

Text excerpt from the voiceover for Study of a Lion (2026; not yet made)

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The injury brought upon me by the thorn was less remarkable than the possibility of its infliction; I had been wandering the wilderness for years without ever experiencing pain – or anything much – of such formidable, remarkable and irrefutable scale. I did not perceive the puncture as it happened but only the foreign object, at some point, as it started to jostle angrily between my toes. Discomfort quickly turned to agony, as I attempted in vain to recall past problems of a similar nature, desperately hoping they might help me to unpick the present predicament. But I could not think straight and certainly not backwards. Thinking only took its place in the moment of my suffering, as the moment of my suffering, in that gaping spiral of woe. And there, in that place, something unfurled: a process I have come to call “interpretation,” by way of which I would ask for the very first time: *Why here? Why now? and Why me?*

These questions, themselves indicative of a stultifying observation, subsequently prompted another: that of whether my thoughtless life prior to the thorn had been anything more than mere existence – a state otherwise known as bliss. Not a day has passed since then that I did not think about the thorn; such that I am now quite committed to the belief that I had, hitherto, barely entertained, indulged or even accommodated thinking at all. The thorn was lodged in that moment that must now necessarily be defined as The Beginning, for none other has proven itself worthy of such nomenclature.

Thorns come in a variety of shapes and sizes; this one was of such dimensions befitting an instrument in its own right. Perhaps it was this instrumentality, little more than an analogy until it wasn't, that led Jerome to intervene in my plight. For days I dragged the afflicted paw through the wilderness; I gnashed at the thorn with my teeth, but they were too large to find purchase on the thing. I approached whomever appeared on my shrinking horizon to see if they might offer salvation. But the pain cast a fury over my visage that occasioned more fear than sympathy, and everyone ran away. Eventually, I lay on my back, writhing in pain, with the thorn jutting upwards from between my toes like a sundial signalling my final hour. Only Jerome stopped to heed my whines. He approached almost nonchalantly, preoccupied and matter of fact as he otherwise never was. He pinched the thorn between his fingers and lifted it with a flourish, as though he had just finished signing his autograph on some sycophant's bare flesh.

This, his alleviating gesture brought about a re-ascription of roles: I was no longer a lion in the wilderness but what exactly he had thus made me, I could not say. Perhaps there have been occasions when I lost sight of myself and pressed my vital will upon Jerome too heavily. In this persistence, I may have come to resemble more closely some playful poodle than any beast of the wilderness I once appeared to be. But wilderness is relative, and I would follow him back and forth across study's shifting divide for as long as he called me his animal.