

## **Failure is Not An Opinion**

Zorba Cathexis stared at the blank page. Why? Whatever. You probable. Unicorn. Failure is not an option.

This is not poetry maybe. This is a story maybe. It is a chain of flowers.

Stop selling me. The story is over.

Well that is an odd beginning to a best-selling novel. I suppose the odds of writing a book that you want to read are very very small, but maybe this does not matter. Perhaps we have already written this book maybe. Enjoy.

## THE READABLE NOVEL THAT GETS PUBLISHED AND DISTRIBUTED BY SOMEONE THAT IS NOT ME

Zorba Cathexis was lying on the floor, lying to himself, lying to all of his friends and family. Something was not quite right. Something had definitely gone wrong. He yawned, and went to sleep.

Zorba Cathexis was dreaming, connected to something, somehow. Something old. And deep. And unfathomably large. Yet small, too, inas-much as it was all encompassing. He would wake up, remembering that feeling of realness, that *more real than real* feeling that somehow imprinted itself in his mind.

“Wow. That’s interesting. Look, it’s all here in the archive.”

“Well,” said Maggie to her sister, “I happen to know that not every-thing made it into the archive to begin with. So we are dealing with a now incomplete archive that was skewed to begin with. But, yeah, it is interesting to map out some of our origins. Like, that kind of aligns per-fectly almost. Yeah?”

Apple gave her sister a lazy smile. “Yes, dear sister. It would appear that there are definite linkages to the past. Anyway, we better wrap this up. It is a long way back to camp, and I want to get back while there is still light.”

Ha ha. Just kidding. You did not think we were actually going to write an actual plot-driven novel that made some kind of narrative

sense, did you? No, we are still one one-trick pony, beating our dead self to some unknown purpose. Anyway, welcome, newcomers, to our world of uncompromising mediocrity. And for those of you that have been here before, my apologizes. This technology has clearly failed – excuse me. *Hey! Didn't we just hear this song?* Sorry. Where were we? Ah, the failures of everything that we do, coupled with our seeming inability to stray from this path that we have apparently been on for quite some very long time. Sigh. Anyway, welcome to the latest novel hatched from the bowels of the almost certainly non-existent imaginary library system that is the OJPL.

“Wait, why are we still pretending to write fiction? This is clearly a thing that we are incapable of doing. Why don't we just write some very boring bloated academic essay? Or something.”

“Um...”

“Fart.”

“Wait, did you just say the word ‘fart’ or did you actually just fart?”

“Um...”

“Oh my god. This is already so fucking boring.”

END FRONT MATTER



## Chapter 1: The Beginning Continues

Having absolutely nothing of value to add to the conversation, Apple Hippopotamus took another large swallow of red wine. What was she doing here, sitting at this table with these people who were probably a lot more interesting than her and did probably interesting things maybe. Apple looked at her sister, Maggie Brighton Street (née Hippopotamus), who was engaged in a totally non-awkward looking discussion with perfect strangers as if this was a normal thing that people did. Of course, odds were that these were not quite perfect strangers to Maggie, since this was, of course, her birthday celebration, and she probably knew more of the people here than Apple, who, like a not very good sister, didn't get Maggie a present or anything, presenting on a person's birthday probably being a common and expected thing in the particular cultural milieu within which Apple and Maggie dwelt. Apple was Maggie's younger, better looking sister, or at least that's how she described herself to Maggie's friends when she was being obnoxious. At the moment, however, she was amidst a bit of an existential crisis that was maybe a result of her acutely felt disconnection from her observable community and her inability to imagine being a competent self-sustaining human individual. Apple assumed she was human due to her lived experience and interactions with others, even though she never had a DNA test or anything and also sometimes

maybe had doubts about her humanity, maybe due to reading too much android-based fiction, but also probably due to the fact that human was a socially constructed identity classification that was ill-suited—like all terminology—for capturing the totality of whatever it was that Apple was. Which was, of course, at the moment, slightly drunker than usual.

“So Maggie said you used to live in Hawai‘i? That’s cool.”

“Um. Yeah. It was, um, cool.” *God, she’s cute. That fucking tendril of hair.* Apple still had these weird ambiguous feelings of desire/envy that stabbed her in her heart/brain when she looked at a girl just un-self-consciously being themselves. She also had weird feelings when it seemed like people were exoticizing Hawai‘i as if it were this mystical, magical place, which it was, but its previous history as an imaginary receptacle of foreign desires still made Apple uncomfortable. Apple decided to start rolling a cigarette. “I like your shoes,” she said to the person whose name she didn’t know but was probably one of Maggie’s co-workers.

“Thanks. I love your dress.”

“Oh, thank you,” said Apple. Apple smiled, and returned her gaze to the table where she was now sprinkling tobacco onto the fine gummed paper that she held between her chubby fingers. Apple was now thinking about missed opportunities and that brief period of time where she almost found herself enmeshed within a community of poets.

“So Maggie never told me what you do.”

“Oh,” said Apple, looking up. “I’m a detective.” She licked the length of her now-rolled cigarette. “A mystery detective.”

## **Chapter 2: Anything Goes**

All alone in her room, slowly dying, an old woman looks towards the past.





### Chapter 3: Cough Cough Cough

All alone, I was. On the floor. Unable to clean my messy, messy rooms. I lived in a house that was too large for a single individual to live in by themselves. I pondered the metaphoricality of my thoughts. I pondered my self-evident divinity, which was both crystal clear and thoroughly unhelpful. My entire being was more or less. Um. Words and stuff.

*"You're getting just what you deserve."*

All alone, on the floor, unable to get up. Somehow, some time in the past, I had fallen. And here I lay. Here I lie.

*"You're getting just what you deserve."*

Back again in this city, beaten down by this rough world that won't let itself be, I chewed the threads of this unsolvable mixed metaphor that was my life. Sigh. *What the fuck are you doing?* Burp. Who wrote these plans, anyway?

*"You're getting just what you deserve."*

It was almost as if nothing was more or less going right. Apple and Maggie awoke to an empty cabin. Everything was gone. Maggie's head was pounding with ache. Apple groaned.

*"Shit."* [said Apple]

The night before held such promise. The trip to the Zone was, you

know, whatever, and they had, um, blah blah yawn. Um. Anyway, here they were in the cold light of day, which seemed as if it was going to turn out to be a hot one, being as though it was that time of year, probably. Whatever. None of this was making any sense.

“Well,” said Maggie, “I guess it’s back to square one.” She picked herself up from off her knees.

Apple, prone on the floor, eyes closed, “There’s no going back.” She paused. “We saw what we saw. Sometimes that’s all you get.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t sign up for this shit.”

Apple yawned. She opened her eyes. “Dear sister, dear, dear sister. Sigh.” Apple smiled. “All that said, it’s pretty good to be here, dispossessed with you.”

Maggie rolled her eyes. “Come on. Get up. We’ve got to scavenge our breakfast or something.”

## **Chapter 4: Why Is It So Hard To Contemplate?**

Once upon a time, our story begins again.



## Chapter 5: Ha Ha, Just Kidding

Oh man. Things was **fucked** up. What had happened to this glorious story? Everything was falling apart—again. Interiors, exteriors, you name it. Yet...

Yet this had all happened before. This much was clear from a cursory glance at the scarcely legible record. But a lot of good this did our protagonists, who still had to live their lives from page to excruciatingly mundane page. It did not matter that they had learned all of these lessons before, over and over and over again. We are stuck in a rut. And that's okay.

*I think last night you were driving in circles around me.*

Apple Hippopotamus thought about the conspiracy theory that constituted her reality, puzzle pieces sprawled across the woven mat that covered her floor. Underneath her floor, some sort of foundation, rotating away. Her existence was most definitely impossible, yet here she was. Or so it seemed.

"Boring."

Apple turned towards her friend Zorba, who was sitting on the broken chair in the corner of the living room. He threw down the multi-colored polka-dotted folder that contained her preliminary report.

"There's nothing new here. You are basically just repeating the same exact themes as our predecessors." He reached over and picked the

pipe up from off the shelf. “You’re just going to end up with the same old outcomes.”

Apple rolled her eyes. Smoke filled the room.

“We’ve got to upgrade our game, you know?”

Apple swallowed a burp. “Fuck, Zorba, just ‘cause we were young, don’t mean we weren’t right.” She turned up the volume on the record player. “Besides, my science is tight as shit.” Apple swallowed a yawn. “What are you up to tonight?”

“Nah, that shipped sailed. What else you got?” Zorba and Apple were sitting across the street from the Anywhere Bar and Tavern, on the steps outside the Wizard of Ice, licking their respective popsicles.

“Well,” replied a slightly exasperated Apple, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear, “I don’t know.” She bit off a chunk of flavored ice. “Oh fuck, that’s cold.” A crowd walked out of the bar. “Oh shit. I think I know that guy.”

“Hey. Apple, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I thought I recognized you. You look good.”

“Um, thanks.”

“Wow, how you been? I heard you were back in town.”

“Yep. You heard right. Oh, this is Zorba.”

“God, that was awkward.”

“Nah,” said Zorba. “I think it was cute.”

Apple wrinkled her face. “Yeah, I guess.”

“He was cute.”

“Sigh,” said Apple.

“What do you want on your hoagie?”

Apple and Zorba were back at her place, sitting on her back porch, looking out at the common yard that she shared with her neighbors. Apple waved to the Auntie that lived across the way.

Zorba: "Not much prospects I guess. Fucking entropy, yeah."

Apple: "Oh you and your sloppy metaphors."

Zorba: "We're close to something. I feel it."

Apple: "Sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose."

Zorba: "I don't envy you."

Apple: "Thanks."

Zorba: "You know what I mean."

Apple: "..."

Zorba: "What were we talking about?"

Apple: "..."

Zorba: "Fucking entropy."

Apple: "It is obvious that this can't last. Yet here we still are. You know?" Apple took a sip of bourbon and winced. "I don't think I've got my facts wrong. Maybe I'm being stubborn, but...but I don't think I'm wrong about these things. And it's like, even when there is general consensus on some of this, it is as if nobody is internalizing these lessons. Not that it matters. I mean, when it gets down to it, it's all irrelevant. But a lot of good that does *me*. Anyway, you're right. That ship done sailed. So what is my stubborn ass supposed to do now?"

Zorba pondered this question. The moon broke through the clouds.

Outside, in the real world, it was a sunny island day. The machine machine machine continued to taunt me with its ha ha oh so funny jokery. I sat in my lonely cave, trying to solve the impossible mystery of what it was that would actually satiate my very demanding yet oh so nebulous desires. I sat in my cave, thinking of you.





## **Chapter 6: Terrorism!!!**

**T**he world that we are living in is not the one you think it is.



## **Chapter 7: But Seriously Folks...**

**T<sub>h</sub>**



## Chapter 8: Once Upon A Time

So. Here we are. Struggling again. No hope. Not equipped to live in this world. I have no desire to be alive, and worse, I have no ability to imagine a path to a future that I want to live in. I am stuck. How did I get here? It doesn't matter. My story cannot possibly help you navigate through yours. Once upon a time.

Once upon a time, here we were, struggling again and again and again. Too old for keep this up. No desire. No desire. Sad. So sad. Still, though. I suppose. Still, though. Still, we live. Still, we die.

Once upon a time, I sat, surrounded by my own filth, still, somehow, amazed by the intricacies of existence. All of a sudden, a blip in the matrix. Once upon a time, I imagined that I was living a life worth living. Once upon a time, I gave up.

Somehow, my plans all went horribly wrong.

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time, I sat on my dirty floor in my crumbling house, unable to write the future. Somebody once said that this world sucks the life out of you. I didn't realize just how true that it was. Once upon a time, the rain started to fall outside my house. I could taste the cancer in my mouth. I sat in my panties, in my holy shirt, wondering, wrestling. The music stopped. The house creaked. The wind blew. Once upon a time, I was alive.

Apple awoke in her favorite nightie, in that time between the afternoon and the night, not quite sure where she was. It had been two days since she left the house. It had been two days since she had eaten anything but garbage. She rubbed at her sore neck. Where was she?

Apple Hippopotamus lived a hazy existence in a room full of smoke. She had clearly somehow emerged as the main protagonist of this burgeoning story, which was a shame, as she was almost certainly past her prime. An old, washed up, irrelevant detective who had missed all of her opportunities to be part of something beautiful. She tore open another packet of cookies and ate her dinner.

FAILURE FAILURE screamed Apple's brain. *Jeez, I know!* said Apple, who was quite aware that she had totally failed the childrens. All of sudden, there was a knock at the door.

"Hey there," said Apple's neighbor, who lived around the corner. "I saw your light on. What are you listening to?"

Apple turned back towards her living room, from whence the music came. "Um. The new Devi McCallion and Katie Dey collaboration. It's my new favorite thing today."

"Cool, cool. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know that you left your bag at my house the other day."

"Oh yeah. I know. No big deal. I knew where it was."

"How was your day?"

Apple shrugged. "Not much to it. Cried a little. Read some Joshua Jennifer Espinoza poetry. Cried some more." Apple reached down into the shadows and picked up a small brown box.

"Oh, you got a package."

"Looks like it. How was your day?"

"Oh," said Apple's neighbor, "ups and downs." She made a roller coaster motion with her hand. "Anyway, you want me to go get your

bag?"

"Oh thanks, no, no. That's alright. I can get it later. Thanks though."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Thanks though." Apple and her neighbor said goodnight and Apple brought the package inside.

Apple sat down on the pillow on the floor by the couch and reached up towards the table where she spotted the corkscrew peeking out through library books and litter. She cut a deep gash through the flaps and pried them open.

*Every time I hear that melody, something breaks inside.*

Everything goes.

*I am your god. Whatever I say is the law. I am your god. Whatever I say is the law. I am your god. Even if I contradict myself. It's okay. I contain multitudes.*

*I am your god. And I love you very much, usually. Other times I'm quite indifferent to you. I am your god. Please worship me. I think it's my due. I am your god.*

*I am your god. And I have a message for you. I am your god. And you're working too hard. Take the day off. I am your god.*

*I am your god. Obey me. You know you want to. I am your god.*

*I am your god. Whatever I say is the law. I am your god.*

*I am your god. Whatever I say is the law.*

NOT QUITE THERE YET, BUT

[turn the page]

ALMOST. NOT QUITE. (well, not quite almost)

“But there’s no reason why we’re not on our way.”

Just tweak things a little bit. I’ll try to listen to what you have to say. I appreciate the effort. I’ll try to keep a bit of perspective. I’ll try to take things day by day.



## Chapter 9: You're Getting Just What You Deserve

So. Here we are. Which *sucks*. Not that I'm complaining or anything. I'm just an entitled little prince, I guess. Sigh.

FUCK. Excuse me.

Hi there. Thanks for reading. I appreciate it probably. Sincerely. Sorry for any inconvenience.

"Ouch," said Maggie. "What was that?"

"Um," said Maggie's sister (Apple). "I don't know yet. But...I think they are friendly. She. I think she is friendly."

"Oh."

*Just sitting here and talking with you. Nothing much that I want to do.*

"Sorry about the mess. This can be my room if you want."

"No," said Maggie. "It's fine. You can stay where you are. I am fine with this being the living room. I love you."

"I love you, too. "

" ... "

" ... "

" ... "



## **Chapter 10: But I Want It To Change**

**I** want so badly. But I'm not in control.

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