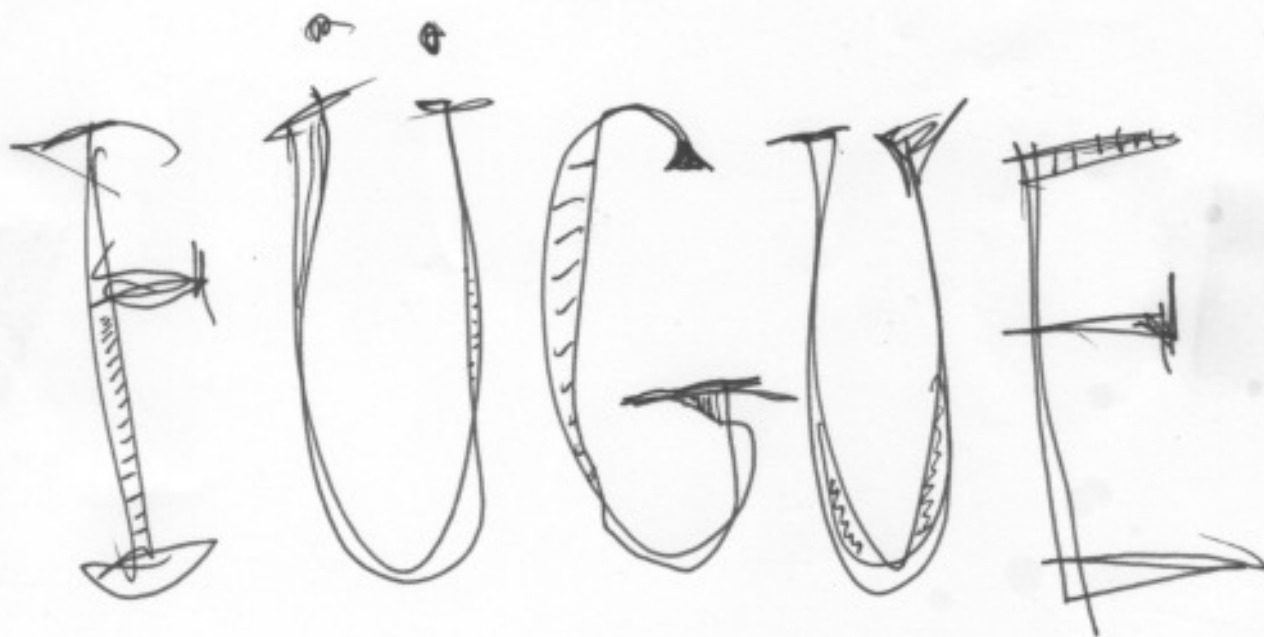


#1 New York Times Bestseller



FUGUE

by



NATTKIVE

Foreword by Thomas Pynchon

Praise for Pulitzer Prize Winning novel

Fügte

“Arguably the funniest book in the English language...a comic masterpiece.”

Booklist

“Hysterical and brilliant from start to finish. A breathtaking tour de force from a heretofore unknown.”

The New York Times Book Review

“My face hurt from laughing. Really. Nothing should be this funny.”

The Washington Post

“Wear a helmet. This is a 734 page carnival ride for your mind. Kaye grabs the reader by the lapels and spins and gyrates until it seems one’s guts will bust.”

The San Francisco Chronicle

“Brimming with intelligence and heart, it is also unbelievably uproarious.”

Kirkus Reviews

“Not since ‘A Confederacy Of Dunces’ has a book defined what literary humor can be....Unrestrained lunacy and genius.”

New York Magazine

“Incredibly entertaining and touching. It is the very best sort of madness.”

Christian Science Monitor

“Astonishing, a tsunami of inventiveness, heart, and brilliant comedic characters.”

Publishers Weekly

Fügte

Chapter 1

Discovering one side of his face mashed against the hard surface, Nugent took a chance and opened an eye. The polished wood landscape stretched away golden, shot through with scratched black veins from a faraway heart. O.K. No one seemed to be screaming at him. Also, nothing hurt or else he was too drunk to feel it. Boop-a-doop. Slouching up, he found a drink resting between his fingers and it was still cold. More than O.K. This was a bar, and he had a drink, and what had just happened had been brief. Just another narcoleptic conk-out. He was not on the backend of one of his blackout “incidents.” No fists, no fires, no fuzz. Very good news. And he could certainly drink to very good news. Or bad news, really. Even a complete absence of news could be drunk to, if he put his mind to it.

He lurched around on the brass stool and bleared at the emblems, pennants, and checkered flags obscuring the walls. For the moment there was an absence of news how someone with his refined cosmopolitan sensibilities had ended up in a sports bar. No matter. Nugent drained his glass. Mysteries of this type were often solved at a more leisurely pace or in the end proved not to be overly important. Hopefully that raisin-faced old Brit, Basil, would have some insight when he turned up. That indolent lackey disappeared at the worst times.

Nugent waved the mullet-haired bartender over and ordered a gin and grape juice. “And let’s take it easy on the grape juice, huh. There’s a shortage this year. ”

The bartender looked at him.

“Maybe from frost or some sort of fungal thing. I’m not a grape scientist.”

“I told you, we don’t serve grape juice.”

“—Sure. The shortage. Just a tall glass of gin then. And ‘Make it *Hamblammensham’s*,” he crooned as he put a large bill down. “That’s all you. What’s the name of this place again?”

“Bar Damu.”

Fugue

That did not ring any bells. “Ah, and would you say Bar Damu is one of the better sports bars in—”

“Best sports bar in Philly. Go Eagles!”

There were profane whoops and echoes from the other patrons.

Nugent gave a half-hearted, “Go Eagles,” long moments after everyone else.

Philadelphia? Well, that was surprising. Last he remembered he hated Philadelphia. Maybe he actually had blacked out for a bit. “It’s definitely busy. Good for you. For business.”

“Yeah, Daytona 400. Plus Saturday’s always jumping.”

Saturday? That was surprising. And concerning. Last he remembered it had been Wednesday and he had been in a beige field somewhere very cold. He couldn’t remember.

“I’m back, you bastard,” said a tall, leonine woman who kissed him on the cheek and sat down.

Who the shit? Total blank. Definitely more panic than the Saturday thing. “Oh, good. I’m glad you’re back.” Simple agreement seemed safest.

“You tried to get rid of me.”

“What?” he tried to sound offended. “Why on earth would I do that?” he asked, hoping for an answer.

“Very funny, Nugent.”

The bartender brought his drink.

“Thanks.” Nugent turned. “Uh, I’d like you to meet our gracious bartender—.”

“Hi, it’s Buck. Buck Mull.”

“Malandra Gem.”

O.K. A name at least. Malandra Gem. Stillness. A complete absence of bells ringing.

“I’m his bodyguard.” She shook rain from her crazy, dark mane. “And his girlfriend.”

Bodyguard and girlfriend? Bicycling Christ. What happened on Thursday and Friday? Something unpleasant. That info was now making itself known. Seeping into his noggin. And

Fügte

she was involved. No details, but he had definitely wanted to get away. O.K. Boop-a-doop. He had learned to trust even the vaguest of intuitions and boogie when things got strange. Let the lizard brain do a little think-a-dink and—yes, out the bathroom window.

“Excuse me.” Nugent slammed his gin and waved to the men’s room. “Gotta drop the kids off at the pool.”

“Nugent.” Malandra grabbed his arm.

“Yes, bodyguard-girlfriend?”

She opened her leather jacket revealing the handle of a .45. “If you try to leave me again, I’m going to shoot you in the leg.”

“You? No—I wouldn’t. I like my leg—my legs. Both.”

“Also,” she opened the other side displaying a medium-sized bag of coke, “you’ll miss the party Mama brought.”

Maybe she deserves a second chance Nugent thought as he looked in the bathroom mirror. He splashed his face and stretched his cheeks up and down making a ‘Bluh’ sound. Even he had probably made mistakes before.

That poor woman, with at least three, possibly four ounces of what looked to be high-quality cocaine, had cared enough about him to find him in a sports bar in Philly, the city of Ben Franklin and the broken bell. In this cold and lonely world could he in good conscience just turn his back on another human being like that? He wasn’t a monster. And who else could he count on? Certainly not Basil the Absent, that pompous piece of toast in shoes.

He reminded himself that she was his girlfriend after all—apparently. He would rise above their past difficulties he couldn’t remember and forgive her. Boop-a-doop. Back to the bar. It was truly a shame nobody knew what a magnanimous saint he was.

The gin taking its effect, he slid onto and then off the barstool. “Don’t worry, I’m a *mag-nam-neous* saint.”

“I’m glad, Nugent.” She unfurled her long limbs and walked him over to a booth.

Fügu

“Gandhi.”

“What?”

“Call me Gandhi the Mamganeeyuhs.”

“I’m not doing that.”

“Hmmmph. *They* will.” He stood on the seat and leaned over the divider to a booth holding a half-dozen people watching the race. “You guys watchin’ the race? Hey, pretty fast with the drive guys *this* year, huh?”

They tried to ignore him.

“Pleased to meet *ebverbod*y, my name is Gandeeb the Mangranymus.”

A few gave him wan smiles.

“See? We can be friends.” He squinted around the group. “You guys eat a lot of cheese.” He pulled a wadded hundred from his pocket. “Here you go. Buy some fried cheese and liquor, new friends. I am a magneembuhnuss individu—.”

A small cheer rose from the table as Malandra yanked down on his belt. She had laid out and cut several lines using the black-blade of the KA-BAR she waved at him. “I’m going to stab you in the nutbag if you don’t sit down and do this blow.”

Nugent turned and looked into her gold eyes. This new girlfriend really had a grasp on the whole stick-or-the-carrot negotiation thing. It was why he imagined he had first fallen for her possibly. His body squeaked against the booth wall as he slid down to his seat. “OK, babe,” he leaned over and kissed the air near her face, “you don’t have to yell at the Gandho. I was just buying some drinks for my big, sweaty cheese-friends.”

“Nugent—”

“It’s the Gandho now.”

“No, it’s not. You need to shut it.” She leaned her shaggy head toward him.

“Remember our situation? We need to keep a low profile.”

Fügué

He blinked at her for a few moments. “Ohhhhhh—riiight.” He held a hand up to his face and strangle-whispered, “—because of the cooooo-caaaaaaine.”

“No, because of the two dead—”

“Hey, uh, excuse me.” One of their burly booth neighbors was standing at the table. “Wanted to say thanks. Bartender seemed to think you were drinking straight gin?”

“Yes, because of the grape famine.” Nugent teared up. “I can’t believe you got me a drink.”

“Yeah—I mean it was with your money.”

“What’s your name, new friend?”

“Darren.”

“Darren. That’s beautiful.” Nugent shook his hand. “Everyone calls me the Gandho.”

“The Gandho. Hey, that’s cool.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Nugent looked at Malandra. “Some people are actually jealous of how cool it is. But, hey, they’re not magnambluhnous, so tough shit, monkey tit, right?”

Darren gave an uncomfortable chuckle.

Nugent dug out another hundred. “Buy the guys a bunch of pitchers, OK?”

“Hell, yeah. If that’s what the Gandho wants.”

“That’s exactly what the Gandho wants,” Nugent yelled after him and looked at Malandra. “I said, that’s exactly what *the Gandho*—” She gave him a short straw. “—wants. Oh, right.”

Down, down, and down he bent to the sparkle of the soft powder lines \\.....

\\.....Hey Ol’ Murray, Full of Grapes, Our Gourd is with Thee.....Uno!

\\.....Blessed Smart Frau, the Jung Women, n’Bless Up the Fruit in My Room.....Dos!

\\.....Slowly Larry, Smother Your God, Hooray for Us Sinners.....Tres!

The earth peeled back to a starlit sky. Yes. Oh, yes. I am a poor boy too, pah-rum-pum-pum-pum! Everything felt clear now. Clear and good like laser beams. Feeeee-ooooop! And

Fügte

strong. His blood was stronger. More corpuscles probably. He sat up straight. He bet he could do math in his head right now. Easy. The squiggled-lines-with-letters-and-dimensional-graphs kind. Probably fluent in Portuguese too. Never studied it. Didn't need to. So much power.

He gripped the booth table and tried to lift it. Repeated yank-thrusts. "Gahhhh."

"It's bolted to the floor," Malandra said.

Nugent looked. "It's bolted to the floor."

"Yes. Now can we discuss—"

"It'll take a blowtorch. I could make one—"

Malandra grabbed his face. "Baby? Blow got your head a little more razored now?"

Focus. We need to talk about the two dead *National Intelligence* agents—"

"—Wait. I can't make one." Nugent groaned. "No tube-hoses or fire juice. I'll have to call the blowtorch store." He pulled out a cellphone. "Plus I need the robot head."

Malandra went pale. "Where did you get that phone?"

"This?" Nugent didn't know. "Phone store?"

"We destroyed your last one."

"Hey, yeah." Maybe that's why he had tried to get away from her. "Why'd you do that?"

"So they can't track you. We can't let them find you." She grabbed his phone and strode out of the bar.

Christ in a canoe. How the hell was he supposed to call the blowtorch store? It was probably going to close soon. He was definitely going to break up with her if she ever came back unless she still had cocaine.

Two grinning heads popped over the booth divider. "The Gandho," one yelled.

"Hey! Cheese-friends."

"Why'd your girlfriend run away?"

"Communication issues. But she's not my girlfriend right now. We're on a break." One handed him a beer. "You guys know where I can get a blowtorch or a robot head?"

Fugue

The one with marinara sauce in his beard said, “No. What kind of robot head?”

“Normal kind. A flip-down, like in *Flashdance*.”

“Oh. My wife liked that movie.”

“Me too. And I don’t usually like documentaries,” said Nugent.

“The Gandho should blowtorch later. Come watch the race with us.”

Nugent looked around. He felt like a human rock concert. All this electricity, Portuguese, and strong blood running through him and not one person here was drunk enough. “Yeah. Good idea. Let me get some drinks first.”

As he slid out the bills to buy pitchers and bottles of tequila for everyone in the bar, a slip of bright yellow paper like a spot of sun twirled to rest on the floor. Nugent knew it was important by the number of times he had written important on it. He never wrote himself messages. Also, his lizard brain had quick-kicked on to its highest focus level. Boop-a-doop. A street address with no explanation. He turned it over. Blank.

Why would he do this to himself? Was this in Philly or near the freezing beige field? Or somewhere on his Thursday and Friday travels, which could have been literally anywhere considering they had also involved losing that pile of damp dishrags, Basil, and acquiring a bodyguard-girlfriend.

He could feel the deceptive suck-back of low water racing over broken shells to create an enormous wave behind him. It would be useless to put the bright yellow back in his pocket. Anything could happen to these pants tonight.

“Buck Mull. I need you to hang on to this for me.”

“Yeah, sure. Anything for the Gandho.”

“You gotta make sure I get this back, could be life or death.”

“O.K. You want me to put it in the safe?”

“Yes. In the safe.”

Fügué

Thanks to Nugent's continued generosity, it wasn't long until Bar Damu became loud and rowdy with a rollicking, heaving energy. It's memorabilia-covered wood paneling like the insides of a pirate ship carrying dozens of drunken, yelling buccaneers who swayed as it pitched to and fro. There was singing and cursing and they were booing and screaming at people who tried to enter the bar. Beer bottles were thrown at dawdlers.

Nugent's table of friends were making race-car noises, "Eeeeeeeooooohhhwww," as the cars zipped across the screen. "Hey, wait, cheese-friends." He pointed at the screen. "This is dumb. All they're doing is going in circles." No one could hear above the commotion.

He climbed over the table, knocking glasses to smash on the floor, and addressed the bar. "Everyone—this race. Nobody's getting anywhere. See?" He pointed. "The same thing. The same track." His listeners stared. "It's useless. Everyone just goes around and around and then it ends."

While the pirates didn't understand what he was going on about, they did understand he was the one buying drinks and they chanted their support. "Gandho! Gandho! Gandho!"

Long and lean, Malandra stepped in the front door and the drunks began booing until one screamed, "Shut up, it's Mrs. Gandho."

Wet from the rain, she met him in the middle of the chaotic bar, her gold eyes flaring. "What in the fuck is going on?"

Nugent ignored her stupid question. He needed answers that would affect the entire future of their relationship. "Where's my phone?"

"I went to a gas station and hid it behind the bumper of a refueling tractor trailer. If *National Intelligence* voice-tracked it, that'll throw them off and buy us some time."

"That's the second phone you—dammit—" He took a deep breath. Easy. He was the Gandho—the Gandho was magnanimous. Also he knew there was more to a good relationship than just not discarding each other's phones. "Do you still have cocaine?"

"Yes—"

Fugue

“We’re back together,” he announced and kissed her while the bar’s mob cheered.

“Whiskey for everyone.”

She grabbed his hand and dragged him to the restroom which he thought was good. They would reconcile, have make-up sex. Then more cocaine. And then he would blowtorch that smug, stubborn table. Boop-a-doop. Busy like day-planner people.

“Nugent, honey, do this.” Her knife had a thick rail on top.

Coke first? She was scrambling up the schedule. Maybe she always did that. Maybe her capricious whimsy was a thing he sometimes found irritating, but also charming about her.

“Now can you hear me, baby?”

Yes. Now he could hear everything. His heartbeat, her heartbeat, a large crash of glass from the bar pirates, the plumbing, the walls humming with their special wall molecules that whirled around so fast they felt solid, but were actually almost entirely the space between their parts, the mind of the Universe, all of it.

She held a small black device with spidering wires. “I’m going to find a landline and signal the Liberation Federation to come get us.”

The Liberation Federation? More unpleasant things seeping in. They had been digging in that freezing beige field. “There’s a phone in the office, but you’ll have to break in,” he said.

“How do you know?”

He felt like he knew everything in this moment. A strong-blooded, electric deity. He pointed to his head and said, “Dervin o castamentala,” which he baselessly thought might be Portuguese for ‘divine intuition.’ She shook her head and left. Nugent guessed it would be fine if they waited to heal the relationship until after her phone call.

The yelling and the banging on tables hit newer, higher levels as the bar continued to pitch and sway. He ignored them. He was disgusted they were still watching the race. Someone handed him a shiny, silver motorcycle helmet as a makeshift robot head. Boop-a-doop. Less to order from the blowtorch store.

Fügué

He flipped up the visor to yell, “Teflenomopo,” and made a phone gesture. Buck pointed to the far end of the bar. Nugent was impressed he understood Portuguese.

He got part way through dialing 1-800-BLOWTORCH on a television remote control before people started yelling. Nugent moved the remote to the side of his helmet as though on a call. He pointed over his shoulder. “Those guys have the clicker.”

“Who? What guys?”

“Greasy tight-shirt guy and his friends. Said you look like Froot-Loop-eating Cowboys fans who don’t deserve to watch the race.”

The entire table grumbled over to explain their differing view on the subject. Nugent realized the chance to connect people would be a more valuable use of time than watching the end of the race. From the yelling he could already tell how enthusiastic the first two groups were about meeting each other. With the remote control in his pocket, he went around the remainder of the bar clicking and matchmaking groups.

It suddenly seemed late and very loud. Nugent was resigned to the likelihood all the reputable blowtorch stores were probably closed. The rest of the bar was behaving like a bunch of angry gorillas, shoving and pounding on each other, so he was probably going to have to get that table out by himself. If you want something done right. He sauntered over to the bar in his shiny helmet, stepping over two people fighting on the ground to grab a bottle of vodka. He poured it out under the booth table and lit it, in an effort to melt off the bolts. Not only magnanimous, the Gandho was resourceful.

Initially, the black smoke billowing from the melting vinyl booth seats made it difficult to tell whether he had been successful or not. He saw Malandra step through the swinging hallway door into the charred fumes and punch someone in the face. She was a great girlfriend. The rest of Bar Damu was in careening decline. There were no less than three fistfights he could see through the smoke, wires hung from the wall where a television had

Fügué

been ripped down, chairs were overturned, and the bartender who should have restored some order was nowhere to be seen. This was exactly why he didn't go to sports bars.

From now on he would only take Malandra to nice places. His gold-eyed flower was waving him over and coughing from the smoke. Why didn't she just put on a robot head? Her face took on a sudden look of terror at something behind Nugent before she turned and ran back through the door. Nugent looked and by the front door's haze, standing very still, was a jowly, aloof gray man with an umbrella. The fire alarm started clanging like murder. Nugent flipped up his visor and yelled, "Whoa-oh, well it's about time, Basil." and then fell over, sound asleep.¹

¹Hey, y'all, my name is Trévarré (roll the Rs if you can) and ok, ok, ok, I suppose this isn't *technically* a footnote, since I'm sure you already know that narcolepsy is a "neurological disorder of periodic excessive daytime sleepiness that can occur at any time, often brought on by strong emotions or psychological stress." You know that.

But, since I'm in charge of the footnoting, I wanted to introduce myself before we really get going and you get distracted like, "Well hello! and who is *this* fabulous fact-person?"

So, *firstable*, I'm a *Creative* (capital C) so this isn't my regular job or anything. These are things I usually do: acting, singing, dancing (*if* I believe in the choreography), poetry writing, photographing clouds, painting, and fashion consulting. Some sculpting.

Last week I helped my friend Chantelle do a mural on the side of a public library. I painted this walrus with a book bag, a mama elephant reading to her baby (you could tell it was a mama because of the eyelashes) and a leopard with glasses. And we also painted a snow-top mountain and a stack of books that was just as tall. I mean the library itself was only one-story tall so we had to use perspective tricks, but it looked *very* realistic.

Although realistic-wise, please don't ask me *when* a leopard has time to go to an optometrist, let alone read *Moby Dick* because I have no idea. I mean, I think jungle animals

Fügu

are definitely the busiest animals. Busiest rankings: Jungle animal > city animal > farmer animal > fish. And if you ask me, fish have more available reading time than all the others put together, but of course the books get wet and their weird little hands can't turn the pages so you know, not everything in life works out.

But nobody asked me what *I* thought and since I'm certainly not the almighty King of Libraries or whatever, I just did what Chantelle asked me. I don't think it's any surprise that she was h-i-g-h on the pot at the time because that's *exactly* where you start to get ideas like leopards having leisure time and bifocals.

Anyhooz—it's nice to meet y'all and your hair looks *super* nice today.