

“The Walkover (Act Three)”

An epic in Thirteen Acts, as Dionysus bridges the river Styx.

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(abridged by editor James K Beach)

PART I – DIGRESSION (cont’d)

Characters in Act Three

Nurses, Orderlies
Resident, Med Students
Fehmin Ashton
Leon Blackwell (various ages)
Gareth Rothschild (various ages)
Leon’s Mother
Gareth’s Father
Middle-school Coach
Brown (age 14)

ACT THREE – Hector, Odysseus, Achilles

(Motif: dark blue; the tenant)

Below the catwalk a second giant cinema screen has joined the first. Both screens zap on, ready to play two movies simultaneously, with each screen being slightly tilted toward the left or right.

On the first screen: After midnight, in a cemetery. Leon Blackwell weaves through the headstones until he opens a small chapel’s doors. On the altar a cross is fixed – it’s too dark, really, to see anything else.

On the second cinema screen: Leon and Gareth are dumped on a sidewalk, injured and bloodied. Leon looks the worse, with a rent cheek and dribbling temple. Gareth, on the other hand is much more decent, almost his usual self. Leon finds this funny and laughs while Gareth fishes in his pockets for a mobile phone and extricates out a pulped piece of gadget. This makes Leon laugh even harder – he also fishes in his pocket and once fished out, he starts punching a number on the phone. The screen blares, “Battery empty” and dies. Leon and Gareth both collapse into laughing

heaps on the sidewalk, as Gareth tries getting up with the help of the nearest lamp post and Leon lies flat on the pavement, even more comfortably than in his bed, and mock sleeps. Gareth kicks him, not too hard, and he smiles, eyes closed. A streetcar zooms in quickening Leon to life as he jumps around and flays his arms for a hike. The car flurries by, almost as if it deliberately ignored and Leon looks at Gareth in mock disbelief as Gareth shrugs his shoulders and laughs. Leon who is equally amused goes and punches Gareth deeper into the lamp post as he wheezes out his redundant smirks rather more audibly–

On the first cinema screen: A measure for passing time these posters of athletes are, for their edges are eroded and flaked, wrinkled as if the skin has gotten old. Below them are two half-packed – or perhaps half unpacked? – trunks to Cambridge, a quantity of royal blue of Chelsea pouring out from one like a fountain, maybe a stream.

On the second cinema screen: An intense match, a derby almost: Cambridge blue and a rival team in complementary orange. It's a furiously contested match. After three successful tackles, and a few exchange of words, Leon rounds at the defender – who feigned a fall after Leon's tackling – to repeat a Zidane of the World Cup 2006. The crowd roars. Gareth rushes over to the commotion and so does the match referee to pull Leon away who is threatening his own time on the field. A free kick is awarded to the other side which further infuriates Leon but before he can say a thing Gareth pulls him off, quickly pointing to a few areas as the players take positions and the ball is once more in play. Seizing possession, Leon back-heels the ball to Gareth, who sends it into the goal.

ACT THREE - Scene 1

A hospital waiting lounge. LEON sits in a corner chair, haggard, red-eyed and dressed in black: he's evidently not eaten or slept for days. A pentagram pendent glimmers as it swings on the chain between his fingers.

Footsteps echo in the corridor.

Leon alerts; he's already looking at the door when the NURSE enters.

Nurse:

“Mr. Blackwell, he will see you now”.

Leon is at the door by this time.

The nurse steps aside to let him pass.

Leon enters the spotless corridor of the most private of the hospital's wings; glass windows blaze the serene dark blue of the twilight outside. Slowly, already defeated, Leon selects a door to push open just as a MED STUDENT is leaving.

From the hospital bed, GARETH's eyes alight on Leon, framed there. Clustered near Gareth is a PHYSICIAN and a tiny GROUP OF MED STUDENTS looking tired and stifling yawns. ANOTHER NURSE fusses over the drip stands and IV lines. Flower arrangements, from Karen Dashwood and others, and a football signed by the Cambridge team, overflow from the windowsill onto a nightstand. The shades are drawn but the utility fluorescents are bright.

The Med Students follow the Physician into the hall to discreetly inform Leon that the topic is sensitive: the end is near, death is inevitable.

The Med Students and the Physician disperse down various corridors.

Gareth manages a grin as Leon re-enters the room.

Gareth:

"Come. Sit with me for a while".

Leon hastily wipes his eyes and takes the empty chair, dragging it to the bed while Gareth eyes the pentagram around Leon's wrist – he closes his eyes in the manner of a silent prayer.

"I am dying. The doctors tell me that soon I'm to go into a state of cataclysmic respiratory collapse that will be the end of me. But I am not afraid".

An adequate pause...

"I couldn't play the tournament out, though. I wanted to see Cambridge win under my captaincy" –

Leon:

"Why are you saying this? Why would you care about it at this hour? Why would I care about it at this hour"?

Gareth:

"No, Leon, listen. We all care about it – you must listen – even though it is just a game, isn't it? A game within a game and every player a different game"...

Leon puts a hand over Gareth's folded ones, waiting patiently for Gareth to finish his thought. Above, each cinema screen shows one of Gareth's closed eyes; two tears seep beneath his eyelids: one tear to each eye. A distant drum beat, before Gareth opens his eyes and smiles at a recollection; a shadow of a smile: a ghost. This seems to frighten Leon, who adeptly conceals his emotion.

Leon:

"Why are we discussing this, old friend"?

Gareth:

“Oh, so many reasons. In my last moments I deserve to dictate the course of the conversation, surely?”

The Nurse finishes giving Gareth his morphine and exits.

“I am leaving you words to remember me by”.

This breaks Leon, finally; fervent tears stream down before he chokes on a taste of eternity.

Leon:

“I don’t need words to remember you by, Gareth”.

Gareth answers vaguely, in a faraway voice, drugged into sleep – “Yes, I know, Leon... Don’t I know”... Leon turns off the light to let Gareth sleep. A slowly beeping monitor lulls Leon into sleep as well.

Some time later, Gareth wakes Leon by gasping for breath, choking – the most ominous of beeping, ticking his seconds; the final countdown begins –

It is a pandemonium. The nurse – the orderlies – a resident. “Mr Rothschild”? An oxygen mask is clamped over him as he struggles to breathe – “Breathe, Mr. Rothschild, into the mask – Mr Blackwell, please leave”!

Gareth pushes away the mask; gasping, just one word – “Leon”.

Leon rushes over and Gareth frantically clutches his shirt, hoisting himself up, it is a confusion – Leon supports him, an arm around him, an embrace of sorts. With his face by Leon’s ear, he whispers:

Gareth:

“Will you forgive me?”

Leon holds him even tighter, the pressure is the answer but he insists.

“Will you forgive me?”

Leon:

“There is nothing to forgive, my friend”.

Gareth:

“Everything I have said in all our years, you must remember me by the moments each”.

He lets go and collapses against pillows. The mask is again clamped - the respiratory depression spirals down –

“Mr Blackwell” –

TWO ORDERLIES arrive with a stretcher: Gareth is shifted and whisked away with efficiency. A MED STUDENT enters the room, looking for something: his file. Leon and the student's eyes meet.

Leon:

“Will he live the night”?

Med Student:

“You can always pray. I hear it helps some people cope”.

She dashes away, clutching the medical file. Leon watches her through a fresh blur of tears – he clutches the pentagram - “God in heaven above”...

ACT THREE - Scene 2

A group study room with one occupied lamp-lit carrel, where a laptop glows in front of LEON, aside a few books in a scatter. FEHMIN enters, her ambiguous hair the darkest brown in this indirect light: she takes her place beside him, dumping her own load of papers and books on top of his, before arranging all in a manageable order on the table: hers, his, the laptop, papers, writing things; and she always opens the talk while she is doing it.

Fehmin:

“Some lawyer named Amedus Rouald phoned. Your mobile phone was powered off, apparently – but that isn't important. Amedus is the Rothschild family attorney. He needs us to be at the Rothschild mansion for the reading of Gare - HIS - will”.

Leon finally looks up from his reverie, attention caught.

Leon:

“Gareth left a will” –

Fehmin:

“Yes, apparently” –

Leon:

“He emptied his locker two days before his death and he left a will. He was the safest driver I ever knew and he dies in a freak car accident. What am I to make of this”?

She has been knotting her hands in her lap: unease or unwillingness to discuss the topic –

Fehmin:

“Leon... Leon, there is something I have to talk about” –

Leon:

“I know. Did he know that he was dying? That is your question. He can't have. Nobody is that good at pretending ignorance. He was always terribly afraid of death”.

Fehmin:

“Yes. Are you”?

Leon:

“No, I don't think so”.

Fehmin:

“Leon, there are things that”...

Leon:

“If he were here right now, he would want to go to La Galleria and he would personally take me aside and beg me not to bring you along before I would tell him you had already excused yourself and were busy. And then, at La Galleria, he would have ordered his boring age-old menu, commented at length at our practice session. Told me Moody is invaluable so I must keep it under control. After each practice, without fail, can you believe that? It's just I miss him so much...”

He pauses; she puts an arm around him. She never uses words in vain, it is very apparent. So there can be no rash promises.

“There is no meaning with him gone. And when I think about it, it is not days or months. It is for life. A whole life without him. It is not possible. It is unreal”.

Fehmin:

“It is because of” –

Fehmin gasps as pain flits across her face. Leon alerts immediately, puts an arm around her shoulder.

Leon:

“Fem? Fem, what is the matter”?

She collects herself and takes a deep breath.

Fehmin:

“It was nothing. It is just some trivial pain that comes and goes. It will pass. Yes – I think it did. I am fine now”.

Leon:

“Are you sure”?

She smiles broadly – too broadly.

Fehmin:

“Very sure.

I am in a mood for some coffee. Are you?”

He places a hand around her waist out of habit as they stroll upstage and the study room lights dim into darkness.

The scene morphs into blinding whiteness. And then:

A sunlit cathedral, stained glass throwing discrete coloured rays. LEON’S MOTHER stands praying at the altar cross in her Sunday suit - as appropriate, as a Catholic would claim. Her eyes are closed, her hands clasped in prayer. Close to her is LEON AS A SMALL BOY of age six or so. With folds of her dress in his small hands, he looks up, transfixed for a moment on his mother, engrossed in her prayer. His short attention span gives way then to the cathedral itself, all the stained glass; next he stares at the altar itself. Then: a glimmer, under the altar, a pinprick sparkle. As soon as Leon’s Mother finishes her prayer, her eyes opened, he lets go of the dress and dives for the glimmer –

Leon’s Mother:

“Leon”!

Leon as a Small Boy hurls himself deeper beneath the altar to reach for the sparkling thing.

Leon’s Mother:

“Leon, what are you doing”?

Leon extricates the silvery thing and in the process also mops out accumulated dust, which he wipes freely on a crisp white shirt. He holds the trophy to the light. It turns out to be a silver chain, very fine, and dangling off it, a queer pendent shaped in the form of a star enclosed inside a circle.

Leon-at-six:

“Got you”!

He turns to look at the Leon’s Mother in jubilation and – as children do – the possibility of praise. She, however, is frowning at him.

Leon’s Mother:

“Leon, put it back. Someone must have dropped it”.

Leon, who had been staring transfixed at the pendant – possibly hypnotized – throughout the reprimand, pockets it.

Leon’s Mother:

“Leon”!

Leon-at-six:

“I found it deep down under the table where it was thrown by someone who did not want it.
I’m not stealing it” –

There is a faint rustle in the nearby bushes (of rose?) causing both Leon and his Mother to stop arguing. There is a momentary glimpse of GARETH, also age six, amidst the leaves. Leon, for one moment, looks at the trembling bush and then takes the pendant out of his pocket, moving it from side to side as the sun plays on its edges, a tiny reflected circle dancing on his forehead before comprehension dawns on him.

Leon-at-six:

“HEY – WAIT” –

He trundles down the steps, his feet pattering. The small figure in the bush makes an escape, leaving the bush trembling in his wake. Leon’s Mother shouts in an attempt to stop her son. But Leon has already raced ahead and disappeared around the corner into the alleyway. She makes to follow him.

The young boy, Leon, is hot in pursuit of Gareth, who is running at break-neck speed himself. Running away – frightened? If yes, then: of what? Leon calls to him.

Leon-at-six:

“Hey, Rothschild – wait! I think you dropped something”.

The young boy keeps running and as the alleyway turns to a fork in the street, he turns right into a cobbled path and disappears around the bend. By the time Leon catches up and reaches the alleyway corner, there is no sign of Gareth. Leon frantically scans the narrowed, potholed street as his mother catches up with him, puffing and clutching a stitch in her chest.

Leon’s Mother:

“Leon – who were you running after”?

Leon-at-six:

“A boy from my class. He is weird. Does not talk to anyone in class. But he is damn rich! His name is Gareth. I think this is his” –

He, once more, and quickly becoming a habit with him, holds the pendant to light.

Leon’s mother turns to face the right of the street where an iron gate stands ajar on its rusty hinges: it is a cemetery, wild, overgrown. Just beyond the gate and a few opening graves Gareth has his back to the gate, standing sentinel at a tombstone and its grave. His mother’s eyes mist a little as she lightly taps Leon on the shoulder. Leon turns and spots Gareth; he leaves his mother’s side to chase him through the gate.

Leon-at-six:

“I called your name”.

Gareth-at-six:

“Go away”.

Leon-at-six:

“That is not very nice”.

He shifts to a lofty tone, detached to sound cool.

“I came to give you – this. I think this is yours”.

He straightens up, holding the pendant aloft only to notice an exact pendant hanging from Gareth’s neck, since the first two buttons are not in place.

Gareth-at-six:

“That is not mine”.

Leon-at-six:

“Yeah – okay. I thought it was yours”.

He carefully pockets it.

“What are you doing here anyway”?

Gareth-at-six:

“That is none of your business”.

Leon opens his mouth to shout an angry retort, but his mother has arrived to put a cautionary hand on his shoulder which is enough to silence him as he stamps his foot and drills the toe of one shoe in the mud and clayey sand of the cemetery.

Leon’s mother, meanwhile, tears in her eyes, bends down in front of Gareth, taking his small, serious face into her hands.

Some of his reflexes loosen.

Leon’s Mother:

“You miss her, don’t you”?

Leon cocks his head to one side to read the tombstone his mother is pointing to.

Etched cleanly and rather freshly in the marble of the tombstone are the words:

“Fallon Bayern Rothschild; nee Rothermere; d. 1995, August 24; b. 1967, September 18

Death is never eternal parting.

Before long Gareth joins Leon to cry in the Leon’s Mother’s arms: she ruffles his hair consolingly as she hugs him and whispers consolations in his ear.

Leon’s Mother:

“You can come to our place to play. I am sure Leon would love that more than anyone. He doesn’t have anyone to play with save Tess. Your mummy would be only happy if you are happy, my dear.

And I make excellent shepherd's pies".

She dries Gareth's eyes and kisses him on the cheek.

"There. Now whenever you miss your own mother, come straight to our house. Promise me"?

Gareth nods mutely as Leon's Mother affectionately ruffles his hair and smiles at him: an encouraging, beaming smile. He holds on it tentatively, like a toddler grasping a mere finger, a meagre thread, and smiles.

She turns to Leon. Leon jerks to attention, caught slightly off guard.

Leon-at-six:

"Oh. We live in Camberwell. Have you seen it"?

Just as Gareth is about to reply with equal cordiality, there is a voice that rings out from behind the just-consoled boy: "Gareth"! All three jump at this, goose bumps raised. The man who called out and who is slowly but efficiently picking his way amongst the graves and potholes and weeds is GARETH'S FATHER, dressed in formal black. Gareth races to meet him.

Gareth-at-six:

"Father" –

His Father places a firm hand on his shoulder as he levels with him and then steers him towards the Blackwells.

Gareth's Father:

"Will you not introduce me to your charming friends, Gareth"?

Gareth-at-six

"That is Leon, from my class and Mrs. Blackwell, his mother".

Leon's Mother:

"I am sorry, Mr Rothschild – about your wife – Gareth's mother –

I – I have taken the liberty of inviting Gareth to our house every Sunday. I think that should cheer him up".

Gareth's Father:

"Cheer him up?"

Gareth recoils at his father's tone.

"Now I am sorry, because he cannot come visit you".

Leon's Mother:

"But surely, Mr Rothschild, the boy needs company" –

Gareth's Father:

"Are you, perhaps, endeavouring to tutor me on how to raise my own child, madam? He does need company, I'll concede but not one of mangy and ordinary school boys. I thank you for your concern, but it is not needed, I assure you".

*He turns, the gesture quite clear, to leave.
“Come, Gareth. We are leaving”.*

Leon looks up into Mrs Blackwell’s eyes and wants to say something, but he abruptly turns to follow his father, just one backward glance.

The Blackwells keep standing as the Rothschilds walk away, growing smaller and smaller before they exit through the rear gate. Leon again gathers the folds of his mother’s dress. She looks down at him and smiles as she folds her arms across her chest.

Leon’s Mother:

“What do you think of that”!

Leon-at-six:

“Nasty old man”.

Leon’s mother smiles rather approvingly.

Leon’s mother:

“So, what’s the plan”?

Leon-at-six:

“Rescue Gareth”.

She chuckles at this bravado even more approvingly as she leads him out of the gate from wherein they entered. Leon is sporting the silver pentagram that began all this: his trophy for the day

The scene morphs again, briefly into darkness, then:

Rothschild Manor: an imposing, cavernous room. On its walls is a gallery of family relics: important portraits in painting – heirlooms. There are precious tapestries and some contrived accolades of rare honour, some even rarer merit, artefacts – arcane – odd reliquary. Narrow windows in stone admit streaks of light, quite consciously chic and of such a repository of relics as thus, quite proper to seem. They carry name plaques, these heirlooms gilded and gold.

A studious old man, balding with wisps of white hair vaporising from the temples and rather intelligent eyes alongside a pencilled near-profile of a young man with straight nose and set jaw with a replica of the same intelligent eye – one – bears a mutual plaque: “Mayer Amschel Rothschild; 24 February 1774- 19 September 1812, The Founding father of international finance.

Below him is a neat little convoy of jitney frames and paintings: Amschel “Anselm” Rothschild (12 June 1773- 6 December 1855), Solomon Mayer von Rothschild (9 September 1774- 28 July 1885), Nathan Mayer Rothschild (16 September 1777- 18

July 1836), Calmann “Carl” Mayer von Rothschild (24 April 1788- 10 March 1885) and Jacob “James” Mayer de Rothschild (15 May 1792- 15 November 1868).

Twelve-year-olds Gareth and Leon stand in this mapped heritage. Leon’s tiny self, though much older in fact, craning around to see, well fixed before some kind of tapestry: clearly, a guest invited to partake of all this. Gareth, gazing around at all the well familiar things, can still keep him busy wondering.

Leon scrutinizes a detailed tapestry riddled with gold arrows and red, bloodied lettering, crisscrossing all over, names and arrows, joined to others, some in isolation, some, obscurity, a heading entitled: “The House of Rothschild” and a family crest borne aloft by a jeering lion and a unicorn, under a handful of half-eagle arrows in a subtle diagonal with the infallible motto etched: “Concordia-Integritas- Industria” and below it a melee of gold – a timeline; a family tree.

Leon-at-twelve:

“Impressive.

I don’t think the Blackwells run that far. And even if we do, I am glad no one bothered to keep a record – for history is one overwhelming, overpriced thing and why anyone would bother remembering it is beyond human comprehension”.

Gareth chuckles.

Gareth-at-twelve:

“Their House, their rules. I believe they update with every birth etcetera”.

Leon rolls his eyes and mocks him in mime, all the while casually strolling past the portraits looking down at him with an expression of thorough disapproval. He stops by one. It is a photograph, scaled and magnified to the standard size of portrait paintings: a man and a woman standing side by side, the man in his formal best suit and the woman with a chic hat laden with sprig-bloom: some feather and heather, and stiff, expensive dress of soft crème: a hint of smile on both their faces, the woman and man. The plaque: “Wedding of Ezra Crassus with Fallon Bayern: December 24, 1984”.

Leon-at-twelve:

“Isn’t that – your father? Blimey, there was a time when he used to be handsome”.

Gareth smiles

Gareth-at-twelve:

“What do you have against my father”?

Leon moves and one of the sun streaks catch the pentagram around his neck, the five points of the star touching the circle marked with a set diamond: this same pendant is around Fallon Bayern’s wedding neck.

Leon-at-twelve:

“I never liked him from the first day – I am sorry if that hurts but truth has to be told”.

He gives Gareth a coquettish shrug.

He never used to let you come over at my place, still doesn't – or allow us to practice football late in the night”.

Garth-at-twelve:

“Such grievances” ...

He laughs a little at Leon's face.

“He doesn't have anything against football. Surprisingly is an avid fan, generally”.

Leon breezily scans the portraits and stops at them at random to freely comment. There is one of a peculiar young man sitting in a high backed chair and background curtain and laughs: “Don't you look a little bit like him, Gareth? Of course you do. Family resemblance”...

Gareth looks cautious.

Gareth-at-twelve:

“Let's go up my study, I want to show you something”.

Leon-at-twelve:

“Boring books and some financial or economics research papers? I'm not interested. But that Nash's equilibrium was interesting, I will have to admit. Though I only vaguely understood”...

Leon's attention is arrested by a portrait of a woman, gilded in her majesty: white skin, like snow and pale gold dressing: wraps and shawls. The plaque: “Sybil Rachel Betty Cecile Sassoon, Marchioness of Cholmondeley, CBE (30 January 1894 – 26 December 1989)”.

Gareth follows his gaze, his eyes narrow.

There is a shuffle behind them and a dry cough: a man materializes. He has a limp and a slouch and a lean frame, lithe. His name is MR. POCKET, and he is Gareth's butler.

Gareth-at-twelve:

“What is it, Mr. Pocket”?

Mr. Pocket:

“I was wondering if lunch is to be laid in your quarters or the dining hall”.

Gareth-at-twelve:

“My quarters, like we do always”.

Mr. Pocket:

“Of course. I think you should hasten there to prepare yourselves for I gather they would have laid the table already, Master Gareth. And, of course, you will take your charming friend”.

Gareth-at-twelve: *hesitates, a stammer, only slight*
 “Y-Yes. We were just leaving. Leon, come”.

Leon inches towards the portrait, drawn quite disconcertingly: questionably.

Gareth-at-twelve:
 “Leon – what” –

Leon-at-twelve:

“Very beautiful woman, that’s all. Very beautiful”...

He tears his gaze from the portrait and smiles perversely. At his smile Gareth’s face relaxes though his eyes still remain narrowed; perturbed.

“I think beauty was denied to everyone in your family save your mother and that woman. The price of money, if you ask me.

What was it that you were about to show me? I swear if it is some boring book by some dead, old idiot” –

Gareth-at-twelve:

“It isn’t. It is Beckham’s” –

Leon-at-twelve:

“WHA – BECKHAM – LET’S GO”!

The boys race each other down the corridor and out of sight, watched till the end by this strange man-servant – housekeeper? – Mr. Pocket. He turns and drags the heavy doors, to bolt them.

The scene morphs a third time, into:

An intense football match, typical of middle school tournament training: not a great many attempts on target but all of them cheered, all of them, in that age brilliant. The boys are aged eleven to fourteen, and their game plan is typical: one goal keeper, two strikers, and two defenders – even one – (or that is what seems) and all the rest is a variation of the midfield: every variation, everyone wants to score.

A trinity of familiar faces, only younger: Leon Blackwell, Gareth Rothschild, and Alastair Brown. The two main strikers: Blackwell and Rothschild, who can pass effectively, and have a few stunning techniques: push passing and neat chipping of the ball, some excellent display of wall passing; Leon’s magnificent side volley lands straight in the net and some moments later – perhaps in retaliation, perhaps in competition or perhaps awe – an incidental chipper, one of many others and Gareth’s bicycling it into an overhead kick –

THE MIDDLE-SCHOOL COACH whistles.

Polite clapping, some hooting from the sparse crowd of enthusiastic mothers, mostly.

Middle-school Coach:

“Excellent work, team, and if we can repeat this tomorrow we are flattening Westfield. But that is just a side-line treat: after this time tomorrow, we are preparing to lift the trophy”.

Everyone cheers. The Coach winks at Gareth as the ring breaks up, and puts one arm around his shoulder and the other around Leon’s and steers them toward the dressing room.

“That was magnificent. Can we repeat that tomorrow?”

Leon-at-thirteen:

“When have we failed to, Coach”?

The Coach is much humoured by the cheekiness. Gareth however adheres firmly to modesty and merely smiles.

Middle-school Coach:

“I will not be surprised if you are approached by some fine clubs very soon. Have you both given that a thought”?

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Leon talks about it in his sleep too” –

Leon-at-thirteen:

“What” –

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“I don’t think a professional career in the game has ever attracted me” –

Leon laughs heartily at this.

Middle-school Coach:

“You two are a brilliant attacking duo, if you would care to develop. Which duo is your favourite of all time”?

Leon-at-thirteen:

“The Ro-Ro duo of Brazil: Ronaldo and Romario”.

Middle-school Coach:

“Excellent, excellent. Short lived, but excellent. The years after the world cup of 1994, and in that world cup how Romario partnered with Bebeto. That is another fierce duo; one of my favourites”.

He reminisces, as he steers them along.

“So which one of you is which”?

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Leon likes to think he is Ronaldo, of course. But I think we work more like Kocsis and Puskas, or would like to in any case”.

Middle-school Coach:

“Ah. Them... Kocsis and Puskas and the Golden Team... So, I gather there must be a competition for Puskas”?

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Gareth sometimes very childishly never admits to the obvious”.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Most of Leon’s goals are headers, and it was Kocsis who was known for his aerial prowess and nicknamed “The Golden Head””.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“With Gareth around I think it is impossible – even criminal – for someone else to be crowned the ‘Golden Head’”.

The Coach laughs along with the duo, whichever they may be: Romario and Kocsis or the other. Some combination of the two or so –

The changing room door: the parting of ways, requires an excuse, nonetheless: as they reach for the door it is thrown open from the inside and a MIDDLE-SCHOOL BOY walks out, already showered and changed. The Coach calls him to stop, going over to talk to him, with a slight pat; Leon and Gareth are dismissed. They enter the changing room.

Several cubicles are already busy, the generous rushing of shower water creating background music as they both extricate their changing things from their lockers; Gareth’s deodorant can clatters to the floor.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Puskas was the “Gallop Major”, for God’s sake. And we both know whose footwork resembles his when it comes to it”.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Oh please, Leon. Like I said before: “The Golden Head” –

Leon-at-thirteen:

“I might have more headers, or whatever, but please don’t try to cloud the fact that it is your favourite style of goal scoring. I just have ‘accidental headers’ more or less. I best enjoy a goal with footwork”.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Puskas was the CAPTAIN of the Golden Team, for crying out loud, Leon. Captain, if you can hear well”.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“You support Chelsea and I support United, sort of number two and number one, respectively” –

Gareth opens his mouth to retort but Leon forestalls him.

“No, wait, hear me out – And by the way what I said is true, just in case if you were defending it – When they left Hungary, Puskas joined Real Madrid” –

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“You are about to make a very silly point, really” –

Leon-at-thirteen: *even more loudly*

“– and Kocsis joined Barcelona, sort of number one and two, wouldn’t you say”?

Gareth puts his deodorant can with some finality on the bench.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“When they joined Real and Barcelona, Barcelona was number one and Real were number two, as far as La Liga titles go” –

Leon-at-thirteen: *somewhat outraged*

“You are just making that up”.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Well, you have the right to go and check, of course.
And I did warn you about the silly point in advance”.

Leon struggles to come up with a counter argument to this.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Fine, then. Whichever one of us dies first, okay”?

Gareth laughs briefly.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Be a good loser”.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Oh I am. I am leaving it in God’s hands to choose: ‘divine oracles to proclaim’ or whatever the phrase is”.

Gareth laughs again, patting Leon mockingly on the back.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Yes. Seems fair to me, I would say. But please be a good loser on your death bed, because I don’t think it would be a pleasant sight to see your old, wrinkled self-coughing up his last breaths”.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Blackwells generally live longer than Rothschilds, I have noticed. Another ‘price of money’ I would say. And thanks to your elaborate gallery, I can even imagine an

exact white haired and toothless portrait of you in that hall. And since everyone in your family has an additional something to go with their faces, it would be my immense pleasure to get it personally carved in gold: ‘Sandor Kocsis’.

I wouldn’t even mind dying the next second”.

Leon puts a hand on Gareth’s shoulder while he hasn’t retracted his, one hand on each shoulder, the mockery stays.

“So would you prefer a photograph or a painting in oil”?

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Don’t” –

The warning is too late and they are both locked in a playful fist-fight and plummeting, on the ground, laughing as they carry on. Leon picks up Gareth’s deodorant can and drills it into his arm with as much force as when he would have been fighting for real. Gareth struggles towards the bench where their discarded things are, like a drowning man struggling for the shore– he grabs it: one of the metal-soled boots - his or Leon’s? it doesn’t matter – the fighting on a more equal plane continues.

After a few ticking seconds, Gareth extricates himself, red faced and laughing and now they face each other, the shoe lying at some distance to Gareth’s disadvantage. He makes a move to grab it – Leon hurls the all-purpose can at Gareth with full force which hits him squarely on the chest – Gareth catches it and hurls it back: it misses, sailing over Leon’s ducked head and hitting the lockers opposite – clang. Leon quickly dashes to retrieve it while Gareth strips and makes for an open shower cubicle. Leon turns and rages ahead, realizing – just as Gareth is forcing it shut – thud of body and wood – the sure-safe sound of a bolt sliding home. Leon kicks the door and it duly shudders. To drive the victory nail even more surely home: the gurgle and merry splash of a shower turned on at full burst.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Err... you left your clothes outside, though” –

The water-laughter stops immediately: a mute button pushed.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“Leon, I am warning you – If you stoop to your usual bastardy and hide them” –

One of the shower doors opens and Leon turns, distracted by BROWN, age fourteen, just finished.

Brown-at-fourteen:

“Drop dead, Gareth, you poof.”

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Good luck in the game tomorrow, Brown”.

Brown-at-fourteen:

“See you around, Leon”.

Brown waves and exits through the entrance doors as Leon facetiously mouths “good luck” to the swinging door. A shower cubicle unlocks, stealthily: ‘the’ shower – and Gareth steps outside, hair dripping as he inches toward his pile of clothes: Leon is just too quick for him – in a flash he is waving them leeringly in the air above his head.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“I could have taken them when you were busy talking to Brown, of course”.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Not my fault, if you didn’t. So, some unfinished business from where we left off and as it is said, ‘if you want it, come, and get it’”.

Gareth-at-thirteen:

“If we must” ...

He dives forward and catches a trailing sleeve from the heap. Leon clutches the bundle to his heart as the tug-of-war begins: the shirt comes lose as Gareth pulls and the force sends him reeling into the line of lockers, with Leon losing his footing on the wet surface and falling flat on the floor. The punch line of the most amusing joke as they both laugh –

The changing room door opens and the Coach steps inside, for several split seconds the scene frozen: both Leon and Gareth sober up and straighten.

Middle-school Coach:

“Not over with your shower yet”?

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Err... no” -

Middle-school Coach:

“Leon, your mother is waiting on the field. I told her I would go and check on what’s holding you”.

The Coach exits and Leon moves to follow him, still clutching Gareth’s clothes to his chest, and realizing this, he turns around and flashes Gareth an evil grin. Gareth flashes one back, for he is standing at the shower door, with Leon’s bundle of clothes held in an embrace. Leon winks at Gareth and throws the scrunched bundle of his clothes on the bench before dashing inside the shower cubicle. The song of the shower resumes. Alone now, Gareth folds Leon’s clothes and leaves them outside the shower cubicle. Eventually Leon shuts off the water and gets dressed.

By the time he reaches the field outside, it is nearly twilight. In the bleachers Leon finds his mother seated, with her warmest smile waiting. She stands and approaches her son.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Did you see my last goal? And Gareth’s overhead kick, boy. That was something”.

Leon’s mother:

“Yes. You both were outstanding. Though I have noticed it works better when you create the room for Gareth and he almost always manages to convert your passes to goals. Possession isn’t Gareth’s strongest point and patience isn’t yours; a good portrayal of your personalities, I think”.

Leon laughs good-naturedly.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“That is very true, I think”.

Leon’s mother:

“What on earth have the two of you been doing all this time in the shower, I am wondering”.

Leon-at-thirteen:

“Oh. Arguing and killing”.

Leon’s mother gives a non-committal giggle as she heaves a bag from beneath her chair and puts it on her lap.

Leon’s mother:

“I brought you your things. How can you just show up for a stay over at someone’s house without a shred of preparation is beyond me”?

Leon smiles as he takes the bag and Mrs. Blackwell gets up and they both descend the stands into the parking lot. They hug for a long moment before she gets into her vehicle. She turns on the engine and reverses the car out of the lot before driving off on the road, giving her son one final wave. Leon waves back, standing in the darkening parking lot as she drives away.

The moment: when it is subtly dark but the night-lights are not turned on, yet. The last rays of the sun catch the glimmering pentagram on his neck that snaked out during the wave back.

The scene morphs a fourth time:

Rothschild Manor: “Gareth’s quarters” - in a room he calls his “study”. Leon and Gareth, now age fourteen, lounge on high-backed tufted chairs. A great quantity of Chelsea F.C. posters, gathered over the years, every Chelsea hero on the field. The boys are in the middle of some serious conversation. Leon is sprawled beneath two photographs: Leon and Gareth, in the first photograph, sport aloft some trophy, the rest of their teammates surrounding them, yet only peripherally. The second photograph is newer: Gareth and Karen, his head resting against hers and more inclined than hers towards him so that his is almost a profile, a secretly or subtly blushing. Gareth sits on perhaps an heirloom, and inherited - the style or the furniture – both, it seems.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Father says I cannot continue Math for a professional degree once I start college, after high school”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“There must be an enlightening reason, I am sure”.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Since I would have to take up the family business, it is prudent to pursue a more worthwhile combination: something that includes Accounts and Economics. So, pure Math is out of the question”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“So what is your family’s business? Dishtowels, hotels or toilet seats”?

Gareth-at-fourteen: (*chuckling*)

“Our business is to make money”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“Err... that is the ultimate outcome, of course, but one needs to do something to make that outcome possible. Like my father is an assistant professor at King’s and so on. So what does he do, your – I won’t add a complimenting adjective – father?”

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“He makes money. That is his profession”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“Does he make money on fields or on trees? Oh, mines - probably”?

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Take your pick.

The money is double than the last night in the morning and four times by the evening; that is how it grows.

We probably have more money than many small countries”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“I get it now. So this is what you brag, in front of Karen.

I mean, she is such a brilliant girl, pretty and funny and well read – and I always think if any of my girlfriends were like that we would never split up” –

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“You humour me, Leon Blackwell. Tell me, truly, how many of that string of one-month- girlfriends did you actually know the favourite colour of? Or the birth dates of and countless such tiny details that responsible boyfriends are supposed to know”?

Leon-at-fourteen:

“Don’t divert the topic, Gareth Rothschild. I have just uncovered what makes a damn amazing girl so steadily cling to a guy as boring as you”.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Err... maybe because I am an ideal boyfriend, I think: rich, handsome, down to earth and sincere”?

He emphasizes the last word very emphatically for Leon’s understanding.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“You listen to opera, for heaven’s sake, and take her to dull, sordid and filthily rich restaurants and theatres for dates. It is the twenty-first century, for crying out loud. Dance clubs and cinemas have replaced the things our grandparents used to do... The only reason I can think as to why a damn beautiful girl like her would be wasting herself on you is because you probably bragged on the first date that you can buy Dubai if you wanted to”.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“If just one of your one-month-girlfriends find you handsome, down-to-earth and sincere, then she has my sympathies”.

Leon mock-laughs and throws a cushion at Gareth, which he catches and flings back at Leon, like a redundant joke-line, repeated.

“Come. I want to show you something”.

Gareth gets up and switches on all the possible lights of the study: it is much larger than it appeared initially; every corner is now illuminated. Gareth particularly scans the corner recesses for Mr Pocket before bolting the doors of his study.

He then kneels to remove an expensive piece of carpet strategically placed. No markings to aid the memory - it is never advisable to mark these things.

He begins to count, something.

Finally he pushes on a plank of wood several floorboards wide, working somehow on the internal screws and wheels. It caves in to reveal a chamber below, dimly lit or so it appears from above –

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“As above, so below”!

Gareth jumps in, and a second later: the expectant thud on the floor below; body and stone. Leon keeps standing at the edge, looking down, a childish insecurity he would never admit to, creeping in.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“How do we get back up here”?

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“There is a way. Trust me. There is”.

Leon jumps in, and perhaps the pressure on the floorboard releases or some internal machinations controlled from down below, the floorboards swing back into place, sealing that connection with the world above quite definitely.

Down below: the slight echo of a room disused: and as Leon catches his bearings enough to register it; it is an exact replica of Gareth's study save for a narrow bed with cushions and coverings where the lounging couch is located above – oh, the exactness of it. He goes around, now properly exploring with Gareth looking intently at him; waiting for his verdict.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“It is a refuge. I can for hours ‘mysteriously disappear’ down here and no one knows. It is a place where I will find myself if I return to it with no sense of self at all”.

Leon's attention is caught by a life-size poster of Ferenc Puskas and Sandor Kocsis together, pre-match and cropped off from the rest of the team. It bears Leon's inscription: “To Gareth, From Leon”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“I can't believe you still have this”.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Well, I do”.

Leon's attention once again engaged by something else: a photograph on Gareth's study table: his father, with his arm around a woman, only slightly shorter than him and laughing enthusiastically. They both are frozen forever in the act of clinking together glasses of rare, exotic wine. The woman's head is inclined, her face as exotic as the wine: bubbling, effervescent; her pendant is the letter ‘M’.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“Who is this”?

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“My father with his sister – my aunt – Emma Rothschild”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“I see. I haven't seen her around the estate. Is she dead”?

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Yes. She was a beautiful person; a true friend – before all that blood traitor raucous”.

He sits down on a chair to compose himself all the while Leon peers closely at the photograph.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“How old is she in this photograph”?

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Twenty-four, perhaps... twenty-five, I don’t know” –

Leon-at-fourteen:

“So you haven’t told me why you are showing me this secret space”.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“It makes two places that only we know about. There should be seven in total”.

Leon-at-fourteen:

“And here come your superstitions and numerology and lucky numbers”.

Gareth laughs.

Gareth-at-fourteen:

“Hear hear”.

He crosses the study length to an apparently solid piece of wall, unadorned, and pushes it. It gives way, like a light door very craftily blended, that opens onto the grassy slopes of an extensive garden.

“You see? I can pretend I was in the garden all along.

And I think it is an excellent day for practice, don’t you”?

A football sails past him into the garden, picked up and kicked by Leon Blackwell, displaying - wordlessly and elaborately - that he agrees.

The scene morphs a fifth time:

Rothschild Manor, Gareth’s study. Leon and Gareth are now on the edge of adulthood: age twenty. They stand opposite, a table between them: a proper argument is brewing. Gareth scowls. Leon paces tersely.

Leon-at-twenty:

“I don’t understand... how can I make her believe? ‘Believing’ has suddenly become so important... She just keeps refusing me”.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“And why has this become so important for you, I have some trouble coming to understand. She has been refusing you for half a year now – roughly more. Why don’t you try another girl”?

Leon-at-twenty:

“I can’t”.

Suddenly very vulnerable

“Because I love her”.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“Really? What do you know about her, let’s begin with that: her name is Fehmin Ashton and she is a double major, History of Politics and Contemporary Literature, whose hometown is York. She isn’t pretty enough, according to your usual standards.

I can pick out for you ten other girls you can pursue”–

Leon-at-twenty:

“Ten other girls of that description? Political Thought and Intellectual History And English Literature double major. I would congratulate you if you even manage one”.

Another deep breath

“I am serious, Gareth”.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“So am I”.

They glare at one another.

Leon-at-twenty:

“There is something about her – Or perhaps there is everything about her. I will have her or none”.

He is visibly angry now: Gareth.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“Leon, this is very ridiculous. Some may-fair type of theatrical ridiculous. She does not want you, has in fact made this point quite clear but your obsession on trying to win her is” –

Leon-at-twenty:

“I might be wrong, Gareth Rothschild, but I think it was you who endlessly tutored me on fidelity. Or was it someone else? I forget”...

Gareth-at-twenty:

“I did, but” –

Leon-at-twenty:

“I see it now. You have something against her and against me pursuing her” –

Gareth takes his turn at feverishly pacing. Leon’s turn to stop, a stability reached.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“No” –

Leon-at-twenty:

“I don’t want to add the obvious Gareth but – you are lying. What is it about her?”

Gareth-at-twenty:

“It is nothing”.

Leon-at-twenty:

“Look at me and say that and I will believe you”.

Gareth looks up at him for a brief moment, it fails: the audacity – whose? – He bursts into a tirade well-kept in control for a good long time, it is very clear.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“Don’t you see? Don’t you understand? She is Emma Rothschild’s daughter. She is a blood traitor. You can’t be with her. You simply cannot. Leon? Are you listening to me”?

Leon-at-twenty:

“Yes”.

Gareth-at-twenty:

“She is a blood traitor. She is – just forget her”.

Leon-at-twenty:

“Gareth, your family judgements mean nothing to me, haven’t I always been clear on that? I can’t forget her. How can you even ask that of me”?

He draws in a deep breath – Gareth: the final card: would he play it? And if that fails too, what then?

Gareth-at-twenty:

“Leon” –

Leon-at-twenty:

“Why is it so difficult for you to understand, Gareth, that I lack imagination here too”?

Gareth’s eyes widen – it is not that he did not expect this card to be played; it is only that he never expected this card to be played.

Leon strides from the room, significantly triumphant. Still in shock, Gareth appears frozen by Leon’s words. All stage light then goes blue, before dimming into darkness.

On the first cinema screen: The hospital room is being cleared, every trace of Gareth removed to ready the room for a new patient.

On the second cinema screen: Leon kneels in prayer, the protégé cross dangling. On him, one floodlight is left lit. The stadium is deserted. Where the starting whistle is sounded – at centre point – is a football, next to Leon. His own mystic religion assumes a form in motion as he kicks the ball. The solitary match at midnight begins. All spectacular moves appear bizarre in isolation but not comical as he repeatedly scores on an undefended goal.

On both cinema screens: The dark blue of the hour before the dawn, when both Gareth and Leon, knocked silly on the sidewalk, hail a random streetcar to stop. The lamppost is out of order. Gareth's battery is untarnished, Leon's phone even more so. A quick exchange with the operator of the streetcar operator, who uses his phone to call for help. Rubbing of the wounds make them look presentable... A mutual story concocted to cover up most of the inquiries. But what follows is even more hilarious as an ambulance arrives, rounding them in. A matronly nurse and emergency staff, and a full week in the infirmary... The invented story takes only minutes to spread. Gareth in hospital bed says: "I hope one day we can appreciate this moment"...

Curtains fall.

End of Act Three.