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HE GRIPS THE EDGE of the windowsill with his left hand, steadies himself, places the cane in his right hand onto the mattress, and eases himself into a sitting position on the edge of the bed. He stares out the window at a pale blue sky and a flat, sunlit, glimmering white, almost treeless landscape. It's bounded in the distance by a street where there's swift traffic. To his left, the land is vast with icy patches. In places the wind stirs the snow and mists the surrounding air. A strong wind whistles over and around the building. Each gust rattles the glass in the window.

It's the first time he notices the landscape around this mysterious building. He tries to remember the name of another place that is flat for miles around, that's sometimes green and sometimes brown, that's bounded, he's sure, by a snarling, pounding sea on one side, and on the other side by smoke-grey mountains.

He gazes upwards, at fangs of ice hanging from the cornice, reflecting the sun's light. For a moment it's as if he has been half-swallowed by a dragon, and the window is a transparent glottis through which he sees the dragon's diamond fangs.

The Saint Lawrence is near here, he vaguely remembers Dr Stein telling him some time ago, after asking him whether the Saint Lawrence was "a lake, a river, a sea, or a country." "A river—a river in Canada," he'd replied as he would have done in his high school geography class, in a past that's now reduced to grey billowing smoke. Stein said his identity was returning. His palms began to sweat.

He turns his head slightly to the right and looks at a spot where there are trees. Their bare, grey twigs hide nothing, except when they're bundled by the gusting wind. There are redbrick apartment buildings some three hundred feet away, outside a chain-link fence with a gate that's now open. To the far right, about 150 feet from the window, a long, oxblood, rectangu-

lar four-storey brick building hides the view.

"How are you today, Mr Cock Robin?" he hears Dr Stein asking from the doorway at his back.

"Fine, but Cock Robin's not my name. That much I can tell you." He doesn't turn to face Doctor Stein, keeps his eyes focused on a rime-patterned part of the window.

"What's it, then?"

He doesn't answer.

"How's your foot feeling?"

"Like a painful foot. Pain's necessary."

"When it isn't pleasure." Now it's Dr Defoe speaking.

Cock Robin turns his head. The usual trio is there. Gladys Knights, in her baggy, drab, bark-brown clothes, her bulk taking up more than half the space inside the doorway, faithfully holds the tape recorder.

"What were you staring at?" Defoe continues. The light from the window transforms his eyes into glowing blond marbles. His glossy black, mixed-race curls and oak-coloured forehead glisten.

"Just wondering why this place looks both strange and familiar."

Stein says, "You are in . . .?"

"Montreal. And *you* are *not* Sparrow. I know that now. How did I get to Montreal and then to . . .?"

"Douglas Hospital."

"A . . .?"

"Psychiatric hospital."

"*Psychiatric*. I've been here before."

"Not according to our records," Stein says.

"How do you know that? You don't know my name."

Stein starts to say something but checks himself.

There's a long pause.

"Which letter will we be working on today, folks?"

"J," Stein replies and begins putting on his glasses. They are suspended from a copper chain. They magnify the wrinkles below and at the corners of his eyes and make his bulbous nose seem larger. It's usually Gladys who reads, and Cock Robin is supposed to stop her if the name she mentions means anything to him. So far the names they've called are not his, unless he has forgotten his name.

But today it's Stein who reads from the thick, worn, blue-black book. "Jack, Jacob, Jake, James, Japheth, Jarred, Jason, Jasper, Jemmoth, Jethro,

Jim, Job, Joel, John.” After each name Stein lifts his head to see Cock Robin’s reactions. Gladys’s and Defoe’s eyes are spotlighted on Cock Robin.

Cock Robin returns to staring out the window.

“Jonathan, Joseph . . . “

“*Joseph and Jonathan,*” he interrupts Stein and pauses for a while. “But they’re not my real names.” His hands begin to sweat and his skin tightens the way it does when he’s in a dusty place.

“Pseudonyms?”

“Yes, pseudonyms.”

“Why *pseudonyms*?”

“If I knew would I be trapped here?”

“You mean this has happened to you before?”

“I’m sure it has. Maybe even here.”

“In London? Paris? Madrid?”

He doesn’t answer.

“In your confused state, you told us you’ve lived in those cities. Did you?”

“*Sí. Sí. Es verdad. Pero no me acuerdo mucho.*”

“What did you study in school?”

“Don’t remember.”

“You think someone might’ve hit you over the head and stolen your wallet before the police found you? You had a contusion on the back of your head.”

“More likely hit from inside my head.”

“Now you’re speaking in riddles.”

“Riddle me! Riddle me!” He giggles. *I don’t have to be hit over the head to have welts.* “May I rest now? Oh, and may I go for a walk later? I’d like to see what’s behind that four-storey brick building.”

“To the south?”

“Yes.” The word south orients him, and he remembers east, west, north, and how to find them.

“I’ll get an aid to accompany you after lunch. But go easy on your left foot. Before I leave, though, I want to ask you one more question: Who is Sparrow?”

“He kept the accounts. Was supposed to. He pronounced his nickname Sparrer.”

“Is he alive?”

“Yes and no. That’s two questions, Doctor Stein. He is more alive now than before he died. You would be too, depending on the life you lead.”

“Do you see his ghost?”

“His ghost!”

“You said you used to see your sister’s.”

“Yes. That’s certainly true.” He pauses. “Maybe I dreamed it. I’ve told you: gales howl in my head when I try to remember some things.”

“Do you see Sparrow’s ghost?”

“No. It’s in me.”

“You mean his ghost possesses you?”

“No, I possess it.” He shakes his head with a can-you-believe-it gesture. “*Each man kills the thing he loves/ but each man does not die.*’ *Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends,*” he quotes in a drone. “Ever loved anyone that deeply, Doctor Stein?”

“I guess not: I’m still alive.”

“You, Dr Defoe? You’re so silent.”

Defoe doesn’t answer.

“Dr Stein, I used to think you were Sparrow come back from the dead to haunt me.” He knows he’s jesting. “Have you ever been a fundamentalist preacher?”

Stein says nothing.

“Well, it’s one with fundament.”

Stein looks puzzled.

“The arse, Doctor. That organ that processes shit? *Fair and foul are next of kin.*” He pauses, concentrates. “*Love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement.*’ There’s someone who knew a thing or two about shit.”

“More important to spot it,” Defoe says.

“Some hoard it.”

“What are you running away from?” Stein asks.

They’re provoking me so I’d blurt out something useful to them. “Now, you are full of shit, Dr Stein. You’re paid to give your patients shit, right? Just leave me alone. Go analyze your own shit. If it doesn’t poison you, you’ll be old before there’s time for mine.”

He hopes they leave now.

“Do you know why you’re here?” Stein continues.

He sighs, exasperated. “Because the police brought me here. You told me so. And you’ve kept me here.” He pauses. His jaws are clamping; he has to force to get the words out. “Because I’m poisoned.”

“So you haven’t been disposing of your own shit, then,” Defoe says.

“Stop being so vulgar, Dr Defoe! You’re black so I know you’ve been

taught to respect your elders.”

“There’s enough spunk in you to make two people well. Keep it up,” Defoe says.

“Where do you live?” Stein asks.

He rolls his eyes. “Montreal. You’ve told me so several times, Dr Stein.”

“Where in Montreal?”

He’s a while answering. “I’d love to know. But the rent is paid. I pay my rent a year ahead of time. That much I remember.”

“That’s unusual.”

“Not really. Why can’t I remember anything?” He deliberately turns away from them and returns to looking out the window, at the trees. Eventually he says, “Doctors, you’ve already asked me ten questions, not one! Didn’t you learn to count in med school?”

Now he knows what will make them leave. “Weren’t you a Rhodes scholar?” he asks, turning to stare at Stein.

“In fact I was. How did you know that?”

Cock Robin smiles but doesn’t know how he knows.

“Were you?” Stein’s pupils have dilated and some of his facial wrinkles have vanished.

“No.”

“Why did you ask?” His wrinkles have returned.

“Doctor Stein, if you, a Rhodes scholar, don’t know, it’s pointless my telling you.”

“Am I on trial?”

“Certainly. Unless you’re spiritually dead. I see now. You’re part of my illness. Bye-bye.” He lifts his right hand and wiggles his fingers in a contemptuous bye-bye gesture.

Stein and his retinue leave, and Cock Robin-Joseph-Jonathan (who knows he is not altogether Cock Robin-Joseph-Jonathan) picks up the cane he uses to ease the pressure on his left foot when he moves around. He leans on it, gets up from the edge of the bed where he’s been sitting, walks around the foot of the bed and goes to sit in the armchair on the other side, near the head of his bed.

He’s in the isolation room. He knows he has money. Knows too that unless he can remember where it is, they’ll put him in the public ward, and that would be a live burial. If he wanders out onto the street, would he find the bank? What would he say his name was? Perhaps someone would recognize him and call out to him. The question of his leaving the isolation room

didn't come up today. He appreciates the privacy of this room, especially when he hears the howls and yells of the patients in the large communal room that he goes through whenever he takes the short indoor walks he has been prescribed. He would bully the staff in whatever way he could to avoid being sent there.

Thinking these thoughts he dozes.

His sister Bita sits on the armrest of the chair and takes his face in her hand the way she used to in the hallucinations he had during his first wipeout at age sixteen.

"Bita, you no longer come to see me."

"Hush."

"You've come to get me?"

"Hush."

"Why'd you go without me?"

"Hush."

"Sing me one of your songs."

"Be quiet, Joshua!"

"Joshua! That's my name."

"Bita! Bita!" he shouts, half-awake.

Leroy, the orderly, comes running.

"Joshua Éclair! Don't forget it. Tell Dr Stein. Joshua Éclair! Her name was Averill Éclair. Joshua Éclair." Something dissolves in him, like a frozen river melting, releasing torrents of water; outside his body, it literally feels like the cutting loose of a tightly wound rope—and he sobs, loud, hiccupping sobs.

Stein arrives, followed by Defoe and Gladys.

They look away from him, uncomfortably.

"It's all right. It's all right," he tells them. He takes a tissue from the box on the night table on his right, wipes his eyes and blows his nostrils. "What would you like to know?"

"You don't have to talk now," Defoe says. "We could come back."

"No. Stay."

"How many names do you use?" Stein asks.

"I don't know."

"Why so many?"

"Joshua Éclair is a borrowed name. Joshua Éclair pays the bills. Please write down my adopted mother's name: Averill Éclair. Dead but not buried."

They stay on a few more minutes, and when they leave they post Leroy to his room. Joshua gets into bed, lies on his back and closes his eyes.

“Who’re you talking to? Your lips are moving.” It’s Dr Stein. He’s alone. Joshua didn’t hear him reenter the room.

“My sister.”

“What’re you telling her?”

“None of your business.”

“Where’s your sister?”

“In the Atlantic.”

“How did you come by all this money?”

“I got it from Averill Éclair. She got it from Cecil Rhodes or her husband—same thing. Rhodes was the archetype. Before him Prospero.” He stares hard at the doctor, expecting a reaction.

None comes.

“The immediate problem is solved.” He takes a deep, audible breath. “I can now have my own private room. Tomorrow you will have my bank account, my social insurance number and my health insurance number. You and your damn hospital will be paid.”

“You are angry.”

“You are lucky not to be. We can’t control what history does. A puppeteer we perform for until our strings break or we’re thrown onto the rubbish heap. We eat its fruits—are its fruits—are the spokes in its wheel; we nurse its wounds, wear its crutches, repeat its lies, enact its horrors.” He wants to stop, but the stuff, like water heading down a cataract, just rushes out.

“Would you like a sedative?”

“Yes. Shut me up. It’s all you can do for me, Doctor: write prescriptions!” He’s shouting. He wants to stop but is unable to. “Damn Joshua Éclair! Damn all Éclairs! Damn history! Damn humanity! Damn you, too, Doctor! Where’s that sedative?”

“Gladys will bring it shortly,” Stein says softly.

“Let her bring cyanide too.”