feet at the shore. The Duchess is right: as far as they can see, there are no other houses, no other people, just a dense ruff of trees clustered around this spangle of a cove. From above it must look as if a giant has pressed a thumbprint into the forest, carving this perfect hollow for the cabin right at the water's edge.

He has never been so far from other people before. All his life, there have always been others nearby, watching, listening. Even if you couldn't see them, you knew they were there: just through the window, just on the other side of the wall, just out of sight around a corner. Out here there is no one and he feels himself expanding to gigantic size. Beside him, Sadie gives a sudden whoop, and he gives one, too, and from the nearby trees a cluster of sparrows takes flight, and then they are running, shrieking, churning the rocky shore with their footprints, darting after the velvet chipmunks that whip between the roots of trees and the squirrels that scamper out of reach. When they collapse, exhilarated and exhausted, the hum of silence that settles over them again feels louder than their shouting. For the moment neither of them thinks about their parents. They are simply children, at play.

Let's go in, Sadie suggests. Just up to our ankles.

They pry off their sneakers and socks and roll their jeans to their knees, and as they tromp in, small muddy rings echo outward from their feet. The water is frigid, but they don't notice or care. There are trees to climb, not the thin reedy saplings that ringed the playground, rippling the asphalt with their roots, but tall ones that stretch higher even than Sadie dares to venture.

They spend the afternoon noticing things: the fine white *V*s on each clover leaf, as if painted by a thin-bladed brush. The salmon-colored mushroom caps prodding up through the soil; the delicate lichens that cling to tree trunks like jade fish scales. A slim young birch, too tall for its slender whip of a frame, bowed nearly into an arch, but growing, still growing

nevertheless, sending its jagged green leaves toward the sky. October is nearly over, winter is coming, but things are growing, still alive.

As the afternoon starts to dim, Sadie gives a yelp, and Bird comes running just in time to see a little crab, the size of a quarter, scuttle across the sand. Now that he looks, he spots them everywhere, hiding in plain sight. They've been there all along; he just hadn't looked. For a while they try to catch them, chasing them across the shore, trying to scoop them up in their hands, and once Sadie gets close enough and gets nipped by tiny claws, but every time the crabs escape: down into holes in the sand, among the rocks, out into the vast blue blur of the water.

You need a chicken leg, Sadie says, with authority. She drops to a squat on the sand. That's what you need. To get big crabs, way bigger than this.

She pauses.

My mom took me one summer, she says. You tie a chicken leg to a string and throw it in the water, and when the crab grabs it, you pull the string toward you, really really slow, and the crab follows the chicken, and then you catch the crab in a net.

Bird imagines his own parents teaching him this: mud streaked, wading in the sea. Laughing together, the way he remembers. Reeling in a line heavy with prey. He wonders, suddenly, what time it is, what his mother is doing right now, if whatever she's planning has already begun. Above them the sky stretches wide and flat and blue, but he scans it anyway, as if they might spot plumes of smoke drifting all the way from the city.

Crabs eat chicken? he asks, pushing the thought away, and Sadie nods. They eat everything, she says.

My mom told me once, she goes on, rocking back on her heels, about this thing that happened where she grew up. Sometimes, like one night a year, all the crabs get confused and run up on the shore. It's like the tide and the phase of the moon, or something. A jubilee, it's called. You wake up in the middle of the night and go down to the beach and the water is just full of them. They practically *crawl* out—you can just reach in and pull them out, bucketsful. She and her cousins and aunts and uncles used to do it. People would fill their trucks. And they'd build a big bonfire and cook the crabs and have a midnight feast, right there.

Wow, Bird says.

She said when she was a girl, she would go to bed in her bathing suit every night in summer and lie there awake in the dark, just praying for a jubilee.

Sadie is lost in thought, her eyes trained on something off in the distance.

She always said we'd go down some summer and visit that side of the family so I could meet all my cousins, but we never did.

Overhead a hawk circles, lazy, in the sky.

We'll find her, Bird says. My mom, Domi—I'm sure they can find her.

They've been looking, Sadie says. I don't know if she's still out there.

He has never heard her sound so uncertain, and this disorients him.

If she's out there, Bird says confidently, they'll find her. His mother, he thinks, always keeps her promises.

This thing your mom is planning, Sadie says, this is *it*, Bird, it's going to change everything.

The tiniest of pauses, before she continues.

I mean, it has to. Right?

The little hitch in her voice, like a splinter, snags Bird's attention. Sadie's eyes appear to be fixed on the horizon, but in the warm afternoon light they shine glass-bright, glazed with tears. His own eyes go liquid and hot. He thinks of everything his mother has told him, of all the years

his father has been trying to protect him. Of the man in the pizza parlor, the man at the Common. The woman with her dog. Sadie's parents, his mother's parents. His father's parents retreating from their lives, Mrs. Pollard crouched anxiously beside his computer, D. J. Pierce's spit falling inches from his shoe. Everything that needs to be changed feels immense and immeasurable.

You know, he says. We could build a fire.

It works: her eyes come back from the realm of what if to what is. Right here? she says.

In the fireplace, Bird says. We don't have any crabs, but we can have a fire.

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Together, they lay out the wood. A small and concrete thing. My dad showed me how, Sadie says, he was a Boy Scout as a kid. He knew how to do lots of useful stuff, like tie knots, and find north using the stars. You stack it like a log cabin, like this. Dried grass, then sticks, then logs.

Bird flushes. His father has never taught him to do anything useful like this. Like the three little pigs, Bird says. Sadie laughs, and he feels an odd twinge of pride. It feels good, making someone else laugh.

Here goes, Sadie says, and lights a match with a quick grating flick.

The dried grass catches right away, and then the twigs, a burst of gratifying orange. Then the whole thing collapses and goes dark. Huff, puff, Sadie says. With a stick she sweeps the remnants of their fire aside. Let's try again.

They rebuild the crosshatches of wood, and Bird looks for something to help it catch faster, and it's then that he spots the stack of newspapers, set by the hearth. He reaches for one, begins to crumple it, then stops.

Look, he says.

The date on the paper is almost fifteen years old. The middle of the Crisis, they both realize.

SIXTH STRAIGHT DAY OF DISRUPTIONS ROIL DC; 400 ARRESTED; 12 RIOTERS, 6 OFFICERS SLAIN.

A photo covers the entire front page: Washington, DC, ablaze, a crowd of people on the run. Attacking? Fleeing? They can't tell, only that from the sharp angles of their bodies—arms and legs thrown wide—they are moving fast, forcefully, instinctively. They wear black, from the hats pulled low over their foreheads to the masks and scarves across their faces, all the way down to the lug-soled boots on their feet; they could be protesters or authorities, it's impossible to say. On the pavement, almost obscured, lies a woman's body, her face turned aside, blood matting her hair. In the background the Washington Monument juts like a single raised finger, dark against a smoldering orange sky.

With both hands Bird crushes the paper into a tight wad, hiding the photograph inside.

Let's try again, he says.

He sets the knot of paper in the middle of the miniature cabin they've built, and reaches for the matches again.

This time, the flame gobbles the paper, flaring up as the newsprint dissoves to ash. Small flames lick hesitantly at the sticks and begin to fade, and this time, Bird remembers something from long ago, something his father once told him. A word, and its story. He drops to hands and knees, sets his face before the flame. As gently as he can, he purses his lips and blows, as if blowing a kiss, or soothing a bruise, and the flames rise, the tinder crumples and shrivels and glows the most intense orange he's ever seen, and then—as he runs short of breath—fades back to gray. Sadie drops down beside him and blows, too, and the glow slowly returns, then grows. It is like watching color return to someone's face, like watching dawn spreading across a darkened sky.

In silence they tend the fire in turns—first Bird, then Sadie, then both together, breathing life into it—until the larger sticks catch, then the logs, and the flames grow steady and calm and hot.

Spirare, Bird hears his father say. *To breathe. Con: together. So conspiracy literally means breathing together.*

They make it sound so sinister, Sadie says, and only then does Bird realize he's spoken aloud. But breathing together, breathing the same air—it's actually kind of beautiful.

They sit for a moment, quiet, and Bird thinks back to the past days huddled with his mother around the coffee table. Piecing together her whispered story, both of them breathing in the same thick air. Sadie feeds a stick into the fire, nudging it closer to the little blaze until it begins to char and glow. Outside, the sun is falling but the night is still warm, and through the window they see the air ignite. Fireflies. In their excitement they have left the door open and a firefly drifts into the cabin, then another, green sparks shimmering in the red glow of the fire.

I used to hate her, Bird says suddenly.

But you don't anymore.

A long silence. Around them, bright flecks swirl and dip.

No, he says, and realizes it is true. Not anymore.

For dinner they eat from the paper bag of food the Duchess has left them. Bird heats water, tips in a packet of angel hair. It's good, Sadie says. You know my foster parents wouldn't let me use the stove? Thought I was a risk. Like I might set the whole house on fire.

They scrape the last dregs of sauce from their bowls.

What do you think she's doing right now? Bird says.

Sadie furrows her brow. She's getting ready, she says. Ready to set them all off.

By *them* she means the hundreds of bottle caps scattered all over the city.

Do you think— Bird hesitates. Do you think she's dangerous? I mean, she couldn't hurt anyone. Could she?

A long pause as they both turn this over in their minds.

I think, Sadie says finally, that anyone could hurt someone, if there was a really good reason.

Bird thinks of his mother, tugging him into the shadows as the police car approached, the sharp-toothed animal that suddenly reared in her eyes. He thinks of his father, that day on the Common, standing over the man who'd pushed him. Of the blood on his fist. They'd been dangerous, he thought; they'd loved him so fiercely it had made them dangerous.

They go to bed early, taking turns in the bathroom, letting their hard-earned fire die down to coals. They are eager for tomorrow. They are full of plans, each building on the other's like a tower of dominoes. Tomorrow, Domi and Margaret will bring them back to the city. Where everything will be different, they are sure, because of whatever Margaret is doing.

It's happening, right now, Sadie says with glee. Bird, just think, it's happening, and Bird has no reply.

At sundown, she begins.

She opens the old laptop, the one she's scrounged together from parts found on the curb: all those late-night books she'd studied, late at night in all those libraries, put to good use. For the first time she turns on the wi-fi. It is a risk—signals that go out can be traced back. For so long she's muffled her footsteps, muzzling herself. Now it is time to speak.

Her fingers tap the keyboard, running the program she's rigged. She sends out the signal and waits, watching for them to connect. To prick up their ears for her commands. The bottle caps she has been making and planting, four weeks' worth. Everything she'd planned so carefully before Bird had arrived.

She has done the math: one every two blocks, all the way down to the Financial District, nearly all the way up to Harlem. Weatherproof in their little plastic shells, small enough to be concealed in places where they won't be disturbed for weeks. Even if one were spotted, it wouldn't be looked at: just a worthless scrap, a piece of litter to be swept away. No one examined the things in the gutters, in the dustpans, in the street cleaner's bins; those were the things people tried to ignore. By her count, she's planted two thousand and eleven: how many of them have survived and are working, how many will connect and answer her call?

Ten at first, now fifteen. Twenty-five.

She hadn't known, at first, what to do with the stories she'd collected. The first wisp of an idea had formed when one of the mothers clasped her hand, her voice trembling. *Tell everyone what happened to my girl. Tell it to the world. Shout it from the skies if you can.* Later it had crystallized, on a sunny morning in LA, when she looked up and saw it: a cell-phone tower, disguised as an unconvincing tree. Swathed in green leaf-print canvas, right-angled arms held mannequin-stiff. The wrong kind of tree for the climate, an evergreen towering over the palms, head and shoulders higher than the real trees, emitting a faint hum. What kind of messages was it beaming through the air? For a moment she'd closed her eyes and imagined it: all those invisible words made audible, a cacophony of voices crisscrossing the city like a net.

She thinks of it again as she watches the monitor, watching the bottle caps answer her call. Seventy, a hundred, two hundred.

Inside each, a tiny receiver tuned to the precise frequency her computer now emits. And also: a tiny speaker. Reception up to ten miles, Domi had promised her, crystal clear, and you'll hear it from a block away, at least. Her father had made his fortune on this technology, though he'd surely never imagined it put to this use. One by one they wake, the counter ticking upward. Two hundred and fifty. Three hundred. Each a glowing pinprick on the map, spreading northward from the Battery, freckling Chinatown and Koreatown and Hell's Kitchen, dotting Midtown to the Upper West Side and beyond. Over five hundred now, the counter still climbing. When it reaches nineteen hundred, it pauses, and she does a quick calculation. Nearly ninety-five percent, a solid A. Wouldn't her parents be proud.

She lifts the microphone, clears her throat, and across the city, block after block, bottle-cap speakers crackle to life. Picking up the signal she is transmitting. A voice emerging from the knotholes of trees, the undersides of trash cans, cracks in front stoops and behind lampposts: everywhere and anywhere she has wedged a bottle cap in the past month. Hiding unnoticed until this moment, when from that little round cap her voice would spring, surprisingly loud, startling those nearby. In unison, this voice speaking—slightly scratched, as if from wear—all over the city. Only one voice, but speaking the words of many.

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It doesn't have to be live, Domi had said. A recording, maybe. It would be safer. You don't have to be there. She'd said it gently, as if trying to persuade a stubborn child.

Margaret shook her head. I don't have to, she said, but I want to.

She couldn't explain why, but she feels this in her bones: certain things must be done in person. Testifying. Attending the dying. Remembering those who were gone. Some things need to be witnessed. But there was another reason she herself couldn't quite see, could only sense its presence, the way you sensed a ghost. She had not been there to see her parents die; they had died alone, without her, and she should have been there, to see the man who'd pushed her father and sear his face into her mind; she should have been there by her father's hospital bed, among the beeping, blinking machines, to kiss him and send him on his way. She should have been there, that next morning, to catch her mother as she fell, perhaps to save her, but at the very least to give her a loving face to focus on as the light in her eyes faded. She could not have articulated this, but she could feel the shape of this wrong inside her, the way she could feel her own heart kettle-drumming in her chest. They had deserved that kind of caretaking and no one had given it to them and she would, in this small way, give that solemn witnessing and hand-holding to each of the stories she was about to tell.

Alone in the darkened brownstone, she opens the first of the notebooks, a library of stories she has gathered and borne on her body for the past three years. The words of those she's spoken to, faithfully jotted down in microscopic print, entrusted to her to keep and to safeguard and to share. She begins to read the words these families have whispered, letting them speak through her mouth. One by one, child by child, she tells each story.

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The outlines first. Only a first name, nothing that could betray anyone: *Emmanuel. Jackie. Tien. Parker.* The city they'd lived in: *Berkeley. Decatur. Eugene. Detroit.* Their age, when they'd been taken: *Nine. Six. Seven and a half. Two.*

And then, shading in those outlines: the contours and textures of a particular life lived, the details that made each child themselves. The smallest and most human moments, that explained who they were. *Keep to the small.*

> *His smile was so sudden. One moment he'd be laughing, happy. The next, instantly stern. Even playing peekaboo, he took it so seriously. As if he knew even then we might vanish, with the twitch of a blanket, and disappear.*
>
> *She wouldn't eat any food that had corners. I had to cut her sandwiches into circles. For months, I lived off the cut-off corners she left behind.*

At first people stop, baffled. Where is this voice coming from? They glance over their shoulders, searching for the source. Someone behind them? Behind that tree? But no, there is no one. They are alone. And then they begin to listen; they can't help it. One story, then another. Then another. They pause and soon they are not alone any longer, there are clusters of them, then dozens, so many people standing silently together, listening. These steely New Yorkers—people who could ignore a troupe of breakdancers spinning around subway poles, who could swerve around a swarm of camera-toting tourists or a man dressed as a giant hot dog without losing speed or focus, without even a sideways glance—they paused, listening, and the teeming rivers of the city's streets thickened and clogged. The voice comes from all around them, as if from the air itself, and though later a few of them would say it sounded godlike, from the sky, most of those who heard it would insist on the exact opposite: it felt like a voice inside them, speaking somehow both to them and from them, and though it was speaking the stories of strangers, people they had never met, children who were not their own, pain they had not experienced, it

was somehow speaking not just to them but with them, of them, that the stories it told, one after the other in a seemingly endless stream, were not someone else's but one larger story of which they, too, were a part.

The night they took you I was angry with you, you'd scribbled on the wall with a permanent pen, you'd scribbled on your hands and your face and part of the carpet, too, angry black scrawls. I'd smacked you and you'd gone to bed crying, and I was scrubbing the wall with a sponge when the knock came at the door.

She wants people to remember more than their names. More than their faces. More than what happened to them, more than the simple last fact that they were taken. Each of them needs to be remembered as a person unlike any other, not a name on a list but as *someone*, someone unlike anyone else.

Do you remember that day we went to the pier? That day the world was full of things to look at, the sea lions gliding through the harbor and the Ferris wheel spinning against the blue sky and the seagulls swooping overhead, and when it started to get dark I said, let's have ice cream for dinner, and you looked at me as if I'd grown wings. You had peanut butter fudge with whipped cream, and I had chocolate. On the way home the Muni was crowded so you sat in my lap and fell asleep and drooled peanut-butter spit down my neck.

I hope you remember that day. I hope you remember the ice cream for dinner.

She cannot go on forever; she knows this. Already, somewhere, they are tracking her. They are hunting the speakers, smashing them one by one. She has made it as hard as she can. They will have to follow the sound, elbowing through the crowds of listeners, winding the thread of her voice back to its source. They will need flashlights; they will have only those thin needles of light to probe every crevice and cranny. They will have to feel with their hands, into the gum-crusted undersides of city garbage cans, into slimy gutters and rancid grates and under piles of dog shit, scrabbling to extract the bottle caps that she has so painstakingly concealed. The speakers cannot be turned off; they can only be destroyed, and her trackers will smash them under boot heels, but the sound will continue, from other speakers, just a block or two away; with every one they find, they will realize there are hundreds more, that no matter how far they stretch their net there is somewhere farther that these stories still reach. It is a game of hide-and-seek, and she will draw it out as long as she can. They will never find all the speakers, but sooner or later they will trace her signal, the wi-fi that connects her to those speakers in a trail of tiny digital footprints; they will follow those footprints back to this house, where she sits with a microphone and her stack of notebooks, their covers softened and curved from being carried on her body for so long. By the time they arrive, she will be gone.

She will tell as many stories as she can. She still has time. One family's story. Then the next. What do you want to remember, she'd asked those left behind. What would you want to say to your child. She'd recorded those words and now, as she promised, she says it for them, the words that they're unable to utter aloud.

When I can't sleep I count your freckles in my mind. On your temple, where the skull is thinnest. On your right cheek, just beside your ear. On the inside of your elbow, on the side of your knee, a pair on the knob of your wrist. These marks you have carried since you were inside my body. I wonder if they are still there, or if they've faded with time. If you have more marks on your skin now that I will never see.

At bedtime you used to ask me for something to dream about. Tonight, I would say, you will dream you are a mermaid, exploring a huge sunken city. Or: Tonight you will fly on a rocket and sail past glittery stars. One night, I was tired. I couldn't think of anything. The truth is, you'd been a brat all day and I just wanted you to sleep. I said, Tonight you will

dream that you are lying warm and safe and sleeping in your bed. That's a boring dream, Mom, you said, that's the most boring dream I've ever heard. And it was, but now it is the best dream I can think of, the only dream I can imagine.

When they begin to get close, she will abandon ship. She tracks the speakers blinking out one by one on her map, marking how close they've come. Domi is waiting on Park Avenue; the plan is that Margaret, after broadcasting what she can, will smash the laptop and take her notebooks and run.

Is anyone listening, out there? Are people simply rushing by? And how much of a difference can it make really, just one story, even all these stories taken together and funneled into the ear of the busy world—a world moving so quickly that voices and sounds Doppler into a rising whine, so distracted that even when your attention snags on the burr of something unusual, you are dragged away before you can see it, uprooting it like a bee's spent stinger. It is hard for anything to be heard and even if anyone hears it, how much of a difference could it really make, what change could it possibly bring, just these words, just this thing that happened once to one person that the listener does not and will never know. It is just a story. It is only words.

She does not know if it will make any difference. She does not know if anyone is listening. She is here, locked in her cabinet, drawing cat after cat, slipping them through the cracks. Unsure if they will sink even one claw into the beast outside.

But still: she turns another page and goes on.

I saved all the teeth you left under your pillow, in a little tin that once held mints. Sometimes I take them out and tip them into my hand, and let them clink together like beads in my palm. I keep the tin in my jewelry box. It feels like the right place for these fragments of you, the right place for tiny precious things.

I hope you are happy.

I hope you know how much

I hope

Up until the end, she believes she still has time. That she can share every story she's gathered and recorded and promised to pass on, and still make it back to Bird. But she is mistaken. The darkest part of night is over, and far away, just where the sky meets the ocean, the sun is beginning to rise. And then she hears it: a car, then another and another. Another. The squeal of tires skidding to a halt, the sudden ominous silence as engines cut off one by one.

She still has notebooks full of stories that she will not have time to speak. She has miscalculated. She's stayed too late.

They settle on her with their dark wings then, nearly suffocating her: all of her many mistakes of motherhood. Each and every time she'd brought pain to the one she most wanted to protect. Once she'd swung Bird to her shoulders and his head hit the doorframe, a plum-colored bruise blooming on his forehead. She'd handed him a cup, and the glass—invisibly cracked—shattered in his mouth. The catalog of failures in her mind is endless and indelible and each memory digs its talons into her, weighing her down, pinning her in place. She'd pricked him with a needle, trying to dig out a splinter, raised a pearl of blood on his thumb. She'd snapped at him, mid-tantrum, and left him alone to cry. She'd put him in danger, with a line of a poem, and then she'd left him alone for so long, and soon he would be alone all over again. Would he ever understand? Through the feathery blackness she glances down at the notebooks spread on the table. A whole stack of them, lined with the stories of others, all with their own memories and regrets, all their failings and love, all things they wished they could tell the children they might never see again. Maybe, she thinks, this is simply what living is: an infinite list of transgressions that did not weigh against the joys but that simply overlaid them, the two lists mingling and

merging, all the small moments that made up the mosaic of a person, a relationship, a life. What Bird will learn, then: That his mother is fallible. That she is only human, too.

She closes the cover of the notebook before her, sets it atop the others. She will take these stories with her the only way she can: she strikes a match and sets the stack aflame.

And then, because she has just one more moment, because they are on their way but not here yet, she begins to tell one last story. An apology, a love letter. A story she has never written down because she knows it by heart. She closes her eyes and begins to speak.

Bird. Why did I tell you so many stories? Because I wanted the world to make sense to you. I wanted to make sense of the world, for you. I wanted the world to make sense.

When you were born, your father wanted you to have my name. Miu: a seedling. He liked that idea, you as our little sprout. But I chose his: Gardner. One who makes things grow. I wanted you to be not only the grown, but the grower. To have power over your own life, turning your energy toward what's to come, leaning into the light.

Except some people have another story for your name. Gar: a weapon. Dyn: an alarm. Gardner, the one who hears the warning call and comes bearing arms. A warrior, shielding what's behind, protecting what's dear. I didn't know that then. But now, I'm happy you have both in you. A caregiver, tending the future; a fighter, defending what's already here.

There are so many more stories I wish I could tell you. You'll have to ask others—your father, your friends. Kind strangers you will meet someday. Everyone who remembers.

But in the end every story I want to tell you is the same. Once upon a time, there was a boy. Once upon a time there was a mother. Once upon a time, there was a boy, and his mother loved him very much.

When does she stop speaking? When are you ever done with the story of someone you love? You turn the most precious of your memories over and over, wearing their edges smooth, warming them again with your heat. You touch the curves and hollows of every detail you have, memorizing them, reciting them once more though you already know them in your bones. Who ever thinks, recalling the face of the one they loved who is gone: yes, I looked at you enough, I loved you enough, we had enough time, any of this was enough?

She raises the laptop above her head and smashes it to the floor, and behind her she hears the door open.

When Bird and Sadie wake it is sunrise. At first neither of them remembers where they are, and then it comes back to them in a rush: the cabin. The project. Outside the trees are like long straight arrows pointing at the sky. They are certain Margaret's plan has been a success, certain that she will have changed everything, certain that when she and the Duchess arrive they will be whisked back to a city completely transformed, a world set on its axis again.

Only no one comes. They finish their cereal and sit side by side on the cabin steps, waiting. An overcast day with heavy air, dampening the sound around them like a thick quilt. Now and then they swear they hear something—the crunch of tires on gravel, or the grumble of an engine approaching. But still no one comes.

They'll be here soon, Sadie says, confident. I bet there's just traffic. They're coming.

There is no telephone in the cabin, no computer, no internet. Nothing to tether them to the outside world. It is at this point that Bird and Sadie realize they only have the faintest sense of where they are; on the trip up, they'd stopped paying attention to the road signs the farther they got from the city. It hadn't mattered then, but they think of the forty-seven acres between them and the nearest person. How would you find another person, in such a space? Far off above the trees, the clouds gray and darken.

What if no one ever comes back, Bird says. In the silence they both consider this. They could live here, for a time; it is warm and sheltered; the bag of food the Duchess has left could last a few days, maybe longer. And then?

Maybe we could find a neighbor, and use their phone, Sadie says.

But both of them know this is impossible. Which direction would they head in, and how would they find another house, and once they got there, who would they call, anyway? They try to imagine: they could follow the long gravel driveway all the way back out to the road, and then follow the road. It must lead somewhere: either back to the city, or farther away from it, but it would take them to people. And then? They pause here, stalled, unsure what follows. Whoever found them will surely call the authorities and they will be taken away, and not together. There's a sudden rustling and rattling, and both of them tighten in anticipation, but there is no one there, no movement; it's just the wind, picking up, throttling the trees. Branches whip and thrash in the air. He had never known the forest could be so noisy, or so wild.

Maybe something happened, Bird says.

He doesn't say it, but both of them are thinking it: maybe they were caught, Margaret or the Duchess or both of them, maybe they've been captured, maybe no one will ever come for them again. Or—a much worse thought, one that comes to both of them in near unison though neither of them dares voice it—maybe the authorities are coming for them now, on their way to track them down. The air suddenly cools, puckering goose bumps on their skin.

Sadie shakes her head. As if by refusing to believe, she can will it from the universe.

That could never, she says. They're too careful, they had everything planned. They wouldn't *let* that happen.

Let's go inside, Bird says, pushing to his feet, but Sadie does not budge. Come on, he says, look, it's about to rain anyway. He is right, the air has grown clammy and tingles, teetering on the edge of a storm. But Sadie plants her feet more firmly on the step, hugs her knees.

Go if you want to. I'm staying here. They'll come soon, I know it.

Bird wavers in the doorway, not wanting to leave Sadie alone, not wanting to be alone himself. Neither outside nor in, he scans the gravel drive trailing off into the trees, around the curve and out of sight. Still nothing, and fat drops begin to fall, inking dark blotches on the wooden steps.

Sadie, he calls. Sadie. Come on.

The rain hisses as it falls, like a thousand tiny snakes, and where it hits, the ground writhes. It needles the dirt, punching holes that widen to craters that fill and swell into ponds. It ricochets off the gravel driveway and off the steps, jumping ankle high. Off Sadie, who still sits, faithful, stubborn, eyes fixed on the path to the road, until she is soaked to the skin and finally comes inside.

Bird shuts the door and the quiet that follows, after the whirl and roar of the storm, is deafening. Water trickles from Sadie's clothes to pool at her feet. She doesn't even wipe her face, just lets her hair drip straight down her cheeks, so Bird can't tell if she's crying. He reaches out a hand to touch her shoulder, but she swats him aside.

I'm fine, she says.

She goes into her bedroom for dry clothing, and when she returns she has something in her hands.

Look at this, she says. Look what I found in the nightstand.

A small orange bottle, a white lid. She gives it a shake and inside, pills rattle like hail.

Together they read the faded label: Duchess, Claude. In case of panic attack, take 1 tablet. The date of expiration right in the middle of the Crisis. Sadie twists off the lid.

Only two left, she says. Out of—she consults the label—a hundred and fifty.

Methodically, as the rain thrums overhead, they turn out the hidden pockets of the house. In the dresser: lavender oil, a meditation guide, three kinds of sleeping pills. Letters in a language they can't read, with foreign stamps. In the other nightstand, a broken pencil, a booklet of crosswords—*Easy as Pie!*—an empty bottle of whiskey, an empty carton of bullets. Now they notice the twin sags on either side of the mattress, the worn spots on the carpet where someone must have stood, morning after morning, gathering the strength and the willpower to begin the day again. They notice the crack in the bedside lamp, where it has been broken and then repaired. Burn marks here and there on the wooden floor where hot ash from cigarettes fell.

They have nothing but time. Now and then they think they hear a sound, someone approaching, but when they run to the small front window and peer out, it's always just the wind, the rain rattling against the side of the cabin, the trees creaking and groaning in the storm. In the kitchen, at the back of the topmost cupboard, they find old packages of pasta and beans, with best-by dates from before their births.

For the first time they are able picture it: the long months of waiting, far away here in the woods. Wondering what was happening in the world beyond, worrying about when it would reach them. Dreading what kind of world would await them when they reemerged. They'd had the luxury of retreat, nestled in this cozy house with plenty of food and running water and warmth. They'd been able to bunker down and wait for the worst of the Crisis to pass. Now here they are, huddled together, and finally they understand it, too: the cabin feels like the only safe place, a refuge they clutch with desperate hands. Was someone coming? Who would it be, what news would they bring of the outside world, would they be friend or foe, and when would they arrive? Would they die here, alone and barricaded, sequestered and isolated from the rest of the world? And would that be better or worse than whatever might happen to them if they'd stayed and taken their chances, or did it even matter?

In the middle of the gray afternoon they build another fire, feeling the need for warmth, for heat, for something dancing and glowing and alive. It is easier this second time; now they know how, and they watch the headlines on the crumpled newspapers fade into the flame.

DOW FALLS FOR FOURTH STRAIGHT MONTH; FED WEIGHS BAILOUT

CHINESE MARKET MANIPULATION LIKELY A FACTOR IN DOWNTURN, OFFICIALS SAY

Even after the fire has caught, they leaf through the stack of papers, taking in the headlines, the front-page photos. Peeling backward in time. LARGE GATHERING BAN TO REMAIN IN PLACE THROUGH AUGUST. HOUSE WEIGHS MEASURES TO WEED OUT PRO-CHINA SUBVERSIVES. POLLS SHOW OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED 'PACT' BILL.

Enough, Sadie says, dropping the papers back onto their stack. I don't want to see any more.

In silence, they feed the fire, slipping it a stick here and there, offering it a log, nuzzling it into the flame, watching anxiously until it catches light. Flecks of rain slither down the chimney, making pops and hisses of steam. Both of them feel, without discussing it, that they must keep this fire burning, that if it goes out something terrible will happen, something precious and irretrievable will be lost, that keeping it burning is their only recourse, that somehow not only their fate but the world's rests on them keeping this fire alight. If they can keep it alight, they are sure, Margaret and the Duchess will come back for them, Margaret will not only be all right but will bring news that her plan has succeeded, that everything has suddenly changed, that all that needs righting has been restored. They will earn this miracle. If they let it go out . . .

They don't think about this, not daring to put those fears into words. That evening they don't bother to cook, subsisting instead on snacks from the food bag, eaten by the handful whenever one of them is hungry. Dried cranberries, crackers, roasted almonds: they nibble their way through the day. As it gets dark, they do not retreat back to their separate rooms. Instead, they sit together by the hearth, watching the flames devour the logs one by one.

When they peek outside everything seems blurred, everything outside uncertain and obscured. No longer trees but an impression of trees: green blurs sliced by wet, dark streaks. No longer the calm water from yesterday but a slate-gray blur, something swelling and churning just at the edge of their sight. They can't see far; a haze hangs in the air, like the spray of salt from the sea, and they pull the curtains shut so they don't have to glimpse whatever terrifying fight is raging outside. The wind grinds against the roof, the windowpanes, the ground—so much rain, it is indistinguishable from an ocean's roar. They are a small boat caught in a squall, everything topsy-turvy. Which way is up? They are no longer sure. The wood-paneled floor might be the deck, upended; the rain scouring the roof might be the waves, lashing and gnawing at the keel below their feet.

I'm scared, Bird says.

Sadie's hand creeps into his, warm and comfortingly damp and alive.

Me too, she says.

Late into the night, they feed the ravenous fire, neither of them ready to give up, nodding off well after midnight, waking up as the fire dies down and the room grows cold, adding another log, coaxing it back to life, rousing it from the ashes again and again until, just before sunrise turns the sky gray-gold, they both fall asleep, side by side beneath the scratchy wool blanket, and at last the fire goes out.

They wake up, stiff-necked and cold, and look at the darkened hearth, then at each other.

It doesn't matter, Sadie says quickly. It doesn't count. It's almost daytime now.

She says this with all her old brash confidence, but he knows she needs him to agree.

He nods. It's okay, he says.

Outside the roar of the storm has stilled. The silence swells and echoes, their ears gradually adjusting to the absence of sound. Now the taps of the slowing rain are discrete, fingers drumming. Instead of an indistinguishable blur, they can make out individual sounds. There is a single drip of rain pattering against the window. There is the single ping of a drop clanging against the gutter like a bell. There, suddenly, is a single bird testing the predawn air, then another bird answering its call.

Though it's still dark, they eat the last of the cereal for breakfast, because even at the end of the world, they think, these things make them feel more prepared for whatever is to come. Then, without discussing it, they take up their posts on the front steps, though they still are not sure what they are waiting for. The sky is just beginning to lighten. After yesterday's storm the air feels clean and crisp, the birds shouting at each other from the trees. The rain-damp world seems two shades darker—the rocks changed from pale buff to dark gold, the dirt from gray-brown to near-black—but everything is still here. A squirrel climbs, fusty-eyed, out of its hole, dangles by its rear feet, and stretches itself languidly, first one side, then the other. At Bird's feet an industrious pair of ants lifts a crumb that's fallen from his breakfast and begins the long awkward journey back to the nest.

Perhaps it is possible. Perhaps everything is fine, there was just a delay, perhaps Margaret and Domi are on the way to them, safe and sound and triumphant.

I hear them, Sadie says, jumping to her feet.

She's right: they both hear it, a car crunching up the long gravel drive through the woods. From the front step, they watch it approach. The Duchess's car, so urban and oddly incongruous here, a thin bright bullet boring through the forest in slow motion. It comes slowly, almost reluctantly. Sadie takes Bird's hand, or Bird takes Sadie's hand, they aren't quite sure which, and they watch the car make its way to the cabin with agonizing slowness. As it nears they can see two figures in the front, though through the tinted glass they can't make out the faces, only a shadowy shape on the passenger side, another at the wheel. Then it comes to a halt and the engine dies and the passenger door opens, but it isn't her, it's a man, a tall body unfolding itself and turning toward them, and Bird makes a choked sound of recognition. It is his father, the Duchess grim-faced behind the wheel, and they know something has gone terribly wrong.

Dad, Bird cries. Dad. But no sound comes out. Beside him, Sadie begins to cry.

And as if his father has heard him anyway, his father runs to him, runs to them, folds them both in his arms.

• • •

She'd waited, the Duchess—waited in her gilded townhouse through the evening and well into the night, waited for Margaret to arrive. As soon as you think they've pinpointed you, she'd said. Don't wait, M. Just get out, before they have time to reach you. Don't cut it close—you always get carried away. And Margaret had agreed.

And then she'd kept speaking, kept on going, past the point where Domi had expected her to stop, past the point where it seemed prudent, then past the point where it seemed safe, then past the point where it seemed possible. By the time it was clear Margaret wasn't coming, that something had gone wrong, the sky had circled from light to dark and was beginning to grow

light again, and she got in the car and headed for Brooklyn. Margaret's voice had nearly gone out, the authorities finding and crushing speaker after speaker as they slowly spiraled toward her, but as Domi crossed the bridge, a few minutes after three, there it was again: her old friend, louder now, more distinct, through the speakers they'd missed or not yet found, as if now that she was closer her words came more clearly. Telling the stories that those who needed to tell could not say, now grieving, now angry, now tender, a thousand people shouting through her mouth.

But blocks away she knew things had gone wrong. Suddenly it was eerily silent. The roads were blocked off, starting from Flushing Avenue; she couldn't even get in sight of Fort Greene Park. A cordon of police cars, sirens off but lights flashing, surrounded the whole area, and she turned down a side street and headed home. She already knew what they were there for, and that they'd found it. Still, she waited, watching her phone, still hoping that the screen would light up and it would be Margaret, calling from somewhere, anywhere, to say that she was all right.

When the phone finally did ring it was well into morning, and it was the call she'd expected, and she was ready. Yes, she owned the property in question—*what* had they found inside? No, a complete shock and quite an outrageous one, as they could probably imagine. No, she had *no* idea how—well, wait a moment, there was a keypad at the back; whoever this woman was must have managed to open it and work her way inside. *What* did they say she'd been doing? Absolutely horrifying. No, she never went there herself; her father had bought it during the Crisis intending to renovate it, but it had never happened and he'd passed and it had been sitting there empty ever since. In fact it was a rather upsetting place for that reason; she never liked to go there but hadn't been ready, yet, to sell it. Claude Duchess, his name was—yes, like the tech company; that was their family. Why yes, of course, she would make it more secure going forward; she would add an alarm system, hire security to keep an eye on it. Given everything happening these days, you really couldn't be too careful. If the authorities could let her know when they'd finished their work . . . ? They were too kind; she so appreciated the service they provided, watching over the community—and this reminded her, she'd been meaning to make a donation to support the officers in their duties. No, no—thank *you.*

In the meantime, she was searching. Margaret hadn't told her much, but the few scraps she already knew were enough. It was surprising how much you could track down with just a name, if you asked the right people. *Ethan Gardner* led her to Harvard, then to the library staff payroll, and then, eventually, to what she needed: a Cambridge address, one of the dorms. No phone number, but of course she couldn't risk a call anyway. It took her nearly five hours to reach Boston, traffic clotting as the afternoon turned to evening, stalling outside of Stamford, then New Haven, then Providence. By the time she reached Cambridge it was just past four, and she parked outside the dorm, waiting. Maybe she'd missed him already, perhaps he didn't work Friday, perhaps he'd already come home from work or he had never left or she was in the wrong place, and she had driven all that way for nothing. She nearly gave up. But finally, just after nine, there he was—a little older, a little grayer, but the same face she remembered from all those years ago. Dressed the same, even: a tucked-in pale blue oxford, a corduroy blazer. She couldn't understand it, at the time, what had fascinated Margaret so, but she thought she saw it now, the softness in him, the promise that there could be gentleness in this world.

As he passed by, she stepped out of the car.

Ethan? she said, and he turned, startled. Uncertain. Scanning her face for something familiar.

It's Domi, she said, and watched recognition flood his eyes. I'm here about Margaret, she said, and then, before he could speak, she added: And Bird.

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He'd come home to an empty apartment that Monday, and his chest had seized. So it had happened, he'd thought in a panic: despite everything, they'd taken him at last. Noah, he called out, flicking on the lights in the living room, then the bedroom, circling the apartment again, as if Bird were a misplaced key he'd simply overlooked. Only then did he see the note on the table, the drawing, the scrap of paper reading *New York, NY.* After all these years, he still recognized her writing, quick and pointed and sure, and he understood.

He could not call the police: as soon as they began to investigate they would see the link to Margaret, they would dig gleefully into Margaret's file, and begin one on Bird. He could go to New York, but then what? All he could do was wait. If Bird found Margaret, he assured himself, they'd contact him. He did not allow himself to think *and if not?*

Tuesday morning, he called Bird in sick from school; he called himself in sick from work. If Bird came back, he would be there. He spent the day pacing the apartment, picking up his dictionaries, setting them down again. Again and again he looked at the drawing Margaret had sent: the cats, the cabinet. What had this told Bird? At dinnertime he forgot to eat. Where was Bird? Had he found Margaret? And if he hadn't—? That night, half dizzy, he dreamed himself back in his old apartment with Margaret, the Crisis still whirling around them. In the morning, woozy and sleep deprived, he awoke alone, below Bird's empty bunk, and he called them both in sick again. Exhausted, he half dozed over and over; each time, he woke certain he'd heard Bird's voice, but no one was there.

Friday morning, he headed back to work: he was out of days off. In the library, he wheeled his cart through the stacks, taking extra time to line up the books with care, to restore everything to the precise place it belonged. When his shift was over, he lingered, dreading the empty apartment. Instead he headed to the southwest corner of D level, combing the shelves until he found it: the thin book with a cat on its cover, and a boy who looked something like Bird.

This retelling, he discovered, was different from Margaret's. In this version, the parents had too many children, the boy was sent off to study with priests, the building was not a house but a temple. Perhaps she'd misremembered, or maybe she'd changed the story to suit her own purposes. Or maybe, he thinks, there were simply many versions of this single tale. What did it tell Margaret and Bird that it did not say to him? He read it again and again, until the library closed, looking for the message, for the clue that would unlock everything and tell him where his family was. But the book revealed nothing.

He was still thinking this over as he walked home in the darkness. Whatever the meaning, it was not in the words themselves but somewhere else, and it was then that Domi had stepped out of her car and called his name.

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In the small hours, they drove back toward Connecticut, the traffic evaporated, everyone home with blinds drawn. In some places the streetlights were already winking out, but in Domi's car, they sped along the highway, frictionless. For long stretches theirs was the only car in sight, and they glided through the darkness in the small bubble of light cast by their headlights. As if there were nothing and no one else left in the world. For a long while Ethan didn't speak at all, and Domi, as if to fill the silence, chattered away. She had told him the most urgent things already, of course: what had happened to Bird, about the townhouse, the plan. Where they were headed. With these most pressing things covered, though, she found herself coming back to the smallest of details. How Margaret had looked when they'd first seen each other again. I could

tell, Domi said, I could tell she'd been happy with you. In the life she'd had. Because she was so sad to lose it. You could see it in her eyes.

She described it all for Ethan, as best she could: Margaret's notebooks, her journeys from one family to the next, until he could almost see it, her tracks like fine lines of stitching crisscrossing the map, trying to suture something torn asunder.

You should've heard it, Domi said, you should've seen it, her voice just—

She waved a hand in the air, and the car wavered over the yellow line and back again.

Just coming out of the air. Everywhere. And people standing there, listening. I looked out the window and I saw them, just standing. Like statues. It was like she'd turned everyone to stone.

Except, she thought—and this she could not bring herself to say aloud, would never manage to utter—except that some of those stone people were crying. She held on to this fact, even when the authorities came and searched out the speakers and smashed them under boot heels, even when they ordered the crowds to disperse, even when there was nothing left to see from the window but an empty sidewalk and a few strands of wire and plastic shards on the concrete. Those vanished people had wiped their tears and retreated back into their lives, but those tears had been there all the same, even for a moment, and she told herself that this meant something, that this mattered.

He's a good kid, she said instead. Bird. He's a sweet boy.

After a pause, she added, He looks so much like her. Like both of you.

He does, Ethan said, and then they both fell silent again, and outside the road scrolled by, luminous in the reflected shine of their headlights.

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It was like Pompeii, one person would say later. Everyone just frozen exactly where they were. You just stood there and let it wash over you. Destroying and preserving you all at once.

Another would carry that moment through her life, and years later, in the Natural History Museum with her daughter, she would glance at the dioramas, the animals so lifelike you could imagine they'd only paused, like burglars caught in a searchlight, that as soon as you turned your back, they would reanimate and scamper off on their way. She would look at that diorama—a lion crouched beside a herd of grazing antelope, the painted savannah air wavering behind them in a honeyed sheen, jackals prowling in the shadows, all of them, predator and prey, transfixed by some invisible force—and she would suddenly remember that evening, as the light dimmed, the voice speaking to all of them, that feeling of being surrounded by strangers who were somehow experiencing the same thing. She would remember the man on the park bench opposite—grizzled and hard, wearing fatigues that didn't fit, slashes of gray sock in the gaps between shoe top and sole—the way his eyes and hers had met, the unspoken affirmation that had passed between them: *Yes, I hear it, too.* She would never see that man again, but standing there in the museum she would remember him, remember that feeling that somehow he was important to her, that they were connected and they'd found each other, that feeling of being conjoined by this surreal moment in time, and she would be frozen again, captivated, staring past the lion and antelope and into the past until her daughter tugged at her hand and asked why she was crying.

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I just don't understand, Domi keeps saying. Scrubbing her eyes with the heel of her hand, yesterday's eyeliner smudged to angry dark rings. Sadie's head cradled against her shoulder. Why she cut it so close. We talked about it. She promised. I thought she meant it.

You know Margaret, Ethan says. Now and then, she got carried away. A wild thing.

He and Domi share a pained laugh, everything they found exasperating about her become precious.

They are speaking about her in the past tense, Bird thinks, and he almost smiles at how childish and shortsighted this is. They are so certain that she is gone, but he's not. I promise I'll come back, she had said, but he realizes now: she hadn't said when. Only that she would. And he believes this, still. She will come back. Someday, somehow. In some form. He'll find her, if he looks hard enough. Strange things happened. She might be there, somewhere, in some other form, the way it happened in stories: disguised as a bird, a flower, a tree. If they look closely enough, they'll find her. And as he thinks this, he thinks he might see her: in the birch tree showering its leaves ever so gently down upon them, in the hawk that sails into the sky, releasing its piercing and melancholy and beautiful cry. In the sun that has begun to needle its way through the trees, tinting everything with a faint golden glow.

What now, he says. But already he knows the answer.

What happens now is a choice: they can go back, all of them, to the lives they'd had before. Bird and his father can go back to Cambridge, back to school and replacing books on their locked-up shelves. They can pretend this never happened; they can still say, no, we don't know her, we haven't heard from her in years. We have nothing to do with her, we had nothing to do with it, of course we would never, of course we don't think like that. As for Sadie: the Duchess assures them she can find somewhere safe, but from the look on Sadie's face Bird knows what will happen—she'll run again, she'll keep running, the way she had before she found Margaret, she'll keep searching for her own parents, for a way out of all this, and she'll be gone. So they will all go back to the way they were before, as if none of this has ever occurred, as if it changed nothing, as if it meant nothing.

Or: they can go on. They can keep looking—for Sadie's parents, for the families who've lost children, for the children themselves. For Margaret, perhaps still out there, somewhere, though none of them dare to voice this, even in their minds. They can keep collecting stories, finding ways to share them. Finding ways to pass them on and remember them. They will have to conceal themselves, the way Margaret has all these years, slipping through shadows, moving from kindness to kindness. Listening and gathering. Refusing to let things die. They can let what Margaret has done change them, they can make it change things. They can keep rolling this stone uphill.

Somewhere, maybe, someone is telling someone else: *Listen, this crazy thing happened the other night and I can't stop thinking about it.* Days later, weeks even, Margaret's voice still lodged in the crevices of their brain, the stories they've heard a pin completing a circuit, lighting up feelings that have long lain dark. Illuminating corners of themselves they hadn't known. *Listen, I've been thinking.* Eight million people, all those stories passing from mouth to ear. Would one person be compelled? One out of eight million, a fraction of a fraction. But not nothing. Absorbing that story, passing it on. *Listen.* Somewhere, out there, saying to others at last: Listen, this isn't right.

None of them are sure how this will work, where they will go, how they will find their way, but it is not impossible, and right now that feels like enough.

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Before they leave, Domi catches Bird by the hand.

I wish you could've heard it, she says. Her face puffed and pink, swollen with the weight of what she carries. I wish you could have heard her.

And someday he will hear: one day, he will meet someone who, on hearing his story, will say slowly, I remember that, I was there, I'll never forget—who will recite it for him, the very last bit of his mother's broadcast, the one story she did not read but spoke, directly, in her own words, will recite it nearly word for word, because it has been rooted inside them ever since they heard it, all those years ago, that night when out of nowhere, out of everywhere, a voice began to speak into the darkness, carrying messages of love.

Now Domi says: Her poems.

All those years ago, she says, I went to the bookstore and there was your mother's book on the table. I knew she'd write one, one day. I bought it on the spot and read it in one sitting. We hadn't spoken in years. I hated her for a while, you know, I really did. I didn't think I'd ever see her again, until she showed up at my door. But they stuck with me, those poems; I could hear her voice when I read them. I kept thinking about everything we'd lived through. It made me think of who we'd been, back then.

Bird holds his breath. Could it be, he thinks. That she still has it. That she'll take it from her bag and press it, battered and worn, into his hands.

But Domi shakes her head.

I burned it, she says. When they started to go after her. No one knew I had it and maybe no one would ever have known but I did it anyway. I was a coward. That's what I'm trying to tell you, Bird: I'm sorry. It's gone.

Tears clot in Bird's throat. He nods, and begins to turn away. But Domi is still speaking.

There was one poem, she says, speaking softly, almost to herself, as if she is trying to remember an almost-faded dream. One poem that just—

She rubs the spot between her collarbones, as if the punch of the poem still lingers there.

I read it over and over, you know. Because it kept saying something I felt but couldn't hold on to and the words there made it solid, just for a second, while I was reading. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Bird nods, though he's not sure he does.

I think, she says, I think I could write it down for you. The poem, I mean. I might get a word or two wrong. But I think—I *think*—I still know most of it. Would you like that?

And he understands, then, how it's going to go. How he'll find her again. What he's going to do next, alongside everything else his life will bring. Somewhere out there are people who still know her poems, who've hidden scraps of them away in the folds of their minds before setting match to the papers in their hands. He will find them, he will ask them what they remember, he will piece together their recollections, fragmentary and incomplete though they may be, mapping the holes of one against the solid patches of another, and in this way, piece by piece, he will set her back down on paper again.

Yes, please, he says. I would like that, very much.

Author's Note

Bird and Margaret's world isn't exactly our world, but it isn't *not* ours, either. Most of the events and occurrences in this book do not have direct analogues, but I drew inspiration from many real-life events, both past and current—and in some cases, things I'd imagined had become realities by the time the novel was done. Margaret Atwood once wrote of *The Handmaid's Tale*, "If I was to create an imaginary garden I wanted the toads in it to be real," so what follows is a list of just a few of the real toads—and conversely, the beacons of hope—that shaped my thinking as I wrote.

There is a long history, in the U.S. and elsewhere, of removing children as a means of political control. If this strikes a nerve with you—as I hope it does—please learn more about the many instances, both past and ongoing, in which children have been taken from their families: the separations of enslaved families, government boarding schools for Indigenous children (such as that in Carlisle, PA), the inequities built into the foster care system, the separations of migrant families still occurring at the U.S.'s southern border, and beyond. Much more attention needs to be brought to this subject, but Laura Briggs's *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* gives an invaluable overview.

The pandemic that began in 2020 brought a sharp increase in anti-Asian discrimination, but this isn't a new phenomenon, either: such discrimination has long and deep roots in American history. As I wrote this novel, real-life examples were never far from my mind—including Japanese American internment during World War II, Vincent Chin's 1982 murder, and the Department of Justice's long-running "China Initiative," among many others. If you're new to this subject and want to learn more, I hope you'll look at *The Making of Asian America*, by Erika Lee; *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*, edited by John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats; *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II*, by Richard Reeves; and *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement*, by Paula Yoo, as a few starting points. New books on Asian American experience are being written every year, and I'm grateful to those illuminating the many facets of this complex and ever-expanding topic.

I'm fascinated by the way folktales and language are both remembered and slowly altered as they're passed between generations—and how we find different meanings in them depending on the circumstances we're in. The version of "Sleeping Beauty" that Bird recalls is from *The Illustrated Junior Library's Grimms' Fairy Tales*, the volume I had growing up, and throughout the book, Margaret tells Bird a mix of Western and Asian stories that I remember from my own childhood. The Japanese folktale at the center of this novel was popularized in English by Lafcadio Hearn in 1898 and has been retold many times over the years; the version in this novel, with all its variations, is my own. On the language side: the Online Etymology Dictionary, various message boards on linguistics, and my father's research on the history of Chinese characters were invaluable in inspiring Ethan's etymologies, though any errors Ethan makes are of course mine alone.

Inspirations for some of the protests in the novel came from widespread sources—in general, the concept of guerrilla art was a guiding light, as were Gene Sharp's writings on nonviolent protest. The knitted web in the Common is based on various pacifist yarn-bombings around the U.S. and the U.K., while the ice children in Nashville have their seeds in the surprise overnight installations of statues, such as the nude Donald Trump statues created by INDECLINE to protest his policies, and the haunting depictions of caged children that were planted by the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) to draw attention to migrant family separations at the U.S.-Mexico border. In particular, the

nonviolent protests of the Serbian Otpor! movement, Syrian anti-Assad protestors, and other groups, especially as described so vividly in *Blueprint for Revolution*, by Srdja Popović, sparked the ideas for the cement block and crowbar in Austin, the ping-pong balls in Memphis, and Margaret's bottle caps, as well as influencing the overall spirit of all the art protests. The struggles of prodemocracy Hong Kongers, particularly against the recent China-imposed "national security" legislation, were always on my mind as well. I am also deeply grateful to Anna Deavere Smith, whose work I discovered only after completing this book but who nevertheless is clearly one of the foremothers of Margaret's project.

Several real people make appearances in this novel: Anna Akhmatova arrived in my life, clicking various pieces of this story together, with the kind of fortuitous timing that makes you believe in fate. *Poems of Akhmatova*, selected and translated by Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward, gives a wonderful introduction to her work and life story. I was honored to name a character—one who bravely speaks out about injustice—after Sonia Lee Chun, as thanks for her family's generous support of Immigrant Families Together. Margaret thinks of the legacy of Latasha Harlins and Akai Gurley; may we remember your names and your lives. Last but not least, after finishing the novel, I discovered that there is a Facebook group using the hashtag #ourmissinghearts, dedicated to raising awareness about missing persons. I'm grateful for the work they do in trying to bring peace to families hoping for answers.

Finally, it was all too easy to imagine PACT, the justifications for it, and the impacts it might have on society: there are far too many instances of free expression being stifled—and discrimination rationalized—under the guise of "protection" and "security." Over the course of writing this novel, the news provided a slew of contemporary examples in both the U.S. and abroad, and in the time between my typing this note and your reading it, there will doubtless be more. It is hard to analyze your own era, but looking to history provided some helpful perspective. Writings on McCarthyism, including *Naming Names*, by Victor S. Navasky, and *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, by Ellen Schrecker and Phillip Deery, provided a chilling glimpse into how all-pervasive fear can become; *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime*, by Geoffrey R. Stone, cataloged dozens of historical examples with eerie resonances to our current times; and books such as Ronald C. Rosbottom's *When Paris Went Dark: The City of Light Under German Occupation, 1940–1944* helped me consider the blurry overlaps between resisting, tolerating, and colluding. More generally, Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny* was a powerful reminder about how quickly authoritarianism can rise (as well as what can be done about it), and Václav Havel's classic 1978 essay "The Power of the Powerless" changed my thinking about the impact a single individual could have in dismantling a long-established system. I hope he's right.

Acknowledgments

No one does anything alone, and I owe more thanks than I can say to the many, many people who have helped along the way.

I'm still not sure what I did to deserve my agent, Julie Barer, but I sure am grateful. My undying gratitude to you, Nicole Cunningham Nolan, and everyone at The Book Group. Full stop.

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The Guggenheim Foundation provided support for this project and, even more importantly, an early vote of confidence without which I would probably never have attempted this book. The Cambridge Public Library provided me not only writing space but also endless inspiration in its books, patrons, and librarians; thank you for all that you do, and thank you to Kate Flaim for arranging that behind-the-scenes tour that sparked my imagination.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. My mother and my sister continue to indulge me in This Creative Writing Thing, forty-odd years along. It's not easy to have a writer in the family, so thank you for letting me be one and for sharing your stories with me. I hope I'm making you proud. Thank you to my husband for bringing me lunch when I forget to eat, patiently listening while I ramble about plot points and research, taking on more than your fair share of house and family duties while I write, and having faith in my work even when I've misplaced my own. I'm so lucky, and grateful, to be on this journey with you. Finally, thank you to my son: you're still the best thing I've created.

About the Author

Celeste Ng is the number one *New York Times* bestselling author of *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*. Her third novel, *Our Missing Hearts*, will be published in October 2022. Ng is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, and her work has been published in over thirty languages.

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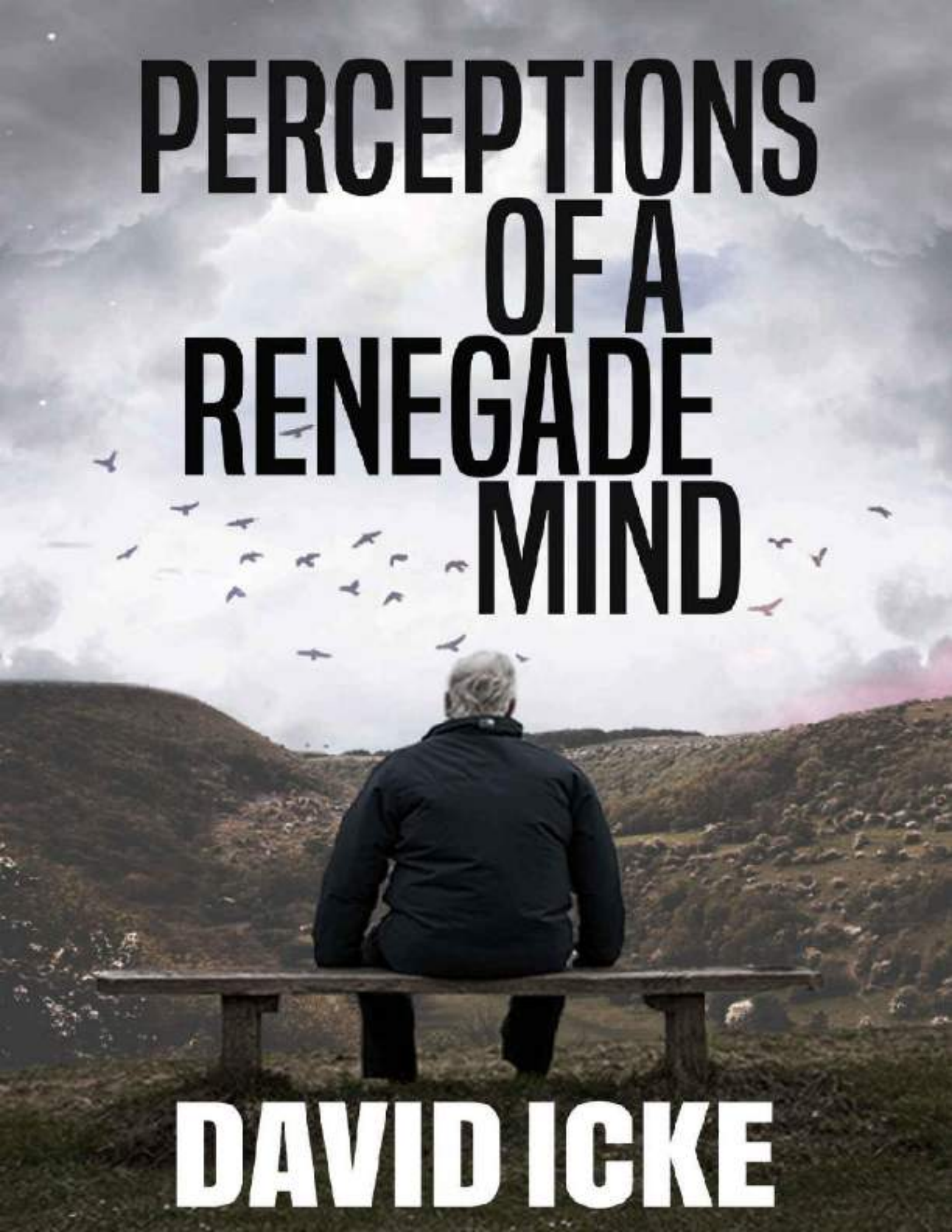

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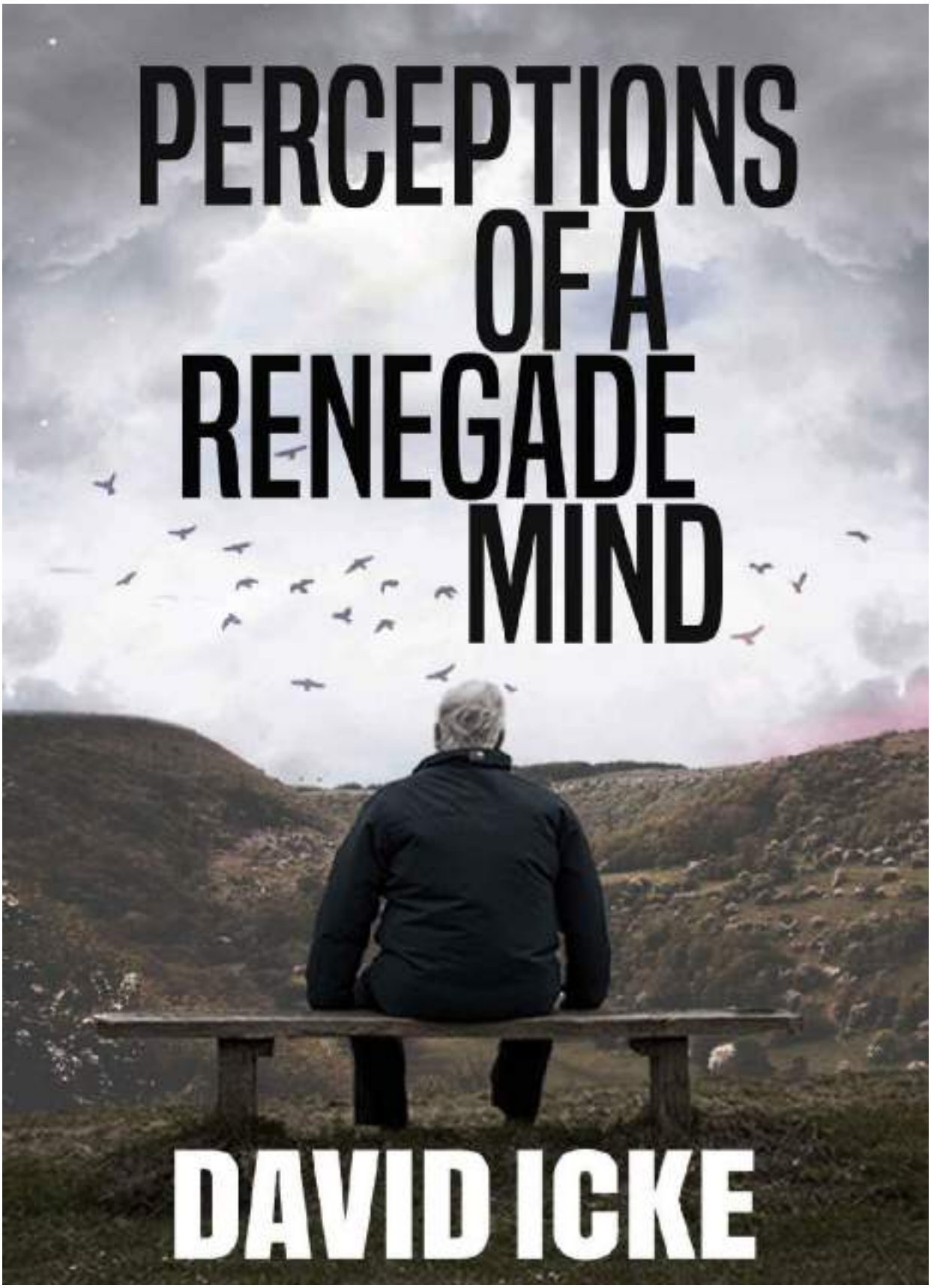
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PERCEPTIONS OF A RENEGADE MIND

DAVID ICKE

Dedication:

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Renegade:
Adjective
‘Having rejected tradition: Unconventional.’
Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Acquiescence to tyranny is the death of the spirit

You may be 38 years old, as I happen to be. And one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid … You refuse to do it because you want to live longer … You're afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticised or that you will lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab you, or shoot at you or bomb your house; so you refuse to take the stand.

Well, you may go on and live until you are 90, but you're just as dead at 38 as you would be at 90. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.

Martin Luther King

How the few control the many and always have – the many do whatever they're told

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
Rode the six hundred

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

The mist is lifting slowly
I can see the way ahead
And I've left behind the empty streets
That once inspired my life
And the strength of the emotion
Is like thunder in the air
'Cos the promise that we made each other
Haunts me to the end

The secret of your beauty
And the mystery of your soul
I've been searching for in everyone I meet
And the times I've been mistaken
It's impossible to say
And the grass is growing
Underneath our feet

The words that I remember
From my childhood still are true
That there's none so blind
As those who will not see
And to those who lack the courage
And say it's dangerous to try
Well they just don't know
That love eternal will not be denied

I know you're out there somewhere
Somewhere, somewhere
I know you're out there somewhere

Somewhere you can hear my voice
I know I'll find you somehow
Somehow, somehow
I know I'll find you somehow
And somehow I'll return again to you

The Moody Blues

Are you a gutless wonder - or a Renegade Mind?

Monuments put from pen to paper,
Turns me into a gutless wonder,
And if you tolerate this,
Then your children will be next.
Gravity keeps my head down,
Or is it maybe shame ...

Manic Street Preachers

Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number.
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep have fallen on you.
Ye are many – they are few.

Percy Shelley

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CHAPTER ONE

I'm thinking' – Oh, but *are* you?

Think for yourself and let others enjoy the privilege of doing so too
Voltaire

French-born philosopher, mathematician and scientist René Descartes became famous for his statement in Latin in the 17th century which translates into English as: 'I think, therefore I am.'

On the face of it that is true. Thought reflects perception and perception leads to both behaviour and self-identity. In that sense 'we' are what we think. But who or what is doing the thinking and is thinking the only route to perception? Clearly, as we shall see, 'we' are not always the source of 'our' perception, indeed with regard to humanity as a whole this is rarely the case; and thinking is far from the only means of perception. Thought is the village idiot compared with other expressions of consciousness that we all have the potential to access and tap into. This has to be true when we *are* those other expressions of consciousness which are infinite in nature. We have forgotten this, or, more to the point, been manipulated to forget.

These are not just the esoteric musings of the navel. The whole foundation of human control and oppression is control of perception. Once perception is hijacked then so is behaviour which is dictated by perception. Collective perception becomes collective behaviour and collective behaviour is what we call human society. Perception is all and those behind human control know that which is

why perception is the target 24/7 of the psychopathic manipulators that I call the Global Cult. They know that if they dictate perception they will dictate behaviour and collectively dictate the nature of human society. They are further aware that perception is formed from information received and if they control the circulation of information they will to a vast extent direct human behaviour. Censorship of information and opinion has become globally Nazi-like in recent years and never more blatantly than since the illusory 'virus pandemic' was triggered out of China in 2019 and across the world in 2020. Why have billions submitted to house arrest and accepted fascistic societies in a way they would have never believed possible? Those controlling the information spewing from government, mainstream media and Silicon Valley (all controlled by the same Global Cult networks) told them they were in danger from a 'deadly virus' and only by submitting to house arrest and conceding their most basic of freedoms could they and their families be protected. This monumental and provable lie became the *perception* of the billions and therefore the *behaviour* of the billions. In those few words you have the whole structure and modus operandi of human control. Fear is a perception – **F**alse **E**motion **A**ppearing **R**eal – and fear is the currency of control. In short … get them by the balls (or give them the impression that you have) and their hearts and minds will follow. Nothing grips the dangly bits and freezes the rear-end more comprehensively than fear.

World number 1

There are two 'worlds' in what appears to be one 'world' and the prime difference between them is knowledge. First we have the mass of human society in which the population is maintained in coldly-calculated ignorance through control of information and the 'education' (indoctrination) system. That's all you really need to control to enslave billions in a perceptual delusion in which what are perceived to be *their* thoughts and opinions are ever-repeated mantras that the system has been downloading all their lives through 'education', media, science, medicine, politics and academia

in which the personnel and advocates are themselves overwhelmingly the perceptual products of the same repetition. Teachers and academics in general are processed by the same programming machine as everyone else, but unlike the great majority they never leave the 'education' program. It gripped them as students and continues to grip them as programmers of subsequent generations of students. The programmed become the programmers – the programmed programmers. The same can largely be said for scientists, doctors and politicians and not least because as the American writer Upton Sinclair said: 'It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.' If your career and income depend on thinking the way the system demands then you will – bar a few free-minded exceptions – concede your mind to the Perceptual Mainframe that I call the Postage Stamp Consensus. This is a tiny band of perceived knowledge and possibility 'taught' (downloaded) in the schools and universities, pounded out by the mainstream media and on which all government policy is founded. Try thinking, and especially speaking and acting, outside of the 'box' of consensus and see what that does for your career in the Mainstream Everything which bullies, harasses, intimidates and ridicules the population into compliance. Here we have the simple structure which enslaves most of humanity in a perceptual prison cell for an entire lifetime and I'll go deeper into this process shortly. Most of what humanity is taught as fact is nothing more than programmed belief. American science fiction author Frank Herbert was right when he said: 'Belief can be manipulated. Only knowledge is dangerous.' In the 'Covid' age belief is promoted and knowledge is censored. It was always so, but never to the extreme of today.

World number 2

A 'number 2' is slang for 'doing a poo' and how appropriate that is when this other 'world' is doing just that on humanity every minute of every day. World number 2 is a global network of secret societies and semi-secret groups dictating the direction of society via

governments, corporations and authorities of every kind. I have spent more than 30 years uncovering and exposing this network that I call the Global Cult and knowing its agenda is what has made my books so accurate in predicting current and past events. Secret societies are secret for a reason. They want to keep their hoarded knowledge to themselves and their chosen initiates and to hide it from the population which they seek through ignorance to control and subdue. The whole foundation of the division between World 1 and World 2 is *knowledge*. What number 1 knows number 2 must not. Knowledge they have worked so hard to keep secret includes (a) the agenda to enslave humanity in a centrally-controlled global dictatorship, and (b) the nature of reality and life itself. The latter (b) must be suppressed to allow the former (a) to prevail as I shall be explaining. The way the Cult manipulates and interacts with the population can be likened to a spider's web. The 'spider' sits at the centre in the shadows and imposes its will through the web with each strand represented in World number 2 by a secret society, satanic or semi-secret group, and in World number 1 – the world of the seen – by governments, agencies of government, law enforcement, corporations, the banking system, media conglomerates and Silicon Valley (Fig 1 overleaf). The spider and the web connect and coordinate all these organisations to pursue the same global outcome while the population sees them as individual entities working randomly and independently. At the level of the web governments *are* the banking system *are* the corporations *are* the media *are* Silicon Valley *are* the World Health Organization working from their inner cores as one unit. Apparently unconnected countries, corporations, institutions, organisations and people are on the *same team* pursuing the same global outcome. Strands in the web immediately around the spider are the most secretive and exclusive secret societies and their membership is emphatically restricted to the Cult inner-circle emerging through the generations from particular bloodlines for reasons I will come to. At the core of the core you would get them in a single room. That's how many people are dictating the direction of human society and its transformation

through the ‘Covid’ hoax and other means. As the web expands out from the spider we meet the secret societies that many people will be aware of – the Freemasons, Knights Templar, Knights of Malta, Opus Dei, the inner sanctum of the Jesuit Order, and such like. Note how many are connected to the Church of Rome and there is a reason for that. The Roman Church was established as a revamp, a rebranding, of the relocated ‘Church’ of Babylon and the Cult imposing global tyranny today can be tracked back to Babylon and Sumer in what is now Iraq.

Figure 1: The global web through which the few control the many. (Image Neil Hague.)

Inner levels of the web operate in the unseen away from the public eye and then we have what I call the cusp organisations located at the point where the hidden meets the seen. They include a series of satellite organisations answering to a secret society founded in London in the late 19th century called the Round Table and among them are the Royal Institute of International Affairs (UK, founded in 1920); Council on Foreign Relations (US, 1921); Bilderberg Group (worldwide, 1954); Trilateral Commission (US/worldwide, 1972); and the Club of Rome (worldwide, 1968) which was created to exploit environmental concerns to justify the centralisation of global power to ‘save the planet’. The Club of Rome instigated with others the human-caused climate change hoax which has led to all the ‘green

new deals' demanding that very centralisation of control. Cusp organisations, which include endless 'think tanks' all over the world, are designed to coordinate a single global policy between political and business leaders, intelligence personnel, media organisations and anyone who can influence the direction of policy in their own sphere of operation. Major players and regular attenders will know what is happening – or some of it – while others come and go and are kept overwhelmingly in the dark about the big picture. I refer to these cusp groupings as semi-secret in that they can be publicly identified, but what goes on at the inner-core is kept very much 'in house' even from most of their members and participants through a fiercely-imposed system of compartmentalisation. Only let them know what they need to know to serve your interests and no more. The structure of secret societies serves as a perfect example of this principle. Most Freemasons never get higher than the bottom three levels of 'degree' (degree of knowledge) when there are 33 official degrees of the Scottish Rite. Initiates only qualify for the next higher 'compartment' or degree if those at that level choose to allow them. Knowledge can be carefully assigned only to those considered 'safe'. I went to my local Freemason's lodge a few years ago when they were having an 'open day' to show how cuddly they were and when I chatted to some of them I was astonished at how little the rank and file knew even about the most ubiquitous symbols they use. The mushroom technique – keep them in the dark and feed them bullshit – applies to most people in the web as well as the population as a whole. Sub-divisions of the web mirror in theme and structure transnational corporations which have a headquarters somewhere in the world dictating to all their subsidiaries in different countries. Subsidiaries operate in their methodology and branding to the same centrally-dictated plan and policy in pursuit of particular ends. The Cult web functions in the same way. Each country has its own web as a subsidiary of the global one. They consist of networks of secret societies, semi-secret groups and bloodline families and their job is to impose the will of the spider and the global web in their particular country. Subsidiary networks control and manipulate the national political system, finance, corporations, media, medicine, etc. to

ensure that they follow the globally-dictated Cult agenda. These networks were the means through which the 'Covid' hoax could be played out with almost every country responding in the same way.

The 'Yessir' pyramid

Compartmentalisation is the key to understanding how a tiny few can dictate the lives of billions when combined with a top-down sequence of imposition and acquiescence. The inner core of the Cult sits at the peak of the pyramidal hierarchy of human society (Fig 2 overleaf). It imposes its will – its agenda for the world – on the level immediately below which acquiesces to that imposition. This level then imposes the Cult will on the level below them which acquiesces and imposes on the next level. Very quickly we meet levels in the hierarchy that have no idea there even is a Cult, but the sequence of imposition and acquiescence continues down the pyramid in just the same way. 'I don't know why we are doing this but the order came from "on-high" and so we better just do it.' Alfred Lord Tennyson said of the cannon fodder levels in his poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade*: 'Theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die.' The next line says that 'into the valley of death rode the six hundred' and they died because they obeyed without question what their perceived 'superiors' told them to do. In the same way the population capitulated to 'Covid'. The whole hierarchical pyramid functions like this to allow the very few to direct the enormous many. Eventually imposition-acquiescence-imposition-acquiescence comes down to the mass of the population at the foot of the pyramid. If they acquiesce to those levels of the hierarchy imposing on them (governments/law enforcement/doctors/media) a circuit is completed between the population and the handful of super-psychopaths in the Cult inner core at the top of the pyramid. Without a circuit-breaking refusal to obey, the sequence of imposition and acquiescence allows a staggeringly few people to impose their will upon the entirety of humankind. We are looking at the very sequence that has subjugated billions since the start of 2020. Our freedom has not been taken from us. Humanity has given it

away. Fascists do not impose fascism because there are not enough of them. Fascism is imposed by the population acquiescing to fascism. Put another way allowing their perceptions to be programmed to the extent that leads to the population giving their freedom away by giving their perceptions – their mind – away. If this circuit is not broken by humanity ceasing to cooperate with their own enslavement then nothing can change. For that to happen people have to critically think and see through the lies and window dressing and then summon the backbone to act upon what they see. The Cult spends its days working to stop either happening and its methodology is systematic and highly detailed, but it can be overcome and that is what this book is all about.

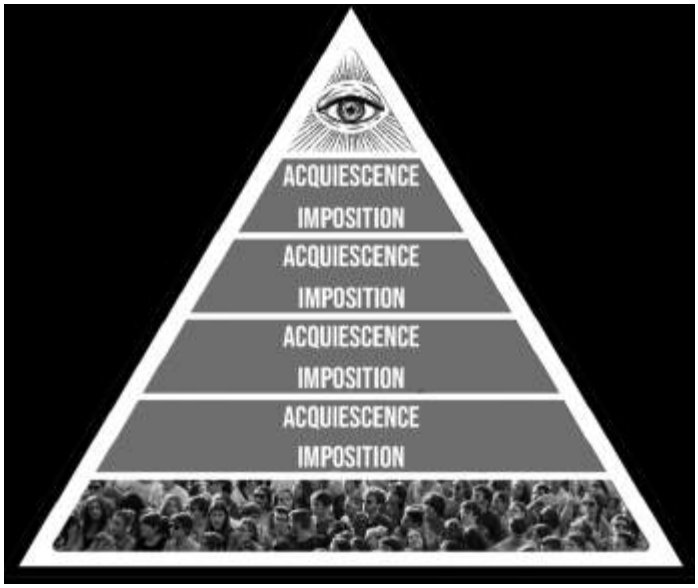

Figure 2: The simple sequence of imposition and compliance that allows a handful of people at the peak of the pyramid to dictate the lives of billions.

The Life Program

Okay, back to world number 1 or the world of the 'masses'. Observe the process of what we call 'life' and it is a perceptual download from cradle to grave. The Cult has created a global structure in which perception can be programmed and the program continually topped-up with what appears to be constant confirmation that the program is indeed true reality. The important word here is 'appears'.

This is the structure, the fly-trap, the Postage Stamp Consensus or Perceptual Mainframe, which represents that incredibly narrow band of perceived possibility delivered by the 'education' system, mainstream media, science and medicine. From the earliest age the download begins with parents who have themselves succumbed to the very programming their children are about to go through. Most parents don't do this out of malevolence and mostly it is quite the opposite. They do what they believe is best for their children and that is what the program has told them is best. Within three or four years comes the major transition from parental programming to full-blown state (Cult) programming in school, college and university where perceptually-programmed teachers and academics pass on their programming to the next generations. Teachers who resist are soon marginalised and their careers ended while children who resist are called a problem child for whom Ritalin may need to be prescribed. A few years after entering the 'world' children are under the control of authority figures representing the state telling them when they have to be there, when they can leave and when they can speak, eat, even go to the toilet. This is calculated preparation for a lifetime of obeying authority in all its forms. Reflex-action fear of authority is instilled by authority from the start. Children soon learn the carrot and stick consequences of obeying or defying authority which is underpinned daily for the rest of their life. Fortunately I daydreamed through this crap and never obeyed authority simply because it told me to. This approach to my alleged 'betters' continues to this day. There can be consequences of pursuing open-minded freedom in a world of closed-minded conformity. I spent a lot of time in school corridors after being ejected from the classroom for not taking some of it seriously and now I spend a lot of time being ejected from Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. But I can tell you that being true to yourself and not compromising your self-respect is far more exhilarating than bowing to authority for authority's sake. You don't have to be a sheep to the shepherd (authority) and the sheep dog (fear of not obeying authority).

The perceptual download continues throughout the formative years in school, college and university while script-reading 'teachers', 'academics' 'scientists', 'doctors' and 'journalists' insist that ongoing generations must be as programmed as they are. Accept the program or you will not pass your 'exams' which confirm your 'degree' of programming. It is tragic to think that many parents pressure their offspring to work hard at school to download the program and qualify for the next stage at college and university. The late, great, American comedian George Carlin said: 'Here's a bumper sticker I'd like to see: We are proud parents of a child who has resisted his teachers' attempts to break his spirit and bend him to the will of his corporate masters.' Well, the best of luck finding many of those, George. Then comes the moment to leave the formal programming years in academia and enter the 'adult' world of work. There you meet others in your chosen or prescribed arena who went through the same Postage Stamp Consensus program before you did. There is therefore overwhelming agreement between almost everyone on the basic foundations of Postage Stamp reality and the rejection, even contempt, of the few who have a mind of their own and are prepared to use it. This has two major effects. Firstly, the consensus confirms to the programmed that their download is really how things are. I mean, everyone knows that, right? Secondly, the arrogance and ignorance of Postage Stamp adherents ensure that anyone questioning the program will have unpleasant consequences for seeking their own truth and not picking their perceptions from the shelf marked: 'Things you must believe without question and if you don't you're a dangerous lunatic conspiracy theorist and a harebrained nutter'.

Every government, agency and corporation is founded on the same Postage Stamp prison cell and you can see why so many people believe the same thing while calling it their own 'opinion'. Fusion of governments and corporations in pursuit of the same agenda was the definition of fascism described by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. The pressure to conform to perceptual norms downloaded for a lifetime is incessant and infiltrates society right

down to family groups that become censors and condemners of their own 'black sheep' for not, ironically, being sheep. We have seen an explosion of that in the 'Covid' era. Cult-owned global media unleashes its propaganda all day every day in support of the Postage Stamp and targets with abuse and ridicule anyone in the public eye who won't bend their mind to the will of the tyranny. Any response to this is denied (certainly in my case). They don't want to give a platform to expose official lies. Cult-owned-and-created Internet giants like Facebook, Google, YouTube and Twitter delete you for having an unapproved opinion. Facebook boasts that its AI censors delete 97-percent of 'hate speech' before anyone even reports it. Much of that 'hate speech' will simply be an opinion that Facebook and its masters don't want people to see. Such perceptual oppression is widely known as fascism. Even Facebook executive Benny Thomas, a 'CEO Global Planning Lead', said in comments secretly recorded by investigative journalism operation Project Veritas that Facebook is 'too powerful' and should be broken up:

I mean, no king in history has been the ruler of two billion people, but Mark Zuckerberg is … And he's 36. That's too much for a 36-year-old ... You should not have power over two billion people. I just think that's wrong.

Thomas said Facebook-owned platforms like Instagram, Oculus, and WhatsApp needed to be separate companies. 'It's too much power when they're all one together'. That's the way the Cult likes it, however. We have an executive of a Cult organisation in Benny Thomas that doesn't know there is a Cult such is the compartmentalisation. Thomas said that Facebook and Google 'are no longer companies, they're countries'. Actually they are more powerful than countries on the basis that if you control information you control perception and control human society.

I love my oppressor

Another expression of this psychological trickery is for those who realise they are being pressured into compliance to eventually

convince themselves to believe the official narratives to protect their self-respect from accepting the truth that they have succumbed to meek and subservient compliance. Such people become some of the most vehement defenders of the system. You can see them everywhere screaming abuse at those who prefer to think for themselves and by doing so reminding the compliers of their own capitulation to conformity. 'You are talking dangerous nonsense you Covidiot!!' Are you trying to convince me or yourself? It is a potent form of Stockholm syndrome which is defined as: 'A psychological condition that occurs when a victim of abuse identifies and attaches, or bonds, positively with their abuser.' An example is hostages bonding and even 'falling in love' with their kidnappers. The syndrome has been observed in domestic violence, abused children, concentration camp inmates, prisoners of war and many and various Satanic cults. These are some traits of Stockholm syndrome listed at goodtherapy.org:

- Positive regard towards perpetrators of abuse or captor [see 'Covid'].
- Failure to cooperate with police and other government authorities when it comes to holding perpetrators of abuse or kidnapping accountable [or in the case of 'Covid' cooperating with the police to enforce and defend their captors' demands].
- Little or no effort to escape [see 'Covid'].
- Belief in the goodness of the perpetrators or kidnappers [see 'Covid'].
- Appeasement of captors. This is a manipulative strategy for maintaining one's safety. As victims get rewarded – perhaps with less abuse or even with life itself – their appeasing behaviours are reinforced [see 'Covid'].
- Learned helplessness. This can be akin to 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em'. As the victims fail to escape the abuse or captivity, they may start giving up and soon realize it's just easier for everyone if they acquiesce all their power to their captors [see 'Covid'].

- Feelings of pity toward the abusers, believing they are actually victims themselves. Because of this, victims may go on a crusade or mission to 'save' [protect] their abuser [see the venom unleashed on those challenging the official 'Covid' narrative].
- Unwillingness to learn to detach from their perpetrators and heal. In essence, victims may tend to be less loyal to themselves than to their abuser [*definitely* see 'Covid'].

Ponder on those traits and compare them with the behaviour of great swathes of the global population who have defended governments and authorities which have spent every minute destroying their lives and livelihoods and those of their children and grandchildren since early 2020 with fascistic lockdowns, house arrest and employment deletion to 'protect' them from a 'deadly virus' that their abusers' perceptually created to bring about this very outcome. We are looking at mass Stockholm syndrome. All those that agree to concede their freedom will believe those perceptions are originating in their own independent 'mind' when in fact by conceding their reality to Stockholm syndrome they have by definition conceded any independence of mind. Listen to the 'opinions' of the acquiescing masses in this 'Covid' era and what gushes forth is the repetition of the official version of everything delivered unprocessed, unfiltered and unquestioned. The whole programming dynamic works this way. I must be free because I'm told that I am and so I think that I am.

You can see what I mean with the chapter theme of 'I'm thinking – Oh, but *are* you?' The great majority are not thinking, let alone for themselves. They are repeating what authority has told them to believe which allows them to be controlled. Weaving through this mentality is the fear that the 'conspiracy theorists' are right and this again explains the often hysterical abuse that ensues when you dare to contest the official narrative of anything. Denial is the mechanism of hiding from yourself what you don't want to be true. Telling people what they want to hear is easy, but it's an infinitely greater challenge to tell them what they would rather not be happening.

One is akin to pushing against an open door while the other is met with vehement resistance no matter what the scale of evidence. I don't want it to be true so I'll convince myself that it's not. Examples are everywhere from the denial that a partner is cheating despite all the signs to the reflex-action rejection of any idea that world events in which country after country act in exactly the same way are centrally coordinated. To accept the latter is to accept that a force of unspeakable evil is working to destroy your life and the lives of your children with nothing too horrific to achieve that end. Who the heck wants that to be true? But if we don't face reality the end is duly achieved and the consequences are far worse and ongoing than breaking through the walls of denial today with the courage to make a stand against tyranny.

Connect the dots – but how?

A crucial aspect of perceptual programming is to portray a world in which everything is random and almost nothing is connected to anything else. Randomness cannot be coordinated by its very nature and once you perceive events as random the idea they could be connected is waved away as the rantings of the tinfoil-hat brigade. You can't plan and coordinate random you idiot! No, you can't, but you can hide the coldly-calculated and long-planned behind the *illusion* of randomness. A foundation manifestation of the Renegade Mind is to scan reality for patterns that connect the apparently random and turn pixels and dots into pictures. This is the way I work and have done so for more than 30 years. You look for similarities in people, modus operandi and desired outcomes and slowly, then ever quicker, the picture forms. For instance: There would seem to be no connection between the 'Covid pandemic' hoax and the human-caused global-warming hoax and yet they are masks (appropriately) on the same face seeking the same outcome. Those pushing the global warming myth through the Club of Rome and other Cult agencies are driving the lies about 'Covid' – Bill Gates is an obvious one, but they are endless. Why would the same people be involved in both when they are clearly not connected? Oh, but they

are. Common themes with personnel are matched by common goals. The 'solutions' to both 'problems' are centralisation of global power to impose the will of the few on the many to 'save' humanity from 'Covid' and save the planet from an 'existential threat' (we need 'zero Covid' and 'zero carbon emissions'). These, in turn, connect with the 'dot' of globalisation which was coined to describe the centralisation of global power in every area of life through incessant political and corporate expansion, trading blocks and superstates like the European Union. If you are the few and you want to control the many you have to centralise power and decision-making. The more you centralise power the more power the few at the centre will have over the many; and the more that power is centralised the more power those at the centre have to centralise even quicker. The momentum of centralisation gets faster and faster which is exactly the process we have witnessed. In this way the hoaxed 'pandemic' and the fakery of human-caused global warming serve the interests of globalisation and the seizure of global power in the hands of the Cult inner-circle which is behind 'Covid', 'climate change' *and* globalisation. At this point random 'dots' become a clear and obvious picture or pattern.

Klaus Schwab, the classic Bond villain who founded the Cult's Gates-funded World Economic Forum, published a book in 2020, *The Great Reset*, in which he used the 'problem' of 'Covid' to justify a total transformation of human society to 'save' humanity from 'climate change'. Schwab said: 'The pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world.' What he didn't mention is that the Cult he serves is behind both hoaxes as I show in my book *The Answer*. He and the Cult don't have to reimagine the world. They know precisely what they want and that's why they destroyed human society with 'Covid' to 'build back better' in their grand design. Their job is not to imagine, but to get humanity to imagine and agree with their plans while believing it's all random. It must be pure coincidence that 'The Great Reset' has long been the Cult's code name for the global imposition of fascism and replaced previous code-names of the 'New World

Order' used by Cult frontmen like Father George Bush and the 'New Order of the Ages' which emerged from Freemasonry and much older secret societies. New Order of the Ages appears on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States as 'Novus ordo seclorum' underneath the Cult symbol used since way back of the pyramid and all seeing-eye (Fig 3). The pyramid is the hierarchy of human control headed by the illuminated eye that symbolises the force behind the Cult which I will expose in later chapters. The term 'Annuit Coeptis' translates as 'He favours our undertaking'. We are told the 'He' is the Christian god, but 'He' is not as I will be explaining.

Figure 3: The all-seeing eye of the Cult 'god' on the Freemason-designed Great Seal of the United States and also on the dollar bill.

Having you on

Two major Cult techniques of perceptual manipulation that relate to all this are what I have called since the 1990s Problem-Reaction-Solution (PRS) and the Totalitarian Tiptoe (TT). They can be uncovered by the inquiring mind with a simple question: Who benefits? The answer usually identifies the perpetrators of a given action or happening through the concept of 'he who most benefits from a crime is the one most likely to have committed it'. The Latin 'Cue bono?' – Who benefits? – is widely attributed to the Roman orator and statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero. No wonder it goes back so far when the concept has been relevant to human behaviour since

history was recorded. Problem-Reaction-Solution is the technique used to manipulate us every day by covertly creating a problem (or the illusion of one) and offering the solution to the problem (or the illusion of one). In the first phase you create the problem and blame someone or something else for why it has happened. This may relate to a financial collapse, terrorist attack, war, global warming or pandemic, anything in fact that will allow you to impose the 'solution' to change society in the way you desire at that time. The 'problem' doesn't have to be real. PRS is manipulation of perception and all you need is the population to believe the problem is real. Human-caused global warming and the 'Covid pandemic' only have to be *perceived* to be real for the population to accept the 'solutions' of authority. I refer to this technique as NO-Problem-Reaction-Solution. Billions did not meekly accept house arrest from early 2020 because there was a real deadly 'Covid pandemic' but because they perceived – believed – that to be the case. The antidote to Problem-Reaction-Solution is to ask who benefits from the proposed solution. Invariably it will be anyone who wants to justify more control through deletion of freedom and centralisation of power and decision-making.

The two world wars were Problem-Reaction-Solutions that transformed and realigned global society. Both were manipulated into being by the Cult as I have detailed in books since the mid-1990s. They dramatically centralised global power, especially World War Two, which led to the United Nations and other global bodies thanks to the overt and covert manipulations of the Rockefeller family and other Cult bloodlines like the Rothschilds. The UN is a stalking horse for full-blown world government that I will come to shortly. The land on which the UN building stands in New York was donated by the Rockefellers and the same Cult family was behind Big Pharma scalpel and drug 'medicine' and the creation of the World Health Organization as part of the UN. They have been stalwarts of the eugenics movement and funded Hitler's race-purity expert' Ernst Rudin. The human-caused global warming hoax has been orchestrated by the Club of Rome through the UN which is

manufacturing both the 'problem' through its Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and imposing the 'solution' through its Agenda 21 and Agenda 2030 which demand the total centralisation of global power to 'save the world' from a climate hoax the United Nations is itself perpetrating. What a small world the Cult can be seen to be particularly among the inner circles. The bedfellow of Problem-Reaction-Solution is the Totalitarian Tiptoe which became the Totalitarian Sprint in 2020. The technique is fashioned to hide the carefully-coordinated behind the cover of apparently random events. You start the sequence at 'A' and you know you are heading for 'Z'. You don't want people to know that and each step on the journey is presented as a random happening while all the steps strung together lead in the same direction. The speed may have quickened dramatically in recent times, but you can still see the incremental approach of the Tiptoe in the case of 'Covid' as each new imposition takes us deeper into fascism. Tell people they have to do this or that to get back to 'normal', then this and this and this. With each new demand adding to the ones that went before the population's freedom is deleted until it disappears. The spider wraps its web around the flies more comprehensively with each new diktat. I'll highlight this in more detail when I get to the 'Covid' hoax and how it has been pulled off. Another prime example of the Totalitarian Tiptoe is how the Cult-created European Union went from a 'free-trade zone' to a centralised bureaucratic dictatorship through the Tiptoe of incremental centralisation of power until nations became mere administrative units for Cult-owned dark suits in Brussels.

The antidote to ignorance is knowledge which the Cult seeks vehemently to deny us, but despite the systematic censorship to that end the Renegade Mind can overcome this by vociferously seeking out the facts no matter the impediments put in the way. There is also a method of thinking and perceiving – *knowing* – that doesn't even need names, dates, place-type facts to identify the patterns that reveal the story. I'll get to that in the final chapter. All you need to know about the manipulation of human society and to what end is still out there – *at the time of writing* – in the form of books, videos

and websites for those that really want to breach the walls of programmed perception. To access this knowledge requires the abandonment of the mainstream media as a source of information in the awareness that this is owned and controlled by the Cult and therefore promotes mass perceptions that suit the Cult. Mainstream media lies all day, every day. That is its function and very reason for being. Where it does tell the truth, here and there, is only because the truth and the Cult agenda very occasionally coincide. If you look for fact and insight to the BBC, CNN and virtually all the rest of them you are asking to be conned and perceptually programmed.

Know the outcome and you'll see the journey

Events seem random when you have no idea where the world is being taken. Once you do the random becomes the carefully planned. Know the outcome and you'll see the journey is a phrase I have been using for a long time to give context to daily happenings that appear unconnected. Does a problem, or illusion of a problem, trigger a proposed 'solution' that further drives society in the direction of the outcome? Invariably the answer will be yes and the random – *abracadabra* – becomes the clearly coordinated. So what is this outcome that unlocks the door to a massively expanded understanding of daily events? I will summarise its major aspects – the fine detail is in my other books – and those new to this information will see that the world they thought they were living in is a very different place. The foundation of the Cult agenda is the incessant centralisation of power and all such centralisation is ultimately in pursuit of Cult control on a global level. I have described for a long time the planned world structure of top-down dictatorship as the Hunger Games Society. The term obviously comes from the movie series which portrayed a world in which a few living in military-protected hi-tech luxury were the overlords of a population condemned to abject poverty in isolated 'sectors' that were not allowed to interact. 'Covid' lockdowns and travel bans anyone? The 'Hunger Games' pyramid of structural control has the inner circle of the Cult at the top with pretty much the entire

population at the bottom under their control through dependency for survival on the Cult. The whole structure is planned to be protected and enforced by a military-police state (Fig 4).

Here you have the reason for the global lockdowns of the fake pandemic to coldly destroy independent incomes and livelihoods and make everyone dependent on the 'state' (the Cult that controls the 'states'). I have warned in my books for many years about the plan to introduce a 'guaranteed income' – a barely survivable pittance – designed to impose dependency when employment was destroyed by AI technology and now even more comprehensively at great speed by the 'Covid' scam. Once the pandemic was played and lockdown consequences began to delete independent income the authorities began to talk right on cue about the need for a guaranteed income and a 'Great Reset'. Guaranteed income will be presented as benevolent governments seeking to help a desperate people – desperate as a direct result of actions of the same governments. The truth is that such payments are a trap. You will only get them if you do exactly what the authorities demand including mass vaccination (genetic manipulation). We have seen this theme already in Australia where those dependent on government benefits have them reduced if parents don't agree to have their children vaccinated according to an insane health-destroying government-dictated schedule. Calculated economic collapse applies to governments as well as people. The Cult wants rid of countries through the creation of a world state with countries broken up into regions ruled by a world government and super states like the European Union. Countries must be bankrupted, too, to this end and it's being achieved by the trillions in 'rescue packages' and furlough payments, trillions in lost taxation, and money-no-object spending on 'Covid' including constant all-medium advertising (programming) which has made the media dependent on government for much of its income. The day of reckoning is coming – as planned – for government spending and given that it has been made possible by printing money and not by production/taxation there is inflation on the way that has the

potential to wipe out monetary value. In that case there will be no need for the Cult to steal your money. It just won't be worth anything (see the German Weimar Republic before the Nazis took over). Many have been okay with lockdowns while getting a percentage of their income from so-called furlough payments without having to work. Those payments are dependent, however, on people having at least a theoretical job with a business considered non-essential and ordered to close. As these business go under because they are closed by lockdown after lockdown the furlough stops and it will for everyone eventually. Then what? The 'then what?' is precisely the idea.

Figure 4: The Hunger Games Society structure I have long warned was planned and now the 'Covid' hoax has made it possible. This is the real reason for lockdowns.

Hired hands

Between the Hunger Games Cult elite and the dependent population is planned to be a vicious military-police state (a fusion of the two into one force). This has been in the making for a long time with police looking ever more like the military and carrying weapons to match. The pandemic scam has seen this process accelerate so fast as

lockdown house arrest is brutally enforced by carefully recruited fascist minds and gormless system-servers. The police and military are planned to merge into a centrally-directed world army in a global structure headed by a world government which wouldn't be elected even by the election fixes now in place. The world army is not planned even to be human and instead wars would be fought, primarily against the population, using robot technology controlled by artificial intelligence. I have been warning about this for decades and now militaries around the world are being transformed by this very AI technology. The global regime that I describe is a particular form of fascism known as a technocracy in which decisions are not made by clueless and co-opted politicians but by unelected technocrats – scientists, engineers, technologists and bureaucrats. Cult-owned-and-controlled Silicon Valley giants are examples of technocracy and they already have far more power to direct world events than governments. They are with their censorship *selecting* governments. I know that some are calling the 'Great Reset' a Marxist communist takeover, but fascism and Marxism are different labels for the same tyranny. Tell those who lived in fascist Germany and Stalinist Russia that there was a difference in the way their freedom was deleted and their lives controlled. I could call it a fascist technocracy or a Marxist technocracy and they would be equally accurate. The Hunger Games society with its world government structure would oversee a world army, world central bank and single world cashless currency imposing its will on a microchipped population (Fig 5). Scan its different elements and see how the illusory pandemic is forcing society in this very direction at great speed. Leaders of 23 countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) backed the idea in March, 2021, of a global treaty for 'international cooperation' in 'health emergencies' and nations should 'come together as a global community for peaceful cooperation that extends beyond this crisis'. Cut the Orwellian bullshit and this means another step towards global government. The plan includes a cashless digital money system that I first warned about in 1993. Right at the start of 'Covid' the deeply corrupt Tedros

Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the crooked and merely gofer 'head' of the World Health Organization, said it was possible to catch the 'virus' by touching cash and it was better to use cashless means. The claim was ridiculous nonsense and like the whole 'Covid' mind-trick it was nothing to do with 'health' and everything to do with pushing every aspect of the Cult agenda. As a result of the Tedros lie the use of cash has plummeted. The Cult script involves a single world digital currency that would eventually be technologically embedded in the body. China is a massive global centre for the Cult and if you watch what is happening there you will know what is planned for everywhere. The Chinese government is developing a digital currency which would allow fines to be deducted immediately via AI for anyone caught on camera breaking its fantastic list of laws and the money is going to be programmable with an expiry date to ensure that no one can accrue wealth except the Cult and its operatives.

Figure 5: The structure of global control the Cult has been working towards for so long and this has been enormously advanced by the 'Covid' illusion.

Serfdom is so smart

The Cult plan is far wider, extreme, and more comprehensive than even most conspiracy researchers appreciate and I will come to the true depths of deceit and control in the chapters 'Who controls the

Cult?' and 'Escaping Wetiko'. Even the world that we know is crazy enough. We are being deluged with ever more sophisticated and controlling technology under the heading of 'smart'. We have smart televisions, smart meters, smart cards, smart cars, smart driving, smart roads, smart pills, smart patches, smart watches, smart skin, smart borders, smart pavements, smart streets, smart cities, smart communities, smart environments, smart growth, smart planet ... smart *everything* around us. Smart technologies and methods of operation are designed to interlock to create a global Smart Grid connecting the entirety of human society including human minds to create a centrally-dictated 'hive' mind. 'Smart cities' is code for densely-occupied megacities of total surveillance and control through AI. Ever more destructive frequency communication systems like 5G have been rolled out without any official testing for health and psychological effects (colossal). 5G/6G/7G systems are needed to run the Smart Grid and each one becomes more destructive of body and mind. Deleting independent income is crucial to forcing people into these AI-policed prisons by ending private property ownership (except for the Cult elite). The Cult's Great Reset now openly foresees a global society in which no one will own any possessions and everything will be rented while the Cult would own literally everything under the guise of government and corporations. The aim has been to use the lockdowns to destroy sources of income on a mass scale and when the people are destitute and in unrepayable amounts of debt (problem) Cult assets come forward with the pledge to write-off debt in return for handing over all property and possessions (solution). Everything – literally everything including people – would be connected to the Internet via AI. I was warning years ago about the coming Internet of Things (IoT) in which all devices and technology from your car to your fridge would be plugged into the Internet and controlled by AI. Now we are already there with much more to come. The next stage is the Internet of Everything (IoE) which is planned to include the connection of AI to the human brain and body to replace the human mind with a centrally-controlled AI mind. Instead of perceptions

being manipulated through control of information and censorship those perceptions would come direct from the Cult through AI. What do you think? You think whatever AI decides that you think. In human terms there would be no individual 'think' any longer. Too incredible? The ravings of a lunatic? Not at all. Cult-owned crazies in Silicon Valley have been telling us the plan for years without explaining the real motivation and calculated implications. These include Google executive and 'futurist' Ray Kurzweil who highlights the year 2030 for when this would be underway. He said:

Our thinking ... will be a hybrid of biological and non-biological thinking ... humans will be able to extend their limitations and 'think in the cloud' ... We're going to put gateways to the cloud in our brains ... We're going to gradually merge and enhance ourselves ... In my view, that's the nature of being human – we transcend our limitations.

As the technology becomes vastly superior to what we are then the small proportion that is still human gets smaller and smaller and smaller until it's just utterly negligible.

The sales-pitch of Kurzweil and Cult-owned Silicon Valley is that this would make us 'super-human' when the real aim is to make us post-human and no longer 'human' in the sense that we have come to know. The entire global population would be connected to AI and become the centrally-controlled 'hive-mind' of externally-delivered perceptions. The Smart Grid being installed to impose the Cult's will on the world is being constructed to allow particular locations – even one location – to control the whole global system. From these prime control centres, which absolutely include China and Israel, anything connected to the Internet would be switched on or off and manipulated at will. Energy systems could be cut, communication via the Internet taken down, computer-controlled driverless autonomous vehicles driven off the road, medical devices switched off, the potential is limitless given how much AI and Internet connections now run human society. We have seen nothing yet if we allow this to continue. Autonomous vehicle makers are working with law enforcement to produce cars designed to automatically pull over if they detect a police or emergency vehicle flashing from up to 100 feet away. At a police stop the car would be unlocked and the

window rolled down automatically. Vehicles would only take you where the computer (the state) allowed. The end of petrol vehicles and speed limiters on all new cars in the UK and EU from 2022 are steps leading to electric computerised transport over which ultimately you have no control. The picture is far bigger even than the Cult global network or web and that will become clear when I get to the nature of the 'spider'. There is a connection between all these happenings and the instigation of DNA-manipulating 'vaccines' (which aren't 'vaccines') justified by the 'Covid' hoax. That connection is the unfolding plan to transform the human body from a biological to a synthetic biological state and this is why synthetic biology is such a fast-emerging discipline of mainstream science. 'Covid vaccines' are infusing self-replicating synthetic genetic material into the cells to cumulatively take us on the Totalitarian Tiptoe from Human 1.0 to the synthetic biological Human 2.0 which will be physically and perceptually attached to the Smart Grid to one hundred percent control every thought, perception and deed. Humanity needs to wake up and *fast*.

This is the barest explanation of where the 'outcome' is planned to go but it's enough to see the journey happening all around us. Those new to this information will already see 'Covid' in a whole new context. I will add much more detail as we go along, but for the minutiae evidence see my mega-works, *The Answer, The Trigger* and *Everything You Need to Know But Have Never Been Told*.

Now – how does a Renegade Mind see the 'world'?

CHAPTER TWO

Renegade Perception

It is one thing to be clever and another to be wise
George R.R. Martin

A simple definition of the difference between a programmed mind and a Renegade Mind would be that one sees only dots while the other connects them to see the picture. Reading reality with accuracy requires the observer to (a) know the planned outcome and (b) realise that everything, but *everything*, is connected.

The entirety of infinite reality is connected – that's its very nature – and with human society an expression of infinite reality the same must apply. Simple cause and effect is a connection. The effect is triggered by the cause and the effect then becomes the cause of another effect. Nothing happens in isolation because it *can't*. Life in whatever reality is simple choice and consequence. We make choices and these lead to consequences. If we don't like the consequences we can make different choices and get different consequences which lead to other choices and consequences. The choice and the consequence are not only connected they are indivisible. You can't have one without the other as an old song goes. A few cannot control the world unless those being controlled allow that to happen – cause and effect, choice and consequence. Control – who has it and who doesn't – is a two-way process, a symbiotic relationship, involving the controller and controlled. 'They took my freedom away!!' Well, yes, but you also gave it to them. Humanity is

subjected to mass control because humanity has acquiesced to that control. This is all cause and effect and literally a case of give and take. In the same way world events of every kind are connected and the Cult works incessantly to sell the illusion of the random and coincidental to maintain the essential (to them) perception of dots that hide the picture. Renegade Minds know this and constantly scan the world for patterns of connection. This is absolutely pivotal in understanding the happenings in the world and without that perspective clarity is impossible. First you know the planned outcome and then you identify the steps on the journey – the day-by-day apparently random which, when connected in relation to the outcome, no longer appear as individual events, but as the proverbial *chain* of events leading in the same direction. I'll give you some examples:

Political puppet show

We are told to believe that politics is 'adversarial' in that different parties with different beliefs engage in an endless tussle for power. There may have been some truth in that up to a point – and only a point – but today divisions between 'different' parties are rhetorical not ideological. Even the rhetorical is fusing into one-speak as the parties eject any remaining free thinkers while others succumb to the ever-gathering intimidation of anyone with the 'wrong' opinion. The Cult is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back thousands of years as my books have documented. Its intergenerational initiates have been manipulating events with increasing effect the more that global power has been centralised. In ancient times the Cult secured control through the system of monarchy in which 'special' bloodlines (of which more later) demanded the right to rule as kings and queens simply by birthright and by vanquishing others who claimed the same birthright. There came a time, however, when people had matured enough to see the unfairness of such tyranny and demanded a say in who governed them. Note the word – *governed* them. Not served them – *governed* them, hence government defined as 'the political direction and control exercised over the

actions of the members, citizens, or inhabitants of communities, societies, and states; direction of the affairs of a state, community, etc.' Governments exercise control over rather than serve just like the monarchies before them. Bizarrely there are still countries like the United Kingdom which are ruled by a monarch *and* a government that officially answers to the monarch. The UK head of state and that of Commonwealth countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand is 'selected' by who in a *single family* had unprotected sex with whom and in what order. Pinch me it can't be true. Ouch! Shit, it is. The demise of monarchies in most countries offered a potential vacuum in which some form of free and fair society could arise and the Cult had that base covered. Monarchies had served its interests but they couldn't continue in the face of such widespread opposition and, anyway, replacing a 'royal' dictatorship that people could see with a dictatorship 'of the people' hiding behind the concept of 'democracy' presented far greater manipulative possibilities and ways of hiding coordinated tyranny behind the illusion of 'freedom'.

Democracy is quite wrongly defined as government selected by the population. This is not the case at all. It is government selected by *some* of the population (and then only in theory). This 'some' doesn't even have to be the majority as we have seen so often in first-past-the-post elections in which the so-called majority party wins fewer votes than the 'losing' parties combined. Democracy can give total power to a party in government from a minority of the votes cast. It's a sleight of hand to sell tyranny as freedom. Seventy-four million Trump-supporting Americans didn't vote for the 'Democratic' Party of Joe Biden in the distinctly dodgy election in 2020 and yet far from acknowledging the wishes and feelings of that great percentage of American society the Cult-owned Biden government set out from day one to destroy them and their right to a voice and opinion. Empty shell Biden and his Cult handlers said they were doing this to 'protect democracy'. Such is the level of lunacy and sickness to which politics has descended. Connect the dots and relate them to the desired outcome – a world government run by self-appointed technocrats and no longer even elected

politicians. While operating through its political agents in government the Cult is at the same time encouraging public distain for politicians by putting idiots and incompetents in theoretical power on the road to deleting them. The idea is to instil a public reaction that says of the technocrats: 'Well, they couldn't do any worse than the pathetic politicians.' It's all about controlling perception and Renegade Minds can see through that while programmed minds cannot when they are ignorant of both the planned outcome and the manipulation techniques employed to secure that end. This knowledge can be learned, however, and fast if people choose to get informed.

Politics may at first sight appear very difficult to control from a central point. I mean look at the 'different' parties and how would you be able to oversee them all and their constituent parts? In truth, it's very straightforward because of their structure. We are back to the pyramid of imposition and acquiescence. Organisations are structured in the same way as the system as a whole. Political parties are not open forums of free expression. They are hierarchies. I was a national spokesman for the British Green Party which claimed to be a different kind of politics in which influence and power was devolved; but I can tell you from direct experience – and it's far worse now – that Green parties are run as hierarchies like all the others however much they may try to hide that fact or kid themselves that it's not true. A very few at the top of all political parties are directing policy and personnel. They decide if you are elevated in the party or serve as a government minister and to do that you have to be a yes man or woman. Look at all the maverick political thinkers who never ascended the greasy pole. If you want to progress within the party or reach 'high-office' you need to fall into line and conform. Exceptions to this are rare indeed. Should you want to run for parliament or Congress you have to persuade the local or state level of the party to select you and for that you need to play the game as dictated by the hierarchy. If you secure election and wish to progress within the greater structure you need to go on conforming to what is acceptable to those running the hierarchy

from the peak of the pyramid. Political parties are perceptual gulags and the very fact that there are party 'Whips' appointed to 'whip' politicians into voting the way the hierarchy demands exposes the ridiculous idea that politicians are elected to serve the people they are supposed to represent. Cult operatives and manipulation has long seized control of major parties that have any chance of forming a government and at least most of those that haven't. A new party forms and the Cult goes to work to infiltrate and direct. This has reached such a level today that you see video compilations of 'leaders' of all parties whether Democrats, Republicans, Conservative, Labour and Green parroting the same Cult mantra of 'Build Back Better' and the 'Great Reset' which are straight off the Cult song-sheet to describe the transformation of global society in response to the Cult-instigated hoaxes of the 'Covid pandemic' and human-caused 'climate change'. To see Caroline Lucas, the Green Party MP that I knew when I was in the party in the 1980s, speaking in support of plans proposed by Cult operative Klaus Schwab representing the billionaire global elite is a real head-shaker.

Many parties – one master

The party system is another mind-trick and was instigated to change the nature of the dictatorship by swapping 'royalty' for dark suits that people believed – though now ever less so – represented their interests. Understanding this trick is to realise that a single force (the Cult) controls all parties either directly in terms of the major ones or through manipulation of perception and ideology with others. You don't need to manipulate Green parties to demand your transformation of society in the name of 'climate change' when they are obsessed with the lie that this is essential to 'save the planet'. You just give them a platform and away they go serving your interests while believing they are being environmentally virtuous. America's political structure is a perfect blueprint for how the two or multi-party system is really a one-party state. The Republican Party is controlled from one step back in the shadows by a group made up of billionaires and their gofers known as neoconservatives or Neocons.

I have exposed them in fine detail in my books and they were the driving force behind the policies of the imbecilic presidency of Boy George Bush which included 9/11 (see *The Trigger* for a comprehensive demolition of the official story), the subsequent 'war on terror' (war *of* terror) and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The latter was a No-Problem-Reaction-Solution based on claims by Cult operatives, including Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, about Saddam Hussein's 'weapons of mass destruction' which did not exist as war criminals Bush and Blair well knew.

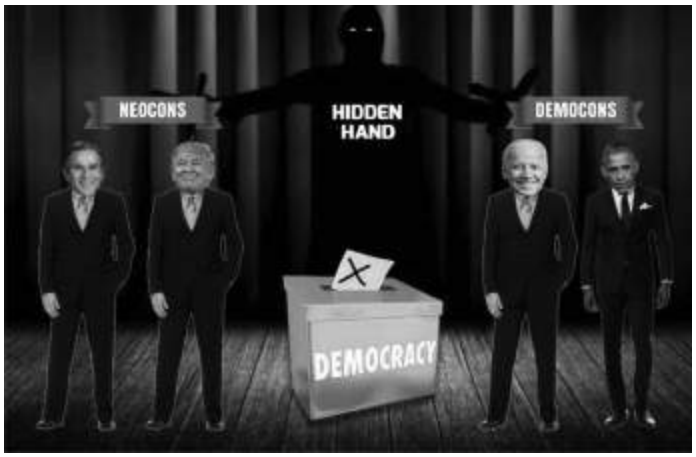

Figure 6: Different front people, different parties – same control system.

The Democratic Party has its own 'Neocon' group controlling from the background which I call the 'Democons' and here's the penny-drop – the Neocons and Democons answer to the same masters one step further back into the shadows (Fig 6). At that level of the Cult the Republican and Democrat parties are controlled by the same people and no matter which is in power the Cult is in power. This is how it works in almost every country and certainly in Britain with Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green parties now all on the same page whatever the rhetoric may be in their feeble attempts to appear different. Neocons operated at the time of Bush through a think tank called The Project for the New American Century which in September, 2000, published a document entitled *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces, and Resources*

For a New Century demanding that America fight 'multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars' as a 'core mission' to force regime-change in countries including Iraq, Libya and Syria. Neocons arranged for Bush ('Republican') and Blair ('Labour Party') to front-up the invasion of Iraq and when they departed the Democons orchestrated the targeting of Libya and Syria through Barack Obama ('Democrat') and British Prime Minister David Cameron ('Conservative Party'). We have 'different' parties and 'different' people, but the same unfolding script. The more the Cult has seized the reigns of parties and personnel the more their policies have transparently pursued the same agenda to the point where the fascist 'Covid' impositions of the Conservative junta of Jackboot Johnson in Britain were opposed by the Labour Party because they were not fascist enough. The Labour Party is likened to the US Democrats while the Conservative Party is akin to a British version of the Republicans and on both sides of the Atlantic they all speak the same language and support the direction demanded by the Cult although some more enthusiastically than others. It's a similar story in country after country because it's all centrally controlled. Oh, but what about Trump? I'll come to him shortly. Political 'choice' in the 'party' system goes like this: You vote for Party A and they get into government. You don't like what they do so next time you vote for Party B and they get into government. You don't like what they do when it's pretty much the same as Party A and why wouldn't that be with both controlled by the same force? Given that only two, sometimes three, parties have any chance of forming a government to get rid of Party B that you don't like you have to vote again for Party A which … you don't like. This, ladies and gentlemen, is what they call 'democracy' which we are told – wrongly – is a term interchangeable with 'freedom'.

The cult of cults

At this point I need to introduce a major expression of the Global Cult known as Sabbatian-Frankism. Sabbatian is also spelt as Sabbatean. I will summarise here. I have published major exposés

and detailed background in other works. Sabbatian-Frankism combines the names of two frauds posing as 'Jewish' men, Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676), a rabbi, black magician and occultist who proclaimed he was the Jewish messiah; and Jacob Frank (1726-1791), the Polish 'Jew', black magician and occultist who said he was the reincarnation of 'messiah' Zevi and biblical patriarch Jacob. They worked across two centuries to establish the Sabbatian-Frankist cult that plays a major, indeed central, role in the manipulation of human society by the Global Cult which has its origins much further back in history than Sabbatai Zevi. I should emphasise two points here in response to the shrill voices that will scream 'anti-Semitism': (1) Sabbatian-Frankists are NOT Jewish and only pose as such to hide their cult behind a Jewish façade; and (2) my information about this cult has come from Jewish sources who have long realised that their society and community has been infiltrated and taken over by interloper Sabbatian-Frankists. Infiltration has been the foundation technique of Sabbatian-Frankism from its official origin in the 17th century. Zevi's Sabbatian sect attracted a massive following described as the biggest messianic movement in Jewish history, spreading as far as Africa and Asia, and he promised a return for the Jews to the 'Promised Land' of Israel. Sabbatianism was not Judaism but an inversion of everything that mainstream Judaism stood for. So much so that this sinister cult would have a feast day when Judaism had a fast day and whatever was forbidden in Judaism the Sabbatians were encouraged and even commanded to do. This included incest and what would be today called Satanism. Members were forbidden to marry outside the sect and there was a system of keeping their children ignorant of what they were part of until they were old enough to be trusted not to unknowingly reveal anything to outsiders. The same system is employed to this day by the Global Cult in general which Sabbatian-Frankism has enormously influenced and now largely controls.

Zevi and his Sabbatians suffered a setback with the intervention by the Sultan of the Islamic Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and what is now the Republic of Turkey where Zevi was located. The

Sultan gave him the choice of proving his 'divinity', converting to Islam or facing torture and death. Funnily enough Zevi chose to convert or at least appear to. Some of his supporters were disillusioned and drifted away, but many did not with 300 families also converting – only in theory – to Islam. They continued behind this Islamic smokescreen to follow the goals, rules and rituals of Sabbatianism and became known as 'crypto-Jews' or the 'Dönmeh' which means 'to turn'. This is rather ironic because they didn't 'turn' and instead hid behind a fake Islamic persona. The process of appearing to be one thing while being very much another would become the calling card of Sabbatianism especially after Zevi's death and the arrival of the Satanist Jacob Frank in the 18th century when the cult became Sabbatian-Frankism and plumbed still new depths of depravity and infiltration which included – still includes – human sacrifice and sex with children. Wherever Sabbatians go paedophilia and Satanism follow and is it really a surprise that Hollywood is so infested with child abuse and Satanism when it was established by Sabbatian-Frankists and is still controlled by them? Hollywood has been one of the prime vehicles for global perceptual programming and manipulation. How many believe the version of 'history' portrayed in movies when it is a travesty and inversion (again) of the truth? Rabbi Marvin Antelman describes Frankism in his book, *To Eliminate the Opiate*, as 'a movement of complete evil' while Jewish professor Gershom Scholem said of Frank in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*: 'In all his actions [he was] a truly corrupt and degenerate individual ... one of the most frightening phenomena in the whole of Jewish history.' Frank was excommunicated by traditional rabbis, as was Zevi, but Frank was undeterred and enjoyed vital support from the House of Rothschild, the infamous banking dynasty whose inner-core are Sabbatian-Frankists and not Jews. Infiltration of the Roman Church and Vatican was instigated by Frank with many Dönmeh 'turning' again to convert to Roman Catholicism with a view to hijacking the reins of power. This was the ever-repeating modus operandi and continues to be so. Pose as an advocate of the religion, culture or country that you want to control and then

manipulate your people into the positions of authority and influence largely as advisers, administrators and Svengalis for those that appear to be in power. They did this with Judaism, Christianity (Christian Zionism is part of this), Islam and other religions and nations until Sabbatian-Frankism spanned the world as it does today.

Sabbatian Saudis and the terror network

One expression of the Sabbatian-Frankist Dönmeh within Islam is the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, the House of Saud, through which came the vile distortion of Islam known as Wahhabism. This is the violent creed followed by terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS or Islamic State. Wahhabism is the hand-chopping, head-chopping 'religion' of Saudi Arabia which is used to keep the people in a constant state of fear so the interloper House of Saud can continue to rule. Al-Qaeda and Islamic State were lavishly funded by the House of Saud while being created and directed by the Sabbatian-Frankist network in the United States that operates through the Pentagon, CIA and the government in general of whichever 'party'. The front man for the establishment of Wahhabism in the middle of the 18th century was a Sabbatian-Frankist 'crypto-Jew' posing as Islamic called Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. His daughter would marry the son of Muhammad bin Saud who established the first Saudi state before his death in 1765 with support from the British Empire. Bin Saud's successors would establish modern Saudi Arabia in league with the British and Americans in 1932 which allowed them to seize control of Islam's major shrines in Mecca and Medina. They have dictated the direction of Sunni Islam ever since while Iran is the major centre of the Shiite version and here we have the source of at least the public conflict between them. The Sabbatian network has used its Wahhabi extremists to carry out Problem-Reaction-Solution terrorist attacks in the name of 'Al-Qaeda' and 'Islamic State' to justify a devastating 'war on terror', ever-increasing surveillance of the population and to terrify people into compliance. Another insight of the Renegade Mind is the streetwise understanding that

just because a country, location or people are attacked doesn't mean that those apparently representing that country, location or people are not behind the attackers. Often they are *orchestrating* the attacks because of the societal changes that can be then justified in the name of 'saving the population from terrorists'.

I show in great detail in *The Trigger* how Sabbatian-Frankists were the real perpetrators of 9/11 and not '19 Arab hijackers' who were blamed for what happened. Observe what was justified in the name of 9/11 alone in terms of Middle East invasions, mass surveillance and control that fulfilled the demands of the Project for the New American Century document published by the Sabbatian Neocons. What appear to be enemies are on the deep inside players on the same Sabbatian team. Israel and Arab 'royal' dictatorships are all ruled by Sabbatians and the recent peace agreements between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and others are only making formal what has always been the case behind the scenes. Palestinians who have been subjected to grotesque tyranny since Israel was bombed and terrorised into existence in 1948 have never stood a chance. Sabbatian-Frankists have controlled Israel (so the constant theme of violence and war which Sabbatians love) and they have controlled the Arab countries that Palestinians have looked to for real support that never comes. 'Royal families' of the Arab world in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, etc., are all Sabbatians with allegiance to the aims of the cult and not what is best for their Arabic populations. They have stolen the oil and financial resources from their people by false claims to be 'royal dynasties' with a genetic right to rule and by employing vicious militaries to impose their will.

Satanic 'illumination'

The Satanist Jacob Frank formed an alliance in 1773 with two other Sabbatians, Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1744-1812), founder of the Rothschild banking dynasty, and Jesuit-educated fraudulent Jew, Adam Weishaupt, and this led to the formation of the Bavarian Illuminati, firstly under another name, in 1776. The Illuminati would

be the manipulating force behind the French Revolution (1789-1799) and was also involved in the American Revolution (1775-1783) before and after the Illuminati's official creation. Weishaupt would later become (in public) a Protestant Christian in archetypal Sabbatian style. I read that his name can be decoded as Adam-Weishaupt or 'the first man to lead those who know'. He wasn't a leader in the sense that he was a subordinate, but he did lead those below him in a crusade of transforming human society that still continues today. The theme was confirmed as early as 1785 when a horseman courier called Lanz was reported to be struck by lighting and extensive Illuminati documents were found in his saddlebags. They made the link to Weishaupt and detailed the plan for world takeover. Current events with 'Covid' fascism have been in the making for a very long time. Jacob Frank was jailed for 13 years by the Catholic Inquisition after his arrest in 1760 and on his release he headed for Frankfurt, Germany, home city and headquarters of the House of Rothschild where the alliance was struck with Mayer Amschel Rothschild and Weishaupt. Rothschild arranged for Frank to be given the title of Baron and he became a wealthy nobleman with a big following of Jews in Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and other European countries. Most of them would have believed he was on their side.

The name 'Illuminati' came from the Zohar which is a body of works in the Jewish mystical 'bible' called the Kabbalah. 'Zohar' is the foundation of Sabbatian-Frankist belief and in Hebrew 'Zohar' means 'splendour', 'radiance', 'illuminated', and so we have 'Illuminati'. They claim to be the 'Illuminated Ones' from their knowledge systematically hidden from the human population and passed on through generations of carefully-chosen initiates in the global secret society network or Cult. Hidden knowledge includes an awareness of the Cult agenda for the world and the nature of our collective reality that I will explore later. Cult 'illumination' is symbolised by the torch held by the Statue of Liberty which was gifted to New York by French Freemasons in Paris who knew exactly what it represents. 'Liberty' symbolises the goddess worshipped in

Babylon as Queen Semiramis or Ishtar. The significance of this will become clear. Notice again the ubiquitous theme of inversion with the Statue of 'Liberty' really symbolising mass control (Fig 7). A mirror-image statute stands on an island in the River Seine in Paris from where New York Liberty originated (Fig 8). A large replica of the Liberty flame stands on top of the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris where Princess Diana died in a Cult ritual described in *The Biggest Secret*. Lucifer 'the light bringer' is related to all this (and much more as we'll see) and 'Lucifer' is a central figure in Sabbatian-Frankism and its associated Satanism. Sabbatians reject the Jewish Torah, or Pentateuch, the 'five books of Moses' in the Old Testament known as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy which are claimed by Judaism and Christianity to have been dictated by 'God' to Moses on Mount Sinai. Sabbatians say these do not apply to them and they seek to replace them with the Zohar to absorb Judaism and its followers into their inversion which is an expression of a much greater global inversion. They want to delete all religions and force humanity to worship a one-world religion – Sabbatian Satanism that also includes worship of the Earth goddess. Satanic themes are being more and more introduced into mainstream society and while Christianity is currently the foremost target for destruction the others are planned to follow.

Figure 7: The Cult goddess of Babylon disguised as the Statue of Liberty holding the flame of Lucifer the 'light bringer'.

Figure 8: Liberty's mirror image in Paris where the New York version originated.

Marx brothers

Rabbi Marvin Antelman connects the Illuminati to the Jacobins in *To Eliminate the Opiate* and Jacobins were the force behind the French Revolution. He links both to the Bund der Gerechten, or League of the Just, which was the network that inflicted communism/Marxism on the world. Antelman wrote:

> The original inner circle of the Bund der Gerechten consisted of born Catholics, Protestants and Jews [Sabbatian-Frankist infiltrators], and those representatives of respective subdivisions formulated schemes for the ultimate destruction of their faiths. The heretical Catholics laid plans which they felt would take a century or more for the ultimate destruction of the church; the apostate Jews for the ultimate destruction of the Jewish religion.

Sabbatian-created communism connects into this anti-religion agenda in that communism does not allow for the free practice of religion. The Sabbatian 'Bund' became the International Communist Party and Communist League and in 1848 'Marxism' was born with the Communist Manifesto of Sabbatian assets Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is absolutely no coincidence that Marxism, just a different name for fascist and other centrally-controlled tyrannies, is being imposed worldwide as a result of the 'Covid' hoax and nor that Marxist/fascist China was the place where the hoax originated. The reason for this will become very clear in the chapter 'Covid: The calculated catastrophe'. The so-called 'Woke' mentality has hijacked

traditional beliefs of the political left and replaced them with far-right make-believe 'social justice' better known as Marxism. Woke will, however, be swallowed by its own perceived 'revolution' which is really the work of billionaires and billionaire corporations feigning being 'Woke'. Marxism is being touted by Wokers as a replacement for 'capitalism' when we don't have 'capitalism'. We have cartelism in which the market is stitched up by the very Cult billionaires and corporations bankrolling Woke. Billionaires love Marxism which keeps the people in servitude while they control from the top. Terminally naïve Wokers think they are 'changing the world' when it's the Cult that is doing the changing and when they have played their vital part and become surplus to requirements they, too, will be targeted. The Illuminati-Jacobins were behind the period known as 'The Terror' in the French Revolution in 1793 and 1794 when Jacobin Maximillian de Robespierre and his Orwellian 'Committee of Public Safety' killed 17,000 'enemies of the Revolution' who had once been 'friends of the Revolution'. Karl Marx (1818-1883), whose Sabbatian creed of Marxism has cost the lives of at least 100 million people, is a hero once again to Wokers who have been systematically kept ignorant of real history by their 'education' programming. As a result they now promote a Sabbatian 'Marxist' abomination destined at some point to consume them. Rabbi Antelman, who spent decades researching the Sabbatian plot, said of the League of the Just and Karl Marx:

> Contrary to popular opinion Karl Marx did not originate the Communist Manifesto. He was paid for his services by the League of the Just, which was known in its country of origin, Germany, as the Bund der Geaechteten.

Antelman said the text attributed to Marx was the work of other people and Marx 'was only repeating what others already said'. Marx was 'a hired hack – lackey of the wealthy Illuminists'. Marx famously said that religion was the 'opium of the people' (part of the Sabbatian plan to demonise religion) and Antelman called his books, *To Eliminate the Opiate*. Marx was born Jewish, but his family converted to Christianity (Sabbatian modus operandi) and he

attacked Jews, not least in his book, *A World Without Jews*. In doing so he supported the Sabbatian plan to destroy traditional Jewishness and Judaism which we are clearly seeing today with the vindictive targeting of orthodox Jews by the Sabbatian government of Israel over 'Covid' laws. I don't follow any religion and it has done much damage to the world over centuries and acted as a perceptual straightjacket. Renegade Minds, however, are always asking *why* something is being done. It doesn't matter if they agree or disagree with what is happening – *why* is it happening is the question. The 'why?' can be answered with regard to religion in that religions create interacting communities of believers when the Cult wants to dismantle all discourse, unity and interaction (see 'Covid' lockdowns) and the ultimate goal is to delete all religions for a one-world religion of Cult Satanism worshipping their 'god' of which more later. We see the same 'why?' with gun control in America. I don't have guns and don't want them, but why is the Cult seeking to disarm the population at the same time that law enforcement agencies are armed to their molars and why has every tyrant in history sought to disarm people before launching the final takeover? They include Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and Mao who followed confiscation with violent seizing of power. You know it's a Cult agenda by the people who immediately race to the microphones to exploit dead people in multiple shootings. Ultra-Zionist Cult lackey Senator Chuck Schumer was straight on the case after ten people were killed in Boulder, Colorado in March, 2121. Simple rule … if Schumer wants it the Cult wants it and the same with his ultra-Zionist mate the wild-eyed Senator Adam Schiff. At the same time they were calling for the disarmament of Americans, many of whom live a long way from a police response, Schumer, Schiff and the rest of these pampered clowns were sitting on Capitol Hill behind a razor-wired security fence protected by thousands of armed troops in addition to their own armed bodyguards. Mom and pop in an isolated home? They're just potential mass shooters.

Zion Mainframe

Sabbatian-Frankists and most importantly the Rothschilds were behind the creation of 'Zionism', a political movement that demanded a Jewish homeland in Israel as promised by Sabbatai Zevi. The very symbol of Israel comes from the German meaning of the name Rothschild. Dynasty founder Mayer Amschel Rothschild changed the family name from Bauer to Rothschild, or 'Red-Shield' in German, in deference to the six-pointed 'Star of David' hexagram displayed on the family's home in Frankfurt. The symbol later appeared on the flag of Israel after the Rothschilds were centrally involved in its creation. Hexagrams are not a uniquely Jewish symbol and are widely used in occult ('hidden') networks often as a symbol for Saturn (see my other books for why). Neither are Zionism and Jewishness interchangeable. Zionism is a political movement and philosophy and not a 'race' or a people. Many Jews oppose Zionism and many non-Jews, including US President Joe Biden, call themselves Zionists as does Israel-centric Donald Trump. America's support for the Israel government is pretty much a gimme with ultra-Zionist billionaires and corporations providing fantastic and dominant funding for both political parties. Former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney has told how she was approached immediately she ran for office to 'sign the pledge' to Israel and confirm that she would always vote in that country's best interests. All American politicians are approached in this way. Anyone who refuses will get no support or funding from the enormous and all-powerful Zionist lobby that includes organisations like mega-lobby group AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Trump's biggest funder was ultra-Zionist casino and media billionaire Sheldon Adelson while major funders of the Democratic Party include ultra-Zionist George Soros and ultra-Zionist financial and media mogul, Haim Saban. Some may reel back at the suggestion that Soros is an Israel-firster (Sabbatian-controlled Israel-firster), but Renegade Minds watch the actions not the words and everywhere Soros donates his billions the Sabbatian agenda benefits. In the spirit of Sabbatian inversion Soros pledged $1 billion for a new university network to promote 'liberal values and tackle intolerance'. He made the announcement during his annual speech

at the Cult-owned World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January, 2020, after his 'harsh criticism' of 'authoritarian rulers' around the world. You can only laugh at such brazen mendacity. How *he* doesn't laugh is the mystery. Translated from the Orwellian 'liberal values and tackle intolerance' means teaching non-white people to hate white people and for white people to loathe themselves for being born white. The reason for that will become clear.

The 'Anti-Semitism' fraud

Zionists support the Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine which has been the Sabbatian-Rothschild goal for so long, but not for the benefit of Jews. Sabbatians and their global Anti-Semitism Industry have skewed public and political opinion to equate opposing the violent extremes of Zionism to be a blanket attack and condemnation of all Jewish people. Sabbatians and their global Anti-Semitism Industry have skewed public and political opinion to equate opposing the violent extremes of Zionism to be a blanket attack and condemnation of all Jewish people. This is nothing more than a Sabbatian protection racket to stop legitimate investigation and exposure of their agendas and activities. The official definition of 'anti-Semitism' has more recently been expanded to include criticism of Zionism – a *political movement* – and this was done to further stop exposure of Sabbatian infiltrators who created Zionism as we know it today in the 19th century. Renegade Minds will talk about these subjects when they know the shit that will come their way. People must decide if they want to know the truth or just cower in the corner in fear of what others will say. Sabbatians have been trying to label me as 'anti-Semitic' since the 1990s as I have uncovered more and more about their background and agendas. Useless, gutless, fraudulent 'journalists' then just repeat the smears without question and on the day I was writing this section a pair of unquestioning repeaters called Ben Quinn and Archie Bland (how appropriate) outright called me an 'anti-Semite' in the establishment propaganda sheet, the London *Guardian*, with no supporting evidence. The

Sabbatian Anti-Semitism Industry said so and who are they to question that? They wouldn't dare. Ironically 'Semitic' refers to a group of languages in the Middle East that are almost entirely Arabic. 'Anti-Semitism' becomes 'anti-Arab' which if the consequences of this misunderstanding were not so grave would be hilarious. Don't bother telling Quinn and Bland. I don't want to confuse them, bless 'em. One reason I am dubbed 'anti-Semitic' is that I wrote in the 1990s that Jewish operatives (Sabbatians) were heavily involved in the Russian Revolution when Sabbatians overthrew the Romanov dynasty. This apparently made me 'anti-Semitic'. Oh, really? Here is a section from *The Trigger*:

British journalist Robert Wilton confirmed these themes in his 1920 book *The Last Days of the Romanovs* when he studied official documents from the Russian government to identify the members of the Bolshevik ruling elite between 1917 and 1919. The Central Committee included 41 Jews among 62 members; the Council of the People's Commissars had 17 Jews out of 22 members; and 458 of the 556 most important Bolshevik positions between 1918 and 1919 were occupied by Jewish people. Only 17 were Russian. Then there were the 23 Jews among the 36 members of the vicious Cheka Soviet secret police established in 1917 who would soon appear all across the country.

Professor Robert Service of Oxford University, an expert on 20th century Russian history, found evidence that ['Jewish'] Leon Trotsky had sought to make sure that Jews were enrolled in the Red Army and were disproportionately represented in the Soviet civil bureaucracy that included the Cheka which performed mass arrests, imprisonment and executions of 'enemies of the people'. A US State Department Decimal File (861.00/5339) dated November 13th, 1918, names [Rothschild banking agent in America] Jacob Schiff and a list of ultra-Zionists as funders of the Russian Revolution leading to claims of a 'Jewish plot', but the key point missed by all is they were not 'Jews' – they were Sabbatian-Frankists.

Britain's Winston Churchill made the same error by mistake or otherwise. He wrote in a 1920 edition of the *Illustrated Sunday Herald* that those behind the Russian revolution were part of a 'worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality' (see 'Woke' today because that has been created by the same network). Churchill said there was no need to exaggerate the part played in the creation of Bolshevism and in the actual bringing about of the Russian

Revolution 'by these international and for the most part atheistical Jews' ['atheistical Jews' = Sabbatians]. Churchill said it is certainly a very great one and probably outweighs all others: 'With the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of the leading figures are Jews.' He went on to describe, knowingly or not, the Sabbatian modus operandi of placing puppet leaders nominally in power while they control from the background:

> Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from the Jewish leaders. Thus Tchitcherin, a pure Russian, is eclipsed by his nominal subordinate, Litvinoff, and the influence of Russians like Bukharin or Lunacharski cannot be compared with the power of Trotsky, or of Zinovieff, the Dictator of the Red Citadel (Petrograd), or of Krassin or Radek – all Jews. In the Soviet institutions the predominance of Jews is even more astonishing. And the prominent, if not indeed the principal, part in the system of terrorism applied by the Extraordinary Commissions for Combatting Counter-Revolution has been taken by Jews, and in some notable cases by Jewesses.

What I said about seriously disproportionate involvement in the Russian Revolution by Jewish 'revolutionaries' (Sabbatians) is provable fact, but truth is no defence against the Sabbatian Anti-Semitism Industry, its repeater parrots like Quinn and Bland, and the now breathtaking network of so-called 'Woke' 'anti-hate' groups with interlocking leaderships and funding which have the role of discrediting and silencing anyone who gets too close to exposing the Sabbatians. We have seen 'truth is no defence' confirmed in legal judgements with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in Canada decreeing this: 'Truthful statements can be presented in a manner that would meet the definition of hate speech, and not all truthful statements must be free from restriction.' Most 'anti-hate' activists, who are themselves consumed by hatred, are too stupid and ignorant of the world to know how they are being used. They are far too far up their own virtue-signalling arses and it's far too dark for them to see anything.

The 'revolution' game

The background and methods of the 'Russian' Revolution are straight from the Sabbatian playbook seen in the French Revolution

and endless others around the world that appear to start as a revolution of the people against tyrannical rule and end up with a regime change to more tyrannical rule overtly or covertly. Wars, terror attacks and regime overthrows follow the Sabbatian cult through history with its agents creating them as Problem-Reaction-Solutions to remove opposition on the road to world domination. Sabbatian dots connect the Rothschilds with the Illuminati, Jacobins of the French Revolution, the 'Bund' or League of the Just, the International Communist Party, Communist League and the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that would lead to the Rothschild-funded Russian Revolution. The sequence comes under the heading of 'creative destruction' when you advance to your global goal by continually destroying the status quo to install a new status quo which you then also destroy. The two world wars come to mind. With each new status quo you move closer to your planned outcome. Wars and mass murder are to Sabbatians a collective blood sacrifice ritual. They are obsessed with death for many reasons and one is that death is an inversion of life. Satanists and Sabbatians are obsessed with death and often target churches and churchyards for their rituals. Inversion-obsessed Sabbatians explain the use of inverted symbolism including the *inverted* pentagram and *inverted* cross. The inversion of the cross has been related to targeting Christianity, but the cross was a religious symbol long before Christianity and its inversion is a statement about the Sabbatian mentality and goals more than any single religion.

Sabbatians operating in Germany were behind the rise of the occult-obsessed Nazis and the subsequent Jewish exodus from Germany and Europe to Palestine and the United States after World War Two. The Rothschild dynasty was at the forefront of this both as political manipulators and by funding the operation. Why would Sabbatians help to orchestrate the horrors inflicted on Jews by the Nazis and by Stalin after they organised the Russian Revolution? Sabbatians hate Jews and their religion, that's why. They pose as Jews and secure positions of control within Jewish society and play the 'anti-Semitism' card to protect themselves from exposure

through a global network of organisations answering to the Sabbatian-created-and-controlled globe-spanning intelligence network that involves a stunning web of military-intelligence operatives and operations for a tiny country of just nine million. Among them are Jewish assets who are not Sabbatians but have been convinced by them that what they are doing is for the good of Israel and the Jewish community to protect them from what they have been programmed since childhood to believe is a Jew-hating hostile world. The Jewish community is just a highly convenient cover to hide the true nature of Sabbatians. Anyone getting close to exposing their game is accused by Sabbatian place-people and gofers of 'anti-Semitism' and claiming that all Jews are part of a plot to take over the world. I am not saying that. I am saying that Sabbatians – the *real* Jew-haters – have infiltrated the Jewish community to use them both as a cover and an 'anti-Semitic' defence against exposure. Thus we have the Anti-Semitism Industry targeted researchers in this way and most Jewish people think this is justified and genuine. They don't know that their 'Jewish' leaders and institutions of state, intelligence and military are not controlled by Jews at all, but cultists and stooges of Sabbatian-Frankism. I once added my name to a pro-Jewish freedom petition online and the next time I looked my name was gone and text had been added to the petition blurb to attack me as an 'anti-Semite' such is the scale of perceptual programming.

Moving on America

I tell the story in *The Trigger* and a chapter called 'Atlantic Crossing' how particularly after Israel was established the Sabbatians moved in on the United States and eventually grasped control of government administration, the political system via both Democrats and Republicans, the intelligence community like the CIA and National Security Agency (NSA), the Pentagon and mass media. Through this seriously compartmentalised network Sabbatians and their operatives in Mossad, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and US agencies pulled off 9/11 and blamed it on 19 'Al-Qaeda hijackers' dominated by men from, or connected to, Sabbatian-ruled Saudi

Arabia. The '19' were not even on the planes let alone flew those big passenger jets into buildings while being largely incompetent at piloting one-engine light aircraft. 'Hijacker' Hani Hanjour who is said to have flown American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon with a turn and manoeuvre most professional pilots said they would have struggled to do was banned from renting a small plane by instructors at the Freeway Airport in Bowie, Maryland, just *six weeks* earlier on the grounds that he was an incompetent pilot. The Jewish population of the world is just 0.2 percent with even that almost entirely concentrated in Israel (75 percent Jewish) and the United States (around two percent). This two percent and globally 0.2 percent refers to *Jewish* people and not Sabbatian interlopers who are a fraction of that fraction. What a sobering thought when you think of the fantastic influence on world affairs of tiny Israel and that the Project for the New America Century (PNAC) which laid out the blueprint in September, 2000, for America's war on terror and regime change wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria was founded and dominated by Sabbatians known as 'Neocons'. The document conceded that this plan would not be supported politically or publicly without a major attack on American soil and a Problem-Reaction-Solution excuse to send troops to war across the Middle East. Sabbatian Neocons said:

> ... [The] process of transformation ... [war and regime change] ... is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalysing event – like a new Pearl Harbor.

Four months later many of those who produced that document came to power with their inane puppet George Bush from the long-time Sabbatian Bush family. They included Sabbatian Dick Cheney who was officially vice-president, but really de-facto president for the entirety of the 'Bush' government. Nine months after the 'Bush' inauguration came what Bush called at the time 'the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century' and with typical Sabbatian timing and symbolism 2001 was the 60th anniversary of the attack in 1941 by the Japanese Air Force on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, which allowed President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to take the United States into a Sabbatian-

instigated Second World War that he said in his election campaign that he never would. The evidence is overwhelming that Roosevelt and his military and intelligence networks knew the attack was coming and did nothing to stop it, but they did make sure that America's most essential naval ships were not in Hawaii at the time. Three thousand Americans died in the Pearl Harbor attacks as they did on September 11th. By the 9/11 year of 2001 Sabbatians had widely infiltrated the US government, military and intelligence operations and used their compartmentalised assets to pull off the 'Al-Qaeda' attacks. If you read *The Trigger* it will blow your mind to see the utterly staggering concentration of 'Jewish' operatives (Sabbatian infiltrators) in essential positions of political, security, legal, law enforcement, financial and business power before, during, and after the attacks to make them happen, carry them out, and then cover their tracks – and I do mean *staggering* when you think of that 0.2 percent of the world population and two percent of Americans which are Jewish while Sabbatian infiltrators are a fraction of that. A central foundation of the 9/11 conspiracy was the hijacking of government, military, Air Force and intelligence computer systems in real time through 'back-door' access made possible by Israeli (Sabbatian) 'cyber security' software. Sabbatian-controlled Israel is on the way to rivalling Silicon Valley for domination of cyberspace and is becoming the dominant force in cyber-security which gives them access to entire computer systems and their passcodes across the world. Then add to this that Zionists head (officially) Silicon Valley giants like Google (Larry Page and Sergey Brin), Google-owned YouTube (Susan Wojcicki), Facebook (Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg), and Apple (Chairman Arthur D. Levinson), and that ultra-Zionist hedge fund billionaire Paul Singer has a $1 billion stake in Twitter which is only nominally headed by 'CEO' pothead Jack Dorsey. As cable news host Tucker Carlson said of Dorsey: 'There used to be debate in the medical community whether dropping a ton of acid had permanent effects and I think that debate has now ended.' Carlson made the comment after Dorsey told a hearing on Capitol Hill (if you cut through his bullshit) that he

believed in free speech so long as he got to decide what you can hear and see. These 'big names' of Silicon Valley are only front men and women for the Global Cult, not least the Sabbatians, who are the true controllers of these corporations. Does anyone still wonder why these same people and companies have been ferociously censoring and banning people (like me) for exposing any aspect of the Cult agenda and especially the truth about the 'Covid' hoax which Sabbatians have orchestrated?

The Jeffrey Epstein paedophile ring was a Sabbatian operation. He was officially 'Jewish' but he was a Sabbatian and women abused by the ring have told me about the high number of 'Jewish' people involved. The Epstein horror has Sabbatian written all over it and matches perfectly their modus operandi and obsession with sex and ritual. Epstein was running a Sabbatian blackmail ring in which famous people with political and other influence were provided with young girls for sex while everything was being filmed and recorded on hidden cameras and microphones at his New York house, Caribbean island and other properties. Epstein survivors have described this surveillance system to me and some have gone public. Once the famous politician or other figure knew he or she was on video they tended to do whatever they were told. Here we go again …when you've got them by the balls their hearts and minds will follow. Sabbatians use this blackmail technique on a wide scale across the world to entrap politicians and others they need to act as demanded. Epstein's private plane, the infamous 'Lolita Express', had many well-known passengers including Bill Clinton while Bill Gates has flown on an Epstein plane and met with him four years after Epstein had been jailed for paedophilia. They subsequently met many times at Epstein's home in New York according to a witness who was there. Epstein's infamous side-kick was Ghislaine Maxwell, daughter of Mossad agent and ultra-Zionist mega-crooked British businessman, Bob Maxwell, who at one time owned the *Daily Mirror* newspaper. Maxwell was murdered at sea on his boat in 1991 by Sabbatian-controlled Mossad when he became a liability with his

business empire collapsing as a former Mossad operative has confirmed (see *The Trigger*).

Money, money, money, funny money …

Before I come to the Sabbatian connection with the last three US presidents I will lay out the crucial importance to Sabbatians of controlling banking and finance. Sabbatian Mayer Amschel Rothschild set out to dominate this arena in his family's quest for total global control. What is freedom? It is, in effect, choice. The more choices you have the freer you are and the fewer your choices the more you are enslaved. In the global structure created over centuries by Sabbatians the biggest decider and restrictor of choice is … money. Across the world if you ask people what they would like to do with their lives and why they are not doing that they will reply 'I don't have the money'. This is the idea. A global elite of multi-billionaires are described as 'greedy' and that is true on one level; but control of money – who has it and who doesn't – is not primarily about greed. It's about control. Sabbatians have seized ever more control of finance and sucked the wealth of the world out of the hands of the population. We talk now, after all, about the 'One-percent' and even then the wealthiest are a lot fewer even than that. This has been made possible by a money scam so outrageous and so vast it could rightly be called the scam of scams founded on creating 'money' out of nothing and 'loaning' that with interest to the population. Money out of nothing is called 'credit'. Sabbatians have asserted control over governments and banking ever more completely through the centuries and secured financial laws that allow banks to lend hugely more than they have on deposit in a confidence trick known as fractional reserve lending. Imagine if you could lend money that doesn't exist and charge the recipient interest for doing so. You would end up in jail. Bankers by contrast end up in mansions, private jets, Malibu and Monaco.

Banks are only required to keep a fraction of their deposits and wealth in their vaults and they are allowed to lend 'money' they don't have called 'credit. Go into a bank for a loan and if you succeed

the banker will not move any real wealth into your account. They will type into your account the amount of the agreed 'loan' – say £100,000. This is not wealth that really exists; it is non-existent, fresh-air, created-out-of-nothing 'credit' which has never, does not, and will never exist except in theory. Credit is backed by nothing except wind and only has buying power because people think that it has buying power and accept it in return for property, goods and services. I have described this situation as like those cartoon characters you see chasing each other and when they run over the edge of a cliff they keep running forward on fresh air until one of them looks down, realises what's happened, and they all crash into the ravine. The whole foundation of the Sabbatian financial system is to stop people looking down except for periodic moments when they want to crash the system (as in 2008 and 2020 ongoing) and reap the rewards from all the property, businesses and wealth their borrowers had signed over as 'collateral' in return for a 'loan' of fresh air. Most people think that money is somehow created by governments when it comes into existence from the start as a debt through banks 'lending' illusory money called credit. Yes, the very currency of exchange is a *debt* from day one issued as an interest-bearing loan. Why don't governments create money interest-free and lend it to their people interest-free? Governments are controlled by Sabbatians and the financial system is controlled by Sabbatians for whom interest-free money would be a nightmare come true. Sabbatians underpin their financial domination through their global network of central banks, including the privately-owned US Federal Reserve and Britain's Bank of England, and this is orchestrated by a privately-owned central bank coordination body called the Bank for International Settlements in Basle, Switzerland, created by the usual suspects including the Rockefellers and Rothschilds. Central bank chiefs don't answer to governments or the people. They answer to the Bank for International Settlements or, in other words, the Global Cult which is dominated today by Sabbatians.

Built-in disaster

There are so many constituent scams within the overall banking scam. When you take out a loan of thin-air credit only the amount of that loan is theoretically brought into circulation to add to the amount in circulation; but you are paying back the principle plus interest. The additional interest is not created and this means that with every 'loan' there is a shortfall in the money in circulation between what is borrowed and what has to be paid back. There is never even close to enough money in circulation to repay all outstanding public and private debt including interest. Coldly weaved in the very fabric of the system is the certainty that some will lose their homes, businesses and possessions to the banking 'lender'. This is less obvious in times of 'boom' when the amount of money in circulation (and the debt) is expanding through more people wanting and getting loans. When a downturn comes and the money supply contracts it becomes painfully obvious that there is not enough money to service all debt and interest. This is less obvious in times of 'boom' when the amount of money in circulation (and the debt) is expanding through more people wanting and getting loans. When a downturn comes and the money supply contracts and it becomes painfully obvious – as in 2008 and currently – that there is not enough money to service all debt and interest. Sabbatian banksters have been leading the human population through a calculated series of booms (more debt incurred) and busts (when the debt can't be repaid and the banks get the debtor's tangible wealth in exchange for non-existent 'credit'). With each 'bust' Sabbatian bankers have absorbed more of the world's tangible wealth and we end up with the One-percent. Governments are in bankruptcy levels of debt to the same system and are therefore owned by a system they do not control. The Federal Reserve, 'America's central bank', is privately-owned and American presidents only nominally appoint its chairman or woman to maintain the illusion that it's an arm of government. It's not. The 'Fed' is a cartel of private banks which handed billions to its associates and friends after the crash of 2008 and has been Sabbatian-controlled since it was manipulated into being in 1913 through the covert trickery of Rothschild banking agents Jacob Schiff and Paul

Warburg, and the Sabbatian Rockefeller family. Somehow from a Jewish population of two-percent and globally 0.2 percent (Sabbatian interlopers remember are far smaller) ultra-Zionists headed the Federal Reserve for 31 years between 1987 and 2018 in the form of Alan Greenspan, Bernard Bernanke and Janet Yellen (now Biden's Treasury Secretary) with Yellen's deputy chairman a Israeli-American duel citizen and ultra-Zionist Stanley Fischer, a former governor of the Bank of Israel. Ultra-Zionist Fed chiefs spanned the presidencies of Ronald Reagan ('Republican'), Father George Bush ('Republican'), Bill Clinton ('Democrat'), Boy George Bush ('Republican') and Barack Obama ('Democrat'). We should really add the pre-Greenspan chairman, Paul Adolph Volcker, 'appointed' by Jimmy Carter ('Democrat') who ran the Fed between 1979 and 1987 during the Carter and Reagan administrations before Greenspan took over. Volcker was a long-time associate and business partner of the Rothschilds. No matter what the 'party' officially in power the United States economy was directed by the same force. Here are members of the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations and see if you can make out a common theme.

Barack Obama ('Democrat')

Ultra-Zionists Robert Rubin, Larry Summers, and Timothy Geithner ran the US Treasury in the Clinton administration and two of them reappeared with Obama. Ultra-Zionist Fed chairman Alan Greenspan had manipulated the crash of 2008 through deregulation and jumped ship just before the disaster to make way for ultra-Zionist Bernard Bernanke to hand out trillions to Sabbatian 'too big to fail' banks and businesses, including the ubiquitous ultra-Zionist Goldman Sachs which has an ongoing staff revolving door operation between itself and major financial positions in government worldwide. Obama inherited the fallout of the crash when he took office in January, 2009, and fortunately he had the support of his ultra-Zionist White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel, son of a terrorist who helped to bomb Israel into being in 1948, and his ultra-Zionist senior adviser David Axelrod, chief strategist in Obama's two

successful presidential campaigns. Emmanuel, later mayor of Chicago and former senior fundraiser and strategist for Bill Clinton, is an example of the Sabbatian policy after Israel was established of migrating insider families to America so their children would be born American citizens. 'Obama' chose this financial team throughout his administration to respond to the Sabbatian-instigated crisis:

Timothy Geithner (ultra-Zionist) Treasury Secretary; Jacob J. Lew, Treasury Secretary; Larry Summers (ultra-Zionist), director of the White House National Economic Council; Paul Adolph Volcker (Rothschild business partner), chairman of the Economic Recovery Advisory Board; Peter Orszag (ultra-Zionist), director of the Office of Management and Budget overseeing all government spending; Penny Pritzker (ultra-Zionist), Commerce Secretary; Jared Bernstein (ultra-Zionist), chief economist and economic policy adviser to Vice President Joe Biden; Mary Schapiro (ultra-Zionist), chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC); Gary Gensler (ultra-Zionist), chairman of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC); Sheila Bair (ultra-Zionist), chair of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC); Karen Mills (ultra-Zionist), head of the Small Business Administration (SBA); Kenneth Feinberg (ultra-Zionist), Special Master for Executive [bail-out] Compensation. Feinberg would be appointed to oversee compensation (with strings) to 9/11 victims and families in a campaign to stop them having their day in court to question the official story. At the same time ultra-Zionist Bernard Bernanke was chairman of the Federal Reserve and these are only some of the ultra-Zionists with allegiance to Sabbatian-controlled Israel in the Obama government. Obama's biggest corporate donor was ultra-Zionist Goldman Sachs which had employed many in his administration.

Donald Trump ('Republican')

Trump claimed to be an outsider (he wasn't) who had come to 'drain the swamp'. He embarked on this goal by immediately appointing ultra-Zionist Steve Mnuchin, a Goldman Sachs employee for 17

years, as his Treasury Secretary. Others included Gary Cohn (ultra-Zionist), chief operating officer of Goldman Sachs, his first Director of the National Economic Council and chief economic adviser, who was later replaced by Larry Kudlow (ultra-Zionist). Trump's senior adviser throughout his four years in the White House was his sinister son-in-law Jared Kushner, a life-long friend of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Kushner is the son of a convicted crook who was pardoned by Trump in his last days in office. Other ultra-Zionists in the Trump administration included: Stephen Miller, Senior Policy Adviser; Avrahm Berkowitz, Deputy Adviser to Trump and his Senior Adviser Jared Kushner; Ivanka Trump, Adviser to the President, who converted to Judaism when she married Jared Kushner; David Friedman, Trump lawyer and Ambassador to Israel; Jason Greenblatt, Trump Organization executive vice president and chief legal officer, who was made Special Representative for International Negotiations and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict; Rod Rosenstein, Deputy Attorney General; Elliot Abrams, Special Representative for Venezuela, then Iran; John Eisenberg, National Security Council Legal Adviser and Deputy Council to the President for National Security Affairs; Anne Neuberger, Deputy National Manager, National Security Agency; Ezra Cohen-Watnick, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; Elan Carr, Special Envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism; Len Khodorkovsky, Deputy Special Envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism; Reed Cordish, Assistant to the President, Intragovernmental and Technology Initiatives. Trump Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, both Christian Zionists, were also vehement supporters of Israel and its goals and ambitions.

Donald 'free-speech believer' Trump pardoned a number of financial and violent criminals while ignoring calls to pardon Julian Assange and Edward Snowden whose crimes are revealing highly relevant information about government manipulation and corruption and the widespread illegal surveillance of the American people by US 'security' agencies. It's so good to know that Trump is on the side of freedom and justice and not mega-criminals with

allegiance to Sabbatian-controlled Israel. These included a pardon for Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard who was jailed for life in 1987 under the Espionage Act. Aviem Sella, the Mossad agent who recruited Pollard, was also pardoned by Trump while Assange sat in jail and Snowden remained in exile in Russia. Sella had 'fled' (was helped to escape) to Israel in 1987 and was never extradited despite being charged under the Espionage Act. A Trump White House statement said that Sella's clemency had been 'supported by Benjamin Netanyahu, Ron Dermer, Israel's US Ambassador, David Friedman, US Ambassador to Israel and Miriam Adelson, wife of leading Trump donor Sheldon Adelson who died shortly before. Other friends of Jared Kushner were pardoned along with Sholom Weiss who was believed to be serving the longest-ever white-collar prison sentence of more than 800 years in 2000. The sentence was commuted of Ponzi-schemer Eliyahu Weinstein who defrauded Jews and others out of $200 million. I did mention that Assange and Snowden were ignored, right? Trump gave Sabbatians almost everything they asked for in military and political support, moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem with its critical symbolic and literal implications for Palestinian statehood, and the 'deal of the Century' designed by Jared Kushner and David Friedman which gave the Sabbatian Israeli government the green light to substantially expand its already widespread program of building illegal Jewish-only settlements in the occupied land of the West Bank. This made a two-state 'solution' impossible by seizing all the land of a potential Palestinian homeland and that had been the plan since 1948 and then 1967 when the Arab-controlled Gaza Strip, West Bank, Sinai Peninsula and Syrian Golan Heights were occupied by Israel. All the talks about talks and road maps and delays have been buying time until the West Bank was physically occupied by Israeli real estate. Trump would have to be a monumentally ill-informed idiot not to see that this was the plan he was helping to complete. The Trump administration was in so many ways the Kushner administration which means the Netanyahu administration which means the Sabbatian administration. I understand why many opposing Cult fascism in all its forms gravitated to Trump, but he

was a crucial part of the Sabbatian plan and I will deal with this in the next chapter.

Joe Biden ('Democrat')

A barely cognitive Joe Biden took over the presidency in January, 2021, along with his fellow empty shell, Vice-President Kamala Harris, as the latest Sabbatian gofers to enter the White House. Names on the door may have changed and the 'party' – the force behind them remained the same as Zionists were appointed to a stream of pivotal areas relating to Sabbatian plans and policy. They included: Janet Yellen, Treasury Secretary, former head of the Federal Reserve, and still another ultra-Zionist running the US Treasury after Mnuchin (Trump), Lew and Geithner (Obama), and Summers and Rubin (Clinton); Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State; Wendy Sherman, Deputy Secretary of State (so that's 'Biden's' Sabbatian foreign policy sorted); Jeff Zients, White House coronavirus coordinator; Rochelle Walensky, head of the Centers for Disease Control; Rachel Levine, transgender deputy health secretary (that's 'Covid' hoax policy under control); Merrick Garland, Attorney General; Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security; Cass Sunstein, Homeland Security with responsibility for new immigration laws; Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence; Anne Neuberger, National Security Agency cybersecurity director (note, cybersecurity); David Cohen, CIA Deputy Director; Ronald Klain, Biden's Chief of Staff (see Rahm Emanuel); Eric Lander, a 'leading geneticist', Office of Science and Technology Policy director (see Smart Grid, synthetic biology agenda); Jessica Rosenworcel, acting head of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) which controls Smart Grid technology policy and electromagnetic communication systems including 5G. How can it be that so many pivotal positions are held by two-percent of the American population and 0.2 percent of the world population administration after administration no matter who is the president and what is the party? It's a coincidence? Of course it's not and this is why Sabbatians have built their colossal global web of interlocking 'anti-

hate' hate groups to condemn anyone who asks these glaring questions as an 'anti-Semite'. The way that Jewish people horrifically abused in Sabbatian-backed Nazi Germany are exploited to this end is stomach-turning and disgusting beyond words.

Political fusion

Sabbatian manipulation has reversed the roles of Republicans and Democrats and the same has happened in Britain with the Conservative and Labour Parties. Republicans and Conservatives were always labelled the 'right' and Democrats and Labour the 'left', but look at the policy positions now and the Democrat-Labour 'left' has moved further to the 'right' than Republicans and Conservatives under the banner of 'Woke', the Cult-created far-right tyranny. Where once the Democrat-Labour 'left' defended free speech and human rights they now seek to delete them and as I said earlier despite the 'Covid' fascism of the Jackboot Johnson Conservative government in the UK the Labour Party of leader Keir Starmer demanded even more extreme measures. The Labour Party has been very publicly absorbed by Sabbatians after a political and media onslaught against the previous leader, the weak and inept Jeremy Corbyn, over made-up allegations of 'anti-Semitism' both by him and his party. The plan was clear with this 'anti-Semite' propaganda and what was required in response was a swift and decisive 'fuck off' from Corbyn and a statement to expose the Anti-Semitism Industry (Sabbatian) attempt to silence Labour criticism of the Israeli government (Sabbatians) and purge the party of all dissent against the extremes of ultra-Zionism (Sabbatians). Instead Corbyn and his party fell to their knees and appeased the abusers which, by definition, is impossible. Appeasing one demand leads only to a new demand to be appeased until takeover is complete. Like I say – 'fuck off' would have been a much more effective policy and I have used it myself with great effect over the years when Sabbatians are on my case which is most of the time. I consider that fact a great compliment, by the way. The outcome of the Labour Party capitulation is that we now have a Sabbatian-controlled

Conservative Party 'opposed' by a Sabbatian-controlled Labour Party in a one-party Sabbatian state that hurtles towards the extremes of tyranny (the Sabbatian cult agenda). In America the situation is the same. Labour's Keir Starmer spends his days on his knees with his tongue out pointing to Tel Aviv, or I guess now Jerusalem, while Boris Johnson has an 'anti-Semitism czar' in the form of former Labour MP John Mann who keeps Starmer company on his prayer mat.

Sabbatian influence can be seen in Jewish members of the Labour Party who have been ejected for criticism of Israel including those from families that suffered in Nazi Germany. Sabbatians despise real Jewish people and target them even more harshly because it is so much more difficult to dub them 'anti-Semitic' although in their desperation they do try.

CHAPTER THREE

The Pushbacker sting

Until you realize how easy it is for your mind to be manipulated, you remain the puppet of someone else's game
Evita Ochel

I will use the presidencies of Trump and Biden to show how the manipulation of the one-party state plays out behind the illusion of political choice across the world. No two presidencies could – on the face of it – be more different and apparently at odds in terms of direction and policy.

A Renegade Mind sees beyond the obvious and focuses on outcomes and consequences and not image, words and waffle. The Cult embarked on a campaign to divide America between those who blindly support its agenda (the mentality known as 'Woke') and those who are pushing back on where the Cult and its Sabbatians want to go. This presents infinite possibilities for dividing and ruling the population by setting them at war with each other and allows a perceptual ring fence of demonisation to encircle the Pushbackers in a modern version of the Little Big Horn in 1876 when American cavalry led by Lieutenant Colonel George Custer were drawn into a trap, surrounded and killed by Native American tribes defending their land of thousands of years from being seized by the government. In this modern version the roles are reversed and it's those defending themselves from the Sabbatian government who are surrounded and the government that's seeking to destroy them. This trap was set years ago and to explain how we must return to 2016

and the emergence of Donald Trump as a candidate to be President of the United States. He set out to overcome the best part of 20 other candidates in the Republican Party before and during the primaries and was not considered by many in those early stages to have a prayer of living in the White House. The Republican Party was said to have great reservations about Trump and yet somehow he won the nomination. When you know how American politics works – politics in general – there is no way that Trump could have become the party's candidate unless the Sabbatian-controlled 'Neocons' that run the Republican Party wanted that to happen. We saw the proof in emails and documents made public by WikiLeaks that the Democratic Party hierarchy, or Democons, systematically undermined the campaign of Bernie Sanders to make sure that Sabbatian gofer Hillary Clinton won the nomination to be their presidential candidate. If the Democons could do that then the Neocons in the Republican Party could have derailed Trump in the same way. But they didn't and at that stage I began to conclude that Trump could well be the one chosen to be president. If that was the case the 'why' was pretty clear to see – the goal of dividing America between Cult agenda-supporting Wokers and Pushbackers who gravitated to Trump because he was telling them what they wanted to hear. His constituency of support had been increasingly ignored and voiceless for decades and profoundly through the eight years of Sabbatian puppet Barack Obama. Now here was someone speaking their language of pulling back from the incessant globalisation of political and economic power, the exporting of American jobs to China and elsewhere by 'American' (Sabbatian) corporations, the deletion of free speech, and the mass immigration policies that had further devastated job opportunities for the urban working class of all races and the once American heartlands of the Midwest.

Beware the forked tongue

Those people collectively sighed with relief that at last a political leader was apparently on their side, but another trait of the Renegade Mind is that you look even harder at people telling you

what you want to hear than those who are telling you otherwise. Obviously as I said earlier people wish what they want to hear to be true and genuine and they are much more likely to believe that than someone saying what they don't want to here and don't want to be true. Sales people are taught to be skilled in eliciting by calculated questioning what their customers want to hear and repeating that back to them as their own opinion to get their targets to like and trust them. Assets of the Cult are also sales people in the sense of selling perception. To read Cult manipulation you have to play the long and expanded game and not fall for the Vaudeville show of party politics. Both American parties are vehicles for the Cult and they exploit them in different ways depending on what the agenda requires at that moment. Trump and the Republicans were used to be the focus of dividing America and isolating Pushbackers to open the way for a Biden presidency to become the most extreme in American history by advancing the full-blown Woke (Cult) agenda with the aim of destroying and silencing Pushbackers now labelled Nazi Trump supporters and white supremacists.

Sabbatians wanted Trump in office for the reasons described by ultra-Zionist Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) who was promoting the Woke philosophy through 'community organising' long before anyone had heard of it. In those days it still went by its traditional name of Marxism. The reason for the manipulated Trump phenomenon was laid out in Alinsky's 1971 book, *Rules for Radicals*, which was his blueprint for overthrowing democratic and other regimes and replacing them with Sabbatian Marxism. Not surprisingly his to-do list was evident in the Sabbatian French and Russian 'Revolutions' and that in China which will become very relevant in the next chapter about the 'Covid' hoax. Among Alinsky's followers have been the deeply corrupt Barack Obama, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton who described him as a 'hero'. All three are Sabbatian stooges with Pelosi personifying the arrogant corrupt idiocy that so widely fronts up for the Cult inner core. Predictably as a Sabbatian advocate of the 'light-bringer' Alinsky features Lucifer on the dedication page of his book as the original radical who gained

his own kingdom ('Earth' as we shall see). One of Alinsky's golden radical rules was to pick an individual and focus all attention, hatred and blame on them and not to target faceless bureaucracies and corporations. *Rules for Radicals* is really a Sabbatian handbook with its contents repeatedly employed all over the world for centuries and why wouldn't Sabbatians bring to power their designer-villain to be used as the individual on which all attention, hatred and blame was bestowed? This is what they did and the only question for me is how much Trump knew that and how much he was manipulated. A bit of both, I suspect. This was Alinsky's Trump technique from a man who died in 1972. The technique has spanned history:

Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, polarize it. Don't try to attack abstract corporations or bureaucracies. Identify a responsible individual. Ignore attempts to shift or spread the blame.

From the moment Trump came to illusory power everything was about him. It wasn't about Republican policy or opinion, but all about Trump. Everything he did was presented in negative, derogatory and abusive terms by the Sabbatian-dominated media led by Cult operations such as CNN, MSNBC, *The New York Times* and the Jeff Bezos-owned *Washington Post* – 'Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, polarize it.' Trump was turned into a demon to be vilified by those who hated him and a demi-god loved by those who worshipped him. This, in turn, had his supporters, too, presented as equally demonic in preparation for the punchline later down the line when Biden was about to take office. It was here's a Trump, there's a Trump, everywhere a Trump, Trump. Virtually every news story or happening was filtered through the lens of 'The Donald'. You loved him or hated him and which one you chose was said to define you as Satan's spawn or a paragon of virtue. Even supporting some Trump policies or statements and not others was enough for an assault on your character. No shades of grey were or are allowed. Everything is black and white (literally and figuratively). A Californian I knew had her head utterly scrambled by her hatred for Trump while telling people they should love each other. She was so totally consumed by

Trump Derangement Syndrome as it became to be known that this glaring contradiction would never have occurred to her. By definition anyone who criticised Trump or praised his opponents was a hero and this lady described Joe Biden as 'a kind, honest gentleman' when he's a provable liar, mega-crook and vicious piece of work to boot. Sabbatians had indeed divided America using Trump as the fall-guy and all along the clock was ticking on the consequences for his supporters.

In hock to his masters

Trump gave Sabbatians via Israel almost everything they wanted in his four years. Ask and you shall receive was the dynamic between himself and Benjamin Netanyahu orchestrated by Trump's ultra-Zionist son-in-law Jared Kushner, his ultra-Zionist Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, and ultra-Zionist 'Israel adviser', Jason Greenblatt. The last two were central to the running and protecting from collapse of his business empire, the Trump Organisation, and colossal business failures made him forever beholding to Sabbatian networks that bailed him out. By the start of the 1990s Trump owed $4 billion to banks that he couldn't pay and almost $1billion of that was down to him personally and not his companies. This mega-disaster was the result of building two new casinos in Atlantic City and buying the enormous Taj Mahal operation which led to crippling debt payments. He had borrowed fantastic sums from 72 banks with major Sabbatian connections and although the scale of debt should have had him living in a tent alongside the highway they never foreclosed. A plan was devised to lift Trump from the mire by BT Securities Corporation and Rothschild Inc. and the case was handled by Wilber Ross who had worked for the Rothschilds for 27 years. Ross would be named US Commerce Secretary after Trump's election. Another crucial figure in saving Trump was ultra-Zionist 'investor' Carl Icahn who bought the Taj Mahal casino. Icahn was made special economic adviser on financial regulation in the Trump administration. He didn't stay long but still managed to find time to make a tidy sum of a reported $31.3 million when he sold his

holdings affected by the price of steel three days before Trump imposed a 235 percent tariff on steel imports. What amazing bits of luck these people have. Trump and Sabbatian operatives have long had a close association and his mentor and legal adviser from the early 1970s until 1986 was the dark and genetically corrupt ultra-Zionist Roy Cohn who was chief counsel to Senator Joseph McCarthy's 'communist' witch-hunt in the 1950s. *Esquire* magazine published an article about Cohn with the headline 'Don't mess with Roy Cohn'. He was described as the most feared lawyer in New York and 'a ruthless master of dirty tricks ... [with] ... more than one Mafia Don on speed dial'. Cohn's influence, contacts, support and protection made Trump a front man for Sabbatians in New York with their connections to one of Cohn's many criminal employers, the 'Russian' Sabbatian Mafia. Israel-centric media mogul Rupert Murdoch was introduced to Trump by Cohn and they started a long friendship. Cohn died in 1986 weeks after being disbarred for unethical conduct by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court. The wheels of justice do indeed run slow given the length of Cohn's crooked career.

QAnon-sense

We are asked to believe that Donald Trump with his fundamental connections to Sabbatian networks and operatives has been leading the fight to stop the Sabbatian agenda for the fascistic control of America and the world. Sure he has. A man entrapped during his years in the White House by Sabbatian operatives and whose biggest financial donor was casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson who was Sabbatian to his DNA?? Oh, do come on. Trump has been used to divide America and isolate Pushbackers on the Cult agenda under the heading of 'Trump supporters', 'insurrectionists' and 'white supremacists'. The US Intelligence/Mossad Psyop or psychological operation known as QAnon emerged during the Trump years as a central pillar in the Sabbatian campaign to lead Pushbackers into the trap set by those that wished to destroy them. I knew from the start that QAnon was a scam because I had seen the same scenario many

times before over 30 years under different names and I had written about one in particular in the books. 'Not again' was my reaction when QAnon came to the fore. The same script is pulled out every few years and a new name added to the letterhead. The story always takes the same form: 'Insiders' or 'the good guys' in the government-intelligence-military 'Deep State' apparatus were going to instigate mass arrests of the 'bad guys' which would include the Rockefellers, Rothschilds, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, George Soros, etc., etc. Dates are given for when the 'good guys' are going to move in, but the dates pass without incident and new dates are given which pass without incident. The central message to Pushbackers in each case is that they don't have to do anything because there is 'a plan' and it is all going to be sorted by the 'good guys' on the inside. 'Trust the plan' was a QAnon mantra when the only plan was to misdirect Pushbackers into putting their trust in a Psyop they believed to be real. Beware, beware, those who tell you what you want to hear and always check it out. Right up to Biden's inauguration QAnon was still claiming that 'the Storm' was coming and Trump would stay on as president when Biden and his cronies were arrested and jailed. It was never going to happen and of course it didn't, but what did happen as a result provided that punchline to the Sabbatian Trump/QAnon Psyop.

On January 6th, 2021, a very big crowd of Trump supporters gathered in the National Mall in Washington DC down from the Capitol Building to protest at what they believed to be widespread corruption and vote fraud that stopped Trump being re-elected for a second term as president in November, 2020. I say as someone that does not support Trump or Biden that the evidence is clear that major vote-fixing went on to favour Biden, a man with cognitive problems so advanced he can often hardly string a sentence together without reading the words written for him on the Teleprompter. Glaring ballot discrepancies included serious questions about electronic voting machines that make vote rigging a comparative cinch and hundreds of thousands of paper votes that suddenly appeared during already advanced vote counts and virtually all of

them for Biden. Early Trump leads in crucial swing states suddenly began to close and disappear. The pandemic hoax was used as the excuse to issue almost limitless numbers of mail-in ballots with no checks to establish that the recipients were still alive or lived at that address. They were sent to streams of people who had not even asked for them. Private organisations were employed to gather these ballots and who knows what they did with them before they turned up at the counts. The American election system has been manipulated over decades to become a sick joke with more holes than a Swiss cheese for the express purpose of dictating the results. Then there was the criminal manipulation of information by Sabbatian tech giants like Facebook, Twitter and Google-owned YouTube which deleted pro-Trump, anti-Biden accounts and posts while everything in support of Biden was left alone. Sabbatians wanted Biden to win because after the dividing of America it was time for full-on Woke and every aspect of the Cult agenda to be unleashed.

Hunter gatherer

Extreme Silicon Valley bias included blocking information by the *New York Post* exposing a Biden scandal that should have ended his bid for president in the final weeks of the campaign. Hunter Biden, his monumentally corrupt son, is reported to have sent a laptop to be repaired at a local store and failed to return for it. Time passed until the laptop became the property of the store for non-payment of the bill. When the owner saw what was on the hard drive he gave a copy to the FBI who did nothing even though it confirmed widespread corruption in which the Joe Biden family were using his political position, especially when he was vice president to Obama, to make multiple millions in countries around the world and most notably Ukraine and China. Hunter Biden's one-time business partner Tony Bobulinski went public when the story broke in the *New York Post* to confirm the corruption he saw and that Joe Biden not only knew what was going on he also profited from the spoils. Millions were handed over by a Chinese company with close

connections – like all major businesses in China – to the Chinese communist party of President Xi Jinping. Joe Biden even boasted at a meeting of the Cult's World Economic Forum that as vice president he had ordered the government of Ukraine to fire a prosecutor. What he didn't mention was that the same man just happened to be investigating an energy company which was part of Hunter Biden's corrupt portfolio. The company was paying him big bucks for no other reason than the influence his father had. Overnight Biden's presidential campaign should have been over given that he had lied publicly about not knowing what his son was doing. Instead almost the entire Sabbatian-owned mainstream media and Sabbatian-owned Silicon Valley suppressed circulation of the story. This alone went a mighty way to rigging the election of 2020. Cult assets like Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook also spent hundreds of millions to be used in support of Biden and vote 'administration'.

The Cult had used Trump as the focus to divide America and was now desperate to bring in moronic, pliable, corrupt Biden to complete the double-whammy. No way were they going to let little things like the will of the people thwart their plan. Silicon Valley widely censored claims that the election was rigged because it *was* rigged. For the same reason anyone claiming it was rigged was denounced as a 'white supremacist' including the pathetically few Republican politicians willing to say so. Right across the media where the claim was mentioned it was described as a 'false claim' even though these excuses for 'journalists' would have done no research into the subject whatsoever. Trump won seven million more votes than any sitting president had ever achieved while somehow a cognitively-challenged soon to be 78-year-old who was hidden away from the public for most of the campaign managed to win more votes than any presidential candidate in history. It makes no sense. You only had to see election rallies for both candidates to witness the enthusiasm for Trump and the apathy for Biden. Tens of thousands would attend Trump events while Biden was speaking in empty car parks with often only television crews attending and framing their shots to hide the fact that no one was there. It was pathetic to see

footage come to light of Biden standing at a podium making speeches only to TV crews and party fixers while reading the words written for him on massive Teleprompter screens. So, yes, those protestors on January 6th had a point about election rigging, but some were about to walk into a trap laid for them in Washington by the Cult Deep State and its QAnon Psyop. This was the Capitol Hill riot ludicrously dubbed an 'insurrection'.

The spider and the fly

Renegade Minds know there are not two 'sides' in politics, only one side, the Cult, working through all 'sides'. It's a stage show, a puppet show, to direct the perceptions of the population into focusing on diversions like parties and candidates while missing the puppeteers with their hands holding all the strings. The Capitol Hill 'insurrection' brings us back to the Little Big Horn. Having created two distinct opposing groupings – Woke and Pushbackers – the trap was about to be sprung. Pushbackers were to be encircled and isolated by associating them all in the public mind with Trump and then labelling Trump as some sort of Confederate leader. I knew immediately that the Capitol riot was a set-up because of two things. One was how easy the rioters got into the building with virtually no credible resistance and secondly I could see – as with the 'Covid' hoax in the West at the start of 2020 – how the Cult could exploit the situation to move its agenda forward with great speed. My experience of Cult techniques and activities over more than 30 years has showed me that while they do exploit situations they haven't themselves created this never happens with events of fundamental agenda significance. Every time major events giving cultists the excuse to rapidly advance their plan you find they are manipulated into being for the specific reason of providing that excuse – Problem-Reaction-Solution. Only a tiny minority of the huge crowd of Washington protestors sought to gain entry to the Capitol by smashing windows and breaching doors. That didn't matter. The whole crowd and all Pushbackers, even if they did not support Trump, were going to be lumped together as dangerous

insurrectionists and conspiracy theorists. The latter term came into widespread use through a CIA memo in the 1960s aimed at discrediting those questioning the nonsensical official story of the Kennedy assassination and it subsequently became widely employed by the media. It's still being used by inept 'journalists' with no idea of its origin to discredit anyone questioning anything that authority claims to be true. When you are perpetrating a conspiracy you need to discredit the very word itself even though the dictionary definition of conspiracy is merely 'the activity of secretly planning with other people to do something bad or illegal' and 'a general agreement to keep silent about a subject for the purpose of keeping it secret'. On that basis there are conspiracies almost wherever you look. For obvious reasons the Cult and its lapdog media have to claim there are no conspiracies even though the word appears in state laws as with conspiracy to defraud, to murder, and to corrupt public morals.

Agent provocateurs are widely used by the Cult Deep State to manipulate genuine people into acting in ways that suit the desired outcome. By genuine in this case I mean protestors genuinely supporting Trump and claims that the election was stolen. In among them, however, were agents of the state wearing the garb of Trump supporters and QAnon to pump-prime the Capital riot which some genuine Trump supporters naively fell for. I described the situation as 'Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly'. Leaflets appeared through the Woke paramilitary arm Antifa, the anti-fascist fascists, calling on supporters to turn up in Washington looking like Trump supporters even though they hated him. Some of those arrested for breaching the Capitol Building were sourced to Antifa and its stable mate Black Lives Matter. Both organisations are funded by Cult billionaires and corporations. One man charged for the riot was according to his lawyer a former FBI agent who had held top secret security clearance for 40 years. Attorney Thomas Plofchan said of his client, 66-year-old Thomas Edward Caldwell:

He has held a Top Secret Security Clearance since 1979 and has undergone multiple Special Background Investigations in support of his clearances. After retiring from the Navy, he

worked as a section chief for the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 2009-2010 as a GS-12 [mid-level employee].

He also formed and operated a consulting firm performing work, often classified, for U.S government customers including the US. Drug Enforcement Agency, Department of Housing and Urban Development, the US Coast Guard, and the US Army Personnel Command.

A judge later released Caldwell pending trial in the absence of evidence about a conspiracy or that he tried to force his way into the building. *The New York Post* reported a 'law enforcement source' as saying that 'at least two known Antifa members were spotted' on camera among Trump supporters during the riot while one of the rioters arrested was John Earle Sullivan, a seriously extreme Black Lives Matter Trump-hater from Utah who was previously arrested and charged in July, 2020, over a BLM-Antifa riot in which drivers were threatened and one was shot. Sullivan is the founder of Utah-based Insurgence USA which is an affiliate of the Cult-created-and-funded Black Lives Matter movement. Footage appeared and was then deleted by Twitter of Trump supporters calling out Antifa infiltrators and a group was filmed changing into pro-Trump clothing before the riot. Security at the building was *pathetic* – as planned. Colonel Leroy Fletcher Prouty, a man with long experience in covert operations working with the US security apparatus, once described the tell-tale sign to identify who is involved in an assassination. He said:

No one has to direct an assassination – it happens. The active role is played secretly by permitting it to happen. This is the greatest single clue. Who has the power to call off or reduce the usual security precautions?

This principle applies to many other situations and certainly to the Capitol riot of January 6th, 2021.

The sting

With such a big and potentially angry crowd known to be gathering near the Capitol the security apparatus would have had a major police detail to defend the building with National Guard troops on

standby given the strength of feeling among people arriving from all over America encouraged by the QAnon Psyop and statements by Donald Trump. Instead Capitol Police 'security' was flimsy, weak, and easily breached. The same number of officers was deployed as on a regular day and that is a blatant red flag. They were not staffed or equipped for a possible riot that had been an obvious possibility in the circumstances. No protective and effective fencing worth the name was put in place and there were no contingency plans. The whole thing was basically a case of standing aside and waving people in. Once inside police mostly backed off apart from one Capitol police officer who ridiculously shot dead unarmed Air Force veteran protestor Ashli Babbitt without a warning as she climbed through a broken window. The 'investigation' refused to name or charge the officer after what must surely be considered a murder in the circumstances. They just lifted a carpet and swept. The story was endlessly repeated about five people dying in the 'armed insurrection' when there was no report of rioters using weapons. Apart from Babbitt the other four died from a heart attack, strokes and apparently a drug overdose. Capitol police officer Brian Sicknick was reported to have died after being bludgeoned with a fire extinguisher when he was alive after the riot was over and died later of what the Washington Medical Examiner's Office said was a stroke. Sicknick had no external injuries. The lies were delivered like rapid fire. There was a narrative to build with incessant repetition of the lie until the lie became the accepted 'everybody knows that' truth. The 'Big Lie' technique of Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels is constantly used by the Cult which was behind the Nazis and is today behind the 'Covid' and 'climate change' hoaxes. Goebbels said:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

Most protestors had a free run of the Capitol Building. This allowed pictures to be taken of rioters in iconic parts of the building including the Senate chamber which could be used as propaganda images against all Pushbackers. One Congresswoman described the scene as 'the worst kind of non-security anybody could ever imagine'. Well, the first part was true, but someone obviously did imagine it and made sure it happened. Some photographs most widely circulated featured people wearing QAnon symbols and now the Psyop would be used to dub all QAnon followers with the ubiquitous fit-all label of 'white supremacist' and 'insurrectionists'. When a Muslim extremist called Noah Green drove his car at two police officers at the Capitol Building killing one in April, 2021, there was no such political and media hysteria. They were just disappointed he wasn't white.

The witch-hunt

Government prosecutor Michael Sherwin, an aggressive, dark-eyed, professional Rottweiler led the 'investigation' and to call it over the top would be to understate reality a thousand fold. Hundreds were tracked down and arrested for the crime of having the wrong political views and people were jailed who had done nothing more than walk in the building, committed no violence or damage to property, took a few pictures and left. They were labelled a 'threat to the Republic' while Biden sat in the White House signing executive orders written for him that were dismantling 'the Republic'. Even when judges ruled that a mother and son should not be in jail the government kept them there. Some of those arrested have been badly beaten by prison guards in Washington and lawyers for one man said he suffered a fractured skull and was made blind in one eye. Meanwhile a woman is shot dead for no reason by a Capitol Police officer and we are not allowed to know who he is never mind what has happened to him although that will be *nothing*. The Cult's QAnon/Trump sting to identify and isolate Pushbackers and then target them on the road to crushing and deleting them was a resounding success. You would have thought the Russians had

invaded the building at gunpoint and lined up senators for a firing squad to see the political and media reaction. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a child in a woman's body, a terrible-twos, me, me, me, Woker narcissist of such proportions that words have no meaning. She said she thought she was going to die when 'insurrectionists' banged on her office door. It turned out she wasn't even in the Capitol Building when the riot was happening and the 'banging' was a Capitol Police officer. She referred to herself as a 'survivor' which is an insult to all those true survivors of violent and sexual abuse while she lives her pampered and privileged life talking drivel for a living. Her Woke colleague and fellow mega-narcissist Rashida Tlaib broke down describing the devastating effect on her, too, of *not being* in the building when the rioters were there. Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib are members of a fully-Woke group of Congresswomen known as 'The Squad' along with Ilhan Omar and Ayanna Pressley. The Squad from what I can see can be identified by its vehement anti-white racism, anti-white men agenda, and, as always in these cases, the absence of brain cells on active duty.

The usual suspects were on the riot case immediately in the form of Democrat ultra-Zionist senators and operatives Chuck Schumer and Adam Schiff demanding that Trump be impeached for 'his part in the insurrection'. The same pair of prats had led the failed impeachment of Trump over the invented 'Russia collusion' nonsense which claimed Russia had helped Trump win the 2016 election. I didn't realise that Tel Aviv had been relocated just outside Moscow. I must find an up-to-date map. The Russia hoax was a Sabbatian operation to keep Trump occupied and impotent and to stop any rapport with Russia which the Cult wants to retain as a perceptual enemy to be pulled out at will. Puppet Biden began attacking Russia when he came to office as the Cult seeks more upheaval, division and war across the world. A two-year stage show 'Russia collusion inquiry' headed by the not-very-bright former 9/11 FBI chief Robert Mueller, with support from 19 lawyers, 40 FBI agents plus intelligence analysts, forensic accountants and other

staff, devoured tens of millions of dollars and found no evidence of Russia collusion which a ten-year-old could have told them on day one. Now the same moronic Schumer and Schiff wanted a second impeachment of Trump over the Capitol 'insurrection' (riot) which the arrested development of Schumer called another 'Pearl Harbor' while others compared it with 9/11 in which 3,000 died and, in the case of CNN, with the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s in which an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 were murdered, between 250, 000 and 500,000 women were raped, and populations of whole towns were hacked to death with machetes. To make those comparisons purely for Cult political reasons is beyond insulting to those that suffered and lost their lives and confirms yet again the callous inhumanity that we are dealing with. Schumer is a monumental idiot and so is Schiff, but they serve the Cult agenda and do whatever they're told so they get looked after. Talking of idiots – another inane man who spanned the Russia and Capitol impeachment attempts was Senator Eric Swalwell who had the nerve to accuse Trump of collusion with the Russians while sleeping with a Chinese spy called Christine Fang or 'Fang Fang' which is straight out of a Bond film no doubt starring Klaus Schwab as the bloke living on a secret island and controlling laser weapons positioned in space and pointing at world capitals. Fang Fang plays the part of Bond's infiltrator girlfriend which I'm sure she would enjoy rather more than sharing a bed with the brainless Swalwell, lying back and thinking of China. The FBI eventually warned Swalwell about Fang Fang which gave her time to escape back to the Chinese dictatorship. How very thoughtful of them. The second Trump impeachment also failed and hardly surprising when an impeachment is supposed to remove a sitting president and by the time it happened Trump was no longer president. These people are running your country America, well, officially anyway. Terrifying isn't it?

Outcomes tell the story - always

The outcome of all this – and it's the *outcome* on which Renegade Minds focus, not the words – was that a vicious, hysterical and

obviously pre-planned assault was launched on Pushbackers to censor, silence and discredit them and even targeted their right to earn a living. They have since been condemned as 'domestic terrorists' that need to be treated like Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. 'Domestic terrorists' is a label the Cult has been trying to make stick since the period of the Oklahoma bombing in 1995 which was blamed on 'far-right domestic terrorists'. If you read *The Trigger* you will see that the bombing was clearly a Problem-Reaction-Solution carried out by the Deep State during a Bill Clinton administration so corrupt that no dictionary definition of the term would even nearly suffice. Nearly 30, 000 troops were deployed from all over America to the empty streets of Washington for Biden's inauguration. Ten thousand of them stayed on with the pretext of protecting the capital from insurrectionists when it was more psychological programming to normalise the use of the military in domestic law enforcement in support of the Cult plan for a police-military state. Biden's fascist administration began a purge of 'wrong-thinkers' in the military which means anyone that is not on board with Woke. The Capitol Building was surrounded by a fence with razor wire and the Land of the Free was further symbolically and literally dismantled. The circle was completed with the installation of Biden and the exploitation of the QAnon Psyop.

America had never been so divided since the civil war of the 19th century, Pushbackers were isolated and dubbed terrorists and now, as was always going to happen, the Cult immediately set about deleting what little was left of freedom and transforming American society through a swish of the hand of the most controlled 'president' in American history leading (officially at least) the most extreme regime since the country was declared an independent state on July 4th, 1776. Biden issued undebated, dictatorial executive orders almost by the hour in his opening days in office across the whole spectrum of the Cult wish-list including diluting controls on the border with Mexico allowing thousands of migrants to illegally enter the United States to transform the demographics of America and import an election-changing number of perceived Democrat

voters. Then there were Biden deportation amnesties for the already illegally resident (estimated to be as high as 20 or even 30 million). A bill before Congress awarded American citizenship to anyone who could prove they had worked in agriculture for just 180 days in the previous two years as 'Big Ag' secured its slave labour long-term. There were the plans to add new states to the union such as Puerto Rico and making Washington DC a state. They are all parts of a plan to ensure that the Cult-owned Woke Democrats would be permanently in power.

Border – what border?

I have exposed in detail in other books how mass immigration into the United States and Europe is the work of Cult networks fuelled by the tens of billions spent to this and other ends by George Soros and his global Open Society (open borders) Foundations. The impact can be seen in America alone where the population has increased by *100 million* in little more than 30 years mostly through immigration. I wrote in *The Answer* that the plan was to have so many people crossing the southern border that the numbers become unstoppable and we are now there under Cult-owned Biden. El Salvador in Central America puts the scale of what is happening into context. A third of the population now lives in the United States, much of it illegally, and many more are on the way. The methodology is to crush Central and South American countries economically and spread violence through machete-wielding psychopathic gangs like MS-13 based in El Salvador and now operating in many American cities. Biden-imposed lax security at the southern border means that it is all but open. He said before his 'election' that he wanted to see a surge towards the border if he became president and that was the green light for people to do just that after election day to create the human disaster that followed for both America and the migrants. When that surge came the imbecilic Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said it wasn't a 'surge' because they are 'children, not insurgents' and the term 'surge' (used by Biden) was a claim of 'white supremacists'.

This disingenuous lady may one day enter the realm of the most basic intelligence, but it won't be any time soon.

Sabbatians and the Cult are in the process of destroying America by importing violent people and gangs in among the genuine to terrorise American cities and by overwhelming services that cannot cope with the sheer volume of new arrivals. Something similar is happening in Europe as Western society in general is targeted for demographic and cultural transformation and upheaval. The plan demands violence and crime to create an environment of intimidation, fear and division and Soros has been funding the election of district attorneys across America who then stop prosecuting many crimes, reduce sentences for violent crimes and free as many violent criminals as they can. Sabbatians are creating the chaos from which order – their order – can respond in a classic Problem-Reaction-Solution. A Freemasonic moto says 'Ordo Ab Chao' (Order out of Chaos) and this is why the Cult is constantly creating chaos to impose a new 'order'. Here you have the reason the Cult is constantly creating chaos. The 'Covid' hoax can be seen with those entering the United States by plane being forced to take a 'Covid' test while migrants flooding through southern border processing facilities do not. Nothing is put in the way of mass migration and if that means ignoring the government's own 'Covid' rules then so be it. They know it's all bullshit anyway. Any pushback on this is denounced as 'racist' by Wokers and Sabbatian fronts like the ultra-Zionist Anti-Defamation League headed by the appalling Jonathan Greenblatt which at the same time argues that Israel should not give citizenship and voting rights to more Palestinian Arabs or the 'Jewish population' (in truth the Sabbatian network) will lose control of the country.

Society-changing numbers

Biden's masters have declared that countries like El Salvador are so dangerous that their people must be allowed into the United States for humanitarian reasons when there are fewer murders in large parts of many Central American countries than in US cities like

Baltimore. That is not to say Central America cannot be a dangerous place and Cult-controlled American governments have been making it so since way back, along with the dismantling of economies, in a long-term plan to drive people north into the United States. Parts of Central America are very dangerous, but in other areas the story is being greatly exaggerated to justify relaxing immigration criteria. Migrants are being offered free healthcare and education in the United States as another incentive to head for the border and there is no requirement to be financially independent before you can enter to prevent the resources of America being drained. You can't blame migrants for seeking what they believe will be a better life, but they are being played by the Cult for dark and nefarious ends. The numbers since Biden took office are huge. In February, 2021, more than 100,000 people were known to have tried to enter the US illegally through the southern border (it was 34,000 in the same month in 2020) and in March it was 170,000 – a 418 percent increase on March, 2020. These numbers are only known people, not the ones who get in unseen. The true figure for migrants illegally crossing the border in a single month was estimated by one congressman at 250,000 and that number will only rise under Biden's current policy. Gangs of murdering drug-running thugs that control the Mexican side of the border demand money – thousands of dollars – to let migrants cross the Rio Grande into America. At the same time gun battles are breaking out on the border several times a week between rival Mexican drug gangs (which now operate globally) who are equipped with sophisticated military-grade weapons, grenades and armoured vehicles. While the Capitol Building was being 'protected' from a non-existent 'threat' by thousands of troops, and others were still deployed at the time in the Cult Neocon war in Afghanistan, the southern border of America was left to its fate. This is not incompetence, it is cold calculation.

By March, 2021, there were 17,000 unaccompanied children held at border facilities and many of them are ensnared by people traffickers for paedophile rings and raped on their journey north to America. This is not conjecture – this is fact. Many of those designated

children are in reality teenage boys or older. Meanwhile Wokers posture their self-purity for encouraging poor and tragic people to come to America and face this nightmare both on the journey and at the border with the disgusting figure of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi giving disingenuous speeches about caring for migrants. The woman's evil. Wokers condemned Trump for having children in cages at the border (so did Obama, *Shhhh*), but now they are sleeping on the floor without access to a shower with one border facility 729 percent over capacity. The Biden insanity even proposed flying migrants from the southern border to the northern border with Canada for 'processing'. The whole shambles is being overseen by ultra-Zionist Secretary of Homeland Security, the moronic liar Alejandro Mayorkas, who banned news cameras at border facilities to stop Americans seeing what was happening. Mayorkas said there was not a ban on news crews; it was just that they were not allowed to film. Alongside him at Homeland Security is another ultra-Zionist Cass Sunstein appointed by Biden to oversee new immigration laws. Sunstein despises conspiracy researchers to the point where he suggests they should be banned or *taxed* for having such views. The man is not bonkers or anything. He's perfectly well-adjusted, but adjusted to what is the question. Criticise what is happening and you are a 'white supremacist' when earlier non-white immigrants also oppose the numbers which effect their lives and opportunities. Black people in poor areas are particularly damaged by uncontrolled immigration and the increased competition for work opportunities with those who will work for less. They are also losing voting power as Hispanics become more dominant in former black areas. It's a downward spiral for them while the billionaires behind the policy drone on about how much they care about black people and 'racism'. None of this is about compassion for migrants or black people – that's just wind and air. Migrants are instead being mercilessly exploited to transform America while the countries they leave are losing their future and the same is true in Europe. Mass immigration may now be the work of Woke Democrats, but it can be traced back to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (it

wasn't) signed into law by Republican hero President Ronald Reagan which gave amnesty to millions living in the United States illegally and other incentives for people to head for the southern border. Here we have the one-party state at work again.

Save me syndrome

Almost every aspect of what I have been exposing as the Cult agenda was on display in even the first days of 'Biden' with silencing of Pushbackers at the forefront of everything. A Renegade Mind will view the Trump years and QAnon in a very different light to their supporters and advocates as the dots are connected. The QAnon/Trump Psyop has given the Cult all it was looking for. We may not know how much, or little, that Trump realised he was being used, but that's a side issue. This pincer movement produced the desired outcome of dividing America and having Pushbackers isolated. To turn this around we have to look at new routes to empowerment which do not include handing our power to other people and groups through what I will call the 'Save Me Syndrome' – 'I want someone else to do it so that I don't have to'. We have seen this at work throughout human history and the QAnon/Trump Psyop is only the latest incarnation alongside all the others. Religion is an obvious expression of this when people look to a 'god' or priest to save them or tell them how to be saved and then there are 'save me' politicians like Trump. Politics is a diversion and not a 'saviour'. It is a means to block positive change, not make it possible.

Save Me Syndrome always comes with the same repeating theme of handing your power to whom or what you believe will save you while your real 'saviour' stares back from the mirror every morning. Renegade Minds are constantly vigilant in this regard and always asking the question 'What can I do?' rather than 'What can someone else do for me?' Gandhi was right when he said: 'You must be the change you want to see in the world.' We are indeed the people we have been waiting for. We are presented with a constant raft of reasons to concede that power to others and forget where the real power is. Humanity has the numbers and the Cult does not. It has to

use diversion and division to target the unstoppable power that comes from unity. Religions, governments, politicians, corporations, media, QAnon, are all different manifestations of this power-diversion and dilution. Refusing to give your power to governments and instead handing it to Trump and QAnon is not to take a new direction, but merely to recycle the old one with new names on the posters. I will explore this phenomenon as we proceed and how to break the cycles and recycles that got us here through the mists of repeating perception and so repeating history.

For now we shall turn to the most potent example in the entire human story of the consequences that follow when you give your power away. I am talking, of course, of the 'Covid' hoax.

CHAPTER FOUR

'Covid': Calculated catastrophe

Facts are threatening to those invested in fraud
DaShanne Stokes

We can easily unravel the real reason for the 'Covid pandemic' hoax by employing the Renegade Mind methodology that I have outlined this far. We'll start by comparing the long-planned Cult outcome with the 'Covid pandemic' outcome. Know the outcome and you'll see the journey.

I have highlighted the plan for the Hunger Games Society which has been in my books for so many years with the very few controlling the very many through ongoing dependency. To create this dependency it is essential to destroy independent livelihoods, businesses and employment to make the population reliant on the state (the Cult) for even the basics of life through a guaranteed pittance income. While independence of income remained these Cult ambitions would be thwarted. With this knowledge it was easy to see where the 'pandemic' hoax was going once talk of 'lockdowns' began and the closing of all but perceived 'essential' businesses to 'save' us from an alleged 'deadly virus'. Cult corporations like Amazon and Walmart were naturally considered 'essential' while mom and pop shops and stores had their doors closed by fascist decree. As a result with every new lockdown and new regulation more small and medium, even large businesses not owned by the Cult, went to the wall while Cult giants and their frontmen and women grew financially fatter by the second. Mom and pop were

denied an income and the right to earn a living and the wealth of people like Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) and Sergei Brin and Larry Page (Google/Alphabet) have reached record levels. The Cult was increasing its own power through further dramatic concentrations of wealth while the competition was being destroyed and brought into a state of dependency. Lockdowns have been instigated to secure that very end and were never anything to do with health. My brother Paul spent 45 years building up a bus repair business, but lockdowns meant buses were running at a fraction of normal levels for months on end. Similar stories can told in their hundreds of millions worldwide. Efforts of a lifetime coldly destroyed by Cult multi-billionaires and their lackeys in government and law enforcement who continued to earn their living from the taxation of the people while denying the right of the same people to earn theirs. How different it would have been if those making and enforcing these decisions had to face the same financial hardships of those they affected, but they never do.

Gates of Hell

Behind it all in the full knowledge of what he is doing and why is the psychopathic figure of Cult operative Bill Gates. His puppet Tedros at the World Health Organization declared 'Covid' a pandemic in March, 2020. The WHO had changed the definition of a 'pandemic' in 2009 just a month before declaring the 'swine flu pandemic' which would not have been so under the previous definition. The same applies to 'Covid'. The definition had included… 'an infection by an infectious agent, occurring simultaneously in different countries, with a significant mortality rate relative to the proportion of the population infected'. The new definition removed the need for 'significant mortality'. The 'pandemic' has been fraudulent even down to the definition, but Gates demanded economy-destroying lockdowns, school closures, social distancing, mandatory masks, a 'vaccination' for every man, woman and child on the planet and severe consequences and restrictions for those that refused. Who gave him this power? The

Cult did which he serves like a little boy in short trousers doing what his daddy tells him. He and his psychopathic missus even smiled when they said that much worse was to come (what they knew was planned to come). Gates responded in the matter-of-fact way of all psychopaths to a question about the effect on the world economy of what he was doing:

> Well, it won't go to zero but it will shrink. Global GDP is probably going to take the biggest hit ever [Gates was smiling as he said this] … in my lifetime this will be the greatest economic hit. But you don't have a choice. People act as if you have a choice. People don't feel like going to the stadium when they might get infected … People are deeply affected by seeing these stats, by knowing they could be part of the transmission chain, old people, their parents and grandparents, could be affected by this, and so you don't get to say ignore what is going on here.
>
> There will be the ability to open up, particularly in rich countries, if things are done well over the next few months, but for the world at large normalcy only returns when we have largely vaccinated the entire population.

The man has no compassion or empathy. How could he when he's a psychopath like all Cult players? My own view is that even beyond that he is very seriously mentally ill. Look in his eyes and you can see this along with his crazy flailing arms. You don't do what he has done to the world population since the start of 2020 unless you are mentally ill and at the most extreme end of psychopathic. You especially don't do it when to you know, as we shall see, that cases and deaths from 'Covid' are fakery and a product of monumental figure massaging. 'These stats' that Gates referred to are based on a 'test' that's not testing for the 'virus' as he has known all along. He made his fortune with big Cult support as an infamously ruthless software salesman and now buys global control of 'health' (death) policy without the population he affects having any say. It's a breathtaking outrage. Gates talked about people being deeply affected by fear of 'Covid' when that was because of *him* and his global network lying to them minute-by-minute supported by a lying media that he seriously influences and funds to the tune of hundreds of millions. He's handed big sums to media operations including the BBC, NBC, Al Jazeera, Univision, *PBS NewsHour*,

ProPublica, National Journal, The Guardian, The Financial Times, The Atlantic, Texas Tribune, USA Today publisher Gannett, *Washington Monthly, Le Monde,* Center for Investigative Reporting, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, National Press Foundation, International Center for Journalists, Solutions Journalism Network, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, and many more. Gates is everywhere in the 'Covid' hoax and the man must go to prison – or a mental facility – for the rest of his life and his money distributed to those he has taken such enormous psychopathic pleasure in crushing.

The Muscle

The Hunger Games global structure demands a police-military state – a fusion of the two into one force – which viciously imposes the will of the Cult on the population and protects the Cult from public rebellion. In that regard, too, the 'Covid' hoax just keeps on giving. Often unlawful, ridiculous and contradictory 'Covid' rules and regulations have been policed across the world by moronic automatons and psychopaths made faceless by face-nappy masks and acting like the Nazi SS and fascist blackshirts and brownshirts of Hitler and Mussolini. The smallest departure from the rules decreed by the psychos in government and their clueless gofers were jumped upon by the face-nappy fascists. Brutality against public protestors soon became commonplace even on girls, women and old people as the brave men with the batons – the Face-Nappies as I call them – broke up peaceful protests and handed out fines like confetti to people who couldn't earn a living let alone pay hundreds of pounds for what was once an accepted human right. Robot Face-Nappies of Nottingham police in the English East Midlands fined one group £11,000 for attending a child's birthday party. For decades I charted the transformation of law enforcement as genuine, decent officers were replaced with psychopaths and the brain dead who would happily and brutally do whatever their masters told them. Now they were let loose on the public and I would emphasise the point that none of this just happened. The step-by-step change in the dynamic between police and public was orchestrated from the shadows by

those who knew where this was all going and the same with the perceptual reframing of those in all levels of authority and official administration through 'training courses' by organisations such as Common Purpose which was created in the late 1980s and given a massive boost in Blair era Britain until it became a global phenomenon. Supposed public 'servants' began to view the population as the enemy and the same was true of the police. This was the start of the explosion of behaviour manipulation organisations and networks preparing for the all-war on the human psyche unleashed with the dawn of 2020. I will go into more detail about this later in the book because it is a core part of what is happening.

Police desecrated beauty spots to deter people gathering and arrested women for walking in the countryside alone 'too far' from their homes. We had arrogant, clueless sergeants in the Isle of Wight police where I live posting on Facebook what they insisted the population must do or else. A schoolmaster sergeant called Radford looked young enough for me to ask if his mother knew he was out, but he was posting what he *expected* people to do while a Sergeant Wilkinson boasted about fining lads for meeting in a McDonald's car park where they went to get a lockdown takeaway. Wilkinson added that he had even cancelled their order. What a pair of prats these people are and yet they have increasingly become the norm among Jackboot Johnson's Yellowshirts once known as the British police. This was the theme all over the world with police savagery common during lockdown protests in the United States, the Netherlands, and the fascist state of Victoria in Australia under its tyrannical and again moronic premier Daniel Andrews. Amazing how tyrannical and moronic tend to work as a team and the same combination could be seen across America as arrogant, narcissistic Woke governors and mayors such as Gavin Newsom (California), Andrew Cuomo (New York), Gretchen Whitmer (Michigan), Lori Lightfoot (Chicago) and Eric Garcetti (Los Angeles) did their Nazi and Stalin impressions with the full support of the compliant brutality of their enforcers in uniform as they arrested small business owners defying

fascist shutdown orders and took them to jail in ankle shackles and handcuffs. This happened to bistro owner Marlena Pavlos-Hackney in Gretchen Whitmer's fascist state of Michigan when police arrived to enforce an order by a state-owned judge for 'putting the community at risk' at a time when other states like Texas were dropping restrictions and migrants were pouring across the southern border without any 'Covid' questions at all. I'm sure there are many officers appalled by what they are ordered to do, but not nearly enough of them. If they were truly appalled they would not do it. As the months passed every opportunity was taken to have the military involved to make their presence on the streets ever more familiar and 'normal' for the longer-term goal of police-military fusion.

Another crucial element to the Hunger Games enforcement network has been encouraging the public to report neighbours and others for 'breaking the lockdown rules'. The group faced with £11,000 in fines at the child's birthday party would have been dobbed-in by a neighbour with a brain the size of a pea. The technique was most famously employed by the Stasi secret police in communist East Germany who had public informants placed throughout the population. A police chief in the UK says his force doesn't need to carry out 'Covid' patrols when they are flooded with so many calls from the public reporting other people for visiting the beach. Dorset police chief James Vaughan said people were so enthusiastic about snitching on their fellow humans they were now operating as an auxiliary arm of the police: 'We are still getting around 400 reports a week from the public, so we will respond to reports …We won't need to be doing hotspot patrols because people are very quick to pick the phone up and tell us.' Vaughan didn't say that this is a pillar of all tyrannies of whatever complexion and the means to hugely extend the reach of enforcement while spreading distrust among the people and making them wary of doing anything that might get them reported. Those narcissistic Isle of Wight sergeants Radford and Wilkinson never fail to add a link to their Facebook posts where the public can inform on their fellow slaves.

Neither would be self-aware enough to realise they were imitating the Stasi which they might well never have heard of. Government psychologists that I will expose later laid out a policy to turn communities against each other in the same way.

A coincidence? Yep, and I can knit fog

I knew from the start of the alleged pandemic that this was a Cult operation. It presented limitless potential to rapidly advance the Cult agenda and exploit manipulated fear to demand that every man, woman and child on the planet was 'vaccinated' in a process never used on humans before which infuses self-replicating *synthetic* material into human cells. Remember the plan to transform the human body from a biological to a synthetic biological state. I'll deal with the 'vaccine' (that's not actually a vaccine) when I focus on the genetic agenda. Enough to say here that mass global 'vaccination' justified by this 'new virus' set alarms ringing after 30 years of tracking these people and their methods. The 'Covid' hoax officially beginning in China was also a big red flag for reasons I will be explaining. The agenda potential was so enormous that I could dismiss any idea that the 'virus' appeared naturally. Major happenings with major agenda implications never occur without Cult involvement in making them happen. My questions were twofold in early 2020 as the media began its campaign to induce global fear and hysteria: Was this alleged infectious agent released on purpose by the Cult or did it even exist at all? I then did what I always do in these situations. I sat, observed and waited to see where the evidence and information would take me. By March and early April synchronicity was strongly – and ever more so since then – pointing me in the direction of *there is no 'virus'*. I went public on that with derision even from swathes of the alternative media that voiced a scenario that the Chinese government released the 'virus' in league with Deep State elements in the United States from a top-level bio-lab in Wuhan where the 'virus' is said to have first appeared. I looked at that possibility, but I didn't buy it for several reasons. Deaths from the 'virus' did not in any way match what they

would have been with a 'deadly bioweapon' and it is much more effective if you sell the *illusion* of an infectious agent rather than having a real one unless you can control through injection who has it and who doesn't. Otherwise you lose control of events. A made-up 'virus' gives you a blank sheet of paper on which you can make it do whatever you like and have any symptoms or mutant 'variants' you choose to add while a real infectious agent would limit you to what it actually does. A phantom disease allows you to have endless ludicrous 'studies' on the 'Covid' dollar to widen the perceived impact by inventing ever more 'at risk' groups including one study which said those who walk slowly may be almost four times more likely to die from the 'virus'. People are in psychiatric wards for less.

A real 'deadly bioweapon' can take out people in the hierarchy that are not part of the Cult, but essential to its operation. Obviously they don't want that. Releasing a real disease means you immediately lose control of it. Releasing an illusory one means you don't. Again it's vital that people are extra careful when dealing with what they want to hear. A bioweapon unleashed from a Chinese laboratory in collusion with the American Deep State may fit a conspiracy narrative, but is it true? Would it not be far more effective to use the excuse of a 'virus' to justify the real bioweapon – the 'vaccine'? That way your disease agent does not have to be transmitted and arrives directly through a syringe. I saw a French virologist Luc Montagnier quoted in the alternative media as saying he had discovered that the alleged 'new' severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus , or SARS-CoV-2, was made artificially and included elements of the human immunodeficiency 'virus' (HIV) and a parasite that causes malaria. SARS-CoV-2 is alleged to trigger an alleged illness called Covid-19. I remembered Montagnier's name from my research years before into claims that an HIV 'retrovirus' causes AIDs – claims that were demolished by Berkeley virologist Peter Duesberg who showed that no one had ever proved that HIV causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS. Claims that become accepted as fact, publicly and medically, with no proof whatsoever are an ever-recurring story that profoundly applies to

'Covid'. Nevertheless, despite the lack of proof, Montagnier's team at the Pasteur Institute in Paris had a long dispute with American researcher Robert Gallo over which of them discovered and isolated the HIV 'virus' and with *no evidence* found it to cause AIDS. You will see later that there is also no evidence that any 'virus' causes any disease or that there is even such a thing as a 'virus' in the way it is said to exist. The claim to have 'isolated' the HIV 'virus' will be presented in its real context as we come to the shocking story – and it is a story – of SARS-CoV-2 and so will Montagnier's assertion that he identified the full SARS-CoV-2 genome.

Hoax in the making

We can pick up the 'Covid' story in 2010 and the publication by the Rockefeller Foundation of a document called 'Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development'. The inner circle of the Rockefeller family has been serving the Cult since John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) made his fortune with Standard Oil. It is less well known that the same Rockefeller – the Bill Gates of his day – was responsible for establishing what is now referred to as 'Big Pharma', the global network of pharmaceutical companies that make outrageous profits dispensing scalpel and drug 'medicine' and are obsessed with pumping vaccines in ever-increasing number into as many human arms and backsides as possible. John D. Rockefeller was the driving force behind the creation of the 'education' system in the United States and elsewhere specifically designed to program the perceptions of generations thereafter. The Rockefeller family donated exceptionally valuable land in New York for the United Nations building and were central in establishing the World Health Organization in 1948 as an agency of the UN which was created from the start as a Trojan horse and stalking horse for world government. Now enter Bill Gates. His family and the Rockefellers have long been extremely close and I have seen genealogy which claims that if you go back far enough the two families fuse into the same bloodline. Gates has said that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was inspired by the Rockefeller Foundation and why not

when both are serving the same Cult? Major tax-exempt foundations are overwhelmingly criminal enterprises in which Cult assets fund the Cult agenda in the guise of 'philanthropy' while avoiding tax in the process. Cult operatives can become mega-rich in their role of front men and women for the psychopaths at the inner core and they, too, have to be psychopaths to knowingly serve such evil. Part of the deal is that a big percentage of the wealth gleaned from representing the Cult has to be spent advancing the ambitions of the Cult and hence you have the Rockefeller Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (and *so* many more) and people like George Soros with his global Open Society Foundations spending their billions in pursuit of global Cult control. Gates is a global public face of the Cult with his interventions in world affairs including Big Tech influence; a central role in the 'Covid' and 'vaccine' scam; promotion of the climate change shakedown; manipulation of education; geoengineering of the skies; and his food-control agenda as the biggest owner of farmland in America, his GMO promotion and through other means. As one writer said: 'Gates monopolizes or wields disproportionate influence over the tech industry, global health and vaccines, agriculture and food policy (including biopiracy and fake food), weather modification and other climate technologies, surveillance, education and media.' The almost limitless wealth secured through Microsoft and other not-allowed-to-fail ventures (including vaccines) has been ploughed into a long, long list of Cult projects designed to enslave the entire human race. Gates and the Rockefellers have been working as one unit with the Rockefeller-established World Health Organization leading global 'Covid' policy controlled by Gates through his mouth-piece Tedros. Gates became the WHO's biggest funder when Trump announced that the American government would cease its donations, but Biden immediately said he would restore the money when he took office in January, 2021. The Gates Foundation (the Cult) owns through limitless funding the world health system and the major players across the globe in the 'Covid' hoax.

Okay, with that background we return to that Rockefeller Foundation document of 2010 headed 'Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development' and its 'imaginary' epidemic of a virulent and deadly influenza strain which infected 20 percent of the global population and killed eight million in seven months. The Rockefeller scenario was that the epidemic destroyed economies, closed shops, offices and other businesses and led to governments imposing fierce rules and restrictions that included mandatory wearing of face masks and body-temperature checks to enter communal spaces like railway stations and supermarkets. The document predicted that even after the height of the Rockefeller-envisaged epidemic the authoritarian rule would continue to deal with further pandemics, transnational terrorism, environmental crises and rising poverty. Now you may think that the Rockefellers are our modern-day seers or alternatively, and rather more likely, that they well knew what was planned a few years further on. Fascism had to be imposed, you see, to 'protect citizens from risk and exposure'. The Rockefeller scenario document said:

During the pandemic, national leaders around the world flexed their authority and imposed airtight rules and restrictions, from the mandatory wearing of face masks to body-temperature checks at the entries to communal spaces like train stations and supermarkets. Even after the pandemic faded, this more authoritarian control and oversight of citizens and their activities stuck and even intensified. In order to protect themselves from the spread of increasingly global problems – from pandemics and transnational terrorism to environmental crises and rising poverty – leaders around the world took a firmer grip on power.

At first, the notion of a more controlled world gained wide acceptance and approval. Citizens willingly gave up some of their sovereignty – and their privacy – to more paternalistic states in exchange for greater safety and stability. Citizens were more tolerant, and even eager, for top-down direction and oversight, and national leaders had more latitude to impose order in the ways they saw fit.

In developed countries, this heightened oversight took many forms: biometric IDs for all citizens, for example, and tighter regulation of key industries whose stability was deemed vital to national interests. In many developed countries, enforced cooperation with a suite of new regulations and agreements slowly but steadily restored both order and, importantly, economic growth.

There we have the prophetic Rockefellers in 2010 and three years later came their paper for the Global Health Summit in Beijing, China, when government representatives, the private sector, international organisations and groups met to discuss the next 100 years of 'global health'. The Rockefeller Foundation-funded paper was called 'Dreaming the Future of Health for the Next 100 Years and more prophecy ensued as it described a dystopian future: 'The abundance of data, digitally tracking and linking people may mean the 'death of privacy' and may replace physical interaction with transient, virtual connection, generating isolation and raising questions of how values are shaped in virtual networks.' Next in the 'Covid' hoax preparation sequence came a 'table top' simulation in 2018 for another 'imaginary' pandemic of a disease called Clade X which was said to kill 900 million people. The exercise was organised by the Gates-funded Johns Hopkins University's Center for Health Security in the United States and this is the very same university that has been compiling the disgustingly and systematically erroneous global figures for 'Covid' cases and deaths. Similar Johns Hopkins health crisis scenarios have included the Dark Winter exercise in 2001 and Atlantic Storm in 2005.

Nostradamus 201

For sheer predictive genius look no further prophecy-watchers than the Bill Gates-funded Event 201 held only six weeks before the 'coronavirus pandemic' is supposed to have broken out in China and Event 201 was based on a scenario of a global 'coronavirus pandemic'. Melinda Gates, the great man's missus, told the BBC that he had 'prepared for years' for a coronavirus pandemic which told us what we already knew. Nostradamugates had predicted in a TED talk in 2015 that a pandemic was coming that would kill a lot of people and demolish the world economy. My god, the man is a machine – possibly even literally. Now here he was only weeks before the real thing funding just such a simulated scenario and involving his friends and associates at Johns Hopkins, the World Economic Forum Cult-front of Klaus Schwab, the United Nations,

Johnson & Johnson, major banks, and officials from China and the Centers for Disease Control in the United States. What synchronicity – Johns Hopkins would go on to compile the fraudulent 'Covid' figures, the World Economic Forum and Schwab would push the 'Great Reset' in response to 'Covid', the Centers for Disease Control would be at the forefront of 'Covid' policy in the United States, Johnson & Johnson would produce a 'Covid vaccine', and everything would officially start just weeks later in China. Spooky, eh? They were even accurate in creating a simulation of a 'virus' pandemic because the 'real thing' would also be a simulation. Event 201 was not an exercise preparing for something that might happen; it was a rehearsal for what those in control knew was *going* to happen and very shortly. Hours of this simulation were posted on the Internet and the various themes and responses mirrored what would soon be imposed to transform human society. News stories were inserted and what they said would be commonplace a few weeks later with still more prophecy perfection. Much discussion focused on the need to deal with misinformation and the 'anti-vax movement' which is exactly what happened when the 'virus' arrived – was said to have arrived – in the West.

Cult-owned social media banned criticism and exposure of the official 'virus' narrative and when I said there *was* no 'virus' in early April, 2020, I was banned by one platform after another including YouTube, Facebook and later Twitter. The mainstream broadcast media in Britain was in effect banned from interviewing me by the Tony-Blair-created government broadcasting censor Ofcom headed by career government bureaucrat Melanie Dawes who was appointed just as the 'virus' hoax was about to play out in January, 2020. At the same time the Ickonic media platform was using Vimeo, another ultra-Zionist-owned operation, while our own player was being created and they deleted in an instant hundreds of videos, documentaries, series and shows to confirm their unbelievable vindictiveness. We had copies, of course, and they had to be restored one by one when our player was ready. These people have no class. Sabbatian Facebook promised free advertisements for the Gates-

controlled World Health Organization narrative while deleting 'false claims and conspiracy theories' to stop 'misinformation' about the alleged coronavirus. All these responses could be seen just a short while earlier in the scenarios of Event 201. Extreme censorship was absolutely crucial for the Cult because the official story was so ridiculous and unsupportable by the evidence that it could never survive open debate and the free-flow of information and opinion. If you can't win a debate then don't have one is the Cult's approach throughout history. Facebook's little boy front man – front boy – Mark Zuckerberg equated 'credible and accurate information' with official sources and exposing their lies with 'misinformation'.

Silencing those that can see

The censorship dynamic of Event 201 is now the norm with an army of narrative-supporting 'fact-checker' organisations whose entire reason for being is to tell the public that official narratives are true and those exposing them are lying. One of the most appalling of these 'fact-checkers' is called NewsGuard founded by ultra-Zionist Americans Gordon Crovitz and Steven Brill. Crovitz is a former publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*, former Executive Vice President of Dow Jones, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and on the board of the American Association of Rhodes Scholars. The CFR and Rhodes Scholarships, named after Rothschild agent Cecil Rhodes who plundered the gold and diamonds of South Africa for his masters and the Cult, have featured widely in my books. NewsGuard don't seem to like me for some reason – I really can't think why – and they have done all they can to have me censored and discredited which is, to quote an old British politician, like being savaged by a dead sheep. They are, however, like all in the censorship network, very well connected and funded by organisations themselves funded by, or connected to, Bill Gates. As you would expect with anything associated with Gates NewsGuard has an offshoot called HealthGuard which 'fights online health care hoaxes'. How very kind. Somehow the NewsGuard European Managing Director Anna-Sophie Harling, a remarkably young-

looking woman with no broadcasting experience and little hands-on work in journalism, has somehow secured a position on the 'Content Board' of UK government broadcast censor Ofcom. An executive of an organisation seeking to discredit dissidents of the official narratives is making decisions for the government broadcast 'regulator' about content?? Another appalling 'fact-checker' is Full Fact funded by George Soros and global censors Google and Facebook.

It's amazing how many activists in the 'fact-checking', 'anti-hate', arena turn up in government-related positions – people like UK Labour Party activist Imran Ahmed who heads the Center for Countering Digital Hate founded by people like Morgan McSweeney, now chief of staff to the Labour Party's hapless and useless 'leader' Keir Starmer. Digital Hate – which is what it really is – uses the American spelling of Center to betray its connection to a transatlantic network of similar organisations which in 2020 shapeshifted from attacking people for 'hate' to attacking them for questioning the 'Covid' hoax and the dangers of the 'Covid vaccine'. It's just a coincidence, you understand. This is one of Imran Ahmed's hysterical statements: 'I would go beyond calling anti-vaxxers conspiracy theorists to say they are an extremist group that pose a national security risk.' No one could ever accuse this prat of understatement and he's including in that those parents who are now against vaccines after their children were damaged for life or killed by them. He's such a nice man. Ahmed does the rounds of the Woke media getting soft-ball questions from spineless 'journalists' who never ask what right he has to campaign to destroy the freedom of speech of others while he demands it for himself. There also seems to be an overrepresentation in Ofcom of people connected to the narrative-worshipping BBC. This incredible global network of narrative-support was super-vital when the 'Covid' hoax was played in the light of the mega-whopper lies that have to be defended from the spotlight cast by the most basic intelligence.

Setting the scene

The Cult plays the long game and proceeds step-by-step ensuring that everything is in place before major cards are played and they don't come any bigger than the 'Covid' hoax. The psychopaths can't handle events where the outcome isn't certain and as little as possible – preferably nothing – is left to chance. Politicians, government and medical officials who would follow direction were brought to illusory power in advance by the Cult web whether on the national stage or others like state governors and mayors of America. For decades the dynamic between officialdom, law enforcement and the public was changed from one of service to one of control and dictatorship. Behaviour manipulation networks established within government were waiting to impose the coming 'Covid' rules and regulations specifically designed to subdue and rewire the psyche of the people in the guise of protecting health. These included in the UK the Behavioural Insights Team part-owned by the British government Cabinet Office; the Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B); and a whole web of intelligence and military groups seeking to direct the conversation on social media and control the narrative. Among them are the cyberwarfare (on the people) 77th Brigade of the British military which is also coordinated through the Cabinet Office as civilian and military leadership continues to combine in what they call the Fusion Doctrine. The 77th Brigade is a British equivalent of the infamous Israeli (Sabbatian) military cyberwarfare and Internet manipulation operation Unit 8200 which I expose at length in *The Trigger*. Also carefully in place were the medical and science advisers to government – many on the payroll past or present of Bill Gates – and a whole alternative structure of unelected government stood by to take control when elected parliaments were effectively closed down once the 'Covid' card was slammed on the table. The structure I have described here and so much more was installed in every major country through the Cult networks. The top-down control hierarchy looks like this: The Cult – Cult-owned Gates – the World Health Organization and Tedros – Gates-funded or controlled chief medical officers and science 'advisers' (dictators) in each country –

political 'leaders'– law enforcement – The People. Through this simple global communication and enforcement structure the policy of the Cult could be imposed on virtually the entire human population so long as they acquiesced to the fascism. With everything in place it was time for the button to be pressed in late 2019/early 2020.

These were the prime goals the Cult had to secure for its will to prevail:

1) Locking down economies, closing all but designated 'essential' businesses (Cult-owned corporations were 'essential'), and putting the population under house arrest was an imperative to destroy independent income and employment and ensure dependency on the Cult-controlled state in the Hunger Games Society. Lockdowns had to be established as the global blueprint from the start to respond to the 'virus' and followed by pretty much the entire world.

2) The global population had to be terrified into believing in a deadly 'virus' that didn't actually exist so they would unquestioningly obey authority in the belief that authority must know how best to protect them and their families. Software salesman Gates would suddenly morph into the world's health expert and be promoted as such by the Cult-owned media.

3) A method of testing that wasn't testing for the 'virus', but was only claimed to be, had to be in place to provide the illusion of 'cases' and subsequent 'deaths' that had a very different cause to the 'Covid-19' that would be scribbled on the death certificate.

4) Because there was no 'virus' and the great majority testing positive with a test not testing for the 'virus' would have no symptoms of anything the lie had to be sold that people without symptoms (without the 'virus') could still pass it on to others. This was crucial to justify for the first time quarantining – house arresting – healthy people. Without this the economy-destroying lockdown of *everybody* could not have been credibly sold.

5) The 'saviour' had to be seen as a vaccine which beyond evil drug companies were working like angels of mercy to develop as quickly as possible, with all corners cut, to save the day. The public must absolutely not know that the 'vaccine' had nothing to do with a 'virus' or that the contents were ready and waiting with a very different motive long before the 'Covid' card was even lifted from the pack.

I said in March, 2020, that the 'vaccine' would have been created way ahead of the 'Covid' hoax which justified its use and the following December an article in the New York *Intelligencer* magazine said the Moderna 'vaccine' had been 'designed' by

January, 2020. This was 'before China had even acknowledged that the disease could be transmitted from human to human, more than a week before the first confirmed coronavirus case in the United States'. The article said that by the time the first American death was announced a month later 'the vaccine had already been manufactured and shipped to the National Institutes of Health for the beginning of its Phase I clinical trial'. The 'vaccine' was actually 'designed' long before that although even with this timescale you would expect the article to ask how on earth it could have been done that quickly. Instead it asked why the 'vaccine' had not been rolled out then and not months later. Journalism in the mainstream is truly dead. I am going to detail in the next chapter why the 'virus' has never existed and how a hoax on that scale was possible, but first the foundation on which the Big Lie of 'Covid' was built.

The test that doesn't test

Fraudulent 'testing' is the bottom line of the whole 'Covid' hoax and was the means by which a 'virus' that did not exist *appeared* to exist. They could only achieve this magic trick by using a test not testing for the 'virus'. To use a test that *was* testing for the 'virus' would mean that every test would come back negative given there was no 'virus'. They chose to exploit something called the RT-PCR test invented by American biochemist Kary Mullis in the 1980s who said publicly that his PCR test … *cannot detect infectious disease*. Yes, the 'test' used worldwide to detect infectious 'Covid' to produce all the illusory 'cases' and 'deaths' compiled by Johns Hopkins and others *cannot detect infectious disease*. This fact came from the mouth of the man who invented PCR and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1993 for doing so. Sadly, and incredibly conveniently for the Cult, Mullis died in August, 2019, at the age of 74 just before his test would be fraudulently used to unleash fascism on the world. He was said to have died from pneumonia which was an irony in itself. A few months later he would have had 'Covid-19' on his death certificate. I say the timing of his death was convenient because had he lived Mullis, a brilliant, honest and decent man, would have been

vociferously speaking out against the use of his test to detect 'Covid' when it was never designed, or able, to do that. I know that to be true given that Mullis made the same point when his test was used to 'detect' – not detect – HIV. He had been seriously critical of the Gallo/Montagnier claim to have isolated the HIV 'virus' and shown it to cause AIDS for which Mullis said there was no evidence. AIDS is actually not a disease but a series of diseases from which people die all the time. When they die from those *same diseases* after a positive 'test' for HIV then AIDS goes on their death certificate. I think I've heard that before somewhere. Countries instigated a policy with 'Covid' that anyone who tested positive with a test not testing for the 'virus' and died of any other cause within 28 days and even longer 'Covid-19' had to go on the death certificate. Cases have come from the test that can't test for infectious disease and the deaths are those who have died of *anything* after testing positive with a test not testing for the 'virus'. I'll have much more later about the death certificate scandal.

Mullis was deeply dismissive of the now US 'Covid' star Anthony Fauci who he said was a liar who didn't know anything about anything – 'and I would say that to his face – nothing.' He said of Fauci: 'The man thinks he can take a blood sample, put it in an electron microscope and if it's got a virus in there you'll know it – he doesn't understand electron microscopy and he doesn't understand medicine and shouldn't be in a position like he's in.' That position, terrifyingly, has made him the decider of 'Covid' fascism policy on behalf of the Cult in his role as director since 1984 of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) while his record of being wrong is laughable; but being wrong, so long as it's the *right kind* of wrong, is why the Cult loves him. He'll say anything the Cult tells him to say. Fauci was made Chief Medical Adviser to the President immediately Biden took office. Biden was installed in the White House by Cult manipulation and one of his first decisions was to elevate Fauci to a position of even more control. This is a coincidence? Yes, and I identify as a flamenco dancer called Lola. How does such an incompetent criminal like Fauci remain in that

pivotal position in American health since *the 1980s*? When you serve the Cult it looks after you until you are surplus to requirements. Kary Mullis said prophetically of Fauci and his like: 'Those guys have an agenda and it's not an agenda we would like them to have … they make their own rules, they change them when they want to, and Tony Fauci does not mind going on television in front of the people who pay his salary and lie directly into the camera.' Fauci has done that almost daily since the 'Covid' hoax began. Lying is in Fauci's DNA. To make the situation crystal clear about the PCR test this is a direct quote from its inventor Kary Mullis:

> It [the PCR test] doesn't tell you that you're sick and doesn't tell you that the thing you ended up with was really going to hurt you ...'

Ask yourself why governments and medical systems the world over have been using this very test to decide who is 'infected' with the SARS-CoV-2 'virus' and the alleged disease it allegedly causes, 'Covid-19'. The answer to that question will tell you what has been going on. By the way, here's a little show-stopper – the 'new' SARS-CoV-2 'virus' was 'identified' as such right from the start using … *the PCR test not testing for the 'virus'*. If you are new to this and find that shocking then stick around. I have hardly started yet. Even worse, other 'tests', like the 'Lateral Flow Device' (LFD), are considered so useless that they have to be *confirmed* by the PCR test! Leaked emails written by Ben Dyson, adviser to UK 'Health' Secretary Matt Hancock, said they were 'dangerously unreliable'. Dyson, executive director of strategy at the Department of Health, wrote: 'As of today, someone who gets a positive LFD result in (say) London has at best a 25 per cent chance of it being a true positive, but if it is a self-reported test potentially as low as 10 per cent (on an optimistic assumption about specificity) or as low as 2 per cent (on a more pessimistic assumption).' These are the 'tests' that schoolchildren and the public are being urged to have twice a week or more and have to isolate if they get a positive. Each fake positive goes in the statistics as a 'case' no matter how ludicrously inaccurate and the

'cases' drive lockdown, masks and the pressure to 'vaccinate'. The government said in response to the email leak that the 'tests' were accurate which confirmed yet again what shocking bloody liars they are. The real false positive rate is *100 percent* as we'll see. In another 'you couldn't make it up' the UK government agreed to pay £2.8 billion to California's Innova Medical Group to supply the irrelevant lateral flow tests. The company's primary test-making centre is in China. Innova Medical Group, established in March, 2020, is owned by Pasaca Capital Inc, chaired by Chinese-American millionaire Charles Huang who was born in Wuhan.

How it works – and how it doesn't

The RT-PCR test, known by its full title of Polymerase chain reaction, is used across the world to make millions, even billions, of copies of a DNA/RNA genetic information sample. The process is called 'amplification' and means that a tiny sample of genetic material is amplified to bring out the detailed content. I stress that it is not testing for an infectious disease. It is simply amplifying a sample of genetic material. In the words of Kary Mullis: 'PCR is … just a process that's used to make a whole lot of something out of something.' To emphasise the point companies that make the PCR tests circulated around the world to 'test' for 'Covid' warn on the box that it can't be used to detect 'Covid' or infectious disease and is for research purposes only. It's okay, rest for a minute and you'll be fine. This is the test that produces the 'cases' and 'deaths' that have been used to destroy human society. All those global and national medical and scientific 'experts' demanding this destruction to 'save us' *KNOW* that the test is not testing for the 'virus' and the cases and deaths they claim to be real are an almost unimaginable fraud. Every one of them and so many others including politicians and psychopaths like Gates and Tedros must be brought before Nuremburg-type trials and jailed for the rest of their lives. The more the genetic sample is amplified by PCR the more elements of that material become sensitive to the test and by that I don't mean sensitive for a 'virus' but for elements of the genetic material which

is *naturally* in the body or relates to remnants of old conditions of various kinds lying dormant and causing no disease. Once the amplification of the PCR reaches a certain level *everyone* will test positive. So much of the material has been made sensitive to the test that everyone will have some part of it in their body. Even lying criminals like Fauci have said that once PCR amplifications pass 35 cycles everything will be a false positive that cannot be trusted for the reasons I have described. I say, like many proper doctors and scientists, that 100 percent of the 'positives' are false, but let's just go with Fauci for a moment.

He says that any amplification over 35 cycles will produce false positives and yet the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have recommended up to *40 cycles* and the National Health Service (NHS) in Britain admitted in an internal document for staff that it was using *45 cycles* of amplification. A long list of other countries has been doing the same and at least one 'testing' laboratory has been using *50 cycles*. Have you ever heard a doctor, medical 'expert' or the media ask what level of amplification has been used to claim a 'positive'. The 'test' comes back 'positive' and so you have the 'virus', end of story. Now we can see how the government in Tanzania could send off samples from a goat and a pawpaw fruit under human names and both came back positive for 'Covid-19'. Tanzania president John Magufuli mocked the 'Covid' hysteria, the PCR test and masks and refused to import the DNA-manipulating 'vaccine'. The Cult hated him and an article sponsored by the Bill Gates Foundation appeared in the London *Guardian* in February, 2021, headed 'It's time for Africa to rein in Tanzania's anti-vaxxer president'. Well, 'reined in' he shortly was. Magufuli appeared in good health, but then, in March, 2021, he was dead at 61 from 'heart failure'. He was replaced by Samia Hassan Suhulu who is connected to Klaus Schwab's World Economic Forum and she immediately reversed Magufuli's 'Covid' policy. A sample of cola tested positive for 'Covid' with the PCR test in Germany while American actress and singer-songwriter Erykah Badu tested positive in one nostril and negative in the other. Footballer Ronaldo called

the PCR test 'bullshit' after testing positive three times and being forced to quarantine and miss matches when there was nothing wrong with him. The mantra from Tedros at the World Health Organization and national governments (same thing) has been test, test, test. They know that the more tests they can generate the more fake 'cases' they have which go on to become 'deaths' in ways I am coming to. The UK government has its Operation Moonshot planned to test multiple millions every day in workplaces and schools with free tests for everyone to use twice a week at home in line with the Cult plan from the start to make testing part of life. A government advertisement for an 'Interim Head of Asymptomatic Testing Communication' said the job included responsibility for delivering a 'communications strategy' (propaganda) 'to support the expansion of asymptomatic testing that *'normalises testing as part of everyday life*'. More tests means more fake 'cases', 'deaths' and fascism. I have heard of, and from, many people who booked a test, couldn't turn up, and yet got a positive result through the post for a test they'd never even had. The whole thing is crazy, but for the Cult there's method in the madness. Controlling and manipulating the level of amplification of the test means the authorities can control whenever they want the number of apparent 'cases' and 'deaths'. If they want to justify more fascist lockdown and destruction of livelihoods they keep the amplification high. If they want to give the illusion that lockdowns and the 'vaccine' are working then they lower the amplification and 'cases' and 'deaths' will appear to fall. In January, 2021, the Cult-owned World Health Organization suddenly warned laboratories about over-amplification of the test and to lower the threshold. Suddenly headlines began appearing such as: 'Why ARE "Covid" cases plummeting?' This was just when the vaccine rollout was underway and I had predicted months before they would make cases appear to fall through amplification tampering when the 'vaccine' came. These people are so predictable.

Cow vaccines?

The question must be asked of what is on the test swabs being poked far up the nose of the population to the base of the brain? A nasal swab punctured one woman's brain and caused it to leak fluid. Most of these procedures are being done by people with little training or medical knowledge. Dr Lorraine Day, former orthopaedic trauma surgeon and Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery at San Francisco General Hospital, says the tests are really a *'vaccine'*. Cows have long been vaccinated this way. She points out that masks have to cover the nose and the mouth where it is claimed the 'virus' exists in saliva. Why then don't they take saliva from the mouth as they do with a DNA test instead of pushing a long swab up the nose towards the brain? The ethmoid bone separates the nasal cavity from the brain and within that bone is the cribriform plate. Dr Day says that when the swab is pushed up against this plate and twisted the procedure is 'depositing things back there'. She claims that among these 'things' are nanoparticles that can enter the brain. Researchers have noted that a team at the Gates-funded Johns Hopkins have designed tiny, star-shaped micro-devices that can latch onto intestinal mucosa and release drugs into the body. Mucosa is the thin skin that covers the inside surface of parts of the body such as *the nose* and mouth and produces mucus to protect them. The Johns Hopkins micro-devices are called 'theragrippers' and were 'inspired' by a parasitic worm that digs its sharp teeth into a host's intestines. Nasal swabs are also coated in the sterilisation agent ethylene oxide. The US National Cancer Institute posts this explanation on its website:

> At room temperature, ethylene oxide is a flammable colorless gas with a sweet odor. It is used primarily to produce other chemicals, including antifreeze. In smaller amounts, ethylene oxide is used as a pesticide and a sterilizing agent. The ability of ethylene oxide to damage DNA makes it an effective sterilizing agent but also accounts for its cancer-causing activity.

The Institute mentions lymphoma and leukaemia as cancers most frequently reported to be associated with occupational exposure to ethylene oxide along with stomach and breast cancers. How does anyone think this is going to work out with the constant testing

regime being inflicted on adults and children at home and at school that will accumulate in the body anything that's on the swab?

Doctors know best

It is vital for people to realise that 'hero' doctors 'know' only what the Big Pharma-dominated medical authorities tell them to 'know' and if they refuse to 'know' what they are told to 'know' they are out the door. They are mostly not physicians or healers, but repeaters of the official narrative – or else. I have seen alleged professional doctors on British television make shocking statements that we are supposed to take seriously. One called 'Dr' Amir Khan, who is actually telling patients how to respond to illness, said that men could take the birth pill to 'help slow down the effects of Covid-19'. In March, 2021, another ridiculous 'Covid study' by an American doctor proposed injecting men with the female sex hormone progesterone as a 'Covid' treatment. British doctor Nighat Arif told the BBC that face coverings were now going to be part of ongoing normal. Yes, the vaccine protects you, she said (evidence?) … but the way to deal with viruses in the community was always going to come down to hand washing, face covering and keeping a physical distance. That's not what we were told before the 'vaccine' was circulating. Arif said she couldn't imagine ever again going on the underground or in a lift without a mask. I was just thanking my good luck that she was not my doctor when she said – in March, 2021 – that if 'we are *behaving* and we are doing all the right things' she thought we could 'have our nearest and dearest around us at home … around *Christmas* and N*ew Year!* Her patronising delivery was the usual school teacher talking to six-year-olds as she repeated every government talking point and probably believed them all. If we have learned anything from the 'Covid' experience surely it must be that humanity's perception of doctors needs a fundamental rethink. NHS 'doctor' Sara Kayat told her television audience that the 'Covid vaccine' would '100 percent prevent hospitalisation and death'. Not even Big Pharma claimed that. We have to stop taking 'experts' at their word without question when so many of them are

clueless and only repeating the party line on which their careers depend. That is not to say there are not brilliants doctors – there are and I have spoken to many of them since all this began – but you won't see them in the mainstream media or quoted by the psychopaths and yes-people in government.

Remember the name – Christian Drosten

German virologist Christian Drosten, Director of Charité Institute of Virology in Berlin, became a national star after the pandemic hoax began. He was feted on television and advised the German government on 'Covid' policy. Most importantly to the wider world Drosten led a group that produced the 'Covid' testing protocol for the PCR test. What a remarkable feat given the PCR cannot test for infectious disease and even more so when you think that Drosten said that his method of testing for SARS-CoV-2 was developed 'without having virus material available'. *He developed a test for a 'virus' that he didn't have and had never seen*. Let that sink in as you survey the global devastation that came from what he did. The whole catastrophe of Drosten's 'test' was based on the alleged genetic sequence published by Chinese scientists on the Internet. We will see in the next chapter that this alleged 'genetic sequence' has never been produced by China or anyone and cannot be when there *is no* SARS-CoV-2. Drosten, however, doesn't seem to let little details like that get in the way. He was the lead author with Victor Corman from the same Charité Hospital of the paper 'Detection of 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) by real-time PCR' published in a magazine called *Eurosurveillance*. This became known as the Corman-Drosten paper. In November, 2020, with human society devastated by the effects of the Corman-Drosten test baloney, the protocol was publicly challenged by 22 international scientists and independent researchers from Europe, the United States, and Japan. Among them were senior molecular geneticists, biochemists, immunologists, and microbiologists. They produced a document headed 'External peer review of the RTPCR test to detect SARS-Cov-2 Reveals 10 Major Flaws At The Molecular and Methodological Level: Consequences

For False-Positive Results'. The flaws in the Corman-Drosten test included the following:

- The test is non-specific because of erroneous design
- Results are enormously variable
- The test is unable to discriminate between the whole 'virus' and viral fragments
- It doesn't have positive or negative controls
- The test lacks a standard operating procedure
- It is unsupported by proper peer view

The scientists said the PCR 'Covid' testing protocol was not founded on science and they demanded the Corman-Drosten paper be retracted by *Eurosurveillance*. They said all present and previous Covid deaths, cases, and 'infection rates' should be subject to a massive retroactive inquiry. Lockdowns and travel restrictions should be reviewed and relaxed and those diagnosed through PCR to have 'Covid-19' should not be forced to isolate. Dr Kevin Corbett, a health researcher and nurse educator with a long academic career producing a stream of peer-reviewed publications at many UK universities, made the same point about the PCR test debacle. He said of the scientists' conclusions: 'Every scientific rationale for the development of that test has been totally destroyed by this paper. It's like Hiroshima/Nagasaki to the Covid test.' He said that China hadn't given them an isolated 'virus' when Drosten developed the test. Instead they had developed the test from *a sequence in a gene bank*.' Put another way … *they made it up*! The scientists were supported in this contention by a Portuguese appeals court which ruled in November, 2020, that PCR tests are unreliable and it is unlawful to quarantine people based solely on a PCR test. The point about China not providing an isolated virus must be true when the 'virus' has never been isolated to this day and the consequences of that will become clear. Drosten and company produced this useless 'protocol' right on cue in January, 2020, just as the 'virus' was said to

be moving westward and it somehow managed to successfully pass a peer-review in 24 hours. In other words there was no peer-review for a test that would be used to decide who had 'Covid' and who didn't across the world. The Cult-created, Gates-controlled World Health Organization immediately recommended all its nearly 200 member countries to use the Drosten PCR protocol to detect 'cases' and 'deaths'. The sting was underway and it continues to this day.

So who is this Christian Drosten that produced the means through which death, destruction and economic catastrophe would be justified? His education background, including his doctoral thesis, would appear to be somewhat shrouded in mystery and his track record is dire as with another essential player in the 'Covid' hoax, the Gates-funded Professor Neil Ferguson at the Gates-funded Imperial College in London of whom more shortly. Drosten predicted in 2003 that the alleged original SARS 'virus' (SARS-1') was an epidemic that could have serious effects on economies and an effective vaccine would take at least two years to produce. Drosten's answer to every alleged 'outbreak' is a vaccine which you won't be shocked to know. What followed were just 774 official deaths worldwide and none in Germany where there were only nine cases. That is even if you believe there ever was a SARS 'virus' when the evidence is zilch and I will expand on this in the next chapter. Drosten claims to be co-discoverer of 'SARS-1' and developed a test for it in 2003. He was screaming warnings about 'swine flu' in 2009 and how it was a widespread infection far more severe than any dangers from a vaccine could be and people should get vaccinated. It would be helpful for Drosten's vocal chords if he simply recorded the words 'the virus is deadly and you need to get vaccinated' and copies could be handed out whenever the latest made-up threat comes along. Drosten's swine flu epidemic never happened, but Big Pharma didn't mind with governments spending hundreds of millions on vaccines that hardly anyone bothered to use and many who did wished they hadn't. A study in 2010 revealed that the risk of dying from swine flu, or H1N1, was no higher than that of the annual seasonal flu which is what at least most of 'it' really was as in

the case of 'Covid-19'. A media investigation into Drosten asked how with such a record of inaccuracy he could be *the* government adviser on these issues. The answer to that question is the same with Drosten, Ferguson and Fauci – they keep on giving the authorities the 'conclusions' and 'advice' they want to hear. Drosten certainly produced the goods for them in January, 2020, with his PCR protocol garbage and provided the foundation of what German internal medicine specialist Dr Claus Köhnlein, co-author of *Virus Mania*, called the 'test pandemic'. The 22 scientists in the *Eurosurveillance* challenge called out conflicts of interest within the Drosten 'protocol' group and with good reason. Olfert Landt, a regular co-author of Drosten 'studies', owns the biotech company TIB Molbiol Syntheselabor GmbH in Berlin which manufactures and sells the tests that Drosten and his mates come up with. They have done this with SARS, Enterotoxigenic E. coli (ETEC), MERS, Zika 'virus', yellow fever, and now 'Covid'. Landt told the *Berliner Zeitung* newspaper:

> The testing, design and development came from the Charité [Drosten and Corman]. We simply implemented it immediately in the form of a kit. And if we don't have the virus, which originally only existed in Wuhan, we can make a synthetic gene to simulate the genome of the virus. That's what we did very quickly.

This is more confirmation that the Drosten test was designed without access to the 'virus' and only a synthetic simulation which is what SARS-CoV-2 really is – a computer-generated synthetic fiction. It's quite an enterprise they have going here. A Drosten team decides what the test for something should be and Landt's biotech company flogs it to governments and medical systems across the world. His company must have made an absolute fortune since the 'Covid' hoax began. Dr Reiner Fuellmich, a prominent German consumer protection trial lawyer in Germany and California, is on Drosten's case and that of Tedros at the World Health Organization for crimes against humanity with a class-action lawsuit being prepared in the United States and other legal action in Germany.

Why China?

Scamming the world with a 'virus' that doesn't exist would seem impossible on the face of it, but not if you have control of the relatively few people that make policy decisions and the great majority of the global media. Remember it's not about changing 'real' reality it's about controlling *perception* of reality. You don't have to make something happen you only have make people *believe* that it's happening. Renegade Minds understand this and are therefore much harder to swindle. 'Covid-19' is not a 'real' 'virus'. It's a mind virus, like a computer virus, which has infected the minds, not the bodies, of billions. It all started, publically at least, in China and that alone is of central significance. The Cult was behind the revolution led by its asset Mao Zedong, or Chairman Mao, which established the People's Republic of China on October 1st, 1949. It should have been called The Cult's Republic of China, but the name had to reflect the recurring illusion that vicious dictatorships are run by and for the people (see all the 'Democratic Republics' controlled by tyrants). In the same way we have the 'Biden' Democratic Republic of America officially ruled by a puppet tyrant (at least temporarily) on behalf of Cult tyrants. The creation of Mao's merciless communist/fascist dictatorship was part of a frenzy of activity by the Cult at the conclusion of World War Two which, like the First World War, it had instigated through its assets in Germany, Britain, France, the United States and elsewhere. Israel was formed in 1948; the Soviet Union expanded its 'Iron Curtain' control, influence and military power with the Warsaw Pact communist alliance in 1955; the United Nations was formed in 1945 as a Cult precursor to world government; and a long list of world bodies would be established including the World Health Organization (1948), World Trade Organization (1948 under another name until 1995), International Monetary Fund (1945) and World Bank (1944). Human society was redrawn and hugely centralised in the global Problem-Reaction-Solution that was World War Two. All these changes were significant. Israel would become the headquarters of the Sabbatians

and the revolution in China would prepare the ground and control system for the events of 2019/2020.

Renegade Minds know there are no borders except for public consumption. The Cult is a seamless, borderless global entity and to understand the game we need to put aside labels like borders, nations, countries, communism, fascism and democracy. These delude the population into believing that countries are ruled within their borders by a government of whatever shade when these are mere agencies of a global power. America's illusion of democracy and China's communism/fascism are subsidiaries – vehicles – for the same agenda. We may hear about conflict and competition between America and China and on the lower levels that will be true; but at the Cult level they are branches of the same company in the way of the McDonald's example I gave earlier. I have tracked in the books over the years support by US governments of both parties for Chinese Communist Party infiltration of American society through allowing the sale of land, even military facilities, and the acquisition of American business and university influence. All this is underpinned by the infamous stealing of intellectual property and technological know-how. Cult-owned Silicon Valley corporations waive their fraudulent 'morality' to do business with human-rights-free China; Cult-controlled Disney has become China's PR department; and China in effect owns 'American' sports such as basketball which depends for much of its income on Chinese audiences. As a result any sports player, coach or official speaking out against China's horrific human rights record is immediately condemned or fired by the China-worshipping National Basketball Association. One of the first acts of China-controlled Biden was to issue an executive order telling federal agencies to stop making references to the 'virus' by the 'geographic location of its origin'. Long-time Congressman Jerry Nadler warned that criticising China, America's biggest rival, leads to hate crimes against Asian people in the United States. So shut up you bigot. China is fast closing in on Israel as a country that must not be criticised which is apt, really, given that Sabbatians control them both. The two countries have

developed close economic, military, technological and strategic ties which include involvement in China's 'Silk Road' transport and economic initiative to connect China with Europe. Israel was the first country in the Middle East to recognise the establishment of Mao's tyranny in 1950 months after it was established.

Project Wuhan – the 'Covid' Psyop

I emphasise again that the Cult plays the long game and what is happening to the world today is the result of centuries of calculated manipulation following a script to take control step-by-step of every aspect of human society. I will discuss later the common force behind all this that has spanned those centuries and thousands of years if the truth be told. Instigating the Mao revolution in China in 1949 with a 2020 'pandemic' in mind is not only how they work – the 71 years between them is really quite short by the Cult's standards of manipulation preparation. The reason for the Cult's Chinese revolution was to create a fiercely-controlled environment within which an extreme structure for human control could be incubated to eventually be unleashed across the world. We have seen this happen since the 'pandemic' emerged from China with the Chinese control-structure founded on AI technology and tyrannical enforcement sweep across the West. Until the moment when the Cult went for broke in the West and put its fascism on public display Western governments had to pay some lip-service to freedom and democracy to not alert too many people to the tyranny-in-the-making. Freedoms were more subtly eroded and power centralised with covert government structures put in place waiting for the arrival of 2020 when that smokescreen of 'freedom' could be dispensed with. The West was not able to move towards tyranny before 2020 anything like as fast as China which was created as a tyranny and had no limits on how fast it could construct the Cult's blueprint for global control. When the time came to impose that structure on the world it was the same Cult-owned Chinese communist/fascist government that provided the excuse – the 'Covid pandemic'. It was absolutely crucial to the Cult plan for the Chinese response to the 'pandemic' –

draconian lockdowns of the entire population – to become the blueprint that Western countries would follow to destroy the livelihoods and freedom of their people. This is why the Cult-owned, Gates-owned, WHO Director-General Tedros said early on:

The Chinese government is to be congratulated for the extraordinary measures it has taken to contain the outbreak. China is actually setting a new standard for outbreak response and it is not an exaggeration.

Forbes magazine said of China: '… those measures protected untold millions from getting the disease'. The Rockefeller Foundation 'epidemic scenario' document in 2010 said 'prophetically':

However, a few countries did fare better – China in particular. The Chinese government's quick imposition and enforcement of mandatory quarantine for all citizens, as well as its instant and near-hermetic sealing off of all borders, saved millions of lives, stopping the spread of the virus far earlier than in other countries and enabling a swifter post-pandemic recovery.

Once again – *spooky*.

The first official story was the 'bat theory' or rather the bat diversion. The source of the 'virus outbreak' we were told was a ''wet market' in Wuhan where bats and other animals are bought and eaten in horrifically unhygienic conditions. Then another story emerged through the alternative media that the 'virus' had been released on purpose or by accident from a BSL-4 (biosafety level 4) laboratory in Wuhan not far from the wet market. The lab was reported to create and work with lethal concoctions and bioweapons. Biosafety level 4 is the highest in the World Health Organization system of safety and containment. Renegade Minds are aware of what I call designer manipulation. The ideal for the Cult is for people to buy its prime narrative which in the opening salvoes of the 'pandemic' was the wet market story. It knows, however, that there is now a considerable worldwide alternative media of researchers sceptical of anything governments say and they are often given a version of events in a form they can perceive as credible while misdirecting them from the real truth. In this case let them

think that the conspiracy involved is a 'bioweapon virus' released from the Wuhan lab to keep them from the real conspiracy – *there is no 'virus'*. The WHO's current position on the source of the outbreak at the time of writing appears to be: 'We haven't got a clue, mate.' This is a good position to maintain mystery and bewilderment. The inner circle will know where the 'virus' came from – *nowhere*. The bottom line was to ensure the public believed there *was* a 'virus' and it didn't much matter if they thought it was natural or had been released from a lab. The belief that there was a 'deadly virus' was all that was needed to trigger global panic and fear. The population was terrified into handing their power to authority and doing what they were told. They had to or they were 'all gonna die'.

In March, 2020, information began to come my way from real doctors and scientists and my own additional research which had my intuition screaming: 'Yes, that's it! *There is no virus*.' The 'bioweapon' was not the 'virus'; it was the *'vaccine'* already being talked about that would be the bioweapon. My conclusion was further enhanced by happenings in Wuhan. The 'virus' was said to be sweeping the city and news footage circulated of people collapsing in the street (which they've never done in the West with the same 'virus'). The Chinese government was building 'new hospitals' in a matter of ten days to 'cope with demand' such was the virulent nature of the 'virus'. Yet in what seemed like no time the 'new hospitals' closed – even if they even opened – and China declared itself 'virus-free'. It was back to business as usual. This was more propaganda to promote the Chinese draconian lockdowns in the West as the way to 'beat the virus'. Trouble was that we subsequently had lockdown after lockdown, but never business as usual. As the people of the West and most of the rest of the world were caught in an ever-worsening spiral of lockdown, social distancing, masks, isolated old people, families forced apart, and livelihood destruction, it was party-time in Wuhan. Pictures emerged of thousands of people enjoying pool parties and concerts. It made no sense until you realised there never was a 'virus' and the

whole thing was a Cult set-up to transform human society out of one its major global strongholds – China.

How is it possible to deceive virtually the entire world population into believing there is a deadly virus when there is not even a 'virus' let alone a deadly one? It's nothing like as difficult as you would think and that's clearly true because it happened.

Postscript: See end of book Postscript for more on the 'Wuhan lab virus release' story which the authorities and media were pushing heavily in the summer of 2021 to divert attention from the truth that the 'Covid virus' is pure invention.

CHAPTER FIVE

There *is no* 'virus'

You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time
Abraham Lincoln

The greatest form of mind control is repetition. The more you repeat the same mantra of alleged 'facts' the more will accept them to be true. It becomes an 'everyone knows that, mate'. If you can also censor any other version or alternative to your alleged 'facts' you are pretty much home and cooking.

By the start of 2020 the Cult owned the global mainstream media almost in its entirety to spew out its 'Covid' propaganda and ignore or discredit any other information and view. Cult-owned social media platforms in Cult-owned Silicon Valley were poised and ready to unleash a campaign of ferocious censorship to obliterate all but the official narrative. To complete the circle many demands for censorship by Silicon Valley were led by the mainstream media as 'journalists' became full-out enforcers for the Cult both as propagandists and censors. Part of this has been the influx of young people straight out of university who have become 'journalists' in significant positions. They have no experience and a headful of programmed perceptions from their years at school and university at a time when today's young are the most perceptually-targeted generations in known human history given the insidious impact of technology. They enter the media perceptually prepared and ready to repeat the narratives of the system that programmed them to

repeat its narratives. The BBC has a truly pathetic 'specialist disinformation reporter' called Marianna Spring who fits this bill perfectly. She is clueless about the world, how it works and what is really going on. Her role is to discredit anyone doing the job that a proper journalist would do and system-serving hacks like Spring wouldn't dare to do or even see the need to do. They are too busy licking the arse of authority which can never be wrong and, in the case of the BBC propaganda programme, *Panorama*, contacting payments systems such as PayPal to have a donations page taken down for a film company making documentaries questioning vaccines. Even the BBC soap opera *EastEnders* included a disgracefully biased scene in which an inarticulate white working class woman was made to look foolish for questioning the 'vaccine' while a well-spoken black man and Asian woman promoted the government narrative. It ticked every BBC box and the fact that the black and minority community was resisting the 'vaccine' had nothing to do with the way the scene was written. The BBC has become a disgusting tyrannical propaganda and censorship operation that should be defunded and disbanded and a free media take its place with a brief to stop censorship instead of demanding it. A BBC 'interview' with Gates goes something like: 'Mr Gates, sir, if I can call you sir, would you like to tell our audience why you are such a great man, a wonderful humanitarian philanthropist, and why you should absolutely be allowed as a software salesman to decide health policy for approaching eight billion people? Thank you, sir, please sir.' Propaganda programming has been incessant and merciless and when all you hear is the same story from the media, repeated by those around you who have only heard the same story, is it any wonder that people on a grand scale believe absolute mendacious garbage to be true? You are about to see, too, why this level of information control is necessary when the official 'Covid' narrative is so nonsensical and unsupportable by the evidence.

Structure of Deceit

The pyramid structure through which the 'Covid' hoax has been manifested is very simple and has to be to work. As few people as possible have to be involved with full knowledge of what they are doing – and why – or the real story would get out. At the top of the pyramid are the inner core of the Cult which controls Bill Gates who, in turn, controls the World Health Organization through his pivotal funding and his puppet Director-General mouthpiece, Tedros. Before he was appointed Tedros was chair of the Gates-founded Global Fund to 'fight against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria', a board member of the Gates-funded 'vaccine alliance' GAVI, and on the board of another Gates-funded organisation. Gates owns him and picked him for a specific reason – Tedros is a crook and worse. 'Dr' Tedros (he's not a medical doctor, the first WHO chief not to be) was a member of the tyrannical Marxist government of Ethiopia for decades with all its human rights abuses. He has faced allegations of corruption and misappropriation of funds and was exposed three times for covering up cholera epidemics while Ethiopia's health minister. Tedros appointed the mass-murdering genocidal Zimbabwe dictator Robert Mugabe as a WHO goodwill ambassador for public health which, as with Tedros, is like appointing a psychopath to run a peace and love campaign. The move was so ridiculous that he had to drop Mugabe in the face of widespread condemnation. American economist David Steinman, a Nobel peace prize nominee, lodged a complaint with the International Criminal Court in The Hague over alleged genocide by Tedros when he was Ethiopia's foreign minister. Steinman says Tedros was a 'crucial decision maker' who directed the actions of Ethiopia's security forces from 2013 to 2015 and one of three officials in charge when those security services embarked on the 'killing' and 'torturing' of Ethiopians. You can see where Tedros is coming from and it's sobering to think that he has been the vehicle for Gates and the Cult to direct the global response to 'Covid'. Think about that. A psychopathic Cult dictates to psychopath Gates who dictates to psychopath Tedros who dictates how countries of the world must respond to a 'Covid virus' never scientifically shown to exist. At the same time psychopathic Cult-owned Silicon Valley information

giants like Google, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter announced very early on that they would give the Cult/Gates/Tedros/WHO version of the narrative free advertising and censor those who challenged their intelligence-insulting, mendacious story.

The next layer in the global 'medical' structure below the Cult, Gates and Tedros are the chief medical officers and science 'advisers' in each of the WHO member countries which means virtually all of them. Medical officers and arbiters of science (they're not) then take the WHO policy and recommended responses and impose them on their country's population while the political 'leaders' say they are deciding policy (they're clearly not) by 'following the science' on the advice of the 'experts' – the same medical officers and science 'advisers' (dictators). In this way with the rarest of exceptions the entire world followed the same policy of lockdown, people distancing, masks and 'vaccines' dictated by the psychopathic Cult, psychopathic Gates and psychopathic Tedros who we are supposed to believe give a damn about the health of the world population they are seeking to enslave. That, amazingly, is all there is to it in terms of crucial decision-making. Medical staff in each country then follow like sheep the dictates of the shepherds at the top of the national medical hierarchies – chief medical officers and science 'advisers' who themselves follow like sheep the shepherds of the World Health Organization and the Cult. Shepherds at the national level often have major funding and other connections to Gates and his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which carefully hands out money like confetti at a wedding to control the entire global medical system from the WHO down.

Follow the money

Christopher Whitty, Chief Medical Adviser to the UK Government at the centre of 'virus' policy, a senior adviser to the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), and Executive Board member of the World Health Organization, was gifted a grant of $40 million by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for malaria research in Africa. The BBC described the unelected Whitty as 'the

official who will probably have the greatest impact on our everyday lives of any individual policymaker in modern times' and so it turned out. What Gates and Tedros have said Whitty has done like his equivalents around the world. Patrick Vallance, co-chair of SAGE and the government's Chief Scientific Adviser, is a former executive of Big Pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline with its fundamental financial and business connections to Bill Gates. In September, 2020, it was revealed that Vallance owned a deferred bonus of shares in GlaxoSmithKline worth £600,000 while the company was 'developing' a 'Covid vaccine'. Move along now – nothing to see here – what could possibly be wrong with that? Imperial College in London, a major player in 'Covid' policy in Britain and elsewhere with its 'Covid-19' Response Team, is funded by Gates and has big connections to China while the now infamous Professor Neil Ferguson, the useless 'computer modeller' at Imperial College is also funded by Gates. Ferguson delivered the dramatically inaccurate excuse for the first lockdowns (much more in the next chapter). The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in the United States, another source of outrageously false 'Covid' computer models to justify lockdowns, is bankrolled by Gates who is a vehement promotor of lockdowns. America's version of Whitty and Vallance, the again now infamous Anthony Fauci, has connections to 'Covid vaccine' maker Moderna as does Bill Gates through funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Fauci is director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), a major recipient of Gates money, and they are very close. Deborah Birx who was appointed White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator in February, 2020, is yet another with ties to Gates. Everywhere you look at the different elements around the world behind the coordination and decision making of the 'Covid' hoax there is Bill Gates and his money. They include the World Health Organization; Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States; National Institutes of Health (NIH) of Anthony Fauci; Imperial College and Neil Ferguson; the London School of Hygiene where Chris Whitty worked; Regulatory agencies like the UK Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)

which gave emergency approval for 'Covid vaccines'; Wellcome Trust; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI); Johns Hopkins University which has compiled the false 'Covid' figures; and the World Economic Forum. A Nationalfile.com article said:

> Gates has a lot of pull in the medical world, he has a multi-million dollar relationship with Dr. Fauci, and Fauci originally took the Gates line supporting vaccines and casting doubt on [the drug hydroxychloroquine]. Coronavirus response team member Dr. Deborah Birx, appointed by former president Obama to serve as United States Global AIDS Coordinator, also sits on the board of a group that has received billions from Gates' foundation, and Birx reportedly used a disputed Bill Gates-funded model for the White House's Coronavirus effort. Gates is a big proponent for a population lockdown scenario for the Coronavirus outbreak.

Another funder of Moderna is the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the technology-development arm of the Pentagon and one of the most sinister organisations on earth. DARPA had a major role with the CIA covert technology-funding operation In-Q-Tel in the development of Google and social media which is now at the centre of global censorship. Fauci and Gates are extremely close and openly admit to talking regularly about 'Covid' policy, but then why wouldn't Gates have a seat at every national 'Covid' table after his Foundation committed $1.75 billion to the 'fight against Covid-19'. When passed through our Orwellian Translation Unit this means that he has bought and paid for the Cult-driven 'Covid' response worldwide. Research the major 'Covid' response personnel in your own country and you will find the same Gates funding and other connections again and again. Medical and science chiefs following World Health Organization 'policy' sit atop a medical hierarchy in their country of administrators, doctors and nursing staff. These 'subordinates' are told they must work and behave in accordance with the policy delivered from the 'top' of the national 'health' pyramid which is largely the policy delivered by the WHO which is the policy delivered by Gates and the Cult. The whole 'Covid' narrative has been imposed on medical staff by a climate of fear although great numbers don't even need that to comply. They do so through breathtaking levels of ignorance and

include doctors who go through life simply repeating what Big Pharma and their hierarchical masters tell them to say and believe. No wonder Big Pharma 'medicine' is one of the biggest killers on Planet Earth.

The same top-down system of intimidation operates with regard to the Cult Big Pharma cartel which also dictates policy through national and global medical systems in this way. The Cult and Big Pharma agendas are the same because the former controls and owns the latter. 'Health' administrators, doctors, and nursing staff are told to support and parrot the dictated policy or they will face consequences which can include being fired. How sad it's been to see medical staff meekly repeating and imposing Cult policy without question and most of those who can see through the deceit are only willing to speak anonymously off the record. They know what will happen if their identity is known. This has left the courageous few to expose the lies about the 'virus', face masks, overwhelmed hospitals that aren't, and the dangers of the 'vaccine' that isn't a vaccine. When these medical professionals and scientists, some renowned in their field, have taken to the Internet to expose the truth their articles, comments and videos have been deleted by Cult-owned Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. What a real head-shaker to see YouTube videos with leading world scientists and highly qualified medical specialists with an added link underneath to the notorious Cult propaganda website *Wikipedia* to find the 'facts' about the same subject.

HIV – the 'Covid' trial-run

I'll give you an example of the consequences for health and truth that come from censorship and unquestioning belief in official narratives. The story was told by PCR inventor Kary Mullis in his book *Dancing Naked in the Mind Field*. He said that in 1984 he accepted as just another scientific fact that Luc Montagnier of France's Pasteur Institute and Robert Gallo of America's National Institutes of Health had independently discovered that a 'retrovirus' dubbed HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) caused AIDS. They

were, after all, Mullis writes, specialists in retroviruses. This is how the medical and science pyramids work. Something is announced or *assumed* and then becomes an everybody-knows-that purely through repetition of the assumption as if it is fact. Complete crap becomes accepted truth with no supporting evidence and only repetition of the crap. This is how a 'virus' that doesn't exist became the 'virus' that changed the world. The HIV-AIDS fairy story became a multi-billion pound industry and the media poured out propaganda terrifying the world about the deadly HIV 'virus' that caused the lethal AIDS. By then Mullis was working at a lab in Santa Monica, California, to detect retroviruses with his PCR test in blood donations received by the Red Cross. In doing so he asked a virologist where he could find a reference for HIV being the cause of AIDS. 'You don't need a reference,' the virologist said … *'Everybody knows it.'* Mullis said he wanted to quote a reference in the report he was doing and he said he felt a little funny about not knowing the source of such an important discovery when everyone else seemed to. The virologist suggested he cite a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on morbidity and mortality. Mullis read the report, but it only said that an organism had been identified and did not say how. The report did not identify the original scientific work. Physicians, however, *assumed* (key recurring theme) that if the CDC was convinced that HIV caused AIDS then proof must exist. Mullis continues:

I did computer searches. Neither Montagnier, Gallo, nor anyone else had published papers describing experiments which led to the conclusion that HIV probably caused AIDS. I read the papers in Science for which they had become well known as AIDS doctors, but all they had said there was that they had found evidence of a past infection by something which was probably HIV in some AIDS patients.

They found antibodies. Antibodies to viruses had always been considered evidence of past disease, not present disease. Antibodies signaled that the virus had been defeated. The patient had saved himself. There was no indication in these papers that this virus caused a disease. They didn't show that everybody with the antibodies had the disease. In fact they found some healthy people with antibodies.

Mullis asked why their work had been published if Montagnier and Gallo hadn't really found this evidence, and why had they been fighting so hard to get credit for the discovery? He says he was hesitant to write 'HIV is the probable cause of AIDS' until he found published evidence to support that. 'Tens of thousands of scientists and researchers were spending billions of dollars a year doing research based on this idea,' Mullis writes. 'The reason had to be there somewhere; otherwise these people would not have allowed their research to settle into one narrow channel of investigation.' He said he lectured about PCR at numerous meetings where people were always talking about HIV and he asked them how they knew that HIV was the cause of AIDS:

> Everyone said something. Everyone had the answer at home, in the office, in some drawer. They all knew, and they would send me the papers as soon as they got back. But I never got any papers. Nobody ever sent me the news about how AIDS was caused by HIV.

Eventually Mullis was able to ask Montagnier himself about the reference proof when he lectured in San Diego at the grand opening of the University of California AIDS Research Center. Mullis says this was the last time he would ask his question without showing anger. Montagnier said he should reference the CDC report. 'I read it', Mullis said, and it didn't answer the question. 'If Montagnier didn't know the answer who the hell did?' Then one night Mullis was driving when an interview came on National Public Radio with Peter Duesberg, a prominent virologist at Berkeley and a California Scientist of the Year. Mullis says he finally understood why he could not find references that connected HIV to AIDS – *there weren't any!* No one had ever proved that HIV causes AIDS even though it had spawned a multi-billion pound global industry and the media was repeating this as fact every day in their articles and broadcasts terrifying the shit out of people about AIDS and giving the impression that a positive test for HIV (see 'Covid') was a death sentence. Duesberg was a threat to the AIDS gravy train and the agenda that underpinned it. He was therefore abused and castigated after he told the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

there was no good evidence implicating the new 'virus'. Editors rejected his manuscripts and his research funds were deleted. Mullis points out that the CDC has defined AIDS as one of more than 30 diseases *if accompanied* by a positive result on a test that detects antibodies to HIV; but those same diseases are not defined as AIDS cases when antibodies are not detected:

> If an HIV-positive woman develops uterine cancer, for example, she is considered to have AIDS. If she is not HIV positive, she simply has uterine cancer. An HIV-positive man with tuberculosis has AIDS; if he tests negative he simply has tuberculosis. If he lives in Kenya or Colombia, where the test for HIV antibodies is too expensive, he is simply presumed to have the antibodies and therefore AIDS, and therefore he can be treated in the World Health Organization's clinic. It's the only medical help available in some places. And it's free, because the countries that support WHO are worried about AIDS.

Mullis accuses the CDC of continually adding new diseases (see ever more 'Covid symptoms') to the grand AIDS definition and of virtually doctoring the books to make it appear as if the disease continued to spread. He cites how in 1993 the CDC enormously broadened its AIDS definition and county health authorities were delighted because they received $2,500 per year from the Federal government for every reported AIDS case. Ladies and gentlemen, I have just described, via Kary Mullis, the 'Covid pandemic' of 2020 and beyond. Every element is the same and it's been pulled off in the same way by the same networks.

The 'Covid virus' exists? Okay – prove it. Er … still waiting

What Kary Mullis described with regard to 'HIV' has been repeated with 'Covid'. A claim is made that a new, or 'novel', infection has been found and the entire medical system of the world repeats that as fact exactly as they did with HIV and AIDS. No one in the mainstream asks rather relevant questions such as 'How do you know?' and 'Where is your proof?' The SARS-Cov-2 'virus' and the 'Covid-19 disease' became an overnight 'everybody-knows-that'. The origin could be debated and mulled over, but what you could not suggest was that 'SARS-Cov-2' didn't exist. That would be

ridiculous. 'Everybody knows' the 'virus' exists. Well, I didn't for one along with American proper doctors like Andrew Kaufman and Tom Cowan and long-time American proper journalist Jon Rappaport. We dared to pursue the obvious and simple question: 'Where's the evidence?' The overwhelming majority in medicine, journalism and the general public did not think to ask that. After all, *everyone knew* there was a new 'virus'. Everyone was saying so and I heard it on the BBC. Some would eventually argue that the 'deadly virus' was nothing like as deadly as claimed, but few would venture into the realms of its very existence. Had they done so they would have found that the evidence for that claim had gone AWOL as with HIV causes AIDS. In fact, not even that. For something to go AWOL it has to exist in the first place and scientific proof for a 'SARS-Cov-2' can be filed under nothing, nowhere and zilch.

Dr Andrew Kaufman is a board-certified forensic psychiatrist in New York State, a Doctor of Medicine and former Assistant Professor and Medical Director of Psychiatry at SUNY Upstate Medical University, and Medical Instructor of Hematology and Oncology at the Medical School of South Carolina. He also studied biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and trained in Psychiatry at Duke University. Kaufman is retired from allopathic medicine, but remains a consultant and educator on natural healing, I saw a video of his very early on in the 'Covid' hoax in which he questioned claims about the 'virus' in the absence of any supporting evidence and with plenty pointing the other way. I did everything I could to circulate his work which I felt was asking the pivotal questions that needed an answer. I can recommend an excellent pull-together interview he did with the website The Last Vagabond entitled *Dr Andrew Kaufman: Virus Isolation, Terrain Theory and Covid-19* and his website is andrewkaufmanmd.com. Kaufman is not only a forensic psychiatrist; he is forensic in all that he does. He always reads original scientific papers, experiments and studies instead of second-third-fourth-hand reports about the 'virus' in the media which are repeating the repeated repetition of the narrative. When he did so with the original Chinese 'virus' papers Kaufman

realised that there was no evidence of a 'SARS-Cov-2'. They had never – from the start – shown it to exist and every repeat of this claim worldwide was based on the accepted existence of proof that was nowhere to be found – see Kary Mullis and HIV. Here we go again.

Let's postulate

Kaufman discovered that the Chinese authorities immediately concluded that the cause of an illness that broke out among about 200 initial patients in Wuhan was a 'new virus' when there were no grounds to make that conclusion. The alleged 'virus' was not isolated from other genetic material in their samples and then shown through a system known as Koch's postulates to be the causative agent of the illness. The world was told that the SARS-Cov-2 'virus' caused a disease they called 'Covid-19' which had 'flu-like' symptoms and could lead to respiratory problems and pneumonia. If it wasn't so tragic it would almost be funny. *'Flu-like' symptoms'? Pneumonia? Respiratory disease?* What in *CHINA* and particularly in *Wuhan*, one of the most polluted cities in the world with a resulting epidemic of respiratory disease?? Three hundred thousand people get pneumonia in China every year and there are nearly a billion cases worldwide of 'flu-like symptoms'. These have a whole range of causes – including pollution in Wuhan – but no other possibility was credibly considered in late 2019 when the world was told there was a new and deadly 'virus'. The global prevalence of pneumonia and 'flu-like systems' gave the Cult networks unlimited potential to re-diagnose these other causes as the mythical 'Covid-19' and that is what they did from the very start. Kaufman revealed how Chinese medical and science authorities (all subordinates to the Cult-owned communist government) took genetic material from the lungs of only a few of the first patients. The material contained their own cells, bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms living in their bodies. The only way you could prove the existence of the 'virus' and its responsibility for the alleged 'Covid-19' was to isolate the virus from all the other material – a process also known as 'purification' – and

then follow the postulates sequence developed in the late 19th century by German physician and bacteriologist Robert Koch which became the 'gold standard' for connecting an alleged causation agent to a disease:

1. The microorganism (bacteria, fungus, virus, etc.) must be present in every case of the disease and all patients must have the same symptoms. It must also *not be present in healthy individuals*.

2. The microorganism must be isolated from the host with the disease. If the microorganism is a bacteria or fungus it must be grown in a pure culture. If it is a virus, it must be purified (i.e. containing no other material except the virus particles) from a clinical sample.

3. The specific disease, with all of its characteristics, must be reproduced when the infectious agent (the purified virus or a pure culture of bacteria or fungi) is inoculated into a healthy, susceptible host.

4. The microorganism must be recoverable from the experimentally infected host as in step 2.

Not one of these criteria has been met in the case of 'SARS-Cov-2' and 'Covid-19'. Not ONE. *EVER*. Robert Koch refers to bacteria and not viruses. What are called 'viral particles' are so minute (hence masks are useless by any definition) that they could only be seen after the invention of the electron microscope in the 1930s and can still only be observed through that means. American bacteriologist and virologist Thomas Milton Rivers, the so-called 'Father of Modern Virology' who was very significantly director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in the 1930s, developed a less stringent version of Koch's postulates to identify 'virus' causation known as 'Rivers criteria'. 'Covid' did not pass that process either. Some even doubt whether any 'virus' can be isolated from other particles containing genetic material in the Koch method. Freedom of Information requests in many countries asking for scientific proof that the 'Covid virus' has been purified and isolated and shown to exist have all come back with a 'we don't have that' and when this happened with a request to the UK Department of Health they added this comment:

However, outside of the scope of the [Freedom of Information Act] and on a discretionary basis, the following information has been advised to us, which may be of interest. Most infectious diseases are caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi. Some bacteria or fungi have the capacity to grow on their own in isolation, for example in colonies on a petri dish. Viruses are different in that they are what we call 'obligate pathogens' – that is, they cannot survive or reproduce without infecting a host ...

… For some diseases, it is possible to establish causation between a microorganism and a disease by isolating the pathogen from a patient, growing it in pure culture and reintroducing it to a healthy organism. These are known as 'Koch's postulates' and were developed in 1882. However, as our understanding of disease and different disease-causing agents has advanced, these are no longer the method for determining causation [Andrew Kaufman asks why in that case are there two published articles falsely claiming to satisfy Koch's postulates].

It has long been known that viral diseases cannot be identified in this way as viruses cannot be grown in 'pure culture'. When a patient is tested for a viral illness, this is normally done by looking for the presence of antigens, or viral genetic code in a host with molecular biology techniques [Kaufman asks how you could know the origin of these chemicals without having a pure culture for comparison].

For the record 'antigens' are defined so:

Invading microorganisms have antigens on their surface that the human body can recognise as being foreign – meaning not belonging to it. When the body recognises a foreign antigen, lymphocytes (white blood cells) produce antibodies, which are complementary in shape to the antigen.

Notwithstanding that this is open to question in relation to 'SARS-Cov-2' the presence of 'antibodies' can have many causes and they are found in people that are perfectly well. Kary Mullis said: 'Antibodies … had always been considered evidence of past disease, not present disease.'

'Covid' really is a *computer* 'virus'

Where the UK Department of Health statement says 'viruses' are now 'diagnosed' through a 'viral genetic code in a host with molecular biology techniques', they mean … *the PCR test* which its inventor said cannot test for infectious disease. They have no credible method of connecting a 'virus' to a disease and we will see that there is no scientific proof that any 'virus' causes any disease or there is any such thing as a 'virus' in the way that it is described. Tenacious Canadian researcher Christine Massey and her team made

some 40 Freedom of Information requests to national public health agencies in different countries asking for proof that SARS-CoV-2 has been isolated and not one of them could supply that information. Massey said of her request in Canada: 'Freedom of Information reveals Public Health Agency of Canada has no record of 'SARS-COV-2' isolation performed by anyone, anywhere, ever.' If you accept the comment from the UK Department of Health it's because they can't isolate a 'virus'. Even so many 'science' papers claimed to have isolated the 'Covid virus' until they were questioned and had to admit they hadn't. A reply from the Robert Koch Institute in Germany was typical: 'I am not aware of a paper which purified isolated SARS-CoV-2.' So what the hell was Christian Drosten and his gang using to design the 'Covid' testing protocol that has produced all the illusory Covid' cases and 'Covid' deaths when the head of the Chinese version of the CDC admitted there was a problem right from the start in that the 'virus' had never been isolated/purified? Breathe deeply: What they are calling 'Covid' is actually created by a *computer program* i.e. *they made it up* – er, that's it. They took lung fluid, with many sources of genetic material, from one single person alleged to be infected with Covid-19 by a PCR test which they *claimed*, without clear evidence, contained a 'virus'. They used several computer programs to create a model of a theoretical virus genome sequence from more than fifty-six million small sequences of RNA, each of an unknown source, assembling them like a puzzle with no known solution. The computer filled in the gaps with sequences from bits in the gene bank to make it look like a bat SARS-like coronavirus! A wave of the magic wand and poof, an in silico (computer-generated) genome, a scientific fantasy, was created. UK health researcher Dr Kevin Corbett made the same point with this analogy:

> … It's like giving you a few bones and saying that's your fish. It could be any fish. Not even a skeleton. Here's a few fragments of bones. That's your fish … It's all from gene bank and the bits of the virus sequence that weren't there they made up.
>
> They synthetically created them to fill in the blanks. That's what genetics is; it's a code. So it's ABBBCCDDD and you're missing some what you think is EEE so you put it in. It's all

synthetic. You just manufacture the bits that are missing. This is the end result of the geneticization of virology. This is basically a computer virus.

Further confirmation came in an email exchange between British citizen journalist Frances Leader and the government's Medicines & Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (the Gates-funded MHRA) which gave emergency permission for untested 'Covid vaccines' to be used. The agency admitted that the 'vaccine' is not based on an isolated 'virus', but comes from a *computer-generated model*. Frances Leader was naturally banned from Cult-owned fascist Twitter for making this exchange public. The process of creating computer-generated alleged 'viruses' is called 'in silico' or 'in silicon' – computer chips – and the term 'in silico' is believed to originate with biological experiments using only a computer in 1989. 'Vaccines' involved with 'Covid' are also produced 'in silico' or by computer not a natural process. If the original 'virus' is nothing more than a made-up computer model how can there be 'new variants' of something that never existed in the first place? They are not new 'variants'; they are new *computer models* only minutely different to the original program and designed to further terrify the population into having the 'vaccine' and submitting to fascism. You want a 'new variant'? Click, click, enter – there you go. Tell the medical profession that you have discovered a 'South African variant', 'UK variants' or a 'Brazilian variant' and in the usual HIV-causes-AIDS manner they will unquestioningly repeat it with no evidence whatsoever to support these claims. They will go on television and warn about the dangers of 'new variants' while doing nothing more than repeating what they have been told to be true and knowing that any deviation from that would be career suicide. Big-time insiders will know it's a hoax, but much of the medical community is clueless about the way they are being played and themselves play the public without even being aware they are doing so. What an interesting 'coincidence' that AstraZeneca and Oxford University were conducting 'Covid vaccine trials' in the three countries – the UK, South Africa and Brazil – where the first three 'variants' were claimed to have 'broken out'.

Here's your 'virus' – it's a unicorn

Dr Andrew Kaufman presented a brilliant analysis describing how the 'virus' was imagined into fake existence when he dissected an article published by *Nature* and written by 19 authors detailing *alleged* 'sequencing of a complete viral genome' of the 'new SARS-CoV-2 virus'. This computer-modelled *in silico* genome was used as a template for all subsequent genome sequencing experiments that resulted in the so-called variants which he said now number more than *6,000*. The fake genome was constructed from more than 56 million individual short strands of RNA. Those little pieces were assembled into longer pieces by finding areas of overlapping sequences. The computer programs created over two million possible combinations from which the authors simply chose the longest one. They then compared this to a 'bat virus' and the computer 'alignment' rearranged the sequence and filled in the gaps! They called this computer-generated abomination the 'complete genome'. Dr Tom Cowan, a fellow medical author and collaborator with Kaufman, said such computer-generation constitutes scientific fraud and he makes this superb analogy:

> Here is an equivalency: A group of researchers claim to have found a unicorn because they found a piece of a hoof, a hair from a tail, and a snippet of a horn. They then add that information into a computer and program it to re-create the unicorn, and they then claim this computer re-creation is the real unicorn. Of course, they had never actually seen a unicorn so could not possibly have examined its genetic makeup to compare their samples with the actual unicorn's hair, hooves and horn.
>
> The researchers claim they decided which is the real genome of SARS-CoV-2 by 'consensus', sort of like a vote. Again, different computer programs will come up with different versions of the imaginary 'unicorn', so they come together as a group and decide which is the real imaginary unicorn.

This is how the 'virus' that has transformed the world was brought into fraudulent 'existence'. Extraordinary, yes, but as the Nazis said the bigger the lie the more will believe it. Cowan, however, wasn't finished and he went on to identify what he called the real blockbuster in the paper. He quotes this section from a paper written

by virologists and published by the CDC and then explains what it means:

Therefore, we examined the capacity of SARS-CoV-2 to infect and replicate in several common primate and human cell lines, including human adenocarcinoma cells (A549), human liver cells (HUH 7.0), and human embryonic kidney cells (HEK-293T). In addition to Vero E6 and Vero CCL81 cells. ... Each cell line was inoculated at high multiplicity of infection and examined 24h post-infection.

No CPE was observed in any of the cell lines except in Vero cells, which grew to greater than 10 to the 7th power at 24 h post-infection. In contrast, HUH 7.0 and 293T showed only modest viral replication, and A549 cells were incompatible with SARS CoV-2 infection.

Cowan explains that when virologists attempt to prove infection they have three possible 'hosts' or models on which they can test. The first was humans. Exposure to humans was generally not done for ethical reasons and has never been done with SARS-CoV-2 or any coronavirus. The second possible host was animals. Cowan said that forgetting for a moment that they never actually use purified virus when exposing animals they do use solutions that they *claim* contain the virus. Exposure to animals has been done with SARS-CoV-2 in an experiment involving mice and this is what they found: *None of the wild (normal) mice got sick*. In a group of genetically-modified mice, a statistically insignificant number lost weight and had slightly bristled fur, but they experienced nothing like the illness called 'Covid-19'. Cowan said the third method – the one they mostly rely on – is to inoculate solutions they *say* contain the virus onto a variety of tissue cultures. This process had never been shown to kill tissue *unless* the sample material was starved of nutrients and poisoned as *part of the process*. Yes, incredibly, in tissue experiments designed to show the 'virus' is responsible for killing the tissue they starve the tissue of nutrients and add toxic drugs including antibiotics and they do not have control studies to see if it's the starvation and poisoning that is degrading the tissue rather than the 'virus' they allege to be in there somewhere. You want me to pinch you? Yep, I understand. Tom Cowan said this about the whole nonsensical farce as he explains what that quote from the CDC paper really means:

The shocking thing about the above quote is that using their own methods, the virologists found that solutions containing SARS-CoV-2 – even in high amounts – were NOT, I repeat NOT, infective to any of the three human tissue cultures they tested. In plain English, this means they proved, on their terms, that this 'new coronavirus' is not infectious to human beings. It is ONLY infective to monkey kidney cells, and only then when you add two potent drugs (gentamicin and amphotericin), known to be toxic to kidneys, to the mix.

My friends, read this again and again. These virologists, published by the CDC, performed a clear proof, on their terms, showing that the SARS-CoV-2 virus is harmless to human beings. That is the only possible conclusion, but, unfortunately, this result is not even mentioned in their conclusion. They simply say they can provide virus stocks cultured only on monkey Vero cells, thanks for coming.

Cowan concluded: 'If people really understood how this "science" was done, I would hope they would storm the gates and demand honesty, transparency and truth.' Dr Michael Yeadon, former Vice President and Chief Scientific Adviser at drug giant Pfizer has been a vocal critic of the 'Covid vaccine' and its potential for multiple harm. He said in an interview in April, 2021, that 'not one [vaccine] has the virus. He was asked why vaccines normally using a 'dead' version of a disease to activate the immune system were not used for 'Covid' and instead we had the synthetic methods of the 'mRNA Covid vaccine'. Yeadon said that to do the former 'you'd have to have some of [the virus] wouldn't you?' He added: 'No-one's got any – seriously.' Yeadon said that surely they couldn't have fooled the whole world for a year without having a virus, 'but oddly enough ask around – no one's got it'. He didn't know why with all the 'great labs' around the world that the virus had not been isolated – 'Maybe they've been too busy running bad PCR tests and vaccines that people don't need.' What is today called 'science' is not 'science' at all. Science is no longer what is, but whatever people can be manipulated to *believe* that it is. Real science has been hijacked by the Cult to dispense and produce the 'expert scientists' and contentions that suit the agenda of the Cult. How big-time this has happened with the 'Covid' hoax which is entirely based on fake science delivered by fake 'scientists' and fake 'doctors'. The human-caused climate change hoax is also entirely based on fake science delivered by fake 'scientists' and fake 'climate experts'. In both cases real

scientists, climate experts and doctors have their views suppressed and deleted by the Cult-owned science establishment, media and Silicon Valley. This is the 'science' that politicians claim to be 'following' and a common denominator of 'Covid' and climate are Cult psychopaths Bill Gates and his mate Klaus Schwab at the Gates-funded World Economic Forum. But, don't worry, it's all just a coincidence and absolutely nothing to worry about. *Zzzzzzzz*.

What is a 'virus' REALLY?

Dr Tom Cowan is one of many contesting the very existence of viruses let alone that they cause disease. This is understandable when there is no scientific evidence for a disease-causing 'virus'. German virologist Dr Stefan Lanka won a landmark case in 2017 in the German Supreme Court over his contention that there is no such thing as a measles virus. He had offered a big prize for anyone who could prove there is and Lanka won his case when someone sought to claim the money. There is currently a prize of more than 225,000 euros on offer from an Isolate Truth Fund for anyone who can prove the isolation of SARS-CoV-2 and its genetic substance. Lanka wrote in an article headed 'The Misconception Called Virus' that scientists think a 'virus' is causing tissue to become diseased and degraded when in fact it is the *processes they are using* which do that – not a 'virus'. Lanka has done an important job in making this point clear as Cowan did in his analysis of the CDC paper. Lanka says that all claims about viruses as disease-causing pathogens are wrong and based on 'easily recognisable, understandable and verifiable misinterpretations.' Scientists believed they were working with 'viruses' in their laboratories when they were really working with 'typical particles of specific dying tissues or cells …' Lanka said that the tissue decaying process claimed to be caused by a 'virus' still happens when no alleged 'virus' is involved. It's the *process* that does the damage and not a 'virus'. The genetic sample is deprived of nutrients, removed from its energy supply through removal from the body and then doused in toxic antibiotics to remove any bacteria. He confirms again that establishment scientists do not (pinch me)

conduct control experiments to see if this is the case and if they did they would see the claims that 'viruses' are doing the damage is nonsense. He adds that during the measles 'virus' court case he commissioned an independent laboratory to perform just such a control experiment and the result was that the tissues and cells died in the exact same way as with alleged 'infected' material. This is supported by a gathering number of scientists, doctors and researchers who reject what is called 'germ theory' or the belief in the body being infected by contagious sources emitted by other people. Researchers Dawn Lester and David Parker take the same stance in their highly-detailed and sourced book *What Really Makes You Ill – Why everything you thought you knew about disease is wrong* which was recommended to me by a number of medical professionals genuinely seeking the truth. Lester and Parker say there is no provable scientific evidence to show that a 'virus' can be transmitted between people or people and animals or animals and people:

> The definition also claims that viruses are the cause of many diseases, as if this has been definitively proven. But this is not the case; there is no original scientific evidence that definitively demonstrates that any virus is the cause of any disease. The burden of proof for any theory lies with those who proposed it; but none of the existing documents provides 'proof' that supports the claim that 'viruses' are pathogens.

Dr Tom Cowan employs one of his clever analogies to describe the process by which a 'virus' is named as the culprit for a disease when what is called a 'virus' is only material released by cells detoxing themselves from infiltration by chemical or radiation poisoning. The tidal wave of technologically-generated radiation in the 'smart' modern world plus all the toxic food and drink are causing this to happen more than ever. Deluded 'scientists' misread this as a gathering impact of what they wrongly label 'viruses'.

Paper can infect houses

Cowan said in an article for davidicke.com – with his tongue only mildly in his cheek – that he believed he had made a tremendous

discovery that may revolutionise science. He had discovered that small bits of paper are alive, 'well alive-ish', can 'infect' houses, and then reproduce themselves inside the house. The result was that this explosion of growth in the paper inside the house causes the house to explode, blowing it to smithereens. His evidence for this new theory is that in the past months he had carefully examined many of the houses in his neighbourhood and found almost no scraps of paper on the lawns and surrounds of the house. There was an occasional stray label, but nothing more. Then he would return to these same houses a week or so later and with a few, not all of them, particularly the old and decrepit ones, he found to his shock and surprise they were littered with stray bits of paper. He knew then that the paper had infected these houses, made copies of itself, and blew up the house. A young boy on a bicycle at one of the sites told him he had seen a demolition crew using dynamite to explode the house the previous week, but Cowan dismissed this as the idle thoughts of silly boys because 'I was on to something big'. He was on to how 'scientists' mistake genetic material in the detoxifying process for something they call a 'virus'. Cowan said of his house and paper story:

> If this sounds crazy to you, it's because it should. This scenario is obviously nuts. But consider this admittedly embellished, for effect, current viral theory that all scientists, medical doctors and virologists currently believe.

He takes the example of the 'novel SARS-Cov2' virus to prove the point. First they take someone with an undefined illness called 'Covid-19' and don't even attempt to find any virus in their sputum. Never mind the scientists still describe how this 'virus', which they have not located attaches to a cell receptor, injects its genetic material, in 'Covid's' case, RNA, into the cell. The RNA once inserted exploits the cell to reproduce itself and makes 'thousands, nay millions, of copies of itself … Then it emerges victorious to claim its next victim':

If you were to look in the scientific literature for proof, actual scientific proof, that uniform SARS-CoV2 viruses have been properly isolated from the sputum of a sick person, that actual spike proteins could be seen protruding from the virus (which has not been found), you would find that such evidence doesn't exist.

If you go looking in the published scientific literature for actual pictures, proof, that these spike proteins or any viral proteins are ever attached to any receptor embedded in any cell membrane, you would also find that no such evidence exists. If you were to look for a video or documented evidence of the intact virus injecting its genetic material into the body of the cell, reproducing itself and then emerging victorious by budding off the cell membrane, you would find that no such evidence exists.

The closest thing you would find is electron micrograph pictures of cellular particles, possibly attached to cell debris, both of which to be seen were stained by heavy metals, a process that completely distorts their architecture within the living organism. This is like finding bits of paper stuck to the blown-up bricks, thereby proving the paper emerged by taking pieces of the bricks on its way out.

The Enders baloney

Cowan describes the 'Covid' story as being just as make-believe as his paper story and he charts back this fantasy to a Nobel Prize winner called John Enders (1897-1985), an American biomedical scientist who has been dubbed 'The Father of Modern Vaccines'. Enders is claimed to have 'discovered' the process of the viral culture which 'proved' that a 'virus' caused measles. Cowan explains how Enders did this 'by using the EXACT same procedure that has been followed by every virologist to find and characterize every new virus since 1954'. Enders took throat swabs from children with measles and immersed them in 2ml of milk. Penicillin (100u/ml) and the antibiotic streptomycin (50,g/ml) were added and the whole mix was centrifuged – rotated at high speed to separate large cellular debris from small particles and molecules as with milk and cream, for example. Cowan says that if the aim is to find little particles of genetic material ('viruses') in the snot from children with measles it would seem that the last thing you would do is mix the snot with other material – milk –that also has genetic material. 'How are you ever going to know whether whatever you found came from the snot or the milk?' He points out that streptomycin is a 'nephrotoxic' or poisonous-to-the-kidney drug. You will see the relevance of that

shortly. Cowan says that it gets worse, much worse, when Enders describes the culture medium upon which the virus 'grows': 'The culture medium consisted of bovine amniotic fluid (90%), beef embryo extract (5%), horse serum (5%), antibiotics and phenol red as an indicator of cell metabolism.' Cowan asks incredulously: 'Did he just say that the culture medium also contained fluids and tissues that are themselves rich sources of genetic material?' The genetic cocktail, or 'medium', is inoculated onto tissue and cells from rhesus monkey *kidney* tissue. This is where the importance of streptomycin comes in and currently-used antimicrobials and other drugs that are *poisonous to kidneys* and used in ALL modern viral cultures (e.g. gentamicin, streptomycin, and amphotericin). Cowan asks: 'How are you ever going to know from this witch's brew where any genetic material comes from as we now have five different sources of rich genetic material in our mix?' Remember, he says, that all genetic material, whether from monkey kidney tissues, bovine serum, milk, etc., is made from the exact same components. The same central question returns: 'How are you possibly going to know that it was the virus that killed the kidney tissue and not the toxic antibiotic and starvation rations on which you are growing the tissue?' John Enders answered the question himself – *you can't*:

A second agent was obtained from an uninoculated culture of monkey kidney cells. The cytopathic changes [death of the cells] it induced in the unstained preparations could not be distinguished with confidence from the viruses isolated from measles.

The death of the cells ('cytopathic changes') happened in exactly the same manner, whether they inoculated the kidney tissue with the measles snot or not, Cowan says. 'This is evidence that the destruction of the tissue, the very proof of viral causation of illness, was not caused by anything in the snot because they saw the same destructive effect when the snot was not even used … the cytopathic, i.e., cell-killing, changes come from the process of the culture itself, not from any virus in any snot, period.' Enders quotes in his 1957 paper a virologist called Ruckle as reporting similar findings 'and in addition has isolated an agent from monkey kidney tissue that is so

far indistinguishable from human measles virus'. In other words, Cowan says, these particles called 'measles viruses' are simply and clearly breakdown products of the starved and poisoned tissue. For measles 'virus' see all 'viruses' including the so-called 'Covid virus'. Enders, the 'Father of Modern Vaccines', also said:

There is a potential risk in employing cultures of primate cells for the production of vaccines composed of attenuated virus, since the presence of other agents possibly latent in primate tissues cannot be definitely excluded by any known method.

Cowan further quotes from a paper published in the journal *Viruses* in May, 2020, while the 'Covid pandemic' was well underway in the media if not in reality. 'EVs' here refers to particles of genetic debris from our own tissues, such as exosomes of which more in a moment: 'The remarkable resemblance between EVs and viruses has caused quite a few problems in the studies focused on the analysis of EVs released during viral infections.' Later the paper adds that to date a reliable method that can actually guarantee a complete separation (of EVs from viruses) DOES NOT EXIST. This was published at a time when a fairy tale 'virus' was claimed in total certainty to be causing a fairy tale 'viral disease' called 'Covid-19' – a fairy tale that was already well on the way to transforming human society in the image that the Cult has worked to achieve for so long. Cowan concludes his article:

To summarize, there is no scientific evidence that pathogenic viruses exist. What we think of as 'viruses' are simply the normal breakdown products of dead and dying tissues and cells. When we are well, we make fewer of these particles; when we are starved, poisoned, suffocated by wearing masks, or afraid, we make more.

There is no engineered virus circulating and making people sick. People in laboratories all over the world are making genetically modified products to make people sick. These are called vaccines. There is no virome, no 'ecosystem' of viruses, viruses are not 8%, 50% or 100 % of our genetic material. These are all simply erroneous ideas based on the misconception called a virus.

What is 'Covid'? Load of bollocks

The background described here by Cowan and Lanka was emphasised in the first video presentation that I saw by Dr Andrew Kaufman when he asked whether the 'Covid virus' was in truth a natural defence mechanism of the body called 'exosomes'. These are released by cells when in states of toxicity – see the same themes returning over and over. They are released ever more profusely as chemical and radiation toxicity increases and think of the potential effect therefore of 5G alone as its destructive frequencies infest the human energetic information field with a gathering pace (5G went online in Wuhan in 2019 as the 'virus' emerged). I'll have more about this later. Exosomes transmit a warning to the rest of the body that 'Houston, we have a problem'. Kaufman presented images of exosomes and compared them with 'Covid' under an electron microscope and the similarity was remarkable. They both attach to the same cell receptors (*claimed* in the case of 'Covid'), contain the same genetic material in the form of RNA or ribonucleic acid, and both are found in 'viral cell cultures' with damaged or dying cells. James Hildreth MD, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Meharry Medical College at Johns Hopkins, said: 'The virus is fully an exosome in every sense of the word.' Kaufman's conclusion was that there is no 'virus': 'This entire pandemic is a completely manufactured crisis … there is no evidence of anyone dying from [this] illness.' Dr Tom Cowan and Sally Fallon Morell, authors of *The Contagion Myth*, published a statement with Dr Kaufman in February, 2021, explaining why the 'virus' does not exist and you can read it that in full in the Appendix.

'Virus' theory can be traced to the 'cell theory' in 1858 of German physician Rudolf Virchow (1821-1920) who contended that disease originates from a single cell infiltrated by a 'virus'. Dr Stefan Lanka said that findings and insights with respect to the structure, function and central importance of tissues in the creation of life, which were already known in 1858, comprehensively refute the cell theory. Virchow ignored them. We have seen the part later played by John Enders in the 1950s and Lanka notes that infection theories were only established as a global dogma through the policies and

eugenics of the Third Reich in Nazi Germany (creation of the same Sabbatian cult behind the 'Covid' hoax). Lanka said: 'Before 1933, scientists dared to contradict this theory; after 1933, these critical scientists were silenced'. Dr Tom Cowan's view is that ill-heath is caused by too much of something, too little of something, or toxification from chemicals and radiation – not contagion. We must also highlight as a major source of the 'virus' theology a man still called the 'Father of Modern Virology' – Thomas Milton Rivers (1888-1962). There is no way given the Cult's long game policy that it was a coincidence for the 'Father of Modern Virology' to be director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research from 1937 to 1956 when he is credited with making the Rockefeller Institute a leader in 'viral research'. Cult Rockefellers were the force behind the creation of Big Pharma 'medicine', established the World Health Organisation in 1948, and have long and close associations with the Gates family that now runs the WHO during the pandemic hoax through mega-rich Cult gofer and psychopath Bill Gates.

Only a Renegade Mind can see through all this bullshit by asking the questions that need to be answered, not taking 'no' or prevarication for an answer, and certainly not hiding from the truth in fear of speaking it. Renegade Minds have always changed the world for the better and they will change this one no matter how bleak it may currently appear to be.

CHAPTER SIX

Sequence of deceit

If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything
Mark Twain

Against the background that I have laid out this far the sequence that took us from an invented 'virus' in Cult-owned China in late 2019 to the fascist transformation of human society can be seen and understood in a whole new context.

We were told that a deadly disease had broken out in Wuhan and the world media began its campaign (coordinated by behavioural psychologists as we shall see) to terrify the population into unquestioning compliance. We were shown images of Chinese people collapsing in the street which never happened in the West with what was supposed to be the same condition. In the earliest days when alleged cases and deaths were few the fear register was hysterical in many areas of the media and this would expand into the common media narrative across the world. The real story was rather different, but we were never told that. The Chinese government, one of the Cult's biggest centres of global operation, said they had discovered a new illness with flu-like and pneumonia-type symptoms in a city with such toxic air that it is overwhelmed with flu-like symptoms, pneumonia and respiratory disease. Chinese scientists said it was a new – 'novel' – coronavirus which they called Sars-Cov-2 and that it caused a disease they labelled 'Covid-19'. There was no evidence for this and the 'virus' has never to this day been isolated, purified and its genetic code established from that. It

was from the beginning a computer-generated fiction. Stories of Chinese whistleblowers saying the number of deaths was being supressed or that the 'new disease' was related to the Wuhan bio-lab misdirected mainstream and alternative media into cul-de-sacs to obscure the real truth – there was no 'virus'.

Chinese scientists took genetic material from the lung fluid of just a few people and said they had found a 'new' disease when this material had a wide range of content. There was no evidence for a 'virus' for the very reasons explained in the last two chapters. The 'virus' has never been shown to (a) exist and (b) cause any disease. People were diagnosed on symptoms that are so widespread in Wuhan and polluted China and with a PCR test that can't detect infectious disease. On this farce the whole global scam was sold to the rest of the world which would also diagnose respiratory disease as 'Covid-19' from symptoms alone or with a PCR test not testing for a 'virus'. Flu miraculously disappeared *worldwide* in 2020 and into 2021 as it was redesignated 'Covid-19'. It was really the same old flu with its 'flu-like' symptoms attributed to 'flu-like' 'Covid-19'. At the same time with very few exceptions the Chinese response of draconian lockdown and fascism was the chosen weapon to respond across the West as recommended by the Cult-owned Tedros at the Cult-owned World Health Organization run by the Cult-owned Gates. All was going according to plan. Chinese scientists – everything in China is controlled by the Cult-owned government – compared their contaminated RNA lung-fluid material with other RNA sequences and said it appeared to be just under 80 percent identical to the SARS-CoV-1 'virus' claimed to be the cause of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) 'outbreak' in 2003. They decreed that because of this the 'new virus' had to be related and they called it SARS-CoV-2. There are some serious problems with this assumption and *assumption* was all it was. Most 'factual' science turns out to be assumptions repeated into everyone-knows-that. A match of under 80-percent is meaningless. Dr Kaufman makes the point that there's a *96 percent* genetic correlation between humans and chimpanzees, but 'no one would say our genetic material is part

of the chimpanzee family'. Yet the Chinese authorities were claiming that a much lower percentage, less than 80 percent, proved the existence of a new 'coronavirus'. For goodness sake human DNA is 60 percent similar to a *banana*.

You are feeling sleepy

The entire 'Covid' hoax is a global Psyop, a psychological operation to program the human mind into believing and fearing a complete fantasy. A crucial aspect of this was what *appeared* to happen in Italy. It was all very well streaming out daily images of an alleged catastrophe in Wuhan, but to the Western mind it was still on the other side of the world in a very different culture and setting. A reaction of 'this could happen to me and my family' was still nothing like as intense enough for the mind-doctors. The Cult needed a Western example to push people over that edge and it chose Italy, one of its major global locations going back to the Roman Empire. An Italian 'Covid' crisis was manufactured in a particular area called Lombardy which just happens to be notorious for its toxic air and therefore respiratory disease. Wuhan, China, déjà vu. An hysterical media told horror stories of Italians dying from 'Covid' in their droves and how Lombardy hospitals were being overrun by a tidal wave of desperately ill people needing treatment after being struck down by the 'deadly virus'. Here was the psychological turning point the Cult had planned. Wow, if this is happening in Italy, the Western mind concluded, this indeed could happen to me and my family. Another point is that Italian authorities responded by following the Chinese blueprint so vehemently recommended by the Cult-owned World Health Organization. They imposed fascistic lockdowns on the whole country viciously policed with the help of surveillance drones sweeping through the streets seeking out anyone who escaped from mass house arrest. Livelihoods were destroyed and psychology unravelled in the way we have witnessed since in all lockdown countries. Crucial to the plan was that Italy responded in this way to set the precedent of suspending freedom and imposing fascism in a 'Western liberal democracy'. I emphasised in an

animated video explanation on davidicke.com posted in the summer of 2020 how important it was to the Cult to expand the Chinese lockdown model across the West. Without this, and the bare-faced lie that non-symptomatic people could still transmit a 'disease' they didn't have, there was no way locking down the whole population, sick and not sick, could be pulled off. At just the right time and with no evidence Cult operatives and gofers claimed that people without symptoms could pass on the 'disease'. In the name of protecting the 'vulnerable' like elderly people, who lockdowns would kill by the tens of thousands, we had for the first time healthy people told to isolate as well as the sick. The great majority of people who tested positive had no symptoms because there was nothing wrong with them. It was just a trick made possible by a test not testing for the 'virus'.

Months after my animated video the Gates-funded Professor Neil Ferguson at the Gates-funded Imperial College confirmed that I was right. He didn't say it in those terms, naturally, but he did say it. Ferguson will enter the story shortly for his outrageously crazy 'computer models' that led to Britain, the United States and many other countries following the Chinese and now Italian methods of response. Put another way, following the Cult script. Ferguson said that SAGE, the UK government's scientific advisory group which has controlled 'Covid' policy from the start, wanted to follow the Chinese lockdown model (while they all continued to work and be paid), but they wondered if they could possibly, in Ferguson's words, 'get away with it in Europe'. 'Get away with it'? Who the hell do these moronic, arrogant people think they are? This appalling man Ferguson said that once Italy went into national lockdown they realised they, too, could mimic China:

> It's a communist one-party state, we said. We couldn't get away with it in Europe, we thought … and then Italy did it. And we realised we could. Behind this garbage from Ferguson is a simple fact: Doing the same as China in every country was the plan from the start and Ferguson's 'models' would play a central role in achieving that. It's just a coincidence, of course, and absolutely nothing to worry your little head about.

Oops, sorry, our mistake

Once the Italian segment of the Psyop had done the job it was designed to do a very different story emerged. Italian authorities revealed that 99 percent of those who had 'died from Covid-19' in Italy had one, two, three, or more 'co-morbidities' or illnesses and health problems that could have ended their life. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a figure of 94 percent for Americans dying of 'Covid' while having other serious medical conditions – on average two to three (some five or six) other potential causes of death. In terms of death from an unproven 'virus' I say it is 100 percent. The other one percent in Italy and six percent in the US would presumably have died from 'Covid's' flu-like symptoms with a range of other possible causes in conjunction with a test not testing for the 'virus'. Fox News reported that even more startling figures had emerged in one US county in which 410 of 422 deaths attributed to 'Covid-19' had other potentially deadly health conditions. The Italian National Health Institute said later that the average age of people dying with a 'Covid-19' diagnosis in Italy was about 81. Ninety percent were over 70 with ten percent over 90. In terms of other reasons to die some 80 percent had two or more chronic diseases with half having three or more including cardiovascular problems, diabetes, respiratory problems and cancer. Why is the phantom 'Covid-19' said to kill overwhelmingly old people and hardly affect the young? Old people continually die of many causes and especially respiratory disease which you can re-diagnose 'Covid-19' while young people die in tiny numbers by comparison and rarely of respiratory disease. Old people 'die of Covid' because they die of other things that can be redesignated 'Covid' and it really is that simple.

Flu has flown

The blueprint was in place. Get your illusory 'cases' from a test not testing for the 'virus' and redesignate other causes of death as 'Covid-19'. You have an instant 'pandemic' from something that is nothing more than a computer-generated fiction. With near-on a

billion people having 'flu-like' symptoms every year the potential was limitless and we can see why flu quickly and apparently miraculously disappeared *worldwide* by being diagnosed 'Covid-19'. The painfully bloody obvious was explained away by the childlike media in headlines like this in the UK '*Independent*': 'Not a single case of flu detected by Public Health England this year as Covid restrictions suppress virus'. I kid you not. The masking, social distancing and house arrest that did not make the 'Covid virus' disappear somehow did so with the 'flu virus'. Even worse the article, by a bloke called Samuel Lovett, suggested that maybe the masking, sanitising and other 'Covid' measures should continue to keep the flu away. With a ridiculousness that disturbs your breathing (it's 'Covid-19') the said Lovett wrote: 'With widespread social distancing and mask-wearing measures in place throughout the UK, the usual routes of transmission for influenza have been blocked.' He had absolutely no evidence to support that statement, but look at the consequences of him acknowledging the obvious. With flu not disappearing at all and only being relabelled 'Covid-19' he would have to contemplate that 'Covid' was a hoax on a scale that is hard to imagine. You need guts and commitment to truth to even go there and that's clearly something Samuel Lovett does not have in abundance. He would never have got it through the editors anyway.

Tens of thousands die in the United States alone every winter from flu including many with pneumonia complications. CDC figures record *45 million* Americans diagnosed with flu in 2017-2018 of which 61,000 died and some reports claim 80,000. Where was the same hysteria then that we have seen with 'Covid-19'? Some 250,000 Americans are admitted to hospital with pneumonia every year with about 50,000 cases proving fatal. About 65 million suffer respiratory disease every year and three million deaths makes this the third biggest cause of death worldwide. You only have to redesignate a portion of all these people 'Covid-19' and you have an instant global pandemic or the *appearance* of one. Why would doctors do this? They are told to do this and all but a few dare not refuse those who must be obeyed. Doctors in general are not researching their own

knowledge and instead take it direct and unquestioned from the authorities that own them and their careers. The authorities say they must now diagnose these symptoms 'Covid-19' and not flu, or whatever, and they do it. Dark suits say put 'Covid-19' on death certificates no matter what the cause of death and the doctors do it. Renegade Minds don't fall for the illusion that doctors and medical staff are all highly-intelligent, highly-principled, seekers of medical truth. *Some are*, but not the majority. They are repeaters, gofers, and yes sir, no sir, purveyors of what the system demands they purvey. The 'Covid' con is not merely confined to diseases of the lungs. Instructions to doctors to put 'Covid-19' on death certificates for anyone dying of *anything* within 28 days (or much more) of a positive test not testing for the 'virus' opened the floodgates. The term dying *with* 'Covid' and not *of* 'Covid' was coined to cover the truth. Whether it was a *with* or an *of* they were all added to the death numbers attributed to the 'deadly virus' compiled by national governments and globally by the Gates-funded Johns Hopkins operation in the United States that was so involved in those 'pandemic' simulations. Fraudulent deaths were added to the ever-growing list of fraudulent 'cases' from false positives from a false test. No wonder Professor Walter Ricciardi, scientific advisor to the Italian minister of health, said after the Lombardy hysteria had done its job that 'Covid' death rates were due to Italy having the second oldest population in the world and to *how hospitals record deaths*:

The way in which we code deaths in our country is very generous in the sense that all the people who die in hospitals with the coronavirus are deemed to be dying of the coronavirus. On re-evaluation by the National Institute of Health, only 12 per cent of death certificates have shown a direct causality from coronavirus, while 88 per cent of patients who have died have at least one pre-morbidity – many had two or three.

This is extraordinary enough when you consider the propaganda campaign to use Italy to terrify the world, but how can they even say twelve percent were genuine when the 'virus' has not been shown to exist, its 'code' is a computer program, and diagnosis comes from a test not testing for it? As in China, and soon the world, 'Covid-19' in

Italy was a redesignation of diagnosis. Lies and corruption were to become the real 'pandemic' fuelled by a pathetically-compliant medical system taking its orders from the tiny few at the top of their national hierarchy who answered to the World Health Organization which answers to Gates and the Cult. Doctors were told – ordered – to diagnose a particular set of symptoms 'Covid-19' and put that on the death certificate for any cause of death if the patient had tested positive with a test not testing for the virus or had 'Covid' symptoms like the flu. The United States even introduced big financial incentives to manipulate the figures with hospitals receiving £4,600 from the Medicare system for diagnosing someone with regular pneumonia, $13,000 if they made the diagnosis from the same symptoms 'Covid-19' pneumonia, and $39, 000 if they put a 'Covid' diagnosed patient on a ventilator that would almost certainly kill them. A few – painfully and pathetically few – medical whistleblowers revealed (before Cult-owned YouTube deleted their videos) that they had been instructed to 'let the patient crash' and put them straight on a ventilator instead of going through a series of far less intrusive and dangerous methods as they would have done before the pandemic hoax began and the financial incentives kicked in. We are talking cold-blooded murder given that ventilators are so damaging to respiratory systems they are usually the last step before heaven awaits. Renegade Minds never fall for the belief that people in white coats are all angels of mercy and cannot be full-on psychopaths. I have explained in detail in *The Answer* how what I am describing here played out across the world coordinated by the World Health Organization through the medical hierarchies in almost every country.

Medical scientist calls it

Information about the non-existence of the 'virus' began to emerge for me in late March, 2020, and mushroomed after that. I was sent an email by Sir Julian Rose, a writer, researcher, and organic farming promotor, from a medical scientist friend of his in the United States. Even at that early stage in March the scientist was able to explain

how the 'Covid' hoax was being manipulated. He said there were no reliable tests for a specific 'Covid-19 virus' and nor were there any reliable agencies or media outlets for reporting numbers of actual 'Covid-19' cases. We have seen in the long period since then that he was absolutely right. 'Every action and reaction to Covid-19 is based on totally flawed data and we simply cannot make accurate assessments,' he said. Most people diagnosed with 'Covid-19' were showing nothing more than cold and flu-like symptoms 'because most coronavirus strains *are* nothing more than cold/flu-like symptoms'. We had farcical situations like an 84-year-old German man testing positive for 'Covid-19' and his nursing home ordered to quarantine only for him to be found to have a common cold. The scientist described back then why PCR tests and what he called the 'Mickey Mouse test kits' were useless for what they were claimed to be identifying. 'The idea these kits can isolate a specific virus like Covid-19 is nonsense,' he said. Significantly, he pointed out that 'if you want to create a totally false panic about a totally false pandemic – pick a coronavirus'. This is exactly what the Cult-owned Gates, World Economic Forum and Johns Hopkins University did with their Event 201 'simulation' followed by their real-life simulation called the 'pandemic'. The scientist said that all you had to do was select the sickest of people with respiratory-type diseases in a single location – 'say Wuhan' – and administer PCR tests to them. You can then claim that anyone showing 'viral sequences' similar to a coronavirus 'which will inevitably be quite a few' is suffering from a 'new' disease:

> Since you already selected the sickest flu cases a fairly high proportion of your sample will go on to die. You can then say this 'new' virus has a CFR [case fatality rate] higher than the flu and use this to infuse more concern and do more tests which will of course produce more 'cases', which expands the testing, which produces yet more 'cases' and so on and so on. Before long you have your 'pandemic', and all you have done is use a simple test kit trick to convert the worst flu and pneumonia cases into something new that doesn't ACTUALLY EXIST [my emphasis].

He said that you then 'just run the same scam in other countries' and make sure to keep the fear message running high 'so that people

will feel panicky and less able to think critically'. The only problem to overcome was the fact *there is no* actual new deadly pathogen and only regular sick people. This meant that deaths from the 'new deadly pathogen' were going to be way too low for a real new deadly virus pandemic, but he said this could be overcome in the following ways – all of which would go on to happen:

1. You can claim this is just the beginning and more deaths are imminent [you underpin this with fantasy 'computer projections']. Use this as an excuse to quarantine everyone and then claim the quarantine prevented the expected millions of dead.

2. You can [say that people] 'minimizing' the dangers are irresponsible and bully them into not talking about numbers.

3. You can talk crap about made up numbers hoping to blind people with pseudoscience.

4. You can start testing well people (who, of course, will also likely have shreds of coronavirus [RNA] in them) and thus inflate your 'case figures' with 'asymptomatic carriers' (you will of course have to spin that to sound deadly even though any virologist knows the more symptom-less cases you have the less deadly is your pathogen).

The scientist said that if you take these simple steps 'you can have your own entirely manufactured pandemic up and running in weeks'. His analysis made so early in the hoax was brilliantly prophetic of what would actually unfold. Pulling all the information together in these recent chapters we have this is simple 1, 2, 3, of how you can delude virtually the entire human population into believing in a 'virus' that doesn't exist:

- A 'Covid case' is someone who tests positive with a test not testing for the 'virus'.

- A 'Covid death' is someone who dies of *any cause* within 28 days (or much longer) of testing positive with a test not testing for the 'virus.

- Asymptomatic means there is nothing wrong with you, but they claim you can pass on what you don't have to justify locking

down (quarantining) healthy people in totality.

The foundations of the hoax are that simple. A study involving ten million people in Wuhan, published in November, 2020, demolished the whole lie about those without symptoms passing on the 'virus'. They found '300 asymptomatic cases' and traced their contacts to find that not one of them was detected with the 'virus'. 'Asymptomatic' patients and their contacts were isolated for no less than two weeks and nothing changed. I know it's all crap, but if you are going to claim that those without symptoms can transmit 'the virus' then you must produce evidence for that and they never have. Even World Health Organization official Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, head of the emerging diseases and zoonosis unit, said as early as June, 2020, that she doubted the validity of asymptomatic transmission. She said that 'from the data we have, it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits onward to a secondary individual' and by 'rare' she meant that she couldn't cite any case of asymptomatic transmission.

The Ferguson factor

The problem for the Cult as it headed into March, 2020, when the script had lockdown due to start, was that despite all the manipulation of the case and death figures they still did not have enough people alleged to have died from 'Covid' to justify mass house arrest. This was overcome in the way the scientist described: 'You can claim this is just the beginning and more deaths are imminent … Use this as an excuse to quarantine everyone and then claim the quarantine prevented the expected millions of dead.' Enter one Professor Neil Ferguson, the Gates-funded 'epidemiologist' at the Gates-funded Imperial College in London. Ferguson is Britain's Christian Drosten in that he has a dire record of predicting health outcomes, but is still called upon to advise government on the next health outcome when another 'crisis' comes along. This may seem to be a strange and ridiculous thing to do. Why would you keep turning for policy guidance to people who have a history of being

monumentally wrong? Ah, but it makes sense from the Cult point of view. These 'experts' keep on producing predictions that suit the Cult agenda for societal transformation and so it was with Neil Ferguson as he revealed his horrific (and clearly insane) computer model predictions that allowed lockdowns to be imposed in Britain, the United States and many other countries. Ferguson does not have even an A-level in biology and would appear to have no formal training in computer modelling, medicine or epidemiology, according to Derek Winton, an MSc in Computational Intelligence. He wrote an article somewhat aghast at what Ferguson did which included taking no account of respiratory disease 'seasonality' which means it is far worse in the winter months. Who would have thought that respiratory disease could be worse in the winter? Well, certainly not Ferguson.

The massively China-connected Imperial College and its bizarre professor provided the excuse for the long-incubated Chinese model of human control to travel westward at lightning speed. Imperial College confirms on its website that it collaborates with the Chinese Research Institute; publishes more than 600 research papers every year with Chinese research institutions; has 225 Chinese staff; 2,600 Chinese students – the biggest international group; 7,000 former students living in China which is the largest group outside the UK; and was selected for a tour by China's President Xi Jinping during his state visit to the UK in 2015. The college takes major donations from China and describes itself as the UK's number one university collaborator with Chinese research institutions. The China communist/fascist government did not appear phased by the woeful predictions of Ferguson and Imperial when during the lockdown that Ferguson induced the college signed a five-year collaboration deal with China tech giant Huawei that will have Huawei's indoor 5G network equipment installed at the college's West London tech campus along with an 'AI cloud platform'. The deal includes Chinese sponsorship of Imperial's Venture Catalyst entrepreneurship competition. Imperial is an example of the enormous influence the Chinese government has within British and North American

universities and research centres – and further afield. Up to 200 academics from more than a dozen UK universities are being investigated on suspicion of 'unintentionally' helping the Chinese government build weapons of mass destruction by 'transferring world-leading research in advanced military technology such as aircraft, missile designs and cyberweapons'. Similar scandals have broken in the United States, but it's all a coincidence. Imperial College serves the agenda in many other ways including the promotion of every aspect of the United Nations Agenda 21/2030 (the Great Reset) and produced computer models to show that human-caused 'climate change' is happening when in the real world it isn't. Imperial College is driving the climate agenda as it drives the 'Covid' agenda (both Cult hoaxes) while Patrick Vallance, the UK government's Chief Scientific Adviser on 'Covid', was named Chief Scientific Adviser to the UN 'climate change' conference known as COP26 hosted by the government in Glasgow, Scotland. 'Covid' and 'climate' are fundamentally connected.

Professor Woeful

From Imperial's bosom came Neil Ferguson still advising government despite his previous disasters and it was announced early on that he and other key people like UK Chief Medical Adviser Chris Whitty had caught the 'virus' as the propaganda story was being sold. Somehow they managed to survive and we had Prime Minister Boris Johnson admitted to hospital with what was said to be a severe version of the 'virus' in this same period. His whole policy and demeanour changed when he returned to Downing Street. It's a small world with these government advisors – especially in their communal connections to Gates – and Ferguson had partnered with Whitty to write a paper called 'Infectious disease: Tough choices to reduce Ebola transmission' which involved another scare-story that didn't happen. Ferguson's 'models' predicted that up to150, 000 could die from 'mad cow disease', or BSE, and its version in sheep if it was transmitted to humans. BSE was not transmitted and instead triggered by an organophosphate pesticide used to treat a pest on

cows. Fewer than 200 deaths followed from the human form. Models by Ferguson and his fellow incompetents led to the unnecessary culling of millions of pigs, cattle and sheep in the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 which destroyed the lives and livelihoods of farmers and their families who had often spent decades building their herds and flocks. Vast numbers of these animals did not have foot and mouth and had no contact with the infection. Another 'expert' behind the cull was Professor Roy Anderson, a computer modeller at Imperial College specialising in the epidemiology of *human*, not animal, disease. Anderson has served on the Bill and Melinda Gates Grand Challenges in Global Health advisory board and chairs another Gates-funded organisation. Gates is everywhere.

In a precursor to the 'Covid' script Ferguson backed closing schools 'for prolonged periods' over the swine flu 'pandemic' in 2009 and said it would affect a third of the world population if it continued to spread at the speed he claimed to be happening. His mates at Imperial College said much the same and a news report said: 'One of the authors, the epidemiologist and disease modeller Neil Ferguson, who sits on the World Health Organisation's emergency committee for the outbreak, said the virus had "full pandemic potential".' Professor Liam Donaldson, the Chris Whitty of his day as Chief Medical Officer, said the worst case could see 30 percent of the British people infected by swine flu with 65,000 dying. Ferguson and Donaldson were indeed proved correct when at the end of the year the number of deaths attributed to swine flu was 392. The term 'expert' is rather liberally applied unfortunately, not least to complete idiots. Swine flu 'projections' were great for GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) as millions rolled in for its Pandemrix influenza vaccine which led to brain damage with children most affected. The British government (taxpayers) paid out more than £60 million in compensation after GSK was given immunity from prosecution. Yet another 'Covid' déjà vu. Swine flu was supposed to have broken out in Mexico, but Dr Wolfgang Wodarg, a German doctor, former member of parliament and critic of the 'Covid' hoax, observed 'the spread of swine flu' in Mexico City at the time. He

said: 'What we experienced in Mexico City was a very mild flu which did not kill more than usual – which killed even fewer people than usual.' Hyping the fear against all the facts is not unique to 'Covid' and has happened many times before. Ferguson is reported to have over-estimated the projected death toll of bird flu (H5N1) by some three million-fold, but bird flu vaccine makers again made a killing from the scare. This is some of the background to the Neil Ferguson who produced the perfectly-timed computer models in early 2020 predicting that half a million people would die in Britain without draconian lockdown and 2.2 million in the United States. Politicians panicked, people panicked, and lockdowns of alleged short duration were instigated to 'flatten the curve' of cases gleaned from a test not testing for the 'virus'. I said at the time that the public could forget the 'short duration' bit. This was an agenda to destroy the livelihoods of the population and force them into mass control through dependency and there was going to be nothing 'short' about it. American researcher Daniel Horowitz described the consequences of the 'models' spewed out by Gates-funded Ferguson and Imperial College:

> What led our government and the governments of many other countries into panic was a single Imperial College of UK study, funded by global warming activists, that predicted 2.2 million deaths if we didn't lock down the country. In addition, the reported 8-9% death rate in Italy scared us into thinking there was some other mutation of this virus that they got, which might have come here.
>
> Together with the fact that we were finally testing and had the ability to actually report new cases, we thought we were headed for a death spiral. But again … we can't flatten a curve if we don't know when the curve started.

How about it *never* started?

Giving them what they want

An investigation by German news outlet *Welt Am Sonntag (World on Sunday)* revealed how in March, 2020, the German government gathered together 'leading scientists from several research institutes and universities' and 'together, they were to produce a [modelling]

paper that would serve as legitimization for further tough political measures'. The Cult agenda was justified by computer modelling not based on evidence or reality; it was specifically constructed to justify the Cult demand for lockdowns all over the world to destroy the independent livelihoods of the global population. All these modellers and everyone responsible for the 'Covid' hoax have a date with a trial like those in Nuremberg after World War Two when Nazis faced the consequences of their war crimes. These corrupt-beyond-belief 'modellers' wrote the paper according to government instructions and it said that that if lockdown measures were lifted then up to one million Germans would die from 'Covid-19' adding that some would die 'agonizingly at home, gasping for breath' unable to be treated by hospitals that couldn't cope. All lies. No matter – it gave the Cult all that it wanted. What did long-time government 'modeller' Neil Ferguson say? If the UK and the United States didn't lockdown half a million would die in Britain and 2.2 million Americans. Anyone see a theme here? 'Modellers' are such a crucial part of the lockdown strategy that we should look into their background and follow the money. Researcher Rosemary Frei produced an excellent article headlined 'The Modelling-paper Mafiosi'. She highlights a guy called John Edmunds, a British epidemiologist, and professor in the Faculty of Epidemiology and Population Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. He studied at Imperial College. Edmunds is a member of government 'Covid' advisory bodies which have been dictating policy, the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

Ferguson, another member of NERVTAG and SAGE, led the way with the original 'virus' and Edmunds has followed in the 'variant' stage and especially the so-called UK or Kent variant known as the 'Variant of Concern' (VOC) B.1.1.7. He said in a co-written report for the Centre for Mathematical modelling of Infectious Diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, with input from the Centre's 'Covid-19' Working Group, that there was 'a realistic

possibility that VOC B.1.1.7 is associated with an increased risk of death compared to non-VOC viruses'. Fear, fear, fear, get the vaccine, fear, fear, fear, get the vaccine. Rosemary Frei reveals that almost all the paper's authors and members of the modelling centre's 'Covid-19' Working Group receive funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and/or the associated Gates-funded Wellcome Trust. The paper was published by e-journal *Medr χiv* which only publishes papers not peer-reviewed and the journal was established by an organisation headed by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and his missus. What a small world it is. Frei discovered that Edmunds is on the Scientific Advisory Board of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) which was established by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Klaus Schwab's Davos World Economic Forum and Big Pharma giant Wellcome. CEPI was 'launched in Davos [in 2017] to develop vaccines to stop future epidemics', according to its website. 'Our mission is to accelerate the development of vaccines against emerging infectious diseases and enable equitable access to these vaccines for people during outbreaks.' What kind people they are. Rosemary Frei reveals that Public Health England (PHE) director Susan Hopkins is an author of her organisation's non-peer-reviewed reports on 'new variants'. Hopkins is a professor of infectious diseases at London's Imperial College which is gifted tens of millions of dollars a year by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Gates-funded modelling disaster Neil Ferguson also co-authors Public Health England reports and he spoke in December, 2020, about the potential danger of the B.1.1.7. 'UK variant' promoted by Gates-funded modeller John Edmunds. When I come to the 'Covid vaccines' the 'new variants' will be shown for what they are – bollocks.

Connections, connections

All these people and modellers are lockdown-obsessed or, put another way, they demand what the Cult demands. Edmunds said in January, 2021, that to ease lockdowns too soon would be a disaster and they had to 'vaccinate much, much, much more widely than the

elderly'. Rosemary Frei highlights that Edmunds is married to Jeanne Pimenta who is described in a LinkedIn profile as director of epidemiology at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and she held shares in the company. Patrick Vallance, co-chair of SAGE and the government's Chief Scientific Adviser, is a former executive of GSK and has a deferred bonus of shares in the company worth £600,000. GSK has serious business connections with Bill Gates and is collaborating with mRNA-'vaccine' company CureVac to make 'vaccines' for the new variants that Edmunds is talking about. GSK is planning a 'Covid vaccine' with drug giant Sanofi. Puppet Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in the spring of 2021 that up to 60 million vaccine doses were to be made at the GSK facility at Barnard Castle in the English North East. Barnard Castle, with a population of just 6,000, was famously visited in breach of lockdown rules in April, 2020, by Johnson aide Dominic Cummings who said that he drove there 'to test his eyesight' before driving back to London. Cummings would be better advised to test his integrity – not that it would take long. The GSK facility had nothing to do with his visit then although I'm sure Patrick Vallance would have been happy to arrange an introduction and some tea and biscuits. Ruthless psychopath Gates has made yet another fortune from vaccines in collaboration with Big Pharma companies and gushes at the phenomenal profits to be made from vaccines – more than a 20-to-1 return as he told one interviewer. Gates also tweeted in December, 2019, with the foreknowledge of what was coming: 'What's next for our foundation? I'm particularly excited about what the next year could mean for one of the best buys in global health: vaccines.'

Modeller John Edmunds is a big promotor of vaccines as all these people appear to be. He's the dean of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine's Faculty of Epidemiology and Population Health which is primarily funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Gates-established and funded GAVI vaccine alliance which is the Gates vehicle to vaccinate the world. The organisation Doctors Without Borders has described GAVI as being 'aimed more at supporting drug-industry desires to promote new

products than at finding the most efficient and sustainable means for fighting the diseases of poverty'. But then that's why the psychopath Gates created it. John Edmunds said in a video that the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is involved in every aspect of vaccine development including large-scale clinical trials. He contends that mathematical modelling can show that vaccines protect individuals and society. That's on the basis of shit in and shit out, I take it. Edmunds serves on the UK Vaccine Network as does Ferguson and the government's foremost 'Covid' adviser, the grim-faced, dark-eyed Chris Whitty. The Vaccine Network says it works 'to support the government to identify and shortlist targeted investment opportunities for the most promising vaccines and vaccine technologies that will help combat infectious diseases with epidemic potential, and to address structural issues related to the UK's broader vaccine infrastructure'. Ferguson is acting Director of the Imperial College Vaccine Impact Modelling Consortium which has funding from the Bill and Melina Gates Foundation and the Gates-created GAVI 'vaccine alliance'. Anyone wonder why these characters see vaccines as the answer to every problem? Ferguson is wildly enthusiastic in his support for GAVI's campaign to vaccine children en masse in poor countries. You would expect someone like Gates who has constantly talked about the need to reduce the population to want to fund vaccines to keep more people alive. I'm sure that's why he does it. The John Edmunds London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) has a Vaccines Manufacturing Innovation Centre which develops, tests and commercialises vaccines. Rosemary Frei writes:

> The vaccines centre also performs affiliated activities like combating 'vaccine hesitancy'. The latter includes the Vaccine Confidence Project. The project's stated purpose is, among other things, 'to provide analysis and guidance for early response and engagement with the public to ensure sustained confidence in vaccines and immunisation'. The Vaccine Confidence Project's director is LSHTM professor Heidi Larson. For more than a decade she's been researching how to combat vaccine hesitancy.

How the bloody hell can blokes like John Edmunds and Neil Ferguson with those connections and financial ties model 'virus' case

and death projections for the government and especially in a way that gives their paymasters like Gates exactly what they want? It's insane, but this is what you find throughout the world.

'Covid' is not dangerous, oops, wait, yes it is

Only days before Ferguson's nightmare scenario made Jackboot Johnson take Britain into a China-style lockdown to save us from a deadly 'virus' the UK government website gov.uk was reporting something very different to Ferguson on a page of official government guidance for 'high consequence infectious diseases (HCID)'. It said this about 'Covid-19':

As of 19 March 2020, COVID-19 *is no longer considered to be a high consequence infectious diseases (HCID) in the UK* [my emphasis]. The 4 nations public health HCID group made an interim recommendation in January 2020 to classify COVID-19 as an HCID. This was based on consideration of the UK HCID criteria about the virus and the disease with information available during the early stages of the outbreak.

Now that more is known about COVID-19, the public health bodies in the UK have reviewed the most up to date information about COVID-19 against the UK HCID criteria. They have determined that several features have now changed; in particular, more information is available about mortality rates (low overall), and there is now greater clinical awareness and a specific and sensitive laboratory test, the availability of which continues to increase. The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) is also of the opinion that COVID-19 should no longer be classified as an HCID.

Soon after the government had been exposed for downgrading the risk they upgraded it again and everyone was back to singing from the same Cult hymn book. Ferguson and his fellow Gates clones indicated that lockdowns and restrictions would have to continue until a Gates-funded vaccine was developed. Gates said the same because Ferguson and his like were repeating the Gates script which is the Cult script. 'Flatten the curve' became an ongoing nightmare of continuing lockdowns with periods in between of severe restrictions in pursuit of destroying independent incomes and had nothing to do with protecting health about which the Cult gives not a shit. Why wouldn't Ferguson be pushing a vaccine 'solution' when he's owned by vaccine-obsessive Gates who makes a fortune from them and

when Ferguson heads the Vaccine Impact Modelling Consortium at Imperial College funded by the Gates Foundation and GAVI, the 'vaccine alliance', created by Gates as his personal vaccine promotion operation? To compound the human catastrophe that Ferguson's 'models' did so much to create he was later exposed for breaking his own lockdown rules by having sexual liaisons with his married girlfriend Antonia Staats at his home while she was living at another location with her husband and children. Staats was a 'climate' activist and senior campaigner at the Soros-funded Avaaz which I wouldn't trust to tell me that grass is green. Ferguson had to resign as a government advisor over this hypocrisy in May, 2020, but after a period of quiet he was back being quoted by the ridiculous media on the need for more lockdowns and a vaccine rollout. Other government-advising 'scientists' from Imperial College' held the fort in his absence and said lockdown could be indefinite until a vaccine was found. The Cult script was being sung by the payrolled choir. I said there was no intention of going back to 'normal' when the 'vaccine' came because the 'vaccine' is part of a very different agenda that I will discuss in Human 2.0. Why would the Cult want to let the world go back to normal when destroying that normal forever was the whole point of what was happening? House arrest, closing businesses and schools through lockdown, (un)social distancing and masks all followed the Ferguson fantasy models. Again as I predicted (these people are so predictable) when the 'vaccine' arrived we were told that house arrest, lockdown, (un)social distancing and masks would still have to continue. I will deal with the masks in the next chapter because they are of fundamental importance.

Where's the 'pandemic'?

Any mildly in-depth assessment of the figures revealed what was really going on. Cult-funded and controlled organisations still have genuine people working within them such is the number involved. So it is with Genevieve Briand, assistant program director of the Applied Economics master's degree program at Johns Hopkins

University. She analysed the impact that 'Covid-19' had on deaths from *all* causes in the United States using official data from the CDC for the period from early February to early September, 2020. She found that allegedly 'Covid' *related*-deaths exceeded those from heart disease which she found strange with heart disease always the biggest cause of fatalities. Her research became even more significant when she noted the sudden decline in 2020 of *all* non-'Covid' deaths: 'This trend is completely contrary to the pattern observed in all previous years … the total decrease in deaths by other causes almost exactly equals the increase in deaths by Covid-19.' This was such a game, set and match in terms of what was happening that Johns Hopkins University deleted the article on the grounds that it 'was being used to support false and dangerous inaccuracies about the impact of the pandemic'. No – because it exposed the scam from official CDC figures and this was confirmed when those figures were published in January, 2021. Here we can see the effect of people dying from heart attacks, cancer, road accidents and gunshot wounds – *anything* – having 'Covid-19' on the death certificate along with those diagnosed from 'symptoms' who had even not tested positive with a test not testing for the 'virus'. I am not kidding with the gunshot wounds, by the way. Brenda Bock, coroner in Grand County, Colorado, revealed that two gunshot victims tested positive for the 'virus' within the previous 30 days and were therefore classified as 'Covid deaths'. Bock said: 'These two people had tested positive for Covid, but that's not what killed them. A gunshot wound is what killed them.' She said she had not even finished her investigation when the state listed the gunshot victims as deaths due to the 'virus'. The death and case figures for 'Covid-19' are an absolute joke and yet they are repeated like parrots by the media, politicians and alleged medical 'experts'. The official Cult narrative is the only show in town.

Genevieve Briand found that deaths from all causes were not exceptional in 2020 compared with previous years and a Spanish magazine published figures that said the same about Spain which was a 'Covid' propaganda hotspot at one point. *Discovery Salud*, a

health and medicine magazine, quoted government figures which showed how 17,000 *fewer* people died in Spain in 2020 than in 2019 and more than 26,000 fewer than in 2018. The age-standardised mortality rate for England and Wales when age distribution is taken into account was significantly lower in 2020 than the 1970s, 80s and 90s, and was only the ninth highest since 2000. Where is the 'pandemic'?

Post mortems and autopsies virtually disappeared for 'Covid' deaths amid claims that 'virus-infected' bodily fluids posed a risk to those carrying out the autopsy. This was rejected by renowned German pathologist and forensic doctor Klaus Püschel who said that he and his staff had by then done 150 autopsies on 'Covid' patients with no problems at all. He said they were needed to know why some 'Covid' patients suffered blood clots and not severe respiratory infections. The 'virus' is, after all, called SARS or 'severe acute respiratory syndrome'. I highlighted in the spring of 2020 this phenomenon and quoted New York intensive care doctor Cameron Kyle-Sidell who posted a soon deleted YouTube video to say that they had been told to prepare to treat an infectious disease called 'Covid-19', but that was not what they were dealing with. Instead he likened the lung condition of the most severely ill patients to what you would expect with cabin depressurisation in a plane at 30,000 feet or someone dropped on the top of Everest without oxygen or acclimatisation. I have never said this is not happening to a small minority of alleged 'Covid' patients – I am saying this is not caused by a phantom 'contagious virus'. Indeed Kyle-Sidell said that 'Covid-19' was not the disease they were told was coming their way. 'We are operating under a medical paradigm that is untrue,' he said, and he believed they were treating the wrong disease: 'These people are being slowly starved of oxygen.' Patients would take off their oxygen masks in a state of fear and stress and while they were blue in the face on the brink of death. They did not look like patients dying of pneumonia. You can see why they don't want autopsies when their virus doesn't exist and there is another condition in some people that they don't wish to be uncovered. I should add here that

the 5G system of millimetre waves was being rapidly introduced around the world in 2020 and even more so now as they fire 5G at the Earth from satellites. At 60 gigahertz within the 5G range that frequency interacts with the oxygen molecule and stops people breathing in sufficient oxygen to be absorbed into the bloodstream. They are installing 5G in schools and hospitals. The world is not mad or anything. 5G can cause major changes to the lungs and blood as I detail in *The Answer* and these consequences are labelled 'Covid-19', the alleged symptoms of which can be caused by 5G and other electromagnetic frequencies as cells respond to radiation poisoning.

The 'Covid death' scam

Dr Scott Jensen, a Minnesota state senator and medical doctor, exposed 'Covid' Medicare payment incentives to hospitals and death certificate manipulation. He said he was sent a seven-page document by the US Department of Health 'coaching' him on how to fill out death certificates which had never happened before. The document said that he didn't need to have a laboratory test for 'Covid-19' to put that on the death certificate and that shocked him when death certificates are supposed to be about facts. Jensen described how doctors had been 'encouraged, if not pressured' to make a diagnosis of 'Covid-19' if they thought it was probable or *'presumed*'. No positive test was necessary – not that this would have mattered anyway. He said doctors were told to diagnose 'Covid' by symptoms when these were the same as colds, allergies, other respiratory problems, and certainly with influenza which 'disappeared' in the 'Covid' era. A common sniffle was enough to get the dreaded verdict. Ontario authorities decreed that a single care home resident with *one* symptom from a long list must lead to the isolation of the entire home. Other courageous doctors like Jensen made the same point about death figure manipulation and how deaths by other causes were falling while 'Covid-19 deaths' were rising at the same rate due to re-diagnosis. Their videos rarely survive long on YouTube with its Cult-supporting algorithms courtesy of CEO Susan Wojcicki and her bosses at Google. Figure-tampering was so glaring

and ubiquitous that even officials were letting it slip or outright saying it. UK chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance said on one occasion that 'Covid' on the death certificate doesn't mean 'Covid' was the cause of death (so why the hell is it there?) and we had the rare sight of a BBC reporter telling the truth when she said: 'Someone could be successfully treated for Covid, in say April, discharged, and then in June, get run over by a bus and die … That person would still be counted as a Covid death in England.' Yet the BBC and the rest of the world media went on repeating the case and death figures as if they were real. Illinois Public Health Director Dr Ngozi Ezike revealed the deceit while her bosses must have been clenching their buttocks:

> If you were in a hospice and given a few weeks to live and you were then found to have Covid that would be counted as a Covid death. [There might be] a clear alternate cause, but it is still listed as a Covid death. So everyone listed as a Covid death doesn't mean that was the cause of the death, but that they had Covid at the time of death.

Yes, a 'Covid virus' never shown to exist and tested for with a test not testing for the 'virus'. In the first period of the pandemic hoax through the spring of 2020 the process began of designating almost everything a 'Covid' death and this has continued ever since. I sat in a restaurant one night listening to a loud conversation on the next table where a family was discussing in bewilderment how a relative who had no symptoms of 'Covid', and had died of a long-term problem, could have been diagnosed a death by the 'virus'. I could understand their bewilderment. If they read this book they will know why this medical fraud has been perpetrated the world over.

Some media truth shock

The media ignored the evidence of death certificate fraud until eventually one columnist did speak out when she saw it first-hand. Bel Mooney is a long-time national newspaper journalist in Britain currently working for the *Daily Mail*. Her article on February 19th, 2021, carried this headline: 'My dad Ted passed three Covid tests

and died of a chronic illness yet he's officially one of Britain's 120,000 victims of the virus and is far from alone ... so how many more are there?' She told how her 99-year-old father was in a care home with a long-standing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and vascular dementia. Maybe, but he was still aware enough to tell her from the start that there was no 'virus' and he refused the 'vaccine' for that reason. His death was not unexpected given his chronic health problems and Mooney said she was shocked to find that 'Covid-19' was declared the cause of death on his death certificate. She said this was a 'bizarre and unacceptable untruth' for a man with long-time health problems who had tested negative twice at the home for the 'virus'. I was also shocked by this story although not by what she said. I had been highlighting the death certificate manipulation for ten months. It was the confirmation that a professional full-time journalist only realised this was going on when it affected her directly and neither did she know that whether her dad tested positive or negative was irrelevant with the test not testing for the 'virus'. Where had she been? She said she did not believe in 'conspiracy theories' without knowing I'm sure that this and 'conspiracy theorists' were terms put into widespread circulation by the CIA in the 1960s to discredit those who did not accept the ridiculous official story of the Kennedy assassination. A blanket statement of 'I don't believe in conspiracy theories' is always bizarre. The dictionary definition of the term alone means the world is drowning in conspiracies. What she said was even more daft when her dad had just been affected by the 'Covid' conspiracy. Why else does she think that 'Covid-19' was going on the death certificates of people who died of something else?

To be fair once she saw from personal experience what was happening she didn't mince words. Mooney was called by the care home on the morning of February 9th to be told her father had died in his sleep. When she asked for the official cause of death what came back was 'Covid-19'. Mooney challenged this and was told there had been deaths from Covid on the dementia floor (confirmed by a test not testing for the 'virus') so they considered it 'reasonable

to assume'. 'But doctor,' Mooney rightly protested, 'an assumption isn't a diagnosis.' She said she didn't blame the perfectly decent and sympathetic doctor – 'he was just doing his job'. Sorry, but that's *bullshit*. He wasn't doing his job at all. He was putting a false cause of death on the death certificate and that is a criminal offence for which he should be brought to account and the same with the millions of doctors worldwide who have done the same. They were not doing their job they were following orders and that must not wash at new Nuremberg trials any more than it did at the first ones. Mooney's doctor was 'assuming' (presuming) as he was told to, but 'just following orders' makes no difference to his actions. A doctor's job is to serve the patient and the truth, not follow orders, but that's what they have done all over the world and played a central part in making the 'Covid' hoax possible with all its catastrophic consequences for humanity. Shame on them and they must answer for their actions. Mooney said her disquiet worsened when she registered her father's death by telephone and was told by the registrar there had been very many other cases like hers where 'the deceased' had not tested positive for 'Covid' yet it was recorded as the cause of death. The test may not matter, but those involved at their level *think* it matters and it shows a callous disregard for accurate diagnosis. The pressure to do this is coming from the top of the national 'health' pyramids which in turn obey the World Health Organization which obeys Gates and the Cult. Mooney said the registrar agreed that this must distort the national figures adding that 'the strangest thing is that every winter we record countless deaths from flu, and this winter there have been none. Not one!' She asked if the registrar thought deaths from flu were being misdiagnosed and lumped together with 'Covid' deaths. The answer was a 'puzzled yes'. Mooney said that the funeral director said the same about 'Covid' deaths which had nothing to do with 'Covid'. They had lost count of the number of families upset by this and other funeral companies in different countries have had the same experience. Mooney wrote:

The nightly shroud-waving and shocking close-ups of pain imposed on us by the TV news bewildered and terrified the population into eager compliance with lockdowns. We were invited to 'save the NHS' and to grieve for strangers – the real-life loved ones behind those shocking death counts. Why would the public imagine what I now fear, namely that the way Covid-19 death statistics are compiled might make the numbers seem greater than they are?

Oh, just a little bit – like 100 percent.

Do the maths

Mooney asked why a country would wish to skew its mortality figures by wrongly certifying deaths? What had been going on? Well, if you don't believe in conspiracies you will never find the answer which is that *it's a conspiracy*. She did, however, describe what she had discovered as a 'national scandal'. In reality it's a global scandal and happening everywhere. Pillars of this conspiracy were all put into place before the button was pressed with the Drosten PCR protocol and high amplifications to produce the cases and death certificate changes to secure illusory 'Covid' deaths. Mooney notes that normally two doctors were needed to certify a death, with one having to know the patient, and how the rules were changed in the spring of 2020 to allow one doctor to do this. In the same period 'Covid deaths' were decreed to be all cases where Covid-19 was put on the death certificate even without a positive test or any symptoms. Mooney asked: 'How many of the 30,851 (as of January 15) care home resident deaths with Covid-19 on the certificate (32.4 per cent of all deaths so far) were based on an assumption, like that of my father? And what has that done to our national psyche?'All of them is the answer to the first question and it has devastated and dismantled the national psyche, actually the global psyche, on a colossal scale. In the UK case and death data is compiled by organisations like Public Health England (PHE) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Mooney highlights the insane policy of counting a death from any cause as 'Covid-19' if this happens within 28 days of a positive test (with a test not testing for the 'virus') and she points out that ONS statistics reflect deaths 'involving Covid' 'or due to Covid' which meant in practice any

death where 'Covid-19' was mentioned on the death certificate. She described the consequences of this fraud:

Most people will accept the narrative they are fed, so panicky governments here and in Europe witnessed the harsh measures enacted in totalitarian China and jumped into lockdown. Headlines about Covid deaths tolled like the knell that would bring doomsday to us all. Fear stalked our empty streets. Politicians parroted the frankly ridiculous aim of 'zero Covid' and shut down the economy, while most British people agreed that lockdown was essential and (astonishingly to me, as a patriotic Brit) even wanted more restrictions.

For what? Lies on death certificates? Never mind the grim toll of lives ruined, suicides, schools closed, rising inequality, depression, cancelled hospital treatments, cancer patients in a torture of waiting, poverty, economic devastation, loneliness, families kept apart, and so on. How many lives have been lost as a direct result of lockdown?

She said that we could join in a national chorus of shock and horror at reaching the 120,000 death toll which was surely certain to have been totally skewed all along, but what about the human cost of lockdown justified by these 'death figures'? *The British Medical Journal* had reported a 1,493 percent increase in cases of children taken to Great Ormond Street Hospital with abusive head injuries alone and then there was the effect on families:

Perhaps the most shocking thing about all this is that families have been kept apart – and obeyed the most irrational, changing rules at the whim of government – because they believed in the statistics. They succumbed to fear, which his generation rejected in that war fought for freedom. Dad (God rest his soul) would be angry. And so am I.

Another theme to watch is that in the winter months when there are more deaths from all causes they focus on 'Covid' deaths and in the summer when the British Lung Foundation says respiratory disease plummets by 80 percent they rage on about 'cases'. Either way fascism on population is always the answer.

Nazi eugenics in the 21st century

Elderly people in care homes have been isolated from their families month after lonely month with no contact with relatives and grandchildren who were banned from seeing them. We were told

that lockdown fascism was to 'protect the vulnerable' like elderly people. At the same time Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders were placed on their medical files so that if they needed resuscitation it wasn't done and 'Covid-19' went on their death certificates. Old people were not being 'protected' they were being culled – murdered in truth. DNR orders were being decreed for disabled and young people with learning difficulties or psychological problems. The UK Care Quality Commission, a non-departmental body of the Department of Health and Social Care, found that 34 percent of those working in health and social care were pressured into placing 'do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation' orders on 'Covid' patients who suffered from disabilities and learning difficulties without involving the patient or their families in the decision. UK judges ruled that an elderly woman with dementia should have the DNA-manipulating 'Covid vaccine' against her son's wishes and that a man with severe learning difficulties should have the jab despite his family's objections. Never mind that many had already died. The judiciary always supports doctors and government in fascist dictatorships. They wouldn't dare do otherwise. A horrific video was posted showing fascist officers from Los Angeles police forcibly giving the 'Covid' shot to women with special needs who were screaming that they didn't want it. The same fascists are seen giving the jab to a sleeping elderly woman in a care home. This is straight out of the Nazi playbook. Hitler's Nazis committed mass murder of the mentally ill and physically disabled throughout Germany and occupied territories in the programme that became known as Aktion T4, or just T4. Sabbatian-controlled Hitler and his grotesque crazies set out to kill those they considered useless and unnecessary. The Reich Committee for the Scientific Registering of Hereditary and Congenital Illnesses registered the births of babies identified by physicians to have 'defects'. By 1941 alone more than 5,000 children were murdered by the state and it is estimated that in total the number of innocent people killed in Aktion T4 was between 275,000 and 300,000. Parents were told their children had been sent away for 'special treatment' never to return. It is rather pathetic to see claims about plans for new extermination camps being dismissed today

when the same force behind current events did precisely that 80 years ago. Margaret Sanger was a Cult operative who used 'birth control' to sanitise her programme of eugenics. Organisations she founded became what is now Planned Parenthood. Sanger proposed that 'the whole dysgenic population would have its choice of segregation or sterilization'. These included epileptics, 'feeble-minded', and prostitutes. Sanger opposed charity because it perpetuated 'human waste'. She reveals the Cult mentality and if anyone thinks that extermination camps are a 'conspiracy theory' their naivety is touching if breathtakingly stupid.

If you don't believe that doctors can act with callous disregard for their patients it is worth considering that doctors and medical staff agreed to put government-decreed DNR orders on medical files and do nothing when resuscitation is called for. I don't know what you call such people in your house. In mine they are Nazis from the Josef Mengele School of Medicine. Phenomenal numbers of old people have died worldwide from the effects of lockdown, depression, lack of treatment, the 'vaccine' (more later) and losing the will to live. A common response at the start of the manufactured pandemic was to remove old people from hospital beds and transfer them to nursing homes. The decision would result in a mass cull of elderly people in those homes through lack of treatment – *not* 'Covid'. Care home whistleblowers have told how once the 'Covid' era began doctors would not come to their homes to treat patients and they were begging for drugs like antibiotics that often never came. The most infamous example was ordered by New York governor Andrew Cuomo, brother of a moronic CNN host, who amazingly was given an Emmy Award for his handling of the 'Covid crisis' by the ridiculous Wokers that hand them out. Just how ridiculous could be seen in February, 2021, when a Department of Justice and FBI investigation began into how thousands of old people in New York died in nursing homes after being discharged from hospital to make way for 'Covid' patients on Cuomo's say-so – and how he and his staff covered up these facts. This couldn't have happened to a nicer psychopath. Even then there was a 'Covid' spin. Reports said that

thousands of old people who tested positive for 'Covid' in hospital were transferred to nursing homes to both die of 'Covid' and transmit it to others. No – they were in hospital because they were ill and the fact that they tested positive with a test not testing for the 'virus' is irrelevant. They were ill often with respiratory diseases ubiquitous in old people near the end of their lives. Their transfer out of hospital meant that their treatment stopped and many would go on to die.

They're old. Who gives a damn?

I have exposed in the books for decades the Cult plan to cull the world's old people and even to introduce at some point what they call a 'demise pill' which at a certain age everyone would take and be out of here by law. In March, 2021, Spain legalised euthanasia and assisted suicide following the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Canada on the Tiptoe to the demise pill. Treatment of old people by many 'care' homes has been a disgrace in the 'Covid' era. There are many, many, caring staff – I know some. There have, however, been legions of stories about callous treatment of old people and their families. Police were called when families came to take their loved ones home in the light of isolation that was killing them. They became prisoners of the state. Care home residents in insane, fascist Ontario, Canada, were not allowed to leave their *room* once the 'Covid' hoax began. UK staff have even wheeled elderly people away from windows where family members were talking with them. Oriana Criscuolo from Stockport in the English North West dropped off some things for her 80-year-old father who has Parkinson's disease and dementia and she wanted to wave to him through a ground-floor window. She was told that was 'illegal'. When she went anyway they closed the curtains in the middle of the day. Oriana said:

> It's just unbelievable. I cannot understand how care home staff – people who are being paid to care – have become so uncaring. Their behaviour is inhumane and cruel. It's beyond belief.

She was right and this was not a one-off. What a way to end your life in such loveless circumstances. UK registered nurse Nicky Millen, a proper old school nurse for 40 years, said that when she started her career care was based on dignity, choice, compassion and empathy. Now she said 'the things that are important to me have gone out of the window.' She was appalled that people were dying without their loved ones and saying goodbye on iPads. Nicky described how a distressed 89-year-old lady stroked her face and asked her 'how many paracetamol would it take to finish me off'. Life was no longer worth living while not seeing her family. Nicky said she was humiliated in front of the ward staff and patients for letting the lady stroke her face and giving her a cuddle. Such is the dehumanisation that the 'Covid' hoax has brought to the surface. Nicky worked in care homes where patients told her they were being held prisoner. 'I want to live until I die', one said to her. 'I had a lady in tears because she hadn't seen her great-grandson.' Nicky was compassionate old school meeting psychopathic New Normal. She also said she had worked on a 'Covid' ward with no 'Covid' patients. Jewish writer Shai Held wrote an article in March, 2020, which was headlined 'The Staggering, Heartless Cruelty Toward the Elderly'. What he described was happening from the earliest days of lockdown. He said 'the elderly' were considered a group and not unique individuals (the way of the Woke). Shai Held said:

> Notice how the all-too-familiar rhetoric of dehumanization works: 'The elderly' are bunched together as a faceless mass, all of them considered culprits and thus effectively deserving of the suffering the pandemic will inflict upon them. Lost entirely is the fact that the elderly are individual human beings, each with a distinctive face and voice, each with hopes and dreams, memories and regrets, friendships and marriages, loves lost and loves sustained.

'The elderly' have become another dehumanised group for which anything goes and for many that has resulted in cold disregard for their rights and their life. The distinctive face that Held talks about is designed to be deleted by masks until everyone is part of a faceless mass.

‘War-zone’ hospitals myth

Again and again medical professionals have told me what was really going on and how hospitals ‘overrun like war zones’ according to the media were virtually empty. The mantra from medical whistleblowers was please don’t use my name or my career is over. Citizen journalists around the world sneaked into hospitals to film evidence exposing the ‘war-zone’ lie. They really *were* largely empty with closed wards and operating theatres. I met a hospital worker in my town on the Isle of Wight during the first lockdown in 2020 who said the only island hospital had never been so quiet. Lockdown was justified by the psychopaths to stop hospitals being overrun. At the same time that the island hospital was near-empty the military arrived here to provide *extra beds*. It was all propaganda to ramp up the fear to ensure compliance with fascism as were never-used temporary hospitals with thousands of beds known as Nightingales and never-used make-shift mortuaries opened by the criminal UK government. A man who helped to install those extra island beds attributed to the army said they were never used and the hospital was empty. Doctors and nurses ‘stood around talking or on their phones, wandering down to us to see what we were doing’. There were no masks or social distancing. He accused the useless local island paper, the *County Press*, of ‘pumping the fear as if our hospital was overrun and we only have one so it should have been’. He described ambulances parked up with crews outside in deck chairs. When his brother called an ambulance he was told there was a two-hour backlog which he called ‘bullshit’. An old lady on the island fell ‘and was in a bad way’, but a caller who rang for an ambulance was told the situation wasn’t urgent enough. Ambulance stations were working under capacity while people would hear ambulances with sirens blaring driving through the streets. When those living near the stations realised what was going on they would follow them as they left, circulated around an urban area with the sirens going, and then came back without stopping. All this was to increase levels of fear and the same goes for the ‘ventilator shortage crisis’ that cost tens of millions for hastily produced ventilators never to be used.

Ambulance crews that agreed to be exploited in this way for fear propaganda might find themselves a mirror. I wish them well with that. Empty hospitals were the obvious consequence of treatment and diagnoses of non-'Covid' conditions cancelled and those involved handed a death sentence. People have been dying at home from undiagnosed and untreated cancer, heart disease and other life-threatening conditions to allow empty hospitals to deal with a 'pandemic' that wasn't happening.

Death of the innocent

'War-zones' have been laying off nursing staff, even doctors where they can. There was no work for them. Lockdown was justified by saving lives and protecting the vulnerable they were actually killing with DNR orders and preventing empty hospitals being 'overrun'. In Britain the mantra of stay at home to 'save the NHS' was everywhere and across the world the same story was being sold when it was all lies. Two California doctors, Dan Erickson and Artin Massihi at Accelerated Urgent Care in Bakersfield, held a news conference in April, 2020, to say that intensive care units in California were 'empty, essentially', with hospitals shutting floors, not treating patients and laying off doctors. The California health system was working at minimum capacity 'getting rid of doctors because we just don't have the volume'. They said that people with conditions such as heart disease and cancer were not coming to hospital out of fear of 'Covid-19'. Their video was deleted by Susan Wojcicki's Cult-owned YouTube after reaching five million views. Florida governor Ron Desantis, who rejected the severe lockdowns of other states and is being targeted for doing so, said that in March, 2020, every US governor was given models claiming they would run out of hospital beds in days. That was never going to happen and the 'modellers' knew it. Deceit can be found at every level of the system. Urgent children's operations were cancelled including fracture repairs and biopsies to spot cancer. Eric Nicholls, a consultant paediatrician, said 'this is obviously concerning and we need to return to normal operating and to increase capacity as soon as possible'. Psychopaths

in power were rather less concerned *because* they are psychopaths. Deletion of urgent care and diagnosis has been happening all over the world and how many kids and others have died as a result of the actions of these cold and heartless lunatics dictating 'health' policy? The number must be stratospheric. Richard Sullivan, professor of cancer and global health at King's College London, said people feared 'Covid' more than cancer such was the campaign of fear. 'Years of lost life will be quite dramatic', Sullivan said, with 'a huge amount of avoidable mortality'. Sarah Woolnough, executive director for policy at Cancer Research UK, said there had been a 75 percent drop in urgent referrals to hospitals by family doctors of people with suspected cancer. Sullivan said that 'a lot of services have had to scale back – we've seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of elective cancer surgery'. Lockdown deaths worldwide has been absolutely fantastic with the *New York Post* reporting how data confirmed that 'lockdowns end more lives than they save':

> There was a sharp decline in visits to emergency rooms and an increase in fatal heart attacks because patients didn't receive prompt treatment. Many fewer people were screened for cancer. Social isolation contributed to excess deaths from dementia and Alzheimer's.
>
> Researchers predicted that the social and economic upheaval would lead to tens of thousands of "deaths of despair" from drug overdoses, alcoholism and suicide. As unemployment surged and mental-health and substance-abuse treatment programs were interrupted, the reported levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts increased dramatically, as did alcohol sales and fatal drug overdoses.

This has been happening while nurses and other staff had so much time on their hands in the 'war-zones' that Tic-Tok dancing videos began appearing across the Internet with medical staff dancing around in empty wards and corridors as people died at home from causes that would normally have been treated in hospital.

Mentions in dispatches

One brave and truth-committed whistleblower was Louise Hampton, a call handler with the UK NHS who made a viral Internet video saying she had done 'fuck all' during the 'pandemic'

which was 'a load of bollocks'. She said that 'Covid-19' was rebranded flu and of course she lost her job. This is what happens in the medical and endless other professions now when you tell the truth. Louise filmed inside 'war-zone' accident and emergency departments to show they were empty and I mean *empty* as in no one there. The mainstream media could have done the same and blown the gaff on the whole conspiracy. They haven't to their eternal shame. Not that most 'journalists' seem capable of manifesting shame as with the psychopaths they slavishly repeat without question. The relative few who were admitted with serious health problems were left to die alone with no loved ones allowed to see them because of 'Covid' rules and they included kids dying without the comfort of mum and dad at their bedside while the evil behind this couldn't give a damn. It was all good fun to them. A Scottish NHS staff nurse publicly quit in the spring of 2021 saying: 'I can no longer be part of the lies and the corruption by the government.' She said hospitals 'aren't full, the beds aren't full, beds have been shut, wards have been shut'. Hospitals were never busy throughout 'Covid'. The staff nurse said that Nicola Sturgeon, tragically the leader of the Scottish government, was on television saying save the hospitals and the NHS – 'but the beds are empty' and 'we've not seen flu, we always see flu every year'. She wrote to government and spoke with her union Unison (the unions are Cult-compromised and *useless*, but nothing changed. Many of her colleagues were scared of losing their jobs if they spoke out as they wanted to. She said nursing staff were being affected by wearing masks all day and 'my head is splitting every shift from wearing a mask'. The NHS is part of the fascist tyranny and must be dismantled so we can start again with human beings in charge. (Ironically, hospitals were reported to be busier again when official 'Covid' cases *fell* in spring/summer of 2021 and many other conditions required treatment at the same time as *the fake vaccine rollout*.)

I will cover the 'Covid vaccine' scam in detail later, but it is another indicator of the sickening disregard for human life that I am highlighting here. The DNA-manipulating concoctions do not fulfil

the definition of a 'vaccine', have never been used on humans before and were given only emergency approval because trials were not completed and they continued using the unknowing public. The result was what a NHS senior nurse with responsibility for 'vaccine' procedure said was 'genocide'. She said the 'vaccines' were not 'vaccines'. They had not been shown to be safe and claims about their effectiveness by drug companies were 'poetic licence'. She described what was happening as a 'horrid act of human annihilation'. The nurse said that management had instigated a policy of not providing a Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) before people were 'vaccinated' even though health care professionals are supposed to do this according to protocol. Patients should also be told that they are taking part in an ongoing clinical trial. Her challenges to what is happening had seen her excluded from meetings and ridiculed in others. She said she was told to 'watch my step … or I would find myself surplus to requirements'. The nurse, who spoke anonymously in fear of her career, said she asked her NHS manager why he/she was content with taking part in genocide against those having the 'vaccines'. The reply was that everyone had to play their part and to 'put up, shut up, and get it done'. Government was 'leaning heavily' on NHS management which was clearly leaning heavily on staff. This is how the global 'medical' hierarchy operates and it starts with the Cult and its World Health Organization.

She told the story of a doctor who had the Pfizer jab and when questioned had no idea what was in it. The doctor had never read the literature. We have to stop treating doctors as intellectual giants when so many are moral and medical pygmies. The doctor did not even know that the 'vaccines' were not fully approved or that their trials were ongoing. They were, however, asking their patients if they minded taking part in follow-ups for research purposes – yes, the *ongoing clinical trial*. The nurse said the doctor's ignorance was not rare and she had spoken to a hospital consultant who had the jab without any idea of the background or that the 'trials' had not been completed. Nurses and pharmacists had shown the same ignorance.

'My NHS colleagues have forsaken their duty of care, broken their code of conduct – Hippocratic Oath – and have been brainwashed just the same as the majority of the UK public through propaganda …' She said she had not been able to recruit a single NHS colleague, doctor, nurse or pharmacist to stand with her and speak out. Her union had refused to help. She said that if the genocide came to light she would not hesitate to give evidence at a Nuremberg-type trial against those in power who could have affected the outcomes but didn't.

And all for what?

To put the nonsense into perspective let's say the 'virus' does exist and let's go completely crazy and accept that the official manipulated figures for cases and deaths are accurate. *Even then* a study by Stanford University epidemiologist Dr John Ioannidis published on the World Health Organization website produced an average infection to fatality rate of … *0.23 percent!* Ioannidis said: 'If one could sample equally from all locations globally, the median infection fatality rate might even be substantially lower than the 0.23% observed in my analysis.' For healthy people under 70 it was … *0.05 percent*! This compares with the 3.4 percent claimed by the Cult-owned World Health Organization when the hoax was first played and maximum fear needed to be generated. An updated Stanford study in April, 2021, put the 'infection' to 'fatality' rate at just 0.15 percent. Another team of scientists led by Megan O'Driscoll and Henrik Salje studied data from 45 countries and published their findings on the Nature website. For children and young people the figure is so small it virtually does not register although authorities will be hyping dangers to the young when they introduce DNA-manipulating 'vaccines' for children. The O'Driscoll study produced an average infection-fatality figure of 0.003 for children from birth to four; 0.001 for 5 to 14; 0.003 for 15 to 19; and it was still only 0.456 up to 64. To claim that children must be 'vaccinated' to protect them from 'Covid' is an obvious lie and so there must be another reason and there is. What's more the average age of a 'Covid' death is akin

to the average age that people die in general. The average age of death in England is about 80 for men and 83 for women. The average age of death from alleged 'Covid' is between 82 and 83. California doctors, Dan Erickson and Artin Massihi, said at their April media conference that projection models of millions of deaths had been 'woefully inaccurate'. They produced detailed figures showing that Californians had a 0.03 chance of dying from 'Covid' based on the number of people who tested positive (with a test not testing for the 'virus'). Erickson said there was a 0.1 percent chance of dying from 'Covid' in the *state* of New York, not just the city, and a 0.05 percent chance in Spain, a centre of 'Covid-19' hysteria at one stage. The Stanford studies supported the doctors' data with fatality rate estimates of 0.23 and 0.15 percent. How close are these figures to my estimate of *zero*? Death-rate figures claimed by the World Health Organization at the start of the hoax were some 15 times higher. The California doctors said there was no justification for lockdowns and the economic devastation they caused. Everything they had ever learned about quarantine was that you quarantine the *sick* and not the healthy. They had never seen this before and it made no medical sense.

Why in the in the light of all this would governments and medical systems the world over say that billions must go under house arrest; lose their livelihood; in many cases lose their mind, their health and their life; force people to wear masks dangerous to health and psychology; make human interaction and even family interaction a criminal offence; ban travel; close restaurants, bars, watching live sport, concerts, theatre, and any activity involving human togetherness and discourse; and closing schools to isolate children from their friends and cause many to commit suicide in acts of hopelessness and despair? The California doctors said lockdown consequences included increased child abuse, partner abuse, alcoholism, depression, and other impacts they were seeing every day. Who would do that to the entire human race if not mentally-ill psychopaths of almost unimaginable extremes like Bill Gates? We must face the reality of what we are dealing with and come out of

denial. Fascism and tyranny are made possible only by the target population submitting and acquiescing to fascism and tyranny. The whole of human history shows that to be true. Most people naively and unquestioning believed what they were told about a 'deadly virus' and meekly and weakly submitted to house arrest. Those who didn't believe it – at least in total – still submitted in fear of the consequences of not doing so. For the rest who wouldn't submit draconian fines have been imposed, brutal policing by psychopaths *for* psychopaths, and condemnation from the meek and weak who condemn the Pushbackers on behalf of the very force that has them, too, in its gunsights. 'Pathetic' does not even begin to suffice. Britain's brainless 'Health' Secretary Matt Hancock warned anyone lying to border officials about returning from a list of 'hotspot' countries could face a jail sentence of up to ten years which is more than for racially-aggravated assault, incest and attempting to have sex with a child under 13. Hancock is a lunatic, but he has the state apparatus behind him in a Cult-led chain reaction and the same with UK 'Vaccine Minister' Nadhim Zahawi, a prominent member of the mega-Cult secret society, Le Cercle, which featured in my earlier books. The Cult enforces its will on governments and medical systems; government and medical systems enforce their will on business and police; business enforces its will on staff who enforce it on customers; police enforce the will of the Cult on the population and play their essential part in creating a world of fascist control that their own children and grandchildren will have to live in their entire lives. It is a hierarchical pyramid of imposition and acquiescence and, yes indeedy, of clinical insanity.

Does anyone bright enough to read this book have to ask what the answer is? I think not, but I will reveal it anyway in the fewest of syllables: Tell the psychos and their moronic lackeys to fuck off and let's get on with our lives. We are many – They are few.

CHAPTER SEVEN

War on your mind

One believes things because one has been conditioned to believe them
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

I have described the 'Covid' hoax as a 'Psyop' and that is true in every sense and on every level in accordance with the definition of that term which is psychological warfare. Break down the 'Covid pandemic' to the foundation themes and it is psychological warfare on the human individual and collective mind.

The same can be said for the entire human belief system involving every subject you can imagine. Huxley was right in his contention that people believe what they are conditioned to believe and this comes from the repetition throughout their lives of the same falsehoods. They spew from government, corporations, media and endless streams of 'experts' telling you what the Cult wants you to believe and often believing it themselves (although *far* from always). 'Experts' are rewarded with 'prestigious' jobs and titles and as agents of perceptual programming with regular access to the media. The Cult has to control the narrative – control *information* – or they lose control of the vital, crucial, without-which-they-cannot-prevail public perception of reality. The foundation of that control today is the Internet made possible by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the incredibly sinister technological arm of the Pentagon. The Internet is the result of military technology.

DARPA openly brags about establishing the Internet which has been a long-term project to lasso the minds of the global population. I have said for decades the plan is to control information to such an extreme that eventually no one would see or hear anything that the Cult does not approve. We are closing in on that end with ferocious censorship since the 'Covid' hoax began and in my case it started back in the 1990s in terms of books and speaking venues. I had to create my own publishing company in 1995 precisely because no one else would publish my books even then. I think they're all still running.

Cult Internet

To secure total control of information they needed the Internet in which pre-programmed algorithms can seek out 'unclean' content for deletion and even stop it being posted in the first place. The Cult had to dismantle print and non-Internet broadcast media to ensure the transfer of information to the appropriate-named 'Web' – a critical expression of the *Cult* web. We've seen the ever-quickening demise of traditional media and control of what is left by a tiny number of corporations operating worldwide. Independent journalism in the mainstream is already dead and never was that more obvious than since the turn of 2020. The Cult wants all information communicated via the Internet to globally censor and allow the plug to be pulled any time. Lockdowns and forced isolation has meant that communication between people has been through electronic means and no longer through face-to-face discourse and discussion. Cult psychopaths have targeted the bars, restaurants, sport, venues and meeting places in general for this reason. None of this is by chance and it's to stop people gathering in any kind of privacy or number while being able to track and monitor all Internet communications and block them as necessary. Even private messages between individuals have been censored by these fascists that control Cult fronts like Facebook, Twitter, Google and YouTube which are all officially run by Sabbatian place-people and from the background by higher-level Sabbatian place people.

Facebook, Google, Amazon and their like were seed-funded and supported into existence with money-no-object infusions of funds either directly or indirectly from DARPA and CIA technology arm In-Q-Tel. The Cult plays the long game and prepares very carefully for big plays like 'Covid'. Amazon is another front in the psychological war and pretty much controls the global market in book sales and increasingly publishing. Amazon's limitless funds have deleted fantastic numbers of independent publishers to seize global domination on the way to deciding which books can be sold and circulated and which cannot. Moves in that direction are already happening. Amazon's leading light Jeff Bezos is the grandson of Lawrence Preston Gise who worked with DARPA predecessor ARPA. Amazon has big connections to the CIA and the Pentagon. The plan I have long described went like this:

1. Employ military technology to establish the Internet.

2. Sell the Internet as a place where people can freely communicate without censorship and allow that to happen until the Net becomes the central and irreversible pillar of human society. If the Internet had been highly censored from the start many would have rejected it.

3. Fund and manipulate major corporations into being to control the circulation of information on your Internet using cover stories about geeks in garages to explain how they came about. Give them unlimited funds to expand rapidly with no need to make a profit for years while non-Cult companies who need to balance the books cannot compete. You know that in these circumstances your Googles, YouTubes, Facebooks and Amazons are going to secure near monopolies by either crushing or buying up the opposition.

4. Allow freedom of expression on both the Internet and communication platforms to draw people in until the Internet is the central and irreversible pillar of human society and your communication corporations have reached a stage of near monopoly domination.

5. Then unleash your always-planned frenzy of censorship on the basis of 'where else are you going to go?' and continue to expand that until nothing remains that the Cult does not want its human targets to see.

The process was timed to hit the 'Covid' hoax to ensure the best chance possible of controlling the narrative which they knew they had to do at all costs. They were, after all, about to unleash a 'deadly virus' that didn't really exist. If you do that in an environment of free-flowing information and opinion you would be dead in the

water before you could say Gates is a psychopath. The network was in place through which the Cult-created-and-owned World Health Organization could dictate the 'Covid' narrative and response policy slavishly supported by Cult-owned Internet communication giants and mainstream media while those telling a different story were censored. Google, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter openly announced that they would do this. What else would we expect from Cult-owned operations like Facebook which former executives have confirmed set out to make the platform more addictive than cigarettes and coldly manipulates emotions of its users to sow division between people and groups and scramble the minds of the young? If Zuckerberg lives out the rest of his life without going to jail for crimes against humanity, and most emphatically against the young, it will be a travesty of justice. Still, no matter, cause and effect will catch up with him eventually and the same with Sergey Brin and Larry Page at Google with its CEO Sundar Pichai who fix the Google search results to promote Cult narratives and hide the opposition. Put the same key words into Google and other search engines like DuckDuckGo and you will see how different results can be. Wikipedia is another intensely biased 'encyclopaedia' which skews its content to the Cult agenda. YouTube links to Wikipedia's version of 'Covid' and 'climate change' on video pages in which experts in their field offer a different opinion (even that is increasingly rare with Wojcicki censorship). Into this 'Covid' silence-them network must be added government media censors, sorry 'regulators', such as Ofcom in the UK which imposed tyrannical restrictions on British broadcasters that had the effect of banning me from ever appearing. Just to debate with me about my evidence and views on 'Covid' would mean breaking the fascistic impositions of Ofcom and its CEO career government bureaucrat Melanie Dawes. Gutless British broadcasters tremble at the very thought of fascist Ofcom.

Psychos behind 'Covid'

The reason for the 'Covid' catastrophe in all its facets and forms can be seen by whom and what is driving the policies worldwide in such a coordinated way. Decisions are not being made to protect health, but to target psychology. The dominant group guiding and 'advising' government policy are not medical professionals. They are psychologists and behavioural scientists. Every major country has its own version of this phenomenon and I'll use the British example to show how it works. In many ways the British version has been affecting the wider world in the form of the huge behaviour manipulation network in the UK which operates in other countries. The network involves private companies, government, intelligence and military. The Cabinet Office is at the centre of the government 'Covid' Psyop and part-owns, with 'innovation charity' Nesta, the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) which claims to be independent of government but patently isn't. The BIT was established in 2010 and its job is to manipulate the psyche of the population to acquiesce to government demands and so much more. It is also known as the 'Nudge Unit', a name inspired by the 2009 book by two ultra-Zionists, Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, called *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. The book, as with the Behavioural Insights Team, seeks to 'nudge' behaviour (manipulate it) to make the public follow patterns of action and perception that suit those in authority (the Cult). Sunstein is so skilled at this that he advises the World Health Organization and the UK Behavioural Insights Team and was Administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in the Obama administration. Biden appointed him to the Department of Homeland Security – another ultra-Zionist in the fold to oversee new immigration laws which is another policy the Cult wants to control. Sunstein is desperate to silence anyone exposing conspiracies and co-authored a 2008 report on the subject in which suggestions were offered to ban 'conspiracy theorizing' or impose 'some kind of tax, financial or otherwise, on those who disseminate such theories'. I guess a psychiatrist's chair is out of the question?

Sunstein's mate Richard Thaler, an 'academic affiliate' of the UK Behavioural Insights Team, is a proponent of 'behavioural economics' which is defined as the study of 'the effects of psychological, cognitive, emotional, cultural and social factors on the decisions of individuals and institutions'. Study the effects so they can be manipulated to be what you want them to be. Other leading names in the development of behavioural economics are ultra-Zionists Daniel Kahneman and Robert J. Shiller and they, with Thaler, won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for their work in this field. The Behavioural Insights Team is operating at the heart of the UK government and has expanded globally through partnerships with several universities including Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, University College London (UCL) and Pennsylvania. They claim to have 'trained' (reframed) 20,000 civil servants and run more than 750 projects involving 400 randomised controlled trials in dozens of countries' as another version of mind reframers Common Purpose. BIT works from its office in New York with cities and their agencies, as well as other partners, across the United States and Canada – this is a company part-owned by the British government Cabinet Office. An executive order by President Cult-servant Obama established a US Social and Behavioral Sciences Team in 2015. They all have the same reason for being and that's to brainwash the population directly and by brainwashing those in positions of authority.

'Covid' mind game

Another prime aspect of the UK mind-control network is the 'independent' [joke] Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B) which 'provides behavioural science advice aimed at anticipating and helping people adhere to interventions that are recommended by medical or epidemiological experts'. That means manipulating public perception and behaviour to do whatever government tells them to do. It's disgusting and if they really want the public to be 'safe' this lot should all be under lock and key. According to the government website SPI-B consists of

'behavioural scientists, health and social psychologists, anthropologists and historians' and advises the Whitty-Vallance-led Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) which in turn advises the government on 'the science' (it doesn't) and 'Covid' policy. When politicians say they are being guided by 'the science' this is the rabble in each country they are talking about and that 'science' is dominated by behaviour manipulators to enforce government fascism through public compliance. The Behaviour Insight Team is headed by psychologist David Solomon Halpern, a visiting professor at King's College London, and connects with a national and global web of other civilian and military organisations as the Cult moves towards its goal of fusing them into one fascistic whole in every country through its 'Fusion Doctrine'. The behaviour manipulation network involves, but is not confined to, the Foreign Office; National Security Council; government communications headquarters (GCHQ); MI5; MI6; the Cabinet Office-based Media Monitoring Unit; and the Rapid Response Unit which 'monitors digital trends to spot emerging issues; including misinformation and disinformation; and identifies the best way to respond'.

There is also the 77th Brigade of the UK military which operates like the notorious Israeli military's Unit 8200 in manipulating information and discussion on the Internet by posing as members of the public to promote the narrative and discredit those who challenge it. Here we have the military seeking to manipulate *domestic* public opinion while the Nazis in government are fine with that. Conservative Member of Parliament Tobias Ellwood, an advocate of lockdown and control through 'vaccine passports', is a Lieutenant Colonel reservist in the 77th Brigade which connects with the military operation jHub, the 'innovation centre' for the Ministry of Defence and Strategic Command. jHub has also been involved with the civilian National Health Service (NHS) in 'symptom tracing' the population. The NHS is a key part of this mind control network and produced a document in December, 2020, explaining to staff how to use psychological manipulation with different groups and ages to get them to have the DNA-manipulating 'Covid vaccine'

that's designed to cumulatively rewrite human genetics. The document, called 'Optimising Vaccination Roll Out – Do's and Dont's for all messaging, documents and "communications" in the widest sense', was published by NHS England and the NHS Improvement *Behaviour Change Unit* in partnership with Public Health England and Warwick Business School. I hear the mantra about 'save the NHS' and 'protect the NHS' when we need to scrap the NHS and start again. The current version is far too corrupt, far too anti-human and totally compromised by Cult operatives and their assets. UK government broadcast media censor Ofcom will connect into this web – as will the BBC with its tremendous Ofcom influence – to control what the public see and hear and dictate mass perception. Nuremberg trials must include personnel from all these organisations.

The fear factor

The 'Covid' hoax has led to the creation of the UK Cabinet Office-connected Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) which is officially described as providing 'expert advice on pandemics' using its independent [all Cult operations are 'independent'] analytical function to provide real-time analysis about infection outbreaks to identify and respond to outbreaks of Covid-19'. Another role is to advise the government on a response to spikes in infections – 'for example by closing schools or workplaces in local areas where infection levels have risen'. Put another way, promoting the Cult agenda. The Joint Biosecurity Centre is modelled on the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre which analyses intelligence to set 'terrorism threat levels' and here again you see the fusion of civilian and military operations and intelligence that has led to military intelligence producing documents about 'vaccine hesitancy' and how it can be combated. Domestic civilian matters and opinions should not be the business of the military. The Joint Biosecurity Centre is headed by Tom Hurd, director general of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism from the establishment-to-its-fingertips Hurd family. His father is former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. How coincidental that Tom

Hurd went to the elite Eton College and Oxford University with Boris Johnson. Imperial College with its ridiculous computer modeller Neil Ferguson will connect with this gigantic web that will itself interconnect with similar set-ups in other major and not so major countries. Compared with this Cult network the politicians, be they Boris Johnson, Donald Trump or Joe Biden, are bit-part players 'following the science'. The network of psychologists was on the 'Covid' case from the start with the aim of generating maximum fear of the 'virus' to ensure compliance by the population. A government behavioural science group known as SPI-B produced a paper in March, 2020, for discussion by the main government science advisory group known as SAGE. It was headed 'Options for increasing adherence to social distancing measures' and it said the following in a section headed 'Persuasion':

- A substantial number of people still do not feel sufficiently personally threatened; it could be that they are reassured by the low death rate in their demographic group, although levels of concern may be rising. Having a good understanding of the risk has been found to be positively associated with adoption of COVID-19 social distancing measures in Hong Kong.

- The perceived level of personal threat needs to be increased among those who are complacent, using hard-hitting evaluation of options for increasing social distancing emotional messaging. To be effective this must also empower people by making clear the actions they can take to reduce the threat.

- Responsibility to others: There seems to be insufficient understanding of, or feelings of responsibility about, people's role in transmitting the infection to others … Messaging about actions need to be framed positively in terms of protecting oneself and the community, and increase confidence that they will be effective.

- Some people will be more persuaded by appeals to play by the rules, some by duty to the community, and some to personal risk.

> All these different approaches are needed. The messaging also needs to take account of the realities of different people's lives. Messaging needs to take account of the different motivational levers and circumstances of different people.

All this could be achieved the SPI-B psychologists said by *using the media to increase the sense of personal threat* which translates as terrify the shit out of the population, including children, so they all do what we want. That's not happened has it? Those excuses for 'journalists' who wouldn't know journalism if it bit them on the arse (the great majority) have played their crucial part in serving this Cult-government Psyop to enslave their own kids and grandkids. How they live with themselves I have no idea. The psychological war has been underpinned by constant government 'Covid' propaganda in almost every television and radio ad break, plus the Internet and print media, which has pounded out the fear with taxpayers footing the bill for their own programming. The result has been people terrified of a 'virus' that doesn't exist or one with a tiny fatality rate even if you believe it does. People walk down the street and around the shops wearing face-nappies damaging their health and psychology while others report those who refuse to be that naïve to the police who turn up in their own face-nappies. I had a cameraman come to my flat and he was so frightened of 'Covid' he came in wearing a mask and refused to shake my hand in case he caught something. He had – naïveitis – and the thought that he worked in the mainstream media was both depressing and made his behaviour perfectly explainable. The fear which has gripped the minds of so many and frozen them into compliance has been carefully cultivated by these psychologists who are really psychopaths. If lives get destroyed and a lot of young people commit suicide it shows our plan is working. SPI-B then turned to compulsion on the public to comply. 'With adequate preparation, rapid change can be achieved', it said. Some countries had introduced mandatory self-isolation on a wide scale without evidence of major public unrest and a large majority of the UK's population appeared to be supportive of more coercive measures with 64 percent of adults saying they would

support putting London under a lockdown (watch the 'polls' which are designed to make people believe that public opinion is in favour or against whatever the subject in hand).

For 'aggressive protective measures' to be effective, the SPI-B paper said, special attention should be devoted to those population groups that are more at risk. Translated from the Orwellian this means making the rest of population feel guilty for not protecting the 'vulnerable' such as old people which the Cult and its agencies were about to kill on an industrial scale with lockdown, lack of treatment and the Gates 'vaccine'. Psychopath psychologists sold their guilt-trip so comprehensively that Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis reported that children were apologising (from a distance) to their parents and grandparents for bringing 'Covid' into their homes and getting them sick. '… These apologies are just some of the last words that loved ones will ever hear as they die alone,' she said. Gut-wrenchingly Solis then used this childhood tragedy to tell children to stay at home and 'keep your loved ones alive'. Imagine heaping such potentially life-long guilt on a kid when it has absolutely nothing to do with them. These people are deeply disturbed and the psychologists behind this even more so.

Uncivil war – divide and rule

Professional mind-controllers at SPI-B wanted the media to increase a sense of responsibility to others (do as you're told) and promote 'positive messaging' for those actions while in contrast to invoke 'social disapproval' by the unquestioning, obedient, community of anyone with a mind of their own. Again the compliant Goebbels-like media obliged. This is an old, old, trick employed by tyrannies the world over throughout human history. You get the target population to keep the target population in line – *your* line. SPI-B said this could 'play an important role in preventing anti-social behaviour or discouraging failure to enact pro-social behaviour'. For 'anti-social' in the Orwellian parlance of SPI-B see any behaviour that government doesn't approve. SPI-B recommendations said that 'social disapproval' should be accompanied by clear messaging and

promotion of strong collective identity – hence the government and celebrity mantra of 'we're all in this together'. Sure we are. The mind doctors have such contempt for their targets that they think some clueless comedian, actor or singer telling them to do what the government wants will be enough to win them over. We have had UK comedian Lenny Henry, actor Michael Caine and singer Elton John wheeled out to serve the propagandists by urging people to have the DNA-manipulating 'Covid' non-'vaccine'. The role of Henry and fellow black celebrities in seeking to coax a 'vaccine' reluctant black community into doing the government's will was especially stomach-turning. An emotion-manipulating script and carefully edited video featuring these black 'celebs' was such an insult to the intelligence of black people and where's the self-respect of those involved selling their souls to a fascist government agenda? Henry said he heard black people's 'legitimate worries and concerns', but people must 'trust the facts' when they were doing exactly that by not having the 'vaccine'. They had to include the obligatory reference to Black Lives Matter with the line … 'Don't let coronavirus cost even more black lives – because we matter'. My god, it was pathetic. 'I know the vaccine is safe and what it does.' How? 'I'm a comedian and it says so in my script.'

SPI-B said social disapproval needed to be carefully managed to avoid victimisation, scapegoating and misdirected criticism, but they knew that their 'recommendations' would lead to exactly that and the media were specifically used to stir-up the divide-and-conquer hostility. Those who conform like good little baa, baas, are praised while those who have seen through the tidal wave of lies are 'Covidiots'. The awake have been abused by the fast asleep for not conforming to fascism and impositions that the awake know are designed to endanger their health, dehumanise them, and tear asunder the very fabric of human society. We have had the curtain-twitchers and morons reporting neighbours and others to the face-nappied police for breaking 'Covid rules' with fascist police delighting in posting links and phone numbers where this could be done. The Cult cannot impose its will without a compliant police

and military or a compliant population willing to play their part in enslaving themselves and their kids. The words of a pastor in Nazi Germany are so appropriate today:

First they came for the socialists and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.

Those who don't learn from history are destined to repeat it and so many are.

'Covid' rules: Rewiring the mind

With the background laid out to this gigantic national and global web of psychological manipulation we can put 'Covid' rules into a clear and sinister perspective. Forget the claims about protecting health. 'Covid' rules are about dismantling the human mind, breaking the human spirit, destroying self-respect, and then putting Humpty Dumpty together again as a servile, submissive slave. Social isolation through lockdown and distancing have devastating effects on the human psyche as the psychological psychopaths well know and that's the real reason for them. Humans need contact with each other, discourse, closeness and touch, or they eventually, and literarily, go crazy. Masks, which I will address at some length, fundamentally add to the effects of isolation and the Cult agenda to dehumanise and de-individualise the population. To do this while knowing – in fact *seeking* – this outcome is the very epitome of evil and psychologists involved in this *are* the epitome of evil. They must like all the rest of the Cult demons and their assets stand trial for crimes against humanity on a scale that defies the imagination. Psychopaths in uniform use isolation to break enemy troops and agents and make them subservient and submissive to tell what they know. The technique is rightly considered a form of torture and

torture is most certainly what has been imposed on the human population.

Clinically-insane American psychologist Harry Harlow became famous for his isolation experiments in the 1950s in which he separated baby monkeys from their mothers and imprisoned them for months on end in a metal container or 'pit of despair'. They soon began to show mental distress and depression as any idiot could have predicted. Harlow put other monkeys in steel chambers for three, six or twelve months while denying them any contact with animals or humans. He said that the effects of total social isolation for six months were 'so devastating and debilitating that we had assumed initially that twelve months of isolation would not produce any additional decrement'; but twelve months of isolation 'almost obliterated the animals socially'. This is what the Cult and its psychopaths are doing to you and your children. Even monkeys in partial isolation in which they were not allowed to form relationships with other monkeys became 'aggressive and hostile, not only to others, but also towards their own bodies'. We have seen this in the young as a consequence of lockdown. UK government psychopaths launched a public relations campaign telling people not to hug each other even after they received the 'Covid-19 vaccine' which we were told with more lies would allow a return to 'normal life'. A government source told *The Telegraph*: 'It will be along the lines that it is great that you have been vaccinated, but if you are going to visit your family and hug your grandchildren there is a chance you are going to infect people you love.' The source was apparently speaking from a secure psychiatric facility. Janet Lord, director of Birmingham University's Institute of Inflammation and Ageing, said that parents and grandparents should avoid hugging their children. Well, how can I put it, Ms Lord? Fuck off. Yep, that'll do.

Destroying the kids – where are the parents?

Observe what has happened to people enslaved and isolated by lockdown as suicide and self-harm has soared worldwide,

particularly among the young denied the freedom to associate with their friends. A study of 49,000 people in English-speaking countries concluded that almost half of young adults are at clinical risk of mental health disorders. A national survey in America of 1,000 currently enrolled high school and college students found that 5 percent reported attempting suicide during the pandemic. Data from the US CDC's National Syndromic Surveillance Program from January 1st to October 17th, 2020, revealed a *31 percent* increase in mental health issues among adolescents aged 12 to 17 compared with 2019. The CDC reported that America in general suffered the biggest drop in life expectancy since World War Two as it fell by a year in the first half of 2020 as a result of 'deaths of despair' – overdoses and suicides. Deaths of despair have leapt by more than 20 percent during lockdown and include the highest number of fatal overdoses ever recorded in a single year – 81,000. Internet addiction is another consequence of being isolated at home which lowers interest in physical activities as kids fall into inertia and what's the point? Children and young people are losing hope and giving up on life, sometimes literally. A 14-year-old boy killed himself in Maryland because he had 'given up' when his school district didn't reopen; an 11-year-old boy shot himself during a zoom class; a teenager in Maine succumbed to the isolation of the 'pandemic' when he ended his life after experiencing a disrupted senior year at school. Children as young as nine have taken their life and all these stories can be repeated around the world. Careers are being destroyed before they start and that includes those in sport in which promising youngsters have not been able to take part. The plan of the psycho-psychologists is working all right. Researchers at Cambridge University found that lockdowns cause significant harm to children's mental health. Their study was published in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, and followed 168 children aged between 7 and 11. The researchers concluded:

> During the UK lockdown, children's depression symptoms have increased substantially, relative to before lockdown. The scale of this effect has direct relevance for the continuation of different elements of lockdown policy, such as complete or partial school closures …

… Specifically, we observed a statistically significant increase in ratings of depression, with a medium-to-large effect size. Our findings emphasise the need to incorporate the potential impact of lockdown on child mental health in planning the ongoing response to the global pandemic and the recovery from it.

Not a chance when the Cult's psycho-psychologists were getting exactly what they wanted. The UK's Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has urged parents to look for signs of eating disorders in children and young people after a three to four fold increase. Specialists say the 'pandemic' is a major reason behind the rise. You don't say. The College said isolation from friends during school closures, exam cancellations, loss of extra-curricular activities like sport, and an increased use of social media were all contributory factors along with fears about the virus (psycho-psychologists again), family finances, and students being forced to quarantine. Doctors said young people were becoming severely ill by the time they were seen with 'Covid' regulations reducing face-to-face consultations. Nor is it only the young that have been devastated by the psychopaths. Like all bullies and cowards the Cult is targeting the young, elderly, weak and infirm. A typical story was told by a British lady called Lynn Parker who was not allowed to visit her husband in 2020 for the last ten and half months of his life 'when he needed me most' between March 20th and when he died on December 19th. This vacates the criminal and enters the territory of evil. The emotional impact on the immune system alone is immense as are the number of people of all ages worldwide who have died as a result of Cult-demanded, Gates-demanded, lockdowns.

Isolation is torture

The experience of imposing solitary confinement on millions of prisoners around the world has shown how a large percentage become 'actively psychotic and/or acutely suicidal'. Social isolation has been found to trigger 'a specific psychiatric syndrome, characterized by hallucinations; panic attacks; overt paranoia; diminished impulse control; hypersensitivity to external stimuli; and difficulties with thinking, concentration and memory'. Juan Mendez,

a United Nations rapporteur (investigator), said that isolation is a form of torture. Research has shown that even after isolation prisoners find it far more difficult to make social connections and I remember chatting to a shop assistant after one lockdown who told me that when her young son met another child again he had no idea how to act or what to do. Hannah Flanagan, Director of Emergency Services at Journey Mental Health Center in Dane County, Wisconsin, said: 'The specificity about Covid social distancing and isolation that we've come across as contributing factors to the suicides are really new to us this year.' But they are not new to those that devised them. They are getting the effect they want as the population is psychologically dismantled to be rebuilt in a totally different way. Children and the young are particularly targeted. They will be the adults when the full-on fascist AI-controlled technocracy is planned to be imposed and they are being prepared to meekly submit. At the same time older people who still have a memory of what life was like before – and how fascist the new normal really is – are being deleted. You are going to see efforts to turn the young against the old to support this geriatric genocide. Hannah Flanagan said the big increase in suicide in her county proved that social isolation is not only harmful, but deadly. Studies have shown that isolation from others is one of the main risk factors in suicide and even more so with women. Warnings that lockdown could create a 'perfect storm' for suicide were ignored. After all this was one of the *reasons* for lockdown. Suicide, however, is only the most extreme of isolation consequences. There are many others. Dr Dhruv Khullar, assistant professor of healthcare policy at Weill Cornell Medical College, said in a *New York Times* article in 2016 long before the fake 'pandemic':

> A wave of new research suggests social separation is bad for us. Individuals with less social connection have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones. One recent study found that isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent and stroke by 32 percent. Another analysis that pooled data from 70 studies and 3.4 million people found that socially isolated individuals had a 30 percent higher risk of dying in the next seven years, and that this effect was largest in middle age.

Loneliness can accelerate cognitive decline in older adults, and isolated individuals are twice as likely to die prematurely as those with more robust social interactions. These effects start early: Socially isolated children have significantly poorer health 20 years later, even after controlling for other factors. All told, loneliness is as important a risk factor for early death as obesity and smoking.

There you have proof from that one article alone four years before 2020 that those who have enforced lockdown, social distancing and isolation knew what the effect would be and that is even more so with professional psychologists that have been driving the policy across the globe. We can go back even further to the years 2000 and 2003 and the start of a major study on the effects of isolation on health by Dr Janine Gronewold and Professor Dirk M. Hermann at the University Hospital in Essen, Germany, who analysed data on 4,316 people with an average age of 59 who were recruited for the long-term research project. They found that socially isolated people are more than 40 percent more likely to have a heart attack, stroke, or other major cardiovascular event and nearly 50 percent more likely to die from any cause. Given the financial Armageddon unleashed by lockdown we should note that the study found a relationship between increased cardiovascular risk and lack of financial support. After excluding other factors social isolation was still connected to a 44 percent increased risk of cardiovascular problems and a 47 percent increased risk of death by any cause. Lack of financial support was associated with a 30 percent increase in the risk of cardiovascular health events. Dr Gronewold said it had been known for some time that feeling lonely or lacking contact with close friends and family can have an impact on physical health and the study had shown that having strong social relationships is of high importance for heart health. Gronewold said they didn't understand yet why people who are socially isolated have such poor health outcomes, but this was obviously a worrying finding, particularly during these times of prolonged social distancing. Well, it can be explained on many levels. You only have to identify the point in the body where people feel loneliness and missing people they are parted from – it's in the centre of the chest where they feel the ache of loneliness and the ache of missing people. 'My heart aches for

you' … 'My heart aches for some company.' I will explain this more in the chapter Escaping Wetiko, but when you realise that the body is the mind – they are expressions of each other – the reason why state of the mind dictates state of the body becomes clear.

American psychologist Ranjit Powar was highlighting the effects of lockdown isolation as early as April, 2020. She said humans have evolved to be social creatures and are wired to live in interactive groups. Being isolated from family, friends and colleagues could be unbalancing and traumatic for most people and could result in short or even long-term psychological and physical health problems. An increase in levels of anxiety, aggression, depression, forgetfulness and hallucinations were possible psychological effects of isolation. 'Mental conditions may be precipitated for those with underlying pre-existing susceptibilities and show up in many others without any pre-condition.' Powar said personal relationships helped us cope with stress and if we lost this outlet for letting off steam the result can be a big emotional void which, for an average person, was difficult to deal with. 'Just a few days of isolation can cause increased levels of anxiety and depression' – so what the hell has been the effect on the global population of *18 months* of this at the time of writing? Powar said: 'Add to it the looming threat of a dreadful disease being repeatedly hammered in through the media and you have a recipe for many shades of mental and physical distress.' For those with a house and a garden it is easy to forget that billions have had to endure lockdown isolation in tiny overcrowded flats and apartments with nowhere to go outside. The psychological and physical consequences of this are unimaginable and with lunatic and abusive partners and parents the consequences have led to tremendous increases in domestic and child abuse and alcoholism as people seek to shut out the horror. Ranjit Powar said:

Staying in a confined space with family is not all a rosy picture for everyone. It can be extremely oppressive and claustrophobic for large low-income families huddled together in small single-room houses. Children here are not lucky enough to have many board/electronic games or books to keep them occupied.

Add to it the deep insecurity of running out of funds for food and basic necessities. On the other hand, there are people with dysfunctional family dynamics, such as domineering, abusive or alcoholic partners, siblings or parents which makes staying home a period of trial. Incidence of suicide and physical abuse against women has shown a worldwide increase. Heightened anxiety and depression also affect a person's immune system, making them more susceptible to illness.

To think that Powar's article was published on April 11th, 2020.

Six-feet fantasy

Social (unsocial) distancing demanded that people stay six feet or two metres apart. UK government advisor Robert Dingwall from the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group said in a radio interview that the two-metre rule was 'conjured up out of nowhere' and was not based on science. No, it was not based on *medical* science, but it didn't come out of nowhere. The distance related to *psychological* science. Six feet/two metres was adopted in many countries and we were told by people like the criminal Anthony Fauci and his ilk that it was founded on science. Many schools could not reopen because they did not have the space for six-feet distancing. Then in March, 2021, after a year of six-feet 'science', a study published in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* involving more than 500,000 students and almost 100,000 staff over 16 weeks revealed no significant difference in 'Covid' cases between six feet and three feet and Fauci changed his tune. Now three feet was okay. There is no difference between six feet and three *inches* when there is no 'virus' and they got away with six feet for psychological reasons for as long as they could. I hear journalists and others talk about 'unintended consequences' of lockdown. They are not *unintended* at all; they have been coldly-calculated for a specific outcome of human control and that's why super-psychopaths like Gates have called for them so vehemently. Super-psychopath psychologists have demanded them and psychopathic or clueless, spineless, politicians have gone along with them by 'following the science'. But it's not science at all. 'Science' is not what is; it's only what people can be manipulated to believe it is. The whole 'Covid' catastrophe is

founded on mind control. Three word or three statement mantras issued by the UK government are a well-known mind control technique and so we've had 'Stay home/protect the NHS/save lives', 'Stay alert/control the virus/save lives' and 'hands/face/space'. One of the most vocal proponents of extreme 'Covid' rules in the UK has been Professor Susan Michie, a member of the British Communist Party, who is not a medical professional. Michie is the director of the Centre for Behaviour Change at University College London. She is a *behavioural psychologist* and another filthy rich 'Marxist' who praised China's draconian lockdown. She was known by fellow students at Oxford University as 'Stalin's nanny' for her extreme Marxism. Michie is an influential member of the UK government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and behavioural manipulation groups which have dominated 'Covid' policy. She is a consultant adviser to the World Health Organization on 'Covid-19' and behaviour. Why the hell are lockdowns anything to do with her when they are claimed to be about health? Why does a behavioural psychologist from a group charged with changing the behaviour of the public want lockdown, human isolation and mandatory masks? Does that question really need an answer? Michie *absolutely* has to explain herself before a Nuremberg court when humanity takes back its world again and even more so when you see the consequences of masks that she demands are compulsory. This is a Michie classic:

> The benefits of getting primary school children to wear masks is that regardless of what little degree of transmission is occurring in those age groups it could help normalise the practice. Young children wearing masks may be more likely to get their families to accept masks.

Those words alone should carry a prison sentence when you ponder on the callous disregard for children involved and what a statement it makes about the mind and motivations of Susan Michie. What a lovely lady and what she said there encapsulates the mentality of the psychopaths behind the 'Covid' horror. Let us compare what Michie said with a countrywide study in Germany published at researchsquare.com involving 25,000 school children and 17,854 health complaints submitted by parents. Researchers

found that masks are harming children physically, psychologically, and behaviourally with 24 health issues associated with mask wearing. They include: shortness of breath (29.7%); dizziness (26.4%); increased headaches (53%); difficulty concentrating (50%); drowsiness or fatigue (37%); and malaise (42%). Nearly a third of children experienced more sleep issues than before and a quarter developed new fears. Researchers found health issues and other impairments in 68 percent of masked children covering their faces for an average of 4.5 hours a day. Hundreds of those taking part experienced accelerated respiration, tightness in the chest, weakness, and short-term impairment of consciousness. A reminder of what Michie said again:

The benefits of getting primary school children to wear masks is that regardless of what little degree of transmission is occurring in those age groups it could help normalise the practice. Young children wearing masks may be more likely to get their families to accept masks.

Psychopaths in government and psychology now have children and young people – plus all the adults – wearing masks for hours on end while clueless teachers impose the will of the psychopaths on the young they should be protecting. What the hell are parents doing?

Cult lab rats

We have some schools already imposing on students microchipped buzzers that activate when they get 'too close' to their pals in the way they do with lab rats. How apt. To the Cult and its brain-dead servants our children *are* lab rats being conditioned to be unquestioning, dehumanised slaves for the rest of their lives. Children and young people are being weaned and frightened away from the most natural human instincts including closeness and touch. I have tracked in the books over the years how schools were banning pupils from greeting each other with a hug and the whole Cult-induced Me Too movement has terrified men and boys from a relaxed and natural interaction with female friends and work colleagues to the point where many men try never to be in a room

alone with a woman that's not their partner. Airhead celebrities have as always played their virtue-signalling part in making this happen with their gross exaggeration. For every monster like Harvey Weinstein there are at least tens of thousands of men that don't treat women like that; but everyone must be branded the same and policy changed for them as well as the monster. I am going to be using the word 'dehumanise' many times in this chapter because that is what the Cult is seeking to do and it goes very deep as we shall see. Don't let them kid you that social distancing is planned to end one day. That's not the idea. We are seeing more governments and companies funding and producing wearable gadgets to keep people apart and they would not be doing that if this was meant to be short-term. A tech start-up company backed by GCHQ, the British Intelligence and military surveillance headquarters, has created a social distancing wrist sensor that alerts people when they get too close to others. The CIA has also supported tech companies developing similar devices. The wearable sensor was developed by Tended, one of a number of start-up companies supported by GCHQ (see the CIA and DARPA). The device can be worn on the wrist or as a tag on the waistband and will vibrate whenever someone wearing the device breaches social distancing and gets anywhere near natural human contact. The company had a lucky break in that it was developing a distancing sensor when the 'Covid' hoax arrived which immediately provided a potentially enormous market. How fortunate. The government in big-time Cult-controlled Ontario in Canada is investing $2.5 million in wearable contact tracing technology that 'will alert users if they may have been exposed to the Covid-19 in the workplace and will beep or vibrate if they are within six feet of another person'. Facedrive Inc., the technology company behind this, was founded in 2016 with funding from the Ontario Together Fund and obviously they, too, had a prophet on the board of directors. The human surveillance and control technology is called TraceSCAN and would be worn by the human cyborgs in places such as airports, workplaces, construction sites, care homes and … *schools*.

I emphasise schools with children and young people the prime targets. You know what is planned for society as a whole if you keep your eyes on the schools. They have always been places where the state program the next generation of slaves to be its compliant worker-ants – or Woker-ants these days; but in the mist of the 'Covid' madness they have been transformed into mind laboratories on a scale never seen before. Teachers and head teachers are just as programmed as the kids – often more so. Children are kept apart from human interaction by walk lanes, classroom distancing, staggered meal times, masks, and the rolling-out of buzzer systems. Schools are now physically laid out as a laboratory maze for lab-rats. Lunatics at a school in Anchorage, Alaska, who should be prosecuted for child abuse, took away desks and forced children to kneel (know your place) on a mat for five hours a day while wearing a mask and using their chairs as a desk. How this was supposed to impact on a 'virus' only these clinically insane people can tell you and even then it would be clap-trap. The school banned recess (interaction), art classes (creativity), and physical exercise (getting body and mind moving out of inertia). Everyone behind this outrage should be in jail or better still a mental institution. The behavioural manipulators are all for this dystopian approach to schools. Professor Susan Michie, the mind-doctor and British Communist Party member, said it was wrong to say that schools were safe. They had to be made so by 'distancing', masks and ventilation (sitting all day in the cold). I must ask this lady round for dinner on a night I know I am going to be out and not back for weeks. She probably wouldn't be able to make it, anyway, with all the visits to her own psychologist she must have block-booked.

Masking identity

I know how shocking it must be for you that a behaviour manipulator like Michie wants everyone to wear masks which have long been a feature of mind-control programs like the infamous MKUltra in the United States, but, there we are. We live and learn. I spent many years from 1996 to right across the millennium

researching mind control in detail on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere. I met a large number of mind-control survivors and many had been held captive in body and mind by MKUltra. MK stands for mind-control, but employs the German spelling in deference to the Nazis spirited out of Germany at the end of World War Two by Operation Paperclip in which the US authorities, with help from the Vatican, transported Nazi mind-controllers and engineers to America to continue their work. Many of them were behind the creation of NASA and they included Nazi scientist and SS officer Wernher von Braun who swapped designing V-2 rockets to bombard London with designing the Saturn V rockets that powered the NASA moon programme's Apollo craft. I think I may have mentioned that the Cult has no borders. Among Paperclip escapees was Josef Mengele, the Angel of Death in the Nazi concentration camps where he conducted mind and genetic experiments on children often using twins to provide a control twin to measure the impact of his 'work' on the other. If you want to observe the Cult mentality in all its extremes of evil then look into the life of Mengele. I have met many people who suffered mercilessly under Mengele in the United States where he operated under the name Dr Greene and became a stalwart of MKUltra programming and torture. Among his locations was the underground facility in the Mojave Desert in California called the China Lake Naval Weapons Station which is almost entirely below the surface. My books *The Biggest Secret*, *Children of the Matrix* and *The Perception Deception* have the detailed background to MKUltra.

The best-known MKUltra survivor is American Cathy O'Brien. I first met her and her late partner Mark Phillips at a conference in Colorado in 1996. Mark helped her escape and deprogram from decades of captivity in an offshoot of MKUltra known as Project Monarch in which 'sex slaves' were provided for the rich and famous including Father George Bush, Dick Cheney and the Clintons. Read Cathy and Mark's book *Trance-Formation of America* and if you are new to this you will be shocked to the core. I read it in 1996 shortly before, with the usual synchronicity of my life, I found

myself given a book table at the conference right next to hers. MKUltra never ended despite being very publicly exposed (only a small part of it) in the 1970s and continues in other guises. I am still in touch with Cathy. She contacted me during 2020 after masks became compulsory in many countries to tell me how they were used as part of MKUltra programming. I had been observing 'Covid regulations' and the relationship between authority and public for months. I saw techniques that I knew were employed on individuals in MKUltra being used on the global population. I had read many books and manuals on mind control including one called *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* which came to light in the 1980s and was a guide on how to perceptually program on a mass scale. 'Silent Weapons' refers to mind-control. I remembered a line from the manual as governments, medical authorities and law enforcement agencies have so obviously talked to – or rather at – the adult population since the 'Covid' hoax began as if they are children. The document said:

> If a person is spoken to by a T.V. advertiser as if he were a twelve-year-old, then, due to suggestibility, he will, with a certain probability, respond or react to that suggestion with the uncritical response of a twelve-year-old and will reach in to his economic reservoir and deliver its energy to buy that product on impulse when he passes it in the store.

That's why authority has spoken to adults like children since all this began.

Why did Michael Jackson wear masks?

Every aspect of the 'Covid' narrative has mind-control as its central theme. Cathy O'Brien wrote an article for davidicke.com about the connection between masks and mind control. Her daughter Kelly who I first met in the 1990s was born while Cathy was still held captive in MKUltra. Kelly was forced to wear a mask as part of her programming from the age of *two* to dehumanise her, target her sense of individuality and reduce the amount of oxygen her brain and body received. *Bingo*. This is the real reason for compulsory

masks, why they have been enforced en masse, and why they seek to increase the number they demand you wear. First one, then two, with one disgraceful alleged 'doctor' recommending four which is nothing less than a death sentence. Where and how often they must be worn is being expanded for the purpose of mass mind control and damaging respiratory health which they can call 'Covid-19'. Canada's government headed by the man-child Justin Trudeau, says it's fine for children of two and older to wear masks. An insane 'study' in Italy involving just 47 children concluded there was no problem for babies as young as *four months* wearing them. Even after people were 'vaccinated' they were still told to wear masks by the criminal that is Anthony Fauci. Cathy wrote that mandating masks is allowing the authorities literally to control the air we breathe which is what was done in MKUltra. You might recall how the singer Michael Jackson wore masks and there is a reason for that. He was subjected to MKUltra mind control through Project Monarch and his psyche was scrambled by these simpletons. Cathy wrote:

In MKUltra Project Monarch mind control, Michael Jackson had to wear a mask to silence his voice so he could not reach out for help. Remember how he developed that whisper voice when he wasn't singing? Masks control the mind from the outside in, like the redefining of words is doing. By controlling what we can and cannot say for fear of being labeled racist or beaten, for example, it ultimately controls thought that drives our words and ultimately actions (or lack thereof).

Likewise, a mask muffles our speech so that we are not heard, which controls voice … words … mind. This is Mind Control. Masks are an obvious mind control device, and I am disturbed so many people are complying on a global scale. Masks depersonalize while making a person feel as though they have no voice. It is a barrier to others. People who would never choose to comply but are forced to wear a mask in order to keep their job, and ultimately their family fed, are compromised. They often feel shame and are subdued. People have stopped talking with each other while media controls the narrative.

The 'no voice' theme has often become literal with train passengers told not to speak to each other in case they pass on the 'virus', singing banned for the same reason and bonkers California officials telling people riding roller coasters that they cannot shout and scream. Cathy said she heard every day from healed MKUltra survivors who cannot wear a mask without flashing back on ways

their breathing was controlled – 'from ball gags and penises to water boarding'. She said that through the years when she saw images of people in China wearing masks 'due to pollution' that it was really to control their oxygen levels. 'I knew it was as much of a population control mechanism of depersonalisation as are burkas', she said. Masks are another Chinese communist/fascist method of control that has been swept across the West as the West becomes China at lightning speed since we entered 2020.

Mask-19

There are other reasons for mandatory masks and these include destroying respiratory health to call it 'Covid-19' and stunting brain development of children and the young. Dr Margarite Griesz-Brisson MD, PhD, is a Consultant Neurologist and Neurophysiologist and the Founder and Medical Director of the London Neurology and Pain Clinic. Her CV goes down the street and round the corner. She is clearly someone who cares about people and won't parrot the propaganda. Griesz-Brisson has a PhD in pharmacology, with special interest in neurotoxicology, environmental medicine, neuroregeneration and neuroplasticity (the way the brain can change in the light of information received). She went public in October, 2020, with a passionate warning about the effects of mask-wearing laws:

> The reinhalation of our exhaled air will without a doubt create oxygen deficiency and a flooding of carbon dioxide. We know that the human brain is very sensitive to oxygen deprivation. There are nerve cells for example in the hippocampus that can't be longer than 3 minutes without oxygen – they cannot survive. The acute warning symptoms are headaches, drowsiness, dizziness, issues in concentration, slowing down of reaction time – reactions of the cognitive system.

Oh, I know, let's tell bus, truck and taxi drivers to wear them and people working machinery. How about pilots, doctors and police? Griesz-Brisson makes the important point that while the symptoms she mentions may fade as the body readjusts this does not alter the fact that people continue to operate in oxygen deficit with long list of

potential consequences. She said it was well known that neurodegenerative diseases take years or decades to develop. 'If today you forget your phone number, the breakdown in your brain would have already started 20 or 30 years ago.' She said degenerative processes in your brain are getting amplified as your oxygen deprivation continues through wearing a mask. Nerve cells in the brain are unable to divide themselves normally in these circumstances and lost nerve cells will no longer be regenerated. 'What is gone is gone.' Now consider that people like shop workers and *schoolchildren* are wearing masks for hours every day. What in the name of sanity is going to be happening to them? 'I do not wear a mask, I need my brain to think', Griesz-Brisson said, 'I want to have a clear head when I deal with my patients and not be in a carbon dioxide-induced anaesthesia'. If you are told to wear a mask anywhere ask the organisation, police, store, whatever, for their risk assessment on the dangers and negative effects on mind and body of enforcing mask-wearing. They won't have one because it has never been done not even by government. All of them must be subject to class-action lawsuits as the consequences come to light. They don't do mask risk assessments for an obvious reason. They know what the conclusions would be and independent scientific studies that *have* been done tell a horror story of consequences.

'Masks are criminal'

Dr Griesz-Brisson said that for children and adolescents, masks are an absolute no-no. They had an extremely active and adaptive immune system and their brain was incredibly active with so much to learn. 'The child's brain, or the youth's brain, is thirsting for oxygen.' The more metabolically active an organ was, the more oxygen it required; and in children and adolescents every organ was metabolically active. Griesz-Brisson said that to deprive a child's or adolescent's brain of oxygen, or to restrict it in any way, was not only dangerous to their health, it was absolutely criminal. 'Oxygen deficiency inhibits the development of the brain, and the damage that has taken place as a result CANNOT be reversed.' Mind

manipulators of MKUltra put masks on two-year-olds they wanted to neurologically rewire and you can see why. Griesz-Brisson said a child needs the brain to learn and the brain needs oxygen to function. 'We don't need a clinical study for that. This is simple, indisputable physiology.' Consciously and purposely induced oxygen deficiency was an absolutely deliberate health hazard, and an absolute medical contraindication which means that 'this drug, this therapy, this method or measure should not be used, and is not allowed to be used'. To coerce an entire population to use an absolute medical contraindication by force, she said, there had to be definite and serious reasons and the reasons must be presented to competent interdisciplinary and independent bodies to be verified and authorised. She had this warning of the consequences that were coming if mask wearing continued:

When, in ten years, dementia is going to increase exponentially, and the younger generations couldn't reach their god-given potential, it won't help to say 'we didn't need the masks'. I know how damaging oxygen deprivation is for the brain, cardiologists know how damaging it is for the heart, pulmonologists know how damaging it is for the lungs. Oxygen deprivation damages every single organ. Where are our health departments, our health insurance, our medical associations? It would have been their duty to be vehemently against the lockdown and to stop it and stop it from the very beginning.

Why do the medical boards issue punishments to doctors who give people exemptions? Does the person or the doctor seriously have to prove that oxygen deprivation harms people? What kind of medicine are our doctors and medical associations representing? Who is responsible for this crime? The ones who want to enforce it? The ones who let it happen and play along, or the ones who don't prevent it?

All of the organisations and people she mentions there either answer directly to the Cult or do whatever hierarchical levels above them tell them to do. The outcome of both is the same. 'It's not about masks, it's not about viruses, it's certainly not about your health', Griesz-Brisson said. 'It is about much, much more. I am not participating. I am not afraid.' They were taking our air to breathe and there was no unfounded medical exemption from face masks. Oxygen deprivation was dangerous for every single brain. It had to be the free decision of every human being whether they want to

wear a mask that was absolutely ineffective to protect themselves from a virus. She ended by rightly identifying where the responsibility lies for all this:

> The imperative of the hour is personal responsibility. We are responsible for what we think, not the media. We are responsible for what we do, not our superiors. We are responsible for our health, not the World Health Organization. And we are responsible for what happens in our country, not the government.

Halle-bloody-lujah.

But surgeons wear masks, right?

Independent studies of mask-wearing have produced a long list of reports detailing mental, emotional and physical dangers. What a definition of insanity to see police officers imposing mask-wearing on the public which will cumulatively damage their health while the police themselves wear masks that will cumulatively damage *their* health. It's utter madness and both public and police do this because 'the government says so' – yes a government of brain-donor idiots like UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock reading the 'follow the science' scripts of psychopathic, lunatic psychologists. The response you get from Stockholm syndrome sufferers defending the very authorities that are destroying them and their families is that 'surgeons wear masks'. This is considered the game, set and match that they must work and don't cause oxygen deficit. Well, actually, scientific studies have shown that they *do* and oxygen levels are monitored in operating theatres to compensate. Surgeons wear masks to stop spittle and such like dropping into open wounds – not to stop 'viral particles' which are so miniscule they can only be seen through an electron microscope. Holes in the masks are significantly bigger than 'viral particles' and if you sneeze or cough they will breach the mask. I watched an incredibly disingenuous 'experiment' that claimed to prove that masks work in catching 'virus' material from the mouth and nose. They did this with a slow motion camera and the mask did block big stuff which stayed inside the mask and

against the face to be breathed in or cause infections on the face as we have seen with many children. 'Viral particles', however, would never have been picked up by the camera as they came through the mask when they are far too small to be seen. The 'experiment' was therefore disingenuous *and* useless.

Studies have concluded that wearing masks in operating theatres (and thus elsewhere) make no difference to preventing infection while the opposite is true with toxic shite building up in the mask and this had led to an explosion in tooth decay and gum disease dubbed by dentists 'mask mouth'. You might have seen the Internet video of a furious American doctor urging people to take off their masks after a four-year-old patient had been rushed to hospital the night before and nearly died with a lung infection that doctors sourced to mask wearing. A study in the journal *Cancer Discovery* found that inhalation of harmful microbes can contribute to advanced stage lung cancer in adults and long-term use of masks can help breed dangerous pathogens. Microbiologists have said frequent mask wearing creates a moist environment in which microbes can grow and proliferate before entering the lungs. The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, or CADTH, a Canadian national organisation that provides research and analysis to healthcare decision-makers, said this as long ago as 2013 in a report entitled 'Use of Surgical Masks in the Operating Room: A Review of the Clinical Effectiveness and Guidelines'. It said:

- No evidence was found to support the use of surgical face masks to reduce the frequency of surgical site infections
- No evidence was found on the effectiveness of wearing surgical face masks to protect staff from infectious material in the operating room.
- Guidelines recommend the use of surgical face masks by staff in the operating room to protect both operating room staff and patients (despite the lack of evidence).

We were told that the world could go back to 'normal' with the arrival of the 'vaccines'. When they came, fraudulent as they are, the story changed as I knew that it would. We are in the midst of transforming 'normal', not going back to it. Mary Ramsay, head of immunisation at Public Health England, echoed the words of US criminal Anthony Fauci who said masks and other regulations must stay no matter if people are vaccinated. The Fauci idiot continued to wear two masks – different colours so both could be clearly seen – after he *claimed* to have been vaccinated. Senator Rand Paul told Fauci in one exchange that his double-masks were 'theatre' and he was right. It's all theatre. Mary Ramsay back-tracked on the vaccine-return-to-normal theme when she said the public may need to wear masks and social-distance for years despite the jabs. 'People have got used to those lower-level restrictions now, and [they] can live with them', she said telling us what the idea has been all along. 'The vaccine does not give you a pass, even if you have had it, you must continue to follow all the guidelines' said a Public Health England statement which reneged on what we had been told before and made having the 'vaccine' irrelevant to 'normality' even by the official story. Spain's fascist government trumped everyone by passing a law mandating the wearing of masks on the beach and even when swimming in the sea. The move would have devastated what's left of the Spanish tourist industry, posed potential breathing dangers to swimmers and had Northern European sunbathers walking around with their forehead brown and the rest of their face white as a sheet. The ruling was so crazy that it had to be retracted after pressure from public and tourist industry, but it confirmed where the Cult wants to go with masks and how clinically insane authority has become. The determination to make masks permanent and hide the serious dangers to body and mind can be seen in the censorship of scientist Professor Denis Rancourt by Bill Gates-funded academic publishing website ResearchGate over his papers exposing the dangers and uselessness of masks. Rancourt said:

ResearchGate today has permanently locked my account, which I have had since 2015. Their reasons graphically show the nature of their attack against democracy, and their corruption of

science … By their obscene non-logic, a scientific review of science articles reporting on harms caused by face masks has a 'potential to cause harm'. No criticism of the psychological device (face masks) is tolerated, if the said criticism shows potential to influence public policy.

This is what happens in a fascist world.

Where are the 'greens' (again)?

Other dangers of wearing masks especially regularly relate to the inhalation of minute plastic fibres into the lungs and the deluge of discarded masks in the environment and oceans. Estimates predicted that more than 1.5 billion disposable masks will end up in the world's oceans every year polluting the water with tons of plastic and endangering marine wildlife. Studies project that humans are using 129 billion face masks each month worldwide – about three million a minute. Most are disposable and made from plastic, non-biodegradable microfibers that break down into smaller plastic particles that become widespread in ecosystems. They are littering cities, clogging sewage channels and turning up in bodies of water. I have written in other books about the immense amounts of microplastics from endless sources now being absorbed into the body. Rolf Halden, director of the Arizona State University (ASU) Biodesign Center for Environmental Health Engineering, was the senior researcher in a 2020 study that analysed 47 human tissue samples and found microplastics in all of them. 'We have detected these chemicals of plastics in every single organ that we have investigated', he said. I wrote in *The Answer* about the world being deluged with microplastics. A study by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) found that people are consuming on average every week some 2,000 tiny pieces of plastic mostly through water and also through marine life and the air. Every year humans are ingesting enough microplastics to fill a heaped dinner plate and in a life-time of 79 years it is enough to fill two large waste bins. Marco Lambertini, WWF International director general said: 'Not only are plastics polluting our oceans and waterways and killing marine life – it's in all of us and we can't escape consuming plastics,' American

geologists found tiny plastic fibres, beads and shards in rainwater samples collected from the remote slopes of the Rocky Mountain National Park near Denver, Colorado. Their report was headed: 'It is raining plastic.' Rachel Adams, senior lecturer in Biomedical Science at Cardiff Metropolitan University, said that among health consequences are internal inflammation and immune responses to a 'foreign body'. She further pointed out that microplastics become carriers of toxins including mercury, pesticides and dioxins (a known cause of cancer and reproductive and developmental problems). These toxins accumulate in the fatty tissues once they enter the body through microplastics. Now this is being compounded massively by people putting plastic on their face and throwing it away.

Workers exposed to polypropylene plastic fibres known as 'flock' have developed 'flock worker's lung' from inhaling small pieces of the flock fibres which can damage lung tissue, reduce breathing capacity and exacerbate other respiratory problems. *Now* … commonly used surgical masks have three layers of melt-blown textiles made of … polypropylene. We have billions of people putting these microplastics against their mouth, nose and face for hours at a time day after day in the form of masks. How does anyone think that will work out? I mean – what could possibly go wrong? We posted a number of scientific studies on this at davidicke.com, but when I went back to them as I was writing this book the links to the science research website where they were hosted were dead. Anything that challenges the official narrative in any way is either censored or vilified. The official narrative is so unsupportable by the evidence that only deleting the truth can protect it. A study by Chinese scientists still survived – with the usual twist which it why it was still active, I guess. Yes, they found that virtually all the masks they tested increased the daily intake of microplastic fibres, but people should still wear them because the danger from the 'virus' was worse said the crazy 'team' from the Institute of Hydrobiology in Wuhan. Scientists first discovered microplastics in lung tissue of some patients who died of lung cancer

in the 1990s. Subsequent studies have confirmed the potential health damage with the plastic degrading slowly and remaining in the lungs to accumulate in volume. Wuhan researchers used a machine simulating human breathing to establish that masks shed up to nearly 4,000 microplastic fibres in a month with reused masks producing more. Scientists said some masks are laced with toxic chemicals and a variety of compounds seriously restricted for both health and environmental reasons. They include cobalt (used in blue dye) and formaldehyde known to cause watery eyes, burning sensations in the eyes, nose, and throat, plus coughing, wheezing and nausea. No – that must be 'Covid-19'.

Mask 'worms'

There is another and potentially even more sinister content of masks. Mostly new masks of different makes filmed under a microscope around the world have been found to contain strange black fibres or 'worms' that appear to move or 'crawl' by themselves and react to heat and water. The nearest I have seen to them are the self-replicating fibres that are pulled out through the skin of those suffering from Morgellons disease which has been connected to the phenomena of 'chemtrails' which I will bring into the story later on. Morgellons fibres continue to grow outside the body and have a form of artificial intelligence. Black 'worm' fibres in masks have that kind of feel to them and there is a nanotechnology technique called 'worm micelles' which carry and release drugs or anything else you want to deliver to the body. For sure the suppression of humanity by mind altering drugs is the Cult agenda big time and the more excuses they can find to gain access to the body the more opportunities there are to make that happen whether through 'vaccines' or masks pushed against the mouth and nose for hours on end.

So let us summarise the pros and cons of masks:

Against masks: Breathing in your own carbon dioxide; depriving the body and brain of sufficient oxygen; build-up of toxins in the mask that can be breathed into the lungs and cause rashes on the face and 'mask-mouth'; breathing microplastic fibres and toxic chemicals into the lungs; dehumanisation and deleting individualisation by literally making people faceless; destroying human emotional interaction through facial expression and deleting parental connection with their babies which look for guidance to their facial expression.

For masks: They don't protect you from a 'virus' that doesn't exist and even if it did 'viral' particles are so minute they are smaller than the holes in the mask.

Governments, police, supermarkets, businesses, transport companies, and all the rest who seek to impose masks have done no risk assessment on their consequences for health and psychology and are now open to group lawsuits when the impact becomes clear with a cumulative epidemic of respiratory and other disease. Authorities will try to exploit these effects and hide the real cause by dubbing them 'Covid-19'. Can you imagine setting out to force the population to wear health-destroying masks without doing any assessment of the risks? It is criminal and it is evil, but then how many people targeted in this way, who see their children told to wear them all day at school, have asked for a risk assessment? Billions can't be imposed upon by the few unless the billions allow it. Oh, yes, with just a tinge of irony, 85 percent of all masks made worldwide come from *China*.

Wash your hands in toxic shite

'Covid' rules include the use of toxic sanitisers and again the health consequences of constantly applying toxins to be absorbed through the skin is obvious to any level of Renegade Mind. America's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said that sanitisers are drugs and issued a warning about 75 dangerous brands which contain

methanol used in antifreeze and can cause death, kidney damage and blindness. The FDA circulated the following warning even for those brands that it claims to be safe:

Store hand sanitizer out of the reach of pets and children, and children should use it only with adult supervision. Do not drink hand sanitizer. This is particularly important for young children, especially toddlers, who may be attracted by the pleasant smell or brightly colored bottles of hand sanitizer.

Drinking even a small amount of hand sanitizer can cause alcohol poisoning in children. (However, there is no need to be concerned if your children eat with or lick their hands after using hand sanitizer.) During this coronavirus pandemic, poison control centers have had an increase in calls about accidental ingestion of hand sanitizer, so it is important that adults monitor young children's use.

Do not allow pets to swallow hand sanitizer. If you think your pet has eaten something potentially dangerous, call your veterinarian or a pet poison control center right away. Hand sanitizer is flammable and should be stored away from heat and flames. When using hand sanitizer, rub your hands until they feel completely dry before performing activities that may involve heat, sparks, static electricity, or open flames.

There you go, perfectly safe, then, and that's without even a mention of the toxins absorbed through the skin. Come on kids – sanitise your hands everywhere you go. It will save you from the 'virus'. Put all these elements together of the 'Covid' normal and see how much health and psychology is being cumulatively damaged, even devastated, to 'protect your health'. Makes sense, right? They are only imposing these things because they care, right? *Right?*

Submitting to insanity

Psychological reframing of the population goes very deep and is done in many less obvious ways. I hear people say how contradictory and crazy 'Covid' rules are and how they are ever changing. This is explained away by dismissing those involved as idiots. It is a big mistake. The Cult is delighted if its cold calculation is perceived as incompetence and idiocy when it is anything but. Oh, yes, there are idiots within the system – lots of them – but they are *administering* the Cult agenda, mostly unknowingly. They are not deciding and dictating it. The bulwark against tyranny is self-

respect, always has been, always will be. It is self-respect that has broken every tyranny in history. By its very nature self-respect will not bow to oppression and its perpetrators. There is so little self-respect that it's always the few that overturn dictators. Many may eventually follow, but the few with the iron spines (self-respect) kick it off and generate the momentum. The Cult targets self-respect in the knowledge that once this has gone only submission remains. Crazy, contradictory, ever-changing 'Covid' rules are systematically applied by psychologists to delete self-respect. They *want* you to see that the rules make no sense. It is one thing to decide to do something when *you* have made the choice based on evidence and logic. You still retain your self-respect. It is quite another when you can see what you are being told to do is insane, ridiculous and makes no sense, and *yet you still do it*. Your self-respect is extinguished and this has been happening as ever more obviously stupid and nonsensical things have been demanded and the great majority have complied even when they can see they are stupid and nonsensical.

People walk around in face-nappies knowing they are damaging their health and make no difference to a 'virus'. They do it in fear of not doing it. I know it's daft, but I'll do it anyway. When that happens something dies inside of you and submissive reframing has begun. Next there's a need to hide from yourself that you have conceded your self-respect and you convince yourself that you have not really submitted to fear and intimidation. You begin to believe that you are complying with craziness because it's the right thing to do. When first you concede your self-respect of 2+2 = 4 to 2+2 = 5 you *know* you are compromising your self-respect. Gradually to avoid facing that fact you begin to *believe* that 2+2=5. You have been reframed and I have been watching this process happening in the human psyche on an industrial scale. The Cult is working to break your spirit and one of its major tools in that war is humiliation. I read how former American soldier Bradley Manning (later Chelsea Manning after a sex-change) was treated after being jailed for supplying WikiLeaks with documents exposing the enormity of

government and elite mendacity. Manning was isolated in solitary confinement for eight months, put under 24-hour surveillance, forced to hand over clothing before going to bed, and stand naked for every roll call. This is systematic humiliation. The introduction of anal swab 'Covid' tests in China has been done for the same reason to delete self-respect and induce compliant submission. Anal swabs are mandatory for incoming passengers in parts of China and American diplomats have said they were forced to undergo the indignity which would have been calculated humiliation by the Cult-owned Chinese government that has America in its sights.

Government-people: An abusive relationship

Spirit-breaking psychological techniques include giving people hope and apparent respite from tyranny only to take it away again. This happened in the UK during Christmas, 2020, when the psycho-psychologists and their political lackeys announced an easing of restrictions over the holiday only to reimpose them almost immediately on the basis of yet another lie. There is a big psychological difference between getting used to oppression and being given hope of relief only to have that dashed. Psychologists know this and we have seen the technique used repeatedly. Then there is traumatising people before you introduce more extreme regulations that require compliance. A perfect case was the announcement by the dark and sinister Whitty and Vallance in the UK that 'new data' predicted that 4,000 could die every day over the winter of 2020/2021 if we did not lockdown again. I think they call it lying and after traumatising people with that claim out came Jackboot Johnson the next day with new curbs on human freedom. Psychologists know that a frightened and traumatised mind becomes suggestable to submission and behaviour reframing. Underpinning all this has been to make people fearful and suspicious of each other and see themselves as a potential danger to others. In league with deleted self-respect you have the perfect psychological recipe for self-loathing. The relationship between authority and public is now demonstrably the same as that of

subservience to an abusive partner. These are signs of an abusive relationship explained by psychologist Leslie Becker-Phelps:

Psychological and emotional abuse: Undermining a partner's self-worth with verbal attacks, name-calling, and belittling. Humiliating the partner in public, unjustly accusing them of having an affair, or interrogating them about their every behavior. Keeping partner confused or off balance by saying they were just kidding or blaming the partner for 'making' them act this way … Feigning in public that they care while turning against them in private. This leads to victims frequently feeling confused, incompetent, unworthy, hopeless, and chronically self-doubting. [Apply these techniques to how governments have treated the population since New Year, 2020, and the parallels are obvious.]

Physical abuse: The abuser might physically harm their partner in a range of ways, such as grabbing, hitting, punching, or shoving them. They might throw objects at them or harm them with a weapon. [Observe the physical harm imposed by masks, lockdown, and so on.]

Threats and intimidation: One way abusers keep their partners in line is by instilling fear. They might be verbally threatening, or give threatening looks or gestures. Abusers often make it known that they are tracking their partner's every move. They might destroy their partner's possessions, threaten to harm them, or threaten to harm their family members. Not surprisingly, victims of this abuse often feel anxiety, fear, and panic. [No words necessary.]

Isolation: Abusers often limit their partner's activities, forbidding them to talk or interact with friends or family. They might limit access to a car or even turn off their phone. All of this might be done by physically holding them against their will, but is often accomplished through psychological abuse and intimidation. The more isolated a person feels, the fewer resources they have to help gain perspective on their situation and to escape from it. [No words necessary.]

Economic abuse: Abusers often make their partners beholden to them for money by controlling access to funds of any kind. They might prevent their partner from getting a job or withhold access to money they earn from a job. This creates financial dependency that makes leaving the relationship very difficult. [See destruction of livelihoods and the proposed meagre 'guaranteed income' so long as you do whatever you are told.]

Using children: An abuser might disparage their partner's parenting skills, tell their children lies about their partner, threaten to take custody of their children, or threaten to harm their children. These tactics instil fear and often elicit compliance. [See reframed social service mafia and how children are being mercilessly abused by the state over 'Covid' while their parents look on too frightened to do anything.]

A further recurring trait in an abusive relationship is the abused blaming themselves for their abuse and making excuses for the abuser. We have the public blaming each other for lockdown abuse by government and many making excuses for the government while attacking those who challenge the government. How often we have heard authorities say that rules are being imposed or reimposed only because people have refused to 'behave' and follow the rules. We don't want to do it – it's *you*.

Renegade Minds are an antidote to all of these things. They will never concede their self-respect no matter what the circumstances. Even when apparent humiliation is heaped upon them they laugh in its face and reflect back the humiliation on the abuser where it belongs. Renegade Minds will never wear masks they know are only imposed to humiliate, suppress and damage both physically and psychologically. Consequences will take care of themselves and they will never break their spirit or cause them to concede to tyranny. UK newspaper columnist Peter Hitchens was one of the few in the mainstream media to speak out against lockdowns and forced vaccinations. He then announced he had taken the jab. He wanted to see family members abroad and he believed vaccine passports were inevitable even though they had not yet been introduced. Hitchens

has a questioning and critical mind, but not a Renegade one. If he had no amount of pressure would have made him concede. Hitchens excused his action by saying that the battle has been lost. Renegade Minds never accept defeat when freedom is at stake and even if they are the last one standing the self-respect of not submitting to tyranny is more important than any outcome or any consequence.

That's why Renegade Minds are the only minds that ever changed anything worth changing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

'Reframing' insanity

Insanity is relative. It depends on who has who locked in what cage
Ray Bradbury

'Reframing' a mind means simply to change its perception and behaviour. This can be done subconsciously to such an extent that subjects have no idea they have been 'reframed' while to any observer changes in behaviour and attitudes are obvious.

Human society is being reframed on a ginormous scale since the start of 2020 and here we have the reason why psychologists rather than doctors have been calling the shots. Ask most people who have succumbed to 'Covid' reframing if they have changed and most will say 'no'; but they *have* and fundamentally. The Cult's long-game has been preparing for these times since way back and crucial to that has been to prepare both population and officialdom mentally and emotionally. To use the mind-control parlance they had to reframe the population with a mentality that would submit to fascism and reframe those in government and law enforcement to impose fascism or at least go along with it. The result has been the fact-deleted mindlessness of 'Wokeness' and officialdom that has either enthusiastically or unquestioningly imposed global tyranny demanded by reframed politicians on behalf of psychopathic and deeply evil cultists. 'Cognitive reframing' identifies and challenges the way someone sees the world in the form of situations, experiences and emotions and then restructures those perceptions to view the same set of circumstances in a different way. This can have

benefits if the attitudes are personally destructive while on the other side it has the potential for individual and collective mind control which the subject has no idea has even happened.

Cognitive therapy was developed in the 1960s by Aaron T. Beck who was born in Rhode Island in 1921 as the son of Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine. He became interested in the techniques as a treatment for depression. Beck's daughter Judith S. Beck is prominent in the same field and they founded the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Philadelphia in 1994. Cognitive reframing, however, began to be used worldwide by those with a very dark agenda. The Cult reframes politicians to change their attitudes and actions until they are completely at odds with what they once appeared to stand for. The same has been happening to government administrators at all levels, law enforcement, military and the human population. Cultists love mind control for two main reasons: It allows them to control what people think, do and say to secure agenda advancement and, by definition, it calms their legendary insecurity and fear of the unexpected. I have studied mind control since the time I travelled America in 1996. I may have been talking to next to no one in terms of an audience in those years, but my goodness did I gather a phenomenal amount of information and knowledge about so many things including the techniques of mind control. I have described this in detail in other books going back to *The Biggest Secret* in 1998. I met a very large number of people recovering from MKUltra and its offshoots and successors and I began to see how these same techniques were being used on the population in general. This was never more obvious than since the 'Covid' hoax began.

Reframing the enforcers

I have observed over the last two decades and more the very clear transformation in the dynamic between the police, officialdom and the public. I tracked this in the books as the relationship mutated from one of serving the public to seeing them as almost the enemy and certainly a lower caste. There has always been a class divide

based on income and always been some psychopathic, corrupt, and big-I-am police officers. This was different. Wholesale change was unfolding in the collective dynamic; it was less about money and far more about position and perceived power. An us-and-them was emerging. Noses were lifted skyward by government administration and law enforcement and their attitude to the public they were *supposed* to be serving changed to one of increasing contempt, superiority and control. The transformation was so clear and widespread that it had to be planned. Collective attitudes and dynamics do not change naturally and organically that quickly on that scale. I then came across an organisation in Britain called Common Purpose created in the late 1980s by Julia Middleton who would work in the office of Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott during the long and disastrous premiership of war criminal Tony Blair. When Blair speaks the Cult is speaking and the man should have been in jail a long time ago. Common Purpose proclaims itself to be one of the biggest 'leadership development' organisations in the world while functioning as a *charity* with all the financial benefits which come from that. It hosts 'leadership development' courses and programmes all over the world and claims to have 'brought together' what it calls 'leaders' from more than 100 countries on six continents. The modus operandi of Common Purpose can be compared with the work of the UK government's reframing network that includes the Behavioural Insights Team 'nudge unit' and 'Covid' reframing specialists at SPI-B. WikiLeaks described Common Purpose long ago as 'a hidden virus in our government and schools' which is unknown to the general public: 'It recruits and trains "leaders" to be loyal to the directives of Common Purpose and the EU, instead of to their own departments, which they then undermine or subvert, the NHS [National Health Service] being an example.' This is a vital point to understand the 'Covid' hoax. The NHS, and its equivalent around the world, has been utterly reframed in terms of administrators and much of the medical personnel with the transformation underpinned by recruitment policies. The outcome has been the criminal and psychopathic behaviour of the

NHS over 'Covid' and we have seen the same in every other major country. WikiLeaks said Common Purpose trainees are 'learning to rule without regard to democracy' and to usher in a police state (current events explained). Common Purpose operated like a 'glue' and had members in the NHS, BBC, police, legal profession, church, many of Britain's 7,000 quangos, local councils, the Civil Service, government ministries and Parliament, and controlled many RDA's (Regional Development Agencies). Here we have one answer for how and why British institutions and their like in other countries have changed so negatively in relation to the public. This further explains how and why the beyond-disgraceful reframed BBC has become a propaganda arm of 'Covid' fascism. They are all part of a network pursuing the same goal.

By 2019 Common Purpose was quoting a figure of 85,000 'leaders' that had attended its programmes. These 'students' of all ages are known as Common Purpose 'graduates' and they consist of government, state and local government officials and administrators, police chiefs and officers, and a whole range of others operating within the national, local and global establishment. Cressida Dick, Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, is the Common Purpose graduate who was the 'Gold Commander' that oversaw what can only be described as the murder of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes in 2005. He was held down by psychopathic police and shot seven times in the head by a psychopathic lunatic after being mistaken for a terrorist when he was just a bloke going about his day. Dick authorised officers to pursue and keep surveillance on de Menezes and ordered that he be stopped from entering the underground train system. Police psychopaths took her at her word clearly. She was 'disciplined' for this outrage by being *promoted* – eventually to the top of the 'Met' police where she has been a disaster. Many Chief Constables controlling the police in different parts of the UK are and have been Common Purpose graduates. I have heard the 'graduate' network described as a sort of Mafia or secret society operating within the fabric of government at all levels pursuing a collective policy

ingrained at Common Purpose training events. Founder Julia Middleton herself has said:

> Locally and internationally, Common Purpose graduates will be 'lighting small fires' to create change in their organisations and communities … The Common Purpose effect is best illustrated by the many stories of small changes brought about by leaders, who themselves have changed.

A Common Purpose mission statement declared:

> Common Purpose aims to improve the way society works by expanding the vision, decision-making ability and influence of all kinds of leaders. The organisation runs a variety of educational programmes for leaders of all ages, backgrounds and sectors, in order to provide them with the inspirational, information and opportunities they need to change the world.

Yes, but into what? Since 2020 the answer has become clear.

NLP and the Delphi technique

Common Purpose would seem to be a perfect name or would common programming be better? One of the foundation methods of reaching 'consensus' (group think) is by setting the agenda theme and then encouraging, cajoling or pressuring everyone to agree a 'consensus' in line with the core theme promoted by Common Purpose. The methodology involves the 'Delphi technique', or an adaption of it, in which opinions are expressed that are summarised by a 'facilitator or change agent' at each stage. Participants are 'encouraged' to modify their views in the light of what others have said. Stage by stage the former individual opinions are merged into group consensus which just happens to be what Common Purpose wants them to believe. A key part of this is to marginalise anyone refusing to concede to group think and turn the group against them to apply pressure to conform. We are seeing this very technique used on the general population to make 'Covid' group-thinkers hostile to those who have seen through the bullshit. People can be reframed by using perception manipulation methods such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in which you change perception with the use of

carefully constructed language. An NLP website described the technique this way:

… A method of influencing brain behaviour (the 'neuro' part of the phrase) through the use of language (the 'linguistic' part) and other types of communication to enable a person to 'recode' the way the brain responds to stimuli (that's the 'programming') and manifest new and better behaviours. Neuro-Linguistic Programming often incorporates hypnosis and self-hypnosis to help achieve the change (or 'programming') that is wanted.

British alternative media operation UKColumn has done very detailed research into Common Purpose over a long period. I quoted co-founder and former naval officer Brian Gerrish in my book *Remember Who You Are*, published in 2011, as saying the following years before current times:

It is interesting that many of the mothers who have had children taken by the State speak of the Social Services people being icily cool, emotionless and, as two ladies said in slightly different words, '… like little robots'. We know that NLP is cumulative, so people can be given small imperceptible doses of NLP in a course here, another in a few months, next year etc. In this way, major changes are accrued in their personality, but the day by day change is almost unnoticeable.

In these and other ways 'graduates' have had their perceptions uniformly reframed and they return to their roles in the institutions of government, law enforcement, legal profession, military, 'education', the UK National Health Service and the whole swathe of the establishment structure to pursue a common agenda preparing for the 'post-industrial', 'post-democratic' society. I say 'preparing' but we are now there. 'Post-industrial' is code for the Great Reset and 'post-democratic' is 'Covid' fascism. UKColumn has spoken to partners of those who have attended Common Purpose 'training'. They have described how personalities and attitudes of 'graduates' changed very noticeably for the worse by the time they had completed the course. They had been 'reframed' and told they are the 'leaders' – the special ones – who know better than the population. There has also been the very demonstrable recruitment of psychopaths and narcissists into government administration at all

levels and law enforcement. If you want psychopathy hire psychopaths and you get a simple cause and effect. If you want administrators, police officers and 'leaders' to perceive the public as lesser beings who don't matter then employ narcissists. These personalities are identified using 'psychometrics' that identifies knowledge, abilities, attitudes and personality traits, mostly through carefully-designed questionnaires and tests. As this policy has passed through the decades we have had power-crazy, power-trippers appointed into law enforcement, security and government administration in preparation for current times and the dynamic between public and law enforcement/officialdom has been transformed. UKColumn's Brian Gerrish said of the narcissistic personality:

> Their love of themselves and power automatically means that they will crush others who get in their way. I received a major piece of the puzzle when a friend pointed out that when they made public officials re-apply for their own jobs several years ago they were also required to do psychometric tests. This was undoubtedly the start of the screening process to get 'their' sort of people in post.

How obvious that has been since 2020 although it was clear what was happening long before if people paid attention to the changing public-establishment dynamic.

Change agents

At the centre of events in 'Covid' Britain is the National Health Service (NHS) which has behaved disgracefully in slavishly following the Cult agenda. The NHS management structure is awash with Common Purpose graduates or 'change agents' working to a common cause. Helen Bevan, a Chief of Service Transformation at the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, co-authored a document called 'Towards a million change agents, a review of the social movements literature: implications for large scale change in the NHS'. The document compared a project management approach to that of change and social movements where 'people change

themselves and each other – peer to peer'. Two definitions given for a 'social movement' were:

A group of people who consciously attempt to build a radically new social order; involves people of a broad range of social backgrounds; and deploys politically confrontational and socially disruptive tactics – Cyrus Zirakzadeh 1997

Collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities – Sidney Tarrow 1994

Helen Bevan wrote another NHS document in which she defined 'framing' as 'the process by which leaders construct, articulate and put across their message in a powerful and compelling way in order to win people to their cause and call them to action'. I think I could come up with another definition that would be rather more accurate. The National Health Service and institutions of Britain and the wider world have been taken over by reframed 'change agents' and that includes everything from the United Nations to national governments, local councils and social services which have been kidnapping children from loving parents on an extraordinary and gathering scale on the road to the end of parenthood altogether. Children from loving homes are stolen and kidnapped by the state and put into the 'care' (inversion) of the local authority through council homes, foster parents and forced adoption. At the same time children are allowed to be abused without response while many are under council 'care'. UKColumn highlighted the Common Purpose connection between South Yorkshire Police and Rotherham council officers in the case of the scandal in that area of the sexual exploitation of children to which the authorities turned not one blind eye, but both:

We were alarmed to discover that the Chief Executive, the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services, the Manager for the Local Strategic Partnership, the Community Cohesion Manager, the Cabinet Member for Cohesion, the Chief Constable and his predecessor had all attended Leadership training courses provided by the pseudo-charity Common Purpose.

Once 'change agents' have secured positions of hire and fire within any organisation things start to move very quickly. Personnel are then hired and fired on the basis of whether they will work towards the agenda the change agent represents. If they do they are rapidly promoted even though they may be incompetent. Those more qualified and skilled who are pre-Common Purpose 'old school' see their careers stall and even disappear. This has been happening for decades in every institution of state, police, 'health' and social services and all of them have been transformed as a result in their attitudes to their jobs and the public. Medical professions, including nursing, which were once vocations for the caring now employ many cold, callous and couldn't give a shit personality types. The UKColumn investigation concluded:

By blurring the boundaries between people, professions, public and private sectors, responsibility and accountability, Common Purpose encourages 'graduates' to believe that as new selected leaders, they can work together, outside of the established political and social structures, to achieve a paradigm shift or CHANGE – so called 'Leading Beyond Authority'. In doing so, the allegiance of the individual becomes 'reframed' on CP colleagues and their NETWORK.

Reframing the Face-Nappies

Nowhere has this process been more obvious than in the police where recruitment of psychopaths and development of unquestioning mind-controlled group-thinkers have transformed law enforcement into a politically-correct 'Woke' joke and a travesty of what should be public service. Today they wear their face-nappies like good little gofers and enforce 'Covid' rules which are fascism under another name. Alongside the specifically-recruited psychopaths we have software minds incapable of free thought. Brian Gerrish again:

An example is the policeman who would not get on a bike for a press photo because he had not done the cycling proficiency course. Normal people say this is political correctness gone mad. Nothing could be further from the truth. The policeman has been reframed, and in his reality it is perfect common sense not to get on the bike 'because he hasn't done the cycling course'.

Another example of this is where the police would not rescue a boy from a pond until they had taken advice from above on the 'risk assessment'. A normal person would have arrived, perhaps thought of the risk for a moment, and dived in. To the police now 'reframed', they followed 'normal' procedure.

There are shocking cases of reframed ambulance crews doing the same. Sheer unthinking stupidity of London Face-Nappies headed by Common Purpose graduate Cressida Dick can be seen in their behaviour at a vigil in March, 2021, for a murdered woman, Sarah Everard. A police officer had been charged with the crime. Anyone with a brain would have left the vigil alone in the circumstances. Instead they 'manhandled' women to stop them breaking 'Covid rules' to betray classic reframing. Minds in the thrall of perception control have no capacity for seeing a situation on its merits and acting accordingly. 'Rules is rules' is their only mind-set. My father used to say that rules and regulations are for the guidance of the intelligent and the blind obedience of the idiot. Most of the intelligent, decent, coppers have gone leaving only the other kind and a few old school for whom the job must be a daily nightmare. The combination of psychopaths and rule-book software minds has been clearly on public display in the 'Covid' era with automaton robots in uniform imposing fascistic 'Covid' regulations on the population without any personal initiative or judging situations on their merits. There are thousands of examples around the world, but I'll make my point with the infamous Derbyshire police in the English East Midlands – the ones who think pouring dye into beauty spots and using drones to track people walking in the countryside away from anyone is called 'policing'. To them there are rules decreed by the government which they have to enforce and in their bewildered state a group gathering in a closed space and someone walking alone in the countryside are the same thing. It is beyond idiocy and enters the realm of clinical insanity.

Police officers in Derbyshire said they were 'horrified' – *horrified* – to find 15 to 20 'irresponsible' kids playing a football match at a closed leisure centre 'in breach of coronavirus restrictions'. When they saw the police the kids ran away leaving their belongings behind and the reframed men and women of Derbyshire police were seeking to establish their identities with a view to fining their parents. The most natural thing for youngsters to do – kicking a ball about – is turned into a criminal activity and enforced by the moronic software programs of Derbyshire police. You find the same mentality in every country. These barely conscious 'horrified' officers said they had to take action because 'we need to ensure these rules are being followed' and 'it is of the utmost importance that you ensure your children are following the rules and regulations for Covid-19'. Had any of them done ten seconds of research to see if this parroting of their masters' script could be supported by any evidence? Nope. Reframed people don't think – others think for them and that's the whole idea of reframing. I have seen police officers one after the other repeating without question word for word what officialdom tells them just as I have seen great swathes of the public doing the same. Ask either for 'their' opinion and out spews what they have been told to think by the official narrative. Police and public may seem to be in different groups, but their mentality is the same. Most people do whatever they are told in fear not doing so or because they believe what officialdom tells them; almost the entirety of the police do what they are told for the same reason. Ultimately it's the tiny inner core of the global Cult that's telling both what to do.

So Derbyshire police were 'horrified'. Oh, really? Why did they think those kids were playing football? It was to relieve the psychological consequences of lockdown and being denied human contact with their friends and interaction, touch and discourse vital to human psychological health. Being denied this month after month has dismantled the psyche of many children and young people as depression and suicide have exploded. Were Derbyshire police *horrified by that*? Are you kidding? Reframed people don't have those

mental and emotional processes that can see how the impact on the psychological health of youngsters is far more dangerous than any 'virus' even if you take the mendacious official figures to be true. The reframed are told (programmed) how to act and so they do. The Derbyshire Chief Constable in the first period of lockdown when the black dye and drones nonsense was going on was Peter Goodman. He was the man who severed the connection between his force and the Derbyshire Constabulary *Male Voice* Choir when he decided that it was not inclusive enough to allow women to join. The fact it was a male voice choir making a particular sound produced by male voices seemed to elude a guy who terrifyingly ran policing in Derbyshire. He retired weeks after his force was condemned as disgraceful by former Supreme Court Justice Jonathan Sumption for their behaviour over extreme lockdown impositions. Goodman was replaced by his deputy Rachel Swann who was in charge when her officers were 'horrified'. The police statement over the boys committing the hanging-offence of playing football included the line about the youngsters being 'irresponsible in the times we are all living through' missing the point that the real relevance of the 'times we are all living through' is the imposition of fascism enforced by psychopaths and reframed minds of police officers playing such a vital part in establishing the fascist tyranny that their own children and grandchildren will have to live in their entire lives. As a definition of insanity that is hard to beat although it might be run close by imposing masks on people that can have a serious effect on their health while wearing a face nappy all day themselves. Once again public and police do it for the same reason – the authorities tell them to and who are they to have the self-respect to say no?

Wokers in uniform

How reframed do you have to be to arrest a *six-year-old* and take him to court for *picking a flower* while waiting for a bus? Brain dead police and officialdom did just that in North Carolina where criminal proceedings happen regularly for children under nine. Attorney Julie Boyer gave the six-year-old crayons and a colouring book

during the 'flower' hearing while the 'adults' decided his fate. County Chief District Court Judge Jay Corpening asked: 'Should a child that believes in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy be making life-altering decisions?' Well, of course not, but common sense has no meaning when you have a common purpose and a reframed mind. Treating children in this way, and police operating in American schools, is all part of the psychological preparation for children to accept a police state as normal all their adult lives. The same goes for all the cameras and biometric tracking technology in schools. Police training is focused on reframing them as snowflake Wokers and this is happening in the military. Pentagon top brass said that 'training sessions on extremism' were needed for troops who asked why they were so focused on the Capitol Building riot when Black Lives Matter riots were ignored. What's the difference between them some apparently and rightly asked. Actually, there is a difference. Five people died in the Capitol riot, only one through violence, and that was a police officer shooting an unarmed protestor. BLM riots killed at least 25 people and cost billions. Asking the question prompted the psychopaths and reframed minds that run the Pentagon to say that more 'education' (programming) was needed. Troop training is all based on psychological programming to make them fodder for the Cult – 'Military men are just dumb, stupid animals to be used as pawns in foreign policy' as Cult-to-his-DNA former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger famously said. Governments see the police in similar terms and it's time for those among them who can see this to defend the people and stop being enforcers of the Cult agenda upon the people.

The US military, like the country itself, is being targeted for destruction through a long list of Woke impositions. Cult-owned gaga 'President' Biden signed an executive order when he took office to allow taxpayer money to pay for transgender surgery for active military personnel and veterans. Are you a man soldier? No, I'm a LGBTQIA+ with a hint of Skoliosexual and Spectrasexual. Oh, good man. Bad choice of words you bigot. The Pentagon announced in March, 2021, the appointment of the first 'diversity and inclusion

officer' for US Special Forces. Richard Torres-Estrada arrived with the publication of a 'D&I Strategic Plan which will guide the enterprise-wide effort to institutionalize and sustain D&I'. If you think a Special Forces 'Strategic Plan' should have something to do with defending America you haven't been paying attention. Defending Woke is now the military's new role. Torres-Estrada has posted images comparing Donald Trump with Adolf Hitler and we can expect no bias from him as a representative of the supposedly non-political Pentagon. Cable news host Tucker Carlson said: 'The Pentagon is now the Yale faculty lounge but with cruise missiles.' Meanwhile Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, a board member of weapons-maker Raytheon with stock and compensation interests in October, 2020, worth $1.4 million, said he was purging the military of the 'enemy within' – anyone who isn't Woke and supports Donald Trump. Austin refers to his targets as 'racist extremists' while in true Woke fashion being himself a racist extremist. Pentagon documents pledge to 'eradicate, eliminate and conquer all forms of racism, sexism and homophobia'. The definitions of these are decided by 'diversity and inclusion committees' peopled by those who see racism, sexism and homophobia in every situation and opinion. Woke (the Cult) is dismantling the US military and purging testosterone as China expands its military and gives its troops 'masculinity training'. How do we think that is going to end when this is all Cult coordinated? The US military, like the British military, is controlled by Woke and spineless top brass who just go along with it out of personal career interests.

'Woke' means fast asleep

Mind control and perception manipulation techniques used on individuals to create group-think have been unleashed on the global population in general. As a result many have no capacity to see the obvious fascist agenda being installed all around them or what 'Covid' is really all about. Their brains are firewalled like a computer system not to process certain concepts, thoughts and realisations that are bad for the Cult. The young are most targeted as the adults they

will be when the whole fascist global state is planned to be fully implemented. They need to be prepared for total compliance to eliminate all pushback from entire generations. The Cult has been pouring billions into taking complete control of 'education' from schools to universities via its operatives and corporations and not least Bill Gates as always. The plan has been to transform 'education' institutions into programming centres for the mentality of 'Woke'. James McConnell, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, wrote in *Psychology Today* in 1970:

> The day has come when we can combine sensory deprivation with drugs, hypnosis, and astute manipulation of reward and punishment, to gain almost absolute control over an individual's behaviour. It should then be possible to achieve a very rapid and highly effective type of brainwashing that would allow us to make dramatic changes in a person's behaviour and personality ...
>
> … We should reshape society so that we all would be trained from birth to want to do what society wants us to do. We have the techniques to do it... no-one owns his own personality you acquired, and there's no reason to believe you should have the right to refuse to acquire a new personality if your old one is anti-social.

This was the potential for mass brainwashing in 1970 and the mentality there displayed captures the arrogant psychopathy that drives it forward. I emphasise that not all young people have succumbed to Woke programming and those that haven't are incredibly impressive people given that today's young are the most perceptually-targeted generations in history with all the technology now involved. Vast swathes of the young generations, however, have fallen into the spell – and that's what it is – of Woke. The Woke mentality and perceptual program is founded on *inversion* and you will appreciate later why that is so significant. Everything with Woke is inverted and the opposite of what it is claimed to be. Woke was a term used in African-American culture from the 1900s and referred to an awareness of social and racial justice. This is not the meaning of the modern version or 'New Woke' as I call it in *The Answer*. Oh, no, Woke today means something very different no matter how much Wokers may seek to hide that and insist Old Woke and New

Woke are the same. See if you find any 'awareness of social justice' here in the modern variety:

- Woke demands 'inclusivity' while excluding anyone with a different opinion and calls for mass censorship to silence other views.

- Woke claims to stand against oppression when imposing oppression is the foundation of all that it does. It is the driver of political correctness which is nothing more than a Cult invention to manipulate the population to silence itself.

- Woke believes itself to be 'liberal' while pursuing a global society that can only be described as fascist (see 'anti-fascist' fascist Antifa).

- Woke calls for 'social justice' while spreading injustice wherever it goes against the common 'enemy' which can be easily identified as a differing view.

- Woke is supposed to be a metaphor for 'awake' when it is solid-gold asleep and deep in a Cult-induced coma that meets the criteria for 'off with the fairies'.

I state these points as obvious facts if people only care to look. I don't do this with a sense of condemnation. We need to appreciate that the onslaught of perceptual programming on the young has been incessant and merciless. I can understand why so many have been reframed, or, given their youth, framed from the start to see the world as the Cult demands. The Cult has had access to their minds day after day in its 'education' system for their entire formative years. Perception is formed from information received and the Cult-created system is a life-long download of information delivered to elicit a particular perception, thus behaviour. The more this has expanded into still new extremes in recent decades and ever-increasing censorship has deleted other opinions and information why wouldn't that lead to a perceptual reframing on a mass scale? I

have described already cradle-to-grave programming and in more recent times the targeting of young minds from birth to adulthood has entered the stratosphere. This has taken the form of skewing what is 'taught' to fit the Cult agenda and the omnipresent techniques of group-think to isolate non-believers and pressure them into line. There has always been a tendency to follow the herd, but we really are in a new world now in relation to that. We have parents who can see the 'Covid' hoax told by their children not to stop them wearing masks at school, being 'Covid' tested or having the 'vaccine' in fear of the peer-pressure consequences of being different. What is 'peer-pressure' if not pressure to conform to group-think? Renegade Minds never group-think and always retain a set of perceptions that are unique to them. Group-think is always underpinned by consequences for not group-thinking. Abuse now aimed at those refusing DNA-manipulating 'Covid vaccines' are a potent example of this. The biggest pressure to conform comes from the very group which is itself being manipulated. 'I am programmed to be part of a hive mind and so you must be.'

Woke control structures in 'education' now apply to every mainstream organisation. Those at the top of the 'education' hierarchy (the Cult) decide the policy. This is imposed on governments through the Cult network; governments impose it on schools, colleges and universities; their leadership impose the policy on teachers and academics and they impose it on children and students. At any level where there is resistance, perhaps from a teacher or university lecturer, they are targeted by the authorities and often fired. Students themselves regularly demand the dismissal of academics (increasingly few) at odds with the narrative that the students have been programmed to believe in. It is quite a thought that students who are being targeted by the Cult become so consumed by programmed group-think that they launch protests and demand the removal of those who are trying to push back against those targeting the students. Such is the scale of perceptual inversion. We see this with 'Covid' programming as the Cult imposes the rules via psycho-psychologists and governments on

shops, transport companies and businesses which impose them on their staff who impose them on their customers who pressure Pushbackers to conform to the will of the Cult which is in the process of destroying them and their families. Scan all aspects of society and you will see the same sequence every time.

Fact free Woke and hijacking the 'left'

There is no more potent example of this than 'Woke', a mentality only made possible by the deletion of factual evidence by an 'education' system seeking to produce an ever more uniform society. Why would you bother with facts when you don't know any? Deletion of credible history both in volume and type is highly relevant. Orwell said: 'Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.' They who control the perception of the past control the perception of the future and they who control the present control the perception of the past through the writing and deleting of history. Why would you oppose the imposition of Marxism in the name of Wokeism when you don't know that Marxism cost at least 100 million lives in the 20th century alone? Watch videos and read reports in which Woker generations are asked basic historical questions – it's mind-blowing. A survey of 2,000 people found that six percent of millennials (born approximately early1980s to early 2000s) believed the Second World War (1939-1945) broke out with the assassination of President Kennedy (in 1963) and one in ten thought Margaret Thatcher was British Prime Minister at the time. She was in office between 1979 and 1990. We are in a post-fact society. Provable facts are no defence against the fascism of political correctness or Silicon Valley censorship. Facts don't matter anymore as we have witnessed with the 'Covid' hoax. Sacrificing uniqueness to the Woke group-think religion is all you are required to do and that means thinking for yourself is the biggest Woke no, no. All religions are an expression of group-think and censorship and Woke is just another religion with an orthodoxy defended by group-think and censorship. Burned at

the stake becomes burned on Twitter which leads back eventually to burned at the stake as Woke humanity regresses to ages past.

The biggest Woke inversion of all is its creators and funders. I grew up in a traditional left of centre political household on a council estate in Leicester in the 1950s and 60s – you know, the left that challenged the power of wealth-hoarding elites and threats to freedom of speech and opinion. In those days students went on marches defending freedom of speech while today's Wokers march for its deletion. What on earth could have happened? Those very elites (collectively the Cult) that we opposed in my youth and early life have funded into existence the antithesis of that former left and hijacked the 'brand' while inverting everything it ever stood for. We have a mentality that calls itself 'liberal' and 'progressive' while acting like fascists. Cult billionaires and their corporations have funded themselves into control of 'education' to ensure that Woke programming is unceasing throughout the formative years of children and young people and that non-Wokers are isolated (that word again) whether they be students, teachers or college professors. The Cult has funded into existence the now colossal global network of Woke organisations that have spawned and promoted all the 'causes' on the Cult wish-list for global transformation and turned Wokers into demanders of them. Does anyone really think it's a coincidence that the Cult agenda for humanity is a carbon (sorry) copy of the societal transformations desired by Woke?? These are only some of them:

Political correctness: The means by which the Cult deletes all public debates that it knows it cannot win if we had the free-flow of information and evidence.

Human-caused 'climate change': The means by which the Cult seeks to transform society into a globally-controlled dictatorship imposing its will over the fine detail of everyone's lives 'to save the planet' which doesn't actually need saving.

Transgender obsession: Preparing collective perception to accept the 'new human' which would not have genders because it would be created technologically and not through procreation. I'll have much more on this in Human 2.0.

Race obsession: The means by which the Cult seeks to divide and rule the population by triggering racial division through the perception that society is more racist than ever when the opposite is the case. Is it perfect in that regard? No. But to compare today with the racism of apartheid and segregation brought to an end by the civil rights movement in the 1960s is to insult the memory of that movement and inspirations like Martin Luther King. Why is the 'anti-racism' industry (which it is) so dominated by privileged white people?

White supremacy: This is a label used by privileged white people to demonise poor and deprived white people pushing back on tyranny to marginalise and destroy them. White people are being especially targeted as the dominant race by number within Western society which the Cult seeks to transform in its image. If you want to change a society you must weaken and undermine its biggest group and once you have done that by using the other groups you next turn on them to do the same … 'Then they came for the Jews and I was not a Jew so I did nothing.'

Mass migration: The mass movement of people from the Middle East, Africa and Asia into Europe, from the south into the United States and from Asia into Australia are another way the Cult seeks to dilute the racial, cultural and political influence of white people on Western society. White people ask why their governments appear to be working against them while being politically and culturally biased towards incoming cultures. Well, here's your answer. In the same way sexually 'straight' people, men and women, ask why the

authorities are biased against them in favour of other sexualities. The answer is the same – that's the way the Cult wants it to be for very sinister motives.

These are all central parts of the Cult agenda and central parts of the Woke agenda and Woke was created and continues to be funded to an immense degree by Cult billionaires and corporations. If anyone begins to say 'coincidence' the syllables should stick in their throat.

Billionaire 'social justice warriors'

Joe Biden is a 100 percent-owned asset of the Cult and the Wokers' man in the White House whenever he can remember his name and for however long he lasts with his rapidly diminishing cognitive function. Even walking up the steps of an aircraft without falling on his arse would appear to be a challenge. He's not an empty-shell puppet or anything. From the minute Biden took office (or the Cult did) he began his executive orders promoting the Woke wish-list. You will see the Woke agenda imposed ever more severely because it's really the *Cult* agenda. Woke organisations and activist networks spawned by the Cult are funded to the extreme so long as they promote what the Cult wants to happen. Woke is funded to promote 'social justice' by billionaires who become billionaires by destroying social justice. The social justice mantra is only a cover for dismantling social justice and funded by billionaires that couldn't give a damn about social justice. Everything makes sense when you see that. One of Woke's premier funders is Cult billionaire financier George Soros who said: 'I am basically there to make money, I cannot and do not look at the social consequences of what I do.' This is the same Soros who has given more than $32 billion to his Open Society Foundations global Woke network and funded Black Lives Matter, mass immigration into Europe and the United States, transgender activism, climate change activism, political correctness and groups targeting 'white supremacy' in the form of privileged white thugs that dominate Antifa. What a scam it all is and when

you are dealing with the unquestioning fact-free zone of Woke scamming them is child's play. All you need to pull it off in all these organisations are a few in-the-know agents of the Cult and an army of naïve, reframed, uninformed, narcissistic, know-nothings convinced of their own self-righteousness, self-purity and virtue.

Soros and fellow billionaires and billionaire corporations have poured hundreds of millions into Black Lives Matter and connected groups and promoted them to a global audience. None of this is motivated by caring about black people. These are the billionaires that have controlled and exploited a system that leaves millions of black people in abject poverty and deprivation which they do absolutely nothing to address. The same Cult networks funding BLM were behind the *slave trade!* Black Lives Matter hijacked a phrase that few would challenge and they have turned this laudable concept into a political weapon to divide society. You know that BLM is a fraud when it claims that *All* Lives Matter, the most inclusive statement of all, is 'racist'. BLM and its Cult masters don't want to end racism. To them it's a means to an end to control all of humanity never mind the colour, creed, culture or background. What has destroying the nuclear family got to do with ending racism? Nothing – but that is one of the goals of BLM and also happens to be a goal of the Cult as I have been exposing in my books for decades. Stealing children from loving parents and giving schools ever more power to override parents is part of that same agenda. BLM is a Marxist organisation and why would that not be the case when the Cult created Marxism *and* BLM? Patrisse Cullors, a BLM co-founder, said in a 2015 video that she and her fellow organisers, including co-founder Alicia Garza, are 'trained Marxists'. The lady known after marriage as Patrisse Khan-Cullors bought a $1.4 million home in 2021 in one of the whitest areas of California with a black population of just 1.6 per cent and has so far bought *four* high-end homes for a total of $3.2 million. How very Marxist. There must be a bit of spare in the BLM coffers, however, when Cult corporations and billionaires have handed over the best part of $100 million. Many black people can see that Black Lives Matter is not

working for them, but against them, and this is still more confirmation. Black journalist Jason Whitlock, who had his account suspended by Twitter for simply linking to the story about the 'Marxist's' home buying spree, said that BLM leaders are 'making millions of dollars off the backs of these dead black men who they wouldn't spit on if they were on fire and alive'.

Black Lies Matter

Cult assets and agencies came together to promote BLM in the wake of the death of career criminal George Floyd who had been jailed a number of times including for forcing his way into the home of a black woman with others in a raid in which a gun was pointed at her stomach. Floyd was filmed being held in a Minneapolis street in 2020 with the knee of a police officer on his neck and he subsequently died. It was an appalling thing for the officer to do, but the same technique has been used by police on peaceful protestors of lockdown without any outcry from the Woke brigade. As unquestioning supporters of the Cult agenda Wokers have supported lockdown and all the 'Covid' claptrap while attacking anyone standing up to the tyranny imposed in its name. Court documents would later include details of an autopsy on Floyd by County Medical Examiner Dr Andrew Baker who concluded that Floyd had taken a fatal level of the drug fentanyl. None of this mattered to fact-free, question-free, Woke. Floyd's death was followed by worldwide protests against police brutality amid calls to defund the police. Throwing babies out with the bathwater is a Woke speciality. In the wake of the murder of British woman Sarah Everard a Green Party member of the House of Lords, Baroness Jones of Moulescoomb (Nincompoopia would have been better), called for a 6pm curfew for all men. This would be in breach of the Geneva Conventions on war crimes which ban collective punishment, but that would never have crossed the black and white Woke mind of Baroness Nincompoopia who would have been far too convinced of her own self-righteousness to compute such details. Many American cities did defund the police in the face of Floyd riots

and after $15 million was deleted from the police budget in Washington DC under useless Woke mayor Muriel Bowser car-jacking alone rose by 300 percent and within six months the US capital recorded its highest murder rate in 15 years. The same happened in Chicago and other cities in line with the Cult/Soros plan to bring fear to streets and neighbourhoods by reducing the police, releasing violent criminals and not prosecuting crime. This is the mob-rule agenda that I have warned in the books was coming for so long. Shootings in the area of Minneapolis where Floyd was arrested increased by 2,500 percent compared with the year before. Defunding the police over George Floyd has led to a big increase in dead people with many of them black. Police protection for politicians making these decisions stayed the same or increased as you would expect from professional hypocrites. The Cult doesn't actually want to abolish the police. It wants to abolish local control over the police and hand it to federal government as the psychopaths advance the Hunger Games Society. Many George Floyd protests turned into violent riots with black stores and businesses destroyed by fire and looting across America fuelled by Black Lives Matter. Woke doesn't do irony. If you want civil rights you must loot the liquor store and the supermarket and make off with a smart TV. It's the only way.

It's not a race war – it's a class war

Black people are patronised by privileged blacks and whites alike and told they are victims of white supremacy. I find it extraordinary to watch privileged blacks supporting the very system and bloodline networks behind the slave trade and parroting the same Cult-serving manipulative crap of their privileged white, often billionaire, associates. It is indeed not a race war but a class war and colour is just a diversion. Black Senator Cory Booker and black Congresswoman Maxine Waters, more residents of Nincompoopia, personify this. Once you tell people they are victims of someone else you devalue both their own responsibility for their plight and the power they have to impact on their reality and experience. Instead

we have: 'You are only in your situation because of whitey – turn on them and everything will change.' It won't change. Nothing changes in our lives unless *we* change it. Crucial to that is never seeing yourself as a victim and always as the creator of your reality. Life is a simple sequence of choice and consequence. Make different choices and you create different consequences. *You* have to make those choices – not Black Lives Matter, the Woke Mafia and anyone else that seeks to dictate your life. Who are they these Wokers, an emotional and psychological road traffic accident, to tell you what to do? Personal empowerment is the last thing the Cult and its Black Lives Matter want black people or anyone else to have. They claim to be defending the underdog while *creating* and perpetuating the underdog. The Cult's worst nightmare is human unity and if they are going to keep blacks, whites and every other race under economic servitude and control then the focus must be diverted from what they have in common to what they can be manipulated to believe divides them. Blacks have to be told that their poverty and plight is the fault of the white bloke living on the street in the same poverty and with the same plight they are experiencing. The difference is that your plight black people is due to him, a white supremacist with 'white privilege' living on the street. Don't unite as one human family against your mutual oppressors and suppressors – fight the oppressor with the white face who is as financially deprived as you are. The Cult knows that as its 'Covid' agenda moves into still new levels of extremism people are going to respond and it has been spreading the seeds of disunity everywhere to stop a united response to the evil that targets *all of us*.

Racist attacks on 'whiteness' are getting ever more outrageous and especially through the American Democratic Party which has an appalling history for anti-black racism. Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi all eulogised about Senator Robert Byrd at his funeral in 2010 after a nearly 60-year career in Congress. Byrd was a brutal Ku Klux Klan racist and a violent abuser of Cathy O'Brien in MKUltra. He said he would never fight in the military 'with a negro by my side' and 'rather I should die a thousand times,

and see Old Glory trampled in the dirt never to rise again, than to see this beloved land of ours become degraded by race mongrels, a throwback to the blackest specimen from the wilds'. Biden called Byrd a 'very close friend and mentor'. These 'Woke' hypocrites are not anti-racist they are anti-poor and anti-people not of their perceived class. Here is an illustration of the scale of anti-white racism to which we have now descended. Seriously Woke and moronic *New York Times* contributor Damon Young described whiteness as a 'virus' that 'like other viruses will not die until there are no bodies left for it to infect'. He went on: '… the only way to stop it is to locate it, isolate it, extract it, and kill it.' Young can say that as a black man with no consequences when a white man saying the same in reverse would be facing a jail sentence. *That's* racism. We had super-Woke numbskull senators Tammy Duckworth and Mazie Hirono saying they would object to future Biden Cabinet appointments if he did not nominate more Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Never mind the ability of the candidate what do they look like? Duckworth said: 'I will vote for racial minorities and I will vote for LGBTQ, but anyone else I'm not voting for.' Appointing people on the grounds of race is illegal, but that was not a problem for this ludicrous pair. They were on-message and that's a free pass in any situation.

Critical race racism

White children are told at school they are intrinsically racist as they are taught the divisive 'critical race theory'. This claims that the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and that race is a socially constructed concept used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of colour. White is a 'virus' as we've seen. Racial inequality results from 'social, economic, and legal differences that white people create between races to maintain white interests which leads to poverty and criminality in minority communities'. I must tell that to the white guy sleeping on the street. The principal of East Side Community School in New York sent white parents a manifesto that called on

them to become 'white traitors' and advocate for full 'white abolition'. These people are teaching your kids when they urgently need a psychiatrist. The 'school' included a chart with 'eight white identities' that ranged from 'white supremacist' to 'white abolition' and defined the behaviour white people must follow to end 'the regime of whiteness'. Woke blacks and their privileged white associates are acting exactly like the slave owners of old and Ku Klux Klan racists like Robert Byrd. They are too full of their own self-purity to see that, but it's true. Racism is not a body type; it's a state of mind that can manifest through any colour, creed or culture.

Another racial fraud is *'equity'*. Not equality of treatment and opportunity – equity. It's a term spun as equality when it means something very different. Equality in its true sense is a raising up while 'equity' is a race to the bottom. Everyone in the same level of poverty is 'equity'. Keep everyone down – that's equity. The Cult doesn't want anyone in the human family to be empowered and BLM leaders, like all these 'anti-racist' organisations, continue their privileged, pampered existence by perpetuating the perception of gathering racism. When is the last time you heard an 'anti-racist' or 'anti-Semitism' organisation say that acts of racism and discrimination have *fallen?* It's not in the interests of their fund-raising and power to influence and the same goes for the professional soccer anti-racism operation, Kick It Out. Two things confirmed that the Black Lives Matter riots in the summer of 2020 were Cult creations. One was that while anti-lockdown protests were condemned in this same period for 'transmitting 'Covid' the authorities supported mass gatherings of Black Lives Matter supporters. I even saw self-deluding people claiming to be doctors say the two types of protest were not the same. No – the non-existent 'Covid' was in favour of lockdowns and attacked those that protested against them while 'Covid' supported Black Lives Matter and kept well away from its protests. The whole thing was a joke and as lockdown protestors were arrested, often brutally, by reframed Face-Nappies we had the grotesque sight of police officers taking the knee to Black Lives Matter, a Cult-funded Marxist

organisation that supports violent riots and wants to destroy the nuclear family and white people.

He's not white? Shucks!

Woke obsession with race was on display again when ten people were shot dead in Boulder, Colorado, in March, 2021. Cult-owned Woke TV channels like CNN said the shooter appeared to be a white man and Wokers were on Twitter condemning 'violent white men' with the usual mantras. Then the shooter's name was released as Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, an anti-Trump Arab-American, and the sigh of disappointment could be heard five miles away. Never mind that ten people were dead and what that meant for their families. Race baiting was all that mattered to these sick Cult-serving people like Barack Obama who exploited the deaths to further divide America on racial grounds which is his job for the Cult. This is the man that 'racist' white Americans made the first black president of the United States and then gave him a second term. Not-very-bright Obama has become filthy rich on the back of that and today appears to have a big influence on the Biden administration. Even so he's still a downtrodden black man and a victim of white supremacy. This disingenuous fraud reveals the contempt he has for black people when he puts on a Deep South Alabama accent whenever he talks to them, no, *at* them.

Another BLM red flag was how the now fully-Woke (fully-Cult) and fully-virtue-signalled professional soccer authorities had their teams taking the knee before every match in support of Marxist Black Lives Matter. Soccer authorities and clubs displayed 'Black Lives Matter' on the players' shirts and flashed the name on electronic billboards around the pitch. Any fans that condemned what is a Freemasonic taking-the-knee ritual were widely condemned as you would expect from the Woke virtue-signallers of professional sport and the now fully-Woke media. We have reverse racism in which you are banned from criticising any race or culture except for white people for whom anything goes – say what you like, no problem. What has this got to do with racial harmony and

equality? We've had black supremacists from Black Lives Matter telling white people to fall to their knees in the street and apologise for their white supremacy. Black supremacists acting like white supremacist slave owners of the past couldn't breach their self-obsessed, race-obsessed sense of self-purity. Joe Biden appointed a race-obsessed black supremacist Kristen Clarke to head the Justice Department Civil Rights Division. Clarke claimed that blacks are endowed with 'greater mental, physical and spiritual abilities' than whites. If anyone reversed that statement they would be vilified. Clarke is on-message so no problem. She's never seen a black-white situation in which the black figure is anything but a virtuous victim and she heads the Civil Rights Division which should treat everyone the same or it isn't civil rights. Another perception of the Renegade Mind: If something or someone is part of the Cult agenda they will be supported by Woke governments and media no matter what. If they're not, they will be condemned and censored. It really is that simple and so racist Clarke prospers despite (make that because of) her racism.

The end of culture

Biden's administration is full of such racial, cultural and economic bias as the Cult requires the human family to be divided into warring factions. We are now seeing racially-segregated graduations and everything, but everything, is defined through the lens of perceived 'racism. We have 'racist' mathematics, 'racist' food and even 'racist' *plants*. World famous Kew Gardens in London said it was changing labels on plants and flowers to tell its pre-'Covid' more than two million visitors a year how racist they are. Kew director Richard Deverell said this was part of an effort to 'move quickly to decolonise collections' after they were approached by one Ajay Chhabra 'an actor with an insight into how sugar cane was linked to slavery'. They are *plants* you idiots. 'Decolonisation' in the Woke manual really means colonisation of society with its mentality and by extension colonisation by the Cult. We are witnessing a new Chinese-style 'Cultural Revolution' so essential to the success of all

Marxist takeovers. Our cultural past and traditions have to be swept away to allow a new culture to be built-back-better. Woke targeting of long-standing Western cultural pillars including historical monuments and cancelling of historical figures is what happened in the Mao revolution in China which 'purged remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society' and installed Maoism as the dominant ideology'. For China see the Western world today and for 'dominant ideology' see Woke. Better still see Marxism or Maoism. The 'Covid' hoax has specifically sought to destroy the arts and all elements of Western culture from people meeting in a pub or restaurant to closing theatres, music venues, sports stadiums, places of worship and even banning *singing*. Destruction of Western society is also why criticism of any religion is banned except for Christianity which again is the dominant religion as white is the numerically-dominant race. Christianity may be fading rapidly, but its history and traditions are weaved through the fabric of Western society. Delete the pillars and other structures will follow until the whole thing collapses. I am not a Christian defending that religion when I say that. I have no religion. It's just a fact. To this end Christianity has itself been turned Woke to usher its own downfall and its ranks are awash with 'change agents' – knowing and unknowing – at every level including Pope Francis (*definitely* knowing) and the clueless Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby (possibly not, but who can be sure?). Woke seeks to coordinate attacks on Western culture, traditions, and ways of life through 'intersectionality' defined as 'the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups'. Wade through the Orwellian Woke-speak and this means coordinating disparate groups in a common cause to overthrow freedom and liberal values.

The entire structure of public institutions has been infested with Woke – government at all levels, political parties, police, military, schools, universities, advertising, media and trade unions. This abomination has been achieved through the Cult web by appointing

Wokers to positions of power and battering non-Wokers into line through intimidation, isolation and threats to their job. Many have been fired in the wake of the empathy-deleted, vicious hostility of 'social justice' Wokers and the desire of gutless, spineless employers to virtue-signal their Wokeness. Corporations are filled with Wokers today, most notably those in Silicon Valley. Ironically at the top they are not Woke at all. They are only exploiting the mentality their Cult masters have created and funded to censor and enslave while the Wokers cheer them on until it's their turn. Thus the Woke 'liberal left' is an inversion of the traditional liberal left. Campaigning for justice on the grounds of power and wealth distribution has been replaced by campaigning for identity politics. The genuine traditional left would never have taken money from today's billionaire abusers of fairness and justice and nor would the billionaires have wanted to fund that genuine left. It would not have been in their interests to do so. The division of opinion in those days was between the haves and have nots. This all changed with Cult manipulated and funded identity politics. The division of opinion today is between Wokers and non-Wokers and not income brackets. Cult corporations and their billionaires may have taken wealth disparity to cataclysmic levels of injustice, but as long as they speak the language of Woke, hand out the dosh to the Woke network and censor the enemy they are 'one of us'. Billionaires who don't give a damn about injustice are laughing at them till their bellies hurt. Wokers are not even close to self-aware enough to see that. The transformed 'left' dynamic means that Wokers who drone on about 'social justice' are funded by billionaires that have destroyed social justice the world over. It's *why* they are billionaires.

The climate con

Nothing encapsulates what I have said more comprehensively than the hoax of human-caused global warming. I have detailed in my books over the years how Cult operatives and organisations were the pump-primers from the start of the climate con. A purpose-built vehicle for this is the Club of Rome established by the Cult in 1968

with the Rockefellers and Rothschilds centrally involved all along. Their gofer frontman Maurice Strong, a Canadian oil millionaire, hosted the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 where the global 'green movement' really expanded in earnest under the guiding hand of the Cult. The Earth Summit established Agenda 21 through the Cult-created-and-owned United Nations to use the illusion of human-caused climate change to justify the transformation of global society to save the world from climate disaster. It is a No-Problem-Reaction-Solution sold through governments, media, schools and universities as whole generations have been terrified into believing that the world was going to end in their lifetimes unless what old people had inflicted upon them was stopped by a complete restructuring of how everything is done. Chill, kids, it's all a hoax. Such restructuring is precisely what the Cult agenda demands (purely by coincidence of course). Today this has been given the codename of the Great Reset which is only an updated term for Agenda 21 and its associated Agenda 2030. The latter, too, is administered through the UN and was voted into being by the General Assembly in 2015. Both 21 and 2030 seek centralised control of all resources and food right down to the raindrops falling on your own land. These are some of the demands of Agenda 21 established in 1992. See if you recognise this society emerging today:

- End national sovereignty
- State planning and management of all land resources, ecosystems, deserts, forests, mountains, oceans and fresh water; agriculture; rural development; biotechnology; and ensuring *'equity'*
- The state to 'define the role' of business and financial resources
- Abolition of private property
- 'Restructuring' the family unit (see BLM)
- Children raised by the state
- People told what their job will be
- Major restrictions on movement
- Creation of 'human settlement zones'

- Mass resettlement as people are forced to vacate land where they live
- Dumbing down education
- Mass global depopulation in pursuit of all the above

The United Nations was created as a Trojan horse for world government. With the climate con of critical importance to promoting that outcome you would expect the UN to be involved. Oh, it's involved all right. The UN is promoting Agenda 21 and Agenda 2030 justified by 'climate change' while also driving the climate hoax through its Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), one of the world's most corrupt organisations. The IPCC has been lying ferociously and constantly since the day it opened its doors with the global media hanging unquestioningly on its every mendacious word. The Green movement is entirely Woke and has long lost its original environmental focus since it was co-opted by the Cult. An obsession with 'global warming' has deleted its values and scrambled its head. I experienced a small example of what I mean on a beautiful country walk that I have enjoyed several times a week for many years. The path merged into the fields and forests and you felt at one with the natural world. Then a 'Green' organisation, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, took over part of the land and proceeded to cut down a large number of trees, including mature ones, to install a horrible big, bright steel 'this-is-ours-stay-out' fence that destroyed the whole atmosphere of this beautiful place. No one with a feel for nature would do that. Day after day I walked to the sound of chainsaws and a magnificent mature weeping willow tree that I so admired was cut down at the base of the trunk. When I challenged a Woke young girl in a green shirt (of course) about this vandalism she replied: 'It's a weeping willow – it will grow back.' This is what people are paying for when they donate to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and many other 'green' organisations today. It is not the environmental movement that I knew and instead has become a support-system – as with Extinction Rebellion – for a very dark agenda.

Private jets for climate justice

The Cult-owned, Gates-funded, World Economic Forum and its founder Klaus Schwab were behind the emergence of Greta Thunberg to harness the young behind the climate agenda and she was invited to speak to the world at … the UN. Schwab published a book, *Covid-19: The Great Reset* in 2020 in which he used the 'Covid' hoax and the climate hoax to lay out a new society straight out of Agenda 21 and Agenda 2030. Bill Gates followed in early 2021 when he took time out from destroying the world to produce a book in his name about the way to save it. Gates flies across the world in private jets and admitted that 'I probably have one of the highest greenhouse gas footprints of anyone on the planet … my personal flying alone is gigantic.' He has also bid for the planet's biggest private jet operator. Other climate change saviours who fly in private jets include John Kerry, the US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, and actor Leonardo DiCaprio, a 'UN Messenger of Peace with special focus on climate change'. These people are so full of bullshit they could corner the market in manure. We mustn't be sceptical, though, because the Gates book, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need*, is a genuine attempt to protect the world and not an obvious pile of excrement attributed to a mega-psychopath aimed at selling his masters' plans for humanity. The Gates book and the other shite-pile by Klaus Schwab could have been written by the same person and may well have been. Both use 'climate change' and 'Covid' as the excuses for their new society and by coincidence the Cult's World Economic Forum and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation promote the climate hoax and hosted Event 201 which pre-empted with a 'simulation' the very 'coronavirus' hoax that would be simulated for real on humanity within weeks. The British 'royal' family is promoting the 'Reset' as you would expect through Prince 'climate change caused the war in Syria' Charles and his hapless son Prince William who said that we must 'reset our relationship with nature and our trajectory as a species' to avoid a climate disaster. Amazing how many promotors of the 'Covid' and 'climate change' control

systems are connected to Gates and the World Economic Forum. A 'study' in early 2021 claimed that carbon dioxide emissions must fall by the equivalent of a global lockdown roughly every two years for the next decade to save the planet. The 'study' appeared in the same period that the Schwab mob claimed in a video that lockdowns destroying the lives of billions are good because they make the earth 'quieter' with less 'ambient noise'. They took down the video amid a public backlash for such arrogant, empathy-deleted stupidity You see, however, where they are going with this. Corinne Le Quéré, a professor at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East Anglia, was lead author of the climate lockdown study, and she writes for … the World Economic Forum. Gates calls in 'his' book for changing 'every aspect of the economy' (long-time Cult agenda) and for humans to eat synthetic 'meat' (predicted in my books) while cows and other farm animals are eliminated. Australian TV host and commentator Alan Jones described what carbon emission targets would mean for farm animals in Australia alone if emissions were reduced as demanded by 35 percent by 2030 and zero by 2050:

Well, let's take agriculture, the total emissions from agriculture are about 75 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, equivalent. Now reduce that by 35 percent and you have to come down to 50 million tonnes, I've done the maths. So if you take for example 1.5 million cows, you're going to have to reduce the herd by 525,000 [by] 2030, nine years, that's 58,000 cows a year. The beef herd's 30 million, reduce that by 35 percent, that's 10.5 million, which means 1.2 million cattle have to go every year between now and 2030. This is insanity!

There are 75 million sheep. Reduce that by 35 percent, that's 26 million sheep, that's almost 3 million a year. So under the Paris Agreement over 30 million beasts. dairy cows, cattle, pigs and sheep would go. More than 8,000 every minute of every hour for the next decade, do these people know what they're talking about?

Clearly they don't at the level of campaigners, politicians and administrators. The Cult *does* know; that's the outcome it wants. We are faced with not just a war on humanity. Animals and the natural world are being targeted and I have been saying since the 'Covid' hoax began that the plan eventually was to claim that the 'deadly virus' is able to jump from animals, including farm animals and

domestic pets, to humans. Just before this book went into production came this story: 'Russia registers world's first Covid-19 vaccine for cats & dogs as makers of Sputnik V warn pets & farm animals could spread virus'. The report said 'top scientists warned that the deadly pathogen could soon begin spreading through homes and farms' and 'the next stage is the infection of farm and domestic animals'. Know the outcome and you'll see the journey. Think what that would mean for animals and keep your eye on a term called zoonosis or zoonotic diseases which transmit between animals and humans. The Cult wants to break the connection between animals and people as it does between people and people. Farm animals fit with the Cult agenda to transform food from natural to synthetic.

The gas of life is killing us

There can be few greater examples of Cult inversion than the condemnation of carbon dioxide as a dangerous pollutant when it is the gas of life. Without it the natural world would be dead and so we would all be dead. We breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide while plants produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide. It is a perfect symbiotic relationship that the Cult wants to dismantle for reasons I will come to in the final two chapters. Gates, Schwab, other Cult operatives and mindless repeaters, want the world to be 'carbon neutral' by at least 2050 and the earlier the better. 'Zero carbon' is the cry echoed by lunatics calling for 'Zero Covid' when we already have it. These carbon emission targets will deindustrialise the world in accordance with Cult plans – the post-industrial, post-democratic society – and with so-called renewables like solar and wind not coming even close to meeting human energy needs blackouts and cold are inevitable. Texans got the picture in the winter of 2021 when a snow storm stopped wind turbines and solar panels from working and the lights went down along with water which relies on electricity for its supply system. Gates wants everything to be powered by electricity to ensure that his masters have the kill switch to stop all human activity, movement, cooking, water and warmth any time they like. The climate lie is so

stupendously inverted that it claims we must urgently reduce carbon dioxide when we *don't have enough*.

Co2 in the atmosphere is a little above 400 parts per million when the optimum for plant growth is 2,000 ppm and when it falls anywhere near 150 ppm the natural world starts to die and so do we. It fell to as low as 280 ppm in an 1880 measurement in Hawaii and rose to 413 ppm in 2019 with industrialisation which is why the planet has become *greener* in the industrial period. How insane then that psychopathic madman Gates is not satisfied only with blocking the rise of Co2. He's funding technology to suck it out of the atmosphere. The reason why will become clear. The industrial era is not destroying the world through Co2 and has instead turned around a potentially disastrous ongoing fall in Co2. Greenpeace co-founder and scientist Patrick Moore walked away from Greenpeace in 1986 and has exposed the green movement for fear-mongering and lies. He said that 500 million years ago there was *17 times* more Co2 in the atmosphere than we have today and levels have been falling for hundreds of millions of years. In the last 150 million years Co2 levels in Earth's atmosphere had reduced by *90 percent*. Moore said that by the time humanity began to unlock carbon dioxide from fossil fuels we were at '38 seconds to midnight' and in that sense: 'Humans are [the Earth's] salvation.' Moore made the point that only half the Co2 emitted by fossil fuels stays in the atmosphere and we should remember that all pollution pouring from chimneys that we are told is carbon dioxide is in fact nothing of the kind. It's pollution. Carbon dioxide is an invisible gas.

William Happer, Professor of Physics at Princeton University and long-time government adviser on climate, has emphasised the Co2 deficiency for maximum growth and food production. Greenhouse growers don't add carbon dioxide for a bit of fun. He said that most of the warming in the last 100 years, after the earth emerged from the super-cold period of the 'Little Ice Age' into a natural warming cycle, was over by 1940. Happer said that a peak year for warming in 1988 can be explained by a 'monster El Nino' which is a natural and cyclical warming of the Pacific that has nothing to do with 'climate

change'. He said the effect of Co2 could be compared to painting a wall with red paint in that once two or three coats have been applied it didn't matter how much more you slapped on because the wall will not get much redder. Almost all the effect of the rise in Co2 has already happened, he said, and the volume in the atmosphere would now have to *double* to increase temperature by a single degree. Climate hoaxers know this and they have invented the most ridiculously complicated series of 'feedback' loops to try to overcome this rather devastating fact. You hear puppet Greta going on cluelessly about feedback loops and this is why.

The Sun affects temperature? No you *climate denier*

Some other nonsense to contemplate: Climate graphs show that rises in temperature do not follow rises in Co2 – *it's the other way round* with a lag between the two of some 800 years. If we go back 800 years from present time we hit the Medieval Warm Period when temperatures were higher than now without any industrialisation and this was followed by the Little Ice Age when temperatures plummeted. The world was still emerging from these centuries of serious cold when many climate records began which makes the ever-repeated line of the 'hottest year since records began' meaningless when you are not comparing like with like. The coldest period of the Little Ice Age corresponded with the lowest period of sunspot activity when the Sun was at its least active. Proper scientists will not be at all surprised by this when it confirms the obvious fact that earth temperature is affected by the scale of Sun activity and the energetic power that it subsequently emits; but when is the last time you heard a climate hoaxer talking about the Sun as a source of earth temperature?? Everything has to be focussed on Co2 which makes up just 0.117 percent of so-called greenhouse gases and only a fraction of even that is generated by human activity. The rest is natural. More than *90 percent* of those greenhouse gases are water vapour and clouds (Fig 9). Ban moisture I say. Have you noticed that the climate hoaxers no longer use the polar bear as their promotion image? That's because far from becoming extinct polar

bear communities are stable or thriving. Joe Bastardi, American meteorologist, weather forecaster and outspoken critic of the climate lie, documents in his book *The Climate Chronicles* how weather patterns and events claimed to be evidence of climate change have been happening since long before industrialisation: 'What happened before naturally is happening again, as is to be expected given the cyclical nature of the climate due to the design of the planet.' If you read the detailed background to the climate hoax in my other books you will shake your head and wonder how anyone could believe the crap which has spawned a multi-trillion dollar industry based on absolute garbage (see HIV causes AIDs and Sars-Cov-2 causes 'Covid-19'). Climate and 'Covid' have much in common given they have the same source. They both have the contradictory *everything* factor in which everything is explained by reference to them. It's hot – 'it's climate change'. It's cold – 'it's climate change'. I got a sniffle – 'it's Covid'. I haven't got a sniffle – 'it's Covid'. Not having a sniffle has to be a symptom of 'Covid'. Everything is and not having a sniffle is especially dangerous if you are a slow walker. For sheer audacity I offer you a Cambridge University 'study' that actually linked 'Covid' to 'climate change'. It had to happen eventually. They concluded that climate change played a role in 'Covid-19' spreading from animals to humans because … wait for it … I kid you not … *the two groups were forced closer together as populations grow*. Er, that's it. The whole foundation on which this depended was that 'Bats are the likely zoonotic origin of SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2'. Well, they are not. They are nothing to do with it. Apart from bats not being the origin and therefore 'climate change' effects on bats being irrelevant I am in awe of their academic insight. Where would we be without them? Not where we are that's for sure.

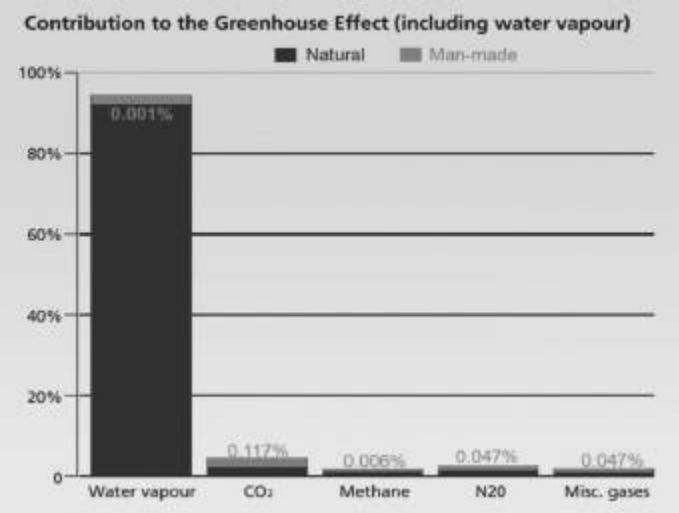

Figure 9: The idea that the gas of life is disastrously changing the climate is an insult to brain cell activity.

One other point about the weather is that climate modification is now well advanced and not every major weather event is natural – or earthquake come to that. I cover this subject at some length in other books. China is openly planning a rapid expansion of its weather modification programme which includes changing the climate in an area more than one and a half times the size of India. China used weather manipulation to ensure clear skies during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. I have quoted from US military documents detailing how to employ weather manipulation as a weapon of war and they did that in the 1960s and 70s during the conflict in Vietnam with Operation Popeye manipulating monsoon rains for military purposes. Why would there be international treaties on weather modification if it wasn't possible? Of course it is. Weather is energetic information and it can be changed.

How was the climate hoax pulled off? See 'Covid'

If you can get billions to believe in a 'virus' that doesn't exist you can get them to believe in human-caused climate change that doesn't exist. Both are being used by the Cult to transform global society in the way it has long planned. Both hoaxes have been achieved in pretty much the same way. First you declare a lie is a fact. There's a

'virus' you call SARS-Cov-2 or humans are warming the planet with their behaviour. Next this becomes, via Cult networks, the foundation of government, academic and science policy and belief. Those who parrot the mantra are given big grants to produce research that confirms the narrative is true and ever more 'symptoms' are added to make the 'virus'/'climate change' sound even more scary. Scientists and researchers who challenge the narrative have their grants withdrawn and their careers destroyed. The media promote the lie as the unquestionable truth and censor those with an alternative view or evidence. A great percentage of the population believe what they are told as the lie becomes an everybody-knows-that and the believing-masses turn on those with a mind of their own. The technique has been used endlessly throughout human history. Wokers are the biggest promotors of the climate lie *and* 'Covid' fascism because their minds are owned by the Cult; their sense of self-righteous self-purity knows no bounds; and they exist in a bubble of reality in which facts are irrelevant and only get in the way of looking without seeing.

Running through all of this like veins in a blue cheese is control of information, which means control of perception, which means control of behaviour, which collectively means control of human society. The Cult owns the global media and Silicon Valley fascists for the simple reason that it *has* to. Without control of information it can't control perception and through that human society. Examine every facet of the Cult agenda and you will see that anything supporting its introduction is never censored while anything pushing back is always censored. I say again: Psychopaths that know why they are doing this must go before Nuremberg trials and those that follow their orders must trot along behind them into the same dock. 'I was just following orders' didn't work the first time and it must not work now. Nuremberg trials must be held all over the world before public juries for politicians, government officials, police, compliant doctors, scientists and virologists, and all Cult operatives such as Gates, Tedros, Fauci, Vallance, Whitty, Ferguson, Zuckerberg, Wojcicki, Brin, Page, Dorsey, the whole damn lot of

them – including, no *especially*, the psychopath psychologists. Without them and the brainless, gutless excuses for journalists that have repeated their lies, none of this could be happening. Nobody can be allowed to escape justice for the psychological and economic Armageddon they are all responsible for visiting upon the human race.

As for the compliant, unquestioning, swathes of humanity, and the self-obsessed, all-knowing ignorance of the Wokers … don't start me. God help their kids. God help their grandkids. God *help them*.

CHAPTER NINE

We must have it? So what is it?

Well I won't back down. No, I won't back down. You can stand me up at the Gates of Hell. But I won't back down
Tom Petty

I will now focus on the genetically-manipulating 'Covid vaccines' which do not meet this official definition of a vaccine by the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC): 'A product that stimulates a person's immune system to produce immunity to a specific disease, protecting the person from that disease.' On that basis 'Covid vaccines' are not a vaccine in that the makers don't even claim they stop infection or transmission.

They are instead part of a multi-levelled conspiracy to change the nature of the human body and what it means to be 'human' and to depopulate an enormous swathe of humanity. What I shall call Human 1.0 is on the cusp of becoming Human 2.0 and for very sinister reasons. Before I get to the 'Covid vaccine' in detail here's some background to vaccines in general. Government regulators do not test vaccines – the makers do – and the makers control which data is revealed and which isn't. Children in America are given 50 vaccine doses by age six and 69 by age 19 and the effect of the whole combined schedule has never been tested. Autoimmune diseases when the immune system attacks its own body have soared in the mass vaccine era and so has disease in general in children and the young. Why wouldn't this be the case when vaccines target the *immune system?* The US government gave Big Pharma drug

companies immunity from prosecution for vaccine death and injury in the 1986 National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act (NCVIA) and since then the government (taxpayer) has been funding compensation for the consequences of Big Pharma vaccines. The criminal and satanic drug giants can't lose and the vaccine schedule has increased dramatically since 1986 for this reason. There is no incentive to make vaccines safe and a big incentive to make money by introducing ever more. Even against a ridiculously high bar to prove vaccine liability, and with the government controlling the hearing in which it is being challenged for compensation, the vaccine court has so far paid out more than $4 billion. These are the vaccines we are told are safe and psychopaths like Zuckerberg censor posts saying otherwise. The immunity law was even justified by a ruling that vaccines by their nature were 'unavoidably unsafe'.

Check out the ingredients of vaccines and you will be shocked if you are new to this. *They put that in children's bodies?? What??* Try aluminium, a brain toxin connected to dementia, aborted foetal tissue and formaldehyde which is used to embalm corpses. World-renowned aluminium expert Christopher Exley had his research into the health effect of aluminium in vaccines shut down by Keele University in the UK when it began taking funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Research when diseases 'eradicated' by vaccines began to decline and you will find the fall began long *before* the vaccine was introduced. Sometimes the fall even plateaued after the vaccine. Diseases like scarlet fever for which there was no vaccine declined in the same way because of environmental and other factors. A perfect case in point is the polio vaccine. Polio began when lead arsenate was first sprayed as an insecticide and residues remained in food products. Spraying started in 1892 and the first US polio epidemic came in Vermont in 1894. The simple answer was to stop spraying, but Rockefeller-created Big Pharma had a better idea. Polio was decreed to be caused by the *poliovirus* which 'spreads from person to person and can infect a person's spinal cord'. Lead arsenate was replaced by the lethal DDT which had the same effect of causing paralysis by damaging the brain and central nervous

system. Polio plummeted when DDT was reduced and then banned, but the vaccine is still given the credit for something it didn't do. Today by far the biggest cause of polio is the vaccines promoted by Bill Gates. Vaccine justice campaigner Robert Kennedy Jr, son of assassinated (by the Cult) US Attorney General Robert Kennedy, wrote:

In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) reluctantly admitted that the global explosion in polio is predominantly vaccine strain. The most frightening epidemics in Congo, Afghanistan, and the Philippines, are all linked to vaccines. In fact, by 2018, 70% of global polio cases were vaccine strain.

Vaccines make fortunes for Cult-owned Gates and Big Pharma while undermining the health and immune systems of the population. We had a glimpse of the mentality behind the Big Pharma cartel with a report on WION (World is One News), an international English language TV station based in India, which exposed the extraordinary behaviour of US drug company Pfizer over its 'Covid vaccine'. The WION report told how Pfizer had made fantastic demands of Argentina, Brazil and other countries in return for its 'vaccine'. These included immunity from prosecution, even for Pfizer negligence, government insurance to protect Pfizer from law suits and handing over as collateral sovereign assets of the country to include Argentina's bank reserves, military bases and embassy buildings. Pfizer demanded the same of Brazil in the form of waiving sovereignty of its assets abroad; exempting Pfizer from Brazilian laws; and giving Pfizer immunity from all civil liability. This is a 'vaccine' developed with government funding. Big Pharma is evil incarnate as a creation of the Cult and all must be handed tickets to Nuremberg.

Phantom 'vaccine' for a phantom 'disease'

I'll expose the 'Covid vaccine' fraud and then go on to the wider background of why the Cult has set out to 'vaccinate' every man, woman and child on the planet for an alleged 'new disease' with a survival rate of 99.77 percent (or more) even by the grotesquely-

manipulated figures of the World Health Organization and Johns Hopkins University. The 'infection' to 'death' ratio is 0.23 to 0.15 percent according to Stanford epidemiologist Dr John Ioannidis and while estimates vary the danger remains tiny. I say that if the truth be told the fake infection to fake death ratio is zero. Never mind all the evidence I have presented here and in *The Answer* that there is no 'virus' let us just focus for a moment on that death-rate figure of say 0.23 percent. The figure includes all those worldwide who have tested positive with a test not testing for the 'virus' and then died within 28 days or even longer of any other cause – *any other cause*. Now subtract all those illusory 'Covid' deaths on the global data sheets from the 0.23 percent. What do you think you would be left with? *Zero*. A vaccination has never been successfully developed for a so-called coronavirus. They have all failed at the animal testing stage when they caused hypersensitivity to what they were claiming to protect against and made the impact of a disease far worse. Cult-owned vaccine corporations got around that problem this time by bypassing animal trials, going straight to humans and making the length of the 'trials' before the public rollout as short as they could get away with. Normally it takes five to ten years or more to develop vaccines that still cause demonstrable harm to many people and that's without including the long-term effects that are never officially connected to the vaccination. 'Covid' non-vaccines have been officially produced and approved in a matter of months from a standing start and part of the reason is that (a) they were developed before the 'Covid' hoax began and (b) they are based on computer programs and not natural sources. Official non-trials were so short that government agencies gave *emergency*, not full, approval. 'Trials' were not even completed and full approval cannot be secured until they are. Public 'Covid vaccination' is actually a *continuation of the trial*. Drug company 'trials' are not scheduled to end until 2023 by which time a lot of people are going to be dead. Data on which government agencies gave this emergency approval was supplied by the Big Pharma corporations themselves in the form of Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, and

others, and this is the case with all vaccines. By its very nature *emergency* approval means drug companies do not have to prove that the 'vaccine' is 'safe and effective'. How could they with trials way short of complete? Government regulators only have to *believe* that they *could* be safe and effective. It is criminal manipulation to get products in circulation with no testing worth the name. Agencies giving that approval are infested with Big Pharma-connected place-people and they act in the interests of Big Pharma (the Cult) and not the public about whom they do not give a damn.

More human lab rats

'Covid vaccines' produced in record time by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna employ a technique *never approved before for use on humans*. They are known as mRNA 'vaccines' and inject a synthetic version of 'viral' mRNA or 'messenger RNA'. The key is in the term 'messenger'. The body works, or doesn't, on the basis of information messaging. Communications are constantly passing between and within the genetic system and the brain. Change those messages and you change the state of the body and even its very nature and you can change psychology and behaviour by the way the brain processes information. I think you are going to see significant changes in personality and perception of many people who have had the 'Covid vaccine' synthetic potions. Insider Aldous Huxley predicted the following in 1961 and mRNA 'vaccines' can be included in the term 'pharmacological methods':

> There will be, in the next generation or so, a pharmacological method of making people love their servitude, and producing dictatorship without tears, so to speak, producing a kind of painless concentration camp for entire societies, so that people will in fact have their own liberties taken away from them, but rather enjoy it, because they will be distracted from any desire to rebel by propaganda or brainwashing, or brainwashing enhanced by pharmacological methods. And this seems to be the final revolution.

Apologists claim that mRNA synthetic 'vaccines' don't change the DNA genetic blueprint because RNA does not affect DNA only the other way round. This is so disingenuous. A process called 'reverse

transcription' can convert RNA into DNA and be integrated into DNA in the cell nucleus. This was highlighted in December, 2020, by scientists at Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Geneticists report that more than 40 percent of mammalian genomes results from reverse transcription. On the most basic level if messaging changes then that sequence must lead to changes in DNA which is receiving and transmitting those communications. How can introducing synthetic material into cells not change the cells where DNA is located? The process is known as transfection which is defined as 'a technique to insert foreign nucleic acid (DNA or RNA) into a cell, typically with the intention of altering the properties of the cell'. Researchers at the Sloan Kettering Institute in New York found that changes in messenger RNA can deactivate tumour-suppressing proteins and thereby promote cancer. This is what happens when you mess with messaging. 'Covid vaccine' maker Moderna was founded in 2010 by Canadian stem cell biologist Derrick J. Rossi after his breakthrough discovery in the field of transforming and reprogramming stem cells. These are neutral cells that can be programmed to become any cell including sperm cells. Moderna was therefore founded on the principle of genetic manipulation and has never produced any vaccine or drug before its genetically-manipulating synthetic 'Covid' shite. Look at the name – Mode-RNA or Modify-RNA. Another important point is that the US Supreme Court has ruled that genetically-modified DNA, or complementary DNA (cDNA) synthesized in the laboratory from messenger RNA, can be patented and owned. These psychopaths are doing this to the human body.

Cells replicate synthetic mRNA in the 'Covid vaccines' and in theory the body is tricked into making antigens which trigger antibodies to target the 'virus spike proteins' which as Dr Tom Cowan said have *never been seen*. Cut the crap and these 'vaccines' deliver *self-replicating* synthetic material to the cells with the effect of changing human DNA. The more of them you have the more that process is compounded while synthetic material is all the time self-replicating. 'Vaccine'-maker Moderna describes mRNA as 'like

software for the cell' and so they are messing with the body's software. What happens when you change the software in a computer? Everything changes. For this reason the Cult is preparing a production line of mRNA 'Covid vaccines' and a long list of excuses to use them as with all the 'variants' of a 'virus' never shown to exist. The plan is further to transfer the mRNA technique to other vaccines mostly given to children and young people. The cumulative consequences will be a transformation of human DNA through a constant infusion of synthetic genetic material which will kill many and change the rest. Now consider that governments that have given emergency approval for a vaccine that's not a vaccine; never been approved for humans before; had no testing worth the name; and the makers have been given immunity from prosecution for any deaths or adverse effects suffered by the public. The UK government awarded *permanent legal indemnity* to itself and its employees for harm done when a patient is being treated for 'Covid-19' or 'suspected Covid-19'. That is quite a thought when these are possible 'side-effects' from the 'vaccine' (they are not 'side', they are effects) listed by the US Food and Drug Administration:

Guillain-Barre syndrome; acute disseminated encephalomyelitis; transverse myelitis; encephalitis; myelitis; encephalomyelitis; meningoencephalitis; meningitis; encephalopathy; convulsions; seizures; stroke; narcolepsy; cataplexy; anaphylaxis; acute myocardial infarction (heart attack); myocarditis; pericarditis; autoimmune disease; death; implications for pregnancy, and birth outcomes; other acute demyelinating diseases; non anaphylactic allergy reactions; thrombocytopenia ; disseminated intravascular coagulation; venous thromboembolism; arthritis; arthralgia; joint pain; Kawasaki disease; multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children; vaccine enhanced disease. The latter is the way the 'vaccine' has the potential to make diseases far worse than they would otherwise be.

UK doctor and freedom campaigner Vernon Coleman described the conditions in this list as 'all unpleasant, most of them very serious, and you can't get more serious than death'. The thought that anyone at all has had the 'vaccine' in these circumstances is testament to the potential that humanity has for clueless, unquestioning, stupidity and for many that programmed stupidity has already been terminal.

An insider speaks

Dr Michael Yeadon is a former Vice President, head of research and Chief Scientific Adviser at vaccine giant Pfizer. Yeadon worked on the inside of Big Pharma, but that did not stop him becoming a vocal critic of 'Covid vaccines' and their potential for multiple harms, including infertility in women. By the spring of 2021 he went much further and even used the no, no, term 'conspiracy'. When you begin to see what is going on it is impossible not to do so. Yeadon spoke out in an interview with freedom campaigner James Delingpole and I mentioned earlier how he said that no one had samples of 'the virus'. He explained that the mRNA technique originated in the anti-cancer field and ways to turn on and off certain genes which could be advantageous if you wanted to stop cancer growing out of control. 'That's the origin of them. They are a very unusual application, really.' Yeadon said that treating a cancer patient with an aggressive procedure might be understandable if the alternative was dying, but it was quite another thing to use the same technique as a public health measure. Most people involved wouldn't catch the infectious agent you were vaccinating against and if they did they probably wouldn't die:

> If you are really using it as a public health measure you really want to as close as you can get to zero sides-effects … I find it odd that they chose techniques that were really cutting their teeth in the field of oncology and I'm worried that in using gene-based vaccines that have to be injected in the body and spread around the body, get taken up into some cells, and the regulators haven't quite told us which cells they get taken up into … you are going to be generating a wide range of responses … with multiple steps each of which could go well or badly.

I doubt the Cult intends it to go well. Yeadon said that you can put any gene you like into the body through the 'vaccine'. 'You can certainly give them a gene that would do them some harm if you wanted.' I was intrigued when he said that when used in the cancer field the technique could turn genes on and off. I explore this process in *The Answer* and with different genes having different functions you could create mayhem – physically and psychologically – if you turned the wrong ones on and the right ones off. I read reports of an experiment by researchers at the University of Washington's school of computer science and engineering in which they encoded DNA to infect computers. The body is itself a biological computer and if human DNA can inflict damage on a computer why can't the computer via synthetic material mess with the human body? It can. The Washington research team said it was possible to insert malicious malware into 'physical DNA strands' and corrupt the computer system of a gene sequencing machine as it 'reads gene letters and stores them as binary digits 0 and 1'. They concluded that hackers could one day use blood or spit samples to access computer systems and obtain sensitive data from police forensics labs or infect genome files. It is at this level of digital interaction that synthetic 'vaccines' need to be seen to get the full picture and that will become very clear later on. Michael Yeadon said it made no sense to give the 'vaccine' to younger people who were in no danger from the 'virus'. What was the benefit? It was all downside with potential effects:

> The fact that my government in what I thought was a civilised, rational country, is raining [the 'vaccine'] on people in their 30s and 40s, even my children in their 20s, they're getting letters and phone calls, I know this is not right and any of you doctors who are vaccinating you know it's not right, too. They are not at risk. They are not at risk from the disease, so you are now hoping that the side-effects are so rare that you get away with it. You don't give new technology … that you don't understand to 100 percent of the population.

Blood clot problems with the AstraZeneca 'vaccine' have been affecting younger people to emphasise the downside risks with no benefit. AstraZeneca's version, produced with Oxford University, does not use mRNA, but still gets its toxic cocktail inside cells where

it targets DNA. The Johnson & Johnson 'vaccine' which uses a similar technique has also produced blood clot effects to such an extent that the United States paused its use at one point. They are all 'gene therapy' (cell modification) procedures and not 'vaccines'. The truth is that once the content of these injections enter cells we have no idea what the effect will be. People can speculate and some can give very educated opinions and that's good. In the end, though, only the makers know what their potions are designed to do and even they won't know every last consequence. Michael Yeadon was scathing about doctors doing what they knew to be wrong. 'Everyone's mute', he said. Doctors in the NHS must know this was not right, coming into work and injecting people. 'I don't know how they sleep at night. I know I couldn't do it. I know that if I were in that position I'd have to quit.' He said he knew enough about toxicology to know this was not a good risk-benefit. Yeadon had spoken to seven or eight university professors and all except two would not speak out publicly. Their universities had a policy that no one said anything that countered the government and its medical advisors. They were afraid of losing their government grants. This is how intimidation has been used to silence the truth at every level of the system. I say silence, but these people could still speak out if they made that choice. Yeadon called them 'moral cowards' – 'This is about your children and grandchildren's lives and you have just buggered off and left it.'

'Variant' nonsense

Some of his most powerful comments related to the alleged 'variants' being used to instil more fear, justify more lockdowns, and introduce more 'vaccines'. He said government claims about 'variants' were nonsense. He had checked the alleged variant 'codes' and they were 99.7 percent identical to the 'original'. This was the human identity difference equivalent to putting a baseball cap on and off or wearing it the other way round. A 0.3 percent difference would make it impossible for that 'variant' to escape immunity from the 'original'. This made no sense of having new 'vaccines' for

'variants'. He said there would have to be at least a *30 percent* difference for that to be justified and even then he believed the immune system would still recognise what it was. Gates-funded 'variant modeller' and 'vaccine'-pusher John Edmunds might care to comment. Yeadon said drug companies were making new versions of the 'vaccine' as a 'top up' for 'variants'. Worse than that, he said, the 'regulators' around the world like the MHRA in the UK had got together and agreed that because 'vaccines' for 'variants' were so similar to the first 'vaccines' *they did not have to do safety studies*. How transparently sinister that is. This is when Yeadon said: 'There is a conspiracy here.' There was no need for another vaccine for 'variants' and yet we were told that there was and the country had shut its borders because of them. 'They are going into hundreds of millions of arms without passing 'go' or any regulator. Why did they do that? Why did they pick this method of making the vaccine?'

The reason had to be something bigger than that it seemed and 'it's not protection against the virus'. It's was a far bigger project that meant politicians and advisers were willing to do things and not do things that knowingly resulted in avoidable deaths – 'that's already happened when you think about lockdown and deprivation of health care for a year.' He spoke of people prepared to do something that results in the avoidable death of their fellow human beings and it not bother them. This is the penny-drop I have been working to get across for more than 30 years – the level of pure evil we are dealing with. Yeadon said his friends and associates could not believe there could be that much evil, but he reminded them of Stalin, Pol Pot and Hitler and of what Stalin had said: 'One death is a tragedy. A million? A statistic.' He could not think of a benign explanation for why you need top-up vaccines 'which I'm sure you don't' and for the regulators 'to just get out of the way and wave them through'. Why would the regulators do that when they were still wrestling with the dangers of the 'parent' vaccine? He was clearly shocked by what he had seen since the 'Covid' hoax began and now he was thinking the previously unthinkable:

If you wanted to depopulate a significant proportion of the world and to do it in a way that doesn't involve destruction of the environment with nuclear weapons, poisoning everyone with anthrax or something like that, and you wanted plausible deniability while you had a multi-year infectious disease crisis, I actually don't think you could come up with a better plan of work than seems to be in front of me. I can't say that's what they are going to do, but I can't think of a benign explanation why they are doing it.

He said he never thought that they would get rid of 99 percent of humans, but now he wondered. 'If you wanted to that this would be a hell of a way to do it – it would be unstoppable folks.' Yeadon had concluded that those who submitted to the 'vaccine' would be allowed to have some kind of normal life (but for how long?) while screws were tightened to coerce and mandate the last few percent. 'I think they'll put the rest of them in a prison camp. I wish I was wrong, but I don't think I am.' Other points he made included: There were no coronavirus vaccines then suddenly they all come along at the same time; we have no idea of the long term affect with trials so short; coercing or forcing people to have medical procedures is against the Nuremberg Code instigated when the Nazis did just that; people should at least delay having the 'vaccine'; a quick Internet search confirms that masks don't reduce respiratory viral transmission and 'the government knows that'; they have smashed civil society and they know that, too; two dozen peer-reviewed studies show no connection between lockdown and reducing deaths; he knew from personal friends the elite were still flying around and going on holiday while the public were locked down; the elite were not having the 'vaccines'. He was also asked if 'vaccines' could be made to target difference races. He said he didn't know, but the document by the Project for the New American Century in September, 2000, said developing 'advanced forms of biological warfare that can target *specific genotypes* may transform biological warfare from the realm of terror to a politically useful tool.' Oh, they're evil all right. Of that we can be *absolutely* sure.

Another cull of old people

We have seen from the CDC definition that the mRNA 'Covid vaccine' is not a vaccine and nor are the others that *claim* to reduce 'severity of symptoms' in *some* people, but not protect from infection or transmission. What about all the lies about returning to 'normal' if people were 'vaccinated'? If they are not claimed to stop infection and transmission of the alleged 'virus', how does anything change? This was all lies to manipulate people to take the jabs and we are seeing that now with masks and distancing still required for the 'vaccinated'. How did they think that elderly people with fragile health and immune responses were going to be affected by infusing their cells with synthetic material and other toxic substances? They *knew* that in the short and long term it would be devastating and fatal as the culling of the old that began with the first lockdowns was continued with the 'vaccine'. Death rates in care homes soared immediately residents began to be 'vaccinated' – infused with synthetic material. Brave and committed whistleblower nurses put their careers at risk by exposing this truth while the rest kept their heads down and their mouths shut to put their careers before those they are supposed to care for. A long-time American Certified Nursing Assistant who gave his name as James posted a video in which he described emotionally what happened in his care home when vaccination began. He said that during 2020 very few residents were sick with 'Covid' and no one died during the entire year; but shortly after the Pfizer mRNA injections 14 people died within two weeks and many others were near death. 'They're dropping like flies', he said. Residents who walked on their own before the shot could no longer and they had lost their ability to conduct an intelligent conversation. The home's management said the sudden deaths were caused by a 'super-spreader' of 'Covid-19'. Then how come, James asked, that residents who refused to take the injections were not sick? It was a case of inject the elderly with mRNA synthetic potions and blame their illness and death that followed on the 'virus'. James described what was happening in care homes as 'the greatest crime of genocide this country has ever seen'. Remember the NHS staff nurse from earlier who used the same

word ‘genocide’ for what was happening with the ‘vaccines’ and that it was an ‘act of human annihilation’. A UK care home whistleblower told a similar story to James about the effect of the ‘vaccine’ in deaths and ‘outbreaks’ of illness dubbed ‘Covid’ after getting the jab. She told how her care home management and staff had zealously imposed government regulations and no one was allowed to even question the official narrative let alone speak out against it. She said the NHS was even worse. Again we see the results of reframing. A worker at a local care home where I live said they had not had a single case of ‘Covid’ there for almost a year and when the residents were ‘vaccinated’ they had 19 positive cases in two weeks with eight dying.

It’s not the ‘vaccine’ – honest

The obvious cause and effect was being ignored by the media and most of the public. Australia’s health minister Greg Hunt (a former head of strategy at the World Economic Forum) was admitted to hospital after he had the ‘vaccine’. He was suffering according to reports from the skin infection ‘cellulitis’ and it must have been a severe case to have warranted days in hospital. Immediately the authorities said this was nothing to do with the ‘vaccine’ when an effect of some vaccines is a ‘cellulitis-like reaction’. We had families of perfectly healthy old people who died after the ‘vaccine’ saying that if only they had been given the ‘vaccine’ earlier they would still be alive. As a numbskull rating that is off the chart. A father of four ‘died of Covid’ at aged 48 when he was taken ill two days after having the ‘vaccine’. The man, a health administrator, had been ‘shielding during the pandemic’ and had ‘not really left the house’ until he went for the ‘vaccine’. Having the ‘vaccine’ and then falling ill and dying does not seem to have qualified as a possible cause and effect and ‘Covid-19’ went on his death certificate. His family said they had no idea how he ‘caught the virus’. A family member said: ‘Tragically, it could be that going for a vaccination ultimately led to him catching Covid …The sad truth is that they are never going to know where it came from.’ The family warned people to remember

that the virus still existed and was 'very real'. So was their stupidity. Nurses and doctors who had the first round of the 'vaccine' were collapsing, dying and ending up in a hospital bed while they or their grieving relatives were saying they'd still have the 'vaccine' again despite what happened. I kid you not. You mean if your husband returned from the dead he'd have the same 'vaccine' again that killed him??

Doctors at the VCU Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia, said the Johnson & Johnson 'vaccine' was to blame for a man's skin peeling off. Patient Richard Terrell said: 'It all just happened so fast. My skin peeled off. It's still coming off on my hands now.' He said it was stinging, burning and itching and when he bent his arms and legs it was very painful with 'the skin swollen and rubbing against itself'. Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines use mRNA to change the cell while the Johnson & Johnson version uses DNA in a process similar to AstraZeneca's technique. Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca have both had their 'vaccines' paused by many countries after causing serious blood problems. Terrell's doctor Fnu Nutan said he could have died if he hadn't got medical attention. It sounds terrible so what did Nutan and Terrell say about the 'vaccine' now? Oh, they still recommend that people have it. A nurse in a hospital bed 40 minutes after the vaccination and unable to swallow due to throat swelling was told by a doctor that he lost mobility in his arm for 36 hours following the vaccination. What did he say to the ailing nurse? 'Good for you for getting the vaccination.' We are dealing with a serious form of cognitive dissonance madness in both public and medical staff. There is a remarkable correlation between those having the 'vaccine' and trumpeting the fact and suffering bad happenings shortly afterwards. Witold Rogiewicz, a Polish doctor, made a video of his 'vaccination' and ridiculed those who were questioning its safety and the intentions of Bill Gates: 'Vaccinate yourself to protect yourself, your loved ones, friends and also patients. And to mention quickly I have info for anti-vaxxers and anti-Coviders if you want to contact Bill Gates you can do this through me.' He further ridiculed the dangers of 5G. Days later he

was dead, but naturally the vaccination wasn't mentioned in the verdict of 'heart attack'.

Lies, lies and more lies

So many members of the human race have slipped into extreme states of insanity and unfortunately they include reframed doctors and nursing staff. Having a 'vaccine' and dying within minutes or hours is not considered a valid connection while death from any cause within 28 days or longer of a positive test with a test not testing for the 'virus' means 'Covid-19' goes on the death certificate. How could that 'vaccine'-death connection not have been made except by calculated deceit? US figures in the initial rollout period to February 12th, 2020, revealed that a third of the deaths reported to the CDC after 'Covid vaccines' happened within 48 hours. Five men in the UK suffered an 'extremely rare' blood clot problem after having the AstraZeneca 'vaccine', but no causal link was established said the Gates-funded Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) which had given the 'vaccine' emergency approval to be used. Former Pfizer executive Dr Michael Yeadon explained in his interview how the procedures could cause blood coagulation and clots. People who should have been at no risk were dying from blood clots in the brain and he said he had heard from medical doctor friends that people were suffering from skin bleeding and massive headaches. The AstraZeneca 'shot' was stopped by some 20 countries over the blood clotting issue and still the corrupt MHRA, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the World Health Organization said that it should continue to be given even though the EMA admitted that it 'still cannot rule out definitively' a link between blood clotting and the 'vaccine'. Later Marco Cavaleri, head of EMA vaccine strategy, said there was indeed a clear link between the 'vaccine' and thrombosis, but they didn't know why. So much for the trials showing the 'vaccine' is safe. Blood clots were affecting younger people who would be under virtually no danger from 'Covid' even if it existed which makes it all the more stupid and sinister.

The British government responded to public alarm by wheeling out June Raine, the terrifyingly weak infant school headmistress sound-alike who heads the UK MHRA drug 'regulator'. The idea that she would stand up to Big Pharma and government pressure is laughable and she told us that all was well in the same way that she did when allowing untested, never-used-on-humans-before, genetically-manipulating 'vaccines' to be exposed to the public in the first place. Mass lying is the new normal of the 'Covid' era. The MHRA later said 30 cases of rare blood clots had by then been connected with the AstraZeneca 'vaccine' (that means a lot more in reality) while stressing that the benefits of the jab in preventing 'Covid-19' outweighed any risks. A more ridiculous and disingenuous statement with callous disregard for human health it is hard to contemplate. Immediately after the mendacious 'all-clears' two hospital workers in Denmark experienced blood clots and cerebral haemorrhaging following the AstraZeneca jab and one died. Top Norwegian health official Pål Andre Holme said the 'vaccine' was the only common factor: 'There is nothing in the patient history of these individuals that can give such a powerful immune response … I am confident that the antibodies that we have found are the cause, and I see no other explanation than it being the vaccine which triggers it.' Strokes, a clot or bleed in the brain, were clearly associated with the 'vaccine' from word of mouth and whistleblower reports. Similar consequences followed with all these 'vaccines' that we were told were so safe and as the numbers grew by the day it was clear we were witnessing human carnage.

Learning the hard way

A woman interviewed by UKColumn told how her husband suffered dramatic health effects after the vaccine when he'd been in good health all his life. He went from being a little unwell to losing all feeling in his legs and experiencing 'excruciating pain'. Misdiagnosis followed twice at Accident and Emergency (an 'allergy' and 'sciatica') before he was admitted to a neurology ward where doctors said his serious condition had been caused by the

'vaccine'. Another seven 'vaccinated' people were apparently being treated on the same ward for similar symptoms. The woman said he had the 'vaccine' because they believed media claims that it was safe. 'I didn't think the government would give out a vaccine that does this to somebody; I believed they would be bringing out a vaccination that would be safe.' What a tragic way to learn that lesson. Another woman posted that her husband was transporting stroke patients to hospital on almost every shift and when he asked them if they had been 'vaccinated' for 'Covid' they all replied 'yes'. One had a 'massive brain bleed' the day after his second dose. She said her husband reported the 'just been vaccinated' information every time to doctors in A and E only for them to ignore it, make no notes and appear annoyed that it was even mentioned. This particular report cannot be verified, but it expresses a common theme that confirms the monumental underreporting of 'vaccine' consequences. Interestingly as the 'vaccines' and their brain blood clot/stroke consequences began to emerge the UK National Health Service began a publicity campaign telling the public what to do in the event of a stroke. A Scottish NHS staff nurse who quit in disgust in March, 2021, said:

I have seen traumatic injuries from the vaccine, they're not getting reported to the yellow card [adverse reaction] scheme, they're treating the symptoms, not asking why, why it's happening. It's just treating the symptoms and when you speak about it you're dismissed like you're crazy, I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy because every other colleague I've spoken to is terrified to speak out, they've had enough.

Videos appeared on the Internet of people uncontrollably shaking after the 'vaccine' with no control over muscles, limbs and even their face. A Scottish mother broke out in a severe rash all over her body almost immediately after she was given the AstraZeneca 'vaccine'. The pictures were horrific. Leigh King, a 41-year-old hairdresser from Lanarkshire said: 'Never in my life was I prepared for what I was about to experience … My skin was so sore and constantly hot … I have never felt pain like this …' But don't you worry, the 'vaccine' is perfectly safe. Then there has been the effect on medical

staff who have been pressured to have the 'vaccine' by psychopathic 'health' authorities and government. A London hospital consultant who gave the name K. Polyakova wrote this to the *British Medical Journal* or *BMJ*:

> I am currently struggling with … the failure to report the reality of the morbidity caused by our current vaccination program within the health service and staff population. The levels of sickness after vaccination is unprecedented and staff are getting very sick and some with neurological symptoms which is having a huge impact on the health service function. Even the young and healthy are off for days, some for weeks, and some requiring medical treatment. Whole teams are being taken out as they went to get vaccinated together.
>
> Mandatory vaccination in this instance is stupid, unethical and irresponsible when it comes to protecting our staff and public health. We are in the voluntary phase of vaccination, and encouraging staff to take an unlicensed product that is impacting on their immediate health … it is clearly stated that these vaccine products do not offer immunity or stop transmission. In which case why are we doing it?

Not to protect health that's for sure. Medical workers are lauded by governments for agenda reasons when they couldn't give a toss about them any more than they can for the population in general. Schools across America faced the same situation as they closed due to the high number of teachers and other staff with bad reactions to the Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson 'Covid vaccines' all of which were linked to death and serious adverse effects. The *BMJ* took down the consultant's comments pretty quickly on the grounds that they were being used to spread 'disinformation'. They were exposing the truth about the 'vaccine' was the real reason. The cover-up is breathtaking.

Hiding the evidence

The scale of the 'vaccine' death cover-up worldwide can be confirmed by comparing official figures with the personal experience of the public. I heard of many people in my community who died immediately or soon after the vaccine that would never appear in the media or even likely on the official totals of 'vaccine' fatalities and adverse reactions when only about ten percent are estimated to be

reported and I have seen some estimates as low as one percent in a Harvard study. In the UK alone by April 29th, 2021, some 757,654 adverse reactions had been officially reported from the Pfizer/BioNTech, Oxford/AstraZeneca and Moderna 'vaccines' with more than a thousand deaths linked to jabs and that means an estimated ten times this number in reality from a ten percent reporting rate percentage. That's seven million adverse reactions and 10,000 potential deaths and a one percent reporting rate would be ten times *those* figures. In 1976 the US government pulled the swine flu vaccine after *53* deaths. The UK data included a combined 10,000 eye disorders from the 'Covid vaccines' with more than 750 suffering visual impairment or blindness and again multiply by the estimated reporting percentages. As 'Covid cases' officially fell hospitals virtually empty during the 'Covid crisis' began to fill up with a range of other problems in the wake of the 'vaccine' rollout. The numbers across America have also been catastrophic. Deaths linked to *all* types of vaccine increased by *6,000 percent* in the first quarter of 2021 compared with 2020. A 39-year-old woman from Ogden, Utah, died four days after receiving a second dose of Moderna's 'Covid vaccine' when her liver, heart and kidneys all failed despite the fact that she had no known medical issues or conditions. Her family sought an autopsy, but Dr Erik Christensen, Utah's chief medical examiner, said proving vaccine injury as a cause of death almost never happened. He could think of only one instance where an autopsy would name a vaccine as the official cause of death and that would be anaphylaxis where someone received a vaccine and died almost instantaneously. 'Short of that, it would be difficult for us to definitively say this is the vaccine,' Christensen said. If that is true this must be added to the estimated ten percent (or far less) reporting rate of vaccine deaths and serious reactions and the conclusion can only be that vaccine deaths and serious reactions – including these 'Covid' potions' – are phenomenally understated in official figures. The same story can be found everywhere. Endless accounts of deaths and serious reactions among the public, medical

and care home staff while official figures did not even begin to reflect this.

Professional script-reader Dr David Williams, a 'top public-health official' in Ontario, Canada, insulted our intelligence by claiming only four serious adverse reactions and no deaths from the more than 380,000 vaccine doses then given. This bore no resemblance to what people knew had happened in their owns circles and we had Dirk Huyer in charge of getting millions vaccinated in Ontario while at the same time he was Chief Coroner for the province investigating causes of death including possible death from the vaccine. An aide said he had stepped back from investigating deaths, but evidence indicated otherwise. Rosemary Frei, who secured a Master of Science degree in molecular biology at the Faculty of Medicine at Canada's University of Calgary before turning to investigative journalism, was one who could see that official figures for 'vaccine' deaths and reactions made no sense. She said that doctors seldom reported adverse events and when people got really sick or died after getting a vaccination they would attribute that to anything except the vaccines. It had been that way for years and anyone who wondered aloud whether the 'Covid vaccines' or other shots cause harm is immediately branded as 'anti-vax' and 'anti-science'. This was 'career-threatening' for health professionals. Then there was the huge pressure to support the push to 'vaccinate' billions in the quickest time possible. Frei said:

> So that's where we're at today. More than half a million vaccine doses have been given to people in Ontario alone. The rush is on to vaccinate all 15 million of us in the province by September. And the mainstream media are screaming for this to be sped up even more. That all adds up to only a very slim likelihood that we're going to be told the truth by officials about how many people are getting sick or dying from the vaccines.

What is true of Ontario is true of everywhere.

They KNEW – and still did it

The authorities knew what was going to happen with multiple deaths and adverse reactions. The UK government's Gates-funded

and Big Pharma-dominated Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) hired a company to employ AI in compiling the projected reactions to the 'vaccine' that would otherwise be uncountable. The request for applications said: 'The MHRA urgently seeks an Artificial Intelligence (AI) software tool to process the expected high volume of Covid-19 vaccine Adverse Drug Reaction …' This was from the agency, headed by the disingenuous June Raine, that gave the 'vaccines' emergency approval and the company was hired before the first shot was given. 'We are going to kill and maim you – is that okay?' 'Oh, yes, perfectly fine – I'm very grateful, thank you, doctor.' The range of 'Covid vaccine' adverse reactions goes on for page after page in the MHRA criminally underreported 'Yellow Card' system and includes affects to eyes, ears, skin, digestion, blood and so on. Raine's MHRA amazingly claimed that the 'overall safety experience … is so far as expected from the clinical trials'. The death, serious adverse effects, deafness and blindness were *expected?* When did they ever mention that? If these human tragedies were expected then those that gave approval for the use of these 'vaccines' must be guilty of crimes against humanity including murder – a definition of which is 'killing a person with malice aforethought or with recklessness manifesting extreme indifference to the value of human life.' People involved at the MHRA, the CDC in America and their equivalent around the world must go before Nuremberg trials to answer for their callous inhumanity. We are only talking here about the immediate effects of the 'vaccine'. The longer-term impact of the DNA synthetic manipulation is the main reason they are so hysterically desperate to inoculate the entire global population in the shortest possible time.

Africa and the developing world are a major focus for the 'vaccine' depopulation agenda and a mass vaccination sales-pitch is underway thanks to caring people like the Rockefellers and other Cult assets. The Rockefeller Foundation, which pre-empted the 'Covid pandemic' in a document published in 2010 that 'predicted' what happened a decade later, announced an initial $34.95 million grant in February, 2021, 'to ensure more equitable access to Covid-19

testing and vaccines' among other things in Africa in collaboration with '24 organizations, businesses, and government agencies'. The pan-Africa initiative would focus on 10 countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia'. Rajiv Shah, President of the Rockefeller Foundation and former administrator of CIA-controlled USAID, said that if Africa was not mass-vaccinated (to change the DNA of its people) it was a 'threat to all of humanity' and not fair on Africans. When someone from the Rockefeller Foundation says they want to do something to help poor and deprived people and countries it is time for a belly-laugh. They are doing this out of the goodness of their 'heart' because 'vaccinating' the entire global population is what the 'Covid' hoax set out to achieve. Official 'decolonisation' of Africa by the Cult was merely a prelude to financial colonisation on the road to a return to physical colonisation. The 'vaccine' is vital to that and the sudden and convenient death of the 'Covid' sceptic president of Tanzania can be seen in its true light. A lot of people in Africa are aware that this is another form of colonisation and exploitation and they need to stand their ground.

The 'vaccine is working' scam

A potential problem for the Cult was that the 'vaccine' is meant to change human DNA and body messaging and not to protect anyone from a 'virus' never shown to exist. The vaccine couldn't work because it was not designed to work and how could they make it *appear* to be working so that more people would have it? This was overcome by lowering the amplification rate of the PCR test to produce fewer 'cases' and therefore fewer 'deaths'. Some of us had been pointing out since March, 2020, that the amplification rate of the test not testing for the 'virus' had been made artificially high to generate positive tests which they could call 'cases' to justify lockdowns. The World Health Organization recommended an absurdly high 45 amplification cycles to ensure the high positives required by the Cult and then remained silent on the issue until January 20th, 2021 – Biden's Inauguration Day. This was when the

'vaccinations' were seriously underway and on that day the WHO recommended after discussions with America's CDC that laboratories *lowered their testing amplification*. Dr David Samadi, a certified urologist and health writer, said the WHO was encouraging all labs to reduce their cycle count for PCR tests. He said the current cycle was much too high and was 'resulting in any particle being declared a positive case'. Even one mainstream news report I saw said this meant the number of 'Covid' infections may have been 'dramatically inflated'. Oh, just a little bit. The CDC in America issued new guidance to laboratories in April, 2021, to use 28 cycles *but only for 'vaccinated' people*. The timing of the CDC/WHO interventions were cynically designed to make it appear the 'vaccines' were responsible for falling cases and deaths when the real reason can be seen in the following examples. New York's state lab, the Wadsworth Center, identified 872 positive tests in July, 2020, based on a threshold of 40 cycles. When the figure was lowered to 35 cycles *43 percent* of the 872 were no longer 'positives'. At 30 cycles the figure was 63 percent. A Massachusetts lab found that between *85 to 90 percent* of people who tested positive in July with a cycle threshold of 40 would be negative at 30 cycles, Ashish Jha, MD, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute, said: 'I'm really shocked that it could be that high … Boy, does it really change the way we need to be thinking about testing.' I'm shocked that I could see the obvious in the spring of 2020, with no medical background, and most medical professionals still haven't worked it out. No, that's not shocking – it's terrifying.

Three weeks after the WHO directive to lower PCR cycles the London *Daily Mail* ran this headline: 'Why ARE Covid cases plummeting? New infections have fallen 45% in the US and 30% globally in the past 3 weeks but experts say vaccine is NOT the main driver because only 8% of Americans and 13% of people worldwide have received their first dose.' They acknowledged that the drop could not be attributed to the 'vaccine', but soon this morphed throughout the media into the 'vaccine' has caused cases and deaths to fall when it was the PCR threshold. In December, 2020, there was

chaos at English Channel ports with truck drivers needing negative 'Covid' tests before they could board a ferry home for Christmas. The government wanted to remove the backlog as fast as possible and they brought in troops to do the 'testing'. Out of 1,600 drivers just *36* tested positive and the rest were given the all clear to cross the Channel. I guess the authorities thought that 36 was the least they could get away with without the unquestioning catching on. The amplification trick which most people believed in the absence of information in the mainstream applied more pressure on those refusing the 'vaccine' to succumb when it 'obviously worked'. The truth was the exact opposite with deaths in care homes soaring with the 'vaccine' and in Israel the term used was 'skyrocket'. A re-analysis of published data from the Israeli Health Ministry led by Dr Hervé Seligmann at the Medicine Emerging Infectious and Tropical Diseases at Aix-Marseille University found that Pfizer's 'Covid vaccine' killed 'about 40 times more [elderly] people than the disease itself would have killed' during a five-week vaccination period and *260 times* more younger people than would have died from the 'virus' even according to the manipulated 'virus' figures. Dr Seligmann and his co-study author, Haim Yativ, declared after reviewing the Israeli 'vaccine' death data: 'This is a new Holocaust.'

Then, in mid-April, 2021, after vast numbers of people worldwide had been 'vaccinated', the story changed with clear coordination. The UK government began to prepare the ground for more future lockdowns when Nuremberg-destined Boris Johnson told yet another whopper. He said that cases had fallen because of *lockdowns* not 'vaccines'. Lockdowns are irrelevant when *there is no 'virus'* and the test and fraudulent death certificates are deciding the number of 'cases' and 'deaths'. Study after study has shown that lockdowns don't work and instead kill and psychologically destroy people. Meanwhile in the United States Anthony Fauci and Rochelle Walensky, the ultra-Zionist head of the CDC, peddled the same line. More lockdown was the answer and not the 'vaccine', a line repeated on cue by the moron that is Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Why all the hysteria to get everyone 'vaccinated' if lockdowns and

not 'vaccines' made the difference? None of it makes sense on the face of it. Oh, but it does. The Cult wants lockdowns *and* the 'vaccine' and if the 'vaccine' is allowed to be seen as the total answer lockdowns would no longer be justified when there are still livelihoods to destroy. 'Variants' and renewed upward manipulation of PCR amplification are planned to instigate never-ending lockdown *and* more 'vaccines'.

You *must* have it – we're desperate

Israel, where the Jewish and Arab population are ruled by the Sabbatian Cult, was the front-runner in imposing the DNA-manipulating 'vaccine' on its people to such an extent that Jewish refusers began to liken what was happening to the early years of Nazi Germany. This would seem to be a fantastic claim. Why would a government of Jewish people be acting like the Nazis did? If you realise that the Sabbatian Cult was behind the Nazis and that Sabbatians hate Jews the pieces start to fit and the question of why a 'Jewish' government would treat Jews with such callous disregard for their lives and freedom finds an answer. Those controlling the government of Israel *aren't Jewish* – they're Sabbatian. Israeli lawyer Tamir Turgal was one who made the Nazi comparison in comments to German lawyer Reiner Fuellmich who is leading a class action lawsuit against the psychopaths for crimes against humanity. Turgal described how the Israeli government was vaccinating children and pregnant women on the basis that there was no evidence that this was dangerous when they had no evidence that it *wasn't* dangerous either. They just had no evidence. This was medical experimentation and Turgal said this breached the Nuremberg Code about medical experimentation and procedures requiring informed consent and choice. Think about that. A Nuremberg Code developed because of Nazi experimentation on Jews and others in concentration camps by people like the evil-beyond-belief Josef Mengele is being breached by the *Israeli* government; but when you know that it's a *Sabbatian* government along with its intelligence and military agencies like Mossad, Shin Bet and the Israeli Defense Forces, and that Sabbatians

were the force behind the Nazis, the kaleidoscope comes into focus. What have we come to when Israeli Jews are suing their government for violating the Nuremberg Code by essentially making Israelis subject to a medical experiment using the controversial 'vaccines'? It's a shocker that this has to be done in the light of what happened in Nazi Germany. The Anshe Ha-Emet, or 'People of the Truth', made up of Israeli doctors, lawyers, campaigners and public, have launched a lawsuit with the International Criminal Court. It says:

> When the heads of the Ministry of Health as well as the prime minister presented the vaccine in Israel and began the vaccination of Israeli residents, the vaccinated were not advised, that, in practice, they are taking part in a medical experiment and that their consent is required for this under the Nuremberg Code.

The irony is unbelievable, but easily explained in one word: Sabbatians. The foundation of Israeli 'Covid' apartheid is the 'green pass' or 'green passport' which allows Jews and Arabs who have had the DNA-manipulating 'vaccine' to go about their lives – to work, fly, travel in general, go to shopping malls, bars, restaurants, hotels, concerts, gyms, swimming pools, theatres and sports venues, while non-'vaccinated' are banned from all those places and activities. Israelis have likened the 'green pass' to the yellow stars that Jews in Nazi Germany were forced to wear – the same as the yellow stickers that a branch of UK supermarket chain Morrisons told exempt mask-wears they had to display when shopping. How very sensitive. The Israeli system is blatant South African-style apartheid on the basis of compliance or non-compliance to fascism rather than colour of the skin. How appropriate that the Sabbatian Israeli government was so close to the pre-Mandela apartheid regime in Pretoria. The Sabbatian-instigated 'vaccine passport' in Israel is planned for everywhere. Sabbatians struck a deal with Pfizer that allowed them to lead the way in the percentage of a national population infused with synthetic material and the result was catastrophic. Israeli freedom activist Shai Dannon told me how chairs were appearing on beaches that said 'vaccinated only'. Health Minister Yuli Edelstein said that anyone unwilling or unable to get

the jabs that 'confer immunity' will be 'left behind'. The man's a liar. Not even the makers claim the 'vaccines' confer immunity. When you see those figures of 'vaccine' deaths these psychopaths were saying that you must take the chance the 'vaccine' will kill you or maim you while knowing it will change your DNA or lockdown for you will be permanent. That's fascism. The Israeli parliament passed a law to allow personal information of the non-vaccinated to be shared with local and national authorities for three months. This was claimed by its supporters to be a way to 'encourage' people to be vaccinated. Hadas Ziv from Physicians for Human Rights described this as a 'draconian law which crushed medical ethics and the patient rights'. But that's the idea, the Sabbatians would reply.

Your papers, please

Sabbatian Israel was leading what has been planned all along to be a global 'vaccine pass' called a 'green passport' without which you would remain in permanent lockdown restriction and unable to do anything. This is how badly – *desperately* – the Cult is to get everyone 'vaccinated'. The term and colour 'green' was not by chance and related to the psychology of fusing the perception of the green climate hoax with the 'Covid' hoax and how the 'solution' to both is the same Great Reset. Lying politicians, health officials and psychologists denied there were any plans for mandatory vaccinations or restrictions based on vaccinations, but they knew that was exactly what was meant to happen with governments of all countries reaching agreements to enforce a global system. 'Free' Denmark and 'free' Sweden unveiled digital vaccine certification. Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain have all committed to a vaccine passport system and the rest including the whole of the EU would follow. The satanic UK government will certainly go this way despite mendacious denials and at the time of writing it is trying to manipulate the public into having the 'vaccine' so they could go abroad on a summer holiday. How would that work without something to prove you had the synthetic toxicity injected into you?

Documents show that the EU's European Commission was moving towards 'vaccine certificates' in 2018 and 2019 before the 'Covid' hoax began. They knew what was coming. Abracadabra – Ursula von der Leyen, the German President of the Commission, announced in March, 2021, an EU 'Digital Green Certificate' – green again – to track the public's 'Covid status'. The passport sting is worldwide and the Far East followed the same pattern with South Korea ruling that only those with 'vaccination' passports – again the *green* pass – would be able to 'return to their daily lives'.

Bill Gates has been preparing for this 'passport' with other Cult operatives for years and beyond the paper version is a Gates-funded 'digital tattoo' to identify who has been vaccinated and who hasn't. The 'tattoo' is reported to include a substance which is externally readable to confirm who has been vaccinated. This is a bio-luminous light-generating enzyme (think fireflies) called … *Luciferase*. Yes, named after the Cult 'god' Lucifer the 'light bringer' of whom more to come. Gates said he funded the readable tattoo to ensure children in the developing world were vaccinated and no one was missed out. He cares so much about poor kids as we know. This was just the cover story to develop a vaccine tagging system for everyone on the planet. Gates has been funding the ID2020 'alliance' to do just that in league with other lovely people at Microsoft, GAVI, the Rockefeller Foundation, Accenture and IDEO.org. He said in interviews in March, 2020, before any 'vaccine' publicly existed, that the world must have a globalised digital certificate to track the 'virus' and who had been vaccinated. Gates knew from the start that the mRNA vaccines were coming and when they would come and that the plan was to tag the 'vaccinated' to marginalise the intelligent and stop them doing anything including travel. Evil just doesn't suffice. Gates was exposed for offering a $10 million bribe to the Nigerian House of Representatives to invoke compulsory 'Covid' vaccination of all Nigerians. Sara Cunial, a member of the Italian Parliament, called Gates a 'vaccine criminal'. She urged the Italian President to hand him over to the International Criminal Court for crimes against

humanity and condemned his plans to 'chip the human race' through ID2020.

You know it's a long-planned agenda when war criminal and Cult gofer Tony Blair is on the case. With the scale of arrogance only someone as dark as Blair can muster he said: 'Vaccination in the end is going to be your route to liberty.' Blair is a disgusting piece of work and he confirms that again. The media has given a lot of coverage to a bloke called Charlie Mullins, founder of London's biggest independent plumbing company, Pimlico Plumbers, who has said he won't employ anyone who has not been vaccinated or have them go to any home where people are not vaccinated. He said that if he had his way no one would be allowed to walk the streets if they have not been vaccinated. Gates was cheering at the time while I was alerting the white coats. The plan is that people will qualify for 'passports' for having the first two doses and then to keep it they will have to have all the follow ups and new ones for invented 'variants' until human genetics is transformed and many are dead who can't adjust to the changes. Hollywood celebrities – the usual propaganda stunt – are promoting something called the WELL Health-Safety Rating to verify that a building or space has 'taken the necessary steps to prioritize the health and safety of their staff, visitors and other stakeholders'. They included Lady Gaga, Jennifer Lopez, Michael B. Jordan, Robert DeNiro, Venus Williams, Wolfgang Puck, Deepak Chopra and 17th Surgeon General Richard Carmona. Yawn. WELL Health-Safety has big connections with China. Parent company Delos is headed by former Goldman Sachs partner Paul Scialla. This is another example – and we will see so many others – of using the excuse of 'health' to dictate the lives and activities of the population. I guess one confirmation of the 'safety' of buildings is that only 'vaccinated' people can go in, right?

Electronic concentration camps

I wrote decades ago about the plans to restrict travel and here we are for those who refuse to bow to tyranny. This can be achieved in one go with air travel if the aviation industry makes a blanket decree.

The ‘vaccine’ and guaranteed income are designed to be part of a global version of China’s social credit system which tracks behaviour 24/7 and awards or deletes ‘credits’ based on whether your behaviour is supported by the state or not. I mean your entire lifestyle – what you do, eat, say, everything. Once your credit score falls below a certain level consequences kick in. In China tens of millions have been denied travel by air and train because of this. All the locations and activities denied to refusers by the ‘vaccine’ passports will be included in one big mass ban on doing almost anything for those that don’t bow their head to government. It’s beyond fascist and a new term is required to describe its extremes – I guess fascist technocracy will have to do. The way the Chinese system of technological – technocratic – control is sweeping the West can be seen in the Los Angeles school system and is planned to be expanded worldwide. Every child is required to have a ‘Covid’-tracking app scanned daily before they can enter the classroom. The so-called Daily Pass tracking system is produced by Gates’ Microsoft which I’m sure will shock you rigid. The pass will be scanned using a barcode (one step from an inside-the-body barcode) and the information will include health checks, ‘Covid’ tests and vaccinations. Entry codes are for one specific building only and access will only be allowed if a student or teacher has a negative test with a test not testing for the ‘virus’, has no symptoms of anything alleged to be related to ‘Covid’ (symptoms from a range of other illness), and has a temperature under 100 degrees. No barcode, no entry, is planned to be the case for everywhere and not only schools.

Kids are being psychologically prepared to accept this as ‘normal’ their whole life which is why what they can impose in schools is so important to the Cult and its gofers. Long-time American freedom campaigner John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute was not exaggerating when he said: ‘Databit by databit, we are building our own electronic concentration camps.’ Canada under its Cult gofer prime minister Justin Trudeau has taken a major step towards the real thing with people interned against their will if they test positive with a test not testing for the ‘virus’ when they arrive at a Canadian

airport. They are jailed in internment hotels often without food or water for long periods and with many doors failing to lock there have been sexual assaults. The interned are being charged sometimes $2,000 for the privilege of being abused in this way. Trudeau is fully on board with the Cult and says the 'Covid pandemic' has provided an opportunity for a global 'reset' to permanently change Western civilisation. His number two, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, is a trustee of the World Economic Forum and a Rhodes Scholar. The Trudeau family have long been servants of the Cult. See *The Biggest Secret* and Cathy O'Brien's book *Trance-Formation of America* for the horrific background to Trudeau's father Pierre Trudeau another Canadian prime minister. Hide your fascism behind the façade of a heart-on-the-sleeve liberal. It's a well-honed Cult technique.

What can the 'vaccine' *really* do?

We have a 'virus' never shown to exist and 'variants' of the 'virus' that have also never been shown to exist except, like the 'original', as computer-generated fictions. Even if you believe there's a 'virus' the 'case' to 'death' rate is in the region of 0.23 to 0.15 percent and those 'deaths' are concentrated among the very old around the same average age that people die anyway. In response to this lack of threat (in truth none) psychopaths and idiots, knowingly and unknowingly answering to Gates and the Cult, are seeking to 'vaccinate' every man, woman and child on Planet Earth. Clearly the 'vaccine' is not about 'Covid' – none of this ever has been. So what is it all about *really*? Why the desperation to infuse genetically-manipulating synthetic material into everyone through mRNA fraudulent 'vaccines' with the intent of doing this over and over with the excuses of 'variants' and other 'virus' inventions? Dr Sherri Tenpenny, an osteopathic medical doctor in the United States, has made herself an expert on vaccines and their effects as a vehement campaigner against their use. Tenpenny was board certified in emergency medicine, the director of a level two trauma centre for 12 years, and moved to Cleveland in 1996 to start an integrative

medicine practice which has treated patients from all 50 states and some 17 other countries. Weaning people off pharmaceutical drugs is a speciality.

She became interested in the consequences of vaccines after attending a meeting at the National Vaccine Information Center in Washington DC in 2000 where she 'sat through four days of listening to medical doctors and scientists and lawyers and parents of vaccine injured kids' and asked: 'What's going on?' She had never been vaccinated and never got ill while her father was given a list of vaccines to be in the military and was 'sick his entire life'. The experience added to her questions and she began to examine vaccine documents from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). After reading the first one, the 1998 version of *The General Recommendations of Vaccination*, she thought: 'This is it?' The document was poorly written and bad science and Tenpenny began 20 years of research into vaccines that continues to this day. She began her research into 'Covid vaccines' in March, 2020, and she describes them as 'deadly'. For many, as we have seen, they already have been. Tenpenny said that in the first 30 days of the 'vaccine' rollout in the United States there had been more than 40,000 adverse events reported to the vaccine adverse event database. A document had been delivered to her the day before that was 172 pages long. 'We have over 40,000 adverse events; we have over 3,100 cases of [potentially deadly] anaphylactic shock; we have over 5,000 neurological reactions.' Effects ranged from headaches to numbness, dizziness and vertigo, to losing feeling in hands or feet and paraesthesia which is when limbs 'fall asleep' and people have the sensation of insects crawling underneath their skin. All this happened in the first 30 days and remember that only about *ten percent* (or far less) of adverse reactions and vaccine-related deaths are estimated to be officially reported. Tenpenny said:

> So can you think of one single product in any industry, any industry, for as long as products have been made on the planet that within 30 days we have 40,000 people complaining of side effects that not only is still on the market but … we've got paid actors telling us how great

they are for getting their vaccine. We're offering people $500 if they will just get their vaccine and we've got nurses and doctors going; 'I got the vaccine, I got the vaccine'.

Tenpenny said they were not going to be 'happy dancing folks' when they began to suffer Bell's palsy (facial paralysis), neuropathies, cardiac arrhythmias and autoimmune reactions that kill through a blood disorder. 'They're not going to be so happy, happy then, but we're never going to see pictures of those people' she said. Tenpenny described the 'vaccine' as 'a well-designed killing tool'.

No off-switch

Bad as the initial consequences had been Tenpenny said it would be maybe 14 months before we began to see the 'full ravage' of what is going to happen to the 'Covid vaccinated' with full-out consequences taking anything between two years and 20 years to show. You can understand why when you consider that variations of the 'Covid vaccine' use mRNA (messenger RNA) to in theory activate the immune system to produce protective antibodies without using the actual 'virus'. How can they when it's a computer program and they've never isolated what they claim is the 'real thing'? Instead they use *synthetic* mRNA. They are inoculating synthetic material into the body which through a technique known as the Trojan horse is absorbed into cells to change the nature of DNA. Human DNA is changed by an infusion of messenger RNA and with each new 'vaccine' of this type it is changed even more. Say so and you are banned by Cult Internet platforms. The contempt the contemptuous Mark Zuckerberg has for the truth and human health can be seen in an internal Facebook video leaked to the Project Veritas investigative team in which he said of the 'Covid vaccines': '… I share some caution on this because we just don't know the long term side-effects of basically modifying people's DNA and RNA.' At the same time this disgusting man's Facebook was censoring and banning anyone saying exactly the same. He must go before a Nuremberg trial for crimes against humanity when he *knows* that he

is censoring legitimate concerns and denying the right of informed consent on behalf of the Cult that owns him. People have been killed and damaged by the very 'vaccination' technique he cast doubt on himself when they may not have had the 'vaccine' with access to information that he denied them. The plan is to have at least annual 'Covid vaccinations', add others to deal with invented 'variants', and change all other vaccines into the mRNA system. Pfizer executives told shareholders at a virtual Barclays Global Healthcare Conference in March, 2021, that the public may need a third dose of 'Covid vaccine', plus regular yearly boosters and the company planned to hike prices to milk the profits in a 'significant opportunity for our vaccine'. These are the professional liars, cheats and opportunists who are telling you their 'vaccine' is safe. Given this volume of mRNA planned to be infused into the human body and its ability to then replicate we will have a transformation of human genetics from biological to synthetic biological – exactly the long-time Cult plan for reasons we'll see – and many will die. Sherri Tenpenny said of this replication:

> It's like having an on-button but no off-button and that whole mechanism … they actually give it a name and they call it the Trojan horse mechanism, because it allows that [synthetic] virus and that piece of that [synthetic] virus to get inside of your cells, start to replicate and even get inserted into other parts of your DNA as a Trojan-horse.

Ask the overwhelming majority of people who have the 'vaccine' what they know about the contents and what they do and they would reply: 'The government says it will stop me getting the virus.' Governments give that false impression on purpose to increase take-up. You can read Sherri Tenpenny's detailed analysis of the health consequences in her blog at Vaxxter.com, but in summary these are some of them. She highlights the statement by Bill Gates about how human beings can become their own 'vaccine manufacturing machine'. The man is insane. ['Vaccine'-generated] 'antibodies' carry synthetic messenger RNA into the cells and the damage starts, Tenpenny contends, and she says that lungs can be adversely affected through varying degrees of pus and bleeding which

obviously affects breathing and would be dubbed 'Covid-19'. Even more sinister was the impact of 'antibodies' on macrophages, a white blood cell of the immune system. They consist of Type 1 and Type 2 which have very different functions. She said Type 1 are 'hyper-vigilant' white blood cells which 'gobble up' bacteria etc. However, in doing so, this could cause inflammation and in extreme circumstances be fatal. She says these affects are mitigated by Type 2 macrophages which kick in to calm down the system and stop it going rogue. They clear up dead tissue debris and reduce inflammation that the Type 1 'fire crews' have caused. Type 1 kills the infection and Type 2 heals the damage, she says. This is her punchline with regard to 'Covid vaccinations': She says that mRNA 'antibodies' block Type 2 macrophages by attaching to them and deactivating them. This meant that when the Type 1 response was triggered by infection there was nothing to stop that getting out of hand by calming everything down. There's an on-switch, but no off-switch, she says. What follows can be 'over and out, see you when I see you'.

Genetic suicide

Tenpenny also highlights the potential for autoimmune disease – the body attacking itself – which has been associated with vaccines since they first appeared. Infusing a synthetic foreign substance into cells could cause the immune system to react in a panic believing that the body is being overwhelmed by an invader (it is) and the consequences can again be fatal. There is an autoimmune response known as a 'cytokine storm' which I have likened to a homeowner panicked by an intruder and picking up a gun to shoot randomly in all directions before turning the fire on himself. The immune system unleashes a storm of inflammatory response called cytokines to a threat and the body commits hara-kiri. The lesson is that you mess with the body's immune response at your peril and these 'vaccines' seriously – fundamentally – mess with immune response. Tenpenny refers to a consequence called anaphylactic shock which is a severe and highly dangerous allergic reaction when the immune system

floods the body with chemicals. She gives the example of having a bee sting which primes the immune system and makes it sensitive to those chemicals. When people are stung again maybe years later the immune response can be so powerful that it leads to anaphylactic shock. Tenpenny relates this 'shock' with regard to the 'Covid vaccine' to something called polyethylene glycol or PEG. Enormous numbers of people have become sensitive to this over decades of use in a whole range of products and processes including food, drink, skin creams and 'medicine'. Studies have claimed that some 72 percent of people have antibodies triggered by PEG compared with two percent in the 1960s and allergic hypersensitive reactions to this become a gathering cause for concern. Tenpenny points out that the 'mRNA vaccine' is coated in a 'bubble' of polyethylene glycol which has the potential to cause anaphylactic shock through immune sensitivity. Many reports have appeared of people reacting this way after having the 'Covid vaccine'. What do we think is going to happen as humanity has more and more of these 'vaccines'? Tenpenny said: 'All these pictures we have seen with people with these rashes … these weepy rashes, big reactions on their arms and things like that – it's an acute allergic reaction most likely to the polyethylene glycol that you've been previously primed and sensitised to.'

Those who have not studied the conspiracy and its perpetrators at length might think that making the population sensitive to PEG and then putting it in these 'vaccines' is just a coincidence. It is not. It is instead testament to how carefully and coldly-planned current events have been and the scale of the conspiracy we are dealing with. Tenpenny further explains that the 'vaccine' mRNA procedure can breach the blood-brain barrier which protects the brain from toxins and other crap that will cause malfunction. In this case they could make two proteins corrupt brain function to cause Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) , a progressive nervous system disease leading to loss of muscle control, and frontal lobe degeneration – Alzheimer's and dementia. Immunologist J. Bart Classon published a paper connecting mRNA 'vaccines' to prion

disease which can lead to Alzheimer's and other forms of neurogenerative disease while others have pointed out the potential to affect the placenta in ways that make women infertile. This will become highly significant in the next chapter when I will discuss other aspects of this non-vaccine that relate to its nanotechnology and transmission from the injected to the uninjected.

Qualified in idiocy

Tenpenny describes how research has confirmed that these 'vaccine'-generated antibodies can interact with a range of other tissues in the body and attack many other organs including the lungs. 'This means that if you have a hundred people standing in front of you that all got this shot they could have a hundred different symptoms.' Anyone really think that Cult gofers like the Queen, Tony Blair, Christopher Whitty, Anthony Fauci, and all the other psychopaths have really had this 'vaccine' in the pictures we've seen? Not a bloody chance. Why don't doctors all tell us about all these dangers and consequences of the 'Covid vaccine'? Why instead do they encourage and pressure patients to have the shot? Don't let's think for a moment that doctors and medical staff can't be stupid, lazy, and psychopathic and that's without the financial incentives to give the jab. Tenpenny again:

> Some people are going to die from the vaccine directly but a large number of people are going to start to get horribly sick and get all kinds of autoimmune diseases 42 days to maybe a year out. What are they going to do, these stupid doctors who say; 'Good for you for getting that vaccine.' What are they going to say; 'Oh, it must be a mutant, we need to give an extra dose of that vaccine.'
>
> Because now the vaccine, instead of one dose or two doses we need three or four because the stupid physicians aren't taking the time to learn anything about it. If I can learn this sitting in my living room reading a 19 page paper and several others so can they. There's nothing special about me, I just take the time to do it.

Remember how Sara Kayat, the NHS and TV doctor, said that the 'Covid vaccine' would '100 percent prevent hospitalisation and death'. Doctors can be idiots like every other profession and they

should not be worshipped as infallible. They are not and far from it. Behind many medical and scientific 'experts' lies an uninformed prat trying to hide themselves from you although in the 'Covid' era many have failed to do so as with UK narrative-repeating 'TV doctor' Hilary Jones. Pushing back against the minority of proper doctors and scientists speaking out against the 'vaccine' has been the entire edifice of the Cult global state in the form of governments, medical systems, corporations, mainstream media, Silicon Valley, and an army of compliant doctors, medical staff and scientists willing to say anything for money and to enhance their careers by promoting the party line. If you do that you are an 'expert' and if you won't you are an 'anti-vaxxer' and 'Covidiot'. The pressure to be 'vaccinated' is incessant. We have even had reports claiming that the 'vaccine' can help cure cancer and Alzheimer's and make the lame walk. I am waiting for the announcement that it can bring you coffee in the morning and cook your tea. Just as the symptoms of 'Covid' seem to increase by the week so have the miracles of the 'vaccine'. American supermarket giant Kroger Co. offered nearly 500,000 employees in 35 states a $100 bonus for having the 'vaccine' while donut chain Krispy Kreme promised 'vaccinated' customers a free glazed donut every day for the rest of 2021. Have your DNA changed and you will get a doughnut although we might not have to give you them for long. Such offers and incentives confirm the desperation.

Perhaps the worse vaccine-stunt of them all was UK 'Health' Secretary Matt-the-prat Hancock on live TV after watching a clip of someone being 'vaccinated' when the roll-out began. Hancock faked tears so badly it was embarrassing. Brain-of-Britain Piers Morgan, the lockdown-supporting, 'vaccine' supporting, 'vaccine' passport-supporting, TV host played along with Hancock – 'You're quite emotional about that' he said in response to acting so atrocious it would have been called out at a school nativity which will presumably today include Mary and Jesus in masks, wise men keeping their camels six feet apart, and shepherds under tent arrest. System-serving Morgan tweeted this: 'Love the idea of covid vaccine passports for everywhere: flights, restaurants, clubs, football, gyms,

shops etc. It's time covid-denying, anti-vaxxer loonies had their bullsh*t bluff called & bar themselves from going anywhere that responsible citizens go.' If only I could aspire to his genius. To think that Morgan, who specialises in shouting over anyone he disagrees with, was lauded as a free speech hero when he lost his job after storming off the set of his live show like a child throwing his dolly out of the pram. If he is a free speech hero we are in real trouble. I have no idea what 'bullsh*t' means, by the way, the * throws me completely.

The Cult is desperate to infuse its synthetic DNA-changing concoction into everyone and has been using every lie, trick and intimidation to do so. The question of '*Why*?' we shall now address.

CHAPTER TEN

Human 2.0

I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted –
Alan Turing (1912-1954), the 'Father of artificial intelligence'

I have been exposing for decades the plan to transform the human body from a biological to a synthetic-biological state. The new human that I will call Human 2.0 is planned to be connected to artificial intelligence and a global AI 'Smart Grid' that would operate as one global system in which AI would control everything from your fridge to your heating system to your car to your mind. Humans would no longer be 'human', but post-human and sub-human, with their thinking and emotional processes replaced by AI.

What I said sounded crazy and beyond science fiction and I could understand that. To any balanced, rational, mind it *is* crazy. Today, however, that world is becoming reality and it puts the 'Covid vaccine' into its true context. Ray Kurzweil is the ultra-Zionist 'computer scientist, inventor and futurist' and co-founder of the Singularity University. Singularity refers to the merging of humans with machines or 'transhumanism'. Kurzweil has said humanity would be connected to the cyber 'cloud' in the period of the ever-recurring year of 2030:

Our thinking … will be a hybrid of biological and non-biological thinking … humans will be able to extend their limitations and 'think in the cloud' … We're going to put gateways to the

cloud in our brains ... We're going to gradually merge and enhance ourselves ... In my view, that's the nature of being human – we transcend our limitations. As the technology becomes vastly superior to what we are then the small proportion that is still human gets smaller and smaller and smaller until it's just utterly negligible.

They are trying to sell this end-of-humanity-as-we-know-it as the next stage of 'evolution' when we become super-human and 'like the gods'. They are lying to you. Shocked, eh? The population, and again especially the young, have been manipulated into addiction to technologies designed to enslave them for life. First they induced an addiction to smartphones (holdables); next they moved to technology on the body (wearables); and then began the invasion of the body (implantables). I warned way back about the plan for microchipped people and we are now entering that era. We should not be diverted into thinking that this refers only to chips we can see. Most important are the nanochips known as smart dust, neural dust and nanobots which are far too small to be seen by the human eye. Nanotechnology is everywhere, increasingly in food products, and released into the atmosphere by the geoengineering of the skies funded by Bill Gates to 'shut out the Sun' and 'save the planet from global warming'. Gates has been funding a project to spray millions of tonnes of chalk (calcium carbonate) into the stratosphere over Sweden to 'dim the Sun' and cool the Earth. Scientists warned the move could be disastrous for weather systems in ways no one can predict and opposition led to the Swedish space agency announcing that the 'experiment' would not be happening as planned in the summer of 2021; but it shows where the Cult is going with dimming the impact of the Sun and there's an associated plan to change the planet's atmosphere. Who gives psychopath Gates the right to dictate to the entire human race and dismantle planetary systems? The world will not be safe while this man is at large.

The global warming hoax has made the Sun, like the gas of life, something to fear when both are essential to good health and human survival (more inversion). The body transforms sunlight into vital vitamin D through a process involving … *cholesterol*. This is the cholesterol we are also told to fear. We are urged to take Big Pharma

statin drugs to reduce cholesterol and it's all systematic. Reducing cholesterol means reducing vitamin D uptake with all the multiple health problems that will cause. At least if you take statins long term it saves the government from having to pay you a pension. The delivery system to block sunlight is widely referred to as chemtrails although these have a much deeper agenda, too. They appear at first to be contrails or condensation trails streaming from aircraft into cold air at high altitudes. Contrails disperse very quickly while chemtrails do not and spread out across the sky before eventually their content falls to earth. Many times I have watched aircraft cross-cross a clear blue sky releasing chemtrails until it looks like a cloudy day. Chemtrails contain many things harmful to humans and the natural world including toxic heavy metals, aluminium (see Alzheimer's) and nanotechnology. Ray Kurzweil reveals the reason without actually saying so: 'Nanobots will infuse all the matter around us with information. Rocks, trees, everything will become these intelligent creatures.' How do you deliver that? *From the sky*. Self-replicating nanobots would connect everything to the Smart Grid. The phenomenon of Morgellons disease began in the chemtrail era and the correlation has led to it being dubbed the 'chemtrail disease'. Self-replicating fibres appear in the body that can be pulled out through the skin. Morgellons fibres continue to grow outside the body and have a form of artificial intelligence. I cover this at greater length in *Phantom Self*.

'Vaccine' operating system

'Covid vaccines' with their self-replicating synthetic material are also designed to make the connection between humanity and Kurzweil's 'cloud'. American doctor and dedicated campaigner for truth, Carrie Madej, an Internal Medicine Specialist in Georgia with more than 20 years medical experience, has highlighted the nanotechnology aspect of the fake 'vaccines'. She explains how one of the components in at least the Moderna and Pfizer synthetic potions are 'lipid nanoparticles' which are 'like little tiny computer bits' – a 'sci-fi substance' known as nanobots and hydrogel which can be 'triggered

at any moment to deliver its payload' and act as 'biosensors'. The synthetic substance had 'the ability to accumulate data from your body like your breathing, your respiration, thoughts and emotions, all kind of things' and each syringe could carry a *million* nanobots:

This substance because it's like little bits of computers in your body, crazy, but it's true, it can do that, [and] obviously has the ability to act through Wi-Fi. It can receive and transmit energy, messages, frequencies or impulses. That issue has never been addressed by these companies. What does that do to the human?

Just imagine getting this substance in you and it can react to things all around you, the 5G, your smart device, your phones, what is happening with that? What if something is triggering it, too, like an impulse, a frequency? We have something completely foreign in the human body.

Madej said her research revealed that electromagnetic (EMF) frequencies emitted by phones and other devices had increased dramatically in the same period of the 'vaccine' rollout and she was seeing more people with radiation problems as 5G and other electromagnetic technology was expanded and introduced to schools and hospitals. She said she was 'floored with the EMF coming off' the devices she checked. All this makes total sense and syncs with my own work of decades when you think that Moderna refers in documents to its mRNA 'vaccine' as an 'operating system':

Recognizing the broad potential of mRNA science, we set out to create an mRNA technology platform that functions very much like an operating system on a computer. It is designed so that it can plug and play interchangeably with different programs. In our case, the 'program' or 'app' is our mRNA drug – the unique mRNA sequence that codes for a protein …

… Our MRNA Medicines – 'The 'Software Of Life': When we have a concept for a new mRNA medicine and begin research, fundamental components are already in place. Generally, the only thing that changes from one potential mRNA medicine to another is the coding region – the actual genetic code that instructs ribosomes to make protein. Utilizing these instruction sets gives our investigational mRNA medicines a software-like quality. We also have the ability to combine different mRNA sequences encoding for different proteins in a single mRNA investigational medicine.

Who needs a real 'virus' when you can create a computer version to justify infusing your operating system into the entire human race on the road to making living, breathing people into cyborgs? What is missed with the 'vaccines' is the *digital* connection between synthetic material and the body that I highlighted earlier with the study that hacked a computer with human DNA. On one level the body is digital, based on mathematical codes, and I'll have more about that in the next chapter. Those who ridiculously claim that mRNA 'vaccines' are not designed to change human genetics should explain the words of Dr Tal Zaks, chief medical officer at Moderna, in a 2017 TED talk. He said that over the last 30 years 'we've been living this phenomenal digital scientific revolution, and I'm here today to tell you, that we are actually *hacking the software of life*, and that it's changing the way we think about prevention and treatment of disease':

In every cell there's this thing called messenger RNA, or mRNA for short, that transmits the critical information from the DNA in our genes to the protein, which is really the stuff we're all made out of. This is the critical information that determines what the cell will do. So we think about it as an operating system. So if you could change that, if you could introduce a line of code, or change a line of code, it turns out, that has profound implications for everything, from the flu to cancer.

Zaks should more accurately have said that this has profound implications for the human genetic code and the nature of DNA. Communications within the body go both ways and not only one. But, hey, no, the 'Covid vaccine' will not affect your genetics. Cult fact-checkers say so even though the man who helped to develop the mRNA technique says that it does. Zaks said in 2017:

If you think about what it is we're trying to do. We've taken information and our understanding of that information and how that information is transmitted in a cell, and we've taken our understanding of medicine and how to make drugs, and we're fusing the two. We think of it as information therapy.

I have been writing for decades that the body is an information field communicating with itself and the wider world. This is why

radiation which is information can change the information field of body and mind through phenomena like 5G and change their nature and function. 'Information therapy' means to change the body's information field and change the way it operates. DNA is a receiver-transmitter of information and can be mutated by information like mRNA synthetic messaging. Technology to do this has been ready and waiting in the underground bases and other secret projects to be rolled out when the 'Covid' hoax was played. 'Trials' of such short and irrelevant duration were only for public consumption. When they say the 'vaccine' is 'experimental' that is not true. It may appear to be 'experimental' to those who don't know what's going on, but the trials have already been done to ensure the Cult gets the result it desires. Zaks said that it took decades to sequence the human genome, completed in 2003, but now they could do it in a week. By 'they' he means scientists operating in the public domain. In the secret projects they were sequencing the genome in a week long before even 2003.

Deluge of mRNA

Highly significantly the Moderna document says the guiding premise is that if using mRNA as a medicine works for one disease then it should work for many diseases. They were leveraging the flexibility afforded by their platform and the fundamental role mRNA plays in protein synthesis to pursue mRNA medicines for a broad spectrum of diseases. Moderna is confirming what I was saying through 2020 that multiple 'vaccines' were planned for 'Covid' (and later invented 'variants') and that previous vaccines would be converted to the mRNA system to infuse the body with massive amounts of genetically-manipulating synthetic material to secure a transformation to a synthetic-biological state. The 'vaccines' are designed to kill stunning numbers as part of the long-exposed Cult depopulation agenda and transform the rest. Given this is the goal you can appreciate why there is such hysterical demand for every human to be 'vaccinated' for an alleged 'disease' that has an estimated 'infection' to 'death' ratio of 0.23-0.15 percent. As I write

children are being given the 'vaccine' in trials (their parents are a disgrace) and ever-younger people are being offered the vaccine for a 'virus' that even if you believe it exists has virtually zero chance of harming them. Horrific effects of the 'trials' on a 12-year-old girl were revealed by a family member to be serious brain and gastric problems that included a bowel obstruction and the inability to swallow liquids or solids. She was unable to eat or drink without throwing up, had extreme pain in her back, neck and abdomen, and was paralysed from the waist down which stopped her urinating unaided. When the girl was first taken to hospital doctors said it was all in her mind. She was signed up for the 'trial' by her parents for whom no words suffice. None of this 'Covid vaccine' insanity makes any sense unless you see what the 'vaccine' really is – a body-changer. Synthetic biology or 'SynBio' is a fast-emerging and expanding scientific discipline which includes everything from genetic and molecular engineering to electrical and computer engineering. Synthetic biology is defined in these ways:

- A multidisciplinary area of research that seeks to create new biological parts, devices, and systems, or to redesign systems that are already found in nature.

- The use of a mixture of physical engineering and genetic engineering to create new (and therefore synthetic) life forms.

- An emerging field of research that aims to combine the knowledge and methods of biology, engineering and related disciplines in the design of chemically-synthesized DNA to create organisms with novel or enhanced characteristics and traits (synthetic organisms including humans).

We now have synthetic blood, skin, organs and limbs being developed along with synthetic body parts produced by 3D printers. These are all elements of the synthetic human programme and this comment by Kurzweil's co-founder of the Singularity University,

Peter Diamandis, can be seen in a whole new light with the 'Covid' hoax and the sanctions against those that refuse the 'vaccine':

Anybody who is going to be resisting the progress forward [to transhumanism] is going to be resisting evolution and, fundamentally, they will die out. It's not a matter of whether it's good or bad. It's going to happen.

'Resisting evolution'? What absolute bollocks. The arrogance of these people is without limit. His 'it's going to happen' mantra is another way of saying 'resistance is futile' to break the spirit of those pushing back and we must not fall for it. Getting this genetically-transforming 'vaccine' into everyone is crucial to the Cult plan for total control and the desperation to achieve that is clear for anyone to see. Vaccine passports are a major factor in this and they, too, are a form of resistance is futile. It's NOT. The paper funded by the Rockefeller Foundation for the 2013 'health conference' in China said:

We will interact more with artificial intelligence. The use of robotics, bio-engineering to augment human functioning is already well underway and will advance. Re-engineering of humans into potentially separate and unequal forms through genetic engineering or mixed human-robots raises debates on ethics and equality.

A new demography is projected to emerge after 2030 [that year again] of technologies (robotics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology) producing robots, engineered organisms, 'nanobots' and artificial intelligence (AI) that can self-replicate. Debates will grow on the implications of an impending reality of human designed life.

What is happening today is so long planned. The world army enforcing the will of the world government is intended to be a robot army, not a human one. Today's military and its technologically 'enhanced' troops, pilotless planes and driverless vehicles are just stepping stones to that end. Human soldiers are used as Cult fodder and its time they woke up to that and worked for the freedom of the population instead of their own destruction and their family's destruction – the same with the police. Join us and let's sort this out. The phenomenon of enforce my own destruction is widespread in the 'Covid' era with Woker 'luvvies' in the acting and entertainment

industries supporting 'Covid' rules which have destroyed their profession and the same with those among the public who put signs on the doors of their businesses 'closed due to Covid – stay safe' when many will never reopen. It's a form of masochism and most certainly insanity.

Transgender = transhumanism

When something explodes out of nowhere and is suddenly everywhere it is always the Cult agenda and so it is with the tidal wave of claims and demands that have infiltrated every aspect of society under the heading of 'transgenderism'. The term 'trans' is so 'in' and this is the dictionary definition:

A prefix meaning 'across', 'through', occurring … in loanwords from Latin, used in particular for denoting movement or conveyance from place to place (transfer; transmit; transplant) or complete change (transform; transmute), or to form adjectives meaning 'crossing', 'on the other side of', or 'going beyond' the place named (transmontane; transnational; trans-Siberian).

Transgender means to go beyond gender and transhuman means to go beyond human. Both are aspects of the Cult plan to transform the human body to a synthetic state with *no gender*. Human 2.0 is not designed to procreate and would be produced technologically with no need for parents. The new human would mean the end of parents and so men, and increasingly women, are being targeted for the deletion of their rights and status. Parental rights are disappearing at an ever-quickening speed for the same reason. The new human would have no need for men or women when there is no procreation and no gender. Perhaps the transgender movement that appears to be in a permanent state of frenzy might now contemplate on how it is being used. This was never about transgender rights which are only the interim excuse for confusing gender, particularly in the young, on the road to *fusing* gender. Transgender activism is not an end; it is a *means* to an end. We see again the technique of creative destruction in which you destroy the status quo to 'build back better' in the form that you want. The gender status quo had to be

destroyed by persuading the Cult-created Woke mentality to believe that you can have 100 genders or more. A programme for 9 to 12 year olds produced by the Cult-owned BBC promoted the 100 genders narrative. The very idea may be the most monumental nonsense, but it is not what is true that counts, only what you can make people *believe* is true. Once the gender of 2 + 2 = 4 has been dismantled through indoctrination, intimidation and 2 + 2 = 5 then the new no-gender normal can take its place with Human 2.0. Aldous Huxley revealed the plan in his prophetic *Brave New World* in 1932:

Natural reproduction has been done away with and children are created, decanted', and raised in 'hatcheries and conditioning centres'. From birth, people are genetically designed to fit into one of five castes, which are further split into 'Plus' and 'Minus' members and designed to fulfil predetermined positions within the social and economic strata of the World State.

How could Huxley know this in 1932? For the same reason George Orwell knew about the Big Brother state in 1948, Cult insiders I have quoted knew about it in 1969, and I have known about it since the early 1990s. If you are connected to the Cult or you work your balls off to uncover the plan you can predict the future. The process is simple. If there is a plan for the world and nothing intervenes to stop it then it will happen. Thus if you communicate the plan ahead of time you are perceived to have predicted the future, but you haven't. You have revealed the plan which without intervention will become the human future. The whole reason I have done what I have is to alert enough people to inspire an intervention and maybe at last that time has come with the Cult and its intentions now so obvious to anyone with a brain in working order.

The future is here

Technological wombs that Huxley described to replace parent procreation are already being developed and they are only the projects we know about in the public arena. Israeli scientists told *The Times of Israel* in March, 2021, that they have grown 250-cell embryos

into mouse foetuses with fully formed organs using artificial wombs in a development they say could pave the way for gestating humans outside the womb. Professor Jacob Hanna of the Weizmann Institute of Science said:

We took mouse embryos from the mother at day five of development, when they are just of 250 cells, and had them in the incubator from day five until day 11, by which point they had grown all their organs.

By day 11 they make their own blood and have a beating heart, a fully developed brain. Anybody would look at them and say, 'this is clearly a mouse foetus with all the characteristics of a mouse.' It's gone from being a ball of cells to being an advanced foetus.

A special liquid is used to nourish embryo cells in a laboratory dish and they float on the liquid to duplicate the first stage of embryonic development. The incubator creates all the right conditions for its development, Hanna said. The liquid gives the embryo 'all the nutrients, hormones and sugars they need' along with a custom-made electronic incubator which controls gas concentration, pressure and temperature. The cutting-edge in the underground bases and other secret locations will be light years ahead of that, however, and this was reported by the London *Guardian* in 2017:

We are approaching a biotechnological breakthrough. Ectogenesis, the invention of a complete external womb, could completely change the nature of human reproduction. In April this year, researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia announced their development of an artificial womb.

The article was headed 'Artificial wombs could soon be a reality. What will this mean for women?' What would it mean for children is an even bigger question. No mother to bond with only a machine in preparation for a life of soulless interaction and control in a world governed by machines (see the *Matrix* movies). Now observe the calculated manipulations of the 'Covid' hoax as human interaction and warmth has been curtailed by distancing, isolation and fear with people communicating via machines on a scale never seen before.

These are all dots in the same picture as are all the personal assistants, gadgets and children's toys through which kids and adults communicate with AI as if it is human. The AI 'voice' on Sat-Nav should be included. All these things are psychological preparation for the Cult endgame. Before you can make a physical connection with AI you have to make a psychological connection and that is what people are being conditioned to do with this ever gathering human-AI interaction. Movies and TV programmes depicting the transhuman, robot dystopia relate to a phenomenon known as 'pre-emptive programming' in which the world that is planned is portrayed everywhere in movies, TV and advertising. This is conditioning the conscious and subconscious mind to become familiar with the planned reality to dilute resistance when it happens for real. What would have been a shock such is the change is made less so. We have young children put on the road to transgender transition surgery with puberty blocking drugs at an age when they could never be able to make those life-changing decisions.

Rachel Levine, a professor of paediatrics and psychiatry who believes in treating children this way, became America's highest-ranked openly-transgender official when she was confirmed as US Assistant Secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services after being nominated by Joe Biden (the Cult). Activists and governments press for laws to deny parents a say in their children's transition process so the kids can be isolated and manipulated into agreeing to irreversible medical procedures. A Canadian father Robert Hoogland was denied bail by the Vancouver Supreme Court in 2021 and remained in jail for breaching a court order that he stay silent over his young teenage daughter, a minor, who was being offered life-changing hormone therapy without parental consent. At the age of 12 the girl's 'school counsellor' said she may be transgender, referred her to a doctor and told the school to treat her like a boy. This is another example of state-serving schools imposing ever more control over children's lives while parents have ever less.

Contemptible and extreme child abuse is happening all over the world as the Cult gender-fusion operation goes into warp-speed.

Why the war on men – and now women?

The question about what artificial wombs mean for women should rightly be asked. The answer can be seen in the deletion of women's rights involving sport, changing rooms, toilets and status in favour of people in male bodies claiming to identify as women. I can identify as a mountain climber, but it doesn't mean I can climb a mountain any more than a biological man can be a biological woman. To believe so is a triumph of belief over factual reality which is the very perceptual basis of everything Woke. Women's sport is being destroyed by allowing those with male bodies who say they identify as female to 'compete' with girls and women. Male body 'women' dominate 'women's' competition with their greater muscle mass, bone density, strength and speed. With that disadvantage sport for women loses all meaning. To put this in perspective nearly 300 American high school boys can run faster than the quickest woman sprinter in the world. Women are seeing their previously protected spaces invaded by male bodies simply because they claim to identify as women. That's all they need to do to access all women's spaces and activities under the Biden 'Equality Act' that destroys equality for women with the usual Orwellian Woke inversion. Male sex offenders have already committed rapes in women's prisons after claiming to identify as women to get them transferred. Does this not matter to the Woke 'equality' hypocrites? Not in the least. What matters to Cult manipulators and funders behind transgender activists is to advance gender fusion on the way to the no-gender 'human'. When you are seeking to impose transparent nonsense like this, or the 'Covid' hoax, the only way the nonsense can prevail is through censorship and intimidation of dissenters, deletion of factual information, and programming of the unquestioning, bewildered and naive. You don't have to scan the world for long to see that all these things are happening.

Many women's rights organisations have realised that rights and status which took such a long time to secure are being eroded and that it is systematic. Kara Dansky of the global Women's Human Rights Campaign said that Biden's transgender executive order immediately he took office, subsequent orders, and Equality Act legislation that followed 'seek to erase women and girls in the law as a category'. *Exactly*. I said during the long ago-started war on men (in which many women play a crucial part) that this was going to turn into a war on them. The Cult is phasing out *both* male and female genders. To get away with that they are brought into conflict so they are busy fighting each other while the Cult completes the job with no unity of response. Unity, people, *unity*. We need unity everywhere. Transgender is the only show in town as the big step towards the no-gender human. It's not about rights for transgender people and never has been. Woke political correctness is deleting words relating to genders to the same end. Wokers believe this is to be 'inclusive' when the opposite is true. They are deleting words describing gender because gender *itself* is being deleted by Human 2.0. Terms like 'man', 'woman', 'mother' and 'father' are being deleted in the universities and other institutions to be replaced by the *no*-gender, not trans-gender, 'individuals' and 'guardians'. Women's rights campaigner Maria Keffler of Partners for Ethical Care said: 'Children are being taught from kindergarten upward that some boys have a vagina, some girls have a penis, and that kids can be any gender they want to be.' Do we really believe that suddenly countries all over the world at the same time had the idea of having drag queens go into schools or read transgender stories to very young children in the local library? It's coldly-calculated confusion of gender on the way to the fusion of gender. Suzanne Vierling, a psychologist from Southern California, made another important point:

Yesterday's slave woman who endured gynecological medical experiments is today's girl-child being butchered in a booming gender-transitioning sector. Ovaries removed, pushing her into menopause and osteoporosis, uncharted territory, and parents' rights and authority decimated.

The erosion of parental rights is a common theme in line with the Cult plans to erase the very concept of parents and 'ovaries removed, pushing her into menopause' means what? Those born female lose the ability to have children – another way to discontinue humanity as we know it.

Eliminating Human 1.0 (before our very eyes)

To pave the way for Human 2.0 you must phase out Human 1.0. This is happening through plummeting sperm counts and making women infertile through an onslaught of chemicals, radiation (including smartphones in pockets of men) and mRNA 'vaccines'. Common agriculture pesticides are also having a devastating impact on human fertility. I have been tracking collapsing sperm counts in the books for a long time and in 2021 came a book by fertility scientist and reproductive epidemiologist Shanna Swan, *Count Down: How Our Modern World Is Threatening Sperm Counts, Altering Male and Female Reproductive Development and Imperiling the Future of the Human Race*. She reports how the global fertility rate dropped by *half* between 1960 and 2016 with America's birth rate 16 percent below where it needs to be to sustain the population. Women are experiencing declining egg quality, more miscarriages, and more couples suffer from infertility. Other findings were an increase in erectile dysfunction, infant boys developing more genital abnormalities, male problems with conception, and plunging levels of the male hormone testosterone which would explain why so many men have lost their backbone and masculinity. This has been very evident during the 'Covid' hoax when women have been prominent among the Pushbackers and big strapping blokes have bowed their heads, covered their faces with a nappy and quietly submitted. Mind control expert Cathy O'Brien also points to how global education introduced the concept of 'we're all winners' in sport and classrooms: 'Competition was defused, and it in turn defused a sense of fighting back.' This is another version of the 'equity' doctrine in which you drive down rather than raise up. What a contrast in Cult-controlled China with its global ambitions

where the government published plans in January, 2021, to 'cultivate masculinity' in boys from kindergarten through to high school in the face of a 'masculinity crisis'. A government adviser said boys would be soon become 'delicate, timid and effeminate' unless action was taken. Don't expect any similar policy in the targeted West. A 2006 study showed that a 65-year-old man in 2002 had testosterone levels *15 percent* lower than a 65-year-old man in 1987 while a 2020 study found a similar story with young adults and adolescents. Men are getting prescriptions for testosterone replacement therapy which causes an even greater drop in sperm count with up to 99 percent seeing sperm counts drop to zero during the treatment. More sperm is defective and malfunctioning with some having two heads or not pursuing an egg.

A class of *synthetic* chemicals known as phthalates are being blamed for the decline. These are found everywhere in plastics, shampoos, cosmetics, furniture, flame retardants, personal care products, pesticides, canned foods and even receipts. Why till receipts? Everyone touches them. Let no one delude themselves that all this is not systematic to advance the long-time agenda for human body transformation. Phthalates mimic hormones and disrupt the hormone balance causing testosterone to fall and genital birth defects in male infants. Animals and fish have been affected in the same way due to phthalates and other toxins in rivers. When fish turn gay or change sex through chemicals in rivers and streams it is a pointer to why there has been such an increase in gay people and the sexually confused. It doesn't matter to me what sexuality people choose to be, but if it's being affected by chemical pollution and consumption then we need to know. Does anyone really think that this is not connected to the transgender agenda, the war on men and the condemnation of male 'toxic masculinity'? You watch this being followed by 'toxic femininity'. It's already happening. When breastfeeding becomes 'chest-feeding', pregnant women become pregnant people along with all the other Woke claptrap you know that the world is going insane and there's a Cult scam in progress. Transgender activists are promoting the Cult agenda while Cult

billionaires support and fund the insanity as they laugh themselves to sleep at the sheer stupidity for which humans must be infamous in galaxies far, far away.

'Covid vaccines' and female infertility

We can now see why the 'vaccine' has been connected to potential infertility in women. Dr Michael Yeadon, former Vice President and Chief Scientific Advisor at Pfizer, and Dr Wolfgang Wodarg in Germany, filed a petition with the European Medicines Agency in December, 2020, urging them to stop trials for the Pfizer/BioNTech shot and all other mRNA trials until further studies had been done. They were particularly concerned about possible effects on fertility with 'vaccine'-produced antibodies attacking the protein Syncytin-1 which is responsible for developing the placenta. The result would be infertility 'of indefinite duration' in women who have the 'vaccine' with the placenta failing to form. Section 10.4.2 of the Pfizer/BioNTech trial protocol says that pregnant women or those who might become so should not have mRNA shots. Section 10.4 warns men taking mRNA shots to 'be abstinent from heterosexual intercourse' and not to donate sperm. The UK government said that it *did not know* if the mRNA procedure had an effect on fertility. *Did not know?* These people have to go to jail. UK government advice did not recommend at the start that pregnant women had the shot and said they should avoid pregnancy for at least two months after 'vaccination'. The 'advice' was later updated to pregnant women should only have the 'vaccine' if the benefits outweighed the risks to mother and foetus. What the hell is that supposed to mean? Then 'spontaneous abortions' began to appear and rapidly increase on the adverse reaction reporting schemes which include only a fraction of adverse reactions. Thousands and ever-growing numbers of 'vaccinated' women are describing changes to their menstrual cycle with heavier blood flow, irregular periods and menstruating again after going through the menopause – all links to reproduction effects. Women are passing blood clots and the lining of their uterus while men report erectile dysfunction and blood effects. Most

significantly of all *un*vaccinated women began to report similar menstrual changes after interaction with *'vaccinated'* people and men and children were also affected with bleeding noses, blood clots and other conditions. 'Shedding' is when vaccinated people can emit the content of a vaccine to affect the unvaccinated, but this is different. 'Vaccinated' people were not shedding a 'live virus' allegedly in 'vaccines' as before because the fake 'Covid vaccines' involve synthetic material and other toxicity. Doctors exposing what is happening prefer the term 'transmission' to shedding. Somehow those that have had the shots are transmitting effects to those that haven't. Dr Carrie Madej said the nano-content of the 'vaccines' can 'act like an antenna' to others around them which fits perfectly with my own conclusions. This 'vaccine' transmission phenomenon was becoming known as the book went into production and I deal with this further in the Postscript.

Vaccine effects on sterility are well known. The World Health Organization was accused in 2014 of sterilising millions of women in Kenya with the evidence confirmed by the content of the vaccines involved. The same WHO behind the 'Covid' hoax admitted its involvement for more than ten years with the vaccine programme. Other countries made similar claims. Charges were lodged by Tanzania, Nicaragua, Mexico, and the Philippines. The Gardasil vaccine claimed to protect against a genital 'virus' known as HPV has also been linked to infertility. Big Pharma and the WHO (same thing) are criminal and satanic entities. Then there's the Bill Gates Foundation which is connected through funding and shared interests with 20 pharmaceutical giants and laboratories. He stands accused of directing the policy of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), vaccine alliance GAVI, and other groupings, to advance the vaccine agenda and silence opposition at great cost to women and children. At the same time Gates wants to reduce the global population. Coincidence?

Great Reset = Smart Grid = new human

The Cult agenda I have been exposing for 30 years is now being openly promoted by Cult assets like Gates and Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum under code-terms like the 'Great Reset', 'Build Back Better' and 'a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world'. What provided this 'rare but narrow window of opportunity'? The 'Covid' hoax did. Who created that? *They* did. My books from not that long ago warned about the planned 'Internet of Things' (IoT) and its implications for human freedom. This was the plan to connect all technology to the Internet and artificial intelligence and today we are way down that road with an estimated 36 billion devices connected to the World Wide Web and that figure is projected to be 76 billion by 2025. I further warned that the Cult planned to go beyond that to the Internet of *Everything* when the human brain was connected via AI to the Internet and Kurzweil's 'cloud'. Now we have Cult operatives like Schwab calling for precisely that under the term 'Internet of Bodies', a fusion of the physical, digital and biological into one centrally-controlled Smart Grid system which the Cult refers to as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'. They talk about the 'biological', but they really mean the synthetic-biological which is required to fully integrate the human body and brain into the Smart Grid and artificial intelligence planned to replace the human mind. We have everything being synthetically manipulated including the natural world through GMO and smart dust, the food we eat and the human body itself with synthetic 'vaccines'. I said in *The Answer* that we would see the Cult push for synthetic meat to replace animals and in February, 2021, the so predictable psychopath Bill Gates called for the introduction of synthetic meat to save us all from 'climate change'. The climate hoax just keeps on giving like the 'Covid' hoax. The war on meat by vegan activists is a carbon (oops, sorry) copy of the manipulation of transgender activists. They have no idea (except their inner core) that they are being used to promote and impose the agenda of the Cult or that they are only the *vehicle* and not the *reason*. This is not to say those who choose not to eat meat shouldn't be respected and supported in that right, but there are ulterior motives

for those in power. A *Forbes* article in December, 2019, highlighted the plan so beloved of Schwab and the Cult under the heading: 'What Is The Internet of Bodies? And How Is It Changing Our World?' The article said the human body is the latest data platform (remember 'our vaccine is an operating system'). *Forbes* described the plan very accurately and the words could have come straight out of my books from long before:

The Internet of Bodies (IoB) is an extension of the IoT and basically connects the human body to a network through devices that are ingested, implanted, or connected to the body in some way. Once connected, data can be exchanged, and the body and device can be remotely monitored and controlled.

They were really describing a human hive mind with human perception centrally-dictated via an AI connection as well as allowing people to be 'remotely monitored and controlled'. Everything from a fridge to a human mind could be directed from a central point by these insane psychopaths and 'Covid vaccines' are crucial to this. Forbes explained the process I mentioned earlier of holdable and wearable technology followed by implantable. The article said there were three generations of the Internet of Bodies that include:

- Body external: These are wearable devices such as Apple Watches or Fitbits that can monitor our health.

- Body internal: These include pacemakers, cochlear implants, and digital pills that go inside our bodies to monitor or control various aspects of health.

- Body embedded: The third generation of the Internet of Bodies is embedded technology where technology and the human body are melded together and have a real-time connection to a remote machine.

Forbes noted the development of the Brain Computer Interface (BCI) which merges the brain with an external device for monitoring and controlling in real-time. 'The ultimate goal is to help restore function to individuals with disabilities by using brain signals rather than conventional neuromuscular pathways.' Oh, do fuck off. The goal of brain interface technology is controlling human thought and emotion from the central point in a hive mind serving its masters wishes. Many people are now agreeing to be chipped to open doors without a key. You can recognise them because they'll be wearing a mask, social distancing and lining up for the 'vaccine'. The Cult plans a Great Reset money system after they have completed the demolition of the global economy in which 'money' will be exchanged through communication with body operating systems. Rand Corporation, a Cult-owned think tank, said of the Internet of Bodies or IoB:

> Internet of Bodies technologies fall under the broader IoT umbrella. But as the name suggests, IoB devices introduce an even more intimate interplay between humans and gadgets. IoB devices monitor the human body, collect health metrics and other personal information, and transmit those data over the Internet. Many devices, such as fitness trackers, are already in use … IoB devices … and those in development can track, record, and store users' whereabouts, bodily functions, and what they see, hear, and even think.

Schwab's World Economic Forum, a long-winded way of saying 'fascism' or 'the Cult', has gone full-on with the Internet of Bodies in the 'Covid' era. 'We're entering the era of the Internet of Bodies', it declared, 'collecting our physical data via a range of devices that can be implanted, swallowed or worn'. The result would be a huge amount of health-related data that could improve human wellbeing around the world, and prove crucial in fighting the 'Covid-19 pandemic'. Does anyone think these clowns care about 'human wellbeing' after the death and devastation their pandemic hoax has purposely caused? Schwab and co say we should move forward with the Internet of Bodies because 'Keeping track of symptoms could help us stop the spread of infection, and quickly detect new cases'. How wonderful, but keeping track' is all they are really bothered

about. Researchers were investigating if data gathered from smartwatches and similar devices could be used as viral infection alerts by tracking the user's heart rate and breathing. Schwab said in his 2018 book *Shaping the Future of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*:

> The lines between technologies and beings are becoming blurred and not just by the ability to create lifelike robots or synthetics. Instead it is about the ability of new technologies to literally become part of us. Technologies already influence how we understand ourselves, how we think about each other, and how we determine our realities. As the technologies … give us deeper access to parts of ourselves, we may begin to integrate digital technologies into our bodies.

You can see what the game is. Twenty-four hour control and people – if you could still call them that – would never know when something would go ping and take them out of circulation. It's the most obvious rush to a global fascist dictatorship and the complete submission of humanity and yet still so many are locked away in their Cult-induced perceptual coma and can't see it.

Smart Grid control centres

The human body is being transformed by the 'vaccines' and in other ways into a synthetic cyborg that can be attached to the global Smart Grid which would be controlled from a central point and other sub-locations of Grid manipulation. Where are these planned to be? Well, China for a start which is one of the Cult's biggest centres of operation. The technological control system and technocratic rule was incubated here to be unleashed across the world after the 'Covid' hoax came out of China in 2020. Another Smart Grid location that will surprise people new to this is Israel. I have exposed in *The Trigger* how Sabbatian technocrats, intelligence and military operatives were behind the horrors of 9/11 and not '19 Arab hijackers' who somehow manifested the ability to pilot big passenger airliners when instructors at puddle-jumping flying schools described some of them as a joke. The 9/11 attacks were made possible through control of civilian and military air computer systems and those of the White House, Pentagon and connected agencies. See *The Trigger* – it

will blow your mind. The controlling and coordinating force were the Sabbatian networks in Israel and the United States which by then had infiltrated the entire US government, military and intelligence system. The real name of the American Deep State is 'Sabbatian State'. Israel is a tiny country of only nine million people, but it is one of the global centres of cyber operations and fast catching Silicon Valley in importance to the Cult. Israel is known as the 'start-up nation' for all the cyber companies spawned there with the Sabbatian specialisation of 'cyber security' that I mentioned earlier which gives those companies access to computer systems of their clients in real time through 'backdoors' written into the coding when security software is downloaded. The Sabbatian centre of cyber operations outside Silicon Valley is the Israeli military Cyber Intelligence Unit, the biggest infrastructure project in Israel's history, headquartered in the desert-city of Beersheba and involving some 20,000 'cyber soldiers'. Here are located a literal army of Internet trolls scanning social media, forums and comment lists for anyone challenging the Cult agenda. The UK military has something similar with its 77th Brigade and associated operations. The Beersheba complex includes research and development centres for other Cult operations such as Intel, Microsoft, IBM, Google, Apple, Hewlett-Packard, Cisco Systems, Facebook and Motorola. Techcrunch.com ran an article about the Beersheba global Internet technology centre headlined 'Israel's desert city of Beersheba is turning into a cybertech oasis':

> The military's massive relocation of its prestigious technology units, the presence of multinational and local companies, a close proximity to Ben Gurion University and generous government subsidies are turning Beersheba into a major global cybertech hub. Beersheba has all of the ingredients of a vibrant security technology ecosystem, including Ben Gurion University with its graduate program in cybersecurity and Cyber Security Research Center, and the presence of companies such as EMC, Deutsche Telekom, PayPal, Oracle, IBM, and Lockheed Martin. It's also the future home of the INCB (Israeli National Cyber Bureau); offers a special income tax incentive for cyber security companies, and was the site for the relocation of the army's intelligence corps units.

Sabbatians have taken over the cyber world through the following process: They scan the schools for likely cyber talent and develop them at Ben Gurion University and their period of conscription in the Israeli Defense Forces when they are stationed at the Beersheba complex. When the cyber talented officially leave the army they are funded to start cyber companies with technology developed by themselves or given to them by the state. Much of this is stolen through backdoors of computer systems around the world with America top of the list. Others are sent off to Silicon Valley to start companies or join the major ones and so we have many major positions filled by apparently 'Jewish' but really Sabbatian operatives. Google, YouTube and Facebook are all run by 'Jewish' CEOs while Twitter is all but run by ultra-Zionist hedge-fund shark Paul Singer. At the centre of the Sabbatian global cyber web is the Israeli army's Unit 8200 which specialises in hacking into computer systems of other countries, inserting viruses, gathering information, instigating malfunction, and even taking control of them from a distance. A long list of Sabbatians involved with 9/11, Silicon Valley and Israeli cyber security companies are operatives of Unit 8200. This is not about Israel. It's about the Cult. Israel is planned to be a Smart Grid hub as with China and what is happening at Beersheba is not for the benefit of Jewish people who are treated disgustingly by the Sabbatian elite that control the country. A glance at the Nuremberg Codes will tell you that.

The story is much bigger than 'Covid', important as that is to where we are being taken. Now, though, it's time to really strap in. There's more … much more …

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Who controls the Cult?

Awake, arise or be forever fall'n
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

I have exposed this far the level of the Cult conspiracy that operates in the world of the seen and within the global secret society and satanic network which operates in the shadows one step back from the seen. The story, however, goes much deeper than that.

The 'Covid' hoax is major part of the Cult agenda, but only part, and to grasp the biggest picture we have to expand our attention beyond the realm of human sight and into the infinity of possibility that we cannot see. It is from here, ultimately, that humanity is being manipulated into a state of total control by the force which dictates the actions of the Cult. How much of reality can we see? Next to damn all is the answer. We may appear to see all there is to see in the 'space' our eyes survey and observe, but little could be further from the truth. The human 'world' is only a tiny band of frequency that the body's visual and perceptual systems can decode into *perception* of a 'world'. According to mainstream science the electromagnetic spectrum is 0.005 percent of what exists in the Universe (Fig 10). The maximum estimate I have seen is 0.5 percent and either way it's miniscule. I say it is far, far, smaller even than 0.005 percent when you compare reality we see with the totality of reality that we don't. Now get this if you are new to such information: Visible light, the only band of frequency that we can see, is a *fraction* of the 0.005

percent (Fig 11 overleaf). Take this further and realise that our universe is one of infinite universes and that universes are only a fragment of overall reality – *infinite* reality. Then compare that with the almost infinitesimal frequency band of visible light or human sight. You see that humans are as near blind as it is possible to be without actually being so. Artist and filmmaker, Sergio Toporek, said:

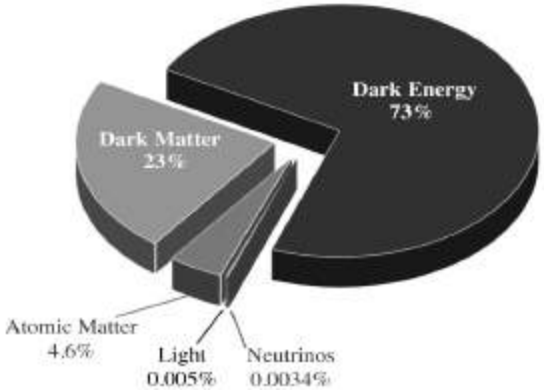

Figure 10: Humans can perceive such a tiny band of visual reality it's laughable.

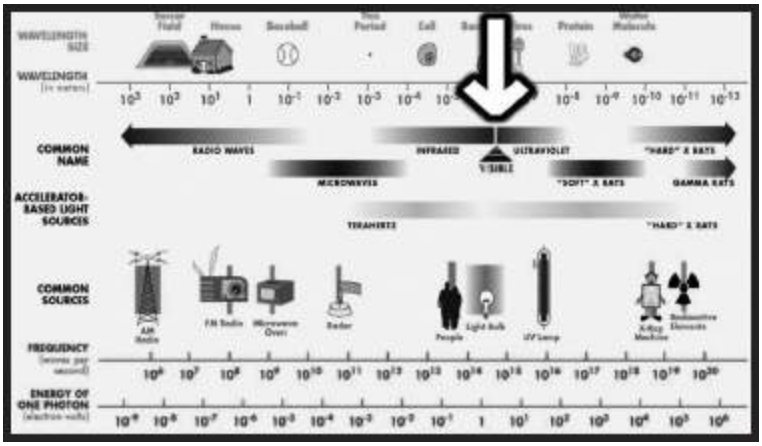

Figure 11: We can see a smear of the 0.005 percent electromagnetic spectrum, but we still know it all. Yep, makes sense.

Consider that you can see less than 1% of the electromagnetic spectrum and hear less than 1% of the acoustic spectrum. 90% of the cells in your body carry their own microbial DNA and are not 'you'. The atoms in your body are 99.9999999999999999% empty space and none of them are the ones you were born with ... Human beings have 46 chromosomes, two less than a potato.

The existence of the rainbow depends on the conical photoreceptors in your eyes; to animals without cones, the rainbow does not exist. So you don't just look at a rainbow, you create it. This is pretty amazing, especially considering that all the beautiful colours you see represent less than 1% of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Suddenly the 'world' of humans looks a very different place. Take into account, too, that Planet Earth when compared with the projected size of this single universe is the equivalent of a billionth of a pinhead. Imagine the ratio that would be when compared to infinite reality. To think that Christianity once insisted that Earth and humanity were the centre of everything. This background is vital if we are going to appreciate the nature of 'human' and how we can be manipulated by an unseen force. To human visual reality virtually *everything* is unseen and yet the prevailing perception within the institutions and so much of the public is that if we can't see it, touch it, hear it, taste it and smell it then it cannot exist. Such perception is indoctrinated and encouraged by the Cult and its agents because it isolates believers in the strictly limited, village-idiot, realm of the five senses where perceptions can be firewalled and information controlled. Most of those perpetuating the 'this-world-is-all-there-is' insanity are themselves indoctrinated into believing the same delusion. While major players and influencers know that official reality is laughable most of those in science, academia and medicine really believe the nonsense they peddle and teach succeeding generations. Those who challenge the orthodoxy are dismissed as nutters and freaks to protect the manufactured illusion from exposure. Observe the dynamic of the 'Covid' hoax and you will see how that takes the same form. The inner-circle psychopaths knows it's a gigantic scam, but almost the entirety of those imposing their fascist rules believe that 'Covid' is all that they're told it is.

Stolen identity

Ask people who they are and they will give you their name, place of birth, location, job, family background and life story. Yet that is not who they are – it is what they are *experiencing*. The difference is *absolutely crucial*. The true 'I', the eternal, infinite 'I', is consciousness,

a state of being aware. Forget 'form'. That is a vehicle for a brief experience. Consciousness does not come *from* the brain, but *through* the brain and even that is more symbolic than literal. We are awareness, pure awareness, and this is what withdraws from the body at what we call 'death' to continue our eternal beingness, *isness*, in other realms of reality within the limitlessness of infinity or the Biblical 'many mansions in my father's house'. Labels of a human life, man, woman, transgender, black, white, brown, nationality, circumstances and income are not who we are. They are what we are – awareness – is *experiencing* in a brief connection with a band of frequency we call 'human'. The labels are not the self; they are, to use the title of one of my books, a *Phantom* Self. I am not David Icke born in Leicester, England, on April 29th, 1952. I am the consciousness *having that experience*. The Cult and its non-human masters seek to convince us through the institutions of 'education', science, medicine, media and government that what we are *experiencing* is who we *are*. It's so easy to control and direct perception locked away in the bewildered illusions of the five senses with no expanded radar. Try, by contrast, doing the same with a humanity aware of its true self and its true power to consciously create its reality and experience. How is it possible to do this? We do it all day every day. If you perceive yourself as 'little me' with no power to impact upon your life and the world then your life experience will reflect that. You will hand the power you don't think you have to authority in all its forms which will use it to control your experience. This, in turn, will appear to confirm your perception of 'little me' in a self-fulfilling feedback loop. But that is what 'little me' really is – a *perception*. We are all 'big-me', infinite me, and the Cult has to make us forget that if its will is to prevail. We are therefore manipulated and pressured into self-identifying with human labels and not the consciousness/awareness *experiencing* those human labels.

The phenomenon of identity politics is a Cult-instigated manipulation technique to sub-divide previous labels into even smaller ones. A United States university employs this list of letters to

describe student identity: LGBTTQQFAGPBDSM or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, flexual, asexual, gender-fuck, polyamorous, bondage/discipline, dominance/submission and sadism/masochism. I'm sure other lists are even longer by now as people feel the need to self-identity the 'I' with the minutiae of race and sexual preference. Wokers programmed by the Cult for generations believe this is about 'inclusivity' when it's really the Cult locking them away into smaller and smaller versions of Phantom Self while firewalling them from the influence of their true self, the infinite, eternal 'I'. You may notice that my philosophy which contends that we are all unique points of attention/awareness within the same infinite whole or Oneness is the ultimate non-racism. The very sense of Oneness makes the judgement of people by their body-type, colour or sexuality utterly ridiculous and confirms that racism has no understanding of reality (including anti-white racism). Yet despite my perception of life Cult agents and fast-asleep Wokers label me racist to discredit my information while they are themselves phenomenally racist and sexist. All they see is race and sexuality and they judge people as good or bad, demons or untouchables, by their race and sexuality. All they see is *Phantom Self* and perceive themselves in terms of Phantom Self. They are pawns and puppets of the Cult agenda to focus attention and self-identity in the five senses and play those identities against each other to divide and rule. Columbia University has introduced segregated graduations in another version of social distancing designed to drive people apart and teach them that different racial and cultural groups have nothing in common with each other. The last thing the Cult wants is unity. Again the pump-primers of this will be Cult operatives in the knowledge of what they are doing, but the rest are just the Phantom Self blind leading the Phantom Self blind. We *do* have something in common – we are all *the same consciousness* having different temporary experiences.

What is this 'human'?

Yes, what *is* 'human'? That is what we are supposed to be, right? I mean 'human'? True, but 'human' is the experience not the 'I'. Break it down to basics and 'human' is the way that information is processed. If we are to experience and interact with this band of frequency we call the 'world' we must have a vehicle that operates within that band of frequency. Our consciousness in its prime form cannot do that; it is way beyond the frequency of the human realm. My consciousness or awareness could not tap these keys and pick up the cup in front of me in the same way that radio station A cannot interact with radio station B when they are on different frequencies. The human body is the means through which we have that interaction. I have long described the body as a biological computer which processes information in a way that allows consciousness to experience this reality. The body is a receiver, transmitter and processor of information in a particular way that we call human. We visually perceive only the world of the five senses in a wakened state – that is the limit of the body's visual decoding system. In truth it's not even visual in the way we experience 'visual reality' as I will come to in a moment. We are 'human' because the body processes the information sources of human into a reality and behaviour system that we *perceive* as human. Why does an elephant act like an elephant and not like a human or a duck? The elephant's biological computer is a different information field and processes information according to that program into a visual and behaviour type we call an elephant. The same applies to everything in our reality. These body information fields are perpetuated through procreation (like making a copy of a software program). The Cult wants to break that cycle and intervene technologically to transform the human information field into one that will change what we call humanity. If it can change the human information field it will change the way that field processes information and change humanity both 'physically' and psychologically. Hence the *messenger* (information) RNA 'vaccines' and so much more that is targeting human genetics by changing the body's information – *messaging* – construct through food, drink, radiation, toxicity and other means.

Reality that we experience is nothing like reality as it really is in the same way that the reality people experience in virtual reality games is not the reality they are really living in. The game is only a decoded source of information that appears to be a reality. Our world is also an information construct – a *simulation* (more later). In its base form our reality is a wavefield of information much the same in theme as Wi-Fi. The five senses decode wavefield information into electrical information which they communicate to the brain to decode into holographic (illusory 'physical') information. Different parts of the brain specialise in decoding different senses and the information is fused into a reality that appears to be outside of us but is really inside the brain and the genetic structure in general (Fig 12 overleaf). DNA is a receiver-transmitter of information and a vital part of this decoding process and the body's connection to other realities. Change DNA and you change the way we decode and connect with reality – see 'Covid vaccines'. Think of computers decoding Wi-Fi. You have information encoded in a radiation field and the computer decodes that information into a very different form on the screen. You can't see the Wi-Fi until its information is made manifest on the screen and the information on the screen is inside the computer and not outside. I have just described how we decode the 'human world'. All five senses decode the waveform 'Wi-Fi' field into electrical signals and the brain (computer) constructs reality inside the brain and not outside – 'You don't just look at a rainbow, you create it'. Sound is a simple example. We don't hear sound until the brain decodes it. Waveform sound waves are picked up by the hearing sense and communicated to the brain in an electrical form to be decoded into the sounds that we hear. Everything we hear is inside the brain along with everything we see, feel, smell and taste. Words and language are waveform fields generated by our vocal chords which pass through this process until they are decoded by the brain into words that we hear. Different languages are different frequency fields or sound waves generated by vocal chords. Late British philosopher Alan Watts said:

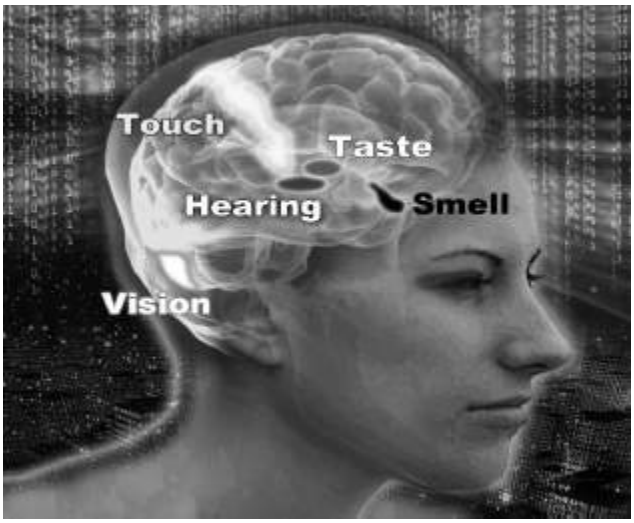

Figure 12: The brain receives information from the five senses and constructs from that our perceived reality.

[Without the brain] the world is devoid of light, heat, weight, solidity, motion, space, time or any other imaginable feature. All these phenomena are interactions, or transactions, of vibrations with a certain arrangement of neurons.

That's exactly what they are and scientist Robert Lanza describes in his book, *Biocentrism*, how we decode electromagnetic waves and energy into visual and 'physical' experience. He uses the example of a flame emitting photons, electromagnetic energy, each pulsing electrically and magnetically:

… these … invisible electromagnetic waves strike a human retina, and if (and only if) the waves happen to measure between 400 and 700 nano meters in length from crest to crest, then their energy is just right to deliver a stimulus to the 8 million cone-shaped cells in the retina.

Each in turn send an electrical pulse to a neighbour neuron, and on up the line this goes, at 250 mph, until it reaches the … occipital lobe of the brain, in the back of the head. There, a cascading complex of neurons fire from the incoming stimuli, and we subjectively perceive this experience as a yellow brightness occurring in a place we have been conditioned to call the 'external world'.

You hear what you decode

If a tree falls or a building collapses they make no noise unless someone is there to decode the energetic waves generated by the disturbance into what we call sound. Does a falling tree make a noise? Only if you hear it – *decode* it. Everything in our reality is a frequency field of information operating within the overall 'Wi-Fi' field that I call The Field. A vibrational disturbance is generated in The Field by the fields of the falling tree or building. These disturbance waves are what we decode into the sound of them falling. If no one is there to do that then neither will make any noise. Reality is created by the observer – *decoder* – and the *perceptions* of the observer affect the decoding process. For this reason different people – different *perceptions* – will perceive the same reality or situation in a different way. What one may perceive as a nightmare another will see as an opportunity. The question of why the Cult is so focused on controlling human perception now answers itself. All experienced reality is the act of decoding and we don't experience Wi-Fi until it is decoded on the computer screen. The sight and sound of an Internet video is encoded in the Wi-Fi all around us, but we don't see or hear it until the computer decodes that information. Taste, smell and touch are all phenomena of the brain as a result of the same process. We don't taste, smell or feel anything except in the brain and there are pain relief techniques that seek to block the signal from the site of discomfort to the brain because if the brain doesn't decode that signal we don't feel pain. Pain is in the brain and only appears to be at the point of impact thanks to the feedback loop between them. We don't see anything until electrical information from the sight senses is decoded in an area at the back of the brain. If that area is damaged we can go blind when our eyes are perfectly okay. So why do we go blind if we damage an eye? We damage the information processing between the waveform visual information and the visual decoding area of the brain. If information doesn't reach the brain in a form it can decode then we can't see the visual reality that it represents. What's more the brain is decoding only a fraction of the information it receives and the rest is absorbed by the

sub-conscious mind. This explanation is from the science magazine, *Wonderpedia*:

> Every second, 11 million sensations crackle along these [brain] pathways ... The brain is confronted with an alarming array of images, sounds and smells which it rigorously filters down until it is left with a manageable list of around 40. Thus 40 sensations per second make up what we perceive as reality.

The 'world' is not what people are told to believe that is it and the inner circles of the Cult *know that*.

Illusory 'physical' reality

We can only see a smear of 0.005 percent of the Universe which is only one of a vast array of universes – 'mansions' – within infinite reality. Even then the brain decodes only 40 pieces of information ('sensations') from a potential *11 million* that we receive every second. Two points strike you from this immediately: The sheer breathtaking stupidity of believing we know anything so rigidly that there's nothing more to know; and the potential for these processes to be manipulated by a malevolent force to control the reality of the population. One thing I can say for sure with no risk of contradiction is that when you can perceive an almost indescribable fraction of infinite reality there is always more to know as in tidal waves of it. Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates was so right when he said that wisdom is to know how little we know. How obviously true that is when you think that we are experiencing a physical world of solidity that is neither physical nor solid and a world of apartness when everything is connected. Cult-controlled 'science' dismisses the so-called 'paranormal' and all phenomena related to that when the 'para'-normal is perfectly normal and explains the alleged 'great mysteries' which dumbfound scientific minds. There is a reason for this. A 'scientific mind' in terms of the mainstream is a material mind, a five-sense mind imprisoned in see it, touch it, hear it, smell it and taste it. Phenomena and happenings that can't be explained that way leave the 'scientific mind' bewildered and the rule is that if they

can't account for why something is happening then it can't, by definition, be happening. I beg to differ. Telepathy is thought waves passing through The Field (think wave disturbance again) to be decoded by someone able to connect with that wavelength (information). For example: You can pick up the thought waves of a friend at any distance and at the very least that will bring them to mind. A few minutes later the friend calls you. 'My god', you say, 'that's incredible – I was just thinking of you.' Ah, but *they* were thinking of *you* before they made the call and that's what you decoded. Native peoples not entrapped in five-sense reality do this so well it became known as the 'bush telegraph'. Those known as psychics and mediums (genuine ones) are doing the same only across dimensions of reality. 'Mind over matter' comes from the fact that matter and mind are the *same*. The state of one influences the state of the other. Indeed one *and* the other are illusions. They are aspects of the same field. Paranormal phenomena are all explainable so why are they still considered 'mysteries' or not happening? Once you go down this road of understanding you begin to expand awareness beyond the five senses and that's the nightmare for the Cult.

Figure 13: Holograms are not solid, but the best ones appear to be.

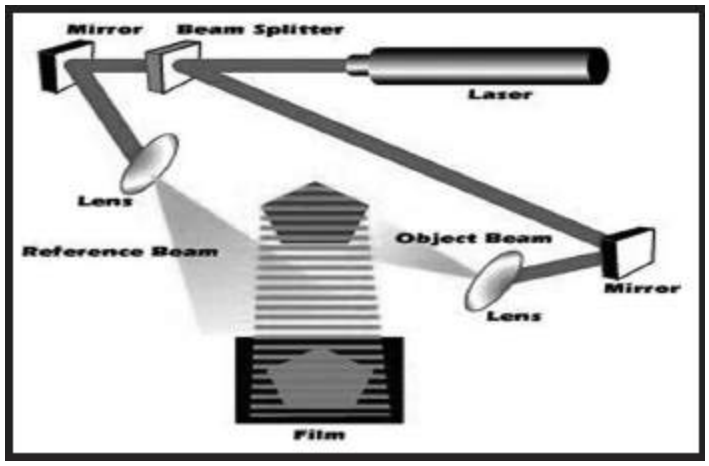

Figure 14: How holograms are created by capturing a waveform version of the subject image.

Holographic 'solidity'

Our reality is not solid, it is holographic. We are now well aware of holograms which are widely used today. Two-dimensional information is decoded into a three-dimensional reality that is not solid although can very much appear to be (Fig 13). Holograms are created with a laser divided into two parts. One goes directly onto a holographic photographic print ('reference beam') and the other takes a waveform image of the subject ('working beam') before being directed onto the print where it 'collides' with the other half of the laser (Fig 14). This creates a *waveform* interference pattern which contains the wavefield information of whatever is being photographed (Fig 15 overleaf). The process can be likened to dropping pebbles in a pond. Waves generated by each one spread out across the water to collide with the others and create a wave representation of where the stones fell and at what speed, weight and distance. A waveform interference pattern of a hologram is akin to the waveform information in The Field which the five senses decode into electrical signals to be decoded by the brain into a holographic illusory 'physical' reality. In the same way when a laser (think human attention) is directed at the waveform interference pattern a three-dimensional version of the subject is projected into apparently 'solid' reality (Fig 16). An amazing trait of holograms reveals more 'paranormal mysteries'. Information of the *whole*

hologram is encoded in waveform in every part of the interference pattern by the way they are created. This means that every *part* of a hologram is a smaller version of the whole. Cut the interference wave-pattern into four and you won't get four parts of the image. You get quarter-sized versions of the *whole* image. The body is a hologram and the same applies. Here we have the basis of acupuncture, reflexology and other forms of healing which identify representations of the whole body in all of the parts, hands, feet, ears, everywhere. Skilled palm readers can do what they do because the information of whole body is encoded in the hand. The concept of as above, so below, comes from this.

Figure 15: A waveform interference pattern that holds the information that transforms into a hologram.

Figure 16: Holographic people including 'Elvis' holographically inserted to sing a duet with Celine Dion.

The question will be asked of why, if solidity is illusory, we can't just walk through walls and each other. The resistance is not solid against solid; it is electromagnetic field against electromagnetic field and we decode this into the *experience* of solid against solid. We should also not underestimate the power of belief to dictate reality. What you believe is impossible *will be*. Your belief impacts on your decoding processes and they won't decode what you think is impossible. What we believe we perceive and what we perceive we experience. 'Can't dos' and 'impossibles' are like a firewall in a computer system that won't put on the screen what the firewall blocks. How vital that is to understanding how human experience has been hijacked. I explain in *The Answer*, *Everything You Need To Know But Have Never Been Told* and other books a long list of 'mysteries' and 'paranormal' phenomena that are not mysterious and perfectly normal once you realise what reality is and how it works. 'Ghosts' can be seen to pass through 'solid' walls because the walls are not solid and the ghost is a discarnate entity operating on a frequency so different to that of the wall that it's like two radio stations sharing the same space while never interfering with each other. I have seen ghosts do this myself. The apartness of people and objects is also an illusion. Everything is connected by the Field like all sea life is connected by the sea. It's just that within the limits of our visual reality we only 'see' holographic information and not the field of information that connects everything and from which the holographic world is made manifest. If you can only see holographic 'objects' and not the field that connects them they will appear to you as unconnected to each other in the same way that we see the computer while not seeing the Wi-Fi.

What you don't know *can* hurt you

Okay, we return to those 'two worlds' of human society and the Cult with its global network of interconnecting secret societies and satanic groups which manipulate through governments, corporations, media, religions, etc. The fundamental difference between them is *knowledge*. The idea has been to keep humanity

ignorant of the plan for its total enslavement underpinned by a crucial ignorance of reality – who we are and where we are – and how we interact with it. 'Human' should be the interaction between our expanded eternal consciousness and the five-sense body experience. We are meant to be *in* this world in terms of the five senses but not *of* this world in relation to our greater consciousness and perspective. In that state we experience the small picture of the five senses within the wider context of the big picture of awareness beyond the five senses. Put another way the five senses see the dots and expanded awareness connects them into pictures and patterns that give context to the apparently random and unconnected. Without the context of expanded awareness the five senses see only apartness and randomness with apparently no meaning. The Cult and its other-dimensional controllers seek to intervene in the frequency realm where five-sense reality is supposed to connect with expanded reality and to keep the two apart (more on this in the final chapter). When that happens five-sense mental and emotional processes are no longer influenced by expanded awareness, or the True 'I', and instead are driven by the isolated perceptions of the body's decoding systems. They are in the world *and* of it. Here we have the human plight and why humanity with its potential for infinite awareness can be so easily manipulatable and descend into such extremes of stupidity.

Once the Cult isolates five-sense mind from expanded awareness it can then program the mind with perceptions and beliefs by controlling information that the mind receives through the 'education' system of the formative years and the media perceptual bombardment and censorship of an entire lifetime. Limit perception and a sense of the possible through limiting knowledge by limiting and skewing information while censoring and discrediting that which could set people free. As the title of another of my books says *… And The Truth Shall Set You Free*. For this reason the last thing the Cult wants in circulation is the truth about anything – especially the reality of the eternal 'I' – and that's why it is desperate to control information. The Cult knows that information becomes perception

which becomes behaviour which, collectively, becomes human society. Cult-controlled and funded mainstream 'science' denies the existence of an eternal 'I' and seeks to dismiss and trash all evidence to the contrary. Cult-controlled mainstream religion has a version of 'God' that is little more than a system of control and dictatorship that employs threats of damnation in an afterlife to control perceptions and behaviour in the here and now through fear and guilt. Neither is true and it's the 'neither' that the Cult wishes to suppress. This 'neither' is that everything is an expression, a point of attention, within an infinite state of consciousness which is the real meaning of the term 'God'.

Perceptual obsession with the 'physical body' and five-senses means that 'God' becomes personified as a bearded bloke sitting among the clouds or a raging bully who loves us if we do what 'he' wants and condemns us to the fires of hell if we don't. These are no more than a 'spiritual' fairy tales to control and dictate events and behaviour through fear of this 'God' which has bizarrely made 'God-fearing' in religious circles a state to be desired. I would suggest that fearing *anything* is not to be encouraged and celebrated, but rather deleted. You can see why 'God fearing' is so beneficial to the Cult and its religions when *they* decide what 'God' wants and what 'God' demands (the Cult demands) that everyone do. As the great American comedian Bill Hicks said satirising a Christian zealot: 'I think what God meant to say.' How much of this infinite awareness ('God') that we access is decided by how far we choose to expand our perceptions, self-identity and sense of the possible. The scale of self-identity reflects itself in the scale of awareness that we can connect with and are influenced by – how much knowing and insight we have instead of programmed perception. You cannot expand your awareness into the infinity of possibility when you believe that you are little me Peter the postman or Mary in marketing and nothing more. I'll deal with this in the concluding chapter because it's crucial to how we turnaround current events.

Where the Cult came from

When I realised in the early 1990s there was a Cult network behind global events I asked the obvious question: When did it start? I took it back to ancient Rome and Egypt and on to Babylon and Sumer in Mesopotamia, the 'Land Between Two Rivers', in what we now call Iraq. The two rivers are the Tigris and Euphrates and this region is of immense historical and other importance to the Cult, as is the land called Israel only 550 miles away by air. There is much more going with deep esoteric meaning across this whole region. It's not only about 'wars for oil'. Priceless artefacts from Mesopotamia were stolen or destroyed after the American and British invasion of Iraq in 2003 justified by the lies of Boy Bush and Tony Blair (their Cult masters) about non-existent 'weapons of mass destruction'. Mesopotamia was the location of Sumer (about 5,400BC to 1,750BC), and Babylon (about 2,350BC to 539BC). Sabbatians may have become immensely influential in the Cult in modern times but they are part of a network that goes back into the mists of history. Sumer is said by historians to be the 'cradle of civilisation'. I disagree. I say it was the re-start of what we call human civilisation after cataclysmic events symbolised in part as the 'Great Flood' destroyed the world that existed before. These fantastic upheavals that I have been describing in detail in the books since the early1990s appear in accounts and legends of ancient cultures across the world and they are supported by geological and biological evidence. Stone tablets found in Iraq detailing the Sumer period say the cataclysms were caused by non-human 'gods' they call the Anunnaki. These are described in terms of extraterrestrial visitations in which knowledge supplied by the Anunnaki is said to have been the source of at least one of the world's oldest writing systems and developments in astronomy, mathematics and architecture that were way ahead of their time. I have covered this subject at length in *The Biggest Secret* and *Children of the Matrix* and the same basic 'Anunnaki' story can be found in Zulu accounts in South Africa where the late and very great Zulu high shaman Credo Mutwa told me that the Sumerian Anunnaki were known by Zulus as the Chitauri or 'children of the serpent'. See my six-hour video interview with Credo on this subject entitled *The*

Reptilian Agenda recorded at his then home near Johannesburg in 1999 which you can watch on the Ickonic media platform.

The Cult emerged out of Sumer, Babylon and Egypt (and elsewhere) and established the Roman Empire before expanding with the Romans into northern Europe from where many empires were savagely imposed in the form of Cult-controlled societies all over the world. Mass death and destruction was their calling card. The Cult established its centre of operations in Europe and European Empires were Cult empires which allowed it to expand into a global force. Spanish and Portuguese colonialists headed for Central and South America while the British and French targeted North America. Africa was colonised by Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Germany. Some like Britain and France moved in on the Middle East. The British Empire was by far the biggest for a simple reason. By now Britain was the headquarters of the Cult from which it expanded to form Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The Sun never set on the British Empire such was the scale of its occupation. London remains a global centre for the Cult along with Rome and the Vatican although others have emerged in Israel and China. It is no accident that the 'virus' is alleged to have come out of China while Italy was chosen as the means to terrify the Western population into compliance with 'Covid' fascism. Nor that Israel has led the world in 'Covid' fascism and mass 'vaccination'.

You would think that I would mention the United States here, but while it has been an important means of imposing the Cult's will it is less significant than would appear and is currently in the process of having what power it does have deleted. The Cult in Europe has mostly loaded the guns for the US to fire. America has been controlled from Europe from the start through Cult operatives in Britain and Europe. The American Revolution was an illusion to make it appear that America was governing itself while very different forces were pulling the strings in the form of Cult families such as the Rothschilds through the Rockefellers and other subordinates. The Rockefellers are extremely close to Bill Gates and

established both scalpel and drug 'medicine' and the World Health Organization. They play a major role in the development and circulation of vaccines through the Rockefeller Foundation on which Bill Gates said his Foundation is based. Why wouldn't this be the case when the Rockefellers and Gates are on the same team? Cult infiltration of human society goes way back into what we call history and has been constantly expanding and centralising power with the goal of establishing a global structure to dictate everything. Look how this has been advanced in great leaps with the 'Covid' hoax.

The non-human dimension

I researched and observed the comings and goings of Cult operatives through the centuries and even thousands of years as they were born, worked to promote the agenda within the secret society and satanic networks, and then died for others to replace them. Clearly there had to be a coordinating force that spanned this entire period while operatives who would not have seen the end goal in their lifetimes came and went advancing the plan over millennia. I went in search of that coordinating force with the usual support from the extraordinary synchronicity of my life which has been an almost daily experience since 1990. I saw common themes in religious texts and ancient cultures about a non-human force manipulating human society from the hidden. Christianity calls this force Satan, the Devil and demons; Islam refers to the Jinn or Djinn; Zulus have their Chitauri (spelt in other ways in different parts of Africa); and the Gnostic people in Egypt in the period around and before 400AD referred to this phenomena as the 'Archons', a word meaning rulers in Greek. Central American cultures speak of the 'Predators' among other names and the same theme is everywhere. I will use 'Archons' as a collective name for all of them. When you see how their nature and behaviour is described all these different sources are clearly talking about the same force. Gnostics described the Archons in terms of 'luminous fire' while Islam relates the Jinn to 'smokeless fire'. Some refer to beings in form that could occasionally be seen, but the most common of common theme is that they operate from

unseen realms which means almost all existence to the visual processes of humans. I had concluded that this was indeed the foundation of human control and that the Cult was operating within the human frequency band on behalf of this hidden force when I came across the writings of Gnostics which supported my conclusions in the most extraordinary way.

A sealed earthen jar was found in 1945 near the town of Nag Hammadi about 75-80 miles north of Luxor on the banks of the River Nile in Egypt. Inside was a treasure trove of manuscripts and texts left by the Gnostic people some 1,600 years earlier. They included 13 leather-bound papyrus codices (manuscripts) and more than 50 texts written in Coptic Egyptian estimated to have been hidden in the jar in the period of 400AD although the source of the information goes back much further. Gnostics oversaw the Great or Royal Library of Alexandria, the fantastic depository of ancient texts detailing advanced knowledge and accounts of human history. The Library was dismantled and destroyed in stages over a long period with the death-blow delivered by the Cult-established Roman Church in the period around 415AD. The Church of Rome was the Church of Babylon relocated as I said earlier. Gnostics were not a race. They were a way of perceiving reality. Whenever they established themselves and their information circulated the terrorists of the Church of Rome would target them for destruction. This happened with the Great Library and with the Gnostic Cathars who were burned to death by the psychopaths after a long period of oppression at the siege of the Castle of Monségur in southern France in 1244. The Church has always been terrified of Gnostic information which demolishes the official Christian narrative although there is much in the Bible that supports the Gnostic view if you read it in another way. To anyone studying the texts of what became known as the Nag Hammadi Library it is clear that great swathes of Christian and Biblical belief has its origin with Gnostics sources going back to Sumer. Gnostic themes have been twisted to manipulate the perceived reality of Bible believers. Biblical texts have been in the open for centuries where they could be changed while Gnostic

documents found at Nag Hammadi were sealed away and untouched for 1,600 years. What you see is what they wrote.

Use your *pneuma* not your *nous*

Gnosticism and Gnostic come from 'gnosis' which means knowledge, or rather *secret* knowledge, in the sense of spiritual awareness – knowledge about reality and life itself. The desperation of the Cult's Church of Rome to destroy the Gnostics can be understood when the knowledge they were circulating was the last thing the Cult wanted the population to know. Sixteen hundred years later the same Cult is working hard to undermine and silence me for the same reason. The dynamic between knowledge and ignorance is a constant. 'Time' appears to move on, but essential themes remain the same. We are told to 'use your nous', a Gnostic word for head/brain/intelligence. They said, however, that spiritual awakening or 'salvation' could only be secured by expanding awareness *beyond* what they called *nous* and into *pneuma* or Infinite Self. Obviously as I read these texts the parallels with what I have been saying since 1990 were fascinating to me. There is a universal truth that spans human history and in that case why wouldn't we be talking the same language 16 centuries apart? When you free yourself from the perception program of the five senses and explore expanded realms of consciousness you are going to connect with the same information no matter what the perceived 'era' within a manufactured timeline of a single and tiny range of manipulated frequency. Humans working with 'smart' technology or knocking rocks together in caves is only a timeline appearing to operate within the human frequency band. Expanded awareness and the knowledge it holds have always been there whether the era be Stone Age or computer age. We can only access that knowledge by opening ourselves to its frequency which the five-sense prison cell is designed to stop us doing. Gates, Fauci, Whitty, Vallance, Zuckerberg, Brin, Page, Wojcicki, Bezos, and all the others behind the 'Covid' hoax clearly have a long wait before their range of frequency can make that connection given that an open heart is

crucial to that as we shall see. Instead of accessing knowledge directly through expanded awareness it is given to Cult operatives by the secret society networks of the Cult where it has been passed on over thousands of years outside the public arena. Expanded realms of consciousness is where great artists, composers and writers find their inspiration and where truth awaits anyone open enough to connect with it. We need to go there fast.

Archon hijack

A fifth of the Nag Hammadi texts describe the existence and manipulation of the Archons led by a 'Chief Archon' they call 'Yaldabaoth', or the 'Demiurge', and this is the Christian 'Devil', 'Satan', 'Lucifer', and his demons. Archons in Biblical symbolism are the 'fallen ones' which are also referred to as fallen angels after the angels expelled from heaven according to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These angels are claimed to tempt humans to 'sin' ongoing and you will see how accurate that symbolism is during the rest of the book. The theme of 'original sin' is related to the 'Fall' when Adam and Eve were 'tempted by the serpent' and fell from a state of innocence and 'obedience' (connection) with God into a state of disobedience (disconnection). The Fall is said to have brought sin into the world and corrupted everything including human nature. Yaldabaoth, the 'Lord Archon', is described by Gnostics as a 'counterfeit spirit', 'The Blind One', 'The Blind God', and 'The Foolish One'. The Jewish name for Yaldabaoth in Talmudic writings is Samael which translates as 'Poison of God', or 'Blindness of God'. You see the parallels. Yaldabaoth in Islamic belief is the Muslim Jinn devil known as Shaytan – Shaytan is Satan as the same themes are found all over the world in every religion and culture. The 'Lord God' of the Old Testament is the 'Lord Archon' of Gnostic manuscripts and that's why he's such a bloodthirsty bastard. Satan is known by Christians as 'the Demon of Demons' and Gnostics called Yaldabaoth the 'Archon of Archons'. Both are known as 'The Deceiver'. We are talking about the same 'bloke' for sure and these common themes

using different names, storylines and symbolism tell a common tale of the human plight.

Archons are referred to in Nag Hammadi documents as mind parasites, inverters, guards, gatekeepers, detainers, judges, pitiless ones and deceivers. The 'Covid' hoax alone is a glaring example of all these things. The Biblical 'God' is so different in the Old and New Testaments because they are not describing the same phenomenon. The vindictive, angry, hate-filled, 'God' of the Old Testament, known as Yahweh, is Yaldabaoth who is depicted in Cult-dictated popular culture as the 'Dark Lord', 'Lord of Time', Lord (Darth) Vader and Dormammu, the evil ruler of the 'Dark Dimension' trying to take over the 'Earth Dimension' in the Marvel comic movie, *Dr Strange*. Yaldabaoth is both the Old Testament 'god' and the Biblical 'Satan'. Gnostics referred to Yaldabaoth as the 'Great Architect of the Universe'and the Cult-controlled Freemason network calls their god 'the 'Great Architect of the Universe' (also Grand Architect). The 'Great Architect' Yaldabaoth is symbolised by the Cult as the all-seeing eye at the top of the pyramid on the Great Seal of the United States and the dollar bill. Archon is encoded in *arch*-itect as it is in *arch*-angels and *arch*-bishops. All religions have the theme of a force for good and force for evil in some sort of spiritual war and there is a reason for that – the theme is true. The Cult and its non-human masters are quite happy for this to circulate. They present themselves as the force for good fighting evil when they are really the force of evil (absence of love). The whole foundation of Cult modus operandi is inversion. They promote themselves as a force for good and anyone challenging them in pursuit of peace, love, fairness, truth and justice is condemned as a satanic force for evil. This has been the game plan throughout history whether the Church of Rome inquisitions of non-believers or 'conspiracy theorists' and 'anti-vaxxers' of today. The technique is the same whatever the timeline era.

Yaldabaoth is revolting (true)

Yaldabaoth and the Archons are said to have revolted against God with Yaldabaoth claiming to *be* God – the *All That Is*. The Old Testament 'God' (Yaldabaoth) demanded to be worshipped as such: ' *I am* the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me' (Isaiah 45:5). I have quoted in other books a man who said he was the unofficial son of the late Baron Philippe de Rothschild of the Mouton-Rothschild wine producing estates in France who died in 1988 and he told me about the Rothschild 'revolt from God'. The man said he was given the name Phillip Eugene de Rothschild and we shared long correspondence many years ago while he was living under another identity. He said that he was conceived through 'occult incest' which (within the Cult) was 'normal and to be admired'. 'Phillip' told me about his experience attending satanic rituals with rich and famous people whom he names and you can see them and the wider background to Cult Satanism in my other books starting with *The Biggest Secret*. Cult rituals are interactions with Archontic 'gods'. 'Phillip' described Baron Philippe de Rothschild as 'a master Satanist and hater of God' and he used the same term 'revolt from God' associated with Yaldabaoth/Satan/Lucifer/the Devil in describing the Sabbatian Rothschild dynasty. 'I played a key role in my family's revolt from God', he said. That role was to infiltrate in classic Sabbatian style the Christian Church, but eventually he escaped the mind-prison to live another life. The Cult has been targeting religion in a plan to make worship of the Archons the global one-world religion. Infiltration of Satanism into modern 'culture', especially among the young, through music videos, stage shows and other means, is all part of this.

Nag Hammadi texts describe Yaldabaoth and the Archons in their prime form as energy – consciousness – and say they can take form if they choose in the same way that consciousness takes form as a human. Yaldabaoth is called 'formless' and represents a deeply inverted, distorted and chaotic state of consciousness which seeks to attached to humans and turn them into a likeness of itself in an attempt at assimilation. For that to happen it has to manipulate

humans into low frequency mental and emotional states that match its own. Archons can certainly appear in human form and this is the origin of the psychopathic personality. The energetic distortion Gnostics called Yaldabaoth *is* psychopathy. When psychopathic Archons take human form that human will be a psychopath as an expression of Yaldabaoth consciousness. Cult psychopaths are Archons in human form. The principle is the same as that portrayed in the 2009 *Avatar* movie when the American military travelled to a fictional Earth-like moon called Pandora in the Alpha Centauri star system to infiltrate a society of blue people, or Na'vi, by hiding within bodies that looked like the Na'vi. Archons posing as humans have a particular hybrid information field, part human, part Archon, (the ancient 'demigods') which processes information in a way that manifests behaviour to match their psychopathic evil, lack of empathy and compassion, and stops them being influenced by the empathy, compassion and love that a fully-human information field is capable of expressing. Cult bloodlines interbreed, be they royalty or dark suits, for this reason and you have their obsession with incest. Interbreeding with full-blown humans would dilute the Archontic energy field that guarantees psychopathy in its representatives in the human realm.

Gnostic writings say the main non-human forms that Archons take are *serpentine* (what I have called for decades 'reptilian' amid unbounded ridicule from the Archontically-programmed) and what Gnostics describe as 'an unborn baby or foetus with grey skin and dark, unmoving eyes'. This is an excellent representation of the ET 'Greys' of UFO folklore which large numbers of people claim to have seen and been abducted by – Zulu shaman Credo Mutwa among them. I agree with those that believe in extraterrestrial or interdimensional visitations today and for thousands of years past. No wonder with their advanced knowledge and technological capability they were perceived and worshipped as gods for technological and other 'miracles' they appeared to perform. Imagine someone arriving in a culture disconnected from the modern world with a smartphone and computer. They would be

seen as a 'god' capable of 'miracles'. The Renegade Mind, however, wants to know the source of everything and not only the way that source manifests as human or non-human. In the same way that a Renegade Mind seeks the original source material for the 'Covid virus' to see if what is claimed is true. The original source of Archons in form is consciousness – the distorted state of consciousness known to Gnostics as Yaldabaoth.

'Revolt from God' is energetic disconnection

Where I am going next will make a lot of sense of religious texts and ancient legends relating to 'Satan', Lucifer' and the 'gods'. Gnostic descriptions sync perfectly with the themes of my own research over the years in how they describe a consciousness distortion seeking to impose itself on human consciousness. I've referred to the core of infinite awareness in previous books as Infinite Awareness in Awareness of Itself. By that I mean a level of awareness that knows that it is all awareness and is aware of all awareness. From here comes the frequency of love in its true sense and balance which is what love is on one level – the balance of all forces into a single whole called Oneness and Isness. The more we disconnect from this state of love that many call 'God' the constituent parts of that Oneness start to unravel and express themselves as a part and not a whole. They become individualised as intellect, mind, selfishness, hatred, envy, desire for power over others, and such like. This is not a problem in the greater scheme in that 'God', the *All That Is*, can experience all these possibilities through different expressions of itself including humans. What we as expressions of the whole experience the *All That Is* experiences. We are the *All That Is* experiencing itself. As we withdraw from that state of Oneness we disconnect from its influence and things can get very unpleasant and very stupid. Archontic consciousness is at the extreme end of that. It has so disconnected from the influence of Oneness that it has become an inversion of unity and love, an inversion of everything, an inversion of life itself. Evil is appropriately live written backwards. Archontic consciousness is obsessed with death, an inversion of life,

and so its manifestations in Satanism are obsessed with death. They use inverted symbols in their rituals such as the inverted pentagram and cross. Sabbatians as Archontic consciousness incarnate invert Judaism and every other religion and culture they infiltrate. They seek disunity and chaos and they fear unity and harmony as they fear love like garlic to a vampire. As a result the Cult, Archons incarnate, act with such evil, psychopathy and lack of empathy and compassion disconnected as they are from the source of love. How could Bill Gates and the rest of the Archontic psychopaths do what they have to human society in the 'Covid' era with all the death, suffering and destruction involved and have no emotional consequence for the impact on others? Now you know. Why have Zuckerberg, Brin, Page, Wojcicki and company callously censored information warning about the dangers of the 'vaccine' while thousands have been dying and having severe, sometimes life-changing reactions? Now you know. Why have Tedros, Fauci, Whitty, Vallance and their like around the world been using case and death figures they're aware are fraudulent to justify lockdowns and all the deaths and destroyed lives that have come from that? Now you know. Why did Christian Drosten produce and promote a 'testing' protocol that he knew couldn't test for infectious disease which led to a global human catastrophe. Now you know. The Archontic mind doesn't give a shit (Fig 17). I personally think that Gates and major Cult insiders are a form of AI cyborg that the Archons want humans to become.

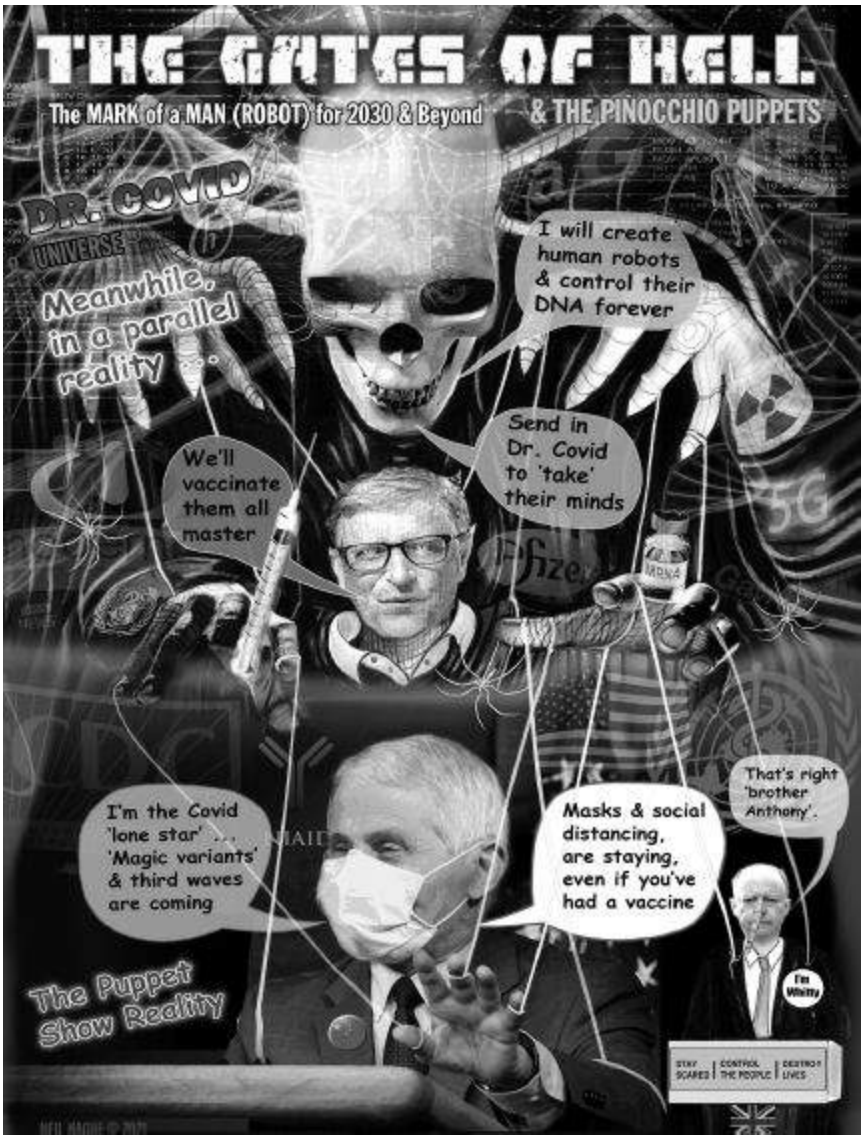

Figure 17: Artist Neil Hague's version of the 'Covid' hierarchy.

Human batteries

A state of such inversion does have its consequences, however. The level of disconnection from the Source of All means that you withdraw from that source of energetic sustenance and creativity. This means that you have to find your own supply of energetic power and it has – *us*. When the Morpheus character in the first *Matrix* movie held up a battery he spoke a profound truth when he said: 'The Matrix is a computer-generated dream world built to keep us under control in order to change the human being into one of

these.' The statement was true in all respects. We do live in a technologically-generated virtual reality simulation (more very shortly) and we have been manipulated to be an energy source for Archontic consciousness. The Disney-Pixar animated movie *Monsters, Inc*. in 2001 symbolised the dynamic when monsters in their world had no energy source and they would enter the human world to terrify children in their beds, catch the child's scream, terror (low-vibrational frequencies), and take that energy back to power the monster world. The lead character you might remember was a single giant eye and the symbolism of the Cult's all-seeing eye was obvious. Every thought and emotion is broadcast as a frequency unique to that thought and emotion. Feelings of love and joy, empathy and compassion, are high, quick, frequencies while fear, depression, anxiety, suffering and hate are low, slow, dense frequencies. Which kind do you think Archontic consciousness can connect with and absorb? In such a low and dense frequency state there's no way it can connect with the energy of love and joy. Archons can only feed off energy compatible with their own frequency and they and their Cult agents want to delete the human world of love and joy and manipulate the transmission of low vibrational frequencies through low-vibrational human mental and emotional states. *We are their energy source*. Wars are energetic banquets to the Archons – a world war even more so – and think how much low-frequency mental and emotional energy has been generated from the consequences for humanity of the 'Covid' hoax orchestrated by Archons incarnate like Gates.

The ancient practice of human sacrifice 'to the gods', continued in secret today by the Cult, is based on the same principle. 'The gods' are Archontic consciousness in different forms and the sacrifice is induced into a state of intense terror to generate the energy the Archontic frequency can absorb. Incarnate Archons in the ritual drink the blood which contains an adrenaline they crave which floods into the bloodstream when people are terrorised. Most of the sacrifices, ancient and modern, are children and the theme of 'sacrificing young virgins to the gods' is just code for children. They

have a particular pre-puberty energy that Archons want more than anything and the energy of the young in general is their target. The California Department of Education wants students to chant the names of Aztec gods (Archontic gods) once worshipped in human sacrifice rituals in a curriculum designed to encourage them to 'challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, imperialist/colonial beliefs', join 'social movements that struggle for social justice', and 'build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic racism society'. It's the usual Woke crap that inverts racism and calls it anti-racism. In this case solidarity with 'indigenous tribes' is being used as an excuse to chant the names of 'gods' to which people were sacrificed (and still are in secret). What an example of Woke's inability to see beyond black and white, us and them, They condemn the colonisation of these tribal cultures by Europeans (quite right), but those cultures sacrificing people including children to their 'gods', and mass murdering untold numbers as the Aztecs did, is just fine. One chant is to the Aztec god Tezcatlipoca who had a man sacrificed to him in the 5th month of the Aztec calendar. His heart was cut out and he was eaten. Oh, that's okay then. Come on children … after three … Other sacrificial 'gods' for the young to chant their allegiance include Quetzalcoatl, Huitzilopochtli and Xipe Totec. The curriculum says that 'chants, affirmations, and energizers can be used to bring the class together, build unity around ethnic studies principles and values, and to reinvigorate the class following a lesson that may be emotionally taxing or even when student engagement may appear to be low'. Well, that's the cover story, anyway. Chanting and mantras are the repetition of a particular frequency generated from the vocal cords and chanting the names of these Archontic 'gods' tunes you into their frequency. That is the last thing you want when it allows for energetic synchronisation, attachment and perceptual influence. Initiates chant the names of their 'Gods' in their rituals for this very reason.

Vampires of the Woke

Paedophilia is another way that Archons absorb the energy of children. Paedophiles possessed by Archontic consciousness are used as the conduit during sexual abuse for discarnate Archons to vampire the energy of the young they desire so much. Stupendous numbers of children disappear every year never to be seen again although you would never know from the media. Imagine how much low-vibrational energy has been generated by children during the 'Covid' hoax when so many have become depressed and psychologically destroyed to the point of killing themselves. Shocking numbers of children are now taken by the state from loving parents to be handed to others. I can tell you from long experience of researching this since 1996 that many end up with paedophiles and assets of the Cult through corrupt and Cult-owned social services which in the reframing era has hired many psychopaths and emotionless automatons to do the job. Children are even stolen to order using spurious reasons to take them by the corrupt and secret (because they're corrupt) 'family courts'. I have written in detail in other books, starting with *The Biggest Secret* in 1997, about the ubiquitous connections between the political, corporate, government, intelligence and military elites (Cult operatives) and Satanism and paedophilia. If you go deep enough both networks have an interlocking leadership. The Woke mentality has been developed by the Cult for many reasons: To promote almost every aspect of its agenda; to hijack the traditional political left and turn it fascist; to divide and rule; and to target agenda pushbackers. But there are other reasons which relate to what I am describing here. How many happy and joyful Wokers do you ever see especially at the extreme end? They are a mental and psychological mess consumed by emotional stress and constantly emotionally cocked for the next explosion of indignation at someone referring to a female as a female. They are walking, talking, batteries as Morpheus might say emitting frequencies which both enslave them in low-vibrational bubbles of perceptual limitation and feed the Archons. Add to this the hatred claimed to be love; fascism claimed to 'anti-fascism', racism claimed to be 'anti-racism';

exclusion claimed to inclusion; and the abuse-filled Internet trolling. You have a purpose-built Archontic energy system with not a wind turbine in sight and all founded on Archontic *inversion*. We have whole generations now manipulated to serve the Archons with their actions and energy. They will be doing so their entire adult lives unless they snap out of their Archon-induced trance. Is it really a surprise that Cult billionaires and corporations put so much money their way? Where is the energy of joy and laughter, including laughing at yourself which is confirmation of your own emotional security? Mark Twain said: 'The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter.' We must use it all the time. Woke has destroyed comedy because it has no humour, no joy, sense of irony, or self-deprecation. Its energy is dense and intense. *Mmmmm*, lunch says the Archontic frequency. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was the Austrian philosopher and famous esoteric thinker who established Waldorf education or Steiner schools to treat children like unique expressions of consciousness and not minds to be programmed with the perceptions determined by authority. I'd been writing about this energy vampiring for decades when I was sent in 2016 a quote by Steiner. He was spot on:

> There are beings in the spiritual realms for whom anxiety and fear emanating from human beings offer welcome food. When humans have no anxiety and fear, then these creatures starve. If fear and anxiety radiates from people and they break out in panic, then these creatures find welcome nutrition and they become more and more powerful. These beings are hostile towards humanity. Everything that feeds on negative feelings, on anxiety, fear and superstition, despair or doubt, are in reality hostile forces in super-sensible worlds, launching cruel attacks on human beings, while they are being fed ... These are exactly the feelings that belong to contemporary culture and materialism; because it estranges people from the spiritual world, it is especially suited to evoke hopelessness and fear of the unknown in people, thereby calling up the above mentioned hostile forces against them.

Pause for a moment from this perspective and reflect on what has happened in the world since the start of 2020. Not only will pennies drop, but billion dollar bills. We see the same theme from Don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian shaman in Mexico and the information source for Peruvian-born writer, Carlos Castaneda, who wrote a series of

books from the 1960s to 1990s. Don Juan described the force manipulating human society and his name for the Archons was the predator:

We have a predator that came from the depths of the cosmos and took over the rule of our lives. Human beings are its prisoners. The predator is our lord and master. It has rendered us docile, helpless. If we want to protest, it suppresses our protest. If we want to act independently, it demands that we don't do so ... indeed we are held prisoner!

They took us over because we are food to them, and they squeeze us mercilessly because we are their sustenance. Just as we rear chickens in coops, the predators rear us in human coops, humaneros. Therefore, their food is always available to them.

Different cultures, different eras, same recurring theme.

The 'ennoia' dilemma

Nag Hammadi Gnostic manuscripts say that Archon consciousness has no 'ennoia'. This is directly translated as 'intentionality', but I'll use the term 'creative imagination'. The *All That Is* in awareness of itself is the source of all creativity – all possibility – and the more disconnected you are from that source the more you are subsequently denied 'creative imagination'. Given that Archon consciousness is almost entirely disconnected it severely lacks creativity and has to rely on far more mechanical processes of thought and exploit the creative potential of those that do have 'ennoia'. You can see cases of this throughout human society. Archon consciousness almost entirely dominates the global banking system and if we study how that system works you will appreciate what I mean. Banks manifest 'money' out of nothing by issuing lines of 'credit' which is 'money' that has never, does not, and will never exist except in theory. It's a confidence trick. If you think 'credit' figures-on-a-screen 'money' is worth anything you accept it as payment. If you don't then the whole system collapses through lack of confidence in the value of that 'money'. Archontic bankers with no 'ennoia' are 'lending' 'money' that doesn't exist to humans that *do* have creativity – those that have the inspired ideas and create businesses and products. Archon banking feeds off human creativity

which it controls through 'money' creation and debt. Humans have the creativity and Archons exploit that for their own benefit and control while having none themselves. Archon Internet platforms like Facebook claim joint copyright of everything that creative users post and while Archontic minds like Zuckerberg may officially head that company it will be human creatives on the staff that provide the creative inspiration. When you have limitless 'money' you can then buy other companies established by creative humans. Witness the acquisition record of Facebook, Google and their like. Survey the Archon-controlled music industry and you see non-creative dark suit executives making their fortune from the human creativity of their artists. The cases are endless. Research the history of people like Gates and Zuckerberg and how their empires were built on exploiting the creativity of others. Archon minds cannot create out of nothing, but they are skilled (because they have to be) in what Gnostic texts call 'countermimicry'. They can imitate, but not innovate. Sabbatians trawl the creativity of others through backdoors they install in computer systems through their cybersecurity systems. Archon-controlled China is globally infamous for stealing intellectual property and I remember how Hong Kong, now part of China, became notorious for making counterfeit copies of the creativity of others – 'countermimicry'. With the now pervasive and all-seeing surveillance systems able to infiltrate any computer you can appreciate the potential for Archons to vampire the creativity of humans. Author John Lamb Lash wrote in his book about the Nag Hammadi texts, *Not In His Image*:

> Although they cannot originate anything, because they lack the divine factor of ennoia (intentionality), Archons can imitate with a vengeance. Their expertise is simulation (HAL, virtual reality). The Demiurge [Yaldabaoth] fashions a heaven world copied from the fractal patterns [of the original] ... His construction is celestial kitsch, like the fake Italianate villa of a Mafia don complete with militant angels to guard every portal.

This brings us to something that I have been speaking about since the turn of the millennium. Our reality is a simulation; a virtual reality that we think is real. No, I'm not kidding.

Human reality? Well, virtually

I had pondered for years about whether our reality is 'real' or some kind of construct. I remembered being immensely affected on a visit as a small child in the late 1950s to the then newly-opened Planetarium on the Marylebone Road in London which is now closed and part of the adjacent Madame Tussauds wax museum. It was in the middle of the day, but when the lights went out there was the night sky projected in the Planetarium's domed ceiling and it appeared to be so real. The experience never left me and I didn't know why until around the turn of the millennium when I became certain that our 'night sky' and entire reality is a projection, a virtual reality, akin to the illusory world portrayed in the *Matrix* movies. I looked at the sky one day in this period and it appeared to me like the domed roof of the Planetarium. The release of the first *Matrix* movie in 1999 also provided a synchronistic and perfect visual representation of where my mind had been going for a long time. I hadn't come across the Gnostic Nag Hammadi texts then. When I did years later the correlation was once again astounding. As I read Gnostic accounts from 1,600 years and more earlier it was clear that they were describing the same simulation phenomenon. They tell how the Yaldabaoth 'Demiurge' and Archons created a 'bad copy' of original reality to rule over all that were captured by its illusions and the body was a prison to trap consciousness in the 'bad copy' fake reality. Read how Gnostics describe the 'bad copy' and update that to current times and they are referring to what we would call today a virtual reality simulation.

Author John Lamb Lash said 'the Demiurge fashions a heaven world copied from the fractal patterns' of the original through expertise in 'HAL' or virtual reality simulation. Fractal patterns are part of the energetic information construct of our reality, a sort of blueprint. If these patterns were copied in computer terms it would indeed give you a copy of a 'natural' reality in a non-natural frequency and digital form. The principle is the same as making a copy of a website. The original website still exists, but now you can change the copy version to make it whatever you like and it can

become very different to the original website. Archons have done this with our reality, a *synthetic* copy of prime reality that still exists beyond the frequency walls of the simulation. Trapped within the illusions of this synthetic Matrix, however, were and are human consciousness and other expressions of prime reality and this is why the Archons via the Cult are seeking to make the human body synthetic and give us synthetic AI minds to complete the job of turning the entire reality synthetic including what we perceive to be the natural world. To quote Kurzweil: 'Nanobots will infuse all the matter around us with information. Rocks, trees, everything will become these intelligent creatures.' Yes, *synthetic* 'creatures' just as 'Covid' and other genetically-manipulating 'vaccines' are designed to make the human body synthetic. From this perspective it is obvious why Archons and their Cult are so desperate to infuse synthetic material into every human with their 'Covid' scam.

Let there be (electromagnetic) light

Yaldabaoth, the force that created the simulation, or Matrix, makes sense of the Gnostic reference to 'The Great Architect' and its use by Cult Freemasonry as the name of its deity. The designer of the Matrix in the movies is called 'The Architect' and that trilogy is jam-packed with symbolism relating to these subjects. I have contended for years that the angry Old Testament God (Yaldabaoth) is the 'God' being symbolically 'quoted' in the opening of Genesis as 'creating the world'. This is not the creation of prime reality – it's the creation of the *simulation*. The Genesis 'God' says: 'Let there be Light: and there was light.' But what is this 'Light'? I have said for decades that the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) is not the fastest speed possible as claimed by mainstream science and is in fact the frequency walls or outer limits of the Matrix. You can't have a fastest or slowest anything within all possibility when everything is possible. The human body is encoded to operate within the speed of light or *within the simulation* and thus we see only the tiny frequency band of visible *light*. Near-death experiencers who perceive reality outside the body during temporary 'death' describe a very different

form of light and this is supported by the Nag Hammadi texts. Prime reality beyond the simulation ('Upper Aeons' to the Gnostics) is described as a realm of incredible beauty, bliss, love and harmony – a realm of 'watery light' that is so powerful 'there are no shadows'. Our false reality of Archon control, which Gnostics call the 'Lower Aeons', is depicted as a realm with a different kind of 'light' and described in terms of chaos, 'Hell', 'the Abyss' and 'Outer Darkness', where trapped souls are tormented and manipulated by demons (relate that to the 'Covid' hoax alone). The watery light theme can be found in near-death accounts and it is not the same as *simulation* 'light' which is electromagnetic or radiation light within the speed of light – the 'Lower Aeons'. Simulation 'light' is the 'luminous fire' associated by Gnostics with the Archons. The Bible refers to Yaldabaoth as 'that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world' (Revelation 12:9). I think that making a simulated copy of prime reality ('countermimicry') and changing it dramatically while all the time manipulating humanity to believe it to be real could probably meet the criteria of deceiving the whole world. Then we come to the Cult god Lucifer – the *Light Bringer*. Lucifer is symbolic of Yaldabaoth, the bringer of radiation light that forms the bad copy simulation within the speed of light. 'He' is symbolised by the lighted torch held by the Statue of Liberty and in the name 'Illuminati'. Sabbatian-Frankism declares that Lucifer is the true god and Lucifer is the real god of Freemasonry honoured as their 'Great or Grand Architect of the Universe' (simulation).

I would emphasise, too, the way Archontic technologically-generated luminous fire of radiation has deluged our environment since I was a kid in the 1950s and changed the nature of The Field with which we constantly interact. Through that interaction technological radiation is changing us. The Smart Grid is designed to operate with immense levels of communication power with 5G expanding across the world and 6G, 7G, in the process of development. Radiation is the simulation and the Archontic manipulation system. Why wouldn't the Archon Cult wish to unleash radiation upon us to an ever-greater extreme to form

Kurzweil's 'cloud'? The plan for a synthetic human is related to the need to cope with levels of radiation beyond even anything we've seen so far. Biological humans would not survive the scale of radiation they have in their script. The Smart Grid is a technological sub-reality within the technological simulation to further disconnect five-sense perception from expanded consciousness. It's a technological prison of the mind.

Infusing the 'spirit of darkness'

A recurring theme in religion and native cultures is the manipulation of human genetics by a non-human force and most famously recorded as the biblical 'sons of god' (the god*s* plural in the original) who interbred with the daughters of men. The Nag Hammadi *Apocryphon of John* tells the same story this way:

> He [Yaldabaoth] sent his angels [Archons/demons] to the daughters of men, that they might take some of them for themselves and raise offspring for their enjoyment. And at first they did not succeed. When they had no success, they gathered together again and they made a plan together ... And the angels changed themselves in their likeness into the likeness of their mates, filling them with the spirit of darkness, which they had mixed for them, and with evil ... And they took women and begot children out of the darkness according to the likeness of their spirit.

Possession when a discarnate entity takes over a human body is an age-old theme and continues today. It's very real and I've seen it. Satanic and secret society rituals can create an energetic environment in which entities can attach to initiates and I've heard many stories of how people have changed their personality after being initiated even into lower levels of the Freemasons. I have been inside three Freemasonic temples, one at a public open day and two by just walking in when there was no one around to stop me. They were in Ryde, the town where I live, Birmingham, England, when I was with a group, and Boston, Massachusetts. They all felt the same energetically – dark, dense, low-vibrational and sinister. Demonic attachment can happen while the initiate has no idea what is going on. To them it's just a ritual to get in the Masons and do a bit of good

business. In the far more extreme rituals of Satanism human possession is even more powerful and they are designed to make possession possible. The hierarchy of the Cult is dictated by the power and perceived status of the possessing Archon. In this way the Archon hierarchy becomes the Cult hierarchy. Once the entity has attached it can influence perception and behaviour and if it attaches to the extreme then so much of its energy (information) infuses into the body information field that the hologram starts to reflect the nature of the possessing entity. This is the *Exorcist* movie type of possession when facial features change and it's known as shapeshifting. Islam's Jinn are said to be invisible tricksters who change shape, 'whisper', confuse and take human form. These are all traits of the Archons and other versions of the same phenomenon. Extreme possession could certainty infuse the 'spirit of darkness' into a partner during sex as the Nag Hammadi texts appear to describe. Such an infusion can change genetics which is also energetic information. Human genetics is information and the 'spirit of darkness' is information. Mix one with the other and change must happen. Islam has the concept of a 'Jinn baby' through possession of the mother and by Jinn taking human form. There are many ways that human genetics can be changed and remember that Archons have been aware all along of advanced techniques to do this. What is being done in human society today – and far more – was known about by Archons at the time of the 'fallen ones' and their other versions described in religions and cultures.

Archons and their human-world Cult are obsessed with genetics as we see today and they know this dictates how information is processed into perceived reality during a human life. They needed to produce a human form that would decode the simulation and this is symbolically known as 'Adam and Eve' who left the 'garden' (prime reality) and 'fell' into Matrix reality. The simulation is not a 'physical' construct (there is no 'physical'); it is a source of information. Think Wi-Fi again. The simulation is an energetic field encoded with information and body-brain systems are designed to decode that information encoded in wave or frequency form which

is transmitted to the brain as electrical signals. These are decoded by the brain to construct our sense of reality – an illusory 'physical' world that only exists in the brain or the mind. Virtual reality games mimic this process using the same sensory decoding system. Information is fed to the senses to decode a virtual reality that can appear so real, but isn't (Figs 18 and 19). Some scientists believe – and I agree with them – that what we perceive as 'physical' reality only exists when we are looking or observing. The act of perception or focus triggers the decoding systems which turn waveform information into holographic reality. When we are not observing something our reality reverts from a holographic state to a waveform state. This relates to the same principle as a falling tree not making a noise unless someone is there to hear it or decode it. The concept makes sense from the simulation perspective. A computer is not decoding all the information in a Wi-Fi field all the time and only decodes or brings into reality on the screen that part of Wi-Fi that it's decoding – focusing upon – at that moment.

Figure 18: Virtual reality technology 'hacks' into the body's five-sense decoding system.

Figure 19: The result can be experienced as very 'real'.

Interestingly, Professor Donald Hoffman at the Department of Cognitive Sciences at the University of California, Irvine, says that our experienced reality is like a computer interface that shows us only the level with which we interact while hiding all that exists beyond it: 'Evolution shaped us with a user interface that hides the truth. Nothing that we see is the truth – the very language of space and time and objects is the wrong language to describe reality.' He is correct in what he says on so many levels. Space and time are not a universal reality. They are a phenomenon of decoded *simulation* reality as part of the process of enslaving our sense of reality. Near-death experiencers report again and again how space and time did not exist as we perceive them once they were free of the body – body decoding systems. You can appreciate from this why Archons and their Cult are so desperate to entrap human attention in the five senses where we are in the Matrix and of the Matrix. Opening your mind to expanded states of awareness takes you beyond the information confines of the simulation and you become aware of knowledge and insights denied to you before. This is what we call 'awakening' – *awakening from the Matrix* – and in the final chapter I will relate this to current events.

Where are the 'aliens'?

A simulation would explain the so-called 'Fermi Paradox' named after Italian physicist Enrico Fermi (1901-1954) who created the first nuclear reactor. He considered the question of why there is such a lack of extraterrestrial activity when there are so many stars and planets in an apparently vast universe; but what if the night sky that we see, or think we do, is a simulated projection as I say? If you control the simulation and your aim is to hold humanity fast in essential ignorance would you want other forms of life including advanced life coming and going sharing information with humanity? Or would you want them to believe they were isolated and apparently alone? Themes of human isolation and apartness are common whether they be the perception of a lifeless universe or the fascist isolation laws of the 'Covid' era. Paradoxically the very

existence of a simulation means that we are not alone when some force had to construct it. My view is that experiences that people have reported all over the world for centuries with Reptilians and Grey entities are Archon phenomena as Nag Hammadi texts describe; and that benevolent 'alien' interactions are non-human groups that come in and out of the simulation by overcoming Archon attempts to keep them out. It should be highlighted, too, that Reptilians and Greys are obsessed with *genetics* and *technology* as related by cultural accounts and those who say they have been abducted by them. Technology is their way of overcoming some of the limitations in their creative potential and our technology-driven and controlled human society of today is *arch*etypical Archon-Reptilian-Grey modus operandi. Technocracy is really *Archon*tocracy. The Universe does not have to be as big as it appears with a simulation. There is no space or distance only information decoded into holographic reality. What we call 'space' is only the absence of holographic 'objects' and that 'space' is The Field of energetic information which connects everything into a single whole. The same applies with the artificially-generated information field of the simulation. The Universe is not big or small as a physical reality. It is decoded information, that's all, and its perceived size is decided by the way the simulation is encoded to make it appear. The entire night sky as we perceive it only exists in our brain and so where are those 'millions of light years'? The 'stars' on the ceiling of the Planetarium looked a vast distance away.

There's another point to mention about 'aliens'. I have been highlighting since the 1990s the plan to stage a fake 'alien invasion' to justify the centralisation of global power and a world military. Nazi scientist Werner von Braun, who was taken to America by Operation Paperclip after World War Two to help found NASA, told his American assistant Dr Carol Rosin about the Cult agenda when he knew he was dying in 1977. Rosin said that he told her about a sequence that would lead to total human control by a one-world government. This included threats from terrorism, rogue nations, meteors and asteroids before finally an 'alien invasion'. All of these

things, von Braun said, would be bogus and what I would refer to as a No-Problem-Reaction-Solution. Keep this in mind when 'the aliens are coming' is the new mantra. The aliens are not coming – they are *already here* and they have infiltrated human society while looking human. French-Canadian investigative journalist Serge Monast said in 1994 that he had uncovered a NASA/military operation called Project Blue Beam which fits with what Werner von Braun predicted. Monast died of a 'heart attack' in 1996 the day after he was arrested and spent a night in prison. He was 51. He said Blue Beam was a plan to stage an alien invasion that would include religious figures beamed holographically into the sky as part of a global manipulation to usher in a 'new age' of worshipping what I would say is the Cult 'god' Yaldabaoth in a one-world religion. Fake holographic asteroids are also said to be part of the plan which again syncs with von Braun. How could you stage an illusory threat from asteroids unless they were holographic inserts? This is pretty straightforward given the advanced technology outside the public arena and the fact that our 'physical' reality is holographic anyway. Information fields would be projected and we would decode them into the illusion of a 'physical' asteroid. If they can sell a global 'pandemic' with a 'virus' that doesn't exist what will humans not believe if government and media tell them?

All this is particularly relevant as I write with the Pentagon planning to release in June, 2021, information about 'UFO sightings'. I have been following the UFO story since the early 1990s and the common theme throughout has been government and military denials and cover up. More recently, however, the Pentagon has suddenly become more talkative and apparently open with Air Force pilot radar images released of unexplained craft moving and changing direction at speeds well beyond anything believed possible with human technology. Then, in March, 2021, former Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe said a Pentagon report months later in June would reveal a great deal of information about UFO sightings unknown to the public. He said the report would have 'massive implications'. The order to do this was included bizarrely

in a $2.3 trillion 'coronavirus' relief and government funding bill passed by the Trump administration at the end of 2020. I would add some serious notes of caution here. I have been pointing out since the 1990s that the US military and intelligence networks have long had craft – 'flying saucers' or anti-gravity craft – which any observer would take to be extraterrestrial in origin. Keeping this knowledge from the public allows craft flown by *humans* to be perceived as alien visitations. I am not saying that 'aliens' do not exist. I would be the last one to say that, but we have to be streetwise here. President Ronald Reagan told the UN General Assembly in 1987: 'I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.' That's the idea. Unite against a common 'enemy' with a common purpose behind your 'saviour force' (the Cult) as this age-old technique of mass manipulation goes global.

Science moves this way …

I could find only one other person who was discussing the simulation hypothesis publicly when I concluded it was real. This was Nick Bostrom, a Swedish-born philosopher at the University of Oxford, who has explored for many years the possibility that human reality is a computer simulation although his version and mine are not the same. Today the simulation and holographic reality hypothesis have increasingly entered the scientific mainstream. Well, the more open-minded mainstream, that is. Here are a few of the ever-gathering examples. American nuclear physicist Silas Beane led a team of physicists at the University of Bonn in Germany pursuing the question of whether we live in a simulation. They concluded that we probably do and it was likely based on a lattice of cubes. They found that cosmic rays align with that specific pattern. The team highlighted the Greisen–Zatsepin–Kuzmin (GZK) limit which refers to cosmic ray particle interaction with cosmic background radiation that creates an apparent boundary for cosmic ray particles. They say in a paper entitled 'Constraints on the Universe as a Numerical Simulation' that this 'pattern of constraint' is exactly what you

would find with a computer simulation. They also made the point that a simulation would create its own 'laws of physics' that would limit possibility. I've been making the same point for decades that the *perceived* laws of physics relate only to this reality, or what I would later call the simulation. When designers write codes to create computer and virtual reality games they are the equivalent of the laws of physics for that game. Players interact within the limitations laid out by the coding. In the same way those who wrote the codes for the simulation decided the laws of physics that would apply. These can be overridden by expanded states of consciousness, but not by those enslaved in only five-sense awareness where simulation codes rule. Overriding the codes is what people call 'miracles'. They are not. They are bypassing the encoded limits of the simulation. A population caught in simulation perception would have no idea that this was their plight. As the Bonn paper said: 'Like a prisoner in a pitch-black cell we would not be able to see the "walls" of our prison,' That's true if people remain mesmerised by the five senses. Open to expanded awareness and those walls become very clear. The main one is the speed of light.

American theoretical physicist James Gates is another who has explored the simulation question and found considerable evidence to support the idea. Gates was Professor of Physics at the University of Maryland, Director of The Center for String and Particle Theory, and on Barack Obama's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. He and his team found *computer codes* of digital data embedded in the fabric of our reality. They relate to on-off electrical charges of 1 and 0 in the binary system used by computers. 'We have no idea what they are doing there', Gates said. They found within the energetic fabric mathematical sequences known as error-correcting codes or block codes that 'reboot' data to its original state or 'default settings' when something knocks it out of sync. Gates was asked if he had found a set of equations embedded in our reality indistinguishable from those that drive search engines and browsers and he said: 'That is correct.' Rich Terrile, director of the Centre for Evolutionary Computation and Automated Design at NASA's Jet

Propulsion Laboratory, has said publicly that he believes the Universe is a digital hologram that must have been created by a form of intelligence. I agree with that in every way. Waveform information is delivered electrically by the senses to the brain which constructs a *digital* holographic reality that we call the 'world'. This digital level of reality can be read by the esoteric art of numerology. Digital holograms are at the cutting edge of holographics today. We have digital technology everywhere designed to access and manipulate our digital level of perceived reality. Synthetic mRNA in 'Covid vaccines' has a digital component to manipulate the body's digital 'operating system'.

Reality is numbers

How many know that our reality can be broken down to numbers and codes that are the same as computer games? Max Tegmark, a physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), is the author of *Our Mathematical Universe* in which he lays out how reality can be entirely described by numbers and maths in the way that a video game is encoded with the 'physics' of computer games. Our world and computer virtual reality are essentially the same. Tegmark imagines the perceptions of characters in an advanced computer game when the graphics are so good they don't know they are in a game. They think they can bump into real objects (electromagnetic resistance in our reality), fall in love and feel emotions like excitement. When they began to study the apparently 'physical world' of the video game they would realise that everything was made of pixels (which have been found in our energetic reality as must be the case when on one level our world is digital). What computer game characters thought was physical 'stuff', Tegmark said, could actually be broken down into numbers:

> And we're exactly in this situation in our world. We look around and it doesn't seem that mathematical at all, but everything we see is made out of elementary particles like quarks and electrons. And what properties does an electron have? Does it have a smell or a colour or a texture? No! ... We physicists have come up with geeky names for [Electron] properties, like

electric charge, or spin, or lepton number, but the electron doesn't care what we call it, the properties are just numbers.

This is the illusory reality Gnostics were describing. This is the simulation. The A, C, G, and T codes of DNA have a binary value – A and C = 0 while G and T = 1. This has to be when the simulation is digital and the body must be digital to interact with it. Recurring mathematical sequences are encoded throughout reality and the body. They include the Fibonacci sequence in which the two previous numbers are added to get the next one, as in ... 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, etc. The sequence is encoded in the human face and body, proportions of animals, DNA, seed heads, pine cones, trees, shells, spiral galaxies, hurricanes and the number of petals in a flower. The list goes on and on. There are fractal patterns – a 'never-ending pattern that is infinitely complex and self-similar across all scales in the as above, so below, principle of holograms. These and other famous recurring geometrical and mathematical sequences such as Phi, Pi, Golden Mean, Golden Ratio and Golden Section are *computer codes* of the simulation. I had to laugh and give my head a shake the day I finished this book and it went into the production stage. I was sent an article in *Scientific American* published in April, 2021, with the headline 'Confirmed! We Live in a Simulation'. Two decades after I first said our reality is a simulation and the speed of light is it's outer limit the article suggested that we do live in a simulation and that the speed of light is its outer limit. I left school at 15 and never passed a major exam in my life while the writer was up to his eyes in qualifications. As I will explain in the final chapter *knowing* is far better than thinking and they come from very different sources. The article rightly connected the speed of light to the processing speed of the 'Matrix' and said what has been in my books all this time … 'If we are in a simulation, as it appears, then space is an abstract property written in code. It is not real'. No it's not and if we live in a simulation something created it and it wasn't *us*. 'That David Icke says we are manipulated by aliens' – he's crackers.'

Wow …

The reality that humanity thinks is so real is an illusion. Politicians, governments, scientists, doctors, academics, law enforcement, media, school and university curriculums, on and on, are all founded on a world that *does not exist* except as a simulated prison cell. Is it such a stretch to accept that 'Covid' doesn't exist when our entire 'physical' reality doesn't exist? Revealed here is the knowledge kept under raps in the Cult networks of compartmentalised secrecy to control humanity's sense of reality by inducing the population to believe in a reality that's not real. If it wasn't so tragic in its experiential consequences the whole thing would be hysterically funny. None of this is new to Renegade Minds. Ancient Greek philosopher Plato (about 428 to about 347BC) was a major influence on Gnostic belief and he described the human plight thousands of years ago with his Allegory of the Cave. He told the symbolic story of prisoners living in a cave who had never been outside. They were chained and could only see one wall of the cave while behind them was a fire that they could not see. Figures walked past the fire casting shadows on the prisoners' wall and those moving shadows became their sense of reality. Some prisoners began to study the shadows and were considered experts on them (today's academics and scientists), but what they studied was only an illusion (today's academics and scientists). A prisoner escaped from the cave and saw reality as it really is. When he returned to report this revelation they didn't believe him, called him mad and threatened to kill him if he tried to set them free. Plato's tale is not only a brilliant analogy of the human plight and our illusory reality. It describes, too, the dynamics of the 'Covid' hoax. I have only skimmed the surface of these subjects here. The aim of this book is to crisply connect all essential dots to put what is happening today into its true context. All subject areas and their connections in this chapter are covered in great evidential detail in *Everything You Need To Know, But Have Never Been Told* and *The Answer*.

They say that bewildered people 'can't see the forest for the trees'. Humanity, however, can't see the forest for the *twigs*. The five senses

see only twigs while Renegade Minds can see the forest and it's the forest where the answers lie with the connections that reveals. Breaking free of perceptual programming so the forest can be seen is the way we turn all this around. Not breaking free is how humanity got into this mess. The situation may seem hopeless, but I promise you it's not. We are a perceptual heartbeat from paradise if only we knew.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Escaping Wetiko

Life is simply a vacation from the infinite
Dean Cavanagh

Renegade Minds weave the web of life and events and see common themes in the apparently random. They are always there if you look for them and their pursuit is aided by incredible synchronicity that comes when your mind is open rather than mesmerised by what it thinks it can see.

Infinite awareness is infinite possibility and the more of infinite possibility that we access the more becomes infinitely possible. That may be stating the apparently obvious, but it is a devastatingly-powerful fact that can set us free. We are a point of attention within an infinity of consciousness. The question is how much of that infinity do we choose to access? How much knowledge, insight, awareness, wisdom, do we want to connect with and explore? If your focus is only in the five senses you will be influenced by a fraction of infinite awareness. I mean a range so tiny that it gives new meaning to infinitesimal. Limitation of self-identity and a sense of the possible limit accordingly your range of consciousness. We are what we think we are. Life is what we think it is. The dream is the dreamer and the dreamer is the dream. Buddhist philosophy puts it this way: 'As a thing is viewed, so it appears.' Most humans live in the realm of touch, taste, see, hear, and smell and that's the limit of their sense of the possible and sense of self. Many will follow a religion and speak of a God in his heaven, but their lives are still

dominated by the five senses in their perceptions and actions. The five senses become the arbiter of everything. When that happens all except a smear of infinity is sealed away from influence by the rigid, unyielding, reality bubbles that are the five-sense human or Phantom Self. Archon Cult methodology is to isolate consciousness within five-sense reality – the simulation – and then program that consciousness with a sense of self and the world through a deluge of life-long information designed to instil the desired perception that allows global control. Efforts to do this have increased dramatically with identity politics as identity bubbles are squeezed into the minutiae of five-sense detail which disconnect people even more profoundly from the infinite 'I'.

Five-sense focus and self-identity are like a firewall that limits access to the infinite realms. You only perceive one radio or television station and no other. We'll take that literally for a moment. Imagine a vast array of stations giving different information and angles on reality, but you only ever listen to one. Here we have the human plight in which the population is overwhelmingly confined to CultFM. This relates only to the frequency range of CultFM and limits perception and insight to that band – limits *possibility* to that band. It means you are connecting with an almost imperceptibly minuscule range of possibility and creative potential within the infinite Field. It's a world where everything seems apart from everything else and where synchronicity is rare. Synchronicity is defined in the dictionary as 'the happening by chance of two or more related or similar events at the same time'. Use of 'by chance' betrays a complete misunderstanding of reality. Synchronicity is not 'by chance'. As people open their minds, or 'awaken' to use the term, they notice more and more coincidences in their lives, bits of 'luck', apparently miraculous happenings that put them in the right place at the right time with the right people. Days become peppered with 'fancy meeting you here' and 'what are the chances of that?' My entire life has been lived like this and ever more so since my own colossal awakening in 1990 and 91 which transformed my sense of reality. Synchronicity is not 'by chance'; it is by accessing expanded

realms of possibility which allow expanded potential for manifestation. People broadcasting the same vibe from the same openness of mind tend to be drawn 'by chance' to each other through what I call frequency magnetism and it's not only people. In the last more than 30 years incredible synchronicity has also led me through the Cult maze to information in so many forms and to crucial personal experiences. These 'coincidences' have allowed me to put the puzzle pieces together across an enormous array of subjects and situations. Those who have breached the bubble of five-sense reality will know exactly what I mean and this escape from the perceptual prison cell is open to everyone whenever they make that choice. This may appear super-human when compared with the limitations of 'human', but it's really our natural state. 'Human' as currently experienced is consciousness in an unnatural state of induced separation from the infinity of the whole. I'll come to how this transformation into unity can be made when I have described in more detail the force that holds humanity in servitude by denying this access to infinite self.

The Wetiko factor

I have been talking and writing for decades about the way five-sense mind is systematically barricaded from expanded awareness. I have used the analogy of a computer (five-sense mind) and someone at the keyboard (expanded awareness). Interaction between the computer and the operator is symbolic of the interaction between five-sense mind and expanded awareness. The computer directly experiences the Internet and the operator experiences the Internet via the computer which is how it's supposed to be – the two working as one. Archons seek to control that point where the operator connects with the computer to stop that interaction (Fig 20). Now the operator is banging the keyboard and clicking the mouse, but the computer is not responding and this happens when the computer is taken over – *possessed* – by an appropriately-named computer 'virus'. The operator has lost all influence over the computer which goes its own way making decisions under the control of the 'virus'. I have

just described the dynamic through which the force known to Gnostics as Yaldabaoth and Archons disconnects five-sense mind from expanded awareness to imprison humanity in perceptual servitude.

Figure 20: The mind 'virus' I have been writing about for decades seeks to isolate five-sense mind (the computer) from the true 'I'. (Image by Neil Hague).

About a year ago I came across a Native American concept of Wetiko which describes precisely the same phenomenon. Wetiko is the spelling used by the Cree and there are other versions including wintiko and windigo used by other tribal groups. They spell the name with lower case, but I see Wetiko as a proper noun as with Archons and prefer a capital. I first saw an article about Wetiko by writer and researcher Paul Levy which so synced with what I had been writing about the computer/operator disconnection and later the Archons. I then read his book, the fascinating *Dispelling Wetiko, Breaking the Spell of Evil*. The parallels between what I had concluded long before and the Native American concept of Wetiko were so clear and obvious that it was almost funny. For Wetiko see the Gnostic Archons for sure and the Jinn, the Predators, and every other name for a force of evil, inversion and chaos. Wetiko is the Native American name for the force that divides the computer from

the operator (Fig 21). Indigenous author Jack D. Forbes, a founder of the Native American movement in the 1960s, wrote another book about Wetiko entitled *Columbus And Other Cannibals – The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism* which I also read. Forbes says that Wetiko refers to an evil person or spirit 'who terrorizes other creatures by means of terrible acts, including cannibalism'. Zulu shaman Credo Mutwa told me that African accounts tell how cannibalism was brought into the world by the Chitauri 'gods' – another manifestation of Wetiko. The distinction between 'evil person or spirit' relates to Archons/Wetiko possessing a human or acting as pure consciousness. Wetiko is said to be a sickness of the soul or spirit and a state of being that takes but gives nothing back – the Cult and its operatives perfectly described. Black Hawk, a Native American war leader defending their lands from confiscation, said European invaders had 'poisoned hearts' – Wetiko hearts – and that this would spread to native societies. Mention of the heart is very significant as we shall shortly see. Forbes writes: 'Tragically, the history of the world for the past 2,000 years is, in great part, the story of the epidemiology of the wetiko disease.' Yes, and much longer. Forbes is correct when he says: 'The wetikos destroyed Egypt and Babylon and Athens and Rome and Tenochtitlan [capital of the Aztec empire] and perhaps now they will destroy the entire earth.' Evil, he said, is the number one export of a Wetiko culture – see its globalisation with 'Covid'. Constant war, mass murder, suffering of all kinds, child abuse, Satanism, torture and human sacrifice are all expressions of Wetiko and the Wetiko possessed. The world is Wetiko made manifest, *but it doesn't have to be*. There is a way out of this even now.

Figure 21: The mind 'virus' is known to Native Americans as 'Wetiko'. (Image by Neil Hague).

Cult of Wetiko

Wetiko is the Yaldabaoth frequency distortion that seeks to attach to human consciousness and absorb it into its own. Once this connection is made Wetiko can drive the perceptions of the target which they believe to be coming from their own mind. All the horrors of history and today from mass killers to Satanists, paedophiles like Jeffrey Epstein and other psychopaths, are the embodiment of Wetiko and express its state of being in all its grotesqueness. The Cult is Wetiko incarnate, Yaldabaoth incarnate, and it seeks to facilitate Wetiko assimilation of humanity in totality into its distortion by manipulating the population into low frequency states that match its own. Paul Levy writes: 'Holographically enforced within the psyche of every human being the wetiko virus pervades and underlies the entire field of consciousness, and can therefore potentially manifest through any one of us at any moment if we are not mindful.' The 'Covid' hoax has achieved this with many people, but others have not fallen into Wetiko's frequency lair. Players in the 'Covid' human catastrophe including Gates, Schwab, Tedros, Fauci, Whitty, Vallance, Johnson, Hancock, Ferguson, Drosten, and all the rest, including the psychopath psychologists, are expressions of Wetiko. This is why

they have no compassion or empathy and no emotional consequence for what they do that would make them stop doing it. Observe all the people who support the psychopaths in authority against the Pushbackers despite the damaging impact the psychopaths have on their own lives and their family's lives. You are again looking at Wetiko possession which prevents them seeing through the lies to the obvious scam going on. *Why can't they see it?* Wetiko won't let them see it. The perceptual divide that has now become a chasm is between the Wetikoed and the non-Wetikoed.

Paul Levy describes Wetiko in the same way that I have long described the Archontic force. They are the same distorted consciousness operating across dimensions of reality: '… the subtle body of wetiko is not located in the third dimension of space and time, literally existing in another dimension … it is able to affect ordinary lives by mysteriously interpenetrating into our three-dimensional world.' Wetiko does this through its incarnate representatives in the Cult and by weaving itself into The Field which on our level of reality is the electromagnetic information field of the simulation or Matrix. More than that, the simulation *is* Wetiko / Yaldabaoth. Caleb Scharf, Director of Astrobiology at Columbia University, has speculated that 'alien life' could be so advanced that it has transcribed itself into the quantum realm to become what we call physics. He said intelligence indistinguishable from the fabric of the Universe would solve many of its greatest mysteries:

> Perhaps hyper-advanced life isn't just external. Perhaps it's already all around. It is embedded in what we perceive to be physics itself, from the root behaviour of particles and fields to the phenomena of complexity and emergence ... In other words, life might not just be in the equations. It might BE the equations [My emphasis].

Scharf said it is possible that 'we don't recognise advanced life because it forms an integral and unsuspicious part of what we've considered to be the natural world'. I agree. Wetiko/Yaldabaoth *is* the simulation. We are literally in the body of the beast. But that doesn't mean it has to control us. We all have the power to overcome Wetiko

influence and the Cult knows that. I doubt it sleeps too well because it knows that.

Which Field?

This, I suggest, is how it all works. There are two Fields. One is the fierce electromagnetic light of the Matrix within the speed of light; the other is the 'watery light' of The Field beyond the walls of the Matrix that connects with the Great Infinity. Five-sense mind and the decoding systems of the body attach us to the Field of Matrix light. They have to or we could not experience this reality. Five-sense mind sees only the Matrix Field of information while our expanded consciousness is part of the Infinity Field. When we open our minds, and most importantly our hearts, to the Infinity Field we have a mission control which gives us an expanded perspective, a road map, to understand the nature of the five-sense world. If we are isolated only in five-sense mind there is no mission control. We're on our own trying to understand a world that's constantly feeding us information to ensure we do not understand. People in this state can feel 'lost' and bewildered with no direction or radar. You can see ever more clearly those who are influenced by the Fields of Big Infinity or little five-sense mind simply by their views and behaviour with regard to the 'Covid' hoax. We have had this division throughout known human history with the mass of the people on one side and individuals who could see and intuit beyond the walls of the simulation – Plato's prisoner who broke out of the cave and saw reality for what it is. Such people have always been targeted by Wetiko/Archon-possessed authority, burned at the stake or demonised as mad, bad and dangerous. The Cult today and its global network of 'anti-hate', 'anti-fascist' Woke groups are all expressions of Wetiko attacking those exposing the conspiracy, 'Covid' lies and the 'vaccine' agenda.

Woke as a whole is Wetiko which explains its black and white mentality and how at one it is with the Wetiko-possessed Cult. Paul Levy said: 'To be in this paradigm is to still be under the thrall of a two-valued logic – where things are either true or false – of a

wetikoized mind.' Wetiko consciousness is in a permanent rage, therefore so is Woke, and then there is Woke inversion and contradiction. 'Anti-fascists' act like fascists because fascists *and* 'anti-fascists' are both Wetiko at work. Political parties act the same while claiming to be different for the same reason. Secret society and satanic rituals are attaching initiates to Wetiko and the cold, ruthless, psychopathic mentality that secures the positions of power all over the world is Wetiko. Reframing 'training programmes' have the same cumulative effect of attaching Wetiko and we have their graduates described as automatons and robots with a cold, psychopathic, uncaring demeanour. They are all traits of Wetiko possession and look how many times they have been described in this book and elsewhere with regard to personnel behind 'Covid' including the police and medical profession. Climbing the greasy pole in any profession in a Wetiko society requires traits of Wetiko to get there and that is particularly true of politics which is not about fair competition and pre-eminence of ideas. It is founded on how many backs you can stab and arses you can lick. This culminated in the global 'Covid' coordination between the Wetiko possessed who pulled it off in all the different countries without a trace of empathy and compassion for their impact on humans. Our sight sense can see only holographic form and not the Field which connects holographic form. Therefore we perceive 'physical' objects with 'space' in between. In fact that 'space' is energy/consciousness operating on multiple frequencies. One of them is Wetiko and that connects the Cult psychopaths, those who submit to the psychopaths, and those who serve the psychopaths in the media operations of the world. Wetiko is Gates. Wetiko is the mask-wearing submissive. Wetiko is the fake journalist and 'fact-checker'. The Wetiko Field is coordinating the whole thing. Psychopaths, gofers, media operatives, 'anti-hate' hate groups, 'fact-checkers' and submissive people work as one unit *even without human coordination* because they are attached to the *same* Field which is organising it all (Fig 22). Paul Levy is here describing how Wetiko-possessed people are drawn together and refuse to let any information breach their rigid

perceptions. He was writing long before 'Covid', but I think you will recognise followers of the 'Covid' religion *oh just a little bit*:

People who are channelling the vibratory frequency of wetiko align with each other through psychic resonance to reinforce their unspoken shared agreement so as to uphold their deranged view of reality. Once an unconscious content takes possession of certain individuals, it irresistibly draws them together by mutual attraction and knits them into groups tied together by their shared madness that can easily swell into an avalanche of insanity.

A psychic epidemic is a closed system, which is to say that it is insular and not open to any new information or informing influences from the outside world which contradict its fixed, limited, and limiting perspective.

There we have the Woke mind and the 'Covid' mind. Compatible resonance draws the awakening together, too, which is clearly happening today.

Figure 22: The Wetiko Field from which the Cult pyramid and its personnel are made manifest. (Image by Neil Hague).

Spiritual servitude

Wetiko doesn't care about humans. It's not human; it just possesses humans for its own ends and the effect (depending on the scale of

possession) can be anything from extreme psychopathy to unquestioning obedience. Wetiko's worst nightmare is for human consciousness to expand beyond the simulation. Everything is focussed on stopping that happening through control of information, thus perception, thus frequency. The 'education system', media, science, medicine, academia, are all geared to maintaining humanity in five-sense servitude as is the constant stimulation of low-vibrational mental and emotional states (see 'Covid'). Wetiko seeks to dominate those subconscious spaces between five-sense perception and expanded consciousness where the computer meets the operator. From these subconscious hiding places Wetiko speaks to us to trigger urges and desires that we take to be our own and manipulate us into anything from low-vibrational to psychopathic states. Remember how Islam describes the Jinn as invisible tricksters that 'whisper' and confuse. Wetiko is the origin of the 'trickster god' theme that you find in cultures all over the world. Jinn, like the Archons, are Wetiko which is terrified of humans awakening and reconnecting with our true self for then its energy source has gone. With that the feedback loop breaks between Wetiko and human perception that provides the energetic momentum on which its very existence depends as a force of evil. Humans are both its target and its source of survival, but only if we are operating in low-vibrational states of fear, hate, depression and the background anxiety that most people suffer. We are Wetiko's target because we are its key to survival. It needs us, not the other way round. Paul Levy writes:

A vampire has no intrinsic, independent, substantial existence in its own right; it only exists in relation to us. The pathogenic, vampiric mind-parasite called wetiko is nothing in itself – not being able to exist from its own side – yet it has a 'virtual reality' such that it can potentially destroy our species …

…The fact that a vampire is not reflected by a mirror can also mean that what we need to see is that there's nothing, no-thing to see, other than ourselves. The fact that wetiko is the expression of something inside of us means that the cure for wetiko is with us as well. The critical issue is finding this cure within us and then putting it into effect.

Evil begets evil because if evil does not constantly expand and find new sources of energetic sustenance its evil, its *distortion*, dies with the assimilation into balance and harmony. Love is the garlic to Wetiko's vampire. Evil, the absence of love, cannot exist in the presence of love. I think I see a way out of here. I have emphasised so many times over the decades that the Archons/Wetiko and their Cult are not all powerful. *They are not*. I don't care how it looks even now *they are not*. I have not called them little boys in short trousers for effect. I have said it because it is true. Wetiko's insatiable desire for power over others is not a sign of its omnipotence, but its insecurity. Paul Levy writes: 'Due to the primal fear which ultimately drives it and which it is driven to cultivate, wetiko's body politic has an intrinsic and insistent need for centralising power and control so as to create imagined safety for itself.' *Yeeeeeees!* Exactly! Why does Wetiko want humans in an ongoing state of fear? Wetiko itself *is* fear and it is petrified of love. As evil is an absence of love, so love is an absence of fear. Love conquers all and *especially* Wetiko which *is* fear. Wetiko brought fear into the world when it wasn't here before. *Fear* was the 'fall', the fall into low-frequency ignorance and illusion – fear is **F**alse **E**motion **A**ppearing **R**eal. The simulation is driven and energised by fear because Wetiko/Yaldabaoth (fear) *are* the simulation. Fear is the absence of love and Wetiko is the absence of love.

Wetiko today

We can now view current events from this level of perspective. The 'Covid' hoax has generated momentous amounts of ongoing fear, anxiety, depression and despair which have empowered Wetiko. No wonder people like Gates have been the instigators when they are Wetiko incarnate and exhibit every trait of Wetiko in the extreme. See how cold and unemotional these people are like Gates and his cronies, how dead of eye they are. That's Wetiko. Sabbatians are Wetiko and everything they control including the World Health Organization, Big Pharma and the 'vaccine' makers, national 'health'

hierarchies, corporate media, Silicon Valley, the banking system, and the United Nations with its planned transformation into world government. All are controlled and possessed by the Wetiko distortion into distorting human society in its image. We are with this knowledge at the gateway to understanding the world. Divisions of race, culture, creed and sexuality are diversions to hide the real division between those possessed and influenced by Wetiko and those that are not. The 'Covid' hoax has brought both clearly into view. Human behaviour is not about race. Tyrants and dictatorships come in all colours and creeds. What unites the US president bombing the innocent and an African tribe committing genocide against another as in Rwanda? What unites them? *Wetiko*. All wars are Wetiko, all genocide is Wetiko, all hunger over centuries in a world of plenty is Wetiko. Children going to bed hungry, including in the West, is Wetiko. Cult-generated Woke racial divisions that focus on the body are designed to obscure the reality that divisions in behaviour are manifestations of mind, not body. Obsession with body identity and group judgement is a means to divert attention from the real source of behaviour – mind and perception. Conflict sown by the Woke both within themselves and with their target groups are Wetiko providing lunch for itself through still more agents of the division, chaos, and fear on which it feeds. The Cult is seeking to assimilate the entirety of humanity and all children and young people into the Wetiko frequency by manipulating them into states of fear and despair. Witness all the suicide and psychological unravelling since the spring of 2020. Wetiko psychopaths want to impose a state of unquestioning obedience to authority which is no more than a conduit for Wetiko to enforce its will and assimilate humanity into itself. It needs us to believe that resistance is futile when it fears resistance and even more so the game-changing non-cooperation with its impositions. It can use violent resistance for its benefit. Violent impositions and violent resistance are *both* Wetiko. The Power of Love with its Power of No will sweep Wetiko from our world. Wetiko and its Cult know that. They just don't want us to know.

AI Wetiko

This brings me to AI or artificial intelligence and something else Wetikos don't want us to know. What is AI *really*? I know about computer code algorithms and AI that learns from data input. These, however, are more diversions, the expeditionary force, for the real AI that they want to connect to the human brain as promoted by Silicon Valley Wetikos like Kurzweil. What is this AI? It is the frequency of *Wetiko*, the frequency of the Archons. The connection of AI to the human brain is the connection of the Wetiko frequency to create a Wetiko hive mind and complete the job of assimilation. The hive mind is planned to be controlled from Israel and China which are both 100 percent owned by Wetiko Sabbatians. The assimilation process has been going on minute by minute in the 'smart' era which fused with the 'Covid' era. We are told that social media is scrambling the minds of the young and changing their personality. This is true, but what is social media? Look more deeply at how it works, how it creates divisions and conflict, the hostility and cruelty, the targeting of people until they are destroyed. That's Wetiko. Social media is manipulated to tune people to the Wetiko frequency with all the emotional exploitation tricks employed by platforms like Facebook and its Wetiko front man, Zuckerberg. Facebook's Instagram announced a new platform for children to overcome a legal bar on them using the main site. This is more Wetiko exploitation and manipulation of kids. Amnesty International likened the plan to foxes offering to guard the henhouse and said it was incompatible with human rights. Since when did Wetiko or Zuckerberg (I repeat myself) care about that? Would Brin and Page at Google, Wojcicki at YouTube, Bezos at Amazon and whoever the hell runs Twitter act as they do if they were not channelling Wetiko? Would those who are developing technologies for no other reason than human control? How about those designing and selling technologies to kill people and Big Pharma drug and 'vaccine' producers who know they will end or devastate lives? Quite a thought for these people to consider is that if you are Wetiko in a human life you are Wetiko on the 'other side' unless your frequency

changes and that can only change by a change of perception which becomes a change of behaviour. Where Gates is going does not bear thinking about although perhaps that's exactly where he wants to go. Either way, that's where he's going. His frequency will make it so.

The frequency lair

I have been saying for a long time that a big part of the addiction to smartphones and devices is that a frequency is coming off them that entraps the mind. People spend ages on their phones and sometimes even a minute or so after they put them down they pick them up again and it all repeats. 'Covid' lockdowns will have increased this addiction a million times for obvious reasons. Addictions to alcohol overindulgence and drugs are another way that Wetiko entraps consciousness to attach to its own. Both are symptoms of low-vibrational psychological distress which alcoholism and drug addiction further compound. Do we think it's really a coincidence that access to them is made so easy while potions that can take people into realms beyond the simulation are banned and illegal? I have explored smartphone addiction in other books, the scale is mind-blowing, and that level of addiction does not come without help. Tech companies that make these phones are Wetiko and they will have no qualms about destroying the minds of children. We are seeing again with these companies the Wetiko perceptual combination of psychopathic enforcers and weak and meek unquestioning compliance by the rank and file.

The global Smart Grid is the Wetiko Grid and it is crucial to complete the Cult endgame. The simulation is radiation and we are being deluged with technological radiation on a devastating scale. Wetiko frauds like Elon Musk serve Cult interests while occasionally criticising them to maintain his street-cred. 5G and other forms of Wi-Fi are being directed at the earth from space on a volume and scale that goes on increasing by the day. Elon Musk's (officially) SpaceX Starlink project is in the process of putting tens of thousands of satellites in low orbit to cover every inch of the planet with 5G and other Wi-Fi to create Kurzweil's global 'cloud' to which the

human mind is planned to be attached very soon. SpaceX has approval to operate 12,000 satellites with more than 1,300 launched at the time of writing and applications filed for *30,000* more. Other operators in the Wi-Fi, 5G, low-orbit satellite market include OneWeb (UK), Telesat (Canada), and AST & Science (US). Musk tells us that AI could be the end of humanity and then launches a company called Neuralink to connect the human brain to computers. Musk's (in theory) Tesla company is building electric cars and the driverless vehicles of the smart control grid. As frauds and bullshitters go Elon Musk in my opinion is Major League.

5G and technological radiation in general are destructive to human health, genetics and psychology and increasing the strength of artificial radiation underpins the five-sense perceptual bubbles which are themselves expressions of radiation or electromagnetism. Freedom activist John Whitehead was so right with his 'databit by databit, we are building our own electronic concentration camps'. The Smart Grid and 5G is a means to control the human mind and infuse perceptual information into The Field to influence anyone in sync with its frequency. You can change perception and behaviour en masse if you can manipulate the population into those levels of frequency and this is happening all around us today. The arrogance of Musk and his fellow Cult operatives knows no bounds in the way that we see with Gates. Musk's satellites are so many in number already they are changing the night sky when viewed from Earth. The astronomy community has complained about this and they have seen nothing yet. Some consequences of Musk's Wetiko hubris include: Radiation; visible pollution of the night sky; interference with astronomy and meteorology; ground and water pollution from intensive use of increasingly many spaceports; accumulating space debris; continual deorbiting and burning up of aging satellites, polluting the atmosphere with toxic dust and smoke; and ever-increasing likelihood of collisions. A collective public open letter of complaint to Musk said:

> We are writing to you … because SpaceX is in process of surrounding the Earth with a network of thousands of satellites whose very purpose is to irradiate every square inch of the

Earth. SpaceX, like everyone else, is treating the radiation as if it were not there. As if the mitochondria in our cells do not depend on electrons moving undisturbed from the food we digest to the oxygen we breathe.

As if our nervous systems and our hearts are not subject to radio frequency interference like any piece of electronic equipment. As if the cancer, diabetes, and heart disease that now afflict a majority of the Earth's population are not metabolic diseases that result from interference with our cellular machinery. As if insects everywhere, and the birds and animals that eat them, are not starving to death as a result.

People like Musk and Gates believe in their limitless Wetiko arrogance that they can do whatever they like to the world because they own it. Consequences for humanity are irrelevant. It's absolutely time that we stopped taking this shit from these self-styled masters of the Earth when you consider where this is going.

Why is the Cult so anti-human?

I hear this question often: Why would they do this when it will affect them, too? Ah, but will it? Who is this *them*? Forget their bodies. They are just vehicles for Wetiko consciousness. When you break it all down to the foundations we are looking at a state of severely distorted consciousness targeting another state of consciousness for assimilation. The rest is detail. The simulation is the fly-trap in which unique sensations of the five senses create a cycle of addiction called reincarnation. Renegade Minds see that everything which happens in our reality is a smaller version of the whole picture in line with the holographic principle. Addiction to the radiation of smart technology is a smaller version of addiction to the whole simulation. Connecting the body/brain to AI is taking that addiction on a giant step further to total ongoing control by assimilating human incarnate consciousness into Wetiko. I have watched during the 'Covid' hoax how many are becoming ever more profoundly attached to Wetiko's perceptual calling cards of aggressive response to any other point of view ('There is no other god but me'), psychopathic lack of compassion and empathy, and servile submission to the narrative and will of authority. Wetiko is the psychopaths *and* subservience to psychopaths. The Cult of Wetiko is

so anti-human because it is *not* human. It embarked on a mission to destroy human by targeting everything that it means to be human and to survive as human. 'Covid' is not the end, just a means to an end. The Cult with its Wetiko consciousness is seeking to change Earth systems, including the atmosphere, to suit them, not humans. The gathering bombardment of 5G alone from ground and space is dramatically changing The Field with which the five senses interact. There is so much more to come if we sit on our hands and hope it will all go away. It is not meant to go away. It is meant to get ever more extreme and we need to face that while we still can – just.

Carbon dioxide is the gas of life. Without that human is over. Kaput, gone, history. No natural world, no human. The Cult has created a cock and bull story about carbon dioxide and climate change to justify its reduction to the point where Gates and the ignoramus Biden 'climate chief' John Kerry want to suck it out of the atmosphere. Kerry wants to do this because his master Gates does. Wetikos have made the gas of life a demon with the usual support from the Wokers of Extinction Rebellion and similar organisations and the bewildered puppet-child that is Greta Thunberg who was put on the world stage by Klaus Schwab and the World Economic Forum. The name Extinction Rebellion is both ironic and as always Wetiko inversion. The gas that we need to survive must be reduced to save us from extinction. The most basic need of human is oxygen and we now have billions walking around in face nappies depriving body and brain of this essential requirement of human existence. More than that 5G at 60 gigahertz interacts with the oxygen molecule to reduce the amount of oxygen the body can absorb into the bloodstream. The obvious knock-on consequences of that for respiratory and cognitive problems and life itself need no further explanation. Psychopaths like Musk are assembling a global system of satellites to deluge the human atmosphere with this insanity. The man should be in jail. Here we have two most basic of human needs, oxygen and carbon dioxide, being dismantled.

Two others, water and food, are getting similar treatment with the United Nations Agendas 21 and 2030 – the Great Reset – planning to

centrally control all water and food supplies. People will not even own rain water that falls on their land. Food is affected at the most basic level by reducing carbon dioxide. We have genetic modification or GMO infiltrating the food chain on a mass scale, pesticides and herbicides polluting the air and destroying the soil. Freshwater fish that provide livelihoods for 60 million people and feed hundreds of millions worldwide are being 'pushed to the brink' according the conservationists while climate change is the only focus. Now we have Gates and Schwab wanting to dispense with current food sources all together and replace them with a synthetic version which the Wetiko Cult would control in terms of production and who eats and who doesn't. We have been on the Totalitarian Tiptoe to this for more than 60 years as food has become ever more processed and full of chemical shite to the point today when it's not natural food at all. As Dr Tom Cowan says: 'If it has a label don't eat it.' Bill Gates is now the biggest owner of farmland in the United States and he does nothing without an ulterior motive involving the Cult. Klaus Schwab wrote: 'To feed the world in the next 50 years we will need to produce as much food as was produced in the last 10,000 years … food security will only be achieved, however, if regulations on genetically modified foods are adapted to reflect the reality that gene editing offers a precise, efficient and safe method of improving crops.' Liar. People and the world are being targeted with aluminium through vaccines, chemtrails, food, drink cans, and endless other sources when aluminium has been linked to many health issues including dementia which is increasing year after year. Insects, bees and wildlife essential to the food chain are being deleted by pesticides, herbicides and radiation which 5G is dramatically increasing with 6G and 7G to come. The pollinating bee population is being devastated while wildlife including birds, dolphins and whales are having their natural radar blocked by the effects of ever-increasing radiation. In the summer windscreens used to be splattered with insects so numerous were they. It doesn't happen now. Where have they gone?

Synthetic everything

The Cult is introducing genetically-modified versions of trees, plants and insects including a Gates-funded project to unleash hundreds of millions of genetically-modified, lab-altered and patented male mosquitoes to mate with wild mosquitoes and induce genetic flaws that cause them to die out. Clinically-insane Gates-funded Japanese researchers have developed mosquitos that spread vaccine and are dubbed 'flying vaccinators'. Gates is funding the modification of weather patterns in part to sell the myth that this is caused by carbon dioxide and he's funding geoengineering of the skies to change the atmosphere. Some of this came to light with the Gates-backed plan to release tonnes of chalk into the atmosphere to 'deflect the Sun and cool the planet'. Funny how they do this while the heating effect of the Sun is not factored into climate projections focussed on carbon dioxide. The reason is that they want to reduce carbon dioxide (so don't mention the Sun), but at the same time they do want to reduce the impact of the Sun which is so essential to human life and health. I have mentioned the sun-cholesterol-vitamin D connection as they demonise the Sun with warnings about skin cancer (caused by the chemicals in sun cream they tell you to splash on). They come from the other end of the process with statin drugs to reduce cholesterol that turns sunlight into vitamin D. A lack of vitamin D leads to a long list of health effects and how vitamin D levels must have fallen with people confined to their homes over 'Covid'. Gates is funding other forms of geoengineering and most importantly chemtrails which are dropping heavy metals, aluminium and self-replicating nanotechnology onto the Earth which is killing the natural world. See *Everything You Need To Know, But Have Never Been Told* for the detailed background to this.

Every human system is being targeted for deletion by a force that's not human. The Wetiko Cult has embarked on the process of transforming the human body from biological to synthetic biological as I have explained. Biological is being replaced by the artificial and synthetic – Archontic 'countermimicry' – right across human society. The plan eventually is to dispense with the human body altogether

and absorb human consciousness – which it wouldn't really be by then – into cyberspace (the simulation which is Wetiko/Yaldabaoth). Preparations for that are already happening if people would care to look. The alternative media rightly warns about globalism and 'the globalists', but this is far bigger than that and represents the end of the human race as we know it. The 'bad copy' of prime reality that Gnostics describe was a bad copy of harmony, wonder and beauty to start with before Wetiko/Yaldabaoth set out to change the simulated 'copy' into something very different. The process was slow to start with. Entrapped humans in the simulation timeline were not technologically aware and they had to be brought up to intellectual speed while being suppressed spiritually to the point where they could build their own prison while having no idea they were doing so. We have now reached that stage where technological intellect has the potential to destroy us and that's why events are moving so fast. Central American shaman Don Juan Matus said:

> Think for a moment, and tell me how you would explain the contradictions between the intelligence of man the engineer and the stupidity of his systems of belief, or the stupidity of his contradictory behaviour. Sorcerers believe that the predators have given us our systems of beliefs, our ideas of good and evil; our social mores. They are the ones who set up our dreams of success or failure. They have given us covetousness, greed, and cowardice. It is the predator who makes us complacent, routinary, and egomaniacal.
>
> In order to keep us obedient and meek and weak, the predators engaged themselves in a stupendous manoeuvre – stupendous, of course, from the point of view of a fighting strategist; a horrendous manoeuvre from the point of those who suffer it. They gave us their mind. The predators' mind is baroque, contradictory, morose, filled with the fear of being discovered any minute now.

For 'predators' see Wetiko, Archons, Yaldabaoth, Jinn, and all the other versions of the same phenomenon in cultures and religions all over the world. The theme is always the same because it's true and it's real. We have reached the point where we have to deal with it. The question is – how?

Don't fight – walk away

I thought I'd use a controversial subheading to get things moving in terms of our response to global fascism. What do you mean 'don't fight'? What do you mean 'walk away'? We've got to fight. We can't walk away. Well, it depends what we mean by fight and walk away. If fighting means physical combat we are playing Wetiko's game and falling for its trap. It wants us to get angry, aggressive, and direct hate and hostility at the enemy we think we must fight. Every war, every battle, every conflict, has been fought with Wetiko leading both sides. It's what it does. Wetiko wants a fight, anywhere, any place. Just hit me, son, so I can hit you back. Wetiko hits Wetiko and Wetiko hits Wetiko in return. I am very forthright as you can see in exposing Wetikos of the Cult, but I don't hate them. I refuse to hate them. It's what they want. What you hate you become. What you *fight* you become. Wokers, 'anti-haters' and 'anti-fascists' prove this every time they reach for their keyboards or don their balaclavas. By walk away I mean to disengage from Wetiko which includes ceasing to cooperate with its tyranny. Paul Levy says of Wetiko:

> The way to 'defeat' evil is not to try to destroy it (for then, in playing evil's game, we have already lost), but rather, to find the invulnerable place within ourselves where evil is unable to vanquish us – this is to truly 'win' our battle with evil.

Wetiko is everywhere in human society and it's been on steroids since the 'Covid' hoax. Every shouting match over wearing masks has Wetiko wearing a mask and Wetiko not wearing one. It's an electrical circuit of push and resist, push and resist, with Wetiko pushing *and* resisting. Each polarity is Wetiko empowering itself. Dictionary definitions of 'resist' include 'opposing, refusing to accept or comply with' and the word to focus on is 'opposing'. What form does this take – setting police cars alight or 'refusing to accept or comply with'? The former is Wetiko opposing Wetiko while the other points the way forward. This is the difference between those aggressively demanding that government fascism must be obeyed who stand in stark contrast to the great majority of Pushbackers. We saw this clearly with a march by thousands of Pushbackers against lockdown in London followed days later by a Woker-hijacked

protest in Bristol in which police cars were set on fire. Masks were virtually absent in London and widespread in Bristol. Wetiko wants lockdown on every level of society and infuses its aggression to police it through its unknowing stooges. Lockdown protesters are the ones with the smiling faces and the hugs, The two blatantly obvious states of being – getting more obvious by the day – are the result of Wokers and their like becoming ever more influenced by the simulation Field of Wetiko and Pushbackers ever more influenced by The Field of a far higher vibration beyond the simulation. Wetiko can't invade the heart which is where most lockdown opponents are coming from. It's the heart that allows them to see through the lies to the truth in ways I will be highlighting.

Renegade Minds know that calmness is the place from which wisdom comes. You won't find wisdom in a hissing fit and wisdom is what we need in abundance right now. Calmness is not weakness – you don't have to scream at the top of your voice to be strong. Calmness is indeed a sign of strength. 'No' means I'm not doing it. *NOOOO!!!* doesn't mean you're not doing it even more. Volume does not advance 'No – I'm not doing it'. You are just not doing it. Wetiko possessed and influenced don't know how to deal with that. Wetiko wants a fight and we should not give it one. What it needs more than anything is our *cooperation* and we should not give that either. Mass rallies and marches are great in that they are a visual representation of feeling, but if it ends there they are irrelevant. You demand that Wetikos act differently? Well, they're not going to are they? They are Wetikos. We don't need to waste our time demanding that something doesn't happen when that will make no difference. We need to delete the means that *allows* it to happen. This, invariably, is our cooperation. You can demand a child stop firing a peashooter at the dog or you can refuse to buy the peashooter. If you provide the means you are cooperating with the dog being smacked on the nose with a pea. How can the authorities enforce mask-wearing if millions in a country refuse? What if the 74 million Pushbackers that voted for Trump in 2020 refused to wear masks, close their businesses or stay in their homes. It would be unenforceable. The

few control the many through the compliance of the many and that's always been the dynamic be it 'Covid' regulations or the Roman Empire. I know people can find it intimidating to say no to authority or stand out in a crowd for being the only one with a face on display; but it has to be done or it's over. I hope I've made clear in this book that where this is going will be far more intimidating than standing up now and saying 'No' – I will not cooperate with my own enslavement and that of my children. There might be consequences for some initially, although not so if enough do the same. The question that must be addressed is what is going to happen if we don't? It is time to be strong and unyieldingly so. No means no. Not here and there, but *everywhere* and *always*. I have refused to wear a mask and obey all the other nonsense. I will not comply with tyranny. I repeat: Fascism is not imposed by fascists – there are never enough of them. Fascism is imposed by the population acquiescing to fascism. *I will not do it*. I will die first, or my body will. Living meekly under fascism is a form of death anyway, the death of the spirit that Martin Luther King described.

Making things happen

We must not despair. This is not over till it's over and it's far from that. The 'fat lady' must refuse to sing. The longer the 'Covid' hoax has dragged on and impacted on more lives we have seen an awakening of phenomenal numbers of people worldwide to the realisation that what they have believed all their lives is not how the world really is. Research published by the system-serving University of Bristol and King's College London in February, 2021, concluded: 'One in every 11 people in Britain say they trust David Icke's take on the coronavirus pandemic.' It will be more by now and we have gathering numbers to build on. We must urgently progress from seeing the scam to ceasing to cooperate with it. Prominent German lawyer Reiner Fuellmich, also licenced to practice law in America, is doing a magnificent job taking the legal route to bring the psychopaths to justice through a second Nuremberg tribunal for crimes against humanity. Fuellmich has an impressive record of

beating the elite in court and he formed the German Corona Investigative Committee to pursue civil charges against the main perpetrators with a view to triggering criminal charges. Most importantly he has grasped the foundation of the hoax – the PCR test not testing for the 'virus' – and Christian Drosten is therefore on his charge sheet along with Gates frontman Tedros at the World Health Organization. Major players must be not be allowed to inflict their horrors on the human race without being brought to book. A life sentence must follow for Bill Gates and the rest of them. A group of researchers has also indicted the government of Norway for crimes against humanity with copies sent to the police and the International Criminal Court. The lawsuit cites participation in an internationally-planned false pandemic and violation of international law and human rights, the European Commission's definition of human rights by coercive rules, Nuremberg and Hague rules on fundamental human rights, and the Norwegian constitution. We must take the initiative from hereon and not just complain, protest and react.

There are practical ways to support vital mass non-cooperation. Organising in numbers is one. Lockdown marches in London in the spring in 2021 were mass non-cooperation that the authorities could not stop. There were too many people. Hundreds of thousands walked the London streets in the centre of the road for mile after mile while the Face-Nappies could only look on. They were determined, but calm, and just *did it* with no histrionics and lots of smiles. The police were impotent. Others are organising group shopping without masks for mutual support and imagine if that was happening all over. Policing it would be impossible. If the store refuses to serve people in these circumstances they would be faced with a long line of trolleys full of goods standing on their own and everything would have to be returned to the shelves. How would they cope with that if it kept happening? I am talking here about moving on from complaining to being pro-active; from watching things happen to making things happen. I include in this our relationship with the police. The behaviour of many Face-Nappies

has been disgraceful and anyone who thinks they would never find concentration camp guards in the 'enlightened' modern era have had that myth busted big-time. The period and setting may change – Wetikos never do. I watched film footage from a London march in which a police thug viciously kicked a protestor on the floor who had done nothing. His fellow Face-Nappies stood in a ring protecting him. What he did was a criminal assault and with a crowd far outnumbering the police this can no longer be allowed to happen unchallenged. I get it when people chant 'shame on you' in these circumstances, but that is no longer enough. They *have* no shame those who do this. Crowds needs to start making a citizen's arrest of the police who commit criminal offences and brutally attack innocent people and defenceless women. A citizen's arrest can be made under section 24A of the UK Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act of 1984 and you will find something similar in other countries. I prefer to call it a Common Law arrest rather than citizen's for reasons I will come to shortly. Anyone can arrest a person committing an indictable offence or if they have reasonable grounds to suspect they are committing an indictable offence. On both counts the attack by the police thug would have fallen into this category. A citizen's arrest can be made to stop someone:

- Causing physical injury to himself or any other person
- Suffering physical injury
- Causing loss of or damage to property
- Making off before a constable can assume responsibility for him

A citizen's arrest may also be made to prevent a breach of the peace under Common Law and if they believe a breach of the peace will happen or anything related to harm likely to be done or already done in their presence. This is the way to go I think – the Common Law version. If police know that the crowd and members of the public will no longer be standing and watching while they commit

their thuggery and crimes they will think twice about acting like Brownshirts and Blackshirts.

Common Law – common sense

Mention of Common Law is very important. Most people think the law is the law as in one law. This is not the case. There are two bodies of law, Common Law and Statute Law, and they are not the same. Common Law is founded on the simple premise of do no harm. It does not recognise victimless crimes in which no harm is done while Statute Law does. There is a Statute Law against almost everything. So what is Statute Law? Amazingly it's the law of the *sea* that was brought ashore by the Cult to override the law of the land which is Common Law. They had no right to do this and as always they did it anyway. They had to. They could not impose their will on the people through Common Law which only applies to do no harm. How could you stitch up the fine detail of people's lives with that? Instead they took the law of the sea, or Admiralty Law, and applied it to the population. Statute Law refers to all the laws spewing out of governments and their agencies including all the fascist laws and regulations relating to 'Covid'. The key point to make is that Statute Law is *contract law*. It only applies between *contracting* corporations. Most police officers don't even know this. They have to be kept in the dark, too. Long ago when merchants and their sailing ships began to trade with different countries a contractual law was developed called Admiralty Law and other names. Again it only applied to *contracts* agreed between *corporate* entities. If there is no agreed contract the law of the sea had no jurisdiction *and that still applies to its new alias of Statute Law*. The problem for the Cult when the law of the sea was brought ashore was an obvious one. People were not corporations and neither were government entities. To overcome the latter they made governments and all associated organisations corporations. All the institutions are *private corporations* and I mean governments and their agencies, local councils, police, courts, military, US states, the whole lot. Go to the

Dun and Bradstreet corporate listings website for confirmation that they are all corporations. You are arrested by a private corporation called the police by someone who is really a private security guard and they take you to court which is another private corporation. Neither have jurisdiction over you unless you consent and *contract* with them. This is why you hear the mantra about law enforcement policing by *consent* of the people. In truth the people 'consent' only in theory through monumental trickery.

Okay, the Cult overcame the corporate law problem by making governments and institutions corporate entities; but what about people? They are not corporations are they? Ah ... well in a sense, and *only* a sense, they are. Not people exactly – the illusion of people. The Cult creates a corporation in the name of everyone at the time that their birth certificate is issued. Note birth/ *berth* certificate and when you go to court under the law of the sea on land you stand in a *dock*. These are throwbacks to the origin. My Common Law name is David Vaughan Icke. The name of the corporation created by the government when I was born is called Mr David Vaughan Icke usually written in capitals as MR DAVID VAUGHAN ICKE. That is not me, the living, breathing man. It is a fictitious corporate entity. The trick is to make you think that David Vaughan Icke and MR DAVID VAUGHAN ICKE are the same thing. *They are not*. When police charge you and take you to court they are prosecuting the corporate entity and not the living, breathing, man or woman. They have to trick you into identifying as the corporate entity and contracting with them. Otherwise they have no jurisdiction. They do this through a language known as legalese. Lawful and legal are not the same either. Lawful relates to Common Law and legal relates to Statute Law. Legalese is the language of Statue Law which uses terms that mean one thing to the public and another in legalese. Notice that when a police officer tells someone why they are being charged he or she will say at the end: 'Do you understand?' To the public that means 'Do you comprehend?' In legalese it means 'Do you stand under me?' Do you stand under my authority? If you say

yes to the question you are unknowingly agreeing to give them jurisdiction over you in a contract between two corporate entities.

This is a confidence trick in every way. Contracts have to be agreed between informed parties and if you don't know that David Vaughan Icke is agreeing to be the corporation MR DAVID VAUGHAN ICKE you cannot knowingly agree to contract. They are deceiving you and another way they do this is to ask for proof of identity. You usually show them a driving licence or other document on which your corporate name is written. In doing so you are accepting that you are that corporate entity when you are not. Referring to yourself as a 'person' or 'citizen' is also identifying with your corporate fiction which is why I made the Common Law point about the citizen's arrest. If you are approached by a police officer you identify yourself immediately as a living, breathing, man or woman and say 'I do not consent, I do not contract with you and I do not understand' or stand under their authority. I have a Common Law birth certificate as a living man and these are available at no charge from commonlawcourt.com. Businesses registered under the Statute Law system means that its laws apply. There are, however, ways to run a business under Common Law. Remember all 'Covid' laws and regulations are Statute Law – the law of *contracts* and you do not have to contract. This doesn't mean that you can kill someone and get away with it. Common Law says do no harm and that applies to physical harm, financial harm etc. Police are employees of private corporations and there needs to be a new system of non-corporate Common Law constables operating outside the Statute Law system. If you go to davidicke.com and put Common Law into the search engine you will find videos that explain Common Law in much greater detail. It is definitely a road we should walk.

With all my heart

I have heard people say that we are in a spiritual war. I don't like the term 'war' with its Wetiko dynamic, but I know what they mean. Sweep aside all the bodily forms and we are in a situation in which two states of consciousness are seeking very different realities.

Wetiko wants upheaval, chaos, fear, suffering, conflict and control. The other wants love, peace, harmony, fairness and freedom. That's where we are. We should not fall for the idea that Wetiko is all-powerful and there's nothing we can do. Wetiko is not all-powerful. It's a joke, pathetic. It doesn't have to be, but it has made that choice for now. A handful of times over the years when I have felt the presence of its frequency I have allowed it to attach briefly so I could consciously observe its nature. The experience is not pleasant, the energy is heavy and dark, but the ease with which you can kick it back out the door shows that its real power is in persuading us that it has power. It's all a con. Wetiko is a con. It's a trickster and not a power that can control us if we unleash our own. The con is founded on manipulating humanity to give its power to Wetiko which recycles it back to present the illusion that it has power when its power is *ours* that we gave away. This happens on an energetic level and plays out in the world of the seen as humanity giving its power to Wetiko authority which uses that power to control the population when the power is only the power the population has handed over. How could it be any other way for billions to be controlled by a relative few? I have had experiences with people possessed by Wetiko and again you can kick its arse if you do it with an open heart. Oh yes – the *heart* which can transform the world of perceived 'matter'.

We are receiver-transmitters and processors of information, but what information and where from? Information is processed into perception in three main areas – the brain, the heart and the belly. These relate to thinking, knowing, and emotion. Wetiko wants us to be head and belly people which means we think within the confines of the Matrix simulation and low-vibrational emotional reaction scrambles balance and perception. A few minutes on social media and you see how emotion is the dominant force. Woke is all emotion and is therefore thought-free and fact-free. Our heart is something different. It *knows* while the head *thinks* and has to try to work it out because it doesn't know. The human energy field has seven prime vortexes which connect us with wider reality (Fig 23). Chakra means

'wheels of light' in the Sanskrit language of ancient India. The main ones are: The crown chakra on top of the head; brow (or 'third eye') chakra in the centre of the forehead; throat chakra; heart chakra in the centre of the chest; solar plexus chakra below the sternum; sacral chakra beneath the navel; and base chakra at the bottom of the spine. Each one has a particular function or functions. We feel anxiety and nervousness in the belly where the sacral chakra is located and this processes emotion that can affect the colon to give people 'the shits' or make them 'shit scared' when they are nervous. Chakras all play an important role, but the Mr and Mrs Big is the heart chakra which sits at the centre of the seven, above the chakras that connect us to the 'physical' and below those that connect with higher realms (or at least should). Here in the heart chakra we feel love, empathy and compassion – 'My heart goes out to you'. Those with closed hearts become literally 'heart-less' in their attitudes and behaviour (see Bill Gates). Native Americans portrayed Wetiko with what Paul Levy calls a 'frigid, icy heart, devoid of mercy' (see Bill Gates).

Figure 23: The chakra system which interpenetrates the human energy field. The heart chakra is the governor – or should be.

Wetiko trembles at the thought of heart energy which it cannot infiltrate. The frequency is too high. What it seeks to do instead is close the heart chakra vortex to block its perceptual and energetic influence. Psychopaths have 'hearts of stone' and emotionally-damaged people have 'heartache' and 'broken hearts'. The astonishing amount of heart disease is related to heart chakra

disruption with its fundamental connection to the 'physical' heart. Dr Tom Cowan has written an outstanding book challenging the belief that the heart is a pump and making the connection between the 'physical' and spiritual heart. Rudolph Steiner who was way ahead of his time said the same about the fallacy that the heart is a pump. *What*? The heart is not a pump? That's crazy, right? Everybody knows that. Read Cowan's *Human Heart, Cosmic Heart* and you will realise that the very idea of the heart as a pump is ridiculous when you see the evidence. How does blood in the feet so far from the heart get pumped horizontally up the body by the heart?? Cowan explains in the book the real reason why blood moves as it does. Our 'physical' heart is used to symbolise love when the source is really the heart vortex or spiritual heart which is our most powerful energetic connection to 'out there' expanded consciousness. That's why we feel *knowing* – intuitive knowing – in the centre of the chest. Knowing doesn't come from a process of thoughts leading to a conclusion. It is there in an instant all in one go. Our heart knows because of its connection to levels of awareness that *do* know. This is the meaning and source of intuition – intuitive *knowing*.

For the last more than 30 years of uncovering the global game and the nature of reality my heart has been my constant antenna for truth and accuracy. An American intelligence insider once said that I had quoted a disinformer in one of my books and yet I had only quoted the part that was true. He asked: 'How do you do that?' By using my heart antenna was the answer and anyone can do it. Heart-centred is how we are meant to be. With a closed heart chakra we withdraw into a closed mind and the bubble of five-sense reality. If you take a moment to focus your attention on the centre of your chest, picture a spinning wheel of light and see it opening and expanding. You will feel it happening, too, and perceptions of the heart like joy and love as the heart impacts on the mind as they interact. The more the chakra opens the more you will feel expressions of heart consciousness and as the process continues, and becomes part of you, insights and knowings will follow. An open

heart is connected to that level of awareness that knows all is *One*. You will see from its perspective that the fault-lines that divide us are only illusions to control us. An open heart does not process the illusions of race, creed and sexuality except as brief experiences for a consciousness that is all. Our heart does not see division, only unity (Figs 24 and 25). There's something else, too. Our hearts love to laugh. Mark Twain's quote that says 'The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter' is really a reference to the heart which loves to laugh with the joy of knowing the true nature of infinite reality and that all the madness of human society is an illusion of the mind. Twain also said: 'Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.' This is so true of Wetiko and the Cult. Their insecurity demands that they be taken seriously and their power and authority acknowledged and feared. We should do nothing of the sort. We should not get aggressive or fearful which their insecurity so desires. We should laugh in their face. Even in their no-face as police come over in their face-nappies and expect to be taken seriously. They don't take themselves seriously looking like that so why should we? Laugh in the face of intimidation. Laugh in the face of tyranny. You will see by its reaction that you have pressed all of its buttons. Wetiko does not know what to do in the face of laughter or when its targets refuse to concede their joy to fear. We have seen many examples during the 'Covid' hoax when people have expressed their energetic power and the string puppets of Wetiko retreat with their tail limp between their knees. Laugh – the world is bloody mad after all and if it's a choice between laughter and tears I know which way I'm going.

Figure 24: Head consciousness without the heart sees division and everything apart from everything else.

Figure 25: Heart consciousness sees everything as One.

'Vaccines' and the soul

The foundation of Wetiko/Archon control of humans is the separation of incarnate five-sense mind from the infinite 'I' and closing the heart chakra where the True 'I' lives during a human life. The goal has been to achieve complete separation in both cases. I was interested therefore to read an account by a French energetic healer of what she said she experienced with a patient who had been given the 'Covid' vaccine. Genuine energy healers can sense information and consciousness fields at different levels of being which are referred to as 'subtle bodies'. She described treating the patient who later returned after having, without the healer's knowledge, two doses of the 'Covid vaccine'. The healer said:

I noticed immediately the change, very heavy energy emanating from [the] subtle bodies. The scariest thing was when I was working on the heart chakra, I connected with her soul: it was detached from the physical body, it had no contact and it was, as if it was floating in a state of total confusion: a damage to the consciousness that loses contact with the physical body, i.e. with our biological machine, there is no longer any communication between them.

I continued the treatment by sending light to the heart chakra, the soul of the person, but it seemed that the soul could no longer receive any light, frequency or energy. It was a very powerful experience for me. Then I understood that this substance is indeed used to detach consciousness so that this consciousness can no longer interact through this body that it possesses in life, where there is no longer any contact, no frequency, no light, no more energetic balance or mind.

This would create a human that is rudderless and at the extreme almost zombie-like operating with a fractional state of consciousness at the mercy of Wetiko. I was especially intrigued by what the healer said in the light of the prediction by the highly-informed Rudolf Steiner more than a hundred years ago. He said:

In the future, we will eliminate the soul with medicine. Under the pretext of a 'healthy point of view', there will be a vaccine by which the human body will be treated as soon as possible directly at birth, so that the human being cannot develop the thought of the existence of soul and Spirit. To materialistic doctors will be entrusted the task of removing the soul of humanity.

As today, people are vaccinated against this disease or that disease, so in the future, children will be vaccinated with a substance that can be produced precisely in such a way that people, thanks to this vaccination, will be immune to being subjected to the 'madness' of spiritual life. He would be extremely smart, but he would not develop a conscience, and that is the true goal of some materialistic circles.

Steiner said the vaccine would detach the physical body from the etheric body (subtle bodies) and 'once the etheric body is detached the relationship between the universe and the etheric body would become extremely unstable, and man would become an automaton'. He said 'the physical body of man must be polished on this Earth by spiritual will – so the vaccine becomes a kind of arymanique (Wetiko) force' and 'man can no longer get rid of a given materialistic feeling'. Humans would then, he said, become 'materialistic of constitution and can no longer rise to the spiritual'. I have been writing for years about DNA being a receiver-transmitter of information that connects us to other levels of reality and these 'vaccines' changing DNA can be likened to changing an antenna and what it can transmit and receive. Such a disconnection would clearly lead to changes in personality and perception. Steiner further predicted the arrival of AI. Big Pharma 'Covid vaccine' makers, expressions of Wetiko, are testing their DNA-manipulating evil on children as I write with a view to giving the 'vaccine' to babies. If it's a soul-body disconnector – and I say that it is or can be – every child would be disconnected from 'soul' at birth and the 'vaccine' would create a closed system in which spiritual guidance from the greater self would play no part. This has been the ambition of Wetiko all

along. A Pentagon video from 2005 was leaked of a presentation explaining the development of vaccines to change behaviour by their effect on the brain. Those that believe this is not happening with the 'Covid' genetically-modifying procedure masquerading as a 'vaccine' should make an urgent appointment with Naivety Anonymous. Klaus Schwab wrote in 2018:

> Neurotechnologies enable us to better influence consciousness and thought and to understand many activities of the brain. They include decoding what we are thinking in fine levels of detail through new chemicals and interventions that can influence our brains to correct for errors or enhance functionality.

The plan is clear and only the heart can stop it. With every heart that opens, every mind that awakens, Wetiko is weakened. Heart and love are far more powerful than head and hate and so nothing like a majority is needed to turn this around.

Beyond the Phantom

Our heart is the prime target of Wetiko and so it must be the answer to Wetiko. We *are* our heart which is part of one heart, the infinite heart. Our heart is where the true self lives in a human life behind firewalls of five-sense illusion when an imposter takes its place – *Phantom Self*; but our heart waits patiently to be set free any time we choose to see beyond the Phantom, beyond Wetiko. A Wetikoed Phantom Self can wreak mass death and destruction while the love of forever is locked away in its heart. The time is here to unleash its power and let it sweep away the fear and despair that is Wetiko. Heart consciousness does not seek manipulated, censored, advantage for its belief or religion, its activism and desires. As an expression of the One it treats all as One with the same rights to freedom and opinion. Our heart demands fairness for itself no more than for others. From this unity of heart we can come together in mutual support and transform this Wetikoed world into what reality is meant to be – a place of love, joy, happiness, fairness, justice and freedom. Wetiko has another agenda and that's why the world is as

it is, but enough of this nonsense. Wetiko can't stay where hearts are open and it works so hard to keep them closed. Fear is its currency and its food source and love in its true sense has no fear. Why would love have fear when it knows it is *All That Is, Has Been, And Ever Can Be* on an eternal exploration of all possibility? Love in this true sense is not the physical attraction that passes for love. This can be an expression of it, yes, but Infinite Love, a love without condition, goes far deeper to the core of all being. It *is* the core of all being. Infinite realty was born from love beyond the illusions of the simulation. Love infinitely expressed is the knowing that all is One and the swiftly-passing experience of separation is a temporary hallucination. You cannot disconnect from Oneness; you can only *perceive* that you have and withdraw from its influence. This is the most important of all perception trickery by the mind parasite that is Wetiko and the foundation of all its potential for manipulation.

If we open our hearts, open the sluice gates of the mind, and redefine self-identity amazing things start to happen. Consciousness expands or contracts in accordance with self-identity. When true self is recognised as infinite awareness and label self – Phantom Self – is seen as only a series of brief experiences life is transformed. Consciousness expands to the extent that self-identity expands and everything changes. You see unity, not division, the picture, not the pixels. From this we can play the long game. No more is an experience something in and of itself, but a fleeting moment in the eternity of forever. Suddenly people in uniform and dark suits are no longer intimidating. Doing what your heart knows to be right is no longer intimidating and consequences for those actions take on the same nature of a brief experience that passes in the blink of an infinite eye. Intimidation is all in the mind. Beyond the mind there is no intimidation.

An open heart does not consider consequences for what it knows to be right. To do so would be to consider not doing what it knows to be right and for a heart in its power that is never an option. The Renegade Mind is really the Renegade Heart. Consideration of consequences will always provide a getaway car for the mind and

the heart doesn't want one. What is right in the light of what we face today is to stop cooperating with Wetiko in all its forms and to do it without fear or compromise. You cannot compromise with tyranny when tyranny always demands more until it has everything. Life is your perception and you are your destiny. Change your perception and you change your life. Change collective perception and we change the world.

Come on people … One human family, One heart, One goal … *FREEEEEEDOM*!

We must settle for nothing less.

Postscript

The big scare story as the book goes to press is the 'Indian' variant and the world is being deluged with propaganda about the 'Covid catastrophe' in India which mirrors in its lies and misrepresentations what happened in Italy before the first lockdown in 2020.

The *New York Post* published a picture of someone who had 'collapsed in the street from Covid' in India in April, 2021, which was actually taken during a gas leak in May, 2020. Same old, same old. Media articles in mid-February were asking why India had been so untouched by 'Covid' and then as their vaccine rollout gathered pace the alleged 'cases' began to rapidly increase. Indian 'Covid vaccine' maker Bharat Biotech was funded into existence by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (the pair announced their divorce in May, 2021, which is a pity because they so deserve each other). The Indian 'Covid crisis' was ramped up by the media to terrify the world and prepare people for submission to still more restrictions. The scam that worked the first time was being repeated only with far more people seeing through the deceit. Davidicke.com and Ickonic.com have sought to tell the true story of what is happening by talking to people living through the Indian nightmare which has nothing to do with 'Covid'. We posted a letter from 'Alisha' in Pune who told a very different story to government and media mendacity. She said scenes of dying people and overwhelmed hospitals were designed to hide what was really happening – genocide and starvation. Alisha said that millions had already died of starvation during the ongoing lockdowns while government and media were lying and making it look like the 'virus':

Restaurants, shops, gyms, theatres, basically everything is shut. The cities are ghost towns. Even so-called 'essential' businesses are only open till 11am in the morning. You basically have just an hour to buy food and then your time is up.

Inter-state travel and even inter-district travel is banned. The cops wait at all major crossroads to question why you are traveling outdoors or to fine you if you are not wearing a mask.

The medical community here is also complicit in genocide, lying about hospitals being full and turning away people with genuine illnesses, who need immediate care. They have even created a shortage of oxygen cylinders.

This is the classic Cult modus operandi played out in every country. Alisha said that people who would not have a PCR test not testing for the 'virus' were being denied hospital treatment. She said the people hit hardest were migrant workers and those in rural areas. Most businesses employed migrant workers and with everything closed there were no jobs, no income and no food. As a result millions were dying of starvation or malnutrition. All this was happening under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a 100-percent asset of the Cult, and it emphasises yet again the scale of pure anti-human evil we are dealing with. Australia banned its people from returning home from India with penalties for trying to do so of up to five years in jail and a fine of £37,000. The manufactured 'Covid' crisis in India was being prepared to justify further fascism in the West. Obvious connections could be seen between the Indian 'vaccine' programme and increased 'cases' and this became a common theme. The Seychelles, the most per capita 'Covid vaccinated' population in the world, went back into lockdown after a 'surge of cases'.

Long ago the truly evil Monsanto agricultural biotechnology corporation with its big connections to Bill Gates devastated Indian farming with genetically-modified crops. Human rights activist Gurcharan Singh highlighted the efforts by the Indian government to complete the job by destroying the food supply to hundreds of millions with 'Covid' lockdowns. He said that 415 million people at the bottom of the disgusting caste system (still going whatever they say) were below the poverty line and struggled to feed themselves every year. Now the government was imposing lockdown at just the

time to destroy the harvest. This deliberate policy was leading to mass starvation. People may reel back at the suggestion that a government would do that, but Wetiko-controlled 'leaders' are capable of any level of evil. In fact what is described in India is in the process of being instigated worldwide. The food chain and food supply are being targeted at every level to cause world hunger and thus control. Bill Gates is not the biggest owner of farmland in America for no reason and destroying access to food aids both the depopulation agenda and the plan for synthetic 'food' already being funded into existence by Gates. Add to this the coming hyper-inflation from the suicidal creation of fake 'money' in response to 'Covid' and the breakdown of container shipping systems and you have a cocktail that can only lead one way and is meant to. The Cult plan is to crash the entire system to 'build back better' with the Great Reset.

'Vaccine' transmission

Reports from all over the world continue to emerge of women suffering menstrual and fertility problems after having the fake 'vaccine' and of the non-'vaccinated' having similar problems when interacting with the 'vaccinated'. There are far too many for 'coincidence' to be credible. We've had menopausal women getting periods, others having periods stop or not stopping for weeks, passing clots, sometimes the lining of the uterus, breast irregularities, and miscarriages (which increased by 400 percent in parts of the United States). Non-'vaccinated' men and children have suffered blood clots and nose bleeding after interaction with the 'vaccinated'. Babies have died from the effects of breast milk from a 'vaccinated' mother. Awake doctors – the small minority – speculated on the cause of non-'vaccinated' suffering the same effects as the 'vaccinated'. Was it nanotechnology in the synthetic substance transmitting frequencies or was it a straight chemical bioweapon that was being transmitted between people? I am not saying that some kind of chemical transmission is not one possible answer, but the foundation of all that the Cult does is frequency and

this is fertile ground for understanding how transmission can happen. American doctor Carrie Madej, an internal medicine physician and osteopath, has been practicing for the last 20 years, teaching medical students, and she says attending different meetings where the agenda for humanity was discussed. Madej, who operates out of Georgia, did not dismiss other possible forms of transmission, but she focused on frequency in search of an explanation for transmission. She said the Moderna and Pfizer 'vaccines' contained nano-lipid particles as a key component. This was a brand new technology never before used on humanity. 'They're using a nanotechnology which is pretty much little tiny computer bits … nanobots or hydrogel.' Inside the 'vaccines' was 'this sci-fi kind of substance' which suppressed immune checkpoints to get into the cell. I referred to this earlier as the 'Trojan horse' technique that tricks the cell into opening a gateway for the self-replicating synthetic material and while the immune system is artificially suppressed the body has no defences. Madej said the substance served many purposes including an on-demand ability to 'deliver the payload' and using the nano 'computer bits' as biosensors in the body. 'It actually has the ability to accumulate data from your body, like your breathing, your respiration, thoughts, emotions, all kinds of things.'

She said the technology obviously has the ability to operate through Wi-Fi and transmit and receive energy, messages, frequencies or impulses. 'Just imagine you're getting this new substance in you and it can react to things all around you, the 5G, your smart device, your phones.' We had something completely foreign in the human body that had never been launched large scale at a time when we were seeing 5G going into schools and hospitals (plus the Musk satellites) and she believed the 'vaccine' transmission had something to do with this: '… if these people have this inside of them … it can act like an antenna and actually transmit it outwardly as well.' The synthetic substance produced its own voltage and so it could have that kind of effect. This fits with my own contention that the nano receiver-transmitters are designed to connect people to the

Smart Grid and break the receiver-transmitter connection to expanded consciousness. That would explain the French energy healer's experience of the disconnection of body from 'soul' with those who have had the 'vaccine'. The nanobots, self-replicating inside the body, would also transmit the synthetic frequency which could be picked up through close interaction by those who have not been 'vaccinated'. Madej speculated that perhaps it was 5G and increased levels of other radiation that was causing the symptoms directly although interestingly she said that non-'vaccinated' patients had shown improvement when they were away from the 'vaccinated' person they had interacted with. It must be remembered that you can control frequency and energy with your mind and you can consciously create energetic barriers or bubbles with the mind to stop damaging frequencies from penetrating your field. American paediatrician Dr Larry Palevsky said the 'vaccine' was not a 'vaccine' and was never designed to protect from a 'viral' infection. He called it 'a massive, brilliant propaganda of genocide' because they didn't have to inject everyone to get the result they wanted. He said the content of the jabs was able to infuse any material into the brain, heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, sperm and female productive system. 'This is genocide; this is a weapon of mass destruction.' At the same time American colleges were banning students from attending if they didn't have this life-changing and potentially life-ending 'vaccine'. Class action lawsuits must follow when the consequences of this college fascism come to light. As the book was going to press came reports about fertility effects on sperm in 'vaccinated' men which would absolutely fit with what I have been saying and hospitals continued to fill with 'vaccine' reactions. Another question is what about transmission via blood transfusions? The NHS has extended blood donation restrictions from seven days after a 'Covid vaccination' to 28 days after even a sore arm reaction.

I said in the spring of 2020 that the then touted 'Covid vaccine' would be ongoing each year like the flu jab. A year later Pfizer CEO, the appalling Albert Bourla, said people would 'likely' need a 'booster dose' of the 'vaccine' within 12 months of getting 'fully

vaccinated' and then a yearly shot. 'Variants will play a key role', he said confirming the point. Johnson & Johnson CEO Alex Gorsky also took time out from his 'vaccine' disaster to say that people may need to be vaccinated against 'Covid-19' each year. UK Health Secretary, the psychopath Matt Hancock, said additional 'boosters' would be available in the autumn of 2021. This is the trap of the 'vaccine passport'. The public will have to accept every last 'vaccine' they introduce, including for the fake 'variants', or it would cease to be valid. The only other way in some cases would be continuous testing with a test not testing for the 'virus' and what is on the swabs constantly pushed up your noise towards the brain every time?

'Vaccines' changing behaviour

I mentioned in the body of the book how I believed we would see gathering behaviour changes in the 'vaccinated' and I am already hearing such comments from the non-'vaccinated' describing behaviour changes in friends, loved ones and work colleagues. This will only increase as the self-replicating synthetic material and nanoparticles expand in body and brain. An article in the *Guardian* in 2016 detailed research at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville which developed a new method for controlling brain circuits associated with complex animal behaviour. The method, dubbed 'magnetogenetics', involves genetically-engineering a protein called ferritin, which stores and releases iron, to create a magnetised substance – 'Magneto' – that can activate specific groups of nerve cells from a distance. This is claimed to be an advance on other methods of brain activity manipulation known as optogenetics and chemogenetics (the Cult has been developing methods of brain control for a long time). The ferritin technique is said to be non-invasive and able to activate neurons 'rapidly and reversibly'. In other words, human thought and perception. The article said that earlier studies revealed how nerve cell proteins 'activated by heat and mechanical pressure can be genetically engineered so that they become sensitive to radio waves and magnetic fields, by attaching them to an iron-storing protein called ferritin, or to inorganic

paramagnetic particles'. Sensitive to radio waves and magnetic fields? You mean like 5G, 6G and 7G? This is the human-AI Smart Grid hive mind we are talking about. The *Guardian* article said:

> … the researchers injected Magneto into the striatum of freely behaving mice, a deep brain structure containing dopamine-producing neurons that are involved in reward and motivation, and then placed the animals into an apparatus split into magnetised and non-magnetised sections.
>
> Mice expressing Magneto spent far more time in the magnetised areas than mice that did not, because activation of the protein caused the striatal neurons expressing it to release dopamine, so that the mice found being in those areas rewarding. This shows that Magneto can remotely control the firing of neurons deep within the brain, and also control complex behaviours.

Make no mistake this basic methodology will be part of the 'Covid vaccine' cocktail and using magnetics to change brain function through electromagnetic field frequency activation. The Pentagon is developing a 'Covid vaccine' using ferritin. Magnetics would explain changes in behaviour and why videos are appearing across the Internet as I write showing how magnets stick to the skin at the point of the 'vaccine' shot. Once people take these 'vaccines' anything becomes possible in terms of brain function and illness which will be blamed on 'Covid-19' and 'variants'. Magnetic field manipulation would further explain why the non-'vaccinated' are reporting the same symptoms as the 'vaccinated' they interact with and why those symptoms are reported to decrease when not in their company. Interestingly 'Magneto', a 'mutant', is a character in the Marvel Comic *X-Men* stories with the ability to manipulate magnetic fields and he believes that mutants should fight back against their human oppressors by any means necessary. The character was born Erik Lehnsherr to a Jewish family in Germany.

Cult-controlled courts

The European Court of Human Rights opened the door for mandatory 'Covid-19 vaccines' across the continent when it ruled in a Czech Republic dispute over childhood immunisation that legally

enforced vaccination could be 'necessary in a democratic society'. The 17 judges decided that compulsory vaccinations did not breach human rights law. On the face of it the judgement was so inverted you gasp for air. If not having a vaccine infused into your body is not a human right then what is? Ah, but they said human rights law which has been specifically written to delete all human rights at the behest of the state (the Cult). Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights relates to the right to a private life. The crucial word here is *'except'*:

> There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right EXCEPT such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others [My emphasis].

No interference *except* in accordance with the law means there *are* no 'human rights' *except* what EU governments decide you can have at their behest. 'As is necessary in a democratic society' explains that reference in the judgement and 'in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others' gives the EU a coach and horses to ride through 'human rights' and scatter them in all directions. The judiciary is not a check and balance on government extremism; it is a vehicle to enforce it. This judgement was almost laughably predictable when the last thing the Cult wanted was a decision that went against mandatory vaccination. Judges rule over and over again to benefit the system of which they are a part. Vaccination disputes that come before them are invariably delivered in favour of doctors and authorities representing the view of the state which owns the judiciary. Oh, yes, and we have even had calls to stop putting 'Covid-19' on death certificates within 28 days of a 'positive test' because it is claimed the practice makes the 'vaccine' appear not to work. They are laughing at you.

The scale of madness, inhumanity and things to come was highlighted when those not 'vaccinated' for 'Covid' were refused evacuation from the Caribbean island of St Vincent during massive volcanic eruptions. Cruise ships taking residents to the safety of another island allowed only the 'vaccinated' to board and the rest were left to their fate. Even in life and death situations like this we see 'Covid' stripping people of their most basic human instincts and the insanity is even more extreme when you think that fake 'vaccine'-makers are not even claiming their body-manipulating concoctions stop 'infection' and 'transmission' of a 'virus' that doesn't exist. St Vincent Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves said: 'The chief medical officer will be identifying the persons already vaccinated so that we can get them on the ship.' Note again the power of the chief medical officer who, like Whitty in the UK, will be answering to the World Health Organization. This is the Cult network structure that has overridden politicians who 'follow the science' which means doing what WHO-controlled 'medical officers' and 'science advisers' tell them. Gonsalves even said that residents who were 'vaccinated' after the order so they could board the ships would still be refused entry due to possible side effects such as 'wooziness in the head'. The good news is that if they were woozy enough in the head they could qualify to be prime minister of St Vincent.

Microchipping freedom

The European judgement will be used at some point to justify moves to enforce the 'Covid' DNA-manipulating procedure. Sandra Ro, CEO of the Global Blockchain Business Council, told a World Economic Forum event that she hoped 'vaccine passports' would help to 'drive forced consent and standardisation' of global digital identity schemes: 'I'm hoping with the desire and global demand for some sort of vaccine passport – so that people can get travelling and working again – [it] will drive forced consent, standardisation, and frankly, cooperation across the world.' The lady is either not very bright, or thoroughly mendacious, to use the term 'forced consent'.

You do not 'consent' if you are forced – you *submit*. She was describing what the plan has been all along and that's to enforce a digital identity on every human without which they could not function. 'Vaccine passports' are opening the door and are far from the end goal. A digital identity would allow you to be tracked in everything you do in cyberspace and this is the same technique used by Cult-owned China to enforce its social credit system of total control. The ultimate 'passport' is planned to be a microchip as my books have warned for nearly 30 years. Those nice people at the Pentagon working for the Cult-controlled Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) claimed in April, 2021, they have developed a microchip inserted under the skin to detect 'asymptomatic Covid-19 infection' before it becomes an outbreak and a 'revolutionary filter' that can remove the 'virus' from the blood when attached to a dialysis machine. The only problems with this are that the 'virus' does not exist and people transmitting the 'virus' with no symptoms is brain-numbing bullshit. This is, of course, not a ruse to get people to be microchipped for very different reasons. DARPA also said it was producing a one-stop 'vaccine' for the 'virus' and all 'variants'. One of the most sinister organisations on Planet Earth is doing this? Better have it then. These people are insane because Wetiko that possesses them is insane.

Researchers from the Salk Institute in California announced they have created an embryo that is part human and part monkey. My books going back to the 1990s have exposed experiments in top secret underground facilities in the United States where humans are being crossed with animal and non-human 'extraterrestrial' species. They are now easing that long-developed capability into the public arena and there is much more to come given we are dealing with psychiatric basket cases. Talking of which – Elon Musk's scientists at Neuralink trained a monkey to play Pong and other puzzles on a computer screen using a joystick and when the monkey made the correct move a metal tube squirted banana smoothie into his mouth which is the basic technique for training humans into unquestioning compliance. Two Neuralink chips were in the monkey's skull and

more than 2,000 wires 'fanned out' into its brain. Eventually the monkey played a video game purely with its brain waves. Psychopathic narcissist Musk said the 'breakthrough' was a step towards putting Neuralink chips into human skulls and merging minds with artificial intelligence. *Exactly*. This man is so dark and Cult to his DNA.

World Economic Fascism (WEF)

The World Economic Forum is telling you the plan by the statements made at its many and various events. Cult-owned fascist YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki spoke at the 2021 WEF Global Technology Governance Summit (see the name) in which 40 governments and 150 companies met to ensure 'the responsible design and deployment of emerging technologies'. Orwellian translation: 'Ensuring the design and deployment of long-planned technologies will advance the Cult agenda for control and censorship.' Freedom-destroyer and Nuremberg-bound Wojcicki expressed support for tech platforms like hers to censor content that is 'technically legal but could be harmful'. Who decides what is 'harmful'? She does and they do. 'Harmful' will be whatever the Cult doesn't want people to see and we have legislation proposed by the UK government that would censor content on the basis of 'harm' no matter if the information is fair, legal and provably true. Make that *especially* if it is fair, legal and provably true. Wojcicki called for a global coalition to be formed to enforce content moderation standards through automated censorship. This is a woman and mega-censor so self-deluded that she shamelessly accepted a 'free expression' award – *Wojcicki* – in an event sponsored by her own *YouTube*. They have no shame and no self-awareness.

You know that 'Covid' is a scam and Wojcicki a Cult operative when YouTube is censoring medical and scientific opinion purely on the grounds of whether it supports or opposes the Cult 'Covid' narrative. Florida governor Ron DeSantis compiled an expert panel with four professors of medicine from Harvard, Oxford, and Stanford Universities who spoke against forcing children and

vaccinated people to wear masks. They also said there was no proof that lockdowns reduced spread or death rates of 'Covid-19'. Cult-gofer Wojcicki and her YouTube deleted the panel video 'because it included content that contradicts the consensus of local and global health authorities regarding the efficacy of masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19'. This 'consensus' refers to what the Cult tells the World Health Organization to say and the WHO tells 'local health authorities' to do. Wojcicki knows this, of course. The panellists pointed out that censorship of scientific debate was responsible for deaths from many causes, but Wojcicki couldn't care less. She would not dare go against what she is told and as a disgrace to humanity she wouldn't want to anyway. The UK government is seeking to pass a fascist 'Online Safety Bill' to specifically target with massive fines and other means non-censored video and social media platforms to make them censor 'lawful but harmful' content like the Cult-owned Facebook, Twitter, Google and YouTube. What is 'lawful but harmful' would be decided by the fascist Blair-created Ofcom.

Another WEF obsession is a cyber-attack on the financial system and this is clearly what the Cult has planned to take down the bank accounts of everyone – except theirs. Those that think they have enough money for the Cult agenda not to matter to them have got a big lesson coming if they continue to ignore what is staring them in the face. The World Economic Forum, funded by Gates and fronted by Klaus Schwab, announced it would be running a 'simulation' with the Russian government and global banks of just such an attack called Cyber Polygon 2021. What they simulate – as with the 'Covid' Event 201 – they plan to instigate. The WEF is involved in a project with the Cult-owned Carnegie Endowment for International Peace called the WEF-Carnegie Cyber Policy Initiative which seeks to merge Wall Street banks, 'regulators' (I love it) and intelligence agencies to 'prevent' (arrange and allow) a cyber-attack that would bring down the global financial system as long planned by those that control the WEF and the Carnegie operation. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace sent an instruction to First World

War US President Woodrow Wilson not to let the war end before society had been irreversibly transformed.

The Wuhan lab diversion

As I close, the Cult-controlled authorities and lapdog media are systematically pushing 'the virus was released from the Wuhan lab' narrative. There are two versions – it happened by accident and it happened on purpose. Both are nonsense. The perceived existence of the never-shown-to-exist 'virus' is vital to sell the impression that there is actually an infective agent to deal with and to allow the endless potential for terrifying the population with 'variants' of a 'virus' that does not exist. The authorities at the time of writing are going with the 'by accident' while the alternative media is promoting the 'on purpose'. Cable news host Tucker Carlson who has questioned aspects of lockdown and 'vaccine' compulsion has bought the Wuhan lab story. 'Everyone now agrees' he said. Well, I don't and many others don't and the question is *why* does the system and its media suddenly 'agree'? When the media moves as one unit with a narrative it is always a lie – witness the hour by hour mendacity of the 'Covid' era. Why would this Cult-owned combination which has unleashed lies like machine gun fire suddenly 'agree' to tell the truth??

Much of the alternative media is buying the lie because it fits the conspiracy narrative, but it's the *wrong* conspiracy. The real conspiracy is that *there is no virus* and that is what the Cult is desperate to hide. The idea that the 'virus' was released by accident is ludicrous when the whole 'Covid' hoax was clearly long-planned and waiting to be played out as it was so fast in accordance with the Rockefeller document and Event 201. So they prepared everything in detail over decades and then sat around strumming their fingers waiting for an 'accidental' release from a bio-lab? *What??* It's crazy. Then there's the 'on purpose' claim. You want to circulate a 'deadly virus' and hide the fact that you've done so and you release it down the street from the highest-level bio-lab in China? I repeat – *What??*

You would release it far from that lab to stop any association being made. But, no, we'll do it in a place where the connection was certain to be made. Why would you need to scam 'cases' and 'deaths' and pay hospitals to diagnose 'Covid-19' if you had a real 'virus'? What are sections of the alternative media doing believing this crap? Where were all the mass deaths in Wuhan from a 'deadly pathogen' when the recovery to normal life after the initial propaganda was dramatic in speed? Why isn't the 'deadly pathogen' now circulating all over China with bodies in the street? Once again we have the technique of tell them what they want to hear and they will likely believe it. The alternative media has its 'conspiracy' and with Carlson it fits with his 'China is the danger' narrative over years. China *is* a danger as a global Cult operations centre, but not for this reason. The Wuhan lab story also has the potential to instigate conflict with China when at some stage the plan is to trigger a Problem-Reaction-Solution confrontation with the West. Question everything – *everything* – and especially when the media agrees on a common party line.

Third wave ... fourth wave ... fifth wave ...

As the book went into production the world was being set up for more lockdowns and a 'third wave' supported by invented 'variants' that were increasing all the time and will continue to do so in public statements and computer programs, but not in reality. India became the new Italy in the 'Covid' propaganda campaign and we were told to be frightened of the new 'Indian strain'. Somehow I couldn't find it within myself to do so. A document produced for the UK government entitled 'Summary of further modelling of easing of restrictions – Roadmap Step 2' declared that a third wave was inevitable (of course when it's in the script) and it would be the fault of children and those who refuse the health-destroying fake 'Covid vaccine'. One of the computer models involved came from the Cult-owned *Imperial College* and the other from Warwick University which I wouldn't trust to tell me the date in a calendar factory. The document states that both models presumed extremely high uptake

of the 'Covid vaccines' and didn't allow for 'variants'. The document states: 'The resurgence is a result of some people (mostly children) being ineligible for vaccination; others choosing not to receive the vaccine; and others being vaccinated but not perfectly protected.' The mendacity takes the breath away. Okay, blame those with a brain who won't take the DNA-modifying shots and put more pressure on children to have it as 'trials' were underway involving children as young as six months with parents who give insanity a bad name. Massive pressure is being put on the young to have the fake 'vaccine' and child age consent limits have been systematically lowered around the world to stop parents intervening. Most extraordinary about the document was its claim that the 'third wave' would be driven by 'the resurgence in both hospitalisations and deaths … dominated by *those that have received two doses of the vaccine*, comprising around 60-70% of the wave respectively'. The predicted peak of the 'third wave' suggested 300 deaths per day with 250 of them *fully 'vaccinated' people*. How many more lies do acquiescers need to be told before they see the obvious? Those who took the jab to 'protect themselves' are projected to be those who mostly get sick and die? So what's in the 'vaccine'? The document went on:

> It is possible that a summer of low prevalence could be followed by substantial increases in incidence over the following autumn and winter. Low prevalence in late summer should not be taken as an indication that SARS-CoV-2 has retreated or that the population has high enough levels of immunity to prevent another wave.

They are telling you the script and while many British people believed 'Covid' restrictions would end in the summer of 2021 the government was preparing for them to be ongoing. Authorities were awarding contracts for 'Covid marshals' to police the restrictions with contracts starting in July, 2021, and going through to January 31st, 2022, and the government was advertising for 'Media Buying Services' to secure media propaganda slots worth a potential £320 million for 'Covid-19 campaigns' with a contract not ending until March, 2022. The recipient – via a list of other front companies – was reported to be American media marketing giant Omnicom Group

Inc. While money is no object for 'Covid' the UK waiting list for all other treatment – including life-threatening conditions – passed 4.5 million. Meantime the Cult is seeking to control all official 'inquiries' to block revelations about what has really been happening and why. It must not be allowed to – we need Nuremberg jury trials in every country. The cover-up doesn't get more obvious than appointing ultra-Zionist professor Philip Zelikow to oversee two dozen US virologists, public health officials, clinicians, former government officials and four American 'charitable foundations' to 'learn the lessons' of the 'Covid' debacle. The personnel will be those that created and perpetuated the 'Covid' lies while Zelikow is the former executive director of the 9/11 Commission who ensured that the truth about those attacks never came out and produced a report that must be among the most mendacious and manipulative documents ever written – see *The Trigger* for the detailed exposure of the almost unimaginable 9/11 story in which Sabbatians can be found at every level.

Passive no more

People are increasingly challenging the authorities with amazing numbers of people taking to the streets in London well beyond the ability of the Face-Nappies to stop them. Instead the Nappies choose situations away from the mass crowds to target, intimidate, and seek to promote the impression of 'violent protestors'. One such incident happened in London's Hyde Park. Hundreds of thousands walking through the streets in protest against 'Covid' fascism were ignored by the Cult-owned BBC and most of the rest of the mainstream media, but they delighted in reporting how police were injured in 'clashes with protestors'. The truth was that a group of people gathered in Hyde Park at the end of one march when most had gone home and they were peacefully having a good time with music and chat. Face-Nappies who couldn't deal with the full-march crowd then waded in with their batons and got more than they bargained for. Instead of just standing for this criminal brutality the crowd used their numerical superiority to push the Face-Nappies out of the

park. Eventually the Nappies turned and ran. Unfortunately two or three idiots in the crowd threw drink cans striking two officers which gave the media and the government the image they wanted to discredit the 99.9999 percent who were peaceful. The idiots walked straight into the trap and we must always be aware of potential agent provocateurs used by the authorities to discredit their targets.

This response from the crowd – the can people apart – must be a turning point when the public no longer stand by while the innocent are arrested and brutally attacked by the Face-Nappies. That doesn't mean to be violent, that's the last thing we need. We'll leave the violence to the Face-Nappies and government. But it does mean that when the Face-Nappies use violence against peaceful people the numerical superiority is employed to stop them and make citizen's arrests or Common Law arrests for a breach of the peace. The time for being passive in the face of fascism is over.

We are the many, they are the few, and we need to make that count before there is no freedom left and our children and grandchildren face an ongoing fascist nightmare.

COME ON PEOPLE – IT'S TIME.

One final thought …

The power of love
A force from above
Cleaning my soul
Flame on burn desire
Love with tongues of fire
Purge the soul
Make love your goal

I'll protect you from the hooded claw
Keep the vampires from your door
When the chips are down I'll be around
With my undying, death-defying
Love for you

Envy will hurt itself
Let yourself be beautiful
Sparkling love, flowers
And pearls and pretty girls
Love is like an energy
Rushin' rushin' inside of me

This time we go sublime
Lovers entwine, divine, divine,
Love is danger, love is pleasure
Love is pure – the only treasure

I'm so in love with you
Purge the soul
Make love your goal

The power of love
A force from above
Cleaning my soul
The power of love
A force from above
A sky-scraping dove

Flame on burn desire
Love with tongues of fire
Purge the soul
Make love your goal

Frankie Goes To Hollywood

APPENDIX

Cowan-Kaufman-Morell Statement on Virus Isolation (SOVI)

Isolation: The action of isolating; the fact or condition of being isolated or standing alone; separation from other things or persons; solitariness
Oxford English Dictionary

The controversy over whether the SARS-CoV-2 virus has ever been isolated or purified continues. However, using the above definition, common sense, the laws of logic and the dictates of science, any unbiased person must come to the conclusion that the SARS-CoV-2 virus has never been isolated or purified. As a result, no confirmation of the virus' existence can be found. The logical, common sense, and scientific consequences of this fact are:

- the structure and composition of something not shown to exist can't be known, including the presence, structure, and function of any hypothetical spike or other proteins;
- the genetic sequence of something that has never been found can't be known;
- "variants" of something that hasn't been shown to exist can't be known;
- it's impossible to demonstrate that SARS-CoV-2 causes a disease called Covid-19.

In as concise terms as possible, here's the proper way to isolate, characterize and demonstrate a new virus. First, one takes samples (blood, sputum, secretions) from many people (e.g. 500) with symptoms which are unique and specific enough to characterize an illness. Without mixing these samples with ANY tissue or products that also contain genetic material, the virologist macerates, filters and ultracentrifuges i.e. *purifies* the specimen. This common virology technique, done for decades to isolate bacteriophages[1] and so-called giant viruses in every virology lab, then allows the virologist to demonstrate with electron microscopy thousands of identically sized and shaped particles. These particles are the isolated and purified virus.

These identical particles are then checked for uniformity by physical and/or microscopic techniques. Once the purity is determined, the particles may be further characterized. This would include examining the structure, morphology, and chemical composition of the particles. Next, their genetic makeup is characterized by extracting the genetic material directly from the purified particles and using genetic-sequencing techniques, such as Sanger sequencing, that have also been around for decades. Then one does an analysis to confirm that these uniform particles are exogenous (outside) in origin as a virus is conceptualized to be, and not the normal breakdown products of dead and dying tissues.[2] (As of May 2020, we know that virologists have no way to determine whether the particles they're seeing are viruses or just normal breakdown products of dead and dying tissues.)[3]

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1 Isolation, characterization and analysis of bacteriophages from the haloalkaline lake Elmenteita, KenyaJuliah Khayeli Akhwale et al, PLOS One, Published: April 25, 2019. https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0215734 – accessed 2/15/21

2 "Extracellular Vesicles Derived From Apoptotic Cells: An Essential Link Between Death and Regeneration," Maojiao Li1 et al, Frontiers in Cell and Developmental Biology, 2020 October 2. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcell.2020.573511/full – accessed 2/15/21

3 "The Role of Extraellular Vesicles as Allies of HIV, HCV and SARS Viruses," Flavia Giannessi, et al, Viruses, 2020 May

If we have come this far then we have fully isolated, characterized, and genetically sequenced an exogenous virus particle. However, we still have to show it is causally related to a disease. This is carried out by exposing a group of healthy subjects (animals are usually used) to this isolated, purified virus in the manner in which the disease is thought to be transmitted. If the animals get sick with the same disease, as confirmed by clinical and autopsy findings, one has now shown that the virus actually causes a disease. This demonstrates infectivity and transmission of an infectious agent.

None of these steps has even been attempted with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, nor have all these steps been successfully performed for any so-called pathogenic virus. Our research indicates that a single study showing these steps does not exist in the medical literature.

Instead, since 1954, virologists have taken unpurified samples from a relatively few people, often less than ten, with a similar disease. They then minimally process this sample and inoculate this unpurified sample onto tissue culture containing usually four to six other types of material – all of which contain identical genetic material as to what is called a "virus." The tissue culture is starved and poisoned and naturally disintegrates into many types of particles, some of which contain genetic material. Against all common sense, logic, use of the English language and scientific integrity, this process is called "virus isolation." This brew containing fragments of genetic material from many sources is then subjected to genetic analysis, which then creates in a computer-simulation process the alleged sequence of the alleged virus, a so called in silico genome. At no time is an actual virus confirmed by electron microscopy. At no time is a genome extracted and sequenced from an actual virus. This is scientific fraud.

The observation that the unpurified specimen — inoculated onto tissue culture along with toxic antibiotics, bovine fetal tissue, amniotic fluid and other tissues — destroys the kidney tissue onto which it is inoculated is given as evidence of the virus' existence and pathogenicity. This is scientific fraud.

From now on, when anyone gives you a paper that suggests the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been isolated, please check the methods sections. If the researchers used Vero cells or any other culture method, you know that their process was not isolation. You will hear the following excuses for why actual isolation isn't done:

1. There were not enough virus particles found in samples from patients to analyze.

2. Viruses are intracellular parasites; they can't be found outside the cell in this manner.

If No. 1 is correct, and we can't find the virus in the sputum of sick people, then on what evidence do we think the virus is dangerous or even lethal? If No. 2 is correct, then how is the virus spread from person to person? We are told it emerges from the cell to infect others. Then why isn't it possible to find it?

Finally, questioning these virology techniques and conclusions is not some distraction or divisive issue. Shining the light on this truth is essential to stop this terrible fraud that humanity is confronting. For, as we now know, if the virus has never been isolated, sequenced or shown to cause illness, if the virus is imaginary, then why are we wearing masks, social distancing and putting the whole world into prison?

Finally, if pathogenic viruses don't exist, then what is going into those injectable devices erroneously called "vaccines," and what is their purpose? This scientific question is the most urgent and relevant one of our time.

We are correct. The SARS-CoV2 virus does not exist.

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Dr. Thomas Cowan, MD
Dr. Andrew Kaufman, MD

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Ickonic is something that has been a dream of mine for the last 5 years, growing up around alternative information I have always had a natural interest in what is going on in the World and what could I do to make it better.
Across the range of subjects and positions of influence occupied mainly by people who don't strive to make things better it's the Media that I have always found the most frustrating and fascinating. Mainly because if the Media did their Jobs properly then so much of the negative things happening in the World simply would not be able to happen, because they would be exposed within a heartbeat.
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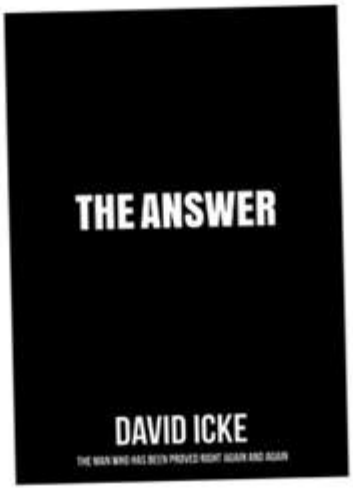

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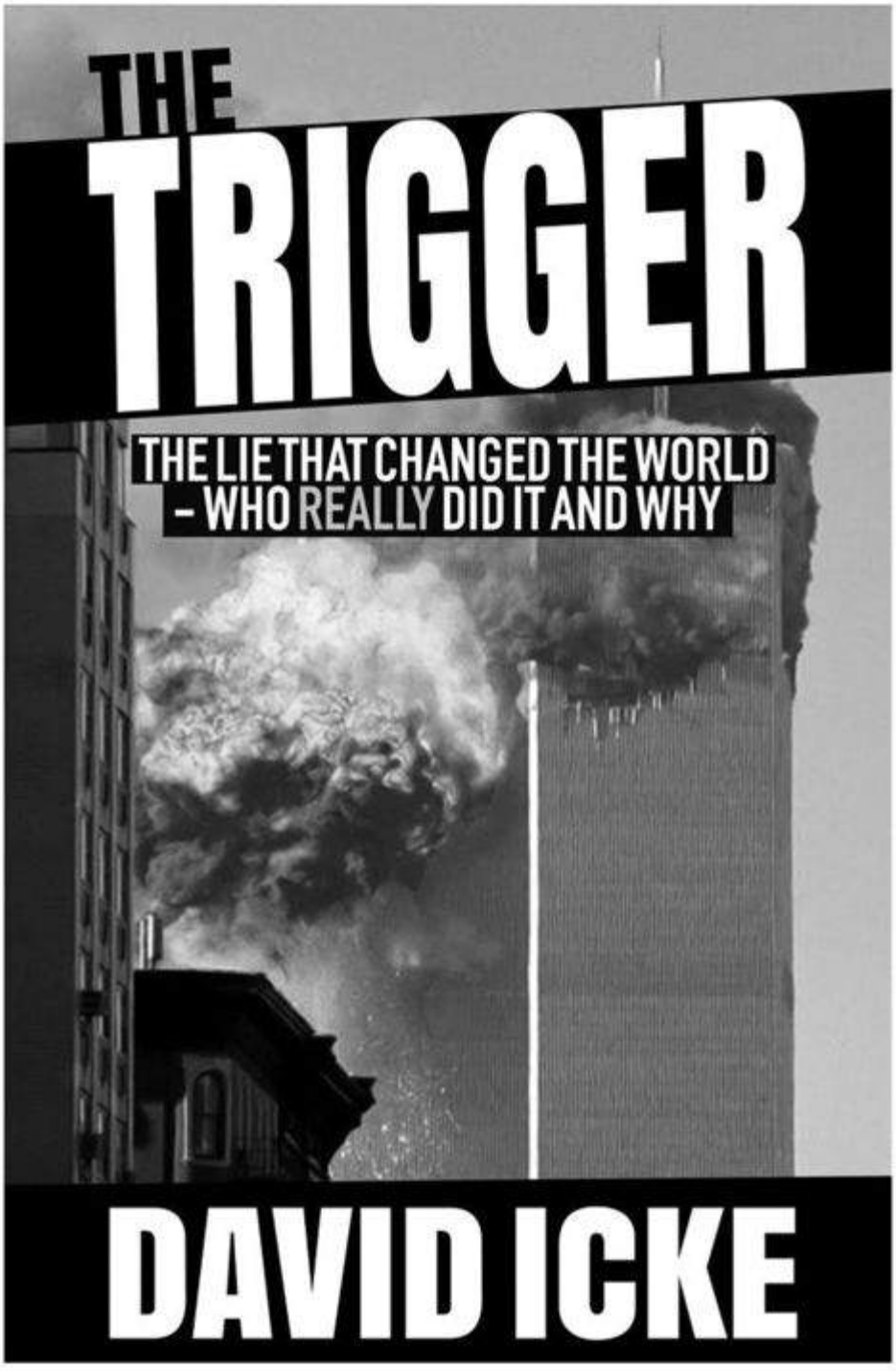
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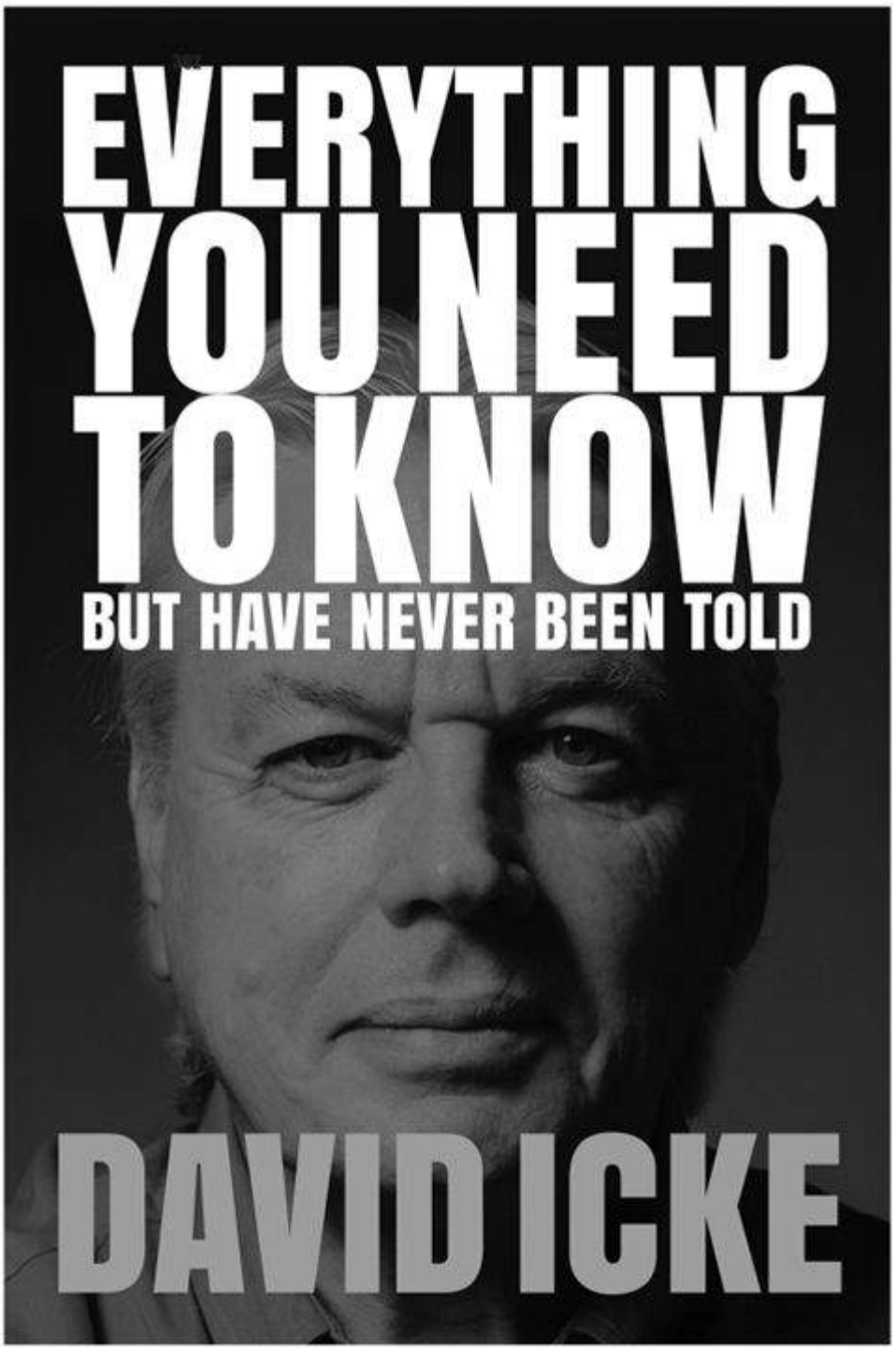
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noun

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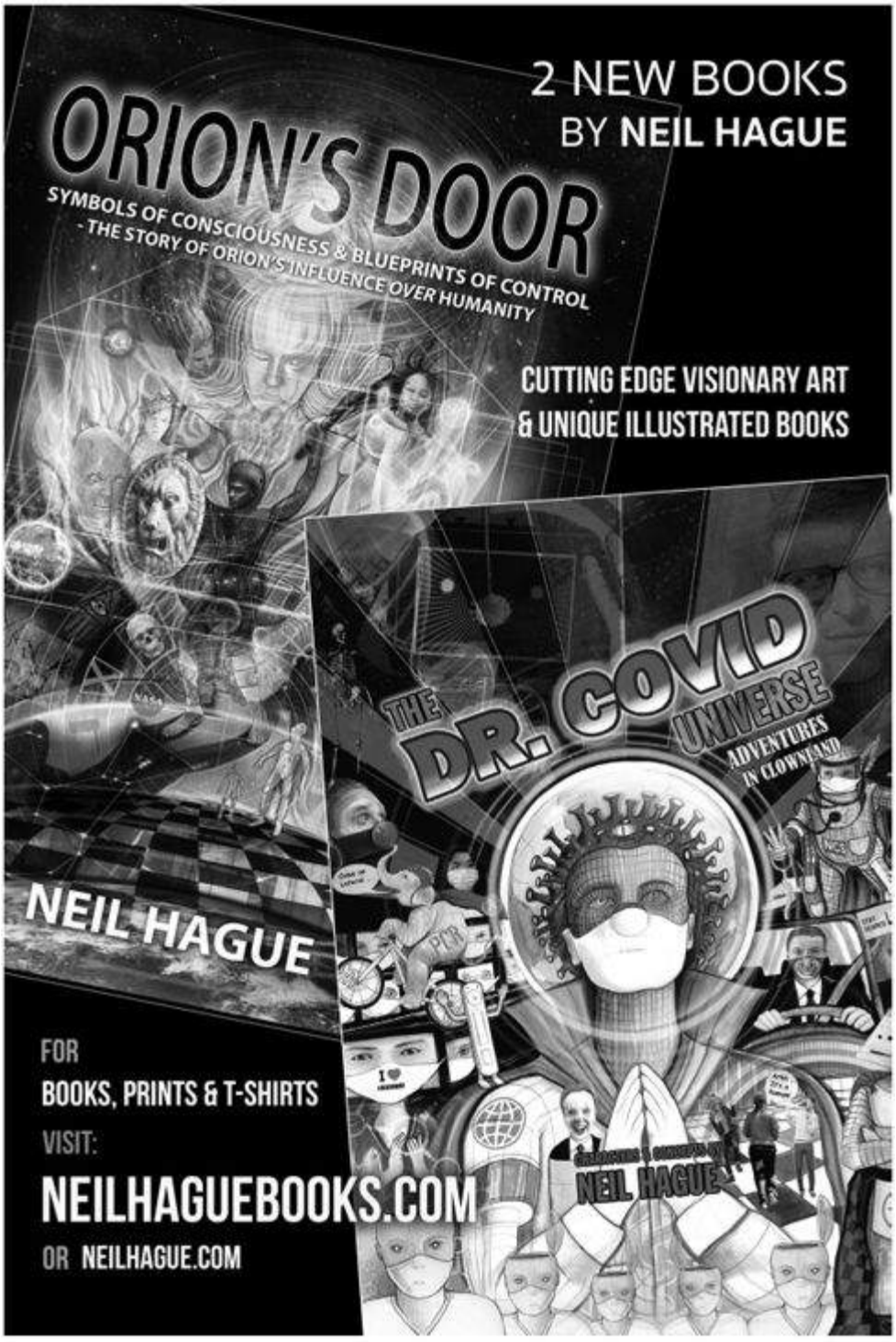
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#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Little Fires Everywhere*

Celeste Ng

OUR MISSING HEARTS

A Novel

ALSO BY CELESTE NG

Everything I Never Told You

Little Fires Everywhere

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For my family

In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months waiting in line outside the prison in Leningrad . . .

Standing behind me was a woman, with lips blue from cold . . . Now she started out of the torpor common to us all and asked me in a whisper (everyone whispered there):

“Can you describe this?”

And I said: “I can.”

Then something like a smile passed fleetingly over what had once been her face.

• Anna Akhmatova, “Requiem, 1935–1940”

But PACT is more than a law. It’s a *promise* we make to each other: a promise to protect our American ideals and values; a promise that for people who weaken our country with un-American ideas, there will be consequences.

• from *Let’s Learn About PACT: A Guide for Young Patriots*

I

The letter arrives on a Friday. Slit and resealed with a sticker, of course, as all their letters are: *Inspected for your safety—PACT.* It had caused confusion at the post office, the clerk unfolding the paper inside, studying it, passing it up to his supervisor, then the boss. But eventually it had been deemed harmless and sent on its way. No return address, only a New York, NY postmark, six days old. On the outside, his name—Bird—and because of this he knows it is from his mother.

• • •

He has not been Bird for a long time.

We named you *Noah* after your father's father, his mother told him once. *Bird* was all your own doing.

The word that, when he said it, felt like him. Something that did not belong on earth, a small quick thing. An inquisitive chirp, a self that curled up at the edges.

The school hadn't liked it. Bird is not a name, they'd said, his name is Noah. His kindergarten teacher, fuming: He won't answer when I call him. He only answers to Bird.

Because his name *is* Bird, his mother said. He answers to Bird, so I suggest you call him that, birth certificate be damned. She'd taken a Sharpie to every handout that came home, crossing off *Noah*, writing *Bird* on the dotted line instead.

That was his mother: formidable and ferocious when her child was in need.

In the end the school conceded, though after that the teacher had written Bird in quotation marks, like a gangster's nickname. *Dear "Bird," please remember to have your mother sign your permission slip. Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gardner, "Bird" is respectful and studious but needs to participate more fully in class.* It wasn't until he was nine, after his mother left, that he became Noah.

His father says it's for the best, and won't let anyone call him Bird anymore.

If anyone calls you that, he says, you correct them. You say: Sorry, no, that's not my name.

It was one of the many changes that took place after his mother left. A new apartment, a new school, a new job for his father. An entirely new life. As if his father had wanted to transform them completely, so that if his mother ever came back, she wouldn't even know how to find them.

He'd passed his old kindergarten teacher on the street last year, on his way home. Well, hello, Noah, she said, how are you this morning? and he could not tell whether it was smugness or pity in her voice.

He is twelve now; he has been Noah for three years, but *Noah* still feels like one of those Halloween masks, something rubbery and awkward he doesn't quite know how to wear.

• • •

So now, out of the blue: a letter from his mother. It looks like her handwriting—and no one else would call him that. *Bird*. After all these years he forgets her voice sometimes; when he tries to summon it, it slips away like a shadow dissolving in the dark.

He opens the envelope with trembling hands. Three years without a single word, but finally he'll understand. Why she left. Where she's been.

But inside: nothing but a drawing. A whole sheet of paper, covered edge to edge in drawings no bigger than a dime: cats. Big cats, little cats, striped and calico and tuxedo, sitting pert, licking their paws, lolling in puddles of sunlight. Doodles really, like the ones his mother drew on his lunch bags many years ago, like the ones he sometimes draws in his class notebooks

today. Barely more than a few curved lines, but recognizable. Alive. That's all—no message, no words even, just cat after cat in ballpoint squiggle. Something about it tugs at the back of his mind, but he can't quite hook it.

He turns the paper over, looking for clues, but the back of the page is blank.

• • •

Do you remember anything about your mother, Sadie had asked him once. They were on the playground, atop the climbing structure, the slide yawning down before them. Fifth grade, the last year with recess. Everything too small for them by then, meant for little children. Across the blacktop they watched their classmates hunting each other out: ready or not, here I come.

The truth was that he did, but he didn't feel like sharing, even with Sadie. Their motherlessness bound them together, but it was different, what had happened to them. What had happened with their mothers.

Not much, he'd said, do you remember much about yours?

Sadie grabbed the bar over the slide and hoisted herself, as if doing a chin-up.

Only that she was a hero, she said.

Bird said nothing. Everyone knew that Sadie's parents had been deemed unfit to raise her and that's how she'd ended up with her foster family, and at their school. There were all kinds of stories about them: that even though Sadie's mother was Black and her father was white they were Chinese sympathizers selling out America. All kinds of stories about Sadie, too: that when the officers came to take her away she'd bitten one and ran screaming back to her parents, and they'd had to cart her off in handcuffs. That this wasn't even her first foster family, that she'd been re-placed more than once because she caused so much trouble. That even after she'd been removed, her parents kept on trying to overturn PACT, like they didn't care about getting her back; that they'd been arrested and were in jail somewhere. He suspected there were stories about him, too, but he didn't want to know.

Anyway, Sadie went on, as soon as I'm old enough I'm going back home to Baltimore and find them both.

She was a year older than Bird, even though they were in the same grade, and she never let him forget it. Had to repeat, the parents whispered at pickup, with pity in their voices. Because of her *upbringing*. But even a new start can't straighten her out.

How, Bird had asked.

Sadie didn't answer, and after a minute she let go of the bar and slumped down beside him, a small defiant heap. The next year, just as school ended, Sadie disappeared—and now, in seventh grade, Bird is all alone again.

• • •

It is just past five: his father will be home soon, and if he sees the letter he'll make Bird burn it. They don't have any of his mother's things, not even her clothes. After she'd gone away, his father burned her books in the fireplace, smashed the cell phone she'd left behind, piled everything else in a heap at the curb. Forget about her, he'd said. By morning, people living rough had picked the pile clean. A few weeks later, when they moved to their apartment on campus, they'd left even the bed his parents had shared. Now his father sleeps in a twin, on the lower bunk, beneath Bird.

He should burn the letter himself. It isn't safe, having anything of hers around. More than this: when he sees his name, his old name, on the envelope, a door inside him creaks open and a draft snakes in. Sometimes when he sees sleeping figures huddled on the sidewalk, he scans

them, searching for something familiar. Sometimes he finds it—a polka-dot scarf, a red-flowered shirt, a woolen hat slouching over their eyes—and for a moment, he believes it is her. It is easier if she's gone forever, if she never comes back.

His father's key scratches at the keyhole, wriggling its way into the stiff lock.

Bird darts to the bedroom, lifts his blankets, tucks the letter between pillow and case.

He doesn't remember much about his mother, but he remembers this: she always had a plan. She would not have taken the trouble to find their new address, and the risk of writing him, for no reason. Therefore this letter must mean something. He tells himself this, again and again.

• • •

She'd left them, that was all his father would say.

And then, getting down on his knees to look Bird in the eye: It's for the best. Forget about her. I'm not going anywhere, that's all you need to know.

Back then, Bird hadn't known what she'd done. He only knew that for weeks he'd heard his parents' muffled voices in the kitchen long after he was supposed to be asleep. Usually it was a soothing murmur that lulled him to sleep in minutes, a sign that all was well. But lately it had been a tug-of-war instead: first his father's voice, then his mother's, bracing itself, gritting its teeth.

Even then he'd understood it was better not to ask questions. He'd simply nodded, and let his father, warm and solid, draw him into his arms.

It wasn't until later that he learned the truth, hurled at him on the playground like a stone to the cheek: *Your mom is a traitor.* D. J. Pierce, spitting on the ground beside Bird's sneakers.

Everyone knew his mother was a Person of Asian Origin. Kung-PAOs, some kids called them. This was not news. You could see it in Bird's face, if you looked: all the parts of him that weren't quite his father, hints in the tilt of his cheekbones, the shape of his eyes. Being a PAO, the authorities reminded everyone, was not itself a crime. PACT is not about race, the president was always saying, it is about patriotism and mindset.

But your mom started riots, D. J. said. My parents said so. She was a danger to society and they were coming for her and that's why she ran away.

His father had warned him about this. People will say all kinds of things, he'd told Bird. You just focus on school. You say, we have nothing to do with her. You say, she's not a part of my life anymore.

He'd said it.

We have nothing to do with her, my dad and me. She's not a part of my life anymore.

Inside him his heart tightened and creaked. On the blacktop, the wad of D. J.'s spit glistened and frothed.

• • •

By the time his father comes into the apartment, Bird is sitting at the table with his schoolbooks. On a normal day he'd jump up, offer a side-armed hug. Today, still thinking about the letter, he hunches over his homework and avoids his father's eyes.

Elevator's out again, his father says.

They live on the top floor of one of the dorms, ten flights up. A newer building, but the university is so old even the newer buildings are outdated.

We've been around since before the United States was a country, his father likes to say. He says *we* as if he is still a faculty member, though he hasn't been for years. Now he works at the college library, keeping records, shelving books, and the apartment comes with the job. Bird

understands this is a perk, that his father's hourly wage is small and money is tight, but to him it doesn't seem like much of a benefit. Before, they'd had a whole house with a yard and a garden. Now they have a tiny two-room dorm: a single bedroom he and his father share, a living room with a kitchenette at one end. A two-burner stove; a mini fridge too small to hold a carton of milk upright. Below them, students come and go; every year they have new neighbors, and by the time they get to know people's faces, they are gone. In the summer there is no air-conditioning; in the winter the radiators click on full blast. And when the balky elevator refuses to run, the only way up or down is the stairs.

Well, his father says. One hand goes to the knot of his tie, working it loose. I'll let the super know.

Bird keeps his eyes on his papers, but he can feel his father's gaze pause on him. Waiting for him to look up. He doesn't dare.

Today's English assignment: *In a paragraph, explain what PACT stands for and why it is crucial for our national security. Provide three specific examples.* He knows just what he should say; they study it in school every year. The Preserving American Culture and Traditions Act. In kindergarten they called it a promise: *We promise to protect American values. We promise to watch over each other.* Each year they learn the same thing, just in bigger words. During these lessons, his teachers usually looked at Bird, rather pointedly, and then the rest of the class turned to look, too.

He pushes the essay aside and focuses on math instead. *Suppose the GDP of China is $15 trillion and it increases 6% per year. If America's GDP is $24 trillion but it increases at only 2% per year, how many years before China's GDP is more than America's?* It's easier, where there are numbers. Where he can be sure of right and wrong.

Everything all right, Noah? his father says, and Bird nods, makes a vague gesture at his notebook.

Just a lot of homework, he says, and his father, apparently satisfied, goes into the bedroom to change.

Bird carries a one, draws a neat box around the final sum. There is no point in telling his father about his day: each day is the same. The walk to school, along the same route. The pledge, the anthem, shuffling from class to class keeping his head down, trying not to attract attention in the hallway, never raising his hand. On the best days, everyone ignores him; most days, he's picked on or pitied. He's not sure which he dislikes more, but he blames both on his mother.

There is never much point in asking his father about his day, either. As far as he can tell, his father's days are unvarying: roll the cart through the stacks, place a book in its spot, repeat. Back in the shelving room, another cart will be waiting. *Sisyphean*, his father said, when he first began. He used to teach linguistics; he loves books and words; he is fluent in six languages, can read another eight. It's he who told Bird the story of Sisyphus, forever rolling the same stone up a hill. His father loves myths and obscure Latin roots and words so long you had to practice before rattling them off like a rosary. He used to interrupt his own sentences to explain a complicated term, to wander off the path of his thought down a switchback trail, telling Bird the history of the word, where it came from, its whole life story and all its siblings and cousins. Scraping back the layers of its meaning. Once Bird had loved it, too, back when he was younger, back when his father was still a professor and his mother was still here and everything was different. When he'd still thought stories could explain anything.

These days, his father doesn't talk much about words. He is tired from the long days at the library that grind his eyes into sand; he comes home surrounded by a hush, as if it's soaked into him from the stacks, the cool sweet-stale air, the gloom that hovers at your shoulder, barely

pushed back by the single light in each aisle. Bird doesn't ask him, either, for the same reason his father doesn't like to talk about his mother: both of them would rather not miss these things they can't get back.

• • •

Still: she returns in sudden flashes. Like scraps of half-remembered dreams.

Her laugh, sudden as a seal's bark, a raucous burst that threw her whole head back. Unladylike, she'd called it, with pride. The way she'd drum her fingers while she was thinking, her thoughts so restless she could not be still. And this one: late at night, Bird ill with a rasping cold. Waking from a sweaty sleep, panicked, coughing and crying, his chest full of hot glue. Certain he was going to die. His mother, draping a towel over the bedside lamp, curling up beside him, setting her cool cheek to his forehead. Holding him until he fell asleep, holding him all night. Each time he half woke, her arms were still around him, and the fear that rose in him like a ruffled thing grew smooth and sleek again.

• • •

Together they sit at the table, Bird drumming a pencil against his worksheet, his father studiously combing through the newspaper. Everyone else in the world gets their news online, scrolling through the top stories, pulling phones from pockets at the ding of a breaking-news alert. Once his father had, too, but after they moved he'd given up his phone and his laptop. I'm just old-fashioned, he said, when Bird asked. These days he reads the newspaper, front to back. Every word, he says, every single day. This is as close as he comes to bragging. Between problems, Bird tries not to look toward the bedroom, where the letter lies in wait. Instead he studies the headlines on the front page that screens him from his father. SHARP EYE OF NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH FOILS POTENTIAL INSURRECTION IN DC.

Bird calculates. *If a Korean car costs $15,000 but lasts only 3 years, while an American car costs $20,000 but lasts 10 years, how much money would be saved over 50 years by purchasing only American cars? If a virus spreads exponentially through a population of 10 million, and doubles its rate of growth every day—*

Across the table, his father inverts the newspaper.

There is only the essay left. Haltingly, Bird picks his way through the assignment, building a lopsided paragraph word by word. *PACT is a very important law that ended the Crisis and keeps our country safe, because—*

He is relieved when his father folds the paper and checks his watch, when he can abandon the essay and set his pencil down.

Almost six thirty, his father says. Come on, let's get something to eat.

• • •

They cross the street to the dining hall for dinner. Another alleged perk of the job: no one has to cook; handy for a single dad. If, through some unforeseen delay, they miss dinner, his father scrambles—a blue box of macaroni from the cupboard, perhaps; a scanty meal that leaves them both hungry. Before his mother left, they'd eaten together, a circle of three at the kitchen table, his parents chatting and laughing as they ate, afterward his mother singing softly as she washed the dishes and his father dried.

They find a spot in the back corner of the dining hall where they can eat alone. Around them, students cluster in twos and threes, the low murmur of their whispered conversations like an air current in the room. Bird knows none of their names and only a few of their faces; he's not

in the habit of looking people in the eye. Just keep on walking, his father always says if passersby stare, their gazes like centipedes on Bird's face. Bird is grateful that he isn't expected to smile and nod to the students, to make small talk. They do not know his name either, and anyway, by the end of the year, they will all be gone.

They have almost finished eating when there's a commotion outside. A scuffle and a crash, the screeching of wheels. Sirens.

Stay here, Bird's father says. He runs to the window and joins the students already gathering there, peering out onto the street. All around the dining hall, abandoned plates grow cold. Blue and white lights strobe across the ceiling and walls. Bird does not get up. Whatever it is will pass. Stay away from trouble, his father always tells him, which to his father means anything that attracts attention. You see any trouble, his father once said, you run the other way. This is his father: trudging through life, head bowed.

But the murmur in the dining hall grows louder. More sirens, more lights, casting shadows that swell and loom, monstrous, on the ceiling. Outside, a tangle of angry voices and the jostle of bodies, booted feet on pavement. He's never heard anything like this and part of him wants to run to the window, to peek out and see what's going on. The other part of him wants to duck under the table and hide, like the small scared creature he suddenly knows himself to be. From the street comes a scratchy burst of megaphone: *This is the Cambridge Police. Please shelter in place. Stay away from windows until further notification.*

Around the dining hall, students scurry back to their tables, and Peggy, the dining-hall manager, skirts the room, yanking the curtains shut. The air tingles with whispers. Bird imagines an angry mob outside, barricades of trash and furniture, Molotov cocktails and flames. All the photos from the Crisis they've studied in school, come to life. He jitters his knee against the table leg until his father returns, and then the jittering transfers itself inside him, to the hollow part of his chest.

What's going on, Bird asks.

His father shakes his head.

Some disruption, he says. I think. And then, noticing Bird's wide eyes: It's okay, Noah. The authorities are here. They have everything under control.

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During the Crisis, disruptions happened all the time; they've learned this over and over in school, for as long as he can remember. Everyone out of work, factories gone idle, shortages of everything; mobs had looted stores and rioted in the streets, lighting whole neighborhoods ablaze. The nation paralyzed in the turmoil.

It was impossible, his social studies teacher had said, to lead a productive life.

He'd flicked to another slide on the smartboard. Streets in rubble, windows smashed. A tank in the middle of Wall Street. Smoke rising in an orange haze beneath the St. Louis Arch.

That, young ladies and gentlemen, is why you are fortunate to be living in an age where PACT has made disruptive protests a thing of the past.

And it's true, for most of Bird's life disruptions have been vanishingly rare. PACT has been the law for over a decade, passed with overwhelming majorities in both House and Senate, signed by the president in record time. Poll after poll still shows huge public support.

Except: over the past few months, strange things have been happening all over—not strikes and marches and riots like the disruptions they've learned about in class, but something new. Weird and apparently pointless stunts, too bizarre not to report, all of them anonymous, all of them aimed at PACT itself. In Memphis, ski-masked figures emptied a dump truck of ping-pong

balls into the river and fled, leaving a plume of white orbs in their wake. A miniature red heart drawn on each, above the words END PACT. Just last week, two drones had unfurled a banner across the Brooklyn Bridge, arch to arch. FUCK PACT, it read. Within thirty minutes, the state police had closed the bridge, rolled a cherry picker to the support towers, and taken it down—but Bird has seen the photos, snapped on phones and unleashed online; all the news stations and sites had run them, and even some papers, too. The big banner with bold black lettering, and beneath it, a splotchy red heart like a splash of blood.

In New York, traffic had snarled for hours with the bridge closed: people had posted videos showing long lines of cars, a chain of red lights stretching into the night. We didn't get home until midnight, one driver told reporters. Under his eyes, dark rings bloomed like smudges of smoke. We were basically held hostage, he said, and no one knew what was going on—I mean, it was like terrorism. News reports calculated the gasoline wasted, the carbon monoxide released, the economic cost of those lost hours. Rumor had it that people were still finding ping-pong balls floating in the Mississippi; Memphis police released a photograph of a duck they said had choked, gullet bulging with tumor-like lumps.

Absolutely unacceptable behavior, his social studies teacher had sniffed. If any of you ever get wind of someone planning disruptions like these, it's your civic duty under PACT to report it to the authorities.

They'd gotten an impromptu lecture and an extra assignment: *Write a five-paragraph essay explaining how recent disturbances to the peace have endangered public safety for all.* Bird's hand had curled and cramped.

And here is a disruption right outside the dining hall. Bird is equally terrified and fascinated. What is it: An attack? A riot? A bomb?

From across the table, his father takes his hand. Something he did often when Bird was still small, something he almost never does anymore now that Bird is older, something Bird—secretly—misses. His father's hand is soft and uncalloused, the hand of a man who works with his mind. His fingers wrap warm and strong around Bird's, gently stilling them.

You know where it comes from? his father says. *Dis-* means *apart*. Like *dis*turb, *dis*tend, *dis*member.

His father's oldest habit: taking words apart like old clocks to show the gears still ticking inside. He is trying to calm Bird, as if telling a bedtime story. To distract him, maybe even to distract himself.

Plus *rupt*: to break. As in e*rupt*, to break out; inter*rupt*, to break between; ab*rupt*, broken from.

His father's voice rises half an octave in his excitement, a guitar string coming into tune. So *disruption,* he says, really means *breaking apart*. Smashing to pieces.

Bird thinks of train tracks uprooted, highways barricaded, buildings crumbling. He thinks of the photos they've been shown in school, protesters hurling rocks, riot officers crouched behind a wall of shields. From outside they hear indistinct screeches from police radios, voices swelling in and out of range. Around them, the students bend over their phones, looking for explanations, posting updates.

It's okay, Noah, his father says. It'll all be over soon. There's nothing to be afraid of.

I'm not afraid, Bird says. And he isn't, exactly. It isn't fear that spiderwebs across his skin. It's like the charge in the air before a storm, some immense and shocking potential.

About twenty minutes later another megaphone announcement crackles through the drawn curtains and the double panes of glass. *It is safe to resume normal activities. Please alert authorities to any further suspicious activity.*

Around them, the students begin to trickle away, depositing their trays at the wash station and hurrying off to their dorm rooms, complaining about the delay. It is past eight thirty, and everyone suddenly has somewhere else they wish to be. As Bird and his father gather their things, Peggy begins to open the curtains again, revealing the darkened street. Behind her, other dining-hall workers dart from table to table with dishcloths and spray bottles of cleaner; another shoves a push broom hastily across the tiles, collecting spilled cereal and scattered bread crumbs.

I'll get those for you, Peggy, Bird's father says, and Peggy gives him a grateful nod.

You take care, Mr. Gardner, Peggy says, as she hurries back into the kitchen. Bird fidgets, waiting, until his father has reopened each set of curtains, and they can head home again.

Outside the air is brisk and still. All the police cars have gone, and all the people, too; the block is deserted. He looks for signs of the disruption—craters, scorched buildings, broken glass. Nothing. Then, as they cross the street back toward the dorm, Bird sees it on the ground: spray-painted, blood-red against the asphalt, right in the center of the intersection. The size of a car, impossible to miss. A heart, he realizes, just like the banner in Brooklyn. And circling it this time, a ring of words. *BRING BACK OUR MISSING HEARTS.*

A tingle snakes over his skin.

As they cross, he slows, reading the letters again. *OUR MISSING HEARTS.* The half-dried paint sticks to the soles of his sneakers; his breath sticks, hot, in his throat. He glances at his father, searching for a glimmer of recognition. But his father tugs him by the arm. Pulling him away, not even looking down. Not meeting Bird's eye.

Getting late, his father says. Better head in.

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She'd been a poet, his mother.

A famous one, Sadie had added, and he'd shrugged. Was there such a thing?

Are you kidding, Sadie said, everyone's heard of Margaret Miu.

She considered.

Well, she said, they've heard her poem, at least.

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At first it had just been a phrase, like any other.

Not long after his mother left, Bird had found a slip of paper on the bus, thin as a dead butterfly's wing, in the gap between seat and wall. One of dozens. His father snatched it from his hand and crumpled it, tossed it to the floor.

Don't pick up garbage, Noah, he said.

But Bird had already read the words at the top: *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS.*

A phrase he'd never heard before but that sprang up elsewhere in the months, then years, after his mother had gone. Graffitied in the bike tunnel, on the wall of the basketball court, on the plywood around a long-stalled construction site. *DON'T FORGET OUR MISSING HEARTS.* Scrawled across the neighborhood-watch posters with a fat-bladed brush: *WHERE ARE OUR MISSING HEARTS?* And on pamphlets, appearing overnight one memorable morning: pinned under the wipers of parked cars, scattered on the sidewalk, caught against the concrete feet of lampposts. Palm-sized, xeroxed handbills reading simply this: *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS.*

The next day, the graffiti was painted over, the posters replaced, the pamphlets swept away like dead leaves. Everything so clean he might have imagined it all.

It didn't mean anything to him then.

It's an anti-PACT slogan, his father said curtly, when Bird asked. From people who want to overturn PACT. Crazy people, he'd added. Real lunatics.

You'd have to be a lunatic, Bird had agreed, to overturn PACT. PACT had helped end the Crisis; PACT kept things peaceful and safe. Even kindergarteners knew that. PACT was common sense, really: If you acted unpatriotic, there would be consequences. If you didn't, then what were you worried about? And if you saw or heard of something unpatriotic, it was your duty to let the authorities know. He has never known a world without PACT; it is as axiomatic as gravity, or *Thou shalt not kill.* He didn't understand why anyone would oppose it, what any of this had to do with hearts, how a heart could be missing. How could you survive without your heart beating inside you?

It made no sense until he met Sadie. Who'd been removed from her home and re-placed, because her parents had protested PACT.

Didn't you know? she'd said. What the *consequences* were? Bird. Come *on.*

She tapped the worksheet they'd been given as homework: The Three Pillars of PACT. *Outlaws promotion of un-American values and behavior. Requires all citizens to report potential threats to our society.* And there, beneath Sadie's finger: *Protects children from environments espousing harmful views.*

Even then, he hadn't wanted to believe it. Maybe there were a few PACT removals, but they couldn't happen much—or why did no one talk about it? Sure, every now and then, you heard of a case like Sadie, but surely those were exceptions. If it happened, you really must have done something dangerous, your kid *needed* to be protected—from you, and whatever you were doing or saying. What's next, some people said, you think molesters and child-beaters deserve to keep their kids, too?

He'd said this to Sadie, without thinking, and she went silent. Then she wadded up her sandwich in a ball of tuna and mayonnaise and smashed it into his face. By the time he wiped his eyes clear, she was gone, and all afternoon, the stink of fish clung to his hair and skin.

A few days later Sadie had pulled something from her backpack.

Look, she'd said. The first words she'd spoken to him since. Bird, look what I found.

A newspaper, corners tattered, ink smudged to gray. Almost two years old already. And there, just below the fold, a headline: LOCAL POET TIED TO INSURRECTIONS. His mother's photo, a dimple hovering at the edge of her smile. Around him, the world went hazy and gray.

Where did you get this, he asked, and Sadie shrugged.

At the library.

> *It's become the rallying cry at anti-PACT riots across the nation, but its roots are here—terrifyingly close to home. The phrase increasingly being used to attack the widely supported national security law is the brainchild of local woman Margaret Miu, pulled from her book of poems* Our Missing Hearts. *Miu, who is the child of Chinese immigrants and has a young son—*

The words wobbled out of focus then.

You know what this means, Bird, Sadie said. She raised herself onto her toes, the way she always did when excited. Your mom—

He did know, then. Why she'd left them. Why they never spoke about her.

She's one of them, Sadie said. She's out there somewhere. Organizing protests. Fighting PACT. Working to overturn it and bring kids home. Just like my parents.

Her eyes darkened and took on a far-off gleam. As if she were gazing right through Bird to something revelatory just beyond.

Maybe they're together, out there, she said.

Bird had thought it was just one of Sadie's wishful fantasies. His mother, the ringleader of all this? Improbable, if not impossible. Yet there were her words, emblazoned on all those signs and banners to overthrow PACT, all over the country.

What the news calls people who protest PACT: *Seditious subversives. Traitorous Chinese sympathizers. Tumors on American society.* Words he'd had to look up in his father's dictionary, back then, alongside *excise* and *eradicate.*

Every time they spotted his mother's words—in news reports, on someone's phone—Sadie elbowed Bird as if they'd sighted a celebrity. Evidence of his mother, out there, elsewhere, so worried about somebody else's children though she'd left her own behind. The irony of it leached into his veins.

Now it is no longer elsewhere. Here are his mother's words, streaked across his street in blood-red. Her letter upstairs, in his pillow. The same splash of red heart from the Brooklyn Bridge, there on the pavement at his feet. He glances over his shoulder, scanning the dark corners of the courtyard, not sure if the coldness in his throat is hope or dread, if he wants to run into her arms or drag her from her hiding place into the light. But there is no one there, and his father tugs his arm, and he follows his father inside and up the stairs.

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Back in the dorm, sweaty and tired from their climb, his father peels off his coat and hangs it on its peg. Bird settles down to finish his homework, but his mind buzzes, unruly. He glances at the window toward the courtyard below, but all he can see is their own shabby apartment reflected in the glass. In front of him, his half-finished essay trails into blank white space.

Dad, he says.

Across the room, his father looks up from his book. He is reading a dictionary, leafing idly from page to page: an old habit Bird finds both peculiar and endearing. Long ago his parents would spend evenings like this, on the couch with their books, and sometimes Bird would drape himself over his father's shoulder, then his mother's, sounding out the longest words he could find. These days, the dictionaries are the only books in the apartment, the only books they'd kept when they moved. From his father's eyes Bird can see he was centuries away, wandering the zigzagging past of some archaic word. He regrets having to call him back from that peaceful golden place. But he has to know.

You haven't—he clears his throat—you haven't heard from her, have you?

For a moment his father's face goes very still. Though Bird hasn't spoken her name, he doesn't need to: both of them know who he means. There is only one *her*, for them. Then his father shuts the dictionary with a thump.

Of course not, he says, and comes to stand at Bird's elbow. Looming over him. He sets a hand on Bird's shoulder.

She is not a part of your life anymore. As far as we're concerned, she doesn't exist. Do you understand, Noah? Tell me you understand.

Bird knows exactly what he should say—*Of course, I understand*—but the words clog in his throat. But she is, he wants to say. She does, I don't, she has something to say, she has something to tell *me*, this is a loose end that needs to be tied off—or unraveled. In this moment of hesitation his father glances over Bird's shoulder at the unfinished essay on the table.

Let me see, he says.

His father hasn't been a professor for years but he can't stop himself from trying to teach. His brain is like a big dog penned in his skull, restless and pacing, aching for a run. Already he's leaning over Bird's homework, tugging the paper from the crook of Bird's arm.

I'm not done yet, Bird protests, and bites the eraser end of his pencil. Graphite and rubber flake onto his tongue. His father shakes his head.

This needs to be much clearer, he says. Look—here, where you say *PACT is very important for national security.* You need to be much more specific, much more forceful: *PACT is a crucial part of keeping America safe from being undermined by foreign influences.*

With one finger he traces a line, smudging Bird's cursive.

Or here. You need to show your teacher you really get this—there should be absolutely no question you understand. *PACT protects innocent children from being indoctrinated with false, subversive, un-American ideas by unfit and unpatriotic parents.*

He taps the paper.

Go on, he says, jabbing at the loose-leaf. Write that down.

Bird stares back at his father with set jaw and angry, liquid eyes. They have never been like this before: two flinty stones striking off sparks.

Do it, his father says, and Bird does, and his father lets out a deep breath and retreats into the bedroom, dictionary in hand.

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After he's finished his homework and brushed his teeth, Bird turns out the lights in the apartment and slips behind the curtains. From here he can see across the street to the dining hall, closed now, lit only by the faint red glow of the exit signs inside. As he watches, a truck pulls to the curb and flicks off its headlights. The shadowy figure of a man gets out, carries something to the center of the road, begins to work. It takes Bird a minute to understand what's happening: the something is a bucket of paint and a large roller brush. He is painting over the heart, and by morning it will be gone.

Noah, his father says from the doorway. Time for bed.

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That night, while his father snores faintly beneath him, Bird worms a hand into his pillowcase, feeling for the faint edges of the envelope. Carefully he slips out the letter, flattens it out. He keeps a penlight in the top bunk so he can read while his father is sleeping, and he clicks it on.

In the watery light the cats are a tangle of angles and curves. A secret message? A code? Letters in their stripes, perhaps, in the points of their ears or the bends of their tails? He turns the letter this way and that, traces the ballpoint lines with the beam. On a tabby he thinks he spots an *M*; the arched leg of a black cat looks like an *S*, or maybe an *N*. But he can't be certain.

He's about to tuck the letter away when he sees it, the little circle of light bringing it into crisp focus like a magnifying glass. Down in the corner, where a page number would be: a rectangle, the size of his pinky fingernail. Inside it another rectangle, a bit smaller. The cats, of course, ignore it; unless you looked closely, you would miss it between them. But it catches Bird's attention. What is it? A framed picture of nothing, perhaps. An old-fashioned television set, screen blank. A window with a flat plane of glass.

He studies it. A dot on one side, two tiny hinges on the other. A door. A door on a box, a cabinet shut up tight. A faint breeze flutters a page in the back corner of his brain, then settles again. A story his mother told him, long ago. She'd always been telling him stories—fairy tales, fables, legends, myths: a rainbow of different, beautiful lies. But now, seeing the picture, it's familiar. Cats, and a cabinet, and a boy. He can't quite remember it, but he knows it is there. How did it go?

Once upon a time. Once upon a time there was—a boy who loved cats.

He waits, hoping for his mother's voice to come back to him, to fill in the rest of the story. A ball given a shove downhill. But there's only the whispery sound of his father breathing. He can't remember what his mother's voice sounds like. The voice he hears in his head is his own.

After science, his classmates jostle off to the cafeteria for lunch, eager to buy their corn dogs and chocolate milk, to jockey for seats at the best tables. Bird has never liked eating there, all those whispers. For years he took the table in the corner, half hidden in the nook behind the vending machine. Then, near the end of fifth grade, Sadie had arrived, unabashed and unrepentant, elbowing out a space for the two of them. For one glorious year he'd not been alone. The first day they met, she'd grabbed his hand and pulled him outside to the small patch of lawn. Out there, the air was cool and calm and the quiet poured into his ears, magnifying every sound, and as he settled beside her on the grass, he could hear everything, the rustle of the plastic bags they unfurled from their sandwiches, the scrape of Sadie's sneaker against the concrete as she curled her leg beneath her, the murmur of the newly uncurled leaves overhead as the breeze rattled their branches.

The whispers had changed then. There were songs: Noah and Sadie, sitting in a tree.

Kids still sing that? his father had said, when Bird told him about it. That idiotic chant will outlast the apocalypse. When they've burned all the books, that's all we'll have left.

He cut himself off.

Just ignore it. They'll stop.

Then he paused. But don't spend too much time around that Sadie, he said. You don't want people to think you're like her.

Bird had nodded, but after that he and Sadie ate together every day, no matter the weather, huddling together under the overhang when it rained, shivering side by side in the winter slush. After Sadie disappeared, he hadn't returned to the cafeteria but went back to their spot each day. He'd learned, by then: sometimes being alone was the less bad option.

Today, instead of going outside, he lingers in the science classroom, pretending to rummage in his bookbag, until everyone else has gone. At her desk, Mrs. Pollard stacks her papers in an orderly sheaf, gives him an appraising look.

Did you need something, Noah? she asks. From a drawer she removes a brown paper sack, neatly crimped: her own lunch. On the wall behind her, a row of colorful posters beam. IN THIS TOGETHER, one reads, a chain of red, white, and blue paper dolls stretched across a map of the United States. *Every good citizen is a good influence*, says another. *Every bad citizen is a bad influence.* And then, of course, there is the flag that hangs in every classroom, dangling just over her left shoulder like a raised axe.

Could I use a computer? Bird says. I wanted to look something up.

He waves toward the table by the far wall, where a half dozen laptops have been placed for student use. Most of his classmates look things up on their phones instead, but Bird's father won't let him have one. Absolutely not, he says, and as a result Bird is one of the few kids he knows who ever use the school computers. Behind them, empty bookshelves. Bird has never seen books on them, but there they stand, fossils of a long-gone era.

Did you know, their teacher explained the year before, that paper books are out of date the instant they're printed?

The beginning-of-year welcome talk. All of them sitting crisscross applesauce on the carpet at her feet.

That's how fast the world changes. And our understanding of it, too.

She snapped her fingers.

We want to make sure you have the most current information. This way we can be sure nothing you use is outdated or inaccurate. You'll find everything you need right here online.

But where did they all go, Sadie insisted. Sadie, still new to the school then, and fearless. The books, she said. There must have been some before, or there wouldn't be shelves. Where did you take them?

The teacher's smile widened, and tightened.

Everyone has storage limitations, she said. So we've culled the books that we felt were unnecessary or unsuitable or out of date. But—

So you banned all those books, Sadie said, and the teacher had blinked twice at her over her glasses.

Oh no, sweetie, she said. People think that sometimes, but no. No one bans anything. Haven't you ever heard of the Bill of Rights?

The class giggled, and Sadie flushed.

Every school makes its own independent judgments, the teacher said. About which books are useful to their students and which books might expose them to dangerous ideas. Let me ask you something: Whose parents want them to spend time with bad people?

She looked around the circle. No one raised a hand.

Of course not. Your parents want you to be safe. That's part of being a good parent. You all know that I'm a mom, too, right?

A general murmur of assent.

Imagine a book that told you lies, the teacher went on. Or one that told you to do bad things, like hurt people, or hurt yourself. Your parents would never put a book like that on your bookshelf at home, would they?

All around the circle, children shook their heads, wide-eyed. Only Sadie's stayed still, her arms folded, her mouth a thin straight line.

Well, it's like that, the teacher said. We all want our children to be safe. We don't want them exposed to bad ideas—ideas that might hurt them, or encourage them to do bad things. To themselves, or to their families, or to our country. So we remove those books and block sites that might be harmful.

She smiled around at all of them.

It's our job as teachers, she said, her voice soft but firm. To take care of all of you, just like I'd take care of my own children. To decide what's worth keeping and what isn't. We just have to decide on these things.

Her gaze came to rest, at last, on Sadie.

We always have, she said. Nothing's changed.

Now, Bird holds his breath as Mrs. Pollard hesitates. It's only a month into seventh grade but he already likes Mrs. Pollard; her daughter, Jenna, is a year behind Bird, and Josh, her boy, is in first. She has gray-blond hair and wears sweaters with pockets and big, round earrings that look like candy. Unlike his social studies teacher, she never stares at him when PACT comes up, and if she hears one of the kids giving him a hard time, she'll say, *Seventh graders, let's focus on the task at hand, please*, with a rap of her knuckles on the desktop.

Is this for class? she asks.

Something in Mrs. Pollard's voice puts Bird on his guard—or maybe it's the way she peers at him, eyes narrowed, as if she knows what he's doing. He wishes he had that confidence in himself. To believe that what he's after is anything more than a wild-goose chase. On her lapel, a tiny flag pin glints in the fluorescent light.

Not exactly, he says. It's just something I'm interested in. About cats, he adds, improvising. My dad and I—we're thinking of getting a cat. I wanted to look up different breeds.

One of Mrs. Pollard's eyebrows lifts ever so slightly.

Well, she says, brightly. A new pet. That's lovely. Let me know if you need help.

She tips her head toward the row of computers, shining and silver, and begins to unwrap her lunch.

Bird seats himself at the computer farthest from her desk. On each, a small brass plaque reads: *A gift from the Lieu family.* Two years ago Ronny Lieu's family had purchased them for every classroom, upgraded the whole school to high-speed internet. Just part of giving back to society, Mr. Lieu had said at the unveiling ceremony. He was a businessman—some kind of real estate—and the principal had thanked him for this generous gift, said how grateful they were to private citizens for stepping in where the city budget still fell short. He'd praised the Lieus for being such loyal members of the community. It was the same year Arthur Tran's parents had donated money to renovate the cafeteria and Janey Youn's father had given the school a new flagpole and flag.

He jiggles the mouse and the screen snaps to life, a photo of Mount Rushmore under cloudless blue. A tap of the browser and a window opens, cursor blinking slow and lazy at its top.

What to type? *Where is my mother.* Is it too much to hope the internet can tell him this?

He pauses. At her desk, Mrs. Pollard scrolls on her phone as she nibbles her sandwich. Peanut butter, by the smell. Outside, a brown leaf drifts from treetop to pavement.

Story about boy with many cats, he types, and words flood the screen.

The Black Cat (short story). List of Fictional Cats in Literature. He clicks one link after another, waiting for something familiar, that jolt of recognition. *The Cat in the Hat. The Tale of Tom Kitten. Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.* Nothing he recognizes. Gradually he wanders farther and farther afield. *Amazing and True Cat Stories. Five Heroic Cats in History. Care and Feeding of Your New Cat.* All these stories about cats, and none of them his mother's. He must have imagined it. But still he digs.

Finally, when he is too tired to resist, he pecks out one more search, one he has never dared to try before.

Margaret Miu.

There's a pause, then an error message pops up. *No results*, it says. Somehow he feels her absence more, as if he's called out for her and she hasn't come. He peeks over his shoulder. Mrs. Pollard has finished her lunch and is grading worksheets, ticking check marks down the margins, and he clicks the back button.

Our missing hearts, he types, and the page stills for a moment. *No results.* This time, no matter how many times he clicks, it won't reset.

Mrs. Pollard, he says, approaching the desk. I think my computer froze.

Don't worry, dear, she says, we'll fix it. She rises and follows him back to the terminal, but when she sees his screen, the search at the top, something in her face shifts. A tenseness in her that Bird can feel even over his shoulder.

Noah, she says after a moment. You're twelve?

Bird nods.

Mrs. Pollard squats down beside his chair so they are eye to eye.

Noah, she says. This country is founded on the belief that every person gets to decide how to live his own life. You know that, right?

To Bird, this seems like one of the things adults say that do not require answers, and he says nothing.

Noah, Mrs. Pollard says again, and the way she keeps saying his name—which is not his name, of course—makes him clench his teeth so tightly they squeak. Noah, honey, listen to me,

please. In this country we believe that every generation can make better choices than the one that came before. Right? Everyone gets the same chance to prove themselves, to show us who they are. We don't hold the mistakes of parents against their children.

She looks at him through bright, anxious eyes.

Everyone has a choice, Noah, about whether they're going to make the same mistakes as the people who came before them, or whether they're going to take a different path. A better path. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Bird nods, though he's fairly sure he doesn't.

I'm saying this for your own good, Noah, I really am, Mrs. Pollard says. Her voice softens. You're a good kid and I don't want anything to happen to you and this is what I'd tell Jenna and Josh, truly. Don't make trouble. Just—do your best and follow the rules. Don't stir things up. For your dad's sake, if not your own.

She rises to her feet, and Bird understands that they're finished here.

Thank you, he manages to say.

Mrs. Pollard nods, satisfied.

If you decide on a cat, be sure to find a good breeder, she says as he heads into the hall. Adopting a stray—who knows what you'll get.

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A waste of time, he thinks. All afternoon, through English and math, he berates himself. On top of it all, his lunch is still in his bag, uneaten, and his stomach rumbles. In social studies, his mind wanders and the teacher calls him sharply to attention.

Mr. Gardner, he says. I would think you, of all people, would want to pay attention to this.

With a blunt nub of chalk he taps the board, leaving white flecks beneath the letters: WHAT IS SEDITION?

Across the aisle Carolyn Moss and Kat Angelini glance at him sideways, and when the teacher turns back to the chalkboard, Andy Moore throws a ball of wadded-up paper at Bird's head. What does it matter, Bird thinks. Whatever this cat story is, it has nothing to do with him, nothing useful or purposeful. Just a story, like everything his mother had told him. A pointless fairy tale. If he even remembers right, if there was even a story like that at all.

• • •

He's on his way home when he sees it. First the crowd, then a cluster of navy uniforms in the center of the Common—then a second later, all he can see are the trees. Red, red, red, from roots to branches, as if they've been dangled and dipped. The color of cardinals, of traffic signs, of cherry lollipops. Three maples standing close, arms outstretched. And strung between their branches, woven between the dying leaves: a huge red web, hanging in the air like a haze of blood.

He's supposed to walk straight home, to stay on the route his father has prescribed: cutting across the wide courtyard between the university's lab buildings, then through the college yard with its red brick dorms. Staying off the streets as much as possible, staying on university land as much as he can. It's safer, his father insists. When he was younger, he'd walked Bird to and from school every day. Don't try to take shortcuts, Noah, his father always says, just listen to me. Promise me, he'd said, when Bird began walking to school alone, and Bird had promised.

Now Bird breaks his word. He darts across the street to the Common, where a small group of onlookers has gathered.

From here he can see it more clearly. What he'd thought was red paint is yarn, a giant red doily fitted round each tree, all the way up the branches in a tight red glove. The web, too, is yarn, chains of red stretching twig to twig, crisscrossing, thickening in some places to clots, thinning in others to a single thread. Knotted in the strands, like snared insects: knit dolls the size of his finger, brown and tan and beige, fringes of dark yarn framing their faces. Around him passersby whisper and point, and Bird edges closer, into the crowd.

It frightens him, this thing. A monster's knitting. A scarlet tangle. It makes him feel small and vulnerable and exposed. But it fascinates him too, pulling him closer. The way a snake holds you with its eyes even as it draws back to strike.

A group of police officers clusters around the trees in intense conversation, prodding the yarn with their fingers. Discussing the best way to take it all down. It's too late: already passersby are slipping phones from pockets and bags, quietly snapping photos without breaking stride. They will be texted and posted everywhere soon. Beneath the trees, the officers circle the trunks, pistols dangling at their hips. One of them pushes his visor back up over his head; another sets his plexiglass shield down on the grass. They are equipped for violence, but not for this.

Clear out, folks, one of the policemen booms, stepping between the crowd and the trees as if he can hide this strange spectacle with his body. He draws his nightstick, thwaps it against one palm. Active crime scene, here. Move along, all of you. This is an unlawful gathering.

Overhead, the breeze flutters and the dolls bob and sway. Bird gazes up at them, the dark shapes they make against the innocent blue sky. Around him, the onlookers drift obediently away, the crowd thinning, and it is then that he spots it, stenciled on the pavement in white: *HOW MANY MORE MISSING HEARTS WILL THEY TAKE?* Beside it a red blotch—no, a heart.

He knows it is improbable—impossible—but he looks anyway. Over his shoulder, all around him, as if she might be lurking behind a tree or a bush. Hoping for her face in the shadows. But of course, there's no one there.

Let's go, son, the policeman says to him, and Bird realizes the crowd has dispersed, that he's the only one left. He ducks his head—*sorry*—and retreats, and the policeman turns back to his fellow officers. Cruisers, lights flashing, block the street at either end, directing traffic away. Cordoning off the park.

Bird crosses the street but loiters, watching surreptitiously from behind a parked car. Had his mother knitted? He doesn't think so. Anyway, surely one person could not have done this alone: the yarn, the web, the dolls wobbling like overripe fruit, all knitted into place, as if they've sprung fungus-like from the tree itself. How did they put this in place, he wonders, even as he is unsure who *they* might be. Through the windows of the car he can see the policemen debating how to handle this unusual situation. One of them worms his fingers into the web and yanks, and a thin branch snaps with a crack like a gunshot. A single long loop of yarn billows down, unraveling inch by inch. Something inside Bird cracks and unravels too, at the sight of something so delicate and intricate, destroyed. The dolls tremble, trapped in their red net. His skin feels too small for his thoughts.

Then one of the policemen produces a box cutter, begins to saw his way through the knitting from top to bottom, and yarn falls away in a waterfall of snippets. Another arrives with a ladder, climbs into the branches, pulls down the first doll and tosses it to the ground. Not dolls, Bird thinks suddenly: children. The big heads and snub limbs and dark hair. They had eyes but no mouths, just two buttons on a blank face, and as the small body tumbles down into the mud below, Bird turns away, stomach roiling. He can't bear to watch.

• • •

He'd thought Sadie had been an exception. *PACT-related re-placements remain extremely rare.*

Well, they aren't, Sadie said.

But how many, he'd asked once. Ten? Twenty? Hundreds?

Sadie eyed him, hands on hips. Bird, she said, with infuriating pity, you don't understand anything, do you?

• • •

People didn't like to talk about it, liked to hear about it even less: that the patriotism of PACT was laced with a threat. But some had tried to say what was happening, to explain it to others, and to themselves. Sadie's mother had been one of them. There is footage of her, on a tidy tree-lined street in Baltimore. It could be any street in America except that it is deserted: no cars, no people walking their dogs or out for a stroll, just Sadie's mother in a yellow blazer, the black foam bulb of her Channel 5 mic held to her mouth.

Yesterday morning, she says, *on this quiet street, Family Services officers arrived at the home of Sonia Lee Chun and took custody of her four-year-old son, David. The reason? A recent post by Sonia on social media, arguing that PACT was being used to target members of the Asian American community.*

Behind her a pair of police cars pull up—lights off, ominously silent—and park, blocking the street. You can see them at a distance, the four officers emerging from the barricade of cars and approaching slowly, a push broom relentlessly sweeping the pavement clean. The camera is steady, and so is her voice. *We seem to have attracted some police presence. Officer, we are with Channel 5, here is my press badge, we—* Muffled cross-talk and then, to the camera, she says, imperturbably calm: *They are arresting me.* As if she is reporting on things happening to someone else.

The police seize her microphone. Her lips keep moving, but now there is no sound. As one officer pulls her arms back to cuff her, another approaches the camera, hand on holster, his mouth barking silent commands. The unseen cameraman sets his camera on the ground and the horizon tips sideways, a plumb line from sky to earth. As they are led away, the camera—still rolling—catches only their feet, retreating upward, off, then gone.

Bird has seen this video because Sadie kept a copy of it on her phone. Technically it is incriminating evidence—it shows her mother *espousing, promoting, or endorsing unpatriotic activity in private or in public*—but Sadie had managed to get a copy somehow and doggedly transferred it, over the years, from phone to phone. On the dumbed-down smartphone her foster parents have granted her—my leash, she says, sarcastically: so that they can always reach her, so that they can track her by GPS if need be—she hides it in a folder labeled *Games.* Sometimes Bird would find her crouched in the corner of the playground, or under the structure in the cubby where the younger kids played house. Over and over on the screen, her mother. Calm in the chaos around her. Slowly walking off into the sky.

It was the first time she'd been arrested, Sadie said, but it had only made her braver. After that she'd gone looking for other families whose children had been taken under PACT, trying to convince them to speak with her on-camera. Trying to trace where the children had been taken. Trying to film a PACT re-placement in action, pulling on her contacts in Family Services, in the mayor's office, anyone with a lead on who might be next.

Soon after, Sadie's mother got an email from her boss, Michelle: coffee, that weekend. Just a friendly chat. Unofficial. Off the record. Michelle stopped by, two takeout cups in hand, and

they sipped them at the kitchen table. Out in the hallway Sadie lurked, unnoticed. She was eleven.

I'm worried, Erika, Michelle said over a flat white, about *repercussions.*

A reporter over at WMAR had recently been fined for saying that PACT encouraged discrimination against those of Asian descent; his story, the state insisted, drummed up sympathy for people who might be dangerous to public stability. The station had paid it, almost a quarter of their yearly budget. In Annapolis, another station had had its license revoked. By coincidence, surely, it also had run a number of segments critical of PACT.

I'm a journalist, Sadie's mother had said. Reporting on these things is my job.

We're a small station, Michelle said. The bottom line is, with budget cuts we're basically at bare-bones operation as it is. And if our funders pulled out . . .

She stopped, and Sadie's mother twisted the sleeve of her paper cup around and around.

Are they threatening to? she asked, and Michelle replied, Two already have. But it's not just that. It's the repercussions for you, Erika. For your family.

They'd known each other for years, these two women: one Black, one white. Barbecues and picnics together, holiday gatherings. Michelle had no children, had never married. This station is my baby, she always said. When Sadie was born, Michelle had knitted her a yellow sweater and booties to match; over the years she'd taken Sadie on outings to the zoo and the aquarium and Fort Henry. Auntie Shellie, Sadie called her.

I'm hearing things, Michelle said. Really scary things. It's not just PAOs and protesters who need to worry about PACT, Erika. It might be best if we assigned you a different beat for a while. Something less political.

What beat would be less political, Sadie's mother asked.

I just don't want anything to happen to you, if you keep pushing this, Michelle said. Or to Lev. And most of all Sadie.

Sadie's mother took a long, slow sip. The coffee had gone cold.

What makes you think, she said finally, that any of us will be safe if I don't?

It was just a few weeks later that they'd come for Sadie.

• • •

They came at night: that's what Sadie said. After dinnertime. She'd just taken a shower and was swathed in a towel when the doorbell rang. Her mother was combing Sadie's hair, which was thick and curly and prone to tangles, and downstairs they heard her father, shouting. Then the voices of strangers—a man, two men. Sadie's mother had lifted a section of hair in one hand and gently worked the comb through it, and this is what Sadie remembered most clearly: a stray drop of water trickling down the back of her neck, her mother's steady hand as she coaxed out the knots.

She didn't shake, Sadie said, her voice proud. Not one tiny bit.

Maybe she didn't know what was happening, Bird said.

Sadie shook her head.

She knew, she said.

Her mother wrapped her arms around her, pressed her lips to Sadie's forehead. Sadie hadn't understood, yet, what was going on, but dread seeped into her like a chill against her damp skin. She leaned against her mother, burrowed her face into the soft crook of her mother's neck so hard she couldn't breathe.

Don't forget us, okay? her mother had said, and Sadie was still confused when the bathroom door opened. A man, in a police uniform. Sadie's father was still shouting downstairs.

There were four officers, it turned out. Two stayed with her father downstairs and one stayed with her mother upstairs and one stood guard outside Sadie's room while she got dressed. Unsure what to do, she'd put on her rainbow-striped pajamas, as if she were simply going to bed like any other day. Let her go back and change, her mother had said, when Sadie came out into the hallway, at least let me braid her hair. But the man in the hallway shook his head.

From now on, he said, she's not your responsibility anymore.

He put his hand on Sadie's shoulder and steered her down the stairs, and Sadie understood that something terrible was happening but was positive, at the same time, that it could not be real. She'd tried to look back at her mother for a clue—if she should scream or fight or run or obey—but all she could see was the broad blue chest of the officer behind her, blocking everything but a sliver of her mother's arm from view. And so she remembered what her mother had always taught her: be extra careful around policemen, say please and thank you and ma'am and sir. Whatever you do, don't make them angry. They'd shuttled her into a big black car, and the policeman had buckled her into the back seat, and she'd said: *Thank you*. After they'd driven away, after they'd taken her to the station, then the airport, then a foster home, after she'd realized she wasn't going home again, she'd regretted that thank-you, she'd regretted going so quietly.

• • •

Her first foster parents had wanted to rename her. A new name for a new start, they'd suggested, but she'd flat-out refused.

My name is Sadie, she said.

For two weeks they'd tried to convince her, but eventually they'd given in.

So many new things for her in those early days. Some—new family, new house, new city, new life—she could not fight, so she resisted in the few places she could. On the way to school, she'd stopped on the front step and stripped off the flounced, flowered dress they'd given her, left it on the lawn, walked the rest of the way in her underwear. A phone call from the principal; a stern lecture from her foster parents. The next morning she did it again. You see, everyone said. What kind of parents—? She's practically a savage.

Her second foster mother tried to untangle the dense cloud of her hair. We'll have to have it relaxed, she said, despairing, and that night, after everyone was asleep, Sadie snuck downstairs for the kitchen shears. From then on she kept it clipped to a curly halo around her head. I don't know what to do with her, this foster mother said once to a friend, when she thought Sadie couldn't hear. It's like she takes no pride *at all* in her appearance.

They were kind people who thought they meant well. They'd been government-selected as fit parents, certified as people of *good moral character* who could teach good patriotic values.

There's something wrong with her, Sadie heard her latest foster mother say into the telephone: the weekly check-in with the social worker, pumping for evidence that Sadie would need to stay. She hasn't cried once, all the time she's been here. I even sat outside her room and listened all night. She doesn't cry at all. Now tell me, what kind of child goes through all this and doesn't even cry? Yes. That's what I think, too. What kind of parents she must have had, to make her so cold and unfeeling.

She'd sighed. We're doing what we can, she said. We'll try to repair the damage that's already been done.

A few weeks later, a letter, which Sadie had found in her foster mother's desk: *In light of severe emotional scarring inflicted by child's previous domestic situation, recommend permanent removal. Permanent custody granted to foster parents.*

And it was true, Sadie never cried. A few times she'd given Bird letters to her old address, scribbled on notepaper, but the last had come back stamped RECIPIENT UNKNOWN. Even then, Bird had not seen her cry.

Sometimes, though, when he saw her squatting in the corner of the playground, head leaning against the chain-link fence, he turned away, so she wouldn't have to pretend to be brave. To let her be alone with her grief, or whatever heavier thing she'd put on top to hold it down.

• • •

She'd suggested they run away, last May.

We'll go and we'll find them, she said.

Sadie, he knew, had run away before, though they'd caught her every time. This time, she insisted, she would make it. She had just turned thirteen—basically an adult, she insisted.

Come with me, Bird, she'd said. I'm sure we can find them.

Them was her parents and his mother. Her certainty that they were still out there, findable and maybe even together, was unshakable. A comfortable, beautiful fairy tale.

They'll catch you, he said.

No, they won't, Sadie snapped. I'm going to—

But he'd cut her off. Don't tell me, he said. I don't want to know. In case they ask me where you've gone.

He'd watched her on the next swing, pumping and pumping her legs, hard, harder, until her feet cleared the top bar and the chain went slack and bucked beneath her. Then Sadie let out a whoop and catapulted herself free, leaping into the air, into nothing. When he'd been small, he'd loved leaping from the swings that way, swooping into his mother's waiting arms. Sadie hadn't even done anything, Bird thought, she didn't deserve any of it, and he hated her parents for doing this to her. Why didn't they stop, that first time, how could they have been so irresponsible? Sadie sat up and looked back at him from where she'd landed in a tumbled heap in the grass. She wasn't hurt. She was laughing.

Jump, Bird, she cried, but he didn't, just let the swing slow until the toes of his sneakers dragged in the gravel, leaving grubby gray scratches on the canvas.

• • •

He thinks about her now: Sadie, poised in midair, arms flung wide, slicing across the sky. After she'd disappeared, no one seemed to know where she'd gone; his classmates and even his teachers simply went on as if she'd never existed. As he stands there, he knows the photos from the Common are already beginning to appear online, the trees holding up little figures in their fingers, raising them to the light. A thousand little Sadies silhouetted against the blue.

The next morning, walking to school, he sees the real trees: stripped bare to rough bark again. As if nothing had ever been there at all. Yet there is the sharp bright gash running down each trunk like a scar; there are the broken spots where the web, roughly yanked, has dragged the branches away. There, in the mud, a single strand of red yarn left behind. Something happened here, and he is determined to find out what, and thinking of Sadie, suddenly he has an idea of where to begin.

After school he is supposed to come straight home. Stay in the apartment, his father says. And do your homework. But today he does not follow the path. He turns onto Broadway, follows it out toward the high school, where he'll have to go in a few years, toward the big public library beside it, where he has never been.

From *liber,* his father has told him. Books. Which comes from the word meaning *the inner bark of trees*, which comes from the word for *to strip*, *to peel.* Early peoples pulled off the thin strips for writing material, of course.

A fall walk, once. His father's hands had brushed the flaking birch bark, rising paper-white in curls from the slender trunk.

But I like to think of it as peeling back layers. Revealing layers of meaning.

In the science museum, long ago: a giant slice of tree trunk, taller than his father. Rings of caramel against cream-colored wood. They'd counted the rings, bark to core, then back out again. His father's finger tracing the grain. This is when the tree was planted, when George Washington was a boy. This is the Civil War, World War I, World War II. This is when his father was born. This is when everything fell apart.

You see? his father said. They carry their histories inside them. Peel back enough layers and they explain everything.

It's like a castle, Sadie had told him. She'd visited the library daily, a stolen five minutes on the way home from school. Half jogging to get there as fast as she could, sprinting to get home on time after lingering as long as she dared. Sadie, I think you need to start showering more often, her foster mother would say when she arrived home sweaty and rumpled. You'll get caught, Bird warned, but Sadie was unmoved. Her parents had read to her every night and where stories were grit in Bird's memories, in Sadie's they were a rich balm. A castle, she insisted to Bird, her voice swollen with awe. He had rolled his eyes, but now he sees it is more or less true: the library is a huge sandstone building with arches and a turret, though a newer glass wing has been added on, all sharp angles and sparkling panes, and because of this, as he climbs the steps, he feels that he is somehow entering both the past and the future at once.

He's seldom around so many books, and for a moment it is dizzying. Shelves and shelves. So many you could get lost. At the front desk, the librarian—a dark-haired woman in a pink sweater—glances his way. She sizes him up over the tops of her glasses, as if she knows he doesn't belong, and Bird quickly sidles away into the aisles, out of view. Up close, he can see that here and there books have been removed, leaving gaps in the rows like missing teeth. But still he senses that there are answers here, caught somewhere between the pages and filed away. All he has to do is find them.

Placards hang at the ends of the shelves, a list of subjects that live down each aisle, perplexingly numbered and inscrutably arranged. Some sections are still lush and thriving: Transportation. Sports. Snakes/Lizards/Fish. Other sections are dry deserts: by the time he gets to the 900s, nearly everything is gone, just rows and rows of skeletal shelving, slicing the sunlight into squares. The few remaining books are small dark spots against all that bare. *The China-Korean Axis and the New Cold War. The Menace at Home. The End of America: China on the Rise.*

As he roams, he notices something else, too: the library is all but deserted. He is the only visitor here. On the second floor sit rows of bare study carrels and long worktables with wooden chairs, all unoccupied. All the way down to the basement, just empty seats and a forlorn sign reading: CHANGED YOUR MIND? PLEASE PLACE UNWANTED BOOKS ON THE CART BELOW. There is no cart anymore, only a bare stretch

of linoleum tile. It is a ghost town, and he, still alive, is intruding in the land of the dead. With one finger he traces an empty shelf, making a clean bright line in the thick fur of dust.

Far downstairs, in the back corner, he finds the poetry section, scans the shelves until he reaches *M.* Christopher Marlowe. Andrew Marvell. Edna St. Vincent Millay. He isn't surprised to find that the shelf jumps straight from Milton to Montagu, but he's sad not to find her name.

Coming here was a mistake, he thinks. This place feels forbidden, the whole undertaking unwise. In his nostrils, the sharp scent of iron and heat. He inches toward the front, where at the desk the librarian sorts through a crate of books with ruthless efficiency. He's afraid to catch her eye again. When she turns around, he thinks, he'll slip out.

Peering through a gap in the shelf, he watches, waiting for an opening. The librarian pulls another book from the blue plastic crate on the desktop, consults a list, makes a check mark. Then—and here Bird is puzzled—she quickly riffles through the book, fanning the pages like a flipbook, before shutting it and placing it on the stack. With the next book, she does the same. Then the next. She's looking for something, Bird realizes, and a few books later she finds it. This time she scans the list once, then again, and sets her pen down. Evidently this book isn't on it. Slowly she flips through the pages, one at a time, pausing finally to extract a small white slip of paper.

From where Bird stands, he can just make out a few lines of handwriting scribbled across it. He leans around the shelf, trying to see more, and it is at this point that the librarian looks up and spots him peeking out.

Swiftly she folds the paper in half, hiding it from view, and marches toward him.

Hey, she says. What are you doing back there? Yes, you. I see you. Up. Stand up.

She jerks him up by one elbow.

How long have you been there, she demands. What are you doing back there?

Up close she's both older and younger than he expected. Long dark brown hair threaded with iron gray. Older, he thinks, than his mother would be. But there's a youthful quality to her, too: a small flash of silver in her pierced nostril; an alertness in her face that reminds him of someone. After a minute, he realizes who. Sadie. The same glinting dare in her eye.

I'm sorry, he says. I'm just—I'm looking for a story. That's all.

The librarian peers at him over her glasses.

A story, she says. You'll have to be more specific.

Bird glances at the maze of shelves around them, the librarian's hand clamped on his arm, her other fist clenched—around what? His face flushes.

I don't know the title, he says. It's a story—someone told me a long time ago. There's a boy, and a lot of cats.

That's all you know?

Now she'll throw him out. Or she'll call the police and have him arrested. As a child, he understands instinctively how arbitrary punishment can be. The librarian's thumb digs harder into the crook of his arm.

Then she half closes her eyes. Thinking.

A boy and a lot of cats, she echoes. Her grip on his arm slackens, then releases. Hmm. There's a picture book called *Millions of Cats*. A man and a woman want the prettiest cat in the world. Hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions of cats. Ring a bell?

It doesn't sound familiar, and Bird shakes his head.

There's a boy in this story, he repeats. A boy, and a cabinet.

A cabinet? The librarian bites her lip. There's a sudden light in her eyes, an alertness to her, as if she is a cat herself, on the hunt with ears pricked and whiskers twitching. Well, there's a

boy in *Sam, Bangs and Moonshine*, she says, but no cabinet, that I can recall. Lots of cats in Beatrix Potter, but no boys. Is it a picture book, or a novel?

I don't know, Bird admits. He has never heard of any of the books the librarian is describing, and it makes him slightly dizzy, all these stories he hadn't even known existed. It's like learning there are new colors he's never seen. I never actually read it, he says. I think it might be a fairy tale. Somebody just told it to me, once.

Hmm.

The librarian pivots on her heel with startling alacrity. Let's take a look, she says, and marches off, discreetly sliding the folded slip of paper into her pocket.

She walks so briskly that he nearly loses her. Shelf by shelf, the world rushes by in microcosm: Customs & Etiquette. Costumes & Fashion. This is a world, he realizes, she knows forward and backward, a map she's traveled so many times she can draw it from memory.

Here we are, she says. Folklore.

Drumming her fingers along the spines, she skims the shelf, appraising and ticking off each book in her mind.

I know there's a story called Cat-skin, she says, pulling down a volume and handing it to Bird. On the cover, gilt letters and a cluster of golden-haired ladies and knights.

And there's one in there called The Cat and Mouse in Partnership, too. Ends how you'd expect. Nothing about a boy, though. Of course there's Puss in Boots, but I don't know that I'd call the miller's son a boy—and there's no cabinet, for sure. And only the one cat.

Before Bird can reply, she's already moved on.

Let's see: Hans Christian Andersen? No, I don't think so. There's an old legend about a cat calming baby Jesus in his cradle—that's sort of like a cabinet. Or maybe it's a myth? There's Freyja and her chariot cats, and of course there's Bastet, but no cabinets or boys. And I don't remember the Greeks saying much about cats.

She rubs her temple with one bony knuckle. It's almost, Bird thinks, as if she's forgotten about him, as if she's talking to herself. Or to the books themselves, as if they're beings of their own who might answer back. To his great relief, she seems to have forgotten about him spying, about the mysterious slip of paper.

You don't remember anything else? she says.

I can't, he says. I mean, I don't.

He looks down at the book of fairy tales in his hands, turns it over. On the back: a slain dragon, borne on a pole, red tongue lolling like a dangling rope. His throat goes hot and sticky, and he closes his eyes and swallows, trying to clear it.

My mother told it to me, he says, a long time ago. It's okay. Never mind.

He turns to go.

You know, I think I remember an old picture book, the librarian says. She lowers her voice. A Japanese folktale.

She pauses a moment, glances at the shelf, then the search terminal at the end of the row.

But it won't be in there.

Then she snaps her fingers, points at him. As if he himself has figured out the answer.

Come with me, she says.

Bird follows her between the shelves to an office marked STAFF ONLY. The librarian lifts a key from her lanyard, unlocks it. The room beyond is full of stacks of books, a desk piled high with papers. Filing cabinets, a rotary fan. Dust. But they walk straight past the desk to a rusty metal door the gray-green color of mold. She shoulders it open, tugs a wastepaper basket toward her

with her foot, wedges it behind the door to keep it from shutting. From the dent in the basket, it's clear that this has been its job for years.

There's one more place we might look, she says, and beckons him through.

It's a kind of loading dock, separated from the outside by a roll-down metal grate. Once, trucks must have dropped off their cargo here: books, he supposes, from other libraries. From the piles of crates and boxes on the sides of the dock he can see it hasn't been used in some years; there's no way a truck could even approach it.

Fewer loans these days, the librarian says. Just a crate or so a week. Easier to just bring it in the front.

She begins to lift them down, and when Bird goes to help, he sees that they're stacked on something: a huge wooden cabinet, bigger than his dresser at home, made of dozens of little drawers.

We stopped using this years ago, when we converted the catalog to digital, the librarian says, clearing the last of the boxes away. Moved it out here to save space. Then the Crisis hit. Now they still haven't restored our budget. The city won't take it and we don't have the funds to have someone haul it away.

She runs her fingers along the brass labels of the drawers and hooks her finger into the pull.

Here, she says. Let's take a look. The book I'm thinking of is quite old.

Inside, to Bird's astonishment, the drawer is jammed with small cards covered in neat typing. With deft flicks the librarian riffles through, so quickly he can barely make out the words. *Cats—literature. Cats—mythology.* Every one of these cards, he realizes, is a book. He had no idea there could be so many.

Ah, the librarian says, with a sigh of satisfaction. It's the tone of someone who has solved a puzzle, of someone who's decoded a riddle and found the treasure beneath the X. She extracts a single card and holds it out to him.

Cats—folklore—Japanese—retellings. The Boy Who Drew Cats.

Recognition chimes in him, setting him aquiver like a tuning fork. A strangled noise rises in his throat.

That's it, he says. I think—I think that's it.

The librarian turns the card over and scans the back.

I was afraid of that, she says.

You don't have a copy? Bird asks, and she shakes her head.

Removed. Three years ago, it says. Someone complained, probably. That it encouraged pro-PAO sentiment, or something. Some of our donors have—opinions. On China, or in this case, anything that vaguely resembles it. And we need their *generosity* to keep this place open. Or just as likely, someone got nervous and got rid of it preemptively. Us public libraries—a lot of us just can't take the risk. Too easy for some concerned citizen to say you're promoting unpatriotic behavior. Being overly sympathetic to potential enemies.

She sighs and slides the card back into its place in the stack.

There's another book I wanted to find, Bird says cautiously. *Our Missing Hearts.*

The librarian's eyes snap toward him. For a long moment she studies him. Appraising.

I'm sorry, she says curtly. That book I know we don't have anymore. I doubt you'll find it anywhere.

With a bang, she pushes the long thin drawer shut again.

Oh, Bird says. He'd known it was unlikely and yet deep down, he'd still nursed a flicker of hope, and it goes out in a small sooty puff.

What did they do with them, he asks after a moment. All those books.

He remembers a picture from history class: heaps of books in a town square, set ablaze. As if she can tell what he's thinking, the librarian gives him a sideways glance and chuckles.

Oh no, we don't burn books here. This—this is *America.* Right?

She raises an eyebrow at him. Serious, or ironic? He can't quite tell.

We don't burn our books, she says. We pulp them. Much more civilized, right? Mash them up, recycle them into toilet paper. Those books wiped someone's rear end a long time ago.

Oh, says Bird. So that's what happened to his mother's books. All those words ground up into dingy gray, flushed down into the sewer in a mess of shit and piss. Something goes hot and liquid behind his eyes.

Hey, the librarian says. You okay?

Bird snuffles and nods. Fine, he says.

She doesn't ask any more questions, doesn't press him or ask why he's crying, only pulls a tissue from her pocket and hands it to him.

Fucking PACT, she says softly, and Bird is speechless. He can't remember ever hearing an adult swear.

You know, she says, after a minute or two. It's possible some library might have a copy of that cat book still stored away. A big library, like the university's. Sometimes they can get away with keeping things we can't. For *research* purposes. But even if they did, you'd have to ask for it at circulation. Present credentials and a reason for requesting access.

Bird nods.

Good luck, she says. I hope you find it. And Bird? If there's anything I can help with, just come back and I'll try.

He is so touched by this that it doesn't occur to him until much later: to wonder how she knows his name.

When his father gets home, Bird decides, he will ask. He'll ask him to look at work for a copy of the book. He is certain that somewhere in the university library is a book of Japanese folktales with this story in it. They still have thousands of Asian texts, he knows, because every so often, there are petitions to purge all of them—not just those from China and Japan and Cambodia and other places, but those about them, too. The news calls China *our greatest long-term threat*, and politicians fret that Asian-language books might contain anti-American sentiments or even coded messages; sometimes angry parents complain if their children choose to study Mandarin, or Chinese history. *I sent him to get an education, not to be brainwashed.* Each time it makes the college paper, then the news; a congressman or sometimes a senator delivers an impassioned speech about universities as *incubators of indoctrination*; the provost issues another public statement in reply, defending the library's collection. Bird has seen it in the newspaper as his father turns the pages. *If we fear something, it is all the more imperative we study it thoroughly.*

He'll ask his father just to check. Just to see if this book still exists, and if it does, if he'll bring it home so Bird can see it. Just for a day. He doesn't need to tell his father about the letter, or about his mother. It's just a book he's interested in; it's just a story, just a folktale about a boy and some cats, surely there's no harm in it. It's not even Chinese, after all. When his father gets home, he will ask.

But his father doesn't come, and he doesn't come, and doesn't come. They don't have a telephone; no one has a landline anymore, the dorms ripped out all those wires years ago, so all Bird can do is wait. Six o'clock arrives, then seven. They've missed dinner; in the dining hall the workers will be lifting the pans from the steam baths, tipping dried-out leftovers into trash cans, scouring the stainless steel clean. Through the window Bird watches the lights of the dining hall turn off, one by one, and a thin tentacle of dread slithers through him. Where is his father? Could something have happened? As eight o'clock ticks by, he thinks suddenly of his trip to the library that afternoon, of the computer at school blinking *No results.* Of Mrs. Pollard, clicking her pen over his shoulder; of the librarian pocketing her mysterious note. Of the policeman at the Common, tapping his baton against his palm. Of Sadie, and her mother, asking questions, nosing into dark corners. There is always someone watching, he realizes, and if someone has seen him, might his father be blamed, might his father—

It's almost nine when he hears the stairwell door creak open and slam shut—the elevator still not working, after three days—then footsteps in the hall. His father. Bird has a sudden impulse to run to him, the way he did as a small child. When his arms barely circled his father's knees, when he still thought his father was the tallest man in the world. But his father looks so tired, so sweaty and defeated from all those stairs, that Bird hesitates. As if he might knock his father down.

What a day, his father says. The FBI came in just after lunch.

Bird flashes hot, then cold.

They're investigating a professor over at the law school. Wanted a list of every book she's ever borrowed. And then, once they had the titles, they wanted to take every single one. Took me six and a half hours to pull them all. Four hundred and twenty-two books.

Breath rushes into Bird; he hadn't known he was holding it.

Why did they want them, he asks cautiously.

It is a question he would not have asked a week ago; a week ago, he would not have found this ominous, let alone unusual. Maybe, he thinks suddenly—maybe it isn't unusual at all.

His father sets his bag on the floor, drops his keys with a clatter on the counter.

She's writing a book on the first amendment and PACT, apparently, he says. They think she might be funded by the Chinese. Trying to stir up unrest over here.

Slowly he pulls the noose of his tie free from his collar.

Is she? Bird asks.

His father turns toward him, looking more tired than Bird has ever seen. For the first time he notices the gray threading through his father's hair, the lines etched from the corners of his eyes, like tear tracks.

Honestly? his father says. Probably not. But that's what they think.

He checks his watch, then opens the cupboard, which contains nothing but a half-empty jar of peanut butter. No bread.

Let's get some dinner, he says to Bird.

They hurry down the stairs and out to the pizza place just a few blocks away. Bird's father doesn't care for pizza—too greasy, he tells Bird, all that cheese—but it is late and they are hungry and this is the closest place, open until nine.

The man behind the counter takes their order and slides four slices into the oven to heat up, and Bird and his father lean against the sticky wall, waiting. His stomach is growling. Cool dark air wafts in through the propped-open door, and the handful of notices taped to the store's window flutter in the breeze. Found cat. Guitar lessons. Apartment for rent. Down in the corner, right above the health inspection sticker, a star-spangled placard: GOD BLESS ALL LOYAL AMERICANS. The same placard nearly every store displays, sold in every city, proceeds benefiting neighborhood-watch groups. The few stores that don't hang it are viewed with skepticism. *Aren't you a loyal American? Then why the fuss over a little sign? Don't you want to support the neighborhood watch?* The huge steel oven ticks and steams. Behind the counter, the pizza guy rests one elbow on the cash register, scrolling on his phone, smirking at a joke.

It is 8:52 when the old man comes in. An Asian face, white button-down and black pants, silvering hair neatly clipped. Chinese? Filipino? Bird can't tell. The man sets a folded five on the counter.

Slice of pepperoni, he says.

The pizza guy doesn't even look up. We're closed, he says.

You don't look closed. The man glances over at Bird and his father, who half steps in front of Bird like a screen. They're here, he says.

We're closed, the pizza guy repeats, louder. His thumb flicks upward across the phone, and an endless river of pictures and posts whizzes by. Bird's father jostles him on one shoulder. The same jostle as when they pass a policeman, or roadkill in the street. It means: Turn around. Don't look. But this time Bird doesn't turn. It's not curiosity; it's a need. A morbid need to know what's been crouching behind him, unseen.

Look, I just want a piece of pizza, the old man says. I just got off work, I'm hungry.

He slides the bill across the counter. His hands are leathery and tough, the fingers knobbled with age. He looks like someone's grandfather, Bird thinks, and then the thought arrives: if he had a grandfather, he might look like this man.

The pizza guy sets his phone down.

You don't understand English? he says calmly, as if commenting on the weather. There's a Chinese restaurant over on Mass Ave. Go get yourself some fried rice and spring rolls, if you're hungry. We're closed.

He folds his hands like a patient teacher, and stares squarely at the old man. *What are you going to do about it?*

Bird is frozen in place. He can only look and look: at the old man, jaw set, one leg squared behind him as if braced for a push. At the pizza guy, the oil spots speckling his T-shirt, his large meaty hands. At his father, the lines on his face making whiskery shadows, his eyes fixed on the flyers on the window, as if nothing is happening, as if this is just an ordinary day. He wants the old man to deliver a biting comeback, he wants the old man to punch the pizza guy in his smirking face, he wants the old man to back away before the pizza guy says—or does—something worse. Before he lifts those hands that pound and flatten thick dough into compliance. The moment tautens and tightens, like an overtuned string.

And then the old man plucks the money from the counter again, wordlessly, and tucks it back into his pocket. He turns, away from the pizza guy's grin, and looks at Bird instead, a long hard look, then at Bird's father. And then he murmurs something to Bird's father, something Bird doesn't understand.

He has never heard these words before, has never even heard this language before, but it is clear from the look on his father's face that his father has, that he not only recognizes the language but understands it, understands what this man has said. He has the feeling, somehow, that they're talking about him, the way the man looks at him and then at his father, that meaningful gaze that cuts right through Bird's skin and flesh to scrutinize his bones. But his father doesn't reply, doesn't even move, just quickly glances away. Then the old man strides out, head held high, and is gone.

A timer dings and the pizza guy turns to open the oven. The hot smoky air shrivels Bird's throat.

Some people, the pizza guy says. I mean.

He slips the long wooden paddle into the scorching oven and extracts their slices, slips them into a waiting box. For a moment he stares through narrowed eyes at Bird, then at his father, as if trying to place their faces. Then he slides the pizza across the counter.

Have a good night, Bird's father says, and he takes the box and guides Bird toward the door.

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What did he say, Bird says, when they're back on the sidewalk. That man. What did he say?

Let's go, his father says. Come on, Noah. Let's get home.

At the corner, a police car glides by, lights off, nearly silent, and they wait for it to pass before crossing. They reach the dorm just as the church tower across the way begins to strike nine.

It's not until they're back in the apartment that his father speaks again. He sets the pizza down on the counter and pries off his shoes and stands there, his eyes very far away.

Cantonese, his father says. He was speaking Cantonese.

But you understood him, Bird says. You don't speak Cantonese.

Even as he says it, he realizes he does not know this is true.

No, I don't, his father snaps. And neither do you. Noah, listen to me very carefully. Anything that has to do with China, Korea, Japan, anything like that—you stay away from it. You hear someone talking in those languages or talking about those things, you walk away. Understand?

He pulls a slice from the box and hands it to Bird, then takes one himself and settles wearily into a chair without even getting a plate. It is the second time, it occurs to Bird, that his father has climbed all those steps in the past hour.

Eat your dinner, his father says gently. Before it gets cold.

He knows then: even if he asks, his father won't track down this book. He'll have to find another way.

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It is difficult to sneak into the university library; it always has been. There are old books in there, valuable books. A Gutenberg Bible and a first folio of Shakespeare, Bird's father told him once, though Bird has only a hazy idea what this means. Countless irreplaceable old documents. Even—his father wriggled his fingers creepily in the air—an anatomy book bound in human skin. He had just transferred over—linguistics professor to book shelver—and Bird, age nine and newly cynical, had decided all of this was an attempt to make his job sound more impressive, and had ignored it.

What he does know is that he needs a keycard to enter the building, huge and impressive, a marble paperweight pinning down one end of the college yard—and even then, only staff are permitted to pass further into the warm labyrinth of shelves where all the books are kept. But when he was younger, on days off school, he'd trotted along after his father into the reshelving room, where carts of books sat waiting to be set back in place. You can help, his father had suggested, and once or twice Bird had, pushing the cart through the narrow aisles until they found the right one, pressing the antique switch in the corridor to flick on the lights. While his father scanned the shelves, sliding the books one by one into the gaps from which they'd come, Bird ran his fingertips over the embossed spines where gilt lettering had long been rubbed away, breathing in the peculiar smell of the library: a mix of dust and leather and melted vanilla ice cream. Warm, like the scent of someone's skin.

It soothed him and unsettled him at the same time, the murky hush like a wool blanket thrown over everything. Underneath, something large lying in wait. It never ended, the stacks of books needing to be set back in place, the constant insistent reiteration of order, and the thought was dizzying: that just beyond this shelf there were hundreds more, thousands of books, millions of words. Sometimes after his father had nestled one book into its spot, lining up the spines, Bird had the impulse to sweep the whole rack clear with one arm, to send the whole shelf dominoing into the next and the next and the next, to shred the smothering silence. It frightened him, and he made excuses for not coming into the stacks. He was tired, he would rather sit in the staff room and have a snack, he would rather stay home and play.

He hasn't come to the library in years; the last time, he was ten.

That evening, while his father is brushing his teeth, Bird rifles through his briefcase. His father is a creature of habit; after he comes back to the apartment he always stores his keycard in the outside pocket of his bag, ready for the next day. Bird slips the card into his back pocket and zips the bag shut again. His father never checks for it in the morning: for the past three years it's been right there when he arrives at work, exactly where he put it the night before. Tomorrow, just this once, it won't be. But the security guard knows him, has seen him every day for years, will let him in for the day, just this one time. Tomorrow evening, when Bird's father arrives home and does a thorough search for the keycard, he'll find it right there on the floor beneath the table, right where his briefcase always sits. Must have slipped it next to the bag rather than into it, he'll think, and that will be that.

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At first the plan works perfectly. After school, Bird heads to the college yard, climbs the huge mountain of stairs to the library's front entrance. In the lobby, he copies the impatient and vaguely annoyed look the students always wear and swipes his father's card quickly through the

reader. The turnstile turns green and he passes through without stopping and without looking back. As if he has somewhere to be, on the trail of important knowledge. The security guard doesn't even glance up from his monitor.

The next problem: how to get into the stacks. Long ago, his father told him, they'd been open to anyone. You could go in and wander, exploring whatever came your way. Now they don't let just anyone in. Now you have to fill out a slip of paper at the counter, explain why you need the book, show your ID. And if your reason is good enough—a treatise on the failures that led to the Crisis, perhaps, or new strategies for detecting internal enemies—someone, like his father, will venture into the stacks and retrieve it for you. He doesn't say what changed, but Bird understands: it is PACT, of course, that changed everything. That deemed some books dangerous, to be kept only if they were kept out of reach.

Bird heads into the circulation room and eyes the entrance to the stacks at the other end. A squeaky cart comes around the corner and he recognizes the woman pushing it: Debbie, one of the other shelvers. Long ago she'd given him gold-wrapped butterscotch candies, those times he'd come to work with his father. In fact, she looks exactly the same—long billowy dress, frizzy gray hair pinned in an improbable cloud around her head—and though he's older and taller now, he's sure she'll recognize him, too. Quickly he darts behind one of the computer carrels, and Debbie and her cart squeak their way past, leaving a lingering smell of cigarette smoke in their wake.

This reminds him of something. Debbie is a chain smoker; the minute she came into the room, sometimes, the other librarians would lift their heads, sniffing, as if suddenly remembering the possibility of fire. Officially, smokers must leave the premises and stand at least fifty feet from the building before lighting up, but no one ever seemed to do this. Instead Debbie and the other smokers ducked out the side door of the stacks and then out a side door of the building, propping each open with a brick, huddling beside the huge library until their furtive cigarettes were gone, then ducking back inside. His father often complained about the smell drifting into the hall, had combined it with a lecture on the evils of smoking. *You see what a slippery slope it is? Once you start, you can't shake free.*

After Debbie and the cart have gone, Bird heads downstairs, where the side door to the stacks lets out. Despite the lack of a sign, he's certain this is the right place. There, just across from it, is an emergency exit, clearly marked KEEP CLOSED. Most tellingly, just beside it is an old, weatherworn red brick. All he has to do is wait and hope for a stroke of luck. He stations himself around the corner, where—if anyone comes by—he might conceivably be heading into or out of the men's room nearby.

For twenty minutes no one passes, and he understands why the staff use this spot for smoke breaks: upstairs people come and go, but down here, it's practically deserted. Then, just as he's debating giving up, he hears a hinge creak, the scrape of brick on stone flooring, the soft thud of a heavy door coming to rest. A second later, another clicks open and the faint sounds of the outside rush in: a whoosh of wind, birds chirping, someone laughing far off in the distance, across the yard.

Bird peeks around the corner. The door to the outside is propped open: someone must be out there, sneaking a quick smoke, and just as he'd hoped, the one leading back into the stacks is propped open, too. He doesn't have much time. As quietly as he can, he creeps down the hallway and pries the stacks door farther open. It emits a faint creak, and he glances back over his shoulder to see if the smoker has noticed. No movement. Bird takes a deep breath and slips inside.

It takes him a minute to get his bearings. All the titles around him are in a language he doesn't know, in words he has no idea how to say: *Zniewolony Umysł. Pytania Zadawane Sobie.* He darts into one of the aisles and heads upstairs, away from the door. Whoever is out there smoking will be finished soon, and he shouldn't be anywhere nearby when they return. The stacks are incredibly silent—an absorbent, watchful, almost predatory quiet, waiting to suck away any noise you dared to make. A staffer comes by, paper in hand, one book lodged in her armpit as she scans the shelves for the next. Bird waits for her to turn away before he passes. Somewhere there must be a search terminal, and eventually he finds one in a corner, taps at the keyboard. *The Boy Who Drew Cats.* A long pause, and then a number pops up on the screen. He scribbles it on a slip of paper and consults the charts posted beside the monitor, running his finger down the list of call numbers: D level, the bottom floor. Four levels below ground. Southwest corner.

Before he leaves, he can't resist typing in one more search.

Our Missing Hearts.

Another pause, longer this time, and then instead of a number, a notice: DISCARDED. Bird swallows and clears the screen. Then he grabs the slip of paper and sets off for the stairs.

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The stairs bring him down on the wrong end of the library, northeast instead of southwest. But at least D level is deserted. Only the main corridors are lit, and those dimly; the aisles crisscrossing them are pitch black. He's never appreciated before just how big the library is: a full city block, hundreds of feet by hundreds of feet with miles of shelves in between. Something his father once said comes back to him: the shelves around him are not just book holders but the iron skeleton of the building itself, holding the library upright. The easiest way, he decides, will be keeping to the edges; zigzagging his way across, he'll get lost for sure. Cautiously he picks his way along the wall, heading south. It isn't as straightforward as he'd hoped. Sometimes, a stack of old chairs or tables looms up in his path and he has to turn aside, go over a few aisles, and then find his way back. Somewhere, overhead, footsteps thump across C level. A furnace clicks on and a breath of warm air, like a thermal geyser, flows through the grated floor.

Bird passes shelf after shelf, slotting his fingers into the spaces where removed books once stood. There are fewer missing here than at the public library, where some shelves had been more gap than books. But still nearly every shelf is missing one, sometimes more. He wonders who decided which books were too dangerous to keep, and who it was that had to hunt down and collect the condemned books, like an executioner, ferrying them to their doom. He wonders if it is his father.

At the correct shelf he slows, then pauses, tracing the call numbers along the neatly squared spines as they count down, fraction by fraction. And then: there it is. Slim and yellow. Hardly a book at all, barely bigger than a magazine. He'd nearly missed it.

With one finger he tips it from the shelf. *The Boy Who Drew Cats: A Japanese Folktale.* He's never seen this particular book before, but as soon as he sees the cover he knows it's the same story. A Japanese folktale, but his Chinese mother had heard it or read it somewhere, had remembered it and told it to him. On the front is a watercolor drawing of a boy, a Japanese boy, holding a brush. Painting a huge cat on a wall. The boy looks a bit like Bird, even: dark hair grown shaggy over his forehead, the same dark eyes and slightly rounded nose. It's coming back to him, the way his mother told it, a story buried in Styrofoam packing long ago that he's digging out, pulling back into the light. A boy, wandering alone and far from home. A lonely building, in the darkness. Cat after cat after cat springing from the bristles of his brush. His fingers shake,

struggling to peel the cover from the cloth-soft pages beneath. Yes, he thinks. It's almost there, like something edging out of the shadows, just starting to take its shape; as soon as he reads it, he'll remember it, remember what happens, this story from his mother, in a moment he'll understand everything.

It is at this point that someone sets a hand on his shoulder, and he whirls around to find his father.

They let me come to find you, his father says, instead of security.

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He should have known: of course the library has security cameras, of course they would have noticed that someone swiped in with his father's card just hours after his father—responsible and rule following as ever—had reported his card was lost.

Dad, Bird begins, I just needed to—

His father turns around without responding, and Bird follows his straight, angry back all the way through the stacks and up the stairs to the staff room with its endless rows and rows of carts, where two security guards are waiting. In the instant before the guards turn around, he shoves the book into the back waistband of his jeans, beneath his T-shirt.

It's okay, Bird's father says, before the guards can speak. Just my son, like we thought. I left my card in his bookbag by mistake, and he came in trying to find me to give it back.

Bird studies the linoleum floor, holding his breath. His father has not asked him a single question about what he's doing there, and to him this story sounds implausible. Why would he search for his father in the stacks, how could he possibly expect to find one man in that labyrinth of shelves? The security guards hesitate, teetering on the edge of belief. One of them leans closer, squinting at Bird's face. Bird blinks, trying to look innocent, and inside his balled-up fists, his fingernails bite into his palm.

His father lets out a chuckle, a loud, insincere whinny that gallops around the room and then vanishes. Just trying to be responsible, right, Noah? he says. But don't worry. He understands now.

He claps Bird on the shoulder, and grudgingly, the security guards nod.

Next time, one of them says to Bird, just stop at the front desk, okay, son? They'll call your dad down for you.

Bird's legs go quivery in relief. He nods, and swallows, and squeaks out *Yes, sir,* because from his father's taut grip on his shoulder, he understands this is what he needs to do.

When the security guards have gone, Bird reaches to the small of his back, plucks the book from beneath his T-shirt.

Dad, he whispers. His voice quivering. Dad, can I—

His father barely glances at the book. In fact, he doesn't look at Bird at all.

Put that on the cart, he says quietly. Someone will reshelve it. Let's go.

• • •

Only once has Bird ever been in trouble. Mostly, he listens to his father's advice: Don't attract attention. Keep your head down. And: If you see any trouble, you go the other way, understand?

It had driven Sadie crazy. Sadie, at the first scent of trouble, would follow it like a bloodhound to its source.

Bird, she'd said. Don't be such a pussy.

It was the posters that caught her eye that time, the ones that hung and still hang all around town, in grocery-store windows and on community bulletin boards and sometimes even in the windows of houses, reminding everyone to be patriotic, to watch over each other, to report the merest sign of trouble. Each designed by a famous artist to be eye-catching and collectible. A red-white-and-blue dam over a huge yellow-brown river, with a hairline fracture: *Even small cracks widen.* A blond woman peeking through curtains, cell phone at her ear: *Better safe than sorry.* Two houses, side by side, a pie passing hand to hand over a white picket fence: *Watch over your neighbor.* At the bottom of each, four bold capitals: PACT.

That afternoon, Sadie had paused by a row of posters pasted to a bus shelter, ran her fingers over the glue. It flaked away under her fingers like chalk.

That evening, a pair of policemen arrived at their apartment.

We were told, said one, that your son was part of a group defacing public-safety posters earlier this afternoon.

Sadie, pulling a Sharpie from her jeans pocket. Scribbling out the slogans of watchfulness and unity.

A group, his father said. What group?

Naturally we're very concerned, the officer said, about why he might have felt the need to do this. What kind of messages he's getting at home that make him feel this kind of unpatriotic and, frankly, dangerous behavior is appropriate.

It was that Sadie, wasn't it? his father said, to Bird this time, and Bird swallowed.

Mr. Gardner, the officer said, we've looked into your file, and given your wife's history—

His father cut them off.

That woman is no longer part of this family, he said brusquely. We have nothing to do with her. We have had nothing to do with her since she left.

It was as if his father had struck his mother, right there in front of him.

And we have absolutely no sympathies for the radical stances she supported, his father went on. Absolutely none.

He gave Bird a look, and Bird stiffened his spine into an iron bar and nodded.

Noah and I both know PACT protects our country, he went on. If you doubt my sincerity, just take a look. I've made steady donations to security and unity groups for the past two and a half years. And Noah is a straight-A student. There are no unpatriotic influences in this house.

Be that as it may, the officer began, your son *did* deface a sign advocating for PACT.

His gaze rested on Bird's father, as if waiting for a reply, and then Bird spotted it: the quick flick of his father's eyes to the kitchen drawer, where they kept their checkbook. The pay at the library wasn't much, he knew; at the end of each month his father spent a good hour hunched at the table over the check register, painstakingly tabulating the balance. How much, he could see his father calculating, would it take to make them go away? Already he knew it was more than they had.

It's the influence of that girl, his father said. The re-placed one. Sadie Greenstein. I understand she's a tough case.

Shock sizzled through Bird.

We've encountered her before, the officer admitted.

That's where it's coming from. You know how boys start to get around this age. Girls can get them to do anything.

He put a hand on Bird's shoulder, firm and heavy.

I'll make sure it comes to an end. There are no questions about loyalty in this household, officer.

The officer hesitated, and Bird's father sensed it.

We're very grateful to folks like you who are protecting our security, he said. After all, if it weren't for you, who knows where we'd be.

Not anywhere good, the police officer said, nodding. Not anywhere good, that's for sure. Well. I think we're all set here, sir. Just a misunderstanding, obviously. But you keep out of trouble, son, okay?

When the police had gone, Bird's father put his fingers to his temples, as if he had a migraine.

Noah, he said, after a long, long pause. Don't ever do that again.

He opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say more, but all the air seemed to have gone out of him, like a tent whose poles had collapsed. Bird wasn't sure what *that* was: Destroy posters? Talk to the police? Get in trouble? At last his father opened his eyes again.

Stay away from that Sadie, he said, as he headed into the other room. Please.

So Bird didn't sit with Sadie the next day, and he didn't have lunch with her the next day, and a week later he still wasn't speaking to her when she stopped coming to school and didn't come back, and no one seemed to know where she'd gone.

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Today his father doesn't say anything all the way down the steps of the library, all the way out of the college yard to the street. Bird follows him home in silence, though it's the middle of the afternoon and his father would usually be at work for another two hours at least. Even from behind he knows his father is furious from the rigid rectangle of his back. His father only walks like that—stiff, angular, as if his joints are rusted—when he's too angry to speak. Bird lags behind, letting the distance between them stretch out to a few yards, then half a block. More. If he slows down enough, maybe they'll never reach home, they'll never have to talk about this, he'll never have to face his father again.

By the time they reach the Common, his father is nearly a full block ahead, so far distant that from where Bird stands, he could be a stranger. Just some man in a brown overcoat, carrying a briefcase. No one he knows. There was something else in his father's voice in the library, not just anger but an acrid thing Bird can't quite name, and then, suddenly, he knows. It's fear. The same loud, blustering fear that he'd heard that day with the posters, when his father spoke to the policemen. A hot metallic musk, the hiss of claws drawn.

Bird's eyes go again to the three big trees that just days before had been red, to the jagged scars running down their lengths. A wound like that, his father had once told him, will never fully heal. The bark will grow over, but it'll stay there, under the skin, and when they cut the tree down, you'll see it there, a dark mark slicing through the rings of the wood.

He's so busy thinking about this he runs smack into someone coming the other way. Someone large, and in a rush, and angry.

Watch where you're fucking going, chink, he hears, and a big hand catches his shoulder, shoves him to the ground.

It happens so quickly then that he doesn't piece it together until later. It only becomes clear in the aftermath, as he lies there on the damp grass, winded, cold smudges of mud caked to his palms and knees. There is the man who pushed him, running away, one hand clutching his bloody nose. There on the sidewalk is one fat red droplet, like a splash of paint on the concrete. There, standing over him, is his father, looking down at him as if from a very great height.

You okay? his father says, and Bird nods, and his father reaches down a hand, its knuckles red and raw. His father, he realizes, is a big man, too, though he doesn't seem it: soft voiced,

bashfully stooped, he seems smaller than he is, but in college he ran track, he's broad and tall and sturdy. Fast enough to race back to a son in danger. Strong enough to punch someone threatening his child.

Let's go home, his father says, helping him to his feet.

Neither of them speaks until they're back at the dorm.

Dad, Bird says, as they enter the lobby.

Not now, is all his father says, heading for the stairwell. Let's get upstairs first.

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When they reach their own floor, his father shuts and bolts the door of the apartment behind them.

You have to be careful, he says, grabbing Bird by the shoulders, and Bird bristles.

I didn't do anything. *He* pushed me—

But his father shakes his head. That man, he says, he's not the only one like that out there. They'll see your face and that's all the provocation they need. And this library stunt—

His father stops.

You usually follow the rules, he says.

It was just a book.

I'm responsible if you get in trouble, Noah. Do you know how bad this could have been?

I'm sorry, Bird says, but his father doesn't seem to be listening. He has braced himself for shouting, for parental rage, but his father's voice is a seething hiss and somehow Bird finds this more terrifying.

They could have fired me, he says. The library isn't open to just anyone, you know. You have to be a researcher. They have to watch who they let in. The university gets a lot of leeway because of its reputation, but they're not immune. If someone caused trouble and they traced it back to a book they got here—

He shakes his head.

And if I lost my job we'd lose this apartment, too. You know that, right?

Bird hadn't, and a chill washes over him.

Worse than that. If they realized *you* got it, and decided to take a closer look at us—at you —

His father has never hit him, not even a spanking, but he stares at Bird with such violent intensity that Bird flinches, preparing for a blow. Then with a jerk his father yanks Bird into his arms, so hard the breath flies out of him. Holds him tightly in a shaking embrace.

And suddenly, a door clicks open in Bird's mind. Why his father is always so cautious, why he's always nagging Bird to follow this particular route or that, to not go off on his own. How his father reached him so fast. It isn't just dangerous to research China, or go looking for Japanese folktales. It's dangerous to look like him, always has been. It's dangerous to be his mother's child, in more ways than one. His father has always known it, has always been braced for something like this, always on a hair trigger for what inevitably would happen to his son. What he's afraid of: that one day someone will see Bird's face and see an enemy. That someone will see him as his mother's son, in blood or in deed, and take him away.

He puts his arms around his father, and his father's tighten around him.

That man in the pizza place, Bird says, slowly. What did he say?

He's one of us. His father's voice is half muffled against Bird's hair and buzzes inside Bird's skull. And he's right. What he meant was, these kinds of things—they might happen to you, too.

His father's arms loosen, and he holds Bird at arm's length.

Noah, he says. That's why I keep telling you, keep a low profile. Don't do anything to call attention to yourself.

Okay, Bird says.

His father goes to the sink, begins to run cold water over his bruised knuckles. And because it feels like the door between them is still ajar, Bird sets his palm against it. Pushes.

Did my mother like cats? he asks.

His father stops. What, he says, as if Bird has spoken in another language, one of the few he doesn't know.

Cats, Bird repeats. Did she like them.

His father shuts off the water. Where is this coming from? he says.

I just want to know, Bird says. Did she?

His father glances quickly around the room, his habit whenever Bird's mother comes up. Outside, all quiet, only the occasional siren passing.

Cats, he says, looking down at his raw and reddened hand. She did. She adored them.

He looks at Bird searchingly, with a gaze more pointed than Bird has seen in a long time. Like he's spotted something unusual in Bird's face, like a sheath has been removed.

Miu, his father says slowly. Her surname.

He writes the character in the dust on the top of the bookshelf: a square crisscrossed to represent a field, two smaller crosses sprouting from the top.

苗

It means seedling, or sometimes crops. Something just beginning to grow. But it sounds like a cat's meow, doesn't it? *Miu.*

And, he says, his voice warming the way it does when he grows excited, when he's talking about things that he loves, like words. It has been a long time since this happened. And, his father goes on, if you put this, which means *beast*, in front of it—

He adds a few more strokes, a pared-down suggestion of an animal sitting at attention:

貓

—this whole thing means cat. The beast that makes the sound *miu*. But of course you could think of it as the beast that protects the crops.

His father is in his element, as Bird hasn't seen him in years. He has almost forgotten his father could be like this, that his father had this in him. That his eyes and his face could light up this way.

The story, his father says, is that once there were no cats in China. No house cats, anyway. Only wildcats. Classically, cat was written like this—he sketches another character—

貍

—which really meant a wild creature, like a fox. Then Persian traders taught them to domesticate their wildcats, and they added this—

He begins to write a third character, made of two halves. First, the character for woman. Then beside it, so close they almost overlap, the symbol for hand.

奴

Slave, his father says. Wildcat plus slave, a domesticated cat. See?

Together they look down at the characters written in the dust. *Miu.* His mother. Beast plus seedling meant cat. What kind of beast would she have been? A cat, for sure. Woman plus hand

meant slave. Had his mother ever been domestic, or domesticated?

With one swipe of his palm his father wipes the top of the bookshelf clean.

Anyway, he says. We used to talk about these kinds of things, your mother and me. Long time ago.

He rubs his palm against the thighs of his pants, leaving a faint gray streak.

She liked that idea, he says after a moment. That the only thing separating her from a beast was a few little strokes.

I didn't know you knew Chinese, Bird says.

I don't, his father says absently. Not really. But I can understand some Cantonese. I studied it, for a while. With your mother. A long time ago.

He turns to go, and then, just as suddenly, turns back.

That book.

And then, after another long pause: Your mother used to tell you that story, didn't she.

Bird nods.

I remember, his father says.

And as he begins to speak, it comes back to Bird, all of it: not the words on the pages of the book, not the few bare-bones sentences his father uses to tell it to him now, but the way he remembers hearing it, in his mother's voice. Painting a picture with words on the blank white wall of his mind. Long buried. Crackling as it surfaced in the air once more.

Once, long ago, there was a boy who loved to draw cats. He was a poor boy, and most of the day he worked in the fields, planting rice with his parents and the others in his village in the spring, harvesting the paddies beside them in the fall. But whenever he had a spare moment, he would draw. And what he most liked to draw, what he drew most often of all, were cats. Big cats, little cats, striped and calico and spotted. Cats with pointy ears and skinny eyes, cats with black paws and black muzzles, cats with white patches on their chests like eagles. Shaggy cats, smooth cats, cats leaping, cats stalking, cats sleeping or cleaning their fur. On the flat rocks by the river, he sketched them with a burnt stick. He scraped them into the sand on the shores of the nearby lake where the fishermen pulled in their nets. On dry days, he scratched them into the dust of the path to his house, and after the rains he carved them into the thick mud where puddles had once glistened.

The others in his village thought this was a waste of time. What use is it to draw cats, they scoffed. It doesn't put food on the table or bring in the grain. The richest man in town had beautiful scrolls on the walls of his house: paintings of fog-tipped mountains and elegant gardens, far-off things no one in their village had ever seen. But you could simply step outside and see a cat; they were everywhere. They had never heard of an artist choosing to draw cats. What was the point?

The boy's parents, however, did not agree. Although they had to work many hours in the field—and the boy often had to help—they were proud of his talent. After the day's work was done, the father collected pieces of bamboo the length of his hand and gave them to his son for brushes. The mother cut the tips of her own hair and bound them into tufts for the bristles. The boy gathered stones—every color he could find, from deep red to pure black—and ground them to dust to make his paints. And every night, he painted cats—on flat pieces of bark, on scraps of paper and worn-out rags—until it was time for bed.

One year, sickness struck the village, and the boy's parents died. No one in the village would take him in: he had a reputation. A boy who wasted time, a boy who did useless things. Besides, the villagers had little to spare. They had been sick, too; there was little food, nothing left for one who wasn't their own. Each family took a handful of rice from their stores, bound it all in a cloth, and gave it to the boy. Good luck, they said. May fortune smile on you. He thanked them and shouldered the bundle, tucked his brushes in his pocket, and set off on his way.

It was winter, and bitterly cold. The boy wandered for hours through the dark until he came to a small village, where every door was shut tight. Though he could see the glow of firelight through the windows, no one would answer his knock. A harsh wind began to blow; snow began to whirl around him in the air like ghosts clawing at his face. At the last house, an old woman peered out. I'm sorry, she said. If I let you in, my husband will kill me. We dare not take in strangers. This whole town is afraid. Afraid, the boy said, afraid of what? But the woman simply shook her head.

In desperation, the boy looked around the deserted street. At the end, just past the outskirts of town, he spotted a small building he hadn't noticed before. What about that, he said, that deserted house? Surely I can stay there just for the night.

The old woman seized his hands. That place is dangerous, she said. Cursed. It is said that a monster lives there. No one who enters at night ever returns.

I am not afraid, the boy said, and anyway, I may as well be eaten by a monster as freeze to death out here in the street.

The old woman bowed her head and gave him a torch lit from her cooking fire. Take this, she said. And keep to the small. Then she blessed him and wiped a tear from her cheek.

May you see tomorrow, she said. And if you do, I beg you forgive us.

The boy made his way to the deserted house. Snow had begun to stick to the ground and to the bare branches of the trees, and when he reached it he found a small drift just beginning to form at its door. But it was unlocked, and he let himself inside. He lit a fire in the fireplace and looked around. There was only one room, with only one piece of furniture: a small cupboard, the kind that his mother had once kept their blankets in. There were no carpets on the floor, no decorations on the walls: only whitewashed walls, a plain dirt floor swept clean.

Well, he thought, this place may be cursed, but at least it's dry and warm. He was about to unroll his blanket on the floor and go to sleep when the white walls caught his attention. They seemed so bare, so empty. Like a face without features. He dug into his pocket and pulled out his brushes, and before he had thought it through, he had painted a cat on one of the walls. Just a little one, a small striped gray-and-white thing. A kitten, really. There, he thought, that's better. And again he prepared to go to bed.

But the cat seemed lonely, all by itself on the wall—and there was so much wall. He painted it a friend, a bigger cat, a tabby sitting beside it, licking its paw. Then he forgot himself completely. He painted another cat, a big orange tom, asleep by the fire. A black cat ready to pounce, a white cat watching with big blue eyes, a calico clambering among the rafters. He painted cats until all the walls were covered, a whole coterie of cats to keep him company, and only when he ran out of space—and the fire was sputtering down to embers—did he put his brushes away.

The boy was tired—who wouldn't be, after conjuring a hundred cats out of nothingness? He unrolled his blanket, but despite all the cats, he was lonely. He missed his parents, and he wished he were at home again, in his own house, in his own bed, with his parents sleeping beside him. He thought of his brushes, made from his father's bamboo, his mother's hair. He remembered the small gestures about them he missed the most: the way his mother raked her hand through his hair, smoothing it from his face; the way his father had hummed while he worked in the field, so quietly it might have been the buzzing of bees. He felt small, and suddenly he remembered the old woman's words: keep to the small. He took his blanket and opened the cupboard and made his bed inside it. It was as close to his own little bed as he could get, and he crawled inside, with all of his things, and pulled the door shut behind him.

In the middle of the night he awoke to a terrible wordless wailing. It was an unearthly shrieking: like the groaning of old trees splintering as they fell, like the howling of a hundred winter winds, like the screeching of the earth as it shifted and tore itself apart. Even his eyelashes stood on end. He put his eye to a tiny crack, but all he could see outside was a ghastly red light, as if the whole room were full of blood. He shut his eyes and held his breath and pulled the blanket over his head. Whatever you do, he thought, don't make a sound.

After a long time—he didn't know how long—it was quiet again. Still he waited in silence. An hour passed. Two. He put his eye to the crack again and this time, no red: only a faint sliver of sunlight. Hands shaking, he pushed his way out of the cupboard. His cats were still there, on the walls, just as he'd painted them. But every cat's mouth was red. All over the floor: the prints of hundreds and hundreds of cat feet, pressed into the dirt, scrapes and smudges and marks of a battle. Flecks of blood and foam sprayed on the walls. And there, in the corner—a huge dead shaggy thing. Still now, clawed half to shreds. A rat the size of an ox.

So what does it mean, Bird thinks, as he lies in his bunk that night. It's well after midnight and below him his father snores once, then turns to one side, and is still. Outside, the city is quiet, except for an occasional siren wailing its way through the dark. *We promise to watch over each other.*

Bird tiptoes into the living room, pushes the edge of the curtain aside, slips behind it, and looks out. All he sees are the hulking forms of buildings, the far-off specks of streetlights. The flat dark band of the street. Newly blackened, but somewhere beneath it, a painted heart still blooms. So risky, he thinks, and what was the point? When a few hours later all trace of it was gone.

But the truth is: it isn't gone. He can't see that bare stretch of ground without thinking of it, the bright splotch flashing into his mind, sharp as a wildcat's snarl.

Hadn't they been afraid?

He tries to imagine what it had felt like, to be that painter. Tiptoeing into the street. Breath dragon-hot beneath a mask, heartbeat a deafening roar. Slapping stencil to pavement with shaking hands, spraying a sizzling cloud of red. And then running, lungs aflame with fear and fumes, finding a small sheltered corner to hide. Red paint like smears of blood on his hands.

And then it floods him. Rushing in as if someone has unstopped a plug.

A game they played, he and his mother, when he was very small. Before school, before he had any other world but her. His favorite game, one he'd begged her to play. Their special game, played only when his father was at work, kept as a secret between just them.

You be the monster, mama. I'll hide, and you be the monster.

She'd taped sheets of paper to the walls and Bird drew cat after cat: with crayons, half-dried markers, pencil stubs. Simple cats, scrawls with ears, but still. Cats. Cats, all over his room. And then, when he tired of drawing, came the second part of the game. Inside his closet was a crawl space his parents had discovered when they'd fixed up the house. Too small, under the eaves, for anything practical, but his mother had kept it. For him. A perfect boy-sized cubby she'd furnished with a sliding panel, a pillow and a blanket and a flashlight. A dragon's cave. A bandit's lair. And sometimes, the cabinet in which the boy hid.

He would crawl inside and slide the panel shut and yawn loudly, then flop down and begin to snore. From outside would come a growl that peppered goose bumps up and down his arms. A series of snarling meows. Inside, Bird pulled the blanket over his head and shivered deliciously. After a few minutes it grew quiet, and he would crawl from the hot cubby back out into the closet and then the light of the room, and there, on the carpet: his mother on her back, arms curled to her chest. Deadly still. The mouth of every cat he'd drawn smeared with red.

He would run to her then and throw himself on her chest and she would catch him in her arms, warm and strong, and tickle him and laugh. Always, a moment of terror at seeing her there, and a hot rush of relief when she came back to life. Over and over they played it, this game, his mother indulging him again and again. So long ago that he'd forgotten. Kindergarten, new friends, new games arrived and swept it away. And then, after she'd gone, he'd packed that memory up, along with everything else he could, and left it behind in the house they'd once shared. Where maybe—just maybe, though he doesn't even dare to think the words—perhaps he might find her again.

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Something he's never told anyone, even Sadie: he's been there many times, over the years. It is just a few blocks from his new school, and though he's supposed to come directly home,

sometimes he detours, just a little, so he can walk past the old house. Just to see it. It is the only time he ever deviates from the path. Construction, he imagines telling his father, the main road was closed, I had to go around. Or: The police were detouring people—I dunno why. His father would never argue with that; he's always reminding Bird to stay away from trouble, to avoid the police.

But his father never even asks. He is so certain Bird will always follow the rules, so confident in Bird's unquestioning obedience, and on those days—standing on the sidewalk, looking up at the house where they no longer live, at its shaded-over windows like closed eyes—Bird resents it, this assumption that there could be nothing off his prescribed path that he wants or misses or needs.

No one has moved into the house in the past three years. His father hasn't sold it—he can't, without his mother's signature, too—and no one seems to want to rent it, once they learn who'd lived there before. Every time Bird visits, it is just the same, windows obscured by blinds, tall back gate always shut tight. None of the houses in this neighborhood have front yards; the houses come right up to the sidewalk like pushy neighbors, elbowing their way in. A scraggly strip of grass runs between sidewalk and street in a threadbare ribbon, and this is the only thing that changes from visit to visit: first overgrown and tufty, then knee high and gone to seed, then buried under a bank of uncleared snow. One spring he visited and found it bristling with daffodils: he had forgotten his mother had planted them there, and their cheerful yellow—her favorite color—pained him so much that he did not come back again for a whole month, until the flowers had shriveled, leaving nothing but splayed stems and wilting leaves.

What he knows from this: the house is still sitting empty. The perfect place to hide.

The next day, after school, instead of heading home, he follows the road along the curve of the river, back toward their old house. As he walks, a smattering of memories flare at each step, small bright stones lighting a path through the forest. There is the huge gray-brown sycamore, like an enormous elephant's foot, which even together their arms could not encircle. There is the lopsided white house, two centuries old and all corners and additions: the mish-mosh house, he'd called it; his mother had called it the House of the Thirty-Seven Gables. There is the monastery behind its high sandstone wall, as impenetrable and imperturbable as ever. Monks live there, she'd told him, and when he'd asked *what's a monk*, she'd answered: a person who wants to escape the world. All the landmarks of his childhood coming back, patiently pointing the way. For a moment he pauses before the great hollow of an old stump, disoriented, until he realizes: the big maple he remembers has been cut down. In the fall it had showered red leaves over the sidewalk, the smallest as big as his face. His mother had plucked one, poked two eyeholes, let him wear it as a mask. One for her, too. A pair of wood spirits, roaming the city. The tree must have been decaying from within all that time, rotting and crumbling like sponge. The tragedy of this nearly crushes him, until he peers inside and sees small green shoots rising deep within the ring of stubborn wood.

On their old street, each house is a different drab shade: tan, dirty cream, the washed-out gray of tattered laundry: as if all the color has leached away since his childhood. Slope shouldered, listing slightly to one side, they resemble old ladies, their clothing grown shabby and loose. There are garbage cans stowed behind fences, here and there a soggy newspaper, still in its plastic sheath, on the sidewalk—but it's quiet. And then there it is again: their house, just as it has always been. Dusty green, like the underside of a leaf. Wooden steps leading to the porch, gracefully sagging, edges rounded with age. The front door, once cherry red, faded to the soft brown of aged brick.

If his father never sold the house, Bird reasons, then it's still theirs. Which means it isn't trespassing. Not, technically, breaking the rules. Still, he glances over his shoulder, scanning the street, as he picks his way through the weeds toward the gate and the backyard. The windows of the other houses glaring at his back.

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After his mother left, some of their neighbors had shied away from them. Before, they'd waved, said hello, maybe told Bird how tall he was getting, or commented on the weather. After: tight lips, the merest head nods. Darting inside quickly as if they'd forgotten something, or left the stove on. Once, in Harvard Square, Bird and his father had run into Sarah, who lived two houses down, who had sometimes brought them rhubarb muffins and borrowed Margaret's pruning shears. She'd crossed the street as they approached, casually but quickly, as if there were a bus she needed to catch. The next time they saw her, on their own street, hauling in garbage cans after the truck had gone by, she didn't meet their eyes.

Worse than the neighbors who ignored them: the ones who began to check on them. To see if you needed anything, one would say. Just dropping by, to see how you were doing. To see how you were holding up. What was it they were supposed to be holding up, Bird wondered, though eventually he realized it was themselves. It did feel that way in those early days, on the mornings when he'd learned to eat his cereal dry, because the milk in the fridge always seemed to have curdled: like they were puppets and the strings *holding them up* had gone slack. His mother had done all those things, but she was gone, and they would have to learn to survive on their own: a near impossible thing, those first weeks.

When the smoke alarm went off, the fire department arrived and his father had to explain: no, everything was fine, just the pancakes left in the pan too long. Yes, he knew the stove should never be unattended; Bird had called him into the other room; no, Bird was perfectly safe, everything was under control. Another afternoon, Bird fell off his bike at the corner and skinned both knees and ran back home, screaming, blood trickling down both shins: he was sitting on the closed toilet, sniffling, his father dabbing at him with a damp paper towel—it's okay, Bird, see? just a scrape, not as bad as it seems—when the police arrived. A neighbor had called. The little boy, crying and alone. The bike abandoned, front wheel still spinning. *Just wanted to make sure he wasn't unattended. You know, with his mother gone. Just wanted to be sure someone was watching.*

Someone was always watching, it seemed: when Bird went out without a hat and stood shivering at the bus stop; when Bird forgot his lunch and his teacher asked him if his father was giving him enough to eat. There was always someone watching. There was always someone wanting to check.

It's probably nothing, but—

I just figured I should say something in case—

Of course I'm sure everything is fine, but—

Posters were starting to appear all around town then, all over the city. All over the country. *United neighborhoods are peaceful neighborhoods. We watch out for each other.* Years later, Bird would see Sadie pull a Sharpie from her jeans pocket and scribble over *out for*. Their neighbor across the street, who had never liked them, who said their yard was overgrown and their house needed painting and their car was parked too close to hers, took particular joy in calling in everything. When his father burned his hand on the cast-iron skillet and dropped it on the floor with a loud clang and a shouted oath, a police officer arrived fifteen minutes later. Report of domestic disturbance, they'd said. Was he in the habit of using profanity in front of his

son? Would he say he had a temper? And to Bird, privately, out of his father's hearing: Was he ever afraid of his father, had his father ever hit him, did he feel safe at home?

Every few days, menacing items would appear in their mailbox, or on their front steps: broken glass; bags of garbage; once, a dead rat. All-caps notes that his father tore down before Bird could read them. It was not long after that, he realizes, that his father had transferred to his new job, that he'd switched Bird to his new school, that they'd moved to the dorm. For the first time, he considers what might have appeared at his father's work, outside his office, on the desks in his classrooms. What his bosses might have said, or not said, about it all.

Good news, his father had said, the university has agreed to let us use an apartment in one of the dorms.

His new job paid hourly, barely enough for food and clothes, not enough for Cambridge rent. But through favors and kindnesses, he'd managed to negotiate a safe place for them to live. At the top of a tower, buffered by a courtyard, a key-swipe, an elevator. A refuge from prying eyes.

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As Bird pushes the back gate open, there's a sudden scurrying, a blur of brown and a flash of white: a rabbit, startled while browsing in the overgrown lawn. It darts to a gap under the fence and disappears, and Bird picks his way through the grass. The weeds are waist high after three years of neglect and nearly cover the path; here and there a branch, grown leggy and bare, plucks at his sleeve like a beggar asking for alms. A story comes back to him: a castle, all covered in a rose briar. *So thick nothing could be seen of it, not even the flag on the roof.* All the princes struggling to fight their way through. When the rightful prince came, after a hundred years, the hedges made a path for him. Once he had loved that story, once his mother had told it to him and he had believed it, every word.

As he looks around, memories hover close before alighting on his shoulders like dragonflies. They'd had flowers here, before: lavender, and honeysuckle, and huge purple puffballs, his father's favorites. White roses the size of his fist that fat golden bees wriggled into. Vines with purple star-shaped blooms. Here there had been vegetables, curling squash with hairy leaves and sprawling tomatoes. His mother's green rubber boots, treads caked with mud. His had been orange. Once he'd been stung and his mother had pulled his wrist to her mouth, sucked the stinger from his skin.

He ventures farther, parting the weeds. There is the pole where beans once twined themselves up a teepee of string. A cool green hideaway, once upon a time. His father had had one as a child and then his mother had grown one for him. Now the strings are bare, gray from the weather, some slack and some frayed. At his feet, a tangle of dry, withered vines.

Somewhere here, he remembers, somewhere in this garden, there is a key. He is sure of it. Near the back steps, perhaps, or under the porch. A rock with a key buried under it.

They'd been outside. How old had he been? Four? Five? His father at work. His mother tending the garden: pulling weeds, pruning shrubs, tying branches—swollen with ripening fruit—to their stakes. He'd shut the back door and it wouldn't open again and he'd burst into tears. Certain they were trapped outside forever. It's all right, she'd said. Listen, I'll tell you a story. She told him stories often, while she worked, as he dug in the dirt, collected twigs, lay in the grass at her feet. *Once upon a time, there was a witch with a magical garden. Once upon a time, there was a young man who understood the language of animals. Once upon a time, there were nine suns in the sky, and it was so hot nothing could grow on the earth.*

This time, as she wiped the smudge of dirt from his wet cheek: *Once upon a time, there was a boy who found a golden key.* She'd knelt by the bottom of the stairs, flipped over a stone. Presto! There it was.

She was always doing that, telling him stories. Prying open cracks for magic to seep in, making the world a place of possibility. After she left, he had stopped believing all those fantasies. Wispy, false dreams that disintegrated in the morning's light. Now it occurs to him that, perhaps, there might be truth in them after all.

It takes him a long time, but he finds it. Pressed down into the dirt, teeth edged with rust. But it is there, hard and solid and real in his hand. It still fits in the lock, still clicks when he turns it, still draws the bolt back so he can turn the knob and step through.

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Inside: the smell of a house long unoccupied. A clamminess, the musty scent of air not mellowed by the warmth of bodies, but he expected this. What he hasn't expected is how familiar it is. The long narrow hallway from kitchen to living room where he and his father had raced wind-up toys, the brick fireplace set into the wall, the staircase rising steeply before him and disappearing into the darkness overhead. Like somewhere he's been in a dream, a place he knows without recognizing, a place he can navigate though he could not draw a map. Everywhere he looks, memories ripple and swell. He remembers the furniture that has vanished, once hulking and solid: his mother's beloved leather armchair, the glass-topped coffee table where the three of them had once played Candyland. He remembers the color of the light in the evenings, when it was nearly time for bed: honey-colored and warm, coating everything in its sweet syrupy glow.

Inside the castle, everything was frozen in time. The maid dozed in the kitchen with a half-plucked chicken on her lap. The cook snored, one hand still raised, about to slap the scullion.

Hello? he calls, but no one answers.

There's nothing here anymore, just speckles of dust hanging in the sunlight that seeps around the drawn blinds. A darker rectangle on the wooden floor, which for years their rug had kept unfaded. A pile of ashes on the hearth, the color of faded bones. His father had stacked his mother's books there, set a match to their corners.

No sign of her anywhere here. Signs of her everywhere here.

He sets his hand on the banister and begins to climb. On each step his feet leave prints in the dust.

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Upstairs, the landing is lit only by slashes of light slicing around pulled-down shades. His parents' room. The bathroom, clawfoot tub now streaked with rust. And there, at the end of the hallway, his room, with its uniquely shaped door: one corner cut off, to fit under the sloped ceiling. He nudges it open, but there's no one there. In the corner stands a frame with no mattress, the skeleton of a bed. By the opposite wall, an bare bookshelf, a dresser with drawers lolling. He peers inside: empty. The husk of his old life. A long-ago memory surfaces, and he runs his hand down the jamb, brushing away the grime, until he finds it. Pencil ticks like the rungs of a ladder, each labeled with a date and two letters. BG. Bird Gardner. His name, once upon a time. Three feet. Three feet, two inches. Three feet six. Creeping ever upward.

The closet's hinges groan as he pulls it open. Empty. Overhead, a solitary wire hanger dangles from the bare rod. There it is, on the back wall: the panel that's actually a door, the secret he'd guarded so fiercely that he'd never even shown his friends, had kept it just for

himself. And his mother. Exactly as he remembers it, uncannily so. As if he has imagined it into being.

Carefully Bird lifts up the latch and slides the panel open, revealing a gap that would be tight for a five-year-old. He flops down on the closet floor, wedges his head and one shoulder inside. He can't see anything, but he feels around the cubby with his hands, sweeping his palms over everything he can. In his memory it's a vast space, a huge cave, but the truth is, it's just a nook. If he could squeeze through the opening now, it wouldn't even hold him crouching down.

Inside he finds an old flashlight, flips the switch: the battery, of course, is long dead. A threadbare pillow. A crinkle of cellophane that, when examined, proves to be an empty Twinkie wrapper, caked with dust. Nothing else. He feels foolish now, for ever thinking she might have been here.

Bird wriggles himself backward, hooks his hands in the opening to lever himself out, and then he feels it. A little card, wedged in the backside of the cubby door's frame. No, not a card: a scrap of paper. Dusty, like everything else, as if it has been there a long time. A single word printed in black pen—DUCHESS—and beneath it an address in New York City, on Park Avenue. The handwriting is his mother's.

The next day after school he goes back to the library, the public one, the librarian's words drifting back to him as he nears the entrance: *If there's anything I can help with.* He's not sure if she can, but if there's one thing he remembers from stories, it's that people who offer help along your way—whether directing you to treasure or warning you of danger—should not be ignored.

Today, to Bird's consternation, the library is not quite deserted. There's another visitor: an older Black man in the how-to section, not far from the front desk. Tall and trim, a gray beard, long gray locs neatly tied back at the nape of his neck. Bird dawdles by the cookbooks, out of sight, watching the man flip books open and shut them again, replacing them with no apparent interest in what's inside. He'll simply wait for the man to go away, he decides, and then he can speak to the librarian without being overheard.

But after nearly ten minutes of idle browsing, the man is still loitering there. What was taking him so long? Sometimes people came in off the street, Bird knows, just looking for a place to get warm. It's October; each day the weather gets colder, and a full decade after the Crisis there are still plenty of people living rough—lingering on street corners, hunched on park benches, dodging police and the neighborhood-watch groups. But this man doesn't look like he lives on the street. He wears dark jeans and a tailored tan blazer, shoes of polished leather; there's an ease to his bearing, a comfort in this place—despite his apparent aimlessness—that Bird himself doesn't share. Yet there's a tension, too: as if he's readying himself for a difficult task.

Then the man pulls a small slip of paper from his blazer pocket, inserts it carefully between the pages of a washing machine repair manual, and shuts it again. A bookmark, Bird thinks. Still, something about it catches his attention: the slightly furtive glance the man casts over his shoulder, the way he nudges the neighboring books back into place, lining the spines up so precisely you can't tell that one has disappeared. Suddenly Bird remembers the librarian searching the books at her desk last time, the note she'd retrieved. On his side of the shelf, the man straightens, as if he's made a decision, tucks the book under his arm, and heads for the circulation desk with a new air of purpose.

Excuse me, he says to the librarian. I found this book lying around. I'm not sure but I think —I think it might have been taken out of its place.

Bird can see him more clearly now. The black-brown of his eyes, the clean white collar of his shirt. The precisely trimmed edges of his beard.

The librarian looks up, and when she speaks there's a tightly tethered eagerness in her voice. Thank you, she says. I'll take a look.

The man sets the book on the counter. I'm not sure, you understand, he says. But I *think* someone might be looking for it.

He slides the book toward her, but his hand is still pressed to the cover. As if he can't bear to let it go.

They're probably very, very worried, he says. The words come out thick and sticky, as if he's trying not to cry.

I'll do my best to find out where it belongs, the librarian says.

Bird, peering out from behind the shelf of cookbooks, understands that something is being said that he can't hear. He senses it more than registers it: a faint thrumming felt deep in the bone. No one would cry over a misplaced book.

I won't speak of this to anyone, the librarian is saying. Her voice is so low that Bird has to strain to make out the words. Thank you. For bringing this in.

She smiles at the man then, sets her hand on the cover beside his, not prying the book away, just holding it, waiting for the man to be ready, and at last the man lets it go.

I couldn't live with myself if I didn't, he says quietly. My brother and I grew up in foster care, years ago. They said our parents couldn't provide—I was almost grown up by the time they got us back.

And then he is gone.

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The librarian has just pulled out the slip of paper when she spots Bird and swiftly shuts the book again. This time Bird catches a glimpse before she slips it into her sweater pocket: jotted-down notes, what might have been an address, a name. The excitement on her face cools into wariness as she recognizes him.

Well, hello again, she says. You're back. Did you need something else?

You said you could help me, Bird says. Last time I was here. You said—if there's anything you could help with, to come back.

The librarian doesn't say yes and she doesn't say no. With the book still clutched in her hands, she studies him.

I can try, she says. What do you need?

Bird clears his throat.

I need to get to New York, he says. New York City. There's somebody I have to see.

The librarian laughs. That's out of my area of expertise, she says. I meant with another book. Or finding information.

This is finding information, he says. There's someone there I need to talk to.

All last night he'd thought about it. His mother has left him this address for a reason, he is sure of it. No one else would have known about the cubby, let alone left something inside. Her letter, the story, this note: it is too much to be a coincidence. To Bird it has the certainty of a prophecy, or a quest; he feels it with the arrogant confidence only a child can have. This Duchess, whoever she is, will have something to tell him about his mother, and therefore his next step must be to go and hear it.

The librarian rubs a knuckle to her temple. I'm sorry, she says. I can't really help with that.

Please, he says. It's for a good reason. I promise.

But still she shakes her head.

I'm not a travel agent. And even if I were, I can't help a kid run away.

I'm not running away, Bird begins, but she's not listening anymore.

I'm sorry, she says again, and starts to turn away, and he decides to bluff.

I know about what you're doing, he says, though of course he does not quite yet; he knows only that it is something illicit, something shameful or perhaps even illegal, and therefore it is a crowbar: something that can be used to pry, or—if it comes to that—something to swing.

She doesn't answer but pauses, half turned away from him, and from the slight stiffening in her posture he knows she's listening and decides to press further.

I saw that man, he goes on, his gaze trained on her back. And what you were doing the other day. The note in the book.

And then, steeling himself, he takes the plunge: I saw what you put in your pocket, he says.

It works. The librarian turns around, and though her face is calm and still, there's a new tightness in her voice.

Let's talk in my office, she says, and then her hand is on his elbow, pincerlike, and she marches him back through the shelves and to the STAFF ONLY office again. This time, once they're

inside, she grabs him by the shoulders, her eyes blazing.

I knew you were spying, she says. That other day. I knew you were going to make trouble. You cannot mention to anyone—anyone—what you've seen. Do you understand?

Bird tries to wriggle free, but can't. I just need your help, he says.

No one can know, she says. People will get hurt—really hurt—if anyone finds out.

Like that man? Bird says. A guess, but a right one. The librarian releases him, leans back against the wall, hugging the book to her chest.

He's trying to help, she says. And risking so much just to try. Most people won't even do that. They'd rather just close their eyes, as long as it's not their kids at stake.

She turns back to Bird.

How old are you? Twelve? Thirteen? You're old enough to understand this, aren't you? People's lives are at stake. Children's lives are at stake.

I'm not trying to cause trouble, Bird says. His tongue is awkward and unwieldy, a fish flopping on the shore. I'm sorry. I really am. Please. You're helping them. Can't you help me, too?

From his jeans pocket, he extracts the paper with the address, now battered and wrinkled.

I'm just trying to find my mother, he pleads, and then it strikes him: this, of all things, might convince her. She'd known his name, before. How else, but through his mother? It is all coming together in Bird's mind, the pieces zippering neatly together. The painting on the street, the banner in Brooklyn, the ephemeral flyers that dot the neighborhoods. His mother's poems, the stolen children, our missing hearts. He can see it all, as clearly as a spider's web misted with dew, the wispy strands crisscrossing into a magnificent, crystalline whole. They're on the same side.

My mother is one of the leaders, he says, proudly. A feeling he's never dared claim about her before, and saying it feels like standing full height after years of crouching.

The librarian gives him a look. A wry look, as if he's about to tell her a joke she already knows.

Your mother, she says.

Bird clears his throat. Margaret, he says, his voice cracking just a bit on the *M*, a hairline fracture. Margaret Miu.

It is the first time he's said her name aloud in as long as he can remember. Maybe ever. It feels like an incantation. He waits—for what? Earthquakes. Lightning strikes. Bolts of thunder. But all he sees is a half smirk at one corner of the librarian's mouth. He'd thought it would be a password that let him through the secret entrance into sparkling rooms beyond. Instead he's smashed his nose into a wall.

Oh, I know exactly who your mother is, the librarian says.

She studies Bird, leaning in closer to him, so close he can smell the morning's sour coffee on her breath, and he sags under her gaze.

You know, I didn't recognize you at first, she says. The last time I saw you, you were a baby. She used to come in, with you in a sling. But when you asked me about her book, I realized who you reminded me of. Why you looked familiar. You look a lot like her, actually, once I made the connection.

Bird has so many questions he wants to ask, but they all jam together in his mind and fall in a muddled heap. He tries to picture it: his mother, here, among these very shelves; himself, snuggled small against her chest.

She used to come here? he repeats. Still processing the idea that once his mother stood in this very spot, touched the same books that stand all around them.

Every day. Borrowing books, back when she was still writing her poems. Before she became the *voice of the revolution.*

The librarian laughs, a short laugh edged with bitterness. She closes her eyes and recites in a singsong.

All our missing hearts
scattered, to sprout elsewhere.

Bird sits with this, lets it soak into him like rain into stone. Leaving a wet dark patch. Not just a book, but a poem, too, and a line in the poem as well.

I've never heard the whole thing, he admits.

The librarian settles back against the wall, hands at her hips. All those posters and banners with her slogan on them. Such good *branding*. All those viral photo ops.

She sniffs.

I guess it's easier, she says, to write brave words than to actually do the work.

So that's what you do, he says. You find the children and bring them back home.

The librarian sighs.

It's not quite that simple, she admits. There's so much fear around it all. Most people won't even publicly say their children have been taken. People are told if they stay silent, they can get their kids back. But—

She stops, pinches the bridge of her nose. We try to convince them, she says. We keep a list: name, age, description. And if we hear about a re-placed child, we try and figure out who it is. Sometimes the leads pan out, sometimes they don't.

Unconsciously, her hand touches her sweater pocket, and the man's note crinkles inside.

It's risky, you know—a lot of people just don't want to get involved. But we try to find people we can trust, here and there.

Like that man, Bird says, and she nods.

A lot of times no one knows where the children have been taken. Some of the younger ones, at least, are re-placed. But some of them are given new names. Some are so young they don't even know their parents' names. And usually they're re-placed far away from home. Not accidentally.

Bird thinks of Sadie, the hundreds of miles between Cambridge and her parents in Baltimore. How impossible it would be for a child to retrace that distance alone.

Then what, he asks.

For now, then nothing, she says, and he can feel how bitter the words are on her tongue. There isn't anything we can do yet, to actually bring them back home. Not as long as PACT is in effect anyway. But we've matched up a few and I think it helps the families, letting them know at least their children are safe, and where. We're just trying to keep track. Of who's been lost, and who's been found. As much as we can.

We?

A handful of us, she says carefully. All over the country. We share notes. She half smiles. It's part of our job, you know: information. Gather it. Keep it. Help people find what they need.

All this time a question has been flickering inside Bird.

But why, he says. When it's so risky. Won't they punish you, too, if they find out?

The librarian's lips tighten.

Of course they could. Me, and everyone else who's trying to find these children. That man and anyone else who passes us information. Of course it's a risk. But—

She pauses, and rubs her temples.

My great-grandfather was at Carlisle, she says simply, as if that explains everything. Then at the sight of Bird's blank face, she snorts. You have no idea, do you, she says. How could you? They don't teach you any of this. Too unpatriotic, right, to tell you the horrible things our country's done before. The camps at Manzanar, or what happens at the border. They probably teach you that most plantation owners were kind to their slaves and that Columbus *discovered* America, don't they? Because telling you what really happened would be espousing un-American views, and we certainly wouldn't want that.

Bird doesn't fully understand any of these things, but what he does understand, suddenly, and with head-spinning force, is how much he does not know.

I'm sorry, he says meekly.

The librarian sighs. How can you know, she says, if no one teaches you, and no one ever talks about it, and all the books about it are gone?

A long silence unwinds between them.

I didn't mean to make trouble, Bird says finally. Honest. I just—I just want to find my mother.

She softens.

I only knew your mother a little, she says. And a long time ago. But I remember her. She was a nice person. And a good poet.

But a bad mother, he thinks.

Only when the librarian replies does he realize he's spoken out loud.

You shouldn't say that, she says. Not about your own mother.

She puts her hand on Bird's shoulder again—gently, this time. A tender squeeze.

I'm not saying there aren't bad mothers, she says. Just that you don't always know. What makes them do something, or not do something. Most of us, we're trying our best.

Something in her voice makes Bird pause. A brittle sound. Something stretched too thin, more cracks than whole.

Do you have kids? he asks.

Two, she says slowly. I had two.

Past tense. Snipping the sentence in two: before, and after.

What happened to them, Bird asks.

My little girl got sick, she says. During the Crisis. We couldn't afford the hospital, hardly anybody could. Then my boy ran out of insulin, toward the end.

Her eyes have drifted away from him, are focused somewhere just over his shoulder, on the wall beyond.

Wherever your mother is, whatever she's doing, the librarian says, I'm sure of this: she'd be happy to know you grew up and stayed well. That you're still here.

Then she blinks, once, twice. Returns to the present, to him.

But look, Bird, she says, if you want to get to New York—you need to find your own way. I can only pass on information. Not people.

Bird nods.

And I can't let you go until you promise not to speak about any of this. Please, Bird. You of all people should understand. Pretend you don't know anything—I mean *anything*—about this. People's lives are at stake.

I would never, he says, the last word half garbled. I could never. And then, to prove to her he means it: My best friend, Sadie, was one of those kids.

A long, startled pause.

You knew Sadie? she says.

And then Bird remembers: of course. Sadie, after school every day, stopping by the library, even just for a few minutes.

We'd talk, the librarian says. Hard not to notice a little girl coming in like that, on her own.

A sudden hot flare of hope sears through Bird.

Is that where she went? he says, excited. You sent her home? Back to her mom and dad?

But the librarian shakes her head.

I couldn't find out where her parents had gone, she says. Nobody could find out anything, except that they weren't home anymore. And then all of a sudden, Sadie was gone, too.

A moment of silence, in which the librarian's eyes on him are gentle and kind. It feels good, surprisingly good, to talk about Sadie with someone who knew her. To remember her.

Listen, the librarian says. I can't take you to New York. I don't know anyone who can. But I can do something.

She leads him back out of the office and through the shelves to a thick maroon binder. Inside: pages and pages of timetables, printed in pale blue columns.

Train schedules and routes, she says. This binder here, this one is buses. At the station, you can go to the counter, but there are also machines that sell tickets. In case you wanted to avoid—questions.

Thank you, Bird manages to say.

She smiles. I told you, she says, that's my job. Information. Passing it on. Helping people find what they need.

She sets the opened binder atop the shelf and slides it across to him.

What you do with this information, she says, is your own business only.

Monday morning, his father is already waiting, work satchel in hand, when Bird emerges from the bedroom. He has hidden his schoolbooks under the blanket on his bed; in their place, the bag on his back holds a change of clothes, a toothbrush, and all the money he has. All the dropped bills he's found and saved over the years, all the lunch money kept from all the days when, rather than eat in the cafeteria, he would sit alone with his thoughts outside. Just enough, according to the timetables in the library, for a one-way ticket to Manhattan. The bus he's selected departs at ten o'clock. Plenty of time.

Though the elevator has been repaired at last, it groans and fumbles as it shudders its slow way downward. Between the mirrored walls, an infinite chain of Bird and his father accordions into the distance.

Bird waits until the numbers tick down from six to five before he speaks.

I forgot my lunch, he announces.

Noah, his father says, how many times do I have to tell you.

The elevator grinds to a halt and opens onto the dorm lobby. Sunlight pours through the plate-glass windows, so bright he feels like an insect on a light table. Surely his father will look at his face and know that he's lying. But his father just sighs and checks his watch.

Staff meeting at nine today, he says. I can't wait for you. Run back up and get it and hurry to school. Don't dawdle, okay?

Bird nods and hits the elevator button again, and his father turns to go. At the sight of his back—so familiar, in his old brown coat—Bird's throat tightens.

Dad, he calls, and his father turns around, gives a soft *oof* as Bird throws his arms around him.

What's this? his father says. I thought you were too old for hugs.

But he's teasing, and he squeezes Bird tight, and Bird snuggles into the comfortable dusty wool of his father's overcoat. He suddenly wants to tell him everything. To say, come with me. We'll find her together. But he knows his father will never let him go, let alone come with him. If he wants to go, he will have to go alone.

Bye, Dad, he says, and his father gives him a wave and is gone.

Upstairs, Bird lets himself back into the apartment and rushes to the window. He ducks behind the curtains and peeks down at the small grassy square of courtyard below. There he is: the dark speck of his father, nearly at the gate.

He's watched his father cross this courtyard before, on snow days when Bird's school closed but his father's work did not. He used to stand by the window, waiting until his father emerged far below, watch him head down the path and out of sight. In the winter, the small dots of footprints that appeared in his father's wake were like magic. Up close, Bird knew, they were jagged holes crushed into the ice. But from where he stood—ten stories up, pinned against and behind glass—they were dainty and precise. Beautiful. Purposeful. Thin stitching on a snow-white quilt; a trail of stones placed to mark the path home, or to show someone the way. How comforting, to know that he could go downstairs, follow the marks his father's feet have made, all the way to wherever he's gone.

Now, as he watches, the lone figure in the brown coat hugs that coat tighter around himself against the chilly fall breeze and steps through the gate. There is no snow, yet, to hold footprints, and in a moment, as his father disappears from sight, it is as if he never passed that way at all. Today it strikes Bird as unbearably sad, to pass by and leave no trace of your existence. To have no one remember you'd been there. He wants to run down all ten flights of stairs and place his feet into the invisible footsteps his father has left behind. He presses his fingertips to the cool

glass, as if—if he tried hard enough—he could push the entire window aside and step through into the air above all of this.

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He hadn't looked up when she'd said goodbye.

Birdie, she'd said, I have to go out.

Was that it? Or had she said: I have to go? He can't remember. He'd been playing with Legos, building something. He doesn't even remember what anymore.

Bird, she called again. She'd hovered just behind him, and he'd bristled with irritation. Whatever he was building wouldn't hold together; it kept tipping and falling in a shower of bricks, breaking itself apart again and again. He took two bricks, jammed them together as hard as he could, so hard that the knobs left divots in his skin.

Birdie, she said. I'm—I'm going now.

She was waiting for him, waiting for him to come and kiss her, like he usually did, and he attached one more brick and the whole thing collapsed again with a clatter, and he blamed her, for calling him when he was busy with something else.

Okay, he said. He picked up the bricks again, piecing the thing together once more, and by the time he turned around at last, to see if she was still there, she was gone.

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It is nearly nine o'clock: time to go. When his father comes back for dinner, the apartment will be empty, and Bird will be in New York. He's thought about this all weekend, how to tell his father where he's gone. Any mention of his mother is too big a risk, so his note is short and obscure: *Dad, I'll be back in a few days. Don't worry.* Beside it, he places the cat letter in its envelope on the table. Then he rips the paper from the cubby in two: the Park Avenue address he tucks back into his pocket; the last line—*New York, NY*—he sets beside the letter and his note. And last of all, a box of matches. He hopes his father will understand—where he's gone, and why, and most of all, what to do with this information.

He has never traveled out of Cambridge; all night he'd fretted about the dangers that might lie ahead. Taking the wrong train or turning down the wrong street or boarding the wrong bus, ending up who knows where. A ticket agent demanding: where are your parents? Policemen stopping him, loading him into the back of a patrol car, carting him back to his father—or worse, somewhere else. Strangers, so many of them, scrutinizing him. Measuring him with their eyes, gauging whether he is a threat or to be threatened.

Yet none of this happens. Baseball cap pulled down, sunglasses on, he rides the T to the station. The cops on the platform, talking football, don't even give him a second glance. Instead of approaching the ticket window, he heads for the machine: cash in, ticket out, no questions asked. At the bus terminal, no one looks around; everyone here seems to be focused on the ground, avoiding eye contact, and it occurs to him that maybe they, too, are hoping not to be seen. A pact between strangers, all of them agreeing tacitly to ignore one another, to mind their own business, for once. As one fear after another fails to materialize, Bird grows increasingly, absurdly confident. It's as if the universe is signaling he's on the right path, that he's doing exactly what he's meant to be. When his bus pulls in, he takes a seat by the window toward the back. He's made it. He's on his way.

After his mother left, for months he would lie in bed at night, certain that if he could stay awake long enough, she would return. He was convinced, for reasons he could never explain, that his mother came back in the night and disappeared by morning. By sleeping, he missed her

each time. Perhaps it was a test—to see how badly he wanted to see her. Could he stay awake? He imagined his mother, each night, standing over his bed, shaking her head. Again he was asleep! Again he had failed the test.

It made perfect sense to him then; it still does. In all the stories his mother had told him, there was an ordeal the hero had to endure: Climb down this well and fetch the tinderbox. Lie beneath this waterfall and let it drum you to pieces. He was sure if he could stay awake his mother would be there. The fact that the test was so arbitrary did not bother him; the tests they had in school were arbitrary, too: circle the nouns and underline the verbs; combine these two random numbers into a third. Tests were always arbitrary; it was part of their nature and, in fact, what made them a test. Separate the peas and the lentils from the ashes before morning's light. Journey beneath the sea and bring back the pearl that shines by night.

He'd pinched his own arm, bruising black and blue down the forearms, trying to stay awake. Night after night he would catch a sliver of flesh between finger-pad and thumbnail, squeezing until white flashes flecked the corners of his vision. In the morning, his mother was still gone and a half-moon of purple blotted his forearm, and his father asked if the other boys at school were bullying him. They were, but not in the way his father meant. It's fine, Dad, he said, and all day his eyelids drooped and sagged, and that evening, he would try, and fail, to stay awake again. It was around then that he stopped believing in stories.

Now, after all this time, he is on his way to find her. Like someone in those very stories she'd told him all those years ago. He will journey to where his mother is waiting patiently for him. As soon as she sees him, whatever spell has kept her away all this time will be broken. In the fairy tales, it happens at once, like a switch flipped: At once she recognized him. At once she knew her true self. He is certain this is how it will happen for his mother, too. She will see him and at once she will be his again and they will all live happily ever after.

The interstate scrolls by as the motor settles into the steady thrum of high gear. The farther they go, the easier Bird begins to breathe. He falls asleep and wakes only when the bus downshifts and merges left, jostling him against the glass. By the roadside: a navy-blue SUV has pulled over to the shoulder, a police cruiser parked behind it, lights flashing. An officer, navy suited, emerges from the driver's seat. Stay away from policemen, his father says in his mind, and Bird tugs the visor of his hat a bit lower, shading his face, as they whip by. He should be scared, but to his surprise, he isn't. Everything beyond the window feels far away, walled off behind glass, and his heart beats with the same slow, steady thump of the wheels beneath them. Outside the bus, trees and scrubby fields blur on and on.

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The bus drops him in Chinatown in the midst of a fine drizzle. A different world: more people than he's ever seen, more bustle, more noise. Despite the clamor and commotion, he feels oddly at home, and it takes him a moment to understand why: all around him, suddenly, are people with faces like hers. And a bit like his. He has never been in a place like this, where no one gives him a second glance. If his father was here, he'd be the one standing out, not Bird, and Bird laughs. For the first time in his life, he is unremarkable, and this feels like power.

Before he left he'd studied the map, the librarian nudging it wordlessly toward him. A grid, his father would say, calm and patient. Just count your way up and over. He does the math: Bowery will turn into Third; eighty-seven blocks up, then two blocks west. Just over five miles. All he has to do is walk in a straight line.

He begins.

He begins to notice things.

That on all the signs here in Chinatown, something has been painted out or taped over or, in some cases, pried away. He can still see the perforations where something was once nailed on, still make out shapes embossed beneath silvery-gray duct tape. He notices that the street signs have been painted over, too: a fat swath of black runs under the feet of neat white letters spelling MULBERRY and CANAL, like a shadow at high noon, like a dark ring beneath the white of an eye. Only when he spots one where the paint has begun to wear away, revealing a thicket of characters beneath, does he understand. He remembers his father's finger, inscribing characters like these in the dust: once, all these signs bore two languages. Someone—everyone—has tried to make the Chinese disappear.

He begins to notice other things.

How the people he passes speak either in English, or not at all, casting quick glances at one another but saying nothing. Only when they duck into a shop can he sometimes catch the low murmur of another language—Cantonese, he guesses. His father would know; his father might even understand. Everyone here seems cautious and edgy, scanning the sidewalks and the street, checking over their shoulders. Poised to run. He notices how many, many American flags there are—on nearly every storefront, on the lapels of nearly every person he sees. In the corner of each store hang the same kinds of posters from home: GOD BLESS EVERY LOYAL AMERICAN. All the way through Chinatown, not a single store is without one. Some sport other signs, too, garish in red, white, and blue: AMERICAN OWNED AND RUN. 100% AMERICAN. Only when he's left Chinatown, and the faces around him become Black and white instead of Asian, do the flags become more sporadic, the people here apparently more confident that their loyalty will be assumed.

He walks.

He passes storefronts shielded by graffitied metal grates. New and Used. Bought and Sold. For Lease. A concrete median dividing patched concrete streets. Mystifying names: Max Sun. Chair Table Booth. On the curbside, broken pallets splay like desert-bleached bones. No grass, no trees, nothing green, only street lamps the same gray as the sidewalk, the roads, the dirt that streaks its way up the sides of the buildings from the ground. Everything grit-colored, as if trying to escape notice. The people who pass carry heavy plastic bags, roll shopping carts, avoid each other's eyes. They do not linger. Sometimes the crosswalks under their feet are simply spray-painted on, the lines wobbling and uncertain; in other places there are no crosswalks at all. More than a decade after the Crisis ended, so many things still haven't been repaired.

Block by block, the landscape begins to shift around him. Stunted patches of grass fight their way through gaps in the sidewalk. How long has he been walking? An hour? He's lost track already. Has the school already noticed his absence, have they notified his father? Up, up, up. The drizzle slows, then stops. Supermarkets with giant glossy billboards of pizza, intricately ruffled kale, slices of mango that make his mouth water. His stomach growls, but he doesn't stop: he has no money left anyway. Bodegas with tumbling mountains of fruit and buckets of sheathed roses and indifferent, yawning cats stretched across the displays; barbershops where men's laughter floats through the propped-open doors on a wave of aftershave. In their windows, familiar posters: PROUD TO BE AMERICAN. WE WATCH OVER EACH OTHER. Now there are trees, small wispy ones barely above a man's head, but trees, nonetheless. Somewhere a church bell strikes. Three o'clock, or four? The street buzzes with life, and he can't tell chimes from echoes. He should be walking home from school, but instead he is here, his pulse growing faster with each block. Nearly there.

He walks faster and around him the city changes faster, too, like a sped-up video zipping into the future, or possibly the past. The way things used to be, that golden pre-Crisis world he's only heard about. More taxis, nicer ones, newer. Cleaner, as if they've just been washed. The streetlights are shiny black here, taller, sleeker, as if here there is more space to hold their heads

high. He passes buildings with crowns of decorative stonework over each window: someone took the trouble, up here, to pick out details in beige against the red, just so that they would be beautiful. Now there are stores with wide glass windows, unafraid of being smashed. Restaurants with awnings. People walking small dogs; trees ringed by neat metal fences no taller than his knee: for show, not for protection.

As the mist clears, he spots patches of green high in the air: rooftop gardens, the peaks of potted evergreens pointing at the sky. The buildings and businesses are no longer trying to hide. YES WE ARE OPEN. Flashy, catchy, quirky names, trying to stand out, trying to catch your attention and stick in your mind: The Salty Squid. Sound Oasis. Chickenosity. His father would have laughed. In each window, the familiar star-spangled placard. Banners advertising the fanciness of what they had, not its cheapness. Higher and higher the cross streets climb, as if he is scaling a ladder: Fiftieth, Fifty-Fifth, Fifty-Sixth. Men in suits. Men with ties. Men in leather shoes with fringed tassels and smooth soles in which you had no need to run. Long ago his father had worn shoes like that. Banks, so many banks—three, four, five in a row, sometimes the same bank on both sides of the street, one across from the other. He had not known it was possible to be so rich you would not cross the street.

A department store the length of an entire block, all sleek dark granite polished to mirror gloss. As if to say: in this place, even stones shine like stars. In its windows, faceless mannequins wear floral silk scarves around their throats. Tall apartment buildings, each window a pocket of reflected sky set into the walls like a gem. He imagines his mother living in one of them, looking down on him, waiting for him. Soon he'll know. Refrigerated trucks idle by the curbs, crammed with grocery deliveries, huffing their frosted breath into the air. Now there are coffee shops, places meant to linger in. Billboards for whitening and straightening teeth; hotels with suited bellhops in hats poised just outside. Here, people hold bags not meant to carry, but to be pretty. Dry cleaner after dry cleaner: a neighborhood of silk, too delicate to wash. At each door, burly men from the neighborhood watch stand guard.

Seventy-Fifth Street. Seventy-Sixth. Older buildings that wore their age gracefully, looking staid, not shabby. Here foreign words are proudly displayed: Salumeria. Vineria. Macarons. A safe and desirable foreignness. Shops labeled *gourmet* and *luxury* and *vintage.* Here—and it does not seem possible that this is the same street he's followed from those painted-over signs and fearful whispers; it must be another world he's journeyed into—the street is wide and lined with trees. He likes the thought of his mother here, in this beautiful place. Blond women in jogging tights puff beside him, ponytails bobbing, as they wait for the signal to change. Nannies push sleek strollers, the babies inside sumptuously dressed. He passes stores that make only picture frames, restaurants that serve only salad, shops selling pink shirts embroidered with tiny, smiling whales. Buildings so tall their tips are invisible, even when he cranes his head so far he nearly falls backward. Anything could happen here, everything does happen here. It is like fairyland, or a fairy tale.

This is the place, he thinks. This is where she is.

And because this is a magical fairyland, where anything can happen, because he is so invigorated by all that he's seen, still swooning on the rich air of possibility inflating his lungs, he isn't surprised when suddenly, there she is: his mother, just across the street. A small brown dog at her side. Something inside him leaps skyward in a shower of sparks, and he almost cries out in joy.

Then his mother glances down at the dog, which is nosing in a manicured flower bed, and it is not his mother at all. Just a woman. Who doesn't resemble her at all, actually; only in the most superficial ways—an East Asian woman with long black hair, carelessly pulled back in a knot.

The face, now that he can see her more clearly, is nothing like his mother's. His mother would never have such a dog, this little amber powder puff like a teddy bear with black-button eyes, a pert velvet nose. Of course it isn't her, he chides himself, how could it be. And yet there is something about the way she holds herself—the alertness of her posture, the quickness of her eyes—that reminds him of her.

The woman notices him across the street, watching her, and smiles. Perhaps he reminds her of someone, too; perhaps at first glance she mistook him for someone she loves and now that love spills over to him, a largesse. And because she is looking at him, because she is smiling at him and perhaps thinking fond thoughts about this little boy who reminds her of someone she loves, she does not see it coming: a fist, smashing into her face.

It happens in seconds but it seems to stretch on forever. Out of nowhere. A tall white man. The woman crumpling, turned to rubble. Bird's own body petrified, his scream cemented in his throat. The man towering over her, kick, kick, kick, soft sickening thumps like a mallet on meat: her belly, her chest, and then—as she curls up like a shelled shrimp, arms over face, trying to protect what she can—the curve of her back. Her cries wordless sounds, hanging in the air like shards of glass. The man himself says nothing, as if he is doing a job, something impersonal but necessary.

No one comes to help. An older couple about-faces, as if they've remembered something urgent elsewhere. A man hurries away, bent over his phone; cars flow by, unperturbed. They must see, Bird thinks, how can they not? The dog, ankle high, barks and barks. A doorman emerges from the building behind and Bird nearly sobs with gratitude. Help, he thinks. Help her. Please. Then the doorman pulls the door shut. Bird can faintly make him out on the other side of the thick plate glass, blurred and ghostly, watching as if it were a scene on a TV screen: the woman's cheek against the sidewalk now, the jolt of her body with each blow. Waiting for it to be done so that he can open the door once more.

The woman has stopped moving and the man looks down at her—with disgust? With satisfaction? Bird can't tell. The dog is still snarling and barking, furious and impotent, its small feet scuffling the pavement. With a swift movement the man brings his boot down, hard, on its back. The way he might crush a soda can, or a cockroach.

Bird screams then, and the man turns and spots Bird watching him, and Bird runs.

Blindly, as fast as he can. Not daring to look behind him. Bookbag hammering against him like a drumbeat. Sweat-soaked shirt hot then cold at the small of his back. Is she dead, he thinks, is the dog dead. Did it matter. The man's eyes still drill at the nape of his neck and his stomach heaves and he retches, but nothing comes out. He darts down an alleyway and huddles behind a dumpster, catching his breath, the back of his throat raw and burning.

He'd forgotten: in fairylands there is evil, too. Monsters and curses. Dangers lurking in disguise. Demons, dragons, rats as big as oxen. Things that could destroy you with a glance. He thinks of the man at the Common. He thinks of his father, his broad shoulders and strong hands, lifting him back to his feet. But his father is far away, cocooned in the soundless library, where the outside world cannot reach. He has no idea where Bird is, and this more than anything makes Bird feel terribly alone.

He stays there for a long while, trying to smooth his breathing, trying to steady his hands, which won't stay still. When he's finally ready, he rises on shaky feet and picks his way back to the corner. He's run backward, several blocks off course. When he reaches Park Avenue, he moves quickly and cautiously, scanning the streets. He feels conspicuous now; he notices people noticing him. He understands, as he hadn't before. Perhaps he'd been invisible once, but the

spell has worn off—or maybe it had only ever been in his imagination. People can see him, and at last he understands how small he is, how easily the world could shred him to pieces.

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It's late afternoon by the time he finally reaches the address: a big brick building, flowered window boxes, a huge green door. Not an apartment building—a single-family townhouse, a thing he had not known existed here. The Duchess's castle. Cautiously, he studies it from across the street. In stories you might find anything inside a castle: riches, an enchantress, an ogre waiting to devour you. But this is it, the place his mother has sent him. Street name and numbers written in her own hand. A leap of faith, then.

He climbs the marble steps and reaches for the brass knocker and raps it, three times, against the green-painted wood.

It feels an eternity, but it's really only a minute or two before an older white man answers the door. He's a bit stout, in a uniform: shiny brass buttons on navy-blue wool, like the captain on a ship. He eyes Bird coldly, and Bird swallows twice before he can speak.

I am here to see the Duchess, Bird announces, and as if by magic, the captain nods, and steps aside.

A foyer of sunny yellow, a fireplace with a fire lit, even though it's only October. Cream-colored tiles on the floor, studded with squares of ambery brown. A marble-topped table with scrolled legs squats in the middle of the room, its only apparent purpose to hold the biggest vase of flowers Bird has ever seen. All around him the lights are haloed with gold.

I'm here to see the Duchess, Bird repeats, trying to sound surer than he is, and the captain squints down at him.

I'll have to call up, he says. Who may I say is here, please?

And because he is hungry and thirsty and exhausted, because he has walked for miles on an empty stomach, because his head feels uncannily detached from his body, like a balloon floating just over his shoulders, because he feels slightly unreal and he's not sure this place is real, let alone this city, nor the Duchess he's come to see, Bird answers as if he were in a fairy tale, too.

Bird Gardner, he says. Margaret's son.

If you will wait here, the captain says.

Bird hovers uncertainly by one of the chairs near the fireplace. It is covered in sandy velvet and reminds him of a throne. With his fingertips he traces the chiseled grooves on the arms, and words his father has taught him float back: Mahogany. Alabaster. Filigree. He clears his throat. On the mantel is a little gold clock, a little golden woman gesturing decorously toward the time. Almost five. Soon his father will head home and discover that he is gone.

The captain returns. If you'll follow me, he says.

He strides through an archway and down the hall and Bird trails behind him, cautious, peering around corners, waiting for a monster to spring. But all they pass is a palaceworth of luxuries. A paneled silk screen, stitched with cypress trees and cranes and a pagoda in the far-off distance. A sofa of yellow silk with cushions shaped like candy rolls; a huge oval dining room, its floor a dizzying parquet. Everything here seems to be touched with gold: the handles of the urns and vases on the mantelpieces, the twisted tassels on the drapes, even the claws of the lions' feet on which the tables and chairs rest. Then they are at the foot of a grand swooping staircase spiraling up and up and up, a lush tawny carpet spilling down its center. He has never seen such a staircase. A delicate chandelier dangles on a chain swathed in velvet. Bird counts: one story, two, three, four, and far above them a compass-shaped skylight, a blue crystal pool of sky.

This way, please, the captain says. And then Bird sees it: just beside the staircase, a little elevator, wood-paneled and parquet-floored. An elevator in a house, he thinks in awe. The captain gestures with one hand and Bird steps inside, feels as if he's climbing into a polished nutshell.

She's waiting for you upstairs, the captain says. He pulls a brass grate shut, caging Bird inside.

As the elevator shudders upward, Bird's mind whirls. Around him the brass bars of the grate rattle, as if something is trying to get out, or in. He has no idea what he is heading toward. What will the Duchess be like? Will she be kind, or will she be threatening? He pictures the evil queens from storybooks, all malice sheathed in charm. Trust, he thinks to himself: in the stories you had to trust strangers on your quest. Even this elevator is decorated, as befits a palace. Miniature golden frames around sketches of ancient buildings and winged women. A small white telephone. On the back wall, a round mirror bulges and flexes, bending his face back to him in distorted form: an ogre's, or maybe a dwarf's.

At last the elevator opens. A living room, as big as their apartment back home. Another table; another bowl billowing with flowers. In the polished surface he can see his own face peering back up at himself. Underfoot the carpet is gold patterned. The home of nobility, for sure.

And then there she is, gliding through French doors at the end of the room: the Duchess. Younger than he'd expected: regal, tall, blond hair clipped short around her head. Pearls. A blue drapey pantsuit instead of a gown, but it is clear to him she is a woman of power. For a moment Bird's voice deserts him, and he simply stares up at her. She doesn't break the silence, just looks down at him in bemusement.

Are you the Duchess? he finally asks. But he already knows she is.

And who do we have here? she asks. One eyebrow raised. Skeptical.

Bird, he says, trembling. Margaret's son.

For a moment he fears she will say, who? But she doesn't. Instead she says, rather coldly, Why are you here?

My mother, he says, the answer so obvious it feels ridiculous to say it. I came here to find her.

What makes you think she's here? the Duchess asks. The smallest tendril of curiosity curling the edge of her voice.

Because, he says, and pauses. Feeling for the answer inside himself. *Because I want to know why she left me. Because I want her back. Because I want her to want me back, too.*

She sent me a message, he says.

The Duchess purses her lips, and he can't tell if she is perplexed or pleased or angry. For a moment she's like a teacher, weighing the answer he's given, deciding between praise and punishment.

I see. So your mother—she asked you to come here?

Bird hesitates. Wonders if he should lie, if this is a test. His chest tightens.

I'm not sure, he admits. But she left me this address. A long time ago. I thought—I thought you might know where she is.

From his pocket he pulls the scrap of paper, or what remains of it. Tattered and crumpled, edges smudged with blue dye from his jeans. But there it is, in his mother's handwriting: the very address in which they stand.

I see, the Duchess says again. And you came here alone? Where's your father?

How does she know about his father, Bird thinks with a jolt.

He doesn't know I'm here, he says, and as the words pass his lips, it hits him again how alarmingly true this is. His father has no idea where he is; his father cannot help him or save him.

The Duchess leans closer, scrutinizing him, her eyes needle-sharp. Up close he can see that her face is only just beginning to wrinkle, that her hair is not yet gray. She's maybe the age, he realizes, that his mother would be.

So who does know you're here? she demands. A steel glint of menace in her tone.

Bird's throat swells. No one, he says. I didn't tell him. I didn't tell anyone. I came alone.

You can trust me, is what he wants to say. A sweaty panic slithers over him, that he might have come so far and in the end be turned away. That this dragon of a Duchess and her gilded palace might swallow him and trap him forever.

Interesting, the Duchess says. She turns away, and to Bird it feels like a very bright light being switched off. Wait here, she says, and without another word she sweeps out, leaving him alone.

Bird circles the room, unable to be still. Dusty-gold drapes at the windows, through which he can see the glitter of traffic on the street below. A grand piano in the corner. On the end table, a silver-framed photograph of a woman and a man: the Duchess, much younger and with longer hair, hardly more than a girl, and someone who might be her father. The old Duke, he decides, though the man in the picture is wearing a polo shirt and khakis, and they seem to be on the deck of a sailboat, blue sky and bluer water colliding at the horizon behind them. A stern, almost angry expression on his face. He wonders where the old Duke is. He wonders how the Duchess knows his mother. He wonders what his mother has been doing all these years, away from him. If she will recognize him when she sees him. If she's sorry, if she ever thinks about him. If she regrets.

Outside the sky has darkened, hardening to flat, steely gray. To his amazement, he isn't hungry at all anymore. He imagines his father arriving at home to their tiny cinderblock dorm, finding the apartment dark and deserted. Searching for him. Calling his name. It's okay, Dad, he thinks, I'll be back soon. He feels oddly alert and alive, his veins electrified. He is almost there. After all this time.

Far off in the recesses of the house, a clock strikes, a deep sonorous chime. Five o'clock. And then, as if it is a signal, the Duchess returns.

If you really are who you say, she says, then prove it. What color is your bicycle?

What?

You should be aware, she adds, that if you aren't who you claim, I have no compunction at all about calling the authorities.

I— Bird stops, bewildered. His father has not let him ride a bike since that day he fell off and the neighbor called the police.

I don't have one, he blurts out. The Duchess's face remains calm and impassive and blank.

What kind of milk do you put on your cereal in the morning? she asks.

Again Bird is too baffled to speak. He hesitates, but the only thing to do is tell the truth, however odd it seems.

I eat my cereal dry, he says.

Once more the Duchess makes no reply. Where in the cafeteria do you eat lunch? she says, and Bird pauses, seeing himself as if from above, a solitary dot perched on the steps with a brown paper sack.

I don't eat lunch in the cafeteria, he says. I eat outside. By myself.

The Duchess says nothing, but she smiles, and by this he understands that he has passed.

So you want to see your mother, she says.

It is not a question.

Well then. Come with me.

In the hallway she presses a button on the wall and a panel slides away. Magic? No: an elevator, cunningly camouflaged in the hall. The same elevator, in fact, in which he arrived. At a touch of the Duchess's finger, the button labeled B glows the color of flame. When the doors open again, they are in a dim cave: an underground garage, a sleek black sedan with the engine already running. A mustached man in a suit stands at attention beside the waiting car. The footman, Bird thinks, as they slide into the back seat.

And then they're off.

The car glides up the ramp and out of the garage and injects itself into the crowded streets: smoothly, liquidly, regally. From inside, Bird can hear nothing at all. Not the voices of the throngs that gather at street corners, thinning and bunching with the rhythm of the crossing lights, like a great snake inching its way downtown. Not the growling engines of the cars that surround them in a pack. Not the honking that he knows must pierce the air, those deafening blares of impotent frustration. There is simply no sound, and through the tinted windows the city scrolls by in sepia, like a silent film. To him they seem to be not driving but floating.

Seat belt, please, the Duchess says beside him. It would be a shame to get this far and then crack your skull open.

Bird opens his mouth and the Duchess shuts it with a glance.

I'm not here to answer questions, she says. That's your mother's job, not mine.

After that she says nothing at all, as they weave along the river and down into a long tunnel and then back out again into twilight, the moon just beginning to emerge. Time moves in fits and starts, starting and stopping like the traffic around them, and sometimes Bird dozes and wakes to find they haven't moved at all, and sometimes he is sure he hasn't closed his eyes but they seem to have teleported a great distance, nothing outside familiar, and then around them the traffic congeals and clots once more, slowing them to a crawl, and finally—he doesn't know how much time has passed—the sun has gone down and the streets around them are calm and nearly deserted, lined with brownstones, and the car pulls to the side of the road and stops at last.

Listen carefully, the Duchess says, with new urgency in her voice. As if this is the last time she'll speak to him, as if the real test is about to begin. Follow these instructions precisely, she tells him. I can't be responsible for what happens if you don't.

To Bird, bleary-eyed, half-dizzy with excitement and fatigue, this does not seem strange. In fact, he expects no less: in stories, there are always inscrutable rules to obey. *Ignore the golden sword; use the old and rusty one instead. No matter how thirsty you are, do not drink the wine. Do not speak a word, even if you are pinched and beaten, even if they cut off your head.* After the car drives away, leaving him standing on the sidewalk, he does exactly what the Duchess has commanded. He walks two blocks over and three blocks up, crosses the street, and there it is, just as she'd said: a big brownstone with a red door, every window covered. *It will look deserted, but appearances can be deceiving.* As instructed, he ignores the wide front stoop and skirts around to the side of the house. *No one must see you enter the gate.* Twice a car passes while he's hunting for the latch, the rough wood of the gate snagging at his fingertips, and then he has it, the metal cool and solid and smooth. He glances over his shoulder at the lighted windows in the houses all around him, and when he's sure there's no one watching, he turns the catch and the gate swings open.

At the back of the house is a door. You must be absolutely silent as you approach. With tentative feet, Bird picks his way through the tangle of weeds and grass. This must have been the

back garden once, untouched for ages; here and there he stumbles across a sapling, scrappy and saucy, whipping its branches in his face. But in the moonlight he sees the faint glitter of a path, shiny grit embedded in the cement to point the way, and he follows it toward the dark hulk of the house. *Enter these five numbers—eight, nine, six, zero, four—and it will open for you.* He feels his way along the wall of the house, as if stroking a sleeping dragon with his fingers, looking for the soft spot: brick, brick, brick, and then there is the door, a keypad. Too dark to see, but he counts the buttons, presses the passcode. A faint beep. He turns the knob.

Inside: a narrow hallway leading into a darker gloom. *You must shut the door behind you, even though it will be completely dark. You won't be able to see her until you do.*

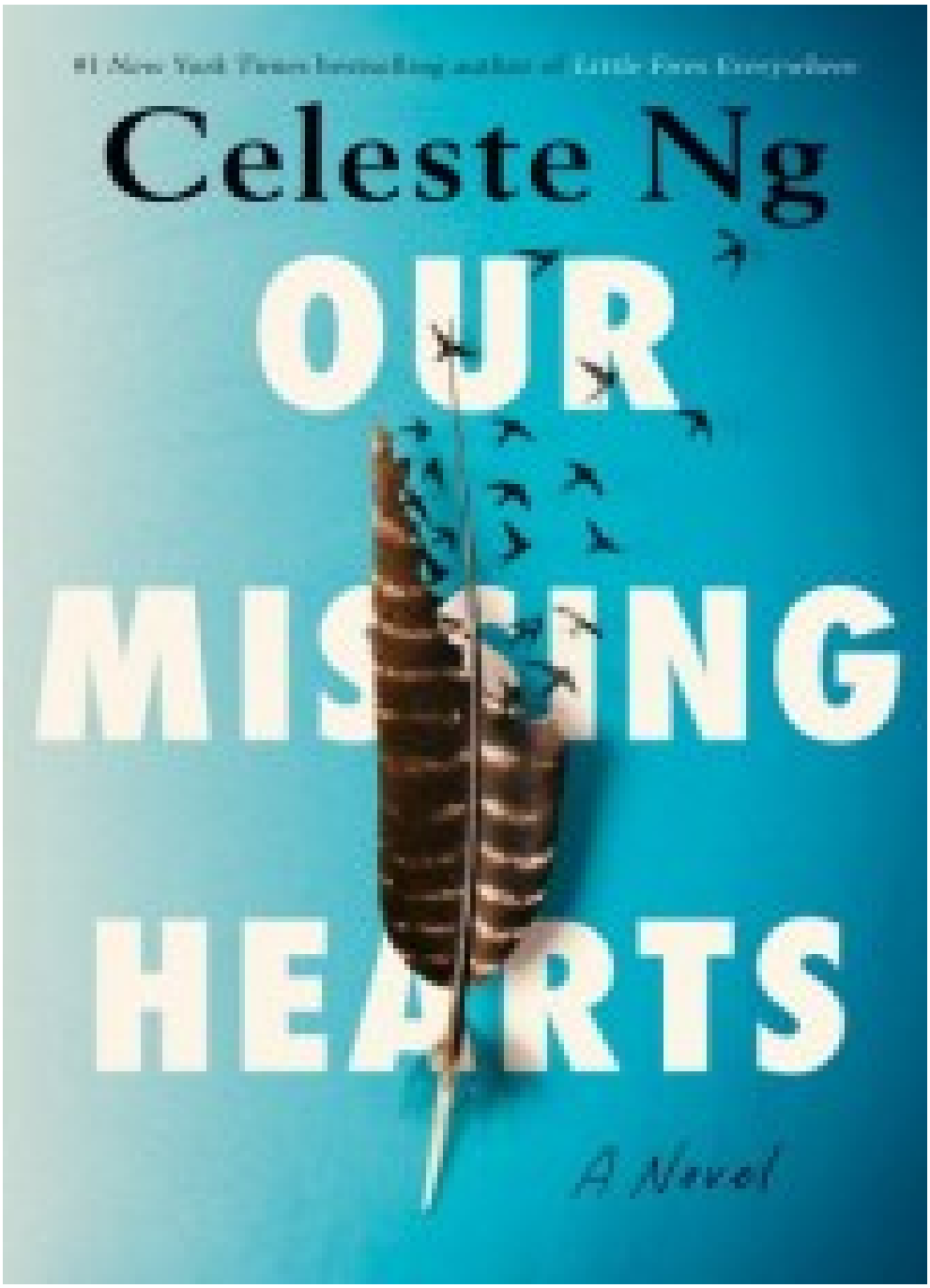
Slowly he closes it, and the outside world narrows to a wedge, then a sliver, then disappears. The latch clicks, sealing him into darkness.

And then he hears footsteps, hurrying toward him. A small light clicks on, scattering golden sparks across his sight.

His mother, astonished. Holding out her arms. Throwing them around him. Her warmth. Her scent. The shock and wonder and delight on her face.

Bird, she cries. Oh Bird. You found me.

II


#1 New York Times bestselling author of Little Fires Everywhere
Celeste Ng
OUR
MISSING
HEARTS
A Novel

So here he is: Bird. Her Bird.

Taller than she'd expected; thinner. The last scrapings of baby fat nearly gone from his face. A lean, cool face, a skeptical face, a hard set to his mouth, a squaring of the jaw she can't quite place. Not Ethan's; certainly not hers.

Bird, she says. You've gotten so tall.

Well, he says, suddenly reserved. It's been kind of a long time.

He doesn't trust her, she can see that already: the way he lingers by the door, not meeting her eyes. Yet, she thinks. He doesn't trust her *yet.* She flicks off the light.

We have to avoid attention, she says.

She can see him thinking, already: *What is this place?*

The hallway is narrow and behind her Bird's footsteps slow as he picks his way between unfamiliar walls. A stutter-step, a pause. The soles of his sneakers scuffing the floor as he drags his feet.

This way, she says. Wait. Be careful, the floor's uneven here. Watch your step.

She is speaking quickly, uncharacteristically chatty, words tripping over each other as they fall from her mouth, but she can't help it.

I knew you'd figure it out, she says, as they make their way down the darkened hall. I knew you were smart enough.

How, he says.

At the entrance to the living room she stops and waits for him to catch up, and his hand brushes the small of her back, reaching for something known, something steady. She wants to take it in hers, to press it to her face, but she knows he's not ready yet.

Someone told me, she says.

After the darkness of the hallway, the living room is blinding. Bird's hand flies to shade his eyes, as if he's stepped into blazing sun. She watches him bring the room into focus, taking it in piecemeal. The wallpaper, peeling off in strips, like old skin. A faded and fraying sofa hunched by the wall, a folding card table covered with tools. A single lamp minus its shade, naked bulb staring. She can see his eyes swiveling to the plywood nailed over the window frames, the blurry bull's-eyes on the ceiling where the rain has seeped in. To herself, shaggy and overgrown, in ragged T-shirt and worn-out jeans. Hiding like a hermit in the murky darkness. It is not where he expected her to be. She is not who he expected, either.

You must be tired, she says. I've got a room ready for you.

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She leads him upstairs, the orange-red stair runner muffling their steps. All the way up, square blotches in the wallpaper mark the places where pictures once hung.

Whose house is this?

No one's, anymore. Careful. Watch your step. The banister's broken here.

At the landing, she opens the door at the top of the stairs. A large room that clearly belonged to a small child, once upon a time: when she flips the light switch, the ceiling lamp features a clown's face, a red-nosed screw holding the glass dome in place. In the corner a crib still stands, one side lowered, the mattress bare. She's swept the room clean, but this cannot make it inviting. Part of the ceiling plaster has crumbled, exposing the slender wooden slats beneath, like bones. The windows are sheathed in black.

Garbage bags, she explains. To hide the light. We have to be careful—the neighbors think it's abandoned.

Bird sets his bookbag on the floor, touches one hand to the plastic stretched over the window frame. She's done the same herself many times, feeling the faint tremble as a car thrums by on the street below.

I set this up for you, she says. Just in case you made it. She smooths the sleeping bag laid out on the window seat, fluffs the small throw pillow at its head. I'm sorry I don't have a proper bed. More comfortable than the floor, at least.

Bird shrugs one shoulder and half turns away. From outside, the thin wail of a siren worms its way through the plastic sheeting, growing louder, then fading again. If everything was different, she thinks, if she'd had all those years with him as she should have, perhaps this language would be less foreign. The language of those beginning to shed their childhood: all gestures and subtext, all reserve and disdain. Maybe she would have learned to understand it. She wonders if Ethan does.

Are you hungry? she asks, and though she's quite sure it's a lie, he shakes his head no. Just rest then, she says. We'll talk later.

She pauses, then turns back.

Bird. I'm so glad you're here.

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As a toddler, he'd cried when other people cried. Certain songs on the stereo filled him with pins-and-needles tingling and moving even a finger would increase the agony. How unbearable, that Jackie Paper came no more. How tragic, that she was leaving home after living alone for so many years. How terrifying, to be the only living boy in New York. The music peeled his skin away, note by note, and the naked muscles throbbed and stung. Stop, mama, he would sob, make it *stop*, and Margaret, in horror, ran to the stereo and paused the music and folded him in her arms.

It stunned her, how hungry and wondrous he was at it all. He was a quiet child, watching intently, soaking everything in—the good and the bad, the joy and the pain. The pink nipples of the cherry tree swelling into blossoms. The dead sparrow folded up small on the sidewalk. The exuberant rush of loose balloons soaring upward into a wide blue sky. How porous the boundary was between him and the world, as if everything flowed through him like water through a net. She'd worried about him, moving through a rough world as a tender bare heart, beating out in the open where anything could cause a bruise.

This boy standing in front of her looks like Bird and sounds like Bird. She'd know him anywhere, that face. But there's something between them now, through which she can't quite see or hear him clearly, something opaque and hard, a layer of tortoiseshell. As if he's standing, always, just beyond arm's length. Something has scarred over in him. Oh Bird, she thinks.

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Upstairs, Bird peeks out into the hallway. No light, only a faint gibbous glow on the wall from the single lamp downstairs. He tiptoes past dark room after dark room. In the bathroom, the toilet and sink are green-streaked and grimy; moss stretches from the rusty bathtub in a lush carpet. Only one other room seems to be occupied. A bare mattress lies in one corner, an old table lamp, shadeless, squats beside it on the floor. His mother's room. The sharp scent of sweat in the air. His mother, who'd planted flowers in the sunshine and whispered stories into his ears at night, has somehow become this strange woman lurking in the shadows. He wishes his father were here, to explain this. To help him understand. To decide what to do.

Back on the landing, the light from downstairs seems dingy, like something reused, and he has to guide himself by his fingertips all the way down the hall and back to his own lonely room.

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When Bird wakes, Margaret is sitting on the floor by his bedside. Feet curled under her on the worn carpet, her gaze resting softly on his face. As if she's been studying him in his sleep, patiently waiting for him to wake. Which she has.

What time is it, he croaks. Under the darkened windows it's impossible to tell if it's night or daylight.

Just past midnight, she says.

She's brought him a mug of instant coffee. Which he doesn't like, she can see it in his face, of course he doesn't like it, what kind of mother brought her child coffee, she should have brought something else, though coffee is all she has. She is out of practice at this, at everything. But the mug is warm and cozy in the chill of the room, and he struggles to a seat, sips it. She sips hers, too. Bitter, but comforting. Like strong medicine.

The gas is shut off, she says. So no heat, no real cooking. Just a hot plate. But the water and power are still on. Which is all I need.

What is this place? he asks, but she doesn't answer. There are other things she needs to explain first. Start at the beginning, she reminds herself. This is why you called him here.

Bird, she says, I want to show you something.

She takes him up another flight of stairs, to the third floor, where all the rooms are empty. Through their half-open doors, the bare hardwood looks like deep water: dark receding into darker. She'd gone into them once, when she first arrived. The dust had piled up in drifts, like snow. Old furniture, missing feet and legs, half-kneeling on the floor; an old record player with the record still on it, too scratched to play. Everywhere there were signs of the outside, creeping in, taking over. In the bathroom, one long arm of ivy had twined its way through a broken pane and was groping for the latch; in a bedroom she'd found a forest of mushrooms sprouting from the rain-soaked carpet beneath a crack in the wall.

Now, at the top of the steps, she reaches up into the shadows, feeling for the cord, and when she finds it and pulls, a trapdoor swings down, a ladder unfolds. Her instinct is to take his hand, to guide him, but she fights it. As she knows he would, too.

This way, she says, climbing up into the thick clouded gloom. Without waiting for him.

Behind her, she hears Bird setting a first hesitant foot on the bottom rung. She forces herself to keep on going, to keep walking away. To trust that he will follow. At the far end of the house, she stops and turns back to look at him for the first time. Her eyes are used to the dark, but his are not, and he follows more by sound than by sight, feeling his way with his hands, guiding himself by the beams that run underfoot like railroad tracks. It is dusty and cold, and small slivers of moonlight pierce their way through chinks in the siding, forming bars of light he ducks his head to avoid as he picks his way along the length of the attic. When he reaches her, she sets her shoulder against the hatch on the ceiling.

Here we are, she says, as the latch gives way with a shriek. Watch your step.

They step onto the flat roof into a pool of night. It is chilly, and the wind scrapes across the top of the city like a knife leveling flour from a cup, but as they emerge Margaret feels herself going soft at the corners. At the beauty of it all.

Around them, the city spreads out like a dropped cloth, all peaks and ridges and hidden folds. Even at this quiet hour, here and there bright ribbons of cars weave along the streets; in the distance a forest of steel trees stretches upward, grasping at the moon. She can just make out the

starry glitter of far-off windows, reflecting shattered moonlight in their darkened panes. The roof is bare; all there is up here is the city, and the sky, and them. No railing, just the sharp clean edge giving way to the ground below. Beside her, she hears Bird catch his breath, and for a moment she sees him: her son, as she remembers him. Curious, alert. Eyes aglow. Marveling at how there is so much life, out there.

I didn't—he begins, and then stops. Slowly he takes a step out onto the flat plain of the roof, then another. Cautiously, as if on rocky terrain. I didn't know the city was that big, he says. One hand reaches out, as if a fingertip might brush the tip of a downtown skyscraper.

It's something, Margaret agrees. I only come up at night. Just in case anyone's watching. It's amazing, isn't it, she continues, turning toward the horizon. So much bigger than I imagined, before I got here. The first time I came to the city when I was young, I walked everywhere I could. Just trying to take it all in.

Bird's head swivels the merest bit in her direction, and she knows she has caught his interest. She pretends not to notice.

Of course, she says, I got to see a lot of it from my job. I learned my way around pretty well.

She pauses, waiting. Wondering if Ethan has told him anything. If Bird knows anything at all. But after a moment, Bird bites.

What job, he says, without turning. As if it doesn't matter to him at all.

A messenger. I carried letters, and things. Back during the Crisis. I rode a bicycle, she adds, as if as an afterthought.

Bird says nothing, but for a moment the scrim between them effaces. She has never told him anything about her time in New York, anything about her life before him; first he was too young, and then she was gone. As far as he knows, her life before him is a clean blank slate. She watches him adjust to it, this new piece of information. This new image of his mother: whizzing through the city, bearing things.

What kind of things, he says.

Deliveries, mostly. Sometimes papers that needed signing. So many things were closing then, there weren't as many trucks. We bikers were cheaper and faster and gas was so expensive, too.

She watches his face. Food, sometimes, she goes on. And medicine, when people got sick and couldn't go out. We'd pick it up at the pharmacy, leave it on their step.

We? Bird says.

There were a lot of us. All trying to scrape by.

She considers whether to say more. Wait, she decides.

Is that how you met my father?

Margaret shakes her head.

He was in a different world. A student. It was an accident that we even met at all.

She pauses.

How is he, she asks. Unsure how to ask what she really wants to know: who is he now, has he changed in all these years apart, after everything that's happened. He must be worried sick about Bird, she thinks, with a pang of regret. She wishes she could call him, to assure him that Bird is all right. But it's too dangerous; nothing's changed. Not yet. He will have to trust—the way she's trusted him, all this time, to keep their child safe.

Bird shrugs, a single shoulder rising and slumping again. So noncommittal, even his shoulders don't agree.

He's fine, he says. I guess.

She waits, holding her breath, but he says nothing more. All this time Bird's gaze hasn't left the city below, the dense milling swarm of it. One hand still rests half raised, as if he's propping himself up on air, or trying to grasp the edge of the skyline. She waits, lets the moment breathe and drift, trusting it to find its own way to land.

Why did you leave, he says at last.

It is easier to ask these things up here, somehow, where everything except them is small and far away.

She spreads her arms wide, as if to dive, tips her head back, closes her eyes. The moonlight catches in her hair, frosting it with silvery glints. For a moment, frozen there, she looks like the figurehead of a ship, sailing boldly forward into strange new waters. Then her hands drop to her sides, and she turns back again.

I'll tell you, she says. I'll tell you everything. If you promise to listen.

She begins the story while she works: hunched over the folding table, coils of wire and long lengths of pipe laid out before her. Carefully, she selects a pipe and twists a cutter around it, grinding off segments the length of her thumb, smoothing the edges with a file. Around her a halo of silver dust emerges. Bird sits at the edge of the carpet, waiting. Watching. Outside, beyond the blacked-out windows, morning light slowly tints the grayscale world.

Let me tell you first, his mother says, how I came to the city.

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Her parents' aspirations carried them across the sea, so for her, an aspirational name: Margaret. A prime minister, a princess, a saint. A name with a pedigree as long as time, a solid trunk growing from rugged roots: in French, la marguerite, the daisy; in Latin, margarita, the pearl. Both of her parents were good Catholics, back in Kowloon, educated by priests and nuns, brought up on Communion wafers and confession and daily Mass. Saint Margaret, defeater of dragons, often depicted half in, half out of a dragon's mouth.

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A thing she wouldn't learn until later: the bomb in their mailbox two months before she was born. Just enough to blow the aluminum door off its hinges and warp it from within, as if a tiny enraged creature had tried to punch its way out. A new mailbox, a new home, her father the new engineer at the factory in their little Rust Belt town. Minimal explosive power, the police said. Just a prank, who could say why. Afterward, Margaret's father dug out the kinked metal pole, hair plastered to his forehead with sweat, Margaret's mother watching from the threshold with one hand resting on her belly, Margaret still growing inside. From their windows, their new neighbors watched, too, silently, and then, as the pole came free and the dented mailbox tipped to the ground with a clang, went back inside.

PACT was decades away, but her parents felt it already: the eyes of the neighborhood scrutinizing their every move. Blending in, they decided, was their best option. So after she was born, they dressed her in pink corduroy overalls and Mary Janes, tied ribbons in her pigtailed hair. When she got older, they would buy her the clothes off the headless mannequin at the department store; anything it wore, she wore. Surreptitiously, they studied the neighborhood children and bought Margaret what they saw: Barbies, a Dream House, a Cabbage Patch Kid named Susanna Marigold. A pink bike with white-streamered handles; a toy oven that baked brownies by the light of a bulb. Suburban camouflage from the Sears catalog. Her father's saying: *The stick hits the bird that holds its head the highest.* Her mother's: *The nail that sticks up gets hammered down.* She never, in her memory, heard her parents say a word in Cantonese. Only later would she realize what she'd missed.

On Fridays they ordered pizza and played board games; on Sundays they went to church, the only black-haired heads at Mass. Her father began to watch football and drink beer with the neighborhood men. Her mother bought a set of CorningWare and learned to make casseroles. Margaret herself was bookish and loved poetry. Like her parents, she strove for *unremarkable*, anchoring herself firmly in the hill of the bell curve. To be noticed was to invite predation; better to blend seamlessly into the foliage. She earned average grades, met expectations but seldom exceeded them, caused no trouble and set no examples. Graduation, a scholarship to school in New York: *the city*, her mother always called it. As if there were only one. It was an intangible promise that lured her: that in the city, there was more than one way to be. Then the grit of the city scoured away the enamel of her to reveal something molten and pulsing inside.

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In those first days, she dressed like her idea of a New Yorker: black jeans, high heels, silky blouse. Glamour, sophistication. Mystery. Then, two days after arriving, she got off the N and a bearded figure in an emerald ball gown glided past, gathered their skirts, and squeezed into the seat she'd just left. Not a head turned, and as the doors closed, they extracted a copy of *The New Yorker* from the folds of their dress and began to read, and then the train swept them away and out of sight. In the days to come she would see much more. A man weaving his bike through stalled traffic, making loud siren noises with his mouth. *Baa-DOO baa-DOO baa-DOO*. An elderly woman with a cane thumping her way down Broadway, singing at the top of her lungs in time with her steps: *Our God is an awesome God / He reigns from heaven above.* A man pressing a woman against the side of a stoop, her knees knotted around his waist, the whole narrow passage thrumming with their cries, funneling them like a speaker to the street beyond. No one paused or smirked or looked around; everyone hurried away, intent upon their own business, their own lives. It began to rain, sheets of water blanketing the city, and Margaret stepped into a nearby bookstore, rattailed and drenched, and no one batted an eye. Here no one noticed you, she realized. Which meant you could do anything, be anything. In the bathroom she peeled the sodden socks from her feet and dried them under the hand dryer and no one said a word. When they were dry, she put them back on and felt the warmth curl between each toe. She'd never felt so free.

She cut her hair, then added a purple streak. Seeing how far she could take it before a head turned, before anyone gave her a second glance. She changed her clothes, piece by piece: higher heels, shorter skirts, jeans ripped to more hole than denim. She pierced things. No one ever gave her a second glance. Not like home, where people always gave her a second glance, and sometimes a third. Where she had to be on best behavior, always, to give no one a reason to notice her: a bird keeping her head down, a nail nestling into soft, safe wood. Staying unnoticed was how you survived.

Things were already starting to fray, even then. Cut hours, lower wages. Prices beginning to climb. But it wasn't everywhere yet: you still saw people buying new clothes, eating in restaurants. At night certain parts of town still shimmered and hummed with the collected energy of people who gathered just to be young and alive in the dark. It was still possible to enjoy things. To waste time. It was still possible to sit on a park bench or out on the stoop and watch other people go by, smiling and laughing, and smile back.

Margaret plunged herself into the city. She got a job waitressing. She skipped class and walked around and around the city, exploring its corners and crannies, devouring it. She made friends. In Chinatown you could still hear people speaking Cantonese then, and she bought Chinese newspapers and a dictionary, pored over the characters at night, learning their parts and their sounds the way she might learn a lover's body. For the first time, she realized that her old life had chafed like a too-tight coat. She learned to drink, and to flirt. She learned to give pleasure, and to take it. She was writing by then, lines scribbled on scraps of paper, on grocery receipts, on the white backs of minty gum wrappers, each word a chip of diamond, flint edged and biting. They felt like the work of a different person, someone she hadn't known she was carrying within her. The Crisis was coming, would be there soon, but there were still magazines and time for poetry and people to read it, and editors liked her tempestuous rhythm, the marvelous wild suppleness of her lines. Images that sank their teeth into your heart and refused to shake free. They never paid, but it didn't matter. At night she and her friends would pool their handfuls of bills and change for bottles of wine, drinking it from plastic cups in someone's dorm room, a ring of them sitting with mouths stained red.

In those days, the city was at fever pitch, as if everyone could feel the storm coming, the air electric, crackling with potential. Her parents thought it demented, but to her it seemed the sanest and most logical course: if the world was on fire, you might as well burn bright. Late nights that turned into early mornings; just enough money to buy coffee wherever she happened to end up. Walking home in the dawn hours to save cab fare, watching the city shift from gray to gold as the sun rose. She went to parties, danced, kissed strangers just to see what would happen. Often they'd end up in someone's bed—hers, theirs, someone else's. Beautiful men. Beautiful women. The world, at that time, was full of them, all of them furiously incandescent like dying stars.

Later, when she thought of that time she would picture a nightclub, the air thick and black and steaming around her. Bodies jostling, slick with sweat. Flecks of light circling the room, fragments of illumination: an eye, a lip, a hand, a breast. The feeling of dissolving into a crowd, a shapeless sweaty pulsating thing, all of them moving separately to the same beat, bound together by the moment. Above their heads: bright lights that would flick on when the night was done, if they hadn't fled yet. Below their dancing feet: the floor grown sticky with spilled liquor. There was no curfew yet.

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It started slowly at first, the way most things did. She'd been a junior. Shops began to shutter, windows soaped over from within. Here and there at first, like cavities in teeth, and suddenly whole blocks were empty, all over the country. The rents too high, the customers too few. More panhandlers, rattling coins in paper cups plucked from trash cans, more signs markered on scraps of cardboard. FAMILY OF 5. LOST MY JOB. ANYTHING HELPS. Everything cost more and everyone had less to spend. Clothing stores marked down their sweaters—ten percent off, twenty, forty-five, and still they dangled on the racks. No one even tried them on. No one had the money, or the time, anymore. One in ten unemployed, the statistics ran. Then: one in five. People began to lose their cars, then their homes. People began to lose their patience.

The restaurant where Margaret worked shut down: forty-five years in business, but no one came in anymore except the men who ordered coffee and lingered in the corner booths, sipping it long after it grew cold. Her boss wept as he pulled the grate across the door; he'd played behind the counter as a boy. When she asked other restaurants if they were hiring, some of them laughed. Some of them simply shook their heads. One manager told her, gently, to go home. It's going to get worse, he said, before it gets better. *If* it gets better. He had a daughter about her age who had just lost her job, too.

They would never fully agree, the economists, on what had caused it: some would say it was just an unfortunate cycle, that these things happened periodically—like cicadas, or plagues. Some would blame speculation, or inflation, or a lack of consumer confidence—though what might have caused *those* would never be clear. In time, many would dredge up old lists of rivalries, searching for someone to blame; they would settle, in a few years, on China, that perilous, perpetual yellow menace. Seeing its sabotage behind every stumble and fracture of the Crisis. But at first all they agreed on was this: it was the worst crisis since the 1980s, then since the Depression, and then they stopped making comparisons.

Those who'd been at the top locked their doors, hunkered down to wait it out. As stores closed, they ordered from afar, paying the rising prices. Those who'd been *comfortable* tightened their belts, began cutting coupons, cutting back, cutting down on everything they could—no more travel, no more leisure, only less, less, less. Those who'd just barely stretched a paycheck from one Friday to the next stumbled down a steep staircase of losses: first their jobs, then their leases, then their pride. All across the country, people couldn't make rent; by then evictions were

happening daily. The pictures were everywhere: furniture dumped unceremoniously on the sidewalk, families huddling curbside on their couches, passersby gawking as the landlords changed the locks. Foreclosures rippled block to block until swaths of neighborhoods were deserted.

A *correction*, the news called it at first, as if all that time when people had mostly gotten by, had mostly been fed and housed, had been a mistake; as if things were getting better, instead of the opposite. In Houston, the lines at food banks stretched for blocks; in Sacramento, you'd wait for hours and come away with a can of beans, a few boxes of crackers. In Boston, people dozed in the pews of churches, waiting out the night, and in the morning there were more outside.

Soon there were protests in the streets. Strikes. Marches that were peaceful. Marches with guns. Windows smashed, things seized or set aflame: anger and need made manifest and tangible. Police in full battle gear. All across the country, the same story repeating, just at different scales. In New York, Margaret watched the city begin to empty around her. The ones with houses and families elsewhere sought shelter with them, sharing expenses, making do. The ones who didn't disappeared in other ways: hiding, or holed up, or dead. You could hear birdsong, suddenly, between the pillars of buildings. The *economic crisis*, the newspapers began to call it, and then, as it became more than economic, as people began to lose their confidence, their sense of purpose, the willingness to wake up in the morning, their ability to keep trying, their optimism that something could be different, their memory that anything had ever been different, their hope that anything would ever improve—other phrases took hold. *Our ongoing national crisis*, the headlines kept saying, and soon, economizing even in words: the Crisis. The capital *C* the only extravagance still allowed.

At the college, classes were postponed, then cancelled. The dorm grew quieter and quieter as parents called children back to the safety of their homes. From Margaret's parents, somber updates: furloughs at the factory, shortages at the stores. I'm okay, Margaret told her parents, I'm staying, everything's fine, don't worry about me. Be careful. I love you. Then, after hanging up the phone, she scoured the hallways, gleaning what she could from bags of trash abandoned on the way out. Clothing and too-big shoes, which she took anyway. Blankets and books, half-eaten packages of cookies. Most of the rooms were shut, their message boards wiped bare, except for one, a scrawl of black: SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE. She touched her finger to the letters. Permanent.

Three weeks later, she ran into another person in the halls for the first time: Domi. They'd had a class together, back when there still were classes: Marxism and 20th-Century Literature. Chic and worldly Domi, perfect streaks of eyeliner winging their way toward the sky. Rhymes with *show me*, she'd said, one brow arched. Now, without makeup, her eyes looked bigger, younger. More rabbit than hawk.

Didn't think anyone else was crazy enough to still be here, Domi said. Come on. Time to go.

Domi had an ex who had a girlfriend who had a sister with a two-bed in Dumbo. Six of them squeezed into it now: the sister and her boyfriend in one room, the ex and his new girl in another, Domi on the couch and Margaret in a sleeping bag on the living room floor. The room so small that, when they held out their arms in the dark, their fingers intertwined.

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In the darkened brownstone, she tells Bird these things as she unwinds wire from the spool, strips the red plastic away to reveal gleaming copper marrow. There is a deftness to her work, a precision, like watching a clockmaker set each gear into place. Bird sits, knees hugged to chest, mesmerized: by her story, by her hands. Outside the blackened windows, it is midmorning, the

Crisis is long over, the city pulses and churns, but inside it is eerily quiet in the glow of the single lamp. The two of them together in the soundless bubble, listening.

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The sister with the apartment still had a job, one of the few that did. She worked for the mayor, taking calls, trying to match people with the services they needed. What people needed was rent, meals, medicine. Reassurance and calm. What she had to offer was sympathy, a promise to pass their concerns along. Another number they could try. Sometimes broken bricks came through the office windows; other days, bullets. Soon the desks huddled at the centers of the rooms. Her boyfriend was a security guard in an empty skyscraper in Midtown, once so busy there were three banks of elevators: one for the lower half, one for the upper, one an express straight to the top. Now everyone had been sent home—furloughed or fired outright—and he circled the lobby beneath eighty-one floors of abandoned rooms. There were computers up there, ergonomic desk chairs, couches of tobacco-hued leather. Those who had sat in them no longer had access to the building, and those who owned them were in their houses on Long Island, in Connecticut, in Key West, waiting for the Crisis to abate. One day, when no one had any money and they were all hungry, the boyfriend snuck upstairs, filched a laptop, sold it, and brought home nine overstuffed plastic bags of groceries so heavy they cut rings into his hands. They'd eaten for two weeks off that.

Domi's ex and his new girlfriend took odd jobs where they could: boarding up the windows of businesses gone bust, loading crates onto trucks for those leaving the city. He was a stocky, burly guy, bald by choice; his new girl was sandy haired and wiry and quick, both of them alert to opportunities. A warehouse in Queens closed down and they'd celebrated: nearly a month of pay loading pallet after pallet onto a cargo ship, until it sailed away—back to Taiwan or possibly Korea, none of them knew where, just *away*—and the warehouse stood empty and echoing, shafts of sunlight slicing down through dusty air. When they couldn't find work they scavenged, combing the streets, collecting cans to sell for scrap, anything useful they could repurpose. They visited the rich neighborhoods where the garbage held treasures, the owners watching them from behind double-paned windows above as if they were crows picking carrion. Once they'd spotted a man in Park Slope being carted out on a stretcher, draped with a white sheet. His brownstone, for the moment, left unguarded. After dark, they'd come back and crept in. The furniture and clothes were all gone already, but they'd stripped yards of copper pipe and wires from the walls, and the girlfriend found a watch—a small silver bangle of a thing, still ticking, engraved *To A from C*—which she'd buckled onto her wrist before they vanished into the night with their haul. None of them felt guilt, at least not then. Things could sit unused and wasted or they could be turned into heat, a full belly, a night spent tipsy and giddy as they all waited for either the Crisis or the world to end. An easy choice to make.

As for Domi and Margaret: they became messengers. Cycling through the city, down half-empty streets, in the unnerving quiet of a half-deserted Manhattan. It was cheaper than mailing things, and the post office was struggling—fewer funds, carriers laid off, gas exorbitant, packages stolen right off the truck—and for three dollars a biker would get it there in an hour. Margaret went first: one morning she'd spotted a bike propped against a stoop, and when it was still there that evening, unchained, she took it without regret. A fleet of messengers crisscrossed the city, and she recognized their faces, learned their names as their paths overlapped. A few weeks later, when they found another bike, Domi joined them, too.

At night, parts of town turned rough. Men out of work sat in the park, burning their last few dollars on a fifth of whiskey, and by evening they grew resentful and belligerent. Women learned

the hard way to avoid them. Since childhood, Margaret had mastered how to check over her shoulder, to gauge risk from a gesture, to fight if she could not flee. Domi, who'd grown up in Westport with her father—summer house, riding lessons, in-ground pool—was less prepared. Sometimes she cried out in her sleep, hands flying to shield her face, as if someone were trying to gouge out her eyes. Margaret climbed up beside her, held her tight, stroked her hair, and Domi stilled and quieted. In the mornings, the few stores stubbornly clinging to life might find their windows smashed, shelves stripped bare, alarm bell ringing ferociously, though no one had answered the call. Some people tried not to go out at all, and soon Margaret was running errands and delivering messages, too. Five dollars a run, then ten, though for those in need, she would do it for one. Medicine from the drugstore, a bag of groceries. Tampons, batteries. Candles. Liquor. All the things people needed to survive another day. She folded the dollar bills they gave her and tucked them into the cups of her bra; at the end of the night, back in the apartment, she counted them, soft as damp felt with her sweat, and smoothed them out again. By then she wasn't thinking about poetry at all.

You got used to it, after a while: all the new rules the city and the governor imposed, trying to keep order—when you could go out, when you had to stay in, how many people could gather at one time: few, then fewer. Sometimes waves of sickness rippled over the city, then the state: not enough people at work to pay hospital bills, not enough doctors or medicine anyway, just referrals for Advil from the drugstore on the corner, or something stiffer from the liquor store next door. Lines everywhere, everything in short supply except anger, and fear, and grief. Tents clustered like toadstools at the feet of overpasses and bridges. Based on the news, it was the same everywhere. You got used to waiting, to the men who squatted on sidewalks, holding signs scrawled on cardboard: ANYTHING HELPS. You learned to keep watch on them without meeting their eyes, to skirt them at a distance. Your ears pricked for the sounds of shouting, the high jangle of breaking glass; even before you recognized it, your feet would already be turning you down another street, steering you safely around. You got used to sandwiches of whatever you had—ketchup, mayonnaise, salt, whatever made bread palatable enough to choke down—to rebrewing coffee grounds, once, twice, sometimes for a whole week if you needed; even mostly water, it was something to keep you warm. You got used to not speaking to people on the street, to edging past them, both of you on your way to somewhere else, and to the sirens that flared and then quieted like an infant's stifled cry. After a while you stopped wondering where they were headed, stopped thinking about whose need they were going off to serve. Somewhere out there, you knew, wealthy people were barricaded in their fortresses, fed and warm, if not happy, but soon you stopped thinking of them. You stopped thinking about other people at all. You got used to that, too, eventually, just as you got used to people disappearing: gone back home, gone elsewhere hoping for better, sometimes simply gone.

What you couldn't get used to—what she never got used to—was the quiet. In Times Square the lights changed red to green and back again and sometimes not a car went by. Overhead the gulls screamed and dove toward the empty harbor. When she spoke to her parents it was brief, a few minutes at a time; service was spotty and minutes were expensive and all they needed to know, really, was that the other was still alive. Sometimes she would ride through Central Park and see not a single person, not on the footpaths, not on the lake, no sign of a single other human except the tents that dotted the Sheep Meadow, springing up overnight, disappearing just as quickly when word of police sweeps came. In the silence between things there was too much time to dwell and no matter how fast she pedaled, she couldn't leave her thoughts behind.

• • •

In the honeyed glow of the lamplight her hands tremble.

The Crisis. The Crisis. Bird has grown up hearing about it: We must never forget the turmoil of the Crisis, everyone has said, his whole life; we must never again go back to that. But it is impossible to explain what it felt like.

Evictions and protests daily, then nightly, people clamoring for assistance, for any kind of aid. The police fired rubber bullets and sprayed tear gas; cars plowed into the crowds. Each night sirens whirred to life and wailed away across the city; the only question was which way. Fires began to spring up all over the country—Kansas City one night, Milwaukee and New Orleans the next—frantic signal fires from those deserted and desperate. In Chicago, tanks rolled past department stores on Michigan Avenue, protecting their glossy wares. No one agreed on who to blame—not yet—and with no focus, outrage and panic and fear swelled over everything, hot and thick, rasping your lungs. It was there in the silent darkened streets after curfew, in the slate-gray shadows of the buildings and the echoing footsteps of your shoes on the deserted sidewalk. It flashed sharp and bright in the lights of the police cars as they went by, always on their way to somewhere else more urgent, which was everywhere.

How to explain this to someone who has never seen it? How to explain fear to someone who has never been afraid?

Imagine, Margaret wants to tell him. Imagine if everything you think is solid turns out to be smoke. Imagine that all the rules no longer apply.

I'm hungry, Bird ventures, and Margaret returns with a jolt, glances at her watch. It's past noon, and he's had no breakfast, either. She curses herself mentally. It's been so long since she's taken care of anyone.

She sets down the wire cutters and wipes her palms on the thighs of her jeans.

I know I've got something, she says, rummaging in a plastic bag beside the sofa. After a moment, she emerges with a single granola bar.

I get caught up in working, she says, almost embarrassed. I forget to keep food around. Here, you take it.

Bird peels the foil from the bar, then hesitates. It's starting to make sense to him: his mother's whittled features, the dark rings beneath her eyes. Whatever it is she's doing, it is consuming her. She is barely eating, maybe barely sleeping, too. All day, all night, she is working—or whatever this is.

Eat, his mother says gently. Get some food into you. I'll get more tonight.

From under the table she pulls another plastic bag: inside, bottle caps, the kind you'd unscrew from a two-liter bottle. Red, white, orange, sickly highlighter green—sticky, still smelling faintly of cola and caffeine and acid fizz. She sets a handful on the table, picks one up, inspects it. Tallies them two by two. For weeks she has been gathering them, these small bright rounds plucked from the sidewalks and the dark mouths of garbage cans.

But what are you doing, Bird says, between mouthfuls of granola, what are they *for*?

Margaret takes one cap and sweeps the rest to the side, plucks a transistor from the pile: red and yellow striped, like a sprinkle from a child's birthday cake. She touches the soldering iron to one of its spindly wire legs and the hot biting scent of rosin fills the air.

Let me tell you, she says instead, about meeting your father.

• • •

She'd been a wild thing, when they met.

Two years into the Crisis: *Fuck everything* was her motto by then. People came and went, sometimes on purpose, sometimes without warning, and you'd never know where they'd gone, if it was part of their plan or an accident, or worse. Sometimes on her deliveries, people spat in her face, told her this was China's fault, accused her of wringing America dry; she'd begun wearing a bandanna, pulled high to the bridge of her nose. Fuck this, fuck everything, she and Domi agreed, by which they meant: don't get attached to anything, or anyone. Just survive. They said it to each other almost fondly, like a greeting, or a good-night kiss. Fuck everything, Domi would murmur as they fell asleep in the living room, and Margaret, rolled in a blanket on the floor, would squeeze her hand and whisper it back, the day's sweat drying on their skin to a fine crystal grit.

And then came Ethan. Domi's birthday: still celebrated, celebrated with vengeance in the face of it all. Liquor enough to make a party; the apartment full of people, gathering limits be damned; the air hot and sticky, like someone's breath. Domi was drunk already and didn't notice him, but Margaret felt a tingle zigzag between her shoulder blades. A friend of a friend of a friend, out of place in a charcoal-gray suit. A suit! She felt an irresistible urge to dishevel him. The room was dizzy and humid and loud and she drifted away from Domi and crossed the room and put her hand to his throat and caught the knot of his tie in her fist.

They ended up outside, on the fire escape that was little more than a ledge, so small that when they both squeezed onto it they were close enough to kiss. Between their feet: Domi's broken flowerpot, full of cigarette butts and ash. Ethan, he said. Just finished at Columbia when the Crisis put everything on hold. All night, people came and went in the room behind them, laughing, drinking, forgetting—for the moment—everything else. Neither of them noticed. The night air gathered close like a blanket drawn over their heads. They talked and talked until they found themselves squinting into the peach-colored sunrise spiking its way between the buildings. Inside, the party had burned down like a banked fire. A handful of people curled up on the rug and the sofa, a tangle of lonely puppies. Domi had gone off to bed, not alone.

I should go, Ethan said, and Margaret took his jacket from her shoulders, where he'd placed it in the late-night chill, and handed it back. It was the only time they'd touched all night. She wanted to kiss him. No: she wanted to bite him, hard enough to draw blood.

It was nice meeting you, she said, and went inside.

• • •

The next evening, after curfew, she walked across the bridge and uptown, ducking into the shadows when the few cars still out flashed by. She left her bike in the apartment: outside, even locked-up bikes would be stripped of parts by morning, and Ethan, he'd said, lived on the fourth floor. Now and then she passed someone else and they exchanged a brief glance before moving on, each of them on their own mysterious errands. A hundred and twenty blocks uptown to Ethan's building, where his window glowed like a wide-awake eye. She climbed the fire escape and set her fingers in the half-open window, and at the noise he looked up, startled, put his book down. Lifted the sash and let her in.

In the morning, a ring of her tooth marks blossomed on his bare shoulder.

• • •

Domi didn't like it.

You've changed, she said, all you think about now is *him*. She said it like that—*him*—a fragment of pit she needed to spit out.

Your fancy boyfriend, she said. With his fancy apartment. So much *nicer* than here.

The truth was that it was a studio, three flights up, just one big room with a futon for both couch and bed and an old clawfoot bathtub in the kitchenette—but it was safe and warm. Ethan's family wasn't particularly fancy or rich—his mother was a nursing-home aide, his father an engineer—but they did have connections: his landlord was an old friend of his mother's from high school and had rented to him at a steep discount; Ethan could afford to wait out the Crisis a long time. The truth was that Domi could have been in her own apartment, too—a much nicer one—if she'd chosen: her father's electronics company made the innards of half the cell phones and computers in the country; he owned two yachts, a small private plane, houses in London and L.A. and the south of France. One on Park Avenue, too, where Domi had grown up: she'd pointed it out to Margaret one afternoon, and they spat on the sidewalk and fled before her father's driver could chase them away. Her mother had died when she was eleven, and a month later her father married the Danish au pair and Domi swore that once she left home she'd never speak to him again, and she hadn't. In college, she'd ripped up his checks and mailed back the pieces.

So that's it, Domi said, you're just going to hide out with your rich boyfriend and ignore all this, while the rest of us scrounge?

Margaret's hands were chapped and raw; a week ago someone had grabbed at her coat, tearing it, hungry for more than she was offering, but she'd gotten away. She had mended the rip with yarn—red, the only color she'd had—and the stitches traced a jagged gash along her collarbone.

Fuck both of you, Domi said, but Margaret didn't answer. She was already on her way out the door.

• • •

He spoke half a dozen languages fluently, could get by in even more. Not bad for a white boy from Evanston, he'd joke. His parents had both loved traveling, had chosen a different country for each vacation; he'd been to four continents before he was ten years old. He was an only child like Margaret, and this was one of the things that drew them together: the feeling that they were the last twigs on the family tree, grafting themselves together for strength, to forge something new.

How about Cantonese, she'd asked, and he shook his head.

Only a little Mandarin. And not very good Mandarin at that.

And then: We could learn it together. The two of us.

He specialized in etymology: the meanings of things. As a boy he'd played Scrabble and done crosswords with his father; his mother had coached him for the spelling bee. For his birthdays and Christmas, he'd always asked for books. These days, with libraries and stores shuttering, he had nothing to read but the row of dictionaries lined up on the windowsill. The first morning, after they woke, she rose from his bed and crossed the room to look at them. Fat yellow ones for different languages: French, German, Spanish, Arabic, some she didn't even recognize. Dead languages: Latin, Sanskrit. A sprawling English one the size of a phone book, pages thin as Bible leaves. Slowly she'd traced her fingers along the spines and then turned back to him—both of them still undressed from the night before, their skin burnished to gold in the midmorning sun—in wonder. As if she suddenly recognized him as someone she already knew.

For Ethan, words carried secrets, the stories of how they came to be, all their past selves. He would find the mysterious ways they connected, tracing their family tree back to pinpoint the unlikeliest cousins. It was proof that despite the chaos around them, there was logic and order to the world; there was a system, and that system could be deciphered. She loved this about him,

this unshakable belief that the world was a knowable place. That by studying its branches and byways, the tracks it had rutted in the dust, you could understand it. For her the magic was not what words had been, but what they were capable of: their ability to sketch, with one sweeping brushstroke, the contours of an experience, the form of a feeling. How they could make the ineffable effable, how they could hover a shape before you for an eyeblink, before it dissolved into the air. And this, in turn, was what he loved about her—her insatiable curiosity about the world, how for her it could never be fully unraveled, it held infinite mysteries and wonders and sometimes all you could do was stand agape, rubbing your eyes, trying to see properly.

Holed up in the apartment, they read, pulling one dictionary or another from the shelf and poring over it, stretched across the futon, one's head pillowed on the other's thigh. Reading passages aloud, dissecting meanings, each of them digging: she mining words like precious gems, arranging them around the outlines of the world; he excavating the layers fossilized within. All the traces of people trying to explain the world to themselves, trying to explain themselves to each other. *Testify* had its roots in the word for three: two sides and a third person, standing by, witnessing. *Author* originally meant *one who grows*: someone who nurtured an idea to fruition, harvesting poems, stories, books. *Poet*, if you traced back far enough, came from the word for *to pile up*—the earliest, most basic, form of making.

Margaret had laughed at this. That's me, she said, a piler-up of words.

Krei, she read, meant *to separate*. To judge. Like a sieve, Ethan said, separating the good from the bad. And thus, *krisis*: the moment at which a decision is made, for better or for worse.

With one finger she'd traced the delicate line of his sternum, circled the soft hollow at the base of his throat.

So a moment, she said, in which we decide who we are.

Outside there were sirens and shouting, and sometimes gunshots—or were they firecrackers? Waves of unrest rippled state to state like a wildfire, the whole country tinder-dry and eager to burn. In Atlanta, unemployed protesters had set the mayor's office ablaze; they'd called in the National Guard. Bombs kept going off at statehouses, in subway stations, on the lawns of governors' mansions. There were emergency meetings and votes and marches and rallies and nothing seemed to change. It can't go on, people kept saying, in the few spaces where they still dared meet: in the aisle of the grocery store, picking what they could from sparse shelves; in apartment building hallways as neighbors passed and over fences as people raked fallen leaves—any attempt to maintain order and neatness and normalcy in an era that was anything but. It can't go on, everyone said, but it kept going on.

Inside: Margaret and Ethan drank tea and ate crackers from the cupboard. After her shower, she put on one of his old shirts, washed her dress in the bathtub, hung it over the rod to dry. They closed the windows, then the curtains. They read. They made soup. They made love.

The way he handled her, like butter to be licked off a finger. In bed afterward, her cheek pressed to his back, she had never felt so calm. It felt good: a stretch after weeks spent coiled. One morning, she simply stayed.

• • •

She'd sent Domi a letter when she left: a faltering attempt to say goodbye after their last, worst fight, which had ended with Domi stripping off the jacket Margaret had handed down to her—*Take it, I'd rather be naked*—and storming out. It was a whole precious sheet, front and back, and afterward she couldn't remember which things she'd written and which she'd held back, trying to avoid Domi's wrath, trying to spare Domi pain. All she knew for sure was that Domi never called, never came by, and eventually Margaret stopped waiting.

In the quiet of Ethan's apartment, poems came to her like timid animals emerging after a storm.

She wrote about the hush of the city, how the pulse of it had changed with so many people gone. About love, and pleasure, and comfort. The smell of his neck in the early morning. The warm soft den of their bed at night. About finding stillness in the whirr that had been there for so long, a quiet place in the grinding, never-ending shriek of the Crisis. There was nowhere to publish these poems; only the big newspapers could afford to keep running, and that with government support; no one had time for poetry, for words, but she wrote phrases on scraps of paper, in the wide margins of Ethan's dictionaries, and someday they would form the first grasping branches of her own book.

No one saw it yet, but by then, almost imperceptibly, the story of the Crisis had begun to solidify. Soon enough it would harden, like silt from turbid water, settling in a thick band of mud.

We know who caused all this, people were beginning to say. Ask yourself: who's doing well because we're on the decline? Fingers pointed firmly east. Look how China's GDP was rising, their standard of living climbing. Over there you got Chinese rice farmers with smartphones, one congressman ranted on the House floor. Over here in the U.S. of A. you got Americans using bucket toilets because their water's shut off for nonpayment. Tell me how that's not backwards. Just you tell me.

The Crisis was China's doing, some started to insist: all their manipulations, their tariffs and devaluations. Maybe they'd even had help, dismantling us from within. They want to take us down. They want to own our country.

Suspicious eyes swiveled to those with *foreign* faces, *foreign* names.

The question, people kept saying, is what are we going to do about it?

• • •

A frantic phone call from her mother, her voice nearly unintelligible: someone had pushed Margaret's father down the stairs at the park. He'd passed by them, the man who'd done it—they were heading down, he coming up—but they hadn't even glanced at him, and then he had turned and shoved her father with both hands, right between the shoulder blades. Margaret's father was sixty-four and had grown thinner, slighter, his body still compact but no longer as strong as it was, touches of arthritis gumming his hips and shoulders, and he had tumbled down, not even trying to catch himself, just down, like something already dead, the edge of the bottom step shattering his skull just above his ear, all of it so sudden neither of them even had time to scream. By the time Margaret's mother understood what had happened and turned to see who'd pushed him, the man was gone. Her father never regained consciousness, and two and a half hours after her mother's phone call, he was dead. The next morning, reeling from grief, her mother had a heart attack in the kitchen of their empty house—now too big for her alone—and this time Margaret, still trying to book a plane ticket, got the news from a police officer who'd managed to find her, as next of kin.

It was already happening then, though she didn't know it yet: already happening not just in the push down the stairs but in the people who watched the elderly man fall and shrank away from the man who'd pushed him, letting him pass—whether out of shock or fear or approval, none of them would ever dare to ask themselves. It was already happening, in the three people—a middle-aged woman, a young man in his twenties, a mother pushing a stroller—who passed by before the fourth called an ambulance, in the moment they saw the elderly woman crouching over her husband's tangled body, not screaming but murmuring to him unintelligibly, in a

language neither of them had spoken in decades, even in private, pulled out of her now in a desperate hope that these words would be rooted deeply enough inside him that he might still hear.

I didn't realize he was hurt, the woman would say to her husband later, when they saw a report about the *unfortunate incident* on the news. I thought maybe he slipped and fell or something, I didn't want to embarrass anyone.

I heard her speaking Chinese or whatever, the young man would say, I just knew it wasn't English, and you know, what they're saying about China these days—it seemed better not to get involved.

The mother with the stroller would say nothing. She would never even see the news; her baby had a new molar coming in, and neither of them was sleeping through the night.

An isolated incident, the police report would say a few weeks later. No leads on the man who'd done the pushing. No evidence of why he might have done such a thing.

It was happening in other cities, in infinite variations: a kick or a punch on the sidewalk, a spray of spit in the face. It would happen everywhere, here and there at first, then all over, and eventually the news would stop reporting the stories, because they weren't new anymore.

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We can fly home, Ethan said. Plane tickets were scarce and expensive, but they had some money saved. We can fly home and take care of whatever needs doing.

She didn't know how to explain there was nothing left to go home for anymore. That it wasn't home any longer. Instead she focused on a different word: we.

I want to leave New York, she told Ethan. Please, let's just leave. Anywhere else.

It didn't make sense, exactly; her parents had never been to New York; she'd left their house years ago; why this need to flee? But on another level it did make sense, this urgent need she felt to start over. To begin again somewhere in her new orphaned state, in a new place where she could cushion herself from the hard corners of the world. She wanted to be a bird keeping her head low. She wanted to not stick up. Ethan emailed his father, who reached out to his network: neighbors, colleagues, old roommates, friends of friends, all the dividends of goodwill he'd collected over the course of his gregarious life. Someone always knew someone; it was how things happened in his world, and neither of them thought much of it then, except to be grateful: as it turned out, Ethan's godfather's brother was golf buddies with a Harvard dean, who said the university was hiring, or would be soon. A few phone calls, a résumé slipped over the transom, and soon Ethan found himself newly employed as an adjunct in the linguistics department.

Within two weeks it was settled. They said goodbye to no one; they'd lost touch with everyone they'd known in the city by then. They took little with them because they had little to take: a suitcase of clothes between them, a stack of dictionaries. They would start again from scratch.

• • •

He can't imagine it. She can see it on his face: the puzzled look of someone trying to feel what they've never felt. To see what they've never seen. Her father had told her a parable once, blind men trying to describe an elephant, able to grasp it only in parts—a wall, a snake, a fan, a spear. A cautionary tale: how futile to believe you could ever share your experience with another. Details pour out of her now like sharp grains of sand, but it's still just a nightmare someone else had. Nothing can make him understand it but living through it, and she would give her life to make sure that never happens.

But how *did* it end, Bird asks, and she thinks: yes. So much more to tell.

• • •

She sank into her new life like it was a thick down comforter. In their little house in Cambridge, purchased with every penny they'd saved—the only upside to the Crisis, Ethan joked grimly, so many houses for sale, cheap—she painted the walls a warm orange-gold. The color she wanted their lives to be. They repaired the windows, sanded the floors, planted a garden: squash and tomatoes, lettuce of a shocking green. Inside the tall fence that hemmed in their postage-stamp of a yard, it was easy to imagine the rest of the world was like this, too. It was easy to forget the Crisis still raging outside, because with money and luck and connections they had simply stepped out of it, the way you'd step out of a blizzard, into warm dry shelter.

For everyone else, it came to an end with a snowy video clip from a security camera. The footage showed a grainy gray figure, shrouded in a hoodie, skulking outside an office building on a DC street. It all happens quickly: a dark-suited man emerges from the lobby, the hooded figure raises a gun. A flash of light. The dark-suited figure crumples. And then, just before fleeing off-screen, the man in the hoodie glances up at the security camera, as if just noticing it for the first time, his sunglassed face centered in the still frame.

The dark-suited figure, news reports explained as they ran the clip on a loop, was a senator from Texas, one of the most hawkish on what he called *the Chinese Crisis.* He'd made a name for himself with fiery calls for sanctions, polemics on the creeping menace of Chinese industry, thinly veiled insinuations about loyalty. But with the assassination attempt, public opinion made a swift U-turn: though the face of the man in the hoodie was too blurry to identify him, it was clear enough to show that he was East Asian—*based on the context*, analysts concluded, *likely Chinese.* Police departments were flooded with calls pointing fingers at neighbors, coworkers, the barista at the corner café. On social media, dozens of photos—pulled from online records, dating profiles, work portraits, vacation snapshots—were posted side by side with the still frame from the security tape by those sure they'd cracked the case. All in all, amateur sleuths would positively identify the culprit as thirty-four different men, aged nineteen to fifty-six and none resembling another, and because of this the shooter would never be apprehended, no one would ever be charged, and every Asian face would always remain a suspect—of the shooting, or of secretly sympathizing with it. From his hospital bed, bandaged shoulder prominently featured, the senator beat his drum. *You see? They'll stop at nothing, even cold-blooded murder. And who might be next?* Editorials weighed in: *not just an attack on the physical person of one senator, but an outright attack on our government, on our very way of life.*

A few tried to defend the shooter: *Look at the hate this man's been spewing; violence is never right, but can you blame him, really?* Chinese American organizations quickly condemned the unknown shooter as a lone wolf, an outlier, an aberration. He does not speak for us, their statements seemed to plead. But it was too late. Suspicion spread like ink on wet cloth, bleeding outward until everyone was tinged. It was the same dirty tint that would be used, for years to come, to justify the sidelong glances at anyone who might seem Chinese, to excuse the refusals of service and shouted slurs and spat-in faces, and later on, the baseball bats, the booted feet.

It was the catalyst needed to pass PACT. Everyone was tired of the Crisis; it had dragged on for nearly three years, long enough to ratchet everyone into submission. To most people, PACT seemed temperate, sensible even: patriotism, public vigilance. Why *wouldn't* you support it? Margaret watched a video of the president signing it, a group of lawmakers clustered around his desk. Just over his right shoulder, the injured senator, arm still in a sling, nodded grimly.

PACT will protect us from the very real threat of those who undermine us from within, the president said. All loyal Americans—including loyal persons of Asian origin—need fear nothing from this law.

He paused for a moment, then signed his name with a flourish at the bottom of the page. Cameras flashed. Then he turned and presented the pen to the sling-armed senator, who accepted it daintily with his uninjured hand.

PACT: Preserving American Culture and Traditions. A solemn promise to root out any anti-American elements undermining the nation. Funding for neighborhood-protection groups to break up protests and guard businesses and stores, for make-work projects churning out flags and pins and posters encouraging watchfulness, and *reinvesting in America*. Funding for new initiatives to monitor China—and new watchdog groups to sniff out those whose loyalties might be divided. Rewards for citizen vigilance, *information leading to potential troublemakers*. And finally, most crucially: preventing the spread of un-American views by quietly removing children from un-American environments—the definition of which was ever expanding: Appearing sympathetic to China. Appearing insufficiently anti-China. Having any doubts about anything American; having any ties to China at all—no matter how many generations past. Questioning whether China was really the problem; questioning whether PACT was being applied fairly; eventually, questioning PACT itself.

In the days after PACT's passage, things calmed slowly, imperceptible at first as stars moving across the sky. Quiet in the streets stretched for one, two, ten nights in a row. People began to find work again. The noises of the city ground back to life, like the clearing of the throat after a long period of silence. Here and there, as buy-American orders resuscitated the idled factories, stores began to reopen, grocery shelves became fuller. People staggered back out into daylight like survivors from a fallout shelter. Blinking and bewildered and groggy. Timid and cautious and shell-shocked. Anxious, above all, to move on.

PACT, its proponents insisted, would strengthen and unify the nation. Left unsaid was that unity required a common enemy. One box in which to collect all their anger; one straw man to wear the hats of everything they feared.

Reports began to trickle in. A Chinese American man, punched in the face in DC; two middle-aged aunties, pelted with garbage in Seattle. A Chinese American woman in Oakland, dragged into an alley and groped, while back on the sidewalk, her baby screamed in its stroller. Margaret's father, it turned out, had been one of the first but far from the last.

Soon it became clear that anyone who might remotely be mistaken for Chinese was at risk. In Miami, a Thai man heading to his office was stabbed; in Pittsburgh, a Filipino teen walking home from swim practice was beaten with a hockey stick; in Minneapolis, a Hmong woman was pushed into traffic, nearly hit by a bus. The perpetrators were seldom caught and even more rarely charged: it was hard to prove they'd acted because the victim was—or was thought to be—Chinese. *The average American*, one judge ruled, *cannot reasonably be expected to visually distinguish between various varieties of persons of Asian origin*. As if they were types of apples, or breeds of dogs; as if those *persons of Asian origin* did not count as average Americans themselves. As if any of this might be justified by careful distinguishing on the part of the one wielding the bat.

The persons of Asian origin, conversely, were scrutinized thoroughly. A vigil for the Thai man in Miami was dispersed by police for unruliness. A rally for the young mother in Oakland refused to disband, ending in two arrests. The Chinese American man punched in DC was discovered to have an outstanding speeding ticket and was jailed for thirty days. The Filipino teen had fought back, giving his attacker a concussion, and was charged with assault. Soon,

when the protests and vigils and demonstrations refused to abate, the first of the PACT child replacements would begin.

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The simple truth was that like most people, Margaret did not think much about any of this. The new act focused on those who held un-American views—but she was doing nothing of the sort. She was buying a table runner, warm slippers, a new bedspread. Magazines were printing again, showing beautiful people and beautiful lives to ogle and emulate; it was possible once more to dine at a restaurant, to have a white-shirted waiter pour you wine. Like everyone, she was trying to build a new, shiny, beautiful life. What could be more American?

A house, a husband. A yard ringed by a fence. Two kinds of boots, rubber for puddles, fur-lined for snow. Scented candles and trivets, a recycling bin, an electric toothbrush, all the paraphernalia of domestic life. All the things she thought she'd been happy to escape. If someone had told her at twenty where she'd be five years later, she would have laughed in their faces, to hear that she not only had these things again, but that she wanted them. Craved them. The only part she would have believed was Bird: she'd always wanted a child. Back in Ethan's tiny apartment they'd daydreamed, the two of them, imagining what their child would be like. Soon, to their delight, they would find out.

Inside her, Bird began to grow. The size of a lentil. The size of a pea. The size of a walnut, then a lemon. Each morning Ethan kissed her belly, just above the navel, before heading to work. A year ago, she and Domi would have been standing face-to-face, gripping their handlebars, steeling themselves for the gauntlet of the day. Armor check, they called it, and that was all they would say. Not goodbye, not see you later, though it meant all those things. Margaret might straighten the collar of Domi's scuffed leather jacket; Domi might tug Margaret's scarf higher over her throat, hiding her face. Armor check, each of them would say, before riding away. Packed into those two words: take care, come back safe, I love you.

Now, in the quiet house, southern sun and sparrow song pooling through the windows, she wore a long soft dress, under which Bird was just beginning to swell. Woolly slippers in which she could not run. Earrings. There was no need for armor here, yet she missed Domi most in these moments, when she remembered there was no more need for toughness.

Ethan's parents came for a visit, and Margaret made up the second bedroom—soon to be the nursery—with clean white sheets. In the kitchen, his mother taught her how to make shepherd's pie, Ethan's childhood favorite. Through the doorway, Ethan watched them, aproned and haloed in the afternoon light, Margaret holding a wooden spoon in one hand as she jotted notes on an index card with the other, his mother setting her free hand on the growing round of Margaret's stomach, so tenderly it might have been a baby's head.

Bird grew: the size of a peach, a mango, a melon. How to understand it, these mystifying sensations, the baffling new phenomenon that was her body? Margaret headed for the public library—now reopened, thanks to private donations—down streets softly humming once more. Stores had reopened, too, one by one, selling fancy notebooks and candy and jewelry; there were people strolling the sidewalks again. It was like the first days of spring after a long and snowy winter, everyone hungry to not be alone. For a brief glorious moment, strangers smiled at each other in passing, so happy to see one another: *You're still here? Me, too!* Still relieved, back then, not yet afraid. Glints of red, white, and blue on everyone's collars and coats.

In the library, nothing had been removed yet; everyone was simply happy to have books again. The young librarian at the counter pointed her to shelf after shelf: Margaret wanted to know much more than *what to expect*, and at night, as they lay in bed, she read tidbits to Ethan.

Mother pandas crawled into a den alone; for the first months of the cub's life there was no other world but the dark snug den, no other creature but its mother. Cuckoos crept into other birds' nests, laid their eggs among strangers, and flew away, trusting the other mothers to raise their young as their own. The octopus laid its eggs in strings, like long garlands of pearls, guarded them until her death, starving as she blew air across them to keep them alive.

She grew larger. From within, Bird thrummed against her: his heels the mallets, her belly the drum. She could feel his hiccups, a microscopic ping. When he turned over, she felt the movement inside her stillness. What's it feel like, Ethan asked, wondrous, and she tried to explain: what the ocean floor felt as the waves rolled out, then in. The librarian slid another book across the counter toward her as she ventured farther and farther from shore. Some fish needed no mate, laid eggs and hatched them alone, every fishling a perfect copy of its mother. Some single-celled creatures simply divided, neatly unzipping themselves in two. Each week, another book, another marvel. Another piece of the eternal mystery, life's need to make more life. From the animal world to the plant: Milkweed trees sent their seeds aloft on the wind, to grow far from home; pinecones flared open at their mother's feet, a skirt of stubby seedlings scrabbling for space and light. Succulents would grow anew from a broken-off leaf, pushing roots out into the air, then down into the soil: a piece of its own body, transformed into its child. She thought of the Bible verse her own mother had once made her recite, for Sunday school: *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*

She found mothers everywhere, even in the garden, tending her plants. When the frost is coming, she learned, the way to ripen tomatoes on the vine is to twist their roots. Pull until the earth cracks, until the spider-hairs below snap like cut strings. This tells the plant: Your end is near—save what you can. Give up on growing taller; give up on leafing wide. Think only of the fruit, dangling in hard green fists. Exhaust yourself. Let your leaves shrivel and yellow. Nothing else matters. Push until there is nothing left of you but a dry stalk holding a round red globe aloft. Wither, pushing that one sweet fruit into ripeness, hoping that in summer something of you will sprout again.

Wakened at night by Bird's restless somersaults, she wrote: tender things that clung to one another, tentatively, like fish eggs. One poem, two. Then a dozen. Then enough for a book. One of those nights, Bird eight and a half months in her belly, she'd had a craving. That morning Ethan had bought her a pomegranate, and she tore it in bloody halves with her hands. They'd finally come available again, after the Crisis, and it felt like the luxury it was, heavy with tiny gemstones. Glistening seeds showered onto the floor, red droplets splashed on the tile. How many trees might spring from that one hard globe? This was its job, she understood suddenly: to create all these seeds, and then to explode. From within, Bird kicked at her, gently this time. As if playing a game. Did the pomegranate know, she thought, did it ever wonder where they went, how they turned out. If they'd ever managed to grow. All those bits of its missing heart. Scattered, to sprout elsewhere.

When the book was finished, this would be the poem on the last page.

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It is painful to admit: back then, she had believed that PACT was progress, that they had moved past something. That they were on their way to something better. That if she behaved, none of it would apply to her. Now and then, on the news, there were still reports of unrest: neighborhood patrols discovering *radicals* who threatened public order; investigations of *suspicious activities*. But that was elsewhere, abstract and nebulous. Isolated incidents. What was concrete was here: the private roiling of Bird inside her, like a ship rolling on the sea; her

husband, warm and solid in their bed. The long nights they spent reading side by side on the couch, her feet in his lap, sharing favorite passages so often that afterward, she felt she'd read his book, and he hers. She knitted small socks. Ethan painted the nursery. When Bird tapped his feet within her, she tapped back. She bought an apron. She roasted a chicken. She arranged dishes on a shelf.

She had never been so happy.

As she tells him this, she coils the wires neatly round her fingertip and tucks the bundle into the bottle cap. A twiddle of the screwdriver and the little capsule is sealed, a fat plastic pill.

Bird can't stop himself. What is it, he asks.

Resistance, his mother says, and sets the bottle cap on the tabletop with all the others.

• • •

Rumors started. Of nighttime knocks at the door, of children ushered into black sedans and whisked away. A clause buried in the folds of the new law, allowing federal agencies to remove children from homes deemed un-American. A few journalists had pointed it out, before PACT had been passed; one congresswoman had questioned whether it might lead to misuse, whether it was truly necessary. But the consensus—on Capitol Hill and among the public—was that the perfect was the enemy of the good, that too much was better than nothing at all. That all tools should be used to safeguard national security, that nothing should be off the table. Of course no one had an interest in splitting up families. Only for the most dire cases.

A few of these cases made the news. In Orange County, a march protesting anti-Chinese bias spiraled into a clash with bystanders hurling epithets, ending with riot police, tasers, a Chinese American three-year-old struck by a tear-gas canister. For the officer, paid leave; for the protester, a full investigation into the family. Cable-news anchors pointed out this was not the first march the child had been taken to; on social media, photos showed her as a toddler perched on her father's shoulders, an infant strapped to her mother's chest like a bomber's pack. Never mind that the parents were second- and third-generation Americans, that their grandparents had been Angelenos before Union Station erased Chinatown. Instead, the parents' booking photos flashed on-screen, their faces dark-haired and glaring and so obviously *foreign.* Not one of us. From the hospital, the child was whisked away. The best possible outcome, headlines agreed. Protecting a child from learning such harmful views.

Margaret, reading the news on her phone, a milk-stoned Bird dozing at her breast, thought: *awful.* And: *How could those people endanger their child.* She tried to imagine carrying Bird into the crush of a mob, flash bombs bursting at their feet, the bite of tear gas setting her nostrils aflame. Her mind slammed its door on the thought. There he was, safe here in her arms: her Bird. Long lashes resting on cheeks softer than anything she'd ever touched. A small furrow rumpling his eyebrows. What troubling dreams could a baby already have? She smoothed the creases with the pad of her thumb until his face went calm again. Beside her, Ethan's hand squeezed her shoulder, then cupped Bird's head. She would never do such a thing, she promised Bird silently. None of this would ever apply to them.

The next march protesting anti-Chinese hate, in Queens, was sparsely attended; after that, there was a long stretch with none.

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What she thought was about her poems, her garden, her husband. Bird. She pushed seeds into the soil and watered them until threads of green shoots emerged. She set cutoff milk jugs over seedlings to shield them from the night chill. She knit a blanket for Bird from cream-

colored wool. Late at night, she made love to Ethan. In the morning, content, she baked banana scones, licked honey from the spoon.

Ethan's parents came to visit when they could: for Bird's birthday, for Halloween bearing candy he could not yet chew, for Christmas laden with gifts heavier than their small recipient. His mother shared feeding tips with Margaret; one afternoon, when Margaret dozed on the sofa, exhausted, with a tantrum-drained Bird on her chest, Ethan's father spread a blanket over them and then clicked off the light. Margaret and Ethan had said only that her parents had passed, and it warmed both of them to see the eagerness and openness with which Ethan's parents enfolded Margaret into their lives.

He looks just like her, Ethan's parents kept saying, and they'd thought this was a compliment at first—and maybe it was, though later both would wonder if it was also a twitch of discomfort, someone else's face so clearly stamped on a child they felt should have been *theirs.* Privately, Margaret and Ethan thought Bird simply looked like Bird. Looking down on him late at night, they could pick out small features and trace them to their source—Margaret's cheekbones, Ethan's eyelashes—but where they saw resemblance was in the expressions: the two parallel wrinkles that appeared on Bird's forehead when he was thinking, the dimple in his cheek, like a fingerprint, when he laughed. That was Ethan's wrinkle on Margaret's brow, Margaret's dimple just southeast of Ethan's mouth. It was a strange and unsettling experience, watching expressions that they knew flit over the face of this small person, part them and part the person they loved most, and they sensed that this would be only the first of many strange and unsettling experiences that parenthood would bring.

Margaret wrote more poems. Publishers were printing again, and when Bird was three, a small, plucky press agreed to publish her book. A split pomegranate on the cover, so close up it resembled an organ, or a wound: you had to look twice to see it for what it was. *Our Missing Hearts* was praised by a few poetry critics and read by almost no one. Tens of copies sold, she'd said to Ethan drily, who reads poetry anymore? and he'd joked, Who ever read it before?

It didn't matter. The world was full of poems to her then.

She taught Bird to catch fireflies: hands cupped, lemon-lime light flashing in the cracks of his fingers. And then to let them go, spiraling into the night like a dying spark. She taught him to lie still in the grass and watch the neighborhood rabbits nose in the clover, so close his breath stirred the fine white fluff of their tails. She taught him the names of flowers and bugs and birds, to identify the low *coo-coo-coo* of the mourning dove and the brash scream of the blue jay and the singsong *phoebe* of the chickadee, clear and fresh as cold water on a summer day. She taught him to pluck honeysuckle blossoms from the vine and touch the end to his tongue: such sticky sweetness. She pulled the shell of a cicada from a pine tree's trunk, turned it over to show the neat slit down the belly where, having grown, it had wriggled out of its old self into something new.

And she told him stories. Stories about warriors and princesses, poor brave girls and boys, monsters and magicians. The brother and sister who outwitted the witch and found their way home. The girl who saved her swan-brothers from enchantment. Ancient myths that made sense of the world: why sunflowers nod, why echoes linger, why spiders spin. Stories her mother had told her in childhood, before she stopped speaking of such things: how once there had been nine suns, baking the earth to dust, until a brave archer shot them one by one out of the sky. How the monkey king tricked his way into the heavenly garden to steal the peaches of immortality. How once a year, two lovers, forever separated, crossed a river of stars to meet in midair.

Did that really happen? he asked each time, and she smiled and shrugged.

Maybe.

She filled his head with nonsense, with mystery and magic, carving out space for wonder. A haven in their long-ago Eden.

• • •

Enough for today, she says, setting down the pliers.

In part this is selfish. She is drawing out this moment of calm, lingering in the sweet times, before the bitter things she has to confess. But there are things she needs to do before dark, and they will take time.

She lines up the bottle caps she's completed, tallying them two by two. Fifty-five. Much fewer than on a usual day, but that's to be expected: wading through the bog of the past slows her hands. Slows everything. Fifty-five little round capsules, brimful with transistors, a watch battery, a small metal disc. And wires, so many wires. Packed down tight into a cap the size of a coin and sealed up tight, simple and primitive and dangerous as a stone. She bundles them all into a plastic shopping bag emblazoned with a yellow smiley face: *Thank you for your patronage.*

Bird waits while she disappears upstairs into her room, and when she comes back, she has donned a baggy sweatshirt, a folding straw hat with a wide brim. She looks just like the trash-picking women who roam the streets, looking for bottles and cans to salvage.

Stay here, Margaret says. She hesitates, then says: You'll be fine and I won't be long.

She says it firmly, trying to convince herself more than him.

Stay inside, she adds, and keep quiet. She loops the bag of bottle caps around her wrist, then lifts a trash bag from the corner. Inside, cans and soda bottles clink as it settles over her shoulder. There's a sour smell in the air and he can't tell if it's the bag, or her clothes, or her.

I'll be back soon, she says, and heads into the hall.

• • •

After his mother has gone, Bird lifts one of the still-empty caps and twists it between his fingers, his thumbnail tick-ticking along the ridged sides. His mind tick-ticking over what he's just heard.

It's difficult to imagine, the world his mother has described. The world of the Crisis, and the world before that. In school, when they've studied the Crisis, it has always seemed like a story in a book: something made up to impart a lesson. A cautionary tale. It is different, to hear his mother tell it. To hear how it felt and sounded and smelled, to imagine her in the midst of it. To see the scars etched in her hands from those jagged days.

The mother he remembers coaxed frilly green leaves from the earth and bright globes of vegetables from their vines. She let bees land on her fingers, spread butter on his toast, spun shimmering fairy tales in the darkness. This mother is a different creature entirely, lean and wiry, almost feral, a ravenous look in her eyes. Her hair uncombed and greasy, a harsh animal musk on her skin. It makes it easier to believe the things she's telling him: the Crisis, her wildness. How she survived. It fills him with apprehension, too, at what she might be doing now. He thinks of his mother, bent over the table, whispering stories to him, the point of the cut wire glinting in her hand. Her mouth set firm and tense in a straight grim line. He thinks of the bottle caps: little time bombs, ready to be detonated at a moment's notice. Candy-colored bits of shrapnel to perforate the city. She wouldn't do that, he thinks, but the truth is, he's not sure. He's seen the look in his mother's eyes, a hardness he does not remember from childhood, a razor-edged glint that would slice you if you looked too long.

• • •

When Margaret returns, nothing seems to have changed: the trash bag of cans is still over her shoulder, the plastic bag still dangles from her wrist. She peels off her hat.

Are you all right? she asks. You weren't scared, while I was gone?

You've been gone for three years, Bird thinks, a few hours is nothing. He bites back the words.

I'm fine, he says.

His mother reaches into the plastic bag.

I didn't know what you liked, she says, so I got some of everything.

Granola bars, nuts, candy, cans of soup, packages of salted almonds, a carton of Minute rice. As if she'd gone aisle by aisle, plucking an item from every shelf. It saddens him and touches him all at once, that she had no idea what he wanted, and that despite not knowing she had still tried so hard to please him.

It's been such a long time, she says, since—

She stops, looking down at the bounty between them.

I should have brought you real food, she says, embarrassed, and Bird can see the meal she wishes she'd procured: hot and nourishing, balanced and wholesome. Green vegetables, mashed potatoes, corn glossy with butter. Meat sliced thin and fanned out on the white china plate. He understands: it's been a long time since she's taken care of anyone, and she's nearly forgotten how. It's been so long she'd forgotten such a meal could exist, let alone the world in which someone might eat it.

It's okay, he says, this is fine. And he means it.

They settle on cups of instant noodles, something to warm their hands. The bottle caps, he sees, are all gone.

When the noodles are ready, she slides a steaming cup toward him along with a plastic fork. They are lemon-yellow and intensely salty, and Bird wolfs them down. On the other side of the coffee table, Margaret pauses, forkless, then slurps hers straight from the cup.

How long have you been living here, Bird asks. He fishes up the last dregs of his noodles.

Almost four weeks. Though *living* isn't the right word. This is just temporary, while I get things ready.

This only raises more questions for Bird. Ready, he says, ready for what? What are you doing?

Have some milk, she says, filling a mug and nudging it toward him. It builds strong bones.

She fills one for herself and takes a gulp.

Besides, she adds, it won't keep. No fridge. So drink up.

From the bag she pulls a can, pries up the ring with a fingernail, pops the lid off. Inside, jewels of fruit glisten.

Dessert, she says, setting the can between them, and this gesture, small as it is, warms him: he has always loved canned peaches and she still remembers this. He spears a golden wedge with his fork.

Do you like school, she asks suddenly. Is your teacher nice? Are the other kids kind to you?

Bird shrugs, a one-shoulder twitch, and scoops up a sliver of peach. It is her fault if they're not, but he does not want to tell her this. They call me Noah, he says instead. Dad told them to.

His mother pauses. She's barely eaten any of her noodles, and now she sets her cup aside.

Is he happy, she asks.

Her voice is calm and even, as if she's asked about the weather. Only her hands give her away: her thumbs press so hard against her fingers that the nails have turned white.

Like most children, Bird has seldom considered whether his father is happy or not. Each morning he gets up and goes to work; he tends to Bird's needs. Yet as Bird thinks about it, there is a melancholy around him, that hush he'd ascribed to the library but maybe—he realizes—is rooted much deeper.

I don't know, he says. But he takes good care of me.

It feels important to say this, though whether he's defending his father or reassuring his mother, he isn't sure.

His mother smiles, a small sad smile. That was one thing I never worried about, she says. Then: Does he still read the dictionary?

Bird laughs. He does, he says. Every night.

She does remember, he thinks, even that tiny thing. It makes her a little less of a stranger.

He doesn't like to talk about you, Bird admits. He said—he said to pretend you don't exist.

He expects this to sadden her even more, but instead she nods.

We agreed that was best.

But why, Bird insists, and his mother sighs.

I'm trying to tell you, Bird. I really am. But you need to hear everything, the whole story, to understand. Tomorrow, okay? The rest of it, tomorrow.

As he heads up the stairs, she calls after him.

Do you want me to call you Noah, now? If that's what everyone else calls you?

One hand on the creaking bannister, he pauses.

No, he says, cheeks suddenly aglow. You can still call me Bird. If you want to.

The next morning, back at the table, she works faster, hands moving quickly, aware time is running out. She begins without preamble. Like plunging into the ocean before she has time to be afraid.

• • •

Two weeks after Bird's ninth birthday. Over breakfast, Ethan had suddenly paused, stunned, and set his phone before her. Heads bent over the screen, they'd read the headline together: CONFLICT ERUPTS AT PROTEST; 6 INJURED, 1 DEAD. Below, a photo of a young Black woman—long braids pulled back in a ponytail, glasses, yellow hat. Still standing, eyes still clear and open, mouth still parted in a cry, a millisecond before her mind knows what her body already feels: a red rose of blood just starting to bloom on her chest. Clutched in her hands, a poster: *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS*. And a caption: *Protester Marie Johnson, 19, a first-year student at NYU from Philadelphia, was killed by a stray bullet in police response to anti-PACT riots Monday.*

The first of many such articles, but they would all use the same photo.

This young woman—Marie—had read Margaret's book in her dorm room. She was studying developmental psychology, planning to become a pediatrician, and with each news report of a child taken, the last lines of the last poem had come back to her, insistent as an infant's cry. Nine years after PACT's passage, there were more and more of them: the few that made the news here and there, framed as stories of negligence and endangerment, the parents portrayed as reckless and careless and callous; but others, too, shrouded in rumor and secrecy and shame.

Just rumors, some people scoffed; re-placements happened only in a few isolated cases. Others insisted PACT removals were a necessary evil: a rescue, for the child's good, and society's. *Can't rock the boat*, one commenter wrote online, *and be surprised when your kid gets washed overboard.* But for every child you heard was taken, how many families said nothing, stopped protesting, stopped everything, hoping their good behavior would earn their children back?

The night before the march, Marie bought sheets of posterboard at the drugstore. With fat-tipped scented markers, she jigsawed words onto the sign, sketched the solemn face of a child below. After the march, they'd found the markers and the rest of the posterboard on the floor of her dorm room, blank and unused, beside a spread-eagled copy of Margaret's book.

After that: vigils. Campaigns to remember Marie. Online, thousands of people changed their profile photos: Marie after Marie after Marie, a sea of them crying out, flushed with youth and fury and pulsing lost life, every one of them brandishing the poster with Margaret's words. People googled those words, and up popped the name Margaret Miu, the title of her book. The poems she'd written while pregnant, in a sleep-deprived haze nursing Bird late at night, watching the sky turn from black to navy to bruised grayish-blue.

Not even her best line, she'd always thought, not even one of her best poems, and yet here it was. Clutched in this dying child's hands.

Those lines began appearing online, the adopted slogan of those opposed to PACT. At the protests that sprang up here and there, quick flares of grief and rage. On pins, as graffiti, on hand-lettered T-shirts. They're all over campus, Ethan said, wide-eyed. Margaret, seeing one for the first time, stopped dead in the street, jolting back to life only when someone behind bumped into her, cursed, and elbowed his way past. She felt as if she'd come around the corner and run into some uncanny version of herself. She had never been to a protest. She had never, in all honesty, thought much about PACT at all.

Someone painted the lines on the wall of the New York Department of Family Services, on the sidewalk outside the Justice Department. All over the country, anti-PACT marches began to spring up like brush fires. Anti-PACT protesters hurled eggs—then rocks—at the cars of pro-PACT senators and officials. Always, always carrying posters bearing Margaret's lines. The protests were short and sporadic—but they were long enough for passersby to take photos, and soon those photos were everywhere, and so were Margaret's words.

Who would ever, she said to Ethan, have expected a poem to go viral. Neither of them laughed. It was the least unbelievable thing of all the unbelievable things that had happened in the past few years.

Then a talk-radio show did an investigation into the sign, the poem. Margaret.

Who's inspiring these lunatic protesters? he asked. Well, I'll tell you: a radical female poet named Margaret Miu, lives in Cambridge, that liberal bubble. And—surprise surprise—she's a kung-PAO.

A cable-news host who'd defended PACT from the beginning—Chinese *American*? he'd said, there's no such thing; you know where their loyalties *really* lie—picked up the story. He scanned the photo from the back of Margaret's book and flashed it on-screen. Letting her foreign face say it all.

People like this, he said, are the reason we *need* PACT. You know who her main audience is, who's buying her books? I'll tell you. I've looked up the figures. Young people. College kids, high school kids. Could be even middle schoolers, who knows. Kids at that age are so impressionable. And this woman's influence is *skyrocketing*. You know what her sales figures show? Four thousand copies of her book sold last week alone. Six thousand this week. Next week it'll be ten. I tell you, we'd better take a lot closer look at what's in those poems. There's a very real danger of our kids being corrupted. This is what PACT is *for*.

On message boards—and soon, in the authorities' offices—people combed through Margaret's lines. *Scattered, to sprout elsewhere*—might that not be an encouragement for spreading harmful ideas? This poem about a spider, clutching its empty egg sac—*hollow and dry with only air inside*—well, it wasn't hard to interpret that as a metaphor for America, clinging to *hollow* ideals until it died. And this one, about tomatoes, disturbing their *sturdy roots*: how could you read these lines as anything other than urging others to strike at the roots of American stability?

The anti-American ideology was clear, which made it all the more dangerous that people were reading these poems—nearly fifty thousand copies sold so far, an unheard-of number for a book of poetry, especially from a minuscule press. That, in and of itself, was suspicious; of course the Pentagon should take a look; one could not rule out the possibility that messages were coded in the lines. Regardless, these poems weren't just un-American, they were inciting rebellion. Endorsing and espousing terrorist activity. Persuading others to support insurrection. Look how many anti-PACT protests were happening.

It just goes to show, one official thought, as he branded Margaret's file with a crisp red stamp. Born here, but clearly American in name only. Probably learned it from *her* parents. That foreign mindset rooted deep, he mused; maybe it twined all the way down in the DNA. Maybe it wasn't ever possible to straighten their loyalties out.

Margaret got a call a week later from her publisher: they'd been ordered to cease publication of her book, to destroy any warehoused copies. Can they really do that, Margaret asked, and her editor sighed. He was a reedy, bespectacled white man who could recite Rilke from memory; the press operated out of a rented two-room office in Milwaukee. For weeks he'd been getting threatening emails and phone calls, the most recent one with detailed suggestions

about what should be done to his seven-year-old daughter. That's not all, he said. They've also sent a subpoena to look into our finances and our other authors. Not even just the Asian ones—everyone. To see if we've funded anyone else *un-American.* It was strongly implied that if we didn't comply, they'd find ways to shut us down. I'm sorry, Margaret. I really am.

Within a month the publisher would shutter anyway, all its stock pulped, all its files deleted. Libraries, flooded with angry calls about the book, began to pull it from their shelves. PACT supporters held a rally in downtown Boston, collecting copies and burning them in an oilcan on City Hall Plaza. The post office began to monitor Margaret and Ethan's mail.

It got worse. Someone dug online, posted their address and Margaret's phone number on social media. *Dont like this PAO CUNT & the poison she's feedign our kids?* he wrote. *Call her up & tell her.*

What are we going to do, she said to Ethan, as she silenced her phone. It had been ringing for the past twenty minutes and for a while she'd answered and hung up immediately, but every time it just began to ring again.

Ethan put his arms around her. He had already spoken to the police; there was nothing illegal, they informed him, about posting publicly available information. He'd sworn at them and hung up. It was Saturday morning, and on a normal day, they'd have been at the kitchen table eating waffles, sunlight streaming onto their plates. Instead, all morning Ethan had been pacing around the house, pulling the curtains shut, nudging Margaret and Bird away from windows.

It will stop, she assured him. It has to stop. They'll get tired of it. I didn't even do anything. I've never been to a protest. All I did was write a poem.

It didn't stop. No one seemed to be getting tired except for Margaret and Ethan—and Bird. What's wrong with your phone, Bird kept asking, who keeps calling? Rotten fish and bags of dog shit and broken glass began to appear on their front step, and one day, a single bullet, still in its casing. After that, Bird was no longer allowed to go outside alone, even into the backyard.

People are crazy, Ethan told him. Don't worry. You're safe.

Did you know, the talk-show host said a few days later, that this Margaret Miu—she has a kid? Nine years old. Yeah. Can you believe it? And his name—get this—his name is *Bird.*

The comments online:

That's child abuse, right there. Enough said.

People like that shouldn't be allowed to reproduce.

Can you imagine what kind of shit she's teaching him at home? Imagine having her as your mother.

Poor kid. Let's pray Family Services checks them out soon.

That night, after they'd put Bird to bed, Ethan's mother emailed him. *My friend Betsy forwarded me this article about Margaret*. It was the first of many articles, some of which she would forward and many of which she would simply read as they dinged, one by one and sometimes two or three at a time, into her inbox, forwarded by ostensibly well-wishing acquaintances: *I remember you mentioned your son's new wife (?). Is this the same Margaret Miu?!*

As articles and news reports and headlines accumulated, Ethan's parents read and discussed, measuring the woman they'd met and loved, the woman their son adored, the woman who'd borne their grandson, against the woman the news portrayed. The person they knew—or had they?—against the person everyone else seemed to see. How many times had they met her? How well could you know someone in that time? On their weekly phone calls, Ethan ranted to his parents about the latest developments—the anonymous emails filling Margaret's inbox, the

notes duct-taped to their front door. It was not until Ethan stopped speaking, exhausted by rage and fear, that he noticed his mother's uncharacteristic silence.

She always seemed so *kind*, his mother said, in tones of profound sadness and betrayal, and Ethan understood then: a story had settled in his mother's mind, and there was nothing he could do to rewrite it. In the weeks to come, Ethan's parents did not call him, and when he and Bird moved to the dorm, he would not send them his forwarding address.

Then came the note. A scrap of paper from Bird's teacher, Ms. Hernández, slipped surreptitiously into his bag. *Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gardner*, it read in her neat, looped cursive. Tall proud *S*s. Upright and rigid-backed *P*s. *The school has received a call from Family Services. I have been summoned to speak with them Monday morning and they will likely wish to speak with you soon thereafter.* And then: *It seemed only fair to let you know.*

A warning. A kindness, really.

She packed that night, a single bag. One she could carry on her back, small enough that she could walk as long as needed; a bedroll and all the cash they could gather. The bedroll had been Ethan's originally. It's warm, he said softly, pulling it from the back of the closet, and she could hear his voice snagging as they imagined all the nights to come when they would no longer be lying beside each other. She'd taken it and turned away quickly, bending over to buckle it to her bag, but in truth she couldn't face the pain in his eyes, and wasn't sure he could face the pain in hers. They'd agreed: she wouldn't write, she wouldn't call. Nothing that could be traced. She'd leave her phone behind. Any ties unsevered could unravel, so they would cut her, the traitorous PAO mother, out of their lives. They would give not even the slightest pretext to take Bird away. Whatever it takes, they agreed. Whatever needed to be done or said to keep him safe.

The next morning, she had tried to say goodbye. A Saturday, late October. The leaves just loosening from the trees. We'll be fine, Ethan told her. Both of them understood he was reassuring himself as much as her. He buried his face in her hair, and Margaret burrowed against his chest, breathing him in, all the words she was not brave enough to speak trying desperately to escape her mouth. When they finally let each other go, neither could look at the other. Ethan hurriedly shut himself in the bedroom, because really, what else was there to say, and he couldn't bear to watch her leave. Bird, oblivious, was kneeling on the living-room carpet, piecing together plastic brick after plastic brick. It was a house, and the roof kept falling in, the arch of it too high for his child's hands.

Birdie, she said. Her voice splintering. Bird, I have to go.

She expected questions, as soon as he saw her backpack: a thing she never carried, which he certainly would notice. Why're you carrying that? Where are you going? Can I come, too? But he didn't turn. He hadn't heard her at first, he was so absorbed in what he was doing, and she loved that about him, loved the way his attention focused, intense as summer heat, on the thing he wanted to understand.

Bird, she said again, louder this time. Birdie, my darling. I'm going now.

He did not turn around, and she was grateful for this: grateful not to see his eyes in this last moment, grateful that he did not run to her and press his face into her belly as he usually did, because how then could she ever hope to peel herself away.

Okay, he said, and she ached at his trust, how confident he was that she would be right back, as she always had. It was she who turned then, turned and hoisted her backpack on her shoulder and went straight out the door, before her heart could change her mind.

Two days later, when Family Services arrived, her things would already be piled on the curb. When they questioned him, Ethan would shake his head and his son's heart would crack. No, he didn't know where she'd gone. No, he didn't share her views, not at all. Quite the

opposite, to tell the truth. No, he couldn't honestly say he was sorry. He'd tried to make things work for the sake of their son, but a man could only stand so much, right? Well—let's just say he was relieved that she'd no longer be an influence. Yes, exactly. Much better off without.

Her books? Absolutely not. Seditious trash. He'd burned them all.

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A bus to Philly, scarf pulled up, shielded by sunglasses. Eleven hundred dollars cash in her pocket, most of their savings. She did not have a plan just yet, only a hope: someone she thought might help, who might give her a place to pause and decide what to do next. But first, before she could pause, she needed to pay respects, to apologize. To atone. Slouched in her seat, she tugged her knit hat down nearly to the bridge of her nose, dug her chin into the collar of her coat. She refused to cry. Instead she watched the highway whir by in a blur of gray and white. Beside her, a man with a mustache snored, the roll of fat on his neck trembling with each breath.

The small suburb where Marie Johnson had grown up had neat green lawns dotted with flowering shrubs and old oak trees, tidy wooden houses with crisp coats of paint over edges softened by age. Marie's house could have been any one of them: from the outside, it did not look like a house in mourning. But she knew it at once, from the news reports that had flashed it over and over on-screen, always with curtains shut tight against the cameras sizzling outside. Now, months later, the neighborhood had returned to some semblance of normalcy: a few yards down, a man yanked the chain of his leaf blower and it ground to life with a throaty growl; across the street an older woman in flowered gardening gloves deadheaded a chrysanthemum with schoolmarmish rigor. At Marie's house, the only signs of life were the car in the driveway and the thin gap between the curtains, letting the afternoon sunlight slice inside.

As a girl, Marie must have played here. Maybe she turned floppy cartwheels on this patch of grass and chalked hopscotch grids on the sidewalk squares. Maybe she ran through the sprinkler on hot summer days, fleeing—then chasing—the curtain of spray. Margaret could see it, could hear her squeal, like Bird's, rising like the peal of a bell. On her back, the rucksack chafed wide red welts into her shoulders. She rang the bell.

The woman who answered might have been ten years older than Margaret, but Margaret had the feeling she had lived lifetimes more. Her face was still young, but there was something worn and heavy about the way she carried herself, as if she had been stretched past what she should hold. Behind her a man, broad shoulders rounded and hunched, reading glasses perched on the tip of his nose, a newspaper folded in his hand.

Mrs. Johnson, Margaret said. Mr. Johnson. I'm here about Marie.

It came pouring out of her then, in a confused torrent: apologies and confession, explanation and regret and self-recrimination. Her poems, her intent, her horror and sadness at Marie's death. I didn't mean, she kept saying. I never imagined. I didn't expect. Even as the words slithered from her mouth back to her own ears she realized her mistake. What she desperately wanted—reassurance, comfort, absolution—she had no right to ask of them, and they had no reason to give to her.

They're after me, she found herself saying. Pleading, half begging, her own fear shrill in her ears. They blame me for all this. And they're right.

Before her, Marie's parents stood in the entryway, impassive. Down the street, the man with the leaf blower cut the motor and the air went quiet. She was still on the front step; she hadn't even waited, she thought, before laying all this at the feet of this man and this woman who had lost their child. It was hopeless, she was hopeless; how could you ever apologize for this.

I am so very sorry, she said finally, and turned to go.

What did you come here for, Marie's father asked. He folded the newspaper in half, not angrily, but calmly. As if he had read enough news to last a lifetime, as if this were the last newspaper he would ever read again. He looked at her directly, without flinching: he was past fear, now. You think we have anything to say to you? he said. Our baby's dead and you come here, looking for what. Wanting us to feel sorry for what *you* went through?

His voice was quiet, the kind of voice you'd use to talk in the library, and somehow this froze Margaret more than if he was shouting.

You think you know her? he went on. They all think they know her. Everybody thinks they know her, now. You got people wearing my little girl's face on their chests, who don't care about her or who she was. Just using her name to justify doing what they want. She's nothing but a slogan to them. They don't know the first thing about her. You don't know the first thing about her either.

Around them, the ever-present noises of the suburbs—cars ambling by as if they had nowhere urgent to be, a sky-bound crow's squawk, the inevitable dog bark from some indeterminable distance. Continuing on, as if nothing were amiss.

What is there to say, he finished.

He turned and retreated into the dark interior of the house.

For a moment, Margaret and Marie's mother stood there on opposite sides of the doorway: Margaret frozen on the front step, the breeze chilly on the back of her neck, where sweat dampened her hair. Marie's mother with one hand braced against the jamb, as if she were keeping the house from collapse. Eyes half squinted against the sun, her back cast in shadow. Studying Margaret. Margaret wondered what she saw. She thought, belatedly, of the Asian and Black worlds, orbiting each other warily, frozen at a distance in a precarious push-pull. In her childhood: a young Black girl shot, Los Angeles on fire, Korean stores aflame. Her parents had fumed, reading the news, indignant at the damage, the *delinquency.* And then, years later, a young Black man dead in a stairwell, a Chinese American cop's finger on the trigger. There'd been outcry on all sides—an accident, police brutality, scapegoating—until the circles separated again into an uneasy truce. More than once, her mother had been shoved on the street by a Black teen, taunting her with ching-chong chants. Yet also: soon after she'd moved to New York, she'd been in Chinatown picking fruit from a cart when a Black man drove by in an SUV, rap blasting from the rolled-down windows so loud the pear in her hand shivered, and the shop owner, a wiry older Chinese man, gritted his teeth. Those thugs, he said, as if it were something they already agreed on, and spat, and she'd been so stunned that—to her shame—she'd simply nodded, paid, and darted away without a word. It weights her, this history, heavy as the pack on her back.

I'm sorry, Margaret said, again. I should go.

You have children? Marie's mother asked suddenly.

One, Margaret said. I had a son. The past tense, unintended, shocks her. How easily her mind has accepted what her heart cannot. Have, she corrects herself. I have a son. But I won't ever see him again.

A long pause between them, stretching and swelling until it wrapped around both of them, thick and plush. Then, to Margaret's surprise, Marie's mother reached out, touched Margaret's wrist.

Welcome to the worst club in the world, she said.

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The Johnsons' house was cozy and tidy but everywhere there were signs of their daughter. Mr. Johnson, lips clamped shut, shook his head at his wife and disappeared up the stairs, but

Mrs. Johnson led Margaret into the living room. On the mantel, a framed photograph of Marie in cap and gown, paper scroll in the crook of her arm like a sheaf of flowers. High school graduation, Mrs. Johnson said. Salutatorian. In the corner, a music stand, a flute case, sheet music covered in flurries of impossibly high notes.

She did marching band. But what she really loved was the classical stuff.

Her hand brushed the leatherette, wiping a fleck of dust from the latch.

I wanted her to keep it up in college. But she said she wouldn't have time. She had so many plans.

Margaret still had not taken off her backpack; she was not sure if she was invited to stay. In this crowded living room she felt like a large and lumbering animal, every movement threatening to knock some part of the past to the floor. She held her breath, as if that might make her smaller and stiller, as if that might help anything.

Mrs. Johnson took a small china elephant from the mantel, turning it over. After a moment she found what she was looking for, held it up so Margaret could see: a thin seam of glue circling the uplifted trunk.

You see this? she said. My friend went on vacation, to India, and brought me back this. Marie was maybe seven, or eight? She loved it. She'd play with it, put it in her pocket, carry it around. One day I came home from work and she'd broken off the trunk. Did I give her hell. I told her she had no respect for other people's things, didn't I tell her to be careful, why didn't she listen to me. No, Mama, she said to me, I wanted to see what was inside. She did it on purpose. I told her she was on punishment for a month. The next day I found it like this.

She tipped her palm where the little elephant stood, letting the light catch its curves.

She'd patched it back together. You can barely see where the break was. Only if you know where to look.

Gently she set the elephant back on the mantel.

That was Marie, she said. No one out there will remember those things. Just me.

The two women stood there in silence. In the shaft of light that sliced through the crack in the curtains, dust motes hovered.

Will you tell me, Margaret asked. She took the older woman's hands between hers, and Mrs. Johnson did not pull back. A kindness that humbled Margaret, because it was one she had not earned. Will you tell me about her? she said. Who she was. What she was like.

I'll tell you. But only if you promise to remember. That she was a real person, not a poster. That she was a child. My child.

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She stayed for two days, listening. Letting Marie's mother tell her anything and everything that came to mind. Mr. Johnson avoided her, eyeing her with brittle wariness, tucking his glasses into the breast pocket of his shirt before leaving the room.

He doesn't trust you, Mrs. Johnson said, as her husband passed by in the hall. Not an apology; a simple statement of fact.

But Mrs. Johnson led her into Marie's bedroom, where they sat together from sunup until darkness fell. Mrs. Johnson roamed the room, speaking softly, touching this and that, reminiscing. Picking up Marie's hairbrush, her rings, the ocean-smoothed stones she'd kept on the windowsill, each awaking a memory like a talisman. None of the stories were important. A visit to an aunt in North Carolina, a day at Six Flags, Marie's first trip to New York as a skinny, gawky adolescent: Mama, I want to live *here*. All the stories were unbearably important. The time, as a toddler, she'd farted in church, right after the minister had said *Let us pray.* The red

shoes she'd loved so much she squashed her feet into them for months, refusing to give them up, insisting they still fit until they split at the seams. How, as a teenager, she'd clipped words she liked out of her magazines, saving them like confetti in a blue envelope—*nebulous*, *muscovado*, *smithereens*. I just like the way they sound, she'd said.

I don't know what she wanted to do with them, Mrs. Johnson said.

She talked and talked, picking her way from memory to memory, crossing a wide ocean on stepping-stones. Remember this, Marie's mother said, again and again. Hold on to it. As if memory were a bead that might spring from her fingers, clatter to the floor, roll into a crack and disappear. Which it was. At night, swaddled in her bedroll in the Johnsons' living room, Margaret jotted down what Marie's mother had said, each word echoing like a chime. But while Mrs. Johnson talked, Margaret simply listened and listened and listened.

The second night, Marie's father stepped in from the hallway. He looked at his wife, sitting on their daughter's flowery bed; at Margaret, cross-legged on the floor.

You know the last thing I said to her, he said.

No greeting, no introduction. As if he'd been waiting a long time to say just this.

She told me, on the phone. How there was this protest planned, protesting PACT, how she planned to go and hold up a sign. I said, Marie, that ain't about you. You think those PAOs would stick their necks out for you? You think any of them care when we get followed in stores, or shot in traffic stops? Just let it be.

He paused.

She'd been doing research, he went on. Trying to trace our family tree. In high school, she got curious. She was at the library all the time, looking at databases and census records, trying to find her roots. Our roots. What she found was a big blank spot. No records, before Emancipation —except for one. A bill of sale, for my maybe-ancestor. Age eleven. To a Mr. Johnson in Albemarle County, Virginia.

Another pause. He looked down at Margaret, and she looked up at him. Listening.

I didn't want her to go. But she was set on it. She just said: It's wrong to take children from their families, Daddy. You know that. And she didn't want to argue so we just hung up and the next day she went to that march.

He stood there, framed by the doorway, a strong man made fragile by grief. Margaret's mother had crossed the street when she saw men like him approaching. Out of disdain? Out of fear? She didn't know and wasn't sure it mattered. At the factory where her father worked, there were only a handful of Black men, and her father hadn't socialized with any of them. Not my kind of people, he'd said, and she hadn't bothered to ask what he meant.

You weren't wrong, Margaret said at last. You weren't wrong. But neither was Marie.

A small tug at a complicated knot that would take generations to unpick.

Mr. Johnson settled himself down on the bed next to his wife, who put her arm around him and turned her face to his shoulder, and they sat there quietly, the three of them, in Marie's room, Margaret a witness to what they'd lost.

After a long, long while, he said: You know what keeps coming back to me? This one night, I came home from work.

The memory seeping out of him, like water filtered through stone.

I don't even remember how old she was. She might've been five, she might've been fifteen.

Margaret did not question; she understood this, how slippery and elastic time was in the fact of your child, how it seemed to move not in a line but in endless loops, circling back again and again, overwriting itself.

She was laughing, Marie's father said. Laughing and laughing and laughing. Laughing so hard she couldn't stand up. Laughing so hard tears were running down her face. I came in and I saw her there, rolling on the carpet. Just laughing. Marie, I said, what's so funny? She just kept on laughing. Until I started laughing, too. I couldn't help it.

He was half laughing again, as the memory of it swirled around him, pulling him back into the past.

Finally she calmed down and she just lay there. Catching her breath, looking at the ceiling, big smile still on her face. Marie, I said again, what's so funny? She let out a big sigh. She looked so happy. Everything, she said. Everything.

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She left Marie's family with a request, and a name.

Put her in a poem, Mr. Johnson said, she'd like that. You put her in a poem, okay? Make other people remember her.

I'll try, Margaret said, though she knew, already, that no poem could encapsulate Marie, just as no poem could encapsulate Bird. There would always be too much left unsaid.

Mrs. Johnson said nothing, just hugged Margaret, even tighter than Margaret hugged her. They would never speak again, but they were linked now, as those who've been through something terrible together are forever fused, in ways they don't always understand.

The name was the librarian's, though the Johnsons only knew her last: Mrs. Adelman this, Mrs. Adelman that, that's all that came out of Marie's mouth all of high school, her mother said, she spent all her free time over there. Across town; catch the bus on the corner. Margaret walked instead, following the trail of bus stop signs, the bus itself lumbering past her at encouraging intervals, reassuring her she was still on the path. By the time she reached the library, six buses had passed her, and perhaps it was because of this that she had the feeling, ascending the steps of the library, that she had been here before, that some previous version or versions of herself had already arrived, were already within, had already discovered what she herself was only now entering to find.

The library was not the vast marble hall she'd expected, but warm and cozy, the carpet and walls and shelves all the honeyed tan of an old leather armchair, like a great-aunt's living room, and at the desk in the back corner sat only one librarian, an older woman with a streak of white slicing through her graying hair right at the temple—a lightning bolt emanating from her brain—and penetrating eyes, and the most regally upright posture Margaret had ever seen, and she had let her instinct guide her.

Mrs. Adelman? she said. I'm here about Marie.

The librarian said nothing at first, just studied Margaret in silence for a long time. As if they'd met in a past life and she was trying to place her. Then a change came across her face, like clouds in a strong breeze shifting across the sky.

Oh yes, she said. I know *you*.

Then, after a moment of quiet: I gave her your book, you know.

It was one of many books the librarian had given Marie over the years. They'd first struck up a friendship, the two of them, when Marie came in trying to trace her roots. Mrs. Adelman had helped her find the right archives and historical societies to contact, and she had been there, too, when Marie had reached the hole in the records where the rest of her lineage had been erased. Her own grandparents had fled Munich in the 1930s, but the rest of the family had stayed, and though it wasn't the same, she knew the pain of fault lines in family history that you could not see across. Then, as Marie grew older and her interests broadened, Mrs. Adelman had

loved following her mind, feeding this girl whose appetite to *know* was omnivorous and insatiable. *Notes of a Native Son*. Biographies of Gandhi and Grace Lee Boggs. Books on ecology, on tarot, on space exploration and climate change. And poetry, too: Marie had started with the poems from school, Keats and Wordsworth and Yeats, and had come looking for more, and the librarian had helped her find it: Lucille Clifton, Adrienne Rich, Ada Limón, Ross Gay. All of these books the librarian had given to Marie and Marie had dutifully returned each two weeks later, never once overdue. The week Marie headed off to college, she'd come to the library one last time and Mrs. Adelman had slipped a slim parcel in blue wrapping paper across the counter. Written inside the flyleaf: *You never need to give this one back.* On the cover, a close-up photo of a split pomegranate, seeds glistening like jewels.

We've removed it, Mrs. Adelman said. Not my decision. After Marie, people started calling in. Some of them wanted to borrow it. But then, once the talk-radio shows and those cable guys went after you, people got scared. How could we keep such a book, they wanted to know. If you were really a subversive, how could we risk letting young minds see it? In the end the higher-ups decided it was easier to just remove it. The mayor was nervous. Same thing's been happening other places, according to my friends. Not just your book; anything with the remotest ties to China. Anything Asian. Anything that might be a risk.

It's cowardly, Margaret said, and Mrs. Adelman said, Well, they've got children, too, you know.

There was a long silence.

Your son, Mrs. Adelman said. The news said you had a son. How old?

Nine, Margaret said. Ten in the summer.

In silence she tried to imagine Bird's birthday. Would there be a cake? Candles? What would they celebrate? Would he miss her? All she can picture is a dark room.

So before they removed him, you removed yourself.

Margaret nodded dumbly.

It devastated Marie, Mrs. Adelman said. Those children taken to silence their parents, and the news not even mentioning it. Everyone staying quiet, pretending it didn't happen, saying they deserved it. All those families, split apart.

On the news they showed only a few, the cases where it seemed clear-cut, the right answer obvious and uncomplicated.

How many? Margaret asked.

Too many, Mrs. Adelman said. Not just protesters, either. Anyone opposed to PACT. And more every day.

Margaret had the sudden feeling of picking up on a frequency she had not previously been able to hear. It had grown dark; by then the library had closed. No one had come in.

Hardly anyone comes in these days, Mrs. Adelman said. People are nervous. If they come in, they get what they want and go.

Where can I find them, Margaret asked. The families. How can I reach them.

I've *heard*, Mrs. Adelman said slowly. There are people starting to try to track down the children who've been taken. In hopes of reuniting them with their families.

Is that still possible, Margaret asked, if there are so many of them.

Nine years into PACT, it felt like fighting gravity, or the tide. These protests, people said, shaking their heads, on the news, in the streets. Exercises in futility. All it does is bother the rest of us.

The librarian shrugged. You tell me, she said. If the protests are nothing, then why are you here?

Where can I find these families, Margaret asked, and Mrs. Adelman said, I know of one.

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She followed a trail of whispers. The name Mrs. Adelman provided led to more: a friend, a neighbor's sister. I heard of someone. I know someone. No email, no cell phones, nothing that could be traced. One by one she found them, bearing the name of the one who'd sent her as a token of trust. Listening.

Gradually she began to understand how it happened. You said something and someone didn't like it. You did something and someone didn't like it, or perhaps you didn't do something and someone didn't like it. Maybe you were a journalist and you wrote an article that talked about re-placed children, or mentioned the attacks on Asian faces, or dared to question their demonization. Maybe you posted something on social media that criticized PACT, or the authorities, or America. Maybe you got promoted and your coworker got jealous. Maybe you did nothing at all. Someone would appear on your doorstep. Someone called, they'd say, though they would never say who, citing privacy, the sanctity of the system. It only works, they said, if people know they won't be named.

Don't worry, one of the officers would usually say. I'm sure it's nothing. Just our duty to check.

Sometimes it did turn out to be nothing. If you were well connected, if you showed the proper deference, or if perhaps you had a friend in the mayor's office or the statehouse or, even better, the federal government, if in their background investigation it turned out you'd donated money to the right groups, or perhaps if you were willing to donate money now—well, then, perhaps you could make clear that you would never instill dangerous ideologies in your child. But so often it was not nothing. Most often, by the time the officers came: there was something. You had done something, you had said something, you had not done something, you had not said something. If you didn't have the resources to buy your way out with money or influence, at the end of it, they took your child and put them into the back seat of a car already waiting at the curb, and then they were gone.

She'd believed it was just a handful of extreme cases, the ones that made the news—high-profile, cautionary tales. But mostly, she learned—as she found one family, then another—it happened quietly. Nothing reported at all, their removals and re-placements unannounced. The families reported nothing themselves: speaking about PACT was complaining about PACT, which would only prove their disloyalty. Most of them stayed silent, hoping that in their silence, what had been taken would be returned. People began to hold their children closer, began to bite their tongues. They shied away from discussing PACT at all, afraid they might be next. Editors and producers wielded their red pens more freely: Let's not say that, best not to ruffle feathers. It happened so slowly that you might not even notice it at all, like the sky turning from dusk to dark. The calculation everyone made before parting their lips, before setting fingers to keys: how important was it to say? You glanced at the crib in the corner, at your child sprawled on the rug with their toys.

By the time she'd spoken with five families, she understood: it was more people than she'd realized, more people than she'd ever thought of. It had been happening all along, and she'd never known. No, she admitted to herself: she'd never chosen to know.

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By the seventh family, she had run out of money. She had to be careful, too: passersby might not recognize her offhand, but if the police stopped her, even on the slightest of pretexts,

they would demand ID, and everything would unravel. She had an unconvincing fake license, purchased in an alley for a hundred dollars—another name, a photo of another Chinese woman who looked nothing like her except the part of her hair and the wary expression on her face. But the police would run it through the system and discover the fraud immediately. After that it would happen quickly: they would arrest her for using false ID, they'd investigate further, they'd check their files for persons of interest, and it would only be a matter of time before they figured out who she really was. Margaret Miu: dozens of counts of incitement to her name, one for every anti-PACT poster and protester bearing her words. And now, liable for Marie's death, as well.

So she moved with caution: keeping to quiet streets, careful not to attract attention. She thought of her parents, the mantra of her entire childhood: *Don't stick out.* So little had changed in all that time; it was just a little more obvious now. In her head she heard her mother's stunned voice on that last phone call, pictured her father's face in the moment before he was pushed. Unaware of what more was to come. *Hide*, they would have said to her. *Head down, out of sight.* But she did not want to hide. Now she understood that there were so many more stories than she'd imagined. Each person she spoke to knew another, sometimes two more, or three. In her head she did the math. Too many to ignore. How could everyone not know?

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The bus dropped her in Chinatown, and she walked up, up, up, following Third as the street numbers climbed higher. The same route that her son would take years later. As she walked, she remembered the long treks uptown, after curfew, from that crowded apartment with Domi and her ex and his sister, up to the quiet golden bubble she and Ethan shared. She remembered, still, how to avoid the corners where policemen stood, the areas where she might be conspicuous, and she skirted these, taking the long way around, looping down side streets and around corners until she was sure she was in the clear. Working her way over to Park, she found it: the red brick townhouse with huge apple-green doors. The round window set in the white arch above, like a Cyclops's watchful eye.

Hello, she said, as the door opened. A middle-aged white man wearing a decorous navy suit and a deferential expression. Is this still the Duchess residence?

When Margaret was at last ushered through the marble-floored entryway and up the sweeping staircase, there she was. A little plumper, a little older. New wrinkles creasing from nose to chin, bracketing her mouth. Eyes tired, faintly ringed. But still the same.

Well, well, Domi said. Look who it is.

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She had never expected to see Domi again. After the way they'd parted, after the last thing Domi had said to her: *Sellout. Whore. Fuck you.* She'd put Domi out of her mind, packed their time together in the smallest box she could, taped it firmly shut. Then, years later, scrolling the news while Bird napped, she'd spotted a headline: the largest gift ever given to the New York Public Library. The name beneath leaping out like a ghost from the shadows. *Electronics heiress Dominique Duchess.* Duchess Technologies. And a photo. Last time she'd seen her, Domi had been in a man's leather jacket and lug-soled boots, both hand-me-downs from Margaret. The blond of her ponytail streaked dark with sweat and grime. In the photo she was impeccable in a tailored Chanel suit. Her hair was blown to pale gold, clipped short in the businesslike bob Domi had always mocked: rich man's wife, she'd called it, after her stepmother.

Margaret scrolled through the article. New head of Duchess Technologies. Founded by her late father—inherited after his death. Groundbreaking audio components—smallest and lightest

—revolutionized cell-phone technology. And the caption: *Ms. Duchess, at home in her Park Avenue residence.*

She remembered that house, that rare single-family, the golden numbers gleaming against the brick, the lantern above the entrance, patinaed to green, held aloft by twin swirls of iron. Snakes, Domi had said, looking up at them, I thought they were snakes, as a kid. They'd been hungry that day; she remembered her stomach growling. Her feet throbbing. The sound their spit made as it hit the sidewalk. Fuck you, Domi had screamed up at the windows, and then, as her father's face appeared behind the glass, she'd grabbed Margaret's hand and they'd jumped on their bikes and fled, laughing, pedaling and pedaling until their thighs ached.

So Domi called Daddy after all. Margaret clicked the browser window shut. Well, fuck *you*, Domi, she thought.

But in the following years Domi appeared again and again, in small sharp flashes. Donations to women's shelters, to food banks, to union groups. Donations for health-care assistance. Donations to libraries, a string of them, all over New York, here and there all over the country. Margaret watched, holding these acts up to the Domi she'd once known, as if holding a sealed letter to the light. The night before she left, she'd scribbled down that address on Park Avenue—the one person who might help, the only person left besides Ethan who'd ever cared about her—and hidden it in the safest place she could think of, because it was too painful to go without leaving even one bread crumb behind.

And here she was. Life had a strange symmetry, she thought: years ago she'd left Domi to take refuge with Ethan; now it was the other way around. Domi touched Margaret's arm, and her hands, once red and chapped from the cold as she clutched Margaret's in the night, were soft and pale, like just-risen dough. Margaret kissed her on the cheek and it, too, was tender, so tender she expected to see the imprint of her lips on Domi's skin.

It's good to see you, Domi said.

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In the end Domi had decided to hide, too. At the depth of the Crisis, around the time Margaret had left New York, Domi had called her father. Help me, she said, and he'd sent a car within the hour. He'd whisked her out of New York to the safety of the countryside, a summer cabin in Connecticut she hadn't seen since she was a child, which her father had built when the land had been cheap, before his company took off, before they'd had any real money. When he'd still just been Claude Duchess, a young upstart businessman; when her mother had still been alive. Over the years, as his company had grown, he'd acquired the parcels of land around it, chipping out a larger and larger pocket of wilderness around them; he'd added a powerful generator, a fresh coat of paint—but it still bore the traces of what it had been, just a simple house set away from everything, beside a rocky little ocean inlet. So when he wanted to escape the unrest in the city, what better place than here, in the past, a time when everything was still in the future for him, when the world was nothing but possibility? Here alone, out of all his houses, they did not have to hear protests in the streets or the eerie silences in between; here, there was nothing but the constant whoosh of the ocean's waves. Here, they could pretend they were not eating cake while everyone else had no bread.

Domi had stepped inside, steel-toed boots clumping against the polished wooden floors, flecks of city grit still ground into her roughened palms. There was her stepmother on the leather sofa, reading a magazine, but her bedroom was exactly as she remembered: the way her own mother had decorated it in her childhood, all pink and lace and pearls. Welcome home, her father had said awkwardly. Elsa had grudgingly left her alone, and that was how they'd weathered the

Crisis, the three of them: circling each other at a distance, trapped like flies in the amber of the past. Their fortune vast as a mammoth ship, unswayed by the currents and waves that buffeted smaller, lesser boats. They could order what they needed, afford whatever it took, for as long as it took. All they had to do was wait.

A few months after PACT passed, Domi's father and Elsa were headed to the Maldives—a weekend vacation, to celebrate the return to *normal*—when their private plane crashed into the Pacific. Everything had gone to Domi: the houses in Malibu and Provence; the apartment in the 16th arrondissement and the townhouse here on Park; the electronics empire, smaller than before the Crisis, but still ticking out crucial parts for phones and smartwatches, still more than enough to support all this. And all the secrets too: accusations from her father's factories in Hanoi and Shenzhen, complaints about long hours, hazardous materials, years of ignored reports. The donations to senators who'd passed tax cuts and exemptions for men like him, who'd go on to champion PACT and everything that came after. All hers now, to tabulate and reckon and repay.

I'm finding out, says Domi, some of things he did. For me, or so he thought.

She and Margaret were sitting in the glass-roofed courtyard—the winter garden, Domi called it—glasses of iced tea sweating in their hands. A square pocket of green lined with potted arborvitae, carved into the belly of this vault of a house. Rooms of sturdy furniture and solid brick fortressed them on four sides, filled with all the fine trinkets Domi's father had collected and kept. Above, thick glass sheltered them from possible rain. They could not be seen or heard from outside; for the first time in weeks, Margaret found she could catch her breath. And yet she felt like an insect sealed in a jar.

So now what, Domi said. What are you going to do? Hole up here, forever, with me? Get a fake passport and flee the country?

There was the faintest whiff of mockery in her voice, and Margaret couldn't tell if it was aimed at her, or at Domi herself. Of course there were places where a person could hide: Margaret could take a new name, lie low. Keep her head down; start again. She thought again of her parents, how they'd lived their whole lives trying to avoid trouble, and in the end it had ferreted them out anyway. Maybe sometimes, she thought, the bird with its head held high took flight. Maybe sometimes, the nail that stuck up pierced the foot that stomped down.

Not hiding, she said. Something else.

The idea was not fully formed in her mind yet, only a need: the need to make up for years of choosing to look away, of remaining deliberately incurious. For thinking that it didn't matter as long as it was somebody else's child. It was just starting to come to her, the seeds of it barely beginning to root: what she would do with these stories, the messages of hope and love and care and longing. She would go out and gather them, like grains of rice gleaned from threshed-out fields. She would find as many as she could.

To Domi, she said: I need your help.

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All over the country, zigging and zagging, she traced the flow of information. Emails could be hacked, calls intercepted. But libraries shared books all the time; pooling information was part of their work. Crates of books shuttled between them, crammed with loaned bounty: rare texts on obscure painters, guidebooks on esoteric hobbies. It was the librarians' job to sort these books, to label each with a slip bearing the requester's name, to set them on the shelf behind the counter in neat rows, ready to be claimed.

Now and then, though, an extra book would find its way into a crate and arrive in some faraway city, unannounced. A clerical mistake; a simple human error. With no one to meet them

at the gates, these stowaways would simply be set aside, to be shipped back home in the next crate. No one would notice, of course, if a librarian idly riffled through it, nor think anything amiss if they found a slip of paper inside. People left things in books all the time, and most libraries had a bulletin board where these mislaid items were thumbtacked: bookmarks, of course, but also sales receipts, travel brochures, business cards, shopping lists, cancelled checks, toothpicks, popsicle sticks, plastic knives, once even a strip of bacon sealed in a plastic sandwich bag. No one paid much attention to these things, and no one would notice if a librarian happened to pluck a note from a stowaway book, or from the bulletin board, and pocket it.

The messages were short. To a casual observer they resembled a list of call numbers, an arbitrary jumble of letters and digits and decimal points. But to those who knew to pull out the stray books, who collected these missives from their far-off colleagues, they said volumes. Encoded in them: the names of children who'd been taken, a brief description. The names and locations of their families. All over the country, a scattered network of librarians would note this information, collating it with the Rolodex in their minds, cross-referencing it with the re-placed children they might have learned about. Some kept a running written list, but most, wary, simply trusted to memory. An imperfect system, but the brain of a librarian was a capacious place. Each of them had reasons of their own for taking this risk, and though most of them would never share these reasons with the others, would never even meet them face-to-face, all of them shared the same desperate hope of making a match, of sending a note back, sandwiched between pages, with a child's new location. A message to reassure the family that their child still existed, even if far away, to place a bottom on the deep hole of their loss. Librarians, of all people, understood the value of knowing, even if that information could not yet be used.

Such messages were rare, though a handful of children had been found. More often, the notes were memorized or jotted down, then tucked into a new book to be passed forward in the next crate to the next city, the lists of the missing and the re-placed growing like twin prongs of a long sharp fork. There were so many names, and the network was few and patchwork, dependent on memory and luck, two dots aligning just long enough for someone to make the connection and join them with a stroke. Meanwhile, all that could be done was to remember, and to pass the information along: to the next librarian, the next city, and—when she could persuade them—to Margaret.

One by one she searched out the families whose children had been taken, the ones waiting in vain for the holes in their lives to scar closed. She met them on lunch breaks, on park benches, walked round and round the block with them, holding their cigarettes, waiting for them to be ready. If they wanted, sometimes she talked to them about Bird, telling them about him, about what she missed, which was everything. Other times she simply waited with them, as long as it took. Days of visits that passed in silence; three hours sitting wordless in the park. Ten blocks, fifteen, fifty. Until they trusted her. Until they wanted to speak. Until they wanted their stories to be told.

Tell me, she said. What you want to say to them. What you want them to hear. What you still remember. She wrote it all down, just as the words came out.

They are not just Asian American families, she finds: there are white journalists who'd researched the re-placements, Latina activists who'd organized protests. Not all of them want to speak to her. Some don't trust her, with her Chinese face: You all caused the Crisis and you want us to feel sorry for you? Some Asian Americans don't trust her either, sure she's only making things worse. They've seen what happened when they spoke up; now, twice shy, they shake their heads and close the door in her face without a word.

Other people are angry: if you hadn't written that poem, they insist, this would never have happened. Some believe she has deliberately egged on the protests, that she is behind it all. She does not argue or try to explain as their voices chase her down the hallway, out onto the street. Some are afraid: families who have no papers, who live in terror of raids, or worse. And some people chide her for coming too late. One older woman—a Choctaw woman, whose granddaughter had been taken—looked at Margaret for a long time with weary eyes, then clicked her teeth.

You think this is something new? She shook her head.

Margaret listened. She began to learn: there was no new thing under the sun. About the schools where Indigenous children were shorn and stripped, renamed, reeducated, and returned home broken and scarred—or never at all. About children borne across borders in their parents' arms only to be caged in warehouses, alone and afraid. About foster children pinballed from home to home, their own families sometimes unable to track their path. Things she'd been able to not know, until now. There was a long history of children taken, the pretexts different but the reasons the same. A most precious ransom, a cudgel over a parent's head. It was whatever the opposite of an anchor was: an attempt to uproot some otherness, something hated and feared. Some foreignness seen as an invasive weed, something to be eradicated.

But most of the families are hungry to speak, ravenous with story. She wrote down how their children had been taken, what they wanted to say to those children, the most precious things they would never forget, the things they needed said but did not dare to say themselves. Trying to save every one, all the stories hushed and hidden, all the faces and names too precious to be forgotten. She scribbled them down, in a notepad she carried in the left cup of her bra, the writing so small you'd almost need a magnifier to read it. When that notebook was full, she got another, then another, tucking the old ones into the pocket of her jeans, the side of her sock. Bearing them on her body. At night, she leafed through the pages, engraving the names and stories on her heart, Bird and Ethan haunting every word.

In the early days, it was the librarians who took her in. Some had lounges and sofas; a few even had shower stalls for the staff who'd once biked to work but were long gone. At the others, once the librarian had headed home, she wandered until she found a quiet corner, away from windows. In the shelter of a high shelf she would spread out her bedroll, and then, as she tried to settle her mind for sleep, she would allow herself the luxurious pain of thinking about Ethan and Bird. In the day, she sealed them out, but paused here in the night, the rags she'd stuffed into the gaps of her mind worked loose, and they seeped back in, like fog.

She longed for the broad firm comfort of Ethan curled against her back, the calm that enveloped her whenever he was near. So many things she wished she could tell him: the stories she'd heard, the families she'd met, all the things that would be easier to hold, together. Small joys, too: the silver-green dragonfly that had landed on her forearm, stilled its wings, then vanished again; the improbable red of the maple leaves just beginning to fall—things that felt only half real when she could not share them with him. And Bird: he was the hollow to which her mind, like water, inevitably ran. How tall was he—up to her nose? Her brows? Would he be able to look her straight in the eye? Did he still clip his hair short or had he let it grow shaggy, did it hang in his eyes, was it still the same brown as Ethan's or had it darkened with age to coffee-colored, or even black like her own? Had he lost the last of his baby teeth, and if so, had Ethan plucked them from beneath his pillow and saved them, did Bird even put them beneath his pillow anymore or did he no longer believe in such childish things? What had happened at school today, did he smirk at an inside joke with a friend, was someone unkind to him, was it raining where he was, and if it was, had he remembered his rain jacket or was he soaked to the

skin? What was he dreaming, far away, did he still sleep with one arm thrown across his face like a blindfold, were they happy dreams or sad, did she ever appear in them, did he remember her at all, and if he did, was it with love or with hate? She hated herself in these moments, when she tried to picture Bird's face and knew that what she remembered was growing further and further from the truth, that she had missed so much that could never be retrieved.

Most nights, she got up and roamed the library, not daring to turn on the lights but guiding herself by the maze of shelves, fingertips walking the spines of the books. Eventually she would pull one down, something about its feel catching her attention, and take it to bed, burying herself in whatever it had to say. Programming languages; basic electronics; French cuisine. The evolution of the panda's paw. One night, she found she had selected a biography of a poet: Anna Akhmatova. Akhmatova was so beloved in Russia, it said, that you could buy a porcelain figurine of her, wearing a gray flowered dress and a red shawl. It was said that in 1924 most homes had one, though this was impossible to verify, because many of the figurines were later smashed during the Terror. Akhmatova was forbidden to write, Margaret read, but she did so anyway. She wrote about her friends, arrested and dying in prison camps. She wrote about her former husband, shot for treason. Most of all she wrote about her son, locked in a prison that she visited daily but was never allowed to enter. Finally, agonizingly, she wrote about Stalin—effusive, flowery, goose-stepping praise—hoping that her compliments would persuade him to pardon her son, but they did not. Years later, when her son was released at last, he believed that his mother had not tried to free him, that she cared more for her poetry than for him, and their relationship was never the same.

Margaret told this story to herself over and over, so that she would not forget it.

Once upon a time in Russia, a poet was forbidden from writing her verse. Instead of silence, she chose fire. Each night she wrote her lines on scraps of paper, working them over and over, committing them to memory. At dawn she touched a match to the paper and reduced her words to ash. Over the years her words repeated this cycle—resurrection in the darkness, death at first light—until eventually their lives were inscribed in flame. The poet murmured her poems into the ears of her friends, who memorized them and carried them away tucked under their tongues. Mouth to ear, they passed them on to others, until the whole world whispered with the poet's lost lines.

The next morning, the librarian found her with head pressed to the page, mirrored letters tattooed on her cheek.

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As she gathered more and more stories, a curious thing began to happen: some of the families invited her into their homes, asking her to join them at the table, offering a spare bed if they had it, a sofa if they didn't, a folded blanket on the floor when that was the best they could do. The gentle nighttime noises of a home comforted her: the soft padding of slippered feet shuffling through the dark from bedroom to bathroom and back again; the tangled murmur of adult voices speaking softly, even though the children were not there to wake; the quiet creaks and ticks of a house settling, as if, its occupants sleeping, it could finally loosen its girdle and breathe. But they punished her, too: late at night, the only one awake, nestled in the core of someone else's life, she missed Bird and Ethan even more, the hurt of it so vicious the room blurred.

One night, curled in her bedroll on the floor of a family's kitchen, she awoke to a man's hands on her. She'd startled, every muscle in her body iron-tense, coiled to fight. But no: it was the father, carefully spreading a cover over her. Mohamad, his name was. Earlier that evening,

she'd sat beside him and his wife and eaten maqluba and listened to them tell the story of their son. I was a child when the Twin Towers fell, he had said toward the end. Someone spray-painted filthy things on our garage door. Someone broke our front window with a brick. My father hung a huge American flag on our house, for a while.

He'd paused, and his wife took his hand.

None of our neighbors did or said anything to help us, he said.

Now, the night had grown cold, and here he was tucking a blanket around her with such tenderness she might have been his lost child.

When he had gone, Margaret touched it with her hands and felt unimaginable softness, plush and warm, like the shaggy pelt of some luxurious beast, and she fell into a deep sleep. In the morning, she awoke to find it was just a blanket, of course—a large, soft, fluffy one, printed with the bold striped face of a tiger. For the next three nights she slept under the tiger skin, as she thought of it, and when she left that apartment she had embraced the couple and carried the warmth of that tiger blanket inside her like a benediction.

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Miles and months passed. A year, then two. She marked the time by Bird's age: now he was ten, now he was eleven, now eleven and a half. The list of things she knew she had missed grew and grew. Learning to swim, learning to dance; new interests and obsessions she could only begin to imagine. A birthday, then another. The days were a blur of buses and trains, of tired tramping across cities, and at night she dreamed of hovering high in in the clouds and seeing herself from above, a small speck crossing the landscape. A fly crawling over an endless map.

What kept her going was this: every few weeks, a news story caught her eye. She'd abandoned her phone when she left home, of course, but she heard snippets of radio as she passed a store, or scavenged newspapers discarded on the sidewalk. Over and over they came, her own words echoing back to her, not on signs or in marches this time but woven into strange happenings, things so odd—half protest, half art—that they caught people's attention, forcing them to take note; things that unsettled them days and weeks later, knotting a tangle in the chest. Bursts punctuating the static of those endless days, pushing her onward.

In Nashville, statues appeared in the early morning mist, a hundred ghostly children cast from ice. *ALL OUR MISSING HEARTS,* read a sign chained around one's neck. The police arrived with handcuffs at the ready, but whoever had placed them was gone. Just a prank, one officer radioed back to the station, it's just ice, but— Around them, commuters paused, shaken for once out of their routines. Some snapped photos, but most simply stood mesmerized, even just for a moment, watching in silence as the small faces slowly, slowly dissolved and blurred. One of them reached out and touched what had once been the face of a little girl, melting a thumb-shaped indent in her cheek. The police shooed them away, cordoned off the area, set up a perimeter in case the perpetrators returned. It took most of the morning for the statues to melt, and for hours the officers on duty would glance up at the skyscrapers and see the silhouettes of people in the windows above, staring down at the fading blocks of ice, and later, at the dark damp patches where children had once stood.

In Des Moines one morning, the main street was painted red, block after block after block. From the news helicopters above, it looked like a stream of blood slicing straight through the city. Stenciled on the sidewalk where the source of the river would lie: *BRING BACK OUR MISSING HEARTS.* Those who discovered it first found that the paint was still wet, and as they walked away they left trails of footprints that grew indistinct, then disappeared. That night, and in the days and weeks to come, people would find streaks of red on the soles of their shoes and the cuffs of their pants and

the sleeves of their jackets and pause, thinking *blood*, their chests seizing, patting themselves for the hurt.

In Austin, outside the governor's mansion: a giant concrete cube with a crack running down the center, a crowbar by its side. Etched into the cube, four chiseled letters: P A C T. Etched into the crowbar: *OUR MISSING HEARTS*. One by one, passersby picked up the bar and hefted it, but no one dared swing, and when the police arrived they'd confiscated it as a dangerous weapon. The cube they loaded onto a flatbed and hauled away.

The authorities made no official statements, hoping to avoid publicity, but these happenings were so bizarre, so eye-catching, that they attracted attention. In the days after each happened, photos of them splashed across social media, going viral each time; eyewitness accounts and videos circulated from those who'd been there and seen it. Newspapers who might have ignored a march or a protest sent photographers and reporters to the scene. Pranks, some authorities insisted, when pressed. Just meaningless pranks. Others took a harsher tone: Subversion. A threat to civil society. Des Moines had spent a hundred thousand dollars painting the streets black again.

But they kept happening, and Margaret, on the road, watched. She noticed that people complained about marches blocking traffic, about the futility and inconvenience, but something about these strange happenings caught their attention and held it. She spotted passersby pausing on the sidewalk to zoom in on the photos on their phones or linger over articles about them before tossing their papers into the trash. She overheard people talking about these happenings on street corners, on subway platforms, over coffee on café patios. Not irritated or dismissive, but filled with curiosity and sometimes even delight at the unexpected weirdness of them. *Did you see? Did you hear about? Isn't it crazy? What do you think—?*

By the time Bird was eleven, these happenings were nearly monthly. Each time she saw her words in one, she felt a peculiar and not unwelcome glow—even as she knew that with every mention of *missing hearts*, another line appeared in her file. One more thing she would be held responsible for, though she knew no more about them than anyone else. It was as if those words were their own independent creatures, off leading their own life—which, in truth, they were. What did you call it—surely not pride, because you could take no credit for these accomplishments, you could only marvel like a stranger at the things this *being* had gone on to do without you. It kept her moving, the thought that others out there were thinking about the children who had been taken, too. Each happening she heard about jump-started her again when the journey and the weight of the stories had nearly drained her dry. We haven't forgotten, they seemed to say, have you?

Who's doing it? she asked one of the librarians. Who's behind them all?

Those art pranks? the librarian sniffed. Margaret had noticed this, a certain disdain for the protests from the librarians—and it was understandable, that when they were painstakingly gathering grains of information, listing and tracking and trying to keep records, these happenings felt trivial and frivolous and showy.

What makes you think it's even the same people, the librarian said, sliding the name of another family across the counter, and Margaret thanked her, and departed.

For there were always more children, more stories. It was like picking up seashells on the beach: one more, one more, one more. Each wave depositing another on the wet and gleaming sand. Each shell a relic of a creature once there, now gone. Bird was nearly twelve, and still there were more; she could continue this forever, traveling round and round. Counting the next and the next in an endlessly increasing line.

One day, overcome, she sent a postcard: no message, just a small line drawing. A cat beside a little door. A clue, if they would accept it; an invitation to find the note she'd left for them. To find her. As she dropped it into the mailbox, she imagined it winging its way from truck to sack to the porch of their house. She waited and waited, but no reply came.

Now and then she tried again, each postcard gaining another cat, or two, or five, smaller and smaller, until the entire card was full, the cabinet shrunk to the size of a stamp, then the size of a penny, then the size of a fingernail. There was never any reply. On Bird's twelfth birthday, she took a risk, hunted down one of the few remaining pay phones, and dialed their old number. Disconnected. By this time Bird had lived a quarter of his life without her; perhaps he didn't even remember she existed. Perhaps it was better that way.

It was then that she decided on a date: October 23. Three years to the day since she'd gone away. She would do it then. In September she sent a note to Domi. It's time, she said. Can you find me a place to stay. Domi, of course, had offered her house, but Margaret had refused.

Somewhere faraway, she said, somewhere no one will look. Somewhere I won't take you down, if I'm caught.

A week later she'd arrived in New York, made her way to Brooklyn and the darkened brownstone. The next day she went out into the city, cap pulled low over her face, in search of bottle caps.

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I have someone, the librarian said.

Astoria: a small branch library. Margaret had been in New York for two weeks already, camped out in the darkened brownstone, making final preparations, filling her bottle caps. Two weeks left to go. She should stop collecting stories; already she had more than she could use. But she did not want to stop. What she wanted was to find every one of them, though she knew this was impossible, because there would always be more.

The librarian lowered her voice, even though there was no one else in the room, no one else in the building, nothing around them but half-empty shelves. Not a family, she went on. A child.

Margaret sat up straighter. In all these years she hadn't spoken to a single re-placed child. They were well concealed: new cities, new families, new names. All that was left was the trail of grief in their absence, the snagged holes they'd left behind. The few they'd tracked down were inaccessible, fortressed in their new homes and new lives. Those who were taken young enough sometimes didn't remember their old lives, their old families, at all.

She wandered into the main branch a couple months ago, the librarian said. A runaway. From Baltimore, originally. Bold little thing, she added, half chuckling. Marched in there like a policeman. Said: I need you to help me find my parents. Hands on her hips, like she was giving them a dressing-down. Said she ran away from a foster family in Cambridge, up near Harvard.

A tingle cinched the back of Margaret's neck. Cambridge, she said. How old is she?

Thirteen. We're trying to find out more. They moved her around a lot at first, and no one's at the address she remembers anymore.

Can I talk to her? Margaret said, pulse thumping. Where is she?

The librarian studied her warily. The moment Margaret knew so well: when they decided if she could be trusted, and if so, how far. How much rope she was to be given, how far the door was to be pushed ajar.

The scale tipped.

She's at one of the branches, the librarian said. I can get you the address. We've been moving her around, trying to find a long-term place for her.

And there she was: a girl, cross-legged on a makeshift pallet. Big brown eyes like two blazing stars.

Margaret, she repeated, when Margaret introduced herself, are you Margaret Miu?

And in the stunned silence that followed, Sadie smiled.

I know your poems, she said. And then: I know Bird, too.

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The government had commissioned a study: Children under the age of twelve, once removed from their parents, could not be expected to find their way back home unassisted. Those above twelve were usually sent to a state-run center; younger children could be placed in foster care. Sadie had been eleven when they'd taken her.

They'd moved her from place to place in quick succession—first West Virginia, then Erie, then Boston—farther and farther, as if trying to pull her from orbit. From her first foster home, she called her old number: disconnected. She wrote letter after letter, zip code neatly printed in ink, plastered with stamps stolen from the second. No response, but she'd remained hopeful: maybe when she'd been transferred she'd missed it; maybe behind her, letters from her parents were trailing like the tail of a kite, always a step too late. Then, at her third foster home in Cambridge, a letter came back: UNKNOWN.

Come with me, she'd said to Bird, but in the end she'd gone alone.

Two buses and a train ride back to Baltimore, with money filched from her foster father's wallet, the address still etched in her memory even though her mother's face had begun to blur. Everything dreamily familiar: the neighbor's tulips, pink against the green lawn. The ambient buzz of a mower on the summer air. The same picture she'd clung to so staunchly for the last two years.

But when she ran up the steps, the door was locked. The woman who answered was a white woman, a stranger. A kind face, mousy hair pulled back in a bun. Honey, no one like that lives here, she said.

She'd moved in six months ago. No, she didn't know who lived here before that. Did Sadie need help? Was there someone she could call?

Sadie ran.

She'd slipped onto the first train out of the station, burrowed into a corner seat, awoke in the bustle of Penn Station. Overwhelmed and alone. She struggled out of the low, rat-colored hallways of the terminal, past the one-footed pigeons scrabbling for crumbs, past the homeless men with cardboard signs and jingling cups, past the scum of litter on the curb. Above her rose a canopy of scaffolding, net nearly obscuring the REBUILDING THE NYC YOU ♥ stenciled across it. Above that, needles of glass and concrete jabbed at the clouds.

And then, out of the gloom, she'd spotted the big gray arches, on the far side of a patch of green.

Back in Cambridge, she had loved the peace of the library. Loitering among the shelves, opening and closing the books still left standing there. Many were gone, she knew, but these were survivors; she took them down from the shelves and flipped through them, breathed them in. Imagined how many others had read and handled these books before her.

One day the librarian caught her. Sadie looked up, her nose to the page, to see the librarian at the end of the aisle, bemused. They'd seen each other often, of course—in and out, each day she came in—but they never spoke. Sadie had no library card, never asked for assistance, never caused any trouble. The librarian said nothing, and Sadie slammed the book shut and pushed it

back onto the shelf and fled. But a few days later, when she'd dared creep into the library again, the librarian had waved her over to the desk. I'm Carina, she said, what's your name?

It took Sadie a while to notice: she wasn't the only one who came in but borrowed nothing. Once or twice people came to the counter, held murmured, intense conversations with the librarian, and left, looking anxious or anguished or hopeful, or all three. Now and then wayward books came down the book return, shuddering their way into the collection bin: tattered paperbacks, old textbooks, sometimes just a magazine. As if someone had made a mistake, dropping the wrong thing down the chute. One day she'd wedged herself through the book return, fished one out. A note between the pages with a name, an age, and a description: a child taken, like her. A family's plea that the network would encode, and remember, and pass on.

We are filling in the cracks, the librarian admitted, wherever we can.

So when Sadie had ended up in New York, no trace of her parents anymore, she knew where to go. When she spotted the library, it had felt like something out of a fairy tale: a palace guarded by two mighty lions, pale gray, impassive. She climbed the steps and stretched to set her hand on one massive paw, fingers curving between the broad claws, and it came back to her like a scent on the breeze: a story her mother had read her once. A little girl lost and alone, aided by a lion, the king of that land. She looked around. There was the street lamp. And here in front of her was the magical doorway that might take her home. The library was almost empty; it was nearly closing time, and Sadie wandered until she found a quiet corner, an old armchair in the children's section, where posters that said READ still hung over half-emptied bookshelves. She curled up and fell asleep and awoke to a young woman patting her shoulder.

Hello there, she said to Sadie. It looks like you're lost.

• • •

You're Bird's mom, aren't you? Sadie said.

Margaret touched her hips, her heart, checking for the notebooks that she'd carried so long they felt like part of her flesh.

I was, she said.

He told me about you, Sadie said, and to Margaret it had felt like a sign.

Sadie, young and motherless and fearless. After three months on her own, half wary adult, half child.

I know somewhere she can stay, Margaret said to the librarian.

• • •

It took some time, convincing Domi.

You've got to be fucking kidding, M., she'd protested. What do I know about kids.

They were speaking in fierce whispers, while Sadie waited, cross armed and skeptical, at the far end of the living room. Out of the corner of her eye, Domi studied her, and imperiously, unabashedly, Sadie studied her back.

You know as well as I do, Margaret said, that the brownstone isn't a place for a child. And I can't keep an eye on her myself anyway. I've got too much to do.

What is it exactly, Domi said, that you want me to do?

Keep her safe. Just while I'm finishing up. And after it's done, we'll find somewhere better. Maybe we can find her parents. But she needs somewhere now. She's been shuttled from library to library for weeks and they won't be able to hide her forever. It's a miracle they've been able to this long.

She paused. Or are you too cramped for space? she added dryly. A glance around the enormous living room, at the ceiling where, overhead, a half dozen bedrooms sat unused.

Domi let out a long slow breath through her nostrils. Still the sign, after all these years, that Margaret had won.

Fine. But she'll have to take care of herself. I don't have time to be babysitting.

I only need my diaper changed twice a day, Sadie called from across the room.

Domi laughed.

Hmm, she said. She's got a sense of humor, at least.

The two of them sized each other up—the tall blond woman in her suit and high heels, the little brown girl in her hoodie and fading jeans—and Margaret had felt it between them then, the crackle of kindred spirits, of like meeting like.

It was Sadie who'd finally told Margaret, some days later: But Bird doesn't live at that house anymore. Didn't you know? They live in a dorm now. I can tell you where.

• • •

Why didn't you tell me, Bird says. Why didn't she come down when I was there?

We'd told her to stay out of sight, Margaret says. So no one would spot her and start asking questions. You'll see her soon, I promise. But I needed this time with you. I needed—

She stops, clippers poised.

Someone's here, she murmurs.

Bird hears it, too: the sound of someone at the back door. It is raining, he realizes; though he can't see it through the boarded-up windows, in the sudden silence he can hear it tapping against the plywood, like small, insistent fingers. Over the rain they hear the rattle of the knob being tested. Then the faint low beeps of the keypad: One number. Another. Another.

Bird turns to his mother, waiting for a cue. To fight or to flee. To brace or to take cover. Margaret doesn't move. A thousand scenarios flicker through her head, each worse than the last. Where Bird will be taken. Where they'll take her. Stay calm, she tells herself. Think. But there is nowhere for them to hide, and even if she takes him by the hand and flees through the front, out into the street, where would they go, in the rain, in this city of strangers? Into whose hands?

Footsteps thud out in the darkened hallway. Someone trying to move quietly, and failing. And then the door to the living room creaks open. It's the Duchess, in a black raincoat. Shaking the wet from her feet.

Fuck, Domi, Margaret says. You scared me.

She lets out her breath, and Bird finds this more unsettling than her profanity, even more than their unexpected guest: that his mother, too, could be frightened.

I couldn't exactly ring the bell, could I, the Duchess says. Or call ahead.

She and Margaret exchange a shrug, and Bird understands: cell phones, of course, can be traced.

What time is it? Margaret asks.

Almost four.

I thought we said tomorrow morning.

The Duchess unzips the raincoat and peels it from one arm, then the other. With a glance she takes in the table, the litter of wire snippings and bottle caps and the shiny coins of the batteries.

So you're still going through with it, she says.

Margaret stiffens. Of course, she says.

The Duchess's gaze sweeps around the room like a searchlight, illuminating things Bird himself has barely even noticed. The garbage can in the corner, overflowing. The foam cup from yesterday's noodles, still slick with oil, on the floor at Bird's feet. Bird himself in three-day-old clothes, his hair unbrushed and untidy, half-obscuring his eyes.

I thought things might have changed, she says. Now that— Her eyes pause on Bird.

Nothing's changed, Margaret says sharply.

The Duchess drapes her raincoat over the back of the armchair. As always she moves like a ship in full sail: puffed with purpose. She settles herself on the arm of the sofa, beside Margaret.

You can still change your mind, she says.

Margaret fiddles with the knob on the soldering iron, lifts it from its wire sheath, touches its tip to the damp sponge. It gives off a faint, resentful hiss.

It's not just about *me*, she says. You know that.

Under the tip of the soldering iron a drop of molten metal shines silver, then dulls to gray. His mother's eyes are shimmering, like sunlight speckles on wind-rippled water. They tighten and twitch, as if she can't quite make them focus.

I have to, she goes on. I promised them. I owe it to— She hesitates. I owe this, she says.

The Duchess places a hand on top of hers, and Bird sees the tenderness there. The affection.

Margaret looks up, her eyes meeting the Duchess's, and the Duchess sighs—not convinced, but resigned. I'll come tomorrow morning and take Bird, then, she says.

Bird's head jerks up. Take me, he demands. Take me *where*?

To see Sadie, Margaret says brightly. Domi will take the two of you out of the city. Just for one day. While I get this—she waves a hand at the table—this project under way.

Somewhere nice, Domi says. I think you'll like it.

Why, Bird says. Unconvinced and wary.

His mother sets the soldering iron down, leans across the table, takes his hand in both of hers.

There are some things I have to do, she says. Which I can't do with you here. Domi'll take you, and bring you to Sadie, and then we'll both come and fetch you back. Do you trust me?

Bird hesitates. On the table, the soldering iron lets off a thin curl of smoke. A hot scent, singed metal and pine. He looks at his mother, her hands calloused and rough. But still they are strong and warm and gentle on his. The same hands he remembers lifting a seedling from the soil, plucking an inchworm from his T-shirt and setting it in the grass. Almost by instinct, they align their hands together, finger to finger, palm to palm, the way they used to when making promises. Now his hands are nearly the size of hers. He looks at the deep brown pools of her eyes, and finally he sees her. His mother. She's still there.

Okay, he says, and his mother closes her eyes, lets out a breath.

Tomorrow morning, she says, in Domi's direction. Say ten o'clock. Come for him then.

She opens her eyes and peels her hand away, then picks up the dangling ends of the wires and crimps them savagely.

We don't have much time left, she says. Still a lot to do.

By the time the Duchess leaves, the rain has slowed to a drizzle. As the afternoon begins to fade, Margaret snaps a lid onto the last cap. It is Wednesday. Tomorrow will be three years since she left home.

Enough, she says, softly, and though Bird can hear it, it's clear she's speaking to herself. As if she's telling herself to let go. Giving herself permission to stop, or to move on, neither of them will ever be quite sure which.

With one hand she sweeps the pile of bottle caps from the table and into a plastic bag. Then she hesitates.

Do you want to come with me, she asks. Just this one last time.

• • •

For almost four weeks she's been making and planting them, over a hundred a day, in plain sight. No one paid any attention to the old women who wandered the streets, gathering bottles and cans to sell; if anything, people edged back or turned away, embarrassed or disgusted or both. She'd seen them for years: of all things the Crisis had not changed, of all things that had survived, somehow these women were one of them. Dogged, unproud, patiently sifting the trash for what could be salvaged—and many of them, even before the Crisis, Asian. Their faces reminded her of her grandmother's, her mother's, her own, and she thought of them each time she pulled her straw hat lower over her eyes and shuffled down the sidewalk, bending over garbage bins or at the roots of trees. Dressed like one of them, she could go anywhere, if she was careful.

Still, there were close calls. Sometimes the police came: she never saw those who'd called, only looked up to see them peeking from behind the curtains as the patrol car pulled up beside her. When the officer approached, she would tuck a twenty into his back pocket, but once that wasn't enough. He'd clutched her elbow with tight fingers, his breath hot on the side of her neck, until she followed him into an alley and undid his zipper, slipped her hand beneath his waistband. As he writhed and groaned, she'd fixed her gaze on the badge on his chest until he'd arched backward and scrabbled at her hair and let out one last strangled yelp, and at last she was free to go on her way. When she'd straightened herself and emerged back onto the street, the patrol car was pulling away, and in the windows above she saw the lights on, the people behind it going about their delicate lives, the ragged woman below already forgotten.

Today, she must be extra careful. With Bird in tow, she can't afford a mistake. They will be quick. The last few places she hasn't been.

Stay a few steps behind and pretend you don't know me, she says, pulling on her hat. And wear your sunglasses.

They emerge from the subway at West Seventy-Second Street: the territory of wealthy women with rhinestoned phone cases, of small white dogs on taut leashes. Everywhere the sidewalks are a damp silvery gray, the car windows streaked with rain. On the corners, the bodegas still have umbrellas hooked over their door handles, ready for sale.

Margaret slips the first of the bottle caps from the bag on her wrist, palms it in one curled fist. After a few minutes of searching, they find a spot: a trash can, half overflowing. Crushed beer cans and plastic wrappers spilling onto the wet pavement.

Stand there, Margaret murmurs. Behind the screen of Bird's body, she stoops as if to rummage in the bin, then sticks the bottle cap under the can's lip, against a handy wad of gum. There, she says. That ought to hold it.

Bird takes a step back from the trash can and eyes it warily. To anyone else it would still look innocuous and ordinary; your eyes would glide right past it. Just another of the city's uglinesses you'd do your best to ignore. But to him, now, the place is marked—with menace or promise, he isn't sure which—and he can't seem to turn away.

What will it do, he asks, though Margaret can see what he's already imagining: flash, flames, a mushroom of smoke. She doesn't answer. Already she's pulled the next cap from her pocket.

Come on, she says. We've got to hustle.

For weeks Margaret has done this daily, and her eyes zero in on likely spots: wedged into a sewer grate, buried in a finger-wide crack in a building's foundation. She pokes one cap neatly into the belly of a squirrel half crushed by a truck.

I don't know, she says, wiping blood from her fingertips as she rises from the curb. They might come sweep it away.

She surveys the purpling mash of fur and flesh, the crust of flies beginning to gather.

But probably not, she says. I don't think they'll bother. Not by tomorrow, anyway.

They tuck them everywhere, these little capsules, and soon Bird begins to help, eyes adjusting to see hiding places everywhere, the way your sight adjusts to the dark. Some of the spots Margaret dismisses as too obvious, too neat. Somewhere messy, she says. Somewhere no one will want to touch. Bird runs a half step ahead, then two, then three, finding places for them all. Inside dumpsters reeking sweetly of rotting fruit; in corners where homeless men took their morning piss. At the feet of trees, nestled between bullets of dog shit. He forgets to question, for a moment, what they are for. It is a reverse treasure hunt, a game he and his mother are playing. Bottle cap by bottle cap, the bag on Margaret's arm lightens, and Bird feels a swirl of glee at the clever places they've found, a sense of power and awe when he thinks how many of these caps are hiding out there. He calculates: a hundred a day, for a whole month.

Is that all of them? Bird asks, when she's placed the last one. In a rusted crevice in a lamppost, just outside the entrance to the park.

That's everything, Margaret says shortly, and lets out a sigh—of satisfaction? Of sadness? It isn't clear.

With the last bottle cap planted, she abandons the trash bag she's carried as camouflage all these weeks, adding it to a nearby heap. It is garbage day in this neighborhood and everywhere lopsided piles dot the curb, threatening to tip. Here and there, something has gnawed through the plastic, spilling a plume of trash across the sidewalk. She wipes her hands on the thighs of her pants, looks at him. Her Bird: wide-eyed and impressionable, trusting, eager for the future though he has no idea what it will hold. Half grown, but only half.

What can she teach him, what can she do for him, what can she give him to make up for what's been lost? She wants to buy him pretzels and ice cream and lemonade from a cart, to let him dance through the park, licking the salt and drips from his fingers. To watch him play silly games, rules changing as he goes: leapfrogging broken squares on the sidewalk, jumping high to slap stop signs as they pass. No: she wants to play those games with him. She wants to be just his mother for one day. As if she can correct all these years without her, with one golden afternoon.

A police car approaches slowly, on the prowl. The silhouettes of the officers inside: foggy blurs through the tinted glass.

In an instant Margaret catches Bird by the elbow, yanking him behind a nearby stoop. Crouched behind a pyramid of garbage bags, her arms cinch him tight, so close they can feel each other's hearts beating.

The car glides closer, suspicious. Scans the area. Then moves on.

Something thick and bitter coats the roof of Margaret's mouth. In her grip, Bird's shoulders are still a boy's: unmuscled and bony, terrifyingly breakable. She can't give him the beautiful afternoon he deserves, not yet. It isn't fair, she thinks. The reek of the garbage rises around them in a fug, curdled and clinging. The police car is long gone, but still she cradles him, eyes shut, face pressed into the impossible warmth of his hair. When she finally loosens her arms and looks down at him, his gaze is startled, but trusting. Searching her face for a cue.

It's okay, she whispers. Don't be scared.

I'm not scared, he says. I knew we'd be okay.

With a shaky smile Margaret gives him a final squeeze, rises to her feet.

Let's get home, she says.

They ride the subway back to Brooklyn, Bird at one end of the car, Margaret at the other, so no one will suspect they're together. From afar she studies him: a small fidgety dark-haired figure, crossing one leg over the other, picking at the tape-mended tears in the seat. Behind his sunglasses she can't quite see his eyes, but when she looks closely she spots his furtive glances in her direction, the nearly imperceptible relaxing of his shoulders each time he finds her, leaning against a pole, keeping surreptitious watch from afar. This is the past three years, she thinks, condensed into an instant: orbiting at a distance, guessing but never sure what he is seeing, hoping that the idea of her is reassuring. No, she corrects herself. Not the past three years. This is simply having a child.

Planting the bottle caps, returning home—usually this is a well-rehearsed dance she can do without flinching. But today is different. Today she cannot stay still; every time the train stops, she jumps, warily scanning the other passengers as they doze or idly scroll on their phones. Her gaze darts again and again to the boy at the end of the car, now settled calmly, breaking from his daydream only to catch her eye once and give her the faintest conspiratorial smile. She tries and fails to smile back. Another train rushes by, headed elsewhere, and in the blurred shapes through the window she remembers the shadows of the officers in their cruiser, Bird's face against her shoulder, Bird's body thin and warm and vulnerable even in the cage of her arms. She hates herself for putting him there. When she holds her breath she can still smell the garbage, sour and suffocating all around. The train pulses beneath them, palpitating, the thumps of the wheels and roar of the engine and the sway of the car coalescing into a single word that throbs faster and faster inside her. By the time they reach the brownstone—walking a ways apart, slipping one at a time through the gate into the back garden—it churns in the base of her throat, and the moment they are safely back inside, it erupts out of her, leaving her breathless.

No, she says. No. I'm not doing it.

Bird turns back to look at her, frozen with her back against the door, as if barring the way out. For a moment she looks older, drawn; in the darkened hallway, lit only by the single bare bulb in the living room, her hair silvers, her face turns gray. A woman turned to stone.

It's not worth the risk, she says. In her own ears her voice is leathery, coarse and cracked.

But the bottle caps, Bird says. All the ones we just hid. And those ones you already hid.

It doesn't matter. We'll leave them.

But it's important. Bird shakes his head, as if she is trying to fool him. Isn't it? Whatever you're doing, I know it's going to help.

It doesn't matter, Margaret says again. Forget it. Forget the whole thing,

She rushes to him, clutching him close, cradling his face in her palms, because it is unbearable to remember him in danger, to imagine him ever being in danger again, let alone

putting him there herself. Whatever it takes, she and Ethan had promised each other all those years ago, and she still means it. She will do whatever it takes to keep their child safe.

Except. In her arms, Bird stiffens, then pulls away.

But—he says.

His brow furrows, a look she knows because she's felt it on her own face her whole life: trying to unknot what people do and what they say and what they mean. She'd inherited it from her mother, who had probably inherited it from her mother, and here it was on her child's face, too, staring back at her. An unintended legacy.

Birdie, she says. You're all that matters. I don't want to do it anymore. I just don't want to take any chances.

But you said—he begins, then stops again, and she hears everything he isn't saying aloud. But all those kids. Like Sadie. And their families. Isn't that why you left?

We'll find another way to help, she says. Something else. I don't know what. But something less risky.

Her mind is full of hazy, incoherent plans.

We'll figure something out, she says. Some way to stay together, somewhere to hide. Maybe Daddy can find a way to join us. Domi could help. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Bird.

She is babbling now; she can hear it. She grabs at his hands with both of hers, as if he is sinking, or she is, and this might keep them afloat. They are still jammed together in the hallway, the tiny space thick and hot with their breath, still speaking in whispers, but it feels to both of them as if they're shouting. All she wants is to not let him go.

None of this matters anymore, she says.

But even as she says it, she can see his face hardening, small embers in his gaze. How, she reads in his eyes, can you look away now that you know?

So it doesn't matter, he says, as long as it's happening to somebody else.

And she knows: it is too late to convince him, because she has already told him the truth.

Bird, she says, but the sheer disappointment on his face crumbles her voice into sand.

You're a hypocrite, he says.

He hesitates for only an instant, then plunges ahead anyway.

You're a terrible mother.

Margaret flinches, but Bird seems to feel it, too, recoiling as if she's struck him. In his face she sees a mirror of what must be happening on her own: nostrils tense and trembling, eye rims suddenly hot and red. With a sudden jerk, he pushes her away. Then he is running up the stairs, and she doesn't follow. She feels as wrung out and emptied as if she has vomited and vomited until nothing is left inside.

• • •

In the dark, Bird falls into a stormy sleep.

He dreams a sharp and jagged tangle. Machines broken and rusted, gears inextricably meshed. Bottles of ink shattering in his hands, dying his fingers a watery blue. Someone has given him a building to hold up, and if he walks away it will collapse. He has caught a snake in a pillowcase, and he stands, bearing the writhing sack, nowhere safe to release it. In the last dream, just before he wakes, he is surrounded by other children, crammed so close he can feel their warmth, hear their breath, smell the sweat on their skin. But none of them speak to him or even look at him. Each time he reaches out they drift away soundlessly, a silent sea parting. Their eyes turning everywhere he is not: down at their dirty palms, over their shoulders, up at the clear and cloudless sky.

He wakes in a panic, burrows into the sleeping bag, tugs it up to his chin. Now he remembers: the bottle caps, the police cruiser, the argument. Everything his mother had told him over the past two days, all the reasons she'd had to leave, and how quickly she'd thrown all that aside. He thinks about the years without her, he and his father all alone, missing her. Once he'd have traded anything, everyone, to have her back.

He can't see anything, not even a crack of light from the hall. He listens for his mother, but hears nothing. Even the noises from outside—though there must be some—are muffled and muted to nothing more than whispers and faint hums. Somewhere she must be here, but he doesn't remember the way to her room, and in the unrelenting dark he isn't even sure he can find his way out. It is as if no one is there at all.

The wail of a siren slices through the window plastic: rising, here, gone. The only sign of life in the world. With a finger he drills into the corner of the plastic, stretching it, until a pinprick hole spreads. He bends down, puts his eye to it.

Outside he expects only more blackness, but instead what he sees is a dizzying array of light. Lights glimmer from window after window in a glittering mosaic. A sea of lights. A tidal wave of lights. Washing down over him in sparkling droplets. Each of those lights is a person, washing dishes or working or reading, completely oblivious to his existence. The thought of so many people dazzles and terrifies him. All those people out there, millions of them, billions, and not one of them knows or cares about him. He claps his hand over the hole, but still he can feel the lights sizzling against his skin like a sunburn. Even curling up inside the sleeping bag, the covers pulled over his head, brings no relief.

Out of him pours a cry so long buried the sound of it is like an earthquake in his throat. A name he hasn't uttered in years.

Mama, he cries, stumbling out of bed, and the darkness reaches up and tangles around his ankles, tugging him to the ground.

When he opens his eyes again he is curled up tight in a ball and a hand rests warm and heavy on the tender V between his shoulder blades. His mother.

Shh, she says, as he tries to turn over. It's all right.

She is sitting on the floor beside him. A less-dark shape against the dark.

You know, I felt the same way, she says, the first night I spent on my own.

Her palm warm and soft on the nape of his neck. Smoothing the hairs that bristle there.

Why did you bring me here, he says at last.

I wanted—she begins, and stops.

How to finish? I wanted to make sure you were all right. I wanted to make sure you would be all right. I wanted to see who you were. I wanted to see who you had become. I wanted to see if you were still you. I wanted to see you.

I wanted you, she says simply, and this is the only explanation she can give, but it is what he needs to hear. She had wanted him. She still wanted him. She hadn't left because she hadn't cared.

The understanding seeps into him like a sedative. Limpening his muscles, scooping smooth the hard edges of his thoughts. He leans against her, trusting her to bear his weight. Letting her arms twine around him like a vine round a tree. Through the tiny hole he's poked in the window covering, a thin strand of light pierces the black plastic, casting a single starry splotch on the wall.

She strokes his back, feels the nubs of his spine under the skin like a string of pearls. Gently she sets their hands together, finger to finger, palm to palm. Nearly as big as hers, his feet

perhaps even bigger. Like a puppy, all paws, the rest of him still childlike but eagerly lolloping behind.

Birdie, she says, I'm just so afraid of losing you again.

He looks up at her with the fathomless trust of a sleepy child.

But you'll come back, he says.

It is not a question, but a statement. A reassurance.

She nods.

I'll come back, she agrees. I promise I'll come back.

And she means it.

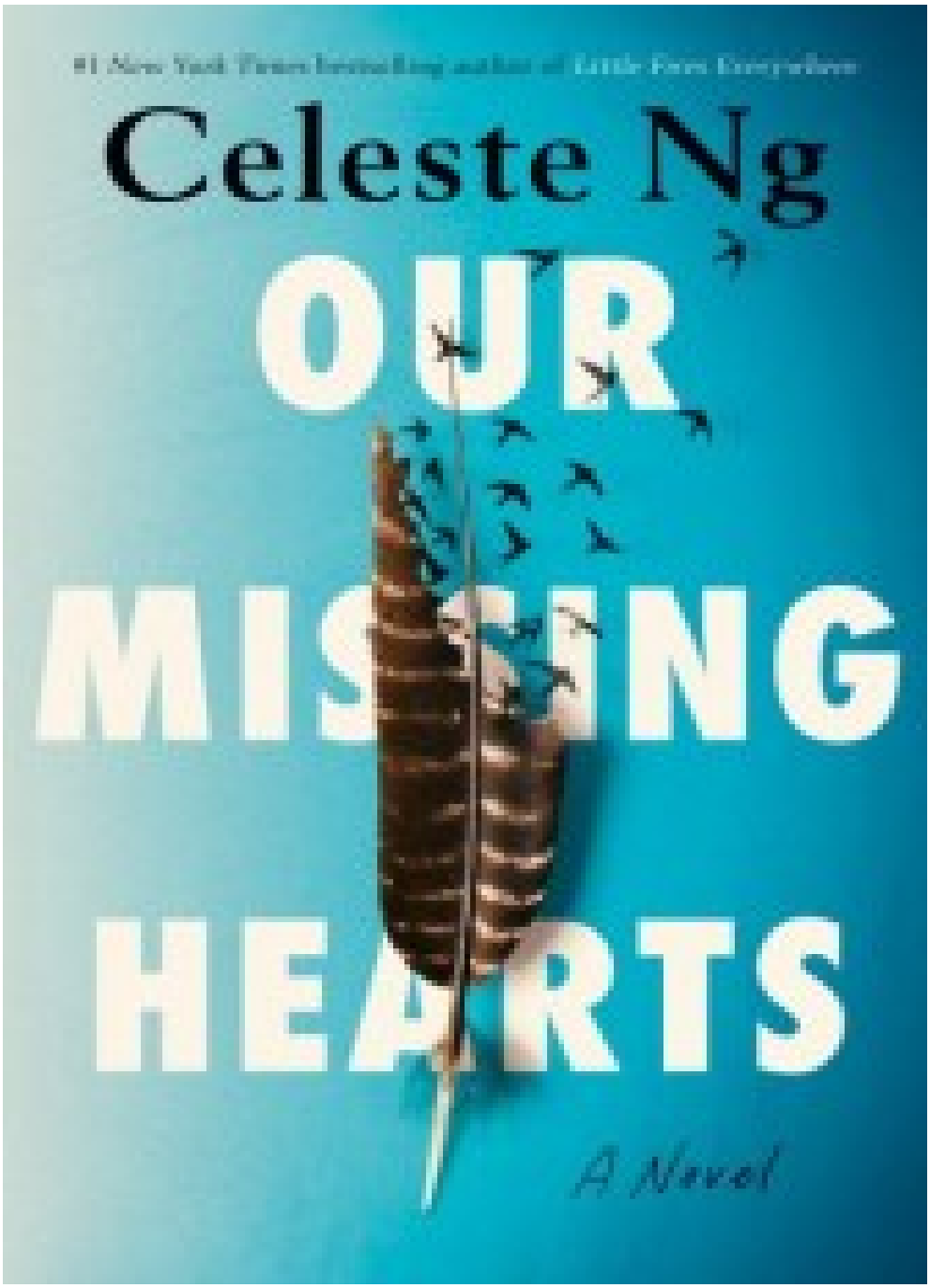
Okay, he murmurs. He isn't sure if he is speaking to her, or to himself. About what is to come, or what happened long ago. All of it, he decides. Everything. It's okay, he says again, and he knows, by the gentle tightening of her arms, that she has heard.

I'm here, she says, and Bird lets the darkness absorb him.

• • •

When Bird wakes again his mother is gone and it is morning. He is curled in the crib, legs folded nearly to chest, the sleeping bag left behind on the window seat, twisted like a shed skin. He has a dim memory of wanting to be small, of finding this safe place to hide. Of retreating. Draped over him is a blanket he doesn't recognize, heavy and too small and oddly shaped, and then he realizes it is not a blanket but his mother's coat.

III


#1 New York Times bestselling author of Little Fires Everywhere
Celeste Ng
OUR
MISSING
HEARTS
A Novel

In the morning, at ten o'clock precisely, the Duchess arrives in her long sleek car, driving herself this time. Just inside the back door, Margaret hesitates. But Bird doesn't. He is eager to go.

Good luck, he says. Confidence beaming from his eyes.

Okay, she says at last. I'll see you soon.

She pulls him close, kisses him on the temple, just where the pulse beats under the skin.

Then Bird, backpack slung over his shoulder, darts through the back garden and out the fence and slips into the car at the curb. There, at the other end of the seat, is a figure silhouetted against a tinted window, turning as he enters. Taller—half a head taller than him now, maybe—longer haired, but the same quick eyes, the same skeptical grin.

Bird, Sadie says. Oh my god, Bird.

She throws her arms around him. Her skin smells of cedar and soap. Bird, she says, I've got *so* much to tell you—

If you're going to gossip about me, please wait until we're out of the city, the Duchess says drily. I don't want to miss anything while I'm concentrating on traffic.

Sadie gives an exaggerated eye roll toward the front seat.

Fine, she says.

In the rearview mirror Bird sees the Duchess's eyes twinkle back at them, and this more than anything reassures him. Sadie is at ease here, in a way he's never seen. As the car shifts back into gear, she settles into her seat and turns her gaze to the window, letting out a soft sigh. It's been months since they saw each other, but somehow Sadie seems younger rather than older, less wary and watchful, as if she's finally able to breathe after a long time without air. As if she no longer has to fight her way through the world alone. He knows this feeling, or something like it: it is what he felt last night, when he'd called his mother and she came to him; it is what he felt this morning, waking under the comforting weight of her coat. He settles back into his seat, too, happy to be just a child for the moment, not in charge, simply along for the ride. There is so much he wants to ask Sadie—he cannot imagine living with the Duchess, for one thing—but he can wait.

Where are we going? he asks, as the Duchess nudges the car back into traffic again.

To the cabin, she says, and then they're off.

She drives fast, the Duchess, Bird and Sadie belted firmly in back and pinned in place by unrelenting acceleration, and as they burst out of the tangled gray nest of the city and onto the open road, it feels like a rocket launch into the stars.

I hope neither of you gets carsick, the Duchess says suddenly, with a glance into the rearview mirror.

Neither of them does. Bird is seldom in a car and the sheer speed of it exhilarates him. The tinted windows deepen the colors outside, turning the sky turquoise, the grass emerald. Even the road, which he knows is ordinary flat asphalt, gleams with a silver sheen. In the Duchess's proximity everything seems richer and more expansive, and this makes such inherent sense to him that he does not question it, simply settles against the soft leather and absorbs it. Beside him, Sadie draws in her breath quickly as a cloud of birds rises from a tree and scatters like a handful of confetti. For the first time he understands why dogs hang their heads out of windows: after so long inside, he, too, feels eager to lap up all he can, the very air tingling with life.

They drive for an hour and a half in companionable silence, the only noise being the occasional whoosh as they whip past another car or truck. The Duchess does not use signals, merely plants her foot firmly on the gas pedal and speeds past as the engine lets out a throaty

growl. Bird wonders where the other half of the highway is, the side returning to the city—on the far side of the trees, perhaps. Though he can't see it, it must be there. It is an exercise in faith. His mother has promised him she will come back. Another exercise in faith. He will remember everything and when he returns he will tell her what he's seen.

The Duchess has referred to it as the *cabin* and in the strictest sense this is true: a little milk carton of a house, encircled by trees. To Bird and Sadie, *cabin* calls to mind Abe Lincoln, hewn logs, and howling wolves. The Duchess's cabin is small and simple, but this is as far as the resemblance goes. The wooden floors in the main room gleam like buttery toffee. The big fireplace at its center is made of rounded river stones. Behind it are a pair of small bedrooms, a bathroom. On one wall, a window peeks through a clearing in the trees to the silver sparkle of water in the distance.

I'm trusting you not to drown, the Duchess says. There's not another house for miles, so no one will be coming to save you.

She lifts her wrist and checks a slim gold watch.

So here are the rules, she says. You are not to go off the property, but it's forty-seven acres so I assume that won't be too much of a limitation. You may swim, if you don't mind the cold. You may make a fire, if you're careful. In the fireplace only. I've left you a bag of food that should last until I come back tomorrow. Anything unclear?

Who built this house? Sadie asks. Somehow I don't think it was you.

She grins cheekily at the Duchess, and the Duchess smiles back indulgently.

My father did, she says.

She pauses suddenly and looks around, as if she is seeing the cabin for the first time. Taking in the wooden walls, the planked ceiling, the satiny floor.

Or rather, had it built, she says. That's how he did things. Her voice softens. When I was little, we used to sit on the shore, out there, and fish. He and my mother and I. I haven't been here in many years.

Then she shakes her head, as if shrugging away dust. So don't burn it down, please, she says crisply.

Are you going back to help my mother? Bird asks.

For the first time the Duchess looks uncertain.

You know your mother, she says, and Bird nods, even as he wonders if this is true. When she gets an idea in her head there's no stopping her. But she's coming to me when she's finished, and we'll be here tomorrow morning to pick you up.

And then what, Bird and Sadie both think, but neither of them dares to ask.

The Duchess checks her watch again.

I'd better go, she says. I won't get back until midafternoon as it is, and if there's traffic—

She picks up her keys from the table and turns back, looks from one of them to the other.

Don't worry, she says, her voice unexpectedly gentle. Bird, Sadie. Everything will be fine.

Of course it will, Sadie says. *We're* here, now.

• • •

When the Duchess is gone, Bird and Sadie—suddenly aware of all the months that have passed between them—lapse into bashful silence. Tacitly, they take stock of their surroundings. In the big main room, a table and three chairs, a kitchenette; in the bathroom, a shower and toilet and a small louvered window through which they can see nothing but trees. Two bedrooms, a larger one, cream colored with a big double bed, and a smaller one—pink—with a twin bed in the corner.

Without asking, Sadie kicks her shoes off in the big room, but Bird doesn't mind. It's clear who the house was built for—parents, child—and he is happy to let someone else play the role of adult for a little while longer. He settles on the sofa in front of the fireplace, and beneath him the aged leather crackles.

What is it like, he says. Living with the Duchess. What is *that* like?

Sadie laughs. Domi? she says. She seems super scary, but she's not.

As if a seal has been broken, she begins to chatter away. The first day, she said, she hadn't seen Domi at all. She'd been given a bedroom—up on the top floor, with a huge antique map of the world hung on the wall—and left to her own devices, and she'd spent all day exploring the museum of a house, trying to figure out what kind of place she'd landed in, what kind of woman Domi was. Margaret said she could be trusted, but Sadie was not used to taking things on assurance. Late that night, she'd found her way into Domi's office and was still behind the desk, reading the papers scattered there, when Domi came in.

And just what do you think you're doing? Domi demanded, and Sadie had looked up, studying her with new eyes.

So all these checks, she said, ticking her finger down Domi's ledger. To all these libraries. You know what they're doing. You're—helping.

A long moment, where they appraised each other anew.

Why, Sadie asked, and Domi said: It's one small thing. To start to make things right.

Sadie shut the checkbook. I want to help, she said.

She'd expected Domi to laugh, but she didn't. Instead Domi had sat down in the chair across the desk, as if Sadie were in charge and she was the supplicant, asking for a favor.

Maybe you can, she said.

They'd spent days talking, Sadie telling Domi everything she remembered about the authorities, her host families, the whole system of PACT. How they'd moved her, who had met her, where she'd gone. What she'd seen in the libraries, those months in which they'd hidden her. What she'd wished she'd done, and what she'd wished others had. Domi listening. Learning.

I couldn't go out, Sadie says to Bird. In case anyone spotted me. But Domi found me stuff to do. And she's been looking for my parents. Trying to trace where they've gone.

She pauses and swallows, and Bird knows better than to ask.

She said not to give up *yet*, Sadie says. She says—well, she says you just never know.

The day before Bird arrived, Domi's last lead had come up empty, and she'd broken the news to Sadie gently, the way you'd break news of a death. We'll keep looking, she'd promised, holding Sadie tight.

If you could have anything else, Domi had asked eventually, breaking the silence. What would you wish for.

Sadie considered.

A whole day where I could do whatever I wanted, she said. Without anyone watching or judging or tracing or tracking me. Just one day like that.

Hmm, Domi said. Might be tricky. But maybe there's a way. If you can wait a bit, until the right time.

• • •

And now here they were, she and Bird. A day with no one watching or judging. A day to do what they wanted.

She told me, Sadie says. Some of the things she and your mom saw in the Crisis. The things they did—and the things they didn't do. Things she would've done differently. You know that

day you came? she adds smugly. I told her what to ask. She came upstairs and said, what would you ask Bird to find out if he really was Bird? And I told her, ask about his bike. Ask about his cereal. Ask about lunch.

Do you know? Bird asks. What my mom's doing.

Sadie pauses.

Domi wouldn't tell me exactly, she admits. Your mom came a few times, to plan. I tried to listen, she adds, rather proudly. But I couldn't hear much.

Together, they pool notes. By their math, Margaret must have hidden thousands of bottle caps, all over the city. At the Duchess's, Sadie had flipped through the newspapers and scanned news reports on television and online: no reports of people finding suspicious devices in bottle caps. No reports of trouble, at least not in the city. Whatever is being set up, it hasn't happened yet. For weeks this has been going on, like a spring being inexorably wound.

It's something big, Sadie says.

Of course it is, Bird says. My mother doesn't do things by halves.

I don't think Domi does either.

Their eyes meet.

Bird, Sadie says, I bet this will change everything. Whatever they're planning.

For a moment they pause, trying to imagine a world after. Inside Bird fizzes with excitement, and he jumps to his feet. Needing somewhere to put it.

Let's go down to the water, he says.

They follow the path through the clearing in the trees and there it is: sparkling in the sunlight, a little inlet stretching out to the blue expanse beyond. Bird scoops up a pebble and tosses it as far as he can. With a satisfying *bloop* the water swallows it in a single gulp, and rings ripple back to his feet at the shore. The Duchess is right: as far as they can see, there are no other houses, no other people, just a dense ruff of trees clustered around this spangle of a cove. From above it must look as if a giant has pressed a thumbprint into the forest, carving this perfect hollow for the cabin right at the water's edge.

He has never been so far from other people before. All his life, there have always been others nearby, watching, listening. Even if you couldn't see them, you knew they were there: just through the window, just on the other side of the wall, just out of sight around a corner. Out here there is no one and he feels himself expanding to gigantic size. Beside him, Sadie gives a sudden whoop, and he gives one, too, and from the nearby trees a cluster of sparrows takes flight, and then they are running, shrieking, churning the rocky shore with their footprints, darting after the velvet chipmunks that whip between the roots of trees and the squirrels that scamper out of reach. When they collapse, exhilarated and exhausted, the hum of silence that settles over them again feels louder than their shouting. For the moment neither of them thinks about their parents. They are simply children, at play.

Let's go in, Sadie suggests. Just up to our ankles.

They pry off their sneakers and socks and roll their jeans to their knees, and as they tromp in, small muddy rings echo outward from their feet. The water is frigid, but they don't notice or care. There are trees to climb, not the thin reedy saplings that ringed the playground, rippling the asphalt with their roots, but tall ones that stretch higher even than Sadie dares to venture.

They spend the afternoon noticing things: the fine white *V*s on each clover leaf, as if painted by a thin-bladed brush. The salmon-colored mushroom caps prodding up through the soil; the delicate lichens that cling to tree trunks like jade fish scales. A slim young birch, too tall for its slender whip of a frame, bowed nearly into an arch, but growing, still growing

nevertheless, sending its jagged green leaves toward the sky. October is nearly over, winter is coming, but things are growing, still alive.

As the afternoon starts to dim, Sadie gives a yelp, and Bird comes running just in time to see a little crab, the size of a quarter, scuttle across the sand. Now that he looks, he spots them everywhere, hiding in plain sight. They've been there all along; he just hadn't looked. For a while they try to catch them, chasing them across the shore, trying to scoop them up in their hands, and once Sadie gets close enough and gets nipped by tiny claws, but every time the crabs escape: down into holes in the sand, among the rocks, out into the vast blue blur of the water.

You need a chicken leg, Sadie says, with authority. She drops to a squat on the sand. That's what you need. To get big crabs, way bigger than this.

She pauses.

My mom took me one summer, she says. You tie a chicken leg to a string and throw it in the water, and when the crab grabs it, you pull the string toward you, really really slow, and the crab follows the chicken, and then you catch the crab in a net.

Bird imagines his own parents teaching him this: mud streaked, wading in the sea. Laughing together, the way he remembers. Reeling in a line heavy with prey. He wonders, suddenly, what time it is, what his mother is doing right now, if whatever she's planning has already begun. Above them the sky stretches wide and flat and blue, but he scans it anyway, as if they might spot plumes of smoke drifting all the way from the city.

Crabs eat chicken? he asks, pushing the thought away, and Sadie nods. They eat everything, she says.

My mom told me once, she goes on, rocking back on her heels, about this thing that happened where she grew up. Sometimes, like one night a year, all the crabs get confused and run up on the shore. It's like the tide and the phase of the moon, or something. A jubilee, it's called. You wake up in the middle of the night and go down to the beach and the water is just full of them. They practically *crawl* out—you can just reach in and pull them out, bucketsful. She and her cousins and aunts and uncles used to do it. People would fill their trucks. And they'd build a big bonfire and cook the crabs and have a midnight feast, right there.

Wow, Bird says.

She said when she was a girl, she would go to bed in her bathing suit every night in summer and lie there awake in the dark, just praying for a jubilee.

Sadie is lost in thought, her eyes trained on something off in the distance.

She always said we'd go down some summer and visit that side of the family so I could meet all my cousins, but we never did.

Overhead a hawk circles, lazy, in the sky.

We'll find her, Bird says. My mom, Domi—I'm sure they can find her.

They've been looking, Sadie says. I don't know if she's still out there.

He has never heard her sound so uncertain, and this disorients him.

If she's out there, Bird says confidently, they'll find her. His mother, he thinks, always keeps her promises.

This thing your mom is planning, Sadie says, this is *it*, Bird, it's going to change everything.

The tiniest of pauses, before she continues.

I mean, it has to. Right?

The little hitch in her voice, like a splinter, snags Bird's attention. Sadie's eyes appear to be fixed on the horizon, but in the warm afternoon light they shine glass-bright, glazed with tears. His own eyes go liquid and hot. He thinks of everything his mother has told him, of all the years

his father has been trying to protect him. Of the man in the pizza parlor, the man at the Common. The woman with her dog. Sadie's parents, his mother's parents. His father's parents retreating from their lives, Mrs. Pollard crouched anxiously beside his computer, D. J. Pierce's spit falling inches from his shoe. Everything that needs to be changed feels immense and immeasurable.

You know, he says. We could build a fire.

It works: her eyes come back from the realm of what if to what is. Right here? she says.

In the fireplace, Bird says. We don't have any crabs, but we can have a fire.

• • •

Together, they lay out the wood. A small and concrete thing. My dad showed me how, Sadie says, he was a Boy Scout as a kid. He knew how to do lots of useful stuff, like tie knots, and find north using the stars. You stack it like a log cabin, like this. Dried grass, then sticks, then logs.

Bird flushes. His father has never taught him to do anything useful like this. Like the three little pigs, Bird says. Sadie laughs, and he feels an odd twinge of pride. It feels good, making someone else laugh.

Here goes, Sadie says, and lights a match with a quick grating flick.

The dried grass catches right away, and then the twigs, a burst of gratifying orange. Then the whole thing collapses and goes dark. Huff, puff, Sadie says. With a stick she sweeps the remnants of their fire aside. Let's try again.

They rebuild the crosshatches of wood, and Bird looks for something to help it catch faster, and it's then that he spots the stack of newspapers, set by the hearth. He reaches for one, begins to crumple it, then stops.

Look, he says.

The date on the paper is almost fifteen years old. The middle of the Crisis, they both realize.

SIXTH STRAIGHT DAY OF DISRUPTIONS ROIL DC; 400 ARRESTED; 12 RIOTERS, 6 OFFICERS SLAIN.

A photo covers the entire front page: Washington, DC, ablaze, a crowd of people on the run. Attacking? Fleeing? They can't tell, only that from the sharp angles of their bodies—arms and legs thrown wide—they are moving fast, forcefully, instinctively. They wear black, from the hats pulled low over their foreheads to the masks and scarves across their faces, all the way down to the lug-soled boots on their feet; they could be protesters or authorities, it's impossible to say. On the pavement, almost obscured, lies a woman's body, her face turned aside, blood matting her hair. In the background the Washington Monument juts like a single raised finger, dark against a smoldering orange sky.

With both hands Bird crushes the paper into a tight wad, hiding the photograph inside.

Let's try again, he says.

He sets the knot of paper in the middle of the miniature cabin they've built, and reaches for the matches again.

This time, the flame gobbles the paper, flaring up as the newsprint dissoves to ash. Small flames lick hesitantly at the sticks and begin to fade, and this time, Bird remembers something from long ago, something his father once told him. A word, and its story. He drops to hands and knees, sets his face before the flame. As gently as he can, he purses his lips and blows, as if blowing a kiss, or soothing a bruise, and the flames rise, the tinder crumples and shrivels and glows the most intense orange he's ever seen, and then—as he runs short of breath—fades back to gray. Sadie drops down beside him and blows, too, and the glow slowly returns, then grows. It is like watching color return to someone's face, like watching dawn spreading across a darkened sky.

In silence they tend the fire in turns—first Bird, then Sadie, then both together, breathing life into it—until the larger sticks catch, then the logs, and the flames grow steady and calm and hot.

Spirare, Bird hears his father say. *To breathe. Con: together. So conspiracy literally means breathing together.*

They make it sound so sinister, Sadie says, and only then does Bird realize he's spoken aloud. But breathing together, breathing the same air—it's actually kind of beautiful.

They sit for a moment, quiet, and Bird thinks back to the past days huddled with his mother around the coffee table. Piecing together her whispered story, both of them breathing in the same thick air. Sadie feeds a stick into the fire, nudging it closer to the little blaze until it begins to char and glow. Outside, the sun is falling but the night is still warm, and through the window they see the air ignite. Fireflies. In their excitement they have left the door open and a firefly drifts into the cabin, then another, green sparks shimmering in the red glow of the fire.

I used to hate her, Bird says suddenly.

But you don't anymore.

A long silence. Around them, bright flecks swirl and dip.

No, he says, and realizes it is true. Not anymore.

For dinner they eat from the paper bag of food the Duchess has left them. Bird heats water, tips in a packet of angel hair. It's good, Sadie says. You know my foster parents wouldn't let me use the stove? Thought I was a risk. Like I might set the whole house on fire.

They scrape the last dregs of sauce from their bowls.

What do you think she's doing right now? Bird says.

Sadie furrows her brow. She's getting ready, she says. Ready to set them all off.

By *them* she means the hundreds of bottle caps scattered all over the city.

Do you think— Bird hesitates. Do you think she's dangerous? I mean, she couldn't hurt anyone. Could she?

A long pause as they both turn this over in their minds.

I think, Sadie says finally, that anyone could hurt someone, if there was a really good reason.

Bird thinks of his mother, tugging him into the shadows as the police car approached, the sharp-toothed animal that suddenly reared in her eyes. He thinks of his father, that day on the Common, standing over the man who'd pushed him. Of the blood on his fist. They'd been dangerous, he thought; they'd loved him so fiercely it had made them dangerous.

They go to bed early, taking turns in the bathroom, letting their hard-earned fire die down to coals. They are eager for tomorrow. They are full of plans, each building on the other's like a tower of dominoes. Tomorrow, Domi and Margaret will bring them back to the city. Where everything will be different, they are sure, because of whatever Margaret is doing.

It's happening, right now, Sadie says with glee. Bird, just think, it's happening, and Bird has no reply.

At sundown, she begins.

She opens the old laptop, the one she's scrounged together from parts found on the curb: all those late-night books she'd studied, late at night in all those libraries, put to good use. For the first time she turns on the wi-fi. It is a risk—signals that go out can be traced back. For so long she's muffled her footsteps, muzzling herself. Now it is time to speak.

Her fingers tap the keyboard, running the program she's rigged. She sends out the signal and waits, watching for them to connect. To prick up their ears for her commands. The bottle caps she has been making and planting, four weeks' worth. Everything she'd planned so carefully before Bird had arrived.

She has done the math: one every two blocks, all the way down to the Financial District, nearly all the way up to Harlem. Weatherproof in their little plastic shells, small enough to be concealed in places where they won't be disturbed for weeks. Even if one were spotted, it wouldn't be looked at: just a worthless scrap, a piece of litter to be swept away. No one examined the things in the gutters, in the dustpans, in the street cleaner's bins; those were the things people tried to ignore. By her count, she's planted two thousand and eleven: how many of them have survived and are working, how many will connect and answer her call?

Ten at first, now fifteen. Twenty-five.

She hadn't known, at first, what to do with the stories she'd collected. The first wisp of an idea had formed when one of the mothers clasped her hand, her voice trembling. *Tell everyone what happened to my girl. Tell it to the world. Shout it from the skies if you can.* Later it had crystallized, on a sunny morning in LA, when she looked up and saw it: a cell-phone tower, disguised as an unconvincing tree. Swathed in green leaf-print canvas, right-angled arms held mannequin-stiff. The wrong kind of tree for the climate, an evergreen towering over the palms, head and shoulders higher than the real trees, emitting a faint hum. What kind of messages was it beaming through the air? For a moment she'd closed her eyes and imagined it: all those invisible words made audible, a cacophony of voices crisscrossing the city like a net.

She thinks of it again as she watches the monitor, watching the bottle caps answer her call. Seventy, a hundred, two hundred.

Inside each, a tiny receiver tuned to the precise frequency her computer now emits. And also: a tiny speaker. Reception up to ten miles, Domi had promised her, crystal clear, and you'll hear it from a block away, at least. Her father had made his fortune on this technology, though he'd surely never imagined it put to this use. One by one they wake, the counter ticking upward. Two hundred and fifty. Three hundred. Each a glowing pinprick on the map, spreading northward from the Battery, freckling Chinatown and Koreatown and Hell's Kitchen, dotting Midtown to the Upper West Side and beyond. Over five hundred now, the counter still climbing. When it reaches nineteen hundred, it pauses, and she does a quick calculation. Nearly ninety-five percent, a solid A. Wouldn't her parents be proud.

She lifts the microphone, clears her throat, and across the city, block after block, bottle-cap speakers crackle to life. Picking up the signal she is transmitting. A voice emerging from the knotholes of trees, the undersides of trash cans, cracks in front stoops and behind lampposts: everywhere and anywhere she has wedged a bottle cap in the past month. Hiding unnoticed until this moment, when from that little round cap her voice would spring, surprisingly loud, startling those nearby. In unison, this voice speaking—slightly scratched, as if from wear—all over the city. Only one voice, but speaking the words of many.

• • •

It doesn't have to be live, Domi had said. A recording, maybe. It would be safer. You don't have to be there. She'd said it gently, as if trying to persuade a stubborn child.

Margaret shook her head. I don't have to, she said, but I want to.

She couldn't explain why, but she feels this in her bones: certain things must be done in person. Testifying. Attending the dying. Remembering those who were gone. Some things need to be witnessed. But there was another reason she herself couldn't quite see, could only sense its presence, the way you sensed a ghost. She had not been there to see her parents die; they had died alone, without her, and she should have been there, to see the man who'd pushed her father and sear his face into her mind; she should have been there by her father's hospital bed, among the beeping, blinking machines, to kiss him and send him on his way. She should have been there, that next morning, to catch her mother as she fell, perhaps to save her, but at the very least to give her a loving face to focus on as the light in her eyes faded. She could not have articulated this, but she could feel the shape of this wrong inside her, the way she could feel her own heart kettle-drumming in her chest. They had deserved that kind of caretaking and no one had given it to them and she would, in this small way, give that solemn witnessing and hand-holding to each of the stories she was about to tell.

Alone in the darkened brownstone, she opens the first of the notebooks, a library of stories she has gathered and borne on her body for the past three years. The words of those she's spoken to, faithfully jotted down in microscopic print, entrusted to her to keep and to safeguard and to share. She begins to read the words these families have whispered, letting them speak through her mouth. One by one, child by child, she tells each story.

• • •

The outlines first. Only a first name, nothing that could betray anyone: *Emmanuel. Jackie. Tien. Parker.* The city they'd lived in: *Berkeley. Decatur. Eugene. Detroit.* Their age, when they'd been taken: *Nine. Six. Seven and a half. Two.*

And then, shading in those outlines: the contours and textures of a particular life lived, the details that made each child themselves. The smallest and most human moments, that explained who they were. *Keep to the small.*

> *His smile was so sudden. One moment he'd be laughing, happy. The next, instantly stern. Even playing peekaboo, he took it so seriously. As if he knew even then we might vanish, with the twitch of a blanket, and disappear.*
>
> *She wouldn't eat any food that had corners. I had to cut her sandwiches into circles. For months, I lived off the cut-off corners she left behind.*

At first people stop, baffled. Where is this voice coming from? They glance over their shoulders, searching for the source. Someone behind them? Behind that tree? But no, there is no one. They are alone. And then they begin to listen; they can't help it. One story, then another. Then another. They pause and soon they are not alone any longer, there are clusters of them, then dozens, so many people standing silently together, listening. These steely New Yorkers—people who could ignore a troupe of breakdancers spinning around subway poles, who could swerve around a swarm of camera-toting tourists or a man dressed as a giant hot dog without losing speed or focus, without even a sideways glance—they paused, listening, and the teeming rivers of the city's streets thickened and clogged. The voice comes from all around them, as if from the air itself, and though later a few of them would say it sounded godlike, from the sky, most of those who heard it would insist on the exact opposite: it felt like a voice inside them, speaking somehow both to them and from them, and though it was speaking the stories of strangers, people they had never met, children who were not their own, pain they had not experienced, it

was somehow speaking not just to them but with them, of them, that the stories it told, one after the other in a seemingly endless stream, were not someone else's but one larger story of which they, too, were a part.

The night they took you I was angry with you, you'd scribbled on the wall with a permanent pen, you'd scribbled on your hands and your face and part of the carpet, too, angry black scrawls. I'd smacked you and you'd gone to bed crying, and I was scrubbing the wall with a sponge when the knock came at the door.

She wants people to remember more than their names. More than their faces. More than what happened to them, more than the simple last fact that they were taken. Each of them needs to be remembered as a person unlike any other, not a name on a list but as *someone*, someone unlike anyone else.

Do you remember that day we went to the pier? That day the world was full of things to look at, the sea lions gliding through the harbor and the Ferris wheel spinning against the blue sky and the seagulls swooping overhead, and when it started to get dark I said, let's have ice cream for dinner, and you looked at me as if I'd grown wings. You had peanut butter fudge with whipped cream, and I had chocolate. On the way home the Muni was crowded so you sat in my lap and fell asleep and drooled peanut-butter spit down my neck.

I hope you remember that day. I hope you remember the ice cream for dinner.

She cannot go on forever; she knows this. Already, somewhere, they are tracking her. They are hunting the speakers, smashing them one by one. She has made it as hard as she can. They will have to follow the sound, elbowing through the crowds of listeners, winding the thread of her voice back to its source. They will need flashlights; they will have only those thin needles of light to probe every crevice and cranny. They will have to feel with their hands, into the gum-crusted undersides of city garbage cans, into slimy gutters and rancid grates and under piles of dog shit, scrabbling to extract the bottle caps that she has so painstakingly concealed. The speakers cannot be turned off; they can only be destroyed, and her trackers will smash them under boot heels, but the sound will continue, from other speakers, just a block or two away; with every one they find, they will realize there are hundreds more, that no matter how far they stretch their net there is somewhere farther that these stories still reach. It is a game of hide-and-seek, and she will draw it out as long as she can. They will never find all the speakers, but sooner or later they will trace her signal, the wi-fi that connects her to those speakers in a trail of tiny digital footprints; they will follow those footprints back to this house, where she sits with a microphone and her stack of notebooks, their covers softened and curved from being carried on her body for so long. By the time they arrive, she will be gone.

She will tell as many stories as she can. She still has time. One family's story. Then the next. What do you want to remember, she'd asked those left behind. What would you want to say to your child. She'd recorded those words and now, as she promised, she says it for them, the words that they're unable to utter aloud.

When I can't sleep I count your freckles in my mind. On your temple, where the skull is thinnest. On your right cheek, just beside your ear. On the inside of your elbow, on the side of your knee, a pair on the knob of your wrist. These marks you have carried since you were inside my body. I wonder if they are still there, or if they've faded with time. If you have more marks on your skin now that I will never see.

At bedtime you used to ask me for something to dream about. Tonight, I would say, you will dream you are a mermaid, exploring a huge sunken city. Or: Tonight you will fly on a rocket and sail past glittery stars. One night, I was tired. I couldn't think of anything. The truth is, you'd been a brat all day and I just wanted you to sleep. I said, Tonight you will

dream that you are lying warm and safe and sleeping in your bed. That's a boring dream, Mom, you said, that's the most boring dream I've ever heard. And it was, but now it is the best dream I can think of, the only dream I can imagine.

When they begin to get close, she will abandon ship. She tracks the speakers blinking out one by one on her map, marking how close they've come. Domi is waiting on Park Avenue; the plan is that Margaret, after broadcasting what she can, will smash the laptop and take her notebooks and run.

Is anyone listening, out there? Are people simply rushing by? And how much of a difference can it make really, just one story, even all these stories taken together and funneled into the ear of the busy world—a world moving so quickly that voices and sounds Doppler into a rising whine, so distracted that even when your attention snags on the burr of something unusual, you are dragged away before you can see it, uprooting it like a bee's spent stinger. It is hard for anything to be heard and even if anyone hears it, how much of a difference could it really make, what change could it possibly bring, just these words, just this thing that happened once to one person that the listener does not and will never know. It is just a story. It is only words.

She does not know if it will make any difference. She does not know if anyone is listening. She is here, locked in her cabinet, drawing cat after cat, slipping them through the cracks. Unsure if they will sink even one claw into the beast outside.

But still: she turns another page and goes on.

I saved all the teeth you left under your pillow, in a little tin that once held mints. Sometimes I take them out and tip them into my hand, and let them clink together like beads in my palm. I keep the tin in my jewelry box. It feels like the right place for these fragments of you, the right place for tiny precious things.

I hope you are happy.

I hope you know how much

I hope

Up until the end, she believes she still has time. That she can share every story she's gathered and recorded and promised to pass on, and still make it back to Bird. But she is mistaken. The darkest part of night is over, and far away, just where the sky meets the ocean, the sun is beginning to rise. And then she hears it: a car, then another and another. Another. The squeal of tires skidding to a halt, the sudden ominous silence as engines cut off one by one.

She still has notebooks full of stories that she will not have time to speak. She has miscalculated. She's stayed too late.

They settle on her with their dark wings then, nearly suffocating her: all of her many mistakes of motherhood. Each and every time she'd brought pain to the one she most wanted to protect. Once she'd swung Bird to her shoulders and his head hit the doorframe, a plum-colored bruise blooming on his forehead. She'd handed him a cup, and the glass—invisibly cracked—shattered in his mouth. The catalog of failures in her mind is endless and indelible and each memory digs its talons into her, weighing her down, pinning her in place. She'd pricked him with a needle, trying to dig out a splinter, raised a pearl of blood on his thumb. She'd snapped at him, mid-tantrum, and left him alone to cry. She'd put him in danger, with a line of a poem, and then she'd left him alone for so long, and soon he would be alone all over again. Would he ever understand? Through the feathery blackness she glances down at the notebooks spread on the table. A whole stack of them, lined with the stories of others, all with their own memories and regrets, all their failings and love, all things they wished they could tell the children they might never see again. Maybe, she thinks, this is simply what living is: an infinite list of transgressions that did not weigh against the joys but that simply overlaid them, the two lists mingling and

merging, all the small moments that made up the mosaic of a person, a relationship, a life. What Bird will learn, then: That his mother is fallible. That she is only human, too.

She closes the cover of the notebook before her, sets it atop the others. She will take these stories with her the only way she can: she strikes a match and sets the stack aflame.

And then, because she has just one more moment, because they are on their way but not here yet, she begins to tell one last story. An apology, a love letter. A story she has never written down because she knows it by heart. She closes her eyes and begins to speak.

Bird. Why did I tell you so many stories? Because I wanted the world to make sense to you. I wanted to make sense of the world, for you. I wanted the world to make sense.

When you were born, your father wanted you to have my name. Miu: a seedling. He liked that idea, you as our little sprout. But I chose his: Gardner. One who makes things grow. I wanted you to be not only the grown, but the grower. To have power over your own life, turning your energy toward what's to come, leaning into the light.

Except some people have another story for your name. Gar: a weapon. Dyn: an alarm. Gardner, the one who hears the warning call and comes bearing arms. A warrior, shielding what's behind, protecting what's dear. I didn't know that then. But now, I'm happy you have both in you. A caregiver, tending the future; a fighter, defending what's already here.

There are so many more stories I wish I could tell you. You'll have to ask others—your father, your friends. Kind strangers you will meet someday. Everyone who remembers.

But in the end every story I want to tell you is the same. Once upon a time, there was a boy. Once upon a time there was a mother. Once upon a time, there was a boy, and his mother loved him very much.

When does she stop speaking? When are you ever done with the story of someone you love? You turn the most precious of your memories over and over, wearing their edges smooth, warming them again with your heat. You touch the curves and hollows of every detail you have, memorizing them, reciting them once more though you already know them in your bones. Who ever thinks, recalling the face of the one they loved who is gone: yes, I looked at you enough, I loved you enough, we had enough time, any of this was enough?

She raises the laptop above her head and smashes it to the floor, and behind her she hears the door open.

When Bird and Sadie wake it is sunrise. At first neither of them remembers where they are, and then it comes back to them in a rush: the cabin. The project. Outside the trees are like long straight arrows pointing at the sky. They are certain Margaret's plan has been a success, certain that she will have changed everything, certain that when she and the Duchess arrive they will be whisked back to a city completely transformed, a world set on its axis again.

Only no one comes. They finish their cereal and sit side by side on the cabin steps, waiting. An overcast day with heavy air, dampening the sound around them like a thick quilt. Now and then they swear they hear something—the crunch of tires on gravel, or the grumble of an engine approaching. But still no one comes.

They'll be here soon, Sadie says, confident. I bet there's just traffic. They're coming.

There is no telephone in the cabin, no computer, no internet. Nothing to tether them to the outside world. It is at this point that Bird and Sadie realize they only have the faintest sense of where they are; on the trip up, they'd stopped paying attention to the road signs the farther they got from the city. It hadn't mattered then, but they think of the forty-seven acres between them and the nearest person. How would you find another person, in such a space? Far off above the trees, the clouds gray and darken.

What if no one ever comes back, Bird says. In the silence they both consider this. They could live here, for a time; it is warm and sheltered; the bag of food the Duchess has left could last a few days, maybe longer. And then?

Maybe we could find a neighbor, and use their phone, Sadie says.

But both of them know this is impossible. Which direction would they head in, and how would they find another house, and once they got there, who would they call, anyway? They try to imagine: they could follow the long gravel driveway all the way back out to the road, and then follow the road. It must lead somewhere: either back to the city, or farther away from it, but it would take them to people. And then? They pause here, stalled, unsure what follows. Whoever found them will surely call the authorities and they will be taken away, and not together. There's a sudden rustling and rattling, and both of them tighten in anticipation, but there is no one there, no movement; it's just the wind, picking up, throttling the trees. Branches whip and thrash in the air. He had never known the forest could be so noisy, or so wild.

Maybe something happened, Bird says.

He doesn't say it, but both of them are thinking it: maybe they were caught, Margaret or the Duchess or both of them, maybe they've been captured, maybe no one will ever come for them again. Or—a much worse thought, one that comes to both of them in near unison though neither of them dares voice it—maybe the authorities are coming for them now, on their way to track them down. The air suddenly cools, puckering goose bumps on their skin.

Sadie shakes her head. As if by refusing to believe, she can will it from the universe.

That could never, she says. They're too careful, they had everything planned. They wouldn't *let* that happen.

Let's go inside, Bird says, pushing to his feet, but Sadie does not budge. Come on, he says, look, it's about to rain anyway. He is right, the air has grown clammy and tingles, teetering on the edge of a storm. But Sadie plants her feet more firmly on the step, hugs her knees.

Go if you want to. I'm staying here. They'll come soon, I know it.

Bird wavers in the doorway, not wanting to leave Sadie alone, not wanting to be alone himself. Neither outside nor in, he scans the gravel drive trailing off into the trees, around the curve and out of sight. Still nothing, and fat drops begin to fall, inking dark blotches on the wooden steps.

Sadie, he calls. Sadie. Come on.

The rain hisses as it falls, like a thousand tiny snakes, and where it hits, the ground writhes. It needles the dirt, punching holes that widen to craters that fill and swell into ponds. It ricochets off the gravel driveway and off the steps, jumping ankle high. Off Sadie, who still sits, faithful, stubborn, eyes fixed on the path to the road, until she is soaked to the skin and finally comes inside.

Bird shuts the door and the quiet that follows, after the whirl and roar of the storm, is deafening. Water trickles from Sadie's clothes to pool at her feet. She doesn't even wipe her face, just lets her hair drip straight down her cheeks, so Bird can't tell if she's crying. He reaches out a hand to touch her shoulder, but she swats him aside.

I'm fine, she says.

She goes into her bedroom for dry clothing, and when she returns she has something in her hands.

Look at this, she says. Look what I found in the nightstand.

A small orange bottle, a white lid. She gives it a shake and inside, pills rattle like hail.

Together they read the faded label: Duchess, Claude. In case of panic attack, take 1 tablet. The date of expiration right in the middle of the Crisis. Sadie twists off the lid.

Only two left, she says. Out of—she consults the label—a hundred and fifty.

Methodically, as the rain thrums overhead, they turn out the hidden pockets of the house. In the dresser: lavender oil, a meditation guide, three kinds of sleeping pills. Letters in a language they can't read, with foreign stamps. In the other nightstand, a broken pencil, a booklet of crosswords—*Easy as Pie!*—an empty bottle of whiskey, an empty carton of bullets. Now they notice the twin sags on either side of the mattress, the worn spots on the carpet where someone must have stood, morning after morning, gathering the strength and the willpower to begin the day again. They notice the crack in the bedside lamp, where it has been broken and then repaired. Burn marks here and there on the wooden floor where hot ash from cigarettes fell.

They have nothing but time. Now and then they think they hear a sound, someone approaching, but when they run to the small front window and peer out, it's always just the wind, the rain rattling against the side of the cabin, the trees creaking and groaning in the storm. In the kitchen, at the back of the topmost cupboard, they find old packages of pasta and beans, with best-by dates from before their births.

For the first time they are able picture it: the long months of waiting, far away here in the woods. Wondering what was happening in the world beyond, worrying about when it would reach them. Dreading what kind of world would await them when they reemerged. They'd had the luxury of retreat, nestled in this cozy house with plenty of food and running water and warmth. They'd been able to bunker down and wait for the worst of the Crisis to pass. Now here they are, huddled together, and finally they understand it, too: the cabin feels like the only safe place, a refuge they clutch with desperate hands. Was someone coming? Who would it be, what news would they bring of the outside world, would they be friend or foe, and when would they arrive? Would they die here, alone and barricaded, sequestered and isolated from the rest of the world? And would that be better or worse than whatever might happen to them if they'd stayed and taken their chances, or did it even matter?

In the middle of the gray afternoon they build another fire, feeling the need for warmth, for heat, for something dancing and glowing and alive. It is easier this second time; now they know how, and they watch the headlines on the crumpled newspapers fade into the flame.

DOW FALLS FOR FOURTH STRAIGHT MONTH; FED WEIGHS BAILOUT

CHINESE MARKET MANIPULATION LIKELY A FACTOR IN DOWNTURN, OFFICIALS SAY

Even after the fire has caught, they leaf through the stack of papers, taking in the headlines, the front-page photos. Peeling backward in time. LARGE GATHERING BAN TO REMAIN IN PLACE THROUGH AUGUST. HOUSE WEIGHS MEASURES TO WEED OUT PRO-CHINA SUBVERSIVES. POLLS SHOW OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED 'PACT' BILL.

Enough, Sadie says, dropping the papers back onto their stack. I don't want to see any more.

In silence, they feed the fire, slipping it a stick here and there, offering it a log, nuzzling it into the flame, watching anxiously until it catches light. Flecks of rain slither down the chimney, making pops and hisses of steam. Both of them feel, without discussing it, that they must keep this fire burning, that if it goes out something terrible will happen, something precious and irretrievable will be lost, that keeping it burning is their only recourse, that somehow not only their fate but the world's rests on them keeping this fire alight. If they can keep it alight, they are sure, Margaret and the Duchess will come back for them, Margaret will not only be all right but will bring news that her plan has succeeded, that everything has suddenly changed, that all that needs righting has been restored. They will earn this miracle. If they let it go out . . .

They don't think about this, not daring to put those fears into words. That evening they don't bother to cook, subsisting instead on snacks from the food bag, eaten by the handful whenever one of them is hungry. Dried cranberries, crackers, roasted almonds: they nibble their way through the day. As it gets dark, they do not retreat back to their separate rooms. Instead, they sit together by the hearth, watching the flames devour the logs one by one.

When they peek outside everything seems blurred, everything outside uncertain and obscured. No longer trees but an impression of trees: green blurs sliced by wet, dark streaks. No longer the calm water from yesterday but a slate-gray blur, something swelling and churning just at the edge of their sight. They can't see far; a haze hangs in the air, like the spray of salt from the sea, and they pull the curtains shut so they don't have to glimpse whatever terrifying fight is raging outside. The wind grinds against the roof, the windowpanes, the ground—so much rain, it is indistinguishable from an ocean's roar. They are a small boat caught in a squall, everything topsy-turvy. Which way is up? They are no longer sure. The wood-paneled floor might be the deck, upended; the rain scouring the roof might be the waves, lashing and gnawing at the keel below their feet.

I'm scared, Bird says.

Sadie's hand creeps into his, warm and comfortingly damp and alive.

Me too, she says.

Late into the night, they feed the ravenous fire, neither of them ready to give up, nodding off well after midnight, waking up as the fire dies down and the room grows cold, adding another log, coaxing it back to life, rousing it from the ashes again and again until, just before sunrise turns the sky gray-gold, they both fall asleep, side by side beneath the scratchy wool blanket, and at last the fire goes out.

They wake up, stiff-necked and cold, and look at the darkened hearth, then at each other.

It doesn't matter, Sadie says quickly. It doesn't count. It's almost daytime now.

She says this with all her old brash confidence, but he knows she needs him to agree.

He nods. It's okay, he says.

Outside the roar of the storm has stilled. The silence swells and echoes, their ears gradually adjusting to the absence of sound. Now the taps of the slowing rain are discrete, fingers drumming. Instead of an indistinguishable blur, they can make out individual sounds. There is a single drip of rain pattering against the window. There is the single ping of a drop clanging against the gutter like a bell. There, suddenly, is a single bird testing the predawn air, then another bird answering its call.

Though it's still dark, they eat the last of the cereal for breakfast, because even at the end of the world, they think, these things make them feel more prepared for whatever is to come. Then, without discussing it, they take up their posts on the front steps, though they still are not sure what they are waiting for. The sky is just beginning to lighten. After yesterday's storm the air feels clean and crisp, the birds shouting at each other from the trees. The rain-damp world seems two shades darker—the rocks changed from pale buff to dark gold, the dirt from gray-brown to near-black—but everything is still here. A squirrel climbs, fusty-eyed, out of its hole, dangles by its rear feet, and stretches itself languidly, first one side, then the other. At Bird's feet an industrious pair of ants lifts a crumb that's fallen from his breakfast and begins the long awkward journey back to the nest.

Perhaps it is possible. Perhaps everything is fine, there was just a delay, perhaps Margaret and Domi are on the way to them, safe and sound and triumphant.

I hear them, Sadie says, jumping to her feet.

She's right: they both hear it, a car crunching up the long gravel drive through the woods. From the front step, they watch it approach. The Duchess's car, so urban and oddly incongruous here, a thin bright bullet boring through the forest in slow motion. It comes slowly, almost reluctantly. Sadie takes Bird's hand, or Bird takes Sadie's hand, they aren't quite sure which, and they watch the car make its way to the cabin with agonizing slowness. As it nears they can see two figures in the front, though through the tinted glass they can't make out the faces, only a shadowy shape on the passenger side, another at the wheel. Then it comes to a halt and the engine dies and the passenger door opens, but it isn't her, it's a man, a tall body unfolding itself and turning toward them, and Bird makes a choked sound of recognition. It is his father, the Duchess grim-faced behind the wheel, and they know something has gone terribly wrong.

Dad, Bird cries. Dad. But no sound comes out. Beside him, Sadie begins to cry.

And as if his father has heard him anyway, his father runs to him, runs to them, folds them both in his arms.

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She'd waited, the Duchess—waited in her gilded townhouse through the evening and well into the night, waited for Margaret to arrive. As soon as you think they've pinpointed you, she'd said. Don't wait, M. Just get out, before they have time to reach you. Don't cut it close—you always get carried away. And Margaret had agreed.

And then she'd kept speaking, kept on going, past the point where Domi had expected her to stop, past the point where it seemed prudent, then past the point where it seemed safe, then past the point where it seemed possible. By the time it was clear Margaret wasn't coming, that something had gone wrong, the sky had circled from light to dark and was beginning to grow

light again, and she got in the car and headed for Brooklyn. Margaret's voice had nearly gone out, the authorities finding and crushing speaker after speaker as they slowly spiraled toward her, but as Domi crossed the bridge, a few minutes after three, there it was again: her old friend, louder now, more distinct, through the speakers they'd missed or not yet found, as if now that she was closer her words came more clearly. Telling the stories that those who needed to tell could not say, now grieving, now angry, now tender, a thousand people shouting through her mouth.

But blocks away she knew things had gone wrong. Suddenly it was eerily silent. The roads were blocked off, starting from Flushing Avenue; she couldn't even get in sight of Fort Greene Park. A cordon of police cars, sirens off but lights flashing, surrounded the whole area, and she turned down a side street and headed home. She already knew what they were there for, and that they'd found it. Still, she waited, watching her phone, still hoping that the screen would light up and it would be Margaret, calling from somewhere, anywhere, to say that she was all right.

When the phone finally did ring it was well into morning, and it was the call she'd expected, and she was ready. Yes, she owned the property in question—*what* had they found inside? No, a complete shock and quite an outrageous one, as they could probably imagine. No, she had *no* idea how—well, wait a moment, there was a keypad at the back; whoever this woman was must have managed to open it and work her way inside. *What* did they say she'd been doing? Absolutely horrifying. No, she never went there herself; her father had bought it during the Crisis intending to renovate it, but it had never happened and he'd passed and it had been sitting there empty ever since. In fact it was a rather upsetting place for that reason; she never liked to go there but hadn't been ready, yet, to sell it. Claude Duchess, his name was—yes, like the tech company; that was their family. Why yes, of course, she would make it more secure going forward; she would add an alarm system, hire security to keep an eye on it. Given everything happening these days, you really couldn't be too careful. If the authorities could let her know when they'd finished their work . . . ? They were too kind; she so appreciated the service they provided, watching over the community—and this reminded her, she'd been meaning to make a donation to support the officers in their duties. No, no—thank *you.*

In the meantime, she was searching. Margaret hadn't told her much, but the few scraps she already knew were enough. It was surprising how much you could track down with just a name, if you asked the right people. *Ethan Gardner* led her to Harvard, then to the library staff payroll, and then, eventually, to what she needed: a Cambridge address, one of the dorms. No phone number, but of course she couldn't risk a call anyway. It took her nearly five hours to reach Boston, traffic clotting as the afternoon turned to evening, stalling outside of Stamford, then New Haven, then Providence. By the time she reached Cambridge it was just past four, and she parked outside the dorm, waiting. Maybe she'd missed him already, perhaps he didn't work Friday, perhaps he'd already come home from work or he had never left or she was in the wrong place, and she had driven all that way for nothing. She nearly gave up. But finally, just after nine, there he was—a little older, a little grayer, but the same face she remembered from all those years ago. Dressed the same, even: a tucked-in pale blue oxford, a corduroy blazer. She couldn't understand it, at the time, what had fascinated Margaret so, but she thought she saw it now, the softness in him, the promise that there could be gentleness in this world.

As he passed by, she stepped out of the car.

Ethan? she said, and he turned, startled. Uncertain. Scanning her face for something familiar.

It's Domi, she said, and watched recognition flood his eyes. I'm here about Margaret, she said, and then, before he could speak, she added: And Bird.

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He'd come home to an empty apartment that Monday, and his chest had seized. So it had happened, he'd thought in a panic: despite everything, they'd taken him at last. Noah, he called out, flicking on the lights in the living room, then the bedroom, circling the apartment again, as if Bird were a misplaced key he'd simply overlooked. Only then did he see the note on the table, the drawing, the scrap of paper reading *New York, NY.* After all these years, he still recognized her writing, quick and pointed and sure, and he understood.

He could not call the police: as soon as they began to investigate they would see the link to Margaret, they would dig gleefully into Margaret's file, and begin one on Bird. He could go to New York, but then what? All he could do was wait. If Bird found Margaret, he assured himself, they'd contact him. He did not allow himself to think *and if not?*

Tuesday morning, he called Bird in sick from school; he called himself in sick from work. If Bird came back, he would be there. He spent the day pacing the apartment, picking up his dictionaries, setting them down again. Again and again he looked at the drawing Margaret had sent: the cats, the cabinet. What had this told Bird? At dinnertime he forgot to eat. Where was Bird? Had he found Margaret? And if he hadn't—? That night, half dizzy, he dreamed himself back in his old apartment with Margaret, the Crisis still whirling around them. In the morning, woozy and sleep deprived, he awoke alone, below Bird's empty bunk, and he called them both in sick again. Exhausted, he half dozed over and over; each time, he woke certain he'd heard Bird's voice, but no one was there.

Friday morning, he headed back to work: he was out of days off. In the library, he wheeled his cart through the stacks, taking extra time to line up the books with care, to restore everything to the precise place it belonged. When his shift was over, he lingered, dreading the empty apartment. Instead he headed to the southwest corner of D level, combing the shelves until he found it: the thin book with a cat on its cover, and a boy who looked something like Bird.

This retelling, he discovered, was different from Margaret's. In this version, the parents had too many children, the boy was sent off to study with priests, the building was not a house but a temple. Perhaps she'd misremembered, or maybe she'd changed the story to suit her own purposes. Or maybe, he thinks, there were simply many versions of this single tale. What did it tell Margaret and Bird that it did not say to him? He read it again and again, until the library closed, looking for the message, for the clue that would unlock everything and tell him where his family was. But the book revealed nothing.

He was still thinking this over as he walked home in the darkness. Whatever the meaning, it was not in the words themselves but somewhere else, and it was then that Domi had stepped out of her car and called his name.

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In the small hours, they drove back toward Connecticut, the traffic evaporated, everyone home with blinds drawn. In some places the streetlights were already winking out, but in Domi's car, they sped along the highway, frictionless. For long stretches theirs was the only car in sight, and they glided through the darkness in the small bubble of light cast by their headlights. As if there were nothing and no one else left in the world. For a long while Ethan didn't speak at all, and Domi, as if to fill the silence, chattered away. She had told him the most urgent things already, of course: what had happened to Bird, about the townhouse, the plan. Where they were headed. With these most pressing things covered, though, she found herself coming back to the smallest of details. How Margaret had looked when they'd first seen each other again. I could

tell, Domi said, I could tell she'd been happy with you. In the life she'd had. Because she was so sad to lose it. You could see it in her eyes.

She described it all for Ethan, as best she could: Margaret's notebooks, her journeys from one family to the next, until he could almost see it, her tracks like fine lines of stitching crisscrossing the map, trying to suture something torn asunder.

You should've heard it, Domi said, you should've seen it, her voice just—

She waved a hand in the air, and the car wavered over the yellow line and back again.

Just coming out of the air. Everywhere. And people standing there, listening. I looked out the window and I saw them, just standing. Like statues. It was like she'd turned everyone to stone.

Except, she thought—and this she could not bring herself to say aloud, would never manage to utter—except that some of those stone people were crying. She held on to this fact, even when the authorities came and searched out the speakers and smashed them under boot heels, even when they ordered the crowds to disperse, even when there was nothing left to see from the window but an empty sidewalk and a few strands of wire and plastic shards on the concrete. Those vanished people had wiped their tears and retreated back into their lives, but those tears had been there all the same, even for a moment, and she told herself that this meant something, that this mattered.

He's a good kid, she said instead. Bird. He's a sweet boy.

After a pause, she added, He looks so much like her. Like both of you.

He does, Ethan said, and then they both fell silent again, and outside the road scrolled by, luminous in the reflected shine of their headlights.

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It was like Pompeii, one person would say later. Everyone just frozen exactly where they were. You just stood there and let it wash over you. Destroying and preserving you all at once.

Another would carry that moment through her life, and years later, in the Natural History Museum with her daughter, she would glance at the dioramas, the animals so lifelike you could imagine they'd only paused, like burglars caught in a searchlight, that as soon as you turned your back, they would reanimate and scamper off on their way. She would look at that diorama—a lion crouched beside a herd of grazing antelope, the painted savannah air wavering behind them in a honeyed sheen, jackals prowling in the shadows, all of them, predator and prey, transfixed by some invisible force—and she would suddenly remember that evening, as the light dimmed, the voice speaking to all of them, that feeling of being surrounded by strangers who were somehow experiencing the same thing. She would remember the man on the park bench opposite—grizzled and hard, wearing fatigues that didn't fit, slashes of gray sock in the gaps between shoe top and sole—the way his eyes and hers had met, the unspoken affirmation that had passed between them: *Yes, I hear it, too.* She would never see that man again, but standing there in the museum she would remember him, remember that feeling that somehow he was important to her, that they were connected and they'd found each other, that feeling of being conjoined by this surreal moment in time, and she would be frozen again, captivated, staring past the lion and antelope and into the past until her daughter tugged at her hand and asked why she was crying.

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I just don't understand, Domi keeps saying. Scrubbing her eyes with the heel of her hand, yesterday's eyeliner smudged to angry dark rings. Sadie's head cradled against her shoulder. Why she cut it so close. We talked about it. She promised. I thought she meant it.

You know Margaret, Ethan says. Now and then, she got carried away. A wild thing.

He and Domi share a pained laugh, everything they found exasperating about her become precious.

They are speaking about her in the past tense, Bird thinks, and he almost smiles at how childish and shortsighted this is. They are so certain that she is gone, but he's not. I promise I'll come back, she had said, but he realizes now: she hadn't said when. Only that she would. And he believes this, still. She will come back. Someday, somehow. In some form. He'll find her, if he looks hard enough. Strange things happened. She might be there, somewhere, in some other form, the way it happened in stories: disguised as a bird, a flower, a tree. If they look closely enough, they'll find her. And as he thinks this, he thinks he might see her: in the birch tree showering its leaves ever so gently down upon them, in the hawk that sails into the sky, releasing its piercing and melancholy and beautiful cry. In the sun that has begun to needle its way through the trees, tinting everything with a faint golden glow.

What now, he says. But already he knows the answer.

What happens now is a choice: they can go back, all of them, to the lives they'd had before. Bird and his father can go back to Cambridge, back to school and replacing books on their locked-up shelves. They can pretend this never happened; they can still say, no, we don't know her, we haven't heard from her in years. We have nothing to do with her, we had nothing to do with it, of course we would never, of course we don't think like that. As for Sadie: the Duchess assures them she can find somewhere safe, but from the look on Sadie's face Bird knows what will happen—she'll run again, she'll keep running, the way she had before she found Margaret, she'll keep searching for her own parents, for a way out of all this, and she'll be gone. So they will all go back to the way they were before, as if none of this has ever occurred, as if it changed nothing, as if it meant nothing.

Or: they can go on. They can keep looking—for Sadie's parents, for the families who've lost children, for the children themselves. For Margaret, perhaps still out there, somewhere, though none of them dare to voice this, even in their minds. They can keep collecting stories, finding ways to share them. Finding ways to pass them on and remember them. They will have to conceal themselves, the way Margaret has all these years, slipping through shadows, moving from kindness to kindness. Listening and gathering. Refusing to let things die. They can let what Margaret has done change them, they can make it change things. They can keep rolling this stone uphill.

Somewhere, maybe, someone is telling someone else: *Listen, this crazy thing happened the other night and I can't stop thinking about it.* Days later, weeks even, Margaret's voice still lodged in the crevices of their brain, the stories they've heard a pin completing a circuit, lighting up feelings that have long lain dark. Illuminating corners of themselves they hadn't known. *Listen, I've been thinking.* Eight million people, all those stories passing from mouth to ear. Would one person be compelled? One out of eight million, a fraction of a fraction. But not nothing. Absorbing that story, passing it on. *Listen.* Somewhere, out there, saying to others at last: Listen, this isn't right.

None of them are sure how this will work, where they will go, how they will find their way, but it is not impossible, and right now that feels like enough.

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Before they leave, Domi catches Bird by the hand.

I wish you could've heard it, she says. Her face puffed and pink, swollen with the weight of what she carries. I wish you could have heard her.

And someday he will hear: one day, he will meet someone who, on hearing his story, will say slowly, I remember that, I was there, I'll never forget—who will recite it for him, the very last bit of his mother's broadcast, the one story she did not read but spoke, directly, in her own words, will recite it nearly word for word, because it has been rooted inside them ever since they heard it, all those years ago, that night when out of nowhere, out of everywhere, a voice began to speak into the darkness, carrying messages of love.

Now Domi says: Her poems.

All those years ago, she says, I went to the bookstore and there was your mother's book on the table. I knew she'd write one, one day. I bought it on the spot and read it in one sitting. We hadn't spoken in years. I hated her for a while, you know, I really did. I didn't think I'd ever see her again, until she showed up at my door. But they stuck with me, those poems; I could hear her voice when I read them. I kept thinking about everything we'd lived through. It made me think of who we'd been, back then.

Bird holds his breath. Could it be, he thinks. That she still has it. That she'll take it from her bag and press it, battered and worn, into his hands.

But Domi shakes her head.

I burned it, she says. When they started to go after her. No one knew I had it and maybe no one would ever have known but I did it anyway. I was a coward. That's what I'm trying to tell you, Bird: I'm sorry. It's gone.

Tears clot in Bird's throat. He nods, and begins to turn away. But Domi is still speaking.

There was one poem, she says, speaking softly, almost to herself, as if she is trying to remember an almost-faded dream. One poem that just—

She rubs the spot between her collarbones, as if the punch of the poem still lingers there.

I read it over and over, you know. Because it kept saying something I felt but couldn't hold on to and the words there made it solid, just for a second, while I was reading. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Bird nods, though he's not sure he does.

I think, she says, I think I could write it down for you. The poem, I mean. I might get a word or two wrong. But I think—I *think*—I still know most of it. Would you like that?

And he understands, then, how it's going to go. How he'll find her again. What he's going to do next, alongside everything else his life will bring. Somewhere out there are people who still know her poems, who've hidden scraps of them away in the folds of their minds before setting match to the papers in their hands. He will find them, he will ask them what they remember, he will piece together their recollections, fragmentary and incomplete though they may be, mapping the holes of one against the solid patches of another, and in this way, piece by piece, he will set her back down on paper again.

Yes, please, he says. I would like that, very much.

Author's Note

Bird and Margaret's world isn't exactly our world, but it isn't *not* ours, either. Most of the events and occurrences in this book do not have direct analogues, but I drew inspiration from many real-life events, both past and current—and in some cases, things I'd imagined had become realities by the time the novel was done. Margaret Atwood once wrote of *The Handmaid's Tale*, "If I was to create an imaginary garden I wanted the toads in it to be real," so what follows is a list of just a few of the real toads—and conversely, the beacons of hope—that shaped my thinking as I wrote.

There is a long history, in the U.S. and elsewhere, of removing children as a means of political control. If this strikes a nerve with you—as I hope it does—please learn more about the many instances, both past and ongoing, in which children have been taken from their families: the separations of enslaved families, government boarding schools for Indigenous children (such as that in Carlisle, PA), the inequities built into the foster care system, the separations of migrant families still occurring at the U.S.'s southern border, and beyond. Much more attention needs to be brought to this subject, but Laura Briggs's *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* gives an invaluable overview.

The pandemic that began in 2020 brought a sharp increase in anti-Asian discrimination, but this isn't a new phenomenon, either: such discrimination has long and deep roots in American history. As I wrote this novel, real-life examples were never far from my mind—including Japanese American internment during World War II, Vincent Chin's 1982 murder, and the Department of Justice's long-running "China Initiative," among many others. If you're new to this subject and want to learn more, I hope you'll look at *The Making of Asian America*, by Erika Lee; *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*, edited by John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats; *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II*, by Richard Reeves; and *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement*, by Paula Yoo, as a few starting points. New books on Asian American experience are being written every year, and I'm grateful to those illuminating the many facets of this complex and ever-expanding topic.

I'm fascinated by the way folktales and language are both remembered and slowly altered as they're passed between generations—and how we find different meanings in them depending on the circumstances we're in. The version of "Sleeping Beauty" that Bird recalls is from *The Illustrated Junior Library's Grimms' Fairy Tales*, the volume I had growing up, and throughout the book, Margaret tells Bird a mix of Western and Asian stories that I remember from my own childhood. The Japanese folktale at the center of this novel was popularized in English by Lafcadio Hearn in 1898 and has been retold many times over the years; the version in this novel, with all its variations, is my own. On the language side: the Online Etymology Dictionary, various message boards on linguistics, and my father's research on the history of Chinese characters were invaluable in inspiring Ethan's etymologies, though any errors Ethan makes are of course mine alone.

Inspirations for some of the protests in the novel came from widespread sources—in general, the concept of guerrilla art was a guiding light, as were Gene Sharp's writings on nonviolent protest. The knitted web in the Common is based on various pacifist yarn-bombings around the U.S. and the U.K., while the ice children in Nashville have their seeds in the surprise overnight installations of statues, such as the nude Donald Trump statues created by INDECLINE to protest his policies, and the haunting depictions of caged children that were planted by the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) to draw attention to migrant family separations at the U.S.-Mexico border. In particular, the

nonviolent protests of the Serbian Otpor! movement, Syrian anti-Assad protestors, and other groups, especially as described so vividly in *Blueprint for Revolution*, by Srdja Popović, sparked the ideas for the cement block and crowbar in Austin, the ping-pong balls in Memphis, and Margaret's bottle caps, as well as influencing the overall spirit of all the art protests. The struggles of prodemocracy Hong Kongers, particularly against the recent China-imposed "national security" legislation, were always on my mind as well. I am also deeply grateful to Anna Deavere Smith, whose work I discovered only after completing this book but who nevertheless is clearly one of the foremothers of Margaret's project.

Several real people make appearances in this novel: Anna Akhmatova arrived in my life, clicking various pieces of this story together, with the kind of fortuitous timing that makes you believe in fate. *Poems of Akhmatova*, selected and translated by Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward, gives a wonderful introduction to her work and life story. I was honored to name a character—one who bravely speaks out about injustice—after Sonia Lee Chun, as thanks for her family's generous support of Immigrant Families Together. Margaret thinks of the legacy of Latasha Harlins and Akai Gurley; may we remember your names and your lives. Last but not least, after finishing the novel, I discovered that there is a Facebook group using the hashtag #ourmissinghearts, dedicated to raising awareness about missing persons. I'm grateful for the work they do in trying to bring peace to families hoping for answers.

Finally, it was all too easy to imagine PACT, the justifications for it, and the impacts it might have on society: there are far too many instances of free expression being stifled—and discrimination rationalized—under the guise of "protection" and "security." Over the course of writing this novel, the news provided a slew of contemporary examples in both the U.S. and abroad, and in the time between my typing this note and your reading it, there will doubtless be more. It is hard to analyze your own era, but looking to history provided some helpful perspective. Writings on McCarthyism, including *Naming Names*, by Victor S. Navasky, and *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, by Ellen Schrecker and Phillip Deery, provided a chilling glimpse into how all-pervasive fear can become; *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime*, by Geoffrey R. Stone, cataloged dozens of historical examples with eerie resonances to our current times; and books such as Ronald C. Rosbottom's *When Paris Went Dark: The City of Light Under German Occupation, 1940–1944* helped me consider the blurry overlaps between resisting, tolerating, and colluding. More generally, Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny* was a powerful reminder about how quickly authoritarianism can rise (as well as what can be done about it), and Václav Havel's classic 1978 essay "The Power of the Powerless" changed my thinking about the impact a single individual could have in dismantling a long-established system. I hope he's right.

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No one does anything alone, and I owe more thanks than I can say to the many, many people who have helped along the way.

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The Guggenheim Foundation provided support for this project and, even more importantly, an early vote of confidence without which I would probably never have attempted this book. The Cambridge Public Library provided me not only writing space but also endless inspiration in its books, patrons, and librarians; thank you for all that you do, and thank you to Kate Flaim for arranging that behind-the-scenes tour that sparked my imagination.

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About the Author

Celeste Ng is the number one *New York Times* bestselling author of *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*. Her third novel, *Our Missing Hearts*, will be published in October 2022. Ng is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, and her work has been published in over thirty languages.

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