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The SWARM

**HIS
ANGER
KILLS!**

Also: Aquinas: The thrilling end! And more! All inside!

There Is No Hell

by Slaya Nemoy

LIAM CLEMENS sat with his mother in the back of the courthouse. He was only seven years old and the youngest one in the room, but his mother had insisted he come.

"It's history in the making," she told him as she buttoned him into his best jacket. She had that gleam in her eye that always made Liam nervous. Last time she got the gleam, she had taken him to that strange parade and made him throw rocks at a constable. They had spent the night in prison that time. It hadn't been fun.

"Is someone going to get hurt, mom?" Liam asked. His mother smiled and put his cap on his head.

"God, I hope so."

Liam screwed up his face on the verge of tears. His mother quickly fell to her knees and hugged him.

"Oh, sweetie, it's not like that. It's just a bad man who is going to get hurt, no one else."

"We aren't throwing rocks at constables?"

"Do you want to?"

"NO!"

She smiled. "Let's go, or we'll miss the bus."

It had been a long bus ride, and then they had to walk a couple of blocks until they got to a large stone building. Liam craned his neck all the way back and still couldn't see the top. His mother pulled him through revolving doors and past two constables who checked her purse. Then they went down an echoing hall into a big room which was packed with people. His mom led him to a bench in the back and sat him down next to a dark man who gave Liam a smile. Liam smiled back and his mom slapped his hand.

"Don't talk to strangers," she hissed.

"I wasn't talking!" Liam protested.

"Pay attention," she said, ignoring him. She shifted from side to side, trying to look past the people in front.

"Liam, stand up on the bench and tell me what you see."

Liam didn't want to, but his mother glared and he stepped up. With the extra two feet of height he could easily see over all those seated, right to the front. There was a strange stage set up, and before it was two tables which were separated from the seats by a wooden gate. To the side was another stage in which sat some men and a woman. He told this to his mother. She rolled his eyes.

"It's a courthouse, darling. I know all that. Is the judge in yet?"

"Judge?" Liam frowned, confused.

"A man in dark robes," his mother explained. But just then the judge walked in, and all rose.

"The judge came!" Liam said eagerly. His mother sighed and pulled him down just as everyone else was sitting.

The judge said, "Let the defendant, Norman Burke, be brought in."

There was a noisy hush as a door to the side of the judge was opened and a constable walked in leading a man. The man was not very large, but imposing, with dark eyes and hair. He stared around as if he didn't care. The constable led him to a table furthest from the jury where a crooked man was already sitting, looking at Norman Burke contemptuously. The judge was perusing a document quickly.

"It says here, Mr. Burke, that you are accused of homicide charges on three accounts, the last being the murder of a fourteen year old girl, Alma Potter. Her parents, Charles and Hannah Potter, have brought charges against you. Many witnesses were called in on the prosecuting side, including an eyewitness account of your crime. You made no plea before the case began. Do you still refuse to do so?"

At the table Norman Burke nodded. "I have nothing to say as of yet."

The crooked man shot him a disapproving glance. The judge merely nodded.

"Now it is in the jury's hands to decide your fate. If the jury will please rise and exit into the antechamber."

The men sitting in the side box all rose at once and exited into a side door opposite to the one Norman Burke

came through. There was hushed whispering throughout the court room. Liam pulled on his mom's sleeve.

"What's homicide?"

"It means murdering someone," she answered.

Liam pondered that. "What's murder?"

His mom frowned. "Killing someone for no good reason."

"What's killing?"

She sighed. "Making someone no more."

Liam opened his mouth to ask more questions but she glowered at him.

"Stop bothering me, Liam."

Liam cowered and curled up on the bench. He frowned trying to puzzle out what it meant to be no more. Next to him the black man was looking at his mom quizzically.

"Isn't your boy a little young to be here, miss?" he asked politely. His mom glared.

"This is history in the making; he should be here! Not that it is any of your business."

"Murder is not something a child of his age should be privy to, I believe," the man murmured.

"I did not ask your opinion," she snapped. The man shrugged and gave Liam a small smile.

"You need not worry about this bad man, son. The law will take care of him."

"Don't talk to strangers, Liam," his mom said pulling him away.

"I wasn't," Liam muttered so she wouldn't hear.

Time passed, and Liam started to grow restless. He squirmed around in his seat until his mom pinched him to stop.

"Try to sit still," she ordered. He tried. He made it a game to see how long he could sit without moving. He never lasted long. After an hour of sitting, he realized he was not the only one squirming around on the uncomfortable bench.

"The decision should have been made within five minutes," his mom murmured.

"Condemning a man is no easy task," the black man said.

"It should be."

The man stared, taken aback, glanced at Liam, then shifted away from them. The door the jury had exited opened again and the jury filed in.

"At last," Liam's mom said eagerly, leaning in. The last jury man in was holding a piece of paper that he handed off to a constable who handed it to the judge. The judge read it carefully then nodded to the jury.

"The jury has come to a decision," he declared. "Jury, if you will."

The last jury man stood up and took a deep breath. "Your honor, we find the defendant, Norman Burke, guilty."

The courthouse exploded in applause. The judge banged his hammer on the table in front of him.

"Order!" he cried, "I will have order!"

The courthouse died down and the judge turned to Norman Burke. "Norman Burke, you have been found guilty on charges of three known homicides and, specifically, the murder of Alma Potter. Your sentence is death. Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

The crooked man looked at Norman Burke, who rose slowly.

"I do." Norman Burke turned to the audience. "I regret none of it." He sat down.

There was uproar, and the judge had to bang his hammer again.

"On September 15, you will be executed by the electric chair. May God have mercy on your soul."

Norman Burke burst into laughter. "God have mercy? There is no God to have mercy! Only humans, and what do humans care?"

Liam's mother suddenly rose, fuming. "You bastard, you will burn in Hell for what you have done!"

Norman Burke turned to her in the back. "If there is no God, there is no Hell. "

"There is!" she shrieked. "There will be divine retribution! You will regret every death you have wrought in this world!"

Norman Burke looked at her pityingly. "You poor woman. No God means no retribution. Only man can dole out

punishments, but why should we bother? There is no reason to punish, no reason to care. It's dog eat dog out there, and the only one that matters is you. So why not live life to the fullest? Why subject yourselves to pathetic laws and court systems that fail human beings all the time? Why give a fuck what happens in this world?"

"Because God will know!"

"Woman, there is no God."

She opened her mouth to retort but black man pulled at her sleeve to sit down, and she fell over onto the bench.

"Stop arguing with him," the man hissed. "He is perfectly right." He had a strange look in his eye that unnerved Liam.

"I will not let that man go without him knowing he will suffer for what he has done," Liam's mom countered.

"But he won't," the man said softly.

There were constables moving toward them.

"I'm afraid, miss, you are going to have to leave," one of them said.

Liam's mom threw her head back proudly. "I won't. I have a right to be here same as anyone else."

"No, you don't." He grabbed her arm roughly and pulled her from the seat.

"Let go of me! I'll go. Come, Liam."

Liam slid to the floor and the constable stared at him worryingly.

"You brought your son here?" he said incredulously.

"Why not?" she retorted. She took Liam's hand and started to move past them. The black man suddenly got up and leaned in toward Liam.

"Be careful out there, son. When truths are spoken, all Hell breaks loose." He glanced at the front of the courthouse where Norman Burke was being led out. "And that was a mighty truth. Remember it."

Liam nodded, though he was already forgetting. He wondered what they were going to have for supper and whether the constables were going to arrest his mother again. It was only later, much later, during the war, that he would try to dredge through his memory for this one historical moment. His mother was right; it was the most important moment, historically speaking, since the initial experiment disproving God that prompted it. And he never forgot his mother caused it.

Penelope and Ismene: Part 2

by H.P. Legomenon & Sophronia Tamaya

ISMENE LOOKED AT PENELOPE incredulously. “Darling, we’re in Victorian England. We’ve left the two of them a long time back. Paris was already dead when you decided to follow me. I’m pretty sure they’re not going to be running stores!”

“Care to put money on that?”

“I’d put anything you care to name on it.”

“Night with Chinese triplets?”

“Almost anything.”

Penelope forced her way through the crowd. For a Greek woman she had gotten a surprising talent for weaving her way past groups of men. A few seconds later, she was standing next to the two altercating parties.

“All right,” she said, with all the authority of her rank. “Let’s get calm here.” The two of them looked at her. She turned to the French one. “What is your name?”

He stood upright and spoke with a strong accent. “My name? I am Paris! And I-”

Penelope interrupted, “And your name, sir?”

“I’m Menelaus. And he-”

“I’ve heard your complaint. What is your wife’s name?”

“Helen. And she-”

Penelope had heard what she wanted to hear. She ducked away, leaving the Bobbies to take care of the situation. She went back to Ismene.

“That’s absolutely impossible,” Ismene said.

Penelope nodded. “I agree. But just because something is impossible doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen.”

“The word is often used to that effect.”

“She said, standing in a different country, hundreds of years after what should be her death.”

They started to walk away from the tussle, not noticing any of the eyes planted on them from the shadows of the alleys.

“All right, point made. But surely we ought to look into it...”

“What kind of adventurers would we be if we didn’t?”

At that moment, a figure launched himself in front of them. It was an old man, clearly drunk, dressed in rather unbecoming rags. He held out his hat to the two ladies.

“Penny for an old man?” he said, with a strong cockney accent. “No work for men like me out there, anymore, you know. Just a little somethin’ to get along?”

“I’m afraid we don’t have any money,” Ismene said, coldly.

“Not even if I were to tell you somethin’? I have somethin’ you might want to ‘ear.” He pointed to one of the alleys. “Follow me there. We ought to be safe there.”

“I’m afraid we really don’t have any money,” Penelope said, intrigued. “Is there anything else you might take in exchange?”

Ismene interrupted. “Penelope, don’t be an idiot. He doesn’t know anything. He’s just an old beggar, trying to make a quick buck.” She started to pull Penelope past him.

“An old beggar, am I?” the man said, indignantly. “Aye, I may look like an old beggar now, but you should ‘ave seen me when I was young. Back then, I was so strong, I could lift stones that no five men could lift, such as men are now. Nestor the Great, they called me!”

Both of the women stopped in their tracks and turned towards him.

“There isn’t any chance that you’d take payment in drachmas, is there?” Ismene said.

“I’ll take what I can get.” He beckoned, and Penelope and Ismene followed him through a few of the city’s

"I'll take what I can get." He beckoned, and Penelope and Ismene followed him through a few of the city's seemingly innumerable alleys. Eventually, they reached a spot that was almost entirely shaded by the buildings on either side. He looked around, as if to assure himself that there was no one watching them, then began speaking in a hushed whisper.

"I needed to get you girls off the streets. They watch the streets. He always keeps them there, looking for people. I don't know 'ow 'e picks 'em, but I know 'e's picked you. They've been following you two ever since they saw you."

"Who?" asked Penelope. "Who's been following us?"

"I don't know," Nestor replied. "They look like 'umans, but they ain't. It's just a disguise. The perfect disguise. Even the Bobbies wouldn't give a second glance at them, no matter what they did. They're trained not to."

Something about that phrase struck Ismene, but she couldn't think what.

"What are you talking about?" Penelope insisted. She began to suspect that he wasn't entirely in his right mind.

"It's a bad business, what 'e's doing to people. The 'ole thing's a bad business. I don't know what it is, but I know that it's a bad business. And I know that it's close to finishing. You two need to run before 'e finds you. Before 'e does something to you. Like 'e did to me..." He put his hand on his forehead.

"Who?" said Penelope, "Who and what?"

"'Im!" He lowered his voice, "The blind bard!"

But there was no time to ask for any elaboration on that. At the moment he said it, he suddenly gasped, and a second later blood started to come out of his mouth. Penelope and Ismene stepped aside as he fell forward, a knife buried in the back of his throat. They looked up to see the shadows that the knife had come from. Three figures stepped out of them, in perfect synchronization.

Penelope recognized them instantly. "The Chinese triplets?" she said, stunned.

Ismene's eyes widened. "Prostitutes...the people the police are trained not to see... Penelope, we need to get out of here."

"Maybe," said Penelope, "but I wouldn't recommend that direction..." She pointed, and Ismene saw that there were another three prostitutes standing at the other end of the aisle, blocking the exit. "Unless you know how to fly, I say we put up a fight."

"You remind me of my sister sometimes, you know."

"I'll take that as a compliment, I suppose."

"Just an observation." They stood back to back as the prostitutes approached.

"Do not attempt to fight," announced the center triplet in an oddly monotone voice. "No harm will come to you."

"Wish I could say the same for you!" Penelope said, kicking up and in the face of the triplet. To her surprise, the woman made no attempt to avoid the blow, but took it, and staggered back a few seconds. Penelope grabbed onto her foot, realizing she had just kicked something much harder than flesh.

The triplet then walked up and took her left hand in her right. She twisted it, and there was a slight burst of steam. And then, the hand revolved ninety degrees separately of the wrist, which stayed fixed, pointing at Penelope. Underneath the hand, Penelope could see a number of small gears twisting. And above it, she could see the glint of a small knife, just like the one in Nestor's throat. All of the other prostitutes in the alley imitated this move.

"Do not attempt to fight," she repeated. "No harm will come to you."

Ismene raised her hands. "Tempting offer."

The next thrilling installment - coming soon to <http://www.issuu.com/theswarm!>

Blood For Blood

by Jack Farrell

THERE'S SOMETHING living in my basement. I keep the door chained and the window boarded, but it keeps finding ways out. It's something like a monster, but it's also something else entirely. It's killed seven people already, and I know it doesn't intend on stopping. Because it can't stop. It doesn't want to, and it doesn't know how. And neither can I. I used to be able to hold it back. It used to be effortless, but now it's impossible. And it's all my fault.

There's a part of us all that we don't want to admit to. Some people are greedy. Some people are afraid. And I...I was angry. Not at everything, but still all the time. Not at the things happening around me, but the things that had happened in the past that were never made right. The things I could never forgive. Most people let go when someone hurts them. Given enough time most people forget. But not me. I just kept being angry. I just kept hating. Only I hated that I hated, and so I hated myself. The pain of things long finished ground against my mind, and the pain of all that hate threatened to break it. But a solution presented itself. And like a fool I took it.

(I can hear it trying to get out now. Most of the time it just stays in a corner of the basement and sleeps, except when it wants to kill. It's angry now. It's always angry. Sometimes it keeps me up all night screaming for blood. It wants to hurt more. Nothing will stop it wanting that except for death. But I can't kill it. Because of what it is.)

I admit, I should have been wary of Doctor Kedslaw. The situation itself was obviously back alley and experimental, but what really should have put me off from the whole situation was the man himself. It was the eyes. Those hungry, empty eyes. He didn't want anything but to know that he was right, and he didn't care about the consequences. He told me he could cut it out. He told me he could get rid of all my pain, all my anger, and all my sorrow. I asked him how soon. He just smiled a big, gaping grin and lead me into the back where the...instruments were laid out.

(I don't know if it thinks. I don't know if it feels. I know it never laughs or cries. But I'm certain that it won't be done until it dies. Or maybe until everything else does first.)

There was a big machine that looked rusty and some strange curved instruments that looked sharp and Doctor Kedslaw who I didn't have the courage to look at. He put me under and I came out different. But maybe not in the best way. To his credit, the good Doctor's idea did work. Now I feel a healthier man. I don't feel the hate anymore. I don't spend my time obsessing over wrongs of the past. The problem is that the rage I don't feel isn't gone. It just isn't in me anymore. It's in my basement.

(I think it's getting bigger. I've been having to give it more and more food. When this started it was only three feet tall. Now I'm sure it's closer to four. That means it's getting stronger. How long until it's stronger than me?)

The problem with separating your worst feature from yourself is that when it's left on its own there's nothing to control it. Greed without control leads to a gambling addiction. Fear without control makes you stay in your house for twenty years and put all of your money into a fallout shelter. What I had created...what I had let loose, I suppose, was all my anger at never being able to forgive. And there was nothing stopping it anymore. Jimmy Walten beat me up in high school. He was found beaten to death with a brick. Megan Smith broke my heart when I was twenty-four. Her neck was broken in three places. Every time it gets out it hurts people who hurt me. And I can't stop it.

It keeps coming back for the same reason I can't kill it. Because we're the same. Me and it...we're both one being. It's my fault that it lives a life of endless hate and pain, and it's me who has to take care of that. Like I used to ignore it. It sits in my basement screaming itself to sleep, and once it gets out it will do again what it's already done seven times. But how many more people are there? How long before it comes for me? How long before I have to make up for the things I've never forgiven myself for doing? I don't know, but I can't stop it. Now, all I can do is wait...

The Sindri Saga:

Chronicled by Jason Abidan, Chief Librarian Magus of the Archive by Aki O.

MIDSUMMER CAME to the plains of Up-North on a bright and sunny day, bearing with it a wind free of any cares and the sounds of small children and animals playing inside the waves of its tall grass. Below in the valley, the small village Folk bustling with the life that had been familiar to them for so long: fathers selling their wares in the markets, tailors jammed up next to food merchants and blacksmiths clanging in front of workshops whose sooty scent masked the more carnal one of the butcher's next door, the wives of other men buying whatever food and luxuries their families would need, and more. Off in the corner sat the Village Inn, its giant clock face gleaming, which served as the home to Folk's mayor, his young daughter and son, and his wife, as well as being the one stop-over for the carriages that came from Nowhere to Somewhere.

Midsummer came to this place with the joy of a small child tasting honey for the first time, the attitude of youth bored of endless days and sweaty with too much sunshine, and the serenity of the elders who spent their days rocking in their own beds. It was, in short, a midsummer that seemed to want to bother none, but was bound to do so eventually.

And it did. Midsummer bothered Morgan Caron Sindri a lot, and Morgan returned the favor by lying back-down on the tall grass, staring into the empty blue sky, and brooding with the type of vicious angst and pain that made the ghosts of mother hens long since roasted want to cluck from their ethereal realms nonstop.

Morgan didn't really care much for them either, but felt it was rather pointless to hate a ghost bird that was too chicken to cross the road into death after a lifetime of practice.

In order to understand who Morgan Caron Sindri is, there is one fact that must be understood in its utmost depth:

Morgan Caron Sindri rued the Day. Specifically, between Sunrise and Sunset.

Morgan had nothing against the Twilight or Night.

In fact, Morgan was very sure they lived up to their reputations as rather decent people, with a few twinkly exceptions, who loved taking a bit of break and celebrating their lives. Given the choice, Morgan would probably have chosen to go live among them, but traveling around the world to get to their towns wasn't exactly on the budget of a youth that lived among the eternally active, working world of the Day. Indeed, their industriousness was a chief virtue of the Day, who considered it their business not to let a single moment go to waste, who from a ripe young age knew exactly what they were to do, how to start doing it, and would get started incredibly quickly.

From the time Morgan was three, the consensus had been that Morgan's job was to do Nothing.

It wasn't exactly a popular job position.

To begin with, there wasn't exactly a proper methodology for doing "Nothing." Nor had anyone managed to explain to Morgan what "Nothing" looked like. The butcher said it wasn't cutting meat, and the blacksmith said it wasn't forging, and the tailors that it wasn't sowing, and the merchants said it wasn't selling because Nothing was cheap and none of the wives could remember ever buying Nothing when they went shopping so no one had ever had Nothing. The children in the field knew Nothing, of course, but being rather small couldn't quite explain it well to Morgan.

But they thought Morgan was nice, and so they had invited Morgan to watch them playing in the grass.

Morgan, of course, didn't know how to respond, since watching them seemed to be something of some sort, but didn't want to be rude. After staring at them playing and running around for three hours Morgan had collapsed, and wondered if maybe today, just maybe, on the day that Morgan turned twenty, there would finally be a breakthrough about what Nothing was so Morgan could do it.

Morgan could've laid there all day without anything happening. That wasn't what happened though.

Instead, it was at about this point when a rather large, black rabbit hopped out of the grass and landed on Morgan's chest.

"Oi! You don't happen to know where the town Folk is, do you?" The rabbit asked.

Morgan stared. "You-you're a rabbit."

"Yes, and I'm looking for Folk. Do you know where it is?"

"It's that way," Morgan gestured, pointing down across the plains. "Why do you want to go there?"

"Why not?" asked the rabbit.

"Because you're a talking rabbit who asks a lot of questions, and there's a butcher down there with a very large knife."

The rabbit shook. "But they wouldn't hurt me," he said. "I'm soft and fluffy."

"...The sad part is that actually makes sense to me," Morgan admitted after a moment, "but still, you have to admit that you would be a rather unusual visitor."

"Oh, I'm not a visitor," said the rabbit. "I'm a Familiar Companion."

"A what?"

"A FAMILIAR COMPANION," the rabbit said slowly, cottony tail punctuating each syllable with a soft thwack on Morgan's stomach. "You know, a buddy? A pal?"

"You're supposed to be someone's friend?" Morgan asked.

"D-do you think I'll be a-a...a bad one," the rabbit whispered, his ears dropping.

"Oh no," Morgan said hurriedly. "I'm sure you'll make a great friend."

"I worry about it you know," said the rabbit. "See, it's taken me a long time to hop here to find my Friend, and I'm worried that they'll think I'm, you know, unreliable."

"Well, it does take a long time for a rabbit to go anywhere. I'm sure they'll be quite understanding."

"You think?" the rabbit said, ears perking up.

"Oh yes," Morgan said. "Being reasonable is a big thing for the Day."

"That's a relief," the rabbit said. "Hopefully my friend doesn't mind it then. I have hopped a long way."

"Well, hold on a second," Morgan said, seeing the rabbit about to hop off, "What's your friend's name?"

The rabbit glared at Morgan. "Why do you want-"

"I might know them."

"Oh. The name is Morgan."

"...Morgan?"

"Morgan Caron Sindri," the rabbit said cheerfully. "You wouldn't happen to know where-"

"You're on Morgan's stomach," Morgan replied.

Morgan hadn't known it was possible for a rabbit to show more than its front teeth while smiling. Morgan was soon proven wrong as the rabbit showed a mouthful of incredibly white and shiny teeth while he manically bounced up and down in what could only be described as a rabbit victory dance.

There were exactly twenty-eight teeth.

Morgan counted.

Which wasn't hard to do, because no matter how the rabbit bounced up and down, his teeth were aimed directly where Morgan could see it.

"I-really-hate-to-bother-you," Morgan muttered through teeth that unconsciously were grinding in an effort not to snap at the obviously overjoyed, small mammal, "but-what's-your-name-again?"

"Oh!" said the rabbit, hopping off Morgan's stomach and onto the ground. "Where are my manners? My name is Alpin. Alpin Von Lamis. You can call me Al."

"Nice to meet you, Al," Morgan said, offering a hand.

“Nice to meet you Morgan,” Alpin said, reaching out a paw.

“So...ah...”

“You do Nothing right?”

“Well, actually, yes,” said Morgan. “Or at least, I’m supposed to.”

“What do you mean supposed to?” asked Alpin, sprawling alongside Morgan’s side so that his ears grazed Morgan’s shoulder absently.

“No one’s told me exactly what Nothing is, so I can’t tell if I am doing it right.”

“Oh...” said Alpin. “Well, that’s okay. I guess if you can’t do Nothing right, you can’t do it wrong either.”

“I guess...say, out of curiosity, how long were you hopping to get here anyway?”

“Since you were five.”

“Oh...”

“You were extremely hard to find,” Alpin said. “Totally hopped the wrong direction. Took me until I had almost hopped past Twilight to realize maybe I should be hopping the other way.”

“I understand,” Morgan told him. “I mean, that’s where I’d rather be. I rue the Day. Especially when I have to give them the time.”

“You have to give them the time?”

“Well, everyone else is busy doing something,” Morgan muttered, “and so clearly, since I’m doing Nothing- which no one can tell- I’m the prime candidate to give the town Folk the time of Day.”

“When do you have to do that?”

“Actually,” Morgan said, glancing down towards the clocktower, “in about five. Guess we should head in.”

“Guess so,” said Alpin, getting up. “Say, you wouldn’t mind carrying me a bit, would you? It was a lot of hopping.”

Morgan smirked. “Of course not. Hop on,” he added, cradling his arms around Alpin. Together the two set off towards the village Folk.

If they knew then what they know now...well, I’d be out of a job.

Thomas Aquinas: Private Eye

by Leonard J. Franks

“SO YOU MADE IT out of my basement, eh?” he said. “Very clever of you. But you’ve forgotten who you’re dealing with.”

“What makes you think I’ve forgotten it?”

“Because you wouldn’t be trying to mess with me if you hadn’t.” He fired the gun, and the pistol I was holding flew backwards and out of my hands.

“Goodbye now, Mr. Aquinas,” he said. “It’s been nice knowing you.”

“Wait!” I cried.

He paused. “What?”

“Don’t I get any last words?”

“Last words?”

“Yeah.”

“Compromise. I’ll shoot you in the neck. If you can still talk after that, you can have all the last words you want.” He pointed the gun at me again.

“I prefer to say them now. Besides, they’re short.”

He smiled. “Fine. What are they?”

“There’s something behind you.”

He was too smart to turn around, of course, but he didn’t need to. Because at that moment, a cop car drove directly through the gate of the mansion, and around him towards me. Five other cars piled up outside, and cops burst out of them. A female voice came out of the police car next to me.

“Get in, you idiot!”

I whipped the door open and jumped obediently into the back seat of the car. It was empty aside from the policewoman in the front.

Perhaps not all dames are that bad.

“Thanks for the save,” I said. “What’s your name?”

“Officer Aphrodite. And no thanks necessary. We’ve been looking to get something on Menelaus for a long time. If you actually have something to testify...”

“Of course I have something to testify. And I’ll do it as soon as I get the chance. Now would you mind dropping me off at my office? It’s at 22-”

“Fat chance. You’re staying at the station until we’re finished with the trial. We don’t plan on losing a witness. That is, if you actually have something to testify.”

I changed my mind. Dames are all that bad.

The next few weeks were wilder than a man who doesn’t need the city. The instant I made my deposition, about fifty other other witnesses found the courage to talk about the offenses Menelaus had committed over the years. To make things better, investigating policemen managed to find a payroll in a cabinet in the office. Suddenly, his whole gang was on the run. I got to be pretty interested in who was caught and who wasn’t. Odysseus was probably the biggest boss who got away, probably into a part of Mexico so far away they would think an American passport was a checkbook. Achilles got taken down by a lucky shot to the foot. Ajax got half-blinded and was caught having a gunfight with a herd of sheep. As for Agamemnon, his gold-digging wife knocked him off in the bathroom as soon as it became apparent that things were going badly. But then she got knocked off herself by her own son, who immediately hired one of those damn fancy pants lawyers. And all the time, I was forced to stick around at the

station along with all the people I had helped to nail.

But eventually, when all the arrests were done, I got released. I knew that there were reporters swarming the streets like bad definitions of virtue, so I took a back route. I didn't want to deal with any questions and articles at that precise moment. I still had a loose end to tie up.

After a few quick stops, I was finally sitting in my desk again, facing the window. I heard the door open, and then the sounds of someone in high heels walking to a chair and sitting down. "Thanks for coming," I said, and spun around.

"You look terrible," Helen said as soon as she saw my face.

"Nothing a little gin and divine grace won't fix," I said. "Much to your regret, I imagine."

She put her hands to her face. "Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean that the game's up. I know that you set up this whole thing."

"What makes you think that?" An expression of concern that almost seemed real floated across her face.

"Because it's the only way that any of this makes any sense. If you want me to, I can go through it all. Maybe it will make a nice bedtime story for you before you head off to the iron barred Hades to cool down."

"You can't be serious!"

"Reply objection 1! I've never been so serious. It all started out between you and Paris. I'll believe that the two of you fell in love, like kids do, and so you ran off with him. Only Menelaus didn't take it so well. He started up a gang war. And when things started going badly, and it looked like the protection of your new honey's father wasn't going to be enough, you decided to fall back on simpler tricks. So you went back to Menelaus, secretly. Am I right so far?"

She made no response. I kept going. "I'm sure that you knew how to play Menelaus like a well tuned lyre, and you knew everything you needed to to take down his whole gang. You went through the list of enemies he had formed, and chanced upon me. And you proposed a plan to him for him to get rid of me. And due to his incontinence, he fell into your plot as if he had a natural tendency towards it."

She still said nothing. "You got him to buy all of that new security equipment, and place guards in the street, where no sensible boss would station them, and finally you got him to make that elaborate trap for me, knowing full well that I was skilled enough to escape it. Then, finally, you planted a very incriminating clue."

"What?"

"The paysheet. No real crime boss would have something so obvious as that. You assembled it out of your knowledge of his contacts. So that when I made an inevitable escape, and the police finally got a warrant for the place, his whole gang gets destroyed, and you get to always have Paris. Am I right?"

"You don't have a shred of evidence for this story," she said, sounding slightly worried.

"Reply objection 2. I have all the evidence I need. You gave me a check for the job. It was from Menelaus' account, and it cleared when I took it to the bank. You claimed that you weren't on speaking terms with your husband. Am I supposed to think that he still gives you money? It'll be enough to spark an investigation. And unless you think there are no clues whatsoever..."

She started to gently snuffle, and I saw a tear welling in her eye. "I admit it. I did it all. But do you have to tell the police about it? I only acted out of love, you know. What's a girl supposed to do?"

"A little too late for that, honey. They should be here any moment now."

Her face left a period of Love and instantly entered one of Strife. "Fine! You win. But this isn't over, Thomas. The plan wasn't my idea. It was my boss's. We're both pawns in his game. And he'll sacrifice you when he wants to."

"The boss?" I said surprised. "What boss? Priam? The Prime Mover? The Demiurge? The Great-Souled Man?"

Helen laughed. "More pawns, just like Menelaus was before he got uppity. No. Those aren't real bosses. They're just emanations."

"Emanations?"

"That's right. The one you're looking for can only be referred to properly as... The One."

Before I could ask for anything more, the police burst in.

The Swarm Is:

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“TELL ME, O MENO, whether pulp fiction is something good, or if not good, can it be something worthwhile, or at least entertaining? And if any of these are true is it something that comes to human beings by publication or some other way?”

“It is not hard to tell, Socrates. First we must know what the virtue of a pulp story is. If it's the virtue of hard boiled crime you want, it's easiest to say that it's this you want: a detective who does well to his friends and manages the affairs of dangerous dames and crimes, and a nemesis who does harm to his enemies, and the detective who avoids the twists and turns of convoluted plot points. And if it's the virtue of a space opera that you want, that's not too hard. It is to manage well the breaking of the laws of physics and to boldly go where no man has gone before. And the virtue of horror, and of fantasy, and of parody, and light poetry, and there are a great many other genres, so that there is no difficulty in knowing what the virtue of pulp fiction is.”

“But Meno, I have asked you for pulp fiction, and you have given me *The Swarm*.”

“Yes. I have.”

