

Pop!

**A Novel By
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I had no feeling of life, and the flow of all moral concepts was like a dry river in my veins. Life was not an object or form to me, it had become a series of rationalizations. But these rationalizations never got off the ground and only freewheeled, they were possible 'diagrams' within me which my will power could not light on. Even to arrive at this suicidal state, I must wait for my ego to return. I need the free play of all the articulations of my being. God set me down in despair as in a constellation of stalemates whose radiance terminates in me. I can neither live nor die, but am unable not to wish to live or die. And all men are like me.

Antonin Artaud

**In Memory of my beloved friend,
Edmund Moore**

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Although portions of this novel were suggested by real events, each character in it is fictional.

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BOOK ONE
DANTE'S
DÉJÀ VU

ONE

Over Diamond Heights, between Twin Peaks, fog billowed relentlessly, exhuming the City of Saint Francis in its wake. What a sissy.

Dante Tutticosa awoke misty eyed and thick headed on a late Monday morning. He had, in fact, been born on a Monday, so he could get a full week of work in right away. Even this late, the sun had yet to peek its head out of its own sweet cloud over. He peered out his crudely curtained window and watched the tops of electric trolley cars lumber by noisily on Market Street.

Oh, no, Dante realized, I'm back. I was gone almost a year. It was only the second time in twenty years that I managed to escape San Francisco, that jagged edge of fragile rock sticking out over the ocean. I lived in New Orleans, near the Vieux Carre, but it got too hot down there. It's August, and I'm back in 'Frisco. Damn.

What do I know this morning that I didn't know yesterday? He wondered. He grimaced at himself, viewing the tousled brown hair on his slightly balding head in the tiny mirror in his room with a sink.

"More than I knew when I went to bed last night," he said to the man in the mirror, with a single digit raised skyward. He was not fully awake, and yet not asleep.

He was still in the land of *Tandra*. Sometimes in meditation he fell into that state, a state of consciousness between wakefulness and slumber. It was a very potent time for revelations. It was trance like. Here was Dante as the misogynist Sibyl, a hermaphroditic soothsayer.

A vacuous and unrelenting minor pelvic flurry, a mackerel in a barrel roll off the quay, a walk upon the waves of a waterfall, a Piscean dream rain dance, a fanciful perspiration -- all this retained wetness prevailed in this mind this morning. The cause was his new friend Jenna Finway; she was a college student, a writer she said *and* the mother of two children. When Dante first met her, she was working on a book pondering the significance and the complexities of the Greek myth of Orpheus and his consort Eurydice. When he could find her at all, Dante found Jenna sexy, intelligent, girlish, picturesque, exotic, majestic and alluring. Her edifying ineluctability stretched Dante's capacity for hyperbole to extremes. *I like this wench*, he thought. *With her impetus, then, I think I'll quaff the inspiration to write my first novel.* "Slobovia!" he yelled out loud, throwing a just then sipped ginseng glass vial out the window to smash onto the street below.

Outside his second story windowsill, on the bone bleached, solar heated asphalt, men, women and children abounded wearing toe rings, finger, wrist, neck, ear and ankle jewelry; they discussed art, the theater, lunch and the price of Intel, in a variety of foreign and domestic tongues -- this was San Francisco at noon on Market Street in the Civic Center. There were puppy dogs with punks, yuppies of all sexes with pony tails, and ragged, grungy plaid lumberjack shirts on bums, the kind Kerouac used to wear. Truncated syllables wafted up to Dante's room, melding with car horn brays, jet plane

engine roars, the sizzling complaint of electric buses on the wire, Harley hog pipes thundering by and the lonely foot patter of plain faced young maidens on their way home from tea and sympathy.

Dante gargled mock philosophy for a laugh. Witness the platitude: *A cur can only rise to its individual identity when it realizes its innate curness.* However, Dante Tutticosa, at length, awoke in retrograde with a startling apprehension. His mental uniqueness, his pluperfect form, his healthy monaural heterogeneity -- all these were now modulated by a new kind of crazy wisdom, thanks to his dream of the night before: *I have lived before this life.*

His coffee was comfortably cold, so's you could gnaw on it; it got sucked with savor between Dante's two missing eyeteeth holes, the blend left over from last night's *soiree* precisely for this kind of emergency. For this dawn day, Dante did not have time nor three Lincoln head pennies to waste on the usual breakfast. Breaking wind instead in the whispers of his first shower of the day, the floating point logic of the thing spumed in his cranium.

How they had chortled in Paris, Dante remembered, down in the concierge's cabin on the *Rive Gauche*, hanging on him the appellation of *Monsieur Douche*, Mister Shower, precisely because he had to go down to the lobby and pay a few extra francs for the privilege of using a facility which without his attendance would have remained permanently neglected. But he did so twice a day! *Mon dieu!*

He thought, *I have lived before, in another life. I must sup with the ever languishing Miss Gwenette Landerhan tonight and delve into the ramifications of this life*

and death revelation. His ardent umbrage concerning the lady in question, however, does not concern us at this poignant puncture.

“First lather, then palaver,” Dante mumbled amusedly, coaxing the ion charged, ozone eating shaving foam from its pressurized container with his left index finger. He began romantic, poetic, mock epic fits and starts as he shaved in the bathroom. He quoted to himself from the grandest of time honored drama, which he made up entirely on the spot: “Now, slashing at imaginary strophic units with my straight razor, here’s looking up your whole family through a newly wrenched orifice made in the stratosphere by the emissions from this one little lousy can of shaving cream. But I fear not the fruitless flutter of singed bird wings above my shaving trough! Let the harpies eat my seeds today,” he expunged, with sufficient spleen to chase the vile mind vultures away. This elevated the shaving process into fine art.

The mist his pre brushed breath made on the mirror screened his calls. For fifteen seconds easy, Dante let the smother bubbles on his time tormented face become dry and flaky. During this interval, amid this ineffable reverie, Mr. Dante Tutticosa was firmly rooted in the present time: it was Monday, August 16th, 1997; he was fully aware of his present location: he lived at the Chase Hotel on Market Street in San Francisco, California, USA. And yet, somewhere in his dream, he had died of pneumonic plague, suddenly, long before buboes the size of coffee cups had a chance to appear in his groin or his armpits like they had on his son and sister. How now, what chance nightmare this? The time: 1349 A.D., he seemed to recall. The place: somewhere in England, he thought. The family of plagues: The Black Death?

Cut to Dante's attention skidding along aimlessly as he begins his daily constitutional. A fully eaten watermelon rind is seen laying in a bus zone. In that very location, only moments before, a big lug of a man, a debauched dude, had run a damsel headlong into the street while chasing another commoner with no apparent motive. In that very street, slightly earlier, drum accompanied monks had paraded by gruffly hissing *OM NAMA SHIVAYA*. He was now up in the Haight. A warm, gentle, early *El Niño* drizzle wetted the parked cars along the sidewalk.

This, however, was not enough. He could not shake the memory of his dream vision, no matter how far he strolled, no matter how much he was distracted. Somewhere in Farnham, in Winchester, Sussex, places he had never been before -- as Tutticosa -- somewhere there in England a bell had tolled, and he need not ask for whom. He heard inside his mind the unmistakable utterance of the Spanish nuns around him, the shuttering silent scream, *Magna Karista!* which always meant incurable Black Death. How malevolent the sweet green fields and rolling glacier formed hills dotted with neat trees and no noise seemed to him then, caught in the throes of his own demise. Shake your head, Dante, leave it all behind, in the land of *Tandra*.

Later in the day, Dante sat munching water chestnuts and won tons at Tommy Toy's across from the pyramid with the centrally concerned and thoroughly air conditioned Miss Landerhan. She inquired as to the seriousness with which Mr.

Tutticosa was taking his dream of the night before, a dream that seemed to prove to him, “beyond the umbrella of doubt,” the theory of reincarnation.

“Are you mad? Do you think you are losing your mind?” Gwenette mused briefly before getting back to herself.

“With this dream,” Dante remonstrated, “I have swept the broken shards of my illusions into the dustbin of history.”

Landerhan chewed her pressed duck fatuously.

Dante felt *cul de sac'd* at that moment; he wondered what he would enter into his journal this night. Then quickly, an insight, an idea, a bold strategy: he would, as a ruse, erect a construction paper conundrum in the chicken coop of his mind by the sea. He dared anyone to fathom the significance of such an articulation. He knew he would have to implicate his cohort, his friend Edgar, The Egg Man, AKA Ditz, The Banana King, in this purely nonsensical posturing. Edgar would surely, in his inimitable manner, embellish the legend upon his initiation into the fold in like manner: “This is a caustic calling, beginning and ending in chaos, a cosmic conundrum of celestial import.” That would stop even a Congressional investigation.

That night in his room, Dante listened to the news of the day being ripped and read on the radio. The announcer eructed: “What would it be like if pot were legal, just for one day? To find out, join the fun on August 21st at Chrissy Field in the Presidio for Hemptown, USA, with over sixty booths, music...*the last monarch of the so called Heraclid line of Lydian monarchs, Candolus, was killed by Gyges, founder of the Mernhad dynasty, The House of the Hawk, with its capitol at Sardis, on the river Hermus, at the edge of a well watered plain.*”

He turned off the radio, but the news still reverberated in his mind. Which report real, which imaginary, which new and which old, here and there, truth and lies, light and dark, time out of joint -- it came and went this way for poor old Tutucosa, during the first day of his devastating *deja vu*.

TWO

In all, the twelve clear glass globules, first heated and then vacuum sealed to Raven's silken thighs, had been moved by the healer over 100 centimeters from the spots where they were placed at the beginning of the unconventional treatment. Dante recommended the exotic procedure to Raven shortly after she arrived in San Francisco from New Orleans, where he met her while she was in service at Marie Laveau's Voodoo Emporium on Bourbon Street, selling gaudy trinkets, effeminate powders and overpriced candles to gullible tourists from around the country and the world.

Raven complained bitterly to Dante about painful post ovulations while he was staying in Louisiana on a grant to study molds and fungi at the Two Sisters Symposia and Monastery near Lake Pontchartrain. It was only later that Dante discovered that the word *symposia* meant "men's drinking group" in Greek, and by then, of course, it was too late.

By way of consolation, Dante reminded Raven as she endured the procedure: "At least in this case, the cure won't be worse than the disease."

"Or the bill," Raven prayed out loud.

Raven, whose last name Dante never obtained, and whose first name has not been changed, hailed originally from Albany, New York, and when she reads this, she will probably try to find Tutticosa for a quick out of court settlement. She reportedly began

frequenting the punk venues of St. Mark's Place in New York City early on, but then, of course, at twenty six, what was early on for Raven could not have possibly eclipsed what had been overdone by him personally, practically before she was born. Still, he thought, *I might come in handy*; because although Raven had presumably been menstruating since she was thirteen years old or so, which by now meant she had gone through the ignominy well over a hundred times, she had apparently not yet figured out how to navigate the ebbing and flowing of the tides, so to speak, although well aware of the lunar effect, he presumed, on the female reproductive organs. Being a man, of course, raw presumption in this regard was the most he could muster.

Perhaps as a consolation, Raven decided to pursue a highly primitive lifestyle, the outward manifestations of which are enumerated as follows: she had Christ's crown of thorns tattooed around her noggin, ornate gothic necklaces tattooed around her throat, assorted bird feathers and *fleur de lys* tattooed on her back and arms, the Mad Hatter's tea party tattooed on her calf, a mahatma mandala on her stomach, original stigmata inked down her pubis, along with several ear, nose, lip, eyebrow, tongue, nipple, umbilical scar, clitoris and bum hole piercings.

All this torture and pain she endured with veritable disinterest or unbridled zeal, take your pick. Dante, very succinctly he imagined, posited that this ordeal was undertaken perhaps only in coincidence with the aforementioned lunar affectations on the female organs. To follow this ludicrous train of thought and crash headlong into its illogical absurdity; *ergo*, the several and distinctly different pains, commingled yet mutually exclusive, i.e., the pain of being culturally empowered, *avant garde*, primitive, a body manipulator or living artwork, and the pain of feminine menstrual necessity, if you

can follow this driftwood of an argument, competed for Raven's somewhat limited attention span and thus canceled each other out.

“In an abysmal rat's ass,” was Raven's disposition concerning this bit of dimwit.

A peal of thunder, a bowling ball rolling down the lanes and then a strike above him in the fog and clouds, sounded like applause. He took it as an affirmation of some kind.

Raven had always seemed pretty to Dante, especially when vexed with PMS, in a childish, pouty sort of way, her dyed purple shock of pony tailed hair stretched taut across her temples, her body obviously retaining uncomfortable amounts of water weight, visible about her slightly acne pitted cheeks and below her eyes, which were often puffy like the soft underbelly of a newt. And for all of it, he was very much in love with her. But alas, they were to have a falling out. A bauble, a possession that Dante had offered to sell her, was the catalyst. He had decided that, in fact, it would not be forthcoming, that he could not sell her the device in question, that to do so would be to act much as a detestable pirate might, or a donkey vendor in eye shot of Socrates' torts of disapproval. The philosopher, like Dante himself, disdained commerce.

This altercation between friends sent Tutticosa into a fit of melancholia. *First deja vu*, he thought, *and now this*. Thus, his dreams of eternity had transmigrated all values hitherto embraced, however embarrassing those values may have been to hold, which is a nebulous euphemism for him being shit out of luck. Everyday now seemed pregnant with compromise. Every moment he felt like a cuckolded father, the one in the wings with the bubble gum cigars that say alternatively *boy* or *girl* on them. Whom,

however, was the real father that no one wanted to talk about? This realization and query froze Dante; he was alone again, with not a friend in sight to whom he could whine.

“When can I get my tape back, please,” Raven coolly questioned him after discovering his betrayal, so called yet untrue. She could not have known what you will be told.

Raven had bestowed upon Mr. Tutticosa a brand new unopened copy of the videotape *Grease*, which she coveted, being of that age when it was nostalgic and new at the same time to revel in the adolescence portrayed in the film, to say the least. She gave him the tape even before viewing it herself because Dante had promised to relinquish his VCR to her for a mere pittance, when, shortly, he was to depart for San Francisco. But he could not sell it, for reasons we shall henceforth reveal. On Raven’s behalf, this refusal to part with the device merited nothing more than a “You suck, Tutticosa,” in a distinctly vituperatory tone of voice.

He put the comment out of his mind for the moment. *She is in San Francisco now and all that trouble is history as far as I am concerned.*

The absolute beauty of the typical California day at length exhausted Dante, as did days of lesser beauty. In fact, he had found, up to this point in his life, no way to pass a day without the annoying onslaught of fatigue. Still, he had enough pluck to resent the unmitigated gall of the kids who came from Indiana, with backpacks and body odor, to the corner of Haight and Ashbury Streets, where Wavy Gravy had once seen a split in the fabric of reality while on *Alice in Wonderland* blotter acid, to sing their rendition of *All Along The Watchtower*, while accompanying themselves on fifes and zithers. This place, this nutty place, it tired him so.

To wit: someone would remind him how grand the weather had turned, how tank tops and mini skirts aid the warm summer sun in gleaming seductively off women's breasts, necks and legs, or how alluring ladies' naked feet were in revealing sandals, or how the buses downtown were not even crowded today, and Dante would simply respond without forethought: "I'm spent."

Or: perhaps someone would inquire as to his relative condition: "How's it goin', Tut?" He might take the opportunity to reply, "I'm tired, hungry and lonely," to which any number of people could relate, with comments like, "Right on, have a nice day."

Let us get back to the box, the aforementioned VCR, which conventions of the narrative force us to bring to full disclosure. His fascination with his VCR surely began due to his lack of gainful employment. This must be why Tutticosa would have considered such an extravagance, simple fellow that he was, one that never did want no trouble. In fact, normally, Dante would rather do almost anything other than watch the tube, which he in all seriousness called *The Eye of Hell* even in mixed company. Yet, without much encouragement, he would readily discourse upon why there are few things more admirable than an expertly split infinitive or an athletically dangling modifier, or which Turk or Jew tribe it might have been that first put to papyrus animal fables and why.

As to work, the fact of the matter was that Dante only felt sadness when he did not work because he saw the boredom of life and the tedium of time on one's hands, and only felt sorrow when he applied himself to work because he saw the never ending uselessness of the cycle of getting, consuming and excreting. And this in the face of all the things his *guruji* had explained to him, with such beacons of light as to blanch even

the blackest eyes. But still he did not see clearly. At least he still felt compelled to excrete even if he failed to consume. Simile to a protoplasmic world view, mitochondrion art. He's moving through the milieu with his mouth open at one end and his arse open at the other. *Let it move through you, then you become it and it becomes you, there is no separating you from it, only a continuum of getting, consuming and excreting, a scenario in which you played no more part than that other which you got, consumed and eliminated*, he thought.

In fact, if Hadley Dunn hadn't pushed Dante over the brink one day by commenting on this conflict, this theatrical contrivance that all good playwrights worth their salt would dog for, Dante may never have repaired to his enchanted VCR nor felt the need to. Hadley commented, seeing the irony in this diatribe concerning the unity of subject, object and the act of subjectifying the object, as follows: "Quite unremarkably, my good man, when you die, the unsalted potato chips and diet cola you had for lunch that day also cease to exist."

This brave manifesto sent ripples through the entire entourage of traveling vermin Dante was wont to discourage in any other manner. The operative word above, we hoped you picked up on, is *enchanted*. Dante normally was indifferent to it all. For example, the enigma of the relationship between verb conjugation and conjugal bliss left him limp. He got no stimulus from such provocative phrases as: *The perverse pleasure that Pan feels*. And as to the sadness experienced even during work, Dante immediately broke off further silk screening of the word *REKT* on t shirts and selling them to crusties, and instead began training small dogs using nothing more than carrots in their mouths and silent hand gestures.

Unable to remember where he was in his life, at times, or unwilling to suppress and retard certain secretions, Dante in the abnormal course of events began consorting with his VCR. At length, he found, quite by accident, a small red plastic button on the remote control of the device, which was cut into a strange upside down five pointed star and circled with a thin red line. No mention of the purpose or function of this button was made in the device's operating manual, even though it was printed in several languages. Some tongues, however, must remain unwagged, he discovered. Only one line seemed to pertain to the control: *Note: The function activated by the pentagram shaped button can also be accessed by entering the numerals 666 on the numeric keypad.*

One night, feeling a little more abandoned than usual, thanks in no small way to a Scotch whiskey with a stout chaser, while watching a sequel, which failed to be reviewed, to a movie he liked but the critics panned, the sequel entitled, *Gunfight at Waterworld, OK?*, he was at a point in the film where dual dolphins, equipped with depth charges and blow hole activated spear guns, are sent out to destroy a heavily guarded pier. Dante fancied that he would just go ahead and push that button, but unable to find it amid the wash of keys on the remote and the deteriorated condition of his one a day contact lenses, he used the keypad and pushed "6" three times.

On the tube flashed the following:

MARK OF THE BEAST INVERSION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Remove all extraneous objects from your person, including clothing and jewelry.

2. Be prepared to seek security immediately upon inversion. CAUTION: Do not activate during situations that might compromise your personal safety.
3. Do not lose the remote control or damage it in any way.
4. When ready, push the pentagram button or enter “666”.
5. To return to point of origin, push the pentagram button again.

This seemed simple enough to the Dante dude. However, as soon as he complied with the above mandates and pressed the star shaped key, he found himself incredibly neck deep in water with two very large fish swimming by him with malice in their eyes. He was in the videotape, right inside the movie itself! Of course, being naked and in water presented a few problems, not the least of which was keeping the remote control, luckily still in his right hand, dry. A few minutes of this amusement soon revealed to him another knotty dilemma: he was out to sea with no ship or floating device in view. With unusual resourcefulness under extreme duress, however, Dante discovered that he could use the remote control to good purpose in the fast forward or rewind mode to get him out of tight spots, and soon he was navigating the device's unique and bizarre capabilities with alacrity.