

BLANK

by Amiri Baraka

LC stopped at the corner and looked in a shop window. At whatever, but his reflection caught his eye and startled him. He did not recognize who he saw. The face would not smile. His shoulders were not stooped, but broad. He had a grey flannel blazer and black tweed pants. A thin yellow sleeveless sweater and open collar grey silk mixture shirt, tieless. His brown hair, carefully combed, flattened casually back to his ears. Perhaps a strand or two brushed his forehead.

He stared, amazed. Amazed at what? He was not certain, only that he was surprised at what he saw in the window, stashed between the hats and ties in the store. He looked at his hands, there was a light brownish red tinge to them, as from the sun. His nails, carefully manicured, he turned his hands over slowly, at the same time peering closer into the window trying to see was his face lightly tanned as well. It looked like it, like the light tan over the otherwise healthy but very northern European complexion.

Why was he surprised, yes, amazed? He was not certain. Not certain, except . . . and his thoughts tailed off as he turned from the shop window and stared randomly up and down the street at the breezy walkers crossing and moving at the corner of E. 65th and Madison Avenue. Perhaps they were shoppers and executives out to lunch. Perhaps . . . and he turned his head in another direction, watched, then turned it back, then turned around.

He was surprised because . . . now he had forgotten why, but maybe something was wrong with . . . He crossed toward a drugstore on the opposite corner, maybe he could look closer at his face, if he bought . . .

But a car mirror served his initial purpose and he stopped and peered into it, now seeing more of his face more clearly than before. His face was smooth, clean shaven. There was a subtle after shave he could barely smell. His grey eyes narrowed slightly as he inspected his face. But then, what was it? What was so strange? Why was he sort of stumped? Or something . . . dazzled? Whatever. It was . . . (his hand slid into one pocket and a few coins tapped and rolled against each other. He noticed the Oyster Rolex watch, it was just after one in the afternoon. The date read Sept. 1.) . . . what? There was something pressing in his mind, against his brain, from within. However, some pressure. But he could not say from what. He patted his back pockets, there was a grey handkerchief, nothing else. He patted his jacket; there were keys in his right-hand jacket pocket. And in the inner breast pocket, he felt a wallet. He slid it out, unfolded the wallet; people passed him oblivious and perhaps lighthearted. There was, of course, money in the wallet. He fingered the bills lightly, not really counting, but definitely counting. Not much, perhaps 1600 dollars in twenties and fifties. An inadvertent smile, he didn't see, flirted with his lips and vanished. He slipped the wallet back into the pocket simply, turning at the same time to survey the passing strangers.

But here he stopped, abruptly, as if pondering. It was warm and bright, at the civilized edge of summer's swift demise. He had nothing in his hands. In his

mind, a question was forming. But he stepped quickly toward a newsstand and looked down at the newspapers and magazines. Confirming the date, the day was Wednesday. He glanced innocently at the headlines and a few stories on the front pages. One paper predicted War, another Peace. Another showed the bare breasts of a blond woman with her mouth open, in a mixture of grimace and smile.

Suddenly he went into the inside pocket again and withdrew the wallet. He fished for the rows of credit cards that were stuffed into several compartments of the wallet. There was American Express Gold, Visa, Diner's Club, Carte Blanche, Brooks Bros., all made out in the name Close Securities-LC. Close Securities-LC was on each one. But why was he studying these cards? What, was he going to buy something? What? But that was not it, it was something else. It was not clear, it was not on the windows of the buildings he looked at, scanning easily toward each of the four corners. He had moved perhaps fifty or sixty feet in the last five minutes or so, according to his watch. But there was something bothering him. Everything seemed all right, in order, so to speak.

He was at the corner now, and the traffic light was blinking about to change, and people streamed by him absorbed in their movement and the flow of midday traffic through the glistening part of the glistening city. He too began to cross as the flow of people eased off somewhat. But then it occurred to him that he had some time to kill, that he had been looking in the window, and also that he did not know where he had decided to go. He thought it would come to him momentarily, when he touched the other side of his jacket, running his hand inside the jacket into the other inside pocket. Here was an envelope, a long business envelope with no writing whatsoever on it. Inside the envelope was a cashier's check, with the Bankers Trust seal on it for two point five million dollars. The check was made out to Close Securities-LC. 2,500,000 as well as Two Million and Five Hundred Thousand Dollars and no cents was written on the check. Made out to Close Securities-LC.

The bank at which the check had been drawn was very close to where he was at this moment. He looked at the numbers on the buildings, the bank was . . . it was across the street, just in back of him. It was over there, just next to that haberdashery. That was the same clothing store he had been standing in front of, where he'd looked at himself in the window. When he'd been amazed . . . that . . . he . . . did . . . not . . . He turned and at this point the steel grey Bentley eased up to the curb next to him and a black man looked out at him earnestly. In a moment, the man was out of the car and around it almost at LC's side. "Sir," he began, "shall I wait or where would you like to go?"

The black man wore a grey worsted suit and dark blue shirt with grey silk tie. A small accommodating smile played at his lips and he reached toward the Bentley's back door ready to open it at LC's request.

"I should go to the bank," LC said quietly, staring straight at the black man.

"Yes, sir, but I thought you'd already gone in, sir?"

"Yes." LC wanted to say more, but he looked across the street at the bank and then at the envelope which he still clutched in his hand. He put the envelope back in his inside pocket. "Yes."

The chauffeur had his hand on the door handle and as LC looked at him, he opened the door easily and held it for LC to enter. With no thought at all LC entered the rear of the car. There was a small well-outfitted bar that opened out of the front of the back seat, a small television. There was also a tiny compartment with the day's newspapers.

On the seat next to where he sat lay a leather envelope. LC moved his hand toward it expectantly. At the same time, the chauffeur turned to look at him, asking instructions with his eyes. The question in LC's mind, as it finally made itself clear, was jokish but at the same time frightening. "Who?" The word pushed into the connecting slide between mouth and brain, remaining unsaid but felt in the softest part of his voice. There was a rush of words flooding through, but what was heaviest was a fearful thrust of steel absurdity. He realized now that he did not know who he was. He did not recognize the face, the voice, the clothes, the wallet, the check, the black chauffeur, the Bentley. He did not even recognize completely where he was, except what he had seen in fragments shuffled by the day and sun and light sensuous breeze. He did not know who he was.

So he did not know where he was going, or where he had been. He had no instructions for the chauffeur, because he did not know anything about anything. Was it amnesia? Was he ill or crazy? What had happened to him? He was amazed at who he looked like. Surprised, happily perhaps at the wallet, the two-and-half million dollar check. The car and chauffeur, there among the tall rich buildings.

"Sir," the elegantly dressed black chauffeur was saying, "aren't you going back to the office as scheduled or somewhere else?"

"Schedule?" LC was about to say that he did not know who he was, but it sounded too stupid. "Can you open the window, please?" he said instead. He thought perhaps a little more air and time, some of the sun maybe . . . anything. But there was no real panic, it was just aggravating. And for awhile he had not even understood that he knew nothing, that there was . . . nothingness just a little before thirty minutes ago. Blankness.

But the aggravation was being replaced now by something else, because the chauffeur was asking him to respond. In effect, to be . . . someone. Why couldn't he remember? Perhaps he should go straight to the doctor. Thank God for the chauffeur, now after all. He, the chauffeur, knew who LC was. Indeed on the leather envelope at his side which his left hand nervously covered were the initials in slight elegant gold, "LC." And the chauffeur knew what these initials stood for. He knew who he, LC, was. He even had some knowledge of his schedule, where he, LC, was supposed to be going. "Follow the schedule. That's it." This was soft, but it rose as he repeated, "Yes, by all means follow the schedule."

The car slid smoothly away from the curb. The chauffeur wheeled it slowly up Madison Avenue without comment. At LC's finger tips were control buttons and he pushed the button at the far right. Quiet music rolled into the car. It was made by a violinist and what was that, a saxophonist, it seemed. He did not know who it was, a drum and bass came in seamlessly as the sounds throbbed in the car in soft harmonies. It pulled at him, also very softly, he rather liked it, but had no idea who it was playing or whose music it was.

As the car rolled up Madison, LC pulled at the leather envelope and finally picked it up. It was obvious that it belonged to him the way the rest of these things (or the rest of this situation) did. But he'd been too caught in wonder, blank wonder and an aggravation that perhaps had now turned the corner toward something more stark. As the car turned the corner, a right turn, he finally drew the envelope up fully into his hands and opened it. There was only a single sheet of paper and a typed schedule on it. At the top of the paper in gold lettering *Close Securities-LC*. Directly beneath this title, the heading "Schedule—Sept 1." The schedule, apparently his, read, "12am Bank—Mr. R./2pm Office-Briefing/4pm L'Arouilles (?)/ 6pm home /11pm Depart—Watercrest port for B." The schedule was initialed AL with a cc to JW & RM. The question mark caught his eye. Why was it there? He looked up at the chauffeur who was moving his head very slightly to the music and looking straight ahead, the music was playing sweetly, but there was no other sound, not even the car or the traffic.

In a few minutes the handsome Bentley had circled to Park Avenue, just above 70th Street and pulled to a stop in front of a very narrow and very new looking building that seemed like it was made of metal. The building was not as tall as the other buildings on both sides, though it was only slightly shorter, but its metallic look made it stand apart. It was not aluminum, it seemed like highly polished steel, with no bolts in sight. What was even more striking about this piece of metal sculpture that seemed to be a building was that there were no windows. And just as the building itself seemed narrow in comparison to the buildings on both sides, the door entrance to the building seemed very narrow.

There was a completely understated sign cut into the metal which read "Close Securities." The chauffeur, without looking back at LC, exited and was quickly pulling open the rear door for LC to exit. What was going on? LC was moving to get out, and he was out, but a larger flood of questions washed behind his eyes. I don't know who I am? I didn't even know that. But it seems all arranged and orderly. A schedule. He had the leather envelope in his hand. It may be that all of this will be clarified . . . that seemed stupid. He wanted to turn and ask the chauffeur. But the chauffeur was moving toward the wooden door of the metal building. He was already pushing it in and holding it for LC to enter. LC tried to move along as if he was in control, but he was being swept along. He knew nothing, except what the chauffeur said, what the check read, the credit cards, the money, the schedule. He glanced at the street signs as he passed into the building and it occurred to him that he did not even recognize the streets. E. 70th Street and Park Avenue. The newspapers had said New York. He recognized New York, as a word. A geographic location, but he had never been there. He had no knowledge of New York, but he had no knowledge of anything.

They had now passed into a lobby, which, unlikely as it might seem, was paneled completely in wood. There were thick rugs somewhat darker than the wood on the lobby floors. On the walls large abstract paintings that matched the wood and the rugs. On one wall a small tasteful sign, *Close Securities*. And against another wall, just before a small bank of elevators, a middle-aged man in a grey suit stood up quickly and nodded respectfully as LC and the chauffeur entered.

The chauffeur led the way past the group of elevators to a narrow wooden door at the back of the lobby. They stepped through the door and there was another, smaller elevator. The chauffeur pushed the button and the door of this elevator slid open. There were two leather jump seats at the back of the elevator, which apparently could be pulled into place if a rider wanted to sit. But LC could make no independent moves and, when the chauffeur moved to pull down one of the seats, LC made a move with his head that seemed to say that he did not want to sit. But otherwise the chauffeur said nothing.

The building was about twenty stories high, and the elevator shot swiftly up with the lights on the board near its roof blinking each floor as they passed. In a few seconds the elevator stopped smoothly and the door slid open. The chauffeur stepped out of the elevator, leading the way. They had stepped into a large room. It was an office, but it was outfitted not for any heavy work but rather to house a presence, a person whose tastes were somewhat intellectual and artistic and very very wealthy.

The taste ran to antique books, wood, Persian and Chinese rugs and hard-edge abstractions on the wall. There was a highly polished bar and high fidelity components. And for the first time there was a window, as the chauffeur touched a switch and one panel in a wall slid back to reveal a glass-enclosed balcony somewhat like a hot house with varying kinds of flora.

"You want the roof opened, sir?" the chauffeur said softly. LC could only nod, and in a moment, the glass panels slid away and a cool breeze from the open city swept in. LC moved to the edge of the terrace and looked down at the swirling streets below and across the avenue toward the East River and Queens. The trees on the roof swayed and the air was clear. Behind LC, the chauffeur moved and stepped close to him holding a drink which he handed to LC as if he was expected to. "You have 15 minutes, sir. You want me to ring for Miss London?"

What could LC say, he thought? And what would he say to a secretary? But maybe she would open up some path to what was happening. It was probably amnesia or something. He did not even know his name. But the idea of a name had not meant anything to him until this moment. Apparently, he was LC and he had some position of responsibility and authority at Close Securities. He could ascertain these things, but they seemed abstract. They were words in his head of some meaning. But they signified nothing specific or ultimately clarifying to him.

He had accepted the chauffeur's offer. This tall dark-skinned black man in the elegant clothes. The chauffeur, LC noted, was dressed as tastefully as he, but how he got in the clothes he had on was blank as well. He appreciated the things he saw and had on and seemed to have, but still there was a distance between himself and all of it, because he understood none of it.

The chauffeur went to the desk and pressed a button. "Miss London." Turning towards LC he said, "If there is nothing else, sir, I'll be in the outer office at 3:30." LC nodded, trying to be more positive. But still, he said nothing. He wondered if that bothered the chauffeur, but apparently it did not. The chauffeur made a deferential gesture with his head and left the office. As he was leaving, a tall middle-aged woman with tinted wire-rim glasses and grey suit with light grey

scarf tied like a tie came into the room. She wore black Cuban heels and carried a leather folder and gold pen. She was smiling as an efficient person smiles to let her boss know that she has completed all assigned tasks and is ready for anything.

"Sir," she said simply, "I hope you are well."

LC nodded, at a loss as to how to respond. The woman, her name was London the chauffeur had said, paused to open her folder and began speaking like the efficient person she seemed. It was a low steady airy voice, like one that could be heard over loudspeakers in airports or department stores. "Everything is in preparation for the meeting, sir. I have the agenda, nothing special, just the preparation for your trip tonight." She handed a paper from the folder to LC. It listed four names and under them in brief, concise sentences apparent responsibilities they had while LC was on his trip.

"Mr. Wallace, Mr. Edrick, Mr. Costen and Mr. Wray are all waiting in the conference room. They each have a brief response to the assignments they've been given in your absence, but there seems to be no real hitch. It should go smoothly. Mr. Williams is about to go into the conference room now; he'll arrive at Watercrest at 10 pm to accompany you. Mr. Scales is finishing up the last tasks he has in that regard, and of course will be waiting in the outer office when the meeting is finished."

The sheet read, "Wallace, Communications between LC and staff and any board members. Project B maintenance./Edrick: Project B maintenance and development./Costen: Project C projections and design. Wray/Normal comptroller functions—special attention to target investment area." There was a space under this list. Then the name, "Williams; Overview of B trip goals."

"The rest of the papers and darts are here," Miss London said, holding up the folder to LC. He automatically took it from her. He had said nothing at all. He wondered how he looked. "I will see if Mr. Williams has come in and all is quite ready." She stepped away from LC and slid another panel back in the wall. On the other side, five men sat at a long table in a high ceilinged room with what appeared to be a slit that ran around the entire top part of the wall which admitted light. "They are all ready, sir." Miss London gestured and LC, knowing no other course, moved toward them through the door.

The five men, one closest to him (this must be Williams) and the other four ranged around at the far end of the table, all stood and acknowledged LC's entrance. They all spoke deferentially and seemed to smile as one, not with happiness but out of mutual knowledge and perhaps security. Miss London followed LC into the room and took a seat by the wall with steno pad in hand, also smiling.

LC was at a loss. Anyone could, perhaps, say the things that would start such a meeting, with the proper background. LC simply placed the folder Miss London had given him in front of him, opened it and looked at the gentleman closest to him. (All these men seemed in their late forties or fifties except one who sat directly opposite LC and the one closest to him LC took for Williams. These two were older. LC actually was around the same age as the three other men, somewhat younger than Williams or the man who sat opposite.)

As LC opened the folder the man who seemed like Williams took up the calling out of items on the agenda, and each man in turn discussed what was outlined. All of the men in the room looked similar. They were all middle-aged or approaching, dressed in dark suits (with some diversity according to taste or whatever, however not much) and none of them looked at all "ethnic."

LC was fascinated at the reporting that went on. Williams made a few corrections, additions, extensions, but for the most part all was straightforward. Of course LC had only the vaguest idea of what they were talking about. He must have had some training in . . . something. He must have some background. But he did not know it, he did not know anything but the surfaces of things. Words without substance with invisible contexts.

But then why sit and go through with what this seemed to be? He could understand to some extent some things as they unfolded in front of him. Close Securities was an investment firm, he gathered. These men were high officers in that firm, reporting to LC, who was going on a trip. The place "B" which was LC's destination, LC could not even ascertain from the reporting. But from Williams, who seemed to be his closest assistant, "B" was not too far away. The firm's Lear jet would take them there. It was a combination of business and relaxation. A deal was to be cooked up with a bank and local investors in "B" and Williams would do most of the work and LC would be there to provide the image of Close Security's highest commitment to the project, but at the same time he would be mostly relaxing. Or so it seemed.

Why did LC let it go on? He was fixed in the chair staring at one then the other, fascinated by a life in which he was a central even controlling figure, but of which he knew nothing. He had said nothing at the table. He had said nothing at the meeting. He nodded at a couple of witticisms but doubted whether he had smiled. He remembered the face in the glass did not smile and that seemed strange, amazing. It alerted him that something was out of whack. Yet the talk went on, the business, the slight humor, the deference. Was it simply his face and body that commanded this obvious life of power and luxury? Nothing moved through his mind but blankness and questions about blankness. He knew what these people said, but only a trifle of that. And that was his entire fix on reality. The talking and smiling went on. Was he always going to be like this? Perhaps if he stopped them now and told them the truth, he could be cured. For the first time he acknowledged that he must be ill, or else all these people are. But they know who they are. They are performing their tasks efficiently and happily. I am in darkness with no road in or out, he thought. This could not go on. The game had gone far enough. So he began to talk.

"I cannot remember my name or who I am. Everything is blank and darkness with no way in or out. I found myself in front of a shop window and didn't even recognize who I was. My face in the glass startled me. I would have wandered away except for the chauffeur who picked me up and brought me here. I have no knowledge at all of what you are talking about or what my role here is. I have no information or memory. It is all blank!"

At this, LC threw up his hands in a gesture of futility and waited. But everyone

in the room was laughing. As he stood and made a broader gesture of futility they all stood and laughed even harder and pounded each other on the back. Even Miss London stood and laughed, though with a certain deference. Williams even took LC's hand, shaking it to show how effective LC's statement had been. They all stood laughing, and addressing each other at LC's statement. And they started to move out of the room, still delighted with it all.

2nd Ending

After the others had left, Miss London moved the door so that LC could go back into his office. She quickly made him a drink and just as quickly opened the door to her office in which the chauffeur Scales stood up as she entered. LC did not know what the drink was; it was brownish. He tried to look at the bottle she had poured from. It was scotch, into which she had put water and ice. But LC knew nothing of drinking.

Scales stepped forward and LC acknowledged his presence by downing the drink. It was warming and calming. The events of the board room had sent his head spinning a bit. He had not known how to react, so he said nothing, merely looking from one to the other of his laughing apparent colleagues. His dilemma was humorous to them; it might be humorous to LC as well if he could carry it correctly, he reasoned. But still he had grown more and more uncomfortable, not knowing anything. and when he'd said this, it sounded ridiculous. Perhaps if he had used the word "amnesia," they would have taken him more seriously. That's why such words existed: to make experience seem more readily disposable.

Scales had an attache case in his hand; it had LC's initials on it. "Mr. Scales has all the documents, sir." She extended her hand. "Have a good trip. We will take care of everything." LC could only nod and pump her hand as if really acknowledging what it meant. He had said literally nothing but the truth, and it had contributed some light humor to the events, nothing else. At no time had he said anything to hide anything. It is like a story I read, he thought. Yes, a story. And that thought fascinated him, because for the first time there was some vague shadow of a past or an identity. Some story I read, he thought. What story? Where? And who read it?

As Scales and LC descended in the private elevator once more, LC thought there was a way he could get more information before opening up again. This time he would say "amnesia" and they would take him seriously.

"What goes on in here?" LC asked of Scales.

"Where, sir?"

"In this building we're in. In these offices on all these floors." Scales looked puzzled, momentarily. He replied, "You want to stop on a certain floor, sir? You want to walk through a floor of offices before you go? You want me to contact Miss London?"

"No, I want to stop now, at any floor and just look. I want to know that, at least. I want to see."

"Yes, sir." Scales pushed the button on the elevator's control panel. The elevator stopped smoothly and the door slid open soundlessly. Scales stepped out, his hand against the door so that it might not close inadvertently. They stepped out into a long paneled corridor which seemed doorless, yet at certain points there were narrow glass slits which apparently enabled one to look through to the other side of the walls.

"What is this?" LC wanted to know.

"Uhh, this is the third floor, sir. There are production rooms here, of course."

"Production?" LC wanted to know more and see. "Let's go in one."

"Of course." Scales moved smartly but not too quickly up the hall. He'd pressed a button and a panel slid open in the wall, so that they could enter. Another step and LC would be at the opening, but he glanced as he moved towards it through one of the slits. There were many people moving back and forth seeming to pick up . . . something. But he had already gotten to the opening and Scales stood to one side to let him enter. At the door a middle-aged man with thick glasses immediately jumped to his feet from a desk placed in such a way as to command the entire large room that lay beyond the door.

LC had expected an office or series of offices, instead there was one huge room he could see, though the walls were curved in odd ways so that he could not see all of the room at once. On the desk of the man who had stood up with great deference were a series of monitors which enabled the man with the glasses to see throughout this room and what seemed like other large rooms on the other side of this one.

There were maybe two or three hundred people in the room where LC and the two other men stood. The people were divided into small gatherings of about twenty to thirty. Men and women of varying nationalities, it seemed. Each group hovered around, bending and scooping and placing something in sacks which they had on their shoulders. LC could not understand what they were doing. He moved tentatively forward.

"Is there something specific you're interested in, sir?" the man with the thick eyeglasses asked. "Any particular production group?"

LC shrugged. "I just want to know what they're doing." He thought he sounded apologetic, but to the man in the eyeglasses, he must have sounded deadly ironic, the man moved so quickly forward toward one of the closest groups. He moved close to the milling group who seemed to see nothing but the . . . it was scraps of paper they picked up. Scraps of paper being . . . pushed out . . . of. . . . It was difficult for LC to see. He moved a little closer, Scales at his side and slightly behind him.

"Sir?" Scales asked. But LC said nothing. He took another step.

The man in glasses had said something to someone so that the closest group seemed to open a bit so LC could see more directly into the center of the milling and moving and scooping. There was a machine with a screen of some sort. Numbers flashed up and across the screen as LC came forward still closer.

Numbers and names, cities, it seemed. LC could not see it all, but out of the machine's "mouth" a steady stream of papers shot, scattering in all directions. White papers blown out, it seemed, as the numbers and names registered and flashed across the device.

"The I90 computer, sir!" the man with the thick glasses said. But their talking did not distract or divert the milling men and women who scrambled patiently and without expression to pick up the papers. They bent and picked up the papers as they shot out of the machine, and put them in the bags. LC wanted to see what was on one of the papers. Why were they being shot out and picked up like this? Was this efficient? He wanted to ask this, but as he readied his mouth to ask, another bulkier blonde man came into view on the other side of the crowd. He, like all the others, had on a dark suit and tie. But this man wore dark gloves as well and he carried no bag on his shoulder, but in his hand was a long blue tube with what appeared to be red flashing eyes on either side of one tip.

As LC scanned the room now, with his eyes, very slowly, he could see that at each station, as they were called, near the center or edge of the milling crowds was a similar figure, wearing dark gloves and carrying the blue tube with the red blinking eyes. LC looked toward the man with the eyeglasses as if for some further explanation, but the man tried to smile with the smile of the employee at your service. Scales stared straight ahead, looking at the groups but somehow not focusing directly on them.

At one point, as LC stared, and was about to turn and ask or exit quietly, he could not decide which, one of the people almost directly in front of him stopped scooping and stuffing and froze in his tracks. It was a large man, one who had seemed most energetic in catching and scooping and stuffing. Now he was frozen, stock still, almost like he wasn't breathing. Then, almost as suddenly, he started to sag, slowly, very slowly like something melting or with the wind slowly being sucked out. Now the man with the blue tube moved forward and touched the big man with the tube, the thing's red "eyes" sputtered furiously and LC thought he heard a brief humming. At once, the big man raised up and, as if he had never stopped, resumed his catching and scooping and stuffing. No one seemed to even notice it.

LC wanted to question, but he knew that was foolish. He had been at the top, among the most powerful, he presumed (and he assumed the most informed) and they laughed. I know now it is amnesia. It must be something like that. I don't know anything about any of this.

In thinking so deeply about his problems, he inadvertently jerked his head and arms in a manner that suggested to Scales and the man with the eyeglasses that he wanted to leave. They both turned and strode forward to lead him out of the production room.

"Is there anything else, sir?" the man in the eyeglasses asked. LC shook his head. Scales moved to the door and made it slide open. He stepped out into the corridor, and LC followed.

After a few steps towards the elevator, LC, figuring there must be some way to find out more, asked, "Do *you* know what goes on in there?" As if he was checking to see Scales' understanding.

"Yes, sir," was the chauffeur's reply. "Information, the production of information." Scales smiled at his precise answer, but in a non-irritating way. He had the door to the elevator open now. LC entered and said nothing. He was thinking about amnesia. About not knowing anything that was happening. About how he would get out of all this . . . blankness.

"Will you be going to L'Arouilles, sir, or directly to the house?" If I go home, LC was thinking, perhaps there will be something recognizable, something that will reconnect me with myself. It is not that I reject anything in this world, but I must reconnect up to it in consciousness. "The house," was what he said and followed the chauffeur through the lobby and out into the street where the rear door of the Bentley was quickly opened and LC got in and pushed the stereo and fixed himself a scotch and water with one piece of ice.

As the limousine moved quietly through the streets, through the tunnel, up the turnpike, and into wooded, peaceful, pastoral New Jersey, LC relaxed, letting his questions maraud inside his head without trying to draw conclusions or resolution. Finally he drifted off to sleep, a puzzled grey sleep with no dreams and no answers.

3rd Ending

When LC woke up, the Bentley was cruising up a grass incline, on a narrowing road which quickly reached its top and leveled off. The road was sided by large rocks every five yards or so, natural but whitish. These seemed to get larger and larger, till they got larger than humans as the road pierced straight ahead and entered what seemed like a forest of tall, very straight trees. It was now late afternoon and the sun was cascading through a reddening sky but it was still day, but tall trees hid the light suddenly, and grey shadows made stranger looking by the reddening tint abstracted the shapes of everything.

But the car came out of the forest, which seemed now simply a grand fence around the low wooden, windowless structure that lay just ahead behind a free-form fence of huge boulders like those that lined the approach road. The house was made of some dark wood and without one window, though a thin strip of light-admitting glass ran around near the roof.

The house itself was placed in the middle of a formal garden, but the garden seemed not so much a garden as a wild mixture of improbable looking trees, shrubs twisted like Japanese bonsai, high bushes with red-flowering bulbs, the flora of some specialized collector. LC watched impassively, the images passing through his eyes, his mind, colliding painlessly with his questions. He sat up, and the chauffeur acknowledged this by raising his eyes slightly in the rear view mirror, but said nothing. The Bentley moved forward a few more feet then veered to the right, as the land rose a little but was mainly flat and set out with the flashy flora and the large stones, the road carrying them around a curve so that they were going to the side of the house. But there was not a gate or place to enter at the

front, though one could simply walk through the openings between the stones. At the side of the house, the road turned into an opening which led behind the stones and directly toward the house, dipping down toward the entrance of a garage built right into the house.

The garage door swung open as the car approached and the Bentley rolled in quietly, the door closing slowly behind them. In the garage were three more cars. LC did not know what kind they were. They looked new, except for one which did not. There were several doors or panels around the garage wall. The garage was perhaps as large as a couple of tennis courts. And beyond the area where the cars were parked was a glass-enclosed lounge with all the accoutrements of an exclusive club bar.

Scales had the door open and LC, without a pause, got out. LC tried looking at Scales but he did not know how to look. He thought perhaps he could look like he wanted something, like he had some need Scales could fill. But he was a closed container, containing blankness, only questions. And what curiosity he had, though whetted by the twists and turns and newness of everything, was like a rope which wrapped him tighter and tighter in its embarrassing absurdity.

Scales had caused one panel in the wall to open and they entered the lounge. Scales moved to an elevator at the far side and pressed the button so that the door to the elevator slid open. It was wood and leather inside. LC stepped in, Scales behind him, the elevator hummed upwards. In a moment it had stopped and the door hummed open. LC hesitated momentarily, but stepped through into a large well-lit room which seemed to be made, on all four of its surfaces, of the same dark wood. It was some kind of library, office, drawing room, complete with drawings, mostly French and English impressionists, not prints, the floors set off exquisitely with Persian and Chinese rugs.

At each wall glass and wood cases showing antique books, first editions. There was a low desk, empty of everything except a control panel apparently for lights; doors; windows; and recessed in the ceiling expensive sound equipment and various kinds of film, projector and television screens. There was, of course, a bar, and LC, who had no recollection of ever drinking, suddenly wanted a drink. That's what he'd do, he'd speak directly to Scales and ask for a drink. He'd practice what he obviously had been . . . was. And perhaps, with practice, what that was, is, would come back. He wondered momentarily did this man he was have any special skills to be this. Suppose, he thought, conjuring further with this panic trend of thought, that because he could not remember what that special skill or information was, that provided all this (his eyes swept the room now almost sensuously) it could or would be taken away? But there were files, reports, minutes, there were ways to reeducate himself. He felt somewhat restored, though thought and counterthought had both transpired in the split second of his eyes' travel over the walls, floors, rugs, drawings, bar, etc. He could learn, anything, he thought. I must be this person they all think I am . . . it's simply that . . . I have . . . amnesia. But I need a drink.

Turning sharply to give Scales this order, he was confronted with an image that was even more shocking than his own reflection in the shop window several

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hours ago on the street. For the black chauffeur, Scales, now stood, just a few feet from LC, his legs a little apart, as if planted. His vague accommodating smile replaced in his dark skin with the mouth of a straight line. LC could no longer even see Scales' eyes, the lids were drawn down so tight only a slit of eye shown. But strangest of all, in Scales' right hand now, pointed directly at LC's stomach, was a modest but nevertheless menacing automatic pistol.