

The Hand That Holds the World

By

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To all the /new/sman and /pol/itical activists of this world. This is for you.

What happened?

What happened to our nation?

They all asked that simple little question and they all expected a simple little answer.

Fire and thunder on the horizon. Megaphones and sirens.

Brutes and thieves with badges pummel through crowds and homesteads.

Tears on red cheeks and quivering chapped lips.

Empty pockets and empty accounts.

Deceivers and puppet masters behind the curtain pull strings and send out their hounds.

Lost sons of factory workers lay dead with bullet riddled bodies or lay starving on park benches.

Cardboard signs begging for change and political literature begging for revolution are read but ignored.

Newscasts of homegrown terrorists and safe camps.

Men and women are taken while they sleep and never seen again.

All those with a voice to scream were silenced and there was complete and utter compliance.

Only the whisperers spoke in secret and they asked the question.

What happened to our nation?

What happened?

I

A man with great love of his country woke one morning and began his monotonous routine. Shit, shower, and shave. He then opened his wardrobe and put on his Wednesday suit, a sleek gray fitted three piece. With a pull and twist and a flip and a tug he put on his black silk tie and looked at himself in the mirror that rested on the wall. A frown appeared on his pale weathered face as he noticed the growing speckles of gray that made residence in his well-groomed hair.

Still scowling he snatched up his briefcase, checked his pockets to ensure that his wallet was there and burst out the front door and onto the raucous city street. An ocean of citizens of no discernible race flowed on the sidewalks. The street itself was a pulsing fluid mechanism of large public transport carriers that were guided by sensory apparatuses on the vehicle and the streets they drove on. Above on the towering skyscrapers digital advertisements of banking corporations and investment firms and various food and drink products ran streamlined across the smart windows. Here and there scores and statistical nuggets from last night's games pulsed between the adverts.

The man set out on his journey to work and melted into the flowing tide. He traveled five blocks before a booming voice carried on the stale steam riddled air and the blue and red and white lights soon came into view. The massive hoverboat floated just above the carrier traffic as it shot strobe lights of the American flag in every direction and blasted the prerecorded message. The recorded voice that spouted out the words was deep and strong. "America the free. America the beautiful. America the strong. Defend her. Love her. Work for her. Remember Lady Liberty. Renew your CITI ID or face reeducation. Respect TSA and peace officers. Report any suspicious activity. Support our troops in Venezuela. America the free. America the beau..."

As it passed many people waved and cheered at it. On board the craft was a handful of black garbed peace officers that held either a long metal pole with an electric prong on the end of it or they carried what looked like a rifle but at the end of the barrel there was only a red lens instead of a hole for a bullet to come out of. On every side of the hover boat there were TSA agents. Most of them were portly with sweat stains at their armpits that were quite visible on their light blue uniforms. They pointed box like hand held devices at the crowd. The man knew that they were scanning for hidden contraband and weapons as well as checking for outdated or missing CITI ID's.

A cheer erupted from the man as the hoverboat passed him. He felt safe and secure when

the boat was around for he knew that they protected him from terrorists and criminals and every other domestic danger that would indeed harm him. The raucous cheering ceased abruptly as if on cue and the ocean of beige and brown skinned humans resumed their ebb and flow.

As the man passed under the rusted scaffolding that held up the speeding bullet trains he tried to ignore the calls for food and loose change. An army of Caucasian men and women with dirtied faces and hands toiled in the filth as they searched for the leftovers of the sprawl. One of the creatures rolled a flat tire clinging to a rusted rim into a pile of plywood and scrap metal. Hard eyed lookouts stood on pallets and kept their faces to the skies while others scanned the passing crowd. The man felt disgust creep into him as he studied the pale skinned rodents.

His observations were interrupted as a young woman wearing a grime stained dress that had rips and frays along the worn hemline touched his arm. He pulled it away from her gesture with haste and vitriol.

Her eyes were green and a thin layer of dirt stained her youthful face. A tangled mass of mouse brown hair fell from her crown and a split lip quivered as she whispered out the words “Spare a coin? I haven't eaten since the last time you've come here.”

The Man couldn't pull himself from her eyes. Two oceans of green fighting to stave off the threat of the two black voids at their centers. There was life and the fires of war in those eyes when the rest of her body suggested that every conflict she had encountered had defeated her. She reminded him of an old electronic china doll his younger sister used to play with. After all the years of dragged around it was left battered and broken and stained. Everything about it was tainted, from its cornflower blue dress being ripped and re sewn and ripped again to its missing left leg. Everything was wrong with it save for the eyes. They used to blink and stare at him with haunted green glass irises. Once he had asked his sister if she remembered her childhood friend but she didn't. Through all the years the image of its piercing emerald eyes stayed with him and he loathed that it did.

“Please sir. I am hungry. I'm not a junky. I'm hungry sir.” She reached to touch him again and before she could The Man dredged out a few dollars and his spare change from his pocket and put it into her hands and darted away.

The man heard her yell out something but he ignored it and hurried off to work. Neon lights and the rhythmic hum of electric motors and the monotone and unintelligible voices of advertisements meshed together to create the portrait of an artificial and omniscient being in his mind. The city of technological progress was a living breathing thing. After a few blocks he was standing in front of a massive and awe inspiring building of twisted steel and manipulated glass that formed the shape of a sphere resting on a golden hand. Cameras rested in every nook and cranny of this marvelous work of architecture and they scanned the faces of every man woman and child that came into their specific vicinities of view. He approached an opening at the base of the golden wrist. He halted at the concrete door and without looking or thinking he slid his CITI card into a small slot. There was a beep and a green light flashed and the door slid open and he strode inside. A rush of cool clean air filled his lungs and a smug smile eased onto his face. He always imagined his daily walk to his job as a treacherous gauntlet that held many hidden

dangers and when he reached the interior of the Hand That Holds The World he felt safe and at home.

A generic upbeat and politically correct song played throughout the first level. The man walked past the reception desk and the shapely woman that sat there said a pleasantry with a grand smile. As he made his way to the elevator he passed men and women sitting sheep eyed and with bent backs in their computer chairs furiously smashing away on their primitive keyboards. They were the entry level defenders of the world. They updated and filed profiles on the inhabitants in their assigned sectors. They determined whether specific individuals were deemed as threats or good citizens. Memories of the grueling and tedious work that he had once done came to the man but he pushed it down and replaced it with thoughts of women and how he would like to bend the receptionist over her desk and lift her skirt up and pound her from behind.

He clicked the up arrow of the elevator and a moment later there was a ding and the doors crawled open and he went inside. A beep and a green light and he removed his CITI card from the slot and the number 13 lit up. A well-dressed man also entered the elevator and he put his CITI card in and the number 14 lit up.

The man's heart began to race. He glanced over at the superior gentleman and took him in. He first noticed that he was an inch taller than he was and that his suit was more expensive than his. The man was black of color and the hue of his skin reminded him of charcoal.

The man's inspection was interrupted as the 14 spoke to him in a deep and powerful voice. "We've been taking notice of you Thomas. You're analytical study of the social and economic weak points of the Nordic Federation is very thorough and shrewd."

Thomas's hands began to sweat and he coughed before he answered for he feared his voice would quake and quiver. "Thank you sir. I believe we can cripple their infrastructure in a few months with careful engineering of a virus that can survive the multiple purifying steps of a water treatment facility. It would wipe out 60% of the inhabitants of Oslo after the first week."

The fourteen nodded and said. "Please, call me Mr. Johnson. We at level fourteen agree with you and will be executing a modified and reformatted version of your original layout. General Clark was the one of the few in the think tank to help make your original plan transition into a military assignment. You should be proud. You have helped progress the world with your hard work."

On the inside Thomas was melting with the feeling of accomplishment and joy but on the outside he remained stoic and replied in an equally emotionless tone. "Thank you sir."

The elevator dinged and the door trudged open and Thomas nodded to his superior and began to walk to his office. Mr. Johnson then offhandedly said to the turned back of his inferior. "You should pack any personal belongings you may have in your office Thomas."

The door shut and Thomas wanted to pop a bottle of champagne and celebrate. The thought of the ten percent pay raise and the higher security clearance lingered in his mind as the

feeling of euphoric confidence filled him up.

As he walked down the hallway donned with anti-racism posters, the statue of liberty, and codes of conduct a haze of self-importance and narcissism blurred his conscious vision and as the other 13's greeted him with pleasant statements Thomas ignored them all. It took no time for him to create a swift disconnect from the people that he had spent two years with. He felt as if he was already above them looking down at their scowling faces as they rifled through mountains of raw data trying to find gold in the numbers and graphs that had been sloppily handed up to them from the 12's below. When he finally reached the door to his office half of his fellow 13's had started to talk about him in hushed voices. The brass doorknob twisted and the mahogany door opened to reveal his plain desk and plain computer resting peacefully in the middle of an empty room. Almost everything about the room was devoid of beauty and personality. The floor was covered in a simple gray rug, the walls were plain and white with a few cracks in the dry wall in the corners, on the desk there was nothing, not even a thin film of dust that would cling around the base of the monitor. The room was painfully boring save for one aspect, the far wall. There was no plaster or paint for it was one large window that rested just a slight degree above parallel above the uniform rooftops of the skyscrapers.

He would stand in that office and peer out that window and soak in the view of looking over the neon metropolis and witness the instant where concrete and steel met the infinity of horizon. Usually when he approached the Hand that Holds the World on his daily walk to work he would glance up to the glass earth and find his office window, it is now an afterthought to do it, for he had memorized the exact location as it lays in the northwest corner of Mexico.

When he sat down in his uncomfortable straight backed chair he mindlessly turned on his computer and opened up the syllabus for the day. Apparently today's subject of interest was a sudden influx of antisemitism and hatespeech occurring in "private" and "anonymous" debate sites on the internet. There was a bounty of highlighted statements made by "anonymous" citizens that blatantly denied the holocaust and blamed the Jewish state of Israel for instigating major detrimental occurrences across the world. They also claimed that Zionists ran the media and most bureaucratic and political positions within the American infrastructure and have remained in control for close to a century. Thomas sifted through the hateful and disgusting remarks and pitiful lies. When he could not read another sentence he opened the list of IP addresses with matching CITI Identification numbers and marked them all for reeducation. He took pleasure in doing it. Even though some part of him knew he just ruined the life of a man or woman or even child it didn't matter. They were just numbers that didn't have a face attached to it. They were all just stepping stones.

The sun began to set and the workload for the day had been finished for a good hour. Thomas sat at the computer killing time by reading articles and essays about the current violent events that had erupted in South America. Riots, murders, militia skirmishes, and poignant terrorist attacks sprouted up in almost every Latin city. The name Rodrigo Fuentes was in every other sentence for he was the one inciting the unrest. Thomas did a quick search of him in the collective database and pulled up his profile. Apparently Rodrigo was thirty two years of age and grew up in Venezuela under the safety net of various militant radical groups. Another thing that stood out was the fact that pesky little Rodrigo was a descendant of a top adviser to the tyrannical and corrupt dictator Hugo Chavez who murdered his own people for sport.

In the depths of Thomas's mind the vivid memory surfaced of the countless videos from grade school of pudgy Hugo screaming in tongues and scowling his fat lined face as he stood wavering atop the podiums. Then came the images of his slaughter. Heaps of charred corpses rested in awkward angles crammed in filthy alleys between houses of stucco and poorly thatched roofs. Bile quickly rose from Thomas's gullet and the flood of sadness and anger cascaded over him. How he wished he was alive to witness the world heave the sigh of relief as the news reached the public that the villain of earth died on his knees weeping for mercy. An ironic way to go seeing as he showed no such mercy to the millions of innocents he snuffed out with lead and fire. He began to ponder the thought that maybe his heir apparent Rodrigo was a man of different philosophy. And maybe the people of Mexico and Brazil and Venezuela called this new leader Fuentes a hero rather than a villain. Maybe he was inciting a Latin revolution with honest intentions of progressing his people past the perpetual societal and economic disparities that have always plagued the region. The thought quickly dispersed as soon as it came. The swine was a through and through criminal. A soulless terrorist that bombed market places and hospitals and schools and he would suffer by the hands of the righteous. Just like his great dictator, he would die on his knees weeping, knowing that his countless wrong doings had finally caught up to him.

With a few clicks he signed off the computer and rubbed his weary eyes. Lazily he pressed the power button and lumbered up from his chair and exited his office and made his way towards the elevator. A few of his colleagues who worked the night shift congratulated him on his potential promotion and he made humble gestures to them and said a few scripted pleasantries. When he was inside the elevator his body sagged in relief as his mind made a lackadaisical effort to think of the good times he had on this level but he found none. The elevator doors closed and Thomas instinctively reached to press the lobby button but quickly noticed that the "C" button was already illuminated. His eyes grew wide and his heart began to pound as the elevator lurched upwards. With haste Thomas straightened his back and shoulders and began a mental checklist of things to say and things certainly not to say. Cold fear shot through his guts as the box he was standing in came to a sudden halt and as the dreadful ding met his ears he felt his palms film over with a thin layer of sweat. The two blocks of metal effortlessly slid apart and a scent of fine tobacco flowed into Thomas's nostrils. Once the doors opened completely Thomas finally dared to step out of the box and onto the black and white checkered marble floor. The room he strolled into was a spacious waiting area with a fine leather couch against the left wall. To the right and on the far wall was a large door flanked by two dying ficus's. The name David Deutch was etched in gold on the door. On the couch sat Mr. Johnson who made a swooping hand gesture indicating to Thomas to go through the door. Thomas nodded and couldn't help that his eyes shot down towards his shoes as he walked. Thomas began to think of the reasons why he felt so nervous and insecure and he couldn't grasp any. Unconsciously his hand gripped and pushed open the door and a plume of smoke smacked him in the face and made his eyes water.

A nasally voice called out "Thomas Donnelly just the guy I want to see. Come sit, sit."

Thomas quickly wiped away the beads of water around his eyes and took his seat in the large tan leather chair. Across a massive mahogany desk two stubby hands wrung together making the golden Zion star signet click against what Thomas could assume was a wedding band that was crafted into the likeness of a golden bull. A loose blue dress shirt hung from a meatball shaped torso. Thomas decided that there once was a neck but it had long since been buried by flaps of age weathered sand colored skin and fat bulges. Then came the massive nose that was as long as the lit cigar that was tightly clamped in a large mouth. A lightening quick thought came to his brain as the image of this man dislodging the ashes of his cigar with the flick of his massive nose. It didn't take much to quell rising laughter as Thomas's eyes met the beady black and sunken rodent spheres that darted across his face in an unknown hunger or lust and disgust. Thomas all of a sudden felt naked and vulnerable and the rising fear had returned to make his palms damp again.

“Do you know why you were brought up to my office Mr. Donnelly?”

“No, sir I only have some educated guesses.”

“Now now tommy, can I call you Tommy? I'm gonna call tommy.” A pink tongue snuck out of his mouth and moistened his lips. “Tommy my boy the reason why you are here is because of those educated guesses. Those well devised and tactical educated guesses. You are quick my boy very quick and we need someone like you to rise to the next level where we can use that quick noggin of yours.”

“Thank you sir.”

“Good good!” His fat hands unclasped themselves from the eternal wringing and shot up in excitement. “Thomas Donnelly the fourteen! I really like the sound of that Tommy do you like the sound of it?”

“Yes sir that sounds amazing sir.”

“Good good! Now tommyboy I'm going to ask you a few questions alright? Don't be scared just be truthful and answer okay?”

Thomas nodded.

“How many people of color have you slept with?”

“Numerous.”

“Have you ever had hateful thoughts to people of color or of those of different sexualities or religion?”

“Never.”

“Being white do you feel empathy for the way other races have suffered because of your ancestors and do you feel the way your people have been treated within the last five decades is fair?”

“Yes.”

“Where are your parents?”

Shame and anger swept over Thomas as he spoke. “They are dead.”

Deutch's rodent eyes brightened and a vicious smile appeared as he said. “Why did they die Thomas?”

Thomas had an urge to reach over the desk and crush the skull of the disgusting creature. Then a switch in his head snapped on and his mind calmed. As he spoke the emotion in his voice drained out with every word. “From what I've been told they placed my sister and I under federal care before they killed themselves with drugs and poisonous thinking. My parents were perpetrators of unforgivable acts. They broke the trust of their friends and family and they abandoned their children. They died because they were weak. They died because they didn't follow the guiding hand of our nation.”

Deutch nodded and said. “It is good to hear you say it and it is good to know that you know.” He brought his hands together once again. “Tommy my boy stop by Mr. Johnson's office tomorrow we'll get a contract signed.” He stuck his right hand out and Thomas gripped it and felt how weak it was. “Welcome aboard.”

Thomas nodded and feigned a smile convincingly and walked out of the office and into the lobby. Mr. Johnson hadn't moved from the couch and the smile on his face made Thomas uncomfortable. He spoke. “I'll see you tomorrow in my office at let's say ten. Go celebrate. I know you've been waiting for this day for a long time Thomas.”

The elevator dinged and Thomas walked out and made his way past the entry level drones and past a new olive skinned woman with large breasts and red hair inhabited the reception desk, she smiled enticingly at him and his mind swirled with new thoughts of lust.

Stale warm air and pulsing neon lights and the slapping sounds of a hundred thousand feet stamping into the pavement enveloped him as he exited the Hand that Holds the World. An army of Hoverboats skimmed among the sky scrapers shining their infrared spotlights at the crowds. There was always the potential for crime and violence at night so of course there would be officers to deter it. He wanted to celebrate, for it was not every day someone climbed up the corporate ladder. He checked his wrist and saw that his Pro-J had run out of juice. It didn't take long for him to spot the nearest smart window. It was the window of a large building which belonged to Bank of America and he pushed and maneuvered his way through the tide of flesh and when he reached it he placed the back of his Citi card against the glass. The window spiraled and finger recognition menu appeared. Thomas looked over his back and saw that no one was taking any interest in him so he quickly placed his right ring finger against the smooth glass.

The window beeped and a new larger menu was brought up and had different shortcuts in a bold blue color to choose from. Phone, Bank, Emergency, Directions, Market, were among the bundle of choices. Thomas chose Phone and then clicked the contact list option. Within seconds he was calling his sister. When she answered a video display appeared and revealed a pale stern face of thirty years with lines of stress riveting throughout her brow and corners of her mouth. Her black hair was propped up in a bun atop her head and a silver chain holding a pendent of the red white and blue fist rested between her modest cleavage.

She initiate the conversation by squawking out. "What's wrong?"

Taken aback Thomas replied. "Nothing, is wrong I wanted to ask if you wanted to go out to get some drinks."

She eyed him pensively as she said. "Somethings wrong, you never call for drinks unless someone's died or some she-devil dumped you. So what's wrong Tommy."

He sighed. "Nothing is wrong. I'm going to be promoted, I hope, well I think. I'm fairly certain I'm going to be promoted. I want to celebrate sis."

"You're going to be a 14?"

"That's what they say."

Her stern face gave way to joy and she proclaim. "That's more than an excuse to get a few drinks Tommy!"

"The Hole in the Wall in two hours?"

"I'll be there!"

He clicked the disconnect button and the blue bold numbers of ten appeared next to a dollar sign. Snarling at the dollar raise in price for a minute video call he nearly punched the exit option and spun and stormed off to join in with the ocean.

II

The hole in the wall was a spacious pub that feigned the effect that it was a decrepit beat up establishment with painted on cigarette and dirt stains in the ceiling. It had random off colored floorboards and the large oak bar was riddled with chips and dents that were a mix of premeditated attacks by the employees as well as drunken fits of rage from the patrons that unintentionally aided in solidifying the false atmosphere. It was packed full of well-dressed customers talking loudly over the melodies of the late 1900's. The bartender was wearing a dirty plaid shirt that was two sizes too small which made the illusion that her ample breasts were ready to burst through and when Thomas approached the bar she winked at him and grabbed a bottle of Jameson's, a shot glass and a mug.

Thomas smiled coyly as he said. "You know me too well."

She gingerly placed the beer and the shot in front of him and leaned towards him and granted him the view of the century. Her voice had hints of seduction as she said. "How could I forget a face like yours darlin."

Petty compliments and enforcing the signals of lust always granted better tips. Thomas knew the game but he didn't care. He welcomed the blind ignorance of the situation with open arms and as he opened his mouth to board the flirtation train to an empty wallet he felt a small hand on his shoulder. He twisted his body and saw his sister standing there with a mischievous plastered on her face.

"Here's the man of the hour!" She threw her arms up and wrapped him around him in a great embrace. Meekly, he returned the gesture by barely wrapping his arms around her and patted her on the back.

"Great to see you in person sis. It's been too long." He turned to the luscious bartender who was still showing off her goods to the world. "Get me a Patriot Missile for my lovely sister."

"This one is on the house. I can tell you guys are celebrating. Nobody goes to a bar with their sister unless someone died or something good has happened." The bar tender then turned around and rolled her fingers on a suspended touchpad. A moment passed and then a mechanical arm descended with a glass filled with a red white and blue concoction clutched in its claw.

A relic of a song was blaring through the pub and a drunken man sagging in a corner was attempting to sing with the lyrics with great difficulty. Thomas eyed him over with the hints of disgust being slowly drawn across his face. He disliked the damp spots on the shirt and he disliked the way the lulled gray eyes wandered aimlessly around in their sockets as they desperately tried to cling to something before losing focus again.

The inspection ended at the inebriate's fine shoes that were attached to feet that were twisting and bucking under the weight of an upset stomach, a flurry of confused emotions, and a world that has all of a sudden spiraled out of control. The only thing Thomas liked about the drunkard was his shoes.

Thomas snorted and gestured towards the lout with a lazy movement with his beer hand and said with heavy tones of condescension. "What a disgrace. The fool has no self-control."

His sister turned and gazed upon the drunkard and her face contorted into a mess. She made no comment on the scene but Thomas knew exactly what she was thinking and needless to say the impression that was imprinted had no hints of positivity.

The fool attempted to rise and he threw his body against the poorly painted wall but the strength in his legs gave way and he slowly slid back down into his original position. Lazily he ran his hand through his messy black hair and then through his cleanly cropped goatee. He then opened his mouth and revealed a bright white smile which he flashed at stern and disgusted faces that looked down upon him. Then he belted out with slurred and misplaced confidence the lyrics of an odd relic of a melody that played throughout the bar. "Welcome my son, welcome to the machine!"

Two bulky bald headed men full of pent up aggression pounced upon the man and dragged him up to his feet. He began to waver and lean dangerously so the brutes snatched him up by the armpits and began to drag the buffoon towards the door. His head rolled from shoulder to shoulder and the tips of his shoes glanced the floor as he was aided towards his destination. With a bang and a toss and a wet smack he disappeared into the unknown. The instant he departed the music ceased. There was a silent sigh of relief and the patrons resumed their half invested conversations of that day's celebrity and that week's fashion with calculated sips from their brightly colored drinks.

Thomas smiled slyly and said. "I love this place. The drinks are overpriced, the floors are sticky, the women are cold and usually flat, and the drunkards always give us a show."

His sister scoffed and raised her drink and Thomas brought his to meet it with a clink.

Hours slipped by and the outside world trudged on with flashing lights and megaphones. Artificially illuminated obelisks of industry towered above the army of scurrying specks below. The piercing light emanating from the sky idols had made the little creatures forget about the wondrous fire that burns beyond. The beckoning cry of the unknown ignored as their ears are pumped full of pleasant lies and soothing coos of sex and half hopes of fortune. Their glazed dull eyes fixed on pavement and on the varied color schemes in the shape of universal signs. Stop, Go, prepare CITI card. Their minds had lost the ability to engage in thought. Instead they carry out automated schematics of means to get food, sex, currency, shelter, and products to improve their image. Sometimes there is a ping of something foreign yet vaguely familiar that lingers for mere milliseconds but they cannot grasp it. They can't hold nor chase it. It slips by barely

noticed and disappears into the maw. They had gone far too long without it. They had gone far too long with structure and trend. The spark of ingenuity and sheer intelligence was systematically maimed in the classrooms in an age lost and forgotten. Then it was swiftly executed with distraction and monotony.

With one hand Thomas threw open the doors of the Hole in the Wall and he and his sister stumbled out with wolfish grins accompanied by laughter. They meandered down a paved side street lined with smartglass playing advertisements for The Defenders of Zion asking for donations and various antiracism scenarios always accompanied by a hotline number, hashtag, and website. The smartglass would only enable volume when there was a face is looking at it and when the two fools passed through the alley with their heads rolling in laughter the alley lit up with a chorus of narrated voices.

Thomas and his sister were startled for a moment and they both flinched and stopped chuckling and then they began laughing even harder. Tears welled up in their eyes and chests began to hurt from the onslaught of drunken joy.

After a few minutes they emerged from the alleyway that had opened up into a brightly lit park full of vibrant hues of blue and red and white and violet. A spider web of glowing wires spiraled up plastic tree trunks and lined pathways. The pair always ended a night of drinking here and they mechanically stumbled onto a bench with a Bank of America logo painted onto its wooden back. From underneath his coat Thomas pulled out a bottle of whiskey which he had stolen. He intended on paying the bar back if he remembered in the morning. Thomas had the money to pay for it but in his altered state he figure he would get a kick out of sneaking it instead.

With a grunt he twisted the cap off and brought the bottle to his lips in a quick motion. He inhaled a little and began coughing uncontrollably. With a red face a bright smile flashing in between fits of coughs he handed the bottle to his sister who expertly took a quick swig.

She placed the bottle on the ground beside the bench and her face drained of color and happiness and a morose tone suddenly took her usual jolly and upbeat voice. "I sent a thirteen year old to reeducation today. He won't even make it through stage two. They already deemed him impossible to be reinstated."

Thomas choked back a cough and replied in a labored tone. "What will happen to him?"

Her eyes fixated on something within the florescent forest and she replied with a pained voice. "They will send him back to me strapped to a gurney and we will read him his last rites and he will have his last words. Then I'm going to stick him with a needle and then he'll die. Then who knows where or what they do with the body." Fat tears began to roll down her cheeks.

Thomas reached over to brush them off and said in a hushed voice. "This is the way of things. This is how it is."

She batted his hand away and picked up the bottle and took another swig. She forced a

smile and attempted to quell the rising hurt in her voice as she said.

“It's so much easier when they are older and uglier. It's hard to feel bad when they have already lived you know? Hell, the little shit probably deserves it. He must of done something awful. They wouldn't just kill him just because.”

Thomas nodded. He knew that the child must have been caught with banned literature or music or hell even a documentary and made the conscious decision to spread. There was a chance Thomas was the one who sent him there. There was no need to upset her more on the subject. It had surprised him that they were relieving people as young as thirteen though.

With one arm his put it around his sister and with his free extremity he snatched up the bottle and raised it. “To America. Land of the free.” He then took a gulp and passed it to his sister who in turn did the same. He then leaned his head back and let his head spin as his eyes attempted to collect the barrage of light and color. “I shouldn't tell you this but I will anyways because I guess it's a spill your guts moment. The reason why I'm getting promoted is because I wrote up a series of su-suggestions for our military to cripple the Nordic Federation.” He took a gulp and continued. “I might be the hand of death for eradicating the people that were responsible for taking down the Lady Liberty.”

She pondered for a moment opened her mouth and said. “As much as I hate murder and destruction they deserve it. Those scum have been a stain on this world. They deserve what is coming to them. They murdered Jews and Muslims and blacks anyone who didn't agree with them. They've attacked all across the world. They are the new world Nazis. They are evil.”

“Exactly. I'm doing the world a favor.”

They then sat there and didn't say a word. The world was spinning around Thomas and the forest became a mash of piercing light that crept into his pupils and scrambled his sight. His stomach churned and his mind begged for it to stop. His head lulled to the side and his breathing became heavy as he desperately tried to keep the contents of his gullet inside his body.

His ear caught a ringing whisper that carried on the wind but he ignored it and concentrated his efforts on the rising sickness that plagued him.

Thomas wasn't able to contain it. He leaned forward and a slew of foul smelling liquid erupted out of his mouth and onto the lit ground near his feet. A gentle hand began to rub his back in an effort to sooth him. A long thin string of spit clung to his lower lip and he wiped it away with a shaking hand.

The ringing had grown to thunder.

Between spitting out remnants of vomit Thomas blubbered out. “That's not our uncle.”

He turned his head and horror struck him dead in the chest for the growing thunder was not of a nearing storm but of the scream of whirring engines and sirens erupting behind them. The sound startled Thomas so badly that he almost fell into the newly formed puddle in front of

him. Panic gripped them and made the drunken pair immobile as they watched two hoverboats quickly descending from the skies. Passerby's scrambled out of the way and a booming voice called out. "CEASE ACTIONS CITIZENS!"

With a slight of hand his sister snatched the cap off the knee of Thomas and quickly fastened it upon the bottle before gently tossing it into the bushes. Thomas was not terribly worried for he knew that they weren't going to be bothered by the Peace Officers for he had accumulated too much political pull to be nabbed for a mere open container or theft charge. Yet, a nagging unease and panic was there. An eternal fear of authority was successfully placed in his psyche from countless intimidating videos and lectures and scare tactics from the stern mouths of remorseless teachers.

The boats landed about a hundred feet from them and a gust of air carrying dust and grit smacked them both in the face. Six men, tall and garbed in black hopped off with shocksticks already in hand. Their faces were veiled behind black tinted visors attached to black carbon fiber helmets with the logo of red white and blue fist on the side. They began to trot in unison in the direction of Thomas and his sister on the bench. Black tentacles of fear rose from Thomas's empty stomach and rested in the back of his throat.

Thomas stood up and shouted in a desperate squawk. "What is the meaning of this?"

They did not slow their militaristic trot. Thomas pleaded as they drew near. "We have done nothing wrong! I'm a fourteen!"

Without a word the six Peace Officers strode on past them. Thomas stood there with a slurry of confusion and fear racking his body. Then he spotted their target. Standing in the distance on the bright orange and pink pathway was a lanky fellow with an awkwardly stance. The glowing lights revealed a soiled shirt and messy black hair. Upon his feet were a nice pair of black shoes that were slightly scuffed. Behind a cleanly cropped gray streaked beard his face was solemn and lined with dirt and in his gray eyes there wasn't fear but something else and that terrified Thomas. The man called out in their direction. "And so the hounds have come to rip out another tongue!"

Thomas couldn't believe his ears. Perhaps he heard him wrong in his altered state. Talking like that to the law was the fast track to having your skull crushed and nerve endings seared.

Then with haste the man took off into the forest of lights. One of the enforcers howled out in a gruff voice. "You fuck!" Then they took off after him like a pack of wolves with blood in the wind. The hoverboats took flight and floated above the plastic treetops in the direction of the fleeing man. A loud siren began screaming and portly TSA agents aboard the craft clambered up to the helm and attempted to scan the forest with the infrascopes but squealed out in pain as the light burned their retinas. One of them managed to reach the megaphone and began sputtering into it with heavy hints of frustration. "You are only making it worse for yourself scumbag. Stop running now and you might be able to walk in a few months." In between words the sound of

sucking air through the mouth was heard.

Thomas felt a hand fall upon his shoulder and a soft voice followed it. "It's time to go home. We shouldn't stick around in case they don't catch the fool."

He nodded in agreement and walked over to the bush. He fished out the half empty bottle with a shaking hand and stumbled back towards the general direction of his house.

Whirling galaxies and nebulae spun and danced around the blood moon and from the heavens a kaleidoscope of radiance with shifting hues showered down upon the snow covered pine thicket. Clouds of vapor pulsed in and out with each breath. Cold wrapped its embrace upon Thomas's bare legs and arms and sent him into a shivering fit and he clutched and wrung his hands on his chest in an effort to keep frostbite at bay. In the distance something shifted. With a dulled pain in his feet Thomas trudged towards the movement until he came into a clearing and an Ivory Stag came into view. With a long skinny leg it hoofed at the snow and bent down to chew on the exposed grass. Its massive antlers left a mess of imprints in the undisturbed snow wherever it bent its head. Something pulled Thomas towards the stag and through pain and cold he awkwardly forged a path towards it. When he was about twenty feet away the stag reared his head and stared into him with large blue marble eyes. A cloud of vapor shot out from its snout as it huffed at him. Thomas didn't heed the warning and diligently labored on his path until he was a mere three feet away. The stag stood motionless and serene and Thomas reached out and placed his frozen hand upon its snout and felt warmth rush through his body. A piercing howl erupted from everywhere and the Stag jerked its head and Thomas felt the freeze sink back into his body and he fell to his hands knees. A haunting cry came from the deer and it set off into a panicked flight as it ran past Thomas and towards the outcrop of pines only to meet a wall of black wolves. Overhead ravens circled and swirled and squawked. The stag pivoted and reversed its direction and bounded past Thomas once again and headed off towards a falling thick sheet of snow that pulsed with light. Thomas reached for it as it passed in a desperate effort to feel the life giving warmth once more but his muscles were too stricken by the cold to move quick enough. The pounding of a thousand paws in chase was growing thunder. Thomas tried to rise to his feet but his legs and arms were blocks of ice. Groaning in agony he began to crawl. When the first trampling paw struck Thomas's shoulder exploded into a thousand frozen crimson red shards. Thomas screamed out and cursed and wept. His lamentations were quickly silenced as a heavy paw shot straight through the back of his skull and sent frozen gray flesh and white skull and red gruel up and out to stain the pristine snow.

Gasping for air Thomas shot up in his bed. He leaned over and fumbled for his wastebasket but wasn't able to find it in time before he vomited all over the floor, comforter, and dresser. His exhausted body lifelessly slunk out of bed and into his own filth. With shaking arms he was able to crawl on his hands and knees to his bathroom which lit up in blinding artificial white light when he entered. With what little strength he had he managed to make it to the toilet and heave up the remainder of the contents that dwell in his belly. A bridge of spit connected his bottom lip to his toilet seat. Mechanically he flopped a rubbery arm up to the sink counter and laboriously pulled himself up to face the stranger in the mirror.

The man trapped in the glass seemed to forget to take his clothes off when he went sleep and he didn't seem to mind that they were caked in oatmeal colored vomit. A lazy hand stretched out and pulled the mirror away to reveal a personal warehouse of white bottles chock full of synthetic beta endorphins and everything else available to drive away any feeling of depression or pain. The lazy hand passed all the bottles donned with product names thought up in rooms full of men trying to find the perfect one liner that comfortably whispered 'smiles and laughter in a capsule'. The brain connected to the meandering hand didn't care that a few bottles were knocked from their perch and sent careening into the sink basin. All that brain cared about was one thing.

“Thank god for you little buddy.”

Lids fell and raised and like magic two aspirin appeared in his open palm which he then popped into his mouth and sent them careening down into a newly vacant cavern with a mouthful of sink water chasing and carrying them. With a grunt he awkwardly began to strip while putting most of his body weight against the sink. Naked and weak he stumbled into the standing shower and gently met the cool far wall. He placed his back against it and slowly slid down.

An automated female voice spoke from the ceiling. “Cold shower at this hour Mr. Donnelly?”

“Yes please.”

III

The sun crested the edge of the world and silhouetted an endless litter of clustered buildings that rode the horizon. A brave new day for the progressive utopia bloomed in the bath of light. Bodies attached to half empty heads full of wisps of incomplete ideas and ideals and primal instructions sprung up and went out to make everything in their little world a little bit more equal and politically friendly for all. For each day is a small victory against their so called terrible plague. Each day inches closer to their progressive utopia.

The remains of three white men were found by a tram stop just as the light from the cleansing sun blanketed the city. Three thin plastic tarps draped over the broken bodies shifted and flinched at the slightest breeze. Three reporters exited the scene scoffed and complained when they found out the victims race. Three detectives with boredom strewn across their faces checked their email on their Pro-J watches. Three thousand citizens waited only a few feet away for the tram to pick them up before a hungover man asked one of the detectives for their names.

“What are their names?”

The detective raised his uncaring brown eyes from the projected video of a naked fat woman being gang banged to read Thomas's face before answering in an annoyed tone. “Their names *were* Jack Bollen, Sean King, and Robert Gould.”

“What happened?”

On the detective's temple an invisible vein beneath the dark skin bulged. “There are no leads at this time.”

Thomas balled up his fist and retorted under his breath. “Of course there aren't. That would mean you would actually have to care.”

The detective rolled his eyes and placed his hand on his holster and put his full attention onto Thomas with an aggressive demeanor. “What was that? You mind speakin up boy? Got somethin to say? Because it sounded like you really wanted to say somethin to me.”

Thomas stood there with his jaw clenched and the fires of war burning in his chest. Words of hate exploded within his brain but they would not escape through his sealed lips. Thomas remained silent.

The detective snorted. “That's what I thought. Now get the hell out of here whitey. This stop ain't for you boy.”

Thomas forced a smile onto his face full of anger and shame. "I don't take the tram anyways. Have a productive day detective."

Blank faces and similar cloths to fit the ever shifting fashion sense blurred into a mess of perfume and sweat. New watches new necklaces new vests and pants that the idols on the screens donned were more than scattered within the ocean and Thomas melted into them with his clean cut suit that was once worn by a prominent politician giving a speech on the subject of racial discretion and equality. He trudged along with a head full of a burning anger until he reached the barren scaffolding of the rusted tram bridge. He loathed that he missed the encounter of the bright eyed girl he met the day prior. Yet she was gone. They were all gone. The rats even took the pallets with them.

When the cool fresh air hit his face a smile broke and he shined it to the new well-endowed secretary whose sole purpose of living was to entice and slather men's brains with distraction of thoughts of procreating and to work towards it. When he slid his CITI card into the elevator slot it felt better than sex as the number 14 lit up.

With thoughtful and diligent steps Thomas contained a posture of confidence as he strode into Johnson's office right as ten o'clock struck. Johnson was sitting in a luxurious leather chair behind a grand steel desk embroidered with dancing sprites and licking flames. All three walls were windows as his office was in the middle of the Colorado Rocky mountain chain. The book in his hands was green and beat up with dirt and burn marks scarred across the spine.

Brown eyes peered over the open pages and studied Thomas for a moment and then he began to read from it. "With the use of the controlled media, fabricated events and fabricated outrage plagued the society in order to trick the populace into throwing their support into hidden premeditated narratives or to distract them from real events that aided in tightening the manacles around their wrists and tongues. The citizens of the nation had put themselves into slavery with beaming smiles and empty heads. Those that had the perception to see this the subversive tactics used by the powers that be were ostracized and demonized and thrown into prisons. It had become heresy to speak your mind and to speak the truth. Only the manufactured way of thinking was allowed. The nation that had once bragged to the world that it was a free society full of free peoples had been essentially been twisted into the land of the cage and home of the slave."

With that the book snapped shut and Johnson was on his feet with an extended hand. Thomas grasped it and they shook and headed the advice of the gesturing black hand and took a seat across his new equal.

Johnson held the tattered green book aloft and shook it slowly back and forth as he said "This. This right here is a plague."

"Is it picking your brain?"

Johnson stopped the movements of the book and a broad smile broke his face. "Yes. It's picking it in all the wrong places. This sorry excuse for a book is used as a recruitment tool for

reeducated and disenfranchised whites to join who knows what. We find them everywhere after they vacate whatever dark corner of the city they inhabit for that day or for that hour.”

“Is the book filled with hate speech or calls to violence?”

“No I've searched every page for anything illegal and it falls within the parameters of law. It only insinuates but it does it fairly well. But because of how incendiary the book is the author and the distributors would be placed under arrest indefinitely as we conducted an investigation.” Johnson then activated his computer and a projected image hung suspended in midair. “I've been studying it Thomas and I've been tracking the hands that it exchanges but it is much more difficult for that tracing an IP or for a face. I feel like I'm like that one British detective, you know the one. The um, the one that was solved all those mysteries using wit and intellect alone for during the age when there were no toothbrushes and penicillin. It was an age of funny hats as well. God it's on the tip of my tongue.”

“Sorry but it isn't ringing any bells for me.”

“Well no matter. But I've been tracking these books and I believe I found the one that either wrote the poison or most likely is the head of spreading its filthy pages all over my city. The funny thing is you met him last night without even knowing it.”

The video started to play and it showed Thomas and his sister at the Hole in the Wall conversing and shooting nasty glances to the drunkard slouched in the corner. Thomas's skin began to crawl as if he felt naked in the brown calculating eyes that scoured him. The video paused and Johnson spoke with a very serious tone.

“That one seemingly wasted fellow in the corner is who I'm hunting. He's a very crafty one as well. He even managed to splice in a banned tune into the bar's speaker system.”

“I believe I saw your chase of him last night as well.”

“Yes you did. I'm dubbing that the cluster fuck in the park. He managed to evade my dogs by hiding within light. Shifty bastard is clever I'll give him that. But here is my question to you Thomas. Do you believe it is mere coincidence that he just happened to be around those two times? Do you believe it is just happenstance that you ran into him twice in one night in our massive metropolis?”

“Well yes I do. What are you getting at Johnson?” Bile began to rise and the shadow of worry began to descend upon his thoughts.

“Do you think such an attractive girl never mind the dirty clothes she wore would wait just for you out of the other whites that passed? She ignored twenty seven other white males. Do you believe that is just a coincidence?”

A creeping fear set into Thomas and he didn't like where the conversation was heading

one bit. “Well maybe she liked the cut of my suit. I don't know these people. They are just beggars and thieves.”

Johnson's terrifying smile returned. “They are neither of those things. They are the biggest threat we have in my city Thomas.” He raised the tattered green book once more. “Do you believe that this was left on your front porch two days ago by accident?”

“What the hell is this? Am I under investigation? Have I broken any laws? I don't know those filthy fucking rats so what the hell is this?”

Johnson's smile disappeared. “Of course you are under investigation. You have been under investigation your whole life. You're no different than anyone else of your race. Did you think that if you were just a good citizen and you have been, that nobody would keep an eye on you?”

“I have done nothing wrong.”

“Well apart from stealing that bottle of whiskey, no you have done nothing wrong. But the problem is we aren't the only people that have taken an active interest in you and I think they particularly liked the guff you gave the detective this morning. Hell even I did.”

Thomas scoffed and said sarcastically. “I'm glad you found it entertaining. Maybe I should put on a show and hand in my resignation for this breach of privacy on an employee. Maybe do a little song and dance for you cocksuckers. Would you like that?”

Johnson's face looked in pain as he tried to contain the laughter that was building within him. When it finally broke out it was a thunderous laugh that left Thomas scowling. When it finally subsided Johnson spoke between leftover bits of hilarity. “Shit Thomas you're funny for a cracker. Now don't get all uppity, you were promoted because of all this. You were chosen by them so you are chosen by us. You are a patriot and you love your country we all know this. But the reason you're a fourteen is to go beyond that and to be a hero.”

“I'm not being promoted because of the years of hard work? Not for the plans I created to end the Nordic Federation? Not for being the most efficient thirteen for three years running? But because I had a camera on my back my entire life and you realized you could use me as bait? Please remind me why I should be happy about this.”

“Well for one your plans for poisoning the well in Oslo was tossed out because of how dangerous it would be for the entire water table. Secondly we tell every employee that they are the most efficient. If we just told one it would be a breach of the equality act. So please stop throwing your adolescent temper tantrum and stop being so negative about what I'm saying to you. You're not the only one that is being monitored so take solace in that. But you are going to be the only white male fourteen. That's something to be proud of and after you complete your assignment everyone will know your name. Everyone will know the hero Thomas Donnelly the savior of our great nation. The man who puts his country first and race last. Protector of liberty and freedom. I think it has a good ring to it.”

“I'm glad that you find monitoring an innocent man such a thrill. I'm not here to be your pet project Johnson. I am here to better my country and if you wish to hold my balls in a vice I'm going to walk out that door and by the end of the day you'll hear from my lawyer.”

Johnson rolled his eyes and spoke. “Your threats hold no weight. You know the power of video editing. Maybe I'll just move some frames around and show you having contact with this known domestic terrorist. I can turn you into a villain just as easily as I can make you a hero and by the end of the day you'll be going back to school. So just embrace it Thomas.” The judging brown eyes studied his prey. “You look like a trapped animal. Seething with rage for getting caught in a snare. But don't blame yourself. Blame your scumbag ancestors and their insidious sins for your plight.”

Like a wild ape Thomas snapped up from his seat and took hold of his chair and threw it against the large window leaving an extensive spider web of damage. Johnson's smile never shone brighter.

Thomas wished to finish the job on the damaged window with a flurry of kicks until all that was left was a few jagged edges that clung for dear life on the thin steel dividers and then toss his adversary into the open air so that he too could experience the demoralizing feeling of not having the ground beneath his feet. But the switch in his head snapped on and his head lulled in defeat and he stared into nothing. He stood there like a child that had just been scolded for something he did not do with sagged shoulders and adrenaline rushing and a chest rising and falling raggedly with hitched heaving. Two peace officers ripped the door open with shocksticks raised and Johnson quickly motioned them to leave.

With a bright smile Johnson gently tossed the worn green book at Thomas's feet. “Welcome aboard.”

IV

Soft talk and a whipping of air came screaming in from the open windows of the car. Sunshine amplified from the windshield making the exposed leather of the empty middle seat searing hot. Rolling hills of green and towering leafed giants blurred. Windmills reached to scrape heaven with each thrust. A beautiful woman with flowing chestnut hair sat up in the front seat and turned round and stared with piercing green eyes that were on the verge of being flooded with tears.

“We're almost there.”

The scenery quickly turned to stretches of farmland. Golden wheat and green sprouts blanketed the flat earth. Smells of manure. Ancient telephone and power line poles stood lonely without cables to connect them. The little girl next to him was hyperventilating as she desperately attempted to stifle her weeping as she clutched an electric china doll closely to her chest.

The car slowed and turned onto a gravel road. Loose stones struck the inside of the wheel well and with each ding the woman in the passenger seat would flinch. It was the year of the locust and their wailing blurred into a fine hum.

“We're here.”

The farmhouse stood alone. Vines and lichen engulfed the lesser part of the bricks and the grass had become wild and knee high as it bordered the entirety of the property. Starlings had made a city in the attic and as the car neared they erupted into a black cloud that swirled and circled and when it was decided that it was safe the winged conglomerate retreated back through the gap in the roof.

The car lurched to a halt and they exited the car. The woman kneeled and stared with tears streaking down her face. She embraced me tight. And I could feel her sorrow rack her body.

“We have to go now. You'll be safe.”

The man driving was dredging out boxes and small coolers from the trunk. The little girl was wailing and the woman fell to her knees and embraced her while making soft hushes.

The man approached. He was a titan and his face was broken by sorrow. He placed a worn leather sheathe containing a large hunting knife into a small hand. As he spoke the noises of the wild quieted.

“Remember what I taught you. Take care of your sister. Your uncles will be here in two weeks.”

“Why do you have to leave? Where are you going? Is this a dream or a memory?”

“We have to go because no one else will. We are going to a place we won't be able to come back from. We love you both.”

A forced cough ripped Thomas back to reality. Johnson's face held little amusement as he glared from across the large conference table. The six other women that joined the meeting sat in their chairs with their faces glued with snide smiles as they anticipated the brewing confrontation.

“Welcome back Mr. Donnelly. Would you care to answer the question?”

“Sorry could you repeat it?”

A look of disgust filled Johnson's face for a moment but was quickly replaced by his traditional fake smile. “Do you believe we will achieve our goals within the next two weeks.”

“Well if all your monitoring and intelligence is correct and they have taken an active interest in me it wouldn't surprise me if the plan doesn't pick up speed a lot quicker.”

Johnson slapped the table and exclaimed. “See, this is why he's the man for the job!”

A slug shaped black woman sitting at the table was appalled by the remark from Mr. Johnson and piped up with aggressive authority. “He's the man for the job? Are you implying that a woman couldn't do his job Mr. Johnson? Sexist remarks from a fourteen I would never, lord no he did not just say that!”

Another woman with skin leathered from years spent in tanning beds and a nose that took up half her face spoke with a voice that sounded like a thousand cats in heat. “Mr. Johnson, you should already be educated on the law that no direct reference of gender should be dictated when speaking of employees or customers. In the future please use the politically correct pronouns if such an event shall rise.”

Johnson bowed his head and took a deep breath and replied. “Am I deeply ashamed of my actions and I have made a grave mistake. I apologize for my sexist remark and I hope that my fellow fourteen's will forgive me.”

It was then Thomas realized that these women had only gotten to this position of power through blackmail or simply because of their gender. Before Thomas had begun to day dream he

witnessed the other six women talking on their pro-j watches and painted their nails and clucked and yapped amongst themselves about their boyfriends and lovers and their shitty television shows. They talked and ate and laughed all the while Johnson gave a presentation for our eyes only regarding a high risk national security threat. There was no way in hell that these estrogen filled dolts made it to this high of a rank by merit. At the moment of this discovery something died in Thomas. He worked his ass off for years to get to this position and when he finally was promoted it was under dire circumstances to his disadvantage. But these babbling idiots climbed to the nearest rung of the corporate ladder screaming sexism all the way up. Something indeed died in Thomas and its corpse was beginning to fester.

V

A wide gait and a scowl. An upturned nose and hard eyes. Thomas felt a sickness fall upon him. His body felt exhausted and his mind churned with diseased thoughts. A desperation was overcoming him as he walked on the cracked pavement and past the countless empty faces and empty messages that blinked and shouted in colors and excitement on their smart windows. A pit had formed in his head and all the good things and all the good thoughts that had once made residence there were quickly sliding into it to be held imprisoned and then replaced by poisonous doppelgangers. Anger sadness and bitterness all rolled into one hunk of sludge spitting out little black bubbles of venomous emotion. As he walked under the towering steel goliaths and by the blank faces dug into artificial happy projected images the overriding feeling that the world was bending in upon Thomas's to slowly squash his frail body filled him completely. And when he passed the hundreds of cameras he felt their lenses zooming in to monitor his every step and breathe. Trapped and studied. Trapped with nowhere to go. Thoughts of buying a ticket to the ever shrinking country side would pop up every now and again. But he knew that he would be stopped by either a group of smack happy peace officers or by a couple of obese TSA agents before stepping into the tram station and if he ended up getting lucky enough to manage to escape his assets would be frozen as soon as he left the city limits. Trapped. Trapped within invisible walls. But there was one escape that he could stomach and he was surely going to partake in it tonight.

The weight of the small green book in his left hand was barely noticeable as it worked as a pendulum as it swung haphazardly with each step. His speed slowed to a stop as he tried to remember if the large square building that rested in front of him was the right one. The building was covered with pulsing white neon lights making the shape of an oriental flower and with each blink it would blossom and reveal a pink button at its center then it would blink again and the flower would close to its original state. The bouncers looked like the love children of the TSA and the peace officers for they were tall and gruff but had sagging breasts and numerous chins and sweat stains in all the wrong places. Thomas nonchalantly placed the book on his inside coat pocket.

Thomas approached them and they handed him a Citi card swipe and a contract that dictates that he was not to fondle any of the dancers without consent and a form of comfort signed and agreed upon and if he did not follow the guidelines he would automatically be charged with rape. A scribble here and a scribble there and the bouncers opened the doors up for him and the rank stench of sex and bleach punched him in the face.

Strobe lights and rib rattling bass. Men and women with floss for underwear humped and slid and grinded on metal poles on elevated platforms. Images of intercourse flashed on the walls and floor. In the pit a mass of sweaty drunk and high men and women and creatures slid their

bodies on one another and shared bodily fluids and let fingers explore and roam and prod and rub and enter. In the mess of things two girls and a creature that once was a man were at the center of an assembly line as their faces and mouths were used by a cord of frantic men waiting for their turn to dump their seed. A twinge of disgust itched the back of Thomas's brain and he searched for the bar and quickly found it. A civil war raged in his head as he deduced that it wouldn't be rude to take the only vacant barstool even though it was next to a couple having a very loud love making session. When he sat down regret set in as he forgot to clean off the stool with his handkerchief for he could be sitting on a tiny puddle of gonorrhea infested discharge. The bartender came over and wasn't shy about placing her large bare brown tits on the bar in front of him. Thomas ordered some whiskey and made a fake laugh to her retort about it being impossible to get whiskey dick in a place like this. He felt a faint tap on his shoulder and he turned to see a large man with pupils the size of grapes and a nostril dusted with yellow powder. The man asked him if he could buy him a drink and Thomas gently explained to him that he wasn't interested. The man took it well as he stared blankly into Thomas's shirt for a moment but was able to break himself from whatever horrors or enlightenment that was contained in the fabric and lethargically descended back down into the pit and disappeared among the flailing arms and legs and bobbing heads and exposed breasts and genitalia. When Thomas turned back around a pair of tits and a tumbler of whiskey waited for him. Thomas took the tumbler and downed it. The bartender was taken aback and stood up straight and crossed her arms and said scornfully to her customer. "Why are you even here?"

Thomas was confused by her question. He looked at her and saw that he had somehow hurt her feelings. Then it struck him. Any sane man would have brought his face between the funbags and had the time of their lives for moment or two and then would have tipped her handsomely but he didn't. He ignored them and took the drink instead.

"I don't know. I'm sorry I don't know why I'm here."

Her face broke back to an inviting smile and her voice regained the artificial overtones of lust. "Oh it's fine honey. Don't worry about a thing. Are you looking for something other than a drink? Maybe some Heaven or perhaps a private session with one of the dancers?"

"I've never shoved anything into my nose before and I don't think I'm in any shape to do the dirty right now."

"Well Heaven comes in a pill too honey. We can set you right up and you will have a great night. I don't allow anyone to have a bad time here."

"I'll have another whiskey."

A primal beat of the drums. A rush of blood and heat and pheromones deployed. Pupils dilated and minds fixated. A mesh of bodies sewn together with sweat and cum as the glue.

Thomas watched it all from his stool and bile was rising and he cursed himself for not joining in as he once had not even a month ago. An invisible barrier had formed around him and he felt completely severed from whatever these people were feeling. He felt distant from this base

emotion and impulse. With each sip something whispered inside him and it would ask '*what is wrong with me?*'. Then the thought came to him that maybe that this isn't what sex should be. Maybe it didn't need to be coaxed out of you with an artificial environment bombarded with drugs and images. Maybe it didn't need to happen with everyone watching or participating. What was the point to all of this if all the men and women are on birth control anyways? No reproduction occurs from it. No life is bloomed. Only the spread of disease and an emptying of pockets. But Thomas knew that The White Peony was federally funded and there was at least three every thousand blocks which made him even more confused and even more sick to his stomach.

His speeding thoughts smashed into a brick wall and his eyes widened as a goddess entered in through the double doors. Long flowing chestnut hair bounced slightly with each step. Pale opal skin caught the light with each flash of the strobe. A perfect face cut from marble by a divine hand. Two green eyes locked onto Thomas and he felt his heart rip itself apart.

She walked past the metal poles and the imps that clung shied away and hissed at her. She walked past the pit and the decaying bodies moaned and cried out for her. She walked past the plethora of poisoned queers, envious dykes, empty women, lost men, and supposed people that couldn't be categorized by earthly terms to stand two feet from Thomas.

An angel's voice called down to him. "Spare a coin?"

He looked into her eyes and saw galaxies imploding. He saw two oceans of green fighting to hold off the impending of the two black holes. He saw the fires of war and the fight for life. He saw through the window of a farmhouse a little girl playing with an electric china doll in knee high grass.

"How about a drink instead?"

Her smile melted the world. "How about we get out of here?"

"Sounds good to me."

"Did you miss me?"

"Now I know I should have."

VI

A foul stench rode on the steam that belched from the clogged underbelly of the sprawl. The unintelligible mash of consumerism incarnate from the constant barrage of commercials blasted on the air and drowned out the monotonous tones of the brainless fools talking to each other through their pro-j watches or smartwindows.

Thomas didn't remember leaving the White Peony as his mind had been turned to jelly as he followed the enchantress. Her hand felt fragile as it lay in his and she guided him down alleys and side streets and under bridges. The journey ended at the mouth of a large sewer. She turned to him and kissed his cheek and gently patted the book in his breast pocket and whispered. "He's been waiting a long time for you."

Thomas let go of her hand. "Where are you taking me? You know we can just go back to my place."

She smiled and reached into her purse and removed a small pistol and aimed it at his face and asked sweetly. "Would you please turn out your pockets?"

With lethargic movements Thomas slowly began removing the contents concealed in his pants and overcoat. A look of hatred painted his face and he snarled as he spoke. "And here I thought my rotten day was getting better. But no, some rotten halfwit bitch thinks two hundred in cash is worth an eternity in prison. Dumb fucking cunt." He felt like a dope as he stood there defenseless with a green book in one hand and his wallet in the other.

She smiled as she spoke. "Dumb fucking cunt? That's cute, now go ahead and put the book back in your pocket and leave your wallet on the ground." Thomas complied. "Now, take off your Pro-J and take out the battery." After he completed that task she motioned Thomas towards the mouth of the sewer with quick flick of the pistol. "It is time for you to go down the rabbit hole Thomas."

Thomas snorted. "What are you planning on adding homicide to robbery? I'm not going walk my happy ass into my own grave, you're going to have to drag me to my final resting place."

She rolled her eyes. "This isn't a robbery but if you don't do what I ask right fucking now I will put a bullet in your brain." Thomas stood there and shook his head and planted his feet to the ground.

The click of the hammer being drawn back into place magically breathed life in to his feet and they began to mechanically trudge towards the open maw. "Now that's not so hard just keep walkin hun. He's waited a long time to see you."

Thomas halted his movement as he stood on the precipice of total darkness to which she grasped the back of his overcoat and placed the barrel of the small pistol against the base of his skull. She pushed forward and escorted him into the darkness. They both were engulfed by the void but she walked fluidly as if each of the blind steps was walked a million times. As she spoke her angelic voice bounced off the cylindrical walls. "I had once attempted to live the life you live, Thomas. Waking up every day and going to work for some large corporation or tentacle of the government. I had tried to belong and smile and buy things to make me happy. I tried to find the joy in monotony. The Zen in having a schedule. But it always eluded me. It didn't take long before I began using sex and drugs as crutches to give me little spurts of euphoria. But the smiles left too quick and the mornings were always empty. I tried to believe all the things that I was told to believe. I had tried to forget that I was orphaned because this tyrannical societal machine. I had tried to forget that my parents were sent to reeducation because they made a few offhanded remarks about homosexuality and abortion. I really tried, Thomas. I really tried. But I guess some people are more capable with lying to themselves every day."

A violent tension filled the darkness as her words cut into Thomas. He whipped his head round only to see that the light from the sewer opening was gone. In his head a beast was screaming for him to backhand her and crush her skull and for a moment his body contemplated the action. Thomas stopped dead in his tracks and right before he moved to strike the switch in his head turned off and the voice dissipated. Her hands clamped tightly onto the back of his overcoat and gave him a shove and quickened their pace as she spoke. "To willingly live and thrive and support in a society that proclaims freedom of speech yet imprisons and kills those who own certain books or speaks certain truths is something I could never wrap my head around. Not only do you do these things Thomas you actually aid in this as you have sent over ten thousand men and women to reeducation in only a five year span. How do you live with yourself?"

Thomas snorted before replying with an exasperated tone. "Hate speech isn't free speech. All those I marked were privileged racists and sexists. How do you live with yourself supporting such disgusting people?"

"I live and sleep quite soundly for they are my people, Thomas. They are your people."

A faint hum crept through the dark and it was rapidly growing louder. When they turned a corner a wave of sensory struck him square in the face as the orange glow of an awaiting hell lurked in the distance. Screams and laughter and drums erupted and crimson firelight and black shadows danced with each other along the curved walls. Beads of sweat began to collect on his brow and his eyes grew wide and darted to every shifting shape that moved. The thunderous pounding of the drums reverberated around his ribcage and coaxed his heart into playing in stride. Invisible cement formed around his ankles and a pleading voice in the back of his skull cried out for him to turn and run.

"For twenty years they have hunted us down like animals. For twenty years they have dehumanized our people and made us into monsters. They call us the murders and slavers and imperialistic thieves of the world. We are the scapegoats for every ail the human race had ever

endured. They have stolen our accomplishments and claimed them as their own. They call us racists yet they openly attack us just because of our ancestry and skin color. They claim that we are beholden and prone to committing hate crimes yet whenever another group of people attacks us it is viewed as fair game.”

Thomas spoke sarcastically. “What a load of bullshit. You should stop drinking every cup of Kool-Aid they put in front of you. Do you sleep with a tinfoil hat on?”

She retorted without missing a step. “The three dead white men that you saw this morning as you walked to work were murdered last night by a group of blacks but no charges of homicide has been pressed for the group of eight claimed it was in self-defense. Which is strange seeing as the victims were unarmed. This is commonplace. Murder of innocents is commonplace. Murder and imprisonment for those who cry out is commonplace. We are witnessing the instrumentation of the greatest genocide western civilization has ever perpetrated and it is a silent genocide full of propaganda and indoctrination that started as black bags and bullets. A social genocide full of interbreeding and slavery.”

Thomas wanted to flee but he knew he couldn't. He would undoubtedly become lost within the labyrinth behind him. He wondered if this is what it felt like to walk to the gallows or to the chair or to the principal's office. Walking into certain death with a body and mind full of fear and anxiety but somehow you are convinced to do so willingly and without struggle. Footsteps behind him forced his head to whip round to see two men silently shadowing them from a few yards behind.

Thomas's voice shook and it loathed that it did. “You are in-insane.”

“I wish I was Thomas.”

The screams engulfed the tunnel and he could feel the heat from the dancing orange light. The legs attached to his body moved on their own to bring him to his doom. Thoughts ran wild in his head as he envisioned a horde of men and women and children waiting to rip him limb from limb. He was going to be their grand sacrifice for sending them and their loved ones away. He was their instrument for vengeance for lives being broken. He was going to meet the devil that ruled over his pale horrid and barbaric creatures and then he's going to toss him down into the mess of human depravity so that they can feed on his flesh. But as they turned the corner there was no army of angry dissents and no grand altar to be sacrificed and no gallows to be strung up from. Just a larger extension of the tunnel with an elevated walkway with two garbage cans with flames spewing out and a rusted out truck resting on the tracks below. A horrid screeching and thumping was emanating from under the dented hood of the pickup. A man with hard eyes and a ragged black beard and a shaved head hung out of the passenger window. Behind him a monstrous shadow stirred in the driver's seat.

The bearded man called out to them. “Hell Gabby, you're right he looks like a stiff.”

She barked a laugh and said. “You don't know the half of it. He's a true blue suit.”

The bearded man flashed a smile and slapped the outside of the door. “Well, we can spare the introductions let's get this happy caravan goin.”

A harsh and unexpected shove from behind almost knocked Thomas off his feet. Thomas got the picture and clambered down to the tracks below and climbed into the filthy bed of the truck. Gabby and the two brutes climbed in after him.

The truck lurched forward and bounced and rumbled as it journeyed down the spacious tunnel. There was no speaking from the residents of the truck bed only grunts and forced coughs. Thomas kept his eyes cast down and watched the outlines of flakes of rust and shale vibrate and shift in the dim light. In a corner of his brain a creature was pacing back and forth begging his body to either jump from the truck and make a break for it or snatch the pistol from one of the apes and take Gabby hostage. The rest of his mind had already become calm and collected since being rife with fear and panic caused by earlier events. An internal struggle ensued and at the end of it all the creature was soothed and Thomas exhaled and let his thoughts wander through a lazy checklist of hypothetical events that potentially could take place very shortly. Inside the cab of the truck music was blaring and the two men inside of it were laughing and bobbing their heads. As Thomas watched them he felt a washing calm wash away whatever residual panic and fear that remained. Heavy lids fell over his eyes and he let the rocking and bucking of the truck lull him to sleep.

VII

Crickets and starlings called. Swallows and bluebirds dove in and out of the high grass picking off the swarm of small clouds of breeding gnats and blackflies. In the distance against the tree line of pines and oak a parade of deer bent their heads to feed. The sun was high and showered the life bloom with warming rays. Wisps of white crawled against the endless blue. Three coolers lay empty and beaten and defeated upon the gravel driveway. A little girl sat in a patch of beaten down grass and talked to her dirtied and battered electric china doll even though the batteries have long since died and its green eyes lay stark open and peering to give the effect that it was wrought with terror. A boy sat on the dilapidated porch of the old farmhouse and carefully stuck the point of a large hunting knife into his palm to dredge out a wooden splinter.

Their bellies twisted and churned begging for something other than small pan fish caught from the nearby pond. The girl called out to the boy and asked when they were coming and the boy told her the same answer that was given for ten consecutive days. Soon. Rabbits cautiously hopped out from under the house and ate clover and dandelion leaves. Grasshoppers launched above the high golden grass and revealed their hidden wings.

Rolling thunder broke but there were no clouds. The girl stood up and scanned the horizon and started jumping with joy as she witnessed the black spots against the blue and a dust cloud growing on the road. She danced in her circle of worn down grass. No smile was brought to the boy's face.

The boy shot up and said in panic. "That's not our uncle."

The boy told the girl to go hide. But she wouldn't listen. The crickets and starlings stopped singing. The rabbits retreated back under the farmhouse. The swallows and bluebirds canceled their feast and shot out in all directions. The deer disappeared beyond the trees. The rolling thunder arrived and the girl screamed with tears streaming.

Black helicopters circled and shouted down at them in demonic voices. A line of black Humvees spouted gravel in all directions as they careened down the road. The boy grabbed the girl by the hand and dragged her and begged her to flee. They ran as fast as their little legs could muster towards the enclave of trees. Saw grass and burrs dug and sliced into their arms and legs. A great gust of wind from above almost knocked them off their feet but still they ran. Hellish voices and whining of engines and chopping of air surrounded them as they traversed the field. The boy refused to look up but took a quick glance behind and saw great beasts careening through the high grass in pursuit of their flesh. A helicopter landed in front of the tree line and a number of tall men draped in black stepped out cradling machine guns. The humvees flanked the boy and girl and the boy forced the girl to the ground and took the large knife in both hands and pointed it the circle of soldiers that were

quickly closing in.

A gruff voice called down to the boy. “Put the knife down kid. Everything is alright.”

Tears streamed down the boy’s face and his voiced quaked. “Where's our mom and dad? Where's our uncle?”

A soldier approached the children and the boy slashed at him and was quickly disarmed. Handcuffs dug into his tiny wrists and the boy screamed in fury as he was carried into a separate helicopter as the girl.

The helicopter took off and the boy saw the billows of smoke and then the raging inferno that had engulfed the farmhouse. Little burning comets ripped out from under the house and shot out through the high golden grass leaving a trail of smoke and kindling fires. The boy hoped the other animals made it out alive. He didn't know if he was going to.

Something struck Thomas's chest and he shot open his eyes in panic and gasped. The two brutes chuckled and Gabby shook her head with a smile. Thomas put his head in his hands as the image of the burning farmhouse lingered in his vision.

One of the brutes spoke to Thomas. “Must have been a nasty nightmare. You were groaning and flinching and fidgeting for the last five minutes.”

Thomas responded without raising his head. “How long have I been sleeping?”

“About three hours.”

“Where are we?”

“We're here. Thomas. We're home.”

The sound of metal scraping and chains cycling drowned out the constant screaming and thudding emanating from under the hood of the truck. The sun rose and a cascade of light filled the tunnel.

“Welcome to New Berlin.”

The truck slowed and the bouncing and jumbling ceased as wheels met smooth concrete and wondrous music full of strings and brass engulfed the tunnel. When the vehicle came to a halt a heavenly choir rang full of angelic voices. Thomas lumbered from the bed of the truck and shielded his eyes against the blinding light. As his eyes adjusted an army of men and women appeared and completely filled the tunnel in front of him.

They dressed in fine clothes and had bright smiling white faces. A group of children adorned in white robes held lit candles as they sang an ancient hymn. Behind them was a vast lit area full of bronze statues and polished train cars that mimicked ranch houses. Cobblestone paved walkways between the homes. At the center of it all was a large fountain adorned with marble men standing proud above the erupting jets of water. The high dome roof held an intricate mosaic and from Thomas's vantage could see the depiction of a beautiful blue sky circling round the brim.

In front of the army a straight backed man stood with arms open. His grinning face was covered in a well cropped black beard that was streaked with gray. His eyes were warm and their irises were the color of storm clouds. Upon his feet were fine shoes that were slightly scuffed.

Thomas was in a state of shock and confusion to his sudden change of surroundings but there was an instinctive push that pulsed through his body and sparked it to move. Thomas approached the man and the man embraced him.

The man broke the embrace and placed his hands upon Thomas's shoulders and the man looked onto his face and said with a smile. "You've arrived on a blessed day. Welcome home nephew."

Laughter and smiles and conversation. Jokes and stories and compliments and sarcasm and crying babies. Above blue sky and a god's face made of colored glass and painted stones. Below lengthy wooden tables filled with platters of food and pitcher of wine and ale and water. A man meandered table to table playing on a guitar and sang a song with a beautiful voice and people raised their steins and cups and joined him. Thomas sat with a broad smile on his face and he shoveled down chicken and ale. Next to him sat his supposed uncle and he clapped his hands and sang along with the song with a face broken by a large warm smile. Children ran from their chairs and started to dance around the musician. Thomas couldn't remember the last time he saw a child and quickly remembered that public education institutions are year round boarding schools that start at the age of three and end at the age of eighteen. That fact disgusted him and he knew that not even a minute ago that it didn't but the sight of smiling children surrounded by their mothers and fathers and family and friends certainly trumped the memories of cramped rooms full of bunk beds and endless hours trapped in a metallic and plastic room with a projector and a teacher berating you to memorize and memorize and memorize.

Thomas blinked and everyone around him was standing and swinging their drinks to and fro in unison as they sang the lyrics with the musician who was now standing on a table. Thomas stood as well and his uncle put his arm round his shoulders and Thomas tried to preempt the words as they were sung but only managed to mumble the majority of them. The symphony of drunken and happy voices filled their little city and each word hung suspended for an extra second as became trapped within the dome.

So hear those siren's call
And scream all you want
I will not hear what you have to say
'Cause I need freedom now
And I need to know how
To live my life as it's meant to be
And I will hold on hope
And I won't let you choke
On the noose around your neck
And I'll find strength in pain
And I will forge the way
I'll know my home when I'm free again

When the song ended everyone began to cheer and clap and Thomas fought hard to keep tears at bay. Frantically he filled his cup with more ale and began chugging it. A giant of a man with a full unkempt beard and long curly hair sat adjacent at the long wooden table witnessed Thomas's actions and filled his own stein full of ale and swallowed the contents in two gulps. The giant then slammed the stein down and pointed at Thomas and declared to everyone "The Stiff has challenged me to a drinking contest! Me, Cinsealach master of the amber drink!"

Someone called out deep within the building crowd. "But not of the red drink." The crowd burst out in a roar of laughter.

Cinsealach chortled with the crowd but composed himself and said with a smirk. "It's true. But as a true Christian my stomach and body can't forgive itself for drinking the blood of the lord like the rest of you cannibalistic heathens. I atoned for that sin laboriously and violently into the fountain as you all remember." The crowd laughed and heckled him for a moment. "But that is beside the point. For this newcomer, this company man, this stiff has challenged me, the great master of the amber drink, driver of the truck, and preserver of knowledge to a drinking contest!"

A thousand eyes fixated on Thomas as he straightened his back, fixed his tie, and checked his cufflinks before replying with a smile. "Last man standing wins?"

The bout lasted eighteen rounds. The last seven had become terrible sloppy as the contestants gained inebriation. During these rounds large portions of the ale was spilled onto faces and shirts completely missing their destinations. The contest ended when Thomas attempted to put his full weight on a chair and it gave way. Thomas faltered and tried to keep his footing and he began to churn his legs but wasn't able to regain his balance and fell clumsily into a line of plastic chairs. The crowd burst in a hysterical fit of laughter and cheers and it rained down upon him as he laid there feeling the cool cobblestone suck the warmth from his body. Cinsealach lumbered on top of a table and began yelling nonsense to the heavens while making hip thrusting motions at random

women within the crowd.

Thomas watched it all in a drunken haze with a grand smile upon his face. He blinked and a moment later he was floating past the smiling faces and a giant dancing on a table. He blinked again and he was sinking into a mess of pillows and blankets. Above him Gabby and his supposed uncle stood. Gabby yelled unintelligible words into his uncle's face while pointing down at Thomas. The string of consciousness snapped and a world of sensory and light faded to darkness and comfort and Thomas basked in it.

No dreams and if there were they were insignificant and were easily forgotten. Thomas awoke to unfathomable pain from inside his skull. Half dead he rose from the bed and lazily searched for a toilet. Before he resorted to urinating into a vase full of fresh wild flowers he found the bathroom and rushed inside and did his business. When he reached for the medicine cabinet hidden behind a mirror he hesitated as another man stared at him through the reflective glass. A man with messy hair, a soiled tie stained with dried ale, and sunken eyes full of agony peered back at him. Thomas ripped open the cabinet and retrieved the aspirin and downed two tablets with haste. He avoided looking at the stranger in the mirror again as he prepared the shower and when he understood that the temperature of the water wasn't going to rise past lukewarm he stepped in. A faint square red rash had formed on his left breast and Thomas traced it with a lazy finger.

A black tee shirt and a pair of jeans waited for Thomas on the tussled bed. He quickly changed into them and discovered a pair of clean white socks next to his shoes. He put them on as well and ventured into the next room.

When he walked into the kitchen he was greeted by his supposed uncle sitting at a dinner table with a book in one hand and a steaming coffee mug in the other. When he noticed Thomas standing there he put them both down and spoke with a smile. "Good morning sunshine! You had quite a night didn't you?" He rose from his chair and went to the cabinets above a porcelain sink. "Would you like some coffee? Shot of whiskey? A glass of absinthe? A tab of acid? A button of peyote? What'll it be? What's your poison?"

Thomas took a seat at the table and studied the book that his uncle was reading. He offhandedly responded. "Water is fine thank you." The words 'Brave New World' jumped out at him and itched his brain. Memories of hundreds of IDs and IPs being highlighted on a computer screen flashed in his head.

A glass of water was placed in front of him and Thomas said thank you once more. His supposed uncle looked at him inquisitively and asked. "Did you know that when you were born that the nurses called you The Boss?"

Thomas forced out a smile past the grimace of pain caused by the hangover. In his head a sarcastic voice whispered '*sure they did*' he quelled urge to repeat it out loud and instead said. "I didn't know that."

"They called you The Boss because you dwarfed the rest of the newborns. You were ten

pounds. A goddamn elephant child.

The staff joked about you walking out of your mother with a full beard and a pack of smokes clutched in your fist.” He reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. An accordion of clear plastic containing small pictures tumbled from it and with deft fingers he meticulously searched through the miniature album while he mumbled to himself. Then he squinted his eyes and nodded and removed two pictures from the protective plastic and slid them to Thomas.

The edges were frayed and their once white backs were gray from age. In one faded picture a fat baby with tufts of black hair atop his head was lain down on his back on a checkered blanket and dressed in a white gown. He looked at the camera with innocent eyes and an open mouth that was all gums. The other picture was of an exhausted young woman sitting on a hospital bed donned in a hospital sheet. She had piercing green eyes and tussled chestnut hair and in her arms she appeared to be holding a large white pupa with a pink face sticking out. Next to her on her left was a man with tired eyes and a relieved smile. His face was covered in stubble and his black hair was slicked with sweat. On her right was a excited smiling teenager with a pock marked face. Thomas stared at the woman and knew that he had seen her before.

“You were born a minute past midnight on July seventeenth two thousand and ten in St. Peter's hospital Albany New York. The man on the left is your father. He was a welder and machinist named Ed Donnelly. The woman in the middle is your mother. She worked as a teller at Bank of America her maiden name is Colleen Hammel. That handsome devil who has aged like wine on the right is your godfather and uncle. He's the leader of the NC and his name is Declan Hammel.”

Without looking from the picture Thomas said. “Well nice to formally meet you uncle Declan.”

Declan smiled and said. “Well nice to meet you too Thomas. You can keep the pictures.”
As

Thomas put the pictures in his pocket his eyes shot to the book on the table nervously. Declan took note and asked politely as he picked up the book. “Do you know of it?”

Thomas responded quickly. “I know that it is banned.”

“It was also banned in Ireland and Australia an eon ago for supposedly promoting promiscuity. Seeing as our American society today has no problem devolving into sexual filth I can't imagine that it is banned for that same reason.”

Thomas didn't hide the rolling of his eyes as his uncle feigned the lack of knowledge and responded. “Oh a slew of things for starters hatespeech, racism, sexism, classism, and inciting anti-American sentiments to start it off.”

Declan shook his head and took a sip of coffee before speaking. “Huxley’s masterpiece is not banned today for those reasons. This book is a warning, well it was a warning but it was ignored. It warned our ancestors of how populaces can be controlled through decadence and distraction. Through materialism and the use of pharmaceuticals for providing artificial

happiness.

It is banned because of the parallels you can draw between the artificial and soulless society he foresaw and the one we are living in today.” He looked into Thomas's eyes and witnessed the sense of uneasiness that was being inflicted behind the sockets. Thomas quickly broke eye contact and took a drink of water. His uncle rose from his chair once more and went to the bookcase next to a grand portrait of a proud man with an emotionless face and a white wig. Declan quickly scanned the tightly packed inventory and found what he wanted. With a slap he placed another book upon the table and asked Thomas. “Do you know what this book is?”

Thomas responded curtly. “1984.”

“Why is it banned?”

Irritation was tickling the words as Thomas spoke. “You know why it is officially banned.”

“I do.”

The capillaries under the skin of Thomas's face rushed with blood and he snarled out angrily. “Then why are you quizzing me? Why are you asking such questions to dredge up answers you already know? Here's a set a fuckin questions for you. First off why the fuck am I here? Second off, do you really expect me to believe that you are my uncle because you have some old pictures and have information on my parents you could easily access from the internet? And finally do you actually expect me to guzzle this indoctrinating anti-intellectual swill you're vomiting like the rest of your cultists? 1984 is banned because it romanticizes anarchist beliefs. It dehumanizes federal workers and smears federal constructs and institutions with unfounded libel. It is banned to prevent the creation of people like you. Not because of some trumped up set of false truths muttered by a madman living in an abandoned train car in a fucking sewer.”

Declan huffed a barely contained chuckle and said. “This is a friendly conversation Thomas. I'm just seeing how deep they planted their seed is all. I didn't mean to upset you.” He watched his nephew clench his jaw and grind his molars. With a smile he said. “You have your father's temperament.”

Thomas snorted and replied with words rich in sarcasm. “Of course I do and you would know because you're my uncle.”

Declan got up from his chair and with a smile said. “Let's take a walk. I'll show you around and you can see the entirety of the cult lair and witness what my mindless followers are like when they have hangovers.”

Thomas took a sip of water and rose as well and walked to Declan as he waited by the door with one hand gripped the handle.

The door slid open and a thousand needles shot through Thomas's pupils and sliced through his brain over and over again as they ricocheted off the inside of his skull.

Thomas grimaced and quickly brought his right arm to his eyes as he shied away from the light. All of a sudden it felt as his brain had become detached from the strings of nerves and spun wildly end over end within the confines of soup and bone. Eyes rolled and his torso leaned forward to attempt to release whatever demon dwell inside his body. Nothing came out save for the hideous noises of violent dry heaving. All the while Declan laughed and jeered playfully at his ailing nephew. After a few moments Thomas painfully forced himself to become accustomed to the hellish light as he squinted fiercely to ween and immunize his eyeballs to the onslaught of the billions of piercing needles attacking his pupils. Woozy and half blind he and his uncle began their stroll.

The first structure that they visited was a circular enclosure comprised of chicken wire and wooden beams. Thomas looked through the thin interlocking iron octagons and saw a pasture of green residing within. Precisely seventy nine brown rabbits chewed and hopped and screwed peacefully. Next to the large enclosed pen was a squared patch of freshly sodded grass with white lines dividing it. Declan informed Thomas that it was the football field and moved on. The second structure they visited was a large square building. At the base of it was the familiar shape of a train car but atop of it brick and wood additions had added another story. Inside Cinselach lay on the linoleum kitchen floor with a puddle of drool growing near his snoring mouth. Thomas and Declan climbed a set of spiral stairs to reach the second floor and once they had they found themselves flanked on each side by walls flooded with labeled shelves and the contents that they held. A myriad of books and DVD's and VHS's and CD's and flash drives and hard drives and external drives rested on their wooden planks above their white labels. Thomas's eyes scanned the names and saw that they were all banned but that didn't quell the feeling of awe from appearing within him. On one of the walls was a large mounted television screen and in the middle of the room sat two large brown leather sofas facing it. Declan softly told Thomas that he was standing in the movie theater and library of New Berlin. They left Cinselach to his slumber and exited on light feet. They strolled past small shacks that hummed with electricity and past wood stained porches with mute wind chimes dangling peacefully by frayed twine. Far away a woman sang and her voice melted into the sound of splashing water of the fountain. They left the town behind and strolled into a dimly lit tunnel with walls of rough stone and fractured concrete. A string of holiday lights lined the walkway and the clapping of their footfalls echoed and rang. They walked and walked. The tendons in Thomas's legs burned and the soles of his feet cried out for rest but still he strode on with his uncle. Time slipped and was lost and Thomas couldn't begin to grasp how long the trek in the tunnel was taking. Then after cresting an incline a beam of light shot through the dark.

Declan stopped and pointed at it and said. "There it is. There is freedom."

"There what is?"

"Go ahead Thomas take a glance to the other side."

Reluctantly Thomas trudged to the end of the tunnel and saw the quarter sized hole punctured through the limestone and cobble. He crouched down on his hunches and felt the cool of the stone against the side of his face as he drew his eye close to the origin of the beam. When

he was perfectly aligned his pupils quickly retracted and flooded his eyeballs with a film of tears. Then he saw it. The diving arch of the valley of green.

Tall golden grass and the purple buds of wildflowers. Starlings chattered and the locusts called. Foothills rode the horizon and the towers of ancient pines perched upon them against the blue. In Thomas's head he imaged it being the lichen riddled fur that rose from the thigh of some great resting beast god. The picture clouded for a moment and Thomas wiped away gathered tears clinging to the lashes on the under lip of his eyelid. Visions of lonely telephone poles and a long gravel driveway poured into him. He quickly glued his face against the stone once more and his eyes eagerly feasted on the world lost and forgotten. His body racked with unbridled sobs and a gentle hand fell upon his shoulder.

“We've all forgotten about that world Thomas. We've all been trapped within the confines of the sprawl. What you are seeing with your naked eye is something that hasn't been seen by a regular American in decades. An entire society caged in like rats. We've all been lost in the maze for so long that we forgot there was a world beyond the high walls. So distracted by materialism and vanity and decadence that we forgot that we had become rats. Those poor souls on the surface think that they are freethinking individuals living in a free society. But they are just creatures born within the cage and have had their eyes and minds shielded from any other thing outside of it. They have been conditioned not to see the walls of their enclosure. They have been conditioned to be swayed and to bend to authority. They have been poisoned to strive each day to keep themselves enslaved.”

Thomas ripped from the peephole to the world and briskly stood up and wiped away tears. “You are wrong. I could get a permit to leave the city. There are plenty of cities and towns out there that I can visit by plane or by train. I just didn't because I didn't want to...”

Declan's eyes were filled with sorrow and his voice held compassion as he spoke. “You may be able to go to the four great cities by bullet train or by plane but there are no windows for you to peer out. There's not even a windshield for there is no human pilot or conductor and once you get to Greater Chicago or Pacifica or Miami you won't be able to step foot outside the wall of false skyscrapers that border the city limits.”

Shaking his head and grinding his teeth Thomas sputtered out. “You're insane. It isn't illegal to leave the city limits. There are plenty of people living on the outside. Farmers, surveyors, miners, and for fuck's sake all the small rural towns.”

“All food is manufactured in factory farms within the ever growing city limits. All mining and other means of collecting natural resources is automated or shipped in on automated barges from third world nations living under the threat of drone strikes if they don't provide what we need. There are no rural towns they have been abandoned for close to two decades now. Only giant military compounds and vacation mansions owned by those who reap the benefits from your hard work. There possibly could be some outcrops of those who have escaped the reach of our captors and I hope there are.

As for the legality of being able to explore the outside world, it is paramount to the powers that be that nobody leaves the four great cities. Hell, just ask yourself how many people you know that have gone out to visit the wilderness.”

Thomas quickly searched the catacombs of his brain and found only gliding commercials full of smiling rock climbers and families clad in life jackets fishing on a boat. There was nothing else. Not one co-worker bragging about his camping trip nor one highlighted name speaking of nature in any way shape of form. Just fabricated faces on smartwindows. As that realization soaked in something deep within his ribcage roiled and his hand clenched into tight fists. “How did you do it? How did you make this?”

A smile broke across Declan's bearded face. “Sheer will and hard work and the thirst for freedom. Nothing else could have done it. No amount of complaining or shifting blame onto others could have made this tunnel. Only hard work and will. This two mile tunnel claimed two lives and god knows how many chisels and drills. We worked hard Thomas. So very hard. Nobody was going to hand us our freedom we had to sweat and bleed for it. Work has set us free. Work has set us free. Now come there is one last thing I want to show you.”

When they emerged from the mouth of the tunnel the town of New Berlin was alive with scurrying citizens filling backpacks with various trinkets and supplies. A team of five men armed with pickaxes and hammer drills marched past Thomas and Declan and were swallowed by the maw of darkness. Another small group of men banged away with hammer and nail as they constructed a podium of scrap wood near the town center. They waded through the smiles and laughter and productivity until they reached a wooden church with a high pointed steeple thatched with slate that scraped the cement ceiling. The back half the structure was missing as it collided into the wall of concrete. Declan threw open the twin oak doors strapped with black iron and they both strode in. Lines of stained wooden pews held men and women and children all with bowed heads and with hands clutched and mouths frantically moving with whispers. Plumes of white clouds of incense puffed up through grates in the marbled floor. Numerous oval portraits of proud men with white wigs stared with hard determined eyes and clenched jaws adorned each wall. Hanging from the ceiling was a man with a face wrought with melancholy and eyes full of defeat and a body full of wounds and a head crowned with bloody thorns. He stared down upon the chapel helpless as he lay suspended to a wooden cross with hands and crossed ankles nailed down. Where the wooden walls met concrete a hollow was formed by chisel and sander. An alter formed from rising marble steps and on the wall behind the stone plateau was a grand tapestry depicting the scene of a large group of stern faced men some with scalps donned with white others with brown and black but all with their faces turned forward in rapt attention and stared towards a man sitting at a desk littered with parchment. The tapestry was flanked on each side by two pieces of framed parchment full of audacious cursive writing. On each of the framed parchment a small brass plate held the title. The one on the left stated 'The Constitution' and the one on the right stated 'The Declaration of Independence'.

With eyes glued to figures immortalized in paint and oil Declan said. “This world wasn't always this way. It may have always been violent but it wasn't so bleak. Our country was built upon the lives of those who fought to give us freedom. True freedom. And for a period of time

there was. This is our religion, Thomas. We believe in it more than anything else. We pray for it every day. We strive for it with every breath and we will attain it tonight.”

Thomas climbed the steps to the stone alter and began skimming the tumbling cursive of The Constitution. Behind him Declan continued in a subdued tone. “The greatest victory that the Zionists and the Corporatist had ever achieved is the making of the discovery of truth into the emptiest of victories. With the control of the media on all fronts and through the use of monopolized democracy they quelled those who screamed and shouted for the American populace to wake up. True patriots became enemies of the nation. True heroes became terrorists. All through the use of driving narratives on every television station and through every online facet and through every school and college they turned a free and striving society into a gaggle of fools. Through these medians they plied a heavy presence of paid voices or fabricated ones to drown out those who spread the truth. A slew of media controlled false flag attacks appeared and became catalysts for the removal of the rights granted by the Constitution. The poison seeped in slowly but like clockwork our rights began to evaporate one by one and the world cheered and danced and celebrated it. All the while citizens that were aware of the attack screamed desperately in warning and panic but nobody could listen for their ears had been clipped by the years of yellow journalism and indoctrinating propaganda. Indoctrinated by driving narratives and crudely conceived lies masked as truth. All tricked by slavers disguised as those sworn to serve and protect.”

“Were you one of the screamers?”

“I wasn't Thomas. I was a young fool with a head full of lies and moral decay. Your father on the other hand saw the direction of where our world was plunging towards and did his best to steer it onto a safer trail.” He looked up at the grand tapestry and continued. “The last right to go was the freedom of speech and it was slain during the end of the hate speech movement and the beginning of that cycle's recession. It went down swinging. During this time colleges had become factories that squashed free thinkers into a pulp of crushed will and maimed initiative but on the opposite side they were exceedingly proficient at the manufacture of loyalists to whatever narrative that was being spouted during that five year period. Through the use of the media and internet these brain washed college educated shells attacked those that disagreed with their reprogrammed artificial worldview. They would claim that those that didn't agree with them were racists or homophobic or transphobic or misogynists or a slurry of other meaningless buzzwords that were pounded into their impressionable brains by their professors. Then the marches against hate speech began which quickly turned to violent riots against the nonconforming whites that opposed them. Over three hundred white males were murdered in a two day period spanning three major cities. The media did what it did best and spun the story against the true victims of the riots stating that they had instigated the violence by using racial slurs to incite the crowds. The internet swelled with artificial and human supporters of the banning of hate speech and if you were to oppose their view openly you were attacked on all fronts.

If you had a job your boss would receive hundreds of calls demanding the loss of your livelihood. If you had any embarrassing secrets or habits your internet provider would dig them up and hand them over to the rabid mob for you to be exposed publicly. The owners of so called

anonymous websites were also pressured by either money or blackmail or just flat out were supporters of the hate speech movement and they thrust the majority of their user base into the limelight and were subsequently ripped apart by their peers. It didn't take long before a federal bill was written up that banned the use of hate speech from all forms of public and private communication.

It was written broadly and didn't truly set specific parameters of what hate speech actually was so it potentially opened the door for an ever shifting ban of any sentiment that went against whatever driving narrative that was in place for that year. Before the bill even made it to the senate it was estimated that two million men ages from eighteen to thirty were outed as hate speakers and had already been vilified and ostracized openly. Ten of those poor men got together and focused their anger. The bill passed the senate with all in favor and waited on the president's desk for the final signature. On that day ten bombs exploded across the Colombia campus and ten armed men stormed into a local news station and executed five sociology professors on a live feed before they themselves were gunned down. The president signed the bill and on the first day three million Americans were arrested and charged with hate speech. Because of a secret law attached to the bill it gave the federal government the powers to seize all property owned by the perpetrators of hate speech and to ensure that nobody could complain about this clear overreach a secret gag order was also applied and if it was breached then an automatic punishment of fifteen years in prison would be charged. Thousands of books and movies and songs were banned or rewritten and altered to fit within the parameters of the new law. The second day all internet writings and video publications were scoured through to meet the hate speech standards. Hundreds of thousands of videos were expunged and thousands of websites were outright taken down. Another six million were arrested and charged with hate speech. FEMA displacement camps were quickly turned over to Homeland Security and were opened to be used as reeducation camps for the sudden influx of so called criminals. On the third day forty five universities, four major newspaper buildings, three reeducation camps, and twenty five various federal buildings were burned to the ground by so called terrorists. The corpses of professors, bankers, journalists, police, lawyers, judges and anyone else donning a federal ID card hung from lamp posts. On the fourth day Martial law was enacted and the national guard and army were called in. A media blackout ensued and fire engulfed the horizon and the night sky rang out with machine guns and laments of death and misery. Your parents died that day in Albany as they were gunned down by a drone after they had burned down a federal courthouse with fifty feds locked inside. The following week the millions that fought for freedom and liberty were either systematically detained or executed. Then there was silence and only whispers. During the calm the television stations and internet were turned back on and flooded the ears and eyes of those that listened and saw with poisonous words and doctored images painting those that fought for their constitutional rights as terrorists and traitors. The sudden influx of propaganda worked wonderfully and neighbors and friends and family members turned in those still fighting or still screaming. The one chance that America had was gone. The age of true tyranny and slavery began and all those with voices to scream had their tongues cut out. All those with fists to fight had their hands lopped off. All those that had heart and spine were drawn and quartered.

All that was left was the whisperers in the dark and the stoics shell shocked in horror. And they watched their sons and daughters and friends and family stride down the path of unholy conformity hand in hand. They watched them place the manacles on their own wrists with smiles

on their faces. They couldn't do anything but watch and weep.”

A pig like snort came from Thomas and he spewed a flurry of words dripping with condescension. “Just because you claim that you are fighting for these ancient rights given to us by ghosts while killing innocents doesn't make you a freedom fighter. It does indeed make you a terrorist.”

Declan's face grew red with anger and his mouth opened to lash Thomas but instead he snapped it shut and exhaled and continued. “Millions were executed in the camps when they refused to comply with the strict syllabus forced upon them. Their corpses were stripped naked and dumped into unmarked plastic coffins which in turn were then stacked one on top of each other and placed on barges and dumped into the cold depths of the nearest ocean. Seeing as most of those that died or were incarcerated resided in rural areas Monsanto and its subsidiaries quickly set up shop with massive greenhouses and livestock farms around the outskirts of the major cities. Those that owned land and were not charged with hatespeech were forced to sell their property through a skewed version of the immanent domain law. Those that refused to sell were quickly removed by the now fully militarized police force. Some organized and fought back but were quickly annihilated. It wasn't before long that all rural townships and neighborhoods were dismantled and left millions of refugees scrambling towards the cities. New housing and federally funded businesses sprouted up and effectively expanded the borders of the sprawl. Cities melded into one another. The only work available was through jobs in service or janitorial or security through the NSA. There was only a small set number of openings in each department so most resorted to living off federally funded structured loans that provided apartment housing and food but with high interest rates. After the majority of the population was hopelessly indebted to the federal government great construction projects were initiated and had hordes of potential workers clambering and crying out to be hired in order to erase the debt they had racked up. The government hired them all with meager wagers and put them to work. During the next five years massive construction projects were taken on and completed. The National Hyperloop, The Hand That Holds the World, The Pillars of Freedom, and the conglomeration of the great cities. Those are the most renown but the greatest things created were the projects that went unnoticed. The construction of great communication hubs and server farms and specialized manufacturers used solely towards the creation of automated and remotely controlled machines were erected. The hard working slaves to debt unwittingly spurred off the next golden age of efficiency. After the construction projects were finished the masses weren't any closer to where they started. They desperately tried to climb out of the ever deepening hole of debt but with each quarter inflation would rise and taxes would hike and made the walls of the pit slick and smooth. And when the machines started marching out of the newly built factories and taking even the most menial of work away from the populace it had become quite apparent of how irrelevant the working class was to this brave new world being thrust upon them. Those who protested for workers' rights were tossed into the reeducation camps to either be rewired or to disappear. Federal stipends were handed out to every citizen every two weeks and solidified the citizen's need for the government in order to survive. At this point the populace had been culled to roughly one hundred million.

The white population through imprisonment, flight, or execution had plummeted to being only a sliver of what it once was and effectively became a minority within the nation it built fifteen years ahead of schedule. Through the use of aggressive propaganda family ties were severed as a

new generation of interbreeding commenced. Christianity was all but abandoned as churches were plied with steep taxation. Apathy became the new chapel. Whatever smiling face on the screen became the day's saint. Whatever corporate haircut selected into the oval office was the new pope. And above in the shattered heavens the federal government rested on the stolen throne and it became the end all be all. The giver of the cramped apartment and taker of the backyard. The producer of genetically and chemically cured meals and the killer of things that grew without the hand of man or appendage of machine. The builder of steel and concrete obelisks and the blinder of the rolling green hills and valleys cut by rushing rivers. The voice of approved words and empty ideals and ripper of tongue and mind. The soothing protector of security and brainless comfort and the destroyer of your friends and family and heritage and culture. It taketh and taketh and taketh and taketh and taketh and giveth only slavery. Slavery with shackles made of artificial lust and expected compliance. Clay slaves crafted with empty heads and empty souls. Molded by hellish hand and stamped with a serial number."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I'm a man of my word. I made a promise a long time ago to keep you and your sister safe. I'm trying to hold up half of the bargain."

"I was safe and my sister is safe. Hell she's a principal now."

"You were raised to be bait Thomas. You are the son of a denounced leader in the bloodiest war America has ever witnessed. You are nowhere near being safe. And that woman you think is your sister is your handler. A goddamn profiler that has ensured your transition to this moment has been smooth. She will be livid to know that it hasn't. Your real sister is missing. I lay awake some nights imagining her living under a fake name in a cramped apartment. Then when I fall asleep I'm plagued with the same nightmare of a lone plastic box on the bottom of the sea draped in kelp and barnacles."

"You live in a sad deranged little world. A world I want no part of *uncle*."

"We live in the same world *nephew*. The difference is they gave you blinded eyes and shook your head up with a soup of poison. I'm just force feeding you the antidote to your affliction. Granted it is a crash course but there's so much to tell. So much more to explain but right now we don't have the time."

Outside the chapel a set of trumpets called rife with exuberance. A bright smile slid onto Declan's face and said. "It's finished." With that he briskly turned heel and strode towards the doors. Hard judging eyes pierced Thomas from every angle from the surrounding portraits. A feeling of nakedness and loathing filled him and he quickly half jogged to catch up with his uncle.

They left the chapel and walked abreast in the direction of the tunnel's opening. As they approached Thomas was left wide eyed as a grand podium had been erected next to the waiting maw of the tunnel. A large grayscale tapestry of his father's stern face hung behind it. In front of

the wooden podium were rows and rows of standing men and women with backpacks strapped to their backs and hands clutching the tiny palms of their children.

Four trumpet players stood proud atop the podium and sprayed their underground world with the calls of victory. The rash on Thomas's breast began to burn with a dull ache. He melted into one of the human columns and Declan climbed the steps and was showered with a thunder of cheers. He reached the square block of the podium and gripped the edges of it. With a slow movement he held up his right hand and the crowd and trumpets crept to silence.

His voice rang with pride and gumption as he spoke to his kin and they all stood with eyes damp with tears and grand smiles plastered upon their faces. "Fellow brothers and sisters and sons and daughters I call to you! Three years is a short time span, a fraction of a single person's life, barely a second in the life of a whole people. And yet the past three years somehow seemed longer than many decades of the past. A very important historical event is about to blossom within them. The rebirth of a race and society formerly threatened by extinction!" The crowd roared and Declan waited for the energy to subside before continuing. "This is an incredibly eventful time, and often seems like a lofty dream for us, for we have had the opportunity not just to witness but also to grant the kindling fire to birth it. Through the gauntlet of genocide and adversity we stand here as the future forefathers and mothers of the American Free State! Free of debt slavery! Free of the constant prying eyes wishing us imprisonment and death! Free of the locks on our minds and clamps on our tongues! Free to raise our children and to build our homes! That freedom begins tonight!"

The crowd erupted in raucous cheers and clapping and many screamed the word 'freedom' at the top of their lungs.

Declan waited for his followers to quiet and continued. "For years we have suffered. For years we have hid and took flight from those who wanted nothing more than to take our heads. For years we have watched the world around us become nothing more than a slavers utopia. We are the revolutionaries by default for we have opted out of a society that demands complete compliance. But in the eyes of those who live in willful ignorance we are quickly spurned and categorized as terrorists. My friends are we terrorists?"

The word "NO" erupted and bounced and recycled off the walls.

"We have planted not one bomb nor shot one man and yet we are called monsters and murderers. Are we the monsters and murderers of this world?"

The crowd pummeled the words "NO" once again.

"If we are not then who is?"

"THEY ARE!"

"Yes they are. They are the monsters that hunt you from the skies. They are the monsters who study and judge you're every word. They are the monsters who have slid into the skin of

your neighbors and friends and family. They are swine with angels' wings sewn on whispering soothing lies that poison your soul. They are the hellhounds brandishing badges hunting you down and slaying you but at the same time telling you that they are there to protect you. They are false idols that proclaim to their servants that they are the givers and creators of everything in this world and there is nothing else without them. They are the whispering voice in the back of your head telling you what to do and how to do it. They are the guiding hand in what to buy and when to buy it. They are the raised fist and rallying cry demanding you to hate and why to hate them. They are the eyes that you once owned telling you what to see and when to turn away. They are the forked tongue in your mouth twisting out words and phrases with their stamp of approval. They are the clipped ears on your head that once were able to listen to the truth but now only allow the ocean of lies and inane excuses to reinforce your tainted worldview."

Declan's eyes roved the crowd and found and fixated on to Thomas's face. Roiling uneasiness inflicted itself onto Thomas and he squirmed under the gaze. Declan's voiced lost its bite and spoke gently. "They are the red hot brand that sears your soul with their number rather than your name. They are the knife that cuts out your thro-

A faint pop from somewhere far away and a spray of red and gray spattered on the canvas behind Declan's head. His left hand gripped the podium while the rest of his body went limp and when his legs failed he twisted off the rise and landed face down in front of the crowd and exposed the fist sized hole in the back of his skull. A mash of chest drumming bangs and heart wrenching screams of terror formed a nightmarish chorus that echoed from every direction. The crowd around him descended into panic and sprinted towards the mouth of the tunnel. Thomas didn't move a muscle. His eyes fixated on the hole in the back of his uncle's skull. Unconsciously a flurry of frantic words escaped quivering lips. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

With the back of his shaking hands he wiped away the welling tears and spittle and turned to face the myriad of chaos that was unfolding before him. A swarm of black death descended on their fleeing prey. Mechanically marching and armed with rifles the black garbed peace officers mowed down everything that drew breath. Bloodied women knelt clutching the mangled lifeless bodies of their children and then themselves were quickly executed. A mountain of drained moaning bodies formed a growing ocean of blood as they lay twitching and weeping at the mouth of the tunnel. A titan stood defiant amongst the human hill with arms wide with a chest pocked with bleeding bullet holes. With a mouth foaming with red spittle a bellowing howl escaped from Cinselach as he cried out "For mortals vanished from the day's sweet light I shed no tear, rather I mourn for those who day and night live in death's fear." Red mist erupted from two fresh holes made in his belly and the giant flinched and wavered but did not fall. Crimson flowed like a fountain from his mouth and he gurgled out a string of words. "Hanging from the beam, slowly swaying such the law, gaunt the shadow on your green, Shenandoah, the cut is on the crown, lo john brown, and the stabs shall heal no more."

A single shot rang and the giant collapsed lifeless atop the writhing pile. Black boots stamped upon grimacing pallid white faces as the peace officers mounted the corpse mound and ventured into the tunnel. Flashes of light and the echoed sounds of death sang from the black void. A hundred yards away Gabby and a man with an arm hanging by a tendon shepherded a group of weeping children

towards the chapel. A tall black skinned man dressed in a smart suit donning a grand smile strutted past the shifting line of extermination and the twitching fallen to approach Thomas. He outstretched a hand and Thomas dumbly stared at it for a moment and then with a shaking hand reached out and weakly grasped it.

Johnson's words reached Thomas's ears in a haze. "Good work Tommy. Let's go grab your things. We leave in a few minutes after our boys clean up the rest of these white rodents."

Thomas didn't respond for his mind was lost in a world far away to shield himself from the horror all around him. Gliding on the razor's edge of consciousness his legs churned and set off in the direction of his uncle's home and Johnson followed. Peace officers around him stalked to maimed men women and children still writhing about on the blood stained cobblestone as their bodies and minds desperately clung to the last thread of life. Swift bullets to their skulls ended their struggles. For a moment the sounds of terror ceased and all that was heard was the faint clapping of boots upon stone. But the string of peace broke as shrieks of panicked fright and cracks of gunfire filled the air. Bellows of smoke rose from the chapel and spread out like rolling storm cloud against the ceiling. As they walked they came upon the rabbit pen with its wooden beams engulfed by fire. Thomas glanced inside and saw tiny whirling suns slinging round in rapid circles all screaming in unison as they desperately searched for an exit within their enclosure. Johnson laughed and laughed and thudded Thomas's back with comradely.

Flanked by murders and maniacs Thomas breached the surface of the world and was hailed with a shower of clapping and cheers from a crowd of fat sweat drenched TSA agents and mongoloid looking Peace officers. As he stepped out of the mouth of the sewer and into the stinking stale air and blinding neon lights a rat faced EMT draped a blanket over his shoulders and thrust a paper cup in each of his hands. One full of water the other full of yellow pills. The rodent spoke and it said. "Down em, it'll help your skin and bone morrow out." Thomas did what he was told. As he had always done. His sister emerged from crowd and embraced him and she told him that she was so glad he was safe. With a weak voice he asked her if she remembered her electric china doll that she played with as a child and she told him that he needed rest. They took him home in a fancy hoverboat and handed him the keys. When he got inside his apartment it had been refurnished with expensive floors and sparkling new appliances. Thomas ignored it all and went to the freshly stocked bar and drowned out the burning visions of fire and blood and thunder with tumbler after tumbler after tumbler until his legs ceased to carry weight and the weeping turned to laughter. The world went dark and Thomas basked in it.

VIII

Swirling white stars spun in an unintelligible chaos against a canvas of black. Screams of horror and pain and terror danced on the wind. Thomas clasped his hands over his ears but the horrible sounds crept through the spaces between his fingers and echoed round and round in his head. Hot tears burned his cheeks as they tumbled. A biting cold whipped and raked his naked body. Strength failed him and mud met his knees and it gripped him into a freezing embrace and began to slowly pull him into the earth and down a gradual slope. He began to slide slowly down down down and he whipped his head in confusion. The terror, the bloody terror his blasted eyes rendered.

Despair sunk into his chest as he peered down into the valley that he was being dragged into. His mouth open to scream but the only sounds that escaped his throat were a string of words that could only be repeated. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." His terrified eyes captured the image of an army of naked and muddied and weeping and smiling men and women and children with crimson numbers tattooed on their faces and backs. Those poor souls mechanically trudged through the mud with legs rising and falling in unison. Monstrous Hellhounds the color of night with blood drooling from their open jaws shadowed the poor souls as they trotted pathetically in their circle. Their eyes were the color of fire and they hungered for flesh and pain and torment from the livestock that they oversaw. Up in the sky were pigs with black wings and leather whips who cackled and squealed and struck the hellhounds on their rumps with thunderous cracks. But this did not cause Thomas to claw at the mud to attempt to climb up in an opposite direction. The naked bruised and battered bodies trudging in their circle did not cause his soul to cry out in terror. The snapping jaws that hungered for death did not cause his heart to leap from its cage and into his throat. The sadistic swine of flight did not send twinges of panic down through his spinal cord and into and limbs to cause them to flail uncontrollably. It was the eye.

It was the colossal eye in the sky. It was the eye that hovered in the heavens and all the stars began to revolve around it as it peered down unto the primordial mess in the mud. At its pupil there was a black hole and at its iris was a kaleidoscope of galaxies and nebulae crashing into each other causing a constant barrage of heightened light the color of blue and purple and yellow and green all smashed onto a divine tapestry of reckoning and judgment that no stringent mind could compartmentalize nor comprehend for it foretold the future of gravity and the universe and the consequences and brutality of playing by its rules. Thomas desperately attempted to dissect the meaning or cause of the creature or deity and the iris that it bore but was only able to clutch to simple base emotions. He saw love and hatred in it. He saw chaos and order in it. But most of all he saw wrath and slavery in it. It was the high father. It was god himself. It was the divine creator. It was the all seeing eye and it demanded hierarchy and obedience above everything else.

Thomas neared the base of the hill and closer to the bottom of the valley. Within the trudging circle he eyed a muddied naked man that had ceased all movement and stood still with a crooked spine and a head lulled and eyes to the ground. After a moment the living statue shot

two fists in the air but kept his face to the ground as he cried out with a voice full of defeat and sorrow. “We are living in an orwellian police state! Can't you fools see what is going on? Can't you fools see that we are slaves! Wake up!”

The army stopped its march and faced the man. A handful of other men put their fists up. One with a voice marred with hatred and pestilence cried out. “Our leaders are bought by corporate money! We do not live in a democracy we live in a perpetual oligarchy! The two party system is only in place to keep the masses split in two. Divide and conquer is the name of their game! They are poisoning our children with endless distractions and materialism!”

The circle collapsed into a conglomerate mess and all the dirt streaked faces turned and stared at the men with the raised fists.

“Monopolies and inflation have held our wallets hostage and demeaned our worth to less than what you would scrape off your boot. It is wage slavery! Then the taxes hit and the sliver that we have left is just enough to pay for rent in an undersized apartment! Hell, even taxes are thievery our so called leaders don't even tell us where our hard earned money goes! I'll tell you where it goes my friends, our sweat stained dollars goes directly into the endless pockets of those who own us!” A cheering erupted from the now convulsing ball of flesh. Fists were shooting up rapidly. All the swine quickly stopped badgering the hounds and zipped over to the original man that had caused the scene and began hovering over him like vultures ready for a feast.

“The use of false flag attacks are used to spread fear throughout the populace. Through fear they have gained more control. Through the blood and bodies and silvered forked tongues they have gained more control. Through a national network of media outlets used as a mouthpiece they convince and deceive us. They bombard us with lies and half-truths all of it laden with subliminal propaganda. Through the guise of multiculturalism you have blamed all the ails of society on one so called privileged race yet they are in the same mess as we all are. They are a mere scapegoat!” The cheering was louder than thunder and half of the muddied population now had their hands raised. From nowhere a massive black winged pig cradling a long black scythe swooped down and joined his hovering brethren. Thomas then noticed something very strange with the largest pig. Its head was shaped like a man's and its face was missing the long snout. Then the pig turned its massive head just enough and Thomas finally got a good look at the beast and instantly he wish he hadn't. The hog had Johnson's face and it held a sickening look of depraved excitement and happiness as he smiled a smile full of white teeth and yellowed tusks.

The heavens above began to rumble and growl and then a deep bellowing horn called. The massive hog bearing Johnson's likeness pointed his scythe at the original troublemaker and then swine swooped down and landed in the mud amongst their slaves and began to calmly whisper to the horde of muddied men and women while the hounds darted over to those with fists raised and ripped them to the ground with hungry jaws and dragged them away from the circle.

Two of the larger pigs then picked the instigator up by his fists and lifted him up into the air with legs wheeling about. The rest of the muddied slaves began to lower their hands and fidget nervously but it didn't take long before forgetfulness and distraction eased their troubled minds

and they began to laugh and dance and fuck with the whispering swine before setting back onto track and continued its never ending journey of the circle once again. The swine's whispers increased in volume and eventually drowned out the screams from the defiant man in midair and those being disemboweled on this sidelines. While being held aloft by the two burly swine a third swooped up and took the muddied man by his head and pried his mouth open with a hoof and buried its jaws around the man's tongue. Two legs stained with mud kicked and writhed in agony and blood poured down out of his mouth like an opened faucet that traveled down his chest and onto the ground where the hellhounds greedily lapped it up. Then the fiendish pig spat the mangled tongue into its owners face which tumbled through the air and down into the eager bellies below. Thomas wanted to look away from the grotesque scene but his eyes refused to focus on anything else. With his gaze locked on the tongueless man suspended in the air with arms horizontally straightened and legs crossed at the ankle Thomas knew what came next. The body fell gracefully for a moment but met the ground with a bone snapping crack. Then there were only the howls of victory and the sound of tearing flesh and snapping bones. The great eye above pulsed with white light emanating from its iris and the swine squealed and danced in the air.

Thomas felt that his limbs was no longer confined and he raised himself up onto shaking legs. Terror clutched at him so he began to sprint away from the circle and from the horror into the wasteland of mud. Lightning scoured the horizon. Thomas blinked and found himself flanked on each side by farmhouses and churches being eaten alive by laughing heads of fire. He began to scream and beg as he ran through the gauntlet. Pain sliced into his shoulders and he cried out and saw the pair of hooves dug into his flesh. The pig began to squeal and snort and chuckle as it said "Where in the hell do you think you're goin goy?!"

Thomas desperately sputtered out his two cents. "I don't belong here. I don't belong here please let me go I'll do anything. Just let me be free please I beg you."

The pig squealed and snorted again and said "Free? Nothing in this country is free boy. Now we're going to set you up right so you can earn a nice living. Get yourself a nice apartment and a nice box of toys and things that taste and feel real real good! You'll do just fine if you keep your head down and your tongue locked up and keep your life movin forward." And with that he dropped Thomas off into the filth in front of large pristine desk of mahogany and gold. Behind it sat a pig with spectacles that rested at the end of his snout. Its beady eyes scanned Thomas up and down.

The beast then squealed out "Name and age."

Thomas answered mechanically "Thomas Donnelly, thirty two."

The beast looked him up and down again then said. "Are you a good boy Tommy? You're not like your parents or your uncle are you now? You will play by the rules?"

"Yes sir I'm a good goy. I will do what is asked and what is needed."

The pig's lips curled back into a smile. "Good, good. I don't like trouble makers Tommy

boy. You have seen what happens to those who don't behave haven't you? You have seen where I put them haven't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Those traitors didn't even deserve a trial did they?"

"No sir. They were traitors and terrorists."

"Had to even end the runts. The seed was already planted. Gotta nip it in the bud. Gotta make sure nothing else sprouts up. You were down there for a while Tommy I hope they didn't plant a seed somewhere in you."

"I understand sir. There's no age limit or minimum for being a traitor to our beautiful nation and no sir I am not a traitor. There is no seed of dissent within me. I do not share any of their disgusting views. I love my country and I do what I'm told not matter what the cost or reason. I'm a good American sir."

The pig leaned back into its leather chair made of the hide of man and kicked up its hooves and said. "I hope so, I wouldn't want to give you to those hounds. They are truly animals." It opened a drawer and pulled out a fat cigar and began to tut on it and thin tendrils of black smoke twisted out of his snout. "I think you could very useful Thomas. Very useful indeed. Always need a sub servant with a quick mind. I think I'll make you a fourteen how's that sound?"

Thomas's heart jumped and his voice was filled up with joy and pride. "Yes sir that would be wonderful! I won't let you down!"

"Good good." It paused and pulled the pipe from its mouth and with its free hoof clicked on an intercom that Thomas could not see from the ground. The pig cleared its throat and said. "Degenerate whore, will you please send in Johnson." An inaudible crackled voice responded from the intercom and the pig then said "Yes the fourteen. Bring the fourteen."

Behind Thomas the sound of door swinging open caused him to turn around to see Mr. Johnson striding through an arched hallway that carried into its own horizon. His fine black shoes clicked as they slapped against the black and white tiles that stretched into the infinite. In one hand Johnson held a red hot brand and in the other was a bulging money sack. Johnson's ebony face split in two as a strange smile broke upon it. Thomas couldn't decipher if the smile was either over joyous or down right malicious.

The pig put his hooves together in front of him and rolled each half against each other making a clacking noise and spoke down to Thomas. "Mr. Donnelly are you ready to become a fourteen?"

"Yes sir. I truly truly am. I've wanted this for as long as I can remember."

The pig grinned from ear to ear and nodded to Mr. Johnson. Then in an instant there was searing pain that sparked from his spine and rushed up through nerve endings through his brain and into his eyes and boiled them.

With a panicked gasp and flailing limbs Thomas was ripped from the depths of the hellish nightmare. Two shaking hands dug their fingers into his horror stricken face. Body slick with piss and sweat and a mouth frothing with a string of curses he struck at the soiled wet sheets that clung to the skin of his calves and thighs. Thomas slithered from the womb of filth and onto the clean hardwood floor. On newborn calf legs he rose shaking with knees bucking and when he had enough confidence he began his journey towards his only saviors as they lay waiting in their glass prisons. Feet meandered and his body leaned against the walls as he broke into an awkward gait towards his refurbished kitchen. Fresh memories full of screams and fire and music and laughter and death descended upon him. The cap gripped too tightly to the neck of the whiskey bottle and in a hurried panic it was ripped off and gashed a deep line into the skin of his palm. Wasting no time to drown out the world of fire and faces filling around him he brought the bottle to his sputtering mouth with shaking hands. The rusted iron taste of blood mixed with the burn as it coursed down his throat and into his belly. For a moment his ears didn't ring full of signs of lives just known and gone and were instead full of his labored heaving. Thomas closed his eyes and listened to the pounding of his heart and his hitched breaths. When he opened his eyes to grab a rag to wrap around his hand a chaos had enfolded in his kitchen as a mess of blazing comets shot across the floor in wild circles. The smell of charred flesh and fur lofted into his nostrils. Piercing screams of fright and agony erupted from everywhere. Thomas snapped his eyes close and held them tight. With two shaking hands he brought the bottle to his lips and like a babe he suckled it until the smell and screams slowly melted away. He drifted out of that world and into another.

Thomas dreamed of being in the chapel with his uncle. On the walls the stern faced men in the portraits argued with each other and pointed down at him. A group of weeping children huddled around Gabby on the alter. Thomas asked Declan why they were crying and he said that they wept because they missed their parents and that they wanted to see trees and birds and rivers but knew that they wouldn't. The walls began to quake and the wooden doors strapped with black iron began to bulge and splinter. Choking black smoke poured up through the grates. Declan solemnly shook his head and said with great sorrow. *We were so close. So close. All ruined because of you. I wish I could take it all back. I want to take it all back.*

Thomas awoke to his sister shoving his left shoulder over and over. Her face was pulled into disgust as she looked upon her brother sitting in a puddle of whiskey and blood.

His sister spat out. "Clean him up."

Two pairs of rough hands ripped him upwards to stand on weak legs. His knees buckled but did not fall and then he felt hooves dig into his armpits. His head lulled side to side and looked into the faces of the two hogs holding him aloft. Thomas then looked to his sister and

asked with consonants and syllables forging together. “Do you r-remember the doll you loved? I'm s-sorry we had to leave it behind.”

She shook her head and said in a pained voice. “What did they do to you Tommy?”

Thomas let his head roll back and a flood of laughter spewed out. Then his body floated past his bedroom and into the bathroom then he was gently leaned against the cool wall of the shower. A heavenly automated voice asked. “Warm shower at this hour Mr. Donnelly?”

A hard voice behind him said. “Cold.” A hoof plastered a sticky white pad against the square black wound on his breast and the muscles beneath it began to ache.

Then a rain of frozen spears broke against his skin. Thomas huddled into the corner and grunted with each strike. Sickness rose and he lurched forward and vomited towards the drain. He kicked out at the piles of clumped mucus that refused to go down. Ten minutes passed and through the clouded glass door two burly shapes formed. The door opened and two homeland security officers reached in and dragged Thomas out. In a rage Thomas batted their hands away and backed away into his bedroom where his finest suit and pants and bow tie waited on his stark mattress. One of the bastards nodded towards the outfit and Thomas slowly put it on. Once fully clothed they escorted him out of the bedroom and into his kitchen where his sister was enjoying a red white and blue drink in a martini glass as she leaned against the marble counter. She quickly downed it and clapped her hands together and said with a smile. “Well look at you handsome. All cleaned up and rearin to go!”

Thomas's world was still in a haze and asked with a tongue tripping. “Where are we going?”

“To the commemoration of the hero of the free world. Now let's head out we don't want to be late for your big night.”

They all walked out the front door and were met by his new black hoverboat waiting in the driveway. Behind it a mash of clay colored faces mechanically strode on the sidewalk with their brown eyes glued to little square projections coming from their Pro-J's. Dress shoes clacked against the concrete steps as he descended. He looked at the sky and saw the ripped gray cotton tufts all jumbled up and riding with slow currents blocking out the wondrous blue beyond. One of the Homeland officers strode up and opened the passenger door and Thomas filed in. Once all were inside the beast hummed to life and took flight. When they were high enough they entered a new universe of giant smiling faces and logos streaming across shimmering smart screens. Thomas lowered his window and stuck his out to look down to see a giant populace of ants circling in mud with square barges full of pigs and hellhounds snorting and howling down to them through megaphones. Thomas turned his head from it all and looked at the swine draped in a royal blue uniform deftly handing the steering wheel. Then he whipped his head round to see two hogs sitting in the backseat peacefully checking whatever it was on their Pro-J's.

With a shaking voice Thomas asked the pig in a sharp black dress “Are you sending me back to school when this is over?”

It gently placed a hoof on his hand and said with his sister's voice. "Don't worry about that now Tommy."

Containing his horror Thomas leaned back his seat and closed his eyes again but did not find solace nor rest. He laid there for a few moments before the pit of his stomach rose into his lungs as the hoverboat descended. He opened his eyes and peered out the window to see a platinum winged helmeted god rising past him. He knew instantly where they arrived. The Gershon opera house. It was once the headquarters of a national electrical provider but turned into a stage for all the important happenstances decades ago. When the hoverboat landed the windows were bombarded by the flashes of photographs from bloated floating black spheres gliding to and fro. When Thomas exited the vehicle and raised his arm to protect his eyes his sister clamped both arms into hers and guided him down the red carpet.

Slithering out between her clenched teeth she said. "Smile goddammit."

Thomas smiled.

Thomas didn't remember entering the building and he didn't remember eating the three course meal plied with drinks. Opening and closing he felt his palms slick with sweat. A restless stomach churned and threatened to eject the slurry of steak and champagne that roiled within it. The bow tie round his neck felt like a noose and it took a silent determination to not loosen it. Someone far away was talking about nothing which made the crowd around Thomas erupt into laughter followed by thunderous clapping. His eyes roved to the podium and witnessed a straight backed man with a cleanly cropped beard and a hole in his forehead staring back into him with piercing gray eyes. A fountain of pain erupted from the depths of his ribcage and he quickly snapped his eyes shut and brought his hands to his mouth in order to keep from crying out. When he opened them Deutch was at the podium with his fat spewing to the sides of it and he was prattling on in his dreadful nasal laden voice about civic duty and the ails of racism and how we all are the defenders of the world. Behind him Johnson silently shadowed a few feet behind with the grandest of smiles on his face.

"Let us mark this day as a day of victory for we have prevented another impending terrorist attack from occurring in our utopia. We have stopped evil from destroying our freedom and liberty. We have stopped evil from poisoning our people with racist and misogynistic propaganda. With one fell swoop we have ended white supremacy in the united states forever!"

For everyone else in the hall it was riveting and they all sat in rapt attention. Unconsciously Thomas's eyes began to scan the brainless crowd and with dread he witnessed them transform into naked muddied bodies laughing and cheering and clapping as they sat manacled to their bolted down chairs. With eyes wide he gasped as the pigs appeared in the attendance snorting and gorging on their plates. Slowly Thomas turned round in his seat and looked towards the exits and sure enough a handful of hell hounds patrolled with gaping maws dripping with crimson gruel. He shot back around and peered up at the black stone alter to see a large pig at the podium tutting on a cigar. In its left hand it held his uncle's detached head aloft by pinching its hooves into his scalp. Behind the swine stood a large boar with black wings and it looked at Thomas with an

inquisitive look and a cocked head.

The pig at the podium held the decapitated head high and with its free hoof pointed at Thomas and spoke. “EVERYONE GIVE A BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR OUR HERO AND EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR, THOMAS DONELLY!”

Thomas sat frozen in shock as the ocean of clapping and cheering crashed upon him. The pig that sat next to him elbowed him in the ribs and yelled into his ear. “GO ON UP TOM!”

With that he stood and looked to the ceiling and saw galaxies and nebulae colliding in a great iris and quickly decided it was best to keep his eyes on the ground. But that was only the lesser of two evils for as his feet trudged they splashed with each step as a shallow layer of blood covered the black and white checkered floor. It took great effort to quell the quick rise of a frantic scream as he climbed the mound of bullet riddled corpses of his brethren in order to get onto the great obsidian alter. Thomas slowly approached the pig at the podium and it gently placed his uncle's head into shaking hands. Tears freely flowed from his eyes and it took everything in his power to push down the urge to completely lose his composure and mind.

The pig then embraced Thomas and whispered in his ear. “You earned this Tommy boy.”

The head felt heavy in his hands and when he blinked it was gone and replaced with a trophy in the shape of a golden hand clutching a thick glass earth.

Pain dripped from word as Thomas asked. “Is this a dream?”

The pig responded with a smile. “If it was then it had come true. You did a great thing Tommy boy. Your sacrifice will never be forgotten.”

Thomas's hand gripped tightly onto the golden wrist of the miniature Hand That Holds the World and spoke with words gliding on ice. “I'm still dreaming. This can't be real. I want to take it all back.”

Through locked teeth the pig snarled. “Tommy stop fuckin blathering and take the award. Take the fame. Take the money and thank us for it all. Don't make me give you a hell worse than the one I made in the sewers.”

Heavy exhales huffed through Thomas's nostrils and he spoke with an inferno raging deep within his soul. “The life as your pawn is already something akin to hell. I'm taking it all back. I'm breaking free. I'm waking up from this nightmare.”

Thomas used his free hand to grip Deutch's soft flabby neck and forced his meatball shaped torso to be at arm's length. Will all his strength Thomas made a great arc and brought the glass world down upon the tyrant's crown. The skull forfeited and splintered and caved to leave a large dented soft area full of crushed bone and bruised brain. Blood rushed like a waterfall from Duetch's large nostrils and his arms shot out straight while his legs turned to jelly as he crumbled to the floor. Somewhere far away

applause and cheers turned to shrieks and screams of horror. Huffing and snarling like a wild animal Thomas quickly sought out the damaged area above Deutch's forehead and once he found it he repeated the attack over and over again until the glass globe split in two and broke off a jagged hunk deep within Deutch's exposed brain.

After Thomas was satisfied with his brutish handiwork he looked up at Johnson and saw the growing damp stain at his crotch and the wide eyes full of pure dread and panic. Thomas straightened his back and beamed his brightest smile straight at him before he turned to the crowd of screaming pigs and cowering slaves. The great iris was full of rage as it spouted out exploding galaxies and hellfire down upon the crowd below. The hounds were almost upon him and they howled with bloodthirst and bounded towards the corpse pile to reach the alter.

Nonchalantly Thomas tossed the award towards the recently slaughtered pig and spoke into the microphone with pride filling every syllable. "I'm not your creature! I'm not your pale golem pieced together with the slop of decade's worth of propaganda and fear! I'm an awakened man in a world of sleeping slaves and I refuse to be your symbol of compliance! I'm taking it all back! I'm getting off this ride! I'm waking from this nightmare! Long live freedom and long live liberty!"

Like lightening, pain struck without warning as jaws clamped into flesh. The first set tore into the back of his right knee and as he faltered a barrage of viscous bites ripped into his chest and neck. Lungs hitched and deflated. The pumping of the heart fluttered and ceased. Retinas were scorched and nerve ending were severed. The walls of the opera house melted and gave way to a heavenly green valley with distant foothills riding the horizon. His uncle and father and mother stood amongst golden grass with arms wide with joy painted across their faces. Behind them a caravan of men, women, and children sang and danced amongst the trees and ferns as they ventured down towards the emerald unknown. The sun was high against the canvas of blue and its rays kissed his skin with warmth. White light crept in at the edges of his vision and slowly engulfed the world. As the last drip of dimethyltryptamine soaked in and as the last neuron fired off one driving thought and encompassing feeling remained locked within that last second that bridged an ever expanding eternity. Freedom.

Freedom.