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Cover by Popjellyfish.

INTRODUCTION;

Placid Dingo

In 2008 the Principia Discordia forum created an exciting little concept and named it Intermittens. Intermittens was a collaborative project, a monthly (or so) webzine with a different creative team behind each issue. To edit an edition all you had to do was throw up your hand and say 'me, me!' Content, images, layout; everything was provided by an amateur team of creative passionate individuals.

Potential was seen for bigger things though. More than a regular magazine, Intermittens was seen as an open source publishing house, capable of a wide variety of projects.

This file you now possess is the first of these works. It features 25 works from the creative minds busy making madness at Principia Discordia.com. Some have a Discordian bent, some don't. They range from the small to the large, the vulgar to the elegant, the funny to the touching.

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Please enjoy.

Parents of the Year - The Dreadful Hours

this whole thing started off wrong
dad and mom and a bottle of jack
alcohol is a shitty contraceptive

Untitled (from the Sesame Street Series) **- Richter**

Of all the Muppets that got a load of shit out of Sesame Street, I always felt the

worst about the Yippers. You know, the “Aliens”? We were never certain ourselves. Jim would take these trips now and then, just bum around the world for a month or two between seasons. He’d meet different Muppet or Monster populations, talk with them, learn about them, and maybe have a few back. That’s how there got to be so many Sesame Street variants; he did his PR, and set it all up. Not like franchises, more like making the entertainment and message local and native.

So anyways, one year he comes back and he’s got these guys with him. Never said where they were from. Of course theories abounded. Actual aliens was the most popular, although the possibility of a tribe of forgotten and de-socialized mutant Muppets from outside Chernobyl was compelling. Centralia in PA or some deep jungle got credit too. Jim just never said, and would sort of smile and dodge any questions. He loved that sort of game. Like any good teacher, he wanted to see us figure it out ourselves.

The Yippers (Mike, who ran the boom mic dubbed them), were odd, but really great once you got used to them. They were true “Anthropologists from Mars”. Everything was new and different to them. They were innocent, well meaning, boundlessly curious, but never quite naïve. They loved Jim too, and would follow him around whenever he was on site. Otherwise they’d just mill about. We never saw them sleep, and never got a good idea for how many there were, even. Jim would take a stroll about an hour before any scene they were going to do, and would gather two or three, bring them to the set, show them an object, and let them do their thing. They’d go over it, talk about it back and forth, have some fun and go on. Never did any harms to it, just studied, inquisitive as children, but harmless as Buddhist monks.

They did hit some bumps though. Jim (no one else could really get through to them), had to designate a few areas off limits. Like the bathrooms. They floated in on a gaffer whacking off once. It was “Yip yip yip yipy FAPFAPFAP, WWWAAAAAHHH! Uh-huh, uh-huh” for a week. They got on some people’s nerves. Otherwise, most of us loved them. Not like you love a pet cat or a child, since neither have a cold alien intellect (possibly far surpassing your own) behind their behavior. If you had the time for them, and would take a minute or two to interact, play or share some food, it was like you got to share their joy and interest in discovering anything, and the fascination of everything being new. It really made you see things for what they were. They had great fun doing this, you could tell. They’d be a bit more animated and lean against you a bit like a cat before floating on.

After Jim’s death, the new producers had a world of trouble with them. Jim had no contracts for a lot of the Muppets. He’d just fudged them all in on the books, but always did right by them. Like Cookie, the Yippers all had trusts set up, continually

being reinvested and contributed to. The producers expected them to sign proper papers, fill out schedules, follow scripts, and none of that worked for them. Honoring a paper or a clock was outside their way of doing things. The producers, predictably enough, had lawyers throw papers at them (Literally, a sad fact of Muppet / Monster inequality is that anyone without hands CAN be served papers by throwing.), and they stopped the trust fund contributions. They tried to herd them off the lot, but that was fruitless. Trying to touch one of the Yippers against their will is like trying to grab a towel with a black belt in Aikido.

Jim's lawyer, who was executing his will, came down to the studio once he got official documentation of the trust fund cutoff. I stopped and talked with him quickly, but he had a package. Wouldn't say much, except to say he couldn't say much, it was one of Jim's instructions, but I could come along and watch. He walked around a bit, and in the same way Jim did, found a few of the Yippers. He just mentioned Jim's name and motioned them on. Once he had three of them, he put down the package for them and took out a book. It was a compilation about Gandhi and his methods on nonviolent resistance. There was a quick note in the front, to the Yippers from Jim too. They all read it, gave a sort of exaggerated mournful "AAAwwwwwww...", and floated off, the book levitating cleanly between them. The lawyer and I went for coffee, and he seemed rather satisfied with how things went.

The next few days on the lot were chaos. The Yippers, for the first time, had taken up action against something. They floated in front of cameras, trucks, and any moving equipment. They blocked doorways, occupied sinks, and unplugged power cables. They never did anything harm, or hurt anyone (no safety equipment was EVER compromised, as much as they could have). Overnight they had become a cross between the perfect pranksters, and peace guerrillas (as weird as that sounds). A letter had been sent to the producers too, and they got so hot under the collar about it everyone knew. Jim was holding them hostage from beyond the grave they said, and got their own lawyers on it. There was no evidence though, (the book and Jim's note was gone, never to resurface). Jim's lawyer never said anything direct, and refused to reveal any details from the will, but suggested strongly that Jim's wishes about the Yippers be honored. The producers had nothing to say to it.

"Yip yip yip yip Gaaaaaddhi Gaaaaaadhi. Uh huh- uh -huh. NONviolent Uh huh."

Two night later they closed the lot. Just being able to close the lot was a small miracle, things go on there all day, and lots of the Muppets nearly live there. You can never really empty it, but they came close. It was sealed off at 5PM, under the excuse of sewer work. Harry Monster and I were going home after stopping at a bar when we cut past the studio lot to save time. It was really late, but we were

both half curious about things. I was about to turn out of a side road onto the road in front when Harry just about screamed "STOP" at me and turned off my headlights in a flash of movement. I was about to ask him what his big problem was, and just saw him pointing.

A black van, no plates, pulled up to one side of the lot, and about 10 people, all wearing black piled out. A few entered the building, and a few started doing a low jog down the outside perimeter. They'd pause, every so often, and poke around. Once, a figure, like a dangling towel approached them. We just saw a dull pop of light, and could almost hear the "Thwip Thwip" of a silenced pistol in our heads. It was a text book "cleaning" service, and another unmarked black van collected them all at the opposite side of the lot.

The Yippers just weren't there the next day. I tried asking around quietly, but only got stony silence and sad looks. Veggie monster was having a really bad day, he could hardly speak and was only howling sobs when he could. Pretty apparent that asking was not a long term survival move.

Harry and I let Jim's lawyer know. He just got shook his head and poured us all scotch. What the hell were we going to do? Not much to be sure. Harry had one upside to it though. Might have been the beers he said, but he did see something floating off towards the sky that night. Maybe just a trash bag, but flying trash don't move against the prevailing wind, or carry a book with it.

A Nice Night for a Stroll - Reverend What's-His-Name

I was walking down Main Street as I like to do from time to time. It feels good to stretch one's legs. And I like to enjoy a well crafted cup of Joe, and they brew some mighty fine brew at Annie's Corner Diner. Indeed it was yet again the ultimate destination of this night's jaunt.

I entered the diner and sat at my usual stool. I ordered the joe with a slab of Annie's famous French Apple Pie. As I waited for my order, a gentleman came in

and sat a couple of stools over. It was someone I had not seen before. At least, I hadn't seen him in this particular establishment.

"The name is Don. Pleased to meet your acquaintance."

I proceeded to introduce myself.

"I heard the coffee here was good, and not too expensive. I don't have a lot on me right now and I really could use me some good Joe."

"It's pretty good." I said. "Don't put too much sugar in it though, it ruins the character."

"Is that what happened to this town?", he asked.

"I'm sorry."

"Did someone dump an assload of sugar on this town? Is that how it lost all of its character?"

"Maybe." I chuckled.

"I remember back in the day when this place had *real* character. It wasn't just a dot on a map. It was a destination. It was where you came to meet people. Interesting people. Not just some sack of meat filling up space. You'd meet the sort of person that left a mark on you. The sort of person you think of every now and again and wonder, "Where is that guy! What's he up to?" You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I think I do. I used to live in one of those places too. Had to leave it though. No work."

"Too right brother. That's what happened to this town. Local economy went to shit and everyone just up and left. Can't blame them. A family's got to eat. I'd have left too if I could have."

"Oh, you live here?" I asked. "Where?"

"Oh, it's just a little place I have nearby. A place with a great view of the river. I've lived there for quite a few years now. I've been hoping to upgrade and find a place that's a bit bigger. But, it does the trick for now."

"I understand. I know what you mean. I'm in that spot too. Where is your place?"

"On your way here did you happen to notice that old cobbler's shop on the corner of Main and Fifth?" he queried.

"Yeah, I think I remember it. It had a bunch of big cardboard boxes next to it." I recalled.

"That's the place. That's where I hang my hat these days."

"The old cobbler's shop? Really? That's cool."

"No." he replied. "I live in the boxes."

The rest of my time was spent in a cold, awkward silence. We both sipped on our coffee. I ordered him a slab of the pie to go along with the joe. He seemed to enjoy it. We then both quietly left and went our separate ways.

The moon was very bright in the crisp fall sky. Tomorrow should be pleasant too.

Ideas Storming the Gates - LMNO

Jack felt his knees pop as he knelt by the window. He figured he could jimmy the lock from the outside and they could make their way to the inner sections through the net of underground connections connecting the buildings together. As he eased the wire picks into the mechanism, he wondered if it were this easy to pick into someone's brain.

It could be easy. All you needed was to find a weak or fragile frame, and then just apply the right pressure in just the right place. Now that doesn't mean you can just shove it in; that's a direct way to a brain collapse; plus, if there's any kind of security, they'll come running in quick, and then you're fucked. No, what you wanted was a subtle slip, a knife's edge into the space. Something simple. Something they'll agree with. That's how you do it. Then, once you get inside, you can start to move around. Find other agreeable things. But the magic was, you

didn't even have to find things they agreed with. Once you were inside, no one ever noticed the damage you could do.

It was like people had this heavy security wall that only looked out. They were incredibly skeptical about what was on the outside; that was part of the inertia; it just kept on going, blasting down the outside ideas. Criticizing and shooting them down for any number of reasons, real or imagined. But if something got in, then it was like they had a backstage pass at the Republican National Convention: Never questioned, never accused, never doubted. You were home free. So, first thing, get in. From there, you can start spreading, like some horrifically welcomed cancer. And oh, the things you can do.

See, most people aren't aware of how fragile their own ideas really are. They flit about inside the compound, only bumping into their own kind, agreeing with themselves constantly, and when this goes on long enough, they think they're strong, and assured, and righteous. But what happens when someone gets inside without their noticing? Yeah. Those pretty butterflies of ideas can get clipped so easily. Just... turn them a little. One dark idea can be like a reverse lamp, all the pretty flitting things don't get drawn to it, they turn away, they turn themselves, they turn into, they begin to become like that dark idea. They reflect. Once the dark idea is in there, they start to push a little. And all the flitting ideas agree with each other, so somehow, they have to agree with the dark idea, no?

And here's where the dark rationalization comes in. The immense power of those damn frontal lobes can turn piss into wine. Anything can become anything else, if you just give it a little time and a push. That little idea, that tiny, fragile thing, it so wants to be included in the greater picture, it wants to be part of the whole. But it sees that strong, dark thought and idea, and that idea is nudging. Why not? Why not become part of a larger idea? There's some sense in what they're saying, after all, no reason you shouldn't go along with it.

And all the while, the perimeter guards stand silent. After all, their job is to fight off outside concepts. All the difficult "mental" stuff happens on the inside, their job is just to keep stuff out. There's not upper level thinking going on here. They can't tell the difference between an idea that they started with and one that was snuck in. So when all the beautiful Moon Moth thoughts become flopping vultures, they start giving orders. To the guards. Of course, the guards don't question anything coming from the inside, they only question what's on the outside, yeah? So, slowly but surely, the guards start guarding against what used to be on the inside, and they keep safe what they used to repel. And that's all there is to it. The outside comes in.

But that doesn't account for the subversion through immersion that happens so

often. You take a person who thinks one thing, and then you put them in an environment where every other person they talk to thinks the opposite. All day long, they're inundated with the same message; but not confrontational. A confrontation sets those guards up, and protects the flitting thoughts. No, the conversion by immersion happens when it's not even discussed. The constant opinion without rebuttal. It just lives in the environment. The guards, ordered to keep watch over differing opinions, eventually just accept it as part of the background noise. It becomes accepted as normal, and then it gets inside. And without even knowing it, you've become something other than you ever thought you could be.

So, with all of this, all of this mechanical, insidious, unthinking, unfeeling process, where so called "free thinking" people are forced to obey decades old rules they didn't even know they were signing up for, and don't even know how to change it, how the hell do you compete with something like that? By turning the guards around, and by pointing them inside your own head.

Instead of questioning every outside thought that you encountered, you need to question every thought you've ever had. Become a butterfly collector. Nail those fuckers to a board and study them. Where did your thoughts come from? What did you experience that caused you to think like that? And lastly, do you really agree with it, or after breaking it down, does it just not add up? When you start thinking like this, that what you are is a combination of your environment and the feedback loop you have with your environment.

Untitled: A (Hopefully) New Riff on an Old Theme - Epithemeus

Many years ago, in my youth, I had an encounter I have never been able to forget.

I was hiking around a local mountain. I heard a stream nearby and I broke with the trail to follow the sound. There, sitting at the stream, I saw him. He was sitting on a rock, hunched over, head in his hands. A linen garment hung over his body which, despite a large build, seemed weak, exhausted. Liver spots were visible on his exposed skin.

As he heard the crunching of the leaves under my approaching steps, he lifted his head and turned it with a painful slowness to look at me.

In his gaze and his ancient, drooping face I saw the weight of innumerable years. I saw pain, anguish, but also subtle vestiges of anger, and the potential for love. The complex labyrinth of wrinkles on his face seemed to belie a complex past, full of intense experience. For a moment I lost myself in his deeply sad expression; an expression I had never seen on anyone before. A teary redness filled his eyes. A

breeze flowed through the area, nudging his frail beard.

"Hello," he said with a voice that seemed to come up from the very earth itself.

Moved by the emotion in his voice and movements, I could bring myself to no more than a nod.

"It's a nice stream," he said, turning to look at it. "Water has always calmed me."

Once again my voice failed me and I nodded, even though he was looking away from me.

"Look," he said, and pointed. An orb of water formed from the stream and floated into the air, then stopped, hovering. Within the orb the water swam around and encircled itself. It was amazing.

"Oh my god," I said.

He forced a fraction of a smile against his sadness and chuckled.

"That's the kind of thing I should have done more often," he said, quietly, and his expression slowly turned back to one of grief. The orb succumbed to gravity and splashed against the ground.

His eyes lit up for a moment.

"People used to love me. I mean really love me. They used to *worship* me."

Hesitantly, I asked, "Who are you?"

He sighed, as once again the wind played with his beard.

"I used to be called Yahuwa," he said. "Different people called me different things, though. I've never had much of a preference for any particular title."

I remained silent, feeling awkward. I still didn't fully comprehend the figure before me. He leaned back, and the rock he sat on grew and changed form behind him to catch him.

"I was *king*," he said, sighing again. "I was judge, jury, and executioner. My word was their command."

Silence again, as he shifted his legs.

"But I went and ruined it all. Of course, I was young. New to the game, so to speak. I did a lot of stupid things. I was brash. Mean-tempered. Tyrannical. I destroyed a lot of lives. I may as well have been a war patron. Death himself was bothered by how many of his future clients I was removing from the world."

If the orb of water hadn't convinced me, now I truly began to realize who this person was, or at least who he was pretending to be.

There was a pause.

Dumbly, I ventured, "Um...are you-" I took a breath, and continued. "Are you God?"

Once again, a chuckle, and an almost imperceptible smile on his lips.

"Like I said, different people called me different things. But, singular God? Timeless, endless, omni-everything God? No. You have to understand, a long time ago there were many gods. ...Well, they're still around, but they're like me: tired, lonely, weak. We are nothing without our people."

Suddenly something clicked and I realized: Yahuwa. Yahweh. Jehovah. I felt a little braver.

"You mean to tell me you are the ancient Middle-Eastern god? Yahweh?" I asked, to make sure.

His peaceful smile grew slightly.

"Yahuwa. But yes."

My mind was washed over with a mix of awe, disbelief, and confusion. The most popular god on the planet was telling me he has lost his people.

"But your people are all around the world!" I said, louder than I meant to.

He looked at me again, pitifully. "Is that so?" he asked.

"Yes! Your followers are the largest following on the planet, of any deity, ever!" I said even louder.

He put out a hand in a calm-down gesture, and instantly I was filled with a feeling

of peace, and my stressful confusion was indeed calmed down. I sat on a fallen tree next to me.

"I am worshipped by none," he said.

Still indignant, I stifled my urge to argue. Knowingly, he smiled.

"From your books you know the stories of the destructive and vengeful god who rained fury on Sodom and Gomorrah, the god who tortured poor Job as part of a bet, the god who flooded the world. The god who spoke the words, 'I am a jealous god.'"

I grunted to confirm this.

"That was, indeed, me." he said, his face returning to sadness. "I was, I know, hateful. Horrible. But I was worshipped, and that was all I cared about."

He took a slow breath.

"I ruled for many, many years. Eventually, though, the other gods of the area began talking. I was getting older, and they thought I was getting softer. They thought I couldn't hear their gossiping mutters - but then, none of them had the powers I did.

"There was even that boy - the one they all talk about now, the one I-" he paused, "concieved with a mortal woman. My son, technically, yes. But many gods were doing such things with mortals, and I was arrogant enough to do it as well. That, of course, would spell my undoing.

"You see, the boy - my son - became aware that he was my son. He taught many people about me. But he told lies. Of course, he didn't know what he was doing, and I am not angry, now, as I was then.

"People began to believe in another god - one of love, one of forgiveness, one that transcended all human pettiness. As they began to believe in the new god, I began to get weaker. I could feel it, too. It was terrible, and my rage made it all the more terrible.

"Oh, I tried to stop it. I tried to destroy the boy at every chance I got. My debilitation was rapidly worsening, though, and every shot I took missed. I would bribe soldiers and government to take him captive, but every time he was finally arrested my attack would hit the soldiers and not the boy.

"My reign was coming to a close. I'm not sure when I finally accepted it, but in my last desperate throes, I made one last attempt on his life, bribing the Romans once more. This time, being humbled by failure, I stayed out of the actual killing.

"As you know, it worked. It was over for him. The irony is that it was over for me, too."

He sighed, and a wind whipped through the trees.

"Other wrathful, destructive gods of the area eventually lost their power, too. Now, we're almost all just old men like me, able to do little more than lift water into the air."

I watched him, awestruck and humbled.

"I had a good run, though," he said, and smiled. A tear fell from his tired eyes. "We all had a good run."

He wiped his tears, and looked at me with gratitude. "Thank you for listening."

I smiled back.

We sat for a minute in quietude, listening to the stream and the songs of birds.

At some point, I don't know when exactly, he was no longer there. All I know is that I looked and he was gone. In his place was a rock formation, with vague erosions on the flat front that might, with scrutiny, resemble an ancient, sad, smiling face.

After a few minutes of walking around the rock, hoping to somehow bring back the man that was there, I sighed and shook my head, unsure of the thing I had just witnessed. I patted the sad rock as if it were a friend, and went back to the trail.

Charon to Pluto - Nigel

He is water, he is agate,
he is sorrow, he is bone.
He is the smell of rain
falling on dry earth, he
is the sound of the ocean
when the water is still.
Between his shoulder and
his thigh is everything
the tides respond to, and
the curve of his lower lip
is all the song sirens need
to lure sailors to disaster.
He is the sigh that rises
from the shaded canyon,
he is the sweet heavy light
of dusk in early summer.
It is his melancholy which
cools the air of caverns,
and when he turns in his
sleep the seabottom stirs.
In his eyes is the gravity
of Jupiter; when Io dreams,
it is his body she orbits.
Like Charon to Pluto, he is
impossible, and like the

dangerous wilderness he
is beautiful, beautiful.

The Pathetic Life of Oxo Marx - Baron Von Hoopla

Oxo Marx awoke on a Monday morning with a large blemish on his left cheek. He felt it the moment his eyes opened; the muscles moving to let light into his brain sent a sharp, fierce pain throughout his face, and he let out a small sound:
-Gahaaa.

Sitting up, within his sheets, he sought it out with his fingertips, delicately feeling out the soft flesh below his eye like a blindman might. When he touched the pimple another shockwave of pain fluttered through his face, causing his eyes to blink a few times without his permission. A tear rose to attention in his left eye, but didn't have the heart to jump.

-Goddammit, Oxo hissed through clenched teeth. -A pimple. A fucking pimple.

He was angry not only because it was Monday, a day he routinely loathed, but also because he was meant to have his first date with Priscilla later than evening. He had bought tickets for the circus. He didn't know if Priscilla liked the circus anymore, but she had been an elephant rider for years, and then quit one summer day to become a dental hygienist. Just like that. He hoped she still liked the circus. He hoped she wouldn't notice his pimple.

The pimple, not his pimple. He wasn't going to think of it as his, he had nothing to do with it, apart from the fact that it had decided to nest on his face.

-Goddammit, he hissed again, and got out of bed.

As he walked to the bathroom to survey the damage, he let out a fantastically long and loud fart. Feeling slightly better, he faced his reflection in the mirror. It was

worse than he thought. The pimple was about the size of a quarter, red, pulsating, a drop of pus just starting to ooze from the head. 'A decidedly ugly pimple', he thought to himself. He laughed then. -As if there's an attractive pimple. he said to himself.

It was then that the pimple spoke.

YOU'RE NOT SO HOT YERSELF, YA KNOW. it said. He believed he even saw the pore open and close slightly as it spoke. The movement was painful, and uninvited. It was, to be quite frank, insulting. He was not used to being addressed by blemishes, and chose to ignore the remark.

Oxo turned on the water in the shower, and when it had reached the desired temperature, he stepped inside. The water smacked the pimple immediately, jolting him again, and Oxo turned his back to the hot stream. He cursed slightly under his breath, and the pimple throbbed. He felt it was gearing up to speak again, or had he imagined that? No blemish had ever spoken to him before, and he had never heard of a blemish speaking to anyone else. He had just gotten out of bed, after all, perhaps its the was the remains of a dream. A hypnogogic hallucination ... or hypnopompic maybe, he could never remember which was which.

As he stood in the shower, feebly washing his chest with a sudsy rag, he went over what he had heard the pimple say. "You're not so hot yourself, you know." it had said. He washed the back of his neck. He knew he wasn't the best looking guy in the world, that's precisely why getting the pimple in the first place had angered him so much. He really didn't need the pimple to point it out to him. He washed his left arm. Oxo had never been particularly attractive, in fact he still harboured the memory of a girl on the bus telling him point blank "You're ugly" when he was fifteen. He hated that memory. He hated the memory, and hated that he remembered it so vividly, when he had forgotten so many other memories. He wasn't certain if the memories he had forgotten were good ones or bad ones, since he had forgotten them, but he secretly always assumed they were good ones. It would be just like him to only remember bad memories. He washed his genitals. The thing about that memory that bothered him most was what he had ended up responding at the time. He didn't like to think about it. Oxo washed the crack of his ass. Witty comebacks had never been his strong suit, nor had quick thinking on his feet. When she had told him he was ugly he hadn't known what to say, he was so blown away by the sheer naked honesty of the comment. He responded, quietly, "I know." and quickly taken a seat, his ears and neck turning red, and burning hot. Oxo washed the back of his neck again.

He thought of the memory again, saw the girl's face, her casual indifference, and started to become angry again, after fifteen years. He would love to meet the girl

again. He would love to see her on the street, or on the bus, and have something to say back to her. Oxo was mindlessly running the rag back and forth across his chest now. He imagined bumping into her on the street and saying "Oh I remember you, you're the girl who said I was ugly. Well, did I mention that you have bad breath?" No no no.

He slapped the sudsy rag down to the bathtub. What a terrible retort. Even after fifteen years he couldn't think of anything good to say back to her. Say something hurtful, something that would make her think about the comment later, much later. Maybe for the rest of her life. Tell her that she has fat thighs or that she has . . . he paused, remembering. It occurred to Oxo that he couldn't actually remember the girl's face anymore, he could only remember his memory of it. She had blonde hair and blue eyeshadow, that much he knew, but would he be able to recognize her on the street if he saw her now? He didn't think so.

Oxo turned the water off, and stood dripping. He was going to be damned if he would spend another fifteen years wondering if he could have responded more appropriately to his pimple. Without drying, he stepped out of the bathtub and faced the mirror. He wiped away the fog that steam had left on the surface and looked at the pimple. It still throbbed.

-Say something, smartass. he said to it. It throbbed on, but made no reply. He looked down at it, another single drop of pus starting to ooze out of the head.
-C'mon smart guy. Say something smart. I dare you.

The pus dribbled out of the head, but still no reply was forthcoming.

Oxo leaned in, toward the mirror, almost pressing his face against the reflection.
-Say something you little fuck, I know you want to ... come on!

And then the pimple spoke again. The pore opened and closed as it said YOU'RE UGLY. then began to giggle.

Oxo stared at it, dumbstruck. He had expected it to repeat its original comment. Standing there, still dripping wet and nude, Oxo began to shake with rage. Again! Again with that comment, and now from a pimple. A fucking pimple. That was the last straw.

He was getting rid of the pimple. The pimple was going to be gone, that's all there was to it. One way or another.

Oxo stalked off into his apartment, slammed open a closet, and began to rummage through a box in the bottom. He thought he could hear the pimple ask what he was

doing, but kept lifting objects up, feeling beneath them and then dropping them back down and moving on. Finally, his finger tips found what he was looking for.

Oxo Marx pulled out his father's saw. -HA! he cried out in triumph. He walked into the kitchen, took out the cutting board he had never used, and placed it onto the counter. He turned his head, laid it onto the cutting board, and began to saw at his neck in long quick strokes. In three full slices his head came off from the stump and rolled into his sink.

In this way, the problem was solved.

THE FUNERAL OF OXO MARX

Oxo Marx's funeral was a small, sad affair, attended only by his mother, who was blind, deaf, dumb and not very good at crossword puzzles; his sister Oxa, who was on an oxygen mask, not because she needed it, but because she thought it was hip; his almost girlfriend Priscilla, who was now considering returning to the circus; his landlord, Willy Man, who had found the self-beheaded Oxo and considered him a pretty good tenant; and a mysterious woman in black, whose face was obscured by a thick veil.

The funeral was lead by Reverend Ricardo, who Oxo's mother trusted with her life, and most of her savings. His speech was short, and to the point.

"Let's be honest, people. Oxo wasn't an overly popular man. And, for good reasons. His breath was rank, his teeth had a fuzzy film, he made objectional comments on a routine basis, and besides all that he never liked reality tv. There were many things wrong with Oxo, and the world is probably better off without him. He beheaded himself, which to my knowledge has never been done before, this is itself an accomplishment, and probably his only one, so let us savour it. Uh . . . yeah, that's about it I suppose. Does anyone want to say a few words?"

Oxo's sister Oxa raised her hand wearily. Reverend Ricardo stood aside as she staggered to the podium, and took three minutes to arrange her oxygen mask perfectly. Then, she cleared her throat, leaned down to the microphone and said: "Phlegm. Formica. Saliva. Bochi. Wang Doodle. Syphon. Thank you. These are. Just some words. I like to say. Thank you."

Oxa shuffled back to her seat and noisily rearranged her oxygen mask.

There was some awkward silence before Reverend Ricardo made his way back to the podium. Just before he spoke for the final time he turned away and took a nip from his flask. "Well," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I guess that's it. It actually took longer than I expected. Who wants to get drunk?"

The mourners wandered away from the grave, except for the mysterious woman in black, who lingered by the grave stone until the cemetery was empty, then she leaned down and whispered to the stone: "I just like to go to funerals."

Then she walked away, went home, and ate some white toast.

Elegy for an assassinated disney character - Sepia

He looked like a kind man, in the stills. He looked like a man that knew something and he knew it would fall silent as he fell in his grave. His eyes looked kind but they had the crooked nose, the towel, the beard and the tone of his skin. His eyes should have been beady and he shouldn't have slept enough but it's okay though because apparently he tried to use his wife for a shield but I wonder how many wives he had. The tragedy of it isn't the assassination of it. It might spark possibilities for instating more western-friendly policies and now with all the uprisings, the war on qadaffi. This isn't a tragedy because they know what they're getting into and are they already planning how to benefit from the next act of terror? Do these men exist at all or did I watch too much x files when I was wee?

The tragedy is that it makes everyone american for one day or rather, everyone becomes what they think an american is. It reminded me of a Jello Biafra line, people we know who should know better howl america rules lets go to war except these people aren't american, most probably haven't been in america, all of them have a great grandfather that went there and the events beginning with nine eleven and then unfolding for the next ten years is as real to them as boardwalk empire and I try to understand this desire they have to cheer for their country for I find it most archaic. Space we have conquered on this little globe but not yet time and it doesn't really matter what age we are in, bin laden could have been crucified and would that also become a religion that would swallow up the west?

The only outcome of this is a sensation of vengeance fulfilled in those who desire to feel it and a symbol of all those who will die in his name. Who has the strongest god is the question it will amount to for it will be sold as a crusade because crusades always work, if all goes to shit atleast you had good intentions as you went hellward, with england in your heart as you conquered jerusalem and we are still here, it is still a holy war but it's grown so much bigger and we've all grown more afraid and I feel I will see my streets littered with more americans play pretending, celebrating more terror. Here is the crusade, here are seven knights sent to kill a heretic but they bury him unmarked in the sand, facing his maker and now his destroyer before

Me? I'm waiting for the creation of a police state and while your cctvs will be british, your new privately owned security forces will be let lose, anonymous men in

blackwater uniforms and if Philip K Dick saw this he'd say something about the empire and if William Burroughs saw this he'd mutter words about interzone and when George Orwell saw it he laughed and drank and when Aldous Huxley saw it he'd point to his Revisited and smile a knowing smile and when I went to school we learned that those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it and as I gaze around me and see these men and women around me I feel completely alien and it's like an acid trip or a heavy comeup on e, everything is blurred and distorted feeling heavy through the hot mud everything is breaking up

going bad

The Fail Whale Apocalypse - Rev.

DiscoUkulele

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang
but a tweet.*

Part One: Touch The Sky

<< **JackieNYC** lol #kanyewest is such a tool. Have U seen Power? Delusional!!

1 hour ago

<< **MistahDJ** yall b hatin. Go @kanyewest!! voice of a generation

57 minutes ago

<< **PartyDiscoPop** @JackieNYC lololol #gayfish #kanyewest

6 minutes ago

<< **BoopBopBeep** Imma let ya'll finish, but I'm God incarnate. Word. (made flesh). #kanyewest

2 minutes ago

With two clinched fists, he slammed his laptop shut. The small, white Apple logo on top continued to glow ominously, a reminder of the hoards of Tweeters across the globe still firing messages back and forth. He could disconnect himself, but the chatter would still continue. Day and night. Talkin' shit as always. They just found a better medium. He reached for the small glass of scotch on the tray table before him, took a sip, and allowed himself to melt into his cozy, leather first class seat. Once he was up in the sky beyond the reach of telephone wires and 4G signals, he'd be free. He could hide out in the clouds for a few hours while those worthless haters continued to fire electronic signals back and forth across the invisible Network below. Maybe by the time he landed, Britney would have flashed her vag again and pulled the spotlight off of him for a few news cycles.

"But you love the spotlight, don't you?"

He turned to his right. Some white bitch was sitting in the seat next to him.

He'd deliberately bought tickets for both seats so he could sit alone. But the anger quickly faded. There was something about the woman beside him that felt strangely okay, and comfortable. Maybe it was her deep, teasing cleavage, or the way her sparkling, blond hair fell softly beside a devilish, playful grin.

Spellbound, he managed to mutter "...I-I'm K-"

"Kayne." She finished for him before she took a sip of her appletini and set it back in her lap. "Yes, I know. I'm a big fan."

Part Two: Graduation

"You can't stop reading the tweets, can you?"

His companion was beginning to get tipsy. It was obvious. Nevertheless, she ordered herself another appletini, pointed to Kanye with a wry grin splashed across her face, and told the flight attendant "Oh, he'll pay."

He slid his tongue across his diamond teeth, thinking of a proper response. Sure, this crazy bitch had plopped herself down beside him, without asking, and had ordered several drinks on his tab. But for some reason, he couldn't get mad at her. She had a nice energy around her. And she... listened.

"Down there, in all those shit cities below us, people gab about you nonstop. 'George Bush doesn't like black people', ruining young girls' moments in the spotlight... it's not like you don't give them ammunition, darling."

"Listen, bit—"

"I just love Twitter, don't you?" She waved him off with a flick of her wrist, and sipped down a large gulp of her new appletini. "It's so remarkable that people have finally uncovered the keys to the Tower of Babel." Suddenly, she seemed contemplative, running her finger delicately along the rim of her glass.

She took another sip.

Was this bitch high?

"The Tower of Babel, darling," she started, noticing the dazed expression on his face. "You know the story, Man tried to build a tower to the Heavens, so that he could take his place alongside God. But God wasn't having any of that, so he locked up the tower and scattered people all across the globe."

"And he fucked up their language, too, right?"

She nodded, "Mmm-hmm." Then she flashed that teasing grin. "And why do you think that was, dear?"

Kanye thought for a moment. He opened his mouth to give the answer he'd heard in Sunday school as a kid, but stopped himself. Was she using this story to attack him? He couldn't help but be a bit defensive. Nah, he thought. He'd humor her with the answer, and if she turned it against him, he'd knock her back down to her place.

"Because Man was trying to be God."

She laughed. He felt oddly relieved.

"No, no, darling. That's not it at all. Well, I guess that's partly it. Sure, Man was trying to be God, but the whole problem was that Man wasn't ready yet. He needed to stay in the oven a few more centuries first. So God brought Man back to square one until He's ready again."

"Man wasn't ready yet?" he interrupted. His eyes flashed. "That seems a bit blasphemous."

She laughed again. "It's logical. Look." She set her drink down on her tray table before continuing.

"Unless you're some holy-rolling Bible-thumper, you've got to realize that the universe is constantly evolving, right? At one point, the entire universe existed in a tiny, tiny little particle. But that's probably not even the right description. Scientists say that it must have been infinitely smaller than a particle. And then, WHOOSH!"

She threw her hands up in the air. Kanye's muscles clinched. God, hopefully no

one's paying attention to this...

"In one single moment, the universe expanded from that single point. And then, for millions of years, the Earth was a desolate little rock floating in space. Until the next Big Bang."

"The next Big Bang?" He arched his brow, and raised his scotch to his lips.

The glass pinged as it knocked against his diamond teeth.

"Yeah, the next big bang. All of a sudden, the conditions were right for life, and consciousness was born. Suddenly, the universe had produced something from within itself that was capable of being aware of the Universe. The Universe had given birth to a set of eyes to explore itself. Some philosophers like to think that the Universe and the Eyes must have developed simultaneously. After all, can a Universe exist without any Eyes to look at it?"

He stared at her blankly, confused. He looked down at his laptop. The apple still glowed faintly. "I guess... that makes sense. That's deep."

"That's not the half of it." She winked. "So, as life continued, it got more and more complex. Amoeba, bacteria, fish, whales, lizards, birds, monkeys, and finally..." She leaned forward to give this last bit a dramatic punch. "Man. With the evolution of Man, things reached the next level. Suddenly, the Universe had Eyes with which to experience Itself, and these Eyes evolved to the point where they realized that they were Eyes. The Eyes became Self-Aware, to some extent. But unfortunately, they weren't completely aware."

The flight attendant interrupted to bring them dinner. Steaks with mixed veggies and crispy Pinot Grigio. She waited for the flight attendant to move on before continuing, as if she were sharing an occult secret.

"The Eyes aren't completely aware. They realize that they're Eyes, but they're trapped inside their little Eye thoughts. They build themselves religions, and philosophies, and distract themselves with cell phones and television so that they never get around to realizing how deeply connected they are with the rest of the Universe. Hell, for all I know, the Eyes and their Awareness could BE the Universe." Kanye's head was throbbing. He let out an exaggerated sigh to signal that he wanted to know where this was going.

"Okay, okay" she swirled her wine, sniffed, and drank. "I'll try to wrap this up for you. Man tried to build a Tower to the Heavens in order to become God.

But Man wasn't ready. He couldn't pass the final test because He was still operating under his little delusional Eye thoughts that he was somehow separate from God and separate from the millions of other Eyes in existence. After all, if you're building a physical Tower, you can't help but be aware of the physical boundaries between your body and the other builders' bodies. And during your lunch break, you can't help but get into arguments about whether

there's a God or not, and whether he's Jehovah, or Gaia, or Allah. So what Man needs to reach the Heavens, to get to that next stage in evolution, is to get past physical boundaries between individual points of consciousness. To engage in a dialogue on some incorporeal, psychic level."

She paused. "What would you call a collective, incorporeal Awareness that stretched all over the Earth?"

"A god?" he shrugged. Does this bitch ever stop talking?

"Exactly. You'd call it a god."

He chugged the rest of his wine, and gave her a curious glance. "What are you, some kind of Neo-Pagan?"

"No", she grinned. "I'm a Tweeter. And Twitter is the key to the Tower of Babel."

Part Three: Power

"So let me get this straight," Kanye paused to finish the last bite of his steak.

"Everything in the Universe is an Eye experiencing the Universe, and the Eyes could also be the Universe itself?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"And the Eyes are evolving through higher and higher levels of Awareness, and the next level of Awareness is on the other side of the Tower of Babel?"

"That's right."

"And... Twitter is the Key to the Tower of Babel?"

"Exactly," she patted her lips with a Wet Nap. "So what's the problem?"

"That doesn't make any sense. Evolution is relying on Twitter? A website that some neckbeard basement-dweller made up?"

"Well, not really." She reclined back in her chair and clasped her hands on her solar plexus. "There's lots of other keys. Kundalini yoga, meditation, prayer, LSD...

there's lots of ways that individual people can enter the Tower. But it won't work unless most of Mankind goes in. Man has tried to do mass entrances through different religions, but those always seem to just cause conflict or lock people even deeper into their Eye thoughts. But with Twitter, you can easily link most of Man's individual sparks of consciousness into one mass network. Then, with a little conscious intention, you could send out a meme to nudge the whole

network into the right direction. Just look at flashmobs. Send out a message to a bunch of people to do something silly, convince them it'll be fun, and they'll do it."

"So, what? You just make up a joke, get enough people to laugh and pass it on, and we'll evolve?"

She rolled her eyes. "No, no. You've got to convince people to wake up. Send out a message to make them realize they're just little dreaming Eyes. I think that should do the trick. Get most of the people on the Network to believe it, and you're good. Besides, by my calculations, it shouldn't take too much more time."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you ever heard of the 100th monkey? See, apparently, a bunch of monkeys on this island got the idea to eat their food one certain way. As soon as the 100th monkey learned how to eat that way, there was a total shift in the collective monkey consciousness so that all of the monkeys started eating that way. When enough people become aware, strange shit happens. Maybe if just enough people

woke up, the entire balance would shift and everyone would suddenly become self-aware. Then the Tower of Babel would open up."

"But what happens then?"

"I don't remember." She frowned.

"You don't remember? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well," she shifted in her seat, "The Universe is bubbling with infinite possibilities, wouldn't you agree? So who's to say we haven't been through this before? Maybe the Universe has expanded from that little particle, become aware of itself, and then collapsed back into the particle an infinite number of times already. I'd say, if we're dealing with infinite possibilities, then at some point, it's got to be true. We've been through all of this before, and any day now, we'll all reach the breaking point of self-awareness, and crumble back to the start again. Who knows, maybe you're the 100th Man. If you become self-aware, maybe that could be the tipping point."

"This is really tripping me out..." He signaled for the flight attendant and ordered another scotch. "...How would I become self-aware, if I wanted to?"

She smiled, reached below her seat, fumbled with her bag, and pull out a stack of papers. "Maybe Twitter's process of causing mass self-awareness has already started. Maybe you're the only person holding the process back. You've seen these, right? #kanyenewyorkertweets? Members of Twitter have been pasting your tweets onto cartoons from the New Yorker"

He laughed. "Oh yeah, shit's funny."

"Yes," she began, "Shit is funny. But you're not in on the joke. Not really."

Kanye arched a brow.

"You see, they're laughing at you. The entire Twitterverse is laughing at you"

His eyes flashed as he snapped his body around to face her. "Excuse me? What the fuck!?"

She giggled lightheartedly. "The joke's on you. And once you realize that the joke is on you, that's it."

His eyes were wild, "What the fuck, who are you with? TMZ?"

She laughed again. "The entire universe is laughing at you. The entire universe is laughing at itself. Once you realize that the joke's on you, you can finally be aware of the joke and laugh with us. Maybe Twitter consciously produced this meme just for you, just to cause you to become self-aware and tip the scale towards enlightenment."

Kanye fell silent and seeped in his rage until he finally responded, "Okay, so, I've listened to your entire rambling sermon. And you're telling me that the minute I realize that the world is laughing at me, or that the entire universe is laughing at itself, including me, I'll attain self-awareness, and possibly cause the world to collapse on itself?"

"That about sums it up, Darling."

"I've got to piss."

He stood up, crawled over her, and made his way down the aisle to the bathroom. He locked the door behind him, and splashed some water on his face.

What if that bitch was right? What if the entire Universe existed only because of he was aware of it? What if it existed only in his own mind? What if his whole life was a complete joke and he was the only person who didn't realize it?

Then, without warning, he snickered.

"The joke's on me."

He looked up into the mirror. His reflection revealed a glittering, toothy smile.

"The joke's on me."

His snickering grew louder, and more intense. He let loose and broke down into a fit of maniacal laughter. "The joke's..." he could barely breathe, "on me."

Kanye lost his shit.

And the Universe lost its shit. Right there, in the bathroom, at 14,000 feet.

Rules for Life - Cain

Because I am a font of wisdom and experience compared to some of you whipper-snappers here:

Being Able To Look It Up Isn't A Substitute For Thinking

Data you don't know about and haven't internalised can't really be used for thinking, only for reference. The internet only makes you capable of finding things out, not what is worth knowing. Once you know something, you can use it, form connections with other pieces of knowledge you have. Therefore you should try and learn as much as possible, and not rely on being able to find information when you need it.

Attempts To Impose Order Increase Disorder

The Aneristic Delusion. Micro-managing or coercing people just causes them to

rebel against you in covert and harder to detect ways, which then require more resources to deal with than whatever the original problem was. Enough said.

Knowing And Explaining Are Synonymous

If you can't explain something, you don't understand it, and if you don't understand it, then you don't know it.

Anything That Can Aid You Can Also Harm You

Every extra thing you rely on in your life to achieve your goals can be turned against you, or used in a way it was not originally intended. The more things you rely on, the more open to attack you become.

Rewards and Punishment

When studying any system, law, group or process, ask yourself what behaviour is rewarded and what behaviour is punished. Once you know how that system incentivizes people, you not only know how it works, but also how to manipulate or disrupt it, if you want. Also consider this if you are ever in the position where you have to create a system or law or anything similar.

Arguing Rarely Persuades People

More often than not, if you argue with someone, they will become more set in their ways and more stubborn, less open to criticism. If you have to convince someone, use examples, not words.

Human Nature Doesn't Change

Any argument which implies this should be immediately dismissed. Conversely, what constitutes human nature is often wider than what many people suppose. Remember to take into account various other cultures and groups throughout history, to fully understand what is meant by this term.

Black Swans Are Rare

Real discontinuities in history or day to day life do not often occur. The ipod is a better cd player is a better walkman. The "communication revolution" of the 90s just speeded up processes that had been going on for decades, if not centuries. Things usually change by degrees and slow accumulation over time. When someone declares a change as revolutionary or life-changing, it is normally a sales pitch or attempt to obscure the past, or both.

There Is No Such Thing As A Free Lunch

Everything has a cost, in time, effort, money or some other fashion. If something is free, then a scam is in effect, probably with you as the mark.

Smartness Just Means You Have Better Excuses

If you twist logic into loops to "prove" your point, then you are wrong. Smart people can make you believe anything, given enough data to manipulate. This is the Law of Fives in effect in the real world, smart people are very, very good at seeing what they want to see, and sometimes at making others see the same thing. People like this are not to be trusted.

Hard And Complicated Are Not The Same

Climbing a canyon is hard work. But it is simple. You just walk until you are out. Conversely, building Lego models is easy, since all you are doing is clipping certain blocks together, but complicated. Especially some of the larger sets. Whenever someone tells you something is complicated, check to see if they mean it is hard or not. The same if they tell you something is easy. For instance, solving public debt is not complicated, but it can be hard as hell, since you either have to raise taxes, or lower spending.

Always Attack The Base Of Something

When dealing with people, attempt to either strike at the root of their power or their root motivation for conflict. Rendering them either powerless or without a reason to fight saves time and is a lot easier than fighting through attrition.

Accept What Is Obvious

People are not rational. Invading foreign countries will cause death of innocent people, resentment and hatred. The stock market has nothing to do with how most people live their lives. People who die for their beliefs are not cowards. You cannot declare an entire race or religion has certain innate characteristics. There is no such thing as perfect security. Popular does not equal good. Oil will eventually run out. If you cannot even accept the obvious, then when you try to understand what is complicated, you will fail.

Bureacracy Is The Same Wherever You Go

One of the more strange beliefs of the modern era is that while a government

bureacracy will automatically fail and inflate costs when it attempts to do something, a corporate bureacracy will somehow succeed, despite both having the same hierarchical model. Because both corporations and governments are structures designed to accumulate and direct power, they devote massive resources to centralization and control of access, which, because of the Aneristic Delusion, quickly becomes an unmanageable mess. Both only survive through increased taxation of the general public, which can offset the increasing costs of controlling and managing data, access and use of power (directly in the case of government, through "contracts" in the case of corporations).

Ideas Are Tools

No theory accounts for everything. Fit the tool for the job in front of you. Want to understand state versus state conflict? Read up on Realism. By contrast, if you want to understand civil wars, sociology and constructivism might fit better. Marxism is great for understanding how means of production and class interact, but not so hot on root causes of terrorism. Decontructionism in literary theory is cool, though not so good when it comes to hard sciences. Memetics is great for the viral spread of ideas, crap at understanding the current financial crisis. Anyone who is merely a Feminist or a Jungian Psychoanalyst or a Post-Modernist is an idiot, a one trick pony.

Never Trust A Liar

Lying here is not the same as making a mistake. If someone goes out of their way to mislead you in order to get you to do something, then you should never trust them again when they try and convince you about anything.

Read The Shortest Book

Getting to grips with a new area of inquiry? By all means avoid the classic texts, the materials which the discipline is based on. Instead, read the shortest thing you can find on it. So if you want to understand Nietzsche, read Iconoclasm For Dummies instead of The Will To Power. For Existentialism, read A Very Short Introduction To Existentialism, not Being and Nothingness. Any good short text has to cut out all the extraneous information and deal with the core of the subject. It also acts as a building block so you can later understand the bigger and more complex works. If you have to revise your thinking on the subject later, well, at least you have something to start with.

Putting A Gun To Their Head Won't Get You The Truth

Communication is only possible between equals. Threatening, coercing or

otherwise attempting to force someone to give up information will not work for precisely this reason. The only way someone higher up in the hierarchy (social, organizational or otherwise) can get the truth out of someone from lower down is by treating them as an equal and not shooting the messenger.

This Crisis Is Bullshit

Most crisis' are manufactured problems which will sort themselves out with minor adjustments and clear thinking. Whenever someone tries to sell you that there is a crisis, they want you reacting instead of thinking. And usually they want to get you into a panic so they can then sell you their own cure to the problem. Sometimes of course, the crisis is real, but not that often.

Hot Avatar Equals Ugly Girl

Also known as the TGRR Rule. On the internet, any female with an attractive avatar will likely be compensating, unless it is a picture of herself. The latter is very rare though, for obvious reasons.

Never Play Games Of Chance Against Someone Called "Doc"

Or mathematicians. They'll take the shirt off your back if you let them.

The Bastards Let Me Go Today (Harry gets mad) - Dr Howl

Yeah, gimme the usual.

Oh, wait. You're new, here. What happened to Stan?

Oh.

Ron? Pleased to meet you. My name's Harry, and what happened to Stan, happened to me. Whiskey, please.

No, I was a millwright. I built things. For 22 years, I built things. Then I got sick, and they sacked me. Tossed me right out, wouldn't even let me clean my own workbench out. Now they say I owe THEM money, because the time I missed on account of my cancer made them fall behind on a project. The bastards.

What? Oh, yeah, they can do that shit now. They can do anything they want, and if you don't like it, you can sue them. Know how much a lawyer costs, these days? It'd drag through the courts for a few years, and even if I won, the legal fees would eat it all.

Hit me again. Make it a double.

You know, time was, you took care of your job, the company took care of you. Of course, that was back in the day, long before your time.

What? Wow. That's a callous attitude you have there, kid. Let me ask you a

personal question? How much do you make?

Really? Stan had been here for 15 years, and he was making twice what you make, and he never once skimmed the till. What do you suppose is going to happen to you after you get a few raises? Happens all the time in the service sector. My wife's best friend was a gas station clerk for 12 years, and they found some reason to can her. The real reason, of course, is that she was making way over minimum wage by that point, and it's not brain surgery. They canned her and hired a kid to work for half of her rate, just like they did to Stan.

Oh, you're one of those "free market" guys, then? Let me ask you something, kid: What the hell is the point of a society if it doesn't benefit its members? Why have a free market if it means that 10% get everything, and 90% get shat on?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, you'll be rich one day, kid. Of course you will. Haha! All you kids are going to be rich. You even going to college? Yeah? What's your major?

That's what I thought, you little punk. You'll be slinging booze until they do to you what they did to Stan.

Fuck this drink. It tastes like the future. You know what that tastes like? Here, try it.

Fuck you, call the cops. I'm outa here. I'll find a loser bar with a better class of losers.

Two Untitled Poems - Nigel

Six chickens and one blind dog.
Goddamn. I go outside and I call
"Chook chook chook chook chook chook"
and six chickens come running
but one blind dog, he just stands there.

I could smell you a block away,
you whore; your bloom upspread
in the fading rouge of evening
for every passer-by to view
shameless pink ruffled panties.
You'd drop your petals into any hand
that came along, promiscuous rose.

The Parable of Dog - Dimo

Dog, for the most part, liked his life. Master fed him, and he had a decent enough yard, with just enough space to play and poop.

Dog, however, was curious and intelligent, and it wasn't so long before he realized the fence. Dog became obsessed with everything that happened on the other side of it. "Where is that car going? What's that smell? Far more exciting things happen out there, on the other side of this fence!" And soon, Dog began planning an escape.

Over the course of the next five nights, Dog endeavored to dig a hole, clear underneath the fence to the other side. To the land of freedom and opportunity.

On the morning after the fifth night, Dog escaped. Upon exiting his tunnel, Dog noticed a stray canine, intently observing a butterfly.

"Ho, there!" Dog called to the stray, "Don't you realize that you are free? Why aren't you running and playing, pooping and peeing on everything you see?"

The stray looked up at Dog and smiled. He said nothing, sniffed the grass a bit, and continued to regard the butterfly.

"Well, if *you* want to waste it, that's fine with me! I'm going to play and play, forever, without restriction! So long!" and Dog took off running.

With unrestrained glee, Dog took off running into the world, wild. His tongue slung out, flapping flagellantly. "The sights! The smells! Look! I am my own!" and he ran and ran...

...Right into traffic and got hit by a Greyhound.

Untitled 1 - ThatGreenGentleman

Long ago, perhaps so long ago that no one would remember, there was a man who built a house for his wife. The man himself was plain and ordinary, but he was too kind for his own good. His wife was gorgeous and charismatic, but was cruel and had a heart of coal. She was known as someone who used to enjoy the best food, but now enjoyed the most gruesome dishes imaginable. When he finished building her house she ordered him to hire a cook, and he complied. So a chef was hired, but he made food that she didn't desire. She told him she wanted something that no one could possibly stomach eating, he didn't quite get it, so she gave him a hint. His eyes widened with fear and disgust, and she merely said, "Well? Go make me some food." And slowly, the village people began to go missing, one by one. The husband couldn't bear to let his wife do such a thing, but he knew he was powerless, especially when his legs "disappeared". There was only one thing the husband could do.

The wife eventually ate the chef, and the servants, and the villagers who hadn't left town. The only people left were her, and her husband. So, the wife began to look for her husband in their large house, but he was nowhere to be found. She happened to pass by a window and saw him. He pouring a liquid around the house, and lit a match. She began to laugh, and then looked at her hand. She said to herself, "Well here's something I haven't tried yet." As the flames engulfed the house, she happily ate herself. Even now, no one knows if the flames burned her to a crisp, or if she ate herself to death. The remains of the house still stand and are ever so quiet, but if you listen closely, you can still hear her laughing while munching upon her own flesh.

Eat your heart out, we all know she would.
THE END.

Koans of the Foolish Master - Guy Incognito

Long ago there was a master who sat atop a hill and was renowned throughout the country for his great wisdom. Once a young man came seeking to study under him, hoping that one day he too might become as wise. The master permitted him to stay, and the young man became his disciple.

Many years passed, and one day the disciple approached the master and asked him, "Master, for many years I have followed you each day down the hill to collect water from the well and into the grove to pick fruit from the trees there, and meanwhile I have meditated on the great questions of the universe, but in all that time I have not been able to arrive at any answers. Tell me, how did you attain such great wisdom?"

Said the master, "I am not so wise. There is much that I do not know, and there are many who know more than I."

"But master," complained the disciple, "only a foolish man would deny his wisdom for the sake of modesty."

"There, you see," said the master, "perhaps I am not so wise after all." And on hearing this, the disciple was enlightened.

The Diamond Sutra

Once there was a novice monk who was sent by his master to the market to make almsround. The monk, who was but a young man, found himself tormented by impure thoughts and covetousness of the painted women there. When he returned

to his master high atop the hill the monk whined, "Master, surely the flesh poses no barrier to the buddha." The master replied, "Surely it does not," then rapped the young monk twice on the knuckles and bade him spend the rest of the day in quiet contemplation of his impiety. So the monk did, in time coming to control his impure thoughts of the painted women in the market. And that night the master descended the hill and chanted the diamond sutra from a brothel bed.

Wind Chimes

Once at a meal the master observed a novice who ate greedily. The master smiled at this and praised the novice for his gusto. At the same meal the master also observed a novice who ate only sparingly. The master smiled at this and praised the novice for his forbearance.

The philosopher Chet Tze said to the master, "But surely one is right and the other wrong?"

The master said nothing in reply, but rose from the table and went to the garden where he ran his fingers through the wind chimes.

The Magistrate

A magistrate was fond of quoting the precept, "No one can give away that which he does not own." A novice scoffed at this, saying to the magistrate, "Then what, sir, can be given away? Only the beggar is truly wealthy for he is bereft even of the illusion of property. " At this the magistrate became enraged, and had the novice taken to the square and lashed. When Chet Tze related the exchange to the master, the master responded thus, "Certainly the wealthy man is rich in illusion. Yet does the young man's back smart any less for it?"

The Pilgrim

One night a pilgrim found herself lost in the wilderness during a fearsome snowstorm. She at last came to a small glade, where she crouched down so as to shield herself from the wind. Too cold and exhausted to go on, she took out from among her few possession a string of prayer-beads and began to recite. And there she sat, confident that if she prayed she would be delivered from her predicament.

The next morning Chet Tze and the master chanced upon the glade, where they found the pilgrim frozen to death. Seeing the prayer-beads in her hands, they were able to deduce what had occurred. The master's eyes welled up with tears, and Chet Tze consoled him, "It is a pity that her prayers were not answered."

"You are wrong," replied the master, "I weep out of joy. For she who has kept her faith to the very last is three times blessed."

The Storm at Sea

Once when the master was young, he undertook a long journey, which brought him to distant lands across the sea. When the master made his voyage home, he sailed on a ship the crew of which was comprised of many notorious criminals. One night the ship was overtaken by a terrible storm, and the ship was tossed about violently by waves two and three times the height of a man. The crewmen despaired, and many of them prayed to heaven to save them. The master cautioned them, "You had better not pray too loudly. If heaven finds out that you are here then all is lost."

Lots

It was well known that some of the novices spent long nights hidden away from view, casting lots and playing cup games with the money they had begged in the village. When Chet Tze asked why it was the master would permit such a thing, the master replied, "Indeed I encourage it, for there is no surer path for these novices who seek wisdom. Only the winner is punished."

Clouds

Chet Tze and the master sat atop the hill watching the moon as it was being swallowed up by the great dragon. Chet Tze marvelled at this, and turned to the master and asked, "Having seen so many eclipses in your long life, what is the most beautiful sight your eyes have beheld in the heavens?" To this the master replied, "Only the backs on my eyelids."

Just then a storm rolled across the countryside and, much to the displeasure of Chet Tze, blotted out the moon from view. The master consoled him, "In these clouds tonight I have beheld the most beautiful sight that I have seen in of all my years." And to this Chet Tze replied, "Then life is a dream, and beauty is only to be found by awakening."

The Ghost

Once there was a man who purchased a fine house overlooking a lush and beautiful valley, only to find that his new home was haunted by a ghost. Hoping that a holy man might be able to perform an exorcism, the man sought out the master atop the hill and pleaded for his assistance. The master agreed and went with the man to inspect the house.

Upon their arrival the master said, "The ghost that haunts this house is strong indeed. I'm afraid we must burn the house to the ground in order that this evil spirit might leave." The next day the merchant returned to the master and explained that the ghost was troubling him no more, and that the house did not

have to be burned after all.

Of these events Chet Tze said, "It seems that from fear of losing his home the man is no longer troubled by the ghost."

Said the master, "That is not the case, rather when I said the house must be burned the ghost heard me. So it is from fear of losing its home the ghost no longer troubles the man."

Fish

"In moderation, fish promotes good health," an abbot once told the novices at a monastery, "but if eaten every day it is deleterious to the digestion." He therefore instructed the novices to limit fish to only one meal per week, a rule which the novices obeyed dutifully. The master, who was visiting, observed, "If only it were as easy to issue a proscription against the ego."

Waves

Once when the master walked along the coast, he encountered two men who were traveling together and called them brothers. The two men explained that they were not brothers, but rather that one was a wealthy merchant and the other was his servant. The master gazed out at the sea and said, "Though one wave is high and the next is low, are they not both upon the same ocean?"

Arête - Professor Cramulus

Are you Conflicted? Anxious? Doubtful? A Shadow of your Potential Self?

It's likely -- in fact, it's almost certain -- that your are living off balance.

There are two drives at war within each of us - the creation and maintenance of **order**, and the reckless breakneck chase of **disorder**.

Visualize a skinny nerd walking a big dog. The dog is trying to pull the nerd where he wants to go, and the nerd is gripping the leash with white knuckles. And you are neither the nerd nor the beast, but both at the same time.

Cut to:

Ancient Athens was a pretty hip joint. In its day, it was the central nexus of rational thought, a unique oasis in a world where most people were busy screaming and stabbing each other with spears. They had this word in Ancient Greece, Arête. Ar-uh-tay. It means Virtue. It means Quality. It means Heroism. And it requires balance.

Odysseus, the preeminent Greek Hero, was not a straight-laced do-gooder, a shield of righteousness and a spear of justice. He was kind of a bastard. He lied, he cheated on his wife, he insulted the Gods, and he killed more people than Rambo. He was both a man and a beast at the same time. But he was not weighted down by his personal Disorder, he made it into one of his virtues. That's Quality. That's Arête.

See, the Athenians believed that man has to romance his chaos. They spent most of the month worshipping Apollo, the God of Light and Reason and Harmony and Rational Thought. But for one or two days out of each moon, they ignored Apollo

and worshiped Dionysus, the God of Drinking and Orgies and *fantastic* fucking Parties.

They had huge, unbelievable festivals which swallowed the whole city. Everybody in the Athens would put down their day-to-day selves and spend all night chanting and dancing and drumming and wearing strange masks. They really let their hair down. One might expect violence, human sacrifices, people fucking in the streets. It's not just about having a good time, it's about experiencing those aspects of ourselves which we flee from, like fear and rage and sloppy drunkenness and uninhibited ecstasy.

Who participated in these festivals? Unlike the present day, it wasn't JUST the rebel kids: youths on the cusp of adulthood whose chaos hasn't yet been bled out of them by the Machine. The Bacchanal was attended by both the rich and the poor, the smart and the dumb, the old and the young. These festivals were what they needed - they needed to FREAK OUT and let the animal loose.

See the Athenians thought this was necessary for sanity. If they were going to get their Important Stuff done during the week, they knew they needed to **kick out the jams** on the weekend. A Greek Hero is balanced between Apollo and Dionysus. He's a warrior AND a philosopher. He's a good guy AND a scoundrel. He is a man, but he is also a beast. He is Apollo, but he is also Dionysus.

"Don't suppress your nature," the Greeks are saying to us. "Once in a while, party with no hesitation or regret. Let your beast loose."

Let yourself succumb to emotions like panic and fear and joy. Allow yourself to get lost in a riotous crowd all cheering at the same time. You'll lose your identify for a little while. Then when you put your Apollo back on, you'll be tempered.

And where are we now? I look around and I see very few people who know how to ride their beasts, let alone take them for a walk every so often. People are afraid of that aspect - they don't want to look in the mirror and see a frazzled, cracked out animal, bloodied and drunk, but still smiling. They'd prefer to see the guy with the neatly combed hair, confident and rational, comfortable and reasonable. The kind of guy who doesn't make waves. A go-getter with everything to lose.

You can't keep the beast tranquilized forever. One day it's going to leak out through your tension and anxiety. It's going to make your rational-self uneasy. And when you're loosest, it's going to claw its way out of your heart and murder all the philosophers and poets and innocent bystanders. It's going to hurt them and it's also going to hurt you.

The beast is, by its nature, not comfortable. It's emotional. It's savage. It's unpredictable. The beast is what you're trying to escape with your breathing exercises and iPod. With your drive for homeostasis and your metronomic routine. Living the way we do, we've all learned and internalized dozens of techniques to keep the beast in its cage. But it's going crazy in there, waiting for a moment of weakness to spring out and tear shit up. Your beast is a big strong dog, and your Rational Thought is a skinny nerd trying to walk him but barely in control. Who's in charge here? Who's leading whom? If you have mastered *Arête*, one checks the other but they move in unison.

So there it is. *Arête*. It's not a mastery one learns by living by the rules and being in control every day. It's not experienced by becoming the most rational, controlled, stand-up person you can be. It's found by tempering your brain with your balls. It's pouring your fire into a shot glass and drinking it straight up, no chaser.

Hail Eris

Statues and Cliffsides - Eater of Clowns

In the Traveler's world no place has a name. Destinations are necessary as beginnings and ends to journeys, for resting or restocking his supplies, for anxious leisure while not feeding insatiable desires for new sights. Home and place of birth exist separately, the latter forgotten to decades of wandering and seeming eons without speaking, the languages of men and other blended to ambiance of new surroundings, both brick and mortar to empires raised on words, some hollow and some awesome. And the former is where the pack rests beside him that night, the sky perpetually taunting him with its infinity above. Tonight they would offer no such humiliations, their merry eyes and innumerable grins, their hints of grander meaning falling on the uncaring tiles of a standard fare inn.

His road ended shortly ahead at walls that seemed to dance in the waning sunlight. They rose tauntingly before him, covering only the half of the city not resting upon sheer cliff side. Rumors told him to arrive at twilight while others claimed twilight never ceased so long as the sun fell on the city, the beautiful city, its irrelevant name etched as the only mark upon the high walls. There was no welcome in addition to the name, no title or claim to supremacy, merely a declaration of its being. With similar function the guards stared at this path worn man, the filth of his lengthy wanderings seemingly more than the accumulated filth of the entire city could be. They watched him pass and watched the soles of feet that seemed to have seen more miles than the world has seen years disappear on cobbled streets more immaculately tended than most palaces.

Business of the denizens appeared to be dwindling with the hour, the city's squares emanating a foreknowledge of desertion. Men and women were perfect here the Traveler saw. As his gaze rested from face to face in awe a plethora of the same passed by without his notice, each attractive in unique ways. Looks began to be thrown at him of concern and distaste and in his shame he realized how he much look to these people. With effort he averted his eyes to the architecture of the place.

Nothing about the place was uniform, no two buildings alike nor even very many symmetrical, yet it was all so perfect. He sat for a moment on a bench that clearly belonged precisely where it stood to find the breath pulled from him by his shock.

Shocking eyes that had seen so much he marveled briefly, the thought interrupted by his notice of a pristine fountain his seat faced. A child with clever eyes knelt on a stone pedestal with a smile hinted on her lips as her arms lifted a circlet to place upon her brow. It was a snake engulfing its own tail. Clear water cascaded from the serpent and splashed to the rest of the pool with a shifting chime.

After marveling from his spot for some time he rose on tired legs with excitement, the exploration of a new place at hand. He mastered the skill of finding the shy sights, the ones which hid themselves from prying eyes and appeared only if one knew they were there. In cities they were discovered only by following the kind of person who looked as though they might find themselves where one wishes to go, a skill that takes a keen eye. But he found none like this here. Instead he set to his life's work of letting his whims guide him.

Darkness fell before long, marked by moonlight shimmering on the streets and none to see it but him. His footsteps echoed across the lonely alleys in an ethereal music. Down one street or another he might find flickering light playing upon the edges of a closed door, laughter inside like any other tavern in any other city. But the tones were richer and the light more pure somehow. Eventually he found one such doorway from which slow music drifted and the light seemed feeble and the laughter was not real but only an idea that had once been there, a memory imprinted on the spot by those who would frequent it. Here he stepped inside.

Lovely people sat dejectedly about the place, their features no less striking for the almost determinedly sullen mood. He sat at a bar of oily wood, rich smelling and spotless. A mug was set down before him in a silent gesture from the rough looking man tending to the customers. With a nod he turned to a woman crooning before a fire, her voice sounding as though it might catch aflame by the sparks popping intermittently. He became slowly infatuated as her tune carried him through histories and tragedies. These were not the words of a mortal, or if they were they were not meant for mortal ears.

His drink was sweet and heady and as he turned for another the bar man lingered a moment longer, the act so foreign to the man as to make him visibly uncomfortable. As though he knew the question forthcoming.

"What does the lady sing?" the Traveler asked. It was the first he'd spoken since arriving; he awaited the reply nervously. Thus far his beaten appearance had made no impact on the folk but he feared to be ostracized.

"The day's events, in town at least," came the reply. The man's tones lilted in gruff song not unlike the lady's own.

The Traveler listened more closely, catching the rhythm and understanding her at last. Expecting to hear of thefts and politics, of deaths and religious figures he instead learned gossip. The grocery boy was in love with a nobleman's daughter; a visitor had entered the city gates and has been seen exploring its streets. He perked up at what might be about him, but there was no more. His presence was known and evidently unremarkable. He motioned to the barkeep.

"Do you have rooms available?"

"We do, and baths and food if you'd like more than drink."

"I'll have the lot of them," he said.

The man showed him to the upper floors of the building, where narrow halls belied spacious rooms and opulent beds. His own was decorated with flowers. He laughed a little, unnoticed by the exiting innkeeper. It made him forget a disturbing image while he left the basement lounge, a slight vision that chilled him. On the railing leading upstairs his hand passed over a gouge in the wood otherwise polished smooth by both care and years. It was the first imperfection he'd seen since arriving, but with those delicate flowers in view it seemed a mistake of his own senses.

A bath was drawn shortly after, happy looking attendants filled it swiftly without seeming to break their own paces. In it he washed the filth of miles, the dust of roads caked so firmly upon him it seemed a part of him. It stayed there in the basin, now a cloudy unsavory stew that drew his mind again to that rough spot on the railing. He fell asleep with it in mind.

A gentle ray of sunlight found its way to his resting eyes then opening to a second day in the city. The quality of the day was unmatched already, he could tell, and he bounded from his rest in eagerness to further look upon this strange place. The thought that he might find the streets paved in clouds or gold passed him briefly, but going down the stairs his mind turned back to the railing. Slowing, he let his hand rest lightly on its surface, focusing his efforts on letting his calloused and leathery palm detect that groove again. It was there. And more accompanied it.

The door to the inn was open, light pouring through it and catching on a heavy dust in the place. The innkeeper nodded to him from the bar, his face a little more careworn than the Traveler could remember, the lines of age a little more pronounced. The bar was stained and scratched in places.

He left the place behind, anxious to see the remainder of the city that day in a light unlike his previous explorations. This time of the day shops were open, their

doors ajar to welcome the cool air and the sounds of the sea far below. Looking down the cliff side of the far side of the city was an experience he'd saved for daylight, the eerie moon of the previous night not being adequate to see to the very bottom. Residents were walking about between stalls and shops seemingly delighted and he saw they suffered the same degeneration as the innkeeper, their appearances no longer beautiful as the night before but marred slightly as though years of age came upon them as they slept. Or perhaps his fascination with the new place clouded his vision, that and the twilight sun. Surely that must be it.

Spray from the sea grew thick as he neared the far end of town. The cliff was terrifying in its height, the city a risk-taking child playing upon the edges unaware of the death waiting below. He wanted to pull it by its gates, its hands, and drag it further from the drop to safety. The Traveler reassured himself of his footing and peered down to see deep blue waves crashing on the rocks, spraying and foaming as though in jubilation of their freedom. There was no railing here, no caution of any sort, nor were the city folk loitering about. He was alone and he pondered briefly jumping, the air inviting him and assuring him he could fly. This was, after all, the perfect city. He shuddered and stepped back to the safety of land but even that was precarious, a weighty few bodies away from crumbling into the hungry ocean.

The first steps back to the city proper were light at first, as though unsure they would fall on firm ground. The feeling departed after some time and before he jaunted almost merrily as he had at the day's beginning. No people were along the road back to town. He wanted to run until he saw one, the thought manifesting itself in a hastier stride while he looked about anxiously. The road ended at the cliffs again.

This time the breaking waters sounded like music and the air felt more invigorating, the mist looked solid enough to step on and walk across, an ethereal bridge to, well, somewhere even more beautiful than this place. Perhaps it was the city closest to the heavens. He could find out if he climbed the stair that he was now sure solidified before him; it would carry him to gods and their ilk, a whole new realm to explore unhindered by the dust of roads he'd come to know. His feet were so weary from the years but he could not stop, maybe this bridge would cure his sore heels. One foot hovered just above the first stair, one short gesture shy of shifting his weight to trust the vapor.

Bells rang in the distance, the mid day signal from the city square. Their ringing was drowned and hushed at first, his ears following the sound to bring clarity with each successive clang. It was foreign to start but grew into reality and regularity. Finally he understood their meaning and their origin, regaining his senses, becoming suddenly aware of his foot hovering above the sheer drop. Rational

thought would have told him to ease back slowly, let his foot touch ground again. But it was so far down and he was so close, he leaned the wrong way, his solidly planted foot shifted dangerously, the other foot flying about wildly, joining his arms in the struggle for balance. It ended an eternity later, with his eyes wide and his back against the street. Reveling in the feeling of ground beneath him for some time, he turned and kept his wits about arriving back in the city proper, pushing the cliff from his mind lest he find himself facing it again. The remainder of his wandering he did with trepidation for fear of losing his way and arriving at that dreaded end of the town.

He found himself again at the fountain of the young girl. Small chips of the stone had worn away, leaving the girl pocked and, as it occurred to the Traveler seems to happen, hollow around the eyes. Her smile was faded. The water seemed cloudy, dirty like the bath water of the previous night. And the snake had unfurled.

He hastened back to the inn, trusting the man at the bar more than any other in the city. Few others had spoken to him. There he was stationed, behind the bar now more marred with the day's passing, as much a piece of the room as the fireplace. A rag dragged futilely about against the onslaught of dust so absent the previous day. He looked old, now, not just older than the night before but old. The Traveler sat at the bar, directly across from him. He was handed a drink without requesting it.

"You seem unnerved," the man said to him.

"Tell me about the cliffs," he said immediately, relieved to be able to ask.

"What about them?"

"They seemed to be calling me over. The first time was a pull but when I walked away they brought me back and I stood ready to step over the edge when I heard the bells."

The man seemed to ponder this for a while, a darkness playing with his features while every piece of that information came together for him. "I don't know what you mean," he lied at last.

"How many are lost over those cliffs? Why isn't there something to stop people from going over them?"

"Only seems to be the occasional foolhardy visitor. None of the city folk bother with them much and when we do we know better than to skip about their edges. I don't suppose such sense is ingrained in all."

The Traveler ignored the comment. This man would not be giving him any more information he wanted. And he knew the kinds of attitudes outsiders would bring in places like this. He drained his glass and settled his drinks and room with the innkeeper before meeting the remainder of the day. Exploration previously so important to him was now forgotten, he only sought to know about the cliffs, but he dared not investigate them once more. He found a bench along the street leading to them as close as he dared to go, and he waited, taking in the city as the sun drifted low in the sky. None came to the cliffs.

Not wanting to return to his room and trying to avoid the innkeeper he decided upon another place shortly into the evening. The air here was merrier, the song less a lament but still informing them of the day's events. He listened more closely to this now. Little concerned him but the small gem nestled in the center. Yesterday's visitor narrowly escaped a fall over the edge of the cliffs on the far side of the city. Now he knew there were several ways that information could be around. People talked in this city, to each other if not to outsiders. The innkeeper might have passed the news on following his earlier visit. Someone might have seen his ordeal, meaning someone neglected to help him in the moments before he was able to stop himself. Or the city simply knew.

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Not a single patron looked to him while the song played though they all must have known of whom the news regarded. They resolutely watched the singer, looking dirty to him now, thinner and almost sickly pale. Things were changing here as he stayed. The buildings were worn, the people were worn, and that statue. It had shifted somehow. Dancing flames in the fireplace were more ominous, the sun even at its zenith harsh in its light but cold in its effect.

"Another visitor to the city came through the gates," came the next line he heard.

He motioned to a woman serving drinks. The stuff here was not crisp and sweet like the night before, it was muddier, harsher. She attended to him with an air of

discomfort.

"When did the other visitor come in?"

"Twilight," she responded.

"Where might I find him?"

"She is at the fountain right now," the server told him.

The Traveler decided he didn't much like the people in this city. They were cold. He paid and left the place, ignoring the remainder of the day's song, instead walking to the fountain. Like the previous night, none were on the streets. His footsteps echoed across seemingly the entire city.

She sat at the same bench upon which he pondered the fountain the day previous. She was young, pretty, and seemed to be composed entirely of eyes. They were a delicate green that seemed to shine in the moonlight, made more vibrant by the vague semblance of shadows attempting to cross them. She smiled at his approach, at peace in this city where he could only find dread. He sat beside her.

"You and I seem to be the only outsiders here," he informed her, gazing at the fountain. Had the statue's features changed?

"I could tell, you don't look like you're one of the city people," she replied.

"They do have a presence about them, don't they?"

"Not just a presence, no. They all share similar features. Look at their noses, I notice noses, they're practically the same. Even this statue. And their eyes. Not the color but the shape. What brought you here anyway?"

"I go everywhere I can. It's been my whole life. What about you? You seem too young for such curiosities."

"I like new places, too. But mostly it's because I'm a baker, I like finding new recipes so I come to strange places for them."

It occurred to him to warn her of the cliffs just then, and just as quickly it left his mind. He'd forgotten why he sought her out at all, really, other than to converse with someone willing to talk back. His visits to civilization were rare, and one part of it that he missed was easy conversation. Sitting next to this girl, though, in

silence for several minutes, he began to think it was the city that killed talking.

"Well it was a pleasure meeting you, young lady, but I'm off to the inn. Perhaps I'll see you about town tomorrow," he said.

"You very well might," she smiled, watching him return from where he came before paying close attention to the statue.

He stopped at the bar before going to his room, looking directly to the innkeeper behind it, saying nothing. He studied the face he'd come to know more closely than the others in his two days here. His nose matched that of the rest of the patrons, and the baker was right, the eyes did as well. Now the Traveler knew his gaze did not deceive him in the bar man's features having degraded. His age was more pronounced, his hair grayer and wilder. The bones seemed less sharp and he'd grown sickly spots. The Traveler said nothing and went upstairs.

His room overlooked an alley and the ocean side of the city. Behind the hundreds of houses and other buildings, which now looked decrepit and neglected, were the cliffs. Even knowing they were there, they seemed to call to him. He stared for some time.

The sun was high when he woke up. He had no recollection how or when he got to bed. The shutters were drawn but filled with holes. They hung loosely from their hinges on rotted wood, the curtains on them tattered and yellowed from neglect. He hesitantly opened one side, afraid the wood would crumble from his lightest touch. It opened, squealing like death along the way. Sickly light poured in, throwing itself on thick dust inside. Rooftops of the city were before him now, with shingles missing and shredded as though by clawed by the icy fingers of winters.

His room, nor the bar upon his leaving it, fared much better through the night. Were the mirror less smudged he would have checked his reflection to see if the effect carried over to him. With great reluctance he looked to the man behind the bar. He was still strong, still clearly the same man, but his degeneration was wretched. He was thin and pale enough to look dead, skin hanging from his bones in a similar fashion. The few remaining wisps of his hair drifted in some breeze he could not feel. If he was aware of his transformation he gave no sign, moving along the frail bar just as though it were the rich wood of two days ago. The man nodded to the Traveler as he passed into the sick day.

Perhaps this place declined in his vision along with his estimation of its character. Where he once thought it warm and pretty it had been, now where he thought it dying in insular it has become so. But then there was the cliff; it came back to the

cliff somehow. Shortly after it he had been afraid, very much so, not only of the seductive pull of the place but of the people's hiding of its true nature. There was danger there, yet following his experience the city did not become more frightening. Its people remained cold and polite as always, their features degrading, though never changing overtly. He wondered if he watched them, would they change before his eyes?

Dirt and refuse were caked between the stones of the street, replacing the ones that were missing and making his walk less than comfortable. Still the people went about as though nothing had changed. In some time he arrived at the city square before the fountain, the fountain spouting brown and stinking water. The young girl had changed little as far as the quality of the stone. Her face was still pocked and all pieces of the statue chipped as before but her expression had altered. The circlet of serpent was not a gift, she did not eagerly anticipate being crowned. Her mouth was wide with silent fright and her eyes frozen open, unable to fight the snake's strength. Its fangs were drawn, sharper than stone could possibly be, its mouth open and so close to her face. She held it back now, as best she could, but she was so young and it was so wild and unpredictable.

The Traveler did not intend to stay the following day to discover whether the snake would strike. He set to fill his pack and restock before moving from this place, perhaps forever like so many places before it, though not always under such distressing circumstances. He felt like the little statue girl felt; he struggled to fight the snake from poisoning him but with time it was inevitable. Time was something he did not intend to give it.

As he left the grocer he saw the young baker woman walking about, hunched over as though in ward of something. He met her stride and she slowed to allow him nearer.

"So you've noticed the people, then," he said to her.

"How could I not? I saw the city was a bit worn when I arrived yesterday but there's been a huge change. Not just the people, the buildings, I mean, have you seen the buildings?"

"Of course I have. You know when I arrived the day before you I'd never seen such splendor. It was so rich here, the people so beautiful, the streets shining as though made of gold. I felt hideous by contrast, an aging man beaten by heavy skies. But now..." he trailed off.

"I'm glad to know it isn't just me. I have what I came for, or at least I know I won't be employing any new techniques at my own shop. I intend to leave today, as soon

as I explore a bit. I haven't seen the cliffs yet."

The cliffs. There was something about them, something so clear, something he knew instinctively. He struggled for it vainly, a fleeting feeling so much like déjà vu that could not be caught again.

"I'll be leaving myself today. I hesitate to think what the city will look like tomorrow," he thought of the snake, the little girl, "with how quickly it's all deteriorating. We might very well wake up in rubble."

Their path took them closer to the cliff. Dread filled the Traveler just as wonder filled his companion, though neither could think why. He broke from her side.

"I have a few more things to do before I can leave the city. Perhaps I'll see you again before I go," he told her.

"Maybe I'll join you," she said hopefully. "I'd like to see a little more before I return home, to come back at least with new ingredients if not a new technique."

"I think I'd like that," he told her in earnest. Companions were not foreign to him, but they were rare. Those whose interests were struck by his life were at first enthralled by the seeming romance of it all. They also became quickly tired of such a living. The unsure, the discomfort, the loneliness, the weather, and the walking. The endless walking with no destination. The Traveler was rare in that case, in not needing a destination.

They parted on this idea. She drew nearer to the cliffs while he meandered away. It seemed with each step the severity of her investigation came back to him. Cliffs, he thought, stairways of vapor, promises of other worlds, danger, death. He froze, now in the city square. How did he get here so quickly? In turning to race where he came did he see the statue again? Had the serpent finally struck the girl?

It was rare that he ran but he did now, his strides great and heedless of the uneven road. The forever long road, stretching before him to the cliffs. He seemed to go nowhere even in his great speed, to be running against a steep slope or swift waters. Onlookers paid him no mind, nor did they determinedly ignore him. They faded to nothingness behind him, voices silenced by his footfalls and deteriorated faces blurring in his vision.

The cliffs were in sight now, the woman's back to him, her hair whipping wildly in the sea winds. She was so close to the edge, and he was so close to her. He thought to reach her; to pull her back like none pulled him back days ago. He thought to shout, having no name by which to call to her he tried to say stop or

wait or anything but his breath was suddenly gone from him, stolen by the thick ocean spray. She was an arm's length away now but seemed to be getting further, further outward and so quickly.

Briefly he thought he saw her foot land on something solid, as though that stair of mist held fast beneath her. If it had, it did not for long. She fell forward, turning with her other foot as though to grasp onto something. His hand perhaps. He reached for hers, their fingertips touching for what seemed like forever before they slipped away. She did not scream; he did not cry out. He collapsed on the solid ground, his forehead in the soil in a bow to her loss. Somehow he expected to look below and not see any trace of her but the risk of what he would see was too great.

Dimly aware now of his need to leave the cliffs behind lest they sway his own mind again, he turned his back to the tragedy. His pack. He needed his pack, now filled, dropped in the town center while he broke for his run. The road was short again, time swift again. He was by the inseparable piece of equipment in such a short time, eyes never peeling from the horizon. A horizon he intended to meet that day, out of the city, with the stars above him again.

Were they to have faltered from that spot he may have noticed the seemingly pristine stones in the road, the conspicuous absence of grime citywide. He may have noticed the buildings in such a lovely state, catching the light and playing with it just as they had that first day, every house and shop, the walls all undamaged. He may have seen the people changed, again beautiful but without the noses and eyes the young baker woman pointed out to him. They would be young, pretty, and composed almost entirely of delicate green eyes that would appear to shine in the moonlight, made more vibrant by vague semblances of shadows attempting to cross them. He may have caught the fountain, the girl humbled again in placing the circlet upon her brow, again a snake engulfing its tail.

But his eyes were frozen to that horizon.

Advice to a Returning Veteran - The Good Reverend Rodger

See this? It's a forked stick.

It's a very useful thing.

You can use it to kill a snake (very important in these mountains).

You can use it to whack a tweaker over the head (Tucson, remember).

It's a weapon.

It's a lever.

It can prop your hatchback open while you get the groceries out.

Yep, there's nothing like a stick.

In fact, if you put the fork in your armpit, you can walk with it.

See? Almost as good as that foot you used to have.

Thank you for your service, and the best of luck finding a job.

Goodbye, now.

Gorillas in the Midst - Professor Cramulus.

"Gorillas live in that house now." That's what I almost said. But I thought better of spilling my secret. Instead, I told Dana that the house was still abandoned. She turned her music back on and kept jogging. It's only a partial lie. Another one.

I like jogging with Dana because she wears headphones. I like this because it means she is not talking to me, she's singing along to her music. When we get back, she'll hop in the shower and I have about twenty minutes of freedom to find the good stuff. Her off-key singing echoes through the house and I know it'll be stuck in my head for hours. She's singing the same line from some shitty song over and over again. I try to distract myself but not even hardcore pornography can get last week's argument out of my mind. It must be Spring, because she wants kids again. I want to drink bleach.

You know your marriage is in the pits when you can't even bring yourself to masturbate. Jesus, what an irritating argument. We haven't had sex in months. Maybe even a year now. We never really matched up in the bedroom. She liked

burly, hairy-chested men and I'm a smooth skinny guy. She makes a lot of noise and I'm notoriously silent. I can tell she's lonely, but I don't care.

Late at night, the windows of the house next door were dark. I hid in the bushes until I knew it was safe. Then, carefully, I crept up to the window and peered in. There they were. Gorillas. Like, five fucking gorillas. I don't how they found their way into a house in the suburbs of New England. I don't think that they knew either. They sounded sort of lonely. Sort of desperate. All I know is that the last guy who lived there, Tom, was evicted two years ago. I think he's in a mental hospital now. The house has been quiet ever since. But that has zero to do with these goddamned gorillas.

I first noticed them last Friday. I was standing on my back deck, spying on the angry elderly Scandinavian couple that lives behind us. That's when I saw them. The gorillas were standing in a circle in Tom's back yard. I lowered the binoculars and rubbed my eyes but it seemed real enough. Some of them were smoking cigarettes. One busted me staring at them from my deck, my binoculars in one hand and a bottle of Jim Beam in the other. The gorilla made a noise which startled the others. They scattered like huge lumbering cockroaches, spiking their cigarettes into the driveway before hurrying inside the house. Then it was dark.

Was Dana serious? Kids? Apparently we have to have this argument every year. Her biological clock is ticking loudly and it's keeping me awake. That woman is going to be the death of me.

As I looked in the window, the gorillas were talking. Something about missing the jungle I think. I thought I heard one say "That bastard's probably humping my mate by now." The whole place reeked of feces. Big sweaty gorilla feces. Smelly enough to let you know whose fucking territory this was. Apparently, they hadn't been eating very well. They must be very hungry by now.

Then, the big one said something about kidnapping a human, and the others were nodding. One was licking his lips. Another rubbed his hands together. That's all I needed to hear. I boogied out of there so fast I spilled Jim Beam all over my bathrobe.

The next day, Dana was in the garden with a concerned look on her face. There were gorilla-sized footprints in her fresh topsoil. A few of her homegrown tomatoes were gone. She was always going on about those fucking tomatoes.

"We can buy more, honey," I said, not looking up from the paper.

"You can't buy homegrown tomatoes," said Dana, annoyed. I rolled my eyes,

knowing that the bluegrass was coming again. *"There's only two things that money can't buy,"* she sang. I was so sick of this song. *"And that's true love – and homegrown tomatoes."* My eyeball twitched.

"Besides," she said, "what am I going to put in the gift-basket for our new neighbors?"

"Neighbors?" I said, looking over the top of the newspaper. Behind her, a dark, hairy face with wide eyes was staring in through the window, looking at Dana, licking his lips.

"Yeah," she said. "Last night I saw lights on next door. I think someone moved into Tom's old house."

"You don't say," I said all deadpan.

"I'm gonna go give them a gift basket."

The words "fucking gorillas," were on the tip of my tongue. But I bit it.

"Do you wanna come?" asked Dana.

I blinked.

"Well?"

"No," I said.

"Are you sure?"

I nodded my head slowly. My palms had gotten clammy all of the sudden.

When Dana left and the house was finally silent, I went to my stash and poured myself a victory shot.

The shrieking was brief and intense. As I recall, the gorillas tearing her apart and eating her had a sort of melodious, musical quality. Almost erotic. I knew that this song was going to be stuck in my head, and for once, I was going to enjoy it. Then it was silent again and I poured myself another shot. Fucking gorillas.

I never saw Dana again. After that, the gorillas disappeared too. It was a quiet neighborhood now, just me and the crotchety Scandinavians. The garden in the back yard began to wither and I could finally masturbate in peace.

Two weeks later, there was a note in the mailbox. Dana's lilting handwriting reminded me of when we were first dating. It was a long, tear-stained, goodbye letter. I read the first few lines, then skimmed down to the good parts.

"I met some men," she wrote, and "they're taking good care of me." I swigged my bourbon, swishing it around in my mouth as I thought about that shrieking. Five fucking gorillas.

"I won't see you again," the letter said. "It's probably for the best."

"Yeah," I said out loud. "Probably."

And somehow, we all lived happily ever after.

No Such Thing - Placid Dingo

There's no such thing as police
Just men with uniforms, badges and guns
But metaphysics won't release you from a parking ticket
And a wicket's just wood but it means the world if you flick it over
I used to play red rover
Hiding up a tree so they couldn't reach me
I called it winning; they called it cheating
Success is fleeting
But so is failure. Australia loves it's own mythology
A rainbow serpent choking on a noble democracy
I used to play tiddlywinks
Threw out my union jacks and started counting cards
Shuffled the West Pack and contributed to the Common Wealth
A toast to your Heath; the numbers aren't real
But goddamn this bed feels good after sleeping on a wooden floor.
Not done yet folks, here's some more;
So, why did the chicken cross the road?
Well it was a symbolic gesture an exercise of free speech, opposed to the
treatments of displaced metaphors, similes with their necks cut wide open, he
Took a burning flag and tried
To get. To the other. Side.
Haha! Rimshot please!

Heart beats like a drum with my own internal drummer.
I pull him out every time I need to make a (chssss) cymbalic gesture.
I hide from my demonic jester
Hearing the jingling in the garden
Cats eyes and bladed teeth
A thief in the night stealing sleeping screams
Maybe I'm a butterfly with elaborate dreams
But I've been dodging barstools since primary school
I was a brain in a vat before solipsism was cool, I could
Fool myself into entering my own narrative structures
Deconstructing the floorboards revealing the broadswords
Because Phaedras's knife wasn't big enough
To cut my illusions into the wall
In comes night fall so I light up a torch
With a match I borrow off Rene Margarete
And it burns to a close revealing bare bones, blood and meat.
And there's no such thing.

Untitled 2 - ThatGreenGentleman

He had no memory of what had happened to him. No memory of who or what he was. This nameless person wandered the desert, looking for something but had no idea of what it looked like, or if it even existed. In the distance he could see a water tower, and a small oasis. He staggered towards it, hoping it wasn't a mirage, but expecting it be one...

A strange girl with three tattoos under her left eye sat on top of the water tower that was covered in graffiti. She sat there, staring at the sky. If you stared close enough, it looked as if she was flickering in and out of existence. Something out in the distance something caught her eye. She couldn't tell from where she was, but it seemed as if it was a boy in some sort of head pain. She got down from the water tower and ran towards the figure. As she got closer she could make out the figure a bit better, and she was right. It was a boy in some sort of head pain. But there were dark figures in a circle around the boy...

His back was sprouting a mysterious type of machinery that seemed to be the source of his head pain. The girl had seen this before, but it was such a long time ago. She still remembered what to do. She cautiously got closer to the boy and pulled at a string that had also sprouted from his back. The machinery sprang from his back and then melted away. Where the string had been, a small hole opened in his back, and a strange mechanical creature with a large red eye that took up most of its body, scrambled to get out. The girl picked it up and swallowed it whole. She had saved the boy, but she would die very soon. But she was not afraid, she lived such a long life. She had outlived her people, who had died centuries ago. The

water tower, the oasis, and herself were all that remained. She smiled as she turned into sand. Now all that was left of her were her clothes.

The boy had a strange dream. Machinery was sticking out from his back, and standing across from him was a girl with three tattoos under her left eye, with machinery coming out of her mouth. They stood there for a while, until she melted into sand. Then he awoke to a desert. Looking around, he saw clothing covered in sand. He stared at it, not knowing if he was still dreaming. Slowly standing up, he then ventured off into the desert once more, oblivious of the hole in his back.

Their time stopped long ago. Will yours?
THE END.

Rebar Man - Eater of Clowns

In the woods of Maine there stands an old farmhouse. It's near a lake and has long been abandoned.

The windows are shattered.

The shingles are shredded.

The paint and wallpaper are peeling from the walls.

Piles of old garbage and broken furnishings litter the interior. And on the second floor, up a creaky old set of stairs, there once sat a man made of wire on a plain wooden table gouged and worn from the years.

The wire man knew a family once. He knew the people who placed him on that table and the man who created him. He knew the fresh strong feeling of the new rebar wire that made him.

Then one day there was a fire. His family was away and the farmhouse still stood, but they never returned.

The Rebar Man waited for a long time. A year went by and nobody came. People began to explore the old farmhouse. They were kids who were curious and young adults who were bored. To many of them the Rebar Man went unnoticed. Some few picked him up, some fewer spoke slow words he did not know, and all set him back on his table when they left. These were the greatest moments of his existence.

While he waited, and he always waited, he looked down the hallway to the window outside. He would see snow and rain, he would see the leaves changing colors and the cars passing by. But his favorite times were when he saw sunlight.

Time moves slowly for the man made of wire. One day, five years after the fire, a rock was thrown through the window. It took him two months to be surprised and to know the glass lay broken. That was the day he decided to reach the sunlight.

He was made to stand, it would seem, but not to walk. For one month did he step forward, for one second did he fall, and for some time longer did he realize it. But the window was closer.

Two years it took the Rebar Man to fall from the table and two months to right himself from his back. But the window was closer.

Again and again he saw the snow and rain, the leaves changing colors and cars passing by. Again and again he felt when the air went moist, when something began happening to his wire. He slowly rusted. But the window was closer.

Patches of orange-brown flakes were about him after three years. He was halfway to the window. A small group of people came to the house and searched its rotting shell. They stomped on decrepit floor boards and gazed upon fire wrecked fixtures. They took to the stairs and stood before the window. They stepped on the Rebar Man's right arm and leg, dragging him a little before realizing it. They left. His right side was crushed and moved poorly. And the window was further away.

Five years passed. He felt the tremors of visitors cautiously looking about before leaving the old house. Few came near him, none disturbed him. He was covered in rust. But the window was closer.

The rust grew thick. His movements became slower. From his hand first touching the light cast from the window til his body rested entirely within it four months passed. He rolled onto his back with some time and gazed up. The window was there. But it rained on him.

The next day he felt little. He was rusted and bent oddly. He cracked and broke in places. But the sun shone that day and he basked in its light.

Then the man made of wire knew no more.

Stories for the Soul Eater - Nigel

A very long time ago, in a forested area that is just to the southeast of what was once the continent's largest city, a young woman lived in the outskirts of a village. It was an unimportant village, and people there mostly avoided the war and politicking that went on in more populated areas, living their lives as they had for many generations, hunting, farming, loving, worshipping, weaving, and having the same petty intrigues and gossip and fallings-out that people have always had; raising their children, tending their elders, and growing close to friends, spending hours in the evenings talking with each other. This is when people still knew how to talk and how to listen, and how to not mind the silences that fell when everyone was beginning to get tired and reflect on what had been said.

The woman was brown and strong and healthy, with dark brown eyes and thick black hair and a strong high nose like the eyes and hair and noses of the other women in the village, and she lived on the outskirts because she was a priestess. She had large white teeth and smiled often. Her primary job was to perform the duties associated with the transfer of souls from death to underworld and from underworld to birth. Her altar was no more than a pale stone slab that lay on the ground, and her temple was a simple arch. Her position as priestess was hereditary, and her father, also a priest, taught her the rites of death and birth. The village was healthy, and she was happy. She became pregnant, and this was a blessing which made her even happier.

Her son was the most beautiful baby she had ever seen, with her same wavy thick black hair and curly eyelashes, and his eyes were like obsidian mirrors. She loved him fiercely, with every part of her being, and as he grew, and his eyes lightened to a deep brown, they spent many hours playing together in the forest near the altar, where she taught him to be as observant and fluent of the language of the plants and small wildlife as she had been taught by her own father and mother. She taught him about the frogs and the insects, the pronghorns and the wrens. Life was right and good for the young woman with her village and beloved villagers, her parents,

and her beautiful son.

I don't know how she died; possibly of infection from a wound, possibly of complications from another pregnancy. It seemed important at the time, but it really isn't. Her grieving father performed the rites of death, showing her son for the first time how to prepare the dark-green leaves from a certain small tree into a drink that would help him to channel the god who carries souls from the dead to the underworld in his belly, to wait to be assigned by the wife of Death to a newborn body.

The young priest had few friends; he had needed none, because he was still at an age where his best friend was his mother. He was small and slight and had not yet developed an interest in girls. Despite the attention of his grandparents, he was now alone, and profoundly lonely.

Some months after his mother's death, among the other births, a baby girl was born in the village, and not long after she was born, he looked past her curly lashes into her obsidian mirror eyes.

After that, they were inseparable. They had an arrangement. How fortunate that their Goddess was the Goddess of assigning souls! Usually they would be husband and wife. Sometimes she would precede him into death and he would be her grandfather for a while, laughing at her toddler antics as she played around his feet. Sometimes he would be the teacher and she the student, sometimes they would be siblings, but they were always together. It wasn't always a kind life; there was pain and strife and suffering. But in the village, it was mostly a clean and straightforward life. They were together this way for over three hundred years.

Until the last time. I don't know what happened; perhaps he was bound or killed or taken away. Perhaps the magic that allowed them to find each other was broken. Perhaps he was protecting her from something, because often the most painful mistakes men make are the ones that are meant to be for the good of the ones they love. But whatever happened, the last time, he did not call the soul-eater god to carry her into the underworld in his belly. He was not waiting for her, and he did not come back. She waited for him, and waited until the waiting became despair and the despair became bitterness. Lost in confusion and sorrow, she didn't notice at first that around her the happy village that she loved faded and died away. The old rites were no longer practiced, and her altar and arch became forgotten and overgrown. The gold and blue paint that once represented the wings of the goddess of rebirth was long gone. When the time came that no more babies were born in the village, she couldn't wait any longer.

After a while, no one would know there had ever been a village there, not even the

builders when they came to put up row after row of blank red houses for the new civilization that had no priestesses at all.

The once-young-woman lived now in a world where true partnership between sexes was mostly forgotten, if not forbidden, and she knew that this world was poisonous. It had eaten her old world. She made herself forget her village and her mate, her abandonment and anger. She even, mostly, forgot that she had been a priestess. Far away from the happy days of playing among the trees, she found other loves, had children, and at times she was even content. Sometimes, though, the pain of loss and loneliness would bubble up from a place deeper than memory, strong enough to pin her to the ground.

There is a story that Death's wife, her pride wounded over her husband's infidelity, killed him and took his mantle, hiding her feathered wings beneath it and assuming his duties alongside her own, and that this is why men, afraid, stopped working together with women and forgot that the goddess had once been their mother.

Mr Mendlehorn's Tea - Placid Dingo

Mr Mendelhorn sat into his chair comfortably and signaled to the waitress with a dignified air. The day was warm, with a light breeze that prevented the heat from becoming uncomfortable. There was a faint drone in the air, as the bees in the trees nearby jumped lightly between the pink and purple flowers.

Mr Mendelhorn's waitress looked much like she had in the photo he'd seen, young and cocky, yet distinctively feminine. She was now wearing glasses though, which so far as he could tell, were simply cosmetic, and her hair had been cut to half length and dyed black. The nose though, the soft curve of the neck, the greeny hazel eyes betrayed her identity perfectly.

"How may I help you?" she asked.

"Tea, thank you. A pot, two cups. Darjeeling."

"Would you like anything to eat with that?"

"The tea will suffice for present."

The waitress walked off, and Mendelhorn pulled a small pouch of tobacco from his jacket pocket and rolled a small cigarette. He placed it gently between his lips and began to feel for a lighter, but soon seemed to loose interest, and placed the unlit cigarette in his breast pocket. He pulled a small mirror from his pocket and used it to check his hair, before tilting it further to gain a glimpse of The Doctor.

The Doctor was dressed smartly, though he had attempted to dress down a little to avoid being conspicuous. There were a number of individuals around him, equipped to prevent an attempt of his life. Mendelhorn placed the mirror back into his pocket and reclined a little in his chair.

The footsteps of the waitress approached, and he sat up a little as she came into view, placing down the tray with the pot, cups, milk and sugar. Mendelhorn gave a slight smile as she poured the tea into a cup. he took the pot with one hand - the other remained below the table out of view - and filled the second cup also.

"Will that be all sir?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid, despite your excellent service, I must find fault here."

"I am certainly willing to help."

"I'm afraid the tea is poisoned."

There was a short shocked pause. The girl had made to disguise her distress, but it had already flashed across her face. Her composure had returned though, and she seemed unaffected. She smiled politely.

"I am sure that is not the case, but I am happy to return your tea to the kitchen if it is not to your satisfaction."

He waved aside the idea with a flick of his hand. "That won't be needed," he said dismissively. "I am quite happy to drink it regardless. But I would have you drink with me."

The concern was quite evident on her face by this stage. "With due respect sir," she said, "It is store policy that I am not to dine with customers. Especially while I am at work."

"I insist."

"I will replace your tea presently."

She leaned over the table, and grabbed the tray. His hand placed itself gently on hers, and he leaned forward, speaking in an urgent whisper, a new sound, a husky violence creeping into his hushed speech..

"My hand is under the table madam, my finger curls a trigger. The tea is poisoned, the effects of our present actions are of great consequence. Do not mistake my geniality for indifference. I will shoot you and leave you on the floor to bleed to death." He reclined again, and flashed a warm smile. "Please, go ahead, sit. Your boss will understand. I will tell them I insisted." He gave a wide, cheesy grin. "If need be, I'm sure I can tell him that I will have the Party ensure his taxes are looked after." he gave a small, humourless chuckle.

The girl sat in front of him, and visibly held back a physical reaction as she saw him lift the teacup to his lips and gulp down mouthfuls of tea. He placed the cup down and nodded thoughtfully.

"You have chosen a good substance," he said, "one can barely distinguish a difference between the two. Taste your cup. You will not be disappointed. You have clearly made a great deal of tea in your time."

The girl took her cup nervously and held it to her lips. Mr Mendelhorn kept one hand conspicuously beneath the table as she did, his eyes probing her face curiously, lustful of a reaction, an insight beyond her well rehearsed veneer. She took a small gulp, then, with nothing to lose, another larger, and another, and placed the cup on the table again, nearly empty.

"The tea is pleasant," she said. "I should think it is unlikely it is poisoned. I do not feel any effects. I suspect you only try to frighten me to make me more susceptible to your advances." She shook a finger reproachfully at him, but she was still clearly ill at ease, and the effect was not convincing.

Mr Mendelhorn pulled a small vial of aqua blue liquid from his jacket pocket and placed it on the table.

"We shall have a little of this," he said, "when we are done talking. Provided I am satisfied with the conversation. It will undo what harm has been done from the tea." He waited patiently for a reaction, but she did not show one.

He picked up his cup and drank the last, refilling from the pot, adding a little milk and sugar, and stirring slowly. He tapped the teaspoon twice, and placed it on the tray.

"My question is this," he stated, "What are your feelings about The Doctor?"

"Which Doctor, sir?"

"The Doctor, my dear. The great gallows-man of our political institution. The executor of dissidents. The bogeyman we have hidden in the closet of our society, to keep the people imprisoned and the Party free. Is that clarified."

The girl chose her words with care. "I'm afraid my views are not so energetic as yours, Sir."

"And those views are?"

"I do not have a view. I suspect he is simply doing a job."

"You say then, you have no hatred of him?"

"I see no need for hatred," she said, but a very slight pang of disgust betrayed the lie. "Should you expect me to hate him?"

"Of course," he said, matter-of-factly. "Most people do. Even those inside the party who defend the value of his role openly despise him."

"I suppose you are telling me you despise him?"

Mr Mendelhorn sipped again at his tea. The girl caught herself staring at the antedote of the table, and averted her eyes.

"I do not," he said finally. "No more than I despise the man two tables down, with the beard. As I walked towards the guests entrance, he perceived I was heading towards the main gates, and rudely shoved past me to ensure any unreserved table would be his, not mine. The human condition is not simply the pursuit of happiness, but the pursuit of power, the imposition of the appearance of order over chaos. The need to know that tomorrow the sun will rise, the bus will arrive, there will be a spare table provided for lunch, and the political zeitgeist will remain undisputed. We do not hate a man for seeking power, but we see fit to demonize one who wields it. I hate The Doctor for his acts of killing no more than I'd hate a spider for eating flies. Each man has the right to seek the power of a tyrant, and to wield it where he can."

"But not the right to resist him?" said the girl. The remark was casual, but instantly regretted.

"Resistance is not the noble alternative to the pursuit of power," he replied. "It is only the label placed on it by those who would wish to impose the illusion of nobility on their own power seeking actions. You believe you have the right to take the power of The Doctor away. You have wrapped your intent in the veil of utilitarianism, and when your suitcases explode and tear off the face of a woman awaiting the birth of her child, you will cling to this veil like a childish toy."

"I didn't mean to imply anything," said the girl hurriedly, "I'm not about to kill him! I admit he makes me ill, but I wouldn't kill him!"

"You are more correct than you suspect you are," said Mr Mendelhorn, looking at his watch. "You took great care, all of you, to ensure your success, but you overlooked the simplest of details; The carpet on the left back wall, behind the kitchen area hides a staircase downstairs, to a cramped area below where the indoor diners eat. In four minutes, your two companions will make their move to place their explosives within killing distance of The Doctor. And they will be stopped short by two of my own gentlemen, who lie under these floorboards, prepared to

shoot them."

Time slowed to a painful crawl. The girl seemed to sit a little higher up as they waited. The low drone of the bees seemed lower in pitch, and the tables seemed full of couples paused in the midst of conversation. The girl pressed her fingers more firmly against the wood of the table. She felt as though she could feel the poison seeping into her muscles and leeching into her brain. The first step, from what she had been told, would be the failure of her ability to speak, as her tongue went numb. Then to walk. Then the failure of consciousness, and finally the complete stopping of her heart.

Then it hit.

The ground vibrated as an explosion shattered the serenity of the day. There was the distinct sound of the shattering of wood and glass. The girl leaped across the table, thrusting a hand into Mr Mendelhorn's face and grabbing the vial, rolling off the table and landing with her back to the ground, Mendelhorn falling backwards off his chair, clumsily staggering to his feet. The pistol had fallen beside the table, and she reached over to snatch it up, and jumped to her feet. Gripping the vial tightly she tore the lid off with her teeth and downed the whole of the sickly sweet liquid, throwing the glass vial away. She held the gun out at Mr Mendelhorn who simply stood before her.

She pulled sharply at her shirt and several buttons broke off, revealing the skinny microphone strapped to her light chest.

"They hear you! They heard it all!" she cried, "They knew all about your ambush! Your little game has been lost you swine! You lose!"

Mendelhorn did not make any effort to move, but pulled the cigarette from his pocket and placed it between his lips.

"Of course you had a microphone," he said. "How else would your two compatriots have been convinced to delay their operation in order to walk into an ambush?" He reached into his pocket and pulled out a lighter, lighting his cigarette.

"You perhaps still take satisfaction in your having prevented my drinking of the antidote," he said. "However, one soon finds when one works intimately with such things, that it is not difficult to bribe a dealer of poisons. You were again more correct than you supposed when you suggested there was no poison in my tea."

The girl looked to the side, and saw clearly; the explosion had occurred behind the restaurant, and standing flanked by security, and looking straight through her with

an expression of painful smugness was The Doctor.

She turned her head back to Mendelhorn and, filled with panic, tried to ask what was in the vial if not an antidote, but her tongue was already too numb to form the words.