

Oogle Gothic
Guttermouth
April 2025

In memory of

Samuel Rodriguez-Carrillo (29)

Victor “Vinnie” Spieldenner (31)

Janine Lascelles (64)

Grant Biggers (23)

Gail Sacco (63)

Daniel Eckert “Dreamer” (27)

Bryan Carrillo (23)

Jared Medina (24)

Benjamin Mastik “Canada” (early 20s)

Benjamin Mowrey “Buttons” (31)

Philly (early 20s)

Kitty (early 30s)

Baby Sarah (passed in childbirth)

Aunt Liz (57)

Aunt Jan (32)

Zorro (Orion)

Mowgli

Bear

Beardog

Shyguy

Sushi the Cat

Written on Lands Properly Belonging to the Coast Salish Peoples and the Duwamish, stolen through Genocide that was and is carried out by White Anglos in the westward expansion and current fidelity of the so called United States of America.

**Oogle is a slur. Never use it. Don't say it. Unless you live the life, just keep it out of your mouth. Thanks.

Content Warnings:

- Sex
- Suicide
- Violence against women
- Mentions of Incest
- Mentions of Rape
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Police Brutality
- The Devil
- God
- Death
- Cockroaches and other creepy crawlers
- White People Being Shitty (™)
- Profanity (the f word mostly)
- Christianity
- Homophobia
- Transphobia
- Racism

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1 **Naked City and The Harrowing Doom of Yog-Soggoth**

He put his hands on her in a dark vacant lot under the shadow of the STRAT. The weeds bore witness as she fought back with her voice, legs, and hands. She wasn't afraid of him. He grew tired after a few seconds, the rage escaping out of his pores into the hot midnight air. She coughed and wheezed. She beat him as soon as he let go. Violence, a friend, a fire in the eye of a devil that lives within all of us. Her name was Lili, and he was some worthless shit.

“How could you be so stupid!” She yelled at him. There was no color in the world, just a tunnel of heat and pressure. She snatched his glasses and threw them over a chain link fence. Lili wailed on him. It was around 4:30 in the morning, thirty minutes after the freight train they were supposed to catch was supposed to appear. It had never arrived. In other places, the move is to sit there and wait it out. But in Naked City, the heat climbs over triple digits by midmorning. There was no cover. There was no way to stay past the dawn.

“Lili, shut up!” He barked, now legally blind.

Hopouts were forsaken places. Cursed places. Forgotten places. Where Lili and the worthless shit were kicking the shit out of each other, a rush of ocean foam from ten million years ago fell on a hot, Mojave breeze. Blood leaked out from somewhere but it was too dark to see it. Lili and the worthless shit were trespassing, waiting for the freight train to take them across the giant desert to Salt Lake City.

“You're such a pussy,” Lili told him, full of disdain. She shoved him down. He tried to light a cigarette but she broke all of

them. He looked down at the pile of ripped paper and sunk his head down low. Lili kept talking some rude shit. Seeing the garbage strewn around, the plastic bags and cigarillo wrappers, the glass and the candy wrappers, a single creosote bush, he glanced at a cockroach scuttling not away, but toward him. To his surprise, the cockroach began to speak. It was a squeaky speech, but not the physical vibrations we understand as noise; it was dark and foreboding, and it was in his head.

The cockroach whispered, "I can't believe you just did that."

Lili interrupted-- "Are you even listening, you bastard? Hey!" She threw a rock and missed his head.

"What?"

"You ruined my life!"

The cockroach became two, became five, became twenty. They said, as if in a choir,

"You said you'd never do it again. You lied. You're a liar. We know who you are. You can't even look at us, you know we are right. You're disgusting. You fuck everything up."

Lili said, "I knew I should have listened to my mother--"

He stammered, "I had to. She wouldn't stop. I just wanted her to stop."

Lili cried out of rage, "Who -- who are you talking to?"

The cockroaches sang, "Fat, ugly, clumsy, desperate, pathetic."

"Fat, ugly, clumsy, desperate, pathetic."

"Fat, ugly, clumsy, desperate, pathetic."

He put his hands over his face. "I don't want to live anymore."

Lili spat, "Fuck You!" Then she left his dumb ass.

The cockroaches squealed in delight. As he sobbed, they whispered in unison, “Come, be with us.”

He cried out of rage, “What the fuck!”

“Listen to us now. We are here for all time. We are part of a power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good. We are servants of the Great All-One, Yog-Soggoth. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Soggoth. Come, be with us,” The cockroaches tempted him. “We will bring you what you desire.”

“I want to kill myself!”

“Yes, do it, so we can eat you!”

“I deserve it!”

“Yes, you do.”

“I’ll do it!”

“Come, feed us. Feed us.”

He was a woman beater. A piece of shit. He *should* kill himself. He sat there, staring at the railyard gravel, surrendering to the cockroaches. They crawled all over him. In the distance, a bum with a shopping cart slowly approached the other side of the tracks. A hot wind blew like a furnace. The thwipping sound of what some local residents call a ghetto bird swarmed the sky, a spotlight jerking from alley to alley. Somewhere, a car backfired. He moaned softly as the lights of Vegas glittered, the neon flashed, and the cockroaches quietly consumed him alive in the darkness of Naked City.

Part I

“To light a candle is to cast a shadow.”

-- Ursula K. LeGuin, 1968

2 Dreamer

Dreamer you met back in 2014 and the both of you drank sidewalk slams, that's black raspberry steel reserve poured into a 40oz, at the hopout in Vegas. He was white and balding and looked a decade older than his age. He was kind and mean with a shaved face and thick arm hair. He hopped freight trains, did heroin, spoke to the devil, really respected poetry. Dreamer was ugly and sunburnt and made due with his charm. It was a wild, angry charm.

You two slammed them down and he got to telling you that you needed to get out of the city with him. He needed a roaddog. A train of IMs bellowed through the hopout and he grabbed one on the fly, drinking his steelie and yelling "Get on! It's easy!" You knew because not two months before you were exactly where he was, only hundreds of miles northwest behind an IKEA in the East Bay. You turned Dreamer down that night. He left after sleeping off the booze and you didn't see him for another two years.

He fell further into trainkid culture and that 'Gimme Gimme' mentality but periodically kept up the offer of road-dogging with him. It was weird that he was going to the Gathering at all. Most trainkids hated it. He wanted to get to the Gathering to get laid, or see an ex, or something. You think it's because he was sentimental and actually enjoyed it, but couldn't admit it. He was out in Tennessee, nowhere near Vegas.

You spent most of your last check on a bus ticket and met up with Dreamer in Johnson City in mid June. An eleven year old boy all by himself in a Kāṣāya sat next to you on the Greyhound, eventually placing his head on your shoulder and smiling as the

sun rose over Arizona. The bus trip itself was three days and nights. The Gathering was in early July up in Vermont and there were two other kids Dreamer was bringing along. They picked you up outside the Greyhound Station in Johnson City at nine thirty at night. You four, two dogs, guitars, and packs were supposed to fit in a PT Cruiser belonging to a kid named Blue. The other kid was something like Pancakes or some shit but it was a stupid name and you ended up calling him by his government name, Brendan. The PT hit the highway and ten minutes later it died. It was 10 PM and there was a rush to leave so Blue left it right there on the side of the freeway and a friend of theirs took you to a truck stop, where you camped at the top of a hill behind the store.

In the morning you four split into teams of two to catch a ride. You and Dreamer had the onramp. Blue and Brendan had the truck-stop. Hours, in fact all of the next day, you waited for a ride. The truck-stop eventually won out and a lumberjack of a truck driver got all four of you in his cab and made you listen to Larry the Cable Guy at a decibel not meant for human ears. But he drove through the night and you ended up in Pennsylvania, outside of Scranton, at one of those mega-truck-stops with a laundromat and a movie theater and a diner.

Brendan free-fooded the diner and got you all a few platters to share, courtesy of the kind but poor ass waitress. Hours went by as you flew a sign for northbound, Albany or Syracuse. It was sunny and warm but not hot and you sat in the grass playing cards, Brendan and Blue smoking weed, playing with Blue and Brendan's two labradors. Dreamer got a rideshare to Vermont with your \$20 with an old creepy Prism hippie in the back of a pickup to the final destination: Prism Family of Living Light's National Gathering.

Lots can be said about Prism, what it is and isn't, what it was, who's there and why. Plenty of other people have their baggage about it, but for those not in the know about what 15,000 dirty ass hippies do in the woods once a year, it's a novelty. To put it shortly, Prism is where Burning Man stole their ten principles from and then charged people \$500 a ticket to attend. Prism was, is, and always will be FREE.

Prism was created in the 1970s by some white people trying to get away from modern Babylon and create a more utopian, egalitarian society. That was the main idea, where everyone with a bellybutton is welcome; where freedom is celebrated; where no matter your socio-economic status or skin color or religion, you can come, eat for free, eat vegan, and be free, if only for a few weeks. There are also regional gatherings throughout the US and across the world. Nationals takes place in a different US National Forest every summer for a July 4th silent prayer for peace, decided by several council times anyone can attend; and by scouts looking for a place in the deep woods for 15,000 people, with adequate water and distance from Babylon, where the impact of that many humans won't drastically disturb the resilient and fragile local ecosystem, unlike virtually every other festival.

Far from being a festival, and far from reaching such a promise of utopian dreams, every year is some fucked shit. Sometimes local tribes and clans of Indigenous folk disapprove of it happening at all. Local townspeople disapprove of it happening at all. Local papers create hysteria over homeless thieves and unsanitary bums and disapprove of it happening at all. The US Federal Government definitely disapproves of it happening at all. The FBI has put Prism Family on their Terrorist Watchlist. Rumors have even suggested that the US government used ticks as

a bioweapon on gatherers, among their many other historical atrocities. Forest Service and other Law Enforcement groups will ticket and cite thousands of vehicles and detain hundreds of people for marijuana, drugs, or outstanding warrants from other places, if they can find them. The counties Gatherings take place in will host a special Kangaroo court in a trailer to deal with travelers and citations.

The men at Prism often make it a dangerous place for women and children and while in the abstract, rape is taken seriously, perpetrators' identities are often kept quiet for fear of retaliation. Some people say that the problems in Prism merely reflect the problems of Babylon, and that building a temporary city in the woods will always have these problems as long as they exist in society. Many of the greybeards say Prism is a prayer for world peace. Many younger people just go to party. Some go to practice their religion.

As a refuge for (mostly white) travelers every year for half a century as well as plenty of other hippies, oddballs, wooks, sociopaths, dreadnecks, fugitives, normies with kids, oogles, Deadheads, Phishheads, festi kids, REI hikers, Walmart campers, RV dwellers, townies, trailer park locals, Rez folks, college kids, drop outs, burnouts, squatters, punks, crusties, stinkies, bums, tramps, hobos, vagabonds, nobodies, vagrants, nomads, indigents, itinerants, underage runaways, stowaways, novelists, painters, dancers, chefs, gardeners, ambassadors, fakers, freaks, holy men, holier women, two-spirited people, juggalos, juggalettes, fairies, ghouls, abolitionists, pirates, preppers, child molesters, rapists, witches, sorcerers, cultists, occultists, Untouchables, Roma, Mullo, Pagans, Boddhisatvas, Krishnas, Sufis, Jews, Muslims, Jesus freaks, Hindus, Zoroastrians, immigrants, ex-pats, refugees,

carnies, rogues, thieves, charlatans, warriors, the Devil, and Vampires, Prism was a shining light, all organized by kitchens. Shining Light being the name of one of them, kitchens became the focal point for which all other non-organization happened. Or didn't happen. Or didn't not-not happen. Prism often had its own language, based in irony, puns, and non-descript descriptors that wouldn't hold up in a court of law, which may or may not be explained here. A curious reader just needs to ask their local hippies out on the onramp.

Your rideshare wanted you all to spange up a gas station in Bennington, Vermont, to which Dreamer said, "Fuck that," and got out the truck. "We can hitch from here."

The Gathering was less than an hour away and there were plenty of other rubbertramps and hitchhikers passing through on their way there. You jumped out with him, leaving Blue and Brendan to their fate. You immediately went to the liquor store. Liquor wasn't "allowed" at Prism but this rule was broken every year. \$100 of your last minimum wage check went to pipe tobacco, rolling papers, and two half-gallons of Old Crow. You gave some papers and tobacco to Dreamer. You and him stood by a highway marker that said HITCHHIKING IS PROHIBITED and stuck your thumbs out. Found a ride pretty quickly from a woman that lived nearby and watched as the tall spruce trees engulfed you. You gave her the coordinates and she said she knew where it was, that it was close to her house.

Cars started to appear parked on either side of the road. More and more until, to the left, was a little metal Forest Service gate and a homemade bedsheet banner. The banner hung ten feet from the ground in-between two trees with paracord and on the banner was a giant blue-violet painted hand and letters that spelled

WELCOME HOME! Hippies were on either side of the banner and the gate sitting around, talking, other hippies on the trail with gear and handcarts, old hippies and young hippies and the smell of weed and fart and tea tree oil was everywhere. A toddler waved at you.

Dreamer found a friend right away and you all went to work on one of the half-gallons of Old Crow. Dreamer and you and his friend chatted for a minute and chugged Old Crow like tomorrow didn't exist. The sun started to move toward the horizon and it was important to move into the gathering and set up camp somewhere among the kitchens and bodies and bliss pits. Dinner was being served soon, too. His friend said goodbye and you started the slow, long walk in. Most everything inside the gate was a good distance inward. Depending on who you ask it's one mile or five miles. Realistically, it was only a thousand feet before he tried to start some shit.

“Yo, you never gave me those rolling papers,” He said. You did, and you'd give him more if you could. You told him that.

“Man, I did already, and I'm saving the rest of 'em. I don't know when I'm going to town next.”

“You needa stop worrying about those Babylonian tickets,” He said, referring to money. “Gimme my rolling papers,” He commanded. It was no request.

“Your papers?” You asked, stunned at his audacity. The next response wasn't a quip or a gripe but a fist to your face. You hit back and then you were scrapping with this motherfucker over rolling papers. You snatched his shitty ass cowboy hat off his head and put a jab into his shoulder. His boots dug into the dirt as he grabbed and threw you. While you were on the ground, he threw your glasses into the woods and kicked you in the gut. You

couldn't breathe for a minute, long enough for him to take both half gals of whiskey and your papers. You deserved it. You blacked out maybe, from the fight or the liquor.

The next morning was better. You got some breakfast at a kitchen inside the gathering. Kitchens are a Prism mainstay. Kitchen crews dug slit trenches (shitters) and laid water lines, filtered live water into potable water, set up stoves and firepits, brought food supply, housed food supply, gathered firewood, built trails, maintained relative sanitation, sometimes hauling water or propane or dry goods or some other heavy ass shit miles in and out of the woods, among hundreds of other tasks. Some kitchens set up solar showers, others built giant webs of rope in the trees. Lovin' Ovens made mud ovens out of old oil drums and mud. Main Supply also helped with much of this process. Food was found through Main Supply, individual donations, food banks, food stamp recipients generously donating some of their limited funds, locally farmed produce, unsellable produce, second-hand produce, barely ripe produce, sometimes rotting produce, mostly perfect produce.

Prism usually (not always) had at least one kitchen, and if it's big enough, Main Supply. Also essential for a gathering this large is a medic tent, stocked with homeless or volunteer (often both) professionals, a few cots, medicine, thousands of things both holistic and traditional. A place called "Info" with actual bulletin boards helps people find lost people, objects, rides, big trades. Main Gate is what it sounds like, with one caveat. To keep alcohol out of Prism, a resolution was made between alcoholics and non-alcoholics for alcoholics to keep at Main Gate to scare away normies, yuppies, and cops, and to stay the fuck away from children and everyone else.

Main Gate is what some call A-Camp; to some people, they are not the same thing. Parking Lot also existed, for the really sick alcoholics that had no money and always needed a ride to town and a nice fella to buy some more medicine. Parking Lot, too, was someone's name, probably because he was always there. There's Handicamp for the elderly and disabled; Jesus Camp, Home Shalom, Krishna Kitchen, and a few others were more organizationally religious kitchens. There's We Home Kitchen and Granola Funk Theater. East Coast urbanites had Green and Purple Kitchen. Instant Soup promised to have food 24 hours a day, meaning if you were hungry at 3 AM or needed company, Instant Soup would be there. There was Turtle Soup Kitchen. Kiddie Village for the young ones, mothers, families. Stockpot Kitchen. Fat Kids Kitchen always had the best pizza. Pirate Camp, Dirty Kid Village, Tiny Camp, Fairy Camp, Hobo Alley. GOAT (Get on a Train) Camp. Camps were not necessarily hooked into Main Supply and had no commitment to making or serving food at Main Circle or at all, although they often did. They merely existed. A few non-organized organizations served coffee. Montana Mud, Coffee Mafia. Tea Time always had tea, served by tea fairies in beards and dresses. In Vermont specifically, you really took to Camp Nothing, which had the invariable promise of uh--nothing.

Main Meadow was where dinner was served, every night of the official gathering as well as many, many nights before and a few nights after. Main Meadow dinners were prepared by various kitchens and served by anyone willing. Everyone's an active participant, or should be, in some way, at Prism. Main Meadow dinners had a particular ritual: a conch horn is blown and can be heard from miles away. People knew that dinner will be served soon. Kitchens knew to hurry the fuck up. Gatherers start to

gather, in Main Meadow in a loose circle, almost always concentric, around an invisible center. Horn blew again, more people arrived. People chatted, sat, smoked bowls, unlatched their blissware from their carabiners. Dogs played and begged and searched for scraps. Children ran around. The food collected, focalizers focalized, organizers organized, worried anxious Main Suppliers looked worried, a marching band began to play. It's the Magic Hat! "Main Meadow dinners rely on donations," they sang, while some naked man played a tuba and a child passed around a literal hat. As the Hat Song played, people made announcements. THE MAGIC HAT RAISED SEVEN HUNDRED NINETY SIX DOLLARS AND FIFTY TWO CENTS TODAY! They celebrated. Announcements continued. BURY YOUR DOG SHIT! They yelled. Someone yelled back BURY YOUR DOG! Someone else: WASH YOUR HANDS. USE THE SHITTER. THIS IS HOW, somebody mimicking taking a shit. And, most importantly, DON'T TOUCH YOUR THING TO THE THING.

Then, the Oming begins. You hold hands with your neighbors and link five hundred people together, each concentric circle turning into waves of energy. Om. Everyone breathes. The whole thing is a prayer. It's a reminder. It's a gift, that we are all the same, even though we are vastly different. It's powerful and vulnerable and courageous and warm. It's dangerous and easily corruptible and fragile. It's appropriative. It's 500 or 10,000 or any other number of people all believing, at the same moment in time, that another world is possible.

Food that was served at Main Circle was always vegan. That was a hard and fast rule. Each kitchen had two or three volunteers carrying the pots around the circle, splashing an amount from

their big spoons into your blissware. There was also a guy walking around with a container full of Nutritional Yeast (Nooch) yelling, for emphasis, YEEEEAAAASSST. Protein was delivered through the yeast and also through an unholy amount of legumes. Some Kitchens did rice and beans. Some did salads or stir fry. Some did pasta. Some gave you soup. Some deep-fried everything. Sometimes they switched it all up and gave you a culinary explosion that could outdo even the most celebrated chefs. Has Gordon Ramsey ever cooked vegan for a thousand people on a regular ass firepit in the middle of the woods in the mud, in the dark, by headlamp, with food scavenged from food banks? Every night after dinner, a large bonfire was erected, a drum circle began, and continued until dawn.

You met Tinker Bell and Oscar at Main Circle that night and wound up sleeping in their “yard” right outside the tent they shared. Tinker Bell and Oscar were friends from Ohio and were not Prism kids really. They sometimes worked out of a drug house in Lima, Ohio, other times doing legitimate work. You really took to them and spent the next few days hanging out all day. Tinker Bell had a German Shepherd mutt that he swore had a little wolf in him he admirably called Bear or Beardog. Tinker Bell put up caution tape upside down and backward around both tents, to signify a “yard” and to keep hippies from wandering through it. Tinker Bell also built a little fire, something frowned upon by people in the non-organization of Prism. “No personal fires!” some guy scolded every now and then. Camp was on a hillside right behind Instant Soup Kitchen. You needed a name for your camp and motley crew that seemed to be growing.

And so you named it. “Camp Noituac,” you said. “You don’t know us ‘cus we don’t talk about it!”

“What?” Oscar laughed.

“Caution said backwards!” You said. “You don’t know us ‘cus we don’t talk about it!”

Tinker Bell had a truck and you went to town with him a few times. He told you as you drove out the Gathering and saw Forest Rangers with a hippie in cuffs about his experience getting into the Gathering. He was a fighter, and talked shit to the Rangers as they tried to pull some shit on him. They set up a checkpoint and Tinker Bell knew the checkpoint to be illegal, that in order for it to be a legal checkpoint, the Rangers or Sheriffs or whoever needed to identify that there was an upcoming checkpoint and allow an alternative route. Because there were no road signs posted explaining that a checkpoint was upcoming, it was illegal for them to check him or search the vehicle or anything else. So Tinker Bell told the cops this information, and the cops didn’t like it very much. They demanded to search his truck (it was clean) and when Tinker Bell refused, the cops yanked him from the driver’s seat and put him in cuffs while they ripped his truck apart. Luckily, the truck was close enough to the Gathering and Beardog was with Oscar, somewhere inside already. The cops told Tinker Bell he was under arrest and then drove him miles away. They threatened to kill him. The cops stopped their truck and threw him out, then wailed on him with billy clubs. When he was about to pass out, they removed the handcuffs and drove off. Tinker Bell walked five miles back, sore and bleeding, to the main dirt road, through windy twists and turns and forks, and found his truck. You couldn’t believe it. He talked about how spineless all the hippies are, and how no one wants to fight back against the pigs.

In town, you bought beer and more rolling papers. You were almost out of money but you didn’t care. You also checked

your phone for the first time in a week. Due to Dreamer, you were distraught. But you persevered, collecting new friends at the Gathering everyday, spending mornings at Camp Nothing shit-talking with other bums, yelling at people on the trail.

“Show us your asshole!” They shouted to strangers.

They were collecting pubic hair in a coffee can to turn it into a beard for one unlucky camp member. They were a fun little group. They built a little skynet that could fit two or three people five feet up off the hillside. You helped them with a few little tasks but never fully committed. Camp Nothing certainly had its workhorses, men and women that gathered water and food everyday of Prism.

People met along the trail and yelled, “WE LOVE YOU!”

“WELCOME HOME!”

They hugged for twenty minutes at a time, complete strangers.

Some kissed.

Others stared into your soul to try and steal it!

Oscar woke up one morning, looked at all the tents, looked at you, and said, “Well, there goes the neighborhood!” Tinker Bell was constantly whacking a machete into the brush and the clearing looked to others like a sign to set up camp. Tinker Bell was salty though.

“Why everybody gotta come here? We were here first!” He stomped.

Nic@Nite wasn't quite a kitchen or a camp. The service they provided Prism was so unique and important: they ensured all the smokers in the woods had a cigarette. They collect hundreds

if not thousands of dollars of rolling tobacco of all kinds, mostly pipe tobacco because it's cheapest (and also cleanest, so they say), and roll cigarettes all day long to pass out after Main Circle or at big events or on the trail or anywhere else. Because of this service, they are often treated much like other service providers at Prism: servants. Capitalism has instilled in all of us this notion of servitude, and unless you consciously, consistently, rid yourself of this dynamic, it remains and will remain. Even a Gathering of so-called "conscious people" had many, many that were not aware. Including yourself sometimes.

At the same time, Nic@Nite is so valuable that much of what they do is excused by the greater community. They are the frat of Prismland: the angry, loud, fun-loving, sexist, elitist career traveler types all bonded together for family and status. Nic@Nite was a status. Dreamer was a Nic@Niter and he wouldn't let you forget it. These motherfuckers were a secret street society with a camp that year in Vermont fenced off by wooden pikes, a drawbridge-style-gate, doll-heads, dildos, scarecrows, and dinosaur toys placed strategically for maximum terror.

To be a Nic@Niter, they haze you to prove your commitment to excellence at the task at hand. They slap nicotine patches on probate Nic@Neters and make them do lines of snuff and smoke multiple cigarettes at once, all while the probates do handstands, planks, and suicides and reciting the Nic@Niter motto. Then your basket is filled with tobacco, your pockets with rolling papers, and a priority is given to you at kitchens for food, weed, and the very valuable name-brand tailor made cigarette. In order for a Nic@Niter to smoke, you must order the Nic@Niter to take a break. Then they can only smoke whatever you give them to smoke.

To take up smoking as a hobby or a point of pride is to embrace with warmth and enthusiasm the slow, slow suicide that smoking delivers. That you are not worthy or don't belong on this Earth. That you should die. This quiet unconscious subtext informed much of what Nic@Niters did or said or believed, as well as trainkids at large and the traveling community at larger. Maybe much of addiction is rooted in this belief, maybe not. Can't speak for all addicts, or all Nic@Niters, or all travelers, or all smokers. You just know what it meant for you.

People wore t-shirts and scarves, skirts, leggings, boots. Old greybeards that lived in houses loved bright tie-dye, fresh and clean from Tide Color-Safe bleach at the beginning of the Gathering until the inevitable dirty filthy end. Crystals, body modifications, stick-n-poke tattoos. Halloween costumes. Handmade jewelry. Giant earplugs. Some wore or wore Roma traveler fabrics, or called themselves g*psies. Some wore Indian dress with saris and lehengas or Kāṣāyas. Then there's the Deadhead kids with their Grateful Dead tie-dye, the nudists not wearing much of anything, the occasional normie, the REI gear camper.

Trainkids had a specific dress code. Carhartt bibs, matted hair, a dog in tow, skanks worn around their necks, for the purpose of keeping carbon monoxide out of their lungs when a train goes through a tunnel, but also for wiping their chins when they eat or drink, to stay warm, to conceal identity. The skanks themselves became symbols of status comparable to how many miles you trekked. Motherfuckers would tell greenhorns to piss on their skank to keep it smelling fresh. Some did.

One morning, women at Prism marched down the trail demanding Prism eject a gatherer, Silver Larry, for his crimes against women. He dosed an underage girl, or tried to touch her,

or did touch her. It was Prism's *#MeToo*. Gender Based violence was a longstanding problem and this was a stand. Committees formed and councils talked endlessly about whether the story was true, what to do. This carried on far past the Gathering for many years. Many gatherers became apologists for Silver Larry, or other men with other deep-seated problems. Silver Larry was indeed ejected, but the darkness and distrust remained. Many women rejected Prism, though violence was often worse elsewhere. How many women that could have made the Gathering or traveling a better place were coerced, intimidated? How many nightmares? It made you think of your own past violence, how to correct it, why it was there. No one seemed to have answers.

June turned into July as you lived in the largest commune in North America, nestled in the Green Mountains. Electric orange Salamanders scurried among the bright green ferns of Vermont and the dogs of Prism chased away any other wildlife. Some people would say there were two Gatherings: those of the humans and those of dogs. Many people let their dogs roam free. There were hundreds of dogs forming packs, bonding, running, playing, fucking. Many kids also never neutered their dogs, feeling this violated the dogs' wellbeing, which meant hostile aggression between them sometimes interrupted even the most peaceful of events. Often you would hear or say, "Dog out!" or "Get your Dog!" or "My Dog! Right here, right now!" A Law Enforcement Officer shot a dog at Oregon Nationals the next year.

Spruce and Dorian were new friends to each other and they moved into your neighborhood during the boom of the first few days in July, when everyone coming to the Gathering tries to be there for the Prayer Circle and celebrations on the 4th. Spruce was a hacker undocumented in the United States, long beard and in his

mid-late 30s. He was a bit of a wingnut, and a bit of a sexist thirsty pig. He had drugs though, and was friendly. Dorian was a kid with a beautiful golden face and hair. He was kind, smart, funny. He was cute too; a poet, a musician. He had a Jim Morrison air about him, although Dorian was much too nice and much too sweet to be anywhere close to the conniving, manipulative, cunning Morrison. That made you like him even more. Would you really like Jim Morrison if you met him?

They loved each other and introduced themselves as brothers. They acted like lovers.

The night of the 3rd you wandered all the way to a blisspit at Fat Kids' Kitchen on the other side of the Gathering without a headlamp. You fell asleep listening to drama about a puppeteer and a friend he left on the side of the road. They had a romance at one time.

When you awoke, you saw the aftermath of using a sleeping bag so close to the blisspit. Burn holes everywhere. You sighed, then remembered that this was a silent morning. Besides dogs, you couldn't hear a thing. You saw Dreamer from a distance sitting with someone you didn't know. They looked close, whispering to each other. They kissed.

That was the last time you saw Dreamer alive. Dreamer died by suicide a year and a half later.

Around noon, the dinner conch blew and everyone gathered in Main Meadow. Fifteen thousand people in one circle, stretching around the meadow, oming. A deep breathe in, and an Om outward. Fifteen thousand people became one huge organism as power radiated back and forth along the circle, down into the sacred earth, and up to the sky. World peace seemed not just possible but inevitable. After fifteen minutes of breathing and

oming, everyone cheered and a drum circle began. People started dancing. Clothes came off. Babies were put on the shoulders of fathers while they pranced through the meadow. The Hare Krishnas sang and chanted and formed a conga line of spiritual emancipation. At regular intervals, screams of elongated WE LOVE YOUs emitted past the tops of the beech trees, echoing through space and time.

WEEEEEEE LOOOOOOOOOOVEEE
YOOOOOUUUUU!

Some people were already trying to leave the Gathering. The trail was filled with people with signs asking for rides everywhere: Canada, NYC, Montreal, Maine, West, South, California. Someone's always trying to get to California. The night of the 4th Spruce and Dorian invited you inside their tent to discuss poetry and take drugs. The Main Meadow's drum circle produced an ecstatic, nervous energy that gushed throughout the gathering. People were naked, high, fucking, laughing, dancing, drumming, working, wandering, lost. The energy levels there in Main Meadow were just too much for you and instead you sat with Spruce and Dorian. Spruce had a guru vibe although he was pretty self involved. Someone came knocking on the tent and it was someone you wished you never met.

Her name was Maggie. She had matted blonde hair down to her ass, vacant eyes, and a cavalier demeanor. She immediately took off her top and did drugs with you three-- it was some kind of amphetamine procured by Spruce that you put on your tongue. Spruce and Dorian both caressed and held her breasts as she sighed, boringly and longingly, wishing to be somewhere else. She

called herself Buzzard. Spruce spoke loftily about the musician Grimes and Free Love, whatever the hell that is.

Over the next few days, the Gathering wound down. Someone at Dinner Circle called for Prism people to come with him to Philadelphia to protest the DNC. His name was Diamond Dave. He proclaimed that the Shining Light kitchen bus was headed there, and you felt around the idea from other Shining Light members to catch a ride with them. It didn't sound likely. Tinker Bell and Oscar left the 6th. Spruce left without saying goodbye. Lauren was gone. Your only neighbors were Dorian and Maggie. You explained your intentions to Dorian and Maggie of going to Philadelphia to protest the DNC's all-but-endorsement of Hillary Clinton. Clinton's foreign policy, her war-profiteering, her arrogant racism and classism, it all drove you crazy. She was the capitalist class. She had ties to big oil, big banking institutions-- the enemy of the people.

Dorian didn't care, Maggie wanted to go wherever Dorian went.

So you got to the road out of the gathering and got a ride to town and the three of you slept behind a Denny's parking lot.

3 Squat Possums

The next day, you, Dorian, and Maggie caught a ride with a Dominican truck driver to the outskirts of Philadelphia. He loved you, even asking if you wanted to go to Atlantic City and do coke with him. You laughed and said sure, but the dude had work to do. He dropped you off in Doylestown, the edge of local train service to Philly. It was dark by then, with no trains to Philadelphia until the next morning.

“Drop us here,” You directed. It was a park a little ways away. “We can camp here,” You told Dorian and Maggie. But you weren’t alone. There were a few other bums in the distance. You could hear them chattering.

Then you heard a shriek. “OI! SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

A murder of crows got scared away. Beyond them were four kids, a half gallon, and what looked like a very serious card game. As you approached, you heard at least three dogs sound the alarm of an intruder. Immediately, all eyes were upon you.

“Oi,” You said, stunned.

“Oi oi, what’s good?” Kali immediately responded, not looking up from her hand of cards on the ground. Dorian and Maggie gathered their bags and started to walk toward the circle.

Kali, as you came to know, was an alcoholic in her early/mid-20s, from Long Beach. She was Black with a set of healthy locs, and stood at 5’4”. She was a trainrider, a Lover, a Fighter. Angry as fuck, funny as fuck. She had a black lab puppy named Princess Peach that she talked about constantly. Kali wore shirts that showed her midriff and long skirts, leggings. She often went barefoot.

Kali was yelling at her boyfriend, Hobbit. Hobbit, as the name suggested, stood at 6'4", was from Montana, and was white, with a deep voice, broad shoulders, and short, strawberry blond hair. He liked Oi! and Speed Metal and had studs on his baseball hat, with the word "HATERADE" scrawled in black Sharpie on the underside of the visor, which was bent up. Hobbit had a small face tattoo under his eye and wore eyeliner with painted nails, a punk rock t-shirt, denim jacket, denim jeans, and skate shoes.

Also sitting in the circle was Suzie from Los Angeles. She was Mexican but called herself a g*psy, a wild woman with a dream of living out of a covered wagon, hunting deer, and picking grapes in Oregon. Suzie wore a headscarf and a skank, earth-tone leggings, a dusty metal band t-shirt, an earth-tone vest over that, a tattered patched-up jacket over that, boots. The three of them were a tight little unit. Suzie had a puppy named Dank, Princess Peach's brother.

Then there was a guy that didn't hang out for long. His name was Seattle and he had a guitar in his lap. Seattle didn't talk much but he did play, often improvising.

"What's up, where you guys coming from?" Hobbit asked.

"Vermont," Dorian said. Then, "What about you?"

"Oh shit, I don't even know." Hobbit and Suzie looked at each other and laughed. You did too.

You said, "You guys trying to hop out?"

"If we can get our lazy asses up in time," Hobbit said. Then he pointed at Dorian's guitar, "You play?"

"Sometimes, I'm not good," Dorian said sheepishly.

Kali took a long schwill. "This bitch was just subjecting us to Johnny Hobo...*again*. Fucking oogle."

Maggie showed her ass immediately. “Who’s Johnny Hobo?”

Kali looked stunned. Hobbit said, “Who’s Johnny Hobo? Who’s Johnny Hobo!”

“He’s the patron saint of Oogles,” You said.

Kali laughed. “Something like that.” You rolled her a cigarette. Then one for you.

“What’s your dog’s name?” Maggie asked Hobbit.

Hobbit said, “Oh that’s Diogenes. Or sometimes I call him Dio.”

Kali said, “Fucking nerd. Who am I sleeping with? Jesus Christ Suzie.” Kali glanced at Suzie and Suzie leaned to her side and farted. They both laughed.

“Diogenes was a G, dude. Shut up. Like you can even read.” Hobbit took Kali’s cigarette.

Seattle started to play a Johnny Hobo song. It morphed into an Against Me! song.

Hobbit slurred out some garbled lyrics.

It was corny and overdone but you liked these guys. Hell, it wasn’t Days n Daze. Dorian and Maggie wandered off, an item for the moment. You sat up with this new crew and drank. Kali put the cards away.

“What brings you to Philly?” Suzie asked.

“The DNC.”

“What’s that?”

You knew your audience. “It’s this fucking bullshit where they fucking tell us who to vote for and I’m sick of it.”

“Can’t vote,” Hobbit said. “I’m legally dead.”

“No you’re not, shut up.”

“No, I am. I had this guy make me a fake death certificate so I could get out of going to jail. Now I’m an outlaw for life.” He looked at you intensely like he really wanted you to believe him.

“What did you do?” You asked.

“What are you, a cop?” Hobbit asked, and you said nothing further.

You told yourself you came to Philly because of Bernie Sanders and the caucus cheats in Nevada by the Hillary Clinton campaign. You weren’t a Bernie supporter either per se. You saw it happen before your eyes that February. “Caucus math”, gerrymandering the very rooms the caucuses took place in, mis-using the word “delegates” to turn a room of Bernie supporters to Clinton on the books. It was a total con by the DNC or the Clinton campaign or both of them or even worse, a systemic failure. The threat of the quickly expanding fascist “alt-right” as well as the corrupt Clinton campaign cheating into victory in Nevada were two forces you knew needed to be stopped. Of course, they wouldn’t be.

You were angry. Millions of people were, still are, and while those millions of people were told to vote, you knew that voting for Clinton to keep Donald Trump from winning was just a power move for the TV cameras and the spectacle. The Democratic National Committee was corrupt as shit. It had been for decades. It will continue to be. The only thing you thought to do was to be there, at the Convention in Philadelphia come July. It was a historic guess at how to stab at the political machine in an age controlled by mass media pundits and unethical television journalism. You thought the convention had the potential to be something like the DNC in Chicago 1968, although altogether different.

Diogenes started growling at the darkness.

“OO DOG, SHUT THE FUCK UP!” Kali screamed.

Diogenes inspired Dank.

“DANK!”

Dank paid Suzie no attention and kept barking.

They all had shit they said aloud, like a call and response.

“OH-WELL,” they said to each other, sometimes in unison when the whiskey disappeared or something broke, or when something stupid happened.

Suzie loved to screech, “Orale!” and Kali and Hobbit said it back to her, laughing.

You exchanged road stories.

Kali was considerably drunk. Or maybe you were. She started rambling. “This one time, man, I was holing up in this bando in Kansas City (...) And then this guy, he takes a whole wad of toilet paper (...) for two Reeses Peanut Butter Cups (...) And we fuckin’ got so lost (...) He had to shit in his hand, man! In his hand! (...) There was all this leather, and a St Andrew’s Cross (...) And then she tried to grab Princess and I wasn’t going to let that fucking happen (...) And that’s why I’ll never go back to Seattle again...” She glanced at Seattle. “No offense.” Princess Peach yawned and put her snout on Kali’s lap.

Seattle set the guitar down, bored.

You wandered off, giving them all space, and slept in the bushes somewhere. In the morning, Dorian and Maggie found you and you all sat bleary-eyed behind the vampire museum of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. You lit up a rollie and sucked down a little instant coffee that you stashed in your pack. Hobbit and Seattle came by.

“Morning. We gotta take shits. You guys want to hit up a bum feed?”

So you all gathered your shit: three dogs, seven kids, seven packs, two guitars, and three jugs of water. Then you walked a mile in the morning sun to an old church somewhere not in Philadelphia. Kali and Hobbit paired up at the head of the pack with Diogenes and Princess Peach leading the way, Maggie and Dorian were behind them, and they were not having a good morning. They were bickering about something. The romance between them seemed to be dying. You and Suzie were behind them, Stank pulling on her, with Seattle absent-minded and quiet, strumming at the back of the pack.

Suzie and you were riffing about all the different names for dicks.

You rattled off a few. “There’s Pecker, there’s Johnson, Willy, uh Prick, Dick, Cock, Rooster, Wang, Snake, Python, Cobra, One-Eyed Monster, Trouser Snake...”

Suzie picked a cigarette butt off the ground. “I don’t smoke, you can have this.”

“Thank you,” You mumbled, lighting it. “Uh, Lil Bro, Lil Guy, Lil Buddy, Lil Peter, Lil Willy, Lil Stevie.”

Suzie played along. “Lil Stevie? What the fuck?”

You said, “OK, OK, your turn.”

“Let me think.” A pause. Then, she said, “WHAT THE FUCK!”

“What, what is it?”

“Look at that fucking thing!” Suzie pointed. It was a cockroach at least six inches long. “Jesus Christ that’s disgusting!”

Then you heard Dorian raising his voice at Maggie. “Dude, that’s not what I’m saying!”

“Whatever,” Maggie said with a passive-aggressive sigh, not getting anywhere with him.

Someone was jogging in the opposite direction, causing all the dogs to flip their shit. Their owners respectively screamed over each other, “STANK! DIO! PRINCESS!” and held their leashes. Suzie held Stank’s muzzle. None of them were good at training their dogs.

At the church were a bunch of nice, worried Christians serving macaroni salad and ham sandwiches. The real reason to come was the clothing closet. All seven of you needed something. Socks, a new pair of jeans, a belt, new leggings. Suzie and Seattle volunteered to watch the dogs outside.

Five of you sat around a table in the church gymnasium, quiet and listening to the homebums of Greater Philly chatter. There was a heatwave affecting Philadelphia and everyone was sweating. In addition to being a feed, this was a cooling center for people that lived outside. Like you. But also, homebums.

Homebums are, by definition, not travelers. A disparaging name, a slur, homebums bum it up at home. In all kinds of ways, travelers, tramps, g*psies, hippies, crusties, oogles, nomads, trainriders, hobos, dirty kids, whatever the fuck you call it, distance themselves from homebums. Homebums are selfish, greedy, dependent, have no self-sufficiency skills, will steal your shit, and will blow up the spot. They bring with them any and all kinds of chaos, including police, and are generally mentally or physically unwell. Hell, housies, aka the general voting public, hate homebums, and many that can tell the difference between travelers and homebums hate travelers for the same reason. New Orleans,

San Francisco, Southern Oregon, Florida, etcetera-- they're all sick of the oogle shit. You don't blame them.

There is no way to avoid homebums. And there are plenty of homebums that are super helpful, are funny as fuck, are resourceful, and can hang. Some know some sick spots to camp, honey holes to spange, bandos to open up, plugs to call, scams to play. Some can even travel, *and* a few even graduate into traveler culture, but the vast majority do not leave their city of origin unless the government sends them to a new town. Travelers will befriend homebums for safety and security, but more often than not, it's to find drugs. When a traveler pulls into a new town, finding the plug often requires meeting the local homebums.

In addition to being batshit crazy, a lot of homebums are also beautiful, intelligent, resourceful, resilient, strong, courageous, have deep empathy and emotional regulation skills, fight hard, work harder, and party harder still. In fact, homebums are often objectively *better* people than housies in all kinds of ways housies are blind to seeing. Solidarity is a homeless person's secret superpower, whether they are travelers or homebums or refugees or Roma or any other grouping of people living without a "proper" domicile. And wow, is it powerful. Homebums have looked out for you, mentored you, philosophized with you, shared with you, and taught you all kinds of things over the years. There are some you will never forget.

One came up to you once in LA, a bloody gaping hole where his right eye is supposed to be, and asked you in a panic, "What year is this?"

In Seattle, another homebum gave you his ten rules for life while you both walked all night. "Be impeccable with your word," he warned. "Your word is everything."

In Berkeley, a wino prince commanded respect from everyone around him with his Li Po smile and snotty, stained hoodie.

One homebum you still think about was a guy in Atlanta named Homer. Diabetes took his eyes and he was losing feeling in his feet too. Homer couldn't make it to the shelter in time so he camped outside of it on some cardboard with no blanket or sleeping bag, sleeping sitting up. The shelter was full. He had a plan to get out of his situation, a plan to buy a truck that depended on a lost SSI check and no proper mailing address. In short, Homer was fucked. Doomed. America let this man down at least three times: first with Diabetes, because America has been poisoning its population for upwards of 70 years; second with the appalling lack of healthcare, because insulin isn't free or accessible in Atlanta; then thirdly, with the concrete reality of homelessness in the richest nation in the history of the world. And he most certainly paid taxes.

One homebum that was special to you was named Angel Eyes.

Angel Eyes lived behind the Dollar General. She slept up in the mulberry tree, drinking nips and smoking flavored cigarillos. She was in her fifties but her Caucasian skin had the color of stretched leather. Angel Eyes had no teeth and owned a hundred-pound dog named Bear. Angel Eyes loved that dog. He was the light of her life after her husband passed away. One day, a social worker came by and got her a trailer behind the auto parts store. It was on the same road as the Dollar General, in a tiny village on the border of the Mojave and the Sonoran deserts.

Angel Eyes was a staple in the village. Lots of people knew her. She became your best friend one summer, the summer you

turned 21. You smoked cigarettes together and you would listen to her speak of God. She was a very spiritual woman who saw demons where there were none. There was another guy you met that summer who saw demons in the village too. The village, some of them said, was a gateway to hell.

The village's main economy was in farming and, more recently, solar power. At least, on paper. Three hours from Vegas, LA, and Phoenix, on an intersection between Arizona and California, two hours from Mexico. Three thousand people in the village itself, with other villages constellating out into the night sky; however, somehow, three thousand people needed six different types of law enforcement. San Bernardino County Sheriff's, the local PD, DEA, FBI, CHP, ICE. Drugs and trafficked slaves moved across the border regularly. This evil was personified by Angel Eyes's Shadow People, who walked the main drag in the darkest hours of the night, just before dawn, kidnapping, killing, and eating their prey. Someone would die once a week. Gunshot wound, bludgeoned to death, darkness pervading everything, not a fantasy of Angel Eyes, but a reality.

You and Angel Eyes got wine-drunk on your twenty-first birthday. Your only friend, Angel Eyes took out her dentures and showed you her tits.

And Angel Eyes talked of God. You tried to teach her how to read. She didn't receive an education, only got stuck working at such a young age in Valencia. You did what you could for a few months. You later heard through the grapevine that Angel's landlord went and shot Bear in her trailer while Angel Eyes was away--

-- "I can't stand you!" Dorian said abruptly, and got up and left the table.

You decided to follow him. Outside the feed was a white woman Hobbit's height passing out flyers for a Food Not Bombs event a trainride away in West Philadelphia. While the feed you're at now only operated on Saturdays, Food Not Bombs was on Sundays. Maybe this was your ticket to being useful during the DNC.

"Dude, she's the worst. You can fucking have her," Dorian said to you.

"What's wrong?"

"The sex sucks, she's so whiny. She's a brat and I'm sick of it. Let me have a smoke."

You gave Dorian a cigarette.

"Think about it," Dorian said, "You and me. We can go to Vegas, or I guess, you go *back* to Vegas. Let's get out of here."

"We just got here. We're not even in Philly yet," You said.

"You won't come with me?"

You didn't answer. The woman with the Food Not Bombs flyers passed you a few.

She said, "Feed tomorrow, hope to see you there."

"Thank you," You said, and looked at it. She moved on but then you said her, "Hey, do you have any plans for the DNC?"

The next day, you dragged Maggie and Dorian to West Philadelphia. It was huge and hot and buggy and humid and dirty as shit. Bodegas sold water-ice and cheesesteaks and the smell of Halal kebabs drifted to your hungry stomach. That church feed was gross and you hadn't eaten since. At Malcolm X Park, three tables were set up by a dozen volunteers and at least fifty hungry

people beginning to crowd. On one table was fresh produce and groceries in boxes, and the other two tables was food ready to eat: vegan burritos with salsa and some kind of fruit salad. The woman from yesterday waved at the three of you and you made introductions. She was tall, like 6'4", and had a face tat as well as some stick-n-pokes on her arms. Her name was Alexi and she told you to hang out after the meal. Maggie and Dorian were both tense energy, so you tried to dispel it with a game of chess made out of cardboard and sharpie. You and Dorian fashioned one and started to play, Maggie sighing and bored the whole time. She eventually gave up and wandered away.

"Bro," Dorian said again, "She sucks."

Alexi came back and you chatted about politics.

It turned out Alexi lived at a squat somewhere in the neighborhood, and the squat had a garden where much of this Food Not Bombs food came from. You three were invited to come crash for the duration of the DNC.

"Does it have a name?" You asked.

"Possum Squat."

It was an old three story rowhouse with a vacant lot beside. The house looked normal from front, red brick exterior and chipping charcoal colored trim. Alexi led the three of you around where there were tall weeds blocking the view of a broken basement window. You turned the corner and there in the backyard was indeed, a garden.

"This is supposed to be shared with the neighbors. But they don't have time to do anything. I had to do all this soil remediation work," Alexi explained. "The arsenic and lead from all the history of this city leached into a lot of the soil. But that's ok. Mushrooms do the trick!" She giggled.

The garden was beautiful. Raised beds created a perimeter, where in the center was a little gazebo and a bench swing, and a path through it all made of stone pieces. Bicycle parts gleamed from the corners of the beds to keep the birds away. You saw tomatoes, broccoli, arugula, chard, and kale. You were sure there was more.

“How do you water it all?”

“Devon knows someone,” Alexi explained. “We have the utilities turned on and we pay them.”

In addition to Alexi, there were three others in Possum Squat full-time: Alexi’s partner Howard, who was a scholar of Greek at Drexel University; and two guys that knew each other: Jimmy and Devon. The garden was a labor of love (and spare change) from both Howard and Alexi. Alexi gave you a tour inside. The first floor was meant for gathering. The living room was nasty. A moldy couch sat sadly in a corner, and trash became a bunch of makeshift chairs: egg crates, wire spindles, empty kegs. There was graffiti everywhere as well as piles of beer cans and general refuse. Mildew was encroaching on the windowsills. The mess was contained, though, as the bathroom and the kitchen were both immaculate. There was a bedroom here somewhere, where Jimmy lived. Upstairs was Alexi and Howard’s room and Devon’s room. Jimmy and Devon were buddies from an auto shop down the way. Both were mechanics, but Devon had his shit together. Jimmy did not. Devon was Black and from a Christian, military family. Jimmy was white and a bit country. The idea both of them had for staying in a squat wasn’t political at all-- it was just to save money.

At this point, Maggie became interested in the garden and wandered downstairs.

Alexi showed you the roof. “I was thinking this is where you guys could be.”

“Fuck yeah, fuck yeah,” You said. You dropped your pack immediately.

Dorian said, “Incredible,” and did the same.

It was a great view, and there was a billboard within touching distance. Dorian did a little parkour and made it up to the catwalk. “I’m sleeping here!” He shouted. But the sun’s unrelenting oppression forced you all to wander back downstairs.

Even though the living room was meant for gathering, it was so fucking hot, everyone ended up on the stoop of the squat. Maggie busied herself with a coloring book. Soon enough, Devon and Jimmy got home from work with a case of beer. Introductions were made and beer distributed. You decided to try this game with Devon, Jimmy, and Alexi too.

“Weiner, Hot dog, Popsicle, Lollipop, Sausage, Kielbasa, Ice Cream Cone”--

“Fuck, why is it all food?” Devon thought it was the funniest shit. He drank his Voodoo Ranger and added one. “The Colonel.”

“Jesus Christ.”

Devon gave a fake salute to his junk. “Hello, Colonel, sir!” Everyone sipped their beers. Jimmy wanted to go for a walk and get some Chinese food from up the street. You, Dorian and Jimmy went on a walk. At the door of the Golden Dragon, Jimmy stopped.

“I don’t really wanna get Chinese,” Jimmy said. Then, “You guys ever smoke crack?”

An hour later, Dorian and Jimmy went to smoke crack in the first floor bathroom. Jimmy and Devon both had twelve hour shifts the next day. Devon wanted Jimmy to quit smoking crack or leave, and Jimmy hid it from him. You smoked cigarettes with Devon and he knew, of course, telling Jimmy to leave the next morning.

4 **On the Subject of Dogs**

In the morning, you got a desperate phone call from Kali.

“They took our dogs! Cops took our fucking dogs!”

“What?”

“They stole our fucking dogs!”

“What happened?”

“They found our camp and were about to arrest us, but Hobbit talked them out of it. But then Dio bit at one of the cops! So they called Animal Control. So lucky they didn’t shoot him! But now they’re in doggie jail, and it’s fucking crazy expensive to get them out!”

“Wait, how much?”

“Like 300.”

“A piece?”

“No, for all three. We got a discount on account of us being HOMELESS AS FUCK,” She laugh-yelled out of exasperation.

“Stupidest shit, I swear. So fucking stupid. They want to fix Dio!”

“So we have to raise 300 dollars? We can do that.”

“Bro, you gotta help us out.”

“Where are you?”

“We’re down in Center City. Shit’s crazy down here.

There’s a bunch of protests going on. We have to get there by 4!”

So you and Maggie snuck onto the SEPTA, leaving Dorian to spend the day alone.

There’s a symbiotic relationship between travelers and dogs. Dogs provide a much needed security and are also a great way to make money. Spanging without a dog equals many ignoring passers-by, but spanging with a dog equals lots of comments, many

positive, about the dog. If the dog is trained well, it can start a conversation with a potential patron, donor, or good samaritan looking to adopt a crusty feral adult-child and their mangy mutt sidekick. Dogs can also bring potential sweeties, and are generally pretty awesome companions to hang out with. They might incessantly bark and whine, but they love you. Yes they do. They love a good head pat, and they especially love the McDonald's kickdowns you keep getting.

Dogs to Dirty Kids are children. Dirty Kids treat dogs better than they treat themselves, giving them the best food, the best treats, the best care, the best portions of a white box kickdown. The world often thought homeless people to be irresponsible dog owners, absurdly and ignorantly believing that homeless people don't 'deserve' dogs, or even worse, that the dogs seen in public 'deserved a good home.' That's some nasty shit implying that homeless people didn't *also* deserve a good home, *and that* the homeless owners didn't give their dogs the best life. It could even be argued that a dog's best life is not in some inside box all by themselves, but in public, around people, new sights, new smells, new people, new dogs.

You and Maggie found Kali, Hobbit, Suzie, and Seattle. The six of you anxiously talked about what to do. In a moment of heated creativity, you told Seattle to find a big can. "Like a coffee can or something." You ran off to the library with Maggie, and an hour later, along with some texting with Kali, you came out with two photos of Dio and Princess color printed on paper. Hobbit caught up with you and you both made two donation cans from what Seattle found with scotch tape and sharpies.

The big weekend was about to start and protestors gathered in every direction. There must have been five thousand

people or more, wearing various colored t-shirts, bullhorns, flags, banners, paper mache heads of Clinton. There was a lot to hate about Hilary Clinton at the time. Clinton was linked to the firing squad death of Berta Cáceres, an Indigenous Honduran Humanitarian. Berta's daughter was there in Philadelphia, giving speeches in front of City Hall, which had an arcade that tunneled through the building and became the spot to chill out of the sun.

“HELP US BREAK OUR DOGS OUT OF DOGGIE JAIL!” Kali desperately screamed at oblivious yuppies. She ran from person to person, shaking the empty can.

Seattle had a different approach. He posted up at a corner outside of a WaWa and started playing original music. Suzie sat with him and while he jammed out, she crackspanged people coming in and out of WaWa. At noon, Kali counted. \$60 from you and Maggie. She and Hobbit made \$150 and a ride offer to the animal shelter. Suzie and Seattle, though, they made a new friend.

Kasper was a sad, Persian-American guitarist with matted hair and sleeve tattoos and a small upside down cross on their cheek. They also had gauges, a septum, and all the other trappings of a cool kid. They appeared out of nowhere and sat next to Seattle and they both started jamming. Kasper was introverted and quite depressed, really, but they were a goldmine on guitar. They sang pop covers for the yuppies and the yuppies ate it up. Kasper's version of *Hey There Delilah* made strangers cry, go to the ATM, and kick down 20s. A few college-aged women stopped and oggled Seattle and Kasper. They threw some ripped notebook paper into Seattle's guitar case. Their phone numbers. Kasper just sighed.

Around 2:30, the whole crew made your fundraising goal. Kali, Hobbit, and Suzie bounced to bail out the dogs, leaving you

and Maggie with Seattle and Kasper and a crowd of 10,000 Bernie-or-Busters.

Maggie pulled you aside and said, “I’m over Dorian.”
“I know.”

All of a sudden you and Maggie were making out in the middle of the Bernie Revolution of 2016. You held her waist, she squeezed yours, you grabbed her ass in broad daylight and she breathed in pleasure. A single spark flew, then dissipated. You didn’t really like her. She wasn’t real likeable, at least at first. Her dazed composure wasn’t cute, and neither was her annoyed sighs and whiny attitude. But she turned you on. Kind of. You think.

Alexi texted you and invited you to an anarchist space elsewhere in the city. You told Kasper and Seattle to meet up later, and Maggie and you took off. You and her got handsy as you rode the SEPTA to North Philly. The anarchist space in question was a storefront, usually used as an AA meeting hall. Inside the storefront were a bunch of regular ass people. Mostly white, but all of them were there for a reason: a general assembly. The main topic, of course, was how to deal with all the protestors in the city. Some suggested the community flyer them, feed them, engage them in conversation. Another suggested to avoid it altogether. Eventually, consensus was made on helping to hand out water. Alexi needed help with the Food Not Bombs chapter in West Philly. There was some kind of schism you didn’t understand nor care to, but basically, her largely successful project was built by her, her partner, and three others. There was no way they could feed West Philly *and* the protests, plus the outreach Alexi recently did should mean newcomers to the mealshare. People volunteered and the meeting was adjourned.

Back at the Possum Squat, Dorian was angry. He knew you and Maggie made out. He didn't directly say it, nor confront you, but he was pissed. He smoldered alone for some time before telling you during a cigarette on the roof, "I'm leaving, bro. Tomorrow." Dorian wasn't the closest guy, but his mellow demeanor was sorely missed. He felt blindsided. Sorry, buddy. You felt a pang of guilt and silence grew between the two of you. As the moon rose and the sun fell, Kali, Hobbit, and Suzie came through to the squat, dogs in tow, relieved and excited about splitting a half gallon.

Hobbit, though, was secretly devastated.

"They took Dio's balls!" He cried.

"Ah, you'll get over it." Suzie shouted. "OH-WELL!"

Kali shouted, "OH-WELL!"

Maggie came around and draped herself on you. She also found a hobby: sewing. She was working on a cotton patch for her jeggings with some dental floss.

"It's so fucking hot," Kali said. Princess Peach and Stank were panting. Kali panted with them. The heat was not dissipating, though night had come.

You rolled a cigarette and asked Hobbit, "Bro, so what's up with Dio?"

"What do you mean?"

"Who's Diogenes?"

"This dude, this ancient Greek philosopher, he said, 'I am Diogenes the Dog. I nuzzle the kind, bark at the greedy, and bite scoundrels.' That's why. My Dog does all that shit. He's so fucking cool. But also, like, I like Dio." He put up the horns.

"Fucking dope."

"He's a great dog, isn't he? Can't believe he actually tried to bite a cop! Guess that cop was a scoundrel."

“Crazy.”

“He should get a medal.” He scratched Dio’s torso. “Yes, you should. You’re the best dog ever.” Diogenes just looked at him.

Meanwhile, Alexi showed up, a little exasperated. “We have so much work to do,” she said sadly before going to bed early and sober. Howard made an appearance to the roof to say hi, then went to bed.

That morning, you saw Alexi rushing to water the garden.

“Do you need any help?” You asked.

“Actually...” Alexi thought about it.

A short time later, everyone had a mission to clean the squat. Alexi made a list of chores before she went to work, chores like sweeping the roof, sweeping the second floor, sweeping the kitchen, cleaning the kitchen, the bathroom. Alexi wanted you all to clean the living room since Jimmy dipped. There was also some Food Not Bombs prep work to do with a bunch of veggies Alexi harvested. She wanted you to make a dressing for a giant kale-chard salad, but you had to go to the store for some things that the garden didn’t have.

Dorian was true to his word, and while the crew was scrubbing down Possum Squat, he pulled an Irish Goodbye. You never found out what happened to him.

Howard appeared in the late morning, bleary eyed and just waking up. He made everyone coffee and sat on the front stoop, giving direction when needed. Standing at 5’9”, he had a full beard but was balder than a cue ball. Taking a break, you asked him about the cross around his neck.

“Oh,” He said when you asked, “This is from my grandmother. She’s Greek. She thought it would protect me from the Vrykolakas.”

“What’s that?”

“Vampires,” Howard said, and smiled vaguely.

You were caught off guard.

“Wait, seriously?”

“Yeah. Old superstition.”

“Cool.” You took a drag of a rollie and changed the subject.

“Also, your girlfriend is hella cool.”

Howard met your eyes, excited. “Isn’t she?”

“Where does she work?”

“Uh, I’m not sure she wants me to tell people, but she works at a Domestic Violence shelter. She says it’s her way of giving back.”

“Wow, she does so much!”

“Yeah, I can barely keep up.”

Suzie and Kali came to the front stoop and handed you both a bit of breakfast. Devon appeared from somewhere, just to say he was off to work. You mentioned the name of Hobbit’s dog and Howard had a big chuckle. He stood up and went to leave.

“Oh, by the way,” Howard said, “It’s Devon’s birthday today so we’re gonna have a little party on the stoop tonight.” He waved goodbye and left.

5 A Haunting Near Hoboken

Kali asked you for a smoke, then you, Hobbit, Kali, and Suzie went to spange up Drexel University. Maggie stayed back and took a nap.

“Shit, you hear what happened to Cholula?” Suzie asked on the commute.

“Cholula?” Kali said, snipe-hunting in the gutters.

“Yeah, you remember her. We saw her in Houston last.”

Kali remembered, “Oh, the cutie with the hella cool moon tattoo!”

“Well, she retired. Just homebumming it up. Has a shopping cart and everything!”

Kali’s eyes were focused on the nasty old sidewalks. “From what?”

Your crew maneuvered around another crew on the sidewalk.

“Hey mama,” a local said to Kali. Everyone ignored it.

“Fuck, you better kill me if I get a shopping cart,” Hobbit said to Kali, seriously.

Kali said without thinking, “That’s how I’m gonna retire. A tent under the bridge and a shopping cart. That’s all I’ll need. Shit I wish I had a corner for twenty years. The stability! I need that shit.”

The heat was thick and you didn’t make much. None of you had an instrument. You did have the dogs, but the dogs were dying with their paws on the pavement.

“Princess, kick it down,” Kali said as she took water and physically rubbed it into Princess Peach’s paws and fur. Princess Peach would not stop moving. You wandered back to Possum Squat, sweaty and exhausted. En route, some Philly locals on a corner gave you a steep street discount on a liter of Kraken. You bought it as a gift for Devon. Devon had a bunch of friends. They all crowded the stoop chilling and blasting trap beats. He was really

excited to receive your gift, and soon enough, everyone was taking schwills of Kraken spiced rum to the dome.

“RELEASE THE KRAKEN!” Hobbit announced before taking a gulp. You caught up with Maggie and talked to her about nothing in particular. She didn’t drink much, but gave in and decided to celebrate. Alexi was actually present, and telling Suzie, Hobbit, and Kali about MOVE.

“MOVE was this Black Power org in the 70s and 80s. There’s alot to say about it all but I guess what’s important to say right now is that in 1985, the police dropped bombs on their commune and killed eleven people, and five of them were children. They destroyed like 65 houses in that bombing.” Alexi said, pointedly, “Understand that rowhouses in Philadelphia are connected. Like ours right here, no side-yard. We’re lucky there’s a vacant lot next to us, sure. But generally speaking, it’s a fire code disaster. And that those rowhouses were full of Black people, usually because of racist real estate agents and banks. For the cops to deploy weapons like bombs from helicopters, means they knew they were killing people that had nothing to do with MOVE. They were killing people for the crime of being Black.”

MOVE was radical. You found out much later that people in Food Not Bombs also worked closely with MOVE supporters and Ramona Africa to free the MOVE 9: political prisoners serving time for a crime they did not commit, that of killing a Philadelphia Police Officer, back in 1978. Shots came from the Philly police themselves that day, but you won’t hear that from them. MOVE is a historic organization that lives on, a source of power for those that wish to seek it. They really frightened the police, the city, and civil society by advocating for liberation.

That's all you want, isn't it? Liberation from bondage, whatever form, explicit or implicit, that bondage takes.

The night started to turn once the sun set.

For some reason, Hobbit got pissed at Kali about something and they started yelling at each other in the garden. Then shoving, then pulling.

“WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP! YOU NEVER LISTEN TO ME!”

“I NEVER LISTEN TO YOU?! YOU DON'T LISTEN TO ME!”

It was a garden variety fight, nothing special, until Kali dropped the bomb.

“AND YOU CAN'T EVEN STOP PISSING YOURSELF!”

It got physical. Hobbit gave Kali a shove. Kali smacked him. Hobbit grabbed her and started to shake her. Suzie and Alexi stepped in and de-escalated. Suzie took Kali on a walk with the dogs and Alexi took Hobbit to the roof. You followed them up there. The other partygoers were quiet for awhile, then you heard things roll back to normal soon enough. People murmured that it was time to leave. Alexi made Hobbit sit down and they both sat facing the skyline of Philly lights, looking down and not at each other.

“I'm sorry, dude. I know this is your spot--”

Alexi rubbed her legs and calves, speaking slowly and carefully. “Many lifetimes ago, I had the same problems as you. I was so angry. Rage poured out of me. All I could think about was how angry I was. I uh, I strangled my girlfriend, and then I strangled the cop trying to arrest me. I went to prison for awhile.” She sighed. “It felt like all these people didn't want what was best

for me, and that I didn't have control over my own life. I just wanted a tiny smidgeon of control. But take it from someone that knows, booze isn't control."

"Yeah," Hobbit said.

Alexi breathed out. "I am not that person anymore. I left Montana. I realized I was so angry because I was a girl trapped in a boy's body, and in Montana, I couldn't do anything about it. I was trapped. So I left. I left and got sober. Changed my name. I took estrogen. I grew tits. Now I have a boyfriend that loves me. I work hard. I give back and help women leave these psychopathic monsters for good. I am no longer that person. I am me. I think I'm doing pretty well for myself--"

"Shit's so fucking hard," Hobbit said lowly, staring at his shoes.

"You'll be me someday. Just keep going. And stop doing stupid shit."

"I know."

"Take care of yourself."

"I know."

"Do you? Do you really?"

Suzie appeared, with Kali. "Orale!" Suzie screeched.

The next morning, you found out Devon gave Maggie a mandolin.

Devon said, "Yeah, dude, it was Jimmy's. He'll probably be back to pawn it, but fuck it. It's yours." Maggie immediately started to strum it. Everyone was hungover. Kali and Hobbit made up. Hobbit apologized for his behavior.

"RELEASE THE KRAKEN!" You joked. Hobbit groaned.

It was going to be a big day. A little hungover, you, Maggie, Hobbit, Alexi, Howard, and Kali took the SEPTA up to North Philly for another action: the Black Resistance March. It was a Black Lives Matter organized march from North Philly down to City Hall, then from City Hall down to the Convention. They were to take Broad Street the whole way. Suzie stayed at the squat with the dogs. It was too much for her.

The Black Resistance March was held down by Socialist Alternative too, and it was unclear of the boundaries between Black Lives Matter Philadelphia and Socialist Alternative. The gathering spot was on Broad Street by Temple University and as you saw people gather, a Black woman began to sage herself. A white cop walked up to her and asked her if the smoking smudge stick in her hand was marijuana. You just had to laugh. She was quite annoyed and gave him a look of daggers. He backed away and shrugged.

Food Not Bombs members arrived to pass out water. Maggie became your best friend that afternoon as you all tried to keep everybody hydrated, a familiar face from Food Not Bombs on a bicycle pulling a cartful of water. It was going to be a big march.

“OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IS UNDER ATTACK,” A Black woman yelled from a truckbed at the front of the demo. “WHAT DO WE DO?”

“STAND UP, FIGHT BACK,” The People responded to her cry. She repeated this chant a few times and the march began. Pigs by the dozens in cars and motorcycles were both at the front of the march and at the very back. Kendrick and Meek Mill blasted from the speaker system in the truckbed.

“STAY TOGETHER, STAY TIGHT!”

Cops and journalists ran up and down the sidewalks. Everyone paired off and disappeared. It was just you and Maggie handing out water.

The walk from North Philly to City Hall in Center City was about four miles. This was also the day Bernie delegates were to walk out off the floor and join the protests outside the convention. People tried to climb the temporary fence and federal agents held sniper positions on the rooftops of buildings closeby; but you wouldn't hear about that until later.

You started a few chants of your own. The energy was strong and optimistic-- you all were going to shut down the convention. Someone started yelling about an infiltrator and people started to punch at him. Someone grabbed his mask and someone else grabbed a bottle of water out of your hand and then doused the infiltrator.

Everyone slowed down by the time you got to City Hall. Thousands of others were there, milling around or otherwise occupied, listening to speeches. You started to see Maggie in a new light. She was so hot in that shirt, her midriff showing, and her matted locs wild and free. You kissed her. Green Party Presidential Candidate Jill Stein was somewhere, so was Seattle City Councilwoman Kshama Sawant. There were other marches and actions by environmental NGOs, by Democracy Spring. The city was paralyzed with people going every which way. A crowd of twenty or so were chanting:

BRICK BY BRICK, WALL BY WALL
(WE'RE GONNA FREE MUMIA ABU JAMAL)

It was at City Hall that you and Maggie chilled out and sat down. Someone passed a bowl around and then it was time to keep marching. It was mid-afternoon and they had Kendrick Lamar

blasting out of the truck speakers. The sun set as you made it to the end of Broad Street, eight miles total, with sirens and lights underneath an overpass. A lone little pro-police “protest” quickly disbanded as they saw you, thousands of you, coming at them yelling:

BLACK LIVES MATTER

By the time you made it to the site, the convention hall on the left side with a SEPTA subway station guarded by cops in the dozens, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park on the right, many Bernie delegates inside were either refusing to leave, trying to leave but were forced to stay by the police, or had found a way out and were with the folks outside the fence. There were journalists interviewing sweaty delegates on the street as they panted for air.

You and Maggie were shouting at intervals:

“CLIMB THE FENCE! CLIMB THE FENCE!” At the fence, a skirmish broke out as three people did indeed try to climb, then handcuff themselves, to the fence, unrelated to your chant. It was their plan to do so. A line of bicycle cops surrounded them and in the process of arresting them, they started to punch and kick one of the activists, a woman. People stepped in to de-escalate. Everyone was scooped up.

Some other protestors tried to burn an American flag, to the shouts and jeers of many. They didn’t spray accelerant on it so it wasn’t lighting. Someone else’s jacket somehow caught fire for a few seconds, giving Fox News and other outlets free footage to call the protestors what they’ve always called them. Someone else brought out an Israeli flag, this time with an accelerant, and burned it.

People freaked! Bernie, after all, was Jewish! Someone tried to douse the fire with their water bottle and someone else pushed

them back. It was (now) a good time to explain Bernie's foreign policy, AIPAC, Israel, Zionism, the difference between religion and state, Orthodox Jews Against Israel, the IDF, Hezbollah, PLF, Palestinian Liberation; and it came muddled from the mouths of half a dozen (white?) guys like yourself, other people shouting "ANTI-SEMITES!" (Since 2016, Bernie has revisited and revised this policy, but it was a point of contention then.)

There was a real growing threat of the police deploying tear gas or pepper spray. They told everyone from loudspeakers. People were passing out Maalox, an over-the-counter antacid, to help take the sting away. This caused much of the crowd, who weren't there to fight the police, to back off and many started to walk back the mile or so to the last SEPTA stop. The cops, of course, had the nearest one blocked off.

Department of Homeland Security then drove a passenger sized armored bus up from the back of the crowd, pinning the crowd between the fence and them, and the back of the bus opened up like a Star Wars movie. Out came twenty soldiers ready to commit war crimes on American citizens, on civilian demonstrators, marching and beating riot shields. They had a battle cry of their own:

"MOVE BACK!"

They marched out and around for a few minutes, showing the crowd different military srike formations they were taught by their Israeli and American warhawk choreographers and handlers, and then they marched back into their metal hole. So much for democracy. You and Maggie wandered off to make out on the street somewhere. The crowd started to peter out, it was getting late and all the promises of shutting down the too-big-to-fail Democratic National Convention were nil.

On the way back to Possum Squat, Kali wondered where Seattle went.

“He was gonna hop out with us.”

You and Maggie glanced at each other. Time alone was exactly what you needed.

“We might know where he could be,” You offered, not breaking eye contact with Maggie.

“Where?” Kali asked. The train lurched forward and she stumbled.

“We can go check the bars.” Travelers often spanged and busked outside the bars at night.

Kali was picking up what you were saying. She knew you weren’t gonna go look for Seattle.

“See you kiddos later,” She smirked. She elbowed Hobbit and the train stopped at 56th St station and they took off walking toward Possum Squat.

You got off at the next stop and took Maggie dumpstering for pizza. It was her first time, being a recent college dropout and new to traveling.

“So gross!” She laughed. But she tried it. You assured her it was safe and she tried it.

That was when she decided she really liked you.

You made love inside a half constructed gentrified townhome.

After, you held hands and talked for awhile.

“I like you,” You said.

“I like you too,” She smiled.

It wasn't the most intense tryst, but it was nice. That's when you heard a small meow from the shadowy darkness. There, in the corner, was a shivering black kitten. Maggie immediately fell in love. There was no collar. A stray baby. Maggie held her.

"Everyone has dogs, no one has a cat. Can cats even be on a leash? Oh look at her!"

"Hell yeah, I've seen kids put their cat on their shoulder. Shoulder cat!"

"Hmm..." She decided to keep the kitten. You wandered back to Possum Squat with considerable difficulty, as the baby kept trying to leap away the whole time. Once on the roof of Possum Squat, the dogs noticed immediately. The kitten was so frightened she tried to jump off the roof of a three story building, but Maggie caught her.

"Dio! Kick it down!"

"Schwag dog! Kick it down, Princess!"

The crew thought the kitten was adorable.

Maggie decided on a name. "Sushi."

You put the cat in Jimmy's old room and made love there.

In the morning, Kali was anxious. "Yo, forreal, we gotta go find Seattle," Kali said, and so the three road dogs dipped in the hot molasses summer, leaving you and Maggie alone with Sushi. You made love on the roof. You made love in the bathroom. You made love in the garden.

Meanwhile, Alexi was beginning to get tired of everyone. It was time to go. You and Maggie left, bringing your packs with you, to find Suzie and Hobbit and Kali and maybe Seattle. You stopped by a pet store to get a leash and harness first, and some food, and a

little rubber collapsible bowl, and a tag, and a few little toys. You needed shots, too, but that had to happen later.

Somewhere in South Philly you stumbled across Kasper. They were busking next to a water ice stand. Something bothered you about Kasper, but it didn't hit right away. You recognized their face. They had a beard, and a fat septum piercing, and sleeve tats. It hit you.

“I recognize you from Vegas!” You said.

You realized you knew some of the same people.

Kasper tried to play an acoustic cover of Baby Got Back, but forgot the words.

“Oh my god, look at her butt. It is so big,” Kasper joked. Then, when they got bored, they asked, “Are you trying to get out of here?”

“We could.” You looked at Maggie.

As if god heard you, a good samaritan saw the three of you and produced a crisp hundred dollar bill. She handed it to Kasper and told them they had a guardian angel watching them.

“I guess we're getting out of here,” Kasper concluded.

New York City. Three boring, exhausted ass, broke ass, dumb ass kids, one cat, no wonder you only got a few days in such a loud ass place. As you stood outside Port Authority, staring at the New York Times building and the vast skyscraper mountains, giant mesas of concrete and glass canyons on all sides, you quickly decided to leave as soon as possible. Too little money here, too much to get caught up in. You knew St Marks would be the spot, but Maggie wanted to make enough money for tickets to ‘see the dinosaurs’ at the Museum of Natural History. She even made up a

shitty little song about dinosaurs and played a simple two chords over and over on Kasper's guitar.

You found Malcolm X's autobiography on the street somewhere and read it in fervor. Kasper had an interesting take on Malcolm.

"What if they made a movie like Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter?" Kasper said.

"Like if Malcolm X is a vampire hunter?" You laughed.

"He's stabbing vampires in the chest with a stake mid-speech."

"And Klansmen."

"Oh yeah, that's it. Fighting vampires in white sheets." You and Kasper laughed.

"I never saw it, that movie."

"Oh me neither. It looked so fucking stupid."

You slept in Central Park that night across from the Museum of Natural History. Not a soul bothered you. In fact, everything died down quite early for what was supposed to be the city that never sleeps. Next day you shoplifted the big two story Whole Foods by Columbus Circle.

The statue of Columbus at Columbus Circle was eerie shit. A seventy-six foot column featured Christopher Columbus, Discoverer of the New World. An angel holding a globe sat at the base, staring at you with a punishing threat of empty abandon. You *were* abandoned. Abandoned by your community, your society. You looked closer and saw this angel to be a devil, holding the world hostage, the world turned upside down, pedestrians and car traffic oblivious to its malevolence. Columbus himself was hard to see from the ground, but you wondered if his teeth were worse

than yours. He was no discoverer. He was a privateer, collecting his salary on behalf of Pestilence. Was he smiling? You couldn't see in the sunlight. If he was, the teeth in his smile weren't marble. Columbus' teeth were pulled from the mouths of the Arawak on the sands of the Caribbean.

You took the subway, and wandered through a little of Brooklyn, eventually getting to Coney Island to swim and sleep again. It was so hot. Without money, much food, or access to those resources, NYC was a big ole lock and no key. Anyone that spoke to you, you eyed with suspicion. Cannibals, creeps, and charlatans. Trusting no one didn't make things easier. Any energy went to moving around the city. Sleeping on the beach at Coney Island that night was probably the best part about the experience.

It was possible to hop out of New York. Well, not New York exactly. The freight trains that supplied NYC were out of North Bergen, New Jersey, right across the Hudson River.

Hopouts were sacred places. They shifted when the railcops caught on or oogles blew the spot up, shopping carts and plastic bags taken by clay and evicted back out, each rail-adjacent rubbish storm of hopeless shoes and broken glass a shrine. Spiritual gifts like roadkill, bones of birds and mice, empty cans of bug repellent, shopping carts, moldy blankets and insulation materials, discarded whippits, spray paint cans, McDonald's wrappers, canned trainfood were strewn in piles, underneath the cover of trees in jungles of hobo nobodies. You can tell by the gnat orgies that form clouds above the trail of crushed beer cans and the strong smell of piss. Oogles marked locations with their trashy tags, awaiting reclamation by this deeply poisoned earth. Hopouts were behind libraries, warehouses, Costcos, panaderias, laundromats, city halls,

IKEAs, peoples' yards, all still belonging to many clans, tribes, nations, and families of the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

Hopouts can be quite serene, with nobody or nothing around as trains sail to and fro carrying everyone's favorite brand of well, everything. Hopouts can be cleaned up, too, with a trashbag on deck to catch all the stupid shit addicts use, abuse, and toss. Some trainriders don't do any sort of drug at all and take care of the litter.

Some hopouts were haunted.

Haunted by what, it depends. Often it's other trainriders missing each other by mere hours, only to get pushed in opposite directions. Sometimes it's the warm fraternal presence of old hobos past, like Woody Guthrie, Boxcar Betty, Joe Hill. Sometimes, still, hopouts were home to dead trainriders that suffered as they became caught between the air and the ground. Dreamer's Ghost absolutely haunts hopouts from Reno to Pittsburgh, hopping out one more time on Tomàs Garretton's The Train That Can Fly and at the same time still remaining here on Earth to remind us all that Bob Dylan still sucks.

In North Bergen, you wound up at another motel, this one with a TV channel dedicated to pornography. It was that kind of motel, boarded up windows and old keys. Kasper slept on the floor and Maggie rubbed her feet on yours the whole night. Next day and afternoon you sat at the hopout playing cards. Train never came. Nighttime arrived and a small rain dribbled over all of you. You fell asleep behind bushes to railworkers on ATVs moving cars around on the string.

Kasper disappeared somewhere in the night, living up to their streetname.

Haunted, indeed.

You didn't see them again until late morning, after Maggie and you woke and bought Sushi a new harness. No train, no food, little water. Time to *really* stop messing around and get the fuck out. Pittsburgh to catch up with Dreamer maybe. Anywhere but here. The farthest west you could get on the local train system was Port Jervis.

666 Hitchhiking in Lands Rightfully Belonging to the Susquehannock and the Munsee Delaware

Can you remember what the Delaware River looked like? The hunger in your stomach? The way your blue tarp swayed in the breeze? You camped hugging the river, watching leaves from the sycamores drop into the water. Watching as people with homes paddle-boarded or canoed. Watching the houses on the other bank. Do you remember Port Jervis? The little town caught in three states: Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. How many hundreds of years did the sometimes thin, sometimes wide, Delaware River flow through Port Jervis? Does the silt remember slavery?

There was a library there, and a Burger King, and a few bars, and a little dollar grocer warehouse, and the train station to New York City. Port Jervis was the last stop. Salsa came in a can there and tasted like ketchup. The library had white columns and was built on a hill. Inside was small, tables and chairs, Tiffany desk-lamps. Was there also a laundromat? No, no, that was another town in Pennsylvania.

What Port Jervis had was rain. Lots and lots of rain. So much rain that night, in thick globs, that your sleeping situation became inadequate and you were trapped in an onslaught of water. It took awhile to work up the courage to move, puddles forming around your belly and thighs, shivering. You fled the riverbank for an abandoned K-mart overhang. The police were there at the K-mart overhang, waiting. They didn't do anything other than tell you to leave in the morning. Everything you owned was soaked. Maggie was crying. Sushi The Cat was somewhere in the whole mess.

After hours that were actually probably days, Dawn finally cracked open like a cold beer on a hot day, and all three of you took off as many clothes as you could in public, wringing out water and drying them. You waited most of the day for them to dry. Meanwhile, Maggie took Sushi's leash and collar and went on a walk with her. Kasper practiced a Violent Femmes song on their guitar. There was an ice cream shop at the other edge of the parking lot. Maggie carried her head down, watching the little black blob play. A car pulled up next to her.

She got in it. The car drove away, to the other side of the ice cream shop, out of view.

Kasper and you weren't paying any attention.

Fifteen minutes passed. Maggie wandered back.

"He wanted me to suck him off," she said, matter-of-factly.

You slowly nodded. Your eyes were stone, your mind impenetrable. You didn't ask. Maggie seemed unshaken, much more disturbed by the rain than the solicitation. The same car then came back to another, farrer side of the parking lot. A large man, about 50, proceeded to throw chicken nuggets onto the ground. Pigeons began to flock to him. Kasper kept plucking. Maggie hung her head out of boredom.

"That's him," Maggie said.

Kasper nodded and stopped.

"What do you want to do?" You asked. Then, after she shrugged, you said, "Is he feeding chicken nuggets to pigeons? Is--Is that cannibalism?" All three of you laughed before setting out to find a laundromat, a laundromat which did not exist in this town.

You did find someone that could take you to the next rest stop outside of Port Jervis on the I-84, toward Scranton. Scranton, again. Scranton ended up being an intersection you arrived and left at in three different directions. At the time, Pittsburgh was the eventual destination. The rest stop outside Port Jervis had no food and no way out. Lots of old people with white hair and fancy RVs.

Kasper had a word game they liked to play.

“It’s where you put the word Anal in front of whatever RV name they had painted on the side or back of the fucker. Like this one. Anal Roadrunner.”

“Anal Voyager,” You commented.

“Anal Adventure,” Kasper said. Maggie sighed.

“ANAL ESCAPE!”

After a few cheap laughs and a whole day with no food and no cigarettes, all three of you decided to start walking the interstate. Someone pulled up right away and took you to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Mid-Pennsylvania had a nickname: Pennsylvtuckey. It was Trump country, where people open-carried hunting rifles and yelled at you from the windows of their pick-up trucks to get a job. Maggie strayed not fifty yards once somewhere while you were hitching and a truck pulled up with intentions to kidnap her. It was a dangerous place to be a woman on the road.

Wilkes-Barre had a steeltown past and the downtown shopping district was three blocks long. You found yourselves at a park trying to make the next move. A Wilkes-Barre cop made it his personal mission to kick loiterers out of the public park. The sun was shining and it was hot, still August after all, so you collected the cat, the packs, Maggie’s mandolin, Kasper’s guitar and walked to the freeway again.

On the onramp, a woman pulled over and asked, “You guys aren’t gonna kill me, are ya?”

You said no. “Just need a ride out of here! West!”

She said she’d take you to the next junction because she was just going home, in the North, where you had just come from.

There was a bus bench, strangely enough, at the junction. The next car that pulled up was a kid around your age, he was a lonely college student in the medical field. He said he couldn’t take you West but he could take you to the movies. While chatting with him, Kasper sang Townes Van Zandt and began to teach Maggie on mando.

Another cop approached you and gave you eight giant blue gatorades out of misplaced generosity. You asked if he could take you to the county line westbound. He declined. The gatorades were too much of a burden to carry and you left them in the kid’s car.

So you went with the kid to the movies. It was a shitty Batman movie, and this kid bought you all tickets and popcorn. It was very sweet. After the movie, he took you to a private camping spot on top of a rocky outcropping sticking up out of the trees, camped out with you, but you ended up back in Wilkes-Barre. Maggie decided to spend more of her money, which wasn’t much to begin with, and bought you three bus tickets to Harrisburg.

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania was at least two separate cities. Nights downtown were wild as the bars and clubs were packed with people of color and street fairs during the day were very white, packed with families and trash-rescued funnel cake. While living outside and traveling, crowds were an endless supply of people-watching, free food, free booze, other sundries. You spent way too much time in Harrisburg for two reasons: the free shit and

house-ups, and the possibility of work at a cabinet factory. Most vividly, the bugs in Pennsylvania and across the Northeast were particularly disgusting. Earwigs, silverfish, other little critters at work decomposing centuries of settler-colonialism embedded in soil. The spiders in Harrisburg were everywhere and in the thousands, a whole city of spiders. You remembered them best as they strung their webs across the Harvey Taylor bridge in the hot August daylight, a bridge which crossed the Susquehanna River.

The Susquehanna was another old river with a miserable past, its character etched into the mud at its banks as the brown water flowed toward the Atlantic. Named after an Indigenous people decimated by Colonizers in the 1700s, the Susquehanna had too many secrets.

You all didn't care too much for the secrets of the Susquehanna as you crossed it to go to a job interview at a temp agency on the other side of the river. It was Brendan's idea, and he was a pushy guy. Brendan was apart of your crew with Dreamer in June, going into the Gathering, and you connected with him through Facebook. He wanted you there with him in Harrisburg because he was lonely. He promised you, Maggie, and Kasper a garage and a shower. The garage wasn't his. Neither was the shower. The garage and shower belonged to a single mother who was too busy to even give you the time of day. She was hospitable, if only by Brendan's coercion. The garage itself was spidery and full of silverfish, naturally not the most comfortable of situations.

Sushi the Cat loved being indoors. She was an indoor cat, yet too young to know what the indoors could bring her. Brendan also promised you money. That meant busking with him outside the bars. Kasper had his guitar and Maggie had her mandolin. Brendan also played guitar. Busking ended up being a ridiculous

night, full of whiskey, free coke, half-empty beers left behind and snatched for your pleasure. Almost made you forget where you were, and the evil all around.

When busking didn't make shit and all three of y'all were hungry and wanting to leave Harrisburg (and all of Pennsylvania for that matter!), Brendan said "Let's get a job!"

Those dreaded words. Get. A. Job.

Haven't showered in a week and sleeping in a garage full of silverfish, and this motherfucker wants you to get jobs! But there weren't many other options, and jobs seemed to be plentiful. That's what Brendan said, anyway. So you all went and watched the spiders on the bridge as you walked the three miles in the sweat and sun in a wrinkly button-down given to you that morning. The interview was an interview and what no one ever talks about is the power dynamic, especially if you're homeless and in a new place. The temp agency associate treated you nice enough but there was a loud subtext of dehumanization: "You don't deserve a job, you're on drugs, you smell, you won't get hired here, none of your kind allowed." Your face was hot the entire time you were in their nice air-conditioned office.

A cabinet factory was interested in hiring Kasper and yourself because you were men. A tour of the factory later, you knew you definitely did not want to end up in Harrisburg making cabinets. You told Maggie. She still had money, like 400 dollars or something just in case, and she was tired of sleeping in the silverfish garage. It had only been a week in the garage; still, you didn't blame her. She wanted a room with just you and her in it, for sex, sure, but also a break from traveling. A place inside-inside. She was gonna pay for it.

And that's how you met Amy and David. You found Amy and David through a craigslist ad about opening up a room in their house for a month. You contacted them and explained that you only wanted a week, and when could you meet. You abandoned Kasper to the streets of Harrisburg and slept in a cemetery before meeting David and Amy. Amy was a caretaker of horses, among other odd jobs she worked, and David worked as an auto mechanic. They liked both you and Maggie right away and understood your situation. Maggie paid them and they shared their food, their TV room, all their pets. Sushi fit right in and disappeared underneath the furniture. It was a lived-in house, with ancient heirlooms covered in pet dander and hair. It smelled like it too. They both kept up efforts to clean the house, and it was pretty spacious for two people and their dogs. It was Amy's grandparent's house and Amy kept most everything the same since they passed away. You slept really well that night and in the morning, Amy took you to see the horses.

Maggie ended up riding a horse named Cheyenne. The horses were located on a property that was spacious and private, built on a hill. The corral had six or seven horses total, and you met them all as you helped Amy feed them, one by one. There was a pig somewhere too. Amy's pride and joy was working with those horses. She loved them so much.

David, meanwhile, had a serious problem. Not abusive like so many other men, not an alcoholic. He smoked weed! He even got a DUI in the great state of Pennsylvania for driving under the influence of marijuana, or so he said. Amy bailed him out and there was a serious imbalance of guilt in that situation. He took you out to the gas station on some make-believe errand one night and unloaded his feelings onto you after loading a bowl.

The next day, you noticed something really terrible while recuperating and watching television: an itchy scalp. You said something to Maggie and she said her head was itchy too. You thought it was just dry skin. Wrong. You looked into Maggie's matted locks and saw them. They were clear with big black eyes, about the size of a grain of rice. Their eggs were even smaller, like grains of sand. It was horrifying and further dehumanizing. Maggie puked and cried. Maggie had her matted locks for years. The locks were long, going down to her lower back. Both of you tried wearing plastic bags with vinegar soaking on your head. It burned but after a day, no avail. In the meantime, Amy and David were very understanding. They bought you a lice treatment from Walgreens as Amy said that she got them many times and got rid of them the last time months before. You didn't know if you got the lice from them or from the silverfish garage. Lice takes a week to hatch and start sucking your blood, so it could have been either place.

You didn't care about your hair that much. After a day of vinegar and lice treatment, you gave up and borrowed their electric buzzer. You made Maggie shave your head and she begged to be next. The dreadlocks went and so did a piece of Maggie. Then you both went over each other's heads with a lice comb. Then more lice shampoo. Then plastic bag lice treatment heads to bed. After the lice, Maggie changed. For the purposes of this story, her name changed too. She wanted to be called Buzzard.

"Bzz, bzz," she laugh-cried.

Soon after the lice incident, you saw footage on your Facebook of private security officers in North Dakota attacking protestors, or water protectors as they came to be known, with dogs. The historic significance of using dogs to attack unarmed

civilians was not lost on you. Six people were injured, including a child. The police were not present and lied on behalf of their mercenary allies, saying no one was hurt. The site where dogs tasted human flesh was on a sacred burial ground that belonged to the Standing Rock Sioux.

“Tribal cultural experts, among them Tim Mentz Sr., an elder and citizen of Standing Rock, had identified at least 27 burials west of the highway-- on private land, and directly in the pipeline’s path. The immense historical importance of the discoveries, in other circumstances, would have given pause to tribal historians and scholars. Mentz characterized one finding-- a rock structure arranged in the shape of the Dakota constellation Iyokaptan Tanka (the ‘Big Dipper’)-- as ‘one of the most significant archaeological finds in North Dakota in many years,’” (Estes, 2019).¹

Naturally, the pipeline company *and* the government didn’t give a shit. Imagine if someone dug up both your grandmother *and* the fucking Stonehenge to plop down a telephone pole.

Thousands of people were camping out in an occupation both close to and on construction sites, working to stop a crude oil pipeline from entering the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and digging underneath the Missouri River. North Dakota became the goal, and was the end of the world, in more ways than one.

¹ Estes, N. (2019). *Our History is the Future*. Verso Books.

7 **Seven Council Fires**

You hustled together two Scamtrak tickets and snuck the kitten onto the train. A layover in Pittsburgh, switching trains in Chicago, another layover in Milwaukee. Sushi slipped away eventually. The conductor found her at 4 in the morning, one stop away from Fargo. He kindly let you get off at your destination without much fuss. Getting off in Fargo seemed like a dream. The dawn's rays yet to hit the village and you stood there in the North Dakota mud in an all-too-familiar industrial part of town. Buzzard took Sushi on a walk and you stared at Venus twinkling in the dark blue. You knew this is where you needed to be. You watched a freight train saunter down the track away from the Fargo yard.

It was then, in those dark, early hours, that something darker than the devil, someone you have met before as well, a feminine energy some call God, made barely a whisper.

“You need to do the work,” she quietly said with the aether, barely recognizable. You fell to your knees and started to cry.

“Where have you been?” You demanded. No answer. The wind became still. All of a sudden you were talking to yourself.

You found a rideshare coming to Fargo via Minneapolis and washed clothes at a laundromat while waiting. In the afternoon you got out of Fargo, not for the last time, and headed west to Bismarck. Your rideshare was a white, gender non-conforming computer software engineer that lived in Minneapolis and was doing material support, bringing with them camping gear to donate and money. They also loved Sushi and played with her while driving most of the way.

You arrived at Oceti Sakowin Camp after dark. It was chaotic, no light save for floodlight shadows from the nearby stage

further up the hill, and so much mud. You and Buzzard wandered a few hundred yards into the darkness before setting up camp under a tree. You heard someone on a microphone announcing traditional singers and family lineages, and eventually, Peter and Paul from Peter, Paul, and Mary. Older people, both white and Indigenous, cheered, making the place look and feel a bit like Sturgis.

The next morning, you found the large, sprawling camp to be Overflow Camp, across the Cannon Ball River from Rosebud, the original camp at Standing Rock. Overflow was much, much bigger than Rosebud, and was on Army Corps of Engineer land. Rosebud, in contrast, was on the Standing Rock Reservation land. People had been camping at Rosebud since April, but since the summer and the footage of the dogs, an explosion of people made it necessary for Overflow to exist. Also at Overflow were most of the kitchens, a main stage with a mic and a sacred fire, a main dirt road lined on either side with nearly a hundred flagpoles, each flag a nation, village, clan, or movement. Most you didn't recognize.

Offering sage and cedar to the sacred fire by the main stage was common, constant, everyday, everynight. The smell of sage and cedar saturated your memory. The protests were prayers, and the prayers were protests. That was an indelible truth there.

Overflow also included Red Warrior Camp, a half dozen donation tents with clothes, cigarettes, water, sleeping bags, tent stakes and poles, tents themselves; there was a media tent, a library, generator buses, horse corrals, horses, dozens of tipis, and sweat lodges dug into the earth. There were also dozens of portable toilets and pallets of bottled water placed on the dirt roads. Each portable toilet was sponsored by the reservation and other groups that came out of Standing Rock.

Being present in such a historical moment can sometimes be lackluster. Wanting to help, you checked at various kitchens. Too many cooks, so to speak, giving direction. Hauling water, firewood, dry goods, tending fire, cooking, washing, cleaning-- all taken care of. You and Buzzard decided to rest from the journey and so you both fixed the tarp and laid in the tent all day, listening to the sounds of pow-wow drums, prayers, and singing that were ubiquitous and forever. Late in the afternoon, Buzzard met a VICE journalist on the way to the porta potty. You all went swimming together across the Cannon Ball River before they left for Denver.

The next day, there was a protest at the statehouse in Bismarck so you caught a ride with two Indigenous women that drove all the way from Florida. The protest itself was peaceful; Lakota, Dakota, Ojibwe ceremonial dress, having a prayer dance on the steps of a vacant capital. Police presence was little, although the crowds of people in support of Standing Rock were large. You saw a herd of buffalo on the road back to camp, the two women from Florida themselves leaving in the morning, having to go back to work.

A dark, stoic atmosphere laid thick at camp. Indigenous people knew that white people generally, and the government specifically, to stop at nothing to repress them. They remembered very well the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, where 300 women, children, and men were murdered by the US government. They also remembered the more recent AIM occupation of Wounded Knee back in 1973. The government was murderous then, and it certainly was now. Shouts and whooping were constant, as were pledges from young men to give their lives for Standing Rock. They said it on the mic, they said it to each other

in passing and in media interviews. Young Indigenous people committed themselves to stopping the Dakota Access Pipeline at any cost. Older people were more cautious, fearing any loss of life, water protector and police alike, and the Elders wished for the youth to stay alive, and did convince them to do so, at least during this occupation.

There was a four-way cultural split, between Indigenous Youth and Indigenous Elders, and between white tourist youth and older white tourists. Much infighting on the ground at the surface level of the occupation camp was between all of these generational, racial groups. A tell-tale sign of one of these fissures was the use of bandannas or face coverings. Older people felt that it was disingenuous. *Why hide your face unless you're doing something wrong?* was often the question to those who did in fact wear masks. What was lost on old people and Elders often was that *they already think you're doing something wrong*. Maskless, or otherwise identifiable, you are a target for police violence, harassment, or prison. It didn't matter what you did or didn't do, your presence was the threat. Drones could pick out your face, or your license plates, from miles out. Photographs taken by the media and individuals could be, and were, seized by the police to identify and threaten people later. Spies for the police and the government lurked, collecting faces and names and, eventually, addresses and phone numbers. The FBI was everywhere. The CIA might even be on the ground at camp.

And obviously, the racial dynamics in this four-way split were uh, complicated.

The NoDAPL protests sparked an Indigenous Rights and Sovereignty Movement not seen in 50 years, the largest gathering of nations and tribes of the Peoples of Turtle Island in 100 years.

Of course, the movement existed before DAPL. There was the Keystone Pipeline and Kinder-Morgan Pipeline in recent memory. In 2020, there is an ongoing movement against a pipeline in Wet'suwet'en in British Columbia, a seven-year-long fight against a pipeline in Northern Minnesota, and the Land Back Movement in the US and Canada. There's the Red Nation movement in Navajo Nation, the movement to find Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and many, many, *many* others that are just as important. Indigenous peoples have been fighting for life and sovereignty since Columbus raped and murdered his first human being in the Caribbean.

So for the descendants of Columbus to share food and space with Humans at odds with a Machine the children of Columbus themselves built, maintained, and continued to use, was tortuous and painful. It had to have been. Always the better people, always having to be more honorable, Indigenous peoples and the Lakota Nation specifically welcomed white people, accepting you onto Indigenous land, as guests. Tourists. Forced to accept you, even. There are more white bodies on Turtle Island than nonwhite bodies. People like Columbus made sure of that. The Police also treated white people differently. You know, *like them*. Some Indigenous Elders called for white people to be present, some told you to go away. Some Indigenous Youth identified with your homeless ass, some clowned you and despised you. Some Indigenous people asked, and pleaded, for white faces to show up. And some, maybe most, never wanted you there in the first place.

For some homeless white nobody, you felt connected to the *idea* of the movement. But there were many ideas of the movement, much bickering about goals and visions, strategies and

obstacles. Many Indigenous people wanted better representation in government. Many came for the simple reason of stopping a pipeline. Many came to honor their ancestors, and their children, spanning either seven generation or, as one gentleman put it, spanning three generations ahead, this generation, and three generations behind. Many Indigenous and white people came for the future of Earth itself, poisoned by White Capitalist power. Some, like you, saw a vision of self-determination for all Indigenous Peoples of Turtle island, for in that self-determination is *your* freedom, too. By helping those most or more marginalized, you're helping yourself. Is that PC, cringey, selfish? Does it matter if it's true? Indigenous sovereignty has long been confused as, or associated with, anarchism. The Zapatistas in Chiapas who fought Mexican Federal troops for their own land refuse(d) to adhere to anarchism, calling such labels limiting. Even Indigenous sovereignty as a label doesn't fully encompass the actual heart of either the Zapatistas, the American Indian Movement, Wounded Knee in 1973, or the current occupation and protests of Standing Rock. Words contain ideas, and these ideas of Liberation refuse containment.

That evening, you met Kim, a single mom and white-passing Chippewa. She thought you and Buzzard were married. Kim was very generous, if only because she didn't have to be. She camped next to you, so you made a fire and chatted. The next morning, she drove you and Buzzard to the casino to do laundry and use real restrooms. At the casino, waiting on Kim, you saw an elderly woman eating alone at a buffet. You couldn't afford the buffet yourself, but you were hungry, so you walked up and accosted her, asking her for her leftovers. She obliged, Buzzard and

you then going to town on some leftover BBQ in a styrofoam box. You found out later this woman to be Joan Baez.

Leaving the casino, Kim showed you a wooded area she pointed out as the old Sun Dance grounds, excitedly telling you about Pipe Carriers and tobacco ceremonies. She drove you and Buzzard to the Missouri River, where she took out a pouch of American Spirit and told you to offer a pinch to the River.

Kim brought you back to camp at nightfall and wanted to sweat. She taught you about sweats on the drive back, explaining that stones were placed in blessed campfires, and when hot, the stones were called grandfathers. Lodges at Standing Rock were structures dug partially into the mud, where grandfathers were placed below the feet of those who sweat. A spiritual Elder led the ceremony with prayer and song. Knowledge usually not for white people like yourself or Buzzard as this knowledge was often abused, Kim's invitation was to be cherished.

You ultimately decided to stay behind at your tent to look after Sushi the kitten, while Buzzard and Kim went to sweat. Sushi was scared shitless as the wind expanded and contracted the walls of the tent, you falling asleep, holding her, listening to the drums and prayer songs at the Main Stage. The wind blew so hard that your tarp came loose and you woke up to fix it, taking in the Milky Way high above, pow-wow prayers rising like campfire smoke to heaven.

The noise of a helicopter woke you again, as Buzzard and Kim came back to your tent. You tended a little fire and asked about the sweat.

"It felt so good," Kim said. "Just what I needed. I miss my son so much, I wish he was here." Not to prod, you didn't ask where her son was.

Buzzard, however, did.

Kim sighed. “He’s with his dad. His dad isn’t around a lot, so I want them to bond, and you know, do guy stuff.” She laughed. Then, “My boyfriend is in jail right now. I’m mad at him. I miss him too, you know? But he’ll be out soon. And we can start our life together.”

When the helicopter noises became too loud to ignore, Kim mentioned her childhood and the traumas of growing up under intense police repression. Her family was involved in the American Indian Movement back in the 70s, and she told you about the midnight raids, the helicopters, the threats of prison, sterilization, or extermination. The Evil American Empire.

“I’m done with all that now,” she said. “Until this. Isn’t this beautiful?” She said, your little campfire illuminating her face. You could hear the flags whipping back and forth while she spoke. “I had to live my life. I became pregnant. I left AIM. It was scary. There’s things I can’t speak to you about, not here. But this, this pipeline, it’s not just about the oil. It’s about unity. We have to stand up. They’re poisoning the earth. They’re killing us.” It was indeed genocide. Between the boarding schools, the forced sterilizations, the codified barring of traditional ceremony, dance, and language, it was all too clear. The truth couldn’t be denied. There were also the man camps, the missing women, teen suicides and homicides, drug abuse, white people coming in with agendas to further exploit and capitalize on the pain, the suffering, even the hope and the spirituality, maybe even in this fucking novel.

Kim was really affected by it all. There is a point sometimes when activists do stop fighting, when life happens, when it’s time to turn away. You weren’t even sure if Kim would call herself an

activist at all, just a survivor, and you eventually had to say goodbye to her. She had to go back to Bismarck.

A sickness fell over camp, people wondering if it had to do with the warmth of September shifting steadily to thunderstorms, rain and wind, seasons changing as they always do; or if it had to do with thousands of people from all over the country passing through a frontierland often left alone, bacteria and viruses being introduced and re-introduced to peoples' immune systems, like when the Settlers colonized the plains. Years later, "The Standing Rock Sickness" was revealed to be a biological weapon sprayed by the federal government, chemicals released high in the atmosphere by drone. With cold-like symptoms, sometimes shivering or vomiting, it was a deterrent from working on this critical portion of a longer project toward liberation, with many people on the frontlines consistently trying to fight, recover, and stay healthy.

A few days after Kim left, you and Buzzard decided it was time to go. There were a couple instances of miscommunication between Buzzard and the greater community. At times, it did feel like a Prism Gathering. After all, some friendly faces from Vermont were present here. This occupation wasn't a gathering, of course, but it didn't stop Buzzard nor you from slipping some and from treating it as such. Buzz loved to be topless, and while it was a little too chilly and not exactly appropriate, she came close.

One warmer moment, walking around in booty shorts, she was reminded by an Elder that it was disrespectful to show so much skin. "It upsets the children. And the men. You have to be careful, these guys will get the wrong idea."

You thought it to be sexist and disrespectful to Buzz at the time. Buzz didn't know what to think, or it was impossible to tell. You even asked her, and she didn't have anything to say. Funnily,

Buzz only had a pair of leggings and shorts. She found a long skirt at a donation tent in the meantime, but it was clear you and her were going to overstay your welcome, among thousands of other white people.

You explored the camp, looking for vehicles with Washington license plates. You wanted to keep going west, toward Seattle. In Seattle was potential work and a possible safe house, a place to get off the road and start over making pennies. You were beginning to get tired, real tired, of homeless life. Buzz had different ideas but was down with going west. There were several Seattleites there at Standing Rock at the time, each car giving you the same excuse.

“We don’t have room, but I’m sure you’ll find someone!”

8 All Cats Are Beautiful

You and Buzz did what you had to do. You walked with your packs, gear, cat, mandolin, and tent to the entrance of Overflow, where an internal security checkpoint stood, to stick thumbs out for a ride. After a few false starts and watching lifted Dodge 4x4s with thin blue line window stickers laugh at you, one truck almost ran you into a ditch. You gave it the finger.

A young guy around your age working Security, clowning you for being white and a tourist yourself, said, “Whoa now. Whoa. The elders said you need to leave.” “The elders’ this, ‘the elders’ that. He didn’t speak to any elders. But you held your tongue. You didn’t dignify his words with any response. Your finger was more offensive than a jerk with a thin blue line window sticker. So, without a word, you started walking the road. Ten minutes later, an actual Elder pulled over with his black Dodge 4x4 and picked you both up. He was headed to Bismarck himself. No names exchanged, and with hitchhiking common out here, he turned on a Journey Greatest Hits CD which you listened to, *twice*, before conversation turned to his work trying to preserve the Lakota language.

“In 2007, there were only 6,000 speakers left,” he said. “We’re working now on teaching kids from Kindergarten up to preserve our heritage and our nation.” It was really quite amazing.

He dropped you at the Mandan Walmart and you returned your tent for money. Buzz decided to get a motel room for a night with that money before trying to go west. Prospects for travel were decent, as the hopout was down the hill about a mile. And if that didn’t work out, the interstate seemed hopeful. The room was refreshing, taking pleasure in brushing your teeth and a long

shower, your first shower since Pennsylvania. You and Buzz had sex for the first time since Pennsylvania, too.

The next morning you met a fellow hitchhiker on the onramp. He told you about his experience at Red Warrior Camp, as another white traveler that came all the way from Northern California. He told you about the commune he came from, and if you whistled at the third tree on a dirt road in Ukiah, the commune will appear like a mirage. He convinced you and Buzz to walk with him to the hopout and wait for the next train.

It never came, and instead, you watched the rail workers in the yard drive back and forth on ATVs working a string of coal cars, oil tankers and equipment for the pipeline, before someone called the Morton County Sheriffs to disperse you three loitering. The sky was grey. Of course, you told the cops you would leave and did leave for about an hour, wandering back onto a hillside under Main Street and the train tracks, hanging a tarp and bracing for the cold rain. Day turned to night and by morning, your new friend disappeared on you. It's the way it is for travelers, people appearing and disappearing at random, in some Taoist kind of way.

It was a little demoralizing and so you and Buzz schlepped back up the hill to the Walmart onramp. You sat at the intersection with a sign that said WEST. In less than an hour, the police came back to harass you. They told you hitchhiking was illegal, and you asked them, "Where else can we go?", and they printed out a map to the local shelter on MapQuest from their cars. There was no way to the shelter from your location without taking the interstate. You told them this, and asked for a ride there. They said they couldn't take you there, and you asked them if it was legal to walk on the interstate.

They said, "No."

The other cop said, “But if we catch you out here again, you’re going to jail.”

“So what are we supposed to do?”

The cops shrugged.

Good news was, someone did pick you up not long after the cops left, but they were only going to Fargo. Back east, not west. Buzz said she had family in Minneapolis, and you piled into the dude’s truck and he drove you to a truck stop just outside Fargo. He was white and told you about how many jobs there were in the Dakotas, how easy it was to live there.

“You could buy a house in a year,” he said.

You got out at a small truck stop outside Fargo and sat for 15 minutes, the yellow fields of September expanding as far as the eye could see, high noon approaching, before the next ride came along. This ride was a woman, late 30s maybe, with two cats of her own in cat carriers. She drove a double cab truck filled mostly with her things. She said she was moving. It was crammed up and smelled like cat, but that’s ok because she was homeless-friendly, and understood your predicament. Her name was Muli.

Muli told you about her friends at a punk house in Illinois that she was moving to, that she was a carnie and leaving an abusive relationship. There were a few red flags early on, Muli constantly complimenting you both. Over the course of a few hours, she started to call you her best friends. Along the way, Sushi’s curiosity with the other two cats became a problem and so you all separated them. Meanwhile, Muli drove like a nightmare, switching lanes constantly, slowing down and speeding up, jerking the whole vehicle around, her belongings falling everywhere.

You didn’t know much about carnival workers before or after Muli. The only thing you really did know is that carnival

work, like trimming and harvesting marijuana, was seasonal, under the table, and notorious for unpredictable pay and thieving bosses. Muli quickly shifted from best friend sweet talk to more insidious language. “I don’t know what I would do without you two,” and, “You’re both so special. You both are my rock. My best friends.” You just met this lady.

Buzzard whispered in your ear, “We have to get out of here.”

You let Muli take you all the way to Minneapolis. Buzzard informed her Aunt Susan you were in town. Susan did not immediately offer refuge, which was disappointing to say the least. Buzzard convinced Muli to stop at a Walmart.

“Don’t leave me. Promise you won’t leave. I can’t take it. If you leave, I just might kill myself,” this 40 year old woman cried out. Buzzard pretended to walk into Walmart and go shopping.

Sure enough, Muli had to use the bathroom eventually. In a light drizzle, Buzzard flung the bungee straps off your gear and you grabbed Sushi from the cab that Muli left unlocked, strangely. You fled into the woods a good half-mile before recognizing it to be swampland.

The next morning eventually came and Buzzard wanted coffee. Spanging the corner proved to be a little hustle, 5 bucks in 20 minutes. At the coffee-shop, Buzzard made friends with a thin, bougie, happy, festi vanlifer, working out of her parents’ house to convert a van into an RV with a circular saw and cabinet diagrams. She wanted help and offered you both a place in her backyard. She drove you to her parent’s house in Wisconsin, across the St Croix River. Buzzard went to work with her for hours and you slept under her deck, fighting the beginnings of a cold.

The vanlifer dropped you the next morning at a park-and-ride. Lots of time passed. Patience, a necessity, could be rare to find. You were grumpy at the vanlifer for stranding you, angry at the transit system, disappointed in Buzzard's Aunt Susan, the decision to head eastward, and sick. You played with Sushi. No bus came, but an older couple did drive through the lot, take pity and pick you up. You wound up somewhere in the city on the eastern banks of the Mississippi River, watching the leaves turn orange and fall. Buzzard was bored of your routine and wanted to go to a yoga class. She left you and the cat, sicker than ever, at the river. You fell asleep in the middle of the day.

Buzzard appeared, shrieking and running. "I DIDN'T MEAN TO TELL THEM, I DIDN'T MEAN TO TELL THEM." Within a minute, you in your sleeping bag, a little high on robitussin, stared up at a police issue sidearm, a pasty-colored Hulk behind it. A female officer stood on his right, close to Buzzard as she stood crying.

"IS THAT YOUR TENT?" He demanded.

You said no in the form of a question.

"DON'T LIE TO ME, THAT IS YOUR TENT. I SAW YOU GO IN IT."

You said no. "What tent?" You dissociated.

"HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM."

You took your hands out of your sleeping bag.

"Slower!" He yelled. Then, "WHY AREN'T YOU IN YOUR TENT?"

"That isn't my tent. Why would I be down here if I had a tent?" You didn't recognize those words to be yours.

The female officer told you to stop talking back.

He put his gun away and told you to pack up. You and Buzzard did so.

The female officer barked, “Faster!”

You said you were sick. Buzzard kept apologizing to you over and over.

The pigs eventually left up the hill to investigate the tent itself, a tent you didn’t know existed.

“Can you please call your aunt?” You asked Buzz. “I need to be indoors.”

Buzzard’s Aunt Susan used to squat in London in the 90s, but had long since cleaned up. She was married, had a daughter, was a homeowner. She voted democrat and liked the Clintons. Susan at the time didn’t believe police violence existed. She knew your kind to be dangerous, and many of you were. Rapists and thieves, deadbeat dads, felons. Susan brought all this up within minutes of meeting outside a light-rail station in Minneapolis.

Susan took you and Buzz out for ice cream, held strong and gave Buzzard a little money. Buzz suggested you stay in the backyard, recollecting the story with Minneapolis Police earlier that day. Susan called Buzzard’s mom, and eventually relented, while you clung to a corner stool in the ice cream shop.

Their house was nice, two stories with a basement, white with a sunroom style wraparound porch. Susan’s husband and Buzzard’s uncle, Hank, was a teacher for a living. They were kind enough to buy some cold medicine for you, and Buzzard hung up a tarp. She got to sleep inside. You slept in your bag in the backyard, the sleeping bag still covered with burn holes from Vermont, you waking up and coughing intensely every hour or so. That morning, Susan and Hank talked to you and worked out a

situation in the basement. You were only going to be there until you were healthy.

You cooked for Hank, Susan, and Buzzard's cousin, scrubbed their fridge, did some yard work. Buzzard became bored very quickly, and decided to model for a little money. Modeling turned into a blowjob, she told you later. For fun. Your romance and sexual intimacy was waning, although Buzz did tell you about a moment when you both were sleeping on the Mississippi River.

“You were passed out but these people were fucking right in front of us on the beach in the dark. I got so wet, I wish you were up.” You did try to turn her on, but she felt uncomfortable in her aunt’s house, and you started to sleep separately.

September made way into October. You and Buzzard explored Minneapolis, checking out a bookstore downtown, a food coop, and a little bit of St Paul. Minneapolis has an interesting and unique activist history, home to both the creation of the American Indian Movement and the genesis of Anti-Racist Action. AIM sought to fight poverty and police brutality for Indigenous People on Turtle Island. The ARA sought to fight police and American neonazis in the streets of poor neighborhoods. Minneapolis was a deeply political city, if you call human necessities to safety, dignity, and peace political.

Susan, in a drunk moment over dinner, said to Buzzard, “He really is a blowhard, isn’t he?”

Buzzard said, rolling her eyes, “I have to deal with it all the time.”

Susan smiled at you a fake yuppie smile. You could see she thought you were worthless. Maybe you were.

Part II

“For in and out, above, about, below,
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show,
Play'd in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.”

-- Omar Khayyam, tr.
Edward Fitzgerald,
1859

9 THE SPIRIT!

THE SPIRIT did eventually arrive in Minneapolis. A 1979 International school bus conversion project, THE SPIRIT was unique in that its original converter cut, then welded, the top half of a 1967 Volkswagen Microbus onto the roof of the International, making the bus a two-story spectacle. Circe kept most of the original exterior paint, where on a white background, in faded blue letters one could make out the word eXpresso, and a picture of a cup of espresso next to it.

THE SPIRIT ran on gasoline with an 8-cylinder 5.7 L engine and a 5-speed manual transmission.

Inside was a bunch of traveler shit: packs, food, cast iron skillets, stockpots, kitchen knives, guitars, a banjo, cold weather gear, hand tools, art supplies, ratty blankets, tons of artwork, a bicycle pump, spare tires, jumper cables, a hand jack, potted plants, rigging, rope, dog food, and a bunch of dogs, all crammed onto the short bus, amidst a working stove and a nonworking sink. On the interior walls was Circe's art, band posters, beer bottle caps, tags from past travelers, hippie tapestries. You, yourself, hung up an activist poster from a *Slingshot* newspaper in the back that lasted a month. Also inside THE SPIRIT, by the captain's wheel, was a hole in the ceiling to move between the top level and the bottom. The hole had a hatch-style door. The upper level served as Circe's bedroom, which was only four feet tall, but spanned most of the length of the bus. You had to crawl to move through it. You called it a lair.

The back of the bus carried skateboards, a bike rack, four or five bikes, a few five-gallon water jugs, a 10-gallon gas jug, a 5-gallon gas jug, and 2 two-gallon gas jugs, rail spikes, interesting

rocks, more potted plants, seashells, and propane. There was no heat, no A/C, no interior lights at night, and THE SPIRIT moved at a maximum speed of 40 miles per hour.

There were about as many people and animals as windows on the bus.

Circe (she/her) : ‘owner’ of THE SPIRIT, you and Circe shared hometown kinship. She was white, very much a vegan, 26, crusty, matted hair, and was very cunning. Circe had a long hair dog named Lady at the time, and was a Scorpio. Circe rarely drove her own fucking bus, and when she did, it was only momentarily while drunk, with John Lennon guiding her.

Jay (he/him) : Circe’s age, escaped heroin addiction and his hometown in Tennessee, finding traveling to stave off his addiction. He was a white, crusty trankid that talked with a drawl, and was learning how to fix the bus, and to eventually drive it.

John Lennon (he/him) : The driver of THE SPIRIT, John actually was a member of the free food Prism kitchen bus Stockpot. He was around 27 too. He agreed to drive THE SPIRIT to Washington to eventually reunite with Stockpot. He came from a middle-class background and started traveling because of *Into the Wild*. He was a Sagittarius, like Buzzard, and like Buzzard, was from New Jersey.

Kasper (they/he) : A sad Persian-American guitarist with matted hair in their early 30s. You, Circe, and Kasper all came from Vegas. Kasper met up with the bus in Pennsylvania as it was taking off, weeks previous. They thought of themselves as a serious musician, working on a concept album by themselves, and was pretty introverted.

Bonnie (she/her) : a white twenty-something alcoholic from Wisconsin, Bonnie also had matted hair. She had a black labrador named Johnny Hobo, who wore saddlebags and a skank around his neck. Bonnie had self harm scars on her arms and a few stick-n-pokes.

Tracy (she/they) : Tracy was Black, a guitarist and accordion player, a Nic@Niter, and was a Leo like yourself. Tracy loved to put Circe in her place, as Circe put her agenda as bus 'owner' above everyone else's. Tracy also drank a lot, and was sick of everyone's shit. Tracy would often dress in wild, 80s inspired outfits. Cheetah print leggings, pink wigs, halter tops, eyeliner, painted nails. Tracy also had self-harm scars on her arms. She had a black lab she often called My Dog and was from Maryland.

Plague Rat (she/her) : A white teenage foster kid runaway, and an alcoholic that suffered DTs every morning, Plague Rat also suffered memory loss and fits of rage. She was an Aries. She *also* had plenty of self-harm scars, and loved to punch, kick, and jab others for fun. The bus called her an oogle. Plague Rat's favorite word was the n-word to Tracy's annoyed indifference, feigned or true. For this story, it will not be used. The reader can infer it.

Christopher (he/him) : Chris was a white, straight-shooting whiskey drinker in his early 20s. He had long, dirty, golden hair and a brown leather jacket. Spent a lot of energy working with Plague Rat's rage, using a calm masculine approach and taking a fair share of beatings from her. You think he loved her. Chris also had a pitbull named Sparky. Sparky also wore saddlebags and a skank of his own.

Stephen (he/him) : Stephen and Circe were a couple at one point. He was smart and quiet, and good friends with Tracy. He loved the banjo more than life itself, and wore brown Carhartt

overalls with a plaid buttondown. His long golden brown hair and beard made him look a bit like Jesus. Tracy and Stephen knew each other from high school in Maryland. He read often, enjoying great solitude. Christopher, Stephen, and Tracy played Magic: The Gathering games together.

Buzzard's Uncle Hank drove you from his house to THE SPIRIT alone, as Buzz wanted a night to herself. He talked to you about his brother, a trainhopper named Knuckle. You thanked him, as you got out of his truck and onto the empty bus in the evening. The crew arrived and you made introductions. Mostly strangers, it was good to see a friend in Kasper. Circe wanted to check out a metal band she liked at a bar. So most of you showed up and snuck in, leaving Plague Rat and Chris on the bus with the dogs.

The show was outrageous and chaotic as fuck, as the band was as much theater as it was music. Band members started crowd-surfing early on, with the drummer and lead guitarist in Kabuki facemasks, jumping from high points on the stage equipment and from barstools. Then, during the final song, a cover of *War Pigs* by Black Sabbath: piece by piece, the lead guitarist directed members of the crowd to hold up the drumkit and then the drummer's stool, and then the drummer himself, the drummer actually hitting his head on the ceiling and losing cymbals that crashed down onto the floor. Then the guitarist squirted lighter fluid all over his guitar, somehow still playing it. They directed everyone outside as they lit the damn thing on fire, the song still going, the crowd holding the guy up in the air as he played a solo of his own while his guitar sprouted licks of flame. The smell of plastic was in the air as the show ended, the crowd

cheered, and the band sold merch out of their van. That was Daikaiju.

THE SPIRIT was a time traveling anarcho pirate ship. Time on the vessel bended backward and forward, as it often did on the road. Crewmembers were buccaneers, smugglers, and shoplifting thieves; they took booze, food, socks, and flashlights from Walmarts across the country, sharing the bounty with the rest of the ship and sometimes homebums. Tracy, Bonnie, Plague Rat, Circe, John, all had weed stashes of their own, usually in mason jars, from marijuana farms they either trimmed and cultivated on, or were gifted by friends that did. Marijuana came in more flavors and manifestations than just flower: hash, hash oil, keef, tinctures, extracts, wax, shatter, honeycomb, the very occasional edible. Who knew had what when, but everyone always had some way to get high. Stored in Circe's lair was LSD, mescaline, mushrooms, molly, ketamine, cocaine, benzos, and of course, her precious dab rig. Not that she, nor anyone, did drugs everyday. It was often and sporadic, but not everyday. Everyday drugs included weed and alcohol: 211s, Hurricanes, 40oz malt liquor, craft beer, IPAs, whisky, rum, tequila sometimes, spagebags. Alcohol never lasted long on the bus, as someone was always drinking too much too fast, or stashing it for their wakeup or general consumption. You smoked pipe tobacco cigarettes, cheap as fuck and plenty to share, and you drank. You didn't smoke weed, nor did you venture into Circe's belongings for hoarded treasure.

Hoarded treasure was a strange phenomenon on a bus that shared *everything*. Rarely was something denied when asked for. *You have a cigarette? Let me get a schwill?* True to anarcho-communism and traveler shit, ownership of more than your pack, your dog, and your toothbrush was frowned upon.

Unless you were a trankid. Then you had to fight for everything. *Everything*. A lighter, a snipe, a moment's peace from the incessant screaming. Also true to crusty anarcho bullshit was the philosophical concept of egalitarianism: "everyone was equal." No private property, no tyrants, no sexism, no gods, no masters. There should also be no racism, but crusties (including yourself) often overlooked that part; and quite often, the sexism too. But THE SPIRIT specifically and intentionally believed in no hierarchies. There was (to be) no hierarchy on the bus. There was a community process stolen from Prism free food kitchen buses, that of a bus council, to be called by whoever whenever. Like a family meeting, bus council was used to redress grievances and create solutions. Circe held onto another Prism tradition, what she called the magic hat, for gas and bus repairs. But even this was corrupted. She often used magic hat money for her own expensive beer affliction. Or dabs. Or coke this one time. Jay, who was very straight, told you this story about Madison, right before you got on, when someone sold the bus coke and Circe convinced Jay to do lines off the dealer's dick.

Like travelers everywhere else, crew members on THE SPIRIT were expected to sponge or busk and give to the magic hat. Exactly how much was argued over pretty much every night. Because Circe was the only one that actually owned the bus, the repairs benefited her the most. Taxes to the Queen, really. No one wanted to stay forever in a shitty crust punk "anarchist" schoolie nightmare.

Yuppies and normies loved seeing THE SPIRIT, often taking photos. It was common practice to yell at them.

"PICTURES COST A DOLLAR!"

Gas juggling was easier because of its hippie appeal. Yuppies loved to fill the tank. Yuppies also were drawn to whatever the fuck everyone was wearing.

Everyone on the bus wore headlamps and skanks around their necks. Most of them had wire wrapped gems, crystals and rocks dangling from their necks too. Or on their ears. Plague Rat had EAT SHIT tattooed on her knuckles. Jay had a face tattoo of a Celtic Rune on his nose. Stephen, Bonnie, Jay and Plague Rat wore Carhartt bibs. Circe wore long skirts and had a spiral tattoo on her cheek. She also had spiral gauges, and wore death metal band t-shirts, cut off to show her midriff and bellybutton piercing. Circe had both of her nipples pierced. Bonnie wore a small collection of Grateful Dead shirts, faded, torn and ripped, tied into halter tops. None of the women wore bras or shaved their legs, pits, or genitals. No one shaved anything at all, actually. John had round spectacles, a big beard, a steampunk tophat. He wore a long brown leather trench coat. The jacket often looked like he wore a cape, like a psychedelic Count from the 19th century. John brushed his teeth, but no one else really did. John also wore a bunch of rings that rattled when he cracked his knuckles, held onto the steering wheel, drank water, or rolled a joint. He was constantly taking the rings off to roll his knuckles too. Christopher wore a leather jacket and corduroys. Virtually everyone wore patches. On hats, pants, shirts, vests, jackets, backpacks.

While Circe was sleeping with Stephen back in Maryland, now Circe was very clearly sleeping with John Lennon. Bonnie and Tracy slept together, though they weren't seriously together. Plague Rat, not to be anyone's pet, fought very hard to be alone, although her anger told Christopher that she needed his (platonic?) love. He tried his best to hold her, to her agonizing cries

of pain. She was torn up about something, a darker devil than the one within you. Chris seemed to know, and took her punches to his face with dignity and pride.

The bus picked up a bored rehab-patient-gone-AWOL named Paul the morning after Daikaiju. He wanted to show off his version of the Twin Cities. Buzz met the bus at a punk cafe called Hard Times, where you watched Stephen and John Lennon play chess. Running around in a group this large often meant herding cats. Buzz and John Lennon decided to take a bike ride while waiting on others to complete morning rituals. Eventually, you all ended up on the bus, yelling directions for John Lennon as he drove through city traffic to Minnehaha Falls Park to explore, at behest of Paul. He was clean for six weeks, living in a halfway house, an ex-traveler. He really liked you all for some reason.

Minnehaha Falls was beautiful. A city park, the centerpiece was a gorgeous waterfall along the Mississippi, attracting locals and tourists alike among the limestone bluffs, coniferous forest, and wildflowers. There's something about wildflowers, the way they smell, that rejuvenates the soul and turns depression into content. Combined with the sunshine, it was a perfect afternoon. The bus ended the day at a beautifully constructed library downtown, seven stories of giant glass. You stole an old book from the library in a case of the *fuck-it's*.

At nightfall, Paul directed the bus to a place he called The Space Station, a salt warehouse somewhere in an industrial part of the city, on the banks of the Mississippi, to sleep. The Space Station was a playground of an industrial complex. Giant domes of concrete that looked much like Death Stars held massive piles of road salt that sat inside, put there by conveyor belts. Paul swore up and down it was abandoned, though it was clear the salt was to be

used soon. Walls covered in graffiti separated the domes from towers that were used to unload the salt from boats at the riverbank onto the conveyor belts. For the last time, you slept next to Buzz without rage, anguish, resentment, dread, or fear.

In the morning, where you and Buzz and Sushi slept was now the site of activity. City workers moved forklifts around your bodies. You got up and lit a rollie, watching a boat back up to meet the dockworkers in vests and hardhats. They all stared at you as you and Buzzard carried Sushi the cat and your sleeping bags off property. No one said a word. Paul lied, this place was very much *not* abandoned.

The bus went back to Hard Times, and this is where Buzzard and Tracy flirted a little before Buzzard took off with John Lennon again. You noticed but wanted to give space at the same time. You trusted Buzzard, and loved her. Kind of. Circe and John decided to park the bus downtown at a paid lot. Several kids wanted to try for Minnesota food stamps. And the offices were down by the library. John started to show a very interested Buzzard in leather-work. They coupled off to sew leather pockets on Buzzard's long ankle-length dress. You went to spange for most of the day, oblivious to the sparks flying between them, taking Sushi with you. You read your stolen book and smoked a dozen rolled cigarettes.

Social programs in the United States in the year 2016 were sad. No one batted an eye when the Pentagon spent billions of dollars on fighter jets, or when billionaires hoarded imaginary numbers in tax havens, or when police officers make more money than city mayors, but everyone had something to say about some homeless youth in their 20s collecting 200 dollars a month in food coupons. In Minnesota, you had to have dependents (kids) or have

a legally recognized disability, and also somehow prove it on paper. Alcoholism wasn't a disability, or at least one any of you were smart enough to prove to a case manager. If you were an able-bodied worker without dependents, your coupons were withheld unless you checked in with the office every week and showed proof you were looking for work.

In America, if you didn't work, you didn't deserve to eat. Nevermind grocery stores waste 40% of their produce to trash compactors, nevermind starvation being weaponized against poor people for hundreds of years. Nevermind all the abundance in the 21st century, it was a moral imperative, a Puritan morality, that led to thousands if not millions of people starving every year, many of them children.

And the worst part? Even with 200 a month, you weren't able to purchase hot food. If someone is homeless, in the cold of the north, and they couldn't buy hot soup from a local grocer, what kind of system is that? And people are *proud* of this country?

No, no one was able to get food stamps.

In the evening, a young housie couple stumbled upon the bus with a bottle of *something*, you don't quite remember what, and very soon everyone was drunk with no dinner to be mentioned, and also screaming.

Tracy was saying some caustic shit.

Bonnie was crying, as Tracy and Bonnie's new relationship was falling to pieces.

A few new people that wanted to get on the bus arrived. They were Neal and Iggy. Neal wanted to smoke your cigarettes, as did Jay. Eventually, you and Bonnie and Iggy and Neal realized there wasn't enough room to sleep on the bus. You were too drunk

to figure out where Buzzard was in the mess. Then the housie couple started to scream at each other.

Plague Rat was beating on Chris.

Chris was trying to hold her in her rage. She shrieked unholy noise as the young housie couple shoved each other. The dogs began to bark. Tracy broke up the physical fight between the couple, and Jay, Kasper, Bonnie, and Neal pushed the housie dude off the bus, where he then stormed off down the block. Circe poked her head down from her bedroom and invited the blonde housie girl 'upstairs.' Housie dude wandered back, yelling incoherently across the street. He made two or three laps. You made out the words "fiance," "cheater," "slut."

Kasper mumbled to himself, ready to pass out in the corner of the bus.

Plague Rat was screaming "Fuck you!" to Chris, threatening to leave.

Tracy egged her on, Chris keeping Plague Rat from beating on Tracy.

You decided to flee with Bonnie and Iggy and Neal, to an embankment off a freeway onramp, where Neal and Bonnie built a tarp overhang to keep out the drizzling rain.

The next morning, you realized Buzzard wasn't there outside with you. You walked to the bus and took Sushi on her leash on a morning walk herself. Sushi never took to her leash and harness. She hated it. Sushi hated the bus too. She also hated the dogs, all four of them, usually hiding in a crevice by the bus doors. Sushi hated you. The poor kitten. Eventually, Buzzard appeared from the upper deck of THE SPIRIT, with two deep purple hickeys on her neck. Your heart sank.

Sober Buzzard bought you coffee in an absent-minded, dim feeling of remorse. You talked it over with her. Why should you feel bad? You had your moments of sexual freedom, why couldn't she have hers? Of course, it was much more complicated than that.

"I don't really like you anymore," she said. "I mean, I guess I'm not attracted to you. I guess maybe we should break up." The honest brutality aside, you didn't want to let her off the hook that easy.

"You don't like me anymore?" You asked.

"Well, I like you *sometimes*."

"Sometimes?"

"Yeah, sometimes. We're poly right? Why are you mad?"

"Did you have sex with him? I don't even know who it was! I didn't even know where you went."

"No, we didn't have sex. I'm on my period." She didn't tell you who. You had to figure that out yourself. You did some mental calculus then, on what leverage you had. You had none. Did she cheat? Is this cheating? What right did you have to her body? Can you cheat when you're poly? Did you even love Buzzard? You did, you grew to love her.

"Maybe we can work something out," you said finally. You wanted to believe her. You didn't want to lose her. You didn't want to be stranded in Minneapolis. You felt a little possessive. Not over Buzz really, but over the bus. Circe was *your* friend, and it wasn't your first ride on THE SPIRIT either. You rode it from Vegas to South Dakota a few years previously, and had a blast on it. You introduced Buzz to hitching, to dumpster pizza, to this stupid homeless shit. Jealousy or possessiveness aside, your survival also depended on this bus. It was the plan since you left Philadelphia in July. It was now early October. Snow was going to come soon. It

was your ticket back to Vegas eventually. And then being all alone terrified the fuck out of you. You traveled alone in the past, and never wanted to do it again. In hindsight, you should have walked away. Instead, you stayed.

You said, “We can work it out, but can you sleep with me tonight?”

She said, “Sure,” holding your hand.

You poked her hickeys. “Does that hurt?”

“Ow!” Two teeth puncture wounds were raw on her neck.

“Who gave you those?”

“Circe and John.” The betrayal started to set in. Circe didn’t give a shit about you. She was just using you to get to Buzz. Which wouldn’t have been a problem with you if anyone actually communicated with you about it. Buzz was her own free, sexual being. You wanted her to blossom and fly. You also just wanted to be safe with her.

“Circe and John? What the fuck? I thought you were straight?”

“I am straight! We didn’t do anything. I’m on my period! It was Circe’s idea.”

“Circe?” How could Circe not tell you?

“She wanted to hook me up with John.”

“So wait, who wanted what now?”

“Just, nevermind.”

“Wait, no, I deserve answers.”

“John thought I was cute and so Circe had sex with John while they both gave me hickeys.”

“I thought you didn’t have sex?”

“I didn’t!”

Oh, so a threesome. Without you.

“Why didn’t you invite me?”

“Well, there wasn’t space. And Circe doesn’t like you like that.” You didn’t like Circe like that either.

“You like Circe like that?”

“I don’t know, just--Are we breaking up or not?”

Heterosexual/heteronormative polyamory on the road was horseshit. It just meant *I’m gonna sleep around and not tell you*. Well, why the fuck not? One obvious conclusion you, and the traveling community, came to is that you had no right to claim her. Which you weren’t trying to do, exactly. It was more the stabbing pangs in your chest and throat you just wanted to go away. Another conclusion is that the traveling community was inundated with male violence, and with men being the large majority of travelers, women were coveted by both men and other women-- until they weren’t, and were called names, abandoned, raped, or beaten, which was, sadly, endemic. Seasoned femme travelers would become tough as fuck, or at least front it, to survive. All this meant communicating became difficult, or impossible, especially in groups of potential suitors, as the outcome could be some fucked up shit.

Because of sexual desire and their general rarity, women often had more social capital and power in groups of travelers. So many lonely straight dudes that would say or do anything for a cuddle buddy in a warm sleeping bag, and so many women that found (sometimes toxic) solidarity with each other in the maelstrom of toxic evil. This was certainly true of THE SPIRIT.

That whole day was miserable. Iggy left the bus on some personal errand and Neal stayed. The bus drove off the paid lot and a plan developed to leave the city. The bus, consuming gas at four miles per the gallon, needed a large amount of money to make

it out of the city. The whole crew split into pairs to spange whole neighborhoods and fundraise dollars and gasoline. You were stuck with Neal, while Buzz ran off with John. Not wanting to scare her off or scare the new crew, you kept quiet.

You kept thinking of how fucked up it was, how blindsided you were.

You also kept thinking about what to say to her to win her favor again.

You just wanted to go back to normal with her.

Buzz and you were both very comfortable. You did love her. You would pick each other's noses. You were humiliated by her family. You cleaned poo off her intoxicated body. You liked her body. You thought she liked yours. But then, like what the fuck, right?

You started to remember some of the times during sex that she told you your penis hurt her. You would stop every time, wondering what was wrong. She said that you were too big. You started to wonder if that was why she was so quick to sleep with somebody else. *Somebodies* else. You couldn't fulfill her needs. It was your fault she didn't tell you the truth. It was your fault. And you knew she was lying. They totally fucked. What the fuck. They're fucking right now.

So the crew all came back together and bought alcohol instead of gas. Or in addition to gas. You didn't really give a shit. You soberly tried to make nice with Buzz and John and you reminded Buzz of her promise. Tequila made rounds among the ten travelers, then whiskey, then Franzia. John was driving to a place to sleep.

Kasper and Neal were arguing about something, about you maybe, vaguely, you don't know. Did Neal call you a pussy?

You got Buzz away from John and Circe and said to her, “Why are you lying?”

Jay asked you for a cigarette, and Plague Rat was getting rowdy again.

Bonnie took some of the whiskey for her wake-up the next morning.

Someone got pissed the whiskey disappeared.

Buzz disappeared too, again.

Oh, she’s up at the front of the bus. She was flirting with John. You watched John and Buzz climb upstairs. The bus must have stopped moving.

Kasper and Neal were yelling at each other.

“You calling me a bitch?”

“Bitch ass pussy.”

Fists were thrown.

You were parked now.

Neal and Kasper were scrapping, and Tracy was egging them on, and Plague Rat, Chris and Bonnie were breaking them apart. Where the fuck was Paul?

You barely paid attention. The shit was so chaotic. You felt so low and so bad. Buzz and John were fucking, *right now*. You just knew it. You chugged some more Franzia and next thing you remember you belted out YOU’RE FULL OF SHIT, BUZZARD. It felt so good, you did it again. YOU’RE FULL OF SHIT. You wanted her, or someone, to come down and hold you. You were in so much pain. Everyone leaves you eventually.

YOU’RE FULL OF SHIT!

Then you were in the mud outside. There was no Buzz to bring you comfort. Buzz wasn’t coming, Buzz didn’t give a fuck about you. She just wanted to fuck. But not you. Everyone *but*

you. You're pathetic. You're a pussy. Pathetic fake loser. You cuck. You're worthless. You're shit. You're humiliated. They think you're weak. Everyone thinks you're weak. You are weak, you pathetic fuck. You piece of shit. Why didn't you scrap with John? Why didn't you put a fist in his fucking ear? He stole your old lady. What the fuck. And Circe? What the fuck!

YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT!

YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT!

YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT, Buzzard!

Chris eventually came around to tell you to quiet down or the neighbors will call the cops. You shivered and cried. You screamed in agony. How could you feel this way? You wanted them to hear it. You wanted the whole world to know! Your old lady was a liar! Betrayer! Vampire! Chris gave you a sleeping bag and you crawled inside of it, weak and a baby, still shivering. Why didn't mom care that you were shivering?

YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT, Buzzard!

Oblivion came.

10 Out of Oblivion Came a Spider

Out of Oblivion came a spider the size of a pitbull, spinning webs in a dark, abandoned bathroom, blocking your exit with its body and segmented legs, webbed excrement covering the ceiling and walls. Its menace and hunger put in you Fear. You glanced in a gritty bathroom mirror in the darkness and saw your eyes, all of ten of them. You went to touch your face. The spider hissed and lunged at you.

You screamed aloud, waking yourself in a jump at the early dawn. What seemed like a nightmare was indeed, the Real.

You didn't want to believe it at first. You had to pee. Not able to find your glasses, you wandered to a bathroom in the middle of a park. You wandered back. You rolled a cigarette. Plague Rat came out from a corner of the park, asking for a smoke.

"You missed the orgy last night. It was disgusting," she spat. She opened a 211 for her wakeup medicine, her hands shaking. You started to shake yourself. Buzzard was at the center of it, wasn't she? Where were your glasses? Chris appeared soon after her, your glasses in hand. One of the arms was made out of copper wire.

"They broke," he said. "So I wrapped them up for you. I couldn't find your other arm."

"Thanks," you said, in shock at his kindness and skill. It was a decent wrap. You knew you had to leave. You didn't want to see anybody, nor hear anything about last night. You gathered your things. Neal awoke with a similar intention. You forgot all about the fight between your old road dog and Neal.

Then Kasper appeared with a huge black eye and a giant, bloody cut above it. Bonnie woke up and tended to him. You started to leave. Neal got his dog, trying to come with you.

You lost Neal pretty quickly. You just wanted to be alone.

Well, actually, not alone. You needed comfort. In no place to deal with housie women, low as all fuck, you turned to a social category of sexual partner you knew would put up with you, dirty as hell, no money or charisma. Men. Middle aged men, bears specifically, were a top tier comfort. But not just any bear. They had to use speed.

It took most of the day to find what you were looking for. He bought the speed, took you to a sex shop and bought a pookie, then the room. All you wanted was to put the thoughts at bay, to shove the devil down. You were too weak to fight it. You used the motel laundry and did speed with him. He was a nurse, actually, and speed was medicine that night, as you both took hits and took turns sucking flaccid dick. You both watched football and you asked him to hold you. Then the sun rose and it was time to go. Coming down from speed wasn't very fun. It made you more paranoid and antisocial than usual. A black hole beckoned and groaned as the nurse dropped you off downtown the next day, and with no sleep, little energy, and nowhere else to go, you returned to THE SPIRIT at the invitation of Chris and Plague Rat.

Kasper's eye was really bad. It had swollen shut, pink and purple and full of pus, becoming blacker by the hour. Neal was gone for good. Paul was gone too. The bus, down to eleven people including yourself, decided to drop Kasper at a hospital. You hadn't slept since the night in the mud, and wanted nothing to do

with anyone on THE SPIRIT. You volunteered to stay with them during intake while the rest of the bus went down to Dinkytown to sponge up more booze. Space from it all, and sleep in a hospital waiting room, sounded so good. Buzzard decided to come with, reuniting your three person crew from Pennsylvania. Kasper was thankful but annoyed.

You couldn't really look at her. All you looked at was Kasper's pink, purple, blackened, swollen eye.

"I can't believe you did that to me," you said to her, all three of you sitting in the hospital lobby.

"I don't owe you anything," she said.

What?

"Why didn't you just tell me?"

"I don't know, it just happened."

"What the fuck, Buzzard?"

Buzzard looked at Kasper, then at you. It must've looked like two sad sacks of shit, because she then said, "Ugh, being with you two. You two are both so miserable."

"What the fuck, Buzzard? I can't believe you did that to me."

Kasper sighed, holding an ice pack to his eye, "Will you two just shut up?"

Kasper was admitted. You and Buzzard were alone.

"Plague Rat told me there was an orgy?" You finally asked.

"Where'd you go last night?" She countered.

"I was in a motie."

"I was worried about you. I just wanted to know you weren't out in the rain somewhere."

"What happened, Buzzard?"

Buzzard said, “Oh, and Sushi’s gone. I lost her. She must’ve gotten scared and ran away.”

“Damn, that’s a shame,” you said.

“She probably got scared of your yelling.”

“OK, Buzzard.”

Buzzard eventually told you what happened. After your shouting quieted down, John, Circe, Stephen even, Jay, and Tracy all wound upstairs and naked drinking wine.

“There was no orgy,” Buzzard said. “You know how Plague Rat is. She’s such a prude.”

Just like the other morning, you could tell Buzzard was lying.

“Did you fuck John?”

“We’ve been fucking.” You knew it. You seethed. She was lying before, she just told you the truth about before. She’s lying now.

“What the fuck, Buzzard? I thought you were on your period.”

“I mean, so like, John doesn’t really care about that.” (You didn’t either?)

“What happened?”

“Ugh, so John was fucking me and Circe and Circe was fucking Jay and Stephen was just, like, there. Tracy wanted me to suck their dick and I did a little but, like, I didn’t want to really.”

“You didn’t want to?”

“I kind of wanted to.”

“That sounds like an orgy to me.”

“I mean, I guess it was kind of an orgy.” She smiled, quietly thinking about how hot it all was. “Circe wanted to eat me out but I was on my period. And I jerked Jay off a little. His dick’s kinda

small.” She laughed. It was kind of hot. It also stung like a blade in your spine.

“So you just left me there, in the dirt?”

“You were being abusive! Everyone said so. I convinced everyone to let you stay.”

You were going through touch withdrawals. You wanted so bad just to hold her. She wouldn’t let you.

“If we’re gonna make this work, can you please stop lying to me?” You asked.

“I’m not lying! I’m just, ugh. We’re not even together!” That one hurt. Of course you two were together. At least until the other night.

“Do you love me?” You asked.

“Sometimes.” Then she said, “Sometimes you can be real happy and free. Like when we were in Philly. But lately you’ve just been so grumpy and angry. You’re kind of a dick.”

“You only love me when I’m happy?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Can you hold me?” You asked.

“No! I’m mad at you. You said some real mean things!”

“You did some real fucked up shit to me, Buzzard.”

“Ugh, why did I even come in here!”

Kasper, it turned out, had a staph infection in their eye. He had to stay overnight. And the night after that, at least. Bonnie, Circe, and Plague Rat all had staph infections on their feet, or one of them had one on their hand. It made sense, disgusting ass travelers. You volunteered to be there overnight. You asked Buzzard to be there too, and she said no. Buzzard left, and you sat up while Kasper had some tests run. You fell into a light sleep.

Eventually, Buzzard came back to the fourth floor lobby. You both checked in on Kasper, who was in and out of consciousness.

“I mean I feel bad,” she said. “Are you eating?”

You said no. She left. The hours blurred together. What a fucking mistake this all was.

Eventually, maybe the next day, Buzzard came with food and you felt better. You told her you weren’t sleeping well, still not eating enough. She finally gave in and slept next to you that night, in an empty nearby lobby off the 4th floor of the hospital.

Kasper had to have surgery on his eye. He might not be able to see again. With gauze on their right eye and a face tattoo of an anchor below their left eye. You told Kasper he looked like a pirate. He groaned in pain. Buzzard left again, acting as a liaison between the bus people and you. The bus needed to leave soon. It was quickly becoming colder, and THE SPIRIT wouldn’t be able to make it over the Rockies with snow on the ground.

Kasper had surgery, and meds were pumped by IV into their eye. He gained his vision back. He figured out plans with family to fully recover. It was unwise to go back to the bus with an open wound and become reinfected with staph. You spanged a resident doctor for a pack of cigarettes and a cafeteria cheeseburger. That cafeteria cheeseburger was so delicious you dreamed about it. All you wanted was to be held by her again.

You and Buzz talked about your situation.

“I do want to be with you,” she said.

“Are you sure, dude? Fuck, I could leave.” You said.

“I don’t want you to leave!”

“You sure acted that way a few days ago.”

“You were a real dick.”

“I love you, Maggie.”

“I love you too.” She hugged you.

You cried. “OK, I’ll stay.” You were weak. You craved her touch. You weren’t sleeping well, or at all. You weren’t eating well, or rarely. You also didn’t know how to face John, or Tracy, or Circe, or Jay. Or Stephen. You couldn’t really, not without Buzz by your side. And she was, for now. You made your peace and apologized to them all for being abusive. Buzz was feeding you. It was going to be ok. Buzz did love you. Buzzard *loved* you. You were worthy of love. You weren’t just shit on the bottom of her shoe. You and Buzz wound up back on THE SPIRIT, destination St Cloud, Minnesota, without Kasper. You never knew how they healed.

11 WAKE UP AND RAGE!

On the way, you found a water bottle filled with what looked like tomato soup.

"Don't open that!" Bonnie said. She snatched the bottle from your hand.

Against your better judgment, you asked, "What is it?"

"That's blood," Tracy grimaced. "Didn't you know that? There's vampires on this bus."

"OK, more like a bloody mary." You turned away, bored.

"Circe's one."

"A vampire?" You said, trying to figure out where she was going.

Tracy chugged her 211. She was serious. "Can't you see them?"

Bonnie's dog started barking. Bonnie left to attend the pup.

Plague Rat, coming from the back, looked at you. "Circe and John, duh," winking. "They got Tracy a few weeks back." They both were bullshitting. You finished the thought for Plague Rat. 'And now Buzz.'

"OK assholes. Whatever man." You turned toward the moving landscape of western Minnesota, a long string of cars behind you, all blaring their horns. THE SPIRIT only went 40 miles an hour.

"No, I'm serious, look," Tracy said, revealing identical bite-marks to Buzzard's on their neck.

"Fuck off."

"But you know what. Vampires are not Vampires all the time."

You tried to ignore her.

Nevertheless, she persisted. “Hey, you seein’ those shadow people yet?” Tracy knew you limped off to smoke dick and suck meth.

You grew red in the face. “The fuck’s your problem?”

Tracy said, unimpressed, “Hey, you know why they call them tweakers right? ‘Cus they’re up for twoweeks at a time! Get it? Two-weeks!”

Plague Rat, laughing, “Tweak?! Where?! I love meth!” She was seriously enthusiastic at the idea. She started singing some fucked up Smash Mouth lyrics. “Hey now, smoke a fat shard, get paid”--

Tracy, “Aren’t you underage, child? Like what the fuck? Calm down, oogle.”

“I ain’t no oogle, faggot.”

“You know what, I’m not even gonna touch that.” Tracy concluded. “Do you even know what meth is short for?”

“Methistopheles?”

“Metha-what? No, kid. Just, no.” Tracy scoffed in disbelief.

Circe came down from her lair. She held a mason jar full of urine. She dumped it out the window of the moving bus. You had no words to say to her. Not yet. You closed your eyes and tried to sleep. It didn’t come.

The bus stopped in St Cloud. Buzzard left to wander alone.

Was Buzzard a vampire? Buzzard was a fucking vampire, she had to be by now. Circe definitely was one. John, absolutely.

The St Cloud Walmart parking lot was like every other Walmart parking lot. Buzzard left you again, going back to John. No words spoken. Like you didn’t exist. They wandered into Walmart together, holding hands. You watched Christopher and Bonnie wire wrap gems to sell. You tried to fall asleep again.

Buzzard's naked body, flat on an altar. She was pale with short hair. Thin. Bony shoulders, long arms. Arms by her side. Lying on her back. Her eyes were closed. Hooded figures in satin robes around her, chanting, dozens of little fires on tall candelabras. The chanting wasn't in English. The hooded figures loomed; you think they were casting a spell. You recognized them as vampires. Her arms and legs were bound to the altar with silk rope--

--The dogs barked at something and you watched Buzzard and John walk back from Walmart, in each others' clothes, dorky as fuck. It made you fucking sick.

"What the fuck," you muttered to yourself. You were miserable watching this new love bud and germinate. You smoked like a chimney, the pipe tobacco you carried didn't have enough nicotine in it and so you kept pulling, one after the other, sweating, clammy, in a fever. It was a chilly 40 degrees outside.

"You're awake. We're gonna carve pumpkins!" Bonnie said to you, offering some respite. It was October, after all.

"WAKE UP AND RAGE!" Plague Rat screeched to you.

You followed both of them down off the bus into daylight.

That night, still in St Cloud, you hid in your sleeping bag while Plague Rat went into another furor, getting everyone upset. John threatened to kick her off. He was the driver, he reminded her, pulling rank on an anarchist non-hierarchical schoolbus. He wasn't gonna drive until she left.

"FUCK YOU," She shrieked. "YOU CAN'T DO THAT! THIS IS ANARCHY!"

"Yo, shut the fuck up," Tracy said, rolling a joint.

“FUCK YOU TRACY!”

“Ooo, you’re not scary. You better shut the fuck up or I’m gonna fuck you up,” Tracy said, still bored.

Bonnie said, “Plague Rat, dude, calm down.”

“I’LL FUCKING CUT YOU!” Plague Rat screamed.

Christopher said, “Hey, come here, I wanna show you something.”

“I don’t want to go anywhere with you, Christopher! Don’t come near me!”

It went on and on.

“Here, kid, have a headchange,” Tracy said to her, lighting the joint and passing it to her, in an act of compassion and mercy. Tracy’s voice was cold and calm. “Calm down.”

You scored a seat near the front of the bus to sleep. You woke up to the bus rocking back and forth. You could hear her moans. Buzzard and John and Circe or whoever the fuck else up there were fucking again. Tracy was on the floor with Bonnie. Stephen slept in the back. Plague Rat and Christopher were sleeping in the bushes somewhere. Who else was up there? Jay. Right. Jay and Circe were fucking a lot. But this wasn’t them. It was Buzzard and John. The whole bus shook back and forth. Your heart raced as a stinging blade of betrayal reentered your heart for probably the third time now.

“WHAT THE FUCK,” You shouted. No one answered. Then you felt a weird tingle on your neck, went to touch it, and a cockroach appeared on your hand. “WHAT THE FUCK!” You impulsively leered into your sleeping bag. An army of cockroaches, a family of hundreds, spilled up onto your face. They were crawling up the walls and blocking out the bright white LED

lamps emitting from the Walmart parking lot. They were in the food, in your hair, on Tracy's face. You finally let out a "FUCK," jumping up out of your bag onto Bonnie's body below you.

She woke up screaming, "WHAT THE FUCK!"

Then Tracy's screaming, "WHAT THE FUCK!"

Then the conquering army of cockroaches were gone. Just, gone.

But the bus still kept rocking back and forth, as if hell on earth couldn't stop the fucking. It was disgusting. Squeak. *Mmmm. Oh yeah. Squeak. Like that. Right there.*

You were a fucking monk. You were a masochist, a flagallator. You walked on coal. You ate knives. You flogged yourself every time those two new lovers kissed. More if they tongue kissed. More if they did it in front of people. And even more if you heard them fucking. You kept your ear out for it now. Was that a moan or a breeze through the trees? It was worse when it was silent and you swore you heard her moan, only to know she wasn't even there. Face it. You lost Buzzard. This was absolutely clear. You hated her. You hated John too, but knew it was Buzzard's choice to cheat on you. It was all Buzzard.

John Lennon was relatively innocent. He just wanted to bone. Or, as became increasingly clear, he wanted a Yoko Ono. He was a tall, lanky dork in a tophat. A steampunk psychedelic Jack Skellington. If you let yourself be the other man with other women, you couldn't hate on John. You also cheated on women. So why did you hate Buzzard? You really, actually, genuinely hated yourself. You smelled like shit, the stench of pathetic sadboy heartbreak in your sleeping bag, in your clothes, skidmarks in your underwear.

She *did* cheat on you. All this poly shit. It was fucking bullshit. Fake as fuck. You don't get to lie to your partner, sleep with everybody, treat that partner like catshit and not have any consequences. You *were* her partner, and she *was* yours.

Fuck, Dorian. She did the same thing to him!

You decided to confront Buzzard. It was night time, or day. You were still in St Cloud, or maybe it was another city. Another Walmart. They all look the same.

She was walking alone in the parking lot.

“What the fuck, Buzzard? Why are you lying to me?” You said, accosting her.

“What?” She asked.

“Why are you lying to me, Buzzard?”

“Leave me alone.”

“No, why are you lying?”

“Stop it! Quit following me!” She cried crocodile tears. You weren't following her.

“I'm not following you!” You said.

“Stop following me you creep!” She screamed.

Bonnie peered out from a bus window or somewhere. “Yo, if you don't chill out, maybe it's time you go.” Bonnie was trying to kick you off. The Marooning, that shit was gonna happen. Buzzard, or maybe John, was playing chess with your heart and soul, turning everyone against you. Circe came down from her towering spot on THE SPIRIT.

“If you keep treating Buzzard like this, you gotta go.”

What. The fuck? Everyone was a fucking sociopath. No one gave a fuck about you.

You asked why.

“Stop stalking her, dude. She’s just trying to do her thing.”
Circe said.

“Yo, she’s lying to me. She’s a fucking liar. I just want the truth. That’s all I want. Peace,” you said to Circe. Finally.

“OK, come upstairs. Hold on, let me do a dab.” As if she was waiting for you to say those words.

You communed with The Vegan Vampire Pirate Queen of THE SPIRIT, Circe. Circe, at the center of everything wrong in your life. Circe, who ~~stole~~ Buzzard from you. (How can you steal a person?) Circe, who played hippie guru but was actually a servant to the Lord of Darkness. Circe, who held *your* soul in a mason jar for ransom, pawning it to place among her collection of innocent blood from her victims. Circe, who you had to diplomatically speak with if you wanted to stay, to recollect your soul from her pawnshop of doom, to not be marooned in a Walmart somewhere on the Tundra before the first snow. Circe, the cannibal vegan sociopath. Fucking Circe.

You sat there in her lair, unable to even utter a word. You thought about how much cum must be in the sheets.

She said, “Do you remember when you fucked my sister?”
You were quiet. “That hurt my sister’s boyfriend *a lot*.”

What the fuck did that have to do with any fucking thing?

Circe continued. “You’re poly, right? I don’t see the problem? I don’t think you have any place to criticize what Buzzard does or doesn’t do.”

“I’m not criticizing--”

“Maybe Buzzard just needs to fly.” Yeah, fly like a bat.
“Blossom like a butterfly and soar. She’s so pure. You can’t keep a butterfly like her in a cage forever. You have to let her go.”

“She’s telling me one thing and it’s just--”

“Just breathe with me. Breathe, and release.” You did what she said. It made no difference. You were being condescended to by the woman that your old lady cheated on you with. *And you weren't even invited.* Not that you would fuck Circe. You did sleep with her sister, after all. You were totally fucking reckless but not that reckless. And Circe was fucking gross. She ate her own period blood. And that's not cus she was a vampire. She was just a fucking hippie. You breathed with Circe. You told Circe it did, in fact, make a difference.

“OK, so I see you're in a lot of pain. Figure it out. Talk with her about it. Just stop being a creep--”

“I *was* trying to talk to her about--”

“Shouting isn't talking.”

There's something fucking wrong here. Reality wasn't matching what anyone else said. It was ok for her to cheat, celebrated and even conspired by the bus, but you raising your voice wasn't? Free love, right? Were you the one fucking up? Were you just being gaslit? Did the vampire queen use some Jedi Mind Tricks on you? Were you being abusive?

“Lovin' you, brother.” She said, reaching for a hug and gesturing your exit from her lair.

Christopher, John, you, Buzzard, and Plague Rat went dumpstering behind an Aldi. You all found five shopping carts worth of food. Tomatoes, butter leaf lettuce, spinach, broccolettes, oranges, pomegranates. A whole produce section of a grocery store. Plus a greasy bottle of sesame oil, coconut oil with a broken seal, soy sauce, bread with a little mold on it, droopy flowers. The bus couldn't eat it all before it went bad.

Upon returning, Plague Rat said, “HAIL SATAN!” before dumping vegetables all over the counter.

Circe, Stephen and Tracy, strict vegans, said together, “Hail Seitan.”

Jay drawled, “Sail Hatan.”

Bonnie, drunk, said, “Sail Hatan, Jay? Y’all need Jesus.”

Tracy giggled. “We got Jesus. Over here. Stephen’s Jesus as fuck. Look at him.”

Iggy decided this was the moment to tell THE SPIRIT a long-kept secret.

“I have a ghost lover,” she said.

“A what?”

Iggy hiccuped. “He’s been visiting me for a while now. He undresses me and we fuck. Then he’s gone.” Plague Rat got real quiet.

Bonnie guffawed.

Stephen plucked away at his banjo.

Buzzard was curious. “How do you know it’s a he?”

Iggy said, “I mean he has a dick, I feel it inside me.”

“I have a dick,” Tracy said. “And I’m not a man.”

Iggy looked Tracy in the eyes and said, “Is it you? Are you my ghost lover?”

“Uh, no.”

“He makes me cum everytime. I kind of like it.”

“Kind of?” Tracy looked a little concerned.

“I really like it.”

“Wild,” You said.

12 **Plague Rat**

THE SPIRIT wasn't always a nightmare. You got day-drunk and everyone sang out My Chemical Romance lyrics to a blown out speaker. Plague Rat loved it. She was feeling better too. She was learning an indie pop song on her ukelele. Buzzard was learning to play mandolin to Stephen on banjo and Tracy on accordion. It sounded fucking terrible. Tracy sang. Christopher played country songs on his guitar. Jay had a guitar but his DTs made him shake too much to play often. Stephen and Circe cooked vegan stirfry and everyone ate. You healed a little. You still had touch withdrawals, but you slept a full eight hours. Everyone stopped fucking for a day or two. The crew started to feel like some fucked up family. Belting out lyrics to music from middle school, you began to see everyone as kids from back then. Children, just kids, regressing. Plague Rat relished in it, like twelve years old was her prime, like she was inside the largest Hot Topic store in the world, forever.

Were you still in St Cloud? The days bled together. At some point, a Prism traveler kid came to kick it. He had face tats and wore a fedora, and brought 10 tabs of LSD as a gift to the wary souls of THE SPIRIT. His name was Truckstop. He carried with him four extra duffel bags.

"I'm a mobile truck stop. Too sick or stranded to make it there? I'll come to you."

He knew John and they hashed out their experiences at Nationals in Vermont, and other regional gatherings of hippie vampires. Other travelers hashed out their stories. Tracy knew John from Cumberland, a quasi-Prism regional, before John broke off from Stockpot to drive THE SPIRIT. Plague Rat knew Circe

because they both had the same ex boyfriend. Christopher was hitching alone in Indiana, but met Truckstop a year or two ago, maybe. Truckstop had one of those faces, like you knew them already. Bonnie was in Cumberland too. Stephen and Circe knew each other for a year now, traveling together in a committed, polyamorous relationship. Stephen didn't seem to mind being cast aside for Circe's flings with John, maybe Buzzard, now Jay. They were still together, and Stephen, while quiet, introverted and disinterested with others, had a vested interest in THE SPIRIT. He was zen. He read all the time. He read while others screamed, or fucked. At night, he read by headlamp.

Buzzard came up to you as you played chess with Stephen with two offerings: a talisman and a tab of acid. The talisman was really quite wonderful. It was a necklace made of leather strips, with a pouch in the center to snugly fit a BIC lighter. On the pouch was a triangle, also made of leather.

She said, "I made this for you. That way, you'll never lose your lighter again. It'll always be around your neck."

You took it, completely shocked that she even remembered your name.

"Really? Why?" you quietly mustered. "I don't want this."

"You sure? It's pretty cool. I made it with love."

"Love, huh?" You examined it. Wore it. You lit a cigarette with it. Fuck, any scrap of love you could get was love you needed. You were low, pathetic. You gave in. It *was* cool. You took it from her.

"OK. I don't want any acid though."

"I think you should get to know him. He's not that bad. He's a real dork. Let's all take acid together. I think you'll feel better. But only if you want to."

“You want me to take acid with John Lennon in a Walmart parking lot? Right now?”

Buzz chortled. “He’s not John Lennon. Yes right now.”

“He sure looks like it. What’s it with you and rockstars? Dorian looked like Jim Morrison. Now you have John Lennon. What’s next? Slash? Kid Rock?”

“Oh, Dorian. I miss him.” Buzz sighed, reminiscing.

“Are you trying to fight? Cus I’ll leave.”

“No, I’m too tired to fight.”

“OK. We can take it together, me and you. Then we’ll all wander the store together. Take a walk into the park over there.” She pointed. “You know, get to know each other. I think you’ll feel so much better. He’s not a bad guy.” Oh, there was a park over there.

You slowly nodded, wondering why on earth you would trust her. Was she being sincere? The talisman made it seem like it. You didn’t want anything to do with drugs at the moment. But this was another chance to, as Buzzard said, feel better. You took it.

“Just one tab,” you said to her.

“Open your mouth.”

John was really a dork. You could take him. You probably could have jumped him. Beat him up. Take his lunch money, his keys to the bus. Drive the bus into a ditch. Set the bus on fire in the ditch. But that was that poison shit talking. He was harmless. John juggled oranges as you three walked through the park, talking about how you all came to travel.

“For me, it was *Into the Wild*,” he said.

“*Into the Wild*?” you said, in disbelief.

“That kid, man. He was really livin’ it. So I came out on the road. Met Stockpot. They serve free food across the country, coast

to coast.” Silence as you judged him. *Into the Wild*. That kid died, didn’t he? Of eating bad berries or something. What burned in you is that at the time, that movie was trendy. He was trendy. He was more connected than you. Had a better skillset. Was calmer, more collected. Smarter. You found out later his parents were middle-class, like Buzzard’s. Lived in the same state, in a city close by Buzz. Large, suburban houses. White neighborhood. Picket fence. They were both Sagittariuses. In a way, they were supposed to be together.

John said, eventually, looking at the ground, “So, what about you?”

You sighed. “It wasn’t really a choice. Starve in Vegas, or go to jail eventually, or leave. So I went.” Jay’s story held the same stakes. That might have been why you weren’t angry with him at all. You fed Jay nicotine on a regular basis now.

John nodded. More silence. The acid wasn’t very strong. Thank god for that. John brought the chess board out and you both did eventually bond over teaching Buzz how to play. This is what polyamory was. What it could have been. Had she just told you the truth, or her feelings. Her desires. It was her life, her body, all hers. You didn’t want it. You just wanted the nightmares to stop. You wanted to go back in time to that night when you fucked it all up. Fuck, man. Fuck you. You didn’t hate Buzz or John or Circe. You hated yourself.

You were called back to THE SPIRIT. Some raver chick around your age, in a zebra onesie, invited all (ten? eleven? thirteen?) of you over to her house for the night. She and Truckstop were pals, as Truckstop lived in the area for a few months. Jay drove for the first time. John was starting to trip. You did too, though it was quite mellow. You were relaxed. Buzz made

a peace offering, after all. The place was the Raver's grandparents' house, and they recently passed away. She was tasked with cleaning it out. She said it was lonely, and the basement was haunted. THE SPIRIT pulled up to it and almost immediately, the police flashed their red and blues, a spotlight peering into the back window of the bus.

Bonnie and Raver went to speak with them. Bonnie loved talking to the cops. She did it barefooted, innocent, with her Midwestern accent peaking out. Raver came back to the group, before any of you even set foot in the house, and told everyone that the neighbors saw the bus and thought you were casing the place to rob.

Just another paranoid Baby Boomer.

Thankfully, the police believed a nice, young, smiling, white girl in a zebra onesie. They could have searched THE SPIRIT. You all filed inside, the cops of St Cloud watching before they turned off their lights and eventually drove away.

You asked your hostess if you could use the shower, the first one in a week. You wanted to rinse the filthy, cold, pathetic sweat that covered your body in a thin slime. She showed you the bathroom and you undressed. A knock on the door. It was Buzz.

She wanted to shower with you. She lathered you up in soap, squatting to wash your feet, your legs, your stomach, your chest, your arms, your face. She looked you in the eyes with care and consideration. She really did love you. She just wanted freedom. You could understand that. But you were still angry with her. You cautiously, fearfully, allowed her to touch your body. You then touched hers, holding her waist, watching her as she diligently washed away your shame. A shower turned into a bath. There was pressure to make love. She was giving you a window.

You wound up in the attic, in a spare bedroom.

Your hostess called *you two* lovers, which made you smile a little, her saying there were only a few beds in the whole place and you as a couple scored one. You won the little luxury of a bed in an unsaid competition with the fucked up SPIRIT family. You also won Buzz back, somehow, for the moment. The talisman, Buzzard's mercy. You loved Buzz. You did. You ran past everyone else, both of you barely toweled. You wanted it to be known. You both laid naked in bed together. She guided your hand to her body. You made love. Slowly, quietly at first. You thought of your nightmares, of the other men that touched her in the last few weeks, and John. You remembered the bus rocking back and forth, them in each others' clothes, them kissing, you mentally flogging yourself. You became angry.

"I can't," you said. She cried. You held her and fell asleep. You needed sleep so bad.

You were on a bench in THE SPIRIT. You saw Buzzard's naked body, almost unrecognizable, covered in what looked like sores, standing over you. But when you looked closer, they weren't sores. They were vulvas. No eyes, ears, lips, nose, or hair on Buzzard's head. Just vulvas. Buzzard's vulva. Other vulvas. Vulvas opened and closed all over its body, as if they were lungs, gasping for air. Sweaty vulvas, small vulvas, big vulvas, hairy vulvas, vulvas with large labia, vulvas with small labia, missing labia, white and black and brown and pink. The vulvas started to excrete white discharge. Yellow discharge, brown discharge, red discharge. Buzz leaked from her sores all over the floor of THE SPIRIT. She breathed. She smelled. Not a good smell. Like a dead mouse, moldy potatoes, and soured, minced garlic. This didn't scare you like the other nightmares. You tried to shake Buzzard's

outstretched hand. Buzz opened a sore so big it looked like the mouth of a viper. She consumed you.

You woke up in a slime, alone in the bed.

Plague Rat stood over you with a cup full of loogies, finding it hilarious to dump on you.

“WAKE UP AND RAGE,” she roared.

Downstairs, Buzz and John were making breakfast for everyone. Bonnie, Stephen, and Tracy were walking dogs. Truckstop was playing Magic: The Gathering with Raver, still in a dirty zebra onesie. Jay was digging under the hood of THE SPIRIT outside. And Circe sat there on a phone, connected to a wall plug.

“We’re going to Standing Rock,” Circe announced to you, without looking up. Everyone ate breakfast, smoked morning joints, and said goodbyes to Truckstop and Raver. THE SPIRIT left port and sailed across the prairie, due west.

Fargo. What a distant memory this place was. It was only a few weeks ago but it felt like a lifetime had passed. Buzz and John were inseparable. You worked hard to ignore them, to read like Stephen, learn a skill, pick up an instrument. You gave up after a few minutes on a spare kiddie ukelele. You asked to borrow pliers and some wire from Bonnie. She said it was her only set. Plague Rat was still practicing the same indie pop song. Something about true love and sailing. Not like her at all. Her voice was a high soprano, which worked for a while. After an hour, you just wanted her to shut up. Tracy was sick of her shit too, and Circe’s for that matter.

“Something’s fucking wrong with you, Circe.” Tracy said. It was daylight in another Walmart lot. “We go wherever *you* want.

But when we wanna go somewhere it's some bullshit excuse-- Jesus, oogle," Tracy looked at Plague Rat. "Can you shut the fuck up?"

Plague Rat broke her singing and her concentration. "Fuck off, faggot," Plague Rat said.

"Listen, I get it, you're a fucking orphan. You got beat up, were raped or whatever. I don't care. You gotta start treating people with respect."

"I'm not a fucking orphan, Trace."

"Your Dad touched you. Whatever dude. Face it. Deal with it. Conquer it. Don't take it out on the rest of us."

"You fucking liar." White-faced, she got up and left.

Circe said, "You're a real piece of shit, Tracy."

"Oh, Ok. We're just gonna let all the white people drop the N bomb all over the place but when I say the truth I'm the piece of shit?"

"She's 17." Circe said.

"Listen, ok. She shouldn't even be here. You know we could all go to jail for harboring a runaway? Where they gonna put me in jail out here anyway? I'm Black, I'm trans. They think I'm the fucking tooth fairy out here."

Speaking of jail, THE SPIRIT was waiting on two old friends of John's, Prism kitchen crewmates from Stockpot, to get out of jail there in Fargo. Well, one was in jail. The other was communicating with John about the waiting. So you sat there at Walmart for several hours. THE SPIRIT was also waiting on Iggy to return. She was on her way from her family's trailer somewhere in Fargo too. The bus was about to get crowded. Iggy arrived before John's friends. Night came. Rain started to pour. Then lightning. Hail. Bus windows fogged up. Circe, Buzz, John, and

Jay all climbed upstairs. Downstairs was Tracy, Bonnie, Plague Rat, Iggy, Stephen, you, and all the dogs. Christopher was out somewhere. He liked his independence.

Everyone passed around a spacebag and Bonnie got in a playful mood with her dog, Johnny Hobo. She sang:

*Waiting in this parking lot
It's in my dreams
I am dirty broke, beautiful, and free*

An oogle classic. Then, as her dog began to shit on the floor, “OOO! SCHWAG DOG! DOG OUT!” She took Johnny Hobo out into the hail to shit.

“AS HE LIGHTS AN AMERICAN SPIRIT--” Iggy decided to sing that shit in screamo. It was fucking god-awful.

Plague Rat and Iggy started to scream at each other about how terrible it was.

The bus started to rock back and forth. Somebody was fucking somebody again.

Lightning cracked. Tracy, picking fights and speaking truth, spoke up. “Hey! People of the upstairs! You guys all say there’s no hierarchy on this bus but I literally see one, right now! Circe! There’s the upstairs people and the downstairs people. You guys get everything. We get fucking nothing. This isn’t a fucking joke.” You didn’t know what the hell Tracy was talking about, specifically.

Circe’s faint voice yelled back down out of the hole. “THERE IS NO HIERARCHY HERE.”

Tracy yelled back up, “Then why are you spending magic hat money on beer you’re not sharing! I work hard for that money, I don’t even get to have any?”

“Stephen’s got the beer,” she said. Stephen, downstairs with the rest of you, quietly pulled an IPA out of a hidden corner and passed it to Tracy. You didn’t give a fuck about a beer but you did know there was a hierarchy. Tracy was onto something.

Iggy and Plague Rat pulled at each other’s hair, shrieking like harpies at each other. The bus stopped rocking.

John came down from the lair, his tall trench coat tails and pointy shoes the first thing you saw. The man looked like a fucking elf. A fucking hippie fucking slenderman. Severus Snape if Snape dropped a bunch of mescaline on the Haight. He glided over to Plague Rat, grabbed her by the ear, and said to everyone, “Council, *now!*”

“What’s that?” Iggy asked.

“Family meeting,” Stephen sighed.

Everyone came down from upstairs.

“Somebody go find Chris,” John spat.

Tracy dipped in the thunder to do just that.

“Listen, I don’t want you on this bus anymore. You’re aggro as fuck. You don’t contribute. You blow up our shit. I think it’s time you kick rocks,” John said, directly.

“She’s 17,” Bonnie said, sticking up for Plague Rat. “You gotta calm down, dude. But she can stay. She just needs to stop being so aggro. You can do that, right?”

Plague Rat said nothing. Chris and Tracy hopped back on the bus.

“What’s going on?” Chris asked.

“I don’t want her here anymore. She’s fucking shit up for everybody.” John explained.

“She’s going through a lot,” Chris said.

“I’m right here!” Plague Rat yelled. “Quit talking about me like I’m not here.”

Circe, “This bus is a family. You can’t be doing this aggro screaming shit every*night*.”

Plague Rat, in a panic. “You motherfuckers don’t know shit! Don’t know shit about what I been through! I’m not gonna let some Prism prick kick me off this bus in a hailstorm.”

“That’s true, John. It’s bad out there right now,” Bonnie said, worried. The parking lot was a flood zone.

John realized he picked this fight on the wrong night. He sighed. “Chill out, Plague Rat. Or I’ll drag you off this bus myself. You’re an oogle. You’re about that life. I’ll drive you to the hop out, free of charge. You can hop right on out of here. I’ll give you one more night. If you’re aggro tomorrow, you’re gone.”

“You can’t do that! This is supposed to be anarchy!”

“You don’t even know what that word means,” Tracy said, shaking her head.

Iggy, blown away by what just happened, said, “Listen, I’m sorry. I didn’t know. I just got here.”

“We’ve been having issues with her since we picked her up,” John said. He continued, “I made an agreement with Circe to drive this bus to Seattle. Then I’m done. I’m done with this.” Thank fucking god. John’s leaving. You hoped he was gonna leave tomorrow. “Stockpot does not run like this. Drunk aggro kids yelling every night.”

“Love and light, John,” You said, sarcastic spit dripping out of your jaw, fangs at the ready.

“You included,” John said back to you.

“Fuck you,” you said, hawking a loogy. You finally got to say it. You wished it included a fist to his glasses.

Jay bothered you for a cigarette. You touched the talisman and found a little strength.

“Yuppie shithead John Lennon looking motherfucker.” You started to heat up.

You realized just then that Plague Rat saw the vampires too. She was alone in fighting them off, except for maybe Chris. You pictured them with stakes at the ready, watching all these villains glide around them.

“OK,” John said, ignoring you. “We’ll take a vote. Who wants Plague Rat gone?” John raised his hand. Buzz raised hers. Circe. Stephen. Jay. Jay’s vote was surprising. He liked Plague Rat. Jay was a crusty trankid himself. Then you realized he wasn’t voting for himself.

“Who wants her to stay?” John asked. Chris. Bonnie. You. Iggy, even.

“5 to 4. What about you, Tracy?”

“Oh, the Black t**** gets a vote?” Tracy said. Then, “I want her to stay. I fucking hate her. But I think she needs to be here. She needs to chill out.”

Plague Rat raised her hand.

“You don’t get a vote!” John snapped.

“Why not?” Bonnie said.

Then John sighed, “5 to 5.”

“Not consensus,” mumbled Stephen.

“Why doesn’t she get a vote, John?” asked Bonnie, pressing.

“Not consensus, not even close.” John agreed with Stephen, ignoring Bonnie. Made you wonder if it was 6 to 4,

would he have called that consensus? Consensus meant just that: *everyone* agrees. Defeated, he slid back upstairs. Buzz quickly followed him.

Plague Rat left the bus in the thunderstorm with Chris and Chris' dog. They must have had a tarp set up somewhere.

Bonnie said, "Lovin' you, family," to Plague Rat and Chris. Bonnie lifted her shirt to reveal her bellybutton. A reminder of what everyone had in common. Prism brought everyone together whether they liked it or not, everyone a human being whether you like it or not.

"Huffing glue, family," Plague Rat said, lifting her shirt to reveal her own bellybutton, before clumsily leaving THE SPIRIT with her gear, the bus doors slamming behind her.

A child. Thin, glasses, shaggy hair. You recognized it to be you. You were lying on your stomach on a hospital table. A nurse stood over you. White sheets lay over you, except to expose your bottom. The nurse held in his hands a probe, connected to a machine and an IV tree. He put the probe inside of you. You screamed and cried.

Your dad, a large, older man, stood beside the nurse. He made a joke with the nurse, something light-hearted. It wasn't funny. Your skin began to fall off your body. You were naked, skinless, sodomized. You looked at your father with shock and betrayal in your eyes. You watched this from outside yourself, watched your seven year old self be penetrated. Watched the nurse look at a computer chart, a blinking graph, as he defiled you, your father just-standing there. The nurse finished, pulling the probe out. It was covered in fecal matter. He took off his gloves and washed his hands. You couldn't look.

Then:

Chris and Plague Rat, together, plunging their stakes into the hearts of satin cloaked figures as they had their long, clawed, fingernails out, ready for the feeding. Magic Flame circled around them as Christopher in a leather jacket drew out a sword. Long and silver, he thrust the sword at the vampires. You recognized these same vampires as the ones from an earlier nightmare. The ones that sacrificed Buzz. Plague Rat, in adrenaline-fueled strength, cried out words you couldn't recognize. The magic flame devoured the vampires. It devoured a nearby cop car, licks of fire protruding out from the drivers' side window. It devoured a gas station, then a bank next to it, then a skyscraper. Plague Rat's fire covered the sky devouring Chris and Plague Rat, devouring everything, everything--

Then:

Your mom sobbing with you, gripping you. You were in fourth grade again. In a bathroom in an upstairs apartment you used to live at.

“Why me?” You sobbed, bare naked on a toilet.

She replied with careful mercy, “God chose you. God wants to teach you what other peoples' suffering is like. God's doing this because God loves you.” She then sodomized you. It was a pipet filled with warm water. You smelled Dial soap, fecal matter, shame. So much shame. She held you after. You continued to sob.

Then:

Your dad abandoned you for her. His new lover. You were in some stranger's apartment. They put you to bed. You were seven again. All you remember is crying. You couldn't stop crying. He was never going to come back. You didn't sleep that night. Night turned to morning. Morning turned to afternoon. Where was he? Other figures moved around you, they tried to feed you raisin bagels. You hated raisins. Another night came, you were there in a strange apartment. Time barely moved, if it moved at all. Where was he? Where was your dad? The strangers took you to school in the morning. Your dad never came back.

Then:

A pile of rats, fucking, their tails conjoined together in a wormlike tangle. Biting, clawing, screaming, an orgy of rats. It smelled like piss and musk, wild, squirming, beady-eyed rats.

13 Thirteen-Twelve

You woke up in the night. You didn't know what time it was. You didn't care. The rain stopped. You had to move your body. You walked to the front entrance of Walmart. There were vending machines, a whole bank of them, up front. In-between the machines, Christopher had a surge protector he had plugged into outlets meant for the vending machines. Everyone's phones were charging on it, plus his bluetooth speaker, some other random shit, a headlamp even. You plugged your phone in and lit a cigarette.

"I got this song stuck in my head," Chris said, making conversation.

You hadn't heard music, recorded music, by yourself, in a few months now.

"Yeah," he started to sing, like Eddie Vedder. "Something something let your light shine down--"

It was a buttrock song. A radio station song. He walked off somewhere. You tried googling it. You found it. You listened. You remembered a new magic, a new way to ward off the dread. Music. The sun's rays warding off vampires again, it was time to go back to THE SPIRIT. Back to the miserable present.

John sat in the captain's chair, sipping tea and chatting with Tracy.

"Back when I was on the Shining Light bus, there was an old dude that called it *cherry coke*. You pull up to a Walmart or grocery store or whatever, but it has to be a big enough store. You give the person a few dollars, and tell them, 'Get whatever you want. A candybar, a beer, whatever you want. But get me a cherry coke.' And when they get out the bus and into the store, you collect all their shit, drop it at the front door of Walmart, drive

away and leave them.” John sipped and laughed. “But only for those real obnoxious fuckers. The insufferable ones. The ones that don’t know when to quit, when to leave. Can’t stand them? You cherry coke them.”

“When were you on Shining Light?” asked Tracy.

“Awhile back. It doesn’t matter. Like, we’re all travelers here. Why can’t she just go? She wants to be a trainhopper so bad. Go do it. Someone’s gotta crew change to give her, right? She doesn’t have to stay on this bus and drag everyone down.”

John’s friends from Stockpot arrived a little later. Cowboy and Coyote. Cowboy just got out of jail, picked up on *loitering*. Coyote waited around for 30 days and arranged a rescue mission for when he got out. THE SPIRIT happened to be that mission. You dissociated. There was no way in fuck you were gonna like these guys. John now had allies. Before, you might have been able to get Jay and Stephen on your side. But now, nah. You thought about getting off this bullshit at Standing Rock. It was only a day away. Coyote and Cowboy became insulation between you and John. But the bus was now crowded. Very crowded.

It wasn’t just crowded for people. It was crowded for animals. Cowboy and Coyote came without dogs, but Iggy had one. There was Bonnie’s dog, Johnny Hobo. Tracy’s, My Dog. Chris’ dog, Sparky. Circe’s dog, Lady. They all fought for places to sleep, hidden under the benches or on the benches or on top of packs. Shit was getting cramped. The bus also carried ringworm. Circe got it, and then Jay. You were sure it was upstairs somewhere. And then flies. Flies took THE SPIRIT by storm. They must have hatched somewhere, because they were everywhere. All over the fruit and veggies that were dumpstered, rotting. All over the blankets. Everyone was swatting flies out of their faces.

“It’s too cold for this shit,” Tracy examined. “Fuck kind of flies living in almost freezing temperatures?”

John drove, showing Jay how to drive a five-speed manual and downshift. Jay got in the captain’s chair and tried it. He couldn’t get in the clutch. It stalled. John showed him a trick to get it going again. Jay stalled it again. Jay tried the trick. It didn’t work. He got frustrated, his drawl coming out. John tried it. It didn’t work. The bus stalled on the side of the interstate.

“We gotta take this to a shop. Any shop around here work on schoolbuses?” John said.

Circe made some calls. A samaritan drove up. He called his buddy. His buddy walked something through on the phone with Jay and John. They tried it. It worked, but only temporarily. Still had to stop by a shop.

Jay wore an ankle-length skirt. It was pretty common for the dudes of the bus to wear women’s clothes, thanks to Tracy’s pioneering. Stephen wore an ankle-length skirt too. And John was wearing Buzzard’s purple leggings with some regularity. All three of them, plus Circe in her own short skirt and leggings, stood around the hood at the front of THE SPIRIT with a few North Dakota mechanics, the mechanics scratching their heads. They figured it out in a few hours. None of the Dakotans batted an eye at the white, cross-dressing, homeless, alcoholic, vampiric tramps, nor at the Flower Power Mad Max apocalypse ass schoolbus.

Meanwhile Cowboy free-fooded an Indian Buffet nearby.

“My kids and I broke down, do you have anything you’re going to throw away?” He asked. It worked for him. He was in his 30s, or 40s, human age not really a concept Cowboy was familiar with. He was married once, that much you knew. Copper wire

wrapped gems dangled around his neck. Among the shinies was a wedding ring on a chain. He also wore a trench coat like John's.

Coyote wore Grateful Dead t-shirts. And shorts. He was a shorts guy. Didn't matter if it was 20 degrees. Or sometimes cargo pants. He had a pair of aviator goggles and a gas mask he liked to wear. He was the most aesthetically apocalyptic out of all the crew.

THE SPIRIT made it to Mandan that night. The plan was to sleep at Walmart, the same Walmart you and Buzz were at an eternity ago, then hit up a food bank the next morning. You were to arrive at Standing Rock with food. Buttlods of food. The whole place if you could. John, not much of a drinker, decided to drink that night. You made peace with him that night as well, if for no other reason than that Buzz wanted to sleep alone. Buzz was sick of booze. Sick of drunk shit. She slept on a bench in the corner downstairs while you and John bullshitted by the captain's chair. The bus, usually very crowded, was relatively empty: Iggy was somewhere off with Stephen, a blossoming relationship. Circe was up in the lair with Jay. Cowboy and Coyote paired off, sleeping under the bus. Tracy was somewhere in the bushes. Christopher, Bonnie and Plague Rat were present, helping you suck down some kind of whiskey that wasn't Black Velvet.

"I actually like that you call me John Lennon," John said. The fucker. He took a swig from the nalgene before handing it to you. He sang, "*All we are say-ying, is take off your pants.*" He laughed.

"The Beatles fucking suck," Plague Rat said. "Blah blah, love. Gross. Where's the blood, the violence?"

Bonnie was pawing through Plague Rat's hair, looking for lice.

Bonnie said, "There's more to life than violence."

Plague Rat, “Yeah, right. I like that black metal shit.” She imitated guttural noises, and kicked the air. “You can kick in those pits. That shit is so much fucking fun.” She shoved you.

Circe came down from her lair with a Ouija board.

“Oh shit,” Bonnie said, excited. “It’s a fucking *weege* board.”

“Did y’all wanna call on the spirits with me?” She offered. She snatched the nalgene that sat on the dashboard, unattended. Gulped it. Gave it to John. “Jay’s afraid of this shit. Says it’s gonna open a portal or something.” Oh god, if anyone had a Ouija board, it was the Vampire Queen of THE SPIRIT. Of course she wanted to summon some shit. John Lennon the Vampire was sitting right there, after all.

Bonnie was all about it.

Circe walked off the bus and climbed on the hood, ducked down and motioned for you all to come with her. She then mounted up on the roof. You could see the whole sky as you climbed up there to join her. The Milky Way glimmered in some mixture of optimism and doom. Like you were gonna die eventually. You weren’t undead after all. A mere mortal. A mere mortal about to open up the gates of hell. This was how you were gonna die. Some fucking demon thing she pulls out of there was gonna pick you off one by one. Like any stupid horror movie involving drunk idiot kids.

Circe, reading your thoughts, basically said the same thing. “This isn’t for demons. It’s for relatives. Or those nearby. But if a demon does start killing us, don’t worry. It’ll start with Tracy.” She giggled to herself.

Your stomach churned.

You, John, Bonnie, Plague Rat, and Circe sat, as best you could, in a circle at the top of a two story school bus in an empty Walmart parking lot. This Walmart was 24/7, so anytime you needed a bathroom, there one was. Anytime you needed to run away from some evil fucking demons, there it was. You could lose a demon in the labyrinthine aisles of Walmart. You smiled at the thought.

You all held hands. You *obmed*. Like Prism. Fuck.

“OK,” Circe began, leading the seance. “Who should we talk to? What is our intention?”

No one said anything. Circe was the one with the intentions. “Oh! Let’s try to talk to Iggy’s ghost boyfriend!”

Obviously. So Circe breathed. She muttered something. Fuck if you knew what. “OK, everyone put their pointer finger on the planchette,” she directed. Everyone did so. Circe said, “What do we want to ask?”

Plague Rat said without thinking, “Is there anybody out there?”

Nothing moved.

It was frosty out, below freezing. Teeth chattering and jaw clenched, you lit a cigarette, not moving your finger from the planchette. No one said anything.

Jay shouted from the lair below you, “Is it working?!”

Circe said, “We have to be patient. Is anybody out there?”

Nothing.

John said, “It’s cold up here. This is done--”

“Wait, wait. We just started!”

“I want to call up the old homie,” Bonnie said. “I gotta girlfriend that died a few years back. Let’s give her a ring.”

“OK, sure.”

Bonnie closed her eyes and put intention into the planchette. “Valerie. Valerie, honey, it’s me. Bonnie. I miss you Valerie.” She breathed. “Valerie, please come to me. Remember when we said we’d always be there for each other? Valerie, please come. Are you there?” A tear started to form under Bonnie’s left eye.

And Plague Rat must have been having nightmares or visions or trances of her own, because her eyes rolled back in her head and she whispered in a deep gravel voice, “I have seen your face on the edge of Oblivion.”

What the fuck?

Plague Rat made that sound from the Disturbed song everyone knows from a hundred years ago. *Oh Ah Ah Ah Ah*. Then the one that sounds like Disturbed dude had a cough. *Oh oh*. She roared in laughter. Another prank.

“Hey, look at this,” Bonnie said. Plague Rat looked. It was a circle Bonnie made with her fingers. Bonnie punched Plague Rat in the arm, really hard. “That’s for ruining my moment!”

“Fuck! I hate the circle game!” Plague Rat said. Then, “Oi, where’s the whiskey?”

With the Ouija board a bust, everyone climbed down off the top of THE SPIRIT.

As everyone clamored back in the bus, Circe pulled you aside.

“THE SPIRIT is more than just a name,” she warned.

“I know,” you said.

“You’re going through it, I can tell.”

“Circe, please, just let me be--”

She reached under her skirt, between her legs. “I know you receive visions. You are going to keep having them.” Circe looked you dead in the eye.

“What does that mean?” You thought it was a threat.

Circe revealed her bloody palm. “I’m going to cast a spell. *From You, There Will Be An I.* When you receive the I, you will find peace.” She calmly put her palm on your forehead. You smelled her blood and stood, stunned.

14 Moloch and the Lakota Nation

Day came without you having to have some fucked up vision or nightmare. The parking lot, empty the night before, was filled with Mandanites and Bismarckians doing their shopping. This was where the wives of Morton County Sherriffs went shopping. The police themselves, even. In regular clothes with bellybuttons. Police from the dozen or so other agencies probably shopped here too, at this Walmart in Mandan. They also had bellybuttons. But when they put on those riot suits, badges, tasers, guns, those costumes of war and death, their bellybuttons disappeared. No longer human.

The food bank was a short drive away. Coyote schwilled coffee out of a huge thermos as he talked about libertarianism. Great, a libertarian. You kept quiet while Tracy, versed in the academic and technical parts of both anarchism and communism, tore Coyote a new asshole.

“All you libertarian shitheads wanna defund libraries. You *hate* libraries. You stupid fuck! You’re fucking homeless! Who else is gonna let you use their fucking WiFi?”

“Starbucks does. Besides, I’m not homeless. I’m *homefree*”--

“You’re fucking homeless, dude. If libertarianism was a thing, you’d be somebody’s bitch right now. Someone’s slave. Isn’t that some fucked up shit? Fuck out of here with some Starbucks shit. Starbucks ain’t shit. Libraries are forever. The ancient Egyptians had libraries, you fuck.”

The food bank was out of a church and had a DMV style approach to getting food. Take a number, fill out a form, wait thirty minutes in the cramped office with a small TV/VCR combo

and some children's toys, someone calls your number, you give them the form, they hand you a box filled with some stuff and point you to a door. At the door, there's relatively few things to pick from. Then there's a commercial sized chest freezer off to the side with a hand-written label in cursive: *meat*. It was easy to miss. Inside was all kinds of meat. Most of it wild game or raised on small farms, donated by local hunters and farmers. Pork, chicken, venison, sturgeon, deer, bison, rabbit, duck, pheasant. 8 or 9 of you walked in to get boxes. You came out with 20 or so boxes of meat, dairy, eggs, and some frozen veggies. The veggies you dumpstered from Aldi last week were tossed, so the veggies from this food bank were of utmost importance.

Circe didn't have too many rules for THE SPIRIT. The biggest one was perhaps NO MEAT ON THE BUS. She made an exception for the meat from this food bank this *one time*, to store *only* to get rid of at Standing Rock, but it was *not* to be cooked ON THE BUS. Many crewmates had portable stoves so this wasn't too big of an issue. Circe hated the smell of animal carcass. She would complain about it every time she walked into a grocery store.

"The smell of meat taints everything. It's disgusting. Why would you want to smell animal carcass? I wanna throw up."

Naturally, Coyote the Libertarian was a straight carnivore. He stashed some meat for later in his pack.

"Everyone's gotta have some backpack meat," he joked to whoever was listening.

Jay was starting to drive more regularly. He was learning. He drove down Highway 1806 southbound to Standing Rock, right into a police checkpoint.

“HIDE THE SHIT!” Jay yelled, turning his head. “SIX UP!” The bus erupted into a frenzy. Weed was stashed in peanut butter jars. Pipes were shoved under packs, booze was put in a storage cupboard. Coyote had some mushrooms just chilling on the counter. He stuffed them in his pants. Circe or someone had an eight foot glass bong that camped out in the back of the bus.

“There’s no hiding this shit,” Bonnie said, concerned. “I’m not even gonna touch it. If I do I’m gonna break it.”

“Fuck, I have a warrant.” Jay said.

“I have a warrant too,” Bonnie said.

Plague Rat, “I have like, 3.”

Circe said, “They could impound this thing. It’s not legal.” She laughed. THE SPIRIT was everything but legal.

Fuck. You hate this shit. Johnny Law, these steroid-taking-mobsters suck everytime. Tracy took off her wig to reveal her locs.

A boy no older than 19, crew cut, white of course, stood at the captain’s side window with a Maglite pointed at Jay, touching the gun at his hip. It was the middle of the day. His arm patch said “Morton County Sheriff’s Department.”

“Hello,” the cop said.

“What seems to be the problem, officer?” Jay asked, squinting in the sun.

“Oh, just wanted to let you know about the protest occupation down the way. You might see pedestrians on the roadway. Just wanted to letcha know.”

“Thank you, officer.” Jay said.

“May I ask what your business is in Morton County?”

“No you may not, officer.” Jay was proud of that line.

The boy shined his light into the windows of the bus. Someone's dog barked.

"How many people you got in here?"

"Just me and the kids."

"Oh, we're taking some sort of field trip, are we?"

Jay was silent. The boy stood for a solid minute. Time stopped. He probably thought about how much work it would be to line you all up, search the bus, haul you off to jail. All the paperwork.

Officer Dudley Do-Right concluded, "OK, sir, have a nice day."

"You too, sir." Jay cranked up the window. He turned the engine over.

Circe made fun of him. "*No you may not, officer.*"

"Just me and the kids," John laughed. You did too. You had to.

"No you may not have my full legal name, see my aliases, birthdate, past criminal history, upcoming court dates, or outstanding warrants. No you may not check my asshole. No you may not cut my hair." Cowboy said, having just got out of jail.

"They cut your hair?" Bonnie asked.

"Yeah they fucking did. Fucking sucks. I used to have dreads down to my ass." Cowboy said, "I had a warrant out in North Carolina but they didn't want to extradite me. Too much money."

John switched out with Jay to drive in, so Jay didn't have to talk to pigs again.

John said, "We're in and we're out. I don't wanna spend too much time here. I don't want to be here at all, really. We need to get over the Rockies before snow. If the snow comes--" Yeah,

you got it. Ending up like the Donner Party eating each other off the side of the mountain. Surely, John would appreciate that scenario. His prey would be easy, fresh, on ice.

Oceti Sakowin was different the second time you pulled in. A sign out by the road said “NO ALCOHOL, NO DRUGS, NO FIREARMS.” Was that there before? People watched the bus pick a spot on the muddy yellow field. Residents looked at you all with deep suspicion, even more so than before. Like the camp couldn’t tell the difference between serious activists and festi kids. Wait, you couldn’t either. You all (mostly) were alcoholics first and foremost. They already hated you. Read the sign.

First stop was a large kitchen supply tent to drop off the meat so it could remain frozen. The crew of THE SPIRIT wandered after that, taking advantage of the clothing donation tent, switching hats and coats, snatching freshies, wreaking havoc. You snagged a new sleeping bag, rated 0 degrees, down, expensive. Your 30 degree bag just wasn’t cutting it anymore, and all those burn holes weren’t helping. Tracy, Bonnie, Plague Rat, and Christopher wound up at a workshop at Two-Spirit camp, something that didn’t exist when you and Buzz were here last month. You took photos of tipis, Facebook Hill, the Cannon Ball River, vehicles, horses, the flags, pausing to really take in the moment.

Were you Rasputin to Buzzard’s Anastasia? Anastasia, innocent girl. The daughter of a czar that murdered 13,000 civilians in the initial revolt. Rasputin, rapist. He had a mummified dick, possibly a pedophile. Saved the czar’s son by throwing out his aspirin. Is this small act part of a retribution for the Cossack massacre in the 1600s, where your ancestors murdered 20,000 of Buzzard’s ancestors? She looked like Voltairine de Cleyre

now, her hair growing back in thick, brown curls. She probably doesn't even know who de Cleyre was.

Buzz didn't give a fuck about Standing Rock. She didn't care about anarchy, or water protectors, or history, or Indigenous sovereignty. She didn't deserve that sweat with Kim. It should have been you. As far as you could tell, Buzz really only cared about cultivating personal hobbies. Leatherwork, playing the mandolin, sleeping with everyone. Fucking everyone. Now that's a hobby. You liked that hobby too. Her new hobby was making coffee. Coyote was teaching her a special brewing process in his special thermos. She was probably going to move from John to Coyote soon. She was over you. After that night in that attic room, it was very much over.

You lit a cigarette off the lighter around your neck. You watched her walk across the plain, bobbing her head, to a portapotty. She was wearing John's coat and a racoon tail bopped from her ass. You wondered where that tail came from. Were you still in pain? Your heart said *yes*. But your brain told you to compartmentalize, to survive. Accept what you can and throw the rest in a file drawer you'll never open. You didn't get the closure you wanted. You didn't get the truth. Did Buzz love you? Was she actually a vampire? A bat hanging upside down in a cave, feasting on flies and maggots, human flesh?

Or was Buzz a butterfly, a free bird flowing with the tempo of the anarchist, hippie dream of free love? She was cold-blooded. Certainly wasn't mammalian. Mammals cared for their spouses. Well, some mammals did. They also ate their young. Sloths left their young to die. Monkeys, they were good caretakers. Apes. Baboons were so organized, scientists called their groups and gatherings congresses. Gorillas were polygamous. One silverback to

many wives. Bonobos, now bonobos were polyamorous. They were warm-blooded mammals. They didn't lay eggs. They had multiple lovers, families of lovers, polycules, raising each others' kids and having sex. Lots of sex. Orgies upon orgies of bonobos hooting and hollering and fucking. That's what you wanted, in the end. A polycule. A family. Safety and freedom and promise. Hooting and hollering and *fucking*, creating, painting, dancing, cooking, Loving. Bonnie, barefoot, sweeping the floor, windows open, dancing to Michael Jackson or Tracy singing baritone on her accordion. Circe, even, the matriarchal desert witch that betrayed you, cooking vegan stir fry with a headlamp. You loved her still. You loved THE SPIRIT. Was THE SPIRIT this messy polycule? Yes, it was. Messy as fuck. Buzz exited the portapotty, the door slamming behind her. Did Buzz even remember who you were?

Can you find another lover? That was probably the most pertinent question. If you found a new lover, all this pain and weirdness would go away. You'd have someone else to share memories of one of the most important events of a lifetime with. Standing Rock was important. Very important. It was the center of the earth, the end of the world. You'd be telling your grandkids one day, if you had them, "I was at Standing Rock. When the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island rose up against the capitalist oppressors for the last time."

Iggy? No, she was nice and fun. But damn, she had her own devil inside of her. And you didn't want to hurt Stephen like that, if he was even capable of being hurt. He was so zen you weren't sure if he even had a heart to break. Bonnie? Bonnie was nice. Bonnie, once when drunk, tried to kiss you. You could probably sleep with Bonnie. But that wouldn't stop the pain. It wouldn't. You weren't mad at Buzz anymore. You weren't mad at any lost

soul that lived or traveled, even briefly, on THE SPIRIT. Except you. You were mad at yourself, continuing this same cycle of love and abuse, rage and despair. It had to end. But how?

Wait.

Wait, were you a vampire? Did you feed off Buzzard yourself?

Were all men really vampires? Were you just there to feed off women or other men? Cannibalize each other? Feed, satiate, shit, decompose and survive on this wretched earth, destroying everyone else to live forever. You wanted to die. Was this the devil's gift? That you couldn't. That you were a vampire now, the undead, you could never die, immortal, castaway, marooned, your dick in your hand, destroying anyone you touched like some fucked up Midas' Hand bullshit? You thought of the women you hurt. Then of the violence from other men. Life forces obliterated, depleted souls in therapist offices, WIC cubicles, rehab centers, prisons, on the street. Bodies in dumpsters. Victims in shelters, if alive at all.

Is this what you wanted?

Jesus, it's so evil.

Water Protectors, Indigenous and white, eyed you and your bus crew with contempt and suspicion. They did not want you here. They saw you as leeches, clowns. Did they see what you saw? The vampires? You looked in the dirty puddle of a tire tread mark in the mud. You had no reflection. You walked in a porta potty to unzip your pants and take a leak. You had no penis. Instead of a penis, there was a buck knife. You cut yourself on it. If it wasn't clear before, it was certainly understood now.

You were a vampire. Your white skin, your genitals, your past, your present. You fed off mortals and humans, women and a

few men. You were young forever, wild, gray, hungry, greedy, lost. Your skin lost its farmer's tan, becoming pallor and sullen. Your hair coarse, your claws sharp. Your fangs were words. When did it happen? When did you become this, *thing*? Was it as you repeated cycles of abuse, over and over, again and again? Witnessing cycles of rage and despair, enacting them, tumbling? When you were seven, sodomized by your family in medical ritualistic necessity? Neglected by them? Loved by them? Loved by them.

Your mom, a vampire hunter that lost her way and became one.

Your father, a vampire in an oblivious haze, forever a boy trapped by his own father's abuse.

Your mom's father, an incestuous demon.

Your dad's father, a drunken fiend.

It was generational. Ancestral. The poison lived within you, within the blood that leaked out of your hand. It was in your first name, your last name. The poison was in your heritage as your dad's predecessors fled the Soviet Union, as your predecessors on your mom's side settled the plains in Amarillo, Texas, a land far to the south but not unlike North Dakota, to slaughter cattle. As your predecessors on both sides put on white hoods and burned down the houses of the free Black people that lived in their neighborhoods. As your predecessors polluted rivers in Detroit with car factory chemicals, razed forests in the Ozarks, disappeared records of grand violence in the name of the White Race.

Oh, it's white people. White people are the vampires. White men, vampires. Obviously, of course. This was it! But, you didn't do this all yourself. Nor your family lineage. You weren't alone. You had help.

If you were a vampire, if men were vampires, if *white people* on Turtle Island were actually vampires, then the executives and politicians overseeing all this bloodshed were a different breed of evil. A darker evil. Institutionalized, imperial, barbaric, beauracrat, banal, dominating, domineering, colonial, genocidal, totalitarian, Neoliberal, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, capitalist evil. From another planet evil. Alien invasion evil. The devil's real trick had nothing to do with you or some nobodies on a bus in the middle of nowhere. Real Evil, it spoke with the lips of Barack Obama as he bombed hospitals in Afghanistan. It spoke with the lips of George Bush as he tortured innocent people and destabilized a subcontinent. It spoke with the lips of Hillary Clinton as she assassinated Berta Carceres and helped starve Yemen. And obviously, Trump had to have sucked some mad devil dick to possess the empty flair and paper tiger curses he created with the tips of his undead fingers or on his forked tongue. Biden too, and yes, Harris, speak with the lips of the devil.

Even smaller guys and gals were puppets in the devil's game. The mayor of Bismarck. The governor of North Dakota. Pigs, especially the head pig of Morton County Sheriff's Department, were of yet *another*, special kind of evil. Zombies, maybe. Cannibals, absolutely. The CEO of Energy Transfer Partners was all three. You hated them all. Passionately, devotedly, doggedly. Anarchists don't believe in a state. Anarchists don't believe in capitalism either. Meaning no more mayor of Bismarck. No more governor, senator, court judge, city councilmember, president, prime minister, parliament member, landlord, king, boss, police union, 'wealth-creator,' hedge-fund manager, energy CEO, 'social media influencer,' or cop. No more American Constitution from 1787. Burn the fucker. Write a new one.

Because the American Constitution of 1787 was written by real Vampires. These Vampires stole the ideas behind the Constitution from the Iroquois Confederacy. They held millions of humans in bondage. They raped them. Repeatedly. For centuries. Systematically, systemically, foundationally. Codified rape as legal action ripples out today. They were pedophiles. Leaving behind a massacre of generational, mental anguish that turned into ancestral anguish, things both Water Protectors and Black Descendants of Slavery fight today, everyday, and often lose. The real Vampires of 1787 committed acts of irredeemable menace. They whipped, beat, separated, isolated, shoved into closets, chained to beds, sodomized, experimented on, sterilized and made barren. They stole first born sons and daughters, destroyed graves, obliterated artifacts, languages, music, history, and even *dance*. Wovoka of the Northern Paiute danced a revolutionary resistance to Vampirism, creating what colonizers called a new religion. The Ghost Dance. Ghost Dancers spread from Nevada to Dakota, reigning until Wounded Knee, when the US Army murdered 300 Lakota souls, and even then, the lion's share of casualties on the US side were of the US Army's making. Cannibals. Vampires.

Thomas Jefferson raped a young Black girl he held in bondage and proceeded to have children with her. Washington held hundreds of slaves, stealing their teeth to put in his own mouth. Jackson, Hamilton, kidnapping thousands of baby girls and sending them to Christian dungeons to rape them, hold them in captivity, and eventually, destroy the sexual and social reproduction of an entire people. All these men, idolized on pedestals in city squares, their evil faces on US legal tender, embossed in silver plates and remembered in musicals, they *all* rot

in piss for their acts of state. They wrote law, hired friends. Their friends had children. Children became schoolmasters, teaching other children the ways of Moloch. It grew and grew, Vampirism now as common as Instagram and cherry pie. These slavers, Hamilton and Jefferson and Custer and Lee, they were the real Vampires. Jefferson coined it. White Supremacy. He championed it, made love with it, married it.

They acquiesced long ago and gave us Harriet Tubman. But do you know who Harriet Tubman really is? Schizophrenic, a prophet and seer like Joan of Arc before her, she was a Vampire Hunter. Ida B Wells. Lucy Parsons. Toni Morrison was an expert hunter. Sitting Bull. Red Cloud. Wovoka. Crazy Horse. Spotted Elk. All the women not remembered in documentation by colonizers. Du Bois. Hampton. All the Shakurs. The Panther 21. Lorde. hooks. Davis. Robeson. King. Baldwin. X. Simone. Holiday. Kochiyama. Butler. On and on the names go. Deandre Joshua, a 20 year old in the Ferguson Uprising. He was a vampire hunter. Darren Seals, of Ferguson and the Uprising. Bree Black of Florida, murdered in 2020, a woman that dared to exist as a woman, was a vampire hunter. Breonna Taylor. Tony McDade. Korryn Gaines. George Floyd, a sex worker, homeless shelter worker, human mortal, vampire hunter. Jorge Gomez, gunned down by Las Vegas Metropolitan Police for practicing his second and first amendment rights peacefully and in support of Black Lives Matter; a vampire hunter. Winston Smith, in 2021 Minneapolis, an activist, human mortal, vampire hunter. Christopher Dorner, a successful vampire killer, a human mortal. On and on the names go.

Vampires were an international conspiracy. Cecile Rhodes. Mussolini. Francisco Franco. Napoleon was a short, syphilitic

vampire. Duterte of the Phillipines is a fucking vampire. Bolsonaro, of Brazil. A vampire. Pinochet, the Chilean fascist that threw civilians out of helicopters to their deaths over the Pacific Ocean. A Vampire. The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. A Vampiric War Criminal.

Nelson Mandela hunted vampires. Evo Morales of Bolivia. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, of the free Indigenous lands of Chiapas under the banner of Neozapatismo. Zapata himself, a cross-dressing vampire hunter. Ricardo Flores Magon. *Las Soldaderas*, teenage women that fought the Spaniard vampires in the Revolution, fighting patriarchy at the same time. Cuahatemoc hunted vampires. Touissant hunted vampires. Young punks in a Food Not Bombs Philippines chapter kidnapped by the police, they're vampire hunters. On and on. Water Protectors, Indigenous Warriors, Black descendants of slaves, slaves too, free Black people, Black and Indigenous people in captivity now-- Royalty, hundreds, thousands, millions of hunters have been born, millions have died. Revolutionaries.

Revolutionaries continue to hunt these Vampires down. Standing Rock is the stage of this battle, but it does not stand on its own. Interconnected, an ecosystem of struggle in a war that's been going on since Columbus. The Hunters are losing battle after battle, but winning the war, each gain not a good deed by Vampires like Lincoln, but a victory of Nat Turner. Solidarity will carry through, and this is a promise, we will destroy the Vampire's Contracts and burn down every plantation on which Lestat de Lioncourt feeds. A new constitution will be written, yes, and it will be written by Guatemalan kids in converted Walmart concentration camps. It will be written by Lakota two-spirits, trans sex workers in Baltimore, heroin addicts in San Francisco, men on

Death Row, refugees of the borderlands, children in DV shelters, women like Lili, Plague Rat, Kim, Tracy, Bonnie, your mom and your aunts surviving in Texas fighting, your grandmother that passed from diabetes and rests in a cemetery there in Amarillo, your cousin Sarah born still and resting there beside her, your Aunt Jan whom passed away before your birth, your Aunt Liz who inspired you to travel in third grade before passing four years later, forever remembered, angels angels angels angels angels from sweet heaven, on the tip of your tongue say it, say it, say it now, you flag-burning renegades-- Freedom.

Freedom.

For Freedom. A new Constitution.

No more vampires. No more vampires. No more vampires.

Kill all vampires.

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A voice from the Main Stage, deep and low. “Arise, warriors. You must wake up. It is time to awaken.” Still very much dark, before dawn. A voice beckoned people to the Main Stage, where they fed cold biscuits and gravy by the Sacred Fire. The voice nagged a little.

“This isn’t summer camp,” the voice said. Reminded you of your folks trying to get you up for school.

Prayers and songs, cedar and sage lifted from the fires up toward the Morning Star, where you could see hints of the Aurora Borealis. You could see every constellation now, almost able to pick them out by name. Orion was your favorite, but also the easiest.

You and Bonnie found each other by dawn. It was time to march. A hundred of you walked onto the highway, past Backwater Bridge, singing.

You walked for what seemed like an hour, slowly, hands up, holding signs on wooden stakes, banners and flags. You marched next to some white women and an Indigenous man with long black hair and a large tattoo of a bear claw that stretched over his whole face. Protectors on horseback rode up and down the line, scouting for police, security, or pipeline workers. You made it to a metal fence, some of it topped with stretches of barbed wire. Another song, another prayer, in Lakota.

A man then spoke his introductions in Lakota before switching to English.

“On the other side of this fence is Lakota Treaty Land. It is rightfully ours, as spelled out in documents written *by the colonizers*, the Fort Laramie Treaty. This is our land, this land is Mother Earth. This land is also where they’re planning to dig into Mother Earth and construct the Black Snake!” People booed. “They didn’t ask us and we do not consent to it! We marched here together. My sisters and brothers, my family, together, we’re going to cut this fence and erect a new camp. It will be called Sacred Land.” People whooped and howled. They cheered. An eagle was spotted high above, circling. People pointed fingers at it, saying “Look!” and gasping. They sang in other Indigenous languages. The fence was cut. People flooded around a truck that pulled in, carrying tipi poles. Women and men took the poles, placing them diagonal to the ground, the tops of the poles coming together. The man that spoke took rope, lassoed it around their intersections, and pulled it taut, tying it to a stake in the ground like it was a tarp. Another woman repeated this process, and another. Then someone unrolled a large canvas. They wrapped it around the poles, completing the tipi. They tied the canvas to the poles. Shouts of *Mni Wiconi!* and *Water is Life!* were interspersed with Indigenous words you didn’t know.

MNI WICONI!

WATER IS LIFE!

Soon, a panic set in. Black helicopters spotted in the sky. A dozen of them, like large horseflies, buzzing. Louder. Someone shrieked as a helicopter dumped an orange colored substance out there, somewhere, on Overflow maybe? The buffalo grazed nearby, seemingly unaffected.

You and Bonnie caught a ride with a Protector back to Overflow. THE SPIRIT was leaving. A Styx CD played in their

car. *Come Sail Away*. You watched the Cannon Ball and Missouri River confluence shine silver and blue. Then all hell broke loose as the substances from the helicopters blew toward you. The confluence turned blood red. On the other side, The Land of the Dead.

The Cannon Ball River was the River Styx. Standing Rock was the netherworld now. Water Protectors were warriors of light in an Armageddon, and not their first Armageddon either. Battalions of riot police in military gear, shields and helmets, batons and guns and kevlar, in gas respirators and jackboots, without bellybuttons or souls, on foot, in Dodge trucks, on ATVs, they entered Oceti Sakowin. The sky became burnt orange as chemicals continued to drop from helicopters, drones photographing Protectors for future identification and eventual prosecution. Protectors on horseback whooped as they lassoed down or disabled the drones, the ATVs, the vampires and cannibals, and one on a white horse in a gallop to defend families, produced a deep, piercing light to ward off the Undead. The Lakota Nation lives.

The plains, once lush farmland, then flooded by Colonizers, then dried up and stuck with fracking equipment and pipeline drills, were erupting. The spirits of women, two-spirits, and children of the Lakota Nation, spanning centuries of struggle, climbed up out of the earth. They rose up to claim reparations, vengeance and retribution to the hordes of Riot Police. You saw Ant-Loc, the emcee and rapper, with long black hair, atop a caramel colored horse, a javelin in his hands. He led a charge of Indigenous children that came out of Mother Earth, their bodies consecrated and perfect, glowing, singing, a choir sacred, no fear from the hellfire that rained down from the sky.

It was forever night, forever day, as Protectors near Sacred Land built barricades on the road out of old cars, wooden pallets, and tires. They set the barricades alight, a beacon to the entire world. Black smoke rose into an orange sky.

Grandma Redfeather pleaded with Circe to use THE SPIRIT at the barricades at Sacred Land, to drive it and park it there, to keep the hordes of Moloch away. How many kids thrown to the jaws of a Thousand Eyed, Thousand Armed Satan, The Beast, Beezelebut, the Lord of the Flies? How many *Abu Ghraib's* would it take?

Circe and John cowardly declined Grandma Redfeather.

“Be a good ally,” begged Grandma Redfeather, chaos and destruction all around. You pictured THE SPIRIT on the highway, engulfed in a holy flame. Nearby, soldiers of Moloch stood in formation, guns pointed, at a line of Protectors on their knees. They were stripped to their underwear, heads bowed in shame. The soldiers threw their clothes in a pile, and one bold pig unzipped his pants. He pissed on the Protectors’ clothes, others joining him, cackling with each other, holding each other’s dicks. *Measuring them.* Crows swooped in and ate the jellied eyes of friend and foe alike. It was both below freezing and boiling hot at the same time. Liquid froze within minutes. Coyote’s stash of meat cooked instantaneously in his bag. Forever night, forever day, the pigs sprayed water from cannons on top of tanks into the inferno of black tire smoke at the barricades and eventually onto the Protectors themselves, all to Moloch a victory for the decrepit state and one man, a billionaire, a name you probably haven’t heard: Kelcy Warren, a billionaire, of Dallas, Texas. The Protectors moved to Backwater Bridge, and the water cannons followed. People were snatched in the fray. Pigs, in 50 pounds of unnecessary

gear, slipped in the mud, Protectors laughing at them. Pigs stole cars belonging to Protectors and slashed tires. At the bridge, Protectors stood to hold it. It was below freezing now. The water cannons sprayed onto them, soaking Water Protectors at the Backwater Bridge. They were shivering from hypothermia. Tear gas, banned by the Geneva Conventions as a weapon of war, was dispersed from canisters shot by guns that looked like they were once used to shoot t-shirts at football games.

A woman lost an eye.

Someone else, an arm.

They were quickly led away, Protector Medics doing everything they could to prevent loss of life and limb.

Tear gas lingered, ghoulishly shadowing both pigs and Protectors, both riders in sweatshirts on bare horses with no saddles or reins, and weaponized SWAT Bearcat vehicles made from the very Black Snake everyone was there to fight. You and Bonnie were lost in it. You lost Bonnie. Coughing, burning eyes and throat, you turned on your headlamp for her to see. People were screaming, chaos all around. Someone was crouching and sobbing, someone else swooped them up and carried them out of the gas cloud.

Then you could hear Bonnie's voice.

"Dirty broke, beautiful and free!" she sang. You came upon her. She was elated, holding her dog, Johnny Hobo, in her arms. Coughing, worriedly she said, "I don't know how he got out here." Johnny Hobo licked her face.

You saw more dogs running through the gas, unafraid of the loud *popping* sound of tear gas guns, pepper ball guns, flash bangs, rubber bullets, and possibly live rounds, all coming from the police, with people huddled, pieces of plastic and metal formed

into shields, Protectors themselves in a Roman tortoise formation to fight off the water, the flash bangs, the pepper balls, every loud boom rolling over into another. One dog that ran circles around the chaos looked like your own from a long time ago. Orion, his name was, a 60 pound lab-dalmatian-heeler. He wore a tuxedo of black and white fur with white paws, running, happy, bronze eyes that shone iridescent when he looked into your soul.

“Orion!?” You croaked gravel phlegm into the cloud of gas, unable to see, no respirator. Orion was gone. He was scared of the vacuum cleaner, how could he be out here? You cried from the tear gas and it turned into a sob. Orion! Orion passed away a long time ago, his journey to the Land of the Dead without you. You often dreamed of him alone, scared, without you in the dark.

“HOLD THE LINE!” Protectors in the huddle screamed.

Bonnie and Johnny Hobo took you away in flight, toward the bus. You had no gear to be in the huddle, no training, no friends with names you knew. Except!

“Orion!” you screamed again.

The tear gas started to fade. Someone picked up a canister, cool enough to touch. It had a company logo. *Safariland*. It had an expiration date, a date that ended in a 4. 2014? 2004? 1994?! It was 2016 now. The gas was expired. Expired CS gas emits harmful levels of cyanide, despite whatever lies you heard on the TV or read in a newspaper. Tear gas could make women infertile. It was a weapon of Death, not a tool for peacemaking, diplomacy, or reconciliation.

THE SPIRIT was waiting for you, Bonnie basically dragging you there.

Christopher and Plague Rat decided to go to the barricades, sober, ready to decapitate The Beast. They decided to

stay and fight both Dragons, the one on the Frontlines and the alcoholism inside of them. Plague Rat had her own evil to vanquish. So, too, did Christopher and Bonnie. They pulled their gear off the bus. It was time for them to leave. Was it your time, too?

“No,” something told you. “Don’t get off THE SPIRIT.”

Why not? Your dog, long passed away, is out there, somewhere.

“Don’t get off THE SPIRIT.”

Was it really closure with Buzz that you needed?

Was it cowardice in the face of the forces of true evil?

You already had closure, right? You saw Buzz as herself. A human being. Not an agent of Beezeleubub, not a cold-blooded Vampire. You should have stayed there, in the yellow fields at Oceti Sakowin, with Orion, forever. Instead, against all reason, all of what made sense to you, you got back on THE SPIRIT. You abandoned your dog, your friends, your heart. You quickly realized you left your day bag in the lady’s car, the lady with the Styx CD. It was too late. Notebooks filled with poetry, gone. Your phone, with pictures. Gone. Pipe tobacco. Your precious cigarettes, gone. A strip of blue cloth with a Food Not Bombs emblem screen printed on it, from your time in Philadelphia, a dim and distant memory, gone. That one hurt. Your talisman was still there, around your neck. Your headlamp, your skank. You had two eyes. Both of your arms. Your heart, though, it was left on the banks of the Cannon Ball, in your day bag, with Orion, in the black smoke of a burning tire.

THE SPIRIT peeled out of Standing Rock, southbound on 1806 to another road. The road northbound was blocked.

Everyone prayed there were no police to the south, watching the chemicals and smoke fall upwards into the atmosphere.

15 **The Summoning**

That was October 26th or 27th or something, days and nights blurred together. Halloween was coming up quickly. You could tell as people started wearing their costumes to the grocery store, the grocery stores themselves changing their pumpkin displays out front for Christmas trees.

North Dakota disappeared into Montana. Miles were made.

Montana. The frontier, the wild, wild west, phantoms and spirits will torment it forever. They even named a town after the ghosts that haunt the West. Casper, Wyoming, a place you visited with THE SPIRIT an eternity ago, when you were listening to a large, barefooted juggalo covered in dust and baby powder sing a cover of Death Cab for Cutie's *I Will Follow You Into the Dark* on ukelele. You haven't lived until you heard that man, tiny instrument pressed against his solar plexus, belt out that song, face tattoos and whiskey-throat and all the tenderness in the world.

There was a hole left by the departure of Plague Rat, Bonnie, and Christopher, their dogs gone too. You wondered if Plague Rat was gonna make it. Coyote and Cowboy were quiet. John watched lazily as Jay drove the bus, offering occasional advice and chatting, Circe up in her lair, sleeping.

In Billings, the bus stopped at a Goodwill.

"For leather," John said as he put THE SPIRIT in park. Nobody wanted to talk about the thing that just happened. Instead, everyone walked out of that Goodwill with leather jackets, leather pants, leather vests, leather shoes, leather belts. Buzzard shoplifted random colored leather items to cut apart into strips to make more lighter necklaces or pockets or whatever. You all

wound up at another thrift/Halloween store. Cowboy found a new hat. Coyote found some long johns. Tracy found a new wig. You found a cattle skull mask, for Halloween. Circe mentioned it looked like a bleached-white uterus.

“See, look, the shape, the jaw is the cervix, the horns are fallopian tubes,” she said.

You agreed, saying ‘huh.’

“There’s no ovaries, though,” she chuckled to herself. Walking out brazenly, the crew meandered Billings. John went spanging to pay his phone bill. You and Buzzard wandered through the back of grocery stores, checking for unlocked dumpsters.

“Hey, it’s Saturday. Let’s stay tonight. Halloween weekend. The bars will be popping,” Buzzard suggested.

“It’ll be a good spange,” You agreed, barely holding onto your seat and white-knuckling life.

THE SPIRIT agreed, too.

Iggy looked at Circe and said, “What are we going to even be?”

Tracy, Iggy, Circe, Stephen, and Buzzard went back to Goodwill to pick out some costumes.

Iggy decided on Harley Quinn from the first Suicide Squad. It was the popular outfit of the year. Circe went for a slutty Pikachu. Tracy went for Lady Gaga, except the package said ‘Female Haha.’ Stephen ultimately decided to keep his hippie country 70s Jesus aesthetic, though Circe tried to convince him to be Rasputin. Yes, the Goodwill had a knockoff Rasputin costume.

Buzzard wanted Buzz Lightyear. “Buzz, buzz,” She laughed.

Jay put on a skirt, turned his baseball cap around, and said, “Yep.”

John Lennon stayed behind to go as himself. Fuck him.

Cowboy and Coyote abstained, their new leather gear good enough for them.

You? Fuck you too. You wore your street clothes and the lifted cattle skull mask for twenty minutes before getting bored and giving it to some townie on the street. The bars in Billings were few, small, and they lined the aptly named Montana Ave, right next to the tracks. The girls put makeup on before twilight. Stephen and Tracy went off together with a cardboard sign that shouted “TRICK OR TREAT!” It wasn’t long before Iggy was approached by a man in a flowing purple cape, cane, and tophat. It was an old Gene Wilder era Willy Wonka costume. She disappeared with him for awhile, then returned to rally everyone in their different corners, saying, “Willy Wonka here just invited us to a special *exclusive* party.”

Tracy, accordion in hand, smartly said, “Cool. Does this party contain free money?”

“It’s pretty dope. You don’t have to come if you’re gonna be a bitch about it.”

Tracy shut the fuck up.

Willy Wonka said, “I also got us this,” and pulled out a liter of Bombay Sapphire.

“Fuck yeah fuck yeah--”

“Hey Willy, got any weed?” Jay asked.

“We’re in Montana,” Willy Wonka chuckled as the gin made a trip around the plague of shitty dumb useless oogles. He then led everyone over the tracks and through some industrial park

and arrived at the storefront of an abandoned warehouse. Willy tapped the window with his cane and what can only be assumed as a bouncer opened the glass door.

On the other side was a party fit for teenagers: a punch bowl, paper streamers, blacklights, a sea of dorky costumes, and all the social anxiety such an event entails. The residents of Billings seemed to enjoy masks because there was not a human face in sight. Buzzard and John joined immediately, thrusting hips to the 80s nostalgia DJ set. Iggy as Harley Quinn and Willy Wonka wandered off together and Circe Pikachu and Tracy ‘Haha’ began to grind together.

You and Jay just stood there. You handed him a cigarette. “Check this out--” Jay pointed.

In the corner of the creepy dancehall was a fortune teller machine. Trying to ignore the vampires and Buzzard and John making out all over the dancefloor, you asked Jay for a quarter. The machine itself was old as fuck: inside a glass box was an animatronic Roma woman in a turban with a giant jewel and animatronic hands over a crystal ball. Her eyelids flickered as the lights came on and she told you your fortune. You put your ears close to the box to hear her over the bass. Then a fortune printed from below the glass box.

That’s when you noticed the walls had curtains the color of dried blood, and the ghouls of the masquerade were dancing as light and shadow also danced mottled across the floor. They were ghouls, because they did not speak or laugh or drink. They menaced and floated above the floor.

“Jay, are you seeing this?”

The Vrykolakas hissed in their cheap costumes as their translucent masks concealed any piece of humanity, yuppies

unlearned in the art of bellybuttons. As Vrykolakas made eye contact through their small town Spirit Halloween Venetian masks, you realized you were wearing a mask, too.

And it was fucking ugly. A charade, a caricature, a selfish self-deception. You had inklings at the pit inside your stomach for awhile now. Why did you care so much about political activism when you were so fucked up inside? Who were you to pass judgment on Kelcy Warren, CEO of Energy Transfer Partners and Actually Nonchalant Genocidal Maniac? Your house wasn't clean. This activist shit, it's bullshit. You weren't a do-gooder, a protector, some kind of righteous martyr, and you certainly were no victim. But this mask you wore, you couldn't take it off. You tunneled deeper into this personality, obsessing over a riddle that takes lifetimes to answer: how to make the world a better place?

Hell, to be honest, you only made it worse.

Who are you behind your mask? What is behind the curtain? Do you have a soul? What did you do that made you who you are? What is our true face and why do we hide? Why do we strike out if we are found? Do you know what makes a villain? Who rings the bells of the Cathedral? Who operates the projectors in your cinema? Who is Oz? Is Venice as pretty as the waterways of Xochimilco? How did they smile when they gave us HIV, crack cocaine, and canned ham? Is stone butch or is water dry? Tracy was dancing on one side of Buzzard and John was on the other. Buzzard was grinding all over Tracy. Why are you so fucking jealous? Tracy glanced at you in a pair of stolen sunglasses and you felt the piercing gaze of Medusa. Tracy went to kiss Buzzard as John touched her chest from behind. You turned to stone right there. Does Tracy even have a conscience? Does Buzzard? Do you?

Of course you do.

“Here, come with us,” Circe grabbed your hand and led you up a ladder to the roof of the warehouse. There, Willy Wonka was setting up floodlights with electricity from somewhere, who cares where. Who is Willy Wonka anyway?

“Let’s do a photoshoot!” Circe laughed. Iggy’s eye shadow made her look like Wendy O Williams.

Circe took a few photos of Iggy.

“We have to get your personality! Pick your nose.”

There was so much giggling.

“Wait, I have an idea.” Circe disappeared from the roof, then reappeared with Jay and some old tattered rope. “I make Jay tie me up sometimes,” she explained. “We’re gonna tie you up now.”

“Oh, that’s hot,” Iggy said.

Jay told Iggy to put her wrists together. He did his work quietly and with focus. At the same time, a toasted Willy Wonka wanted to talk to you.

“Why so glum?” He slurred. “Maybe you should have some of this--” He tried to hand you his empty solo cup.

“Here, I’m going to do something else,” Circe said. She drew a pentagram on Iggy’s belly with a black sharpie.

Willy Wonka stumbled and sat down.

“Circe--” Iggy said. “What are you doing?”

“We’re gonna summon your ghost boyfriend!”

“--What?”

“Almost done,” Circe breathed. She took out a relic, a cheap aluminum smoke shop dagger. She made a small cut on Iggy’s thigh. Iggy shrieked.

Circe muttered, “Ο Yog-Soggoth ξέρει την πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι η πύλη.”

All of a sudden, the dusty midnight hues of rural Montana gave way to thunderheads. It was a dry storm as lightning flashed in the distance and ghosts climbed out of the yellow grass. The wind picked up and swirled. The clouds dissipated as soon as they came. Suddenly, Willy Wonka fell prostrate and yelled. Out of his ribcage burst bloody a Thing smoky, dark, and evil. A pasty, soiled corporeal apparition, standing about five feet, eleven inches tall. Green, half eaten flesh hung on a yellow skeleton. On top of rotting shoulders was a skull and a narrow jawline. It wore a pair of sunglasses, a pair of paratrooper boots, and nothing else. The worst part about seeing this horrible sight was a tiny little flaccid penis, just draped ever so delicately over two hanging balls, crowned with a decent amount of pubic hair, and the lice were everywhere. There then the naked, decrepit, undead skeletal malfunction belonging to GG Allin stood on the roof of a warehouse in the middle of nowhere, Montana, tar and toilet paper dripping off his paratrooper boots. Iggy instinctively fell down over Willy Wonka’s corpse.

“Look at all these pretty sluts,” GG Allin remarked.

Iggy howled and tried to get back up.

“Hell fucking rocks dude. Shit, who’s got a beer?” GG looked at Jay.

Jay was frozen, then tripped over himself to get Iggy’s ghost boyfriend a beer.

“Will someone undo me!” Iggy panicked, holding her wrists out to Jay.

Circe said, “GG, we summoned you because we know you know the future.”

GG chugged a full 211 and sprayed a mouthful on Circe. He smashed the can on his skull.

“Another. Give me another,” GG burped.

Jay handed him another.

“Which one of you fine young females gonna show me your tits? I’ll sign them.” He chuckled to himself.

Iggy whispered at GG. “You touch me and I’ll kill you.” Jay started undoing her knots. “Quicker, Jay! Jesus!”

“Baby,” GG Allin laughed. “That’s my name, and I’m already dead.” He stared at Iggy for a long time, chugged the second 211, and dumped it on himself. “Look at you! You’re children. You’re late for school! The Sisters don’t like tardy students!” He snorted.

Circe said again, “We summoned you because we want to know the future.”

“Future ain’t shit, honey.” GG burped. “What’d you do? Where’s the body? I’m expensive. To summon me you have to pay something big.”

Circe spoke with rare sarcasm and weak humor. “We just said ‘suck my ass scumfuc’ six hundred and sixty-six times and here you are.”

GG Allin said, “Really? You didn’t kill the president? Shit in a condom and fuck each other with it? Did I miss the orgy?” Circe and Jay looked at each other. GG continued, “Fuck, summoning me is cheaper than I thought. There was blood at least?”

Circe smirked, “There’s always blood, GG.”

“I could suck yours right now--”

“I have a boyfriend,” Circe said, like it meant anything. Jay just stood there, stunned.

“I don’t give a fuck. Where is he?” GG Allin stared right at Jay. Jay’s eyes looked everywhere but at the skeleton of GG Allin.

“I’m like fucking Beetlejuice!” GG Allin laughed. A centipede crawled between the nose holes in his skull.

“I am fucking Beetlejuice,” he cackled.

Jay whispered to Circe, “What did you do?”

GG Allin finally noticed Iggy. “Hey, wait, don’t I know you from somewhere?”

Iggy trembled.

“Yeah, you’re one of my living little sluts. I remember you. I love sliding my rotting cock inside of you. You got a great cunt.”

Iggy pleaded to Circe, “Please make him go.”

Circe said to GG, “Jesus Christ Kevin Michael Allin, don’t make me send you back.”

“Back to Hell? I’d be honored, fuck. Satan made me a King. Can you believe that? ‘The Cockroach King!’ I love that fucking place.”

Stephen appeared from nowhere. Was he here the whole time? He spoke softly, but stern. “You need to leave them alone.”

GG looked a little perturbed. “Who is this Jesus looking asshat?”

Iggy said, “My boyfriend.”

GG, “You should dump him. He’s too good for you, you little slut.” He looked her up and down and gyrated, his flaccid dick flapping around. “Yeah, you like it when I call you a sleazy whore.” Then he glanced at Circe. “Hey, maybe you and I could

lick this witch's cunt together. Get a little 2-on-1 action going. A *menage a trois*." He made an obscene gesture.

Stephen yelled, "Who the fuck are you?"

That made GG mad. He soared down to Stephen and picked him up by throat. The voice that came next wasn't GG's. It was darker.

"I am everything you despise! I take your rejections and I shit them out and I throw them back at you. I show you who you really are! I am an Immortal Vampire and I told you twice already who I am." He let Stephen go. "The real question is, who the fuck are you? If I'm not here to eat shit, spread syphilis, and fuck, what am I here for?"

"--TO SEE THE FUTURE!" Circe shouted from the roof of THE SPIRIT. Betelgeuse looked up to Circe and Circe could smell his alcoholic horror. Jesus Christ Allin removed his sunglasses and Circe stared, without flinching, into the gaping toothy double-eyed mouth of the beginning and the end of time, the Endless and the All-in-One, the demon Yog-Soggoth.

161 Into Oblivion (A Train That Can Fly)

It was dark outside another Pilot. John, Buzzard, Circe, Jay, Stephen, Iggy, Cowboy, Coyote, and you sat in a little theater room watching the news. Well, Fox News.

Fox News was on air calling Water Protectors eco-terrorists, explaining the pipeline to be integral to the entire american economy. No one in your crew said a word. Moloch gave some kind of statement, but you didn't give a shit what he had to say. You took a shit and went out for a smoke. A traveler in a beat up pick-up asked you for one. He mentioned something about not having a sleeping bag. You gave him your old one.

THE SPIRIT worked its way to Bozeman. Snow started to fall. Cowboy picked up a tin of American Spirit tobacco for the bus. John called *another* Bus Council.

“OK, it's beginning to snow. I don't know about you but I want to be indoors tonight. How does everyone feel about putting some Magic Hat money on a motie?”

Everyone agreed. You didn't give a fuck about the Magic Hat. You might've put 20 dollars in it. All the money you got spanging went to tobacco, either for yourself or the bus, and booze. It sounded like a great idea.

Circe and John bought the room. One by one, each of you slid into the motie with the dogs. By the time it was your turn, Cowboy showed you a short fence to hop over to get in the room unseen by the motel staff. Motel staff would not be ok with eight or nine of you holing up in a single two bedroom unit.

Tracy brought their accordion, and worked on a piece of classical music. Almost immediately upon entering the motie,

John and Buzzard slipped into the bathroom. The bathtub faucet ran.

Coyote and Cowboy stepped out for a cigarette. You joined them, sober, in mild disgust.

Coyote said to you, offhandedly, “I’d leave her, dude. She’s treating you like that, you gotta go. You deserve better.”

You didn’t know what he knew, but damn, did he know something you didn’t. Was he only saying that to get you out of the picture? It was sweet, really. No one’s said that to you in a *long* time. You deserve better. What did that even mean? What did you deserve?

Your corpse, lying in a ditch somewhere in Eastern Montana. Is that what you deserved? Death, sweet death, make it come. The wounds you made within you were psychological. Buzzard changed you. And not for the better. You were worse than the shit on her shoe. Coyote, a boy and a man, said to you:

“She’s just not that into you.”

That’s all it took. You’re done. Cooked. Over it. You were gonna fuck their shit *up*. You were gonna tie together a smiley real quick and kick in the door and beat that fucking John Lennon Vampire Ozzy Osbourne dopey sonofabitch with it. You were gonna stab that motherfucker, you were gonna make him bleed. You were gonna spread the blood of your ex-lover and her new lover, enemies of cosmic eternity, all over the walls of a random motel in Bozeman, Montana, seven other traveling dirty kid scumbags watching you do it, dumbfounded. You were gonna kill anyone in your way. You could see the headlines of the local paper: MASSACRE AT BOZEMAN MOTEL. You pictured Cowboy slamming you in the face with a lamp. You didn’t give a flying fuck. You were gonna kill him too. Tracy’s accordion farting sadly in a

corner as you ripped out a spleen. Iggy seizing from the stress in another corner. Stephen sitting, Zen as fuck, nothing could break him. Circe cursing you. You knew how to break them. You were gonna pour sugar in the gas tank. You were gonna light THE SPIRIT on fire. Nothing could stand in your way from your destiny. You spit lightning. You were The Man. You wanted revenge. Sweet, sweet revenge.

You slammed open the door to the room. Five traveling kids: Iggy, Stephen, Circe, Jay, and Tracy all turned their heads to you. You could hear her orgasms through the walls.

Oh, yes! Oh!

You slammed open the bathroom door. But what you saw wasn't what you thought at all--

It was you. John Lennon wasn't there. You were in the bath with Buzzard. *It was you.*

You saw you in the tub, having sex with Buzzard in wreckless hippie Vampire abandon.

You were John. John was you.

You were taken off guard. You stumbled backward. Any plans of revenge went out the doorway. You had in your hand no weapon. But then, a figure lunged out of the tub.

It wasn't you anymore, it was John, his fingernails long, claws ready, black eyes, top hat and all, tall as fuck and naked as all sin, jaws wider than a rattlesnake, ready to eat you alive.

You ran.

You ran over the fence, to THE SPIRIT, hoping to whatever god was left would save you now. John came running

after you, snow falling, him naked as fuck, dick still hard, hairy chest, steampunk top-hat still mounted to his head, glasses reflecting the black fire he was going to bring to you. Then, John shapeshifted into a large ghost owl, its talons about to impale you. Your running turned into a crawl, slower and slower. No matter how you wanted to get away, you couldn't move fast enough. Your legs merged together, your arms collapsing out of your shoulders. Your eyes rolled back and flesh covered them, your mouth growing another row of teeth, turning into an anus, and you weren't human anymore. You were a worm. John the Owl pecked at you in the dirt. You missed him twice and kept squirming. You stuck yourself into the snow. He kept pecking, digging for you with his talons. His hunger drove him to your demise.

Then you were human again, cowering under John the Giant Ghost Owl. You took off for THE SPIRIT, not looking behind at whatever weirdness he was going to come up with next.

You pried open the doors and immediately grabbed a sign from Standing Rock that sat by the Captain's chair, a wooden stake affixed to it, and stuck it behind you, a sheer guess at where John's body was. But what you stuck with wood wasn't John, nor a ghost owl, nor a worm. You were hurting yourself. You instinctively pushed the stake further into yourself, into your stomach. You bled in the snow, standing, facing yourself, eyes staring deep inside of you, nothing to hide anymore, it's all out here, all of you, skinless, wormlike, pathetic, childish, sodomized, taken from, abandoned, perpetrator, violent, fucked up, asshole--

Looking into a mirror isn't for the faint of heart. Looking into another you, you saw irises that glowed green, blue, yellow, black. You fell right into the black, into holes that were once pupils but now ready to end you. You felt liquid, wet snow and hot

blood, vomit, feces, urine. This was it. This was your death. You weren't a vampire after all. You were just you. Fucked up you fucking up. And now you were going to die, a real-life actual Vampire feasting on your soul. You heard something *thud!* from the lair of Circe, you still on the front steps, the doors of THE SPIRIT open, the Vampire your impending doom.

The *thud!* snapped you out of John's enchantment. You climbed up to the lair and threw down the hatch-door. You moved something heavy on top of it. You were safe, for now. John Lennon the Vampire, Yog-Soggoth, Yourself, God, Circe, Buzzard, they were all after your soul! You breathed heavy, quick. You checked your body for wounds. Warm blood oozed from your stomach. John slammed up on the door-hatch.

You looked around Circe's lair for the first time since you arrived on THE SPIRIT. Blankets, candles, the dab rig, a butane torch, death metal band logos on cotton patches. A book. Mason jars. Weed, urine, a dark liquid. That was her period blood. Then you looked closer. Organs. A brain in saltwater. A liver. A kidney. A heart. There was one jar that growled. It looked like a dachshund made of human flesh. You drew back, disgusted. John, or you, kept slamming the hatch-door. He, *or you*, were-was about to splinter it open.

In sheer panic, you felt around the cum-stained sheets. An iron railspike. You were ready. You knew what you had to do. John the Vampire Nightmare broke open the door. You stuck the railspike out and impaled the Demon right in the chest. Blood squirted on Tarrantino's creepy face as darkness fell upon Bozeman, Montana.

A house. It was your father's. At one time your mom's too, before they divorced. You were there. It was snowing. The house was in Vegas but it was in Montana all the same. No sidewalks, no streetlamps. Neighboring houses had bars over their windows. The house had a chimney stack in its center and a mulberry tree in the backyard. Lightning struck the mulberry tree once. Ghosts lived there. You could sense it. But you felt yourself walk to the front door anyway, your body moving without your brain telling it to move. You weren't in control of your body. It did what it was going to do.

You opened the front door to what was supposed to be the front hall. It wasn't a front hall, it was a two car garage. A hoarder's garage, boxes and dust towered to the ceiling. Black widows and brown recluses made webs between the boxes, along the walls, from the ceiling. You went for the door you just walked into. Locked. Locked. You were trapped. You were a 6th grader trapped in a garage. You screamed for help. A poltergeist behind the cardboard laughed. Scorpions fell from the ceiling.

You were in your father's kitchen. You went to make coffee. A cockroach climbed out of the water reservoir.

You, twenty-one years old, drunk with your girlfriend in an apartment nearby. Her face turned to rubber as you tried to kiss it.

"Cass!" You cried out. Then she's calling your mother, face made of rubber, the kitchen rubber, the walls rubber, melting in the Vegas sun. Your mother, god, or Yog-Soggoth, called the police. You heard the panic on the other end, you were powerless, why were they so scared? Locked in a bathroom, cutting your wrists with a shard of ceramic plate. You were nothing, shit, not worthy of breath or life.

Another room. A man with a spindly mustache crying, Spanish words falling from his shaking lips. He held in his hands an infant, the infant with a small little mustache of his own. The man with a spindly mustache looked up and on his chin were four testicles. You recognized the man to be Salvador Dali, and the testicles to be eggs. The rubber walls were melting clocks, ticking, ticking, melting, the rubber walls melting, the clocks melting, Dali's monsters melting, trapping Dali forever in hell, the infant plastic, the infant's face cardboard. Dali kept sobbing, the plastic baby sobbing, the clocks sobbing, the walls sobbing, Andre Breton, his one-time lover sobbing in a dog kennel, naked and full of fear and Lorca, Dali's shame, shot by Franco's Fascist Firing Squad, over and over, on a movie projector, *forever*.

Another room. A man stood upon a wooden box, a ripped black tunic, a black hood over his head, praying for dear life. Soldiers stood there and took photos, making jokes in English too obscene to say aloud. An American soldier in a camo beret barely holding onto a dog, ferocious and hungry, snapping jaws at an innocent civilian. Lynndie England, born 1982, an American United States Army Reserve soldier, war criminal, just a cardboard cutout, her face made of newspaper. Other soldiers took turns spitting on her.

Another room. More American soldiers. Making a man eat feces. The smell was too much. The year was 2015.

Another room. A police officer in Texas, Brian Encinia, eating a Carls, Jr sandwich after murdering Sanda Bland with his bare hands. *Take on Me* played on the FM radio in his cruiser, his police UHF radio quiet chatter.

Bloody handprints on the walls.

Another room, filled with black smoke from burning tires. Sal Paradise, alias Jack Dulouz, alias Jack Keroauc, is in here, saying, “I didn’t mean to rape her. You know how women are,” before coughing up blood in the cloud, referring to a 14 year old Mexican *child*, coughing, coughing, coughing, coughing, coughing. His friend William, a turd with eyes, covered in insects, hiding in crawlspace and burrowing under skin. His other friend, Allen who looked like *you* at 22, his flaccid dick in his hands, a pedophile, a visionary, a fucking scumbag, in the tire smoke and tear gas forever choking breathe, no speech or words left.

A hallway. It’s upstairs. A monster dislodged itself off its canvas prison, leaving the golden frame on the wall, the monster’s body made of flowing cotton, blues and reds and yellows, a crocodile snout, four limbs, a Max Ernst painting alive. It roared, “VICTORY!,” disrobing, revealing a swastika body, made of paper.

You heard thundering chants of “*USA! USA!*” erupt from a crowd of White America, but saw none. Instead you saw your friends single-file in the middle of a football field on the 70 yard line, lining up for the firing squad.

The walls bleeding rivers of blood.

“Lili!”

Lili putting her skinny fist into your gut. “Stop putting your hands on me!”

The bathroom now. Your father, before sodomizing you with a warm pipet of water, said sadly, “Some people like this kind of thing. You’ll understand when you’re older.” Dial soap, magnesium sulfate, soiled underwear, moldy shower tile, hot and

cold sensations pulsing through your body. You didn't cry anymore. You were used to it. It was supposed to end.

The backyard. A dog covered in flies, decomposing.
Orion! Maggots crawled out of his eyes, so many flies.
So many flies.
Make it stop.

A closet now. Donald Trump and his family hung in it. Next to them, Sid Vicious. You were upside down, or the closet was upside down. They hung from the floor, gravity working backwards, a Lynching well deserved and Revolution imminent.

Another closet. A woman, sobbing hysterically at a bloody babydoll on the floor. She flogged herself with computer wire, fresh blood leaking from her lower back.

Another room. Cicadas molting on the walls, have you ever seen it? They feasted on the face of HP Lovecraft, known white supremacist.

The kitchen again. Franz Kafka, sitting alone at a table, eyes wide, a plate of pickled herring next to him in the dark. Is he here with you, in this hell?

Another room. Your mom, a shell of a person, on Percocet, watching you drown in a swimming pool. Her expression is cold. Was she killing you?

The floor fell away. You were being interrogated. The CIA wanted you bad. For what, you had no idea. You were just a homeless shitstain nobody to them. Can the CIA even operate on American soil? They hooked you up to computer monitors and threatened to kill your mom. Your wife. Your kids. They strung you up in the Strappado position, sodomized you with a pipet of gasoline, and told you that the Aryan Brotherhood would do worse to you inside. You stopped caring after awhile. You saw The

Bellagio burning before your eyes, burning hotter than anything they could put inside of you.

Now you're outside the house, it's in Vegas, no longer Montana, peering up at the pigeons and the palm trees, into Orion. God or fate whispered in the breeze but you couldn't hear what she was saying.

You're in Montana again, fresh snowmelt, clear sky, Aurora green and blue and violet and pink waving, waving, you're flying up to it.

You're past Aurora.

You're into the dark, into Oblivion, in the Big Sky.

The Milky Way. Moons of Jupiter. Saturn. Uranus. Pluto, your body not yours anymore, a doll, a plaything, dark matter.

You're alone in the vast vacuum of space.

You're marooned, cast away, cosmic, the Big Empty Oblivion Nothing jeering and hollering at your demise.

You heard a train whistle. One short, one long.

You're six, you're in Amarillo, Texas, the night sky pulsing in short bursts of starlight.

The train whistle. One short, one long.

You're on the beach with your father, seventh grade, camping out between the Amtrak tracks and the Pacific Ocean, each grain of sand a world unknown to the humans that trek across it. A foggy morning, eating cold cereal, the nearby Nuclear Reactor glowing silver and grey, a humpback breaching out by the horizon.

The train whistle. One short, one long.

You're there in outer space, in vast Oblivion, seeing a burning comet of rage and passion, a string of IMs headed by four engines. You looked down and saw the gravel. Dreamer shouted

from the well of an Intermodal car, “GET ON, IT’S EASY!” and you do, you’re running, reaching for the ladder, running with the train, one foot up, then the other, you hopped onto Dreamer’s car. Dreamer smiled toothily at you and his head morphed into a mosquito’s. He tried to speak through his proboscis but the train is too loud. You screamed but no sound emitted from your mouth, you can’t breathe.

The train whistle blew again. You’re in The Great Basin of the Northern Paiute, no gear, a shitty sleeping bag, snipes in a plastic bag, a yellow piece of paper. It’s still night, the sky dark and full of stars. No moon. You rolled a cigarette with the snipes and the yellow piece of paper, the receipt of a trespassing ticket from cops in the Sierra Nevadas.

You fell asleep to the mighty iron thunder of a freight train hurtling across the night, the Nevada Desert your comfort and your Fear. It used to be ocean, millions of years ago. The basins and ranges of caliche and alkali and yucca told you were nothing to it. The sagebrush sea was going to win your soul in a gamble that lasted a millennium. Nevada wasn’t your home. You had none. You were *homefree*.

You fell out of time and space.

Part III

"Time is a dictator, as we all know. What does it do? Where does it go? Most of all, is it alive? It is a thing you cannot touch but is it alive?"

-- Nina Simone, 1969

17 **Buried Beyond the Palms**

It is true that Las Vegas is naked. Delirious, destitute, fervent, feverish, victimized, hardy; a realm of atomic nuclear fallout, Mojave desert heat and a thousand pressures. Above the caliche, a thriving metropolis, centered by gold-tinted glass towers famous for mobsters and showgirls, corporate oligarchs, dancers and acrobats. Below the ground another city: storm tunnels, the neon bowels, discarded mattresses, teeners, shadow people. There in Vegas is a corrupt city government that has long legitimized the Mafia and shifted power to international corporate interests, enforced by the authority of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and softly enforced by the everyday people that normalize it. The everyday people who normalize this style of fascism perpetuate their own oppression and the oppression of their children.

Then there's the black market economy, ignored and quietly encouraged by the police and the city for the right price. The sex workers, trans and cis, and drug dealers in the weeklies, others living in the storm drain tunnels with the cockroaches, or living in tents and shopping carts frying under the oppressive heat. Maybe the squalor is hidden. Maybe they own a house, maybe they rent, maybe their boyfriends are roofers with large families, maybe they work as cam girls. Maybe they can't hold a job for long. Maybe the oppressor has a face: a father, a husband, a dealer, a john, a pimp. Maybe the oppressor is an institution: ICE, CCSD, CCDC, LVMPD. In Vegas, uniquely, the slots are another omnipresent oppressor.

It is true Las Vegas is naked. Naked villainy: almost everyone under a certain income level eventually goes to jail for something. Jaywalking, expired tabs, DUI, parking tickets, domestic battery, possession of a controlled substance. It is a sinister form of dispossession, one that can be argued as “your own fault.” It is racialized and gendered. It is also a form of social cleansing, keeping us trapped in a tarpit of fees, fines, and months in custody. Social cleansing puts us all in a sunken place, a place where we deny ourselves the right to self-determination to be who we truly are. Describing this flavor of oppression is sometimes like describing water to a fish. It is normal. Oppression is normal. It is true, yes, we are a nakedly brainwashed nation.

Tinker Bell blew southbound from Oregon through the Nevada Desert on a rescue mission. He was coming for you. You were in town for less than a day before you got the text: “Yo, I’m in Vegas. Call me.” Tinker Bell, who you sometimes called by his government name, Vinnie, pulled up in his white Chevy S-10, the bed in the back decked out with a futon pad on a pallet with a red cap and tinted windows. He brought along his dog, Bear, and another traveler, Batface.

Tinker Bell used to be a tweaker and a juggalo down in Mesa, Arizona, but got clean a few years prior, ending up in Ohio with some relatives and then to Vermont where you met him. You thought him coming from Mesa was why you got along with him so well. Southwest kids. He left a son down there with a baby mama that hated him. He found traveling to kick his meth habit, mostly. Watching other people twack out and go mad also helped.

They both just bailed on a place they both called The Shadowlands, running southbound from Oregon in Tinker Bell’s

old Chevy. A marijuana farm on the outskirts of Grants Pass, The Shadowlands was home to a number of demons. Tinker Bell confided in you that the demons of the Shadowlands poisoned its owner, a generous old hippie, with mercury sprinkled on his food. They poisoned him over a series of years, all to take his land and replace his egalitarian spirit with the Kingdom of Meth.

Meth was a conjurer and summoner. It summoned once, a Seattle streetkid named Diver, who told you about losing his virginity to a woman he called the Santa Barbara g*psy. Another time, Meth summoned for you a psychic slave you met on the sands of Venice Beach. You summoned him again three hundred miles away, at the desert edge of California, pentagrams drawn on hands on either side of the portal. He was rightfully terrified of the ordeal and fled into the desert.

You asked Tinker Bell, “Mercury?”

“Yeah, bro. They had a big five-gallon bucket of the shit. I don’t know where they were storing it, but they forsure were poisoning that dude. He died, right? And they convinced him in the will to give them his land. He didn’t talk to his kids. Just Prism shit.” Tinker Bell shook his head.

Tinker Bell came to hippie-nap you, so he said, but you quickly figured out he was there to bring Batface back to family in Kingman, Arizona, and needed some help to do so. Batface had a baby out there, too. But Batface was gone. He sounded like the side of a bottle of Dr. Bronners, except instead of “AllLove” and “Peace for All Living Beings” it was LSD and the CIA. Which, in his defense, some of it was believable.

Batface told you he was injected with 150 milligrams (or 300, or 500) of liquid LSD when he was ten years old outside a rest stop off the I-40 and woke up five years later a sex slave to the Hells

Angels. Batface spun circles around his stories like an eager spider. He had one about the CIA burning down his sister's trailer that you found hideously, suspiciously true, except it wasn't the CIA, it was Batface himself. Batface seemed to believe his own stories, telling each one with conviction and sincerity. It made your stomach knot up.

Tinker Bell and Batface both had face tattoos, but Tinker Bell's was small. Batface's tattoo took up half his face and looked like some Nordic snake. You never asked. Batface also wore black Carhartt bibs, a black skank, and had short hair. Unlike most trainkids, Batface had no dog and might have been in his early 30s. He was a Nic@Niter. Tinker Bell wore a red t-shirt and shorts, had slicked back hair, was a few years older than you, and only had a 6th grade education. One of the coolest stupid little things you learned from Tinker Bell was that he would store his toothbrush in a regular 12 oz plastic water bottle. They were the same length. Fucking genius! He would also cut plastic bottles in half to water Beardog. Beardog was so quiet, you tended to forget he existed.

You directed Tinker Bell to a spot on the eastside called the View, close to the backside of Sunrise Mountain. Sunrise Mountain was home, filled with ghosts, its slopes an old landfill filled in to build subdivisions of single-family houses. Sunrise Mountain was an evil mountain. It watched you as a child, laughing menacingly as the sun beat down upon your head. Its shape burned into your brain, the only thing you saw from the windows of your school, the only thing you saw from the window of your jail cell. Something was watching you in this desert. Most of the Mojave felt this way, like you were being played with by something but you didn't know how or who.

People disappeared in the desert all the time. Mobsters. Victims of mobsters. Gangsters. Victims of gang violence. Victims of male violence. Babies. Sure, they're all here. Lake Mead, too, had so many bodies that it became too toxic to drink when the droughts sucked up the water. Long time ago, they found Spit and Dan in the desert, two anti-racist punks that caught the ire of the local Nazis. Rest in Power Spit and Dan.

In the morning, after Tinker Bell brushed his teeth, you directed them to the other side of town, Summerlin, to sponge up some gas money. Spanging in Vegas sucked dick. No one really gave you anything, and you were often targets for Metro harassment. But you tried, you had to. You flew a sign that said UR BEAUTIFUL and made a few dollars. Tinker Bell always liked to go for the positive messages like SMILE or GOD BLESS, even though Tinker Bell didn't believe in God.

"Go manifest us some breakfast," Tinker Bell told you.

Not long after, an old friend invited you over to her place behind the Palms for pancakes. Her name was Claudia, and she had a two year old son Louis. Claudia was a white hippie of the festi variety, with dyed, matted hair, long skirts, hula hoops, a Chaturbate account. Her son was her life, but Claudia also wanted her own time and a dude to help provide for Louis. Claudia was a schemer out of necessity, somehow scoring an apartment paid off for three months by some guy that lived in Summerlin. She wanted to work, caught in the classic dilemma of young single moms, childcare and employment. In Claudia's two bedroom apartment lived a couple, a white, pregnant woman Hannah and her partner, a big hairy dude named Daniel. Hannah and Claudia called each other sisters.

Claudia never made pancakes. You took a shower and somehow in the span of 20 minutes Claudia and Tinker Bell were holding hands. Then Tinker Bell finally convinced Batface to visit his family in Kingman, an hour and a half away.

You three piled in the cab and you listened to Batface all the way to Kingman. Was he high? No, you didn't think so.

Batface said excitedly, "You hear of Operation Paperclip? That's where all those Nazi scientists came over here and worked for NASA and got us on the moon? Yeah, I met one of them (...) You know the eye in the Taco Bell logo? There, look, can you see it? At the bottom? That's the Illuminati. Like you know, Bohemian Grove. You ever hear of Bohemian Grove, where all those rich dudes go to fuck each other and worship Satan? (...) Hitler *invented* meth, bro (...) MKUltra fucked us *up*, dude (...) I saw this UFO once, it was like last year or something--"

"Bro, me too," you said, finally.

"Yeah, it was like the sky opened up this portal or something--" Batface's eyes got huge.

"It was Elon Musk, dude. That SpaceX shit." You saw it too, it was in December of 2015 when you worked at the bar in Vegas. It lasted ten seconds and can be found on Youtube.

Batface said, "Yeah man, I think we got launched into an alternate reality--"

Tinker Bell said, "Batface, dude, shut the fuck up."

Batface said, "OK, sure buddy." Thirty seconds of quiet. Then Batface said, "Have you spoke to the Geat Old Ones? Interdimensional fractal beings? O Yog-Soggoth, *έλα σε μας*. O Yog-Soggoth, *έλα σε μας*. Freakier than the Lumerians, dude!"

"What fucking language was that?"

"I have no idea, bro. Shit went right through me!"

Finally, you made it to Kingman. You waved goodbye to Batface and on the way back to Vegas, Tinker Bell got a phone call. Batface just got locked up on outstanding warrants. The pigs sprung a trap at Batface's kid's house. He was supposed to get out in 30 days. Rolling back over Hoover Dam, Tinker Bell told you a little of his story.

Tinker Bell had a heart attack when he was 23. He was on a bunch of meth and took some acid and the cops in Ohio watched him have it, telling him he was going to die. Cops everywhere didn't like Tinker Bell. In Grants Pass, Oregon, they beat him on the regular.

Back in Vegas, you and Tinker Bell ended up staying at Claudia's place behind the Palms for a month. Claudia never made pancakes, but she did make amazing conversation. You and Tinker Bell put forth effort to bring food into the house, dumpstering pizza and produce, spending your Maryland EBT on groceries, taking Claudia to the WIC office, trying to find a food bank to no avail. Food banks in Vegas had automated phone mazes to find out when and where they were open, were actually only open two hours a month, and were only available for clients with children or over 65 years old. Vegas *hated* poor people. You got Claudia to go once, and it was sad as hell. Canned peas, a loaf of bread, milk that Claudia didn't drink nor give to Louis. All in all, though, Claudia, Hannah, and Daniel weren't too hung up on money, though all of you were dead broke and lucky to have an apartment to crash in at all. Louis watched Disney movies on pirated DVDs all day. At one point, Daniel, you, and Tinker Bell all tried to get jobs at a call center. What a joke that was.

The place behind the Palms had hot water, no cable. There was spotty wifi borrowed from a neighbor. One night, Tinker Bell

and Claudia started hooking up. Claudia became attached pretty quickly, Tinker Bell enjoying the attention but wary of the commitment.

At one point, Claudia said, “Take us with you. We can go to Mexico, or California, settle down.” Tinker Bell stormed out, telling her no, scared as fuck, coming back a few hours later. Claudia was scared too. She realized that Tinker Bell wasn’t the guy she was looking for within a few days, but entertained herself with him anyway, trying to seduce him into settling down with her. Another night, you took Tinker Bell to a Vegas Punk Rock show at a random bar in Naked City and he loved it. One of the bands, HATEUS, had everyone drunk singing the chorus to their eponymous song on their self-titled album, “They Hate Us Cus They Ain’t Us! They Hate Us Cus They ANUS!”

THE SPIRIT would not let you rest.

Sunrise Mountain was an evil mountain, that you could be sure, because in the silent night, far beyond the twinkling streetlights, even farther from the Bright Lights of the World Famous Las Vegas Strip, even farther from the moonlight and from God, there in the dark a portal into the depths of space-time emerged and out of it appeared a devil hideously familiar. It was you but a you shrouded in shadow. It spoke to you and when it spoke, tar dripped out of its mouth.

“I have a gift for you,” The Devil whispered.

“What is it?” You whispered back.

In your hands was a shovel and you dug all night, the new moon watching. The hard caliche made it impossible without assistance. Tinker Bell worked with you and together, against logic, you dug one big, unmarked shallow grave. Sagebrush grew hardy

and mean, and you tore your palms up ripping roots out of the alkali. You dug by the shining light of Vinnie's Chevy headlamps on the western slope of Sunrise Mountain. Moths gathered and coyotes cried in the distance.

“This used to be a landfill,” You told Vinnie.

Tinker Bell helped haul the corpses, one by one, each one moldering and wrapped in stolen tarps. Tinker Bell helped you cover them in alkaline soil. He was loyal to the end. Ride or Die. With the quickness. He didn't give a fuck.

But THE SPIRIT would not let you rest.

Tinker Bell, Christian name Vinnie, helped bury a part of you at the base of Sunrise Mountain.

18 In The Court of Your Weeping Conscience

Inside the once popular Undead casino and resort was a galleria. The galleria was designed to look like an ancient Roman Forum and Agora, a plaster facade of marbled Roman balconies overlooking large inner corridors of the mall. Above the facade were clouds and sky, painted on the ceiling in eternal day. The luxury brands in the galleria were all the hits: Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Neiman Marcus, Rolex, Armani, Balenciaga. Each plaza had a gorgeous plaster Trevi style fountain: complete with statues of beefy and seductive merpeople, tridents, giant seahorses and octopi, and Neptune riding hippokampi along with his many sea-nymph wives.

One of these plazas was the Court; empty, surrounded by a gaudy Cheesecake Factory that hadn't been used in over 400 years, plaster statues of Roman gods and a *piece de resistance* erected by undocumented near-slave labor.

This piece was a large pedestal, raised fifteen feet above the tile floor. A tile stairway led up, twisting in a circle, to a podium. The pedestal was volcanic rock and etched in it were languages dead to human ears. At the podium is where the subjects of Conscience stood. The podium itself had the two faces of Janus carved into it, with a gold inscription in Greek: Ο Yog-Soggoth ξέρει την πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι η πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι το κλειδί και ο φύλακας της πύλης. Παρελθόν, παρόν, μέλλον, όλα είναι ένα στο Yog-Soggoth. Yog-Soggoth knows the gate. Yog-Soggoth is the gate. Yog-Soggoth is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Soggoth.

Wrapping around the podium, pedestal, and stairway was an aquarium, ten feet tall and two hundred feet around. In the

aquarium was a coral reef, populated by fish that are now extinct. Tropical lionfish, stingrays, sharks, sturgeons, piranhas, eels, hagfish, and schools of minnows swam to and fro for all of eternity. Above the Court and the whole plaza was a concave, domed television screen. It broadcasted the twinkle of a night sky, the Milky Way, the planets Venus and Mars.

Conscience was an androgynous angel reminiscent of Tolkienian elves and graceful swans. Dressed in Greek robes, Conscience was alert, calm, and sure. Conscience stood on a balcony overlooking the podium, a space between the power of Heaven and the punishment Conscience's subjects often received. Employed in the Court of Conscience was a clerk, a stenographer, and three guards, taking different sitting and standing positions on and around the podium. There were no lawyers.

The clerk read out, "Case Number 2:17-cv-02229. The Main Character Nobody v A Closet Full of Shitty Fucked Up Awful Dreadful Shameful Selfish Crimes."

Conscience sighed. "Let him in."

A man, a mortal, a child, a counselor, an offender, entered the court.

"Do you know why you are here?"

You gazed up at your fate. "Yes, Your Honor."

"You are charged with a long, excruciating list of foul acts of malfeasance, of which for the consideration of the Court, the exact nature of them all will not be mentioned here. How do you plead?"

"I feel guilty as fuck."

"Do you believe you would have come to this conclusion even only a few months ago?"

You thought for a moment. "No, maybe not."

“Interesting. Do you think you had to experience callousness, deceit, and rejection before you could see your own misdeeds?”

“Fuck, yeah, probably.”

“And here you speak to me of guilt? Listen, you seem like a nice kid. Other people say as much. I am Conscience so I should know. However, you do have a bad rap sheet. I have to admit, it is bad. Real *bad*. And long.” Conscience studied the paper in front of him. Conscience thought for awhile. “I have to ask you-- Do you believe you are better than women?”

You straightened up and spoke with your chest. “No, I do not, Your Honor.”

“Listen, my friend. Do not lie to me. You’re here in my courtroom, in the palace that I reside in. That means your soul is of special interest to me, The Grand Hegemon of Sin. Are you aware of my history in this position as The Grand Hegemon, why I was to receive such a beautiful court? Billions of people all over the world know my name. By the look on your face, I can surmise that you do not. Let me ask you this: Do you know where Vampires come from?”

“No, I do not, Your Honor.”

“You were right to believe Thomas Jefferson was part of the Cult of the Undead. His words did not match his actions. He once asked, ‘Do you want to know who you are? Don’t ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you.’ Is that not a beautiful thing to write? And this man performed unconscionable cruelties, actions that failed to define him for public scrutiny. Do you know what he also said? ‘There is no act, however virtuous, for which ingenuity may not find some bad motive.’ I believe a friend of yours told you

that Vampires are not Vampires all the time. It is a fluid curse. A malleable curse.

“But you, nor Thomas Jefferson, are the only ones with problems. In your own movement, rest assured that the amount of terrible selfish acts people have done far surpasses your own. Emma Goldman, a woman worthy of a movie franchise, was a hero for dealing with her lifelong lover, a man that spent fourteen years in prison just to run away with a teenager, all in the name of Freedom.

“Yes, freedom. That is what you seek, is it not?”

“A wonderful saint named Lucy Eldine González Parsons once wrote, ‘Anarchism has but one infallible, unchangeable motto: Freedom. Freedom to discover any truth, freedom to develop, to live naturally and fully.’ She knew what Freedom meant more than we do now, as she escaped an Armageddon worse than anything we can imagine today: chattel slavery in the American South and the State Execution of her husband. Mrs. Parsons, who passed away in a house fire, said of women in 1905, ‘We are the slaves of slaves. We are exploited more ruthlessly than men. Whenever wages are to be reduced the capitalist class use women to reduce them.’ Women, subjugated in imprisonment of spirit by the Patriarchy, have been fighting for thousands of years.

“Patriarchy is Vampirism. You might have lied to yourself, told yourself you were equals with the women you hurt. But that is not true. You could not relinquish control and so now you are in my court today.”

“Have mercy, Your Honor.”

“What is that? Mercy?”

“I know I fucked up.”

“Will you fuck up again?”

“I don’t know. Is this just who I am?”

“And what are you?”

“A real piece of shit.” You cried.

“Listen,” Conscience began. “One story about the origins of Vampires comes from Saturn, the God of Time and avatar of the Great and All One, The Endless. Because Saturn was afraid of losing control, he *ate* his own children. And his children passed on the cycle of violence. And violence begets violence, Vampires make more Vampires, Time an Illusion invented to trap us in this cycle forever. But do you know what happened to Saturn? He was outwitted by his sister-wife, Rheia! Rheia, Goddess of all mothers. The real heroine, or hero if you prefer, forsaken by the zeitgeist and the spotlight. Who knows her name? She may be the original vampire-hunter, perhaps.”

Conscience pondered. “Alright, let me tell you how this is going to work. You are going to be in denial. You still believe you are more important than women, and if not all women, *most* women. You will hate me and call me bad names, but you will eventually see I am right. Then, when you can accept the truth, you will have to Do The Work. Read The Books. Listen to your friends. Call your mom. You will hate yourself. You will be afraid and ashamed of yourself. Well, you already are, aren’t you? You will sacrifice yourself to the world, and especially to women. Then, when you find that is not enough, you are going to withdraw from the world. You will lash out at women and you will lose yourself. You might regress. You might seethe at women. You might betray women. But your path is not over. You may have the Vampire Curse for as long as it takes, but eventually, you will be light. You will love and be love. You will do the right thing. You will also do

the wrong thing. You have to make peace with both, and trust that others will do the same.”

Conscience thought for a long time. “Yes, it will come in bursts like stars and tears and rain. There is always room for redemption, if you believe in that promise. But beware. Time is an illusion. As often as time moves forward, it moves backward. There is always hope. Do not let the Vampires win. It is possible, I should know. I used to be one.”

It was November in Vegas. The sun was gone. It was at an early twilight that the news came. The creep won the election not through the popular vote, but by the electoral college. You and Tinker Bell drove out to the Strip, where people were mobilizing in front of Trump Tower. The United States was succumbing to overt fascism. It seemed so important then, and it was, as this conflict reverberated for a decade. The march was a microcosm of the political split of what the TV called ‘the left’ (which isn’t the left at all, it’s just to the left of Rupert Murdoch). Hillary supporters held signs printed nicely on posterboard, or their yard signs that said ‘I’m with her,’ sticking to pedestrian thoroughfares. Everytime liberals shouted ‘not my president,’ you and Tinker Bell and your friend from Indiana shouted back ‘No More Presidents,’ right there in the middle of the United States Necrocapitalist Empire.

The Black activist community tried to take Las Vegas Boulevard on a few occasions, Black Radicals waving Black, Red, and Green into the red, white, and blue sirens. One dude, or maybe two, maybe a woman too, got their shit rocked by pigs outside the Bellagio. Most everyone stood around yelling. It was sad as fuck. The police got hostile and the march split and liberals

marched right back to the parking garages where they were safely parked. Your homeless ass felt powerless. What were you supposed to do? Go to jail with them? Damn, you should have. They had houses, car payments, kids. You had shit.

Another night Claudia took you and Tinker Bell and Louis to the apartment pool, while it was still just warm enough to swim. The three of you were alone and Claudia swam naked, playing with Louis and splashing around. Tinker Bell shoved her down in the water, and what was a good time turned into a bad one. She put on her swimwear and held Louis. Stern, cold, Claudia told Tinker Bell she wasn't to be fucked with, that she came from Palmdale or Oildale or Bakersfield or somewhere miserable, and that Mesa (Tinker Bell's birthplace) didn't have shit on Bakersfield or Oildale or Palmdale. She laughed about sleeping with her cousin's boyfriend to get back at her cousin for something petty. Claudia, while an amazing mother, was petty as fuck and not to be trusted. She felt the same about you two, making it clear that Batface nor any drugs Batface brought with him into her home was not to be tolerated. Claudia and Hannah and Daniel were always smoking weed and were interested in psychedelics. But no crystal, never crystal, if you or Vinnie came home high from crystal or with crystal, she'd kick you out. It was a fair deal, you had no intention of using any drug, especially not Hitler's drug. If you were Claudia, you'd say the same thing. Louis was too important.

Vinnie kept talking about Black Sheep, a gathering of homeless kids in the desert for Christmas/New Years, not unlike Prism but with alcohol. Black Sheep was the place for Prism's rejects, a place for travelers to spend the holidays with family, if family was a bunch of asshole streetkids, usually only a few or several Prism Kitchen buses in attendance. The plan became to

finish the meetings, go to Black Sheep, visit your people. Only, Buzzard was probably going to be at Black Sheep. Or John. Or Circe. Or other fiends from THE SPIRIT. Fuck.

You never wanted to see those motherfuckers ever again.

You did, however, want to see some Vegas friends. One, Hemlock, was blond, short, wore black jeans and button-downs, and did outcall operator services for an adult entertainment company headed by her girlfriend. Hemlock was living out of a place she called the crack shack and was trying to leave, but needed help to do so. When Tinker Bell heard, he wanted to rescue her from that shit. Tinker Bell grabbed Hemlock and her shit and Hemlock ended up staying at Claudia's for a minute.

You kept seeing Tinker Bell and Claudia go off together. Claudia loved you too, wearing your Bob Marley cut-off rag sometimes, kissing you on the cheek, telling you, "I love you." Her love for Tinker Bell, though, got both of them fucked up.

Tinker Bell would say, DOPE: Dead Or Prison Eventually.

Tinker Bell and Claudia started to fight more often, and one night while you were out, Tinker Bell left Claudia's apartment behind the Palms and didn't come back for thirty-six hours. Tinker Bell relapsed. When Tinker Bell came back, Claudia told him to kick rocks. She looked at you with an icy stare. "All you men are the fucking same! Sucking up my energy and time. Both of you no good tweaker ass bums get out of here. Disrespecting me and my child. How dare you." You left Claudia your Bob Marley shirt. She looked good in it.

Vinnie himself seemed regretful and self-hating. After some sleep, he was back to his usual self. He said meth fucking sucked, and that it was given to him spanging. But then he lost the little money he made trying to get more, driving all over town, chasing a

high that never came. His heart too, couldn't take it. For him to do that shit meant he was suicidal. Vinnie's tires were leaking and he had car insurance to pay, he really started to worry about money.

You and Vinnie bummed around a few more days before you got a text from Plague Rat, of all people. Plague Rat was in town and wanted a ride to Black Sheep, which was to take place somewhere by the border in the Colorado desert. Meeting up with Plague Rat, you saw that she chilled out some, saying that she left Christopher at Standing Rock, got a dog she affectionately named Charles, and caught a ride to SLC where she hopped south. You found her spanging on the Strip and collected her, destination Black Sheep. She was still drinking, but kept to 211s and away from the Spirits.

19 The Oracle at the Sphinx of Naxos

As you rode in the back of Vinnie's truck through the borderlands, the Colorado desert between you and the sky, you thought of the ghosts of the people who crossed the low desert lands and didn't make it, their bodies unceremoniously left to decompose among the Yucca and brittlebush, bones later tagged and marked by American scientists. You knew this desert to be a warzone, with Moloch's recent electoral victory looming over like the towering needles of rock where Needles, California gets its name. Plague Rat and Vinnie had the cab to themselves while you laid in the covered truck bed. Your head was on your pack and in Batface's bibs with Beardog at your feet. You watched the sea of sagebrush stretch into valleys and gulleys, wondering how you, white and homeless as fuck, could actually do anything to stop the growing threat of overt Nazism in the United States.

After all, it was Nazism. Make no mistake. The United States has long been a racist empire, inspiring Hitler (as well as plenty of other genocidal maniacs) in ways too hideous for most Americans to recognize. Atrocities sponsored by the US happen all the time. Americans don't give a fuck about the rest of the world and usually don't give a fuck about Americans either. Cue the creep. Molochian despots and Donald himself brought this hideousness to American consciousness and soil for the first time in recent memory. Yes, American Nazism has long existed, using racial mythologies to build economies with the bones of enslaved Africans, erase Indigenous nations from history, erect concentration camps and medically experiment on innocent people, currently dominating the world with child slavery in the Global South and prison labor in the Global North. Seeking ways

to destroy the Empire and end slavery and suffering has left millions of people dead all over the Earth, fighting for future generations from Standing Rock to Montgomery, Grenada to Armenia, Croatia and Ireland to South Africa, Guatemala, Somalia, India, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

And yet, here you are, in the belly of the Thousand Eyed Satan, headed to a holiday gathering of bums and alcoholic do-nothing guerillas.

Black Sheep that year was down the Colorado River some thirty two miles from gorgeous sand dune formations named after a road that darted past them, Ogilby, within fifty miles of the national border, in a series of arroyos and dry ravines full of soft sand interspersed with rocky peaks and debris. No water in sight, all of it had to be purchased in town and carried. Vinnie stocked up what he could in the village of Blythe, buying 15 or so gallons from an Albertson's with his EBT card.

Plague Rat attached herself to Vinnie and that night, you left them by themselves. You knew they hooked up. The spark was palpable. But in the morning, it turned sour and she started beating on him like she beat on Christopher. Tinker Bell held her while she did it, but he knew it was over.

"What'd you do to her?" You asked him when you two were alone.

"I don't know, bro!"

Black Sheep itself hadn't begun yet, kitchen buses taking their time to arrive, no familiar faces yet. Like every gathering, the entrance to Black Sheep was a dirt parking lot off a Fire Control road in the middle of nowhere, but this gathering was on BLM land instead of National Forest. As soon as you pulled in, Plague

Rat disappeared. You and Vinnie set up camp behind a juniper tree and met a new friend. Her name was Kitty.

Kitty was another trainkid, in her late twenties or early thirties, dot tattoos on her face, wild as fuck. Kitty had missing teeth, track marks, from Brooklyn, the accent coming out thick every once and awhile. She noticed there was no Nic@Nite handing out tobacco and took it upon herself to reach out to Nic@Nite royalty to hand out cigarettes on the organizations' behalf. Royalty said yes, and so Kitty donned a busket. You and Vinnie followed her for a day, passing out gallons of water and helping her with her two dogs, Red and Slinky, along with Vinnie's dog, Beardog.

That night, the campfires raged as gatherers fought off the desert chill. Vinnie had an oil drum he burned sticks and brush in, warming the ground around the drum. This gathered some people and people brought out the guitars and sang. You went to bed then. Kitty slept between you and Vinnie in Vinnie's three person tent for warmth, all the dogs at your feet.

In the morning, Vinnie wanted to grab Batface, who was just released from jail in Kingman, two-three hours into Arizona, north of Blythe. You, Kitty, and her dogs tagged along, gas juggling in mid-December with a Santa hat and a sign that said, "HELP ME MAKE IT HOME 4 X-MAS." It made you close to nothing. Kitty didn't help and Vinnie became frustrated with her.

You made it to Batface's family's place. He had a two-year-old daughter that was incredibly sick, and both his aunt and uncle wanted him to stay to take care of his daughter. You were just along for the ride, you told them, and Batface seemed to even out a little, his stories cut off unceremoniously by his uncle who distracted him with Dungeons and Dragons. After a few

hours, night over Kingman just as menacing as night over Sunrise Mountain in Vegas, it was clear Batface wasn't going anywhere so Vinnie and Kitty and you said goodbye and drove off to sleep.

It was then that Batface sent a text saying to pick him up. He escaped. He also wanted to stop by a friend's to pick up his pack. Vinnie did so and all four of you ended up outside a squatted trailer in a neighborhood with no streetlights. Turns out Batface wanted to nod out on H with two of his friends, Tinker Bell pissed, Kitty joining them. You and Tinker Bell sat out in the truck for a long time. You were encouraged to go inside and you did eventually wander to the doorframe.

An emaciated hippie looked at you and said, "You want the bathroom?"

You asked, "Does it work?"

He nodded and pointed through the bedroom. You then watched him tourniquet Kitty and give her a shot. You did your business and on the way out the door, you heard a groan. You glanced in the room and saw Kitty nodding out, groaning in either pain or orgasm. A gurgling sound started to come from her chest. A death rattle. All went black and you moved through time.

The Sphinx of Naxos gave
me a riddle the day you died.

I am shoveling ash out of our firepit and here
is a cool rock. Here is a weed pipe. Here is
human flesh.
the Oracle of Apollo.

Here is the guardian of

Here is a cuticle of a finger. Here
is an arm outstretched palm open toward the sky.

Here is the reflection of the sky
on the eye
of my dead brother, a sacrifice to the machine,
the thing at the center of everything,
the extraterrestrials in the sky that they call
god. The Sphinx of Naxos smirks because she has been visited

t

oo.

I am taking the sharp edges of my shovel and I am dismem
bering
the corpse of
my brother. I
am sacrificing
him to the machine so that I might stay alive. The coals
they are glowing hot as I continue to suffocate
you

and stuff you down the hole.

I AM IN A GIANT SPACE STATION ALL ALONE

with just the machines and there is not enough oxygen for
the both of us.

I am in Donner Pass and I have to
sacrifice you to stay alive. The
machines they smell of human flesh raked over
coals, they leak blood and tell me that my brother will

die is dead can't be dead is it true you are dead?

I am hungry and so I must eat you, the man who
saved my life by
saving my life
again. I cannot bear it, I
cannot think that there is no future for us here.

We have been everywhere.

We have driven down a thousand highways,
down past the intergalactic
castaway cities of Primm and Laughlin and Ely and
Winnemucca and Rachel and
Austin and Tonopah, the stardust
mixing with the lye and the ash and the dirt and the feces
and the flies
and the glassy eyes
of you, my dead brother.

The Sphinx of Naxos gave me a riddle the day you died.
Will someone not come for my dead brother?
We have torched your truck and
put your dog in your mother's care.
We came to each other in Tuscon to tell each other tales
of your heroism,
and have largely
forgotten them.

The fires they are licking the

you knew I

knew you knew

your last message to me a Prophecy

that came down from heaven

a Divine Messenger

a harbinger

herald trumpet angels announcing your

departure from

the top of Sunrise Mountain

on the ancient beaches of Heraklion

in the wards of New Orleans:

“I feel like I might die soon .”

One day we were both homeless in a truck together and
seven years later you prophesize your own
death then overdose in another

broken down american made truck

because you're stupid, stupid

and now I am in Delphi where the Sphinx asked me if I --

If I knew the difference between you and me.

And as far as I can tell, there is no difference.

We are
roaddogs, brothers,
family, blood. We are
the strength that
builds Community, a
love that knows no
limits. We are
beautiful. So why

couldn't I save you?
Why must I eat you?
Why wasn't I there!

“Saw someone get shot I tried doing CPR and he died.”

*“My van broke down and the girl I've been with left
and went down the road and hooked up with some random
dude.”*

*“All I Wana do is get high or drunk
and I don't feel like myself anymore.”*

*“And I'm trying to be strong but I'm so over being hurt
and vulnerable. I've been smoking crack just so I don't go get
fett or heroin.”*

The Greeks believe drugs are US imperialism abroad.
Let me tell you around the campfire
smoke that drugs are US imperialism

at home.

They colonize our minds with drugs
and throw us to the bare-titted sirens.

We want more.

We sacrifice each other to the Great Beast whatever
form it has and we sacrifice ourselves too because
america told us too and
america told me to eat
your flesh on the fire in front of the Sphinx

Tinker Bell did what the officer asked. Nothing happened. You three sat in the truck, looking at the little trailer at the checkpoint for movement.

After five minutes of inactivity, Tinker Bell turned to you and said, "Can we leave?"

You shrugged.

Tinker Bell said, "If they don't come out in a minute, I'm getting out of the truck and walking over to them." He did just that, and another officer with a dog appeared, unthreatened by Tinker Bell's tenacity and skin color. Tinker Bell raised his hands, keeping them visible. You didn't, they were covered in hash oil. Kitty just sat there, glazed eyes, high herself.

"OK, guys, here's the deal," USBP said. His dog noticed the other dogs in the truck and they all started barking at each other. The cop yelled over the dogs. "I know weed's legal in California but this is a federal checkpoint and weed is still illegal federally. I'm gonna let you go this one time. You're not carrying any humans back there, correct?"

Tinker Bell said, "No sir, just dogs."

USBP said, "You should rethink that bumper sticker."

Half an hour later, you arrived back at Black Sheep.

Your tarp was destroyed in the wind, dust devils picking up sand from the dunes miles away. Kitty disappeared into the Gathering much like Plague Rat. Plague Rat now had another boyfriend, some alcoholic in his 30s. He dragged her around as she dragged her new dog Charles around.

Within the hour, Tinker Bell wanted to take off for the beach with another bum in his 40s. "C'mon, let's go fishing."

You declined, wanting to just relax for a little while. The miles back and forth got old. He left and you busied yourself with

helping kitchens set up for the gathering. One kitchen, Shining Light, famous for its tipis, had none. The kitchen bus said they were at Standing Rock too, and gave away all their poles and canvas tarps to people up there. Instead of the appropriate tipis, they had a giant 50x50 foot tarp they hung from the Manzanita trees in a network of ropes and pulleys. They also brought out an old armoire they filled with china, teacups and Victorian style patio furniture, buckets filled with water for dishes. One man went to work building a clay oven with an oil drum. It was a sight to see in the desert, surely a Timothy Leary inspired fever dream. You heard rumors of the Stockpot bus coming down from the Ogilby dunes. You imagined Buzzard would be there, and you were alone with nowhere to run.

You and Kitty still shared Tinker Bell's tent. You slept, or Kitty slept, odd hours.

You saw something on your Facebook that broke your heart. Hobbit posted that the police in San Francisco shot Dio. You didn't know what to say. There are no words.

Buzzard did arrive. She sought you out. She was a Stockpot kid now.

The Stockpot bus was white, maybe, with a caravan of cars around it, homeless traveler Prism activists using walkie-talkies and cell phones to communicate which city they were headed to, what truck stop to beg for diesel at. It was a long bus, with the mission to follow the Prism Trail from Regional Gathering to Regional Gathering, feeding groups of homeless people in metropolitan areas along the way. After Black Sheep, Buzzard told you, they were headed to Vegas for New Years to feed homeless people there. That's what a free food kitchen bus does, after all.

Buzzard was on bad terms with John. It only took a month and a half from your departure for the love to fizzle. John didn't like her doting on him. John also had another part-time lover, but that's not your place to speak on. Buzzard wanted to leave the Stockpot bus altogether. You didn't know what you wanted. You loved Vinnie but didn't want to kick it with him forever. You wanted rest. You wanted love. Partnership. Companionship. You were tired of the homeless shit. You didn't want to stay with your parents in a trailer in Blythe. Blythe was a gateway to another kind of hell. You didn't want Buzzard either, or you did, maybe. You wanted validation and peace. No more Vampire shit. Did she want the things you wanted?

"After you left, things got lonely," she said.

Of course, you still had the curse, put there by your ancestors or yourself, even. There was no cure for this curse, no magic spell that would break your whiteness, nor Buzzards'. No spell either to break the Patriarchy within you. Not even god could remove it. What most everyone understood as power was to you, prison. A life of servitude to traditional gender rules and laws, to Patriarchy, to *Being a Man*.

Buzzard brought you way back into the desert, over where Shining Light set up their kitchen, the oil drum clay oven almost completed. She took you over to Coyote, who also hung onto Stockpot. He still had his goggles and a respirator that did him wonders in the dust storms. Buzzard was intimate with Coyote, affirming your suspicions from months ago, but they weren't an item. He was Stockpot through and through, Buzzard wishing for another option. She took some tea from him and started purring. You had a flashback of the motel room in Bozeman. You walked away in fear and disgust, your stomach in knots.

On your way back to the parking lot, toward Tinker Bell's tent, you saw people starting to pack up in a hurry. There were shouts that BLM agents were evicting the Gathering, something about an underage runaway within the ranks. Whether or not this was true, BLM wanted you all gone. Usually gatherings happen in National Forests, not on Bureau of Land Management land. BLM land didn't necessarily have the authority the Forest Rangers did. However, it didn't matter. Some Black Sheep focalizers stood at the entrance to the dirt parking lot negotiating with officers. Shining Light intended to leave, waiting for stragglers. The question was, where to?

Rumors jumped to land near Yuma, or up near Quartzsite, next to Blythe, where your parents lived, or in Joshua Tree. Someone mentioned Slab City, the idea of which was promptly shot down. Slab City had enough tourists to last a lifetime, a bunch of homeless people in RVs and tents living on massive concrete slabs on a decommissioned military base watching yuppies take Instagram selfies. Tinker Bell was still off fishing somewhere. Kitty was gone too, so you broke down Tinker Bell's tent and stuffed it in the oil drum with your pack, and sat in the parking lot with your shit in the chaos, many other people trying to pile into cars, vans, and buses, not to be stranded.

That's when a wino in a van yelled to you, "GET IN!" and all of a sudden you were in a 1989 Ford Econoline, headed somewhere that wasn't Black Sheep.

20 Cult of The Cockroach King

In the van was the wino owner and driver Ozzy, an alcoholic in his 40s or even 50s. He was arthritic, white, with dark hair and a beard. He was short. His van was packed with at least a dozen people and packs and dogs and cats, but by the time you got to a vacant shopping center outside Yuma, night fell and those others left the van. You dumpstered a Little Caesars and most everyone took turns on a half gallon before departing. After a little while in town at 10 o'clock at night, Ozzy loaded up and drove into the desert northbound. A few turn-offs later, it was time to camp for the night.

Ozzy parked the van next to a small, open abandoned mineshaft. You built a little fire and couldn't sleep.

"Hey, come take a look at this." Ozzy motioned toward the mineshaft. "Wanna go down?" Bats flew noiselessly into the night.

"Bad idea," You warned.

Ozzy smiled, jokingly. "Could be some gold down there."

"You mean scorpions!"

"Wait-- do you hear that?"

The faint sound of music came from down the mineshaft. You could make out the accordion and the piano. Then there was a gravelly voice, a voice you recently heard in person.

Ozzy moved closer to the deep narrow hole in the ground.

"Hey, be careful," You said.

Ozzy moved his ear closer to the music.

You could make out words.

"Do you hear that? Is that--"

Ozzy started to hum it. He moved closer, then he sang it. The desert beneath Ozzy's feet started to cave. Ozzy lost his

footing and suddenly slipped into the hole. You grabbed his arm but lost your footing too.

A boy. White, sturdy, tall. Short hair. No shoes. Brick-red shirt. Spoke frenzy tongues, mumbles. He hadn't showered since Ohio. He was 23 and cared about moving, about making things better. This boy lived nightmares. Blood rushed from his heart to his head to the voices to the plunger to make it stop. And here he was, digging in your front yard. You asked him what the hole was for and he mumbled,

“Us.”

The jawbone of your dog Orion is in your hands. You're staring at it, little strings of polyester from the Rolling Stones beach towel he was wrapped in melted delicately to it, the terrycloth decomposing in the Mojave sun.

The moon was a waning gibbous. There was a wooden object in your front yard. It sat on two sawhorses. It was large, human-sized. A pine box. This boy was sanding down a pine box. Back and forth, back and forth.

“Is it ok if I get one of those?” He pointed at you. He put down that sandpaper and picked up a 211 on the ground. He pulled his head back and swigged the 211. You looked in your hands and your dog's jawbone was now a hand-rolled cigarette. This boy spit blood in your front yard.

The pine box was cheaply made. You asked him, “Is this for us too?”

He mumbled to himself, looking at the ground. He looked in your direction, not realizing you were actually there.

Ozzy stood, bewitched.

The pine box moved. Figures stood on your periphery. You were being watched.

“That’s the Shadow People,” The boy said. He climbed down in the hole. Streetlights illuminated half his face, the hole shrouded in darkness.

Your dog’s eyes multiplied iridescent tumors, a congress of glittering cysts.

Scorpions crawled all over your dog.

Someone came out of your neighbor’s house and busted out windows to a silver Jeep Grand Cherokee with a golf club. The Shadow People made them dance. Your dog’s paws on your chest, the boy took a shovel and killed a small cat. He picked it up and started to eat it raw, fur and all. The pine box sang out to you. You climbed inside.

You’re floating down a river in a pine box and the sheriffs will never find your body.

They found Dreamer’s body hanging in a closet in an apartment in Pittsburgh.

Cockroaches spilled out of the pine box. You’re still alive and the boy laughed innocently and said, “Get out of here, you’re not supposed to be here.” You realized the cat he was holding--it was Sushi.

“Where am I?” You asked no one.

“Drthy Heemn Ded,” the boy said, mouth full of cat flesh. “And I am your friend.”

You were at a hopout somewhere you did not recognize.

There, fifty feet from where you stood, petrified, was the tar-dripping, floating, scumfucking corporeal skeletal Ghost of GG Allin. The night sky menaced and sneered, a heavy blue breathing dome of doom. Around GG Allin was a crowd of

Shadow People. They were pasty, cold and naked, mutant humanoids. They used their legs and hands to crawl on all fours and their knuckles were battered and bruised, but just as easily could they spring up on two legs.

“Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας. Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας.”

One looked straight into you. It had black eyes.

You tried to run. GG put out his hand and then you involuntarily stopped.

“Ο Yog-Soggoth ξέρει την πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι η πύλη.”

GG looked at you and even though he was wearing sunglasses, you could feel the capturing gaze of the nothing devour you. “Got a lighter?”

Rats scurried out of the hole the boy was digging.

You involuntarily obliged, handing him the talisman around your neck. You never got it back.

“Ο Yog-Soggoth ξέρει την πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι η πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι το κλειδί και ο φύλακας της πύλης. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι το παρελθόν, το παρόν και το μέλλον. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι φύλακας του χρόνου και όλοι είναι ένα στο Yog-Soggoth.”

GG took a second to flick a lighter and let the flame cook the tar on the foil. He put the tutor to his lips and inhaled the smoke.

The Land of the Dead spun around and around and went black for a second. All that could be heard were the sound of rats and the demented chanting.

“Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας. Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας.”

You came to. Sulfur took the place of oxygen, and the fires of hell were glowing hot beneath your feet.

And, on some sort of cue, Ozzy stood up on his legs involuntarily and began to moan. His mouth frothed up as his solar plexus pushed upward and outward. His arms began to dangle behind him. He screamed as his ribcage busted open, blood gushing and a thousand little spiders running. A fetus fell out.

The Shadow People chanted.

“Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας. Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας. Ο Yog-Soggoth ξέρει την πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι η πύλη. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι το κλειδί και ο φύλακας της πύλης. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι το παρελθόν, το παρόν και το μέλλον. Ο Yog-Soggoth είναι φύλακας του χρόνου και όλοι είναι ένα στο Yog-Soggoth. Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας. Ο Yog-Soggoth, έλα σε μας.”

The moon shone bright and honest, but the streetlamps drowned it out with artificial lies as THE SPIRIT pulled up onto the tracks. The fetus that fell out of Ozzy grew into a baby into a toddler into a child into a pre-adolescent into an adult before your very eyes. She had a face you knew, and a body you knew, and her name was Circe, the Vampire Witch Queen of THE SPIRIT, and she slithered out of Ozzy’s filth pale and naked and hairless and began to feast on his corpse. The Shadow People danced and shat and ate human flesh and fucked each other while the spiders scuttled over everything.

Circe drooled white and green and spat out bile and vomit. Circe opened her leathery wings and hissed before disappearing into the bus. The Shadow People followed and demons climbed out of the earth, taking the form of a group of a dozen Hare Krishnas. The Hare Krishnas removed their heads from their shoulders and sang *Hare Hare*. Watchers flitted their Biblical feathers in the treeline.

GG paid no mind to the bedlam around you. His black hole gaze was fixed upon you.

“Do you know that your friend here is quite remarkable. She is a Vampire, yes. The Roma in Europe call her Muli. She has a fetish, you know. She likes to dominate her surroundings. She is a Domme. Which is real hot for me, because I’m a sub. I’m a little bitch of a sub too. Are you surprised? No, you wouldn’t be. You get it. You’re like me. I just think the world missed out. Imagine if I, the last, late, great, hope for Rock n Roll, had a pussy! Do you ever think about having a pussy?”

You tried running, again. Your only real response.

“Why do I not eat you?” He taunted. His jaw unhooked like a rattlesnake and he had rows and rows of teeth. Out came a turd instead of a tongue.

He howled.

“Hey, I have an idea--” GG started to say.

Your stomach clenched in pain and you started to shit your pants uncontrollably.

“What if we integrated? What if, instead of this separation, we mixed. You know, Vampires here, Shadows there, me here, you...*over there*. What if we, combined? *Sexually*. Spiritually. A sort of, soup. What if...follow me here, what if we were boiled together in the same delectable stew.”

“What?” You asked, hot liquid shit dripping down your legs. The aroma of diarrhea, sulfur, gasoline, and vomit, all mixed together into a soup of its own.

GG Allin grabbed your throat.

“Don’t you get it? I’ll shit on your dreams! I own you!”

He let go of your esophagus. A cockroach scurried across his skull of a face.

“But hey, I also have a sense of humor,” He said. “They call me another name. The Cockroach King.”

He ate the roach. “I think it’s because of my diet!” GG snickered. You threw a weak ass punch.

You finally got it out. “Aren’t you a racist fucking Nazi?!”

He said something GG would never say. “Now, now. Your little problem won’t be solved with name calling or physical violence. Maybe, emotional or figurative violence. But not physical violence. Violence is never the answer.” The moonlight made the fog milky white, and the fog was thick, and the fog was sentient here in the Land of the Dead.

Meanwhile, the Shadow People threw feces from THE SPIRIT upside down into the sky. Your friend, the boy in the red shirt, disappeared long ago. THE SPIRIT’s engine turned over and it lifted off the ground. THE SPIRIT transformed from a bus made of metal and misery into a Giant Worm, a toothy anusmouth pulsing and whirring and purring and vibrating, human blood squirting out of its body to an irregular time signature. It slithered through the sky as if gravity was a hoax.

The Giant Worm is Yog-Soggoth and it contains all and all is contained in Yog-Soggoth. Each segment of time is a segment of worm, and it sailed closer to the ceiling of Hell with each miraculous thrust. Yog-Soggoth fluttered through the outer limits of inner space. Past Neptune and Pluto, the Kuiper Belt, the Omega Nebula and the Fires of Creation. The worm Yog-Soggoth swam, it careened upwards and backwards, northbound, southbound, catching out Westbound being the old hobo code for death.

Then the little rail worker inside GG’s skull pulled the switch, letting one train side-out, and you assumed the holes

behind his sunglasses lit up. “God is a fat man crouched over a bucket of greasy chicken,” he instructed. “Did you decide if you were one of us, yet? A vampire? Maybe you want to be one.”

You said, “You’re not really GG Allin, are you?”

GG continued his soliloquoy as the piercing sound of hardcore pornography blasted out of a faraway broken down rusted out minivan.

“Jungian psychology posits that individuation relies on the synthesis of opposites, including conscious and unconscious, shadow and light, personal and societal, beast and human, life and death. The self has many layers. It is seen as the totality of body and mind, the image of me, the marriage of opposites, and a dynamic force guiding the individual through life. You might ask, ‘Where is the soul?’ The self retains its mystery, as we can never fully comprehend or embrace it due to our reliance on the comparatively inferior ego for perception. It’s such a shame, really.”

GG paused, then said, “The shadow only proves the existence of light. To live in peace, you have to *eat* yourself.”

211 The Curse

In a toolshed somewhere in Vegas, you sat naked, jerking off to a broken touchscreen and a whole fleshy world of grimy porno. A strange man, another top, sat next to you, and a bored bottom next to him. You couldn't handle the struggle to stay hard any longer, nor their cold hands, and so you just sat there, jerking your soft dick. Someone loaded a bowl of crystal and that got you excited enough to put your mouth on the stranger's dick for a few minutes. You breathed in. You breathed out. You moaned. He moaned. It felt nice. His dick started to grow. But then the thoughts crept in. How did you get here? What happened?

The first time you smoked meth was out of a pookie in front of two people decades older than you. They were both using meth as a party drug, as an aphrodisiac and mood enhancer. A tall, white, muscular man in his 40s wore a pair of reading glasses and loaded a bowl while strutting around in panties and leather fetish gear. His name was unimportant, though you eventually started calling him Sir. He was bald, hairless, looked like a cop, and worked as a skydiving instructor.

At one point, you wanted to be Sir. He was a Dom. A real Dom. A powerful, sensual shadow. That all dissipated when you found out he was no model. Sir might have had another name, another life. Behind the abs and biceps was his true face, a masc.

Back in the shed, you didn't want any more meth. But you did want just one more video. One more. Just one more. You were avoiding the comedown, the comedown that felt like the sound a black hole makes as it slurps everything up into the abyss. Nothing matters, God is dead, the whole world is sinking into quicksand. Oh god, you're demented. What was that dude talking about?

Fucking dogs? And while you were sucking his tiny, slimy penis? You looked in a dirty mirror set up in the corner.

Pasty, fat, pathetic.

Then, suddenly, the bottom next to you was no longer a human, but a giant cockroach the size of a human. It sat there, chilling. The giant cockroach was lounging with a pookie in one foreleg, a torch in the other, one mid leg touching its alien genitalia, and the other midleg reaching out to you. It moved its antennae and mandibles to speak to you.

“You should feel bad, think of your victims,” The Cockroach King said. “You’re a disease. People should know all the evil things you’ve done. What would they say? Come here, baby, smoke this with me. Let’s play.”

The Cockroach King loaded a bowl of the Nazi drug and opened his hairy hindlegs.

“Go down on me.”

Would they still love you? Do you still love you?

Can you love you?

You did as the Cockroach King commanded. He had a pussy and his labia were sticky.

“Yes,” he moaned. “They should read out the exact nature of your crimes in front of everyone, beginning with what you did in first grade.”

The Cockroach King grabbed your hair and squeezed his hairy legs over your head.

His clit throbbed and you sucked on it. “Oh, fuck!”

He breathed heavy. “Your girlfriend left you because you couldn’t pleasure her. You’re useless. They ignore you when you

walk down the street. You're invisible. The world shuns you. Oh yes! But I want it that way. That way you can stay here and eat my filthy pussy every day. You're my dirty slave. My little cuckold. For all time. Yes, put your tongue inside me, all is one in inside me, all is one inside Yog-Soggoth--"

The Giant Spider Yog-Soggoth cradled you in a nexus of doom, its spinnerets stuck in your spine.

Just give in.	Don't ever change.
Live out your nightmares.	You
can't change.	
You can't change.	
Just give in.	
Lay down.	Just lay down and die.
You deserve it.	Lay down and die.
Lay down and die.	
Lay down and die.	

The Black Hole Mouth of Yog-Soggoth called you home louder than your heartbeat.

Your heartbeat.

You fled naked out of the toolshed into the main house. A normal ass lady inside screamed but you didn't care. You saw a bathroom and slammed it shut. You hyperventilated.

A voice came out of the sink drain. *From You, There Will Be an I.*

You looked in the mirror and saw them. The elytra and heads of a mouse-sized earwig, wriggling out of your cheeks. Long

antennae reached out of your face. The earwigs moved by themselves. You resisted. You pulled at the earwigs, crushing their heads. You pulled one out of your cheek fat, like a weed. Out of the elytra were long, spindly roots. They kept going, and going, blood gushing out of your pores. It stung and burned.

You stood at the podium in the Court of Conscience. Conscience was absent, their statue inert and cold. In their place on the balcony was your Shadow. Dark power glistened off his body. He was you. Shadow You. He was muscular, you were fat. He stood upright, you slumped. Your eyes were nervous, searching. His eyes were seductive, knowing, welcoming. Your nails short, dirt underneath them, cuticles untrimmed, his nails long, clean, painted with glowing sigils. He was clean, you were not. The chair he sat on was no normal chair. It was a throne. Human bones were sculpted to form the legs and the back of the throne. A femur, a skull, a hipbone. A spine.

“BE NOT AFRAID,” He commanded. He took the back of his hand and rubbed your cheek. “I am you.” His gaze was more than alluring. He spoke without speaking.

You are me. We are connected. Have you stopped running yet?

“What is the difference between you and me?” came the voice of your shadow, a Vampire. You didn’t have an answer at first. You were in shock. It took you a second, speechless.

I am an angel. I am your angel. An avatar of the once Great Ha-Satan. Yog-Soggoth.

“Despair will do you no favors.”

Your shadow no longer looked like you. The Devil looked beautiful, an androgynous heathen, an angel, skin smooth, ordained in tattoos. He loaded a bowl. JFK used to get it injected

in his arm and at one point, while president, streaked through a hotel while high on that shit.

Come here, honey, smoke this with me. Let's play.

The voice of your Shadow lingered.

What is the difference between you and me?

You heard the click of the torch, watched the flame lick the glass, watched crystals turn from white solid to a clear liquid, bubbles forming, smoke released from the liquid, smoke that swirled like creamy milk, moving from the chamber of the pookie to your mouth.

The Shadow exists because the Light does.

God exists because Yog-Soggoth does.

Here, baby, yes, come to Oblivion with me.

Your heart raced, your sweat glands opened.

What is the difference between you and me?

Janus' eyes, all four of them, burned bright with a flame of truth.

Forward, Backward.

Victim, Perpetrator.

Abused, Abuser.

Fucked up, fucking up.

In the Court of Conscience was an audience of shame. Skeletons hiding under floorboards, in the depths of memory, humiliation manifested in a mountain of garbage, hoarded treasure for sick lepers and fiendish ne'er-do-wells. Which path in the butterfly effect will you take to arrive at the door to the thing at the center of everything? Which next move feeds the skeletons and

which one releases them? The floor in the Court is lava, the walls made of hair.

Behind the silence, everything: the fingernail-lined stomach of Yog-Soggoth and the gigantic alien spiders that weave the fabric of spacetime like a web to catch flies. The CIA too, spins a web that catches flies, and this truth that the CIA really actually honestly truly is the thing at the center of everything: a bullet, a coup, a spy, a mafia, a cultural program that ensnares us with flickering images of black mirrors on our cave walls, embroiled hologram lies, deceit the currency for the world's largest controlled substance manufacturer and distributor of Plague, Fentanyl a gift from the Skull and Bones Society and evil Trump-Obama Moloch to the great taxpaying majority of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a glassy-eyed dopamine dystopia of robotic Brave New Worlders smiling as the earth falls to the machines, arbiter of life and death, O unknown but all powerful beautiful attractive and merciful CIA Agent, please bless us our daily meal, we give thanks to your holy diarrhea, for we too breathe the same poison air.

Your shadow grew segments, long legs shooting up out of its torso. You watched it become a pitbull sized spider. Eight eyes glazed, chelicerae and fangs too close and too large. You jumped out of your skin in horror. The spider gave a human face, your mom in a Percocet stare. She laid eggs. The floor moved, where a thousand cockroaches spilled off the podium. Maggots fell from the domed ceiling. What once was a casino mall was now a cavern complex. You were naked, in a cave, a small hole of light in the ceiling. The spider, your Shadow, lunged for you. He giggled and howled. You were bound, and so you writhed, worm-like, before

the world. Janus, only a two-faced statue of beginnings and endings, of the crossroads, cut your ties.

You jumped over the podium, past the guards, to the large doors of the Courtroom Cavern in the undead Strip casino galleria. The doors wouldn't open. Flies buzzed in your face. Hundreds of them. Maggots crawled up the walls of the cave. A giant worm, larger than your arm, pulsed like a penis. It caught your face in its toothy one-hole anusmouth. You were being digested.

The never was a place you had been before. An alien planet with a sky the color of red cabbage.

Tinker Bell found Yog-Soggoth on the beaches of The never. Pink sand was tossed by the bottomless ocean as Yog-Soggoth told Tinker Bell how he was going to die. Yog-Soggoth was a thief of soul, a giant sandworm, an anusmouth the size of a school bus, walls of teeth grinding gears sifting creosote and bone. The sound of the black hole inside Yog-Soggoth gnawed on Tinker Bell's heart, each minute longer than the last. Each hour shorter than the last.

It was in Brooklyn behind a high school gymnasium where Yog-Soggoth tempted Kitty. When Kitty gave in, her blue crystal eyes fell into another dimension, a world of soft comfort. Stuffed animals, plush, silk linen, and tablecloth lace as far as the eye can see. Kitty remained in childhood. This Pillow World had another name. The pillows sang to Kitty, that there are no problems in Pillow World, that it is easy to forget. That it is easy to stay.

Plague Rat also met Yog-Soggoth. In the hearts of people that were supposed to protect her, she found the webbed trap of a giant spider, hungry and foul for the souls of children. Within the

spider's toxin was the same beaches of The never, upside down, inverted, the terrifying tomb of the Always. The giant spider Yog-Soggoth wove a web of stolen destiny, self-determination a luxury for those untouched by God.

Dreamer met Yog-Soggoth in a boosted car somewhere in Memphis. He fell too, and became indebted to Yog-Soggoth, keeper of doorways. Yog-Soggoth collected his debt without fanfare or special treatment. One day here, the next, gone.

In a filthy trailer in the middle of the desert were three Vampires ready to feed. Your father laughed and you saw his fangs ready to sink into you, again. Your mother outstretched her arms and there were leathery wings. You, yourself, trained to feed on the souls of the innocent. You cannot escape it, there is no change, there is no future. What was is what always will be. There is a black hole inside your heart, a constant whirring, scraping, gagging, derelict doom. A fate inevitable, time an illusion by Yog-Soggoth but still requiring the mortal respect of a concrete retaining wall, a tumbling hillside, a trash compactor.

From You, There Will Be an I.

I was at the hospital. Late, past midnight. My father, awake for god knows how long, gasping for relief. My mom telling him the nurses couldn't give him any, me obliging to his cries of "Please, water." He just had surgery to remove polyps in his colon. He had cancer. It wasn't the first time I had dispensed mercy, nor was given it.

GG Allin is the villain of America and America is the villain of the world. GG Allin also hated his dad but that hatred didn't stop him from being an abusive shithead.

During the Great Famine in 1941 where about 300,000 Greeks starved to death, the graveyards were so overfilled that many families were forced to bury their loved ones outside of the cemeteries. So many people starved to death during the Great Famine that officials took to gathering up the corpses and dumping them in mass graves. Some came back as vrykolakas to exact revenge on the Nazi collaborators.

During the Great Pandemic of 2020, where the death toll is politically disputed, American officials sent prisoners to build mass graves and we all have chosen to forget.

In 1998, the automobile company Ford was sued for compensation for using 10,000 slave laborers supplied by Hitler's Third Reich. The CIA they called me on the phone and told me of crystals, bubbles, Shadow People, rope, chains, the bed of a red Ford pick-up, missing, missing, living among the Shadow People. I put my hand to my face to feel it falling apart, pieces of skin in my palm. I can't scream, the Shadow People will hear me. They shake hands with the Lead Prosecutor. I'll never get away.

My father, screaming from the kitchen table, grey chicken skin falling from his lips, "EITHER EAT, OR BE EATEN!"

It was colder than I ever felt, the icy wind cutting down to the bone. My whole family was starving. The animals gone, no vegetation to eat. I was going to die on the mountain. I, William Foster, a Vampire and Cannibal, murdered Luis and Salvador at Donner Pass in 1847. A White Supremacist through and through, I ate the bodies of Luis and Salvador, Miwok guides for myself and

the rest of my party. They mattered less than me. I ate them like the white fur traders ate Nakota women in the second apocalypse, like white pioneers ate the Lakota Nation, the genocide of the Buffalo Nation, like Americans ate the bodies of Guatemala and Nicauraga and Veneuzuala, Yemen and Palestine and Ethiopia, the nations of Susquehannock and of the Tohono Oo'dham, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, the Phillippines, Afghanistan. I sucked on the bones of Jay Fosdick, a fellow pioneer.

I wanted some weed. He was in his 40s, and I was barely eighteen. He was fresh out of prison and made trashy tattooed Marilyn Monroe portraits for tourists. I smoked a bowl of speed with him and he asked me to blow him. Oral led to anal, led to his orgasmic grunts, led to him holding me and crying.

“You’re an angel,” he said.

I topped another man. He owned a sculpture gallery on Elliot Ave just north of Pike Place in Seattle, before getting into an argument about homelessness. His check did cash out, only \$50 to my name. An intellectual *artiste* fighting internalized Catholicism, or maybe pedophilia, he killed himself a few years later.

She topped me in her bathroom, a Spanish trans woman with steel abs and blonde Jheri curls, just east of the Vegas glamor. I said no. Did I say no? She had a pookie in one hand, her dick in the other. My face pressed up against the ceramic bathtub, hot and cold sensations pulsating through my body. It was hot, sensual, a nightmare, I chose this, did I choose this?

I am old and alone and I have forgotten my own name.

I am old and I am alone and I do not remember you.

I am old and the Black Hole beckons.

Are we friends?

Are we friends?

are we lovers?

blood pouring down the mountains. blood in a torrential
flood. santa muerte's name whispered on the mojave wind.
yog-soggoth, an owl plucking worms from the cosmic desert.
mictēcacihuātl will receive that which is hers. a secret warmth. a
devilish friend. belligerance and betrayal. gambles of fate and
chance. consequential and ubiquitous. a vulture out of space.
daggers out of time. i am the parts of you you banish. i am kali
mata. i am power. i am death.

scorpions live in my mouth.
my fingernails grow forever.
i am cholera.
i am a bubonic plague.

from you, there will be an i.

You were in Oregon, the Malheur National Forest. Dry Oregon Desert, they called it, pine trees and hills, cow patties and a sacred creek not to be touched as it disrupted the fish that bred in it. It was the National Prism Gathering, 2017, a year and a half after white supremacists held a federal building hostage. The hot sun was poison in the sky. Buzz had you to herself, in a tent by a kitchen called Kiddie Village. Children laughed and played in the distance, shouts from worried moms. The tarp over Buzzard's tent blew in the breeze, providing shade from the evil sun. She had a hammock set up, a little personal fire by a log. The hills held ferns and dry grass. There was dust everywhere, among the horseflies and cow patties. The Gathering itself was a mess, with most people contracting giardia and norovirus from unclean water. Buzz took off your pants.

You said no. She kissed you, putting your hand under her shirt, on her breast.

"Please," she said. She took off her leggings and revealed her body to you. "I *love* you, baby. Just for a few minutes."

You tried to leave at first, but she told you, "I never meant to hurt you." Her sweat collected under her pits and above her thin lips. She took off her top. You let her put herself on you. Why didn't you say no? You did say no, didn't you? Once, twice, a third time maybe? She was single now. She wanted you. She finally loved you. You gave in and let her have what she wanted. She came under the dry Oregon sky, the tent billowing like a kite in the wind, pine needles stuck to your crusty socks.

A thousand cockroaches gathered at your feet. Their wings flittered as they climbed on top of each other. They were no longer devils, but angels, ready to save me from myself. They told you

with their minds that their master and yours is one in the same, two in the same, ten in the same. Yog-Soggoth, God, Moloch, the Sun, the Sphinx of Naxos, GG Allin.

They said, "We are a part of you."

I know what we had to do.

We had to be the Ghost Owl, and our Shadow the worm. John Lennon taught us that. Jim Morrison taught us we will be abandoned if we do not change. And GG Allin warned us that we have to eat our shadow before it eats us. The most disgusting meal we would ever eat.

Blood flowed from the steps of the Court down into the cavern. Bugs spilled out of me, maggots and lice and earwigs and silverfish scurried in the thousands. I outstretched my arms and they became wings. I am a hummingbird inside an Angler Fish, a sunflower inside a Vampire, a riddle inside time, a black hole aching for flesh and Love.

me.	you are buried treasure.	you are
change.	i am you.	i am
is possible.	you are change.	change
is possible.	god is change.	change
deserve to live.	i deserve to live.	you
<i>free.</i>	you are free.	i am

change is possible.
inevitable. you can do it.

you can change.

22 **The Cure**

Underneath the lights of the Venice sign on Pacific Avenue, a bunch of crusty fucks sat on a sandy sidewalk drinking Slurrricanes with their dogs. Some were homebums, always staying on the beaches of Venice and Santa Monica. Some were passing through in vans and cars, nomads from the midwest believing in the myth of California. Some were summoned by Satan himself down there to the boardwalk, for no other reason than to scare the yuppies away from Venice.

The yuppies weren't convinced.

They long since moved into Dogtown, gentrifying trailer parks into condos and pushing everyone onto the street. The yuppies used the police, or the police used the yuppies, to threaten and scare the poor out of town. Then the crusty fucks attempted to reclaim space, biting the fingers of business owners and being general nuisances. A cold war ensued. Gentrifiers and normies pushed back in local courtrooms and the cold war became hot when the police gunned down a crusty kid named Dizzle, a Black 29-year-old traveler from Troy, New York. Rest in Power, Dizzle.

There, then, came Conscience, a Watcher from the times of the Bible. Appearing on the beach, an androgynous angel in an ancient Greek toga, they brought with them a marvel, a twenty-foot-tall garish guillotine sharpened for the guilty. The guillotine on their impromptu, beachside court was built from driftwood and the very pier that made Santa Monica famous. Its blade was made of the rustiest scrap metal found in the industrial recycling yards around LA.

There was a man's head locked into the lunette, his arms and legs were hogtied, a Los Angeles Police Department officer by the name of Clifford Proctor. He looked terrified, beads of sweat collecting on his eyebrows, blood dripping from his nose. His gym shorts stained with fresh caca, he did his best to look up at the horrorshow around him, but was stopped from gaining a full view by the lunette.

“BLOOD FOR BLOOD! BLOOD FOR BLOOD!” The crowd of crusty scumfucks shouted. “JUSTICE FOR DIZZLE!” The crowd was a cold dozen deep. Among them was Bonnie, from THE SPIRIT. There was Zombie, a young single mom without her child, rotting teeth, heart full of love. There was Moses, a Mexican trainrider, a wild and chaotic alcoholic. A terrible eye tattoo sat on his forehead. Kali was there, as was Suzie. An Aryan alcoholic trainrider named Chef sat drinking a 40 oz by himself. Others I did not know, some recognized by face but not name.

Accompanying Conscience was a natural executioner, The Cockroach King. Dressed the part, he glistened with excitement as he said, “I fucking hate you faggots.”

The congress of scumfucks cheered.

“But I hate this piece of shit cop more.”

Clifford Proctor sobbed. “PLEASE, HAVE MERCY!”

“I am no spokesman of the oppressed. I am just Vengeance,” The King, GG Allin, announced. “And you, my children, will have it!”

“A-C-A-B! ALL COPS ARE BASTARDS!” came the battle cry.

“Do you hear that, cop? That sweet, sweet melody. Say, what's your name?”

“Pr-proctor!”

“What was that?”

“PROCTOR!” The killer cop spat with all the nervousness in the world.

“Protctor! Proctor what? Like proctoring an exam? Proctoring an asshole?” GG Allin smirked.

Moses and Zombie laughed.

Concience made a suggestion. “Before we send him off, we should speak to the list of his crimes. The defendant tonight has a history of criminal conduct, as I am sure you, my children, the jury, are aware. In addition to the grisly murder of one of your own, the defendant has on record seven counts of battery and domestic violence. I have to remind you all that you, the jury, are not innocent either--”

“I killed him,” Clifford cried.

“Killed who?”

“A no-nobody.”

Chef, the Aryan alcoholic, threw a 40 oz onto the boardwalk. You could hear the shatter.

“Fuck you,” Chef said decidedly.

Bonnie shouted, “His name was Dizzle!”

The Cockroach King was ready for the slicing. “Come, my children, let’s feast on his flesh.”

But before the crowd of streetkids could carry out the Bloody Revolution, the moonlight pulsed crisp white on a deep ultraviolet heaven.

Conscience announced, “I have let you rile their spirits long enough, GG. Shut up now, for I do have final say!”

Conscience ignored the heckles. “I want to remind the jury that we all have the capacity for every crime. We do, yes.

However, we are here precisely because society does not consider

Mr. Proctor's act a crime. In fact, they might even consider it a public service. Because, as you are aware, they see you all as waste, as criminals. Every one of you, therefore, is a charge against society. It can only be replied to when society consents to look into its own errors and rectify the wrong it has done, specifically to you, and especially to you as women. It has done you egregious harm, and instead of looking at itself, it will send minions like Proctor here to bury you. I'm here to tell you: You aren't the disease, you are the solution. Society is the disease. Mr. Proctor is the disease, and its sign-bearer. Patriarchy. Racism. Capitalism. I give you all permission: make the world a better place." Conscience finished.

"I love you," Suzie said to Kali.

Zombie climbed up to the pedestal. She cut the rope and the sheet metal rocketed downward.

"Eat shit, pig," were the last words Clifford Proctor ever heard. His blood sprayed across the beach sand as the junk sheet metal hit wood. His limbs moved involuntarily for a moment, a moment that lasted much longer than it should have. The jury of dirt-faced adult children sat quietly. Several took swills from their tallboys, and after a moment, there was the flick of a lighter.

After a long silence, Conscience thought aloud. "I see Dizzle's death as an act of Vampirism. Of Patriarchy. Why? What is the cure to Patriarchy?"

The crowd of crusty scumfucks were silent. Conscience turned to GG Allin. "Do you know?" The Cockroach King was quiet. Conscience answered, "No, I expect not."

"It's the love of the goddess, man," Zombie spoke up. "It's our love for each other."

"Dude, women rock," Zombie said, lighting a joint.

“Hell yeah we do,” said Bonnie.

“Even when we’re being bitches,” Kali said, taking the joint from Zombie.

“*Fuck*, especially when we’re being bitches!” Zombie laughed and sipped her beer.

“Men have to figure out their own shit,” Bonnie said.

“Yes, of course.”

“And if it’s not this guy, it’s another guy. They’re all a bunch of assholes.”

“Everything transient is but a symbol,” Conscience recited from memory. “The insufficient here finds fulfilment; the indescribable here becomes deed; the eternal-feminine draws us on high.”²

The Eternal Feminine. Yin before Yang. The Mother of all.

The answer. The Eternal Feminine. God by another name.

I hated God. Yes, she was a mischievous light, she lived in the wind and the rain, the same wind and rain that brought punishment and pain. She lived in chance and in fate. She lived in change. She was pushing me to listen to her, my deaf ears full of wax and arrogance. *Do the work, do the work*. What fucking work? Feminists, and especially Black Feminists, had a few answers.

Sonya Renee Taylor once quipped: “There is no epiphany that can outweigh years of social conditioning.”³

How about an anti-epiphany? A no-shit Sherlock epiphany? An epiphany that will make the critics groan because of its obviousness?

²Goethe, J. W. v. (1832). *Faust*.

³Taylor, S. R. (2021). *The Body is Not an Apology*. Berrett-Koehler.

What if I matter, or *don't matter*, just the same as Buzzard? As much as Claudia, Kitty, Tinker Bell, and Batface? As much as Suzie and Kali? As much as the shelter crowd that files inside churches and community centers every night, as much as the natives up in North Dakota that live without regular sanitation services, as much as incarcerated property of the state, as much as trans sex workers in the weeklies in the shadows of the Las Vegas Strip, seventh grade girls reading *Lolita* for the first time, wingnuts in tents driving me batshit crazy, Karens at the drive-thru, the crack spanger at 7-11-- We are all part of the same, incoherent, inconsistent, messy, fucked up, contradictory whole. My destiny is tied to theirs. Solidarity is another word for it. I may have nothing in common with my neighbor in my tenement building, or the family in a tenement building across town, but our destinies are still tied together, a web of neighborhoods and towns and countries of billions of people clamoring, chattering, struggling, watching in absolute terror as the water table rises, coral reefs are bleached, children are burned alive, billionaires start Martian lithium colonies, and new viruses climb out of CIA laboratories.

I have to regain trust in myself. I *have* to trust others with myself, my whole self. Whether they trust me, well, that is for them to decide. Either way, the grace I extended to others more often than not is the grace needed for myself, now. What does this mean?

Forgiveness?

It was never a linear thing, forgiveness. Somedays I forgave God and others I don't give her the time of day. How dare she come to me telling me to do the work when she clearly hasn't been doing her own! Forgiving myself, that's not even possible. Don't even mention it. I am an abuser, a misogynist, a thief of soul. My

shame is my silence. What Buzzard did to me should have happened five times over. Justice!

No, *punishment is not justice*, is it?

Something whispered, 'Grace.'

What is Grace, actually? The church might call it forgiveness from God, or power or favor. I didn't want God's Grace. That was for other people, not me. I'm no Christian. I didn't want power or favor. I just wanted to be free of shame, to live fully, to be released from a spiritual prison I myself built. "Everyday in America men are violent. Their violence is deemed 'natural' by the psychology of patriarchy (...) This thinking continues to shape notions of manhood in our society."⁴ So it is violence that made me a man. Violence put me in my place, in my spiritual prison. I was on Lockdown, in Isolation, the material and spiritual nourishment of self-determination and freedom far, far away. I was hungry for it, desperate for it, starving for it.

What is enough, anymore? *Changing*. It's in the title of the damn book. I may not be able to change the past, but I can change myself.

Then there's this passage from bell hooks.

"The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power to assault his self-esteem. Feminist movement offered to men and women the information needed to challenge the psychic slaughter, but that challenge never

⁴ hooks, b. (2004). *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Atria Books.

became a widespread aspect of the struggle for gender equality. Women demanded of men that they give more emotionally, but most men really could not understand what was being asked of them. Having cut away the parts of themselves that could feel a wide range of emotional response, they were too disconnected. They simply could not give more emotionally or even grasp the problem without reconnecting, reuniting the severed parts.”⁵

Psychic slaughter.

I never want to forget that patriarchal violence is worse upon women, that women suffer incredible violence at the hands of men lost in the grips of Patriarchal Power. Shit is evil, and I did that shit. I did that evil shit. I had to change, or watch as my loved ones turn away from me, become hurt, endangered, terrorized, or destroyed by my hands, and I myself remain, tortured, in Solitary Confinement forever, even in death. Those were the stakes.

Octavia Butler famously built a (non)fictional religion around the simple phrase, “God is change.” Change can and often does feel like death. But it is not. And if I want to stay alive, I must do the work.

If I want to die, well, there’s ways to do that too.

⁵ *ibid.*

23 **Deus Ex Machina**

Christmas Day came and went, as did homeless travelers. I found myself a week later homeless not in Blythe but in Vegas with Buzzard. Long story that doesn't matter so much. I was sick again, with phlegm in my chest, chills, a fever, body aches. I was a fucking mess.

Jan and her husband Don swooped me and Buzzard up like a Deus Ex Machina. They managed a storage unit complex on the north end of town, calling the two-bedroom apartment on-site home. Jan was amazing. She was a colorful person, owning a carpet cleaning business with Don out in Albuquerque, telling me stories of the Hot Air Balloon festival out there, two daughters, grandchildren. Jan was a Buddhist with Catholic roots, or Don was a Buddhist with Catholic roots, I wasn't sure. She loved me, even never having met me before. She spoke highly of her daughters and granddaughters, and of a mutual connection, that of the travelers Carrot and Captain.

Moms are such a vital force in this world. Young moms, older moms, moms that do domestic work and moms that don't, moms that run shit and moms that don't, moms that have their shit together and moms that betray their children for themselves. Moms that identify as humans, not just moms. The love they have is a rhythm beyond my comprehension. How important a mother's love is. I'm so sorry, Claudia.

Jan loved Billy Idol. She was a powerlifter, a healer, a chef, and a grandmother. She put me and Buzz in a spare bedroom in their apartment, the one they use when their grandkids come to visit. Jan was wonderful, taking a vacuum to all my problems. It

wasn't three days later that a friend Mar offered me a job at a vegan fast food place out in the boondocks. Jan congratulated me and set Buzz up to clean the storage unit hallways in exchange for money.

The vegan fast food place was a brand new project. Mar was younger than me, Guatemalan, loved horticulture, gardening, farming, wildcrafts, anarchy. She at the time was the hiring manager at the restaurant, a project concocted by a locally famous vegan chef who specialized in Chinese cuisine. She hired familiar faces, one being Circe, who came to town with Jay and lived out of a van, THE SPIRIT itself on a private lot somewhere in California. Circe only lasted a week. I acted like a fool in Mar's restaurant but also took advantage of the position to sneak food out the door for others.

One of them was a crust punk named Christian who lived in the maintenance room of a dentist's office out in a deep suburban pocket of Vegas called Centennial Hills.

A few days later, I noticed a book on a shelf in Don and Jan's apartment. It had Don's name written in cursive pencil on the inside front cover. It was about contact with the Lumerians, extraterrestrials that are said to live underneath Mount Shasta, a popular traveling kid spot in Northern California. Don was a quiet dude, normal-looking. He was a conservative, no connections to traveling kids beyond myself. Why was he interested in the Lumerians?

Maggie was raising money to buy a van to leave. I still had love for her, maybe due to all the trauma. She encouraged me to try and go to school. I had a job, a place to stay. It seemed like the next move. Hemlock came by, and with Jan's permission, a revolving door of homeless youth came in and out of my room. Hemlock and I helped Buzz purchase a Chevy passenger van and by the end

of January, she was ready to leave. I wanted to stay. This was the official end. Buzzard wanted to make it to a regional Prism gathering in Arizona. I said goodbye. It had to end. I got a job, she got a van. I tried to pay Jan rent and she wasn't having it. She said to save my money. She made dinner every night and started leaving me plates wrapped in aluminum foil. She loved me. Mar, my boss, loved me.

Women run the world.

“I want to show you something,” Jan said to me and Hemlock one night. “If you're ever worried about someone, and you feel like you can't protect them, do this: picture whoever they are, and wherever they are, then project from your heart and mind an infinite glowing string of light that surrounds them. This is a protection spell. You can use it anytime to protect the ones you love.” I wasn't one for the hippie woo-woo, but after Jan passed away in the autumn of 2019, I started to believe. I had to.