

The lights blinked twice, signaling the beginning of the next film. Mathias sighed and slumped back into his seat, seven hours of shitty student films had passed so far. That was seven hours of his life that he was never getting back. But this was the last one. The last film before all of the freedom and bliss that a couple bottles of wine could bring. Mathias just had to make it through this last one.

The film started out with words over a black screen: *Le Jongleur*. Of course it was french, what self respecting film student wouldn't use french? As the title cut away the eponymous juggler appeared on screen. He was dressed in a court jester's uniform, the motley hat askew on his head. Not a word was spoke as the camera zoomed closer to him, to his face, to his eyes, to his soul...or so the filmmaker probably wanted the audience to think. All Mathias saw was a slightly out of focus eye. An obviously non-french eye. But before he could do more than sigh the tape cut back to a full view of the juggler, who finally started to juggle.

The first ball flew silently through the air, reaching its zenith and then falling, to smack into the juggler's palm like a baseball player testing the weight of his ball. It was a rhythmic throw, up and down, up and down. Mathias' eyes followed the ball automatically despite his already great derision for the film. Up and down, up and down, for what could have been minutes, but probably just seconds, the ball rose and fell. And without anyone noticing the ball became two.

Without an increase in speed or rhythm, the balls created a one handed circle. The first reaching its zenith just as the second smacked the juggler's palm. Up and down, up and down, it was so precise. So perfectly timed that even Mathias could feel himself being dragged into the piece. His eye never leaving the cycle of balls. He strained against blinking, watching the screen so intently that his eyes began to water. But even with his attention he couldn't help but gasp when the third ball appeared.

The whole audience was shocked, a girl in the front row even let out a little scream as the juggler suddenly threw one of the balls to his right. It hurtled through the air, almost off the screen entirely when his empty hand snatched it

from the air. What had been a simple circle transformed with that one moment. There was suddenly a fourth ball and fifth flying across the screen to smack into the juggler's palm, with the same rhythm as before. Balls six and seven quickly appeared and the juggler's hands seemed to be a blur on the film now. And then there were too many balls to count, even their pattern through the air began to blur yet the thump of leather on skin never changed its beat.

Thump, thump, thump, all eyes were on the screen. Thump, thump, thump, all eyes were on the juggler. Thump, thump, thump, all eyes were on his grin as it widened into a maniacal snarl. Thump, thump, thump, Mathias realized that he was beginning to see color on the screen. The black and white was giving way to muted colors. It was hard to tell at first as the juggler's motley was as colorful as a chess board—checkered black and white. But his skin began to glow with a faint peachy color and his eyes began to gleam green. Most of all though Mathias noticed the balls. Where previously the balls had been a simple black, each one of them began to take on a deep blood red color. The blur of their movement onscreen turned dark with them. The blur grew in shape, almost as if it was beginning to ooze. Or drip. Or run down the juggler's arms, blood staining his motley pattern and pooling at his feet.

It was in this instant that Mathias realized he was watching a masterpiece. Not because of the sudden appearance of blood in the film, usually Mathias didn't put too much stock in the gory shock-and-awe approach to filmmaking. No, what made this piece a tour de force was the blood on the floor. Or more specifically the blood seeping out of the film and onto the floor of the theater. The deep red liquid gushed off of the movie screen and began to coalesce at the feet of the audience.

Again a scream ripped from the girl in the front row but it was not because of the blood. Her socks were stained to the ankles but she only had eyes for the juggler. The juggler stood above them all, the thump, thump, thumping of his balls continuing their never-ceasing circles, but they were no longer confined to the screen and neither was he. His green eyes were alight with fire and blood-lust and every scream and whimper seemed to only excite him. The wide

grimace of a smile that he wore earlier in the night was replaced by a hungry expression. Slowly his lips parted and a nub of a tongue extended. He licked his lips, tasting the fear in the room.

Mathias watched the whole thing. The only light in the room was from the now-vacant film. The flickering of empty frame after empty frame made the juggler seem as if he was moving in stop motion. First as he approached the girl in the front row, extending one hand without slowing his rhythmic beat. He stroked her quivering breast, as a farmer would a scared animal, and then he lunged. Blood splattered the screen as the juggler removed another ball from her chest. She sank to the ground completely lifeless. From seat to seat and row to row Mathias watched as the juggler moved from the crowd, his arms moving faster and faster to accommodate the new juggling balls. Funnily enough it never entered Mathias' head to flee. This was a masterpiece and you never run from genius.

The juggler was directly above him now. The hand was reaching for his breast. Mathias stared up into those florescent green eyes. They glimmered.

The screen went dark.