

PROLOGUE: Suddenly the CRAZED MAN stood up and began to shake with rage “So! Your all probably wondering why I’m her?!” Everyone on the subway was completely silent. The mood which had started to feel lighter suddenly became an uncomfortable irresolute hush.

“You may know the expression ‘There’s a fine line between genius and insanity’ well I don’t mean to brag but I was on the verge of that line for many years and finally crossed it some months ago. I won’t go into any details but let me tell you there are too many for any of you idiots to comprehend. Imagine the irony! I manage to escape a disgustingly clean institute to be stuck on a disgustingly dirty subway car with a horde of disgustingly dim-witted people! Well I guess since we’re all telling stories I’ll have to make my own contribution” With that he sat down, and pulled out a black piece of paper. He read the paper as if words were printed on it.

*NOTE-The letters written in the story have reason to the chaos. That is to say that all incorrect grammar usage and punctuation was purposely done to display the mentality of the writer. Also note that every time a “letter” is read by the CRAZED MAN, he pulls another piece of black paper out of his pocket and reads from it. This includes the obituary and letters from the directors.

HERE BEGINS THE CRAZED MAN’S TALE: There was a boy by the name of Johnny Truant who was born on June 21st, 1971 to an outwardly happy couple. The

boy's childhood was seemingly normal except for one terrible event that literally scared him for life. At the age of 4 Johnny had been helping his mother, Pelafina, in the kitchen. While she fried zucchini in a large pot Johnny would stand next to her holding a tray of for her to place the finished product. Sadly his mother was terrible in the kitchen and accidentally spilled a great amount of corn oil onto Johnny's outstretched his arms. The result was a mortifying melt running down his forearms where the oil had seethed his skin. His mother had often said "You tried to catch it all" of the boys failed effort at stopping the oil.

The worst was yet to come for the now 7 year old boy when his growingly unstable mother, the same individual who had marked 3 years ago, went insane and was sent to The Three Attic Maelstrom Institute where she lived out the rest of her life. Unfortunately in tragedies such as these one woe treads upon the heels of another and the penultimate ping was the untimely death of Johnny's father. His obituary read:

Local pilot, Donnie Truant, died last Sunday on route 26 when the Mack truck he was in swerved into a ditch and caught fire. Reportedly the driver, who survived, had fallen asleep at the wheel.

Throughout his life Mr. Truant was a dedicated flier. As R. William Notes said of his friend, "Donnie always seemed most at home in the sky."

Born in Dorset Vermont on December 14, 1954, Mr. Truant's family soon moved to Marietta, Ohio where he graduated from Kancet High School. After a stint in the Air Force, he worked for several years as a crop duster in Nebraska, a mail carrier in Alaska, and for one winter flew a spotter plane off the coast of Norway. Eventually, he took a job as a commercial pilot for American Airlines, though on time off, he enjoyed performing aerial stunts in regional shows.

Late last year, Mr. Truant decided to take a job as a pilot for the Nebraska Airlines in order to spend more time with his family. Tragically during the standard physical examination, doctors discovered he had unknowingly—probably in his sleep—suffered a cardiac infarction. The results were sent to Oklahoma where the FAA voted to suspend his ATP license for six months, pending further evaluation. No longer able to earn an income as a pilot, Mr. Truant sought work at a trucking company.

He is survived by his wife, Pelafina, and one son, John.

The Nebraska-Herald, July 28th, 1981

Thus young Johnny was sent to a foster home. About a year after the incident he began receiving letters from his institutionalized mother. Being a something of a literary genius, Pelafina's words were simultaneously consoling and confusing to the boy:

My dear child,

Your mother is her, not altogether here, but her nonetheless. It has been a tough year for her but no doubt a tougher one for you.

The Director tells me you have a foster family now. Open your heart to them. They are there for you. They will help you recover from your father's ill-timed death. They will also help you comprehend the reasons for my stay here.

Remember your mother loves you, despite her crumbling biology. Also remember, love inhabits more than just the heart and mind. If need be it can take shelter in a big toe.

A big toe for you then.

I love you.

Mommy

The boy seemed to repel from each family that he landed with. In the first family he worked himself into terrible fits, throwing numerous items about the house. He moved from foster home to home all the while receiving letters from his mother:

My dear dear boy,

You have your father's zest for extravagance. Another family? For an eleven year old you certainly do possess a great deal of spirit.

I only found out today from the Director how exceedingly unhappy you had become with your last family. He told me you had runaway twice. Good lord Johnny, where does an eleven year old go for three days? He said some policeman found you in a park heating hotdogs over a can of sterno. Is that true? You are sturdy, aren't you?—my cunning, resourceful little boy.

Send me a postcard if you like. I would love to hear even one detail of such flight. (Though I understand perfectly if you continue your silence. It's your right and I honor it. I promise.)

Whatever you do, don't despair. You are exceptional and require the company of the equally exceptional. Never feel compelled to accept less. Time will grant you a place. Time always does. Trust me.

Mommy

Johnny had finally found his way to the foster home of a former marine named Raymond where he remained for quite some time. His mother had sent him several books including a Concise Oxford English Dictionary and many volumes of poetry. The boy wrote a letter thanking his mother for the tomes to which she responded with great joy:

My dear sweet, sweet child,

You are most, most welcome!

Your letter arrived last week—the first ever!—and I'm still a fountain.

Who would have thought such a young boy would succeed where Ponce de Leon failed?

Never could I have imagined how your tender words would repair so much of my failing heart. I have been walking around on clouds, dancing on air. Do you really love your mother so much? I shall guard this letter forever and even if there's never another one it will always restore me. I will wear it like a heart. It will become my heart.

Mommy

I believe now is a good time to tell you all that as my story progresses my interjections will become less visible and these letters (he holds up the black pieces of paper from which he has already read from) will become more numerous. Doe anyone object? (Once again silence envelops the subway) Well then push on we shall. Oh yes, I will also inform you of the dates of the letters to aid in chronology. Not that any of you could understand the use of them being such dimwits. But I must do the story justice. The next letter was sent after Johnny had been suspended from school for fighting.

September 29, 1983

Dearest Fighter,

Another gushing letter! Number two! And yes, I return it all and look what interest you receive in just a few days.

Do not fret over school yard fights. Marine Man Raymond cannot be expected to understand. Fire always coursed through your veins. It's only natural that some of that tremendous heat will now and then forge fists of your wrath.

Let me, however, correct one misunderstanding: This quality does not come from your father or his family. Your father was an exceedingly gentle man and never locked horns with another person, man or woman. As you're well aware, he loved more than anything to fly. His sole conflict was with gravity.

I'm afraid responsibility for your sudden interest in pugilism (Make use of you COED) falls squarely on the shoulders of your mother and her contentious family. You come from a long line of aggressors. Some valiant, many downright scoundrels. Indeed, if you ever decide to design some crest for yourself, you would find it impossible to accurately do so without incorporating at least some of the accouterments of Mars along with the consequent symbology of carnage and bloodshed.

I've little doubt your current lust for physical engagement is the result of this questionable genetic bequeathal. Do what you must, but realize greater strength lies in self-control. The more you learn to command your impulses, the more your potential will grow.

Adoringly Yours,

Mommy

The boy continued to fight in school and was eventually transferred to another school where he again persisted in his brawling. The result was not in the least satisfying to the boy or his mother:

March 15th, 1984

My dearest cherished Johnny,

Forgive you mother. News of your hospitalization sent me into the kind of self-indulgent behavior that serves no one least of all you. I am so sorry.

For a day your mother was even free. So overwrought by her son's misfortune, she escaped this Old English Manor in search of his tormentor. As it

was raining and thundering, the Director claims I outdid Lear. Not even lightning could out light my rage.

In fact, my rage was so great the attendants here had to fit me with a canvas suit lest I hurt them or further damage myself. The Director finally modified and even increased my medications. Eventually these measures took effect and my hate diminished (though never the pain). Unfortunately so did my ability to function coherently, hence my silence during your time of trouble.

When you needed me most, I failed. I'm as sorry as I am ashamed. I shall never behave that way again I promise.

Time does heal—they say. Still were I free now I would head straight for Marine Man Raymond and end him. I don't doubt even your pacific father would have resorted to violence.

I do long to hear the details from your pen. Please write me as soon as possible and recount everything. The telling will help, I assure you. Did he really break your nose? Snap your teeth? Are there still contusions on your face?

I confess even having to write these questions, stirs a frenzy in the chambers of my soul. I would like nothing more than to tear out the liver of your purported protector and feed it to him with a hiss. He could semper fi that meal all the way to Hades.

And now without a doubt you see your mother is mad. At least you shall have a new family. Hopefully this one will be gracious and sympathetic.

Hoping to mend

At least some part of you,

Mommy

But though Johnny did slowly recover he remained with the same foster family and did not send his mother a detailed description of the "incident". This confused his mother but she wrote to him just the same eventually receiving notice from her son of his recent encounters.

June 26, 1984

My dear Johnny,

Your sentences cast spells. Once again you've turned your mother into a silly school girl. Your letter is not paper and pencil. It is glass, a perfectly round glass in which I can endlessly gaze on my fine young boy. And a kite of your own construction still drifting among the temples of Olympus.

Like Donnie, you too were born with the wind under your wings. I've carefully hung your blue ribbons on my bureau where I can see them every morning and every evening. Every afternoon too.

Heart blistering with love,

Mommy

P.S. When you return from camp you will find your birthday present.

September 7, 1984

Dear, Dearest Johnny,

To endure over two months without a word and then with the first words learn such terrible news! It tore me to pieces. Could I now, I would whisk you away to the damp of the underworld and double-dunk you in the Styx so neither head nor heel—especially heel—could ever suffer again the ignoble insults of pain.

Bear in mind though that your mother is an infinitely more subtle reader than you care to give her credit for. When the Director warns me of some battery perpetrated by you (?)/ inflicted on you (?) in the Junior High recess yard, and yet in your letter you mention no such antics, only allude to troubles with that hire of the damned who dares claim the title of patriarch. I know whose offending hand has harmed my only child.

The reasons why you fled to the fields and lived for eight days—an anonym, a no one, a survivor—are no secret to me. Clearly you have great skills to last the world in such zones of deprivation but realize something Johnny; your abilities can take you farther than that. You only have to believe it, and then you will find a better escape.

Do not rely on your fists (enough of brawling), shun the television, do not succumb to the facile and inadequate amazements of liquor and pills (if they

haven't already, those temptations will eventually seek you out) and finally do not entrust your future to the limits of your stride.

*All my love and attention,
Mommy*

October 14, 1984

My dear Johnny,

What an exceptional idea. I knew you'd think of a way. Do not be precious either with your attempts. Apply to every boarding school available.

As for that nit-wit Raymond who insists on calling you "beast" let his blindness protect you. What he does not expect, he cannot work to prevent.

*My unbound love,
Mommy*

March 7, 1985

Dear sweet Johnny,

I am still alive. Unfortunately the dead of winter was not kind to your mother as she reverted to the state that brought her here in the first place, the very same state that your glimmering father wrestled with so nobly.

Everyone here, especially the honest Director, was kind and attentive but their efforts still could not break me from my wild and often, I'm afraid to admit, hallucinatory condition. Sad but true, sometimes your mother hears things.

At least thoughts of you brought me moments of peace. Just the mention of Johnny conjured sweet memories of rain soaked meadows, mint sprigs in tea and sailboats slewing wakes of phosphorescence at midnight—an entire history of the stars caught in the Sight.

My lovely son, please pardon your mother's silence. Only yesterday did the Director show me your letters. I feel terrible that I let you down like this and yet at the same time feel proud that you continued to make such progress.

Right now I am too tired to write a longer letter but never you fear, you will hear from me soon enough.

I love you,

In the time his mother had been debilitated Johnny had been accepted to a boarding school and sent word to his mother that he planned to visit her at the Maelstrom. Their meeting remains a mystery to which only Pelafina's letters can provide some clue as to what went on. Though after their encounter and a lack of written response she finally voiced her fears in her next letter:

July 24, 1985

Dear Johnny,

Where are you? Almost two months have passed since your visit and I'm possessed by an eerie presentiment that all is not well. Was it your leaving that seemed to offer up a discordant note? The way you turned your back on your mother and only looked back twice, not that twice shouldn't have been more than enough, after all once was too much for Orpheus, but your lookings seemed to signal in my heart some message of mortal wrong.

Am I being silly? Is your mother having a fit over nothing? Tell me and I will shut. All I require is the assurance of a letter in your exquisite hand or at the very least a postcard. Tell your mother, my dear, dear child, that she's being a silly girl.

What bliss to have had you in my company. I hope my tears did not disturb you. I was just not prepared to find you so handsome. Like your father. No, not like, more. It made no sense to hear how that terrible Marine Man could beat you like an animal and call you a beast. Your voice and words still sing within me like some ancient hymn which can on its own live forever among the glades and arbors of old mountains, black forests, the waves of dead seas, places still untouched by progress.

Hopefully some good teachers will offer you the nurturing you still require. Perhaps even your mother's condition will improve enough so you can begin to take her seriously.

One bit of bad news: the old director has left. The new one seems more indifferent to my emotional patterns. He's convinced, I regret to say, that my convalescence requires greater restrictions. Though I doubt he'd ever admit it, the New Director sneers whenever he addresses me.

Ah Jonny I could write you like this for days. Your appearance made me so happy. Please write me and tell me your visit did not spoil your feelings for me.

*Your mother loves you like the old
Seafarers loved the stars.*

September 5, 1985

Dearest Johnny,

I am doing my best to accept your decision to leave me in such silence. Hearing it make my ears bleed. The New Director doesn't approve when I use candle wax to keep out the sound of it. (That's the best I can do at levity)

I remember when your father would take me flying. I did not go very often. The experience always left me agitated for days. He, however, was always so calm and delicate about everything. Pre-flight preparations were carried out with the care of a pediatrician and once we took off, despite the roar of the engine, he treated all those thousands of miles as a whisper.

I always wore earplugs but they did nothing to keep out the noise. Donnie was oblivious. I honestly don't believe he heard all the rattling and wind whipping and the awful shuddering sounds the plane made whenever it intersected a particularly unruly patch of air. He was the most peaceful man I ever knew. Up there especially.

Even on that awful chaotic day, when he had no choice but to take me here, he remained calm and tender. By then his heart was broken, though he didn't know yet, no one did, but even so his touch remained gentle and his words as edgeless as the way he flew his plane so far above the clouds.

I wish I could have his peace now. I wish I didn't have to hear the rattle and roar and scream that is your silence. I wish I could be him.

I'm sorry you saw what you saw in me. I'm sorry I made you run. I must understand. I must accept. I must let you go. But it's hard. You're all I have.

Love's love and more,

Mom

In reality Johnny was having his own problems. During the summer he had traversed to Alaska and began working there to make money for boarding school. After finally finding the chance to write to his mother, Pelafina provides an esteemed apology but also a lingering sense of paranoia pertaining to the enigmatic New Director.

September 14, 1985

Oh my dear Johnny,

Doesn't your mother feel sillier than ever. I hope you will burn my last letters. So desperate, so undeserved. Of course you were occupied. That canning business sounds awful. Your description of the stench alone will leave fish in my nose for weeks. I shall think twice next time I'm offered salmon, not that The Maelstrom is particularly fond of dishing out poached portions dolloped with dill sauce.

Even more embarrassing than my own pitiful and mewling whines was my complete disregard for the possibility that you were having and suffering your own adventures and tragedies.

Your description of the sinking fishing boat left me speechless. Your phrases and their respondent images still keep within me. The cold water lapping at your ankles, threatening to pull you down into "freezing meadows stretched to the horizon like a million blue pages" or "a ten second scramble to a life-raft where all of the sudden the eighth second says no" and of worst of all "leaving behind someone who wasn't a friend but might have become one"

You're absolutely right. Losing the possibility of something is the exact same thing as losing hope and without hope nothing can survive.

You are so full of brave insights. They are not for nothing. I have to tell you for a moment your words succeeded in keeping your boat afloat and your Haitian's lungs full of air.

On a brighter note, I am very pleased that you managed to avoid fights. The occasion you described where you walked from the factory showed great courage and maturity. Your mother glows with pride over her son's new found strength.

School is going to bring you untold pleasures. I promise

With love and eternal regard.

Mom

P.S. I fear the New Director insists on reading my mail now. He would not admit to this directly but the things he says along with certain mannerisms indicate he intends to study and censor my letters. Stay alert. We may need to find some alternate means of communicating.

Unfortunately this was only the beginning. The familiar patterns of loneliness appeared when Pelafina did not receive a letter from her son again:

October 12, 1985

Dear and cherished Johnny,

See how incensed your mother is? I confronted the New Director yesterday and demanded he hand over your letters. Once again he insisted you had not written anything. I would hear none of it and caused quite a scene.

A mother separated from her cub can be quite an angry thing. Still, even though they put me in detention, they did not hand over your words. It looks like you will have to come here.

Never forget my love exceeds my combined anguish and woe.

Mom

November 1, 1985

Dearest Johnny will you ever accept this apology? I was clearly wrong to linger so exclusively on myself, and of course you had every right to be upset by my indifference to your difficulties.

To think I was so convinced the staff was hoarding your letter. (But why not? You write beautiful words. Who wouldn't hoard them?)

How dare your teachers misread your beautiful words. They are blind to their colors, deaf to their melodies. You must be brave and disregard them.

This world, inside and out, is full of New Directors. We must watch for them and avoid them. They are here only to keep us from telling everything we know, revealing our little truths.

I think I've found an attendant who I can trust to mail you an unexamined letter. Be on the look out.

*I remain your loving,
Mom*

Many months passed and no word from his mother until spring.

April 5, 1986

Dear, dear Johnny, center and whole of my world.

I cannot understand how you have not received any of my letters. For every agonized one of yours—so full of misadventure and cruelty—I have responded with not one, not two, not even three but five, five endless letters, so surfeit with love, tenderness and confusion they would have with one reading bound your heart and healed it in full. I promise.

Unfortunately in every one, I described—at least in part—the reasons why I was put here and why the New Director means to keep me here until I die or at the very least my mind goes up like Mrs. Havisham's wedding dress. They will stop short of nothing to forbid my revelations. What I know will untie the world. No wonder the doors here are all locked. No wonder they seal the windows too.

Every night that I must sleep, the attendants, they scheme. They sense as does the New Director—or dare I say he knows?—that I have made congeal the artifacts of this world and so behold now its mutations in simple entirety. A fact that binds and at the same time reads it all. And nullifies it all too.

The attendants, of course, are just worker bees. The New Director is not. Why do you think they got rid of the Old Director? Why do you think they installed this new one? To keep, myself and perhaps others here, detained so they can unlock us and then empty us. Which explains why the New Director destroyed all the letters I wrote you. At least this much is obvious.

I have determined one crucial thing. Their control depends on what they call medicine. It's Hippocratic blasphemy. How carefully they mete out such

*debilitating flakes of color. Madder, azure, chartreuse—behold the flag of
tyranny, robbing your mother of her memory, her ability to function, her chance
to flee or feel—the “I” no matter where it stands still stands for the same thing:
loss of self.*

*Your mother will not tolerate this. She most definitely will not. So now,
each morning, lunch and night, I pretend to eat their mechanisms, then when the
worker bees are not looking I retrieve the pills from my mouth and carefully
crush them into dust, then I can, unnoticed, toss them beneath a table or conceal
within the creases of a couch.*

*(This letter goes out by private route)
Returning steadily to my former self,
I lovingly remain your,
Mother*

July 6, 1986

Dear only son, only mine, my Johnny,

*Your mother’s mind’s a mess. They have gotten away with more than I
will ever fathom. Somehow they have even placed their “medicines” within my
food and water. There is no other possibility. It is here. It is within me.*

*Love’s word,
Mother*

September 18, 1986

Dear dear Johnny, my sun in winter, my reason in fog,

*At least we’re out in the open. I went for the New Director. Threw
everything at him. Plates, glasses, pork chops, everything. No more colors. No
more altered foods.*

*The worker bees instantly hauled me away but now at least the New
Director knows I know and there will be no more of this simmering treachery.*

*Please respond to everything I sent you in august. I still have
not heard back. Now that you have the whole story I deserve some comment. You
will make your mother think you don’t love her anymore.*

Devoted beyond death,

Mom

December 6, 1986

My dearest son,

Too much at once. First news of your fight and subsequent expulsion (The New Director feigned concern. I had no idea your teachers had failed you so badly) next news of your intentions to leave Ohio (where will I write you?) and lastly your insistence that you have yet to receive any lengthy letters regarding my situation here. I am flabbergasted and upset.

Perhaps the New Director is too agile for your mother. Perhaps she is just too weak to outwit him. I understand you will be out of touch but do not be away too long lest they do me in while you're gone. I must be brave but I would be too much the liar were I to say I don't fear to the bone your absence.

Love, love, underlying.

Mom

April 25, 1987

Dearest gifted Johnny,

I did not think your silence would ever end yet somehow it did and now I am in blissful possession of a new address and news of your placement in another boarding school.

Perhaps you will have time soon to return to your mother whom by abandoning you have left unprotected from the deviltry committed too many times by too many miscreants too faceless to remember.

There is no escape for me now. I know the New Director knows I know this. In turn he knows I know he knows. These pages are my only flight. At least they escape.

My years steepen, my secrets crack and crumble. Not even my only family, my only boy, comes to see me.

When they murder me how will you feel?

P.

The subsequent letters were during Pelafina's most severe stages of lunacy. Her writing becomes more and more fragmented and illegible as time progresses.

June 23, 1987

Dearest man-child of mine,

No sign from you. Just days folding endlessly into more days. The cancer of ages. And no, aspirin won't help. Won't help. Won't.

My hands resemble some ancient tree: the roots that bind up the earth, the rock and ceaselessly nibbling word-worms.

But you are too young for trees to know anything of their lives. Oh what a crippled existence 900 years must lead.

I am truly only yours,

P.

December 26, 1987

Dear Johnny, reason for devotion, devotion itself,

Yack! Again these dark ribbons wrap me up like a present, a Christmas present, this present never found, never opened.

Tossed like a doll.

The ripe earth

Yawns

Daily

To swallow

Me.

Love's love in her blackest season,

P.

March 19, 1988

Dearest dear Johnny,

Do not forget your father stopped me and took me to The Maelstrom. You may remember. You may not. You were seven. It was the last time I saw you before I saw you again too many years later only to lose sight of you again.

Oh my child,

*My dear solitary boy,
Who abuses his mother with his silence,
Who mocks her with his insupportable absence—*

*—how can you understand the awful weight of
living, so ridiculously riddled with so many lies
of tranquility and bliss, at best half-covering
but never actually easing the crushing weight of
it all, merely guaranteeing a lifetime of the same,
year after year after year after year after year,
and all for what?*

*You were leaving as I was leaving and
so I tried before that great leaving to grant you
the greatest gift of all. The purest gift of all. The
gift to end all gifts.*

*I kissed your cheeks and your head and after a while put my
hands around your throat. How red your face go then even as your tiny
hands stayed clamped around my wrists. But you did not struggle the
way I anticipated. You probably understood what I was doing for you.
You were probably grateful. Yes, you were grateful.*

*Eventually though, your eyes became glassy and wandered
away. Your grip loosened and you wet yourself.*

*I'll never know how close you came to
that fabled edge because your father suddenly
arrived and roared in intervention, a battering
blast of complete nonsense, but a word just the
same full of love too, powerful enough in fact to
halt the action of another love, break its hold,
even knock me back and so free you from me,
myself and my infinite wish.*

*You were a mess but aside from a few evil
coughs and dirty little pants and some half moon
cuts on the back of your neck, you recovered
quickly enough.*

I did not.

*I had long, ridiculous purple nails back then.
The first thing they did when I got here was tie me down
and cut them off.*

*But it was love just the same Johnny. Believe me. For that, should I be
ashamed? For wanting to protect you from the pain of living? From the pain of loving?*

Always from loving. Always for loving.

Always.

Perhaps my shame should really come from my failure.

Tears just the same.

P.

That gleaming revelation was the last coherent thing she wrote for a long time. Either the same words were repeated for pages or random words were placed together in strange patterns. But nobody cares for nonsense these days when they're all trying to make sense of their own lives so therefore I shall omit those letters. Returning to the story though:

November 1, 1988

Dearest Johnny,

*What a terrible sleep and dream I've been roused from. There are so
many pieces to make sense of, the doctors all warn me to just put aside the last
two years. It's a shambles. Seems I'm better off consigning the whole lot to
psychosis, locking it up, throwing away the keys.*

*They tell me I should be grateful that that presents itself as an option. I
suppose they're right. Cast no backward glances, eh?*

The doctors also inform me that you visited several times but apparently I was completely unresponsive. As for all the letters I said I had written you, chock full of paranoia and all, I hardly wrote a thing. Five reams of paper and postage were nothing more than figments of my imagination.

I tend to believe all this because I have come to realize, as you probably realized when you came here, that the New Director is in fact none other than the Old Director, the patient one, the decent one, the kind one who has been taking care of your mother for well over ten years.

I have now my own biochemical cycles and a couple of new drugs to thank for these days of clarity. The Director has already warned me that my lucidity may not last forever. In fact it's unlikely.

I shall be fine as long as I know that the one whose tender sensibilities I imposed such hogwash will forgive me. How could I misplace your visits? Lose your letters? Not even recognize you? I love you so, so very much

Will you ever forgive me?

As always,

All my love,

Mommy

November 3, 1988

Dearest Johnny,

As I seem to have been granted temporary clemency from rabid thoughts, reflections pour out of me at an alarming rate. I think of all the heartache I subjected your father to. I think of everything I have put you through.

It is completely within reason for you to turn your back on me forever. It might even be the wisest decision. I am hopelessly unreliable, and though my love for you burns so brightly all would seem thrown into darkness were the sun to eclipse it, such feeling can still never excuse my condition.

The Director has patiently explained to me, probably for the thousandth time, that my varied dispositions are the result of faulty wiring. For the most part I have come to accept his evaluation.

Sometimes, however, I wonder if my problems originate elsewhere. In my own childhood, for example.

These days I like to believe –which is a shade from belief itself—all I really needed to survive was the voice my own mother never gave me. The one we all need but one I never heard.

Once, a long while ago, I watched a little black girl fall off a street curb and skin both here knees. When she got up, wailing like a siren, I could see that her shins and palms of her hands were flecked with hurt.

The mother had no gauze or antiseptic or even running water handy but she still managed to care for her daughter. She whisked her up in her arms and murmured over and over the perfect murmurs, powerful enough to fully envelop her child in the spell and comfort of only a few words: “It’ll be okay. It’ll be alright”

To me, my mother only said “That won’t do.” She was right. It didn’t do at all.

Love,

Mom

November 27, 1988

Dear, dearest Johnny,

So convinced such happiness has to be a dream—especially these days—I have repeatedly asked the Director whether or not you were really her yesterday. One lifetime ago I was crouched in shadow and the next I am with you.

How profound the difference.

You shimmered almost to the point where I had to squint for fear you’d burn away another chance for me to see you ever again.

If my tears upset you, you should understand they were not spilled out of grief or bitterness but out of pure bliss for having you here with me, able to lift my spirits so effortlessly, carry this old heap of bones, all of me, safe and warm in my dear child’s arms.

*Your adventures in Europe caught me between heartbreak and laughter.
You tell stories so well, all that tramping over the continent for four months. I'm
glad to see you gained back most of the weight you lost.*

*Of course only now as I write this letter do I realize how careful you were
to keep me from your greater troubles and mutilation. Open yourself to me. I will
not harm your secrets. Do not think your mother cannot read in her own child
the trauma he still endures every day and evening.*

*I am here. Ever devoted. Still
surfeit with tenderness, affection
and most of all love,*

your mother

As she had previously been told Pelafina's clarity was short lived. In a letter to
Mr. Truant the Director expressed the condition of his mother:

May 5, 1989

Dear Mr. Truant,

*As you requested in your last visit, I am writing to you now to inform you that
your mother's condition may be on the decline again.*

*We are doing our best to adjust her medication, and while this relapse could
prove temporary, you may want to prepare yourself for the worst.*

*If there are any questions I can answer, please do not hesitate to contact me at
(743)-475-6781. Also, I wish to remind you that I will be retiring at the end of
March. Dr. David J. Draines will be taking my place. He is very capable and well
versed in psychiatric care. He will provide your mother with the very best
treatment.*

Sincerely yours,

Martin V. Templum, M.D., Ph.D.

Director

The Three Attic Maelstrom Institute

Unfortunately the situation did not improve and once again Pelafina's letters were riddled with oddity.

February 28, 1989

Dear Johnny,

It's remarkable how much I continue to improve. For the first time ever, the Director has suggested I might even be able to leave. Every day I read, write, exercise, eat well, sleep well, and enjoy the occasional movie on the television.

For the first time, I feel normal. I know you are swept up in a tide of your own affairs but would it be possible for you to purchase for me a suitcase? I shall need a large one as well as a carry-on. Any color is fine though I would prefer something akin to amethyst, heliotrope, or maybe lilac.

It's been so long since I've traveled. I've forgotten if one checks one's luggage at the station or do I just carry everything to my compartment on the train? Is there room beneath the sleeper or am I forgetting some other sort of storage place? (That is my thinking behind the smaller carry-on.)

Love,

P.

March 31, 1989

Dear Johnny,

Why have you written me such lovely letters and yet failed to mention my luggage?

If my request is a terrible imposition I wish you would just say so. Your mother's an able woman. She'll find another way

As it is I'm fairly annoyed. The Director left today and I was informed that if I had been packed I could have left with him.

Unfortunately, while I am quite adept at folding and arranging my belongings, my inability to place them anywhere impedes my ascent into my new life—drowsy, baked in the sun, with you.

I,

P.

May 3, 1989

Dear John,

With no luggage to speak of—amethyst, lilac or otherwise—I've had nowhere to put my things and so I've lost all of it. To be honest I don't know where all of it went. Clearly the worker bees have stolen it.

By the way I was mistaken. The Director didn't leave. He's still here. The new one is the same after all. In other words everything is fine, though the Old Directors moods have been a little odd lately.

I think I've upset him somehow. There's something malicious about his manner now, very slight, but noticeable just the same, a nasty twisting wire woven into the fabric of an otherwise perfectly decent man.

No matter. I cannot tire myself on the feelings of the world. I am leaving after all, though it is no easy task, especially for this Sibyl of Cumae.

Climes of any kind are trying. Frankly I'm exhausted by all the planning and the paperwork.

Donnie will pick me up soon, very soon, but you my dear child, you should stay awhile.

Do that for me.

Mummy

May 5, 1989

Dear Mr. Truant

We regret to inform you that on May 4, 1989 at approximately 8:45P.M. your mother, Pelafina Heather Lièvre, died in her room at The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute.

After a detailed examination, both our resident doctor, Thomas Janovonich M.D., as well as the county coroner, confirmed the cause of death was the result of self-inflicted asphyxiation achieved with bed linen hung from a closet hook. Ms. Lièvre was 59.

Please permit us to express our sincere condolences over your terrible loss. Perhaps it will be of some solace to know that despite the severity of her mental affliction, your mother managed to show much humor in her last year and attendants said she often spoke fondly of her only son.

While this will be a difficult time, we urge you to contact us as soon as possible to make arrangements for her burial. The conditions of her enrollment here already provide for a standard cremation. However for an additional \$3,000, we would happily provide a proper casket and service. For another \$1,000, a burial plot may also be secured at the nearby Wain Cemetery.

Again we wish to extend our sympathies over the death of Ms. Lièvre. If we can be of any help during this time of need, whether by answering questions or assisting you with funeral plans, please feel free to contact us directly at (743)-475-6781.

Respectfully yours,

David J. Draines, M.D.

Director

The Three Attic Maelstrom Institute

HERE ENDS THE CRAZED MAN'S TALE.

Epilogue

“Now you surely can see the that my story is the tragedy to end all tragedies” said the CRAZED MAN. In his hands were many many pieces of the

21-1 Papito
1 March 2006

English 11:3
Canterbury Tale
Page 25

black paper each of which he threw at a different passenger. He then sat down
and said no more.