

“38 DOLLARS” (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

DRYDEN DEMCHUK

The human being is a facade which is born in our interactions with others - in the words we choose to speak, in the friends we choose to make, and in the smile we choose to show the world. Underneath this facade is an endless causal string of decisions - actions upon which the possibility for both redemption and death dance like angels upon the head of a pin. Our souls are nothing more than the sum of our decisions. In this library I have chosen death - and the cruel machinations of the computer system have kept a tally of my sins which renders my facade of humanity impossible to maintain. My soul is bared. There is no grace in technology. No salvation *ex machina*.

Standing here in the sunlit library, watching the sun's rays dance along the walls as they leap joyfully off the water outside the library windows, my mind is sent back into a realm of shadows. I see my past self renewing a group of books online. Once, twice, then three times. My foul deeds flicker before my mind's eye like a candle in a winter storm. Three times - three times the books were renewed, three days God lay dead in a Palestinian tomb, and three times the funeral bell tolls for the act of inhumanity which I committed thence. I see my past self leaving Vancouver - leaving on a trip for God knows how long - and all the while a stack of books eager to be returned rest atop my desk - forgotten, forsaken, and unable to be renewed further.

“You will have to pay the fees before you can check out any more books.”

Jordan interrupts my inner purgatory. Of course I must pay the fee - how could it be otherwise? Do we not declare the endless justice of God? Do we not praise the *Logos* in its righteousness? Do we not hope in a final all-consuming fire in which all iniquities will be consumed as the harvest's chaff - a fire from which we will emerge pure and unsullied? If this be the fire then I pray that it burns. If this be my sin, then I pray for the justice of God to prevail even if it be the demise of my flesh. I stand alone before the eyes of God and Jordan Weaver and I do not ask for grace from either - grace was offered on cross and still I chose the path of Peter - thrice I renewed, thrice I denied.

In the classic motion of reluctant agreement, I reach into my back pocket for my wallet.

“We only accept cash.”

I should not be surprised - how can atonement be won on credit? How can there be recompense by electronic transfer? Surely there must be a physical exchange - a ransom - a sacrifice.

To be continued...

FOR ORPHEUS

ANONYMOUS

I wonder still if Orpheus,
upon his final grief,
upon the vanishing of her
for whom he sorely weeps,
did not find within himself
a love more bittersweet.
Though bitterly, in flowing tears,
though painfully reborn,
with a death within beloved's face
and death's proud mocking scorn,
beauty's blood did mix with song
and beautifully he mourns.
But still a sweetness in the air
upon their final sight,
upon appearing of his joy
amidst her deathly night;
Orpheus, now seeing full
revealing of her light.

And so, he counts himself among
most blessed creatures of earth.
For memories of her he holds,
though death reveals their worth.

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SEPTEMBER 20 2022

Fall Issue #2

GO AHEAD AND TAKE IT. YOU HELPED PAY FOR THE INK!

“38 DOLLARS”: POSTLAPSARIAN LIBRARY USE

DRYDEN DEMCHUK

“THIRTY-EIGHT DOLLARS?” Hope Teggert asks me in as aggressive of a whisper her library voice will allow. I am standing at the front desk of the library facing my tribunal, and prepared for whatever judgement either God or John Richard Allison have in store for my hopelessly fallen, malevolent soul.

I have no choice but to nod in accordance with Hope's accusation. I have made the mistake of trying to check out a selection of books for my next research paper - a process which came to a grinding halt the moment my criminal past came to light on the library computer screen.

“Is that a lot?” I ask Hope.

“It's the most I've ever seen.”

She has little room left for pity, but I can see in her eyes the effort to extend one more chance for redemption.

“Is it because you lost a book?”

I shake my head.

“Did you damage a book?”

I shake my head.

She has no grace left - and even if she did, who would I be to receive it?

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+ THE USUAL TOMFOOLERY...

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Submissions are subject to minor edits, and may be returned if substantial edits are required.

ETC. Is an independent publication of the Regent College Student Association and the views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the views of Regent College.

VIGNETTES FROM A LIFE WITH EIGHT BROTHERS

ABIGAIL GERMAIN

There is no room to park the car in the driveway today.

With 250 meters of winding gravel driveway, you'd think there would be space. And yet, there is none to be found. Why? The boys are playing hockey.

Plastic sheets cover one of the windows on the house and two on the garage.

Glass that has withstood almost two centuries worth of impact and strain

Now lies shattered on the ground. Why? The boys are playing baseball.

A film of dust encompasses the exterior of my black Volkswagen Jetta

Highlighting a large, circular imprint. The car, cleaned this morning

And left to dry, now dirty. Why? The boys are playing basketball.

The toilet seat is left permanently upright.

The bathroom contains clear signs that marksmanship is not a valued skill.

The tissue box has one tell-tale tissue carefully stuffed back in.

The toilet paper roll is perpetually empty.

Children's bicycles are not meant for teenage races and stunts,

Nor are door frames for chin-ups or staircases for sliding.

And you ask why you're in a cast again. I'm sorry, but is it not clear?

Yes, you'll hurt your brother if he is tied to your bike while you race down the hill,

Yes, the stone will get lodged in your nose if you stick it in there

And yes, the cupboard door will fall off if you use it as a chair.

Why is there a black film on the shower walls? Or a rancid smell in the hall?

Why are there socks on the kitchen counter? Or handprints on the ceiling?

Why are there ruts in the lawn and muddy footprints in the kitchen?

There are eight beloved boys growing up in the house. Need I say more?

UNSEEN

MO HICKMAN

My phone is important.

My phone keeps me connected.

My phone takes me to a million places with a million people.

From the comfort of home.

I didn't eat at that restaurant. But I saw it with you.

I didn't hike to the mountain peak. But I saw it with you.

I didn't buy tickets for that concert. But I saw it with you.

I didn't travel around the world. But I saw it with you.

I didn't go to your wedding. But I saw it with you.

I see your pictures.

I share in your moments.

Moments without memories

But moments with

friends. lovers. family.

people.

Until I look up

and there's no one

no one but me and my phone.

Alone behind the glowing screen,

this is my reality

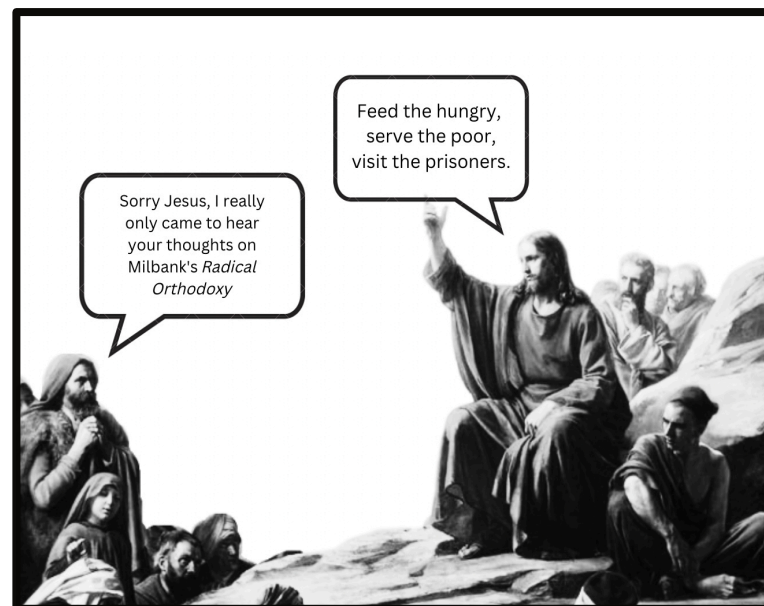
and you don't see it with me.

DAD JOKE OF THE WEEK:

MY WIFE KICKED ME OUT
BECAUSE OF MY TERRIBLE
ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
IMPRESSIONS.

BUT DON'T WORRY.

I'LL RETURN.



NOTES FROM THE UNDERDARK, EP. 5: "THE BLACK CORNIX"

JONATHAN LIPPS

Evendur steps forward out of the mouth of the tunnel into the darkened warehouse, unable to see (or ignoring) the shock and betrayal written on the faces of his party. He addresses the still-wary Black Cornix Syndicate workers whom we surprised on our midnight journey back to the Inner City: "There's no need to fight."

And so began the next chapter of our story. Having confirmed with the gang that he was also a sworn member of the Black Cornix, Evendur managed to extract some news about Syndicate goings-on, news which was particularly germane to our party's business. We learned, for example, that just recently, five of the Syndicate had been massacred, and their intended prey---five unnamed lordlings---stolen out from under the Syndicate's nose. Neither the responsible party nor their motive was identified, but the Cornix suspected either the Belhor Vines (a set of vigilantes out to promote dryadic rights by violent means if necessary), apparently in concert with a mysterious druid named Darfur, or the Peristeri Wing (a rival Nauem gang). After gaining this valuable information, we left the warehouse and were back in the Inner City proper.

The first order of business was to get to a safe place where we could talk freely and, of course, interrogate Evendur. We made it to the Kydemones Academy and posted up at a table in the corner of the Refectory. It was abundantly clear to Evendur that his role in our party depended on his capacity to explain what had happened in our encounter with the Syndicate. He shared with the rest how he had, in fact, worked with the Syndicate in the past, and that this gave him the credibility to pull off the ploy which had saved our lives. He refused to go into more detail, but vowed his present allegiance to the Kydemones. Fenn was satisfied with this statement of faith, but Rianne and Orwin were not. They proposed that we go around the table and share something significant about each of our pasts, so as to elicit more details from Evendur while reciprocating some vulnerability. Fenn had no time for or intention to participate in some kind of forced, cathartic heart-to-heart, and left with his beer.

While he was gone, Rianne shared with the others that before becoming involved with the Academy, she had been working for a group of sailors of less than honourable reputation (yes, dear readers: Rianne was a PIRATE!). She was then reformed by the Academy and served for years aboard one of their vessels, the Ramil's Warden. Evendur ended up disclosing a bit more about his life and how he had been dragged into the Black Cornix as a young man, eventually being rescued by Tarala and sent to the Highbury Monastery in part as a way to escape Nauem and the Syndicate's influence. Orwin, for his part, disclosed that he is 26 years old.

The rest of the day, the party took care of their personal business. Rianne went to have a conversation with Tarala to try to confirm Evendur's trustworthiness. Tarala vouched firmly for Evendur's loyalty, and in further conversation, broke down and revealed how little faith she had in the future of the Academy, given the variety of menacing forces mounting against the Kydemones and the D'Murge way in general.

The next morning, the entire party reconvened for breakfast, at which Fenn apologized for leaving abruptly the day before, but reiterated that what he cared about is our current allegiance to the Kydemones, to our mission, and to each other---he doesn't need to know about all the secrets lurking in everyone's past to get on with our job, just that we can trust one another. We then

strategized our next move based on all the information we had. First, we had learned from the kitchen staff we befriended previously that a rager of a masquerade ball was set to happen at Lord Eglon's palace that very night. Second, that 5 lordlings had been kidnapped and were likely being held for ransom. Third, that the Black Cornix were making plans for some kind of incursion. And so, we felt strongly that Lord Eglon's party was not one we should miss. Too many threads seemed to be tied to this symbolic ritual of decadence, unheeding the chaos growing outside the walls of the wealthy Inner City. But we couldn't just walk up to this kind of event on our own. We needed to get someone to invite us as their guests, for one thing. And for another thing, we needed to get our hands on some finery!

Reader, I am not talented enough in the language of vestment to engage in encomium regarding the wardrobe we subsequently acquired. Suffice it to say that we looked pretty badass. And we still had time to kill. Fenn felt like reconnoitering the Golden Chalice, a pub of some repute where Leolin's friends had been rumoured to spend lots of time, and Evendur joined him. Their time at the Chalice nearly ended in disaster, though. Having eavesdropped out a very suggestive lead, Fenn completely failed to act drunk enough to convince a table of men to take him in their confidence, and narrowly escaped being reported to the city guards.

Orwin took on the task of reconnecting with Lord Arcus, whom we supposed to still be at Lord Eglon's where we left him. Alas, the scatter-brained architect had wandered off to who knows where sometime in the last day!

Rianne, for her part, took Arlo, the Kydemones man responsible for tailoring up a storm to outfit us in our party clothes, out for coffee. (Rianne is a very thoughtful pirate).

Reconvening at Lord Eglon's before the party, we learned of Arcus's disappearance from Orwin, and were surprised to find one Matrim of House Dezel accompanying Evendur, and looking rather the worse for wear. A not-quite-Inner-City lordling, Matrim was a promising ticket into the party for us, but he had been (mysteriously?) assaulted and was in need of help. Evendur went back to the Middle City with him to settle his nerves and get ready for the party in hopes of sliding us in on his coattails. Meanwhile, the rest went to Arcus's palace to see if the architect had gone home. We found the palace in total chaos, but thanks to Rianne's running around the place, found Arcus finally in his chambers, getting ready for the party himself (and all the chaos owing merely to his pre-party demands).

Not wanting to broach the topic of Leolin, Rianne banked on Arcus's forgetfulness and bluffed that they had met at a party a year prior. (Arcus was thrilled by Rianne's outfit and gave her several charming accessories.) However, on the way to the party, Arcus was nonplussed by the sudden appearance of Fenn and Orwin, whom Rianne tried unsuccessfully to pass off as her bodyguards. Arcus then recognized Orwin and began to melt down about Leolin, becoming understandably enraged at our party's lack of success therewith. At this point, Fenn snuck away to avoid getting caught up in the consequences, and found Evendur and Matrim at Lord Eglon's gates, ready to enter.

And so we leave our now-more-dashing-than-ever heroes, some having penetrated the gates of high society and entering what promises to be a powder keg of a party, and others still outside, facing down an irascible powder keg of a lord. Whatever happens next is sure to involve dancing, music, and maybe even some hand-to-hand combat.