

Legacy

Connor Lam sat in the dressing room. He stood in front of the table upon which sat all his various demands for drinks and snacks. He always requested the same things, the same brand of bottled water, the same organic granola bars, the same fresh fruits. He didn't know why. He could never eat before a lecture. Nerves. The only thing he ever touched was the water. He always took a handful of granola bars with him when he left. They were a good midnight snack at the hotel.

He picked up a bottle of water, opened it, and made his way to the dressing room mirror. He studied himself for a moment. Clean-shaven. Salt and pepper hair. His beard was completely white at this point. That was why he shaved it after all. He had gone to the barber that morning, so he was looking particularly well groomed. His suit was freshly cleaned, well-pressed, and cut just right. His tailor had done an excellent job, as always. In short, he looked good. This was important. He needed to command the room during and after his lecture. Looking good was an essential part of this. But it wasn't the only part.

He turned from his general appearance to his face. He began to practice the various expressions he would use throughout the evening. He started with the one he used during the question-and-answer session, when he wanted to appear intimidating but interested, deep in thought. He pushed his jaw out and arched one eyebrow. It was too much. Dissatisfied, he started over. Pushing his jaw out, he arched one eyebrow just a tad, then tilted his head up. His eyes were wrong. Too severe. He softened them, retaining the position of his face. Better, but something was still missing. He pursed his lips ever so slightly. That was it. He moved on to another expression, one that was more congenial. After practicing several more, he quickly ran through a series of them. When he was finished, he studied his posture. There wasn't much to improve on in that department. Satisfied, for the most part, he walked away from the mirror and sat down on the large, red easy chair next to the table of snacks.

He took another sip of water and looked up at the large digital clock on the wall. He hated this. He hated all of it. The speeches. The press conferences. He especially hated the "intimate" interviews with local journalists trying to get a glimpse into the mind of Connor Lam. All of them contained numerous, unimportant details about what he was wearing, his mannerisms, his quiet, yet confident demeanor, his warm smile. He hated every piece written about him. He never admitted this to the journalists. On the contrary he was always very complimentary when they asked him for his thoughts on what they had written. No reason to crush their spirits. The vast majority of them would never move beyond their local papers. There were other, more combative journalists, who wanted to catch him in some contradiction, who wanted to prove he was some sort of hack. The odd thing was he preferred these interviews to the normal fawning ones that he was subjected to. Their stories weren't any better though. The articles were all equally terrible. They all read like bad papers submitted in a creative non-fiction class. Journalism, writing, had all gone to hell, all of it. This was the last tour. He promised himself. Just like he had promised himself during the last two.

Thirty minutes to go. He ran through his notes. He read over a list of all his published works. Trying to recall what was happening in his life when he had written them. Trying to recall his frame of mind. He wondered if any other authors had to do that before speaking. He wondered if anyone else forgot they had written a two-hundred-page novel in the Fall of 1987; one that had somehow become a

runaway best-seller in Taiwan but had failed to make a dent anywhere else. Generally speaking he was only ever asked about a handful of his books. Nonetheless, he wanted to be prepared. So he read through the list a second time.

He smiled to himself, remembering the man from Taiwan who had inspired his pre-lecture ritual of perusing his own bibliography. The man, then in his late thirties, gushed about the enormous and overwhelmingly positive impact *Lotus Bomb* had on his life during his teenage years. The book had opened his eyes to the true nature of the world and inspired him to pursue what had become his life-long passion, Biochemistry. The man didn't have a question. His rambling was just a very long thank you. Connor had been very confused at the time, having no recollection of having written *Lotus Bomb*, what it was about, or how it pertained to Biochemistry of all things. He had never been particularly interested in science. The philosophy of science perhaps, but not science itself. Connor thanked the man and said it was one of the greatest pleasures of his life to meet someone who had gotten so much out of his writing. Later on, during the meet and greet, Connor signed the man's copy of *Lotus Bomb*, at which point he finally remembered the book and what it was about. A Biochemist derives a mind-altering compound from a particular breed of Lotus which was then used to accomplish... something. He had to look it up afterward. The man's copy was dog-eared, well-read, and thoroughly underlined. Connor read it again later and decided he didn't hate it like some of his other works. Better the stranger from Taiwan be influenced by that book than by one he was embarrassed by.

Fifteen minutes to go. He carefully removed his jacket and hung it up on a mobile coat rack. He rolled a yoga mat out on the floor and sat down cross-legged. The last part of his pre-lecture routine was at least ten minutes of meditation. He needed to clear his mind as much as possible. He needed to purge the fear, the negative feedback loop, his expectations of himself, his assumed expectations of the audience, the dread of an unfavorable response to his comments. At the end of every meditation session, he reminded himself that he was inevitably going to say something he would regret for one reason or another. And, more importantly, that it didn't matter. Fans and critics alike would remember it. The internet would enshrine it among his public sins. People would bring it up whenever they could to contradict or embarrass him. None of that mattered. He reminded himself to let go of his most stubborn vice: his pride.

It was time. He rose, retrieved his jacket from the coat rack, threw it on, and turned back to the mirror. He stood for a moment, rolling out a few kinks in his back, waiting. A moment later the stagehand meekly knocked on the door, letting him know it was time.

It was a smaller venue than what he was used to. Nonetheless, the backstage area was remarkably confusing given its size. He wondered what it would be like for actors and actresses changing between acts, having to rush back to the stage through needlessly complicated halls with remarkably unhelpful signage. They reached the stage just as the sponsor for the lecture began his introduction.

Connor surreptitiously peeked out from behind the curtain. It was a full house. Quite a few young faces in the crowd. English departments at the local colleges must be offering extra credit. He cringed inwardly thinking about the questions the young students would ask him at the behest of their learned professors.

He heard his name, followed by applause. He took one last deep breath and then walked out onto the stage. He shook hands with the sponsor, a very nice man, the dean of Cultural Studies at the

local university. He took his place at the podium, fished his notes out of his pocket, and greeted the crowd.

His preliminary remarks were well rehearsed. No need to refer to his notes. However, when he came to the meat of the lecture, where he had to consult the papers laid out on the podium, he realized that he was overdue for a visit to the eye doctor. He lost his place only for a moment. Squinting at his notes he was able to pick up the thread and thankfully recall the joke that served as the transition from the introduction into the lecture proper. The joke was well received, which provided him the necessary confidence and momentum to barrel through the rest of his remarks without any further issues.

He concluded his speech by thanking the sponsor of the lecture and the crowd for their attention. Said crowd responded with applause. He stood off to the side while the sponsor reclaimed the podium and, acting as MC, briefly outlined the house rules for the Q&A session. Two microphones were set up near the stage. Those who had questions to ask were to form lines in front of the nearest microphone. Standard procedure.

The first question came from a young social studies major. He wondered why she thought he needed to know her field of studies. She asked him a question related to his experience as an Asian American. Low-hanging fruit for lazy journalists and college students. He gave a canned response. It was a modification of the one he had been using since the late 1990's. The second question came from a wild-haired young man, probably an English major, regarding the meaning of a passage in *Empire of the Damned* and whether or not it was an allusion to the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan. Connor told him no as politely as he could, primarily because the book was published in 1978 and the assassination attempt happened in the early 1980's. A professorial sort asked the next question, regarding the influence the student protests of the 1960's had on his work and early political thought. It had a considerable impact on him, thanks largely to his older brother being at many of them. Had Connor's mother not been so vigilant, he would've been there himself. Connor further remarked that many of the protestors, seeing that his brother was Asian, assumed he was of Vietnamese descent. Many in the crowd groaned in disgust at the bigotry his brother had to endure. Connor just thought it was an amusing anecdote. He chose not to mention that his father often had Japanese racial epithets hurled at him by the World War II generation.

The Q&A labored on for the allotted time. The younger members of the crowd all asked questions related to the impact his Asian-American identity had on his works. The older folks gravitated towards queries about how the political climate of his formative years influenced his novels. It was the same at every lecture. He could predict, with frightening accuracy, what questions would be asked by which members of the audience based on age alone. He found it alarming because it demonstrated a lack of independent thought. It demonstrated a homogeneity of beliefs among certain demographics, which always made him uncomfortable. Furthermore, it demonstrated the fact that people would never let go of whatever the "important questions of the day" were when they had come of age. The older people clung to the issues and causes of their youth, long after they ceased to be relevant. They couldn't let go because whatever movement it was, was more than just a cause. It was part of their identity. What they were against was more a part of them than what they were for. Perhaps relevant wasn't the word. Atrocities, like war, will always be relevant. Then again, maybe nothing ever ceases to be relevant. Because every cause, every debate that defines an era, is merely a re-imagining of an older idea or disagreement. Terminology may change. Core issues never do. Regardless, he was growing tired of

answering the same questions over and over. Particularly the ones regarding the Vietnam War since he had been answering them for nearly fifty years. One thing Connor could always be sure of, no one would ever ask him about anything he wrote after 1989.

An elderly man approached the microphone and asked him a vague question that was really more of a statement, concerning how his Socialist perspective had been the driving factor in his writing *Ashes of the Moon*. Connor responded as best he could since it wasn't really a question. He affirmed that yes, he had written *Ashes of the Moon* more as an expression of his Socialistic philosophy than as an attempt at fiction. He added that he had long since abandoned Socialism, since he had come to regard it as inherently immoral. The man didn't respond. The crowd seemed to grow uncomfortable.

The next question came from a passionate young man, who demanded an explanation as to why Connor had given up on Socialism. Connor explained that his political positions began to shift in 1990—which curiously matched the ebb of his literary influence—resulting in what he called a sort of “political agnosticism.” He wasn't sure where he fell on the political spectrum anymore, but he was sure that politics poisoned absolutely everything it touched, turning well-meaning people into monsters. He was surprised by the amount of applause he received for his last comment. There were a few jeers and protestations from the younger members of the audience. He could see some of the older ones shaking their heads in disappointment. They had lost a champion.

Connor never drew attention to his changing political ideology. His political opinions had been an integral part of his identity as a young man. It had shaped his persona as an author. It had driven his career in many ways. Retrospectively, he regarded it all with disgust. He knew other authors and thinkers who had changed their minds, who had since become outspoken proponents of their new causes, loudly denouncing their previous beliefs. Perhaps he should be more vocal about what he believed. Perhaps he should more openly condemn the opinions of his youth. The truth was he wanted to leave it all behind. He didn't want to be known as a political or activist writer in any capacity. The quality of his writing had always suffered the more it was driven by his various ideologies, be they political or religious. His output improved dramatically the moment he gave up on pushing a creed. All his best work had been written post-1990. None of it was appreciated the way he thought it should be.

The time for questions was finally over. The crowd dutifully applauded. Fortunately, there was no meet and greet. A stagehand led him back to his dressing room. Once safely back Connor removed his suit coat and undid his tie. A moment later the sponsor knocked on the door. He congratulated Connor on his speech and mentioned he thought the Q&A section went quite well. Connor was briefly worried that the sponsor was going to ask him a follow up question. Thankfully he did not, however, he did invite Connor out to dinner. Connor politely declined, citing his early flight as one reason, and the fact that he felt as though he were getting sick as another. The latter reason was a lie, though he did feel particularly tired after the speech. The sponsor understood, expressing his hopes that he and Connor would meet again. He told Connor his driver would be there shortly, then departed.

Connor shoved several granola bars into his computer bag, sat down in the easy chair, and waited. He turned towards the dressing room mirror. From where he was seated, he could just see the top half of his head, from his hair to the bridge of his nose. He focused on his eyes. Before the lecture they had looked proud and alert. Most likely a manifestation of the fight or flight response that a public appearance always evoked in him. Now that the danger had passed, his eyes looked weary and a little

sad. He was not sad the speech was over. He was very happy about that. He was sad because the whole affair itself was sad. Just another boring, predictable, non-event.

There was a knock on the door. Connor bid he, or she, come in. The driver stepped inside, apologizing for being late. Connor replied that no apology was necessary, and followed the driver out the door, through the back hallways, and finally to the back door.

The driver asked if Connor wanted to stop anywhere on the way back to the hotel. Connor requested a liquor store. The driver obliged. Connor picked up a variety of “airplane” bottles, vodka, gin, and whiskey, ignoring the old adage of not mixing alcohol. He had never found that to be true anyway. He also purchased an off-brand half-liter of club soda, a candy bar, and a small tin of flavored peanuts. The driver took him back to his hotel. Connor thanked him and stepped inside the hotel lobby.

As he walked inside, Connor suddenly remembered the awkward fan who had been manning the front desk when he arrived. Thankfully, someone new was working the night shift. A young woman who smiled, wished him good night, and more importantly didn’t recognize him.

Once back in his room, he deposited his computer bag, alcohol, and snacks on the hotel desk. Then he took the ice bucket on an adventure through the hotel to find the nearest ice machine. It was one story up. Ice procured, he made his way back to his room.

He texted his wife, asking her if she was still up, and then proceeded to make a drink. Vodka and club soda. A moment later she texted back, informing him that she was indeed still up and he should call if he wanted to. He didn’t really want to, not because he didn’t love his wife, but because he didn’t feel like talking. He called her anyway.

Their conversation was short. She asked him how the lecture went. He told her it went well. He told her it was a boring affair and that he was asked the same questions he was always asked. He told her politics came up, as it always did, though this time he and the audience moved passed the subject relatively quickly. He finished his summary with the complaint that no one asked him about any of his newer work. She told him he didn’t have to do the lecture circuit anymore if he didn’t want to. He told her it was paying for their second honeymoon. She filled him in on a few things that had happened at the house while he was away. Jacob, their handyman, had been by to fix the dishwasher. The air conditioner was making a strange noise and they needed to keep an eye on it. She told him Joyce had been by for a visit and that she said hello. Neither one of them had much else to say after that. He told her he loved her. She said “I love you too.” They said good night and hung up their phones.

Connor picked up his drink and made his way to the window. He pushed the curtain aside and looked out at a near-empty parking lot. The hotel was tucked away in the corner of a strip mall. Two rows of shops and restaurants faced each other over a large no man’s land of striped pavement. In the middle of the lot was a small green area with a fountain. Next to it was a gazebo hung with lights. It was vacant and looked inviting. Connor stuffed the liquor and candy bar into his pockets. He stepped out of his hotel room into the hallway, locking the door behind him. He found the nearest stairwell and made his way towards it. It led to a hallway on the bottom floor that bifurcated the building. Signs lined the walls indicating the approximate location of the gym, the pool, and the laundry room. Among the signs were two arrows pointing in opposite directions. One arrow was named “Exit to Shops.” The other was

called "Exit to Parking." Connor followed the one entitled "Exit to Shops," trusting that it was being truthful. He could also see the glass door and through it the distant signage of the storefront.

The pavement outside smelled hot. The air was still warm. Warm enough to make him break a sweat walking towards the gazebo. Connor thought back to what the sponsor had said about meeting again. He wondered if he would be invited back. He would probably accept, so long as it wasn't during the Summer. It wasn't the worst venue or town he had visited. However, it would've been much nicer if it wasn't mid-July.

He walked to the fountain first. Sipping his drink, he looked down at the assortment of coins at the bottom. It was good to see that people still made wishes. He checked his wallet only to find that he had no coins of his own, and therefore could not make a wish. Such is life. He turned away and walked towards the gazebo.

He sat down and looked up at the ceiling. It, like the railing, was strung with lights. The floor was cement, adorned with a colorful assortment of children's chalk art. Most of the works were proudly signed by the young artists. Except for one piece in the corner. It had been violently scratched out, and with chalk of a different color. Perhaps the artist was ashamed of his work. Perhaps it had been a rival, jealous of the talents of his adversary. A chalk artist Salieri, responding to the greater skills of his opponent the only way he knew how, through vigorous scribbles.

Poor Salieri. Thanks largely to a movie, and also the play it was based on, he would forever be remembered as the composer who orchestrated and pulled off an elaborate plot to kill Mozart. Connor was fairly certain that none of that was true. Then again, he had never bothered to look it up. It was a sad state of affairs when the majority of people's knowledge of history came from historical fiction.

Connor finished his drink. He pulled the tiny bottles of alcohol from his pocket and weighed his options. Gin and whiskey. He poured the gin into his plastic hotel cup then deposited the empty bottle in a nearby trash can. He put the whiskey back in his pocket.

He sipped the gin, staring up at the lights. He wondered if they would ever make a movie about him. His early works, written with the passion of youth, had been very successful. Outside of that, he had lived an uneventful life. There were no grand rivalries, no arrests, no torrid love affairs, or substance abuse to blow out of proportion. All the protests he had ever attended were peaceful. All his interviews on television and on podcasts had been more or less congenial. His life wasn't good fodder for an Oscar-bait biopic. He had lived, he had written, and one day he would die.

What would he be remembered for? If he was remembered at all. Most likely his Revolution Trilogy. His second, third, and fourth published works. Released in 1975, 1977, and 1978, respectively. He was only twenty-four when the first installment, "The Rising Tide," was released. They were his most successful books, both critically and commercially. They were also his most polemical and nihilistic.

He had held in his youth what he now considered to be contradictory beliefs: socialism of the Marxist variety and nihilism. He had believed that mankind would someday become the communist ideal of man. He had thought people would one day overcome their inherent selfishness and simply do their part for society, thereby creating a better world. At the same time, he was convinced that everything was meaningless and human effort was pointless. It never occurred to him that the two ideas were incompatible. In his youthful fervor he was more than capable of holding conflicting viewpoints.

Strangely enough, age, he dared not call it wisdom, had partially confirmed his former nihilism. Not in the way he had expected, however. There was a very real sense in which all the efforts of his youth had been completely pointless. Everything he had believed in was pointless. All the causes. All the struggles. Meaningless. He had taken up arms against a perceived enemy, only to discover later that those who he had marched with served the same false god as their foes. He had worked hard at being part of the solution to one manufactured crisis after another. All of them, a distraction from the things that really mattered. So, in that sense, all his nihilistic impulses had been proven correct. But it wasn't that there weren't things that mattered. There were. It was just that what mattered wasn't the transitory crises and ideologies of the day. Those peddling the causes always missed the mark anyway. They always pointed the finger somewhere else, ignoring their own part in assembling the beast. They played the perpetual blame game so they could avoid responsibility for the hell they made of heaven. Life could be beautiful. But they just wouldn't let it. They had to pursue power. They had to have a glorious purpose. To stamp out opposing ideologies. Mold man into some impossible ideal. Make a difference. They had to keep the struggle alive at all costs. The struggle was life for them. And it was no life at all.

What had he solved with all his fervor, with all his passion? Nothing. Meanwhile his past works were fanning the flame of some younger generation to be caught up in a vague, evanescent struggle against some equally vague enemy, all while ignoring very real opportunities for improvement. Better to rage, better to post status updates, better to "like" all the right things, better to get involved in politics than to make any real change.

He downed the rest of the gin. He poured the whiskey into his cup, telling himself to drink it slower. It was the last of his stock.

He stood and began pacing the gazebo. He studied the artwork at his feet. Knights slaying dragons. Princesses. A popular children's character he recognized but could not name. He came to the scribbled-out drawing and tried to piece together what it had once been. He began to discern a shape beneath the scribbles that suggested the art had been obscene. So, it was censorship and not rivalry or artistic embarrassment that had resulted in it being redacted. Connor walked out of the gazebo, approached the fountain, and sat down on its edge, dipping his fingers into the cool water.

He thought back to the Q and A section of the lecture. When he was younger, he thought they were the most meaningful part of the presentation. Interacting with his fans was more important than anything. He still thought this was true. However, when he was younger this meant spreading his ideas. As he grew older it came to mean actually engaging with the fans. Except for a few of the older members in the audience, he wasn't sure if there had been any fans in attendance. Most of them seemed like curious members of the local intelligentsia, students pursuing extra credit, or the press. He wondered how the local newspaper would present the evening. It didn't really matter. He wasn't going to read the story.

As a rule, he avoided reading reviews of his works. After 1996 that is. When he was first starting out he read them religiously, subjecting his various partners to scathing denunciations of the analyses and to personal attacks on the character of the critics themselves. He stopped reading them after perusing an in-depth exposition of his early works and literary legacy in the Fall of '96. The author, Celestine McRae, claimed that a whole new crop of writers had risen in the early '90s who were emulating his unique brand of nihilistic scorn for establishment norms. He wasn't sure how a nihilistic

scorn for establishment norms was in any way unique, but he was willing to overlook that comment. The article was fine as a whole.

What bothered him was the story about the suicide of Nan Bergren. She was a young artist who had painted a large portrait depicting the protagonist of his Revolution Trilogy, Vesta Duan. Nan submitted it to a student art show at her university. It was quickly accepted. The night before the show she broke into the exhibit, took a lethal dose of valium, painted a talking bubble on the floor with a quote from the final book, "When the Tide Came In," and laid down next to it. She was discovered the next day, lying on the floor in the same pose as Vesta Duan in the painting next to her. She had positioned herself so that the bubble looked as though she were speaking the words. She had taped her eyes open. Vesta had killed herself in an act of rebellion and repudiation against the powers that be in Connor's fictitious universe. Apparently, it made quite an impression on Nan.

Somehow the story hadn't been picked up by the media until the feature had been published. Ordinarily, a writer, or artist of any kind, inspiring an impressionable young person to commit suicide would be a public scandal discussed by all the media talking heads. The death of Nan Bergren, which had happened in early 1991, had slipped under the radar. Until Ms. McRae's review that is. After it was published multiple news outlets contacted Connor for an interview. He was not available for comment.

Nan Bergren. He thought of her far more often than he wanted to. After Ms. McRae's review was released, Connor looked Nan up. He read her obituary, her poetry published in student publications, articles on art shows she had participated in. He had even managed to find several pictures of her art pieces. One piece, which he rather liked, came up for auction. He debated about bidding on it for a long time, ultimately deciding that it would be in bad taste. Characters, themes, and quotes from his Revolution Trilogy appeared multiple times in her works. She was only twenty-one when she took her life.

She was but one of his victims. Connor wondered how many others there were. How many had pulled the negativity and the rage from his pages and made it their own? How much despair and hopelessness had he spread? How many souls had he poisoned? How many people had he dragged down into the same muck his diseased mind had inhabited. He wondered if a single one of his works had contributed anything positive to the world. There was always the man from Tawain.

He sighed deeply and stood. He slowly walked around the fountain, studying the various carvings on it. It was a collection of Grecian images. Gods and goddesses cavorted with fauns and chubby angel babies. Grapes and goblets played heavily in the imagery as well. It seemed like an odd theme for a fountain in the middle of a strip mall. When he completed one round trip around the fountain he sat back down. He thought about removing his shoes and socks and dipping his feet into the water. He assumed that this would be frowned upon. But there wasn't anyone around to stop him. He considered the pros and cons of taking the plunge, so to speak, up until the moment a white car conspicuously marked "Security" drove slowly past, whereupon a new idea took hold: He should be getting back to his hotel room.

He stood and slowly ambled his way towards the hotel. Roughly ten feet from the fountain he cast a quick glance over his shoulder. The security car was driving away in the opposite direction. He immediately felt better.

It was a pleasant evening. Even though it was on the warm side. The whiskey wasn't helping with the heat. Nor was it helping his mood. At that precise moment in time, he wasn't sure what it was good for. Nonetheless, he took another sip.

Nan Bergren. An impressionable young life snuffed out by a book. Her suicide was a puzzle. The police officer who had investigated the case had written and self-published a book about it. Connor had read it. It desperately needed a professional editor, but it was fascinating, in the way tragedy always is. She had left no note. She wasn't protesting anything. Or rather if she was, no one knew it. In which case it was not a very effective protest. There was no history of depression or mental illness of any kind. No record of childhood trauma. She had excellent grades in all her courses. She had a steady boyfriend. By all appearances she was happy. The only strange thing about her was her obsession with "When the Tide Came In." Apparently, Connor had signed it. For some reason this little factoid was what disturbed him the most. At some point in his career he had sat at a table, scrawled "Best Wishes" and his name across the first page in a hardbound edition of his most famous book, and handed it back to a girl who would later kill herself in a bizarre homage to its protagonist.

Connor paused in the middle of the parking lot. He would trade every bit of his success for her life. He regretted the impact he had on her and the world in general. He was trying to undo it with his later works, and no one was paying attention. There was a sense in which everything he had written after 1996 was a tribute to Nan. Strange how no one ever asked about her. All anyone cared about were his early politics, and occasionally how his later politics diverged from them. He shook his head and continued towards his hotel.

He shouldn't blame himself for her death. If it hadn't been Vesta, it would've been Ophelia, or Hedda Gabler, or Edna Pontellier. And if it wasn't a fictional character, it could've been Plath, Hemingway, Woolf. Or maybe not. Maybe it could have only been Vesta. Maybe she was the one and only person, real or imagined, that could inspire Nan to take her life in an attempt to make a work of art. If that was what she was doing. It was the only likely explanation. She was trying to create something. Something to be remembered by. She was ending her life so that she could live forever. But her gesture had been forgotten by everyone but Connor and a small-town cop.

Connor heard a distant car in the parking lot, and realized he should probably keep moving. He made his way to the hotel door, pulled his keycard from his pocket, and held it up to the sensor. A little red light blinked. It didn't work. He tried it again. This time the light blinked green. Connor breathed a sigh of relief. Going to the hotel lobby to procure a new keycard sounded particularly awful. It would've only been a minor inconvenience. However, it would've felt like a particularly cruel gesture on the part of the universe when he was already tired and depressed.

He slowly walked up the stairs to the third floor. He wasn't exercising enough, according to his doctor. He got even less exercise while traveling. He was almost done. One more horrendous plane ride and he would be home. All plane rides were horrendous. His wife was right. He should stop going on tours. The world didn't need any more of his meaningless lectures.

Back in his room he walked to the window and looked out at the parking lot. Somewhere in the walk from the bottom floor to the third someone had shut the lights off at the gazebo. He wondered why they didn't leave them running. It wasn't that late.

He downed the rest of his whiskey and tossed the cup into the nearest trash can. He thought of Nan. He thought of the angry student at the lecture. He thought of the older man, apparently still stuck in the 60's. He thought of his legacy. Of the works, and more specifically, the philosophy he would leave behind. Not necessarily unique, but apparently uniquely poisonous. He had to undo it somehow. But he didn't know how many more stories he had left in him. No one was paying attention anymore anyway.

He shut the curtains and stepped away from the window. The back of his legs hit the hotel bed, throwing him off balance. He sat down. He drummed his fingers on the comforter. He felt restless. But there was nothing else to do but get ready for bed. He had to get up early to make his flight.

He turned on the television, primarily for noise. The hotel room was too quiet. He hadn't seen or heard another guest since he checked in. It felt like he was the only one there. There wasn't even traffic noise outside given the hotel's placement in the back corner of the strip mall.

There might be a story in that. A man checks into a hotel and discovers he's the only one there. How could he make that into a story? The man could break into other rooms. The man could start imagining things. He could go just a little bit crazy. He could suffer an existential crisis. It could just be a ghost story. He could at least get a short story out of it.

He walked into the bathroom. A male silhouette aimlessly wandered empty hallways in his mind's eye. Connor washed his face and started brushing his teeth. The man in the unraveling story was locked out of his room. But there was no one at the front desk to let him back in. He was forced to wait in the lobby in the dead of night, amidst the whirring of icemakers, vending machines, and an elevator that traveled back and forth between the third and fourth floor. The lobby door, an automatic door, kept opening and closing, even though there was no one there. The man found it unnerving.

Connor stared at his reflection, thinking about who the lone lodger would be. A man on a business trip, training some end users on a new software. A man in his early fifties. What would his name be? Greg maybe. Or Carl. Or Lewis. Calvin. Calvin might work. Calvin Reiman. An image of a slightly overweight man with a receding hairline slowly coalesced in Connor's mind. Connor finished getting ready for bed, walked into his room, and began jotting down ideas on the hotel notepad.