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Book of Secrets

Chris Roberson

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Extract

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an excerpt from
BOOK OF SECRETS
Chris Roberson

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I was up early the next day and, after saying my good-byes to Tan and Cachelle, was on my way. I had people I needed to see back in Texas, and with a seven hour drive ahead of me, wanted to get there while they were still up and around.

The morning's drive was long and numbing, just straight highway over bayou and through wood, with nothing much to look at and even less to do. Like a Warhol film on wheels. I think I must have nodded off at one point, but dreamt of driving with my eyes open, so it didn't really make much difference. I stopped once in Baton Rouge for cigarettes and gas, and passing a pay phone decided to make a call. It was kind of nice not having a cell phone ringing all hours of the day and night, but it was hell making outgoing calls.

The long distance operator found the number for me without too much trouble, and patched me through to the line. After only five or six rings, the line was answered, by a voice that sounded like its owner had far better things to do with his time.

"KXEN-home-of-Houston's-number-one-news-cast-three-years-in-a-row," the script came pouring over the line. "How-may-I-direct-your-call?"

"Could you give me the news desk?" I asked.

"*Who* may I ask is calling?" the voice asked, professional and the polar opposite of friendly.

"My name is Davis Miles and I'm an attorney representing Mr. J. Nathan Pierce," I spun. "I would like to speak with whomever was in charge of the segment about my client's business interests that aired yesterday morning."

"One moment, sir," the voice answered, sounding a bit more alert.

I heard the line click, and enjoyed a muzak version of "Friends in Low Places" for the next fifteen seconds.

"News desk," came another, more chipper voice. "This is Andy."

"Yes, this is Davis Miles," I droned. "Could I have your full name please?"

"Um… Andrew Morris."

"Uh huh," I breathed. "And am I to understand that you supervised the editing of the piece on J. Nathan Pierce's alleged agreement with Lucetech Incorporated yesterday?"

"Yes," he answered, and I could hear him bristling, defensively. "Was there some problem with it?"

"I have not been authorized to make any formal complaint, Mr. Morris, if that's what you are asking. But there were a couple of points that grabbed

my attention. At the opening of the segment, my client was shown standing in a large room surrounded by statuary and antiquities in glass cases. Do you recall this portion of the airing?"

"Y-yes."

"It is my responsibility to ask how that footage was obtained by your organization, and by whom you were authorized to air it."

"Oh," the voice answered, sounding a bit confused. "That was just a bit we cut from last week's Barbara Walters special. We're an affiliate, you understand, and have blanket permission to rebroadcast any and all network transmissions."

"Hmm mmm," I hummed. "And where was that special filmed, if I may ask?"

"Wait a minute." I heard papers rustling in the background, frantically. "Here it is. *'Tonight, Barbara speaks with billionaire philanthropist J. Nathan Pierce from his home in Houston, Texas.'* It originally aired… almost three weeks ago. It's not currently scheduled to be rebroadcast, but we could provide you with a copy if you like–"

"Not necessary," I interrupted. "That's all for…" A thought struck. "Actually, that would be very useful. If you could just overnight it to my offices in Austin, I think we can get this straightened out without any serious difficulty."

I gave him the address of a place I knew in Austin, and got his assurance that he would send a copy out right away.

"Thank you for your time, Mr. Morris," I sang into the receiver. "You've been most helpful."

With that I dropped the phone back in its cradle and lit a cigarette. Something was coming together, I knew, but just what I couldn't say. For now I was just a blind man describing an elephant, and hadn't got any farther than the tail.

Driving across the state line into Texas, I got a sudden flash of memory, a rush of associations that started with a roadside marker and ended with me and my brother standing in short pants with blood on our hands. Snaking its way through the corridors of memory came an image so indelible I checked my hands for the stains, which I hadn't recalled in years. The flood gates of memory opened wide, and I lost the train entirely, focused entirely on the destination. This happens enough for me to recognize the signs; when I smell bleach I become uncontrollably hungry, when I see a woman in overalls I go weak. I leave my memories alone as much as possible and expect them to do the same for me.

It wasn't easy for us to adjust to living in Texas, my brother and me. We had spent our earliest years in California, the sons of an up-and-coming screenwriter, and thought it a matter of course to go to playgrounds with the children of the stars and to have Mister Spock over to dinner regularly. In those strange years before we became truly aware

of the outside world, our little nucleus of mother, father, and brothers existed at the center of reality, and everything else revolved around us. The people we saw on television and in the movies were no less real than our own parents were, if for no other reason than that our parents seemed to know them all.

Looking back on it, it must have been incredibly strange, but in all honesty we were too young to notice it. We took it as a given that, if we pestered our dad long enough to introduce us to Donnie and Marie or one of the Brady kids, eventually we would pile into the car and drive off to some unimaginably large building past the hills and be presented to them. By which point, naturally, we had lost all interest, and hung at our father's pants legs, hounding him for some other treat or favor.

When our parents died, I think we both expected the television to stop, at least for a while, if only out of respect for them. It didn't, and I don't think I ever really forgave it for that.

In any case, when we arrived in Texas and were escorted to our new school, my brother and I quickly realized something distressing. The center of the world had moved; or rather, we had moved and left it behind. We found ourselves somehow on the periphery of reality, relegated off to a corner where no one really cared who we were. The marks of status among our new peers were how fast you could run, whether you wore the right kind of

jeans, and how many of those little green peppers you could cram into your mouth at once. My brother and I were not much at running, our grandfather (or rather his housemaid) consistently refused to buy us the right kind of jeans, and at three peppers I was tearing up and beginning to wretch. We quickly dropped to the back of the herd.

Left to our own devices, the two of us had to find new ways to entertain ourselves. Our new favorite television shows, starring people we did not and could never know, were the cop shows. *Hawaii Five-O*, *SWAT*, even, inexplicably, *Barney Miller*. Anything and everything to do with crime fighting. After a light appetizer of Clayton Moore as *The Lone Ranger* and Adam West as *Batman*, we'd settle in for long hours of guns and badges and the letter of the law, all in full color. By the time we were eight, we could both recite the Miranda Rights from memory, though it was years before we knew what they were called.

It wasn't too long before we decided we knew everything there was to know about crime fighting, and only a short hop from there to deciding that we should fight crime on our own. Later, after my adventures in breaking and entering into our grandfather's study, I would resolve to put my lot in with the black hats, but for those brief summers, I was foursquare on the side of the angels.

Realizing early the practical difficulties presented by crime fighting on a large scale, we decided to

start small, in our own back yard. In any neighborhood there is petty theft and vandalism that slides in under the radar of the authorities, but which served as more than enough to occupy the attention of two small boys looking for something to do. One neighbor "borrows" another's rake without asking, the newspaper in front of a certain house goes missing every morning, lost dogs and toilet paper-strewn trees. These were as close to larceny as we could come, and we made the most of it.

We started by putting up fliers all around the neighborhood:

FINCH TWINS
DISCREET INVESTIGATIONS
NO JOB TWO BIG
NO JOB TWO SMALL
217 CRESCENT ROW

Despite the spelling errors and the barely legible print, the fliers were noticeable, and within a few days we had our first client. A neighborhood kid had lost two months' worth of lunch money to a schoolyard bully, and wanted our help getting it back. It wasn't exactly the kind of case we were after, but it was undeniably a crime, and so we set to with all our energy. In the end, we dug up some dirt about the bully smoking in the parking lot after school and cowed him into returning the kid's money. As insurance, we wrote up a list of his offenses, made a

dozen copies, and had him sign each and every one. Then we distributed a copy of the list to each of the kids he terrorized on a regular basis, with instructions to hand it to the nearest authority in the event that any of them were troubled further. The only real leverage we had, in the end, was that the bully's dad was a coach at the high school, and knew each of his teachers personally, but it proved to be enough.

It verged on extortion, and when it was all said and done, having collected a fee of one day's lunch money from our client, we were a little uncomfortable about our methods. But seeing justice done proved an admirable result, and we decided never to let the letter of the law stand in our way of the pursuit of justice.

We went on like that for several months, returning stolen bicycles, reuniting joyful little girls with lost kittens, and quelling schoolyard frauds. Then the case we had been waiting for dropped in our laps, and we were ready for it. A runaway, in our own neighborhood.

Ricky Young, who lived four houses down and across the street, was the kind of kid who gets a wide berth in any school. Overweight, in clothes that never seemed to fit and always seemed to be covered in dirt, or food, or both, always wearing a parka even in the warmest weather, he made strange noises while in the bathroom, picked his nose and ate the results. Always looking slightly

dazed when peering out from under his chili-bowl hairdo, he never said two sentences running in anyone's presence, and was not a member, official or otherwise, of any of the free-floating cliques which form and reform in elementary schoolyards at alarming rates. Ricky was simply the fat kid, a constant presence, but a tolerated one. He was a troglodyte, but he was ours.

In the winter of our fifth grade year, our friendly neighborhood troglodyte went missing, and to be honest it took everyone, teachers included, a few days to notice. Always sick with something or other, Ricky was a perennial absentee, and his failure to appear was nothing out of the ordinary. Finally, though, his parents arrived in our classroom, looking so polished and presentable that I couldn't believe they had anything to do with the troll I knew. They wanted to know if anyone knew anything about where Ricky might have gone, whether anyone had seen him since Tuesday, if he had said or done anything that might have indicated he was unhappy. Greeted by a unanimous silence, they filed out of the room, red eyed and harried, and class was back in session.

It didn't take my brother and me that long to decide what had happened. The Ricky that we all knew and loathed had to be a front, a sham, covering some more secret self. The real Ricky must have suffered some trauma to hide away behind all those layers of fat and filth, and when it all proved too

much for him had run away from home. He might even now be crouched somewhere in the rain, hungry and alone, shivering at the sound of wolves baying in the distance; never mind the fact that it was sunny and seventy degrees outside, and the only wolves within a hundred miles were in the San Antonio zoo.

We started our Grand Search for Ricky Young that afternoon, starting with the school grounds and fanning out from there. Ricky had last been seen leaving there Tuesday afternoon, and had not gone home. From that, we had deduced that he had made his preparations for running away before coming to school in the morning. None of our classmates remembered seeing him with a bag or sack of any kind on Tuesday, but we couldn't rely on that testimony. Few found that they could describe Ricky with any kind of certainty at all, except perhaps to mention his odor. We were beginning to suspect that maybe it was all part of his plan.

Our search that first night turned up nothing, and we retired to our grandfather's house and Maria's home-cooked dinner to plan out the next stage of our investigation. The weekend was before us, and all the hours of the day at our disposal. We couldn't leave a three block radius from our house, naturally, but we thought that more than sufficient. Ricky couldn't have gone far.

Over dinner, my brother showed more courage than I had seen him display in some time, and

broached the subject of our neighbor's disappearance with our grandfather.

"Did you hear about that kid who ran away?" he said, his voice only cracking once or twice. "The… um… *big* one?"

Our grandfather speared an entire shrub's worth of salad and, pausing with it right before his face, examined it intently.

"There are many dangerous people in the world," he replied, and then guided the fork into his open mouth.

My brother and I just stared at him, and then at our plates, not sure how to respond.

We started the next phase of the investigation early the next morning. Forgoing the standard Saturday morning fare of *Scooby Doo* and *The Banana Splits*, we watched dutifully as Maria fixed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the two of us, and then we packed them away in matching nylon backpacks along with flashlights, pocket knives, and first aid equipment. We had never been Boy Scouts, but had read enough issues of *Boy's Life* at the doctor's office to know to be prepared.

We started at the house next door and worked our way down, notepads and Bic pens in hand. We asked the people who answered the door where they had been Tuesday afternoon and early evening, whether they had seen a fat kid in a parka, and if they had seen any suspicious persons or activity in the neighborhood recently. This last was

standard operating procedure, learned from studying the moves of TV cops. It never elicited any kind of response, but it was good form, and we included it in our questioning as a matter of course.

By noon, we had canvassed the houses on both sides of our street, and half of the next block over. Our notepads were both blank except for a brief line on each, "MR. ANDERSON SAW FAT KID IN AFTERNOON, MON? TUES?" That was as far as our investigation took us. Deciding it was time for a break, but not wanting to head back home until our assignment was through, we cut between two houses and down an alley until we came to the Creek.

The Creek – really nothing more than a hint of a trickle that meandered down a slight slope and disappeared into a drainage ditch – was a favored spot for afterschool explorations, snow ball fights during the brief Texas winters, and dirt clod fights in the summers. On either side was an empty grassy area, about ten yards wide and running the length of the block, only slightly slanted and perfect for frisbees and touch football. By the end of the summer, and continuing into the first freeze, the grass had usually grown to an alarming height, and hid all the toys and bicycle parts lost there over the preceding months. This being the beginning of December, and the first real cold snap still weeks away, the grass rose to at least two feet and reached easily up to our waists.

Slogging our way through the brown, swaying grass, we made it to the edge of the water and found a dry spot to sit and eat. We munched on our sandwiches, and each opened a can of grape soda we'd secreted from the kitchen. We talked about the facts of the case as we knew them, about the plots of the comics we'd bought the week before, about the possibility of life on other planets and whether we could fly their space ships if we came upon them in the road. In the end, we decided that there was a strong possibility that Ricky had left town, that Superman could in fact beat up the Hulk, and that if the spaceship was a Viper from the Battlestar Galactica we could most likely fly it. Having concluded our important business, we figured we might as well finish up the day, and if we hadn't found Ricky by dinner time file the case under Unsolved.

Finishing off our cans of soda and lobbing them downstream at the drainage ditch, we headed back towards the street through the open field. A few yards in, my brother noticed a cloud of flies hovering in midair like a balloon. It was then that the smell hit us, and I was reminded of dog we'd found the summer before, lying half flattened in the middle of the road, caked with dirt and with *something* still moving around inside. We had touched it with a long stick, and then the something came spilling out, millions of them, squirming out blind onto the hot tarmac. It was that kind of smell.

We continued forward, cautiously now, plowing through the grass with our arms out in front of us, our eyes glued to the ground. It was six paces before we found it, before we almost walked right over it. In that first moment, I wasn't sure what it was, and I bent to pick it up. It was a little white creature, with four or five legs, and I held it for a long moment before my brother snatched it out of my grasp. We both looked at it, and as we did the legs began to resolve into fingers, the little creature into a hand.

I'd like to say that it was my brother that threw up first, and the smell and sound of it caused me to follow, but I can't say for sure. All I know is that we were running all the way home, my head turned to one side, his to the other, crying and vomiting all the way. Hanging in front of each of us, burned into our retinas, was the image of that hand, and that arm, laying all alone in the grass, and a couple of yards away, the hint of something else.

It was Maria who called the police and went down to the Creek with them while we cowered at the kitchen table, gulping down water and shivering despite the warm air. It wasn't until she got back that she noticed the blood on our hands and hurried us to the sink to scald it off. We hadn't said a word since the police had arrived, only occasionally glancing at one other, our faces blank.

It was all over the news for a few days, and Ricky Young's name was added to a short list of

children who had been found mutilated and abandoned around and about central Texas over the previous three years. Reporters came around to the house once or twice, but they were quickly dismissed by our grandfather who told them there was no story. Meanwhile my brother and I hid upstairs, numbly flipping through the stations on a little black and white television. Maria sat stoically in the kitchen every night for a month, her eyes on the back door, one hand perched on a telephone, the other grasping the handle of a large kitchen knife. After a while, when there were no other child murders to report, the story was quietly dropped.

Our grandfather only mentioned the incident once that I can recall. That first night, once Maria had showered and scrubbed us both for hours and then locked us in our rooms, her weeping all the while, he came to our room long after dark.

My brother and I both sat on the floor near our beds, our knees up at our chins, staring wide-eyed at the opening door. Grandfather just stood there in the doorway, immaculately dressed in his coat and hat, and disarmingly calm. He looked at me, then my brother, and then back again, and nodded his head three times slowly.

"There are many dangerous people in the world," he said firmly, and then turned and closed the door. We later heard the front door open and close, and the car started and driven away. We didn't see him

again until the next night, and he never mentioned it again.

I didn't sleep for a week. All thoughts of fighting crime were gone. I never wanted to leave my room again.

It was late afternoon when I finally pulled into a spot on Guadalupe, across from the University of Texas. I dodged the teenage kids on the street begging for change or cigarettes, and crossed the intersection to the campus.

It was finals week, if I was reading correctly the expression on every student's face I saw. Aside from a few sorority sisters rushing to the undergraduate library, an Asian couple discussing Shakespeare in low tones and an Indian engineering student asleep on his textbook, the West Mall was deserted as I made my way to the liberal arts buildings. Clustered together in a defensive fashion, like the deans and profs had circled the figurative wagons to stave of the attacks of irrelevancy from the business and engineering departments across the campus, the buildings housing the liberal arts had a certain rustic, old world charm. Like hairy armpits on women, or the Black Death. I barely ducked a flying dialectical necessity coming up the stairway to the central building, and narrowly missed being smacked in the eyes by a moral imperative as I skirted my way around the philosophy department. Like most ivory towers, it was dangerous to visitors.

The Department of Middle Eastern Studies was squirreled away in a corner on the third floor of the saddest of the buildings, just past the broken water fountain on the left. The bulletin board in the hall out front advertised guest lectures from professors who were simply ordinary on their own distant campuses, and notices about invitations for ordinary professors to lecture at distant schools. There was a film series of Socialist Feminist Cinema from Jordan, and a question-and-answer session with the Deputy Secretary of the Coalition to End Genital Mutilation in Yemen. I was sorry I'd missed that.

The wooden door creaked on its ancient hinges as I entered, and I stepped into the familiar aroma of stale air, dusty books, and a hint of patchouli. Behind the reception desk was a young woman in a tight-fitting tank top, Italian wrestler pants and more tattoos than the Ninth Fleet. She looked up at me around her eyebrow rings, and ran a hand over her close cropped scalp. I watched her take me in a single glance – the rumpled suit, the scuffed boot, the eight dollar haircut – and I could just tell she didn't approve. I might not have been the Man, but she could tell I was on a first name basis with Him.

"Yes," she snarled. "Are you lost?"

I have uncanny luck with receptionists. It never fails.

"I'm here to see Michelle Orlin," I answered.

She sneered.

"*Doctor* Orlin is grading exams," she said, "and can't be disturbed. I'm sure, *if* you have important business, she can arrange to see you some *other* time."

Behind her was a half-opened door, and before I could answer it swung wide and a flurry in faded denim and paisley came bounding into the room.

"Spencer!"

I smiled, catching the receptionist's eye.

"I thought I heard your voice!" The flurry came into focus, all five foot eight of her, her long tangled hair spinning around her like a nimbus.

"Howdy, Michelle," I said.

She hurried around a chair and came up to lock me in a bear hug. For someone so slight, she had a pretty mean grip.

"How the hell have you been?" she asked. "I haven't seen you since… New York?"

"Sounds about right," I answered, gently pushing her to arm's length and looking down into her eyes. "So you reconsider that offer yet?"

She smiled devilishly and chucked me a light tap on the chin.

"Still trying to make an honest woman of me, huh?" She stepped back and crossed her arms, cocking her head to one side. "I know I don't have to remind you of the one flaw in your master plan."

"I'm convinced I could straighten you out, baby," I replied, "just give me half a chance."

I could feel the receptionist's every orifice clench

from where I stood and resisted the temptation to see for myself. I resisted, and failed. A quick glance her way and her gaze showed me the million ways she was planning on emasculating me. I had a notion, and ran with it.

"I'm not selfish, you know," I directed at the scowling tattoo, "I'll share her with you if you want."

Michelle slugged me in the arm and managed a frown for all of five seconds.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she scolded, "God's gift to women, scourge of the lesbian."

I just shrugged.

"Come on back."

She turned and started back for her office. I followed, pausing briefly to blow a kiss to the receptionist. She practically convulsed with rage, but kept her seat.

"Okay, Spence, what's this all about? I know you didn't just come to shoot the shit."

Michelle, one of only two people in the world I let call me "Spence", was leaning back in her chair, her knees folded up to her chin, one arm resting over them. Her free hand pulled at her tangled hair, teasing out the knots one bit at a time. On the desk in front of her were stacks of exam books, a few dozen stapled groups of paper, and a half-dozen ash trays full to capacity. Smoking had been regulated right out of state buildings years before, but since

few of the University officials had any idea where the Middle Eastern department was, much less visited, Michelle figured she was safe.

I sat back in the antique wooden chair, the thing I came to show her resting on my knee. I lit up a cigarette and started in.

"Okay, okay, you got me. I need help, and I think you're the only one who can give it to me." I took a drag on the cigarette and let that sink in.

"The *only* one?" she asked. "Or the only one who's still speaking with you?"

"The only one," I answered simply. "I don't need someone to post bail, or do my laundry, or feed my cat–"

"You don't have a cat," Michelle interrupted, her eyes narrowing.

"I need help only you can give me," I finished.

She leaned forward in her chair, dropping her feet to the floor.

"This should be good," she said.

"I hope so."

Like a corny magician at a birthday party, I reached down out of her line of sight behind the desk and brought it back up with the plastic bag, which I'd kept out of her view up till now. Inside, untouched, was the ancient and yellowed paper with all the tiny markings. I dropped it unceremoniously on the desk in front of her and sat back. I watched her eyes widen.

"What is that?" she asked, her voice breathless.

"I don't know, babe," I answered. "I was hoping you would tell me."

Fifteen minutes and a half-dozen cigarettes between us later, Michelle had at least part of an answer.

"It's old," she pronounced. I was beginning to wonder if I'd come to the right place.

"And...?" I prompted.

"It's very old," she added. "Very, very old."

I sighed and stubbed out a cigarette.

"Fascinating," I drawled.

"I mean it, Spence, this is really a find. Based on the grammatical structures, the syntax, even the penmanship… I'd place it at Eighth, Ninth Century tops." She still hovered over it, a magnifying glass in hand. Her last cigarette, untouched on the ashtray, had burned to the filter.

"Yeah, but what is it?"

"Um, paper," she said, sarcasm dripping.

"Okay, short questions. Language?"

"Definitely Arabic."

"O-kay," I said. "And it says…" I paused, waiting for her to jump in.

"What, all of it?" she asked. "Do you know how long it took me to do my translation of the *Rubaiyat*? And that was after two years of studying the grammar and vocabulary. This isn't a menu, Spencer; I can't just recite it to you." I watched her glasses begin to slip down her nose, but she was so

worked up she didn't even notice.

"Do you have a general idea?" I asked calmly.

"Sure." She paused and held the paper up to the light, still sheathed in plastic. "Where did you get this?" she breathed.

"That's not important. What does it say?" I paused for a beat, then added, "In general terms?"

"Okay, okay, let's see." She pushed her glasses back up on her nose, brought the magnifying glass in close, and then hunched over the page. "Here's something about some scandal, some secrets revealed… some hidden order of men… something about the northern secrets, or the northern mysteries… the book of the one eye… no, 'god'… the one-eyed god…. the revels of the infidels… the god in chains… and…"

Her finger froze over a scribble, and her mouth hung slack. She slowly sat upright, her finger still frozen in place, her mouth open.

"Shit," she whispered.

"What," I asked, leaning over her. "What?!"

"Aeschylus," she said quietly. "Shit."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

She slowly drew her hands in towards her, as though not to upset the air around her, and folded them in her lap. She stared into space for a long minute, and then turned her head to look at me.

"Where. Did. You. Get. This?"

"I. Can't. Tell. You." I answered, mocking her serious tone. "What. Does. It. Say?"

She sighed heavily, her shoulders dropping. "How much do you know about ancient literature?" she asked.

"I had to read *Huck Finn* in high school," I answered.

"Ancient, you philistine," she countered. "Ancient Greek literature."

"Like the man said to the tailor, 'Eumenides?'"

"Aeschylus."

"Nah, nah, the tailor says, 'Euripides?'"

"Shut. Up." She took a deep breath. "Aeschylus, the acknowledged father of the Greek theater; only something like seven of his plays have survived. Dozens of his plays, praised by the ancient world, are totally forgotten to us." She had lapsed into lecturing, but she was a professor so I forgave her. "Of the ones we have, several survived only in translations made later by Arab scholars." Her eyes darted briefly to the paper, and then back to mine. "When discoveries like those are made, it's like… finding Atlantis, for Christ sake, or George Washington's teeth. Something everyone had read about, but which had been thought lost forever."

"Uh huh," I hummed, pretty much at sea.

"This paper," she continued, and then gestured awkwardly to it with her chin. "This paper," she repeated, "mentions Aeschylus… by name… and then starts talking about the 'revels of the chained god'. That's how they understood plays, Spencer, as 'revels'. The Muslim world had nothing of the

kind, and they just thought of them as some pagan debauchery."

"Uh huh," I repeated.

"The chained god," she insisted. "Don't you know what that means?" She could tell I didn't. "Prometheus, you barbarian, Prometheus. One of the surviving plays of Aeschylus is *Prometheus Bound*, which tells how the god Prometheus was chained to a mountain for helping mankind. It's regarded as one of the true classics of the ancient world. We know… we know that Aeschylus wrote two sequels, three in all–"

"*Prometheus II: No More Mister Nice God?*"

"Shut up, I'm thinking… talking… whatever. Listen. If this is what I think it is" – and this time she didn't even bother jutting her chin at the paper; we both knew what she meant – "then this could contain a fragment of one of the lost Prometheus plays. Maybe both. And from the length… both sides… um…" She did some quick math. "It could well be more than any of the other fragments found before. Maybe even the whole fucking play! Or BOTH!"

She paused, and then seemed to calm down by will of force. She lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, gazing over at the paper with love in her eyes.

"Shit," she finally said. "I'm going to be famous."

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