

CHAPTER TWO OF LIBRA

IN WHICH

*Libra tells another story,
Cancer is unimpressed,
and Aries enters and exits.*

“A story about a modern-day leper would be whimsical if it occurred in the Western World, which this one does: Once upon a time, there lived a leper named Tess. As is per usual with lepers, Tess couldn’t touch anyone and no one could touch Tess. This may sound sad; however, such a life also afforded its share of societal concessions. For example, Tess had a reserved seat on the subway. Also, nobody ever attempted to steal Tess’ I-phone. Nobody ever vandalized Tess’ house. Even the Jehovah’s witnesses resigned themselves to a polite, curbside wave. Furthermore, Tess owned three highly intelligent labradoodle retrievers, and these little pups were allowed to shit wheresoever they pleased since no one wanted to deal with fecal matter as discarded by the leper, Tess. As if that weren't enough, the local municipality even supplied Tess with a twenty-four hour ‘touching attendant’ to perform Tess’ unavoidable tactile tasks. I think you could say leper life was good. However, love was difficult. Sex was impossible. Fortunately, the Internet gave Tess freedom and she was eventually caught up in a whirlwind romance with Boys2Gentlemen. Boys2Gentlemen modeled axes for fire station supply catalogs. One night, during a particularly heated Skype session, Boys2Gentlemen turned over and was tangled amid his computer’s charging cord. He struggled. And Tess was, unfortunately, helpless. She listened in agony as the masturbatory moans of her distant lover slowly muffled into silence. Eventually, that man died. Tess died too. But of course, that happened later. During her shambolic pilgrimage to Quebec.”

I step back from my story. Aquarius’ lifeless body lays before me on the Veranda. Cancer, my new acquaintance, stares back at me blankly.

“What in Dodecatmoria was that?” she asks, “You said you were going to revive her.”

“Hold on now,” I say, “And correct me if I’m wrong, Cancer, but was the story I just told not about the distances existing between people?”

“What? What?”

“I thought if Aquarius heard a story about distances between people, she would then clue in to the distance she is currently taking from us, and, through a sort of narrative symbioses, it would rouse her to her own consciousness.”

“But she’s been bricked-out, you louse!”

“Shark.”

“What? No! A brick has hit her in the face! She needs medical attention. I’m calling the medic! Medic! Medic!”

Cancer exits toward the Ladies Deluxe Restroom and I’m left to ask myself one question: bricked-out or blacked-out?

Bricked-out?

Blacked-out?

Bricked-out?

Blacked-out?

The woman lying unconsciously before me has experienced either one or the other.

“Hmm,” I say, “You know, Aquarius, if I knew which you suffered from, then I’d be able to rouse you more effectively. However, it’s difficult to help a friend without knowing the category of their unconsciousness, wouldn’t you say?”

I ruminate on this thought, pineapple, and sip at my one-shot Comet, until another woman runs from the Ladies Deluxe Restroom.

“Did you brick her?” she asks, “Do you hate her? I, me, Aries can help you fight.”

“Woah, now. Neither, friend,” I say, “I found her like this. However, I don’t know if she’s been bricked-out or blacked out.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone that you bricked her. I’ll help you fight.”

“I don’t want to fight her. I’m Vesuvius.”

“What did you say?”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, friend, but for anything further to occur wouldn’t we first need to ascertain whether she’s been bricked-out or blacked-out?”

“No. For anything further to occur, we would first need to ascertain whether or not you want to fight her.”

“Tuba.”

“Umm. Ok. So we can skip the fighting. We can move to convalescing, hmmm? Healing, yah? Diplomacy, if we absolutely must.”

“Oh, I love diplomacy. You know—,”

“So if I could find circumstantial chairs, then you could sit next to a window, like turned a little, and she could be behind her chair, looking outside. Or better yet, we could be outside. In the garden! No! Next to the Pond!”

“Next to the fountain,” I say, “Because it’s a memorial.”

“I don't think I understand.”

“It’s a fountain.”

“It’s a Pond.”

“Memorial.”

“Fine. Whatever. Next to the fountain, memorial whatever the case may be—”

“Fountain.”

“What?”

“Memorial.”

“Huh?”

A brick sails past our heads.

“Holy Zither!” she says, “That’s the Crazy Witch!”

Another brick flies and hits Aquarius squarely in the face.

“The palm fronds! That brick came from the palm fronds! By Zod, I’ve got her! I’ve got your sign, witch!”

She exits into the palm fronds and I’m left alone with Aquarius once again.

I weigh it out:

Blacked-out.

Bricked-out.

Fountain.

Memorial.

Too-too-ta-tuba-ah-ah-ah

“I’m hungry,” I conclude, “I think I’ll have another drink.”

And I exit toward the bar for shallots.