

**THUS SPAKE ARTY:
TRUE MEANING IN PASCAL'S WAGER**

The name's John Paul 'Aristotle' Pascal, P.I. *extraordinaire*. You can read it on the door.

False friends, in bad faith *mauvaise foi*, call me J.P. My enemies call me Art. Nobody ever accused me of being Truth or Beauty, just Art, for Art's sake! Friends, few, call me Al (or All) when they call (or call), which isn't often. Luckily my best, most constant companions are always at hand: absinthe and abyss, whom I call Being and Nothingness. One I keep in a little hip flask, the Other in a holster.

Back as a student, U of Life, I majored in hard knocks. With a lot of Ph, I graduated at last, *somma cum as ur*. My interrectional classmates learned to pontificate ad nauseum... I learned to drink ad nauseum. They shot off their mouths. I shot off my .42, the number! My argument was more persuasive.

I was headed for trouble and I knew it. I landed up a grad student- in the joint for a spell, roomie named Fred. From him I learned the mechanical workings of the criminal Master-madman-mind. When I got out I turned a new leaf [Book of L] and turned P.I. – philosophical investigator.

I hoped to turn a prophet, I mean profit of course, or at least a clever phase. I ended up turning a few heads, the wrong ones. Now my head's spinning, stomach too, waiting in this stinking whole of an office, staring into the void that stares back. There's nothing to do but watch the karkas scurry when I flick the light over and over. It ain't much but at least I'm master/slave of my own destiny. They say every man is king in his own Castle. I take a slow swig from Being. I'm pouring over Montaigne's Essays and pouring down the sweet Likur *liqueur* like there's not tomorrow. Can we ever be sure?

Bang! She saunters in like thunder, like a renaissance, a revolution. I almost lose my head. On top of it all I can tell right away she's an angel of innocence. Would she fit? I want to drink her up gold, body and soul. She has a body that just won't quit, i.e. transcends her being-towards-death. It/she could awaken the desire or will, call it what you will (desire) in a dead man. Says her name is Diana Shonmacherr.

"I've come about a dead man," she intones.

This seems a little out of my league. My interests lie in ethics, not ontology. I tell her so. She quickly makes me see Reason (in a short-cut skirt) *. She has a gorgeous pair of legs square up to her hypotenuse. Now, I'm a man of action *être-pour-agir* and haven't seen Action in quite awhile. One day they'll write about the closing of the Drive-ins in *Fall of an American Empire*. I'm faced with a dilemma, and a pretty one at that.

"You've got to help me," she insists. Who could refuse such an imperative, or is it the sixth conditional? I want to work on, uh, with her but something's making me uneasy. Call it seventh sense.

"What makes you think I'm your man?" I wanted to comprehend, seize, get it.

*c.f. critique of pop(and ma) performance/art piece *Allegory of reason in a short-cut skirt* "Maternal breast with a side of fries: Art Herstory," by Jungian, Turnerean (Tina) analyst, and femynyst fatale Camille Kubla Gengis-de Bellevoire.

“I read about you.” She can read, better than my usuals! “You solved that slasher case last year.”

My names had been in the paper a bit back, tough case. Police picked up the wrong guy- an Acham, profiling, some sicko with a razor. Turns out to be a Brit with bad memories of boarding school. They called me in to figure out his pattern, but it was just a process of elimination really.

“Sorry,” I say, “busy.”

“I understand. You’re not up to the task. True, it’s intellect-boggling.”

“How so?” I’m getting intrigued.

“I was sure you couldn’t solve it anyway.” She’s struck my weakness: vanity of vanities!

“Wanna bet?” I probe.

“Terms?” she demands.

“Yours.”

“After.”

I arrive on the scene, a bit late from the perspective of the corpse, I imagine. Old man, dead, definitely. Deceased. We live our lives like fortresses, when in the end we are only sandcastles to be washed away without a trace by any coming wave. I take a swig.

“*C’est la vie*,” I laugh, sigh. “Fuck it!”

I take another swig – a long one. Can’t feel my fingers anymore, the way I like it. Speech comes slow now. I am careful not to confuse absinthe and abyss in my stupor. In the past I’d confused Being with Nothingness and almost taken a draught from the wrong barrel! That could put a crimp in your day.

“How’d the stiff buy it?”

“Old age,” landlord explains. Too easy, I think.

“Why can’t a man live forever?”

“That’s nature,” coroner claims, laying blame already.

“Why?”

“Bad Luck,” says landlord. Sure!

“Maybe it’s Chaos theory,” the coroner adds. Now he’s just confusing me for a butterfly, or a Chinaman. I don’t buy it. Are they trying to confuse me, planting red herrings in dead ends? Gotta think now. I take a swig.

I run over my list of suspects like a Mac truck with no brakes: Nature, Fate, Luck, butterflies, red herrings... Wished I didn’t know then what I wouldn’t know later; but then, Hindzeit is always 20-20, easier to poke a camel in the eye with a needle. What a headache! Nausea hits suddenly.

Good grief morning! I wake to what the French call wooden snout, maw. I hang over and over, head square in the white porcelin Lyceum. The stench! The horror! I try to reconstruct yesterday through the haze. Had I dreamed it all: Diana with her certain *je ne sais quoi* (French for ass) In the fog I wonder if I myself might not be the guilty party. I stare at my gray face in the mirror, stab self with handy pencil. Nope, no dream.

I find a cup of cold coffee and down it. I look out on the rainy world, no window, thinking how insignificant a red wheelbarrow is, and Woody Allen. Inside walls pounding, ceiling's too low. I'm low, down, dirty. I look round at the friendly filth, laugh. Air is dirty. Carpet is wall-to- cracked-plaster wall ochre, a vomit colored to hide the stains. Cold, stained air. Cold and colder running water. Wobbly chair in a corner, a couch for a bed, and the table there sitting so a priori. What am I looking for? Had I come this far in life only to find myself this far in life? I find some clothes that smell okay and stumble out.

I do some checking. *Chercher la femme*: Fates, Furies, Flies, Muses. They all have alibis in Ancient Greece. The case remains tabula rasa. Lady Luck is another false alarm – just a scam cost me \$100 on roulette and a palm reading: “Gullible,” she says. Add \$100 to my expenses, debit my pride. Which leaves, ergo, only Nature. But where?

He finds me walking on campus... Wham! a definite ad homonym attack. Lucky me the hit is weak or I'd have joined my Mr.E, victim, to ask him personally about death. I reflect stunned on the cause and effect of all this while the thug is kicking me senseless. He's a Red, Marxist, I determine, by the materialist glasses and red beret, the black turtle-neck all the way down marking him as dangerous, with a knife and without a conscience, an existentialist. I decide to deconstruct his dialectic upside the head. With a playful post-modern punch, I lay him out flat as an assumptive argument.

“Please, pal, be reasonable...” he begs.

I laugh. “Is not the ultimate end of all rational thought absurd, defined as it is in a dasein of time and space always already there and *de trop* yet limited by the eternal transcendent. I take a swig of Absolute and I knock his jaw off.

“Who sent you, Brutus?” I demand, towering threateningly over him.

“Mother Nature,” he stammers scared, slipping off to sleep in *là-là* land.

“Naturally”, or is it cultural? I need to go see a certain meta-masseuse I know (and not about the case).

I'm back in my office nursing a few bumps and bruises and a bottle, reading up on “Vealimin Flaubert” when in slips ex-stasy again: Diana! Says she's got a lead so I follow her out into the wilderness.

“Are we there yet?” Patience is not my forte. She says we're halfway, but I am all gone, something in my flask.

“There yet?” Halfway again.

“Half way!” she screams the third time. I'm dizzy. She's got a nice pair of doxa! She knows it. Finally she stops way out in the middle of nowhere and – Wham! she

kisses me. My toes curl, my whole body curls up like a party favor on her mouth. She gets what she wants: Nothingness, abyss, gun. I contemplate the tunnel.

“Mother Nature, I presume?”

“At your service,” she purrs.

“You set me up!” I protest.

“I promise never to deceive you again as long as you live. Goodbye, my sweet.”

Click!

“Oops, you seem to be out of bullets. I must have ‘forgotten’ to load it,” I clear my mind quickly, lucky I’d unloaded it before she came in. Always do.

“I win,” I say, “the bet. My terms to pay now.” I commune with her rolling hills, mountains peaks, deep damp jungle of hidden mysteries, amber waves of grain... My plan? I can’t turn her in so I need a fall guy. God’s my patsy, a sort of out-of-order Deus ex Machina I invent to take the rap. I plant some evidence: Torah, Bible, Koran. Cover my tracks well, make up a lot of aliases (alii?), a whole conspiracy theory so no one knows He’ll strike next, how or why. You’d have to be Superman to figure it out!

Answer their queries with other questions: only a philosopher could think of that! I give Him our image (ugly); anyone could be in on it. Quite a monster racket I create, the world’s biggest Mafia in fact with competing sects and all. What crimes they commit history will tell! World’s biggest confidence game.

It works for awhile. Nature gets off, but I don’t. She’s too much for me in the end. I’m off the case and my fall guy buys it in turn. I’m off on my new case: “Who came first: chicken or egg?” Our only evidence: a discarded cigarette butt. I take a swig.