





## Long

Miles MacNaughton

The night approached, as it always did, all too rapidly, with a scarlet sunset and car horns howling on the boulevard—cabs driven by nasty men, all impatient, all with somewhere more important to be than the other guy, and with it came the dawning dread of the end of festivities and fun, a signal to prepare for the humdrum of “the week”, where disillusioned men and exhausted women break their spines for a few more pennies each year, a few extra percent tacked on for good work; but those howling horns, those bleary little yellow lights, all blinking and flashing at the other guy to hurry the hell up, wouldn’t flash or blink if the one behind the wheel remembered that time moves at a marked-time pace, and that no steaming leadfoot on the boulevard—no matter how high his rush-hour cab fee, no matter what important businessman sits in his back seat—no leadfoot can outrace time, which, unbothered by the comings and goings of lesser creatures, knows that it is on its own side, that in terms of playing the long term game, someday the streets will be cleared and the lights will not flash, the horns will not howl and the cabbies will not swear; and so it seemed so precious, so valuable, as the last few sunbeams stretched over Sunday’s horizon, to remember the fun of the day, to recall the promise of a future, and to see the hidden reminder that each moment must be seized while it lasts, seized and held close like a precious pearl, and to love, to listen, to whisper in a lover’s ear as each precious hour dwindles away in the dark.

# The Trial

Jonathan Vidgop

“Teacher,” said Zhang with a bow, “I have been most diligent. I have studied hard. I have learned all I could learn. I am ready for many a challenge. I can face down a tiger one on one. Womanly cunning does not frighten me. My self-confidence will enable me to overcome any and all obstacles. Now, I have heard tell that pupils of yours must submit themselves to certain trials. Test me, then, O respected one.”

The teacher, Xian Zhi by name, fixed Zhang with an unblinking gaze.

“Esteemed Zhang,” he said at length, bowing, “no one knows when a man’s time for learning might draw to an end. We know only that a man might learn everything, and know nothing. Tell me, why do you wish to undergo the examination?”

Zhang’s reply was swift. The matter had evidently been giving him pause for thought.

“When I pass the examination,” he said, “I shall know that I have completed my learning. I shall know that I am fearless and intelligent, and that my spirit is strong.”

“But do you not know this already?” asked his teacher.



“I do.” Zhang looked at him stubbornly. “I do. But I want to undergo the trials nonetheless.”

“They don’t scare you, then?”

“They don’t!” fearless Zhang replied. “I have heard tell that those who fail the examination perish. But I am prepared even for that.”

“Well then,” said Xian Zhi, “he who seeks out trials finds them. You wish to triumph or to die. You shall have your wish. I’ll set you three tests.”

He paused, snorted, glanced at Zhang.

“Those who wish to acquire *qi*,” he began, “oughtn’t to limit themselves to a single woman. They ought to have three, nine, eleven



and more. Possess ten women or more in the span of a single night and you shall achieve longevity. Hold back your seed, the better to direct it into a roiling stream, and you shall achieve immortality.”

Zhang grew flustered.

“But, teacher,” he said with trepidation, “I have not had eleven women, or nine, or three. I have not even had one!”

“Well then,” said Xian Zhi, “better start with a duo. Those two, for instance, entwined in an embrace as they proceed down that path.”

Zhang leapt to his feet in an access of agitation, only to sink to the ground once more.



“But they’re caressing one another, teacher. How am I to—”

“So much the better!” Xian Zhi exclaimed. “There are two *yin* waiting for you at once.”

Zhang grew utterly unnerved.

“But they do not love me!” he cried.

“How do you know?” said the teacher.

“... Yes, but *I* ought to love *them*, at the very least.”

“Don’t you love them already?”

“I do not.”

“What are you waiting for, then? Go and love them.”

“No,” said Zhang, “I cannot.” And he burst into tears.

“Well,” said Xian Zhi, “let us go then, you and I, for a stroll in the gardens of the Yellow Emperor.”

“What lies in store for us there, teacher?” asked Zhang. “What dangers await us?”

“Dangers?” Xian Zhi thought awhile. “Oh! There may be any number, but they cannot be predicted. Even your beloved tigers could doubtless gain access to the gardens if they took it into their heads to do so.”

They began their stroll. Every now and then Zhang looked about him warily.

“Where are those tigers hiding?” he asked over and over, and assumed a host of combat stances, each more menacing than the last. But Xian Zhi remained silent. Not until they had reached the very end of the path did he call out to his pupil.

“Take a look,” he said, “at how this lizard has concealed itself in the branches of the old elm. Does it know of our existence? Do we trouble it as we amble past?”

“Teacher,” Zhang asked again, “I see the lizard, but where are the tigers?”

“Can you see, my good Zhang, that bamboo whose trunk has arched into the heart of the cypress’s branches? Does it muse on the Yellow Emperor, in whose honour these gardens are named?”

“I cannot answer your question. Forgive me, but I find it obscure. What I should very much like to know is, where are those tigers hiding?!”

“My dear Zhang,” said his teacher, “I’m afraid I must disappoint you. It would appear that the gardens of the Yellow Emperor are devoid of tigers. Nobody has ever encountered one here.”

“But, teacher,” Zhang cried in astonishment, “what exactly did this test involve, then?”

“Strolling,” Xian Zhi replied.

He sat himself down on the grass, looked into Zhang's eyes, and told him to focus on his gaze.

"My dear Zhang," he said, "if you wish to undergo the final trial, you must embark on a journey to the Yan'e region. When your eyes grow weary, close them, and you shall be transported to Yan'e."

Zhang continued to hold his teacher's gaze. Presently his eyes closed, his body began rocking hither and thither, his head fell back, and he froze stock-still. Xian Zhi kept his eyes ever on his pupil. All sound vanished for Zhang, along with grass, trees and teacher. He embarked on his journey. A quarter-hour later he returned.

"How much time has elapsed?" was his first question.

"I believe, esteemed Zhang, that you know the answer better than I do."

"Six months," Zhang said, astonished. "What strange people inhabit the Yan'e region—they're all one-legged. They didn't even know there are people with two. The locals went into raptures over me. I was made Emperor of the Celestial Kingdom! I had a vast palace and a thousand servants. Each and every woman there sought out my love. My riches were incalculable—"

But tell me, my dear Zhang," interjected Xian Zhi, "whom do you feel yourself to be now?"

"Now?" Zhang said. "Oh, I still feel like an emperor!"

"Look around, venerable Zhang. Everybody in our midst also has the good fortune to possess two legs."

Zhang looked around. "True enough," he said. "Strangely, though, I still feel like an emperor!"

"My dear friend," said the teacher, "before disenchantment sets in, and doubts begin to torment you, would you not wish, perhaps, to embark on another journey, this time to the province of the White Clouds?"

"Very well!" Zhang exclaimed. "If what awaits there is what awaited me in Yan'e, I should be only too happy to go."

Once again he focused his gaze on Xian Zhi's, then closed his eyes. It all vanished—sound, glade, teacher, the world entire. Xian Zhi scrutinised him ever more fixedly. A quarter-hour later he returned.

"Teacher," he cried at once, "what a dreadful place I have been to! I spent half a year or so there. Its denizens are all one-armed. They do not so much as suspect that normal folk have two. They treated me with contempt. Branded me a freak of nature. Brought their children to gawk at me! It was a dog's life for me there. Not one woman deigned to glance in my direction. I lived like the poorest of paupers, begging for alms. My deformity meant I was barred from entering teahouses. I was the most despised man in the entire province of the White Clouds!"



“But now you have returned, respect-worthy Zhang,” the teacher said, scrutinising him, “and you’re surrounded by people who are just like you. How do you feel now you’re back?”

“Teacher,” said Zhang, his voice laced with sorrow and surprise, “I know we all have two arms, but I still feel hideous and worthy of contempt. I want to conceal myself in the shadow of that beech, lest anyone catch sight of me and my deformity!”

“But having two arms is not regarded as a deformity amongst us, esteemed Zhang!”

“I know, I know,” Zhang cried, “but I cannot help the way I perceive things. I feel misshapen!”

“Alas, my dear Zhang,” began Xian Zhi, “you subjected yourself to three tests and failed to pass a single one. You opted for dispassion when love was the name of the game. You cast about for non-existent tigers instead of inhaling the scent of grass. You allowed yourself to rise in your own estimation solely because you rose in the estimation of others, and you were willing to regard yourself as a nonentity solely because others came to regard you as such. What, then, do you want now?”

Zhang abased his head and buried it in his hands, despondent. An instant later, however, he proudly straightened up and declared, “I did not pass your tests. Well then! I am ready to accept death!”

“My poor Zhang,” Xian Zhi said sadly, “do clouds know of the wind? And when the wind chases clouds across the boundless sky, does it believe it is subjecting them to trials? You were hungry for an examination, and an examination is what you got. You want death, and death shall come. Await it.”

Bowing to his pupil, Xian Zhi glanced at him a final time, turned on his heel and with light nimble steps proceeded down a path leading to a beech thicket. Zhang turned to watch him go, but he had already vanished.

Zhang spent many years awaiting death on that glade. His body stiffened and his hair grew out, its tangled ends meeting the earth. Rain and wind lashed at his bulk. His clothing rotted, leaving nothing but tatters about his waist. Struggling to move his swollen tongue, he informed passerby that womanly cunning did not frighten him, that he was capable of facing down a tiger one on one, that his self-confidence would enable him to overcome any and all obstacles. And nor was he lying, our pupil Zhang, he was telling the purest truth.

On festal days crowds of gawkers gathered round him and marvelled at the courage of this man.

Zhang is still awaiting death today.

## in and out of my brain

Allen Seward

in and out of my brain  
the flowers have teeth  
and the lightning is pink

the smell of cotton candy is on the air  
but it's just the smell of  
electronic cigarettes

the shade is warm  
the light is cool

in and out of my brain  
the fish swim  
and the worms twist

all these little livers of my life  
like talking bears and foxes  
and giraffes too

I light a cigarette  
I smell of smoke and ash

in and out of my brain  
Noah's ark is a satellite  
which explains why it was never found on any mountain

and the lightning is pink like twisted worms  
and the fish all smell the cotton candy  
and I am brought to judgment

before bears and foxes  
and giraffes too.





## **(c)lean (b)rain**

Shane Coppage

*& Jerome Berglund*

mirror neurons  
within many,  
one

*fluid mechanics  
conceptual map*

ganglia knots  
vetting the day  
all comes undone

*inferior  
building materials  
Chandrasekhar limit*

baptized end to end  
white matter

*new physics  
letting artichoke  
bloom*

# Here We Go Again Instructions

Erica Baron

## Included:

- 24 memory cards
- 13 emotion cards
- Game Board
- 2 Player Pieces

## Set up:

- Shuffle the memory and emotion cards and lay them face down on the board where indicated
- Choose a piece. Give it to the other player when they insist that was the piece *they* wanted.
- Place the pieces at the bottom of the game board on the two squares labeled “Start.”

## Play:

- On your turn, draw a memory card and an emotion card.
- Craft a statement about that emotion and that memory that is designed to score points, as follows:
  - 1 point for a connection between the emotion and the memory
  - 5 points for finding a way to tell the story of the memory that blames the other player for the emotion
  - 10 points for connecting your memory and emotion to those your partner used in their last turn, while reversing the blame
- Move your piece up the board according to how many points you scored.
- Argue with the other player about the scoring of your turn
- Once someone concedes, proceed to the next player

## Ending:

- Game ends when one player advances up the board and reaches 250 points, or when argument escalates to the point of cards and/or the game board being thrown
- No one wins this game
- Put all components back in the box. Be sure that all memories and emotions are safely stored until next time



# **CRIMSON WALLS AND FLESH MEAT, GUTS, GUTS, GUTS**

When he put his ear to pillow it was opening the sounds to the spider-cracks in-between plaster-walls. An echo chamber of the sea in a shell. Especially the clock on the first floor. It reverberated through tilestone wall and powered outlets. The back and forth swagger and tap-dance-click.

It's wood trimmed pale-moon-of-the-face glew in the dark. Except for the one night in May when the lightening and thunder exploded the glass table outside the back door. The rain of shower and sparks and serpentine glass fell down the shingled walls. After that the clock never waggled again; electric/shock.

Listening to that tap dance in dead night still resounded. It was now that he heard the nuance, it was not resonet plea of the puckered clock, but his own heartbeat trying to kill him. Deep in the flesh of his chest, lift-drop-flick.



# Listen

Dimitris Passas

Good doc bends a little downwards as he holds fast his tiny flashlight to illuminate the inside of my faulty ear that persistently hurt me for the last few days. As a formally diagnosed hypochondriac, I refrained from seeing a specialist in the first place as even the idea of setting foot in a doctor's office was enough to stir a distinctive feeling of panic inside me. However, I was forced to take the bold decision when I realized that my hearing sense has been seriously undermined, and I began having trouble hearing from my left ear. When the old woman who lives right next to my apartment rang my bell two days back in order to return a set of tools that I gave to him, she had to reiterate her words twice as I wasn't able to make them out. So, **the string of excuses that I've employed to avoid seeing an ENT had to be set aside** and now I was seating in the sizable leather chair of good doc's medical practice that is located on the first floor of a modern block of apartments in the city centre.

- *"Do you live alone, no family?"*

What was that? After concluding his examination, he turned his back to me, and started writing something n his laptop while standing. Thus, we didn't have any eye contact that would tell me for sure if he uttered



anything. As I remain sitting feeling a bit embarrassed, he turns his face to me and repeats:

- *“Do you live alone?”*

Ok, now I got it. If I lived alone? Yes, of course. It couldn't be any other way for me, an introvert by nature since I have been a baby and a loner by choice for the last twenty years or so. My motto has always been: *Silence breeds, noise corrupts*. Spoken word is the primary source of the fraudulency that governs human contact since time immemorial. Words are exploitative and dishonest. It is the ear of the other that dictates what we should enunciate while we struggle to navigate ourselves through a labyrinthine maze of socio-linguistic norms, the revolting etiquette fostering hypocrisy in all aspects of social life. Deception is oral language's prerogative.

I always preferred to write; my thoughts, desires and wishes, fears and secrets. Everything was drafted on a blank page which progressively became filled by black ink, the succeeding lines manifesting the inner workings of my mind, soul, and imagination.

- *“Yes doc, I live alone. I don't even have a pet.”*

- *“Social life? Friends, girlfriend perhaps?”*

- *“No, nothing.”*

- *“Since when?”*

- *“Since forever.”*

For a few seconds, he seems to ponder on my responses as his face acquires a rueful expression. He says:

- *“Was it that bad?”*

I am stunned. Is it possible that he knows me or *about me* somehow? My past, the days of my youth. The burning shame. No, that happened in another era, another universe.

- *“Sorry, I don't understand doc. What do you mean?”*

He takes his time before answering.

- *“Listen, I've treated and talked with an infinite number of patients throughout my tenure in hospitals and while working as a private practitioner. I've heard people. I've been told stories of guilt, regret, and pain. I know a tortured soul when I see one. And right now, he is standing directly opposite me.”*

- *“You have a penchant for melodrama, right doc? I mean “tortured soul”? Did you dream of becoming a writer perhaps? Because that kind of pretentious blabbering won't stand on page, I can guarantee that.”*

- *“You're the writer and you know best. But I must insist. You possess all the telling signs of a man who has been hiding for a really long time. So, the question is inevitable: What happened to you?”*

I feel my eyes well up and I put an effort to maintain my composure. But something cracks within and almost instead of my own self, I whisper:

-*“Public humiliation is a heavy burden, doc.”*

His eyes reflect gentle feelings and sympathy in all their warmth. Something akin to a sense of affection begins to become realized here, it hovers and rises from the ground up and suffuses the air with a tangible tension.

-*“Do you want to tell me more? I just want your take on it.”*

-*“It was bad, doc. Too rough. Nothing comes even close to the cruelty of being exiled, the pain of banishment. I’ve always been a private person though courteous toward others. I listened to music. I loved music. Then it happened: I won’t tell anything specific, it’s just too painful. Since then, I have never listened to music again. Until today, my house is silent as the depth of the night.”*

-*“Thank you for sharing your grievance Now it’s time to tell you the findings of my examination. I’m afraid that we can’t avoid the total loss of hearing from your left ear.”*

I squirm in my seat for a while, trying to digest what I’ve just heard. That’s it. Embrace reality. I say nothing and take out my wallet to pay but good doc stops me. He stares at me and then in a soft voice says:

-*“You still have one good ear. Make the most of it and listen to people. And remember don’t write for your pain. Write in spite of it.”*

The stories of the others as source of inspiration. Is that possible? As I’m walking down the stairs I feel lost in a series of knotted thoughts. I exit the building and stride towards my car. As I’m ready to leave, the corner of my eye spots an elderly fella walking along with a little kid, probably his grandson. His face is worn and rough, betraying a hard life, perhaps an ex-convict. He holds the child’s hand tightly and looks at him with something resembling reverence; respect. The expression in his eyes is juxtaposing with his intimidating physique. Perhaps he has a story to tell.









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airport

name. \_\_\_\_\_. pretentious. remember: me and you at a beef hotpot. i was expecting something fancier. you dressed in all pink. you whispered something over the table. i leaned in to hear better, worried my hair would drip into the pot, and you'd cook me up and eat me. prescient. \_\_\_\_\_. i'll admit that; so what you still bounce around in me.

after, we called a didi to take us to that wine bar with the dim red lighting. and i don't remember what music they were playing, but on these two tvs in the center of the room, Daft Punk's anime album (not Homework, the next one, Discovery) played on a loop and i always associate you with that slow, lame song on that album that i pretend to hate.

and you said i could spend the night, but no sex. and we cuddled and made out for hours—and then had sex anyways. you had this stand up mirror and would stare at yourself in wonder with my cock in your mouth. you wanted to feel me and i wanted to feel you and that feeling reverbs sometimes when i am alone. that was warm. you were soft. you were exactly what I wanted.

i know, you're thinking about how i left you on that corner, or how i ignored your texts, or how you told me it could be completely no strings attached, but i didn't respond, or how we spent that wonderful day together—two years later—where you told me the lighting in my studio apartment was perfect for a studio and spilled so much Rush on my bed that our sex was this strange-animal-thing that i've never quite replicated since (despite trying all sorts of insane ideas) but I guess it was different and pent up and released and whatever. sometimes i regret things. sometimes that bounces back, too. and i didn't see you after that incident despite promising i would call again. i know. i know. i know.



url: minimag.press  
subs: minimagsubmissions@gmail.com  
substack: minimag.substack.com  
twitter: @minimag\_lit  
insta: @minimag\_write

“Long” by Miles MacNaughton  
Twitter: @MilesMac3000  
Substack: <https://milesowriting.substack.com/>

“The Trial” by Jonathan Vidgop  
Translated by Leo Shtutin  
Website: <https://www.vidgop.co.il/>  
Website: <https://amhazikaron.org/>  
FB: <https://www.facebook.com/alexanderjonathan.vidgop.3>

“in and out of my brain” by Allen Seward  
Twitter: @AllenSeward1  
Insta: @allenseward0  
Bluesky: @allenseward

“(c)lean (b)rain” by Shane Coppage and Jerome Berglund  
**Shane Coppage**  
Insta: @shane\_coppage  
Website: <http://www.shanecoppage.com>  
**Jerome Berglund**  
Twitter: @BerglundJerome  
Insta: @berglundjeromehaiku  
Website: <https://flowersunmedia.wixsite.com/jbphotography/blog-1/>  
FB: <https://www.facebook.com/JeromeBerglundPhotography/>

“Crimson Walls and Flesh Meat, Guts, Guts, Guts” by Trevor Hormel  
Insta: @hormeltrevor  
Website: [trevorhormel.com](http://trevorhormel.com)

“Here We Go Again Instructions” by Erica Baron  
Insta: @parsleybaron

“Listen” by Dimitris Passas  
Twitter: @TapTheLine1  
Website: <https://tapthelinemag.com/>

Comic by Bird  
Insta: @birdbookarts