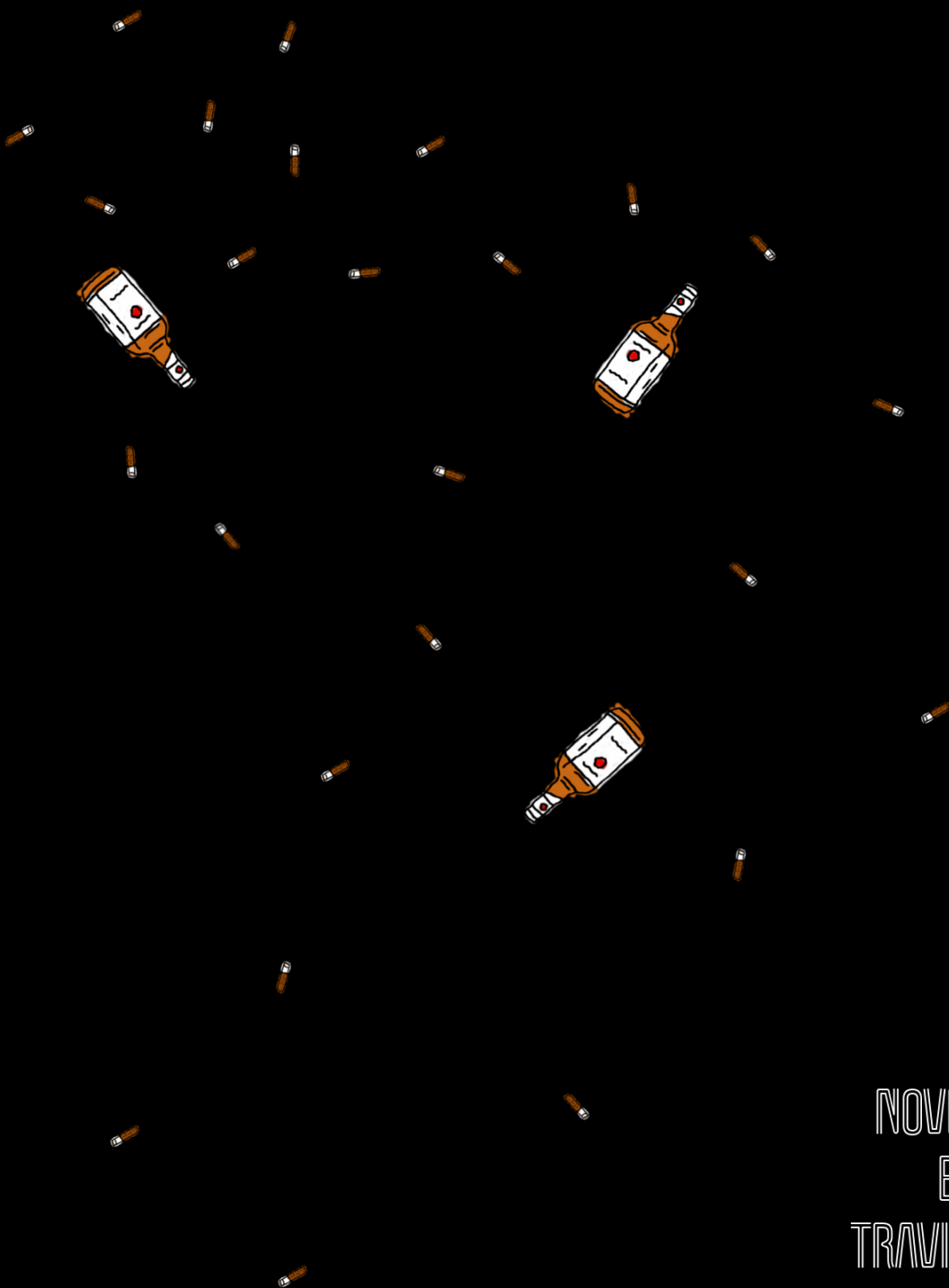


BETWEEN
THE
LINES
OF
MEN



A
NOVEL
BY
TRAVIS
RUSSELL

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Travis Russell

travissrussell48@gmail.com

A note from the author:

I, for one, like to know exactly what I am getting into before I embark on an adventure, unless of course the night is young and my judgement marred by substance. If you are not this type of individual and enjoy surprises, however jarring they may be, then by all means skip this short note and begin. Do not worry; I believe you to be just as astute as any other reader.

For those of you who fall into the former camp, I'd like to bring to your attention the fact that this is a novel of historical *fiction*. Most of these characters do not exist, and those that have, either placed in my novel on purpose or by some accident, are purely figments of dramatization. This isn't to say it is all untrue; I will leave it up to the reader to make that distinction. Unlike most historical fiction novels, however, this is not some hulking beast of a novel in which the author tries to squeeze every last drop out of a certain moment in time. This isn't even a novel that aims to transport you to a faraway place; I can guarantee the reader that my description of a Mississippi morning is beyond flawed (I apologize profusely to the locals).

Above all else, this novel is the story of a man. Some of you will find him appalling; some relatable; a great deal many of you will find him both. I truly hope you enjoy his journey as well as your own between the lines of men.

Travis Russell

Between the Lines of Men

Part I

I

The clock upon the wall struck eleven, but nobody seemed to notice. It was not a particularly hot day in Stanford, in fact it was rather cool and damp, but this did not deter beads of sweat from forming in the underarms and upon the brow of every man in the room.

The room itself was large and plain, as far as rooms go. A large filing cabinet sat in the corner, and a few chairs littered the floor here and there, all taken. Cigarette smoke filled the air. The most intriguing thing about the room was not a physical characteristic or object, but rather the invisible partition that seemed to exist straight down the middle of the room.

On one side stood maybe ten or twelve men, all wearing white shirts and black ties, all carrying notepads and pens, and all with their gaze fixated on the situation unfolding across the invisible partition. Every once in a while one of these men would light up a cigarette, or look at their watch, or make an attempt to shuffle closer to the small window located at the back of the room, but not once did any emotion cross their faces.

On the other side sat two men sitting across from each other. One of the men was an exact counterpart to the others, with their white shirts and black ties. This final man was an odd specimen. In contrast to the appearance of everyone else in the room, he was dressed informally, wearing military boots and a green shirt that was half tucked into his faded blue jeans. His face was worn, despite being

only eighteen or twenty, and it looked as though he hadn't shaven or showered in weeks. Remnants of a meal eaten at an earlier time were still found at the corner of his mouth. His eyes were glossy and his whole face had a look of serenity about it, as though he possessed no thoughts of worry or doubt. The man across from him opened his mouth.

“What country do you currently reside in?”

“The United States of America.”

“Where are we now?”

“Stanford University, California.”

“Who are you?”

No answer. The look on the unshaven man's face had turned from serenity to confusion, and the lines on his brow tightened while he searched for an answer.

“Who are you?”

Again, no answer. A look of despair had crept upon the man's face, his eyes wide, his mouth quivering. The man across from him jotted some notes in his notepad and opened his mouth again. The clock struck noon.

“Do you believe in God?”

The man asking the questions had transformed. He was no longer dressed in a white shirt and black tie, but in the robes of a priest. His pen and notepad had been replaced with a crucifix, and his unemotional gaze had turned into one of anger and contempt. The unshaven man sunk back into his chair. He realized he was now facing the inquisition, and with one wrong answer he could be

deemed a heretic and burned at the stake. He would have to be careful.

The inquisitor moved on, but the unshaven man did not. Between pauses, question after question was posed, each one met with silence, each one prodding deeper and deeper into his personal beliefs. The man did not ignore these new questions out of fear, however; it was that the first question was still churning in his head.

Do I believe in God? He thought to himself, his thoughts clear, his decision not. How can there be a God watching over a world such as this? When there exists such poverty in the world, such war, such injustice, how can this be? Would God claim responsibility for this? Would He let this happen? Would He not try to change this?

The man gulped and looked around the room, aware that the gaze of everyone in the room was fixated on him. He turned back to face the inquisitor, his mind still racing.

The whole of man is responsible for these crimes, and in turn, would this not make God responsible? And what kind of God would that be? We do not possess proof of God, only proof of the evil of man. But should I say this? Do I want to die? Is the truth not more powerful than God and man?

The man began to turn green and convulse, the endless questions in his head weighing upon him like the world entire, his mind spinning out of control.

“Do you believe in God?” the inquisitor returned to the first question.

Another voice crept into the man's head now, an unfamiliar one of confidence and clarity. *Say it.* He looked deeply into the soulless eyes of the inquisitor and a flash of anxiety waved over him for a split second. It was as though he was drowning in the blackness of those eyes, as if those eyes were responsible for all the sins of man. He gave his response.

“Man is God.”

A look of serenity began to creep across the man's face once again, his mind calming. He looked to be completely at peace, as though he knew the fate that awaited him. He was content.

The inquisitor's crucifix began to melt away in his hand, taking the shape of a pen and notepad once again. He scribbled down his verdict and parted his thin, peeling lips to speak.

“Very good. Put down your pens and papers everyone, it's lunchtime. I expect everyone to be back here within the hour. We have much to discuss.”

II

I took a deep inhale of my cigarette and looked down at the blank piece of white paper before me. Exhaling slowly, I repeated my question.

“How much did you give him?”

“About 400 micrograms.”

“And he’s dead?”

“As a doornail.”

I paused to take another inhale. Fuck. This complication was not to be dwelled on long, however. There would be no consequences; just a mark in a file, a lesson learned, and one sad mother. Not even the media would get their grubby hands on this story. The government had its ways.

“So can you explain to me exactly what happened?”

“Well, there’s really not much to be said about it. We administered the dosage, 400 micrograms, at ten o’clock sharp yesterday. We waited an hour, and questioning began at half past eleven.”

“And how did that go?”

“Fine, I guess. We didn’t get much out of him, but that’s becoming more and more common as we’ve been increasing the dosages. Just after noon we broke for lunch, and let him go home. He seemed content enough. Then just this morning we got a call saying he was dead, found in bed by his buddy.”

“Suicide?” It wouldn’t have been the first time; our collaborating team at McGill University in Canada had reported several. I had always thought of suicide as more of an intellectual pursuit, but these results had somewhat challenged this belief.

“We can’t rule it out, in fact it’s very possible. I still can’t fucking believe it. I can only imagine the amount of bullshit paperwork the higher ups are going to expect because of this. I hope you don’t expect me to handle it.”

I tried my best to keep a straight face. Jimmy could be a real lazy twat when he wanted to. A subject under his supervision dies, and the first place his mind goes is the paperwork. No wonder his ass hadn’t made the grade in med school.

“Alright. Let me know if you hear anything else. And close the door behind you, wouldn’t ya?”

I let out a sigh and butted out my cigarette in my ashtray. It was a nice one. Sterling silver, from Tiffany’s. My aunt had given it to me as a gift for a birthday, or graduation, or some other occasion years ago. I had another just like it at home, along with a whole chest of similar gifts given to me at such empty events. To me, my whole life previous to this had been a series of gifts and meaningless milestones. Luckily for both me and my legacy, this was no longer the case.

Project MKUltra; the first time I’d heard of it was about 2 years ago, during the summer of ‘56. The United States government was recruiting graduate students and post docs all across the country

and I was one of the (un)lucky few that signed up. Now, at only 27, I was one of the heads of the project at Stanford.

The project itself had started out as a product of the Cold War. After the synthesis of lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD as it was called around campus, the United States government was eager to put it to the test as a mind control drug or some kind of truth serum. What we were testing was a weapon of war.

The first test subjects were for the most part military, but since then they've come from everywhere. Mental patients. Convicts. And once word got out around campus, every longhaired freak and fruit wanted to be a part of it. It was a circus. We actually had *willing* participants for this. Get that.

The kid who had died this morning had been one of those types. Naïve, eager, bright eyed, ready to “expand his mind”. Just look where that got him. I can't help but have sympathy for the kid, though. Lord knows I didn't have my head on completely straight at that age. He hadn't even seen it coming; one extra drop from an eye dropper was all it took.

Ringggggggggg. Unlike the kid, I had the gift of foresight. I knew that this was coming. *Ringggggggggg*. The higher-ups had heard about the death, now they (or I) would have to clean up their mess. *Ringggggggggg*.

“Hello.”

“We heard about your little mishap.”

“Yes sir. Must have been the dosage sir. Won't happen again sir.” I hate saying that fucking word.

“It better not happen again. This is going to be a mess.”

“I understand sir.”

“I expect a full report on the subject in question sent up to Washington by the end of the week. Truth is, we’re growing tired of your antics down in California. This is a project sanctioned by the government of The United States of America, not some fraternity house community project.”

“I understand sir.”

“Good. On that note, I expect a full report on all your recent findings sent up here by the end of the week as well. And it better be significant.”

“Yes sir. Will do sir. Bye.”

I slammed the phone down on the receiver and lit up another cigarette. Three days. Three fucking days. How was I supposed to write two full reports in three days? Sure, I had my staff, but most of them were useless. On top of that, we had almost nothing to show for our past few months of work besides some incoherent notes and a corpse. As I exhaled it seemed as though the smoke waltzed across the room, mocking me to my face. I knew we were close; we just had to fix the dosage. There was promise, especially in the earlier subjects. I wasn’t about to let my name and work be tarnished by this hiccup. We were going to have to make this a fly by night operation. Picking up the phone, I dialed the rotary. One ring. Two rings. Three rings. Four.

“Hello?”

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