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# Cayo hueso

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**Cayo Hueso**

By

Tyler Koshakow

Accepted in Partial Completion  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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Tyler Koshakow

5/9/2013

**Cayo Hueso**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of

Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirments for the Degree

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May 2013

## Abstract

*Cayo Hueso* owes as much to Barthes as Jimmy Buffett, Hemingway to Heisenberg. The narrative exists as a pastiche of form: third-person prose, first person reportage and journal entries, songs (at this point lyrics, I'd like to add sheet music), stage script, a novel excerpt, and TV transcript (not yet). The plot exists in two distinct temporal planes on the island of Key West. One revolving around the manufactured "paradise" of the contemporary tourist-driven economy, the other set in 1860 at the dawn of the Civil War, and revolves around the islands once lucrative ship wrecking industry.

Part one opens on a tropical tableau of contemporary Key West. The plot follows two misfit drug smugglers on the day a mysterious explosion rocks the island, starting a flurry of media attention. On a routine drug run, the alcoholic anti-hero Roseau rescues a mysterious woman in apparent danger on a railroad bridge. All the while, the island prepares for Coconut Days, a week-long tribute to the Gulf and Western musician Bobby Duvet.

Interspersed within the contemporary narrative, a parallel plot takes place in 1860. This narrative contains a different instance of Roseau existing 150 years earlier. The 1860 Roseau is the black sheep of a wealthy family of Key Westerners who make their living salvaging ship wrecks. Trying to prove himself worthy of his brothers' respect, he attempts to claim salvaging rights to a sinking ship, racing to the vessel in a tiny dingy mounted with a makeshift sail. Upon reaching the ship, a US Navy steamer arrives, and he is knocked overboard. Roseau awakes in a Naval base's infirmary to find that the wreck he had tried to claim was in fact an illegal slave ship that had run aground while being pursued by a Navy steamer. He also finds that his skin has been mysteriously stained brown.

Back in 2010, Roseau informs his partner in drug-running that the mysterious woman was kidnapped. The narrative perspective then shifts to the environmental activist-cum-anti-gay protester, Paul Holmes. Through Holmes' perspective, the reader is presented with a story within the novel, authored by Hunter, titled *The Metamorphosis Part II*. After reading the story, Holmes meditates on his own life, and begins to suspect that the story's narrative is not so different from the events unfolding around him.

Meanwhile, in 1860, a traveling vaudeville minstrel show arrives on the island. In the commotion of the troupe's arrival, Roseau, whose skin now resembles a performer in blackface, is swept by a drunken mob, carried on the shoulders of an excited reveler, and taken to the playhouse where the troupe is scheduled to perform. The play within the story challenges not only conventions of form, but conventions of race and gender. The play exists to deconstruct race, gender, patriarchy and hegemony into a spectacle of performance--a vaudevillian argument essentialist binaries.

As the plot moves forward Part Two (not included here), two main forces emerge. The minstrel show's star, who happens to be the same mysterious woman who Roseau rescued in 2010, is in fact part of a larger abolitionist campaign. In 2010, it becomes apparent that the offshore oil rig explosion that happened on the Gulf side of the island, may have directly caused a mysterious slick of unknown liquid to appear on the Atlantic side of the island. In response to this, the production and development arm of a large multi-national company begins paying out settlements to the residents, while another arm of the corporation begins clean-up measures. Slowly the two timelines intersect as Roseau slips deliriously between the two, and a larger conspiracy begins to emerge.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
<i>Cayo Hueso</i> .....	1

**1935**

Hunter is standing at a lectern.

There is an explosion, then a bang. The sound rips across the Straits of Florida, washing over the archipelago, shaking loose coconuts perched within fronds, rattling clapboard and shutters. The dust settles on the dirt floor of the rolling room, mingling with dry flakes of *seco*. A linen shirt sticks to his Hunter's body. He is dizzy. Unsure of both where he is and how he got here. Three men sit at rolling tables. Their boards are clean, *chavetas* sharp. They wait for him to begin. He knows that he is meant to read to them. He notices the leather bound book on the lectern standing before him. He picks it up, opening to the epigraph, moves his hand across the print. Something from Conrad, maybe, something dark.

He mumbles through the first paragraph. Something about a man sitting on a porch overlooking Southard. One of the rollers whistles. He gestures for Hunter to slow down, holding his dark hands over his board, palms down, fingers outstretched, moving them slowly up and down. Up and down.

The reader begins. Where he left off. This time reading aloud. Slow and clear.

#

**20 April 2010**

On the porch there is a large wooden spindle that serves as a table. On the spindle, next to the typewriter, there are two rum bottles. One is empty and has a lighted candle stuck in its mouth,

long lines of wax hardened over the image of the seaplane printed on its label. Hunter uncorks the other bottle and pours himself a shot in a Mile Marker Zero highball glass. He gives the drink a good sniff, sets it down beside the half-drunk bottle and begins to type:

*The Day of the Explosion*

*The sea is still calm here. Even after all the day's commotion. We boxed all night and then went for a walk into the sea. The earth pulls gently away from the glassy water. It is a long and soft slope. The water was cool against our ankles as we felt our faces swell. The dull static of hard-gloved blows melted as we waded serenely towards that gentle, low-hanging moon.*

*Roseau is a happy drunk, even with a rolling paper twisted into a knot and shoved up his nostril to clot the blood. He's a Michigan boy, and he latched onto me because of my Oak Park roots. Maybe he doesn't realize that my home is in the shadow world's great hog butcher, that broad-shouldered Chicago. His home is a landscape carved out of the ground by an ancient glacier. Rich earth that was mined and logged, and planted over again. A peninsula of second-growth forest, reaching across two Great Lakes. There's no harm in letting Roseau go on thinking we're distant cousins, together abroad in some strange and beautiful place.*

*Here we are now. On this strange island.*

*Here, a simulacrum of what it is to be a human being. Here, a place at the literal end of the road. Here, we came looking for freedom, and we pantomime what it is we think it is to be free.*



*Here:*

*A prop plane flies over the salt flats. A brick of weed falls towards the earth, indifferent as a bomb. It splashes into the shallow water and floats to the surface. We find most of them, but the stray packages wash ashore. The locals, a clever bunch, nickname them square groupers.*

*After we collect the packages, Roseau drives them up the keys. We have an old van that we bought from Reef Relief. It still has the organization's vinyl logos on the sides. Painted across the hood there is still the profile of a fading hog fish with those dumb empty eyes. Roseau, long blond hair pulled back in a pony tail, face like a baby seal. Even the cops here love the water, the reef, the sand bar. Roseau just looks like another reef-hugger on his way to fight the good fight. Roseau watches his speed. Abides the 15 miles per hour limit on Big Pine Key, keeps a keen eye out for those strange dwarf deer that exist nowhere else in the world. If he crosses paths with a cop, they exchange a smile, a wave, a nod.*

*It's early in the morning. The day of the explosion but before it happened. Maybe it was a cormorant, or a pelican—Roseau was always going on about some bird he saw. It could have been anything, really, a speeding powerboat, an interesting cloud, the white glimmer of a fishing lure arching outwards from an angler casting off the bridge, that drew his attention to the woman standing alone on the railroad bridge that ran parallel to the highway. The old railway, once a wonder of the world, still running to and from the mainland.*

*Roseau stopped the van and called to her across the calm blue plane—he waved his arms and she waved back. “Hang on! Just a minute,” he must have called to her, climbing back into the idling van, driving back to the nearest Key that intersects with the tracks. He must have walked out onto the track, onto the bridge over the water where teenagers dare each other to jump, just before the train comes barreling down the tracks. He must have fancied himself the cowboy in one of those old silent Westerns.*

*Here:*

*Roseau the hero. A fresh-faced man-child with the right impulses. But who was she? She doesn't speak the whole ride down to Florida City. I imagine Roseau talking to her: "Hey, uh, I gotta make this long drive up the keys. I gotta drop something off. Wanna stop off somewhere? You must be starving. There's a place in Key Largo, get some fritters in ya, some rice and beans at least. You gotta be starving." In my mind she remains silent. That subtle smile of hers. He stops an hour later, the top of the archipelago, that first key, that last note. A takeout window that stays open until early. A tiny monument of Styrofoam held together in a plastic to-go bag. He orders everything on the menu, not knowing what she likes to eat. Maybe something, he hopes, she'll find appealing. Back in the van he opens each clamshell container one by one and presents it to her. In my mind she sustains that smile, unwavering, immune to that brutal and primordial scent of cumin and lard and lime. Acid, fat, flavor. I'm grafting on details from what Roseau told me later that night at Tony's bar, but just thinking about it makes me salivate nonetheless. The way it all combines into that body smell that is nasty in the way that nasty can be good. Like how sex can hang in a room. Sex, when it's fucking, and the air is still and humid, and coming becomes a labor—the only labor, the only work, that is both worth it in every trying moment and worth it in its own conclusion.*

*I think about that smell in the van. I think about Roseau, his dumb, amiable face, offering that beautiful woman greasy take-away like he was some Spanish explorer, offering a fermented something to whatever Indians lived on these islands before—knowing that their acceptance meant an exchange for the world. Roseau told me she didn't eat anything. That he ate a little bit of everything trying to explain through action that she really ought to eat something, and that all of her options were delicious. In my mind she just smiles slight and lightly. In my mind her indifference is something more sustaining than food. Something strong. I just don't know what it is.*

*Here:*

*Our backyard is a rectangle. Two of the sides are framed by our L-shaped house. The adjacent right angle is a tall bamboo fence. The pool takes up most of the real estate. The pool extends under the bank of windows that frame the yard, and extends into the house. In the opposite corner, a one-room pool house—really more of a finished tool shed—stands against the fence. A single palm arches over the pool, its papery trunk wrapped in Christmas tree lights. It looks like something out of a Corona ad. Something out of a Bobby Duvet song.*

*It's here, on the lawn chair beside the pool in desperate need of a skimming, she sits calmly, her hands on her lap, gazing at the reflection of the tiny light bulbs in the water as the daylight fades away. Roseau cleans out the pool house. He changes the sheets, empties it of the kiteboarding gear, the broken fishing poles, the orphaned flippers, the masks and snorkels. He finds a bong, packed a few days ago and then somehow forgotten. He takes a rip and stares at her. Through the glass French doors of the pool house, he tries to memorize her profile. Perfect.*

*She sits there, staring at the water. I finally convince Roseau to go out. There's nothing to drink in the house, and he's starting to get antsy. We drink, box, walk into the water at Higgs beach, come out feeling new, make it home by 5:00am. In the pool, there she is, naked in the glassy dark water. The smooth curve of her spine twists from side to side as she paddles towards us. I stand there, mouth agape, my brain still too punch drunk to make sense of the beautiful form moving towards me, casting a slow wake that splashes on the grimy walls of our pool, lambent as the sun rises. Roseau doesn't skip a beat. Back in the house in one second, back poolside with a towel in another. He holds the towel out to her, turning his head politely sideways as she pulls herself out of the water. I stare. Perfect.*

*"I'm going to Papi's," I say. "Want anything?"*

Hunter grabs the glass and leans back into his wicker chair and stares at the typewriter that sits dull in the ambient light of the dawn. He drains the rum and stares into the green mile marker sign printed on its side. The green field, the “0” made of negative space. He closes one eye and looks through the glass, squinting at the distorted scene on White Street. It’s early. News vans line the street. Well-dressed anchors talk into microphones. Cameramen fiddle with cords and lights. Somewhere, not too far off, a rooster crows.

#

### **30 April 1860**

There is a lot of talk going around about secession. Roseau doesn’t concern himself with the plight of the slave, of the dimwitted plantation men of the South, the dandies of the North. The thing that really gets Roseau is that right now, just a thirty–minute walk away, every man of Key West worth his salt is giving his thoughts on the matter, in a small auditorium in Fort Zachary Taylor. The nerve. To not be invited, like a child or woman, a negro even.

Here on the widow’s walk of an eyebrow house that looks orange in the sunset, the white railing with pineapple-shaped embellishments shedding paint in big white flakes, Roseau, telescope in one hand, rum bottle in the other, sees a tiny speck on the water, its white sails painted bright in the setting sun. That pain again. The shrapnel still stuck in Roseau’s brain seems to come to life, seems to become molten. The pain is so sharp it makes his spine buzz. He can feel it in his toenails. Seeing the ship, knowing the pain will pass, he raises his hand to look through the glass to try to bring the ship’s image nearer. The pain is sharp, the bottle is half gone

when he realizes that he has raised the wrong hand. Dropping to his knees, it is his eyes now that burn. The headache is gone but the alcohol is burning under his lids. He begins to weep. He can't remember what drew him to the roof in the first place. He takes a long pull from the bottle and curls up against the railing. The tin roof is still warm from the hot day. The smooth metal feels good against his cheek.

In the morning, when the sound rips across the water, Roseau is ready. On the roof, telescope in hand, he sees the ship wrecked on the reef while the rest of the island is still in bed. Every wrecker had been at the meeting last night. Roseau could be the first to get to it. He could be wreckmaster. He could show them. Finally, he could be back.

#

## 1935

Hunter is standing at the lectern sweating. It is, after all, very hot. A large man enters the room. His Panama hat casts a shadow over face. His linen suit is impeccably clean, seems to repel the flecks of dust and tobacco hanging in the shafts of light that pour in through the chinks in the shutters. He is followed by a much younger man, who is sweaty, nervous. Cut-off jeans and a red Hawaiian shirt heavy with sweat, clinging to his slight frame. This is the same man on the cover of the album "Water Witch." This is Robert Downstein, before the fame, the money, the goyish nom de plume. This is Robert Downstein signing the contract that the man in the linen suit has handed him.

#

21 April 2010

The Coconut Heads didn't get the news about the spill. Just a day before, the ugly motel that shares a parking lot with the Winn Dixie decided to break their reservations and sell the rooms for ten times the normal rate.

When the sound of the explosion came barreling down Route 1, the Coconut Heads were sitting around a morning campfire on Key Largo, singing a Bobby Duvet song, passing around bottles of Pina Conch-lada, the only premixed cocktail endorsed by Bobby Duvet himself.

*I woke up this morning  
The roosters were crowin'  
My phone got cut off but nobody calls  
Watching the conch train  
Drownin my old pains  
My bike's got a flat or I'd be on Duval*

*Hey Bubba. Oh Bubba.  
He's big fat tub a'  
The rich stay  
And the poor pour anothe  
Hey Bubba. Oh Bubba  
He's a big rich son a'  
His momma was a conch  
and the devil was his papa*

*Don't know what this letter's about  
But it came from the courthouse  
I put some rum in my blender, a cure for this frown  
I opened the envelope  
And what do you know folks?  
Said, Bubba bought this block and he's tearing it down*

*Hey Bubba. Oh Bubba.  
He's big fat tub a'*

*The rich stay  
 And the poor pour anotha  
 Hey Bubba. Oh Bubba  
 He's a big rich son a'  
 His momma was a conch  
 and the devil was his papa*

*(Steel Drum Solo)*

*I moved down to sugar loaf  
 Just campin' on the Gulf coast  
 Bubba sent me a check for that place I used to live  
 I heard bubba found oil  
 Under my old soil  
 Got some second-hand pipe that leaks like a sieve*

*I bought a pound of the pink shrimp  
 To grill outside of my tent  
 Well it's not a tent, it's more like my car  
 I wished they'd been boiled  
 cause they were covered in oil*

\*At this point in the song there is a pause for a quarter note and then, a highlight of every concert, the band drops out and everyone in the audience shouts:

*BOOM!*

*My hands caught on fire now I can't play guitar!*

*Repeat chorus 2x*

Echoing through the mangroves, the sound that set off seventeen car alarms in Florida city, was mistaken by twenty-seven devout Coconut Heads as their own vociferous bello.

The opening concert was scheduled for Thursday, a stage was to be set up on the corner of Duval and Greene, at the nexus of Captain Tony's and Thirsty Thursday's. The Coconut Heads had planned to spend Monday night on Key Largo, Tuesday at Bahia Honda State Park,

Wednesday night at the Tepid Tarpon's RV Park on Sugarloaf (the very RV park that was rumored to have been home to a young Duvet, who, at the time, was living in his car, composing his breakthrough album *Water Witch*), before making it to the block of rooms they had reserved six months earlier, in the second cheapest hotel in Key West, The Daze Inn.

Hunter sits on the couch in the living room. Looking through the bank of windows that hover over the indoor portion of the outdoor pool, Hunter watches Roseau trying to convince the woman to try a bite of cheese toast, to take a sip of *con leche*. The TV in the living room is on. Muted, the screen cuts continuously between three scenes. One scene is footage taken from a helicopter, an offshore oil rig, engulfed in orange flames that billow up and transition into a thick plume of ominous black smoke. The next scene is a news desk, an anchorman looking well-groomed and worried, his co-anchor a stoic blond dressed conservatively in a black top, a string of pearls tight against her neck. The third scene, another aerial view, this time near the Straits of Florida, shows a large slick of something black and oily expanding outward from an undetermined source. As Hunter drains the last dregs of undissolved sugar and coffee grounds from the bottom of his paper cup, he realizes his opportunity: he came here to be close to something big and to write about it; he had thought drugs would be his ticket at first, but now after this strange explosion, this unknown toxic event at the horizon, now he had something to write about.

Gathering the papers under his bed into a stained file folder he heads out into the bright, blue afternoon. He walks White Street to Truman. Up Truman, past Papi's Cuban Mix, past Mile Marker Gyro, past It's Five O'Clock Swimwear, he crosses Duval, and makes a right onto Whitehead. He walks past Ted Quick's Conch Village--a complex of bars, restaurants, and souvenir shops, the open square at the center of the buildings, served as the main terminal for



conch train tours--the queer mock trains that regularly circle the island, holding up traffic along the way, stopping to gawk at this house or that, even a family of chickens crossing the road.

Before Quick's crews had leveled the block to make way for the structure, a great villa stood here, the island's largest swimming pool, a cemetery for the owner's pets. Try as they may, the mall's management can't get rid of the pride of polydactyl cats that were the villa's last tenants.

After a right on Greene, having safely avoided the hubbub of Duval, Hunter enters Grouper<sup>2</sup>, an empty bar with dollar bills tacked to every inch of the ceiling like some sort of ragged, green thatching.

"A srewdiver sounds good," he calls to the bartender who is transfixed by the images on the bar's TV.

"Cool."

The bartender pours vodka and orange juice into a tall plastic cup molded to look like a snorkel, adds a squirt of key lime juice, and garnishes it with an orange gummy fish, impaled on a plastic spear. Hunter sips the beverage, feeling the fumes of the cheap vodka in his nose, then the sweetness of the juice, followed by its bright acidity hitting the sides of his tongue. He spreads the loose paper out on the bar.

Mostly typed pages with only a date as a title, there are also a few photocopies made from library books: a few pages on the history of the island's wrecking industry; some translations of journals from missionaries detailing their earliest encounters with the native Calusa Indians; Anna's suicide scene from *Anna Karenina*. There is a lone work of short fiction entitled "The Metamorphosis Part II," to which a cover letter that begins, "Dear *New Yorker* Fiction Editor(s)," is affixed with a paperclip. Hunter picks up a typed page with the heading

“10/20/2008.” Hunter tries to remember 2008. It was less than two years ago, yet his mind was blank. He reads:

10/20/2008

I put an ad online to rent out the pool house for Fantasy Fest. Some kid named Roseau came down to look at it, said it was perfect. I was asking 500 a week, a lot, yeah, but some people charge that for their couch this time of year. Roseau agreed that the price was fair, but said he wouldn't be able to pay up front. I told him that wouldn't fly. He hesitated, but then opened his duffle to show me a huge bag of weed.

“When the tourists show up, I'll get your money.”

Against my better judgement, I agreed. We went out drinking that night at Tony's and he unloaded his life story. He grew up in Michigan. His family owned a company that canned herring in a white sauce. It was a popular brand throughout the midwest, where palates still have an old world bent, the acrid taste and firm feel of coldwater fish pickled for leaner times. They say it's good luck to eat herring on New Year's Eve. Roseau's father dove shipwrecks in the great lakes as a hobby. Roseau's father was a widower. To try to bond with his son, he started taking him along on some of the easier dives. One October in a particularly fiscally fruitful year, Roseau's dad took him down the Keys to dive some of the wrecks along the reef. Though it was exhilarating to see the ruins of an actual slave ship, to see brain coral encrusting the old artillery cannon of a battleship, to swim beside grouper and jewfish bigger than he was, it was the unexpected consequence of visiting the island during one of the earliest Fantasy Fests that really grabbed Roseau by the cojones. Everyday, he and his father would spend the morning in the water, diving this wreck or that. Their chartered boat would dock in the bight sometime in the early afternoon. From one end of Duval to the other, his father, holding him firmly at the shoulder, would speed him through the

hordes of semi-clothed men and women, bodies glistening with glitter, paint applied in triangles on women's breasts, mocking the shapes of bikinis, facemasked, collared, bound, gaged, the gaggles of revelers his father pushed him hastily through lit a fire in the young man that never really went out. Throughout his adolescence, lying in bed at night, Roseau would try to bring those images back into frame, to see again those bejeweled breasts glitter in the sunlight, to bring back a wink from a woman in a headdress.

During Roseau's first year off at college, his father died while diving the wreck of a car ferry, pinned under a Briggs and Stratton Flyer from which he was trying to salvage some parts.

Roseau's speech has a little slur to it. Something pauses and searches hard for a word; this seems to cause him real physical pain; he rubs his temples, let lets out a moan. At first I wonder if he's just another drunk. But his story continues:

After his father dies, Roseau gets the keys to the kingdom: the mansion on the shore of Lake Superior in Marquette; the apartment in Chicago; the summer house in Door County; the garage full of classic cars, including the old Flyer his father died trying to restore. Roseau starts drinking. Starts doing blow. On Christmas Day he decides to drive to Key West, bundles up in his father's old fur coat. Puts one of his father's old SCUBA mask over his face, and heads out into the winter wonderland in a Porsche 550 Spyder. Somewhere outside of Green Bay, he drives head-on into a minivan. In the two years that follow, he is nearly bankrupted--the lawsuits, the mismanagement of the company, leaves Roseau living in an empty mansion, burning furniture in the fireplace to keep warm, hawking oil paintings to pawn shops for liquor money.

At this point, a man shows up with a briefcase filled with \$5,000.00. "Sign here," he says, "and it will all go away." Roseau asks the man why he would want to take on a failing company, a hemorrhaging estate.

He tells Roseau the company owns a patent, something about lipids and saltwater, something that keeps their number one product, “Herring in Creamsauce” from turning red. And that’s it. There are no more lawsuits, no more property taxes, nothing. \$5,000.00 gets Roseau to Miami, buys him a pair of linen pants, three Hawaiian shirts, and a pound of weed.

At Tony’s, Roseau lays a thin stack of twenties on the bar. “That’s it,” he says. “That’s the rest of it. My whole fucking birthright. Herring for Highballs.”

#

**1935**

How long has he been here? The dizziness hasn’t subsided. The gaze moves to the space between Hunter’s feet and the foot of the lectern. A cat sprawled on its side. He is afraid to nudge it. Afraid to know if it is alive or dead. One of the rollers clears his throat conspicuously. Hunter’s attention is back on the room. The man in the linen suit rifles through loose papers sprawled atop a worn folder. He stops at once. Crinkles a thin type-written page into a ball in his fist, stands up, leaves the through the open doorway, into the glaring white elsewhere.

#

**21 April 2010**

The Island is buzzing. The feral chickens are agitated by the nonstop commotion that has ensued since the oil rig on the Gulf exploded and the subsequent appearance of the dark

undetermined slick on the Atlantic. The locals have taken to calling the shockwave that caused discomfort and mild non-deductible destruction on the island, “The Big Bong.” Commonwealth International--the company who, by way of contract, not direct operation, owned the rig--has labeled the explosion the “Incidental Unintentional Detonation,” and the black liquid slick surfacing above the reef as the “Unidentified Tectonic Incident.” *The Key West Resident*--its staff already having a month’s worth of filler and fluff ready to facilitate a month’s vacation, detailing in ambiguity the key stories of Coconut Head Days, found itself down to a skeleton staff--the key reporters already deep into the customary end-of-tourist-season bender. The remaining staff, a High School intern and a burrito delivery boy who, after wandering the building for an hour looking for the person who had placed the order, had decided to stay for the free internet and air conditioning, were left to their own devices. The headline for April 21, 2010 read “Authorities Unsure If IUD Is Cause Of UTI.” Below the headline, a picture of Bobby Duvet in front of a crowd of revelers taken at a Coconut Head Days concert two years ago. The adjacent article detailed the schedule of events slated to take place, from the wet tee shirt contest pre-party at Cowboy Dan’s on Thursday morning, to the final climactic concert at Fort Zachary Taylor Saturday night.

The morning of the explosion started out like any morning in recent memory for Paul Holmes. He awoke at eight, checked the schedule of cruise ship arrivals, and then checked his own calendar--the free-to-donors PETA calendar which currently displayed a white rabbit named Lewie--which, in the square with “20” printed in the upper left corner, had, “Marijuana Holiday,” and “Possible Coconuthead Early Arrivers,” handwritten in pencil. After a quick shower, he made his way outside and around the corner to Papi’s. A con leche with extra sugar. A midnight sandwich, cut in half on the bias--half for now, half wrapped back in its wax paper

and re-impaled with its frilly-tipped toothpick, stowed in a brown paper bag for later. Back in his apartment, he changed his clothes, put on the thick-rimmed sunglasses with the pin prick camera hidden in the bridge, grabbed the picket sign that said the words, “GOD HATES FAGS,” every letter but the handwritten “S” printed neatly and professionally, and headed out into the bright day. When the Big Bong hit, he was sure that he had been clocked by another mark. On the ground, in the brief moment of settling dust and tinnitus, before the sirens and the roosters began their own racket, his first act of recombobulation was to make sure his glasses were intact. He fingered the tiny toggle switch behind his left earlobe, making sure it was in the ON position. He ran his pinky across the smooth bridge to make sure the crucial device was still in positions, the tiny hole devoid of particulate, moisture, or any other speck of foreignness that would betray a clear recording. With everything in order, he stood up, and, to his chagrin, found no assailant. An empty sidewalk that one by one became populated with concerned shopkeepers, day drinkers, service folks just waking for the day.

#

### **30 April 1860**

The water is frothing and lapping at Roseau’s little sailing dinghy. The small battered craft, a cruel gift, was a promise fulfilled: when Jacob took control of the much larger vessels Roseau’s father had owned, he promised Roseau that after he had taken his first lot of precious metal to smelt, he would buy Roseau his own boat. Jacob had made a spectacle of delivering the craft. Little more than a rowboat with a mast and keel, with the word HAIRING hand-painted across the stern in careless black letters--an epithet that Roseau’s abundance of body hair and

poor swimming skills had earned him. Jacob and his friends delivered the boat to Roseau's front yard in a red cart, pulled by a mule. They had been out drinking the spoils of their first wreck. Roseau had been sleeping when the delivery arrived. "We got your boat!" Jacob had shouted. "Free portage!" another had chimed in. And another, "Porridge? I'm so hungry I could eat boatful of porridge!" Roseau watched the spectacle from a second story window, and then went back to bed. When he inspected the boat in the morning he found the gang had returned later, to dump what appeared to be buckets of porridge all over the boat and the red wagon it was roped to.

With the memory of his recent humiliation still fresh in his shrapnel-mottled brain, he delights in the craft's seaworthiness. The main sheet in one fist, the sturdy rudder in the other, Roseau leans his body back against the pull of the sail, arching over the white-capped wake beneath the canted hull. His sight is trained on the mainmast of the sinking vessel before him, its crow's nest empty, its mainsail flapping wildly in the wind.

Closer now, he can see the flotsam more clearly. Survivors hung to scraps of wood, barrels, some bobbing, treading water unassisted. Closer still, he can fully see the scale of the ship, its great stern, the name WILDFIRE emblazoned beneath the shattered windows of the captain's cabin, the gold letters gleaming in the sun. Roseau tacks the small vessel across the wind, dodging the boom as it swings port to starboard, shifting his body, pulling tight again the main sheet. The water darkens. The darkness emanates from the wreck which has now stopped sinking, its bow firmly planted in the reef below. As his small craft carves through dark waves, he realizes that the survivors, too, are dark. *A crew of negroes, a hold full of molasses?* he asks himself. Still, aiming his tiny boat at the massive one, a gleaming Navy steamer comes into view from behind the great raised rutter. As it lets blow its tremendous air horn, Roseau is so startled

he loses grip on the mainsheet, falls backwards towards the portside edge. As he pulls the rutter towards himself to try to prevent from falling overboard, he unintentionally comes about, the boom lands hard against his forehead, and Roseau falls backwards into the black, shimmering water.

#

**21 April 2010**

Paul Holmes walks into Grouper<sup>2</sup> and sits at the bar. Hunter, the bar's only other patron, is intently reading a typed manuscript. Beside him, a drink sits sweating on another stack of papers.

“A Yuengling and a glass of ice, please.”

As the bartender pours the beer into a plastic cup with one hand, scooping ice into a glass with the other, Holmes leans over in Hunter's direction. “Local?”

“Go fuck yourself, you fucking fuck.”

“Excuse me,” Holmes pulls back, but it's evident he's acting. Overselling his surprise.

“You know at least those Westminster Baptist fuckers have conviction. Some sort of belief. You're just an opportunist. You're a cock pecking at puke, a fucking cockroach in a port-o-john at a Duvet concert.”

“I beg your...”

“I know who you are. I know you hold that God hates fags sign on the other end of Duval. I also know you have a camera hidden somewhere. I know that when some drunk leather daddy tries to teach you a lesson, you take him to court. I know that's how you get your nut.”



Outside, a large Jamaican man on an adult tricycle covered in blinking christmas tree lights, a PA system rigged between the two back wheels, above a block of car batteries wired in series, parks on the curb in front of the bar.

“Look man,” Holmes says, this time in a pleading tone, sounding this time defeated, sincere. “Its my day off.”

A heavy bassline thunders from the tricycle's PA. The man speaks into a microphone in thick patois:

*Collie Man Like  
Icarus Black, Well High  
Bubba think he a god  
Melt Collie Man wings  
Make Collie Man die  
Bubba Bubba in Nassau  
Bubba Bubba in Kingston  
Bubba Bubba here on Whitehead  
Bubba Bubba der on Truman  
I saw Bubba with Bobby Duvet  
Flying in Duvet seaplane  
Jamaican officer try to shoot him down  
But they shooting in vain  
Bubba drink chicken blood  
Bubba kill de Rasta man  
Bubba take all me royalties  
Treat Duvet like royalty  
Collie Man ain't a peach  
a prickly scratch pear he  
Collie Man ain't no conch-y  
a prickly scratch pear he*

#

### **30 April 1860**

Roseau wakes to find himself wrapped in a wool blanket, atop a cot, laying on his side. A copper mug sits steaming on a short table beside the cot. He retrieves it and takes a slow, careful

sip: rum and hot water, loose tea leaves floating at the surface. He feels the liquid move down his throat as he swallows. Dark bits of tea stick to his warmed lips. As he replaces the mug on the table he notices his arm is stained the color of a cigar wrapper. Startled, he examines both arms in front of his face. His hands shaking with both cold and fright, he opens the blanket to reveal his torso, also now the same dark hue, his ubiquitous coat of body hair, still its normal ruddy shade of blond.

The buzzing in his head starts again. Squinting against the pain, he feels each bit of metal in his brain as a sharp prick. The pain becomes an image like stars in a constellation. As the pain takes over his consciousness, the image of his near-drowning is replayed in grainy bursts:

He sees himself back in the dark water. He is clinging to what must have been his rudder. He is hit with wave after wave after wave, with each one he takes a mouthful of water. The water is salty, as ocean water always is, but has a new taste to it as well: a bitterness, a burn like whiskey. He hears a great bellow from a steamer's horn, feels it rattle in his head. His hands lose grip on the scrap of wood. One final gasp of air, and he feels himself sinking. He feels his body become leaden. He feels the points of metallic pain in his head overtake his body. He becomes an anchor, sinking softly to the ocean floor. The sound becomes the round white pulse of his mass.

His eyes open and the water is clear. The ground is smooth and white. There are white walls on either side of him. In front of him, a set of smooth stairs. Shafts of sunlight filter through the surface above him. He walks weightlessly towards the stairs. His arms move through the clear water in front of him, propelling him closer. His arms are once again fair and unstained. As he climbs the steps he resists the urge to take a breath. With his last bit of struggle, his body breaches the surface, and his torso flops onto cool, wet tiles. Air fills his lungs.

“Brother!” Roseau is jostled out of his trance by Jacob’s familiar voice. “You fool! What were you doing? Trying to take a wreck? From the United States Navy?”

“What?”

“The Navy. That wreck you set out for. It was a slave ship en route to Jamaica. Three steamers were sent to intercept, they chased it here, and it grounded on the reef.”

“Slaves?”

“Yes. Slaves. Even if you had claimed that wreck with your little dingy, you’d only have a hold of ten half-dead negroes to look after. You were lucky they pulled you before you died. I’ve always wondered how a man born on an island never learned to swim.”

“What about the pool?”

“What pool? There is no pool. I bought some clothes. Get dressed.”

#

## **21 April 2010**

When the music abruptly stops, and the man on the decked-out tricycle puts his feet back on the peddles and rides off down the street, an awkward silence takes over the bar. Both men, Holmes and Hunter, take long pulls from their drinks. Hunter lights a cigarette. Through the open doorway bursts Roseau.

“They, uh, someone,” Roseau is grasping his head, trying to render the muddy thoughts into words. “Someone. Took. Her.”

“Who? That Bahamian Anna you rescued from the train tracks?”

“Hunter!”

“What!?”

“We need to find her!”

“Okay. Okay.” Hunter downs the rest of his drink, puts his cigarette in mouth and, squinting against the wisps of smoke lapping his face, gathers his papers into great a mass and follows Roseau out of the bar. Holmes does his best to feign indifference.

When the two men leave, Holmes notices the weathered manuscript that had fallen soundlessly to the ground in the commotion. He picks it up and reads:

*The Metamorphosis Pt. II*

*As Sseoag!gmrr awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found the body of a tiny menace had taken the place of his own. He lay on his soft, viscera-like stomach, and regarded the two limbs splayed on either side of his body. The limbs were pink, somehow plant-like, branching at the ends into five smaller appendages. Sseoag!gmrr felt at once the flood of sensation from the dermal layer stretched around the meat of his being, and the vacancy of perception provided by the dearth of scent. He felt that his senses were pushing him inwards, away from the world around him. Gone were the vapor trails and pheromonic waftings that used to cocoon his perception. In its place, a static and meaningless sensation. Even his sight had collapsed, solipsistically into one narrow and focused point of terrible detail.*

*Sseoag!gmrr wondered what had happened to him. It was no dream. He was back in the hollow behind the cabinets, but the darkness felt empty, cold, frightening. He was drawn to the faint crack of light that beamed through the breach in the wood through which he had crawled every morning since he could remember, escaping the twilight. He wanted to move towards it, craving in his new flesh, warmth and light. He told himself to move, but his body did not cooperate. The great harmony of limbs that he had been accustomed to was replaced by a heavy and painful flailing. His limbs slid back and forth against*

*the rough wood, providing little to no locomotion. A large splinter of dry pine impaled itself in one of his rear limbs, and he felt a deafening sensation shoot up and down his spine, and then centralize on the puncture. Along with the pain, he perceived wetness and warmth pooling around the extremity.*

*Lying still, the thought of falling back asleep was soon dismissed by the sharp feeling of emptiness in his abdomen. Giving up on his old method of locomotion, he experimented with his new limbs. He pulled them in closer to his body. With limbs akimbo, he tried to propel himself by focusing on the smaller appendages. Moving them in a fashion not unlike his old limbs. It was no use.*

*Finally, after several minutes of exhausted struggle, in an act of frustration, he pushed downwards, against the wooden surface below him. In one great motion, he arched his back upward, and tried to tell the wings that he no longer had to reappear and burst from his back and take him in flight upwards, towards some light, some heat, away from this cold, dark emptiness. He felt his frustration manifest itself deep inside him, and rumble upwards; it became a great sound that poured out of his head and vibrated through the long and narrow space around him.*

*When the rumble ceased, a calm overtook him. He realized his vision had altogether disappeared. He felt as if his body had been stretched and lightened. He inhaled and felt his body swell with air. He exhaled and relaxed the sinewy tension wound throughout his body. Lids opened like the shell that once protected his wings, and his eyes were again revealed, his vision returned. He was higher up. He was balanced vertically on his rear limbs. His front limbs were stretched outwards at his side, perpendicular to his body, parallel to the ground. Moving one rear limb at a time, he relished in the ease in which he fell into this new form of movement. It was slow and precarious, but the dynamics of it, the constant fall and catch, start and stop, was both miserable and exhilarating.*

*At the breach, he lowered himself back to the floor, and pushed himself through it. Again, he felt the unpleasant sensation that came with the friction of the jagged wood against his soft and awkward body, and when he had made it to the other side of the plane, and righted himself to the more comfortable, upright position, he noticed several scuffs and tears in his outer layer, some of which were oozing a dark liquid that glistened in the reflected twilight.*

*When he came to the cabinet door, which was always at least ajar, he walked straight through the opening as he was accustomed to, expecting to feel the familiar sensation of the world becoming inverted as his limbs clung to the underside of the cabinet, he instead was instead met with a few breathtaking seconds of weightlessness, followed by the feeling that he had by now come to know as pain--this time felt in such an excruciating iteration, that all other senses went numb, and his consciousness slipped backward into the dark abyss from which it had emerged.*

*When he awoke the pain was still there, though now more manageable. His right front limb was bent awkwardly, and a rigid protuberance stuck out through the soft outer layer, causing around it, a rupture and a more serious leak of dark liquid, which now pooled around the injured limb. The clarity of pain was singular and focused. He stared at the injury with his new eyes. A single image. The structure protruding from the limb was somehow more familiar. For a brief moment he felt ownership over it, and then he remembered his old body. His mind's eye now saw it in through a singular gaze. He tried to recall the feeling of walking on the underside of a surface, gravity no match for the propensity of his many clinging limbs. He remembered the hard shell that protected him, kept him safe from these new terrors around him. He tried to recall the smells that guided him, that led him to females, to food. He tried to recall flight. Did he have to consciously move each wing for every beat, the way he now had to consciously tell his three working limbs to struggle in unison to push his fragile body back again upright? He couldn't recall. Everything now was alone, singular. His life had collapsed into a single point.*

*It was with that feeling of singularity, his body reeling in pain and hunger, that he, for the first time since his transformation, perceived smell. Like every other one of his new perceptions of sense, the experience of smell was singular, overwhelming, and all-encompassing--having the ability to traverse even the metaphysical gap between his mind and his body, sending his abdomen into violent convulsions, as his body folded over in repulsion.*

*As he waited for the feeling to pass, he covered his face, with the spindly end of his one working upper limb. The thought occurred to him that the smell, though utterly repulsive, was familiar. That it held in it a language in which he was once fluent. It was the scent of Sssaa!mmr, who had carried Sseoag!gmrr when he was just one of many tiny eggs in a capsule attached to her underside. To Sseoag!gmrr, this was the smell of the beginning of the world. In the weeks after he had hatched, he had followed this familiar scent, a long, fungible corridor, to the promise of food. Food. Complex and dynamic food. Food that had fermented and matured in the valleys and cracks of this once navigable landscape. With these thoughts, Sseoag!gmrr's stomach rumbled.*

*Sseoag!gmrr now fell to the ground. He held his broken and leaking limb to his torso, and crawled slowly, trying to find the origin of the smell. He crawled in a circle. The scent seemed stronger near the shiny metal breadbox, so he crawled towards it, leaving a trail of dark drops and smears behind him. When he reached the box, he propped himself upright once again. The metal felt cool and smooth. The sensations were new and calming. He stood for a moment leaning against the metal, feeling the coolness against his cheek. He rested for a moment and then opened his eyes. As he backed away from the box, he realized the shape reflected in the shiny metal was his own. His vision which had, just after his metamorphosis, been so sharp, was now becoming blurry. He was having trouble focusing, but he tried to concentrate on the visage before him. The smooth sparse features. It looked like a crumb or a glob of congealed fat. Backing away, he regarded his full form. Limbs: two arms, one broken, one working; two*

*legs, thick and fleshy. He backed away from the ugly image, and hobbled towards the space between the breadbox and the wall.*

*When he got to the shadowy space behind the breadbox, he knew he was on the right path, as the smell was overwhelming. He pushed forward, into the dark space. His eyes took time to adjust. Slowly the darkness turned to shapes. One of those shapes was her. He forced air out of his body into a deep growl and extended his uninjured arm towards her, trying to plead for help. Upon seeing him she let out a hiss and scurried under the breadbox. Seeing her nimble body, the way the limbs moved in unison, the way her body compressed to fit in the tight space beneath the breadbox, caused him such yearning that his body began shaking, vocalized sounds escaped from his mouth.*

*He fell to his side and shook and bellowed, whimpered and trembled. When his body had finally exhausted itself, a calm overtook him. He felt as if his insides were as smooth and cool as the shiny metal surface of the breadbox. He looked towards where his mother vanished. On the ground before him was a large gray crumb, fuzzy with mold. Beyond it, he saw the antennae of his mother peering out from the underside of the breadbox. Clearly she had pushed the morsel towards him and retreated back to a safe distance. He reached his arm towards the crumb and grasped it. As he brought it towards his face, the smell overwhelmed him. Instinctively, he threw it across the floor. Still, the scent lingered. It clung to his hand. It mixed with the repulsive smell of his mother. He tried to bury his face in the nook between his injured limb and his torso.*

#

*It took a long time for Sseoag!gmrr to die. As his condition worsened, Sssaa!mmr felt more comfortable to get closer to her offspring. The scent of his turning flesh eventually drew others. She resisted her own appetites, and fended off the would-be carnivores. She spent several days at the body's side, before the*



*scent was unbearable and she had to leave, fearing that her own hunger would get the best of her and she would feast on the very flesh she had been defending.*

*A month later, she had nearly forgotten the entire debacle. She ventured out onto the counter into the cool still darkness, following the scent of something appetizing. Suddenly the shape of a giant menace appeared before her and let out a yelp. The giant grabbed a striking implement and set forth to crush Sssaa!mmr. She fled back to safe realm in the valley behind the refrigerator. Pausing for a moment, she was reminded of the strange encounter with the tiny menace whom she felt compelled to protect. Her mind replayed the interaction over and over as she struggled to recall the feeling that had so compelled her to defend the strange being. After a while the sun rose, and changed the quality of light around her. As the light compelled her to seek out the comfort of darkness, she scuttled thoughtlessly to the cool space behind the breadbox. Before entering the darkness, she paused at the shiny metal surface. She regarded her own image. Thinking again of the strange encounter, she tried to reel upright, to balance her weight on her back limbs. Managing to only slightly raise her front and expose her underside to the reflective surface, she noticed the new egg capsule attached to her. The eggs had a dull sheen in the diffused twilight. The sight stirred the core of her body. She returned to her normal stance, thinking only of the new life entrusted to her protection. With purpose, she scuttled quietly into the darkness.*

Holmes puts down the strange manuscript, is reminded of his own metamorphosis. His thoughts pool on the sign resting back in his apartment, in need of minor repair. GOD hates FAGS. Or as it used to be, G.O.D. hates F.A.G.: shorthand for Georgia Ocean Defence hates the Florida Atlantic Gulf pipeline. How had it happened? He had been disillusioned with law. Or maybe he was just disillusioned with law school, tired of showing up to class, tired of taking notes. Then came the announcement of plans to build an underwater pipeline from the refineries in the Sovereign Principality of New Orleans that ran across the Gulf of Mexico, between the

Bahamas and the Florida Keys, along the Confederate coast, until, finally, reconnecting with land in New Jersey, USA. Holmes sidestepped the whole law component of his plan, and decided to move to Key West and begin his environmental activism immediately. It was the third or fourth time he had been assaulted by someone who had mistaken his poor choice in acronyms for hate speech. A friend from law school was on the island visiting, celebrating his recent of graduation. After explaining the situation to his friend, Holmes (who as it happened was operating on a quickly diminishing savings account) was persuaded to track down his assailant and take him to court. And so, after a quick settlement, he decided the assaults, the ancillary effects of his *real* work, protesting that awful pipeline, could help sustain him, sustain his *work*. There was an elegance to this solution. A beauty in its altruism, the sacrifice.

Holmes thinks deeply about these events as he un-skewers the gummy fish from its plastic spear and places it on his tongue, sucking on it and letting it slowly dissolve. He remembers how, before activism, before law school, he had wanted to be a theoretical physicist. It was a book he had read in high school that drew him to the field. A paperback that likened quantum physics to Buddhism or Taoism or some loose amalgamation of all non-Western religious principles. But, like so many other things in his life, Holmes had lost interest in it. He had settled into something else.

As the candy dissolves sweetly into the salivary juices of his mouth, his mind returns to the story, “The Metamorphosis Part II.” Some time in college. Either as a Physics major or pre-law, he took a lit survey class and read Kafka’s prequel to Hunter’s brief opus. He recalls the protagonist, Samsa.

He can’t recall any mention of wings in Kafka’s story. *Could it be*, Holmes wonders, *that that poor man swapped bodies with a palmetto bug, and had no idea he could fly*. Holmes

pictures a giant bug flying high above the great steeples and ramparts of old Prague. As his mind drifts aimlessly, a troubled feeling slowly overtakes Holmes. He can't pin it down. Something is happening. Something not unlike the corporeal exchange between Samsa and the unpronounceable protagonist in Hunter's story. Something that wouldn't be out of place in the misguided book that conflated new age science and new age religion that he had encountered so many years ago. Something is happening, he just knows it. Something is happening, as the candy disappears completely, the sweetness still lingering on his tongue.

#

**1935**

He must have spent all day unconscious in the hospital bed. His skin was still stained dark, like a light-skinned negro, or a Cuban. He wore the clean clothes his brother had brought him. Walking down Southard towards Duval, the early evening sunlight against his the side of his face, Roseau feels strangely refreshed.

At Duval, he pauses. The mood is raucous. As a group of drunk sailors passes him, one stops and stares into Roseau's face. One of the sailors is lazy with drunkenness. He raises his arm and points his finger an inch from Roseau's nose. "Ay!" He yells to his comrades who had continued on down Duval without him. "It's one a dem! One a dem, ah, darkies from dat show!" The other sailors stop and look back at the scene.

"Oi! 'Tis one a dem! Grab 'em and take 'em wif us!"

Like a rogue wave cresting a rowboat, the mob came on Roseau and lifted him up above their heads. Unsure of any other option, Roseau acquiesced to his new perch, and tried to balance

as the men carried down the street. Their pace broke into a skip and one of the sailors began to sing, the other humming with the melody:

*What will we do with de darkies*

*When de Dandies win de war?*

*When Dere's no more work to do*

*What are darkies for?*

*Dey were born to pick de cotton*

*Born to pick de corn*

*Born to...*

The singing sailor pauses and looks up at Roseau. "Eh.. Oi! You , darky up der. I can't remember what you was born to do?"

"Let em down! We're 'ere!"

The men place Roseau back on his feet before the entrance to Theatre Concha. Framed beside the door a large printed poster advertising in big bold letters:

THE COMIC CAPERS OF  
E. QUICK'S ETHIOPIANS!  
FEATURING  
THE DANCE OF THE BLACK SWAN

As he burst through the front door a large man with a parrot on his shoulder stops the mob with his outstretched arms, his two massive palms pressed against the chests of the men leading the charge.

"Tickets."

“Oi big feller! This is our ticket!” The men push Roseau to the front of the pile-up. The large man whistles across in the direction of the cloak room, and a midget dressed in a three-piece suit, with a stove pipe hat and cane appears. He reaches up and grabs Roseau by the forefinger.

“This way!” He shouts up to Roseau in a tiny voice, tugging on his finger. Leading Roseau into the dark theatre, he stops and looks back at the mob of sailors. “You lot need to pay if you want a show!” The little man pulls Roseau through the darkened theatre of people finding their seats. The cacophony of the orchestra turns into a deep and singular note as the strings sections bow together in tune.

Roseau is pulled through a curtain at stage right and up darkened stairs, where he is deposited in the wings of the curtained stage, the midget leaving him and scurrying off into the theatre’s crowded bowels of ropes and set. The commotion in the house and back stage has settled. Through the thick curtain, Roseau hears the orchestral overture. The music begins with a prance. Staccato strings with a sweet piccolo melody floating above it. Then suddenly, a darker chord from the brass section. The strings echo the sentiment with a shrill fall. As the piece darkens, Roseau feels his heart beat faster, pins and needles at his soles, weakness in his kness. Then the music ceases. The reverberation fades to silence. Someone in the audience coughs. Then the piccolo returns, rises out of the silence, the strings swelling around it, raising it up. As it the melody rises, and joined by a deeper sound, cello. Swelling, the full the orchestra take the piercing piccolo and the resonant cell to a great crescendo, punctuated by a great cymbal crash that rings in Roseau’s head like breaking glass. As it fades to silence, Roseau hears a bugle playing a familiar melody, something simple and militaristic. The curtains open slowly, and the warm limelight fills the stage. Standing on small platform, the midget that had brought Roseau

backstage appears before him in profile. Now wearing fake beard, arms akimbo and fully light, Roseau sees the likeness as the midget begins the prologue and the play begins:

BABE LINCOLN

Ladies and Gentlemen. I, Babe Lincoln, stand before you to tell you a tale. A tale of love. A tale of magic, a tale of betrayal!

We take you now, to the wilds of Africa!

(The podium on which BABE LINCOLN stands is pushed by two men in blackface and tuxedos stage left onto the apron beside the proscenium arch. The background curtain is raised, revealing a backdrop painted with a West African landscape. From the orchestra comes a rhythmic drumming, a cornet trills an approximation of an elephant call.)

(Enter AMA, an inordinately beautiful native dressed in full ceremonial regalia carrying an earthen vessel)

BABE LINCOLN

Behold Princess Ama. The black jewel of the Gold Coast. Out for a leisurely stroll. She stops to have a drink of water.

(AMA lifts the vessel above her head to drink, but before she has a chance, a woman's scream is heard from stage left. AMA puts down the pitcher and runs offstage after the scream. As she leaves ENTER ABDULLAH, tiptoeing from stage right.)

BABE LINCOLN

But the evil sorcerer Abdullah has other plans.

(ABDULLAH takes from his pouch a pinch of powder and sprinkles it into the vessel. A puff of red smoke is emitted from the vessel and ABDULLAH laughs maniacally and EXITS stage right.)

Ama watches the play from the wing, waiting for her cue. Roseau, standing a few feet behind her, further offstage, stares at her, enthralled. A white man in a sailor's overcoat brushes past Roseau.

(FERRER walks across the stage, ENTERING stage left EXITING stage right)

Ama looks behind her and notices Roseau. Her eyes widen and she approaches him.

“You!” She says in a high whisper, her finger pointed at Roseau’s nose.

“Er. I, uh. Yes?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Er. The sailors. And the, uh, president over there.”

“You keep it down.”

“Sorry,” Roseau replies, keeping his voice to a whisper. “I think you think I’m somebody else. My skin, you see, er, it’s usually, not like...” Ama puts her hand over Roseau’s mouth to quiet him. He feels the warmth of her hand against his lips. He feels the overwhelming to kiss it, to take her fingers into his mouth and taste her. She gives him a stern look and walks onto stage.

(ENTER AMA. Her brow is furrowed and she looks confused. She walks to the vessel and kneels to it. She raises the vessel to her lips, pauses and looks longingly behind her. From the orchestra pit the bass drum begins to pulse, its tempo gradually speeding, as AMA brings the vessel to her lips.)

His head is spinning again. The pain had come on when Ama looked back at him, and now the pinpricks in his skull were becoming hotter. A man in frock with a velvet collar appears before Roseau, grabbing him by the shoulders.

“What are you doing?” he says in a loud whisper just as Ama had before.

“I...”

“Shh!” The man throws up his hand and grabs Roseau at the collar and rips the shirt off of his chest. As the buttons scatter on the floor, he does the same with Roseau’s trousers, and pulls them to the floor. From his pocket he pulls an oversized handkerchief and ties it around Roseau’s waist.

(As AMA drinks from the vessel a flash and puff of smoke, obscuring her from the audience.)

Roseau hears pop. And looks up, his head now ringing in pain. The man now gripping Roseau’s shoulder from behind walks him swiftly to the stage and then shoves him forward, just as the smoke is clearing.

(The smoke clears to reveal that AMA has been transformed into a SAVAGE MAN wearing nothing but a loincloth. ENTER FERRER)

FERRER(Pointing)

Aha! Aqui! Salvaje!

(From over his shoulder RAMON removes a length of rope and lassos the SAVAGE MAN and pull him in. EXIT RAMON and SAVAGE MAN. Lower rear curtain over landscape)

BABE LINCOLN



And so Princess AMA was transformed into a lowly man and captured by the Spaniard trader in slaves, Capitan FERRER. Shackled in the bowels of a great ship he sailed across the atlantic Cuba to work the cane fields as a slave.

(The rear curtain is lifted to reveal a seascape. A large prop boat is pulled across the stage as thunderous drums and crashing cymbals play from the orchestra. When the boat disappears into the wing, the backdrop is lifted to reveal a plantation landscape.)

Roseau, having escaped stage right is now dazed; the pain in his head hasn't subsided, and his vision has been made spotty from staring into the limelights. He rubs his eyes hard against his palms. Someone grabs him by the shoulders and shakes him. He opens his eyes to find Ama standing before him, her image shadowed in his overexposed retinas.

“Who are you?” Roseau asks her.

“Later,” she says handing him a large machete and placing a floppy straw hat over his head. “Go now.” She pauses for a moment, and looks into Roseau's eyes, sending chills from his ankles to neck, turns him around and shoves him back onto the stage.

(ENTER SAVAGE MAN stage right, now wearing a straw hat, with a machete in his hand. He looks confused. ENTER DON JIMENEZ, dressed in khaki waistcoat and trousers, holding a cat o nine tails, stage left.)

DON JIMENEZ

Volver al trabajo!

SAVAGE MAN

I, uh, I'm not supposed to be here!

DON JIMENEZ

¿qué? lo que le dijiste a mi, niño?

SAVAGE MAN

I... You got the wrong guy. She just pushed me.

(DON JIMENEZ cracks whip. EXIT SAVAGE MAN stage right)

BABE LINCOLN

And so AMA toiled under the curse of ABDULLAH only returning to her natural form under the light of a full moon.

(Backdrop is lifted to reveal plantation at night backdrop, a full moon hanging from a thin thread is lowered just below proscenium. ENTER AMA singing in native tongue, with violin and piccolo accompaniment. ENTER DON JIMENEZ)

DON JIMENEZ

(Whispering) She's so beautiful.

(DON JIMENEZ approaches AMA. AMA turns to DON JIMENEZ smiles and then EXITS STAGE LEFT.)

DON JIMENEZ

Espera! Espera!

(EXIT DON JIMENEZ)

BABE LINCOLN

Happening upon AMA in the sweet glow of the moonlight, DON JIMENEZ vowed to find her and make her his wife. But, unfortunately for the smitten JIMENEZ, the plantation was expecting a visitor.

(Daytime plantation background is lowered and moon is raised. ENTER ABDULLAH dressed in a white linen suit, followed by DON JIMENEZ)

DON JIMENEZ

And how was your journey from Florida mr. Adams

ABDULLAH

Fine, fine. I'm quite accustomed to seafaring. And it is worth it of course, your family being such gracious hosts.

DON JIMENEZ

Ah, it is the least we can do for a man such as yourself. And I understand you brought your daughter as well?

ABDULLAH

Why yes, my boy. In fact that's why I asked you out on this little stroll around the property. You see I have ulterior motives.

DON JIMENEZ

Sir?

ABDULLAH

Your father tells me that he has yet to find you a suitable wife. We had a very amiable discussion of the matter, and we have decided that it would be in both family's best interest if our great partnership in business was fortified with the holy bond of marriage between you and my Sarah.

DON JIMENEZ

Sir. I... With all due respect. I'm sure your daughter is a treasure, but there is a woman who has already taken my heart.

ABDULLA

I see. And what is the young lady's name?

DON JIMENEZ

Well. I don't know. I have only seen her from afar, and by only the light of the moon.

ABDULLAH

Hmm. I see. Well, since you have yet to make this lucky lady's acquaintance, I sincerely doubt she'll be prone to jealousy over a dinner engagement with friends. So what do you say? Would you like to accompany my daughter and I to dinner tonight at Hotel De Concha's dining room?

DON JIMENEZ

Well...

ABDULLAH

Come now, it's simply dinner with a friend and his daughter.

DON JIMENEZ

Of course. (Hesitantly) I would be delighted.

(CURTAIN CLOSE)

BABE LINCOLN

Now ladies and gentlemen, you look like a bright lot. You look the type not easily fooled. But DON JIMENEZ, blinded with love and the evil ABDULLAH's dark sorcery wasn't afforded such clear visage. After sharing an aperitif, spiked with trickery, DON JIMENEZ and ABDULLAH are seated at table in the dining room of Hotel De Concha and await the arrival of SARAH.

(CURTAIN OPENS to reveal a dining room. A chandelier hangs above the table where DON JIMENEZ and ABDULLAH are seated. Orchestra plays light diner music.)

ABDULLAH

Now DON JIMENEZ, I must warn you before my daughter's arrival that men are often rendered breathless when making SARAH's acquaintance.

DON JIMENEZ

I'm sure it's true, Mr. Adams. But as I said before, my heart belongs to another.

(ENTER SARAH)

BABE LINCOLN

Let us pause here for moment, dear viewers.

(DON JIMENEZ gasps, and DON JIMENEZ, ABDULLAH, and SARAH all freeze in their positions.)

Little does DON JIMENEZ know it, but the potent tincture he imbibed has blurred his vision to see SARAH as his love AMA.

(Characters unfreeze)

DON JIMENEZ

It's you!

SARAH

So it is.

DON JIMENEZ

(Moving to one knee) Will you...?

SARAH

I will.

(CURTAIN CLOSE.)

BABE LINCOLN

The couple's courtship was quick and public. Banquets were held in their honor. Seldom was a single word exchanged between the engaged. It wasn't until their wedding night, after the newlyweds first moments of privacy, that DON JIMENEZ felt something amiss. Leaving his sleeping bride alone in their marital bed, he ventured out into the moonlight, to settle his mind.

(RAISE CURTAIN to nighttime plantation backdrop, full moon suspended overhead.  
AMA stands, looking out. ENTER DON JIMENEZ)

DON JIMENEZ

Sarah?

(AMA turns to DON JIMENEZ)

It's you. I feel... I feel like a spell has been lifted. I thought you were SARAH! No no, I thought SARAH was you! Oh no! What have I done!?

(ENTER ABDULLAH wearing a his plantation clothes but also a turban)

ABDULLAH

Nothing can be done now, my boy.

(ENTER SARAH)

SARAH

Come back to bed, my husband. Where have you gone?

DON JIMENEZ

I've been fooled! A trick! Sorcery!

ABDULLAH

Come now, JIMENEZ, when the sun rises that woman standing there will be turned back into a SAVAGE MAN, a lowly plantation hand, a slave. You could have broken the curse had you married her under the light of the full moon, but, alas, you've married my SARAH instead. A commotion comes from the back of the theatre. The doors have been flung open. Soldiers fill the isles. A commanding officer takes walks to the front, jumps the gate at the orchestra pit. There is shuffling amongst the musicians as the officer pushes his way through. As he climbs onto stage, a cymbal falls to the ground with a great crash.

(ENTER COMMANDING OFFICER from the front of the APRON.)

COMMANDING OFFICER

Ladies and gentlemen, stay calm. We are looking are looking for an enemy slaver in direct violation of Union law. Remain in your seats while my men perform a swift and orderly search.

BABE LINCOLN

Sir! You can't do this!

COMMANDING OFFICER

Just because you're dressed like my commander in chief, doesn't make you he.

(EXIT AMA, SARAH, ABDULLAH, DON JIMENEZ, BABE LINCOLN)

As the group of raconteurs exit the stage past Roseau, Ama stops, face to face with Roseau.

"You must come with us," she says him. Hearing her voice the pain in his head begins to subside. His body feels lighter, as if he's about to drift off to sleep.

"Where?"

"We're going to Asa Tift's. It's safe."

"Asa Tift? The wrecker. My father always told me he's a crook."

"Come."

As Roseau follows Ama through the darkness backstage, he hears the cacophony of the theatre rise behind him. Above the formless noise, he hears a soldier demand to see someone's palms.

#

04/23/2010

I can't find Roseau anywhere. He must have gone off looking for that girl he found standing on the tracks. The island is a mess. There are camera crews everywhere.

Hunter pulls the sheet of paper out his typewriter, crumples it in his fist and throws it to the ground. It lands and the balcony's wooden floorboards beside several others. He pulls an unopened bottle of rum from brown paper bag. The bottle bears the image of a seaplane similar to the label on the empty bottle that serves as a candle holder beside his typewriter, but on this one, the image is a simple gold outline, embossed directly onto the simple, elegant bottle. Above the image, gold letters spell out BOBBY'S BEST XO. The mouth of the bottle has been corked and then dipped in red wax, which has hardened around the neck. Hunter pulls a yellow diver's knife from his pocket, unsheathes the blade, and ring around the bulbous tip of the cork and the glass neck of the bottle. He lets the knife fall point first beside him. It falls and stick into the wooden floor, the handle remains upright. He uncorks the bottle, pours himself a glass and adds a fresh leaf to his typewriter.

04/23/2010

*Catfish Magazine has given me a generous per diem to follow around Bobby Duvet while this whole explosion or oil spill or whatever the hell it is plays out. It seems the magazine is making an attempt to return to their long-form heyday, when their articles were actually read. When it was more than just an oversized glossy that published fold outs of the celebrity jailbait du jour. Seeing as I live here, and don't have to worry about paying for a hotel, or any of that, I'm happy to oblige them, fill up the old rum coffer, and keep a diary.*



*They sent me down to the bight to an unmarked building behind a large nautical gift store. I knocked on the door and waited. I knocked again and then the door began buzzing so I tried the handle and the door opened right up. Inside I walked down a long windowless corridor, the walls lined with framed gold records. At the end of the corridor was another door. I didn't bother knocking. It was unlocked, so I opened it, revealing a lounge area. There was track lighting and acoustic panels on the ceiling. The room was furnished with a couple overstuffed leather couches, there was a refrigerator, cabinets and a sink, and a fancy coffee machine for making con leches. There was another door beside a big picture window that looked into the control room of a recording studio. In the control room, above the long mixing board filled with faders and knobs, there was another window that looked into the live room. In the live room, sitting on stool, wearing oversized headphones, beside a large condenser microphone, was Bobby Duvet. He looked up, and his eyes met mine through two panes of glass. He pushed a button on a small remote in his hands.*

*"Hello," his voice said through a speaker in the room where I was standing. "I've been expecting you."*

*Duvet left his perch in the live room and met me in the lounge. After a handshake and an introduction, Duvet offered me a beer from the refrigerator and I obliged. It was a cold lager from the Dominican Republic. He took a seat in one of the big leather couches, and I sat across from him in a deep leather chair. I set my recorder on the coffee table and hit record.*

*"Where's the engineer?" I asked pointing to the empty control room.*

*"Don't need one. I can do it all by remote. Besides, I've simplified. It's just me, my guitar, and half inch tape. I'm done with pro tools. I'm done with my old sound. What I'm working on now is real."*

*“So you’re changing direction,” I say. “But why now? You have your big festival in two days. I hope you’re not planning on flipping the script on your adoring coconut heads without warning. They came here to hear ‘Hey, Bubbah,’ and ‘Day Drinkin’ (Better Than Thinkin’)’ and ‘Ditch the Platitudes for Different Latitudes.’”*

*“Hey, man, I got a contract to honor,” Duvet said, smiling. “But if you wanna talk about Coconithead Days, we gotta get out on the water. You like boats?”*

*“Yeah. I like them alright”*

*“Let’s get outta here, then. I’ll show you where I’m gonna’ jump the shark.”*

#

Roseau stops beside the open doorway to a cigar factory. He’s suddenly lost. The pain in his head flares up, his vision blurs. He sees the outline of the man standing before him, inside the factory.

“I, er, did you see a group of actors come through here? A girl?” He stammers. He is overcome by dizziness, bends over and rests his hands on his knees.

When he regains his equilibrium, the man he saw before is gone.

The sound of cannon fire rumbles in the distance.

Now Hunter is dizzy. Did he see something out of the corner of his eye? Someone? A face he knew? His gaze remains fixed on the page. He tries to read on, but the name Roseau rises to the surfaces of his mind. *Roseau*. He can’t place him. Can’t place anything. *Roseau*. He puts his palms flat on the lectern on either side of the book. He breaths deep. As he begins to form the

words into speech he feels in his bones that what he is reading is more than just words. He is reading Roseau. Reading his fate. Slowly he begins:

*A feeling such as he had known when about to take the first plunge into the pool came upon him, and he crossed himself. That familiar gesture brought back into his soul a whole series of boyish and childish memories, and suddenly the darkness that had covered everything for him was torn apart, and life rose up before him for an instant with all its bright past joys. But he did not take his eyes from the wheels of the train car. And exactly at the moment before wheels came opposite him, he dropped to his knees, fell over the track, and lightly, as though he would rise again at once, turned his head up towards the sky. And at the same instant he was terror-stricken at what he was doing. "Who am I? What am I doing? What for?" he tried to get up, to drop backwards; but something huge and merciless struck him on the back and pinned him down. "Lord, forgive me all!" he said, feeling it impossible to struggle. A drunk muttering something was sucking the last drops from an aluminum can on the platform above him. And the lights of pain that filled his head with troubles, falsehoods, sorrow, and evil, flared up more brightly than ever before, lighted up for him all that had been in darkness, flickered, began to grow dim, and was quenched forever.*