

ESAU'S

Holocaust Love Story



a Novella by

Vernon Howl

***Esau's
Holocaust***

A NOVELLA

**Love
Story**

“When it comes to making egg salad, a little mayo goes a long way.”

-Lorraine Johnson, Esau's daughter-in-law

1

Esau fell in love during the Holocaust. Talk about bad timing.

After morning calisthenics on one brisk November day, he found a note in his bunk. Written in pink lipstick on a giant cookie, it read:

“hi. your Esau right? I think your cute :)”

He immediately ate the cookie because he was starving. The chemicals of the lipstick didn't burn as much as he'd imagined. He thought about the girl, the author of this lipstick missive.

I am in love. This is love. Real love.

Esau was in love.

“The Holocaust is a total bummer,” Esau said to his friend Brad.

“I know,” Brad replied. “Total bummer indeed.”

Esau and Brad had lived their whole lives on Alderney, the most northerly of the Channel Islands, the only British Commonwealth to be occupied by Nazi Germany, full stop, all the way, 100%. Back in 1940, before the invasion, when the island was being evacuated, they were among a handful (ten to be exact) of men that decided to stay and fight. But with their weapons cache consisting of just a few rocks, slingshots and a single rifle, they were laughed at by Captain Maximilian List and the rest of the arriving SS soldiers. Talk about being underprepared.

There were ten English captives all toll and to punish their foolishness, the Nazis banished them to the worst of the four concentration camps on Alderney: Lager Sylt. Gals on one side, guys on the other. And Max List ruled the roost with a cold, calculated iron fist.

“Talk about dumb. This chick could've gotten her head shot off sneaking into our barracks.” Esau shook his head. He was so freaking in love.

“Somebody's dumb is another dude's brave, my pal,” Brad chimed in. “Plus, how are you so certain you love this girl?”

“Brad!” Esau exclaimed. “Were you reading my mind again?”

“Guilty as charged,” Brad said with a wink.

(Brad was a mind-reader. He often liked to read the minds of the Nazi guards. Usually they were thinking about pumpernickel pie, oddly. Brad wasn't familiar with that dish and assumed it was a German delicacy. Either that, or his mind-reading skills were on the fritz, and it was a different type of pie. Brad *loved* pie, and was curious about kinds of pie he hadn't tried yet.)

The ten Englishmen did what they could to fit in with all the foreign Jews that the Nazis had taken to Alderney. It wasn't so hard, really. If there was a vague cloud of Antisemitism that hung over much of Anglo-Saxon England proper, it did not stretch to the islands in the south where vagabonds, thieves and drifters were the majority, and had been for quite some time. People were just people in Alderney, and they were judged solely on what they did in each passing moment. Talk about an advanced cultural mindset.

“Time is not on my side,” Esau said. “The Holocaust really ain't no place for a chap to fall in love. In fact, it's the pits!”

“You can say that again,” replied Brad. “Esau, can I ask you something?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“What's it like?”

“What's *what* like, Brad?”

“You know. Love?”

“Ah,” Esau said with a devious smile, as he tried to put together his scrambled thoughts. “Love is... love is... love is a thousand times bigger than you and me! And it's bigger than this stupid Holocaust, too!”

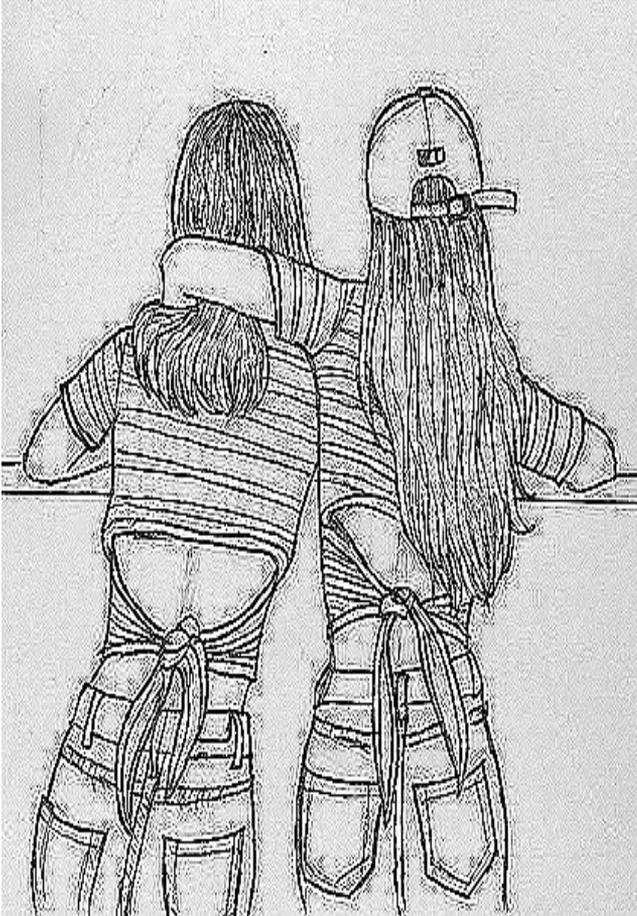
“That's the spirit!”

And then it hit him. Esau would try to convince Max List that a Christmas dance was in order. If he could parlay his non-Jewish roots into a bit of camaraderie with the ole Captain, then maybe—just maybe—come the holiday, he could help organize some sort of party. *You know, to give us some semblance of normalcy*, he imagined he would say. *Even if just for a few hours. And I know they're just dirty Jews but maybe we could invite the ten most attractive chicks over and have, like, a dance or something? Come on, bro? Whattaya say?*

“But how do you know Ms. Pink Lipstick Message is one of the ten most attractive?” asked Brad, coyly, with a wink.

“Brad!” Esau exclaimed.

“Guilty as charged.” They shared a well-needed laugh. “She’s hotter than hellfire, my main man. You really lucked out.” Talk about a mind-reading best bud.



Over the next few months, Esau received several messages from his secret admirer. Most recently, another giant cookie, this time in the shape of a heart. It simply read:

"<3 u Esau XOXO"

"Where the fuck is she getting all this food?" Esau said, slightly perturbed. "I mean, this is a pretty big cookie."

"Good question," answered Brad. "Split it with me?"

"Sure. I'm full on gruel anyhow." He cracked the treat in half and saw a broken heart. "Fore-shadowing?" Esau held up the two pieces of heart cookie to show Brad.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Hey, I thought you were a mind-reader not a fortune-teller."

"Guilty as charged."

"You're funny, Brad. Let's eat this cookie and get back to work before the captain sees us slacking. Don't wanna get on his bad side because of you-know-what."

“Yup. The plan we talked about yesterday involving the Christmas dance.”

“That’s right.”

They were building some kind of war machine. Either a giant plane or tank or something else entirely. It was difficult to discern since all the campers really did was carry shit from one place to another. Esau had become friendly with a German engineer named Klaus, but he had strict orders to keep hush-hush about the project. It couldn't hurt, however, to ask old Klaus about the Captain.

“So, Klaus, my buddy, my pal,” Esau said with a grunt as he set down a big hunk of metal. “What’s the good word?”

“Not too much, Esau. How's it hanging?”

“Could be better,” he replied. “I could *not* be a prisoner in a concentration camp.” The joke fell flatter than a pancake. Klaus eyed Esau suspiciously. Talk about time to go back to stand-up comedy school.

“What’s on your mind, kid?” Klaus called all the Alderney natives “kid” regardless of their age

“The Captain.”

“Yeah? What about him?”

“You two close?”

“Close enough.” Esau, full of worry that he had overstepped the very delicate camper-engineer boundary, decided to go straight for the kill. Talk about bold moves.

“Listen. Who the hell knows how long we're all gonna be stuck here, right?” Klaus nodded for him to go on. *It's working*, Esau thought. “It was dumb as hell for us English chaps to stay behind in the first place, you know? And you got this fancy war machine to build, which, by the way, is looking really good... Great engineer work, dude.” Klaus smiled. “But this war might not end for another fifty years. That's our entire lives practically. Mine and *yours*. Alderney isn't very big. Plus, it's a fairly remote island. What I'm saying is, none of us are going nowhere. And not no time soon. Can't we find a little common ground? Some semblance of humanity? At least among us? Just a coupla guys with no Jew blood flowing in our veins? That's reasonable, right?”

“War by its very definition is not a terribly *reasonable* thing, Esau.” Klaus lit a cigarette. He took several drags before continuing. With a half-forced smile, he asked, “Tell me now, what

exactly does any of this have to do with Max List?
What are you proposing here?"

"Just get my foot in the door. Tell him I'm smart or something, a real go-getter. I just need that intro, you know? That splash. Gotta ask him something." Klaus shook his head like he still didn't get it. He let out a sigh. But it wasn't so much a frustrated sigh, more a sigh that said, "*What the heck? War is a funny thing.*" Esau felt hopeful.

"You know, when I was a small kid in Germany, times were tough. If you wanted something, you had to take it. So I can respect what you're doing here." He paused. "Even if I don't totally understand it." He offered Esau a cigarette. "I'll speak to Captain List but I make no guarantees. The Captain is... well, he's different. He's... strange. I make no guarantees."

2

Captain Maximilian List looked down upon Lager Sylt from his perch in the

watchtower. Daytime lookout was hardly an SS captain's job, but then again, Max List was anything but your ordinary SS captain. *I wish I could just shoot these Jews,* he thought. *That'd be fun. Bang Bang Bang!!!*

He chewed on some bubblegum, made a bubble and popped it with his bayonet. "Fuck this shit," he said to his dog, Blue.

The Captain eyed the lady's side of the camp through his binoculars. "I could rape all these bitches in about one hour." He looked to the shadows to see if Blue had heard what he said. "Said, I bet I could rape—"

"I heard you the first time," Blue, the Captain's dog, said, as he rose from a nap. Blue was an eleven-year old Irish Wolfhound. "And I think you're

a goddamn fool and sick pervert.” Talk about an opinionated talking dog.

“What's with you today?”

“You call them bitches,” Blue said. “Ha. I *wish* they were bitches.” They both chuckled.

“They're really not so unattractive. Some of them. There's one that has a special quality. Ashira, I believe her name is.” Blue jumped up and put his paws on the railing so he could see.

“Ah yes. Ashira.”

“You know her?”

“I was taking a shit the other day near their water supply and overheard. She's a firecracker. She sneaks about in the early morning sometimes, too.”

“Sneaks about? What's this? Where does she go? What in the devil is she up to?”

“To the men's barracks. Been leaving notes for one of the Englishmen. She's *in love*.” The wolfhound made puppy dog eyes.

“Hmm, is that so?” The Captain blew and popped another enormous bubble. “Adorable.”

3

The Englishmen really weren't English at all. Though don't tell them that. Talk about historical identity disorder.

There is no doubt that, like the other Channel Islands, Alderney was occupied by Neolithic man several thousand years ago. But then from where did these chaps flow, from where did they meet their end or make their way? Did they circle back to Alderney as ghosts? Maybe they never left. For certain, The Roman Empire saw the island as a good idea, a stepping stone of sorts to Britain, and they left more than a small footprint, especially as far as this story is concerned. His Mediterranean nose exists as proof. A distant relative of Esau, or so it is believed, under the command of the Empire, realized the importance and ordered built a great fort, Castrum Longini. Esau remained unaware of these facts up and through his death in 1969 by suicide, but his son Kevin, the defacto museum director, put two and two together after the better part of two decades sleuthing, in the summer of 1977. After a period of renovation, the museum's

“Roman Wing” reopened as The Esau Le Mesurier Memorial Roman Wing at the very small, nonprofit and volunteer-run Alderney Museum of Island History. A decision he would almost immediately regret (using Esau's original surname, that is).

Going back in history again, it wasn't until much later that the Brits sunk their grimy toes into the rocky island shoreline. Robert, 6th Duke of Normandy, had given half of Guernsey, the non-Jersey mother isle of the Channel, to the Abbey of St. Michel sometime between 1028 and 1034. Then in 1042, William (7th Duke) exchanged part of *that* land in return for Alderney and Sark, thus cementing the Anglo roots of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, or the following six islands: Guernsey proper; the sub-Guernsey little guys, Herm, Jethou and Lihou; and of course Alderney and its sister island Sark. (The largest island in the Channel, Jersey, has its own rich history, as well as a uniquely grim tie to this particular story. But that is for later on, I'm afraid. Talk about foreshadowing.)

While the Channel Islands have been tied to the English for roughly one thousand years, there remains and forever will linger a discord as it pertains to official governmental ties to this or that. The concept of nationalism does not and can not exist on tiny, transient isle lands, especially ones which were effectively little more than pawns in royal parlour games. Or maybe it's because history is so specifically and wonderfully muddled in places

like this that, what comes off stinking of putrid nationalism, is actually such a slighted and conflicted regional pride that it is rendered confused purely out of embarrassment for the islander. Esau's son Kevin dedicated most of his life to raising awareness about this plight (indirectly, if not subconsciously, of course), both pragmatically within his role at the museum, and more broadly: how it applies to his fellow Aldernians, particularly those lifers with deep Roman blood.

Yes, the very same Kevin Le Mesurier, the famous author of young adult science fiction (millions sold worldwide, translations in more than fifty languages). And while excelling in that profitable arena for years, however, Esau's only kin was also quite the academic, historian and journalist, deeply bent to understand *in totality* what transpired on the scant three square miles of his homeland since the dawn of man. **Three square miles.** That's all Alderney is. You could learn everything about a place that small; you'd think you could anyway.

Kevin's book *Beit Sahour*—one of many nonfiction books he wrote under his legal surname Johnson, after the passing of his father—which in Latin means “place of vigilance,” published in 1977, chronicled a group of three talented Aldernian musicians, brothers, from the historic community of Mannez Pond, a small nook whose residents pride themselves on being direct descendants of mystical island shepherds of some 2,000 years ago,

themselves direct descendants of a Roman offshoot who took to the valleys surrounding Mannez Pond to live a life of solitude. These shepherds allegedly received the angelic message of “peace on Earth and good will to all,” and—even when they stopped being actual shepherds in the 20th century—as shepherd kin are wont to do, and these fascinating men—Manny, Moe and Jack—saw themselves as the keepers of that sacred vision, however trite, and have since distinguished themselves in their peaceful, non-violent resistance against all types of island injustice, in the greater Channel and around the world, founding the politically-minded anti-folk trio, aptly named Mannez. They continue to hold true to this promise through the magic of song well into the 21st century, and have gotten reasonably popular within the genre. Talk about a long-lasting, talented trio.

Though, alas, the actual Mannez line died well before the second world war. These three were imposters. But aren't we all in our own weird ways?

Fast forward, or rewind, as it were.

By around 1600, The Crown awarded the island be sold to John Chamberlain, who took up the title “Governor of Alderney” by way of the lease (some say he lost a bet; you can't make this stuff up). However, when he got involved in the plot to put Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne, he lost

the lease and a man named Henry Le Mesurier snatched it away. With big plans for his Governorship, Henry set about building a jetty at a place on the rocky shores dubbed Brave Harbour, which still remains. He built a Government House on top of the remains of Castrum Longini. He built the island many schools and parks, organized a militia, and so on, but his most important decision? Marrying and procreating with an island native named Betheny. Betheny's big nose gave her away as a Roman, but her spirit was 100% firecracker. This was the 1700s and life was good.

The front end of the Victorian Age saw a great prosperity as well, albeit one which slowly dissolved into malaise due to concerns of an invasion by the French. This spurred the building of thirteen forts at Brave Harbour to protect the island, most of which still survive today and whose maintenance and relevance remain a hot topic. In Kevin *Johnson's* opinionated island history *The Foolish Brave*, he tells the story of his great-great-grandfather George John Edward Le Mesurier, governor of Alderney in the middle 1800s and the man who changed the family surname because it sounded “too damn French.” Talk about an old school xenophobe.

When the French built a giant cannon on the Cherbourg peninsula in 1842, the British Government decided that an upgrade of Brave Harbor was needed to protect British interests. By

1843, major work began on the Alderney breakwater and thousands of tons of granite had to be transported from mainland England. Irish workers escaping from poverty at home arrived by the hundred to work on the project. Among them were relatives of the McChurch boys. The same McChurch boys who made up half of the Alderney ten in 1940: the eldest Brad, the mind-reader, the youngest Seamus, who died of starvation during the Holocaust, and the middle set of triplets, whose names are unimportant at this time. By 1864, the Governor had chopped off over half his name (he was now simply "George John," and later, or perhaps posthumously, George Johnson) and had overseen the construction of nearly 5,000 feet worth of fortified shoreline. Despite the pride he took in the project, at the astonishing cost of £1.5 million, the island's resources were all but taxed and its residents had grown weary and impatient. By 1871 all maintenance and new construction ceased at Brave Harbour, and an elderly Governor Johnson was forced to appeal to the UK for financial assistance just to keep it from crumbling against the constant pressure of the Channel waves. Shortly before his death in 1874, the Governor secured funding for his beloved fort line. This arrangement remained in place until the early 1980s when Guernsey agreed to its upkeep in lieu of defense payments. The debate about how to keep the structure intact goes on today. (Ironically, the advent of the Cold War brought about new

pressures, and within the scope of long-range nuclear warfare, a tiny, remote island isn't much more than an afterthought.)

With adequate mainland money in place, the building of the breakwater and forts gave rise, after the initial military work was finished, to an expanding quarrying industry. To facilitate the export of cut blocks and crushed loadstone, as well as the increasing numbers of tourists, George's son Martin saw to the construction of a commercial jetty, which opened in 1897 and remains active to this day.

In the 20th century, tourism on Alderney flourished and the island community prospered. However, the same can not be said for the family Johnson né Le Mesurier. Martin Johnson was the last of the hereditary Governors, though not by choice or persuasion of the people. While the first Great War did not harm a speck of soil on the Bailiwick of Guernsey, it did bring about great tragedy. Having just lost his only son Edward—who had volunteered for service against the wishes of his father—in the bloody Battle of Loos, Fall 1915, a distraught Governor Martin took to the drink and wandered out past the jetty and into one of the forts his own father had been so proud of. What happened next is something of a mystery. It's assumed by most that the inebriated Governor simply fell into the sea and drowned, but in Kevin Johnson's 1980 book *Harsh November Wind*, the

theory that perhaps he was murdered is floated (albeit without much tangible evidence). Kevin argues that a descendent of old John Chamberlain, who famously lost control of Alderney to the Le Mesurier clan in a card game over 300 years earlier, was out for revenge that windy night, knowing full well that no Johnson was yet of age to take control of the island. For Martin's son Edward had a lone boy of his own, an infant. Esau Jasper Johnson was but two months old when a German bullet pierced through his father's heart on a cow pasture in France during WWI.

The people saw these hardships bestowed upon the Johnson family as an opening to change the outdated monarchical system. A local farmer named Heinz Herzog was elected the first President of Alderney by democratic vote and this system of governing has more or less remained unchanged to this day. Though it's to the credit of the Le Mesurier/Johnson family tree that they remained in power for so long with so little conflict.

When war was declared in 1939, Alderney was enjoying fine weather and another good tourist season. Initially, a machine gun training unit and generous supplies were sent to garrison the island and instruct the local militias. In a short time, however, it became obvious that the Channel Islands could not be defended against the German armies sweeping rapidly across Europe. In June of 1940 all the troops and artillery were withdrawn and

the civilian populations given an opportunity to evacuate to England proper. About 20% of the population of Jersey, 50% of that of Guernsey and virtually the whole 1,450 inhabitants of Alderney left the islands. Even the birds are said to have fled, as occurred in Poland. (Most of the Sarkees on the sister island of Sark decided to remain, however, and were treated to a half-decade of Nazi rule, minus the concentration camps, that is. Talk about a lucky break.)

Six giant ships arrived in Brave Harbour around 4am on Sunday, June 23rd. The fleeing residents turned their animals loose, packed just what they could carry with them and buried or hid the valuables they could not. By midday, the island was left with a few officials destroying fuel stocks, disabling vehicles and attempting to persuade a group of ten men who were determined to stay and fight for their homeland. The English officers in charge of clearing the island saw this stubbornness as a move of desperate foolishness, not symbolic courage. And so no word of their actions was officially recorded. Until now. This book is the first documentation of their story, and it is my pleasure—no, my honor to share it. As Esau Jasper Johnson and those other nine men were and are heroes. This is my attempt to shed a light, to share a light. If ever now, more than ever before, such light is in short supply.

The evacuees of Alderney arrived safely at Weymouth and about two weeks later the first batch of German troops arrived at the jetty of the (almost) deserted island. Ten men with a single firearm between them, and they were easily quelled.

With the population evacuated, it is thought that many hundreds if not thousands of prisoners from eastern Europe (mainly Russians) were shipped to Alderney. They made up the population of the three non-Jewish camps—Lager Helgoland, Lager Borkum and Lager Norderney—and many died as slave workers through malnutrition and sheer exhaustion. In May of 1945, the liberating British forces found close to 500 marked graves, though it's rumored that many more were buried in trenches or thrown off the cliffs. When the islanders returned, they found practically all of Alderney's infrastructure and houses destroyed or damaged, and were reluctantly forced to approach Guernsey for financial help to rebuild. As a result, in 1949, the island's constitution was amended to reflect their dependence on Guernsey, and so ended many centuries of independence.

4

“Channel Islands” is a geographical term, not a political unit. How often had Jerry heard that riff?

If Alderney is a place, a real place that exists, albeit a speck on the globe and wholly unknown to the vast majority of living people, then the Isle of Jersey is a vast metropolis by comparison. The original “Jersey,” if you will—Snooki, eat your heart out. Talk about a reference to the MTV series *Jersey Shore*.

The Government of Jersey is at once deviously autonomous and thoroughly subservient, as any region relegated to “Crown dependency” status might assume (as if the Queen herself might descend with angel wings in the event of a true emergency). It provides education through state schools (including a fee-paying option at secondary level) and also supports a vast and ever-growing

private school system. The Jersey curriculum in both follows that of England: the National Curriculum, although a few discrepancies were adopted over time to for the island, for example: all Year 4 students study a mandatory six-week Jersey Studies course, wherein all other subjects are put on hold for a strict learning of that island's history.

And this is where Jerry found himself on the day of the worst mass shooting in the history of all the United Kingdom and/or its many ancillary points of interest on the larger map.

It was the end of April 2022, on literally the very last day of the Jersey Studies course at the private Helvetia School in Saint Helier, the island's capital and most populous place, when Jerry, aged ten, hid in a utility closet. A lone gunman had already massacred over fifty of his teachers and classmates outside.

Jerry Johnson reached into his backpack for a notepad and pen and just began writing. The sound of the ink tip hitting the pages was just loud enough to drown out the sound of the flying bullets, and Jerry entered a new world, apart from time, Crown dependencies, this very planet altogether...

I am not here. I am not me.

I can't fuss the Flomax branded fidget spinner my daddy got at the last pharma convention for the wind it omits is not enough to blow these bullets away.

My daddy, Big Pharma CEO, Wick Johnson, is no hero and won't be coming here to save me.

I want to be away from here, where the is ain't are, and certainly not our or our's to own.

My daddy's lifeblood was corrupted when, in another part of the world, on a different island, all the air formed an invisible cloud, like a bubble from space to the dirt, all atmospheres; we called it The Impossible Air. It sucked out all of his blood and replaced it with a different blood. And the vampire looked like me, I'm afraid.

I want to be away from here, where the we ain't us, and never had been.

It was the blood of an idea, before he was born.

There was a jean jacket that daddy's grandma gave my grandma on the opposite side of the family tree and she gave it to my mom, her daughter, and in the passing over from one side of the tree to the other the Impossible Air was

created. I want to be away from here, where you never knew me because I don't exist.

My great-granddaddy Esau, now there's a hero for you. He allegedly ended WWII. He's my second middle name as I am his first.

Esau, in the Hebrew Bible, is the older son of Isaac. He is mentioned in the Book of Genesis, and by the prophets Obadiah and Malachi. The New Testament alludes to him in the Epistle to the Romans and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

According to the Bible, Esau is the progenitor of the Edomites and the elder brother of Jacob, the patriarch of the Israelites. Esau and Jacob were the sons of Isaac and Rebekah, and the grandsons of Abraham and Sarah. Of the twins, Esau was the first to be born with Jacob following, holding his heel. My favorite band Manneze wrote a song about Jacob, twenty years before I was born. Or at least I think the song, "Jacob," is about that Jacob. The lyrics of the chorus go:

*Jacob (!) hairless and true / An example
of desire or the desire of you / you can't
make up (!) the difference between / the
brother of a twin or a broken machine*

This is *Esau's Holocaust Love Story* not *Jacob's Holocaust Love Story*, a different book entirely.

Isaac was sixty years old when those boys were born, older than I by a factor of six.

The Esau in the Bible, a "man of the field," became a hunter who had rough qualities that distinguished him from his twin brother. Among these qualities were his redness and noticeable hairiness. Jacob was a plain or simple man, depending on the translation of the Hebrew word *tam* (which also means "relatively perfect man"). Jacob's color was never specifically mentioned, though I know on good authority it was pasty, pale, cruel.

Throughout *Genesis*, Esau is frequently shown as being supplanted by his younger twin, Jacob, in stories and in myth. But this is *Esau's Holocaust Love Story*. His *tam* brother be damned. This isn't *Jacob's Holocaust Love Story*. Nobody's perfect. But you're perfect for me.

We're always two twin brothers holding the elder's heel on our way out of the womb, until we pinch the Achilles and immobilize him, our prey.

This is the story of the reader and the writer.

I want to be away from here, where Isaac is the baby and I am the father of a name.

I felt a casualness in my sex. It was akin to a casualty: being born a man, and aren't we all. Or, no - wait - it's the other way around. Oh, of course it is. Don't be a fool! I've never had a dream where I said "pinch me." I've never pinched anything.

5

(Sark, and the Quality of Light: interlude)

SARK, Bailiwick of Guernsey (AP)--The Isle of Sark draws its fair share of visitors in the warm months of summer from sunbathing shepherds to the cube-headed cop just looking for a little peace and quiet on his state-ordered "violence break." The rock is a haven for rare wildlife, like the giant bespeckled warbler, a staple dish, roasted, of "Sarksgiving," their take on the holiday Thanksgiving; a landscape where pretty hedgerows and quaint villages are bordered by a breathtaking though extremely dangerous craggy coastline (over 550 tourists die each year ascending the jagged terrain).

Ergo: There is plenty to do. The events calendar is full with wildflower walks, scarecrow competitions, ritual sacrifices, and sheep race marathons that last weeks at time until the sheep are run ragged, killed for their wool and put over an open fire on a spit, pig-style. They go gaga for the meat.

Today, the inhabitants of Sark, the smallest of the four main Channel Islands, celebrate a unique addition to their list of attractions, one they hope will bring more visitors in the cold, dark winter season: the light. Lying eighty miles off the south coast of England, Sark has been declared the first "dark sky island" in the world.

The award is in recognition of the exceptional blackness of the night sky that makes for spectacular stargazing on the island (similarly, television manufacturers are searching for the digital counterpart of this "true black" in their newest models; all of humanity is seeking the same darkness, just in different ways). On a cloud-free night - when it's so still your brain will be forced to photocopy

the sound of screams or something similar as accompaniment/juxtaposition - countless stars and hurtling meteors are visible against a backdrop of the Milky Way that reaches across the sky from one horizon to the other.

The announcement, by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA), a United States-based organization devoted to preserving the darkest and most beautiful night skies on Earth, follows more than a year of work with the island's 600+ strong, committed community to ensure as little light as possible spills upwards into the sky, where it can blot out starlight.

"You get spectacular stars from lots of places in the jolly old England proper, but there are very few special sites that are world class in terms of how dark they are," said Owen Stevenson, an a retired astronaut who has started a cult on the isle and whom steamrolled Sark's application/pitch to the IDA.

"If you go to a place like Sark, the Milky Way is a regular feature of the night sky, not an image in a book or

pixels on a screen. It always fills me with a sense of wonder, to see it, really see it. Each of those dots is a sun and there are a hundred-billion of them. It makes me appreciate how special Earth is. We've not found anywhere else in the cosmos that is a perfect haven for life. Yet we literally can't see that."

To earn the title of "dark sky island," officials on Sark measured night time illumination levels and submitted digital photographs that showed the clarity of constellations in the night sky. As part of a lighting audit, Stevenson visited every single one of his cult's outposts which had been set up to strategically cover the two square miles, and made recommendations to reduce the amount of light escaping from each of them into the sky. It was subtraction by addition by subtraction.

The Isle of Sark was already a dark place at night. There are no public streetlights and few, if any, buildings are floodlit. Once the cult gained control they set up a strict

8PM lights-out (electric light) curfew as well. The favoured night time accessory for locals is a torch. All cars are banned from the island, and have been so long before the cult. The only motor vehicles allowed on Sark are tractors, which tow trailers of supplies from the harbours and, in emergencies, pull the island's fire engine and ambulances, which have had their engines removed to make them lighter.

The acting cult government of Sark, the Chief Pleas, welcomed the award as recognition of the island's environmental credentials and as a potential boost for its economy. In a symbolic ceremony, cult leader Owen Stevenson lit the award on fire to thank the lack of light on this planet and existence of light shining down from outer space. When the fire burned out, all of the Sarkees closed their eyes until sunrise, the truest black if not for our memories, our hopes, our fears.

"Our tourism is geared towards sunny weather, but this might bring people over in their woolly jumpers in the

winter months when we have some wonderful night skies," said William Paul, chairman of the island's agriculture committee, whose other hats include that of volunteer firefighter and special meat assessor of the cult (all animals eaten on Sark must be exposed to the black night sky and only be fed at night for at least two weeks before slaughter). "Astronomy is catching on and lots of people want to know about the stars and planets, and whether there is life out there. Who knows, maybe they'll spot something from Sark," he told the AP.

The self-governing island is usually reached by boat from Guernsey, through services run from Jersey and France. The award of "dark sky" status ranks among the island's more notable events since an unemployed French nuclear physicist and amateur astronomer arrived in 1990 with a handgun and declared plans to take the island by force the following day. That was of course, Pierre Stevenson, Owen's father. He was arrested and sent home when two volunteer police officers found him in a trance on a bench

outside of a village church, staring at the night sky. But the seed had been planted.

Sark joins a select group of "dark sky" regions around the world, including Galloway forest park in southern Scotland, which became Europe's first "dark sky" park in 2009 (Stevenson disputes this status, by the way). Mike Kuir, head of tourism at the Galloway forest park, said the award prompted an upsurge in interest in astronomy and the night sky. Local hotels and B&Bs have started running stargazing nights and neighbouring councils have brought in "dark sky" policies to reduce their own light pollution. A new observatory is planned for the edge of Galloway Forest Park that will hold lectures and house a public telescope. Although, they are fiercely against the cultish aspects of embracing the light from above by canceling the light on Earth, such as the cult in Sark has adopted.

"The interest has grown and grown. We've even had requests from people to come up and renew their marriage vows

under the stars. Good people. It can feel like a religious experience, and I get that. But there's nothing that weird about it. A lot of people don't realise how dark it gets and go home early because they get scared shitless," Kuir said. "They can't take it, but it's nothing but simple science, nothing more. Or, maybe a lack of science all together, come to think of it."

In the northern hemisphere, the darkest skies are visible between September and April, and for two hours after sunset. Efforts to preserve areas where lighting has yet to spoil views of the night sky follows work by the Campaign for Dark Skies, a British group set up in 1989 to highlight the growing problem of light pollution, the first organization on record of this kind. From an urban street, it might be possible to see between 50 and 100 stars, but from a truly dark spot there are, quite literally, too many to count.

Dave Rogers, the president of the Royal Astronomical Society, said the announcement was a great achievement

for Sark. "People around the world are becoming increasingly fascinated by astronomy as we discover more about our universe, and the creation of the world's first 'dark sky island' in the British Isles can only help to increase that appetite; I hope this leads to many more people experiencing the wonders of a truly dark sky." When asked to address the Sarkees' relationship to Stevenson's cult, Rogers declined comment.

Other UK parks are now working towards "dark sky" status, including Exmoor national park, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, and the Peak District national park. It seems that everyone wants a piece of the action that is the removal of light.

6

“World War One is a real bummer, ain’t it, Alarick?” Bing

said to his friend in the middle of the Battle of Loos. Talk about bad timing.

It was early October, 1915, and Bing List’s wife Ethelinda had given birth to a son just days earlier, unbeknownst to him. Maximilian List was a kicking, screaming, healthy baby boy. Talk about a soon-to-be fatherless kid.

On the other side of the battlefield, on the other team, Edward Johnson was also opining: *War is indeed a bummer*. He thought about how he had let his father down and how he shouldn’t be there. His side was outnumbered on the field that day, and he knew there was a good chance he would die. He knew his father was right, right about war, right about fatherhood, right about everything. Edward had a baby boy of his own at home, Esau.

Edward vowed to do something amazing before his life ended, and end it would, in just a matter of moments. He lovingly stroked the secret knife in his hidden pocket which had been in the family for generations.

Edward was a devout follower of Buddhādasā Bhikkh, a famous and influential Thai philosopher of the 20th century, and specifically Buddhādasā's rejection of the traditional rebirth and karma doctrine, since he thought it to be incompatible with modern life. Buddhādasā thought the whole question of rebirth to be foolish and denied the existence of any substantial, ongoing entity or soul. "There is no one born; there is no one who dies and is reborn," went the essential mantra of Buddhādasā. Edward saw the whole question of rebirth as its own thing. In fact, he felt it had nothing to do with Buddhism, and he did not consider himself a Buddhist. He had seen Buddhādasā speak at the University of West London alongside the German scholar Hermann Oldenberg in 1912 during a tour in support of the latter's new English translations of three volumes worth of Theravada texts, and that was it. That was the extent of it; he was fully hooked, and carried the pamphlet he took away that day on his person, always. He had it in a small satchel under his army uniform, pressed against his heart. When he was killed, it was burst apart, soiled with blood and mostly illegible. The ranking officer who ID'd the body took one look at it

and felt ill; sickened by the thought of an English soldier dabbling in such mumbo jumbo.

In general, in the sphere of the Buddhist teachings, there is no question of rebirth or reincarnation. Its goal is *nibbana*, which Buddhādasā described as a state “beyond all suffering that also transcends ordinary conceptions of happiness.” Buddhādasā explained it as the *birth* of the “I” and of the “my,” a nonsexual wedding or union, through sense-contact with objects, anything and everything that surrounds you, even the air, and the resulting triplets of this engagement: *vedana* (“feeling”), *tanha* (“craving”) and *upadana* (“clinging”). It is by relinquishing the notion of the “I” and the “my” that all *selfish* clinging is abandoned, and Nirvana or true emptiness will be reached. This can be done by not allowing our dependence on things to take place in the first place, to cut it off right at the moment of sense-contact. Buddhādasā's views are firmly grounded in the present tense. He saw the concept of reincarnation as something that was happening all the time, or had the potential to be, and his ideas were strongly criticized if not fully rejected by many of his fellow Theravada Buddhist monks who held a more orthodox view of the Buddhist Dhamma.

For example, a contemporary, the much revered Bhikkhu Bodhi, states that Buddhādasā's approach of jettisoning the original rebirth doctrine “would

virtually reduce the Dhamma to tatters... the conception of rebirth is an essential plank to the ethical theory, providing an incentive for avoiding all evil and doing good.” But Edward didn’t take Buddhādasā’s teachings as such.

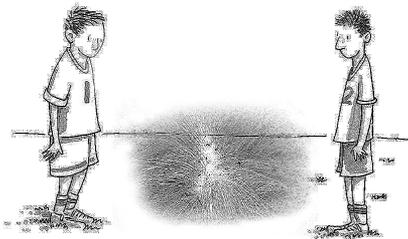
From the earliest period of his religious studies, Buddhādasā utilized a comparative approach and sought to be able to explain lessons of Buddhism through other thought systems such as Taoism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Jainism and even natural science and western thinking. He never denied the rebirth doctrine; he simply sought to apply its deeper meaning to day-to-day life. And through this methodology he came to adopt a religious world-view wherein he stated, “those who have penetrated to the essential nature of religion will regard all religions as being the same. Although they may say there is Buddhism, Judaism, Taoism, Islam, or whatever, they will also say that all religions are inwardly the same... Nothing.” In his most famous work, *No Religion* (1903), Buddhādasā further remarked, “those who have penetrated to the highest understanding of Dhamma will feel that the thing called *religion* doesn't exist after all. There is no Buddhism; there is no Christianity; there is no Islam. How can they be the same or in conflict when they don't even exist?” Thus, the phrase “No religion!” is actually Dhamma language of the highest level, he posited.

And this is all well and good until you are getting killed by an ambush during a war, your nostrils filled with the scent of cowshit. Reincarnation? Talk about your only hope.

Bing List had just shot him in the chest and he would soon be dead. But before he died, he said to his assailant, “one day you will come back, reincarnated as a dog, or some other domestic animal. And I will come back as a different animal, and I will find you. And as those beings, we will set in motion a series of events that will alter the history of the world, and—eventually—end all war.”

Well, all Bing could do was laugh, naturally, the thought of that beyond outrageous.

Edward Johnson reached into his secret pocket for the blade and thrust it into the chest of Bing List. The two men died in each other’s arms, one with a knife in their heart, the other with a bullet. There were no cows. Only cowshit, blood and guts. Talk about metaphors.



7

Michael Smith was having a bad day, but then again they were all bad days since his wife died. Although it was on this particular

bad day that he decided to carry out the worst mass shooting in the history of all the United Kingdom, so one could say it was a worse bad day than the others. Talk about a horrifying absence of mental health resources.

Michael was a police officer. He was good at his job, he felt. Not too strict, not too lenient. The perfect amount of strict and lenient. He's only been directly involved in one excessive use of force lawsuit. Before his wife's suicide, he was more likely to play hackysack with a group of nerdowells than he was to crack their skulls open and put them in a bodybag. He felt that his wife was the victim of the latest prescription painkiller to flood the market, Diopiod. He was not alone.

Diopide marked the first real venture into that specific pharma market for the massive multinational corporation Johnson & Johnson, spearheaded a year earlier by new CEO, Wick Johnson (no relation to Robert Wood and the boys), the first non-American to hold the position. Diopide was different from the previously controversial, opiate-derived drugs like Oxycontin, in that it was truly non-addictive. But a high number of patients reported severe depression after their physical pain had been alleviated and they stopped taking the drug. Wick Johnson and the Johnson & Johnson brass, of course, knew this. They saw it as the perfect synergetic event to push their NMDA receptor antagonist, esketamine, a derivative of K-hole agent ketamine, to be sold under the brand name Spravato, as a sort of Diopide chaser. But Spravato had yet to gain FDA approval, so they needed a short term fix.

Wick won the job because he sold this specific vision: no longer should J&J be content pushing the old standbys Band-Aid® and Tylenol®; the world had changed and so should they. It was a bottomline business and branding was *everything*.

The suicides, however, had started to pile up. And people were growing very angry.

Michael Smith was one of these people and he had long passed his personal breaking point.

Broken and weary, he arrived at the Helvetia School in Saint Helier. Since he was a cop, he knew he'd be allowed in. The receptionist, eyeing him on the security camera, took note of his armament (an MP5 variant along with several high-capacity mags strapped to his person, in addition to his standard issue handgun) and hesitated for a moment before buzzing him in. In that moment, did Michael wish she would decline? Stop to get more information, or perhaps approval from a superior? It doesn't matter now, one way or the other. He entered the building.

Michael, with the vaguest, internet-provided third hand knowledge of the school's layout, made his way to his intended target: Jasper Jerald Esau Johnson, who went by Jerry, a Year 4 student, currently wrapping up the mandatory Jersey Studies course in the East Wing of the building, Room 58.

The only son of Johnson & Johnson CEO, Wick Johnson.

Michael Smith shot everyone and everything in his path just in case Jerry might have gotten a hall pass to go to the bathroom or something.

8

Esau was nervous. He wanted to meet Ashira so badly but was suspicious of how easy it was to convince the Captain to give the go-ahead on the Christmas dance. He hadn't known many Nazi commanders, but the ones he did were hardly known for the charity and/or compassion.

"Nervous, pal?"

"Oh, Brad..." Esau and his best friend shared a good chuckle. Talk about a mind-reading best bud.

The Christmas dance was a go and all the concentration campers put on their finest rags and slicked their unwashed hair with spit.

"I know you don't have an anti-semitic bone in your body," Brad said. "So you'll have no issues with Ashira being... you know. Unlike these Nazis!" Talk about stating the obvious.

"You have a way with words, Brad."

But, truth be told, Esau was even more nervous than he let on. Mostly, he wasn't sure if the Jewish prisoners even gave a shit about a party on the day after Christmas. Klaus had arrived with a large vat of holiday wine on the Captain's orders. Most of the inmates assumed it was poisonous; maybe not 'kill you dead' poisonous but something that would definitely give you the nasty runs. Esau, as brave as ever, decided to dive in and try it first. Calm his nerves. It wasn't good wine but it certainly didn't taste spoiled or tainted. He gave the rest of Lager Sylt the OK sign and the boys dove right in.

Being as malnourished as they all were, they got pretty fucked up, pretty fast. Esau knew he had to keep his wits about him before the girls arrived, however, and so he cooled off. He sat and admired the dozens of men swigging that stuff like there was no tomorrow. Talk about a rocking Christmas party!

He saw a beauty in these men, letting loose with such abandon. The beauty confused him. He shook his head and occasionally yelled out "save some for the broads," and "keep your wits if you wanna get lucky, fellas," in a jovial manner. The wildness in these boys confused him. He had seen the depths of despair humanity could sink to and, yet, there was something almost painful in this exuberant show of release before him now. It was a primal show. These men were beasts; lashing out in fits of intoxication. The transformation had taken less than

an hour. Just as any good Englishman, Esau knew his way around a pint and the rigors of a fierce ale or beer binge, but this was different. His mind spiraled and he felt ill, as much attracted to this senselessness as repelled by it. He fell, drunk by proxy. His face touched the cold ground and things began to go black in his eyes.

Until, suddenly, like some luminous angel descending, or Moses parting the Sea of Reeds, the ladies from across the way cut through the darkness. As if in a phalanx, with Ashira at the lead, they approached. Esau sprung to life.

Time seemed to stand still as they greeted each other. Ashira did not look like a prisoner. She was tall and armed to the teeth with a flowing, fashionable dress, and professional grade makeup application. She so stuck out amongst the other women that they failed to look like women at all. She was a fox and they were shrews. When Esau took her hand, he knew it was the hand of a man and he kissed it kindly.

9

The Story of a Flea on a Dog

This is the story of a flea on a dog. Although, more specifically, it's about how said flea (Edward Johnson) and said dog (Bing List) were the last *conscious* reincarnated souls. Talk about stretching the reader's faith in your ridiculous plot and totally being fine if they decided to bail right now, but still hoping they don't?

As Jerry is the seventh Johnson son of this story, Blue was the seventh dog's body inhabited by Bing List. Each of the previous six iterations existed and perished in the same way: they were bitten by a flea, a flea infected with some cosmic disease which rapidly incinerated the cells of its brain. This

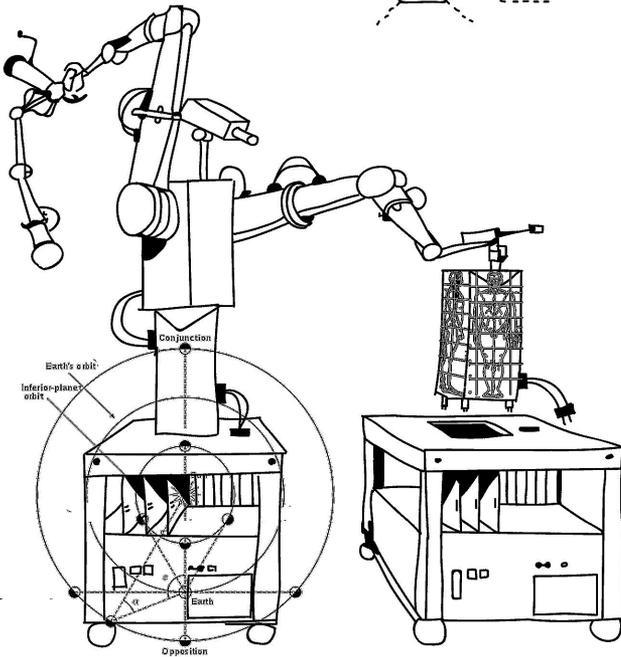
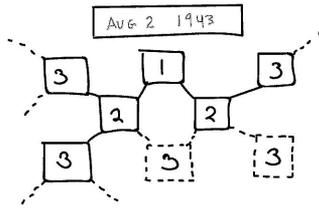
flea, of course, was Edward Johnson, Jerry's great-great-grandfather. He was and still is infinity fleas, likely to outlive humankind itself. But Bing List is no longer a dog. His life as a dog stopped there. He stopped being a dog or a soul, or a soul trapped inside a dog with that dog, the talking dog Blue during the second World War. The time between the first and second World War was the time where Bing and Edward played a kind of cat and mouse game, or: the two souls of reincarnated humans inside of a dog and a flea game, if you will.

Edward's goal was not to kill Bing. He only wanted full control of the dog brain of the dog Bing was inside of. To speak, as if human again, as Bing the dog. It took him close to thirty years and the bodies of about a thousand fleas to finally do it. At best, a flea can live three months. A dog? Maybe a dozen years. You do the math. Some of Bing's previous canine vessels had been lap dogs who didn't get outside too much. It was a struggle, sure, but it was fate that it worked out this way. This was the only way.

Bing, on the other hand, only had one thing on his mind: avoid Edward the flea and the cosmic brain disease he was infected with. But this was damn near impossible. A dog cannot avoid a flea like mankind cannot avoid war. Talk about bringing it all together.

And so this is how Blue the talking dog and loyal companion of Maximilian List came to convince the Nazi Captain to dress as a woman and build a machine that would allow men to be impregnated by other men.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{rad}(abc) &= \text{rad}(a)\text{rad}(b)\text{rad}(c) \\
 &= \text{rad}(1)\text{rad}(2^{6^n} - 1)\text{rad}(2^{6^n}) \\
 &= 2\text{rad}(2^{6^n} - 1) \\
 &= 2\text{rad}\left(9 \cdot \frac{b}{9}\right) \\
 &\leq 2 \cdot 3 \cdot \frac{b}{9} \\
 &= 2\frac{b}{3} \\
 &< \frac{2}{3}c.
 \end{aligned}$$



When you have a dog for over a decade and one night it starts speaking to you, you listen. Life as you know it is effectively over at that point. Your reality is shattered. Everything is rendered meaningless. It is you and the words of the dog, and after a while they become the same thing. And the only language in this conversation exists in the present tense. Everything that has just happened is forgotten, and everything yet to come is a mirage on the horizon.

Edward the flea as Blue the dog, formerly the vessel of the reincarnated Bing List, convinced Bing's son Max to start building the machine before he convinced him to seduce *his* son Esau with lipstick-covered cookies. Blessed with all ancient knowledge and the promise that nothing has ever been achieved *without* magical thinking, the plans for the machine were drawn up. If successful, the machine would allow a man to give birth to a tiny baby through his penishole, killing the man in the process (most likely). Skeptical is not the right word for how Maximilian List felt when he brought the plans to his master engineer Klaus because Maximilian List was not aware he had ever done such a thing. In the evening hours, Max's mind belonged solely to Edward, the man who killed his father, and occasionally Ashira, a construct. He scarcely slept more than twenty minutes a night, literally hounded by the voice of Blue and the otherworldly ideas and seemingly impossible plots

he brought forth. Klaus, ever the loyal soldier, did as he was told and began to build the large machine in the waning days of summer, 1943. Coaxing Max to pester the engineer, Edward assured that the machine was complete well in advance of Christmas. And so it was ready when Esau took his meeting with the Captain a week before the holiday. For time was of the essence; the dates being as important as anything.

The first message from Ashira was to be received on September the 9th, which it was. The first physical meeting was to take place on December 26th, which was also a success. And the commencement ceremony? January the 20th of the following year, 1944. In addition, each instance had to occur at an exact time of day to assure the plan's success.

This was to align with the triple conjunction of Mars and Uranus. The cosmic power of the male birth could only be achieved through this occurrence of syzygy and it was essential that the courtship of Esau and Ashira occurred on those dates at those precise moments. Talk about the power of astronomy.

10

The wildcard was Edward not knowing how Esau would react.

It was an unknowable thing, the lone such variable. We must give something to the unknowable thing every single day. A small part of ourselves, a gift, a secret desire, something. If we don't do this, we cease to be real. It was in knowing this and living this that Edward was able to keep the faith, and his faith only grew stronger with the passing of each flea's body which his soul inhabited.

The unknowable thing was simply the father of many unborn unknowable things. Would Esau fall in love with Ashira who was really just Nazi Captain Maximilian List dressed up as a woman? Would they "have sex" with the machine; would they go through with it? Would the machine work; would it produce a baby? Would the baby be deformed? Would the act kill Ashira/Max List, as Edward theorized?

Would the magical act of two men coming together to birth a baby through one of their penisholes alter the fabric of our collective conscious reality thus ending all war and the necessity for future war through the sheer symbolic value of male birth?

Well, they commenced with the act and Kevin Johnson was born. It's not important how it happened or how the machine worked. The unknowable thing is unknowable. I don't know.

It certainly hurt Ashira. That we know. But it did not kill her. In the light of the eyes of their tiny child, she looked at Esau who was sweaty and amazed. Kevin was the size of a tiny mouse. And his vociferous screams sounded like a squeak because of his size. He was adorable and both men cried.

It's all the same and just as well. You were born to die. So let's go away from here for real and really who am I to say? The asinine cuts like an acid attack on these pages, but how it hurts so good. Oh I see my favorite band is here too! Wait, you guys don't look like Manny, Moe and

Jack? Hello, great-grandfather. Hello, great grandfather. I am sorry, it is time.

There was a great commotion at Lager Sylt after the birth of Kevin. All of the other inmates and Nazis alike were vomiting their wine when the time-traveling ghost of Jasper Jerald Esau Johnson arrived on the scene. He immediately signaled to Brad's younger brothers, the McChurch triplets. He wanted them to play a song.

"You don't know how familiar the three of you are," Jerry asked. "What are your names?"

"Maurice." "Emmanuel." "John." They stated. There are no unimportant characters it turns out.

"Perfect! Exactly who I was looking for. Well, not *exactly*." Jerry chuckled. "Each of you will give birth to a son in time and that son will be a song and the song will birth a thousand sons or more, each an extension of the song before."

"But... we don't play music," Emmanuel said.

"Of course you do!" Jerry exclaimed. Jerry, being a magical spirit apart from time and space now, handed the McChurch boys a fiddle, a kazoo and a set of bongos: the famous tools of the trade of Jerry's favorite band, Mannez. The three young men nearly fainted seeing as how they'd just been

presented with these ghost instruments, conjured from the ether by the spectre of a child. But, sure enough, they solidified in their hands, and they *did* know how to use them. Their hands and mouths, as if guided by the almighty Himself, set to work on a beautiful tune.

"Ah, that's better." Jerry relaxed. He was the perfect boy, handsome. If he wasn't so translucent and dead, the world could've been his oyster.

"Now, where's Edward?"

All relevant parties looked at one another. They didn't know any Edward.

And just then Blue, the talking dog inhabited by the spirit of Ashira's father Bing List whose mind was being controlled by Edward the flea, father of Esau, came galloping into the party.

Edward struggled to form words with the mouth of the dog whose mind he controlled. He felt it happening again and soon Blue the dog would be dead. He couldn't comprehend what was happening. He didn't know who this child was. The confusion, the dissonance was too much. He leapt from the fur as the dog collapsed. Nobody saw him because he was a flea. But Jerry knew everything. Jerry saw the flea.

"Oh, Edward. It was wrong of you to do this, Edward. It solved nothing, you know. The world is more fucked up than ever." He scooped the flea into his ghostly hand. "I suppose you're, technically-speaking, my great-great-grandfather. Oh, and I suppose he is too. Or, well, he was." Jerry gestured to the newly deceased Wolfhound, frowning. "I give you credit, of course I do. You stretched this thing as far as it could go!" He chuckled again. "But you just could have died and became a ghost like everybody else. You could have known everything instantaneously. And for that, I'm sorry. I can't release you."

Jerry placed Edward the flea on the ground and stomped on him. "Don't worry, ladies and gentlemen. He'll wake up good as new in the body of another newborn flea. That's right! A flea for eternity! And then he'll do it again and again and again and again... until, well, you know what." No one really knew what. "Now, as for you -" he again gestured down to the body of Blue "-Umm, Ashira, Esau? Do me a favor. Can you drag this dog over to the machine that just helped you squirt out that suspiciously small baby? Oh, by the way, hi gramps!" Jerry smiled at the baby, his grandfather, Kevin.

Ashira and Esau, in an almost trancelike state, did as they were told and moved the large animal to

the machine. All the while, Emmanuel, Maurice, and John continued to serenade the strangeness with their fiddle, kazoo and bongos. A really wonderful sound. Jerry addressed the new parents as if he was giving a drunken wedding toast:

"Alright, here's the deal, you little lovebirds. While I was waiting to get killed by a school shooter - well, technically, a mass shooter because he was a cop and not a student, I guess. Haha, it's complicated! But, yeah, anyway, while I was hiding in a utility closet, I had sort of a 'come to Jesus' moment, a real-deal, no-shit religious experience, one in which I considered a lot of things from *the big book* and tried to parallel them to this story. Was I successful? That's, maybe, well, not important. That screed seemed to evaporate into nothingness. The main thing is that I'm here now and, yes, I'm your great-grandchild who also happens to be a ghost - sue me! Haha. Look, what I have to do next isn't an easy thing. I have to try to undo some of this madness. Not all of it. I can't kill the baby. The baby is dad's dad, and if I killed the baby, well, he wouldn't have ever been born and I don't think I need to tell you what that means for ol' me! Ol' Jer here! Haha. But, on the other hand, if I did kill the baby then dad would have never been born and a bunch of other things wouldn't have happened, including - right on down the line - all the death I just arrived from. My death

wouldn't have been a part of it on account of my not having been born but so many other deaths, real deaths, deaths born of life, real life, would have been avoided. *Could be* avoided. I could squash that tiny thing right now and save the cop's wife! What's a cop without a wife, I say. And yes, I realize you don't know what any of this means, what any of those things are. I realize that the 'concept' of a mass shooting doesn't exist here in the 1940s. Y'all do your violence the old fashioned way, which is just *the way* because that's what time it is. The time is now. This new war, my war, is worse than war, in a way. It's a surprise party war and it's happening every day and the enemy is your countrymen if not your friend. I guess you guys aren't ready for that, yet. But your kids are gonna love it. Well, your grandkids - aka me, et cetera. And by 'love it', I mean 'hate it'. Haha. Sorry, that was a bad joke. It's from *Back to the Future*. A movie. You guys have movies here, right? Well, it doesn't come out for another 16,743 days. Sorry." Jerry sighed and took a really deep breath. He debated, briefly, internally, whether or not he should go on. He did. "And if you want to know something even crazier... 16,743 days before the day the guy who is writing these words wrote these words was June 17th, 1975. On that day, the Northern Mariana Islands officially became the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. We're talking an

unincorporated territory of the United States consisting of 14 islands in the northwestern Pacific Ocean. That's literally the only thing of significance that happened on June 17th, 1975. No one was born. No one died. Just the Northern Mariana Islands officially became the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. This thing has an island theme, right? No, nothing? Tough crowd! Haha. We're always moving forward and we're always moving backwards. We only go the latter direction because we have to and - the shit about space, about the syzygy? Edward was right about that. We can't control that. And yet, it's in that promise that the impossible becomes reality. But it's easy going backwards or not moving at all and that's how we all *mostly* live life. The calendar changes with such certainty, such confidence; it's the scariest fucking thing in the world. I get it. I see why we look to the past. We can't look the alpha dog in the eye. And it's there, always, just grinning, waiting. Anyway, the national anthem of them islands is 'Gi Talo Gi Halom Tasi' - quite a banger, honestly. Hey, come to think of it, Emmanuel, Maurice, and John - I want you guys to create a song with that name on your final album and I want you to make sure it doesn't sound like the original anthem. Better make it the closing track, naturally. Oh, and make sure they dedicate it to the Jersey 66. That's how many people wound up being killed in

the mass shooting, sadly. That has a ring to it: Jersey 66. Almost sounds like a band name. Speaking of band names, I want the name of your band to be Mannez. In fact, go ahead and change your surnames to that right now. Nobody ordered a McChurch, anyway! Haha. Mostly, I like that name because that *is* the name of their band, but also because it sounds like 'man is' and we all know what 'man is' not...

The boy brought it full circle. He tied the knot. He delivered. He unveiled the unknowable thing by deciphering what the unknowable thing is not. And he wasn't done yet.

"Now, the real reason I'm here. Ashira. Esau. You were unwilling participants in one of humanity's greatest fuckups. Sure, it was a well-intentioned one but, as the saying goes... Esau, I need you to give back the cookies that Ashira left for you. The ones with lipstick on them."

"I—we ate them," Esau sputtered. "They're gone."

"No they are not."

"No they are not."

"You pooped them out and the poop was also cookies, perfectly formed and edible-looking cookies the shade of Ashira's pink lipstick, and

you saved them in a sack that you will get for us now.”

“I pooped them out and the poop was also cookies, perfectly formed and edible-looking cookies the shade of Ashira’s pink lipstick, and I saved them in a sack that I will get for you now.”

Esau went and fetched the sack of pink cookies from below his bunk. They were amorphous blobs, but they still looked like cookies. They had no writing upon them.

“Esau, please give these cookies back to Ashira. Ashira, hand baby Kevin over to Esau, and go stand by the dead dog in the machine. When you’re there, please eat the cookies. All of them. Thank you.”

Esau and Ashira did as they were told. Their love had been real and was fleeting like real love. They would see it blossom and die in a flash. And it was a great flash. When Ashira ate the cookies—which were really just feces—she spontaneously combusted, exploding the dead dog and the machine. They were destroyed beyond recognition. Man (as woman). Man (as dog). And machine (as machine). Their souls were gone forever: two generations of Lists, the last of their kind, the last of their name. And the map of the machine was

trapped in the soul of a flea who would never latch onto anything of meaning again.

"My work here is done," Jerry said. "I'm sorry, Esau. I'm terribly sorry." He dissipated and went to the place where all the ghosts go.

11

Kevin Le Mesurier had lived a life of solitude, generally speaking, before a small fanzine dedicated to his young adult fiction published his whereabouts in 1984, almost exactly one year to the day before his death.

On Alderney he was and had always been Kevin Johnson. Sure, the island people knew of his double life as “the author,” but they didn’t say a peep, knowing full well the good that sizable

income did for the museum and the entire community on the whole.

It was a perfect storm of sorts, that summer. Kevin and his wife Loraine were expecting their first and only child, the “Roman Wing” of the museum had just opened, and he had received news of a brain tumor, inoperable. Add to that a sudden bout of fame and it was all a bit too much to handle. Talk about an avalanche of emotions.

Kevin did what he knew best, though: he wrote. He channeled this energy into what would be his final book, a memoir, primarily about his parents. ***The Islander*** was published posthumously on his son Wick’s first birthday.

And now, a series of excerpts from said book:

From The Real Triple Ds: Dogs, Daddy & Death – An Introduction

...and *that's* why we never owned a dog, dad told me.

They say no man is an island.
But I don't believe that's true.
What's more honest than an island, I say. We act like isolation and loneliness are the same thing. Mainlanders are the

ones living a lie. Water is only water. And island life can be hard. My dad was an honest man, the most honest man. Esau Jasper Johnson was born on an island and he died on an island. *My island*. I've spent the better part of my life dissecting the history of this island, Alderney, the northmost gem of the Channel Islands. I've told its stories, big and small. And I've sung its praises, even when there was scarcely a tune. There's no time for dishonesty on an island.

I find symbolic resonance, along with pain, in the fact that my dad didn't die on Alderney. He traveled to Sark, an even smaller member of the Channels, twenty some miles to the south. He sailed there, via Guernsey proper, by boat, in the summer of 1969. This was not uncommon and there are still ferries running out of the main island to this very day.

My father, for what it's worth, never embraced our French roots. He was a proud UK loyalist despite the constant influence of France; La Hague in Normandy being the closest piece of earth to Alderney. (I never seemed to have this issue; wink-wink ¹.)

In Sark, the French connection was even stronger. And while some of our most famous squabbles seemed to center around my embrace *of*, and his disdain *for* the culture, he'd been secretly doing a bit of research it turned out.

The circumstances around my dad's death are strange; there's no other way to put it. He went to Sark towards the end of June, without warning and without telling a soul. He was prone to

¹ We are, of course, extremely French. As you well know now, I've published over two dozen young adult fiction books utilizing the family's original surname (Le Mesurier) as my pseudonym. (Most popularly, the *K66* series, about a group of six hyper-intelligent robot dogs all named Frank, inspired by—you guessed—my dad's lifelong hatred of all things canine.)

bursts of wanderlust, and so those who knew and loved him weren't that worried with his disappearance; he'd done this before. It wasn't until mid-July when I first heard from him, though. "Sark," he told me. "Can you believe I've never been." It was the last time I would ever hear his voice.

He went on to tell me that the purpose of the trip had to do with Apollo 11. Esau was long an admirer of the cosmos and even dabbled in home astronomy; the Channels being famous for their intensely dark nights due to an extreme lack of light pollution. Sark, as it turns out, is the darkest of them all. I'm not sure how my father knew this at the time, but he packed his telescopes - an expensive and rare hobby at that time - and began to look at the moon, shining brighter than anywhere else on earth on that canvas of black.

I told my dad that I didn't think he would be able to see the Americans actually land on the moon, despite his rather high-grade instruments. He chuckled at that. He knew. He told me that he just wanted to feel close to them when and if they ever set foot. I asked him how he was following the story, and he told me - with a shrewd tone unlike anything I'd recognized in my father's voice before - that he was, simply, "watching the news."

Now, broadcast television in Sark circa 1969 was not exactly a common thing. Channel TV, the British television station which has served as the ITV contractor for the Channel Islands since 1962 was and still is based in Jersey, the largest of the islands. (ITV being the only free-to-air television competition of the BBC.) While household sets were frequently found in the more populated islands (like Guernsey, Jersey and even Alderney, where I had

only a year earlier purchased my first), they were in less than 10% of Sark homes in the late 60s. I didn't have a handle on these statistics at the time, obviously. So when my father proclaimed, during that fateful phone conversation, that he'd made an acquaintance with someone who had a TV, it didn't seem *that* unusual.

I have spent a large swath of my life trying to track down who this person might have been, to unveil some greater clue onto the surroundings of my father's peculiar death. He told me the man he had befriended was "a kindred spirit, eternally youthful, and a like-minded traveler" among other indiscernible and mysterious describers. It pains me that I never pushed him on this issue as I'm certain the answer to why he committed suicide on the 20th of July is connected to this individual. Alas, how could I have known?

Note: I don't fault or blame this person. Life is short, so incredibly fleeting. Well before I reached this stage of my own, I'd been consumed by a feeling that I had to absorb and understand as much of it as I could. It's a passion, but it's also a compulsion. I've had to learn how to let go; nothing has come less naturally. But I've found peace in arriving at this place.



Complicating matters further still is the fact that Esau spent the last days of his life on Little Sark, the southernmost and barely inhabited peninsula of the island. I cannot find a single factual instance of the presence of a television set in any residence or business in that area at that time.

Nevertheless, this is the story I am left to tell. It's not a whole story but it's all I have. Sometime after 4AM on Sunday the 20th of July, 1969 my father began stabbing himself on a narrow isthmus connecting Little Sark to Greater Sark. This famous and beautiful path is commonly called La Coupée (or: "the cup").

In his book *Bastards of Baleine Bay* (1980), Chet Cherberg wrote:

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, access to Little Sark was extremely difficult or, at best, unnerving. La Coupée was traversed by a

narrow dirt track, and children are reputed to have had to crawl across it on their hands and knees to prevent being blown over the edge by the wind. According to a description in 1875, "People have thrown themselves flat on their face, from terror and nervousness on reaching the Coupée; others have lost courage half way across, and have hidden themselves behind the heads of the rocks that crop up in the middle of the Coupée until some passerby came and led them along; others have been unable to get across without shutting their eyes and being led between two persons." ... Strange moaning sounds or unearthly shrieks have been reported; however, these have been explained away as being due to the actions of wave and tide in La Caverne des Lamentes in the bay. A black dog called the Tchico was also reputed to haunt La Coupée as it ran the roads of Sark. Sibyl Hathaway, Dame of Sark, recorded that some of the Islanders believed that the reason why her donkey would not cross La Coupée was because of sensitivity to the presence of the Tchico.

Sark is one of the few remaining places in the world where cars are banned from roads and only tractors and horse-drawn vehicles are allowed.

Politically and lawfully, Sark is among the last, if not the only true feudal state in all of Europe, operating on its own set of laws based on Norman law and those of its own parliament ².

Among the oldest laws of Sark is the ancient French custom of the *clameur de haro*. Using this 'legal device', a person can obtain immediate cessation of any action he considers to be an infringement of his rights. At the scene, he must, in front of witnesses, recite the Lord's Prayer in French and cry out "Haro, Haro, Haro! À mon aide mon Prince, on me fait tort!"

² An interesting sidebar perhaps: since the mid 1500s, Sark has been led by a succession of Seigneurs (the French word for "lord"); a female head of Sark is called the Dame of Sark, of which there have been three, including Dame Sibyl Hathaway who was in charge in 1969. Among the many peculiarities of this arrangement, the Seigneur or Dame has retained the sole right on the island as the only person allowed to keep pigeons and an unsplayed dog.

(translated: "Haro, Haro, Haro! To my aid, my Prince! I am being wronged!"). All actions against the person must then cease until the matter is heard by the Court.

And it was these words that the shepherd who found my father shouting just before he died - naked and alone - the victim of over one thousand self-inflicted stab wounds, none greater than a quarter-inch deep.

Who was he speaking to? Who or what was he addressing with this invocation? We will never know.

This conundrum has plagued me.

But through my recent public outing as Kevin Le Mesurier, my cancer diagnosis and the imminent birth of my first child, I've come to a private understanding.

The last recorded *clameur de haro* on Sark occurred less than a year later, in June, 1970. A

neighborly dispute to prevent the construction of a garden wall. Some things are easy to understand. Others? Less so...

From *Chapter 3: Mama at the Mansion*

...and that's how mama passed away.

It's difficult to describe an absent memory. Do I remember mama because of how she looks in the half-dozen photographs that survived? Or do my memories of her give those photographs the life and the resonance that I cherish? Science says it's the latter; that holding onto age 2 memories into adulthood is almost, statistically, impossible. But yet, I can feel her. I can feel the warmth of being held in her arms.

One photo that will forever haunt me was snapped a few months before she died. It had to have been just shy of my second birthday, about six

months after the end of the war. Mama and I are in a nursery; she's holding me; I'm asleep. Alderney was slowly starting to feel like home again, dad recalled.

We were living in a home on the northside that dad said was demolished at some point, years later. He once showed me the general area of where it once stood: now additional parking for our local football club.

I have no reason to believe my father was a liar. He was so fiercely honest in how he raised me and how he lived his own life. But one thing sticks out. When I became involved as a volunteer with the trust behind the Alderney Museum of Island History I got access to certain buildings and areas that I'd never seen before. One of them was what is known as McChurch Mansion, a late 1800s era home that belonged to a family with no surviving relatives. (Sadly, all five of their young sons

died in an island concentration camp during the war.)

It is a grand house. And during one of the 70s restorations, I would often sneak away to its attic to write. I enjoyed the hum of the workers below as I mapped out the next adventure in my hit young adult fiction series. Then, I heard a voice. "Kevin, you gotta see this!"

I ran down to the second level and saw a hole in one of the bedroom walls. "We were doing electrical work and we discovered this," one of the workers said. It was a tiny room, a baby's nursery. "They sealed this wall up a while ago, maybe even before the war." There was an unmistakable pattern on the wall, a kind of odd, hand-painted zigzag. I knew this wall. I knew this room. I rushed home to fetch the photo of me and mama. I didn't need to return with it to know, but I did. I held it in front of my face, standing there as if I was

taking the picture. It was surreal. This was *my* room.

For years, this discovery plagued me. It was a question that would never be answered. I didn't even know where to begin looking for one.

I struggled in secret and in silence with this knowledge for a long time. But what does it matter? I had to decide to let it all go. Have the stories sunk their talons in my mind so that actual reality is secondary to the truths *they* uphold? Certainly, yes, but the bigger query is 'what does it matter?' I've only recently started to believe that the difference...

From *Chapter 13: A Monk Among Men*

...that he never had sex again.

And, sure, it's strange to think of your father in that light. But as the 20th century moves closer to completion, one thing

about modern society all across the world remains clear: our insistence on gender norms is a fatal flaw, of which we are only now witnessing the start of the unraveling. It isn't sustainable. Masculinity, in whatever form that may take or look like, is a direct result of the dominator culture which was kicked into high gear with the Industrial Revolution and even more so with our current age of mass media and information. This model of society, where fear and force maintain the rigid power imbalance and superiority within a hierarchical structure both on the micro and macro levels of culture, was - of course - popularized by Chan Charnow in her very recently published book, *Hell to Pay for the Will to Change*. She writes:

Dominator culture teaches all of us that the core of our identity is defined by the will to dominate and control others. We are *taught* that this will to dominate is more biologically hardwired in males

than in females. In actuality, **dominator culture** teaches us that we are all natural-born killers but that males are more able to realize the predator role. In the dominator model the pursuit of external power, the ability to manipulate and control others, is what matters most. When culture is based on a dominator model, not only will it be violent but it will frame all relationships as power struggles.

Put very simply, our current global value system is based on violence and not inherent value. Biologically men are presumed to be stronger than women, so we as society give men more value - establishing patriarchy. The richer you are the more able you are to assert all forms of violence against the less rich - establishing classism. The social constructions of race mean that the darker you are, the more likely you are to be subject to violence - establishing racism.

Dominator culture can never achieve community. It is a culture better suited for destruction. In

fact, it was designed for it -
intentionally or not.

The world has been constructed
and based on false values and
prioritised violence.

The human history of the world is
a history of violence. A history of
domination and oppression.

Any reform that attempts to
correct the oppressed but not the
oppressor is doomed to failure.

And our skies will keep on
falling, because half the world is
holding down the other half.

I really can't recommend that
book enough, and Lord knows how
my father would have cherished
its words.

He wasn't necessarily an
articulate man, nor a learned
one at that. But he was damn
smart. He was fueled by a desire
to understand the world, to make
sense of its atrocities. I can't
say this is rare, on a core
level, of any Holocaust
survivor. But the urge to

repress, to move on, seemed wholly absent in my dad's makeup. He never spoke much of the actual war - aside from meeting mama in the camp and keeping me alive during my first year on earth - but he didn't have to. His lust for history, for learning, for *understanding*: that was the greatest gift I ever received.

He saw the causation for war, all war, to be the great male problem of our lifetime, *any lifetime*, throughout much of the vast expanse of human history. In retrospect, his point of view seems almost impossibly ahead of its time.

As I grew older, I began to see this in my father in a new light. It wasn't simply that the war had changed him. The war, coupled with my miracle birth, had completely transformed him. He was, as if a monk, dedicated to his pursuit of peace above all else. He was serene and often suspiciously tranquil.

There was certainly a real, lingering pain underneath - a deep, dark pain - but he never took it out on anyone or anything.

He was fascinated by religion, all religion, but never looked upon them with more reverence than anything else. Science and space and their roles in the construction of human things was far more important to him. He once said to me, "Kevin, I do believe man invented God. But man also invented the toaster. So, perhaps the toaster is God?"

I was a few years out of college and hellbent on becoming a writer when I attempted to get my dad to get in the game. He was the most *writerly* man I've ever met and still - to this day - there isn't a trace of record for his countless amazing thoughts. In fact, aside from the stray signature here and there, there's nearly no evidence of my father's handwriting anywhere. Not a

single grocery or to-do list. Perhaps this isn't so odd for a man of his era and lot. But if you knew him, you'd think differently. He seemed to be bursting with ideas, and yet wholly unable or unwilling to assemble or articulate them in any fashion. He often had the look of a man who was writing a book, that strained focus writers wear on their face. But there was no book. There never will be.

Though he was my greatest inspiration, I never shared my own, albeit raw and early writing with him. I took his own insistence on living inside himself as a warning, if not a wish. What if we were all compelled to live that way? Solemn, alone, forever on some peaceful, private quest. I rejected this method of living, of thinking, full stop. I wrote compulsively, and I published what I wrote, sharing it with any and all. I sit here now, looking back, and I have to

wonder why. What is it all,
beyond a timestamp, a pause of
or for recognition? Look at me.
I did this. It exists. Onto
something else.

It wasn't until *after* the tenth
installment of *K66 Y.A. series* ³
came out before my books became
the phenomenon they are today.
Maybe I'm lucky to have spent
more than half my career toiling
in relative obscurity. I
honestly cannot say. I'm not
sure I gained any more
perspective knowing that many
millions of people were reading
my words instead of a few
hundred or a couple thousand. I

³ The tenth book was called *24 Franks Forever* and it was about how each of the six dogs were fractured into four smaller dogs, each exhibiting the personality of the "Four Temperments" (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic; from the great Greek physician Hippocrates, c. 460 – c. 370 BC). The original concept for the six dogs were themselves modeled after the work of American psychologist John L. Holland in the late 1950s. His "Holland Codes" put for the six personality types: "Realistic (Doers), Investigative (Thinkers), Artistic (Creators), Social (Helpers), Enterprising (Persuaders), and Conventional (Organizers)." The story was an excuse for me to subtly goof on the idea of "personalities," in general; that any human could be so neatly slid into a box. I had been making a modest living at the time, through the *K66* series and other *Y.A.* work in addition to my very humble revenue from my nonfiction writing, until Stanley Kubrick mentioned my work, completely offhand (his daughter Vivian was a fan), in a promotional interview for *The Shining* in 1980. The rest is history.

remained in isolation and
unknown for many years. I,
frankly, didn't think about it.

And now I enter this third phase
- notoriety - knowing full well
it will be my last, and
shortest...

12

***“We will not be bullied,”
Wick Johnson told the board.***

“Who the fuck do these people think they are? Everyone is an expert on pain and human suffering, all of a sudden? This is just another hurdle and we will get past it. Just like we always have.” He was addressing the brass of Johnson & Johnson in a conference room at the company headquarters in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Their current plan of obfuscation wasn't working. They needed to do something else. And the obvious thing—pull it off the market—was not an option for CEO Wick Johnson. “We need to push the perception that these people were going to do this anyway,” he said. “To live with a pain like that?”

A third back surgery? A hip replacement? Do any of you know how *that* feels?" He had a way of making his words seem threatening while never losing his composure outwardly. "Diopine didnt make them commit suicide. Quite the opposite, in fact. Dio extended their life for however long they used it. They were lucky to have that bonus time, if you will. Their family was lucky too. They're heroes. They didn't go down without a fight. This is what the response needs to look like. The drug is more important than ever, in a way." He paused to nibble on a scone "Leslie, let's find some numbers on *overall* suicide rates. Ones that say they're basically the same? Given similar, uh, parameters? I'm sure you can wrangle something up. Get creative. That's the backbone of this whole enterprise. We should be able to show something, longitudinally, but within a reasonable timeframe that also works in our favor." Leslie nodded.

"Good," he said. "Now, let's—" Wick was interrupted by his secretary entering the room in a somewhat frazzled panic. The intrusion was so out of the ordinary, he briefly lost his composure. "Dana, please," he half-shouted. "*Whatever* it is, it can wait."

But Dana lingered by the door. Tensions heightened across the entire room. "I'm sorry," she muttered, near tears. "It's... an emergency."

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Wick replied. His voice still calm, unchanged. “One moment,” he told the board.

He walked outside the boardroom and closed the door behind him. There, Dana, with wet eyes and shivering hands, told him that his only son had been involved in a massive school shooting back home. He was feared among those killed. His mother couldn't contact him. Wick's expression remained. “Alright,” he said. “Thank you, Dana. I will take care of this.” He extended his arm towards Dana's in a gesture of gratitude but he didn't actually touch it. He turned and reentered the boardroom.

“I'm sorry,” Wick told the room, their faces cloaked in curious but pensive masks. “Alex can you pull up the Q1 numbers? The *final* figures; I specifically want to look at the Asian market. Wow, tremendous growth there.” He paused, as in deep, contemplative thought. “Ah, and, um, Gerri,” he said. He heard the sound of that name echo. He swallowed. “Where the hell are we with the FDA? I really think, if we can get the right people on our side, that Spravato will be the answer to all our prayers.”

13

The Holocaust will change a man, Esau thought. *But this is something else entirely.*

Kevin was not an earthly creature, and from the day of his strange birth on the 20th of January, 1944, until the liberation of the island on May 16, 1945, Esau had to care for the baby in secret, in the worst concentration camp on Alderney, the dreaded Lager Sylt.

The only people on the island who had any recollection of the boy ghost Jerry were Esau and the newly crowned Mannez triplets. While they never spoke a word of their encounter, they forever shared a knowing glance in honor of the cosmic event which had occurred.

Esau did not want Kevin to grow up without a mother, or not “without a mother” persay, but without the existence of a mother. Ashira. However unreal she is, was or would be. She would need to

be in Kevin's life forever. Esau knew nothing if not this.

Luckily, he was able to convince his mind-reading best bud Brad to dress the part and act the role of "mother." Brad (because of his mind-reading skills) could tell that this request was pure of heart and something Esau needed deep down beyond all else. Sure, it felt strange wearing a dress and shoving a bottle into a makeshift prosthetic breast fashioned out of old rubber which was used to simulate breastfeeding for baby Kevin, but the very existence of this magic baby was reason enough for Brad. *Besides*, Brad thought. *This is not my story. This is Esau's story.* Sometimes you're the main character in life but often you are not; sometimes you never are. Talk about a really good friend.

And so they lived like that until the end of the war. Something was forever altered inside Esau and Brad could see him struggling existentially. Life was still hard—this being the Holocaust after all—but conditions eased slightly in the final year following the sudden and strange Christmas disappearance of Captain List. Things were less regimented, but—throw a newborn baby in the mix—and they were nonetheless chaotic.

Brad would occasionally question his friend about the origins of Kevin. On a day when the fake nipple

got clogged or he had a run his stockings, he would get frustrated and wonder why in the hell he was doing this routine. But he could see in his buddy's eyes that he'd never get an answer that made any sense. In a way, this was reassuring: not knowing about the not knowing, and only knowing *that* as your one guiding truth.

When they were finally free, Esau and Brad made a plan for “Ashira’s exit.” They joked about how easy it would be to fake a death when the only person you have to fake is a baby. “If only human adults had it so easy!” Brad said.

“Maybe one day,” Esau replied.

They ultimately came up with a story and it was a story like any other story of a mother with a young child dying. It was sad. They felt the sadness; it felt real.

Before Ashira died, they spent some time at Brad’s family home—McChurch Mansion—as a “family.” They took a few photographs, making sure to stage them so Brad looked especially ladylike if not, at least, ambiguously un-male. There was some serendipity or symmetry to this setup—given the details of Kevin’s birth—that Esau could not ignore. All he knew was that they weren’t trying to destroy anything. He wasn’t sure if they were making something new, but he knew that.

Brad and Esau didn't keep in touch after the war. Brad moved abroad and the last Esau heard was that he was in Paris in the late 50s. *Oh, the minds you're reading there*, pal, Esau thought.

In 1953, when Kevin was a little older, Hollywood came to their island. *Seagulls Over Sorrento*, released as *Crest of the Wave* in the United States and Canada, a war-time drama, was partially filmed in Alderney. It was made by the Boulting brothers based on the play of the same name by Hugh Hastings, an Australian writer who moved to England in 1936 determined to break into theatre as an actor. Instead he served in the British Royal Navy for over five years during World War II and became a writer. Because the play—in which all the characters were British—was a hit, MGM retained the title for the film everywhere except in the US and Canada, where the alternate title was used. Hastings later did a musical version of this play called *Scapa*, which debuted in London in 1962. It received terrible reviews.

The film stars Gene Kelly and was one of three made by Kelly in Europe over an 18-month period to make use of frozen MGM funds. Although set on a Scottish island, it was filmed both in Jersey and at Fort Clonque on Alderney. Fort Clonque is a 19th-century coastal fortress. It was constructed at a time when French aggression was becoming an increasing concern to the British. It is built on a

rocky outcrop of land joined to the island by a causeway that can be submerged at high tide. It was manned by fifty men and fortified with up to ten guns. However, none of the guns were ever fired in anger.

MGM (which would eventually be sold to Amazon for the sum of over 8 billion dollars in 2021) was contractually obligated not to release the film until the play version of *Seagulls Over Sorrento* finished its West End run in London, which delayed the film's release until late 1954, almost a year after filming had completed. Esau and Kevin never actually saw the completed film. The first theater on the island didn't open until the early 60s.

But visiting the movie set remained one of Kevin's fondest memories. He would often return to Fort Clonque as a teenager. The fort fell into disuse before becoming totally derelict. Teens would go there to smoke pot and make-out.

It was eventually rescued by the same charitable organization which would go on to found the Alderney Museum of Island History, for which Kevin would subsequently run. The fort now provides comfortable, boutique self-catering accommodation for up to thirteen people.