

Tales of Terror from the 2000's



fables foretold by The Lunatic

"I gave Them life
I gave Them all
They drained my very soul
Dry
I crushed my heart
To ease their pains
No thought for me remains there
Nothing can they spare
What of me?...

We had a friend, a talking man
Who spoke of many powers that he had
Not of the best of men, but ours
We used him
We let him use his powers
We let him fill our needs
Now we are strong
And the road is coming to its end
Now the damned have no time to make amends...

Where money stood
We planted seeds of rebirth
And stabbed the backs of fathers
Sons of dirt
Infiltrated business cesspools
Hating through our sleeves
Yea, and we slit the Catholic throat
Stoned the poor
On slogans such as
'Wish You Could Hear'
'Love Is All We Need'
'Kick Out The Jams'
'Kick Out Your Mother'
'Cut Up Your Friend'
'Screw Up Your Brother or He'll Get You In the End'."

-Cygnet Committee David Bowie

"In the garbage disposal of your dreams I've been ground up dear
On the river of your plans I'm up the creek
Up the elevator of your future I've been shafted
On the calendar of your events I'm last week."

-Flushed From the Bathroom of Your Heart Johnny Cash

"Oh it's such a perfect day...
You're going to reap just what you sow."

-Perfect Day Lou Reed



An Abridged History of
Mankind/
The Artist's Studio

AN ABRIGED HISTORY OF MANKIND/THE ARTIST'S STUDIO



The first men
are
born to the earth
gazing upon its untouched lands
and
breathe with the wind
blown grass gushing green
so loud it makes their heads whirl
and the dirt crunches under their feet
where ancient insects roam in the ground
terrifyingly strange
yet still
is amazing
Life
~
Life
is amazing
yet still
terrifyingly strange
where ancient insects roam in the ground
and the dirt crunches under their feet
so loud it makes their heads whirl
blown grass gushing green
breathe with the wind
and
gazing upon its untouched lands
born to the earth
are
The first men





The gods speak out loud
some nights
the skies open up making water fall
from the heavens
as huge voices crack through the air
trails of light
are
cutting through the dark
for a moment
then
There is fear

~

There is fear
then
for a moment
cutting through the dark
are
trails of light
as huge voices crack through the air
from the heavens
the skies open up making water fall
some nights
The gods speak out loud





In the mud
love
found
both the young and old
the men and women
feeling the water on each others' skin
and
without fear
they could dance in the rain
in a loving embrace
and the gods were dead
at some point
men found out
lightning is just lightning
and
thunder is just thunder
and
Water is just water
~
Water is just water
and
thunder is just thunder
and
lightning is just lightning
men found out
at some point
the gods were dead
and
in a loving embrace
they could dance in the rain
without fear
and
feeling the water on each others' skin
the men and women
both the young and old
found
love
In the mud





A whole lot of killing
there is
during the next centuries
among other things
some things are bad
some things are good
a lot of discoveries are made
they start to figure things out
but
things become more complicated
The farther man goes on

~

The farther man goes on
things become more complicated
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some things are good
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among other things
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there is
A whole lot of killing





Laws
are made
by those in charge
ideas put in place
To control the human race
~

To control the human race
ideas put in place
by those in charge
are made
Laws





At least
on the surface
there is no more
of all that senseless violence
man discovers how to be civil
For anything worth less than a dime
~

For anything worth less than a dime
man discovers how to be civil
of all that senseless violence
there is no more
on the surface
At least





Now
all is good
if your ideas fit in
with the masses
but
to some of you
with wrong ideas
given by wrong men
petty things
dumb ideas
of self and peace and pleasure
ideas
you are so wrong to have
ideas
belong
To the weak
~
To the weak
belong
ideas
you are so wrong to have
ideas
of self and peace and pleasure
dumb ideas
petty things
given by wrong men
with wrong ideas
to some of you
but
with the masses
if your ideas fit in
all is good
Now



Tucked far away from it all is a great green pasture of grass that blows gentle in the wind and that gets warmed perfectly by the sun so that lying there one can snooze almost immediately into a deep and refreshing sleep. It hardly seems to matter whether sleep comes or whether it remains just a second away. Lying there with eyes closed, breathing in the fresh air, nothing much seems to matter at all. It is a space so nice that most anything added to it would only take away from it as the beauty of the pasture is it is a pasture and nothing more. There is something there though, and maybe because it is small and decorated with plants and growing vines it manages to sit on the grass without being a sore to the eyes. It is a tiny structure just big enough for a single person- or perhaps a couple should they be willing to get close enough- to live.

Both you and I stumble upon this pasture by our own means and even though we are strangers we are not too surprised to see one another here, as surely many seek this out as a place of rest. There is not a more perfect spot for us to meet. We say hello. We could say more as you don't know much of me and I don't know much of you, but we could talk anywhere, and we are not anywhere but instead in a beautiful pasture. Who knows the next time we will find such green grass again? So instead of talking we merely sit down and enjoy the day.

As some minutes pass I feel I know you better just sitting there than I would have if we had spoken. I may not know who you are- or should I say who you are outside of the pasture for here I know you are just a person in a pasture same as me- I may not know your character, or if we were to meet under other circumstances how we would treat one another. All I know is you at this moment and at this moment we both feel at ease. We both feel perfectly content as there is no worries to be had between us and no problems to argue over. So what would we say? Our names- words that seem so arbitrary here. What we do for a living- well now I don't want to think of work and besides I suppose a mechanic and a doctor and a police officer and a prisoner can all enjoy the breeze just the same. No, I think it best to just feel good for a while together while we can.

The wind blows a particularly strong gust. It lifts us up as we lay in our half sleep as if we are light as feathers. The breeze is slow enough we could easily put our feet down and walk away should we feel the need, but I enjoy it and it doesn't startle me so I think it best to let it carry us. Over grass we pass closer and closer to the structure I had all but forgotten about. We drift right on through an open window into what soon becomes clear is an artist's studio. Paintings and sketches hang all around so that walls once white burst with color at every corner. There are many paintings of the pasture. All are worth a look but have heavy competition with the view out the window. Most of these paintings are beautiful in a way but not quite as much so as the real thing. There's no wind that blows out from those canvases and the sun which is painted may look the part but it does little to keep us warm. But some, a rare few, maybe just one or two or even one yet to be painted, look almost as nice.

Those are not the only paintings in this studio. There is other art which is altogether different from these. Art which seems a fair bit darker perhaps, artworks which seem to tell a story. Whether this is a physical story we can see or one we have to infer- a story of the mind of this man- is yet to be seen. The Artist is painting away at a canvas and has not noticed us yet. It seems so serene yet I speak up anyway, for a curiosity is now burning in me.

"Hello," is all I think to say, "This is a lovely studio you have."

The Artist jumps at the sound of my voice tearing his mind away from his thoughts and back into the studio. Here he spins and sees us, yet he does not look too surprised or concerned how a couple of strangers stumbled upon his work.

"How did you get here? Was it the wind?" he asks.

"That carried us? Yes. It was."

"That is how I came here too, though when I arrived the place was bare." Now, as I have described, it is far from bare.

"How long have you been here?" I ask.

"Quite some time. Most of my life. Long enough I can't remember much of the time before, only quick memories, like short clips from a tape reel."

That tape reel I cannot see, but I can see other pieces of the tape hung up here on the walls in the form of painted thought. I am standing in a mind as much as a studio.

You, who have remained silent still through all of this, walk around, peruse the wares. I wonder what this Artist must think of your gaze, I wonder of your gaze too, for it is hard to tell by your face what you think. Your slight scrunch of the brow could either be curiosity, or disapproval, or possibly even just complete indifference. While you look around I do too and I come across a series of small little paintings.

"What are these, if you don't mind me asking?" I say this to the Artist.

"Those are Society," he says, "at least as far as I can figure."

"I don't mean to be rude, but how much of society can you know while being kept here in this pasture, so far removed from the rest?"

"That is why I say far as I can figure. I do sometimes venture out, and breathe in what I see till I decide to come back and seek the fresh air, and this place has the freshest air I have found. It is society as seen from greener grass."

I look closer at this man. I see his skin is covered with a rather shoddy tattoo of a snake winding up his arm. He has slightly wild hair. It must be quite strange living a life here all the time, in some half sleep state where the wind is somehow strong enough to lift up people. I contemplate for a second his sanity. I think he sees that. He says "you know what they call me?"

"You mean a name?"

"Yes, like a name, but one which actually means something. They call me the Lunatic."

I smile. That is a cute name, though I wonder who really has called him that. It seems there's no one else around.

"So, Mr. Lunatic, can you tell me how you see society?"

He smiles again. He seems quite enthused. You find your way over to us and seem ready to listen, yet you have a face disinterested enough that you may also leave before this Lunatic has finished talking. But, to be frank, I'm not sure Mr. Lunatic gives a fuck.

The Fables:

I. Human – Papa and the Children/Smiley

II. Lizard – Working Class/The Medicine Cabinet

III. Dog – Good Boy/Bad Dog

IV. Chicken – Tune in Tune Out/Mixed Signals Cause Static

V. Unknown Species – Secrets of the Universe/God Turns to the Needle

VI. Human – The Near Future/The End



Dapa and the Children/
Smiley

PAPA AND THE CHILDREN/SMILEY

I

LIGHT/DARK

In the beginning there is darkness, not just darkness, there is nothing. Then life appears and there is light, not just light, there is everything. Eyes open and the pupils strain and see. It is a dark place on its own. The skin feels the air which is damp yet cool and the walls, the floors the ceilings- all hard stone. A whistle let out from tightened lips echoes. Yes. Before there was nothing, then life found its way here, the world in a way, and then there was everything. The world, life, sandwiched between a heaven and a hell created with the whistle of this man.

II

THE VALUE OF WORDS/THE QUIET DAYS

"Forgive me for not wanting the bread," Papa said. He was just called Papa cause he was more of a Papa to anyone than their real Papa was, though he is the real Papa to most of the Children too. That and he can speak to the Lord above.

"that this great man gave me."

"Forgive me for not wanting the teachings,"

"that this great man gave me."

"Forgive me for not loving the feet and toes and nails of this great man,"

"Forgive me Lord, Forgive me Lord, Forgive this weak man."

That was many beards ago, Papa doesn't use words much anymore. No words for that kind of stuff. Back then if someone left some of the Lord's body unchewed to rot and be thrown on down to the dispose-all to hell Papa would have some righteous words to shower on the Children. But now everyone in the world is saying that he went all kinds of crazy and that his mind got a hole in it not too unlike that dispose-all which makes him act like he does. Like he does now where his words are evil puked up straight out of the dispose-all of his brain.

The Children don't have the heart to do anything about it or put him away or send him up above (or worse yet down below) so he walks free now able to harass at will. He'll plop himself right down into that eating room and while most of the poor Children are trying to enjoy their meal that Crazy Fucker goes right off into some rant about seeing the light of God. Thing is though everyone believes he saw the devil and the devil flew right into him. You can see it if you look in his eyes cause they seem like they seen something they shouldn't have. They open up to You right away. That's the problem. They open up so You know he's not lying. So You know he's telling the truth. That's why all the Children are so scared of him, scared that he's going to say something they shouldn't hear, scared he's going to show the face of something horrible in those wide eyes.

What is horrible the Children are not sure. They hardly know what horror is for they think that horror is not in the world, they think that horror is something that got shit into the dispose-all long ago before even the oldest Children were alive. Back when it was just Papa living alone in the world, with the Lord above sending down hunks of body to eat and the devil below where he belongs.

Papa's old. Papa is older than old. Papa has hair that is white and wrinkles deep as those that run along the jagged walls. He's many beards old. Too many to count. Maybe that is why he is how he is now. After so many beards when the color leaves the hair like it did for Papa maybe your soul starts to lose color too. The Children avoid Papa when they can. Though if You look at him, really look at him, most of the time his eyes aren't saying anything, instead they're screaming. Screaming for help. That's bound to make You uncomfortable. Especially on the days You gotta keep quiet.

Today is one of those days and Papa hasn't come by yet, but everyone's been looking at each other in a way that says he's gonna any minute now, even though none of them are supposed to talk they still communicate through the way they look at each other. People here don't have any way of addressing each other other than You, if You see someone crawlin down one of the halls You want to talk to You just gotta yell "You," and hope they turn around.

You are You, that man is You, that woman is You, that kid is You. You shouldn't say You that much though. It's better for the Children to just look at one another or grab each other by the shoulder and *feel* them. Be them. That's why there are the quiet days. Gotta feel people instead of having them try to feel themselves for You.

All You are Children except of course for Papa. He's not really You, the only one in the world who isn't besides the Lord and the Devil. Lucifer, the Lord, Papa, and You. If there is an exception to this rule it is Smiley, who is You to be sure, but to everyone he's called Smiley instead.

And You, You are about to fuck Smiley. You meet Smiley's eyes- bright green piercers. You look down to his jaw getting squarer and harder these days and the scruff that used to patch on his face is starting to thicken. It has thickened so much it is quite possible one day he will be a Timekeeper with a beard like that. You walk over and put a hand on his naked body and start to kneed it.

"How is it your skin is so thick?" You ask. Since today is a quiet day You speak with eyes instead of a tongue, not that on normal days the words would flow that elegantly. It would be more like grunts, yet the grunts still hold meaning, meaning enough Smiley knows how You grunt to mean skin.

"How is yours so thin?" Smiley's eyes ask right back with genuine curiosity, but also now that You feel him up and down the curiosity leaves by the second in place of something more pressing. You are naked. All the Children are naked. What else would one be? When You are so close to the Lord- so close You can hear his footsteps up in heaven sometimes- You do not need clothes.

The skin You have really is thin. It is pale white- all the Children are the kind of pale white where blue veins show through. Yet it is beautiful and spotless. The skin begins to sweat just a bit. The world is always humid. The hair on You is frizzy and begins to stick to a sweating forehead as You climb on top of Smiley's lap. He doesn't move, he just sits there and watches. You have long legs that You spread and Smiley watches this too. You have labial flaps leading way to a great big pussy dripping wet. Smiley watches as You guide him into You.

This gathering room is filled with You, old You mostly, some so old their face holds wrinkles by their eyes and one, the oldest You of all of You, has hair that has started to gray just like Papa's. It's for this reason and no other that no one joins in as You begin to ride up and

down on Smiley. With old age it seems You lose interest in fucking and prefer instead to watch with a grin and remember Old Times.

You groan a bit, and though You have done this many times before it is still somehow new each time. Skin on skin, You on You, yet still rougher skin on smoother. Something pulsing through Smiley that pulses differently through You. Yet that is what keeps You coming back to each other. You look to his face and Smiley smiles.

The innards of this room are covered in fabrics of bursting colors and patterns that seem to radiate in and out. Sometimes before going insane Papa would put stuff in everyone's drink so that they could get lost in those fabrics. The patterns swirled and swallowed them and the Children could see then for a bit what Papa must see all the time, see that every living thing are each just little dots floating together with the Lord surrounding them. You thought to himself something during one of the times they drank Papa's brew, more like something came to him, something that he thinks about himself instead of saying You, and although it would normally make him feel bad for thinking like this the Lord was the one who showed him. At the time he was smiling, he couldn't stop smiling, he was quite- Smiley.

That is how Smiley came into existence. He was You and then he wasn't in a single thought. If anyone would complain it would be Papa, but Papa had already started to lose his marbles. Instead of getting the whip Smiley got his feet kissed, a feeling all so surreal he almost kicked Papa right in the mouth out of astonishment.

"Smiley! Now you see don't you? You see that this is all a lie! You and You and You and You, you're all different, all unique, all-" the Children shushed Papa to silence. The foul man is the most of their troubles, all of their troubles, and there's a man's humming coming from down the hall now which means that trouble is about to have a face and right in the middle of Smiley's Blissful Penetration into You.

The once grand man made frail once known as Papa and now known as The Crazy Old Fucker comes shaking his head over and over before even feeling the room. All his sense of feeling has gone cold even though he has been drinking his brews lately. He doesn't even try to give those spiked drinks to the Children anymore, and if he did try no one would take it. Not from Corrupted Hands. It looks like he drank one today as his pupils are the size of saucers and everyone can see even more clearly that the devil is in them.

The good thing about Papa drinking his brews is that he doesn't have the mind to start any trouble. He sits down, twiddles his thumbs. Mostly he stares at Smiley, or at You, or at both.

"Smiley, Smiley, Smiley, oh are you happy Smiley?"

Smiley smiles.

"Would you be happier someplace else Smiley?" There is no place else to go- as this is the world. Go where? Jump in the dispose-all? Go where all good children go to die up above with the Lord? Smiley can't say any of this though. Today is a quiet day. So Smiley just keeps fucking You instead.

"There's no reason not to talk you know," Papa says. A heretic. The Lord had spoken through Papa before when none could hear and said that there *was* a reason to be quiet. This is not the Lord speaking now.

Eventually the silence gets to Papa and he leaves. You let out a little squeal of delight and both You and Smiley finish your pleasant act.

III

CLEANSE/WALLOWING IN FILTH

The entrances to the rooms are all small, all rounded. They would be dark as could be if not for the lights, as each room is lit by glorious lights of different colors. The lights are nothing short of magic, for it is hard to imagine what life would be like in the dark cold cave of the world if not for them. Papa doesn't talk much of Old Times. It is possible the world was dark for a time back then. Sometimes a part of the light goes dark and Papa prays to the Lord and the Lord sends down Heavenly Replacement Bulbs.

All rooms have a different color from the different colored lights strung in each. Smiley was coming from the Green Room and had worked up a sweat from his love making. The bath is in the Blue Room. The bath is a small divet in the floor where water drips from somewhere in the ceiling through a metal tube. The Children can wash there, and then the water slowly drains down below. Now in the Blue Room there are two You sitting and splashing. Smiley smiles at them then begins to wash himself. The lights are only so bright. Smiley often looks to see his reflection in this pool but even if he strains his eyes it is still too dark to get a good look. He can make out some things though. He sees the outline of his face. On that face he can see a circle on each cheek.

You see, Papa likes art and color. He thinks color should be put on people just like it is put on those tapestries that adorn the walls and the bright lights strung about. And anyhow the Children can't speak well, as Papa is just one man and not much of a teacher, and so skin works as a universal language. It is there for all You to see. It is more meaningful than a word for it is more permanent- it is a word if a word were to hang in the air forever. So Papa asked the Lord for the power to color people and the Lord sent down a Heavenly Tattoo Machine. Smiley never asked for any before the day he thought of that name Smiley. Papa was the one who suggested what to get. Two big round yellow smiley faces so that Smiley always smiles. That wasn't a problem though to begin with. What is there not to smile about? Smiley looks down at this filthy puddle of water in the dim cave the Children crawl in and call the World and catches a cheek in the light so that the water reflects bright enough for a second to see his marked cheek. Smiley smiles.

IV

THE GENERATOR/THE VOICE OF THE DEVIL

Crawling down the hall from the Blue Room You have to pass the Red Room. Smiley hates this room. The Red Room is the medicine room. It has all the Heavenly Pills the Lord sends down to keep the Children happy and healthy. Magic Pills for Sleep or for Pain or for Worry or for Sadness. Papa dishes out the Heavenly Pills for the Children so they do not take too much. Papa says that they are essences of the Lord himself and to eat too many would be greedy.

Smiley does not need pills to keep happy. Smiley just smiles on his own. He mostly avoids the room all together though, except for the fact You have to crawl passed it to get to the Sleeping Room, the one room with no light at all. The reason he avoids it is because coming from the wall he hears it sometimes. Only when it is dead quiet and You are not around crawling and scampering. Only when it is Smiley alone does the devil speak to him through the wall of the Red Room. It is a small sound. It is just a humming coming from deep in the wall. But

it is not high up enough to be coming from the Lord. It is below, down by Smiley's feet, that the Devil speaks. Smiley hurries passed this to sleep in a crowded mess of bodies on the stone floor bedding.

V

MEDICINE/THE CHILDREN SLEEP FOREVER

Papa finally did it. He finally did that thing. That horrible thing. And now the Children could know horror if they knew anything at all anymore. The horror started in the Red Room. The room where the Devil talks in the form of a power generator hidden from view of the Children. You see Papa took extra doses of those sleepy time pills and crushed them all up and put them in the Children's food. Now the Children do not rise any longer. One of the Children was spared, yet he is hardly one of the Children as he is hardly You. He is Smiley. Smiley was saved in Papa's last act of good grace.

VI

MEETING THE LORD/THE MASS GRAVE

Papa told Smiley to wait in that Red Room while everyone else ate. Smiley did not want to stay there. Smiley wanted to be with all of You. More importantly Smiley did not want to be alone with Papa. But Papa still talked to the Lord and still got the food and the water and the Heavenly Replacement Bulbs and the Heavenly Pills so the Children still needed him.

Once Papa did that horrible thing and killed all of his Children he came back to Smiley who looked at Papa and smiled three smiles.

"Smiley, it is time you saw the truth."

The truth? The Devil hums behind Smiley's back.

"Come with me Smiley." And Papa moves a shelf and back behind it there is a door. A secret door that no one had seen before. Smiley gets very worried now. Behind that door, he fears, is a staircase leading down. *Down* down. Straight down to the Devil. The hum is louder. And Papa opens the door and the Humming Devil is right there. The Devilish Power Generator humming away.

Smiley screams.

"Hush now Smiley. It is nothing bad. Look, look here. A ladder Smiley. Do you see where it goes?"

"Up," Smiley manages to say.

"Yes, up. Up above Smiley. Come with me."

Up above. The only time the Children go up above is when their eyes have no life behind them and their bodies are limp yet stiff and begin to smell. Smiley is plenty alive though.

"No dead," Smiley says, "Smiley living."

"Yes, Smiley. Yes. You are living just as sure as me. Come on."

"Lord?" Smiley asks.

"If that's what will get you up. You are going to see the Lord."

Smiley claps his hands and has a smile that stretches from cheek to cheek. And they climb out of the world and are then born to the world. Smiley looks down there in the small tunnels of the world which unbeknownst to him are now nothing but a mass grave for the Children.

"I dug those tunnels myself. Years ago. After my wife died I thought life could be happier with just me and my children. My children and eventually my children's children. All You. You grow up so fast. My grandchildren, my great grandchildren. But I am not long left in the world Smiley. And without me You could not live. You wouldn't know how. Now all I can bring You is peace. But Smiley, You and your silly name. I couldn't have you sleep. I had to show you, show someone, to know what it is I had done. The horror of it. For it was beautiful, but to be beautiful it had to be so terrible. So, so terrible. Oh God it's been horrible from the start. Don't you see that? Can't you see now? You called yourself Smiley, you're different aren't you? Tell me there was a reason?"

And Papa is staring right at Smiley and those eyes scream louder than ever before.

"Be mad, Smiley. Be mad, hate me, do whatever you need to do, but just look at it, look at what your world really was. Can't you see? You have to go out, Smiley, and face the world."

The words come and go and most fly right over Smiley's head. Most all of what he hears is his name sprinkled in some nonsense of madness. Smiley smiles.

LESSON: *Accept The Changing Of The Times/Don't Forget To Smile*

Smiley Gets To Experience Life/ Smiley Gets A Job in the form of a poem

*The world is his! The sky the ground and all in between.
There's so much to learn, so much to learn!*

*History, Science, Art, Culture
Zebra, Chimpanzee, Turkey Vulture
Evolution, Species, Family, Race
The world is really an amazing place!*

*He is but a Child in this crazy world
And there's so much to learn, so much to learn!*

*Politics, Government, Crime, Police Forcing
Bribes, Slander, Back room dealing
Bureaucracy, Work, Commercialization, Trading Stocks
Offices, Nine to Fives, Time Clocks*

*Smiley needs to get ahead
But there's so much to learn, so much to learn!*

*Now Hiring,
Smiley sees,
And gets weak, weak, weak, in the knees.
This is what is offered in the land of the free,
What a wonderful place to be,
Oh Gee!*



Working Class/
The Medicine Cabinet

WORKING CLASS/THE MEDICINE CABINET

I

MORNING ROUTINE/HABITUAL DEPRECIATION

In the bathroom the mirror swings out and behind it sits a medicine cabinet. In a funny way the medicine cabinet reminds me a lot of my work, probably just because that's all I have time to think about anymore, so that when I try to think about something else the thought of work melts its way in there too. There's some people who have mixed up wires in their brain so that they see an object, say a couch, and derive extreme sexual attraction from it. Most people see the couch as boring, a place to sit and nothing more, but these mixed up people would see it and get turned on. It's not that they want to *fuck* the couch per se, just something about it fires off those signals in their brain that makes them horny.

I'm working overtime now to make up for poor sales last quarter. I suspect that has done something to rewire my brain too and that is why I see the cabinet with its shelves and toiletries and my first reaction is to develop a dull pounding of the head as if having suffered the severe boredom of a nine-hour day in the office. I'd rather get horny. Each pack of dental floss, tube of toothpaste, and bottle of pills sits in its own nice neat little compartment like our cubicles down at the office. The toiletries do their job splendidly and without complaint. All are employees of the month in my book. One more reminder of work sits on the top row of this cabinet. Staring down at me high and mighty is a sample size bottle of pills. I know the pills don't really do anything, would never buy them myself, but we always get one of the products we sell at work for free, as a thank you I suppose, and it is for the very reason they do nothing that I keep them around.

I pick up the pill bottle and imagine I'm picking up a smaller version of myself from my work cubicle. I'm a lot like these pills. I sit there. I don't complain... much. In the end I have as little purpose as these pills, which surely don't do anything helpful at all. Supposedly a mood stabilizer but we're able to sell these without a prescription somehow. Probably because all they are is sugar and the mood stabilizing is just helping those who haven't eaten enough that day and need the sugar in their blood. That thought in itself comforts me, that me and these pills are one and the same, and if I had to rate my mood on a scale like they might have in a shrink's office with faces going from furious to ecstatic, well I think I move up one face to the right and am surely on my way to one that is smiling. I pop one in my mouth and proceed to swallow myself.

I walk out of that bathroom woefully amused by that thought and kiss my darling sweetly sleeping fiancé goodbye. She stirs but does not wake. She is warm. It is the last time I'll ever feel her warm again.

II

WORK/WASTING AWAY

I move the yellow sticky note down one small line on the call list. Those papers are filled with a hundred phone numbers written next to a hundred names all crammed in on one sheet of paper. I didn't know I needed glasses till I started working here. I must need a stronger prescription, as the little black font's starting to look like ants walking all over the paper again. Either my eyes keep getting worse or *they* keep making the font smaller to fit more numbers on

the page meaning we have to make more calls before we can leave for the day. I've already made call after call and the day should be almost over but the list goes on and on.

They, they they they. They already think I'm a sort of conspiracy theorist and if I told them that there are twice the amount of names on the paper than there were when I first started working here, something I'm almost sure of, I would just get scoffed at, get the eye rolls as always. By they I suppose I really mean we, because we are all the people working here together. We are the people shut into our cubicles. We are the Tired Bored and Oppressed. I try to talk to the other workers on occasion, as one can go a bit crazy looking at the same three thin cubical walls all day with no one to talk to other than faceless voices over the phone. When I do all I get back are the scoffs or the eye rolls or just blank faces wondering why this voice has a body to it.

There is a real they though, just as there is a we. A them to our us. They are the powers that be, and we are just bees in the hive bringing back honey to mother. An even more depressing thought, the powers that be are managers working for even bigger them, up and up and up the ladder, till you hit the very tippy top and reach those pearly gates and see the big man upstairs is the CEO of a company for... well I'm still not exactly sure what the company is.

I call day after day, number after number, name after name. The shit I sell always changes. First it was a toy. Plastic racing tracks where children could drop matchbox cars down and somewhere along the way have fun. That was the pitch anyhow. Then it was a scrubber that helps shed the skin on the bottom of your feet in the shower. Most people leave the soles of their feet depressingly unattended. It's a sad fact though that there can be up to a quarter inch of dead skin collected on the bottom of your foot. That was the pitch anyhow. Fun makers and skin shedders, then fifty more products over the years equally worthless. Manufactured emotions, I bet the kids really thought they were having fun and the self conscious housewives really saw their skin fly right off their feet. I'm convinced there isn't a single thing that someone somewhere won't buy. Any bad idea I could think of, the most trivial item I could dream of inventing, I've had to sell worse. And they sold well enough.

Who the hell are you people- Janine Funk, James Gilbert, Rachel Godfrey, Tim Gunthar- that buy whatever it is I'm selling? Before I started working at the call center I would hang up on solicitors as soon as I heard the "Hello Mr.-" in the robotic sounding voice all solicitors have, which is created from the interesting mix of harrowed depression covered by plastered on smiles in the hopes the smile will help create a friendly tone. I don't have any more sympathy now that I am one of those robotic voices.

In fact now I can usually tell it's a solicitor by the half second pause they all seem to have before they start talking to you. That's so we know you have the phone pressed against your ear and we can hop right into your head without any fuss at all. You're not doing us any favors staying on. Each time someone stays on the line all I want to yell is "What's wrong with you hang up the fucking phone!". Instead I have to say, "(Pause) Hello Mr. Gilbert," then whatever the prompt is that week. This week we're selling the pills.

Mr. Gilbert sounds a lot like Mr. Giddigan did. I move the sticky note down one more. Ms. Godfrey sounds a lot like Ms. Funk did. That's another thing they'd say is a conspiracy, that all the voices sound the same nowadays. This one's harder to prove, and even if I could who would care, but I'm sure of it just as I'm sure that font's gotten smaller and smaller. Without a face to tell the difference it feels like I'm just talking to the same two people over and over and

over again selling them order after order of “mood stabilizing” sugar pills. They must be stocking up for a global sugar shortage so they can monopolize on sucrose which will be more precious than gold.

I have a new idea about what this job really is come to me just now. It comes to me before I even hang up the phone which goes to show you never know what someone is thinking, particularly when the only communication you have is through phone signals traveling from God knows how many miles away. You can't know for sure the voice is American, hell you can't know for sure the voice is even human and not some programmed code, and you sure as hell can't know for sure what that solicitor is thinking or doing or planning.

Anyway- the thought that comes to me is this. I think the workers here are really lab rats. I think that this is all some government study on human interactions. Maybe to study what you can force people to say without question. The government officials probably have quite the laugh coming up with all kinds of inventions. When they tested us with the foot scrubber and watched in glee as we actually tried to sell them, that must have kept them entertained for a week.

I like to think about scenarios like this. It might sound depressing, but really does it matter? It would almost be a comfort to know these products are made just for those government employee's amusement. It would make the products actually worthwhile.

It's hard to say everything was fine until I called Mr. Gunthar (Tim Gunthar, that son of a bitch) because today the walls were already grayer, as if they kept painting them more and more gray when all of us lab rats went home until now there is no color left in them. Today the walls are gray and they just shoved more names onto the paper than the day before and the boards to my cubicle got replaced for ones an inch or so taller. So maybe everything was already wrong, wrong with the people that is, and I just happen to notice for the first time with Mr. Gunthar. Like the office maybe the people had been slowly getting switched out for things less and less... human. I know it sounds crazy, they certainly will say I'm a conspiracy theorist for that. Or they would, if they could say anything at all anymore. Anything besides...

“Hello, Mr. Gunthar. Have you been feeling your best self lately? In the modern world the majority of people don't receive enough essential nutrients in their diets so that their brains can't function at full capacity. I'm sure you've noticed these people, foggy, depressed, or if you haven't than maybe you are just as low on these nutrients yourself. There is a simple fix though, if you will give me a moment of your time, to tell you about the latest scientific breakthrough just becoming available to the public. Would you care to hear more Mr. Gunthar?”

And then comes his reply which isn't in English or Spanish or any language at all. No human language at least. From the other end of the line comes a piercing hiss.

“Mr. Gunthar? I think you're breaking up.” Somewhere in my mind I know that the connection is crystal clear. Just how I know they really are making the walls grayer.

He replies with a longer hiss this time and I promptly hang up the phone. My hands are shaking and I feel the urge to scream but the rest of the room is so quiet that the scream may just scare me more. Instead of screaming I move my sticky note down one. Next on the list.

“Hello,” I say voice cracking out of its robotic normalness, “Ms. Harris. Have you been-” then Ms. Harris, whoever or whatever that is, interrupts me with a series of hisses that couldn't possibly be made by a human tongue. I hang up again and this time I really do scream. I can't help myself. I expect complaints from the other callers in here with me but in return all I get is

silence. I'm frozen in my chair and don't dare to peek up from behind my cubicle. Instead I listen. There are no calls being made, no phones hanging up, no pitches for magic pills. No breathing at all.

No breathing but mine, hurried, deep, I watch my shirt move up and down and feel the belt buckle already getting tighter by the day squeeze me more. That's not a conspiracy. That's my fiancé feeding me her home cooked meals each day telling me in her sweet little voice to eat up. Roasted meats and sautéed vegetables is what that is. I can almost smell that roasting meat. I smell it strongly. The smell is coming from me like my own sweat is greasy juices running out into the pot. I fear the others can smell it too.

Through the silence comes a hiss from far off in the corner of the room. Mr. Gunther and Ms. Harris in the flesh. I stay staring at my white walls. Another hiss, a bit closer. Then a hiss comes out right in front of me, whatever is making those noises hidden from sight by these half inch-thick cubicle walls. A shadow begins to pass over me and onto the floor, dark, malformed. I try to make sense of it, of a face, of anything human. I see instead something more similar to a lizard. A huge snout. Maybe an alligator. It goes to hiss and I see teeth. Certainly sharp enough to be an alligator's. What I'd assume them to be at the very least, I can't think at the moment just what an alligator's teeth look like.

The shadow disappears. Heart pounding, sweat/cooking-meat-juices staining through my collard white shirt, frozen still. Jumbled hissing. Agitated hissing. A clucking hen house being riled up. *Cluck cluck cluck Hiss hiss hiss*. Am I the forgotten meat left in the oven that will char and burn, or am I nearing readiness, a perfect golden brown, ready to have my skin plucked off the bone?

The door that has the big glowing red EXIT sign above it stands halfway across the office. I think to dash for it. Run baby run, let my shirt untuck and my hair flow behind me instead of being glued back by a layer of gel, let the bastards catch me if they can. But I don't know yet what I'm dealing with. Whoever or whatever is here with me might be waiting for me to run. Might be watching or listening for the slightest hint of movement. If I got up from this chair maybe they will slither and swallow me whole before I get ten steps.

Shame steepens in me. Is that really why I don't run? I'm still looking at that sheet. At the yellow sticky note. And it's calling to be moved down one more. To call the next name on the list even though all I'll hear is a hiss just to go through the motions. They may leave me alone if I do that.

The hissing becomes frenzied. I am in the middle of a madhouse zoo with lizard men wearing cheap suits. The steady rising of hissing makes me want to dash more and more with each maddening *tick tock* of the office clock, which has been made louder and louder today to remind us lab ratted workers that the time passes by slowly and there is still much more time to be had here in this office, and it wouldn't surprise me a bit if they have slowed the second hand down a tinge just to keep us here working longer and longer each day.

This train of thought distracts me. I am at the door and hardly notice till I hit nose first into it. I stand. Push it open. The hissing stops and I feel all those *things'* eyes on the back on my head. Time freezes as in my mind I need to decide whether or not to look back, to see what kind of skull those eyes sit in, human, mammal, reptile, other. I don't hear anything coming for me. No sound of scales rushing passed carpet, whatever that may sound like. As I'm about to

turn I hear a *tock* from the clock pounding above me and it sends me running down the steps and out the office.

III

THE WALK TO THE CAR/TRYING TO UNWIND

Out the door of the office I get greeted by the same smell everyday, the overwhelming nauseating smell of overflowing trash from the dumpster they stuck right by the exit. I could walk out the front exit (on a normal day before men turned to lizards) but then I am met with the sight of jam locked traffic. I choose the lesser of these evils, the trash, because it gives me less of a headache than seeing what I will be sitting in for the next hour and a half. Of course as soon as I swing open the cold steel fence which keeps our office nice and contained I always see the traffic anyway. I wonder if these things can drive, these creatures. If they lost the ability to speak maybe they lost to ability to reason much less figure out how to start a car, and if they could, would they have anywhere to go?

It seems they are not that far gone. Cars sit with running engines on the road though I quickly turn my eyes to the ground before I can see what sits in them. I can't bring myself to do that yet. All too aware that they are likely watching I walk forward looking only a foot ahead. A car nearby has the radio on. I hear guitars and drums, a familiar tune, except only now the song has lost all meaning as the only words are "Hiss, hisss hisss hissssssss". How have they replaced the words of old recorded songs? A drop in the stomach, of twitch of the eye, a thought is forming in my head I have no desire to think again. I shut it out as quick as I can.

I run the next half mile to the lot where I parked my car, hisses following me from windows and sidewalks. A hiss comes so close to me I must have nearly crashed into whatever made that sound. Then there is my car and I am fumbling for the keys. Unlock, hop in, check the-

-rearview mirror

I turn it around, hit it so hard I tear one end off. I rip at it to tear it off fully. The reflection.... The reflection was a trick of the sun. A trick of the sun a trick of the sun. I open the car door and puke and my tongue flips out of my mouth and it is long and split at the ends and unfurls and I hurl some more. I put it back my tongue back in my mouth and it feels like a snake coiled up. I can hardly breath in this stuffy car. It must be making me confused. I turn the side view mirrors away so that I don't have a chance to see myself in the reflection and drive out onto the road.

IV

TRAFFIC/REFLECTING OVER NOTHING

I look straight ahead in traffic. No matter how much a part of me wishes to turn and look at the car to my right or the ones coming the opposite direction as me I only look forward. My head is glued, that is what I must believe, my head is glued in place and I cannot look anywhere but forward. In the car in front of me, if my eyes were to move from their spot now situated on the bumper of this sedan, the rearview mirror would be visible, in it the driver reflected. The bumper it is then, adorned with bumper stickers holding little meaning, abbreviations of some places never visited by me. One with the words "I SURVIVED THE JUMP!" overtop an airplane and I try to reason if airplanes jump not fly.

In the corner of my eyes I see things aren't quite right. Nothing obvious, more like if the drivers had been replaced by the rigid lifeless forms of mannequins. I'd have to look to be sure, to know they are really plastic and not just still men, but then again my head is glued. It is glued till I arrive home.

Home looks like home. The lights are on inside as they should be, as you'd expect them to be at this hour because inside my love will be just setting the table knowing any moment I'll be home and then we will eat dinner together. On any normal night that is. Tonight even though I cut the workday short an hour (this thought buzzes in my head all this time- LEFT EARLY LEFT EARLY LEFT EARLY) I am slightly later than normal going in because tonight I sit in the car for five minutes then another five and then another five thinking just five more and I'll have the nerve to go in. I don't have the nerve to look in a mirror, how can I have the nerve to see the fate of my soon to be wife? How can I have the nerve to see if I'll spend a lifetime with a cold body? I roast meat and she cold turkey. I shudder. I have no appetite at all but the thought of my love, whatever it is she is at the moment, sitting there waiting after spending an evening cooking brings me inside. It's easier than running out the office. It's easier than driving through traffic. It is a quarter after seven after a long day at work, the longest day I've ever worked, and goddamn it I am going to eat dinner with my fiancé.

V

DINNER/COLD FEET

The door knob feels the same as always, the smell is the same, it is a smell good enough to bring back my appetite when I've never felt sicker. It is warm in there. I think- fool myself- for a moment that it is the heat of my darling but that is not so. It is of course the heat from the oven recently turned off, no one human or otherwise could make a house that hot. Every second goes by slower than the last. Each second is another second of agonizing waiting to hear my fate. It is one second that will determine a lifetime I fear. I listen for breathing. There is none, but again it may just be because my own is deafening.

"Honey," I say, and even before I let out the rest, the rest we all know is coming, that cliché sentence repeated each and everyday almost as a joke at its routinity, before I say it I see myself looking back on it with horror the way it already hangs so eerily in the air before I even utter these words, but of course I still do utter them, and they hang just as eerily as I feared, "I'm home."

There's a clinking from the kitchen, a wine bottle against a wine glass, a lovely sound. It brings a moment of hope to me before that hope shatters as irreparably as a wine glass smashed to a thousand bits. That thing, my fiancé, lets out that same guttural sound as the rest. Now that it comes from a throat I once loved- still love, must love- I can no longer call it a hiss. A hiss does not describe what that sound does to the ears. It is hardly even a sound at all. I should think it doesn't come from vocal cords but instead from air moving leisurely through the mouth. It is merely a breath against a vibrating tongue slipping passed whatever shaped teeth may rest in front sandwiched between curling lips. It escapes like air seeping from a tire. It is a sound that tastes like old rubber. That is the new voice of my love.

"Yes honey, I'm home. Back from another day at the office. Ready to eat. Smells delicious hun. What is that? Chicken? I bet it will hit the spot as always. I've never been so ready to eat." The sound of a voice, even just my own, sets me at ease. As it comes out and fills

the house it gets louder, stronger, more sure, it is an opiodic sound, it calms me more with each word so I keep talking. "Bit of a day I had. Really odd. But actually, now that I'm home away from it, a bit funny! I kept calling people as always and you know what they'd do back? They'd hiss! It was all a sick joke they played on me, but really very funny now that I'm home. I bet it was just one of my friends from the office pulling my leg."

Despite this courage I stand in the hallway by the wall right before the kitchen. I can see the light from it. I can smell the food so strong I can almost taste it. Isn't that enough?

"Hisssssss," (*Oh, come here, don't be shy big boy. I'm sure you're gonna do just fine*)

"Yes well honey, I'm just a little nervous."

"Hisssssss," (*Nervous? No reason to be nervous. It's the most natural thing in the world aint it?*)

"Natural. That's one way to say it.... But really, now that I think about it, I'm just not that hungry, just not that-"

And she comes around the corner and takes me by the arm. I get a full good glimpse of her, except instead of reliving that wonderful memory of seeing her naked for the first time I'm thrust further into the nightmare. Her face looks like a sac of flesh placed poorly on a rock, her body looks like a snail's if snails were dirt dry and had arms and legs sticking out of it, her whole body slithering around on a bone tail sticking from top to bottom.

"Hisssss."

"Yes honey, yes, eating. Eating will be good for me. I bet I'll feel right as rain after a little bite. Tell me," I sit myself down at my plate and she takes her seat opposite me, "are you feeling well yourself? You look a bit peckish."

"Hisssssss."

Even though I don't understand the words, though they all sound the same to me as just another forced breath of air, I wish I hadn't said my own words which I said for my amusement not hers, and I still don't know who *she* is. Maybe she is feeling awful self conscious having been made to look like a monster, hell she hasn't been outside yet has she? Maybe she really thinks she's having a real bad version of a messy hair day.

"Just joking. You look glowing as ever darling."

"Hisssssss."

"A bit of wine dear?" I hold my glass out to her. Habit enough so any bit of my fiancé in there would know to pour. And she does. "Thanks honey. Chardonnay? My favorite. And with this chicken..." I smile at her. Really smile too. She feels comfortable enough. I know she is just my fiancé. The others must have just been themselves too, just turned into.... Whatever these things are. I feel so comfortable I let her pour me another glass and let her tell me all about her day, or that's the story I make up in my mind for all it is "hisss hissss hissss."

VI

BEDTIME/ACCEPTING FATE

In the bathroom now, sweating bullets, standing with the door against my back like I'm keeping a hoard of zombies out, or more like there's a wave of gravity pushing me there keeping me from moving forward. Sick to my stomach knowing what awaits me out there. The nerves of fucking for the very first time but more... retched. Stuck in a loop I think back to those who are sexually attracted to couches. In a way I am going to be one of those, but the couch is

very alive with eyes to stare and will only make it worse. Before I do any of that though I know I must walk to the medicine cabinet. There's a mirror there. I'd really rather not look in it. Maybe never look in a mirror again.

With my hands I cover my eyes so I won't have the urge to peek then throw it open. I have a shrink, had a shrink that is, and at one point this cabinet was filled with all kinds of pills. Funny named pills that were given even funnier names to make them easier to remember. Those went in the trash right along with the shrink. It would have been improper to *actually* throw that son of a bitch into a trashcan but it doesn't hurt to pretend. I should have told him about that fantasy in our last session. Just how well can you and your bogus online certification analyze *that* one. Now all the other pills are gone except that bottle from this morning. And boy oh boy I don't think they did their job. Or maybe did it too well, stabilized my mood so goddamn good that I fly off of the smiley faced psychological charts, I've gone from frown to smile to somewhere a mile off where the faces look like aliens from outer space.

In their cubbies the toiletries still stand at attendance. "Cheerio sir", the toothpaste says. "Hope you have a grand evening", the dental floss follows in quick succession. The condoms are there too. They don't say anything witty though. They got an important job, their work means something, they don't have time for small talk. I grab one. I feel I can really do this. The wine certainly helped. But then all at once as I turn to the door the dinner that had been sitting so nicely in my stomach starts having a fit. I turn on the faucet in hopes to cover the sound of me puking up that chicken and Chardonnay which tasted so great on the way down and so horrid on the way up.

By the time I leave the bathroom I'm probably the worse looking of the pair of us. I'm sweaty and pale and feel all too weak and my fiancé sits there looking... well as she does now. Her skin's just soft enough to lay my head on, and though she isn't warm there's just enough to make me think with eyes closed.... With eyes closed.....

"Hissssss," she breaths in my ear.

"Hissssss," I breath back into hers.

I

MORNING ROUTINE

In the morning my fiancé looks the same as she had the night before. It's hard to read expressions on a face like that, but I think she is pleased. Myself... I go to the bathroom. I am not in the humor to think of witty thoughts at all this morning. The pills look down at me again. I pick up the bottle, and for the first time read the label. Do not operate heavy machinery, do not take with alcohol, do not take if you have prior health conditions, do not take in combinations with other medicines, do not take.... I don't take another. Before I leave I kiss my sweetly sleeping soon-to-be-bride on the cheek.

II

WORK

Work's no different. The faces stay hidden over telephone wires or behind cubicles. I do my pitch just the same. Today we're selling frames for glasses without the lenses.

LESSON: *Find Meaning In Life/Stay Well Medicated*

Smiley Loses His Job/ Smiley Gets Shit Dumped On Him in the form of a poem

*Smiley looks to his fingers, Smiley looks to his toes (enconfined by a pair of black loafers).
Smiley looks right down at his nose!*

*Smiley smiles an awful big smile to match the two stains on his cheeks.
Smiley smiles even though he's been given his two weeks!*

*Smiley doesn't care about the job, heaven's no.
Smiley just likes to talk on the phone and when people pick up- he puffs out his cheeks big as he can- and instead of talking he just blows!*

*"Hello, who's this?" They'll ask, then Smiley blows again and hangs up the phone.
That's why he's being fired, his boss in no fun at all, any fun that bossman sees he simply can not condone!*

*Once Smiley was sitting at the water cooler and having a little harmless fun.
He was letting the water pour out out out and watching the workroom flood till the water cooler was completely done!*

*"No, no, no, you fucking faggot," his boss quipped, "go back on welfare and die of AIDS for all I care."
His boss was a riot, a hell of a riot, such a laugh that made Smiley smile along with his cheeky stained smiling pair.*

*Smiley is back on the street.
He sees another homeless man, how neat!*

*Being homeless aint so bad.
The sun is shining and the birds are chirping, there's no reason at all to be sad!*

*Smiley sits alone on the park bench till a stranger comes up to him, face veiny and red.
The stranger has got a cute little puppy along with a bag of dog shit he keeps in a bag- till now- when he dumps that shit right on Smiley's head!*

*"Get a job you freeloading fuck!" the stranger jibs.
Smiley appreciates a good joke, oh sure, sometimes he himself gets giddy and will find someone to rib.*

*Luckily that night it rains and Smiley can wash off where the water gathers at the metal grated drain-off.
Afterward he hardly even smells like an unwashed animal trough!*

*Slightly cleaner Smiley sits on the bench again, happy as can be.
Smiley looks to his fingers, Smiley looks to his toes, Smiley looks right down at his nose!*



Good Boy/Bad Dog

GOOD BOY/BAD DOG
A Cinderella story

I
GOOD BOY

This story of mine is about an act of self destruction so absolutely fantastic that I hope to inspire a generation. It started, well I suppose it had started a long time ago, probably years, maybe decades, most probably when I decided to marry the Queen Bitch of Boredom herself. The wedding was a most horrific affair. It is still something I have nightmares about. It took place in a great hall of some church with all of our extended families and friends. So many people that even a hall as excessive as the one we got hitched in was filled. Most of the people in there were there for her. The wedding really was for her. Her family paid for all of it. They even gave me a car as a wedding present.

We got so many gifts. That's what really sealed the deal. It wasn't the vows or the rings or any of that bullshit, it was the toaster and the iron and the china. If I broke up the wedding now, who would get the toaster? So I guess the point which set off this act of self destruction can be pinpointed to the point the first guest placed their gift on the table which in a stroke of pure simplistic creative genius we named the "gift table".

That day was not mine. It was as far from what I wanted as could be. That night was not mine either. Wedding night sex- you only get it once. Well, once per marriage I suppose, but that's a hell of a lot of effort just for sex. You expect it to be great. It was probably the worst sex of my life. It was the worst because I knew it was likely the best I would ever have again, and the sheer mediocrity of it sent me to the verge of tears. The next day was not mine, nor the day after, nor the weeks or months or even years after.

No, I did not get the years. But I had my day. My one day to shine. And I knew that I had to shine so brilliantly, had to have a day that was so mind meltingly substantial, to warrant the self destruction. I had to have a day so good that I didn't care if I had any more days after it. That wonderful morning started when that Queen Bitch of Boredom lying in bed turned to me and said we could fuck if I did the dishes. She didn't use a word as crude as fuck though. That would be absurd to her sensibilities. Here is what happened. I woke up, and I was horny. She was lying next to me and her nightgown was thin and silk and draped over her body in a most terrific way. It was a Saturday morning and besides some self appointed choirs we really had nothing pressing to do. As far as I was concerned there was only one thing that was pressing and that was my ever tightening pajama bottoms.

So I stroked her arm and she turned to me. She did not smile. I kissed her mouth and she rolled over and pressed herself tightly against me, and she said,

"only if you promise to do the dishes." This was a sore subject. I had not done the dishes the previous night because as I told her a thousand times before it doesn't matter if you do dishes the night before or the morning after and I do not like to do dishes after dinner. I much prefer to relax and unwind and then do them the next morning with a cup of joe by my side. Either way I do the dishes. I always do the dishes. She knew perfectly well I was going to do the dishes that morning. She knew it, and yet she still had to win over the dishes. The dishes the dishes the fuck goddamn dishes.

I shouldn't blame it all on her. I'm sure she could have married a different man and the two would have been very happy together. She is not the bad guy in this story. The bad guy is circumstance I suppose, or that fucking toaster that holds our marriage together. Something in me snapped when she said that. It sounds petty, I know it does, but it is about more than dishes as it is about more than a toaster. At the time though I couldn't put my finger on what it was. It was something. It had to be because there was a fire burning in me.

First thing I did was fuck her filled with hatred. She saw it in me. Halfway through she saw it. And it was the best sex I had ever had. If this had been the sex we had on our wedding night it all might have worked out after all. But this was the kind of sex where it is good because it is the last time it will happen. I knew once it was over it was over, the marriage, the sex, the friendliness, the dishes, the meaningless chores, all of it.

We didn't speak of it. I finished. I don't know if she did. I got up. I got dressed. And I said to her,

"Sweetheart, if I do the dishes now I think I will shatter each and every one on the floor." Then I left. I grabbed my car keys, my phone, my wallet, and the clothes on my back. And I never came back.

Then I went, high on life in a way, to my car. I sat in it, and I think for the very first time of ever being in a car I was in it with nowhere to go. No destination in mind. The car was no longer a part of the journey, a tool to get somewhere, just another part of the habitual motion. I was not in the thing that will take me to work or to the store or to the appointment. I was in a goddamn exquisite machine, a metal beast, a marvel of engineering that can purr and hum and run at 400 horsepower. Just how fast can this baby go? I put the car in reverse. I slammed down the driveway and then hit the road.

40, 50, 60 miles per hour. The roads by my house are cluttered with traffic. What I needed was a highway, a road that stretches so I can really test it out. Giving me the car really was too nice. Her parents hadn't liked me. Never liked me. Thought I was in it for her money. They knew the car would fuck me over. They gave it to me so I wouldn't leave her. We know you're in it for the money, is what the car said, so here have all the money you want. You just can't leave our girl. See? You're stuck with her now. Hope the car was worth it.

70 miles per hour down the ramp and merging onto the highway. Pedal to the metal. 80, 90, 100 cruise by no problem. 110. The red needle slowly careening to the right. 120. Anywhere to go? This monster can fly at 120, no, 130 miles per hour and I was using it to drive to the grocery store? Oh baby. I had my eyes closed tight. It's like having an apartment with all the modern luxuries, being set up to live so easy that all you have to do is remember to chew and before you swallow your food and that's your biggest worry of the day, yet you spend the time sitting there arguing over the-

I swerve to the right then to the left to pull ahead of traffic, needle closing in on 135 miles per hour

-FUCKING DISHES

Right before my speedometer reaches 140 miles per hour a police cruiser comes roaring from behind in my rearview mirror. I think my car could outrun him. The thing that stops me from testing this out is thinking to the other cars on the road. They have not decided to live a day with reckless abandon. They are all going at a steady 60 and if I were to crash into them and leave us both dead- compressed into a sandwich with Cadillacs for bread and our newly

ruptured insides as the meat- well, I think that would be pretty damn tragic. I might be a selfish bastard but as I said this was *self* destruction. I have absolutely no intention of causing destruction to anyone else. So I pull over. I expect a ticket and a stern voice. The cop is not so easy going. Long story short after a brief argument in which I know I am in the wrong I am hauled out to the station in the back of his cruiser. I ask what is to be of my car. He said they will bring it to the station, but I'll be damned if I expect to have my license to drive the thing for a good long while.

Sitting in the back of a police cruiser brings some doubt to my situation. It's like being punished by your parents if your parents had so much backing as to have laws and bills and regulations behind them so that your transgressions go noticed by the whole state. I think to my wife. My poor wife. Sitting alone, probably crying, in bed. I got phone calls after this was over. They came in steady streams for a few weeks till the callers decided my actions weren't just temporary insanity but an insanity of a more permanent sort. That I had finally snapped. If I could just explain to them the dishes. The dishes. That's enough to make me push the doubt away again.

At the station I witness a side of the earth I am entirely ignorant to in my own picture perfect little life. I have always lived that picture perfect little life. I describe picture perfect as the kind of life where you could take a snapshot from just about any part and hang it in frames in a store. The placeholder pictures. The pictures others see and think they will buy that frame so that maybe they too will have a picture that nice to put in it one day. But that's not how life really is. The people are all actors, models, they aren't in it for the memories but the paycheck at the end of the day. Here though, here these are far from picture perfect. You wouldn't find a mug shot sitting in an AC Moore picture frame.

And why not? At least that's some interest. A story to tell. This is the time I flew at nearly mach 10 speeds to outrun a failing marriage. Don't you see how happy I am? What truly scares the hell out of me is that the most others strive for is that perfect family photo op. Millions of years of evolution and we decided the pinnacle of it all is to take a picture of yourself in front of the now commercialized wonders of the world- of a waterfall or canyon or in a giant red wood forest. We are all nothing but tourists of the earth trying to score the sweetest gift in the gift shop before we exit on to death.

It is here in the police station where I meet Candy. I shit you not, that is the only name I know her by. Candy. Of course with a name like that Candy is a prostitute. She is small, young. Couldn't be more than twenty years old. By this time I'm pushing forty. Then I think, Jesus Christ, is this what a mid-life crisis feels like? Anyway, I'm pushing forty and so is my wife, or soon to be ex-wife, and a twenty-year-old practically looks like a kid now. Candy has short cut hair and wears bright red lipstick that stands in stark contrast to her pale skin. She has big lips. Small perky tits. And she only charges fifty dollars an hour to fuck her any way you please.

After the bullshit at the station where my license gets revoked I take a taxi to the motel Candy is waiting at. Before I arrive though I do two things: I call my boss, and I go to the bank. I call my boss on the way. I'm giddy with excitement. Here it is again, that moment of pure fucking exhilaration like sitting there in a hulking beast of a car quite possibly wishing I could get compressed in it to resemble a can of tuna fish- messy meat in metal. This moment I am fine. In the next moment...

"Why didn't you come into work today?" my boss is asking.

"I'm not going to come in tomorrow either," my mind's flying a mile a minute. I don't even hate my boss, which is the hilarious part, I think he's a kinda good guy. I don't care to be rude to him, "I've gone quite mad and don't think I can go to work, if I go to work I think I might hang myself like a jacket in the maintenance closet, if I go back to work it is quite possible you will be killing me so the only responsible thing I can do is quit."

"Is this a joke?" he's asking.

"Not a bit."

"Take a week to think it over." Oh no. I can't have any chance of coming back.

"Sir, with all due respect, I wish to fuck your wife in front of you on your big boy desk."

"Are you drunk?" he's asking.

"I wish to hold you at gunpoint and take all your cash."

"Stop this. Call me back when you get a grip."

"I wish to take a shit in the middle of the office and when the first person comes into work I wish to rub their fat fucking face right in it. I mean it. If I go back to work that is the first thing I will do."

I think I get the message across to him well enough. He hangs up quickly. Next I tell the taxi to stop at the bank, I have to make a quick withdrawal. The bank gives me some trouble as they wonder why I want to take out just short of a hundred grand in cash and close the account. Well, I quite literally wish to flush it down the toilet. They don't like it, but I guess the law states they have to let me.

"Do you have a paper shredder?" I ask. I don't want to clog their toilets with stacks of bills. They point to the corner of the room where, in fact, they do. "Watch this," I tell them. It takes a long time to shred ninety-six thousand dollars. Even in full one hundred dollar bills. When I go to take those shavings to the bathroom they forcibly throw me out the bank. It's funny watching bank tellers do this. They aren't exactly bar bouncers.

I save just a single hundred-dollar bill. I give half to the patient taxi driver and then take the rest of me to the motel, where I have blissful unprotected anal sex with Candy for fifty minutes at a fair rate of a dollar a minute. I may be broke as can be, but I can be rich on life.

I leave the motel feeling like a hundred bucks even though at that very moment a venereal disease was starting to course through my system. No matter. It made it all the sweeter. All the more poignant. It was a fuck that fucked me for a lifetime but at this moment I walk out with swagger because the city was mine. I'd never seen the streets as I did now. I used to see the bums on the sidewalk and think they were dirt. Dirt in the dirt. But how dirty can the sidewalks really be? Why not lay down and take a snooze or watch the sunset and admire it. I do just that. Lay down right on that filthy sidewalk and watch the sky. The sky darkens and someone comes out of those shadows and sees me, little old me who is much too well dressed for a man lying on a city sidewalk, and he mistakes me for someone who gives a fuck. He draws a long blade out of his pocket and says to me,

"Give me your money or I'll gut you." I look at him and smile.

"Did you see the sunset?" He comes over and kicks me hard in the stomach.

"I've never been stabbed before," I tell him once I can breathe again. "It could be fun."

"It aint fun. Give me your money," he tells me once again.

"How would I know it's not fun if I've never been stabbed."

"Give me your fucking money!" he yells.

"Fucking stab me!" I yell back.

"You're crazy man," he says to me. Maybe it's what I'm saying or the way I'm laying on the filthy ground or some harrowed look in my eyes but he leaves me be after that. It is now dark out and I have no money or car or home to go back to. This is the first night I spend out on the street. I spend it cold and hungry and happy as can be.

Will I ever feel this good again? Oh no, I certainly think not. On paper maybe it doesn't seem like the grand time I say it is, but maybe it's just something you gotta live. I live with it now. In a slight stupor of self hatred. Yes, I suppose I'll have to live with it for a good long while.

II BAD DOG

It's one of those nights where the streets don't stop talking for more than a few minutes at a time. Which is a shame cause I could use some sleep tonight. There's a cold being carried in the air- not quite here yet but soon this fleece jacket I nabbed aint going to cut it and I'll have to go back to fetching newspapers for blankets. As is, if the streets stop talking for a time with angry car horns and shouting from who knows where and why, I hear instead some rowdy chatter coming from the bar next door. I could move but after some drinks people tend to more freely offer me scraps. If the bartender's extra nice while leaving he may even give me a drink to help me sleep. That's if he's nice- just as likely they come out stumbling looking for something to kick. Most of the time though I'm just another part of the alley- I'm the trash can they ignore. But I'm there all the same as that can, and in that trash one can find all kinds of things, leftover, half rotten, but still edible. My stomach rumbles, not from being empty, but barking in complaint of something I'd eaten earlier that night.

Just about any place you're thrown into in life you can adjust to. Living on the streets isn't any different. Sure it might change you in the end but hey people are living in mud caves out there, and yeah some might become radical extremists who are just dying to blow themselves to bits, but I'm sure others live there just fine. They just gotta keep to themselves I think. If everyone keeps their heads down when the shit flies they don't wind up so different no matter what cave or house or street they lie their head at night.

That's not to say I wouldn't rather be lying my head on something soft though. Night after night of sleeping on cement will do more than give you a stiff neck. It means hardly getting a minute of good rest. And then I'll wake up, I'll move, I'll hopefully scrape together some grub, I'll hit the hay, hit the hay hard enough it gives me a headache all over again.

Despite that hard ground I drift off to something like sleep, but then my eyelids light up so bright I think there's a flashlight being shined at me. Some cop making rounds telling me to keep moving. But instead I wake up to a warm light blanketing some room, some room, some room that's awful familiar but I couldn't for the life of me say why. I stay curled up for a moment more on this couch big enough where I fit entirely on one cushion, big enough where I feel tinier than I've ever been made to feel in my life.

I want to close my eyes but the smells, everything smells so... strong. Smells of soap being lathered by someone in the bathroom, smells of toast about to be burned, smells of food, all so strong it's as if someone's shooting scent after scent up my nose like perfumes, but I don't know who'd make perfumes of all of these things, le trash and le toilet bowl.

With a stretch and a yawn and rumble of the stomach and a quick paw at the couch I sit up to the sound of someone talking from the other room. A woman is walking from the kitchen. Love settles in as I look to her, but it is all confused, I recognize her just like the room but couldn't say why or from where or when. For a second I think she's a lover but then quickly that thought fades- feels wrong- maybe it's how she looks at me that makes me think not lover but mother, sister, some friend or other. It's hard to tell because for some reason I can't discern a face well, hardly see her as another person at all.

But I do see enough of her face to see it contorting to something of rage.

"Bad dog!" she screams. "You filthy animal. Off the couch!" (DO THE DISHES) she swats at me and I yelp. I go to step off of the couch and I am sent into a dramatic stumble to the ground as I have no strong feet to catch me. Then shaking like a leaf I do stand, in a way, on all fours. Though I should be bent over awkwardly and hunch backed it instead feels the only way to stand at all. I know that I am not myself, the way I pant with panic at the thought is proof enough, and that I must be dreaming. I know I am dreaming but still I dream and it feels less and less like some random thoughts of a dozing man. It seems like it's thoughts of someone who is not a man at all.

She kicks at me and I yelp again still shaking on twig legs. "You'll get worse than that if you're up there when I get back." She then flattens out her flowered skirt, grabs a jacket off the stand by the door, and leaves, the door swinging open just long enough to see out to the hall, of doors and doors and a flight of stairs going down to God Knows Where. Just as soon as I wonder just where it is she could be going that thought leaves my mind along with thoughts of her and I'm biting at my coat which I've left on from whatever street I'd been on, but it seems a little different...

I wake up and scratch my arm, not sure whether it's the fact the jacket is a scratchy hairy thing that is causing me to itch or whether that jacket had been discarded for a reason- laden with crabs or other such creepy crawlies. Maybe it's the dream that makes my skin crawl. Something a little too real about it for my liking. My dreams are usually jumbled, just thoughts drifting in and out, sometimes faces or places running by and disappearing just as quickly.

It's still night and the air has gotten a little cooler. Through the alley window where the buildings on either side part to an asphalt stream cars are passing by. One of their horns must have woken me up, or so I think until I hear the real culprit scavenging through the trash. Sometimes rodents will, every once in a while a raccoon, but this raccoon's just another bum.

When you become homeless maybe you'd think you'd feel worse for the other homeless wandering around, well I do feel worse in a way, I don't think anyone should live like this, but you don't learn to trust em any more. Everyone's experience might be different but here's mine: some are quite fine and down on their luck and not bad at all to talk to, some are fucking nuts but harmless all the same and are nice to talk to in their own way, you learn to look at them with a bit of good humor and maybe a little sadness, but then there's those who are scum of the goddamn earth. These bastards give the rest of us a bad name, they're the kind that'll rob you blind if you look alone enough or who'll corner you and beg for more money till they go from being homeless to a loan shark. We all know this kind is out there, even the ones who are fucking crazy know enough to know that, so we for the most part keep to ourselves. But tonight I'm feeling chatty.

"I already picked out the good stuff," I tell him showing the evidence laid out in front of me- a candy wrapper, a banana peel, and a bone now picked clean which was once a chicken leg.

The man (though it's hard to say for sure it's a man- a he that is- because of how bundled up under hats and ragged clothes he is) doesn't reply other than spitting on the ground. Sitting on the other side of the trashcan he slides his arm out the sleeve of his coat and with habitual ease ties that thin arm off with his scarf and puts a needle right in. He's dozing immediately in man-made warmth as I toss and turn for another half hour.

Dope is admitting this life is your life, and then it makes sense to do it so long as you can accept that there's no reason *not* to do it because there's no other life to be had. That's a hard fact to face the longer time goes on. It's been a while since I've had a home, in a strange way I hardly remember what I was like before. I remember the first nights on the streets I think (the ones after my initial night of which I remember quite well now that is). I don't remember the rest as well, but I do remember some things, mostly the feeling of being scared shitless not willing to shut my eyes for a second, every honk of the horn and scream from a street over seemed like it was for me, seemed to be the world screaming at me for being there. Now I slam those eyes shut and just try to sleep. "Shut up!" I yell at the world but it keeps yelling anyway.

I fall asleep and wake up and think to doze for another moment more, but my stomach rumbles, and in the hundreds of smells floating around there's one that smells so good both coming from the kitchen and still, less strongly, coming my my mouth with each pant. Sniffing for whatever it is that stains my breath (pebbles on my breath, pebbles on my mind) I find the food already in a bowl but it is set upon the floor. There's no utensils about, not that there are any hands to speak of to hold a spoon with, and something about the way it sits there on the ground held off the floor by only a thin layer of metal keeps me from eating. For a second. But then any kind of pride I had keeping me at bay falls away and I eat it. I lick it up and some falls on the ground but I lick that up too (pebbles on my breath, pebbles on my mind). I lick it till I lick that bowl clean and see a pair of brown little eyes staring back at me behind a layer of fur.

That wakes me up on its own. Wakes me up so fast my real eyes shoot open. It's dead of night now, no one's stirring, there's no good reason to be awake at all at a time like this. Yet someone new starts to move down the alley headed in my direction. There is not *no* reason to be awake at a time like this, just no good reason, so I know before I even meet them that this stranger will be bad news. This stranger has a near pure white face, a ghost come to haunt me in this night that will never end. The spectre stops right next to me. She has long legs spotted with bruises, which I can see go right up to her torso because the skirt she wears is so small it may as well not be there at all, I can see the thong she wears peaking up above it and down below. Her torso is equally as poorly covered and almost equally as beat up. And as I said of her face, it is painted white with makeup other than the bright red lipstick, but does nothing to mask how young she looks. In fact it only makes her look younger because she resembles in many ways a painted porcelain doll.

She reaches a hand out to me and rubs my head, ruffling my hair. "Hey there handsome," she says, her voice both that of a child and of an old woman the way it comes out so scratchy, her vocal cords must be as bruised as her skin. I wish to sink back farther, slink under the covers and not look up till morning, but I have no covers to hide under here. She keeps rubbing my head and I don't stop her.

"You been a good boy?" she purrs. I shudder, this feeling more like a dream than when I had fur. "You don't have to talk if you don't want." I couldn't, no I think I'd just bark if I tried (pebbles on my breath, pebbles on my mind). She moves closer, and as I'm sitting down and she is standing on high heels her crotch sits right there in front of my face (pebbles on my breath, pebbles on my mind). She's wearing a perfume. A strong perfume. I know that she is probably as filthy as me but the perfume helps to hide it, makes me think I'd like to lick this bowl clean....

I wish to remain silent but this night is lonely, so lonely, and passing so slow, and now the cold has come and another body sounds so warm, so I find myself saying softly (not barking) "how much?"

"For the night? How much you got in your little begging bucket." Beside me sits a jar where those who feel bad enough will leave me a few coins. I count it, and there's so little in there it feels wrong to even say.

"About ten bucks."

"About ten?"

"A little shy."

"On a cold night like this, that sounds like plenty, this girl just needs a little company." She says all this with her legs still riding up against my face. A little company, sure, or food for tomorrow. I should think about that but can't hardly focus on anything (pebbles on my breath, pebbles on my-)

"So you know a place we can go to get out of this cold?"

You could chastise all you want but at the end of the day all it comes down to is business- is it worth paying her my table scraps? What's the real value of ten bucks anyway? What's the real value of a girl's body or a hot meal? You could chastise me all you wanted for saying yes, but you wouldn't if you saw me, scraggled ruffled restless bum, in fact I bet you'd be shocked if I said anything but yes. That's the only thing that makes me want to say no, but we all no I don't do that. But as I go to get up she hits me, hits me with something hard and I fall back down again. My head's on the ground and I see her run off with my meager nine dollars and change.

Somewhere warm... somewhere warm...

I wake up. In that warm house again. But warm only in temperature. I am in a cage now. I whine.

"Oh shut the fuck up!" That woman shrieks. "Shut up shut up shut up!" She comes over and rattles the cage door. I yelp. She's in my face screaming now. Lucky for her rows of bars separate my mouth from her wrinkling face. "Mommy can't leave you if you keep barking like that. The neighbors will have a fit and mommy will have to bring you to the POUND. Do you want that? Do you wanna go to the POUND?" she's talking in her puppy dog voice that puts me at ease even though that word POUND sounds as bad as..... DISHES.

I get quiet. She seems content enough as she goes to leave. I see out the door again and it clicks. I've seen that face before. I've seen that hallway. I've seen that welcome mat that sits in front of her door. I lived across from this bitch for two years before I decided to leave it all behind. And I heard that dog bark, that damn dog bark, day in and day out. But now I am the dog I see it wasn't my fault at all. It was the cages and the dishes on the floor and the swatting off the couch and the constant threat of POUND POUND POUND.

I wake up. My ghost girl is gone. I wonder if she was ever here, but the way my head throbs I think she was. I drag my hand through my hair and it comes back wet. Wet dog. But this is blood, still fresh, I hadn't been out for long. It's not so much though, not enough to be worried. Maybe it's the hit to the head or how I've been thinking like a dog for too long but I can't concentrate on much. All I can think of is that welcome mat. Telling its two faced lie of friendliness. Well bitch neighbor, I think it is time to get yours. I need to sleep anyway, not this dozing in and out, but a real sleep, and I'll be damned if I just dream of being locked in a cage.

It's funny how close I stayed. It's only a twenty-minute walk to a life I can never reach again. The keypad's code to get in the building is even the same. Nothing changed for me. I did that myself. Behold your creation, Frankenstein, and weep at its horror.

It seems I still have a tiny bit of luck lingering somewhere in the lint of my pockets. My ex-wife doesn't come out and see me, blood and dirt soaked bum, getting ready to break into our dear dear neighbor's home. She'd probably think I was stealing something. Me explaining that I need to set this dog free to sleep at night wouldn't be any better an explanation though I suppose.

I look to my old neighbor's door. Dogs are dogs. I don't know this dog. Some dogs may be more like wolves, some might be domesticated house ornaments. Domesticity an idea made by the weaker ones looking for an easy way to get some treats. There's a welcome mat sitting in front of the door. In a stroke of pure simplistic creative genius the welcome mat says "welcome". I lift it up and sitting underneath is a key. There's no thoughts to doing or not doing. I just do. I put the key in and turn it and the door opens up and there I see a dog sitting caged up in the corner of the room. He looks at me and doesn't bark. In fact he looks like he was all but expecting me.

I suppose I'm breaking and entering but it doesn't feel that way. It feels more like I'm entering and leaving. Just passing through. Soon as I unlock the cage door the dog bounds out, runs a lap around the couch, then runs back to me for a second. He licks my hand. Then he runs back to the couch jumps up and pisses right on one of the pillows.

The dog has finished pissing and looks to me. My turn? Well okay. I think to what I had told my boss of shitting on the carpet. It's not the office, but this will have to do. I let out the biggest load I can muster on her nicely carpeted living room floor. The dog lets out a howl of approval as I do. I think it's better if I leave quickly just incase Bitchy Neighbor happens to come back at an inopportune time.

"C'mon then," I tell him.

People are dogs. Some people may be more like wolves, some might be domesticated house ornaments. Civility an idea made by the weaker ones looking for an easy way to get some treats. He follows me down the steps knowing or just guessing I'll have to help him out. I think he is going to maybe stay with me, but as soon as I open up the door he dashes out into that harsh dark night.

Lesson: *Be Grateful For What You Have/The Dishes Aren't Worth It*

Smiley Makes A Friend/Smiley Watches A Cat Die in the form of a poem

*Running barking yapping
Comes a dog barreling bounding blazing down the street
Smiley sees this and yelps then hollers
At this strange creature with wagging tail floppy ears and a dog bone collar*

*The pup stops just shy of Smiley
And tilts its little head
“Well hello what’s your name?”
“And from where might you have come?”*

*The dog barks then gives Smiley a big lick
And stares at him with big brown eyes
“Oh who cares about such nonsense things.”
“I only care what our future brings.”*

*And their futures are bright
For they stick together friends forever
Two beings with no real names
So different yet much the same*

*The two run and play
And shout all gay
All is fun till in the park one day
A poor little cat picks the wrong place to lay*

*The dog sees it before the cat can get away
And the poor cat’s about to have an awful bad day
The dog thinks it is a fine meal- gourmet
A freshly made cat soufflé*

*Goodness Gracious “Hey hey hey!”
Smiley tries to keep his friend at bay
But there’s just no way
As the poor cat is nothing but puppy prey*



Tune In Tune Out/
Mixed Signals Cause Static

TUNE IN TUNE OUT/MIXED SIGNALS CAUSE STATIC

I

THE FARM

To promote mingling of the males and females for those meant for breeding you want to keep the them together from a young age. It's surprising how little space they take up. They don't need to be able to move after all, besides for when they do their one role in this whole world, fuck each other, so that their children can end up as breakfast on your plate. You can cram thousands together and won't have many problems. The ones not meant to breed are made to be eaten. Quite literally- they are bred to be behemoths of massive size. These you can keep by the tens of thousands. Little light is needed. When breeders are ready to give birth they should be moved to small cages. A tube sits at the bottom of each cage so that their children can shoot down as soon as they pop out. This is easiest. This way they are more like shits they take which they flush down the toilet without taking a peak. Breeders can produce up to three hundred of these shits in their lifetime. Of course, after that much fucking and shitting out babies they will eventually become weak. They are then shipped off to have their throats slit. Hang them from their feet and they will glide right on through the blade. In the off chance the blade misses their throat they will be boiled alive.

PART ONE: THE POPULACE

It's hard to see in here. What little light there would be is dimmed from kicked up dust. The floor is mostly shit. I look to my left and see a sea of bodies, look to my right and just the same. That is life. I can remember when I was young. It wasn't long ago. We were all small then. I guess that's why we had so much more room. I remember more warmth. I remember hope. But now I am big. I am so large that I can barely stand. Hope is gone- god if I go on my legs will give out any day now. No, now I sleep, I wake up, and I pray to die. What meaning is there to life when life is waiting to die and nothing more?

PART TWO: A PROPHET IN THE MIX

I see all. Yes, I see what all the rest cannot see. They speak of life as this, as waiting in a pile of shit to die. Look, I tell them, at the lights above us. Look at them, look at the material, the strange strings coming from them, surely there is more out there to make such a thing. Look at the whole room we are in. A square, a box, made to keep us in. But where there is a box there is surely something *outside* of it. There must be more out there. What makes the light *light*? What is light? What makes me yearn for it so? Oh I wax lyrically but I wish for just a moment to see light, real light, bright and warm. There must be a place where I could run free. Run free under the light and free of the shit and the dust. Rooms bigger than this, twice, thrice the size, maybe even infinitely large. Outside this box there could be anything. Anything at all. Wonders we can't imagine. We see beings, they herd us, these are our true masters I tell the others. Maybe there are hundreds of these outside, thousands, as plentiful out there as we are in here. Maybe there are more things than just us and them. Maybe....

One day we will get out. One day. Maybe not today, or tomorrow, but one day. It might not even be in our lifetimes. But one day even these walls will fall and what waits outside will show its face to us. Light. One day we will see the light.

PART THREE: MEAT YOUR MAKER

It is The Day, it seems. We are moved out of our room. Such wonders must await us. I can hardly think. The possibilities are too endless. But alas, what I find is a room even smaller than before. "It is okay, brothers," I tell the others, "this is just one room. There will be more. I am sure of it."

But the next room cannot come soon enough. Already some of my brothers and sisters die waiting. I feel myself grow weak. I need food, water, most of all though I need light. I took the light we had for granted. Here there is none. Pitch blackness.

My prayers are answered it seems. We are brought into a new room with wonders I have never seen! What is this contraption? But before I can examine it closely our masters are picking us up one by one and stringing us so the room turns upside down. We cannot move. And then the contraption starts to move.

I wish to say don't worry brothers. Don't worry. All will be alright. But alas I have the feeling the outside I had wished for has arrived and it is horrible. Our room before had really been the best there was. Now we hurtle forward unable to break free of the strings that bind us. Up ahead I see the light. Yes, this is the light I wished for, and it is death. The light is intense and white and reflects off of the metal of the blade which slits our throats and drains us of our blood. I have to see this happen to a long line of brothers and sisters before I meet my maker.

II

FAST FOOD JOINT

I have ten minutes before I have to pick Sally up from daycare and I'm getting off a hell of a day at work. You can tell when I had a hell of a day when I untuck my shirt the second I'm out of the office. I'm starving though. I pass a fast food joint on the side of the road and turn in without a thought, which is good because I almost missed the exit.

I order a chicken sandwich with pickles and a side of fries and a soda. I take one bite of the sandwich then spit it into my napkin. It tastes like a soggy sponge.

III

HUNTING

It was my father who taught me how to hunt. When I was just a boy. I remember it well. Childhood really can be boiled down to a few experiences. The more you think the more you can remember, but there are a few that sit there near the surface, ready to be seen at any moment. I see this one every time I come out here. There was a cabin we used to rent each summer. For the first ten years of my life my father and brother went out to hunt while I stayed home with mother. I didn't mind. Mother made sure we had fun while they were out.

"While they're out freezing their bums off, let me read you a story," she'd say. I loved to hear those stories. Then that summer when I was ten my father and brother were getting ready as always, and my father turned to me and said,

"Well, aren't you going to get ready?" As if it had been assumed, a known fact, that all boys of ten go out to hunt. I didn't argue. The stories would be waiting when I got back.

It was a damp morning. Cold, and damp, but not unbearable. We all had a normal conversation all the way up to the lookout, I forget what now, I was so excited that I wasn't

listening as I normally would. I was more focused on the guns strung across my father and brother's backs. Heavy, metal, ready to kill. But in their hands I knew they weren't dangerous. My father was the man who taught me to ride a bike. My brother was the kid who used to race me on that bike up and down our driveway.

In the lookout now. There was a lot of waiting.

"When are you going to shoot something?" I asked.

"Patience," my father said. "You must have patience. This shouldn't be quick or easy anyhow."

"Why not?" I asked.

"That way you will appreciate it more." I didn't understand at the time. Not until he became rigid, stiff, tense, and aimed down the barrel of the sights. I knew enough not to ask any questions at this moment. Then he pulled the trigger. A bang went off louder than I could believe. Birds flew from the trees around us.

"Did you hit it? Did you hit it?" I squealed excitedly. He nodded, but did not smile with me. We went to the body. The deer was dead, its heart blown clean out. Blood oozed from that wound. Then I began to understand what he had said earlier.

I went out with them for the next ten years of my life before father got too old and tired, and then my brother and I went out. Now my brother is off on the other side of the world, but out here they are still with me in a way, next to me with my gun raised. The most important lessons my father taught me didn't have anything to do with how to hunt. They had to do with why.

A deer passes by my sights, but it is too quick. It runs away before I can fire. We didn't always get a kill while we were out there. More often than not we didn't. "Imagine if we had to do that to survive," father said. "Then it would not feel like such a game to you."

IV

MOVIE NIGHT

"You nab anything this morning?" I ask Bill after I grab him and I a couple of beers out of the fridge.

"No luck," he says.

"Damn shame, I could go for a good old venison burger right about now. I had what was probably the shittiest chicken sandwich for lunch today."

"You hungry?" he asks.

"Starving. Couldn't finish the thing."

We turn on the TV and flip through the channels. Loads of shit after shit on there till we find something bearable to watch. I've seen it before, but it's a decent flick.

"I'm thinking of ordering something to eat, want anything?"

"Depends, what are you eating?" Bill asks after sipping his beer. He's always quieter after days he goes out to hunt. Probably tired from getting up so early.

"Not sure, I was thinking maybe some chicken wings."

Lesson: *You Are What You Eat/Make Sure You Are On Top Of The Food Chain*

Smiley Eats Lunch/Smiley Feels Rejected in the form of a poem

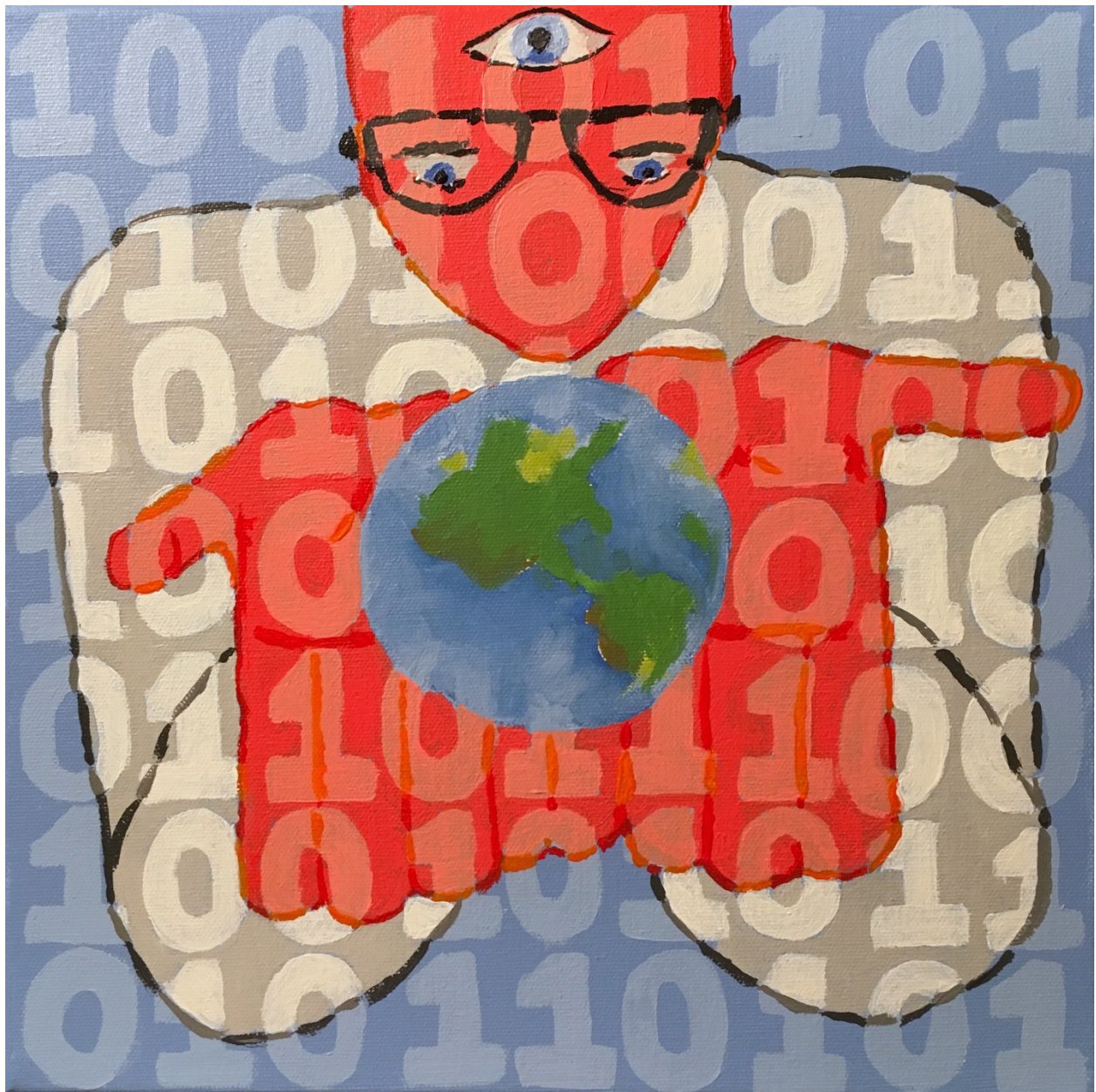
*The dog and Smiley aren't too picky
The meals they eat might make others downright sickly
Food from the trash- icky icky!*

*Just today they were digging through the trash
And found a nearly full chicken sandwich yummy enough to throw a celebration bash
Man oh man- how rash!
To toss such a thing in the trash*

*They get by on whatever they can find
(like a poor recently departed cat if they are in a bind)
And sleep wherever, they really do not mind*

*A beautiful woman walks by
And Smiley just wants to say hi
She is a girl and he is a guy
Why wouldn't they get along, why oh why!*

*She looks at Smiley with disgust
And feels nothing close to lust
She says she'll leave him a dollar if she must
To keep Smiley from staring at her bust*



Secrets of the Universe/
God Turns to the Needle

SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE/GOD TURNS TO THE NEEDLE

I

SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

The first beings (far as they know) to create a universe created it in a petri dish in a laboratory somewhere deep in the mountains where they didn't have to worry about anyone bothering them. When they realized their experiment had worked they celebrated in a manner that might be seen as slightly extravagant but considering they were- for a brief time in their minds- more or less Gods it made sense. As with the pioneers of any science the first to experiment with it are a bit unusual, maybe even a bit crazy, and for all intents and purposes these were mad scientists. Mad, but genius. In that lab tucked away in snowy mountains so it had the appearance of a super villain lair they created the first universe and destroyed it in the same night.

The lead scientist, high as hell from his creation, popped champagne, brought out a baggie with a plant most similar to magic mushrooms found on earth, and together these scientists partied and hollered and had an orgy. Somewhere in the mix of bodies and some point after all that champagne and hallucinogenic substances were consumed one of the scientists hoisted the universe in the air to feel what it was like to hold all of life in the palm of his hands. Seconds later someone bumped him and the universe shattered on the ground.

The actual fate of that universe is hard to tell, and the scientists frankly can't explain what it would have looked like from the perspective inside the petri dish, but for the sake of imagining it more or less the fabrics of reality in that petri dish were ripped to shreds. The scientists, after a few minutes of frustration, decided someone experiencing the feeling of holding the universe in his hands was worthwhile despite the accident that followed. Probably in the history of time and space no one has felt a thing like that. Unfortunately the scientist who held it couldn't relay the feeling to the others as he had drunk enough champagne that night so that the next morning he didn't recall doing it at all. It was not such a big deal though as within the next day, hungover as could be, the scientists created another.

The history books don't mention that last bit. For a while the scientists were idolized, statues made of them, prizes awarded, and the history books looked like they'd house a special place for them for generations to come. Only two decades later though the history books read something like this:

"The science of Universe Creation, while at first providing much excitement to the advancement of science, yielded little benefit. The only use came to researches who study these universes for knowledge on extraterrestrial life. The majority of universes it seems have several planets, spaced out, which have life but only of a single cell nature. Some universes have more advanced creatures, one anomaly had some sort of creatures wondering the planets in almost every galaxy. It is a rare few that hold any kind of intelligent life as our own universe does. However, these universes are the most valuable, for the most research was put into these.

By accelerating the rate of the universe in question's time scientists found that all intelligent life follows a distinct set of phases:

Phase One is the beginning of intelligent life where creatures first learn to use tools. In this phase the world is still in its natural state.

Phase Two is once the creatures mold the world around them. In this phase nature and other species are eradicated to make room for the ever growing dominant population and technology that pops up.

Shortly following Phase Two is Phase Three, and in this Phase two things can happen. One is the destruction of the planet. In this case technology advances too quickly for the intelligent life and they eradicate themselves, either by accident or by some mal-intent. The other thing which can happen, as it did in our universe, is the complete unification of the species. They become the only species, and the planet becomes an enclosed self heating man made planet. They control the environment around them.

Finally, Phase Four, is the extinction of the universe, when energy runs out and the universe implodes on itself, giving rise to yet another universe. Luckily for us, this Phase is still some ten billion years away by our lead scientists' approximations."

II INTO THE VOID

Now some twenty years after its creation the universe- if you're reading this on Earth *our* universe- is nearing the tipping point that those precious universes which house intelligent life reach. The lead scientist behind its creation, now widely regarded as washed up and retired living off of his prize money, has a fear it will tip the wrong way. The petri dish was put into a museum and (wrongly) labeled "First Universe Scientifically Created". The museum curators sped the universe's time up so that it would provide a more interesting viewing for the museum visitors. This scientist had already watched the untimely demise of his first creation. He did not want to see the demise of another.

There were rules in place now to prevent tampering of any kind to the petri dish universes. Even for him their creator. He went each and every day to this museum and studied what he could see. He watched planets form and the first men take their first breaths. He saw it all- the good and the bad- and studied it like some art obsessed student might do to their favorite painting. People took notice of course. For the most part no one had any idea this man's role in the whole thing. They thought maybe it was some kind of weird sexual fetish this man had to look big compared to the men so small. Those who did know who he was assumed he was trying to live in the past in a nostalgia slumber.

But he was there for one thing- to learn. He looked in closely. More closely than any had bothered before. He looked at their primitive yet beautiful languages written in books and studied till he had it close to perfect as he could get. He did this because he had a plan. A marvelous plan. He was going to go down to them and teach them about the world. He was going to show them the way to salvation.

They would listen. They must. He has more knowledge on them than any being from their universe could possibly have. He knows all there is to know about their lives. He knows how their universe started, and if they're not careful, how it will end. He looks like them, the humans, for the most part, except he has redder skin and sitting above his glasses rests a third eye. All beings on his planet have this eye. It is vestigial and doesn't work any longer but at a

time in their long history it was needed. Now, he thinks, it is needed again, as proof to the humans of his divine origins.

There is no way for him to take the petri dish out. It is locked away in the museum and while he might be a genius in some ways he knows not a thing about robbery. So he knew he had to go to it, and for this reason spent the passed decade of his life making his second greatest invention- a machine which can reparticalize the user into the petri dish universes. He had never tested this machine out as once you go into the universe there is no coming out. He would have to have faith in his calculations, and he is nothing if not confident in his abilities. He created life after all. Others may have forgotten, but to him he is still a god. And as such he knows if anyone must sacrifice themselves it should be him. He made the world, and now he must save it. And in the back of his mind the thought is there that a god will likely be treated quite well in the world. In this world where he really will be a god, and not in his world where he was forgotten long ago.

He says goodbye to his house. Goodbye to every possession he owns. Goodbye to his loved ones in the form of letters as he is worried one will try to stop him if they know he will never return. He says goodbye to his universe and drives over to the museum for one final, permanent visit. It is a strange thought, he thinks to himself when he enters the museum, that while he is going to a whole new universe he will know that he is really still in a museum somewhere, and that even if he is able to save this planet he has been studying so intently he will be dead before morning in this world's time.

The exhibit has more people here today. More and more people will attend in the coming weeks. The universe on display is quite rare as far as petri dish universes go and the museum knows it well. In this universe there is only one planet with life on it but the life is quite interesting. It contains a species more intelligent than most planets hosting life will ever see. All the spectators gather knowing, based on the trends of universes with life this advanced, that it will either end soon with the Destruction Phase, or continue on till the final collapse of the universe with the long lasting Unification Phase. They are all gathering to see how this world will turn out. The museum has two different parties planned depending on which fate envelops the planet. A "Goodbye" party and a "Congratulations" party. Of course, being a museum, either will be a little stiff. It mostly consists of a banner that will be displayed for a three-day period on the wall.

In front of all these people who don't give a damn about his creation he sets up. The biggest problem is he has to be naked. Clothes don't atomize well, assuming this works at all if he was still wearing clothes they'd melt to his skin and he'd be dead instantly. So he has to work quick, and also for this reason while he wants to appear right in the oval office to speak to a world leader, he knows he can't. He has to go to the one place people seem crazy enough to be naked for a moment on the street and to where there will be people, a lot of people, to tell his story to. He decides to beam himself right down to Time Square.

III

GOD HAS COME TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE

The machine worked fine. One second he is in a museum of people shouting at him, the next he is in the crazy hustle and bustle of a human filled concrete jungle. He expected his

apparition to cause a scene. But no one much noticed. Those who did still only took notice enough to scream at him.

"Get dressed you fucking freak!" beaming at him from all sides. Angry faces. Screaming mothers. Crying kids. It is not the Godly reception he had wanted. He runs to find somewhere secluded. Down streets, on the sidewalks, then in an alley he sees a dumpster filled with old forgotten and discarded clothing. Soon he will have garments of gold- not that that is what he is here for anyway- so these will do for now. He puts them on, and other than that third eye, he looks quite the part of a normal everyday bum.

Now he is ready. His head still whirls from the reparticalization. It made him nauseous. But he must carry on. He walks to the street and says,

"My people! I am your creator! Please, listen to me," but they keep on walking. "Stop! Stop and listen! You are in mortal danger!" No one stops still. A man dressed well, suit and all, is walking passed. God puts his hand gently on this man's shoulder. It is the first of this species he has felt. He touches him with love as he would do to his own child, if he had ever had any children.

"Sir," he says.

"Fuck off!" his son throws his arm away.

A sweet old woman is walking with what must be her son holding her arm. He bends down to talk to this woman.

"My dear," he says, "won't you please listen to me?"

She looks at him wide eyed.

"Are you some kind of pervert?" her son says and hurries the two of them away.

A group of teens sit smoking cigarettes against a wall. He walks over.

The first holds a five out to him. The kid pushes it towards him again when at first he won't take it.

"C'mon, take it and go we're talking here," the teen says.

"That is not what I am here for," our God says.

"What do you want then?"

"I created you, I know it sounds crazy, but look at my eye. I'm from another world. I created you in my laboratory."

"That's a crazy eye man. That a new kind of surgery?"

"Won't you listen?"

"Okay, we got a minute, give us your zealot spiel."

"I created you and your species. Your planet is in mortal danger. You must bring me to your world leaders to talk about this."

"Oh sure I have our World Leader on speed dial," the kid pulls out a phone and puts it to his ear. "World Leader, great to hear from you again, I have an alien here, says the world's gonna end. Hold on I'll ask," he lowers the phone and addresses God, "the World Leader wants to know, when's this world ending thing gonna happen?"

"I can't say for sure," God says ecstatic to have this happen after some brief obstacles, "in the next thousand years for sure." To God's horror the kid hangs up the phone and laughs.

"Thousand years! Shit man, no one's gonna care about something that far out. We only live hundred years on Earth." Everyone laughs poor God away.

God suffers hours of the same ridicule and wonders if his own people are watching him on the screen now laughing their heads off. Finally one man seems interested enough to listen. He is dressed much the same as God is dressed now, but God does not judge.

"You have to tell somebody!" the man says to God after he tells his story.

"I have tried, my son, but no one will listen."

"All those others are crazy," he says.

"Yes, or at least shortsighted."

"I am too," the man replies, "but only in one eye."

"Ah, then your other must see true."

"Yes! Yes exactly. Well follow me, if you need a place to stay I have one."

"Oh? Yes, it will get dark here soon, and I fear my journey is far from done."

The man leads God down an ever darkening alley. He sits down and shows God his blanket.

"It is so cold, my son, do you not have anything more for warmth?"

"Ahhhhh I see. So cold. It is a cold world you know. A cold, cold world here, probably much colder than yours. I have what you seek." The man pulls out a needle.

"Is this some kind of medicine?" God asks. The man nods solemnly and then proceeds to dose God right up with opioidic warmth.

Lesson: *Life Is A Science/Life Is A Bloody Mess*

Smiley Chats With Friends/Smiley Talks To Crazy Homeless People in the form of a poem

It is lonely for a while

People ignoring Smiley smile after smile

He has the dog and that all well and good

But he'd love to meet some friends if he could

And then an answer to his prayers!

God himself came down heaven's stairs

And assumed the role of a washed up bum

Just to bring Smiley out of his glum

God tells such interesting stories

Of petri dishes and museums and laboratories

Smiley could listen to these all day

And you know what, he just may.



The Near future/
The End

THE NEAR FUTURE/THE END

I

THE END BEGINS

The end started long ago but only really got fun once it was announced on the evening news. Before that it was nothing but a topic to bring up at social gatherings. But once the All Seeing News Anchors announced the end it became written in stone like the Holy Commandments- Biblical. Oh yes, Biblical. The world went from normal to apocalyptic in the hour it took the 6 o'clock news to cover the story. The All Seeing News Anchors declared that the world would end in the next fifty years. We'd finally done the planet in.

The politicians spend the time jerking themselves off pretending they still got the power to send us off the self proclaimed right way. Some people decide to spend their final days running for office for kicks with platforms calling for a mutiny saying that the All Seeing News Anchors are not the Gods everyone thinks and really everything is going to be A-okay. Some people buy it. Cable television runs till the very end. Some die watching.

Law enforcement steps in in some places too, though more often than not they do this just for the kicks of ruling with authoritarian power. Some live like kings, though more often than not they spend their time locking people up and jerking themselves off because they got the biggest guns in this wild west world and die sucking on short stubby barrels of each others' shooters.

II

THE ARSONISTS

When there's no rules or reason for anything standing now to be standing any longer people can discover the real Joys Of Life- in this case fire.

Behind him an earthquake rumbled in the form of four sixteen-wheeler trucks. In each truck the cargo is filled to the brim with gas canisters, flame throwers, C-4 explosives, napalm, dynamite, and a continental map of the United States each marked to high hell with Xs marking landmarks in need of destruction.

Before he was an accountant for a law firm in Detroit. On his own personal roadmap this was the first place he marked with an X. Pouring the gasoline on his office chair and all over his outdated computer and all over his boss, tied to his chair with a string of barbed wire, was the greatest day of his life. It was the day he quit work for good. His colleagues cheered him on as he dumped not one, not two, not five, but ten gas cans full of that oil over the workplace. They cheered him on when he put the duct tape over his whining son of a bitch boss's mouth after they had enjoyed his screams from the curved barbs entering his skin. They cheered when that place lit up in flames and were still cheering when the last skeletal post of that office fell to the ground and fire was replaced with smoke.

Now this misfit band of workers is screaming down this abandoned desert highway at breakneck speeds, in their dust lays a wake of destruction spanning some two thousand miles. A gas station shows up ahead. The owner is long gone but the pumps still got some diesel in them. They fill up much as they can then with the still pumping nozzles shoot gas so it floods the ground. You get to love the smell of gasoline much the same as sex sweats. There's still enough gasoline

left over in the pumps to send a small mushroom cloud in the sky as they leave yet another mark of the ages in the earth.

III

THE SEX FIENDS

When there's no rules or reason for any kind of purity people can discover the real Joys Of Life- in this case sexual satisfaction.

The words Assault Rape and Consent really have no bearing in the New World Dictionary. The only words that are found in there are "Have", "A", and "Ball". So that's why in his house he has a basement fit from wall to wall with chains. In those chains rest women and children. Women and children first, women and children first, well okay, if you insist. When there's nothing left in the world to live for you gotta fill the hole with something, this gaping hole, and by God he's gonna fill it best he can.

IV

THE GLUTTONS

When there's no rules or reason for any kind of restraint people can discover the real Joys Of Life- in this case over indulgence.

The banks were ripe for the picking because no one thought to bother for the money. There's no real reason. The new currency is things much more tangible: women, drugs, and well that's about it. But he, among others, thought why the hell not. We're all hurtling for destruction. There's not much sense to be made of a thing like that so any kind of reasoning is delusional. Why not delude away and play Kings? Most of them were poor bastards Before, him most of all. Now after breaking into the vaults he sits on a throne of hundred dollar bills worth somewhere in the hundreds of thousands. He burns fifty grand each night for warmth. If on these fire lit nights he starts to get thoughtful and the whole situation sinks in he can cry and blow his nose on a fistful worth a grand. Best of all is shitting. When he shits he uses somewhere between five hundred and two thousand dollars depending on the consistency.

V

THE KILLERS

When there's no rules or reason for any kind of reasoning people can discover the real Joys Of Life- in this case death.

Before each and every person on this earth had a story. A past. A present. A future. Well now things had changed so that the pasts mattered not a bit. The present was of such immediate concern that it ate the pasts up. And their futures- there's no such thing. So really everyone is on the same playing field. And it *is* a playing field. The only real substance left is to watch the life drain out of peoples' eyes. She is watching this now. A knife is sticking in some fat son of a bitch's stomach and he's bleeding out under her. His family sits all hacked to pieces next to him. His blood's warm, his eyes show the only feeling left in this cold cold place. Her partners in crime sit and watch as one might watch the television set each night- that is if the

television set wasn't playing reruns they had seen a thousand times before or playing the same Doomsday Clock mindlessness.

VI

THE ROCKSTARS

We've had a real brief slice of life up to now of people who knew what was going on in the sense they knew that what was going on was pure insanity and there is no reason not to join in. Some people though, these small few, take it to the next level. They grab the bull by the horns and go for a ride. They're the dreamers in this dreamland.

The apocalypse is really just another change of period like leaving the stone age (or entering it again). Those who are in the know and with it stay with it. Those who hold onto any kind of old way of life are left to suffer. They are the Confused Scared and Depressed. Here I'm going to focus on those who were with it- yes, with it- the grooviest of the bunch. They would be the face of their generation if there were to be generations to follow and give a fuck about faces. These few would be legends and their faces would be plastered on t-shirts. They are the Hendrix of the age. The rockstars of the era. But they rock and roll harder than any before them cause this is what its all been for. The thousands and thousands of years of society and culture built up to this glorious time of finality. This would be the peak, the climax, before the brutally swift falling action of the Earth crumbling to extinction.

The scene: A fully automatic assault rifle cuts through the silence and rips the two already hunkered in the room to shreds. In barges our rockstar himself. A smiley face sits on each cheek of his precious face and Smiley smiles. A dog with blood wetted fur barks beside him.

Smiley leads a militia of men. These men have one purpose- to nuke the ever living shit out of all that remains breathing. Smiley doesn't do this out of hatred. It's been a long long while since he was living in his hole in the ground. Somewhere it's still there though, cold, and dark since all of those Heavenly Bulbs are probably long since burnt out. The bodies of his brothers and sisters probably still are in some deep state of decay. Out here in this world those tiny set of tunnels seem hardly to matter but to the Children they had been the world just the same as this is the world now. There are just many more Children out here, soon to suffer the same fate of death as those skeletal remains.

And of the Lord and the Devil, were they real all the same in that world as in this world? Smiley's still waiting to see, and see he will soon enough. If they are real they are just buried much deeper and up much higher in the sky than he had expected. The reason for nuking the populace has nothing to do with sending them up above or down below, it is just because Smiley wishes to have as good a time as possible before he dies. He's had many years to meet people, he's almost as old as Papa was at the beginning of our story, and remains fairly indifferent to you. You being everyone other than him because in this world it his him versus you, down below he had been You too and it all mattered not, up here though men have names and men are I's. That is the grand secret of this world.

What is the meaning of life? If the meaning is I, at least for Smiley, the meaning is to have fun. How he's had fun changed over the years. First it was fucking You and washing in the small puddle bath. Then it was talking to you on the phone. Then playing fetch with the dog in

the park. Then finding more friends- kindred spirits as lost as he. Now he has a different meaning of fun which blows those others clean out the water.

How these men have fun is this. They have copious amounts of a thing called “cocaine” which sends your mind up two notches. They sit in this military base which houses the means to launch nuclear weapons wherever they please. It takes codes and keys and all sorts of things to do this- luckily it was the military men themselves who told Smiley of their secret fantasy. With Smiley too is the President of the United States. His politicians are busy wasting their time somewhere on some dumb old thing and he’s had enough of the bullshit bullshit bullshit spewing out of their mouths. He can’t wait to see their faces when they see a light as bright as the sun touch down before evaporating those fucking slack jaw faces to nothing. When he told Smiley this Smiley bought himself a pair of sunglasses.

The men take turns railing lines of cocaine off of the high tech machinery. The President says whoever built this room probably pictured some dignified stiff sitting at the desk pressing the button that will end the world all the while having a stick shoved far up his ass as it can go. This way seems a more respectful way to act he says. If you’re going to end the world at least appreciate what you’re doing. The President screams this after taking a half a gram line of cocaine to the face.

“End it you motherfucker!” The President yells to Smiley. Smiley takes such a hefty bump that his nose starts to bleed. He turns the key which opens the case which shows a bright red button showing its face at him and it is here that Smiley really sees the Lord. The Lord is the end of it all. The Devil is those who deny the earthly pleasure of destruction. It is all a game. Smiley presses the button and nuclear missiles fire off to every continent on the planet. They even nuke Antarctica in case any Polar Bears have the gall to still be breathing. The President laughs. The Dog barks. Smiley smiles.

Lesson: *Save The Planet/Let’s Go Out With A Bang*



The Artist's Studio Part 2

THE ARTIST'S STUDIO PART TWO

The Lunatic finishes his stories. All this time you have been quiet, but now you open your mouth and speak.

"Thanks for wasting my time asshole," you say.

"Those stories were dumb as hell," you say.

"You should really knock down this shed and sell the land to be developed," you say.

"That way you'll make a hell of a lot more money than writing this shit," you say.

The Lunatic smiles a terribly big smile. He goes over to what I think at first is a jar of paintbrushes but that is actually a jar of torture tools. The Lunatic tells me,

"Grab him." I grab you.

The Lunatic walks over and while I hold you he places the jar under you to catch blood. He slices open your stomach with a scalpel. He begins to peel the skin off of your bones with the utmost care.

"The skin makes for a wonderful canvas," The Lunatic says.

"Blood makes for a brilliantly red paint," The Lunatic says.

"You are a piece of art," The Lunatic says.