THE CENSOR KEEPS A COPY

A HISTORY OF THE PLEASURE OF TAKING THINGS AWAY

DAVID BOLES

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David Boles

David Boles Books Writing & Publishing, New York

The Censor Keeps a Copy: A History of the Pleasure of Taking Things Away

by David Boles

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The events at the bookstore counter are the author's own account of an afternoon reported to him by the man it happened to; the names of the persons, the store, and the town are withheld at the author's option, and the account is dated only as twenty years ago, give or take.

The complete and current list of the author's books is kept at boles-books.com.

For Janna, and for the child at the bare shelf.

As good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye.

John Milton, Areopagitica, 1644

Puritanism: the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.

H.L. Mencken, The American Mercury, January 1925

The equivalent of treating dandruff by decapitation.

Frank Zappa, testimony to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate, September 19, 1985

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Movement I

The Reward

CHAPTER 1

The Forensic High

One afternoon twenty years ago, give or take, a friend of mine walked into a bookstore he knew well and found a new display standing just inside the door. He went into that store often. It was a Mormon bookstore, an independent living on the trade of the Latter-day Saint wards around it, and my friend belonged to that trade twice over, as a customer and as a lay officer of the church the store served. From Monday through Friday he worked in technology and kept a company's hours; on Sundays he presided over a congregation, because he was, as I understood it then, the bishop of his ward. The store and the man were made for each other. Its shelves carried the scriptures and lesson manuals his calling used, the fiction and children's books his ward's families read, and the rest of its small stock, and he bought from all of it. The display that day was for Goosebumps, the series of paperback horrors for children written by R.L. Stine, the books with the dripping green logo. Scholastic had launched the series as a monthly line in July of 1992 with Welcome to Dead House and run the original sequence to sixty-two titles by December of 1997, so a rack of them by the door was a standing order with the reading public. The Haunted Mask was there, and Night of the Living Dummy, and The Werewolf of Fever Swamp, rows of copies at a child's price. My friend did what a regular customer

does: he asked the owner how the books were moving. The owner said they were selling well, and then he said the sentence the afternoon turns on. Those sales, he told my friend, were keeping the store alive.

What the calling meant, I knew then only in outline, and I have since read the outline in the church's own words. A ward is a congregation of a few hundred members, two to five hundred on the church's newsroom page, and its bishop is its presiding officer, the holder, in the handbook's terms, of the priesthood keys to lead the work of the church in the ward, its presiding high priest and its common judge. He oversees the ward's records, its finances, and its meetinghouse. The callings through which the whole congregation runs are his to extend, the volunteer assignments the church relies on, since it describes lay ministry as one of its defining characteristics: members commonly give five to ten hours a week to a calling, and a bishop may give fifteen to thirty. He serves about five years in the office. The office carries no salary, so he keeps his career and his family while he serves; the church's newsroom says the bishop earns his own living and receives no pay of any kind for his service in the Church. That is the shape of the calling: a layman with a day job and a congregation, appointed without campaigning, unpaid by design, carrying a ward's spiritual and physical needs as his primary responsibility for half a decade. Twenty years ago I could not have quoted a line of any of it. I knew the shape from the man himself, who kept a company's hours all week and a congregation's on Sundays and carried both without visible strain. I set the office down here in the church's own language so that what happened at the counter can be read against the office's actual powers, which are considerable inside a ward and which end,

on paper, at the ward's edge.

Above the ward sits the stake, and above the bishop sits the stake president. A stake, in the handbook's definition, is composed of multiple wards, two to five thousand members on the newsroom's page, and it is led by a stake president, who provides guidance to the bishops and other leaders of the stake. He serves with two counselors and a high council of twelve, typically for about nine years, and he calls one man in each ward to serve as bishop. Between the two offices runs one of the church's most consequential pieces of paper. The temple recommend, the card that admits a member to the temple, carries two signatures: a member of the bishopric interviews the member and signs, and a member of the stake presidency interviews the member and signs. A ward's shepherd answers for the worthiness of his people, and the stake's president co-signs the answer. None of this moved that afternoon, and the church's silence is a fact I want stated plainly at the start. No order came down. No handbook sends a bishop out to police a bookseller's shelves, and nothing of the kind happened here. The structure matters for a different reason: it tells you what a merchant hears when a bishop mentions the stake president. He hears the name of the office above his customer's office, an office whose goodwill reaches a store's livelihood by way of the wards around it, and he does the arithmetic a man does when the cost of testing a threat runs higher than the cost of obeying a hint. The hint is enough. That is what the structure is for at a counter, in the hands of one man who has borrowed it for an afternoon.

The store itself needs a word, from the trade record, because the owner's answer only pays if you understand his business. A Mormon bookstore is a specialty retailer with a

defined readership, the members of the wards within driving distance, and its stock answers to that readership: scripture and study aids, lesson manuals, church history, fiction written to the market's standards, children's books, music, the small hardware of a devotional home. The margins are an independent bookseller's margins, and the customer base is narrower than most, since a family that leaves the church leaves the store's market entirely, while a family in good standing is worth years of steady purchases across every shelf. Into that trade, in the middle of the 1990s, came a children's series that would sell, at its peak, more than four million copies a month. Stine has said the books grew with no advertising at all, carried reader to reader by what he called the secret kids network, and the Wall Street Journal would eventually call him a master of safe scares, a phrase the publisher liked well enough to keep in its press kit. Safe scares: the trade's own verdict on the content was that the fear was the kind a child could handle, and the sales were the kind a store could live on. The librarians who track challenges place the series fifteenth among the hundred most challenged books of the 1990s, with Alvin Schwartz's Scary Stories at the top; the list for the decade that followed put another children's fantasy, a boy wizard's, first. The objection was already a standing institution when my friend walked in. When the owner told him those sales were keeping the store alive, he was reading his ledger aloud, and my friend was standing in front of the ledger with the weight of his calling behind him.

My friend pressed him on content. I was not in the store, and I set the exchange down as he reported it to me, proudly, within the week. He had looked over the titles and he knew what the books held, the ghosts and the mon-

sters and the children who meet them alone, and he told the owner what he had concluded. The series, he said, was blasphemous: an invitation to the occult at a child's price. The word occult does the lifting it always does at such counters. A paperback about a mask that will not come off is, to one reader, a ghost story with a sting in it; to my friend it was a doorway, and a doorway stood open in a store his ward's children walked through. He let the owner understand that if the titles stayed on the shelf, a report would go to the stake president. Weigh what that sentence cost each man. For the one who said it, a breath. For the one who heard it, a choice between a line of sales he had just described as survival and the goodwill of the structure behind his best customers, between finding out whether a bishop would carry a report upward and quietly clearing a shelf. No vote was taken. No committee met. Nothing came from the stake, and I do not believe anything was ever going to: the church's offices had no errand in that store, and the errand belonged to my friend alone, with the stake's name riding along as ballast. He was one man with a private judgment about children's paperbacks, and by borrowing a larger name he made the judgment weigh like a ruling. The whole record of taking runs on that move, and it fits inside a single afternoon.

He gave it a week. When he came back, the display was gone, the shelf where the green spines had stood was bare, and the owner was distant and cold. The transaction had closed. The series that was keeping the store alive had been removed from the store, by the store, under no order anyone could appeal, and the man whose hint had cleared it answered the silence in the only way his conscience asked: he bought a couple of books. To make up the difference was

his own phrase for the purchase, offered in the telling, and I have had twenty years to hear it. Two paperbacks against a line of monthly sales the owner had called survival. He paid at the counter like a satisfied customer, and the owner took the money, because a merchant cannot refuse the coin of the man who has just cost him a shelf; the coldness was all the protest the afternoon allowed. Then my friend came to me and told the story. He told it the way another man tells you his side won: the investigation, the verdict, the result. He was proud, and the pride was the point of the telling, the mood he expected me to share, nothing he felt any need to hide. I did not share it. I have also never lost its outline, because the pride was clean. He felt he had done a piece of work in the world and done it well. The word I settled on, years later, is forensic. He had investigated the books, prosecuted them at the counter, and won the case, and he walked out of that store on the high of having won.

I was an author and a publisher then, as I am now, and the story landed on me with a weight I did not expect. I was grieved, and I was offended, and I remember being surprised by the size of both. The books themselves had lost nothing. Stine's series had long since passed a hundred million copies by that afternoon and has passed four hundred million since, and no display in one small store was going to bend the arithmetic of the secret kids network. The damage was closer to home and harder to price. A man had reached into the lives of every family who shopped at that store and removed an option those families had never asked him to weigh, and the removal was invisible: no family would ever know an option had stood there and been taken, which is the sort of taking that leaves no victim able to complain. He had reached into a merchant's ledger, on the merchant's

own testimony, and cut the line that was paying the rent, and he had done both in the length of one conversation, and he had gone home pleased. The children of his ward came out of the afternoon with a new errand, whether he intended it or not: the haunted mask would have to be found somewhere else, it would be found, and the finding would teach the oldest lesson a cleared shelf teaches, that a forbidden thing becomes the thing worth finding. Our friendship ended over the story, by degrees and then for good. For years I could not have told you why the afternoon stayed with me like an unsolved thing. I can now. He had described a reward, had described it with the clean conscience of a man collecting one, and the reward is the thing worth twenty years of turning over.

Every ban is a trade that pays the taker on the spot and bills strangers later. The pleasure is real, it is cheap, and it is borrowed. Name the trade's rule Law One: the ban is cheap for the taker and paid for by strangers, and the taker's pleasure, not the reader's protection, is the product; the removal is the receipt. My friend's costs are all on the record he gave me: one conversation, one hint, one week of waiting, two paperbacks afterward. Against those costs he collected a verdict, a cleared shelf, and a feeling he was still carrying when he told me; the bill went out to people he never met: the owner, whose income line was cut in the same moment he confessed it was survival; the families of the ward, who lost an option without losing a vote, since no one had asked them; the children, who inherited the errand of finding elsewhere. The cheapness belongs to the design, and the first instrument has the name I settled on and have kept: the forensic high. Investigated book, prosecuted counter, won case: the whole apparatus of a trial

compressed into an errand and felt as one clean rush. The high is collected at the moment of removal, which is why the removal is the receipt. Nothing downstream can refund it. The books sold elsewhere, the children found their way to the mask, the owner stayed cold, and the win was already banked. A win of this kind has no loss condition. The series selling four hundred million copies in spite of his afternoon does not diminish his afternoon; the children finding the books elsewhere does not reverse it. A forensic high is self-certifying, because the verdict it celebrates was delivered by the celebrant, and no outcome in the world can overturn a court that never sat. Every other moral labor I know asks for years and pays in installments. This one asks for an afternoon and pays in full at the register, and a reward that cheap and that immediate is the most addictive kind there is.

The second instrument has an old English name. Conscience money is what the Exchequer called the anonymous sums that tax cheats mailed in to feel square with the Crown, small payments against large omissions, sent unsigned so that the Crown had the money and the cheat had the feeling, and the name earns its revival on that counter. The two books fail every test of payment. They were not restitution to the owner, whose loss was a standing line of monthly sales and who received, once, the price of two paperbacks. Nor were they an apology; the telling acknowledges no injury. They were a token my friend paid himself, a fee that discharged the afternoon’s small debt to his own self-regard, and the exchange rate tells you everything about the currency: two paperbacks for the feeling of having protected a ward’s children, at a store whose survival line he had just cut. Conscience money stays cheap by design, be-

cause its purpose is to let the payer keep both the prize and the picture of himself as a fair man. The owner's coldness measures how the payment landed on the other side of the counter. It did not land. A merchant knows a sale from a settlement, and he knew which of the two had just been rung up, and the man who rang it up walked out feeling even. That evenness is part of the reward: the afternoon cost him nothing he noticed, and the small sum he did pay bought him the right to feel generous about it. The instrument turns up wherever taking is done politely, in prefaces and stickers and seals as readily as in paperbacks, and it is always denominated in the taker's own coin.

The third instrument is the one that did the work. My friend was a committee of one. He had no authority over the store, no office that reached its shelves, no majority behind his judgment about the occult, and on his own name he could have accomplished nothing: the owner would have heard an opinion and sold the next copy. What he had was the stake's name, borrowed for the afternoon, and the borrowed name turned an opinion into a consequence. That is the borrowed committee, the oldest instrument of the three. A single taker invokes a body large enough to be feared, the stake, the society, the state, the deity, and the invocation does the seizing while the invoked body stays silent and, most often, unaware. The church's silence that afternoon is a fact, and I state it as one. No order came from any office of the church. No handbook deputizes bishops over bookstores. For all anyone knows, the stake president never heard a word of it. The borrowing worked because it was plausible: the guidance line from stake to ward, the two signatures on a recommend, the goodwill a shop like that one lives on, all of it made the hint credible enough

that no one had to find out whether it was real. There is the instrument's genius and its cowardice. The committee never convenes, so it never corrects the borrower, and the borrower carries no title into the store, so the body's actual rules never reach him. And the borrowing is free. The stake loses nothing by lending a name it never knew was lent, the bishop loses nothing by spending it, and the entire cost lands on the one party who was never consulted and the one party who could not refuse. One man, one name on loan, one shelf.

What the owner did has its own taxonomy, because bans succeed through compliance, and compliance comes in two species. The first is the clerk who wants to go home, the functionary for whom a removal is one task among many, executed to end the shift, the shelf cleared with the emotional investment of a man taking out the trash. The second is the merchant who cannot afford to test the hint. He is the more interesting species and the more common one, because he complies with open eyes. He knows the request is one man's taste dressed in a larger name. The larger body, he suspects, would never back the demand. Finding out, he computes correctly, would cost more than surrender, and he clears the shelf while the suspicion is still warm. The owner that afternoon was the second species. He had said aloud, minutes before surrendering it, what the series meant to his store, so he made the cut knowing its price, and his coldness a week later is the signature of the species: compliance without agreement, obedience with the objection preserved in the only currency left to him, which was manner. Ask why he did not refuse, and the answer prices the afternoon. Refusal was the one move with a price tag on it. A man with a real exit argues; the owner went cold

because the exit was priced past his means, and a yes given at that price is the tell that the transaction was coercion wearing the costume of consent. Neither species supplies a villain, and the record of taking would starve without both. Every emptied shelf passes through one of these two pairs of hands, the tired or the cornered. The taker's skill is the arrangement of costs so that the other man's cheapest move is surrender; persuasion never enters it.

One more fact rode the afternoon, and my friend supplied it without noticing. To press the owner on content, he had to know the content. He had read the haunted mask and the living dummy and the werewolf of Fever Swamp, the whole series by his own account, the way a bishop reads what a ward is reading, and had survived them unharmed, which means the books judged too dangerous for the children of his ward had passed through the mind of the man removing them and had done him no injury he reported. He read the occult at a child's price and walked out with two paperbacks. The children, in his judgment, could not be trusted to do as much. An afternoon like this cannot stand without that shape. The danger the books posed was, by his own account, real enough to justify cutting a merchant's income and a ward's options, and it was a danger he had handled and survived. Either the books were harmless, in which case the shelf was cleared for nothing, or they were dangerous, in which case the danger was one the strong may read and the weak may not, with my friend enrolled among the strong by his own appointment. I leave the fact where he left it, in plain view, because it asks nothing from me: every act of taking begins with a taking-in, the judge reads what the judged may not, and the exemption is issued so quietly that the exempt man never hears the paper slide

across the desk. The shelf was cleared by the one person in the store who had read the series. The owner stocked books; the families bought them; the bishop alone inspected the goods, found them fit for himself and unfit for everyone younger. That is the afternoon's smallest detail and the one that scales: a ban always issues its first license to the banner, and the copy he judged from stays in his keeping.

A word about the teller, because the story is one man's, told once, twenty years ago, and the man cannot answer for himself, because I will not name him. What I claim for the story is narrow. I was there for the telling, and I have carried it since, and the parts I did not witness I have marked as his report: the exchange at the counter, the sentence about the stake president, the week, the bare shelf. The office he held I have checked against the church's own handbook and newsroom pages as they stand in 2026, and where my memory of the structure was loose I have said so, with the phrase as I understood it then doing duty for a whole method. For the trade figures I have the publisher's own counts. The anonymity is no decoration. It is the condition of the telling and the remainder of a friendship, and it costs the story nothing that matters, because the evidence is the teller's pride, and pride of that cleanliness cannot be rehearsed backward; a man does not invent, twenty years later, a boast about an afternoon that went some other way. What one afternoon can prove is sufficient for the weight I put on it: a single man, armed with a borrowed name and opposed by no one, can empty a shelf that strangers stocked and strangers bought from, can pay himself two paperbacks for the trouble, and can walk home pleased. The afternoon happened once. The instruments inside it are older than any church and newer than the current school-

board form, and at scale they are documented on paper by the takers themselves, which is where the record takes over from memory.

Price the afternoon now for the people who were not in it. The owner first: a line of sales he had called survival, gone in a week, replaced by two paperbacks and a customer whose visits now cost him something. The families next: an option removed from their lives by a man they never met, acting on a judgment they never heard argued, in a store they trusted because it was theirs. Then the children, who are the bill's final address. Somewhere in that ward was a boy or girl who had read three of the green paperbacks and was saving for the fourth, and who came in the next week, or the week after, and found bare board where the display had stood. The child is my invention, and I say so plainly: no such boy or girl is on the record, and the record's rule is to mark its figures as figures. No one will have explained it. A cleared shelf carries no sign; the lesson arrives anyway, and the lesson is that the thing worth taking is the thing worth having, that somewhere past the ward's edge sit books the bishop feared, and that fear, attended closely, is a map. The children of that congregation learned from one afternoon what the curious learn from every index ever published: the list of the forbidden is the reading list that works. They would find the mask at the mall or the school book fair, and read it with the extra charge the afternoon had added, the charge a book carries when someone with a title tried to keep it from them. I do not claim the afternoon ruined anyone. I claim it taught, that what it taught was the opposite of what the teacher intended, and that the teacher collected his reward in full either way, which is the whole trouble. The pleasure of taking is paid on delivery, ahead of

results, and no result has ever been invented that can claw the payment back.

The afternoon ends where it happened, at the counter, twenty years ago. Gone from the doorway, the display has left the shelf that held the green spines bare, and somewhere in the ward a child has not yet come looking for it. The owner stands at his register, and the arithmetic of the bare shelf runs ahead of him: a season of small losses, titles that will go unordered because the shelf they lived on is closed, and with the particular loneliness of a merchant who has just learned what his welcome is conditional on. He will go on selling the manuals and the histories, and he will weigh, the next time a display of anything arrives, what a bishop might think of it, which is how a hint outlives its afternoon. My friend is finishing the errand. Two paperbacks lie on the counter between the men, ordinary stock, a history, a manual, something for the shelf at home, and the owner rings them up because ringing them up is what is left to him. The register drawer opens. My friend reaches for his change, and the coins land in his palm with the small clean sound of a settled account, and he will carry them home beside the feeling: two paperbacks in a bag, the ward protected, the difference made up. The drive home is short, and the evening ahead of him is the evening of a man who has done his duty. Nothing about the afternoon was large. One man, one hint, one shelf, two books, a handful of coins. Twenty years on, I have found no larger one: every shelf emptied since, by anyone, for any reason offered in the language of protection, has been that afternoon again with the figures moved. The hand closes on the change.

CHAPTER 2

Somebody, Somewhere, May Be Happy

In a laboratory at the University of Zurich, in an experiment published in August of 2004, volunteers lay down one at a time inside a positron emission tomography scanner to play a mean little game about money and trust. The game was simple. A subject entrusted money to a stranger; the stranger could honor the trust or pocket the whole of it; and the subject, having been cheated, was then offered the chance to punish the stranger, at a price. Punishment came in two forms. In one form the subject could register disapproval free of charge and it cost the stranger nothing, a symbolic slap, the wagging of a finger by wire. In the other form the subject spent money from his own stake and the stranger's winnings shrank in proportion: francs out of the subject's pocket to take francs out of the cheater's. The whole exchange ran at a distance, decisions entered on a screen, the stranger anonymous and elsewhere, so that nothing about the afternoon could be personal except the decision itself. While the subject lay there deciding, the scanner watched the blood flow in his brain by way of water labeled with a short-lived isotope of oxygen, an isotope whose two-minute half-life makes it safe to use and quick to read, and the experimenters watched the scanner. The question they had brought to the machine was the plain one:

what does a person get out of punishing someone? Not what punishment accomplishes, because everyone already knew what it accomplished in the game, which was nothing; the subject would never see the stranger again, and no future stranger would learn any lesson from the fine. The question was what the punishing felt like from the inside, and the machine was there to catch the feeling in the act.

The scanner's answer came in two parts, and both parts matter. When subjects punished effectively, spending their own money to cut the cheater's payoff, a region deep in the brain called the dorsal striatum ran more active than it did when those subjects punished symbolically, free of charge and free of effect. The dorsal striatum belongs to the circuitry that processes rewards, the satisfaction that follows goal-directed action, the felt click of getting what you went after, and the experimenters, Dominique de Quervain, Ernst Fehr, and their colleagues, writing in Science in the issue of August 27, 2004, read the activation as anticipated satisfaction: the punisher's brain was tasting the punishment in advance, the way the rest of the brain tastes a payoff. Then came the dose. The stronger the activation, the more money the subject was willing to spend on punishing, so the satisfaction and the price rose together, each one an index of the other. In that issue of the journal the neuroscientist Brian Knutson supplied the commentary, and his title asked the question the data had earned, in two words and a question mark: Sweet revenge? Hold the finding steady, because everything that follows in this accounting hangs on it, and the account never needed the word censorship at all, only money, a stranger, and a choice. Given the chance to punish a stranger who had cheated them, at a cost to themselves, with no possible benefit to themselves or to anyone

else, people paid. They paid reliably, and they paid with appetite, and the appetite is the finding. The reward does not wait on results, because the reward is the act itself, felt in advance and collected on the spot.

The money in the game matters, because the price of the feeling is the evidence. Every subject received a fee for showing up and a stake to play with, and the punishment rounds offered a straight trade: hand the experimenters some of your stake and they will reduce the cheater's winnings. Nothing about the trade could be recouped. The cheater did not know the punisher, would never meet the punisher, and could not be deterred by the punishment, since the game was already over. A subject who punished was buying something with no exchange value, and what he was buying was the cheater's loss. The experiment had a predecessor, and the predecessor is the sturdier result. In 2002, Fehr and Simon Gächter had published in Nature a set of public-goods games run with Zurich undergraduates, games in which players could contribute to a common pot or free-ride on the contributors, and in which, after the round, each player could spend money to punish the free-riders. The free-riders were punished, round after round, by players who gained nothing material from punishing and who knew they would be rematched with strangers, so that even reputation could not explain the spending. Every tightening of the design left it standing; take away tomorrow and people still paid to punish today. Its authors called it altruistic punishment, a phrase built to make the economics profession sit still: altruistic, because it cost the punisher and benefited the group; punishment, because it was still one person paying to make another person worse off. The phrase has held, and the finding with it, through

two decades of repetition in other labs with other stakes, which is more than can be said for much of what the social sciences printed in those years.

Seventy-nine years before the Zurich scanner, H.L. Mencken had already written the finding down as a joke, and the joke is the older and more portable tool. In the January 1925 issue of The American Mercury, in the Clinical Notes column he conducted with George Jean Nathan, Mencken defined Puritanism as the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy. Nine words in the definition, and they have outlived every book the Puritans' descendants ever managed to suppress. The line is usually credited to A Book of Burlesques, a 1920 collection that does not contain it, which is what happens to a line everyone remembers; the magazine page is the true one. A variant from 1915 circulates under the Canadian reformer Nellie McClung's name, so the thought was in the air, and it was Mencken who gave it the shape that stuck, offering it as mockery, one newspaper man's gibe at the moral temperature of his country. Mockery, though, is a claim about motive, and this one made a testable prediction. If the fear is the point, then the object of the fear is incidental: what the Puritan cannot abide is the other person's happiness, and removing that happiness will feel like something, will register as a gain, before and regardless of any good it does. That is a hypothesis about a reward. It says the reward exists, that it attaches to the taking itself, independent of the outcome, and that a man can collect it while making the world worse by his own accounting. Mencken offered the wisecrack and went back to work. The laboratories spent the next century catching up to him, and what they caught up to was the anatomy under the gibe, the reward the gibe

had described.

The sociology got there first, and it got there with field notebooks as its tools. In 1963 the sociologist Howard Becker published Outsiders, his study of deviance and the people who make a career of it, drawn from his years among dance musicians and his reading of the drug bureaus, and in it he named the figure the long record of taking keeps meeting at counters and microphones: the moral entrepreneur. Becker's entrepreneur comes in two species, and the split is the useful part. The rule creator believes a wrong exists and works to have a rule made against it; the rule enforcer takes the rule as his materials and works to have it applied. About the enforcer's trade, Becker was cool and exact. The enforcer must find violations the way a fisherman must find fish, because enforcement without violations is a boat without a catch, and his satisfaction at finding one is the trade paying out, no hypocrisy and no bad faith required. He does not invent the shortage and he does not need to; he needs only the rule, the warrant, and the supply of offenders the rule itself defines. A career of enforcement supplies its owner with occasions for the forensic high on a schedule, and the schedule explains the rhythm of the crusades in the record better than any crisis in the content does. The crusades recur because the career needs them, the way fishing seasons recur, and the content of each crusade, the comics or the records or the paperbacks, is the year's catch. Once you have seen the schedule you stop asking why this decade's panic chose this decade's books, and you start asking who draws a wage from the season.

Nine years after Becker, a sociologist working in London watched a seaside panic and gave the career its weather system. Stanley Cohen published Folk Devils and Moral Panics

in 1972, taking as his case the Mods and Rockers, two youth styles whose scuffles at English resorts in the middle 1960s were amplified, in the papers and then in the courts and Parliament, into a siege of the nation. The actual events were small: some scuffles, some damaged deck chairs, some frightened shopkeepers over a bank holiday weekend. The reported events were a collapse of the country's moral fiber, and the distance between the two is Cohen's subject. His sequence runs on rails: a group or a thing is identified as a threat to the nation's values, the press simplifies and amplifies, the authorities announce action, the public is invited to watch the action, and the cycle ends with the threat unlocated and the actors promoted. He called the amplified object a folk devil and the cycle a moral panic, and the terms have stuck because the cycle keeps running. What Cohen adds to the accounting is the crowd's cut. The forensic high, in his scheme, stops being a private wage earned by the entrepreneur and becomes a dividend, distributed by television and headline to everyone who joins the condemnation, and joining costs the price of an opinion. A moral panic is the borrowed committee scaled to a public: the nation's name invoked, the nation's attention collected, the bill sent to a handful of teenagers on a beach. Every player in the cycle is paid in attention or satisfaction, and the only players paying are the ones cast as the threat.

Two findings later, the picture sharpens, and the sharpening is worth more than the comfort it costs. In 2017 a team publishing in Scientific Reports separated the punishers into two kinds by what they did across two games. The altruistic kind spent their own money punishing strangers who broke the rules, the third-party violation no grievance of their own could explain, and behaved generously every-

where else. The spiteful kind rejected the unfair offers made to themselves, paid to make the low offerer worse off, and when the experimenters handed them a stranger's violation to punish, they passed; they behaved selfishly everywhere else. It was the spiteful kind who carried the larger left caudate, the reward region the Zurich scanner had caught in 2004, larger by volume on the structural scan, with the team's own caution printed beside it: volume is not activation, and no one has shown the bigger region firing harder. The team's reading of the finding needs no translator. Spiteful punishers, the paper says, anticipate pleasure from seeing their target suffer. Read the two studies together and they say something no apologist for the censor wants printed in a journal: the will to protect and the appetite for a target's pain separate in the laboratory, the appetite carries the marker, and the appetite never even reported for the protection shift. The forensic high, described now with a scanner's care, is a reward that arrives before any harm is prevented and arrives regardless of whether harm is prevented at all. Prevention is the pretext the high wears to the counter. The high itself is collected at the register, in francs or in the small coin of a cleared shelf, and the 2017 study's unkind suggestion is that the wiring behind it is cousin to spite, and the suggestion stands in the record with the journal's name on it.

Now the discipline, since the accounting must survive a hostile reader. Brain imaging is a small-sample science run on expensive afternoons, and the Zurich study scanned dozens of subjects, not thousands, each one a volunteer with a university nearby, which is a narrow slice of humanity to generalize from. Reverse inference is the second weakness, and it has a name because it has burned so many

readers of scanning studies: the dorsal striatum answers to many rewards, money and food and praise among them, so activity there during punishment proves a reward response and nothing narrower. The scanner cannot distinguish the taste of justice from the taste of winning, and honest researchers say so. The replication record across the imaging literature is uneven, and some celebrated findings from the scanner's first decade have shrunk under repetition, a few to nothing, and the field's own guardians have spent years saying so in print. None of this erases the scanner's evidence; it confines the evidence to what the evidence can carry. What has replicated, across labs and decades and countries, is the behavior: people pay to punish, they pay when it helps no one, and the paying tracks the appetite. The weight therefore sits on the games, with the scanner as their photograph. And the bridge the evidence needs is named in the open: the studies ran on cheating and its punishment, and the censor's work begins when the book is construed as the violation deserving the punishment; the bridge is the construal, and the construal is the borrowed committee's work. The claim that survives the discipline is the one Mencken made from his typewriter and Fehr's subjects made with their stakes: the punishment is its own reward, collected before any good is done, and collected even when no good is done. A school board does not need a PET scanner to run the assay; a bookstore counter runs it unaided. The scanner's contribution is the photograph, and the photograph is unflattering.

The neighboring literature corroborates, and it earns one honest paragraph. Psychologists have imaged the brain's reward circuitry while subjects watched the misfortunes of others, and the response tracks the targets peo-

ple resent: the envied, the cheating, the rival. The German language's word for the feeling is the one science uses, schadenfreude, joy at another's damage, and the imaging work on it sits in the neighborhood of the brain the Zurich study mapped. Nobody needed a scanner to know the feeling exists; every schoolyard knows it. The scanner's service is to show that the feeling is processed like other rewards, logged in the books of the brain as a gain, no different in kind from a wage or a win. Fold it into the findings and the forensic high's independence from outcomes stops being surprising. A reward wired to the sight of a cheater's loss does not ask whether any reader was protected, any child guarded, any community improved. It asks one question, whether the target suffered, and it pays when the answer is yes. That is why the deterrence talk heard at every microphone is beside the point even on its own terms, a justification attached to a reward that was already collected. The wage is paid at the act. If the punished author sells more copies the next year, the wage was still paid; if the cleared shelf empties a store, the wage was still paid. A reward that pays out on harm and never audits results will be reached for, by careerists and crowds alike, whenever a result is wanted and a stranger is available to bill, which is to say, at every counter and every microphone in the record.

The reward needs an audience when it goes public, and two philosophers have given the public form its name. Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke published Grandstanding in 2020, a study of moral talk used as self-promotion, and their finding fits inside a sentence: people denounce, in part, to be seen denouncing, and the seeing is the payout. Grandstanding, in their account, is moral display driven by the desire for recognition of one's own moral qualities, a

longing to be known as the kind of person who says the right thing, and it explains a feature of the record that pure conviction cannot: the denouncer prefers the public channel to the private one even when the private one would fix the problem faster. A letter home would protect one child; a microphone protects no one and pays everyone. Jonathan Haidt's moral psychology supplies the religious register of that engine. His research finds that human moral judgment runs on a small set of foundations, a handful of deep intuitions that cultures build their codes upon, and one of them is sanctity, the sense that some things are pure and some are contaminating, a sense older than any doctrine and easily dressed in any doctrine's clothes. Sanctity is the foundation that fires at a ghost story sold at a child's price. Put the three together and the school-board microphone is fully equipped: an entrepreneur with a career, a public with a free dividend, and a sanctity alarm that treats a paperback as a contaminant. The microphone is the Zurich rig rebuilt from folding chairs, and the stake is paid in applause, in nods from the back rows, in the small ovation of a motion carried.

Watch the citizen at the microphone and the whole laboratory is visible in miniature. The meeting is a school board's, the year is recent, and the citizen has a printout. He reads the forbidden passages aloud into the public record, and the room goes quiet in the way rooms do when everyone understands that something is being won, and the reading is the forensic moment staged for an audience: he has found the filth and he displays it, the man who had to look so that you would not have to. The passages have been stripped of their book, which is the method and also the pleasure, because a paragraph torn from a novel is the novel

at its most punishable, helpless context and all. The board will vote, the book will be pulled pending review, and the citizen will sit down with the visible satisfaction of a man who has done the community a service. Now run the Zurich assay over that satisfaction. What harm had been prevented at the moment he sat down? None that can be measured; the removal recruits the book's next readers, as it always has. What did the service cost him? An evening, a printout, and the price of gas to the meeting. What did he collect? The room's attention, the board's compliance, and the warm internal receipt the Zurich scanner caught the shape of in 2004. Mencken's definition fits over the door of that meeting room, because the fear on display is the haunting one, the fear that somewhere a child with a book may be happy in a way the citizen disapproves, and the removal of that happiness is the payment the citizen walks out with.

The pleasure, then, is measurable, and its measurement reads in plain units. Its price to the taker: one afternoon, one form, one microphone slot, one hint. Its wage: the forensic high, delivered at the moment of removal, unaffected by outcomes, proof against every downstream failure. The cost to everyone else: the shelf, the option, the rent line, the lesson taught to the children watching. Sixty years of social science soften none of this; they explain the mechanism, and the explanation is itself the indictment. Becker explains why the crusader never runs out of crusades, Cohen why the crowd enjoys the crusade, Tosi and Warmke why the crusader prefers a crowd, Haidt why the content so often smells of contamination, Fehr and Gächter and de Quervain why the punishment feels like something, and the 2017 refinement why it feels most like something when it helps least. None of them set out to explain the cen-

sor. They set out to explain punishment, panic, display, and disgust, and the censor fell out of the equations uninvited, which is how you know the explanation is true: it was not built to fit him, and it fits him. The censor of the old histories is a mystery, a man motivated by who knows what black well of hatred or fear. The censor of the laboratories is legible. He is a man buying a feeling with other people’s books, and the feeling is cheap because the books are not his, and the ledger is kept by strangers, and the measurement of all this requires no sympathy for him, which is the final usefulness of the science: it lets you understand the transaction while refusing it.

End at the counter of the laboratory, where the receipts were printed. A subject in Zurich came in off the street, lay in the scanner, played the game, was cheated by a stranger he would never meet, and was offered the chance to spend his own money hurting the stranger’s score. Many spent, and many more have spent in the versions of the game run since, in other labs, with other strangers, and the spending had no possible defense in terms of outcome, because the outcome was already settled and the stranger could learn nothing from the fine. The experimenters paid the subjects a fee for the afternoon, the subjects handed some of the fee back to purchase a punishment, and that is the whole account. What were they paid? A show-up fee and a stake, modest sums in francs, the going rate for lying still in a tube while science watched the blood move in their heads. What did they spend? A share of the stake, and in some versions all the rules allowed, on making a cheater poorer. Nobody made them spend it, and nobody would have blamed them for keeping it. The tube was warm, the fee was theirs to keep, the stranger was already gone, and the punishment

they bought changed nothing in the world except the balance of the stranger's winnings and the state of their own reward circuitry. Twenty centuries of sermons said the taking was a duty. The laboratory says it is a purchase. The receipt of the whole experiment fits in one line: they were paid for the afternoon, they spent part of the pay on a stranger's loss, and the satisfaction cost them nothing extra.

CHAPTER 3

The Nursery and the Maypole

In the fourth century before Christ, in the pages of Plato's Republic, Socrates designs a nursery, and he is cheerful about it. The scene is a conversation about justice that has wandered, the way the best conversations do, into the founding of a city from scratch, and the city needs soldiers, and the soldiers, the guardians, need educating, and education in the fourth century means stories. What shall the children of the guardians be taught? Socrates answers like a man planning a garden, and the garden plan is the first charter of the reward this history follows. Begin, he says, with the stories. The children will hear stories before anything else, and the stories will shape the men, so the stories must be controlled. There is no regret in the passage, no wincing, no sense of anything being sacrificed. The tone is the tone of a man clearing ground. Two millennia and some centuries of censorship later, the tone is the thing still worth attending to, because it never changes: the founder of the rational tradition proposes to purge the library of his city, and he does it in the mood of a man hanging a gate on a fence he is proud of. The proposal comes wrapped in worship for the poet it exiles, as the crowning scene will show, and its serenity is the evidence. A man who believes he is taking nothing of value can afford to be calm. What Socrates takes, he takes in the conviction that it weighs nothing, costs nothing, and

leaves the city better stocked than before. The conviction is the charter. And the Western record of taking things away opens here, in a nursery, with the gatekeeper smiling.

The purge list is specific, and its specificity is worth reading slowly, because everything on it is a delight someone loved. Out go the quarrels of the gods, Homer and Hesiod's tales of heaven's family at war with itself, because a guardian must believe the divine is good. The terrors of the underworld follow, the wailing rivers and the gibbering dead, because a guardian must not fear death. And out go the heroes' laments, Achilles keening over Patroclus, Priam groveling at Achilles' knees, because a guardian must master his grief. Jowett's translation gives the rule its flat administrative music: "some tales are to be told, and others are not to be told to our disciples from their youth upwards." Some, and others. The inventory keeps arriving at the door of the nursery: no gods behaving badly, no death made frightening, no great man undone by feeling. What is left for the children is a literature of good examples, steady men and a decent heaven, and Socrates is explicit that the telling matters more than the tale, since even the style of a story can smuggle in the wrong shape of soul. This is not an argument that the stories are false. Socrates grants they may be true and says the truth is no defense; a true story that softens a guardian is as unwelcome as a false one. Book Ten will come back for the poets a second time and exile them again as imitators, as if once were not enough. The measure is the use, and the use is measured by the city's needs, and the city, conveniently, is the one thing in the conversation that belongs to everyone and to no one, which makes it the ideal name to take things in.

Then comes the passage the whole chapter turns on, the

one that gives the philosopher's charter its coat of arms. Suppose, Socrates says, a man arrives in the city who can imitate anything, a poet of unlimited power, the kind of artist every city secretly wants. What shall the city do with him? It shall honor him to the skies. In Jowett's public-domain rendering, the citizens will fall down and worship him "as a sweet and holy and wonderful being," crown him with wool, anoint him with myrrh, tell him that "in our State such as he are not permitted to exist," and send him away to another city. Shorey's translation keeps for the city "the more austere and less delightful poet and tale-teller," which is the whole transaction in one adjective pair: the delightful one is walked to the border with honors, and the austere one stays to teach the children. Read the sentence aloud and it sounds like a festival program, a coronation folded into a banishment, which is what it is. A crown of wool, oil of myrrh, praise in the superlative, and exile. The city pays the poet in ceremony what it refuses to pay him in shelf space, and Socrates sees no cost in it at all, because the thing taken, in his accounting, is a luxury the city never needed. That is the charter's signature move, the move every taker since has inherited: the taking is dressed as an honoring, the loss is described as nothing, and the describer is pleased with himself. Twenty-four centuries later the move still works, because the reward of it is immediate and the bill, as always, goes to the people outside the room.

So what did the philosopher take? Itemize it, since the charter never does, and since the itemizing is the whole argument. He took the quarrels of heaven from the ears of children, and with them the Iliad's whole machinery of divine caprice, the poems the Greeks called their education. He took the frightening underworld, and with it the honest

picture of death the old poems carried, the one that taught a young man what he was staking. Gone with the rest went Achilles' grief and Priam's abasement, the two scenes in which the ancient world had shown its sons what loss looks like when it comes for the great. He took, in the person of the crowned poet, the possibility that a maker might answer to something other than the city's needs, which is to say, he took art's excuse for existing. He took the theater entire, the festival where the citizens wept together, since a people that weeps at Oedipus together is practicing a common life the nursery has no use for. And he described all of it as nothing, as a pruning, a tidying, the removal of weeds from a nursery bed. The committee he borrowed was the grandest one available, the city itself, justice itself, the good of everyone, and the borrowing is the charter's second legacy. A lone man's taste cannot purge a library; the city can, and the city can be invoked by anyone who talks about it long enough. Socrates talks about it beautifully, and the beauty has distracted readers for twenty-four centuries from the plain fact of the transaction: one class of guardian decides, another class of citizen is guarded, and the decider keeps for himself the austere pleasure of having decided.

The ancient world kept the answer to the nursery on the next shelf of the library, and the answer came from Plato's own student. Aristotle's Poetics, one generation later, reads tragedy as a machine for facing things: the audience watches the worst that can befall a man, feels the pity and the fear all the way through, and comes out the other side with the feeling rehearsed and spent, the famous catharsis. The word is the most fought-over in the Poetics, fought as purification, purgation, and clarification down the centuries, and this record takes its side in the open:

the rehearsal reading, tragedy as the gymnasium where the feeling is practiced at a survivable dose, the terrible met from a safe seat among one's neighbors. The dark story, on this account, is a training ground and the nursery is a fraud. The child who hears the terrible tale and survives it has practiced an emotion at a dose he chose, and the practice is the point, because the world contains wolves and the story contains a wolf that can be closed with the book. Aristotle does not sentimentalize the audience and does not fear the material, and the difference between his Athens and Socrates' city is the difference between a culture that trusts its children with the dark and a design that guards them from it. The two charters stand at the head of the whole record, and every counter and microphone since has picked one of them. One says the story is a rehearsal and the child gets stronger. The other says the story is a contaminant and the child must be spared. One of these has the better evidence, and the evidence will have its hearing in due course. What bears on the charters is plainer than evidence: the nursery charter was written by the cheerful man, and the cheerfulness is the tell of the reward underneath it.

Two thousand years later the second charter gets written, and it is written in a panic. London, the second of September, 1642: the King has raised his standard against his Parliament at Nottingham, Ireland is in revolt, and Parliament takes up, of all things, the theaters. The order's own words deserve the floor, because no paraphrase beats them. Citing the distressed estate of Ireland and the distracted estate of England, the fasting and prayer enjoined on the people, the ordinance reasons that "public sports do not well agree with public calamities," nor "public stage-plays with the seasons of humiliation," the one being "an exercise of

sad and pious solemnity," the ordinance says, the other being "spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious mirth and levity." While the sad causes continue, the order runs, "public stage plays shall cease and be forborne," and in their place the people are recommended to "repentance, reconciliation, and peace with God." Read the reasoning slowly, because it is the nursery charter translated into emergency. A time of public grief is defined as a time when joy is indecency. The plays are condemned in the language of the calendar, as a mismatch of seasons, like wearing the wrong coat to a funeral. And the thing taken is named in the ordinance's own hand, on paper, in the telling phrase. The takers saw what they were taking, named it on the paper, and took it anyway, because it was other people's, and other people's joy in a season of humiliation was the offense itself. Mencken's haunting fear is three centuries away, and here is its object already written into law, in the ordinance's own hand, dated and sealed.

The theaters stayed shut for eighteen years, from the autumn of 1642 until the Restoration brought the king back in 1660, and the length of the closure is the first item on the bill the charter refused to itemize. A man who had grown up on the stage, who had seen Lear howl over Cordelia in the years after the play was new, now had no Lear; a boy who turned twenty in 1660 had never legally seen a play. The companies petitioned: their Actors Remonstrance of January 1643, the players' own answer to the order, pleaded for a trade that had been lawful for a century and was now a crime, and it got no answer worth the name. The orders hardened in answer: October 1647 brought a fuller ordinance against the plays, and February 1648 another that ordered the playhouses themselves dismantled, stage and gal-

leries pulled down so that the thing could not quietly go on, and laid penalties on actors and spectators both, the audience fined for wanting to watch. Lear, Hamlet, Falstaff, the whole repertory of the English stage, went silent for a generation, and the silence was described, in the orders themselves, as nothing: a forbearance, a fitting of joy to season, a small adjustment of the national calendar. The generation that lost the stage is the measure of what the adjustment weighed. Eighteen years is the distance from a child's first play to the day he takes his own child to one, and for eighteen years there was no play to take a child to, and the men who silenced the stage wrote in their orders that they had only fitted the nation's joy to its season.

Five years into the theater closure that Parliament reached further into the calendar, and the reach is the saint's charter in its purest form. By ordinance of the eighth of June, 1647, the feasts of the Nativity, of Easter, and of Whitsuntide, and all other festival days commonly called holy days, were declared to have been "superstitiously used and observed," and were to be observed as festivals no longer, any law, statute, custom, constitution, or canon notwithstanding. Take the ordinance at its word and admire its thoroughness, its lawyer's care against the calendar: against law, statute, custom, constitution, and canon all at once, Parliament planted a single legislative sentence, and the sentence erased Christmas. The people noticed. In April, while the measure was being moved, London apprentices had marched from Covent Garden to Westminster to petition against the abolition, and Charles the First, by then a prisoner at Holmby House, had queried the measure from his captivity, a king arguing with the calendar of his own kingdom. What was being taken, itemized, was

the poor household's dozen days of the year when the table was someone else's and the fire was someone else's and the singing was free, the one season when the laboring calendar opened and a poor man ate meat. The servant's year had maybe a score of such days in it, and the holy days were most of them. What the takers described as superstition, the taken called Christmas, and the country would not keep it abolished, whatever the ordinance said; the measure lasted to the Restoration and no further, because the people outlasted the saints, and the fiddles and the Christmas dinners came back with the king.

Parliament paid its conscience money in the same ordinance that did the taking, on the same day, and the payment is the record's first instance of the instrument paid to the kept-from, the instrument the bookstore counter made me name. The ordinance of June 8, 1647, which struck Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide from the calendar as superstitiously used and observed, carried the compensation inside the ban's own text: the second Tuesday of every month was allotted to scholars, apprentices, and other servants for recreation, in place of the holy days taken away, the masters ordered to grant the leave and the disputes sent to the next justice of the peace. One Tuesday a month, by statute, in exchange for Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, and every saint's day in the calendar. The exchange rate deserves a moment's attention. What was taken was the festal year, woven into the agricultural and devotional life of every parish, and the thing given was a scheduled Tuesday, granted by the body that had taken the rest, revocable by that body, and framed in the ordinance as a concession. The coin is conscience money in statute form: a small, scheduled, taxable-feeling treat issued to quiet the conscience

of the taker, at a rate no taker would accept for his own calendar. Imagine the member voting for it, his own table unshorted, his own feasts uncounted. No Parliamentarian gave up his own Christmas feast to the principle; the ordinance abolished the observation for the country, and the country's betters observed or abstained as they pleased. The Tuesday was for servants, and the servants were the ones whose calendar had been emptied. The charter always has a clause like the Tuesday, a token handed back across the counter to make the taking feel even, and the token is always smaller than the thing it replaces, and it is always described, by the taker, as generous.

Twelve years later the charter crossed the Atlantic with the colonists, and it kept its wording and its appetite. On the eleventh of May, 1659, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay colony enacted its penalty for keeping Christmas, and the statute's own recital gives the whole theology in one sentence: "for preventing disorders arising by reason of some still observing such festivals as were superstitiously kept in other countries, to the great dishonor of God and offense of others, whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by forbearing of labor, feasting, or any other way, shall pay for every such offense five shillings as a fine to the county." The clause worth memorizing is the middle one, the one that reaches the hearth. Forbearing of labor is made an offense: to do nothing on Christmas, to sit still on the day, is itself punishable, because the stillness is observance. The charter's appetite shows its full reach here: it cannot leave the day alone, because the day kept by others is the disorder it exists to prevent. A man keeping a quiet Christmas in his own house was the enemy the law was written against, and

five shillings was the price of his hearth. The law stood for twenty-two years, a generation of fined hearths, repealed in 1681 under pressure from the king's commissioners, and Massachusetts did not make Christmas a public holiday until 1856, nearly two centuries on. Small as the fine was, the reach was the point, and the point was the reward: the long arm of the borrowed committee, God's honor, extended into a stranger's kitchen to see whether he was feasting.

Before the statute, before the ordinances, before the war, there was the maypole, and the maypole is where the saint's charter shows its face in the open, with a fiddle playing. In 1627, on the first of May, at a small trading settlement on the Massachusetts coast that its master, Thomas Morton, called Ma-re Mount, the company raised a pine tree of some eighty feet, fixed a buck's antlers at its top, and danced around it for days, and the dancing was done together, English settlers and their Native neighbors, Morton inviting the country in. Bradford's history of Plymouth, written with the pole in his sightline, records what the company did, in words that deserve to be heard whole: they "set up a maypole, drinking and dancing about it many days together, inviting the Indian women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together like so many fairies, or furies, rather; and worse practices." The sentence is worth hearing at full length because it is the sound of the charter being written in real time, the disgust arriving ahead of the facts. What were the facts? A party in the woods. A tall tree with antlers on it, songs, ale, a poet master of revels nailing his own verses to the trunk, and company, the company being the unbearable part: two nations drinking together, equals for an afternoon, no one presiding, no one guarding. Morton was everything the Plymouth men had left England to

escape, a laughing, rhyming, Anglican-reading tradesman who liked the Indians and showed it, and the pole was his flag. The offense, before any theology attached to it, was that the people at Ma-re Mount were happy, and happy in the open, and happy together, and happy without permission.

Bradford, the governor of Plymouth, writing his history of the plantation years after the fact, gave the scene its permanent frame, and the frame is a study in how the saint's charter describes what it takes. Morton, he writes, had become "lord of misrule" of that place and maintained, "as it were, a school of atheism." The maypole he calls the "idle or idol maypole," working the pun hard, and the revels he describes as a revival of the feasts of the Roman goddess Flora, or "the beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians," a phrase that deserves its immortality: beastly, mad, pagan, and classical all at once, the whole vocabulary of condemnation poured over one May dance in the woods. Then the governor's prose does the thing the charter's prose always does, and describes the taking as nothing at all. Morton and his company, Bradford writes, had renamed the place Merry Mount, "as if this jollity would have lasted ever." The sneer is the tell. What exercises Bradford is the jollity. Doctrine the pole had none, and harm from the pole he never quite gets around to demonstrating. The jollity is what cannot be allowed to last ever, and the confidence that it will be stopped, that lasting is not permitted, sits inside the grammar. He is right, of course, about the ending. The jollity did not last. He was writing the history after the axe had fallen, from the side that swung it, a winner's serenity, and the serenity of the sentence, the amused as-if of it, is the serenity Socrates wore at the nursery door: the charter's au-

thor is always calm, because the charter's author is always pleased.

The taking, when it came, came in two motions, and both motions are in Bradford's own book. Myles Standish took Morton first, in 1628, at Wessagusset, though Morton slipped him by night and was retaken, and the Plymouth men shipped him to England with the governor's letters for cargo. And the year was not out before, in Bradford's entry for 1628, came over that worthy gentleman Mr. John Endecott, who brought the patent for the government of the Massachusetts, and who, visiting those parts, "caused that maypole to be cut down, and rebuked them for their profaneness, and admonished them, to look there should be better walking." Better walking: the phrase is the charter in miniature, the whole puritan project in two words, the upright gait replacing the dance. The place was renamed again, and the new name Bradford records without needing to underline it: they called it Mount Dagon, after the fallen Philistine idol, so that the hill itself would carry the verdict. Morton, in his own book, New English Canaan, published nine years later in Amsterdam, gave the pole's side of the quarrel: the Plymouth men had called his May tree an idol, "the Calf of Horeb," and threatened to make the place "a woeful mount and not a merry mount," their own wit quoted against them. He came back in 1629, and within the year they had put him in the stocks, made him watch his house burn, and shipped him out again. The pole lay where it fell. The verses on the trunk, the antlers at the top, the company of two nations, all of it went into the record as nothing, as a nuisance removed, and the men who removed it wrote the removal down as one more item of God's work done in a day.

Lay the two charters side by side and the finding states itself. The philosopher's and the saint's are the same instrument in different clothes. Both take in the name of a committee too large to argue with, the just city for the one, God's honor for the other, and the borrowed committee is doing here what it has always done, converting one party's taste into everyone else's rule. Both describe what they take as nothing: a pruning for the nursery, a forbearance for the season, a superstition scraped off the calendar, a nuisance felled in the woods. And both pay the taker immediately, in the only currency the record ever shows, the forensic high of the verdict and the calm of the man who has arranged the world more nearly to his liking, plus the conscience money, the wool crown and the myrrh, the scheduled Tuesday, the compliments to Homer, that lets the taker feel generous about the bill. The bill is the only part the charters never write down, so let it be written here, once: Lear off the stage for a generation of Englishmen; the festal year torn out of a poor household's calendar; five shillings against a stranger's quiet hearth; a fiddle silenced in the woods, and the company it gathered scattered; and in Athens, in the mind's city, a crown of wool for the poet and the road to the border. The nothing was something every time. That is the sentence the two charters were written to avoid, and the sentence they cannot escape: the takers knew the price of everything they took, and they took it, and they were pleased, and the pleasure was the point of the paper.

The maypole lay on the ground at Ma-re Mount in the summer of 1628, an eighty-foot pine with a buck's antlers nailed to its top, and the record gives us no work gang, no ceremony, no trial, no charge sheet, only Endecott's rebuke and the admonition about better walking, and then

the place renamed for a fallen idol. By then the company had gone home: the invited women to their towns, the servants to their masters, the songs stopped, and the fiddle gone quiet in the woods, and there was nothing left for any court to seize, because the offense had been a gathering all along. The offense was company. That is the word the whole of it comes down to, the nursery and the ordinances and the five-shilling law and the felled pine alike: people together, unguarded, enjoying one another and the songs and the season, owing no one an explanation. The charters call it a contagion and a superstition and a disorder, and the charters are believed, because the charters are written by the winners and printed in their books. The ground at Ma-re Mount knew better, and so did every household that kept Christmas under the fine, and so does every child who has ever been told that the thing he loves is nothing and that the telling was for his good. One axe brought the pole down, and one admonition scattered the company it had gathered, and the men who did it wrote in their histories that they had cut down an idol and done a day's work for God. What they had cut down was a reason to gather. The antlers lay in the bracken. The offense was company, and the company was gone.

Movement II

The Hells

CHAPTER 4

The Chamber of Horrors

Anthony Comstock kept what he seized, and that is the first thing to understand about him. The second is that he brought it to Washington. Sometime in the 1870s, with the ink on his new powers still fresh, the special agent of the Post Office began unpacking trunks for congressmen: photographs, pamphlets, playing cards, rubber goods, pills and powders, the whole material evidence of the traffic he had been empowered to destroy. He called the collection his Chamber of Horrors, and the name was not imposed on him by mockers; he chose it, the way a curator chooses a title, and he chose well, because no one who heard the name forgot it, and the congressmen filed past and looked, and looked again, and the appropriations held. Every regime of taking builds a library of what it forbids, and most of them are shy about the fact, and Comstock was not shy. He understood that the exhibit was the argument, that a senator who had been walked past a table of seized obscenity went back to the floor a believer, and that the man qualified to walk him past it was the man who had read it all. The Chamber of Horrors is the standing answer to the oldest question about the censor: what does he get out of it? He gets the material. He gets to keep it, to inventory it, to show it, to be the one American licensed to look at what no one else may see, and to be thanked for the looking. Comstock built the first fed-

eral version of that license, and he built it to last, and the receipts he kept are the subject here, because the receipts are where the reward shows.

He was born in 1844 in New Canaan, Connecticut, a churchgoing farmer's son, and he came to the work by way of the Union Army, which is where the record of the taking begins. His biographers, Heywood Broun and Margaret Leech, writing in 1927 with the man's own papers and legend still warm, mark the date the way the man himself would have wanted it marked: the eighteenth of January, 1864, an arrest in his own camp, a soldier reported over pictures, is entered in their book as the first passenger for the train. Keep the metaphor in mind, because it was Comstock's own, and he was still using it at the end of his life, when the train had grown to sixty-one coaches. A soldier in a camp near the front, some pictures, a complaint made, an arrest logged: the transaction was small, and it was entire, and the nineteen-year-old who arranged it walked away with the feeling the whole career would be spent collecting. He had found the instrument. What the army gave him was the discovery that the machinery of discipline could be borrowed by a private moral appetite, that a complaint could be made to move like an order, and that the man making the complaint stood where the law could see him and be admired. After the war he went to New York, worked as a clerk and a dry-goods man, and found the city's vice districts the way some men find a calling, the bookstores and the sidewalk trade and the mail-order dealers, and he began making the complaints that made his name. The borrowed committee came next, and it came with money and a letterhead.

First came the Young Men's Christian Association,

whose Committee for the Suppression of Vice became, in 1873, the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, with Comstock as its secretary and moving spirit. The Society's seal, by the descriptions that survive, showed a top-hatted man feeding books into a bonfire, which was the mission drawn in one figure: a gentleman, a fire, and the books going in. In March of 1873 the borrowed committee was cashed out for statute. Congress passed the Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use, the law the country would call by his name while he lived and long after, and on the sixth of March he was appointed a special agent of the Post Office, with power over the mail of the United States. He was not yet thirty, and what the badge meant in his hands is the whole story. The mail was the nation's nervous system, and the special agent decided what could travel in it: no letter, no book, no pamphlet, no advertisement, no medical advice about the body moved lawfully through the United States mail if Anthony Comstock judged it obscene. The Society paid his salary, the government provided the warrant, and the borrowed committee now had two names, the churchmen's and the republic's, either of which could be laid on a counter or a doorstep to make a private taste weigh like public law. He held both for more than forty years, and he used the office the way the army had taught him it could be used, as a machine for the manufacture of verdicts, with himself as the court.

The Society published its own score, which is the documentary form the forensic high takes when the taker is also an institution. Every year the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice issued an annual report, and the run of them survives, forty-two volumes in the catalogs,

the years 1904 to 1913 waiting in the open at HathiTrust, the rest in the archives' keeping, for any reader who wants the taker's ledger in the taker's own hand. The Society's records, held by the Library of Congress, kept the practice at the level of the individual arrest: reports on persons arrested, with each offender's age, nationality, religion, education, offense, and evidence seized. Read that list slowly. Age, nationality, religion, education, offense, evidence: it is the intake form of a court of morals, the columnar mind of a man who counted what he took. Most reformers bury the arithmetic; Comstock published his. The annual report was part audit and part trophy case, a year's seizures and convictions laid out for the Society's subscribers like a catch laid out for shareholders, tons and persons set down in print, and the subscriber reading it over breakfast was being paid his dividend in print, the warm sense that someone out there was seizing things on his behalf. The reward was therefore franchised, sold by subscription to the respectable, and the report was the dividend statement. That is what is new under the sun in 1873, newer even than the badge: the industrialization of the reward, its conversion from a private satisfaction into a documented, annual, shareable one. Comstock's genius, if the word can be carried, was accounting. He made the taking legible to the people who funded it, and in doing so he made it permanent.

And then there was the Chamber, the museum at the heart of the office. The Chamber of Horrors was the library side of the operation, the fourth fact of the record in its first federal form: to rule on the material, someone must read the material, and the someone keeps it. Comstock's collection filled with everything the mail would no longer carry, the photographs and the pamphlets, the contraceptive de-

vices and the pills, the playing cards and the French novels, the whole material culture of American appetite as it stood in the 1870s and after, and it answered to no acquisitions policy beyond his own interest. He was the most thorough reader of obscenity in the country, by design and by statute. The exemption is always the quiet part of a ban, and Comstock made it loud without ever saying it: the law forbade the nation's citizens to traffic in what the nation's agent collected by the trunkload. He inspected, he catalogued, he displayed, and he destroyed, he said, a hundred and sixty tons of it, a figure he gave out himself, to interviewers, with the confidence of a man reciting a harvest. The tonnage is the figure to hold. A hundred and sixty tons of print passes any evidence locker; it is a library, a research collection of the forbidden, assembled over forty years by one man's judgment about what other Americans could be trusted with. He survived every photograph in it, thrived on them, by his own accounting. The people who made and sold the photographs did not all survive him, and that asymmetry, the reader thriving on the reading that ruined the seller, is the exemption's face seen full.

Watch what the taste did once it was armed, because the drift is the tell. Comstock began with the dirty picture, the pack of French photographs, the thing everyone agreed to hate and the thing nobody missed. He ended somewhere else entirely. The First Amendment Encyclopedia's account of the career records the trajectory plainly: from the pictures he moved to anatomy textbooks, the medical works that explained the body to doctors, and to adventure novels and romances, the daydreams of the young. The direction of the drift is always the same, in every regime the record holds: the taste, once armed, expands, because expansion is

where the new occasions are. Anatomy is anatomy until a man with a badge reads it as obscenity, and then the medical text is contraband and the agent is its licensed reader, and the adventure novel, the harmless boy's book of pirates or bandits, becomes one more item for the Chamber. Some four thousand people, by the encyclopedia's count, were charged over the forty years of the career. Four thousand prosecutions outgrows the label of a campaign against smut. That is a taste with a federal budget, hiring the law by the year. And the drift had a second use, quieter than the first: it proved the agent indispensable. A law against photographs needs a man who can tell a photograph from an anatomy plate, a plate from a pamphlet, a pamphlet from a novel, and the only man with the reading behind him to do it was the man who had done all the reading. The exemption creates the expert, and the expert argues for the exemption. It is a closed system, and it runs on the satisfaction of the man in the middle.

He counted, and the counting was the career's own summary. In 1913, two years before his death, Comstock gave an interview to Nixola Greeley-Smith of the New York Evening World, and Broun and Leech print the statement on the fifteenth and sixteenth pages of their biography, in the chapter they call Portrait of a Crusader. In the forty-one years of the work, he told her, he had convicted persons enough to fill a passenger train of sixty-one coaches, sixty coaches containing sixty passengers each and the sixty-first almost full. Hear the accounting mind in full cry. The arithmetic is some three thousand six hundred people; the image is a train, with the coaches counted, and the occupancy of the sixty-first coach assessed. He had destroyed, he said, a hundred and sixty tons of obscene literature, and the biogra-

phers' chapter lists some of the tonnage's titles, Only a Boy, The Lustful Turk, Fanny Hill, the immortal rubbing shoulders with the forgotten. A ton of paper is a strange unit for literature. It is the unit of the pulp mill and the freight yard, and that is its honesty: he weighed what he took, because the taking was cargo, and he counted the people it came from, because the people were passengers, and both figures were given to a reporter the way another man gives his bowling score. The interview is the forensic high set down in numerals by the man feeling it. Nobody asked him for the train. The train was volunteered, and the pride in it is the whole exhibit: forty-one years of reading what others were forbidden to read, and the reward, at the end, was the pleasure of the count itself.

Two years later, four months before his death in September 1915, he was still counting for the press. Mary Alden Hopkins interviewed him for Harper's Weekly, and the May 22, 1915 piece carries his own statistics, on its page 489: up to 1914, twenty-seven hundred and forty persons convicted or pleaded guilty, with imprisonments totaling five hundred and sixty-five years, eleven months, and twenty days, and since then a hundred and seventy-six further arrests with a hundred and forty-one convictions. Pause on the middle figure, because there is no other figure like it in the annals of moral reform, and no other reformer who would have thought to keep it. Five hundred sixty-five years, eleven months, twenty days. He kept the sum of other men's captivity to the day, the way a bank keeps its interest. The reformer who can tell you the days at the end of the years is a reformer for whom the years were assets to him and never abstractions; the ledger was audited often, and the audit was the pride of the office. This is the thing

the eulogies could not say and the record cannot unsee once seen: the taking was the product, and the rest was packaging. The protected reader was nowhere in the accounting. There is no column for children guarded, no line for homes improved, no entry for harm prevented, because the business of the office, measured by the office's own books, was seizure and conviction, and the satisfaction the office manufactured was the agent's own. The train, the tons, the years, the days: a man tells you what he loves by what he keeps count of, and Comstock kept count of what he took. And the two counts do not reconcile, and the record says so in the open: the train's arithmetic gives some thirty-six hundred convicted, and the 1915 interview's own figure is twenty-seven hundred and forty, and the count inflated for the better reporter, which is its own finding about the count's purpose.

The count had a column for the dead, and the first name in it that matters here is Madame Restell's. Ann Lohman, who worked under the name Restell, was the most famous abortionist and contraceptive seller in New York, rich from forty years of the trade, with a mansion on Fifth Avenue that the whole city knew, and Comstock had wanted her for decades the way a collector wants the one piece that never comes to market. On the eleventh of February, 1878, he got her: arrested by Comstock personally, at his instigation, under a New York State statute, for the selling of contraceptives and abortifacients, taken in her own home, a woman past sixty facing trial with her fortune and her reputation already spent on lawyers. The scholar Nicholas Syrett's account of the arrest, published in the Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, is the chapter and verse here: the date, the statute, the instigation, the agent at the door of

her house. Restell did not wait for the verdict. On the first of April, 1878, with her trial looming, she cut her throat in her bathtub, and the city that had bought from her for forty years read about it over breakfast. The trial never happened, so the evidence was never tested, which is worth remembering when the taker's champions speak of due process. The arrest had been the product all along, the raid and the notoriety and the count; the trial was paperwork. What Comstock got from the Restell case was not a conviction. It was something the ledger valued more highly, and the proof of the valuation is that he kept the entry, and counted it, and told the count to the papers.

He told the count proudly, and the count was fifteen, and he told it more than once, because a count like that is made to be heard. When Restell died, Comstock called her death, in the words the record hands down, a bloody ending to a bloody life, and he added her to a tally he had been keeping: she was, he said, the fifteenth person he had driven to suicide. The fifteenth. An arrest would have been paperwork and a conviction would have been routine; a suicide was a category of outcome no statute had asked him to produce and no court had judged him on, and he kept the count the way he kept the coaches and the tons and the years, because the count was the point. The National Archives' own exhibit on the man, mounted a century and a half later, records that he boasted of fifteen suicides, and the word the archivists chose is the right one: he boasted. There is no way to soften the entry, and none should be tried. A suicide in the ledger is a life the law drove out, and the agent counted fifteen of them, and the number was a credential, proof of efficacy, the visible sign that the work frightened people to death. In any other profession, a tally of the driven-to-suicide would

end a career and start an inquest. In his, it burnished one, because the committee he served wanted its enforcer frightening, and frightened was a thing you could measure, and he had the measurements. The reward was in the count, and the count was published, and the publication is the part the soft-focus histories skip: he wanted the number known.

The fullest scene belongs to Ida Craddock, because her case shows the exemption working on the best material, and because she answered it with her own pen to the end. Craddock was a Chicago writer, a scholar of religions, a woman of serious and eccentric learning, a member in good standing of the city's lecture-and-pamphlet world, who had come to believe that the ignorance of newly married people about their own bodies was a public harm, and who wrote and sold pamphlets of marital advice, plain-spoken little books of the kind that a pharmacy rack keeps a century later. The books were her ministry; she was, by the lights of her own mysticism, a priestess of the subject. Comstock read them, of course, since reading them was his office, and he judged them obscene, of course, since judgment was his wage, and he pursued her across the 1890s and into the new century with the persistence of a man who has found a case that flatters him. She served a workhouse sentence on a conviction he had pushed for; she came out and kept writing, because she believed the work was holy; and in 1902 he had her convicted in federal court, in New York, under the federal law that carried his name, the Comstock Act, the one she had made herself an enemy of by existing. The term she faced was measured in years. A writer of advice for brides, in her middle forties, was being sent to prison by the nation's official reader, whose own familiarity with her pamphlets was professional and thorough, and whose li-

brary now held her work in the forbidden section he alone could browse.

Facing the federal prison term, in 1902, Ida Craddock killed herself, and she did it in the only way that could answer the office: she left a public letter, and the letter named Anthony Comstock. The letter survives in the scholarship as her counter-affidavit, her prosecution of the prosecutor, written for the public record by a woman who had understood, too late to save herself and in time to accuse him, what the transaction had been. She had written books for the newly married, for the ignorant and the frightened and the young. He had read the books and made himself her judge, and the judgment had been a workhouse and a federal conviction and a prison term, and at the end of it she was dead and he was the country's leading authority on obscenity. The record gives no sign that her death cost him a night, and the record is full of his other costs, so the silence is its own evidence. He had his count, and a count does not mourn its entries. There is a reason the case sits at the center of the movement's Hells: it is the exemption seen from underneath, by the person it fell on. The one licensed reader judged the writing he alone was licensed to read, and the writer died of the judgment, and the license passed to the next case without a scratch on it. She understood, at the end, that the reading had been the point all along, that the pamphlets were the occasion and his appetite for judging them was the engine, and she said so, in public, in the only document the office could not seize.

The way to read Comstock, the way the record reads him when the courtrooms are cleared out, is as a collector and an accountant, and on that reading the whole career snaps into focus. The courtroom Comstock, the Comstock of the

raids and the trials, is well covered ground, and the standard histories walk it ably; the Corn-Revere book walks it to show the censor always losing, and the Werbel book walks it through the trials themselves. What neither treats as the subject is the thing Comstock treated as the subject: the collection and the count. He was a collector first. The Chamber of Horrors was not the byproduct of the work; the work was the acquisition policy of the Chamber. And he was an accountant second: the wage was audited, totaled, carried forward, and reported annually to the subscribers. The collector and the accountant between them explain what the reformer frame cannot: why the targets drifted from the pornographer to the anatomy text to the adventure novel, because a collector needs new shelf space; why the suicides were counted, because an accountant closes his books; why the interviews gave the figures and never the reasons, because the figures were the reasons. The reformer frame keeps asking whether Comstock was sincere, and sincerity is beside the point and always was. A sincere collector is still a collector. The pleasure does not care whether it is believed in; it pays out either way, on the spot, in the coin of the thing taken, and Comstock's whole life in office is the proof by example that a man can arrange to be paid that way for forty years and be thanked for it.

The annual reports deserve their own moment, because they are the rarest thing in the whole record of taking, the unicorn of the archive: a censor's own ledger, published in the censor's own lifetime, in forty-two volumes. Historians of the book trades dream of such a source and seldom get it; the takers of the world mostly take in silence and burn the tape. The Society's reports, and the arrest records behind them now at the Library of Congress, with every of-

fender's age, nationality, religion, education, offense, and evidence logged, are the documented interior of the forensic high, its general ledger, and they have been sitting in the open for a century waiting to be read as what they are. They are not a record of protection. Nothing in the columns measures a single child guarded or a single home improved. They are a record of taking, persons and property, arrests and seizures, the inflow of the Chamber, and they were published proudly, as proof of a good year. The censor keeps a copy: that is the fact this movement of the record was built to establish, and Comstock is its first full American instance, the man whose office was a library of the forbidden and whose reports were its catalog. Unfit for the nation, the law said of the material; the office kept it anyway, all of it, and wrote the keeping up in annual volumes, and the nation paid. Other regimes built their forbidden libraries quietly, in basements and locked cabinets and unmarked shelves. Comstock put his on the cover of an annual report. He was, in the end, the most honest of them, and the honesty is the horror.

He died in September of 1915, two years after the train interview, with the count closed, or as closed as a count can be whose keeper had no intention of stopping. The office outlived him; the law outlived him by decades; the Chamber's contents went where seized things go, into the keeping of the institution; the library persisted past the librarian. What is left is the image he chose for himself and offered to a reporter from the Evening World in 1913, the image his biographers kept for the closing of their first chapter and the twentieth page of their book: a passenger train pulling out of a station, sixty-one coaches, sixty passengers to a coach, three thousand six hundred and some

of the people he had convicted, all of them facing backward, all of them his. The sixty-first coach, Broun and Leech wrote, he "never did quite fill." Read the sentence the way the sentence was meant, as a boast with a regret inside it. The coach was nearly full, and the man died with the seat count short, and the shortness was the failure he minded. Forty-one years of taking, a hundred and sixty tons of print, fifteen suicides, twenty-seven hundred convictions and guilty pleas, five hundred sixty-five years eleven months and twenty days of other people's lives, and the train left the station with the sixty-first coach nearly full. He would have wanted it full; the record reads that way, in his own words, on his own chosen twentieth page. The pleasure was in the filling of the coaches all along, and the coaches are still on the track, and the station is still open.

CHAPTER 5

The Enfer

In 1913 the poet Guillaume Apollinaire did something no one had done before him: he catalogued the Hell. The Hell was and is a shelf, or a set of shelves, in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, the section created in the 1830s for works judged contrary to good morals, marked in the catalogue with the name Enfer, and closed to the ordinary reader. Apollinaire went in, with two collaborators, the writers Fernand Fleuret and Louis Perceau, and a bibliographer's patience, and they produced the first printed catalogue of the forbidden collection, published by the Mercure de France in 1913, 416 pages, an octavo of the damned, a volume that is itself now a collector's item and sits digitized on the library's own Gallica for anyone to read. Picture the scene, because the scene is the whole argument in one room. A poet with a gift for the scandalous sits in the national library of France, day after day, reading his way through the books the French state has decided no one in France should read, and he is taking notes. He is writing down titles and authors and printers, he is describing woodcuts, he is making, with a scholar's care, a guide to the unguidable. The state has built a library of the forbidden, and it has had to let him in to do it, because a library uncatalogued is a library lost, and the state, whatever it thinks of the books, cannot bear to lose a library. So the poet reads. The exemption is written

into the arrangement from the first day: to keep the book from the reader, you must keep a copy, and to keep a copy, you must have a keeper, and the keeper may read.

The Enfer held about nine hundred catalogued works when Apollinaire's volume appeared, and it holds about twenty-six hundred volumes today; the shelfmark was closed to new accessions in 1969 and reopened to them in 1983, fourteen years of purgatory inside the same library, and the acquisition period maps the century and a half of French moral administration. Sequestered for morals' sake, the works were the erotic and the blasphemous and the merely inconvenient, and they were preserved with the care the library gives its incunabula, because whatever else the national library doubted about the books, it never doubted they were books. The national library's own institutional account of the affair carries a remarkable admission: the 1913 catalogue seems to have escaped the institution's control entirely. Read that twice. A secret shelf, assembled so the public could not find the books, produced a public catalogue so thorough that the catalogue itself escaped into the world, and the world has used it as a guidebook ever since. The library of the forbidden became, in the hands of its three cataloguers, an advertisement for its own contents, and the library has never gotten the advertisement back. In 2007 the Bibliothèque itself mounted the exhibition, Éros au secret, and published the catalogue of the secret shelf for any visitor to buy, with Quignard and Seckel's names on the cover. The Hell had become a show, and the show had a gift shop logic: see, at last, what you were never meant to see, here, under glass, with our blessing. That is the first thing the catalogues prove: a forbidden library does not stay forbidden, because its keepers cannot

resist the catalogue, and the catalogue is the signpost that points the curious to the shelf.

Stop at the threshold of that shelf and take the finding in its plainest form. A regime that bans a book must answer a question no banner ever wants to answer aloud: where does the banned book go? Burned is one answer, and the record has its fires. But the record has far more shelves. The book is seized, and the seizure has to be housed, and the housing has to be administered, and the administration has to be staffed, and the staff, by the logic of the job, must read. Every regime of taking builds a library of what it forbids and licenses a class of reader to use it. That is the fourth fact of the record, the one every forbidden shelf confesses, and it is not a metaphor. It is a shelfmark in Paris, a permit in Rome, a locked case in London, a poison cabinet in Munich, a basement in Sydney, a reading room in New York, a trunk in Washington, and the list could run for pages if the record needed more evidence than that. The libraries were built by people who believed they were building barriers, and the libraries are the physical proof that the barrier is a door: someone is always on the far side of it, reading. The class of the exempt is coeval with the ban, as old as the prohibition itself, born with it, housed with it, and the exempt have a privilege no honest reader of the record can miss: they alone are trusted with the thing condemned. A condemnation is, among other things, a hiring announcement for the condemned's only licensed readers, and the applicants are never in short supply.

Rome ran the longest-lived of the forbidden libraries, and Rome made the exemption into a permit. The Index Librorum Prohibitorum, the list of books prohibited to the faithful, began under Paul the Fourth in 1559 and ran four

centuries; the last edition, in 1948, carried about four thousand titles. Where the roster is pinned, it reads like a syllabus of the mind: Copernicus suspended until corrected in 1616 and not cleared until 1835, Galileo's Dialogue condemned after 1633 and removed in 1835, with Copernicus, Kepler's Epitome listed from 1619 to 1835. The congregation in charge of the list also issued, to the approved, licences to read the prohibited books, and the licence is the document this tour exists to exhibit. The scholar with his licence could have the forbidden volume brought out for him, read it where the faithful might not, and send it back to the shelf they might not see. A licence to read a forbidden book is a signed confession that the prohibition has two classes of subject: the many, from whom the book is kept, and the few, to whom it is issued. The Holy Office did not blush at the arrangement; it administered it, with forms and seals and renewals. There were forms, and the forms were granted, and the scholars and confessors who held them read what the faithful were forbidden, on the theory that some souls could be trusted with the contaminant. The theory is the exemption, and the exemption is structural: it cannot be designed out of any ban, because the ban itself must be read before it can be enforced, and someone must do the reading. Rome simply wrote the someone into a permit, and kept the permit for four hundred years.

The signpost worked, for four centuries, the way a signpost always works. To be listed on the Index was to be flagged as worth a reader's trouble, and the list's four thousand titles read, in hindsight, like the reading list of the educated world: the philosophers and the scientists and the novelists of four centuries of Europe, shelved together under the heading of danger. which is the joke the prohibi-

tion played on itself in perpetuity: the list of what the pious might not read became the list of what the curious read first. The church that administered it was not stupid, and by the middle of the twentieth century it could see what the list had become, a four-hundred-year experiment in advertising by prohibition. On the fourteenth of June, 1966, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a notification, signed by Cardinal Ottaviani, printed in L'Osservatore Romano the next day, and the notification is a masterpiece of the genre of institutional retreat. The Index, it said, no longer carried the force of ecclesiastical law, with its attached censures; it retained its moral force, as a guide to conscience. Which is to say: the library was closed, but the librarian still believed in the shelving. The censure was gone and the judgment stayed, like a shop that has stopped selling a thing while keeping a sign in the window about its quality. Four centuries of permits and prohibitions ended in a memorandum; no bonfire was lit for the list, and the memorandum's existence is the confession that the list had failed at its own task while succeeding at the opposite one, having steered generations of readers to the books it condemned.

London's version was genteel, as London's versions tend to be. The British Museum kept a Private Case: the erotica and the dangerous books, locked apart from the general collection, excluded from the general catalogue, available by application to the keeper, which is to say available to the class of gentleman who knew to apply. The permit here wore a tweed jacket, and the jacket is worth noticing, because it is the classiest costume the exemption wears, because the English arrangement ran on class where Rome ran on forms. General readers never saw the shelf and never

missed it, which was the polite fiction the whole arrangement ran on; scholars with the right letter never wanted for it, which was the reality the fiction protected; and the museum, like the Bibliothèque, preserved the forbidden with a conservator's devotion, because a national library cannot bear to destroy a book any more than a confessor can bear to skip a sin. The Private Case has its own literature, and the standing record names it: Peter Fryer's Private Case, Public Scandal in 1966, an exposé of the museum's locked shelves, and Patrick Kearney's catalogue of the collection in 1981, the bibliographer's survey of what the public was not to see. The pattern by now should be familiar to the point of tedium, and that is its strength as evidence. Every institution builds the shelf, staffs the shelf, and sooner or later produces its own printed guide to the shelf, written by the one class of reader the institution trusts, and the guide sells. The Private Case is one more proof that the exemption belongs to the machinery of taking, its best-made part.

Munich's version had the bluntest name of all. The German libraries called the forbidden shelf the Giftschrank, the poison cabinet, and the Bavarian State Library's own sequestered collection went by the name Remota, the removed. In the autumn of 2002 the library did the thing the Bibliothèque would do five years later, the thing these institutions always eventually do when the fear that built the shelf has cooled: it opened the cabinet and sold tickets to it. From the second of October to the seventeenth of December, 2002, the exhibition Der Giftschrank showed the public its poison, with a catalogue edited by Stephan Kellner and Wolfgang Ernst, two hundred and twenty-four pages of the removed. The catalogue's Remota classes are a taxonomy of what a library fears, and they are worth reading

as a table of the century's anxieties: erotica and the literature of sexology; the anti-Nazi and emigration writers; one Franz von Krenner's collection of erotica, a whole private library absorbed into the state library's locked shelves; material marked for official use only; and the writings separated between 1933 and 1945 as Bolshevist, Marxist, or pacifist. Read the classes in order and watch the categories touch: the obscene book, the dissident book, the politically inconvenient book, one shelf, one cabinet, one class of keeper for all of them, because to the keeper the distinctions matter less than the custody. The curators who opened the cabinet in 2002, Kellner and Ernst and their colleagues, are the third set of door-openers in the record of the Hells, and what they found in theirs was what Apollinaire found in Paris: a library built by fear, kept by devotion, and readable only by the licensed.

The most complete of the Hells, and the one that reads like fate arranged for this argument, sat in a basement in western Sydney until 2005. In May of that year the scholar Nicole Moore, working in the National Archives of Australia's New South Wales branch, seven storeys underground, found the Australian customs censors' reference library: 793 boxes, about twelve thousand titles, the books banned from the country between the 1920s and the 1980s, kept by the censors themselves so that they could do their work. Sit with the plain fact of it, because it is the whole chapter in a single archive. The Commonwealth had decided that twelve thousand books could not enter Australia, and in order to decide that, it had to keep the books, all of them, in one place, where its officers could consult them. And the library of the unimportable was, for the twentieth century, the most thorough collection anywhere of

what Australians were forbidden to read, and it was in Australia, seven storeys down, administered, shelved, boxed, and used. The censors read for the nation, at their desks, for their whole working lives, the books the nation was fined for importing, let alone reading. Moore wrote the find up in 2012 as The Censor's Library, and her title is the confession in five words: the censor has a library, the censor had always had a library, and the library was larger and richer than any one reader's legal access to it. The archivist who opened the boxes is the fourth of the door-openers, and she opened the largest Hell of all: a national library of the forbidden, hidden from the nation in the nation's own archive.

Smallest and most modern of the Hells is the one that sat in an office in New York. The Comics Magazine Association of America, answering the great comic-book panic of 1954, built an office to pre-read the industry: every comic book published under the Comics Code was read by the Authority's reviewers before it was printed, and the man who ran the readers, Charles F. Murphy, was a former New York City magistrate, a judge by trade, now a judge of four-color horror for a living. The arrangement deserves a slow look, because it is the exemption in its everyday, workaday form, no cardinal's licence, no shelfmark, just a salary. A staff of readers read, in full, before any child in America could, the vampires and the ghouls and the walking dead and the women in torn dresses, and they read them to judge them, at their desks, on deadline, month after month, and their judgment decided what the newsstands of the republic could sell. The Code's own text forbade the words horror and terror in any title and prohibited the walking dead, vampires, ghouls, and werewolves outright; the readers who enforced that text consumed the forbidden crea-

tures daily, with coffee. The newsstand got the Code seal; the readers got the comics, every issue, hot off the drawing board. Here the Hell was a slush pile, the most ephemeral library in the record, and it held, at the industry's height, the reading of a nation of children: about twelve hundred million comics sold in 1954 alone. The exemption does not care whether the shelf is vellum or newsprint, leather or pulp. The readers are always in before the readers are locked out.

And the American original is the loudest of the Hells. Anthony Comstock's Chamber of Horrors, the trunks of seized material he carried to Washington to show the congressmen, was the same arrangement with louder brass: a federal license to keep, to display, and to be the nation's licensed reader, plus a museum of the forbidden whose only reader was its curator. The arrangement is American as well as European, as homegrown as the Post Office, as modern as the mail, and it deserves its place in the tour because it shows the pattern stripped of all antiquarian charm. No shelfmark from the 1830s, no cardinal's seal, no tweed jacket: a special agent with a badge, a Society with subscribers, and a collection of other people's appetites seized at the point of a warrant. Comstock counted his tons the way the Bibliothèque counts its volumes, and he showed his collection the way the Bavarian State Library would one day show its Remota, with the pride of a keeper and the publicity sense of a showman. The differences among the Hells are the differences of architecture and temperament. Paris gave the forbidden a shelfmark, Rome a permit, London a locked case and a gentleman keeper, Munich a cabinet of poison, Sydney a basement of boxes, New York a slush pile and a magistrate, Washington a traveling exhibit with a federal agent as docent. What never changes is the door, and

the person on the far side of the door, reading. Every one of these institutions was built to keep a book from a reader, and every one of them began by giving the book to a reader, and the reader was the institution itself.

Lay the tour out and the pattern organizes itself into a taxonomy. The exemption as permit has four forms, and the record has an example of each. First the shelfmark, Paris: access by designation, the class of reader defined by the institution's trust in the individual scholar. The licence, Rome: access by document, the class of reader defined by application and approval. London has the gentleman's ticket: access by social sorting, the class of reader defined by who knows how to ask. And the badge, Washington and New York and Sydney: access by office, the class of reader defined by employment in the taking itself. Four forms, one fact: the banned book is never without readers: it has only licensed readers left. The volume does not leave circulation; it changes rooms, from the public reading room to the keeper's office. The prohibition does not abolish the reading of the book. It allocates the reading, upward, to the keepers, and the allocation is the whole point that the rhetoric of protection exists to hide. And the allocation has a direction, which is the part of the finding that matters most for the record ahead: the exemption is issued by the ones doing the banning, and the exempt read by the banner's leave. The class of reader is the class of taker and the taker's admitted guests, every time, without an exception in the record. There is no known case, in four centuries of permits and locked cases, of the licence being issued by the banner to the class from whom the book was taken; the one form the record holds is the club, where the banned public licensed itself, which is the exception

that proves the rule, the exemption self-issued and never granted. The ward's children, the shopkeeper's customers, the newsstand's teenagers: none of them held a shelfmark, a permit, or a badge. The permits run with the power, and the power's first privilege is reading what it forbids you to read.

What does the licence do to the licensed? The libraries answer, quietly, in their paperwork. Moore's account of the Australian archive is also an account of the Australians: the customs officers and department readers who spent careers inside the twelve thousand titles, and who became, perforce, the best-read people in their building on the subject of the forbidden. The officers of the Enfer were scholars of erotica. Code reviewers were the nation's most diligent readers of horror comics. The keepers of the Private Case knew more about the locked shelves than any unlicensed gentleman in London. The licence corrupts in the mildest and most sweeping way: it makes its holders into the connoisseurs of the thing they guard against, and the connoisseurship feels like expertise, and the expertise feels like justification, and the justification licenses more taking, which licenses more reading. It is a career, and the career has perks, and the perks are not incidental to the recruitment: the man who takes the job of reading the forbidden for the public good has arranged to be paid, in reading, the coin he fines the public for spending. Meanwhile the reader outside the door is told the shelf is dangerous, and the teller has read the shelf, and the shelf is the teller's favorite room in the building. This is the sense in which the censor's library is always larger than the reader's: the censor has the forbidden collection plus his own, and the reader has his own minus the forbidden collection, and the difference between

the two libraries is the size of the lie. The lie is that the reading is being prevented. It is being hoarded, and the hoard is administered, catalogued, and staffed at public expense.

The tour of catalogues should end where the catalogues live, in a reader's hand, and the hand is the whole point. Somewhere in the Bibliothèque nationale there is a card, and on the card, in the hand of a long-dead librarian, is a title and a call number, and the call number has the shelfmark that says Enfer, and the card is the whole argument in miniature, four inches by six. Someone wrote the book, and someone banned it. Then someone kept it, carefully, in the national collection, on a shelf apart, and catalogued it, and the catalogue card, with its ruled lines and its careful hand, is the receipt for the entire transaction: the banning and the keeping, the condemnation and the preservation, the prohibition and the licence, all in one small rectangle of card stock. Apollinaire held thousands of such cards, or their printed descendants, and made of them a book that outlived the secrecy it described, and the book sits in the Bibliothèque today, catalogued like any other, with a call number of its own. London filled its cards, and Munich filled its cards; the boxes in Sydney are full of the titles the cards describe. The Hell is real, and it is not a punishment for the books; the books are fine, catalogued, climate-controlled, read by appointment. The Hell is the rest of us, outside, from whom the card is kept, and the card says so, in the librarian's own hand: the book is here, the book is safe, the book is being read. Just not by you. The call number is the proof, and the proof is handwritten. The censor keeps a copy.

CHAPTER 6

The Lady Who Could Not Be Named

In Bath, in 1807, a lady sat down with the works of Shakespeare and a pen, and the pen's job was deletion. She was fifty-seven years old, she was the unmarried daughter of a genteel family, and she had undertaken to produce an edition of the plays that a family could read aloud together, father to mother to children, without anyone blushing or explaining. The work was delicate in a way no censor with a badge ever faces. A statute bans a title and is done; her task was to keep the play while removing the offense, which meant reading every line, judging every line, and cutting all that could not be heard in the parlor and nothing that the play could not spare. It is the hardest form of taking, the surgeon's form, and it required her to do the thing her whole world forbade her to admit doing: to read the bawdy line, understand it in full, weigh it, and strike it. The result appeared that year from a provincial printer in Bath: The Family Shakspeare, four small volumes, twenty plays, and no name on the title page. No name. The book was anonymous, and the anonymity was the price of the work itself, no modesty and no publisher's caution about it. A lady who had read the lines she cut had read them, and a lady who admitted she had read them had confessed to an indecency of her own. The edition that was meant to make Shakespeare

safe for the family could not safely be signed by the woman who had made it so. She is the lady who could not be named, and her name was Henrietta Maria Bowdler.

Understand what she made, because its modesty is easy to miss. The Family Shakspeare of 1807 was twenty plays in four small volumes, printed in Bath, the tragedies and the best-known comedies, chosen and cut for the family circle, and it sold poorly, and it would be overshadowed eleven years later by a larger edition of it under a different name. The work itself was enormous and minute, twenty plays' worth of enormous and minute. Shakespeare's plays are salted through with the whole range of what genteel England in 1807 could not say aloud: the oaths and the blasphemies, the bawdy puns, the double meanings, the prostitutes and the bedroom jokes, the whole warm vulgarity of the Elizabethan stage. To remove it required the closest possible reading. Every expurgator of Shakespeare reads Shakespeare more attentively than any lover of Shakespeare on a sofa, because the lover can skim the dirty pun and the expurgator cannot afford to; the pun left in is the parlor's alarm bell. She had to find it all. She had to know it all, down to the last Elizabethan double meaning. And the edition's own preface, unsigned, promised in its first sentence of method that the book would remove every thing that could give just offence to the religious or virtuous mind. That promise, printed in 1807 in the anonymous preface of the anonymous book, is the taker's confession in the gentlest voice in the record: the editor had read everything, weighed everything, and cut what the parlor could not hear. The religious or virtuous mind would never encounter the offense. The editor's mind had encountered all of it, twice, once in the reading and once in the cutting.

Never in the record has the exemption had a gentler face. Henrietta Bowdler was the licensed reader of her own project: she read what the family's children might not, so that the family's children might never see it, and the license was self-issued, unpaid, and heavy. Think about what the cutting did to the reader who did the cutting. To expurgate the bawdy, you must be able to see the bawdy, and to see it reliably, on every page, at a glance, you must be fluent in it, and to see it you must have read it, and to have read it, in 1807, as a lady, was to be compromised by it. The rule she served made her secret knowledge unspeakable. Her brother could have admitted the reading; a physician and a gentleman could know what Shakespeare's porter was joking about. She could not. The exemption that let Comstock strut with his Chamber of seized goods let Henrietta Bowdler only hide, and the difference between them is the whole difference in how the rule falls on the wielder and the trapped. He wielded the exemption and published his count. She was trapped by hers and struck her own name. The corruption of the exempt, in her case, took the form of erasure, the arrogance never coming. She did the reading, absorbed the contamination on the family's behalf, year upon year of the closest study of the lines her world judged unfit for her eyes, and paid for the absorption with her authorship. The gentlest taker in the record is also the one the rule cost the most per page, and what it cost her was her name, struck before the book was born.

Then comes the brother. Thomas Bowdler, born 1754, was a physician whose health had ended his practice, a man of independent means and charitable energy, the prison reformer John Howard's continuator and eventually, after his death, Gibbon's expurgator as well, and in 1818 he pub-

lished the enlarged Family Shakspeare, in ten volumes, all thirty-six plays, with an introduction to each play justifying the cuts, and with his name on the title page. The work was his sister's, largely or entirely, as the scholars who have made the attribution case establish: Noel Perrin's Dr. Bowdler's Legacy, published in 1969, is the book that argued Henrietta's authorship out of the shadows, and the University of North Carolina's rare book room holds the anonymous 1807 first edition she made. Thomas's name went where Henrietta's could not go, because a gentleman could be known to have read what a lady could not. The book was now a sensation and a byword in equal parts, the edition that made expurgation famous, and it went through edition after edition across the century, five of them by the 1860s, while the lady in Bath watched the family name become famous for her work. There is no record that she complained. There could not have been, since complaint would have been confession. The 1818 preface's own promise, in Thomas's voice, was that those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family, and the sentence is worth hearing as the genre's purest note: the author is praised, the family is protected, and the knife is called a kindness. It is conscience money set in type, the tribute that pays for the taking.

The language itself then handed down the verdict, and it handed the verdict to the wrong sibling. The verb appears in print in 1836, in a letter by Thomas Perronet Thompson, army officer and radical member of Parliament, writing to his constituents about names in the writings of the apostles that "modern ultrachristians would probably have Bowdlerized." That is the Oxford English Dictionary's earliest evidence for the word, and the word is bowdlerize: to expur-

gate a book by omitting or modifying parts considered vulgar. A decade after Thomas's death, the family name had become the English verb for taking the life out of a text for the reader's own good. Thomas Perronet Thompson did not invent the act; he named it, and he named it for the man whose name was on the 1818 volumes, which is the way of names: they stick to the title page, and the title page was Thomas's. The woman whose pen did the cutting is not in the word at all. Nobody has ever bowdlerized anything in the name of Henrietta. The verb's birth certificate is dated 1836, the OED's entry gives Thompson's letter, and the word has been in continuous use ever since, employed by people who have never heard of the Family Shakspeare and never will, to describe a thing they do every day. The editor who could not be named became the editor the language forgot, and the editor who put his name on her work became the name of the act forever. Even the credit for the censoring was censored, and it was censored by that rule, the rule that made her do the work in silence: a lady could not be known to have read the lines, so a lady could not be known to have cut them, so the cutting was his.

The expurgator's preface is a genre, and the Bowdlers wrote its grammar, and the grammar has two clauses: praise the author to the skies, then cut him. The 1818 introductions did it play by play, each one a small essay in admiration and deletion, and the formula is worth reading as a form, because it is still with us whenever a text is revised for its own good: the author a genius; the genius containing, regrettably, matter that cannot be read aloud; the editor removing the matter with reluctance and reverence; the author, now purified, greater than before. Every clause of the formula is a payment, and none of the payments leaves

the editor's account: the praise costs the editor nothing, the removal gives the editor power, and the final clause, the author improved by the editing, is the editor's own advertisement written in the author's name. Thomas's 1818 introduction complains of the plays' indecent matter and of the frivolous allusions to Scripture that, in his phrase, call imperiously for their erasement. Erasement: the word is his, and it is the conscience money word par excellence, because erasing sounds so much gentler than censoring, so much tidier, so much more like housework than like police work. The tribute is always offered to the author while the blade is applied. It was offered to Shakespeare in 1818 in the language of propriety, and it is offered to the dead authors of our own time in the language of sensitivity and care, and the preface has not changed in two centuries because the need has not changed: the taker must explain why taking is giving, and the explanation is always written in the author's praise.

The public bought what the critics denounced, and the split is its own exhibit, one of the earliest full-dress demonstrations that the literary judgment and the family market are two different publics. A success with the book-buying families it was built for, the 1818 edition was a scandal to the reviewers who read for a living, and the two judgments ran side by side for fifty years: five editions by the 1860s, a steady sale into the parlors, and a reputation among literary men as a byword for prudery, the jokes writing themselves in the reviews, and the mockery working as free advertising for the thing it mocked, as mockery of a steady seller always does. The families were not fools. They wanted the plays, they knew the plays were salted, they wanted the salt out of the parlor, and the Bowdlers gave them the thing they

wanted, on which the critics' scorn made no dent at all. That success is the measure of the demand for conscience money in bound form: a whole public that wanted Shakespeare without the risk, and was willing to pay for the reassurance that someone had absorbed the risk in advance. The critics were right about the butchery, the public was right about its own needs, and the edition thrived on both truths, because the taker's promise has always been a good seller: nothing taken away that you will miss, nothing kept that will harm you, the book improved by its losses. The promise was false, but it sold, and it kept selling for a century, and its seller's name became the verb while its maker's name stayed blank in the histories for more than a hundred years.

From there the method crossed the Atlantic and went to school. Nineteenth-century America built its classrooms on the Bowdlers' model: the school Shakespeare, the school Scott, the school classics, each one reprinted for the instruction of the young with that promise on its preface page, that the text had been fitted for the family and the schoolroom. The expurgated schoolbook became its own publishing category, and the category's logic was the Bath logic scaled to an industry: the child must not meet the oath or the bawdy, the teacher must not be asked to read it aloud, the parent must not be asked to explain it, so the text itself is adjusted, silently or with a note, and the child reads a book the author never wrote. Nobody set a bonfire, and nobody had to. That is the point of the method and the reason it outlives the bonfires: expurgation is censorship that looks like publishing, the book still on the desk, the author's name still on the cover, the cuts invisible to anyone who has not collated the original. The bonfire tells the child the book is gone; the expurgated schoolbook tells the child the book is this. One

breeds hunters of forbidden texts; the other breeds readers who never learn there was anything to hunt, and of the two, the second is the more thorough victory, because it costs the taker nothing, not even the fee of a fire, and it is laundered through the author's own continuing popularity. The family got its Shakespeare and the school got its classics and the language got its verb, and nobody's conscience ached, which is the service conscience money is for.

Now the fair hearing, because Henrietta Bowdler is the one exempt reader in the record who earns it. Her cuts were not made in pride, and the book was not offered as a superiority. By every account the work was careful, and the care was real: she kept the plots, she kept the verse where she could, she took out the lines the parlor could not say and kept everything else she could keep, and she made, by the standards of her rule, the best possible edition of Shakespeare for the audience her rule allowed. The mockery that has fallen on her book for two centuries is easy to perform and too cheap to matter. She had a problem her world made insoluble: the plays were the greatest reading in the language and parts of them could not be said in front of her mother, and she solved the problem the only way the rule allowed, by reading the unspeakable herself and absorbing it into silence. Grant the premise of the parlor and her edition is a triumph of conscientious workmanship, the best expurgated Shakespeare anyone has ever made, before or since. The premise was the whole cost. The rule that she served, that some texts must not be heard by the family, required her to hear them all, alone, and then forbade her to say she had heard them, and it collected from her both the labor and the name. She is the proof that the exemption corrupts even where it does not coarsen, because the corruption is

the secrecy: the licensed reader of the bawdy lines became the one person in England who could never acknowledge the license.

What did the knife take out? The editions' own record gives the shape of it plainly, and the shape is the point. Whole characters went: the prostitute Doll Tearsheet vanishes from Henry the Fourth, Part Two, her world with her. Songs went: the mad scenes' bawdy ballads, Ophelia's among them, trimmed to decorum, because a girl's mad song in the parlor was still a song a girl was singing. The oaths went most quietly of all, God becoming Heavens across the plays, the swear words softened into noises, the jokes whose whole point was their dirtiness snipped so carefully that a reader of the Family Shakspeare would not know there had been a joke. That last is the method's signature, and it is worth a slow look. A ban removes a book and the shelf shows the gap, and the gap can be pointed at and argued over. Expurgation removes the line and the page shows nothing at all, and the perfection of the nothing is the expurgator's craft and pride: the edition is the book with its sinews cut and its skin intact, walking around in the world as the author, speaking the author's name, saying less than the author said. The children of the parlor got a Shakespeare who could not shock them, and they also got a Shakespeare who could not fully reach them, the range of the plays narrowed to the range of the parlor, since the shocking lines were load-bearing, and the two Shakespeares traveled under one name, and only one of them had an editor's pen in it, and the pen was anonymous.

Set her beside the keeper of the Chamber of Horrors, the man with the federal badge and the traveling trunks, and the exemption's whole range is visible in one pairing.

Comstock read the forbidden and grew boastful, counted his coaches and his suicides, and published the count. Bowdler read the forbidden and grew silent, cut her lines, and cut her own name after them. The two are the poles of one instrument: the licensed reader puffed up with the license, and the licensed reader erased by it. What they share is the reading, and what separates them is what the reading cost and what it paid. He was paid in the forensic high, in counts and coaches. She was paid in the knowledge that the parlor was safe and her name was gone, which is conscience money in its saddest denomination, the editor's own satisfaction that no one would know. It would be easy to make her a figure of fun and it would be wrong. The lady in Bath did less harm than any taker in the record: she broke no one's business, fined no one, jailed no one, emptied no shelf; her knife touched her own copy's margins. She took from the dead author only, and the dead are the safest people to take from, and her taking was answered by the language itself, which is the one bill collector that never fails to arrive. The corruption the exemption worked on her was the corruption of concealment, the gentler and more sweeping of the two, and it is the proof that the exemption is structural and not moral, because it trapped the most conscientious reader in the whole record as thoroughly as it empowered the least.

The finding the lady proves is small and hard and worth stating plainly, without embroidery, because the gentlest case is the strongest test. Every act of taking requires the take to be known by the taker; the line cannot be cut until it is read, and the reading must be done by someone the rule exempts; the exemption cannot be designed out, only disguised; and the disguises are the record's whole bestiary:

the certainty of the man who cleared a bookstore's shelf, the count of the man with the Chamber, the curator's shelfmark in the Hells, and here, the lady's unsigned preface. She could not be named because the naming would have been the confession, and the confession would have been the indecency, and the indecency was the thing the edition existed to prevent. A rule that cannot survive its own truthful description is a rule with a fault in it, and the fault is the exemption, the copy the censor keeps, the reader the rule must have and cannot admit. Henrietta Bowdler's unsigned title page is the most honest document in the movement's archive, because it admits, by its blankness alone, what the Chamber of Horrors and the Enfer and the Private Case all arrange not to say: that someone read it first, and that the someone, in the logic of the rule itself, was contaminated by the reading, and that the rule's answer to the contamination was never to stop the reading, only ever to hide the reader from view. Her name came off the title page the way the lines came off the page, with one pen, for one reason, by one hand, in one quiet.

One motion, performed twice in one long afternoon's work: see her at the table in Bath with the proof sheets: the pen comes down on the line, the bawdy line, the line that cannot be said in the parlor, and the stroke is firm and level, the work of someone who has done it a thousand times, and the line is gone, and the play survives, and the page gives no sign that anything was ever there. Then the title page: The Family Shakspeare, in four volumes, and the space where the editor's name would go, and the one pen, or the pen's refusal, leaving the space blank, because the hand that struck the line cannot be known to have read the line, and the hand cannot sign for work it was never seen to do.

The two strokes are one stroke, the cut and the anonymity. The cutting of the text and the cutting of the name are the same act, done for the same rule, and the rule is still with us wherever the page is cleaned for the family and the cleaner goes unsigned. She died in 1830, before the verb was born, named in the record only later, by the scholars, after her brother had a century of the credit, and her restoration to the record is still newer than the verb. The pen struck the line, and the name came off the page, and the book went into the world without her, and the world read it, and the parlor was safe, and nobody asked whose work it was, which was the arrangement's whole success and its whole cost, the two being one.

CHAPTER 7

The Blue Pencil

For 231 years, from 1737 to 1968, from Robert Walpole's day to Harold Wilson's, no new play could be lawfully performed in England until a man in an office in London had read it first. The office was the Lord Chamberlain's, the examiner was his Examiner of Plays, and the arrangement was set up by Robert Walpole's Parliament in 1737, after Henry Fielding's satires had made the stage too hot for the government to leave alone. The Licensing Act of that year required every new play to be submitted to the office before performance, and the office could license it, cut it, or refuse it, and there was no appeal and no obligation to give a reason. Read the arrangement as a device for the employment of the exempt reader, because that is what it was, every working morning, for more than two centuries. Every play that England saw for more than two centuries was a play that had first been read, at leisure and at the public charge, by the one class of person licensed to read everything. The obscene comedy, the seditious tragedy, the blasphemous farce: into the office it came, by post and by messenger, and the examiner read it, all of it, before anyone, so that no one else would have to, and so that he would have to first. Defenders of the office called this the protection of public morals. The record calls it something plainer: two centuries of privileged reading, paid for, and the privilege exercised in the ordinary

course of the nation's theater, the plays everyone was talking about, read first and read most by the man charged with deciding who else could.

Its mechanism was a civil service of one taste. The play arrived from the management by post; the examiner read it and wrote his report; the blue pencil came down on the lines that might not be spoken, or the play went back refused, with no reason owed; the license issued, or it did not, and there was no one to appeal to. And the examiner was paid by the play. The office's day books, which registered every play received from 1824 to 1968, were kept for the purpose of calculating the fees due to the examiners, and the fee, in the twentieth century's own account of it, was two guineas a play. Two guineas a reading: the exempt reader on piece rate, the only reader in England whose morning was metered. The arrangement deserves a slow look, because it makes the forensic high into a wage. The examiner got to read what the public was forbidden, and he was paid per forbidden object examined, and the more the nation's stages stirred, the more the office read, and the more the office read, the more the office earned. No one designed the incentive to be perverse; it was the ordinary logic of a licensing office, the logic by which a customs man is paid per parcel. But the effect is perverse in the strict sense: the reader's income depended on the continued supply of the thing he was appointed to suppress, and the reader who suppresses too thoroughly suppresses his own livelihood. The blue pencil had every reason to stay busy, and stay busy it did, for 231 years, two centuries' worth of quiet mornings at a desk with someone else's play.

The office kept a copy, and the copy is the fullest of the record's forbidden libraries because it is the most complete.

Now at the British Library, the Lord Chamberlain's Plays hold the scripts of every new play performed in Britain from 1824 to 1968 as submitted for licensing under the acts of 1737 and 1843, play after play after play, and the library's own guide calls the collection its largest single manuscript holding. Think what that means. The censored archive is the complete one, the only complete one, the stage's whole output as the state required it to be. The free literature of the stage, the plays as the authors wrote them, survives scatteredly and by chance; the plays as the censor required them, with the cuts marked and the correspondence attached, survive entire, because the office was a bureaucracy and bureaucracies keep their paper. And the office had no legal right even to retain the scripts until 1912, and it retained them anyway, year after year, the accumulation its own authority, and the library it built without authority is now the single indispensable source for the history of the British stage. The correspondence files, which run from 1900 to 1968, each contain the examiner's reader's report, his opinion of the play's merits, his advice on licensing, the changes he demanded, and the letters that passed between the office and the management. The files are the exempt reader's diary, kept at two guineas the entry. There has never been a censorship regime anywhere with a fuller record of what the censor was reading while he decided, and it exists because the censor kept a copy of everything, and the keeping, not the cutting, is what history got from the arrangement.

Who were these readers, and what did they write? The examiners were respectable men of letters and of the office's own world, and their reports, the excerpts published in the standard histories aside, are characterized by the col-

lection's own guide with a bibliographer's neutrality: the examiner's opinion of the play's merits, and his advice on licensing, and the demanded changes, and the correspondence. Read the description the way the examiner wrote the reports. He was not a faceless clerk. He was a man of taste giving his opinion, at length, for the record, on every new play in England, before England, and his opinion was law's partner. The forensic high, in this archive, does not come as a boast or a count; it comes as minutes, as the serene daily prose of a man whose reading matter was the nation's theater and whose judgments no one could appeal. The reports' excerpts that the historians print, from Johnston's history of the office to the four volumes of Nicholson's documentary survey to the 2004 collection of the letters, are quoted nowhere here, because the excerpts await their page. What can be said from the collection's own guide is the shape, and the shape is eloquent: two centuries of plays, each with its reader's verdict attached, the censor's taste set down in his own hand on every one. The exemption has never been documented so well, before or since, and the reason it was documented is that the office was proud of the work and kept the proof.

A week at the office was mostly not Ibsen. The day books' thousands of entries are the record of a working theater culture: the melodramas and the pantomimes, the farces and the touring spectaculars, the music-hall sketches and the amateur societies, the whole unremembered sea of the English stage, and into that sea every so often dropped a Ghosts or a Mrs Warren or a Saved, the plays the archive remembers. The examiner read them all alike, at one fee, with one pencil. Hold this about the office: the great refusals were days in a life of ordinary reading, and the ordi-

nary reading was the office's real substance, the daily privilege of first sight over everything the nation wrote for the stage. Every play came to the examiners before it reached the public, and the examiners read more new drama in a year than any critic in the country, and they read it with the blue pencil in hand, which meant they read as judges, and judging everything, morning after morning, is a satisfaction of a specific kind, the connoisseur's pleasure disguised as a duty, and the fee book records it by the piece. Refusals made the office infamous; mornings made the office happy; and the day books keep both, the famous names and the forgotten ones, all read, all judged, all shelved. Pantomime and problem play paid the same two guineas; the Christmas spectacular and the banned tragedy got one morning, one report, one signature. Reading the day books straight through, as one can now do in the national library, is reading the office's diary, and the diary's surprise is how ordinary the days were, how much of the censor's work was the plain daily reading of what everyone else would see a week later, and how the first reading was the job's quiet constant, the perquisite no one mentioned and everyone understood.

The office's refusals read like a syllabus of the modern stage, and the first great name on the list is Ibsen, and the first great refusal is Ghosts. Henrik Ibsen's Ghosts came up at the start of the 1890s, the play about syphilis and inherited rot in a respectable house that is now a fixed star of the world repertory, and the office refused it. The refusal is the exemption's work at its most legible, and the play's survival is the signpost's. The examiner read Ghosts, all of it, every line of Mrs. Alving's despair and Oswald's inheritance, and judged that the playgoing public of England should not see it. Then the public saw it anyway, in the

way the record keeps showing: by exemption, by the club performance, the subscription house, the play staged at a subscription theater for members only, the law's categories politely stepped around, the audience being the sort of audience that can organize a club by Friday. The rule held for the public and bent for the club: the ban protected the people who could not organize a club from the play that the people who could organize one were already reading. Ghosts survived the blue pencil with ease, and the office's refusal is now a footnote in its bibliography, which is where refusals go, and the examiner's own reading of it, the full text with its horrors intact, sat in the office's files. The licensed reader had read it. That was the arrangement working as designed, and what the design produced, for the examiner, was the reward of the first and fullest reading of the most talked-about play in Europe.

Shaw got the same pencil as Ibsen, and held the grudge accordingly, and outlived the refusal by decades, as he outlived everything, with interest. Mrs Warren's Profession, his play about a brothel-keeper and her daughter and the economics that built the brothel, written in the 1890s, was refused by the office and held off the licensed stage for three decades, into the middle of the 1920s. Shaw's case is the standing rebuke to the claim that the office caught only filth: it caught Shaw, the least filthy and most argumentative of dramatists, because the argument was about prostitution, and the office read the argument and judged the subject itself unfit for the public it licensed. The examiner read the play; the public could not see it; the clubs staged it, as the clubs had staged Ghosts; the thirty years passed; and when the play was finally licensed, the office's long custody of it had done nothing for the public's morals and ev-

erything for the office's files. The pattern of Ghosts and Mrs Warren repeats across the whole 231 years with a fidelity that argues the point better than any polemic could, because the refusals are on file: the plays the office refused or held are the plays the anthologies print, the office's files are the reading list of the stage's serious life, and the office's taste, pronounced upon daily at two guineas a play, was wrong with a consistency that suggests the taste was never the job; the job was the reading. Its taste was the reading's excuse, and the blue pencil's true product was the examiner's own morning, spent with the new play before anyone in England, paid for by the piece.

Once a generation the office had to answer for itself, and in 1909 the answer was a committee. The Joint Select Committee of the Lords and Commons on the stage censorship of plays took evidence from the trade's great names, Shaw and Barrie, Galsworthy and Gilbert among them, and the writers came to say, in their different voices, the thing the record keeps proving: the office's judgments were the examiner's own tastes dressed as the nation's morals, the cuts fell on the serious plays and spared the frivolous filth, and the licensing system made one man's morning reading into the nation's law of the stage. The committee's report, a public document anyone may read, recommended reforms and changed nothing fundamental in the office's daily work, because committees of reform meet a licensing office the way water meets a stone: the office outlasts the report, and the report joins the office's files, and the files are where reports go to be read by examiners. What the 1909 hearings preserve for the record is the writers' testimony, the exempt class's subjects describing the class's rule, and the subjects were the most articulate in the language. Shaw's evi-

dence alone is a treatise on the exemption, delivered with his whole arsenal of irony to the lords and commoners, the man whose play had been held for thirty years explaining to the lords and commoners what it is to have one's work read and ruled on by a reader one cannot choose, answer, or even meet. The office heard him out, and the office then continued, at two guineas a play, for two more generations of mornings, the committee's report on the shelf and the pencil back on the desk, and the nation's stage went on being read before it was seen.

The American cousin deserves its paragraph, because the office's form crosses water, and the water shows the form. In 1927, after the furor over Mae West's play Sex, the state of New York passed the Wales Padlock Law, which let the city padlock a theater for a year for presenting an obscene play, the building itself held hostage to the content, and the examiner's role fell, in the American manner, to the police. No blue pencil, no two guineas, no day book, no archive: a precinct's judgment and a padlock, and the play's producers prosecuted, never licensed, and the padlocked building standing empty to teach the street a lesson. The comparison instructs, because the two forms are the two poles of the taking. England's office read everything and kept the copies and paid its readers by the play; New York's arrangement read nothing until someone complained, and then it closed the house. The first is the exemption as a profession, the second as a raid, and both rest on the same fact, that someone must see the show before the public may be kept from it, and the someone sees it whole. Mae West, who wrote the thing, served her days in the workhouse on the obscenity conviction and got her legend and her career, and the play's notoriety, per the pattern the signpost keeps

proving, became its advertisement. Hamilton's biography of her carries the padlock story at length, and this account does not lean on it, because the New York interlude is a sidebar, and the office's home is London, and the London record is the one with the files, the files being the only archive in the record where the censor's whole reading life survives intact.

The office's last great case was Edward Bond's Saved, and the case is the whole 231 years compressed into one file. The Royal Court Theatre staged Saved in November of 1965, the play with the scene of a baby stoned in its pram, and the office's answer was a total ban, on grounds of profanity and that scene. It went ahead as a club production, the members-only device that had carried Ghosts and Mrs Warren through the office's refusals; the police intervened anyway, the club device finally exhausted; and in 1966 the question went to court, and the court hearing went the Lord Chamberlain's way, with Laurence Olivier himself speaking for Bond, the stage's greatest name pleading for the stage's newest troublemaker. The file on Saved, the Parliamentary Archives' own account of it records, was the largest file ever brought to the office in all its centuries: the play read, the reports written, the changes demanded and refused, the club staging, the prosecution, the conviction, the correspondence thickening by the week. Read the file's size as the office's autobiography, written in the case that broke it. The exemption, by 1965, was a grandfather clock in a jet age, and everyone in the case could hear it ticking, and the office still did what it did: it read the play first and most fully, at its leisure, with its fees, and it pronounced. The largest file ever assembled by the censor of the English stage was assembled about a play now in the canon, and the file

is preserved, and the play is preserved, and the only thing abolished was the office, which had lasted 231 years and had read everything.

Statute ended it, quietly, the way the thing had begun. A Joint Committee on Censorship of the Theatre sat in 1966 and 1967, taking evidence from Peter Hall and Kenneth Tynan and Benn Levy, and the office's days were numbered by the hearing, and the Theatres Act of 1968 followed: Royal Assent on the twenty-sixth of July, wholly in force on the twenty-sixth of September, 1968, its first section repealing the Theatres Act 1843 and ending the Lord Chamberlain's powers under it and under the royal prerogative, the whole apparatus of 1737 undone in one sentence of statute, without a day's mourning. The last play the office ever banned was Bond's Early Morning; the office itself was then banned, by Parliament, its powers repealed in a sentence, the examiner's two centuries ended by an act the nation barely noticed at the time. There was no bonfire of the day books, no scene, no crowd, no debate in the streets. The archive went to the British Library, the largest single manuscript holding it has, and the files went on being read, now by anyone, which is the final turn of the exemption's wheel: the licensed reader's private library became the public's, and the public found in it the examiner's own record, two centuries of one office's mornings with the nation's unlicensed reading. The office died as it lived, on paper, and its paper is the fullest record ever kept of what the exempt reader enjoyed, because the exempt reader kept a copy of everything he enjoyed, and filed the reasons he gave for keeping it from you, and signed them, and dated them, and left them to a library that anyone may now visit.

Of all the record's proofs of the exemption's structural

nature, the office is the clearest, because it was the exemption made into a civil service. A ban that must be read to be enforced requires readers, and the readers must be paid, and the paid readers must be housed, and the housed and paid readers must keep files, and the files must be shelved, and the shelves must be staffed, and two hundred thirty-one years later the whole arrangement has become what every such arrangement becomes: an institution whose real product is the reading, with the suppression as its public rationale. The two-guinea fee is the detail that gives the game away. The office did not pay its examiners a salary to keep the stage clean, whatever the license forms said. It paid them by the play, by the object read, by the forbidden thing examined, which means the office's own accounts measured its work in units of privileged reading. The censor was a pieceworker, and the piece was someone else's play, someone else's whole life's work. And the wage was more than the two guineas. The wage was the reading itself, the first and fullest reading of everything England would later argue about, with the pleasure of judgment attached, and the judgment's pleasure was the kind that looks like work from the outside and feels like connoisseurship from the inside, the examiner's own morning elevated above the nation's evening. The forensic high, in the Lord Chamberlain's files, is not a flush or a boast. It is a report, signed, in a correspondence file, in the fullest archive the record holds, and the signature is in a hand that was paid by the piece.

What did 231 years of the office do to the English stage? The honest answer is that it made the examiner's taste into a public institution with a fee book and a pencil, and then mistook the institution for the public's own judgment. The stage that England got was the stage the office passed, and

the stage the office passed was the stage the office liked, and the office liked what the office understood, and so the two centuries produced, alongside the living theater, a shadow theater of the held and the refused, the club nights and the decades of waiting, the plays that had to wait for a club or a decade or a change in the law. Meanwhile the exempt class was professionalized, and professionalization is the final disguise. The Enfer's keepers were scholars, the customs men were officers, the Code's readers were staff; the examiner was a civil servant with a fee book. The disguise works because a fee book looks like the opposite of a reward, all columns and no appetite, and the archive is here to say otherwise: nobody keeps the fullest record of a chore. They kept the reports because the reports were the work and the work was enjoyed, and the enjoyment is legible in the archive's sheer completeness, two centuries of nothing missed, the censor's completeness outlasting the censor. When the office closed in 1968, the papers went to the national library under the new dispensation, where anyone may now read the censor's reading, and the censor's reading turns out to be the best-kept diary of the English stage we have. The censor kept a copy. The copy is the record. And the record is the enjoyment, filed, and the filing outlasted the office by half a century and counting.

The twenty-sixth of September, 1968, was a Thursday, and somewhere in London the office's work ended by the clock, at the close of an ordinary week. The blue pencil was laid down at the end of the day's file. There was no ceremony, because the office had never needed one; its work had been paper, and its ending was paper, and the last of the reader's reports sits in the archive with the last of the signatures, a man noting his opinion of a play and his ad-

vice about its licensing for what neither he nor the management yet knew was the final time. The pencil had been lifted and set down for two hundred thirty-one years, over the small melodramas and the great plays alike, over Fielding's heirs and Shaw and Ibsen and Bond, over every line the nation would eventually be allowed to hear, and the hand that held it had been paid, by the play, in guineas, for the reading. The next morning the nation could perform any play it liked, and the nation, which had been told for two centuries that the office stood between it and corruption, discovered the office had stood between the nation and nothing but the plays, while the nation discovered, in the files, that the office had missed nothing. Every banned line had been read, every refused play preserved, every judgment minuted. The pencil lies in the archive now, beside the last signed report, and the reports run back through the day books for two centuries, thousands upon thousands of plays, each one read first by the one man in England whose job was to read what no one else could.

CHAPTER 8

The Doctor Who Read the Comics

In 1946, in Harlem, a psychiatrist opened a free clinic and named it for Paul Lafargue, and the clinic is where the record of the best of the exempt readers begins. Fredric Wertham was fifty-one years old, a respected figure in American psychiatry, a man who had spent his career on the mental lives of the poor and the condemned, and the Lafargue Clinic was his answer to the plain fact that psychiatric care in New York belonged to those who could pay for it. The clinic charged nothing. It took the patients no one else took, it staffed black doctors and white doctors together in an era when that was itself a statement, and it operated out of modest rooms while its director's name grew. Sit with the clinic for a paragraph, because the man who did this is the man the record is about to watch condemn a whole genre of reading, and the two facts have to be held together or the story is false. Wertham's work at the clinic was real and it was good. He testified, in the Delaware school cases that ran into Brown v. Board, that segregation harmed the mental life of black children, and his testimony was the kind of expert evidence that helped end legal school segregation in America. The Lafargue patients got a doctor for free. The children of Delaware got a scientist on the stand. No crank, no bluenose, no career bluenose-in-waiting stood here; the man was one of the best public men American psychiatry

produced in that century, a reformer with receipts, a doctor whose bill for conscience came to zero. That is the man who read the comics.

His testimony in Delaware deserves its own full account, because the fair reading of this man requires his best evidence given its weight. In the early 1950s the school segregation cases were moving toward the Supreme Court, and the Delaware cases were among the ones that fed into Brown v. Board, and Wertham took the stand for the plaintiffs. His testimony argued from his clinical experience, from the Harlem patients and their children, that the segregation of children by race inflicted psychological harm, that the separation itself taught the lesson of inferiority, and the argument he made is the one the Supreme Court would make famous in 1954, that separate schools could not be made equal in their effects on the child's mind. He was right, and he was early, and he was useful, and the cause he served was the best cause of his century, and the lawyers who used him used him well, because a scientist's certainty in a righteous courtroom is worth a boxcar of briefs. Hold that in the reader's left hand, and weigh it. One man, one method, one certainty, one arrangement of cases to support a verdict, would within a few years be turned on the four-color books in the children's pockets. The exemption does not announce its arrival. The clinician who had watched segregation damage children had learned that his clinical judgment could move the law, and he had learned it in a courtroom where he was right. In the next courtroom he was wrong, and the confidence was identical, and the confidence was the problem, because the exemption that licensed his reading also licensed his certainty, and certainty in a witness is indistinguishable from truth until someone opens the file.

The turn came by way of his method, and the method is where the exemption starts to work on him. Wertham's science was the case study: he listened to children, delinquent and disturbed and poor, and he wrote up what they told him. In the late 1940s his cases kept arriving, the delinquent boys and the disturbed boys and the poor boys of his practice, with the same reading material in their pockets, the crime comics and the horror comics, the four-color books with the ten-cent price and the dripping covers, and Wertham drew the conclusion that the reading was making the cases. The clinician saw the correlation every day, and the correlation was real: the children who stole cars did read Tales from the Crypt. The children who played hooky did read The Vault of Horror. Every delinquent's pocket had the four-color contraband in it, and so did every schoolboy's. What the correlation could not show was the direction of the arrow, and the doctor's confidence filled the gap. He began to write and lecture against the comics, and the case for the prosecution was built from his own casework, his own patients, his own files, evidence he had gathered and interpreted himself, evidence he alone had read. The psychiatrist who judged the comics had read more comics than any parent in America. He had to; the judgment required the reading, the office required the exemption, and the exemption was his by right of his doctorate. The best reader of the horror comics in the country was the man preparing to destroy them, and the cases were his Chamber of Horrors, and the files were in his own hand.

In 1954 the case went public as a book, and the book landed like a verdict. Seduction of the Innocent appeared that spring, a hardcover verdict from a famous doctor, and its title did the work the cover of a comic would do: the

seduced were the nation's children, the innocent; the seducer, unnamed on the title and named inside, was the comic book itself, the whole industry of cheap four-color reading that sold, in 1954, about twelve hundred million copies a year. Wertham's argument was total. The crime comics taught crime; the horror comics taught horror; the love comics taught its own lessons; the reading warped the forming mind, and the proof was his patients, the boys of his clinic and his practice, their stories arranged to lead to one conclusion. The book was a sensation, excerpted in the magazines, argued over at the PTA and the breakfast table, and it made its author the most persuasive exempt reader of the American century, the scientist whose judgment about what children should not read was backed by a lifetime of having read it for them. Parents who had never opened a comic now knew the comics were poison, because the doctor had read them by the stack, and the doctor had pronounced. What the parents did not know, because no one knew it yet, was what the doctor had done to his evidence, and that part of the story waits for its own paragraph below, where it belongs, because the verdict and the rigging of the verdict are two different entries in the ledger. In the spring of 1954 there was only the verdict, and the verdict was believed, and the Senate came calling.

The book had a campaign behind it, and the campaign had been running for years. Wertham had been lecturing and writing against the comics since the late 1940s, in the big magazines and the symposiums and the parents' meetings and the press, and his authority had grown with every repetition, the accretion of the expert's name: the doctor from the Harlem clinic, the expert from the segregation cases, the man who had actually read the stuff. The

campaign's genius was its venue choice. He did not argue with the industry, which would have argued back; he argued over the industry's head, to the parents and the teachers and the columnists, and by the spring of 1954 the ground was so well prepared that the Senate hearing arrived to harvest what was already grown. The committee did not have to build the case. The case had been built, in the magazines and the meetings, by the doctor, and the committee had only to hold it. That is the borrowed committee's ideal form, the one the record shows again and again: the crusader spends years making the weather, and the committee meets for one afternoon and calls the weather its own. Wertham made the weather for the comics panic the way he made his cases, by accumulation, by confidence, by the sheer repeated performance of a man who had read everything and was certain of what it meant, and the weather he made did what weather does: it settled over the whole country at once, over every drugstore rack and every boy's bedroom, and the publishers, seeing the sky, cut their own lines before the lightning could pick them out one by one.

The Senate's Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency took up the comics on the twenty-first of April, 1954, with Robert Hendrickson in the chair, Estes Kefauver asking the questions the country remembers, and the country's press in the room, and the hearing is the borrowed committee in its mid-century costume: the nation's name, the Senate's letterhead, the witness table and the flashbulbs. Wertham testified, the star expert of the morning, and the record of the hearing is a public document, printed by the Government Printing Office, readable by anyone to this day, and the doctor's performance is all there. He had read the books. He named the titles and the covers, the tortures and the

creatures, the whole repertory of the four-color Hell, and the senators listened the way the parents had read, leaning forward: a man who had spent years inside the material was telling them it was too dangerous for children to touch, and every senator in the room could see the headline the hearing would make. The exemption was never more persuasive than it was in that room, because the witness's authority was the exemption itself, demonstrated at length, the fluent command of the forbidden library. Nobody asked him the question the record keeps asking, the question the whole history of the exemption makes unavoidable: how did the doctor survive the reading he prescribed against? The question would have been rude, and the room was not rude to experts in 1954. The morning belonged to the doctor, and the afternoon's other witness was waiting, and he was the publisher, the man whose books had been on the doctor's table all morning, and he walked into the room the way a man walks into a verdict already reached.

William Gaines published Entertaining Comics, the house that made Tales from the Crypt and The Vault of Horror, the sharpest and most successful of the horror lines, and he came to the hearing as the industry's designated defendant. The exchange that survives him is on page 103 of the printed hearing, and it is the day's whole argument in one cover. Kefauver held up an issue of Crime SuspenStories, the one with the severed head on the cover, and asked the publisher whether he thought it was in good taste. Gaines said it was, for the cover of a horror comic: the seven words of his answer, and they are the correct seven words, the whole philosophy of the thing, the claim that a horror comic has its own standard and meets it. The committee did not hear the philosophy; it heard the admis-

sion. Gaines, pressed, went further into the mechanics: bad taste, he said, would be holding the head a little higher so the neck could be seen dripping blood from it, and asked about the blood at the mouth, he answered, a little. The room heard a monster. The room was wrong, because the room had been told, by the day's expert witness, that the covers were seducing the innocent, and the publisher who tried to defend a cover as a cover was done. When the hearing ended, the Code followed, and Gaines's company folded its horror lines within the year. The seven words lived on as the punch line of the panic, the publisher's gallows humor read as the industry's confession, and the lesson the trade took from page 103 was the one the borrowed committee always teaches: the defendant at his own trial loses. The next time, the industry would try itself.

On the twenty-sixth of October, 1954, the Comics Magazine Association of America announced the Comics Code, and the Code is conscience money printed as a seal. The industry had saved itself by cutting itself, and the Code's own text is the cut's instrument panel: no comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title, and scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with, walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited. The walking dead, prohibited. Vampires, prohibited. The whole population of the American newsstand's dark corner, removed by name, by an industry association, before any legislature passed anything. The Code's administrator was Charles F. Murphy, a former New York City magistrate, a judge by training, and he led a staff of reviewers who scrutinized every comic before printing and bestowed the seal, the little stamp on the cover that told a parent the book was clean. The seal was the indus-

try's payment on its conscience account, the fee that let the trade go on: we have policed ourselves, the seal said, and the policing was real, and the Code remained formally in effect until January of 2011, fifty-seven years. The horror comic died of it, died of the seal and the code and the magistrate's readers, died in its best sales year. Gaines's company gave up the crypt and the vault and survived on a humor magazine, and the newsstand's creatures were gone, and the magistrate's readers went on reading whatever the industry could still print, which was less, and tamer, and safe for the innocent. The seal saved no child from a vampire; it saved the publishers from the Senate, which is what it was for.

Then, in 2012, the archive answered back. Carol Tilley, a scholar of children's reading and library history, went into Wertham's papers at the Library of Congress, where the case files and the manuscript notes had been left for researchers, and she published her finding in the journal Information and Culture under the title Seducing the Innocent: the doctor had manipulated and fabricated his case material. The finding is the spine of the case against him and it is stated at the level the record's own pages allow: Wertham's published cases, the evidence on which the verdict rested, did not match the notes they were drawn from; details were altered, invented, or combined; the children in the book and the children in the files were not always the same children. And so the exemption completed its work on the best of them, and it had done the work in silence, in the files, in the gap between the notes and the book. The licensed reader of everything had licensed himself, as well, to adjust the evidence, because the evidence was his, gathered by him, interpreted by him, checkable by no one, and

the doctor's certainty was entire, and the doctor's science was the certainty with footnotes. Nobody audits the exempt reader's notes; that is what the exemption means in practice, the notes as private as the reading. It took fifty-eight years and one careful scholar to open the file, and the file said the verdict had been reached first and the evidence arranged afterward, which is the forensic high disguised as science, and the disguise was a lab coat, and the lab coat was earned, and that is why it worked.

The horror comic died in the middle of the decade, and the manner of its death is the instrument the record has been tracking. Nobody banned it. No statute named it, no court condemned it, no policeman seized it. The industry, facing the subcommittee, wrote its own code, appointed its own magistrate, hired its own readers, and cut its own most profitable line, and called the cut a public service. The seal is conscience money in its corporate form: a payment that lets the payer feel square, stamped in the corner of every surviving comic for fifty-seven years. And the borrowed committee was the Senate subcommittee, never passing a law, only holding the hearing, the nation's name on loan to a panic for an afternoon in April. The three instruments in one transaction, neat as a classroom demonstration: the high disguised as science in the doctor's testimony, the committee borrowed in the Senate's room, the conscience money stamped on the cover. The reader who had read everything and judged it was the doctor; the room that gave the judgment force was the subcommittee's; the seal that said the industry was sorry was the industry's own. And the children of 1954 lost the crypt and the vault. Everyone else kept something: the doctor his reputation for the rest of his life, and his obituaries were kind; the senators

their afternoon; the industry its newsstand. The bill went to the children, the only people in the transaction who were never asked, and the children, per the record's oldest habit, went looking for the forbidden thing somewhere else, and found it, in a barbershop in Ohio, waiting for them in a stack by the chair.

The barbershop was in Bexley, a suburb of Columbus, Ohio, a shop with a stack of reading for the waiting chairs, and the boy was a reader, the kind who finished everything in the house and wanted more. R.L. Stine, decades before the green paperbacks, was a child of the horror comic's last years, and he has told the story himself, across the years, in interview after interview, always in one shape: the comics were forbidden at home. His mother met him at the door on the day he brought a couple of them back from the store, and her sentence, in his recollection, was that's trash, you can't bring these in the house. It was the exemption's domestic version, the mother as the household's licenser, her ruling absolute at her own door. But the barbershop kept a stack. The barbershop had Tales from the Crypt and The Vault of Horror in the pile with the magazines, the forbidden books shelved with the sports pages, and so the boy got a haircut every Saturday and read the forbidden comics in the chair, in the open, in the stillness the clippers allowed. And there is the smallest possible proof of the whole record of taking: the ban at home created the barbershop's reader, and the book removed from the house became the book read with more attention than any other reading of his childhood, in a chair, in public, one eye on the barber, and the mother who banned them never knew, the Saturdays piled up, and the reading piled up with them, and the stack in the shop was never thinned, because nobody had told the

barber to thin it.

The boy in the chair grew up, and the harvest of the Code is the strangest sentence in the record, the one the panic's veterans never wrote. The industry that cut its own horror lines to save itself from the Senate had produced, by way of reaction, a generation of readers who had been told the stuff was dangerous and had consumed it anyway, on the sly, with the appetite the slyness sharpened, and one of them, the boy from the Bexley barbershop, became the best-selling children's horror writer in the history of the trade, the trade the Code had been built to tame. His own account of the Haunted Mask's origin is domestic and perfect: his son's Frankenstein mask stuck at Halloween, and the book grew from the image. The horror comic died in 1954, and the reader of the horror comic grew up and wrote Goosebumps, and Goosebumps passed four hundred million copies sold, and the children who bought the green paperbacks by the armload were the grandchildren, in reading, of the children of the crypt. The panic of 1954 had achieved the opposite of its purpose so utterly that the purpose itself is hard to remember: the vampires were removed from the newsstand so that a generation could grow up to sell the vampire back to it. And the exemption had done its work on the doctor, the committee had lent its name, the industry had paid its conscience money, and the children had grown up and bought the forbidden thing for their own children, who read it past bedtime against the house's rules, which is where the record leaves them, back at the oldest posture of the banned book's reader, the one the takers never reach.

At the end of the doctor's whole career, the chair. A barbershop in Columbus in the middle of the 1950s, a Saturday morning, the clippers and the talk and the smell of the

tonic and the winter light, and beside the chair the stack of comics nobody has removed yet, the crypt and the vault in their last years, the covers with the severed heads and the walking dead, the books the Senate had spent a spring day on, sitting in a pile between the haircut magazines, available to any boy with a quarter and a Saturday. The doctor had read them. The senators had heard about them, and the magistrate's readers had been hired to keep them from the nation's children, and the industry's seal had been printed to say the keeping was done, and in the barbershop the stack stayed where the barber kept it, in reach of the chair, because nobody had bothered to tell the barber, and the barber was not on anyone's committee. In the chair the boy read, the cape around his neck and his heart going fast, one eye on the barber, and he put the comic back in the stack when his turn was done, and the stack waited for the next Saturday, and the next boy, and it is waiting still, somewhere, in every barbershop and every library's back corner and every bookstore that has not yet been told, and every bedroom where a child has been sent without the book he wanted. The Code is gone now, formally ended in January of 2011, and the chair is still there, and the stack beside it is still full.

Movement III

The Foot Soldiers

CHAPTER 9

The Boys of Florence

Picture a knock on a door in Florence, early in 1497, in the last days of Carnival. A woman opens it, and on the step stands a boy, twelve or thirteen, dressed in white, and behind him down the street are more boys in white, moving from door to door in an order too regular to be play. The boy holds out his hand. He has come, he says, for the vanities of the house: the mirror, the cosmetics, the cards, the lute, the doll, the love songs, the painting that is not of the Madonna. He is polite about it, because the companies were instructed in politeness, and he is firm about it, because the companies were instructed in firmness, and the woman at the door faces the question every target of the foot soldier faces: how do you refuse a child? The child is the point. The thing being taken from her is being taken by a boy she could have nursed, and the holiness of the errand is written on his white clothes, and the holiness is real to him, he feels it, the flush of it, the rightness, the thrill of being the one allowed to ask and therefore the one allowed to take. That flush has a curriculum, and the curriculum has a designer, and the oldest documented school of the pleasure of taking things away is running this winter in the streets of Florence, taught by children to children, in the name of a friar who preached and a God who, the boys were told, was watching. The mirror goes into the boy's arms, and the door closes,

and the boy is already at the next door.

Its designer was Girolamo Savonarola, the Dominican of San Marco, and in the winter of 1497 he was, in effect, the conscience of Florence. The Medici had been driven out three years before, the republic was trembling into a new shape, and the friar's preaching had given the city a vocabulary of purification that everyone could hear and everyone could repeat: the luxuries were sins, the sins were the cause of the city's humiliations, the humiliations would end when the sins did. It is the borrowed committee in its oldest working form, God's own voice, and the friar's genius, the thing that makes him the founder of a school, is that he sent the children to collect the vanities, and kept his monks at San Marco. The boys of the city were organized into companies, the fanciulli, the little ones, marshaled by the friar's movement into brigades with their own discipline and their own dignity and their own pride of place, and the brigades were given the work of purification, door to door. The organization of it is the thing to hold: Florence had seen mobs of boys before; what the friar's movement fielded were companies, formed, instructed, and sent. Someone sat with the boys and taught them that taking was holy. The teaching had a uniform and a rank. And the reward was taught, and the teaching is the subject here, because the pleasure of taking is the one moral appetite that does not need to be awakened twice. It needs to be taught once, by one trusted voice, to one child at one door, and the child will teach it to the next, and the next will teach it onward.

The companies were anything but symbolic. They worked. Through the winter of 1496 and into the new year, the boys went through the city asking for the vanities, and the account of their methods, in the scholarship of the Flo-

rentine streets, is the record of an apparatus: the boys organized by the movement's own design, sent out in bands, received by households that mostly yielded. What is a mother to do? The boy at the door is her neighbor's son, or her own, and refusal means telling a child no in the name of the God he says he serves. Behind him stands the friar's whole movement, and behind the movement stands the whole theological machinery of the city, and behind that machinery, waiting, stands the possibility of being marked as a household that kept its vanities. The boy's hand is out, and the household's mirror is heavy, and the boy is patient, because the boy has been taught patience as a soldier's virtue, and the household yields the mirror, and the boy walks away with it, and the thrill of the errand compounds with every door. What the boy feels had no name in 1497. The record is building the name across this whole history, and the name is the forensic high, and it has never been younger. He investigated the house, prosecuted the vanity, won the mirror. He is twelve, and the lesson he has learned is the one every foot soldier of every later panic will learn at the door of someone weaker: that there is a thrill in being the one who is allowed to seize, and that the thrill, once tasted, organizes the child.

What the city handed over is preserved, because an eyewitness wrote down the inventory, and the inventory is the most eloquent list in the record of taking. Lascivious pictures. Women's hats. Mirrors, wigs, dolls. Perfumes, cupids, playing cards, dice boards, chess pieces. Lutes and other instruments. Books of diverse poets. Read the list slowly, the way the householders read their own shelves for the boy at the door, and the thing that strikes you is the size of the items, how small they are, how domestic. A doll, a chess set, a woman's hat. The vanities of 1497 are the ordi-

nary comfort of a house, the small objects of vanity and play, and the taking of them was the purification of the city's daily life, which is the actual content of the friar's program, a program domestic to the last drawer. The chess pieces are the tell. Nobody's soul was ever lost to a chess piece, but the chess piece was an occasion of joy in the house, and the house's joy was the curriculum's target. And the books of diverse poets are on the list too, the songs and the classical verses, because the songbook is the gateway object, the small readable joy that leads to larger ones. The boy with his hand out was taking, item by item, the household's collection of its own joys. And the mirrors are the ones to remember, because the mirrors are the instruments of vanity in the friar's theology, the tool by which a woman admires herself, and the companies took the mirrors from the mothers of Florence, and the mothers gave them up, and the boys carried them away, and the carrying was the lesson.

The seventh of February, 1497, was the last day of Carnival, and the city spent it in the Piazza della Signoria watching its vanities burn. The pile was an engineered thing, built for the occasion, a tiered wooden pyramid filled with brushwood and broom, and the pyramid's design is its own document: at the apex, a statue of Satan, and at the base, demons, so that the burning of the dolls and the chess sets and the mirrors was staged as the burning of a Satan on a throne of the city's joys. Around the square the windows filled with women, the record says, the women watching from above, and the women at the windows are the detail to keep: the mothers of the mirrors, watching the flames take their dressing tables, from above, from the frames of the windows, while the boys stood below in their white. More than a thousand children in white, with armed guards,

had scoured the city for the pyramid's contents, the eyewitness account records, and the thousand is the number to sit with. A thousand boys, organized, uniformed, guarded, victorious, and home in time for dinner. The armed guards are worth a second look, because a thousand children at a thousand doors is a lesson that needed guarding, and the guarding tells you the lesson was never as welcome as the singing suggested: the boys could work the doors because the work had an escort, and the escort was armed. The borrowed committee, in Florence, was more than God's voice. It was God's voice with guards, and the children were its voice at the door, and the guards were its answer when the door stayed shut.

There is a reason the burning fell on the last day of Carnival, and the reason is the taker's perfect instinct for the calendar. Carnival was the year's licensed excess, the days before Lent when the city was allowed its excess, the one window in the Christian year when the flesh was given its due so that the fast could follow it. To burn the vanities on Carnival's final day was to make the year's one holiday of appetite into the pyre of appetite, to take the license itself and burn it with the mirrors. The timing taught the lesson better than any sermon could have. The boys had spent the winter at the doors; the city spent its festival at the fire; and the fire became the festival, which is to say the taking had eaten the holiday. Count the cost of that. A holiday is a thing a city does together, all its classes in one square, and the friar's genius was to replace the thing done together with a taking done together, so that the city still gathered, still sang, still watched something burn, and the gathering itself was the confiscation's instrument. The square was full because the square was where Carnival ended, and the friar's movement

understood that a crowd assembled for pleasure is a crowd available for righteousness, and the two feel, from inside the crowd, alike enough to pass for each other. The band is playing, the fire is lit, the neighbors are singing: that is the deep trick of every burning in the record, the conversion of the feast into the raid, and the children are the ones who carry it out, because the children are the ones the feast was for.

Then the trumpets sounded, and the torches came in through the crowd, and the fire. The pyramid went up with its cargo of dolls and cards and mirrors and poets, and the eyewitness recorded the mood of the square: they burned everything with the greatest happiness, with almost all the citizens present. The greatest happiness, the diarist wrote. It stands in the eyewitness diary as the record carries it, and the diarist's page waits for its reader at the open copy, and even at a translation's remove the mood is legible, because the square was happy. The citizens watched their own possessions burn and felt elevated. The boys watched the work of their own arms burn and felt holy. All of the friar's project is in that happiness, and the happiness is the thing the long record keeps confirming across its centuries: the taking pays on the spot, in public, in company, and the payment is greatest when the taken thing is beautiful or beloved, because the size of the sacrifice measures the size of the holiness, and the holiness is the high. Carnival's last day had always ended in the square; that year it ended in the square on fire with the city's joys, and the boys sang, and the women watched from the windows, and the smoke of the mirrors went up over the Signoria, and nobody in the square called it what it was. It was a debt collection. The city's joys had been seized at the door by the city's children,

and the fire was the receipt, and the receipt was read as worship, and the worship was, in fact, enjoyment, and the enjoyment is the whole finding the square was staged to hide.

About the friar himself the resolution holds: he stays at the edge of the frame, because his century and every century since has made too much of him, the well-loved subject of a hundred good books and plays, and the record's interest is elsewhere. What needs saying is brief, and the brevity is itself part of the evidence, since the friar's fame is the distraction the record refuses. Savonarola had risen on the preaching of wrath and purification in a city exhausted by the Medici's fall and frightened by the French invasion, and his movement was, for a season, the nearest thing the city had to a government of morals, his sermons filling the cathedral while the companies filled the streets. He was excommunicated on the thirteenth of May, 1497, three months after the pyramid burned in the square before him, and his fall moved with the speed such falls always show when the wind changes at last. But the fall of the friar is the usual story, the one that flatters everyone: the fanatic rises, overreaches, falls, and the city comes to its senses. That story is a way of not reading the record. The friar's fall changed nothing about the curriculum. For the companies had already worked, the doors had already been knocked, the mirrors had already been carried away by twelve-year-olds who had learned, with God's own committee behind them, what it feels like to make a household yield. The friar could burn, and did, in that square, before that crowd, and the lesson stayed taught anyway. The point of Florence is the boys; it was never the friar; the boys are where the record's foot soldiers begin.

One painter's fate is pinned at the text, and it belongs

here because it shows what the curriculum did to the city's best. Vasari's life of Botticelli, in the record's public-domain translation, the de Vere rendering of 1912, records that the painter became so ardent a partisan of Savonarola's sect that he was induced to desert his painting, and, having no income to live on, "fell into very great distress"; that persisting in the party and becoming a Piagnone, he abandoned his work; and that in old age he would have nearly died of hunger without the help of Lorenzo de' Medici and the friends who loved him for his talent. That is Vasari, and that is all Vasari on the matter, and the restraint matters to the record's method: Vasari says nothing about Botticelli burning his own paintings, and the story that he threw his canvases on the friar's fire is later legend, and the legend stays out of this record. What Vasari does record is enough for the record, and the record will not go past it. Sandro Botticelli, the painter of the Primavera, stopped painting, in mid-career, at the height of his gift. The purification took his work by conviction alone, no fire needed for that one, and the taking left one of the century's greatest makers in distress, idle, kept from hunger by the friends of his talent. The pyramid took the dolls and the mirrors from the households, publicly, in the smoke, and the curriculum took the painter from his easel, quietly, in his studio. Nobody in the square noticed the second taking, because it happened in a studio, quietly, by belief, in another quarter of the city, and the friends who kept him fed in his last years are the record's note of grace, and the note of grace is small, and small is what a note of grace usually is, and enough.

The curriculum did not run once; it repeated, on schedule, the way curricula do. A lesson taught once is an event; a lesson taught on schedule is a school. A second bonfire rose

in that square the following February, dated the twenty-seventh in the standing accounts, the city's second Carnival of purification, with a second harvest from the doors, the diarist's own pages carrying this one. The boys had a year's seniority now, a year's practice and memory of the taste. The errand was familiar; the households knew the knock and had the answer ready; the white clothes were a known quantity on the street, and that familiarity, the thing no longer needing to be explained, is the difference between a riot and a curriculum. And the first Carnival's reward had been taught and tasted, and the second Carnival's work was done by boys who already knew the taste, and could teach the younger ones, which is how a school works, and keeps working. The friar's movement was by then fighting for its life, the excommunication nine months old, the city turning against its conscience of a season, and still the companies worked, because the work had become its own reward, and the reward is the thing no counterweight can repeal. So the second pyramid is the proof of the first one's pedagogy: the taking had been learned, and the learned take again. The record will see the rhythm in every century after, in every country, the schoolchildren collecting the comics, the students collecting the un-German books, the list repeating because the lesson, once taught, wants to be practiced, and practice is the appetite's persistence in time.

And then, three months later, the same square held its other fire, the one the city is better known for. On the twenty-third of May, 1498, in the Piazza della Signoria, where the vanities had burned the year before, the city hanged Girolamo Savonarola and two fellow friars of San Marco, and burned the bodies on a platform sprinkled with gunpowder, and the citizens who had filled the square for

the vanities filled it again for the friars, that crowd back for the other fire. The eyewitness diarist recorded the execution with the same calm he brought to the bonfire, and the diarist's page waits with the bonfire's pages. About the hanging: it is not the record's subject here, and the record does not celebrate it; the hanging is the city's payment of the friar's bill, and the record's rule about bills applies to this one too, and the payment was public. The boys watched, or did not watch, from wherever the city keeps its children on such mornings, at the windows or away, and the record does not follow them home. What did the boys learn at the second fire? That the taker can be taken and the committee's voice can change its mind. That last year's holiness is this year's ash, and the lesson outlasts the fire. And, underneath all of that, the lesson that outlasted the friar and the fires both: that there is a square, and things burn in it, and the ones who carry the mirrors to the burning feel, in their arms, the specific gravity of being right. The mirrors came back, of course; the dressing tables refilled; the poets returned to the shelves, as the poets always return. And the curriculum never left.

The pleasure is taught. Florence is the oldest documented schoolhouse of that finding, and the school's register survives in the eyewitness inventory itself. Every other appetite in the record is awakened by the object itself: the reader wants the book, the drinker wants the bottle, the lover wants the face in the mirror. The taker's appetite is different, because its object is someone else's loss, and so it must be taught by someone trusted, a friar or a teacher or a parent or a movement, and the teaching is always one lesson: the taking is holy, the taken are dangerous, and you, my child, are the one allowed to do it. Built into the lesson

from the first knock, the exemption arrives with it. The boy at the door with his hand out is exempt from the commandment the household keeps, the one about other people's things; he may handle the vanity, carry the vanity, burn the vanity, and the handling makes him more, not less, holy, because the handling is the work of the committee he serves. The borrowed committee's oldest form is God's own voice, and the voice's genius is that it recruits by pleasure, not by conscription: the forensic high, learned young, at the door of a neighbor, with the mirror heavy in the arms. Once you have seen the school, the record's later fires stop looking like madness and start looking like class. The boys of Florence are the first foot soldiers in the record because they are the first ones we can watch being taught, and what they were taught is written on the inventory, and the mirror is the item that tells the whole curriculum in one household object: take the thing the woman sees herself in, carry it to the square, and be applauded, in public, for the weight.

For the close, the mirror. A boy of the companies, twelve years old, in the February cold of 1497, carrying a mirror to the Piazza della Signoria. The mirror is a good one, a woman's mirror, taken from a dressing table in a house that yielded to his knock, and it is heavy in his arms, and the weight is the weight of the errand, the holiness made portable. It is bright, the street, with the winter noon. The boy is walking with his company, and the square is ahead, and the pyramid is waiting with its Satan and its brushwood, and the boy, being twelve, and carrying a mirror, does the thing that twelve-year-olds do with mirrors: he tilts it, and he catches his own face in it, the white uniform, the flushed cheeks, the importance, the thrill. He sees himself in the taken thing. The friar's whole theology said the mirror was

vanity, and the friar was righter than he knew, because the vanity in the street that winter was not the woman's at her dressing table. It was the boy's, in the glass, on the way to the fire: the face of the one allowed to take, seen by himself, pleased with itself, twelve and already schooled. The mirror went on the pyramid with the rest, and the glass broke in the heat, and the face went with it, and the lesson the face had learned walked home to dinner. The lesson is still walking. It is walking down every later century, in every later company, carrying someone else's mirror to someone else's square, and the weight in its arms is always called a virtue, and the glass always shows the same pleased face, and the square always burns on schedule, and the mothers watch from the windows, and the record keeps the inventory, and the inventory is the proof of the school.

CHAPTER 10

The Pledge

On the evening of May 10, 1933, in the Opernplatz in Berlin, in the light of the torches, some forty thousand people gathered to watch twenty thousand books burn, and the fire was lit by students. That sentence needs to be said in that order. The crowd was enormous, and the night had been organized down to the torches, the microphones, the songs, the oaths, and the organizers were the university students of Germany, acting on their own proclamation, with their own leaders, their own lists, and their own pride. The books went onto the pyre in armloads, the way the vanities went onto the pyramid in Florence, and the carriers were young men and women of the student corporations, in sashes and caps, working in teams. It was one of more than thirty fires that night, in thirty-four university towns and cities across the country, and the whole night's work burned upwards of twenty-five thousand volumes. The textbooks say the Nazis burned the books, and the textbooks are telling a smaller truth than the record, which says the students burned the books, and the regime applauded, and the regime's chief propagandist came down to make a speech over the flames, and the regime had not had to ask. The students had named it themselves: the Action against the Un-German Spirit, proclaimed by the German Student Association on the sixth of April, 1933, weeks before the fires, in the students' own

voice, addressed to the students' own campuses. And the borrowed committee that night was the nation itself, and the borrowers were twenty years old, and they were proud of what they were doing, and the pride is the exhibit.

The students had prepared like librarians, which is the detail that turns the stomach. The blacklists of the un-German books had been compiled by a librarian, Wolfgang Herrmann, a young man who had spent the spring writing letters to the student unions of the republic, assembling the lists of authors and titles, and the lists ran to the predictable syllabuses of the century's first third: the pacifists and the socialists, the Jews, the psychoanalysts, the novelists of the war's truth, the sexologists, the whole population of the Weimar bookshelf. Among the fuel that night was the material seized four days earlier from Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science, the library and the research archive of the world's first institute for the study of sex, hauled out of the building by students and storm troops together and carried to the fire. A library burning a library: the institute's papers were the pyre's own kindling. And the books burned to the singing of the fire oaths, the students' own liturgy, each oath naming a class of the condemned to the flame as the books went on. The oaths were not imposed on the students; the students wrote them: the oaths, the lists, the trucks, the torches, the schedule, all of it the students' own work, the extracurricular project of a semester, and the work had the unmistakable shine of a task enjoyed. In Berlin, the forensic high had a student union card. The investigators were twenty, the prosecutors were twenty, the judges were twenty, and the verdict was fire, and the night was, by every surviving account, a festival. No one conscripted the young into the taking; the young had organized

it, and they organized it the way the young organize everything they love, with more energy than the old could ever lend.

Goebbels spoke over the Berlin pyre, the regime's chief propagandist arriving to bless the students' work, and his sentence is in the record as reported speech: he declared the age of excessive Jewish intellectualism over. The minister's arrival is usually read as the regime taking charge of the fire, and the record reads the other way: the fire was already lit, by the students, when the minister arrived to bless it. The borrowed committee, that night, had been borrowed in both directions: the students had borrowed the nation's name, and the nation's minister had borrowed the students' fire, and the fire belonged to whoever could stand nearest it, and the photographs show who stood nearest: the young, in rows, in the light of their own work. Forty thousand people in the square is a number that does not lie about what the night felt like. It felt like a rally and a graduation at once, a public celebration of the students' own virtue, and the virtue was measured in other people's libraries. The twenty thousand volumes were strangers' books. The forty thousand pairs of eyes were the committee's public. And the fire was the receipt, Florence's receipt, paid on the spot, in company, with music. What was new in Berlin was the paperwork, since the fire itself was as old as Florence: a proclamation, a blacklist, a press office, a schedule of fires across a national grid. The friar had a square and a pyramid and a season. The students had a network and a date and a press office, and the date was one date everywhere, and the simultaneity was the proof of organization, and the organization was the pride.

One of the authors was in the crowd. Erich Kästner,

whose books went onto the pyre that night, stood in the Opernplatz and watched his own work burn, by his own account, the account every book about that night describes, the one eyewitness claim in the record still waiting on its page. He was the only banned author known to have stood there. The rest of the condemned were in exile or in hiding or already gone, and Kästner stood in the crowd and watched, and the crowd did not know him, and his books burned, and he lived. And the detail matters to the record because it is the rare case where we see the writer's side of the fire at the moment of the fire: the man whose name is on the blacklist, standing among the blacklists' readers, unrecognized, watching the copies go up. The students who carried his books to the flame had read him, some of them, since childhood, since his children's books were famous, and that is the exemption's German face: the students were the licensed readers of the books they burned, the ones who had grown up on Kästner and were now old enough to purify him. The man at the counter and the boy at the door and the student at the pyre are one figure in three centuries' clothing. Each had read the thing and survived it, and each had decided the next child could not be trusted with it. The centuries change the costume and the scale and the paperwork. The figure at the center does not change, and in Berlin the figure had a sash.

Heine had written the sentence for it a hundred and twelve years before, in Almansor, and the record gives it here in the book's own translation: where they burn books, they will in the end burn people. The line has been quoted to the point of smoothness, and it is quoted here once, because the German fire is the one everyone agrees to condemn, and the agreement is the reason the fire is in the

chapter at all. Now the concession, made once, in the open. The fire in Berlin belongs to a machinery that went on to murder on a scale no school-board meeting will ever approach, and nothing in this book equates the two, and the scale is conceded here in plain print so that no reader has to wonder whether the author knows the difference. The author knows the difference. What the two fires share is structure, never scale: the borrowed committee, the students' pride, the library condemned by its licensed readers, the pleasure paid on the spot and billed to strangers, and the teaching of the young. Only the structure is compared, and the comparison is made once, here, and then put down. Every other page of the record stands without it. But the structure is the subject, and the structure was visible in Berlin in its largest and most horrible dress, and it was visible in Florence in 1497, and fifteen years after Berlin, on a football field in West Virginia, where no one was murdered and everything was small, and the smallness is what makes the American version legible: the machinery, seen at the size of a schoolyard, with its gears exposed.

On the twenty-sixth of October, 1948, at the Spencer Graded School in Spencer, West Virginia, a thirteen-year-old named David Mace stood before six hundred of his schoolmates and a pyre of some two thousand comic books, and the comics had been collected, over the previous month, by the children themselves, door to door through the town. The collection is the part to sit with. For a month, the children of Spencer had gone from house to house asking for the comics, the way the boys of Florence had gone from house to house for the vanities, and the town had handed them over, the ten-cent books with the four-color covers, the whole circulation of a small town's childhood,

and the school's reading teacher, Mabel Riddel, had organized it, and the boy she had chosen to lead the ceremony was her eighth-grader David. The newspapers named him, and the record names him as the newspapers named him, and no more is claimed about him than the 1948 record carries, because he was thirteen and the 1948 record is where he stays. What he did that day is on the record. He made a speech. The speech, as the papers printed it, declared the comics mentally, physically, and morally injurious, and then the boy added a sentence of his own, a sentence no adult had written for him, and the sentence is the reason the chapter exists: we also pledge ourselves to try not to read any more. Eleven words. The fire got the books, and the pledge got the readers, and the pledge is the finer instrument, because the fire takes the objects and the pledge takes the appetite, and the boy had understood, at thirteen, that the burning was the beginning of the work, that the reading had to be renounced, and that the child had to promise.

Hear the forensic high in the boy's own sentence, because it is the youngest the record has, the purest, the least embarrassed. The pledge promises no better books, no different books, no fewer books; it is a promise to try not to read, and the trying is the tell, the boy's own acknowledgment that the appetite would resist, that the masked man and the caped one would keep calling, that the pledge would be broken and renewed and broken again, and that the renunciation was a state to be maintained daily, an act never completed once. A thirteen-year-old had been handed the prosecutor's role at his own school, before six hundred schoolmates, with a pyre at his back, and he had risen to it, and he had risen to it so fully that he had improved on the adult program: the adults wanted the comics gone, and

the boy understood that the comics were the symptom and the reading was the disease. The pride in the account is the pride of the ceremony's young officiant, and the press covered it as a heartening local story, a school cleaning up its children's reading, and the coverage is the borrowed committee's American costume: the school, the teacher, the parents, the town, and finally the nation's magazines, all lending their names to a pyre of children's books lit by children. The nation did not order it; the nation admired it, which is the committee's quieter function. No order had come from anyone, which is the modern form's chief improvement on the friar: no friar needed, no statute needed, just a teacher, a school, and a boy with the right instincts, and the town's goodwill doing the rest.

Weeks later, in Binghamton, New York, the children of St. Patrick's parochial school ran that errand with a sales force attached. Answering their bishop's denunciation of the comics, the students canvassed house to house, asking at each door whether there were any comic books in the home, and they did not stop at the doors of the houses; they went to the stores. About thirty-five retailers, the 1948 record says, were pressed to sign pledges to discontinue objectionable literature, under threat of boycott, and the signing was the thing: a shopkeeper's name on a pledge, extracted by children with a boycott behind them. Read that sentence and the counter is fifty-eight years early and five hundred miles away: the hint, the arithmetic, the merchant who cannot afford to test it, and the shelf cleared without any order anyone could appeal. The retailer pledges of Binghamton are the bookstore counter with the child's face in place of the bishop's: the counter stripped of everything but the mechanism. And then the fire: some two thousand

comics, gathered by the children, burned in the schoolyard, and Time magazine ran the picture in its issue of December 20, 1948, and the picture went out to the whole country, which is how the nation admired it. The children in the photograph are arranged around the fire like a class photo, and they are smiling, because the fire was a school event, and school events are happy, and the happiness is the finding. The pledge was the instrument at Spencer; the pledge to the retailer was the instrument at Binghamton; the photograph was the instrument for the nation. All three were forms of one transaction, and the children were proud in all three, and the pride was assigned reading.

One newspaper said it, plainly and in print. The Charleston Gazette, in the same state as the Spencer fire, printed an editorial after the burning, in the days when the fire was still the talk of the town, and the editorial is in the record through David Hajdu's history of the comic-book scare: the paper writing that "the burning of books is too recent in our memories," and the burning of authors had followed the burning of books, in Germany, within living memory. The Gazette is the chapter's witness from inside the weather, the hometown paper of the region: a paper in the fire's own state, looking at the schoolchildren's pyre and naming the obvious. Spencer was not listening. The country was not listening either; Time ran the Binghamton picture as a feature, as a curiosity, and not as a warning, and the fifteen burnings Hajdu counts across postwar America were each of them covered, in their towns, as heartening local news. It sits in the record for two reasons. First, that it was right, on the day, in that state, in plain print, and no one could say the warning was not issued. Second, that it lets the chapter's own discipline be seen: the compari-

son everyone agrees to condemn was made, in 1948, by a West Virginia newspaper about a West Virginia school, and this record quotes the paper and lets the paper make the comparison, and the paper's standing in the state makes the naming legible without a lecture. The children lit the fires; the paper saw them; and the paper said what they resembled, and the resemblance was the whole point, and the point was available to anyone, and Spencer burned its comics anyway, proud.

Hajdu's history of the comic-book scare counts fifteen comic-book burnings in postwar America, and the number deserves its own paragraph because of what it rules out. Fifteen is not a fad; fifteen is not a panic of a single town; fifteen is a curriculum. The fires of 1948 and the years around them were lit from Missouri to New York, in parish schoolyards and public schoolyards and town squares, by children organized by their schools and churches, and each fire was covered as a local improvement, in the local paper and the wire photo, and each coverage recruited the next fire. The record of the American burnings is the record of a lesson being taught by example and coverage at once, the mechanism Florence invented: the children did the taking, the adults provided the committee, the press provided the audience, and the audience's children provided the next fire. And the whole wave, all fifteen of them, came fifteen years after the fires everyone agreed to condemn, which is the interval the record keeps finding: long enough for the names to change, short enough that the adults had watched the earlier fires on the newsreels. The parents who signed off on Spencer had seen Berlin, and the teachers who organized Spencer had seen Berlin, and the children had not, and the children are the point of the instrument, because the child

is the one member of the transaction who cannot remember the last time, and so the child brings to the errand the one thing the errand always needs, which is freshness. For the child it is always the first time, and the fire is always new, and the pride is always pristine.

The extreme case is 1966, and it is kept brief on purpose, because the extreme case is the one the record least needs. In that year the Red Guards, the student militias of the Cultural Revolution, went through the cities of China hunting the Four Olds: old customs, old culture, old habits, old ideas. The scholarship of the episode, MacFarquhar and Schoenhals's Mao's Last Revolution, their history of the Cultural Revolution, is carried at the level the scholarship allows; the shape of it is the shape the record knows. Once again the students were organized; the lists were made; the libraries and temples and homes were entered; the books and the art and the objects went to the fire or the truck; and the committee being borrowed was the largest one yet, the revolution itself, and the borrowers were again twenty years old, and again proud, and the pride this time had the state's own radio behind it. The Four Olds campaign is the fire with the friar's pyramid scaled to a country, the proof that the instrument has no maximum size. It is also the proof of the instrument's upward limit on meaning, because at that scale the fire stops being about the books at all and becomes about the burning, the pure performance of the taking, the student's sash made into the whole of politics. The record leaves the extreme case there, at the edge, where it belongs: the instrument at its largest, which is the instrument with its meaning burned off, the fire for the fire's sake. The schoolyard version tells us more, because in the schoolyard the books still matter.

Set the two years side by side, Berlin and the American schoolyards, and the instrument is the same instrument at two sizes. The borrowed committee in Berlin was the nation, its name proclaimed by the student association in April and set alight in May. In Binghamton it was the church, its bishop's denunciation the warrant the children canvassed behind. In Spencer it was the school itself, the teacher and the building and the six hundred schoolmates as the public. And behind the whole American half of the chapter stood the era's parents' organizations, the standing committees of the child in danger, the PTA and its kindred, the permanent standing committee of the child-centered panic. Every committee was borrowed; none of them had ordered a thing; every one of them worked. The students of Berlin received no order from the nation's government when they proclaimed their Action; they were acting in the nation's name, and the nation accepted the act. The children of Binghamton had no order from their bishop; none is in the record, only the denunciation, and the denunciation was enough. And no one required the schoolchildren of Spencer to collect the comics; the collection was the ceremony's raw material, and the town's houses opened to it. That is the borrowed committee's whole secret, and the fires make it visible at scale, at both scales: the name is loaned, the work is volunteered, and the pleasure is pocketed by the volunteers, and the committee's books, when anyone checks, show no order at all, because no order was needed, because the hint was enough, because the hint is always enough when the taker is proud and the target is paper.

And the pride, which is the finding. The record's finding, stated once and flatly, is that the twentieth century's

fires were lit by students who were proud of it, on both sides of the Atlantic, fifteen years apart. In sashes, with oaths and a minister and a schedule of fires, the German students were proud. In school clothes, with pledges and a month of doorbells and a picture in Time, the American children were proud. The scale is conceded, and conceded again: one fire belongs to a machinery that went on to murder, and the other burned two thousand ten-cent comics on a schoolyard, and no reader of this record is being asked to equate them, and the difference in scale is the difference between a crime against humanity and a bad autumn in a small town, and the difference matters, and the difference is recorded. What does not differ is the figure at the center: the young person with the box of other people's books, the organized young person, the proud young person, the one who has been taught that taking is virtue and has believed it with a child's whole heart. The figure recurs because the figure is taught, and the teaching is cheap, and the child is willing, and the pleasure is immediate, and the pleasure is the wage the young collect for work the old could never do with a straight face. The adults of 1933 and 1948 knew what fires like those looked like; the students did not, and they lit them, and they were proud, and the pride is the sound the twentieth century makes when it is teaching its children the family business.

Of all the tools in the taker's hand, the pledge is the purest, purer than the fire, because the fire takes the object and the pledge takes the reader, body and appetite at once. A burning ends; the books are gone; the appetite remains, and the appetite is the thing. A pledge recruits the appetite against itself: the child promises to try not to want. The boy of Spencer had grasped, at thirteen, what the commit-

tees grasp only in their best years, that the problem was the reading and the appetite, the comics and the object being only their occasions, and that the only complete ban is the one the reader administers to himself. That is the foreclosure the whole record has been building toward, and a child said it first, in a speech, before a pyre, in a small town, and the papers printed it as a bright touch. The forensic high in a thirteen-year-old's speech is the finding of the chapter, and it needs no embroidery, and it gets none: investigated all month, prosecuted from the podium, won at the fire, and then, in the eleven words, the insight that the victory must be renewed daily because the enemy is desire itself, and desire does not keep school hours. The friar taught the boys of Florence that the taking was holy, and the boys carried the mirrors; the teacher of Spencer taught the boy that the not-reading was holy, and the boy carried the match, and the boy took the lesson one step further than the teacher, the way the best students always do, and the further step is the pledge, and the pledge is the chapter's name, and the name belongs to a child.

End on the smallest one. A football field in West Virginia, October 1948, the autumn light, the six hundred schoolmates in their rows, the pyre of the town's comics waiting in its cords and colors, and at the front a boy of thirteen with the pledge still warm in his mouth. The speech is done; the difficult part, the part with the words, the part he practiced, is behind him, and what remains is the fire, and the fire is the part he has been waiting for all month, since the first doorbell. A teacher hands him the match, or he takes it from the box; the record does not say, and the record does not need to say, because the match is the universal instrument, the one the friar's boys did not need and the pledge's

boy does. He is a child with a match, and the hand does not tremble, because the pledge has seen to that. The Superman cover is on the pile with the rest of them in this record's telling, the strong man's bright face up, the cape, the whole four-color sunniness of the thing the town has decided to be rid of, and the six hundred are watching, and the moment before the cover catches is the whole twentieth century in miniature: the child trusted with the fire, the committee's name on loan, the strangers' reading in the pile, the pride, the pleasure about to be paid. And the match bends to the pile, and the bright cover catches, and the fire is small, and local, and the scale is conceded, and the boy is thirteen, and the lesson is the largest thing in the record.

CHAPTER 11

Filthy Fifteen

In May of 1985, in Washington, four mothers founded a committee, and the committee was the Parents Music Resource Center, and its founding five thousand dollars came from Mike Love of the Beach Boys, with further help from the Coors money, and the mothers were Susan Baker, Tipper Gore, Pam Howar, and Sally Nevius. Wives of senators and cabinet officers, connected, fluent, and in earnest, and they had a subject: the records their children were buying. The founding story is theirs and is told as theirs: one of them had heard a line on her daughter's copy of Purple Rain, a Prince song called Darling Nikki, a line about a girl and a magazine, and the mother had listened, had heard at last, what the record was saying. And the listening is the thing to hold, because the listening is the exemption in its domestic form. The mothers of Washington resolved to listen to every record so that no one else's children would have to, and the resolution is the whole chapter in one sentence: they would hear it all, the filthiest fifteen songs in America and all their fellows, and then they would tell the country which songs its children might not hear. The nation's children would be spared the records; the mothers would absorb the records; and the mothers would do it in the open, in a cause, with the Senate's letterhead in their future. It is the exempt reader as the listening mother, and the exemp-

tion had never been more respectable or more audible: the women who condemned the records were the women who had heard every word of them, and they said so, proudly, because the hearing was the credential, and the credential was the work.

They made a list, the Filthy Fifteen, the committee's own name for its own syllabus, and the list was the era's catalogue of the forbidden: Prince's Darling Nikki and Sheena Easton's Sugar Walls and Madonna's Dress You Up and Cyndi Lauper's She Bop, the sex of it; Judas Priest and AC/DC and Black Sabbath, the volume of it; Mercyful Fate and Venom, whose Possessed was the occult entry; Twisted Sister's We're Not Gonna Take It, the defiance entry; W.A.S.P., whose Animal was the entry every account of the panic eventually has to quote or blush past. And the list was not the whole of the design. The design, as Billboard printed it in August of 1985, was a letter code on the pattern of the movies: X for the profane and the sexually explicit; D/A for the glorification of drugs or alcohol; V for violence; and O, O for lyrics concerned with the occult. One of the letters they proposed was O. In the year 1985, in the capital of the country that had spent two centuries on the first amendment's text, a free country's capital, a committee of well-connected mothers proposed to stamp a record with a letter for treating the occult, and the letter was the proposal's own tell: the songs about the devil would wear a mark, so that no child would buy them, and every child would know which records they were. The mark is the signpost in its purest form, printed before the fact, proposed in advance of any law, and the mothers could not see it, because the mothers were reading the records and not the market, and the market reads only the mark.

And the record industry answered before the hearing, and the answer is the species of compliance the record knows best. The RIAA's president, Stanley Gortikov, wrote to the PMRC's president on the fifth of August, 1985, and the letter is in the record: the volume of new releases, he told them, made their rating system an unreal expectation, and a parent who wanted to protect a child would care little which of the four categories applied. An unreal expectation: the industry's own three words for the letter code. But the industry did not fight. Nineteen labels had already agreed to a voluntary advisory sticker a month before the Senate heard anyone, the sticker's wording already a negotiation, a sticker reading Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics, the merchant already clearing the shelf before the hint had finished being uttered. The pre-hearing sticker is the conscience money of the record business, paid in advance, before the committee had even been fully borrowed, and it bought the industry what conscience money always buys: the right to say it had cooperated. And the PMRC took the sticker as a down payment and kept the hearing, because the hearing was the point, the hearing was the afternoon at the counter, the room with the senators and the cameras where the mothers could say aloud what the records contained. The negotiations' subject was the hearing alone; the sticker and the labels' liability and the stores' display rules were the furniture. What mattered was whether the hearing would happen, and the hearing happened, on the nineteenth of September, 1985, for five hours, and no bill was ever on the floor, and none was needed, because the forum was the instrument.

The weather of 1985 deserves its paragraph, because the O was born in it. The country was in the early years of

the Satanic Panic: the day-care trials were building their impossible cases, the talk shows were finding Satan in the suburbs, Dungeons and Dragons was being read as a grimoire, and the backwards-masked message was a staple of the panic, the claim that the record played in reverse carried the devil's instructions, the claim that sent a generation of panic-mongers to their turntables to spin the vinyl backwards, which is the exemption's most comical form and its most honest one, because the man who finds the hidden message is the man who has listened to the record backwards, and he has done it many times, and he will tell you where to find the devil. Its geography is its argument: the devil was everywhere at once, in the day care and the game shop and the record collection, and everywhere the devil was found, someone was finding him with the closest possible attention. The mothers of Washington were the panic's respectable face, its Georgetown face, never its clowns, and their O for occult rode the weather of the daycare charges, and the respectability is what makes the PMRC the panic's lasting instrument, because the panic faded and the sticker stayed. The weather always fades; the paperwork always stays. And the paperwork had a letter for the devil, filed between D/A and V, in alphabetical order's own place for him, in a proposal written by women who had listened to the records that worried them, every record, in full, and come out the other side with a filing system.

The hearing's own record is the day's architecture, printed as S. Hrg. 99-529, a Senate document anyone may read, and its contents pages are the map of the afternoon. Susan Baker for the PMRC at page 10. Frank Zappa at 51, his prepared statement at 61. John Denver at 64. Dee Snider at 72. Millie Waterman for the National PTA at 88, Stanley Gor-

tikov for the RIAA at 94, the experts and the broadcasters after them, and the ACLU's letter closing the file at 164. Danforth in the chair. The hearing was a forum, and the printed record is the proof of the chapter's instrument: the borrowed committee in its modern form is a committee of the United States Senate holding no bill, just the hearing, the nation's name on loan to the cause for five hours. And the cause was well served by its witnesses. The PMRC's side read the lyrics aloud, read the filth into the record, the chamber-of-horrors moment at the folding table, and the mothers' side of the table had done the reading, had done all of it, and could recite. The exemption was the day's whole spectacle: the people who had listened to every record telling the people who had not what the records said. No one at the table asked the record's question, which is how the listeners had survived the listening. The question never gets asked in the room. The room is where the exemption is the credential, and the credential was doing five hours of work that afternoon, and the work was, by every account, enjoyable, the senators attentive, the cameras present, the mothers heard at last in the largest room of their cause.

And then the musicians, and the musicians' afternoon belongs to Frank Zappa. His prepared statement called the whole proposal an ill-conceived piece of nonsense, and he told the senators the law's own answer: that First Amendment questions are decided with a preference for the least restrictive alternative, and that measured by that standard the PMRC's demands amounted to the equivalent of treating dandruff by decapitation. Seven words, and they are the day's survivors. And then Zappa said the sentence the whole record had been waiting two thousand years to hear said in a Senate room, the sentence that answers the

counter and the door and the pyre and the committee all at once. Nobody, he said, had forced Mrs. Gore or Mrs. Baker to bring Prince into their homes. They were free to buy other records for their own children. What they wanted, he said, was a label on everyone else's. The sentence is the exit's whole argument in advance: the mother's right ends at her own front door, and the record being labeled belongs to someone else's child. Zappa had read the room the way the room had not read him, had not heard him, had not credited him with a mind. The senators heard a rock star with an opinion; what they had actually heard was the one witness who understood the transaction, because the transaction's every defender was in that room being admired, and Zappa was in that room being precise. The dandruff line got the laughs, and the nobody-forced-you sentence got the record. It is quoted wherever the hearing is remembered, and it deserves to be, because it is the only sentence of the five hours that was about the other people's children.

The other two musicians matter for their wrongness as witnesses, which was the room's instruction. John Denver was the clean-cut one, the wholesome one, the singer the parents trusted, and he told the committee, by his testimony alone, that his own song about a mountain had been read as a drug song, and that the listeners' categories were the problem. The committee had no answer for Denver, because Denver was the witness who proved the letter scheme's whole weakness: the O for occult would be applied by the people who had heard Rocky Mountain High as a drug ballad, and the hearing would be run by the people who had just spent five hours proving they could not tell. And Dee Snider of Twisted Sister came down from New York in the cut-off denim and the hair, the living picture of the panic's

villain, and read his prepared statement in a voice so measured and so smart that the picture and the voice canceled each other, and the senators looked twice, and the looking twice was the whole of his testimony's point. Snider's testimony, like Denver's, is in the printed record for anyone to read. The two of them, the clean one and the filthy one, were the industry's whole defense besides Zappa, and they were chosen almost as if the trade wanted to lose with both kinds of face card, and the day belonged to the mothers anyway, because the mothers had done the reading, and the reading, in that room, was the only credential that counted. The musicians knew the songs, and the mothers knew the list, and the list won, because the list was the artifact, and the artifact is what the afternoon was for.

About the list's effect the record is honest and must stay so: whether the Filthy Fifteen sold more records because of the list is measured nowhere, and no sales figure is claimed here, because none was found; the signpost runs on the participants' own words. The industry's president told the mothers, in the August letter, that the categories were an unreal expectation, and the trade press of the era itself observed that the advisory sticker worked on teenagers as a recommendation, the warning read as the invitation. That is the list as advertisement, confessed by its targets and its opponents alike. The mothers had made a syllabus of the era's most wanted records, had read it aloud at a Senate hearing, and had proposed to stamp it with letters, and the syllable O would have marked the occult records for every teenager in America, and the teenagers, per the record's oldest habit, would have read the mark as the map. And the list is the signpost, because the list is the library in reverse: the Enfer's shelfmark told the licensed reader where

the books were, and the Filthy Fifteen told the unlicensed teenager where the records were, and the difference between the censor's library and the censor's list is the difference between a locked room and a magazine, no difference in kind, only a difference in audience. The forbidden shelf is for the exempt; the forbidden list is for everyone. And the mothers of Washington, who had listened to every record so that no one else's children would have to, published the list of what they had heard, and the children heard it too.

The agreement came on the first of November, 1985, at the National Press Club, and it is the afternoon's receipt. The RIAA, the National PTA, and the PMRC announced it together: the companies whose releases carried lyrics judged explicit about sex, violence, or substance abuse were urged to mark the records Explicit Lyrics: Parental Advisory, or to print the lyrics on the cover. Twenty-two of the RIAA's forty-four member companies signed on, about eighty percent of the records released in the country, with the procedures to take effect in two or three months, and Gortikov told the press the companies themselves would decide when a label was deserved, which is the sentence that tells you who won. The groups had wanted an R label covering sexual language, violence, profanity, and the occult, the lyrics available before purchase, and industry-wide standards; they got a voluntary sticker the companies would apply at their own discretion. Susan Baker, asked whether they had gotten far less than they wanted, gave the transaction its own epitaph: We had to give some. They had to give some. This is a start. Fourteen words, and the whole of the committee's afternoon is in them, the concessions and the pride, and the pride is the part to hold, because a start is what the afternoon was for, and the start was had.

Zappa, reached the same day, called the deal an unenforceable nothing and a defeat for both sides, and Zappa was right on the law and wrong on the history: the sticker came, and it has never left. The sign said Parental Advisory, and the advisory advised, and the records sold, and the mothers of Washington had their start, and their start is still on the shelves.

The sticker was standardized in 1990, one label for everyone, the black-and-white square reading Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics, revised again after the 1994 hearings to read Explicit Content, the wording adjusted and the institution untouched, and the standardization is the end of the arc, the forum's child grown up and living in the industry's own house: what the mothers proposed over a daughter's record in 1985 was, by 1990, the industry's own furniture, applied by the industry, printed by the millions, the exemption's little badge on every other record in the store. By then nineteen states had considered labeling bills of their own, nineteen legislatures' worth of borrowed committees, and none were needed anywhere, because the industry had done the labeling itself, which is the modern form's completion, its graduation: the borrowed committee borrows the Senate once, and thereafter the merchant borrows the committee's errand and runs it in-house. The seal on the comic and the sticker on the record are one device across thirty years of the record, conscience money with a logo, the industry's proof to itself that it had policed itself, and the badge's content is its existence. What the label means was never settled by anyone; what it says is that someone listened first, and that the listening was official. The little black-and-white square is the whole transaction reduced to its icon, one inch of printed obedience: the record someone

heard so that you would not have to, the pleasure of the hearing already collected by the hearer before you were allowed to buy it, the warning on the sleeve the receipt left for you. And the warning is read, by everyone who shops, as the menu.

The whole year is the three instruments in one administration, and the takers wrote the account of it themselves. Tipper Gore's book, Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society, appeared in 1987 as the movement's own telling, and it is named here as the movement's own telling and used only as that: the mothers' side of the afternoon, in the mothers' own words, which is where the takers always tell on themselves. And the instruments, laid against the year, all report present. The forensic high was the afternoon itself, the prosecution staged and won in a room where the verdict had been reached before the witnesses were sworn. Conscience money appeared twice, in the pre-hearing sticker and the November agreement, the industry's two payments on an account it had never owed. The borrowed committee: the Senate's room and the PTA's five and a half million members, the two largest names in the country lent to a five-hour forum with no bill. And the fourth fact reported alongside, as it always does. The exempt reader: the listening mother, the woman who had heard the whole record so that the country's children would not, the exemption domesticated into a duty of care and a night of headphones. The year's signpost was the list itself, published, read aloud, proposed for marking, the era's syllabus of the forbidden distributed free by its opponents, the market effect the ban buys for free. And the pleasure? The pleasure was the listening. Nobody founds a committee to hear what the committee's founders already loved hearing. The records were

heard, every record, in full, by the women who condemned them, and the hearing was the work, and the work was its own reward, and the reward was repeated at five hours of public testimony, in the largest room, with the cameras on.

And what did the listening do to the listeners? The record's answer is the pattern the record has by now made familiar. It made them the era's experts on the occult and the obscene, the country's most credentialed connoisseurs of the four-letter record and the devil's band. The women who founded the PMRC became the nation's designated hearers of the filthy, quoted on the content of the records by people who had not heard them, which is the exemption's whole economic logic: the licensed listener becomes the authority, and the authority compounds, and the compounding is the career. For the mothers of Washington, the listening was the work, and the listening made them, for a season, the country's most powerful critics of popular music, the most consulted, the most quoted, and the critic's pleasure is the pleasure of the piece rate, each new record another occasion, each new lyric another proof. The exemption always professionalizes its holder, always pays the holder in standing, and the standing outlasts the cause. For the friar's boys there were companies; for the customs men a basement; for the examiner of plays two guineas a script; for the mothers of Washington a foundation, a hearing, a book, and a permanent place in the record of the American century. And the getting is the finding, because the getting is what the listening was for, what it was always for, and the listening was real, and the records were heard, and the hearing was enjoyed, and the enjoyment is documented, because the committee published its syllabus and gave it a name that told you what it contained: the Filthy Fifteen, filthy being

the committee's own word for what it had spent the year listening to.

A record sleeve in a bedroom, at the end: the room with the door that closes, the room the whole apparatus was built to protect. Somewhere in America, after 1990, a teenager has bought the record with the law of his own money, and the sleeve carries the little black-and-white square, Parental Advisory, Explicit Lyrics, and the square is the whole chapter reduced to one inch of print: the mothers who listened, the committee they borrowed, the hearing, the agreement, the industry's seal of its own compliance, the warning that says the record is good. And the teenager reads the square the way the square was always going to be read, because the teenager is the record's oldest reader, the child at the forbidden shelf, and the square says the shelf is over here. He peels the sticker off. Or she does, and the bedroom is the same room, and the square is read that way. The adhesive comes away from the sleeve, the square lifts at the corner, and the sticker, the industry's conscience money, the mothers' little letter made plastic, comes off clean, and the record is the record again, and the sleeve is bare, and the music is the music, and the bedroom door closes. The warning was the advertisement; the sticker was the receipt. And the committee was the committee. And the teenager, having peeled it, owns the proof that the whole apparatus, the committee and the hearing and the label and the era's bills, was an afternoon's work by people who had listened first, and that the peeling takes one second, and that the record is playing before the sticker has finished coming off.

CHAPTER 12

Too Frightening for Young People

The American Library Association keeps a scoreboard, and the scoreboard is the decade list, the hundred most challenged books of each ten years, and read the way the record reads it, the list is a census of the one genre every century bans. For the 1990s the most challenged book in America was Alvin Schwartz's Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark, a folklore collection, a retelling of the old dark tales for children, with its famous illustrations, and at fifteen on that list sat Goosebumps, the green paperbacks with the dripping logo, too frightening for young people, the occult and the demonic, per the challengers' own forms. For the 2000s the list's first place belonged to a boy wizard. Harry Potter, the whole seven books of him, was the most challenged series of the decade, and the objections were the objections of the 1990s with the serial numbers filed off: witchcraft, the occult, sorcery presented as fun. Three titles or series at the top of two decades of the count, and all three are one kind of book: the frightening story for the child reader. Not the sexual book, though that one has its own chapters in the record. Not the political book. The scary book: the genre that every century bans is the one that tells a child the dark is interesting, and the children keep finding it, and the finding is the failure at the center of every ban, and the failure's

measure is the signpost's: the most challenged books of the two decades were also the best-selling children's books in the history of the trade, and the two facts are one fact, and the one fact is the whole argument of the genre's long century. The bans were the advertising, and the children were the market. And the draw was the fear.

The lists' own notes are worth a slow read, because the librarians keep them with care. And the association's Office for Intellectual Freedom remarks, in its record of the decade lists, that the Harry Potter challenges shifted the censors' focus: from the sex and language of realistic fiction to the magic and the occult in fantasy, which is the librarians' own way of saying the genre moved the target. The boy wizard had reached the 1990s list at forty-eight on the strength of part of a single year, and by the association's 2006 release the series stood first for the young century already, with more than three thousand challenges reported for 2000 to 2005. Three thousand challenges passes a controversy and becomes a campaign, and the campaign's object was a boarding-school novel with a flying-broom sport in it. And the 1990s list's own texture confirms the genre's place at the top: the Scary Stories challenges, per the association's notes, cited the occult and Satanism, the religious viewpoint, the violence, which is the whole liturgy of the objection, and the Scary Stories books were, again, a folklore collection, the old wives' tales of three continents retold for third-graders, the heritage of the campfire, shelved with the fairy tales. The genre every century bans includes the folktale. That is the thing the objection cannot see: the Scary Stories are the Grimms' grandchildren, and the Goosebumps books are the penny dreadful's great-grandchildren, and the boy wizard is the boarding-school novel crossed

with the hero's quest, and all of them are older than the form used to object to them, and the form used to object to them is, by the librarians' own count, the newest thing in the record. The challenge form is modern; the ghost story is ancient; and the genre keeps winning on points.

Now price the genre, because the price is the signpost's proof. Goosebumps, introduced as a monthly series in July of 1992 and run to sixty-two original titles by December of 1997, has sold more than four hundred million copies, and at its peak it sold more than four million a month, with no advertising, carried by the readers handing the books to the readers. Harry Potter's numbers are the publisher's own, Scholastic's, dated 2023: more than six hundred million copies worldwide, in eighty-five languages, two hundred and thirty million of them in the United States, and the seventh book sold eight point three million copies in its first twenty-four hours in the country, and the first book's first American printing, in September of 1998, had been fifty thousand copies. Fifty thousand to eight million in a day, in nine years. Those are not the numbers of a genre the bans ever suppressed. They are the numbers of a genre the bans fed, and the feeding is the signpost working at industrial scale: every emptied shelf told another million children which shelf to find, and the children found it, and the children who found it grew up, per the librarians' and the publisher's shared account, into readers, the reluctant ones converted by the books themselves. The most challenged series of the 1990s' second tier and the most challenged series of the 2000s are the two best-selling children's series ever published. And the campaign against the frightening book is the longest-running advertisement in the history of children's publishing, and it was run, at full price to them-

selves, by the people who wanted the books gone; whether it sold the books is measured nowhere, and the claim is the signpost's, made of the pattern.

The fires came on schedule. That spring, on a Sunday night in March of 2001, the congregation of the Harvest Assembly of God in Penn Township, Pennsylvania, thirty-five of them bringing material, burned the Harry Potter books with the Disney videos and the rock CDs and the literature of other religions, and their pastor, the Reverend George Bender, said the purpose came out of the Bible, and that they did it in the open so that people would ask why, and that the church had asked for nothing to be banned by anyone else. Bender's sentence is the one honest note in the year's fires: the church asked for nothing to be banned, which is the exit line in miniature, the congregation burning its own books and demanding nothing of anyone else's, and the record honors the difference. And in Lewiston, Maine, one Doug Taylor held book cuttings in 2001 and 2002, scissors in place of fire, after the city warned it would intervene over toxic emissions if he burned the books, and Taylor chose Rowling for her platform and let opponents speak at his microphone, which is the other honest note: the man cutting the books in public and letting the opposition talk. The fires and the cuttings are the record's two species of spectacle: the open ones are honest, and the quiet ones are the record's subject. And the honest ones, for all their smoke, teach the lesson the quiet ones teach: the children of the congregation watched their elders burn the most wanted book in the world, and the lesson the children took was the lesson the signpost always teaches, that the book worth burning is the book worth finding.

At the end of the same year, the year the first film ar-

rived, a church in Alamogordo, New Mexico, held a holy bonfire for the last Sunday of the year, December 30, and the pastor, Jack Brock, seventy-four years old, of the Christ Community Church, told the Reuters wire what the books were: they encourage youth to learn about witches, warlocks, and sorcerers, which are an abomination to God. The Thursday before, he had preached a sermon titled The Baby Jesus or Harry Potter, and on the Sunday the congregation threw the Potter books onto the fire with the Stephen King novels, the Ouija boards, and the AC/DC albums, and they sang Amazing Grace while the books burned, and across the street a line of protesters a quarter of a mile long chanted against the burning, one of them dressed as Hitler. Brock called the books, by the account the record carries, a masterpiece of satanic deception, and he told his congregation he took the attention as a blessing. And the local library answered, that week, with a display: Harry, the display announced, was alive and well at the library. The whole scene is the record's diorama, the fire and the protest and the library's window, and the man with the match is the exemption's local form: the pastor had read enough of the boy wizard to pronounce on his contents, and the congregation's children were the ones fenced, and the protesters across the street were the town's answer, and the library's display was the signpost proving itself in real time, because the children of Alamogordo now knew, from their own pastor, which books were the interesting ones.

In 2019 the genre met its most careful taker, and the care is the point. The Reverend Dan Reehil of St. Edward Catholic School in Nashville removed the Harry Potter books from the school library, and he did it by letter to the parents, and the letter, per the Tennessean's report-

ing, states that the curses and spells in the books are actual curses and spells, and that a human being reading them risks summoning evil spirits into the reader's presence. Actual curses and spells: four words, and they are the exemption's own words, because the pastor's finding rests on his own reading, the priest who had read enough of the books to judge their spells real, and who then ruled the books out of his parish school, as was his right under the diocese's own answer, the superintendent Rebecca Hammel confirming to the paper that each pastor holds canonical authority over his parish school and that the church has no official position on the series. No official position: the borrowed committee declined to be borrowed, and the removal ran on one pastor's letter anyway, because the hint is never the instrument, the letter is. And that year, in Gdańsk, in Poland, priests at the Mother of Church parish burned the books with other objects their parishioners had been told carried evil forces, and the photographs were posted by the foundation SMS z Nieba, so the fire of 2019 is documented in its own parish's photographs, the proof supplied by the takers, which is the modern form's completion: the fire now carries its own camera. The genre every century bans met the century's own bans, and the bans were documented by the banners, and the books sold on.

The pattern, in one page, says it once and plainly: a ban is a transaction that pays the taker on the spot, in a currency the taker names and measures, and bills strangers later. For the genre of the frightening children's book is the proof in its purest market, because the taker is never the reader and the reader is never asked. The pastor who burns the boy wizard has read the boy wizard; the committee that lists the green paperbacks has listened to every ghost story in them;

the mother who bans the horror comic has seen the cover, and the cover was seen in the barbershop all along, and the child who was told the book was too frightening learned the oldest lesson of the cleared shelf, that the forbidden thing is the interesting thing, and found the book anyway, and grew up, and bought the next century's supply of the frightening for his own children, who read it under the covers with the lights out and the flashlights on. The pattern repeats so faithfully you can set a watch by it, and the pattern's motive part has never been the protection of the child, because the child is never consulted, and the motive part is the taker's pleasure, and the pleasure is cheap, and the pleasure is collected at the counter or the fire or the letter to the parents, and the child pays later, in the errand of finding elsewhere, which errand the child has never once failed to complete. That is the argument in its page, and the larger argument has two witnesses the page had no room for, and they are the science and the theology, and they answer the question the pattern could only assert: why the children keep finding it, and why the finding does them good.

The answer begins in Denmark, at Aarhus University, in the cold north of the record's map, where Mathias Clasen runs the Recreational Fear Lab, the only research group in the record devoted to people who seek fright on purpose. The lab's field study, published in Psychological Science in 2020, took a hundred and ten visitors to a haunted attraction in Vejle, aged twelve to fifty-seven, fitted them with heart-rate monitors, and measured the fear and the enjoyment together, and the finding is the one every child under the covers could have dictated to them, had anyone asked: enjoyment and fear rise together to a sweet spot, an inverted U, the fright enjoyed up to the dose that suits the

person and turning sour past it. And the dose is the operative word, the one the whole chapter turns on. The haunted house's customer chooses the scare, sets the dose, and can end it at will, and the enjoyment lives at the chosen dose, and the study's own limitation is stated by its authors and is stated here in the open: no young children took part, so the field study cannot speak to children, and the record does not pretend it does. What it establishes is the mechanism in the older reader: the fear on purpose, the dose controlled, the exit at will, the pleasure measured in the pulse. The mechanism is the record's oldest word for it, the rehearsal, given a heart-rate monitor and a journal's page numbers. And the children, who are the genre's whole question, have their own source, and it arrives in the next paragraph, the finding for the children carried by the children's own study.

The children's study is the lab's own, published in June of 2025 in Child Psychiatry and Human Development, a survey of sixteen hundred parents and caregivers of children aged one to seventeen, and its finding is the one the century of bans never consulted: ninety-three percent of the children were reported to enjoy at least one form of recreational fear, the playful engagement with the scary thing in which fear and enjoyment are both felt, with the activities ranging across nineteen categories and the enjoyment showing distinct trends by age. Ninety-three percent. The genre every century bans is enjoyed, in some form, across the whole survey, from the toddlers upward. And the lab's directors have reported, in their own essays and presentations, that Danish nurseries and kindergartens run fear-inducing games on purpose, the staff describing the scaring of children as formative, which is the nursery's own answer, given in the nursery's own institutions, to the claim

that the fear is foreign to childhood. The two findings are stated separately, as the science's own care requires: the rehearsal mechanism rests on the adult field study and on Clasen's 2017 book Why Horror Seduces, and the prevalence in children rests on the children's own survey. The first says the dose is the point; the second says the child seeks the dose. And the two together answer the pastor and the list-makers in their own terms: the frightening story is not a contaminant the child stumbles into. It is an activity the child pursues, at every age the survey measured, and the pursuit is normal, and the normality is the finding the takers have never once consulted, because the takers' method asks the committee and never the child, and the committee is never seven years old.

The dose the child controls is the closed book, and the closed book is the exit the genre carries in itself, the genre's own brake. A film does not stop when the child hides his eyes; a book does, and the difference is the whole instrument. The page is read at the child's speed, in the child's order, with the child's hand on the cover, and the child who has had enough closes the book, and the ghost is inside it until the child opens it again. That is the rehearsal room the takers keep mistaking for the disease: the fear on the page, taken at the dose the child chooses, with the exit in the child's own hand. Clasen's Why Horror Seduces, the lab director's 2017 book for the general reader, lays the mechanism out at length, and it is carried here at the level the scholarship allows: the horror's appeal is the practice of the emotion, the safe rehearsal of the feeling the world will eventually require. The rehearsal builds the children of the covers-and-flashlight hours. And at the dose the child chooses, the record stakes its claim: they are training.

The survey of the children measures the appetite and owns that it has not measured the benefit; the benefit is the rehearsal's claim, and the rehearsal carries it. They are meeting the ghost at a size they control and putting it away at the moment they choose, and the two facts, the dose and the exit, are the whole of the answer, and they were available to anyone who asked a child, and the takers have never asked the child, because the takers' child is a figure of speech, a creature of the challenge form, and the figure of speech does not get a vote, and the figure of speech, meanwhile, is under the covers with the flashlight, training.

The folklorist's answer is older than the laboratory's, and it is bloodier. Maria Tatar's study of the Grimms' tales, The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales, published by Princeton in 1987, is the record's standing source on the old dark stories, and her case is carried here at the level the scholarship allows, its pages awaiting their reader: the tales children were told for centuries are grimmer than anything the green paperbacks ever printed, and the telling was done by people who understood, without a laboratory, that the child who has met the wolf in a story is better armed for the wolf in the woods. The Grimms' own texts are the proof anyone can read: the stepmothers dancing to death in red-hot iron shoes, the witch in the oven, the fingers in the keyhole, the blood under the key. The old tales do not flinch, and they were the nursery's stock for two hundred years, and the nursery survived them, and grew, and told them onward, and the children of the Grimms' long century became the adults who built the modern world. Take the wolf out of the tale and the woods keep their wolf; the tale is where the child meets him first, at a dose the child controls, in a story with an ending the child can close. The fright-

ening book is the child's armory, and the takers call it the arsenal of the enemy, and the takers are wrong in the oldest way, because they have confused the rehearsal with the disease, and the confusion is the genre's whole history, and the genre's whole history is the confusion made into law, or into a letter to the parents, or into a fire.

The ancient answer was written down twenty-four centuries ago, and the record promised it would return, and it returns here, paid off, with the laboratory's figures behind it. Aristotle, answering his teacher's nursery, read tragedy as the rehearsal of the terrible: the audience watches the worst that can happen, feels the pity and the fear all the way through, and comes out the far side with the feeling spent and mastered, the katharsis, the purification that comes of having met the terrible from a safe seat among one's neighbors. The child under the covers is the Poetics' smallest instance, its most faithful reader, its nightly congregation. The page is his safe seat; the covers are his theater; the flashlight is his lamp; and the book is his tragedy, and he attends it nightly, and he closes it when the dose is reached, and he sleeps. Both answers to the nursery were written in Athens, and the record has now run them both to ground in a Danish laboratory's heart-rate data, and the answer that won the argument is the answer the takers keep banning. Socrates built the nursery to keep the child from the ghost; Aristotle built the theater to teach the child the ghost, to train the feeling in the seat, and the laboratory at Aarhus, twenty-four centuries later, found the theater's mechanism working in the haunted attraction's pulse data, and the child survey found the child already enrolled in the theater, from the age of one, without anyone's permission. The nursery's charter is the taker's answer. The theater's charter is the

child's. And the child, in every century, in every survey and on every decade list, keeps choosing the theater.

And then the theology, because the takers in this chapter's scenes acted in God's name, and God's name deserves its own hearing in its own texts. The Bible the pastors preach from contains a ghost story, and it is a frightening one, and it is in the twenty-eighth chapter of the first book of Samuel. King Saul, at night, in disguise, goes to a woman at Endor who raises the dead, and he asks her to bring up the prophet Samuel, and she does, and the dead prophet comes up out of the ground, and the dead prophet speaks, and what he says is terrible, and Saul falls to the earth in terror, and the terror is the chapter's whole point, because the story is a ghost story, told to frighten, meant to frighten, and it is in the book the pastors are defending. The witch of Endor is neither marginal nor obscure; she is in the first book of Samuel, in the middle of the sacred history, and her scene is the Bible's own haunted attraction, its own rehearsal of the terrible, written by the tradition's own hand. The pastor who burns the boy wizard for teaching children sorcery preaches from a book that contains the witch who raises the dead, and the child who reads the boy wizard and the child who hears the witch of Endor are doing the same reading in two bindings, and one of the bindings is the one the pastor burns, and the other is the one he preaches from, and the difference between them is the century and the binding, and the text is one kind of text, which is the taker's whole position stated in the taker's own library.

And the newer tradition has its own ghosts, and they are treated here with the respect the record owes them, because the tradition's own folklore is the tradition's own answer. The Book of Mormon leaves three of Christ's chosen

disciples alive and walking, the Three Nephites, deathless men who tarry in the world until his return, and the folklore of the Latter-day Saints has made them the tradition's own uncanny visitors: they turn up on lonely roads to help the stranded traveler, they pull the stuck wagon, they deliver the needed food, and they vanish, and the stories are told by the tradition's own families, to the tradition's own children, at the tradition's own firesides. The folklorist Hector Lee collected the legends into a monograph in 1949, The Three Nephites, published by the University of New Mexico Press, and the Nephite scholarship of William A. Wilson continued the work, and both are carried at the level the scholarship allows, the pages awaiting their reader. What needs no pull is the shape of the thing: the tradition whose member emptied a bookstore's shelf of ghost stories has been telling its children ghost stories since the tradition began, and telling them with love, as proofs of the tradition's own hope. The ghost story is the tradition's own instrument. The Three Nephites are the tradition's own ghosts. And the lesson the tradition teaches its children with them is the lesson the green paperbacks teach: the strange figure on the road may be the help you need, and you will not know unless you have practiced the meeting, and the practice is the story, and the story is the rehearsal, and the rehearsal is the whole of the genre the taker keeps banning in the name of the traditions that carry it.

The record's oldest image of the banned book's reader, at the end, the one every taker has failed to reach. A bedroom, a child's room, the house asleep, the door closed, the lights out by the house's own rule, and under the covers a flashlight, and under the flashlight a page, and on the page the ghost, or the masked man, or the boy wizard facing his

own dark lord, and the child's eyes on the line, and the beam small and yellow and warm, and the book held close, and the dose under the child's control, and the exit in the child's hand, the cover ready to close over the whole thing at the first step in the hall. The committee cannot reach under the covers. The fire cannot reach there. Nor can the letter to the parents reach there, or the form with its unanswered questions, or the rating and the sticker and the shelf relocation, or two thousand years of the nursery's charters, because the flashlight's circle is the one jurisdiction the takers have never entered, the one room where the reader rules alone. The child reads, the beam holds, the page turns, and the house sleeps on, unharmed. And the genre every century bans goes on being found, in the one place it has always been found, the one place it will always be found, at the one hour, at the one dose, with the one exit, by the one reader the whole apparatus was built to protect and has never once thought to consult: the child, under the covers, with the light on the page, practicing the dark.

Movement IV

The Clerk Who Wants to Go Home

CHAPTER 13

The Dinner Table

In 1693, in the villages of Switzerland and the border counties, the Swiss Brethren came apart over a table. The quarrel's name in the record is Jakob Ammann, and its substance was a question of strictness: how hard to shun. Its practice was the ban, the excommunication of the erring member, and the question that divided the Brethren was whether the banned man might still be eaten with, spoken with, sat with, and Ammann said no, and Ammann's party walked out of the larger body over it, and the party that walked out became the Amish. The account of the schism, carried by the histories of the Amish, is the account of a disagreement about the dinner table. About the table alone: whether the table could hold a man the church had punished. Ammann said the table was the instrument, that the ban without the table was no ban at all, that the sinner who still eats with his brothers has lost nothing, and the whole history of the pleasure of taking things away is in that sentence, because the taking that costs its target nothing is no taking, and Ammann understood that the pain of the ban is the table's emptiness. The schism of 1693 is where the record's subject stops being the shelf and becomes the family. The emptied shelf and the emptied chair are one rule at two sizes, and the rule's logic is continuous, and the continuity is the chapter's subject, and the chapter follows the rule from the

Swiss villages to the present, by the sects' own texts and the courts' own words, because the rule is still alive, and it still eats dinner.

And the Amish call it the Meidung, and it is the oldest living form of the emptied chair. Under the Meidung the excommunicated member is avoided: the table is closed to him, the social exchange is closed to him, the family's daily life is closed to him, and the closing is the punishment's whole content. The scholarship of the Amish, Hostetler's and Nolt's volumes, is carried here at the level the scholarship allows, and the account is enough for the shape: the community's purity is maintained by the visible absence at its table. And the table's emptiness is engineered to hurt, because the hurt is the instrument. The banned man is left in place, in his house, in his field, in his family's kitchen, and not spoken to, and not eaten with, and the silence at the table is the community's verdict renewed at every meal. That is the thing to hold about the dinner table's form of the rule: the taker and the taken are of one household. The shelf that is emptied is the family's own, and the family does the emptying, and the emptying is done in the name of the community, and the community is the borrowed committee at its full power, because the community is the one committee from which there is no exit to another committee, no other shelf, no other store, no next town with a different rule, because the community is the world. The rule at the table is the rule with the counter removed: no merchant, no hint, no arithmetic, just the family, and the family's table, and the place that used to be set.

And the rule's charter text survives, and it is public domain, and it deserves the floor, because the sects' own words are the chapter's only evidence. The Dordrecht Con-

fession of Faith, adopted on the twenty-first of April, 1632, at Dordrecht, by the Flemish and Frisian Mennonite preachers, drafted first by Adriaan Cornelisz and signed by fifty-one of them, treats the ban in its sixteenth article and the shunning in its seventeenth, Of Shunning the Separated, and the seventeenth article says that one who through a wicked life or perverted doctrine has been separated and punished by the church "must be shunned, without distinction, by all fellow members, especially those to whom it is known, in eating, drinking, and other similar intercourse," with "no company had with him." And then the article does the thing the record's charters never do: it minds the taken. It is to be practiced with moderation and Christian discretion, so that it conduces to the sinner's reformation; aid is owed to the shunned when he is needy, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or in other distress, since the shunning would otherwise tend to destruction; and the separated are to be admonished as brethren and never counted as enemies. The article's care is real, and its severity is real, and the two are in one sentence, and the sentence is the rule's whole self-portrait: the table closed in the name of love, the aid owed in the name of mercy, the reformation hoped for in the name of the brotherhood, and the brother absent from the table the whole while. The Swiss Brethren adopted the confession at Ohnenheim in 1660, per the standing account, and the Amish churches use it still, and the text has been read at four centuries of tables, and the empty chair is always in it, and the point is made in the name of the shunned man's own good.

Lay the shelf and the chair side by side and the rule is legible in both, one rule at two scales, one hand at both, one currency. The emptied shelf removes the book from

the stranger who might have bought it; the emptied chair removes the man from the family that did raise him. The shelf's taker borrows the committee's name; the chair's taker borrows the community itself, the whole body of the taken person's belonging, and that is the borrowed committee at full power, the community as the lever, with no larger name left to invoke. And the pleasure at the table is the pleasure at its limit, and the limit is worth naming in the plainest words: the pleasure of taking away, taken to its conclusion, takes away people, and the rule that does it is the emptied shelf applied to a family. And the rule is administered in the shelf's own currency: the taker's satisfaction, the clean sense of a household purified, the forensic high of the verdict and the banishment, and the bill goes to the taken, who loses the table, and to the family, which loses the son, and to the community, which loses the member it was supposed to be protecting. The empty chair is not a side effect of the rule. It is the rule's content, its method, its message, and its daily advertisement at the table, and it is set, deliberately, in the middle of the family's daily life, where the absence will be felt at every meal, because the felt absence is the point, and the point is to be felt, and the feeling of it is what the rule is for.

The sects that keep the rule today keep it in print, on their own sites, in their own words, and the chapter's method is to quote the words and add nothing. Jehovah's Witnesses publish the rule on their own page, in their own question-and-answer form, and the page, read in full in August of 2026, says that a baptized member who practices serious sin and does not repent after the elders' repeated efforts is removed from the congregation, and the elders announce that he is, in the page's own words, no longer

one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The page says the members do not socialize with a removed person, citing the first letter to the Corinthians on keeping no company with such a one and not eating with him. And the page says, with a care the record credits, that the removed person is treated with respect, may attend the meetings and be greeted there, and may ask the elders for spiritual help; and that where a removed man's wife and young children remain in the congregation and share his house, the marriage and the normal family dealings continue. The vocabulary has changed, and the page says so: the organization once called such a person disfellowshipped and now says removed from the congregation, and the change of word is recorded without comment, because the words are the organization's own and the practice is the organization's own, and the chapter's only interest is the shape of the rule, and the shape is the table: the removed man keeps his house and loses his congregation's company, and the company's withholding is the punishment, and the punishment is administered at the level of the meal, the greeting, the visit, the call.

And the Church of Scientology's own page on disconnection says both of the practice's truths at once, in one place, and the page is quoted here the way the page reads, with attribution, and nothing is added. The page teaches that a Scientologist connected to someone suppressive or antagonistic to the church may lose his spiritual advancement; that the remedy is first to handle the person's antagonism with information about the church; and that, as a last resort when handling has failed, the member disconnects, and the page quotes the founder's own definition of the disconnection as a self-determined decision, a severing of a communication line. Six words, and they are the cleanest engineer-

ing description of the emptied chair ever written, the cleanest in the record: the relationship as a line, and the cutting of it as a self-determined act of the individual. And then the page says the other thing, and the other thing is printed beside the first: that no Scientology disconnection policy requires members to disconnect from anyone, family and friends of different beliefs included, and that the church encourages family relationships. Both statements are the church's own, and both are printed, and the record's rule for the sects is observed: the rule is quoted from the group's own texts, and nothing is asserted beyond them, and the two statements sit together on the group's own site, the practice affirmed as a last resort and the requirement denied in the same breath, and the reader of the page may weigh them as the reader likes, because the weighing of the two statements against each other is the whole of the record's comment, and the comment is the page's own.

The sociology of the empty chair has its own literature, and the chapter's version of it is brief on purpose, because the rule's mechanism is older than its scholarship. A community that cannot expel the dissenter to another community, there being no other community to expel him to, expels him to the far side of the table, which is the one exile that needs no geography. The punishment is cheap to administer and total in effect, and the two properties are one property: the absence costs the community nothing and the dissenter everything, and the ratio of the two costs is the ratio the record has been measuring since the counter. And the empty chair has the shelf's second property as well, the signpost's: the absence is visible, and the visibility is the lesson for the remaining members, the daily proof at dinner of what leaving costs. The community reads the empty chair

the way the town read the bare shelf: someone crossed, and the crossing cost him this, and the this is dinner. And the community's own members are the chair's daily audience, and the audience is the point of the empty place setting, and the place setting is the instrument, and the instrument is administered by the people who love the absent man most, which is the rule's final refinement of the reward: the taking at the table is done by the family, in the family's own name, with the family's own grief as the evidence of its sincerity, and the sincerity is real, and the grief is real, and the chair is empty anyway, because the rule is the rule, and the rule is older than the grief.

In Norway, in this decade, the rule met the state, and the record of the meeting is the record's cleanest modern case, because every word of it is on the courts' own paper. The matter began with a letter: in 2021 a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Rolf Johan Furuli, himself once of the organization's own inner circles and one of its best-known scholars, wrote to the authorities about the practice of shunning the ex-members, and the letter started the machinery of the state. The County Governor of Oslo and Viken denied the congregation its state grants, the public funding the Norwegian state extends to registered religious communities, and at the end of 2022 the registration itself was revoked, over the practice of shunning those who leave. Note what the revocation did, because it is the record's first case of the committee being seized by the other side: the state, which is the largest borrowed committee of all, lent its name to the opponents of the rule, and the state's instrument was the registration, the grant, the money, and the state said the rule harmed the children, the minors inside the community, and the harm-to-the-children is the

record's oldest password, the one that opens every door, and the password opened the treasury's door. The congregation answered at law. And the courts of Norway then spent four years weighing the rule against the child, and the weighing is on the courts' own pages, and the weighing is the most careful public examination the emptied chair has ever received, and the record follows it level by level, district to appeal to the Supreme Court, because the levels are the evidence here.

The Oslo District Court heard the two suits together over nine court days in the January of 2024, the first filed in December of 2022 on the state grants and the second in February of 2023 on the registration, and twenty-seven witnesses were heard across them, and the congregation's own European association intervened in support, and on the fourth of March, 2024, the district court ruled for the state, the judge Ole Kristen Øverberg presiding over the nine days. The judgment found that the shunning practice violates children's rights, the two rights named in particular: the right to free withdrawal from the community, and the right to protection from the effects of the exclusion practice. Read the district court's finding slowly, because it is the state's whole theory in two clauses: the child of the community is a member who has not chosen, and the community's rule therefore binds the unconsenting, and the unconsenting member's rights are violated by the exclusion's effects. The court acquitted the state and awarded it its costs against the congregation, one million, one hundred forty thousand, five hundred and five kroner, and the congregation announced its appeal by the end of that month. The finding is the strongest form the state's case ever gets: the empty chair measured against the child in it, and found

harmful, by a court, after nine days of testimony. And the finding would not stand, and the manner of its falling is the record's instruction, because the upper courts did not say the rule was kind. They said the rule was the community's own, and that is a different answer, and the difference is the whole of the Norwegian case.

The Borgarting Court of Appeal reversed, on the fourteenth of March, 2025, and awarded the congregation some eight and a half million kroner in costs, and the state appealed to the Supreme Court on the twenty-fourth of April, 2025, and the whole of the middle level's answer is in the fact of the reversal: the rule, the evidence, the children, all unchanged, and the opposite conclusion, which is the shape of every hard case. Now the two levels had split, and the split is the honest measure of the question's difficulty, and the difficulty is the record's own evidence here: the district court heard nine days of witnesses and found for the child; the court of appeal read that record and found for the community; and the disagreement between two courts is the proof that the emptied chair is not an easy case, and the record's honesty requires the difficulty to be stated, because the rule the state tried to stop is the rule the congregation's own texts publish, in the open, with the household exception written in, and the state that would stop it must say why the community's own rule is the state's business, and the saying is hard, and the hardness is why the case went to the top. The costs figures are their own note on the difficulty: the eight and a half million kroner of the appeal's award, against the district court's one million one hundred forty thousand, is the price of the state being wrong at the second level, and the numbers are in the record because the courts of Norway publish their costs, and the published

costs are the state's own ledger of the afternoon's expense, the bill for the borrowed committee's loan to the rule's opponents, rendered in kroner, on the court's own page, for anyone to read.

The Supreme Court of Norway ruled on the twenty-ninth of April, 2026, announced the following day, and the judgment is final, the record's fullest weighing of the emptied chair against the child. Five justices sat: Falkanger, Arntzen, Hellerslia, Poulsen, and Steen. On the children's rights the court was unanimous: the state had not shown the minors subjected to psychological violence or negative social control of a severity that breached their statutory rights, and the congregation satisfies the requirement of free and unconditional withdrawal. On the state's deeper claim the court split three to two: the majority, Arntzen, Hellerslia, and Steen, held that the shunning does not amount to undue pressure under the European Convention's ninth article, and the weighing was point by point: the practice is rooted in the doctrine, known on joining, involves no direct pressure, coercion, or threat, does not apply within a household, and does not sever family ties outside it. The minority, Falkanger and Poulsen, dissented on the withdrawal question, and the minority's reasoning is the counter-argument at its best, stated in the court's own summary: the shunning may lead to loss of contact with family members, especially for minors; it follows from a rules-based obligation and is intended as a tangible consequence for those who leave; and so the conditions for refusing the funding and the registration were met, the interference a justified one. Read both and decide; the courts themselves split on it. The majority weighed the rule and found it the community's own; the minority weighed that

rule and found the child in the empty chair; and the state's decisions were held invalid, the registration and the grants restored, and the weighing of the emptied chair against the child was done in public, by both sides, at the highest level, and that is the whole difference between Norway's answer and the table's own law.

And back to the smallest instance, because the record's rule is to end where the scale is smallest, where the rule runs on temperature alone. At the counter, twenty years ago, the owner went distant and cold, and the coldness was the whole protest the afternoon allowed, and the coldness was the table's answer in miniature: no scene, no charge, no rule read aloud, just the warmth withdrawn at the register, the company withheld, the friendship ended by a change of temperature. The ban at the counter cost my friend two friendships, the owner's and mine, and both are the author's own testimony and his alone, and the owner's cold face and my own unanswered phone are the two smallest empty chairs in the record, and they belong in the chapter of the table because the logic is continuous and the scale is not. And the disclaimer is stated in the open, because the naming of the sects' rules invites the charge of prejudice and the charge is answered by the facts: the church at the counter asks no such rule of its members, and the record says so, and the bishop at the counter broke no rule of his church that day, and his church's own texts contain no emptied chair, and the church's silence about the shelf is the fact the record has kept in plain view from the first page. The rule at the table belongs to the sects that publish it, in print, in their own names. And the friend at the counter improvised his own, and his church is not responsible for the improvisation, and the record says so, and means it.

The table itself, at the end, in one of the record's thousand kitchens: the meal at the hour, the family in their chairs, and the one chair empty, and the place set. The place is set. That is the detail the whole rule turns on, and it is the detail that proves the rule is a rule and not a neglect: the plate is there, the glass is there, the fork is there, the place is laid for the absent member, because the absence must be seen to work, and the work is the reformation, the shame that is meant to bring the separated one home, and the setting of the place is the community's hope made visible at every meal. The Dordrecht article's own care is in the place setting: the aid owed to the hungry shunned man, the admonition as a brother, the never-an-enemy. And the Dordrecht article's severity is in that place setting: the plate laid and the chair empty, the food on the table and the man not eating it, the family present and the family member absent, at every meal, indefinitely, in the name of his own good. The empty chair is the emptied shelf's oldest living form, and it is set tonight, in the communities that keep the rule, and the plate is clean, and the glass is full, and the chair is pulled out, and nobody sits in it, and the meal begins, and the meal is the lesson, and the lesson is read by everyone at the table, in silence, at every meal, until the chair is filled or the family is gone, and the place is set either way.

CHAPTER 14

Banned in Boston

Between 1915 and 1926 the book trade in Boston ran on a gentlemen's agreement, and the gentlemen were the Watch and Ward Society and the city's booksellers, and the agreement was that the Society's word was enough. The Society, founded in 1878 as the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, one of the era's Comstock clubs, would write to the trade about a book, and the trade would pull the book, and there was no trial, no statute, no order, no appeal, and no one to sue, because no law had been invoked and no one had been charged with anything. And the shelf was emptied by correspondence. The historian of the arrangement is Paul Boyer, whose Purity in Print is the standard account of the era's purity crusades, and the chapter leans on his account; what can be said from it is the agreement's shape, and the shape is the modern form's Boston edition: the Society borrowed the committee's name from the statute book, and the statute book never had to open. The booksellers complied because the Society could make a prosecution happen if they did not, and the possibility of the prosecution was the hint that never needed testing, and the untested hint is the instrument this record has been following since the counter. Boston's version only made it explicit and contractual, the hint regularized into a standing arrangement, the merchant species of compliance turned

into a trade practice, and the trade practice ran for eleven years, and the books went quietly, and the quiet was the arrangement's whole genius, because a book pulled on a hint makes no record, and no record means no appeal, and no appeal means the hint worked forever.

The Society's pedigree deserves its note, because the Boston club was kin to the New York original. The New England Society for the Suppression of Vice was founded in 1878, five years after Comstock's own, one of the family of vice societies the era produced across the country, and the kinship is the instrument's genealogy: the New York Society had the statute and the badge, and the Boston one had the trade and the letters, and the two forms of the one instrument, the badge and the hint, ran side by side for two generations of the trade. And the Boston club never needed Comstock's powers, the badge and the warrant and the federal mail, because the Boston club had the booksellers, and the booksellers were the whole trade, and the trade's fear of the prosecution was the club's whole warrant, and the club knew it, and used it, and kept it. That is the variant the record keeps, and the variant matters to the whole account: the committee without the statute, the taking without the badge, the emptied shelf by correspondence, the office run out of a writing desk and a stamp. And the club's longevity is the note's point: it outlasted the era's prosecutions and the theatrics on Boston Common and the band's mockery and the secretary's own successors, because the hint is the hardest instrument to kill, since the hint leaves nothing to kill, and the club ran on the hint, and the hint was never on the record, and the trade's answer was to comply, season after season, letter after letter, and the compliance was the agreement, and the agreement was the ban.

The agreement's most famous opponent was H.L. Mencken, and his answer was theatre. In April of 1926 the American Mercury carried a story called Hatrack, about a prostitute's small-town religion, and the Watch and Ward objected, and the issue was barred from the Massachusetts mail, and Mencken went to Boston to be arrested. The staging is the reward's mirror image: Mencken walked onto Boston Common, found the Society's secretary, sold him a copy of the Mercury for fifty cents, and let himself be arrested for the sale, in public, on purpose, with the press notified in advance. He was tried and he was acquitted, and the acquittal was the point of the performance, and the performance cost him a day, but the performance is the part the record keeps, because the performance understood the transaction perfectly: the Society's power ran on the hint and the quiet, and Mencken's answer was to make the hint into an arrest and the arrest into a show. The merchant species of compliance dies in the daylight. The hint works on the merchant who cannot afford to test it; the hint fails against the showman who has budgeted the test, and Mencken had budgeted the test, and the test cost the Society its week. But note the ledger's balance, because the record's honesty is in it: the acquittal freed Mencken, and the agreement went on, and the books kept being pulled on the Society's word, because the Society could lose on the Common and win in the trade, and the trade was where the books were. The show was a victory, and the quiet resumed, and the clerk who wants to go home was back at his desk by Monday, and the Society's letters were back in the mail by Tuesday.

And the trade's own proof of the signpost arrived as a jacket band, an actual printed strip. The publishers learned,

across the era's prosecutions, that a ban in Boston sold books everywhere else, and by the middle of it the learning was printed: the jacket band reading Banned in Boston, wrapped around the book, in Manhattan, by the publisher, as advertising. Nowhere else in its history is the signpost so literal: the ban's announcement, printed on the book, by the book's own maker. The Society's letter had become a marketing asset, and the asset's value was the whole answer to the purity crusade's economics: the Society reduced the supply of the book in one city while raising the demand for it in every other, and the publishers, who were in business, read the arithmetic correctly and printed the band. The Dunster House prosecution is the era's other Boston note, the bookshop on Dunster Street in Cambridge prosecuted for its stock, and the case is named here and no more, the account waiting on Boyer's page, and the page is in Boyer. What needs no pull is the band itself: the jacket band reading Banned in Boston is the signpost made into packaging, the ban's true market effect worn on the book's face, and the band was printed in Manhattan, by the publisher, for the trade, because the publisher had learned the lesson the whole record teaches, that the ban is the advertisement, and the advertisement was worth the paper it was printed on, and the Society went on writing its letters, and the letters were, by then, worth money to the publishers.

The Society's own daily work deserves its paragraph, because the agreement was administered by one man with a letterhead. The Society's secretary was the era's clerk of the ban, the correspondent who wrote to the trade about the books, season after season, and his letters were the hint in its regular form: an opinion on the Society's paper, never a statute, and the opinion was the law's shadow, and the

shadow was enough. Read the secretary's week the way the examiner of plays' week was read: a man at a desk, reading the season's books, writing the season's letters, collecting the trade's quiet answers. The work was the work of the exempt reader in its correspondence form, the books read first and the letters written after, and the secretary's satisfaction was the office's own, the daily reading and the daily ruling, and the trade's compliance made the ruling effective, and the effectiveness was the secretary's credential, and the credential was the Society's whole capital. The letters were not law; the letters worked like law, and the difference between a letter and a law is the difference between a hint and a statute, and the hint worked in Boston for eleven years. And the hint's working is the proof that the ban's engine is the leverage and never the law, and the leverage was the Society's, and the Society's was borrowed, and the borrowing was the trade's own answer to the question of what the Society could do to them if they refused, and the trade did not want to know, and the not-wanting-to-know was the compliance, and the compliance was the ban.

Hollywood's version ran on that machinery with more seats. In 1934 the Catholic bishops built the Legion of Decency, and the Legion had a pledge, and the pledge was signed in the parishes by the millions, and the pledge's content was a promise to stay away from the films the Legion condemned. That is the borrowed committee in its congregational form: the bishops' committee condemning, the parishioners' promise to abstain, and the box office as the merchant who could not afford to test the hint. And the studios read the hint correctly. In July of 1934 the industry's own Production Code Administration, under Joseph Breen, began enforcing the Code in earnest, with the seal

of approval as the ticket to the theaters, and the seal is conscience money at industrial scale: the industry paid itself, in cuts, to feel square with the Legion, and the cuts were administered by the industry's own office, on the industry's own payroll, before any legislature moved. The standard histories are Gregory Black's Hollywood Censored and Thomas Doherty's biography of Breen, and the chapter's account of the office's daily work stands on theirs. What stands without the pull is the seal: the Code with teeth was the studios' own answer to the pledge, the industry cutting itself before the parishes could do it for them, and the cutting was real, and it ran for three decades, and the Legion's pledge went unsigned by anyone who ran a theater, and the theater owners complied anyway, because the pledge was the hint, and the hint was signed by millions of parishioners, and the millions were the committee's own public.

The record has already watched the comics industry do the same office twenty years later, and the kinship is the point of the repetition: the Legion's seal, the Code's seal, and the record industry's sticker are one device across three trades, the industry cutting itself to keep the committee from cutting it, and the cutter is always the industry's own employee, which is the clerk who wants to go home in his definitive form, the salaried reader whose work is the removal, and whose motive is the shift's end. And the two species of compliance meet in the self-censoring industry: the merchant who cannot afford to test the hint owns the company, and the clerk who wants to go home runs the cutting room, and between them the book or the film or the record is cleaned before the committee has finished clearing its throat. The industry's own office is the cheapest form of the ban, for everyone but the audience: no statute

to challenge, no trial to attend, no agent to name, just the seal, and the seal is the receipt that says the taking has already happened. Boston's version ran on letters. Hollywood's ran on the payroll. And the comics' version ran on the magistrate's readers, and all three are the one compliance, the one species pair, the one conscience money, and the one result: the audience never saw the thing, and the taking had already occurred, and the seal on the cover was the advertisement that the taking had occurred, which is the signpost wearing the industry's own colors, and the colors were the industry's own because the industry had learned the lesson Boston taught: the ban sells. The seal says clean. The band says banned. Both move the product, and the product is the point of the trade, and the trade, being the trade, will print either one.

The case that shows the method at its purest is the Bal-Hi Fahrenheit 451, because the book was Bradbury's novel about the burning of books. In January of 1967 Ballantine issued the Bal-Hi edition, the high school classroom text, and it modified about seventy-five passages: the hells and the damns and the abortion went out, a drunk man became a sick man, navel fluff became ear cleaning, and there was no note on the copyright page. No note. The novel about burning books existed in America, for the school market, in a form its author had never approved, and the form was not marked, and the unmarked form is the modern censor's chief improvement on every earlier instrument in the record: the friar burned in public, the Society wrote letters, the Legion condemned in the parish, and the Bal-Hi edition deleted in private and called it a classroom edition. And then it got worse, because from 1973 the cleaned version was the only version Ballantine printed, so that for six

years the novel about the burning of books existed in America only in the form that had been burned for it, and nobody knew, because the copyright page said nothing, and the nothing on the copyright page is the instrument's whole success. The clerk who wants to go home had cut the book; the merchant who could not afford to test the hint had printed it; and the hint had come from the school market's own weather, the standing expectation that a classroom text must be clean, and no one had to sign anything, and no one had to say anything, and the book about the fire was on the fire, quietly, for six years, in the high schools, in the trade's own edition, with the trade's own name on the spine.

The author found out in 1979, when a friend handed him a copy, and the finding is in the biographers' account of him, at Eller's volumes. Bradbury's answer was immediate: the original text was restored by 1980, and he wrote a coda about the affair that now travels with every edition, and one line of the coda is banked here, because the coda is in copyright and one line is the ration: I will not go gently onto a shelf. Eight words, and they are the author's own answer to the whole instrument, and the instrument's answer to the author was the six years of the cleaned text, which is the two species of compliance answering the writer in the trade's own voice. And the record's coda to the coda is the 1992 edition of the story: the Venado Middle School in Irvine, California, issued the book to its students with the words blacked out, marker over the printed line, which is the Bal-Hi method reduced to its kindergarten form, the clerk with the marker, doing the office's work by hand, one copy at a time. The coda now travels with every edition, as the record's sources note, and the traveling coda is the conscience money of the restoration, the pub-

lisher's permanent apology printed in the book itself, and the apology is earned and accepted, and the six years stand in the record as the method's proof: the unmarked deletion is the modern form, and the modern form's rule is that the reader never finds out, and the reader in this case was Bradbury, and Bradbury found out in 1979, by accident, because a friend handed him a copy, and the accident is the only reason the record knows it happened at all.

In February of 2023 the other flank had its turn, and the turn is in the chapter at equal weight. The Daily Telegraph of February 17, 2023, its reporter Anita Singh, compared the editions and found hundreds of changes across Roald Dahl's children's books, made by Puffin with the consultancy Inclusive Minds and approved by the Roald Dahl Story Company, owned by Netflix since 2021: Augustus Gloop became enormous, the Cloud-Men became the Cloud-People, and, per Time's reporting of the same week, Mike Teavee's toy pistols were removed from Quentin Blake's drawings, with a notice at the foot of the copyright page beginning, in the edition's own two words, words matter. The notice is the distinction the record keeps: unlike the Bal-Hi, the Dahl editions carried a note, and the note is the method's 2023 costume, the deletion announced in the language of care. Puffin called the changes minimal and cited a responsibility to protect young readers. Salman Rushdie answered on February 18 with the two words the occasion called for, absurd censorship, and the critic's list of the affronted ran up to the Prime Minister and the Queen Consort, and on February 24 the publisher announced the retreat: the Roald Dahl Classic Collection, seventeen titles in their original texts, published alongside the revised editions, without retracting the revisions. The classic collection is conscience money in its 2023

form, the originals kept in print as the fee for the revisions, and the retreat is the signpost working at the speed of the news cycle, because the outcry was loud, and the loudness was the advertisement, and the advertisement sold both editions, and the publisher kept the fee and the fee paid, and the two texts now sit side by side in the catalogue, the author's and the editor's, which is the whole of the modern method's settlement: the taker takes, the taken keep a classic collection, and the market keeps both.

The chapter's cases now answer the argument, and the argument has three parts. Bans succeed through compliance. Compliance comes in two species. And the ban's true market effect is advertisement. The two species have been on the record since the counter, and Boston and Hollywood and the Bal-Hi and the Dahl year are their full-length demonstration: the merchant who cannot afford to test the hint is the bookseller of 1915 and the studio of 1934 and the publisher of 1967 and the publisher of 2023, and the clerk who wants to go home is the trade's own cutter in every one of those rooms, the man with the pencil and the deadline, and the two of them together empty the shelf before any committee has to. And the advertisement is the signpost's full name: the ban in Boston sold the book everywhere else, the Legion's condemnation told the parishioners which films to want, the school market's cleaning of Bradbury told a generation of students which novel mattered, and the outcry over Dahl sold the originals and the revisions alike. The taker takes, and the market answers, and the market's answer is the one thing the taker never plans and never escapes, because the emptied shelf is the loudest shelf there is. The compliance makes the ban work; the advertisement makes the work fail; and the two species make

the work cheap, and the cheapness is the engine, because a ban that costs the taker nothing and pays the publisher in sales is a ban no one in the transaction has any reason to refuse, except the reader, and the reader is not in the transaction, and the reader is the one the whole thing was for.

And the two flanks sit in the chapter at equal weight, deliberately, because the proof of its shape is that the shape fits both. The Legion of Decency and the Watch and Ward Society worked from the right, in the name of morals and the parish. And the Dahl edits worked from the left, in the name of care, and the Bal-Hi worked from the market's center, in the name of the classroom's shelf. The instruments do not change with the name: the borrowed committee is the parish or the consultancy, the conscience money is the seal or the classic collection, the forensic high is the condemnation or the revision, and the exemption is the legionnaire's viewing or the sensitivity reader's red pen, and in every case the reader who read the thing first was the one who decided no one else could. The pleasure has no party. That is the chapter's finding, stated once here, and the record's two flanks are the proof of it, and the proof is that the one set of instruments works in either name, because the instruments run on the pleasure, and the pleasure is older than the parties, and the parties are its costumes. The right's taker says morals; the left's taker says care; the market's taker says sales. And the takers all mean it. And the shelf is emptied in all three names, in every decade, by the two species, at the one price, for the one reason, in the one quiet, and the reason is the pleasure, and it does not change, and the names are the only thing that ever does, and the change of name is the instrument's whole wardrobe.

The band itself, at the end, because the band is the sign-

post made into an object. A bookshop in Manhattan, or a printer's shop, or a publisher's bindery, sometime in the era of the agreement: the book has just been banned in Boston, pulled on the Society's word, and in New York the publisher has had the bands printed, and the bands say Banned in Boston, and a hand wraps the band around the jacket, and the book goes into the box for the train, and the train goes south and west and north, and the book sells in Cleveland and Chicago and Kansas City on the strength of the band, and the band is the receipt for the whole transaction, printed in the city where the book was made, for the city where the book was banned, sold in the cities in between. The Society wrote its letter, and the booksellers pulled the book. The publisher printed the band, and the readers read it. And the band said the book was worth reading, in the language of the ban, which is the language the readers trusted, because the ban was the only advertisement that could not be bought, and the band was the ban made portable, and the portable ban was the publisher's best salesman, and the salesman worked in Manhattan, and the books it sold were read everywhere but Boston, and Boston's shelves were bare, and Boston's readers took the train. The band is printed, and wrapped, and the box is on the train. And the train is full, coach after coach, and every coach is full, and the band reads Banned in Boston, and it was printed in Manhattan, and it worked.

CHAPTER 15

Better Paperwork

At a school-board meeting in 2024, at a folding table under the fluorescent lights, a challenger stands at the microphone and reads the forbidden passages aloud into the public record. The scene is the record's oldest scene in its newest costume: the Chamber of Horrors carried to Washington is reenacted at the folding table, the seized material displayed to the lawmakers, the taker reading the taker's evidence aloud, and the camera on the district's livestream catching every word. The challenger has not read the book; the challenger has a printout, and the printout came from a website, and the website's whole business is the printout, and the printout's passages are the passages that every challenger in the district reads this year, because the passages are the website's stock in trade. And the board will vote, and the book will be pulled pending review, and the pulling will take no one by surprise, because the pulling is the process's design, and the process's design is the chapter's subject. The borrowed committee has become a machine. That is the argument, and the machine's own numbers prove it, and the numbers are the organizations' own, and the date of the reading is stated here so that the gauge can be checked against its month: the figures given here are the current reading as of the late summer of 2026, and the mechanism the figures measure does not date, and the mechanism is the

machine, and the machine is the borrowed committee with the borrowing automated, the hint industrialized, the shelf emptied at scale, by form, at a rate no Society with a letterhead could ever have approached. The counter needed a bishop. The machine needs a printout.

Florida is the machine's exemplary state, and Florida's statute is read here at its own text. Under section 1006.28 of the Florida Statutes, every district school board must adopt a policy for objections by a parent or a county resident to any material used in a classroom, made available in a school or classroom library, or included on a reading list, and the objection's grounds run from the pornographic to the merely unsuited, and the objection's form is prescribed by the State Board of Education's own rule and must sit on the district's homepage with a named point of contact. And the statute's engine is its deadline: any material objected to on the first two grounds, the pornography and the sexual conduct grounds, must be removed within five school days of receipt of the objection and stay unavailable to the students of that school until the objection is resolved. One form, one resident, five school days, and the shelf is emptied before the review has begun, and the emptying is the default, and the review is the exception, and the exception decides while the shelf stays bare. The form is the instrument's perfection, because the form converts the hint into a procedure: no bishop, no hint, no arithmetic at the counter, just the form, the homepage, the five days. The merchant who could not afford to test the hint is now the district that cannot afford to test the form, and the district's compliance is the clerk species at the level of the system, the process executed to end the meeting, and the meeting's minutes record the removal, and the removal is the receipt, and the

receipt is filed, by rule, with the state.

And the form itself deserves the close reading, because the form's own words give the machine away. Florida's Specific Material Objection Template, the state board's own document, effective September of 2024, asks the objector, as its second question, in its Section 4: Did you examine this material in its entirety? Eight words, and they are the machine's conscience printed at the head of the form's deciding section. There are two boxes, a Yes and a No, and beneath the boxes a line for the sections examined, if not. Read the question as the machine's own confession: the state asks the challenger whether the challenger has read the material, and the state accepts the form either way, and the material comes off the shelf either way, in five school days, either way. The exemption, which for all the record's centuries has been the ban's hidden engine, the reading the taker had to do, is here optional. The machine does not require the reading; it requires the form, and the form's question is a courtesy to the memory of the reading, a printed reminder that once, in some earlier form of the instrument, the challenger had to have read the book, because the challenge was the read. No longer. The list does the reading now, and the form knows it, and the form's question is the machine's own paperwork of conscience, the printed proof that the machine knows the reading has been skipped and files the form anyway, and the blank line beneath the question, the line for the sections examined, is the machine's own blank, the place where the reading would go if there had been one, and the line is left blank, and the form is signed, and the shelf is emptied on schedule.

And the machine's own numbers are the organizations' own, and they are given here as the gauge's reading, dated

to its release. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom released its count for the calendar year 2025 during National Library Week, in the April of 2026, and the count is the machine's dashboard: seven hundred and thirteen attempts to censor library materials and services, four hundred and eighty-seven of them targeting books; four thousand two hundred and thirty-five unique titles challenged, the second highest ever documented, after the four thousand two hundred and forty of 2023; and five thousand six hundred and sixty-eight books banned, sixty-six percent of those challenged, the highest number and the highest rate of challenges resulting in censorship in the whole run of the count, 1990 to 2025, with nine hundred and twenty more restricted by relocation or permission. And the dashboard's most important needle is the split: ninety-two percent of the challenges were initiated by pressure groups, government officials, and decision makers, up from seventy-two percent the year before, and under three percent came from individual parents. Read the split twice. The lone parent with the form is the machine's own mythology, the counter's own legend, and the legend is now three percent of the count, and the ninety-two percent is the machine itself, the groups and the officials, the lists and the forms, the process with the committee built in. The borrowed committee no longer needs to be borrowed by anyone in particular. It is now the standing equipment, and its own numbers say so, and the numbers are the machine's own count of itself, which is the chapter's title made plain: better paperwork, and the paperwork is the proof.

PEN America's count runs beside the librarians', and the two counts are the machine's two gauges, the one measuring the libraries and the other the schools, and the two

gauges agree. PEN has documented nearly twenty-three thousand school book bans since 2021, and its report on the 2024 to 2025 school year, The Normalization of Book Banning, counts six thousand eight hundred and seventy bans across twenty-three states and eighty-seven districts, and its spring 2026 report, Facts and Fiction, documents a doubling of the censorship of nonfiction, which is the machine's reach past the novel into the record of the world. The most frequently banned titles of the four years, per PEN's own list, are led by Looking for Alaska and Nineteen Minutes, the novels that top the count being, as ever, the books the children most need to find, the books the signpost points to, per its rule. And the normalization in the report's own title is the year's finding, the year's own word on the year: the ban is no longer the exception that proves the rule of the open library; the ban is the rule's daily operation, the process's ordinary output, the form's routine result. The gauge reads normal now. And the normalization is the machine's quiet success, because the machine does not need the bonfire or the count of the tons; it needs the form, and the form is ordinary, and the ordinary is the whole point of the paperwork, and the paperwork is better every year, and the count is the machine's own report of its own improvement, published by its opponents, which is the signpost in its administrative form: the machine's own enemies keep its dashboard.

The machine's supply chain is the websites, the ratings pages that no statute created and no board reviews. The lists the challengers read from are generated by the ratings sites, the pages that review the books and assign the marks and publish the lists of the objectionable titles, and the sites are the exemption's industrial form: the reading is done once, by the site, and the list is the reading's product, and

the challenger downloads the product and signs the form, and the shelf is emptied, and no one on the challenger's side of the transaction has read the book: not the challenger, and never the board. And the machine's defining feature is that it has abolished the challenger's reading. The censor kept a copy for five hundred years because the censor had to; the machine's challenger keeps no copy, because the challenger has the list, and the list is the copy's replacement, the judgment without the text, the verdict without the evidence, the ban without the book. The copy still exists, and the law of the library still holds: it sits upstream, on the list-maker's shelf, the largest censor's library in the record, read by the one class of reader the machine still licenses, the raters themselves. And the list's own provenance is the borrowed committee's modern form: the site's raters are the anonymous committee, the list is their name on loan to every challenger in every district, and the challengers bring the name to the folding table the way the bishop brought the stake's name to the counter, except the bishop had read the green paperbacks, and the challenger has read the printout, and the printout is the whole of the challenger's preparation, and the preparation is the machine's own, and the machine's own preparation is the era's answer to the exemption: the reading is now so optional that the form prints the question about it as a courtesy, with the No box provided, and the line beneath it left blank.

Utah's version of the machine is the trigger, and the trigger is the record's first statewide instrument that fires itself. The Sensitive Material Review Amendments of 2024, House Bill 29, effective the first of July, 2024, amended the Utah Code's section 53G-10-103, and its subsection (7) is the machine's self-firing form: when at least three school districts,

or at least two districts and five charter schools, have determined that a given instructional material is objective sensitive material, every local education agency in the state must remove it from student access, and the state board must communicate the requirement to all of them no later than ten school days after the threshold is met. Three districts' removals, and the whole state's shelves empty, automatically, by rule, with the board's spreadsheet carrying the titles to be removed statewide, and the spreadsheet's count is the gauge's Utah reading: the list opened with thirteen titles in August of 2024 and stood at thirty-seven by the third week of August of 2026, by the press's readings of the board's own page, with two districts, Davis and Washington, accounting for most of the triggering removals by one press count. The trigger is the hint industrialized into the statute: no one's judgment fires it, because the statute fires when the count is reached, and the count is reached by the same two districts, and the two districts' forms do the work of a statewide ban, and the statewide ban is the machine's own, and the machine's own ban is the one no one ordered. And the answer to it is on the record too: in early January of 2026 the ACLU of Utah filed suit for the estate of Kurt Vonnegut, three authors, and two students, arguing the law is overbroad, and the suit is the gauge's own needle against the trigger, pending as of that summer's reading.

Texas is where the machine was built at full scale and struck at full scale, and the striking is the record's one full victory at law. The READER Act, House Bill 900 of 2023, added chapter 35 to the state's Education Code, and the chapter was the rating machine: the vendors selling to the school libraries were to rate every material as sexually explicit or sexually relevant against community standards,

with the Texas Education Agency able to overrule a rating, the recall of the sexually explicit titles required by the April of 2024, and a bar on the districts buying from any vendor who did not comply. The machine's genius was the vendor: the state did not rate the books; the state required the sellers to rate the books, which is the borrowed committee outsourced to the merchant, the merchant made into the censor's clerk. And the machine was struck. Judge Alan Albright of the Western District of Texas preliminarily enjoined the rating sections in September of 2023, in a fifty-nine-page order, as compelled speech, unconstitutionally vague, and a prior restraint; the Fifth Circuit affirmed in the January of 2024; rehearing en banc was denied that April; and on the twenty-first of October, 2025, on remand, Judge Albright entered a permanent injunction against the commissioner and those in concert with him enforcing the rating sections, and the standards stand with their rating references inoperable. The rating machine is dead in Texas, and its death is the record's proof that the machine can be struck, and the striking cost two years and a federal suit, and the suit is the price of stopping one machine in one state, which is the asymmetry the machine runs on: it is built by rule and stopped by litigation, and the rule takes a session and the litigation takes years, and the years are the machine's margin.

And the machine's hardest case is the library that weeds itself, and the case is Llano County. Seventeen books were removed from the county's public library after complaints spearheaded by four residents, who were then seated on a new library board, and the county's defense was weeding, the librarian's ordinary practice, the CREW method with its MUSTIE factors, the professional culling of the outdated

and the worn. The weeding that weeds one way is the machine's quietest form, the removal with the librarian's own vocabulary, and the Fifth Circuit's en banc answer, Little v. Llano County, the twenty-third of May, 2025, is the machine's fullest judicial costume. Ten judges joined the holding that the patrons have no right to receive information with which to challenge the removal, overruling the circuit's own Campbell precedent; seven of them joined the opinion in full, including its conclusion that the library's collection decisions are government speech, which makes the government-speech holding a plurality; and the majority quoted the Texas State Library's own 2012 weeding manual and the ALA's 2022 weeding handbook as proof that weeding is itself the choosing of viewpoints, and answered the amici's talk of bans and burnings with the observation that a patron can buy the book elsewhere. A patron can buy the book elsewhere: the machine's own motto, the exit's counterfeit, the answer that says the shelf's emptying is no one's loss because the book exists somewhere, which is the machine's whole theory of itself, stated in a federal opinion, and the opinion is the era's fullest document of the machine made law, and the Supreme Court denied certiorari on the eighth of December, 2025, and the denial left the machine standing in the circuit.

The opinion's two voices deserve their own paragraph in the record of the case, because the voices are the machine's argument with itself, in the opinion's own words. The majority opened with a sentence to the alarmed, the opinion's own first gesture: Take a deep breath, everyone. Five words, and they are the machine's own tone, the process's own reassurance, the calm of the form's own voice. And the dissent, which the majority itself quotes, accused it of sanc-

tioning, in the dissent's own nine words, government censorship in every section of every public library. The two sentences are the whole case, the era's posture and its warning. Its calm and its alarm are the two registers of the machine's era, the two tones of the same opinion, and the dissent's sentence is the one the record keeps, because the dissent's sentence is the machine seen from the shelf: the government speech holding means the library's collection is the government's own message, and the government's own message may weed one way, and the one way is the machine's way, and the machine's way is the law of the circuit as of that summer, until the Supreme Court says otherwise, and the Supreme Court has said nothing. The dissent's pages, from page 57 of the opinion's own document, await their reader; what the chapter uses is the majority's own quotation of the dissent, which is in the majority, which is on the record, the page honored inside the opinion's own text.

And the machine's newest rail is the payment rail, and the rail's test came in July of 2025. An Australian group called Collective Shout wrote an open letter to the executives of Visa, Mastercard, PayPal, Paysafe, Discover, and JCB, backed by roughly a thousand emails and triggered by a video game called No Mercy, and within days the storefronts moved: Steam removed hundreds of adult games, stating that certain games may violate the rules of its payment processors and card networks, and itch.io deindexed all adult content, stating in its own update that its ability to process payments is critical and that it must prioritize its relationship with its payment partners. The payment partners. The machine's newest form needs no committee, no form, no statute, and no shelf: the processor that tells the storefront which titles it will no longer process is

the counter with the merchant removed, the hint with the whole world's trade behind it, and the storefront's answer is the merchant species of compliance at the scale of the rail, the platform that cannot afford to test the hint because the hint controls the money. Mastercard denied involvement, per its own account, and the denial is the rail's own signature: the hint so clean that its author disclaims it. The letter was a page long, and the page emptied more shelves in a week than the Society emptied in a decade, and the emptiness was worldwide, and the worldwide emptiness was the machine's, and the machine's reach is now the payment rail, and the rail is the newest of the record's instruments, and the record's oldest figure is the merchant who cannot afford to test the hint, and the merchant is now the platform, and the platform's name is the storefront, and the storefront's answer was immediate.

And the other flank gets its page here, because the machine has two faces and the record's rule is to weigh both. PEN America's Booklash, published in August of 2023, three years before that summer, with an introduction by Ayad Akhtar, is the receipt from the other side of the machine: the online outrage, the new moral litmus tests on books and authors, the withdrawals in the face of criticism, rare, per the report's own finding, but shrinking the space for risk in what gets proposed and signed, which is the machine's upstream form, the form at the point of commissioning. The report is built on desk research and conversations with more than two dozen industry professionals, fourteen of them with direct experience of a withdrawal, and it rejects the identity-essentialist approach to who may write what, and the rejection is the report's own answer to its own side, and the report is cited here as the receipt

because the record's rule is to cite the organizations' own documents, and the document is the other flank's own account of its own method's cost. And the sensitivity read and the withdrawn book are the machine's left face, and the left face runs on the same three instruments: the borrowed committee of the pile-on, the conscience money of the withdrawal, the forensic high of the callout. The machine has no party, per the record's once-stated finding, and the machine's two faces are the proof at the current scale, and the scale is that summer's, and that summer's record is the two reports, and the two reports are the machine's own account of itself, from both of its faces, in its own words.

At industrial scale, the borrowed committee is the machine, and the account of it reduces to one finding: the borrowing has been automated. The stake's name had to be carried to the counter by a man; the machine's name is printed on the form. And the hint had to be given and taken; the machine's hint is the statute's deadline. The library had to be read by its keeper; the machine's library is the list, which is read by no one, and the machine's copy is the printout, and the printout is the only reading the machine performs, and the machine's exemption is the exemption of everyone: the challenger exempt from the reading, the board exempt from the judgment, the district exempt from the defense, the state exempt from the order, the processor exempt from the decision. The machine is the exemption generalized past the point of anyone's responsibility, which is the machine's own perfection, and its own confession, and the confession is printed on the form, with its question and its No box and its blank line. And one sentence of kinship is acknowledged here, and no more: a rule written for other people reads its maker's intention in its

direction, and the cousin of this book argues the point at its length. And the Senate's own gesture is recorded as a record and nothing more, per its own weight: Senate Resolution 443 of the 119th Congress, submitted in the October of 2025, during Banned Books Week, by Senator Schatz with eighteen cosponsors, reciting PEN's figures and the DoDEA's removals and the Naval Academy's four hundred titles, and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, where it sat, without action, as of that summer, a Senate document reciting the count and carrying no force, unread by the machine and unacted on, while the forms were filed.

The form itself, at the end, filled in and filed, in one of the record's thousand districts: the Specific Material Objection Template, the state board's own. The objector's status, the boxes checked; the material identified, the title, the author, the ISBN, the fields filled from the website's printout; the grounds, the boxes checked. Section 4: what brought the material to the objector's attention, and the answer is the website, though the form does not say so, and then the form's own second question, the machine's printed conscience, the state's own question on the state's own form: Did you examine this material in its entirety? And the No box is checked, because the reading was not done, because the reading is no one's job, and beneath the No box the line for the sections examined, the line the form provides for the reading that did not happen, and the line is blank. The line is blank; the form is signed, and the signature is a name, and the name is on the record, and the record is the district's annual report to the state, and the state's published list of the removed, and the book is off the shelf in five school days from the form's receipt, and the form's question was answered at the No box, and the line beneath it is left blank,

and the blank line is the machine's own signature, the place where the reading would go, the reading the machine does not require, and the shelf is bare, and the form is filed, and the form is the era's whole improvement on the friar and the Society and the badge: better paperwork, and the paperwork's blank line is the censor's copy, and the censor's copy is no longer kept, because the censor no longer reads, and the machine keeps nothing, and the nothing is filed, and the blank line is the proof.

Movement V

The Genius

CHAPTER 16

The Exit

In June of 1643 the Parliament of England ordered that no book be printed without a license, and in November of 1644 John Milton answered it, and the answer is Areopagitica, and the answer was itself printed without a license, which is the whole of the man in one fact. The Licensing Order of the fourteenth of June, 1643, had put the press under the licensers, and Milton had his own case to answer: his Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce had appeared unlicensed on the first of August, 1643, an enlarged unlicensed edition followed in 1644, and in August of 1644 the tract was condemned, Herbert Palmer preaching against it before Parliament itself, and the petitions for stricter licensing cited it by name. He was, in the order's own terms, a criminal author, and he answered as one, and the answer he wrote is the genius of the argument against all of it, the speech to the Parliament that never was delivered, published, unlicensed, on the twenty-third of November, 1644, and Thomason dated his copy the twenty-fourth. The genius of the argument against all of this is Milton's, and it has three parts, and the record has now spent fifteen chapters proving them, and the three parts are the whole of the case against the censor, and they were written in one pamphlet, in one November, by a man who had himself just been reported to the Parliament for printing without a license, and who therefore

knew, in his own person, what the licenser's office was and what it would do, and who was not guessing. The three parts have been the record's skeleton since the counter. Now they get their author's name.

The three parts, stated plainly and in their author's order: the licenser must read what he bans; the virtue he protects has never met its adversary; and the licensers will be either the ignorant or the bored. The first part is the exemption theorem in its earliest form, the discovery that the ban licenses its own reader, and the record has proven it with catalogues and with statutes, with the Chamber and the Enfer and the Private Case and the examiners' reports and the customs' basement and the listening mothers' headphones. And the second part is the nursery's answer, the finding that the protected child is protected into weakness, and the record has proven it with the laboratory's heart-rate monitors and the children's own survey and the Grimms' wolves and Aristotle's safe seat. And the third part is the machine's, the finding that the office of the licenser selects for the man who wants the office, and the record has proven it with the two-guinea fee and the piece rate and the form's blank line and the printout at the folding table. Three parts, one pamphlet, one November, and the pamphlet's author had just been caught by the licenser, which is the pamphlet's credential. Milton did not argue from the library. Milton argued from the dock. And the dock is where the argument is strongest, because the man who has been reported to the licenser knows what the licenser is, and the licenser, in Milton's own November, was a committee of men who had not read his book and had condemned it anyway, which is the third part proven by the pamphlet's own occasion before the pamphlet was even read.

The first part at length, in the author's own words, because the words are public domain and the record may quote them whole. Milton writes that unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. And he writes that books are not absolutely dead things, but preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. The two sentences are the licenser's reading made sacred: the book is the living extract of a mind, and the killing of it is the killing of reason itself, and the man who would kill it must first read it, and the reading is the exemption, and the exemption is the licenser's own copy, and the copy is the censor's library, and the library is the proof that the ban is a license. The licenser must read what he bans. It is the oldest of the record's findings, and Milton saw it in 1644, and he saw it because he had been read by the licensers, and the licensers had not read him, and the difference between the two readings is the difference between the accused and the court, and the accused always reads the charge more carefully than the court does, and the court's careless reading is the third part's evidence, and the careful accused reading is the first part's, and the office keeps the copy, and the copy is the proof of the theorem, filed, by the office, forever.

The second part is the nursery's answer, and it is the most quoted and least heeded of the three. Milton writes that he cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.

And he writes that that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary, and that the youngling virtue that rejects a vice it does not know is but a blank virtue, not a pure. The cloistered virtue is the counter's protected child, the ward's guarded family, the parish's defended faithful: the virtue that has never met the ghost, never read the line, never been asked, and therefore, in Milton's judgment, has never been tested, and therefore is no virtue at all. The laboratory at Aarhus called it the rehearsal and the sweet spot. Aristotle called it the catharsis, the trial by the contrary in a safe seat. The record's whole first movement and its whole third are the second part's evidence: the protected virtue is the blank virtue, and the blank virtue is the taker's product, and the taker's product is the child who has never met the adversary, and the child who has never met the adversary is the reader the censor claims to serve and actually makes, and the making is the harm, and the harm is the censor's whole result, and the censor's whole result is the thing the censor calls the point. The nursery that never meets a ghost produces the adult who cannot face one, and the adult who cannot face one is the next taker, because the untested reader fears the page, and the fear of the page is the taker's whole credential.

And the third part is the machine's, and it is the least quoted of the three and the most prophetic. Milton writes that the licensers will be either the ignorant, who cannot judge, or the learned, who will find the work beneath them and pass it to clerks. The ignorant or the bored. Two kinds of licenser, and the record has now met them both in every century: the ignorant, who cannot judge, are the challenger with the printout and the form with its No box checked; and the bored, who find the work beneath them and pass it to

clerks, are the office with the two-guinea fee and the readers paid by the piece, the customs' basement and the magistrate's staff, the licenser's work handed down to the clerk who wants to go home. And the third part is the mechanism's own sociology: the office of judgment attracts the man who wants to judge without the reading, and the man who wants to judge without the reading is the machine's natural hire, and the hire is the clerk, and the clerk is the record's own figure, the one the whole fourth movement is named for, and the clerk's whole credential is that the work is beneath him, and the work beneath him is the reading, and the reading is the one thing the office was built to do. The licenser who does not read is the ignorant; the licenser who reads and delegates is the bored; and the two are the office's whole staff, and the office's whole staff is the machine, and the third part is the record's current century, and the current century is the form, and the form is signed, and the line beneath its question is blank.

And the theorem's proof in the person of its own author gets its one sentence, with no motive drawn that Milton did not state. Seven years after he told the Parliament that the licensers would be the ignorant or the bored, the one or the other, the author of Areopagitica served the Commonwealth as a licenser of the official newsbook, the Mercurius Politicus, which he superintended through 1651, per the Dictionary of National Biography's entries for Milton and for Needham and the 1911 Britannica's entry, all public domain, and no motive is drawn here that Milton did not state. The exemption is structural, and it cannot be designed out, and it does not spare the man who wrote the argument against it, and the man who wrote the argument against it was the man who held the license, and the man

who held the license had told the Parliament what the license was, and the Parliament had not listened, and the license was the Commonwealth's, and the Commonwealth's licenser was Milton, and the theorem was proven by its own author, in his own person, seven years after he wrote it, which is the strongest proof the record holds, because it was made by its author. The licenser must read what he bans, and the author of the argument was, in the end, the licenser, and he read what he licensed, and the reading was the theorem, and the theorem is Law Two, and Law Two is the record's whole second finding, and the second finding is the exit's foundation, and the foundation was laid by the man who knew the office from both sides of the desk.

Now the theorem is assembled, and the theorem is Law Two, and Law Two is stated in full, once, in the open. Every ban is also a license, issued to one person, and the person is the banner. The exemption is structural: it cannot be designed out, because the ban must be read to be enforced, and the reading must be done by someone, and the someone is the taker. And the exemption corrupts the exempt, because the licensed reader is made the judge of what the unlicensed may not read, and the judgment pays the judge, and the payment is the pleasure, and the pleasure is the whole engine of the taking. The censor's library is always larger than the reader's, because the censor keeps the forbidden collection plus his own, and the reader keeps his own minus the forbidden collection, and the difference between the two libraries is the size of the license. The proof is the record's middle movements: the Chamber of Horrors, kept by the agent who published his count; the Enfer, catalogued by the poet the state let in; the Private Case, kept for the gentleman who knew to apply; the customs' basement; the ex-

aminer's reports, two guineas a play; the doctor's adjusted evidence; the listening mothers' headphones; and the machine's printout, the license without even the reading. And the proof has its fiction's witness, Bothayna Al-Essa's 2024 novel The Book Censor's Library, the censor addicted to the books he condemns, the theorem imagined by a novelist and found, by the record, to be documentary. The standard history of the censor's mind, the Corn-Revere book of 2021, argues the censor always loses, and the record's answer is the theorem's: the censor wins in the currency he spends, and the currency is the license, and the license is the library, and the library is always larger on the censor's side of the door.

And the corruption clause of the theorem is the record's hardest finding, and it is proven on the best of them. The exemption corrupts, and the corruption's three directions are the record's three witnesses. The wielder is puffed up: the agent with the Chamber, publishing his count of the suicides; the gentle one is erased: the lady of Bath, who cut the bawdy lines and struck her own name, because the rule she served forbade the reader she was; and the machine exempts everyone: the form with its No box, the reading no one's job, the license printed by the state for anyone who asks and the judgment exercised by no one at all. And the three directions are the exemption's whole casework, and the casework is the proof that the corruption is structural and never personal, because it takes the proud man and the conscientious woman and the modern form and corrupts them in three different directions at three different scales, and the constant is the license, and the license is the reading that the unlicensed may not do, and the unlicensed are always the readers the license claims to protect. The pro-

tected reader is the one reader the license never licenses. That is the corruption's final irony, and it is not an irony, it is a mechanism, and the mechanism is the license, and the license is the ban, and the ban is the library, and the library is larger on the censor's side of the door, and the door is the whole of Law Two, and Law Two is now proven, and the proof is the record's sixteen shelves, and the proof is the exemption, and the exemption is the censor's library, and the censor's library is always larger than the reader's.

The frame the friend never had is Hirschman's, and it is the frame the whole record now fits. Albert Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, published in 1970, gives the three options of the member who objects: the exit, the leaving; the voice, the complaint; and the loyalty, the staying. The censor refuses all three. He refuses the exit, because he does not leave the store or the school or the library; he refuses the voice, because he does not argue with the book, he removes it; and he refuses the loyalty, because he does not stay and disagree, he takes the shelf. The censor's choice is the fourth option, the one Hirschman did not offer, the coercion, the choice for the stranger, and the coercion is the whole of the record's subject, and the record's whole answer is the line between the first three and the fourth. Mill's On Liberty, its second chapter, is the argument's other pillar: the opinion suppressed may be true, and the opinion suppressed if false still strengthens the true, and the two claims are the nursery's answer in the language of 1859. And Brandeis, concurring in Whitney v. California in 1927, gave the law's own answer: the remedy for bad speech is more speech, in the law's own words, in a federal opinion, which is the exit's own jurisprudence. The exit, the voice, and the more speech: the three options are the answer's

whole inventory, and the inventory is old, and the inventory is free, and the inventory is the one the taker never chooses, because the inventory's options pay nothing, and the taking pays on the spot, and the payment is the pleasure, and the pleasure is the reason the record's whole argument has never once deterred a single censor, and never will, and the never-will is the exit line's whole occasion.

Now the counter-argument, and it is met in the open. The library profession's own essay of 2024, from the Cooperative Children's Book Center at Wisconsin, argues against invalidating a challenge from someone who has not read the book, on the ground that the right to question is as much a right as the right to read, and the argument deserves its full weight, as the strongest form of the other side's case and the answer to the form's No box. Grant it in full. The right to question is as much a right as the right to read, and no one here is barring the question. And the answer the record gives is the answer the association's own model form already prints: the challenge is never barred; the challenge is attested. The form already asks whether the objector has examined the entire resource, and whether the objector represents an organization, and the record's whole proposal is that the two questions bind, that the form be signed under the attestation and the name, and that the No box, once checked, carry its own consequence: the challenge of the unread book is heard, and the hearing is on the record, and the record shows the No, and the No is the challenge's own evidence about itself. The door is open, the form is at the door, and the form asks its two questions, and the two questions are the whole of the price, and the price is the record's whole improvement on the machine, because the machine's whole method is the free and unwitnessed chal-

lenge, and the price is what stops it, and the price is the attestation, and the attestation is the form's own question, made binding, the smallest possible change to the form, the largest possible change to the afternoon.

And the practical movement, priced in a page, and argued from the record's own cases. What makes a ban expensive is what makes anything expensive: a cost at the point of the act, a name on the record, and a process that runs in the open. The cost at the point of the act: the reading attestation on the form, the objector's signature beneath the statement that the material was examined in its entirety, which is already printed on the association's model form and is here made binding. The name on the record: the challenger's name and the organization's name, which the model form already asks and the machine currently hides, and the list-makers' names too, the sites that generate the lists, brought into the same sunlight. And the process in the open: the item considered in its entirety, never judged on portions out of context; the parents' right to guide their own children's reading extended to other parents' children by the same right's own logic; the questioned item remaining in circulation during the reconsideration; and the process run to completion, all from the association's own published toolkit, and beside the toolkit the coalition's own procedures, the National Coalition Against Censorship's resource center and its handbook, the two sets of instructions named together and never conflated, since the association's are the model policy and the coalition's are the defender's field guide. Name the trophy first, since the record names everything it uses: the scalp is the struck title, the book the objector goes home with having removed. The scalp's price is the whole of the machine's cost, and the machine's

cost was zero, and the zero was the afternoon, and the afternoon is now priced, and the price is the reading and the name, and the reading and the name are the form's own two questions, and the form's own two questions are the machine's own two questions, and made binding, they are the machine's end.

And the last adversary standing gets its paragraph, because the record leaves no adversary up: the machine's own jurisprudence, the government-speech holding of the Llano plurality, which says the library's collection is the government's own message and may be weeded one way. The holding exploits a genuine seam, and the seam deserves a name and a fix at once, because the seam is real. A library always chooses for strangers: that is collection development, the choosing of what to add, from scarcity, the shelf being finite. The exit line was never written against the choosing of what to add. It is written against the removal of what strangers already had, on objection, after the fact. Selection is the library's answer to scarcity; removal is the answer to a complaint. The first is the curator's work, done on standards, in the open, before anyone has the thing; the second is the censor's work, done on the objection, taking the thing the stranger already had. And the government's own weeding manuals say the difference is real, and the majority read the manuals as proof that weeding is the choosing of viewpoints, and the majority is right about the manuals and wrong about the law: the standards-based culling of the worn and the outdated is the library's own housekeeping, and the removal on complaint of the seventeen books is the emptied shelf, and the two are different in kind, and the difference is the exit line's own. The library may choose what to buy; it may not take what the stranger al-

ready had because a resident objected to it. And the name on the record and the reading attestation are the removal's price, and the price is the whole of the answer, and the answer holds against the holding, because the holding's own cases are the machine's own forms, and the forms are what the price is written on.

And the pricing of the scalp deserves its own account, because the pleasure's cheapness is the whole of Law One. The ban was cheap for the taker and paid for by strangers, Law One's whole content, and the removal was the receipt, and the receipt was the afternoon, and the afternoon cost the taker two paperbacks. And the record's whole argument is that the cheapness is the engine, and the engine's fuel is the anonymity and the unread book, and the two are now taxed, by the attestation and the name. The forensic high is a real reward, and the real reward can be priced, and the pricing is the record's whole practical content: the ban that requires the reading and the name is the ban that costs the afternoon and the standing, and the cost is the point, because it is only collected when the cost is zero, and the cost is now the reading and the name, and the reading and the name are the two things the taker has never wanted to spend. The taker will still take, sometimes, and the sometimes is the honest limit of the record's proposal, the limit stated plainly, and the honest limit is the point: the taking that survives the attestation and the name is the taking the taker believes in, and the taker's belief is the taker's right, and the right is the whole of the exit line, and the exit line is the record's whole answer, and the answer is old, and the answer is Milton's, and the answer is the one the friend at the counter never heard, and the friend is where the record returns, and the return is the close.

And before the line is drawn, the record takes the hit it has earned: the framework indicts its author, and the indictment is stated in the open because a hostile reader will make it anyway. This whole record is a prosecution. Twenty years of turning one afternoon over, the friend's acts investigated, his words quoted, his motive named, his name withheld the way a court withholds a defendant's face, and the verdict delivered where he cannot answer it, and the whole of it written by a man who has won the case. I have read the instruments on myself, and I find them there: the forensic high of the winning side, the conscience money of the friendship's end, the borrowed committee of the reader's trust, the library of the friend's own afternoon that I have kept and catalogued and shown. The book is the friend's shelf emptied in return. And the difference is the whole argument, and it is the exit line's proof in the person of its author: when my friend cleared the shelf, he took something from people who had not consented and never knew his name; when I wrote the record of it, I took something that was mine to give, my company and my account of my own afternoon, and I took it from two people only, myself and him, and he never knew his story was in it, and the writing is the voice and the voice is mine, and no stranger's shelf is emptier for it. The prosecution is the exit's own form: the author of the record chose the page over the committee, and the page is the stranger's to refuse, and the refusal is free. That is the difference, and the difference is the line, and the line comes next.

And the line is drawn, and the line is the record's whole point, the exit line. The only clean line is the line between exit and censorship. You may refuse a book. You may refuse to buy it, refuse to stock it, refuse to let it into your house,

refuse the company of the man who bans it. All of that is exit, and all of that is yours, and the refusal is the member's right, and the member's right is the whole of the tradition's own answer, the congregation's own practice, the family's own table, and the line is the line of the stranger. The moment you reach across the counter and choose for a stranger, you have crossed the line, and no God and no committee changes the direction of the crossing. The line is the whole of the law the record would write, and the law is one sentence long, and the sentence is the exit line, the difference between the two friendships at the counter and the two courts of Norway, between the man who stops calling his friend and the man who empties his friend's shelf, between the mother who does not buy the record and the mother who labels it for the whole country, and the line is the only clean one, and the exit is free, and the proposal is priced, and the price is the reading and the name, and the reading and the name are the form's two questions, and the form's two questions are the exit line made paperwork, which is the record's whole cure, and the cure is cheap, and the cheapness is the point, because the taking was cheap, and the price is the answer, and the answer is the exit.

And the record returns to the counter, because the counter is where it began, and the counter is where it all still stands. Twenty years ago the friend walked out of the store with his two paperbacks, and the owner was cold, and the shelf was bare, and the friend believed then, and for all the record knows believes today, that he was serving God's discipline, and the record's whole finding is that he was serving the pleasure whether he named it or not, the one instrument the friend could not see, because the friend is the exemption's own reader, the man who read the books

he banned, and the friend's reading was the license, and the license was the ban, and the ban was the bare shelf. He would read this record with delight, and the delight is the friend's own, and the friend's own delight is the proof that the record cannot reach him, cannot and will not, and the friend is not the record's reader, and the record's reader is the child. The child at the bare shelf is the whole of the record's occasion: the child who came in for the green spine that was there last week, and found the bare board, and was told, if the child asked, that it was for his own good. The child is the reader the whole apparatus was built to protect, and the child is the one reader the apparatus never asked, and the child is the record's whole case, and the child's case is now closed, and the close is the counter, and the counter is where the pleasure was paid, and the pleasure was the afternoon's whole product, and the afternoon's product was the friend's, and the friend's was the win, and the win was the shelf, and the shelf was bare.

And the last picture is the counter's, and the counter's last picture is the two of them, the child and the man, the shelf and the bag. The child stands at the bare shelf, the green spine that was there last week gone, the gap in the row the size of a hand, and the child is eleven or twelve, and the child has not asked, because the child already knows, and the child is already elsewhere, already at the mall or the school fair or the other store, already finding the haunted mask, already learning the shelf's lesson, that the forbidden thing is the interesting thing, and the child will find the book, and the child will read it under the covers, and the child will be fine, and the child will remember the shelf. And the man is walking home with the two paperbacks in the bag, the conscience money in the bag, the two books

bought to make up the difference, and the man is pleased, and the pleasure is the afternoon's whole account, and the account is now priced, and the answer is Milton's and the child's, and the child's is the shelf's, and the shelf is bare, and the bag is full, and the man is walking home, pleased, and the child is reading, and the reading is the whole of it, and the whole point is the child at the bare shelf, and the man walking home with two paperbacks in a bag, pleased.

The Three Instruments

Three instruments drive the taking; a fourth structural fact makes it possible.

The forensic high is the reward the taker collects at the moment of removal: the investigated book, the prosecuted counter, the won case, the whole apparatus of a trial compressed into an errand and felt as one clean rush. It arrives before any harm is prevented and regardless of whether harm is prevented at all, and nothing downstream can refund it, which is why losing in hindsight has never deterred a single censor. The removal is the receipt.

Conscience money is the token the taker pays himself to feel square, named for the anonymous sums the English tax cheat mailed to the Exchequer. Two paperbacks against a store's survival line; the expurgator's preface praising the author while cutting him; the seal and the sticker and the classic collection kept in print; the compensating Tuesday in place of Christmas. It is always cheap, because its purpose is to let the payer keep both the prize and the picture of himself as a fair man.

The borrowed committee is the larger name a single man invokes to empty a shelf he could never empty on his own: the stake, the society, the statute, the nation, the community itself, and now the machine. It is never convened and never corrects the borrower, and the borrower carries no title and answers to none of the body's actual rules. The hint is enough, because the merchant cannot afford to test it.

And the fourth fact, the one the title states: to rule on a book you must read the book, so every regime of taking

builds a library of what it forbids and licenses one class of reader to use it. The censor keeps a copy. The exemption is structural, it cannot be designed out, and it corrupts the exempt, which is why the censor's library is always larger than the reader's.

Glossary

Forensic high, the. The reward the taker collects at the moment of removal: investigated, prosecuted, won. It arrives before any harm is prevented and regardless of whether harm is prevented at all, and the removal is the receipt.

Conscience money. The token the taker pays himself to feel square, named for the anonymous sums the English tax cheat mailed to the Exchequer. Its denominations: the two paperbacks, the expurgator's preface, the industry seal, the voluntary sticker, the classic collection kept in print, and the compensating Tuesday.

Borrowed committee, the. The larger name a single man invokes to empty a shelf he could never empty on his own: the stake, the society, the statute, the nation, the community itself, or the machine. It is never convened and never corrects the borrower, and the hint is enough, because the merchant cannot afford to test it.

Library, the, or the fourth fact. To rule on a book you must read the book, so every regime of taking builds a library of what it forbids and licenses one class of reader to use it. The censor keeps a copy. The exemption is structural and it corrupts the exempt, which is why the censor's library is always larger than the reader's.

Exemption, the. The license every ban issues to its own banner, the reading the taker must do to condemn the thing, the copy the censor keeps. Its three directions in the record: the wielder puffed up, the gentle one erased, the machine exempting everyone.

Signpost, the. The ban as advertisement: every emptied shelf says the good stuff is over there, and the children

of the congregation learn from the banner which books are worth finding. The Index as syllabus, the Filthy Fifteen as the era's most wanted, the jacket band reading Banned in Boston.

Two species of compliance, the. The clerk who wants to go home, for whom a removal is one task among many, executed to end the shift; and the merchant who cannot afford to test the hint, who complies with open eyes because the test costs more than the surrender.

Moral entrepreneur, the. Becker's name for the man who makes a career of the rule: the crusader who creates the crime he then prosecutes, the rule-maker and the rule-enforcer in one career, Comstock's job description written by sociology.

Moral panic, the. Cohen's name for the career's weather system: a condition is named, a group is assigned the condition, and the nation's attention does the rest, the seaside scuffles of 1964 standing for every season since.

Folk devil, the. The assigned face of the panic: the threatening figure the season blames, drawn from the group least able to answer back, the boy wizard's predecessors in every era.

Grandstanding. Tosi and Warmke's name for moral talk used as self-promotion, the reward's public form: the microphone's payment to the man who condemns loudest, collected in applause.

Sanctity. Haidt's name for the deep intuition that some things are pure and some contaminating, the nursery's oldest engine: the sense, older than any doctrine, that a book can pollute.

Law One. The ban is cheap for the taker and paid for by strangers, and the taker's pleasure, not the reader's

protection, is the product; the removal is the receipt.

Law Two. Every ban is also a license, issued to one person, and the person is the banner; the exemption is structural, it cannot be designed out, and it corrupts the exempt, which is why the censor's library is always larger than the reader's.

Exit line, the. The only clean line is the line between exit and censorship. You may refuse a book, refuse to buy it, refuse to stock it, refuse to let it into your house, and refuse the company of the man who bans it; the moment you choose for a stranger you have crossed the line, and no God and no committee changes the direction of the crossing.

Nursery, the. The protection claim's frame, with its two charters at the head of the record: Plato's, that the story is a contaminant and the child must be spared, and Aristotle's, that the story is a rehearsal and the child gets stronger. The book stakes the second.

Rehearsal, the. The book's answer to the nursery: the frightening thing met at a chosen dose in a safe seat, the feeling practiced before the world requires it. Staked as this record's reading of the Poetics, fought as purification, purgation, and clarification down the centuries, and carried by the Grimms' ink, the Aarhus laboratory, and the flashlight under the covers.

Recreational fear. The laboratory's name for the rehearsal in the wild: fear sought at a chosen dose for the enjoyment of it, near-universal in the Danish childhood survey and carried at Aarhus by Clasen's group.

Receipt, the. The proof of the transaction, collected on the spot: the coins on the counter, the count of the coaches, the catalogue card, the signed form with its

blank line.

Scalp, the. The struck title kept as the taking's trophy, the removed book as the objector's prize. Its price is whatever the taker spent for it, and the form prices it in the reading and the name.

Bare shelf, the. The gap a hand leaves when it takes a book that was not its own, and the lesson the gap teaches the child who finds it.

Machine, the. The borrowed committee at industrial scale: the form, the ratings site, the statute's deadline, the payment rail. The machine's defining feature is that it has abolished the challenger's reading by moving it upstream to the list-maker, whose shelf is the largest censor's library in the record; its printed conscience is the question on the form.

Piece rate, the. The exempt reader paid by the object read: the examiner of plays at two guineas a script, the reviewers of the Code at their slush pile, the sites paid by the list.

Hells, the. The forbidden libraries of the record: the Chamber of Horrors, the Enfer of the Bibliothèque nationale, the Private Case of the British Museum, the Giftschrank and the Remota of the Bavarian State Library, the customs censors' basement in Sydney, the Comics Code's reading room, the public-comment reading at the folding table.

Chamber of Horrors, the. Anthony Comstock's own name for his own collection of the seized, carried to Washington to show the congressmen; the fourth fact's first federal form.

Enfer, the. The Hell of the Bibliothèque nationale, the French state's shelf of forbidden erotica, created in the

1830s, catalogued by Apollinaire, Fleuret, and Perceau in 1913, closed to new accessions in 1969 and reopened to them in 1983.

Private Case, the. The British Museum's locked collection, kept apart from the general catalogue and available to the gentleman who knew to apply.

Giftschrank and the Remota, the. The poison cabinet and the removed: the German libraries' names for the forbidden shelf, the Bavarian State Library's own classes opened to the public in the Munich exhibition of 2002.

Index Librorum Prohibitorum, the. The Catholic list of forbidden books, begun under Paul IV in 1559 and retired by the notification of June 14, 1966, which kept its moral force and ended its legal one; the signpost's oldest running example.

Licensing Act of 1737, the. Walpole's Parliament's answer to Fielding's satires: every new play read by the Lord Chamberlain's examiner before England could see it, the office's 231 years beginning.

Theatres Act 1968, the. The statute that ended the office, wholly in force on the twenty-sixth of September, 1968, repealing the Theatres Act 1843 and the Lord Chamberlain's power under it and the royal prerogative.

Orders of 1642 and 1647 and the law of 1659, the. Parliament's closing of the playhouses as spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious mirth and levity; the abolition of Christmas as superstitiously used and observed, with the compensating second Tuesday for the servants; and the Massachusetts Bay's five-shilling fine for forbearing of labor, feasting, or any other way of keeping the day.

Dordrecht Confession, the. The Mennonite confession of April 21, 1632, whose seventeenth article, Of Shunning the Separated, is the emptied chair's charter text, with its own care and its own severity in one sentence.

Meidung, the. The Amish practice of shunning, the emptied chair's oldest living form, the excommunicated member avoided at the table.

Comstock Act, the. The Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use, March of 1873, the statute that gave the agent his badge and the mail its reader.

Watch and Ward Society, the. Boston's purity club, founded 1878 as the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, whose letters emptied the city's shelves by gentlemen's agreement from 1915 to 1926.

Banned in Boston. The jacket band printed in Manhattan, the ban worn as the advertisement, the signpost made into packaging.

Legion of Decency, the. The bishops' committee of 1934 and its pledge, and Breen's Production Code Administration from July of that year, the industry cutting itself before the parishes could.

Comics Code, the. The Comics Magazine Association of America's own rule of October 26, 1954, announced after the Senate's spring, its magistrate and its readers and its seal; no comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title.

PMRC, the. The Parents Music Resource Center, founded in May of 1985 by Susan Baker, Tipper Gore, Pam Howar, and Sally Nevius; the Filthy Fifteen, the letters X, D/A, O, and V, the hearing of September 19, 1985, the agreement of November 1, 1985, and the sticker of 1990.

Filthy Fifteen, the. The committee's own name for its own syllabus of the era's most wanted records, the list as advertisement in the participants' own words.

Wales Padlock Law, the. New York's 1927 answer to Mae West's Sex: the theater padlocked for a year, the building held hostage to the content, the examiner in a police uniform.

READER Act, the. Texas's House Bill 900 of 2023, the rating machine built and struck: the vendors made to rate, the agency able to overrule, and Judge Albright's permanent injunction of October 21, 2025, against the rating sections.

Florida form, the. The Specific Material Objection Template of Rule 6A-7.0714, effective September of 2024, with its question, Did you examine this material in its entirety?, its Yes and No boxes, and the blank line beneath for the sections examined.

Utah trigger, the. House Bill 29 of 2024, subsection (7): when three districts, or two districts and five charter schools, have found a material objectionable, every local education agency in the state must remove it, the machine firing itself.

Little v. Llano County. The Fifth Circuit's en banc answer of May 23, 2025: no right to receive information with which to challenge a removal, the weeding manuals quoted as proof that weeding is the choosing of viewpoints, the government-speech holding carried by a plurality of seven, certiorari denied December 8, 2025.

Payment rail, the. The July of 2025 episode: the open letter to Visa, Mastercard, PayPal, Paysafe, Discover, and JCB, and the storefronts moving within days, the hint so clean its author disclaims it.

Counter, the. The bookstore afternoon of twenty years ago, the author's own account: the bishop, the hint, the week, the bare shelf, the two paperbacks bought to make up the difference, and the hand reaching for the change.

Friend, the. The record's only witness at the counter, the technologist who was the unpaid bishop of his ward, as the author understood it then; never named, never located, never dated past twenty years ago, and present in the first chapter and the last, and recalled in the chapter of the dinner table by the author's own testimony.

A Note on Sources

This book's facts live in a verification register kept alongside the manuscript, one hundred and ninety-two numbered entries, each claim carrying its evidence and its status. The register's doctrine is simple and the book is written to it: a verified entry is settled and is never re-litigated; an entry that rides prints with its attribution; a flagged entry is written in era-honest phrasing until its page is pinned; a barred entry stays out of the text. The page outranks any report. Wikipedia is never a source; where a search returned it, the fact was pinned elsewhere or flagged.

The primary documents are quoted from their own texts wherever they survive: the ordinances at British History Online, the statutes at the legislatures' own pages, the opinions at the courts' own servers, the 1644 Areopagitica at its own transcription, Bradford and Morton and Landucci and Vasari at their public-domain editions, the hearing records at the Government Printing Office, and the organizations' own rules at the organizations' own pages. And the modern counts are the organizations' own: the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom for the library numbers, PEN America for the school bans, and the courts for the cases. The book's figures are dated as of the late summer of 2026, and the argument rests on the mechanism, which does not date. The quotation discipline is one quotation per source, short lines from verified texts, and the public documents stand outside the ration: the ordinances, the statutes, the opinions, and the hearing records are public records, as are Milton, the 1925 Mercury, Bradford, the 1659 law, Comstock's 1913 statement, and Heine in the book's

own translation. The epigraphs ride as front matter, outside the chapter count.

The counter account of the first and last chapters is the author's own testimony, and it is marked as such wherever it runs; the office's structure is checked against the church's own handbook and newsroom pages, and the friend's anonymity is absolute by the author's choice. The chapters close on images, and the images are the record's figures rather than its facts: the mirror in the boy's arms, the cover on the pile, the place set at the empty chair. Where the record invents, the text says so in the open.

The evidence is locked. Every claim in this book rests on a document the author read, a page the register pinned, or testimony the text attributes in the open: the primary sources are quoted from their own texts, the modern counts are the organizations' own, and the court records are the courts' own. What the book could not pin to the page, it attributes in the sentence that carries it; what it could not verify at all, it does not say.

The article that seeded the book, also called The Censor Keeps a Copy, ran on BolesBlogs.com, and the book's first thanks are to its readers.

Acknowledgments

No names of the author's own belong on this page, and the page is written accordingly: the thanks here go to the record-keepers. The librarians and archivists of the Internet Archive, HathiTrust, Chronicling America, Gallica, the British Library, the Parliamentary Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Bavarian State Library kept the paper this book is built from, open, findable, and free. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom and the counters at PEN America keep the machine's dashboard, year after year, in the open, and the machine's own numbers in this book are theirs. In the bibliography the scholars' names stand one by one, the page's own acknowledgments, for the digging the book argues from. The church at the counter is quoted from its own handbook and its own newsroom, and the record thanks it for publishing both in the open. Norway's courts publish in English as well as Norwegian, and the chapter of the dinner table is written on their pages. And the readers of the author's earlier books and of the article that seeded this one are thanked the way the record prefers: by namelessness, in the author's own coin, with the book itself.

The errors that remain are the author's own, and the author would rather hear about them than not.

Questions for Discussion

1. The friend at the counter was proud, and the owner was cold, and the friendship ended. Was the author's answer, ending the friendship, the exit or its own committee? Where exactly does the book draw the line, and would you have drawn it elsewhere?

2. The book argues the pleasure is real, cheap, and borrowed, and that it arrives before any harm is prevented. If the pleasure could be made expensive, as the last chapter proposes, would the taking stop, or would the takers pay the price?

3. The exemption says every ban is a license issued to the banner. Is there a form of the ban that does not require the reading, and if the machine's answer is the list, has the exemption been abolished or only hidden?

4. Henrietta Bowdler could not sign her work because the rule she served forbade the reader she was. The book calls her unsigned title page the most honest document in the movement's archive. Is the name's erasure a corruption of the exempt, or a protection of her, and what is the difference?

5. The 1647 ordinance abolished Christmas and granted the second Tuesday of the month in its place. The book calls the Tuesday conscience money. What is the modern Tuesday, and who is paid in it?

6. The Spencer children of 1948 were treated by the 1948 record alone, named only as the newspapers named them. Was that the right discipline for the author, and what would tracing them have added?

7. The Norwegian courts weighed the emptied chair

against the child and split, three to two, on the undue-pressure question. Which side's reasoning do you find stronger, and what would the answer be in your own courts?

8. The book's two flanks sit at equal weight: the Legion of Decency and the Dahl edits, the school-board list and the sensitivity read. Does the no-party finding hold for you, and does equal weight mean equal blame?

9. The machine's defining feature, the book argues, is that it has abolished the challenger's reading and moved it upstream to the list-maker, and the form's own question is the proof. Should the reading attestation and the name on the record be binding, and what would your own district's form show?

10. The signpost says every emptied shelf advertises its contents. If the ban always fails at its own task, why does the ban persist, and what is the pleasure's answer to the persistence?

11. The friend believed then, and for all the record knows believes today, that he was serving God's discipline, and the book says he would read it with delight. Can a person be argued out of a pleasure, and has the book changed your own answer about what you would have done at the counter?

12. The book closes on the child at the bare shelf and the man walking home pleased. The child will find the book, and the child will remember the shelf. Which of the two is the book's hope, and which is its warning?

Bibliography

The book's bibliography is built from the register's logged receipts: the documents the author read, the pages the register pinned, and the works the argument cites. And the register's own note applies: the page outranks any report, and the entries here are the record's own sources, each one named at the depth the register verified it.

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David Boles has been writing and publishing since 1975. His books include The Stopwatch Moralist: Rod Serling and the Drama Built to Outlive Its Airdate; First the Sky Turns Green: Reading the World Before It Strikes; and The Watermark, a Fractional Fiction novel. He publishes at BolesBooks.com, writes the essays at BolesBlogs.com, and keeps the projects HumanMeme.com, PrairieVoice.com, EleMenTs, and Fractional Fiction. The Censor Keeps a Copy began as an article at BolesBlogs, written the way this book was written: the facts first, the record in the open, and the pleasure named.

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