

## **Chapter 16 of *The Debate***

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Nationals approached.

At the Campanile, nine times bonging, hoards of undergraduates scurried off, lattés in hand, Cal Caps, Golden Bears, *Fiat Lux*, Blues and Golds. Idiots all. Every fucking one of them. They never noticed the backside of LeConte, or inquired as to the dead men's ashes in Wheeler's urns. They knew nothing about the life under the bridges. Never wanted to know. They never knew the burden of being born anything but pink and content, consumed by the lunar forces in warm sweatshirts and AirCushy-Nikes. They never burned hot—never needed to—and they were far stupider than they'd ever fully realize. Ubiquitous stupidity was difficult to bear, sometimes. I knew it wasn't their fault per se, but neither was it my fault, the things I had to do, so at best it was a wash.

I would graduate soon and after Nationals, Harvard Law, and by then I would be fully assimilated into the meta-world. At some point, it would make no sense to ask if I was like other people, because others would begin to ask if they were like me, strong and independent. That's all I've ever wanted to be. I just wanted my hour on the stage, unmarred by the sins of my parents, and it may not amount to much either way, but it was my time, my superset, to strut and fret, as I saw fit. But instead there was to be a ring around my ass, and no one was to ever help to get it out, and my legs were to tingle like icy hell, forever and ever, so I was all alone. And I was to be perennially in that condition, born that way, with that smell. I never asked to be weak and pusillanimous, and when help came I took it without question. There was no real alternative if I wanted to ever be strong and independent, and not a porcelain fixture. Anyone would have done what I did. You think

you would not have, but you are wrong. You couldn't be more wrong. And that's a clean kill.

Collin Coboarae once told me that he always got what he wanted. I replied that I had suspected that much.

"But do you know why?" he asked.

"Good knees?" I offered.

"Well, it's more because I don't really want that much."

I never wanted that much either. I just wanted to be free of the smell and get a fresh start for once. I just wanted what the blues and golds already had, a fighting chance, a chance to be even.