MUSIC AND MURDER

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MASTER OF ARTS

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English
(Creative Writing)

by

Jonathan Alston

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MUSIC AND MURDER

A Project

by

Jonathan Alston

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Department of English
Abstract

of

MUSIC AND MURDER

by

Jonathan Alston

A Novella of sound, murder, and truth following the death of Herman Chesterfield.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Doug Rice

_______________________
Date
DEDICATION

for

The Wife

After six and half years, I’m finally finished
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The wife: who has put up with my haphazard schooling and misguided ambitions; who, for six and a half years, worked so that I might focus all my energy on school, on writing, on finding who and what I want to be. I cannot thank her enough.

My parents: They are who they are, and without them, I would not be alive. They have always encouraged my artistic endeavors, and never let me settle.

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And Doug Rice: a teacher from whom I have come to learn most of what I know about writing. The accomplishment of this Novella is because of his insane and precise teaching. By far one of the crassest individuals I have ever met, he knows more about writing and literature than any person I know.

To all those who have been in my life and influenced me in any way, thank you.
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Prologue

In 1919, musicologist Herman Chesterfield published his first and most controversial book: *The Linguistics of Music*, in which he purports that music was the first form of communication used by pre-historic European settlers’ centuries before the unknowable and disputable theories of Proto Indo-European. Chesterfield concludes that all musical forms in the future will converge upon Pure Tonality: as time progresses music will become less and less stratified, and all genres will coagulate into one pure-genre. He graduated in 1903 with a doctorate in Musicology from Harvard University specializing in cultural relations and linguistic structures and patterns through ancient history. Three years after school, Chesterfield joined a prominent social group in Boston known as the *Viennese Society of Musical Reform* – an organization founded in 1785 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn, and Ludwig van Beethoven – which appointed itself structural form enforcement and creation for the advancement of musical thinking; they were responsible for constructing the Classical form and believed that music was only considered such when composed within the gamut that the *Society* dictated. However, after the death of Mozart in 1791, the *Societies* influence began to

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1 Wide scholarship describes Mozart as an abusive drunk, and either died from liver failure, rheumatic fever, trichinous, or syphilis (that he may have contracted from his mother at birth). However, according to Chesterfield’s essay “Mozart’s Death Mass and Resting Place,” these rumors are false. He refutes all claims surrounding Mozart’s death in 1791 based on the sole fact that no definite grave for the beloved musician exists nor any recording in the annals of Vienna of his passing (although this essay offers no other death date). After joining the *Society* in 1906, Chesterfield learned that with the fall of Classical form and the ushering in of Romance, the *Society* went into hiding. When members died, their remains followed wherever the subsequent members ventured: through cremation. For over a decade, the *Society* traveled through Europe, inducting only one new member – at the behest of Beethoven – Franz Shubert, after the death of Haydn in 1809. Mozart followed shortly thereafter in 1811. By this time Beethoven was all but deaf and fearful that the *Society* should fail if he died (Shubert still a fairly new musician and not quite acquainted with the *Society’s* proceedings and procedures). It is for this reason that when Beethoven died in 1827, Shubert had him buried in the Währing cemetery. Fearing for the *Society* because of persecution
wane. By 1825, the Society was completely unheard from, and the Romantic Era of music had replaced it throughout Europe.

It was not until 1839 that a scholastic journal, *Musical Reformation: A Study in the Changes of Music*, began circulation throughout fledgling America. The founder of the Viennese Society of Musical Reform in America, Henry Hathorne, established the foundation in 1830 at the age of twenty-two in his hometown of Boston. Over the next sixty years, the Society gained public interest, but never became accepted among struggling, or otherwise, musicians. Hathorne died in 1890, and his son, William Hathorne, took his place as Chairman of the society at the age of twenty-seven. By this time, the membership of the Society had grown to over 63, all of whom were spread across the country. Every quarter the men gathered in Boston for a weeklong conference where they discussed musical reforms, the current musical status of America as well as the world, voted on any necessary changes in the Society’s functions and leadership, and all other related business.

from the arising Romantic musicians, Shubert traveled to American to re-establish the group. In Boston, after a month long voyage, that he met the unknown poet and musician Henry Hathorne – younger brother to renowned Nathaniel Hawthorne. In desperation, Shubert confided in the nineteen-year-old boy the existence of the Viennese Society of Musical Reform, their goals and intentions. The idea intrigued Hathorne, being fond of both Mozart’s and Beethoven’s works. Shubert lodged with Hathorne for two weeks, until the entirety of the Society was deposited in writing in the Americas. Shubert left then to return home, but died only months after returning in 1828 from contracting syphilis on his voyage back to Europe. He was buried next to Beethoven in Währing. In 1888, Hathorne journeyed to Europe to retrieve the remains of the two missing musicians for the Societies collection. Beethoven’s grave was “moved” to Zentralfriedhof in Vienna (a necessary façade: the city of Vienna had been trying to obtain possession of the corpse for years), but an empty casket was re-buried. Shubert’s remains Hathorne exhumed himself during the cover of night, something much more easily done due to Shubert’s non-popularity. Hathorne returned to American in September of 1888, and reunited Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Shubert in the Chamber of Fathers within the new meetinghouse of the Viennese Society of Musical Reform in Boston.
William Hathorne, in 1920, renounced Chesterfield’s title of musiphilologist and exonerated his membership for the publication of his book. William offered to let Chesterfield rescind his theories, writing a formalized apology to the members of the Society – which would be published in the subsequent journal – stating that the claims of his book (most important, the acceptance of all styles and genres of music) were unfounded and that what he pretended to was in fact heretical in nature. Of course Chesterfield refused, on the grounds that what the Society stood for in its days of creation had disintegrated into a stogy bourbon committee snuffing intellectual stimulation and expansion with regards to musical exploration and imagining; Chesterfield was forced to withdraw from them.

Over 60 essays were published in Musical Reformation throughout the following year denouncing Chesterfield’s studies and book, explicitly pointing out that Chesterfield’s theories in no way reflected the beliefs and practices of the Society. After being ostracized completely, Chesterfield discovered his greatest theorem, a discovery that preceded his untimely death. After its completion, however, he attempted on several occasions to publish the piece in the Society’s journal, under various pseudonyms such as Harold D. Verstenmyer, Giles Telyngsworth, Daniel Tubsburry, and Hector von Wüsenberg. And in response, every attempt was denied – Chesterfield's mark was too heavily imprinted upon his work. Undeterred by Hathorne’s pedagogical slandering and tyranny, Chesterfield resolved to publish his work by any means required to promote his

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2 A radical field of musical nomenclature that Chesterfield created in which certain orders of musical frequencies are given names that correspond vocally to musical wave patterns. “Much like the seven scale modes outline possible divergence on the major scale for tonal variation, in order to better organize and understand frequency patterns and relations, a new form of notation needed creation.”
most important accomplishment. In the small town of Torrington, Connecticut, he found the New Britain Publishing Co. through which he was able to publish his monograph. Two weeks after its release, Chesterfield was found dead in his home smelling strongly of wine and covered in blood. The newspaper the following morning reported that he had committed suicide:

“... slit his own throat, most likely due to his recent estrangement with the Viennese Society of Musical Reform. In questioning William Hathorne about the death of his once colleague, he said: ‘He was always a troubled man. Never quite right in the head, if you catch me.’ Some critiques believe, however, that a more sinister development might emerge over the course of the investigation. A. J. Lewis told Torrington News that he believes ‘Chesterfield was the only right minded person amongst that lot of fanny fuffs.’ The only items found at the scene of Chesterfield’s death in his parlor were an empty bottle of Port, eight journals, and a letter opener with the inscription ‘HMB’ in its hilt. Further investigation is rumored to follow.”

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3 A relatively new publishing company founded by the unknown author A. J. Lewis – of which little is still known. The company’s first publication was an American edition of The Journal of the Alchemical Society in 1913, Lewis being the only States publisher willing to print what many scientists worldwide believed to be “the nonsensical ramblings of demon worshipping Satanists.” With this epithet engraved in Lewis’ works, he gained a reputation for printing, at best, questionable works of which he too was author, including such pieces as The Qabbalan Restoration, and Which Way to Hell?: An Exploration in the Non-existence of the Afterlife. It was in 1927 that he published Chesterfield’s greatest discovery, the title of which is still unknown. Three months after publication, Lewis went missing and the print office and store were burned, along with all his publications. It was said to have been caused by an electrical short, which ignited some loose papers and took the rest with it. Lewis has not been seen since.
A tattered brown blanket and twin bed, decrepit oak desk, and a small shelf half crammed with books accompanied the corpse. One window – facing another building – allowed natural light, if it were possible for any light to slip between the brick coffins.

“Doesn’t matter,” Detective Worstrum answered. The flat smelled of sulfur. “Everything we have should be enough.” Among the three other police men and several journalists – Milton lost count, or rather, cared more for details of the dead – Detective Hynric Worstrum and Milton Verstein commanded the room.

Milton carried a crate smelling of old leather and blood out to the coach awaiting the two gentleman’s return. Morning approached, browns and oranges hugged the horizon, hinting towards dawn. Hynric scribbled notes in a small journal, popping the joints in his jaw over their work, twirling his pencil. The box filled Milton’s lap sitting across from Hynric, watching the street lamps from the window die with the approaching daylight.

“What do you suppose?” Milton asked, turning towards his partner; Hynric left his eyes on his writing.

“It doesn’t matter, Milo,” Hynric mumbled, “we're not in for that sort of business. I leave the why to the family or whomever, as long as I don’t get involved. I can tell you, yes or no, yep, he’s dead, here’s what happened and such. That’s what they pay me for.”

“Murder’s different.” Hynric flicked his eyes at Milton for a moment. Then he placed them back on his page.

“Of course it’s different,” he said. “It changes everything.”
Milton nodded and watched the buildings roll by.

“But he wasn’t murdered,” Hynric added. Milton said nothing. He was not for arguing this late – or early.

The lights were out, the sun breaching over the hills, bleeding cool yellow through the streets and staining facades with docile color. The gentle rocking from the cobbled street against those old rotting wheels pulled Milton into sleep, his face resting on the warming glass, hands falling slack from the edges of the box. Hynric wrote without notice. So the two passed indifferent for the other, Milton black in sight with no more than glass holding him erect, Hynric recording the proceedings of the night, prepping his work for the hours of filing that awaited him. The drudgery never ended, with one death came another, and each in need of explaining: the hows and whys and whens and with whats (and by whom if the case insisted) all warranted importance, whether evidence sketched to conclusions or not. Whether evidence there was at all.

Breaking the routine was ill advised, inconceivable even. “It’s easier to keep a train moving along the track than to stop it completely then start up again,” Hynric would say to Milton when murder and death and hell did not occupy their thoughts and time: “Just keep on along.” Time struck hard against their backs leaving stripes ripped and bleeding until consciousness abandoned hope and left either one to fall apart. Milton had fallen first in the carriage: Hynric wrote. Gray waistcoat unbuttoned, gold watch in panic.

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4 Structurally the town was simple, especially where Chesterfield took up his last residence. La Morte Avenue was – as peculiar things go – the only street that connected back to its self. Not like that of a circle, perfect in turning and motion and spacing, but a long, twisting trail that worked its way through and around Amyrthstow.

5 Given him by his late grandfather, Hueburt Milton, its origin is a mystery to the Verstein family. Hueburt was, as are many men in the later dark years of life, a man who frequented consignment shops and estate...
trying to stay in his pocket, Milton dreamed. He was a man of cleanliness: he kept his face bare and his hair well greased and shaped, presentation made the cases easier. Now his hair pushed against the small square window, disheveling the sculpture. Hynric had too much on his mind to meddle in nonsense. A brown beard dying into gray hid expression from those with whom he worked, an oversight on Milton’s part who was incapable to conceal any and all reaction from his employers. And a hat for Hynric – gray, brown, black – protected his thinning hair.

A sudden jolt woke Milton from sleep, tossing the box from his lap. Papers and books spilled across the carriage floor like water from a pitcher. Hynric pulled away from his notebook to scan the mess. He smirked, then returned to his notes. After rubbing his eyes to wakefulness, Milton slumped off his seat.

“What the hell is all this?” Milton held up piles of staff paper dusted with black dots, and leather bound books.

“That, Milo, is what you will tell me.”
William crumpled the newspaper and threw it into the weak fire. He leaned against the mahogany mantelpiece where four white urns – Chinese porcelain with thin blue characters written in Mandarin – ornamented the fireplace. He spoke into the fire.

“You realize, of course, that we cannot have such slanderous activities attributed to our name. The constable suspects, I’m sure. No, no, I will take care of him, there is no need for that, you fool. Keep up pretences; this is the last thing we need.”

Aaron, in a black suit and bowler, stood from a plush armchair. “But do you really think that anything otherwise could have happened?” He walked near the fire, rubbing his hands over the burning paper. “There was nothing much left for the man, not in the least. They must know that.” His voice echoed flat through the room. “What possibly could bring testimony otherwise? I can’t imagine being confronted by anyone for such accusations.”

“Please understand.” William began wondering the study, his fingers tying his hands behind his back. “You are to do nothing, nothing without consulting me first. Nor should any others. For now, the publication will be *capax infiniti*. See that none gather too conspicuously. I want no reason for further suspicion.” Aaron watched William’s constant neck-cracking as he walked. He did not know how to interpret it. This was new. Though Aaron knew William for a short time – close to a year – few aspects of his personality and life were unknown to him. A week, perhaps, of the last year had not been spent in the presence of each other. Anger, joy, frustration, concern, the emotional gamut humans are capable of experiencing: Aaron witnessed it all from William. But this. . . .
His hair roots soaked with sweat. Sleep left him alone for nights to fight off waking nightmares. He ate little, if anything. Unusual for a man who, when bored, indulged in Welsh caviar spread on Bulgarian rye crackers.

“Could this have come from inside?”

William stopped. “Elaborate for me.” Aaron stepped away from the fireplace.

“We may be small, but still, you can’t know the goings on at all times in all places, even right here, or in Amyrthstow.” He gesticulated large arcs with his hands over the floor. “How can you be certain that it wasn’t Hector? Or Gregor? Or Stelton or Dagwood? I’m not wanting to accuse, nor do I suspect, but are you certain . . . ?”

For a moment, only the fire smoldered. William brought his face into Aaron’s.

“Yes . . . I’m certain. . . . Damn! We have never conducted business this way. That is not how professional men work. You know.”
When the carriage reached their office, sunlight sat on roofs undressing in the middle of town. Colors melted into one mass of burning brown, drowning details, the nuances life grew in Amyrthstow disappearing under the morning’s watchful eye.

Centuries layered on the town. Imperceptible. No stratifications, no evidence categorizing its history. Like cannibals, the people in Amyrthstow consumed their town; abandoned structures were nonexistent. No historian is certain to the founding of this miniature metropolitan community, each decade erased by the new, the progressive, the changing in fashions, architecture, hairstyle, colloquialisms, the way a man should address his mother, how women should select colored stockings to match their attire. All natural. No one individual decided how things changed, which direction the town would follow next.

Nor was Amyrthstow influenced by outside trends: French customs and thinking were frowned upon; Italian designers were considered children running with scissors; England—the entire country—was ignored, hoping that a day would come when it sank back into

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6 An article, written by the late Chesterfield (*On the Occurrence of Accidental Genius*), once made this reference: “How is it that a cannibalistic place such as Amyrthstow can inspire such maddened brilliance in one man? I cannot begin to know or say how I have found myself in such a place as ahistorical as this.”

7 The Offices of Hynric and Milton, Esq. was the ninth business to take up residence in the small twelve hundred square foot, four room building. Before the detectives, the building had been occupied by a machinist, three different barber salons (not consecutively), a public, Miss Monique’s Erotica: Gentlemen’s Club (which closed after a month, her twelve girls and she burned for witchcraft), a post office for years before it was moved to the town square erected in 1867 (this date is one of the few known in Amyrthstow’s history by the bronze inscription at the base of a fountain, which, incidentally, is scheduled to be demolished next year), and a stone mason specializing in headstone fabrication. It was this stratification that Chesterfield feared most for the *Society* and music; it was what Mozart and the other Fathers fought against. Unification, whether in ideals, form, language, all posed threats to further development for Chesterfield's work: "I cannot stress the importance of those before me whose foundations I build. Because of Beethoven's writings, the works of music theorists (far too many to name), my publications are nothing without the work done by them. Where my endeavors would begin having no knowledge but that of my own experimentation - for I cannot say any postulations and conjectures, all the theories I have investigated, researched, have any genesis in me - this here, nothing would come from these pages (or any of mine) but incoherent ramblings of a dejected fool."
the shadows of the unknown from which is sprang; Russia had its advantages to some degree – many facades at one time reflected archaic architecture from the Old Country.

Inspiration. Epiphany. Call it what they may, the people of Amyrthstow re-imagined their town on a daily basis, grasping for an unknown perfection.

For the detectives, current opinion dictated a Greco-Roman façade – complete with columns and nude sculptures of gods and goddesses – for all non-residential buildings. Mars and Aeries watched the doors leading to Hynric and Milton’s offices: shield and spear ready, plumed helmets topping their frames, sandals under feet. All else: exposed.

Inside exuded a complete decorum in opposition to the gods’ genitals. Plush Victorian sofas with gilded framing – vines wrapped around large grape clusters – leaned against West and East walls, while four cushioned Brazilian Cherry wood chairs filled the other empty spaces. Cream velvet upholstered the furniture, with a matching cream oriental rug hiding the cement foundation. A chair runner – its material the two detectives did not know – divided the walls: the bottom half-red and maroon striped wallpaper, the top a two-toned tan colored stucco, reminiscent of antique Italian villas. Overhead, a tin punched ceiling marked with large squares (seven across and ten deep) filled with smaller squares of geometric symmetry into what felt to be the infinite. Milton lost an entire

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8 March 9th, 1908:
There appears to be an unlimited range to sound; specifically, in the scale of music. We teach there are twelve possible notes in all clefs, chromatic scales encompassing the range of eight note scales and their accidentals (all subsequent notes being only octave variations from the base twelve). But consider the violin - or any stringed instrument. From E to F is one note, and one half-step, the smallest notational variation used in music. However, the gap between the positions of E and F on a fret board demonstrates that there are far more tones between the notes than one half-step. In fact, it is limitless; the possibilities follow along a logarithmic tangent, never quite approaching finality. Consider it as such: each half step in
afternoons staring through the ever-shrinking geometry, like tracing veins along a green maple leaf. No matter the length of his study, he never learned how far the squares dissolved; he always found another set of smaller alternate shapes beyond his last discovery.

A plain black oak door intruded on the West wall, no sign denoting its use: it was a storage room. The North wall divided in two, Milton’s office to the left, Hynric opposite, each door with a large window painted with black letters, their names designated stations and behind which a blind could be drawn for privacy. Hynric’s office and the storage room doors had locks. Milton’s did not.

Hynric spoke nothing towards the case once inside. Covered in silence, he read over his notes, feet guiding through to his door, unlocking, opening, and closing without his eyes leaving the tiny yellow pages inhabited with scribbles. Shaking his head, Milton, skilled like a failed contortionist, entered his own office as well, dropping Chesterfield (boxed away in texts) on the floor next to his desk. His office was empty save a simple oaken desk and chair, the walls papers by bookshelves – floor to ceiling – books spilling over to the floor. Reading served all facets in life for Milton. Though not much a man for fiction, the volume he cherished above all – attested to by its worn state – was *The Complete Works of Alfred Tennyson, Poet Laureate*, publish in 1887 (his brother’s name scribbled in black on the inside cover). Comfortable surroundings for a man who devoted time for work. At times Milton woke to his desk for a pillow, books open on the floor, his

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*a scale is one unit, and utilizing an E to F change, the gap notationally is one. So from E(1) to F(2) is one. Yet what lies between the two cannot be defined, these in-between unplayed notes can be represented as E', E'' E''', E''''... E'n, where each division of E is a fragment between E and F: 1.5, 1.75, 1.875, 1.9375, 1.96875, 1.984375, on to infinity.*
lap, and often under his face. Printed words made better blankets than cotton or down. And in the corner sang the low voice of Beethoven, “Moonlight Sonata,” on a brass and cherry wood Victrola.

From a small drawer in the middle of his desk, Milton removed an ink well, pen, a few leaves of paper, and a packet of cigarettes. He fingered a matchbook from his waistcoat pocket, lighting a smoke and pulling deep off the end, a habit given him by Hynric, an equalizer for the two, able to share in something other than work that separated their minds and bodies more than physical distance. While both secured themselves to their desks, each knew the other filled a deep concentration with smoke: an ether binding the offices, binding the men, bridging time and space and dream, outside more than just a simple idea or hoping for connection; a tangible cloud hung over and around them, penetrated deep in their cores, absorbed beyond lungs and air, their blood pulsing with tobacco, intertwining nature and man – shadowy chains linking the two, if only for moments, together. Neither considered the bond, but sensed it. It was why they continued. Detectives are nothing more than socialite peacekeepers: they herd confusion, dispel misconceptions and idiocy, offer warmth for the troubled – for the despairing, etcetera, etcetera. A good smoke burned the stresses implicit with the title Detective; on all occasions a fog to expose nothing but evidence accelerated their process. And so Milton and Hynric, now in their respective offices, lit their second cigarettes, beginning the long sleepless day of creating Herman Chesterfield’s death.9

9 October 28th, 1901:

Lately I have been testing the movement of sound through various mediums. The majority of what we hear travels through air alone: oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, and trace amounts of other molecules. Yet air is not the only compressible matter known. My experiments began simple: mornings in Boston find
“Let’s see them.” Fitz set his elbows on the heavy pinewood table, placing a newspaper aside and leaning toward Clint and Stelton. Several sconces lit the room, a large brass candelabrum on the table’s end beside the paper. A folder laid open, Clint smearing a dozen photographs before Fitz: black and white shadows of a charred building skeleton, its guts, mounds of fleshy books and papers scorched near unrecognizable.

“This it?” asked Fitz.

“No. Nothing more,” Clint said, trying to arrange the photographs, adjusting angles and distances between images.

“You sure, Clint?”

“Yes, sir.” He pulled on the corner of a photograph showing blackened cabinets, doors burned from the hinges, book spines singed and unreadable.

“We spent days out in that, sir. Not much left for us to be going through as you see.” Stelton pointed to a wide shot capturing the entire structure: nothing more than a derelict waste, the impression of a century old and forgotten barn struck by lightning. Fitz examined each photograph in detail, tracing each line and shape and curve with his eyes, hoping to find more than the pictures knew. Since the first photograph Fitz saw as a child – an old family portrait with his dead grandmother before she was buried, who looked no more dead than any other living person in the photograph – he questioned the truth an image preserved. Light, his father explained. A simple chemical reaction to light-reactive

themselves heavy with fog, to the point of visibility being reduced to a few feet. I compared the volume, duration, and tone of each note (a whole note) in the major C scale, played in the fog ten feet away, with the same notes played under the same restrictions in clear afternoon. The difference I could not hear, though I sensed variation. Perhaps infinitesimal reduction plays a part in what may differ. I need more than my ears for further testing.
celluloid, it followed nature; reactions, no more artificial than photosynthesis; Fitz was not a believer. On those thin pieces of paper, within, there was more than light playing with chemicals. More than exact reflections, copies from objects. Not that souls were absorbed through lens, but as light bounced from object to lens to mirror to film, there was something: a cloaking of truth, a scrambling of messages; a coded reality only intricate study revealed. Clint and Stelton did their job, but nothing beyond. Fitz knew, in those images, somewhere – he was not certain when – it was there. A white flag offered up to him. He only had to find it.

“Course we did find a few things could be salvaged, sir.” Stelton lifted a burlap sack from the floor next to his feet and placed it in between him and Clint on the table. To Fitz, it appeared empty, limp. Clint reached inside to pull out a singed book and three half-burned pamphlets. Eyes open, breathing shallow, Fitz swiped the photographs aside, reaching for the book and papers; his eyes drooled over the discoveries. Clint, cracking his fingers, picked up the photographs and straightened them until all aligned in one pile.

“We found them under some boards or other,” Clint remarked, returning the photographs to their folder. “There was others, but nothing like what you was asking for. Dictionaries and such.”

“Yes, yes . . . of course.” Fitz inhaled the book’s black smell, afraid to open it, while Stelton picked up the newspaper at the table’s edge and began to read. Clint watched their findings consumed, Fitz seeing more in those papers than the individuals who created them; like the photographs, a truth deeper than surfaces revealed hibernated somewhere within.
For an unmeasured time, the three men sat in silence: Clint wondering how Fitz could be so enthralled by books of which he knew nothing more than rumors, falling through the void filled with the hidden words he held – a hope – for what he thought would bring order back to the world; Stelton all the while read.

“Men do great things, even when they aren’t great themselves,” Fitz said under his breath, eyes closed, slowing each syllable. “He didn’t deserve what he knew. Just jumbled theories in that bastard head a’ his.” His voice grew. “Nonsense he wrote, smut in the name of musical reformation. Herman didn’t know tonal frequency displacement from astral projection. All music, all sound, stacked in one raucous mound for him. I knew. That damn fool Aaron knew. Even the priest knew ‘what sacrilege’ Herman spouted off. Except William. Trite nonsense to him, expanding his precious restricted Society and old ways. Tradition. Those fathers of music he holds so tight. Foolhardy.” Clint watched Fitz ramble. “But he had it . . . Pure Tone.”

“Look here.” Stelton held up the paper for the others interrupting Fitz. “He’s dead,” pointing to a photograph inside Chesterfield’s flat. Broken from his trance, Fitz translated the words in his ears.

“Since when?” Fitz set the book down, still holding the half pamphlets.

“Near two days now it looks.”

“Who’s killed the fool?” asked Clint.

“None. Says he did himself, the bastard.” At hearing this, Fitz even discarded the pamphlets, turning to look at the light swaying on the candles unsure which way to cast their light. He thought of Chesterfield: stiff, cold, smelling of blood. How he brought
himself to such a place, what drove the genius to madness, to death. Chesterfield burned brighter than all those before him, constant, never swaying left or right, following a course set by even he knew not, but veered from never; until now. For one Fitz hated, coveted, no death pained him more: not that of his parents, found murder days after a young Fitz abandoned his parentage. Born Fitzpatrick Finley, first generation born on American dirt, a natural citizen, the link between the new and old home. A chain which he wanted nothing to be part. That redheaded scourge, blighting the pure new world with ignorance, archaic culture, with inabilities to adapt. Since his parents’ death, he dropped his surname and cut his Christian down to Fitz. From that moment on those he met knew him only as Fitz. Not Fitzpatrick Finley, Irish immigrant from Tulymoore. His hair was black. Accent: nonexistent. He detested corned beef and potatoes. Fitz became American.

“But they probably cleaned him out all the same,” Stelton interjected. “They were there already, course. It’s in the paper and all that. Can’t be much for nothing going on in that now.”

“Does it say?” Clint snatched the paper. He read. “Don’t see for sure, but I’m saying nothing’s happened yet. Besides, look at that photo.” He handed the newspaper across the table. Fitz examined the image, clear on what Clint insinuated.

“Indeed . . . far too much for an investigation to have started. And withal, it says suicide? There’s not much work to be going on at any rate than.” The other two nodded. Fitz lit the paper's corner over the candelabra. For a moment he held it, watching the paper dissolve in warm color, the print unharmed, always visible so long the ashes remained intact. Then, dropping the flames to the table, he stood from his seat and
walked to the door. Clint and Stelton watched the burning; Fitz, the door. “They’re bound sometime to empty that flat out, Herman being dead and all.” He took a black bowler and trench from the coat rack, topping his head off and hanging the coat over his right arm.
Late morning, the tepid sun slipping lazy through windows, waking the scattered
dust coating Milton’s office in gray blankets. The desk stood cold and clean where he
spent his time scribbling, categorizing for Hynric and families of the dead. Evidence was
tedious, beyond Hynric’s attention. While he thought – pondered cases, trying to form
complete pieces that perhaps would conjure a cohesive explanation – Milton, with
scrupulous hands, dissected every material piece of evidence, sifting through piled notes:
testimonies, character sketches, theories, stories; scrutinized thick stacks of eight by ten
photographs – taken, developed, and printed by Milton, the storage closet more a
darkroom than anything.

A claustrophobic life in his tiny office box, even with the comforts authors
wrapped around him. Which is, in part, why Milton never closed his door; if he needed
privacy – which his position offered no opportunity for such frivolities – he walked. Yet
even out, doors throughout only separated out from in. Milton welcomed experience,
newness: fresh basil rubbed between his fingers smelling of Italy. He kept secrets only
from himself; recesses for his past – if there were such places festering in his memory –
ignored to feed themselves on gray rubbing against decaying black: he remembered
details around forgotten memories as though the experiences were more dreams,
illusion’s arc no more present than its reality, yet visceral exactitudes scratched small
alcoves between the wrinkles, stitching past into presents. But he lived unhindered,
unknowing of what his mind did to him, how deep in his thoughts skulked such horrors,
such unfathomable gore to drag any man to the asylum.
Between the two small square windows lighting the office he sat with the plunder, stacked and ordered to his system starting at the desk’s edge and progressing right: eight journals, several monographs and pamphlets, the letter opener, a few books on musical theory and electromagnet construction and function, the empty bottle of port and tumbler.

“To his end and nothing more than books and drink.” Milton sighed. He picked up the gold letter opener, turning it over in the sunlight. No markings of use or age save the crusted blood, staining the polished blade’s mirror surface. Under the dirty glow, the heavy black leather called out; he abandon the blade. Milton took the top journal from the stack, flipped to the middle of the book, and began to read:

... and that is the true reason why Beethoven lost his hearing. What he did not realize, however, is that the Pure Tones are a naturally occurring frequency pre-dating human existence. In essence, the entire universe is structured around nine Pure Tones, unlike the four Beethoven postulated to exist (I can at best assume that this arbitrary number was due to the Classical form structure of a four part Symphony). In accordance with these Pure Tones, all humanity – all physical entities no less – exist on a certain frequency plane, each object vibrating at its respective frequency, or compound of intertwined frequencies, in compliance to its creation. Music then, as I briefly touched upon in my book, is a partial re-creation of our physical selves. It is a finite representation of the complex systems of frequencies that forms the constructs of our bodies, expressed in sound waves. For this very reason it is that we find ourselves so

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9 Nine original manuscripts documented Chesterfield’s processes through his various theorems and musings. However, when A. J. Lewis’s fascination with Chesterfield reached its peak, he was compiling The Collected Works of Brilliance: Journals of Herman Chesterfield. Eight months work put to an end with the destruction of the press. It is believed all the pages were lost to the fire, including Herman Chesterfield’s last journal.
drawn to certain genres of music and oppose others; what we find to be in harmony with our own frequency reverberates within us in accordance with frequencies similar to our own. This practice can also be applied to human relationships – one person in harmony with another through similar humanal frequency –, and in each pattern I have begun to see a particular correspondence between Zodiacal signs and our harmonious human frequency.

As mentioned previously, the Pure Tones were an unfamiliar topic with Beethoven and Mozart, for it was they who conceived the notion, touching upon only the very surface of the conjecture. But their work was never brought into fruition, never actualized to its potential. My reputation is damned, so what I say next will, in effect, burn whatever remains. Of the Pure Tones, Beethoven only wrote this: ‘on the matter in which musical perfection can be achieved, one must discover for himself pure tones, those in which encompass all human emotion by which universal communication can be realized.’ I knew without doubt that this was true: the Pure Tones were the source of all human understanding. But how? For years I studied, but found nothing. No writings on the matter, except for a miniscule pamphlet on the Perfection of Pure Tone in Double Reed Instruments. What I know of language and communication is that all forms of vibration that can be interpreted by a human body come in the form of sound waves: the compression and deflation of air so that when an ear drum, struck by various pressures of air, could interpret said pressures into sounds. But it left unexplained the relation between music and the body. There has to be something more to which . . . .
Light slipped in from the sitting room. Milton set down the book and looked; a woman stood closing the door behind. He saw her often: Nora Aggis. A friend of Hynric’s, years long. How the two met, Milton was unsure; one day she slithered through the cracks beneath their door, already well acquainted with old Hynric.

Her feet fell precise, calculated, no movement left to chance; her face cut the air as she walked. Today she wore a black knee length pea coat, buttoned to her neck, a small cream clutch under her left arm with black velvet gloves hiding hands and wrists up the coat sleeves. A small white hat, shaped to her skull, capped her blonde bob. Milton tried to understand the strange allure, for though she accoutered herself with the fineries wealth afforded, never in the years her visits to Hynric did she wear heels of any kind, the only woman that crossed their threshold outfitted in flats. Nora nodded to Milton. He stared. After she disappeared beyond the doorframe into Hynric’s office, Milton closed the journal but carried it in his hands. The two would want their privacy. Everything in order. He made his way to the front door, retrieving a gray overcoat.

The morning still wore night’s chill, plumes of condensation puffing out Milton’s mouth while the sun warmed his cheeks. Amyrthstow rose with the coming light, fell to sleep at its passing; the people lived separate lives from their town. Buildings, streets, trees, colonnades, parks, fountains, benches, storefronts: all spoke to one another amidst the sun’s oranges and reds and browns. Windows winked back and forth across empty sidewalks, rooftops and chimneys gossiped throughout the day, birches and poplars and cedars pontificated the seasonal changes, how soon winter approached, what was the appropriate colors for fall attire, whether to allow birds and squirrels residence in their
branches. Milton slid among the trees lining the sidewalks, shading benches and businesses, filtered green speckled his gray coat. As a child he played in those trees, no older now than they were then, often to escape the tortures of his elder brother; thick branches burrowed those in massive trunks he could not get his hands around. Still could not get his hands around, though he tried, hoping to meet his fingers behind the coarse bark. Outside, his mind unwound from work – from Hynric – thoughts drifted between the leaves overhead, flinging from leaf to leaf, sifting through veins and stems leading to infinite labyrinths. Yet all the leaves’ edges were browned by Chesterfield’s death; some more than others. And, though few, whole leaves died with the weight of his corpse. Hynric dismissed the dead with ease – all the signs were there, diagnosis gave itself to suicide, Milton admitted. It was true, too, they took evidence: photographs, enough to study, for certainty in order to prove Chesterfield gave up his life held by his hands. Still . . . Milton found his mind drifting to murder. As he often did with new suicide cases. Unexplainable death. But it was clear, even for Constable Jenkins, the blood on Chesterfield’s hands marked it true. Suicide happened, Milton knew, but with every self-murder he wanted to believe otherwise; easier to accept anger, hatred, malice towards each other than turned within to self-destruction; the difference between life and death in another's hands being the simple variance in temperature and rigidity. No cognition present, no emotion or yearnings, no sense of beauty or love or sorrow; a person knew their own ticking, the time neighbors chimed out was a complex mask for metal gears, their time keeping no more relevance than Queen Victoria’s newest Pomeranian pup. But to stop one's own pendulum from its divine swing before nature wore out the mechanisms
– Milton rejected the thought. Inevitable at times, people find themselves sorrowful, melodramatics circumscribed by inescapable situations beyond nature; hell’s fiery jaws gnashing against exposed flesh until all that is left are mounds of macabre. But even under such disparaging times, life – to live, breathe salty ocean air, feel moist earth after long winter rains beginning to warm, smells of baking breads, pies, cakes, assortments of confections, the taste exciting tongue’s hands, or falling asleep in a large cushioned armchair on a winter’s night after a long travel next to a radiating fire, book in hand – the sheer act of living exonerates any despairs accumulated against an individual.

That, and so much more, occupied Milton through Amyrthstow, all directed by Chesterfield’s heavy ghost\textsuperscript{11}. Without knowing, the frigid dead fingers pricked his nerves directing him past Ruis Cathedral. It was Thursday afternoon. Mass was held Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. But the church stayed opened for public prayer and confession. A place to hide away from the woes the world created.

Two tall Elder doors\textsuperscript{12} shielded the inner sanctum, a narrow passage into silence; meditation. The white granite façade, three high spires, the center feet higher than the

\textsuperscript{11} Milton’s younger brother, Thomas Hueburt Verstein, took himself by the hangman’s noose at age seventeen, found in the family's barn by young Milton after two days searching for Thomas. Milton only three years the elder. To say they were inseparable is a lie. They were brothers, close enough in age to hate each other, while willing to defend the honor of familial connection when pressed to do so. Since his birth, Thomas grew as the bane to Milton: the original “baby” replaced.

\textsuperscript{12} The ornamentation marks the pinnacle in Amyrthstow craftsmanship. Standing eighteen feet in height at the center, arched in gothic fashion, artist Angelo Giovannetti dedicated more than ten years to its completion. Reminiscent of the Sistine Chapel, the outer faces depicted Hell and the damned accentuated in three dimensional form, while the inner faces manifest Giovannetti’s interpretation of Mary Magdalene’s visitation of the resurrected Christ – her hands pressed into his palms, the glory round about him displayed in gold leaf (the cost of which Giovannetti never revealed). In his first visit to Amyrthstow in 1904, Chesterfield wrote: "After spending much of my morning and afternoon politicking with various music enthusiasts - amateurs at best, some with undeveloped promise perhaps - I wandered into town and happened upon the Ruis Cathedral. Something deep in the woodwork . . . those doors, I could hear the wood whispering to itself, or the stones. Nearly two hours I stood listening, brushing my fingers over its curves and sharp edges." It was then that Chesterfield first met Father Stevens.
other two at the corners; a solitary, shorter spire, occupied the rear of the church where hung a large iron bell. Though at times no one walked beneath its roof, at least one of the church doors stayed unlocked. Milton found the doors ajar, the smell of incense and candle wax dripped down the five steps leading to the doors. By then the day was dying, welcoming the chill night. A warm place warm to sit. To think. He sidled between the doors.

A single isle of twelve pews huddled up to the pulpit. Behind the pulpit hung a scale sized crucifix, watching. Before Milton squatted a basin filled half with water. He dipped two forefingers from his right hand, crossed himself, then made to sit in the second to last pew. Pastel light filtered through stained glass windows of Mary, Christ’s Apostles, the Holy Grail, and various saints Milton was unfamiliar. Rows and rows of candles burned to the right of the pulpit, wax icicles growing over the table’s edge holding the steady flames. And beneath the crucifix, an antiquated organ: an assortment of brass pipes that rattled when they breathed. All were frequent sights for Milton, even the emptiness of the small cathedral – a designation Milton did not understand.

He sat a few minutes allowing his muscles to warm. Candles burned down their wicks, succumbing to a slow unified dance: curves and sways, delicate bounces, small sensuous motions corrupting the purest hearts. Entranced, the weight of Chesterfield’s journal falling against the pew disrupted their seduction. The reason, at least in part, for Milton leaving the office. The leather smooth in his hands, polished from touch. He found himself unfortunate to know nothing of Chesterfield or his works, the name striking no meaning aside from the corpse at the coroner’s office: Herman Chesterfield –
born 17\textsuperscript{th} February 1880, died 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1921. Beyond that, Chesterfield did not exist to Milton. An enigma of sorts, needing no solution, no investigation. He was dead. Alone, and dead. All left for Milton to compile a report so the sorry sod could be put away from scrutiny. As far as he even knew, the journals back in the office were all that was left of Chesterfield’s life.\textsuperscript{13} Milton opened the book like a relic half disintegrated in time; he read the first page:

“Music. Where shall I begin? It is in all things: natural and artificial. It flows through all creation. In order for communication to be possible – written, verbal, or otherwise – music must exist.

\textsuperscript{13} Chesterfield’s work before the \textit{Society} and since had been pulled from circulation in 1920 after he was discharged. All subsequent publications outside their jurisdiction, primarily Torrington Press, William Hathorne devoted full attention to acquiring and destroying. With the approach of his dismal, Chesterfield devoted months to hiding his work throughout the archives so as to protect his theories, yet keep himself accessible to those loyal or newly discovering him. Elaborate codes and ciphers were not his way: preservation, keeping his voice loud. With the help of his new found colleague A.J. Lewis, Chesterfield and Lewis began dispensing his writings with scores relevant to a text's content: \textit{In Defense of Classical Form and the Harpsichord} behind Bach's complete collection of fugues; \textit{Posthumous Fame: Music from the Graves} with Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik"; \textit{While We Die without a Sound: Requiems from Moonlit Nights} coupled with Debussy's "Claire de Lune." If any copies of his writings remained in existence, they were unknown to William and the \textit{Viennese Society of Musical Reform}. 
“We need word to get out,” William suggested. Hector buttered a slice of bread, Dagwood swirled his glass of wine. The three sat around a small Ash table, dinner remnants smudging white china rimmed in gold. Between Dagwood and Hector waited an empty chair.

“S’pose we ought to be doing something.” Hector took a bite from his bread. “Not it’s real necessary, being not much’s been done save the bastard did himself off.” He shoved in more bread. Dagwood sipped his wine. William slapped an open hand on the table.

“To hell with you! The man is dead, fool,” he pointed to Hector, “as likely as you killed him as he did it of his own. Who, in your simpleton mind, do you presume the pending investigation came through for?” William massaged his palms together. “Do be serious.” Hector snuck another slice of bread, looking at the table.

“What I can’t be understanding,” began Dagwood, letting his wine rest on the table and leaning back in his chair, “is the commotion. It’s Herman Chesterfield, after all. Damn loon's all I'm saying. Can’t mean nothing now he’s gone.”

“That is all well and good,” responded William, calmer to Dagwood’s soft voice, “but do you suppose it all that simple? There is no reason to believe otherwise that this organization is clear from any allegations whatsoever concerning Herman’s death, and by far the worse for us, being things as they were at his end. As they are now, I can say.” Hector started a third after-dinner slice of bread coated with butter when Aaron emerged through the parlor door, a fresh lit cigar ornamenting his lips. The three watched him
dragged over to the empty chair and sit. No one spoke, cigar smoke weaving sentences into empty air, clouds wrapping faces in unutterable phrases. Aaron gestured with his free hand for William to continue.

“There can be no hesitation, on any parts.” He snapped his eyes toward Hector, stuffing in more bread. “Herman killed himself. . . . There is no question in my mind.” For a moment he was silent, unsure where to look, rubbing the right side of his face and mouth with his right hand. “No doubt whatsoever.” He turned to Dagwood. “Call Miles Fuerden. I want The Amyrthstow Herald printing tonight. Whatever’s necessary, so long as we’re on Herman’s side of things. ‘We regret the lamentable state of things as they are with the death of one of our own, Herman Chesterfield,’ and so on. Keep it short. To the point. Sensible.” Aaron removed the cigar from his lips, smoke slithering out his half opened mouth, his face blurred.

“Do you suppose by this you might in fact ask more attention to yourself, William? Consider the risks refuting Chesterfield’s murder will have. There are no accusations yet towards anyone. Not even certain suicide from what the papers write, it’s all hearsay and whatnot.” Dagwood rolled his eyes, taking up his wine again.

“All defensive.” He addressed Dagwood, “No reason to be mentioning murder.” Dagwood nodded. “I have full confidence in our position.” Aaron chuckled, returning his cigar.

“We’ll see,” he said leaning back, his fingers laced behind his head.
Like an infection, a small growth you cannot see, you do not know, and slowly it consumes your flesh. Yet music invigorates life rather than destroys. It is no coincidence that music developed before the rudimentary attempts at symbolic and verbal communication, the unspeakable, inexpressible emotions humans bear can in no way –” Milton turned the page. “Time signatures are more than numbers. Rhythm, time itself, a fluidity with nature –” Milton flipped back to the previous page. Halfway through the sentence Chesterfield broke off. Back and forth Milton flicked the page, friction of paper and flesh echoing between the pews. He read the sentences again, the muscles in his neck tightening. If a connection were intended, Milton found none. What confused him more was the lack of break in the script; though the ideas and sentence fluidity were nonexistent, the record appeared to conform on one time’s writing. Pressure, speed, weight of the ink, the very thickness of the lines themselves, corresponded. Flawless.

Frustrated, Milton found the beginning of the last sentence on the second page, and read: “Ticking makes no more time than undirected castanets played by a small child, they are –,” turning the page, “All objects are imbued with energy.¹⁴” The next few pages he

¹⁴ June 17th, 1914:

All objects are imbued with energy. Right down to the very molecular bonds forming all matter, if science could see such things. Matter is pure energy of various degrees of compaction: where steel and other metals are formed from tightly woven energies, objects such as cotton are spun with thin strands of energy loosely held together and easy to separate. We are energy. And we can see this under differing circumstances. Take a ten pound oak long and burn it down to its ashes; what is left is nothing more than a few ounces of carbon residue. Fire causes all objects – so long as it is hot enough – to be reduced to near nothingness, expelling all energy into the ethers, increasing the entropy of the universe. The rest is simple chemistry and physics. And electricity functions much in the same way.

Music is no different. In fact, this energy is pure music – perhaps the purest sound yet unheard by human ears (with our simple flesh we cannot interpret such eloquences). Consider though the sound of fire, or electricity, or wind, or any moving object expelling energy, how they all possess a certain musicality to their functions. Understand this minute musical energy is not visible in any for: no flame, no lightning, no
scanned produced the same disjunction. Words and sentences bled together, incoherent
scrawls across yellowed spaces with no signification; Milton’s eyes burned. He shut the
book, rubbing his eyes. When he looked up, the priest approached in long white robes
hemmed with thick gold edges, red and gold sashes draped around his neck; the man took
each step with solemn purpose, premeditated direction and pressure and placement before
allowing his weight to fall to the strength of each foot.

“Ah, Milton Verstein,” the priest announced. Milton stood, offering the priest his
right hand.

“Father Stevens.” They shook hands. “I thought I was alone today.”

“God’s children are never alone, my son. Of all places, here in the Lord’s house.”

Milton tried for a smile. Father Stevens gestured, with one hand on Milton’s back, that
they walk to the front of the church. With mild resistance Milton followed. He slid the
journal in an inside coat pocket. Silence joined them along the pews, watching Father
Stevens massaging a short chain of brass beads between his thumb and forefinger, a small
cross keeping time against the white robe.¹⁵

trees bowing under the heavens breath. No, music is deeper – a place I cannot yet extrapolate. But I feel it.
The draw of a Violin bow, the smooth churning air from a French Horn, the raspy phrases spat out of an
Oboe; cast a stone into a pond and it ripples, then dies out to perfect smoothness; play a single note and it
will deposit in your bones.

If music is the energy binding all matter, than how is it that we come to produce this energy with
such simple devices of construct unworthy to their purpose? We convert air to sound, strung across the
void of uncollected atoms bridging our bodies. A transmutation of sorts . . . infusing energy in an otherwise
stationary atmosphere – orderly disrupted by chaos – work to create energy. Music is the source of all
energy. The source of all creation. Be it true, perhaps even, that God Himself is pure energy: is music.

¹⁵ Reverend Wm. Bacon Stevens D. D. received these rosary beads as a gift from Reverend Stephen Elliott,
Jr., D. D. after the publication of Stevens book The Parables of the New Testament Practically Unfolded in
1881. During its printing, Father Stevens was a Bishop in Pennsylvania, but soon left the state for
Connecticut and a lesser calling in Amyrthstow. A letter (March 15th 1879), addressed to Bishop Elliott –
subsequently published as dedication of the book – in part shows their friendship: “I offer a small
expression of the love which I bear to you personally, and of the admiration which I entertain for your
noble qualities, nobly exercised in the noblest of all human offices.” The chain is linked by a gold wire,
In front where the priest performed Mass, both men in turn, first Milton knelt before the crucified savoir, crossed himself, then shuffled to the candles. Along the tabletop where wax drooled off the candles, a half burnt stick awaited to offer more light; Milton picked it up, lit it from one of the already burning candles, and ignited a fresh taper in the middle; the priest, still caressing his beads, rejoined Milton.

“You’ve heard?” Milton stared into the little flame he created, a bright spirit brought back to replace the holes left in his absence.

“Mister Chesterfield I imagine? Yes, the Constable was here this morning about services. Not of the Lord’s church, but he requested this business be redeemed in a holy matter of speaking.” Christ, emaciated, blood painting his hands and feet and face, a hole in his side, hung in Father Stevens’ eyes; a wooden relic to keep faith white, raising the priest into God’s presence.

holding twelve beads each inscribed with a name of an original Apostle, capped by the sacred image of the cross bearing Christ. A similar set of beads at one time were also given to Chesterfield in 1918. The beginning of that year introduced Chesterfield to the then aged Father Elliott who took to retirement in Boston near the Society's homestead. During that year, Chesterfield and Elliott the two often spoke informally about Chesterfield's constant work:

"I cannot think of any other way to explain it," Chesterfield would begin.
"Take no trouble in your thoughts, my boy, God wants nothing more than for us to seek after truth."
"But do you think it possible? Our spirits - if they exist at all - could they be pure sound, a condensed frequency so compressed and layered, a harmonic collapse so to speak, that all that sound becomes an ephemeral matter?" The Father often chuckled at the intensity of Chesterfield's questions.
"I can only speak of His gospel, I'm afraid, Herman. But what brings you closer to Him can't be far off the path leading to His kingdom."
"And if it be that our spirits are these dense bodies of sound waves, we creations after God's image, and He being everywhere yet nowhere, He, too, must be Himself all sound! Rather than sound being a transference of used energy, it is fractured pieces of God, all waves, frequency, taking their heraldry from God." To say that Father Elliott endorsed these proposals is an exaggeration. As a man of faith, his views about God fell in line with the Church's doctrine; however, Elliott was nothing short of encouraging Chesterfield's pondering on God, in hopes that he would lead himself to discover the true nature of God.
Whispers drifted from the little flickers, burning light repeating tales of the dead in the quiet filling the cathedral. Father Stevens spotted Milton fidgeting, twirling the burnt stick back and forth, a foot testing dribbles of wax stalagmites underneath the table.

“What do you see, Father?” Milton said after his taper showed signs of melting. Father Stevens sat down on the front pew, hands folded in his lap.

“His departure from God was willful.” He paused; Milton turned to face Father Stevens. “Herman chose to waste the powers of his mind and body. ‘Ask the loveliness of the earth, of the sea, of the white airy spaces, the loveliness of the sky and order of the stars, ask the sun making the day light with its beams, the moon tempering the darkness of the night that follows; ask the souls that are hidden, the bodies that are perceptive: ask all these things, and they will answer thee, Lo, see we are lovely.’” The leather journal in Milton’s coat pocket began to weigh heavy on him.

“Hell, though. Where is mercy for those in Hell? What time for penitence is given to man taken before His return, before Judgment?”

“You question too much, Milo.” Father Stevens coughed a laugh, patting Milton’s left hand. “I cannot know the will of God Almighty, even with His holy words. Nor Christ’s true mercy.” He pointed to the crucifix. “Christ spoke of a lost son.” Milton nodded and sat next to the priest. “He returned low of heart, shamed in himself: ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.’ God gives Justice. Mercy is only part. ‘But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:
and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this day my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’”

Milton pulled the journal from his pocket, pressing his fingers into the polished leather. “One sin will send a man to the brimstone pits with Satan as Master. I cannot imagine the torment of his damned soul for such a small deed.” Fingers tapping leather played a delicate dirge against Herman’s words.

“God’s grace be upon him. Debased in his own misery, he will fall into the wretchedness of his despairing condition. Only then will the Holy Spirit of God be able to work on his fallen soul. What becomes of Chesterfield the Lord Jesus will sort, whether wheat or chaff.” Together in body, each kept to his own mind: Father Stevens consuming the figure of the sacrificed Lord, Milton wandering through Chesterfield’s thoughts he held. Years of dead, murders, sinners, the villainy in Amyrthstow, still something more penetrated through darkness unsettled by violence. Herman left traces. Volumes to himself, mind and spirit from page to page. Milton could know Chesterfield after death as he now knew Hynric; they were men, entities encapsulating a soul: thoughts, dreams, feelings – simple flesh wasted away. But once an idea’s set in, a sentence tickling the eyes or ears, the body becomes only an amplifier for what is underneath.

After a long silence the two stood, again shaking hands, Milton leaving Father Stevens in the light of candles, stroking the small brass beads hanging from a pocket in his robes.
“Dammmit, there’s nothin’ here.” Fitz slammed a fist against the wall marked by Chesterfield’s bed.

The linens laid crumpled on the floor, table overturned, what books were left on the shelves by the detectives were now scattered across the floor. Meticulous hours spent in Herman’s flat to reveal nothing for the three. Clint was down closing the discarded books and stacking them against the wall next to the front door.

“S’pose they’ve already been here,” Stelton said leaning next to Clint, hands at home in his pockets. Fitz paced around the room, scanning the floor, the walls, the ceiling, the shelves, hoping to find what he knew was no longer present; his left hand tapped out ideas on his leg.

“Why’re we here anyway,” Clint mumbled. Fitz stopped.

“The hell?” Fitz turned around. Clint put another book atop his tower, not answering. “Go on.” He stepped towards Clint cowering over the disheveled tomes. “Do you realize who Herman Chesterfield was? What he was doing?” He stood over Clint. Stelton slid away along the wall. “Do you know why the Viennese Society of Musical Reform removed Herman from his post?” He knelt down to look Clint in the face. “You see,” he said in a childish voice, “he was going to kill us all. It’s hardly consequential. Pure control, he had it smudged black between his fingerprints. He’d found all the dots and laid ‘em out in a nice straight line: one singularity detailing man and the universe and God – Supreme power.” Fitz faked a chuckle. “It’s simple, really, even you might understand. But now, I want it.” Then, grabbing the back of Clint’s head in a handful of
hair, Fitz smashed his face against the wall. A short crunch, followed by wails; blood splattered over Clint’s lips, a faucet dripping on his shirt and hands. Fitz stood. The stack of books leered at him, some rude gesture of Clint’s. He kicked it over.

Snapping his fingers, Fitz advanced on Stelton, jabbing a forefinger into Stelton’s chest. “Go back to your society or whatever. Check the records, files, archived publications. See what William’s got up there. Even estranged, they must have kept Chesterfield’s writings – far too valuable to do away with, I’m sure.” Stelton nodded. “And don’t let William give you any shit.”
Milton delved into Chesterfield’s journals. They were just words in script, knotted into sentences by a solitary man, nothing metaphysical or enlightened or omnipotent. Ink and paper. Punctuation. Separating phrases, theories, perhaps slips of his pen while deep in thought. He never touched those, or the black ink that made them possible, the pen's tip dragging across the page to bend lines into coherent symbols; so many layers between his thoughts and the page. Yet, his theories, the poetics throughout in which Chesterfield lived baffled the young detective: concepts of time and rhythm in and out of the body; solitary frequency harmonization between phonic and material vibrations; hinting at Pure Tonality and an abandoned God Frequency Theory:

Our bodies resonate to a certain frequency, a frequency that cannot be measured by modern instrumentation. If that be so, it would explain the way music affects physical bodies, on a level far more labyrinthine than any could have anticipated. The harmonious mixing of human vibrations and air compressions does not change, I am certain; the body is influenced by those interactions, at which level true communication propagates. The true genius of this discovery revolutionizes my understanding of what Beethoven meant by Pure Tones. There are nine, of this I am sure now. There must be nine, it cannot work under any other quantity. As time reaches the infinite, so does all frequency.

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16 Because Chesterfield could not devote his full attention to any one idea for more than a few hours, his journals began to take a shape that even he, when first started, thought strange. When read together, attempting page autonomy, a reader cannot hope to follow any logical patterns. But, in the words of Chesterfield, “If you read each page as if it were one staff in a whole score, each line becomes harmonious with the others, though different in notes and duration and dynamics; were each line to be read with the assumption the song continued down the page, rhythms and melodies would not correlate. Whereas, each line is to correspond with consecutive pages of the same line.” Ideas were incomplete without the entire nine-volume collection.
The Pure Tones are not tones at all, but pure vibration. If the body functions on one level of frequency, and music on an other, and light even on an other, so too must the Pure Tones function solely on their own plane of reverberation. I do not know how I did not see this before. It is so clear. In order for these Pure Tones to have ultimate dominion over the universe, it only makes sense that they would in effect exist on their own plane, in which all frequency converges into one harmonic unified entity: one wave of continuous cyclicality. The way in which to create these tones eludes me. I have come close to going deaf now, too, with the constant resonance in my head. Futile to be sure, my attempts of physical frequency assimilation for the Pure Tones. They do not exist in the present, or the past, or perhaps even in the future. They are out of time, indeterminate from functional misgivings. I cannot find them, but I need them. They are all I have; all that I have become. I feel I am them, and they me. In some alternate corridor I find them, there, all nine in a row, forgot except for me. And in another path, I stumble upon one or two alone in a forest burning. And yet, they are nowhere, and I am everywhere. Perhaps it is these words in which I write that will guide me to their resting place . . .

Weeks seeped into the journals. No work. No life except Herman Chesterfield. And not even Herman himself, but his ideas, his shadows. Hynric took no notice in Milton’s discovery. Or his developing obsession. While Hynric spent time in his office, Nora drifting in and out as she pleased. Milton kept to his office. He watched Nora’s gait through the door; she’d wink, or blow him a kiss, then slip into Hynric’s office. Minutes or hours she would go unseen, inconstancy followed her everywhere. No reasons for
complaint; she opened space and time for Milton to engorge on Chesterfield’s theories.

On his life.

The two men spent their days in separation. Time spent interested in clients for Hynric lasted – in the best scenarios – no more than a week. Sanity is difficult among the gruesome dead. He avoided memories, visions, nightmares, the images from past experiences. To keep clear, to keep in control.

An abrupt frustration interrupted Milton’s fixation. Similar to his original confusion with the journals, a new one arose. Ending in the eighth book, he realized at least one journal was missing. Perhaps more. The eight he carried unified their concepts from their beginnings, but an indeterminate amount of writing was missing, then continued again oblivious to the absent sections. He assumed perhaps a single journal hid from the others, given the ease by which he continued reading without the lost pages. Confusion, no doubt, over the way Chesterfield made his connections between bouncing ideas, over the conjectures and proofs that hung unfinished, separated from lost words, but the soul lived in the acquired inks spilled over the eight volumes.

Blankets piled in empty corners of his office\(^\text{17}\). All the agitation moved around the dust and cobwebs. Spiders were left with nothing else to do but infest Hynric’s quarters, twisting threads beneath his chaise lounge and along the crown moldings.

Death tightened the loose ends between the detectives. An early morning in mid January brought Constable Jenkins; cold and wet, rain muttering secrets to the trees.

\(^{17}\) The first blanket to find itself warming Milton during those long nights absorbing Chesterfield’s journals was a green, yellow, and white quilt stitched by his mother. He was six when she made it from the pieces of her ball gowns she no longer wore, Milton’s father having died two months prior of tuberculosis, confining her to the walls of her parent’s home while they supported the decrepit family.
Hynric had yet to sit before the door let in the Constable and chilled damp air. From the storage room stowing away the cot, Milton addressed the officer.

“Have a seat, Jenkins.” Milton pointed to the couch. “We’ve not seen you for some time.”

“Yes, yes, all good to not be mixing our business, I suppose. Shame, true shame.” Hynric came out, hand offered. “Only a matter a’ time. Besides, you two look like you need some work to be getting on.” Milton shut and locked the storage closet, forgetting for a moment his place in Chesterfield’s journals.

“Sit, Jenkins, tell us the details.”

“No, we haven’t the time for pleasantries and the like, this is fresh, still warm. Body’s just been found not an hour past.” Hynric nodded. Milton already came back from his office, gray trench and hat in hand.
Dark hallways. Electric lights out for the night and dawn’s cool luminance still resting. Stelton rushed around corners, navigating through the basement’s serpentine halls under the mansion, portraits of Beethoven, Mozart, Hydan, and other renowned musicians witness to his hurry. Sharp metal snaps echoed under his heels, Stelton taking no care to ease his steps’ pressure. All his strength flexed against the satchel under his right arm; the back of his shirt under his brown coat damp along his spine. No need to worry, he knew, but the previous weeks put his confidence in submission. Reappearing in the mansion after months absence and no solid explanations as to his whereabouts gave William suspicions; a close watch kept to Stelton’s movements within the Society, no discretion observed. During the wakeful hours he was never alone, William or Aaron or one of the many others under thumb accompanied him, offering assistance, as they called it, to whatever needs arose. Solace formed in the darkness, night being his only companion under the sleeping members while he scoured through hundreds of shelves.  

He turned right for the stairs leading out into the softening dawn, yellow and gray stems budding between the floor’s stones. Two bodies collided, color went out, molten wax burned Stelton’s right cheek, a candlestick ringed out from the flagstones. Stelton dropped the satchel, both hands hovering over his face, searching for a way to stop the

18 Stacks of musical scores, books, old journals, essays, photographs, everything produced or acquired by the Society in the last hundred years, including an elaborate collection of international scores banned from American consumption (started by Schubert). The Society prized themselves on possessing Mozart’s original, personally completed, Requiem Mass. An alternate version completed by Franz Xavier Süssmayr (a pupil of Mozart’s) is the now known circulated text. It is unclear why this is the case, although Chesterfield asserted on a number of occasions that Mozart’s rumored death had close ties with his attempted murder by Süssmayr, as well as calling into suspect how the Society hoarded “sacred texts,” as Chesterfield referred to them. “How can we claim reformation and propagation of musical creation when our bowels retain every bit ingested from the world?”}
pain; his body fell against the wall then slid to the floor, whimpers replacing the metallic echoes of his shoes.

“My apologies,” said the candlestick carrier, putting his arms under Stelton’s armpits, lifting him to his feet. Stelton whined, but did not respond. “Stelton? . . . your face.” It was William. He forced Stelton’s hands out of the way, examining the now cooled wax under Stelton’s right eye and across his cheekbone. “Why are you down here?” William said, peeling wax fragments from the burned face; high pitch inhalations vibrated Stelton.

“Research.” His right eye squished closed while William scratched off the remaining wax membrane. Thin layers of skin pulled away with each wax strip, blisters popping and oozing clear fluids down his cheek and onto his neck.

“Up stairs,” William began, ushering Stelton to the staircase, “you need this cleaned.” He retrieved the leather satchel and candlestick and followed close behind. Stelton’s right eye watered, his face still burning, even when brushed by the cool dawn air. Atop the stairs he waited for William, all the while short apologies and sympathies replacing Stelton’s footsteps.

“I can’t help wondering why this needed attention so early. It’s not even four.” William chuckled. Stelton moved to stand behind him, reaching for the satchel. Good with one eye, his depth perception failed; William saw it as Stelton grabbing for his arm before falling. “Sit.” He pushed a plush brown velvet armchair against the back of Stelton’s knees. He buckled. On a wide end-table against the wall baring the opening for the basement, William abandoned the brass candlestick, turning a tiny black knob. Both
men squinted, instinct; Stelton more so having only his one eye open to the dark. And
while eyes continued to force out the light, William opened the satchel.

“What’s warranting your interest at such a God awful hour?” Paper ruffling
scratched at artificial light looking for night. Stelton winced at the sting in his face.

“It’s nothing.” He rubbed the dark out of his good eye. “Music and such. Old
works. History lesson, I guess.”

“Yes, yes, all good indeed.” William pulled out a stack of clipped papers. No staff
lines, no notes, measures, time signatures or fermatas; not a single essay or monograph
explaining proper instrument embouchure or history. Chesterfield. Blazoned black ink
qualified the pages. William did not notice the name first, but Herman’s voice spoke out
from the first line: “In an attempt to better acquaint myself with the mysteries found
throughout the phonic sciences separating man and music . . . .” He need not read further.
Other papers spoke similar. Fifty or more typewritten pages, all Chesterfield’s theories;
every single essay that William knew and denounced, and many he did not. He slid his
eyes off the pages to Stelton, who now stood, trying to open the watery eye crowded by
burning red flesh. His right hand rescued the satchel William had forgotten on the floor at
his feet.

“Give ‘em over,” said Stelton.

“What is this?” demanded William. The resurrected pages shuddered.

“Research.” He stepped closer to William, drying his eye the best he could.

“Like hell. Where did these come from?”

“The basement.”
“You know damn well his work has no place here, or anywhere. As far as I knew . . . now this.” He shook the papers again, “Where did it come from?” No answer; tungsten crackled in the silence. The satchel hit the floor and Stelton swung his right fist at William’s head; he missed, landing on a shoulder. William stepped back, throwing the papers to the floor. They lunged. Fists connected with stomachs, arms, legs, sides, both thrashing against each other. Stelton aimed for the face but could not land a hook or jab. William kept to defense, deflecting strikes, trying to wrestle Stelton to the floor – pin him down. Knuckles, red and torn, bled; bruises colored under the skin; both men grunted and wailed. Joints locked, every muscle flexed tight. Stelton saw a tiny shimmer from the end table, snatched the candlestick and pummeled William in the shoulder blades. His body hit the floor. Stelton paused over the body: it breathed but made no effort to get up. He turned and knelt to pick up the papers. William started to push himself up on his hands and knees. No time for order, Stelton shoveled the loose papers into the leather satchel, faced William, and bashed the back of his head. The candlestick rolled along the floor, bumping into William’s ridged feet. Stelton ran.

Stiff yellow light, unblinking from scones and lamps, enlivened when the orange and red sunrise snuck through the east windows. Congealed blood clotted in William’s hair, adding a dark brown layer over the back of his neck, small pools dried on the floor. It was past seven. Aaron came down the stairs, opposite the basement entrance, from his second story apartment wrapped in a gray and red silk robe, barefoot.

The room was dead, all the furniture – including the mahogany grandfather clock – silent, dust aggravated. Aaron expected William in a chair reading, how he welcomed
every morning. But lost dust wandered near the basement stairs kicking up chinks of sunlight, their warmth passed through bay windows carrying Aaron nonchalant across the room.

“Shit,” he whispered at the image of William’s body. Aaron shook him. The brown coagulates on William’s neck crinkled and he wiped his right hand over his face. “William?”

“Chesterfield . . . ,” he began. “Where did Stelton find him?” Aaron sat back against his feet. William rolled onto his left side facing Aaron, eyes shut. “Where did it come from?”

“What happened?” asked Aaron.

“It . . . it doesn’t matter. How did he find him? William moaned, “I asked you to burn everything. In the fire, that fire you told me . . . everything was taken care.” Slits cracked through his eyelids. “Why was it still in the library?” Aaron’s lips began to part, the muscles in his stomach and back seizing. Several times he started before speaking.

“He must have lied.”

“No!” Striking out to Aaron, William’s right hand clenched the hem on the night robe. “I read the name.”

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19 April 11th, 1903:
My work draws more attention than expected, but to the kind I do not seek. Father Elliott, however, continues to support me, though his life is closing soon. I fear that perhaps some struggle is coming, I know not what. Paranoia I am sure. But it matters not, I will not abandon the progress made in recent months; nothing solid yet, but something is near. My recent study is wave density transfer continues to evolve. I have made new discoveries.
“He, he forged it.” Aaron stood and started to pace in front of William, scratching various solutions over his palm. “I don’t know. Something. I destroyed those documents.”

“The work was Chesterfield's. I know –”

“I need to leave. Stelton, he . . . I will fix this.” Aaron charged out of the mansion before William responded.
“You remember Hal Muldrip20?” asked Jenkins. The three men drove through town in a new black Model T, Milton in the back seat. Dew hazed the side windows.

“Alber and Jean’s kid,” answered Hynric.

“Miles Pinton found the poor bastard strung up an elm tree two blocks west of town central.” In the back, Milton shivered; it passed the others unnoticed. He loosened his tie; choked before he spoke:

“Suspects?”

“No. Looks to me another suicide than anything.” Milton started rubbing his hands together, hoping the friction would release the pictures flipping under his eyes. He watched the condensation streak down his obscured window to reveal erratic glimpses of Amyrthstown smeared in the brightening morning light.

“Any others aware of the situation?” asked Hynric.

“I sent one of the boys over to the Muldrip’s, thought it only right. They’ll be along soon enough, I’m sure. Except for me and you two, there’s none more, still early in the day an all.” Hynric nodded, scribbling in his notebook.

Milton, white faced, all the while traced the water etched lines along the glass, each line filled with inconsistent broken fragments of town; of people and trees and buildings, their browns, grays, greens, yellows and oranges all blending into one massive

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20 Long time friend of Chesterfield, knew Herman better than any other, and one of the first to encourage Chesterfield’s prolific musical abilities. The boys were schoolchildren together, sealed by long family connections – their mothers being close cousins, families spending holidays together. Hal was a man of science, instilling new ideas into Herman that the musician could not imagine possible. The two became true brothers after the death of Herman’s father when he was still a child. Even through Herman’s estrangement with the Society, he and Hal kept in close contact until days before Herman’s death. A stream of letters past between the two men, hundreds perhaps, though none remain to document their validity.
body; of the bright blue cloudless sky and its white highlights painted on the horizons; of the mountains holding still wet white paint to dry; of the waning moon without her stars in the morning, waiting to greet the rising sun from his long dark slumber – she never sleeps; of all the emptiness between the moon and sun and earth and everything beyond what Milton saw or could know; and all he set to focus on was the tip of his middle finger following the short trails left in the morning's evaporating dew.

The car slowed to a stop across from Ruis Cathedral. Hynric and the Constable exited the car, shocks squeaking, the car rocking like a skiff. Milton lagged to straighten his vest, coat, pull tight his loosed tie, check his reflection in the mirror to make sure everything lined up. His fingers separated hairs, adjusting and readjusting their part: down the middle, to the side, the middle, none at all.

“Milo,” said Hynric, “what’s keeping you?” Milton responded by getting out of the Ford. But he did not look at the other two, keeping his eyes on the tight knots of his shoelaces; he followed Hynric and Jenkins towards the elm gallows.

“Signs of struggle?”

“No, from what we can see, but we hadn’t much time with him since he was found. You’ll want a closer look, I’m sure.” Hynric nodded into his notebook, the tip of his pen spitting words and phrases without ceasing. “He smelled awful lot like Whiskey, powerful drinker Hal, I didn’t think much on the way of murder and the like. Damn fool, I’d say.” The two in front of Milton stopped. “Here’s what we got,” said Jenkins, pointing to the tree. Milton saw the Constable's body move and rolled his head back to see what he thought would be evidence of Hal’s suspected suicide. What Milton saw pushed all his
blood to the surface of his skin: a one-inch thick manila rope draped over the elm’s lowest branch; beside the trunk – where the rope had been tied off the night previous – laid an overturned oak stool. Hal Muldrip’s body still hung under the leaves, the whole body drooping, a wilting candle in the morning sun, toes and fingers and skin dripping over exposed roots and damp soil. The face was white, red scratches and speckled dry blood wrapped underneath the manila taught against its throat; thirteen loops made the noose. Hynric glanced away from his notes at the pendulum swaying in the breeze, said nothing and continued writing.

“Why is he still up there,” said Milton, breaking between Jenkins and Hynric, knocking their shoulders.

“Needed things to keep as they were for the investigation.”

“Cut him down.” Milton tried to turn away, to escape from the sight of Thomas hanging from the rafters, still and quiet and alone. Instead, his eyes followed the tight rope up over the branch and draw straight to the base of the tree, an anomalous root growing out from the soil to kill Hal Muldrip. The knot tied haphazard, a bugling clump that twisted in and out of itself. Feet of rope coiled on the ground beneath the knot. No one moved to answer Milton.

“Give me a few minutes,” said Hynric, advancing to the tree, tracing the rope and corpse with his eyes to sketch the remains in this notes.

“Cut him down.”

“In time, Milo,” said Jenkins.
“Damnit, cut him down!” Hynric turned to see Milton yelling and the Constable, who put his hands on Milton’s shoulders in an attempt to calm him.

“Nothing’s going to happen now,” said the Constable.

“Cut him down. Now!” Again, no one moved. Milton threw off Constable Jenkins and ran. Ran for the tree, for Muldrip’s body; he pulled off his coat, discarding it as he ran. Without stopping, he dropped to his knees, tearing at the knot, tears gathering on his lower eyelids. All his fingers started to knot together in the rope, tiny fibrous splinters pricking his fingertips and palms. “Get me a knife!” None answered. He dropped his face to gnaw the thin threads. The few around – Constable Jenkins, Hynric, a couple beat cops and accumulating residents waking from Milton’s wails – watched motionless, confused. Milton ripped and tore and hit and screamed at the knot; the body kept time, measuring his inability to save Hal, to unloose the body from the barn’s beams. “Where the hell is a knife!” Half-surfaced granite and quartz gathered under the elm, unearthed by the tree’s expanding roots. Milton’s body jerked against the knot, tight, unaffected. He ripped a cobblestone-sized quartz from the soil and began hacking the rope, grunting after each blow. Hynric brought down his notebook. Together he and Jenkins stared.

“Milo,” Hynric started, but Milton thrashed more. The pitch of his voice heightened. “Milo,” he said to the point of yelling. His young friend did not falter, bringing the rock down in psychotic rhythms, accelerating each beat. Constable Jenkins started for him, Hynric close behind. Over and over Milton bashed the tree’s trunk and rope – no matter what he hit, howling like some feral dog. Frayed manila threads
quivered: then it snapped. Hal Muldrip’s body dropped to the ground, crunching and snapping into a fleshy accordion. Joints dislocated. Bones fractured.

“Hell, Milo, what gives?” said Hynric. Jenkins fell aside to move the collapsed body. Only the sound of Milton’s hard breathing. Father Stevens had come out of the church during the episode, drawn like others to Milton’s cry; he now stood next to Hynric crouching to stop Milton, holding a steady hand on his shoulder – the brass beads dangling from his left hand.

“Come,” he said to Milton. An order. Both of Father Stevens’ hands pulled Milton at the elbow to force him on his feet, then guided him away from the tree and body; the Father did not look.

Together they walked – Milton scraped the toes of his brown leather shoes against the pavement, his face drying, chest and muscles slowing, almost relaxed; Father Stevens took no direction for their escape. Across the street a tall man, hair disheveled and carrying a brown satchel, ran opposite the two, slipping into an alley. Neither spoke, of the body or anything. Trees, however, murmured to each other over the recent deaths – murdered they said; they always said. Even the buildings in Amyrthstow imparted the tales of recent weeks, watching the dead pass before their facades, blank faced. The residents knew nothing more than the sad passing of friends, and even that amounted to few who gave attention to the town. But gossip spread, the wind passing information from leaves to windows and doors to moss and minerals, the soil soaked up anything left unheard. Milton thought it all beyond the scope of reason, outside the possible range he followed in his mind. We collect drops of water in buckets balanced on our backs he
thought, to spill over in the simplest moments, exposed to imperceptible changes in pressure. Time. Movement. But still he found Hal Muldrip hung – by his own noose – an impossibility. Thomas too. And Chesterfield. Their three faces mounted between Milton’s eyes and Amyrthstow’s spring morning.

“It is only natural, of course,” began Father Stevens at last. “We experience this life in different modes, one can only expect such a reaction.” Milton read the lines in the pavement before stepping on them, each crack opened a story of weakness: that place was not strong enough compared to the others. He started to believe it.

“God has no business here, Father.” Milton’s eyes kept falling into the cracks. “These are issues of science and men. What dogma you have poisoned this town with I will no longer allow to take root. I cannot speak for any others.”

“The Lord works in his own way and time,” answered Father Stevens, pausing his prayer while the beads kept time with his words. “It is a shame your faith wanes so, dear Milo. Your back cannot hide you from the Lord’s sight or his grace and love.”

“All words, Father, nothing concrete; nothing quantitative.”

“But it is by our words the world comes to know that we are. Poor Herman fell from his genius when he misplaced his trust in such unholy tongues.”

“We say what we say and do all different from each other and it all ends the same.”

“I can’t but disagree.” Father Stevens’ light tone darkened, but did not mix with Milton’s growing intensity.
“Fine. So do I. It doesn’t change the course we’re on. Do God’s work or don’t, God won’t stop the inevitable.”

Father Stevens pressed hard on the brass beads, the tip of his thumb going white, the cuticle stained red. “The Lord does his work by a means mortals cannot hope to understand. Even with His Gospels, Milo . . . faith is required.”

“Death isn’t nominal. Overcome it and be a god yourself. This isn’t Sunday school.”

The Father began to speak with greater urgency. “The mysteries here and beyond will never be clear. They’re not meant to be.”

“Pedantic dogma.” Milton quickened his pace, hands gesticulating without reason. Father Stevens followed two steps behind, eyes attached to the rapid clicking of Milton’s heels. “Don’t have an answer and explain it away with mysticism and the unknown. Damn good that does any of us right now. Give me the answer as best you have it or nothing at all. If you don’t know, you don’t. Blame it on faith . . . .”

Father Stevens rubbed his left thumb so hard on the brass beads they began to heat up, stinging against his index and middle fingers. “Simplicity in all things, Milo. There must be uniformity within the various forms we take upon ourselves in daily existence. Hope, my son; in nothing fails hope.” Milton glanced at Father Stevens, looking up and down his robes, then turned back to watch his forward path.

“No, Father. No. My work is definitive. Exact. I know what I see, I know what is right in front of me. This nonsense with vapors, spirits, omniscience listening in to my
thoughts. Pray to God for knowledge Father Stevens. I take my information from concrete beings. Galileo knew more of God than the Pope ever could.”

Before Milton could react, he was on his knees looking up into Father Stevens’ eyes, his right arm twisted behind his back and the Father drawing the cross with his free hand clutching his beads. “Hold your blasphemies, Milton. Men have been executed for less atrocities. God is all that keeps your poor soul, He is the only one who can give you truth.” Father Stevens dropped Milton’s arm and marched off in the opposite direction towards his cathedral.
“You’ve been to Muldrip?” said Fitz.

Clint adjusted his belt in line with the buttons of his shirt. “Yes.” Fitz stared; Clint counted pebbles in the dirt around his own feet.

“Well?”

“Taken care of,” said Clint, toes arranging the dirt and stones. Fitz stepped in front of Clint and smeared the calculated placement of the minerals. He grabbed Clint’s face, squeezing his cheeks red.

“Where’s the oscillator?” Before answering, Clint tried to put the stones back in their original order, keeping his eyes away from Fitz.

“At Hal’s still.” The words were unclear, squished out through his fish lips. Fitz pushed against Clint’s face as if throwing him; Clint stumbled back into the wall behind – a few blocks north from the Offices of Hynric and Milton, Esq. It took minutes pacing toward and away from Clint before Fitz calmed enough to speak.

“Get off your ass and bring it here. Stelton’s work won’t do nothing without it.” To avoid being in the conversation Clint pulled at loose ends on his cuticles, ripping tiny bits of flesh from his fingers, beads of blood seeping up through the tender skin.

“I can’t.” He put his thumb in his mouth to bite off a difficult piece. “It’s not what you said it’d be.”

“Don’t be given off excuses for failure.” Clint continued to gnaw his thumb.

“The thing’s huge. Bigger than you even. It won’t move. Hal had said we can do
what we want with it there.” Clint looked up. The news did not move Fitz to change his
scowl.

“Damnit, Hal. Serves him right.” Fitz started to walk away. “It will have to be.
There’s no way other, the fool.” Clint did not respond, but counted Fitz’s pacing steps,
having finished with his thumb.

Without even the sound of slapping feet, Stelton burst around the building’s
corner in the alley, slamming into Fitz arms; a deep groan announced their impact, Fitz’s
forearms solid.

“We gotta get out a here.” Stelton’s words were faster than his feet. Clint looked
up through the cloud of dirt.

“Do you have it?” Fitz asked, feet firm to keep Stelton from running again.

“I’ve killed William! We need to go.”

“Do you have it,” Fitz yelled, fingertips pricking into Stelton’s upper arms.

“Yes!” Stelton shook the satchel in Fitz’s face. The brown leather looked freshly
polished in the coming afternoon sun, sweaty from its journey through Amyrthstow. To
touch the worn frayed corners, the brass clasp and sinew threading, inhale the warm
tanned cowhide reeking of summer, farms, simplicity; Fitz did not move. The muscles in
his face stroked the brown color, rolling his eyes along the folded edges and into the
black slits where the papers waited, protected.

“He’s dead?” Fitz whispered. “There’s a place.”
The rain had stopped. Overhead, clouds darkened to near blackness collecting in rocky mounds against each other. Farther up, the sun watched the heavy masses sink into the valley where Amyrthstow lived, watched the watery rocks roll between mountain ridges trying to escape without punctures. Milton rubbed his right shoulder under the gray sky, walking up the steps to his office hoping Hynric had yet to return from Hal’s body. He checked his watch: not yet noon. A droplet clinked on the watch’s glass face from off his hair, blurring the little black hands inching around their off-white carousel, in perpetual wait for the next hour, minute, second, the tight spring forcing them forward; only the gentle ticking from inside occupied Milton’s ears, entranced by the slow constancy lacking progression. Repetitive. Repetitive. Beginning at the end at the beginning, a hope to move forward while passing familiar ground for eternity, unchanging. The tiny gears vibrated, tickling Milton’s palm. He folded his short fingers around the wet glass, stuffing his fist deep into his pants' pocket. He opened the unlocked door to the building to see Aaron relaxing on the red velvet couch; he rolled a near extinguished cigar between his lips, still wearing his silk morning robe. A small leather bound book sat next to him on the couch.

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21 March 31, 1921:
Symmetry exists between bodies and sound. Flesh resonates with frequencies, a ripple under the skin. Beyond exploring phonic waves and sound movement through compression, a symbiosis where man and music dance. What further purpose would music have if such a coagulation of material and motion were not to be paired with such delicacy? I find it improbable that such ridicule should find its way through the modern society of science we live. If for no other reason that yearning a physical body obtains towards the melodious communion of sound and skin. And I venture to accept the opposite in all cases: that all living forms have embedded within their nature an aversion to those harsh and deplorable sounds contrary to harmony. Imagine the screeching crow’s call, how it disrupts the calm silence of day with terrifying yells fracturing the air. And to put at ease the troubled day, the voice of a child laughing, or perhaps a lover humming with a determined gait. . . . I do not know what I write. Reflections spurred by inconsistent study
“I have no time,” Milton said to Aaron's nonchalant body, walking past and straight into his office, snapping the door shut. Aaron continued rolling his cigar, damp brown paper absorbing word after word he thought to speak but waited to utter. It filled and bloated with ideas, postulations, hoped truths, unknown lies, the slow, red, smoldering glow fed from his tongue while he waited for an opportunity to explain.

Milton could not stop moving. His mind ceased comprehension hours ago – since Hal’s half closed eyes watched Milton attacking the rope hanging the corpse. What had been a man deep in mind, lost to Chesterfield and his theories and music, had decompressed from a solid diamond back to his peat origins. Since last seen his office had grown smaller, furniture occupied more space now, leaving minimal volume to move between his desk and bookshelves and chairs. Cramped. Backed against the walls without release. Pressure against his skin pushed hard to his muscles, squeezing his body to the wall; his hands could no longer resist.

From the red velvet couch, Aaron heard sharp crashes behind the door: scraping and splintering wood, clanking metal, shattering glass, a man’s groans from exhaustion or frustrations or, what, he was unsure. Nothing left of the cigar; he tossed it out the front away from my art, employing no sort of creation or expulsion. I write to you, but who are you except me? Denounced Herman Chesterfield: rambler.

But I cannot ignore what I know from my wandering thoughts, out beyond staff, time, beat, note, clef, accent; music is more than a new language spoken only from mouths of brass and wood and skin, more than deciphering dots on pages relating to some ancient correspondence of sound. We speak to understand ideas from one another, and yet we experience music to understand the deeper workings, under emotions and flesh and bone, even beneath the heart itself, to a place . . . I do not know. To God, perhaps. The soul. To that first note announcing existence in a body, where life generates cognitive response. There is more to this man than flesh and blood and bones and organs. We cannot be simple organisms born from the dust, molded by invisible hands ignorant of their task. I cannot know God as man knows another, but music . . . God speaks through music. God is music.
door then made back to Milton’s office without regard for what happened on the other side of the door.

“Stelton Felburnn has stolen from the Viennese Society of Musical Reform.”  

Shards of broken glass caught light under the window, Milton’s desk up on end cracked book spines on the shelf in the corner, his chair in fragments mixed with the window glass while he, hands on the windowsill, heaved gulps of air.

“Then the Society has a problem to deal with,” Milton said, his deep breaths saturated with wordless obscenities. Aaron gave almost no notice to the mess, picking through its details under the guise of thought.

“No, and all well I agree. But I may have something of interest to you.”

“We follow death,” Milton pointed to Aaron.

“Aaron Lewis.” He offered his right hand; Milton ignored it.

“Give me a corpse. And even that . . . .” He trailed off, mumbling.

“I believe I already have.” The black leather journal he carried hovered under Milton’s eyes. “And more soon I suspect if wanted.” Milton smacked the book from his face.

“Mr. Lewis, the door behind you is yours.” While Aaron did not move Milton’s fingers readjusted all the knuckles in his hands, faint pops revealing no more than the furniture fragments strewn about the room.

“He was murdered, you know.” All the muscles in Milton’s body twitched, slightly. A small, near imperceptible change occurred, one for which Aaron hoped.
Milton leaned out the broken window, flicking small remaining pieces in the frame; his head shook a few times.

“Death is complicated.” He paused. “We can never truly be certain as to how or why or when. At best we can guess, small details: what they wear, how they are positioned, what objects occupy their death space. But nothing speaks of anything more than simple matter resting; decaying. And even when undeniable evidences are found – a slit throat.” He cut his hand through the air to point to Aaron who, motionless, breathing shallow, listened. “Even then, what can be said? ‘He’s dead for sure,’ and we end. It all ends. They all are dead one way or another, what difference does it make to me how it happens?” Milton turned to face Aaron, adjusting his waistcoat. “I saw his room. It was all there.”

Aaron crossed the mess to the window, resting the book on the sill. “Nine, I believe.” The fingers of Milton’s left hand drifted to the book’s cool cracked leather; they caressed the spine, pressing fingerprints into the animal hide’s creases. Aaron cleared his throat before speaking. “This . . . . I can’t quite tell,” he tapped the journal, “it’s all of them.” Milton began to undress the pages, cautious what might be underneath, still wearing an indolent countenance.

“What do you want?” The question was direct, expecting a straightforwardness Aaron often kept for himself.

“William,” he answered. “Herman wouldn’t stop. Always said, ‘there’s no stopping a sound.’ Got him killed for it.”
“He was ostracized from the Viennese Society of Musical Reform years before he
died, there’s no motive.”

“This whole city holds that bastard up like some god.” He wandered around the
disheveled space, slapping his left palm against his thigh. “To hell with them. To hell
with William. If it wasn’t for him I’d still be printing.” Milton left the air between them
to ask the questions he needed answered; the questions Chesterfield needed answered. “A
stray candle or oil lamp. At least that is what I am told – I kept to the old ways, there's no
comfort with those electric lights.”

“What point are you trying to make here?” Milton began to forget the half-naked
journal in his hand. To forget why Aaron approached him at all. To forget Hal.

“A theory. One far too intricate for the simpleminded Society. But William came
around too quick. Why else? He rejected Herman, and I took him in. I gave him the
voice, however small it may have been.” Both hands snaked around each other, fingers
twisting and squirming with nowhere to escape. “William needed him stopped.
Denouncement, extrication, it wasn’t enough. You can’t stop a sound, Milton. Unless you
kill it.” The journal slipped to the windowsill as Milton stepped toward Aaron.

Chesterfield's body lifeless on his bed, soaked in his own blood, the smell of iron and
alcohol, the whole scene faded in and out from Milton's memory; how Hynric
disregarded the dead, picked through their lives without concern or consideration. Milton
wanted it to be murder, a brighter darkness than suicide, something understandable about
hatred between fellow humans. Distain seemed easy, even a feeling he knew on occasion
as he knew everyone encounters at times. And now, with Aaron pushing evidence under the closed case, lines drawing away from Hynrie’s verdict . . . .

“You are certain?”

Aaron put out is right hand, smiling. “I’m never certain of anything.”
“Stelton must be found.” William removed the damp cloth from his forehead. The dust had settled; light jumped off the furniture leaving the electric lamps useless.

“Yes, sir. But what of Aaron?”

William chuckled, twisting the white cloth between his hands, tiny water droplets squeezed from its cold pores. “He will come to us.”
“What of these stolen documents?” Milton’s voice echoed between headstones and gargoyle statues and short obelisks, ruffling the tufts of grass over hundreds of graves, while heavy wind dragged its feet through Amyrthstow’s cemetery, kicking leaves and forgotten flowers draped over the dead. The sky was clear, a burnt blue, the east horizon folding tight the days clouds and rain; to the west, mountains called for the sun’s rest in their valleys, allowing Aaron and Milton privacy. Their shovels cut through the soft soil, ripping out lumps of damp earth.

“Hell, he’s always been off.” From their near six-foot deep hole he flung a spade full of dirt over its brim. “Not quite sure what drove William to allow him membership at all.”

“Goes around with Finley,” Milton asked nonchalant, digging through the earth. The air rippled around Aaron, awakened to Milton’s words.

“Damnit,” Aaron yelled slapping his left palm against the earthen wall. “That bastard stole it for him.” He shook the moist soil from his hand, letting the shovel lean on the wall while rubbing his right hand over his mouth, massaging out all the words for which he was looking. Milton stared, eyebrows raised, at Aaron. “Fitz had been after Herman for years.” Aaron dried his damp palm against his waistcoat, dropping what frustrations he could spare into the exhumed grave. His voice dropped, too, among his draining anger; Milton continued to dig. "He watched, mostly. Wrote letters inquiring to the nature of Chesterfield work and the like. Odd questions. Herman found it all very
strange. I agreed. But we both never considered him a threat. Now . . . ,” his musing trailed off into the hollow grave.

“Chesterfield’s been dead near a month, what took Finley so long? Or even to what point? Unless murder . . . .” Aaron picked up his spade and resumed his labor along with Milton.

Their shovels cracked against the pine of Chesterfield’s coffin. Eager, though not surprised, the two men tossed their tools out onto the grass and knelt down to begin the tedious work of removing the excess soil. “Fitz would not murder Herman, even in the perfect of circumstances; he fared to lose far too much on his end. It was ideas, theories, he was after. Fitz wrote a lot about ‘tones’ in his letters if I remember. It never meant much to Herman, but then I never made much of what Fitz wrote to him, the man has been more than useless.”

“Have you read Chesterfield’s journals?” said Milton, cupping the earth and piling it next to his right thigh.

“With what time I’ve managed at the Society I know the general design. We spent months together theorizing music and sound, hardly anything in those books can expound more than we spoke.”

“Did he ever mention Pure Tones?”

“Of course. I published it.” The pine’s dark yellow decay exposed itself from beneath their hands, the smell of rotting flesh seeping from beneath the boards; a faint aroma of the putrefied. Chunks of soft wet wood clung to the undersides of their
fingernails as they continued digging, shallow grooves revealed in sets of four over the pine.

“He wrote of a device,” Milton said after swallowing all the words that clogged what needed saying, “an amplifier of sorts. Vague with what I had, but the power he described.” Their shoes covered in dry, caked on mud, knees wet and dirty, hands brown and gray and black with flecks of silver light caught in the near lost sun. The cleared the box. Aaron stood and retrieved a crow bar waiting on the edge of hole for this moment, anticipating Chesterfield’s extraction. He handed the metal bar to Milton who wasted no time. The wood did not creak or moan, made no attempts to conceal its resident, more than willing to unearth its secret held for all those weeks; it knew the tragedy which struck Herman Chesterfield and Amyrthstow; it tasted the thick blood drained from his neck; a weight it should not have carried, a weight it did not want to carry. And so with each plunge of the crow bar it gave way, crumbling under the pressure Milton forced upon it, hoping only now that perhaps what visions the coffin held would bring about the restoration of truth.

22 In 1898, Nikola Tesla constructed and tested his later patented electromechanical oscillator. Through exact frequency symmetry – a simple game of guess and check – Tesla’s hypothesis concluded an object’s natural dormant frequency, with the addition of physical motion to match the existent frequency, would result in massive resonance amplification. This research resulted in the New York earthquake of 1898. Tesla’s vibration studies, however, were not devoted to the atomic frequency of matter, but to the tonal vibration inherent in matter. Many of his experiments began with physical motion, but after collecting dozens of results, it became clear that sound – not motion – bound matter together; all of which he collected in his unpublished folio Electromagnetic Frequency Generation in Matter. On a similar subject to Tesla, Chesterfield wrote: “I have begun to take notice of an interesting occurrence in stringed instruments. During the weeks’ practices of ate, I find myself alone with the instruments whilst the others break. Being fascinated by the Contrabasses - which I have yet to learn to play - I often will draw a bow across a lonely E string. Long, slow strokes, not to generate too much noise. But in doing so, while playing one bass, the others, if in close enough proximity, and I play loud enough, the other E strings begin to vibrate and play along with my single note. This works as well with the other strings, and if done properly, other instruments - violins, violas, cellos, and the percussions mostly - to produce some kind of harmonic resonance. I am yet uncertain to what value this can be . . . .”
Milton tossed the bar aside after prying out all the nails. He and Aaron, hesitancy patched and dried with mud on their cheeks, made no signs of delay. They pulled the lid open. An invisible fog rose from the rancid corpse, pulling handkerchiefs from their pockets, attempting to forestall the odor. Milton jerked away, Herman's eyes still open, forced to watch the top of his coffin; the gaping slit under his chin repelled both Milton and Aaron, Hynric being examining the corpses. Milton spoke first through his white cotton tissue:

“He’s still in good condition, considering.” With his left hand he pushed the tissue around the neck: cold and spongy, pushing back through his fingers and into his stomach.

“How can we know?” Aaron asked through his red silk covering.

“When you mentioned murder, it brought back something I’d asked Hynric when we took the case on.” He traced his trembling index and middle fingers across the lacerated neck where the skin had pulled back more from the unhealed wound, revealing a half inch thick slice across his neck. A small, brief smile drifted over Milton’s lips. “If Chesterfield were intoxicated before his death, this should be more rough, or at the very least somewhat crooked.” Milton brought Aaron’s hand to the neck to see with his fingers. Aaron resisted, but allowed Milton to show him. “Past suicides we’ve investigated with lacerations, those who drank typically cannot complete the attempt. Often a family member finds them bleeding out. This,” he said, re-drawing a clean straight line over the opened neck, replicating what Chesterfield’s decaying tissue displayed, “is perfect. And look how far around the neck it goes?” His fingers connected
the points below each of Chesterfield’s ears. “Why didn’t I push?” Milton signed into the wound, turning away; an apology too late that he could not give to Chesterfield.

“How often did he drink?” Milton pushed against his knees with his hands to stand up.

“No more than a glass of wine now and again,” Aaron answered, rising to his feet.

“Positive . . .?” he asked, pointing to the body.

“I as much as any man can know another.” Milton nodded and closed the coffin. He pulled himself up and out of the hole, offering his hands in assistance for Aaron. Once out, the two set to filling the grave.

“Hynric was wrong.” All that Milton said to the covered. Aaron ingested each word Milton left to be buried, savoring each syllable as it passed through his ears into the pit of his stomach where he absorbed all he could of their meaning. Aaron spoke:

“We need to have a talk with William.”
Grinding gears and bellowing coal-powered generators rattled the walls in Hal Muldrip’s small barn. The building was just big enough to house the nine-foot tall cast iron oscillator in the shape of a chess Rook; the five electric generators burned together, huddled behind the decrepit barn keeping warm, miniature blue storms raging beneath round iron grates. Six-inch thick black cables twisted together, electric umbilical cords nourishing the never-satiated oscillator. From the middle of the barn's ceiling the cords unwound and stretched out, draped between rafters making a dense spider web of coursing electrons bringing life to the otherwise dead building, each black cable connected at the oscillators cylindrical base. Stelton sat in the loft near the barn’s large double doors, legs hanging over the edge; he still wore his suit from days prior carrying the smell of melted wax and catacomb archives of the Society; his face already baring the makings of patchy gray scars. Fitz walked the oscillator’s perimeter, caressing the warm iron while its vibrations tickled up his arm and into his chest. The deep screeching from within the black amplifier did not comfort him; not what he expected from the device. Clint entered the barn minutes before and locked the wrapped chains around the two handles.

“It’s not working,” yelled Fitz over the oscillator’s whine; Stelton ignored him; Clint accidentally made eye contact. Fitz turned to Clint, marching away from the machine. “Three days.” Clint did not move. Did not answer. He watched dirt and hay flecks sullying Fitz’s shoes; he wanted to brush it off, just a quick swipe of the hand, or a hard blow of air. “Do you hear this?” index finger sticking into Clint’s left shoulder.
“The motor’s working,” said Clint under the oscillator's din, still examining Fitz shoes. So easy for him to give them a good scrubbing. Fitz pulled his hand back and rolled the papers he held in his other hand and struck Clint in the head, knocking him to his knees.

“It’s just a damn machine,” Fitz said, standing over Clint. “I hear this in the Holsdale factories. What’s Pure about this noise?” Without thinking, Clint looked to Stelton in the loft, who watched the constant spin of the central turbine responsible for the cacophony. Fitz snapped his neck towards the distracted boy fascinated by its monotonous color going around thousands of times a minute, doing nothing use. The papers Fitz held he deposited in his brown coat jacket then drifted over to Stelton, making sure not draw his attention. Once under his feet, Fitz wrapped his hands tight around Stelton’s ankles and jerked him from the loft. Stelton’s head flicked back, cracking against the loft floor, his arms limp, following the fall of his body, two fleshy flags caught in a summer’s breeze. It happened in a second: with a sharp pain in the back of his head – Stelton lay in the straw and dirt, on his back.

23 August 12th, 1905:

Every note has the major chord hidden within it. Music creates a sphere of liberation from existence. The swell of a well-constructed phrase weaves sound together in a seamless manner that resists adequate replacement. Noise, too, has a secret of inharmonious musicality; the difference between the two a simple altering of overtones changing the type of sound we experience. No noise is noise alone, but a sound that relies on sound alone to create a meaning of sorts, noise actually conveyed through its own language, by its contrast, or conflict with silence; the ache of wood in a still house irritates, but perhaps, if accompanied by a gentle rocking of a chair, can also soothe. These noises appear from nowhere, ripped from some deep residence. The laws of physics dictate how frequencies vibrate in sympathy with each other, by mathematics of how sign waves operate, add up, subtract from these musics hidden in every sound. In bird songs, bees buzzing, rain tickling tin roofs, the subtle breeze against dry leaves, the cries of babies; we do not realize they are there. There is a symphony contained in the screeching of a halting train, if only we are open to listening to it. Our ears, perfected over evolutionary time, capture these frequencies in such exquisite detail, that I do not understand how we can make sense of it all. But we do. Picking out the patterns mathematics dictates. Finding order. Finding beauty.
Fitz shook a few pages he pulled from inside his coat. “What are these numbers?”

Stelton blinked repeatedly, trying to bring the writing into focus. “I . . . I can't tell,” he said. The numbers and pages were blurry, white circles obstructing his vision. Fitz threw the papers in Stelton’s face, leaves scattering over him and the ground.

“Make it work.”
“I did not kill him.” The three men had been arguing for hours; Milton and Aaron overcame William after days searching through Boston, the mansion and Amyrthstow. Illusive, for those days, William scoured the town, even in his concussed state – words ate through the back of his head, gnawing the vertebrae below his skull. Amyrthstow, however, lived as always: the very stones marking the streets and sidewalks filed every word spoken over their faces, absorbing delicate intonations impressed by soles more than words; twigs in the sky tickled the clouds with information, hoards of cumuli crowding around popular and birch trees eager for stories scattered throughout the town; the damp air, supersaturated with rumors, postulations, theories, conjectures, judgments, left a thin film over everything; so moist, so dense the air, if only the townspeople concentrated long enough – or at all – in any given direction, they would see horrors acted out in grotesque scenes, contorted bodies and violence revealing all that wished to lay hidden. Ignorance gave itself to the people, finding solace inside soft malleable flesh, its strength fed on the weak tissues wrapping what solid matter Amyrthstow’s citizens might have kept buried under the skins.

Milton and Aaron escorted William through Amyrthstow toward Hal Muldrip’s home on the town’s north side, the two each grasping an arm above the elbow; William’s hands were secured behind his back, his wrists rubbed raw from the coarse rope’s loose fibers. Already the trio passed through town central, making way beyond the Ruis Cathedral – its large doors both shut.
“Killing a man does not stop him, at any rate,” continued William. “Cut a violin’s note short, its echo remains. Eternal. Subtle though it is, nothing will end its resonance. Aaron, why else would I ask you to destroy all Herman’s writings?”

“I suppose the fire is part in that as well,” retorted Aaron, twisting the knot holding William’s hands, pinching his skin until it bled; he tried to pull away, but Milton and Aaron both marched him onward, turning down an barren lane in direction of Hal’s.

“Herman was the most prolific musical theorist the Society – or anyone as it goes – ever knew.” William licked his front teeth before he spoke again. “And dangerous; very dangerous. To himself as well, it seems.”

“I cannot,” snapped Aaron, “I will not . . . .”

“You knew the man not past a three months, what can you say for his state of mind? He was disturbed. You must have read what you printed –”

“He was brilliant.” Aaron stopped to turn William so the two men faced one another. “No man, with that caliber of mind, would conceive a self-destructive proposition the way you believe. Not like that.”

“Genius deteriorates into madness, Aaron. All great minds at some point decay. For our fair Herman Chesterfield, his mind was short lived before it fractured.” Aaron’s eyes, frantic, searched for an alternative answer on William, somewhere, stitched between suit threads, wrapped around a button or hidden in a pocket, stained on his skin,

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24 Throughout the course of his life, particularly once he began his musical theorizing and friendship with Hal Muldrip, organizations outside the Society’s jurisdiction dispensed on Chesterfield a plethora of prestigious awards, including the Presidential Medal of Arts and Letters for his essay *Dispelling a Reality: Music and Language of the Pre Pre-Historic* (1912), and the Congressional Award for Advancement in Humanities for his first book *Strings Theory: A Brief Non-History*. On both occasions, Chesterfield was asked to speak in acceptance of the awards, and ended each with the following: "Ne te quáesiveris extra, for we must advance on the chaos in the dark."
under his nails, caked to his scalp beneath his hair; but no response. Mere seconds skipped while Aaron’s eyes danced over William’s body, then, skin stretched taught, Aaron punched William in his jaw; William dropped.

“Aaron,” shouted Milton, crouching to help William from the ground. “How does that solve anything?”

“He murdered Herman, Milo.” Aaron shook William’s face from his knuckles.

“We don’t know for sure.”

“But you said.”

“I am aware of that; however, I never concluded as to whom. And even still I am uncertain how Chesterfield . . . I know nothing of him as you and William, he is no more than a shadow to me.”

“Milo, he is the villain,” Aaron pointed to William. “You must see that.”

“Too much time have I spent watching Hynric’s rash decisions,” said Milton, returning William to his feet; blood slipped from his swollen bottom lip down his chin.

“We are deciding nothing!” Aaron could not hold back his anger from articulating his hands in wide sweeps. “He murdered Herman. How can you say otherwise?”

“If I am guilty,” added William, “why not take me to Constable Jenkins?”

Aaron lowered his head, rubbings his palms against his wool pants and answered:

“Things are more complicated than that.”
Through the thinning afternoon haze William observed the approaching barn between Aaron and Milton, the two discussing the minutiae circumscribing the events of Chesterfield’s murder and William’s potential – and according to Aaron, definite – involvement. The building galumphed closer, some two hundred yards off, enough to see darkness between warped boards still trying to stand together as walls. The other two, now almost to the point of dragging William through tall dense grasses still green with winter rain, saw only their jaws biting sharp and short words to spit back and forth, both cutting nothing but their own lips and tongues. Even if William had perspective to offer on the debate – perhaps an insight to Chesterfield’s writings and theories, where and how he took time to think, what habits, what obsessions stoked his desire and action, and, if any at all (who could say he had?) what insanities he kept hidden – even if William knew such things, neither man would hear it. Those words would be too smooth, too firm to do the proper damage needed to sway either Aaron or Milton. Rather, William watched the barn, growing taller as it lumbered forward.25

Up close, the barn wrinkled; heavy; rusty nails sprouting where nails should not sprout. Off-centered hung a large set of double doors two stores tall. From behind the men a slow breeze crept between the weeds, imperceptible through their thick wool suits,

25 January 18th, 1900:
It makes no difference what the Society members think of my work, I cannot allow their slander to sway my work and progress. It is only upsetting to see a group such as them, with their background and knowledge of notes and times and songs of composers past, of genres and theory that could, if put to proper use, alter the very tides of the sea. I have made the mistake, to share with those old and decrepit men thoughts I keep precious to me. And I suppose at first they may have received them with suspicions at worst; yet curiosity wove itself along as well. But William has seen to the end of that, to all I may have to say on any subject not within the Society's new gamut. It is to be into hiding now with the aid of A.J. for what I write now. I can feel the Pure Tones within my reach, if that is what they are to be called. So simple a thing, while so complex I fear their reality will, ultimately, remain out of reach.
but one door clapped against the other, applauding their slow approach; William noticed
the subtle movement. None took notice to the increasing groan emitted from the barn’s
bowels. Yet each step closer caused Milton and Aaron to raise their voices, to the point of
yelling once the building was upon them. A sudden gust slammed the doors together
clicking like distant thunder; Milton and Aaron stopped speaking and looked. Only then
did any of them hear the hissing of metal rubbing metal, Aaron and Milton realizing
where they were.

“What is that?” William asked nodding his head to the left side of the building:
worn rubber soles from a black pair of shoes peeked around the corner, half hidden by
green. Aaron let go of William, holding his right hand up to the other two, slipping across
the dirt drive. He paused at the corner; his back twitched and the others saw his head jerk
to the left hard, and short.

“It’s Clint,” Aaron yelled, half turned away from the corpse. Milton, too,
abandoned William, both jogging to the shoes. Clint was dead. Blood soaked his once
white shirt; two bullet holes hollowed out his chest. His eyes still open, watching the sky
and passing clouds. Not a word was said. Each man wanted to speak, was filled beyond
their knowledge of words to say something, not for each other or death or tradition, but
for Clint; for the discarded corpse he now was, a compact dirt casing waiting
decomposition, to unwrap itself and spread out over the land again as it once was. Milton
squatted next to Clint’s head and shut his eyes.

Again Aaron and Milton took up William’s arms, and escorted him back to the
barn’s double doors; all three slipped inside together: a gunshot shattered their ears,
Aaron dove left behind a stack of hay bales, Milton pushed William to the ground; another gunshot, Milton ran right, only a few steps before tripping over another body; a third shot, William crawled forward, watching Milton, he had tripped over Stelton – blood welled up from a hole in his left shoulder just above his heart, he breathed shallow and hard. Impossible to know where the shooting came from with the oscillator’s overpowering roar. Milton smacked Stelton’s face. He appeared to moan, rolling his head back and forth, holding his right shoulder. Milton unbuttoned his own waistcoat, pulled it off, and pressed the fabric against Stelton’s still bleeding chest.

“William,” yelled a voice. William tried to stand, to run to Milton, but the straw carpeting made for too slippery a surface. “Where you off to?” the voice yelled again. Before William saw who spoke, a pistol butt whacked the back of his skull. He dropped on his chest, unconscious. Milton forsook the dying Stelton, and rushed at the gun wielder. They collided, ribs crunching; the unknown gunner landed on his back, Milton against the man’s chest. Aaron ran from behind hay bales to William and saw the men fall to the ground: the shooter was Fitz. Milton rolled from atop him, both men gasping for air, holding their chests.

“Aaron,” commanded Milton out of breath, “Stelton’s been shot.” Without breaking his gallop, Aaron hopped over Milton and Fitz, seized the back of William’s waistcoat in both hands, and dragged his limp body across the straw to where Stelton lay. A hand started to wrap around Milton’s throat; Fitz’s gnarled face slid into view. Milton bashed Fitz’s right temple, the momentum turning Fitz’s over onto his stomach; quick as he could, Milton pulled his knees to his chest and began to stand, and ran around the
oscillator away from Fitz. Around the machine, Milton stopped, body staunched, without words: Father Stevens sat in the straw, leaning against the oscillator, rocking forward and back in small arcs, both hands rubbing the rosary beads, his lips parted in unheard prayer. Milton was thrown to the floor again, Fitz’s arms flung around his head. They landed spread eagle, Father Stevens watching the two men begin to wrestle. Neither gained control of the other, both spun around their assailant’s body, scratching, biting, punching, kicking, pulling at clothing and hair, smacking palms into faces, prying fingers away from tender flesh: neck and stomach and thigh and ear. Blood in smeared finger paintings plastered their clothing and skin, mixing genetic data in an unidentifiable slosh. Aaron knew nothing, Stelton and William requiring his attention, the constant howl from the oscillator killing all sound. And all the while, with both his eyes tied in a knot of appendages and torn clothing, Father Stevens mumbled his silent rosaries. The hole in his thigh already began to clot and close, the bullet still inside the tender flesh. He dare not move, even the beating of his heart, keeping the lifeblood pumping to his wounded leg, was pain almost beyond his capacity to bear. Only his eyes twitched to follow the brawling men.

Fitz unwound himself out of Milton, his footing unsure, hands groping the air for balance, head spinning; Milton stayed on the ground on hands and knees, waiting. Father Stevens followed Fitz’s stagger. His hands found the oscillator. Milton pounced. His right hand smashed Fitz’s face into the machine, his left snatched Fitz’s left wrist and, jerking back, twisted it around and up into Fitz’s shoulder blades, forcing him to his knees.
“You come to kill me too?” asked Fitz through his squished lips. Milton pulled Fitz’s head back and slammed it again into the oscillator.

“Who killed Herman Chesterfield?” Milton demanded. Aaron heard a faint whisper of yelling bend around the noises; he stepped away from the injured William beginning to wake. Fitz laughed.

“You think it’s so simple,” he said; Milton pushed harder against his head and back. Fitz wheezed. “Can one man mean so much? Truly? He wasn’t even a man at all, just an idea of a man. For you especially.”

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“Why did you kill him!” Milton pulled his right hand away and jabbed Fitz in the ribs; his knees buckled. Milton pulled Fitz’s body up from the ground.

“Death . . . isn’t easy . . . for you . . . is it?” He chuckled then took a deep breath. “It’s always . . . personal.” Milton dropped his face, eyes picking haphazard through the straw. Fitz laughed deep in his bones; hoarse, the whole of his body laughing. “Father Stevens knows more than I can tell.” Milton turned from the straw to look at the Father; he sat motionless watching the men, rubbing his dear brass rosary beads whispering Hail Mary. The beads were longer than when Milton first saw them, a porcelain addition – thirty beads – tied round the last brass one; the junction’s angle bent out awkward. Father Stevens’ lips, half-parted, moved in constant rhythm with his prayers, Milton’s lips did the same observing the devote Father. If there was life at all in Milton throughout his struggle with Fitz, and now Father Stevens, if he had any desire to fight against walking demons, he lost it; down on his knees he dropped, pulling Father Stevens’ beads from his hands and throwing them over his shoulder. The Father made no move to stop him.
“What happened to Chesterfield?” Stevens did not answer; Milton asked again. Still, no answer. Down on his knees he dropped, pulling Father Steven’s beads from his hands and throwing them over his shoulder; the Father made no move to stop him. Even the oscillator’s thunderous cylinder softened its grinding until the entire barn became void with silence.

“Father, did you kill Herman Chesterfield?” He made no audible response, but scanned around Milton’s body pursuing in the dense straw his discarded brass relic; Milton waited for the Father’s voice, some indication that in the oscillator’s dissonant absence his ears still functioned; only his small brown eyes dug through straw and dirt and air for the rosary beads. A rich, brush fire smoke wandered in to Milton and Father Stevens’ nostrils, though nothing took the priest from his endeavor. A new sound replaced the vacancy the quieted machine left; the crackling laughter of dying trees. Milton turned to see Fitz – erratic orange and yellow tendrils growing behind, spawning, it seemed, from the soles of his feet – holding in his right hand one of the five black cables that connected to the oscillator. Aaron’s attention, too, had followed the smoke to Fitz. Sharp blue streaks popped from the exposed wire end, kissing the straw with light, exciting the driest places as Fitz wagged the black cable. He advanced on Milton. Father Stevens took advantage of the distraction, crawling with his arms and one good leg passed where Milton had stood, running his fingers through each naked piece of straw. The rapid fire spread, eating all the straw and leaving behind black ash and scorched earth, while clawing its way up thick eight by eight wood supports. Fitz pointed the sparking end at Milton; Aaron searched for a way through the flames.
“I wish I could’ve done in Herman, and that bastard Muldrip. But no matter, either way they’re gone and me left to do what they couldn’t.” Before he finished his tirade the sparking end bit at Milton; he dove sideways away from the oscillator and, from behind, Aaron emerged through the flames draping over him like lace curtains, flying into Fitz’s back and forcing him to the ground. Immediately Aaron patted and rolled making sure no flame caught him while Fitz tried to pull himself up with the cable still in hand; before he gained his feet, Milton rushed, shoulder down, catching Fitz in the stomach and pinning him against the oscillator, cable twisting and thrashing against the black cylinder. By then the fire had made its way up the supports and into the hay loft, angry wood mocking the men’s scuffle, mocking Father Stevens’ fruitless effort; much of the straw had been burned away where his hands could reach, he now on hands and knee finding ways to escape the blaze and avoid the others. Milton pulled away from Fitz and punched him in the jaw, a crack he felt but could not hear. Fitz slid down the oscillator without letting go of the cable while Milton rushed to help Aaron and rid his body of any fire that still lingered.

“William and Stelton,” Milton shouted. Aaron nodded. Over the flames thunderous destruction, Fitz laughed:

“No one leaves.” Then Fitz reached for the cable coupling protruding from the oscillator, shards of blue still falling from the wires. The fingers of his left hand slipped unnoticed into the hole created by the cable’s vacancy. A loud pop, then high-pitched sizzle. Fitz fell on his side. Nothing outward on him changed, except his eyes: the orbs had exploded out of their sockets, exposing two empty red and black holes wreathed in
blood. Though only seconds, Milton and Aaron stared into those hollow recesses leading nowhere, giving no more insight to Fitz than his ravings. Fire already began to overtake his body. Forging through the offensive flames, Milton and Aaron sprinted to where the two injured men lay under a loft raging with auburn colors, boards falling weakened from heat. Aaron wrapped Stelton’s good arm over his neck and the two walked as fast as possible by the burning barn; Milton tried to untie the knot still holding William’s hands behind his back with no success: too hot, too rushed; improvising, he stuck both arms under William’s armpits and dragged him, half conscious, following Aaron. All four men hit the ground a hundred feet from the dying barn, coughing up invisible clouds of smoke. Milton jumped to his feet and ran for the gaping maw of flame.

“Milo, no!”

Inside, frantic, he searched. Father Stevens. Where had he gone? The heat tried to pinch his eyes shut, to hide what death cut down within; but it did not matter, he had to find the Father. Not for love. Nor devotion. Aaron thought it tradition, a past that Milton wished to escape but with the wound so fresh and unhealed, he could not divorce himself yet from the tireless efforts of a system he no longer trusted. It came down to the science of it: to the law. Father Stevens’ life meant nothing more, nor less, than any other man, convicted or under investigation, murderer or otherwise. Guilty or otherwise. Pure reaction. All Milton’s career – even from a young age – was to clean up after the dead. Putting scraps in order, arranging and rearranging realities to fight the most likely scenario possible, yet knowing that whatever conclusion was reached, what occurred could and would not be known. He returned not for Father Stevens or God or religion or
family: it was carnal. And when he did find the poor priest, curled fetal on the ground, his heart felt nothing, could feel nothing; adrenaline replaced all the blood his veins carried pushing him forward. His hands reached down to help Father Stevens stand as best he could, but the priest refused without words. In his hands the Father held the brass rosary beads and had resumed muttering his repetitive prayers.

“We must go,” shouted Milton in the Father’s left ear. The priest did nothing but pray. Milton pulled him across the black ground, ash and fire dripping from above, holes in the roof framing the blackened night. But the fire danced too hot, Milton’s strength already spent hours before; and echoing through the roar around him came Aaron’s voice: “It’s coming down!”

“Father, please,” Milton pleaded, but the man did nothing except pray. The hems of his robes caught fire without the priest flinching. “Don’t do this Father.” But the priest already had. Milton could not see it, or understand, nor would. There is a devotion to truth that cannot be explained or written or understood unless it is to what the devotee ascribes. Amidst the fire, Father Stevens heard nothing, felt noting, except those beads against his fingertips absolving his actions. Milton could not save him from himself. And so he, too, at last, ran from the barn engulfed in the hot orange glow – a bright beacon for the night sky to watch the insignificant happenings of the planet it blanketed – leaving the Father to be consumed. Once out, Milton and the other three men watched as the barn ripped itself apart, the roof finally collapsing.