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The Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner: A Creative Thesis Based on a True Narrative
of the Forgotten American War of Racist Imperialism

By

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
for the Requirements of the
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The Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner: A Creative Thesis Based on a True Narrative of the Forgotten American War of Racist Imperialism

The Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner is an original speculative novel, born from a communal vision from those who suffered discrimination. Similar to most speculative fiction, *The Dreams of Metanoia* does not predict the future. Instead, it explores two questions: What if segregation laws were enacted in today's America, where races protest together against social injustices, where individuals adopt and marry outside their race, and how would these individuals react? At *The Dreams of Metanoia's* most nascent state, one can trace its conception and theme to a true story that occurred in twentieth-century Clover, Virginia, where a black American envisioned a walking monstrosity. His name was Hector Henry, cordially known as Cootie. In Rebecca Skloot's nonfiction piece, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Cootie was Henrietta's cousin. Skloot unveiled the inimical tragedies of scientific racism that the Lacks family endured during the Jim Crow era. However, it is within Cootie's vision where another narrative lays dormant, hidden behind Filipino folktales and war that influence the setting of *The Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner*.

The Dreams of Metanoia has a semi-realistic setting—occurring on a segregated fictional island, known as Caelum, in the Philippines. Similar to Jim Crow's motifs in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, the island is segregated between whites and blacks by a ruling white extremist group. Caelum is a utopia for whites who are obedient to the segregation laws, but it is a dystopian for blacks and their supporters. The story also shares similar horrific events that occurred in the Crownsville Hospital, a place where blacks were subjected to neurological experiments (Skloot 268-279). However, it is essential to note that the overall mindset regarding the Jim Crow-like laws within Caelum is different from the twentieth century's one. It is instead

a modernization of how Jim Crow would be interpreted by today's America, where races openly protest together against racial injustices.

In addition to the racist themes explored in Skloot's book, Hector Henry's mystical vision is a driving force of *Dreams of Metanoia's* drama and setting. Despite the story's realistic approach, there is a subtle blending of magical and surrealistic elements, where the uncanny is normalized and not questioned. Hector's vision is more than what it seems, for it holds forgotten histories of inimical wars and slave-related tragedies. *The Dreams of Metanoia* utilizes Hector's vision and forms monstrosities of its own, which are simply referred to as "beasts" in the story. The Beasts of Metanoia are not harmful unless harmed; it has one specific function: to exist as the embodiment of black American's tribulations throughout history. With Hector's vision and the racist events throughout America's history, *The Dreams of Metanoia* may be depicted as a speculative piece of fiction with surrealistic and magical elements—derived from true history.

As mentioned, the Beasts of Metanoia are influenced by Hector's vision; however, his vision itself is tied to stories about racism in Filipino folktales. A section in Skloot's *Immortal Life*, which had a discernable tone from the rest of the book, was noticeable and alarming yet left uninvestigated by Skloot. It is here Hector told her about the spirits in Lacks Town that caused diseases and wandered aimlessly in Lacks Town:

Then, he told me about spirits in Lacks Town that sometimes-visited people's houses and caused disease. He said he'd seen a man spirit in his house, sometimes leaning against the wall by his woodstove, other times by the bed. But the most dangerous spirit, he told me, was the several-ton headless hog he saw roaming Lacks Town years ago with no tail. Links of broken chains dangled from its bloodstained neck, dragging along dirt roads and clanking as it walked.

‘I saw that thing crossin the road to the family cemetery,’ Cootie told me. ‘That spirit stood right there in the road, its chain swingin and swayin in the breeze.’ Cootie said it looked at him and stomped its foot, kicking red dust all around its body, getting ready to charge. Just then, a car came barreling down the road with only one headlight.

‘The car came along, shined a light right on it. I swear it was a hog,’ Cootie said. Then the spirit vanished. ‘I can still hear that chain dragging.’ Cootie figured that car saved him from getting some new disease. (Skloot 82)

One can assume Hector’s vision was random and a result of psychological stress caused by living under Jim Crow Laws. However, the vision’s elements were too meaningful and specific for it to be random. First, he depicted the headless hog to have links of broken chains around its bloodstained neck. Then, he mentioned encountering it at his family’s graveyard, most likely graves of former slaves. Together, these two descriptions form African bondage themes of oppression, restraint, and humiliation. Moreover, it is unlikely Hector could have read about something similar in a book, newspaper, etc., due to his illiteracy (Skloot 81). If this vision is indeed not arbitrary, he indeed must have heard it orally from someone; in fact, it may correlate with Filipino folktales about black Americans in the Philippine-American War.

In Dean Fansler’s *Filipino Popular Tales* (1908-1914), several tales correlate with Cootie’s vision and involve narratives regarding racism. However, the closest tale that matches Cootie’s description is “Suac and His Adventures.” The short tale originated in the villages of Arayat in the Pampanga province, southwest of Luzon and Quezon City. In the tale, three hunters venture up a mountain and catch two hogs and a deer. Each time they cooked and were about ready to eat, “a very large black man with a beard” known as Pugot swooped down from a tree to steal their food. However, on Pugot’s final attempt, one of the hunters knocked him into a fire,

burning his beard, and noted it became kinky (Fansler 29-31). Anthropologist, Maximo Ramos, notes even more insight regarding the Pugot in his *The Creatures of Philippine Lower*

Mythology:

The term pugot either denotes either 'the black one,' 'the decapitated one,' or one with hands cut off,' and the creature is widely known by that name in Northern and Central Luzon, though less as a headless being than as 'a black being that can assume varying sizes... "terrifying but not particularly harmful."

The Pugot seems somewhat differ from the kapre in its ability to assume a variety of shapes—human or animal, such as dogs and hogs.... (qtd. Ramos 26)

Among the hog and racial-related elements within Cootie's vision and the "Suac and His Adventures" and Ramos' text, there seems to be a connection to African descent activity in the Philippines.

In the Philippine-American war (1899-1902), a war nearly forgotten in American history, black American soldiers found themselves in the Philippines for the first time. It was a tragic war of racism and white American imperialism. America attempted to acquire the Philippines after defeating the Spanish in Cuba and enacting the Treaty of Paris in 1898. Six thousand black soldiers were organized in segregated squads known as the Buffalo soldiers as an auxiliary force to fight Filipino revolutionaries, who were merely fighting for their independence after nearly four centuries of Spaniard imperialism. Among the thousands of black soldiers sent to the Philippines, the two most notable ones were John Calloway and David Fagen.

The lead black protagonist in *Dreams of Metanoia*, Markus, is based on John Calloway's personality and beliefs. Born in Bristol, Tennessee, Calloway was the ideal black soldier in the Jim Crow era. He was literate and trusted by his white superiors (Morey 41-42). Similar to

Calloway, Markus' approach to racism and discrimination is influenced by the renowned black American educator, Booker T. Washington. All three of these individuals believed education, self-improvement, and avoiding confrontation was the appropriate manner to ameliorate society's perception of black Americans (Morey 42). Moreover, mirroring the Jim Crow era, nearly all blacks cannot read in the *Dreams of Metanoia* due to Caelum's prohibition on education in the segregated blacks' town. Markus' ambition in *Dreams of Metanoia* is the same as Booker T. Washington's: to educate the blacks so they can rise in society.

Markus and Calloway were a part of a military organization that suppresses black individuality. In the *Dreams of Metanoia*, Markus is eventually incarcerated for teaching blacks how to read and write. The Capital—the reigning government of Caelum—presents him with a choice to either die a prisoner or become their ambassador. It is here he becomes even more similar to John Calloway by serving an organization that disdains him. Due to Markus and Calloway's passive philosophical nature about racism and education, they both advanced from low ranks to a high ranking major (Russell 215). However, such admirable notions in the Jim Crow era were fragile for blacks, and the same is true in Caelum.

Another influence for Markus is David Fagen, the black American Renegade in the Philippine-American war. Fagen was quite the opposite of John Calloway's temperament, academic abilities, and philosophical approach to racism and discrimination. He was born in Tampa, Florida, where he joined the Buffalo soldiers. Fagen was free-spirited but troublesome in the eyes of his white and black superiors. Eventually, similar to Fagen and other black educators, Markus' ideology that education will surmount discrimination is blown asunder due to the irreconcilable onslaught of racism. From this point, Markus changes his stance from passive to reactive.

There is one notion that Fagen, Calloway, and Markus share throughout their lives: They wanted to improve black lives. “If they could fight with courage and skill and, if it came to it, lay down their lives for their country, they could gain the respect of whites and improve a lot of blacks back home” (Morey 26). Though blacks did enjoy a brief period of renown after the Buffalo soldiers’ feats in the Cuban war (Robinson and Schubert 70), it was perhaps Theodore Roosevelt’s words in his statement that demolished their renown, making them seem meek and cowardly:

None of the white regulars or Rough Riders showed the slightest sign of weakening; but the strain the colored infantrymen (who had none of their officers) began to get a little uneasy and to drift to the rear... This I could not allow... so I drew my revolver... and called out to them... that I should shoot the first man who, on any pretense whatever, went to the rear... and this was the end of the trouble. (qtd. Morey 74)

Roosevelt’s words were enough to disdain everything the black soldiers had sacrificed during the Cuban war. In *Dreams of Metanoia*, a similar fate falls upon Markus. After faithfully serving the Capital for years, he is eventually pushed to do the unthinkable. His allegiance to his race was tested against the Capital’s. Markus had to make a choice to either betray his upbringing as a black individual or continue to serve the Capital in hopes they will allow education to flourish in the blacks’ town. Similar words from Paul Lawrence Dunbar, a black poet during the Jim Crow era, can also be applied to Markus: “... You may be heroes in war, but you must be craven in peace” (qtd. Gatewood 110). Overall, like the Buffalo soldiers who fought in Cuba, Markus’ servitude to gain the Capital’s acceptance was for naught.

Not too long after the Cuban war, Buffalo soldiers saw another chance at gaining recognition in the Philippine-American war (1899-1902); however, upon arrival, some Buffalo

soldiers found a common strife with the enemy: the white man's prejudice. For instance, during wartime, white soldiers used the same offense terminology that dehumanized blacks, such as "savage" and "nigger" to degrade the Filipino people (Kramer 200-203). In fact, a poem by Rudyard Kipling called "The White Man's Burden" was published in 1899, urging for the United States to reclaim and civilize the lost land God gave to them (Hoffman 132). This form of racist rhetoric was similar to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and twentieth-century racism in the United States. Despite their physical and cultural differences, Buffalo soldiers and Filipino revolutionaries found a commonality in their suffering.

Through newspaper articles from the United States, Filipino soldiers learned about the racism blacks were enduring in 20th century America. They used the information to their advantage. Buffalo soldiers found a letter written in broken English on a tree addressed to "colored soldiers" during a patrol:

It is without honor that you are spilling your costly blood. Your masters have thrown you into the most iniquitous fight with double purpose—to make you the instrument of their ambition and also your hard work will soon make the extinction of your race. Your friends, the Filipinos, give you this good warning. You must consider your situation and your history, and take charge that the blood... of Sam Hose proclaims vengeance. (qtd. Gatewood 287)

The Filipino forces researched historical and recent black injustices to compose this persuasive letter. For instance, they knew about black slavery and the infamous hanging and burning of Sam Hose, which infuriated black Americans. They also learned about the Buffalo soldiers' ambition to gain reverence in their country by severing in wars. Despite its attempt to emotionally persuade Buffalo soldiers into their ranks, only a dozen became turncoats (Gatewood 287). The

most renowned turncoat among them was David Fagen, the jovial, rebellious Buffalo Soldier mentioned previously.

Even though John Calloway did not join the revolutionaries with Fagen, both still found the commonality of suffering between them and the Filipino people. Calloway, remaining as loyal as possible to America, wrote letters to the Filipino people, expressing his sympathies:

After my last conference with you and your father, I am constantly haunted by the feeling of what wrong morally we Americans are in the present affair with you. What a wrong to crush every hope and opportunity of a youth of a race of which, you, your brothers... form such brilliant examples. Would to God it lay in my power to rectify the committed error and compensate the Filipino people for the wrong done! But what power have I? If I could muster every youth of the race under my hand, I would say to them be not discouraged. The day will come when you will be accorded your rights. The moral sensibilities of all America are not yet dead; there still smolders in the bosom of the country a spark of righteousness that will yet kindle into flame that will awaken the country to its senses, and then! What you young men must do is Educate, Educate, Educate! (qtd Russell 209)

As noted, Calloway believes in Booker T. Washington's ideology that education will surmount discrimination. In this letter addressed to the opposing faction, Calloway saw the connection between him and those who suffer racism. On the other hand, Fagen took an active approach, becoming a general for the Filipino revolutionaries. America viewed him as a renegade, a target. As a reward for finding the commonality between them and the opposing faction was persecution.

By the end of the war, Calloway and Fagen became traitors to America for finding the commonality between them and the enemy. Even though Calloway's letters did not suggest any inkling of treachery, he was arrested without a proper hearing (Russell 210). Calloway's unwavering loyalty to a Jim Crow-era military was all for naught. As for Fagen, a bounty was placed on his head. Eventually, a Filipino bounty hunter bought American troops his head, along with a West Point ring Fagen stole from a former white officer. However, it is still highly debated whether the head was actually Fagen's. Some buffalo soldiers who served with him noted that it was not him (Robinson and Schubert 80-81). Also, Filipino individuals claimed Fagen was still alive and had married a Filipino woman (Hoffman 211- 213). Though Fagen and Calloway had different approaches for expressing racial injustices—one more radical than the other—both became traitors of Jim Crow America.

Overall, the Philippine-American War was devastating for American and Filipino troops; however, American forces dominated to an inhuman level due to superior technology and training. Americans used a tactic known as General Order 100 that prohibited prisoners of war. Any captured revolutionary was executed, and any villages caught aiding them were destroyed (Russell 204). Moreover, Americans established garrisons, enforced curfews, and fired at Filipinos accused of assisting the imperial resistance. The unlawful accusations and treatment that occurred harken back to what the Buffalo soldiers endured in America. The imperialistic bloodshed became so immense some American soldiers began to question their morality. Captain Jacob Kreps noted his feelings toward the war while staring at a dead comrade: "What good is an honor now? His body lies on the island of Luzon— sacrificed to a policy not be criticized by the soldier, but which has as its objective the subjugation of a people fighting for their liberty" (qtd

Morey 79). By the end of the war, 4,200 American and 20,000 Filipino combatants died.

However, the biggest tragedy was the Filipino civilians' death count of 200,000 (Milestones).

The Philippine-American war was indeed horrific, but something beautiful was born within it— a commonality between enemies which surmounted culture and language barriers between black Americans and Filipinos. They found common ground within their tragedies of racism and were able to sympathize with one another. As proven in the war, surface-level qualities, such as skin color, do not matter when one's freedom is in jeopardy. The Buffalo and Filipino soldiers subconsciously had the same thoughts, for they both had lost freedom in the past—blacks to white Americans and Filipinos to Spaniards. By studying the emotions within The commonality of the Philippine war, it can be light to modern racism and injustice. If two races who never meet each other, speak completely different languages, and were enemies can unite in a matter of months, why is there still racism and prejudice in modern America? Why is it still a topic of tension even though many Americans endure similar woes every day? It is an endless question that spirals around illogical systematic reasoning.

The racist reasoning behind the Philippine-American war has similarities to modern-day white extremist groups, such as Christian Identity. These individuals mirror the inimical rhetoric used against blacks and Filipinos. They believe in the two seed ideology: All white individuals are the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, while Jews were born from Eve having intercourse with a snake (Satan); thus, according to their ideology, white individuals are the Israelites, God's chosen people. All other races are deemed as savages, "talking animals," or even "subhuman." (qtd. Tanya 610-611). These dangerous ideologies of "who is holy" cause division, prejudice, and even atrocities similar to the Philippine-American war and slavery.

The Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner involves modern-day black and white race relations by setting the story in the Philippines—the birthplace of common suffering between enemies. *The Dreams of Metanoia* is not a romanticized or recreation of the war; instead, it is a story that tries to capture the hidden essences of joint suffering within the Philippine-American war, then repurpose it for modern-day issues of black and white American racism and discrimination. Thus, history is fantastically modified to where some ex-buffalo and white soldiers decided to defect from the United States, starting their own country in one of the thousands of islands in the Philippines after the war ended. Instead of the conflict being between Americans and Filipinos, it is a discussion about racism among the blacks and whites who live on the island.

Furthermore, the concept of an “island” has been a popular way of commenting on socio-political matters, for example, Goldings’ *Lord of the Flies* and Huxley’s *Island*. The island in *Dreams of Metanoia*, Caelum, is segregated between three groups: the ruling white Israelites, the blacks, and whites who support blacks, dubbed as Fallen Israelites. Staying true to the anxieties presented in racist rhetoric, such as the *Turner Diaries* and *Christian Identity*, the white Israelites does not want blacks and whites to find their commonality in humanity as blacks and Filipinos did once before. Using perverted religion, myths, and laws of segregation and education, Israelites isolate them. Thus, these individuals are stuck within their racial group, never finding their commonality like the Filipinos and black Americans during the Philippine-American war.

The past and present tense shifting engine between chapters in *Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner* mimics the ouroboros. The ouroboros is an ancient symbol of a dragon or serpent eating its tail. It represents the infinite cycle of birth and destruction.

The engine was highly warranted for the main character's journey to find a commonality with the enemy. In the past tense, Markus is an illegal educator for blacks who cannot read, while in the present, he is the white Israelites first ambassador between them and the blacks. His duty as an ambassador is simple but becomes morally vexing throughout the narrative. The Israelites gradually increase their demands from Markus' negotiations with the blacks, which eventually becomes inhuman and immoral. Similar to Calloway, Markus remains loyal to his white superiors until he breaks and loses everything, including the trust of his race and the Israelites. Like the ouroboros shape, throughout the narrative, Markus is "eating" his past (tail) to find a commonality among whites and blacks until he has nothing left (destruction)—a common theme for Buffalo soldiers in the Cuban and Philippine-American war.

My novel, *Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner*, gathers its seeds from Hector Henry's vision but flourishes within the Philippine-American war. Hector's vision guided me to the forgotten and hidden war in the Philippines, which I would not have known about otherwise. It is a shame that such a war is shrouded from American history, perhaps due to pride or discomfort. It is a shame that individuals cannot unravel its horrors and find the beauty within the chaos inside a classroom. It is a shame because individuals cannot learn how joint human suffering can unite individuals across the spectrum of color. Too often, we learn about historical sorrows from a myopic perspective, not celebrating the beautiful outliers within the chaos, whose voice drowned among the inimical majority.

The first section in my novel, "Year 120," places the readers directly in Markus' world as an illegal reading and writing teacher. Markus teaches blacks of various ages in the town's shopkeeper's cellar. While all his students normally leave before dark, Samuel, the youngest, tends to stay for extra tutoring until night without his family's permission. As his teacher,

Markus feels as though it is his responsibility to escort Samuel home safely night after night; however, upon leaving the shop in this section, they notice the Capital's searchlight, panning outside as if searching for someone. With the fear of being spotted by the searchlight, Markus and Samuel use weeds and abandon houses as cover until they arrive home.

As for the section "Genesis, Year 123," three years have passed since the first section and the tense has shifted to the present. Markus was eventually incarcerated for teaching blacks how to read and write illegally. He only dwelled a few hours in the Capital's prison before being sent to the Cathedral, where he remained until Judgment Day. Although Markus broke the law, he was not the one judged. It was a Fallen Israelite. He committed the worst crime in *Dreams of Metanoia*: miscegenation. The Capital gathers their folk to witness the offender's journey to Mountain of Zion, where God will judge him. After God's judgment, the Capital rejoices and holds a sermon, a sermon that reminded the white Israelites that miscegenation causes sinful diseases.

The Dreams of Metanoia is not a recreation of the Philippine-American war, nor is it a story that harps and rubs old wounds of racism without reason. It is a story that reflects modern-day American racist extremist groups, such as Christian Identity while noting that those individuals are as human as everyone else. There is a quote by Sui Ishida, a Japanese mangaka, that embodies the common theme of suffering all races endure: "If, let's say, you were to write a story with me as the main character, it would certainly be a tragedy. No. Everyone's the same, in fact. He's the main character of his novel, and she's the main character of her movie. All those that walk this earth are the main characters of their own tragedies" (Ishida 239-259). *The Dreams of Metanoia: The Advent Foreigner* is a story that searches for common ground among our shared tragedies of being human.

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Year 120

Samuel tugged on the hole in my shirt, nearly ripping it.

The searchlight swooshed and shined through the glass. We were hiding under the counter with the shopkeeper, Jerry. We waited for the definitive moment to slip through the door and weave in and out around the shanties. It was dark. No one could see each other. We communicated with touches on the shoulder or tugs by the shirt. Talking was too risky in case a vanguard was wandering the dirt road.

All my students had left before nightfall, except for Samuel, my youngest and most optimistic learner. He was the type of student to stay for tutoring well after normal hours, asking the same question but in a roundabout manner. At times, I was not sure if he was testing my knowledge on the fundamentals of reading and writing or his.

The light swooshed across the glass again.

This time it bounced off something, briefly exposing us. The shopkeeper had his finger pressed tight against his dark lips while his eyes stretched wider than an owl. As for Samuel, the child was trembling against my leg. I did the only thing I knew to do as his teacher: I squeezed his hands, letting him know he wasn't alone. But I am no parent, nor would I ever want to be one. But as his teacher, I felt the reasonability to escort him home safely.

We were safe as long as we stayed inside, even if a Capital vanguard came. But if we were caught in the night, we would become infected by the beast's spoor that drift from the nearby shore to our homes, according to the vanguard. Whether that was true, I do not know. But

there was indeed an illness going around. Anyone who was caught roaming the dirt roads at night was automatically assumed a diseased rabid animal and was dealt like one by the vanguard.

It was unusual for the searchlight to be this active—especially on sabbath nights when the Capital fills their bellies and sleeps until morning.

They must have been searching for someone or perhaps the beast from the sea? No, that couldn't have been it; it was not supposed to be a full moon that night, which is the only time it swims from the ocean's nadir to our sandy shores. And it was not supposed to go beyond the sand from what I've heard from fellow black folk who claimed to have seen it before.

They were no longer with us. They all became diseased and needed treatment from the Capital after witnessing the entity.

The light swooshed across the glass once again.

It must've been searching for someone. But who?

The light bounced off Jerry's jars on the wooden shelf and exposed us. Samuel tugged my shirt, ready to move. Jerry placed his hand on my shoulder, saying, "good night."

I nodded and grabbed his shoulder, thanking him once again for letting me use his cellar to teach the blacks in our town how to read and write.

"See you next Sunday," Samuel whispered to him.

I imagined Jerry's dimples and his cheeks brushing the frame of his glasses. He rubbed Samuel's back as if trying to warm his hand. He then gave him one solid pat.

I grabbed Samuel's hand. We both looked at each other, knowing that there could be vanguards just waiting around the corner. A final woosh of light slid across the glass. Samuel

and I crept around the counter and darted out the door onto the dirt road, knocking the welcoming bell off its string. It hit the ground without a jingle, for It's been broken for years.

We looped behind the shop and dived into the bushes and weeds. The shop covered us from the searchlight, but I wanted to make sure no vanguards were secretly patrolling. Only the humming of crickets and the faint smell of chicken and beef loomed the air. I asked Samuel if he could smell it. He nodded. Then, the searchlight started roaming on the whites' side of town.

It was an unusual night. Something had happened.

Someone must've crossed the segregation line, I thought.

I rolled back onto my feet and pulled Samuel up with me. Ahead of us was a straight path of knee-high weeds behind a row of houses—only a few feet apart from one another. They extend as far as eyes can see before dipping off into a swirling haze of darkness. The waxing moon lit a dim path along the weeds for us to follow.

“Ready to go home?”

“Just one moment, please.”

He crept into a nearby bush. The sound of a zipper unzipping echoed in the night. Then a continuing stream of wisping water sounds thudded onto the grass. This was normal for Samuel. He always needed to pee when he became nervous. Even when I call on him in class, he needs to relieve himself after answering a question. The poor child probably had a small stream running down well before we had left the shop. I couldn't imagine what this was doing to him. Yet he continued to march on, soldier-like in his own right for his education every Sunday.

Another zip echoed as bushes rustled from behind me. Samuel tugged on my shirt.

“I’m ready.”

We waded through the weeds. As we progressed, they became taller and taller. We were beginning to pass by homes no one lived in anymore. They were abandoned for one of two reasons: the living conditions were too ravaged, or the folk became ill and needed treatment from the Capital. No one knew if or when they’ll return, but typically the illness overtakes, and the vanguard announces their death to the family—if they had any.

The weeds soon became too high for Samuel to walk through. I hunched down, and he climbed onto my back. His wrists locked around my throat, choking me from time to time. He was anxious. Sweat rolled down his jaw onto my shoulders as we passed numerous forlorn homes. Some houses roofs were collapsed, leaving wooden beams protruding into the sky; some were riddled with fine holes where mice stay; others were completely torn into as if a starved beast charged through it.

The black elders of our shanties would conjure up ghost stories about a headless vanguard who would kidnap black children. It was a mere tale to keep them from playing near these abandon homes. There was no telling when a one could cave in or what nocturnal creatures lie within them. The story used to frighten me when I was a child, but I was always attracted to the taboo nature. It was as if the area pulsated with an aura of milk after rainy days.

Along the moonlit path of weeds, Samuel and I came to a home the size of a barn that stood inside the entrance of the woods. It was not a home in the traditional sense; rather, it was a place where strangers could commune and call home. Throughout the week, the town used to collectively fish and gather crops grown near the woods for the fish fry on Sunday evenings. Everyone lived for that day. I could still smell the salmon and taste its smooth flaking meat. I

could even hear the flirty banter between men and women while children played outside. These were all now memories. Sometimes it felt as if it never happened. A tree from a storm one night fell through the roof and over time, roots from a nearby tree's ruined our home's foundation. Eventually, rain and humidity weakened the floors and walls, bringing along black mold. Now, the only person who can truly call this home is the headless vanguard.

Samuel will never know how important this place was to our culture, for he was not born before it fell apart. He only gawked at the place in chills because the child only knew about the fictional headless vanguard who lived in there now.

Samuel's grip around my neck loosened.

"Can we keep going? This place is scaring me."

"Absolutely."

I did not even realize my feet stopped moving. I was ensnared by this place and the memories within it more so than usual. Perhaps I was subconsciously missing my childhood friend, Blake and all the foolish times he tried to amuse girls by blowing hot air about how he's been to the Capital and traveled to the mountains that surround our town. They only giggled at him while eating their dinner. He'd then mention he fought a beast, but this was the wrong move. Those who even had seen the beast were diseased. The girls would pick up their food and flee without saying a word in fear of becoming ill. Blake probably said it on purpose. He wanted to be taken seriously, but he was the unspoken clown in our town.

Samuel and I continued wading through the weeds. We finally came to a large gap between two houses, with a dirt road lying in the center. It extended from a clearing in the town's center to the woods. Two orange lights hummed on the road. I reared my head around a house.

The light was from the white Israelite's Capital on the far hill in the west. Ramparts enclosed the it, with torches lighting its catwalk. There were no guards on them. From within the Capital's walls, cathedrals and cottages peaked slightly over the ramparts with kindles glistening in their windows. But the tallest building was in its center: the old Pope's Cathedral, towering over everything and seemingly ripping into navy clouds. On the top floor, there was a terrace with an enormous mahogany double door with two torches flickering on each side in its emerald windows. There was nothing so lavished as that down here in our lower lands—especially on our side of town.

Suddenly. The doors opened. A figure strutted out to the terrace and rested his elbows on the rails. The smell of baked chicken, roast beef with red-eyed gravy trailed behind him and then flew out into the open night.

My mouth watered.

Samuel's belly grumbled.

The figure on the terrace was alone. They looked down to our lower lands. I felt as though they were spectating me, studying my movements, But I knew they could not see me down here among the dirt and darkness. If they could, the vanguards would have been called and told that there was an outbreak.

The figure looked curious, though I cannot see their eyes— let alone their face. But something about the posture. It reminded me of a wooden mannequin contemplating some destiny given to them by the invisible puppeteers who strings along the clouds. The figure, like I, was playing a role in this world, but there is a clear difference between us: Fate dealt me the hand of being a darker skin tone with the worthless joker stapled to it, whereas the figure held a

hand of aces with its white hands. But the key to thriving in this world is not only about the hand one is given in life; sometimes, it is one's ability to bluff until their adversary folds.

I was used to bluffing, going against the odds; in fact, I almost felt sorry for the stranger, but I held a slight disdain for the Capital and their segregation and education laws.

However, not all whites had the luxurious hand of aces. Several of them live in the lower lands like us. There was even a time we used to fellowship together, fourteen years ago. On the other side of town, where the watchman normally shines the searchlight, is The Line— a demarcation zone that divides whites, blacks, and the Capital's white Israelites, created by the Capital. We were always supposed to be segregated, but blacks and lower-lander whites broke their law frequently. The punishment for getting caught used to be a mere slap on the wrist or getting tied to a pole somewhere in the woods for a few days.

Everything changed when the beast mutated and started spewing its spoor into the air when it walks onshore. The spoor cause people to become sick— high fever, weakness in the knees, depression, and finally, surreal hallucinations. Then, one is officially diseased. Hopefully, by then, the Capital would have removed the individual before it could spread. But to make matters worse, the beast apparently only comes to our shores, not our white neighbors' who were beyond The Line. When the Capital discovered this, they began to enforce segregation laws fully to minimize the spread of the disease. Nowadays, if anyone from the lower lands, white or black, is caught crossing The Line, it almost certainly leads to execution.

It happened to my childhood friend, Blake. Although, he did the unthinkable. He tried to cross into the Capital by scaling the ramparts. Why? For drunken adventures or clout with the

women? It was anyone's guess. The town and I eventually came to a consensus that Blake was executed on the spot.

The Capital cannot risk an epidemic. The town cannot handle it. We cannot handle it. So segregation is the only way, it seems. The disease and the beast were our side of the town's burden. It was a burden that came with an unspoken curfew. It was a burden that will break our back.

When someone from our side of town gets sick—or diseased— It is the Capital's chosen watcher's duty to report it. Every month, a new black individual is selected for the position, so we never know who could make the call to send one away. And when they are called, the vanguards come down from the hill carrying a crate made for humans. The diseased are loaded into it, while they scream and kick as they are thrown inside. Then, one vanguard in the front, one in the back, picks up the poles attached to the crate and takes them to the Capital's treatment rooms for ours and their own good.

There is a difference between the sick and diseased: The sick wants to get better while the diseased does not. The diseased are so far beyond reality that they no longer mentally exist in our world. They love it.

Although, all of this is just another joker upon our dark skin.

Torn Manuscript

The waxing moon illuminated through a broken window onto my waterlogged timber floor. Shadows crept around its radiances to spectate its majestic night show. Dank beams from above draped and creaked against the wind. Drizzle from yesterday's storm dripped down from them into darkness. I sat back against planks in the house's corner as a fellow viewer among the dark crowd. Another day's lecture completed without an accident, I thought to myself while unwinding from teaching in the unbreathable air in Jerry's cellar.

I dropped Samuel home. He hopped off my back and whispered, "until next Sunday." Instead of going through his front door, he went behind his house and climbed through his window. As I made my way home, screaming and yelling imploded from his house. It was more than likely his mother and grandfather. I'm sure it was about him sneaking off to my lecture. Most families disapproved of them because I am not accredited by the Capital. Without accreditation, someone could get hurt or killed.

It was the Capital's sabbath night, the safest night to light a candle and read without one of their vanguards locking me up like the diseased. It wasn't that reading is a crime here—it was the fact that one could read. If vanguard catches any black folk with anything with words on it—even a scrap of a newspaper—they'll accost them with a flurry of questions: "Where did you learn to read?" "Who taught you?" "You must've crossed The Line, eh?"

They would ask the last question because the only way to learn to read and write was from the white folk on the other side of town. No one here could read, except for me.

The vanguard would administer a reading test, and if one passes or fails, the results were always the same. They'll arrest and send the offender to the Capital prison. The place I want to believe my friend Blake is, but most likely, the Capital executed him for scaling the ramparts.

I lifted a plank from the floorboard and removed a candle and *Paradise Lost*. After wiping off the dirt on them, I pulled a piece of steel and flint from my pocket and stuck a flame over the candle's wick. The corner was better than the window because the vanguards couldn't spot me immediately if they happened to come. They would have to rear into the window and strain their eyes before seeing the candle's glint burning under my thigh. But they wouldn't even see that much. We black folk could hear their clanging wolfsangel dog tags as they wandered the dirt roads. Every vanguard seemed to wear them. It was two pieces of metal from what I've seen, one crescent moon-shaped and the other "Z" shaped. They are bound together on a single chain and worn around their neck.

I opened *Paradise Lost* and withdrew a torn piece of paper of a story by a fellow Negro who once struggled as I did. Holding its yellowed paper of power over the candle's gentle embers, I began my tradition of reciting it before I read anything else:

the Negro's boy birth and connection with an unpopular race is an advantage, so far as real life is concerned. With a few exceptions, the Negro youth must work harder and must perform his tasks even better than the white youth in order to secure recognition.

Shame, I'll never know who wrote those words, which echoes into a Negro's soul. I've adored them since finding it misplaced within *Paradise Lost*. It was only a fragment, but that fragment allowed me to cope with what I am. It was the lone light a negro must cling to after leaving the womb to survive. It gave me hope that there was a way to reconcile mere dark flesh

with their moon-toned skin. I once believed what the unknown writer did: Hard work will earn you recognition as a human, not a low lander as the Capital sees black folk.

But later I questioned the writer's axiom: should we have to work harder, just to be treated humanely? I couldn't even enroll in a program for a Capital's accreditation to teach. Because to do that, I'd have to enter the Capital, which was illegal for any low lander to do, even for our white neighbors across The Line.

The Negro youth must work harder and must perform his tasks even better than the white youth in order to secure recognition.

The validity of his words still permeates my mind, even today.

When it wasn't their sabbath night, the vanguard roamed our dirt roads, searching for any black folk outside. If a black individual is caught, they would be considered infected or diseased and needed treatment—even if there were no symptoms. One man merely coughed on his way home while passing a vanguard and was deemed diseased. He was loaded into a wooden box that was destined for the Capital's treatment room. We never saw him again. As a town, we eventually decided to all be inside before one could see the vanguard torches descend the knoll for their nightly patrol. It was safer that way.

From another plank I removed loose papers and a dank webster dictionary, which I paid four pearls for at the Fallen Israelite's town long ago. The Fallen were not like those from the Capital. They are called Fallen for a reason. They were once Capital citizens, but at some point, they broke the law and were cast out like the devil from heaven. The Capital calls them Fallen Israelites, I believed. But the difference between us black folk and the Fallen Israelites is that we

were never permitted in the Capital. We have no history there. Most of the Fallen Israelites can read because of their Capital heritage and previous access to an education system.

Most of them had brownish skin due to the tropical sun and their love for it. From what I've gathered from the newspapers that would somehow drift to our town, they supported "beasts." One by one, the vanguard exiled them to a settlement on its last legs, about a half a click from ours.

I laid under the candle's flame to begin my duty of learning new words' connotations and denotations from the dictionary. It was my duty as the only black person who could read. I felt obligated to teach anyone who desires to learn—which was hardly anyone. In fact, the town frowns upon it, for they know it will get someone killed one day. But I had to try. I had to prove to the Capital that we're human, not beasts with education. Maybe then, we'll secure recognition, I told myself. But at what cost? How far was I willing to go to prove our humanity? Was I willing to detain or even kill a beast to prove our worth to the Capital?

The candle's flame had boiled down the wick, teasing the leaky wax of Jasmine. I swayed back and forth while listening to the thuds of water plop against the floor. I was falling asleep. The moon was no longer performing its show. The only light entertaining the dark crowd was a starving flame. With the last of my energy, I silenced it with a pinch. My body huddled into a fetal position on its own accord for warmth against the drafts from the window. My eyes slowly started dropping.

Someone started knocking on my door. My eyes popped like a lock. I jerked a plank from the floor up and stuffed my books, candles, and whatever else black folk wasn't supposed to own underneath it. The visitor was becoming irritated. His knocking turned into beating. I thought

about jumping out the window, but that would give the vanguard an excuse to incarcerate me when—not if— they caught me. And if I pretended to be asleep, they'll just bust in and arrest me for being noncompliant. I was in a double bin.

“I know you're in there with them books,” a deep, ghastly voice said. “Now open the door.” He continued beating on the door.

My vision blurred with anxiety. My tongue began edging to the back of my throat.

“If you don't open your door, imma crawl through your window.”

I swallowed it. “Yes sir, I am on my way.”

When I opened the door, no one was there—not even the scent of smoke from the vanguard's torch. Barren homes aligned down the dirt road, snuggled in shadow. The knoll and the woods behind them were torchless as well. And the balcony of the Capital's Cathedral at the top was lit for Sunday's feast. Everything was holding true to tradition. It must have been the first of many dreams, I thought, closing the door.

Beyond tired, my knees plummeted to the floorboard, and I folded like a child. As I was shutting my eyes, I saw something—a figure—in the distance. By the window seal.

It sat one foot planted on the wooden floor and the other dangling somewhere outside. The figure was wrapped in a cloak, which coasted like folding waves in the night. It was no vanguard; it was as thin as a sick, elderly man. It swung the other leg inside and began staggering toward me. Its feet brushed along the wood while creaking and causing it to sink.

I wanted to flee, but I couldn't. I was paralyzed. Was it a beast from the sea? No, that was impossible; they never went beyond the shore, and the moon wasn't full.

Its feet were lumped in mud and grass—they were inches from my eyes. It kneeled. The cloak constricted, revealing the contours of its rib cage. Then, the figure reached in its cloak for a box and struck a match under its jaw. He cackled at the flame, nearly choking like a dehydrated man.

“You should really bar that window with some planks or tin; someone could break in.”

“Blake?”

He removed his hood and smiled, slightly unhinging the mouth. Patches of black hair laid upon his back-row teeth.

“It’s been a few waves, eh, Markus?”

I thought I’d never see him again.

Genesis: Year 123

The judgment bell tower beckons throughout every district within the Capital. Its muffled reverberations rattle dust from the cathedral's-stained window as I lay sprawled and on its checkerboard floor, with pen and paper in hand.

It was another sleepless night.

I imagine the Capital citizens waking from slumber—the wetnurses gathering baby carriages; the sisters and brothers dressing orphaned children; the choir warming their vocals while the old Pope flips through his red tome for Judgement Day—a day when a Fallen White Israelite meets the Capital's God at the brink of dawn.

Though it's still sundown, I am already shirtless and washed in a puddle of my own sweat. My left hand is pressed against the wall; my feet are elevated on the mahogany door, my other hand somewhere under the bed. There is just no room here for humidity to ventilate.

The heat stifles and smothers a current from my pores to fill the fine canals between the checkerboard tiles. I cannot open the window nor door. Both are locked from the outside, making the room a cauldron with me as its ingredient.

It's a typical Philippine summer night in Caelum.

The bed next to me is perhaps one of the softest beds on the entire island of Caelum. The sheets are silk, not cotton, and the comforter is a velvet maroon with golden tassels hanging off it. The first time I laid in the bed, the mattress and pillow sunk like sand and molded around my

head and back. The feeling was unworldly, but the floor is better—especially on nights like these. It's colder and it reminds me of my home in the shanties.

Instead of sleeping on splintered wood with a breeze cruising through a broken window, I now sleep in a cauldron with a teasing bed fit for someone of worth. Marvelous.

It's been three years since I held a book, and it's been three years since I broke the Capital's law: teaching reading and writing without their accreditation, a crime punishable by death. Yet, I am still breathing and writing. And I am not the one being sent to meet their God at the brink of dawn. I will be here, in this Cathedral, watching a divine injustice be delivered to a fellow human.

But to what end? I stroke some sweat out my hair and look into my palms.

When will it be my turn?

What will be my punishment?

Why keep me here?

I lay my head down under the Capital's roof night after night, eating their overly lavished foods, drinking their "sparkling water" only for them to smile and ask, "would you like any dessert before bed?" It wouldn't be wrong to suspect these people to be cannibals who are merely fattening me up to devour me like their souffles.

But they are not cannibals. They are white Israelites, God's chosen children, so they say after every sermon.

Despite their ominous generosity, I am never alone. Someone is always watching me. I am never permitted to go below the 3rd floor in the Cathedral.

It's a luxurious prison here.

Even now, one of their vanguards patrols the hallway shuffling those pearls I slipped him for a weekly supply of loose-leaf paper and ink pens. He unlocks the door and peaks inside. I pretend not to see him, and he continues his way, uttering, "In the beginning."

They don't trust me yet. In their eyes, I am a diseased subhuman. The vanguards don't say it, but I know it's what they are thinking. They bite their tongue at the Pope's behest. But if the Capital citizens knew I was dwelling in their holy place, they would cry sacrilege and die of fright.

I am the Capital's secret who is locked behind their Cathedral doors.

But I should not be complaining because I am not ill; some of them may think it, but I am not sick or diseased like the ones in the Cathedral's cellars.

Last night I heard their overlapping moaning from below. The tiles seemed to contort at each bellow. It's a sound I'd imagine what people make while burning in hell's bowels. The thought gives me anxiety. But now it is silent, thankfully, though my mind now brews with thoughts of penal fire.

Flushed against the wall is an empty bookcase that is covered in dust and fine crumbs of paper. On my first day here, history books on Catholicism, *Mein Kamp*, the Philippine-American War, and numerous other titles about white elitism filled the shelves. There was also a book called *History of Caelum*. I didn't finish any of these books. I read a little from each, but by the time I reached their tragic theses, the vanguard stormed the room and threw all of them into a sack, saying nothing. They must have forgotten I can read.

Even though I didn't finish a single one, something bizarre just now occurs to me: how is it year 123 while most of those books were written in the 20th century? Were they from the future? Nonsense. Not even their God can perform such magic.

The Judgment bell continues to ring, surely pounding all Capital citizens from a dream to reality by now. A storm of pitter-patter against cobblestone taps against the stained window. It sounds like rain, but it isn't. I know the sound.

Using my shirt, I wipe the sweat from my brow and chest. I amble to the window. I take one look at the sky and instantly know, It's almost time for judgment day.

The sky is now navy with a tinge of slowly rising silver in the distance. It bands around the sky with golden ends. The Mountain of Zion's contours is becoming visible as morning fog contorts in and out along the mountains. The woodland area in front of Zion now glistens with dew under the falling moonlight. Each stone in the cobbled road that loops around the Cathedral is faintly shining. And the imperfections of the north and east ramparts are slowly becoming visible, along with the nylon coated guards in front of its gates.

The sound of rain against cobble ameliorates.

Suddenly, two vanguards riding horses trot in from the north and east ramparts of the Capital while two more rides in from the west and south. They each carry the national flag: the wolfsangel shield and sword emblem. Its background is red with four blue paths, which extend from the edges to the center where the shield lies. And upon the shield, a sword is wearing a crown that crosses the center of the letter "Z."

From what I've read in the *History of Caelum*, the four paths represent the four quadrants in the Capital —north, south, east, and west. And the middle represents the Capital's

center, the place the old Pope, his family, and I reside. Every quadrant is under the middle's obedience. This is where Judgment is delivered. This is what I've learned from books and observations.

Three men and one woman ride to the Cathedral's front and dismount. They wear the Capital's formal regalia: ashen wool blouse with the wolfsangel along the sleeve, golden cords wrapped at the pit and black khakis that tucks within their brown combat boots. Two vanguards march to the west side of the Cathedral while the others march to the east. They then suddenly halt, spin around and become stone. Only Their flags move, flickering and twisting in the wind.

I don't recall seeing many women vanguards over my three years here. Most of them work in orphanages or boarding schools. Some even ran their own business, I believe. However, when I did see one, most men seem to revere her more than one another. Perhaps they admired her tenacity for entering such a male-dominated domain. Or perhaps they merely find it alluring that women can hold a gun. Either way, I am sure it wasn't easy for them to break away from their stereotypical roles.

I know a little about that myself.

From the east rampart, an ocean of children pours through the gate like a flood. Teens and young adults trail behind them, taking their time. Some of them are barefooted, but all of them wear white oxford shirts with black slacks. Adults stroll through the north and west, men wearing their retired regalia from when they served, women wearing white dresses while carrying umbrellas to protect their moon-tone complexion. And finally, marching around from the south is the vanguard army, spinning and twirling guns and national flags.

They all surround the front of the Cathedral, waiting for the old Pope's sermon on Judgment day.