

Kafka loved a nice bay window / : a Noh play set in the suburbs of Chicago

by Katharine Anne Marais

The shite in this play is HENRY, the man who lives at the corner of Kedzie & Elston. He is severely ill. His legs are swollen and covered with open sores, but he can speak. He is kind.

The other shite in this play is CAIRO JOE, FRANCIS' closest confidant.

The secondary character in this play is FRANCIS, an emotionally sensitive artist. Francis used to live in SRO housing, and she was dirty and poor. She gave up her art to work as a freelance writer. She accepts any clients as long as they pay the right rate, on time. When she arrived in town, she had enough money to live on for a few weeks as long as nothing disastrous happened.

Now she has warm clothes. She spends her time alone and listens to opera and radio news, gazing out the bay window at the world outside. Francis is svelte and stylish. She owns few clothes, but she keeps them in beautiful condition and always looks impeccable. She has become increasingly alienated from mainstream society, who understands neither her art or his sexuality, and Francis is unable to keep a job. She is often sexually harrassed at work, so he has chosen to telecommute. She is shy, and doesn't leave her apartment except to buy oatmeal and organic apples at the bodega. Francis is, again, becoming sickly and depressed.

on reading George Herbert's Love

Francis reads at a dark oak writing desk by the window.

GEORGE HERBERT enters stage Left from behind the BOOKSHELF:

*Immortal Love, author of this great frame,
Sprung from that beauty which can never fade,
How hath man parcel'd out Thy glorious name,
And thrown it on that dust which Thou hast made,
While mortal love doth all the title gain!
Which siding with Invention, they together
Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
(Thy workmanship) and give Thee share in neither.
Wit fancies beauty, beauty raiseth wit;
The world is theirs, they two play out the game,*

The radiator hisses and blows whistling flumes of steam into the apartment from the bathroom. She gets up from her table, slams the door, and returns to her seat. Now she has the luxury of writing in silence, but the room becomes cold. She puts on a parka, turns on a space heater, at her ankles and continues to clack away, fully wrapped in winter outerwear with knee-high boots, with a fur-lined parka hood pulled over her head. As the clock hits 5, she promptly closes her Macbook and opens her real books to read. She has Simone Weil's collected writings, and George Herbert's poem, Love.

GEORGE HERBERT:

*Thou standing by: and though Thy glorious name
Wrought our deliverance from th' infernal pit,
Who sings Thy praise? Only a scarf or glove
Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love.*

[EXPLOSIVE BANG] [SIRENS]

She peers out of the window onto the street below, and glass has shattered all over the sidewalk. She is dazed, and unsure of how to process the scene below. She cracks the window to listen to the noise on the street below, then quickly slams it shut again, realizing that the draft will be bad for the atmosphere in the apartment; however, it's too late. Her orchid, potted and placed on her writing desk, rapidly and visibly withers from the cold.

GEORGE HERBERT:

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.*

(exit GEORGE).

FRANCIS mourns the loss of the orchid deeply. The radiator has now ceased its wailing and she re-opens the other door, shedding her winter wear to sit down again. She reads aloud from Simone Weil:

Fear is the opposite of Love.

She takes out a pen, taps it twice on the table, and speaks:

Evil's Evil
is its metabolic ferocity.
a throat toothed

& writhing to eat cities
of *Light Itself*-

blunting our retinas
& blackening our nerve endings.

a neuropathy that sizzles,
as cold withers

the fingertips of an orchid,

and upon wilting, kisses

with cold lips that wither,
petal by petal

our fragile spirits-

its dispassionate colonialism,
shrouding atrial space & salting

our heart's fertile air-

its pupil that widens to see nothing
but the *Self Itself*::

(If love is
I Am You

and evil is
We are We

& You are Not)
may we all be
Love's Love

FRANCIS: dammit now I'm going to have to write 'Love's Love'. I'll work on that.

She gets up to amble around the apartment. She presses her face to the window, but draws back, chilled through- cold is a surprisingly invisible thing.

*FRANCIS: Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.*

The aged hardwood floors which looked nice in a .jpeg for Craigslist are crusted with the animal shit of a former tenant's pet, warmed by the radiator. Francis has slim hips that jut, angular, in his brown corduroy trousers, as he leans against the sill of a vaguely stylish bay window.

FRANCIS (to audience): A frigid street is a delight from the elevated vantage point of a second-story window... a vantage point from which I cannot be legally evicted. They can't evict you in Chicago when it's below 15 degrees. There are many online forums that notify residents, if you're not gonna pay, wait until you might die if you get thrown out, to more effectively appeal to our collective legal sympathies.

(Author's Note: character is not advocating not paying rent. the character of Francis is a fictitious parody of an anxious paranoid employee who always believes she is on the cusp of being fired, and is constantly panicking about managing her bills in the event of her imagined termination).

Her LANDLORD enters stage right. He is a creepy old man with a gray beard crusted with small flecks of omelet. He leans in close over her desk.

FRANCIS cringes.

LANDLORD: You know back in Minnesota, if you didn't pay on time, they'd just shut off your dern heater. Heh-heh. You know, I don't always check my messages, but if anything's going on just call Martha. Heh-heh. Naw hon, you don't need that smoke detector. We got plenty in the hallway. That lock's not working right now, but I'll cut you a key real soon.

(exit LANDLORD. He mutters under his breath and shakes as he walks, pulling out a pack of cigarettes to drag on on the porch).

part ii : FIVE O CLOCK BALLET

Peeling back the faux-velvet blackout curtain, he watches red high-beams cut through flurries of falling snow in the FIVE O CLOCK BALLET. The red glare of the headlights is unself-conscious and assertively evil as it cuts through darkness and melts snow- an aesthetic reprieve from the self-consciously cherubic snowflakes. *falling, falling, falling-*

(CORPS DE BALLET is manic, and mechanical- they wear classical ballet costuming and perform a rapid petite allegro on pointe, criss-crossing the stage behind the WINDOW. They smile widely. the CARS are mechanical and unsmiling. They have red eyes and move in rapid, mechanized trajectories across stage behind the WINDOW- I'm thinking Futurist costumes in metal-gray.)

FRANCIS: *I took SAMUEL (MFA Candidate) to see La Sylphide once, staged by the L.A. Ballet (My absolute favorite. Glittering jewels of women! Such disciplined bodies, the turned-out fifth! Absolute sacrifice of the ego for their art. Saints. Martyrs!), and Samuel gently chided my high romanticism throughout the performance- the type of old-fashioned poetic idealism that would turn snowflakes to angels and machines to devils. To his more sophisticated sensibility, there was always a politic to the poetic. Ever in the ideological vogue, he favored the earthliness of modern dance, and we debated the fascist metaphors in the romantic storylines, the corseture, and the corps de ballet. It was a never-ending debate, which I engaged with intellectually, while privately indulging the good-and-evil dichotomies of fairytale and myth as whole-heartedly as a child. I wondered now, if he would be advocating for the fall of the snow, the victorious, Futurist Illumination of the automotive headlights, or the wickedly funny wrench that inclement weather could throw into the whole clockwork operation.*

ENTER, SAMUEL: Have you read Creaturely Life?

FRANCIS: Regardless, this view is absolutely goddamned lovely.

HENRY, who lives on the street below the WINDOW has grown weary of screaming for the day. He screams about nothing every day until around 5pm, and now he curls up in the window sill to rest, bundling into a ragged quilt as shit-stained as FRANCIS's own Craigslist apartment.

FRANCIS: We are all humans here, on Pulaski Rd.

FRANCIS (growing increasingly manic and high-strung throughout the monologue, ranting nervously, his eyes wide): I cannot help feeling a professional kinship toward the man. I've been working as a writer- a role akin to a pasta machine, churning out enormous amounts of cheap, easily digestible literary "carbs" every day- housing prices in Silicon Valley, real estate law in Berkeley, architectural history in Chicago, Custom Murphy Beds for Your Nor Cal Dream Home, Cannabis Feminism: The Movement, Ayahauasca and the Super Ego, fluff psychology for luxury rehab centers- (next time you read a health blog, note that it was written by someone whose qualifications include their art degree, a Google searchbar, and a complete dearth of other career options besides 'cocktail waiter', 'front-desk attendant at strip-mall day

spa and *volunteer for paid study*)- pseudo-political pieces that keep it topical and generate site traffic on Google, vogue-e- logues, travelogues, political blogs, drug blogs, video blogs (“vlogs”!), tech blogs, sculpture blogs, sculpture vlogs, magazines, ‘net zines.... the man’s presence feels metaphoric to say the least.

faced with an absolute dearth of spiritual and material substance, there’s little left to do but babble and sleep...

CHORUS: *AND SO CULTURE SPRUNG FROM THE ABYSS, AND OUR WORDS BECAME POETRY*

CORPS OF SLOWLY BLOOMING FLOWERS entering the stage. In a community staging of this production, the corps of slowly blooming flowers would be a ragged-looking bunch ranging from toddler-age to grown men and women, who unfurl slowly at different rates.

They sing an a capella canon- which is abstract tones. Each tone is improvisational but the notes themselves are written, and sung as such. The canon loops and builds, until it reaches an apex and the CORPS OF SLOWLY BLOOMING FLOWERS scatters and runs off stage in as unchoreographed a manner as which they arrived.

part iii: STATE OF THE CULTURE

FRANCIS is reading a stack of psychoanalytic texts, Marxist theories, Postmodern art criticism, Bertolt Brecht, and contemporary poetry.

FRANCIS: Freud is a real asshole, but discontentment with the state of our Cultur is a discussion worth having. John Cage says that happiness for an artist comes from never having to work- a statement most easily made by a man whose parents send him to knock around Europe for a while instead of finishing college, to “*decide if he wants to become an avant-garde composer.*” I am neither a maharaja nor a schizotypal drug addict, so I write.

FRANCIS’ MOTHER, FATHER, BOYFRIEND, EXTENDED FAMILY, AND FRIENDS enter stage right. Some older relatives appear as Angels. Others are distracted reading books or maps, but they look up to speak.

FRANCIS’ FATHER: *Francis spent all the money we had to give him going to Europe to write avant-garde poetry. Let’s hope something comes of that someday.*

FRANCIS’ MOTHER: *Honey? Where do you live now? Do you know where your grandmother’s corn casserole recipe is?*

FRANCIS’ BOYFRIEND LIAM: (to the audience). Not everybody makes it. (to Francis) What happened? Thinking of you kid.

(extended family disperses).

FRANCIS sits (at writing desk) downstage. Upstage, the ballet continues. Downstage right, another writer, CAIRO JOE, sits at an identical desk. CAIRO JOE is wearing a hoodie with small specks of oatmeal stuck to it. FRANCIS’ long hair is frizzy and occasionally he drags a wide-toothed comb throughout as he types. Right now, the comb is stuck in a tangle and permanently residing on Francis’ head while Francis hammers out a piece of copywriting for a Custom Murphy Bed company that installs fancy retractabeds for old-money families along Philadelphia’s storied Main Line.

FRANCIS: (to the audience): The depth of sorrow that I feel with each passing second at my 9-5 takes the form of gravity, the gravity of seconds piling up like sand around my ankles. They accumulate slowly, and will eventually fill my lungs and still my heart. The melancholia unfolds in slow ticks. I cannot brush them off my body, I cannot run away. My hands are *skittering, fluttering, aflame!* etc. etc. to churn out the necessary words per minute to not get fired, and I am rooted to my work-station.

FRANCIS and CAIRO JOE exchange wry commentary from left to right stage without looking toward each other. They stare at their desks. As they speak, they create small birds of spun sugar, with elaborately crafted wings.

*(the flirtation of your own ego & self-branding
as the market widened and luxury
offerings hit the market)...*

it's just another next-gen status symbol
(I love it, but I'm not sure

the client's going to go
for the Marxist-psychological dialectic)

yeah, corporate vertical-
we'll still have to cater to the tastes of The Men

at the top-
(well, we'll have our fingers in a lot of pies)-

the standard cultural criticism / magazine
hipster bullshit clothing / underwater musical

I was doing a raw economic piece-
but I like the way you are taking it

cause that's where the \$ is

I might not say patriarchy,
but

"Our phallo-centric highway system..."
"lexicon of Fanta\$ia" —

CAIRO JOE: : ...that it is

Also, you'll like the party. I was thinking about that when you said you like Christmas lights. We're lit to the teeth

We don't even need any actual lamps

If only we had an actual fireplace

I mean, I usually burn old tires in a garbage can, but it isn't the same

FRANCIS: HAHA

CAIRO JOE: Or not. I get nervous enough that drunken neighbors are going to burn the place to the ground making pop tarts; having access to open flames would be a disaster

FRANCIS: it's hard

to live

like just to find a reasonable place to sleep at night

CAIRO JOE: Did you ever read Picture This by Joseph Heller?

FRANCIS: no

I never enjoyed Catch-22

CAIRO JOE: Ah, and you were almost-

Anyway, I'll gloss over that for now

Picture This was about the Rembrandt painting "Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer", and it had three narrators- Rembrandt, the painted Aristotle, and a modern art buyer

FRANCIS: HAH

CAIRO JOE: I was thinking about it with the "Josephine the Singer" that's funny

FRANCIS: yeah. glad you read it.

i worked for this guy once

Brancusi said a tree can't grow in the shade of another

I agree

CAIRO JOE: What informs your work?

FRANCIS: What do you mean

CAIRO JOE: Well, I guess, how do you define shade?

(stage lights flicker off momentarily)

B: That's interesting.

That reminds me a lot of Václav Havel and Kundera saying that the key to living under tyranny is living "as if" the world was the way it should be

FRANCIS: yes

life is tyrannical unfortunately

CAIRO JOE: It always wins

FRANCIS: but her idea of happiness is very different than mine, hers is very intellectual, like a shape which I think is why she's so attracted to these architectural sounds, like Beethoven, or the Parthenon, which are all sort of colorless, like her work

like the ideal person would have no feeling or passion

CAIRO JOE: And yours?

CAIRO JOE: (haha- I know this is a big conversation)

FRANCIS: I believe in passion and feeling

there's this Simone Weil text on personality which is interesting

because she had this decreationist belief

that I feel is sort of akin to colorlessness

but I would like my work to sound more like Pachelbel's Canon than Beethoven- emotion and personality I believe, are at the crux of the mystery

and those are very densely colored things

but not personality like Oscar Wilde's kind of socially defined personality, which Weil talks about some

but a sort of ultimate personality, which is depersonal but also ultimately personal

CAIRO JOE: "emotion and personality I believe, are at the crux of the mystery and those are very densely colored things"

yeah

So, basically, if I understand you, there is a personality, almost apart from who you are, the consciousness inside the consciousness

FRANCIS: yes, like a whole, something bigger

CAIRO JOE: Can we know it? Or are we too Wilde and socialized to really grasp it?

FRANCIS: listening

to it

is like a material prayer

I believe

so, can you talk to God when you pray? or are you just listening to yourself speak

CAIRO JOE : You are creating a god from within your own speech
Which, ultimately, could be the idealized and ultimate You
FRANCIS: yes
CAIRO JOE: If we shift our capitalization to the corporeal.
FRANCIS: (?)
CAIRO JOE: Interesting
Boy, this makes the piece I'm writing on mobile presentation and real estate seem somehow even less interesting
But that may be where we differ
Or maybe not. I have to think it through
FRANCIS: which point
is the one
CAIRO JOE: Ha- I don't meant that you would find that more interesting I meant more socialization, experience, and personality.
I do believe in the "I", but think that might be as much as an artifice, just one that is more mysterious
FRANCIS: I think its an open ended question to some extent
FRANCIS: nice big talk for a friday
CAIRO JOE: That it is

FRANCIS: I furtively steal back time, clicking the yellow minimize and pulling up fresh .docs to scrawl off little poems and songs for friends. Occasionally I exchange snips of poetry and politics with a fellow writer over Gchat, but it does little for the soul except mitigate the sorrow of the incremental suicide we're engaged in. We spin small birds of spun-sugar, crafting for them elaborate feathered tufts and tiny hinged wings, but rather than fly into the world they melt on our tongues, dying in a shared moment of indulgence.

FRANCIS and CAIRO JOE lift the birds to fling them into the air, but the elaborate little sculptures crash to the ground and smash in a sticky mess.

part iv: SATIETY

FRANCIS (reading again, alone): Satiety is another discussion worth having. Freud posits kulture as an infrastructure for wealth generation, and seems unable to imagine a civilization that longs for a more substantive satiety than material wealth.

(looks up from book, glances around his environment). *Substance!* Potatoes! Mattresses! Hats! Something meaty for the main course! A substitute for substance, to satiate people enough to continue to function in their established niches in our wealth- generation machine!

One must mold themselves into a niche. *The Niche* is crucial- like populist movements, oligarchies, religious and political indoctrination, cultural archipelagos, subcultures, standardized testing, hashtags, the food pyramid, MFA programs, *squad goals*, health insurance, surnames and "likes"! Let's link up like little sausages and get organized here, people! What are we *about!* Turn out your toes, lace up your corsets, step into the corps!

FRANCIS: The Niche is like shoving a miracle under the plough-blade. Do not be fooled. Be a nicheless freak if you must, but protect The Miracle from the blade.

The CORPS DE POTATOES enters stage right. They lace each other's potato-sack corsets and trip over each other's feet. Dirt is caked in their hair, and they are sprouting eyes.

THE BLADE enters stage left. It charges directly through the CORPS DE POTATOES, leaving disembodied eyes quivering on the stage, and the CORPS DE POTATOES scatters in fright.

THE MIRACLE & THE MIRACLE'S PR AGENT enters stage right. THE MIRACLE's PR AGENT wears a purple tuxedo.

THE MIRACLE'S PR AGENT: The Miracle is a ticklish little shmitzy of a ditzzy, a slacker and a waxer that blooms like the moon and never dies. The Miracle is Nothingshaped and overflows.

(the MIRACLE curtsies).

The Niches are, on the other hand, at the whim of whoever's Almighty-Hand-that-Does both Miracles and Nitches, often shaped like the absolute antithesis of the spirit that occupies them- and for cramming one's own spiritual substance into this Jell-O mold, this pasta churn of an economic machine, the almighty reward? Instant brownies, a particle-board living room set, 140 bpm and a 30 pack on Fridays, a diesel engine, direct deposit, auto-bill-pay, (!) machine-cut diamonds... it's all your's. you. your's. it's you! *YOU!*

(the MIRACLE'S PR AGENT gestures towards the well-organized microcosm of Francis' apartment, complete with coffee maker and fan).

THE SINGER appears from the corps, and picks up where the MIRACLE'S PR AGENT trailed off- screeching out a melodramatic aria that culminates in her swollen vocal cords give way to a thirsty croak. HENRY gives one last, solid holler from behind the WINDOW, weak, in dire need of public attention, before he collapses, as the five-o-clock ballet continues to twirl past)-

KAFKA enters stage right: *the singer clutches desperately at an impossibly high realm of public delight, a degree of delight that the public seems painfully uninterested in accessing- but if it were within her power to adjust she would set aim higher still)-*

SINGER: *(smashes whiskey bottle on sidewalk) (screams profanities in a shower of tears)-*

part iv: POTATOWHIP

(dark stage).

FRANCIS lies curled up in a single spotlight.

MAN WITH POTATOWHIP enters stage right. He whips her with the potatowhip, and she just takes it. She is too tired to scream. She is too tired to protest.

Stage is littered with smashed potatoes.

MAN WITH POTATOWHIP opens his COAT FULL OF MONEY, and throws some dollar bills at her.

(exit MAN WITH POTATOWHIP).

part v: FARADAY'S CAGE

FRANCIS: The bay window is a Faraday's cage in the midst of an orgasmic electrical field. It affords isolation, anonymity. The energy of the street, tightly constrained behind the glass pane, can trace it's fingernails along my neck, rasp out hoarse little flirtations and curses, and never lay so much as a finger to my skin.

(MEMBER OF THE CORPS utters a variety of crude catcalls in passing, clawing at Francis' coat as Francis twists away).

FRANCIS: Good god, we are in public.

FRANCIS: I want a vivisection. I want what I'm doing, here, now, to mean something. *Is there some telic function in poetry? Is every heaven-and-hell tale an apologue?* It's true that there's beauty here- vast, unspeakably sacred grandeur in everything I see- even at *this moment*- from the art-deco skyline, to the internal combustion engine, to the memory of a ballet- but I don't find comprehensive meaning in beauty right now. *I want a fucking answer.*

FRANCIS flicks on the stereo, and the ethereal piping of Maria Callas floats through the speakers of the Zenith Allegro (author's note: it is crucial that this stereo be played by an actual Zenith Allegro, which is local to Chicago and aesthetically crucial to the set of the play).

FRANCIS: The ethereal pipings of Maria Callas interlace with the sound of some sadistically heavy-handed 120bpm dance track from "Black Snake's" sports bar downstairs, and, when placed side by side, each sound seems equally as random a stab at meaning, at substance, at whatever the hell is bringing satiety to people, and this sonic soup seems entirely undifferentiated from the meaningless wails that have just trailed off in the street below.

FRANCIS, in melodramatic fashion, holds up a mirror to examine himself.

FRANCIS: The *whacher* at the window... within the span of a few minutes of trying to vivisect my reality through writing, my mind has been forced to set aside the task in favor of mitigating the immediate discomfort I feel from my rattling floors and windows. *Holy cannoli.* Every weekend I call the police, the clerk says "you live above a bar." I call the police a second time, and the next clerk assures me he is sending someone to help.

FRANCIS dials the police again, and reports a noise complaint.

FRANCIS: I immediately regret the call and fear the sudden apparition of police in my apartment- I feel they will find something in my offbeat manner objectionable, my unkempt braids matting up in the back, my wooly Nordic beanie from my boyfriend, my old flannel shirt-

FRANCIS picks up the shirt, and breathes deeply into it, becoming simultaneously very depressed and very sentimental.

FRANCIS' Soliloquy on The Shirt:

This was brought with me from overseas. Its fibers had breathed in every kind of smoke and never exhaled- it had just grown rich and juicy with the smells of California forests and cafe patios, of the smoke of feminist bonfires at the co-op, of Topanga campgrounds, of the exhalations of Pilsen poets, back-porch acoustic jams in Nor Cal, haze under hot neon as LA gallery openings dissolve into the dusk, of tokes in bed and incense sticks unfurling, hotel parties, motel parties, desert parties, beach parties, boardwalks, love, hate, political & moral passions, past lives, lost loves, the shirt is a living Kodak Carousel of friendships, memory, fading dreams- and now I am utterly and completely alone.

I am so hungry. I am so cold. And I am so. alone.

FRANCIS flings the shirt into the corner and immediately stops acting sentimental. It's obvious that she can shove all her emotions in the corner when necessary, and now she dons a mask of invulnerability to continue living and caring for herself, and to not cry while delivering her monologue.

FRANCIS: *I digress!*

FRANCIS: The point is, art-workers and poets have a tendency to wander the earth shrouded in hazy flannels and dragging suitcases of film and scribbles, taking whatever job society offers to pay the bills. The lack of a career trajectory seems to cast an air of suspiciousness to our persons. Many of us don't even know our credit score. And now (gestures toward desk), I'm writing drug blogs to pay the bills on this house so I can lead a good life in solitude. Now, for trying to improve the quality of life on my block by filing a noise complaint, I'm wracked with anxiety about trying to explain my career and 'who I am' to The Man with a Badge.

For the police, evil is a lifestyle choice, not a moral question. It is an aesthetic of participation. It is not having a credit score. Even opera seems transgressive when I imagine the police catching me in the act of listening to it, whereas enjoying a brew at Black Snake's seems wholesomely in line with Our Values. I think of the recent shooting that took out the front windows of our building, and I imagine being gunned down by some die-hard Black Snake's enthusiast, in violent retribution for my complaints. They would surely know it's me that has repeatedly written plaintive Yelp reviews about the volume level and telephoned the authorities- no one but me in the building would choose the name Laurie Finnegan for her phony Yelp account- Laurie Finnegan even sounds false, it is the very sonic iteration of falsehood.

I've envisioned the physical sensation of the gunning-down. The bullets enter my breastplate and I leave one final instance of expression in the wake of my body: a razor-studded glare, that fully acknowledges the extent of the evil that has just been done, the snowy little powder-puff of an injustice to cap a mountain of injustices. A frank look of comprehensive, mutual understanding between myself and the imagined assailant, as I crumple, lifeless.

I can only presume that my mind chooses to mentally rehearse this absolute horror so that, should the moment come, I shouldn't waste my final opportunity to express both universal scorn and *unique, individual pain* at the discomfort I've repeatedly tolerated just to exist, to tromp my dirty soles around for a few years and leave tracks all over our sweet Gaia. If our dreams are truly a form of wish fulfillment, please, just let me die.

(dream sequence plays out on video: a man on the street fires a gun through Francis' heart. As Francis crumples, he gives his assailant the finger as he dies on the sidewalk. (zoom in on Francis' eyeball; Francis' eyeball is *super-scowling*). (author's note: the tragic meaningless of Francis' death is offset by the comedic element of the zoom on Francis' scowling eyeball).

part vi: HENRY

Exterior, evening. HENRY pulls the blanket off of his own shoulders and places it around Francis on the sidewalk. Henry kisses Francis on the forehead, and wipes the sweat from his face. Henry reads poetry and letters to Francis, while Francis sleeps.

HENRY: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...*

HENRY reads letter from CAIRO JOE: *the key to living under tyranny is living "as if" the world was the way it should be. Keep your chin up, kid. I believe in you. We should've patented our idea for the underwater musical. We'd be chillin.*

HENRY reads letter from FRANCIS' BOYFRIEND LIAM: *Hey sweetheart. Thanks for explaining yourself to me- let's continue our friendship, alright? I'm here for you, however you need me to be. You're a really special person, and it means a lot to me to have you in my life.*

You need to be true to yourself because life just gets more complicated and outside forces can start to make it difficult to devote yourself to personal growth. Let's face it, artists are a different breed, albeit a superior one in my humble opinion!

You have touched me deeply and deserve whatever it is you want out of life and love.

Kind regards

Liam

HENRY reads FRANCIS letter from THE MIRACLE: *sometimes a Niche is just not right, and you need to keep looking. Don't give up!*

A CHILD FROM THE CORPS DE SLOWLY BLOOMING FLOWERS dances across the stage and places a small peony in Francis' hands, a reminder that poetry will always be.

HENRY reads FRANCIS letter from FRANCIS' BROTHER: *Hey, want to move to California? I'll come get you.*

FRANCIS wakes up, and walks away to begin another new life.

FRANCIS kisses HENRY on the forehead and gives the blanket back. She gives HENRY everything except the clothes on her back, her poetry, and her art, which she carries with her as he hits the road again, still unsure of what he was doing here in the first place.

She breathes deeply, and stretches her arms out as she walks away. She is pensive, meditative, and fingers the edge of the orchid's wilted leaves:

FRANCIS:

Love's Love

God's own blood decant in shimmering helixes.
misty and spaceless, aether of feeling

breathing, freely through croci, amarylis, slim blades.
dog's mercury exhales.

guileless; hollow as avian bones.
tiny carpals, a lens for air.

irises dilate and the aether- heart's own
purest sense is flown, weightless.

spaceless: beyond
curve, line, and body.

perfectly squandered, it fizzles. wild spiels,
an ultra-second of being breathing.

the stem wilts, keeling-
a hulking chrysalis discarded.

the kiss is flown.