



IMPULSE [6]
BOOK

DIE SCUM

Sex & Drugs & Contemporary Art



Jubal Brown

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impulseb.com

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Chapter One

Ernest Hemingway is the narc who sits outside my apartment monitoring my comings and goings from the bench in the parkette across the street. It makes little difference whether this is true or just paranoia. He's a big barrel-chested old white guy with a bristly grey beard who is about to get shot in the face.

Beyond the parkette across the street, over the train tracks and past the ten lane highway, the sun descends over the lake. Establishing shot, gold and silver light dances across the water, reflecting the sun and sky, immense and brilliant from afar. The freeway extends like a barricade in both directions vanishing in the east and west, it seems to go on forever.

It's 3 PM as my day begins. I am overflowing with a tremendous feeling of potential like anything could happen, anything good or anything terrible.

I'm going to carpe every bit of positivity out of this diem. Live, Laugh, Die. A cliché of optimistic nihilism. Riding the crest of existential crisis is just another day for a hellion like me. I'm just like you. Young and full of dreams, my heart is on fire and I want more. This is my story and it's a self help book. Everything's great. That's it. Relax, smile. Everything's coming up roses. But they're all full of thorns and they're out to get me. I decide to go grocery shopping to throw them off.

I live between neighbourhoods in the west end, on the border of

the scummiest ghetto and a petit bourgeois middle-class morass. In one direction it's half-way houses and psychiatric survivors, drunks and drug casualties, old failures and crack zombies, ruins of people who once were something, or could've been, or never were. Ghosts of potential. Hipsters slumming in dive bars, life-style tourists pretending to be rock-n-roll hard-cases or down and out romantic tragedies, playing artist in warehouses and lofts. All facing the encroaching plague of real estate development, gentrification eating the neighbourhood, condos growing like a cancer devouring the soul of the city by the square foot.

In the other direction are the dream homes where the "normals" and yuppies live their normal yuppie dream lives. The perfect combination of revolting and seductive, ruthless and alluring, fill me with disgust and jealousy. Nice shops line the main drag, bougee restaurants, vegetable markets, children's clothing stores, specialty bookstores, organic dog food stores, artisanal craft cheeses and local-fair-trade-sustainable bullshit. A few fossilized immigrants remain, from before the area was overrun by thirty-something young professionals and entitled middle class wank-jobs. These self-righteous snots in designer jeans have careers and homes and gym memberships, expensive cars and wives and husbands, expensive dogs and expensive children. They think they're real special. Junior-executives and small business entrepreneurs with jogging strollers, breeders who take up the sidewalk like they're really something. Just because you got somebody to jizz up you doesn't make you the Queen of the World, take your maggot spawn and fuck off.

Some scumbag is looking at me, or is he? I can't be sure. Everybody looks at me, because I look good. Or because I'm paranoid. But I do look good, all in black with white accents. 2-tone black suede brothel creepers with a white brogue, black

stove-pipe trouser with a high cuff and white silk Pantherella socks. Black Fred Perry Harrington, emblazoned with the laurel wreath, black on black, collar popped. A narrow brimmed, hard felt, black Biltmore Trilby tops it off. Skull-face cheekbones flanked by a tight fade into sideburns, pencil thin moustache, Clark Gable style, over tight lips parted in half-smile, half-sneer. Dark, smoky pencilled eyes, slightly buzzed, casually survey the scene peripherally, staring straight ahead. I look good and I go about my business.

"Cause he's oh, so good,
And he's oh, so fine...
...He's a well-respected man about town..."¹

It's all about being a respectable member of society, being responsible and decent and keeping up appearances, having dignity and taking pride in what you do. That'll keep them guessing.



Chapter Two

I walk up the street to buy groceries, three kinds of mushrooms, garlic and ginger and lemons at the cheap Korean market and \$8 sprouts and saffron from the expensive Korean market next door. I'm making dinner for my baby, for when she gets home from work. Sunflower sprouts and shredded carrots and English cucumber make a side salad with pepitas and cubed 12-year-aged white cheddar, drizzled in tahini and orange dressing and topped with golden brown butter fried tempeh steaks. For the mains, three kinds of mushroom ragout marinated in red wine, finished with crème fraîche and a pinch of sea salt over coconut saffron rice with turmeric and cumin seeds. The rich purple on the golden yellow is regal. A sprig of fresh basil from the herb garden on the fire-escape for a garnish and everything is perfect.

When Cookie comes through the door my face lights up. A hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Smells great!” She says.

“All for you baby.”

I crack the wine and pour her a glass of cheap red. We sit together on the couch, our knees touching, and watch TV while we eat. She likes MTV reality shows, like *White Trash Mom*, I like *Coronation Street*. I have everything I need right here. Time stops. The world disappears. For me, this is the pinnacle of contentment, nothing could be better. Together we dissolve into the idyllic paradise of domestic bliss. Life is complete. There on the couch, my stomach is full and my heart is full, nothing

could be better. This shared sacrament of domesticity is my respite before facing responsibility. Leisure then labour. I work hard. All night long. I hit the streets and hustle, get that paper and work towards a future with my baby.

What I do for a job is get things for people, I am a service provider, a facilitator of indulgence, a procurer of substances. I offer products that fall into a legal grey area, that is to say, they're illegal. If you want it I got it, best in the city and I'm happy to help you out, for a price. I'm like half cool guy pimp and half delivery boy, but all class. I answer the phone and make people happy, doing crimes and getting money. The possibilities are exhilarating. Anything could happen. There is the potential to live happily ever after and the potential to fall hard to the bottom of the earth.

In case of a violent conflict I carry a blackjack. A black leather strap with a teardrop shaped pocket of led shot. It slips neatly into a pocket for easy access, it's a real comfort to have at hand anytime you might need a little advantage. A quick swing of that will definitely get someone's attention, if not crack a skull. It feels good in my hand. It gives me confidence and a feeling of security.



Chapter Three

Today Hemingway looks like Tweedle-Dee in suspenders and short-pants, pacing back and forth in front of the park bench, screaming at himself. That's either some deep cover or some authentic psychosis. My defences go down 30% but that's just what they want.

Who are they? You never know. Homeless spies huddled under tarps in the park watching as I board the streetcar or the anthropoid clone sitting near me in shades and a ball cap pretending to read the paper or mindlessly scrolling. They could be among the strange twisted nobodies walking the streets asking for change, or any of the indistinct voids of personality passing for human, the aging viscera blending into the camouflage of population. For many the years have not been kind, unrealized potential has a way of turning into shame and regret.

Who are THEY? The insect people, invertebrates, normals.

They could be among the hipsters in costumes trying to look cool or uncool or post-cool in '90s rock t-shirts, '50s rebel haircuts slicked with Brylcreem and Sailor Jerry knock-off tattoo sleeves that appear randomly plucked from the flash wall. Stray mental patients lingering, lurking, desperate for any shred of human contact. Shopkeepers of dollar stores surveying potential shoplifters. Daleks on electric scooters, a ratty raccoon tail hanging from the antennae, chain-smoking with wrap-around shades

and a fuck-off attitude. Shitty unknowns in nondescript outfits, blending in, generic personae designed to fade into the crowd. Are they watching me or are they just another bunch of insects stumbling through their own private hell? Unknown.

I sit and watch, casually evaluating. Everyone is a prospective threat, or an opportunity. A possible customer or a potential enemy, anything is possible.

As I ride the streetcar passing through neighbourhoods, I survey the parade of survivors outside the window. Images flicker by, all victims, aberrations, blisters on the face of society, making a spectacle of themselves like a baby bird fallen from the nest screaming bloody murder "Look at me!!!" abandoned by its mother, no more worms, no more warm cuddles. From one neighbourhood to the next the narrative develops, over-exposed, bare, cold, passing by the cavalcade of humanity, the window – my screen onto society, makes a movie called "Civilization's Prolapse".

Public transit is a kind of neutral space, a non-place, shared with everyone. It's a way to co-exist with a diverse cross-section of the population without having to speak to them. Proximity without intimacy. With headphones or a screen or a book we protect ourselves from actual contact. In our anonymity we are all equalized, all part of humanity.

Live and let live.

There is a certain satisfaction in sharing space with the "Everyman" (or if you prefer the gender neutral: "Arseholes"). There's an accepted assumption of mutual respect, tolerance, decency, honour among working stiffs. Only some betray that with their shit; a scent, desecrating the atmosphere with cheap

cologne or B.O. or with loud cell phone conversations or by eating a Big-Mac or farting or breathing. Or by fashion crimes, a sharp stick in the eye of aesthetics, breaking the calm illusion of decency.

Live and let fuck off.

People like me, people like you, we need to see ourselves distinct from the faceless hordes just to tolerate being alive. I'm not better than anyone, I don't want to be right, that is the domain of men and authority. I just want to be me. But the putrid scum of the mob needs everyone to be like them and they'll punish anyone who steps out of line, all under the sinister auspices of a common good. They opt into the herd, sacrificing their soul in favour of security and pass through life like cattle following the butcher to the slaughter, blind to the atrocities in which they are complicit by going along.

I stand apart, separated by my composed persona in a stoic disdainful solitude, against the somnolent mediocrity of snivelization with the feigned dignity of a prince. I am possessed by a universal essence, a seeking, desiring magic. I align myself with the chaotic broken beauty of nature. I strive to be truly alive. Are you with me? One "who is interested to know how they should live instead of merely taking life as it comes, is automatically an Outsider."²

I stand against the atrocities of everyday life in pursuit of the truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

I refuse. I negate. I am the adversary. I am.



Chapter Four

I live with my sweetheart, Cookie. She's a cultural worker at a major institution. She spends her day dealing with creative types, administrating, facilitating dancers, theatre people, painters, poseurs, trust-fund clowns who can afford to play "artist". But she is a treasure and I am a lucky dog. She's into the art scene but she's not like them, she is a special kind of creature who doesn't fit the mould. She is cultured but down to earth, mild-mannered and graceful. Her benevolent demeanour disguises the feral, fire-like passion of a savage heart. She's like a fox, lithe and yielding, but wild and dangerous, cannily indivisible. She is possessed of a raw sexual power and a cruel cutting sense of humour and so much more. I am still regularly awestruck by flashes of herself she reveals which excite and inspire, and her uncompromising standards make her a force of mythical proportion.

She's into the art scene, so I will be too. She cares about the community and standards and prestige, so I do too. She still has ambition and is not yet embittered. So she gives me the courage to make artwork and to envision a career. I don't really care about art but I'll do it to impress her.

She is getting dressed up to go out, doing her make-up in the mirror. Heavily sculpted black-lined cat eyes, high angular cheekbones, like two claw hammers, rouged scarlet lips with sharp points, tight, strict bangs, precisely in place. Her thin pointed nose, imperfect by any standard, is my favourite, a swooping vulpine snout framed by the wine coloured points of her bobbed

hair against her white pink perfect toilet porcelain face with perfect teenage acne. When I look into her small ice grey eyes I am transfixed, transformed, transmuted, she has the severe cold stare of a fox, a fire, a star. She looks like an intellectual Pussy Galore, a sex-bomb femme fatale, combination of '60s style and '80s trash, sophisticated and stylish, intelligent and dangerous.

We go to an art opening. Some paintings or something, some abstract formalist objects in a white room, it doesn't really matter what it is. We drink the wine and talk the talk:

"Hmm..." Chin scratching and folded arms.

"Interesting use of colour..."

"The gesture is so... sympathetic..."

"You can really see the influence of graphic design..."

"The post-internet reference to advertising is... virtually interesting..."

"Cynical realism and performative relevance..."

"So how was Berlin?"

"Oh that's soooo cool!"

I hate these things, pretentious garbage. Everybody is there to make the scene, to see and to be seen, they're in it for the schmooze. And so am I. I know my cynicism makes me worse than them. But it's MY community and I have earned my place. They owe me and I belong. I have to play the game. It's my duty to contribute to the dialogue, practice and presentation of contemporary art. Culture is my life.



Chapter Five

My lifestyle is comfortable. I work hard all night and in the day I can play at being a home-maker. I have always dreamed of being a housewife. Now I get to pass the days watching my stories, planning parties, cooking dinner and— my favourite— doing the groceries. Because Cookie is into the art scene I have to be an artist, so I work on art projects too.

At this point I'm a little bittersweet about the whole art thing. I'm just kind of over it. I still have my ideals, but now I pretty much just do it to impress her. So I make installations, video art, neon sculptures, and photo-based conceptual artworks...

Of course I don't actually MAKE anything myself, I have things fabricated, outsourcing the actual production. There's always someone who's better at the skills part, so why try. I hire it out. Pay somebody else to get their hands dirty. "Studio Assistants" they call it. Instead of making objects I move around money and ideas. All this can get a little expensive, so I have to hustle to pay the bills.

Making things is not really what culture is about anyway, the thing that's called "Contemporary art" is about the exchange of ideas. Things, artworks, objects, are just the residue, the scrapings of the intangible against life.

I still struggle with the problem of how to be. As an artist I

think I'm supposed to be concerned with such things. As a human being I'm concerned with how to be happy. As a boy I'm concerned with how to make my girl happy. Get money and be a good person and everything will fall into place. Ok. I think I'm getting it right this time. They say just be yourself, do what thou wilt, follow your dreams. But the unspoken rule is without money you're nothing. So I'll do this job, make art on the side and soon we'll have enough money to open a legit business, I can afford to have an art career and we'll live happily ever after. Don't worry. Nothing can go wrong if you are true to yourself. Ok, good!



Chapter Six

I make the scene, going to all the parties, or just out on the town, stopping for a drink at all the bars. If something is happening, I have to be there, I can't go to the 'hood without seeing a friendly face or ten, I know everybody and everyone knows me.

“What up G?”

These white boys watch too many movies. I'm at The Bucket of Blood, my regular, a hole in the wall, hipster dive bar where everybody knows your name... its central location and its degenerate laissez-faire atmosphere make it the perfect home base. I stop by several times throughout the course of the night, before, during, and after my paper route. Everyone there are friends, clients, colleagues, besties or enemy agents... I join the gang and we defeat another day with the weapons at our disposal, drink and drugs and camaraderie.

Catching up on the usual gossip. Always some bullshit fantasy of something else to get out of here. It's always “Anywhere out of this world.”³

Rob is going to school to be a sound engineer, Doug's band is about to go on tour with White Colours. Zoey is starting her clothing label and Dave is planning on buying a farm.

This is work, it could be worse. I used to come here for fun, I guess I'm having a good time.

Clients come and go while I hold court in the back room, discreetly passing with a handshake or under the table, or slipping away to rendezvous in the toilets or around the corner to serve and back.

I meet a client in the bathroom stall, “Thanks, have a great night.” I wash my hands and straighten my collar in the mirror, waiting a discreet moment before exiting. I see my face, my outfit, my style. I look good. In the mirror the all-importance of performative composition is clear. In the theatre of cold war, appearance is everything and you must always be on. How you perform an image is who you are to the outside world. How you are seen is the last front, the barrier between you and the rest of them, a performance for compound eyes. Identity is always political. No one is innocent. No one is immune. We are always performing. We are never alone, our persona is with us, policing us. And our reflection is always watching, every time you look, there it is staring back at you.

I maintain a superficial confidence, a luminous sentry is placed at the gates of the mind, standing vigilant, 100 feet tall, 24/7 sword in hand, at the ready to slay any doubt that may try to enter.

I perform an appearance of masculinity, with rituals, tableaux, behaviours, and attitudes that go with the job. I must appear secure, strong, capable of taking on any situation, recognizable enough to meet someone by description and conservative enough to blend in. I look friendly and approachable, trustworthy but intimidating enough not to be fucked with. I present an image, stoic, hard, calm, but I’m an agent of chaos, trouble maker, dissident resistor, Promethean tempter, snake-eyed mercenary.

I spend all my hours hanging out, like a fixture, halving the hours

by drinks. I am the devil on your shoulder. You know you want to. “I am just your humble servant.” Do it, do it. “What else are you going to do with your money?” It’s time to party now. “So what if it’s Tuesday.” Tomorrow can go fuck itself. “Now is the only thing that is real.”⁴

And so it goes another day, another night, another series of bad decisions. We all do what we can to get through the night. I am here to serve, my job is to be available. “You available?” the text says. My answer has to be “Where to?” Around the corner, up the street, across town on transit, one stop, two stops, a house party, a dance party, a rock show, a private *soirée*, an art party, a film-shoot, a work night, date night, studying, writing, painting, party time is all the time... whatever, whoever, whenever, wherever my services are needed.

All true hellions know a living creature is bound only by their desires, the triumph of passion over reason is a win in the battle against sobriety and the teetotaling puritanism of social control. If it feels good do it, or pay me to do it for you. I am but a humble servant to the decadent, the modern libertine’s little helper. If the price is right, your wish is my command. Your pleasure is my business. It is my mission to liberate the spirit.

I like it when the automatic, muscle memory reaction to seeing me is to reach for their wallet. My face makes some people twitch. Just seeing me triggers a conditioned response of dopamine release, in anticipation of the associated behaviour. In habitual users, associated behaviours can release more dopamine than the actual imbibing. My face can make people jizz their synapses. Nice to see you too.

I look at my phone. Six new calls. I schedule them in my head in

order of proximity, neighbourhood and client privilege, forming an arc that ends with me back where I started.



Chapter Seven

Cookie and I live together in a modest apartment in a stylish 1920s low-rise walk-up. A romantic film noir building, it feels black and white. Humphrey Bogart or Lauren Bacall could walk by at any moment. It's elegant and understated, with a touch of decay, peeling paint and pigeons on the window sills, sparrows in the ivy. Our apartment is stylish and well kept. I am a good little homemaker.

The living room has cream-coloured walls with wine black dried blood red mouldings. A gold crushed velvet art deco couch, hardwood floors, a black buffalo skin rug under a vintage 1950s coffee table that we bought together at a yard sale. Flanking the couch on either side, end tables with kitschy mint green dancing girl and boy lamps with tasselled shades. Over the window, red velvet curtains with an embroidered lining parted and held with a pink ribbon. My art collection is on one wall and Cookie's is on the other. The centrepiece of the room is a wall mounted black glass chandelier with black glass baubles, the bulbs on the candle mounts flicker with filaments mimicking flame. Mounted above this, the antlers of a young buck from the Black Forest.

The small kitchen is a bright lime green with tangerine trim, a 1950s Arborite table from Goodwill and two matching chairs I found in the street. Pink cockatoos on a cherry blossom tree in a paint-by-numbers is framed on the wall. Multi-coloured alphabet magnets on the fridge spell out "I LOvE YoU bAby"

“HeY hANdSOme” “EAt ASs”... The kitchen door opens to the fire escape balcony with wrought iron chairs, a herb garden in planter boxes, parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme... basil, chives... The arching canopy of a huge old maple tree filters the midday sun.

The restroom is all in sexy baby girl pink. On the shelf a stack of clean towels form a bright rainbow. Red, orange, yellow, green, aquamarine, royal blue, violet. The bathroom walls are hung salon style with black velvet paintings from Goodwill and Salvation Army. Idyllic scenes of paradise, Hawaiian volcanic landscapes, exotic tropical scenes, a sunset, a little grass shack. A Bob Ross style landscape with “...a happy little cloud...a happy little tree...everybody’s happy in this world.”⁵ The pink lavatory and the paintings are a tranquilizing escape into a luscious, black velvet paradise. There is a portrait of Woody Woodpecker smoking a cigar, Mickey Mouse as the magician’s apprentice from *Fantasia*. Above the commode is the *pièce de résistance*, the pride and joy of my collection, the greatest painting I’ve ever seen: The Pink Panther on the shitter, holding his tail with one hand and smoking a pipe with the other. I don’t know what it means but its light-hearted absurdity holds the mysteries of the universe and life’s true meaning. Looking at this painting while pissing is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

Hanging over the commode, a small cheap plastic chandelier with purple plastic gems which cascades prisms of colour over the room. The whole bathroom is a clichéd girly pink pony paradise down to the marbled rose quartz door-knob, enough to titillate the kitsch appetite of any Nana. Even the waste basket, vintage 1960s pastel pink plastic with a white angel blowing flatulent trumpets. There’s a little wooden shelf with back issues of *Artforum* and a tome of Pre-Raphaelite painting.

Above the mirror with Hollywood dressing room lighting are vinyl letters in red script which spells:

You’re Beautiful

This message serves as a daily affirmation and a reminder to keep pure the highest ideal. Like a daily prayer. My mission in this life: To be Beautiful.

On the back of the throne a geometric pyramid of TP is perfectly arranged, a shrine to hygiene. This pyramid fills me with a proud satisfaction, a tremendous feeling of wealth and stability. In TP we are rich. We have enough! It’s as though we will never run out. We have all the soft white kittens we could ever need. True fulfillment.

Because our building is U-shaped there’s a courtyard entrance onto which our windows face, across from us is an identical opposite apartment and we can’t help but see into their lives like *Rear Window*. Their huge flatscreen is always playing terrible sitcoms. They are watching *Friends*. We laugh at them. We are better than that. “*Friends!?*” Fuck.

Our apartment has one small problem, they lurk and they taunt, they creep and swarm... ants, tiny little Sugar Ants. Harmless enough, but every morning they are there, three of them eating the soap, four crawling up the wall. These faceless hordes of conformist clones crawl through our lives, infiltrating and polluting our perfect world. It is my mission to destroy them. “That which is crawling should also be crushed.”⁶

Outside these doors the city is full of scum, lower forms of life that take up space and violate the rule of nature by being boring,

filling the city with inane lives of worthless scum. Like the ants, they crawl. I want to exterminate them all. Not you dear reader, I'm sure you're one of the good ones. But the day to day lives of most people are as soul-crushingly empty as a black hole. If I had to think about it I would cry. I have a drink and feel less terrible about everything, so I have another.



Chapter Eight

In the bedroom I pull the purple velvet drapes closed, part modesty, part paranoia. We kiss as we undress each other in the shadows. Outside on the window sill, pigeons coo.

A cold white pink animal light seems to emanate from her body. Blue-violet ultramarine veins show through her luminescent skin. I run my hands over her broad muscular shoulders and grip her tight athletic arms. Her muscled biceps flex as she pulls me down onto the bed, forearms taper to delicate Barbie doll paws with blood red manicured claws, sharp, experienced. She looks at me with cold cutting eyes, her lips part, wanting. When I touch her, her mouth curls into a snarl revealing crooked vampire snaggle fangs. Swoon. She's like a baby albino alligator, pale white pink and adorable now.

I go down and give her the mouth, tweaking the erect nipples of her perfect breasts, the French ideal, inverted teacup, the upturned belly of a swallow, they fill my hands, only just. I run my fingers over her slender torso and nuzzle into her milk white thighs gently kissing my way towards the prize. I place my mouth over her cunt. I lap it up and clamp my lips over the clit. As I suck the world disappears, my eyes roll back, I am sublimated. I never tire of this, I could suck forever as I spread the orange moss covered crevice and finger the pink. I suck until my upper lip blisters swollen from suckling clit like a baby feeding on the mother's milk of her puss.

She has a full, dangerous electric power which fills the room, she glows with life, like a beautiful sky before a storm, immensely powerful and alive with a delicate and precise force, charged and ready to erupt.

She guides it in and we fuck like wild animals, ravenously devouring one another. I push in and I feel her pushing back into me, I slam into her and we build a rhythm and thrust into perfection, exalted and engaged. Our bodies communicate in a primal language. In and out.

She turns over on all fours, arches her back and presents. I run my tongue over her underside from clit to ass, breathing in the perfume of penetrated hole and I dive back in. Our bodies fitting together like fist in glove, a knife in a wound, it's so wet I slide in easily and start pounding, picking up the rhythm, finding the right angle by degrees until she lets out an encouraging moan.

Then I'm stabbing, building to intensity, my thighs smack against hers with a satisfying flesh on flesh impact, her white pink ass turning red. This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience, a living moment of beauty I hold in my hands, and mouth. It fills me with beauty and meaning. We fuck so hard, waves of force run through my body as I pound into her, feral sounds emerge from her mouth muffled in the pillow. She squeals and whimpers, cooing like an injured dog. But her power is palpable in the room. Consuming me. I submit to her. Sacrifice myself. This force overtakes me and I give in to my crazed convulsions, I submit to pleasure, my eyes roll back and the earth shakes as if it were coming apart. I am giddy and destroyed like a beautiful overdose. Liberated, released, unburdened, shaken throughout my being, I collapse in a heap beside her.

I finish her off with my paws and mouth, hands pumping, finger blasting, tongue lashing, till she goes over the edge and heaving waves ripple through her like a crashing ocean, white crests sculpting doves jerking through flight, heaving and falling, rushing through her body till she shakes and quivers.

After cumming I have the baby moose legs, buckling at the knee like a newborn baby animal, staggering, dizzy, dazzled. Reborn out of her cunt into the world, the light of my life. She'll leave me any minute now.



Chapter Nine

I switch on the phone and it's buzzing text notifications as the night begins.

"You free?"

"You around?"

"Can you come over?"

"Stop by the bar?"

"Are you up for a party?"

"Are you down to meet up?"

I am buzzed in at the condo and get the elevator up to Unit 3701. Brad answers the door with a self satisfied smile and invites me into his luxurious box of concrete and steel and glass. Everything is a flimsy set, like real estate staging, the IKEA artwork, the faux hardwood veneer over concrete, the flat grey walls, cheap pre-fab slab architecture masquerading as minimalism, like the inbred trash descendant of Frank Lloyd Wright.

"How's your night going, Boss?" He addresses me sardonically and presents me with a glass of wine.

"Great. What can I do for you tonight?"

The invertebrate hums and hahs about money.

"Can you do any better on the price?" Looking for discount decadence. Eventually he pays in full, as if it hurts. I drain the glass of wine in one.

"Thanks, have a great night." And with a smile and a nod, I'm out.

Next stop is Tony's restaurant, I arrive as they are preparing for dinner service. Chef Anthony meets me in the kitchen, I say "Hi" to the dishwasher and the sous-chef. I see the DJ and the bartender. We gather at the bar and the shots are poured. Unexpectedly the owner appears and he's walking towards me, great, here comes a lecture, I'll have to put on the charm. But he hands me money, which I reject only twice before accepting and I give him a package and a handshake. "To a successful night!" clink, gulp, and I'm off. The door guy hits me up on my way out. "Thanks man, have a great night."

Back downtown at Skull Man's apartment above a shop, beer cans and overflowing ashtrays cover the coffee table, a black leather couch with holes in it. On the huge flat-screen the video game is paused, the first person shooter jerks his anxious repetitive shuffle waiting to be put back into action. There's a drum-kit in the kitchen, and a wall of pizza boxes partitioning off the sleeping area – a bare mattress with a sleeping bag. I stand in the doorway by a shitty cat-box spilling into the hallway by a pile of shoes. Skull Man has long hair, a three-quarter sleeve Def Leppard shirt and ripped jeans. "You wanna smoke a bowl and play Doom?"

"Oh...I'm running a bit late..."

"Maybe next time."

"Thanks man, have a great night!"

I have an elite clientele, based on decency. I will only talk to people who are decent, well-mannered adults. No bullshit people. No assholes. No teeny-boppers. No waste-oids or junkies. I don't need the grief. I have the goods, best in the city, take it or leave it. I don't have a territory or anything like that, I have friends, decent people who just need a little of this or that to get through the day and to make their lives a bit more entertaining,

in some cases a little more bearable, to ease the boredom or the pain and I'm just a text away.

At the end of the night I take transit home with the other weary service industry slaves, shift workers, ne'er-do-wells and drunks. At home, I throw a heap of cash on the bed and count the money. If I make \$XXX I don't feel like a chump. If I make \$X,XXX I feel like a winner. As long as I'm making money everything is ok.

Everything is great. Finally I have everything I need to be happy. It's like the stars have aligned and harmonized. A divine song ringing in my ears and hanging over my head like a halo. Or a guillotine. How long can I keep it together, how long can I hold this note? How long before everything falls apart and my life collapses under the weight of my own happiness?



Chapter Ten

Another night approaches and I get ready to do it all again. Fresh socks and a clean shirt, black Fred Perry polo with a red lined collar and black Van Heusen socks with red racing stripe. I comb my hair, do my top button and look in the mirror. In the reflection I watch myself transform, bright eyes, narrow and harden, brows tense, cutting lines of focus into my skull, the innocent smile fades as the lips tighten into a wicked sneer. Soft brown eyes blacken and intensify as I turn from a cute little fox to a big bad wolf. I steel myself for impact and I'm ready to take on the night.

Outside, the concrete jungle is coming to life as night closes over the city like a pall. The animals are restless, I can feel the tension build in the grind of gears whirring into motion, tires on asphalt, screams in the distance... "Care stops at the threshold of your apartment...when you reach the public space, you pull on your war face."⁷

When it comes down to it, ultimately, I would prefer not to. But if you want to live, you need the money. It's all about the paper chase.

"Cha-cha-chasin' after motherfuckin' paper
Let's just chase after the motherfuckin' paper
Cha-cha -chasin' after motherfuckin paper..."⁸

To get in the mood I listen to Gucci Mane, Trap God. Koko, a work colleague, says if I'm going to be good at this job, I have to listen to more trap house. Arthur Rimbaud, the greatest poet of the 19th century, said in order to be a gangster one must find that place "...where he becomes among all men...the great criminal, the accursed one!"⁹ Ok.

I know this job is my only chance. I could never be a civilian again. My last job was dishwasher, in the pit with the grease and the gristle and the scum, sweating into the steam and grime, working like a slave, dead on my feet from brunch till dinner. It was more like doing time, serving a sentence of ten dollars an hour for not being a successful artist.

There's nothing wrong with an honest day's work. If you're a sucker. Being a dishwasher comes with the animal humiliation of a beaten dog. There's a war going on, to crush your spirit and remind you at every turn that you're not good enough. That's the slave labour humiliation that makes the world go around. "...thrones, altars, judgment seats and prisons... all part of one gigantic despotic system designed to crush the soul of man."¹⁰

So I chose the life of a small-time gangster with the heart of a prince, the whole time dreaming of anything else, dying for a way out. I'm not a gangster, I'm an artist. But I have to work for a living. So I'm just a scum. I'm a lover and an aesthete and a prince but right now I'm just a scum. I've got big dreams and plans and potential. I'm not made to be a dishwasher. Or a gangster. I'm not just grist for the gears or a cheap statistic, I'm something more. "I have a special plan."¹¹ You have to fight to get out of the trap.

I've been poor all my life, now I can eat whenever I want. So

what if I have to wholesale to crack dealers? The poor have every right to do whatever is necessary to survive. When you have nothing, EVERYTHING belongs to you.

My head is spinning, constantly buzzing, lost in the epic fight to find my place. Class, culture, identity, meaning, there is no place for a person like me. It's up to me to create it myself. I eye the switchblade sitting on the edge of the bathroom sink, stab, slash, hack, chop, carve out a "me" shaped hole in the world. My place. I'll make believe the world anew and create it together with my baby.

I'm not Gucci Mane, more like a dark side Pee-wee Herman. So I steel myself for impact, pull on the mask and go do crimes. "So the artist/gangster/poet is actually a thief of Fire!"¹² I'm not a dishwasher. I'm fucking Prometheus!

I take off the trap house and put on Gowan, this will get me in the mood.

"...ask one who's known me
if I'm really so bad...
I am."¹³



Chapter Eleven

Making a living as an artist is a tenuous business. Sometimes it's great, if you make a sale or get a grant you're living the high life, then it could be months or years till your next paycheck. One day you're on top of the world, the next you're shit. That's a real hustle. When you're in the game, at least you know you're getting paid.

People have always and will always use substances to alter their perceptions, that's never going to change. Being human is a condition that requires a little anaesthesia.

For me, it's really just about bringing people together with what they want, customer service with a smile.

In the bars and clubs, in the galleries, parties, on the scene it's all the same. Everybody wants to be somebody, we all want to feel good and we'll do what we can to get what we want and to justify our choices.

On the weekends, Joe Sixpack might go out with a few buds and let off some steam, sink a few cold ones to cool the inferno of anxiety that burns inside. Whereas Joe Blow might blast an eightball, it's not all that different.

Of course mainstream representations of substance use are all hysterical propaganda, complete fiction and fantasy. Nothing is as it's presented, and there is always an agenda. People are

driven by passions, but these passions are more often than not, prescribed by social programming, tastes dictated by culture and class.

There is an unwritten code (legislatively, I guess some of them are written). Hard drugs, soft drugs, club drugs, pharmaceuticals and psychedelics, say no, say yes, say maybe. Drugs are separated into categories, to be used, to be avoided, to manipulate and spread disinformation. Hard drugs, class A, Schedule-1 are those substances with a "high potential for abuse and no medical value."¹⁴ Generally the rule is Crack, No. Heroin, No. Meth, No. Anything with needles, No way. ...only garbage people do these things and they should be avoided at all costs.

But everyone is free to pop the occasional pill and smoking weed is almost required.

Whereas powdered yays, a class A1 narcotic, considered to be a "hard drug" is basically party favours, it's all over the place, people think nothing of it. Sniff a little powder and your synapses are flooded with dopamine stimulating receptor neurons creating a feeling of euphoria, it can boost self-confidence, it makes some people think they're charming and they can get a little talkative. But, as long as it's powder, you don't see people wiggled out naked in the streets peeling off their skin or trying to eat someone's face. For the most part you'd hardly even notice. To be honest it just feels like drinking ten cups of coffee. But some people really like their coffee.

So by all means snort your brains out, do what thou wilt, party on, as long as it fits with the program, as long as you follow the script. You have to be a good time, you've got to party, you have to be fun. As long as you're cool, as long as you have

enough money, you can get away with anything. Being white helps a lot too.

Before tasting the forbidden fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, those guys were innocent. They knew no shame, they had everything they needed and lived in a blissfully ignorant animal state of perfection, beyond good and evil, like a friendly neighbourhood Übermensch. God said: “Don’t do it...”¹⁵ The first prohibition, that didn’t work out. Prohibition is for suckers.

Prohibition is the criminalization of a behaviour, which leads to the persecution of specific segments of the population. People are turned into criminals so their mistreatment can be normalized. These rules are arbitrary lines drawn in the sand by authorities and institutions, subjective value judgments based on socio-economic, moral or racial preferences.

Personally, I never touch the stuff. It’s just not for me. Everyone knows, you don’t fuck with your own supply. I focus on other interests. The quickening, the divine spark, the lightning strike of inspiration, the electric thrill of life’s blood pumping as Frankenstein’s hand goes up the skirts of the Pieta, a fallen Prometheus draped over her knees, lapping up tears off her tits, like a pup. This is what I want. Anything that “curdles the blood, and quickens the beatings of the heart.”¹⁶

In my ambition I accept the responsibility to share access to fire with others, what they do with it is their choice. I reserve judgment, let people make their own decisions. In my naïve optimism I think they should have that right – maybe I still believe in people.

So I’m bad... I’ve always been bad anyway. I don’t know why. I

have an abject personality. It’s as if I am a poison. Non-compliant and objectionable. Anti-social. I am not like THEM, I wear this as a badge of honour.

They want me to be bad, ok, I’ll be the bad guy. I will be the other to their same. I’m the enemy. “Fuck you pay me.”¹⁷



Chapter Twelve

Like everything else, badness is relative. Any definitive conclusion can't help be anything but wrong. When I think of "Bad" I see the Michael Jackson album cover with Malcolm X standing there instead of MJ. A young Malcolm, the rudeboy, pimp and gangsta, with revolutionary potential. Not Denzel. The identity doubling of the movies creates an historic cognitive dissonance, a side effect of a media saturated consciousness.

These days you're seen as a rebel just for being yourself. If it's a crime to be yourself, so be it. It may cost you your life but if you're not really using it, what's the point. You're not really alive unless you're breaking the rules. If everybody else is doing it why bother? Why be Matthew McConaughey? There's already millions of those walking around.

In the 20th century the criminal was the hero of our culture, the epitome of cool. In the movies and TV and literature, the outlaw, the rebel, the anti-hero was idealized. In the movies you'd wish you could be them. Raskolnikov, Philip Marlowe, Alexander DeLarge, Travis Bickle, Mad Max, Tony Montana... Han Solo, even.

They live outside the restrictions of normalcy and break the rules by being themselves, a beacon of freedom in a society that seeks to stamp out individuality. Artists and revolutionaries, freedom fighters of the culture wars: Arthur Rimbaud, Jean Genet, Kathy

Acker, Quentin Crisp, Sebastian Horsely, Joan Rivers, Charles Manson... the list of exceptions goes on... Nina Simone, Divine, Sun Ra, Huey Newton, Oscar Wilde, Andreas Baader & Gudrun Ensslin, Valerie Solanas and Andy Warhol... inspirational icons of 20th century individuality.

Resistance fighters against emotional and psychological tyranny. "What are you rebelling against?" Oppression, repression, rules, society, people, reality, the body, the mind, the ego, the self.

"Whaddya got?"¹⁸ Every limit must be annihilated.

I'm talking about individuals who love too big to be controlled. Anyone who stands up against the soul-crushing mediocrity of the everyday to bash their head against the wall of spectacular imperial mainstream consensus reality to liberate the spirit. Whether real or made up, it doesn't really matter anymore, if there is no real, we're all equally unreal. From the celebrated rebel to the guy you've never heard of sitting in a jail cell dreaming of flying.

We who are not like others, those of us who have the courage to live a life apart are possessed by a beauty beyond surface. We are exiled, separated by our refusal to let our spirits be taken. The malcontents are a dying breed. You don't even have the right to be dissatisfied anymore.

There used to be only big culture, mass media, Hollywood movies and famous rock stars... none of that represented us, it was easy to hate. Now there are endless options, every style and flavour available, it's all there, every desire capable of fulfillment. You want it? You got it. All you have to do is capitulate. No one says NO anymore. To the predetermined eternal consumer, the

only response can be a selection from the options provided.

Who wouldn't be happy in a world where everything you could want is at your fingertips? The malcontent, that's who. Me. I say NO. Just say No.¹⁹ Ok. "No."

The outsider wants more, "they have glimpsed the possibility of what could be and they cannot accept second best..."²⁰ Why be happy when you can be free? "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion"²¹

"I don't know if I'm unhappy because I'm not free, or if I'm not free because I'm unhappy."²² In the movie *Breathless* Jean-Paul Belmondo is a stylish small-time hood in Paris trying to live like a character in an American noir gangster movie. After a crime spree he's wanted by the police. He hooks up with Jean Seberg and they hide out together, trying to be characters in a movie, trying to be beautiful, talking about love and life and looking in the mirror, trying to find love in their reflections. Until she betrays him, because he's a bit of a prick, but running down the middle of the street he's shot by cops, and she changes her mind, but it's too late, it's the familiar archetype, he has crossed the line and must be punished. And he pays with his life for being in love.

If this sounds familiar it's because it is. All these ideas are stolen. It's a total cliché. *Breathless* is the blueprint for the nostalgic hipster black and white art school drop-out poseur version of cool. A satire, the basis of my ambition, talk about meta, a dream within a dream within a dream, "a lie within a lie within a lie"²³

I can pretend my life has the 1960s French new wave film "Je ne sais quoi" but I do "sais", I know it's nothing. I know I'm

just a small time gangster wanna be, just like Michel Poiccard (Belmondo) looking up to Humphrey Bogart as Philip Marlowe and Jean Seberg doing her Audrey Hepburn impression. A copy of a copy of a copy. I've tried rubbing my thumb over my lips but chicks these days.

These cinematic myths stipulate that the offender always gets it in the end and social control prevails. After committing a transgression as offensive as being himself, the anti-hero must pay for stepping out of line. "The light that burns twice as bright, burns half as long"²⁴. The transgressions must be punished and order restored. That which society cannot control, it must destroy. In the movies the outlaw hero always dies at the end. But spoiler alert... in life everybody dies at the end.



Chapter Thirteen

I meet Cookie when she gets off work and we go to the sailor tattoo bar and have a drink on the patio.

“How was your day?”

“Meh, it was okay. It’s hard.”

“They don’t appreciate you. If they don’t know you’re brilliant, fuck ‘em.”

She knows I’m being patronizing, but she smiles anyway. “We should open our own place.”

“Maybe one day.”

I walk her to her bicycle but as we’re saying our goodbyes I feel the magnetic pull of the alley. Quite naturally we’re in the parking lot behind the bar kissing, I pull her against me and feel her body react.

In the late afternoon sun, she extracts her tampon and throws it in the dumpster. She hitches up her short skirt and we do it face to face staring into each other’s eyes as I shove it in, holding one leg up, her back against the dumpster, she arches her spine, pushing into me and together we pound out the rhythm, like some primordial conversation, we have returned to the dawn of humanity.

Birds chirp approvingly as we consummate our blissful union of flesh. With her ass spread in my hands and her face against the corrugated metal she squeals a little as I ram it home. As the evening sun sets like a postcard, I cum.

I am proud as a prom queen as we kiss goodbye. She’s getting on her bike when she says irritatedly, as if to no one in particular “Why does everybody always cum in me?” I try hard to pretend she didn’t just say that as she rides away with my genetic material dripping down her leg, pink with blood. I cab to work, to do crimes and get money.



Chapter Fourteen

In the parkette across the street from my apartment is a monument which I pass everyday, every time I go out and every time I come home. A memorial to some WWII atrocity. Some people got massacred. It's a 10 foot tall monolithic iron slab with a big crack down the middle. There's votive candles and flags, nationalism, genocide. I marvel at the massive scale of murder people are capable of, it's at once simple and fascinating.

At home I massacre all of the ants on the bathroom sink. I kill about six or seven. I Crush them against the enamel with a bit of TP and wash them down the drain and I win. A little massacre everyday. How many deaths are required for a massacre? I want to exterminate these ants out of my home. How many deaths to make a genocide? I look at the killers face in the mirror. There's a lot of killing to be done.

I have a drink. It hits my stomach and radiates outward. Everything lightens, my body, the mood around me, cares float away, a warm glow glosses over the edges sparkling a little shine on just everything.



Chapter Fifteen

Downtown I hang with my crew, my cadre of agents, cultural attaché, friends, collaborators, partners in crime. We are the elite of a counter-culture which doesn't exist, legends in our own imaginations, bound by a hatred of society and unified by a love of resistance. We make-believe an underground. We conspire to fight back against the mediocrity of civilization by making fun-times.

SHIT FUN is our monthly club night of noisy dance music and dancy noise music held at various locations, this month a dive bar in Chinatown. Thirty people fill the place, the smell of rotting carpet and stale grease hangs in the air. The drinks are cheap, the music is loud, it's a tiny, dark, filthy hole, it's perfect. This will be home base for tonight, clients come and go.

Electronic Body Music fills the tiny dance floor with sweaty bodies writhing under the strobe-light, martial rhythms and stabs of synth, wild shapes flailing in the fog of the smoke machine, losing themselves to the beat. Izad aka DJ VX, after the nerve gas, performs wearing a balaclava with broken mirror bits glued to it like a disco terrorist, between twiddling knobs, overdriving filters and distorting sine-waves, he operates a metal grinder shooting sparks into the small crowd, filling the room with the smell of burning ozone. There's a ten person pit, revellers are slammed and hugged and lifted and thrown and picked up and hugged again. The bass is so heavy the sound waves rip through

the office-tile drop ceiling and we are covered in a rain of noxious dust. This is my idea of a good time. This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

At about 3 AM we cab home with the equipment and enjoy a moment of post-cultural release, able to bask briefly in the bitter-sweet afterglow of the discharge of creative energy, the hollow vindication of having done something. The feeling can last for a couple hours, then I must focus on the next project, to avoid sinking into the mire of idle sediment. Cookie is tired and doesn't share my inflated self-gratification. I'm pleased with myself but she wants to go to sleep. I'm glowing, she's snoring.

As special as my girl is, I am the special one. I love myself when I'm with her. I see my naïve ambition reflected in her indifference and anything seems possible, more so, the impossible seems necessary. I have to do it all to show her that I am worth it. Maybe I'm a narcissist.

Everybody is always down on the narcissist because they're jealous. But if you got it, you got it. Narcissus was the most beautiful boy in town, he was universally desired but he wasn't giving it away, so they called him arrogant. Maybe he doesn't want to be better than everyone, maybe he wants the world around him to be as beautiful as he is, to care as much as he does. I hate the world because I love the world and I see the potential of what it could be. I expect more. So I'm a narcissist. If they want me to be guilty I'll be guilty.

Echo wanted Narcissus, so she cast a spell. As he walked in the forest, Echo was sneaking up to be the one, but before she could get his attention, Narcissus saw his own reflection in the pool and it was over.

He fell in love with his image, not with himself, but the image of himself and he lay there on the bank gazing at his representation. It was him but he could never touch it, could never consummate his love. He was forever separated from himself, by the object of his desire, his own image.

Images re-construct us outside ourselves as appearance; a simplified avatar that degrades the living into a simulation, it develops an artificial persona onto which we project our identity. But the avatar fails us. #selfsacrifice, #lostidentity, #instagramlife.

The ideal colonizes our desires, preys on our fantasies, tells us how to live: Fix your hair, wear these clothes, smile this way, be this person. Like an abusive boyfriend it plays on our insecurities and amplifies an incompleteness that isn't there. Our occupied desires become foreign to us. The ideal we long for is always just out of reach, it needs us to keep looking, it demands our endless striving for its unattainable allure, like a jealous lover.

Eventually only the image exists at all and all of life is reduced to an immense accumulation of spectacular images. Thanks Baudrillard.²⁵

I lay in bed beside Cookie. She drifts off easily, stilled by the decent logic that she has to be up in the morning for her sensible life. I can't sleep. I stare at the ceiling while my mind races over possibilities.

Everyone with the arrogance to make something could be called a narcissist. To dare to make something an artist must first allow themselves agency, they must believe in their power to create, to play god, to bring something to life, asserting your will over the natural disorder of the world.

The artist must gaze into the reflecting pool and what they find staring back at them, ugly or beautiful, must be loved. That's the spell, a blessing and a curse.

What's so bad about being a narcissist? It is a kind of madness, but it is the desire to make art, the desire for perfection that drives us mad but naturally this madness must be indulged. The world, my reflection, tells me what I am. You have to be what you are, Popeye said. If they want me to be mad I'll be mad.

I want to be proud enough to think I could make something, be something, be somebody. In the narcissistic swamp of insecurity, frustration and self-doubt there is a drive to be more. If "pretentious" means "...affecting greater importance, talent, culture, than is actually possessed,"²⁶ an assumption of dignity and self-importance, I'll take it. I have my politics, righteous indignation, spiritual supremacy, my illusions and I need them to keep me going. I'm a fucking pimp, a player. To live up to the demands of my reflection I need to be more than I am. Pretentious? Maybe. Ambitious? Definitely. A pretentious narcissist? Why not.



Chapter Sixteen

Home is in the west end, far from downtown where I work, here no one knows me, and I can relax. Among the strangers walking the streets in my neighbourhood are people with familiar faces, familiar styles and personas; solitary weirdos I see going about their business, doing their own thing, or someone else's. Some of them have the look of famous artists or writers, echoes of cultural icons, bizarro-world clones with everything but success. There's only so many faces to go around, some are re-runs, re-makes. I make up fantasy lives for them from the histories of the great writers or artists they share an appearance with.

There is Ernest Hemingway, the homeless man in the park. The big barrel-chested classic man's man with a grey beard, old Papa. Adventurous and outdoorsy – handy for his current living situation. He's always wearing that dirty cream coloured fisherman's turtleneck. Imagine the adventures he must've lived, deep sea fishing off the coast of Florida, or more likely cottage country in the Kawarthas, big game hunting on safari in Abyssinia or the Don Valley. Enjoys watching bullfights or maybe dogfights.

"Spare change for a Cuba Libre?"

"I once caught a fish...I swear it was thiiiiiiiis big!"

He has drank heroically with the greats of 20th century literature, or with nobodies from nowhere who do nothing. Now HE has the desperate look of a hunted lion. He's winning the Pulitzer prize for homelessness. And schizophrenia, the prize is loneliness and despair.

Then there's the poet Richard Brautigan. He wrote a book about a utopian hippie commune where everything was perfect and peaceful and they all lived off something called "Watermelon Sugar." But this guy lives off Pepsi. Colloquially, he is known as Pepsi-Man. He strolls the neighbourhood with a casual saunter, wearing wire-rimmed poet's glasses, long beard, long hair, balding, blue jean denim suit...He looks just like him but always carrying a Pepsi, always alone. Everybody needs something to be their thing, the thing that does it for them, fulfills them. In Watermelon Sugar it's time for another Pepsi.

These are my neighbourhood characters, strangers to me, I know them only through their cultural accomplishments. Their legends, books, images, and bodies of work they left behind. They used to be somebody, or could have been, or just look like someone who was. "You would not think to look at him, but he was famous long ago"²⁷ Maybe being a legend doesn't help, like flying doesn't help the pigeons. They have to get through the day like everybody else.

These famous clones are the highlight among the creeps wandering the streets. Lost souls who once had all the potential in the world. They haunt the streets because they have nowhere else to be, nothing to do, no one to love, no purpose in life. They are the unwanted, undesirable, unlovable human wreckages. Society has thrown them away. Or they've become impossible, through neglect, addiction, social meltdown, somehow they've fallen through the cracks. Some have real character, a distinct personality, though it may be stolen. They could never fit in with the ants and for this I respect them.



Chapter Seventeen

"Oh look at the beautiful old houses."

Sunday afternoon, Cookie and I are strolling around the neighbourhood after brunch. Everything is being "developed." Slowly any trace of character being cut out like a slow series of amputations. Lobotomy by numbers. Cut the character out, cut the deviant out. Remove all style or beauty or hint of mortality. To be replaced by Kleenex-box, cardboard cut-out, pre-fab nightmares, accommodations more like jail cells than homes. The old bank on the corner has been replaced by a four story deep pit, future parking lot, another mausoleum is coming. High-rise apartments, condominiums, multi-use retail-residential monstrosities, vertical coffin arrays... Legoland empires of shit multiply like a pestilence rising to block out the sky, invasion of the neighbourhood snatchers. They walk among us.

"It's a beautiful day..." I say trying to be positive. Actually it's a miserable grey day, a heavy overcast sky hangs low, threatening to storm.

"Yeah, it's nice." Cookie is trying to be agreeable. We're walking down side streets past the Victorian houses being condemned and turned into construction sites, the poor driven out like rats, buildings vacated and safely fenced off, before being gutted and refurbished. The three inch skin of a heritage building draped over a modernist skeleton.

"Yeah, beautiful." As I look at the old houses for probably the last time. I can't help but get a little maudlin. I'm

a sentimental bitch, what can I say. I carry a torch for dreams of a life always out of reach. Like many people I play host to a morbid sentimental fantasy of another time, slow and stylish, where taste and decency existed. People moved at a different frame rate. Everything was black and white, this fiction that never has been pieced together from old movies and books, someone else's nostalgia, it relies on the illusion that there ever was such a thing as authenticity, it is at odds with the world we live in, but I don't care.

Most areas are taken like this. Poor people live in a run-down area because the rents are cheap, because nobody wants to live near poor people. But the poor people make it cool, they open businesses in old rundown buildings crumbling with soul and character. They open "cool" shops, cafés, and build a neighbourhood where people interact, where stuff happens. They make it desirable, make it into something like a community. Then the art galleries move in and it starts. Soon the developers swoop in like vultures and buy up the property, name it, brand it, market it and sell the "cool" to the uncool, what they sell is a lifestyle. Morality on tap. Loft living. Bohemian chic. With that comes the comfortable uniform of mediocrity and a Starbucks on every block.

The trendy bars move in, expensive restaurants open and close and open again, candle stores, health and wellness shops, lifestyle stores, yoga, organic everything, synthetic life replacements ... all manner of lifestyle fetishism. They "develop" the area, rents double, dive bars become expensive hipster joints, the chain stores open on every corner to accommodate the mainstream tastes of the colonial suburbans: A&W, McDs, HoleFoods, Shoppers Death Mart, Pizza Pizza Pizza, the police of monoculture, spreading like a disease, turning the neighbourhood into a food-court in hell. Cold shit on a plastic tray.

The lost souls who don't fit the mould are driven out or damned to tiny apartments, and rooming houses, the city is getting so expensive people are shamed into basement apartments where they can't stand up. Hell-holes shared with rats and roaches, and ants or other people, this is purgatory.

But they can't turn this neighbourhood. There are too many real fuck-ups that can't be tamed, authentic psychos that still scare the poseurs. They can't be shamed by their poverty, they aren't impressed by expensive shit and they can't buy into the lifestyle. The full on crazy ones are just too far gone. They live like their lives are already on fire. You can't rape the willing and you can't kill what's already dead. The lost souls of purgatory are not going to be run out of town. We live our lives like shredded meat, just waiting to be consumed.



Chapter Eighteen

I'm meeting Chad at the greasy spoon. As the sun sets, neon lights flicker on reflecting in the stainless steel frontage over the window. I get a booth, all wood with leather seats, and Formica table top. The server comes over in a white fitted 1960s waitress smock with an apron and blue hair. I get a coffee. Chad arrives smiling like a guilty schoolboy and sits, opposite me, in the booth. A little idle chit-chat, "How's law school?" We do the exchange under the table. I finish my coffee or don't, I tip well and I'm off.

At the Johnson&Johnson Gallery I meet Johnson, the gallerist, and Cassandra, the gallerina, they are setting up for the next show opening tomorrow. Pristine white walls, painted drywall with exposed brick columns and polished blonde hardwood floors. Each large format photograph is framed in black metal and white mattes, everything looks good in expensive frames. Cassandra disappears and we do the exchange then I get the mini-tour as Johnson practices his used car salesman/art dealer pitch.

"The artist's use of the body speaks to the patriarchal representation of the media...blah blah...exploitation...blah blah...empowerment..." "This diptych would bring sophistication to your space and really make a statement..." They are photos of big tits.

"It would look great over the couch."

"Yeah!"

Steph works in the office at the university, she's got money to burn. Sometimes I meet her at work and we exchange in the smoking area, sometimes she picks me up in her silver Audi, baby seat in the back, toys all over. Tonight I meet her in the parking lot outside the subway station and we chat while she drives around the block.

Back downtown, Mark Anthony, an actor, lives with his boyfriend Tom Brady in a huge open concept condo with a tiny dog. They are drinking wine and watching *Top Model*. We exchange while making small-talk.

"Big plans tonight?"

"We're gonna get high and watch *Top Model*"

"Cool!"

"Yeah Kaytlin is getting kicked off."

"Alright, sashay away!"

They are very flirty and I can't visit without being playfully propositioned. I blush and walk out of there feeling handsome.

Up the street, across town, back to the neighbourhood, at Party Rockers Bar, I meet with Luscious.

"Can I see you in my office?" Business is handled and we down a shot.

"Have a great night!" with a handshake and a bow, I'm out, headed for transit going 'round and 'round on deliveries all night long.

Later, back at the Bucket of Blood I meet friends for last call. Inside the drinking continues, clients come and go, friends come and go. We drink together, we drink to pleasure, we drink to pain, we drink to excess.

At closing time the patrons stumble out and we have a lock-in

as the bartender does his cash-out, in the back room, the lines are cut and the whiskey flows as three or four comrades decompress. Sometimes it's a gossip sesh, sometimes a heart to heart, sometimes just bitching about the slings and arrows of the service industry. Huddled in the inner sanctum, burnt and weary from a nights work there is an intimate warmth in this cave. We share intense, personal, heart rending bonding moments that no one will remember in the morning. Baggies are emptied, bottles drained, when the night comes to an end it's a little sad to have to go out into the light and face the world again, where none of our secrets mean anything.

I make my way homeward, walking the silent grey streets just before dawn, to the transit line and wait for the all-night streetcar. People are starting off to work. Newly hatched pupae fleeing the nest to spread the buzzing drone of insect static across the city. They keep coming and coming, drone after drone after drone, carrying out their program, all going somewhere or nowhere.

In case of a violent conflict I carry an extendable baton or cobra. Like the one Case uses in *Neuromancer*. It's a compact metal cylinder with two smaller coiled steel shafts inside. With the flick of the wrist it extends to about two and a half feet long and is enough to break a bone, or a face. Carrying it makes me feel secure. The weight of it in my pocket reminds me it's there if I need it, ready for the inevitable.



Chapter Nineteen

I work hard. I stress and toil and slog and chop and grind and hustle. Drink is an occupational hazard, a necessity. I am not a bad drunk. I never lose control. I never slur my speech or fall down, never get in trouble, always maintain my cool and keep on top of my game. I keep a clear head, I take care of business and I get paid.

Whiskey makes people tolerable, enjoyable even, I could almost laugh. After a few drinks I can talk myself into believing it's worth doing, whatever it is. Drink lifts the weight of the world, loosens the bonds of time's grinding hours, lightens the terminal pain of being. The sublime vertigo of a light buzz makes anything possible. I could do anything, even talk to you.

When I get home from work at four or five in the morning I drag myself up the stairs to our apartment and unwind with a bottle of whiskey or two and watch a movie or three in the spare room while my baby sleeps next door. *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *Night and the City*. Noir, noir, noir. As Elliot Gould's Phillip Marlowe says in *The Long Goodbye*: "It's okay with me."²⁸ Cradled in clichés I try to sleep, but it doesn't come easy.

It's seven or eight in the morning when my love wakes up to get ready for work, I kiss her good morning. I smell like whiskey.

"Good morning, darling!"

"You smell like whiskey," she says

“I’m trying to cut down.”

“You drink too much.”

“I know, I’m trying to cut down.”

“I’m worried about you.”

“I know I’m difficult, but I’m worth it.” That line always gets a smile.

She goes to work and I drink myself back to sleep alone, watching *To Have and to Have Not* for the three-hundredth time. Unconsciousness comes like a saviour. I don’t have to work again until 4 PM when I switch on the phone and the calls start.

“You know how to whistle don’t you?... Just put your lips together and blow.”²⁹



Chapter Twenty

The phone buzzes the familiar text notification and I hop the bus to a new condo development in a fabricated neighbourhood by the waterfront. I’m buzzed in and pass the concierge with a smile and a tip of the hat. The lobby is covered in mirrors and shiny metal, grotesque pseudo-modernist props, angular sculptures, square furniture, fake abstract paintings, all blank formalism. Faux-art like in a movie set. Post-modern pap. Post post...post architecture, post aesthetics, post looking good, post making sense. I’m post giving a fuck.

I get the elevator up to the unit, one below the penthouse. Barron Trump greets me at the door, and invites me in. The place is flawless, all white and chrome and bleached wood, smoked glass rectangular tables and stark white or black angular leather furniture. The luxury suite looks like a high-end furniture design showroom, right angles, marble counter tops, stainless steel fixtures, appliances built into the cupboards, slick and minimalist like Patrick Bateman’s apartment.

Two walls of floor to ceiling windows overlook the city at night. A long way down tiny lights crawl through the city like ants. The city is a labyrinth, up here in the sky above it all I can see the pointlessness of their endless going around and around, on transit, on the streets, in cars, on raised highways, tiny lights crawling across the city, like Pac-Man, crawling in a vast network of arteries, a perpetual gridlock of uncountable insects trapped in

their routine. Swarming from one meaningless task to the next, collecting sugar, water, fat, alcohol, meat, tobacco, whatever ants collect, nectar, money, clothes...

The ant has a highly structured class system, a complete social hierarchy "doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else."³⁰ Each individual is connected to the others and dependent on their approval for its survival. They have a determined specialization in co-operation within the social order, workers, soldiers, designers, office drones... To maintain the balance they will adapt as needed, changing their roles to serve the hive, from cleaner to soldier, from builder to office worker and so on. Workers organize their own labour, police themselves and one another and enforce their own servility. Each day workers return to their assigned enclosures, like a one bedroom condo or a bachelor apartment, they will do so until death.

At the condo with Brandon, Braydon... Banyon... trying to play along with the banal conversation while I wait to get paid. The fucker complains about the price and tries to haggle. It's always the rich ones who are the cheapest, stingiest bastards. I guess that's why they're rich.

"Take it or leave it." They always take it. And if they don't there's someone else who will. There's always someone who wants. I finish at the condo and I'm off to Fun Bar where I meet Tracy in the toilets, then stop at the bar for a drink, that cheers me up.

I go all over town, from the homes of the elite to the work places of the slaves. Upstairs, downstairs and all the backrooms and dark alleys in between. I'm like a snake with the keys to the city, a fox going from hen-house to hen-house, a player with a bus pass, from the penthouse to the gutter and back.

Brittany is at an artisanal cocktail bar with fancy drinks and fancy bitchez, signature cocktails and craft beers, a cultivated atmosphere, interior designed, custom furnishings, matching glassware and matching douche bags. Everything feels expensive. Behind the bar, some smiling fashion victim, out-of-work actor, a personality, bubbly and fuckable wagging their tail for tips, acts out their game show host routine, nauseatingly surface.

Not far away, Randy is at a tiny shit closet, narrow, cold, barely more than a hole, full of low-lifes, desperate no-hopers and life-haters, drowning their sorrows in cheap whisky and draft beer. Everyone's here for one reason, to get blotto, the atmosphere is essentialist, function over fashion, the floors are sticky, the stench of broken toilet hangs heavy in the air indiscernible from the stink of broken dreams. The bartender Clay is in a band, working like a dog and drinking like a pig, a genuinely good person with bad habits.

Jordan is on a date and needs more party supplies. Dom is working in the kitchen of a hot-spot resto, Alexis is in line to see the Indie Rock show, in the club district Cameron is outside Technoir nightclub, waiting for me. Harry is at an English style pub nearby. Luis is at The Ace Hole, a basic sports bar, twenty-five screens display men chasing a ball or beating the shit out of each other, he's there watching the fights with his boys. I'm in and out in ten minutes.

I meet people of all walks of life and get a private view into their lives, all flavours and habits, randomly diverse lifestyles with one thing in common. Everyone wants to be somebody. And everyone wants to be somebody else. The people doing nine to five on the grid are jealous of what they imagine to be my rock 'n' roll lifestyle of drink and drugs and parties every night. I am

jealous of their normal-guy lifestyle, a wife, a husband, a job, a car, maybe a kid or a dog, or a 401k. Everything always looks more attractive from far away. No one is happy with who they are. People are fascinating. And they're all very nice. When they want something from you.

This is an average day at work. Clients are glad to see me, I make everybody happy, sometimes two or three times a night. But seeing these people up close and personal makes me glad to be who I am. Thanks, Bam-Bam.



Chapter Twenty One

On my way to work as the sun sets I pass the monument. The first thing I see every evening when I leave the house and the last thing I see every morning when I come home. Good morning genocide. Set against the picturesque landscape of rolling hills and flowerbeds, the lake visible in the distance, here in the lush green parkette the black slab of iron stands out. It becomes a fixture in my routine, a daily reminder of the immense possibility of everything.

So many wasted, dead and gone, sometimes I think of all the things they could have done if they hadn't had their lives snuffed out, sometimes I think how irrelevant human life is. Tiny and fleeting, "but a vapour that appeareth for a short time, then vanisheth away."³¹ A fragile momentary bipedal hump, here for a second and then vanished into dust.

I've put together a crew of soldiers. Now I have weekends off to spend with my girl, playing house, while my team of docents take care of business, carrying the torch and keeping the clients happy while I'm free to do as I like, I make money in my sleep. Getting other people to work while you get paid, that's business. I feel proud that I am taking shit to the next level. Like a real capitalist. I'm just like Jeff Bezos, a parasite. And I feel constantly guilty.

Capitalism is a bitch and it's impossible to avoid. It seems simple enough, just don't exploit anyone. But every way you face it

you're fucked. Working for somebody else you're a sucker, working for yourself, you're playing somebody else for a sucker. Selling something you make, you feel like a whore. You can't win. And if you do win, you're an asshole. Call it a conspiracy, a business plan, an addiction, call it supply and demand, whatever. It's an omnipotent ideology. If it isn't a global conspiracy it might as well be, the way everything is set up would seem this could only be happening by some sort of cruel intelligent design. As if money and power were a distinct alien force operating through us, living for it's own sake like a self replicating virus. Anyone who thinks this is paranoid or psychotic. And the likelihood it's true is irrelevant because just the possibility is sufficient to drive anyone crazy. It can be depressing.

So many ways of getting you to part with your hard earned cash. Going out, partying, it's all a sucker's game, you're always getting played. Everybody is just selling you something. The bartender is not your buddy. The dealer is not your friend. The cool guys and the in crowd, everybody on the other side of the game, they're there cause they're getting paid. Service industry, customer culture, pay to play, all the smiling faces where everybody knows your name, they're getting paid to be there. Or they're also paying for the privilege of standing around a darkened room in a crowd full of suckers.

"In a society where ideology controls the minds of everyone, the only way to step outside the system is through crime"³²

On TV they talk about "criminals" as if they are a different breed. But a criminal is just someone who finds themselves in difficult circumstances. It could happen to you. The law is just a bunch of lies made up by a hive of old white dead slave-masters to protect their property and justify the mistreatment of people

born into the affliction of poverty.

Successful business villains rely on the less fortunate for their prosperity. They keep their victims fed, but desperate, they give you just enough to keep you terrified to lose it. Like modern wage slavery. That's the real crime. "Show me a capitalist and I'll show you a bloodsucker."³³

Though I must admit, I do love pay day, I don't care what anybody says, walking away with a few thousand dollars for an honest hours work is a fucking good feeling, it beats the shit out of any anti-depressant.

If no one says anything, how do you know it's wrong? I have to kill the ants. Am I the bad guy? From an ant perspective I would definitely be the bad guy. I never take pleasure in the killing, it's just something that needs to be done.

What does it take to kill ants? What does it take to kill people? To exterminate? To genocide?

The monument is a memorial to 22,000 victims, killed and buried in mass graves, what's left is this monolith half way across the world. How could they kill that many people, commit that many murders and go on murdering. How can they? Easily. People are capable of anything. The human potential for cruelty is infinite.

If you asked them why they'd say "Oh we were just doing our jobs... we were just doing what we were told."³⁴ Maybe they deserve to die. Maybe humanity is a write-off.

Humans, like ants, evolved from stinging wasps, some retain the

ability to sting. Ants became social 130 million years ago. They developed agriculture 50 million years ago and domesticated other species, they raise aphids in factory farms to milk them and eat their bodies the way humans do cattle. People evolved to be social only about 50,000 years ago, they developed agriculture and became basically what they are now only about 10,000 years ago. We still have not successfully learned how to eliminate ants.



Chapter Twenty Two

Some sources say more people exist now than in all human history combined. In 1815 there were 1 billion people living on earth. In 1915 there were 1.5 billion. Now, there are more than 8 billion people walking around. The total weight of all humans, their biomass, is said to be equal to the biomass of all ants and grows equally exponentially. If you stop to think about it, they are a real problem. What are we going to do with all these ants? Of course, the human solution is Extermination. What's problematic is the question of who will decide who goes first? Here are my suggestions:

People who ruin it for everyone else, polluting the world for future generations. Racist, homophobic, sexist, narrow-minded, xenophobic bigots... you know, the obvious ones. People who would take something away from those who have nothing. Exterminate. People who think they know what's best and would try to tell anyone else how to live. Exterminate. People who are rude to waitstaff. "Exterminate."³⁴ Loud people, inconsiderate people...

People who eat McDonald's on public transit, people in cut-off jean shorts, people in flip flops, men in sandals, men with pony tails, soul patch, women in flared "boot cut" trousers, white dreadlocks, people who drive loud muscle cars, people who have loud cell phone conversations in public, people who go on about bacon, people with cosmetic holes in their jeans, anyone

in blue denim really.

Someday a real rain will come.

People who honk their horns, cab drivers who honk their horns, cab drivers who leave their availability indicator light on while unavailable, cab drivers. Jehovah's witnesses, Catholics, people who believe in Jesus Christ, Muslims. Vegans. People who believe in anything. People in shopping malls, people in fast food restaurants, in fancy restaurants, on highways, in the suburbs, in towns, in cities, people. People are the worst.

People who carry a waft of cologne, a stench cloud ten feet long trailing down the sidewalk polluting the air for everyone, flaunting your wealth, proving nothing but your complete lack of class. Cool guys on motorcycles revving their noise-maker as they peel off, gunning it so loud I can't even hear myself screaming at the top of my lungs "Fuck You!?"

Someday, someday.

Ultimately the most basic essential qualification for humanity is compassion. This one thread of decency separates us from the insects. It is a sense of empathy that makes us human. If you don't have that, you deserve to die. People without manners are nothing but a bad smell. A nuisance, like a house fly or a stinging wasp. And they make life shitty for everybody else. Manners and decency are everything, people with no decency deserve to be chopped up with an axe.

The worst are the oblivious, incognizant human cattle who go through life taking up space, basically already dead, ignorant of their surroundings, unaware of their own existence, people

who don't hold the door for the person behind them or don't say thank you when someone holds the door for them. People who stand in thoroughfares like inanimate objects, under my breath I say as I pass "Get off earth now" or "Fucking subhuman waste." Obliviated, forfeited to oblivion, irreconcilably absent.

Someday a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the earth.³⁶

These brand X meat puppets with ordinary jobs and ordinary lives behave as if they have no choice. From their boring childhood to their vacant lives and empty funerals, soul-crushingly uninteresting. Stylistically they are like a paste, like they've traded their blood for luke-warm milky piss. Voidoids all. The only thing I can't decide is whether I want to come raining down blows with a baseball bat or a machete?

People wear their identity for all to see. It's how they express themselves to the world, whether they know it or not they are making clear statements in loud voices:

"I am nothing but a mindless drone."

"I am stupider than a piece of wood."

"I am the lowest vilest wriggling maggot."

"I am a caricature of a caricature of
a caricature of beige."

"I hate my life."

"I'm lonely."

"Please look at me."

"Please kill me."

Appearance and behaviour say so much more than words ever could.

I get it now. I understand genocide. Massacres make perfect

sense. In order to make life livable in this world, a whole lot of motherfuckers need to die.

It's a nice fantasy but I know it's impossible, I'm a dreamer, not a murderer.



Chapter Twenty Three

Public transit is the atrocity exhibition.

On the streetcar some of the specimens are beyond belief. This guy's fingers as he grabs the pole inches in front of my face are so covered in hair, he is clearly descended from lower primates, maybe he's just never seen a mirror or grasped the concept of grooming. A violation of aesthetics that boggles the mind. Some walking zit-farm, teenage failed abortion stuffs his face with McDonalds fries. This one's face looks like a donkeys balls. This one looks like she's been deep fried, candy coloured lip-stick and googly eyes stuck to smiling fried chicken with crispy golden dyed platinum blonde candy floss. There's a 300 lb toad in overalls with a nest of pubic hair for a face. And they keep coming, there are so many of them, like an endless assembly line of defects. Wide-loads in sweatpants, muffin tops bulging and pale pink gunts damaging the very atmosphere with a hot-pink thong peaking out from a hell I try desperately not to imagine. But I worry I can taste it in the air, notes of tuna, sweat, red onions, a very late laundry day. A bouquet of clashing stinks. Axe body spray, salve... greasy dish water, an old rag, Pine Sol, bacon gristle, CKone... packed lard, off-gassing plastics and autonomous hair. "I begin to loathe my kind principally from looking at their faces in the tube, really raw red beef and silver herrings would give me more pleasure to look upon."³⁷

There's the indentured parent, spirit crushed by exhaustion, they

have all but given up. Their gaggle of feral offspring bounce or shout or pick or moan the existential horror of the coming 20-80 years. A boy on a leash eats fish fingers from a tupperware. And they keep on coming. There is an in-exhaustible supply.

The office drones in grey beige puce pants suits, Gap overcoat, twelve dollar haircut, neat and trimmed, intellectually and stylistically as exciting as a polyester cubicle wall.

As with most captive situations they sit and stare at their phones, hiding from eye-contact or any interaction while simultaneously longing for some sort of connection. Alone in the crowd dying for some good news, an affirmation, someone to reach through the phone and ease the loneliness saying “We gonna party tonight?” or “Did you see Celebrity Death Match?” or “Ssup?” or “DTF?” or “How was your day honey?”

These normal monsters are all the same: abdomen, thorax, head, coarse haircut, a flattened face with enamel mandibles, round multi-faceted stressed out compound eyes, protective poly-blend exoskeleton, scent glands and antennae and hand held screen to navigate and share empty information. They are all crawling through their miserable lives from home to office, from oblivious to oblivion, from the cradle to the grave.

The human ant has no method of direct communication other than chemical messaging. They operate following a pheromone trail left by other ants to guide them based on scent or text messaging. A million insects of a singular mind, any individuality sublimated and absorbed, the group becomes a whole, the hive-mind, a thousand tiny selves fused into one “super-organism.” On social media they share the same intimacies and become indistinguishable, one from the next, exterminating

any deviation, any expression of release. Walking and talking, nightmares alive, droning on. They are so prolific that they inhabit every continent on earth.

Though the parade is endless, surrounded by these subhumans I shine inside, because in my heart I know, I’m coming home to her. My queen, my muse, my cloud, she makes me invincible. The daily grind and every middling torture of everyday life is just something that will be over when I come home and find release in her arms.



Chapter Twenty Four

Today I have to go out during the day, do some errands and meet my guy, you know, function. I ride transit downtown, as long as it's not rush hour it's not hell. Daytime transit riders are different, they don't seethe with hate. They move of their own volition. Or they're unemployed bums or whatever, but their purpose is their own, the feeling of slavery is not there, sometimes they look like they might almost smile. It's a beautiful sunny day.

This afternoon on the streetcar it's the normal crowd, people sit and look out the window as the streetcar cruises on its route, stopping and starting. Subtly but clearly a voice breaks the silence blurting out: "REDYUM"³⁸ in the high gurgling voice of Danny's finger in *The Shining*. There's no reaction, the streetcar plods on, the afternoon sun shines. Then again out of nowhere, in a low gurgling scream: "REDYUM!" I look at my phone and plan out my schedule. The streetcar is half full of calm, normal, mild mannered schmoes all minding their own business. "REDYUM!!" It's getting louder. It appears to be coming from a perfectly ordinary smiling gnome with a red face and a puff of white hair. No one says anything, no reaction at all, everyone just goes on pretending everything is normal. And it is. "REDYUM!!!"

I get downtown on the streetcar and I walk the main drag. It feels good to be out during the day, walking in the sunlight among the normals, seeing people with lives and jobs and a purpose,

functional human people going to or from something that must somehow fulfill them.

I meet Freddy at Charm's place we sometimes use as an office. We count the stacks, do the math and measure packages, breaking bricks into chunks, it disintegrates into powder, big nuggets the size of a man's heart, and dust so fine it hangs in the air, a sort of creamy white with gasoline rainbow and sparkly flakes. The electric perfume of it thrills, the delightful alkaline ester and ammonia peaks the attention with excitement, like a bouncy bright-eyed cartoon character. I measure units with a scale making perfect little packages, measuring and counting, using the skills I learned from *Sesame Street*. Little white squares, upon little white squares, into bigger white squares. Everyone's good at something. I use custom printed bags with the Jackson Pollock splatter graphic or a Mondrian grid with squares and rectangles of primary colours. I consider this an art project. I express myself with plastic bags, this is what it's come to.

The secret to a successful business of this kind is to be small enough that the police don't bother, but big enough that nobody will try to fuck with you. Appear dangerous but non-threatening. Our only predators would be police, real gangsters, or do-gooders, we just have to stay under the radar. You don't want them to even know about you, be like a ghost. Feared in the minds of the right people, invisible to the wrong ones. Desired by the desirable ones, and respected by all. Basically, if you aren't too big and aren't too small you'll be ok. Unless someone with a personal vendetta rats you out, so stay friendly. Never bring work home. Stay cool, be nice to people and only associate with decent grown ups.

The first rule is don't get caught. Prometheus got caught and

it went badly for him. Narcissus was turned to stone for his crimes. That won't happen to me, I'll be different. I'll be smart, I won't get caught.

In case of a violent conflict I carry a British Commando dagger. A perfectly symmetrical matte black anodized steel double edged six inch black blade with black enamelled handle. "Black steel, in the hour of chaos"³⁹ Solid, strong, sexy, and well balanced, it feels good in my hand, a deadly thing of beauty. The only part that isn't black is the sharpened razor edge revealing the silvery steel alloy, the last glint of light they'll see, before everything turns red.



Chapter Twenty Five

My therapist would say my difficulty with people comes from childhood, if I had a therapist. I can't remember a lot of things, blocked out years, there are scenes from movies that could be memories, normal life, then snapshots of casual psychological horror. Kodak moments, a word, a look, a threat. As soon as you let your guard down the attack is quick, clear and definite: You will never be good enough.

When I was young they'd ask "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Even then my lack of realistic options as a poor, anti-social, miscreant, was clear to me. The human world and everything about it was a vile corrupt system of lies built on exploitation and spectacular deception, xenophobia and narrow-mindedness of every kind ruled with a million iron fists, oppression, suppression and repression, blah blah blah etc etc. It was clear to me I wanted nothing to do with it. Considering my role-models, my father with his emotional terrorism, or television's insipid excuses for masculinity like Tim Allen or Bill Cosby, Mel Gibson, Tom Cruise...? mainstream society's archetypes of men were skin-crawlingly revolting. I would flatly refuse to be a part of it. I would do basically anything to avoid becoming like that.

"Who do you see yourself as in five years?" This whole identification sickness thing, are you a Ross, a Chandler, or a Joey? A Miranda, Samantha, Carrie or Charlotte? Fuck no, thank you

very much, I'll kill myself first. Anyone who identifies with the rapid two-dimensional clichés on TV is an idiot with no life. Being a caricature is not living. People who complain they are not represented on television are victims of FOMO, they've succumbed to the trap. If I saw myself as one of those cardboard cut-outs I'd be seriously worried. Really? All you want is to be the oppressor?

In high school when they asked "What are you going to be when you grow up?" I knew my answer. A reasonable and attainable goal, something I could wholeheartedly believe in. "Nothing." As long as I didn't try, I couldn't fail.

I was raised on pop trash TV and classic rock but I knew there was more to life than that, I knew another existence was possible. I was introduced to art by a favourite aunt who had escaped, still her influence was great from afar, she showed me there was another world, took me to art shows, showed me music and books and encouraged the idea that artists were different, artists were special. If you do nothing with a little style, people start telling you you're an artist.

I remember hearing my parents fight, well, I guess a one-sided fight is called a beating. There was a lot of yelling from my father, belittling, animal dominance. This is what a man is to me. Domination in every way, physically threatening, emotionally manipulative, an alpha dog mentality that needed to be demonstrated constantly by mind games and psychological torture. My mother probably got it worse than my siblings and I, even I resented her for being his victim.

Any show of tenderness was quickly followed by humiliation and degradation, some form of punishment for an imagined

disrespect. I could never win, never relax, never be myself. I learned to expect the worst. I guess it's only natural for a grown man to derive pleasure by dominating a child. How should I know? I learned not to need any intimacy of any kind. Closeness meant savage judgment, twisted manipulation and constant echoing contempt. The message was clear and thoroughly illustrated. I was not good enough and I never would be.

I never understood how his condemnations were supposed to work, after a certain point, when you're a write off, there's no chance of ever having value, so why try? Once it's established that you are garbage, getting an "A" on a test isn't going to change anything. I used to wonder what could be the inclination to crush those you love. Control? Jealousy? Maybe if someone feels small and defeated they are less likely to challenge you, or leave you? But what is the fun in having a butterfly after you've pulled off the wings? I guess there's no point looking for logic in it, people don't make sense.

By the time I reached my teens my indifference surpassed his contempt. Any need for his approval was long gone, crushed out of sight where it couldn't be ridiculed.

No one deserves to be systematically emotionally tortured, but that's life I guess.



Chapter Twenty Six

Mid-afternoon, warm, fresh, blue sky, birds singing, I'm strolling around downtown. I've dropped off a package to a client in one of the office tower blocks, now I have no responsibilities until about sundown. So I go for a walk without destination and enjoy the day. I feel like Baudelaire's *flâneur*, indulging a casually decadent leisure.

Walking down the sidewalk something intense catches my eye. Startled, I pause to check it out – some sharp-dressed fucker in the office building – oh it's me, reflected in the chromed glass of the thousand feet tall skyscraper. I stand facing my reflection, six foot three with shoes, I look good.

Grey Harrington with red tartan lining, yellow gingham dress shirt by Ralph Lauren with the little polo pony in baby blue, a royal blue tartan scarf against the red tartan of the jacket lining is cheery. Over my tight freshly shaved fade I wear a summery straw pork pie hat with ribbon band, milk chocolate lined with orange and light green and cream coloured pinstripes.

Flâneur, en français, the “saunterer” or “boulevardier” was Baudelaire's idea of the perfect modernist. I like it when there's a highfalutin concept to apply to the practice of just fucking off. Flânerie is the act of strolling, half-watching, half-performing, the disinterested spectator, taking it all in with a casual indifference, aware of the crowd, among them without being of them.

A man of the city, connoisseur of leisure.

People watching can be fascinating. Seeing them stroll through their lives like wildlife while I contemplate the styles, looking at the way they present themselves to the world. There are some that aren't that bad. People can be entertaining, interesting even. There's a guy walking by in a well-fitted periwinkle blazer; a mauve, baby blue and pale yellow argyle v-neck sweater over a yellow and white gingham shirt. His outfit and his smooth coffee coloured complexion matches the pastels, matches the argyle socks and the powder blue suede hush puppies.

“Looking good.” I say with a nod and a smile, a polite appreciation of style.

He reciprocates. “You too”, with an approving nod and smile of acceptance. A little acknowledgement and I've succeeded at being a human being for a moment, having a positive interaction and it only took three seconds. Faith in humanity restored. I smile to myself and bask in the sunshine.

It is a beautiful day. But then I see somebody wearing a San Jose Sharks jacket, a U2 t-shirt, acid-wash jeans, a faded bent baseball cap over a non-ironic long-short tops a shit-pile. It could be ironic hipster D-baggism or it could be authentic time-warp fashion disability, I can't tell. Either way I'm returned to a world of horror and crimes against aesthetics. I look around me and the horror sets in, I'm surrounded. Fake ass hip hop thugs in hoodies and dirty Jordans, unfortunate white boys failing at being ghetto, gangsta skid-marks in perpetual identity crisis, kissing their teeth and faking a swagger. This whitey in flip flops and cargo shorts with a wind-surfer on his t-shirt, thinning disheveled ponytail, hairy arms, dry skin naked knees, he must be going to some post nuclear fall-out beach party, naked feet, exposed toenails, ugh, look away! I wretch. This one apparently

fell through the ceiling of a thrift store to the basement and crawled out with a mouthful of socks. This one got dressed in a nightmare and can't wake up.

Who would wear torn jean shorts and a blue leather overcoat with butterfly collar and dirty white tennis shoes? That bitch right there, that's who.

There are times, in a crowd, I wish my limbs were made of chainsaws or lava. Bump into me again, I dare you. Your elbow vaporizes with a hiss and screams fill the air.

I duck into the alley to avoid the crowds and I'm alone. It's quiet here, I let out a sigh of relief and the tension melts away. No people, just calm, just the backs of shops, banks, office buildings, blank walls with the occasional scrawl of graffiti. "Fuck off balls" "Wu-Tang Forever" "Bomb the USA"... As I stroll along the bright sunny alley, casually minding my own, I notice some movement ahead, some activity in the rubble. I continue walking and as I get closer, what I see makes me smile, a large pile of skids and cardboard about six feet tall is on fire, orange licks of flame dance into the air.

Hmm that's odd. I think to myself. As I reach the fire it's growing quickly, the whole pile of garbage is engulfed in the blaze. Curiouser and curiouser. I pause for a selfie and continue on my way. Oh the things you see on a bright sunny day.



Chapter Twenty Seven

Among the neighbourhood characters who play recurring roles in my little anti-social menagerie is Guy Debord, the French academic who wrote *The Society of the Spectacle*, the book AND the movie. He was the co-founder of the Situationist International, involved with the Paris 1968 uprising. Debord claimed his ambition with the Situationists was "the only thing worth doing at all, destroying capitalism." Now he walks the streets of my neighbourhood, a chubby sour face in a black blazer over a cream coloured turtleneck with a beret and wire frame glasses, perpetually smoking Gauloises, a smug French intellectual look on his face, an air of superiority and a soup stain on his lapel. This next guy walking by could be Mark Rothko, the grumpy old egg-head with a toilet seat ring of hair, bulgy eyes held in by thick glasses. The greatest colour field painter of all time moping around with a pained neurotic expression on his face stares in visceral horror like one of his paintings.

This guy in a dirty white bucket-hat and mirrored shooter-shades, twitchy, unwashed, pasty with a glaze of sweat, muttering to himself with a pipe clenched in his teeth, is the image of Hunter S. Thompson. I see him shuffling along the streets scouring the gutters for butts, going into the local bars on welfare day. The creator of Gonzo Journalism or something supposedly great, and a legend in his time, look at him now. From such great heights the fall to earth can be devastating.

Is this how it works? People who were once great cultural icons, all the rage and all the hype, a cult of personality, they become unworldly and magical, a star called into being on the screen by our faith and we believe in them. Our belief creates all the power and the glory and our faith makes it real.

Is this what happens when the public forgets you? Stars fall to earth and disappear, the world goes on spinning without them, their glory is forgotten, and they end up a nobody walking the streets, just like before. Once they were on top of the world, now they're just another unlovable insect.

Nothing lasts forever, everything falls apart, you wake up one day and you are old. When you stop believing, it ceases to be real. When the hype fades, so does the dream. Like a passing infatuation. But until that fall to reality these dreams will be more real than anything.

When a star collapses a black hole is created.

We die two deaths. Some die a thousand deaths. "Some die old and some die young, some in the very prime of life."⁴⁰ Many die long before their body. It's convenient, it's comfortable and safe. Like a neutered animal no longer causes problems. Many people cannot cope with having a spirit at all and are eager to have someone take responsibility for the unruly monster that lives within them so they opt to have it removed like an appendix they weren't using, or have it put down like a rabid dog. They give up their ideals and kill their dreams, or they give their souls up to Jesus or AA or the corporation they work for.

Even the ones that don't get taken by the grown up life of careers and kids become embittered, hardened by scar tissue as the

disappointments pile up and life takes its toll, eventually they sink into the swamp like Atreyu's horse in *The NeverEnding Story*. The spark goes out, you can see it in their eyes, hear it in their voice. There is a resignation to the gravity of existence. They have given in and let the wheel grind over them, accepted the lies of modern life, and bought in to their own erasure. Maybe they've been lobotomized by pharmaceuticals, anti-depressants, or by media, or work, even just a lifestyle can be the most powerful brainwash. If you're a success the money weighs you down and if you're not you're crushed to death by the stress of poverty in anonymity.

Everything comes to an end. Everything changes, people change, neighbourhoods change. It's still there but now it's something else, what it was is gone, leaving nothing but a memory. Maybe a condo in its place. Things are always changing and it's out of our control. Once you've stopped dreaming that anything else is possible the walls close in around you and the fire burns out. When you lose faith you are as good as gone.

Everyone needs something to believe in to keep them going.



Chapter Twenty Eight

Cookie is my inspiration, my light and my salvation. Brilliant, independent and strong, she is everything I aspire to.

These days the old fashioned mythical romance of the movies and love songs is very out of fashion, very not on-trend, it's thought of as patriarchal and traditional, not woke, but I am a hopeless romantic lost in my devotion, and I exist to serve her. I want to be the adorer, to give her what she wants, to put her needs above my own, to destroy my ego and connect to the universal essence of oneness together. I am a sucker for this mythical fantasy of love and nothing else matters.

She is a beacon of light and warmth that could inspire me to be a real person. She brings out a creature I didn't know I could be, she makes me who I am. She makes me good. When we are together I feel complete and when we are apart I feel good just knowing she's in my world. Having her in my life makes the world a beautiful place.

When we first got together it was like Once Upon a Time. Out of nowhere she came into my life and changed everything. Like a big bang, a new universe of possibility was created. I saw her at Shoppers Drug Mart and there was a flash of recognition between us. Our eyes met and my heart lit up like a chemical fire. A week later she showed up at the bar where I worked and I was swooning under her spell. The world changed from

grey to Technicolor. I was like a kid at Christmas. It was pure Disneyland. Even when she gave me Chlamydia our first time doing it, I could not be dissuaded.

Her character is like the charged coil of a poisonous serpent, marvellous, hypnotic, and dangerous, a viper without its poison would be just a pretty face. We share a beautiful negativity, she hates the things I hate. Together we are at our best when cutting up art, fashion crimes, and laughing at stupid people's bad choices. I thrill to the sound of her laughter taking cruel delight in someone's misfortune.

We share standards and ideals, our religion is beauty. I like the things she likes, there's just an undefinable specialness. She contains multitudes. In her hands the lightnings tremble. In her arms I turn into a baby animal.

I'm not like other boys. I may look like a monster on the outside but I have warm blood and soft feelings and I crave tenderness. With her I become myself. A mild-mannered puppy-dog. Her faith in me frees me from this human world, with her I can be a magical creature, with her I can be a satyr, a swan, a lightning bolt. I can be the fox, with her majestic glow following me everywhere like the fox's tail, without his tail the fox wouldn't be much more than a weird dog, with his tail he is the thief prince of the night. She can be the swan and I'll be the wind beneath her wings, like Bette Midler. Together we are the fox and swan of a fairy tale nursery rhyme, an unlikely duo of beautiful and mischievous wild creatures.

But she wants a man. Ok. I puff up my chest and stand proud with her at my side. If she wants a man, I'll be the man. I can drink, I can swagger. I can beat somebody up. I can be tough,

fuck it. I can spit and swear and grow a moustache. No problem.

My father was a man. He fancied himself a Clint Eastwood type in Spaghetti Westerns, or Dirty Harry. He was the child of Scottish immigrants, brought up in a factory town an hour outside the city with little culture other than alcoholism and abuse. His drunk father beat the shit out of him and he grew up to be a tyrant just like his father and repeat the cycle of abuse. As a father, he must have really hated his life, he seemed constantly in need of revenge for my great crime: being born. Everything I did or didn't do won his scorn and he seemed to derive a tremendous satisfaction from crushing the spirits of those closest to him, my mother and I bore the brunt of his attacks.

I learned early on that a man was a bastard. And I vowed I would do anything to avoid becoming one. If that is what a man is I want nothing to do with it. It's just gross. I swore to god and the devil that I would never be like that.

I was raised with little culture other than poverty and television. And (trigger warning) we didn't have cable. At six or seven years old, alone in the apartment, Dad not back from the night-shift and Mom already gone, driving the school bus, I'd wake in distress every day at 5 AM, my only comfort was *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein*. Vincent Price, Igor and Billy Van's green-skinned Count were not just my role-models, they were my family. I got the love I needed from these monsters and I learned that kindness can often come from unlikely places. Everyday they were there for me, the monsters were the friendliest most reliable constants in my life.

A child raised by wolves becomes like a wolf, a child raised by television becomes a Count Chocula. Television is where I got

my identity, movable and adaptable, just change the channel.

She wants a man, so I'll be the man. No problem. I am the daddy now. Fuck the cycle of abuse, I will do it my way and it'll be all sweetness and light. I can do anything. Sunday morning I go out early to get fresh flowers and groceries for breakfast.

We brunch on the balcony in the afternoon sunshine, homemade waffles with fresh strawberries and whipped cream. Edith Piaf on the turntable.

“Je vois la vie en rose
Elle me dit des mots d'amour...”⁴¹

Up here on the fire escape we sit together on a cloud, lazy tufts of white pink whipped cream, lined in dripping golden syrup. We are in a François Boucher painting. She is my Venus reclined in the forest under the maple tree, naked like in a painting. Her pale pubescent form idealized through my giddy dumbstruck gaze, the blushed pink of her skin, tiny breasts, full round ass, fresh and corporeal, bathes in the dappled sunlight. From inside wafts the intoxicating smells of fresh cooked waffles with maple syrup, a hint of vanilla and fresh cut berries, red, ripe, and full. I slip into a reverie as the sunlight plays across my closed eyelids. I'm a satyr kneeling at her feet, waiting on her. My chestnut locks fall over the gnarled twisted horns protruding from my skull. The silvery blue sky is daubed by tufts of cloud, torn by wind that worships her. The sunlight fights through the trees to caress her. I lift my head to face her, bathed in the light of her gaze. The pale eczema spackled hand of Venus reaches out to bless one charmed satyr, me, lucky me. She chose me.

She taught me to use the whip-cream dispenser to do nitrous

oxide and we did it together, it was her idea but I took it too far and she got mad, so I went to bed and did the nitrous by myself till I passed out. In the stuttering vortex of the Warner Brothers cornucopia, film clicking in the gate and glitchy digital distortion, cupid's arrows scatter through the Boucher sky like tracer bullets, the clouds part, Lemmy from Motörhead comes into the room through the fluttering stuttering doorway and does a Porky Pig impression, saying "T-T-Tails don't grow b-b-back" I took these words of wisdom to heart and never did nitrous again.



Chapter Twenty Nine

Before Prometheus became famous for stealing fire, his lesser known early work was creating man. He moulded them out of mud, in the image of god. Born naked and helpless, we were a flawed creation, so Prometheus breathed life into man giving him reason. Now we could rationalize our suffering, great. So Prometheus flew to the house of the sun and brought down fire, the fire of inspiration from which all art springs. First one's free.

Jealous, Zeus prohibited fire so humans would remain in the dark, cold and sober, helpless to challenge his authority. Authority is always a problem. Power corrupts.

Again, Prometheus flew to the sun and stole fire to give to man. With fire they were all empowered, "By the unrestrained cultivation of knowledge...it is now possible to make every individual happy..."⁴² There is more than enough wealth in the world that we can all be rich. We could all be gods.

Still there remains an unbalanced distribution of that wealth. There are haves and have-nots, there are gods and there are slaves. 1% could own Disneyland while the rest struggle to feed their family.

Through no fault of our own most of us are born into a life of dependency and servitude, desperate and deprived, while those destined for greatness by birthright, the pharaohs of Egypt, the Windsors of England, the Kardashians of USSA... live off the

labour of the slaves.

The worker ants produce the goods and services the gods need to be gods. We build their skyscrapers and pave their streets of gold. We make the cool they assimilate into their lifestyle. We even created the gods themselves, in our own image. "A god made by man has need of man to make himself known to man."⁴³ Any shady business deal always needs a third party to create tension, to drive up the price.

In the 20th century the slaves were transformed, the worker ants are transformed into gatherer ants, into consumers. So now we work and produce AND we buy and consume. We become the product AND the consumer and we can never get enough, ever dependent with a never ending appetite to feed. While the Olympians sit on their thrones getting rich off our suffering.

In ant society we are taught that we are not complete. You must feel shame and guilt that you will never live up to the ideal and you'll always be an ant. And fear that if you step out of the programmed routine you will be rejected from the ant community and starve. To be an ant or not to be, to be a slave or not to exist at all. Who says you don't have a choice. You could always kill yourself.

Even when we get what we want we are left feeling unfulfilled and empty. Anxiety and distress has become the standard, a constant inadequacy that makes you dependant on a complex web of lies and abuse just for your being.

First they make you believe you are nothing, then they can sell you anything. If you are not good enough, you need their product to make you complete. It's marketing 101, from room

101. Thanks, Bernays.

I can hear you scoff and laugh. You've heard it all before, everybody knows. It's all tediously passé political SJW baloney. Even having ideals stinks of privilege, doing the right thing has become a joke. If you have an issue, here's a tissue. People roll their eyes, barf in their mouths and swipe left. Everything has been buried under so many layers of lies it's now impossible to even stand for anything. The general prevailing attitude, the only one that's possible, is trolling sarcasm and ridicule.

While you have total freedom of choice to select (from the available options):

Birken bag, Louis Vuitton bag, plastic bag? Armani suit or H&M? A Big Mac? Or a Whopper? An LG or a Sony 86" 4K flatscreen, "Dope and diamonds, dope and diamonds..."⁴⁴ A Lamborgini or Ferrari, a Lürssen yacht or a Bertam, boob job or botox, stacks of cash or a Platinum Card? Bitcoins or Dogecoins? Coca-Cola or Pepsi, Warhol or Picasso, Xbox or PlayStation, weed or cocaine?

Our identity is created by the objects or ideals we select to surrogate our value. What is it that will make you whole again?

Recycling? Giving to charity, supporting the right activist group? Making ethical choices, thinking about the environment? Being woke? Gold bars or a Supreme™ brick, Gucci flip flops or Birkenstocks, rice or quinoa...

People find meaning in many ways, who's to say any way is better than another?

A diamond bracelet or handcuffs... random cock and cunt,

unlimited butthole, a house and husband or wife and kids, a career and a future, an education, or an investment portfolio...
“Dope and diamonds, dope and diamonds...”

To each their own, people like things and they should, positivity is good. It's good to like things.



Chapter Thirty

We arrive for our reservation at seven and get a nice table in the corner. We sit together holding hands over the table gazing into each others' eyes as the wine is poured, candle light dances reflected in her glasses. We order the stuffed zucchini flowers to start, crispy golden fried orange coloured blossoms stuffed with nuts and herbs and wild rice.

“How decadent! Flowers for dinner!?”

“Next we'll have the butterfly wings salad.”

“And unicorn horn soup”

“Yeah, fuck unicorns!”

“Because we're worth it!”

Quiet conversation and good wine and fine food with my love, this is the life. I feel like I'm getting away with something. This is all the glory in the world, just spending time with my girl, as far as I'm concerned, this is the highest ideal. I could not want more. I look into her eyes and I die. This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

Absentmindedly, I've left the phone on and a preferred client calls, I don't want to disappoint so he comes around and I excuse myself from the table to use the restroom while I meet Hammer outside. We exchange the hundred-dollar-handshake and “Have a great night!” Then back to the composed decorum of the restaurant with dinner and tip covered.

After wining and dining we walk, arm in arm, down the crowded

promenade, the dull hum of people around us buzzing like a swarm of insects. A warm sphere of indifference surrounds us in a bubble of storybook fantasy love, setting us apart from everyone else. We vibrate at a different frequency, existing on a different plane, in a different universe. Together we are separate, indivisible and sovereign, nothing else exists, I can see no one else but her.

In the fashion district hidden among the towering condos, the fashion houses and sweatshops, behind the clothing stores and nightclubs lies a converted factory warehouse. In the back alley is The TV Eye, an underground film venue. It's the last hold-out from a time when this area was all industrial, before the condos and the Starbucks moved in and took over. Housed in the hundred year old coach-house is this raw, unheated, garage with brick walls and a small bar, the most underground venue in the city run by a cranky old curmudgeon. Tonight it's performance art.

An Eastern European man in his 50s wearing a white dress shirt sits on a single chair, facing the audience in silence. A single spot light above his shaved head casts shadows. He stares straight ahead, somber, serious. The silence is like a threat. Just as it's about to get boring he raises an 11 x 17 pane of glass over his head and brings it down onto his skull with a crash. He sits expressionless staring straight ahead. Another pane of glass, smash! and then another, and another... The shattered pieces falling over his shoulders and neck and a tiny, single trickle of blood running down his forehead. When they are all smashed he takes a bow, signalling the audience to applaud.⁴⁵
"That was kinda cool," I say hopefully. Cookie agrees.

Next, a 40 something woman walks in circles screaming nonsense with a Quebecois accent. There was a pile of rope but I

dozed off before I saw what that was for. I woke to applause as the artist nodded smiling, pleased with herself.

"Was that something?"

"Meh."

There's no accounting for taste, I guess.



Chapter Thirty One

Sorry, but let's talk about art for a minute.

Most people suffer from the misconception that art is inherently good for them. Like vitamins. Take your medicine, get some culture. A lot of art is like vitamins in that it doesn't do shit. There's a popular idea that art somehow expands your horizons and makes you a more well-rounded person or whatever but that's a lot of nonsense, it's all purely subjective, a matter of personal taste. Art is just like anything else, if you like it, you like it. Good for you.

In the modernist tradition an artist is someone who creates objects that represent something to do with meaning or beauty. The exchange between artist and viewer is traditionally where the action would happen. Art is a raw material. It's nothing until you engage with it. It's like drugs, you can look at it, talk about it, buy it or sell it, but until it's in your bloodstream it's just an inert object. When it works it moves beyond the painted canvas or the marble or the mud or the white powder, into a moment of transcendence. Art is the high. Of beauty or truth. A sensation, an experience. When it works. Or it could give you a headache or a shitty hangover.

Skip ahead if you've heard this one before but... A narrative line is drawn through art history, from Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism in painting, into the

Futurist's obsession with progress, through Dada and Surrealism into abstraction, Conceptual and Pop Art – you know the story. Over the 20th century various trends and ideas moved the location of art away from the object, away from the representation of a moment, into a moment in and of itself, into life. "Paintings no longer represent, today it has become the role of the painting to look at the spectator and ask them: 'what do *you* represent?'"⁴⁶

Continuing in the avant garde tradition – the pursuit of being progresses from the wall, through the body, opening into the event, taking it further, to its logical conclusion, if you finish the story, the modernist project completed, art disappears into life, or progresses further, anti-socially, into the mind of the viewer, or the artist formerly known as the viewer.

"Everyone is an artist – Joseph Beuys"

"Joseph Beuys is an artist – Everyone"

"Everyone is Joseph Beuys – An artist"⁴⁷

Modernism was about sex and procreation. Jackson Pollock's jizz sploojing, Georgia O'Keefe's floral spreads, Richard Serra's two tonne erections, Carolee Schneemann's visceral Meat Joy... If Modernism was sex then Postmodernism was drugs, where the art happens for the individual in their mind.

One can curate their brain chemistry over the course of the evening for the most desirable experience, planning peaks and valleys, orchestrating the arc of the time-based composition. You can look at a bag of powder as an epiphany waiting to happen, a masterpiece in a pill.

The art world still exists though, split off from the modernist trajectory to become an elite tentacle of capitalism or a craft

making support group pretending the things they make have cultural value. But it's just a self-referential, virtue signalling, history-laden, academic tapeworm eating its own ass for money. This elitism is the source for a lot of the general public's disdain towards contemporary art. Ass eating isn't for everyone.

The Enlightenment that masquerades as human progress is just a series of developing trends. Chaotic constellations whipped into a timeline, chance encounters *delineated* into a narrative after the fact. We are not moving forward, we are all spiralling chaos on our own trajectory towards death. Most art practice is personal noodling, pseudo-political, stylistic posing and trend chasing, passing on the groups pheromone program. In the mob mentality of the hive mind, as in the fiction of democracy, majority rules. But a taste shared with the masses is not a taste, it's a trend.

In another sense art has expanded to include everything, dilated and exploded, (like Goatse) opened to swallow life. Everything is fragmented, specialized and personalized. Everyone gets what they want. Everything is broken but it's broken open so anyone can get in. If everyone is an artist, we are all broken too, and everything gets in, and we are all permeated with culture in the churning ecstatic intercourse of life.

When you think about it really, most of the time the artist is more interesting than the art anyway, so why not just skip it altogether and get on with being fabulous? Some people have known this all along, the dandy, the libertine, homos, Baudelaire's *flâneur*... maybe the narcissist.



Chapter Thirty Two

Some things are good for some people and not so good for others. Some people take anti-depressants to make everything ok. Some people need to smoke two joints in the morning. Some people's lives are vastly improved by a pint of vodka. Some rely on Tylenol or antacids to feel better, others enjoy a sniff once in a while. To each his own. Most people rely on some sort of medication to carry on living normal lives. People have the right to do what they want.

Antonin Artaud said:

“So long as we have failed to eliminate any of the causes of despair, we do not have the right to try to eliminate those means by which people try to cleanse themselves of that despair.”⁴⁸

The bartender says:

“Would you like another?”

I say “Yes please!”

All kinds of people use substances, there are so many stereotypes and prejudices, but 90% of people use substances of some kind. And most are not complete scumbags. 90% of people who use drugs do so without becoming catastrophically addicted. My clients are people with jobs and careers and families, functioning members of society, for the most part. They are people you know, family members, your doctor, your lawyer, your gardener, your mother, the guy sitting next to you on the subway... people like you.

They get their medicine and their lives are enhanced, improved, augmented, party extended, or ended, pain numbed, problems solved, or postponed...The bartender and the pharmacist do fine, why not me.



Chapter Thirty Three

Tonight Izad is throwing a secret party on the train tracks under a bridge. Last month, a kid was killed by a train here, while doing graffiti. In the middle of a clearing about twenty-five shadows are gathered around a fire. Towering slabs of concrete three stories high make us small like little kids. Izad's new cassette EP blares from a small boom-box at full volume, blasting inaudibly at 180bpm. They're all wired and blotto, bouncing off the concrete walls, wrestling and play fighting like wild animals in the dirt and gravel, the fire pumps out thick black smoke and the stench of burning plastic. These nihilistic black leather and darkness cloaked rites should feel cool, but I just feel old and bored. I chug my whiskey and smash the bottle. There is a frenzy building. Vlad is trying to smash the fire with a stick. Izad screams like a Schwarzenegger caveman and smashes his boom box against the concrete wall, it explodes into a thousand pieces. We all pile into his gold Merc and tear off through the streets at warp speed. We crash/park at the 7-11 and head for the club.

Down the stairs to the basement, we file past the doorman, a smile and a nod and we're in. It's dark, filled with fashionable silhouettes, vogueing, posing, making the scene. The attitude is heavy in the air. The bar is long and slick, stylish bartenders glow in the pale green under-lighting. The electro-tech-house blares punchy beats and stabs of synth. It's too loud to talk. "Shake your body like a dance"⁴⁹ I stand around posing, I know I look good, but I don't know if it works here. For some reason I take this seriously. I feel like just another fashion victim. We dance,

more like standing around vibrating, which is fine with me, I'm too insecure to dance.

Cookie isn't having fun, she doesn't care for vapid social scenes. I walk her out and hail a taxi. I have to stay until I make quota, or 'till I am drunk enough, whichever comes first.

Up the street is an art party in a converted storefront, pop-up shop during the day, art party by night. There's a small dance floor with a few scenesters cutting shapes and posing for pictures with ubiquitous Instagram gang signs. They look cool but they might actually be having a good time too. The good time seems to be intertwined with the appearance of cool.

We go back and forth between club and art party, drink for drink, smokes and deals on the way, then back to the dance floor. The music is loud, I'm feeling it, twist a little then shots. I go outside and smoke a cigarette walking the half block back to the art party.

Scene to scene is a battle, the perpetual struggle for cool is a cold war, cool war. Complete with the corresponding perils, propaganda, espionage, diplomatic negotiations and coalitions. Agents vie for position in the social hierarchy. In the culture wars the stakes are high: the spectacular empirical alienation of the norm vs. the unification of living creatures as autonomous individuals in the synchronicity of being.

On the outside the competition is fierce, tooth and nail, grillz and press-ons, cut eye and colours, blood on the dance floor, style wars and drag queens, fighting for bragging rights, while on the inside we were all the same from the beginning, and we temporarily access that primal equanimity in the union of the

party, separated only by class when it's time to go home.

The battlefield is nebulous, made of shifting paradigms and interlocking platforms, different universes like Alien vs. Predator or Marvel vs. DC, but instead of two there is a thousand plateaus and a thousand points of light and it's happening all at once. Peoploids travel from one to the next, code switching as they go.

Still, through-out, we are constantly fighting to create our place, negotiating taste, class, identity – adrift without history, without culture, without our own place in the now. Where is this place, this opening world of shared experience – this “community” we keep hearing about?

In the cultureless gulag the negative pressure of the sucking void yearns to be filled. We are desperate to believe, to find somewhere to direct all this faith and expectation, skeptical and jaded, but still hungry. The audience needs a fantasy.

We live in a psycho-social-geography of intersectional bodies, factions, associations, ideologies. Our presence is a naturalistic mixing of styles, species, genres... beyond classification. We occupy the pre-historic ruins of a disaster that hasn't finished happening yet. Our place is ground zero, the eye of the storm, the eye of the beholder. Here we make believe the world anew and create it together, we dream a world and live a dream. The actual site of the collision, the event horizon, where culture actually lives, or is lived, is necessarily off the radar and in constant flux, being redefined and vanishing as soon as it's identified.

The closest anything comes to actually happening is culture perpetrated by individuals or organizations which exist and thrive on their own power, financed independently or driven by inspiration alone. Here is where a party scene will be more

viable, as that culture is still breathing by the time it reaches the frontlines. Such an untested element is prone to being crap, but that's the chance you take.

So quickly the edge is dulled. You turn around and what seemed at once brilliant and exemplary has been refined to its core of dust, and the truth is visible in its own dimmest reflection.

Another reason why there's no time to make any things. They'll anchor you to a passing moment, and the current will drag you under. Once you are named that's the name on your tombstone. It's best to stay anonymous, stay invisible, don't get caught. They will tempt you with accolades and glory. Never take credit, step into the light for a moment and you'll be stolen. Your face on a t-shirt, your hairdo in the style section. As soon as they have your picture, at that moment you begin aging. And then you're nothing but a monument to decay.



Chapter Thirty Four

We go for a picnic at the beach, my baby and I. Our secret spot between the barbed wire fence on the wrong side of the yacht club and the 1920s dance hall, where grandmas used to party when they were hot teens. A little corner off the beaten path, this secluded little strip is like our own private beach. The sand is scattered with the flotsam and jetsam of civilization, tires, bottles, bits of plastic, sea-glass, used needles, unwanted treasures... I feel at home here.

The sun smiles down on us as we languish on a rock drinking cheap wine and nibbling fine cheeses. A Goats Brie, a Swiss Gruyere and rich crumbly blue Benedictine. In a picnic basket little finger sandwiches and my amateur wine pairings chosen for the label.

“My life is...
Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows,
Everything that's wonderful is what I feel
when we're together...”⁵⁰

We talk and bond over our shared ideals about culture, talking theories and concepts and blah blah blah. We both have strong opinions of what art should be and a passionate drive to apply those ideals to a real culture worth believing in.

Me: “I like your idea of approaching organizing and

curating as if it's your artistic medium.”

Her: “It's about having agency, and having the courage to put yourself out there.”

Me: “It's important to believe in what you're doing and to just do what you want, you know, like “If you build it they will come” sort of thing, but it takes courage.”

Her: “Courage is a lot more than most people are capable of.”

We talked about the necessity of a fuck-off attitude and the ambition to subvert the power of established institutions. We both hated terrible art and talked about real standards and ideals and strategies for putting that passion into practice. We shared the ambition to challenge artistic boundaries, to be in and of the world. No matter how naïve, all the better, to indulge the willfully childish embrace of an impossible positivity.

She talked about formalism and institutional critique. She is into performance art, body art and sexuality, academia and critical theory. She talked about her obsession with the White Cube and the fetishized context of art as a place of academic reverence. She wanted to fuck in a museum. To her performance art is a viable strategy to engage the traditional modernist white box and challenge its limits.

Her: “I want to make the things happen that I want to happen, you know, imagine what I'd like to see and make that happen.”

Me: “Yeah, make your dreams come true, all power to the imagination!”

Her: “Well, it's just doing stuff, really it's simple.”

Me: “But it's magic: ‘the art and science of causing change

to occur in accordance with your will.’ Who said that? David Copperfield?”

Her: “I want to be a catalyst for real experience, it's about allowing yourself the agency to make something happen.”

We share a love of bad taste, we derive a light-hearted, uplifting sense of freedom from embracing filth over the top negativity. But it's a positive hate, a fight for more, the secret is that the hate really comes from a love of life and the desire to make it better.

To me the impossible dream that could make it all worth fighting for is the pursuit of a truly satisfying aesthetic experience. The fight for a fulfilled existence, to be beautiful and truly alive. I believe this is something we could do together.

“...Brighter than a lucky penny
When you're near the rain just disappears, dear
And I feel so fine
Just to know that you are mine...”

I'm delighted to have found someone to share these ambitions. I find myself glowing from within, a new feeling, foreign to me, is shining out of me: happiness. I'm so happy it's disgusting, it's so sweet you could just barf. This is it, the milk and honey, drooling and dripping from my overflowing heart. Together we transcend genre, from dark comedy through rom-com, I see us living a romantic epic. Our shared mission to conquer reality, the pursuit of the sublime, the performance of social magic realism, to break the bonds of everything by joy. *Jouissance*. To achieve moments of true living beauty. To create breaks, ruptures in the surface of the ordinary. The facades of ordinary life shift like tectonic plates and break apart for this crystalline peak of orange glowing magma, a pillar of light, a core of plasma shooting into

the sky like a geyser of cum and I finally feel accepted. Having glimpsed the possibility of what could be, now that world could be found in love.

I opened up and let her in. Completely installed her where my heart would be. I put it all on her, all in, all bets on red. And we would be soulmates. She said she felt the same.

A courage rises up in me and I start to feel like life is finally worth it. My rejection of every code of the normal human world is finally justified and behaving egotistically as if what I thought or felt actually mattered was vindicated. Because she believed in me I was immortal. And because I believed in her it was real. The boundless incorruptible spirit of true love came to us, an anthem of potential pitted against the insurmountable wall of destiny, and lifted our spirits by the wings of seraphim, in Quintessence. Some William Blake shit. Suddenly everything made sense, I had found my meaning, my moment, my mission. To live beautifully, to create a positive cognitive dissonance and the refusal of any limit that would allow me to believe in the possibility of everything. To believe in myself. To believe in us.

“...Everything that’s wonderful is sure
to come your way
‘Cause you’re in love...
...And love is here to stay.” Thanks, Lesley Gore

We were kindred spirits and sweethearts for sure, we were lovers but that day something changed and we took a big step into the world. That day we became accomplices, from then on we were not just lovers but allies, fighters in the culture wars.



Chapter Thirty Five

We walk home hand in hand across the foot-bridge over the highway as the sun melts into the horizon, a super slow motion atomic blast behind the skyline of condos in the distance. I feel the warmth on the back of my neck, an inferno of impossibility chasing us. It will never catch us.

The fairytale has come to life, everything I could want is right here by my side and I have no fear. Together we’ve escaped into the fantasy of story book love and the perfect combination of clichés. I can hear music, I’m Fred Astaire in *Top Hat*.

“I’m in heaven
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak...”⁵¹

And the train goes in the tunnel, fireworks go off, a champagne bottle pops its cork...

In the movies this is what happens after the fade to black, after the happily ever after, after the end of the world, this is the horrific fulfillment of all my hopes and dreams.

We undress and embrace standing in the bedroom, skin on skin, bodies entwined, embracing, opening, disappearing into one-another.

We lay together, her flesh on my flesh lifts me with butterfly wings to great heights and sets me on fire. The ceiling folds away

and from vortices of stained glass windows above, angelic light pours down on our animal bodies. I am ignited with desire so intense it must be of some delicious evil, but so pure it is beyond moral, in paradise there is no guilt or shame, no right or wrong, just a totalizing beauty. A tactile, palpable rapture that we can touch, and we touch it, taste it, bruise it like the petals of a pink lily. In this place without sin, we sin and it is good.

She is like a Renaissance painting of Immaculate Conception, which I defile with my love. I go down, sliding over her ribs and flanks and I'm face to face with the mysteries of the universe, her body is my access to the natural world and I can put my tongue into it. When she spreads and flexes the muscles to the opening of her body, it's real as a dark rippling electrical storm, with clouds of pink, clenching and relaxing, billowing and rippling, engorged with blood, full and wet and electric, wanting, the heaving clouds of the heavens, overflowing with the lightning current of life. I'm fingering the flowing vestment of the Madonna, lapping up the byzantine rippling scapular of the exquisite mantle but it's pink, not blue.

I suck for my sanctification, swallowing light like holy radiation. Indulging the sacrament of the flesh, a carnal, glandular communion. My fulfillment depends on her happiness, if I make her cum my existence is purposed and I am worth something. Giving her pleasure is intoxicatingly fulfilling, and earns my place in the universe.

She is Venus indoctrinating my Satyr into her heavenly realm. I am elevated, consecrated, and bound to her. I stick it in again and thrust into unified perfection. Slamming away, we pound out this rhythmic psalm. Our bodies form a primordial hymn

to flesh. Cock and cunt, imprinting onto eternity, we fuck.

Together we are borne up on serpentine wings, crashing against the vaulted ceiling we fall and thrust again taking dizzy flight, disoriented. In a clumsy process of putrefaction and purification, the angel and the hermaphrodite crashing together with a beautiful explosive chain-reaction of harmonious dissonance, brilliantly, illuminatingly profane, lasciviously divine, celestial and vulgar, virgin and whore, encompassingly maternal, and teeming with visceral animal lust. The holiest of holies manifest as wanton desire incarnate. Because perfection includes everything. We lose ourselves to find a unity in the primacy of our pumping meat and fluid and hair and skin, uniting innocence and experience, pan-sexual and childlike, high in the sky and burning at the centre of the earth, in serendipitous realization.

When my cock is in her, she is made of light, like some exalted saint with vampire teeth and demon eyes. Our bodies entwined form a cathedral in flames with a lustful protoplasm, a supreme high, freeing me from all logic and mortal restraint, into some eternally perfect moment of absolute release. In this moment I become spiritual, totally fantastical, high as fuck.

I have lost all anchor to this earth and its rules, I am liberated absolutely in perfect submission under her thighs. Her body is the night sky, arching over me, Nuit and Ouranos, full of stars. She is my Queen of the infinite azure beyond.

Fade to black.

Fade to white.

Fade to cum.



Chapter Thirty Six

I pull myself together like a body from a car-wreck and head out to work again. I float above the sidewalk bubbling over with happiness, smiling to myself. But duty calls.

Adam and Steve are having a little *soirée* at their swank loft in a converted factory. A very adult party, sophisticated, mild mannered, wine, friends, laughs, conversation, guacamole, house music. It looks like a condo ad. Everyone is so polished and smiling, white teeth and pastel polo sweaters.

“Hiiii!!! Come on in! Have a drink! I’ll get Steven.”

I am introduced to everyone at once and I say hello to a warm welcome, after hello I’ve run out of things to say. I excuse myself to the restroom, gauche I know, but I have to kill time till Steve appears. Roberto exits as I enter. The bathroom is luxurious, vintage tiles, a claw-foot tub with luxury spa rainfall shower head, transparent plastic and red velveteen shower curtains, Ralph Lauren bath mat, antique dressing table, fancy soaps in the shape of shells. On a lace doily, set out lovingly on the table are bottles of perfume, lotions, toiletries, ceramic nic-nacs and a bowl of condoms. But there’s a smell in here like someone’s just done something biological, the afterglow of an unpleasant bodily function. I look over the perfume bottles and select one, I unscrew the large, square top and spray the commode, again and again, misting into the white porcelain. Channel No.5 mingles with Roberto’s No.2. Earthy and floral, the corporeal civet overtakes the poo and allows a citrusy flutter of spring

to float over the top. Aldehydes over excreta every time. I see myself in the mirror, my eyes staring back, guiltily. I don’t belong here. I smile at myself. A little sparkle in the eyes staring back at me. Sure I do, why not. I wash my hands and dry them on the monogrammed Ralph Lauren towels. In the foyer Steve has two glasses of wine and hands me one. “Oh thank you very much!” Clink! And it’s down in one. “What can I do for you today?”

Then I’m across town to another house party at the home of some rock and rollers. The place is raw, vintage, cottagey, with beatnik vibes, “oriental” rug, beaded curtain, a vintage Van Halen poster on one wall and a reproduction of the classic 1950s exotic Green Lady on the other, a sink full of PBR on ice. A Les Paul leans in the corner, a stack of records leans against the wall, on the turntable, Bowie. Someone puts a drink in my hand as I make my way to the living room to meet Mark where he sits on a ratty arm chair. I make myself comfortable on the couch. I sort them out and relax for a moment. As we’re chatting, Mark is dolling out key bumps, to various nostrils that present themselves, he holds the key up like a small shovel, someone passing nudges his arm and the heap of powder falls in his lap. Uh-oh. Crisis. No problem, his friend, a very heterosexual bro, gets down on his knees and thoroughly hoovers it off of his friend’s upper thighs and crotch. Someone turns up the Bowie on the stereo.

“Let the children lose it
Let the children use it
Let all the children boogie”⁵²

I go see David Cockney at his studio. Two thousand square feet filled with heaps and heaps of six foot high canvases stacked in piles line all the walls. Abstract paintings in various stages of development. Paints all laid out, tubes of every colour imaginable

full or squeezed empty. Palettes with an array of glistening wet oils, open canisters of solvents. On the wall, study after study, pages from a titty magazine and newspaper clippings taped over sketches and colour swatches, scribbled notes and collages. Big abstracts with scribbly text and exuberant childish stick figures vibrate and shudder into colour and line smeared with a playful violence. Earthy impasto browns and diarrhea green make a fun bodily hideousness that mocks serious painting with a vocabulary of serious painting. ...It's painting. In the corner is a king size mattress on the floor with a laptop on a couple milk crates.

We have a critique session while he smokes a bong.

“I like the text elements, I like the one that says ‘DIE SCUM’.”

“What do you think of this one?”

“Hmm. I'm loving the shit browns that you're playing with here, it brings a visceral organic component to the formalism, like perfumed shit.”

Arms crossed, stroking his beard, he nods, seriously studying his painting, as if for the first time again. I get paid and hit the streets.



Chapter Thirty Seven

I rise and shine as the sunsets at 4 PM and get it together in time for Cookie to get home from work.

Today there is maybe twenty of them gathered by the soap dish, there's a big one like maybe a mature or a leader. Maybe it's the Queen, if I kill the queen will I win? In ant society they can't live without their queen, their world would fall apart. There is a spot on the wall by the bathroom sink where they're always marching, the killing fields. They march in lines, crawling towards something. Towards their death. I crush them all and wash them down the drain, and I feel like I've accomplished something. I wash my hands and look at the killer's reflection in the mirror.

Tonight is a big formal reception and art show, a fundraiser for a capital 'A' Art museum, it's \$XXX a ticket. But it's against our policy to support such institutions, so we'll sneak in and they can support *us* at the free bar.

“Are you ready to rock?”

Cookie is in the mirror putting on her face, wearing gold silk leopard print panties, stockings and garters and heels and nothing else. Her face is done up like a sex-bomb, a perfect white pink mask with a wound of bright adrenaline red, her cupid's bow, curved petal-like, over crooked shining fangs, a little smear of bright adrenaline red on her teeth. In the mirror she draws

on the blackest black angular points to her smokey cat eyes, and wipes the lipstick off her teeth. Then she squeezes into a royal purple and yellow gold tube dress, a Dolce & Gabana knock-off, under a vintage cr me cashmere A-line coat with creamy mink fur collar, wine coloured thigh-high stockings and garters, and 1960s purple patent leather go-go boots. She looks like a Femme Nikita assassin with French intellectual glasses.

“You ready to roll?”

I’m dressed to impress in my Friday best. Long black military trench with vintage black mink fur collar, an all black Melton patch over the heart is the face of a wolf. Tight black trousers with a high cuff, black Pantherella socks with black on black hounds-tooth. Shiny new black brogue creepers, all in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour, down to the black eye-liner. A sexy Frankenstein.

“Let’s rock and roll.”

To go with my outfit I carry an elegant white pearl handled Italian stiletto, a six inch blade, opening it has the clacking sound of gears being cocked and locked. It feels good to hold. I am ready for action if I need to cut anything, fruit, a package, a throat, or serve up a bump on its delicate point. “Up from the ghetto with the help of my stiletto...”⁵³

We take transit to the art party. Travelling across town we move through one neighbourhood to the next, the people change as the buildings change, the air changes and the images change. We pass through the ordinary horrors of ordinary people, from poor to normal to stylish to rich. Poor hollow ghosts, normal

worker drones with no taste, purposed aristocrats with bad taste, and ghastly middlers trying to compensate with plaintiff fashion statements ripped straight from their feed of celebrities and influencers. All victims, blisters on the face of society, big deal somebodies and no life nobodies, barely discernible.

Cookie hates transit, reviles the plebeian tedium of the normals and expresses her disdain aloud. Clearly it’s beneath her. I’d like to be beneath her. She infers, subtly and charmingly, of course, that she’s better than the scums. And she is. Everyone else is nothing compared to her, the herd, the normals, completely lacking any self-awareness. Scum. I couldn’t stand the shame and horror of being one of them, if I were ever so uninspired I’d just end it for sure, take out the trash and get it over with.

We arrive at the Museum fundraiser and breeze in through the service entrance, my baby and I, swanning in like Zelda & Gatsby, and soon we’re rubbing elbows with the investors, patrons, curators, the cultural-elite guzzling champagne and choking down hors d’oeuvres. They’re all here, garishly dressed trophy wives, power blazer, cigar smoking investors, big swinging dicks, airy patrons, and quirky self-satisfied administrators trying to look expensive, trying to impress, trying to look cool, to be seen to support the arts or to be deemed worthy of support. I’m there only to impress Cookie by being cool. So we roll in, to see and to be seen. Among the socialites and aristocrats, the occasional “artist” is thrown in for colour. But we’re not playing that, we’re in the backroom with the other pretentious jag-offs pretending they’re too cool to care. I’m handling business.

“Oh! you’re an important artist/collector/critic/curator?”

“So cool!”

“You run a gallery?”

“How nice for you.”

“Oh you’re really important?”

“That’s so great!”

“How much do you want?”

Give me the money and I’ll give you the goods. I do not give one single solitary fuck who you know, you arrogant prick, nothing you do impresses me. This is customer service, nothing more. I don’t have to impress anybody and I don’t have anything to prove. I don’t need to pretend. I dish out the bags discreetly and we go back out to the party to people watch and to take advantage of the free bar. We have a laugh with friends, the degenerate artists, half of whom are misery guts complaining about the system and the other half are social climbing, schmoozing power movers and sucking ass, flirting with hotties and chatting up influencers, squares trying to sleep with artists or artists brown-nosing curators and collectors.

We see Dick the painter and Jane the sculptor and have a laugh, Mr. Important Collector is talking about me with Ms. Commercial Gallerist, I can feel them looking and talking in hushed tones, that’s the guy who blah blah. Look darling, your boy is somebody.

We cab home culturally frustrated and financially flush.

I open the door for her and into the lobby we mount the stairs holding the iron worked railing, climbing the well-worn terrazzo steps. On the stairs, I put my hand between her thighs, gliding up her skirt, over garters, she giggles, sliding my hand upwards I feel the outline of her panties and grab a handful of silk lined pudenda. This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience. We embrace, kissing in the doorway, she fumbles for her keys as I bite her neck. We make our way to the bedroom,

undressing and kissing as we go, the neighbours across the way are watching *Friends*.



Chapter Thirty Eight

The next day Cookie and I awake leisurely late, it's Saturday morning. The phone starts as we're getting ready to go for brunch. It's Bobby Superstar, still on Friday night. Post shift drinks flowed into the next day and the party cannot end. He lives nearby, so I stop in on my way and save his life with a bottle of whiskey and a package or seven. A scene-maker from back in the day waxing nostalgic, tales of by-gone glory days, legendary parties, world tours, celebrity liaisons, before they were famous...

"I'm meeting my girl at the diner, must dash."

The local greasy spoon, Frank's Corner Grill is like a fish bowl, big glass windows for looking out or for looking in. We sit in the window while the news scrolls by on the TV: local rapes and murders, sinkholes opening in LA, XXX die in earthquake in Haiti, the smog content in China, HIV in Africa... floods, hurricanes, wildfires on the west coast, heatwaves in the south, bloody coups in the third world, civil wars, climate change, the President of the United States, the end of the world is getting closer...one continent on fire, another under water...

If you watch the news you'd almost get the feeling that there's something going wrong. Cookie orders eggs over easy, home fries, brown toast, bacon-crispy, tea. I order eggs sunny-side-up, home fries, white toast and coffee. We talk about art, she is often trying to justify performance art to my skeptical indifference.

"...the sexual power of the body transcends representation, there's still potential for artistic expression, it's direct,

physical..."

Out the window day dreaming I watch the people passing by. Here comes Guy Debord with the same smug look on his face, going into the Salvation Army.

This next guy has a physicality that makes him look like a performance artist. Let's call him Rudolf Schwarzkogler, a Vienna Aktionist in the 1960s, he made intense body art about physicality. This guy is shirtless, covered in some kind of creamy grease, he is all about physicality.

"...performance is still the best way to avoid being co-opted by the art market and stripped of all meaning, the physicality and sexual power of the body is the best way art can still exist..."

And here comes Hunter S. Thompson tweaking along the sidewalk, dirty white bucket-hat, mirrored shooter-shades, pasty, sweaty. He's furtively searching for something, scouring the gutters for the next butt, stem, sniff, rock, whatever, probably has cocaine for breakfast too. Well, maybe on cheque day.

"...what can't be commodified can't be owned."

"Marina Abramovic's ass."

On the TV the news scrolls by, another disaster, another crisis: football team trapped in a mineshaft, US drone-strikes kill the leader of a small nation, another school shooting, right-wing Christians burn a gay church, Florida is under water – do false teeth float? you ever get the feeling that everything is just a little off, like maybe something's wrong? Our food arrives and they've gotten her order wrong. My baby's eggs are too hard and her bacon is not crispy enough. Now there's definitely something wrong.

I go to work early, walk ten minutes to a beautiful residential neighbourhood and I find Justine's house by the park. This young blonde supermodel type sits at home all day, doing her paintings, reading books, and gardening, while her husband is away at the office. Every month she'll buy in quantity to do by herself while contemplating poetry, literature, painting, reflecting on her life of leisure.

In the same neighbourhood I go to visit Dimitri, systems manager by day, electronic musician on the weekends. In the eighties and nineties he was a legend producing hard electronic body music, dark synth doom and gloom. Today I meet his adorable seven-year-old daughter and admire some of her super cool toys. I visit him weekly at his beautiful ivy-covered red brick house in the west end. We pass the afternoon sitting in the back garden sipping red wine under the canopy of vines talking about music and records.

I get a call from Tarzan, they're at some art party. The typical art student is a party animal with pretensions to creativity. They want to be cool, they want to be special, but more importantly they want to fit in. They're going to be the next big thing. But first they need to party to prove how real they are. Or to get it out of their system before giving up on their dreams and settling down to an office job. A second-rate graphic designer, but tonight he is Damien Hirst, getting cooler with every snort.



Chapter Thirty Nine

At the Bucket of Blood turning day into night, the streetlights come on and the candles are lit. All the animals are out tonight, coquettes and fuck bois, party girls and party boys. Everything is on a plate, new wave sluts in pink hair, black leather mini-skirt, fishnet stockings, hot bitches who want to party. This one is a sight to behold, the bar is her runway, she struts up and down presenting her assets. Her make-up wears make-up because it's embarrassed to be seen on her face. She talks to me.

"Come to the bathroom..." More of an offer than a request.

"Uh no, thanks, I'm fine."

On the sound system "Sex Dwarf" by Soft Cell

"Isn't it nice
Sugar and spice
Luring disco dollies
To a life of vice..."⁵⁴

"Come to the bathroom!"

"Nah."

Everything is on a plate, but it's cold meat. I look the other way, I am faithful to my girl, I'm not tempted. She just makes me nervous. I need a drink.

"Shots?" A nod from the bartender and the ritual is enacted. The whiskey is poured and we raise our glasses.

"Here's to feelin' good all the time!"

The girl is lingering, she's trying to play me but I'm not taking the bait. She thinks I should want her, cause she's the hot girl, everyone's supposed to want her. But I'm not impressed. She keeps looking, buzzing about, trying to make eye contact, trying to lure me into some trap.

When the colony is sufficiently established the Queen gives birth to virgin queens who grow wings and fly off to breed. The Queen controls the whole mating process, copulating with numerous males. Virgin queens and flying male consorts seek each other out on ant Tinder or in ant bars. They take to the skies, six legs spread and wrap around the petiole of the mate, grinding. Segmented abdomen throbbing against greasy thorax. Touch being their only method of communication, erect antennae flail lustfully twitching out pre-programmed mating rituals. Mandibles drool globs of sticky fluid, sugar water, honey dew, vodka-cran and whiskey sours into open mouths. In the air they cling onto one another, mount, valves open, the vesica pulsates as the male leans back in free fall pressing deep into the ostium bursae of the young queen, penetration is achieved. They pump. Ant-style. Hairy pointed ends of abdomens stuck together in arthropod copulation, throbbing into the vestibulum, shoot in the juice and it's over. After they consummate their nuptial flight the males fall to the earth and die.

"Come on, come to the bathroom, I wanna show you something." She says with a sparkle in her eyes.

"Oh, I'm ok, thanks."

I am there for another purpose. I am the predator not the prey. I am the tempter, I am supposed to be the devil on your shoulder, not the sucker. Besides, why go out for filet-o-fish when you got a stone fox at home? I'm an old fashioned romantic, I'm not gonna fuck it up this time.

A shifty suspicious character is at the end of the bar looking at me. I look directly at him and he looks away. I haven't seen him here before. He makes me nervous. I need a drink.

"Shots?" and the ritual is enacted again.

Clink. "Go sports team!"

I look at my phone and pretend something is interesting, order another drink and shoot a glance at the end of the bar, the guy is there, acting nonchalant, looking this way. Maybe he's looking at the girl. I sip my drink. Who is that creep, why is he looking at me? I am the predator, not the prey. I carry on my conversation, nodding and smiling as Chris tells me about the film shoot he worked at all day and his interaction with Mark Wahlberg (he's very short, apparently). I sip my drink and look at my phone. Three new calls in the area. I look up and the guy is gone. Who was that guy, where'd he go? Fuck.

You have to stay sharp in this business. You never know when someone's out to get you. Everybody wants something. If they want to be your friend, there's got to be a catch. Are they a cop, a fiend, an emerging artist, or just another lost insect trying to get through the day? It's impossible to know. I focus all my energy on just doing it right. Discretion, professionalism, and customer service with a smile.

"Thanks man, have a great night!"

I keep it together well enough to make everybody happy. Again and again. I lose count of how many clients I've seen.

Sitting on a bar-stool zoning out, hiding my longing for the night to end so I can go home. On the hi-fi the yacht rock indicates the bartender wants everyone out.

"I've just closed my eyes again..."

...And leave tomorrow behind.

Ooh, dream weaver

I believe you can get me through the night..."⁵⁵

At a certain threshold the subconscious takes over. I'm raised up, out of my seat and carried out the door like a balloon, my feet dangling. I kept going up, there was no gravity, so I floated into the sky, past the houses, past peoples windows tucked in safe in bed, over the rooftops, past the apartment buildings with couples arguing and lonely oldies asleep in front of the TV. I rose into the clouds, my arms extended like an airplane, I cruised through the night sky and headed for the horizon, the moon at my back lined me with silver, the breeze was cold on my cheeks as the wind carried me up and west. Zooming, careening, flying until I saw my building. I slowed and descended, my feet landing silently on the sidewalk as my hand found my keys.



Chapter Forty

Walking the streets I've walked a thousand times, up sidewalks and down alleys I've walked ten thousand times, waiting, smoking, acting nonchalant, standing on the corner. Light another cigarette and look at my phone, meet the guy, do the deed and I'm walking the streets again.

Drifting through neighbourhood after neighbourhood, as the surroundings change the atmosphere changes, conditions, context, meaning; a row of shops, a block of condominium townhouses, a schoolyard, a grocery store, a bank, a public transit station, each place invokes a mandated behaviour. Work here, consume there. Animation here, paralysis there. The subjects assume the position and behave accordingly.

Stimuli penetrate the eye and activate the senses, voices, sounds, smells. Every element is sensual. We breathe it all in through our skin and taste it in the air. Textures on surfaces, sunshine on asphalt, codes on buildings, identity on subjects, camouflaged flesh and glands, tissues and emotions.

I am drunk on sensation, intoxicated by forms, architectural structures and incidental spaces from moment to moment blended in montage as I stroll. Openings in forms, intersections of concrete and glass, steel and brick.

Through every street and alley and every space in-between, an

active time-based composition emerges, inside and out, private property and public domain, as I pass through it, it passes through me. The territory outside interacts with the terrain inside, mingling. It moulds me. Interior: feeling, sensation, thought, viewer. Exterior: body, city, ideology, stage. The spacial territory of the metropolis and the emotional territory of the individual are interlaced. It is in us all, speaking through us. If architecture is stupid and ugly. I am stupid and ugly.

With destinations all over the city, I pass randomly through structures and spaces, distinction is dissolved, creation and reality, the image and the real, fabricated environments and ceded modes become the same involved experience. I am carried on through different worlds as a disinterested spectator and a well-rehearsed performer, wandering in and out of work and non-work, immersed, yet unattached. I observe without distinction, receptive, open to the pageant of scenery, triggering random associations, engaging psychic landscapes for a moment then moving on to the next.

The landscape itself is animated, under our feet something is alive, a Frankenstein monster of architecture and negative space surrounding and enveloping us. The people, the objects, places, buildings, ads, are all layers of codes wrapped up in the ecstasy of exchange, possessed by shifting, cycling meaning, intersecting and overlapping, at once engaging, boring, ecstatic and rapacious.

I text "Here". Penetrate the building, in and out of structures and perspectives, combinations of purpose, function and meaning. My neutrality fades as I fall back into my expected routine and perform.

"Hi, what was it you were looking for today?"

I'm standing in a doorway on the third floor smiling at a virtual

stranger. In a futilely covert gesture her arm extends a fist full of crumpled bills, exchanged for a package.

"Thanks, have a great night!"

Down the steps and outside I'm returned to the chaos below, possessed by reason or delusion or daydream, on to the next place, going to this, coming from that. This goes on and on, like a carnival ride, spinning so fast I couldn't get off if I wanted to. Without the option to withdraw I swallow and do my best to enjoy it.

I meet up with Cookie and we go to perform
The grotesque ritual enforcing the norm
Truly there's nothing that I enjoy more
Than the decadent poetry of the grocery store.

My shopping cart flies down the aisle like a rocket
Possessed by the cash burning a hole in my pocket
I smile down the row of paper towels and TP
Rolls of white kittens smile back at me.

Make me want, then make me whole
57 flavours, the product, my soul

Working class dogs and middle class bitchez
Perusing the palace of disposable riches

I can remember not having enough
Not long ago it was pretty tough
When you got nothing the world doesn't care
Now in my glory I'm a hundredaire

Stock piles of food laid out on the shelves

The ecstasy of consumption is like nothing else

Long white bays of freezers all fully stacked
Every colour of flesh in plastic is wrapped
Pink and white and yellow and red
Pigs, cows and chickens all dead

With each purchase you cause death and torture
To not get what you want would be the true horror

Death and torture everyday
But I get Greek yogurt anyway
Life's fair, that's tough
Life's fair when I have enough

Consumer culture is all about stuff
The greatest luxury is having enough.
Make a wish, here it is,
a little of that, alot of this
This is a truly aesthetic experience
Spending money in ecstatic obedience

Everything I want is everything I need
From the trap of desire I am freed
I have my cart full of all kinds of stuff
But then I realize it's never enough.

Nice and smiling the ugly cashier
Is over-friendly and full of cheer
Under the harsh fluorescent lights
I smile "Thanks, have a great night."



Chapter Forty One

Walking in my neighbourhood I pass Mark Rothko and Pepsi-Man. My neighbourhood caricatures, lost in their representations. They are separate from the numbers swarming about their pre-programmed routines, by looking like somebody else they stand out, therefore they are exiles, whether self-imposed or socially excluded, they have a personality rather than a place in society. That it may not be their own is irrelevant, there are only so many personalities to go around. I'm sure if I got to know them they'd be someone else entirely, but like most people they are just fine from a distance.

Oh, there's Sylvia Plath, the young arty college girl supported by middle class parents, sensitive teenage poet slumming in the bars, acting depressed and bookish, finding herself in a bohemian lifestyle, sleeping with common people, drinking and snorting her student loan before she forgets all about suicide and goes back to her middle class roots to settle in with a career or a baby. Or maybe she's for real, on the verge of a breakdown with the world collapsing around her, trapped in her own private hell, you can never tell.

There's a David Foster Wallace, he's just some university guy, but it might as well be him. A white guy with bad skin, dry or greasy, ponytail, ugly glasses, five days scruff and the zero point fashion choices of a grunge intellectual, barstool philosopher, perma-student; sweatpants or jeans and a t-shirt, functionality without

aesthetic. The clothing is only there for a purpose, appearance is, as they say, purely academic. He smokes too much weed and is prone to post modern existential depression.

Of course there's a Vincent van Gogh or two, you've probably known one of these, this guy is the clichéd tortured artist living in a garret, starving, alone, suffering for his art. He wears baggy no-brand clothing with no identifying marks or logos, he could be from any century, the paint on his clothes lets the world know he's an artist. Old school, art school, no school. This guy lives the classic fantasy of being a great artist, one day he'll be discovered out of nowhere, maybe after his death his work will be appreciated, (at the Salvation Army) though it's a painting of a face and a bowl of fruit or a two-dimensional landscape with a sunset, maybe a flying saucer. With no grasp of the art game, his whole thing relies on his solitary brilliance which, with no reference point, is hard to situate.



Chapter Forty Two

In the movie *Vincent Van Gogh* was a lonely weirdo and reject. The children of small town France would ridicule him. He would get drunk on absinthe and scare them, giving them the monster they needed, the world needs a villain. Weirdos or individuals are easily scapegoated and made out to be a threat. If they are perceived as bad their mistreatment is justified and they can be unilaterally persecuted.

Humans are very social animals. We need each other to define ourselves and to know who we are. Our being depends on many social forces outside of our control; these social constructs are dependent on layers of context outside of which they would not exist.

“In order to feel at home in the world I must see myself reflected in it. And the only way to fully achieve this is to see myself reflected in other individuals.”⁵⁶

“... We never truly see ourselves. You have to leave it up to someone else to know how beautiful you are”⁵⁷ We identify with other recognizable reflections and we gravitate together into groups, we are pack animals, it's in our nature.

Individuals present a threat because they are not easily labelled and categorized. The best way to diffuse a threat is to absorb it. Assimilate. In accepting the association your individuality is lost

and you're absorbed into the horde or community. "Resistance is futile."⁵⁸

Being included in a community has its privileges and disadvantages. It's empowering and validating to have a fellowship you can identify with. To not be alone. To be a member of a community and bask in its glory. It's easy to fall for the seduction of an elite when you are included.

But as soon as you take the devil's hand, all your energy is appropriated and re-directed. To be welcomed into the mainstream, accepted and celebrated with a rainbow flag and a parade only placates the anger and diffuses the spirit of resistance that could have united all individuals against oppressive systems of power. Under it all it's about having your identity swallowed by something larger than yourself over which you have no control, a categorical reduction of the individual into a paralytic background performer, an extra in their own lives.

When you are indoctrinated into the simulation of authorized culture, all your disco revolutions play out within the established arena and your inclusion eliminates any possibility to critique that power relationship. In being absorbed your identity is annihilated. Once you accept a label everything else you are is vaporized. "Once you label me you negate me."⁵⁹ If you fit in to the program you are complicit in the lie.

"...They raise X up into Y society, neutralize him, he feels compelled to try and act like them. He loses his identity and his dissident anger, if he had any. He becomes alien to his kind, they realize he's sold them out and grow to hate him. He becomes worthless to them and safe to us."⁶⁰

"Community" is another word for ghetto. It's a buzzword used to create the illusion of belonging, to diffuse and misdirect energies, it's a theatrical pantomime of shared identity often defined by opposition to a perceived threat. Our "us" needs their "them". Nothing brings people together like a shared enemy. Anyone who is different can be used as that unifying threat. "If you're not with us, you're against us."⁶¹ If you're not a unicorn, you are toxic.

If you can't be assimilated, you are alienated and isolated out of existence by the rest of the group. Why control a population when you can get them to control each other? Pit them against one-another, divide and conquer – you've heard it all before, from Sun Tzu to Situationist Recuperation.⁶²

The lefty liberal arts "community" is adept at this. In order to fight oppression they will oppress better. They will pull their own people apart with surgical precision. In order to be right they make everybody else wrong and they drive any one away who doesn't fit the mould of the latest trends in social stereotype. They self-police so well they vanish into the power dynamic they once sought to oppose.

In order to be exclusive, someone has to be excluded. Like in *Mean Girls*, your success depends on someone else's suffering.

Part of the myth of the tortured artist is that they are dangerous. When they are alive they present a volatile urgency that society cannot accept. In Van Gogh's time there was a thriving art community but he just wasn't invited, penniless and alone, he was uncool, he had no peers, and no community, like a Frankenstein monster. He turned the beauty inward, driving him mad. Only after his death, when he no longer presented a threat, could his legacy be manipulated and exploited. In death

they are neutralized and you can like them without the risk of them coming to dinner.

That's why art is so terrible. If someone sees or experiences something unusual, they are surprised, touched, maybe moved outside the expected program of quotidian dreck.

“What was that!?” They might ask.

“That was an art performance happening.”

“Oh it's art, (eye-roll) I know about art” “I saw that on TV” “Oh yeah Shia LaBeouf” and the bigotry and xenophobia of their pre-conceived notions pave over the moment again and everything goes back to normal.



Chapter Forty Three

I've gone through many soldiers, some do well and then the pressure gets to be too much. They drink too much and get sloppy. Or they indulge in the product a bit too much and lose their edge. The stress can be brutal, living under constant threat, whether real or imagined. It's a tough life, it isn't for everyone.

I have added a new soldier to the team. Carlos covers the weekends, servicing clients and developing the client base. Carlos is the real deal, gangster proper. Tall and stylish, he's like a 1980s 2-tone rude boy vs. classic electro b-boy, dangerous and cool, exactly what the position calls for. He could really take care of business if he had to, but he also has good manners and decency. He went to a liberal arts school, like in the movie, *Fame*. He's like Leroy from *Fame* meets Slick Rick.

He's a painter too. But it's secret. He won't show anyone, he makes splashy abstract expressionist canvases in his apartment, maybe as a kind of art therapy, but denies being an artist.

Among his first clients were the residents of a disabled home where he was volunteering, the quadriplegics started asking him to roll joints, and it snowballed from there, pretty soon he had developed a perfect captive client base.

It's great to have a pro that I can rely on. Carlos won't take shit from anybody, he knows the game, he brings in the cash and he's

not afraid to get his hands dirty. We hang out getting drunk and being dangerous. Sometimes he gets the wild look of a crazed animal in his eyes, quickly disarmed by his charming smile that hides a danger at once a comfort and a concern. We will become partners, like brothers.



Chapter Forty Four

With my soldiers covering the beat I am free to take weekends off. Cookie and I go for a picnic in the nature preserve nearby. We walk through the forest together hand in hand, down the winding path, past the pond, over the stone bridge in soft focus, the leaves are changing from green to yellow, to orange and gold. Deep in the forest we find a secluded spot and sit soaking up the afternoon sun. I feel like a king with her at my side, quietly proud, I'm on top of the world. We feed our lunch to squirrels and starlings, watching the little birds and smiling dumbly.

Cut to love story montage sequence... soft music, running through a field of wildflowers holding hands, butterflies, song birds, Vaseline on the lens... I am at my best when we're alone together, only she sees me, only she understands. If we could just grow old like this I would never want for anything else.

The day quietly passes into evening and the sun filters through the trees, we're sitting at a picnic table by the edge of the woods. I gaze into Cookie's eyes as shadows dance over her face. A breeze moves through the bush and I see a fox sitting there, clear as diamonds, casually staring at us. He wears a tiara, filigreed gold and silver studded in rhinestones that sparkle in the light, set in the centre between pointed ears is a big emerald jewel, surrounded by lush orange fur. I blink and it's gone, leaving a crumpled beer can in its place.

We pack up and head back to civilization. On our way home walking up the strip, the classic stale donut shop, there for decades, has been replaced by a brand new shiny Tim Hortons. Like a stain of suburbia on the neighbourhood, it ruins the atmosphere for as far as the eye can see. The automatic door jerks open invasively when anyone walks by, as if pushing generic donuts on everyone, a donut pusher.

“Every time someone walks out the automatic door: Pop! Pop! Shots ring out, the sniper on the rooftop welcomes new customers to the sidewalk. A pile of bodies leaking jelly filling and an old fashioned glazed rolling into the street.” I break into a rendition of “Neighborhood Sniper” by Eazy-E

“So it’s the shots that sing out like a piper

Everyone’s scared of the neighborhood sniper”

But she doesn’t laugh. I look at the sidewalk and walk on, quietly humming to myself.

“Boom boom had to murda ‘dem

Boom boom had to murda ‘dem...”⁶³



Chapter Forty Five

Everything is great. Everything’s coming up roses. I get what I want. But this can only go on for so long before you run out of luck and the law of averages catches up with you. You need a five year plan. Get in, get money, get out before it’s too late. Five years of hard work, then I’ll retire. I’m more than halfway there. In a couple years I’ll have enough to start a legit business, open a bar/cultural space with my baby, make a normal life and live happily ever after. Everything is great but the greater things are, the greater the anxiety of fucking it all up.

For the job I have to deal with all different types of people all the time... importers, wholesalers, distributors...dangerous people, gangsters, players... information is on a need to know basis, you never know who you’re talking to, so everyone is uncommonly pleasant. It’s a refreshing change from every other job where, unless you’re the boss, you eat shit. At this level everyone is their own boss so respect is the standard, it doesn’t make sense to be rude or fuck anybody over. There’s always some clown starting out who’s just watched *Scarface*, but they don’t last. When your contacts are your greatest asset, it pays to be friendly. I have protection from my suppliers and arrangements with heavies should it come to that but I keep it simple. Basic rules apply, stay away from scumbags, take no unnecessary risks and there will be no problems. It’s simple, you’re strong enough, you treat people well, you get respect, and you get money.

Today I have a business meeting with Koko, a professional colleague. He's a hipster icon in punk rock regalia... we meet in the neighbourhood and walk to his pad, a nice big studio loft in a warehouse. I sit on the huge plush couch in front of the 60" flatscreen.

"You wanna play Mario Cart?"

"Um, nah." Video games.

He sets a pot of herbal tea on the coffee table amongst the range of products in front of me. A pound of this an ounce of that, ziplock bags of capsules and tablets by the hundreds, white powders, green bricks, black chunks, peppermint tea, and purple horse-shoes.

"Got it, got it, need it, not interested...hmm

what's this one!?"

We discuss trades and collaborations, negotiating while catching up on the gossip.

"Did you hear about Daphne? She ripped off Fred, she's with Velma now."

"Makes sense."

"Shaggy was dating Daria last I heard."

"Oh weird."

"Yeah and Scooby works for Scrappy now."

"Like sands through the hourglass..."

"Wut?"

"Oh nothing."

I expand the product line to include a few more pharmaceuticals.



Chapter Forty Six

Another night Cookie and I go to another art opening, some paintings or some sculpture or some conceptual whatever, it doesn't matter...

"Hmm..." Chin scratching and folded arms.

"Powerful."

"Representative."

"Interesting."

"I'd say more post-interesting."

"Expensive."

"Hmm..."

We look good. We drink the wine and laugh the laughs. We shine together. We're the brightest little stars in our own universe. A few sycophants fawn over us, they've heard my name so it's the old social climbing routine. Some hovering, buzzing, you can always tell who wants something, the smell of desperation about them, a needy look in their eyes. As dangerous as a worm thinking they're a shark acting like a snake. It takes a few minutes before it's clear this one is not a drug fiend but an emerging artist. The climbers are the worst. They'll step on their own mother to kiss someone's ass if they think it will do something for their career. Little do they know, talking to us will do nothing for them.

"What are you working on now?"

"Oh that's soooo great!"

"Oh that's soooo cool!"

“Oh it was so interesting...” and “blah blah blah...”
Stop sucking my dick. Ok, don't stop.

We take our inflated egos and go on to the next opening down the street. We hit about three or four over the course of the evening, not so much to look at the art, well we look at the art but most artwork only requires about six seconds to determine that it only deserves three seconds. We attend to participate in the gallery-going culture, the scene of being seen, making an appearance, and making snide remarks. To keep up with what's going on in the city, who's collecting who, who's sleeping with who, who made what and where did they rip off the idea from. To socialize, and anti-socialize, to be cool and to be cooler than thou. To feel good and look great. To be somebody.

I'm making an effort at gallerying, but I get bored.

*
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We're not strolling in the idyllic forest any longer. The innocence of the pretty picture reflected in the calm stream has evolved into an unrecognizable monster. When you look into the reflecting pool and choose the image, you begin a process of unbecoming, subject to the systems which give those images power, the exchange goes beyond image and viewer and feeds into a lexicon of oppression.

Ok, so it's boring pretentious crap now in real life, but in my heart of hearts the dream still lives, like a walk in the enchanted realm where Echo stalked Narcissus and they skipped through the forest together, passing by the stream, better than a pretty picture, all sparkling, all singing, all dancing, the ideals are still there at my core. I'm Charlton Heston wrecking the Sistine

Chapel in *The Agony & the Ecstasy*. The iconoclasts dream of something more.

I know I'm just another casualty seduced by the myth of the artist: Paint the Sistine Chapel, conjure angels out of marble, make doves fly out of bronze. Write books in your blood, make music out of silence, turn trash into idols, play with meat, bisect a shark, turn your body into a statue, human centipede, jump the shark, sell yourself, put your heart into it, drain your essence... All for the creation of the transformative power of beauty.

We evoke culture to create ourselves. Culture is our reflection on earth in mud, it allows us to see ourselves and understand what we are, to create our identities.

“Identity” is identicalness, “the state of being the same.”⁶⁴ The opposite of individuality. Identity is what you share with others, a tribal association like organized sports, your team, the club to which you subscribe. Uniformity, equivalence, equality. Equal to what? How much equality do you want? How much equality can you have before you're not you anymore? Identity is something larger than yourself into which you can disappear.

Whereas “individuality” is “an indivisible particle,”⁶⁵ The sense of who one is.

The outsider is defined outwardly by not being included, they will make us other so they can be the same, defined by what they are not. The distinguishing feature of the other is that they are not included in the dominant chorus of voices.

All of these reflections in the pool of Narcissus make a picture of the world. Still, every artist's mother always says “Why can't you

make something beautiful, like flowers?” Narcissus was turned into a flower as punishment for his crime, believing in himself.

He could’ve been just another cock that wants in but he was in love with himself, the genetic line ends there with Narcissus coming up his own ass, like an Egyptian god, creating himself by masturbating, like an artist. Self gratification, self mutilation. Art as wound. This is my blood. Bleed for me, artist. Like some Christ shit “...*eat my flesh and drink my blood*”⁶⁶. To draw sharks to the smell of blood in the water, your community, eager to devour you.

Culture, art, gods, money... all have one thing in common. If we didn’t believe in them they wouldn’t exist. The human potential to become is entirely based in faith. Believe in something and it’s true. Just a word or a look and BLAM! it’s magic. Imagine it, you create it. Call it into being with a wish. This little light of mine, the power of a thousand suns or the tiniest inner most flicker of electricity in a heartbeat, it is what I imagine it to be, it’s fire. Anything can rupture the surface giving birth to a divine experience. A moment of opportunity, inspiration, an idea – usually aborted before it’s born, and crushed into a box – white box, black box, small box, big box. A genre with a set of rules so you know what to expect. Action/Adventure, Comedy, Drama, Horror, Rom-Com, True-Crime...

The raw spontaneous eruptions of chaos are categorized and named, labelled and limited. But this force lives outside of these narrow prejudicial categories, hanging in the ether waiting to be set free into life’s immeasurable infinity of possibility, waiting to be brought to life by someone’s love, the impulse to share, to open, to exchange, to challenge. To gift. The transmutation of shit into gold.

This is what I’m talking about as a true aesthetic experience.

Art rarely comes close. When there are feelings like this, how can anyone make a picture. The Muslims were right... to make an image is blasphemy when one could be exalting the glorious eternal moment.

I get bored of standing around looking at pictures, so I step outside and pull out my smoke-pack. I flick the lighter on and hold the point of the flame to the end of the long white death stick, inhale deeply, arch my head back and breathe a cloud of smoke into the night. Holding the burning cigarette elegantly to my lips I kiss off another drag and I’m fulfilled. The satisfaction of smoking is so much more than standing around some insipid nothing art show. THIS is enjoyable. A truly satisfying aesthetic experience. The ritual elemental delivery of nicotine into my system, addiction satisfied and I look like a new wave film star.

After the art show it’s getting late. Cookie unlocks her bike and we say our goodnights. She rides off towards home. Feeling the sentimental crush swell in my heart, I hail a taxi and jump in. “Follow that bicycle.” We chase after her in the cab, speeding through the cool night air, soon the driver catches up with her. Rolling down the window I reach out to her as she rides, she grabs my hand and holds tight, zooming through the darkened streets. We ride the night together. I can’t help but smile beaming from the inside outwards and so does she, her laughter cracking the cool night air, we ride the wind, holding hands, together we are unstoppable. Mohammad is smiling too. Eventually we split off, her going her way and me going off to work. I’m still glowing from the ride when I arrive at the bar.



Chapter Forty Seven

At the Empire Bar, the drinks flow, we shoot the shit, talking about art and culture. Everybody's a fuckin' artist.

"I make drawings."

"Yeah, I'm a painter."

"I write poetry."

"Oh yeah, I'm an artist too, I play bass."

"My band has a song about being an artist..."

"My mom is an artist."

"Yeah, blowjob artist." Sebastian catches a punch in the belly and is too winded to laugh at his joke.

We're standing on the patio out front drinking when there's a scuffle six feet in front of us on the street. Two plainclothes run up on some guy and shake him down, he's handcuffed against the wall getting arrested. It's funny, someone snickers, but then, oh shit. It's Koko. A friend. And a player. It's suddenly not at all funny. I keep chatting and sipping my drink as more and more cop cars arrive. Time seems to go slow. I play it cool watching the ordeal unfold as if on a screen, nursing my whiskey sour and looking at my phone. Other people at the table look at me, they know. I squirm in my skin. Inside I'm laughing hysterically thinking of the \$X,XXX worth of product in my pocket, it's not at all funny, the absurdity is just too much, but my face doesn't betray me. I thank god or the devil for white privilege, in this moment I'll take it.

The cops are searching Koko over and over, they can't find anything, they are confused like a dog when you pretend to throw the ball but don't. Eventually, the last place they look they find one nearly empty half-bag in the pocket of his jeans.

"Nice work Columbo." He says.

The undercovers are pleased with themselves, gloating with a shit eating grin, proudly lounging on the hood of the cop car like Eddie Murphy in *Beverly Hills Cop*.

They wear the typical skid costume, greasy unwashed hair spills out from a ratty baseball hat, shaggy, pock marked, pasty face with a self-satisfied sneer, dirty baggy blue jeans. The other guy is short and fattish with five days scruff and the generic blue jeans, t-shirt and ball cap uniform, the disguises work, they look like real pieces of shit.

Half an hour later I run into Koko up the street at the Bucket of Blood, he seems only mildly irritated showing me his ticket, "Possession", presently untrue, I make it so and we have a drink and laugh and drink and laugh.

I make the last subway, to save on cab fare. Home at last after the night's ordeal, I breathe a sigh of relief and try to let my guard down. I get undressed in the living room so not to disturb Cookie and I creep silently into the bedroom in my leopard print boxer briefs. The room has the powerful electric charge of her presence. Under the covers her shape heaves gently in the darkness, rising and falling as she breathes, off in dreamland. I lift the covers and slide in beside her, careful not to wake her. I sidle up close as I can till I feel the warmth of her body, safe asleep. I lay beside her hopelessly awake and stare at the ceiling. My heart pumps in my chest, blood wooshing in my ears. I gaze in awe at the majestic sleeping panther beside me and a smile crawls

across my face. I feel a warmth growing within me, a genuine caring that I want to envelop her in. She stirs and I look away, don't make a move, I hold my breath, stare at the ceiling. When she's sound asleep for sure I'll go next door.

In the spare room I'll drink watching old movies on the laptop with a kitchen knife under the pillow, waiting for something bad to happen.



Chapter Forty Eight

I meet Carlos for our weekly level up and he is full of injuries. He's got a fat lip, more missing teeth, some Phillips shaped wounds in his head... He is acting slow and seems drunk though he hasn't had a drop. He is like a different person. Google says he's got a concussion.

He was jumped or started a fight or came to the aid of a damsel in distress depending on the version of the story. According to him it was unavoidable, there's always a narrative in which he's the hero. He was attacked with a metal bar and threw the guy across the room, there was four of them, they kicked him in the head and stabbed him with a screwdriver.

But you should've seen the other guys, they got off easy because he's such a nice guy. I had to talk him out of murder again. Next time he'll harvest their organs.

Sigh. You win some, you lose. It's becoming clear that he's a bit of a loose cannon.

Violence and danger is exciting and fun, until it gets tedious and stressful.



Chapter Forty Nine

The atmosphere is brittle with tension, the threat of being watched is a constant pressure. Any beautiful sunny day is overshadowed with a sinister dread that looms over me indefinitely.

Out on the street, it could be anyone. I train myself not to look when cop cars go by, act nonchalant, don't look, don't look away, don't yawn, don't do anything. Light a cigarette, don't smile. Act normal. I look at my phone and keep answering texts.

Every time I hear the sound of the text notification I want to stick a knife in my head. They call before, during or after the party. I take transit across town to meet a new client. I do the rounds, everyone seems suspicious, tense, through it all I put on my customer service smile "Thanks, have a great night!"

There's four cops on the street corner near my house. Trouble, something must be up. I prick up my ears, sniff the air for threats. I am alert to danger. Tense. Ready, while outwardly presenting the appearance of calm, inside I'm ready to explode. What have I done now? Must be something horrible. Cops are swarming all over at the corner as more arrive. Are they finally here for me? This is it, I'm fucked. Then they go into Tim's. Oh. Fuck.

I have a shot of whiskey, one for the nerves, then another.

All awake moments are alert, scanning for movement, bodies,

cameras, eyes, neighbours... intruders, informants, authorities, ants... Even at home, across the way the neighbours are watching *Friends* in the darkness. I try not to look. Whatever lives over there is looming, waiting. What could it be? Normals. What could they want? My ruin.

Cookie asks "What's the matter?"

"Nothing." I'm crushed under tonnes of stress, my head is going to pop like a pimple.

"Come to bed, let's watch *Disabled Trailer Park Moms*"

"I'll join you after I smoke a cigarette on the fire escape."

It's not safe, I cannot sleep till the sun comes up. If you're going to get raided they come just before dawn and bust the door down with a battering ram and barge in like 'roid raging jocks looking for a nerd to stomp.

Ever-present is a constant drilling pressure, a sinister electricity that keeps me stretched tight enough to snap. Like the power lines in the greenbelt beyond the city limits, on the other side of the river where they find the dead hookers. A high tension wire, suspended in the night sky, moist with night time dew, lost in the rough edge of suburban sprawl. Every nerve is tight and surging with 100,000 watts of power. I am hung there on a never-ending stress that keeps me fucking strung out with nowhere else to go.

When the sun comes up, I'll pass out.



Chapter Fifty

All my life I have tried only to be true; to remain loyal to an intimate personal ideal. A vision in my mind, of a perfect illumination.

I have tried to keep this flame alive, to stoke and build it within. To fight the tidal wave of boredom with some elegance or style; to be an aesthete. And I have endeavoured to share that ambition with those around **me**. Whether we burn or whether we shine, burn to shine or shine to burn, we can only do our best.

We are all free to make our own decisions. And we are damned to live with the consequences, in a world where all our dreams and nightmares come true.

Why do people use drugs?
Why not? Something to do...?

Myself, I never touch the stuff. Blowing my mind out into oblivion just doesn't hold the appeal it once did. If you want to get anything done you can't be messed up all the time. It's counter-productive and it's really not a good look, my girl doesn't want to see that. I want to be decent for Cookie. She keeps me good. I want to give her all the goodness in the world.

Why do people fall in love? Why do people make art? Why do we get up in the morning?

To fuck? There has to be more to it than that.
To reach up out of the well of isolation? To share your life with those around you?
To give, that's all there is in this life.

Tattooed across my shoulder is a white trumpeter swan that rips its breast, tearing its own heart, drawing out rich black blood to feed its young and nourish its loved ones.



Chapter Fifty One

It's winter. We had an argument. She said I was a drunk piece of shit and went to stay with her girlfriend for a week. Fair enough. I don't want to think about it so, like a drunk piece of shit, I go out for a drink. After drinks and commiserating with friends, I felt like a drunk piece of shit so I went home early. On my way quite by chance, passing a Shoppers Death Mart, I stepped in as if on autopilot and watched myself buy the supplies. And then, well, things got comfortable. It's been over ten years since I did anything like this. But without my love, bad things happen. I never do this, but left to my own devices... I started with a reasonable dose. When the needle goes in there is a moment of tension, concentration and focus of your whole being on getting it right, until you hit the vein and the blood shoots into the chamber, release the tourniquet and push the plunger home, then it starts and you know the ride is coming on fast, you lie back and take it. The unconditional love of a direct hit. These are the feelings of a drug fiend, I haven't done this in years, I don't know why it's happening now. It's like it's out of my control. Soon I was hitting XXXmg at a time, every half hour and then I got lucky and the right dose hit the right spot and the world went white and cold and fast and the rollercoaster blasts off the rails like a rocket into the sky and before I could clean the instrument, I was gone, out of this world. I was floating above the bed and the body began to shake violently, like I was breaking through the atmosphere, I was far gone and going further, the body fell back on the bed and I held on to the wrought iron bed frame as

the room shook like an earthquake. As I left the earth, burning into the stratosphere, nothing mattered anymore, all was painless insignificant careening through skies into nowhere, where nothing hurts, a place where language and image do not exist, time and space are no more. I had reached oblivion.

“And I beheld a white swan floating in the blue.
Between its wings I sate, and the æons fled away.”⁶⁷

The release is immense like being broken open by pleasure. Vibrating, convulsing white blindness. It's an absolute. Absolute elsewhere. Beyond everything. The world goes away. Shame and regret and failure go away, everything goes. Terror is there and I face it and go through it, to another place. Truly void.

“The swan flew and dived and soared, yet no
whither we went.”

Total abstraction of existence. An invocation of bizzaro world negativity, my body and my being is filled with cold hard white nothingness. Very beyond. So wrong, so right, so much more wrong.

But then the world came back, the rollercoaster grinds to a halt, the room comes into view, gravity levels out, stillness and quiet returned. So I did it again. And then again. There was nothing else in the world but this ambivalent void. I must have it, I'm obsessed. I am on a mission to find my mortality there is something waiting for me there.

“And I laid my head against the Head of the Swan,
and laughed, saying:
Is there not joy ineffable in this aimless winging?”

After ten hours I wonder if maybe I am trying to kill myself, I'm so close right now, it's really just a roll of the dice, a 50/50 attempt with no chance to win. And I'm pretty ok with that at this point. I feel a pang of pride that I might finally almost have the courage to relinquish control and end it. But not quite. So I do it again, shooting for the overdose.

“White swan, bear thou ever me up
between thy wings!”

I am too wrecked to find something to watch on TV so I set my novelty drinking bird on the nightstand and its teetering movement is visually stimulating enough. I hit it again and my seizure lasts so long I lose count, I stumble to the bathroom and see myself shaking in the mirror and wonder if I've hit some serious nerve damage, or a stroke and I will palsy and shake like this for the rest of my life, I see myself in the reflection jerking uncontrollably, I worry about knocking my teeth out against the sink. The drinking bird has stopped drinking.

What goes up must come down. And the higher you go, the greater the fall. The brain depends on chemicals, they do everything, dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, endorphins... all naturally occurring chemicals and hormones that we need to function. There's only so much to go around, to manage the well-being and functioning of the mind and body they need to balance. If you use it all up in one go, then you are left with none, and things get ugly. The light that burns twice as bright, etc.

I find myself prone before the porcelain altar retching my guts out in toxic shock. Paradise looks down on me from the black velvet oasis in the paintings on the wall. And I am so far away from paradise right now. While kneeling on the tiles I see a bug

on the wall next to me. I feel tremendous appreciation for life in this moment, I will let this creature live. I name him Willy. I won't crush you Willy. You may live, and maybe I will too.

My nervous system is totally flattened. Both my arms are bruised from elbow to wrist... the regal blue of failure. Azurite, cobalt and indigos that would please the Medici's of Florence, Giotto di Bondone eat your heart out. Splotches of violet, turquoise, verdigris to custard and amber jellied gold under white gauze, I have the arms of a corpse, but I am still alive. I exist.

There's nothing left to do now but go crazy. I lie back and sweat and wait to be devoured by all my demons. A black swirling mist dances across the ceiling, poison ghosts.

In the bathroom Willy is in the exact same spot as before; my one companion in survival, who came through the darkness with me and lived. But Willy is just a dried speck of vomit.



Chapter Fifty Two

This is a crucial moment, a serious wake up call, a potentially positive turning point. I need to make a change. I'm going to stop drinking and get my shit together. Ok, good.

First step, withdrawal, the DTs, the shakes, extreme anxiety, hallucinations, etc. It'll be over in three days. It can get a little ugly, I can't let Cookie see me like this, she's still away at her friend's place until Friday, so I have two or three days to regain my composure.

Delirium Tremens, sounds like a dreamy playland of pretty pink elephants and cartoon hippos in tutus. But it's not pretty, it's more like snakes and rats and insects crawling out of corners and cracks in the ceiling. They are not cute.

Everything is crawling. They are on me, I need a drink. I feel a tickle on the back of my neck, I need a drink. A shadow moves in the corner and I need a drink. The pigeons on the window sill are laughing at me, I need a drink. I know if I just have a couple ounces of whiskey they will all go away, just a tippie and I could avoid wanting to rip my face off. I resist. What's that noise? The creaking of the building settling, trains screaming in the distance, voices, neighbours – am I really crazy, or is it the withdrawal? Do I hear voices because I am having DTs or am I really crazy and drink is the only thing that keeps me sane? I know if I just have a drink the monsters will go away. I resist.

Standing back, objectively looking at my life laid out before me I realize, hey maybe it's not so bad. If this is it, then this is it. We do what we can. I'm trying.

Be optimistic. Stay positive. Accept it and go on. Even going overboard like that with the drugs can be seen as a useful experience, a trial by fire, an acid burn, a catalyst, like amateur electro-convulsive therapy, a shock to the system, blasting the slate clean for a tabula rasa, back to zero to begin anew my quest for... What was it again? Self-Control or something. It'll come back to me.

Without the blurs I'm looking much older. I'm tired and not as charming as I thought I was. The joke is not so funny with the lights on.

Life is brutal, but it's going to get better. There is a dawn at the end of the long dark night, light at the end of the tunnel, there is life after the weekend. My baby will be back in a few days, and I'll make her proud. "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how."⁶⁸

I lay in bed and shake, cocooned under the covers with old movies and try to sleep it off. A TV coma will get me through this. Media excess, an endless supply of narrative distractions, tell me a story that makes sense, take me out of this life and let me be someone else for 90 minutes at a time.

Deep in the dark enchanted forest, an idyllic scene fades into a slow pan right. Under the forest canopy, dead trees lay where they've fallen, overgrown with underbrush. Golden boughs arch overhead, draped in hanging moss. Through the decay, sprouting vines reach up towards the light.

A sparrow swoops down to feed her nestlings, a quail marches her covey of chicks, a fluffle of bunnies, a scurry of squirrels, a mischief of mouse pups... Nature provides for all the little creatures. The bluebird of happiness announces with a song and all come running to see. Maybe this is a satisfying aesthetic experience.

Big brown eyes twitch, lashes fluttering like tiny birds, butterflies, flowers, blinking open for the first time, gazing over the calm scene as the world unfolds. Everything is bright and new. All is well. When Bambi falls his mother is there to pick him up. I fell asleep so nothing bad ever happened and Bambi stayed young forever.

“Good morning young prince!”



Chapter Fifty Three

By the time Cookie comes home I am put together looking good in long sleeves for a week.

I made a special make up Lasagna and we eat at the table by candle light, with Jackie Gleason's *Music for Lovers* playing on the turntable we share a moment of tenderness.

“I'm sorry baby.”

“I'm sorry too.”

“I'll try to get better. I know I'm difficult but I'm worth it” I say with a butter melting look in my eyes. She smiles. The walls have fallen. It feels like there could never be a problem again.

For a while I totally abstain, try to go on with life. The next day I'm out early walking in the park, a dim glow behind an opaque white sky, bleak, cold, tolerable. It's not springtime yet, everything's still frozen, but wet. The trees are bare, naked claws reaching out towards an empty sky. I can hear the snow and ice melting.

There's a brisk static charge in the air, I'm in it. Present. There's no escaping the moment. I don't know if I'm in distress or ok. Thoughts race by, don't let them in. Try to stay positive. Calm. Steady.

That's good luck.

I feel like I'm walking a tight rope, I wish Cookie would hold my hand. But I've got to do it on my own. Why should there be any support, we're all on our own, it's no big deal. I'm a few days sober, almost a week. Now that I'm sober I have a real problem, I exist.

Here come the dog walkers. Oh, they were just poodle foot prints.

I go to work and say hello, at the bar the friends are supportive, it's good to take a break sometimes, yeah. Good for you. Thanks. Here's your ginger ale. Thanks. I take a quiet pride in my self-control. There's a tension that feels like effort. The pride quickly turns to boredom. My head is clear, thoughts move fast, doubts, . Time is long. I'm dizzy, light-headed. I need to get out of here.

Nighttime is closing in. I go home to a quiet night. Cookie is at some work function. I don't know what to do with myself.



Chapter Fifty Four

We all need love, we need to feel safe and ok. We need connection and belonging. That's just part of human nature. But we are very adaptable creatures. If we don't get the love that we need, we will need something else.

Vices replace connection and intimacy. Alcoholism, substance use, addiction to media ...obsessive habitual behaviours. You didn't get the support you needed and that emptiness grows like a disease, develops into a fixation on whatever misplaced attachment you can find, it is a simple transference of need. The substitute takes the place of the love that you never got, colonizing our desires. One addiction follows the next pursuing the endless need to fill the void.

"All addiction comes from trauma."⁶⁹

Addicts don't take drugs because they want to. They take drugs because they NEED. They don't need to get high, they NEED love. But they will take what they can get. Anything can be used to fill the hole in you, but ultimately nothing will ever be enough. Need, desire, distress, desperate longing... it's not romantic or punk rawk, it's a starving unlovable wild animal. Like a rabid fox, frothing at the mouth, dying of dehydration and crippled by an irrational fear of water.

The main defining feature of addiction "is not being able to bear

being present in your life.”⁷⁰

he addict at least knows what it is that will fulfill their need
“Until tomorrow but that’s just some other time.”⁷¹

Prometheus proudly stood by his crimes. Man needs fire to burn away the pain. “You got to burn to shine”⁷² Prometheus was unrepentant so Zeus sent the eagle to give him cirrhosis of the liver. Everyday his liver was eaten and every night it grew back and was eaten again the next day, and so on, forever. Liver everyday. I guess, in our way, we all suffer.



Chapter Fifty Five

Flashback to childhood, scanning over memories, I see myself at age four or five. It’s autumn, walking in the forest with my Mum and Dad, finding milkweed pods, breaking them open to release the wishes, little white feathers hanging in the air, floating away. I run ahead down the path chasing wishes. My father called to me and I went to him as he stood above on the wooden pathway. He said come closer, with a smile and sparkle in his eyes he kicked me full in the chest with construction boots. I crumpled to the ground, confused. He’s chuckling, parenting.

My childhood was ruled by terror and mind games. My father was the all seeing, all knowing god of meaningless rage. But the ever-present threat of violence was nothing compared to the baboon minded domination and humiliation. The lesson was clear and I learned it well, “*You will never be good enough.*”

He seemed to derive a great satisfaction from making me feel small, as if he enjoyed the slow breakdown of my character, like a prisoner of war. It’s confusing when your closest human relation does everything they can to make sure you know deep down you’re unlovable and stupid. “*In a battle of wits you’re unarmed*” was his tagline, used constantly to remind me of my worthlessness. I learned it like an aphorism. As long as someone is suffering more than them, they are not the worst. As long as there’s someone underfoot, they can twist their heel and crush you and they’ve accomplished something. They have power. Is

this what love is like? When you've never experienced anything else it's all you know and you take it, learn to love it. Give me more. Love me more. Give me pain.

If you love someone you take all the abuse they can throw at you and how much you suffer is equal to how much you love them. If they don't hurt you enough then you bully them until they explode. Then if it hurts, you know you're in love.

I reflect on my past trying to understand how to be. How does a man live, how does a man love? I think back to the role-models used to build my understanding of male identity. Searching my memories for bonding moments with my father, we're at the movies, sitting in the dark looking at someone else's fantasies. "Deckard, Blade Runner."

To be a man in love you have to find someone special, someone flawed the same way you're flawed, someone like you only better. You take care of each other and make each other's dreams come true, and you run away together and live happily ever after. I chose this girl to attach all my dreams to, to define my ambitions. Now this unsuspecting woman bears the burden of my expectations, smothered in my adoration she is subjected to the ordeal of my fantasies.



Chapter Fifty Six

On my forearm is a scene from a Victorian children's book, a band of crashing waves breaking on the rocks. A mermaid reclines on the shore amidst the chaos, stable and calm. Strict bangs frame her smiling face as she beckons with one hand, the other holds a bottle of whiskey.

With the first large double whiskey the warmth hits the pit of my stomach and radiates outward filling my whole body and releasing the tension. The second double and the warmth extends to my toes relaxing every muscle and loosening every mortal strain. With the fifth, the blush rises to my face and kicks in the pleasure centres of my brain. A golden light glows out of me and everything in the dark bar seems slightly brighter. I am alive with courage and strength and anything is possible. The atmosphere changes, brightening my eyes and twisting my mouth into a smile.

The emptiness must be filled. Fill 'er up!

With a full drunk on, the night becomes glorious. I move from one client to the next like a phantom sliding, gliding, careening on an arc and a dive, my feet always finding themselves under me, one after the other, leaping from spire to spire, blasting through the night, coat tails flying behind me in the wind, up staircases, down alleys. Cruising at altitude. Propelled ever on by whiskey and nicotine and reckless abandon. Before I have time

to reflect, there's another call and I'm off on the next mission, busying myself with distractions to fill the night with moments, to make it to the dawn. Behind curtains before sun up, like a Nosferatu, safe from the light which would crush my nocturnal fantasy that I am doing ok.



Chapter Fifty Seven

Sometimes romance is like a drug deal. Your partner gives you what you need and you give them what they want, it should be a fair exchange, but it's a delicate balance. In a co-dependent relationship, you depend on someone for your well being and they have power over you. You have to trust them not to disappear and leave you hanging and you have to be there for them. She gives me what I need. The good feeling, a warm heart, stability, the courage to face the world.

The brain chemicals activated during drug use are the exact same brain chemicals released during pair bonding behaviours... cuddling, kissing, and attention from your beloved. Similarly they can lead to dependence. It's not hard to argue that the addict has a problem. Everyone's got problems, but the addict has consolidated all their problems into one problem. Cookie is my drug of choice and when I get enough, everything is perfect.

I should be happy, everything is great, but my fucking brain chemicals betray me. Doubts, fear, worry... The mind wanders over all the bad things that could happen. Anxiety and paranoia encroach on every moment building over days and weeks the feeling that something terrible is about to happen.

She's the only thing keeping my feet on the ground. I need her there to tell me no, to pull me back from the edge. I need her to rub against to know I'm here. To keep me good when the

darkness comes, I can never let her know how much I need her.

Fuck it. We're here for a good time not for a shit time. The bad thing will happen when it happens, there's nothing I can do. "Let the Bad Times Roll!"⁷³

Drink lightens the darkness for a little while. I know it's not the solution but it gets me through the day for now.

I look to my girl for support. But I can't tell her the truth of what's happening inside me. I have to appear strong, like a man, but I rely on her like an addict. And I have the addict's relationship. Adoration paired with tension and resentment, she holds the power because without her I would be lost.

Any moment now something terrible is about to happen, but fuck it. The show must go on.



Chapter Fifty Eight

Springtime melts out of winter, the dog-shit thaws, the voidoids awaken from hibernation and walk like tourists through their lives. And so do I. Everything goes on, life must constantly move forward, like the relationship from *Annie Hall*, you've got to keep up with the sharks. Evolve or die. I've been meeting with investors and started to work on opening a legit venue. The plan is to buy a bar, just the weekends will pay the bills then we can program events, live shows, run a gallery or whatever and make some culture. The art scene is dying for something like this, an unpretentious space where we can build something cool and make shit happen.

A client who is a real estate agent is showing Carlos and I potential locations. I've lost count of generic sports bar shit holes, when eventually we meet at a small bar in the Portuguese neighbourhood where the gentrification is only just starting. It's like a time capsule from the 1970s, covered in red velvet and candelabras with the sinister feel of a Bond villain's lair, or a Dracula castle from a Hammer Horror film plus Euro-disco. Vintage electric dance floor lights, vinyl seating, low lights, tube TVs on no channel cast a flickering glow into the atomic-age incandescence. We'll call it *The Night Gallery*. I put a down payment in cash that day.

To pay for everything I've upped my game, moving large quantities of product for a larger range of distributors. It's more dangerous but the money is faster and I need money to make

our dream come true.

The phone buzzes and I'm off on a call, take the subway to the east end. Steph is waiting in her car with her five or six year old daughter Melanie, in the back. She sheepishly gives me an M&M like it's a disco biscuit. We play with her little stuffed bunny peaking from behind the front seat. I do voices while she jumps in her car seat giggling and screaming. We drop the kid off at the baby daddy's, then mommy wants to party. She drives me all night on deliveries, seeing clients, hopping from party to party, pausing at traffic lights for her to do key bumps and guzzle wine.

My neighbourhood characters continue to provide a stranger comradery. Virginia Woolf is another one, I see her walking alone by the beach in a grey overcoat picking up stones and I stiffen a little with nervous tension. She seems indifferent, intellectual, distant and superior. A long graceful stone-faced Modigliani with mousy brown hair loosely pulled back with a few curls blowing in the breeze. She looks severe and reflective, there's a quiet sadness in her solitary wandering. She's not an ant like the others, she's a moth slowly dying on a window sill.

The next day I get word from Carlos that the main investor, a client of ours, heard rumours about my art scene reputation and pulled out of the project because I'm no good. Back to the fucking drawing board.



Chapter Fifty Nine

Art opening night again, this time we're in the industrial area in the west-end. All the galleries are being pushed out of the city, migrating west to escape real-estate developers, rent increases and douche bags. But they bring the douche with them everywhere they go. It's a familiar routine.

While complaining about gentrification they colonize neighbourhoods, contributing to the "community" with an ethical inference. Before you know it, everyone is subjected to their moral authority, indoctrinated or exiled and it's re-education time all over again. There are three galleries on this street and two around the corner.

At The Sun Life gallery the artist is an actually famous celebrity and the place is a swamp of envy. But the gallerist told me before the opening the artist hides in the bathroom in terror, stage fright gripping him with insecurity. Only when the place is full he can disappear behind his grammable smile as he poses for selfies with aging debutantes and wide-eyed dilettantes.

We walk about saying hello, swilling wine and checking out the people as they come and go, some of them are cool. Anxiety. I feel distressed that someone is watching or worse, not watching. Get another glass of wine, slam it. If you care what they think you've already lost. I drink till I don't care.

There's Fabio "Oh hi!!!"

"Wonderful to see you babe!"

“Fabulous”

“Just divine”

“Mah-velous!”

“Did you see the blah blah?”

At the next opening the routine plays out again, we stand around socializing, networking, just chilling, getting sauced and bitching...

“Dah-ling! Fah-bulous to see you!”

“What do you think of the work?”

“I don’t get it.”

“It’s about masculinity.”

“Oh, I thought it was about pigs fucking”

“Exactly! I love how it challenges heteronormative representationalism by juxtaposing mainstream standards of beauty and shopping with farm animals as a form of protest.”

“I love how it sucks!” Dirty looks.

Is this a good time? I think it’s supposed to be a good time. It’s more like work really. The gallerist is there to sell. They have to find someone to spend \$XX,XXX to own a piece of the artistes soul and here I am nickel and dime-ing it, I feel like a chump.

We move on to the next place and do it all over again. We see Kenny and Dolly and Stevie and meet Mick’s friends the Captain and Tony Orlando and Dawn.



Chapter Sixty

At home the ants are all pervasive. Crush. They just keep coming and coming. Crush.

Everytime I go out I pass the monument to the crushed ants, the memorial to atrocity and the murderous potential of humanity. Every day I pass the flags waving and the candles flickering. Someone still remembers, someone still lights the candles and counts the dead.

The monument is a large slab of iron like the monolith from 2001, which is supposed to represent knowledge and understanding in the movie, but this one has a big crack down the middle, as if the atrocities of war had broken the possibility of understanding. This is what’s left of 22,000 lives, this strong iron curtain split down the middle by a crevice. The curtain at the end of the yellow brick road swept aside to reveal there’s no Great Oz. The temple veil rent in two, removing the barrier separating us from god. The god who never came down to stop the death camps. No more mystery. Just a hole. Existence. Death.

The anonymous billions are all just ants. Irrelevant brand X meat puppets, skin jobs, generic by-products, inoffensive human cattle, worker drones, background actors... They’re all the same. Until you love someone then everything changes, then they are unique and invaluable. If you love someone they have immeasurable worth, for no good reason. Love breaks all the rules.

The people you love are worth more than the lives of a hundred strangers. The wrongs on the other side of the world don't even come close. The anonymous can suffer hunger and starvation and human rights violations, like ants.

Poverty, disease, malnutrition, starvation and death... people die all the time. Two every second, 120 per minute. If you don't know them, it means nothing to you, they're not real. Don't feel bad, their suffering is not your fault, plausible deniability, you had no choice, there was nothing you could do.

With abstractions like class or race or nationality, people are sufficiently othered so that we can ignore their deaths free of moral consequence while simultaneously we benefit directly from the causes of their suffering and death. We need the poor for us to be rich, their suffering is essential to our way of life, they die so we can have cheap underwear. We need their suffering to make our ordinary look like paradise.

There is always a narrative, a story embedding the ideology, that supports the action. And you need to situate your identity within a narrative that justifies and validates your actions and inactions. Anything that fits into the dominant narrative is acceptable. But the broken monolith is there to remind you, the possibility of logic and understanding has been vanquished, leaving us hanging in the ether with no real answers and it's clear that any rationalization is totally made up nonsense. It's just like killing ants. Crush.

This narrative process is universal and self-replicating. A repetitive cycle as predictable as the routine of an addict, and just as ethical. Need it, get it, use it. And the next day, weekend, birthday, economic depression, repeat the cycle. You know it's going

to be the same but you go on anyway. Work. Buy. Consume. Repeat. One day you see a person that makes you sparkle inside, you need them, you make them want you. Dating. Buy them a ring, make a promise, get bored, break their heart. One day you see another one, need them. Repeat. Next! "On with the body count!"⁷⁴



Chapter Sixty One

At the core of everything, somewhere deep down, conscious or unconscious, everyone has some ideal, the essence of what keeps them going, a fundamental priority, a reason to live. For me it is my darling, Cookie. She is my ideal, I have fallen, hard. I have disappeared into this perfect fantasy. It's a story book love, like in the movies, like the Romantic poets. It's more than obsession. She's my transcendent connection to life, eclipsing individuality and accessing the essence of universal oneness.

Of course nothing's perfect. People need problems otherwise there's no dramatic tension. We like people for their qualities, we love them for their flaws.

When you're Romulus & Remus reared on dog's milk, the source of your sustenance, dog tits, are the most beautiful representation of nourishing life.

“Hey wolf tits,” I say as she enters the room topless. She scowls at me.

When you love someone so obsessively, you annihilate reality. And isn't that the whole point of life? To destroy the world, to rise above, to transcend mortality and become gods? “To become immortal and then to die.”⁷⁵ It's magic, plain and simple. I adore her, need her, depend on her. If she is wrong, her wrongness will be my right. She has become my standard. My valuation of goodness is formed by her fancy. She is elevated to deity and in the presence of a god there is no question of what to do, no

option but worship.

This is the madness of love, and it's all true.

When you love someone so compulsively everything is secondary to their whim. This is how gods are made. Every flaw becomes a new ideal, like the Greek marble gods. Her acne is beautiful, her lazy eye, a Venusian quirk, the scar on her face a chip in the marble, any feature becomes iconic. She exhales, the divine incense of a gently blowing seaside current. Sweat – exotic animal perfume. A limp becomes a swagger, a stutter – a stylistic flare, greasy limp mousy hair – amethyst spun into threads anointed with holy oil, the big nose – a goddess feature. And the teeth, swoon, her snaggle-puss fangs make me weak with fear and longing. Nothing should feel this good. I offer my throat and beg under her jagged overlapped angelic alligator maw... behind adrenaline candy apple lips, I cower in delight, lifted by my sweet submission.



Chapter Sixty Two

And the shoes, always with the excellent shoes. Rich thalophadron navy blue polyurethane formed into a slick glossy high heeled pump. Elegant, irresistible, and sexy as fuck. The intoxicating chemical smell of new plastic perfumes the air. I huff it like amyl nitrate.

I drop my leopard print satin bikini bottoms past my knees and kick them into the corner. One of her plastic blue shoes fits perfectly over my soft-on, the balls tucked into the heel and the tip tucked tightly into the toe, becoming tighter as my cock stiffens. I wear one shoe on my erection like a cock basket and prance around the apartment to The Cramps.

“You set my soul on fire
Every muscle in my body’s burning with desire
Don’t hesitate
I can’t wait
Love me
Love me...”⁷⁶

Cookie’s in the bathroom putting on make up. She wears heels and stockings and panties, her tits out and her face half on, strutting from room to room with a sashay, like she’s doing dressage, clip clop clip clop, the sound of her hoofs against the hardwood floor hardens my cock. She is bending over the bathroom sink into the mirror, open mouthed painting on the sex in firecracker red. She goes back and forth from the bedroom

getting potions for her witchcraft, clip clop, clip clop, drawing vicious black smokey eyes, inches from the mirror, just below the writing on the wall:

You’re Beautiful.

I creep into the bathroom silently, she’s facing the mirror. I push my body gently against her, the shoe pressing into the small of her back. I look into her eyes in the mirror, she doesn’t look up from her work. I stare into the mirror, looking for my reflection in the reflection of her eyes. I can see a tiny twisted shape. Embryonic. Is that me?

My face nuzzles into her neck, breathing in the clean moist damp of her messy undone hair. It smells like the sea. I growl a little and she is enticed. My cock is crushing inside the polyurethane pump. She turns and kneels before me, the cock-stuffed shoe smooth against her face. I make it pop up with a flex, gently smacking the side of her blushed cheek and she giggles.

In the bedroom my body glows in the afternoon shadows. Over my heart the black tattooed lines of a rose penetrated by a dagger. She runs her hands over my torso, her fingers fluttering over the nipples, which harden to tiny spikes as I begin my descent on the rollercoaster, blood pumping faster and faster.

My cock stands to attention, engorged with blood, the taught gnarled shaft of scar tissue rock hard, the stainless steel Prince Albert protrudes from the urethra, a silver metal ring glistening with a pearl of translucent white pre-cum.

She pushes me onto the bed and straddles my body so the head of my cock points erect, waiting at her opening, undulating

with breath between parted lips, like the serpent in the garden pointing up towards heaven.

We build a rhythm together. The faintest caress, drawn-out, just grazing, building till I am driven mad with desire. We fuck. Ravenous devouring animal rutting, rising and falling on heaving crescendos of power. The rhythm intensifies. We take each other over edge after edge, discovering new places. We've ascended the highest peaks, and plumbed the depths. Until we've destroyed consciousness. And we are just glowing stars, careening aimlessly through outer space and inner space.

I pull out and pause, she watches as I'm poised on the edge of Niagara falls. Breathless like statues, trying not to move. And I plunge back in for more.

The pearly gates burst open by gushing torrents of spunk overflowing at the edges of the clouds. Olympian peaks of mountain tops frosty, melty, the veined column of the flesh pillar opening a wound in a wild animal, sinew torn, muscle exposed, pink flesh, orange fur, reptilian lips opened like spreading pink batwings, in a swan formation as she rides me up and down, undulating, pumping, heaving, frothing, until she loses her human form emitting the growling, rutting, eye rolling yelps of a fox. I pull out, watch it cum in one constant trickling stream.

When I regained my composure, I turned my attentions to her body and went down. She lay on her back and spread, inviting, waiting for it. After a few tongue caresses I stuck in the fingers and slowly sank them in all the way, building up to longer strokes, sliding it in, ramming it in, fingering, punching it... one finger in the ass, two in the pink, coaxing orgasms from her like taunting a wild animal, pounding out a rhythm slowly

increasing intensity and force, building into peaks, and the waves of pleasure crash over her in slow motion and build again and crash and build, waves of heaving crescendos and tidal waves of power until she stops me. I lay back on the bed, in a post-coital glow, sharing the moment of blissful union.

"I'm gonna fuck your ass open and lick you from the inside out"

I flip her over ass up, face in the pillow and lick her crevice. Tiny hairs, barely perceptible, form a little wreath around the prize and along the perennial divide and back up into the proscenium arch. I trace it with my tongue, it answers me, kisses me back, clenching and opening, like a wild unknowable animal spirit, a tight little god, like Gustave Dore's Empyrean, Dante and St Bernard stand in purgatory on the precipice over-looking paradise. A vortex of angels, opening into heaven, the escape from this world into her body, a hole in the sky, like the moon, the light beyond the darkness, home. To be in her body is to be in heaven.

This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

When I cum I fall into animal convulsions, blindness, loss of control. The wave of blackness overcomes me, blind and stupid. I lose my balance reaching for something to hold onto but there is nothing, she lets me fall, and I hit the floor with a thud, collapsing in a satisfied heap.

My heart runneth over. We are complete together, two halves of one soul. My cock runneth over, cum trickles out of me as I lay heaving, undulating with breath, I have completely lost myself, in perfect lawless abandon to nature and gravity like the falling of light across the earth. I am a wasteland of being,

bathed in light emanating from the creature beside me. My spirit is in her charge.

This is the oblivion I strive for, this is all dreams come true, beauty better than death.



Chapter Sixty Three

Co-dependency can be defined as an intense emotional and psychological connection to the point of reliance for mental and emotional well-being, an intimate confidence in which two people share their lives symbiotically through affectionate bonding and mutual support.

Sounds pretty good to me.

Being practical. Being careful. Self-preservation. Making sense. Fuck that. I am an extremist, it must be total and complete or it's not worth it.

“Love should be everything or not at all.”⁷⁷

I know the risks co-dependency presents: loss of independence, psychological entanglement, identity sublimation, emotional vampirism and addiction. Maybe it's dangerous, but the danger makes it beautiful. 100,000 volts of lightning in her hands. I sacrifice my self to her.

My idea of romantic love is a fatalist one. This type of utopian Hollywood fairytale love is considered patriarchal as a clichéd male fantasy, but I don't care. If relying on someone is wrong, then I'll be wrong. I want to be wrong for her, I want to pick flowers, kill dragons, make babies, do everything I'd normally hate, I want to live life, and do every crime for her.

I want desperate complete all consuming need, like an addict, I want the sweet high that only she can provide, the need only she can fulfill. Absolute worship. Happily ever after. Anything less just wouldn't be worth it.

She not only takes away the horror of solitude, she gives me anti-individuation. A union so all-encompassing that nothing else exists. I want to lose myself in her to become something better. Anima and animus cancel out and what emerges is something new and complete. I become the reflection she sees, a mirror of what she wants, I am called into existence by her desire. I am a man moulded from mud transmuted by love into a magical creature, a true heart, beating, bleeding for love. Loved and loving. And like the Bible and the Spice Girls say, "Two become one." I lose myself in her majesty, with her I am special. This is the glittering prize, rare and precious as diamonds, strong as a lion eating the sun and sharp as a razor in the eye.

But she wants me to be the man. I'm put on the spot, "do relationship." "Be a man." So I enact scenes from movies, Han Solo & Princess Leia... Superman & Margot Kidder, Tyler Durden & Marla Singer... Roy & Priss, Mickey & Mallory Knox... I try to live up to my archetypes.

I try to play the role and give her what she wants. I pull her hair and smack her ass and fuck her so hard she can't walk. I can be a man. Get me a beer, bitch. I'll strangle you, fuck you doggie with your head in the fridge. A man is a bastard. Ugly. Cruel. Insensitive. Hairy. I pull up my pants and buckle the belt, adjust my weapon in my pants and I go to work. I am a man.



Chapter Sixty Four

Everything is so great. I should be overjoyed, but something holds me back like an unseen force. For no reason at all this dark cloud follows me everywhere. All I can do to hold it at bay is drink. I put the whiskey in and life is bearable. I keep pouring it down and things feel better. If I can keep it under a 26er a day I feel like I've exercised some restraint. If I put enough in I accomplish drunkenness.

When we first got together, waking up one morning in her basement apartment, I realized I could actually tolerate this person, this could really be something. She was positively luminous and dazzling. I was worried she wouldn't like misery-guts me, sober and dull, so I undertook the romantic poets mission of the total derangement of the senses, I decided to stay drunk all the time, what could go wrong?

The immortal Arthur Rimbaud proposed the total derangement of the senses⁷⁸ as a strategy to become a visionary by excess of every kind: Love, suffering, madness, intoxicants... To become disoriented and dazzled, to open yourself to the unknown, to realize the human world is an unjust and hypocritical falsehood and to annihilate its influence by fire and re-discover the true nature of living.

By age 19 he gave up poetry completely to do crimes and get money. He wound up dying in his 30s from complications to

an amputated leg. Or maybe that was Leonardo DiCaprio.⁷⁹



Chapter Sixty Five

Down the dark alley and around the corner, a doorman greets you with a smile. If you pass his scrutiny he opens the heavy steel door to the narrow death trap stairway. A girl waits at the bottom of the steps collecting money. Through a black fun-fur curtain you're inside the lounge. As your eyes adjust to the all red lighting, the floor is sticky, black leather couches line the perimeter, the walls are covered in a strange reflective silver padding arching into the ceiling. The whole place is lined in silver foil, it feels like the septic tank of Andy Warhol's Factory, or like a giant silver school bus with no windows, buried alive. The space is long and narrow and claustrophobic. At one end is the bar, at the other end a small stage with a huge circular rainbow vortex. On the stage seven foot propeller blades lined in coloured LEDs rotate, spinning so fast it becomes a blur of coloured lights pumping to the beat. Flashing colours reflect across the foil-covered walls and ceiling, people dance close in the darkness, glowing under the throbbing electric rainbow.

Rainbow Palace is an after-hours club in the basement of a fish and chips shop in the heart of the neighbourhood, a filth-hole booze-can. Tonight the next instalment of SHIT FUN, our crew's bimonthly noisy dance night. I work the bar serving drinks and miscellaneous sundries, illegal activities take place in the open. Business is good. The hanging stench of rancid beer and stale piss does not slow people down, the dance floor is out of control, condensation runs down the walls, it is perfectly vile.

O/H takes the stage, Rich on modular synth with the rainbow machine whirling and pumping behind him, Huren on the mic assaults the crowd with taunts and threats, caterwauling profanities with crushing pounding distorted techno rhythms filtered and destroyed through an industrial sieve. It is mind blowing aural chaos broken to the beat. The crowd is possessed, dancing uncontrollably like a pit of electrified snakes. The sound is overwhelmingly loud, relentlessly pounding and crunching, throbbing and modulating in the ominous claustrophobic darkness smashing open the dance-floor with lightning explosions of jagged electronic rainbow. There is a blood high in the room like an adrenaline fuck and you can't stop violently shaking, jerking to the rhythm. The crowd is like a group of people witnessing a violent crime. There is a sense that they might be next. They don't know what the fuck hit them, some are scared, some can't get enough. This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

In case of a violent conflict I carry a Glock 19 semi-automatic 9mm in grey matte gun-metal with gas nitride finish and a dark grey polymer cased grip. The 4" barrel fits in my pocket if I wear a trench coat. It carries fifteen rounds in the clip. It's kind of heavy and a cold comfort, but it feels good in your hand. So good. And it looks real cool, just like in the movies. Firing it feels like a hug from a man. The smell when it's fired is like burning angels hair, discharged gunpowder, it's like a perfume by *Comme des Garçons*, it's sharp and smooth and warm and cool and chemical. Burnished steel, machine oil, oud, vetiver, tobacco, black pepper and burnt oil on a wisp of blue smoke.



Chapter Sixty Six

A dusk smog blows off the highway as I stand waiting for my streetcar to work. From the corner I can see the lake, rough with white peaked waves breaking in the distance.

On top of the medium sized high-rise apartment building, a giant dis-used mega-billboard, its blank face directed away from the street, outwards towards the highway, towards the real people coming in from the suburbs. The black skeletal back frame of the mega-billboard's iron beams is replete with pigeons, flying rats in the hundreds. Again, on the opposite corner, another towering blank three story billboard facing away, two monsters giving my whole neighbourhood their backsides.

Beneath one mega-billboard is a Streamline Moderne hotel with all its cool hidden under the shitty pastel stucco faux finish of a Ho-Jo's, a Styrofoam tombstone full of bed bugs and no-hopers on their last stop before homelessness under the bridge across the street. The terminal bar at the base of the hotel has long since been turned into a McD's, where the lost souls congregate, praying for salvation at the McMausoleum of beef tallow and saturated fats. Haunted by the ethereal history of what it used to be, this dusty pastel edifice serves as a sad tribute to the lives washed out of existence, any surviving memories have been exiled to the retirement home a block up the street.

The dual blank ad faces create a vortex where I stand at the

streetcar stop, hanging in the ether, between two peaks, two slabs of darkness echoing the WWII monument across the street. Staring into the distance, I can see the edge of the world, the highway disappearing into the suburbs. When I was in my teens my parents moved us to the suburbs to be safer, to live the dream of manicured lawns and picket fences and to pay off their mortgage and aspire to middle-class. Of course none of this worked out, real-estate's a scam and the suburbs is far more dangerous than the city. The suburbs is where I first learned about real racism and the class division of a John Hughes movie. To a young weirdo the suburbs is all about isolation and drugs and drink as an escape. The spiritual vacuum was a hell I never could have imagined as a 12 year old. People were snobby, sheltered, small minded, xenophobic, and down right hateful. The kids trapped there were bored to death. They'd drive by in their pick-up trucks throwing things, screaming "Faggot!" and it was clear they wanted to kill you just for being different.

In the near distance, a few blocks from the streetcar stop, are the golden grey limestone peaks of the haunted hospital, visible over the tree-tops and buildings. This massive cathedral of sickness, a dead end rising to the sky, is topped with a cross holding back the Luciferian sunset on the horizon. Its hundred year old structure, like a termite mound, forms a courtyard watched over by a statue of some saint, ominous and funerary. The beautiful 150 foot art nouveaux tombstone occupies the horizon like a battlement, surrounded by parasitic brutalist extensions from passing decades, sprawling wards, extended wings, parapets and belfry, crucifixes and ghosts, dead saints and a smoke stack pumping incinerated limbs and organs into the air.

The hospital's art deco spires are darkened with black stains on the empty upper floors, locked wards disused, haunted by dead

souls of patients past and future, a beckoning potential of chronic ailments and terminal illnesses.

Just beyond the haunted hospital is the park, a nature preserve overgrown with forest and wildlife. The swans and foxes live here. On the other side of the park is the edge of the earth, Etobicoke. There is nothing there but ghosts and zombies, insects and invertebrates, trilobites and troglodytes. The suburban wasteland, a cultural desert into which people disappear when their life force runs out and they get an office job and a family. Or a warehouse job and an addiction.

In the golden hazy dusk of twilight I stand and stare west. The wires of the streetcar criss-crossing form a net like a barbed wire cage overhead, preventing me from floating away. If we could just get out of this town, maybe things would be different. But the highway leads off into infinity in both directions, you could escape but you're not going anywhere. The oblivion of the vast emptiness is a weight of crushing pressure, the banal horror of endless suburbs.



Chapter Sixty Seven

It is Summer again. We're on an airplane to Paris. I'm showing at a Media Arts Festival. (See, I do have an art career). They fly me over and get me a hotel. I bring my darling and we make it a vacation. From the plane we can see the grids of concrete receding into the distance as we vanish into the sky. Soon only the tops of clouds are visible below us.

We stay in Pigalle with the whores and pimps and pretend to be cool, but we're tourists, drinking wine in the streets and coffee in the cafés. It's her first time in Paris so we see the sights, we go to The Louvre, it's a tourist trap, but you have to go. We both went to art school so we know the clichés by heart, we've seen all the classics in books.

From antiquity to the 19th century, so many historic milestones, but nothing strikes me as particularly impressive. We skip through the halls, being rebellious and dismissive, clowning, we are young and alive, this dead history just doesn't touch us. We're immune to the commercial spectacle of tourist pablum for the parade of livestock driven through the turnstiles.

We mug it up for pictures, clowning in front of the canon of art history. Tweaking a nipple in front of *Julienne d'Estrées* and her sister, click. Grabbing ass in front of *The Three Graces* by Jean-Baptiste Regnault, click. Cookie does her best Ophelia on the floor in front of *The Young Martyr* by Paul Delaroche, click.

Twelve feet tall atop the marble staircase is the epic *Winged Victory of Samothrace* from ancient Greece. Should I moon for a picture in front of the angel? Just do it, click.

It's a temple of beauty but the main idol is the female body. So many faces and bodies of idealized women, maiden after maiden, virgin after virgin in a parade of Holy Mothers and blessed Our Ladys... And for every one there was probably a real woman who under the gaze of the artist, a man, was the perfect ideal feminine archetype. He put her on a pedestal and turned her into an icon. I look at Cookie and she is somewhere else, intellectualizing, lost in centuries of culture. I need to entertain her.

We race down marble halls of classical pagan gods under the cavernous archways and vaulted ceilings, passageways unfolding to galleries and anterooms opening into womb-like vestibules populated with a flayed animal spilling its guts in marble, mortal children and mythic animals... Olympians, deities, titans and heroes... Eros, Psyche, Pan, Dionysus... The whole pantheon is here lining the promenade opening into the atrium's immense palatial courtyard, five storeys high under the glass domed ceiling. Gods and Titans and beasts showered in sunlight.

Hercules fighting the Hydra in the verdigris green of patinaed bronze. Hermes in his winged petasus bounds off the pursed lips and breath of Aeolus, god of wind, and seems to fly. Neptune impales a screaming horse on a trident. Diana of Versailles strides through a wood with a young faun at her side. These titans in bronze and marble carry centuries of power. It's starting to get to me.

Like getting up after drinking a bottle of absinthe, oh I'm fine, until you stand up and your feet don't touch the ground. My

eyes roll back and the greatest artworks of civilization reflect off the backs of my retinas. I'm punch drunk and dizzy, high on images. Oh it's nothing, I'll walk it off. Then in dazzling, creamy white marble, the winged god of love locks lips with a prone *Psyche (Revived by Cupid's Kiss)*, sap dripping, hallmark romance enacted and eviscerated alive before my eyes. I'm falling for it all and I love it.

I am dizzy, overflowing with the glory, eyes penetrated, heart overflowing, I am taken, ravished, and eye-fucked raw in front of everyone. I feel exposed, torn open, turned. There's no escape, I round the corner and it's Boucher and Delacroix and Géricault and Fragonard and the heavenly hosts of paradise. Through the ethers, Cherubs and Angels and Satyrs run riot. I can hear the clack of cloven hooves thundering on marble floors. It's Cookies heels, we're holding hands as we fly through the halls in terror, the galleries echoing with the magic blasphemy of our laughter.

Overcome by a beautiful dementia, nauseous and breathless, intoxicated I float through the galleries, terraces and piazzas, buoyed by reverie, light headed, giddy and dazzled, the power of beauty is in me, clawing through my insides to get to the beauty heaving and breathing before me. Beauty's ecstatic annihilation runs through me and I'm hooked. Seduced by sirens. Impaled on Cupid's arrow, like a beautiful overdose.

This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

I turn and face *Liberty Leading the People*. I am dumbstruck by Delacroix's contribution to the French Revolution painted while outside his studio the streets ran red with blood.

The French Revolution was like the last brilliant gasp of liberty,

as the myth goes anyway, before an age of spleen and ennui. When believing in the possibility of change was not yet crushed by the backward un-cool MK-Ultra social-media programming of mainstream casual fuck-offs, chronically disengaged. When there was still something to believe in that meant more than emojis, ideals existed, the idea that everyone has the right to blah blah blah.

There was not enough cake and the heads rolled. As the myths tell us anyway, the corrupt aristocracy, the monarchy, and the feudal system that thrived on the suffering of the poor was under attack in a nationwide revolt. The church was almost eliminated, iconoclasm was rampant, statues of kings were beheaded, then kings were beheaded, the destruction of the symbols of old power matched by the very real destruction of old power. Bloody revolution. This is when The Louvre was first opened to the public.

It is universally celebrated as a triumph of freedom, The French Revolution. The ruling power was removed by force, 40,000 people died violent deaths for liberty, equality, etc. Killed by guillotine or just by stabbing, beating and stomping aristocrats to death in the streets like ants, to establish a new society. When the good guys win, it's not called genocide, it's called democracy. Outside I walk it off in the sculpture park. Soon we're lost in the streets of Paris again. We end up sitting on a big fountain drinking a cheap bottle of wine, people watching. Finally I get her attention, she looks at me and smiles. Her smile is more beautiful than anything I've seen today, it just blows them all away.

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We make it to the Pompidou, an atrocity of high-modern Meccano scaffolding, its innards exposed like a birth defect

with ducts of intestines born on the outside of the building.

This museum too is tied to the history of revolution, created a couple years after the May 1968 uprising as “a monument of cultural deterrents.”⁸⁰ to diffuse the energy of crowds, “... it functions as an incinerator absorbing all cultural energy and devouring it.”

Inside we see all the 20th century Modernist tombstones. It doesn't make me drunk on beauty, it just makes me angry with jealousy that I didn't make that pile of blue dust. It inspires me only to think of dumb conceptual art ideas. It feels pretty blasé, with a few glorious exceptions.

The Rothko room is a spiritual experience, carnal and reverent. It invokes a visceral vulnerability, tinged with the cutting pain of hope. Surrounded by red orange pink and brown I try it on with Cookie in the Rothko room, I show her my hard cock but she just laughs. Thanks, Mark Rothko.

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My screening at the Festival was ok. People laughed, I got paid.

“Very interesting.”

“It's like a painting.”

“It was... kind of, how you say? Offence?”

“Le suck le fuck, le shit, la merde.”

We do the sights, Montmartre, the Bastille, the Latin Quarter, the Seine... cathedrals Sacré-Cœur, then Notre Dame where the massive stained glass windows create a “celestial aura” (to quote the website⁸¹), the purple rose arrangements can only be interpreted as great circular voids of glorious butthole forming

the perfect analogy for almost a thousand years of Christianity.

At Père Lachaise we visit Edith Piaf and drink wine. On Oscar Wilde's white stone monument among all the lipstick kisses someone has written “Bon Jovi” in black magic marker. Ok.

I saw Jean Paul Belmondo walking in the street wearing a 1970s trench coat and tweed hat, his face was aged into a wrinkled frown but I swear it was him. Now I've seen Paris.

I wanted to go to Pont des Arts, the famous lock bridge where young lovers attach a padlock and throw the key into the Seine to symbolize never ending love or whatever, but I didn't know where it was.

Our last day we just passed the time dallying, walking by the Seine, holding hands and kissing, looking into each others eyes and kissing some more. The afternoon passed and the sun began to set, when completely by chance, destiny even, we found ourselves at the Pont des Arts lock bridge at sunset. The timing is perfect serendipity, my moment is here. Then I'm struck with horror: When we left the apartment this morning I remembered the Pernod but forgot the engagement ring. Typical drunk move. Fuck. So we kissed and took pictures and watched the brides and grooms.

Early the next day we packed up our suitcases and walked to the metro station. The dewy humid air hangs in the quiet of the summer morning. I paused for a smoke, the trees on the median moved in the French breeze, the air was almost chartreuse. Her complexion in this light is magic, she glows pale in the shade of the tree, her scarlet hair aflame.

I double check my pocket for the ring. Ok. I hail a taxi and we fly through the Paris streets. Stuck in traffic we jump out and I take her by the hand, dragging suitcases behind us we run to the middle of the bridge. Down on one knee, I gaze up at her dotingly. I hold up my grandmother's ring and I deliver my well-rehearsed overture. A momentous pause as she looks at me. Before a smile unfurls across her face.

"Yes." And we fly to the metro, to the airport and all the way home and live happily ever after.

But that didn't happen. Instead, outside the metro station I stopped on the median for a smoke. I showed her my grandmother's ring and confessed my plan. She stood there, I stood there, each of us waiting for something to happen. A moment passed. She shrugged. Minutes drag. I need a drink. Horns honked in the distance, the street sounds of Paris carried on, French pigeons milled about the median, bobbing their heads like French jerks. She stared at me and released an exasperated sigh. I finished my cigarette and we got the metro to the airport and home to the ants.



Chapter Sixty Eight

At home in the bathroom surrounded by my black velvet paradise. The same face stares back from the mirror, same desperate eyes, same tentative gaze. Nothing has changed. Above the mirror the script still reads:

You're Beautiful

I doubt it.

For some people there is a black cloud that comes over your life, you don't even know it's there until you turn around and it's eaten half your life. Trapped in this shadow that eclipses everything there's nothing you can do about it. The gnawing sorrow of meaningless terror becomes the creeping dread of everyday life. It's not just pointless to do anything – it's impossible. A crippling weight crushes you under the slow ache of infinite despair. The pain is no less real for being imaginary – greater even – because the imagination is without limit. You know it's wrong but there's nothing you can do but wait for the feeling to go away. It could be hours or days, or weeks or months... waiting for a hand to reach down and shake you back to life.

She's in the other room, stuck there alone, I'm trapped inside my head.

"What's the matter baby?" She says standing in the doorway.

“I... I-I’ll be okay”

No one else should ever be subjected to these horrors, so I keep quiet. I learned a long time ago, never tell. Show anyone your jagged edge and they will use it to cut your throat.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. I’m sorry, I’ll try to get better...I know I’m difficult but I’m worth it.” This time she looks away and sighs.

There’s too much blood in my alcohol. I open a nice bottle of red and sit with her on the couch watching *Mental Health Trailer Park Abortion*, I can’t shake the feeling that she finds me pathetic and I do too. I open the whiskey and drink ‘til it’s not such an emergency

Through the peaks and valleys, even in your darkest hour, you know it will get better. Day break lies at the end of this long cold night of the soul. And my baby holds the torch, the light at the end of the tunnel. That and other clichés keep me holding on. One day, any day now, I’ll get better. And she’ll be there to hold me tight and make it all go away.

“I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants... the ants swarmed out... fell off into the fire... it was the end of the world... I could lift the log off the fire... But I didn’t do anything...”⁸²

I saw Ernest Hemingway in front of the convenience store with his plastic bags poured out on the sidewalk, going through his worldly belongings: photographs, scraps of paper, lost socks, empty bottles, a single baby shoe, endless sadness. Trying to make sense of his life in a bag. Memories, regrets, old lottery tickets, ghosts of potential.

Even the greatest societies are not immune to ultimate destruction. In the ant world there are disasters, weather, predators, inner conflicts or attacks; In the case of an attack, rival ants breach the entrance, disabling the guards and work their way into the structure annihilating any resistance. They tear the enemy limb from limb. They pillage the eggs, cannibalize rivals, the larvae and pupae are dismembered and devoured on site, or sometimes captured and stored at Costco for future use. Finally they take the Queen and it’s finished. With the Queen gone, the whole colony falls apart, they cannot live without her. The entire colony can be destroyed in a couple of hours. Rome fell, all it takes is a couple days.



Chapter Sixty Nine

Autumn is the most romantic of the seasons, when everything dies.

Cookie and I go for a walk through the residential neighbourhood, looking at the old houses. It's getting a little crisp, we can see our breath, I hold her close and nuzzle into her shoulder. Maybe it's not so bad.

I marvel at the vivid colours of the changing leaves. Gold, auburn, crimson, tiger... "Every leaf speaks bliss to me, fluttering from the autumn tree"⁸³

We talk about the future, the dream of opening the bar/arts venue, we'll start a legit business, and build a life together, I'll stop doing crimes and we can work on art projects together and do life "just like real people."⁸⁴

"Oh look at that house... I love that one."

She points out a modest Victorian house, bare brick, ornate wooden gingerbread eaves, peeling paint, jade green and red with a slate roof and a lightning rod. Behind the white picket fence a yard with toys, bikes and family things peaking out from under burnt orange, umber, pomegranate, and copper brown fallen leaves, the colours go on forever, into the future. In just a year and a half my five year plan will be complete and then it's smooth sailing, the end is in sight, the prize almost within our grasp, our happily ever after. I overflow with a tremendous

feeling of potential. In the magic hour light of the early evening setting sun everything glows golden.

This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

Happiness comes close, I feel its presence on the horizon. I don't know what to do with it, I'm scared. Daddy needs his medicine. At home I take a drink, feel the release, the stress goes, the golden beaming happiness of sunset, the future ablaze with possibility. And I pour it back. The leaves are changing, the whiskey flows, the train has left the station. The leaves are falling. Winter is coming. Christmas is just around the corner, I can almost see the lights and feel the warm perfection of cozying up with my baby just like in a movie. Her presence is a soothing lullaby, all warm and safe under the blanket. Everything is going to be ok. I have another drink and watch these dreams dissolving in the golden shine of whiskey.



Chapter Seventy

I'm sitting at the kitchen table sucking nothingness from a 26-er like a zombie, when it hits me like a truck, freight train, earthquake, atomic bomb...

She came into the room like a ghost, already gone, and stood at the doorway.

"I'm leaving."

"What?"

"I can't take it anymore."

"Why?"

"I can't take it anymore."

And I'm dumped. The balloon pops. Car runs out of gas. Cartoon rat run over by a steam roller. She's gone and I'm on my own, staring at this stranger in the kitchen. I'm dazed like I've been smacked across the face with a frying pan. The bubble bursts, a pie in the face, slipped on a banana peel, I am a popped pimple, atomic bomb goes off, dinner is ruined, kid pissed his pants and has to walk home from school, that waiter on Sesame Street balancing all those plates falls down the stairs and all the dishes are smashed... I guess we're not soul mates after all. Sad trombone.

All paranoia vanishes. All anxiety is gone. I no longer fear anything, the worst has happened. I am one of them. No different from the scum on the streets or the ants in the walls. Not special. I am lost and alone among the crawling masses of insects, just another nothing face, already dead, just waiting to disappear.

I look back and she's one too, just another lost insect, a ghost of a memory of a lie. In the blink of an eye the Queen of the universe is turned to an anonymous nobody. Cookie, ha. More like a cracker.

The spell is broken. The ground falls out from under my feet like Wile E. Coyote, a twitch of confused panic before the sheer infinite drop to nothingness. I fall in slow motion as everything good fades out of view.

Ants constantly follow the pheromone trail leading them home to their queen. This connection is their lifeline, without it they are lost. When an ant loses his way, he loses his purpose, trying to find the lost pheromone trail he marches continuously, desperately in a closed circle, the spiral of death, they will march on wildly in aimless, ever narrowing, concentric circles, until they drop dead.



Chapter Seventy One

Here potential meets its limit. This is the climax of my over-flowing Babylonian tower of accredited short-comings, mistakes, promises, devotions. Façades buttressing convictions collapse, justifications crumble, my self-righteous ego disappears into dust.

I thought I was special. Fuck.

All my delusions, all the psychological gymnastics I did to fool myself into believing in my dreams had grown to form my image of what I was, my whole identity is lost in a hall of mirrors. What follows this realization is basic personality failure, a complete and total psychotic nervous breakdown.

Maybe I'm not such an individual, maybe I'm just an asshole. Maybe being Special isn't that special after all. Maybe everyone is special. Fuck.

She said I was "...emotionally abusive..." and I saw stars like I'd been kicked in the face.

"I know I'm difficult, but... ugh." and my throat closed up in horror. With absolute terror and revulsion I realize I have become my father. I am the worst. I wish I could leave me too. I let myself think I was the good guy, but I'm just like the rest, worse even, because I should know better. And the dream to be united in an epic love-story, a Hollywood golden age happily

ever after, was all in my imagination, pure delusion, just another sick fantasy, mine alone.

What I thought was proud and courageous, glorious romance is revealed to be the pathetic sucking of a mollusk, suddenly, my warm feelings are creepy intrusive boners like Bryan Adams, in that song "Everything I Do I Do it For You"⁸⁵ Weeping sores. "There's nowhere unless you're there." Dry heaves. "Oh yeah...I'm going all the way, all the way, yeah" I'm Ross weeping over Rachel. Vomitose. Now Adele or Lionel Richie, Neil Diamond or Celine Dion or any of the bilious pop songs that make you wish you'd drowned on the Titanic, the sentimental chum that churns your guts, the saccharine botulism of brain dead pop music love songs make sense to me. I understand them now, I feel them passing through me like emotional diarrhea. I see my romantic co-dependence for the parasitic infestation that has me by the throat, leaving me a grossly needy, cringe-worthy, clinging slime.

Just last week, everything that made me a romantic, the best thing about me, now makes me a vile creep, what one minute would've been sweet and cute is now cloying, suffocating and stalkery. The caring that made me good, a moment ago, now makes me an irritating insect that deserves to be squashed. Now carrying this torch is burning me alive, pathetic and flailing, like a small dog on fire. Please kill me.

It's funny, the grief of losing someone is so similar to the death of a loved one, like Rick who hanged himself or Tone who died of drugs or Steve who died from "natural causes" at 55... They're just gone now, I'll never laugh with them again. I might pass her in the street but I'm dead to her now. Just gone. It's so funny I can't laugh, can't get my head around it. Inside I feel the same,

I haven't changed. But all the warmth and intimacy we shared has been amputated. I'm left with ghost pains for a part of me that is no longer there.

To end the pain and anxiety and stress and everything, the only possibility is death. Like the end frame of an old movie: *Fin. Finis. The End.* And just like that it will finally all be over. "Slip the surly bonds of –"⁸⁶ this shithole and just let go. Relax. No more pressure, no more anxiety, no more pain, no more hot dogs. Life is hell, to end it seems the only way out. Awesome, beautiful, sublime, finally I've come up with a good idea: Suicide. "The great opportunity to no longer be I."⁸⁷

Guy Debord, Alexander McQueen, Rozz Williams, Wendy O Williams, Kurt Cobain—the voice of my generation (ugh, I know) but Percy Shelley, Nelly Arcan, Robin Williams, Mark Rothko, Darby Crash... these are some cool dudes. These are my heroes now. Proper existential shit, a teenage goth fantasy of Baudelaire and Black Metal. End your life before it ends you. "It's better to burn out than fade away"⁸⁸ It's the coward's road, they say, but it's my road. Taking control of your destiny doesn't sound all that cowardly to me, quite the opposite. We all die, run over by a bus or helpless shitting our pyjamas... To own death and make it yours, take it in your hands and embrace it, why not? Let's go to Disneyland. A proper ending. Ahhh decisions...

Inertia keeps you breathing, your heart beats, so it continues to beat. As if life is just a bad habit, we tend to continue in the direction which we are aimed. Looks like I have taken the cowards road, again.



Chapter Seventy Two

I do my rounds marching in wildly aimless, ever narrowing, concentric circles. I look good in an olive-coloured 1960s trench-coat, black scarf with neon green racing stripe, short brimmed moss coloured trilby and 2-tone grey suede brothel creepers. Eyes blackened with eyeliner, failed protection from evil spirits, pale sunken cheekbones and a pencil thin line of Vincent Price moustache above emotionless lips, pursed tight as a rat's butthole. A black Pendelton cardigan over a black Fred Perry polo with neon lime green lined collar, matches the racing stripe on Relco socks, matches the menthol cigarettes, matches the plastic Bic lighter, neon lime green. The colour of sickness, cheap absinthe or cartoon radioactivity. My gaunt bloodless face feels exposed, bruised by air, radiating shame.

Still, I look good, except there is no longer a smile on my face. All that's left is a smear of disgust. Everything beautiful reminds me of her and I seethe with revulsion for myself, I am shaken with an unbearable quivering disgust, boiling with vile poisonous hatred of my own solitary existence, hatred of my failure to love, my failure to be a man. Seeing a family, a woman with a stroller, a mom, a dog, a happy dad, the colour orange, sunsets, an art gallery, geometric shapes, crooked teeth, straight bangs, "...abashed the devil stood, and felt how awful goodness is, and saw Virtue in her shape how lovely... and pined his loss..."⁸⁹

If I go out into the world I can compose myself long enough to

hide the hell that I am, passing the time working, doing time on the outside, paste on a visage of stoic serenity and take care of business. Pull it together and stare at the floor for any passerby or near interaction, the bus driver, the shopkeeper, the waitress, a client. If I come into contact with someone I know, smile, hide the monster, "Fine, how are you?"

"...Bitten by bugs, lie in sewage eaten by a demon dog, roll stones against each other, fighting in the mud, choking in the mud, flaming coffins in the mud, a violent river of boiling blood, a forest of trees that used to be people, a rain of fire and burning sand, submerged in excrement and fire, whipped by demons, buried head first in holes, set on fire, heads twisted backwards, a river of boiling tar, torn by demons, bitten by a pit of snakes whose bodies combust and re-generate, engulfed in a single continuous flame, and sliced up by demons, afflicted with terrible diseases, submerged frozen in ice, while a devil with three heads is chewing your soul..."⁹⁰

"Cool, thanks, have a great night."

I walk up the street and the normals stare at me. Do they know I'm a monster when I walk to the store to buy smokes? When I'm out in the day trying to make it to the liquor store before closing time. They know. Now they stare cause they see the monster, they know I am an unlovable scum crawling in my own skin. They know all about the tidal wave of shame and guilt that envelops me. They revel in my failure, vindicated by my fall. If anyone talked to me they would say "That's what you get." But they all just look away.

Of all the neighbourhood characters and their imagined personalities most were benevolent, harmless curiosities. What about me? Am I a neighbourhood curiosity to other people? Who am I to the strangers? Creep Man? Zombie Man? The

Mod Nosferatu? Insect Rude Boy? Goth Pee-wee Herman, The Dandy Frankenstein? Some sexless monster? In my neighbourhood characters I saw myself, lonely unlovable weirdos, lost in a charade, living someone else's nightmare. The "after" picture of where are they now, fallen idols, unmasked heroes... When you're somebody, your accomplishments inflating your persona, everybody wants to lift you up, to be part of the glory, share in your glow, they take what they can get, basking in the radiance you give off, just being you. When you fall, no one knows you. They never did. And they're better for it. The greater you were, so much farther the fall. And so many people there to watch you crash, giggling as your skull cracks off the pavement. If you were dead they'd all be your best friend, but for now you're just another failure.

I take a drink to cover the pain. It doesn't work anymore.

Night time wandering in the west end, all is quiet on the street. One storefront is lit up, all white lights in an all-white room. Twenty or thirty people stand around looking at rectangles, somebody sells beers. A small crowd is milling about by the front door, smoking and chattering. I walk the other way and hope no one saw me.

Take another drink. It doesn't work, take ten.

I'm like a black hole, absorbing all potential, dragging it all down with me into the void. All through this life I do my best, I try to be positive, somehow my idea of right always ends up being wrong, it turns out my idea of good is what other people call bad. I did my best. I thought I was doing pretty good. But if my best is to be the loser, I guess I am the loser.

The world is a mirror, and everything is backwards. In a world that pretends to be good, everything which appears to be normal and righteous is false and therefore evil, the only way to be truly good is to be opposite to that. To do evil is sincere and true and therefore the only way to be truly good is to be evil. “Beauty is truth, truth beauty...”⁹¹ True words from the English poet John Keats. And the truth is, “Humanity is disgusting.”⁹² Do I feel bad for taking advantage of people with bad habits? I’ve only ruined a couple of lives. They would’ve done it anyway. Do I feel bad? Of course, I feel terrible. Doesn’t everyone? Is what I do evil? No, it’s good. I make people happy. I am honest. I do good. I am beautiful. Thanks, Keats.



Chapter Seventy Three

Purgatory is for the forsaken, unlovable throw-aways, when you’re dead, dumped, but unable to move on. Unwanted and discarded, there’s nowhere else for you. So you serve time in death’s waiting room between heaven and hell, unsure of your fate, you wait. “Holding out for a hero till the end of the night”⁹³ was just the last resort of “living in a powder keg and giving off sparks.”⁹⁴ The promises remain, I can’t change, I can’t just stop.

Purgatory is the place in-between, you’re not good enough to go to heaven, not good enough to be part of humanity but you’re done here. It is well-populated by the tens of thousands of people systematically crushed out of existence by disappointment, poverty and alienation, whittled to death by neglect, turned into statistics, the down trodden, bad feelings, bad choices developed into habits, alcoholism, substance use, the addicts, the mentally ill – driven insane by isolation and precarious survival – trapped in limbo, nowhere, the west end, we pay for our sins with more sins, by suffering culture. Why don’t you make some art about it?

Everyone’s got an excuse... loneliness, failed marriages, mean parents, exploitation and injustice...hunger and homelessness... you might say we get what we deserve. The building blocks of civilization are slavery and genocide. Anyone with feelings is naturally drowning in shame and guilt. Suck it up sunshine. Anyone who isn’t happy must be erased. Anyone who doesn’t fit in, erase. Any voice of dissent, erase. Shut up and smile or be

erased. It's as if just being ourselves is enough to be condemned. Too weird to live, too gay, too white, too black, too straight, too real, too me, too you.

The future has been cancelled, we are already in the after. It's after the end of the world. Abandoned generations, unborn legacies of bleak dead-end grey remains of lives unlived, occupied by the empty horror of existential ambivalence, distress, anxiety, addiction, ashes of ashes, endless misery.

I've got something you can take for that.



Chapter Seventy Four

In the streets among the faceless hordes, my neighbourhood characters, the familiar representations of representations still echo their corresponding celebrity archetype. Death can't stop the endless memetic image doubling exponentially. Icons live forever.

I saw Hunter S. Thompson walking up the street today, the bullet hole pouring black dust from behind his ear. And Rothko's skeleton staggering along the sidewalk as undigested pills fell through his boney torso like Plinko.

Hemingway is there with no face, at the top of his neck is a bottom jaw and the shattered top of a spinal column. A scruff of beard hanging from mummified neck skin, it's amazing what a shotgun blast can do to a body.

David Foster Wallace with the rope still around his neck, philosophizing about the death of irony, irony of death. His face bloated and blue, eyes bulging.

Virginia Woolf's corpse is strolling down the promenade waterlogged and broken, stones still in the pockets of her overcoat, seaweed in her matted hair, wandering as if she's lost. Longing for a tomb of one's own.

Standing on the street corner waiting for the bus. I take out my

last cigarette, crush the empty pack and throw it in the street. The world is my trashcan, hear me roar. The ugliness of the city justifies my act of sublime abandon. The cultureless vulgarity of the architecture, the streets, my surroundings are so wretched that any garbage I throw could only be an improvement. My trash is the shit icing on your shit cake. I light my smoke with one smooth, well-practiced gesture. Inhale and draw away the cigarette in an elegant *plié-like* dismissal of all around me. I breathe my nicotine and mentholated tar and I am not so present in this dirge. Engaged in my own private consumerist penetration I am lighted by this wand I lift to my lips and kiss away the emptiness with my consumption. I could fly away on a wisp of smoke and not give a fuck. My indifference is beautiful and I ride the breaking crest of my disdain. My disgust is all I have now, and it is all I deserve. It is enough.



Chapter Seventy Five

I am carried on through the night by inertia alone, answering calls I see Tiffany and Blake and Thom, I see Tony, Orlando and Dawn.

I am buzzed in at the condo and get the elevator up to Unit 3701. Glass of wine, down in one, fucker complains about the price then pays in full.

At Tony's restaurant we meet in the kitchen, chef, sous chef, dishwasher, bartender, servers, doorman, the DJ and the owner. Back downtown at Skull Man's apartment, big screen TV with video games paused, Grand Theft Auto... "Thanks man, have a great night!"

I meet Steph at the subway station, she looks stressed. She drove her Audi into the window of a 7-11 and they took away her license and her daughter, a forced leave of absence and addictions counselling. She doesn't look so good. I suggest maybe drugs is not the best idea but she knows what she's doing, I am assured. Most people get high, it just makes her feel normal, like hyperactive kids take Ritalin to calm down, she insists that she's taking care of herself and everything is ok, who am I to argue? Her fake smile is reassuring enough, I give her what she wants.

"Party on!"

3 AM desolate, cold, empty streets, I stand there and quietly reflect, planning my next move. The night is calm and still. The phone pings a text. Fuck.



Chapter Seventy Six

December, Christmas-time, the holidays are busier than usual, there's a lot of miserable lonely people dreaming of a white Christmas. I've just made a call in an unfamiliar uptown neighbourhood, it's about midnight, the night is cold and still. Christmas is in the air, lights decorate the trees and the closed shops, reflecting off the soot grey carbon monoxide banks of slush, creating the feeling of holiday spirit, sad and nostalgic.

Instead of going home to nothing I go for a walk, just wandering, a light snow drizzles, speckling the wet brown slushy sidewalk with a lace of pure white.

I'm outside freezing while inside the home fires burn cozy and warm. Christmas is for families. For the rest of us it's just another hell to endure, wait it out while the candy-stripers pay conscience reparations with forced smiles and candy cane kindness until everything goes back to the usual, cold-hearted, every one for himself. What looks like a Miracle on 34th Street is really Gremlins on the inside.

I'm wandering aimlessly, just following the lights and the distant echo of choral music.

This city was my home, every alley familiar; tied up in moments shared, I used to see her face in everything. As I walked the streets the city became a different place. Soon I couldn't

remember the face, only the fire in my heart. Thank bog for brain damage and alcohol induced dementia. The love in my heart belongs to me now. All the goodness is in me. All the feelings that made it wonderful to be alive are still there but now the love belongs to me and no one can take it away. It glows inside me with a generalized warmth. I am the fox, not her. It is alive in me, a smooth abstract all encompassing sphere of warmth and adoration, radiating. But now, with no outlet, it's burning me alive, and with that burning pain I glow.

I come to a church with the doors propped open, they're having midnight mass. I guess it's Christmas Eve. I pause in the doorway looking at the backs of Catholics' bowed heads. In the vestibule I light a candle for Saint Genet. I knock over a canister of oil and wedge the doors shut and I skip into the night as the flames whoosh up behind me, choral music mingling with panicked screams, I hum along to Silent Night as the wind whips my smiling face.

At home I throw the pile of money on the bed. It's ugly 'cause it has no point. It just sits there. In Paradise, Lethe washes away the memory of sin, while Eunoe strengthens remembrance of good things. At Beatrice's command Dante drinks.⁹⁵ The whiskey flows, enveloping me like a warm blanket.

In bed I watch *It's a Wonderful Life*⁹⁶ online. The black and white, heart-swelling, holiday tradition, from the time of broadcast TV when everyone had to watch the same thing at the same time.

First comes the bait. The beautiful woman, Mary Hatch, hiding in the bushes nude, as women are in the movies. Their laughter colours the night and lights up their young faces, although

James Stewart is a high school senior in his 40s. Everything falls into place and they fall in love and their love fills up the night and they all live happily ever after.

George Bailey is the good guy, hardworking and honest. He had big dreams to escape his small town life and see the world. But social responsibilities and familial pressures closed in on him, he puts on a smile as the years go by but he can't live up to their demands. He has an existential crisis, gets drunk and tries to throw himself off the bridge, saying "I wish I were never born!"

Enter Clarence the bumbling angel, interrupting his suicide. Clarence shows George what Bedford Falls would be like without him. The wholesome town a cold-hearted, unscrupulous ghetto where the poor are exploited by the capitalist villain Mr Potter. In the bar scene, crass drunkos laugh swilling booze and commiserating. "Ka-Ching" goes the cash register. That would be my life, if it were twelve hours long everyday.

In the end, the community comes together to save him and everything stays the same, he's doomed to live out his days making others happy and he loves it. Because he is good? Because "No one is alone who has friends" and there are no communities without individuals? Because of what he can do for them? Because it's a movie and there must be a happy ending.

This movie makes you think—non-consensually makes you think: How wonderful a simple decent life is. George Bailey finds satisfaction as an ordinary contributing member of society. He will never be good enough on his own, he will always need the other people to be himself.

Cue 'Auld Lang Syne', "Every time an angel gets his wings, a homeless person freezes to death."



Chapter Seventy Seven

I have soldiers now who do the work so I can hide in my apartment and drink myself to death.

I watch movies, obsessively disappearing into cinema or garbage TV, no longer a cultural artifact it's a surrogate life, an audiovisual tranquilizer and thought blocker. When the movie's on I am Montgomery Clift, Pierre Clémenti, Charlotte Rampling, Jean-Paul Belmondo... someone cooler than me, someone who can handle this stress. And they all lived happily ever after, roll credits.

Ever since I was a child every moment had to be decidedly arranged, framed like a photograph, composed like a scene from a movie, every frame a work of art. This self-conscious struggle was all-encompassing, the need to "be cool" and the impossibility of ever getting it right. All activities were subject to the criticism of the all seeing, all knowing, god, overbearing father, audience, critic, waiting to punish any misstep.

The problem in life is there is no ending. No *fini*. Sure everyone meets their end and dies sooner or later but it's not the same, it just drags on and on, the indefinite onslaught of consciousness presents an insurmountable horror. Terminal uncertainty, you never get the answers, you never get the plot tied up neatly in a meaningful denouement. You never get to leave the theatre, have a smoke and laugh about the scene with the drunk donkeys...

In a romantic comedy the protagonist must fail before he can make his triumphant return. In the movie this will be the romantic suffering part. The losery artist failure down on his luck, drinks too much, has almost lost all hope, but still has potential and charm, his suffering is quaint, romantic and endearing. Ok. I try to imagine a veneer of demure class adding a shine to this hell. But there is none.

There is no montage to get me through these months, no dramatic music. Pan down, look at the floor.

After a long night at the grind I take the empty subway to my empty apartment. "Hi honey, I'm home," I say to no one. Every time I come home the neighbours across the way are there, like in *The Tenant*, they are watching *Friends*. We used to laugh at them. Now I pretend not to look as I close my curtains and hide.

Scan the apartment looking for a glimmer of hope, I search the shadows and it's quiet, no sign of the girl. Nothing in the apartment would indicate she was ever here, as if she might never have existed at all. Maybe she wasn't even real. – Flashback – picnicking at the beach, alone, was she even there? – flashback – at openings stroking my chin, alone, was she even real? – Flashback – at the nice restaurant I sit alone drinking wine and muttering to myself... Was it ALL in my imagination?

I look around the apartment for evidence, was it all a delusion?

This is the twist, where it's revealed that it was all a fantasy. There was never a girl. I never had an art career, never sold gear, I never did anything.

It's not a romantic comedy, it's a psychological thriller.

Maybe no one gets what they want. I watched the city blow up and come crashing down like the end of *Fight Club*, it brought me no satisfaction at all. I saw the shockwave rolling over everything like in *T2* but nothing changed, I endured the long nuclear winter like an extra in *Threads*. I am a worn copy of someone I became for someone who never really was, like Kim Novak in *Vertigo*.

Still, I am trapped in the movie, but there's no longer an audience, no film, no lights, I am not the good guy, not the anti-hero, just me.

I saw Cookie in the street walking with some dude. She had dyed black hair and looked just like Courtney Cox with her pinched little snake face and her mean scowl. What the fuck was I thinking? It's so strange watching stars fall to earth, from the perfect ideal to mediocre pedestrian, from angel to insect. We passed in the street as if we were strangers.



Chapter Seventy Eight

Rotting through the springtime I hide in my cave. Afraid of running into her in the street, I become a complete shut-in. I would leave the house if the ants let me. But they know better, I no longer fight them. Incapacitated by a constant blood-curdling despair, life becomes a burden of the greatest magnitude. Somewhere along the descent, grief becomes indistinguishable from madness. Despondent, paralytic, delirious, I withdraw into myself, I see no one, do nothing. I'm like Catherine Deneuve in *Repulsion*, but less cute. Standing staring at cracks in the walls and ceiling, reliving the trauma. Things fall on the floor, gravity takes over, everything falls apart, lights burn out, it gets dark. The toilet paper tower has been depleted, the pyramid of plenty is gone.

I forget how to sleep or eat. I eat only Wonder Bread and American cheese. There are ants in the bread. If I eat the ants do I win? At the 7-11 I eat for the first time in 3 days, a triangle of soft dough topped with a layer of petroleum slicked white leatherette, one edge crisped to a perfect golden brown. I actually enjoy it, maybe this is the type of man I really am.

My crisis has plateaued. I continue cycling through the same routine at terminal velocity. The ritual is well practised, grab the bottle and muscle memory takes over, twist, crack, zing, the metal cap spins off into my hand, the bottle at a 45° angle, glug glug glug, four fingers down my throat.

Self annihilation is such hard work. Everyone needs a hobby but this is ridiculous. I drink myself stupid because consciousness is unbearable.

The standard vacancy of the brain-dead clone world is now my singular pursuit. My individuality has become an affliction. I have resigned to closing my mind, giving in and being swallowed by the void to relieve me of the burden of this incessant horror of being me.

Drinking yourself to death is a slow process. The liver hardens with scar tissue, the liver and spleen become enlarged, the kidneys are impaired, the brain turns to mush, the pancreas produces toxins, the stomach develops varices, swollen or "varicose" veins, like in your moms legs, when one of these ruptures the alcoholic coughs up blood until they die.⁹⁷

What if when Narcissus looked into the stream, Echo threw a rock and his reflection was smashed, distorted, a tumultuous chaos of broken ripples? Then forever after, in order to be himself, he would have to be smashed, distorted, messed up all the time.

The total derangement of the senses is reset as an end in and of itself. If senses are nothing but an input mechanism for pain, I won't just punish them, I'll obliterate them. The blood of the world flows through my veins, so to punish the world I will negate myself.

I am left wanting, nothing even comes close to satisfying this unquenchable thirst. A desire to be. The world is not enough. I am not enough.



Chapter Seventy Nine

It's summer again, though everything is grey. The sun is invisible, I haven't seen it in months. A friend visiting from abroad convinces me to leave the apartment and go to dinner, we cab there. It's a nice day, it's strange to be out, suddenly I'm seized with dread. As the taxi starts to pull away I run after it and leap headfirst into the open window, but I bounce off and fall under the wheels. I'm not crushed, my pants have fallen down, hilarious. But no one laughs.

Outside the Chinese restaurant I'm mentally preparing to go in when a gaggle of children comes scrambling along the sidewalk towards me, one flailing toddler bearing down on me threateningly. Staring them down I point and hiss:

“SLOW DEATH!”

Inside the restaurant, we're safe from children. Conversation is stilted. Under the fluorescent lights my face feels like a compound fracture, shattered and exposed. The other guests have arrived and they want, that solves the mystery of why I'm here, at least I have a purpose in this world. I'm beginning to get it together when the bill comes and it's over as quickly as it started.

Since I am out, inertia drags me on, under my own wheels, into the oncoming night. The routine kicks in and it all happens as naturally as falling down the stairs. At the Bucket of Blood, one drink becomes ten. We're invited to a friend's rock show. The

club smells like old sweat and backed up drains, the whiskey is expensive garbage and the portions are too small. The band sounds like Oasis.

The regulars are there presenting all the social niceties expected but the hostility is palpable. I hand out the party bags and collect the money. Boo hoo, I know, tortures of the damned. But customers think I'm getting rich off them, living the high life and rolling deep on their nickel.

“Thanks man you're the best!” They are furiously jealous at the Tony Montana pile they imagine on my desk. When you have the thing that gives them pleasure, you hold power and they hate your guts and curse you through their smile.

I would go home if the ants let me, but I go on, seeing the smiling creeps. We go to the 60s soul dance party, everyone is very nice, it's excruciating. Misty is wasted, wobbling and slurring and coming in for a hug every thirty seconds like a goldfish. She drones on about what a great friend I am, though we've never had a conversation.

“Are we gonna make out?”

“Bye.”

She won't remember anything in the morning anyway. Damon catches me at the bar.

“Can I see you in the bathroom?” raised eyebrows, nod and wink. The typical routine.

Walking down the street I run into Justin and Samantha, hook-ups on the go.

“Have a great night!” smiles and laughter...are we having fun yet?

“Party on!” Until I've reached my breaking point and I head towards home.

The yellow brick road is empty and Tuesday night desolate, another worldly fantasy light bathes everything in sepia tone. There's a homeless woman with her old lady wagon standing under the lamp by the streetcar stop. The homeless represent an unthinkable horror to the norms. Nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to love. If anything's possible we're all just a few bad choices away from being lost to the world, it could happen to you. Standing there waiting I share the emptiness of the night with this woman. I look at her and feel a kinship. In the night all alone, she's lonely, someone to reach out to, someone who would never tell. I offer her money to make out with me. She is soft and warm and smells like lavender and baby powder. An innocent public school style kiss. The tenderness is shocking.

She changed from an image of lonely despair into a real individual person. No longer the cliché I expected, she was an autonomous living creature, and her warmth was punishing, like she had ripped open the tenderness that I had closed off. (Yes, it is about me).

Nate appears out of nowhere, interrupts us and dismisses my paramour. There's always someone looking out for you, ready to ruin your fun. The moment is gone and I'm waiting for a streetcar again.

I started to wonder if maybe that wasn't such a nice thing I did. Maybe everyone isn't a cheap whore like me. I just wanted to have fun. She needed the money. With horror I realize I'm acting like a drunk dude-bro. Fuck. I can't even trust myself, it's not safe to do anything. I cab home to watch TV and get properly drunk. TV protect the world from me, protect me from myself, keep me from doing damage. It's not safe. Try to forget.

We're all just a few bad choices away from being lost to the world, nothing to do, no one to love. Maybe I'm already gone.



Chapter Eighty

Morning comes at 11 AM, I wake up and vomit, one of my greatest pleasures. The purest symbolic rejection of life. Everyone's good at something. I smile as I wretch, prone before the bowl staring into the spiralling void as if it were some kind of oracle, the pillar of bile and acid hits the water without a splash, a smooth swan dive of yellow orange plumes of bile and stomach lining devouring itself.

Partying is self-crucifixion. But wallowing in grief isn't going to get you anywhere either. I need to have some fun no matter what I do, eat my dinner in a fancy restaurant.⁹⁸ Fuck this. Let's go out. The phone keeps ringing and I keep answering it. I have to find something to break this spell. I surrender to my unconscious, surely unconscious me couldn't do worse than conscious me. I revel in the belief that I will never be good enough. Accepting it, indulging it. Proving it. To make real all the reasons why she left, to make it make sense, to make her right.

Now my spirit animal is pigeon. Pigeons are supremely oblivious, vermin with wings, content to be strutting about like Iggy Pop, bobbing their heads without a care in the world. They don't give a fuck. So rock-n-roll. They have wings, the potential to fly, they could soar above all the sunsets. But here they are in the gutter, walking on the sidewalks just like the people milling about around them. It's as if they want to be people. They take

what they can get. On the street I see a pigeon eating sushi, living the high-life. It's quite glamorous. God provides for the little birds. Saint Francis can choke on wasabi.

I'm at an unfamiliar bar, sitting in the booth waiting for Amber to come back from the bank machine. My eyes scan the bar assessing the patrons. It's a bit of a meat market, drunks dancing up on strangers, chatting up hotties at the bar, some have paired up, doing their insect mating rituals. Exhibitionists, showing off that someone else will touch them. Those two would be revolting even if they weren't touching each other. Those ones aren't even revolting, just sad. Why is watching people have a good time so disgusting? "My disgust for the desires of others is because I have none of my own left"⁹⁹

One sits at the bar, slack jawed, dumbly smiling, maw agape. Blind, dumb, idiot bliss. A hole where a face should be, a drooling empty socket. A piston slamming against a thigh, like a dog trying to fuck when it's not in, just grazing a cardboard box, jizzing on the linoleum floor. And through your eyes you can taste it on the back of your tongue. Where is the respite? Death please, gawd. Some people are just a drainpipe in a leather jacket, input and output and little else.¹⁰⁰ Heartless. Lifeless, legless, human sewage, lips and assholes, an inside-out bird.

Another day on the street, a pigeon is flat as a cartoon, run over by a car or a truck or twenty. The pink meat and purple guts show through velvety grey pulverized feathers. Another pigeon pecks casually at his colleagues freshly mashed brains. This is a common, everyday thing that happens in broad daylight and no one takes any notice. It's a jungle out there, the circle of life is a sharp edged scythe, mortality waits in the wings, death is just a kiss away, totally indifferent.

Clubs, bars, work. Home, asleep by 10 AM.



Chapter Eighty One

I wake at 5 PM and it starts again. Tums for dinner, Pepto Dismal for desert. On Facebook I get a message that John Smith was found dead with a needle in his arm, blue and cold. He was a client but I hadn't seen him for a while. It really sucks but I can't say I didn't feel a pang of jealousy.

Each day is spent unconscious, fighting off the light, halfway down in a pit. Rock-bottom is quite a ways off still, but the opening at the top is no longer visible either. I don't know whether to go up or down. Even if I wanted to get better I don't know anymore what "better" looks like, or which way is up. Luckily another night comes and there's no more danger of thinking about it.

This is the party life that everyone dreams of, hammer of the gods, a classical Dionysian bacchanal... of the face down on the sidewalk variety. I'm a rabid fox with no fucks left to give. Yawn. Dante emerges from the inferno, leaving Beatrice behind to go on to paradise alone.¹⁰¹ And that's life. In the end we're all alone. That's just the way it is. Get used to it.

Somehow it goes on, I go 'round and 'round in meaningless, aimless ever narrowing, concentric circles. Every day the sun comes up, and I don't know why. I am struck dumb and blind, I don't understand anything anymore, but I go along with it, another day "Once you get on the merry-go-round you gotta

ride it all the way.”¹⁰²

On the street I see a group of pigeons feasting on a fresh barf in the gutter. They are having the time of their lives, with what once was creamy macaroni and cheese. They peck into it zealously with smiling eyes, proud as peacocks. They have no shame. Is there something to be learned from gods little creatures?

Arriving at the strip club we stumble out of the limo and ditch our champagne flutes in the gutter, laughter mingling with the sound of breaking glass. Passing nuns from the church next to the strip club look on with unreadable expressions and I smile sweetly back at them, through a wistful nostalgia I still admire people with ideals, (no matter how fucked they are). We file into the club and head straight to the VIP. The gorilla man in the tuxedo moves the velvet rope aside for us and we choose our places on the black leather couch. Each of us have a model on our arm, Izad – Heidi Klum, Nate – Kate Moss, Sebastian – Farrah Fawcett, Zoey – Kristen Schaal, my date is the writer Nelly Arcan, rope dangling from her neck like a necktie. We get comfortable and the leopard skin bikini'd server prances over on heels to take drink orders, champagne for the table, whiskey for me with a strawberry daiquiri to chase. It comes served in a human skull and we drink with two straws, bumping noses. Nelly Arcan and I feed one-another from a box of chocolates while we watch dancers spread their buttocks to Wagner.

And so it goes, on and on, another night, another apocalypse. Angry and antsy we need excitement. Some holy crusade or fairytale quest. Downtown along the waterfront are ten or fifteen towering condominiums in various stages of development, Izad and I choose the tallest and scale the seven foot security fence, over the wooden hoarding and barbed wire with a leap and a

bound and we're inside. We press on into darkness, narrowly avoiding open pits of raw concrete and re-bar, hundreds of feet into total darkness, a bit of debris falls and echoes clang into a future parking lot, many stories into the earth. The great condo tower under construction, like the death star, lies before us, a leviathan, threatening and dwarfing us, challenging us, daring us.

Inside the skeletal building, we start climbing the stairwell, stopping every once in a while to explore the circles of hell. We infiltrate every corner, conquering the invading force with our futile unnoticed gestures of resistance, Izad pisses in the vestibule, I drop things down the elevator shaft, we spray paint the walls with neon construction orange: LiBERTy oR DEAtH, BAByLoN FALL, CoNDo GENoCiDE... We take the service elevator 33 floors above the city, then the stairs, then scaffolding all the way into the sky.

When we get to the top it's awe-striking. Four walls of floor to ceiling windows open onto the night. There is no glass in the windows and the wind rips cold through the open levels. Two sides overlook the city at night, still full of tiny lights. A long way down the lights still crawl like ants. Tiny lights crawling across the city, like Pac-Man. Up here in the sky, so far removed from everything, 44 floors above the city, you can see the ridiculous pointlessness of the endless going on and on and on, around and around like an infinite loop, on transit, on the streets... A vast network of perpetual grid, all exposed intestines pumping shit through the city, a gridlock of humans.

The opposite side overlooks the lake in its black infinity, nature's answer to all this ceaseless building. All this nothing could belong to you, if you just take my hand. We have taken the highest point and touched the glass dome of the red light. We've championed

this fortress, captured the flag, all your base are belong to us.

Atop the tower, above the clouds of an empty Olympus, we look out over the infinity of civilization coming to the end of possibility. From this honeycomb monolith of concrete cells I see the structure as a giant ant trap. A debtors prison colony in the sky, thousands of human souls in financial bondage, enraptured in endless mortgages under the omnipotence of capital, lives already bought and sold. I pour out whiskey for the lost, it falls in a spout and fans out scattering into a mist that never lands.

“To my city!”¹⁰³



Chapter Eighty Two

Weeks turn into months turn into oblivious infinities. I have achieved the total derangement of the senses, I have arrived, oblivion is mine. I hold it in my hand like a little dove. It holds me in its hand like a big dove. It is warm and safe and comforting,

This deluge into darkness might seem to be an indulgence but it's serious work, a mission to face existence, confront god if you like. To be aware, to see. In the total derangement of the senses, one takes everything in, ultimately receptive. Take the poison from the world and make it pure. Internalize and exorcise. We are all possessed of a terrifying abundance of freedom and potential. Anything is possible. Nothing holds me down, without anchor I could float away at any moment, lose my grip, and drift off into the ether, submit to wingless flight and disappear. It's exhilarating and somehow petrifying. Everything is possible – therefore nothing is necessary.¹⁰⁴ But there is good in it, there is good in everything. Even if, “in your ecstatic flight you are destroyed by these visions, so what. At least you will have seen them!”¹⁰⁵ I had to look into the eclipse.

There's still a social obligation to have a good time so we find a party at some dork's house, friends of friends, we roll up late bringing good cheer and positive attitudes, intent on having a good time, but we're met with the requisite hostility. They're having some kind of art show in their studio. We hang out being

cool, not causing any trouble, but I can sense the antagonism, it's getting so you can't even relax without getting in a fight.

So we hold a dice game on their front door and charge a cover to their party. Every guest must pay to play to step over the pile of cash they've just lost, but we run a fair game and a few people win. It's just a party, my mind wanders.

I have accomplished the complete derangement of the senses. I have exhausted all poisons within myself, endured ineffable tortures. I dreamed infinite explosions on video screens, weapons of sound and light and used them on myself, colonizing new dream worlds that no one wanted, empires without territory, holy crusades of void, the myriad revolutions of the culture wars, cheap declarations without question, shifting tectonic plates, touching soft boundaries of tissue separating innocence from experience. What was repressed I exorcised, spoke dumbly and loudly misunderstood secrets with blind pride, I turned silent nights of loneliness into free parties. Standing on its axis I made the whirling world stand still and watched the parade of atrocities roll by.

I stood against the grand lie waving my black flag. Before I knew it all my terrific angst and anger was just another cliché. The only threat I provided was an empty meaningless pantomime that could be used against me. In the process I became old. Aged 20 years in a moment. Defeated nothing but my own potential. I remain an escaped mental patient, a mediocre animal, small-time criminal, moderately cursed and supreme adversary, to all and to myself. I found myself and I cultivated it like a disease. I saw. I made shapes. Danced around the gold gilt hole of the soul, until I fell in, and found it just like any toilet. Quintessences? Ruptures? Vibrations? Good times? Clichés? Jouissance? Quintessences?

Dead repeats. Looped samples, blurred memories, faded photographs, corrupt files, scratched records, déjà vu. "Sunshine, lollipops and maggots, that's just how bad it gets. Everything that's wonderful is what I feel..."

Well, I've achieved the total derangement of the senses, now what? Thanks, Rimbaud.

So you liberate the spirit. Then what. Suddenly you have this rabid dog on your hands and all it wants to do is run and rip and devour. Giving life to something wild in this domestic civilization causes a whole new set of problems. It is an ongoing battle, a never ending struggle to avoid being absorbed, none of us will get out alive.

How many more revelations of beautiful chaos, before the world crumbles at the thunder crack of my blissed out omnipotent laughter.

I pull up the gold Merc and park on the lawn. Izad falls into the passenger side and we're out of there. Soon we're cruising up and down the empty streets with Izad barfing through his balaclava out the window. I dump him on the couch at my place and go back out. I cruise around town as the night subsides. This is almost a satisfying aesthetic experience. I take the winding road through the ravine, up into Rosedale's affluent neighbourhoods, speeding past the mansions, smoking and gunning it with the wind at my back and the night giving way to the golden grey rippled dawn and I feel free. For a moment. This is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.



Chapter Eighty Three

After another long night at the game, dawn fades in with a haze, I'm rounding the bend on my block but at the corner in the middle of the sidewalk blocking the door to McShit as the normies try to get their McMuffins, is a haggard rock star in a tiny purple leather jacket. Her face is hotcakes of make-up with ketchup red lipstick. She jerks in the wind like a skeletal marionette shaking to the withdrawals and struggling to remain vertical on stripper heels. Chain-smoking butts she scowls into the souls of passersby with dagger eyes. Purple magic-marker scrawled on a cardboard reads "\$10" next to a brand new purple Dyson vacuum cleaner on the sidewalk. I avert my eyes, to the mega-billboard. On the corner of the huge sign a solitary hawk is perched, surveying the scene, hundreds of pigeons roost in the billboards backside acting nonchalant, most of them will be ok, "It won't happen to me." The hawk cuts a noble silhouette waiting for it's moment. Tender prey. "I feel like chicken tonight!" Good deal for a vacuum cleaner but there seems to be no takers. I just stand and watch the drama unfold. The hawk swoops down.

Another night at another bar, social obligations, I'm helping out at a friend's electronic night, gotta represent, besides, I am trying to socially integrate and be human again. I was bored and slamming the drinks to pass the time. I tried to drink my way out of a bad mood. Shots with every friend who arrived. "Hey great to see you, bottoms up."

Sadenka was there and I was trying to avoid her. She gave me the creeps. Sebastian said she looked like Walter Mathau in drag, I thought that was a little mean. But every time I turn around she is there, trying to insert herself.

Towards the end of the night, trying to order another round I fell off the barstool and I was cut off. I was surprised I was suddenly so out of it and fading fast. I didn't have time to think, I just paid my bill and got my equipment together. I might have been drugged or maybe I was just drunk beyond control and sick with self-hatred. But I know, I said "No" about 25 times. This must be what it's like for a girl.

When she followed me to the cab, I tried to shut the door, but she pushed and forced her way in. The driver must have thought we were together. Again I said "No." Over and over. But it was as if she couldn't hear a word. I pleaded with the driver to take her home, but he wouldn't listen to me because I was drunk. The reality started to sink in and I started to feel sick. At my stop I gave her cab fare and said goodnight. Before I could do anything she was right behind me, she pushed in the front door and followed me up the steps and forced her way through the door to my apartment. I said "No" about 15 more times. *I tried to reason with her and she laughed in my face.*

She climbed on straddling my torso, her dyed blonde hair falling in my face. She tried to make eye contact, I picked a spot on the wall and stared till everything blurred. *I just wished this wasn't happening. She forced an awkward giggle.*

She puts it on me. This isn't happening, this is not happening. I did everything I could. There's no place like home, there's no place like home.

She puts it in. It's like a damp cave. Immediately it's obviously wrong, nothing fits, it's like bumping into a stranger in the subway, but naked. Her shaved pubis is scratchy like a grampa's face forcing a kiss, she grinds it into me. OMG Walter Mathau. At this angle the resemblance is striking. I wished I was doing it with Walter Mathau instead. As her bulk heaves over me I try touching her body, but it just feels antagonistic and hostile, like a violation. *Her thing smells like a shoe from the salvation army.*

I was obviously garbage so she did what she wanted. Maybe it was my fault for being so fucked up. Do the fucked up deserve it? Why not. I'm basically nothing already. For a second it felt good to be wanted, like I had some value. At least for long enough to be used. Nobody finished.

She was really boring so I used her fists to punch my face, her rings gouging my eyes and ripping my skin... I gave her a little performance but it was clearly going nowhere and I gave up. After I begged her to leave for four more hours, she finally went and I could breathe again. The face in the mirror was swollen and blue, torso full of scratches, bedsheets torn to shreds.

I sat in the shower alone, classically trying to wash off the shame, till the water ran cold and nothing changed.

However vile these degradations, nothing is more disgusting than a broken heart.



Chapter Eighty Four

The cops always come just before dawn. They use the battering-ram to break down the door. Sitting on the green velvet arm chair Instagramming in the dark in my smoking jacket, leopard bikini bottoms and slippers. They let themselves in and I let them have it “Blam! Blam!” muzzle flare strobing in the dark. I catch one in the face and one in the neck, it's the only way, because of the Kevlar vests. As the second one bleeds out from his neck wound, it's about three minutes of wheezing and gurgling, I stand on his chest and arm so he can't move as he chokes on his blood. I watch as it pumps out of the neck hole with every heartbeat, getting weaker and weaker till there's none. The blood makes a real mess but I roll the gusher in the Ikea throw-rug, Buffalo hide is surprisingly absorbent. With the bodies in the trunk of their car I drive to the lake, to the secluded spot between the Yacht club and the 1920s dance hall. Tonight it's quiet, I can drive right down the boat launch ramp into the lake. I put the car in neutral and step out as it rolls down the ramp and slips quietly into the black water, I sit on a rock and smoke a cigarette as I watch the lights on the dash slowly fade out of view, steam rises, bubbles gurgle and sputter, and the car slowly sinks out of view.

Ok that didn't happen, really I just went to the old man bar and sat in a dark corner drinking whiskey till the phone started up.



Chapter Eighty Five

“The Happiest Place on Earth!”

I’m sitting on the couch at Suzanne Sommers’ loft apartment. Chrissy Snow is over, the two sit on either side of me in the darkened room, flirtatiously close, sipping bottomless vodka tonics and pouring out their hearts. “I mean think about it... what could be happier?” The music blares. Romantic confessions from Chrissy. “He’s a good boyfriend. It’s like yeah, we live together and everything but he’s just not—you know!?”

“Imagine meeting Mickey Mouse!”

“He just doesn’t—you know!?”

“Or Goofy?! Goofy is the hawtest!”

“He’s the first guy who’s ever been... you know, actually nice to me.”

“But I like dumb guys.”

“He really loves me...but... I don’t know.”

My head spins trying to keep up with two monologues, every statement is an explosion of feeling, a purge of verbiage, every sentence is forced with a desperate delighted urgency, wildly gesturing almost knocking over drinks. Suzanne just got out of rehab and she’s celebrating with her bestie. After a couple more lines everything seems to matter a lot less, still an emergency but who the fuck cares?

“What’s Mickey Mouse’s GF’s name? Who’s your favourite?” I try to answer but Chrissy breaks in, talking a mile

a minute.

“Sometimes I just wish he was someone else, you know?”

“Walt Disney was the greatest artist that ever lived.”

“It’s just gotta be, you know...”

“Walt Disney was just so...”

“MAGICAL!?” they say in unison, laughing as the dual monologues intersect. Chrissy stares at Suzanne’s drink pouring into her lap as she bends over the small mirror on the table. I’m trying to leave politely, but they won’t stop enthusiastically gushing.

“Play the song for him!”

“Oh you’ve got to listen to this song!”

Then again they are adorable.

“How do I...?”

“Push the thing!”

It’s a good song, Primal Scream. I’m in the hallway as the door closes behind me, I can hear Suzanne squealing “Minnie Mouse!”

A couple of blocks down the street, I’m back at the Bucket of Blood, my rapist is there, she comes and sits close to me. I try to ignore her but she talks to me. She’s broke so I buy her a drink hoping she’ll leave me alone and immediately regret it.

I know if I say anything about her behaviour or try to man-splain consent to her, I would just be called a jerk or a baby or a downer and I’d be the bad guy again, so I try to put it out of my mind and I pretend everything is fine. She makes small talk at me.

“So how you doing? Blah, blah, blah...”

Her breath smells like fresh mulched grass.

“Meh.” Ugh. This is skin crawlingly unpleasant, I wish she would just go away.

“I might be pregnant”

“Well congratulations!” I count months in my head

and raise my glass relieved. She instinctively reaches for her wallet, an associated behavioural trigger. Now we're getting somewhere. But her wallet is empty.

I escape to smoke a cigarette outside on the patio where a scene is unfolding.

"...to all my friends ayyy!!!"¹⁰⁶ Imagine if Charles Bukowski was a skinny 40 year old hoser chick in a flannel and a toque. Something must've gone good tonight, Kelly, the owner, is the life of the party.

"Drinks for everybody! ... you're all the best!" With grandiose gestures glasses are filled and raised and emptied and filled. "Everybody except for this guy." She singles out one person on the crowded patio and directs her vitriol at my friend Sebastian. "This guy is a real piece of shit." No one seems to know what the beef is about, but hey, free drinks. She carries on berating him as Sebastian stands there soaking up the abuse. "You worthless fuck! I fuckin' hate your fuckin' guts... you fucking goddamn piece of shit..." Charming. The drama intensifies. Everyone looks or looks away. He throws his 7up on the proprietor of the bar and walks away, slow enough to keep a little of his dignity, but fast enough not to get mauled by the bouncer.

I leave too and we walk down the street to the other bar. He's also been kicked out of his rented room, so I offer my spare room, now I've got a roommate. It's good to have friends, socializing is good for you.



Chapter Eighty Six

It is Spring again. Arriving at the edge of town as dusk descends, I'm coming home. The streetcar arrives at my stop. I look over my shoulder and years have passed. Seasons changed and I did too. Turn, turn, turn with the worm, to everything there is a cliché, a time to love, a time to eat shit, a time to refrain from eating shit. A time to genocide, a time to chill out, a time to embrace with open arms and a time to discriminate. A time to revel in paradise together, and a time to suffer alone the cold gutting hours of solitude ... Cliché after cliché... "Is that all there is?"¹⁰⁷ Still torn between imaginary dualities, love and hate, desire and repulsion, light and dark, I see the sky in the west torn into sinews of pink neon and purple god flesh. Like the eviscerated entrails of a small animal, cotton candy with a radiating ball of gold burning through it. Light from the mouths of dragons pouring over immaculate thighs spreading west, across the earth. This brilliant celestial blanket of colour tucking in for the night, wiping away every care, stripping flesh from bone, a slow-motion shock-wave rolling over the city, like in *72*. The moment feels alive exploding into my eyes, vibrating a beauty beyond my imagination, opening the illuminated interior of heavenly bodies gaping a cavernous orifice in the body of light, this is a truly satisfying aesthetic experience.

The immensity of the heavens makes me small and simple, it makes anything possible again.

You can tell this is the self-help part of the book, characterized by more clichés and a comical pseudo-positivity that might even be sincere, so ironic it could be for real, so pathetic it's got to be a joke, so ridiculous I couldn't have made it up. I'll pretend it's satire, so they'll laugh WITH me, not AT me.

This is me trying to ride into the sunset, this is the redemptive stage of the story, the moment of self reflection and resolve. Our protagonist has been bad and cool, we've watched him gloriously, in his imagination at least, transgress the boundaries of reason and logic and we've watched him fall from that imaginary glory. We watched him let his dreams destroy him. He ascended to the highest peaks of total fantasy, like an Icarus he reached for the prize and found nothing there to hold onto.

Humbled by the infinity of my failures, options are eliminated, possibilities narrowed to a sharp point, one path, forward. Once again I'm back to zero, but still here. Under this majesty, a tiny, crawling nothing, burning with desire, erupting out of this world into the oncoming night.

Everyone must sooner or later face the consequences, and reap what they sow. "Every little heart eventually ends up broken."¹⁰⁸ Being himself was the crime. It turns out being himself is the punishment too. And the greatest prize in life – being in love, is also the worst crime and that crime's worst punishment. Through that punishment our hero must find a way to go on.

Prometheus was strung up on the cliff wall to have his liver ripped out by pigeons everyday forever. Narcissus fell in love with his reflection, became a beautiful flower and was turned to stone.

Our hero looks into the mirror and confronts the monster that looks back. He looks into the abyss and finds himself staring back, just like in *Empire Strikes Back*, *in Darth Vader's helmet is my face, looking meek, trying to shrug it off*. In the sky pink turns to blue and I smile.

Maybe it's just a manic phase, having just punched through to the other side of the same coin and emerged from brutal depression into more fleeting brain chemicals, more deluded falsehoods triggered by stimuli: the pollinating scent of Sumac trees... the sparkling charge of a thunderstorm on a summer night, ice cream in winter. Frankincense, Abramelin, heliotrope and citron, Dr. Pepper, Play Doh, marzipan, cum, new car upholstery, clove cigarettes, gasoline rainbows, fireworks... (fade out) He takes a look into the mirror and the mirror looks back laughing. Suck it up sunshine. Learn to love it, It's a Wonderful Nervous Breakdown.

There are dumpster loads of inspirational quotes and memes: "C'est la vie", "Just do it", "Pobody's Nerfect". "No pressure, no diamonds". "The darkest hour is before the dawn". "The best is yet to come". "Never say never to always". "Don't dream it, be it". "You are somebody's reason to smile", "Anything's possible!" ...Take your pick... "It doesn't get better than this!", "This is as good as it gets", "Oh baby, heaven is a place on earth", "It's going to get a lot worse before it gets better", "It doesn't get better, just easier to ignore". There is a little kitten terrorized, hanging from a stick over an abyss filled with unimaginable horror "Hang in There" the cat has been clinging to this stick for decades.

Still, the most concerning thought, ever gnawing at the back of my mind all the way through to the front, is the same bon mots that's driven me mad all along, it's still there, after the wars,

after the drink and drugs, after the love and the loss. There it is written in fire across the sky:

You're Beautiful

Now it's a question. And the question remains: How to live. What should I do? Who should I be? They say just be yourself, do what you want, follow your dreams, follow your heart, do what thou wilt, don't worry, be true to yourself and everything will fall into place.

Hakuna Matata.



Chapter Eighty Seven

“Thank you, Sir.” I say to the driver with a nod as I step off the streetcar onto the platform. I wait for the other passengers to disembark and I take the foot bridge over the train tracks and the ten lane highway towards the lake to watch the sun set. Halfway across, I pause to look west over the traffic into the waning light. Lucifer falling by Gustave Doré.¹⁰⁹ Beneath me, the hum of tires on pavement roars.

A sunset is beautiful because it ends, life is one ending after the next, a series of deaths. Death is the truth. This makes me laugh.

Life is pain and torture and hell and death. Maybe it would be better to have never been born at all. But we don't get to choose, there is no going back, we are here now. What's done is done. This is life now. If you've had enough, don't worry. Things have a way of taking care of themselves. Ultimately, on the grand scale, it just doesn't matter. On the mega-billboard by the train tracks, twenty feet tall in cold blue neon, the world says: “LIVE OR DIE, WE DON'T GIVE A DAMN.”

For now, I guess survival will do. Maybe tomorrow the sun will rise again.



Chapter Eighty Eight

What if people are ALL wonderful magical creatures. What if we're all unicorns on the inside? Do all people have value. Does everyone really hurt? Are each and everyone of us real living creatures with a heart and blood and the need to be loved. Do the insects have feelings too? Anything's possible.

I know I'm the same as a fox or a swan, but am I driven by the same force that twitches the ant or crawls through the earth worm. What if it is the very same power that gives the lightning its spark and runs through all life like a current of divine electricity. Like a rushing flow of blood.

We are all crawling through this life like the slow snail crawl of the sunset across the earth. But it's always sunset somewhere. In breaks and flashes it comes, as much mine as yours as the random in the streets and the tiger in the zoo or the butterfly in a dog's mouth. And all our little hopes and dreams crushed between the mandibles of an ant crawling in the ceiling... is the universe experiencing itself.

I walked past the dance hall where grandmas used to party to my spot by the yacht club's barbed wire fence. I sat on a rock and looked out over the rippling water, past the silhouetted condos and factories and apartments and smokestacks, to the muted glow sinking behind a wall of ash and vapour. Nightfall.

In the darkness it is clear, a world of pain and trouble is necessary

to make a soul. Everything is Wrong. Grief is the price we pay for loving. Whatever. All that darkness only makes the tiny light in my heart shine that much brighter. "What is to give light must endure burning."¹¹⁰ And this endlessly burning desire, wanting, needing, this unquenchable fire of the heart in its total dimension is divine.

Our capacity to affirm life resides in our ability to embrace the horrors of human potential and to live them as part of what we are. Our complicity in the atrocity of humanity is undeniable, to see the worst in people and to identify, is beginning to be whole, not perfect but complete. As we realize with a tragic awareness that creativity, growth, and benevolence are synonymous with the acceptance of terror and pain. As we accept the agony and the ecstasy, the laughter and the tears, love and anger, desire and repulsion, the boring and the fabulous, dope and diamonds...

A single glorious white trumpeter swan glides up to the shore and waddles over, standing on used hypos and broken bottles he looks at me with the blackest eyes. Where is his partner? Swans mate for life. He seems to be on his own this time. The swan unfolds his enormous wingspan, fanned out into points, his head arched low, forming a great majestic "V" he flaps his angelic wings and tucks them away as he turns and swims off into the darkness alone.



Chapter Eighty Nine

After the disaster comes the peaceful calm after the storm, a neutrally discharged atmosphere of wide open possibility in the quiet release. The horizon ripped from one periphery to the other, everything destroyed, ruptured, split open, new landscapes brought to the surface, the earth gives birth to worms and diamonds, unknown gems, a unicorn horn sprouted from the crown of the skull, a halo of scars, new powers...

Once you have fallen, been taken and thrashed about in its jaws and left for dead, comes the emptiness. In feast and famine, you take it all and revel in it and when there is nothing left, you must take the nothing. Accept the emptiness, to be all of it, you must take it all and be complete. Lonely universe, no one can save you from these jaws.

I stop waiting for my moment and take this moment, the emptiness rich with pain. Gorgeous, luscious, thrilling moment after moment of torture, twisted, eviscerated in horrific agony. When the sensations and distractions stop working...sometimes there's just nothing. Then you are whole again. Balance restored, for an instant. This is a precious treasure, this emptiness, take it, embrace it, let it be empty.

A fox wallowing cozy in a divan of white feathers, in the after-glow of a binge, full and satisfied, desire diffused, pups fed, lying in the dirt, pleased as punch, proud as a prom queen. One pup

chews the curved, severed neck of a trumpeter swan, its dead black pitch eye staring at nothing. Languishing, nuzzling, the pups smiling mouth browned with dried blood, the pink tongue lolling out, heavy panting.

Our capacity to affirm life resides in our ability to embrace the horror and the banality of our complicity in the simple atrocity of living.



Chapter Ninety

No one ever told me to stop. I did it by myself. It was much easier than I expected. I just reached the end. Maybe I finally had enough. It just stopped being interesting, it stopped being urgent. It stopped being the solution to everything.

Convulsing for forty-eight plus hours is no picnic, but I'm used to it now, it's an ab work-out. The waking nightmares, the anxiety, the pigeons laughter out the window... all just part of the picnic, it was over in about three days. Then the boredom and getting on with it.

Life isn't easy, sober or not, there's really no difference, life isn't easy anyway you slice it. Ultimately, it's the same life. And it's enough. Life is torture. And it's a treasure. A burden and a gift, a blessing and a curse. But you can't live without it.

I now look forward to having a basic functional life, watching TV and walking down the street. I'll go on dreaming, I'll go on making my dreams come true. Go home alone, dancing alone in my room, eating ice cream in the winter, alone. Survival will do for now. Maybe the sun will rise again later. I'll grow old, or not. Time will pass and it'll be ok. And it being ok will be pathetic torturous hell and that will be ok too.

End



Epilogue

A week after I stopped drinking I began vomiting black sludge. I thought: this is good, I am expelling the toxic shit in my system and becoming more healthy. But it quickly became clear that it was more than that. Every hour I'd throw up a black spew of poison, gradually it became more frequent and more and more extreme.

My roommate, Sebastian is on a date with Meth Mom, so I'm alone in the apartment, mostly in bed watching *Friends*.

What was every hour became every half hour, rushing to the bathroom to purge. This lasted all day, until there was nothing left but dry heaves and eye-bulging contractions as I knelt supplicated before the bowl with a fever and cold sweats. I was exhausted from the extensive clenching and retching, it felt like I'd received a royal shit kicking.

Then the blood started coming again, more black blood, I vomited up close to a pint every half hour. Gradually, each time, it became brighter and brighter, from black to burgundy, merlot to maroon, it became a dark red, mahogany, garnet, then a fresh bright red scarlet, magenta and crimson. Then a bright firecracker lipstick red. I began to feel helpless and to wonder what would happen next. Where could it go from here? More blood. After twenty-four hours of this there was no sign of slowing, then came a beautiful explosion of pink fuchsia froth

like a fresh kill and it flowed out of me and cascaded over my open hands into the toilet.

When the roommate came home he found me on the bathroom floor.

“Does this look bad to you?”

“You’re going to the hospital.” Sebastian flatly states.

We started out on foot, but when we got to the corner standing was hard, I thought I might faint. I could see the hospital in the distance, the spires of the haunted upper floors, just a couple blocks, seemed a million miles away, I felt like it would be easier if I left my body and flew there, I felt so light this seemed feasible, the body was heavy, every step an effort to move through quicksand. I focused on just trying to remain vertical and not fall into the street.

Everything around me seemed to move in slow motion¹¹¹. We’re in a taxi riding through the empty streets, I have no idea what time it could be, it’s dark. The ominous towers of the haunted hospital get closer. Waiting in line at Emerg, I feel it coming on again, I ask the registrar for something to be sick in and she hands me a paper cup, I laugh and I see stars. Sebastian grabs the garbage can as I erupt a fountain of gore spraying the trash can with my blood. I am rushed into the I.C.U, a stark bright room with only a cold metal table. I continue vomiting gloriously, horror movie explosions of crimson spew keep coming and coming. The room gets cold and bright.

Sebastian breaks the somber tone with his impeccable bedside manner: “If you die can I have your laptop?” I can’t bring myself to speak but I manage a finger and quietly laugh myself unconscious.

Nate and Shawn are suddenly there, my pals, everyone’s there, I’m getting all the attention, like it’s my birthday. Seeing my friends is nice, we are laughing. It’s good to have friends, socializing is good for you. Good times. But I’m getting blurry, the brightness intensifies, cold white fluorescent lights blur everything. I am suddenly full of tubes.

I feel myself fading. Darkness is closing in. Welcoming me, pulling me away, pulling me apart and I go with it. I have found my mortality. The death I’ve craved. And all I have to report is it’s no big deal. When you go, you just go. It’s all ok.

A great feeling of satisfaction comes over me. There is no light at the end of the tunnel, no pearly gates, no angels with harps, just darkness swallowing me and everything going away. And I let it go. And it feels great. It feels like slipping into a warm bath of amniotic fluid.

In an incubated darkness lit by a dim red light, is a giant insect larva temple with a matrix of tentacles, countless IV’s, a breathing tube and a pissing tube, oxygen up the nose and a hose down the throat, a plasma tube and a drugs tube, and another drugs tube, inside the hive, metal snakes go in and out of my body like a building.

It is fresh and cool like a vernal dawn or autumn dusk, the doors are open, the womb of night embraces me. Nuit encloses me in a cloak of midnight blue speckled with stars. Boundaries of inside and outside are no more. Hard bright stars pepper the night sky, so bright they pierce the sky like bullet holes of bright white, so hard the edges fade to prisms of RGB cathode ray. The curtains part in a clearing surrounded by an enchanted forest. I feel the warmth of firelight like the periphery of a bush

party, bonfire, from the parlour room of an abandoned farm house, ancient wallpaper, bruised antique furniture, the smell of fresh soil and musty velvet. There are giant snails the size of armchairs with enormous jewels on their shells, huge cuddly bears and a fox in a golden tiara with large coloured jewels set in a filigree of silver and gold with green glass and rhinestones that sparkle in the firelight. We all congregate in a loose circle. There are smiling baby goats with big floppy ears prancing and fumbling around. I sit on the dirt and play with my new friends who feel like old friends.

Stained glass windows shine down. I feel weightless, unburdened, without a care in the world, almost without self, the animals guide me into the shadow world of nature, welcoming and swallowing me into forever. And I am finally in the moment. I am inside the mysteries of the universe. It's like disappearing into the starry sky, playing hide n' seek. I don't ever want to leave here.

I feel the warm hugs from bears and mystical creatures, filling me with calm. In a state of resignation I look upon the whole world as if from nowhere within it. There is only an endless dark expanse of pure release, my person is extinguished, it is finished and I am ready to calmly accept. Everything is just fine. The immortals start to fade, and I want to go with them but something half remembered clings to me, brothers, friends, mom, they need me. My humans are calling me back to the body, I can't leave them. As appealing as it is to fuck off this mortal coil, they need me. A warmth creeps through me like blood returning to a numb limb. I let go and I go to them.

There is a hard inconvenient brutality to consciousness. A body is solid, textured and cold, it feels, it itches, it's no kind of place to live. It's not at all likeable. But the hugs come and make it better.

My friends and brothers are there, the doctors told them to come say goodbye and watch me die when they turn off the life support for the third and final time. I've been gone for a week, but this time I breathed on my own. Fist bumps, and warm smiles. I can't speak or move, but I feel appreciated.

My generals and my besties are visiting. I'm happy to see them, Mat and Nate and Carlos and *Freddy are there* eager to offer their support, a hug, a laugh, a plan. We arrange transactions, the gears are set in motion and everything is in place.

I would've died. But I didn't. For no reason. Some ants get crushed and some go on living, for nothing. We go on living, the world keeps turning, the fire inside burns. The insects keep crawling. In the shadows, I am crawling too, a glint in my eye, full of potential. I smile, quietly proud. A wholesome smile, a sinister laugh. The smile crawls across my face like a shadow, lighting up my eyes with the fire of life, like the reflection in a knife.



Notes

Chapter 1

1. The Kinks, "A Well Respected Man", *Kwazy Kinks* EP, 1965

Chapter 3

2. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, 1956

Chapter 6

3. Charles Baudelaire, "Anywhere out of this world", 1917
4. Charles Manson via Skinny Puppy, "Worlock", 1989, sample of Charles Manson, or a Charles Manson impostor/actor reciting Manson's "Sneakyville / Sneak Evil" speech, 1970

Chapter 7

5. Bob Ross, the legendary creator of cheesy landscapes and over-the-couch masterpieces had a PBS television show *The Joy of Painting*, 1983-1994
6. (Aiwass dictating to) Aleister Crowley, *Liber LXV:II, The Book of the Law*, 1904

Chapter 10

7. Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, 2014
8. Gucci Mane, "Chasin' Paper", *Trap House III*, 2013
9. Arthur Rimbaud, at age 16, explained his approach to writing and living in a letter to Paul Demeny, dated 1871 (translations vary)
10. Percy Shelley played by Douglas Booth, *Mary Shelley*, 2017, dir. Haifaa Al-Mansour
11. Current 93, "I Have a Special Plan for This World", 2000, written by Thomas Ligotti
12. Arthur Rimbaud (paraphrase)
13. Gowan, "Criminal Mind", *Strange Animal*, 1985

Chapter 11

14. Schedule 1, Drug Scheduling, Controlled Substances Act, United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 2017
15. Holy Bible, English Standard Version (paraphrase)
16. Mary Shelley, on writing *Frankenstein* (also *Haunted Summer*, 1988, dir. Ivan Passer)
17. Various sources, too many to list, basically all rappers

Chapter 12

18. Marlon Brando, *The Wild One*, 1953, dir. Laslo Benedek
19. Nancy Reagan, anti-drug slogan of the 1980s
20. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, 1956
21. Raif Badawi
22. Jean Seberg as Patricia Franchini, *Breathless*, 1960, dir. Jean-Luc Godard
23. Monte Cazzaza, Iron Glove, Psychic TV, *Dreams Less Sweet*, 1983
24. *Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott

Chapter 15

25. Opening lines of *Kapital* by Karl Marx, 1867, echoed in *The Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord, 1967, and again in *Simulation and Simulacra* by Jean Baudrillard, 1981

26. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1999

Chapter 16

27. Bob Dylan, "Desolation Row", *Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965

Chapter 19

28. Elliot Gould as Phillip Marlowe, *The Long Goodbye*, 1973, dir. Robert Altman
29. Lauren Bacall as Marie 'Slim' Browning, *To Have and to Have Not*, 1944, dir. Howard Hawks

Chapter 20

30. e e cummings

Chapter 21

31. James 4:14, Holy Bible, The New *King James Version*, 1611
32. "In a society where ideology controls the minds of everyone, the only way to step outside the system is through crime" (source unknown)
33. Malcolm X
34. Paraphrasing Nazis at Nuremberg, etc.

Chapter 22

35. Daleks, *Doctor Who*, "The Escape", BBC, 1964 (Daleks first said "Exterminate!")
36. Travis Bickle, *Taxi Driver*, 1976, dir. Martin Scorsese

Chapter 23

37. Virginia Woolf, *from her diaries*, 1915

Chapter 24

38. *The Shining*, 1980, dir. Stanley Kubrick
39. Public Enemy, "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos", 1989

59. Soren Kierkegaard
60. *Trick Baby*, 1975, sampled by **JPEGMAFIA** in "Try Me", *Black Ben Carson*, 2016
61. George W. Bush
62. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 5th Century BC, and Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, 1967

Chapter 44

63. Eazy E, "Neighborhood Sniper", *5150: Home for the Sick*, 1992

Chapter 46

64. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999
65. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999
66. John 6:53–56, Holy Bible, English Standard Version

Chapter 51

67. Aleister Crowley, *Liber LXV:II, The Book of the Law*, 1904

Chapter 52

68. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Maxims and Arrows", *Twilight of the Idols*, 1889 and Kimmy Schmidt, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, 2015

Chapter 54

69. Gabor Maté
70. Johann Hari, *Chasing the Scream*, 2015
71. Velvet Underground & Nico, "I'm Waiting for the Man", 1967
72. John Giorno, *You Got to Burn to Shine*, 1994

Chapter 57

73. Nocturnal Emissions, "Let the Bad Times Roll", *Duty Experiment*, 1995

Chapter 60

74. Body Count, "Body Count", 1992

Chapter 61

75. *Breathless*, 1960, dir. Jean-Luc Godard

Chapter 62

76. The Cramps, "Love Me", 1983. Songwriters: Marty Lott / Claudia Colonna

Chapter 63

77. Dionne Warwick, "Heartbreaker", 1982

Chapter 76

95. Dante (paraphrase), *The Divine Comedy*, 1308
96. *It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946, dir. Frank Capra

Chapter 78

97. *Bukowski: Born into This*, 2003

Chapter 80

98. Sinéad O'Connor, "Nothing Compares 2 U", 1990 (written by Prince)
99. Nelly Arcan
100. Donna Lypchuk

Chapter 81

101. Dante (paraphrase), *The Divine Comedy*, 1308
102. Don Birnam, *The Lost Weekend*, 1945, dir. Billy Wilder
103. I wish to acknowledge the land which these condo outposts occupy, for thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Chapter 82

104. A misquote and development of "Nothing is true, everything is permitted" (Hassan-i Sabbāh), and Peter Pomerantsev's *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, 2014

105. Arthur Rimbaud

Chapter 85

106. *Barfly*, 1987, dir. Barbet Schroeder

Chapter 86

107. Peggy Lee, "Is That All There Is?", 1969. Songwriters: Jerry Leiber / Mike Stoller
108. Death in June, "Lord Winter", *Rose Clouds of Holocaust*, 1995

Chapter 87

109. Illustration for John Milton's *Paradise Lost* by Gustave Doré, 1866.

Chapter 88

110. "What is to give light must endure burning."
Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, 1946

Epilogue

111. Skinny Puppy, "Love in Vein", *Last Rights*, 1992

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

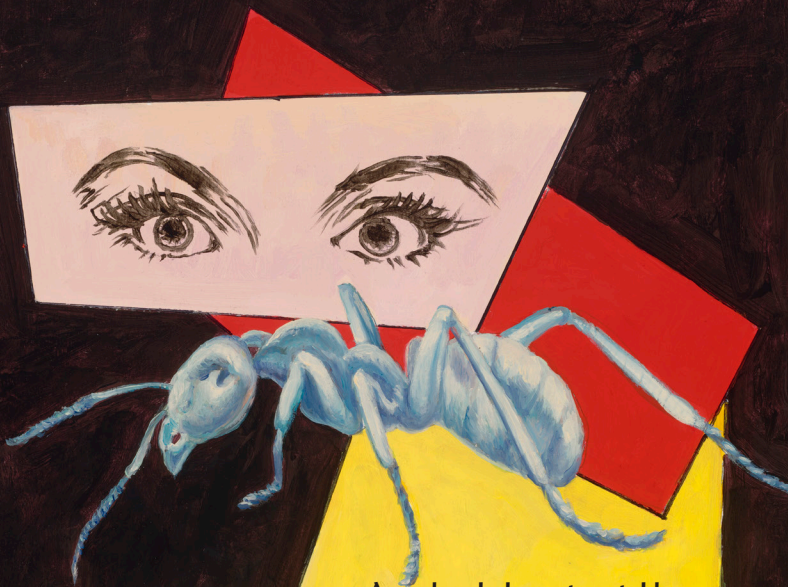
Jubal Brown (b. 1975) is a writer of autofiction and cultural critique, and a producer and presenter of contemporary art and events based in Toronto, Canada. He has shown extensively at media arts festivals in New York, London, Paris, etc. Brown graduated from the Ontario College of Art & Design in 2001, and George Brown College, Social Service Worker Program as an Addictions Counsellor in 2019.

Past projects include Toronto's legendary event series at abandoned industrial sites WASTELAND... (1996-2000), museum vomit intervention RESPONDING to ART (1996-1997), The Cultural Centre ART SYSTEM (2000-2003), multi-media label FAMEFAME (2002-2007), relational aesthetics collaborative The LAND of the LOST (2006-2007), the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)'s live audio/visual event series VIDEODROME (2004-2015), and the rhythmic noise club night SHIT FUN (2011-2015). Brown has exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) (before being banned) and MOCA Toronto. Commercially, he was formerly represented by ArtCore Gallery in Yorkville and the Distillery District. Canadian Art magazine called him "the dark prince of Toronto art."

Brown has self-published numerous pamphlets, 'zines, and manifestos over the years, published in The Globe and Mail and various art publications and catalogues.

DIE SCUM: Sex & Drugs & Contemporary Art is his first novel.

goldenbrown.me



A punk pulp love story told by a post-post-modern dandy, boy-about-town, lost in the perverse underworld of sex & drugs & culture wars. We follow our narrator, drug dealer to the art scene—a hipster libertine obsessed with old movies, happily-ever-afters, and ant invasions—on his paranoid deluge into alcoholic depression and unironic misanthropy. A true hymn to individuality laced with dark humour and suicidal self-help satire. Is he living the dream? Or is the nightmare eating him alive? And will he find his happily ever after?